GamesDomain offline

MAY ISSUE 005

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DOGS OF WAR?

MDK RETURNS

Inside

Pokemon Stadium

Urban Chaos

Thief II

Diablo II

Plus

C&C: Firestorm

Soldier of Fortune

Force Commander

Tony Hawks

Rayman 2

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The dizzy little fellas with the green hair and the blue bodies are back. But this time they've got themselves in a bit of a spin. Literally. They're falling over each other to jump into classic gaming action wrapped round and round more than 100 cylindrical puzzle levels. And with great new graphics, intuitive controls and gameplay that's easy to pick up but hard to master, you'll soon find out why it's the ultimate in crazy gaming.

Lemmings REVOLUTION

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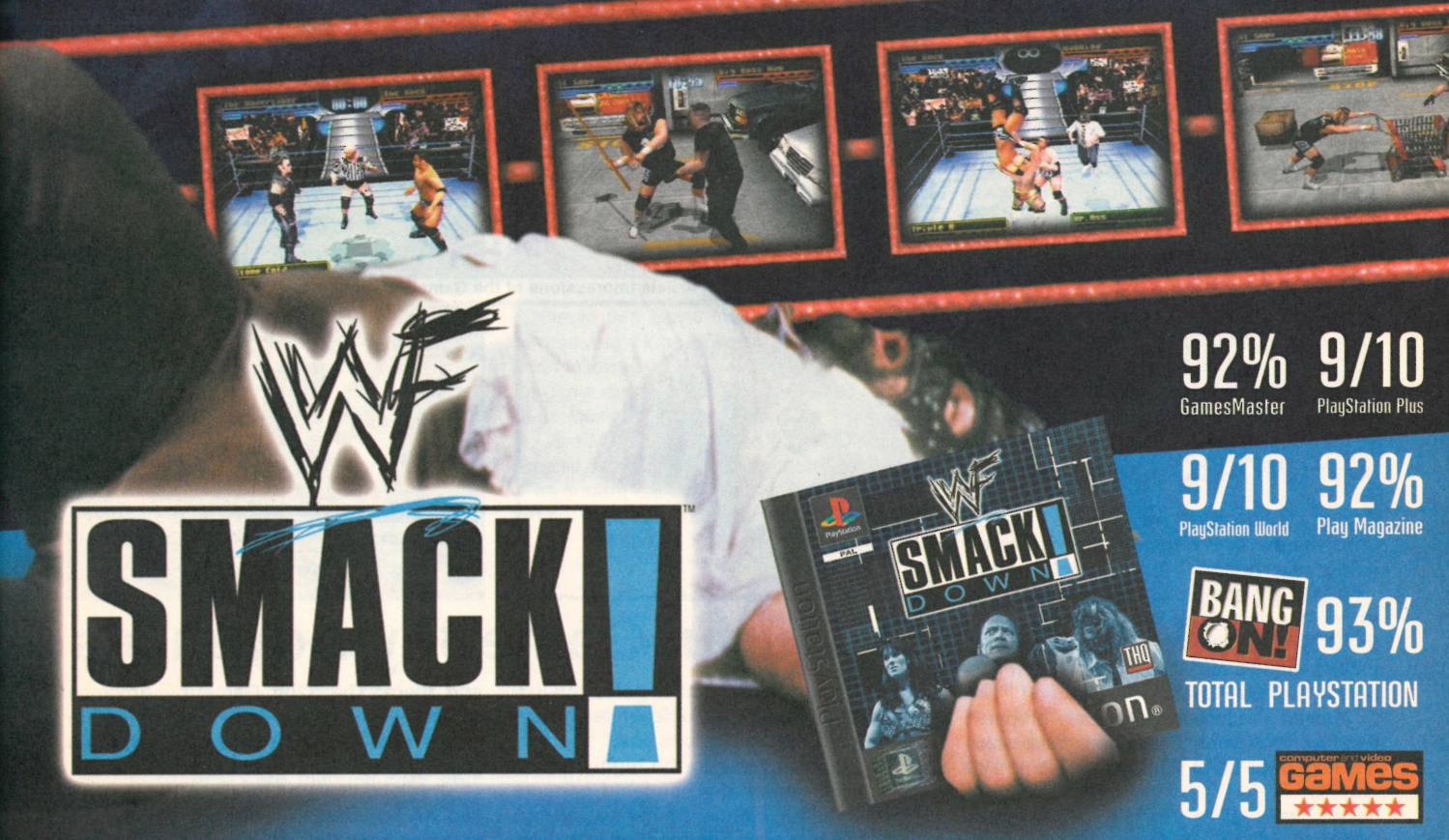

92% GamesMaster

9/10 PlayStation Plus

9/10 PlayStation World

92% Play Magazine

BANG ON! 93% TOTAL PLAYSTATION

5/5 computer and video games ★★★★★

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Army tool-up with DF2


At ease, Private

Novalogic Systems and the U.S. Army have joined forces in a project called Land Warrior that will see troops using first-person strategy shoot 'em up Delta Force 2 as a training tool. Novalogic Systems is a subsidiary of Novalogic which was formed to bring its simulation technology to the military.

The Land Warrior project has been designed to bring soldiers into the 21st century by equipping them with skills which, it is hoped, will increase their chances of survival and effectiveness in combat situations. As part of the scheme the military want Delta Force 2 adapted to include a range of tools. The software will then be used as a training programme. Some of the tools are already included and Novalogic has agreed to modify the program to include the rest.

The tools include self-contained computer and radio systems, global positioning system receivers, and helmet-mounted LCD displays and a modular weapons systems that add thermal, video sights and laser ranging to the standard M4 carbine or M16A2 rifle.

The U.S. Army is hoping to utilise the game's ability to render outdoor and indoor areas. Delta Force's multiplayer support, varied weather conditions, map displays, night vision, large array of real-world weapons (including the M4 carbine) and mission editor will also be put to work by the US forces.

In a statement, the president of Novalogic, Bob Springer, said: "The army is truly looking ahead with its Land Warrior programme. They are very intelligently using the best technology in the consumer market to ensure the highest quality training for their soldiers. We're proud to be part of the Land Warrior team."

Dreamcast online gaming to rocket.

Chu-Chu Rocket, the highly addictive puzzle game is set to introduce Dreamcast owners to their first taste of online gaming. The four player game has you directing mice to rockets to escape cats. This is the first multiplayer game for the Dreamcast and you will be able to play over the Internet if there isn't anyone handy around to give you a challenge. Chu-Chu Rocket is set for release on May 12, although it is unclear whether the Internet facilities will be ready in time.

Dreaming of Quake

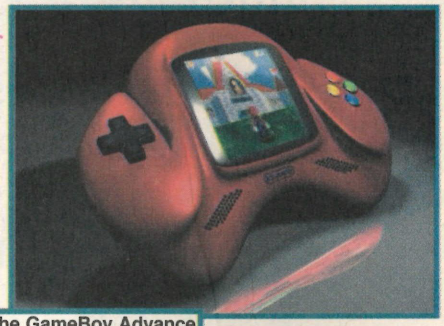
In more multiplayer news, Quake III will soon answer the question of which gamers are better - PC or Console users.

Plans are afoot to bring all the graphical glory of the multiplayer first-person shooter to the Dreamcast and create an online proving ground where console sharp-shooters will be able to take on PC rivals.

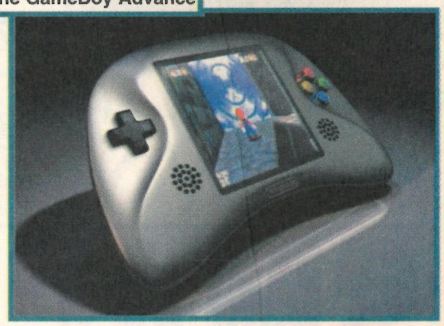
Raster Productions is already prepared to convert the game to the Dreamcast, which it is hoped will be of similar quality to a high-end PC.

McRae V2.0 stalls

Codemasters' Colin McRae V2.0 on the PlayStation has slipped from its initial release date at the end of April, to June.



Artists impressions of the GameBoy Advance



Colourful GameBoy Advances

GameBoy Advance is set to solve the irritating problem of what to do while you are put on hold during a phone call.

An optional extra to the highly anticipated next generation handheld console will be a built-in cellular phone so you can play while you wait. The function will allow people to download and transfer data files as well as talk to their friends. But the features of the little box of technology don't end there. The 32bit GameBoy Advance will also provide gamers with 511 simultaneous colours - a massive improvement on the current GameBoy Color's 56.

It will be powered for up to 20 hours by two AA batteries. The release of the console has been delayed due to the popularity of the GameBoy Color.

The GameBoy Advance is now due out in 2001.

Forthcoming releases:


Buffy. Mmmm...

A bunch of premier titles by various publishers were announced this month. Here are the ones to watch out for:

Interplay releases in the second half of the year include **Star Trek: New Worlds,** a real-time strategy game based on the popular television series and spin-off films.

Interplay will also release **Baldur's Gate II: Shadows of Amn,** the sequel to the critically acclaimed Baldur's Gate, which promises to pick up from where the previous game left off.

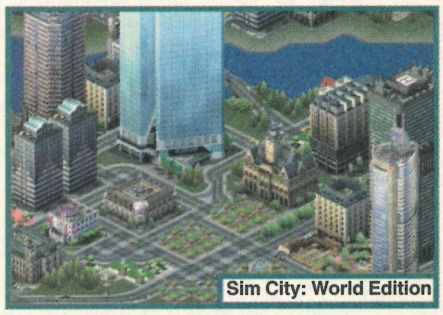
Sim City will be getting a new lease of life with the introduction of **Sim City: World Edition**. The game features Asian and German building sets, a scenario and building architect, and four new disasters including toxic clouds and space debris.

Buffy the Vampire Slayer is coming to a PC, Dreamcast and PlayStation. Players will take control of Buffy and fight against the hordes of vampires and other ungodly creatures in the town of Sunnydale. The Collective is developing the game.

And finally, **Star Wars** is going to hit the Internet with the announcement Lucasarts is planning to make a massively multiplayer RPG. It is expected to give players the opportunity to take the role of their favourite characters attempting daring quests and specialised missions in the classic era of Star Wars. A 2001 release is expected.


Star Trek: New Worlds


Baldur's Gate II


Sim City: World Edition


Star War's lovely Leia

Huge move saddens Firaxis boss

Sid Meier has said he was saddened by the recent departures from his company Firaxis to the newly formed Big Huge Software.

In a statement Sid said: "We were sad to say goodbye to some good friends, but it is not at all uncommon for programmers to spin off and form their own companies - we know, we've been there. Over the years the Hunt Valley, Maryland, area has spawned many new development groups connected in one way or another with the original MicroProse Software."

The surprise departures began last year when Brain Reynolds, Tim Train, Jason Coleman and David Inscore left Firaxis and formed Big Huge Games. Doug Kauffman soon followed them to take on the role of senior game designer. Big Huge Games has yet to announce its first release.

Sid Meier's Civilization III and Dinosaurs are still on track and in the statement he said: "The current Civ and Dino teams are an interesting mixture of experienced veterans and young hot-shots. Perhaps we'll be talking about the 'next Sid Meier' or the 'next Brian Reynolds' soon. We're also continuing the process of seeking out a few uniquely talented programmers and artists to round out our teams."

3dfx buy GigaPixel in $186m deal

Leading graphic card manufacturer 3dfx has bought 3D core technology developer GigaPixel for $186 million.

3dfx hopes to utilise GigaPixel in its creation of premier graphics cards which create higher resolution graphics and enable more visual effects. Dr Alex Leupp, president and chief executive officer of 3dfx Interactive said: "We are on the verge of an exciting new era of 3D display capabilities. We are now positioned to be the leader in providing advanced 3D technology to enable the era of true three-dimensional visual communication for all consumer electronics devices."

Aureal Shock

Executives and all senior staff members of the sound applications company Aureal have resigned and the company has filed for bankruptcy.

The news, announced last month, follows poor financial figures for Aureal which recently won a costly patent lawsuit with Creative. The company board has stated it is seeking replacement or turnaround management and was considering "all necessary actions" to either sell the company, or its assets, or wind it down. Among those to resign was president and chief executive officer Kip Kokinakis.

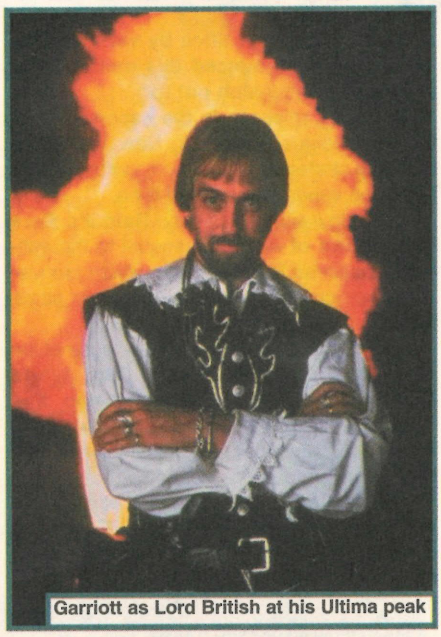
'Lord British' leaves Origin

Richard Garriott has left Origin, the company he co-founded 15 years ago. The Ultima Online site released the information as rumours of his departure flew around the Internet, sparked by a leaked internal email.

A spokeswoman for the company said Garriot had left Origin by mutual consent. But she confirmed 19 other Origin staff have been made redundant.

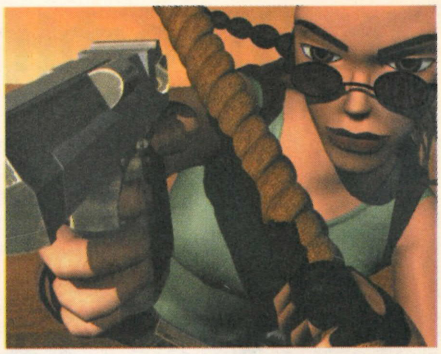
In a statement, Origin Systems' chief executive officer Jack Heistand said: "As Richard and I discussed his vision of what he wanted to do - create new large properties - Origin Systems simply could not pursue those endeavours. We wish Richard only the best and all life has to offer as he embarks on his new challenges."

Garriott was the main driving force behind the Ultima series which gained a cult following over the two decades since the first Ultima game appeared on the market in 1979. The most recent release, Ultima IX: Ascension, was plagued by bugs when it was released in the US. Heistand has pledging his continuing backing for the Ultima series and Ultima Online 2 is already in development. Work on Ultima Online 3 is set to begin soon, he said.



Garriott as Lord British at his Ultima peak

Although Garriott has not announced his plans at this time, his last Origin project was work on a multiplayer game in development called X.



Jolie good film

Angelina Jolie has been confirmed as the actress who will play Lara Croft in the movie of the Tomb Raider game. President of Paramount Pictures, John Goldwyn, announced the signing of the Academy Award-winning actress yesterday. Jolie has appeared in a number of films including Girl, Interrupted (for which she won an Oscar) and The Bone Collector. Director Simon West, made famous by directing the Jerry Bruckheimer picture Con Air, will bring the polygon girl to real life when shooting begins this summer at Pinewood Studios in the UK.

UK All Format Charts - week ending April 1, 2000

	TITLE	PUBLISHER
1	F1 2000	Electronic Arts
2	Pokemon Red	Nintendo
3	Pokemon Blue	Nintendo
4	Star Wars: Force Commander	LucasArts
5	Resident Evil: Survivor	Eidos Interactive
6	Tomb Raider: The last Revelation	Eidos Interactive
7	Toy Story 2	Activision/Disney Interactive
8	Gran Turismo 2	Sony Computer Ent.
9	Soldier of Fortune	Activision
10	The Sims	Electronic Arts

ChartTrack

ELSPA

ChartTrack collects sales data from more than 4,000 UK outlets. Supporting retailers include Argos, Asda, Blockbuster, Comet, Currys Dixons, Electronics Boutique, Game Ltd, HMV, John Menzies, MVC, Our Price, PC World, Staples, Tempo, Virgin, WH Smith, Woolworths and a small selection of independents.

DOGMEAT

YOUR EQUIPMENT IS OBSOLETE AND THE BLACK GUARD ARE ON YOUR TAIL.
ATTACK IS YOUR ONLY DEFENCE.

Cheats....Cheats....Cheats....

You like playing games don't you? But sometimes you feel like shooting your computer? Well stop right there my friend and let us ease you back from the brink of technocide. Four more games are given a public airing on GD Offline's cheats page.

If a life of larceny in **Thief II: The Metal Age** on PC is proving a hard time then allow us to be your accessory. To modify your starting cash, edit the dark.cfg file in the game folder and add the line "cash_bonus n" (n = the amount of cash you want to add to you stash at the beginning of a mission). To skip to the next mission press CTRL + ALT + SHIFT + END together.


Thief II

If your judos, wall rides or varials aren't getting enough air in **Street Skater 2** on the PlayStation then try these codes on the title screen for a perfect ten:

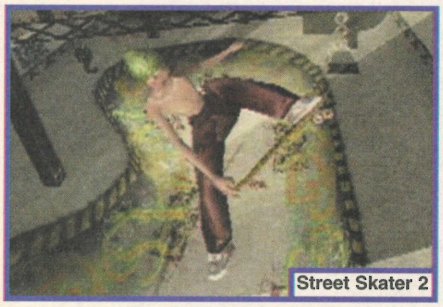
Unlock all characters: left - left - circle - circle - L2 - square - right - R2

Unlock all the tracks: left - right - left - right - circle - circle - R1 - square

Max out player's status/trick level: L1 - square - left - left - R2 - left - R1 - left

Access all the boards: circle - circle - square - circle - square - square - circle - R1

Change the style of your characters clothes: (press and hold) L1, L2, R1, or R2


Street Skater 2

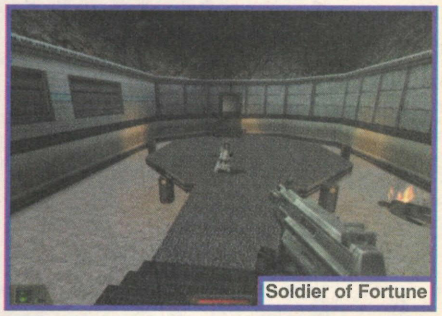
Toy Commander on Dreamcast is more difficult than trying to explain to your parents why it is so important you get those new trainers, so we thought we'd give you a helping hand. To get all the maps: During the room selection hold L and press A, Y, X , B, Y, X.

To stock-up on bombs and missiles: During the game press start, then hold L and press A, B, X, Y, B, A.

For a top-up when you are damaged: Press start, then hold L and press A, X, B, Y, A, Y.


Toy Commander

If John Mullins is giving you grief then blow away all your problems with this little time bomb of a cheat for **Soldier of Fortune** on PC. Select "Run" from the start button in windows and then type in following: "c:\program files\SOF\sof.exe" +set console 1 - this the default installation path. If you have changed the folder then adjust this line accordingly. Once in the game press the tilde key (~) to bring up the console and type: heretic for God mode, phantom to walk through walls, ninja to make yourself invisible or bigelbow for all the weapons.


Soldier of Fortune

replay

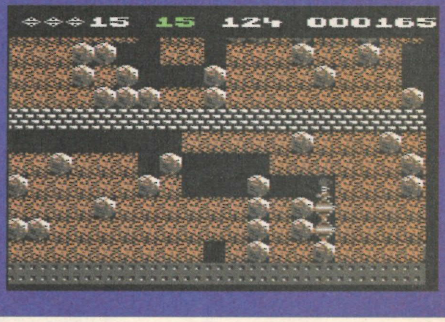
Boulderdash ruined my young gaming life. My first encounter with it was as a present given to my father and pretty soon the C64 I was given as a gift for Christmas was wrested from my control.

Eight hours a day, from the moment my father came home to the time he went to bed - at about 2am - that game and the television were his.

The premise was simple. All you had to do was collect shiny diamonds buried deep in the earth. Problems came in the form of boulders and the creatures that lived in the ground. Clever negotiation of the boulders in this puzzle game from First Star and Statesoft would result in a bag full of diamonds and a healthy score to boot. A foot wrong or an over-eagerness to grab diamonds would be the quickest way to get a ton of boulders on you head and the "Game Over" screen.

Of course any comment on my part on the gameplay would be biased but judging by my dad's obsession it was the best game in the world ever. Never since has he been so captivated by a title.

I've tried everything to get him back into games since, but that was the only one he ever liked. He must have completed it four or five times until I stole the tape, ripped off the label and stuffed it down the back of the sofa - sorry Dad! And who says games aren't addictive?



Pen & Ink

We wanna hear your views, so send your letters to: James Kelly, Games Domain Offline, Cuckoo Wharf, 435 Lichfield Road, Aston, Birmingham, B6 7SS. Or email me at James@gamesdomain.com.

Dear Games Domain Offline,
Well done on the new mag. The quality of writing is very high, and unlike some magazines I've seen (and payed for), you actually know about the games you play.
Here's a few Final Fantasy questions to test your skill at gaming.
1) Do you remember Enix's Illusion of Time and, if so, what the name of Princess Kara's pig was?
2) In Final Fantasy III, Locke was often called a thief, but what name did he prefer?
3) Lastly, where are the Moogles in FFVIII?
Phil Smart, email address supplied.

Thanks Phil. We always welcome feedback from our readers and I'm delighted to hear you like what we are doing. Here are the answers to your questions:
1) Hamlet
2) The Treasure hunter
3) The Moogle in FFVIII can only be found in the PocketStation mini-game - but as PocketStation is hard to find in the UK, not many people have ever seen it.

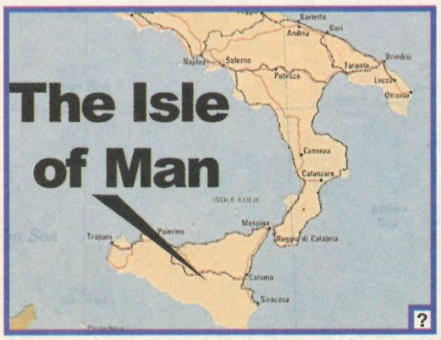
Dear Games Domain,
The article comparing how weak the PlayStation2 will be compared to current PCs wasn't that smart. Unlike PCs, PlayStation2s etc don't need expensive new monitors everytime new software is installed. Also asexual PC spods do not share the same "taste" in games - PC nerds only play top-down, isometric "strategy" games instead of Tekken 3, Tenchu, Metal Gear Solid, Tomb Raider etc.. Finally, no PC could run any game with graphics like Tekken Tag Tournament or Crazy Taxi - ever! So, forget PS2 vs PC power comparisons - the PC is soon to become like the SNES or Megadrive!
Name not supplied, Glasgow.

Woah there, cowboy. Far be it for us to re-open the old 'consoles vs. PCs' can of worms, but our PC experts believe you are just plain wrong. Sure, PC games tend to be deeper and more complex than console titles, and the machines are expensive to keep. However, as for comparing PS2's graphics to an up-to-date PC, forget about it - we can can only assume you have never played Quake 3, or Rally Championship, or Battlezone 2. As the PC is an evolving platform, the new cards from 3dfx and nVidia will just widen the gap. PS2's design is set in stone, and by the autumn could look a bit sad next to a top-end PC.


Rally Championship

Dear Games Domain,
Re. "Rally Championship" in your issue 03 of Games Domain Offline. I must point out to you that there is no such place as "Ireland's Manx Circuit". The Manx Circuit is in fact on the Isle of Man, not in Ireland as you said. As a Manx resident I find your lack of accuracy very upsetting. Do people in the UK still do geography anymore or do they just guess where these places are?
Mr A Mazzone, Ramsey, Isle of Man.

Geography...geography..Oh yes! I remember. That was the lesson at school where you got to cut up frogs wasn't it? Or was that cookery? Whatever, it doesn't matter. We at GDO apologise unreservedly for our oversight and, as editor, I have issued everyone with a map of the UK and her surrounding islands.



Ed's note

Another month, another edition of Games Domain Offline and, as usual, we have managed to squeeze in more filling than a Yorkshireman on free pie day.

Yes, all the hottest titles on all your favourite formats are right here - and we're literally giving it away.

Written by gamers, for gamers, GDO's philosophy is to tell it how it is with no favours owed - so you don't waste your hard-earned cash when forking out for games software or hardware.

Talking of forking out, I'd bet there's a few squillion of you out there wondering how to scrape enough cash together to buy a PlayStation2 when it hits our shores in September. To give you an idea of what the PS2 has delivered so far, this month's GDO includes full reviews of its launch titles: **Ridge Racer V** and **Street Fighter Ex 3**.

But with all the hype surrounding the PlayStation2 it's sometimes easy to forget its kid brother is still here doing the business. As if to prove the point, PlayStation owners continue to be deluged with exiting new titles. This month we have full reviews of the much anticipated **Fear Effect** and the action adventure jaunt **Urban Chaos**.

Dreamcast owners also have reasons to be cheerful. We review the stunning **MDK2**, give **Dead or Alive 2** the once-over and take a first look at **Tony Hawks Pro Skater** on DC.

On PC we bring you a stack of reviews, including **Force Commander**, **Thief II** and **Soldier of Fortune**. Also check out our preview of **Diablo 2**.

Finally we would like to know more about you and what you think of us. We know answering questionnaires is a bore so we have made it worth your while by offering the chance to win three games of your choice. See **page 35** for details.

So it's all here in your bumper Games Domain Offline, and all for free. Get stuck in!
James Kelly: james@gamesdomain.com

Get Voodoo.

INSTANT VISUAL IMPROVEMENT

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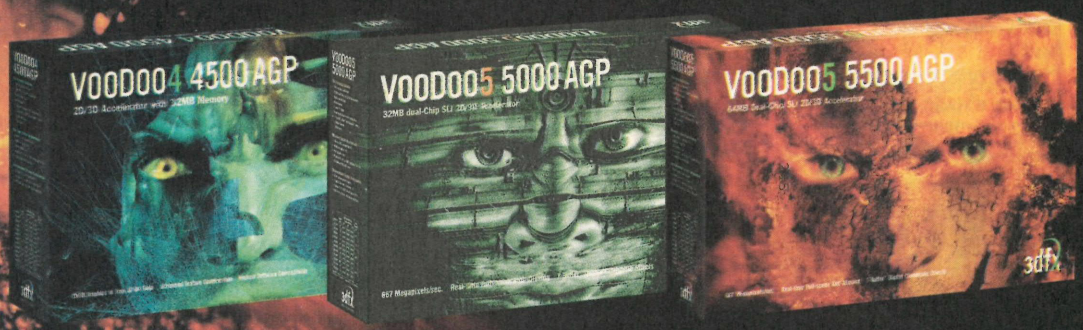

3dfx presents the *complete cinematic experience* in gameplay. The Voodoo5 offers up to **64MB** of memory capable of real-time, ***hardware full-scene anti-aliasing*** for silky smooth images that will **VISUALLY IMPROVE** every game you own. The unique cinematic effects engine (**3dfx T-Buffer™**) enables depth of field blur, motion blur, soft shadows and soft reflections for **Hollywood-like** realism. This is the peak of power matched with the peak of **PERFORMANCE.** Drive your graphics into a whole new game dimension instantly.

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3dfx products are available at all good electronics retailers near you.

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Bloody games!

So, as Soldier of Fortune makes its bloody entry into UK shops, the whole 'video games are evil' row kicks off again.

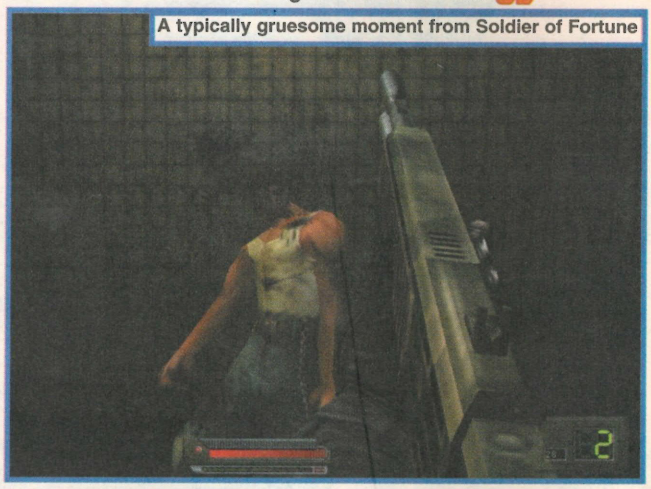
A recent TV documentary set the tone which usually dominates this fractious debate. With its heady mix of scaremongering and ill-informed claptrap it probably had parents nationwide reaching for the panic button.

Why does society have a perception that what is commonplace on film or TV is unacceptable on VDUs? In the excellent Kiwi splatter film Braindead, we can watch babies shoved into blenders, only for their intestines to emerge and creep around throttling people. Such films are available in the same outlets as Soldier of Fortune, with the same BBFC classification, and far more violent content.

No one is suggesting violent or disturbing games should find their way into the hands of children. But now computer games have stopped being just for kids, surely it is time for a wider, informed debate to arrive at a way of controlling children's playing while enabling 'mature' content for those of us old enough to cope. But in the current climate of 'child protection at all costs' perhaps we just need someone to be bold enough to make a stand. Activision has made a good start. Bring on the gore.

But if Soldier of Fortune is not to your taste, we have a bumper selection to choose from. Force Commander brings yet more Star Wars merchandising to the PC market, Thief II lives up to everyone's expectations, and Messiah proves a quirky, yet enjoyable diversion.

Thanks for the fantastic response to last month's issue - keep your feedback coming. Keep checking our web site for up-to-the-minute gaming information, and you can drop me a line at **mike@gamesdomain.com.** GD



A typically gruesome moment from Soldier of Fortune

Voodoo Child

New developments in graphics hardware have left traditional market leader, 3dfx, out in the cold. In recent months nVidia's GeForce has been wiping the floor with 3dfx's Voodoo3-based cards, which have begun to look more and more like yesterday's technology. Now, 3dfx are out to redress the balance.

Voodoo3 was criticised for not supporting 32bit colour, in favour of high 16bit performance and low price. This left 3dfx without a top-end games card, and power gamers went for GeForces in droves. 3dfx cards have always had good reputations - and enjoyed unquestionably the best software support - although they weren't always the fastest option.

3dfx's new VSA-100 chip addresses these problems in some style. Retaining characteristic 3dfx traits - like the ability to connect multiple processors together for maximum performance - it brings glorious 32bit colour to the range for the first time.

But does the VSA chip bring anything new to the market? Meet the T-Buffer, 3dfx's prospective saviour.

T-Buffer, the jaggies slayer

The T-Buffer sits between the graphics chip and the display, accumulating frames as they are drawn. It can then apply a number of different effects to each frame including motion and depth-of field blur and the "holy grail" of 3D technology - full-screen, realtime anti-aliasing (FSAA). 3dfx hopes this technology will make games look more like films, losing the sterile, processed feel PC games so often suffer from.

So what does this mean in practice? In essence, the T-Buffer actually reduces the sharpness and clarity of the picture! FSAA softens the jaggy lines that so often occur at the edges of objects, hopefully making high resolutions unnecessary for smooth images. Motion blur promises to reduce the jerky appearance of fast-moving objects, and depth-of field effects are often used by filmmakers to draw attention to background action.

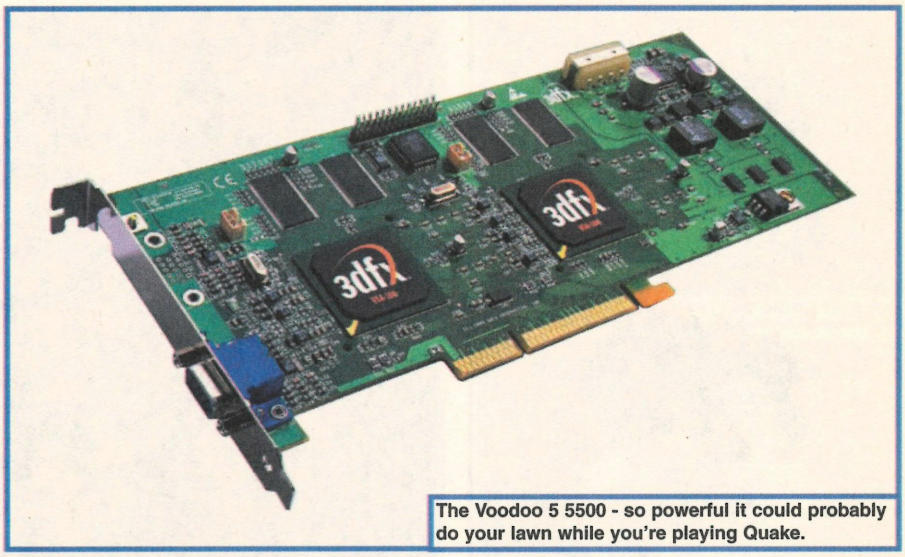
Unlike nVidia's flagship hardware transform and lighting (T&L) engine, older games will make full use of T-Buffer features - they are controlled by the drivers, and there will be no need to write games specifically to take advantage of them.

All these bells and whistles come at a price. Enabling T-Buffer effects will inevitably cause a frame rate hit - but 3dfx will be hoping the improved smoothness and image quality will make such concerns less important. After all, films only run at 24 frames per second - for ultimate Quake performance, 80fps is seen as about right.

Board shopping?

The first boards based on the VSA-100 chipset are expected to hit shops within the next few months, in a variety of configurations - from the single-chip 32Mb Voodoo4 4500 to the top-of-the-range Voodoo5 6000, featuring four VSA-100s working in parallel and a ludicrous 128Mb of video RAM.

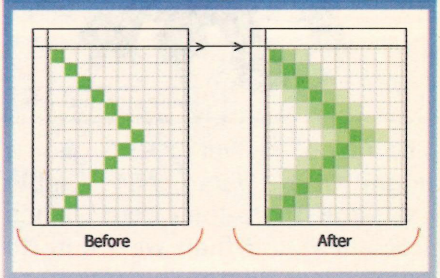
No UK pricing details have been released, but expect them to be competing with the top GeForce cards at around the £200 mark. Keep checking www.gamesdomain.co.uk for the latest details - we are expecting some review cards soon. GD



The Voodoo 5 5500 - so powerful it could probably do your lawn while you're playing Quake.

Quake III with motion blur

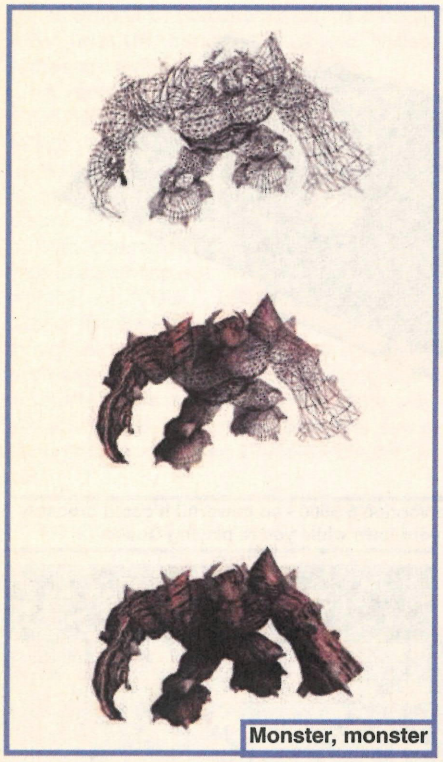
Cutting edge

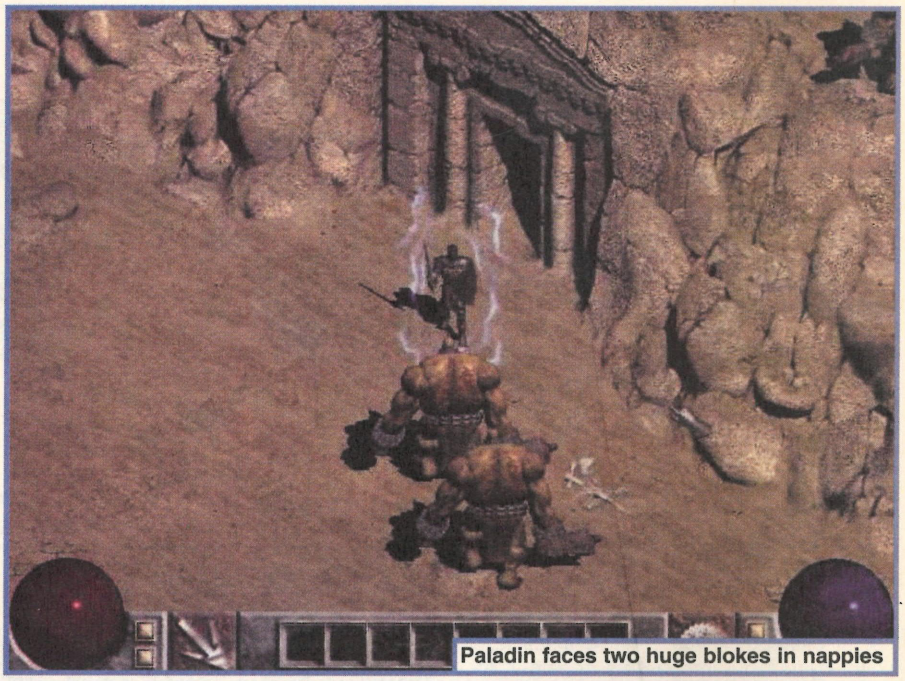


Anti-aliasing is the name given to the process of removing the rough edges or "jaggies" that exist in computer-generated images.

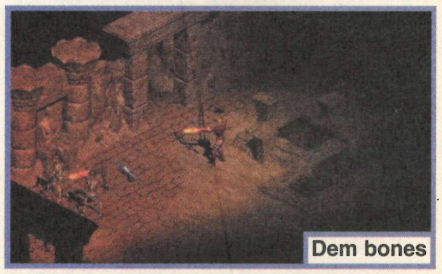
The process smoothes the jagged lines by taking many samples of the scene and blending them together. In the past it has been impossible to do this fast enough to maintain a good frame rate - 3dfx aim to change that for good.

Diablo II


Monster, monster


Paladin faces two huge blokes in nappies


It's a bug's life for the Amazon


Dem bones

The recent revival in RPG games began with a game called Diablo that stole more time from Games Domain's staff than we'd care to admit. Now Blizzard's sequel has arrived and it seems set to eradicate sleep from our lives completely.

Kevan Mander

The thing that I liked most about the original Diablo was it was one of those games you could pop into because you didn't have to keep up with the plot. On the other hand it took away most of my life because it was so addictive it became hard to pop out of. Since then, Blizzard has been working away and is now tempting us with new graphical glories, more characters and extra areas to explore in the highly anticipated Diablo II.

The best place to start is the new characters the four CD game has introduced. You can play as one of five characters: Amazon (feisty fighter woman), Barbarian (tough but dim bloke), Necromancer (creepy, dead-raising Goth), Paladin (local vicar turned warrior) and Sorceress (magic-wielding babe).

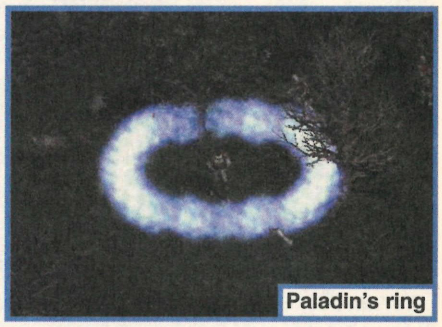
Once you have selected the character you want to play then distributing skills is next. This part of Diablo II is more in-depth than its predecessor, containing three skill forms - passive, active and mastery. Passive means they do not require any activation and remain usable at all times. An active skill is one that must be readied like the repair ability in the original, but each time it is used it will cost you mana - your magical energy. Mastery skills allow you to increase talents in general areas. For instance, if you choose the Barbarian you can increase your mastery of weapons skill, increasing the damage you can inflict during battles and raising your chances of a successful attack.

The game follows on from the original where (turn away now if you haven't finished Diablo) you had captured the nefarious Diablo, trapping the demon inside the soul stone before burying the stone deep in your own forehead. Unfortunately the power of Diablo was too great and now he has taken over your body, destroyed the village of Tristram and headed off to join forces with his demonic brothers Mephisto and Baal. Together they make up the three prime Elvis - sorry, evils - and intend to do a world tour of death and destruction.

There are four acts in the game. The first sees you, in a new character, following the trail of Diablo and encounter-


The Necromancer sneezes


Sorceress being bugged


Paladin's ring


Burn baby, burn

ing various scenes of destruction that you must resolve if you are to find the errant demon and thwart his plans for world domination.

Once the game starts you'll notice its appearance has changed. Gone is the text bar that dominated the middle of the screen. Dialogue now appears over the respective NPC's head giving a clearer view of the game areas. Another change is the belt slots have been reduced to an initial four but you can buy belts to increase your carry capacity. The travel across the in-game areas has been improved, the game now featuring way-points which act as teleports between areas. This ensures your inventory won't be piled high with Town Portal scrolls like the original.

One of the main drains of cash in the first Diablo was the essential and endless purchase of potions in the town. Included now is the convert skill which allows you to change parts of fallen animals into potions or items. So if you kill a creature you can rip out its heart and make a health potion. It may not sound like the most healthy thing to do but every way of saving money means you can get that magic sword you've had your eye on.

The raising of levels in the game is also different. For every level you rise up you get attribute skills to distribute amongst the 20 skills available. This means you can specialise in certain areas allowing you to become the next Jackie Chan or Jamie Oliver - if he made magic potions that is. Some skills are only available once you reach a given-level. For instance, you can only learn certain abilities once you attain level five and then others at level ten.

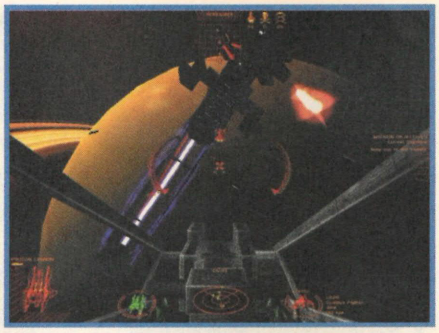
"Prepare for sleep deprivation now. You won't get a wink when Diablo II is released"

Multiplayer in the sequel is more advanced than its predecessor, allowing the entire game to be played with your mates or strangers around the world. New improvements allow you to band together and create a party of wandering warriors to take on Diablo while sharing in the experience and the gold that you accumulate on your travels. To fend off player-killing, Blizzard has introduced a diplomacy state for your characters. This means that you have to actively set your character as hostile towards another player character before you can attack. While this means the element of surprise is reduced it also means that no-one is going to attack you without you knowing it first. If you have set your diplomacy to friendly towards a character then no matter how much you swipe or fire at someone you're not going to hurt them. Diablo II looks as if it has the depth to keep the hardcore role-player interested while also giving the hack n' slash gamer something to get to grips with. If Blizzard can walk the tightrope to keep all parties happy then they will have a great game and big seller on their hands. Prepare for sleep deprivation now because you won't get a wink when it is released. CD

Publisher: Havas Interactive **Developer:** Blizzard Entertainment **Format:** PC **Release:** Summer

www.gamesdomain.co.uk

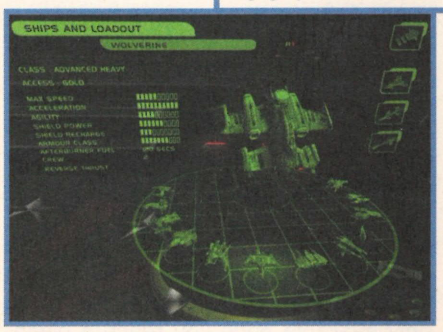
StarLancer



Engage your thrusters and prepare for some space-bound dog-fight action

The dominance of the Star Wars and Freespace games in the intergalactic combat genre is soon to come under question with the release of StarLancer from Erin and Chris Roberts - the men behind the Wing Commander and Privateer games.

Kevan Mander



It seems strange now the cold war is over that some still look on communism as the biggest threat to world peace. StarLancer is no different. Set hundreds of years in the future, the reds have once again stabbed the peace-loving western powers - dubbed the Alliance in StarLancer - in the back by setting a trap when both sides were due to sign a peace agreement at Fort Kennedy.

The attack causes massive casualties forcing the Alliance to draft in civilians with no experience to fill the spaces in the Navy's spacecraft. This is where you come in. As one of the drafts, your unit of rag-tags, the 51st Squadron, is widely regarded as the lowest of the low in the Alliance fleet and gets assigned all the dirty, dangerous jobs no-one else wants.

The action in StarLancer revolves around single-seat fighters launching off carriers and engaging in massive dogfights based on the explosive wars of the 20th century. The game features over 80 different ships and fighters, about a dozen of which you can fly.

Each of the major nationalities in the game (Americans, British, French, and Russians) has its own unique craft. When the title is finished you will be able to blow these craft into space through a variety of futuristic weapons such as pulse lasers, nova cannons, and jackhammer missiles.

> **"Futuristic weapons will include pulse lasers, nova cannons, and jackhammer missiles"**

The game also promises a living universe with allied and neutral craft going about their business as you fly your missions. Events beyond your control will go on around to give you the feeling that you aren't the most important piece in the jigsaw.

The mission structure will be dynamic, with your success or failure in earlier tasks determining the missions you fly later on. There will be an immersive story-line woven into the single player game.

You will able to move through your ship and interact with your fellow pilots, getting to know them as people rather than just generic, faceless wingmen. The game will also support deathmatch or co-operative multiplayer games (up to four players) via a LAN or the Internet.

Erin and Chris Roberts are masters at creating space sims, as the longevity of the Wing Commander series proved, but developers Digital Anvil have no previous track record when it comes to games. We will be watching the skies very carefully for this one. GD

Publisher: Microsoft **Developer:** Digital Anvil **Format:** PC **Release:** April 28

C&C: Tiberian Sun Firestorm

Following the colossal success of C&C: Tiberian Sun, Westwood has played its usual trick - box up some new units and single-player levels with a sprinkling of new features, and watch the pounds flood in.

Mike Smith

Firestorm begins where Tiberian Sun ended. Kane - the charismatic but crazy leader of the Brotherhood of Nod - is missing, presumed dead. The GDI, a UN-type organisation, is developing new weapons in an effort to finish off the Brotherhood, which, deprived of its figurehead, is descending into infighting and anarchy.

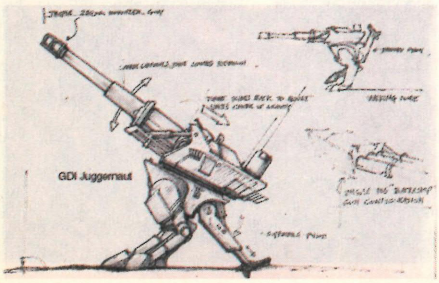
The new single player campaigns follow the fortunes of both GDI and Nod and are difficult enough to provide a serious challenge to veteran C&C fans. The FMV clips linking missions also live up to Tiberian Sun's high standards. C&C games have always played well alone, and the campaigns continue to find novel ways to challenge.

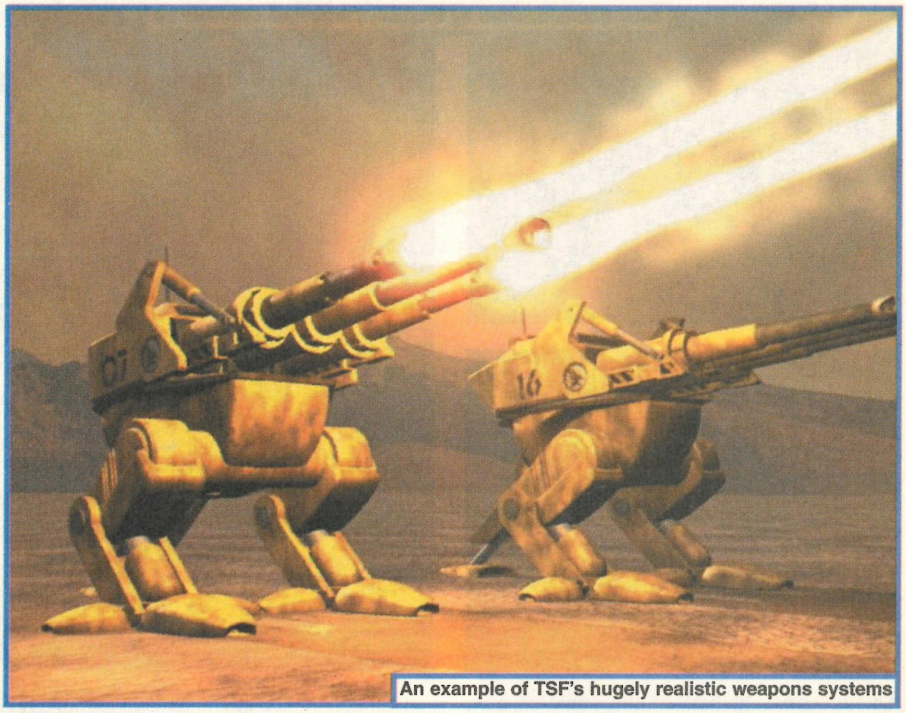
Nod's Reaper

New units are mainly based around existing structures or vehicles and the only novel addition is Nod's Reaper - a cyborg torso with an all-terrain walker base. Their variety of weapons works on just about anything, making them a formidable enemy.

What is questionable, however, is how Westwood can justify asking for gamers' cash for what is really just one genuinely new, useful unit, a handful of new missions and some FMV? When Cavedog released Total Annihilation, new units appeared weekly for download - and two years on the odd one still pops up.

If you enjoyed Tiberian Sun's single player missions you will be happy with Firestorm. But despite the addition of a pseudo-persistent World Domination mode, online C&C players won't find much to get excited about.




An example of TSF's hugely realistic weapons systems

Firestorming extras

Mobile War Factory:
Allows construction of tanks in the battlefield.
Juggernaut:
GDI's answer to Nod's artillery. Carries triple 120mm howitzers.
Mobile EMP:
Tracked version of the GDI building. Pulse gun disables enemy vehicles.
Drop Pod:
Contains veteran infantry and chain guns to make ideal shock troops.
Mobile Stealth Generator:
Battlefield cover for hiding armies from the enemy.
Cyborg Reaper:
Spider-like robot, carrying missile cannons and web-like net launchers to immobilise infantry
Limpet Drone:
Attaches itself to enemy vehicles, allowing you to see whatever they can. Useful for infiltrating cloaked bases. GD


In-game environments

PROS	CONS
Demanding new campaigns	Deeply unimaginative
Powerful and versatile Reaper	Same old formula
Latest in successful series	Questionable value for money

Min Req: P166, 32MB RAM **GDO Suggests:** PII-233, 64MB RAM
Publisher: EA **Developer:** Westwood Studios **Format:** PC **Release:** Out Now

Messiah

Baby Bob is dwarfed by Messiah's impressive backdrops

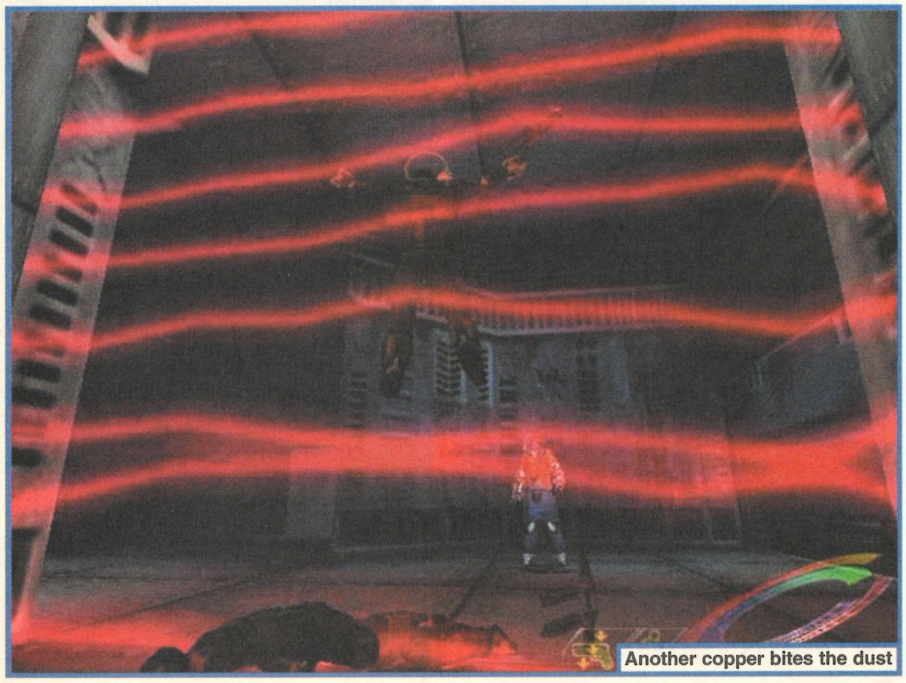
Dave Perry's troubled masterpiece has, contrary to some predictions, seen the light of day. The GDO editorial team, to whom the light of day is just a faint memory, spent some quality time with the son of God.

Mike Smith

Messiah was first unveiled nearly three years ago, when Shiny Entertainment boss Dave Perry talked up his revolutionary graphics engine and gameplay ideas in front of a drooling crowd of eager hacks. But, as tends to be the case with revolutionary projects, Messiah slipped - big style.

Unusually for an action game, the protagonist is neither a butch Arnie clone, nor an early-20s woman with cosmetic surgery, but nappy-clad cherub Bob. Our Bob is sent to an early 21st century Earth by God, to generally kick ass and sort the place out, armed with nothing but the power to possess any living creature he comes across.

This makes an unusual premise for what is essentially a third-person action game with Quake elements thrown in - and the graphics engine is equally atypical. It scales Messiah's 3D objects to take account of your hardware: with a slow PC the characters will lose polygons to compensate. But most impressively, the engine does this in realtime, so when the



Another copper bites the dust

action hots up the detail level drops to keep the frame rate static.

If the many inhabitants of Messiah's city, Faktur, spot Bob wandering around, their reaction is generally shoot first, then ask questions. So the best way to explore is to hop into a policeman's body and go wandering safe from unwanted attention. Unless, that is, you bump into the Chots - a mutant street gang constantly skirmishing with the police. Never mind the unfortunate copper, just run headlong at them. When the constable gets cut down in the inevitable hail of gunfire, Bob is kicked out of his body, and free to possess a Chot.

This novel game mechanic leads to some 'unusual' puzzles. In one room, you must fill a container with liquidated bodies. So Bob must possess a scientist, and run headlong into the handy floor-mounted meat grinder. At the last moment, hitting the "de-possess" button lets Bob flutter clear, as the confused boffin plunges to his messy doom. In case you were in any doubt, Messiah ain't exactly one for the kids.

As Bob continues through Faktur City, the variety of life-forms available for use makes itself apparent. Not limited to humans, Bob can leap into rats - for a challenging close control puzzle section - and the first time he finds a giant mutant Chot you'll be grinning for ages.

In fact, time after time when playing Messiah my colleagues were enquiring if I had been at the nitrous oxide again. So many moments in the game are genuinely new and humorous - not least because it is a tiny baby perpetrating such hideous crimes with abandon.

If you don't have a good joypad, buy one. Lots of controls mean keyboard players will be tying their fingers in knots trying to keep up with Bob, and the fast side-step makes it feel more like Quake than Tomb Raider - one of those PlayStation-style pads with shoulder buttons proved ideal.

But Messiah is not without problems. If you are fighting a spread-out group of enemies, as you possess one the others will turn on you. As your host bites the dust, Bob is often not quick enough to reach the next before getting shot up. This can sometimes lead to Bob becoming pinned down and unable to move - better hope you have an earlier save game, because that is often the only solution.

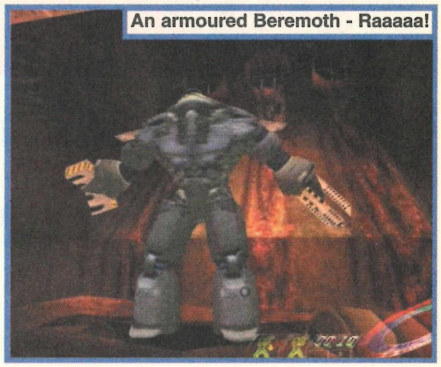
Worse, though, it won't take long to understand why Messiah took so long to develop. It is still buggy, and bears the hallmarks of a rushed game. Although, commendably, gameplay and AI flaws seem absent, Messiah has an annoying tendency to freeze, especially under disk access, and sometimes requires a reboot. Graphical corruption occurs occasionally, and the overall impression the game gives is that Shiny has spent too long tweaking the design, and not long enough ironing out the bugs. Hopefully patches will alleviate the problems - we shall see.

Later in the game, Bob's objectives can become a little unclear, and the huge city a little sprawling. Progress just isn't quite as tightly focused as it should be in such a linear game. And - make no mistake - Messiah is tough, and the unusual style of puzzles can make it frustrating at times. If in doubt, the solution that results in the most mess is usually right - Messiah encourages abuse of its inhabitants.

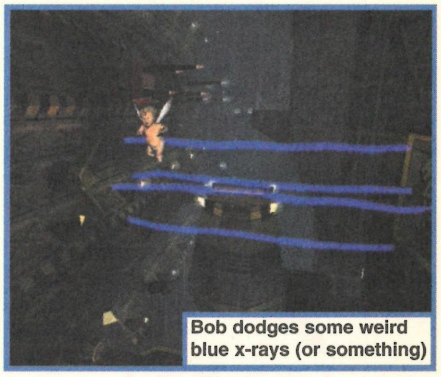
On slower machines, too, the level-of-detail engine can result in some odd effects when watching characters close up - although it enables some interesting distortion and twisting effects, it occasionally gets a little confused.

Don't buy Messiah expecting an easy ride. Almost from the beginning, the difficulty level is high, and combined with the technical difficulties and adult themes - in all senses of the word - make it not a game for children or PC novices.

The hardcore gamer, though, will find City Faktur both compelling and enthralling. Messiah won't be starting any religions, but manages to rise above its flaws to provide an experience which, for once, almost manages to live up to the hype. GD



An armoured Beremoth - Raaaaa!



Bob dodges some weird blue x-rays (or something)

PROS

- Innovative graphical engine
- Comedy value
- Will last ages

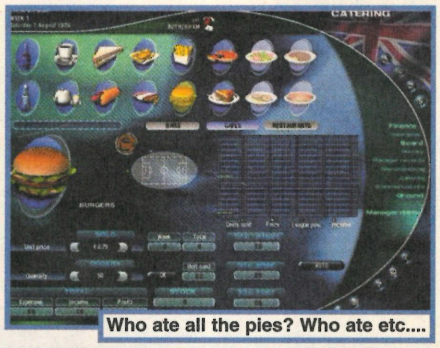
CONS

- Won't suit everyone
- Can be unfocused
- Difficult

Min Req: PII-233, 64MB RAM **GDO Suggests:**PII-300, 64MB RAM
Publisher: Interplay **Developer:** Shiny Entertainment **Format:** PC **Release:** Out Now

Euro League Football

Kanu tries one from 30 yards



Who ate all the pies? Who ate etc....

Rebuild fortress Millmoor

Sort out your sponsors

It's the ultimate football fan's dream - a game which combines the sexy football of EA's FIFA 2000 with the stress-inducing, but ultimately fulfilling, Championship Manager experience. Dinamic Multimedia's latest take on the beautiful game makes an ambitious bid to snatch this achievement.

Gareth Holden

Using a highly experienced team and developers' knowledge from past games like Premier Manager 99 and Gremlin's Actua Soccer series, Euro League Football is hoping to become the next dominant force in European football games. Thanks to the game's two-pronged approach, if your tactics don't cut the mustard you can always shed your over-sized sheepskin coat, stub out your huge cigar and head out onto the pitch to let your feet do the talking. Without further ado, it's time to head into the dressing room to talk tactics.

Starting out for the first time as a player-manager wannabe, you face a multitude of options. If you admired BBC's Fantasy Football geek, Statto, you'll have a field day here. First is an option called history, where you have access to a database containing all the past results of European Cup, Cup Winners Cup, Uefa Cup and Super Cup finals. You can even view the attendance figures and names of referees for each particular match.

Next is a database feature, which is crammed full of facts about all the current players in the English league system. The attention to detail here is phenomenal and it is clear why Dinamic hired a specialist team of journalists just for this section of the game. There are even plans to post updates to this database on the Internet.

League tracker is an option whereby you can compare the recent form of any of the teams used within the main game. Once again though, this is for the statisticians only!

Another novel game mode is the football quiz, where you progress to your opponent's goal by correctly answering football trivia questions. This is initially great fun but does become slightly tiresome after a few games.

The virtual competition is the first option that actually lets you loose on the pitch. Here you can compete in a custom league or cup for up to 32 teams. Having picked your starting 11 and your crop of super-subs, you can head straight to the tactics table. In addition to all of the standard formations, you can individually move players to certain areas of the pitch. Individual roles can be specified from who takes the free-kicks to who is responsible for marking the opposition's towering striker from corners. The virtual competition mode also allows two humans to battle it out in a head-to-head encounter. For many this will be the first taste of the game's arcade action. At this point, I have to admit that in no way does Euro League Football match the excellence of EA's FIFA series for either aesthetic value or smooth gameplay. Indeed, the game's arcade action encompasses the majority of the game's faults with jerky player movement, "ball glued to feet" control and poor goalkeeper AI which allows you to practically walk the ball into the goal.

Passing generally works but the tackling mechanism is rather clumsy and you'll end up relying on the all-or-nothing vicious sliding tackle. I did like the way injuries result in players hobbling around until you substitute them off though. Shooting is a mixed bag, where long shots generally have the keeper pulling off spectacular saves. Close-up shots seem

Wednesday v Chester - what a thriller


Pick yourself a fit coach


Or opt for Ron manager


Beckham, before his £3m hair-do

to loop in the air instead of having any power which, from the standard camera angle, can look truly confusing. On the subject of camera angles, apart from the expected side-on and isometric variant of angles, a nice feature is the ability to choose a free camera angle to play from whichever perspective suits you.

Unfortunately, during matches players sometimes look disinterested even when the ball is just a few metres from their feet and they turn with the agility of hippos. The ability of your players to run into open space or overlap on the wings is also highly limited. From first inspection, stadia look impressive, especially those belonging to the giants of European football. However, when you play as a lower division team, such as Carlisle United, stadiums are poorly recreated. Video gaming fanatic and Scottish football fan, Dominik Diamond is on hand to provide an in-match commentary which unfortunately suffers from the age-old problem of not saying the right things at the right time.

The final mode, euromanager, is where the majority of your time will be spent, and deservedly so. Here you can either start out at the bottom of the career ladder, and work your way up to the top, or pick your favourite team and take it from there. At the forefront of your duties is obviously team selection, tactics and management. But for the business tycoons among you, if you choose to control the club's finances it's possible to dabble in the catering, club shop, ticket sales and advertising aspects. It's also possible to build up a team of virtual staff - such as players scouts - to help you out with all of the essential parts of the game.

The transfer system allows you to scout any player within the database but, because of the length of the procedure, by the time you have landed your catch the chances are your player injury crisis is probably over anyway. Another grievance is that the menu system is not totally user-friendly and at times can prove laborious.

Right in the nitty-gritty of things, you can take as active a part as you want as a player-manager. You can opt to just see the results, watch the computer play for you or don your boots and make your own impact on the games of your choice. Herein, though, lies the greatest problem of the whole concept for creating a "playable arcade management game". Basically, by spending a while mastering the game's arcade mode, you can completely make up for any poor management skills by being a star on the field. Fair enough, you have to replace tired players and it's nice to poach top talent from other clubs, but if you let your feet do the talking the results will be no problem at all.

Although I would definitely recommend the management side of the game, the arcade action is not as playable or polished as that in FIFA 2000. Euro League football makes a valiant attempt to dominate the PC football game market with a blend of strategy and action, but it doesn't quite capture the silverware on either front. GD

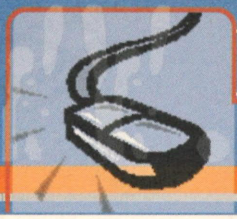
PROS

- Masses of stats and detail
- Strategy and arcade action
- Choice of camera angles

CONS

- Poor arcade mode
- Time consuming transfers
- Labourious menu system

Min Req: P150, 32MB RAM **GDO Suggests:** P233, 64MB RAM
Publisher & Developer: Dinamic **Format:** PC **Release:** Out Now



Thief II: The Metal Age

As impressive as the outfits depicted in Thief II's cut-scenes are, modern day thieves prefer shell-suits to hooded robes.

The developers modelled this Thief II backdrop on the luxurious entrance hall of GDO's Birmingham HQ

Games Domain's Kevan Mander doesn't have a criminal record and when he played Thief II: The Metal Age, we realised why.

Kevan Mander

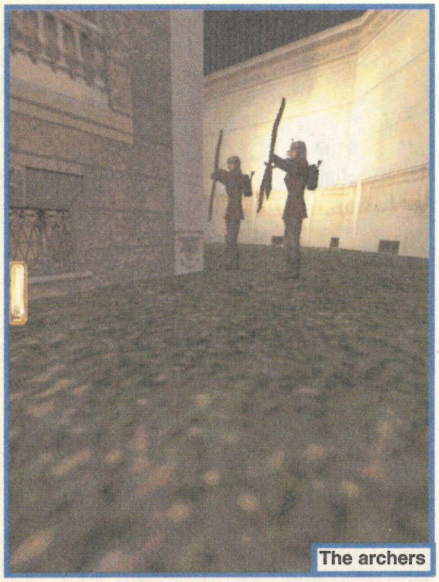
The closest comparison I can come to when reviewing Thief II: The Metal Age is playing hide-and-seek when I was a kid. You remember - when you were hiding and the person who was seeking would come within an inch of you and you would hold your breath, not wanting to give your position away. That's what it's like playing this game. Of course, if I played hide-and-seek in a techno-medieval setting and I was stealing while hiding then it would be exactly like playing Thief II - but I didn't, so it's not.

Set ten years on from the original, Thief II has you once again playing Garrett, the best thief in town. The Hammerites (not the paint - a religious sect) have fallen in popularity and the Mechanists have taken over as the popular religion with their new fangled gizmos. An example of one of these little machines is the eye they gave you as a thank you present at the end of the last game after one of yours was ripped out. Also on the scene is a new sheriff. The town isn't big enough for the both of you and he wants you dead as much as you want him out.

The game starts out fairly innocuously with a rather sweet mission. You are asked by a friend to help him break into a mansion so he can escape with the love of his life who is a chambermaid. Of course, Garrett sees more than romance in the game and you can go around the mansion stocking up your finances. Later though, you start to learn more about the sheriff, the Mechanists and a whole lot about cash. Pretty soon the whole game turns into a detective story.

One thing you will notice when you start up Thief II, if you have played the original, is the fact it looks exactly the same. Now, whether time has eroded my memory or not I don't know, but I can't see much of a difference between this game and its predecessor. Admittedly the areas are a lot bigger, but they suck up your processor and graphics card power quite quickly, turning whole sections into a slideshow - though fortunately not as bad as your Aunt Nora's holiday slides of Rhyl. If Thief II does one thing, it proves you don't need good looks to be a great game.

Fortunately for Thief II much of its action takes place in complete darkness, because this is environment you work in best. At the bottom of the game screen is a light meter which shows you how visible you are to people around you. The ideal situation is to keep this meter jet black, so someone who passes within in an inch of you can't detect your presence. If you are discovered by stepping out


The archers

into the light, by making too much noise or missing with an arrow, then the guards will be on your tail. This, of course, is a very bad situation to be in as you are a thief not a fighter. Although you come equipped with a sword, it is detrimental to your health to get into a situation where you have to use it. Sometimes you could curse the darkness as you adjust the gamma level one more time just to see where you are going - you may end up wishing the Mechanists had put night vision in your new eye.

Players of the original will be pleased to hear that where the enemies are concerned the zombies have now been quietly shown the exit and replaced by the far more scary spiders. Unfortunately, the guards haven't improved much and one experience was spoilt by the fact a guard bumped right into me while I was crouching in the darkness and he failed to react. You can also open doors right next to them and hear them say: "I wonder what that sound was?" It was a bloody door right next to you. Idiots each and every one of them.

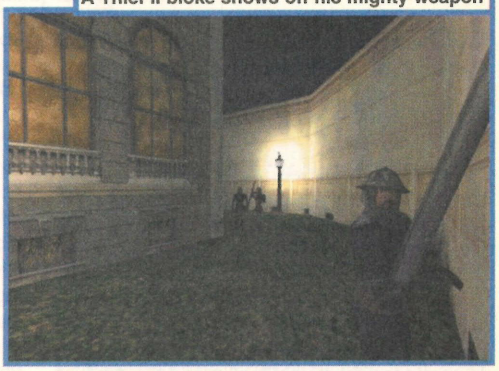
The robots are even worse and are easy to trick into blowing themselves up with their projectile missiles. Far more dangerous are the Mechanist cameras that gaze down at you in certain areas, alerting guards or fireball-hurling turrets to your presence.

The only new addition made to your weaponry is the vine arrow. New potions, however, come in the shape of invisibility and the slowfall potion, which as the names suggest are very useful. Of course, your new eye is the main adaptation to your tools and, although it is a neat concept, it proves little than more than a gimmick. The eye can zoom in and out allowing you get a better look at things and it also acts as a receiver for little cameras you can place around the mansions you are in.


A Thief II bloke shows off his mighty weapon

It may sound as if I am little down on Thief II but the game is absolutely great. However I did expect more from a sequel. The story line is fantastic, the missions are varied enough to keep you involved and can provide as little or as much involvement as you want to give (I spent two hours on the second mission just looking around the area). The game oozes atmosphere down to the last pixel.

One thing that should have been changed in the time between the original Thief and this sequel is the game engine. Since its creation for the original, back in 1998, the engine has undergone one adaptation - for the fantastic System Shock 2. Unfortunately you can't teach an old dog new tricks and the graphics haven't changed much despite an increase in polygons. The sound is still fantastic, especially if you have invested in a 3D soundcard and surround-sound speakers. Thief II packs all the tension in, and provides a greater thrill and more interesting missions than its predecessor. If you're after suspense and a more strategic look at the first-person genre then you have to buy this game. GD



PROS

- Great atmosphere
- Engrossing storyline
- Stylish cut-scenes

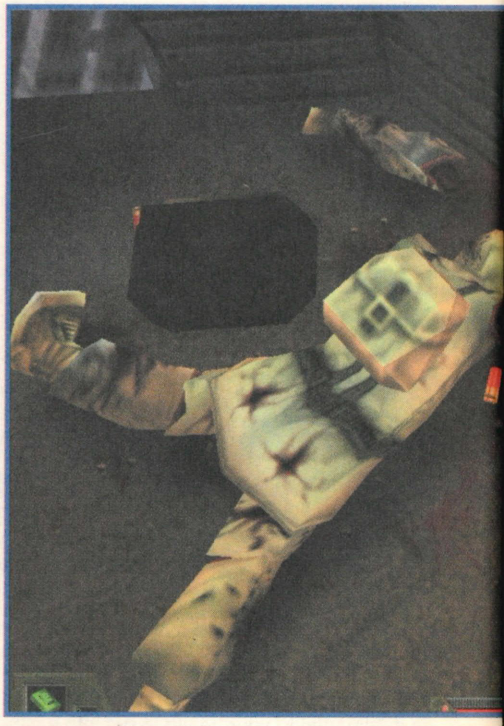
CONS

- Old graphics engine
- Poor guard AI
- No real equipment advances

Min Req: P233, 48MB RAM, 3D card **GDO Suggests:** PII-400, 64MB RAM, 16MB 3D card
Publisher: Eidos **Developer:** Looking Glass Studios **Format:** PC **Release:** Out Now

Soldier of Fortune

Watch it mate, you'll have somebody's eye out with that



Soldier of Fortune is a realistic depiction of modern warfare. As a result, this game contains scenes unsuitable for all audiences. Action is the name of the game in this first person shoot 'em up from Raven Software - action and lots of gore to go with it.

Kevan Mander

Aaaaghhh! - sorry, got a bit carried away there

You play John Mullins, former army man gone freelance, using his guile and knowledge to forge a career as a gun-for-hire. Employed by an organisation called The Shop you and your partner Hawk solve problems that governments just can't fix. So when all hell breaks loose in the subways of New York the people on Capital Hill call in John to blow gang member guts all over the floor. Pretty soon you are on the trail of four missing nuclear warheads across the world in ten gut-spilling missions.

Things start quite nicely and you might be fooled into thinking this is another run-of-the-mill shooter. You'd be wrong. Despite all the simple things you do in training - movement practice, a shooting range and sniper training (and I know some people will buy it just for the sniper rifle feature) - you're in for one hell of a ride.

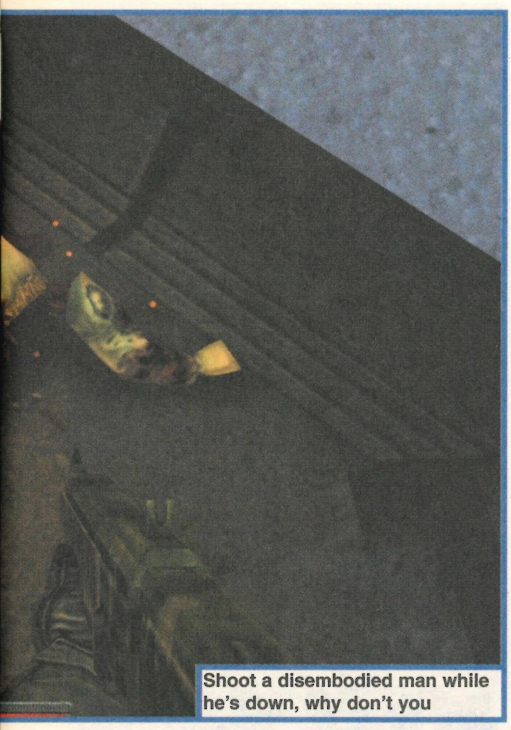
Out in the field things turn into bloody mayhem. Surprisingly, Soldier of Fortune has managed to forgo any controversy about its content. This may be because of the two versions - bloody red and safe green - that hit the shops. If any game in the world deserved a fuss to be made then it was this one. Strange how the world works isn't it?

The first mission introduces you to the most enticing feature of Soldier of Fortune - the body location hit. More of a blood-bath than a challenge, this mission lets you have your fun before getting down to the task at hand.

Previously in games, if you shot someone in the leg it was like hitting them anywhere else and they would invariably die. In Soldier of Fortune each character has 26 hit locations mapped onto their bodies. If you hit a man in the arm he will grab it and curl up in pain. That's if you don't blow it off in the process. More powerful weapons will rip limb from limb, leaving bloody stumps and corpses in their wake. A gut shot will have your victims intestines hanging out and a head shot will blow their skull apart.

One thing which struck me as I was playing Soldier of Fortune was its similarity to Goldeneye on the N64. Although not as great as that console classic, this game certainly gives you the impression it is one of the best out there. I'm hesitant to give it such praise because, while one part of me loves its sick approach, another part of me thinks, beyond the gore, there isn't much else.

The game as a whole doesn't tie together very well. The missions are good but lack interaction. Occasionally, as you run around pushing the umpteenth door button, you feel your involvement waning. This game lacks the puzzle solving element which keep you thinking as you play. One of the most annoy-


Shoot a disembodied man while he's down, why don't you


Use the sniper rifle carefully and you can take out the enemy's chin - handy!

ing features is the way the game fades to cut-scenes. The best example I can find is on the level set in Kosovo where you need to disable a cannon. Once you reach the cannon - by disposing of the horde of soldiers in your way - it automatically switches to a cut sequence. It's not much to ask that I go down to the gun and plant the explosives myself is it? This means the game comes across as a bit of action-only, gunfest and no thought really needs to go into it.

"While one part of me loves this game's sick approach, another thinks, beyond the gore, there isn't much else"

The graphics are surprisingly good. The developers have made the best of the Quake 2 engine and have added a few spins of their own on top. Although some of the textures are a bit average they are as gritty as the art-work in the Victor comic book.

The engine really comes into its own during the animation of the characters as they collapse, writhe in agony and display all kinds of physical pain. The best bit is when you shoot a soldier carrying fuel in a tank on his back. The resultant fireball is very satisfying.

In non-violent mode, pumping a round into a static oil tanker will let forth a stream of black gold. In some levels, such as the arctic level in Siberia, there is a lot of fogging and the enemy can see you before you see them which gets annoying and is very deadly.

Sound is top-notch the deep chugga-chugga of the guns as you let off round upon round of ammo is particularly good. The ambient effects are great like the tannoy system in the hanger bay level and the rumbling of tanks in Kosovo.

To be fair, Soldier of Fortune is a great action game. Great fun is to be had in multi-player, which is fast and furious but not so gory. The level of violence may put a few people off but there is a parental lock for you to switch on if you don't fancy blowing people's heads off. If first-person shoot 'em ups are your thing then this is a must-buy. Not as good as Half-Life, twice as good as Sin, Soldier of Fortune is certainly in the top rank of this genre. GD


To lighten the mood, the main character has been given a comedy moustache

PROS

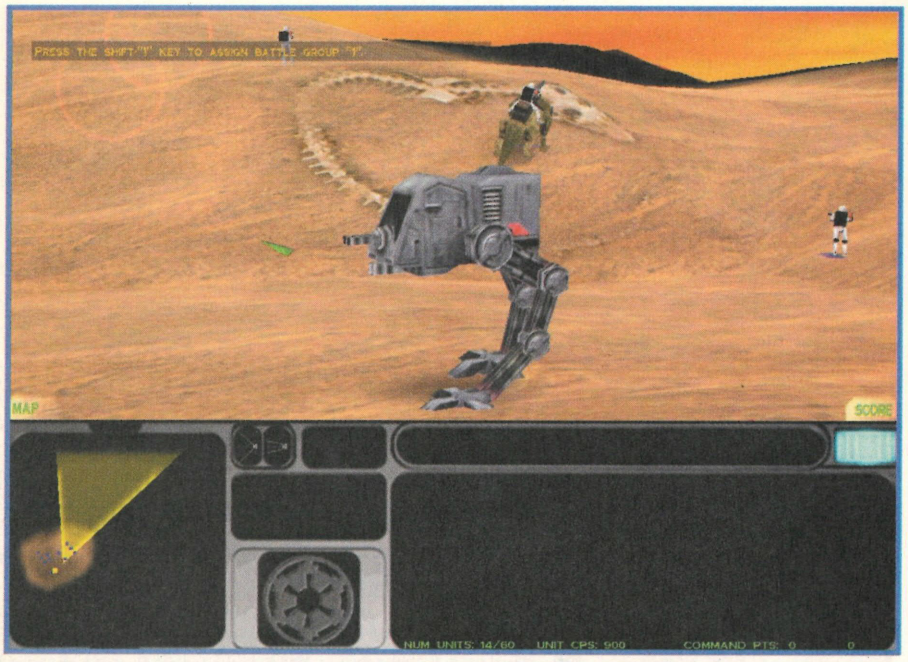
- Loads of gore
- Revamped Quake engine
- Sniper-rifle mode

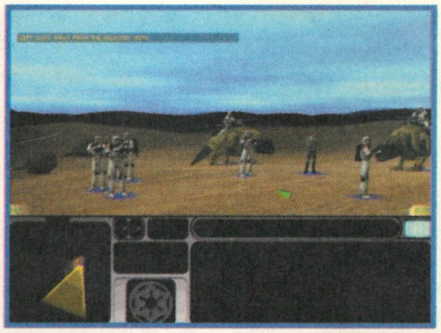
CONS

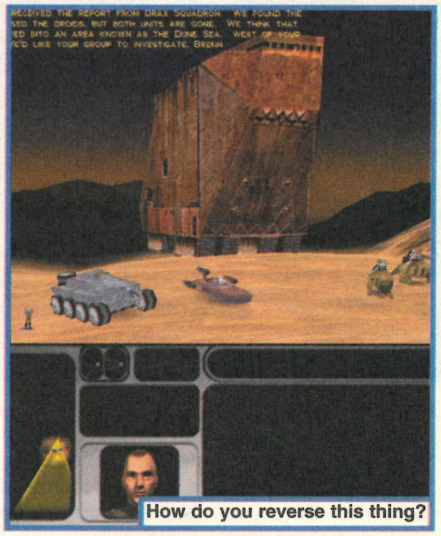
- Loads of gore
- Lack of involvement
- Over use of fogging

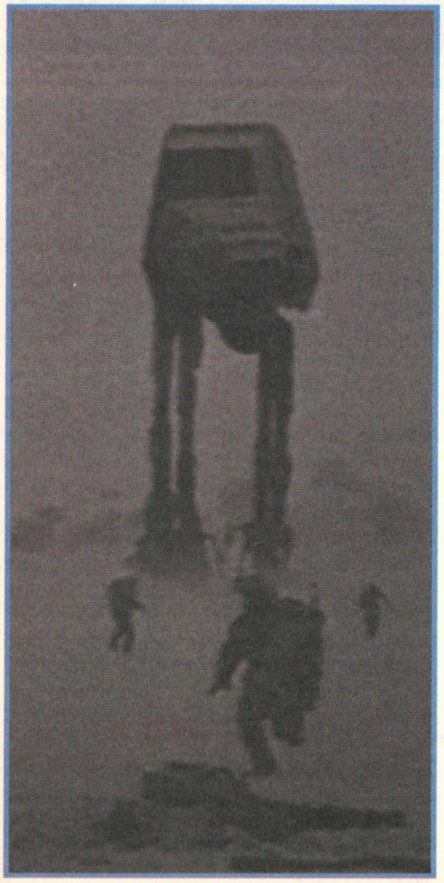
Min Req: P233, 64MB RAM, 3D card **GDO Suggests:** PII-333, 64MB RAM, 3D card
Publisher: Activision **Developer:** Raven Software **Format:** PC **Release:** Out Now

Force Commander






How do you reverse this thing?



Let's face it - anything Star Wars is a guaranteed hit. But in the past some excellent games - and some real tat - have emerged from LucasArts' studios. Which is this?

Mike Smith

LucasArts seem to want to stick the Star Wars licence on as many game genres as possible. There has been the popular X-Wing series of space combat games and an excellent FPS in Jedi Knight with another, Obi Wan, in development. Action adventure The Phantom Menace was another Star Wars spin-off and we hear of an untitled MMRPG in development. So it should be no surprise to see Star Wars making an entry into the traditionally difficult RTS market.

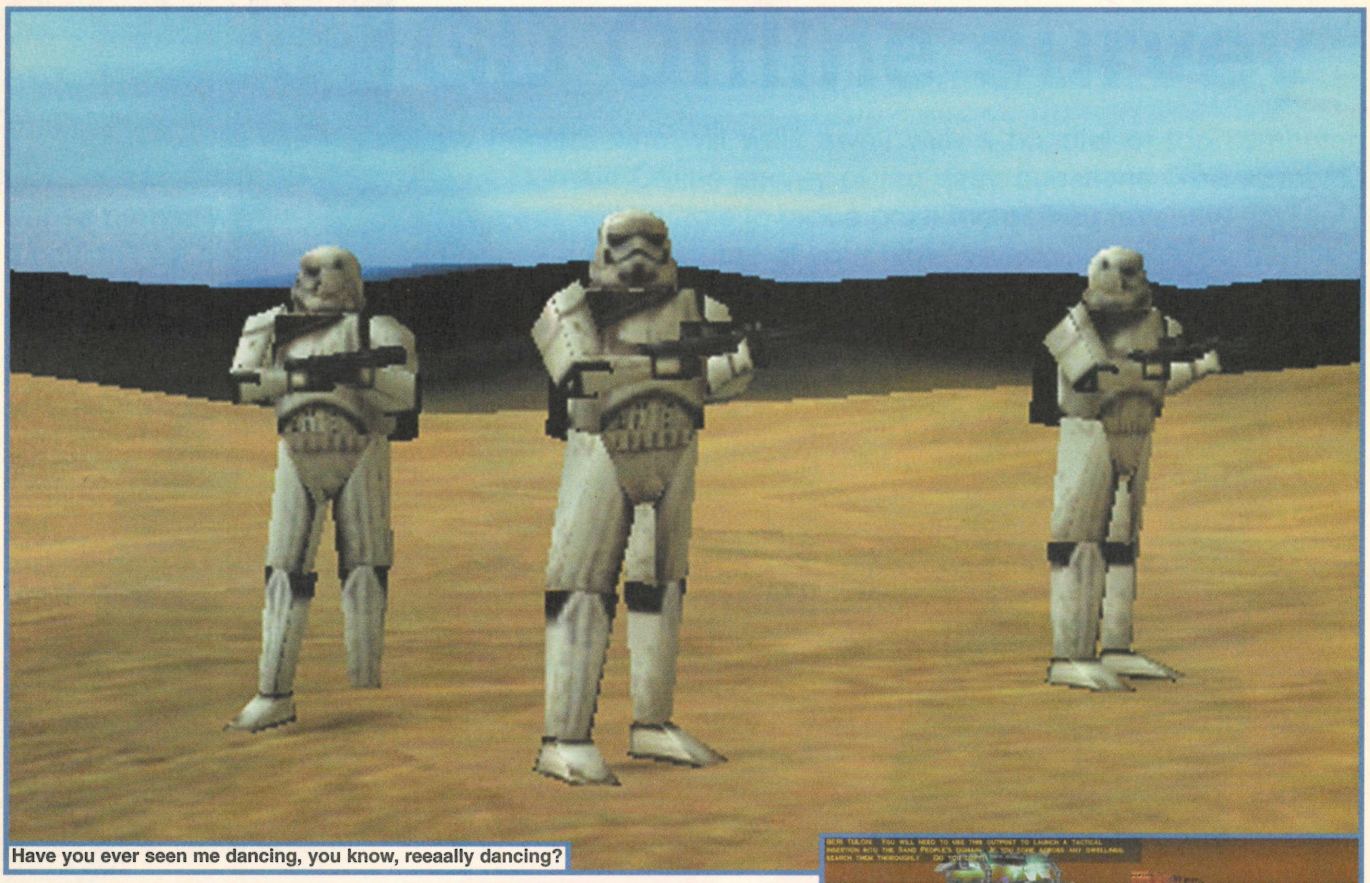
Force Commander takes a slightly different direction to most strategy games, presenting the action in full 3D with a free camera from which to view proceedings. It casts the player as the commander of an Imperial battle force, and the strong plot follows the very first film - at least to begin with.

Unlike traditional RTS games, Force Commander does not rely on resource gathering or economy management. By winning battles and capturing enemy buildings, you gain command points, representing your standing and respect from your commanding officers. These can be spent on reinforcements or base upgrades, which are ferried down from the orbiting Star Destroyers. More respect means a bigger posse - just like it is round my 'hood.

Base upgrades consist of the usual things like turrets for defence, hospitals and repair centres, and landing pads for the ubiquitous TIE Fighters. Lots of people will be eager for the chance to have big-ass AT-ATs stomping around doing their bidding, and they won't be disappointed. From stormtroopers to AT-STs, all the Imperial hardware is here for fans to play with - and the novelty value makes the game great fun to explore.

When units move around the field of battle, atmospheric sound effects place you right among them. And it is always fun to play the baddies for a change - the Rebels always were a smug bunch, and Ewoks just plain got on my tits. It's difficult getting matted teddy bear fur from between the vanes of a speeder bike.

But as time goes on, you will realise the models don't look much like they do in the films. They can be disappointingly blocky and



Have you ever seen me dancing, you know, reeaally dancing?

move in an unconvincing way - walking through hills and even each other. And by the nature of the game, the camera will often be zoomed out for a good view - too far away to enjoy the sight of your walkers stomping some Rebel scum.

As they fight, your troops gain experience - though as you will know from the films, your stormtroopers are little more than cannon-fodder. Although powerful in large numbers, individually they are unlikely to live long enough to make the grade. Larger vehicles, too, won't fare much better - the defence turrets are powerful and the best way to overcome enemy emplacements is by weight of numbers.

This introduces yet more difficulties. Back-up troops need to be shipped down from orbit and there is a tight restriction on the speed at which this can be done. Only six stormtroopers at a time in a drop-ship - which seems odd, remembering the amount of Rebels Han Solo fitted in his stolen Imperial Shuttle. This makes the reinforcement process slow and tedious.

Shame, too, that LucasArts has seen fit to re-mix the classic Imperial March into a hideous dance-techno type mess. I thought we had seen the last of 2 Unlimited in 1994.

And then there's the interface. Although the camera is flexible and easy to control after a little practice, the console takes up a hoofing great chunk of screen real-estate - about the bottom third - and although it can be hidden, it is far from an elegant solution. Path-finding, too, is not ideal, with units wandering about all over the place. Without the Star Wars licence, Force Commander would barely merit a second glance. With it, it manages to be enjoyable and novel - for a few hours, at least.

Extended play reveals it to be just another flawed RTS clone - or, if you prefer, another cynical attempt to make some wedge by putting a big name on a bad game. GD

PROS

- It's Star Wars
- Fun - for a while
- Atmospheric sound

CONS

- Big name, poor game
- Disappointingly blocky models
- Lame Imperial March re-mix

Min Req: P233, 64MB RAM **GDO Suggests:** PII-300, 64MB RAM
Publisher: Activision **Developer:** LucasArts **Format:** PC **Release:** Out Now

SURVEY

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- Computer and Video Games ☐
- PC Gamer ☐
- PC Zone ☐
- Official Dreamcast Magazine ☐
- Other/none _____

2. How many games do you buy every month?
- 0 ☐
- 0-1 ☐
- 1-3 ☐
- 3-5 ☐
- 5+ ☐

3. Where do you usually buy your games?
- Independent games stores ☐
- Electronics Boutique ☐
- Game ☐
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- Other _____

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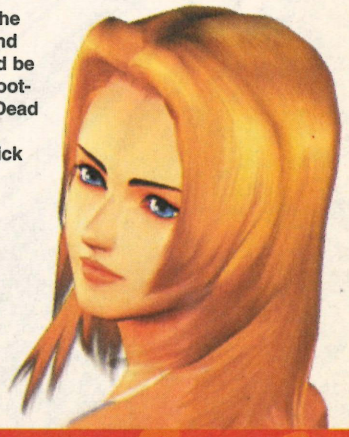

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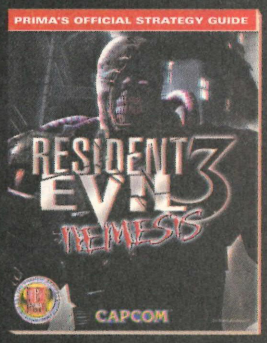

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The Joy of X: Microsoft's console gamble

After nine months of work, Microsoft has unveiled its new toy. Games Domain's **Mike Smith** investigates Bill Gates' biggest gamble.

The Redmond giant, more famous for lumbering operating systems and office software, has decided to combine its game development, DirectX and hardware divisions to produce a Sony-killing monster console. All the speculation is over - we have a comprehensive spec sheet, and we're not afraid to publish it.

X-Box was unveiled in the UK at a press conference in a hyper-trendy bar in London. Microsoft's X-Box general manager, J Allard, came over to take a crowd of drooling journalists through his vision for the console. In a revealing presentation, followed by a question and answer session, J ended speculation over the battle between AMD and Intel to provide the power at the heart of the X-Box.

Sadly for AMD, J confirmed MS has chosen to stick with its traditional bedmate Intel. A 600 MHz Pentium III derivative will be used, custom-built to allow MS to fine-tune the specifications to its exact requirements. Graphics hardware will be provided by nVidia, currently riding high on the success of their GeForce chip. X-Box will feature a chip codenamed NV25 - the GeForce was previously known as the NV10 - indicating we can expect nVidia to release two more chips between now and X-Box launch.

In perhaps the most interesting move, X-Box also contains an 8Gb hard drive. J described this move as the single major advance X-Box will bring to the market. Just as the Nintendo had gamepads, and colour graphics - and PlayStation had its CD-ROM drive, memory cards and 3D hardware - X-Box will have the hard drive. What does this mean from the user's perspective? "Think of an 8Gb hard disk as a very large memory card," J explained. But it appears at this stage Microsoft are really throwing this idea at the development community to see what they can come up with.

Standard 10/100 Ethernet connectors will be included, allowing local-area networking of many X-Boxes, using standard Ethernet connectors. A standard PC could also be connected. Don't like using the track editor on Midtown Madness X-Box? Use your PC instead, download the tracks through the network, and play them on the X-Box. An "expansion port" is included and, at launch, a 56k modem will be available as an add-on. But MS is probably hoping broad-band networking will have taken off by then, in whatever form.

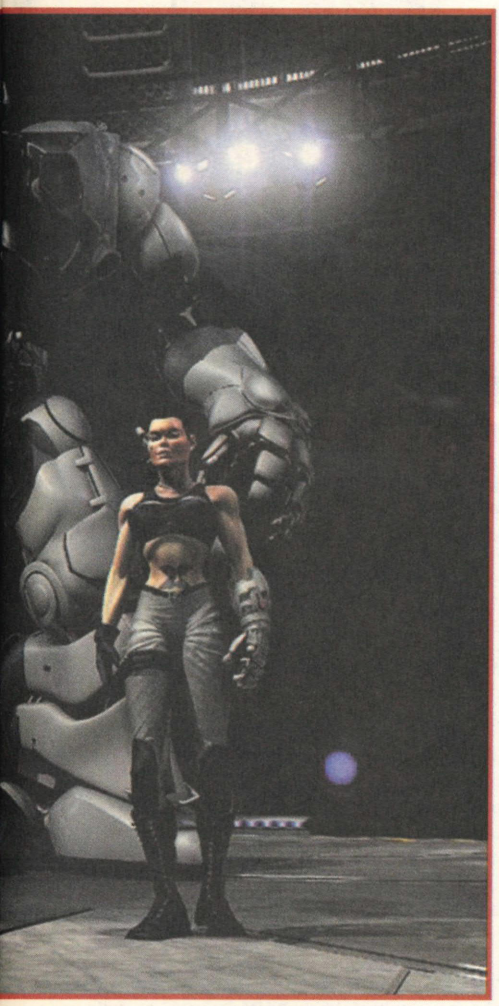
A computer generated mock-up of what X-Box graphics are expected to look like

Microsoft's X-Box general manager J Allard

> "The hype is over. We have got a comprehensive spec sheet and we're not afraid to publish it"

Not everything is smooth in Microsoft's X-Box department though. Before the press conference, the X-Box was shown to some of Microsoft's retail and business partners. When it arrived in the UK, J took it to his hotel room to check out the demos and familiarise himself with the hardware. A source close to Microsoft filled us in on what happened next. The X-Box was shipped over with everything J would need. Not only were there gloves to ensure no fingerprints appeared on the metallic X, a duster and bottle of Windoleen were included to clean off any rogue marks that appeared. Microsoft had though of everything.

Except, that is, a step-down transformer to convert UK 240 volt mains electricity to the 110 volts the X-Box was expecting. Result? One cooked X-Box and a lot of sparks. Many panicked phone calls later, a Middlesex certified solutions provider saved the day with a replacement power supply.



The X-Files

It seems Microsoft will be lacking one "killer", exclusive title - a Mario or Ridge Racer for X-Box - but there is no shortage of support in the publishing and development community.

EA, Activision, Eidos, Namco and Hasbro are just some of the names who have come out in support of Microsoft's project. Game details are thin on the ground now, but in a few months time it seems we won't be able to move for X-Box announcements.

When quizzed about PlayStation key developer Squaresoft, J was non-committal. "Squaresoft make great games. We are working with all developers who make great games." X-Box will use DirectX to control the hardware. More commonly associated with PCs, DirectX simplifies the development process by providing a common language for games to communicate with hardware.

"We want to make sure we get great games done, and get them done faster," J told us. "Not only is DirectX mature, it is familiar to a very broad set of developers." Here is the key - 97% of PC games use DirectX, so by basing X-Box around such established protocols Microsoft hope to succeed in their goal to make "great games, done quickly".

X-Rated: Battle of the boxes

Model	X-Box	PlayStation2
CPU	600 MHz Intel	300 MHz MIPS
Graphics processor	300 MHz nVidia NV25	150 MHz Sony
Total memory	64 Mb	38 Mb
Polygon performance	300 M/sec	66 M/sec
Maximum resolution	1920x1080	1280x1024
Audio channels	64	48
3D audio support	Yes	No

The X-Box logo or a multi-coloured mess? You decide

What the X going on?

There can be no doubt that, in scheduling X-Box's unveiling a matter of days after PlayStation2's launch, Microsoft is making an aggressive move to assert itself over Sony.

And from the appearance of the specifications, X-Box has a clear lead over Sony's machine. But X-Box is more to Microsoft than just a games console. It represents a fundamental shift of focus from MS's dream of "a PC in every home" to "empowering people through great software - any time, any place and on any device".

More likely, though, the shift is driven by the fact Windows is approaching saturation point in the consumer market - a new platform means a whole new audience for Microsoft products. With such strong hardware, and no doubt a huge marketing budget, the only possible cloud on X-Box's horizon is the software.

If developers stick to producing quick-and-dirty PC conversions and multi-format releases, it is difficult to see why Joe Public will want to sell his PS2 for one - especially as in typical TV blur-o-vision, there probably won't be a huge graphical difference.

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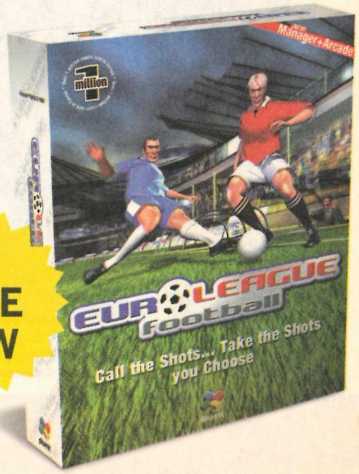
Get your kit on! ELF is released Q1 2000 on PC CD-ROM

"It takes the management / arcade bull by the horns, swings it round and gives it's facial hair a trim with a cut-throat razor"
PC Format (April 2000 - 83%)

"It's testament to the design that you're never overawed by this level of detail"
Four Four Two (May 2000 - 95%)

"You won't be disappointed"
Daily Telegraph (March 2000 - 4/5)

EURO LEAGUE football



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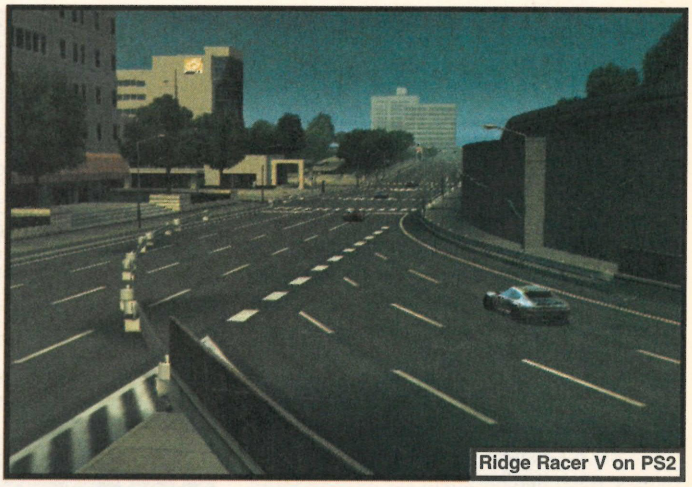
Jury still out on PS2

With baited breath, an expectant crowd gathered around Console Domain's large screen television. As the brown parcel got ripped to shreds, suddenly there it was - the mighty PlayStation2.

As hands trembled in the rush to get it connected, it wasn't long before we all were gorping at Ridge Racer V's stunning visual display. Strangely though, it wasn't long before most had returned back to work as per normal and, even as lunchtime arrived, ISS held its regular time slot on the box.

Don't get me wrong, the PlayStation2 is by no means a waste of space but I think our lack of enthusiasm was more to do with the actual titles themselves lacking any innovation. Both Ridge Racer and Street Fighter have been around for ages now and while they look absolutely awesome on the PS2, once you become accustomed to this, essentially they boil down to the same old gameplay at heart.

Talk around the office generally suggests that when we start seeing a fine blend of inspirational new games, alongside souped-up classics - such as your Tekkens, Resident Evils and Gran Turismos - then everyone will want to own one of these beasts.



Ridge Racer V on PS2

Besides the cutting edge PS2 reviews, we have our usual selection of treats this month, starting off with The World Is Not Enough preview. If this game, under development by Eurocom, amounts to anything nearly as good as the masterpiece of Rare's Goldeneye, then I'm certain it could top the charts for weeks. Tony Hawk's appearance on the Dreamcast is also sure to cause a stir when it's completed next month and we've had a look at the nearly finished article. Our reviews present plenty of street-tough action this month with the likes of Gekido, Dead or Alive 2 and Urban Chaos more than capable of standing their ground. Rayman 2 and MDK2 add a lighthearted perspective to proceedings before we head back to the ramps with Street Skater 2.

As ever, please keep the letters and comments flowing in, where you get a chance to either praise or slate our hard work. You can email me at **gareth@gamesdomain.com** or write to me at the address on the magazine's content page. See you next month. GD

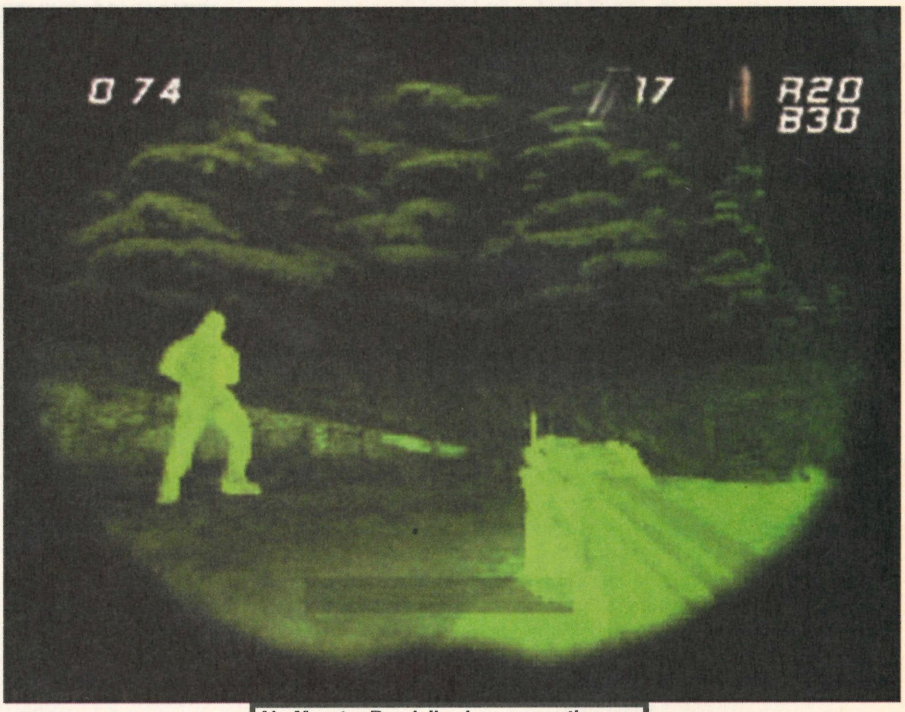
The World Is Not Enough

Voted by many as the greatest console game of all time, Rare's awesome reworking of the 007 Goldeneye movie for the N64 definitely deserves a place on the video gaming role of honour.

Gareth Holden

Now having stealthily captured the game licence for last year's smash hit movie, The World Is Not Enough, Electronic Arts together with UK-based Eurocom, is planning another blockbuster for N64 owners.

As in Goldeneye, the game will be played in a first-person perspective, through the eyes of Her Majesty's finest secret agent - James Bond, secret agent 007. Up to 40 of the most hi-tech and sophisticated weapons and gadgets will be at Bond's disposal as he progresses through 15 different arenas and levels, based on locations from the film. Actual allies and adversaries featured in the film will naturally play a major part in uncovering the game's intriguing plot and the developers have also promised several all-new adversaries.



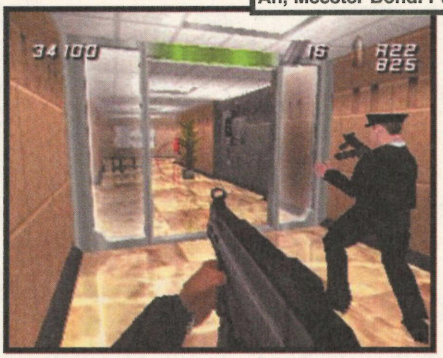
Ah, Meester Bond. I've been expecting you

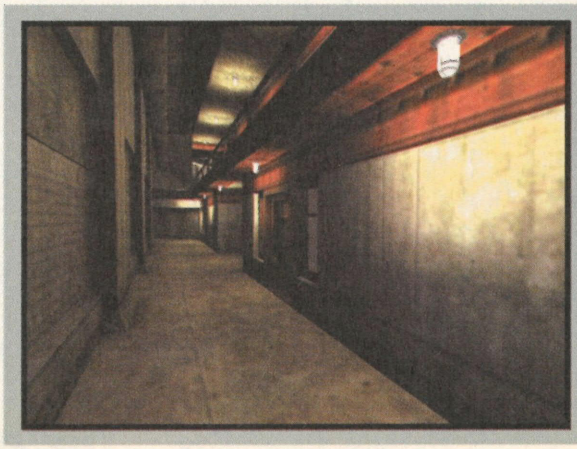
"The World Is Not Enough looks to be shaping up nicely to breath some fresh air into the N64 release list"

Fans of the original game will be especially delighted to know that the insanely addictive four player mode will return for this version. For me, in addition to the pure class of the single player mode, the multiplayer mode was one of the most addictive gaming experiences of all time. Indeed, this always prompted marathon gaming sessions through to the early hours of the morning during my student days. Inclusion of the Expansion Pak will help the action to flow along smoothly at a high frame rate, although there is no word of whether the game will be sold without the pak for those who've already forked out for it.

Other key features include authentic sound effects and dialogue throughout, to add extra depth and atmosphere to enhance the gameplay.

From these screenshots, The World Is Not Enough looks to be shaping up nicely to breath some fresh air into the N64 release list. Although EA's Tomorrow Never Dies game for the PlayStation was a disappointment, expect this to be an absolute cracker when it is released later this year. GD





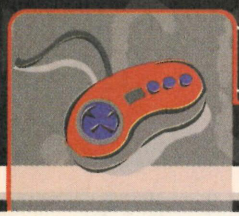
007 on PS2

EA recently announced the development of The World Is Not Enough on Sony's next generation console, the PS2. And EA has kindly released this unexciting screenshot of a hallway to whet the appetites of Bond fans everywhere.

Really makes you want to go out there and get yourself a copy doesn't it?

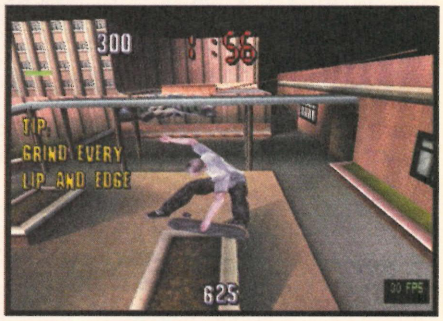
Read more at www.consoledomain.com/articles/EA_Reveal_First_PlayStation_2_Titles.html

Publisher: EA **Developer:** Eurocom **Format:** N64 **Release:** Summer



Tony Hawk's Pro Skater DC

Woah dude! Look at the air I've grabbed (or something)



Dreamcast disciples can now finally wipe the smug grin off of PlayStation owners' faces, because arguably the best game of last year has arrived.

Richard Locke

Tony Hawk's Pro Skater makes its appearance on Sega's white box in June and at last Dreamcast owners everywhere will be able to see what all the fuss is about.

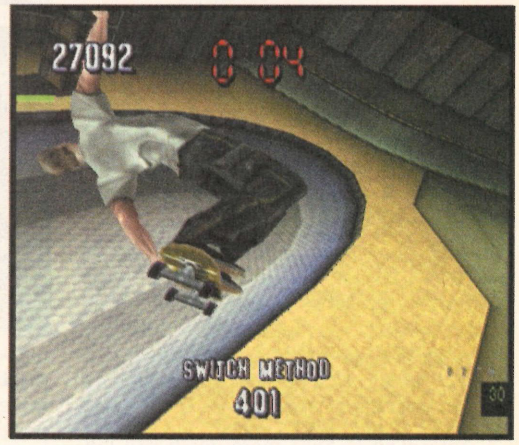
Tony Hawk's Pro Skater is the definitive skateboard simulator. Released last summer on PlayStation, it has quickly become the yardstick for extreme sports games everywhere. Pushing the PlayStation to its graphics and audio limit, and featuring sublime copy-this-if-you-can gameplay, Tony Hawk's has beaten off the competition with ease.

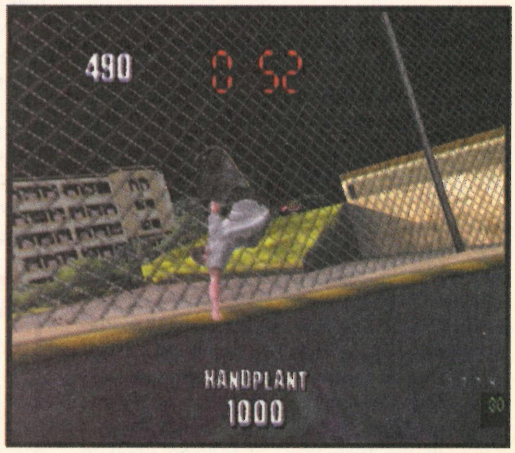
Publisher Activision knew it had something special on its hands and was quick off the mark with versions for Dreamcast, N64 and - we kid you not - GameBoy. Such is the phenomenal power of this game many think it won't be matched until the autumn when the sequel, the imaginatively named Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 2, will be released.

In the game you take control of one of ten professional skateboarders like Bob Burnquist, Jamie Thomas and some guy by the name of Tony Hawk, who is famous for monkeying around on a bit of wood, apparently. You get the chance to tour America as your chosen alter-ego, grinding the asphalt at venues like San Francisco and Area 51 (past caged aliens no less), school parks, warehouses and shopping malls. Performing the tricks and grinds of professional boarders has been translated beautifully to intuitive joypad commands, which will have you doing the impossible - or at least downright stupid - within minutes of switching the game on.

For the Dreamcast version, handled by the coding talents at Crave, the only clear change to the game has been improvements in the graphics. Higher resolution, more frames per second and much better textures have been bolted on to the game engine, making the Dreamcast incarnation of this great game a thing of beauty. Nothing else has been touched or tampered with, and with good reason too, a game this good didn't need any additions. The port to the Dreamcast is top notch and a veteran of the PlayStation version will find the only problem with transition of skills across the platforms is the infernal Dreamcast pad.

Although Tony Hawk's now appears on all platforms, the Dreamcast version looks so far to be the best of the lot, and has all the hallmarks of a classic. Activision could well have itself yet another number one game on it's hands when Tony Hawk's Pro Skater reaches store shelves this spring. GD





Publisher: Activision **Developer:** Crave **Format:** Dreamcast **Release:** Late May

Ridge Racer V

PlayStation2

When Ridge Racer V was loaded up on the PS2 in front of GDO's office of eagerly expectant gaming gurus we got our first glance of what Sony's new baby is capable of. What we saw was pretty, but is RRV's beauty only skin deep?

Gareth Holden

The original arcade version of Ridge Racer was one of the few titles that really convinced punters of the true potential of the PlayStation. A generation down the line and once again Namco has come to the aid of the PS2 with the latest take on the hugely popular series.

When you first load up the game, you are immediately impressed by the stunning intro movie. Set against a cityscape backdrop, intricate fly-over systems, multiple skyscrapers and rows of trees fill the screen, as the action flies by at lightening speed.

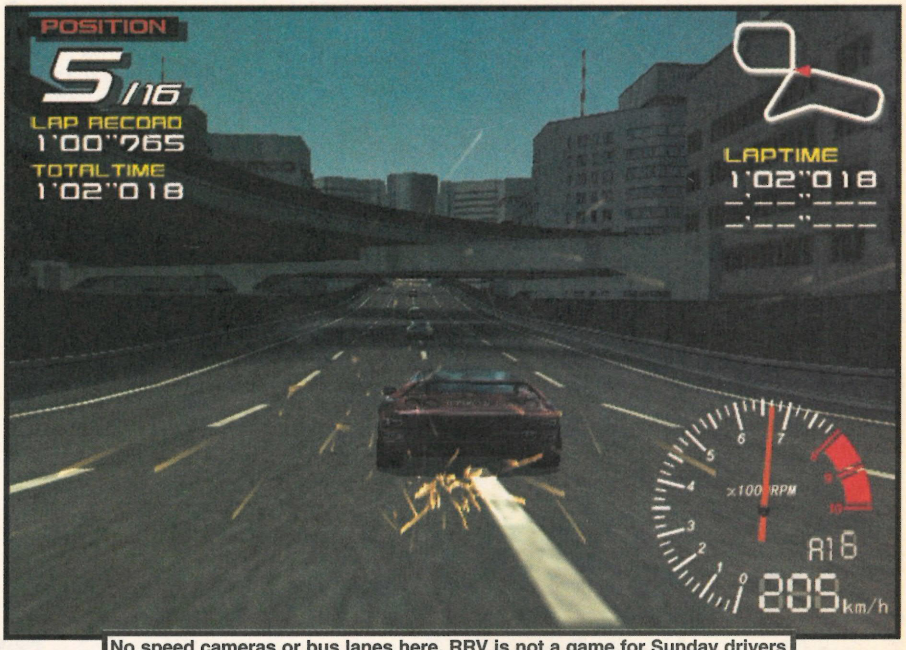
Capitalising on Namco's previous racing expertise, the game plays with the unique handling style Ridge Racer fanatics have become accustomed to. While some people may moan about the control system's lack of realism, once mastered you can race the ridges like a true pro, effortlessly sliding around the tightest of hairpins.

"Never before have I seen rows of trees that pop out of the screen, and lighting effects which make the cars sport a shine that would put many a showroom model to shame"

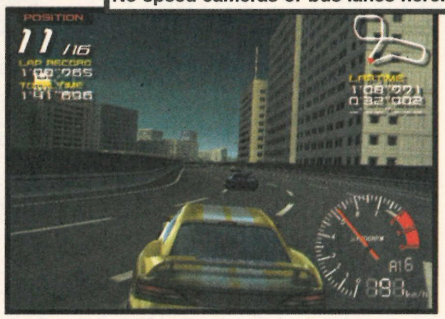
Attempting to build more depth into the light-hearted arcade nature of the game, Namco has continued the championship theme from Ridge Racer 4. For those who can be bothered, there's also the opportunity to customise your car design before the racing begins. Winning sets of races unlocks new cars with improved racing engines.

Aside from the main Grand Prix mode, the free run mode is designed purely for practice. Time attack gives you the opportunity to earn the right to challenge a computer opponent in a one-on-one duel where victory earns you the keys to your opponent's motor.

A two player mode pits two racers head-to-head in split-screen action. Racing against each other, or alongside a host of computer opponents, the action never drops in pace - although the high level of fogging used to mask out background details is slightly disappointing. Improved AI now makes opponents more aggressive, both in defending their positions and in ramming you to ruin your powerslide.



No speed cameras or bus lanes here. RRV is not a game for Sunday drivers



With gameplay fine-tuned, graphically Ridge Racer V impresses even further. Never before have I seen rows of trees that pop out of the screen, and lighting effects which make the cars sport a shine that would put many a showroom model to shame.

So many special effects will impress even the most stringent of gaming critics - blurry brake light trails being the pick of the crop. Tyres smoke and sparks even fly from cars' chassis which looks superb, although it does occur slightly too often. Grungy rock vibes become rather repetitive after a while but you'll tend to block these out, engrossed by the sheer quality of visual wizardry.

Playing this game after being used to so many below-par racers for the original PlayStation (Gran Turismos naturally excluded) is like driving a rally car after a family saloon - everything is finely tweaked and works just as the developers intended. For me, this is one test drive where I won't be returning the car. GD

PROS

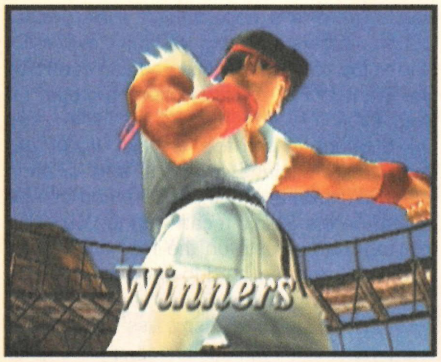
- Revolutionary graphics
- Classic control system
- Loads of spectacular effects

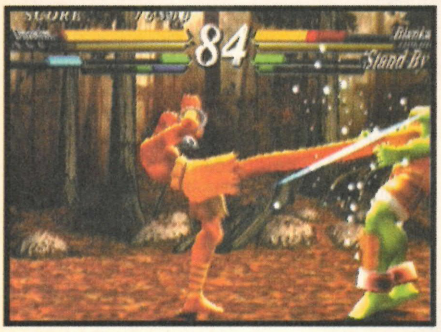
CONS

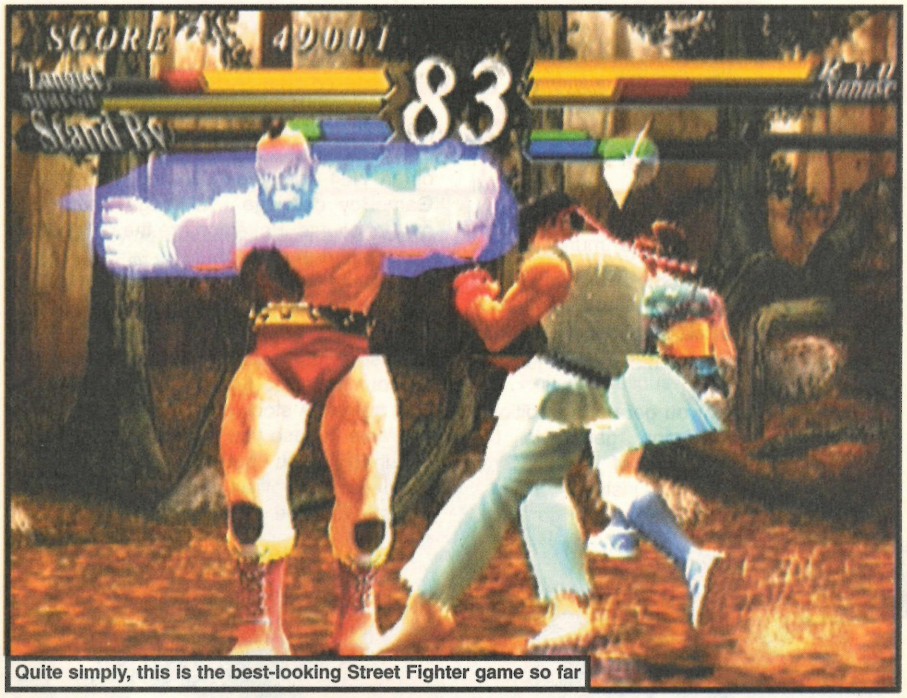
- Fogging in 2P mode
- Becomes repetitive
- Irritating Grunge music

Publisher & Developer: Namco **Format:** PlayStation2 **Release:** Late 2000

Street Fighter Ex 3







Quite simply, this is the best-looking Street Fighter game so far

The console classic Street Fighter has smashed its way onto the PlayStation2 but whether its impact will rival a Ryu dragon punch is open to question.

Gareth Holden

Cutting straight to the action, the most significant addition is the option to invite a few buddies on-screen to help you out when things get out of hand.

Within the original mode, you start out with a choice from 18 of the usual suspects, with a further eight to be unlocked later on. Veterans of the series like Ryu, Ken, Sagat, Balrog, and Dhalsim appear, while Ex series residents like Cracker Jack and Skullomania make a welcome return.

Battling through a series of bouts, each victory ends with the option of showing mercy or not. This allows you to team up with that opponent for the next bout or to leave them in a heap and carry on alone. You can then either have them fighting simultaneously alongside you or rely on them as a tag partner, just in case you're taking a real pasting.

Other modes of play in arena mode include tag battle (team up with another fighter and take on two computer players in a tag team brawl) dramatic battle (take on three computer opponents simultaneously) and team battle (select your team of players and the first person to run out of characters is the loser). A practice training mode is also part of the package and an edit mode allows you to customise your character's moves.

Within the game itself, graphics instantly impress, from the detailed characters to the luscious 3D environments. Quite simply, this is the best-looking Street Fighter game so far.

Gameplay is typically crisp for a Street Fighter title and new multiplayer match-ups add an extra dimension of fun to proceedings.

When you complete the game and the credits are rolling, it's nice to see there's an interactive part for the champion to play. Similar to Tekken 3's scrolling beat 'em up, you're faced with mobs of enemies and have to kill as many as possible before the credits run out.

A disappointment is the absence of the usual difficulty settings range - now based merely on easy, medium and hard. The omission of any speed or turbo settings is especially noticeable as the action already experiences painful slowdown when several characters are battling on-screen at once. Another let-down is that the two player mode is initially inaccessible and must be unlocked. However, you can at least play with two players in one of the arena modes.

In-game music is passive and does little to impress. This is an area that I feel has never actually been improved since the catchy tunes used in the original version on the SNES.

Although loading times are naturally quicker on this version and graphics are at times jaw-dropping, I was rather disappointed at the overall package here. It feels as though the game has been rushed to coincide with the official PlayStation2 launch and I can only hope the European version will iron out the slowdown flaws.

For true Street Fighter fans, this will no doubt prove a valuable addition to their already substantial backlog of Capcom titles. For the general beat 'em up fan, Tekken Tag Tournament's arrival just can't come soon enough. CD

PROS

- Grapically best Street Fighter yet
- Top tag action
- Crisp gameplay

CONS

- Multi character slowdown
- Locked 2P mode
- No speed or turbo settings

Publisher: Capcom **Developer:** Arika **Format:** PlayStation2 **Release:** September

Pokémon Stadium

Nintendo is set to make yet more Pokémoney. As sales of the GameBoy peak and N64s seem glued to shelves countrywide, perhaps Pokémon Stadium will perk up the fortunes of the dying format.

Mike Smith

There is no doubting the astuteness of Nintendo's marketing department. With Dolphin still shrouded in a murky fog of rumour, Pokémon and its franchises are sure to be providing a welcome source of income for the R&D department to spend. But does Pokémon Stadium contain enough to justify a fan's £50?

For your money you get not a traditional Pokémon game in the mould of Red or Blue, but instead a suite of toys and games to play with your captured Pokémon. A Transfer Pak is included - which slots into the bottom of an N64 controller, allowing it to take a GameBoy cartridge - although Mario Golf and, of course, Pokémon are the only games to support it at present.

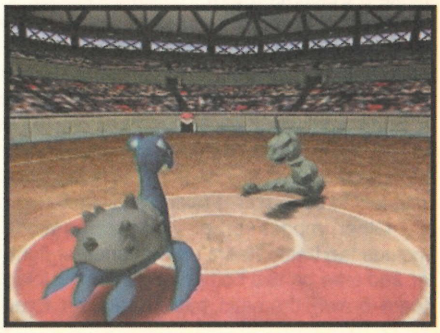
Having imported your Pokémon collection onto the N64, you can then enter them in a variety of different competitions, fight against the trainers in Blue and Red, and take on your mates to find out who really is the best trainer. A stock of "rental" Pokémon are available in case you think your collection is not up to scratch - but imported Pokémon are a little stronger than rental monsters of the same level. There is a collection of sub-games - button-bashers featuring various Pokémon - and to top off the collection you can even use the Transfer Pak to play Pokémon proper on your TV.

Stadium, in perhaps its most useful feature, lets Pokéfans organise and arrange their Pokémon and items. Pokémon can be stored on the Stadium cart - up to 240 - and playing the contests on the N64 will reward you with rare or hard-to-find Pokémon to download to the GameBoy.

Via the lab, it is also possible to trade Pokémon with your friends, and if your Pokémon perform well there are a host of hidden features to unlock - including a facility to play Red or Blue at a greatly accelerated speed - handy for training Pokémon quickly. Mewtwo is in there too, but you'll have to find him for yourself.

Many Pokémaniacs will already be salivating at the prospect of seeing their favourites in full 3D, thanks to the power of the N64. And these people will be pleased with the result. Each monster is rendered in colourful glory, and the animations for each attack and event are well realised and imaginative. The stadium background, although a little featureless, sets off the action neatly. Commendably, the developers have managed to bring Pokémon to the big(ger)

Even though some Pokémon look like the stuff of nightmares, kids love 'em



screen while retaining the crucial humour and charm of both the GB version and the cartoon.

As I took my faithful collection into battle, the Console Domain offices rang once again with the cry "Go Charmander! Kick his ass!" - and Charmander won't disappoint. The attacks - especially the fire and water-based ones - look excellent and really add to the fun of facing-off another trainer.

"Many Pokémaniacs will already be salivating at the prospect of seeing their favourites in full 3D, thanks to the power of the N64."

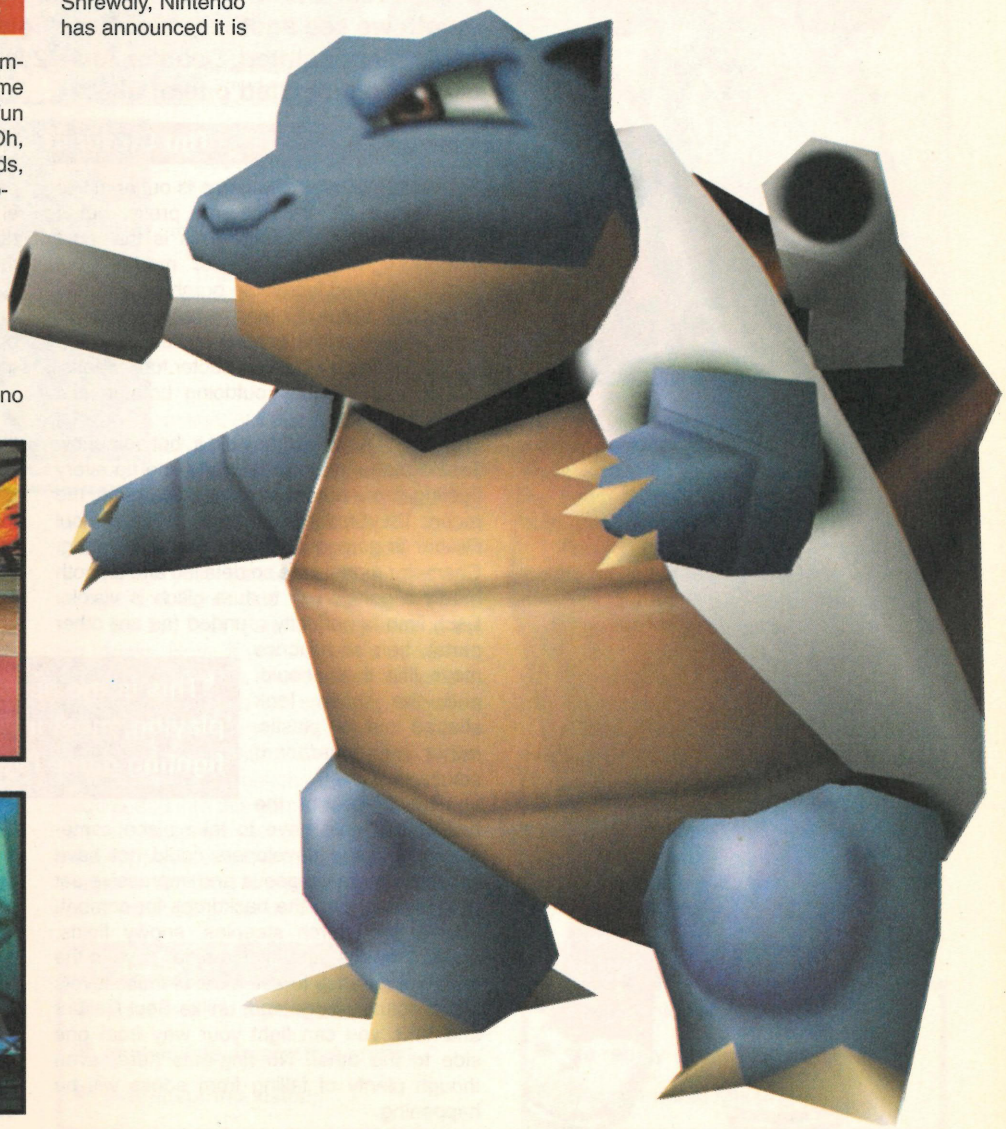
The sub-games are fun too, if a little limited, but get three friends around with some beers and you'll be having nearly as much fun as you probably do with Track and Field. Oh, sorry, Pokémon is supposed to be for kids, isn't it? Perhaps you should skip the alcohol, children - it is bad, and Bulbasaur will come get you.

Shame, though, that more of the original Pokémon voices have not been included - probably down to limited cart space - and although the American commentator will soon annoy, he fits well with the nature of the games. And there is no point in buying Stadium if you missed out on the GameBoy version - many of the features are only accessible via either Red or Blue.

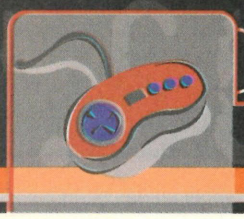
Question is, is it worth buying an N64 for Stadium? A lot of GameBoy owners will be wondering whether to pester their parents into yet more Pokéxpense. Shrewdly, Nintendo has announced it is to release a special N64 package, containing Stadium and a few other goodies for £99. And to any committed trainer - especially with a few fellow Pokémaniacs - it will extend the life-span and amusement value of your favourite game substantially.

Pokémarvellous. GD

PROS	CONS
Excellent graphics	Limited without GBC
Loads of variety	Disappointing sound
Bound to sell a skipful	Will annoy parents



Publisher & Developer: Ninetendo **Format:** N64 **Release:** April 7



Dead or Alive 2

Never trust a girl with enormous feet. (especially when she's a martial arts expert!)

And....rest

Slam dunk da funk!

Dreamcast owners have had no shortage of quality fighters to choose from. From the launch of the console onward, it seems as if every month we see another must-have fighter on the shelves, and few have really disappointed. Dead or Alive 2 is the latest, and perhaps the most eagerly anticipated one of all.

Tim Stevens

The waiting is over, the game is out and, like Muhammad Ali, it's not only pretty, but it packs a hell of a wallop. This is the most intense fighting game ever made. Soul Calibur featured incredible graphics and fluid gameplay, Virtua Fighter 3 featured lavish backgrounds and a fighting system so deep that mastering a single character took weeks. DOA2 impresses by outdoing both in just about every way.

I don't know how they did it, but somehow Tecmo managed to graphically one-up every fighting game out there (except, perhaps, the recent PlayStation2 offerings). Where Soul Calibur is gorgeous, DOA2 is awe-inspiring. Character models are so detailed and smooth hardly a polygon or texture glitch is visible. Each limb is perfectly rounded (as are other parts), hair and fabrics move like they should, and the faces look shaped out of plastic, rather than cardboard pieces.

But that's not the half of it. Fights have to take place somewhere, and the developers could not have chosen a more gorgeous and impressive set of locales to form the backdrops for combat. You've got church steeples, snowy fields, ornate theatres, and even a small cove in the centre of a dense forest. Most of these levels are absolutely huge and, unlike Soul Calibur and VF3, you can fight your way from one side to the other. No ring-outs here, even though plenty of falling from edges will be happening.

> "This is the best looking, best playing, most involving and fun fighting game I've ever played."

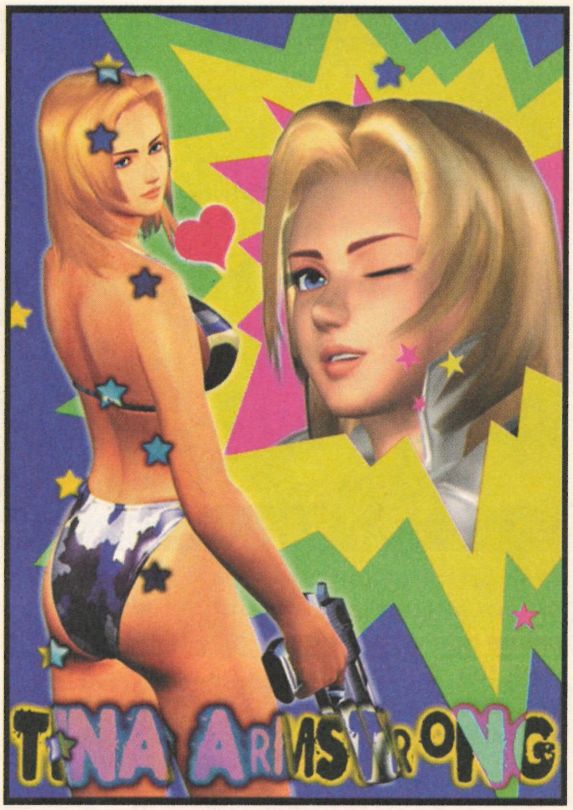
Aside from being huge, multi-tiered, and interactive, the fighting arenas are superbly detailed. One features small streams running about with fireflies filling the air, while another takes place on a large elevator moving through some huge underground complex. Each is impressive enough to make you want to just wander around. Of course, your CPU opponent will be right there, reminding you this isn't a scenic trip.

About half of the selection of characters is made up of beautiful and - ahem - buxom ladies, with the remainder being quite ferocious-looking guys. While many of the ladies look very similar, for the most part their fighting styles are all vastly different. Lei Fang, for instance, uses a very flowing T'ai Chi style, while Tina surprises with her wrestling style fighting, inherited from her father Bass, who is also in the game (and could pass for Hulk Hogan any day of the week). The male characters have a similarly varied array of styles, ranging from Thai-style kick-boxing to Bruce Lee.

Each character has dozens of punches, kicks, throws, special moves, and a whole bunch of snazzy counter-attacks. We've seen counters in some previous games but it's never been implemented so fully or so well as it is here. Each character has counters for high, mid, and low attacks, which are different for kicks and punches. Executing them is a matter of timing (and luck), but the impressive results are well worth the effort. Actually, I've been able to defeat difficult opponents without ever throwing a punch - just waiting for

Steady on love!

Ladies, please!



It does appear at times that Dead or Alive 2 is nothing more than a babe fest - sounds good to me. Tina for example (right) is the sort of girl you'd happily take home to mother.

them to attack, and making them pay for it with a nasty looking counter was enough.

Many of the throws in this game are likewise brutal. I keep wondering when developers will run out of impressive looking new throws, but there's no evidence of that happening here.

The fighting style definitely leans on the realistic side, at least compared to other 3D fighters like Tekken or Street Fighter EX, playing similarly to VF3. Only two buttons are used for attacks, along with a "Free" button for counters. Battle flows well, and there are few pre-set combos, leaving you free to chain together moves and counter-attacks as you see fit.

Finally, there's the phenomenal tag-team mode. Many games have featured tagging before, but none have done it this smoothly. While you are free to make up your team, each character in the game is connected to another in some way, which is likewise connected to them. So, choosing the correct two people will result in some special tag-team action. (It's no mystery - they're all aligned on the character select screen so that the proper two will be one on top of the other.) Tag exchanges are very quick, so quick in fact that many combos can be doubled in length by having your partner jump in half-way though and continuing the barrage. That's nice, but the best feature of tag-team is the tag throws. Here, if you execute a throw and press the tag button, your partner will jump in and the two of you will seriously decimate your opponent in some way.

There is one issue with this game which is really a bit of a problem - there is no replay value coded into this game. As far as anyone can tell, there are no hidden characters to unlock, no secret game modes, not even any images or anything to earn (though there are some "interesting" bonus pictures on the CD).

This omission will probably spark a debate as to whether Soul Calibur, with it's endless trove of hidden goodies, or DOA2 is the better fighter. My answer is that they're both great. Why argue?

There is nothing to earn in this game, but it is so much fun to play that most of you will go back to it again and again just to whoop some on the AI opponents. Or, if you have some friends to whoop on, all the better. This game was meant for multi-player, and a four player tag-team match is as good as it gets.

This is the best looking, best playing, most involving, and most fun fighting game I've ever played. It's lacking a bit of replay value, but the rest more than makes up for it. If you've got multiple controllers and multiple friends (with thumbs), go buy it. If you're a little unsure, go rent it, then go buy it after you're addicted. GD

PROS

- **Most intense fighter ever**
- **Immaculate, interactive arenas**
- **Awe-inspiring visuals**

CONS

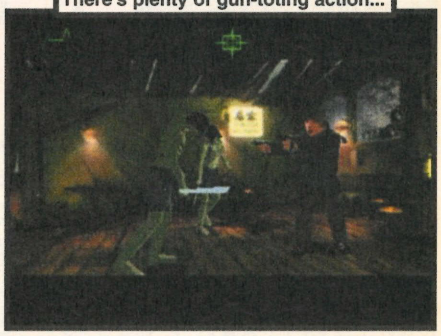
- **Lack of hidden characters**
- **No replay value**
- **Secret modes missing**

Publisher: Acclaim **Developer:** Tecmo **Format:** Dreamcast **Release:** April 28

Fear Effect


Wooooarrrhhh!!!


There's plenty of gun-toting action...



Fear Effect is probably the freshest take yet on the survival horror theme, attempting to blend the action and feel of a quality Japanese anime title with the gameplay of Resident Evil. Unfortunately, along the way the horror and game aspects were left behind in favour of producing what turns out to be an engaging, though not scary, interactive anime thriller.

Tim Stevens

The plot of Fear Effect is, well, interesting to say the least. You start on a mission with Hana and Glas, the two main characters in the game, to kidnap Wee Ming Lam, the daughter of an exceedingly rich Hong Kong businessman. The mission doesn't quite go as planned, and from here you're catapulted on a very chaotic ride that eventually places you on the outskirts of Hell. And no, I'm not talking about any sort of metaphoric Hell - it's the real deal, eternal suffering and all.

Starting out as Hana, the plot soon swings back to Glas and you take control of him for a while. There are three different characters in the game that you'll control at some point or other, though the differences between them are almost entirely superficial (until the very end, but I'll let you figure that out for yourself).

The plot is mostly told through animated cut-scenes, which are very high quality. The characters are all well developed and the visual feel of the game is superb. Backgrounds and areas are lushly detailed and fully animated.

Something that puts this game ahead of many of the anime titles out there is the voice acting. Anime fans know the only true way to watch their movies is with subtitles, as the dubbed versions usually feature the cheapest actors possible who do a stunning job of ruining the film. Fear Effect, however, surprises with quality acting from the opening sequence right down to the credits. Nearly every line is believably delivered and suits each character well.

Playing this game is almost exactly like playing Resident Evil, though often with more firepower. Backgrounds are all pre-rendered, though unlike RE, they are animated and provide a much better sense of reality.

> **"Fear Effect has big guns and a good plot but it's too short and isn't scary at all."**

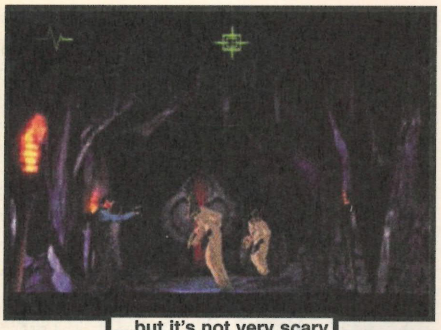
Overlaying these backgrounds are polygonal characters that move about as if they were walking through the background, again like RE. These characters are all textured in a way to emulate the look of anime as closely as possible. Remarkably, they all look nearly as good as their cut-scene counterparts. Walking, running, and other animations, however, aren't quite so well done. Hana has a very sultry walk that looks quite nice, but nearly every character runs and sneaks along almost comically.

Each character can be outfitted with two of many weapons, including pistols and Uzis. Like Tomb Raider, a character can shoot at multiple opponents simply by aiming at some point between the targets. This is a crucial technique as you'll often be facing four or five opponents simultaneously, and this way they can all be kept at bay. Other weapons, like the assault rifle and shotgun, can only be used one at a time, but their stopping power more than makes up for that shortcoming. Typically, ammunition is plentiful.

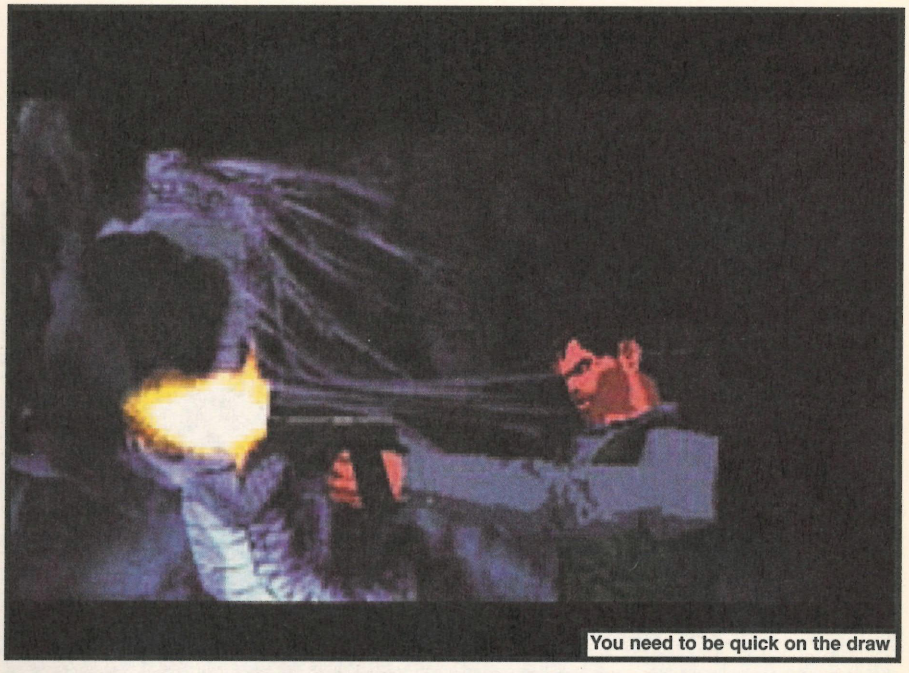
Control is very good. Each character can walk, run, or tiptoe along to sneak up behind enemies and kill them silently with one strike from a hand-held weapon. The element of stealth is not crucial in this game, but can be used effectively to preserve ammunition and life. Characters can also roll in every direction and come up firing, which is very helpful for when stealth isn't possible or you just feel like whipping out the Uzis and doing some damage.

The in-game inventory system is very well implemented and there's also a "quick draw" button that commands your character to rapidly pull out the last selected weapon. Very handy for those unexpected encounters.

Finally, there is no life bar as is typical in nearly every video game. Instead everything is based on a fear gauge. Get shot or run out of ammo, and the gauge gradually turns from green to red, then you die. There are no health bonuses, so to speak, but when you reach certain points in the game your 'fear' is



....but it's not very scary



You need to be quick on the draw

reduced to normal. When playing in the normal difficulty, these points are rather common.

The main problem with this game is two-fold. For starters, you'll find yourself wondering whether this is really a game or just an interactive movie with some action sequences thrown in. Sure, there are plenty of puzzles and plenty of action sequences to boot, but all of the plot is developed with cut sequences, leaving you with the tasks in-between.

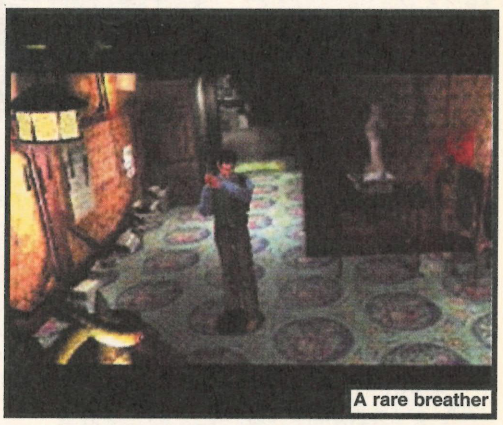
The other weakness is the game's longevity. When I saw all four disks for this title, I thought I'd be spending a very long time working my way through it. Imagine my surprise when after a little over 30 minutes of gameplay I was prompted to insert disc two.

Another issue I have is with that fear gauge. It's an interesting idea, but in practice it is essentially the same thing as the age-old life gauge we've seen since the 8bit days. The only difference is that you lose "life" not only when you are damaged, but also when you run out of ammo. Plus, the implication that your character dies not because of the ten gunshot wounds, but rather because of fear, seems rather odd to me.

Perhaps I have such a problem with this gauge because I was never once the least bit frightened by this game. There are no sections of this game that have any aspect of fear at all. There's a mildly spooky room filled with toys in Hell, but that's about it. The rest of Hell, while cool looking, really didn't make me cringe. So, perhaps this game isn't about fear and horror at all, and is just an action/adventure game. If that's true, then the fear gauge makes even less sense.

For all its shortcomings, Fear Effect is still a decent, fun title. It looks good, sounds good, has big guns and a good plot. However, it's too short, not interactive enough, and not scary at all. Anime fans should definitely check this title out, and many of the rest of you will get a kick out of it, too. However, its shallow longevity really makes this title only worthy of a rent, not of a buy. GD

A typical GDO editorial meeting



A rare breather

PROS

- Great anime styled graphics
- Good acting
- Complex storyline

CONS

- Lack of gameplay
- No fear effect
- Too short

Publisher: Eidos **Developer:** Kronis Digital Entertainment **Format:** PlayStation **Release:** Out Now

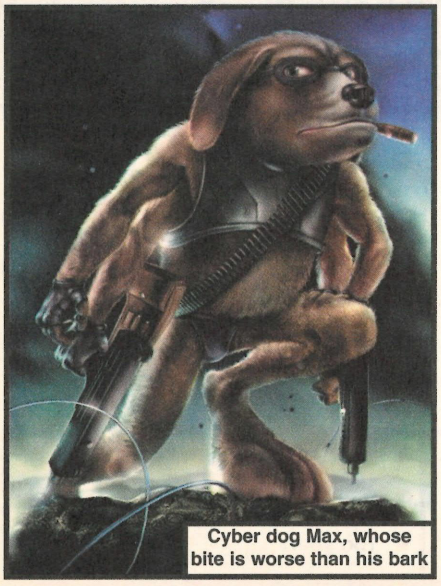
MDK2

The original MDK was released by Earthworm Jim creators, Shiny Entertainment, following a tidal wave of first-person shooters, kick-started by the release of the original Quake. Offering innovative new gameplay ideas, MDK, although not revolutionary, received a fair degree of critical acclaim.


Dr Hawkins I presume?


It's a bit Kurt Hectic round here


Dr Hawki


Cyber dog Max, whose bite is worse than his bark

Matt Vickers

Adopting the same third-person viewpoint as featured in the original, the sequel - the interestingly titled MDK2 - revolves around a post-apocalyptic world, plagued with some of the most surreal enemies yet seen in a videogame. Initially, you take on the role of Kurt Hectic, a top-drawer sniper, kitted out in the most sophisticated PVC cat-suit ever.

The specially designed suit not only gives you extraordinary sniper capabilities, but also the ability of flight in the form of a bizarre parachute. With these capabilities enabled, your character is uncannily agile, allowing you to leap and glide from the greatest of heights and take out the farthest of targets with pinpoint accuracy. But unlike the original, you do get to play as the Doc, and Max the dog, as the levels progress. Being left, in the end, with the choice of which character you think will help take you past the final hurdle.

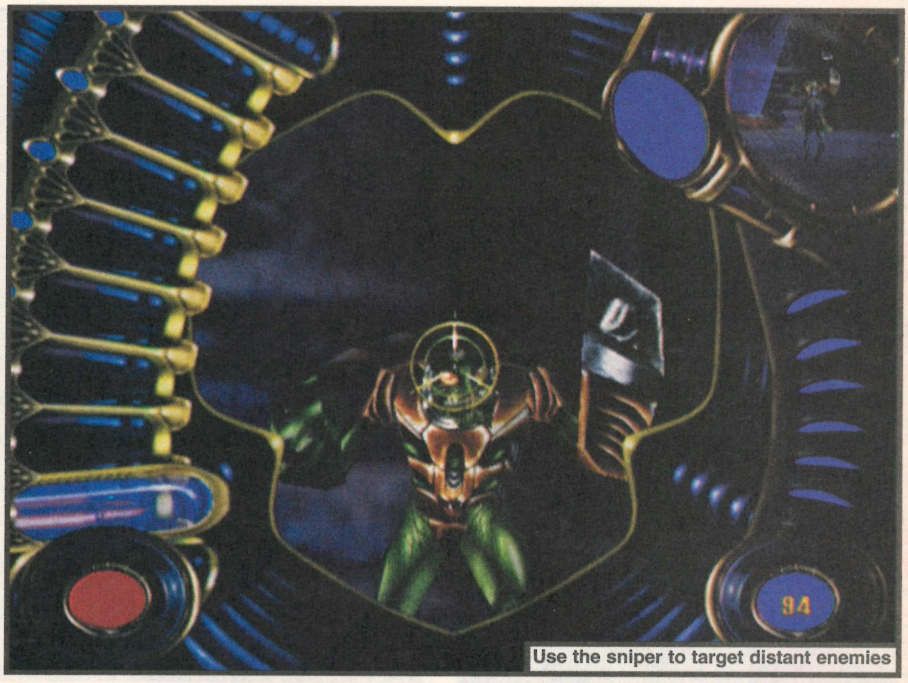
> "Be warned, MDK2 is so hard it will make even the most placid clench their fists in anger"

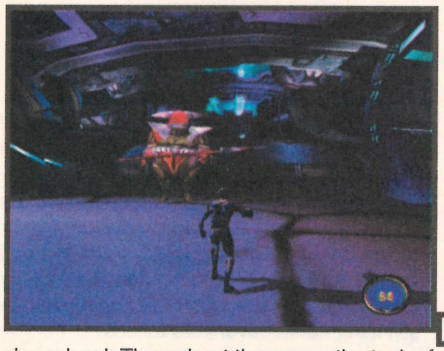
The game begins in an almost identical fashion to the original. You find yourself (Kurt) skydiving into the core of an enemy fortification, avoiding a bombardment of hostile weapon fire. If you successfully avoid an appointment with the Grim Reaper, you land, as in the original, in a series of underground tunnels. Straight away, you're thrown into the heart of the battle, disposing of a vast number of enemies, and targeting dedicated hot-spots that allow progression.

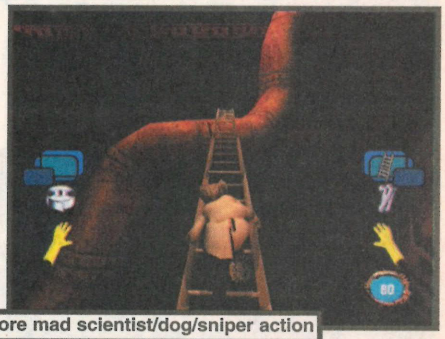
After a few 'scenes', you start wondering what significant differences the sequel offers over the original. The first level, at least, is basically a re-mixed version of the one featured in MDK. But from the second level onwards, you take control of the two extra characters, Doctor Fluke Hawkins and Max. Although both characters were featured in the original game's story-line, they were never playable. The sequel gives you the opportunity to play as Max - a six-legged, cigar-smoking cyber dog, and Dr. Fluke Hawkins - a plutonium toast-wielding scientist.

When playing as Max, MDK2 changes its emphasis from the stealthy, sniper action, to all-out blasting. Having six legs allows Max to hold four weapons in his paws. As soon as a


is surprised by the success of his home-made fertilizer


Use the sniper to target distant enemies




More mad scientist/dog/sniper action

weapon is discarded, you can equip another weapon via the user-friendly interface. Playing as Dr. Hawkins changes the game's emphasis yet again - this time to puzzle solving. As Doctor Hawkins, you gain progression through the level by combining the relevant objects together - for example, combining a toaster with some bread would result in a toast-firing device.

For me, the most impressive part of MDK2's package, is the way Bioware has adapted the MDK control mechanism to the Dreamcast's pad. Manoeuvring the game's three characters is executed in the same way as Acclaim's N64 version of Turok: Dinosaur Hunter, with the analogue joystick moving the field of vision, and the four fire buttons altering direction of movement.

Graphically, especially in 60hz mode, MDK2 is very impressive. Throughout the game, the detailed 'bio-tech' environments give the game a very post apocalyptic atmosphere. Impressively, Bioware has developed one of the smoothest running games on the Dreamcast - even when the huge boss vehicles are hurtling across the screen, the action never slows down.

As with the original MDK, the sequel suffers from the same elemental flaw - it's too damn hard. Throughout the game, the task of reaching the next save-point becomes a real nightmare of a job, making the game a little out of the reach of anyone, but the hardcore gamer.

But despite this, MDK2 is definitely a quality title that will appeal to fans of the original. It's different enough to justify a sequel, and original enough to tempt a new following. Be warned though, this game's so hard it would make even the most placid of people clench their fists in anger. GD

PROS

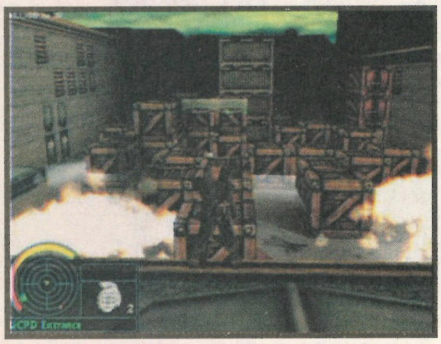
- Excellent graphics
- Varied gameplay
- Excellent control mechanism

CONS

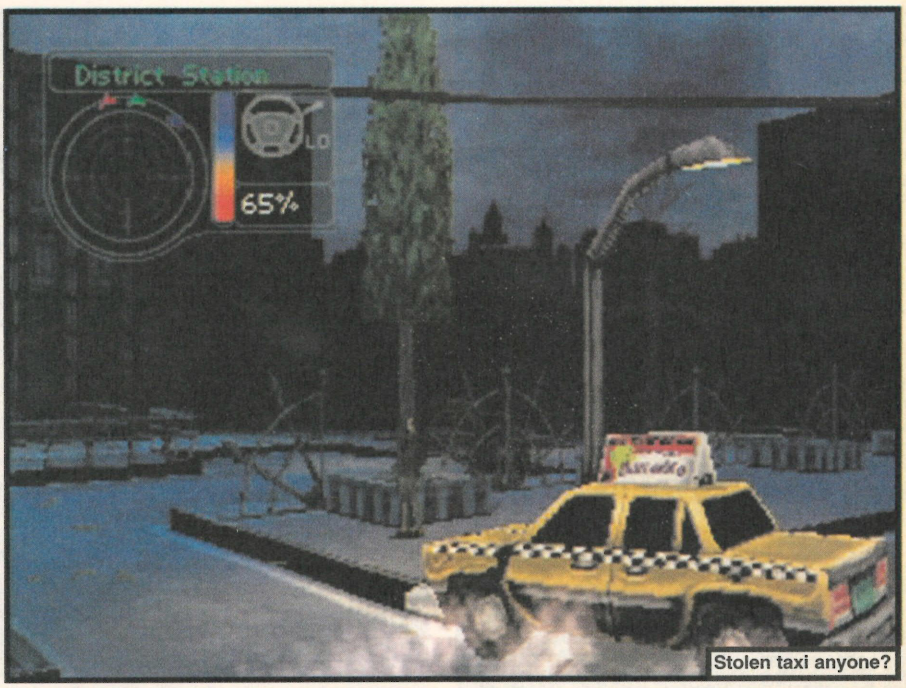
- Difficulty set far too high
- Not enough save points
- Extremely frustrating

Publisher: Developer: Bioware **Format:** Dreamcast **Release:** April 28

Urban Chaos



Urban Chaos is highly atmospheric and helps to give you the feeling that you're roaming the streets of a 'real' city.



Stolen taxi anyone?

Urban Chaos is the first game to emerge from ex-Bullfrog developers, Mucky Foot. Casting players in the role of rookie female cop D'arci Stern, it is a refreshingly diverse action adventure.

Pete Oliver

The game opens with a number of training missions that introduce a comprehensive, but surprisingly intuitive control system. Stern can more than compete with Ms Croft when it comes to platform leaping and throws in a few more 'urban' moves of her own, such as swinging herself over wire fences.

Union City is in chaos thanks to the 'Wildcats' - a gang of criminals controlled by a sinister figure in city hall. So begins a number of missions, each of which allows you free movement throughout a particular area of the city. An on-screen radar directs you to your next objective, but Stern is free to roam around in search of power-ups and extra arrests.

As you move through the streets, you'll notice a number of citizens and vehicles moving around. You may even come across a fellow cop taking on a few criminals. It's highly atmospheric and helps to give you the feeling that you're roaming the streets of a 'real' city. A throwback to Mucky Foot's Bullfrog days and the Syndicate games perhaps?

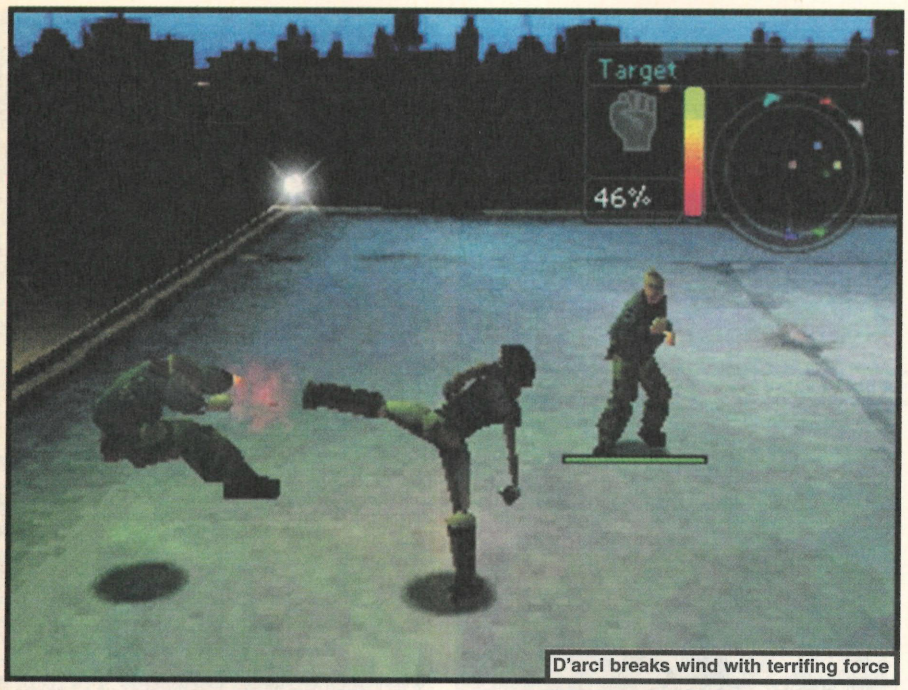
> **"The mix of exploration, combat, and occasional driving makes Urban Chaos a constantly compelling experience."**

The variety of mission objectives is highly refreshing. Taking down Wildcats, investigating murders, bringing in gang-leaders, returning cars to police bomb squads, and rescuing hostages are just some of the situations you have to deal with.

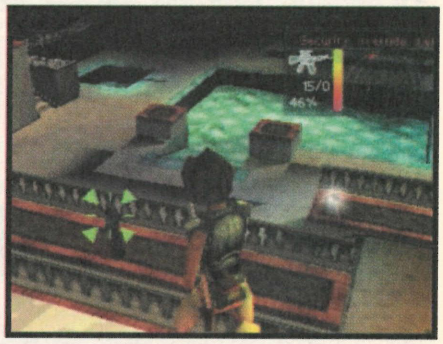
The game mixes all-out action and exploration exceptionally well. Climbing onto rooftops and taking dramatic leaps to reach objectives makes a nice change from the often bloody street fights. You even get to take control of a second character in later missions.

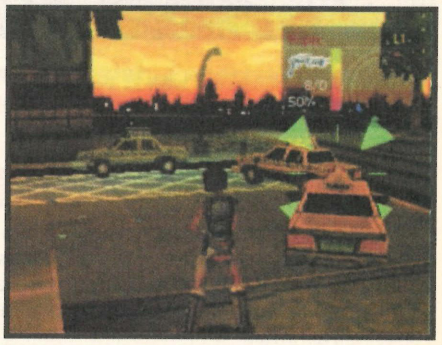
In-game combat is handled very well. Beat an opponent to the ground and you can place them under arrest. More trigger-happy cops can, of course, get their hands on a number of firearms to leave the thugs lying in pools of their own blood. One minor quibble is the relative ease with which you can find extra health - this somewhat devalues the average street fight and leaves only seriously tooled-up goons as a major threat.

Whilst dispensing justice from the barrel of a shotgun certainly helps to ease the bur-



D'arci breaks wind with terrifing force





A high level of attention to detail is evident throughout

den on the courts, it's often strangely more satisfying to arrest your opponents. Silently creep up behind an unsuspecting crook and you can take him down with one blow - be careful though, knock over a dustbin or trip on a can and he'll be alerted to your presence.

The mix of exploration, combat, and occasional driving of vehicles makes Urban Chaos a constantly interesting and compelling experience. However, it's not devoid of frustrations. Whilst mission objectives are usually very well defined, you can occasionally get stuck.

For example, the second level sees you attempting to bring a jumper down from a high rooftop. Climb the building's ladder and he'll simply jump to his doom. To save him, you have to slide down a cable from a nearby building to take him by surprise. Unfortunately, it's by no means immediately apparent that this is the solution and you'll soon feel like looking for a high building to end your own pain.

Curiously, this problem is not repeated to such a serious degree elsewhere in the game. Experienced gamers will make brisk progress through the initial batch of levels. Things only really begin to get tough when the length of missions starts to stretch out and mysterious mini-gun toting gangsters arrive on the scene.

When you consider the activity within the cities and the freedom to roam, it's quite remarkable the 3D engine manages to remain relatively smooth no matter how hectic things get. OK, so things might look a tad blocky, some of the objects could do with a few more polygons, and there is graphical tearing throughout the cityscapes, but it's not really Mucky Foot's fault that the PlayStation's 3D hardware is somewhat dated.

Coloured lighting effects and some excellently designed levels help to keep the game atmospheric. One nice touch is the swirling leaves and newspapers which given a surprisingly realistic impression of gusts blowing through the city.

In-game audio is particularly pleasing, with all the characters speaking in distinctive voices. There are plenty of incidental sound effects and, most importantly of all, the weapons sound spot-on. Walk into a busy nightclub and you'll hear some suitably pumping tunes. A high level of attention to detail is evident throughout.

Whilst it borrows many elements from other games, as a complete package Urban Chaos is an impressive title. Enjoyable combat, exploration of atmospheric locations, and the freedom to fully roam the play area makes this a breath of fresh air in comparison to other, somewhat less inspired PlayStation games. Whilst they may not have the reputation of Bullfrog yet, Urban Chaos has shown Mucky Foot has what it takes to become a top developer. GD

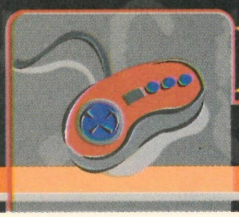
PROS

- Top exploration & combat mix
- Freedom to roam
- Very atmospheric

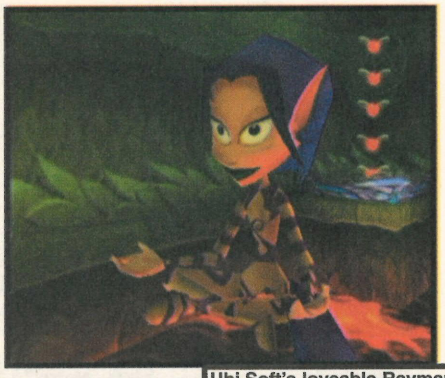
CONS

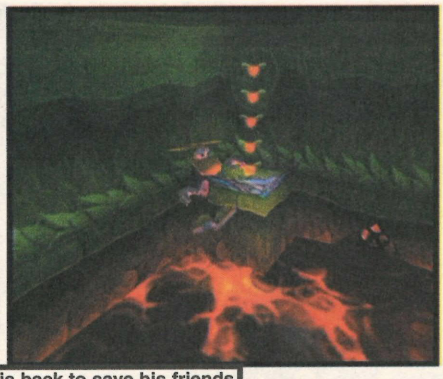
- Occasionally frustrating
- PC version better visually
- Graphical tearing throughout

Publisher: Eidos **Developer:** Mucky Foot **Format:** PlayStation **Release:** Out Now

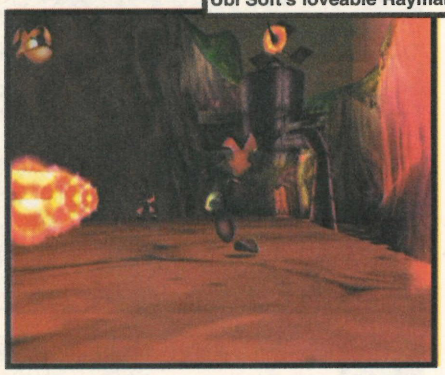


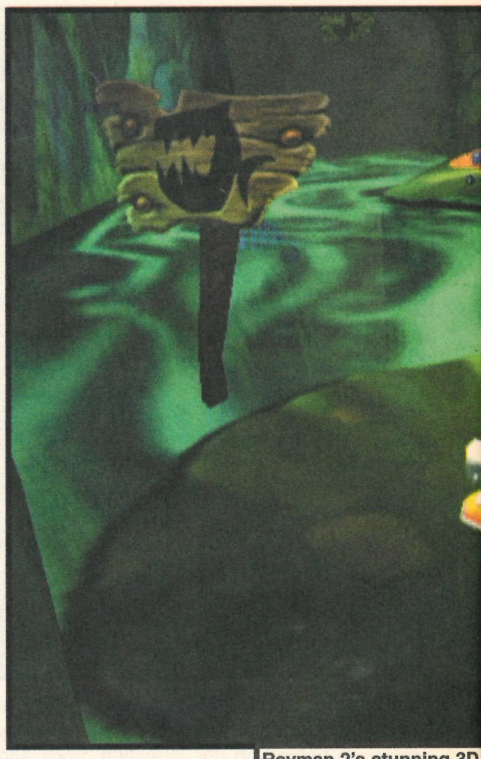
Rayman 2: The Great Escape





Ubi Soft's loveable Rayman is back to save his friends





Rayman 2's stunning 3D

Following Rayman's debut as a mere 2D character on the now feeble 16bit platforms, Ubi Soft's loveable jointless character, Ray, returns for another spectacular adventure.

Gareth Holden

Pushing the Dreamcast into unknown territory, Ubi Soft has lavishly developed an all-new 3D environment for its follow-up, which looks more than capable of suppressing even the finest of N64 rivals.

From the very start of the game, its sheer quality shines through. Beautifully detailed intro sequences outline the story as you prepare to embark on a huge adventure to restore Ray with his magical powers and rescue all of his friends who have been captured and caged by evil pirates.

Meeting Globox and the Teensies for the first time will instantly reveal the lighthearted nature of the game, making it hard for you to ever become frustrated with the action. All of the characters have amusing moves to keep you entertained. The first time you encounter the rocket on legs, which you have to tame to cross a muddy swamp, I guarantee you'll be in stitches.

As you progress deeper into the plot you'll realise that, not only has the learning curve been immaculately tuned, but also that the game has been playtested to oblivion to ensure that there are no niggling problems. Just when you think you may be stuck in an area, a simple glance around with the eyesight camera will reveal a camouflaged ledge or wall vine for you to climb up to a new level.

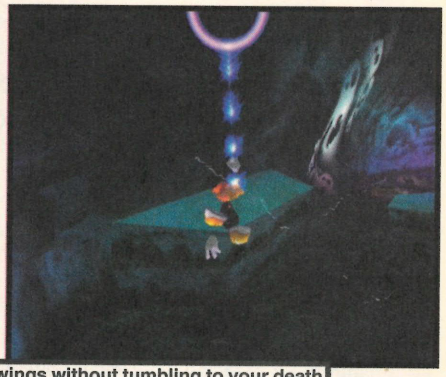
"From gorgeous rippling effects on water to rays of light piercing cave walls, Rayman 2 is quite simply a visual delight"

Starting off with simple run, jump, float and firing moves, it's not long before you're taught how to scale vines, swing from floating hoops, juggle and throw barrels, water-ski and dive down to deeper depths. There's even a Mario-style slide down a twisting slope level, which flows by at a frightening speed. This is definitely assisted by superb in-game physics, which provide realistic character movements, such as when Ray is reduced to a slow, trudging pace when carrying a hefty barrel above his head.

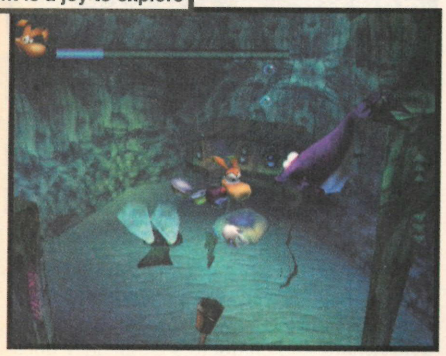
Enemies are relatively sparse in numbers and most of the time the main challenge is to negotiate numerous tricky leaps and swings without tumbling to your death. There's plenty of classic platforming challenges to test even the most experienced of gamers. If you spot an enemy lurking around the next bend, relatively poor AI leaves them reluctant to chase you and so you can simply pop your head around the corner fire off a shot and then duck for cover again. More skilful players will learn to rebound fireballs off walls for even better cover.

Boss characters gel into levels with ease and even borrow elements from titles like Mario World to ensure superb playability

ronment is a joy to explore



Negotiate numerous tricky leaps and swings without tumbling to your death



throughout. Using techniques learned previously within the game, you may have to swing from floating rings while avoiding the dragon boss's fire and then shoot an icicle above its head to finish it off. Nothing is too tricky when taking on bosses though, and you'll soon be progressing after a couple of attempts.

Most of the action is highly simplified and it's always pretty obvious where you're supposed to be going. In games like the mighty Donkey Kong 64 there are just so many objectives to complete and locations to visit you get frustratingly bogged down and, at times, confused within all the back-tracking. Not so here.

Objectives are kept simple, where mainly you're looking for different coloured lums (floating, ball-shaped objects) while searching for four masks to unlock your secret powers. Yellow lums must be gathered to visit secret locations, green lums act as continue points, red lums give you extra energy and blue lums provide oxygen boosts while you're under water.

By far the most spectacular aspect of the game is the immense variation and detail that has been ploughed into the graphical content. Every level seems even more spectacular than the last and locations are so varied that one minute you may be water-skiing around a boggy marsh and the next may see you sliding down icy slopes. From gorgeous rippling effects on the water to the rays of light that pierce through cave walls, Rayman 2 is quite simply a visual delight.

If I had to fault the game it would be to moan about the camera, which at times can't be adjusted to view the action as you want to for tricky platform sections. Also, the game isn't the most challenging in the world and it certainly won't take an eternity to complete. However, I'd much rather it be like this than for it to become ridiculously difficult so you end up ditching the game in total frustration.

To complete this well-rounded package are the fantastic sound effects and in-game music. Sound effects are crisp and always spot-on, while the music helps to add depth and atmosphere to the action by becoming more intense as the action heats up. Every noise, from shrieks and clanging steel to upbeat dance vibes have been captured immaculately.

I find it difficult to see why anyone should not want to own this game. Every aspect of it oozes with class and although it first appears to be slightly simplistic, the action is totally engrossing and addictive right through to the end. Prepare to be overwhelmed! GD

PROS

- Polished sound and visuals
- Classic platforming challenges
- Immense variation and detail

CONS

- Perhaps too easy
- Too childish for some
- Poor camera angle at times

Publisher & Developer: Ubi Soft **Format:** Dreamcast **Release:** Out Now

Gekido Urban Fighters

PSX

Inspired by classic 2D scrolling beat 'em ups like Double Dragon and Final Fight, comes the latest in street-tough entertainment. Gekido Urban Fighters builds on the mould of these titles and is quite capable of holding its own in a nasty situation. Let's get ready to rumble!

Gareth Holden

As a platform for brawling, your main source of trouble is found within the side-scrolling urban fighters mode, which is far more enjoyable with two players. Using a definite anime influence, the frantic fighting spills out over ten levels - from grimly-lit back alleys to train roofs and rocking boats. After every bout, a cut-scene will introduce a new set or a particular boss character.

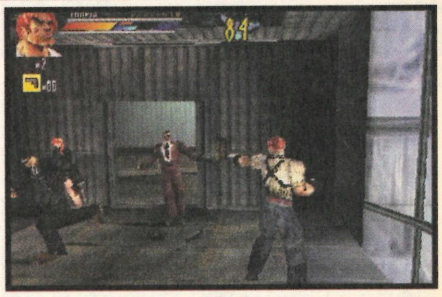
The arena battle pits four players against one another in a fight to the death within the confines of one of nine arenas. Team battle and survival modes provide decent alternatives to this action, but it is the street gangs battle which is by far the most fun. As you and a partner head out onto the streets, local hoodlums try their luck. Unfortunately, the police soon appear in a helicopter and begin spraying the protagonists with bullets.

"With blood splattering everywhere and characters ducking for cover from flying bullets, it will be a long time before you get bored of this"

In all, there are nine characters, each with differing strengths and fighting styles and an in-depth system of combos and special moves can be learned and unlocked. Certain button combinations will be displayed on-screen after being pressed - whether on purpose or purely by accident - which certainly helps to inject more skill into the game. You can also string together combos which are not predefined, allowing players to develop their own preferred fighting style. A special move for each character is limited by means of a power bar, which has to be rejuvenated.

Within the interactive 3D environments, almost anything can be destroyed and used as a weapon, from oil drums and spare tyres to crates. Other weapons include machine-guns, baseball bats and crowbars but the usual rules apply - drop the weapon during a beating and others can then pick it up. Gekido also allows you to hold a different weapon in each hand and use them independently. This is great for slugging guys with a baseball bat at close range, while picking out others from distance with the shooter. Failing this, you can always just pick up an opponent and hurl them headlong into the crowd.

Muscle-bound action, Double Dragon 'stylee'



As a four player game the action is kept at a peak thanks to a zooming camera which keeps all of the fighters on-screen. Large objects become transparent when players are near to them, to avoid unnecessary confusion. The only minor fault here is slight graphical slowdown if players are pulling off special moves involving spectacular lightning flashes. However, with blood splattering everywhere and characters continually ducking for cover from flying bullets, it will be a long time before you get bored of this.

Gekido is a fantastic game, providing plenty of challenge for both lone and multi-player gaming. Its graphics are adventurous and varied, but not over-ambitious, and with all the combos and weapons to experiment with, beat 'em up fans should certainly add this to their collection. CD

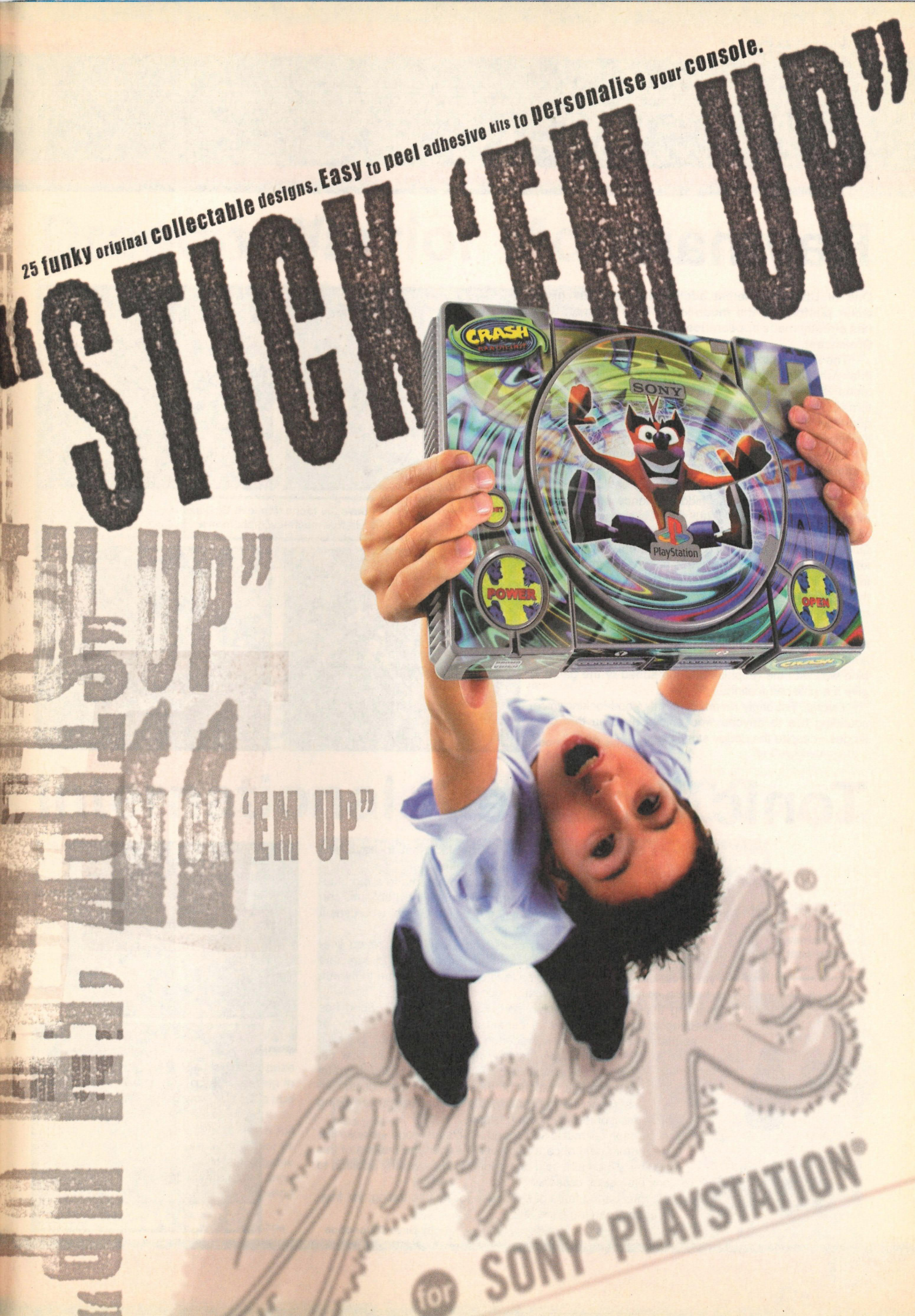
PROS

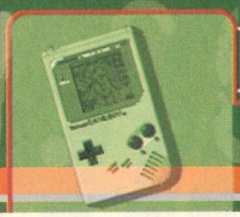
- Loads of game modes
- Fantastic combo action
- Massive multiplayer fun

CONS

- Unoriginal format
- Some slowdown in 4P mode
- Poor in-game music

Publisher: Infogrames **Developer:** NAPS Team **Format:** PlayStation **Release:** April 21


25 funky original collectable designs. Easy to peel adhesive kits to personalise your console.
"STICK 'EM UP"
CRASH
SONY
PlayStation
POWER
OPEN
for SONY® PLAYSTATION®



Rayman

One of Ubi Soft's latest additions to the GameBoy Color platform is the much-loved hero Rayman who has already made appearances on PC, PlayStation and Dreamcast.

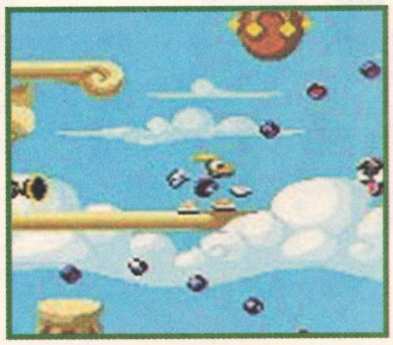
The story behind the game is a little weak but I'll fill you in anyway. It all starts with a peaceful, happy world full of toons who light up the entire universe. Evil guy Mr Dark turns up and, yes, you guessed it, he has plans of conquest on his mind. This is all unless Rayman can rescue the toons from their plight.

In the game, there are eight environments to explore, a total of 30 levels and over 20 characters plus bonus levels - if you are smart or lucky enough to get to the bouncing icon that indicates the hidden chance of gaining an extra life.

A new feature, the 'Ubi Key', is available in-game. Once found, the game will give you the option to send the key to another GameBoy player's copy of Rayman, via an infrared link. By doing this you will unlock a new level on their console. The key also allows you to receive the unlocked level from another player in the same way.

Rayman uses the GameBoy Color's visual abilities well and has been drawn brilliantly with no infringement on its smooth running at all. The music and sound effects combine well with the graphics and the speed of the game to give it a polished feeling.

Overall, I strongly recommend this good-looking, nice-sounding title to anyone who enjoys a game that challenges - despite the dodgy storyline. **By Dave O'Donohoe**



Save the toons from evil Mr Dark in this much-loved platformer

Tonic Trouble

Ubi Soft's GameBoy release Tonic Trouble is set to have you cleaning up one very large global mistake.

Ed, your purple extra-terrestrial character, has made a big blunder involving a can of very potent toxic liquid. Inevitably this can lands up in the hands of an evil guy called Grögh, who uses it to dominate the Earth. It's your job to fix this.

In-game there are six worlds containing a variety of crazed enemies - mad carrots and flaming toast amongst others. To complete your missions you are going to have to do things like learn to fly with a bow tie, or hop across lava with a pogo stick.

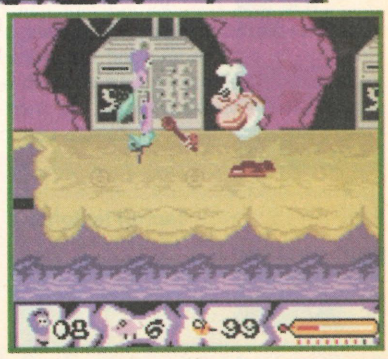
Obtaining these items is the fun part. Each new unique world has something you need to collect a certain number of, be it springs or something else. These are traded in at the end of each universe for the necessary items - such as that lovely bow tie.

Levels can be difficult to navigate without receiving a lot of damage. Much of these injuries can occur off-screen when an enemy blasts you as you are being transported by floating islands.

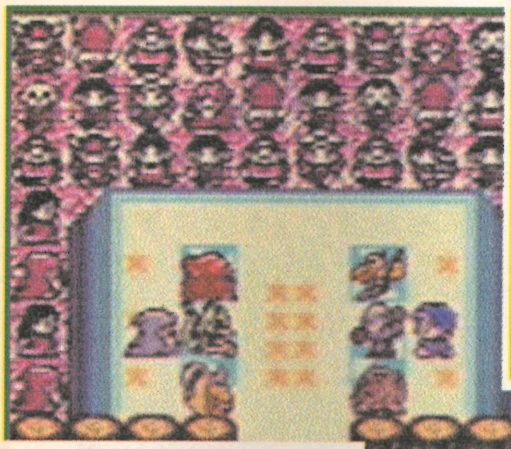
Graphics, music and sound effects are good - it looks like a great deal of care has been taken in the making of this game.When all's said and done, this is a worthy addition to any GameBoy collection.

Various daring feats of skill make for an interesting, yet frustrating, gaming experience.

By Dave O'Donohoe



Dragon Warrior Monsters



Capture and feed-monsters to win - hmm, sounds familiar

In Eidos' Dragon Warrior Monsters you play as a young lad called Terry whose sister has been kidnapped by a monster in the Kingdom of GreatTree.

On arrival in GreatTree, the king tells you the only way to rescue her is by becoming the kingdom's most powerful Monster Master and winning the Starry Night Tournament. To do this you need to capture and train monsters by feeding them food and making them friendly towards you.

As you progress, the monsters - who each possess various special skills which they use to defeat one another - take more persuading and, therefore, more food. Wandering around GreatTree with up to three monster friends, you encounter both friendly people, who will pass you information, and monsters to fight. Every time you win a battle your monsters gain skill points which increase various stats (health, magic points, attack, defence, agility, and intelligence) and the last monster of the defeated group will join you, provided it likes you enough.

Not only can you collect monsters but you can also breed stronger ones. The manual says there are over 40,000 different combinations, but these include monster+5 where monster is the type and +5 is the level. However, there are certainly well over a 100 originals - I collected 120 and saw many, many more.

This is, in my opinion, the best GameBoy release of 2000. It might be a bit of a Pokemon clone, but the game is good enough to be forgiven. I completed it in about 80 hours, but the urge to start again is very strong. If you want something that will keep you awake at night then this is it.

By Dave Stanworth

International Karate 2000 Preview

The ever-popular International Karate is to make a dramatic return from its comfortable retirement for the bout of the millennium.

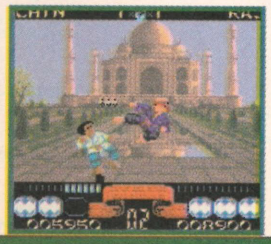
Developer Studio 3 is set to release the GameBoy Color conversion of the fist-and-foot-flying classic this April, with a whole range of planned additions to bring the title into the 21st century - including a cast of 28 warriors and a total of 12 world-wide locations.

AI is said to have been improved, with increasingly challenging combatants as you progress through the "Dans" - the levels of martial arts competence. The ultimate prize of the tournament is, of course, qualifying to wear the black belt - a sign that you are a true master of the ancient form of combat.

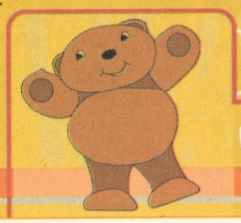
IK 2000 promises to cram as much full colour animation onto the GameBoy Color as possible, along with a good selection of game modes. It looks set to entice fans of the original to give it a go and create a new following from a younger generation.

By Dave O'Donohoe

Fight your way past 28 warriors in 12 international locations



Back to the old school arcade classic



www.kidsdomain.co.uk

Spring crazy

Here at the Kids Domain offices we've gone spring crazy and as mad as a March hare, because this month we are having a fantastic double give-away, with lots of great prizes to be won.

We've got ten copies of the new Noddy game for GameBoy Color and 15 Lemon Dog prizes all up for grabs.

Plus, with Easter just around the corner you can find out how to make a cute little chick to decorate your mountain of Easter eggs! As well as all this you'll find our usual mix of reviews, stories and puzzles to keep you busy in the school break. Or why not make up your own story for Bertie? It couldn't be simpler, all you have to do is email your story to us and keep an eye out on the web site to see it published.

Don't forget, by visiting the site you can find lots more activities, games and features to enjoy.

If you have any comments about the magazine or the site, you can get in touch by emailing either Caroline, (**caroline@kidsdomain.co.uk**), Kate (**kate@kidsdomain.co.uk**) or Maria (**maria@kidsdomain.co.uk**).

Noddy and the Birthday Party

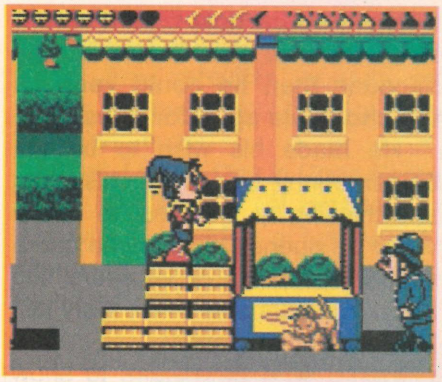
Join Noddy and his pals in Toyland for a Birthday Party adventure from BBC Multimedia which takes you through ten different levels of fun.

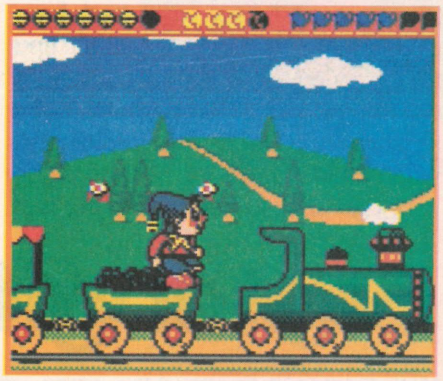
It's Big Ears' birthday and Noddy wants to throw a surprise party for his best friend. However, Noddy soon realises this will not be as easy as he thought. Things like the invitations and balloons keep being mislaid and it's up to you to help Noddy find the missing items.

The good thing about this game is it has been designed with younger children in mind, so they'll find completion of the levels a lot easier than in most other games. There are also three skill levels to choose from, so whatever the ability of your child, there will be a skill setting to suit.

The game encourages children to use number and counting skills as well as colour and object recognition as they complete the levels. The game also gives you a password on completion of each level, so you don't have to worry about your child being stuck endlessly in front of their GameBoy in order to finish the game.

It is refreshing to see a game made specifically for very young children, as it is an area in which software is sadly lacking, especially on the GameBoy. The game will definitely hold the interest of younger children, although you may find any child over the age of six is bored by its simplicity. **This game is suitable for ages 3-6.**





Win Noddy games

We've got ten copies of Noddy and the Birthday Party for GameBoy Color to give away.

All you have to do is colour in the picture (right) and fill in the coupon (below) and send them both to us at the the address below.

The best ten pictures will each receive a copy of the game. Send your entries to: **Kids Domain Noddy Competition, Kaleidoscope Networks, Unit 2, Cuckoo Wharf, 435 Lichfield Road, Aston, Birmingham, B6 7SS.** Entries should arrive no later than May 26, 2000.

Name: _____

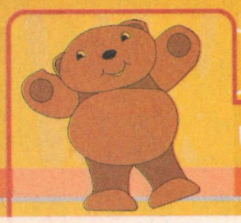
Age: _____

Address: _____

_____

_____

Postcode: _____



Bertie's Easter Adventure

Bertie thought how nice it would be if he was the Easter bunny because then he could keep all the chocolate eggs for himself.

He made his wish to be the Easter bunny by closing his eyes and thinking as hard as he could. When he opened his eyes he had a snuffly nose, lots of whiskers, big feet, huge ears and a little fluffy tail. He was a bunny rabbit!

Bertie went downstairs to show his mum and dad what had happened to him but he couldn't find them anywhere. The only thing he could see was a large white rabbit standing in his garden holding a basket full of eggs. Bertie thought he might go back to bed but his big feet started to hop as the Rabbit disappeared over the fence.

Bounce! Bounce! Bounce! He was forced to follow the big white bunny. The rabbit was leaving brightly coloured chocolate eggs everywhere - it must be the Easter Bunny. Bertie tried to pick one up as all the bouncing was making him hungry. "You can't eat any," said the rabbit, "Not until all the work is done."

The Easter Bunny handed Bertie a basket full of eggs and his big rabbit feet forced him to hop off and hide all the eggs.

As soon as the last egg was hidden Bertie's bouncing bunny feet stopped. He was back in his own garden but the real Easter bunny was nowhere to be seen. All that was left was the largest chocolate egg that Bertie had ever seen. He picked it up and took it inside - he would eat it all in one go.

Bertie's egg-citing day

Easter gifts

With Easter just around the corner, we've come up with a great craft idea to keep you busy during the holidays. This cute little chick will brighten up any Easter day.

Make your own Easter gift

An Easter Chick

This craft is rated **EASY**/average/hard to do

What you will need:

- Half a cracked egg shell
- A large yellow pom-pom
- A small yellow pom-pom
- A piece of orange paper or felt, cut and folded in the shape of a beak
- Two small plastic eyes
- Yellow feathers
- Other decorations you can find to stick on your chick

What you need to do:

1. Glue the large pom-pom in the egg.
2. Glue the small one on top of it.
3. Now glue on the beak and eyes.
4. The feathers can be stuck on either side of the chick to look like small wings.
5. Other items can be added to the chick to make it more decorative.

Lemon Dog in Code Name Alpha

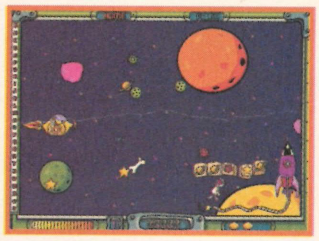
Help Lemon Dog stop the international criminal Sour Puss from escaping to another planet with the top-secret satellites. Although this PC game by Pocket Money Software stems from a very simple idea, it is surprisingly enjoyable and addictive.

The graphics, which are bright and colourful, help to make the game a lot of fun. There are two main games, one using numbers and one letters. The idea is the same in both games. In order to stop Sour Puss escaping, Lemon Dog has to guide his ship through the asteroids, collecting the symbols that represent the satellites Sour Puss is trying to steal. You move Lemon Dog's craft using letters or numbers (to move up the screen you have to type the preceding number or letter and to move down the screen you have to type the succeeding letter or number) and it can get very hectic, trying to keep up.

The letters game was the more difficult of the two, as all the letters in the alphabet can be used, but this does help children learn their way around a keyboard.I would recommend starting with the numbers game so you can get the hang of the game before progressing to the letters. The three difficulty levels will also help make the game appropriate to children of all ages. Basically, the higher the level of difficulty, the faster the satellites appear on screen, meaning you have to type faster and faster.

In all, Lemon Dog in Code Name Alpha is a simple, yet entertaining title which provides a fun way of improving alphabetic, numerical and keyboard skills.

Kate Glanville



Recommended for ages 3 to 10.

Win Lemon Dog goody bags

We have ten Lemon Dog goody bags to give away. Each bag contains six mini games, a mousemat, stickers, a pen and a notepad.

All you have to do to be in with a chance of winning is to find all the words in the word search. Send your completed puzzles, along with your name and address, to: **Kids Domain Doggy-bag Competition, Kaleidoscope Networks, Unit 2, Cuckoo Wharf, 435 Lichfield Road, Aston, Birmingham, B6 7SS.**

Entries Should arrive no later than May 26,

Find these words:

Mission	Harry Hound
Secret	Lemon Dog
Agent	Sour Puss
Yellow	Felix
Airedale	CIA
Karate	Jane

E	L	A	D	E	R	I	A	K	H
Y	E	L	L	O	W	C	I	A	X
J	I	C	P	E	T	A	R	A	K
O	X	S	S	U	P	R	U	O	S
W	I	D	U	R	Y	J	A	N	E
N	L	A	S	H	F	T	V	A	C
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I	F	U	Q	G	L	M	S	U	E
G	N	F	T	H	A	G	E	N	T
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