GHOSTBUSTERS The game is coming but will busting make us feel good?

PROTOTYPE New details for Vivendi's super-heroic action game

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HYPER

SOUL CALIBUR 4

The soul (and boobs) still burn!

+ Yoda WTF?!!

Games of 2008

OVER 50 NEW TITLES PREVIEWED!

MARIO KART

The king of kart is back

BRÜTAL LEGEND

Tim Schafer spills the beans on his rock adventure

ALONE IN THE DARK

The franchise that birthed survival horror returns!

NO MORE HEROES

The most adult-oriented Wii game yet

DEVIL MAY CRY 4

An action masterpiece or just more of the same?

A next MAGAZINE

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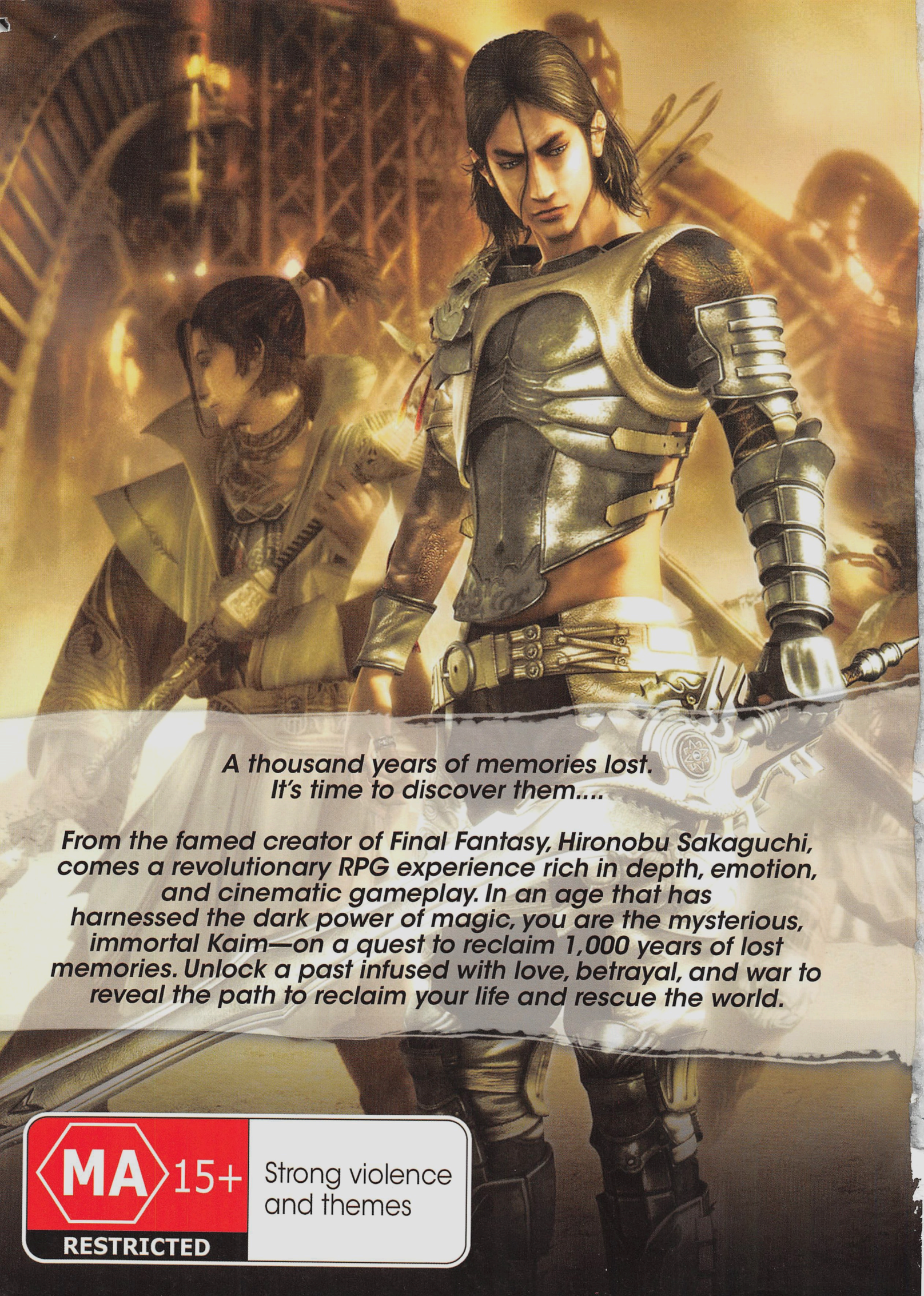

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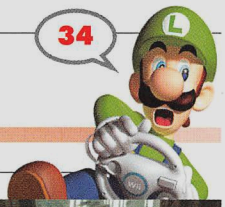

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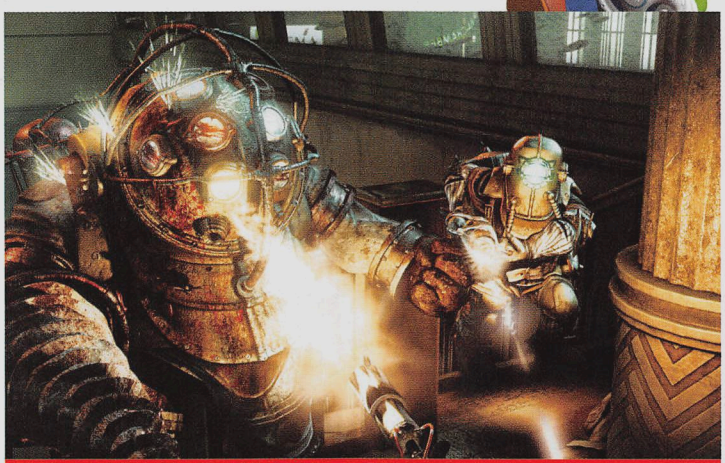

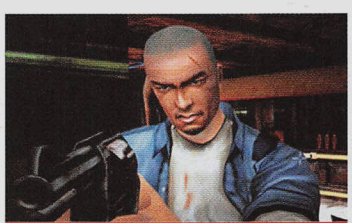

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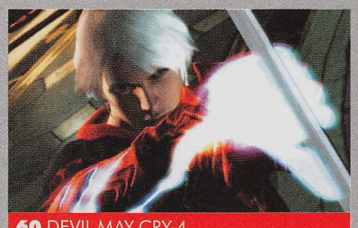

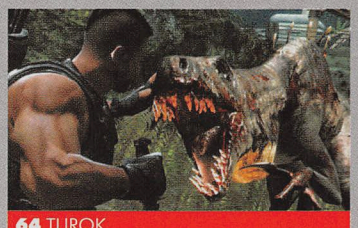

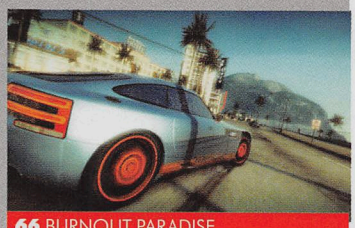

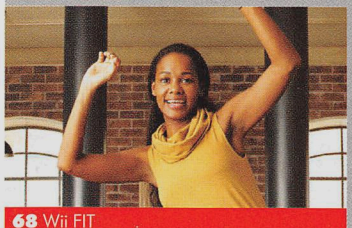

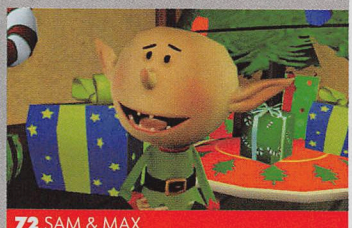

GAMES OF 2008

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Editorial

Things have been a little quiet here at the Hyper bunker for a few weeks now, as I've been flying solo. There's nothing quite so lonely as an office with two desks and only one person. Luckily all this will be changing within the next few days. In mid January, Moe "Chinride" Branscombe left the sunny shores of Hyper to pursue a career in television, leaving a giant, empty hole in the bunker but soon, soon, Darren "Nickname Pending" Wells, former Deputy Editor of PC PowerPlay will be making the trek across to fill his shoes. I'd just like to take this opportunity to farewell Moe and welcome Darren before I move on to other matters.

Now, 2008. It's shaping up to be a big year. Maybe not as big as last year – there are no new consoles scheduled to be released after all – but there's definitely a hell of a lot of AAA titles coming in the next few months. We've already received review code for Devil May Cry 4 and Burnout Paradise, starting 2008 with a bang. Usually the industry is all but dead until about March in terms of big name releases, so we're already off to a good start. With any luck this tactic of releasing games during the slow periods will continue – it won't just make my life easier in terms of content; it will give gamers the time and opportunity to play the games they want instead of releasing them all at the same time and forcing them to choose.

So there you go – 2008 is starting out on both a high note and a low note, but it's shaping up to be a hell of a year. Good luck Moe. You'll be missed.

Welcome on board Darren – we'll come up with a nickname for you soon.

Daniel Wilks Editor

Hyper Crew

MONTHLY TOP 5 GAMES

DANIEL – Editor

1. **No More Heroes** – *Wii*
   "Toilet based saves are the future"
2. **Disgaea: AoD** – *PSP*
3. **DMC 4** – *PS3*
4. **Dark Sector** –*Xbox 360*
5. **Burnout Paradise** – *Xbox 360*

MOE – Deputy Editor

1. **Blade Runner** – *PC*
   "It still makes me dream of electric sheep"
2. **Super Mario Galaxy** – *Wii*
3. **Team Fortress 2** – *PC*
4. **Ult Ghosts 'n Goblins** – *PSP*
5. **NiGHTS** – *Saturn*

MALCOLM – Art Director

1. **Mario Galaxy** – *Wii*
   "W O O O O W!! Except for the spring bit..."
2. **Team Fortress 2** – *PC*
3. **Warhammer 40k Squad Command** – *PSP*
4. **Half-Life 2** – *DS*
5. **Buzz Jungle Party** – *PS2*

TIM HENDERSON – Faux-Pom

1. **Persona 3** – *PS2*
   "I wanted a quick shag and got a relationship"
2. **Uncharted** – *PS3*
3. **NiGHTS** – *Wii*
4. **C.R.U.S.H.** – *PSP*
5. **Shenmue 2** – *Dreamcast*

HYPER

MARCH 2008 ISSUE 173

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FROM THE DIRECTOR OF
INDEPENDENCE DAY AND THE DAY AFTER TOMORROW
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»News

ABSORB!

Electronic Arts Acquires BioWare, Pandemic Studios

Another gaming superpower soaks up two big-name developers.

It was only a month ago that Activision surprised us all by joining with Vivendi Games in the largest game publishing merger in history, worth a cool 18.9 billion US dollars. As a result Activision have acquired the publishing rights to studios such as Blizzard Entertainment, creators of the massively multiplayer online phenomenon, World of WarCraft.

Not to be outdone, Activision's main competition, Electronic Arts, has this month completed its own large-scale acquisition. EA this month took control of the VG Holding Corporation, putting them in control of big-name developers BioWare Corporation and Pandemic Studios.

Pandemic's Mercenaries 2

So what does this mean for you, the game buying public? Well, it seems that Electronic Arts are keen to capitalise on both the name, and the talent, of BioWare and Pandemic since they have announced that they will be working on no less than ten brand-new games, not including those already announced, which include BioWare's Dragon Age and Pandemic's Mercenaries 2: World in Flames.

Along with a new parent company, two executives from each of the acquired companies have been given new titles as part of the acquisition. Ray Muzyka and Greg Zeschuk have both been named Vice Presidents of Electronic Arts, as well as the Co-General Managers of BioWare Corp, while Andrew Goldman and Josh Resnick from Pandemic have also been made EA Vice Presidents, as well as Co-General Managers of their company. Greg Borrund from Pandemic has also been made an EA VP, but takes the role of Chief Production Officer at the studio.

Bioware's Dragon Age

Josh Resnick of Pandemic and Ray Muzyka of BioWare both seem fairly chuffed with their new overlords; "Our new EA partnership is already proving to be both positive and productive," said Resnick. "Pandemic Studios prides itself upon its creative independence while being the best place for top industry talent to work. These values continue to be upheld by all levels of EA and we couldn't be more excited about the future of our studio and our games."

On the same topic, Ray Muzyka added, "EA has shown great respect for the creative integrity of our studios and BioWare's core values of quality in our workplace, quality in our products, and entrepreneurship. [From within EA, we are] empowered to continue delivering powerful emotional experiences through our story-driven games."

The takeover could turn out to be a good thing for both developers and publisher, although we do hope that EA can resist the urge to run these two studios into the ground with yearly iterations of their popular franchises...

CAPTION THIS!

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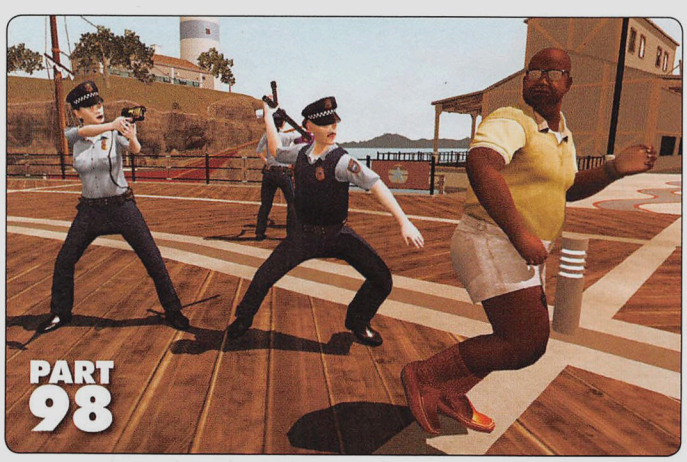


Caption it!

ILLUSION!

Illusion Softworks Becomes 2K Czech

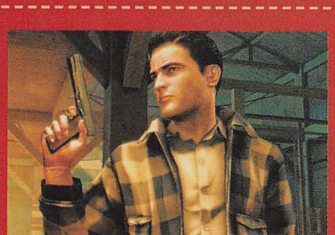
Take-Two Interactive Acquires Mafia II Developer

In yet another story of the big eating the small, Czech developer Illusion Softworks have been absorbed by Take-Two Interactive, one of the industry's biggest publishing houses and parent company of both the 2K Games and Rockstar brands.

Since their formation in 1997, Illusion Softworks have established an enviable reputation as talented game developers, and have released numerous hit games including the Hidden and Dangerous series, the Vietcong series and notably the open-world crime sim, Mafia.

As part of the acquisition Illusion has been renamed as 2K Czech, in a similar way that Irrational Games, the creators of BioShock, were renamed as 2K Boston/2K Australia last year.

The reasoning behind the buyout seems to be clear, Take-Two recognised the value of Illusion's franchises, and wanted in on that gravy train – as Ben Feder, Chief Executive Officer of Take-Two revealed; "The acquisition of Illusion



Softworks reflects our strategic focus on owning high-value intellectual property as we continue to expand our portfolio of triple-A titles."

Petr Vochozka, CEO of the newly branded 2K Czech, also responded happily to the acquisition, remarking that the developer has an excellent working relationship and the "utmost respect" for Take-Two Interactive, and that they "are pleased to become a 2K studio and are confident that this new partnership will strengthen our current and future projects."

The next project for 2K Czech, and the first to be published under their new name, will be the forthcoming Mafia II, the much-anticipated sequel to one of their most popular games.

WARNER!

High Definition Disc War Over?

Warner Bros Chooses Blu-Ray Over HD-DVD.

What a difference a single month can make. Last month the high-definition format war between Sony's Blu-Ray and Toshiba's HD-DVD looked to be at its most competitive. Blu-Ray was leading in the sales and had a strong following with most of the major movie studios pledging their loyalty, while HD-DVD had comparable support from the majors, as well as the exclusive dedication of Paramount, Dreamworks and Universal. The HD-DVD Consortium had even begun to manufacture their first 51GB three-layered discs, to rival the capacity of Blu-Ray discs.

Now, in a move that has rocked the format war, one of the most important movie studios, Warner Brothers, has made a decision that seems to have all but ended the rivalry between the two formats – they have chosen to adopt Blu-Ray exclusively for all future high-definition releases.

The announcement was made just before the commencement of the annual Consumer Electronics Show (CES), held in Las Vegas, a move that wreaked havoc with the HD-DVD Promotional Group's plans to increase the format's profile at the show.

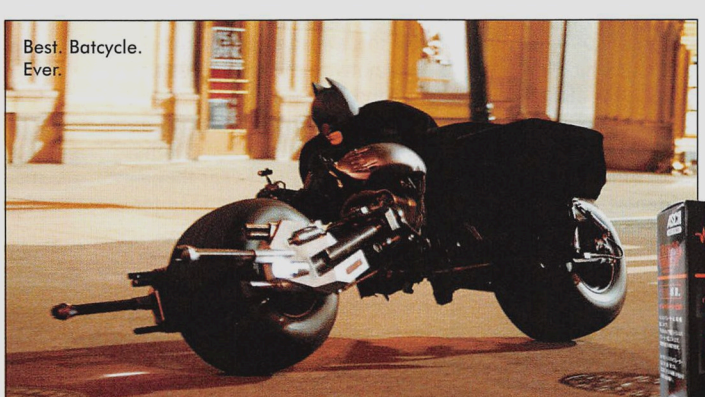
In the wake of the news the HD-DVD Promo Group cancelled many of their CES appointments, deciding instead to regroup, discuss what the loss of Warner Bros means to the brand and to evaluate what their next step will be after such a devastating turn of events.

Warner Bros had previously remained neutral in the ongoing battle between the two formats. They had supported both formats equally, even going so far as to pioneer a hybrid HD-DVD/Blu-Ray disc, called the "Total Hi Def" disc, which was two-sided and was manufactured with Blu-Ray on one side and HD-DVD on the other.

The future of the Total Hi Def disc seems to be sealed, and many believe that the future of HD-DVD is just as doomed. Without Warner's input, HD-DVD users will go without many of the biggest cinema releases of the past and present, and will miss out on big-name future releases like the recent I Am Legend and the forthcoming Batman: The Dark Knight.

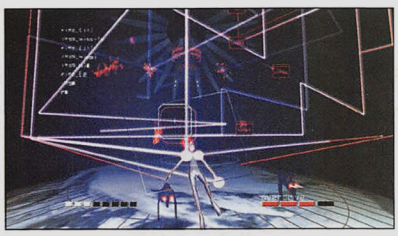
Toshiba and members of the HD-DVD Consortium and Promotion Group are adamant that the loss of Warner Bros will not spell the end for the hi-def format, although it is difficult to see how they can come back from this blow.

(above) Heath Ledger as the Joker in Batman: The Dark Knight



Best. Batcycle. Ever.

The format war eventually wiped out all of human civilisation.



TRANCE!

Rez HD To Attract More Female Gamers

The Infamous "Trance Vibrator" Returns On Xbox 360

If you haven't at least heard something about the infamous Rez "Trance Vibrator", then you can officially classify yourself as ignorant. For the uninformed, however, the Trance Vibrator was peripheral that was released exclusively in Japan for the Dreamcast edition of Rez way back in 2001.

The small black rectangle could be plugged into one of the free controller ports, and while the game was being played – it would vibrate. As the game progressed and the shooting action became harder and more difficult, the vibrations became more intense, and that was pretty much all it did.

Given that the Trance Vibrator had no practical use, other than to vibrate like crazy, it was quickly adopted by a few adventurous girl gamers and used for the kind of fun that we don't usually have reason to write about in this type of magazine – but use your imaginations and we're sure you'll come up with something.

As plenty of satisfied female customers were willing to report, the experience was not at all unpleasant, and many fans of Rez were anxiously wondering whether a similar peripheral would be made available when the high-definition version of the game launches on the Xbox Live Arcade.

Well the answer has arrived – and yes, the XBLA version of Rez will indeed include functionality allowing you to turn any spare Xbox 360 control pads into your own Trance Vibrators!

According to all reports, Microsoft has confirmed that up to three extra control pads can be connected, and that they will function in an almost identical way as the original Trance Vibrator – so if you've got three lady friends who really, really like Rez – you're in luck.

EMMY!

Nintendo Awarded Emmy

Academy awards accolades for excellence in engineering creativity

When most people think of the Emmys, they think of the annual awards ceremony that celebrates the work of the people who keep you glued to your couch night after night, with your unblinking eyes fixated on the glowing phosphorescent box that dominates your living room.

The awards are usually given out to the people who you live your life vicariously through every day, like Ridge from The Bold and the Beautiful, or Doctor Phil McGraw, but unbeknownst to most people, there is another Emmy awards – one intended for technology.

At this year's Technological and Engineering Emmys, held in Las Vegas, the Academy of Television Arts and Sciences gave out many awards for excellence in the technological field, the most noteworthy being the award for excellence in engineering creativity, which was awarded to Nintendo.

Ninty took away their gongs for their work on redefining the humble gaming control pad with the Wii's motion-sensing Wiimote and nunchuk combo, while their ingenuity in equipping the DS with dual screens, one of which is a touch screen, was also given a mention.

It's like the Grammy of the film world

Upon receiving the award, Nintendo of America's vice president, Don James, commented that; "The pioneering interfaces for Wii and Nintendo DS reflect our long tradition of seeking new ways to enhance the gaming experience for users at every level... [and] we're grateful for this award and thank the academy for honouring us a second time."

Indeed, this isn't the first time that Nintendo have won a Tech Emmy. Last year they were finally acknowledged for their invention of the D-Pad way back in the early eighties – better late than never!

FEUDIN!

Man Shoots Son Over Xbox 360

Guns Don't Kill People, Xbox 360's Kill People

The USA is just wrong. If we had an dollar for every time we read a news report about people killing, crippling or otherwise maiming their fellow Americans over the most petty, trifling of reasons, then we'd have amassed a fortune to rival that of Bill Gates a long time ago.

This time the report was different though, since it seems that on this occasion the cause of the violence was a videogame console. In Monroe, Pennsylvania, a teenaged boy was playing his Xbox 360, when he asked his father to come over and take a look at what he was doing. The father refused.

We're not sure how the rest of it escalated to the point that it did, but police reports state that after the father refused to look at his son's Xbox 360 an argument between the two erupted.

Seemingly fed up with his father's stubbornness, the seventeen-year-old boy picked up the family rifle, put it in the hands of his good ol' dad, and told him to shoot him with it. Bizarrely enough, while the father refused to respond to his son's request to look at his games console – the father promptly complied with the request to shoot him – in the head no less!

The boy now has a .22 calibre bullet lodged in his brain and is in hospital, while the father is facing a long stretch in the big house. Heed this warning readers, if your family members won't look at your games consoles, don't give them weapons.

OVERFLOW

Guitar Hero III may be available on all of the home consoles right now, but this month the fret-burning rock star simulator has landed on another platform. That's right PC gamers, you no longer have to settle for playing a freeware Guitar Hero knockoff anymore, because you've got an authentic version, complete with a miniature Gibson Les Paul to rock out on.

The specs are pretty high for a console port (requiring a 2.8GHz dual-core processor, 2GB of RAM and a 128MB Direct X 9.0c compatible video card) but it's still better than Frets on Fire... for now.

We already know that there will be more BioShock games, the original's runaway success made sure of that, but the latest rumour doing the rounds is that the next game in the series won't be a sequel, but will instead be a prequel. Hopefully this rumour turns out to be true, since we could think of nothing better than immersing ourselves in a pre-disaster Rapture. According to publisher 2K Games the next BioShock will release in 2009, with further sequels releasing every two years after that, or at least until the money stops rolling in.

Back in issue 169 we reported the first news of the Blade Runner: The Final Cut 5 disc briefcase set. Well, it's now upon us – and it's magnificent. We've got our copies on DVD, as well as Blu-Ray and HD-DVD (imported), and can confirm that not only is the package itself extravagant (which includes a Spinner hovercar replica, lenticular photograph, origami unicorn model, as well as production art postcards), but the transfer, in both standard and high definition is among the best we've seen, and the supplementary features among the most comprehensive of any film yet released in the digital format. If you're a fan – get it.

Just as we were going to print some more news in the ongoing war between HD-DVD and Blu-Ray discs emerged. It seems that in that wake of Warner Brothers' decision to only support Blu-Ray, the previously HD-DVD exclusive Paramount Studios is also considering dropping the struggling format. Reports are suggesting that Paramount had an escape clause written into their exclusivity contract with the HD-DVD Consortium, and that in the event of Warners changing sides, they are allowed to do the same.

At this stage this is only an unconfirmed rumour, but if it ends up being accurate, HD-DVD is in even more trouble than first thought.

BAD COP NO DOUGHNUT

DANIEL WILKS

Our Knowledge Base Will Answer All Your Questions

As you may or may not know, I am somewhat addicted to what I like to call "games of acquisition"; games like the Diablo series or Titan Quest, in which collecting loot is as integral to gameplay as whacking on some monster until they expire. There's something about trying to get that next little upgrade that just sucks me in time and time again, eating up my hours in a stupid, probably self-destructive way. Certainly in a girlfriend annoying way.

Anyway, to keep a long story short, I've been playing Hellgate: London for the last couple of weeks, simultaneously taking three characters through the adventure, chopping and changing between them when I get bored. It's not a great game but it's fun, and definitely satisfies my hunger for loot but, to be honest, it's a buggy mess. At different times during play I've had the textures of all the character models fall off, leaving a bunch of sexless silver action figures, multiple crashes, multiple disappearing enemies, lockups, crashes and even a blue-screen. I've installed the recommended patches when they became available but all they seem to do is put a bandaid over a bullet wound.

Still I kept playing, accepting that sometimes things would break for no readily apparent reason. Of course my attitude came back to bite me on the arse when one of my characters, a level 27 Evoker, wound up with a duplicate quest item in her inventory after an unexplained lockup – an item that couldn't be removed or handed in and prevented the character from finishing the game, as the item was part of a series of item hand ins and having the part in my inventory meant the next part could not spawn. At a loss for what to do, I thought I'd check with Flagship technical support. After jumping online and trying to access the forums, I was told that I had to create an account, but that I could use the knowledge base. Being lazy and not liking to leave a paper trail, I opted to go straight to the knowledge base. Strangely enough, my specific problem wasn't covered, so I elected to click on the tab to send an email to tech support to ask them directly.

Of course I couldn't send an email to the devs until I had signed up to the forums – a process that was only slightly less time consuming and painful than getting an endoscopy. With a fresh account I tried again. I typed my very specific question into the field provided, selected the correct information in all the drop-down fields, gave them all of the personal information asked for, and hit Send. At this point you might expect to see a screen informing you that your message has been sent and that a member of the tech support staff will contact you as soon as possible, or at least something along those lines. Well, at least that's what I was expecting.

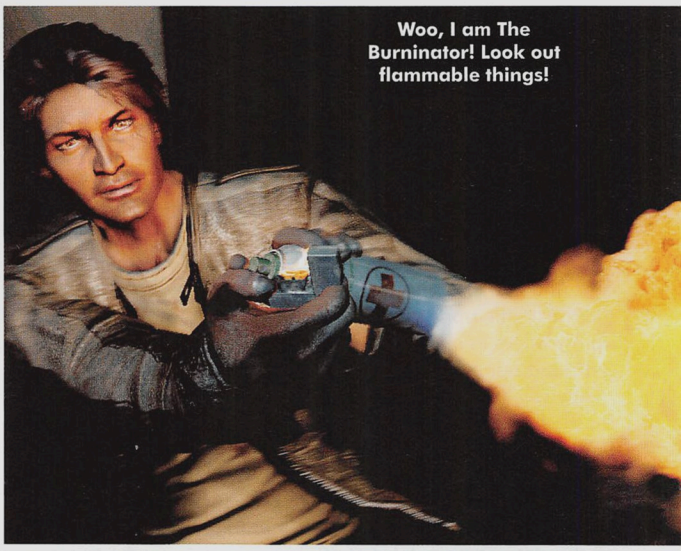
Instead I was sent to a screen that informed me that Flagship technical support don't actually accept email contact but that any question that I had could be answered by the knowledge base.

No game can be entirely bug free – there are too many variables

I could rant all day about the sheer redundancy of having a link enabling you to ask a question if it's not in the knowledge base and question the need for an email form when no email contact is possible, but that's not what really gets my goat. No, what gets me is the attitude of the developers. As far as I can see it, this attitude towards technical support can point to only two equally repugnant things. If the knowledge base could indeed answer any technical problem I was having, that would point to the developers knowing what a buggy pile of crap they have released. If it doesn't contain all the answers and the developers aren't willing to answer technical questions about the game, then it points to them not caring.

To be fair, Flagship isn't the only developer with this kind of attitude to tech support – it's just the most recent example I can think of. But before I bitch any longer I should get to my point. If you're going to offer tech support, offer tech support, not some half-arsed middle ground that explains nothing, but better yet, test your games and release them in a finished state. No game can be entirely bug free – there are too many variables when it comes to gamers, PCS, peripherals and programs to cover all eventualities – but if you can release something that is stable and won't cock up all the time then the only question your knowledge base will have to answer is "how awesome are you guys?"

Alone in the Dark


Woo, I am The Burninator! Look out flammable things!

X360 | PS3 | Wii | PC | PS2 | DS | PSP
(Wii & PS2 versions under external development)

Category: **Survival Horror** • Players: **1**
Developer: **Eden** • Due: **2008**

Welcome to the section of 'awesome things of much awesomeness that are due to arrive sometime in 2008' that is devoted to the latest installment of the true granddaddy of Survival Horror, Alone in the Dark. Gee — it's been a while, hasn't it? I mean, we've not taken a proper look at this sucker since we covered, um, 'awesome things of much awesomeness that are due to arrive sometime in 2007'. But Atari and Eden mean it this time. They've promised us. They told us March for the 360 and PC versions, followed up (as is the trend) by an eventual Playstation 3 release. And they keep on spending good money jetting us off to the development studios. AND, most importantly of all, they finally let us PLAY it. We now know, for absolute certain, that it actually EXISTS.

CLOSED SPACES

Upon arriving at the bottom floor of Eden's office building an information starved pack of Journalists were warned in advance that Eden's working space is lacking in open spaces, and a plea was made for no complaints to be made about this.

A plea? Pah! The seeds of subversive influence were already being sewn, and it was hard to escape the feeling that an intentional effort was being made to give rise to the idea that this game is being developed in an appropriately claustrophobic environment. All of which is fairly null cogitation, really, considering that while the offices were indeed a corridor laden maze, they were also far too sterile to be sufficiently creepy.

Fortunately, such a conventional workplace doesn't seem to have dampened the creative vision of the team one bit. There was a genuine sense of enthusiasm and pride emanating from certain persons, and a solitary Resident Evil 4 poster hanging from one out-of-the way door displayed an interesting circle of influence within the Survival Horror gene pool: Daddy influences baby influences daddy again, and if what we were shown is any indication then daddy will be taking these influences and building upon then so substantially that baby will have no choice to retain his natural role as the student.

There's an immediate sense of familiarity that comes with seeing the game running: the general camera positioning as well as the stance and animation of Alone's lead, Edward Carnby, is immediately evocative of the facelift that Capcom gave their classic franchise back in 2005. To see it at a glance is to mistake it for a clone. To sit down and give it some proper time to show its dank colours is to discover some tweaks and ideas that, while subtle, stand to fundamentally alter the Survival Horror genre, if not hybrid action games as a whole.

LEFT AND RIGHT

So we already know how Alone in the Dark uses the right analogue stick as a means of direct control over whatever Carnby may be holding at any given time. We know he can pick up a piece of wood and whack a mutated freak in the side of the head with it. Very clever, and a nice Fahrenheit-inspired novelty, but it could easily have just been an oh-so-slightly more physical substitute for pressing a button. Fortunately, there's more to it than that. In fact, when we speak of Alone in the Dark potentially influencing action games at large, we speak with very fresh experiences of trying this mechanic for ourselves.

First and foremost comes the obvious: combat. There's no denying that there's a learning curve, and we'd be lying if we claimed to have fully adjusted to it, but then our time was limited and it felt more natural with each passing second. More to the point, it felt organic. There was a sense of a very real physical blow being delivered from the arm of a living human. Get it right and Carnby hits hard, but it's entirely possible to play poke-the-freak instead.

WHAT WE'D LIKE TO SEE:

Eden tweak and refine everything they've promised to. If they get it right then we're willing to go on record as saying that this game will be better than Resident Evil 5.

I'm the firestarter, tuh-wisted firestarter.

Even better is the way in which Alone offers players a chance to make use of their surroundings to make their makeshift weapons even more powerful. The obvious example that we were given to play with was fire. Considering typical mythology when it comes to things that go bump in the night and what they might themselves fear, we expect that fire will also be fairly prominent, and we'll be damned if it doesn't look pretty. Looking nice may be one thing, but behaving nicely is another. Alone's fire behaves exceptionally well, and will catch either in part or in full depending on how far you shove that chair Carnby's holding into it, and it'll spread appropriately until eventually destroying the makeshift weapon. We're told that Carnby won't have such a phenomenal ability to not get burned once the code is finalized, so expect to have to make swift decisions and deal careful blows should you elect to power up your weapon in such a way.

Finally there are environmental puzzles, and it's here that such a control system really shows its true potential. The example we were handed was quite a quite straightforward one; one that revolved around removing an electrical wire hanging loose above a wet floor. The solution? Well, it'd be the most [continued p18]

» ...Alone in the Dark stands to present human resourcefulness at a level never seen before in a videogame.

The chair, the chair, the chair is on fire! We don't need no water...

obvious one you could possible think of: get a pipe or a piece of wood or whatever, sweep it gently so as to lift the wire out of the water, and then hang it over the nearby handrail. Easy – so easy, in fact, that it's easy to forget games of past forcing more convoluted solutions. This is but one example, and we hope it's one of plentiful such tasks to be found in the final release as it could go a long way to remove an amount of 'game logic' from our brains, replacing it with general common sense.

...Actually, maybe I should put it out before...

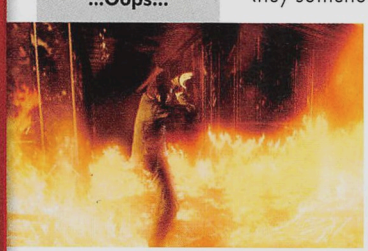
LET'S GET

Much of what makes all of the above click is the team's obsession with physics. The gaming world's fixation with physics engines may be becoming overbearing, but the logical interactions with the environment shown here go some way in justifying it. Too bad, then, that the puzzle used to demonstrate the full potential of the physics engine was essentially a sea-saw one, with a bus taking the place of a wooden plank. Hopefully the promise of expanding Half-Life 2's achievements is more than just hot air.

The demonstrated puzzle, though, was also a solid indication of linear progression, which is something worth pointing out. It's worth pointing out because, alongside physics, 'open, free-roaming spaces' are very current buzzwords in gaming, and there was a keen effort to promise such an experience during our time at Eden. As expected, the scale of the setting of Central Park was pointed out as being huge, and we were promised 'vehicles' – as was the official description – to help us traverse the space. And yet, from what we saw and played we can't help but feel that it's open until you somehow find yourself wandering through a series of conveniently placed corridors.

But that's not to call it a bad thing, far from it: We were just being told what PR thought we wanted to hear. Sometime during the late 90's linearity became a dirty word – perhaps because we were over-excited by texture-mapped polygons and the so-called freedom they promised – but the truth is that it really shouldn't have. As such, when Alone in the Dark seems to allow players to explore Central Park at their own leisure until they somehow find themselves in some carefully designed sewer system full of immaculately paced scenarios, we only see broken (or at least misleading) hype, not fractured gameplay.

...Oops...

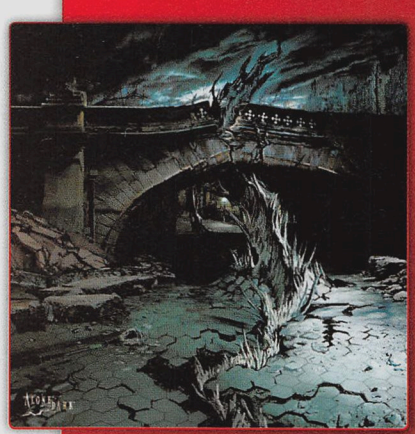


...Oh bugger, that's torn it.

!! SPOILER !!

Among the great tapestry of human emotions, excitement is one of the more accessible to videogames. All the same, we couldn't help but be impressed by a new scene that Eden went out of their way to show us. In fact, there was considerable difficulty found in restoring the pulse to normal for some time afterwards.

The section in question was just another example of an open world cutting out a linear path for the player but, man alive, what a spectacularly destructive one. To try and sum it up quickly, the whole of New York seemed to be tearing itself apart. The road heaved and billowed, high rise buildings tumbled to street level and cars were flung around the place like unwanted Christmas gifts. All the while, the player-controlled Carnby drove through 59th Street, forced along at full throttle by the way a strip of tarmac behind him that insisted on tearing itself apart.



Although effectively just an obstacle course with a dash of added panic, this moment was absolutely mind-blowing. Having the city crumble and create the path before our eyes added a whole new layer of tension to the event, and as for the Bulgarian choir chanting the background music? Well, excitement may be one of the easier to achieve emotions for gaming, but we're struggling to remember the last time any scene – let alone one presented as a standalone piece, separate from the rest of the game – gave us such a rush.

You can't even splash around in puddles any more without the fun police showing up

Playing through the area in question brought a lot of dark to light. The control system, for example, is excellently through-out but lacking in final refinement. Some enemies are truly creative. There is no HUD, which is a true blessing, and inventory is all accessed by having Ed open his jacket and peering down at what he's carrying – a nice touch. Here objects can be mixed and matched in a variety of ways and assigned to either the left or right hand. Add to this the level of environmental interactivity, and Alone in the Dark stands to present human resourcefulness at a level never seen before in a videogame. We're obviously smitten by how the right analogue stick has been implemented (leaving aside some camera concern) and how it offers proper control rather than the gesturing malarkey of some Wii titles such as Red Steel and Manhunt 2. Only the left stick remains to worry about.

Here is where our sole gripe of note abides, as character and camera control is far too springy at present. We quickly expressed our concern over this lack of precision and were equally quickly reminded that what we were playing was still pre-Beta and this was something was yet to be finalised. We're willing to believe this, not just because of the obvious effort that's going into this project, but because we want to. This is a game that stands to be massively influential, and it would be a shame for the experience to be dampened by the most fundamental of niggles.

GENERAL AWESOMENESS

So what else is there to say? Well, the game looks unsurprisingly picturesque in its own dreary way. The design is wonderfully consistent, with Tim Burton and David Lynch pointed too as being key influences. We're not so sure that Alone manages to reach quite such auteuristic heights, but it certainly has an extra notch of atmosphere. Unsurprisingly, a crapload of photos were taken of Central Park (1500 or more), and a variety of influences were pulled upon for certain landmarks that couldn't be presented exactly as they are in reality.

Of more note the soundtrack, which comes in at five or more hours, is sensational. And Eden's Composer? We couldn't help but be smitten by the amount of enthusiasm this guy had for his work, just as we couldn't help but be smitten by what he had accomplished. Not only the music itself, which was fantastic, but the way it which it crept up on us during out own hands-on session with the game. It felt custom-crafted, and never failed to set the right tone while at the same time being a little less than conventional.

We've hinted at it already, but we will paint it in black and white here: Alone in the Dark will move gaming forward. The sheer polish is one thing, and the pacing is another, but it all comes down to the principle of environmental interaction and control that we already knew about last year. There's too much potential here beyond mere combat for this game not to be significant to the point where, even if Eden do somehow mess up the final product (and by Lord we hope they don't), then at least a foundation will still have been laid. The ideas on offer here will be copied and developed upon for years to come. «

I think I need some new glasses

» The design is consistent, with Tim Burton and David Lynch pointed too as being key influences

Prototype

X360 | PS3 | Wii | PC | PS2 | DS | PSP

Category: **Action** • Players: **1-2** • Developer: **Radical Entertainment** • Due: **2008**

Alex Mercer is a monster. We're not talking the child molesting, serial killing kind of monster. We mean the man is an actual honest to god monster, imbued with shape-shifting powers, a lack of conventional morality and a burning desire for both revenge and knowledge of his past, as well as the ability to consume others to gain not only their form but their memories and skills as well. Alex Mercer is also the character you play in Radical Entertainment's new open world IP, Prototype. At this early stage of development Prototype is already looking like one of the most exciting games to be slated for a 2008 release. Why? Well, for a start the gameplay looks something like a cross between Crackdown and Ninja Gaiden, combining the open world super-heroics of the former and the visceral violence of the latter. But that's not all.

AN AMNESIAC ANTI-HERO

Let's start with Alex Mercer himself. Getting Radical away from licenses seems to have freed the development team to run wild with their ideas, allowing them to make the game they truly want to make. The basic idea of gameplay, as was explained to us during a demonstration in early January, is that Radical wants players to feel like a total bad-arse from point one and work from that level of power to being truly terrifying, all the while balancing the feel of the player being superhumanly tough with the idea that the enemy will always pose a threat. We're not sure the level of power the players will begin with but if the gameplay we were shown during our demonstration is any indicator, Mercer is going to be a force to be reckoned with.

From the outset Mercer has the ability to change forms, appearing as himself, the shape of someone he has consumed, or a monstrous armoured beast. In addition to the basic forms, throughout the course of the game, Mercer will gain other abilities such as the ability to grow spikes from his back. Radical promises that Mercer will have access to dozens of powers, making for hundreds of power combinations. We haven't seen how these combinations will work in game as yet but we assume that, after a power has been mapped onto one of the face buttons the player will be able to activate more than one at a time, so you could have an armoured Alex with claws and heightened senses. While that does not sound all that impressive we're sure that there will be some interesting combinations and powers when the full list is released closer to release.

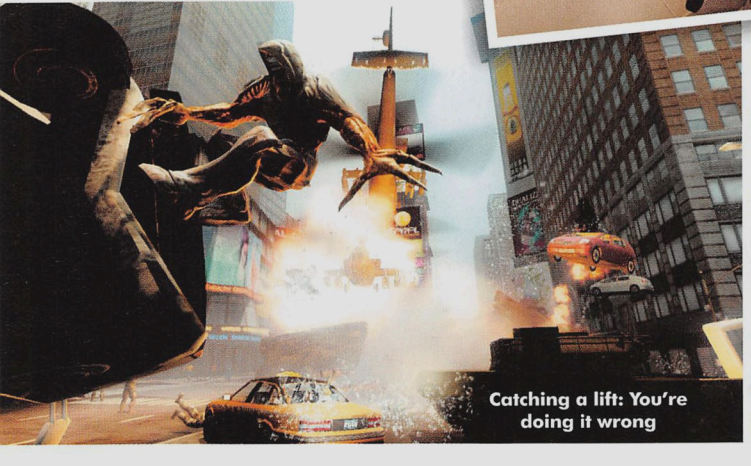
Mercer also has, as a base line, superhuman strength, speed and agility, enabling him to run about as fast as a car, from what we can gather at least, pick up and throw basically anything he can get his hands on, including cars and trucks, and, best of all, run up vertical surfaces, jump long distances and, by the looks of it, has some king of grapple ability as well. Aside from Mercer's supernatural talents, he can also wield around 20 different military grade weapons ranging from handguns all the way through to missile launchers. Alex is also able to pilot or drive any vehicle in the game, from cars to helicopters, although we're not sure if he will first have to absorb the skills of a driver/pilot before hand.

WHAT WE'D LIKE TO SEE:

More of Alex Mercer's powers – there is little that excites us more than the idea of a customisable sandbox superhero game.

Extreme Chin-ups

When eating spaghetti goes horribly wrong



Catching a lift: You're doing it wrong

The crackdown on wearing hoodies continues unabated

NOT A PEOPLE PERSON

Of course, there is one slight problem with the character. For all his amazing physic abilities, Mercer has the potential to be a character that is almost impossible to empathise with. After all – he is an inhuman killing machine with no memory or remorse. Radical hopes to overcome this obstacle through the storytelling, filling in Mercer's memories and motivation, as well as character via "memory nodes", 250 odd characters and places that will, when visited or absorbed, flesh out more of the character.

Prototype takes place on Manhattan Island, held in the grip of fear due to a war between the military, people infected with a bizarre virus (with ties to Mercer) and Mercer himself. According to Radical they took around 11.000 photographs of the city, enabling them to create a living, breathing landscape that is not only a setting but one of the integral characters in the story. At a recent event we were lucky enough to see the game in action.

Taking place in the later stages of the game, the demo mission tasked Alex with destroying two Military bases set up on the war zone that is Manhattan. To destroy the first base the player demonstrator opted to use stealth. First we saw Mercer carry away a soldier, absorb him and assume his form, enabling him to walk onto the military base without raising any suspicion. A military Commander standing between two parked transport trucks proved to be the next target, with Mercer swiftly dispatching and absorbing the Commander, assuming not only his shape but his skills as well. After a short, covert run up a nearby building we were shown how these assumed skills work. Being a military leader, the Commander has the ability to call air strikes on designated locations. A few button presses later and an artillery bombardment, courtesy of a warship off the coast of Manhattan that the base was in ruins.

HERE COMES A CHOPPER

The demonstrator opted for a more up-front attack on the second base, hijacking a helicopter gunship and raining missiles on the base, all the while battling other helicopters, tanks and some rather angry covert military operatives known as the Blackwatch, on eof the two major enemy groups in the game. Escaping from the scene of the crime, trailed by the military, the demonstrator lead his pursuers into an area being attacked by the Infected – mutated monsters courtesy of the virus ravaging Manhattan – leading to a massive, not to mention spectacular, battle, with the military and Infected going hell for leather at each other and Alex, ever the opportunist, laying waste to both sides.

If the brief window of gameplay we saw is anything to go by, Prototype is going to be one hell of an action game, combining all the best bits of Radical's previous efforts into a dark, nasty and frenetic sandbox. We can't wait to get our hands on some code. «

» Prototype is going to be one hell of an action game

THE SINCEREST FORM OF FLATTERY

If imitation a sincere form of flattery, then cloning is the sincerest form of flattery. Prototype will feature co-op multi-player featuring not one but two Alex Mercers, the conceit being that through his remarkable genetic powers, Alex is able to create a complete clone of himself. Though the possibility hasn't been ruled out, Radical are not planning on featuring any other form of multi-player in the game, instead opting to focus their creative energies on making the single player game as complete and compelling as possible.

Brütal Legend

Q&A with creator Tim Schafer

X360 | PS3 | Wii | PC | PS2 | DS | PSP

Category: RPG • Players: 1
Developer: Bethesda • Due: Q4 2008

Coming from the creator of adventure classics like Day of the Tentacle, Full Throttle, Grim Fandango and of course, one of our favourite platform/adventure games of all time, Psychonauts, Tim Schafer's next game is right at the top of our most wanted games of 2008 – and that game is Brütal Legend.

This game promises action and adventure in abundance, a design aesthetic inspired by Norse mythology and heavy metal album art, as well as an accompanying soundtrack that will feature plenty of real classic metal – not to mention a main character who will be voiced and characterised by actor/musician/comedian Jack Black – Brütal Legend looks like it will rock very hard indeed.

Tim Schafer himself was good enough to take some time out of his busy schedule to tell us a little more about his next heavy metal odyssey.

HYPER: What exactly is Brütal Legend? Could you describe to us the general setting, story and style of the game?

Tim Schafer: Brütal Legend is a game about Eddie Riggs, a roadie for a heavy metal band, who is pulled back in time to a world that looks just like the covers of the heavy metal albums he loves. But now he has to live out those album covers in all their brutality. Humans are oppressed by a cruel, demonic overlord, and the Roadie has fight to defend them, using just his axe, his car, and his guitar.

"The goal is to create a world that feels real, and alive."

Where did you get the inspiration for a game about a roadie, set in an alternate reality populated with Nordic and Heavy Metal mythology?

Primarily, from the music itself. I've always loved Heavy Metal, since I was a kid. The art and the lyrics are so evocative and powerful, they just demand to be explored in more detail. For years I've wanted to make a game where you get to visit the dark, brutal worlds this music has been singing about, and live out those epic fantasies.

We have actually heard rumours that you yourself are of Norwegian descent. Did that have any influence on the direction Brütal Legend took?

Actually, it did! Being Norwegian, I was exposed to a lot of Norse mythology and folktales. There are so many great stories of Thor, Odin, Balder, etc. The imagery in them is so incredible – Audhumla, the great cow, licking the ice until it took the form of man, or Fenrir, the great wolf with the mouth so big it scraped the ground and the sky at the same time – I love that stuff, and it has been a huge inspiration on the story for Brütal Legend.

You've helped to create a heavy metal roadie character once before – Hoagie from Day of the Tentacle. Is there something about the roadie that captures your imagination?

I see a certain nobility in roadies. They put up with all the hardships of the road, just like rock stars, but they don't get the glory. But they are the ones that make the whole thing work. Without the roadies, there wouldn't be any show. The difference between what we did with Hoagie and what we're doing with Eddie is that Hoagie was just a reference to a roadie. We said he was a roadie, and made some allusions to it, but with Eddie, we are fleshing it out. You become the roadie, and go on the ultimate roadie fantasy adventure.

How did yourself and Double Fine get mixed up with Jack Black? And how did you convince him to be your lead for Brütal Legend?

The whole time we were putting the initial concept together I was thinking in the back of my mind, "You know who would love this game? Jack Black." Not that I knew it for sure. I just felt it. And I really hoped it was true. Not just so that we could use his voice, but because I knew if the game appealed to Jack, then that meant we were really doing it right. So Vivendi set it up so I could meet with him. We had some Cobb salad at the Four Seasons, and I showed him some concept art and told him all about the game and he dug it. He was really into it. And that was that.

Jack Black is also a rock musician of no small note himself – and while the character of Eddie Riggs is only a roadie – will Eddie, and Jack, end up actually performing music in the game?

Eddie gets plenty of opportunities to shred on the guitar. You know, a lot of roadies are actually really awesome musicians. You can tell that some times when they're doing the sound check. You hear a killer guitar sound, and you think the band has taken the stage for a second, and everybody screams, but then you see it's just the sound check and everybody goes, "Awww!" in disappointment. And that always makes me feel bad for the poor Roadie. But in this game, the roadies rule. And rock.

Additionally, will Jack's Tenacious D band-mate, Kyle Gass, be involved at all in the game, perhaps as a secondary character?

That would be awesome, wouldn't it? We haven't approached him yet, though.

Furthermore on that point, what kind of soundtrack do you have planned for Brütal Legend, and will Tenacious D, among other bands, be on it?

There will be a lot of great bands on it. The final list is still to be decided, but already it has most of my favourite metal bands already on board.

In terms of actual gameplay mechanics, what can we expect from Brütal Legend? Will it be mostly axe-slashing action, or will there be plenty of adventure puzzling to be had as well?

Lots of exciting axe work, some dazzling special attacks with your guitar, a bunch of crazy driving action, and then you get to yell "Charge!" and lead your fellow headbangers into battle.

Who exactly is the big bad of Brütal Legend, and why does Eddie want to carve them up?

Humanity has been oppressed by a sinister race of demons. These guys are really bad news. Ugly, scaly, well-armed,

Greatest screenshot ever? It's certainly a contender.

they have a taste for S&M gear. But to get to them, you have to fight your way through a faction of hostile humans, taking the form of a hair metal army.

How about the game world? What should we expect from Brütal Legend's setting?

It's a wide open world with real weather and day/night cycles. The goal is to create a world that feels real, and alive. And yet, a world where any random screenshot looks like the cover of a heavy metal album. So there are chrome volcanoes, rivers of blood, giant anvils, everything metal that we can think of.

And how about those wings? We've seen them in action in the teaser trailer, but what role will they actually play in the final game?

Ah, yes. The wings. That's a big secret! You're just going to have to play the game to find out how Eddie got his wings.

Now for a completely pointless and stupid question. Is the umlaut in "Brütal" completely superfluous – or should we actually be pronouncing the name with a Germanic "Bruutal Legend"?

The Umlaut is just our way of making everything about the game as metal as possible. I would have put an umlaut over every character if I could have, but I was worried people might injure themselves trying to pronounce it.

Thanks for your time Tim, and good luck with the game – we can't wait to play it. «

Fallout 3

X360 | PS3 | Wii | PC | PS2 | DS | PSP

Category: **RPG** • Players: **1**
Developer: **Bethesda** • Due: **Q4 2008**

Yes, it's Fallout 3 and yes the game is played in either a first person or third person perspective but it is not, and we repeat not, a first person shooter. At least that's what Bethesda have been saying; a claim made a little strange by the fact that the same company has also claimed that players can make their way through the game only using basic shooting controls and not taking advantage of the VATS (Vault-Tec Assisted Targeting System) mechanic that allows players to target specific body parts to do extra damage or inflict status effects. Bethesda has also been quick to point out that Fallout 3 isn't just Oblivion with guns, even though it's being developed by much of the same team using the same engine. It's very much its own game and one that is promising to be a true highlight of 2008. Sure, some Fallout purists will be in a stink about the fact that the game does not fall back on the old semi-isometric perspective but honestly, we don't care. There is a hell of a lot to look forward to in the new game, so shall we start looking?

SPECIAL NEEDS

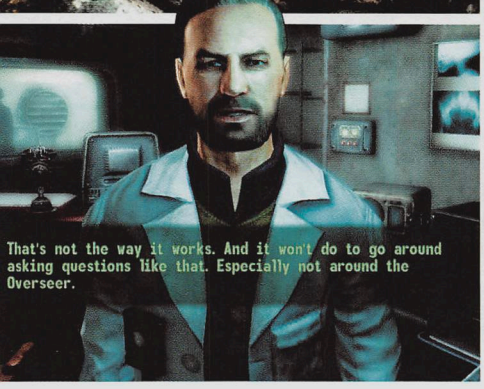
Rather wisely, Bethesda has chosen to ignore Fallout: Brotherhood of Steel and Tactics when working on the chronology of the game. A great war between the USA and China has left the earth in ruins, confining survivors to radiation proof vaults. Players take the role of a teenage Vault 101 dweller. The tutorial and character creation introduces the player to Vault 101. The SPECIAL (Strength, Perception, Endurance, Charisma, Intelligence, Agility, Luck) attribute system, as used in the original games makes a welcome return, allowing players to mould their character in whichever way they see fit. Rather than a standard character creation screen/tutorial, Fallout 3 will instead integrate them into gameplay, first with the player as a child interacting with a book called, appropriately, You Are SPECIAL and then later, when the player turns 10, they are given their PIPBoy 2000, the catch all inventory management, map, character screen and universal doodad made famous in the first two games. The game proper will begin when the player turns 19 and their father disappears. In a nice touch, the character creation allows the player to choose their sex and race and morphs the features of the father to match. It's also important to point out that the father is voiced by Liam Neeson so rescuing him will be one of the

WHAT WE'D LIKE TO SEE:

A full voice cast list. Other examples of the moral/karmic system. And end to the online whining about how the game should have remained a top-down, turn-based RPG.

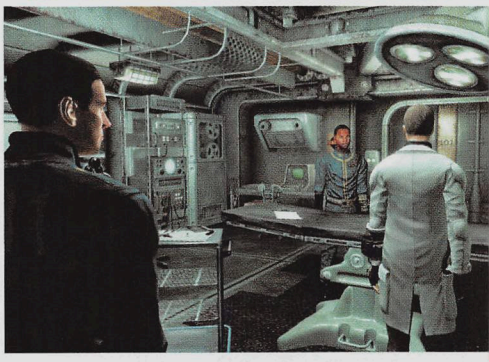
COMPANIONSHIP

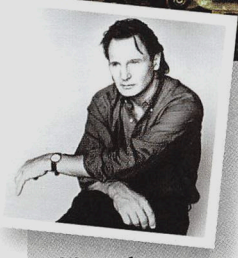
Throughout the course of the game numerous companions will join the player. Much like as in the original game, companions are independent entities not under the direct control of the player. Companions may come and go at will and will react differently depending on your attitude and the way you approach objectives. We'll bring you more info on the available companions when we get some hands on time with the game.



most important tasks ever undertaken in a game, because, you know, he was Darkman! Well, at least he was until they started pumping out sequels starring the poor man's Billy Zane, Arnold Vosloo.

The mission to leave Vault 101 and find your father forms the crux of the Fallout 3 story but of course, along the way to your final goal the player will be presented with numerous side quests. You shouldn't go expecting the sheer number of side quests and NPCs as Oblivion, however, as Bethesda has decided a few hundred fleshed out characters will suit the setting far more than a cavalcade of monosyllabic quest-vendors. As a result, Fallout 3 will only feature a few hundred NPCs, each with a full fleshed out character and personality as opposed to the 1500 odd that populated Bethesda's last game. So far we know that the game is set in Washington DC and the first place the player will have access to, other than Vault 101, is the ominously named city, Megaton. Built around an unexploded nuclear weapon, Megaton will serve both as a quest hub and the first major moral/karmic choice in the game, as players will be presented with the option to detonate the nuke, destroying the city and all the inhabitants in one fell swoop.



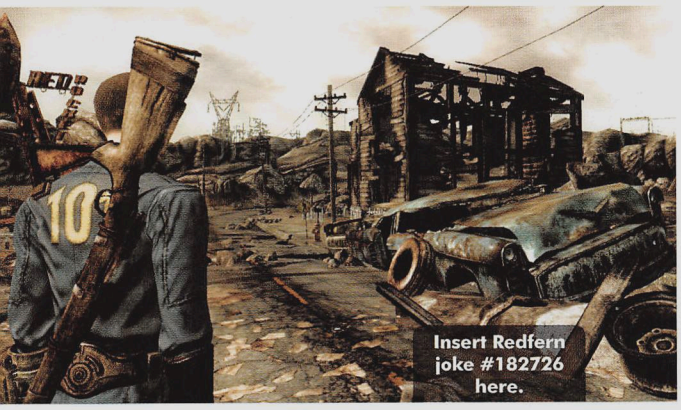


We prefer to think of him as Ra's Al-Ghul rather than Qui-Gon.

EATING PEOPLE IS WRONG

From what we understand these moral choices will play a significant role in the game, with players influencing the direction of the game by the way in which they approach objectives – approaching the same quest in different ways can result in different quests being offered to the character further down the track. Although we haven't had a chance to experience it yet, Bethesda promises that the moral tone of Fallout 3 will not be strictly black and white. What this essentially means is that rather than playing as a flag waving do-gooder or moustache twirling villain as is the case with most other RPGs requiring players to make a moral choice, Fallout 3 will give players the option to take a neutral approach to any given situation as well. These choices will obviously play a vital role in the way the game unfolds – with nine possible endings (so far) it looks as though every decision you make will be important. We also know that one of the tracked statistics is "Bodies Eaten". Whether this is seen as a valuable contribution to resource management or simple cannibalism is a moral question we will leave to the Bethesda developers.

> moral choices will play a significant role in the game



Naturally, sometimes the moral choice you have to make is shooting people, animals and mutants. Throughout the course of the game players will gain access to, build and scavenge numerous weapons ranging from zip guns through to portable tactical nuclear missile launchers and basically everything in between. In addition to simply running and gunning enemies, players can use a system called VATS to make their combat more effective. Somewhat like a mix between bullet time and turn based combat, VATS allows players to stop time so they can target individual limbs. When VATS is used, players will have a finite number of action points to use for movement and attacks (much like the first two Fallout games), so choosing your actions wisely will be the order of the day. Shooting specific locations not only does enhanced damage but can also have secondary effects as well – shoot someone in the leg and they will limp, slowing them in combat, shoot someone in the arm and they may drop their weapon. Shooting specific locations can also result in what Bethesda is hoping will be hilariously over the top gore, with exploding heads, bouncing gibs and other visceral delights. With any luck we will get some hands-on time with code within the next month or so. Stay tuned for more post-apocalyptic goodness.

Frontlines: FUEL OF WAR

X360 | PS3 | Wii | PC | PS2 | DS | PSP

Category: **First Person Shooter** • Players: **1-64/32** • Developer: **Kaos Studios** • Due: **2008**

The last time we covered Frontlines: Fuel of War was way back at the start of last year, when we got some hands-on time with an early version of the game at the 2007 THQ Gamers Day in San Francisco. The game definitely left quite an impression on us, and we can recall thinking that with a little more time to cook, Frontlines could even challenge the Battlefield series for the large-scale warfare crown.

More recently we've scored some more hands-on time with an almost finished copy of the game, and can confirm that as far as multiplayer shooters go, Frontlines: Fuel of War will be one of the games to watch in 2008.

BLACK GOLD, TEXAS TEA

The premise for Frontlines is a fairly straightforward one, and scarily enough it's quite credible as well. The world is addicted to oil, and as we all know, oil is a finite resource. In the year 2024, when Frontlines is set, the global supply of the black gloopy stuff has been reduced to little more than a trickle – sending the world's superpowers into crisis.

Instead of sitting down and working things out in a sensible, civilised manner, all hell breaks loose. The Russians team up with the Chinese to for the "Red Star Alliance" and mount an all-out assault on the United States and Europe to form the "Western Coalition".

You have probably already guessed, but the Americans are the good guys, while the Ruskie/Chinese combo are the root of all evil – and as a good American soldier you will have to kill them mercilessly to protect McDonalds, Disneyland and the American way, along with the precious oil that all of those things depend on to survive.

Or at least you will in the single-player game, which drops you from the air into a hostile Turkmenistan battlefield, with orders to reclaim territory captured by the enemy using a variety of unique methods.

There is of course running and gunning. In the first level alone you'll get your hands on assault rifles, grenade and rocket launchers, turret guns and more, along with whatever weapons you can find mounted on the back of any vehicles you happen to be driving, like tanks and jeeps.

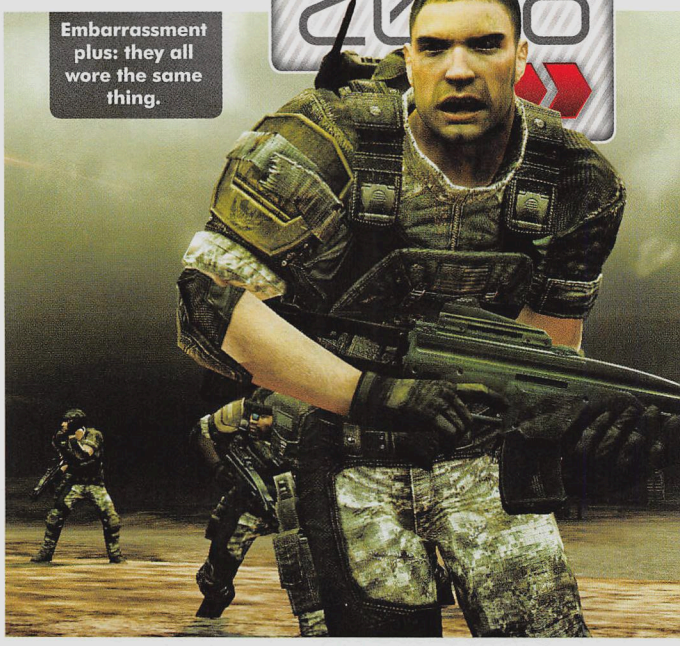
Probably the most interesting of all the tools at your disposal though is the drones, miniature vehicles that you control remotely. So far we've taken a hovering UAV (unmanned aerial vehicle) for a spin, flown it behind enemy lines, and detonated it in their faces. Nice.

Next was the miniature tank drone, which although tiny comes equipped with a devastating canon that can take out pretty much anything in its path, and we had quite a bit of fun doing exactly that. It's clear that the drones are going to bring a lot of fun to the single-player missions, and even more strategy to the class-based multiplayer mode.

Playing much like Battlefield 2 (Kaos Studios did, after all, help to design BF2), Frontlines captures the feeling of large-scale combat, although there's a twist. Instead of capturing flags to win a match, players have to work together to advance their frontline.

Pushing the frontline forward will give you more strategic options, weapons and mission objectives, but letting your guard down and losing your foothold will leave you vulnerable. It's kind of like a game of tug-of-war, on a grander scale.

We're looking forward to seeing the final product later in the year, and if you're a fan of multiplayer shooters and modern combat, you should too.



Embarrassment plus: they all wore the same thing.

WHAT WE'D LIKE TO SEE:

We'd like to see Frontlines deliver on its promise of successfully melding a compelling single-player game with a fresh and addictive multiplayer experience.

» Frontlines captures the feeling of large-scale combat

"Hey, screw this. Just send in the robot instead."

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Ninja Gaiden 2

X360 | PS3 | Wii | PC | PS2 | DS | PSP

Category: **Action/Adventure** • Players: **1**
Developer: **Team Ninja** • Due: **Q1 2008**

Finally! After releasing and remaking the original Ninja Gaiden game three times in three years for two different consoles, this year Team Ninja are preparing to give us what we've been wanting all along, a real sequel to Ryu Hayabusa's cracking ninjutsu romp.

The original's unrelenting difficulty, stunning visuals and addictive hack and slash gameplay made it one of the best original Xbox games ever, and for that matter, made the remake, Ninja Gaiden Sigma, one of the better games on the PS3, but with so much to live up to – will Team Ninja be able to deliver the goods?

FLIP OUT, KILL PEOPLE, REPEAT

So far it look like the goods will be well and truly delivered – probably on the back of a dragon, or some other mythical beast that's equally as awesome. Like a unicorn – as long as the unicorn is on fire and wailing on an electric guitar.

So far, we know that Ninja Gaiden's story is again about revenge – and that to get it Ryu will have to travel to at least three different countries, including Japan (specifically in a level titled "Sky City Tokyo"), New York City, with a trip to the Statue of Liberty, as well as a visit to what looks unmistakably like Venice, complete with canals. There will of course be more levels, and locations than this, and in particular it looks as though there will be some more fantastical locales, including a level called "Niflheim", possibly a reference to a location from Norse mythology known as "the world of mist".

The series still looks great. In combat this is particularly obvious with the intense fights showcased by some cinematic camera angles whenever Ryu busts out a double-figure hit combo. The combos are again spectacular, and super combos also make a return - this time they'll do more damage than ever.

You can actually sever an opponent's arm and if they're tough enough, they'll keep coming for you until you cut of a few other appendages. It all looks very impressive in motion, especially when you've diced a particularly nasty looking gargoyle into several parts, only to have him come back for seconds.

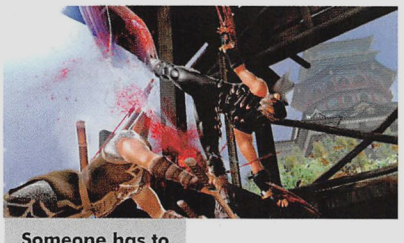
From the looks of it the copious pools of blood and piles of dismembered corpses won't fade away and disappear like in most games, leaving a permanent reminder of your supreme ninja skills and proficiency with sharp metal implements.

Speaking of implements, the weapons of Ninja Gaiden 2 also look interesting. In much of what we've seen already, Ryu's new weapon of choice seems to be a massive scythe. The huge blade attached to a long handle can be waved around with lightning-fast slashes, making short work of your foes. Also shown already have been a pair of Wolverine-style claws that attach to Ryu's hands, and of course his trademark katana and shuriken combo, with the promise of many more new and revised tools for your arsenal.

The difficulty that was lauded by many hardcore gamers as being tough but fair, but was criticised by some others as being too difficult, looks to have been addressed in this sequel as well. Team Ninja are promising that the game will be "more accessible" for casual players, whilst maintaining a challenging difficulty level. Hopefully Team Ninja can maintain that perfect balance to keep experienced ninjas interested. <<

WHAT WE'D LIKE TO SEE:

We hope that Team Ninja's announcement that the game will be "more accessible" doesn't mean the game will be made too easy, as the challenge of the previous Ninja Gaiden was one of its highlights.



Someone has to clean that up, you know.

>> Combos are again spectacular, and super combos make a return

No More Heroes

X360 | PS3 | **Wii** | PC | PS2 | DS | PSP

Category: **Action** • Players: **1** • Developer: **Grasshopper Manufacture** • Due: **Q1 2008**

After sitting down with No More Heroes for a couple of hours we have to say that Suda 51 is, if nothing else, a very funny man. Everything in No More Heroes is a mixture of laugh out loud funny and head scratching weirdness, two things that come together to make a very compelling experience, even if the underlying game isn't as good as hoped. Players take the role of Travis Touchdown, a cooler than cool hipster who, after buying a "Beam Katana", has a fight with a long haired, pretty-boy gunman and quickly finds himself the 10th best hitman in the world. As Yaz and the Plastic Population taught us, the only way is up, so Travis makes the decision to systematically kill his way up the ladder to become number 1. It's a pretty cool premise and one that definitely lets Suda's imagination run wild when coming up with the other hitmen, the ranks of which include a singing Texan lawman, a tattooed swordsman and more.

You're not my father!

MR. BEARDY CAN'T SUE

Before you get your hopes up that No More Heroes is going to be the definitive sword swinger for the Wii, we have to burst your bubble a bit. All basic combat is done via the A and B buttons, with A handling beam katana attacks and B setting up enemies for wrestling moves. Motion sensitivity comes into play in a few different ways; depending on how the wiimote is positioned (either pointing up or forward), Travis will either attack overhand or two the side, enabling players to string together combos at different heights. Motion sensing is also used to deliver finishing attacks and wrestling moves. When an enemy has their health bar reduced to zero, the screen fades and an arrow appears showing the direction in which the wiimote should be flicked to deliver a flashy finishing move, killing the enemy in a shower of coins and black particle effects. Wrestling moves are more difficult, requiring synchronised movements from both the wiimote and nunchuck but result in an instant kill. Combat also features a slot machine-style mechanic whenever you kill an enemy – if the three symbols match, Travis gains a power-up for a short while, ranging from super speed through to one hit kills.

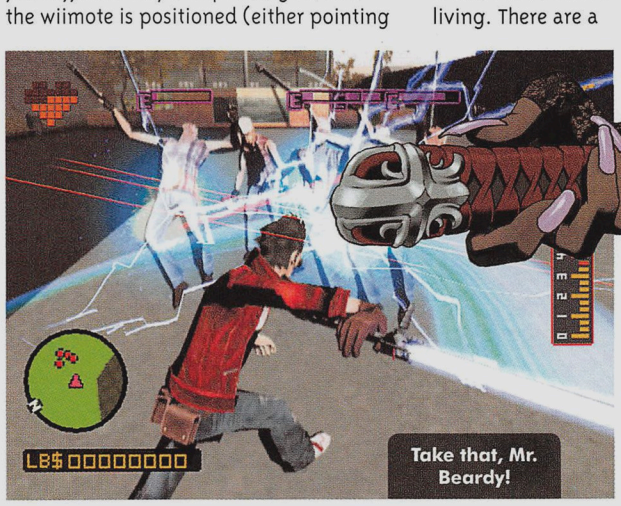
» This is probably the most stylish looking game we've seen on the Wii

Outside of picking off the world's best assassins, Travis has to earn a living. There are a number of side quests available through employment agencies to keep players busy, ranging from the strange, like collecting coconuts for a coconut stand, through to more standard delivery and timed assassination quests in which the player must kill a marked target in a prohibitive time limit.

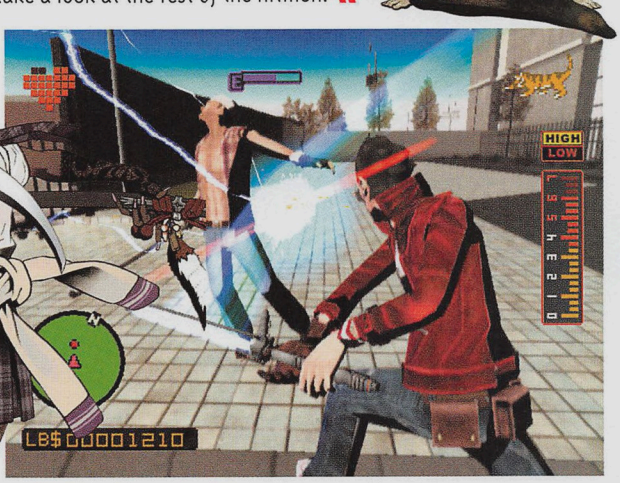
No More Heroes is probably the most stylish looking game we've seen on the Wii. The mixture of beautiful, primary colour cel-shading and strange 8-Bit sensibilities and art combine to make a game world so compelling that the repetitious nature of the combat won't throw you in the slightest as you'll want to see what's coming next. Incidental touches, such as the fact that the game is saved by sending Travis to take a crap, that all of Travis' t-shirts feature some form of Japanese pop-culture reference and the strange cat-feeding mini-game in his flat just serve to make the world even more fascinating. All of the character designs we've seen so far have been brilliant and we can't wait to get a hold of final code so we can take a look at the rest of the hitmen. «

WHAT WE'D LIKE TO SEE:

A little more variety in the story/assassination missions. More wrestling moves.



Take that, Mr. Beardy!



Bionic Commando

X360 | PS3 | Wii | PC | PS2 | DS | PSP

Category: **Action** • Players: **1**
Developer: **GRIN** • Due: **2008**

OK, so the enormous conduits on the main character's arm does make him look as though he's glued a number of horrendous 7-11 hotdogs to a cybernetic limb but we're not going to allow that fact to detract from what has the potential to be one of the most enjoyable third person action games of the year. Although based on the 1988 side scrolling platformer of the same name, Bionic Commando is an entirely new beast that manages to keep the spirit of the original game whilst catering to the more sophisticated tastes of gamers 20 years on. In the original game, the player took the role of the Bionic Commando, a cybernetically enhanced crime fighter working for the government with the ability to use his super-powered arm to swing on platforms and kick enemies' arses. In the new game, players take the role of the same Bionic Commando, now named Nathan Spencer, ten years after the events of the first game. The government to which Nathan gave everything has framed him for a crime he didn't commit and has taken his arm but, luckily for Spencer, all hell breaks loose when a powerful bomb destroys most of Ascension City whilst he is being transported to prison. Nathan is given a choice – either go to prison or destroy the terrorist menace responsible for blowing up the city and killing tens of thousands of people. Pretty easy choice, huh?

DEATH BY WIENER

As with the original game, Nathan's arm plays a vital role in gameplay. Capcom promises that the arm will be able to attach to everything in the environment, allowing the main character to effortlessly swing around the ruined city like an ersatz Spider-Man partially made from sausages. As a matter of fact, Capcom has hinted that some of the bosses will be so big that the player will have to swing on and around them whilst fighting! In close quarters the arm can be used to deliver devastating melee attacks but can also be used as something of a ranged weapon, enabling players to pick up objects and either swing them about like a flail or fling them at distant enemies. In addition to his arm, Nathan will also be able to wield a number of different guns, something that should make for a rather unique experience. The idea of Spider-Man style movement and some good shooting action is something that really excites us.

From what we've seen so far, Bionic Commando is shaping up to be a rather nice looking game, with a great ruined city setting, a huge amount of environmental destruction and an equally huge draw distance. If there's anything that gives us pause it's the design of Nathan Spencer himself. Although we dig the whole oversized bionic arm and the fact that it looks more like a piece of industrial machinery than an actual appendage, we're just not sole on Nathan himself, a character who, at this stage, looks like a rather generic tough guy. The head full of disturbingly bouncy dreadlocks doesn't really help either. Reservations aside, Bionic Commando is slated for a Q4 2008 launch. We can't wait to get some good hands on time. «

"You stay impaled, I'll go and shoot stuff."

WHAT WE'D LIKE TO SEE:

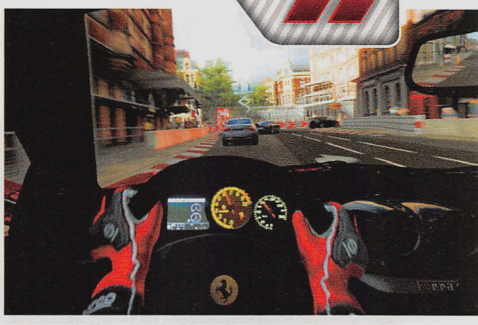
Some of the giant bosses. We like boss monsters and the prospect of bosses so big that you have to climb them (or swing up them as the case may be), Shadow of the Colossus style intrigues us.

» The arm can be used to deliver devastating melee attacks

"I will hug him and name him George."

Running uphill has never been so enjoyable. Or something.

Little do they know the zebra crossing is just around the bend.



Gran Turismo 5 Prologue

X360 | **PS3** | Wii | PC | PS2 | DS | PSP

Category: **Driving** • Players: **1-16**
Developer: **Polyphony Digital** • Due: **2008**

Office opinions are torn about Gran Turismo 5. While half of us are desperate to get our hands on Polyphony Digital's newest ultra-realistic driving simulator, the other half would clearly rather play something that involves hovering space cars, nitrous oxide, ridiculous slow-motion car crashes or Koopa shells and banana peels.

Regardless of personal preference though, nobody could deny GT5's status as one of the most looked-forward to games on the PlayStation 3 so far.

But wait a minute... Gran Turismo 5 Prologue? What exactly is that supposed to mean...

IT MEANS IT'S A BIG DEMO DISC

Of course, what it means for us is that before we get to play the real Gran Turismo 5, we are first going to have to shell out for just a taster of what we'll get in the final game.

Fully sick, bro. Now do a barrel roll.

Polyphony Digital tried this same marketing technique with Gran Turismo 4, putting out a prologue version of that game (at about half the price of a normal game) about a year before the full release. While we're a little reluctant to say that we like this kind of business strategy, it must have worked the first time around, since Polyphony Digital are once again trying to wring extra dollars out of us by doing the same for Gran Turismo 5.

Admittedly, for GT fiends this prologue game offers the only real opportunity to get to grips with the next in the series long before it releases sometime in 2009. That's a fairly enticing prospect in itself, but it looks like there will be a few other aspects of this release worth getting excited about.

For starters, GT5 Prologue is doing something that has eluded the series up until now – online play. Up to sixteen players from around the world will be able to compete against each other simultaneously, a feature that GT fans have been dreaming about for years.

Before you take to the streets to blow tire smoke in the faces of the rest of the world you will of course need to choose your wheels. Thirty cars will be available in all, with manufacturers like Ferrari, Lotus, Nissan and Mitsubishi contributing some of their finest rides to the game. Just as in past GT games, the cars promise to handle about as close to the real thing as possible and thanks to a new physics engine developed exclusively for GT5 this should be the most realistic version yet.

WHAT WE'D LIKE TO SEE:

We just wish that Polyphony Digital would ditch the whole "Prologue" idea. Honestly, we thought this marketing technique was exploitative the first time you tried it – just get on and release the proper game already!

The three-point turn mission is the best.

Not only should GT5 Prologue control as authentic as the real thing but it's getting pretty close to looking like the real thing too. If you thought the freebie Gran Turismo HD Concept looked good, well, GT5 Prologue looks better. There's even a brand new in-cockpit view, allowing you to see the completely customised dashboard and instruments for each car, instead of just a bumper-cam.

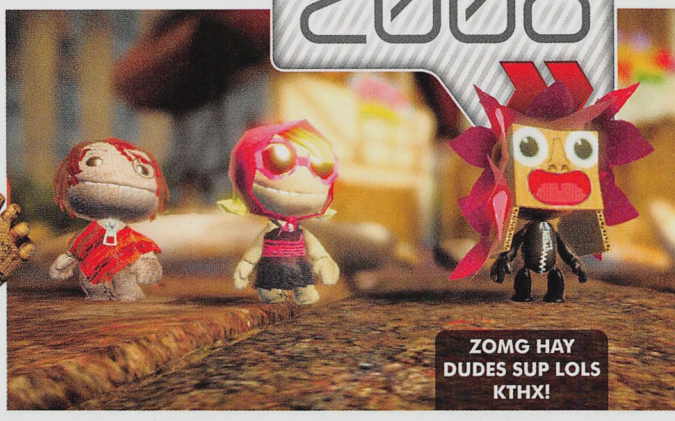
In terms of tracks, this prologue is a bit skint. There'll only be five in total, including big-name circuits like Eiger Nordwand, the London City Track and Suzuka, although you will be able to race them in reverse, and there will apparently be a few alternate routes to try out as well, providing a bit more game time.

Personally, given that the final game will probably feature more than twenty times the content of the prologue (Gran Turismo 4 featured more than 700 cars and 51 tracks alone), we're not entirely sold on the premise of buying a glorified demo disc for even half the cost of a full-price game.

If you're a Gran Turismo nutter, however, and you can't possibly wait for the actual game to arrive, then GT5 Prologue will be enough of a game to hold you over until something more substantial comes along. «

» Cars promise to handle about as close to the real thing as possible

Little Big Planet



X360 **PS3** Wii | PC | PS2 | DS | PSP

Category: **Platform/Creation** • Players: **1-4**
Developer: **Media Molecule** • Due: **2008**

Sony's resolution to go with larger-portioned downloadable games on their online distribution system – the PlayStation Network – rather than the byte-sized morsels offered on Microsoft's Xbox Live Arcade is a somewhat riskier decision, but if they get it right, there's some considerable rewards to be reaped.

They already have the very decent Warhawk online as I type this, and they'll soon have the awesome-looking Wipeout HD ready for download too, although those two are just the beginning. The game with the real potential to define the PS Network is a relatively unassuming community building platform game, called LittleBigPlanet.

ABOMINABLY CUTE

We've covered LittleBigPlanet several times over the course of last year, and each time we write about this game we grow more and more impressed with its unique premise and ambitious development.

Whether it's the construct-it-yourself attitude towards level design, the ability to share and play your creations with players from around the world or the incredibly fun looking physics-based gameplay, we just can't help but want this abominably cute platformer.

Designed by developer Media Molecule as a kind of community development tool, LittleBigPlanet aims to bring out the creative side in its players by letting them make their own levels complete with puzzles, unique visual themes and some pretty exciting design elements, and then let people share them with the rest of the world.

You'll be presented with an expansive toolset to get you started, including the ability to drop shaped blocks onto the landscape, alter terrain and colour, texture, sticker or otherwise decorate your world. All of these elements can also be customised; in fact, pretty much everything in LittleBigPlanet can be customised in size, shape, appearance or functionality, including your player character. What's more, everything will react with realistic physic once you actually lay it down and start playing with it.

WHAT WE'D LIKE TO SEE:

If LittleBigPlanet can do everything it says it can then we'd love to see it attract a large enough community to keep the player-made content flowing in freely.

In fact, the physics seem to be among the most important features of LittleBigPlanet. At the moment there doesn't really seem to be any purpose to the levels of LittleBigPlanet, or any way to include real objectives in your own creations. Instead, the point of playing or creating LittleBigPlanet's levels is purely to experiment with what can be done in the game's virtual world, or simply to toy with whatever someone else has laid out in front of you.

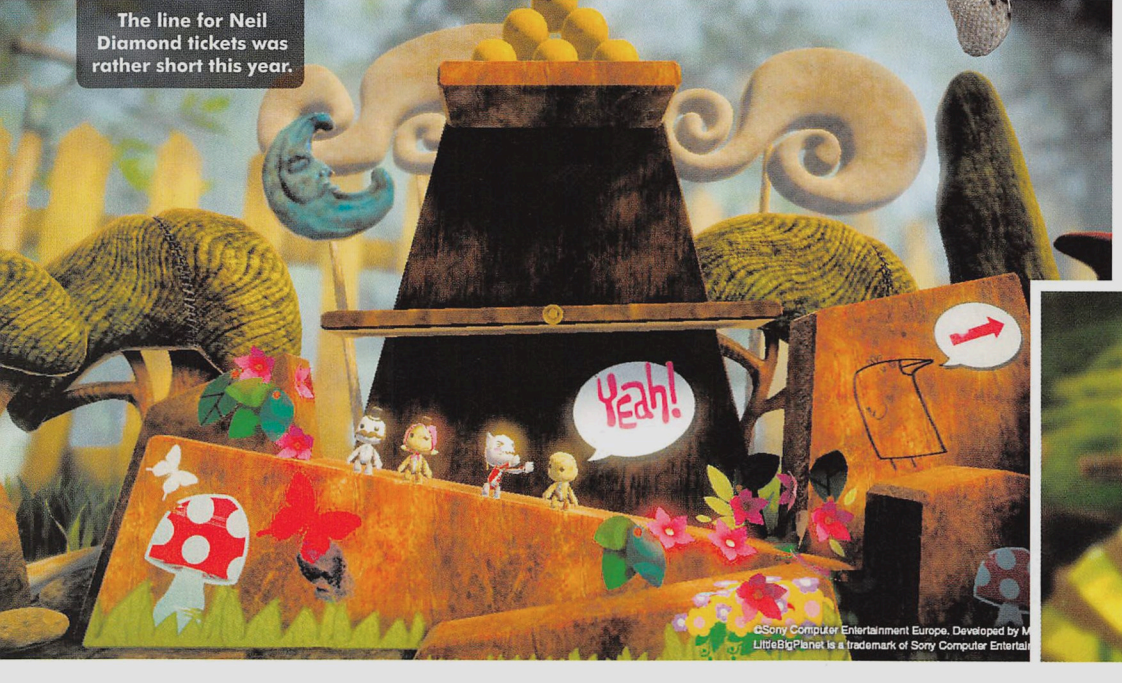
The sophisticated physics engine means that there will be all manner of physics-based puzzles to both solve and create. We've already seen the game's gravity in action, with a player-made skateboard, complete with rolling wheels, careening down a slope and launching off a jump into the air. Other puzzles we've seen include weighted seesaws, cogs and levers, and of course, crate stacking – a perennial favourite.

There will be a lot more than just physics puzzles, however, with a variety of gadgets promised for the final game. The first of these that we've seen is a jetpack, which can be worn by your tiny avatar, and used to fly freely around the level.

Along with all of this, LittleBigPlanet will also boast a pre-prepared single player game that is, to use Media Molecule's own description, "massive".

With all of its imagination and ingenuity, LittleBigPlanet may well turn out to be not just the best reason to log onto the PS Network, but it could also end up being the best reason to own a PlayStation 3. We're really looking forward to finding out.

» there will be all manner of physics-based puzzles to both solve and create



The line for Neil Diamond tickets was rather short this year.

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Mario Kart Wii

X360 | PS3 | **Wii** | PC | PS2 | DS | PSP

Category: **Racing** • Players: **1-12**
Developer: **Nintendo** • Due: **2008**

There has never been a bad Mario Kart game but every time a new sequel rolls around we always find ourselves wishing for a certain something to occur. While Double Dash on the Gamecube was fantastic fun and Mario Kart DS was a pleasing mixture of old and new, none of Nintendo's go-kart grand prix has yet managed to best the original SNES game for pure racing and shell-shooting bliss.

So will the Wii version be the first to take to the winner's podium ahead of the sixteen-year-old Super Mario Kart? It's looking quite promising indeed...

RED SHELLS AND BANANA PEELS

First up, there's one thing that you should know right off the starting line – Mario Kart is no longer just about karts. That's right readers, the game's title will now only be half as accurate in describing what vehicles you will be driving around in, since Nintendo have taken a bold move and decided to add motorcycles.

Ninty released the first bike-riding footage some months ago, and although they've kept quiet on the subject for some time now we have already seen Mario himself taking a bright red two-wheeler out for a spin, and even popping wheelies, which we can only guess will be activated by motion control.

The game has of course gone back to having a single driver per vehicle, unlike Double Dash, although there will be significant developments in the multiplayer department. A full online mode will be included in Mario Kart Wii, a rarity for Wii games and a welcome feature that Mario Kart fans have been wanting for a long time. Twelve players will be able to race against each other simultaneously, with each able to choose either a kart or bike as their chariot.

Many other gameplay features still remain a mystery, but we do know that most, if not all, of your favourite characters will be returning, such as Mario, Luigi, Princess Peach, Wario, Waluigi, Baby Mario, Yoshi and Bowser, as well as a few new ones, including the debut of Boo, a ghost rider of sorts.

That same formula seems to be in use for the rest of the game's features as well, with old favourites returning along with a few new ones to maintain your interest. There will be 16 new tracks, and like Mario Kart DS, there is also rumoured to be a few retro tracks from older games. While weapons like the red and green shells, banana peels and boost shrooms will all return, Nintendo is promising new ones, although they have not yet been unveiled.

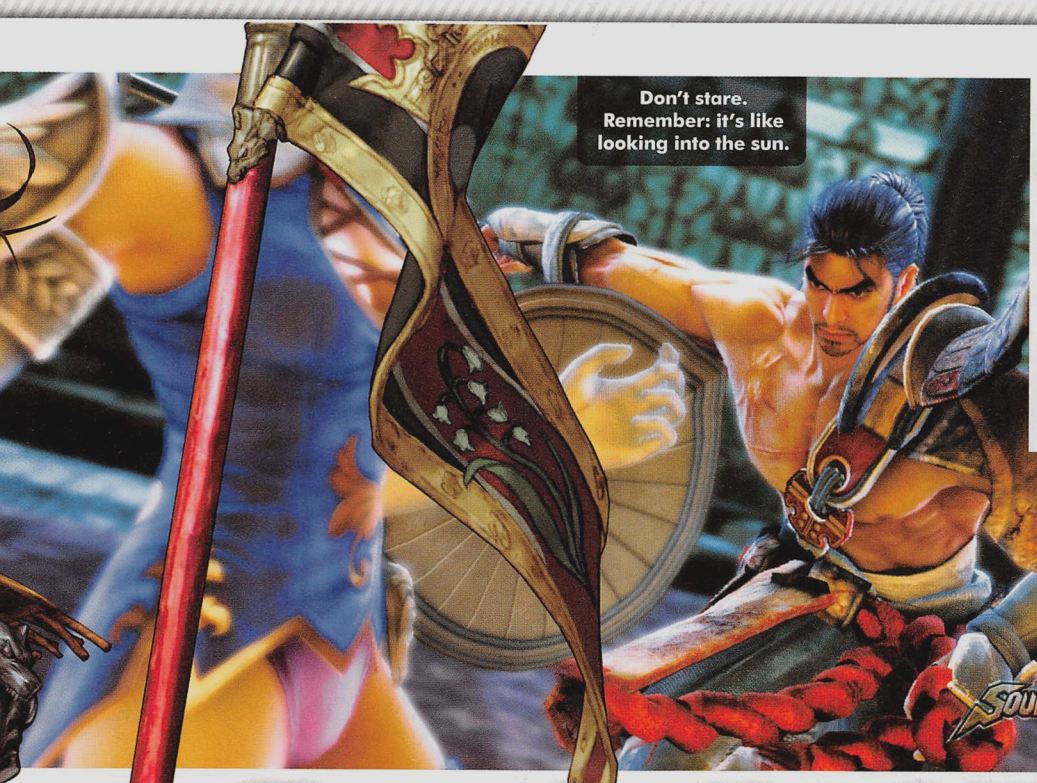
One of the more surprising announcements regarding Mario Kart Wii is that every copy will come with a free "Wii Wheel" accessory that will slip over a conventional Wiimote, giving it the look and feel of a steering wheel. Similar peripherals have of course been available from third-party manufacturers for months, but at least Nintendo's version will come gratis with the game most Wii owners would want it for. «

He's only mad because Bowser keyed his ride.

» Twelve players will be able to race against each other simultaneously

WHAT WE'D LIKE TO SEE:

Aside from the game being excellent, we'd like to see the Wii Wheel attachment actually adding something to the game, unlike the disappointing Wii Zapper.



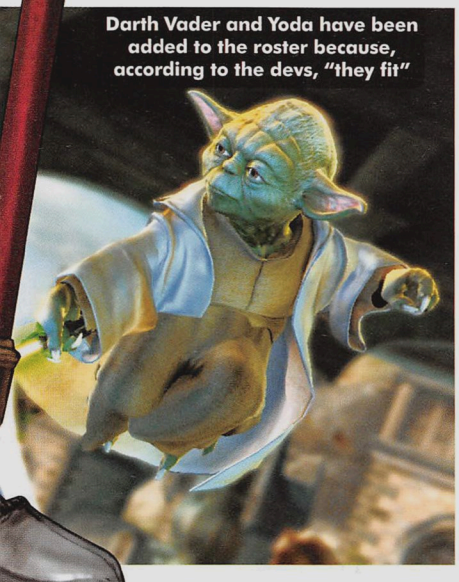
Don't stare. Remember: it's like looking into the sun.

Soul Calibur 4

X360 | PS3 | Wii | PC | PS2 | DS | PSP

Category: **Fighting** • Players: **1-2**
Developer: **Project Soul** • Due: **2008**

There isn't a whole heap of information available about Soul Calibur IV as yet but even so, the game is still one of our most eagerly anticipated titles of the year. Aside from the fact that it's a Soul Calibur game and therefore is going to be a kick arse fighting game, what else do we know? Well, we know that the story this time revolves around Nightmare and Siegfried, both of whom are approaching their final forms and wielding their chosen weapons, the magical blades Soul Calibur and Soul Blade respectively. We know that the majority of familiar characters will be making a return, so fans will be pleased to know that they will be able to play the likes of Mitsurugi, Taki, Voldo, Ivy and Tira. We know that online play will be included, as will be a single player adventure mode in the vein of Chronicles of the Sword as seen in SC III. As far as we understand there will be new guard-break mechanics implemented, as well as a system that will allow players to defeat opponents without actually fully depleting their health bars.



Darth Vader and Yoda have been added to the roster because, according to the devs, "they fit"

PLAYER CREATED CLEAVAGE

The Create a Character mode will also be making a very welcome return but this time there will be some features that should make players very happy. Not only will there be more customisable options with character creation, such as being able to change the voice, the actual appearance, equipment and clothing of the character will change the way the character fights, giving players more impetus to play their created character. The developers also promise that players will be able to take their created characters online and (Sony legal issues revolving around memory cards pending) you should also be able to save your character to a memory card and take them around to a friend's house. There's also talk that players may be able to trade characters online. Although we're not quite sure how this would work we're intrigued by the prospect.

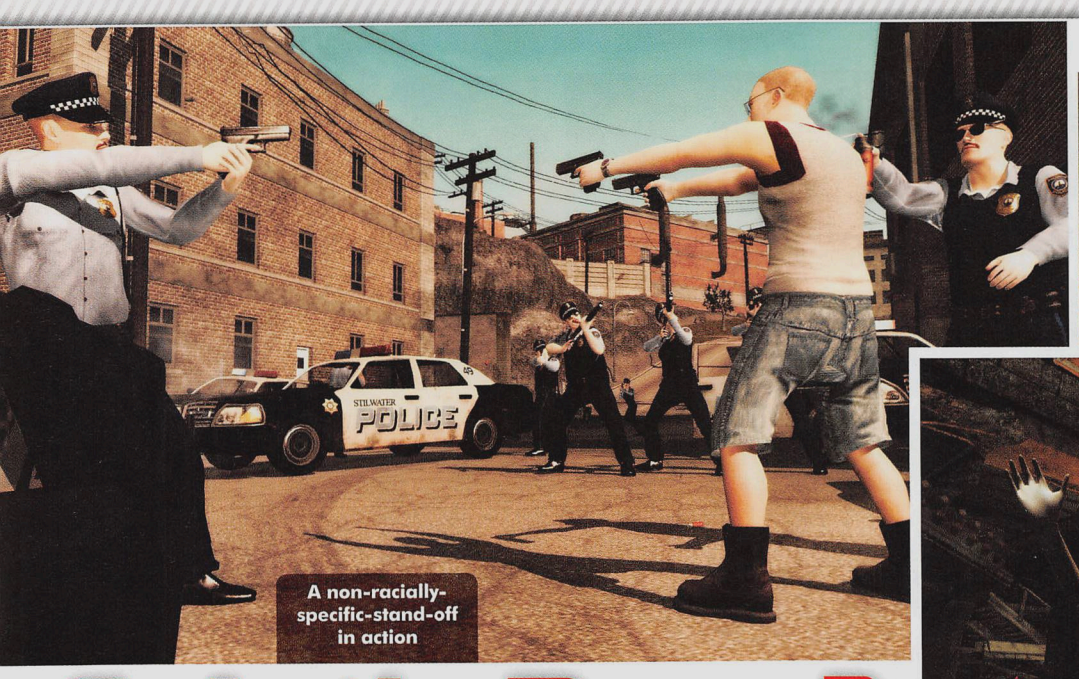
Seconds later: obligatory panty shot.

WHAT WE'D LIKE TO SEE:

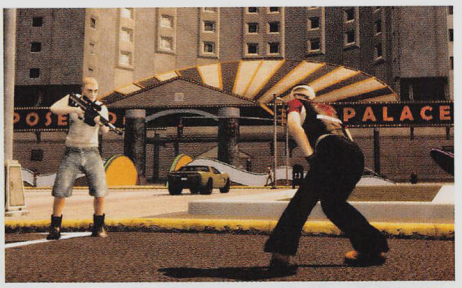
A full character roster as well as details of the new create a character system.

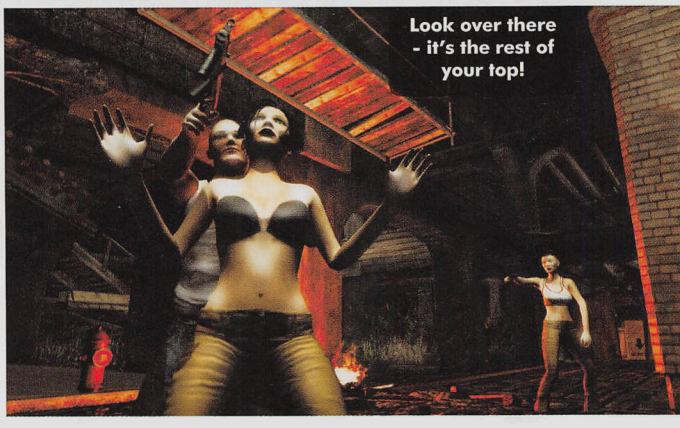
Best of all, a host of new characters will make an appearance in SC IV. The only character announced so far, Hilda, is a very interesting one. Hilda is different from every other character in the franchise so far as she wields two weapons of different lengths, giving her access to both short and long range attacks. The developers promise that Hilda will be a good character for new players. It's also interesting to note that Hilda is the only female character that doesn't show skin and jiggle – unlike all of the other female characters, Hilda is encased head to foot in a suit of armour, leaving only her face visible. Of course, we wouldn't be at all surprised if she had an alternate costume that took the form of a chainmail bikini or something equally as titillating. «

» Players will be able to take their created characters online



A non-racially-specific-stand-off in action





Look over there - it's the rest of your top!

Saint's Row 2

X360 | PS3 | Wii | PC | PS2 | DS | PSP

Category: **Open-World Action** • Players: **1-Multi**
Developer: **Volition** • Due: **2008**

The original Saints Row was somewhat of a coup for THQ and Volition. Not only was it the first game in the open-world action genre to release on a next generation system, beating Grand Theft Auto IV to the punch by nearly two years, but it was also surprisingly well put together.

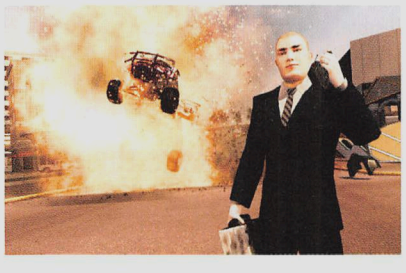
Sure, its humour was a bit forced and its atmosphere less authentic than Rockstar's money-maker, but it still managed to dish out bulk servings of vicarious gangster thrills, along with plenty of amoral violence, fast cars, a huge open city, and hoochies. Lots and lots of hoochies.

The sequel, Saints Row 2, is already shaping up to be bigger, better and ballsier than the first – making it one of our games to watch in 2008.

G'S UP, HO'S DOWN

So what should you expect from this new gangster simulation? For starters, hoochies – and thankfully Volition are also promising that Saints Row 2 will "revolutionise player freedom".

Stilwater, the city that featured in the original game, will once again return as the primary location for Saints Row 2. Stilwater in its first incarnation was a cross between Detroit and Chicago, with a little bit of New York City thrown in for good measure. Spread out over two islands, Stilwater featured a variety of detailed inner-city environments, ranging from the CBD to the suburbs and a whole lot of ghetto.



For its second appearance Volition are promising that Stilwater will be a "totally transformed and expanded" city – featuring not only more landmass, but also more detail, more recognisable landmarks and an overall more lifelike and visually stunning environment. Volition have also announced that one of their main concerns with this sequel is to eliminate the pop-up that often occurred in the previous game, and to greatly increase the draw distance – a good move.

Expanded is also the word we'd use to describe the list of vehicles that will be available. Motorcycles, which were noticeably absent from the original game, will make their first appearance on the streets of Stilwater – allowing you to hit the road in a variety of hogs and sports bikes. Returning will be all the sedans and hatchbacks you can steal, and although it's far from being confirmed, we've also seen some screens that show the player character in the cockpit of a light aircraft, hopefully meaning that we'll be able to take to the skies.

One of the most interesting revelations about the game has been that it will be entirely playable in co-op mode, from start to finish. Whether this will be online co-op or split screen hasn't been specified, but this news, along with the already strong multiplayer modes from the original should make part two a pretty solid multiplayer experience.

Finally there's the premise and story, with Volition promising a grittier experience all around. "Saints Row 2 has a much darker and more sinister story" said Greg Donovan, lead producer at Volition.

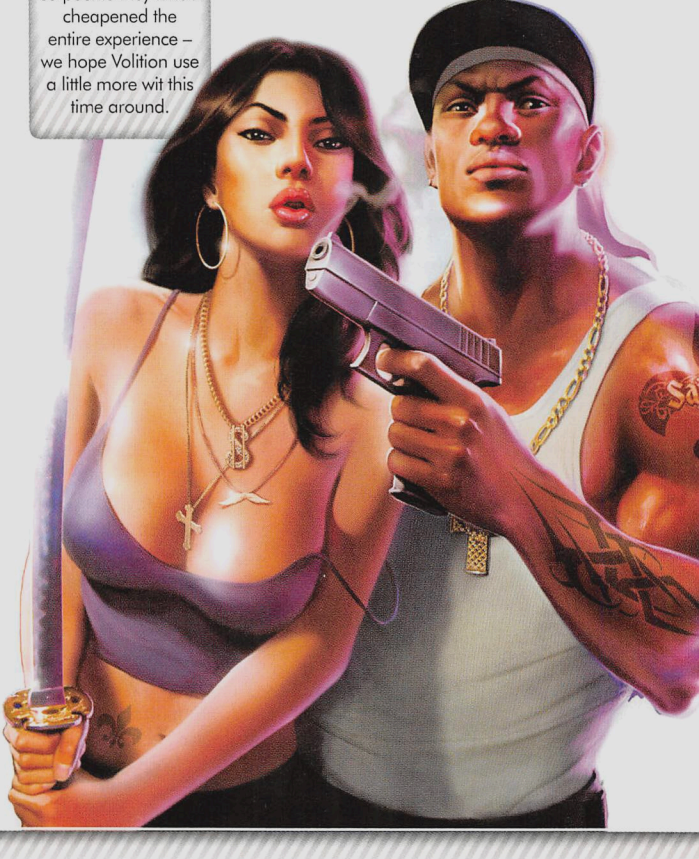
> "Saints Row 2 has a much darker and more sinister story"

WHAT WE'D LIKE TO SEE:

We hope that this time around the humour and atmosphere are given a lot more attention. The last game's gags were so puerile they kinda cheapened the entire experience – we hope Volition use a little more wit this time around.

"[Saints Row 2] leads your character down a path of betrayal, revenge and redemption against the city that has left him for dead, although we've blended that with the same light-hearted humour from the original."

Sounds good so far, although with Saints Row 2 releasing after the planned launch of GTA IV, this game's going to have a lot to prove. «



Lost Odyssey

X360 | PS3 | Wii | PC | PS2 | DS | PSP

Category: **RPG** • Players: **1**
Developer: **Mistwalker** • Due: **2008**

Riddle me this. After the phenomenal success of Final Fantasy 12 and the respectable success of Blue Dragon – a game developed by the same team as Lost Odyssey no less – why is it that Lost Odyssey features that horrible bane of Japanese RPG development, the random battle? You'd think that any developer would have noticed the huge numbers of complaints about random battles and the shift away from them that has been occurring of late. Hell, when Square Enix moves away from random battles, something they all but created, not to mention championed, you know something must be up. Please, for the love of Grod, can we finally put an end to only being able to take two steps before having to fight?

OK, now that that is off my chest, on to Lost Odyssey. We recently had the chance to get some decent hands on time with the English translation of the game and we have to say that the game is looking to be a real mixed bag. From the first showing, Odyssey has been positioned as a game that will wow players with the amazing presentation. The opening sequence showing Kaim, the immortal hero fighting a bunch of soldiers and steampunk-ish mecha before a meteor ruins everyone's day is absolutely phenomenal but after that the game definitely becomes something of a mixed bag. For every lovely looking background, cutscene or character design there is something that looks like it came direct from the PS2 – characters who don't move their mouths when they talk, simple cyclic animations, characters made up entirely of simple geometry. And then there are the framerate issues. We haven't seen one cutscene that hasn't had some problems with keeping a steady framerate. Considering that Lost Odyssey spans 4 DVDs we have to wonder exactly what the space is being used for.

LOST SLIDESHOW

The framerate issues we've encountered in the game so far have not seriously detracted from our enjoyment of the game. Luckily, Lost Odyssey looks as though it will feature a pretty kick arse story, albeit one that utilizes some very old-school RPG clichés. Kaim, the taciturn and monosyllabic pretty-boy hero is an immortal, and, whilst not quite being amnesiac, he has little memory of his long past. Throw him in with some serious political machinations between rival nations and secrets from beyond the veil and it's a story that is shaping up to be quite fun.

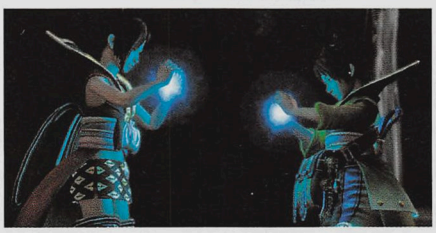
Kaim's immortal status plays a vital role in gameplay mechanics in more ways that one. Naturally, Kaim can't truly die, although he can be rendered unconscious for a few rounds if he is defeated in any of the turn-based, menu-driven battles. More importantly, Kaim doesn't level up like a standard character. Immortals cannot learn magic through leveling – instead they must learn from a mortal spell caster in the party, essentially piggybacking on their skills until both character learn the magic. Throughout his adventures, Kaim can recruit three other immortals and numerous mortals to join his eight man party, so there should be a wide scope for leveling and skill development.

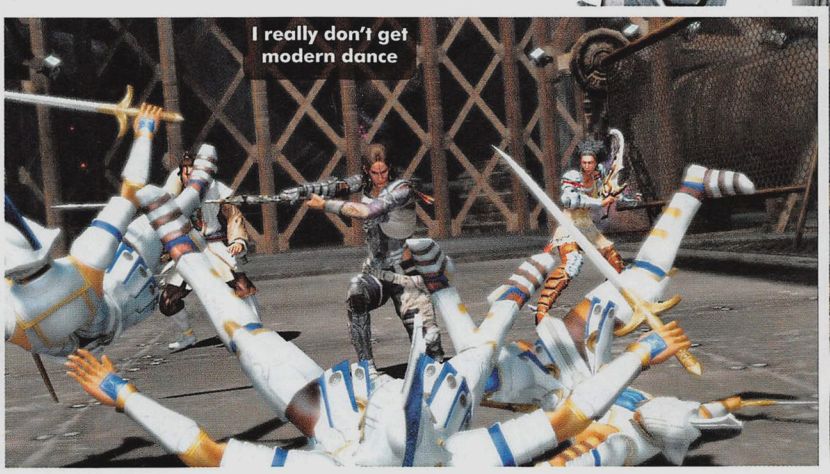
Lost Odyssey is tipped for a February release in the US but so far there is no word on when the game will be released locally. With any luck there will be some tweaking done to remedy some of the framerate problems before final code hits our shores. Fingers crossed. «

WHAT WE'D LIKE TO SEE:

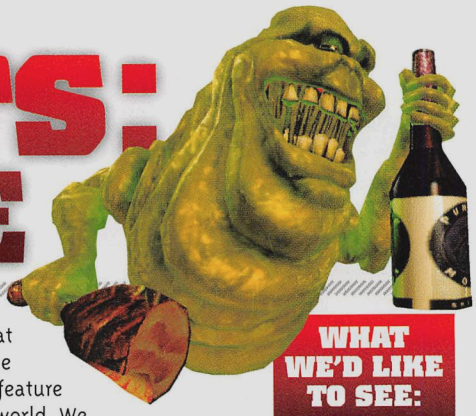
As always, we'd like to see an end too bloody random encounters - we live in hope.

» there should be a wide scope for leveling and skill development





Ghostbusters: THE VIDEOGAME



X360 | PS3 | Wii | PC | PS2 | DS | PSP

Category: **First Person Shooter**
Players: **1-Multi** • Developer: **Terminal Reality** • Due: **2008**

Developer Terminal Reality doesn't exactly have a great track record to fall back on. As the developers of such forgettable videogames as the average Aeon Flux film tie-in, as well as the two BloodRayne games, notable only for spawning the awful Uwe Boll film of the same name, they're not exactly what you would call a AAA development house.

It is with mixed feelings then that we discovered that they are currently working on a game based on one of the greatest comedy films of the eighties, Ghostbusters.

On the one hand we really want to play a game following the ghost-busting exploits of Venkman, Stantz, Spengler and Zeddemore, but on the other hand, we just don't want Terminal Reality to cock it up.

BUSTIN' MAKES ME FEEL GOOD!

We are of course willing to give Terminal Reality a second chance, providing that they do one of our most loved cinematic properties justice. So far, it looks like they're off to a good start in achieving that aim.

The first good sign is that much of the original cast is returning both in likeness and in voice, including Bill Murray, Dan Aykroyd, Harold Ramis, and Ernie Hudson. This fact alone will pretty much seal the deal for any hardcore fans of busting ghosts, as this will be the first time that the four main characters have been reunited in almost twenty years.

As well as the main cast, supporting players will also make an appearance, including Annie Potts who will reprise her role as Janine, the Ghostbusters' receptionist, and William Atherton, who returns as the Ghostbusters' nemesis, Walter Peck. There's still no word on whether Sigourney Weaver or Rick Moranis will feature, but we can only hope.

Perhaps just as important is the fact that both Dan Aykroyd and Harold Ramis, who wrote both Ghostbusters films, will also be penning the game's script, meaning that this is probably as close to Ghostbusters 3 as we're ever going to get.

As exciting as it is to see the original cast back together, both in front and behind the scenes, you won't be playing as any of them. Instead, Ghostbusters: The Videogame places you in the shoes of a fresh-faced recruit who joins the crew to help them sort out a new supernatural outbreak in their native Manhattan. You'll have to strap on a proton pack, grab a ghost trap and hunt down some poltergeists for fun and profit.

With New York City as the backdrop, we're hoping that Ghostbusters: The Videogame will feature a free-roaming world. We could think of nothing better than exploring Manhattan, searching for ghosts and getting into other trouble along the way.

In terms of adversaries, it's safe to say that there will be ghosts – lots of them. More specifically, you can bank on there being a starring appearance by the Stay Puft Marshmallow Man, along with Slimer – although what else you'll come up against is still shrouded in mystery,

> Much of the original cast is returning in likeness and in voice

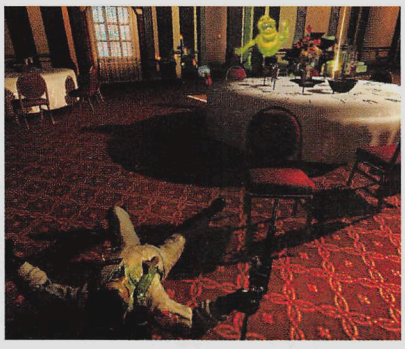
along with many of the game's finer gameplay features.

Our anticipation is already high for Ghostbusters: The Videogame, so much so that if you were to ask us who we were going to call in a vaguely Ray Parker Junior-esque tone, we'd almost certainly reply "Ghostbusters". Unless of course the game is terrible, in which case we'll be calling Terminal Reality to shout at them.

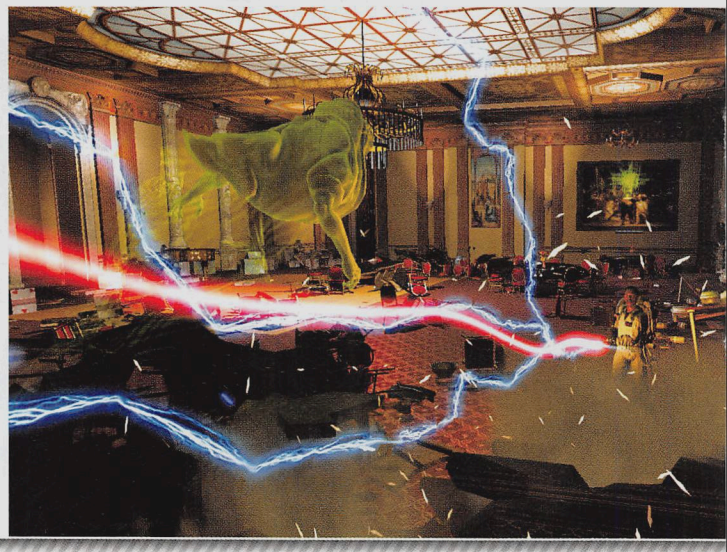
WHAT WE'D LIKE TO SEE:

Terminal Reality are promising that Ghostbusters' New York will "authentically recreate the whimsical time period of the film". Hopefully this means it will be set in the 1980s – as it should be.

That's what you get for not emptying your mind, noob.



Eh, someone else can clean that up.



See that huge cigar? That's totally not phallic symbolism.

Duke Nukem Forever

X360 | PS3 | Wii | **PC** | PS2 | DS | PSP

Category: **First Person Shooter** • Players: **1-Multi** • Developer: **3D Realms** • Due: **2008?**

Don't laugh. We can pre-emptively sense your scepticism even now, as we write this several weeks before the magazine goes to the printers and arrives in your hands. As you read this you are no doubt scoffing at the thought of ever getting to play Duke Nukem Forever in your lifetime, let alone by the end of the coming year, but that is exactly what we are proposing will happen.

Despite 3D Realms' persistent claims that the game will only be coming "when it's done", the rumour mill is grinding away feverishly with the speculation that the game's expectant publisher, 2K Games, have done just about all the waiting they're willing to do – and want the game out by year's end.

With a new teaser trailer doing the rounds, and with 3D Realms attempting to jumpstart yet another Duke Nukem hype machine, an imminent release of the most delayed game in living memory seems possible. It's all completely unfounded speculation, of course, but the game has to come out sometime – and it may as well be 2008.

KICK ARSE, CHEW BUBBLE GUM, ETC...

Let's start with the brand new teaser shall we, seeing as it's the best evidence that we have to prove that the game is indeed still in production.

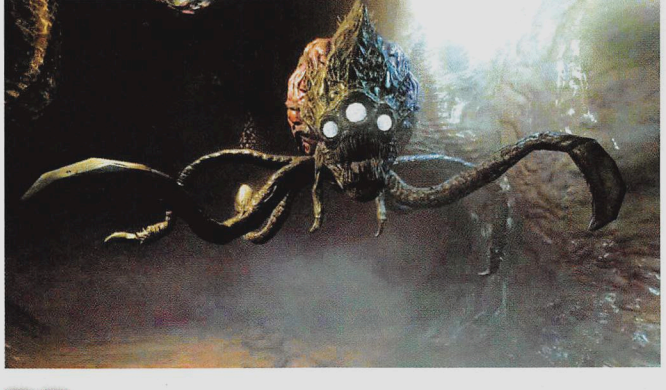
WHAT WE'D LIKE TO SEE:

Need you ask? We'd just like to see the game finished, playable and on store shelves for us to buy – if it's a good game as well, then that will be a bonus.

It all starts with Duke sitting at some sort of total gym, no doubt fresh from pumping up his already bulging pectorals. While Duke may appear to be in great shape he once again shows us what a paradox he is, by sucking back on a stogie the size of a rolled up newspaper as if his life depended upon it.

As Duke smokes and flexes, flashes of action give us a small glimpse at what to expect from the game. The humanoid mutants make an appearance, as do the floating tentacled brains as well as the warthogs wearing police uniform (we see what you did there 3D Realms), and all of them seem angry at Duke. With that Duke stands up, blows smoke into the camera and delivers the line: "I'm looking for some alien toilet to park my bricks... who's first?"

Whatever it is, ten bucks says it's not chewing bubblegum.



» The game has to come out sometime – and it may as well be 2008

Apart from that one-liner not being in the same league as some of Duke's other quips (all of which were stolen from movies like Evil Dead 2 and John Carpenter's They Live anyway), the trailer wasn't particularly impressive either.

All the visuals shown were obviously pre-rendered, without a skerrick of real-time gameplay to be seen, and ultimately the trailer seemed to be simply a reminder that the project was indeed still alive, in some capacity.

Now, we're not willing to pass judgement on the game from seeing only a 70 second teaser, but it has to be said that Duke Nukem Forever is probably the most troubled production the games industry has ever seen. Hell, even GSC Game World managed to make S.T.A.L.K.E.R.: Shadow of Chernobyl in the Ukraine within seven years, Duke Nukem Forever has so far taken more than a decade, and is being developed in the comparatively prosperous USA.

Nevertheless, the Duke Nukem name does still hold a lot of weight amongst gamers who can remember how great Duke 3D was in it's day, and as much as we may rouse on Forever for being so delayed, we still really want to play the final game. If it's at all possible for 3D Realms to pull this one off in 2008, then we'll be here to play it in all its violent, witty and politically incorrect glory.

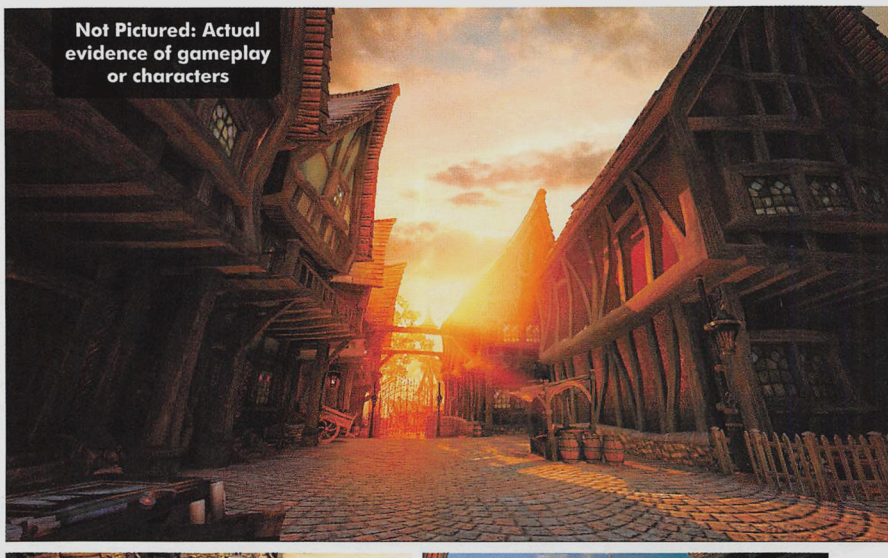
At the very least they've promised us a few more trailers in the coming months, so stay tuned, because they may be a few more surprises yet courtesy of the Duke. «

Far Cry 2

X360 | PS3 | Wii | PC | PS2 | DS | PSP

Developer: **Ubisoft Montreal** • Due: **Q2 2008**

Wave goodbye to mutants as there will be none to fight in Ubisoft's in-house developed sequel to Crytek's Far Cry. Wave goodbye to Jack Carver as well for that matter, as in this second outing players will be able to choose from a range of characters. Starting from a cabin in Africa, players will be thrust into a war against a vicious African warlord in what promises to be the most non-linear sandbox game yet. If Ubisoft lives up to their promise, players will be able to tackle the adventure in whatever manner they so choose, from front on battle to stealth. We can't wait.



Yarr - there be pirates in this picture

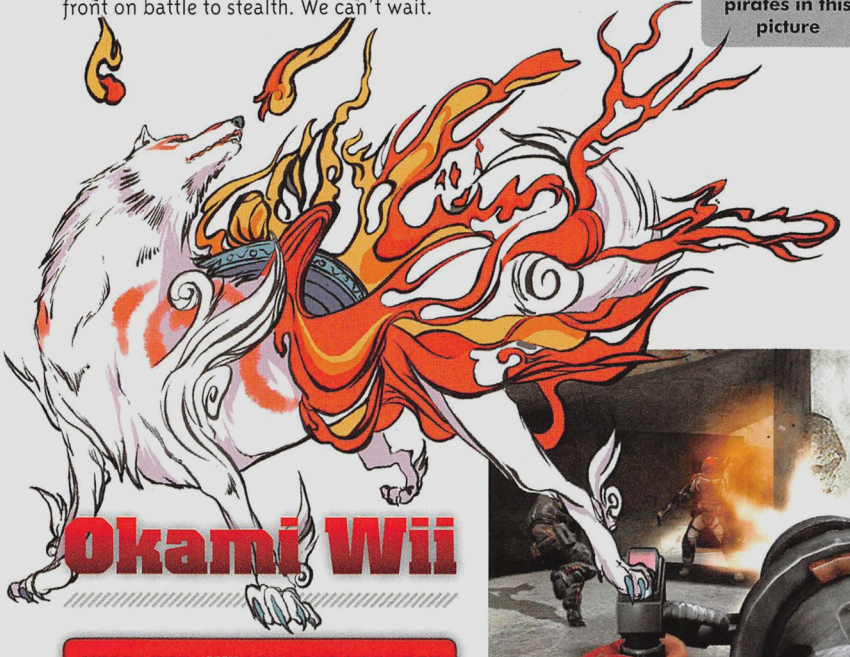
Fable 2

X360 | PS3 | Wii | PC | PS2 | DS | PSP

Developer: **Lionhead Entertainment** • Due: **Q1 2008**

The first Fable game ranks up there as one of the finest original Xbox games ever, and with that in mind, we'd have to say that Fable 2 in amongst our most anticipated releases for 2008. With a new time period, set 500 years after the events of the original game, the land of Albion will be completely different – and promises to be a larger and entire free roaming world.

The combat has been reworked, and because Fable 2's time period is more advanced, you can now wield muskets as well as swords and magic – making for a very interesting adventure indeed.



Okami Wii

X360 | PS3 | Wii | PC | PS2 | DS | PSP

Developer: **Clover Studio/Ready At Dawn** • Due: **Q1 2008**

If you already played one of our favourite games of last year to death on the PlayStation 2, then you might not be quite as excited about this Wii version as you should be. However, if you haven't played this gem yet, and you own a Wii, start getting excited now – as Okami Wii looks to be even better than the original.

Using the Wiimote, you'll be able to paint freely with the Celestial Brush, and using the Nunchuk you'll be able to control Amaterasu to victory in this Zelda-styled adventure. We can't wait.

Haze

X360 | PS3 | Wii | PC | PS2 | DS | PSP

Developer: **Free Radical** • Due: **Q1 2008**

It's so close we can almost taste it. Haze is shaping up to be the first killer PS3 app of the year. If excellent futuristic single player shooting revolving around private armies, hallucinogens and a rebellion doesn't float your boat, the multi-player, including fantastically implemented four-player co-op should seal the deal. What we've played so far has been a little patchy but fills us with a great deal of hope. With any luck we should be able to bring you our full review in the very next issue.

Metal Gear Online

X360 | PS3 | Wii | PC | PS2 | DS | PSP

Developer: **Kojima Productions** • Due: **2008**

Until a few weeks ago it was expected that Metal Gear Online would be a stand-alone game that would be selling separately from MGS4. However, it has recently come to light that while MGO will be a fully realised game on its own, it will in fact come bundled with Metal Gear Solid 4.

Regardless of how it is delivered, Metal Gear Online is one of our most wanted games of 2008, with the prospect of 16-player battles, using stealth, cunning and strategy to better our opponents making us want that copy of MGS4 even more.

Aargh - I'm getting rug burn from your chest!

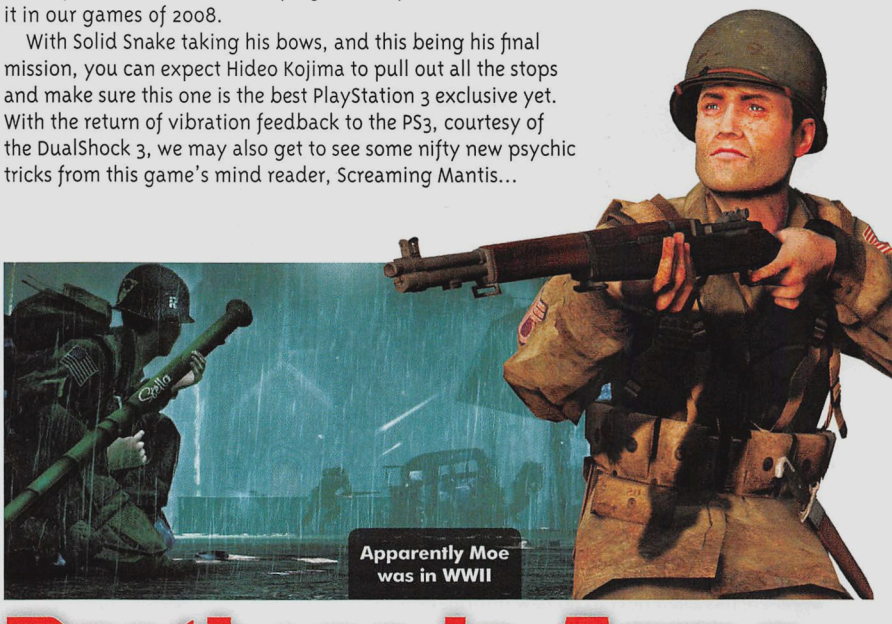
Metal Gear Solid 4: GUNS OF THE PATRIOTS

X360 | PS3 | Wii | PC | PS2 | DS | PSP

Developer: **Kojima Productions** • Due: **Q2 2008**

At the moment there's not much more to say about MGS4 that we haven't said already – but it would be a crying shame if we didn't include it in our games of 2008.

With Solid Snake taking his bows, and this being his final mission, you can expect Hideo Kojima to pull out all the stops and make sure this one is the best PlayStation 3 exclusive yet. With the return of vibration feedback to the PS3, courtesy of the DualShock 3, we may also get to see some nifty new psychic tricks from this game's mind reader, Screaming Mantis...



Apparently Moe was in WWII

Star Wars: THE FORCE UNLEASHED

X360 | PS3 | Wii | PC | PS2 | DS | PSP | N-GAGE

Developer: **LucasArts** • Due: **Q2 2008**

It's coming to every imaginable platform (including the freakin' N-Gage!), so whatever you own LucasArts will have a new Star Wars adventure for you in 2008. This isn't any Star Wars game though; since in The Force Unleashed you don't play a whining farmhand who just wants to get some power converters form Tosche Station... you play the evil apprentice of Darth Vader himself.

With plenty of force lighting and telepathic chokeholds, this is going to be awesome.

You can almost see the crappy blue screen

Brothers in Arms: HELL'S HIGHWAY

X360 | PS3 | Wii | PC | PS2 | DS | PSP

Developer: **Gearbox** • Due: **Early 2008**

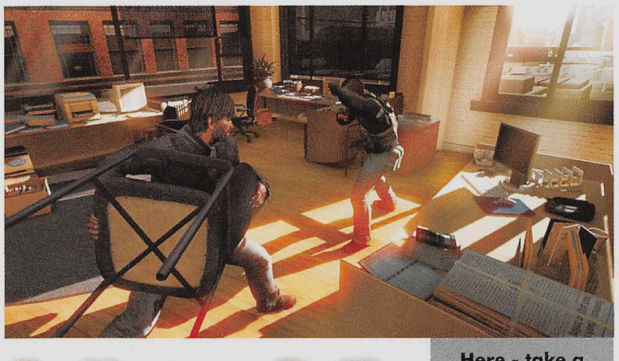
Whilst it may seem as though there are far too many WWII shooters in the world, there is always room for another good one, and that is exactly what Brothers in Arms: Hell's Highway is shaping up to be. Not only are the next-gen (at what point do we call them current gen?) graphics look amazing, the gameplay is shaping up to be something pretty special as well, with a great cover system that takes into account the thickness and durability of what is being hidden behind, intuitive squad mechanics and a fantastic setting – Operation Market Garden.

Endwar

X360 | PS3 | Wii | PC | PS2 | DS | PSP

Developer: **Ubisoft Shanghai** • Due: **2008**

Wilks, a notorious hater of the RTS genre has played it and loved it so we're expecting to have one hell of a time when we get our hands on final code. The implementation of voice commands so far has been second to none, utilizing a powerful and very intuitive system in which players name a unit, and action and a target in that order. The single player and one on one battles are looking tight but what we can't wait to see is the online multi-player in which players take a small role in a larger faction, fighting over persistent maps.



Here - take a seat! Oh what a witty remark!

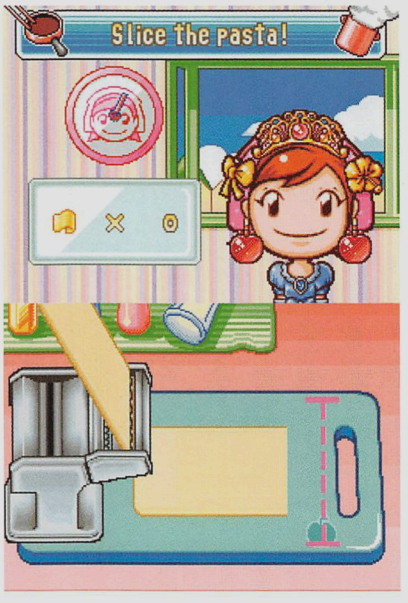
Splinter Cell: CONVICTION

X360 | PS3 | Wii | PC | PS2 | DS | PSP

Developer: **Ubisoft Montreal** • Due: **Q2 2008**

There has been next to no new information on the latest in the Splinter cell franchise since we covered it last year but that does not stop Sam Fisher's latest outing being one of the games to watch in 2008. A new social stealth mechanic and more choice in how to tackle an objective could very well make this the best Splinter Cell yet. It will also be interesting to see Fisher's character arc in the new game – after the events of Double Agent, Fisher is on the run. Whether he can clear his name or will continue on as a fugitive is a question to which we want answers.

Cooking Mama 2: DINNER WITH FRIENDS

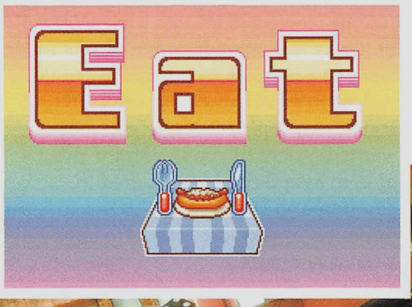


X360 | PS3 | Wii | PC | PS2 | DS | PSP

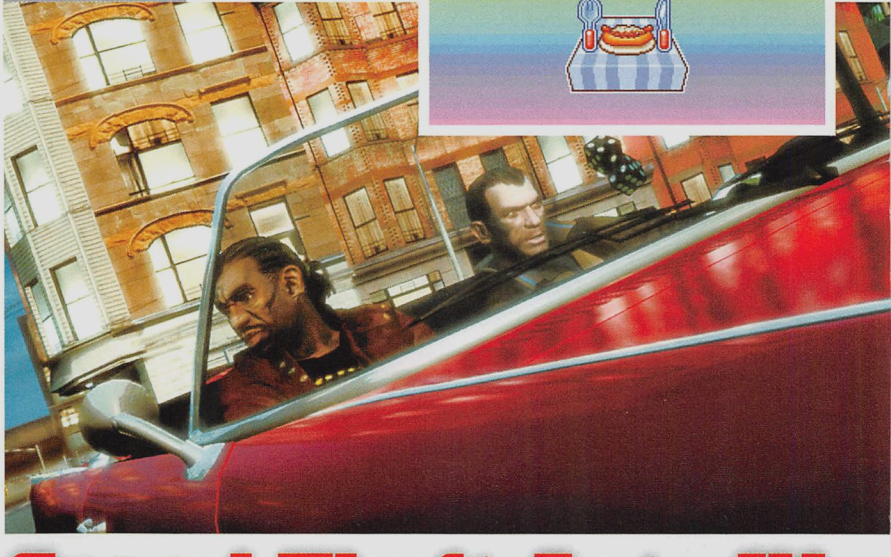
Developer: **Office Create** • Due: **2008**

It's a fairly silly idea, but the original Cooking Mama ended up being one of our favourite DS games of 2006 and the recent Wii version wasn't too bad either. In 2008 we'll finally get a proper DS sequel and it's looking at delivering much of the same fun as the original, with some new features to keep it tasty.

There will be twice as many mini-games than before, plenty of new recipes and a new multiplayer mode, although unfortunately it doesn't look like it will have a proper career or story mode. Should still be fun though.



What the hell are we meant to eat?



Grand Theft Auto IV

X360 | PS3 | Wii | PC | PS2 | DS | PSP

Developer: **Rockstar North** • Due: **Q2 2008**

It may have supposed to release in October of last year, but if we have to wait until quarter-way through 2008 so Rockstar North can perfect their block-busting crime simulator, then that's something we're willing to do.

With a massive, fully-realised metropolis based heavily on New York City, some gorgeous new visuals courtesy of the new RAGE engine and a new anti-hero, in the form of former Russian mafia stand-over man, Niko Bellic, Grand Theft Auto IV is conservatively expected to be the best yet in the series. And now we play the waiting game... the waiting game sucks, lets play Hungry Hungry Hippos!

You can really get into trouble for playing with laser pointers

Rainbow Six Vegas 2

X360 | PS3 | Wii | PC | PS2 | DS | PSP

Developer: **Ubisoft Montreal** • Due: **2008**

We know nothing of the story of Vegas 2 as yet aside from the fact that the terrorists are back in sin city and that it's up to R6 to stop them. What we do know is that the sixth game in the R6 franchise will feature enhanced multi-player and co-op as well as rewards that will cross-over between single and multi-player, meaning that players will reap rewards for completing the single player game as well as indulging in some online shooting. We also know that players will be able to create their own persistent character across both the single and multi-player game.

I bow before you, creepy arse spider thing

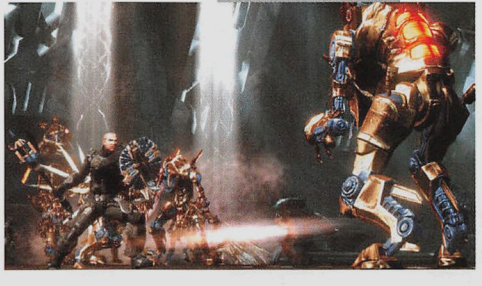
Too Human

X360 | PS3 | Wii | PC | PS2 | DS | PSP

Developer: **Silicon Knights** • Due: **2008**

Fingers crossed that there are no more delays and lawsuits surrounding Too Human because it's shaping up to be the action RPG of 2008. Players take the role of Baldur, an Aesir warrior tasked with the protection of humanity. Baldur can choose from one of five different character classes, each featuring three skill trees through which to progress. Much like the Diablo series, Too Human seems centered around lots of combat and item drops. In Too Human players can fight with both melee and ranged weapons, both of which are controlled by the right analogue stick, the right trigger modifying which weapon is currently being used. We should have some hands on time within a few issues.

Fear my shiny back and blue knees!



Dark Void

X360 | PS3 | Wii | PC | PS2 | DS | PSP

Developer: **Airtight Games** • Due: **2008**

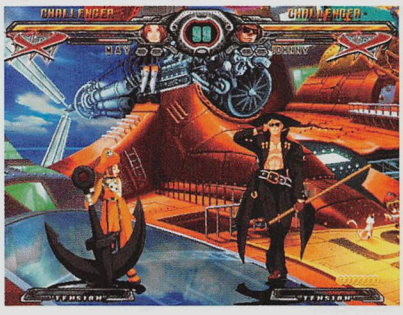
The news that the core developers of Crimson Skies: High Road to Revenge, one of our favourite games on the Xbox are developing a new game excited us, but the trailer for Dark Void excited us even more. Combining third-person air combat (a-la Crimson Skies) and third person shooting with a strong emphasis on the vertical plane rather than the horizontal, and featuring a story about an alien progenitor race known as "The Watchers" coming back to Earth after being cast out thousands of years ago by mankind, Dark Void has all the hallmarks of a fantastic action game. We don't have any concrete detail as yet as to if there is any multi-player or co-op but rest assured we'll keep you informed.

Lego Indiana Jones

X360 | PS3 | Wii | PC | PS2 | DS | PSP

Developer: **Traveller's Tales** • Due: **2008**

The image of a Lego man with stubble, a fedora and a bullwhip is enough to put a smile on all but the most jaded gamers face. Well, it's enough to put a smile on our faces at any rate. Much like Lego Star Wars, Lego Indiana Jones will see players making their way through the original trilogy of movies, encountering all of the friends, enemies and amazing action sequences that made the films so watchable. If the simple idea of Indiana Jones in Lego doesn't make you excited, how about this: Lego Short Round in a Lego Mine Cart Chase.



Guilty Gear XX Accent Core

X360 | PS3 | **Wii** | PC | PS2 | DS | PSP

Developer: **ARC System Works** • Due: **Q1 2008**

Early US reviews have started appearing for the latest Guilty Gear game and they are fairly unanimous – use a classic controller as the Wiimote and Nunchuck controls are atrocious. We'll take that under advisement when we get our hands on the code. The combination of beautiful anime-style characters, excellent 2D fighting mechanics and some of the wackiest fighters in the history of the genre should make this a must have for fighting game fans. Just for the record, our Giant Doctor Baghead (Faust) can beat anyone.

The Wheelman

X360 | PS3 | WII | **PC** | PS2 | DS | PSP

Developer: **Midway Newcastle/Tigon**
Due: **2008**

Fingers crossed that Vin Diesel's Tigon Studios can make lightning strike twice. They may have had a masterpiece when they teamed up with Starbreeze to make Chronicles of Riddick: Escape From Butcher Bay but we're not sure if they can deliver the goods a second time around. This time, along with Midway Newcastle, Tigon are developing The Wheelman, a game that will feature both on foot and in-car action. Set in Barcelona, Midway are promising that The Wheelman will be the ultimate car chase game when it is released later this year. We're keeping a look out for that lightning.

Whoah - this new ammo is great!

Battlefield: Bad Company

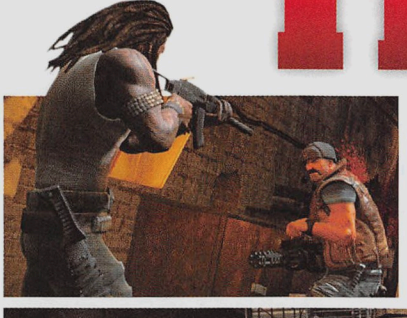
Nobody told Bob the dodo was already extinct

X360 | PS3 | WII | PC | PS2 | DS | PSP

Developer: **DICE** • Due: **Q1 2008**

Created specifically for the Xbox 360 and PS3, Battlefield: Bad Company is doing to be one hell of a shooter when it arrives later this year. Massive destructibility, as well as a wicked sense of humour will differentiate this Battlefield game from the PC games that came before it. Players will be able to destroy nearly all of the environment in Bad Company; an effect that isn't only spectacular but also has the potential to radically change the way in which you play multi-player shooters. After all, cover isn't that useful if it blows up.

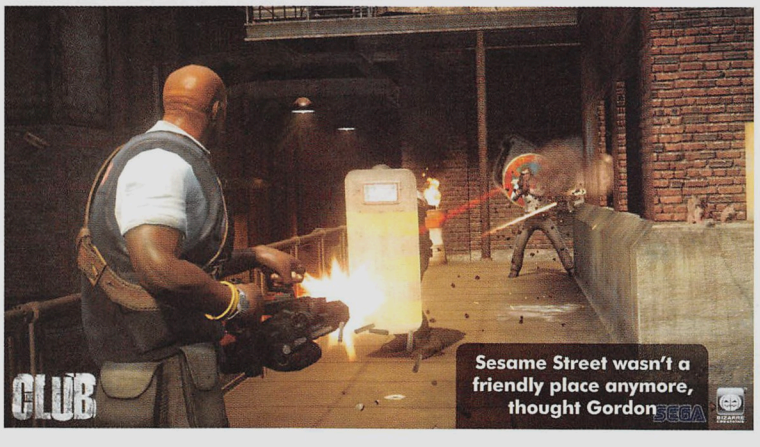
The Club



X360 | PS3 | WII | **PC** | PS2 | DS | PSP

Developer: **Bizarre Creations** • Due: **Q1 2008**

Very little new information has come to light about The Club but we're still chafing at the bit to get our hands on code of the game that promises to combine third person shooting with a racing aesthetic. Players take the role of a member of an exclusive and rather demented hunting club in which the members hunt the most dangerous game – man. Rather than straight shooting, The Club challenges players to make it through stages (tracks) in the shortest time possible whilst building up their kill combo meter by killing targets before the kill timer runs down, shooting targets and performing stunt kills.



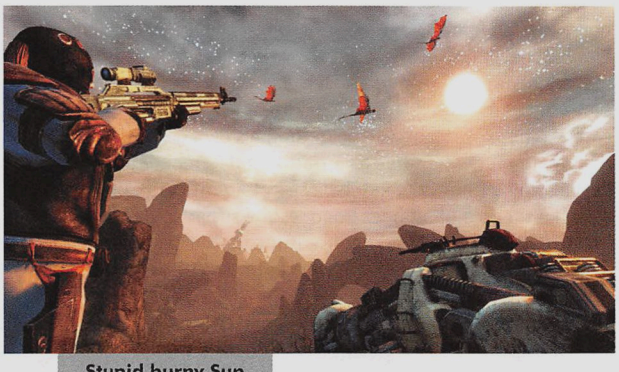
Sesame Street wasn't a friendly place anymore, thought Gordon

Borderlands

X360 | PS3 | Wii | PC | PS2 | DS | PSP

Developer: **Gearbox** • Due: **2008**

The way in which items are dynamically created in Borderlands means that the game will be able to create around half a million different guns for players to get their hands on. That's a pretty damn big number. We're not sure how different these guns will be but the sheer number has out Diablo loot senses tingling. Mad Max-esqe shooting and driving and enough loot to fill 100 other games — how could you not get all tingly thinking about that?



Stupid burny Sun, you go boom now!

Generic car caption

Midnight Club LA

X360 | PS3 | Wii | PC | PS2 | DS | PSP

Developer: **Rockstar San Diego** • Due: **May**

We're keeping just about every opposable appendage crossed that Midnight Club: LA will get the recognition it deserves rather than being overshadowed by other, flashier franchises such as Need for Speed. Why do we want this to happen? Well, from what we've seen so far, Midnight Club: LA is going to be the racing game of 2008, featuring, as it does a seamless world, races and maps, as well as a dynamic camera that seems to conspire to make everything you do look far cooler than you think it could.

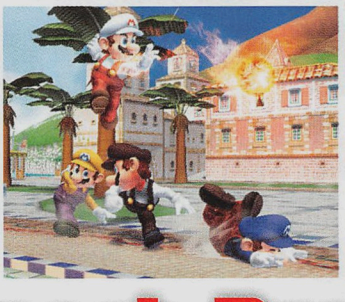
Pikachu, I choose you! (because you're cheap)

Sacred 2: FALLEN ANGEL

X360 | PS3 | Wii | PC | PS2 | DS | PSP

Developer: **Ascaron** • Due: **2008**

The original Sacred was a real sleeper hit of an action RPG, combining the loot whoring of Diablo and a strong story. Sacred 2, although set a millennium before the original game, promises more of the same, as well as a vastly improved and rather gorgeous graphics engine. We know nothing of the plot but do know the game will feature six classes to choose from, two main adventures — Light and Dark — as well as six player multi-player on Xbox 360 and 16 player multi on PC.

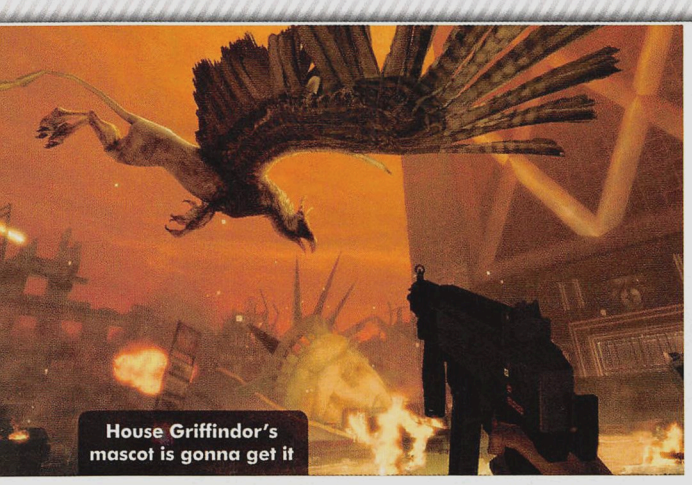


Super Smash Bros Brawl

X360 | PS3 | Wii | PC | PS2 | DS | PSP

Developer: **Nintendo** • Due: **2008**

A recent announcement has revealed that Super Smash Bros: Brawl will feature a very clever mechanic in online multi-player. If a player drops out of an online game the AI will instantly take over playing that character, giving the player that has dropped out time to re-enter the game. With any luck this mechanic will also record the player's loss if they drop out just before losing, discouraging players who try to keep their stats high at the detriment of other players. Fingers crossed this is the case.



House Griffindor's mascot is gonna get it

Legendary: THE BOX

X360 | PS3 | Wii | PC | PS2 | DS | PSP

Developer: **Spark Unlimited** • Due: **Q2 2008**

The name "Legendary: The Box" is a bit strange to say the least, but if we were to tell you that the original title of this game was "Pandora", you'd have a better idea of where this first-person shooter is coming from.

You play the role of a cat burglar on a mission to thieve the real Pandora's Box from a museum, although things take a dramatic turn for the worse when the box opens, letting the ancient evil inside escape. With magic powers gained from opening the box and some mighty big hand-cannons, you'll have to take this otherworldly menace down. Sounds like fun to us.

Wake up Alan! Your missing all the fun now. Wake up Alan!

Alan Wake

X360 | PS3 | Wii | PC | PS2 | DS | PSP

Developer: **Remedy** • Due: **2008**

The has been literally no new information released about Alan Wake since we covered it way back in X06 leading some people to believe that the game has slowly been transforming into vapourware but we have been assured by Microsoft that the game is indeed still on the way and we should be able to enjoy the spooky goings on in a mountain town late this year. Fingers crossed we will.

Secret Agent Clank

X360 | PS3 | Wii | PC | PS2 | DS | PSP

Developer: **High Impact Games** • Due: **Q3 2008**

If it's good enough for Daxter, it's good enough for Clank. Following in the footsteps of Jak's furry sidekick, one half of Sony's other platform-game duo, Clank, the deadpan Metallic chum of the long-eared Lombax, Ratchet, will be getting his own game on the PSP.

Playing much the same as a traditional Ratchet and Clank game, only without the Ratchet, Secret Agent Clank puts the little robot in the role of a James Bond-esque super spy, complete with tuxedo and bow tie. The premise is intriguing, and if it's as good as Daxter's solo outing, it will be one to watch in 2008.

Rock Band

X360 | PS3 | Wii | PC | PS2 | DS | PSP

Developer: **Harmonix** • Due: **Q1 2008**

Guitar Hero is all good and well, but when we're presented with the opportunity to beat on some virtual drums, as well as wail on a toy guitar — well we know which one we're more excited about.

Rock Band promises exactly that, and in addition to having both percussion and rhythm/lead covered, it also comes with a microphone for some Singstar-styled vocal work as well. Hopefully by the time the Australian release rolls around EA and Harmonix will have ironed out the hardware problems that surrounded the American launch of the game (see news).

Why is there no official release date in Aus yet?

Spore

X360 | PS3 | Wii | **PC** | PS2 | DS | PSP

Developer: **Maxis** • Due: **2008**

Providing that Spore actually makes it out this year (and in all probability, delays are highly likely), then it will doubtlessly be one of the games of 2008.

Allowing you to guide the development of a species, from single-celled amoeba, all the way up to a sentient, cultured civilization and beyond, Spore is one of the most ambitious videogame projects ever tackled.

You'll be able to take your limbless blob, evolve them a sweet set of talons, five googly eyes, and pincer-like beak and then send them out into the universe to conquer and pillage. Satisfaction guaranteed.

In space, no one can hear you... AARGH!

Dead Space

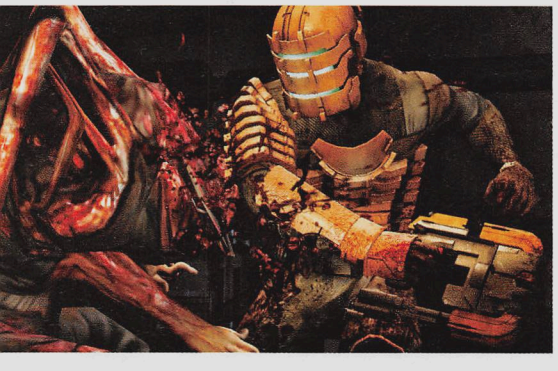
X360 | **PS3** | Wii | PC | PS2 | DS | PSP

Developer: **EA Redwood Shores** • Due: **Q4 2008**

One of the more interesting releases set for the year of the New Year is EA Redwood Shores' first-person science-fiction horror game, Dead Space.

Taking a distinctly cinematic approach to the genre, Dead Space seems to take a lot of inspiration from film such as the original Alien, with the protagonist finding himself alone on a space ship where all his fellow crewmates have been killed by an unknown menace.

Featuring plenty of dark rooms and corridors with only torchlight to find your way to safety, or into the waiting jaws of the onboard aliens, Dead Space promises plenty of scares and action.



Tiberium

X360 | **PS3** | Wii | **PC** | PS2 | DS | PSP

Developer: **EA** • Due: **Q3 2008**

Does anyone else remember 2002's Command & Conquer: Renegade? We bet that there are quite a few of you who do. It was a game that took the C&C universe that we had for so long been playing only from a distant top-down perspective and transported it into the realm of the first-person shooter.

In 2008, Tiberium will attempt to do that same thing, although on a much grander scale. Players will take the role of a GDI field commander, armed to the teeth, and will have to battle the forces of Nod and Scrin using all the familiar weapons and

Killzone 2

Despite the fact that Guerilla Games have constantly had to defend themselves against calls of "Shenanigans!!!" on their Photoshop-doctored screenshots and pre-rendered trailers dressed up to look like real-time gameplay, we still think Killzone 2 is going look and play brilliantly.

With yet more Helghast-blasting single-player gameplay, and mate-blasting multiplayer gameplay, Killzone 2 is likely to be one of the PS3, and 2008's, best games.

X360 | **PS3** | Wii | PC | PS2 | DS | PSP

Developer: **Guerilla Games** • Due: **2008**

NB: Screen may or may not be bullshot

The sound you hear is 20 million Koreans moaning in ecstasy

Starcraft 2

X360 | PS3 | Wii | **PC/Mac** | PS2 | DS | PSP

Developer: **Blizzard** • Due: **2008**

While we may have criticised StarCraft 2 as looking like "more of the same, with prettier graphics" when the game was first unveiled last year, there's no denying that more of the same of one of the best games ever made is something many players will find irresistible.

Will one of the most loyal competitive fan-bases of any game, StarCraft 2 will be one of the games of 2008, even if it doesn't change much from the original StarCraft formula.

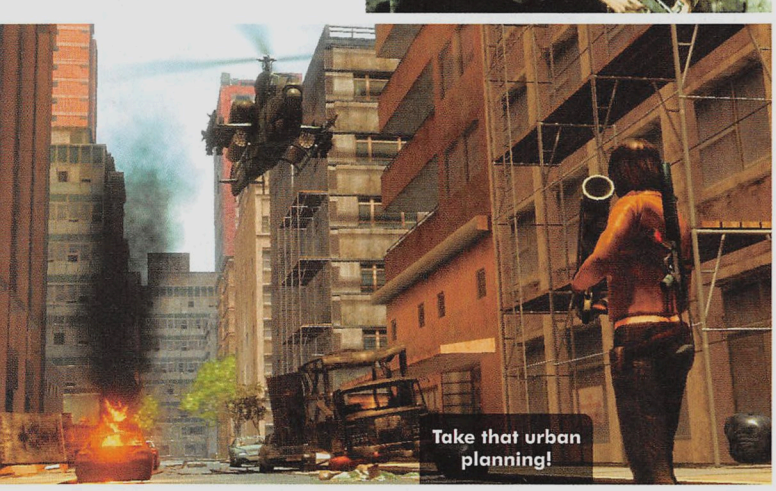
Mercenaries 2: WORLD IN FLAMES

The original Mercenaries game was a riot. It was like taking Grand Theft Auto and transporting it from its urban environment, and dropping it into a real warzone.

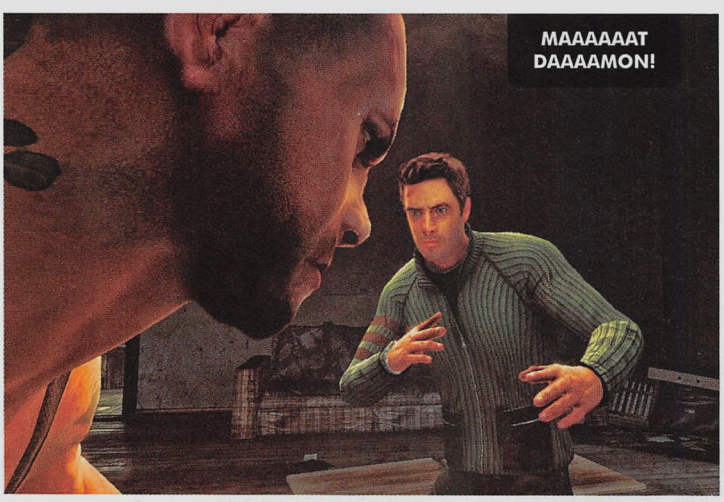
This time that warzone is Venezuela (something that has already caused much controversy amongst Venezuelans), which has been invaded after a "tyrant" messes with the nation's oil supply. As a mercenary, you want in on that action, and once again you'll get to do every dirty job for a very dirt-cheap price, and have fun while you're at it.

X360 | PS3 | Wii | **PC** | PS2 | DS | PSP

Developer: **Pandemic Studios** • Due: **2008**



Take that urban planning!



MAAAAAAT DAAAAMON!

The Bourne Conspiracy

It's risky to put a film tie-in game on a list of game to look forward to, given that a great proportion of them are unplayable trash. However, there are certain films that lend themselves particularly well to being adapted to games, and the Bourne trilogy pretty much have all the qualifying features.

X360 | PS3 | Wii | PC | PS2 | DS | PSP

Developer: **High Moon Studios** • Due: **Q3 2008**

Protagonist with amnesia? Check. Lots of violence? Check. Gorgeous ladies? Check. A car chase every ten minutes? Check. The films have it all, and hopefully the game will too.

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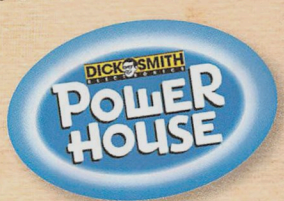

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FIFTEEN MINUTE5

Christopher Taylor chats to Ryan Lambourn, Daniele Ledonne and Running With Scissors' Vince Desi about how developers such as themselves create and use controversy.

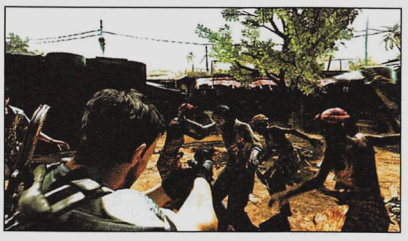
Just after 11AM on 20 April 1999, two senior students entered the car park of their Colorado high school. They were heavily armed—each equipped with an assortment of guns and nine kilos of explosives. By midday, 13 people were dead. 15 if you count the two perpetrators, who both committed suicide. A further 24 people were injured. And a community—no, a country—was left reeling, desperate for answers.

It wasn't long before the media and the public started to play the blame game. Fingers—angry and confused and frightened—were pointed. The Goth subculture and Marilyn Manson were targeted. Movies like Natural Born Killers and The Basketball Diaries were cited as possible influences to the two murderers. And then the public turned their eyes to a newer medium—games. The two killers, you see, happened to be fans of Doom and Wolfenstein 3D. And these games, these "murder simulators", began to draw a lot of flak. Supposedly games such as these desensitised players to the seriousness of and the effects of violence. It was alleged that the two disturbed young men at the centre of the tragedy had even gone so far as to design Doom levels based on the layout of their school.

This wasn't the first time that games had been accused of inciting, inspiring or somehow making violence seem acceptable in the eyes of impressionable, disaffected youth. Doom wasn't the first game to be considered "controversial." Nor, for that matter, would it be the last.

From Wolfenstein 3D to Grand Theft Auto, from Manhunt to Islamic Fun, games have, over the years, drawn a great deal of criticism. Beyond all that business with the guns and guts, some titles have been labelled vehicles for propaganda. Others have been accused of promoting disrespect for women, other ethnicities or filthy heathens (not that we're looking at you, Left Behind). Some have been attacked for encouraging extremism. For having too many naughty words. For daring to flash a bit of nipple. And this controversy, despite what many gamers may think, doesn't just come from tabloids and crappy current affairs programmes. Pointing the finger isn't act committed solely by folks like John Bruce "Jack" Thompson and David Grossman, the former soldier who coined the term "murder simulator" in relation to games like Doom.

Anyone remember what happened when the teaser for Resident Evil 5 hit? The teaser, it depicted a city somewhere in Africa. And there were zombies. Or mutants. Or whatever those diseased baddies in the game's Europe-set predecessor were supposed to be. Only this time, with a considerable portion of Africa's population being black, these monsters had a dark complexion. And—wait for it—a white guy was shooting them. En masse, gamers went nuts. In forums and in magazine articles they wondered aloud about what Mr. Thompson would say. Or what the report on Fox News or 60 Minutes would be like. How bad they'd make gamers look. Like we were all racists, fantasising about jetting off to Republiek van Suid-Afrika and plugging us some kaffirs. And too, what about all those wacky Christian family organisations? Or those African-American interest groups? They'd have a field day with that teaser! How irresponsible of Capcom!

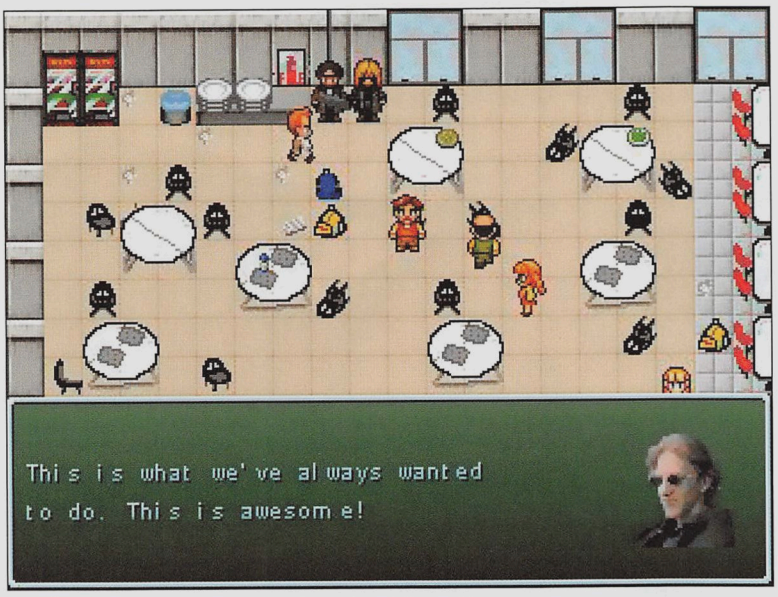


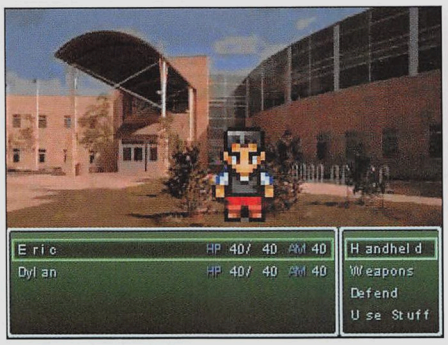
Supposedly games such as these desensitised players to the seriousness of and the effects of violence

As it turns out, the wacky Christian family groups didn't have a field day about the teaser. They didn't say a damn thing about it, actually. Neither did Jack Thompson or David Grossman or Bill O'Reilly or Anna Coren. Indeed, the only people who were devoting their time and energy to telling Capcom they were no good were gamers themselves. How curious.

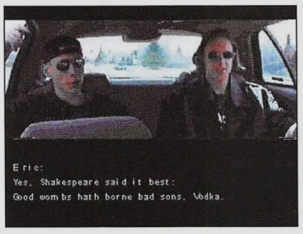
Never fear. This article isn't about violence in games. It's not about what Little Johnny will maybe do in real life

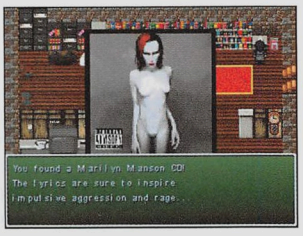
Is the fact that the zombies in RE 5 are black evidence that the developers are racist?





Although controversial, Super Columbine Massacre RPG is far more interesting than it appears





when he's ordered to kill the Haitian dickheads in Vice City or take out that sentry with a shard of glass in Manhunt or nick the flag from an Israeli tank in Under Siege. Rather, this is about a subject that's rarely explored in much depth—what studios intend when they develop games that contain the afore-mentioned.

TO MAKE A FUN, FUNNY AND OFFENSIVE GAME ...

That was 21-year-old Ryan Lambourn's intent when he developed V-Tech Rampage, a game based on the 16 April 2007 massacre at Virginia Tech. This game, available on his website and the ever-classy NewGrounds.com, came out only a month after the tragedy. Not everyone saw the joke. Indeed, the vast majority found it decidedly unfunny. Only after pressure from the Recording Industry Association of America (the game featured a background song he had no right to) did he remove the game from his website, but not before "jokingly" requesting two grand in return for its deletion.

V-Tech Rampage wasn't the first game based directly on an actual school shooting. That honour goes to Super Columbine Massacre RPG!, a product of RPG Maker that Lambourn, in his discussion with us, said he wasn't particularly "fond" of. SCMRPG! was created by Daniele "Danny" Ledonne, writer and amateur filmmaker.

Whereas Lambourn proudly states he fully intended to make a game that was "offensive," Ledonne shies away from accusations that he deliberately set out to create a stir. "Some would argue that I am clearly out to stir up controversy for its own sake," he said, "but I will say this: as a reasonably intelligent person who understands how the media works, I certainly could have done a much better job at 'creating controversy' than to release a game anonymously, moderate an online discussion forum to investigate the subject matter and to offer the download free of charge. The subject matter itself is so charged ('a videogame about Columbine?') that, really, most of my public efforts have been to diffuse the controversy and suggest some form of meaning out of the fervour. I think the controversy surrounding SCMRPG! has been valuable insomuch as it has catapulted the issue of serious games [and] games with an agenda to the forefront and aroused at least some portion of the gaming and non-gaming populations to what can really be achieved with games if we are willing to take artistic risks."

"cinema has had over a hundred years to 'pay its dues' and gain cultural legitimacy"

When games are targeted for being racist or sexist or violence, quite often the legitimacy—the literary merit, if you will—of the medium itself is called into question. Jack Thompson's repeatedly said he reckons the medium's daft. That it's the domain of losers. But here, Ledonne has raised an interesting point. Can tastelessness—and remember, we are talking about a game that's based on a high school massacre here—be forgiven if the developer aims to make a point about censorship, disaffected youth, violence in schools, the legitimacy of the State of Israel, bullying or what-have-you? Ledonne, as you can imagine, believes so.

Movies regularly get away with tackling topics like school shooting – indeed, the 2003 film Elephant was partly based on the events at Columbine – so why don't games? Ledonne outlined for us the three main arguments he's encountered:

"[Firstly,] videogames are an immature medium. Basically, the argument here is that cinema has had over a hundred years to 'pay its dues' and gain cultural legitimacy as an art form capable of handling difficult subject matter. Videogames are not only 'new', but [are also] generally understood to be merely a means of distracting and entertaining ourselves. Thus, a videogame about a particular subject must be making light of that subject and trivialising the event.

"[Secondly,] videogames

are too powerful for this topic due to their interactivity. Generally, [this is] a claim made by those least familiar with or knowledgeable of videogames. Unlike a passive, linear media such as a novel or a film, a videogame requires the participant to interact with the virtual environment and hold at least partial authorship over the story being told. The implication here is that videogames ask too much of a player assuming the role of a school shooter when a more traditional medium would allow the audience to watch the same event unfold in a removed fashion. The idea that a player must make decisions instead of letting a director decide for them is frightening to some people when the subject is a school shooting, terrorist attacks or gang life.

"[Finally,] SCMRPG! trivialises the shooting at Columbine. Instead of identifying videogames as a second citizen to their film counterparts, some have argued that SCMRPG! is simply a poorly-made game that employs parody and satire to unsuccessful ends. Moreover, design choices in the game lack empathy. While I disagree with all of these arguments, this is the most constructive of them because it asks us how difficult subject matter can be more effectively tackled in future interactive media instead of throwing up our hands and saying it's impossible to do so (or, more appropriately, that we should not do so)."

CHICKEN OR EGG

Lambourn is one of Ledonne's biggest critics. "I don't like Danny as a person," he said. "He's the absolute anti-me. I'm sure you've gotten 12 pages worth of content from your questions to Danny. He'll talk for hours to try and justify what he made to someone who doesn't like it, as if somehow he can argue someone into liking his game."

Lambourn went on to say that "[Ledonne's] 'literary' standpoint is really convoluted. [Ledonne says] his game shouldn't be blamed for the massacre [but], at the same time, [the game shows] the killers as seeing the world as a game. [The] worst part was the second half of the game, the Hell section, where a [...] videogame [based on the shooting] turns into a crappy RPG grind version of Doom with the ultimate win coming from defeating South Park's Satan."

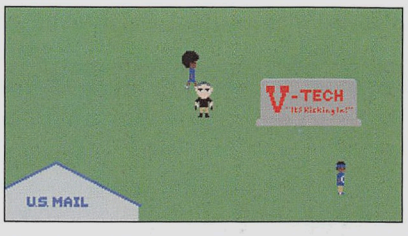
And so we asked Ledonne what came first – the controversy or his belief that SCMRPG! could get the masses to question their beliefs on the causes of school shootings. "I suppose the controversy and the belief arose simultaneously in different sectors of the population. As soon as the game became a public talking point in May 2006, players and critics quickly took sides on the issue of SCMRPG!'s design goals and accomplishments. I believe that very, very few people who once stood behind the game have since recanted their defence, whereas many, many people have personally emailed me to say that they have become more appreciative of the game after playing it, reading press I have done, etc. I have spoken with several college professors in English literature, media studies and game design who have integrated SCMRPG! into their curriculum. For all the vitriolic scorn this game has received, it has also slowly developed a substantial following and respect as well. This kind of polarisation isn't surprising in retrospect."

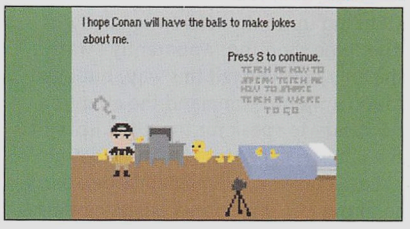
RUNNING SCARED

We asked Vince Desi of Running With Scissors—the studio behind the Postal games—what he thought of both of the school shooting games. On SCMRPG!, he said, "I'm willing to give [Ledonne] the benefit of believing his own motivation. The problem is, when you enter the sphere of reality-based content you must be prepared to educate the audience, not just shock and offend. The worst problem is that the only attention he received is negative. No one in the media will give him a chance. And so, in the end, it really doesn't accomplish what he claims was his true goal."

Ledonne, however, disputes Desi's claim that SCMRPG! wasn't a success. As noted earlier, he feels his game has earned itself a following in some circles. Referencing one of the interviewees in his upcoming documentary on this very topic, Playing Columbine, he said, "Generating controversy one of the only ways that people with a message can articulate their point of view in the (inter)national sphere. Love it or hate it, we live in a culture that generally marginalises points of view that aren't accepted as mainstream. If you don't fall into a narrow spectrum of opinion, you're not likely to be published or televised in the USA. So if one believes, as I do, that the shooting at Columbine has more to tell us about ourselves as a culture than it does Marilyn Manson or Doom, there are very few avenues for expressing this point of view outright. As a high schooler in Colorado when the

V-Tech Rampage plays up to the stereotype of gamers and games being immature and not a little bit stupid





shooting happened, I felt frustrated by the comatose media coverage after the shooting but could respond in virtually no impactful way. When I discovered a program called RPG Maker, through which I could create my own videogame without having any background in the process, I knew it would be an effective way to present an alternative perspective on the shooting at Columbine: to let players learn firsthand what the shooters were going through and open up an online forum where players could discuss why the shooting took place.

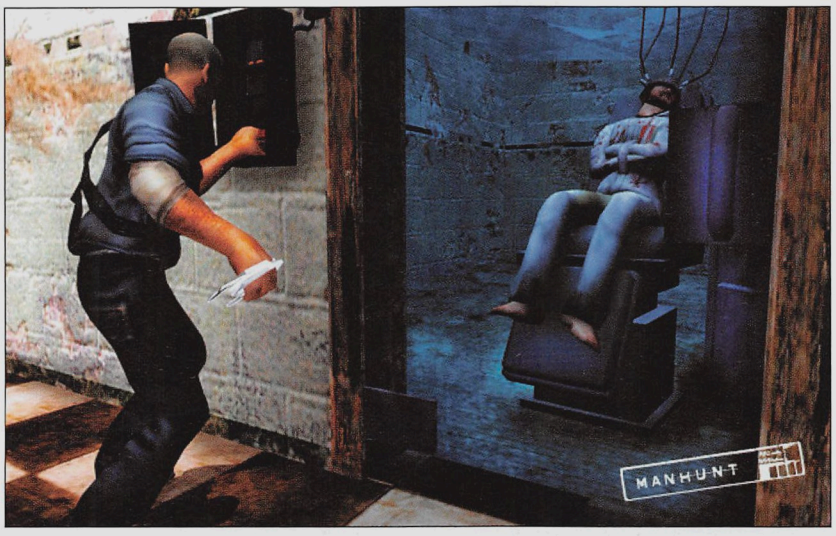
"Once the Associated Press sniffed out the story, I realised that more than merely defending my game, I could use this opportunity in the public eye to present my point of view on the shooting itself. In the months that followed this, I received countless emails commending me for standing up to the conventional myths about the shooting. Apparently I wasn't the only one who felt this way, but I had found a way to command the attention necessary to speak for those fed up with the official scapegoats for the shooting."

Desi's take on V-Tech Rampage wasn't so forgiving. "I wouldn't waste my time. While I strongly support freedom of expression, I also believe as reasonably intelligent citizens we have a responsibility to society to not be arseholes."

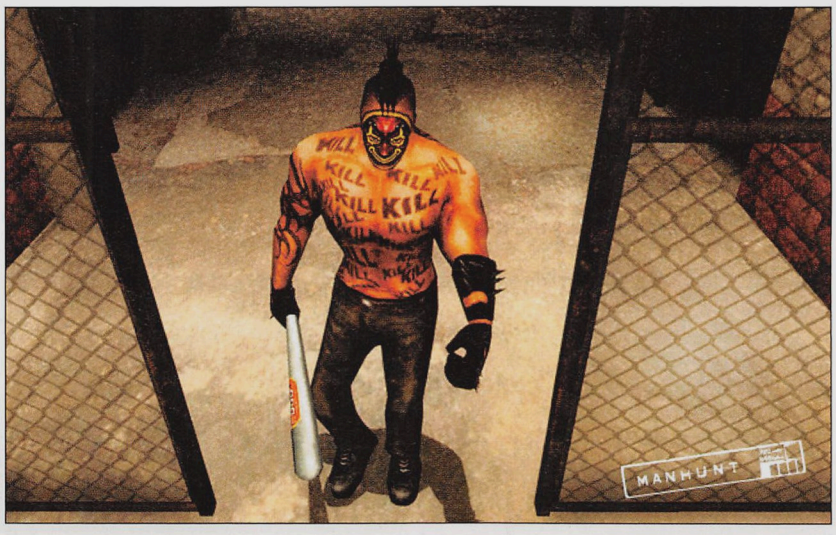
Now, hang on a moment, Mr. Desi. Developers shouldn't be arseholes? Sorry mate, but there are those out there who'd question and have question the validity of that argument when it's coming from the studio behind the Postal series.

We asked him if his team, like Lambourn, deliberately set out to piss people off with the original Postal. "[The controversy] sucked. Our true intention was to make an over-the-top comedic game using insane violence. Compared to many games, the violent content in Postal is unrealistic. The bottom line was we were an independent company and easy to take advantage of. The good news is that I believe times are changing and publishers and retailers are starting to see the comedic value and humour in Postal games. Or maybe it's because, worldwide, we have now sold over one million copies of Postal. With very [few] sales in North America, do they really want to miss the money train again?"

Desi repeatedly stated that in no way does Running With Scissors go out of their way to cause upset. "Do we use content that some consider over-the-top? Outrageous? Extreme? Yes, but we believe [we] do so in a design manner we call 'insane comedy.'" By no means is Desi perturbed by the criticisms levelled at his games or his company. "We are Running With Scissors, not Running Scared. I really think it would be a major business mistake to change who we are and what we do and, quite frankly, our fans would have every right to go postal on our arses. And that's not what we're about. I've spent ten years talking to our fans. I love them and they love us."



The only possible explanation of the brutal kills in Manhunt 2 is to court controversy



THERE'S ONLY GOOD PRESS

Out of the three men we spoke to, only Lambourn admitted have set out with the intent of offending his audience. Of generating controversy. Now, he's not a commercial developer, so it's not like he was ever going to make money—baring the requested $2000 that, to our knowledge, he didn't end up getting—from V-Tech Rampage. Rockstar and Afkar Media (Under Siege, Under Ash), however, are commercial developers of games that've had considerable time in the crosshairs of the media and family groups. While Running With Scissors might view controversy as unfortunate—a result of people not getting the joke—does Desi feel that studios such as the afore-mentioned aim to piss people off so they score some free advertising? After all, as the old adage goes, any publicity is good publicity.

"Your question assumes that there are developers and publishers willing to do anything to make a buck," he said. "That sounds about right. Pretty fucked up situation we've gotten ourselves into."

When we asked Ledonne whether developers who set out to create controversial games did so with artistic intentions like he did or simply wanted to get extra sales, he expressed a similar view to Desi's. "Controversial or not, most videogames today aren't trying to say much other than how to shoot guns or save princesses or assemble falling bricks. But let's face it: controversy sells. The public has a natural curiosity about what raises objection or offends people. From a financial point of view, no press is bad press because the most controversial media (Fahrenheit 9/11, The Last Temptation of Christ, The Da Vinci Code, Grand Theft Auto) gets the most attention which translates into free advertising and often higher sales."

We're inclined to disagree with him there. Certainly, The Da Vinci Code sold well, but remember, the door charge for a paperback's a helluva lot less than the hundred bucks or so you're required to hand over for a new release game. Few would piss away $100 of their hard-earned simply for the "lulz." They might hit

mininova or grab the demo off the web, but that's about it.

Furthermore, The Da Vinci Code is available to all. The Office of Film and Literature Classification haven't slapped a MA15+ sticker on the front. They've not barred bookstores from selling it to minors. Conversely, games —well, at least the commercial ones—are subject to classification. And so, if a developer strays too far beyond the boundaries, their game can be refused classification. Banned from sale. That happened to both Grand Theft Auto III and San Andreas, if you recall, before Rockstar saw fit to trim them of the ability to partake in hookers' wares and gain access to a certain caffeinated mini-game respectively. That would've cost them time, money and, during the time those games were off the shelves of EB, sales.

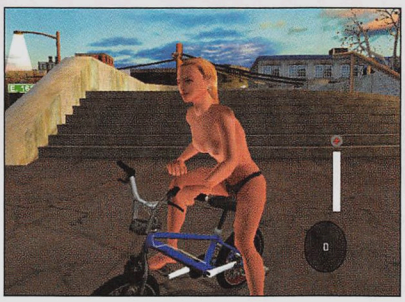
Manhunt, Reservoir Dogs, 50 Cent: Bulletproof and Marc Ecko's Getting Up were banned. The Postal games were too. As Desi said, "I was really surprised [at that]. I thought that Australia and New Zealand, like the USA, had their legal system rooted in Magna Carta. But hey [...] we got blacklisted in our own country."

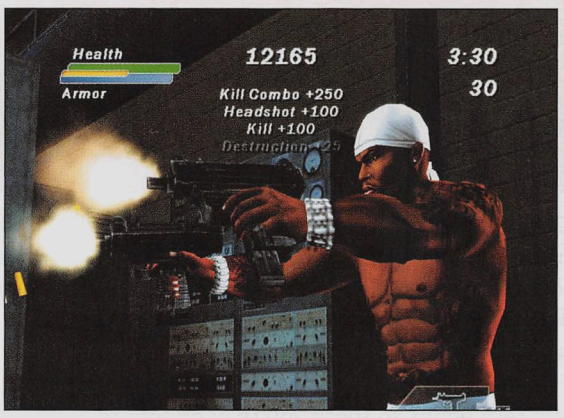
Developers who push the limits regularly lose access to huge markets. The Chinese can't buy I.G.I. 2 or Command & Conquer: Generals. And the Germans can't purchase Commandos, Gears of War, Dead Rising or Crackdown. Unless they're willing to import, of course. The role of a ratings panel such as the OFLC is to enforce on works of entertainment the standards of the society in which it operates. Commandos got the flick for having all that Nazi business, while Gears of War and Dead Rising were deemed too violent.

No doubt there'd be those of you who wouldn't be too worried about having to import a game. Perhaps some of you ordered in copies of the last Leisure Suit Larry when it was banned from sale. But the simple fact is, most people wouldn't be prepared to do that. Not unless there was something other than the controversy that made the game appealing.

A game, let alone a series, requires more than some much publicised titties and decapitation sequences to shift a respectable number of copies. Grand Theft Auto would've only made a fraction of the sales it had if it wasn't for the winning gameplay, longevity, depth, heavy lashings of pop culture references, music or colourful cast of characters.

In short, we feel that while some commercial games might've held their sales figures helped along somewhat by controversy, controversy is something that's far more likely to hinder—as opposed to help—in the shifting of copies. Bad publicity, it seems, is occasionally bad.





Now, as stated earlier, neither Ledonne nor Lambourn were commercial developers. V-Tech Rampage and SCMRPG! were distributed free-of-charge, but that's not to say the attention they've been given in the media has done them many favours. Certainly, Ledonne had his fifteen minutes in which he could share with the world his thoughts on the causes of Columbine and similar tragedies, but now he's struggling to be recognised for his other work. "I have a wide variety of short films and circulate them around the Internet. However, because they aren't controversial, I'm not likely to be interviewed by journalists about them despite the fact I worked as hard on them as I did SCMRPG! Go figure." The Massacre RPG has, unfortunately, overshadowed this writer/director's other works.

Context is king with the OFLC, and BMX XXX, 50 Cent: Bulletproof and Reservoir Dogs failed to meet the criteria when first shown to the ratings body

A game requires more than some much publicised titties and decapitation sequences to shift a respectable number of copies

LEGITIMATE CRITICISM

As gamers, it's tempting to lash out at anyone and everyone who dares suggest that this or that game is overly gory or promotes violence against women. Ol' Jack Thompson, everyone's favourite attorney-cum-activist, has been the target of much hostility from the gaming community.

But we feel that, at times, the criticism levelled at specific games and even the medium as a whole can be valid. There are developers, both indie and commercial, in it for the "lulz." There are studios so desperate—sometimes successfully, sometimes not-so-successfully—to make a buck or two that they'll pump out shitty games where the whole point is the boobs and the gore and the anti-Semitism. BMX XXX and Ethnic Cleansing are prime offenders here. And Manhunt, The Punisher, Reservoir Dogs, Soldier of Fortune and 25 to Life aren't far behind.

Every time one of these games comes out, we should ask ourselves whether the developer deliberately set to nab some "free advertising." And when dealing with games that are purportedly artistic, we should—no, must—question if they're really making a point or if the developer's just pulled some academic-sounding mumbo jumbo from their arse in an effort to not look a total prat when the lenses of the tabloids and current affairs programmes are brought to bear on them.

On so many levels, we—the gaming population—are the ones who pay for controversy. «

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So Christmas has come and gone, as have the after Christmas sales. If you're anything like us you've taken advantage of the sales to upgrade your PC, forking out a large, though not unreasonable sum to get a better processor, graphics card, more RAM and the like. While it is a great feeling to have a brand new (or near enough to brand new) sitting on your desk, the upgrade spiral often comes packaged with a small problem – you may have a PC powerful enough to play every game on the market but after upgrading you can't afford to actually buy any of said games.

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Reviews

WAR GAMES

MAURICE BRANSCOMBE

Wartime Farewell

Over the past year I've dedicated this column to anything even vaguely related to the ongoing battle for your hard-earned gaming dollar. I've covered everything from Nolan "father of the videogames industry" Bushnell rubbishing modern game design, Sony Computer Entertainment's President and Group CEO, Kazuo "Kaz" Hirai, inserting his foot into his mouth repeatedly, the inevitable backlash against videogames in the wake of tragedy, the crackpot ravings of Michael Bay and the ever-increasing rivalry between the Xbox 360, PlayStation 3 and Wii. Not to mention the PC, DS and PSP.

However, after a year of covering the console war from the front lines, I'm hanging up my war correspondent's cap.

It's been an exciting and dangerous tour of duty. I've had to dodge a few bullets, but then again I've also managed to fire a few back myself, and at the end of it all I can at least say that I made a difference, even if it was only for the readers of this magazine.

Admittedly, the war does still rage on, and will no doubt continue well into the next generation. The question is then, where is this home console war at today, and where will it be in the future?

Well, it's fairly clear to me that the Wii is going to dominate in hardware sales this generation – at least in the short term. With more than 19 million units reported to have been shifted worldwide, and counting, even global shortages and a lack of enough compelling software hasn't slowed its assent to the top.

Meanwhile, the Xbox 360 continues to be, game-for-game, the most entertaining home console of the three. With an estimated 16 million users, it's not too far behind the Wii, and it has more AAA games than both of the other competitors combined. At this stage, if any console deserved the higher market share, it's this one.

Finally, the PlayStation 3 has to be considered the underdog of this race. With about half as many consoles in homes as the Xbox 360, and far less than that when compared to the Wii, it has a lot of ground to make up. Do I think it can do it? Maybe.

Being the sceptic that I am, I can't see the PlayStation brand dominating as it did in the previous two generations. However, if (or should that be when) Blu-Ray becomes the undisputed standard for hi-def movies, big things are going to start to happen. If the games are there, then the late-cycle could belong to the PS3.

with that most non-committal of conclusions, I bid thee farewell

There are no neat, simple answers: the innate appeal of the Wii sells it fast, but Nintendo need more than just Mario (and Mario-themed sports games) to sustain their lead; the PS3 could take a bigger market share providing Blu-Ray takes off and Sony secure some tastier exclusives; and while the Xbox 360 may be winning the race for good games, faced with Wii-mania and the potential explosion of Blu-Ray, will it keep growing its market? I can't answer it all. No one can.

And with that most non-committal of conclusions, I bid thee farewell. It's been my great pleasure to inform, entertain and infuriate you all for the past year, and with any luck I'll be doing it all over again, if not in this magazine, then certainly on some other project. Adios.

The Hyper Scoring System - *What's It All About?*

HYPER BIG RUBBER STAMP OF APPROVAL

0-49	50-59	60-69	70-79	80-89	90+
(Lack Of) Chin Chan	A Chin	Jay Leno's chin	Kirk Douglas' chin	Bruce Campbell's chin	Robert Zdar's chin

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Nero looks like Dante, but does he play like him too?

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X360 / PS3 / Wii / PC / PS2 / DS / PSP

Devil May Cry 4

DIRK WATCH revs his keyboard

category: **Action** / players: **1**
developer: **Capcom**
publisher: **Capcom**
price: **$99.95** / rating: **MA 15+**
available: **February 8**

Even for a Devil May Cry game, DMC 4 is pretty over the top. Nero, the silver haired, sword and gun wielding pretty-boy Dante wannabe starts off his inaugural adventure by fighting the man he so resembles. In a church of all places. After much posing and tough guy banter, Dante winds up impaled on his own sword. Well, at least he's impaled for a few seconds before he pulls it out, pontificates a bit about Nero being a kid and flounces off into the netherworld in which pretty-boy game character wait between their hilariously campy cameo appearances. It's obvious from the outset that Capcom are out to impress with the beautiful new graphics engine. It's also obvious from the outset that they've taken the approach of "if it ain't broke, don't fix it" when it comes to gameplay. If the Devil May Cry franchise were perfect then that approach would be fine, but it's not, so what we're left with is a game that looks like a next-gen IP with gameplay that feels stale and dated.

We can already hear the mobs getting their pitchforks and flaming brand ready for the inevitable march down to the Hyper bunker and our even more inevitable lynching for daring to say a bad word about one of the most beloved franchises of recent years, but we stand by our opinion. Nero, the new protagonist is simply Dante with a few new tricks up his sleeve. He wields a sword call Red Queen that can be revved up for slightly more powerful attacks, he carries a big gun with an inexhaustible supply of bullets and poses at every available opportunity. The only new gameplay mechanic that really differentiates Nero from Dante is his demonic hand that can be used as an attack, a grapple and a host of other abilities accrued throughout the game.

My hand is a glow-stick!

[below] Warning: Point away from face. Keep out of reach of children

OLD SCHOOL

The overall tempo of Devil May Cry 4 is chaotic to say the least. Sometimes Nero won't be able to walk 10 feet without one of the recognizable magical barriers being erected, forcing the player to kill a dozen or so beasties before you can move on, but at other times you'll run into a puzzle that will bog everything down horribly for 10 minutes. Similarly a lot of the actual level design switched haphazardly between both extremes. One level a few hours into the game is made up of small jungle areas connected by teleporters. Each one of the small areas teems with monsters every time you enter but finding out exactly which teleport sequence gets you to the end is a long-winded bit of trial and error.

So how does DMC 4 play? Well, with little exception it plays pretty much like DMC 2. Overall the game is harder than DMC 3, which is a godsend but bizarrely the game seems to reach a difficulty plateau in the middle and then gradually gets easier again. Combat is tight and rewarding, with numerous sword combos to play with and unlock with orbs collected during play. Numerous skills, such as being able to leap tables can also be purchased with orbs. Disappointingly, a few skills that should be available from

Nero's impersonation of Radio Raheem

Just in case Nero isn't enough like Dante for your liking, DMC 4 also features Dante as a playable character.

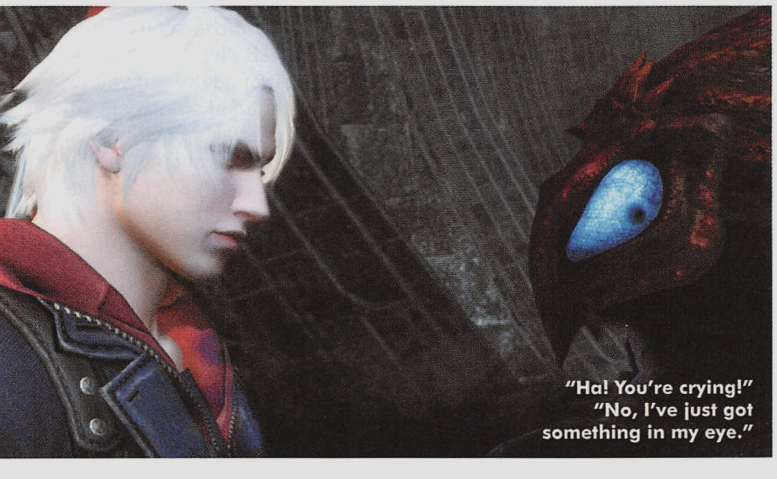
DEVIL INSIDE

A few hours into the game, Nero gains the power to unleash his demon side to do increased damage for a short while. The demonic power is charged up via the killing of beasties so you never really need fear about running low.

the beginning, such as wall jumps and the ability to sprint must be purchased as well.

Unlike a number of modern games that seem to want to reward the player for everything they ever do, Devil May Cry 4 is merciless in its appraisal of the player. Sure, you may have survived the hundreds of demons you had to fight in the level and you may have trounced an enormous boss but unless you manage to do all of that in a nearly seamless string of combos then you won't end up with a high enough rating to be awarded bonus orbs to purchase much needed abilities. While this is punishing, it is quite refreshing to see such an old school approach to risk and reward.

» Devil May Cry 4 is merciless in its appraisal of the player



"Ha! You're crying!" "No, I've just got something in my eye."

THE BIG BOSS

As with previous games, boss battles in DMC 4 are a real treat. Once again an old school approach is taken in the boss design, requiring the player to memorise patterns or attacks. With a few exceptions the bosses are absolutely huge, taking up much of the screen as the run and jump around, heel-bent on wiping out Dante II: Electric Boogaloo. Gameplay wise, the boss battles are where the game truly shines as well, as the different encounters really mix things up in terms of tactics needed – the first battle against the flaming centaur demon, Beliar, is a straight up slugfest but a battle a few hours later requires the player to grab bird monsters (that turn into swords) from the air and hurl them at a human sized boss who stands out of range of all other attacks.

It's a good thing that the boss battles mix things up, because most other encounters are a simple matter of bashing a few buttons. Sure, players can obsess about becoming a combo master but it's really not rewarded enough to make such dedication worthwhile.

The nearly seamless way in which DMC 4 inter-cuts between gameplay and over-the-top cutscenes brings the world of Devil May Cry kicking and screaming into the next generation, as do the detailed character models and excellent animations. Unfortunately the same can't be said about the gameplay itself, which remains steadfastly moored in the previous iterations of the game. While this isn't necessarily a bad thing, DMC 4 was an opportunity for Capcom to breathe new life into the game. Hopefully the next, inevitable sequel will do more to update the stagnating gameplay. «

Looks great; combos galore; it's more fun than DMC 3	Still plays like DMC 2 ; choppy pacing and level design	HYPER VERDICT
It's still Devil May Cry.	VISUALS 90 / SOUND 88 / GAMEPLAY 86	84

X360 / PS3 / WII / PC / PS2 / DS / **PSP**

Disgaea: Afternoon of Darkness

DANIEL WILKS finally has a reason to play his PSP

category: **Turn Based Strategy**
players: **1-2**
developer: **Nippon Ichi** / publisher: **NIS**
price: **$69.95** / rating: **PG**
available: **Now**

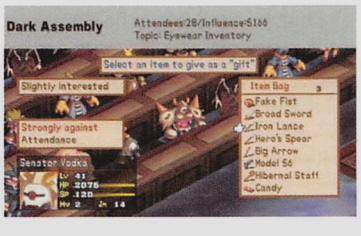
Handheld gaming is awesome. Disgaea is incredibly awesome. A combination of the two is, then, quite predictably, awesome. Disgaea: Afternoon of Darkness is essentially a heavily revised port of the PS2 game, Disgaea: Hour of Darkness. Port or no, Afternoon of Darkness is an incredible game, good enough to be held up as a reason to buy a PSP. A turn based strategy RPG, AoD casts players as Laharl, a hilariously uppity prince of the Underworld who awakes after a two-year nap to find that his father, the king, has died and he has missed his chance to ascend to the throne. Within scant moments of discovering this news, Laharl sets off to defeat a rival for the throne and hundreds of hours of strategic bliss ensue.

If you've never played a Disgaea game before, the simple (yet absolutely lovely) graphics and seemingly simple grid based gameplay may put you off but to give in to these instincts would stop you from playing one of the most enjoyable and engrossing games around. Gameplay revolves around creating a small force of character and fighting your way over numerous maps, both set and randomly generated, collecting new equipment and leveling up to become more powerful and learn new skills. This may sound like a very simple set of mechanics but in reality AoD is anything but simple. It's a deliriously huge game, not just in the number of maps but in the ways that characters and even items can progress.

ARE YOU EXPERIENCED?

Aside from just leveling up characters and equipping new items as you gain in power, Disgaea gives players far more powerful and subtle options for advancement, such as allowing characters to mentor other characters, passing on skills, or the ability to take a character back to first level keeping some of the skills from the previous class, or even allowing players to hurl one enemy monster into another to create a hybrid that can later be recruited. Items can be leveled up as well via item dungeons – random 100 level terrors that unlock special abilities and attributes in items as you progress through levels. The item dungeons were fantastic in the PS2 game but are even more enjoyable on the PSP for the simple fact that instead of having to dedicate hours at a time to a dungeon you can just put the PSP into sleep mode and pick it up again when you want to.

I could go on all day about how damn good Disgaea: Afternoon of Darkness is, detailing the incredible intricacies of the combat which allows players to stack each other into freak totem-poles, perform chain attacks and pull off incredible special moves, or hammer on about the funny story and brilliant characters but instead I'll just give you a bit of advice – if you're a fan of strategy in any way, stop reading this review and go and buy yourself a copy of the game. It really is one of the best the platform has to offer. «



Brilliant strategy; huge; funny

It will eat your life

HYPER VERDICT

IF you like strategy then this is your reason to own a PSP.

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY	
80	86	93	**92**

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!!! We haven't had a chance to test Turok's 16 player multi-player as yet, but in a market that's already glutted with multi-player shooters we can't really see it taking off.

X360 / PS3 / WII / PC / PS2 / DS / PSP

Turok

YURI SPADEFACE hunts the most dangerous game

category: **FPS** / players: **1-16**
developer: **Propaganda Games**
publisher: **Funtastic**
price: **$99.95** / rating: **MA 15+**
available: **Feb 15**

You remember Turok don't you? The heroic Native American killing machine who took on a cybernetic T-Rex and fought enemies with cool weapons like the Cerebral Bore? Well, if you do remember Turok, you should know that this game is not about him. It's about some generically gruff Special Forces guy with a mohawk in the future who is a fraction Native American and was given a bow by his war criminal commander to commemorate his heritage. Trapped on a newly terraformed planet teeming with dinosaurs, Joseph Turok must track down his old leader and bring him to justice...or some guff like that. Is this the game to breathe life back into a franchise that has, after such a great beginning, been run into the ground? Or is it just another questionable use of a license on life support? I think by the tone of this first paragraph you already know the answer to that question.

[below] He REALLY wants that guy's helmet...

RON PERLMAN!

Turok isn't so much a game that does things wrong as a game that doesn't really do things right. The level design seems to be geared more towards frustration than complexity. One level sees you trying to take some ruins but enemy snipers keep you pinned down making you hop from cover to cover. That may sound good but simultaneously you're being attacked by raptors that knock you out from cover, resulting far more often than not in an instant-kill head-shot and a trip back to the last checkpoint. To make matters worse, it's almost impossible to kill a raptor with a gun at close range so you have to use your knife, pulling the trigger at just the right time to trigger a dinosaur killing cutscene that will leave your camera angled to best view the dino being stabbed in the head and not the direction you were looking before the cutscene started.

After you finally take the ruins you need to defend them from waves of enemies. This is a little more fun, as the enemy units display some good AI and tactics, even though their ability to jump 20 feet away from a grenade instantly is more than a little odd. When all those enemies are dead you are essentially told that the princess was in the other castle the entire time and the last hour of gameplay (allowing for umpteen reloads as you're knocked out of cover by raptors) has been little more than an exercise in lengthening the play time. This is but one mission of many that follow basically the same formula, just making things hard, rather than challenging.

[above] Not pictured: Disneyland.

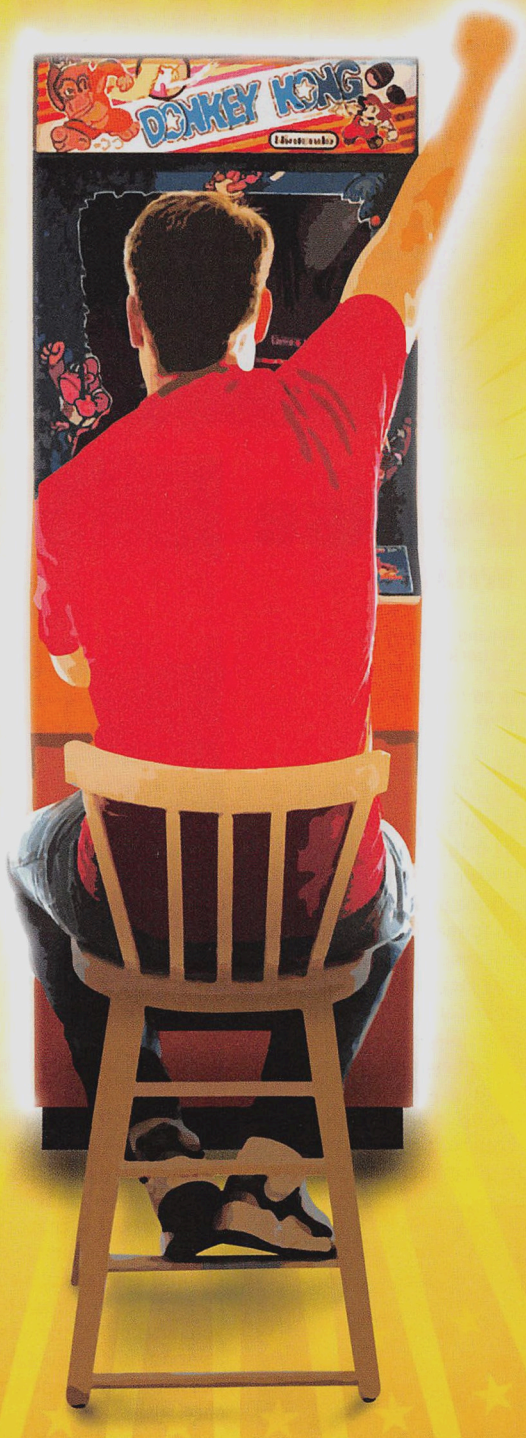
As we said earlier, Turok doesn't really do anything wrong. The controls are decent but unspectacular, as are the graphics. A few named voice actors, including the man with the manliest name on the planet, Powers Booth and the great man himself, RON PERLMAN, do an OK job with the script but it still comes across as though it were written by a couple of 15 year old boys drinking some illegally obtained beer while watching and early Arnie marathon.

Ultimately it's just pretty hard to like Turok. Sure, it's adequate and it should keep you occupied for 12 odd hours – as long as you can put up with the frustration for that long – but unless you are really into dinosaurs you'd be better off saving your money. «

Solid frame rate; RON PERLMAN	Frustrating level design; average execution	HYPER VERDICT
Adequate but uninspiring	VISUALS 85 / SOUND 80 / GAMEPLAY 65	60

The KING of KONG

In the cut-throat world of Donkey Kong, only one man can rule.



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Peter Travers, Rolling Stone

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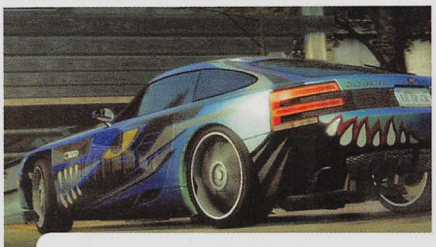


X360 / PS3 / Wii / PC / PS2 / DS / PSP

Burnout Paradise

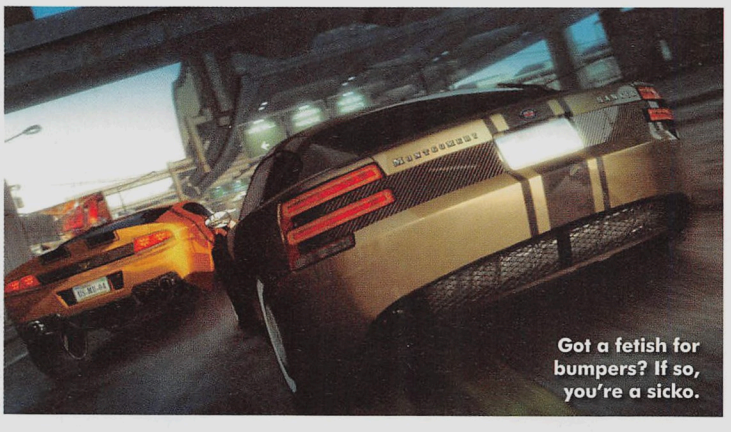
Nobody can read a map like **DANIEL WILKS**

category: **Racing** / players: **1-8**
developer: **Criterion**
publisher: **EA**
price: **$109.95** / rating: **M**
available: **Now**

The Burnout franchise has long been one of the favourites in the Hyper bunker. The arrival of a new game always sees everyone from the gaming area crowding around to see (and get some play time with) the crashingest of all arcade racing games. Not Burnout Paradise, however. The latest iteration of the franchise has been met with something of a cold shoulder. It's not because the game is not beautiful – Paradise City is beautiful, as are the 75 odd cars the player can unlock. It's not because the game is not fast – it's blisteringly quick. It's not because the crashes are not spectacular – they still are. It's because with the new open world format, Burnout Paradise no longer feels like Burnout, as though Criterion, in an attempt to keep up with the Joneses in adopting the now commonplace open world format forgot to include a number of simple features that would vastly increase the fun.

Rather than set races and routes, Paradise takes place in Paradise City (cue GnR), with events scattered across the entirety of the game world. Drive up to any set of lights and pull both triggers and the player can jump into the event.

[below] Don't look, but I think they're following us...


Got a fetish for bumpers? If so, you're a sicko.

Sounds good so far, huh? Well, it is a good idea but there are a few little somethings in the execution that takes away from a lot of the fun. We'll get to them later on.

GRASS GREEN, GIRLS PRETTY

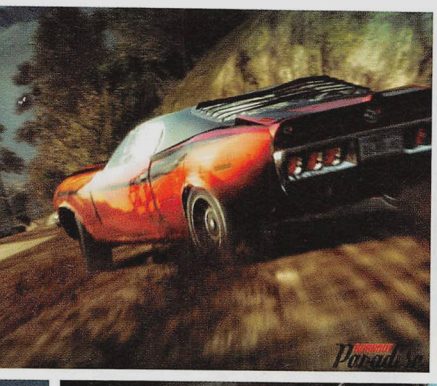
Due to the new open world format, races no longer take place over set tracks and routes, so players are free to find their own fastest routes to the finish line. In theory this is a fine approach but in practice it is hugely frustrating. The first few times you attempt any race, it's all too easy to get stuck on a road that will take you miles out of the way, or to make a wrong turn if you don't constantly pause the game, open the map and check the roads. There is an in-game mini-map in the bottom right hand corner of the screen but it only shows major roads in the immediate area, making it somewhat useless.

Road Rage events are by and large unchanged, with the player trying to take down a certain number of opponents before time runs out. The lack of a dedicated track actually really helps Road Rage, as you need only concentrate on destroying other cars rather than trying to win a race or memorise a route. Marked Man, a kind of combination of Road Rage and a Race also benefits from the open world structure, as the player is simply tasked with making it to the finish line without being taken out by pursuit cars. Burning Routes also make a return, with specific routes for each car. Completing a Burning Route unlocks an improved version of the car you complete the lap in.

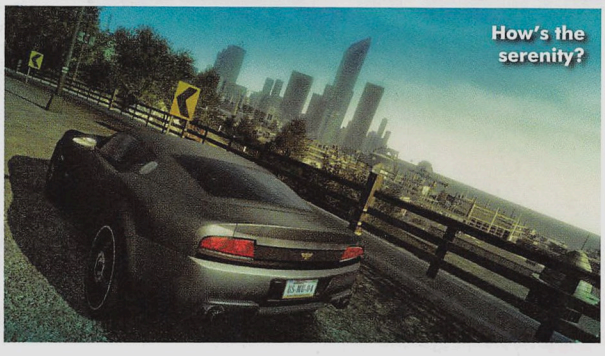
TAKE ME DOWN

The Crash mode is all but gone, replaced with the Showtime mode.

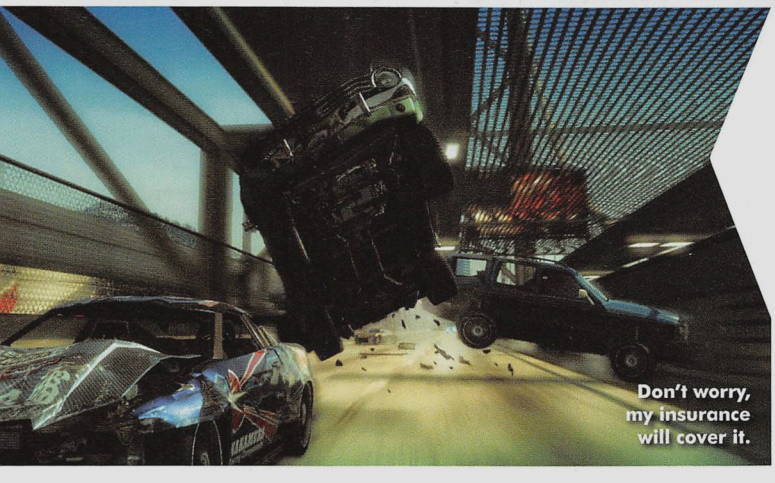
There are a few oversights that really leave Burnout Paradise far less enjoyable than it should be



!!! Bizarrely, there is no speedometer in the game so you don't know how fast different styles of car are in relation to each other.



How's the serenity?



Don't worry, my insurance will cover it.

SMASHY CRASHY DIE, DIE, DIE

Cars fall into three categories in Paradise. Speed cars go fast but have the smallest boost meters. Speed boost meters can only be used when totally full but if you can use your whole boost meter in one go it automatically refills, essentially meaning that Speed cars can boost forever. Stunt cars are more manoeuvrable and gain extra boost from jumps, power-slides and other stunts. Aggression cars gain more boost via takedowns and can take more punishment from other cars in turn. Aside from earning new cars via Burning Laps and race wins, other cars occasionally appear in the city and can be added to your garage by finding them and performing a takedown.

Dude, that's phully sick, bro.

Every road in the city has a dollar score for a crash. At any time the player can start a crash by pressing both shoulder buttons and attempting to crash into as many vehicles as possible. The boost meter is filled with every car and bus hit and players can feather the boost button to keep the car flipping down the road. While it certainly looks impressive the Showtime scores are incredibly easy to achieve making the game mode somewhat dull. Every road in the city also has a timed run that can be started by driving to the end of any street, automatically starting the timer.

A new game mode, Stunt, kind of fills the gap left by the absence of Crash mode. In Stunt, players must earn a certain number of points by stringing together stunt combos and boosting. Pulling off doughnuts, power-slides and jumps while trying to keep the combo timer running is fun but very frustrating in the early stages of the game (before you've explored and memorised much of the map) as jumps are quite widely scattered over the game world.

PLEASE TAKE ME HOME

The controls are as tight as ever and the sense of speed is excellent but there are a few oversights that really leave Burnout Paradise far less enjoyable than it should be. You see, there is no way to start an event without driving up to the right set of traffic lights, so trying to ace all of your favourite events is a process of hunting down the correct intersection. To make matters worse, there's no way to put a waypoint on the map, so you have to constantly pause the game and check the game map to find the event you're interested in participating in. Worse still is the fact that you can't automatically restart an event, so if you fail you need to head right back to the original intersection to begin again, making for not a little bit of hair pulling.

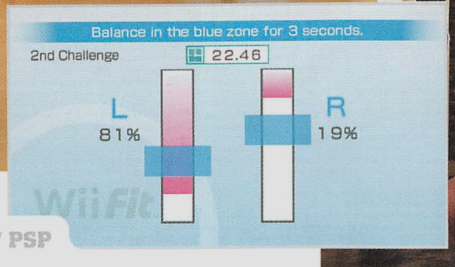
DJ Atomica, the voice over and tutor throughout the game is an insufferable, unskippable menace. At the beginning of every event he tells you exactly the same information and if you fail he'll deliver a condescending piece of advice. Turn him off at your first opportunity in the options. You still hear from him from time to time but at least it won't be every five seconds.

Burnout Paradise isn't a bad game – there's still a lot to like in it – but the move to open world gameplay detracts from the arcade style racing, making playing more of a chore than a joy. Sure the crashes and races are still a hoot but having to peck around Paradise City to find them is just a frustrating exercise in map reading. «

Great sense of speed; Marked Man; things go boom	Can't replay races; no waypoints; frustrating backtracking	HYPER VERDICT

Numerous oversights mar what could have been a great game

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY	
88	85	80	80



HYPER IMPORT REVIEW

360 / PS3 / **Wii** / PC / PS2 / DS / PSP

Wii Fit

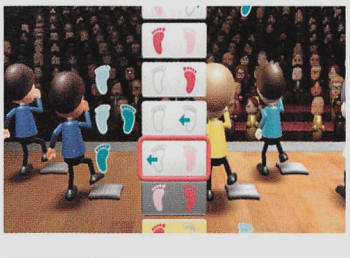
Another anti-game has arrived, but that's no cause for alarm.

category: **Fitness** / players: **1-2**
developer: **Nintendo**
publisher: **Nintendo**
price: **¥8800** / rating: **TBC**
available: **Now (Japan)**

It took me a while to get my head around the concept of *Wii Fit*. Contradiction the first: *Wii Fit* is by Nintendo, so it must be a game – or at the very least some form of entertainment – but it involves PHYSICAL EXERCISE. Contradiction number two: Kids should get out more and stop playing those obesity-fuelling videogames, but here's one that's arguably healthier than hanging around on street corners smoking grass.

Wii Fit's arrival, if it hadn't already been precipitated by a certain *Dr. Kawashima*, would mark the dawn of anti-games. As a veteran gamer, all this could make *Wii Fit* particularly difficult to assess – were it not for the simple fact that I've had fun (yes, *fun*) with it. And so has the wife. And I feel a bit fresher as a result of a month-long *Wii Fit* regimen, even if my body mass index only shows slight improvement...

It's with a BMI and weight readout that *Wii Fit* begins. You input your height and age, load your Mii, and get taken off to a weigh-in screen. Stand atop the Wii Balance Board (see boxout) and your weight and body mass index appear on the screen in big, scary digits. Then there's a quick balance test – stand on one leg and keep your body's centre of weight stationary – before you can enter the 'game' (if we can call it a game).



EWW, HEALTH

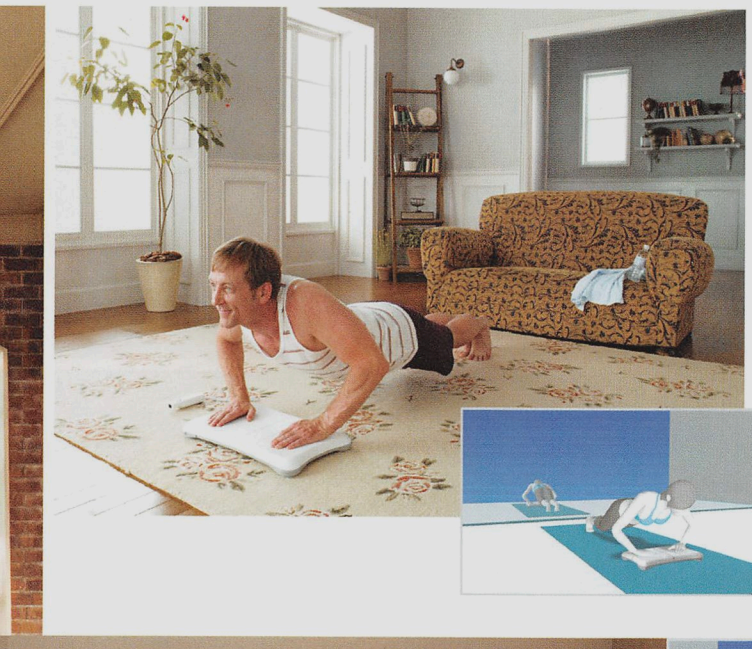
Wii Fit is not the fitness equivalent of *Wii Sports*; it's not a game you'll play with friends and beers, it's more of a solitary pursuit and there are no party vibes. But it does share *Wii Sports*' user-friendly design and simple menu screens. Nintendo hasn't designed *Wii Fit* to appeal to gamers in any way, but obviously efforts have been made to ensure that it's accessible to people for whom this is their first Nintendo experience of any kind. Gamers will probably find it a bit patronising, but we have to remember it's not really for our benefit that *Wii Fit* has been developed.

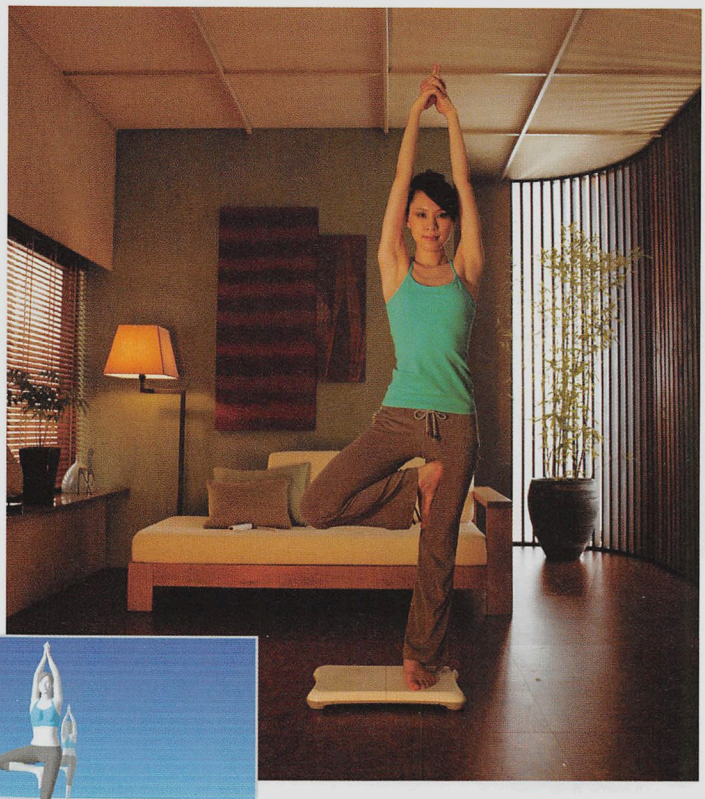
OK, that's nonsense – it *is* for our benefit. Because we're the ones who spend too much time inside and not enough time exercising our bodies. We're the ones with weight to lose. We need *Wii Fit*'s encouragement!

Cleverly, Nintendo has stuffed the software with incentives for us to keep on using it. (Otherwise, we'd probably give up pretty quickly and go back to our sloth-like ways.) For one, it's only possible to be weighed once daily. So if you want to see the results of today's activities, you'll need to check back tomorrow. Then there's encouragement to set targets several weeks into the future – you might want to lose 4kgs in a fortnight, for example – with a graph updated daily to display your progress towards that goal. Finally, there's a neat reward system, with *Wii Fit* keeping a note of how many minutes you've spent engaged in exercise and revealing more of its stages at predetermined intervals.

These incentives only have meaning because the core activities are designed well, are effective and, with a few painful exceptions, are surprisingly *enjoyable*. Activities are grouped according to type: aerobics, breathing exercises, muscle training, and balance games. Each challenge is clearly explained before you can begin, either through direct communication from a virtual trainer (in breathing exercises and muscle training) or via text and drawings (in the simpler aerobics and balance areas).

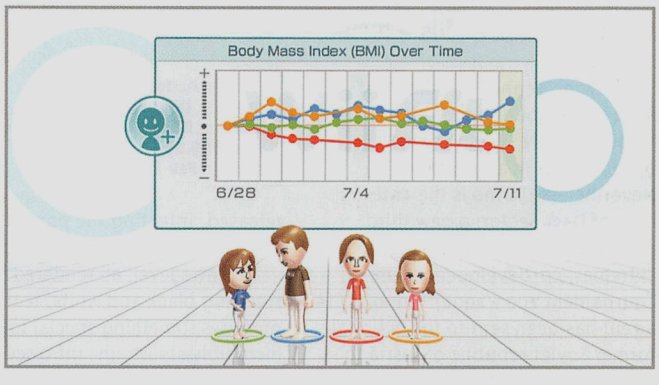
» Interaction with the software is flawless, and that's Wii Fit's biggest achievement





[above] Wax on, wax off...

[above] "Gah, get out of the way! I can't see the telly!"



BOARD GAMES

The Wii Balance Board is a heavyweight piece of equipment – 4.5kgs, and that's before you stand on it. It feels just right, and it's almost impossible to send skidding across the floor so there's no danger of slipping. Without the Balance Board, *Wii Fit* cannot be played. As for the future of this peripheral beyond *Wii Fit*, it's safe to bet that some skiing/snowboarding games will put it to use, but unless Nintendo starts bundling the Board with Wii consoles, its existence outside of *Wii Fit* is always likely to be as an optional, niche peripheral.

NOT FOR THE UNCOORDINATED

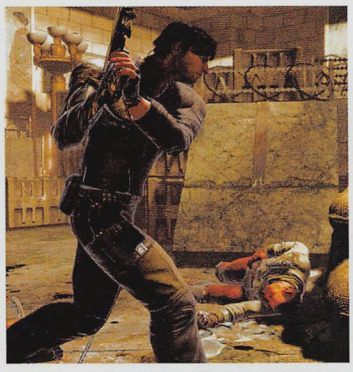
Interaction with the software is flawless, and that's *Wii Fit*'s biggest achievement. The Balance Board is a fine piece of kit and its calibration with the game is perfect. It doesn't lie, and you can never use the "But I wasn't pointing my Remote at the screen!" excuse. It's not applicable here. You could try "But I fell over and landed on my butt and BROKE THE COFFEE TABLE!" instead, but that much would probably be obvious to any onlookers.

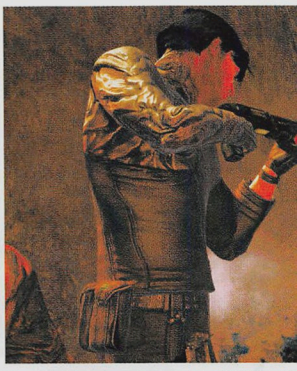
Wii Fit's selection of exercises is quite broad, so there's always something to try that you haven't done in a while. The most physically demanding activities are muscle training exercises, which include so-called 'squats', press-ups, and loads of synchronised arm/leg exercises. These are the most confusing – dual analog control in *Katamari Damacy* is no problem, but moving the right leg and left arm at the same time?! Nintendo is evil.

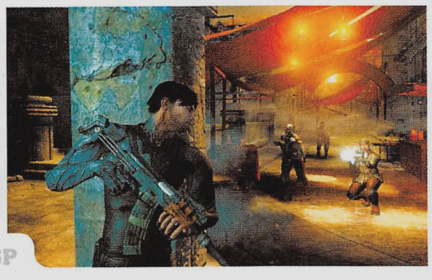
Balance games are the most game-like, and the ski jump event – in which you need to position your body's weight ahead of the Balance Board, crouch, and then stand up with perfect timing – is a personal favourite. Aerobic exercises are similarly funky, although hula-hoop dancing is deceptively difficult. And then there are yoga-ish breathing exercises, which provide some light relief while challenging your ability to stand on one leg for a long time.

Happily, *Wii Fit* permits you to choose which activities you go in for. And it works best as a daily 15-minute blast – it's not something you'll play for hours on end, unless you really want to punish yourself. It does *work*, though, and as a change of pace from *Super Mario Galaxy* or *No More Heroes* or whatever else you're playing on the console, *Wii Fit* provides another new dimension to what the Wii has to offer. And hey, it might even give you a few extra lives. «

Effective exercise program; accessible; massive novelty value	Not much of a gamers' game; no good for long sessions	HYPER VERDICT
Another example of Nintendo taking new games to new audiences.	VISUALS 78 / SOUND 75 / GAMEPLAY 89	80







X360 / PS3 / Wii / PC / PS2 / DS / PSP

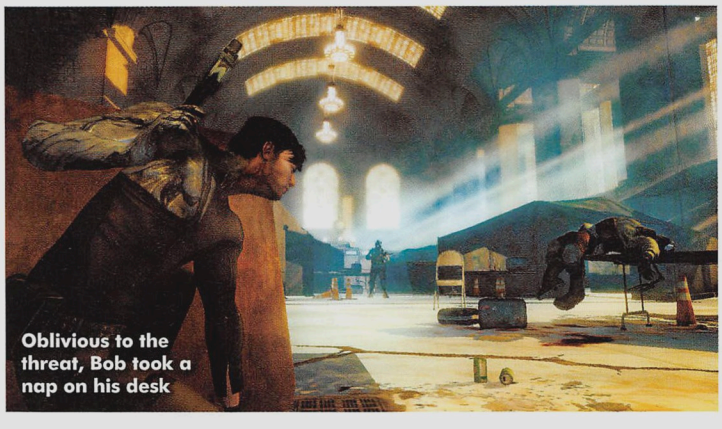
Dark Sector

DIRK WATCH is a former Soviet state

Hayden Tenno isn't the most heroic sounding of names. It sounds more like the name of somebody in a boy band. Nevertheless, Tenno is the anti-hero of Dark Sector, a new third-person action game from Digital Extremes, co-developers of Unreal Tournament 2003/2004. Tenno, a CIA agent has been sent to the fictional former Soviet republic of Lasria to assassinate Mezner, a rogue agent who has been tampering with a mysterious mutagenic virus in the hopes of using it as a bio-weapon. Naturally things have gone pear shaped and the virus has been released, infecting the populace and turning them into monsters.

category: **Action** / players: **1+**
developer: **Digital Extremes**
publisher: **D3**
price: **$99.95** / rating: **MA 15+**
available: **Feb 15**

The intro level, all rendered in stunning black and white, really promises something special to come. Incredibly stylish, the intro sees Tenno infiltrating a facility in Lasria to kill Mezner. After a few frantic fire-fights and a punishing battle against a helicopter gunship it's time for a confrontation with Mezner but, wouldn't you know it, he, along with a monstrous companion with an enormous blade growing from his arm, gets the drop on Tenno and infects him with the virus. Because he's now contaminated with the virus, the CIA all but disowns Tenno, only giving him a formula to slow the progress of the virus rather than stop it, with the understanding that they'll cure him when Mezner is dead. After being infected, Hayden begins to mutate, his right are taking on a metallic appearance and growing an enormous throwing weapon called the Glaive, a catch all weapon and gameplay mechanic that forms the crux of the action in Dark Sector.

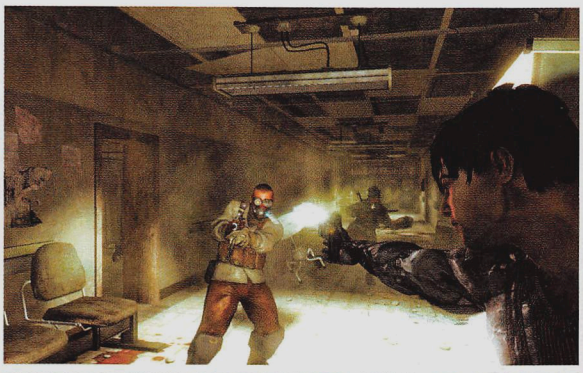

Oblivious to the threat, Bob took a nap on his desk

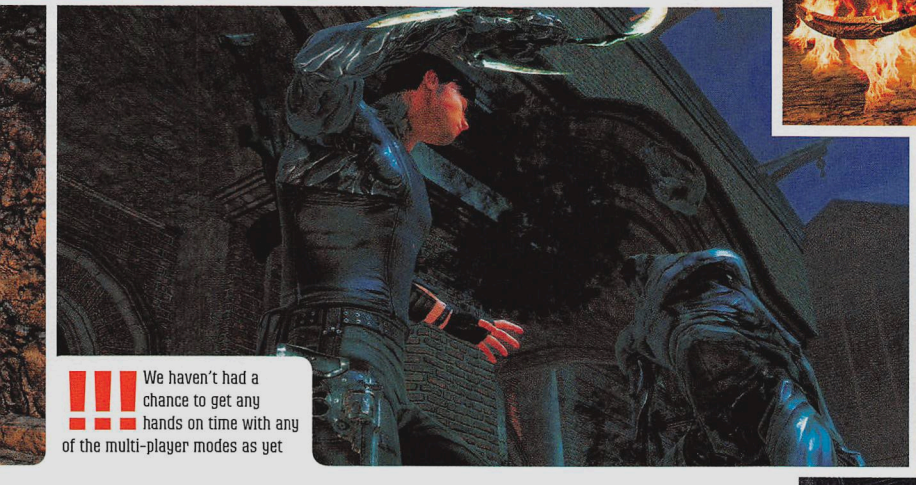
[below] Extreme extreme frisbee

KRULL?

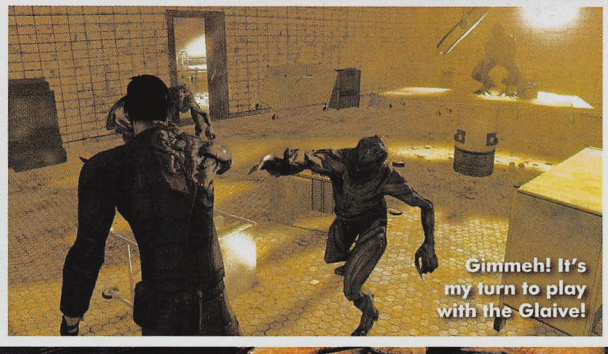
Initially the Glaive is a simple returning throwing weapon that can kill most enemies in two shots, often cutting off limbs in the process, but the further the virus spreads the more powerful the Glaive becomes, unlocking now abilities. One of the first powers unlocked is the Power Throw. Holding down the right bumper and releasing it when the targeting reticule turns yellow allows Tenno to throw the Glaive much harder than usual, allowing him to smash open locked gates and doors and slice enemies in half. Another ability, Steal, allows the player to snatch guns from dead foes at a distance, having them returned to your hands like a boomerang. The Steal ability can also be used to pick up important but otherwise inaccessible quest objectives or to activate switched. Another power that becomes available is Aftertouch, enabling the player to steer the Glaive in flight to hit multiple or hidden enemies.

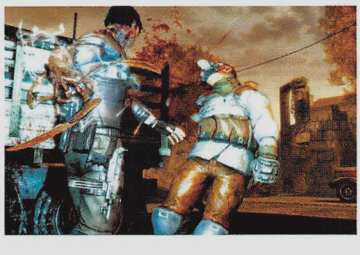
Aside from actual developed powers, the Glaive can also be imbued with elemental properties, such as fire or electricity, by throwing it into something charged with the respective element, such as a geyser of flame or a sparking electrical conduit. Not only does the Glaive do more damage to enemies when it's charged with an elemental state, it can also be used to solve environmental puzzles, such as burning down sections of the environment, or shorting out a faulty automatic door.





We haven't had a chance to get any hands on time with any of the multi-player modes as yet





» the player balances their time between shooting, and using the Glaive to steal another gun

Aside from the Glaive, Tenno can also use a number of guns but Digital Extremes have taken steps to ensure that the Glaive will always remain the player's main weapon. Each gun in the game, with the exception of Tenno's handgun, is equipped with a biological sensor that can detect if the wielder is infected with the virus, detonating a small charge that renders the weapon useless if the virus is detected. What this means is that Tenno can only ever us a gun for about 30 seconds at a time. While this may sound a little frustrating, as a gameplay mechanic it works quite well, leading to fire-fights in which the player balances their time between shooting, and using the Glaive to steal another gun.

The player is equipped with a pistol by default but can upgrade the weapon, or buy new weapons from black-market operatives dotted throughout the game. These weapons don't have a viral sensor so can be used throughout the entire adventure.

DIFFICULTY CLIFF

Dark Sector isn't the easiest of games. It's quite punishing if you make a mistake or take your eyes off the screen for more time than it takes to blink. Thankfully the checkpoint system in the game is quite closely spaced so you rarely have to backtrack any further than the beginning of the action set piece that killed you. Unfortunately the AI isn't a great help when it comes to the learning curve, as it can be described as patchy at best. At times the enemy AI will frighten you with the level of precision and tactical awareness but at other times enemies will simply stand around and look at their shoes or continuously run into a wall. Level design is similarly patchy, with some fantastic events and areas but an over-reliance on doors that can only be opened after you kill umpteen monsters that seem to spontaneously spawn until the threshold is met.

Visually, the stunning black and white intro sequence is the highlight of the game but that said, Dark Sector is no slouch. Showing every indicator that he game is built on the Unreal 3 engine, Dark Sector features some nice, if somewhat shiny, character and monster models and some great looking environmental texturing and destruction. The soundtrack and effects are functional but uninspiring and the voice acting is so sparse it's eminently forgettable.

Falling somewhere between Gears of War and Resident Evil in terms of gameplay, Dark Sector is an interesting and fun new IP that should appeal to fans of action games. Be warned, however. Dark Sector has a high difficulty curve that will most probably see players having to attempt the same battle multiple times against some very scatty enemy AI. With a little more tweaking, Dark Sector could have been a must have action game. As it stands it's a fun but ultimately forgettable romp. «

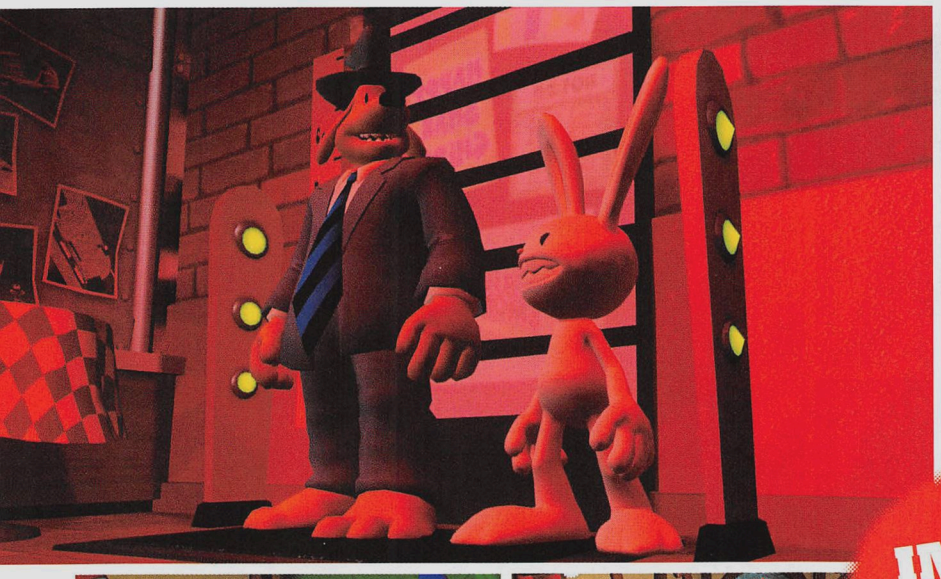
BIG BAD

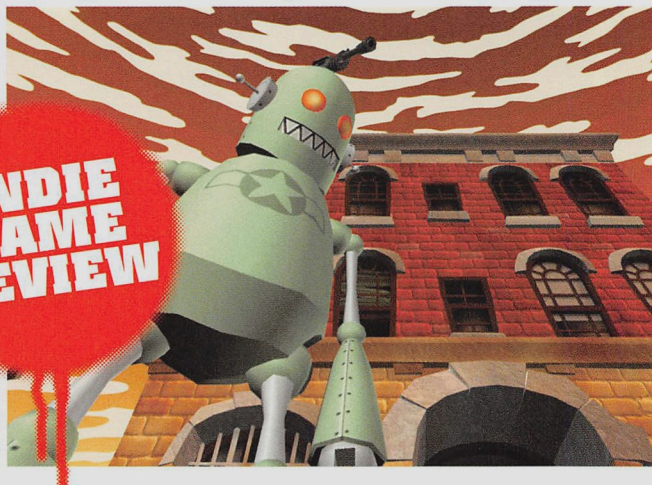
Not every enemy in Dark Sector is human scale. Aside from Lasria soldiers and Technocyte (the name of the virus) mutants, one of the enemies the player will encounter more than once is the Colossus, an enormous, kind of gorilla shaped monstrosity capable of tearing up an entire unit of soldiers without breaking a sweat. When first encountered, the Colossus is an intimidating and deadly foe but throughout the game the virus takes a further hold on the beast, transforming it into something far deadlier.

The Glaive is great; aftertouch; challenging	Patchy AI; steep difficulty curve	HYPER VERDICT

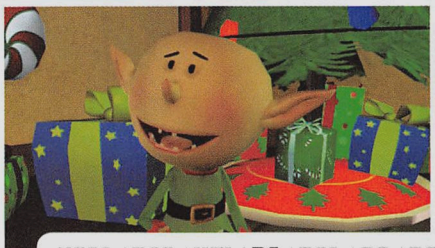
Hampered by patchy AI but still a fun new IP

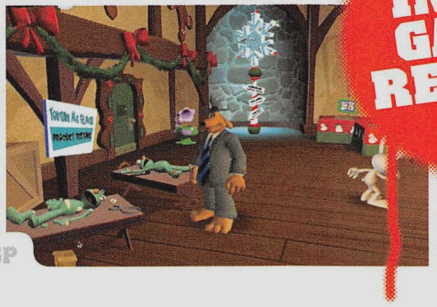
VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY	
85	78	80	80





INDIE GAME REVIEW





X360 / PS3 / WII / **PC** / PS2 / DS / PSP

Sam and Max: Season 2 – Ice Station Santa

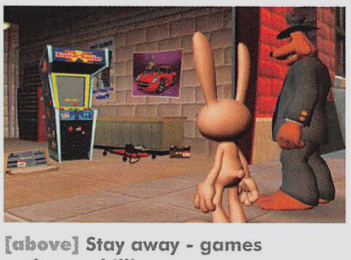
TIM HENDERSON wants a possessed rabbit for Christmas

It's been almost a year to the day since Telltale resuscitated the equally loved and neglected Sam & Max franchise with six slices of episodic content. No doubt a resounding success, the release has already begun spawning its second season while other running projects (Bone, to be specific) have been left out cold to wait for some sense of completion. It's good to see the ol' Dog and Rabbit looking so healthy in the gaming marketplace again, although there is a niggling amount of concern: Season 2 will likely give birth to Season 3, and so on and so forth until we go from welcoming the duo back from a hiatus of over ten years to feeling swamped by them, quality and variety of ideas eventually slipping down an icy slope on Santa's stolen sleigh.

[below] **"I warned you to stop f**king calling me Sneezy!"**

TIME OUT FOR NUMBER TWO

Here's the good news, then: The opening episode of Season 2, Ice Station Santa, feels every bit as polished, playable and accomplished as its evil twin from Season 1 did this time last year. The writing is still top notch, the visuals are ever-so-slightly more impressive and there are sufficient new environments and changes to the old ones to make sure that the setting feels fresh all over again. The learning curve is perfect, starting out with the most simple of tasks revolving around a pop music infected robot of destruction,



[above] **Stay away - games make you kill!**

and the balance of the puzzles is spot on. It's still a little easy, but even so Telltale have included hints of alterable frequency, and this feature nonetheless feels welcome and considerate. The method of having Max spout out random comments that relate to the puzzle at hand hardly feels invisible, but it *does* feels completely in harmony with the game and character.

The plot this time adopts a festive feel, and takes place largely in the North Pole. The twist of lemon that Sam and Max add to your typical Christmas flavour is rather predictable, but it nonetheless sits well and is easy to swallow. Where Ice Station Santa gets most of its merit is by structuring its puzzles in a way that successfully re-introduces the cast of the first season without alienating anyone who bypassed it, as well as ensuring that players have a choice of focus rather than purely linear progression. The tired old gimmick of collecting several objects is used to achieve this, but being able to mull over a platter of problems will always be better than being forcefully stuck at one without anything else to distract, entertain and generally prevent boredom and frustration from settling in.

Ice Station Santa is a very strong start to the second season of Sam & Max. As with past incarnations everything's inherently simple, and almost prehistoric compared to more modern approaches to gameplay. However, again like its predecessors, it's also highly accomplished for what it is as well as more fun than many other, more ambitious games vying for your free money and Hard Drive space this year. Well worth the download.

category: **Adventure** / players: **1**
developer: **Telltale Games**
publisher: **Telltale Games**
price: **US $8.95** / rating: **N/A**
available: **Now**

A truly polished, charismatic and accessible slice of adventure gaming

Still too easy for hardcore fans of the genre

HYPER VERDICT

A strong start full of twisted Christmas Spirit.

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY	
84	85	85	**85**

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X360 / PS3 / **Wii** / PC / PS2 / DS / PSP / GBA

Geometry Wars: Galaxies

category: **Shooter**
players: **1-2**
developer: **Kuju Entertainment**
publisher: **Vivendi**
price: **$69.95**
rating: **G**
available: **Now**

Geometry Wars: Galaxies is an old-school, high score chasing, survive 'em up, combining some of the best bits of Robotron and Rez to make a pleasing, fun and addictive little game that won't hurt the bank balance too bad. It's you've played Geometry Wars: Retro Evolved on Xbox Live Arcade or Geometry Wars: Galaxies on the DS then you know what experience you're in for — fly a small ship around a grid whilst constantly fighting off waves of geometrically shaped enemies in an attempt to progress a little further and best your high scores. Players are awarded for beating levels and achieving high scores with Geoms, a kind of catch-all currency that can be used to purchase behaviour upgrades for your drone, a small helper vessel that follows the main ship.

The only real difference between the Wii version of the game and the others is the control scheme. Rather than using dual analogue sticks or a d-pad and stylus, the player instead steers the craft with the analogue stick on the Nunchuck whilst aiming with the Wiimote, holding down the A button to fire and using the Z trigger to launch smart bombs. Of all the control schemes, the Wiimote/Nunchuck combo is probably the most user-friendly and enjoyable, allowing all but the most clueless of people to pick up and play the game with no worries whatsoever.

VAN HAMMERSLEY

HYPER VERDICT

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY	
88	86	84	**84**

XBOX LIVE ARCADE / PS3 NETWORK / VIRTUAL CONSOLE

Arkadian Warriors

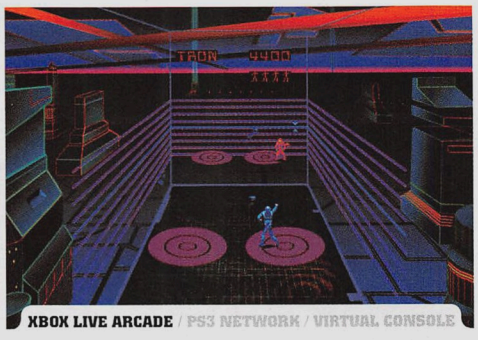
category: **Action RPG**
players: **1-2**
developer: **Wanako**
publisher: **Microsoft**
price: **800 points**
rating: **PG**
available: **Now**

Falling somewhere between Gauntlet and Diablo, Arkadian Warriors is a basic, yet somewhat enjoyable casual action RPG developed by Wanako, a studio best known for their casual Live Arcade titles such as Assault Heroes (one of our favourite games on Live) and 3D Ultra Minigolf. Players choose between one of three spectacularly unattractive big-headed characters — a warrior, sorceress or archer — and set about performing simple kill and collect quests, levelling up and acquiring new gear along the way. That's just about all you can say about the game. It's fun and has an addictive collect 'em up quality but as far as gameplay goes it's little more than Gauntlet (complete with monster spawners that can be destroyed) with a few concession made to modern gameplay concepts, such as item upgrades, class based special abilities gained through levelling, randomly generated dungeons and the ability to assume a super-powered animal form for a short while to do massive damage to enemies. Still, for only 800 points you should be able to get your money's worth out of the title, especially if you can con a friend into playing co-op with you. Now that they've released Arkadian Warriors we'll go back to keeping our fingers crossed that they'll go back to their best game yet and create a sequel to Assault Heroes.

DANIEL WILKS

HYPER VERDICT

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY	
60	62	60	**56**



XBOX LIVE ARCADE / PS3 NETWORK / VIRTUAL CONSOLE

Tron

category: **Arcade Classic**
players: **1-2**
developer: **Backbone Entertainment**
publisher: **Disney Interactive**
price: **400 Points**
rating: **G**
available: **Now**

We have fond memories of both the movie and the game Tron. The simple arcade game was one of the first games to be based upon a movie but, more importantly, it played and controlled well. When the Tron franchise was revisited a few years ago with Tron 2.0, and the Xbox port, Killer App, we couldn't have been happier, as the game was brilliant and very funny. When we heard that the original Tron game was coming to Live Arcade and could be played multi-player we were over the moon with the prospect of being able to play a cherished classic against each other. Now we wish we'd never heard of Tron. In a word, the Xbox Live Arcade multi-player remake is terrible. The original four game modes; I/O Tower, MCO Cone, Battle Tanks and Light Cycles make a welcome return and the graphics have been updated to a small degree whilst still remaining faithful to the original game but overall Tron is nearly unplayable. The controls, for the most part, are to blame for the terrible gameplay. The fondly remembered arcade game features an eight-way joystick that enabled players to gain precise control of the game very quickly. Not so the analogue sticks on the 360 controller, which can be described as sluggish at best, suffering from a fair amount of lag in addition to imprecise aiming. Rather than wasting points on Tron and ruining a fond memory, see if you can track down a copy of Tron 2.0 instead — it's great.

YURI SPADEFACE

HYPER VERDICT

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY	
55	58	45	**43**

2005: Fullmetal Alchemist. 2006: Naruto. 2007: Bleach. 2008 is the year of:

DEATH NOTE

デスノート

Join Light Yagami as he wields the awesome power of the Death Note, a supernatural notebook that kills anyone whose name is written in it. With the anime series, live action feature films, manga comics and apparel range, 2008 is definitely the year of Death Note.

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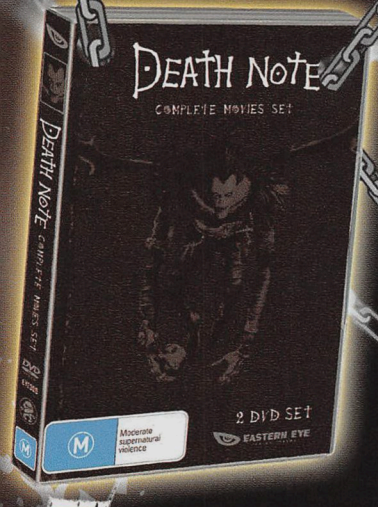

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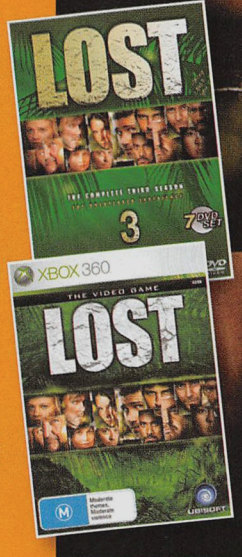


5 PACKS UP FOR GRABS!

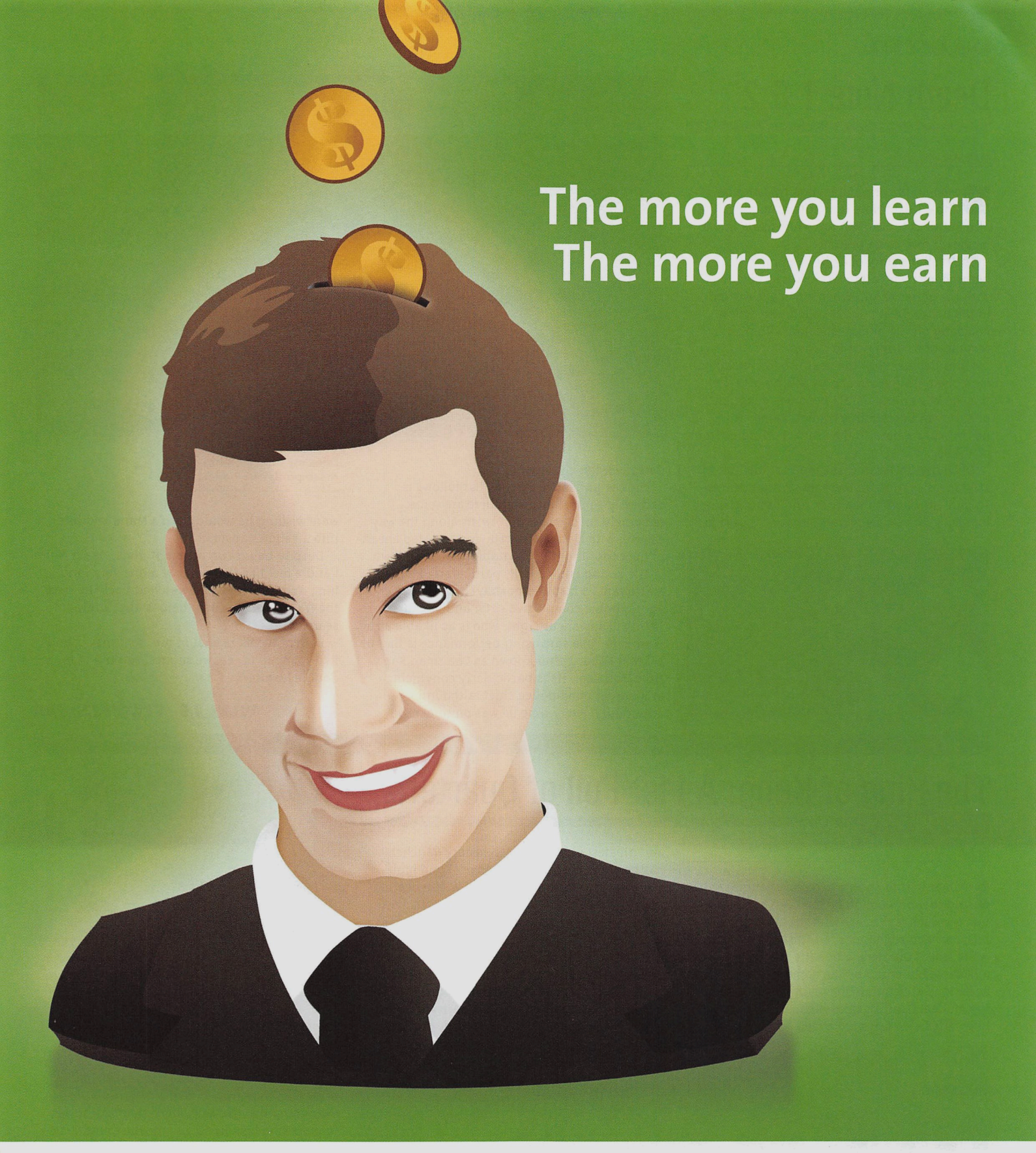
WIN A BUNCH OF LOST GOODIES

»» Imagine you were stranded on an island after a horrific plane crash only to find out that you are actually embroiled in a massive conspiracy. Now imagine that you could have three things with you to ease the burden. You'd probably say that you'd want something like, food, shelter and a gun, or something equally as sensible but that's not what we have to give you. What we have is a copy of the Lost game for Xbox 360, a Lost Season 3 boxed set and a Lost T-Shirt. That should keep you occupied while you wait for the rescue that may never come – well, it might if someone else on the island chose to have a TV, Xbox 360 and electricity as their three burden lifting things.

All you need to do for a chance to win one of these Lost prize packs is **tell us, in 50 words or less, what are the three things you would want if you were stranded on a mysterious island after a horrific plane crash only to find out you were embroiled in a massive conspiracy?**

Send your answers, with your name and address to: **Found, Hyper, 78 Renwick St, Redfern, NSW, 2016**, or email your entry to *hypercomps@next.com.au* with the comp name in the subject line. One entry per person please.

Terms & Conditions: 1) Entry is open to residents of Australia and New Zealand except employees and immediate families of Next Publishing Pty Ltd and its agencies associated with the promotion. 2) Only entries completed with these terms and conditions will be eligible. 3) Competition begins 9am February 5, 2008 and entries close at 6pm March 12, 2008. 4) In determining eligibility the judge's decision is final and no correspondence will be entered into. 5) The winner will be drawn at 9am March 13, 2008 at Next Publishing Pty Ltd, 78 Renwick St, Redfern NSW 2016. 6). Prizes must be taken as offered and are not redeemable for cash. 7) The promoter is not responsible for misdirected or lost mail. 8) The winners names will be published in the May issue of Hyper on sale April 2, 2008. 9) 5 Winners will receive a copy of Lost: The Game on Xbox 360 (RRP: $79.95), a copy of Lost Season 3 on DVD (RRP: 79.95) and a Lost T-Shirt (RRP: 29.95). Total competition value $949.25. The promoter is Next Publishing Pty Ltd ABN 88 002 647 645 of 78 Renwick St, Redfern NSW 2016.



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Death Note 1 & 2

MADMAN, M

Based on the original manga by Tsugumi Ohba, Death Note is an interesting idea that also happens to be great fun when made into a movie, or two, to be precise.

They tell the story of Light Yagami, a highschooler who discovers a cursed notebook with the power to kill. When a name is written in the book a Death God is called into action, knocking off the intended victim within 40 seconds of putting pen to paper.

Light decides that the best use for the book is to clean up the streets, by killing off all of the world's criminals. He becomes a vigilante of sorts, and using an assumed name, "Kira", he becomes a hero to the crime-fearing citizens of Tokyo.

Of course, it doesn't take long for the fuzz to start investigating all these mysterious deaths. To find out who Kira really is, and to bring him to justice, the police recruit the world's greatest detective, the mysterious "L".

Today's ingredient: Freaky bone guy!

The cat-and-mouse game that follows is endlessly compelling, and there are some genuinely spectacular plot twists along the way as well, with Light always staying one step ahead of the cops, until the inevitable final showdown.

The acting is excellent, particularly Ken'ichi Matsuyama's inspired portrayal of "L" as a agoraphobic compulsive eater and of course Tatsuya Fujiwara as Light, who is as likable as he is sinister. One surprising performance is that of Takeshi Kaga, better known as Chairman Kaga from Iron Chef. He is particularly convincing as a hard-boiled police chief, although admittedly, every time he was on screen we were wishing he would flash a smile and bite into a yellow capsicum.

Does my arse look big in these pants? Be honest.

Despite being two different films, Death Note 1 and 2 feel like two parts of a one very long film, and indeed, when watched back-to-back the transition between them is absolutely seamless.

Both of them are a lot of fun, so if they sound like your cup of tea, we suggest settling in for a double feature.

FILM: 7.5 / FEATURES: TBA

The King of Kong: A Fist Full of Quarters

IN CINEMAS

DENDY, M

It's rare that the rights to a documentary are sold to Hollywood to be the basis of a feature film but such is the case with the charming, hilarious and sometimes sad The King of Kong: A Fist Full of Quarters, a true life story following a likeable underdog by the name of Steve Wiebe as he tries to dethrone the reigning king of Kong, the mulleted and Machiavellian arrogant dick, Billy Mitchell, a self proclaimed hot sauce king and greatest video gamer in history. Mitchell has been the holder of the Donkey Kong high score for 25 years when a tape of Wiebe beating the score is sent to Twin Galaxies, the official score keepers of classic arcade games. Mitchell retaliates by discrediting Steve due to his association with Mr. Awesome, a long time rival of Billy Mitchell.

Seth Gordon's tale of the underdog is probably one of the most biased documentaries you will ever see (aside from anything by Michael Moore of course), plainly casting Steve as the hero and Billy as the villain but that is half the fun of the film. Although we're sure Mitchell will say that his words have been taken out of context to portray him in a negative light, everything the man says, in context, conspires to make him look like a villain. The soundtrack, too, is exceptionally manipulative, borrowing heavily from 80s film canon heroic theme songs, including classics like "You're the Best" from The Karate Kid and "Eye of the Tiger".

Billy Mitchell - the king of douchebags

This man has not lived in reality for years

Although the topic of obsessive classic arcade gamers may not sound like the stuff of riveting and hilarious cinema, The King of Kong is a fabulously entertaining film that should be put on any gamers must see list.

FILM: 8 / FEATURES: N/A

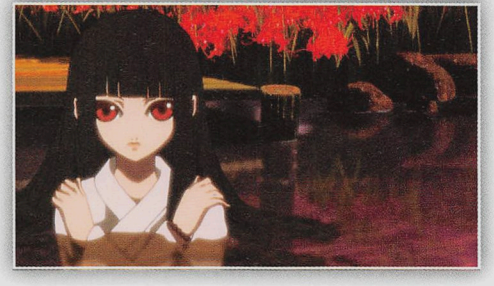
Hell Girl

MADMAN, M

No, this series isn't a spin-off of Mike Mignola's signature comic book character, Hellboy, but it is instead a series about a girl who is quite literally from hell, or more specifically, it is about the people she either helps or torments.

Hell Girl is a series that is almost entirely about revenge. Every episode presents the viewer with essentially the same scenario; a likable, innocent protagonist is introduced and throughout the course of the show they are victimised, bullied or otherwise wronged by another person.

The eyes are the window to the... AARGH, kill it!



That's where Hell Girl comes in. At midnight every night there is a website that can be found, called "Hell Correspondence", and when you log onto the site and type in the name of those you want punished, you enter into a contract of sorts.

Hell Girl will happily torture your enemy to the brink of insanity and then promptly ferry their soul directly to hell, thus avenging your grievances. However, there is a price, and when you yourself die, your soul will belong to hell too.

For example, in the first episode a meek schoolgirl seeks revenge on a bully. The bully is given a taste of her own medicine, courtesy of Hell Girl, before she drags her kicking and screaming into the depths of hades. This is pretty much the formula used for every episode after that, and although there's no real continuity between episodes, you are always left wondering what the next grievance will be.

The animation is good in spots, particularly the trippy revenge sequences, where the victim hallucinates wildly. However, a lot of footage is re-used every episode, like Hell Girl ferrying the souls to hell, and those scenes get tiring to watch time after time.

If you're a fan of the supernatural and seeing jerks get their comeuppance, give Hell Girl a try.

ANIMATION: 9 / STORY: 6 / **OVERALL: 6.5**

Death Note: VOLUME 1

MADMAN, M

It seems a little odd to review the live action films and anime series based on the same Shonen Jump manga in the same issue as both the live action films and the anime tell essentially the same story – Light Yagami finds a notebook discarded by a Death God and uses its powers to start bumping of Japan's criminal element, all the while pursued by the mysterious L, a master detective hell-bent on catching the well meaning but morally bankrupt serial-killer/vigilante. Running over 37 20 minute episodes, the anime sticks much closer to the manga so takes a far more languid approach to storytelling, better fleshing out the fascinating characters of Light an his nemesis, L. Light in particular is one of the most layered characters to appear in anime in a long time and charting his moral decline – at first he only kills criminals but soon he starts using his power to take out anyone who opposes him – will keep most viewers riveted. Without hyperbole, Death note is one of the most interesting and downright enjoyable anime series to come along in ages and should appeal to fans of tight storytelling and moral ambiguity should get a huge kick out of it. The animation by Madhouse is fantastic and helps the story progress beautifully.

It's probably best not to play "I've got your nose" with a god of death

We feel the same way about our Macs

ANIMATION: 9 / STORY: 10 / **OVERALL: 9**

DECONSTRUCTING

BioShock

» DYLAN BURNS

Welcome to this, the second in our series of 'Deconstructing' features, each of which attempts to delve a bit deeper into a game of recent note. To say that BioShock is worthy of a more detailed investigation is a mammoth understatement. The game itself is almost as deep as its setting. Just go to any online message board to see the proliferation of questions regarding the game: What exactly is a Big Daddy? Why don't you get to actually see the Little Sisters die? Is there going to be a sequel? How do I get the good ending? These queries all stem from the richness of BioShock's world, as well as from the excellent writing, planning, art and creature design that has gone into the title.

Here at Hyper we prefer to do our own digging, rather than leave it open to wild speculation. With this in mind, we begged, pleaded, bribed and finally convinced Bill Gardner, Lead Level Designer at 2K Boston, to answer our questions regarding BioShock (we didn't really beg, he was very nice). What follows is an in-depth investigation into the design decisions behind the game. There will be specific spoilers relating to the story, so if you're yet to play the game then perhaps save the next few pages for when you have done so.

Okay, with two of you gone the rest of us can crack our knuckles and get into the meaty stuff!

THE RECEPTION

The first element that makes BioShock stand out is 2K Boston/2K Australia's rather bold decision to go with a completely original IP. Of course, original games are nothing new but when you're Ken Levine, the guy who shaped titles such as Thief: The Dark Project, Freedom Force and SWAT 4, you're more than likely to get people's attention when announcing the spiritual successor to System Shock 2, a game that still gives some people mind orgasms.

Indeed, the level of anticipation for BioShock immediately before its release was almost palpable. It promised to be everything to every gamer: an RPG with first person shooter presentation, customizable weapons, denizens with their own agendas who react to you with varying hostility levels, as well as the sweet promise of powers such as telepathy, electrocution and the ability to set things on fire – all taking place within an emergent and reactive environment.

We asked **Bill Gardner** to tell us what the mood is like in the office, now that the game has been met with such a positive reaction and, in many ways, the determination to work with an original IP has paid off. "I'm on Cloud 9," says Gardner. "I think I could say the same thing for everyone at 2K Boston and 2K Australia. It's one thing to work on the type of game you love to play. Getting the type of response that we have been is a whole different level of gratification. Knowing that people are enjoying something you devoted so much of your life to is the greatest feeling a designer can have. Looking back on everything, from the moments of doubt in focus tests to the seemingly endless crunch – the whole experience was more than worth it."

THE SETTING

The environment in which BioShock takes place is at once familiar and alien. The depths of the ocean are quite analogous to the cold death of space: you can't live there without the protective yet ultimately claustrophobic confines of human architecture. For the denizens of Rapture (the almost utopian underwater setting of BioShock) this decision to live so far beneath the ocean has many side effects. The first is that these people are stuck with their choices; there are no second chances in a distinct and isolated world, a forgotten fracture of modern society. More disturbingly, throughout the course of the game you come to realise that something has gone very wrong in Rapture, to the point where its citizens have become twisted, nightmarish creatures that only resemble human beings in form.

Rapture's existence at the bottom of the ocean in many ways increases the metaphoric pressure on its inhabitants and this may have acted to expedite its moral and social decay, resulting in murderous creatures psychotically focused on their own beauty and self-enhancement through the use of experimental gene therapy. It seems ironic that these people have had to escape to the depths of the ocean in order to ascend to their aspirations. This desperation, combined with a combined disaffection for society, augured Rapture's failing from the very beginning.

» "The pressure of the ocean reclaiming Rapture all around you was key to the atmosphere and the tension"

Medical students seem to be getting younger each year

HYPER: Do you think that BioShock would have been as appropriate in any other setting – say, on an island somewhere or sequestered within a real life location?

Bill Gardner: While we probably could have found a way to make it work in a different location, it just would not have been the same. The pressure of the ocean reclaiming Rapture all around you was key to the atmosphere and the tension. Another equally important aspect is the isolation. Early on in the project, we played around with a few other location ideas. I made a case to keep the bottom of the ocean as it was a nice extension of System Shock 2's deep space. Being at the bottom of the ocean says "abandon all hope, ye who enter" like no other location could (aside from 87 trillion light years away from earth or Hell.)

A lot of the horror or angst experienced during the game comes from the juxtaposition of two main elements: 1) The optimism of the art deco aesthetic (including the period music), against 2) The obvious destruction, violence and horror that has taken place in Rapture. This creates an interesting gaming mood, as the player experiences both awe and dread in equal measures. Is this the type of experience that the design team was aiming for?

Absolutely. It's horrifying to wander the halls of Rapture and hear the music or the PSAs. You almost

want to stop and yell "How can you be so f**king cheery? Take a look around. There are mutilated corpses everywhere!" The thought of things still working, stores still shamelessly and pathetically selling their wares while you're desperately trying to escape from certain death really gets under your skin. It taunts you and makes you feel insignificant. This was 100% intentional.

Some moments in the game are truly moving. One that stands out for us is a room where two parents have committed suicide (from seeing their daughter as a Little Sister). These can be real moments of emotion for the player. How difficult is it to create these emotional tags within the medium of videogames?

The main challenge of "mis en scene" is communicating the right message. This is going to make me sound like a serial killer, but there's a real art to posing dead bodies. The wrong pose and you wind up putting the emphasis on the wrong part of the scene or shattering the player's suspension of disbelief. Creating these scenes requires tremendous attention to detail.

It's also difficult to create these kind of scenes in the sense that it a relatively unique method of exposition. There aren't too many games out there that let the player piece together what happened. Not being able to point to other games as examples can be a little unsettling from a production perspective. You find yourself constantly wondering if people are going to "get it".

While it is challenging, creating these little vignettes are among the most fun parts of creating a level. Being able to really walk through the space and think about what happened and how best tell that story is a blast.

ARTY FARTY

BioShock is quite obviously influenced by the philosophy of objectivism (leaning towards extremism). Andrew Ryan himself espouses the importance of rational self-interest, although the 'rational' part soon dissipated in the face of greed and the unfortunate development of a 'haves' and 'have-nots' class system. Under the philosophy of objectivism, 'art' is about giving abstract values a concrete form. This is beautifully apparent in the character of Sander Cohen – in particular the level where you must complete his morbid quadtych. Sander Cohen states in this level that "The burden of the artist is to capture". In some ways this statement reflects the player's journey throughout the game; more literally with the camera side-missions but also with respect to the player's ultimate burden as a manipulated pawn.

Rosie the Riveter really let herself go

The art deco approach gives BioShock a fantastic ambience and presentation. Can you give us an insight into some of the trials and tribulations of packing so much artistic detail into the game?

Working with art deco as our aesthetic made the designers' jobs easier in a lot of ways. We tried a number of different processes for building levels. Using art deco meant that a designer could rough out a space very quickly and already be on the path to creating an art deco space. Art deco is about bold statements with very broad strokes. If you think about it, that's ideal for video games. That said, the true magic of the look of the game obviously came from the artists. I can recall overhearing many debates about the differences between art nouveau and art deco. I think that sort of discussion gives you a sense of how we wound up with such a cohesive look and feel.

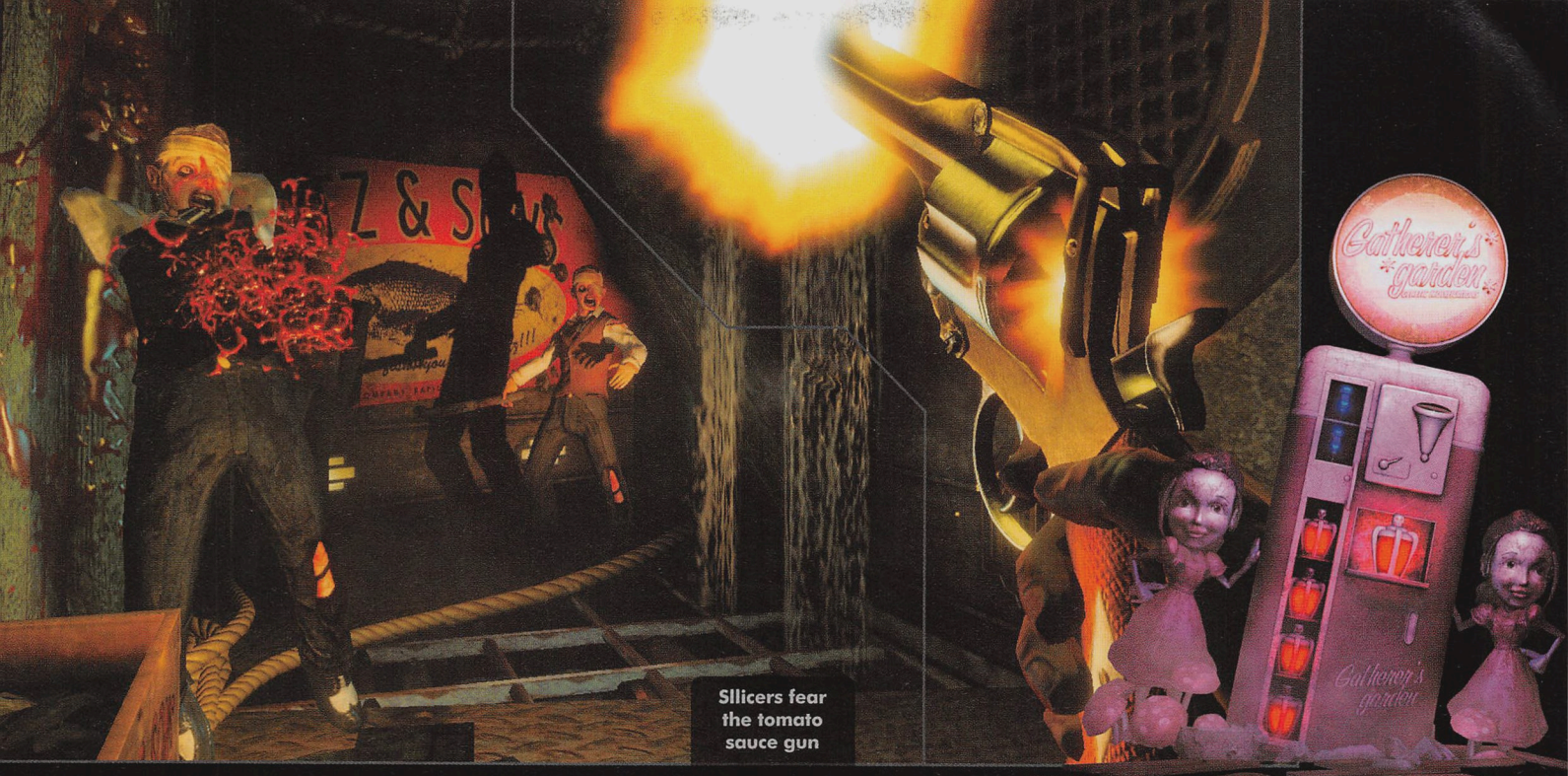
Apart from granting you extra abilities and tonics, why was the camera included in the game? Secondly, is there a reason why you didn't give players the ability to take snaps and share them with friends online?

From the very beginning, we wanted to include a research mechanic. Photography seemed like the perfect fit as it's a natural extension of your moment-to-moment gameplay in a shooter. It's also 93% less nerdy than the research system in System Shock 2. That's a fact by the way.

There are certainly some things we could have done differently. We could have offered more bonuses for exotic shots, offered more unique rewards; the list goes on and on. At the end of the day, I think it's a nice system to get lost in. Not a bad suggestion at all. In fact, we discussed features like trading pictures. Sadly, we simply did not have the time.

What would you say was the most difficult game area and/or character to create and nail down, design wise, and why?

Without a doubt the most difficult part of the game to get right was the beginning. Traditionally, the first level is a bitch to create. It was particularly difficult with BioShock though. There's just so much we had to do to get the player started on the right foot. I can think of at least four separate occasions where I felt it just wasn't going to get where it needed to be. Focus tests can be a blessing and a curse. Hearing twelve people absolutely tear your game a new ass can break your heart. At the same time, we would not be where we are if not for the feedback we received. The amount of iteration on every part of BioShock was astounding, more than any other game on which 2K Boston or 2K Australia has worked.



Sllicers fear the tomato sauce gun

We hear that you helped design the Big Daddy – can you talk us through that process? Were there any cool ideas or designs that you had to abandon?

One of the cooler parts of working at 2K Boston is being able to participate in so many different aspects of the game. We started the game with a very small design team, so I was lucky enough to be involved with just about everything. My role as a designer working on the Big Daddy was to detail their behaviours. This was a particularly rewarding process as we spent a good chunk of time in making their encounters feel right. Seeing all the little pieces from his attacks, to the camera shaking as they walk by, was like getting little gifts from your team. You come into work to work on them and see that someone has implemented a new feature and it completely re-invigorates you.

The design concept of the Big Daddies can mostly be attributed to Ken (Levine). I can remember listening to his pitch of an AI ecology years and years ago. However, it was not until Nate Wells put together some fantastic concept art that the Big Daddies truly started to come to life. It's pretty amazing to look back at some of that early concept art and realize how little their look changed. The look of the Big Daddies is probably the part of the game that has changed the least throughout the development.

STICK TO THE SCRIPT

Any game that wants you to care or connect needs to sell you its story. It needs to make you engage with the plot, the twists, the hooks, the characters, the conflict and, yes, even the love triangles. Of course, in BioShock there's not much time for your character to chase any skirts, but there are plenty of love stories and tragedies to be told throughout the halls of Rapture.

> **"cutscenes are sometimes a necessary evil"**

Presenting a linear story in games can be a real headache for the story tellers, particularly if the player simply becomes an observer during overly long or unnecessary cutscenes. In many interviews Ken Levine has made it quite clear that he despises cutscenes in games. We therefore found it interesting that a few times in BioShock the player's attention is forcefully directed to a story point, such as the Ryan confrontation or the first plasmid injection. Taking control away from the player can have the effect of making you disconnect because your gaze and actions are not under your direct control.

How difficult is it, as a designer who needs to anticipate the player's unpredictability, to get story scenes right?

Ken's not alone in his distaste for cutscenes. We all agreed early on that we would do everything we could to avoid torturing the player with what has become a crutch for developers. Sure, cutscenes have their use, but at the end of the day, I often view cutscenes as a failure of the dev team. I think it's important for developers to find new ways to get information across to the player. Simply relying on a cutscene is often giving up. Take a look at how Half Life 2 communicates information to the player. From the story to the puzzles, everything is presented in a natural, organic way that never takes control off the player.

However, cutscenes are sometimes a necessary evil. To be fair, you are correct in that there are definitely a few instances where we lock the player in place and let a scripted sequence play out. We did this just because of the sheer amount of information we had to communicate to the player. We found that without the proper introduction, players had a real hard time biting off the world of BioShock.

Think about some of the concepts you're introduced early-on. A plane crash. A Bathysphere. A utopia at the bottom of the ocean. Splicers. Plasmids. One-two-punch. Little Sisters. Big Daddies. That's just the first fifteen minutes of the game! I think it's pretty amazing that we succeeded not only in grounding people in Rapture, but by doing it with as few cutscenes as we did.

To answer the final part of your question, knowing what the player is going to be doing, grabbing their attention and holding it were some of the trickiest parts of working on BioShock. The best tool you have to get these scenes right is to simply watch as many people play your game as possible. The results are well worth the hair you'll pull out of your own head.

The Little Sisters present the game's main ethical dilemma – to harvest or save them. However, at the most basic level, it seems that you can either be evil and have no consequences (no body of the girl and a green mist obscuring the actual act) or be good and get slightly punished by receiving less Adam (you take it on faith, however, that you'll be given something nice later on). In the end there seems little difference between the two outcomes.

Can you explain why evil players are not explicitly confronted with the consequences of their actions when harvesting the Little Sisters?

That's a fair criticism. We chose to not explicitly show the harvesting onscreen for several reasons. Primarily because we felt it was far more powerful when it was presented in this abstract manner. At one point in development the Little Sisters

The Big Daddy Disco-Ball retrofit proved unpopular

would take damage from fire and it just didn't work. Not only was it frustrating that they could get caught in the crossfire it really wasn't nearly as emotionally compelling as it should have been. We wanted players to have to walk right up to the Little Sisters and stare right in their eyes while they decide their fate. This interaction was not conceived as a cheap thrill or a way to push buttons to stir controversy. Rather, it was about making decisions – truly meaningful decisions that you don't really get in games.

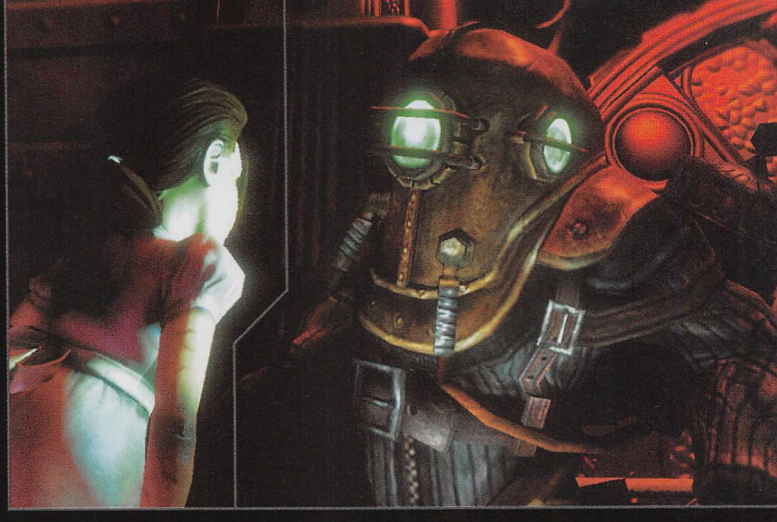
I would argue that the way we present the harvesting forces the player to confront the consequences more by denying the player information. It's about the nature of the action and not the details. It's a real shame that a lot of recent movies and games have lost sight of the fact that the viewer's/player's imagination is always going to be more shocking than what you actually put up on the screen.

come away from a game feeling like you really experienced anything if you're not picking a side. While you could argue that you agreed with neither Atlas nor Tenenbaum, but what does that really mean?

Technically, the player could abstain from harvesting or saving all but one of the Little Sisters. To some degree, that may fall somewhere in the arena of a grey choice. I think the truth of the matter is that no matter how many choices a game offers, players are always going to want more.

The script is quite massive, particularly given all of the audio logs in the game. How was it decided that the back-story would be best delivered using audio?

The use of audio logs was sort of a no-brainer for us. For one, we had experience with this method of storytelling from System Shock 2. We also had the goal to avoid cutscenes at all cost. Finally, the real beauty of the logs is that it allows the player to determine their investment in the story. There's a lot to Rapture. Ken really did a fantastic job creating a believable world. The logs are a key part of this.



Tip-Toe, Through the dead bodies..

> **"There are many moments in the game's story from which the player can derive their own meaning"**

We also noticed that the game has a rather stark black-or-white morality. For example, some players have complained that even if they kill one Little Sister, yet save all the others, they are still treated as though they are evil (getting the evil ending). How difficult is it to program for shades of grey or is that even something that you (or the team) want to see in games?

I think the real challenge with shades of grey stem from design rather than any technical issues. This is a common complaint that is voiced with games that claim to have moral choices. In a game like BioShock, what would choosing the shades of grey mean? We don't really have the option because we don't even know what that is. We want the player to be engaged. We want the player to take a stand. I just don't think you're going to

BUT WHAT ABOUT...?

Then there are all those little questions that pop up as you're playing a game like BioShock, particularly given that most of the game is open to individual interpretation. It becomes a real dart throwing exercise when discussing the game's particulars. BioShock can be approached in many ways; you can delve into the philosophy behind the game or, alternatively, just approach it at a surface level and think 'Man, some strange shit's going down here'. We decided to push for some answers to a few things that have been bugging us since completing the game... or rather, that we have obsessed over repeatedly and absolutely needed to know the answers to!

what we have here is a failure to communicate

Is it possible for you talk us through the encounter with Ryan? Was his strange behaviour at the end an attempt to break you from your conditioning? Or was he simply too proud to realise that his ideology had failed him?

This is one of the best parts of BioShock – there's room for interpretation. There are many moments in the game's story from which the player can derive their own meaning. Even though I know Ken's true intention here, I still have my own personal theory of what it all means. While I could tell you Ken's intention, I'd hate to put an end to the debate. Yours is a fine theory. I'm going to be a dick and let you decide.

What exactly is the Big Daddy? Does your character only become half of one at the end of the game?

That's one of the great mysteries of Rapture. What exactly is behind the mask? Unfortunately, that's a topic we'll continue to keep quiet on. Perhaps if there's a BioShock 2...

To answer the second part of the question, Jack, your character, doesn't go through the normal process someone (or something!) would to become a Big Daddy.

When you get to turn into a Big Daddy, the potential at this point of the game is almost limitless – perhaps an outside foray (seeing as you witness a Big Daddy walking the ocean floor) or even a heart-stopping end sequence that utilises your Big Daddy powers (the rush attack etc.). Why were some of these options not explored in the game?

The goal of the sequence where the player dons the Big Daddy suit was to make the player really feel like they were a Big Daddy. The heart of this, at least to me, isn't so much about drilling people in the chest or shoving grenades up splicers' asses. It's about protecting the Little Sisters. Admittedly, this is not the first time we've heard this request.

We actually wanted to give the player some of the Big Daddy's powers. The reason we didn't was mostly because we were afraid to throw a curveball at the player at the very end. We chose (arguably poorly) to let the player continue to use all their tools to fend off the splicers and see the Little Sisters safely through the Proving Grounds.

Personally, I usually hate it when you finish a game and find yourself with a full arsenal of weapons and ammo that you've been stockpiling. You sort of feel cheated that you never really got the chance to go out with a bang. The Proving Grounds is a great opportunity to go nuts with all your tools one last time.

Giving the player uber Big Daddy powers would have meant the game would suddenly become something very different. Something that I feel could have alienated a lot of players. That said, I realize that not paying off this expectation was probably a mistake.

Player expectations can be a tricky thing though. Just because a player expects something to happen doesn't mean you always want to

Try all you like Jesse - you're unlikely to score a role in the next Predator film

fulfil that expectation. For example, one question we frequently got early on was "what happens when you shoot a window to the ocean?" The answer is nothing, it's bullet-proof. While your first instinct as a player is to expect the glass to shatter and the ocean to come flooding in. The problem is that this sucks for gameplay. Would you really want to die every time you (or a splicer) missed a shot?

Why the decision to opt with the End Boss (Fontaine) fight for the third act of the game? We only ask because to some people this almost seems incongruous to the rest of the experience. Was the ending difficult to plan and present?

Obviously we needed to actually throw down with Fontaine since you don't fight Ryan. We discussed this fight at great length. We talked about just about every type of fight you can imagine. At the end of the day we decided that to go with a more traditional boss fight because players just "get" that.

I understand why it could seem out of place to some players. The truth of the matter is I think it's a rare thing to find a game that gets the end right. I think Zelda OoT was the last game I played where the end actually felt truly satisfying. Maybe that's just me though.

All that said, the fight with Fontaine is one of the most consistent gripes we get. It's pretty clear that we missed the mark in a lot of respects. Lesson learned.

A major spoiler is that all along you've been manipulated and conditioned by the phrase 'would you kindly', which brings to light the fact that for so long we've just accepted what games tell us to do. Was that revelation a comment on games themselves and how players are always complicit when it comes to blindly following in-game instructions?

This is another example of the beauty of interpretation in BioShock. In this particular case I think I can get away with not being so vague. In short, you're right on the money. The whole "Manchurian Candidate" angle led to a fascinating commentary on players' free will (or lack thereof) in games. Props to you for picking up on it.

Finally, thank you very much for your time and effort.

Thank you! It's refreshing to have a deep discussion about the game that goes beyond "how many levels are there?" This is truly thought-provoking stuff. Thanks for elevating the discussion!

GETTING OVER THE SHOCK

It is our opinion that BioShock is a masterpiece, the kind of game that you'll talk about favourably in ten years time and the type of experience that sits right up there with going to see a blockbuster movie or reading the latest novel from your favourite author. It's not, however, perfect, and it's these small impurities that give us the opportunity to critique and query. To some people these imperfections are endearing while to others they are game-breaking. Giving 2k Boston/2K Australia a chance to speak deeply about their game has certainly shown, in this case, that they can be open and honest about the process, as well as willing to face any failures identified by the audience that interact with their product.

We hope that these answers have helped you to gain an insight into the process of making games in general. We also hope that some of your own niggles and/or questions have been covered here. Ultimately, we hope that you get the inspiration to go to your games collection, grab your copy of BioShock and sit down with it for a second, or even third, time. Rapture awaits; would you kindly indulge us? «

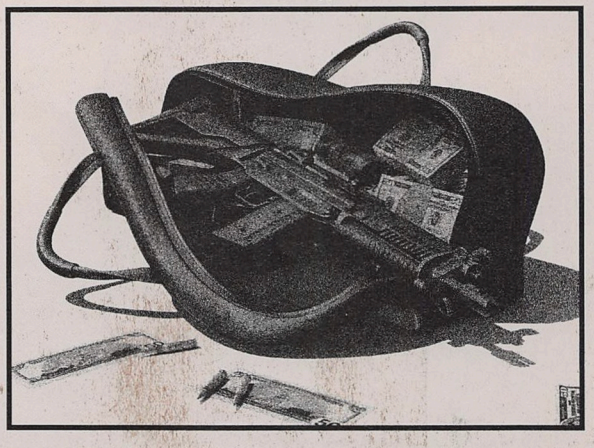
The Worst of '07

All things considered, 2007 is going to be remembered (quite possibly in a retro piece in Hyper #248) as a hell of a good year for gaming. In between our grandmas beating us at Wii Bowling and every single last person in the world buying a DS, games like BioShock, Super Mario Galaxy and Call of Duty 4 blew off so many socks they created a worldwide sock shortage. But not all was well across the land, as more and more game developers this year showed an inability to properly market a game, gauge people's earnings or explain why their consoles were constantly dying. And so we must stop and remember the worst gaming moments of 2007, in the hope that the industry can move past them in 2008.

by James O'Connor

Kane & Lynch Controversy

ONE OF THE MOST PUBLICISED videogame 'events' of the year, the Kane and Lynch incident made us all double-check our sources for gaming information. In late November, long-time Gamespot contributor Jeff Gerstmann was unceremoniously fired from the site, finding himself locked outside his office. Rumours popped up immediately that Gamespot owners CNet Networks had dropped him in connection to his 6.0 review of 'Kane and Lynch: Dead Men', which had been heavily advertised all over the site, as Eidos declared intentions to cut future advertising. Game fans, who had been raging at Gerstmann for an entire year over his 8.8 review of Twilight Princess, were of course very upset about this, god bless 'em. Furthermore, the game's site posted misleading extracts from articles published about the game, indicating 5-star ratings from sources that had actually given the game average reviews. Discussing this whole incident in terms of absolutes is difficult - if it's not true, we'd be accusing a lot of people of some pretty serious stuff,

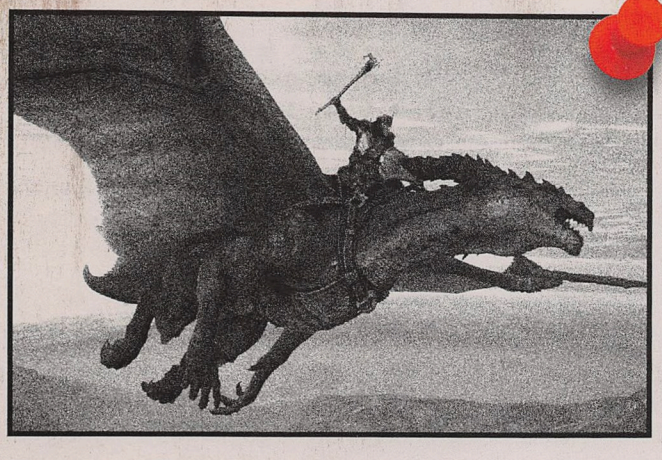


but if it is true, it seems saying anything bad about Eidos gets your throat slit in your sleep. Certainly Hyper would never cave to advertiser pressure and misinform you of a game's quality (although for the record we now all feel this is the best game ever made). In any case, there's no question this has badly damaged the game's reputation, as well as those of Eidos and IO Interactive.

Wii ARE NOT AMUSED

Using 'Wii' to mean 'we'? Still kind of cute. Urination jokes? Not so much. With the Wii still new early this year, the jokes were flowing like...wiine. It has slowed down a bit now, as the console has become a household name, but for a while there you couldn't pick up a controller without someone warning you not to "shake your Wii stick too hard". My family found immense delight at a recent Christmas event when it was realised that the hand movements in one of Mario Party 8's mini-games were similar to those involved in having a wank.

There was also the tragic incident of Jennifer Strange, who in January 2007 died from water intoxication after entering a local radio station's 'Hold Your Wee for a Wii' contest. The contest involved drinking a stupid amount of water while not going to the toilet over a long period of time, and the hosts, who were subsequently fired, claimed they never realised that death from drinking too much water was possible. Although clearly not Nintendo's fault in any way, it did make gamers over the world feel a pang of sadness every time we picked up our Wii remotes for a while.

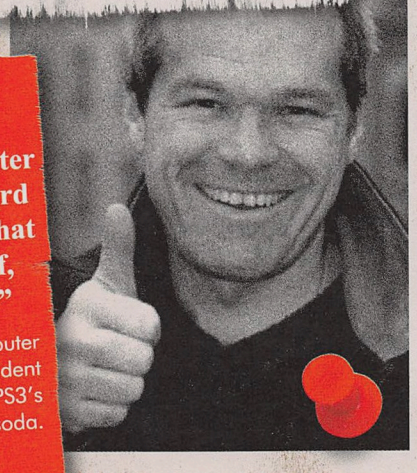


Lair Reviewer's Guide Tells Journalists That They're Wrong

IN AUGUST 2007, FACTOR 5'S EXPECTED hit Lair hit the PS3 to absolutely dismal reviews (IGN's 4.9 in particular led to a brief 'Factor 4.9 lololSOFUNNY' internet obsession). Convinced that members of the media simply didn't know how to handle the game's horrific tilt controls, Sony decided to send out 'Reviewer's Guides' to major media outlets in an effort to better educate people on how to see the positives of Lair, which, as I recall, went something like this:

Dear Esteemed Game Journalist,
We have noted a number of flaws in your review of upcoming hit Lair for the Playstation 3 Super Computer and would like to advise you of your errors:
-The game is not 'almost impossible to control'; it is likely that you are either not an experienced pilot or have recently suffered a brain tumor. Please amend your review to indicate this.
-You describe the dragon's movement as 'chuggy'. However dragons do not really exist so there is no definite way of knowing how they move, and we felt making them chug was the most immersive route.
-You describe our game as 'deeply disappointing'. We would like to put it you that this was also your mother's initial reaction to your birth, which incidentally occurred after we had sex with her, which didn't disappoint her at all, and neither did Lair. Just sayin'.

Of course, this has simply damaged the game's reputation even further, and totally drew attention away from the release of the similar, but vastly superior, Warhawk.

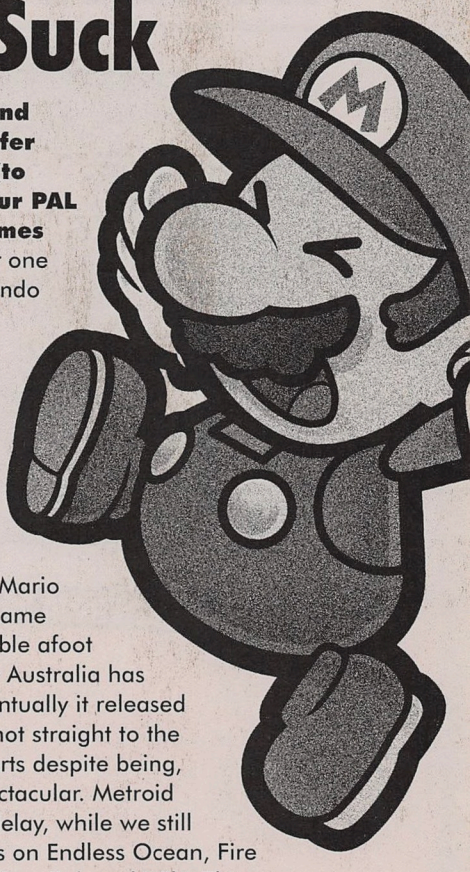


DUMB EXEC QUOTES FROM 2007

"It has been rather like taking a bottle of soda water and we've shaken it so hard over the last six months that when we take the cork off, it's just going to explode."

-David Reeves, Sony Computer Entertainment Europe president and CEO, discusses the PS3's late European launch; soda.

Wii PAL Release Dates Suck

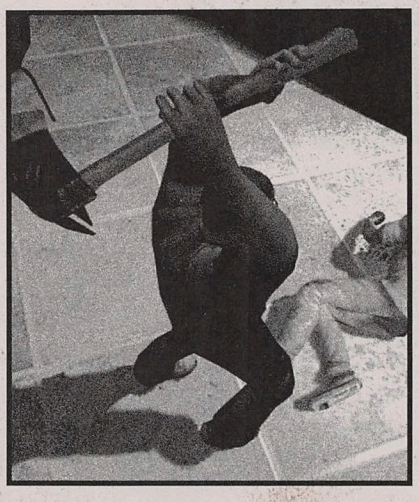


While the 360, PS3 and handheld consoles offer region-free gaming (to varying degrees), your PAL Wii will only play games from PAL regions. For one reason or another, Nintendo Australia decided they didn't want us playing Super Paper Mario in April, leaving Wii owners with nothing to do but go outside and watch the trees turn orange. By the time they were up to their knees in snow and Mario still hadn't arrived, it became clear that there was trouble afoot (especially since typically Australia has little to no snowfall). Eventually it released in late September and shot straight to the top of the Australian charts despite being, honestly, not all that spectacular. Metroid Prime 3 also saw a fair delay, while we still haven't gotten our hands on Endless Ocean, Fire Emblem, Battalion Wars 2 or Zak and Wiki. Things aren't looking good for 2008, either. Super Smash Bros Brawl still has no set PAL release date, despite a confirmed February 10 US release and incredible anticipation. On the plus side, we got Sin & Punishment on the Virtual Console four days before the US, and a mere seven years after Japan. Stick that in your pipe and smoke it, yanks!

UWE BOLL MAKES POSTAL MOVIE

The opening of this movie, released on the internet, features two terrorists, having just hi-jacked Flight 93 on September 11, realising that Osama has not promised them enough unspoiled virgins in the afterlife. Disillusioned, they decide to take the plane to Hawaii instead, but are overcome by the passengers and crash the plane. This is, going by reports of those who have seen it, easily the highlight of the film, which was released in Germany in October. While Uwe Boll used to simply be a terrible director with a videogame obsession, the man has used his inability to direct to gain popularity and get the whole community watching him, meaning that his projects always get far, far more attention then they deserve. In fact I feel an ironic sort of guilt even writing this and drawing attention to Postal, as people will inevitably see it just to get an idea of how bad it really is, although I'm sure if I hadn't written this he would have gone out and beaten up Quentin Tarantino for some publicity (which he deserves after Death Proof anyway).

MANHUNT 2 BANNED EVERYWHERE



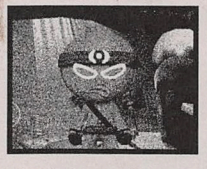
In June 2007, Manhunt 2 was scheduled for a worldwide release on the PS2, Wii and PSP. When put up for classification, however, the game found itself with an Adult's Only rating in the US (meaning that Nintendo and Sony refused to release it) and flat-out denied classification in the UK. Rockstar went back to the drawing board and cut it back to an NC-17 release, and are still, at the time of writing, battling to get their game unbanned in the UK.

Rockstar must have realised quite early on in development that this would happen. It was, after all, scheduled to be the first ever game that allowed people to use their Wii remotes to rip off the testicles of hardened criminals. It's that kind of move, the sacrifice of practicality in the character's attacks in preference of ridiculous brutality, that makes the Manhunt games so objectionable. Hyper's very own editor, Daniel Wilks, has been unable to pry the tinfoil hat off his head since the game was announced, convinced that the game was designed to draw attention away from any potential controversy GTA IV might incur. Of course, that didn't exactly work out, as GTA IV has been delayed until April 2008, and the awful reviews and publicity Manhunt 2 has gotten has ensured that nobody wants it.

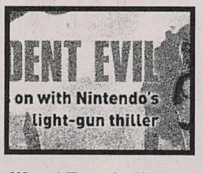
DUMB EXEC QUOTES FROM 2007

"But if your refrigerator's full, you've got to pull something out and put something else back in. That's just the normal issue of space. I mean, really, are you using every single thing on there?"

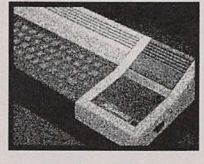
-Perrin Kaplan, Nintendo PR, discusses the Wii's lack of memory, while also pre-empting any 'women belong in the kitchen' comments- clearly this woman has never actually used a fridge.



Worst Game of 2007: The heaping loads of Wii shovelware that get released every other day. Special mention goes to Ninjabread Man, because the vast amount of second-hand copies popping up shows that people actually bought it.



Worst Typo in Hyper of 2007: Has to go to the three cover-typos: Excite Truck being referred to as 'The spiritual successor to Excite Truck', and Issue 171's misspelling of 'finally' and 'thriller'. Don't worry, we'll make suer to pay more attentioon from now on>



Worst Console of 2007: The Mattel Aquarius, which struggled through its 24th year without a game release by not managing a single reported sale. Poor form, Mattel.

DUMB EXEC QUOTES FROM 2007

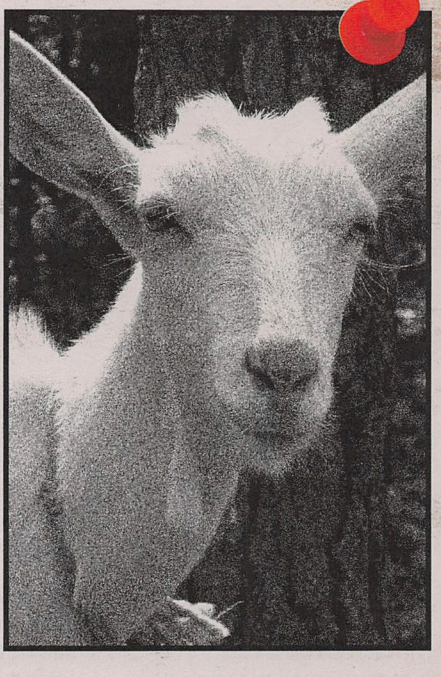
"You can expect virtually every one of those properties will be exploited on an annual or close to annual basis."

-Robert Kotick, Activision CEO, discusses the future of their properties. Look out for Guitar Hero 7: The Songs We Haven't Already Done coming soon.

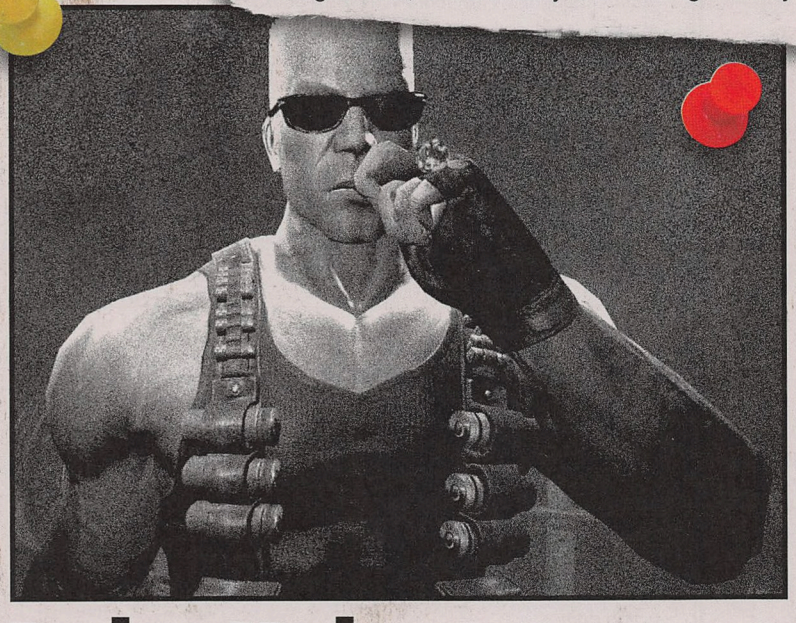
PS3 launches in Australia, costs seventy-six million dollars (well, a thousand)

$999 IS A LOT OF MONEY these days. Back in March, it could buy you an XBox 360 and most of a Wii. It could feed your entire family for quite a long time. It could get you eight liters of petrol (nine on a Wednesday). And it could also net you a brand new PS3 with a 60 gig hard-drive. The problem Sony faced here is that the console, broken down into its various parts, is easily worth $1000, and was actually selling at a loss. It didn't have a bad launch over here, selling around 20,000 consoles, but still dragged far behind the XBox 360 and Wii launches, both record breakers with over 30,000 consoles sold. Sony tried a few moves, packing in the console's two most acclaimed games for free with the console and then eventually releasing a 40 gig model for $699, but still people don't want to pay for the damn thing. Maybe releasing more than three or so really good exclusive games would have been a good idea, but hey, I'm no economist. Come the release of Metal Gear Solid 4 in 2008 the PS3 will almost certainly sell a shitload of consoles, but in 2007 the console struggled to compete.

SONY DECAPITATES GOAT IN ATTEMPT TO GAIN PUBLIC APPROVAL



For the launch of God of War II in Europe, the bright sparks at Sony figured the best way to market a game that dealt heavily with Greek mythology would be the travel to Athens and hold a party where the guests were invited to eat warm offal out of the decapitated corpse of a goat. You'd think, looking at the previous sentence, someone at Sony would have sat down for a moment and thought "wait, this is a really bad idea", but apparently not. There were also topless women wandering about everywhere, giving the numerous detractors even more fodder to condemn Sony. Details of the event were plastered all over Official Playstation Magazine UK, although it was quickly pulled from the shelves once Sony realised they'd made a huge mistake. In 2008, look for Sony's plans to advertise Killzone 2 using sodomy somehow.



Duke Nukem Forever Teaser Hits

In December 2007, 3-D Realms decided that, after ten years of development time, we were entitled to a teaser trailer for their latest game. And it was awful. Painfully awful. A poorly rendered Duke informs us with the world's worst voice-acting that he's "looking for some alien toilet to plug his bricks". I'm not even sure what that's supposed to mean. 3-D Realms have gotten themselves into a nice little system. They've been working on the same game for over ten years now, having published a few games but developed nothing else, and yet they still stay in business. Meanwhile, Acclaim tumbled after a few bad releases, the mighty Atari is on its last legs and Ubisoft just narrowly avoided an EA buy-out recently because of the success of Assassin's Creed. It's a sort of baffling element to the industry that has been particularly prevalent this year. Zoonami, for instance, the development company formed in 2000 by Martin Hollis, the director and producer of Goldeneye on the Nintendo 64, released their first game this year, Zendoku, a weird sudoku game, yet seems to be in no financial difficulty despite having no games announced on the horizon. It seems to me it would be much wiser for 3-D Realms to never, ever finish Duke Nukem Forever- it can't fail if it's never released.

Virginia Tech Massacre Spawns Game; Jack Thompson Rant

The Virginia Tech Massacre on April 16 2007 was a terrible tragedy. America's worst ever school shooting resulted in the deaths of 32 people, with 23 others wounded. From this horrific event spawned two further examples of how depraved mankind can be. The first was 21-year-old Australia man Ryan Lambourn's videogame simulation of the event, posted on his own site and on Newgrounds (Ryan, if you're reading this, you are a douchebag), while the second involved our old friend Jack Thompson. While Ryan has been all but forgotten about and has crawled back into the dark corner of his bedroom, Jack Thompson's crusade to put a stop to videogames doesn't look likely to end soon. Thompson appeared on Fox News the very day the shootings occurred and tried to pin the incident on videogames. Later on it was discovered that shooter Seung-Hui Cho didn't really play videogames, but this didn't stop Thompson from claiming that these murder simulators were what encouraged and trained him to kill. I think by now, if you've followed videogame news, you're getting a little tired of hearing about Jack Thompson, but the fact is the more he gets discredited in major publications the weaker his word becomes. Hopefully 2008 will be a largely Jack Thompson-free year.

DUMB EXEC QUOTES FROM 2007

"Y'know, things break."

-Peter Moore discusses the XBox360's amazing breakdown rate. They sure do, Pete. With alarming regularity!

MAIL HYPER!

POSTAL:
78 Renwick St. Redfern, NSW
2016 Australia

EMAIL:
freakscene@next.com.au

WHAT CONSOLE?

I've been meaning to complain about your practice of not mentioning the platform used for your reviews of multi-platform games for some time. This is me getting off my arse and doing something beyond mumbling to myself in a grumpy tone.

Executive summary: How are readers supposed to know what version of the game you are reviewing?

In issue 171 did you review Beowulf on the PSP or the PS3?

Which machine did use for the review of NFS: ProStreet – was it the DS, PSP, PS2, PC, Wii, 360 or PS3? I would suggest there are perhaps some differences between the versions. In fact I'd suggest a number of them were developed by different companies! You mention Forza 2 in the review – does that mean it's a 360 review?

WWE Smackdown vs RAW 2008 is another insanely multi-platform game that we are left to guess about the version that Hyper played. The argument also applies to a lesser extent, to Kane & Lynch, COD4, and Blacksite: Area 51.

To be fair, the Orange Box review referenced the differences between the 360 and PC versions of Portal. Well done that man Mr. Branscombe.

Perhaps you could consider adding something to indicate the platform you have reviewed. Maybe a nice red circle around the platform name(s)?

In other news, do you have any idea why it takes so long for Hyper to get across the Tasman to "sunny" New Zealand? I picked up issue 171 on (about) Jan 3rd and see on the back page that issue 172 is on sale in Oz on Jan 2nd! My friendly newsagent expects 172 on his shelf around Jan 28th!

I'm used to seeing magazines from the UK arriving so many months late that, in this exciting new world of websites and podcasts, their content is laughably out of date, but PLEASE can you work hard to stop Hyper from falling into the same trap. Surely somebody somewhere can get the magazine into NZ stores a little quicker?

Thanks for listening.

Love 'n kisses,

Kerry

This is a topic that we've tried to address as best we can in the past, but it really seems that we can't win when it comes to listing the consoles that a particular game we are reviewing is available on.

In the past we've had complaints from readers if we only list the version of the game that is being reviewed – and we've also had complaints if we list every platform that the game is available on. As you say, we do often mention what versions we're playing in the text of the review, but I think perhaps we need a new way of representing what consoles the game is available on and which we're reviewing.

We like your idea of having a big red indicator on the console of choice; perhaps we will have to get Malky working on something like that for the coming issues...

As for the NFS: Pro Street review, we played that on both PlayStation 3 and Xbox 360, and we also had a look at the PC version for comparison. We didn't take the handheld versions into account, as they were never made available to us for review, but if they're anything like the disappointing home console versions, then we'd suggest trying before you buy.

WWE: Smackdown vs Raw 2008, Kane & Lynch and Blacksite: Area

Winners!

HYPER 171 HAZE

Why is the theme from Shaft the greatest piece of Oscar winning music ever?

"Because sadly, the theme from The Fresh Prince of Bel-Air never won an Oscar!"
- Ben Moore, Research, VIC.

"Because unlike the theme from Shaft, I can count the number of times I've gotten laid to the theme from Shindler's List on only one hand."
- Julian Ramsay, Cooks Hill, NSW.

- Andrew Bodsworth, Cheltenham, VIC.
- Paul Wyatt, Worongary, QLD.
- Greg Tyson, Robina, QLD.
- Jamie McGraw, Burnett Heads, QLD.
- Cameron Masci, Warrandyte, VIC.
- Tony Ward, Anstead, QLD.

HYPER 172 FEEDBACK

As always, you were unflinching in telling us what you though of the last issue. Here is some of what you had to say on the subject of Issue 172, the Hyper 2007 Yearbook.

concrete donkey
its not a bad issue. shame there's not some more reviews.. like an eternal sonata review. would've preferred less anime/dvd coverage in exchange for reviews. but its pretty good. the 101 games to own is a great feature. I am missing a couple there...

winter_combat_knight
Great issue! You guys are legends! I wasn't too excited about the Mario feature though. It's just that i think most of us know the history of Mario Bros. already and it is kind of a boring topic. But well written Mr. Williams. Overall, nice layout, good reviews and good mailbag.

Tsplodey
Pretty good issue, I read all of it rather quickly (within 3 days), which is how I judge how much I liked it. The articles were good, but I agree it could've used more reviews. Was a little weird not having a News section either but if there's nothing to report there's nothing to report I guess. 9.5/10.

Laz-ers
Thoroughly enjoyed this issue; SMG review was spot on and 'the history of Mario' section was an interesting read to top off the SMG review (especially the thing on The Great Giana Sisters, what a rip off eh?). Sorry guys, don't really agree with your top 10 anime releases though...

Sweating Bullets
Devil May Cry didn't make the top 100 games to own and God of War made it. Drats! I thought Devil May Cry was a huge leap in the genre of action games.

UKG
The graphics review score [Super Mario Galaxy] received was too high in my opinion. (95) better than mass effect and just under crysis how does that work out??

losturtle
That's ridiculous, graphics are scored relevant to the system they're on. There's absolutely no way in hell the Wii will EVER produce anything close to the 360 or a high end gaming PC. On the basis of Wii though, there is no game out there that looks better than Galaxy.

drzaius
GREAT issue! I hope we get a similarly structured 'yearbook' each year.

Reuen SpACeMuNKy
Good issue besides leaving out forum talk or whatever its called. It also seemed like there was a very small amount of reviews which seemed a little strange.

I liked how you took the piss out of the cover spelling mistakes from last issue though.

51 were all reviewed on Xbox 360, while Call of Duty 4 was checked out on both PC and consoles.

On the topic of Hyper taking an eternity to make it across the Tasman, we are aware of how long it takes, but unfortunately there's not much we can do about it. Magazines are sent via surface mail when they travel overseas, and that means that they are loaded into a big ship and sent slowly across the ocean.

Until Star Trek-style teleportation systems become the standard for international mail carriers, I'm afraid that Hyper is always going to arrive a little bit later on New Zealand shores – but surely it's worth the wait!

NON-WARCRAFT FANS

I've been concerned about the rising popularity of World of Warcraft for quite some time now, and your recent article regarding said game merely confirms my suspicions.

As WOW gets more and more popular, Blizzard invests more and more of its time, money and effort into maintaining its 9 million + consumer/fan base, which I know is a worthy investment. However, I feel that this is forcing Blizzard to neglect its other two franchises, Diablo and StarCraft.

Although StarCraft has achieved a successful sequel after 10 years of staunch fanbase support around the world (especially in South Korea), Diablo has been unnaturally dormant since Lord of Destruction in 2001. Not that this has dampened the fan base. Simply type "Diablo 3" into a search engine and you'll find all those desperately waiting for the third instalment.

I don't doubt that Blizzard will make a Diablo 3 and maybe even a Diablo or StarCraft MMORPG, I just wish they would hurry up and remember their non-Warcraft fans

Popdart

It's true Popdart. With more than nine million paying customers living a virtual existence in the land of Azeroth, Blizzard are definitely having to dedicate more time, money and manpower than ever before to maintaining the World of WarCraft.

To keep WOW players happy, they have to constantly monitor the game and interact with the community, while also continue to develop new expansions, patches and tweaks in order to satisfy the insatiable demand for fresh content delivered regularly and in large doses.

This has had an impact on all of Blizzard's other franchises, in fact if you take a look at Blizzard's releases over the past few years, they haven't put out a single game that wasn't related to World of WarCraft since 2003.

The one game that they had been working on during that time was StarCraft Ghost, and that was put on indefinite postponement quite some time ago. They are of course working on StarCraft 2, and are promising a few more MMORPGs as well, but we do wish that they'd work a little more variety into their production schedule. Some new IPs wouldn't go astray either!

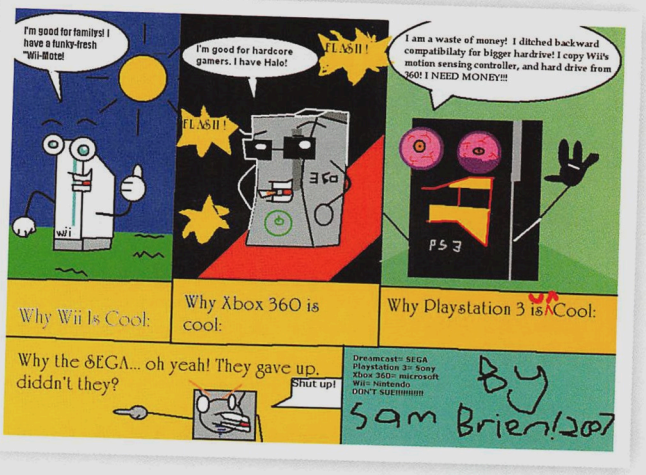
TEH ARTS!

Dear Hyper Peoples,

Since you humans mentioned in issue 170 that you LOVE MS Paint comics based on games, I decided to do the next best thing: do one on GAMING CONSOLES!!! I know, it's not on games, but, well, it's really hard to do a Mario World 2: Yoshi's Island comic without a scanner, or a crayon/felt-tip pen feature on paint!

Lots O' Love,

'Dumbo' Brien(NO O'S!!!).



SWEARY PERSON

Metroid prime 3. It's one of the most interesting games of all time I'd say. Never before have I ever hated yet loved a game so much in my entire life.

I recently picked up Metroid for my Wii and immediately fell in love, I mean c'mon, its freakin' awesome. I got to that floating city in the sky level and got up to that big metal drone boss who put up quite a fight. I had easily figured out how to kill the thing, but it was a lot easier said than done. The guy just kept running around and jumping and shooting huge ass fireballs at me when I had to try and shoot three skinny little antenna things poking out from his head! Whenever I shot one down, the other one that I had previously shot down popped back up. It was complete bullplop.

It made me angry, it made my blood boil and made me want to yell out with rage! I started yelling violently at the TV spitting insults like "WHY DONT YOU [censored] STOP RUNNING AND JUMPING AROUND SO I CAN SHOOT YOU, YOU [censored] ENERGETIC [censored]!!!!

I'm not usually a sweary person but this boss was ridiculous. So it got me wondering... you guys at hyper play a lot of video games, so I guess you must get this sort of thing a lot. I just wanted to know what's your best insult you've ever given to a game when it starts to piss you off? I'm sure there's gotta be some corkers out there, and I'm pretty sure it helps to beat those cheap-ass bosses that just don't quit.

Hughman

Gaming is a fantastic pastime, and yet we agree that it can often become more frustrating than fun, particularly when the game's design seems to be conspiring against you to make you fail.

Playing so many games every month, we see the best and worst of it – and we do indeed have a few corking insults that we like to hurl at any games foolish enough to upset us, we think the best would have to be: "You devilish cad!" or perhaps "You ghoulish, insensitive beast of a game!".

They're the ones most often heard uttered in the Hyper offices, although only if we're really angry – we don't usually stoop to such gutter talk.

A QUICK NOTE

Just a quick note, I've been reading Hyper for a year now, and it's a great read. Gives me something to do between finishing Resident Evil 4 over and over.

Which will more than likely be the gamers who go out and buy the next 20 FPS remakes, or the newest MMORPG. We are living in a "Gaming World" with ever-increasing graphics, sound and more than anything, consumerism. As gamers, we are faced with endless shelves of choice. You might have the new flashy graphics of the PS3, but honestly, who wants to shell out $699 when you can nearly buy 2 Xbox 360's, that quite honestly have better games, and near damn better graphics in some aspects. Then on the next shelf you might have the Xbox 360 games, lined up in all their glory, with such landslide titles as Halo 3, Bioshock, and CoD4 just to name a few. Then, hidden away like a horse with the Flu, you have the Wii games. With few stand out titles, but a lot of pick up and play capabilities, the latter being Nintendo's main drive with the Wii.

Currently, it seems the general

CAPTION THIS!

This month's best of a bad bunch comes from the dualistically named **Danielo Danielo** and it game us a chuckle (or two)

Link's Vasectomy Training

FORUM TALK

Super Mario
Where to meet chicks
I fail at pubs and clubs as I'm not great at holding conversations with strangers, I was thinking of taking a page out of Artemis' book and joining a dance club, I used to do ballroom dancing and hooked up with a few chicks from there then I stopped when I was dating a girl. Any ideas?

Louis
Go to arty people's house parties and pretend you like Captain Beefheart.

Mouldy
Perhaps Super Mario should post a pic of himself so we can get an idea of the damage we're dealing with here.

bi-mon-sci-fi-con
Or one other thing you can do is lower your standards right down, just so you can get a nut off. Then your confidence will begin to build, and eventually you can move up into hoodrat territory!

Jawbreaker982
Local supermarket, Tuesday night from 7-8. Three bananas clearly visible in your trolley. The ladies do the rest.

IRS
Take note for this to work you have to put the bananas in the baby seat compartment. Depending on if they are faced up or faced down means you are looking for a guy or a girl, but I can't remember which way around it goes.

Super Mario
I'm going out with a real scrapper on Friday, but she's got hot swinger friends...

UC1
The official Soul Calibur 4 thread
Two new characters have just been announced. VADER AND FREAKING YODA!

Also just a rumour, apparently Yoda is exclusive to the 360 version and Vader is exclusive to the PS3 version, but you can download any characters from XBL or PSN.

Borgster101
The official Soul Calibur 4 thread
Soul Calibur the home of random out of place characters confirmed now? It happened in SC2, but that was kind of a one off, not anymore!

Better than Spartan in DOA4 though...

StompBrother
Omega 5
It's here! Gave it a quick go... man it's hard. It's certainly unique and Forgotten Worlds fans will have a blast. I couldn't pass the first level. You only have one life bar and 2 continues.

TrinityJayOne
Only played the trial so far, but I quite like what I'm seeing. I would've liked the view to be a bit more zoomed out, but that would detract from the pretty visuals... Will probably pick this up at the same time as Rez HD, if not sooner.

hyperactive.com.au

idea when "creating" a new game is to take some flashy graphics, average gameplay, and 500 too many guns. Couple this with increasing game prices, and it seems we are all faced with a problem. Why should us, as gamers, and the general consumer of the product, pay upwards of $95 to play something that we've probably played before, with a different title? I honestly think it is time companies throw out the old moulds that they are basing everything on and make something UNIQUE! Because frankly, rehashes and remakes can only entertain people for so long. Right?

Rehashes and remakes can only entertain people for so long, and to tell you the truth, we think that the day that all of these endlessly recycled ideas will cease being commercially viable is closer than most game publishers think.

With many publishers forcibly pumping out sequel after sequel in their most popular franchises, often with only superficial differences, there has to be a saturation point at which the game players just stop buying.

We know that we get tired of seeing the same ancient concepts reused month after month, year after year – and paying as much as $119.95 per game is just an unacceptable proposition for something we played only months before, just with a different title.

Games publishers had best start thinking about game development as a creative process where the outcome is a good game, rather than a business process where the outcome is a commodity to be exploited.

If they don't, they risk losing the markets that they've worked hard to establish in the first place.

THANKS FOR ALL THE FISH

I shall try to keep this short, but I thought I might add my opinion on the possible change to your review scores. First of all I don't like change, routine is good, but in the grand scheme of things that's a pretty piss poor argument. So I will try another way, I have read Hyper from day one, and I think Lord Seafood (for any new readers, one Elliot Fish) is the best game reviewers going around (good to see him back in Hyper!).

Having read his work over the years I have learnt were my interest/opinion/likes/dislikes on games lay in comparison to his, what I find is that final scores don't quite mean as much and I feel that you can get away with scores out of 10. That only helps though if you know the writers style/interests, and now that there seems to be a lot of new writers for you mag, and with the amount of games being released over so many platforms, and with only so much space for reviews it is resulting in a lot of one page per game articles.

I feel that a score out of 100 just gives the writer that little more room to express his opinion without having to use words. I know that scores are not an exact science and until you learn a writer's traits you still can have the same problem but I think that they are an important tool and that they can often be as important as the writing (especially on impulse buys when you flick through the mag in the shop as you haven't got yours in the mail yet, hate that) and with the wealth of good quality games out there and only so much coin in one's pocket the more information to the buyer the better.

Anyways that's my rant, there is more but I cant think of how to put into words and I guess that is why I read reviews and not write them, I hope you can see were I'm coming from and wish every one a safe Xmas,

Thanks for your time.

Brad

Thanks for your opinion Brad. We know how you feel about becoming attached to a particular reviewer. We all love Eliot's work here at Hyper HQ, and we know our readers love to see him back in the pages of the magazine. We'll definitely work on getting him in here more regularly in 2008.

Anyway, on to the point at hand. Will we or won't we stick with a one hundred percent system, or will we adopt a simpler 10/10 system? We think it's fairly safe to call this competition between two scoring formats closed, as we feel that Hyper's readers have spoken.

We've got a lot of mail regarding a possible change of ratings systems, and although there was a lot of support for a 10/10 system, the classic 100/100 did manage to edge it out in the popularity polls.

One particular poll, posted on our community forum (www.hyperactive.com.au), pretty much says it all – with over 70% of respondents saying that they prefer to stick with the old system rather than change to a new one.

So don't worry Brad, and the many Hyper readers who voted to keep Hyper reviews being marked out of a hundred, we don't think anything's going to change, at least for the foreseeable future.

TOM DELONGE
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LAND OF THE RISING FUN

Jonti Davies on games and life in Japan.

(top and above left) Mojib Ribbon (above middle and right) Mojipittan

I always get the urge at this time of year to take my Japanese education more seriously. With new resolve and a new year waiting, I start to make plans to dramatically and consistently improve my Japanese language skills over the next 12 months – but most years I end up freewheeling, just picking up new vocabulary by accident. Well, not this year. Besides everyday Japanese conversation with the missus, I've planned a strict – but fun – daily regime of study. It centres on games, you see. So if you fancy increasing your Japanese ability during 2008, play along with me. Here's how it will work:

Morning class: vocabulary building

This course involves Namco's excellent Mojipittan. Any version of the game will suffice – you can pick up PS2 Mojipittan for ¥1500 here in Japan, although I'm particularly fond of the DS edition for its portability and touchpen interface. In Mojipittan you simply need to lay hiragana cards next to each other so as to form polysyllabic words – words of two syllables are acceptable, but if you can construct longer ones you'll get bigger points bonuses. The cards need to be fit inside grids, though, and there are limitations unique to each level, with some restricting your selection of cards and others demanding that you finish on a predefined syllable ending. The key to this education is to complete a stage – any stage – at which point you'll be given the opportunity to review a list of the words you formed (whether you put them together deliberately or haphazardly is irrelevant). Each word is supplied with a brief definition, which is what you need to jot down on your memo pad. Review, remember and repeat every morning before work.

Afternoon class: reading

The afternoon course can be completed with virtually any Japanese release of any game. Just look at those kanji characters; whenever you find ones that are impossible to read, look them up (using radicals) in a Japanese-English dictionary. Make a quick note of each new word you discover, and then review your notes at the end of a session. This will work particularly well if you're playing a game that you really want to understand, something that seems to have hidden depth... If it really does have some fascinating concealed meaning, you'll find the afternoon course immensely satisfying (and if it turns out to be a load of geeky crap, you'll find it massively disappointing – but those are the breaks). The important thing is gradually to become able to read more quickly and encounter fewer incomprehensible kanji characters.

Evening class: writing and culture

For the evening class you'll need a copy of Mojib Ribbon on the PS2. This is your chance to relax and refine your shodo skills. Shodo is Japanese calligraphy, and calligraphy is a fancy-pants writing style. Mojib Ribbon asks you to write lyrics in response to music, so you might like to put some of the day's new words to use in a rap stylee. (Yep, this is the one lesson where you can doss about.)

COLLECTIONS

BY ERIN MARCON

When he tore the Christmas wrapping from his Atari 2600 in 1980, Joseph Hewitt embarked on a lifelong mission to claim and conquer the greatest games the industry has to offer. His obsession was spawned during lengthy sessions with Atari's pioneering Adventure cartridge. More recently, it has taken a more sinister turn, as Hewitt claims to have received telepathic communiqués from his game collection. Read on to discover the terrible truth about a developer that, at first glance, seems as sane as you or I.

"I have pretty much every game I ever bought, borrowed or stole," he says.

"I still have the box that the Atari 2600 came in but it is pretty beat up.

Though his development work propels him around the world, the location of his collection remains constant. The games reside in a secure facility somewhere in Las Vegas. "Sometimes at night," he confides, "I think I can hear them calling out to me. Joseph, where are you? We miss you Joseph! You forgot to put your laundry in the dryer Joseph!"

Denied the daily access to his collection that is the birthright of all gamers, Hewitt turned to his trusty Palm Pilot for relief. Emulated copies of The Lost Treasures of Infocom and its sequel were on high rotation prior to the untimely disappearance of the handheld. Despite this setback, Hewitt's urge to replace lost treasures with faithful and eminently more portable reproductions remains strong. "I recently got one of those joysticks that have a bunch of Atari 2600 games built into it," he says.

"I was jazzed about being able to play Adventure again but then I got pissed that they changed the secret dot and took out the Easter egg message in the secret room."

As much as he enjoys the convenience of emulations, Hewitt continues to accumulate full retail copies of his favourite titles. "I really like looking over and seeing game boxes neatly lined up on the shelves. It makes me feel all warm and fuzzy inside," he says.

A number of titles in his collection, particularly internet RPGs such as EverQuest and Ultima Online sparked his interest in the social aspect of gaming. "I remember when I started playing The Elder Scrolls III," he says.

"I felt so alone. Sure there were plenty of non-player characters around, but no other real people."

"Multi-player features in games just add so much to the experience."

When Hewitt began to tremble and froth at the mouth, we realise that it is time to conclude the interview. He is receiving psychic instructions from the vault in Las Vegas again. It is only a matter of time before the vault instructs him to kill us all.

Meet Joseph Hewitt

During his15 years in the industry, Joseph Hewitt has contributed to a range of blockbuster titles including entires in the Command and Conquer and Eye of the Beholder series. He most recently served as lead content designer on Auran Games' Fury, a PVP focused online role playing game.

INTO THE VAULT

We venture into the darkest corners of Hewitt's collection and emerge with a handful of classics. We present them here, in alphabetical order, for your consideration.

1. Archon: The Light and the Dark
Though often compared to Battle Chess, Free Fall Associates' 1983 strategy game for the C64 contains a spark of inventiveness lacking in its rival.

2. Ballblazer
LucasArts' sports title arrived on the C64 in 1985. Hewitt describes the controls, which automatically ensure players face the correct direction, as ingenious.

3. Bone: Out From Boneville
This 2005 PC title from Telltale is but the first episode in a series based on Jeff Smith's indy comic.

4. Descent
Parallax Software's 1995 FPS for the PC enabled Hewitt to attack his manager with impunity.

5. Dungeon Master
In 1988, Amiga fans were enthralled by FTL's 3D fantasy. Hewitt enjoys "turning out all the lights and going on a hard core dungeon crawl." Don't we all...

6. Modem Wars
Hewitt considers Ozark Software's 1988 wargame for the C64 to be an important step in the evolution of online gaming.

7. System Shock
Released for PC in 1994, this acclaimed sci-fi title from Looking Glass is considered among the more cerebral first-person shooters of the era.

8. Tetris
Tengen's unlicensed version of Tetris for the NES snuck onto market in1989. Hewitt remains adamant that it is superior to the official release.

9. Ultima IV - Quest of the Avatar
Though Hewitt enjoyed Origin Systems' 1985 epic on his C64, it migrated to a plethora of platforms including the Apple II and Sega Master System.

10. Wasteland
Notwithstanding its post apocalyptic setting, Interplay's 1988 RPG for the C64 reminds Hewitt of early Ultima titles. "I loved the cover art too," he says.

The Passion of the Gamer

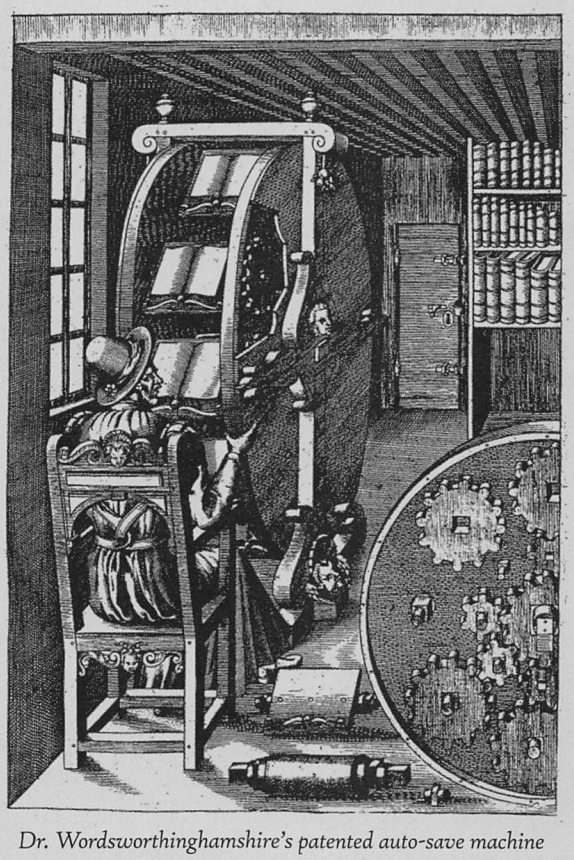
Saving Grace

By Dylan Burns

My gaming den is a place of beauty (and several odd smells). During any given session, the most important thing is the mood of the room. The heavy curtains are drawn across the windows, shunning the sunlight that tries oh so persistently to penetrate those dark folds. This ritualistic act represents separation from the world, allowing me to more easily immerse myself in the many realities that games offer. At a more basic level, it stops the sun from shining on the screen.

The scene is set as electricity fills my console, bringing it to life in an orgy of conductivity, and the familiar whirring noises of the DVD drive settle my mounting anxiety (which builds with every passing moment away from games). The title loads and it's time to become lost in an aural and visual feast, as my interaction with the game makes my surroundings disappear. Buying an upgrade for my fully sick ride has deep meaning, as does my ability to laugh maniacally as I ignore the many pleas for mercy and continue my murderous rampage.

Then, of course, it happens: an interruption, be it the door, a phone call or some well-groomed gentleman ceaseless in his mission to accost me with a brochure depicting the world full of smiling people patting wild lions and basking in the light of some religious deity. Quick, did I just save? Was that an 'auto-saving' message that just popped up? Man, why does this always happen? So you pause the game, deal with said intrusion and, hopefully, come straight back and continue on your merry way.



Dr. Wordsworthinghamshire's patented auto-save machine

However, it's not always so simple. Sometimes the real world does intrude, and I'm becoming much more used to accepting that I may actually need to turn my games off for a time, in which case the slow motion action of my finger aiming for the 'power off' switch is almost worthy of a symphonic overture heavy on the stabby violin effect. It's during these times that my gripes about saving systems arise. Not only does every title seem to have its own esoteric saving procedure, but there is always that awful uncertainty you feel as you turn a game off.

So what kind of save systems do we see in the modern game? First up is the auto-save, which is both a blessing and a curse. I like to think of the auto-save as a little bit like a neat freak aunt who follows you around the house while you're eating a messy biscuit. If you turn around you never quite get a glimpse of her, but all of those crumbs have mysteriously been cleaned up. So too in gameplay does the auto-save neatly categorise and capture your slow but sure progression through a game, yet never seems to intrude enough for you to actually notice it.

The auto-save text is, I'm sure, a patented size and colour designed to completely bypass your attention whilst playing, only popping up for a millionth of a second. Not only that, I've noticed that quite a few games use auto-save only, with no manual save option available to the player. Therefore, when that darn interruption does happen, you're left to guess whether the system saves every five seconds or only when you've done something of note in the game, like kill a prostitute or something.

Next up is the manual save system, which also has several failings. The most obvious of these is that it actually relies on players to have some kind of agency in their own progression – the main problem being that we're arrogant bastards. We're quite happy to blaze along for half an hour, flexing our gaming muscles and laughing in the face of difficulty, all without saving once. Then, when you inevitably get eaten by the sea monster or cut in half by the scarf-wielding, genetically-enhanced ninja nannies, you're pretty much up poo creek without a save point. And oh how game designers love to have that really hard bit right where you forgot to save your game.

The only way to overcome this is to become a paranoid gamer, one of those poor souls who need to pause the game every two steps and create a separate save file each time, just in case the previous ones all become corrupt or the latest patch renders them obsolete. Paranoid gaming is hardly fun at all, but it becomes a necessity if you want to make certain that you have that Scepter of General Awesomeness in your inventory the next time you log in.

Last, but certainly not least, you have the bastardised combination of all save systems. These games are perhaps the most evil of all because they love to constantly confuse you with conflicting messages at their menu screens that read something like, "Restart. Continue. Load Last Checkpoint. Choose Manual Save. Or Shall We Just Take The Game Back For You?"

I mean, what's a gamer to do when there is no standardised saving system across all games? You end up living in a constant state of confusion as you go to load up a game only to be greeted by about eighteen auto-save icons, with your own recent save point buried somewhere within them. Does it save chronologically (date played) or does it categorise them by game time? Does that '1.03' mean you've played it for just over an hour or that you played it until 1.03 in the morning?

I guess that I'm being pedantic, but perhaps some of you have also noticed this mish mash of approaches when it comes to game saves. If there is a solution to be had then please let me know. As gamers, we have become so used to particular systems that we almost abhor change, preferring to put up with current annoyances. Until there is an alternative, we will just have to be happy with hoping that our last few hours of gaming are locked in when next the phone rings or a lion-petting zealot knocks on your door.

gameboffin@hotmail.com

Sir Gameboffin's current Gamerscore: 31, 649 (still as meaningless as ever)

DEVELOPMENT HELL

Dreams end, my friends. They are crushed under the feet of a cold and uncaring world. In this case, my dreams of 'Bastard: The Game' must fail. Because I have discovered that the idea of me pitching a game cold to a company is... laughable.

I contacted an old mate of mine. We met in an abandoned garage at three in the morning, identifying each other by elaborate code words. 'Seven midgets touch your mother,' I muttered to the shadowy figure.

You see, the way that games companies work has changed. When I started out in games journalism in 1932, thing were different. Games were made on punch-cards and distributed through a system of tube and valves and played on Victrola machines. More importantly, games designers were kept in attics and fed only raw fish and made to battle shaved grizzly bears. Now, they are protected by legions of heavily armed Public Relations flacks. PR people are vicious people who crave battle. If you try to talk to their charges without them, they will happily pistol whip your genitals off.

So I cannot identify the games designer who has broken my heart with the truth. I do not want my house invaded by PR Ninjas, nor do I want him to be taken to the Basilica of Torments. So, we shall refer to him only as Palmer Eldritch.

"Palmer, my man, I'm in a black pit of despair. So many games are boring and made clearly by people who smoke big bowls of Cystic Fibrosis then smash their own faces into walls. Who, oh who will purchase my brilliant game?"

Mr. Eldritch quit smoking some time ago, so his reflex to stub something out on my bollocks changed to nothing more than a simple rabbit punch to the ribs.

"See, this is where I add to the black pit of despair. The answer is "no-one" - there's never been a game developed from an external pitch in this industry, and I don't see that changing now."

I began to weep as he sneered.

"Games cost 30 million dollars to develop, so you need the resources to do 30 million dollars worth of work (ie, 50 professionals) before anyone's going to give you the cash."

"But... but my ideas? I had an idea about a dragon that molests an oil derrick!"

"Everyone has ideas. When we started the pitch round on our current one, we produced 246 one page pitch outlines, 18 ten pagers and 3 full blown presentations. We ended up doing something completely different that excited the marketing folk, that was pitched to them three years earlier and fit the platform, timeline, and flowthrough they were looking at. Such is life."

"Hells bells, man! So, no one is going to buy my pitch, despite my fame and success... So how do I make a game?"

"If you want to turn something into a full blown game, you're going to have to make it yourself. There are a few ways to do this, but basically if you have a great idea and can get a few people together, you can get something done. Narbacular Drop is a good example of this - a student project that resulted in everyone getting hired to build Portal."

Ideas are cheap and execution is hard in this industry

He walked away into the darkness. I called out after him.

"But I'm smart! I'm published! I've got a long history of writing for computer games! Surely they would make an exception for me!"

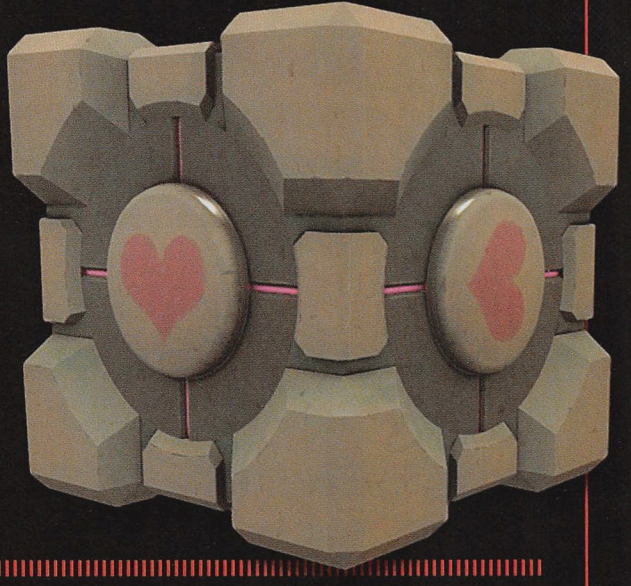
"Sadly, it's [none] of those - it's simply that things don't happen that way. Ideas are cheap and execution is hard in this industry - and being able to prove you can execute is the key thing. Also, being able to show you can make 60 people make a game that is coherent and polished - it's ultimately a collaborative art."

The trouble is, everyone wants to make a 30 million dollar next-gen game and thinks they could make it better than anyone else - first, you have to prove it. Sorry to be the bearer of bad tidings..."

But he wasn't. Palmer Eldritch is a very bad man.

So there you have it: A cold pitch is simply a no go in the games industry. You can't walk in and have a Hollywood moment. The doors are closed. But a team...? Hmmm.

NEXT TIME – NEWS TEAM! ASSEMBLE!



BY CHRISTIAN READ

THE OFFICIAL AUSTRALIAN GAMES CHART

Compiled by GfK in association with the IEAA

TOP 10 PlayStation 2 Games Over $30

W/E 13th January 2008 RETAIL SALES

1	▲	Smackdown V Raw 2008	Fighting
2	◆	Buzz Hollywood Quiz (S/W)	Family
3	▲	The Simpsons Game	Adventure
4	▲	Buzz Junior Monster (S/W)	Family
5	▼	Singstar Pop Hits (S/W)	Family
6	▲	Need For Speed Pro Street	Racing
7	▲	Jackass: The Game	Action
8	▲	High School Musical (S/W)	Family
9	▲	Singstar Rnb Bundle	Family
10	▲	Eyetoy Sports Bundle Ptm	Family

TOP 10 Nintendo DS Games Over $30

W/E 13th January 2008 RETAIL SALES

1	◆	The Simpsons Game	Adventure
2	▲	New Super Mario Bros	Action
3	▲	Brain Training	Family
4	▲	Ratatouille	Adventure
5	▲	Pokémon Pearl	Role-Playing
6	▲	Pokémon Diamond	Role-Playing
7	▲	Drawn To Life	Adventure
8	✪	Bratz: 4 Real	Family
9	▲	Nintendogs Dalmation	Family
10	▲	More Brain Training	Family

TOP 10 Nintendo Wii Games Over $50

W/E 13th January 2008 RETAIL SALES

1	◆	Mario & Sonic At Olympics	Sports
2	◆	Super Mario Galaxy	Action
3	▲	Guitar Hero 3 Bundle	Family
4	▲	Mario Party 8	Family
5	▲	Zelda Twilight Princess	Role-Playing
6	▲	Super Paper Mario	Action
7	▲	Pokémon Battle Revolution	Role-Playing
8	▲	Big Brain Academy Value	Family
9	▲	The Simpsons Game	Adventure
10	▲	Resident Evil The Umbrella	Adventure

TOP 10 Playstation 3 Games Over $60

W/E 13th January 2008 RETAIL SALES

1	◆	Assasins Creed	Action
2	▲	Call Of Duty 4: Modern	Shooter
3	◆	Guitar Hero 3 Bundle	Family
4	▲	Need For Speed Pro Street	Racing
5	▼	Uncharted Drakes Fortune	Adventure
6	▼	Fifa 2008	Sports
7	◆	Kane & Lynch: Dead Men	Shooter
8	◆	Ratchet & Clank: Tools	Action
9	◆	Medal Of Honor Airborne	Shooter
10	▲	The Simpsons Game	Adventure

TOP 10 PC Games Over $20

W/E 13th January 2008 RETAIL SALES

1	◆	Call Of Duty 4: Modern	Shooter
2	◆	World Of Warcraft	Role-Playing
3	▲	WOW Burning Crusade	Role-Playing
4	▼	Crysis	Shooter
5	▼	The Sims 2 Teen Style	Strategy
6	▲	The Sims 2	Strategy
7	▲	Flight Sim X Dlx Edition	Simulation
8	▼	The Sims 2: Bon Voyage	Strategy
9	▼	The Sims 2: Pets	Strategy
10	◆	WOW Battlechest	Role-Playing

TOP 10 Xbox 360 Games Over $50

W/E 13th January 2008 RETAIL SALES

1	◆	Call Of Duty 4: Modern	Shooter
2	▲	Assasins Creed	Action
3	▼	Halo 3	Shooter
4	◆	Guitar Hero 3 Rock Bundle	Family
5	◆	Mass Effect	Role-Playing
6	◆	Need For Speed Pro Street	Racing
7	▲	The Simpsons Game	Adventure
8	▼	Kane & Lynch: Dead Men	Shooter
9	◆	Fifa 2008	Sports Games
10	◆	Smackdown V Raw 2008	Fighting

TOP 10 All Format Games Over $50

W/E 13th January 2008 RETAIL SALES

1	▲	Mario & Sonic At Olympics	Nintendo Wii
2	▲	Call Of Duty 4: Modern	Xbox 360
3	▼	The Simpsons Game	Nintendo DS
4	▲	Super Mario Galaxy	Nintendo Wii
5	▲	New Super Mario Bros	Nintendo DS
6	✪	Assasins Creed	PlayStation 3
7	▲	Smackdown V Raw 2008	PlayStation 2
8	✪	Assasins Creed	Xbox 360
9	▲	Halo 3	Xbox 360
10	▲	Brain Training	Nintendo DS

TOP 10 PlayStation Portable Games Over $40

W/E 13th January 2008 RETAIL SALES

1	◆	Ricky Ponting 2007:Pressure	Sports
2	◆	The Simpsons Game	Adventure
3	◆	Smackdown V Raw 2008	Fighting
4	▲	SW Battlefront Renegade	Shooter
5	▲	Pursuit Force Extreme	Racing
6	◆	Syphon Filter Logans	Shooter
7	▲	Medal Of Honor Heroes 2	Shooter
8	▼	The Sims 2 Castaway	Strategy
9	▼	Juiced 2 Hot Import Nights	Racing
10	▼	Crash Of The Titans	Action

✪ New Entry
◆ Non Mover
▲ Up from last week
▼ Down from last week

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Emergency Mayhem, Tomb Raider: Underworld, Gran Turismo 5, The Club and more!

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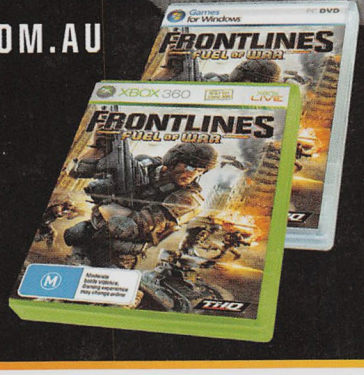

M — Moderate battle violence, Gaming experience may change online

THE WAY NVIDIA IT'S MEANT TO BE PLAYED

KAOS STUDIOS

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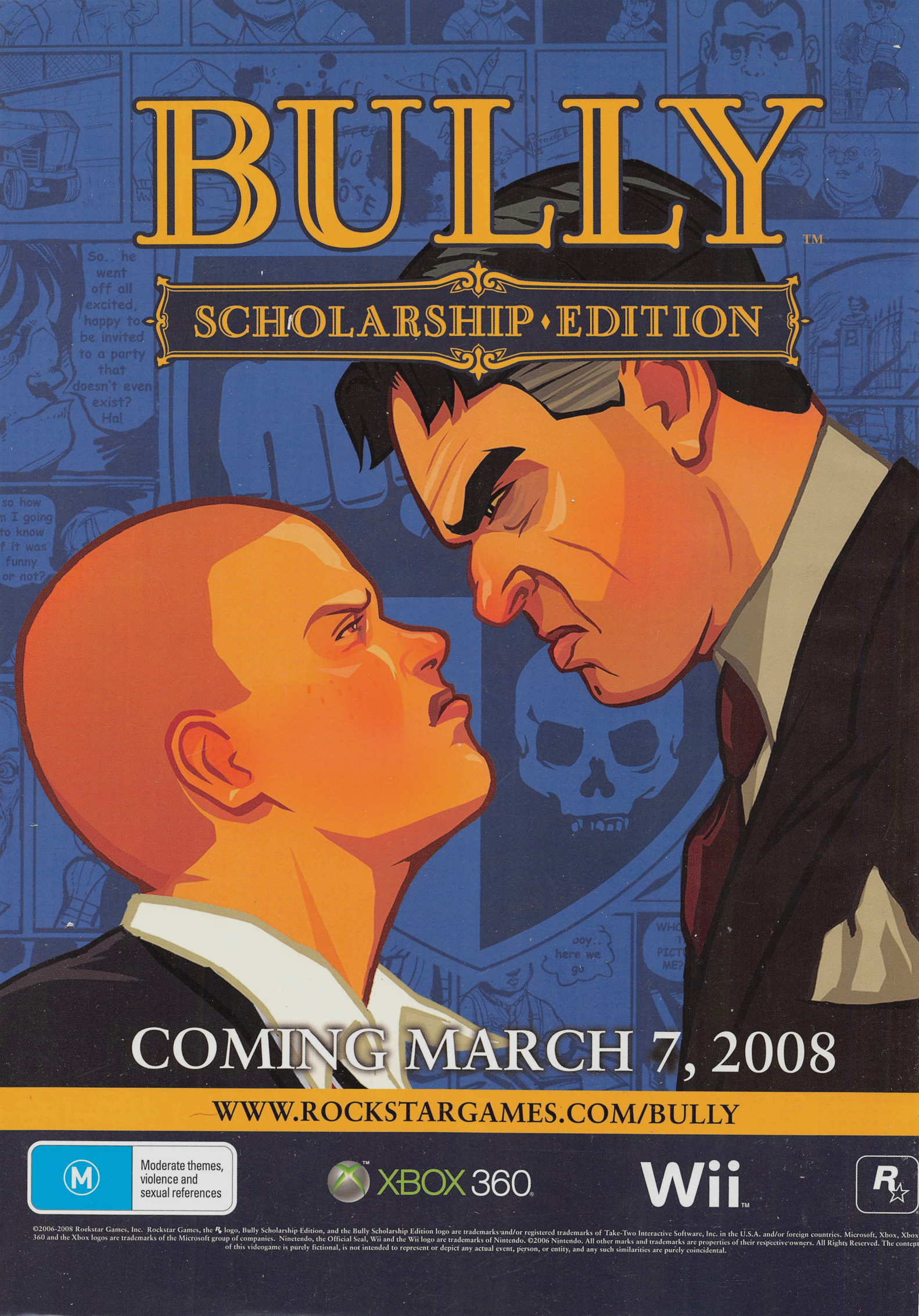
Games for Windows

XBOX 360 LIVE



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