WARHAMMER ONLINE ■ TABULA RASA - Richard Garriott speaks

HALO 3 SECRETS
New mechanics revealed

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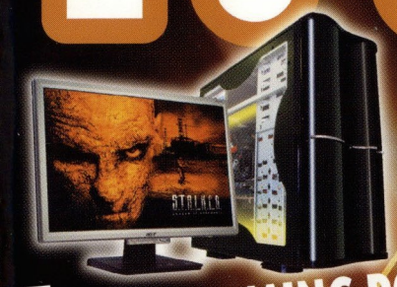

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Rockstar courts controversy with an unlikely sequel

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TOMB RAIDER ANNIVERSARY
Lara Croft goes back to the beginning

NO MORE HEROES Wii
Goichi Suda spills the beans on his new Wii game

PC / PS3 / XBOX 360
HEI$T
Robbing banks has never looked so cool

REVIEWS:
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- Lunar Knights DS
- C&C Tiberium Wars PC
- Ratchet & Clank PSP
- Valkyrie Profile PSP

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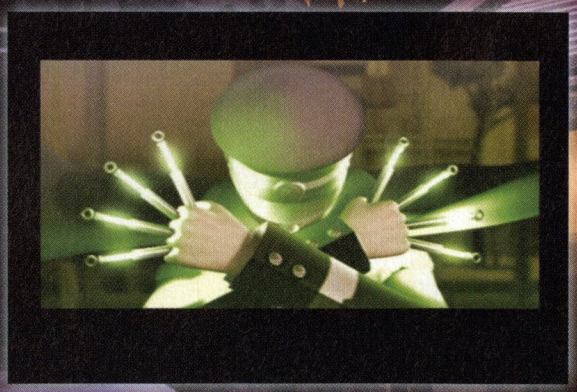

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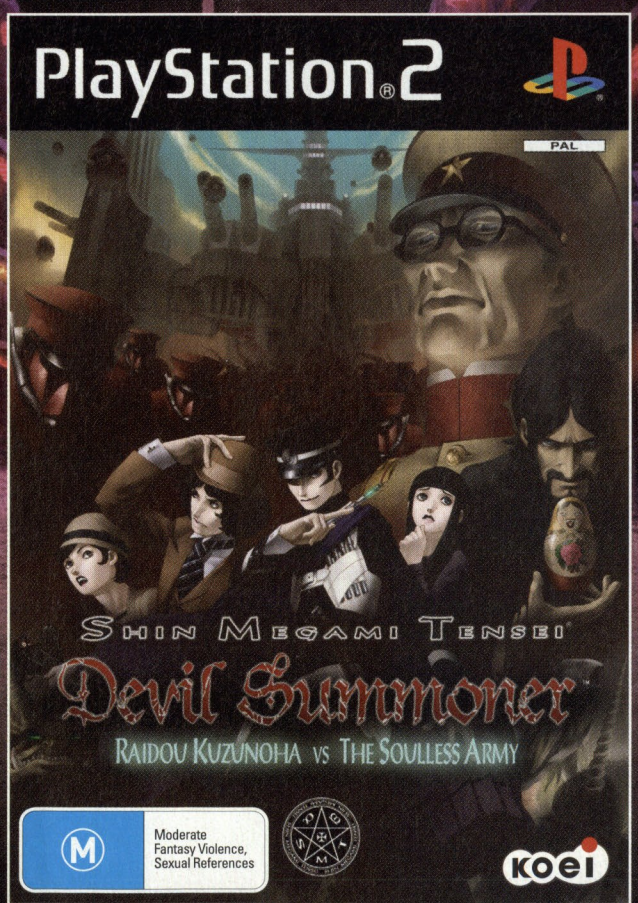

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Robbing banks
San Francisco style.

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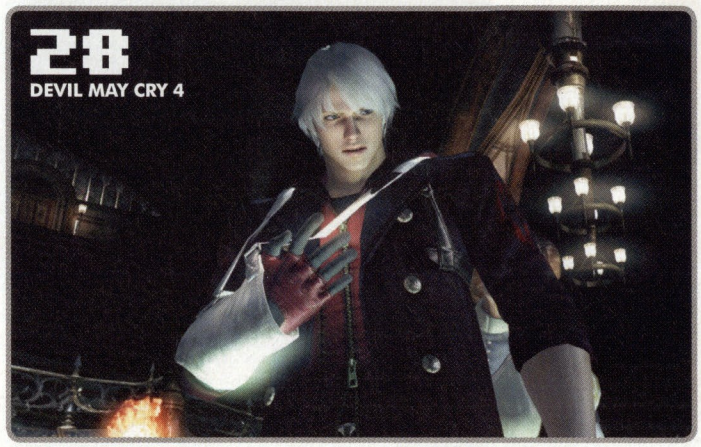

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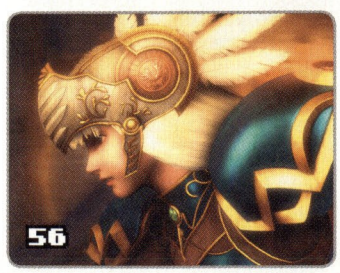

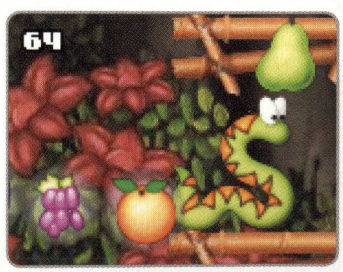

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Editorial

>>Welcome to another action packed issue of Hyper, an issue soaked in the sweat and tears of Mo and some other bodily fluids of the local bums. Everyone in the office has a healthy dose of that nasty stuff that accumulates in the corner of your eyes when you sleep due to the sheer amount of hours we have put in this month. "Why so much work" I hear you ask as if you genuinely cared about our wellbeing. Well, to put it plainly this month saw us not only putting together a regular issue but a gameguide as well and that's a hell of a lot of no fun.

Enough with the bitching and moaning. This issue is what is important and I think we've done a pretty good job. Lets see what we have in store for you over the next hundred or so pages. How do interviews with Tetsuya Mizuguchi, Goichi Suda, Masaya Matsura, Richard Garriott and the team behind the upcoming steal 'em up, Hei$t strike you? How about in depth previews of Tomb Raider: Anniversary, Devil May Cry 4, Rogue Galaxy and Manhunt 2? Still not enough? How about a chat with Introversion, makers of our favourite Genocide 'em Up, Defcon and a look at advertising in games? Maybe Warhammer Online floats your proverbial, maybe not. Maybe that honour goes to a fond look back at some of the most wonderfully mistranslated games in history or maybe the answers to the questions you asked of EA Black Box in Hyper's first Hot Seat. I don't know but I'm sure you'll have fun.

Now it's time to go and get a little shuteye. Not too much mind you. Just enough to get the engine running again. 165 is just around the corner.

Daniel Wilks >>Editor

Hyper Crew

MONTHLY TOP 5 GAMES

DANIEL – Editor

1. **Tomb Raider Anniversary** – *PS2*
   "Stupid dinosaurs"
2. **Rogue Galaxy** – *PS2*
3. **Valkyrie Profile** – *PSP*
4. **World of Warcraft** – *PC*
5. **Castlevanie: PoR** – *DS*

MOE – Deputy Editor

1. **Crackdown** – *Xbox 360*
   "Thanks to jumping, driving has never been so boring"
2. **Ratchet & Clank: Size Matters** – *PSP*
3. **F.E.A.R.** – *PS3*
4. **Guitar Hero 2** – *Xbox 360*
5. **Innocent Life** – *PSP*

MALCOLM – Art Director

1. **Final Fantasy XII** – *PS2*
   "Malboro Overking's moustache = comedy gold"
2. **Ending Wish 11+1** – *PS2*
3. **Closing Illusion Twelve** – *PS2*
4. **Finishing Vision XII** – *PS2*
5. **Elevator Action** – *PSP*

DARREN WELLS – Guitar Hero

1. **Guitar Hero 2** – *PS2*
   "Who would have thought?"
2. **Lumines 2** – *PSP*
3. **S.T.A.L.K.E.R.** – *PC*
4. **Test Drive Unlimited** – *PC*
5. **Phoenix Wright: Ace Attorney** – *DS*

HYPER>>

JUNE 2007 ISSUE 164

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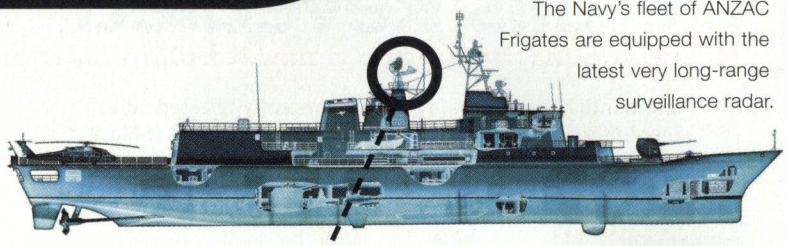
Powerful enough to detect interest.

Wade Barker
Navy Electronic Technician

When a piece of equipment fails it certainly is challenging, because there's a requirement to get it up and running in the shortest amount of time possible.



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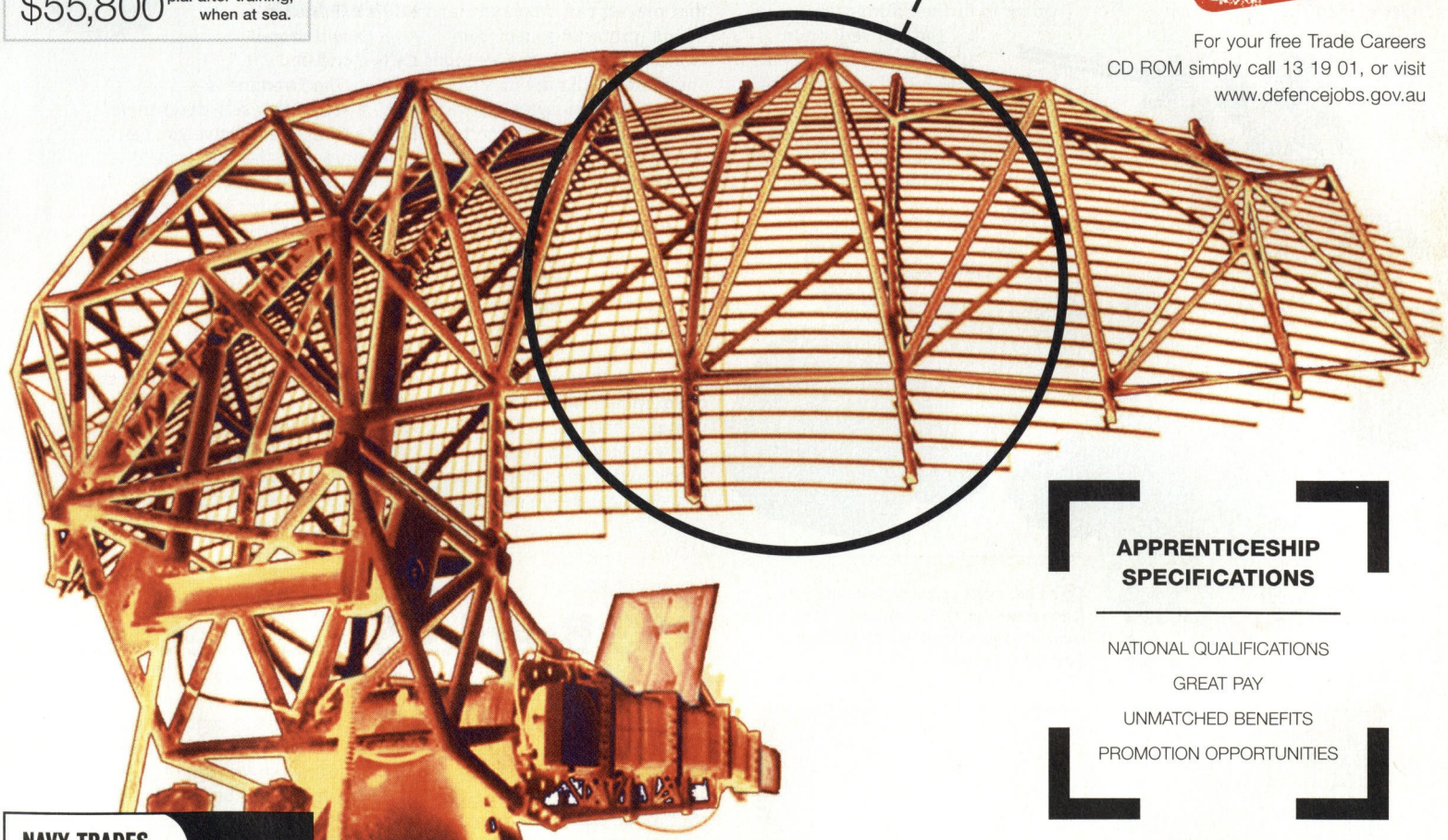

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>> Halo 3 gets new button
>> PS3 makes the filthy lucre
>> WoW players get laid?

CHIEF!

New Halo 3 Details Revealed

New weapons, items, and a new X button function...

A new month has once again brought forth all-new details on what is unquestionably the most anticipated Xbox 360 release thus far, Halo 3. In their regular weekly update a Bungie representative, known only as Frankie, made a number of tantalising revelations about a few of the game's new design features and its multiplayer content.

The first of these was the confirming of exactly what the mysterious function of the Xbox 360's X-button would be. Keen Halo 3 fans had notice that in a recently released video documentary called "Halo 3 Vidoc" that the X-button was used during play – with intense speculation following closely after the video's release.

Frankie responded to the speculation with a definitive answer, stating that; "You guys did see the final revelation of the mysterious X-Button. It's what's known as Equipment."

It seems that the X-button will be used to deploy various devices, something that Frankie would go on to further illuminate.

"The two very plain examples [of equipment] shown in the Vidoc were the Bubble Shield and the Tripmine. Both can be used in all manner of strategic and hilarious ways."

The Bubble Shield, as its name implies, is a domed energy shield that players can drop and stand inside, protecting them from explosions and ranged weapons. The Bubble will offer no such protection from melee and vehicle attacks however, so it's certainly not an invincibility mode.

Any veteran Halo players that may be worried that the inclusion of a shield may affect the game's delicate balance, Frankie offered some reassuring news;

"I read many mails and posts about how Bubble Shields would littler the landscape like an Igloo village. Well, they won't. A piece of equipment will be a rare and valuable find. It will be located, you will pick it up and you will choose when and where to deploy it. As you can see in the HUD, it's indicated that you're carrying it. Pressing X will drop it - not throw it."

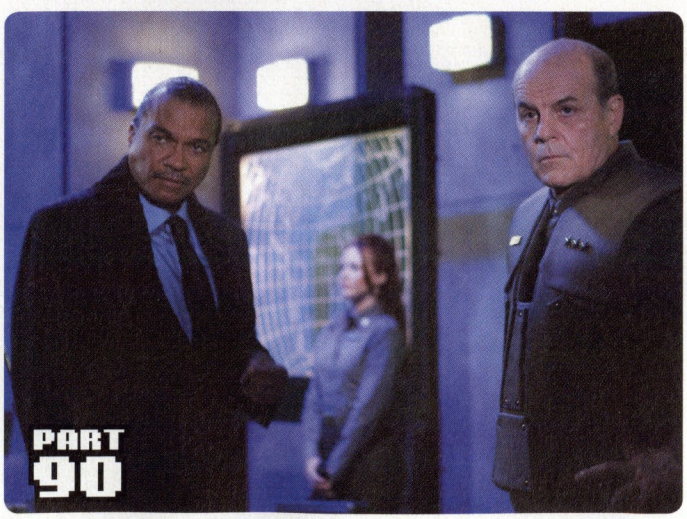
The Tripmine is again rather self-descriptive, and is an explosive you can drop with the X-button. It looks to be particularly useful against vehicles, as demonstrated by Bungie themselves in the Vidoc video.

There were two other new weapons revealed, the first is a sort of chaingun while the second was a "Spike Grenade", but Frankie was tight lipped, ending with a stoic "I'm not talking" on those topics.

With the Halo 3 Beta opening on May 16, it looks as though we'll get to try these features out for ourselves sooner rather than later.

CAPTION THIS!

Come on, make us laugh. Just send your funny screen captions to us at *captionthis@next.com.au* with **Caption This Part 90** in the subject line.



Caption it!

LUCRE!

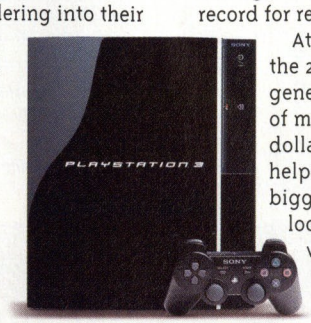
PS3 Breaks Sales Record

But still sells less than Xbox 360, Wii

Despite what could only be called a sad turnout to the official Australian PlayStation 3 midnight launch, where Sony staff outnumbered the punters, and attending radio media were so unsuccessful in whipping up frenzy amongst the few straggling attendees that they resorted to whooping and hollering into their own microphones to feign some kind of enthusiasm, the PS3 has actually gone on to have quite a successful launch period.

In figures just release from Gfk, a market research firm, the PS3 sold 27,083 consoles within its first ten days on the shelves.

Although, this figure is technically far bellow that of the Nintendo Wii's 41,369 units, or the Xbox 360's 36,627 units sold in the same amount of time, the PlayStation 3 still managed to break the Australian record for revenue taken.



At almost $1000 a pop, the 27,083 PS3 units sold generated total revenue of more than 27 million dollars. This influx of cash helped to create the single biggest retail spike in the local industry's history, which should give Sony some encouragement.

MYSTERY!

Fangame developer dies

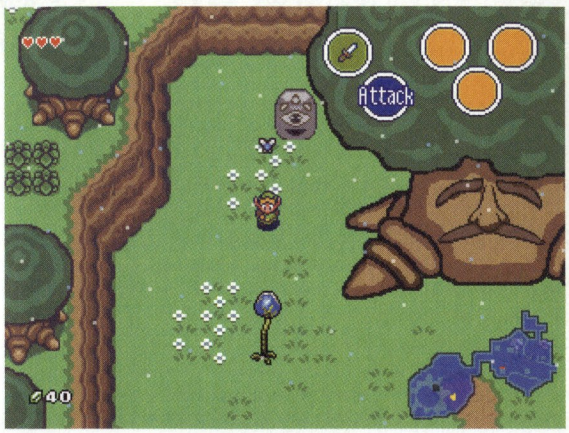
Or does he?

This is undoubtedly one of the strangest stories we've heard for awhile, and at present we're not sure what to believe.

Earlier this month we heard the sad news that an amateur game developer, who went by the name of Dampe, had passed away in a car accident.

The teenager, who lived in Melbourne, Australia, had been working on a 2D adaptation of Nintendo's Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time, a promising project that looked much like the SNES' Zelda: A Link to the Past.

The sad news broke on March 25, with an outpouring of condolences from Internet fans and friends following.



Whatever the outcome, the "2DOOT" project is no more

Before long though, another theory began to emerge. Former online friends of the teenager began to claim that they had talked to him over instant messaging services days and even weeks after his alleged death. It is also alleged that many of his online accounts had been accessed posthumously. The speculation is that Dampe may have faked his death because the responsibilities of manning a highly anticipated independent game may have got the better of him. The constant emails, instant messages and even phone calls from anonymous fans wanting the final release of his fan project may have proved too much for the young coder, and putting an end to his virtual life may have become an attractive escape.

So what is the truth? Due to the anonymous nature of the Internet, there's no way of knowing whether this is actually a hoax or an extremely sad situation that has become a circus. Hyper would like to find out though, so if any readers in Melbourne can confirm or deny this Internet debacle, you know where to contact us.

WHAMMY!

Guitar Hero II Breaks Things

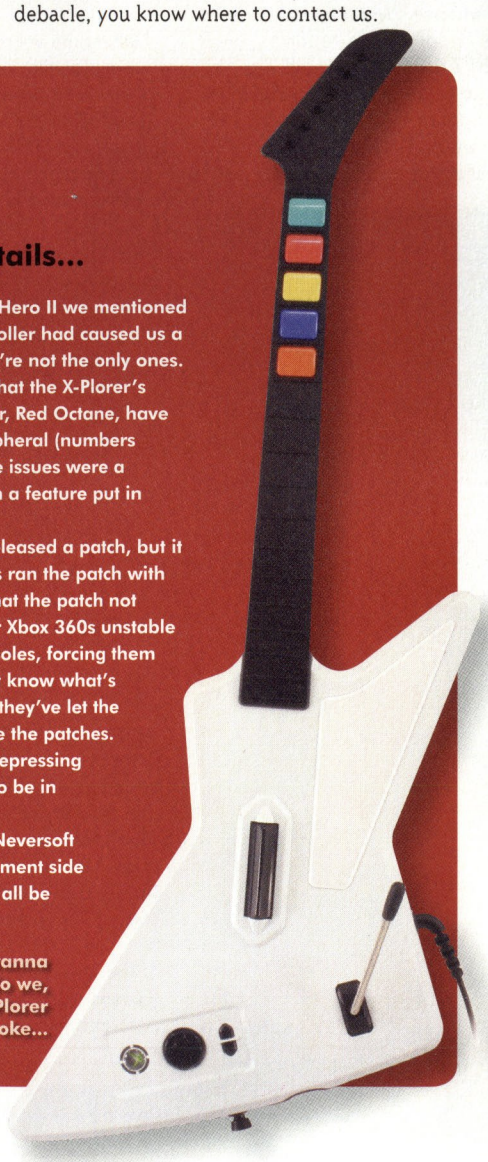
And some Guitar Hero III details...

In our review of the Xbox 360 version of Guitar Hero II we mentioned that the whammy bar on the new X-Plorer controller had caused us a few headaches, and now it seems as though we're not the only ones. Reports are flooding in from around the world that the X-Plorer's whammy is unresponsive. The game's developer, Red Octane, have publicly announced that two models of the peripheral (numbers 95065 and 95055) are defective, stating that the issues were a product of "calibration issue that may stem from a feature put in place to ensure accurate scoring."

To combat the problem Red Octane quickly released a patch, but it seem that did more harm than good. Most users ran the patch with no problems, but many reports have surfaced that the patch not only didn't fix the problem but that it made their Xbox 360s unstable and in some cases completely bricked their consoles, forcing them to send it back to Microsoft for repairs. We don't know what's going on at Red Octane, but it seems like lately they've let the work experience kid design the guitars and code the patches.

Some good news however does cap off this depressing situation, with Guitar Hero III being confirmed to be in development for PS3, X360, Wii and PS2.

Red Octane's Kai Huang has confirmed that Neversoft (Tony Hawk series) will be handling the development side of things and the next generation of guitars will all be wireless. Huang also said that they are hoping to get songs by Metallica, AC/DC and Led Zeppelin in the next game. We're hoping too.



[right] You wanna rock? So do we, pity our X-Plorer is broke...

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- Grant Clark, Doncaster Heights, Vic
- Rob Scurrah, Ellenbrook, WA
- Brad Giles, Australind, WA
- Adrian Catania, Redfern, NSW
- Aaron Wakem, Stafford, Qld
- Sally Ferguson, Carina, Qld
- Benjamin Szabadics, Dardanup, WA
- Nic Finger, Lauching Place, Victoria
- Ashley Leach, Walkley Heights, SA

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- Louise Williams, Mt Macedon, Vic
- Jason Wong, Brentwood, WA
- Marco Farinaccia, St. Helena, Victoria

RICKY PONTING INTERNATIONAL CRICKET 2007
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EPIC!

World of Whorecraft
Woman allegedly prostitutes self for sweet ride

If you play World of Warcraft, then you know how hard it can be to get your hands on the glittering lifeblood of Azeroth's economy – gold. When you're talking about a sum as high as 5000G, it can take weeks and months of gruelling labour to save up. According to Internet reports however, one New York woman has traded in the traditional means of acquiring gold; grinding through endless hordes of virtual enemies and rummaging through their possessions, for an entirely more physical kind of grinding and rummaging.

The unidentified woman, who plays a level-70 Night Elf Druid on the Laughing Skull server, reportedly placed an advertisement on Craigslist, an online classifieds site, stating; "I need 5000 gold for my epic flying mount. In return you can mount me."

The deal was apparently this, send the lady a screen capture of your maxed-out WoW bank account, along with a picture of your perverted face and if you win the love lottery you'll be making it with a promiscuous night elf before tea time.

Naturally, once the classified was discovering it spread across the Internet like a rash, with the woman's picture and business proposal making the front page of every World of Warcraft news page on the planet.

The woman's response to the attention came a day later, with the words; "Talk all the trash you want, I got MY Epic Flying mount AND I got laid which is more than most of you failures can ever hope for." After which she disappeared into the obscurity from whence she came.

It is of course impossible to confirm that the incident was anything more than an elaborate prank, but with virtual property becoming an ever-increasing commodity, we wouldn't be surprised in the slightest if it was entirely legit.

COSPLAY!

Adelaide Avcon '07
City of churches play games, likes anime

If you're going to be in Adelaide between Friday 20th and Sunday 22nd of July, then you may want to drop in on the sixth annual Anime and Videogames Convention.

In previous years the AVCon has proven successful, with more than 1500 attendees to last year's show. Not surprisingly this year's event looks to be even bigger with more anime screenings, videogame tournaments, cosplay competitions, merchandise stands and more, all packed into a single weekend.

This year also has a special theme, a rock show, so even if you're not planning on wearing your moogle cosplay, you'll at least be able to rock out with a pair of leather pants and a tatty mullet wig.

The con will be held at the Adelaide University union building, and you can check www.avcon.org.au for more details.

OVERFLOW

Last month we ran a news piece about rumours that Microsoft were planning on releasing an "Elite" version of the Xbox 360 console, complete with black finish, HDMI output, cooler-running internals and a whopping 120GB hard drive. Since then those rumours have become a reality, with Microsoft unveiling the new console at the Xbox 360's first birthday celebrations in Sydney, making Australia the first country to get official confirmation that the console would be arriving.

There's no local release date yet, but the unit is planned to launch in the US on April 29, for the sum of US$480 (approx AU$580).

Capcom are continuing the tradition of impossibly long titles with the announcement that Super Street Fighter II Turbo HD Remix will be the next game in the illustrious fighting series. The game will abandon the lo-res pixel-art that has served the series well over the years and will instead use hi-def, hand-drawn animations, in a similar style to the Guilty Gear series. Apart from the new visuals that game will feature all 18 classic characters, including Akuma, and will feature extensive online play options. The game is planned for release on Xbox Live Arcade and the PlayStation 3 network, and is scheduled to arrive in the North American Autumn, which means within the next few months!

Just before we went to press this month the news broke that Sony Computer Entertainment Europe would be firing as many as 160 staff in an effort to bring down costs. It seems that even crippling the PAL PlayStation 3's backwards compatibility didn't save the multinational corporation enough dosh, with SCEE president, David Reeves, reportedly having said that "In order to achieve the necessary cost reductions it is possible that there will be up to 160 redundancies in total across SCEE offices in the UK, WWS in Europe and in the Territories."

The 160 layoffs amount to a sizable portion of SCEE's 1900 person workforce; with Reeve's reportedly stating "the business targets that we face have regrettably made it unavoidable."

OPINION

PRESS PASS

DANIEL STAINES

So you want to be a Games Journo

Almost everybody who reads videogame magazines (either in print form or online) has at one point or another thought about being a games journo. It's true. Hardcore gamers are highly opinionated and passionate people, so it's only natural that many of them would toy with the idea of sharing their views for money. For most the notion doesn't progress beyond idle fancy, but there are always a few who go further and seriously pursue the dream of professional publication. It is to these people that this month's column is addressed.

The first thing you need to know about being a games journalist is that we are not actually real journalists. People say this on the internet all the time and think they're being clever and original, but in reality all they're doing is stating a pretty obvious fact. Game journalists don't go out and get scoops like newspaper reporters. We don't run damning exposés or uncover malignant conspiracies. In practical terms, almost everything we write is based on information and assets spoon-fed to us by PR people and other official sources. That's just the nature of the specialist press. We call ourselves journalists, but we're primarily critics – and some of us are barely even that.

This is the second thing you need to know about working in games journalism: it's very much a poor man's industry. Full-time jobs are scarce and not especially lucrative, and even the most reliable freelance gigs are too sporadic to constitute a reliable income. That's why most freelancers I know (myself included) supplement their writing work with other sources of income, usually a full-time job in an unrelated field. Of course, there are fringe-benefits associated with being a games journo, but free games, cool swag, and the occasional press-trip don't pay the rent. (This is especially true now that wily distributors have taken to sending out promo discs instead of full retail versions of their games. How are we supposed to eBay something that doesn't even come with a proper cover?)

Now, if after that you're still interested in becoming a part of the industry, then here's a bit of advice – the third thing you need to know about being a games journalist: you are not alone. As the editor of a relatively small games mag, I used to get at least one or two requests for work every week. For publications like Hyper or PC Powerplay, I can only assume that number is significantly higher. The vast majority of these requests consist of little more than a poorly-worded email asking for games to review. Needless to say, that approach isn't going to get you a positive response. If you want to write for a games mag, then that's what you have to do. Come up with a good feature idea, write it to completion (that means spell-checking it), and then try to sell it to a mag. There's nothing an overworked editor loves more than a piece of copy that's good to print right from the get go – your goal should be to provide exactly that.

You might not hit paydirt on your first try, but if you've got the talent and persistence, you'll get there eventually. That's how most of us got our jobs, after all.

Until next month,

daniels@next.com.au

BAD COP NO DOUGHNUT

DANIEL WILKS

Expectations and Other Disappointments

I was originally going to title this instalment of Bad Cop No Donut "Trailer Trash" as it pertains, in part, to the unreasonable amount of hype given to trailers, or even teasers of certain games. Of course in this instance I am referring to GTA IV. Before anyone starts pointing their nasty pointing fingers I realise that the former statement may sound more than a little hypocritical given that we've run a page of coverage on a teaser that shows bugger all of gameplay, only vaguely hints at what may be a story and has a running time shorter than a romantic stint with a premature ejaculator in this very issue. Yes, it is hypocritical, or it would be if I were talking solely about undue attention being paid to things that are rather flighty at best. Hence the change of title to Expectations and Other Disappointments, four words that more aptly sum up something that has been weighing on my mind.

You see, there is an expectation that certain things happen, certain things are covered and certain things are treated with a little more respect than others. Like it or not this expectation not only comes from the PR people responsible for flogging said games but also from the readers, both hardcore and casual. There is a certain expectation that overrides critical thought and has a habit of turning people into nastier versions of themselves. One common manifestation is hate mail that is inevitably sent when a game someone expected to get a high score gets a score lower than was expected. The amount of hate mail Hyper scored after the reviews of games such as Black, Canis Canem Edit, Prey, The Getaway and Tony Hawk's Downhill Jam would do your head in if you believed every expletive laden insult and the occasional threat of violence.

Now we're all for people defending licenses they like but when half of those letters come from people who haven't actually played the games but will support the IP due to the amount of expectation they had for it things come into perspective. Are we simply expecting so much from an IP that having it not live up to expectations can't be accepted so blame needs to be afforded to another target, or is it the expectation that people must share your opinion that drives people nuts. Whatever the case I'm sure the trend of getting hate mail over the failings of a developer will continue long into the future. Fingers crossed that we don't have to say that Metal Gear Solid 4, GTA IV or FF XIII aren't as good as you thought they'd be. If we do there'll be blood on the streets of Redfern. Well, more blood than there already is at any rate.

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TABULA RA

I am the Great Knight Ulthar of Heroville, not to be confused with the Great Knight Luthar of Heroville (or the Great Hero Uthar of Knightville, even). Along with 5000 others, I was under the tutelage of the legendary Knight_Trainer_002, and after gaining enough experience points, I sallied forth into the mountains and saved the village of my birth from the infamous Red Dragon. Said vile beast came back the next day to confront Luthar (remember him?), but his battle wasn't as successful because a server bug prevented him from finishing the quest. Poor Luthar. As heroes go, he doesn't. Until the next patch, anyway.

Truth is it's difficult to suspend disbelief when you're valiantly adventuring through the average MMO. No matter how many different pieces of shiny armour you can wear, all the characters along a certain race/class path end up looking, sounding, and acting exactly like each other as the game progresses. Their achievements are annulled by the fact that they have no real bearing on anything other than their own advancement, and by the end of the day, no one gets to be Gordon Freeman. Which is why Richard Garriott has had enough. The designer behind the venerated Ultima series knows pretty much all there is to know about making players feel heroic in single-player games. But even his first stab at MMO design, Ultima Online – the game that made online RPGs a commercial possibility – suffered from the Ulthar Complex. As a result, he's now hard at work on Tabula Rasa, the MMO he hopes will revolutionise the genre.

> "ONE OF THE FIRST THINGS THAT NEEDS TO BE ADDRESSED, IS COMBAT"

One of the first things that needs to be addressed, in Garriott's opinion, is combat. He finds traditional MMO combat mundane, repetitive, and ultimately un-heroic. Which is why TR's going to play a lot more like a FPS. "Don't get the wrong idea, though," he cautions. "This is an RPG – in an FPS, it's your personal dexterity that concludes the outcome of shooting at each other. In TR, you aim at something through your reticule, and your targeting cursor sticks to the creature you last aimed at, so jumping and zigzagging have no effect.

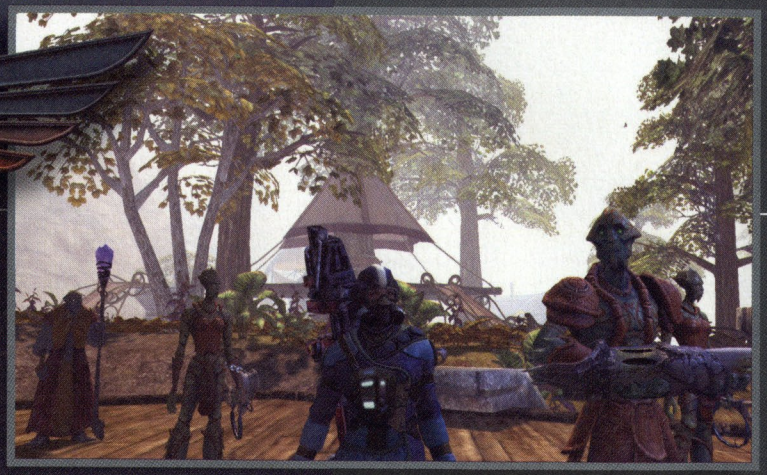
"The problem I have with most MMOs is this: when you're out there, farming your monsters for XP, you highlight one to say it's your opponent, and then you stop looking at the monster and focus all of your attention on your shortcut bar. Then you go fireball, fireball, fireball, sword swing, healing potion, until the monster's dead. And if you stand back a few feet, in about five minutes, that monster will fade right back in right where it was, so you can kill it again. So it's this incredibly boring behaviour that has absolutely no impact on the world, and you're not really fighting monsters; you're playing with a UI."

In TR, you won't have a shortcut bar to worry about, nor will attacks and spells queue up while you watch your enemy's health diminish. Instead, it works like this: if you click, gun go bang; if you don't click, gun go zzzzzzzzzzz. Now, my excitement about this may be a little too 1981 for your tastes, but when you think about it, it's seldom been done before in an MMO. And the results are more far-reaching than you might think. For example, take the following MMO paradigm: if a creature is more than two levels above you, it will crush your skull like a walnut. Not so in TR. "In our game," Garriott beams, "you can both be challenged and defeat any creature within plus or minus ten levels of your current level!"

How does this work? Garriott explains. "Well, in most MMOs, you highlight your target and take turns hacking at each other to find out who does the most damage over time. And that's what most MMOs are all about – optimising your damage over time to fight slightly tougher enemies. I'm creating a game that's much more based on

Guns and invisible dice, together at last

Ugly space hippo



accomplishing missions, advancing the story, and advancing your character. This means we're much more forgiving in the sense that if you're very careful, and you use cover, and you crouch to stabilise your aiming, you can take on much tougher opponents. If you're just going to jump in there and Rambo your way over the sandbags, however, you're gonna die. I mean, if someone's ten levels below you, you probably could, because you're a badass at that point. But if you want to take on a much tougher creature, you really do need to focus on how you fight: cover, aiming, et cetera."

In this way, Garriott sees TR as being significantly more stimulating intellectually than its peers. Contrary to popular logic, the immediacy of the action actually necessitates far more thought. "For example," Garriott suggests, "if I'm fighting the Bane soldiers, I'm going to make sure that when they come, I'm behind the sandbags, crouching. Because while they target me in this state, their 'to-hit' calculation becomes much harder. Whereas because I'm crouched and have full view of them from behind the sandbags, I have a much higher 'to-hit' calculation. So if you just jump in there and start shooting, you'll get killed pretty quickly. TR is much more thoughtful than that."

The advantage of this more thoughtful and, well, realistic combat, is that TR's planets – there are quite a few, and you'll move on to each one over time – don't need to be carved up into little zones catering exactly to your level. The result? A dynamic battlefield. "Your average MMO," Garriott says, "suffers from the following problem: when you're level one, you get your quest to go out and farm level one creatures in the level one fields, until you get enough experience points to become level two. At this point, you go out to the level two fields and farm the level two creatures, and so on. In TR, monsters don't just respawn where they were, in the right area, doing the same thing. Our monsters have goals and objectives, just like players, and they work together.

What TR would look like on DS

So they will, for example, fan away from the bad guy bases and move across the world to try to take what we call 'Control Points'. For whomever owns the control point, the hospitals work for them, the NPCs work for them, and the forcefields and automatic defenses work for them. So the world is much more dynamic."

Surprisingly, the AI needed to manage something on this scale – possibly as big as it gets in gaming – isn't as sophisticated as you'd assume. "I mean, we hope people think it's sophisticated," Garriott laughs, "but the implementation is actually quite simple. Imagine there's a fortress around a control point, and let's suppose it's owned currently by the Bane, who are, obviously, our enemies. What that means is first, the Bane's flag will be flying, second, there will be Bane mortars all around it in defense, and third, all the forcefields and doorways will prevent us from entering."

Straightforward enough, but this is where it gets interesting: TR actually plays itself. Even if no players are currently logged on, fighting for their sweaty, hairy, human comrades, NPCs will do the job for them. And gradually, fortresses will be taken and re-taken in a neverending, aggressive status-quo. "So while a control point is under Bane control," Garriott continues, "the human NPCs will send increasingly strong waves of fighters to try to take that base. And, ultimately, they will. If the player and/or the NPCs take back a base by raising the human flag, not only do the defenses turn human, but the forcefields turn blue, and NPCs come back to populate all the shops and give out missions. Hospitals work for humans, too. But during this time, the Bane will send increasingly strong waves of their own fighters to try to take the base back. If the players actively try to hold the base, they could probably do so indefinitely, but as soon as they focus their attention on something else, the Bane will start to take it back."

The greatest concern for some upon hearing Garriott describe the extent of his dynamic gameworld was that there'll come a point where either players got neglectful and the Bane took over every control point, or the humans pushed their way to complete global dominance. Thankfully, this isn't the case; action can always be found. "Even though the players have a strong influence on the state of the control points," Garriott reassures, "it's on a micro level. The player community never takes a planet. Planets are never ultimately cleansed, if you know what I mean, and nor will

Jokes aside, that looks awesome

Toattly Rad BTLRMOR!!!

one ultimately fall. The battle on that planet will continue; what changes for you as a player is that you'll 'graduate' from certain planets. You will have finished what you went there to do – perhaps you've taken out the overlord that controlled the bad guys, or you've given the indigenous population the skills necessary to fend for themselves - and you'll move on to the next planet."

Given that you'll be battling across many different planets, you might be a little worried that Garriott will have to sacrifice one of the things for which players love him most as a designer: detail. Fortunately, although the game won't be implementing, say, knitting and fishing sequences a la UO, it will certainly provide you with a lot more to play with and see than in its competitors. "Let me just say: TR is not UO," Garriott clarifies. "It's not the 'ultimate sandbox experience'; it's much more combat oriented. That said, compared to most MMOs, TR's planets definitely have the Lord British-level of richness, depth, and detail. There're tons and tons and tons of interactive objects, and there are lots of things to do that ensure you're not just blindly following quests. We have whole strings of missions basically in conflict with each other, and you'll get to points where you can't possibly solve both missions. So you have to decide which is the right one according to your principles. People will know this is a Lord British game."

As mentioned, this level of detail extends into the complexity of TR's missions. Interestingly, Garriott will be crafting many of these missions with what's become an incredibly hackneyed facet of MMO designs: instancing. "MMOs, on the whole, radically underutilise instancing," he admits. "But we're doing it differently – our instances aren't just about making private spaces for players to kill the big dragon and get the best treasure; instead, we're looking at them like story spaces. Because when you think about it, a single-player game is like one, giant instanced space. And you can become the hero that saves the world – you become the Avatar in the Ultima series – and you don't mind that your friend next door is assuming the same role, because he's not in your face doing it. So we use them as spaces for storytelling. You get to solve a big puzzle, or finish a compelling set of activities, and they result in some major success for you. And because your buddies aren't in your face, saying, 'Nyah, nyah, I did it first!' you don't mind."

Instanced missions don't just make you feel like He-Man, though; many of them actually have a significant (albeit temporary) effect on the world at large. "There are a number of ways they can affect the outlying world," says Garriott. "In a mission I was playing earlier today, you're at the Province Research Center. The back-story for that is that there's a factory that your fallen comrades have been taken to by the enemy, and they've then been put back on the battlefield against you. And it turns out that factory is the Province Research Center – so you go into that factory to ultimately destroy it, or take it offline. And when you finish the mission, NPCs in the world will comment on you, saying you're a hero for what you've done, and the actual battlefield will be affected because there'll be a lower drop of those soldiers who've been turned against you, at least until the factory goes back online."

> "TR IS NOT UO," GARRIOTT CLARIFIES. "IT'S NOT THE 'ULTIMATE SANDBOX"

So let's get this straight: an MMO with a dynamic battlefield, realistic combat system, high level of world detail, and instanced missions that aren't crap? In a genre where the greatest innovation most developers can come up with is a new setting, that's quite a shock. But then, it's only just that the father of mainstream MMOs would turn his child into a man. Ulthar, Luthar, and Uthar, you can be heroes – forever and ever. <<

GO! Electronic Entertainment Expo 2007

GO!

On March 30 of this year saw the Perth Convention Exhibition Centre was transformed into a gaming mecca for the first of what will hopefully become an annual occurrence – the 2007 GO3 Electronic Entertainment Expo.

As well as showcasing the latest in gaming and electronic entertainment, communication technology and generally celebrating geek culture (can you say cosplay?), GO3 also doubled as a game developers conference of sorts.

The topics of the conference ranged from the problems facing the industry and it's future direction to game development, licensing and publishing issues, with a variety of local and international speakers invited to share their views and experience on their preferred topic. Three of the highest-profile international guests included Grasshopper Manufacture's Goichi Suda (Killer 7, No More Heroes), Q Entertainment's Tetsuya Mizuguchi (Rez, Lumines) and Nana On Sha's Masaya Matsuura (PaRappa The Rappa, Vib Ribbon).

Timothy C. Best sat down with each of these visionary game makers and quizzed them on their latest projects, their most famous works and where they are heading in the future.

As part of SEGA and their United Game Artists group he worked on games like Rez, Space Channel 5 and Sega Rally Championship. As the founder of Q Entertainment he has created the phenomenally popular Lumines series, as well as releasing Meteos, Every Extend Extra, and a remake of Gunpei Yokoi's last puzzler, Gunpey, and more.

Hyper managed to drag the man himself, Tetsuya Mizuguchi, away from his hectic GO3 schedule just long enough to ask him about his obsession with music, his latest projects and the possibility of going back to some of his older creations.

Music always plays a huge role in all of your games, from Space Channel to Rez, and through to Lumines – what is it about the music part of games that really interests you?

When I am making the games, or thinking about the games, you have to think about the action of the game, and how it will play, as well as the themes of the game, whether it's racing games, action adventure – but what I really like the music element, because the with the musical elements you can make everyone feel the same.

Music can come from nothing, like somebody starting a beat [Mizuguchi claps his hands and hums a beat] and then somebody can start singing and dancing to create the groove from nothing. I think that this is one of the most charming things about being a human being.

Any race, female, male, young or old, everybody knows about the groove. Nobody ever needs to explain it, but everyone knows naturally how the groove works. It is part of being human, and that is why I blend that element into my games.

Also, the music has many aspects. With music people can say I want to sing, I want to dance, I want to play, or, I want to listen. In this way, music is like a big frontier to me, so I'm always striving to make a new experience with music.

Do you have a musical background?

Nothing! [Laughs] I just love music, and I get a lot of inspiration from music and music videos in particular. I remember when I watched my first music videos on TV, there was a music video for Peter Gabriel's 'Sledgehammer' – I remember thinking that this was really great, and I felt that this was a new kind of expression, a new art form.

So, I had a big inspiration, that if I got the chance I would like to create something new using the visual and audio experience. I had a kind of eager passion in my head, and I thought about what kind of things I would like to create, but when I started in interactive entertainment you couldn't create an audiovisual experience using 2D graphics and beeping sounds.

So I waited, and eventually new technology came in the Dreamcast and PlayStation 2 era. Finally I could take beating sounds and blend them with music and control every step of the programming, so it real got better then.

We've also heard that you have dabbled in directing music videos. How did this come about, and has this always been something you'd aspired to do?

When I produced Lumines 2, I got together many music videos from the real artists like Beck, Black Eyed Peas and New Order and many other artists. I tried to find very happy music with happy visuals as well, but sometimes we couldn't find it, so I decided to make it!

Then we made the music, I wrote the lyrics and I produced the music video. That song was called Heavenly Star. The music video was made popular on the Internet when a friend of mine introduced the video on his site. Then it was on youtube, and I was really surprised by how many people watched it. It even got a nomination from SpikeTV for best song of the year – which was a big surprise.

After that we started providing our music on iTunes, and the people who had watched the music video on youtube started to download the song from the iTunes store. Then we released a remix for clubs in Japan, and that was a real surprise – we had the number one chart hit in Tokyo. Many radio stations played Heavenly Star, and all this came from the game.

Now we're making the next music for our music group called Genki Rockets. Genki means like the positive energy – and we are trying to create very happy, very positive pop music. It's almost like power pop, but when you listen to it you will get this happy feeling. We're only just starting to create our music.

You created some classics with United Game Artists at SEGA and there are constantly rumours that you may sometime produce future sequels in any of these series. Will Q Entertainment and SEGA ever join forces to produce a sequel to one of your old creations?

You mean to Space Channel, or Rez? If I had a reason to make a

sequel to one of those games, then I would do it. If I was to make a sequel using the next technology, I feel that it must be fun. So, I haven't decided yet – but it is possible.

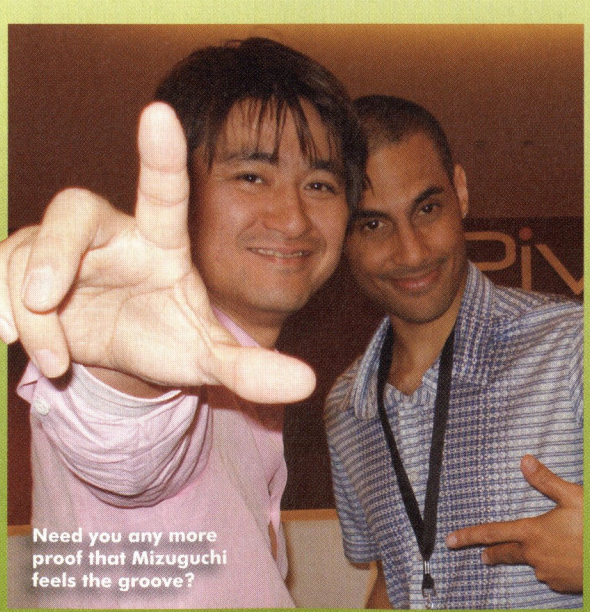
How did it come about that Q Entertainment remade an independent freeware game, Every Extend, as a commercial game?

That was kind of an accident – a very good accident. One of the staff in Q Entertainment discovered Every Extend for the PC, and many people in the office started to play it. One day he came to me and asked if we could make Every Extend Extra, a new one for PSP using the musical elements and make it a game from Q Entertainment. I said he could go ahead and do it, so he contacted the guy who made the original Every Extend and he was still a student at University. He joined our team as a level designer to make Every Extend Extra, and that was really good.

Now we are making the next game, Every Extend Extra Extreme [laughs] for the Xbox Live Arcade, and we are using hi-def visuals and 5.1 surround sound. We call it E4, because it's too long! [laughs]

Apart from hi-def visuals and 5.1 sound, will there be any other differences between Every Extend Extra and E4 on the Xbox Live Arcade?

With E4 we've changed the game design a little bit, mechanically speaking. This is because of many factors. The PSP version is a little bit of a "game" game, but with E4 you have to maintain a chain reaction, not just in the hundreds, but in the thousands, and the music is getting intense and the beat is getting faster – it's more like a "sensorama."



Need you any more proof that Mizuguchi feels the groove?

Still on the topic of Every Extend, there seems to be a great pool of talent out there making freeware games. Do you think that tapping into these underground developers is a way to maintain innovation in the games industry?

There are many possibilities, but in the case of Every Extend – the game's creator showed us what he had to offer by releasing Every Extend on PC for free. That was kind of a presentation. We saw it, and then we played it, and we thought it was really good – and we decided to make a professional game from a free game, he joined with us and we made the game together.

Would you consider taking another underground developer into your company and remaking other freeware games?

Yes. I think that if it is a good game, and it has potential, then we would do that.

We loved your recent remake of Gunpey; was this a special project for you? Had you been an admirer of Gunpei Yokoi's work, and was this you own personal tribute to Gunpei Yokoi?

The inspiration behind Gunpey was that we wanted to add our musical elements to the original game. The original Gunpey was a very simple game, and very addictive, and minimalistic. With the addition of music you can enjoy it even more.

We also wanted to dedicate the game to Mr Yokoi. Unfortunately he died several years ago in a car accident, so it we wanted to pay respect to him.

The thing about Gunpey is that it is a very good game, but people outside Japan had never played it, so we wanted to provide this game to the rest of the world, because it really is a very good game.

You also worked on Ninety-Nine Nights for the Xbox 360. The game was received very well in Japan, but it didn't do so well in the West. Do you think there are fundamental differences between Western and Japanese audiences?

I try to never care about whether some people will like my game or some people wont. My real attitude is just to create.

The game is the invisible art form anyway – if you play a game and it feels fun, then it's a good game, but if you feel it's not fun, then it's not a good game.

Whether or not it looks like an Asian game or looks like a Western game, if you think it's fun, it is a good game.

Sometime in the future, maybe one hundred years away, when humans go into outer space together, and look down on earth, then they will ask themselves "what is a cultural barrier".

Finally, what is next for you and Q Entertainment?

I can't tell you yet, but I am really ready to go to the next stage. I feel that my condition is really good now, and I have really good inspiration and energy.

I will be making some new things in the next two or three years, but until then I don't know yet, but I'll have a few projects.

GO3 Electronic Entertainment Expo 2007

He may have started his career working as an undertaker, but Goichi Suda had his sights set on a slightly livelier audience. The game director, who goes by the nickname SUDA51, a play on words of his actual name ("Go" means five, and "Ichi" means one in Japanese), has been creating games since the mid-1990s, but only came to prominence outside his native Japan after the release of the stunningly violent and visually innovative Killer 7. Suda came to GO3 to talk about "initial contact" with videogames, but we managed to pull him aside and get him to spill the beans on his worldview, his games that never made it outside Japan, and his next project, No More Heroes.

Your career story is a fascinating one – could you tell us how did you manage to go from working as an undertaker to videogame director?

[Laughs] It was a long journey between being an undertaker to being a game director. I had about twenty different jobs between being an undertaker and being a game developer. During these years I was always thinking about creating something myself, I wanted to create something new.

Eventually I had the opportunity to meet with a games company [the since-defunct Human Entertainment] and they hired me as the designer on a professional wrestling game, Super Fire Pro Wrestling Special.

The reason why I was hired as the writer on the pro wrestling game was because I had a very high knowledge about professional wrestling. I'd say I was maybe one of the top ten most knowledgeable people in Japan on the topic of professional wrestling. Human were looking for someone with that kind of knowledge to create their game, so that is how I started my career as a games designer.

You are often said to have a unique outlook on the world, and that this is reflected in your work. Do your see yourself as viewing the world differently to other game makers?

My background always drew me towards mediums like Japanese manga, animation and movies. For this reason it was very good for me to grow up in Japan, as opposed to growing up in another part of Asia or Europe or the USA as well, because it has meant that I have always been inspired by those kinds of entertainment that are made in Japan.

As well, the Japanese education system is very strict. I was always forced to study very hard, but I never had any real interest in it, and instead I just focused my attention on movies and other kinds of entertainment. All of these things that I have seen and have done influence what goes into my games, and that is where my style comes from.

Despite only one of your games having been released outside of Japan, that game being Killer 7, you have already got quite a large following in the West. Do you think there was something in particular about Killer 7, or about your own design style, that is so attractive to Western gamers?

After I released Killer 7 outside Japan, I felt that my life and my career had peaked – the reason that I am here in Australia today is because of the success of Killer 7, which is great. Before making Killer 7 I would only concentrate on creating games that would appeal to Japanese gamers, but after the international success of Killer 7, I'm now thinking about all gamers, not only in Japan. Now I'm focusing on the global market.

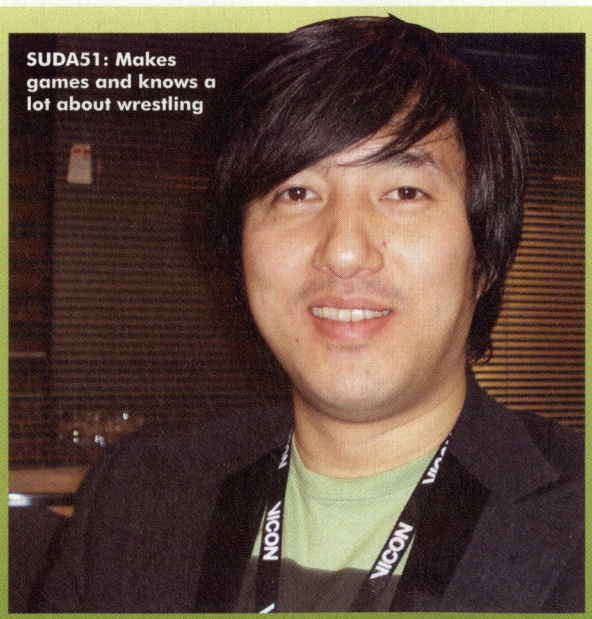
How is it different developing for a global market, instead of only for Japan?

The biggest difference in terms of game design is that I now have to make the games for everyone. Before Killer 7 I only ever thought of the Japanese gamer, but now I need to make my games relevant to the entire world.

Since Killer 7 was so well received over here, do you regret that your other games never made it into the West? Your game "Michigan" sounded particularly interesting – with the entire game being viewed from a camera's viewfinder – we'd really love to play that. Are there any plans to translate or remake these games for Western gamers?

One day I would love to – but right now that is not something we're working on. It's not the time for us to do that.

Many of your previous games have been very much centred on story. Is a compelling story the most important thing for you when creating a game? And



SUDA51: Makes games and knows a lot about wrestling

why do you think story is so important?

The reason why I make the storyline the central part of the design in my games is that, as a director it is my responsibility to control the programming and graphics and sound and all those things – that is my job – but what I really like doing is creating, not just controlling. That is why I like making story an important part of my games.

From the very beginning, the reason why I wanted to join the entertainment business is that I wanted to create something by my own hand, so it has always been important for me to make the stories. Now I feel like I have the confidence to create my game's storylines the way I want

Your latest project – No More Heroes – looks amazing, could you tell us a bit about the game's premise – and how these ideas for the game came to you?

The premise of No More Heroes is that you play a lead character called Travis Touchdown, who is an Otaku, or fan of anime and manga. Suddenly, Travis decides to become an assassin and joins an agency for assassins. His job then becomes to kill other killers to earn the top rank as an assassin. He has to kill the top-ten killers from ten to one to get the top ranking.

There are a lot of different things that this idea came from. There are a lot of games that have assassins, all of the same type of character, and I wanted to show a different type of character playing an assassin in my game. The character of Travis Touchdown is an Otaku, and a big fan of TV soap operas, and that shows through in his character.

I am also a big fan of old samurai films, and I thought about what a samurai-type story would be like set in a modern town, and not in ancient history, would be like.

The more I thought about this character I thought about what would happen if he bought a Beam Katana, like a lightsabre, and decided to become an assassin – and the idea came from that.

THE CHARACTER OF TRAVIS TOUCHDOWN IS AN OTAKU, AND A BIG FAN OF TV SOAPS

No More Heroes will be an open-word game, with driving sections – what did you take any inspiration from any games in particular for this part of the game – Grand Theft Auto perhaps?

No More Heroes isn't really like those games, Travis can only drive one vehicle, which is his motorbike – so that's about it...

For the Beam Katana battling in No More Heroes – what kind of combat system have you created? And are there other ways to fight than just with the Beam Katana?

Basically, the main weapon will be the Beam Katana, but as you play through the game you can collect money, and when you save up enough you can upgrade your katana to a better one.

As for the fighting system, [Goichi pauses for thought] ...it's hard to define, but it is similar to other Japanese games, many Japanese games use the Katana...

But how does it actually control? Does your sword follow the movement of the Wii-mote?

It doesn't use a lot of the motion-sensitivity of the Wii, but when the fights end you can kill your opponents with a slash to the neck – this is really the only time that the player can use the remote control as a sword.

So, could No More Heroes combat work on any other console apart from the Wii?

Of course.

In other interviews that I have read, you often say that you are very happy working alongside Nintendo. Killer 7 was on Gamecube and No More Heroes is a Wii exclusive – what is it about Nintendo that makes them a good working partner for you and Grasshopper Manufacture?

When it came time to decide which next-generation console I wanted to make games for, I needed one that would let me control the balance, that's why I chose the Wii.

Also, Nintendo offered a lot of help, and were very cooperative, even though Grasshopper Manufacture are not a large development company, Nintendo were still very cooperative with us. That is what I like about Nintendo.

We've also heard that you would like to develop for the Xbox 360 in the future – but you have also said that there is only a very small chance that you will develop for the PS3. What is it about the Xbox 360 that attracts you, and what is it about the PS3 that means you may not develop for it?

The situation with the PS3 is that a small game developer doesn't have the time to create a game for the PS3. It's not that I don't want to make games for the PS3, actually I am very interested in developing for both the Xbox 360 and PS3, but I think that for a small developer the Xbox 360 is a more viable platform because of that situation. Especially for independent developers, it just takes less time to develop for the Xbox 360.

Finally, what is next for you and Grasshopper Manufacture? Is there anything that you'd like to try in the future that you haven't already?

I have too many ideas... I could tell you them now, but if I do, other game designers might steal them!

YOU! READER! GET YOU THE HOT TRANSLATION OF INTERVIEW TO READ!

We do understand that a few of the answers given by Suda, Mizuguchi and Matsuura may occasionally seem a little cryptic, or veer onto other tangents not covered in the questions asked. Undoubtedly some of the clarity of the questions and responses may have been dulled by the translation from English to Japanese, and from Japanese back to English, but we have decided not to alter the questions we asked or the answers we were given – as we'd prefer to leave it be, as a document of our discussions with these three brilliant game developers.

GDC Electronic Entertainment Expo 2007

He's the man responsible for the rhythm genre, a type of game where you must press a combination of buttons along with the beat of the music to complete a song. PaRappa the Rappa was the game, and it immediately propelled its creator, Masaya Matsuura, to the status of a virtuoso game designer.

With a deep background in music, Matsuura would continue to create games that used music in innovative ways, like the incomparable Vib Ribbon series.

Matsuura himself sat down to rap with us about his former life as a rock star, his sources of inspiration and his hopes that one day we'll all be playing games without the use of a screen...

You are widely credited as the creator of the "rhythm" genre – with most citing PaRappa the Rapper being the first game of that style. How did you first come up with the idea for this style of game?

I started my music career in 1985, as part of a band with a female vocalist. We were kind of like Eurythmics, or something like that. The very important thing for me was that I used to play a musical instrument called the Fairlight, which was made by an Australian computer music industry company. It was a very expensive computer.

After that there was a very development for me – we release almost ten albums until the middle of the nineties, but after awhile I felt a little frustrated having to make the same kind of style, especially using computers. For example, I used a Macintosh program for my music sequencing, and these types of computer applications forced me to adapt to their style, so I couldn't do my own style.

So, I decided to create my own tools for my music creation. Fortunately, I had a very talented programmer for a friend, and he made a kind of simple prototype of these music tools for me. This cooperation was very interesting for me, and we had around a year to make the tools for my music creation.

I don't know why, but at some point my focus moved to more interactive entertainment software instead of the music tools. That was really the start of my music game creations.

Are there certain hallmarks in your style of game design? What do you think makes a Masaya Matsuura game unique and different from any other?

I was planning on talking about this issue in my lecture tomorrow [on the third day of GO3], but basically, I have always been interested to watch human communication in real time. Today Mizuguchi talked about his ideas on call and response, which is kind of a similar thing, so he's sort of my idol [laughs].

I think to make a game that communicates to different humans, it requires the kind of idea that make that communication very user friendly.

This is my basic theory on game creation. But, I don't mean that the communication is most important between humans, I mean between the hardware or software, between the machine, or between the screen and the people. To build these kinds of relationships we still need much more sophisticated communication between these things. Today we have many inconvenient communication styles, like controlling the game machine like that, or like this [Matsuura mimes playing games with a variety of control styles], so we really need to make this communication much more sophisticated into the future.

I think maybe we need some special idea – this is my style. I focus on these kinds of aspects because I am a musician. For a musician, the musical instrument is a very important tool. For example, a very talented violinist may have a very expensive and very old violin for their playing. The violin may have been around a long time, it may have even been living much longer than the player.

So, in these kind of relationships, maybe if the violinist bought a very cheap violin, they would not be able to play it. Using this violin concept, we see that building these kinds of relationships between the instrument and the player are important.

These kinds of things are happening with consoles and digital hardware, but it's not yet sophisticated enough to integrate the human into the machine.

For Matsuura, everything is kick, punch.. all in the mind

Although you are famous for the rhythm genre, the last couple of games that Nana On-Sha have put out have been two Tamagotchi-themed games for the Nintendo DS. What was the motivation behind wanting to do these games?

I had two kinds of reasons. One reason is that I'm getting older, so

many of my young company staff have started to think of their own creative ideas for games, so I have to assist in creating their ideas too.

The second reason was to explore the communication between humans and non-humans. I am very interested in this communication, especially in the language they use and how to realise the communication between the player and the hardware and software.

Maybe ten years ago if they asked me to make a game like Tamagotchi I would have denied them, but recently my new focus on communication made me want to make a Tamagotchi game for kids.

Will we ever see new sequels in the PaRappa the Rapper, UmJammer Lammy, or Vib-Ribbon series?

At the end of last year we release a Parrapa game for the PSP has been launched in Japan, and maybe for China and Korea too [but not in the West]. So yes.

How do you feel about the recent resurgence in popularity of the rhythm genre, with games like Guitar Hero?

Yes, Guitar Hero has been made by my friend's company called Harmonix. The company's president Alex Rigopulos and I are very good friends, and have known each other for about a decade.

I am very happy to here about how successful that title has been for them, and already their company has been bought from them by Viacom. That was very good news, and I feel good about the new popularity.

GAMES ARE VERY SPECIAL, AND STRANGE.

Is Nana On-Sha going to be developing the newly announced Nintendo Wii Tamagotchi game, Tamagotchi Party On?

Actually, the Wii-only game won't be made by us. We're only doing the Nintendo DS games and Namco Bandai will be doing the other versions.

In the future, will we see you and Nana On-Sha return to the rhythm genre, or have you moved on?

It's not done yet, but recently we are working on a game called Rhythmica. It is more of a concept really, rather than an actual game for a game console. It's kind of like an extended music visualiser for various kinds of environments, like a TV for example. It's hard for me to explain how it really works, but it's very simple, and you will get to see it soon.

Games like Guitar Hero and Donkey Konga in particular have used new peripherals like guitar or bongo controllers. Do you think that your future game ideas might involve new game peripherals?

I've had some ideas for the future that include new peripherals, but I don't know yet. As I said before I am always interested in the communication between the hardware or software and the people. So if a peripheral helps the player to play better, then that would be nice, but on the other hand I am worried about the lifespan of the peripheral.

Maybe you will buy a Guitar Hero controller to play Guitar Hero, but how long will you play with it? Maybe you will play Guitar Hero for three months, but what happens when you stop playing it? Maybe you will throw the controller in the garbage. Maybe after three months 300,000 Guitar Hero controllers will be sitting in the garbage, I always think about that.

I think something like a microphone, so that you can talk to the game naturally, would be more efficient.

Nana On-Sha also publishes game soundtracks, books and a variety of other products. What other kinds of things apart from games are Nana On-Sha involved in making – and how do these other activities affect your business?

Games are very special, and strange. It is very easy to correlate the game between some other medium, like music or book, but all the time, a game has to be special.

So, I am very enthusiastic music lover of course, and also an enthusiastic reader, but although we may make other things, we also make sure that our games are special.

We have been making a lot of other things though, for example, some of the content for Sony's robot dog, Aibo, Although Sony have recently discontinued Aibo, the last two or three years we spent a lot of time creating the content for the Aibo.

You are sometime thought of as a PlayStation developer, but have you given much thought to which platforms you are going to support in the future? Will you stick with the PlayStation, or perhaps go for the Wii or Xbox 360?

Well, Rythmica doesn't focus on one particular platform. But for other games I think we have two types of ways. The first way is to develop for a certain hardware very tightly, and the other one is to have a no platform concept.

I think that downloadable games for something like the Xbox Live Arcade, and I don't know the name of the PS3 download service, but maybe they could be the thing.

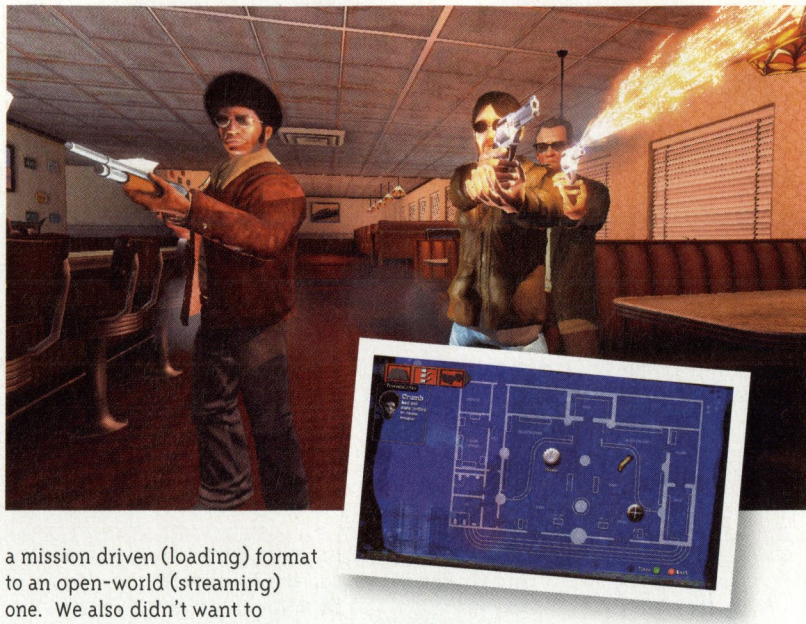
So in the future you are going to develop for multiple formats, including downloadable content?

Yes, but we think that games with a screen are only a small jump. In the future I am going to be focusing on games without screen, like playing with an Aibo – or fighting with a robot [laughs].

I think that traditional gaming needs a complete rethink – it needs a brand new type of concept. Maybe sometime between now and the next decade we will have the chance to play in a way that is much different from how we play now. In the future maybe playing with a TV screen will be only one part of the interactive entertainment industry.

HEI$T

SYSTEM: **PC/PS3/XBOX 360**
CATEGORY: **ACTION**
PLAYERS: **1-???**
DEVELOPER: **INXILE ENTERTAINMENT**
DUE: **LATE 2007**



We talked to Sean Patton, Senior Designer at inXile Entertainment about their recently annouced "steal 'em up", Hei$t.

How was the idea for HEI$T conceptualised? And could you give us a rundown of the game's premise and design philosophy?

Sean Patton: Bank robberies seem to have a special place in American culture. They have a higher status than other forms of crime, they have been romanticized in our culture, and even today there is something iconic about the rebel bank robber. Bank robbers are just cool. So when we started talking about settings and the 60's came up it just seemed to fit together really well. The 60's were a rebellious and tense time in American history. It was also a time when music, cars, clothes, and movies were all cool with a distinct sense of style. It was just perfect.

In HEI$T players take the role of Johnny as he's just getting out of a five year stint in prison. During Johnny's last job someone tipped off the cops and as a result his father was killed and Johnny was put in the slammer. Now he's back on the scene and determined to finish what his dad couldn't.

To pull off a successful bank heist you need to do three things:

1. Get In (preparation) – Players need to find out what they can about the security measures in the banks and develop different strategies to get around them.

2. Get the Cash (execution) – Planning is all done, so now players should make their way to the banks and pull of the heists. Muscle controls the crowd, the getaway driver watches the door for any surprises (and gets the car), and the safe specialist tackles the vault. It's up to players to deal with any surprises and keep their crew working as a cohesive unit.

3. Get Out – On a perfect heist players should be leaving long before the cops arrive, but we all know that not everything goes according to plan. If the cops have the bank surrounded, players need to find a way out and ditch the cops before the fuzz follows them to the hideout.

What was the inspiration behind moving into the open-world crime sim genre?

We set HEI$T in an open-world format as an extension of gameplay rather than jumping on the "open-world" bandwagon. There are three main stages of any bank heist: Get In, Get the Cash, and Get Out. We want players to have just as much excitement running from the cops as they do shooting it out in front of a bank. We especially wanted to avoid having players rob a bank and then hit a loading screen as we load a driving/escape sequence. That would be like watching the movie Ronin, and having a "Please Insert Disk 2" screen pop up right after they hit the courier and right before the car chase begins.

This meant moving away from a mission driven (loading) format to an open-world (streaming) one. We also didn't want to string players along with a linear sequence of missions. Part of the cool factor of many heist movies is the setup, and we want players to feel like they are the ones running the show. Players are provided basic information about the banks, and it is up to them to figure out what they have to do, what they can skip, and in what order to tackle the problems.

Furthermore, when you are entering the open-world genre, certain comparisons are going to be made with the biggest game in that genre (some would say the biggest game in any genre), Grand Theft Auto. What do you think HEI$T will do differently from the GTA games? And are there things you think it will do better? Explain why.

With GTA, it seems like the open world environment takes center stage. Most of the player's actions take place on the streets of the city, doing a multitude of different types of activities which usually aren't important to driving the story.

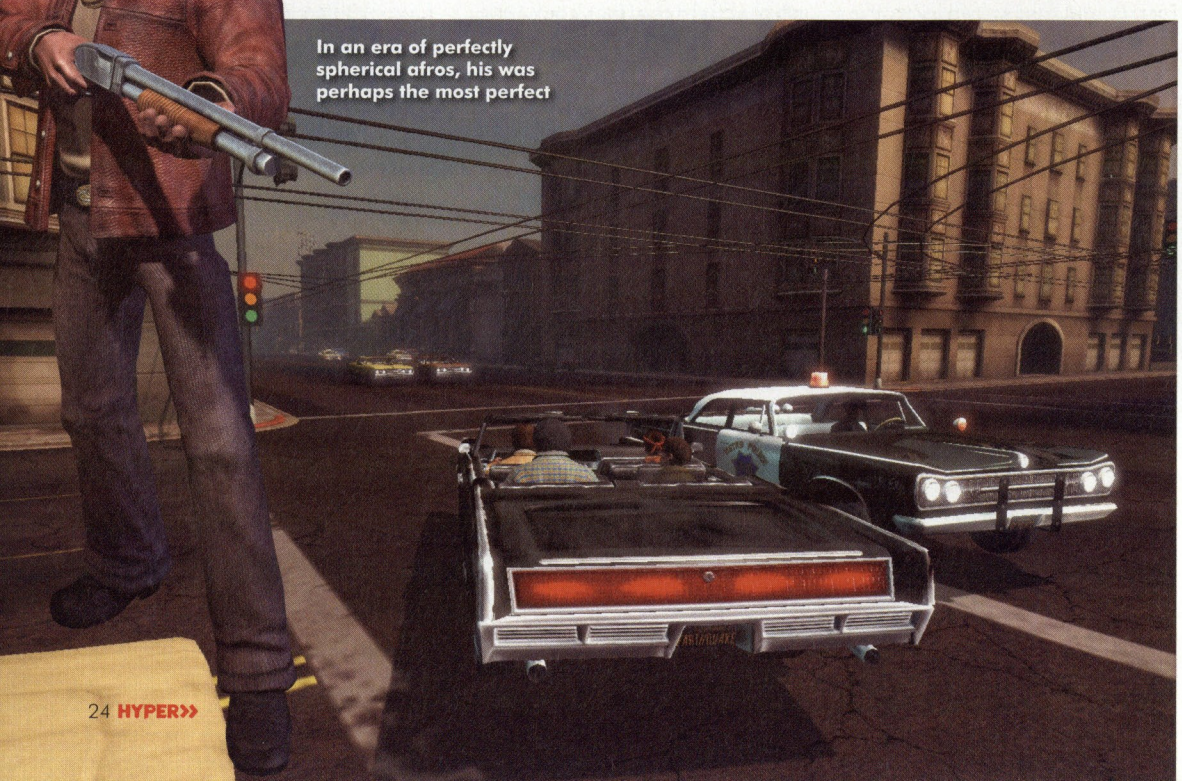
HEI$T's gameplay will be more focused. The ultimate goal of our game is for players to rob the major banks in San Francisco. That said, players will be given tasks to help them achieve these goals. We're also putting more detail into the combat aspects of HEI$T too. In GTA combat seems to be a lesser mechanic in the game. Players lock on to their target and then spam the fire button until the target is dead. We will have an intense cover-based combat system for when you have an encounter with overzealous bank guards, or even worse...cops.

We read that inXile is making HEI$T so that players feel like they are part of the best robberies and car chases from classic movies. Which movies did you have in mind when you were creating the game?

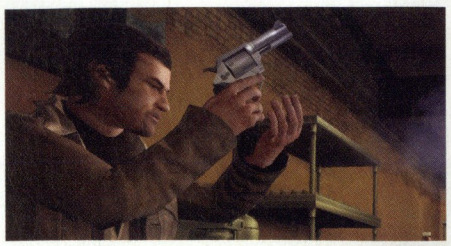
We referenced many different movies for the different parts of HEI$T. For planning we looked at Ocean's Eleven, The Italian Job, and Ronin. Inspiration for the hold-up/shootouts we watched Heat, The Wild Bunch, The Getaway, and Point Break. And for the getaway we referenced Ronin, The Italian Job, and Bullet.

How exactly will the bank heists work? Will you have to recruit a crew of skilled robbers, like a safe man, a crowd control man, a getaway driver, etc?

As previously stated, bank heists are broken up into three primary phases: Planning, execution, and the escape. Players take the lead of a hand-picked crew of professionals: A safe specialist, a getaway driver, and some muscle to keep people in line. During the first phase the crew plan out a bank job and take the necessary precautions to circumvent the various security systems that they'll be facing. Depending upon the security system, players could be acquiring explosives to break through



In an era of perfectly spherical afros, his was perhaps the most perfect



Afros make groovy targets

reinforced doors, or something as simple as getting some blackmail information to coerce a security guard into leaving a back door unlocked.

When breaking down the gameplay during a heist it is all about clock management. If you look at some famous bank robbery movies it is about getting the largest amount of cash in the shortest amount of time (before the cops arrive). In the movie Point Break, it was always about the quick smash and grab. The robbers always called out the time remaining. In Heat they pulled off a perfect job and got out of the bank without firing a shot, unfortunately they didn't quite pull it off quickly enough and the cops were just arriving as they were leaving the bank. Everything that goes wrong in a heist shortens the time on the clock. If players don't manage the crowds properly somebody may trigger the alarm or call the police. If players don't watch the door, someone may sneak out or if someone walks in and they aren't dealt with, they will just run back out and call the cops. If players blow the vault rather than get a specialist to crack it, the explosion will certainly be heard by anyone outside of the bank and then someone will call the cops. See where I'm goin' with this?

inXile founder Brian Fargo has been quoted as saying that HEI$T will have a "Quentin Tarantino" feel. What exactly does this mean, and how will it affect HEI$T's gameplay?

Quentin Tarantino is a genius when it comes to creating great personalities for his characters, especially in tense, unexpected situations. The characters in HEI$T have strong personalities. The crew is constantly talking with Johnny and each other. Sometimes they are giving players important information, sometimes they are just providing color to the world. In addition to interesting characters, we also want to surprise players with unexpected moments. I won't give anything away, but even the best planned robberies can go wrong when the unexpected pops up.

How historically accurate is your San Francisco of 1969 going to be in terms of architecture and atmosphere, and what kind of research did you undertake to make it a credible representation of the city in that era?

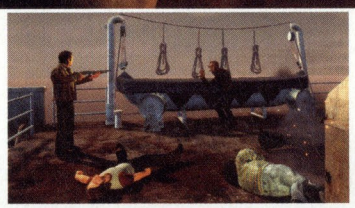
We did a lot of research on the 60's for HEI$T. We examined various types of advertising (print and television commercials), clothing and fashion, music, and movies from the period to get a good feel for the time. As for the city of San Francisco itself, we are definitely going with a stylized version. We're using some of the significant landmarks and trying to focus some of the gameplay around those locations. Also, because we like to emphasize the chase and driving elements of our game, players will be reminded of San Francisco just by the jumps they take while speeding through the hilly streets.

We aren't trying to be a political or social docudrama for the era. Even in this area we are taking liberties.

Furthermore, the big things for San Francisco in 1969 wwere the American Indian occupation of Alcatraz Island and the height of hippie culture, etc. Will these and other political or social events from that era be reflected in your San Francisco?

We aren't trying to be a political or social docudrama for the era. So even in this area we are taking liberties. Overall though, we aren't ignoring these aspects, you will see hippies picketing and hear from certain factions that imply their relationship to historic events.

It has already been announced that HEI$T will have the attitude of "rock-driven films of the 60's". Will HEI$T soundtrack be rock-driven? Will it have an authentic soundtrack full of real '60s hits, and what artists and songs can we expect to be listening to in-game?



Such a friendly town is San Francisco

We are currently working to get some licensed music from the greatest rock bands of that era into HEI$T, but we will also be using a music composer to create tracks in the style of the 60s. Since our music licensing deals aren't final, I can't tell you exactly who just yet though.

How will both the melee and gun combat work in HEI$T? Will the gun combat be of the free-aiming or lock-on targeting variety? And what kinds of weapons can we expect to see?

Most of the combat in HEI$T uses firearms. We do have some melee attacks but they are limited and used more for stealth, crowd control, or as a fallback (e.g. when you are out of ammo). HEI$T uses a free-aiming system with aim-assists to make targeting easier.

Our combat uses the cover system that has become popular in games as of late. Our lead designer, Scott Crisostomo, developed the system for Kill.Switch and is now spearheading the combat for HEI$T, with an emphasis on intense shoot outs.

The weapons will be appropriate to the time period. Players will have access to automatic pistols, revolvers, shotguns, submachine guns, assault rifles, sniper rifles, machine guns, and explosives. Some of the older weapons will be from the WWII era such as the Tommy gun and Grease Guns, while the more "modern" weapons will be from the Vietnam War, M-16s and AK-47s.

What kinds of things are you doing for the driving component of HEI$T? And what kinds of vehicles will we have access to?

Getaway chases are a major component of HEI$T. Players will drive the streets of San Francisco in an attempt to get away from the law. It will be important that players to explore the world looking for ramps and shortcuts. Players will find ways to slow down the police by interacting with different parts of the environment, such as shooting out a billboard to create a blockade behind them. Also, players will be able to create alliances with people in the world that may help them out during a chase. For instance, players could form an alliance with the garbage drivers union, and during a chase the union drivers will cut off the police.

Players will be able to drive pretty much everything the see in the world. That being said, only a limited number of types of vehicles will be able to be upgraded. Upgrading is very important to improving the chances of getting away. Armor, suspension, engine and nitrous can be upgraded on vehicles. Also, cars can be customized with paint and decals, to give a personal touch to the game. <<

Tomb Raider Anniversary

SYSTEM: **PS2/PC/PSP**
CATEGORY: **ACTION ADVENTURE**
PLAYERS: **1**
DEVELOPER: **CRYSTAL DYNAMICS**
DUE: **MAY 2007**

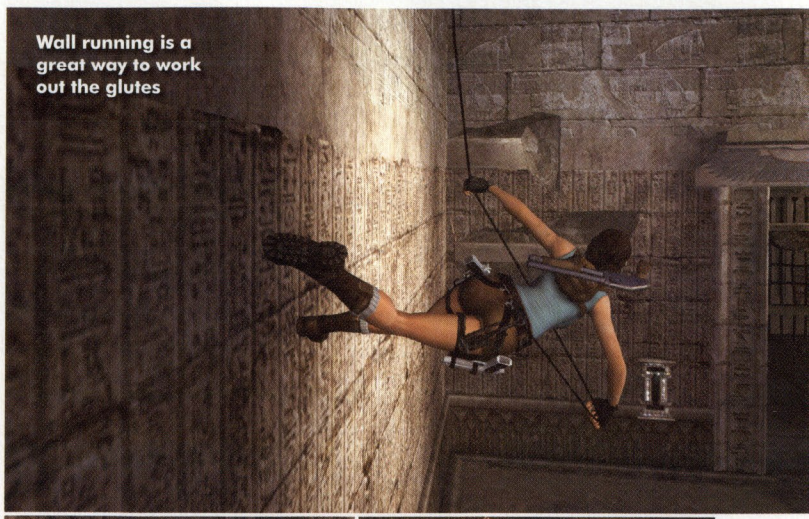
Over the years Lara Croft seems to have had as many facelifts and boob jobs as Pamela Anderson – a rather incredible feat when you consider that the virtual woman is but 10 years old. Well, technically she is 11 as the first game was released in 1996 but you can't let the truth get in the way of a round number of good opening line. As a special Anniversary present to the character and the fans, Eidos and Crystal Dynamics are teaming up to bring us Tomb Raider: Anniversary, not a new adventure but a reworking of the original adventure that introduced the character and essentially became a new genre of puzzle gaming. To set the scene, a rather bony woman named Jacqueline Natla who wants Ms Croft to help her find the Scion of Atlantis and ancient doodad of mystical import contacts Lara. Lara, of course, takes the case, jetting around the world, stealing ancient treasures, destroying monuments and shooting endangered species in her search for the Atlantean mcguffin.

One simple element of a puzzle now can dwarf a full puzzle from the original game.

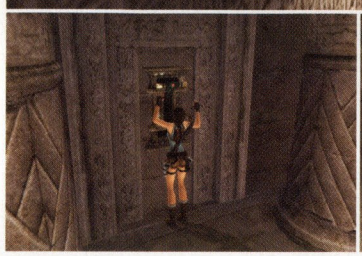
THE NEW YOU

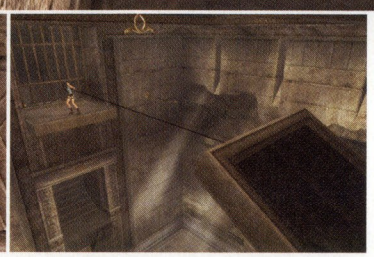
If you played the original Tomb Raider you needn't fear that you've seen all that Anniversary has to offer already. Far from it – the new Lara is as different from the original Lara as night and day, chalk and cheese, cats and dogs and a multitude of other things that are unlike each other. Yes, you could argue that cats and dogs are actually more alike than unlike as they are both small to medium sized carnivorous domesticated mammals but we have no time for your fancy science degrees and book learning. Not only are Lara's breasts and hips now slightly better proportioned and a damn sight less square, the world's most famous game heroine has a number of new tricks culled from the most recent games in the franchise, most notably Legend. Thankfully it looks as though everyone involved is denying the existence of Angel of Darkness so you don't have to worry about not being strong enough to open a door.

The inclusion of all of the most recent skill additions; the grapple, being able to shimmy up and down poles, balancing on top of poles and rolling to avoid enemies or traps has allowed Crystal Dynamics to seriously rethink the original puzzles, adding significantly to their complexity and scope. Yes, a good number of situations and puzzles look similar on the surface tot hose of the original but they lead off on different tangents utilising all of the skills at Lara's command.



Wall running is a great way to work out the glutes





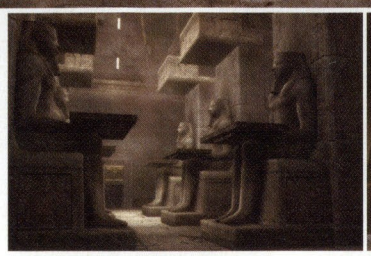
The sheer scale of the puzzles totally eclipses any of those seen in the original game. This scale comes in part from the new skill but also due to the modified Tomb Raider Legend engine that drives the game, an engine capable of rendering environments much, much larger than anything possible in the first game. One simple element of a puzzle now can dwarf a full puzzle from the original game.

DIRTY GIRL

The engine also has a few other nifty little features up its sleeve, or manifold, or whatever you want to call the part of an engine in which it keeps enginey features. For a start the game looks the money. It's shaping up to be a fantastic looking game with lush

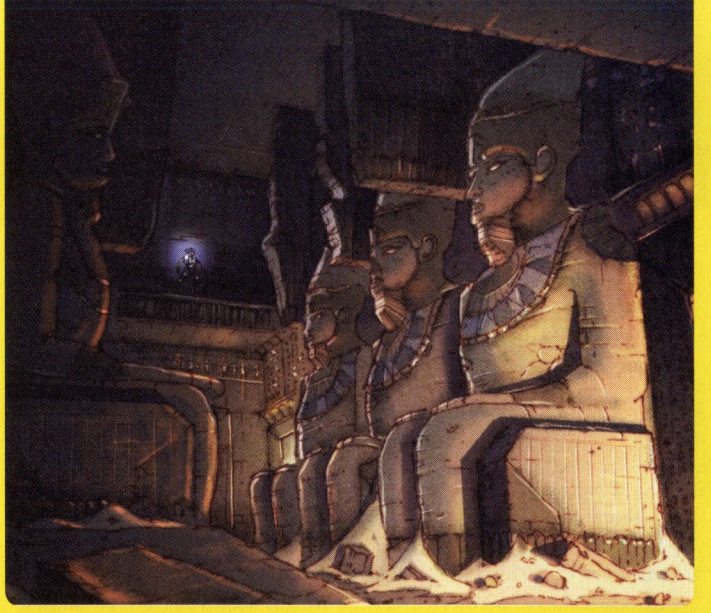
What We'd Like to See:
A control system on the PSP that doesn't require you to stand still to pan the camera.

The very definition of a failed nose-job



Egyptian "Stable Tables"

environments, a fantastically rendered and animated main character and a rather nifty looking (though ultimately frustrating) T-Rex. For that added touch of realism – because we all know that we need an injection of realism in a game about a woman who travels the world stealing ancient stuff, fighting monsters who are inevitably awakened by the aforementioned stealing of ancient stuff and shooting dinosaurs – Lara picks up a layer of dust and grime during her travails (we're using the "arduous task" definition here, not the "labour of childbirth" definition – doing that around dinosaurs and ancient evils is just silly). Sure, Lara getting dirty doesn't really add anything to the game but it's a nice effect nonetheless.



Unlock Stuff

You hear the term "for the fans" bandied about a hell of a lot by developers but there is a hell of a lot in Anniversary that is being developed specifically for the fans. From what we understand there will be up to nine different categories of unlockables to be, err, unlocked in the game, ranging from concept art and character drawings to new costumes for Lara, cheats, character biographies and more. We believe the Croft mansion will also be making a welcome return adding a whole new series of intricate puzzles to the mix.

One thing we definitely noticed during our time with the game was that the level of difficulty you choose at the beginning of the game is directly proportional to how frustrating the game is. Although it may have just been our early code the only difference that seemed to come with choosing a level of difficulty was the number and difficulty of the gunfights. Although there are many opportunities to shoot wild animals and the occasional dinosaur in Anniversary, combat feels like a sideline rather than the main focus and ultimately detracts from the brilliance of the puzzle solving.

Tomb Raider Anniversary is shaping up to be a rather great game. Sure, the combat comes across as a bit of an also-ran but the story still holds up after all these years and the added skill have made for a fantastic "re-imagining" of the events of the original game. As we understand it, Anniversary will be the last Tomb Raider game to be developed for the PS2. If that is the case then you would be hard pressed to find a better send-off. <<

Look, it wants to shake hands

Devil May Cry 4

SYSTEM: **PS3/X360/PC**
CATEGORY: **ACTION ADVENTURE**
PLAYERS: **1**
DEVELOPER: **CAPCOM**
DUE: **NOVEMBER**

Of all the game titles that call into question the probability of Satan weeping, Devil May Cry is perhaps the only one. It also happens to be a series of games so good that even if it doesn't make the Prince of Darkness blub into his chalice of virgin's blood, it may well make you shed a tear instead. Not the kind of tears that you cry when your pet puppy goes to doggy heaven though; the kind that you cry when you win the gameplay lottery and find yourself up to your eyeballs in amazing gun-blazing, sword-slashing action – tears of gaming joy.

Capcom is promising to optimise each version to maximise the game's performance on each format.

It's time once again to prepare your ocular cavities for a torrent of the wet stuff, as Capcom's premier action adventure series is getting a fourth chapter, and this time it has more than a few surprises up its red leather-jacketed sleeve.

SPARDAAAA!

The first thing to note about the Devil May Cry 4 is that you will no longer control Dante, the protagonist of the previous three games. Instead we'll be playing as Nero, a character that may look strikingly similar to Dante, but is actually very different.

For starters Nero hates Dante, and will spend much of the game hunting him down and attempting to exact revenge upon him. As a member of the "Order of the Sword" Nero worships the Dark Knight Sparda but he somehow comes to witness Dante, Sparda's son, slaughtering his fellow order members. Believing that Dante has turned his back on humanity, Nero sets out to avenge his fallen comrades.

Former black Power Ranger turned voice actor, Johnny Yong Bosch, is apparently going to be providing the voice and even some motion-captured movements for the new character. Since Yong Bosch is proficient in Shaolin-style Kung Fu, there's some speculation that Nero's final fighting style may be influenced by the martial arts.

Even if Nero isn't a Kung Fu master though, his unique weapons and powers will give him enough of an edge in his quest for vengeance, with a new gun, sword and another weapon at his disposal. Much like Dante's "Ebony and Ivory" pistols and "Alastor" sword, Nero also names his equipment; wielding a doubled-barrelled revolver called "Blue Rose" as well as a sword called "Red Queen".

What We'd Like to See:
Need you ask? Dante as a playable character is what we need, even if he's just a bonus unlockable character. Although, if he had his own storyline missions we'd be more than happy with that too.

We can really get behind a hero in chaps

Hackety-slash

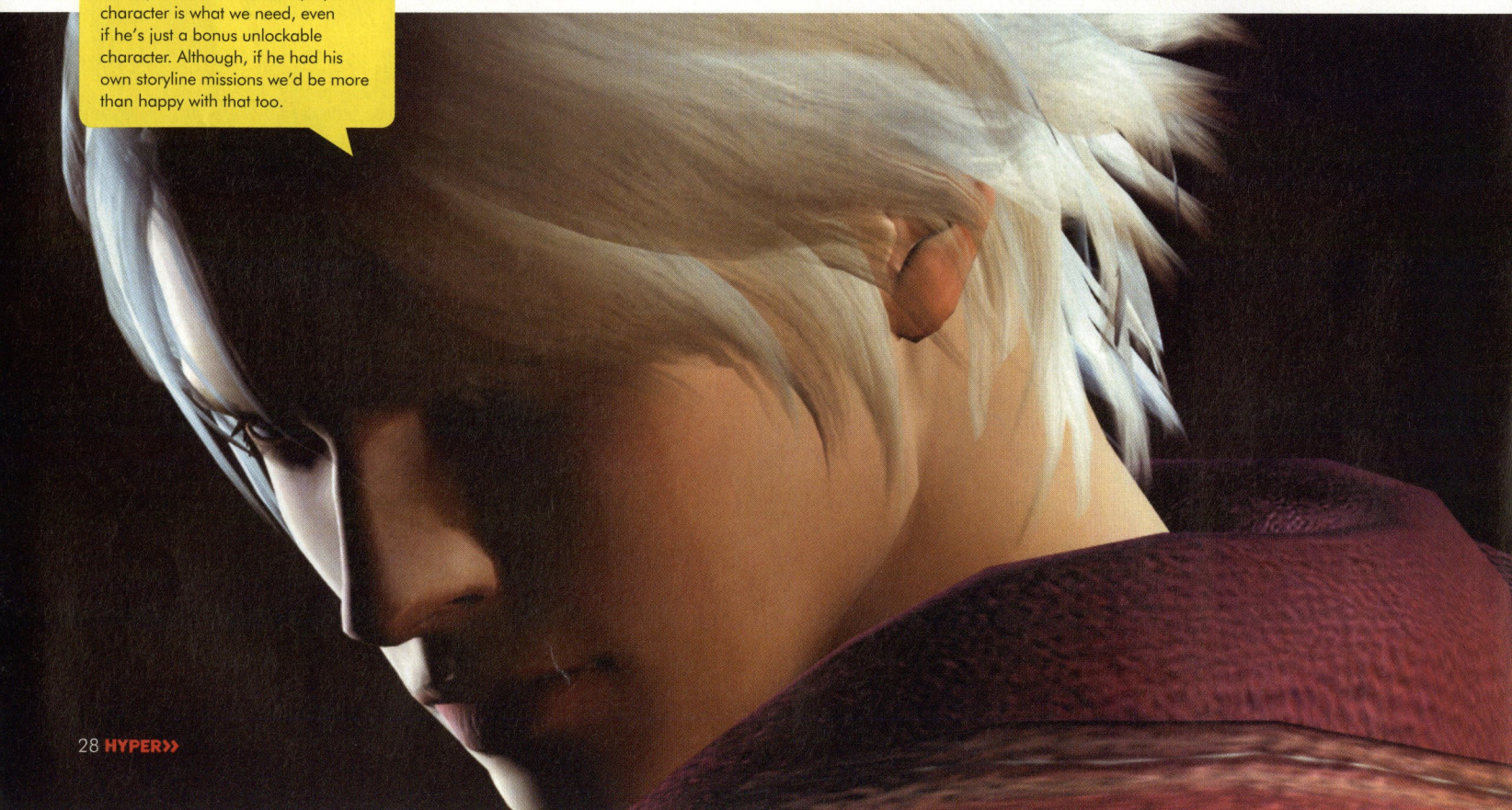
RED RIGHT HAND

The big new power however is the "Devil Bringer", a demonic right arm that Capcom promises will deliver "overwhelming damage to enemies with non-stop combos, while gaining new power". Capcom are promising that the arm will add an entirely new combat mechanic to the DMC formula and there are even rumours that the arm will have other powers that will be used in puzzle solving as well.

Another interesting thing about Devil May Cry 4 is that after months of claiming that the game would only release on the PS3, Capcom have recently announced that DMC4 will indeed be coming to both Xbox 360 and PC as well.

This revelation may have caused a little bit of unrest amongst diehard Sony fans (see boxout), but it's the best kind of news for us, since Capcom is promising to specifically optimise each version to maximise the game's performance on each format. If the footage coming out of Capcom is any indication, then no matter what version you pick up, you're going to get something that looks eye-wateringly good.

The latest trailer for the game showcases the rivalry between



Ooh, flamey

Stupidity In Numbers

Upon Capcom's announcement that DMC4 would not be a PlayStation 3 exclusive one hell of a fanboy shitstorm blew up. Dedicated Sony fans, bewildered by the announcement, banded together to create an online petition to let Capcom know that they felt "left out in [Capcom's] decision to make Devil May Cry 4 a Multi-Platform title, and hereby agree to boycott [the] sale of Capcom affiliated games" and that they found the situation "absolutely demoralising for not only the gamers, but also Sony itself". Staggeringly, the petition gathered more than 11,000 signatures.

Capcom representative Christian Svensson responded with the words of a sane man,

"We feel that allowing more people access to our content pleases far more people than it displeases" Svensson concluded. "After all, we're not denying DMC4 to anyone that was already going to get it." Rationality: 1, Fanboys: nil.

Dante and Nero and takes place in a gorgeously rendered church lit up by candles and sunlight streaming through stained-glass windows. The two warriors face of in a spectacular duel and, surprisingly enough, Nero seems to be kicking Dante's arse. After delivering Dante a brutal slow-motion kick to the face – with both feet – Nero continues to pursue his foe around the church, firing off bullets two-at-a-time from his double-barrel pistol and unleashing what looks like a giant fiery claw from his Devil Bringer arm.

Attack of the clones?

The trailer also provides some snippets of the game's first boss – an enormous flaming demon that would put the Balrog from the Lord of The Rings: The Two Towers movie to shame.

FIRE IT UP!

Not only will this boss battle provide some amazing fire effects, the monster's attacks will also effect the environment around it, shattering buildings into a thousand pieces and setting fire to the scenery along the way. If Capcom keeps to this level of quality in all of DMC4's boss battles even the mighty

God of War may have to bow in deference.

With high-definition visuals of amazing detail, a new protagonist and a gripping new storyline to follow, as well as all the action, puzzling and exotic locales we've come to expect from this series, Devil May Cry 4 will be a real tear jerker. <<

Rogue Galaxy

SYSTEM: **PS2**
CATEGORY: **RPG**
PLAYERS: **1**
DEVELOPER: **LEVEL 5**
DUE: **MID 2007**

Rogue Galaxy marks the end of an era. It is the last big Japanese RPG to be released for the PS2 exclusively. While this is a little sad considering the great games in the genre that have been released on the platform we hope that this ending of an era may see the end of an error as well, that error being random battles. In the early days of the RPG the random battle wasn't the bugbear hiding in the shadows ready to spring out and ruin your gameplay experience – back then the random battles were part and parcel with the gameplay experience. Without the battles the bulk of gameplay would have been lost. Now, however, is a different story. As games progress and stories get more epic and complex, random battles seem to do nothing but get in the way, breaking up the flow of the game, let alone the narrative.

It's such a pity to see that the final big RPG hurrah for the PS2 not only contains but also embraces whole-heartedly the pox that is random battles to the point that it is difficult to walk more than a few steps before being drawn into yet another fight. Cleverly the developers have tried to downplay the disappointment of this archaic gameplay technique by rewarding players for killing a set number of each type of monsters with Hunter Points, allowing them to advance in the Hunter ranks but ultimately it comes across as a bandaid on a bullet wound.

The whole premise of flying around the galaxy on a pirate ship is cool in and of itself

TAME GALAXY

Wow, that's a lot of negativity to start a hands on preview but it's better to get rid of the nasty stuff at the beginning and get to the good stuff later. And there is a lot of good stuff to be had with Rogue Galaxy. For a start the game is incredibly pretty. Utilising a semi-cell shaded approach, Rogue Galaxy delivers a brightly coloured and populated universe with some truly excellent character models and beasties. Jaster, the main character and his band of ragtag hangers on are all beautifully realized from a design sense; the characters are well drawn and animated, exuding personality from every digitised pore. The voice acting is quite decent too, although some of the timing for the multiple jokes often seems to be more than a little questionable.

The story is pretty damn cool too, as is the approach to telling it (irritatingly obtrusive random battles aside). Players take the role of Jaster Rogue; a well-meaning lad with a sword from a backwater planet who is mistaken for a famous bounty hunter named Desert Claw after a stranger gives him a weapon so that he may fight a giant beastie threatening his town. Thinking he is Desert Claw, a band of space pirates recruits Jaster to join their

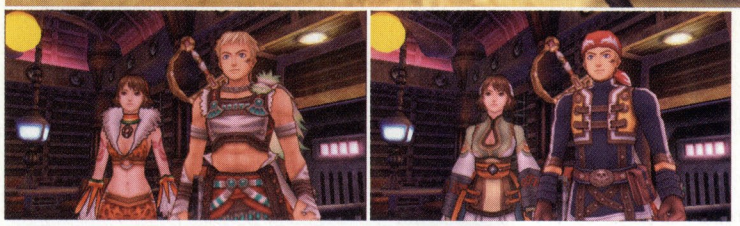
A Gilbert and Sullivan moment

Gentlemen, start your mashing

What We'd Like to See:
The final death of random battles. Please, just take them out the back and put a bullet in them already.

A Huntin' We Will Go

As a bounty hunter part of Jaster's life revolves around killing stuff for bounty (Hunter Points or tokens in this case, not chocolate covered coconut). There are three types of challenge Jaster and his pals undertake in the quest for these points. The most simple is just killing a set amount, usually between 20 and 30 of a type of monster. Tokens which can be redeemed for licenses enabling Jaster and co to buy more exotic gear are earned by beating random battle challenges such as beating all enemies in a set time limit, with only on character, without taking damage or the like. The final way of accruing points is by buying large bounties for boss style monsters that are hidden all over the game and can only be discovered after buying the bounty. The benefits of hunting are twofold – firstly the challenges and kill counts give a little more meaning to the random battles and the second being that at the higher levels of hunter points you get some fairly nifty prizes.



What Not to Wear: Before and After

Crafty

Rogue Galaxy contains a rather expansive crafting system that allows players to combine two weaker weapons to make a higher level weapon or to create entirely new items in a factory that will later on become available to purchase from the many shops in game.

crew and sail the galaxy in search of treasure, adventure and monsters to kill every three or four steps. Having always wanted to leave the planet Jaster agrees. It's a great hook and leads to some great situations.

SPACE PIRATES

The whole premise of flying around the galaxy on a pirate ship is cool in and of itself but the very idea also gave the developers a massive amount of freedom when it came to developing the various planets; instead of being trapped in one set environment players travel across desert planets, a lush jungle ruled by mask wearing luddites, a mining planet run by the mob, a giant robot factory (which is also a giant-robot factory as both the robots and the factory are classifiably giant in stature) and more. The planets are designed well enough that you'll keep playing simply to see what comes next.

While the setting is great the mechanics are a little too simplistic to support the game for its supposed 100+ hour play time. Combat is, for the most part played out in real time. Each character is equipped with two weapons, one melee and on ranged, the X button handling melee attacks and Square button controlling ranged attacks. The right trigger blocks. Players can only attack, use skills or items so many times before their action meter runs down and they need to wait for it to refill. Blocking an enemy attack instantly refills the meter. Holding down the X button charges up a melee attack enabling it to break the shields that surround some monsters.

Each character has extensive skill trees that are unlocked by placing specific items in the skill tree slots, kind of like Materia was used in Final Fantasy. It's quite a compelling system and each time you pick up a new item or find a new shop you'll find yourself checking your trees to see if there are any new skills that can be unlocked. Players can choose these skills from a pause menu during combat. Every time Jaster leaves on a mission he brings two companions with him. During the battles these companions are AI controlled for the majority of their actions, the player simply choosing basic commands for them such as to hold back, go all out, attack the same target or attack different targets.

We're definitely looking forward to sinking some more time into Rogue Galaxy but no matter how good the story and how lovely the design is the simplicity of the combat system and the frustration of the all too frequent random battles gives us pause. <<

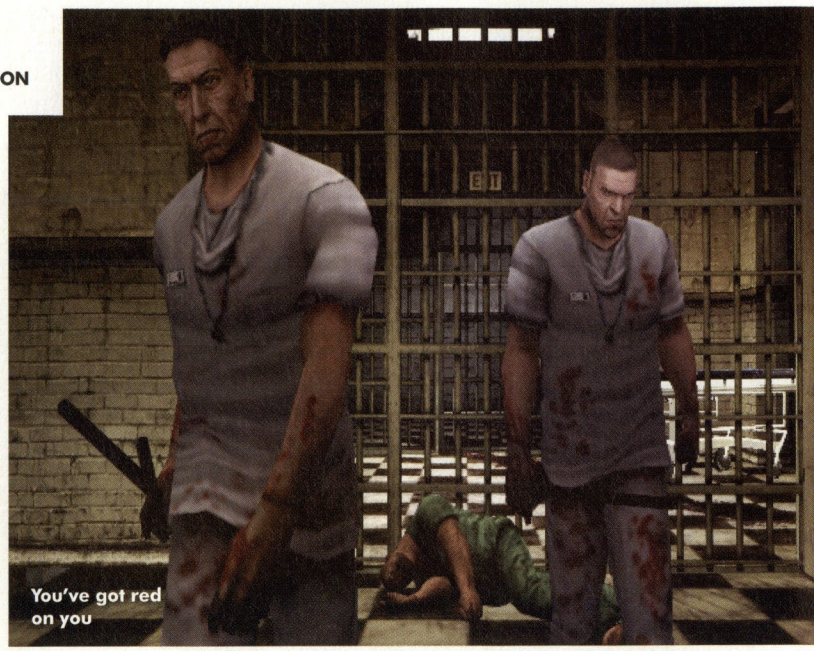
The native beanie really sets off her hot-pants

Bugtastic

If the game wasn't already big enough, Rogue Galaxy also features a Pokemon style bug fighting mini-game in which players must catch an insect, feed it, train it, breed it and pit it against other insects in an insect arena.

Manhunt 2

SYSTEM: **PS2/PSP/Wii**
CATEGORY: **STEALTH ACTION**
PLAYERS: **1**
DEVELOPER: **ROCKSTAR LONDON**
DUE: **LATE 2007**


You've got red on you

We have to start this preview with a little bit of flippancy that will no doubt put a frown on some Rockstar PR faces as they mumble to themselves that somehow us writing the following sentence will cause the OFLC to pay the game a little more attention to the game than they otherwise would. As soon as we heard that a sequel was in the works we started calling the game Banhunt II. After all that preamble a rather juvenile joke probably comes across as more than a little lame but we think the name is very fitting. The sequel to a game that was brought in front of the review board and had its rating revoked will be a red rag to a bull, especially when that game comes from Rockstar, a company that doesn't so much create controversy as revel in it.

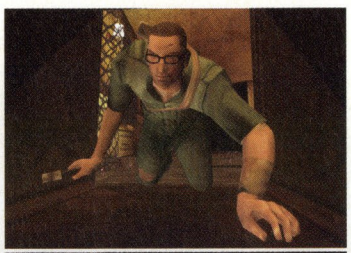
If you recall, the original game told the story of a violent convict who is forced to "act" in increasingly brutal snuff films by deranged director Starkweather so his family isn't murdered. Well, from what we've seen, Manhunt 2 is a sequel in name and theme rather than characters, telling a whole new story. We've only seen two levels of the game so far and aren't privy to a lot of the plot but what we understand so far is that players take the role of Danny, a scientist who was working on some kind of human weapon project who used himself as a guinea pig to prove results when funding is threatened to be cut. As science is want to do when it can lead to screaming and bleeding, things go wrong and for some reason Danny spends the next six years in a hospital for the criminally insane. The plot of the game appears to be the addled scientist and another inmate who may or may not be a figment of his imagination (we haven't seen enough to make the call definitively one way or other) hunting down people from his past to find out the truth of what happened to him and what has gone on in the last six years.

players take the role of Danny, a scientist who was working on some kind of human weapon project

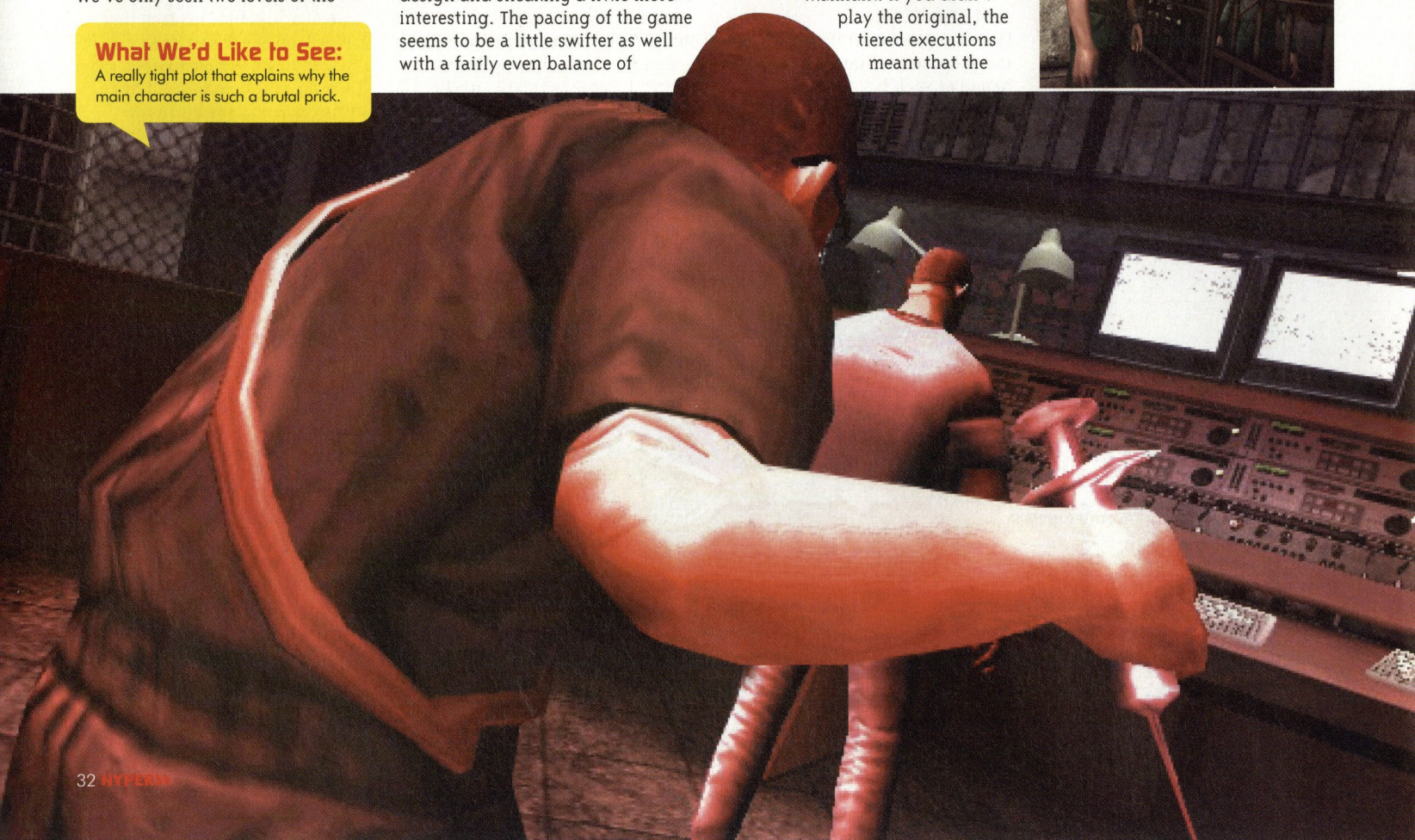
What We'd Like to See:
A really tight plot that explains why the main character is such a brutal prick.

FATALITY

From what we've seen there are a few tweaks to the gameplay that should make the second stab at Manhunt a little more interesting than the first. For a start players can now jump (or mantle if you prefer) over obstacles making level design and sneaking a little more interesting. The pacing of the game seems to be a little swifter as well with a fairly even balance of sneaking and shooting throughout the game. This time around players are also able to break light sources making for some more dynamic sneaking design. Finally the Hunters now have a chance to spot you if they look directly into the shadows in which you are hiding. We didn't see this mechanic in action but apparently if the Hunter suspects you're there the player will have to successfully complete a button matching mini-game to remain unnoticed.

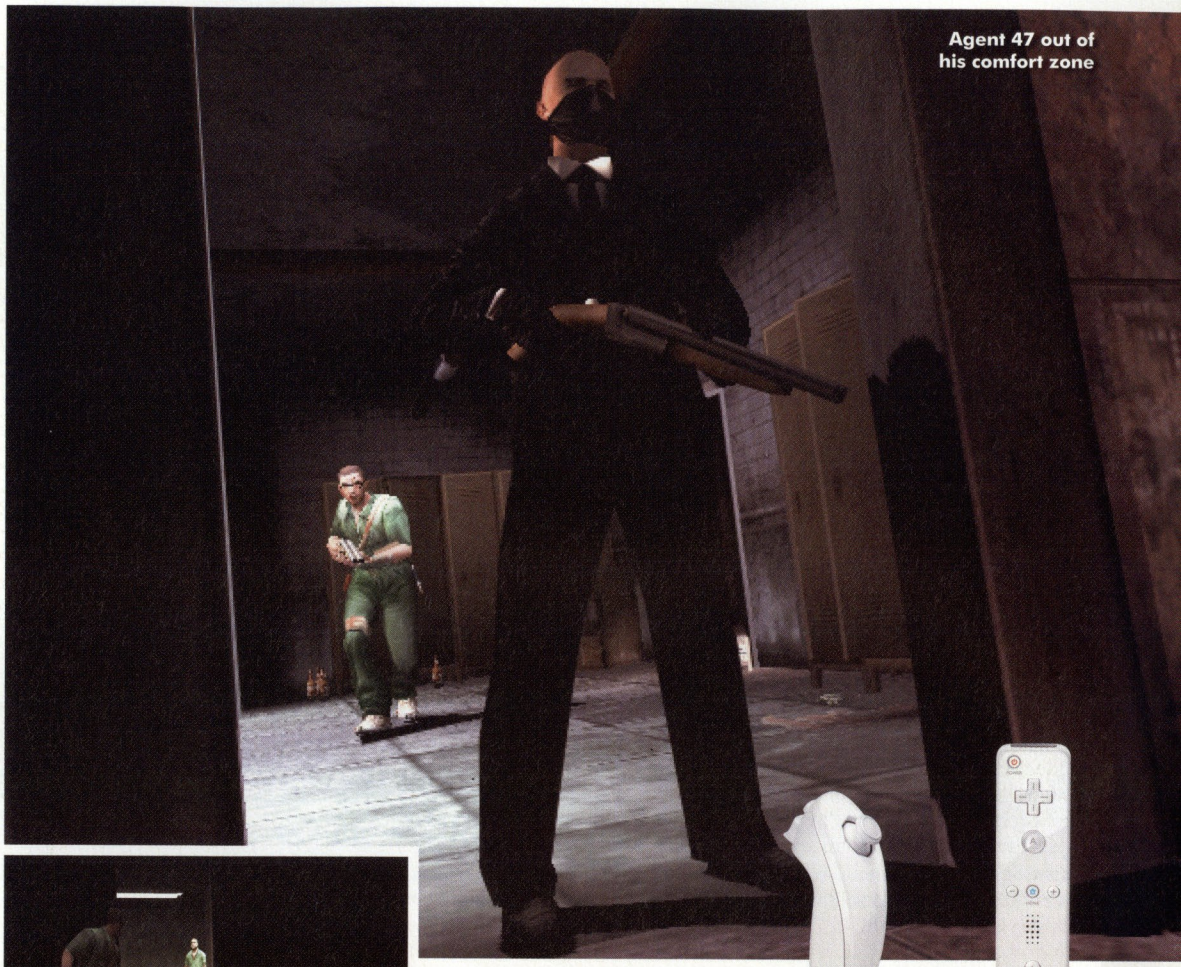


It's interesting to note that Rockstar have kept the three tier execution system from the original Manhunt. If you didn't play the original, the tiered executions meant that the



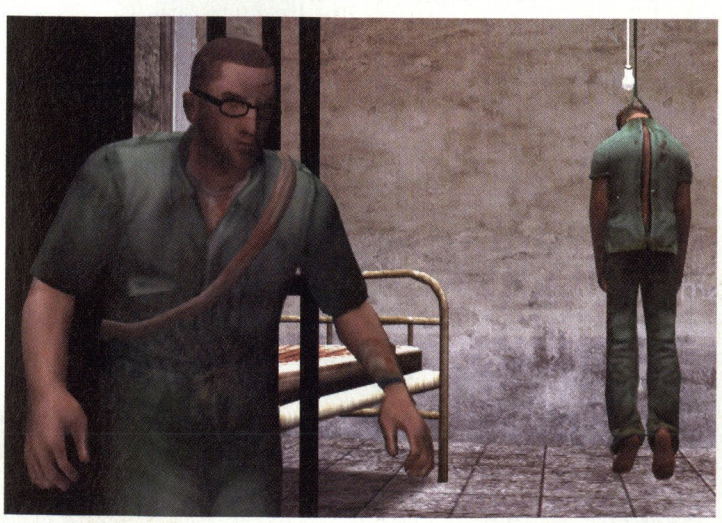
Timing

OK, time for the tinfoil hats to be put on. We can't help but wonder if the timing for the release of Manhunt II has been orchestrated to draw the heat away from Rockstar's slightly more well-known and lucrative franchise game GTA IV. As it stands now Manhunt II looks slated for a release about 2 months before GTA IV, a game that has already stirred up controversy and a little knee jerk hate with nothing but a trailer that shows bugger all of actual gameplay. Due to the similarities in the architecture of Liberty City and New York the Mayor has gone on record condemning the game already, as he can't support anything in which you kill cops for points. It's great to get your facts right before a press conference. But we digress. If GTA IV can stir up that much outrage with nothing abut a trailer showing some architecture, what better way to diffuse the inevitable media storm about the Jack Thompson-esque "murder simulator" than releasing the sequel to a game that was, for the most part, a murder simulator a few months before hand and letting it cop all the flack? Yes, this may be real tinfoil hat territory but from our understanding the original Manhunt wasn't exactly a best seller so we can't really see any other reason for a sequel.

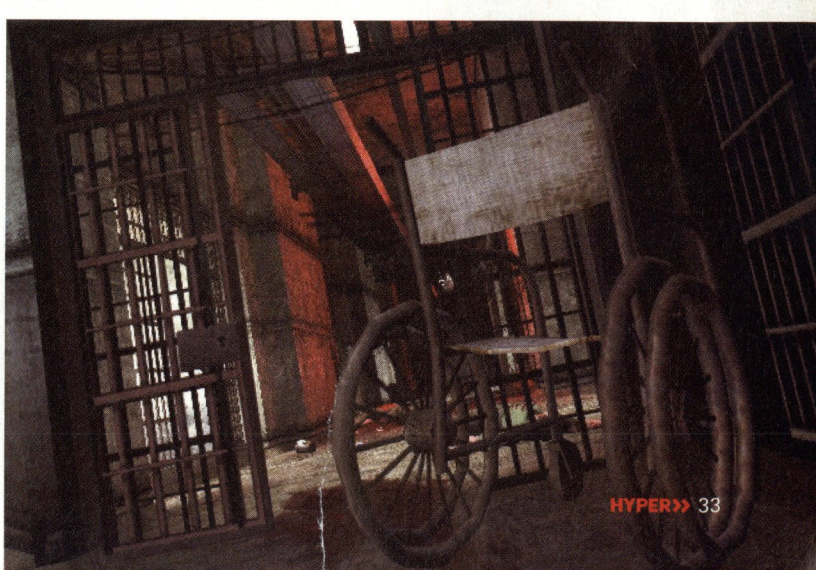


Agent 47 out of his comfort zone

longer you stood behind and in range of someone undetected before attacking the more brutal the execution animation. In terms of Starkweather's directorial vision and the snuff film world in which the first game existed this brutality for brutality's sake made sense, adding to the visceral impact of the game and making the entire thing more than a little uncomfortable contextually, we can't help but wonder why the same style of kills is making an appearance in the second game aside from for the sake of controversy. While brutal executions fit the first game contextually well – the main character being a brutal man forced to do increasingly more brutal things by a mad snuff film director – the idea of a nebbish scientist opening someone up from groin to chin with a knife or stabbing them repeatedly in the face and neck with a pen seems a little out of character, no matter how addled they are. Of course when we see the final game (or at least more complete code) there may be a cutscene or bit of dialogue that puts everything into perspective and gives us that context we so long for. <<



Auto-erotic? You be the judge.



Wiily Killer

Unfortunately there is pretty much no other information on the Wii version of the game aside from the fact that it will be appearing on the Wii. Although the PS2 version of the game is looking quite impressive from a graphical standpoint the gameplay remains very similar to the first. Hopefully Rockstar have something interesting up their sleeves for the Wii version that takes advantage of the unique features of the Wiimote and Nunchuk.

GTA IV

SYSTEM: **PS3/XBOX 360**
CATEGORY: **ACTION**
PLAYERS: **1 - MULTI**
DEVELOPER: **ROCKSTAR**
DUE: **LATE 2007**

So the trailer is finally out. Well, not the trailer per-se, but the teaser trailer, the thing designed to intrigue you, to draw you in and whet your appetite for more. Well, consider our appetites whetted. We want to see more, not simply because the new engine looks rather amazing (it's the same engine that powered Table Tennis) but because we really want to see something that tells us anything about the game. Here are the concrete facts.

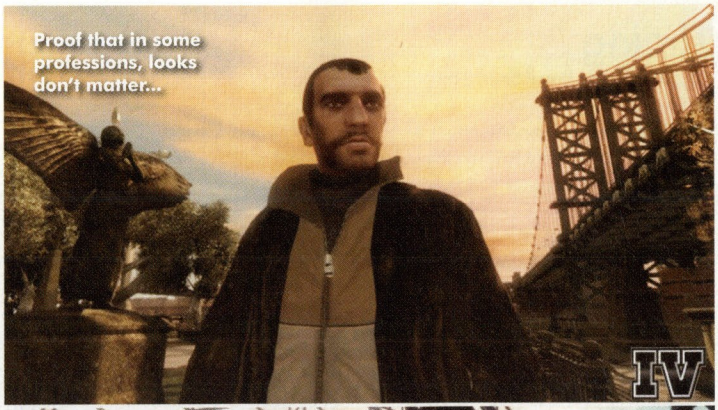
There is one thing that truly peaks our interests; the whole "things will be different" line...

The game is set in the New York inspired Liberty city in a time somewhere around he current day. The protagonist is Eastern European, possible ex Russian mob. The teaser is obviously inspired by the film Koyaaniqatsi but this is most probably just a clever little pop-culture joke rather than any indicator of game content. Aside from that everything looks pretty much up in the air so far.

WILD SUPPOSITION

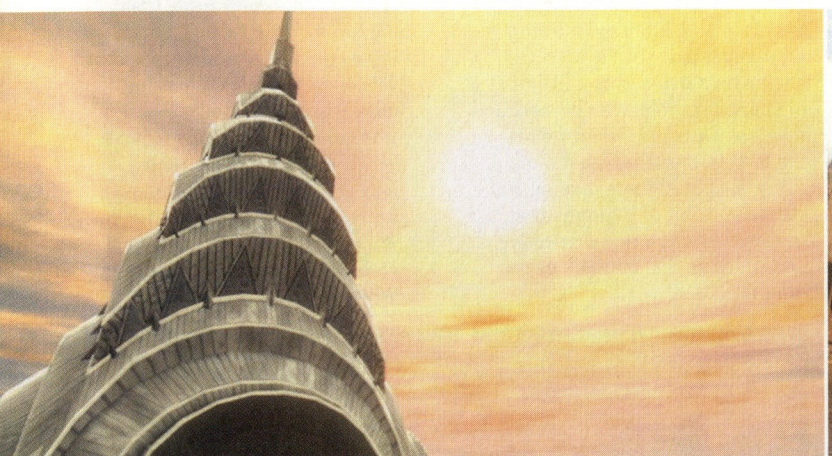
Although nothing of the gameplay is shown overtly or covertly, there is one thing in the trailer that truly peaks our interests as far as he potential for the title is concerned; the whole "things will be different" line that is said by the so far nameless main character. Why is this interesting in terms of gameplay? Well, Rockstar have been very vocal when it comes to GTA San Andreas and GTA Vice City, proclaiming in no uncertain terms from year dot that those games were not sequels to GTA 3 but instead continuations of the theme, telling new stories within the framework pioneered by GTA 3. GTA IV, as made plainly obvious from the title is being pitched as a sequel. The simple fact that Rockstar have been quick to point out the fact that the last two games in the franchise haven't been sequels is a clear indicator to us that a true sequel will feature not only new content but different mechanics as well.

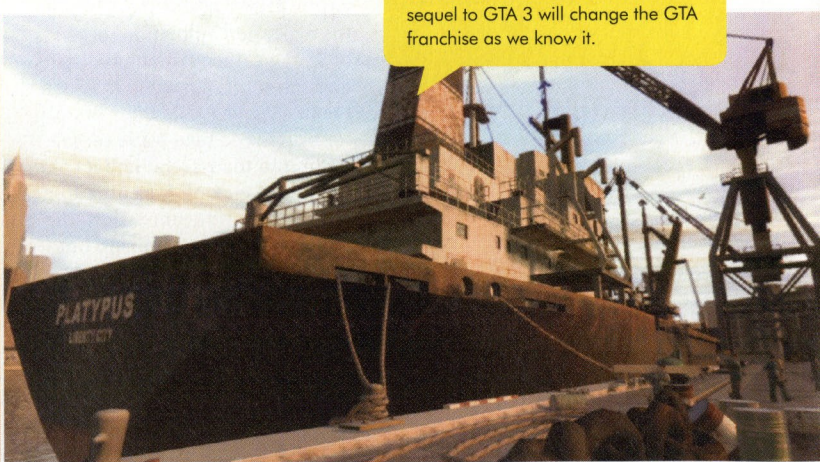
While we are of course not sure of the new things that Rockstar will be throwing at us in the newest game in the franchise we have a few ideas of what we may see based on a few hints from the teaser. For a start the unnamed protagonist appears to be older that any of the previous GTA characters. This could indicate a slowing down of the overall pace and maybe a more deliberate and thoughtful approach to the mission structure. Of course we could just be blowing smoke. The protagonist's brief speech about having killed and smuggled people but here it will be different hints that perhaps the story will revolve around a man trying to leave his life of crime behind him instead of trying to work his way up the ranks as in the previous games. Such a change of plot could really make a fundamental difference in gameplay as it could lead to missions based more around running away than going on the attack. We also have to wonder whether the train and roller coaster shown rather prominently in the trailer will be making a rideable appearance in the game. How either one of these could be implemented as a dynamic gameplay mechanic is up in the air but if there is a working train in the game we here at Hyper are all hoping for a "Taking of Pelham 123" style mission where you need to hijack a train. Wilks gets to be Walther Matthau. <<

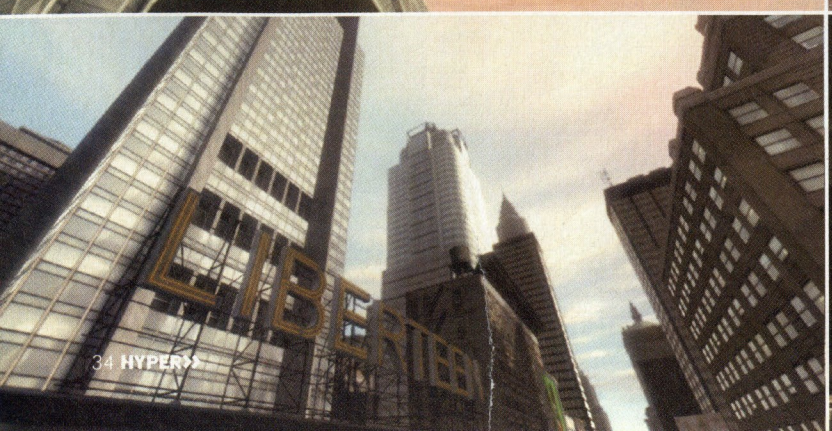


The scene of the latest crime fad: coaster jacking

What We'd Like to See:
Some concrete details on how the sequel to GTA 3 will change the GTA franchise as we know it.







Dungeons & Dragons Tactics

SYSTEM: **PSP**
CATEGORY: **STRATEGY**
PLAYERS: **1-6**
DEVELOPER: **KUJU**
DUE: **MID 2007**

It's no secret that we here at the hyper bunker loves us some turn based strategic action, having swooned over Disgaea 2, Final Fantasy Tactics and myriad others. There's something very pure and elemental about being able to sit down and think about your every action and how it will impact the game as a whole. We loves it. We really want to love D&D Tactics too. We say want because there are currently a few little hiccups that are holding the game back. With luck they will be sorted out by the time to game goes to retail.

As it currently stands the thing that seems to be the biggest blessing and simultaneously the greatest sin of D&D Tactics is the games adherence to the Dungeons and Dragons 3.5 rules set. If you're familiar with the D&D rules from either the pen and paper game or CRPGs like Neverwinter Nights then character creation and the basic rules will be familiar to you but if you're not the entire thing comes across as rather arcane. The problems begin during character creation when you choose a race and character class – while the character class description tells you the most important stats of the character none of this information is visible while you are actually allocating stat points. This may sound like only a small gripe but it's the first inkling of things to come. A familiarity of the rules of 3.5 ed D&D is almost a requirement to play.

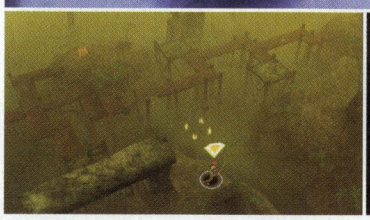
If you're familiar with the pen and paper game then the basic rules will be familiar to you

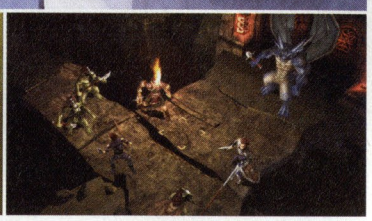
THACO

Another problem with adhering so strictly to the rules is that for the first few hours of the game (until you reach at least level 4 or 5) the game progresses very slowly as players only have access to a limited number of relatively weak weapons and spells and have rather terrible hit rolls. For the first three to four battles missions, battles are more often than not going to be made up of miss, miss, miss, miss, miss, miss, hit for a fraction of the monster's life, miss, miss, miss, miss, and so on making a rather difficult game to get into. After a while the combat becomes a lot more evenly paced but still on the slow side, lacking the massive damaging attacks of some of the better-known turn based titles.

Finally there are just too many menus and navigating them is an experiment in the occult. To buy a piece of equipment you first need to choose the character who will equip it, buy the item, enter the equip menu, enter the unequip sub menu to unequip the item to make sure that you don' end up dual wielding or the like, go back into the equipment and equip the item. If you happen to pick up or buy an item with the wrong character to trading screen is just as fiddly requiring you to use both the nub and d-pad to choose the characters you want to trade between, pick the items and then hope you got everything right. We can only hope they streamline the menu system a great deal before releasing the game. If they do then we may well have the next great turn based strategy. <<

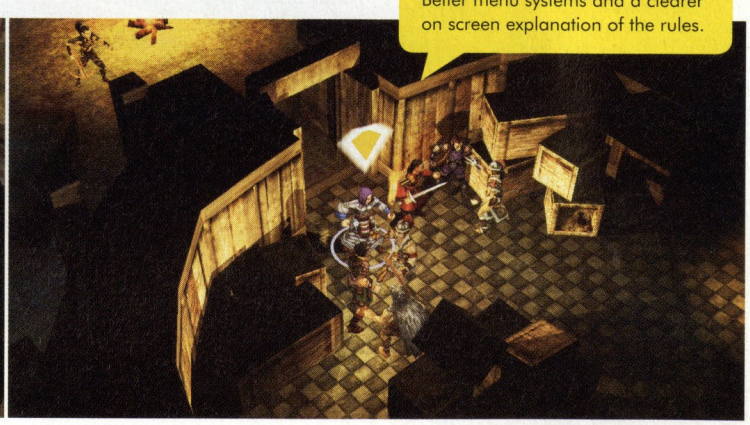
But does the dog shoot bees at you when it barks?





What We'd Like to See:
Better menu systems and a clearer on screen explanation of the rules.

So, the tactic here is to get stabbed with a sword... right...



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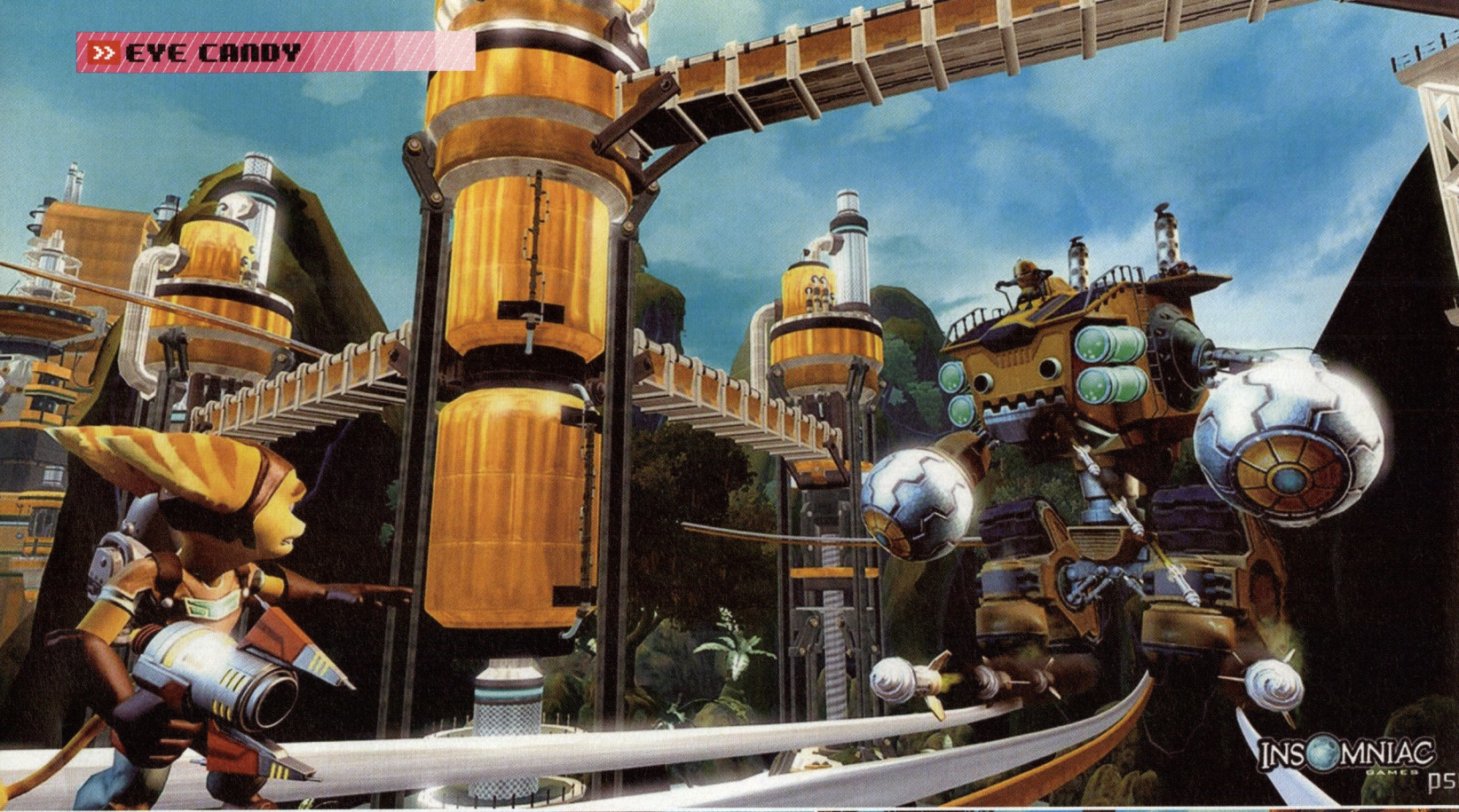
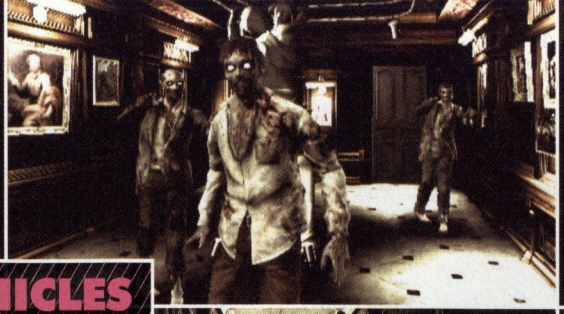
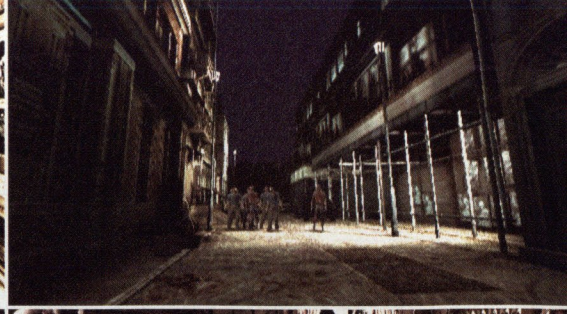


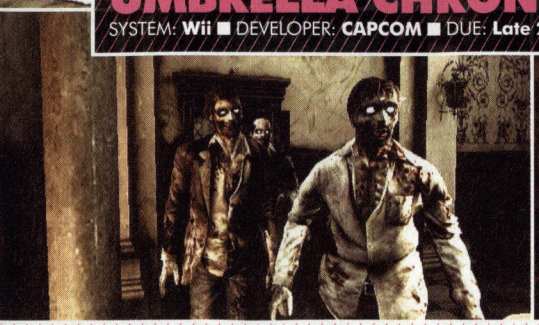
RATCHET & CLANK: TOD

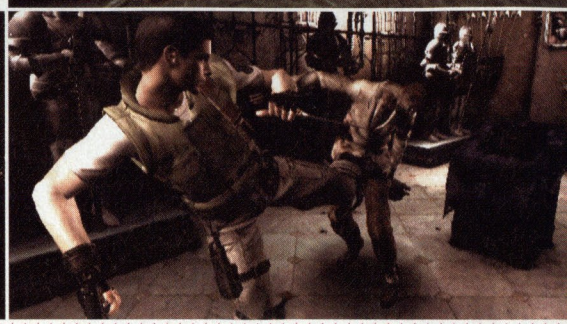
SYSTEM: **PS3** ■ DEVELOPER: **Insomniac** ■ DUE: **Late 2007**

UMBRELLA CHRONICLES

SYSTEM: **Wii** ■ DEVELOPER: **CAPCOM** ■ DUE: **Late 2007**





LAIR

SYSTEM: **PS3** ■ DEVELOPER: **Factor 5** ■ DUE: **Mid 2007**

TRANSFORMERS THE GAME

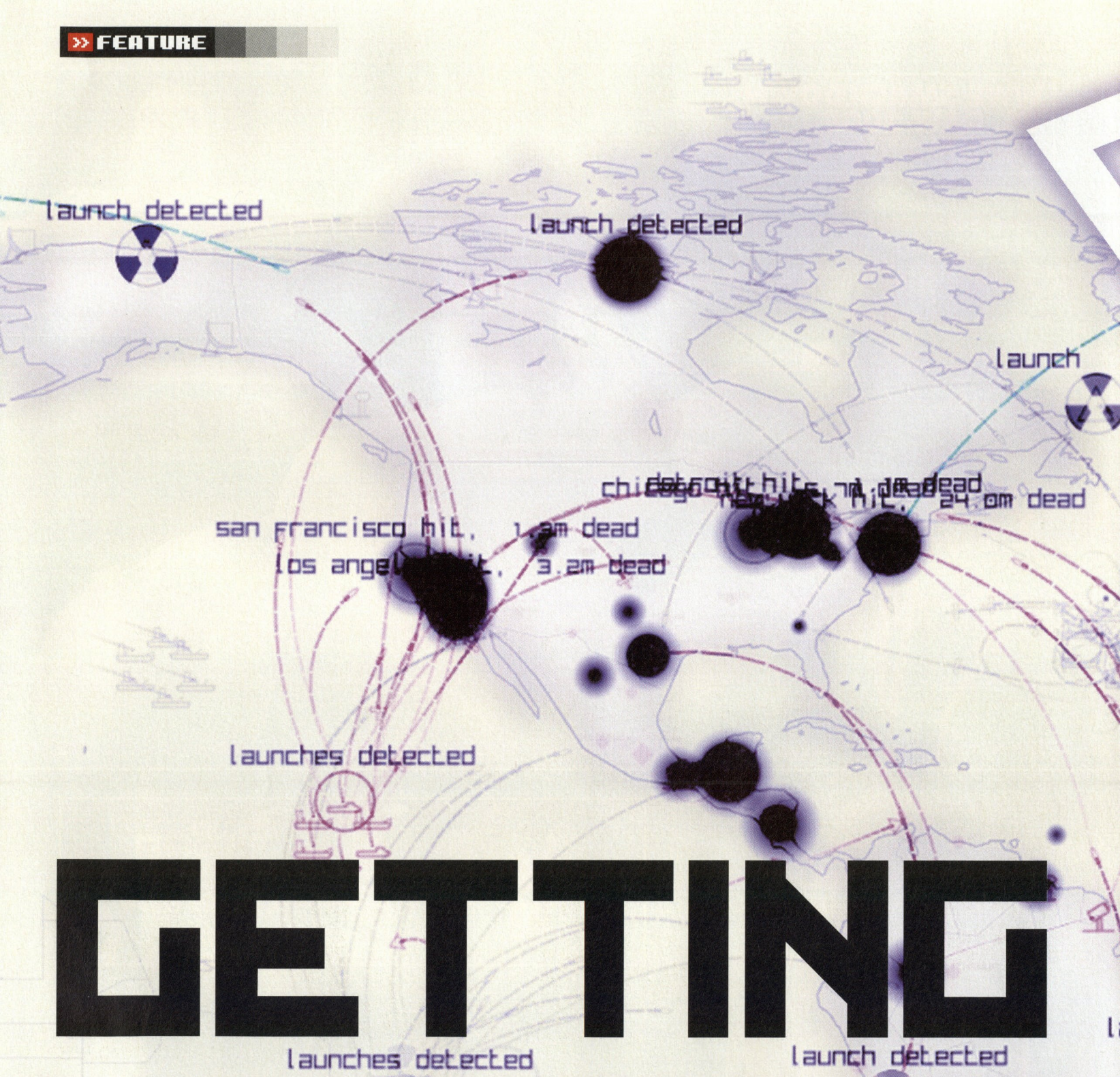
SYSTEM: **PSP** ■ DEVELOPER: **Traveller's tales** ■ DUE: **June**

WIPEOUT PULSE

SYSTEM: **PSP** ■ DEVELOPER: **Sony** ■ DUE: **Sept 07**

WWE SMACKDOWN VS. RAW 2008

SYSTEM: **PS3/XBOX 360** ■ DEVELOPER: **Yuke** ■
DUE: **Late 2007**



GETTING

If J. Allard is to be believed — he's the guy who used to be fat, remember? - we've entered the "HD era". "HD" stands for "High Definition", of course, and on a purely technical level, it references the new standard for image resolution on TV sets. But to freestylin' sk8er boi Allard, it means — or meant, seeing as he's recently mysteriously disappeared - so much more. It's about compelling game characters, immersive worlds, and an overarching sense of realism. Yes, "HD" is more than just a word for people who know nothing about screen resolution to describe the utter awesomeness of their latest telly; this refinement in visual quality will beget a gaming revolution.

Chris Delay, Lead Developer at independent UK-based developer Introversion Software, has three simple words to say about this philosophy: "It's rubbish, frankly."

Why so dismissive? Because Delay is behind Uplink, Darwinia, and DEFCON, three games with graphics that would've been out-of-date ten years ago, but have somehow managed to capture players worldwide. Their originality, clever premises, and tight gameplay, have earned them AAA-standard respect from nearly all who play them, despite not being in the technological ballpark with whatever else is available on the shelves.

Delay considers why he hasn't bothered chasing Carmack. "I think the problem with pursuing photorealism," he muses, "is that, for one, you need a huge company to create the necessary detail. But also, I just think we're nowhere near photorealism. It's like when that Final Fantasy movie, The Spirits Within, came out, and everyone said, 'Oh, it's photorealistic!' Well, it looked kind of photorealistic in the screenshots, but when you saw their faces move, it was pretty obviously rendered.

"I mean, hypothetically, if we could get to the point where we could model human beings so that you couldn't actually tell the difference, that would be the absolute beginning of evoking an emotional response through realism. Because on top of the graphics, you also need to have, y'know, DeNiro acting on it. You need to have real actors who know what to do. But if we get that far — if we get to the point where we're evoking an emotional response through photorealism — isn't that just like a movie, anyway?"

Granted, there is one other reason why Delay doesn't share Carmack's taste for fast graphics and expensive cars: he can't afford either. Introversion may be the

SMALLER

BY ALEXANDER GAMBOTTO-BURKE

darling of fans of innovative games everywhere, but they haven't exactly captured the retail market. And chances are, thanks to the aforementioned graphical handicap and the unusual gameplay, they never will. "For a company like Introversion," Delay sighs, "retail really is a loser's game. It's very difficult to win that game. If you look at Uplink, which came out in 2001, it did okay in the shops. But four years later, Darwinia did very badly indeed. We were taking in returns – they were actually sending copies of the game back to us! And that's a disaster, because you have to pay money back to the distributors. The way we're working is that we have a distributor in the UK, and they load the copies onto shelves, and if they don't sell, they come back to us."

Which is why Introversion started distributing their games online. Because of the restrictiveness of the retail channel – basically, anything that isn't instantly marketable, especially in the minute PC section, bombs – they've found that the internet's immediacy and ubiquity creates a much more viable market for their niche products. Their views on the subject were solidified in 2005, when they struck up a deal with Valve to distribute their games on Steam.

"We can't actually figure out who was responsible for the deal," Delay laughs. "Long before the Steam deal actually came about, we approached Valve, because people were telling us, 'Get your game on Steam! It's a great way to sell it.' And at the time, there was only Ragdoll Kung-Fu up there, but we knew it would be a great place for Darwinia. Eventually, they got back to us and said, 'Let's talk about this.' I think Valve has always been very open to putting unusual games on their Steam system. What must have happened is that at some point Darwinia caught somebody's eye at Valve, and they got back to us. So we're not entirely sure whether it was us or them who made it happen!"

Regardless of who can take credit for the Steam deal, there's no doubt that it's revolutionised Introversion. "Steam has been absolutely fantastic," Delay enthuses. "It's been brilliant! We launched Darwinia in March of 2005, and it sold poorly. It was reviewed very well – great reviews – but it just didn't sell. It didn't capture many people's imaginations; they just didn't understand what they were looking at. Perhaps we didn't market it well enough, but we ended up confusing a lot of people. But anyway, later, the opportunity came for a relaunch on Steam, and it's made a huge difference. In the past, we've said that Steam had

sold as many copies of Darwinia in its first month than we've sold in all the time we'd been going. In one month! The thing is, they have this massive audience – literally millions of hardcore gamers, basically, who use the system to play Counter-Strike. It's just a great way to get your game out to people very quickly."

It was also a great way for Introversion to start recovering from Darwinia's nightmarish development. To get an idea of what went on, imagine a team whose core staff could be counted on one hand, developing their first 3D game with absolutely no idea what they wanted to do with it, no money, and all in sunny London. Yeah, next time you hear the Californian designer of the latest, big-buck FPS whining that his hours are too long, give him Delay's phone number. "We just had no idea what we were doing," he wearily chuckles. "With DEFCON, we knew exactly what we were doing, but with Darwinia, we really didn't. We had some vague ideas; we kind of thought it would be cool to have huge battles with 100,000 troops on each side, and that was our original idea. We started making fractal landscapes, and we just experimented.

"It was open experimentation, which is a lovely idea, but we found it hard to hit upon anything that really worked out well. The problem was that the original idea was pretty big – 100,000 troops on the battlefield. But controlling that many troops isn't actually that fun. It's very indirect. You can't do anything. It took us about 18 months before we actually got to the point where we had a game. 18 months of experimentation, and trying stuff out. We didn't even have the visual style planned out – we didn't know it was going to be retro. The Darwinians were just little placeholder men that we drew in Paint Shop Pro! It took us a while 'til we hit upon the idea of making everything more computerised."

Despite the kerfuffle, though, there's no doubt Introversion's tireless experimentation resulted in a very special, very unique game. "It certainly helped make it very unusual," Delay admits. "But at the time, this was our second game, and we were very short on money. And another additional pressure was that we were running out of money rapidly. We were taking in very small salaries – minuscule salaries – and eventually, we ran out of money completely. Introversion ran for about nine months to a year without any money coming in, so we had to survive for that length of time. It was very hard."

It was lucky, then, that DEFCON's development was a much cleaner affair. With this game, Introversion completely embraced the aesthetic for which they're now well-known - minimalistic, sleek, and symbolic. The problems of asset generation that plagued the UK company throughout Darwinia's gestation were utterly eradicated. As Delay points out, "We didn't even draw DEFCON's world map! There was freely available data with all the city information in the world. And then it was just a matter of sorting that data off the internet and then making renderers to render the map into that lovely low-quality vector style, and I genuinely thought I could do it all in one day. That was the plan. I I was going to do a massive, 24-hour coding session. And I thought I could, because there's no content in DEFCON; it's

> I LIKE ODDBALL THINGS, BUT THAT JUST FITS THE COMPANY ETHOS. NOT THAT WE EVER PLANNED IT THAT WAY

the exact opposite of photorealism."

As it happened, Delay worked out that it would take a bit longer than 24 caffeine-fuelled hours to build his game, but it didn't take that much longer. In fact, it took a week. Unfortunately, there was a little pickle: he was supposed to be working on Darwinia (this was back in 2003). "I realised it would take a bit longer," he concedes, "but after seven days, I had a fully working prototype with multiplayer – you could play it over a LAN. It was essentially the same game as the finished game. It had all the finished units, with basically the same behaviours. I'd become a bit bored of Darwinia, to be honest. We'd been working on it for a long time, and it wasn't really going anywhere."

When Delay took his nuclear war-simulator to show the other Introversion bigwigs, they were justifiably upset. "I took the game in," he laughs, "and they were quite annoyed that I'd spent a week developing a completely different game, when we were already falling behind on Darwinia and running out of money, and so on. So, yeah, it didn't go down entirely well, but you could see that there was a game there. It had to be shelved, though. And years later, after Darwinia had been finished, we went back to it, and finished it. We added stuff to make internet play work and bring it to its finished quality. But in the end, the total time it took was probably about a year from start to finish, and that included about five months of testing."

Despite DEFCON's visual simplicity – which kind of flies in the ugly face of the idea that you need to spend five years working on a game for it to be good – Introversion's managed to craft a deeply complex strategy game whose axis, like Uplink, is trust and betrayal. And whilst the game's sales aren't exactly rivaling FarCry's, it still reinforces Greg Costkyan's "Scratchware" ethos – that you can build a smallish game with a smallish team and still do quite nicely. Of course, Introversion does have the slight advantage of Delay's highly unusual but extremely addictive gameplay ideas. "I tend to be attracted to unusual ideas, definitely," he says. "I like oddball things, but that just fits the company ethos. Not that we ever planned it that way, though. We never sat down and said, 'Let's find a niche – weird, creative games that bigger companies don't make.' But it turned out that way.

Admittedly, Delay's aware unusual ideas are essential to the company's survival; if they tried to do a mainstream game, they'd be flattened by the competition.

EVER

wondered how Delay manages to stay so relaxed in the fast-paced, hard-money world of indie game development? Easy – he doesn't have to worry about game designer dandruff thanks to Head 'n' Shoulders! But beyond that, the fact that he works from home (like everyone else at Introversion) may be good for his chakras. He laughs. "We've always done it that way, in the past, because we haven't been able to afford an office! We've just done what we can by meeting online through Skype. But, you know, we don't have that many developers at Introversion, anyway, so we don't really need an office. Of the original directors, it was only me who did any development work on Uplink. It was two-thirds business and PR, and one third development. So there was no real reason for us to liaison on a daily basis, because our own areas don't really cross that much. What tends to happen now is that we all still work from home, but we usually meet once a month or so in London, and we have these big, day-long meetings where we work out what's going on next month."

"FOR A WHILE, WE CONSIDERED THIS NEW LABEL OF GAMES: MISERYSOFT."

"Weird games are the only games we could make," he asserts. "If we made a FPS, we'd just be lost in the noise. There are so many good FPSs out there that we can't compete with the budgets required. But I'm a firm believer that there are many, many genres of games that haven't been explored yet. Or, at the very least, creative mixes of lots of genres together that haven't been explored in the past. Darwinia is exactly that – it's a kind of genre melting-pot, and it makes for an unusual experience. I think there are a lot of experiences in games that we just haven't tried yet; I think we've become fixated on the small number of videogame types that we know work very well. It's like when people called DEFCON a strategy game – it's so different to the RTS template, because that template hasn't changed since it first appeared with Dune 2, or C&C, and all that stuff. It's the same game, all this time."

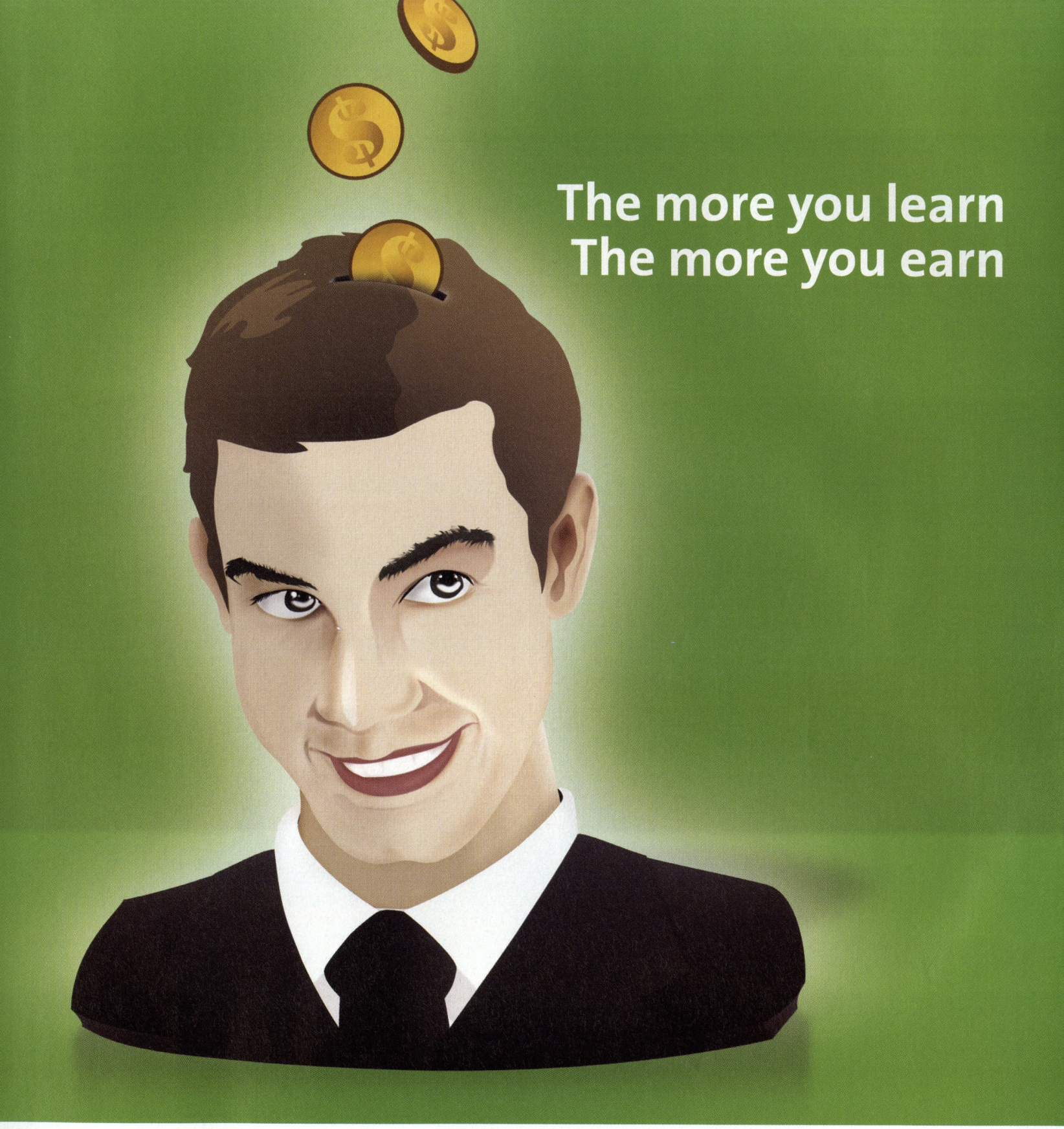
Beyond oddness, though, Delay thinks there's another theme in his games that obviously appeals to a lot of players: his passionate fetish for cold, computerised sterility. You can't help but feel these are the games your computer plays when you're done using it to look up your Night Elf's skirt in WoW. "I think it's definitely there, especially with Uplink and DEFCON," he explains. "They do make you feel quite detached. There's something about that atmosphere that I really like, I guess. It fits what we do, because we don't really necessarily do photorealistic stuff; you don't see characters rendered or anything like that. You tend to be controlling something indirectly, as you do in all our games. It's difficult to put a finger on, but there's just something about that atmosphere in DEFCON, when you're in a bunker, with the music and the sound of the nukes, and you're just very removed from what's happening. But that's totally deliberate – we're trying to make obvious how horrible what you're doing actually is. And you couldn't do it any other way – if you could see what you were doing, you wouldn't be able to do it."

DEFCON is unique in the gaming medium because of this – your real emotional responses don't come out until you're finished playing the game, and you realise you've spent the better part of an hour blowing virtual men, women and children worldwide, into oblivion. Delay likes evoking feelings like these in players; he sees them as more sophisticated than the visceral rushes we get beating fire trolls to a pulp in most games.

"Many people would say all you can do in games is shoot things," he says. "And, you know, you get that thrill of shooting things. But I don't think that's true; we just haven't explored other areas yet. When we started Introversion, me and Mark were discussing different types of games that could be done, and we hit upon this idea: why did we ever conclude that games had to be fun? Where did that even come from? 'Cause there are movies out there that aren't fun experiences, but they're great movies. You know, things like Schindler's List, et cetera. They're horrible experiences; they tell you what happened and evoke powerful emotions, but they're not fun. And so, for a while, we considered this new label of games: 'MiserySoft'. The idea was basically to evoke a feeling of sadness and loss in a player."

It's not the norm to reward those who want to make us sad with praise, admiration, and delicious underdog cred, but in this case, we'll make an exception. Where most big-budget developers are still working out how many naked demonic cheerleaders you can fit on the screen without the framerate dropping, Introversion's trying to actually advance the medium, albeit in a completely unexpected way. Their games may not get them skateboarding with HD Allard anytime soon, but at the end of the day, their going AWOL in the Graphics War and embrace of first class gameplay will render their games timeless. <<

The System Administrator is searching for you



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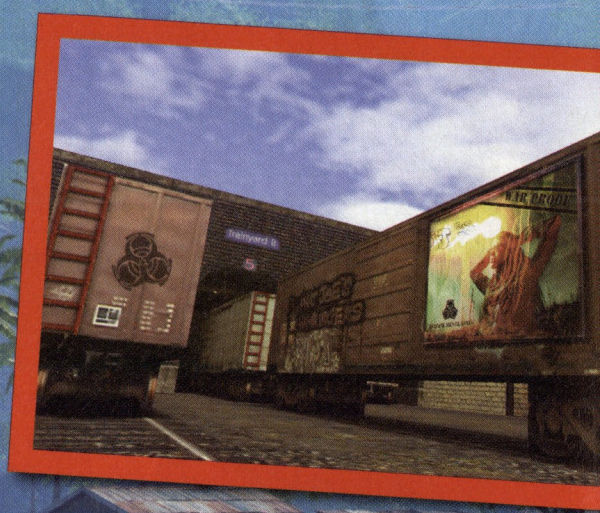
Ads: THEY'RE IN THE GAME.

» CHRISTOPHER TAYLOR



EA managed to create a bit of a ruckus last year when they announced that Battlefield 2142 was going to have ads in it. It's odd. I mean, with other forms of entertainment - radio, television, cinema and even magazines like the one you're reading now - we just accept the presence of advertising. Like it's just part of the deal that when you watch 24 that you'll be told every five minutes or so just what a sexy piece of man meat you'd be if you used a razor with not three, but five - yes, five - diamond-tipped, katana-sharp, beard-decimating blades. But when it comes to our precious games, our attitude is completely different. Like this so-called "in-game advertising" is more is somehow more invasive than the advertising that interrupts Jack Bauer's daylong festival of violence against olive-skinned minority groups.

Thing is, though, in-game advertising - and, indeed, the controversy surrounding it - isn't new. Back in 1992, a little platformer called Zool featured a world with a Chupa Chups theme. While people certainly enjoyed the game, they sure as hell weren't too pleased with the fact that the first four levels were basically a giant, interactive advertisement.

But it's only now (well, in the past eighteen months or so) that in-game advertising has really taken off. There are a number of reasons for this. The first - and most obvious, is that games (at least those of the casual variety) are for everyone now. They're no longer something designed for the amusement of stereotypically anti-social teen boys who spend a bit too much time in dark rooms with rancid tissues littering the floor around their desks. As in-game advertising agencies like Double Fusion and IGA Worldwide like to tell publishers and potential advertisers, even your grandma is getting into gaming. In short, from a marketing point of view, there's a huge audience out there. And, by definition (games, consoles and broadband connections aren't cheap after all), it has one hell of a disposable income.

The also another reason and it's the one we'll be looking. It's that there is now a new kind of in-game advertising. And it's called "dynamic in-game advertising."

EAT FRESH

The Chupa Chups world in Zool - like the billboards in the FIFA games that've been promoting real world companies such as Adidas since the mid-nineties - are considered to be "static in-game advertising."

Essentially, static in-game advertising is when an ad is simply hard-coded into a game. The problem with this is that the ad can't be changed at a later date. Okay, it can be changed with a patch, but that involves too much mucking around, especially when there's no real way of knowing how successful the ad has been.

With this new fandangled dynamic advertising, though, all of that changes. Assuming your computer or console is hooked up to the Internet - and, with

[left] Ads on the railway
[above] Ads on the fairway
[top] Not Coke

the proliferation of broadband, there's a semi-good chance that it is - advertisers are able to tell not only if players have seen an ad, but for how long it has been visible on their screens. They're even able to find our what size it appeared at, because obviously an ad that was seen from up close is going to be more effective than one that was only seen from a distance.

Ed Bartlett, Vice President of IGA Worldwide, was kind enough to explain how this new type of advertising works. "Dynamic in-game advertising is enabled by integrating our software into each game - [allowing for] two-way communication with our Radial servers - and then 'tagging' each of the in-game ad placements with a unique identifier."

These "in-game ad placements" are essentially just blank canvases that can have their textures modified and replaced remotely by IGA Worldwide. They can take the form of pretty much anything - from simple billboards to AI-controlled trucks that drive around the environment to game lobby screens. As the "placement" part implies, they're there for the sole purpose of displaying ads. While IGA Worldwide can strongly encourage them to put the placements in specific spots in the game, the developer has the ultimate say over where they will go.

Bartlett continues, "We are able to remotely update different advertising campaigns across the lifespan of a game, meaning a user might see a different advertisement each time they play. We can also geo-target advertising, so somebody playing in Australia may see a different ad to somebody [who is playing] at the same time in the UK or America."

Geo-targeting - that is, advertising only within a certain region - can be pretty much as specific as an advertiser likes. Take, for instance, the way J. Stokes - an advertising firm that represents a few hundred Subway stores in California and Nevada - had Engage Advertising (another in-game advertising agency) put posters promoting Subway's various meal deals and specials into Counter-Strike. Using IGA Worldwide's software, Engage Advertising made sure the ads only appeared to gamers playing within those states.

That same software also gives advertisers the ability to run ads in several games at once, as the technology, in Bartlett's words, "aggregates" all of the ad placements in all of the games that are ad-enabled, no matter the genre or platform. In other words, if you wanted to put an ad for your new line of extra-flexible, super-colourful pads into both Need for Speed and the new Tiger Woods golf game - but only for people who lived in Western Australia and the Northern Territory - you'd be able to it.

GETTING BUSY WITH THE INTERACTION

As much as dynamic advertising is interesting (or, depending on your perspective, evil, obscene and right up there with Robert

ADVERTISING IN GAMES

[left] Virtual clothing - like virtual nudity but more expensive

> **We'd like it if in-game advertising reduced the cost of games, but we seriously doubt that's going to happen**

Mugabe's regime in terms of human rights violations), it suffers from one serious limitation - the gamer has to be online for it to work. The fact of the matter is, as much as broadband is popular, there are still people who, for whatever reason, don't have it. And this is one of the reasons why dynamic in-game advertising hasn't completely replaced old school, static advertising.

Many ad-enabled games feature both kinds of advertising. And, of course, what you'll find in a lot of games is that the ads aren't dynamic at all and that the only feature of the software that the advertisers take advantage of is the ability to count and record "hits." Like, for instance, Worms 3D with its Red Bull power-up.

There's one other major reason for the continued use of static advertising: interactivity. Take a look at the Ben Sherman clothes shop in the recently-released Test Drive Unlimited or the AXE sign in Splinter Cell: Chaos Theory. They're not just ads you see as you zip around a racetrack or navigate the dark alleyways of an enemy city, but things you have to interact with. In the case of the AXE sign, you're forced to look at it for an extended period of time while you figure out how to get past it.

Dynamic ads can be interactive too, of course. For example, you could be run over by a Gillette Fusion-branded truck as you cross the road. But the sort of high-level integration into the plot and level design of a game you see in Test Drive Unlimited is only really practical with the hard-coded stuff.

STOP

Let's make one thing clear - you're not going to be seeing monstrous billboards for ChicksWithDicksThatAreBiggerThanYours.com in Battlefield 2142 any time soon. All ads have to be approved by the game's publisher before IGA Worldwide will put them into the game.

Bandwidth shouldn't be an issue either. "The caching is done at a time when bandwidth is not at a premium - during load screens, in the game lobby, etc - so it never steals bandwidth at a time when it could negatively affect the game experience," says Bartlett. "However, the ads themselves are very small - comparable to what you might see when loading a typical web page, except that in our ad-enabled games you could never see that many individual ads on the screen at any one time."

He also explains that the software isn't considered spyware - and, as such, won't be picked up by anti-adware suites such as SpyBot Search & Destroy and Lavasoft Ad-Aware - as it's actually part of the games.

Whether his assurances comfort you or not is really up to you. Similarly, it's your choice is you decide to stop buying or playing ad-enabled games. Just realise that as time goes by, ad-free games will become increasingly rare.

We'd like it if in-game advertising reduced the cost of games, but we seriously doubt that's going to happen. All we can really do is hope that seeing as now publishers have another source of revenue to fall back on, they start looking into some riskier, more innovative games. <<

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WAR GAMES

MAURICE BRANSCOMBE

The Game Blame

The last couple of War Games have focused on criticisms from within the games industry, but this month I've got a more important topic to discuss – criticism from outside the games industry.

In the wake of the tragic and shocking events that unfolded on April 16th at Virginia Tech, USA, there has been an outpouring on emotional condolences for the victims of one gravely deranged individual, Cho Seung Hui. If you were to believe various pundits however, Cho was not compelled to kill by his mental illness, but instead by video games. One such claim comes from TV therapist Dr Phil McGraw, who stated on CNN's Larry King Live programme:

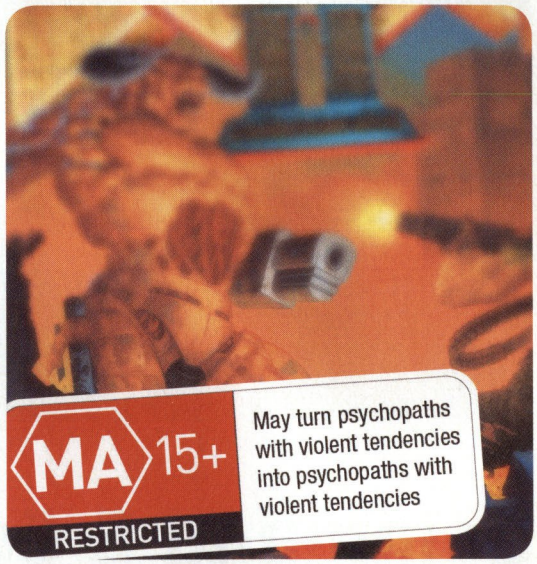
"The problem is we are programming these people as a society... if these kids are playing video games, where they're on a mass killing spree in a video game, it's glamorised on the big screen, it's become part of the fibre of our society. You take that and mix it with a psychopath, a sociopath or someone suffering from mental illness and add in a dose of rage, the suggestibility is too high."

Now, by all reports Cho was athletic and played basketball, but there's no evidence that he played videogames and according to the Virginia police's official search warrant not a single game was found at his residence. There is however evidence that he was seriously and dangerously mentally disturbed.

In 2005 he was classified as being "mentally ill and in need of hospitalisation" and was considered "an imminent danger to self or others" by a Virginia court. Furthermore, when Cho produced several unsettlingly violent plays for writing tasks at University, his teachers recommended him again for psychiatric assessment by the school's counsellors. It seems that on both occasions little was done to help Cho with his illness.

There is also evidence that thanks to Virginia's relaxed gun laws the weapons used in the shooting were extremely easy to acquire. Only a background check and a little paperwork were required and since Cho had no formal criminal record, he obtained them with ease.

So what is to blame? An ineffectual mental health system that turned their back on a deeply troubled man, the ridiculous gun laws that allowed someone who had been identified as an "imminent danger" to easily obtain weapons, or video games that he never played? Is not being a "psychopath" or "sociopath" with an "added dose of rage" enough?



Unfortunately this reflexive anti-videogames reaction is unlikely to subside thanks to the alleged actions of one Andrew Rosenblum. The 20-year-old host of Gamelife, a fan-made Internet TV show that covers videogames, was reportedly arrested only hours after the Virginia Tech shootings for having sent an email to his ex-girlfriend that included threats of: "I'm gonna [expletive] bring a gun to your school and kill you... and everybody you love. It's gonna be VT all over again."

For some, like Dr Phil McGraw, this incident will doubtlessly establish a direct link between videogame players and potential mass murderers, adding yet more fuel to a misdirected argument.

Perhaps these people would do better to stop looking for a single scapegoat. After all, life is not made up of only games, there are physical, mental, political, socio-economic and innumerable other factors that contribute to modern human life.

In the end, games don't kill people – people kill people.

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+
Bad	Badish	OK	Goodish	Good	Great

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Going on the Nod was never so socially acceptable!

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X360 / PS3 / Wii / **PC** / PS2 / XBOX / GCN / DS / PSP

Command & Conquer 3: Tiberium Wars

Daniel Staines has a thing for House

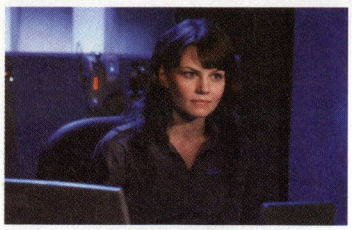
category: **RTS**
players: **1-Multi**
developer: **EA Los Angeles**
publisher: **EA**
price: **$99.95** / rating: **M**
available: **Now**

Compared to games like Supreme Commander and Company of Heroes, Command & Conquer 3 is a Neanderthal – primitive and brutish. It caters to our destructive instincts, to the pleasure we get from watching things explode on command. It's a game about tanks: you build lots of tanks, your opponent builds lots of tanks, and then the two of you meet up somewhere to blow the shit out of each other. Last tank standing wins. In this way, it's pretty much exactly the same as the previous C&C games, except it looks nicer and stars the hot doctor from House. Also, aliens – but we'll get to those later.

HER NAME IS JENNIFER MORRISON

The single-player portion of C&C3 consists of two lengthy campaigns, one for GDI (the good guys) and one for Nod (the bad guys), as well as a short-but-entertaining bonus campaign for the Scrin (the new alien faction alluded to above). Campaign structure is for the most part strictly linear and follows a hammy but genuinely enjoyable narrative that does a surprisingly good job of telling the same story from the different perspectives of each major faction. The live-action cut-scenes are predictably B-grade, but self-consciously so, and the celebrity actors EA has hired (including Josh Halloway and Michael Ironside) make a decent fist of lending credibility to the pseudo-military tosh that makes up 80% of the game's script. And yes, the GDI cut-scenes feature the hot doctor from House, and ... you know ... she's hot. Hotness is good.

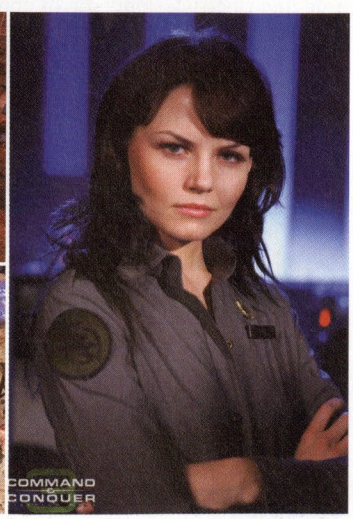
In keeping with the rest of the series, most missions in C&C3 are built on a simple build/defend/destroy formula. You build a base in hostile territory, you defend it from relentless assault, and then you destroy the crap out of some key enemy installations. There is no pretence to sophistication here. Strategic depth is openly and deliberately sacrificed – in its place is an enormous quantity of kick-arse action. Missions are paced to encourage constant activity, and if you don't spend every single second in a state of frantic industriousness, then you will be destroyed. Make tanks! Build an Obelisk of Light! Get a nuke ready! For God's sake, they're coming!



[above] Hottie doctor cares not for monitors

They're right in the base! Get some AA turrets next to the War Factory! HURRY UP! EXPLODE THEM! EXPLODE THEM BEFORE THEY EXPLODE US!

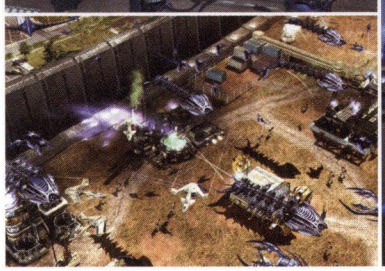
So, yeah: it's a pretty intense experience – perhaps a little too intense. I like blowing stuff up as much as the next guy, but constant action gets tiring after a while, so it's a shame that the languidly-paced guerrilla missions are relatively few. Unlike the more action-focused scenarios, these clandestine operations give



[below] We're paying Staines with pics, not money

SAGE! (IT'S A 4CHAN JOKE) If you think that C&C3 looks kind of familiar, that's probably because it's build on an upgrade version of the SAGE engine, which was developed for C&C Generals and later used in Battle for Middle Earth. Despite its age, it's a surprisingly robust and good looking engine, and it scales really well too. We had the game running perfectly on an old Athlon 2400 with a GeForce FX5700LE and 512Mb RAM – and it still looked great!

!!! Jennifer Morrison is 28 years old and was a child model before getting into acting. If you call "Touched by an Angel" acting



[above] This is her cranky and authoritarian pose

you a chance to breathe, to think about your decisions, and to get thoroughly acquainted with the units under your control. Oh! You know what they should have done? They should've made it so some missions gave you a mutually-exclusive choice between the two different approaches. So, like, you could either go for a good old fashioned all out assault, or send in a commando to cause some havoc in the dark. Oh, man. That would've been great.

I like blowing stuff up as much as the next guy, but constant action gets tiring after a while

ABHOR THE SCRIN, NOT THE SCRINNER

As with any other good RTS, balance – both between and within the different factions – plays a key role in ensuring C&C3 remains enjoyable in the long-term. As it stands, EA has hit the nail pretty squarely on the head first go, with only few minor tweaks still needed to make everything perfect.

Predictably, GDI and Nod play the same as they always have: the former has lots of big tanks and other brute-force units, the latter focuses on faster and stealthier units ideally suited to surprise attacks and ambushes. The Scrin strike a decent balance between the two extremes, and make up for their slow economy and weak early-game with an enormously powerful end-game based on overwhelming air superiority. They also have the best looking units in the game – the Annihilator Tripod might be a direct knock-off of those things from War of the Worlds, but damned if it doesn't look rad striding around the battlefield. (Oh, and wait till you see the Independence Day-style Mothership. It's hee-uge.)

But despite EA's effort to carefully balance the factions, it must be said that it's considerably easier to play a decent GDI game than it is to do well with Nod and the Scrin. The upshot is that playing online using the random matchmaking service tends to be a bit crap right now, as most players seem content to spam Mammoth Tanks rather than try anything new and interesting. Of course, that'll probably work itself out as the good players eventually develop effective counter-rush tactics, but for now – well, what can I say? People suck.

I've always liked Command & Conquer. It's a great series for people like me – people who aren't very good at strategy games, but love the rush of watching tanks blow the hell out of each other. In this regard, C&C3 succeeds admirably, both as a stand-alone RTS and as a successor to the C&C franchise. Plus, did I mention it has that doctor from House in it? She's hot. <<

Fast-paced gameplay, hammy cut-scenes, hot doctor from House	A little too frantic at times, GDI spammers	HYPER VERDICT

Classic C&C gameplay in a shiny new outfit

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY	
86	80	89	89

!!! The music is wonderful and melodramatic, the voice acting, on the other hand, is woeful.

X360 / PS3 / Wii / PC / PS2 / XBOX / GCN / DS / **PSP**

Valkyrie Profile Lenneth

Reviewer Profile **WILKS**

category: **RPG**
players: **1**
developer: **Square Enix**
publisher: **Square Enix**
price: **$69.95** / rating: **M**
available: **Now**

If you've been waiting for the first true great RPG for the PSP then wait no more. Valkyrie Profile Lenneth is the game that fits the bill more than ably but don't let the fact that the game comes from the stable of Square Enix make you think that it is some sort of Final Fantasy or Dragon Quest analogue on the PSP. Far from it – Lenneth is a port (with a face lift) of one of the rarer and more innovative games in the company's large back catalogue. It's not quite like anything you have played before. We mean that in a good way. A really good way.

GENRE: 2DSSPRPGTBS

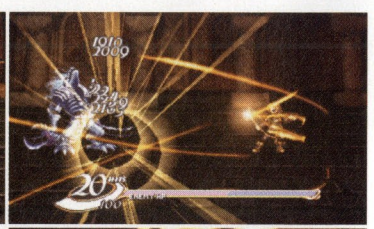
Although at first Lenneth seems to be a strange and rather cumbersome mix of 2D platforming, traditional turn based Japanese RPG combat and a little bit of strategy, Lenneth combines the disparate threads into a very coherent and satisfying whole. As the name suggests, Valkyrie Profile Lenneth takes its cues from Norse mythology, casting the player as Lenneth, one of the Valkyries sent to the mortal realm to search for the worthy souls of the recently deceased to train as holy warriors to fight in the inevitable final battle Ragnarok. It's all pretty heady stuff told in an overblown and rather relentlessly downbeat way but as a game theme it works a treat. Basic gameplay revolves around Lenneth tracking down those who are about to die and recruiting their souls into her four-person party, fighting through some rather traditional Japanese RPG missions to increase their level, skills and make their personalities more noble before sending them on to the army in the sky and recruiting another character.

To keep things interesting Lenneth only has 192 turns in which to complete her mission making it entirely possible to get to the end of the game and not be able to finish it. Each town entered, dungeon explored and soul searched for takes a set number of turns so balancing the risk and reward of exploration and missions becomes a sort of tactical meta-game.

[below] We agree. Sort of.

PIXELICIOUS

Although Lenneth looks like a typical Japanese RPG during the town based missions and "recruitment" sections, exploration of dungeons is essentially a side scrolling platformer with only Lenneth visible.



[above] Four buttons to fight you with

In addition to being able to jump, Lenneth can also shoot ice crystals to make temporary platforms enabling her to scale walls and the like. All monsters during this exploration stage are visible on the map and do not respawn after being killed.

Each characters attach is mapped to one of he four face buttons enabling them to attack each time their timer resets. Whilst simply mashing the buttons may win a few battles you'll soon find that you need to carefully coordinate your attack for best effect – using a heavy hitter to break a guard before the highly damaging mage style character bombards them with fireballs for example. It's clever and fun, much like the rest of the game.

Valkyrie Profile Lenneth is a prime example of the beauty of pixel art. Lenneth herself is a beautifully realised character with wonderful proportions and animations. The detailing on the enemies, weapons and armour is also exceptional. During the games facelift, Squeenix have rendered some new cutscenes in the Final Fantasy style. It may just be us but we think that these new high-res cutscenes really detract from the visual appeal of the game and come across as more than a little out of place. <<

Beautiful design, clever platforming and RPG, no random battles

New cutscenes, can lose due to time restrictions

HYPER VERDICT

Clever, overblown, dramatic and tense – the best RPG on the PSP so far.

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY	
82	69	86	**84**

The next game in the Ratchet & Clank series will be the PlayStation 3 exclusive Ratchet & Clank Future: Tools of Destruction, and believe us when we say that it's looking fantastic. The game promises to bring back many of the platforming elements that have been replaced by gun combat in the past few sequels (including Size Matters), as well as featuring SIXAXIS motion controls.

X360 / PS3 / Wii / PC / PS2 / XBOX / GCN / DS / **PSP**

Ratchet & Clank: Size Matters

MAURICE BRANSCOMBE is a size queen.

category: **Platform**
players: **1-4**
developer: **High Impact Games**
publisher: **Sony**
price: **$79.95** / rating: **G**
available: **May**

When one half of Jak & Daxter made the transition from large to small screen, we had a feeling that Sony's other platforming duo couldn't be far behind. One year later and Ratchet and Clank are finally paying a visit to the PSP in Size Matters, but does it measure up to its home console counterparts, or even to its main PSP competition, Daxter...

MOTION IN THE OCEAN

The game starts with Ratchet and Clank reclining by the beach, taking a hard earned vacation after saving the world three of four times over the past few years. Before long though, trouble inevitably finds them. A shipload of robots swoops down on the beach and kidnaps a little girl, sending Ratchet and Clank after them and into another galaxy-spanning adventure.

From here it jumps straight into the action, and with Ratchet, it's all about the guns, and to a lesser extent the wrench. There are plenty of blasters to try out, with the Acid Bomb Glove (hurls an acid ball), the Scorcher (flame-thrower), the Concussion Gun (a giant shotgun), as well as the trusty Lacerator laser pistol. All of the weapons level up with use, and can also be upgraded with vendor-bought modifications to make them even more powerful.

Another cool feature is Ratchet's new mix-and-match armour. Hidden throughout each of Ratchet and Clank's universe there's no less than 28 pieces of armour each with a kind of elemental power, like fire or ice. If you happen to find a complete matching set of armour then you'll unlock a few surprising abilities, like a flaming wrench to increase your pummelling power.

When Ratchet is at the helm puzzles rarely get harder than flipping a switch to open a door or using a bomb plant to blow a hole in a wall. Thankfully things do get a little more cerebral when you get to control Clank, who is given a small army of subordinate robots to do his bidding, with which you'll have to solve various puzzles. These Clank sections are particularly refreshing, since Ratchet's gameplay often amounts to repeatedly shooting and wrench whipping an endless supply of enemies until you've gone from point A to point B.

Because of this the main missions can get tiresome quickly, but Size Matters does an admirable job at breaking up the action with numerous mini-games like hoverboard racing, rail-sliding, space-shooting and more.

What's more Size Matters looks fantastic. The characters and environments are cartoony and colourful, yet the game still manages to pull of some great looking realistic special effects, particularly the ballistics.

Problems do begin to arise, however, when we come to the controls, particularly when the combat calls for plenty of strafing. Strafing is controlled with the d-pad, and the problem of course is that constantly switching between the analogue stick and d-pad in the heat of battle just doesn't work. There's not even an option to change the control layout either, which is extremely frustrating.

The camera too is problematic, often sticking at the worst of angles, obscuring your view or getting you killed by enemies or the environment all too frequently.

These factors don't stop Size Matters from being fun, but they do take their toll on the game, leaving it feeling far less complete than its PS2 instalments, and more importantly, leaving it shaping up rather poorly against Daxter's PSP effort.

Nevertheless, for fans of the series Size Matters is a large enough portion of the Ratchet & Clank gameplay that you love to keep you well a truly occupied while away from your PS2. <<

[below] Drivey

[above] Shootey

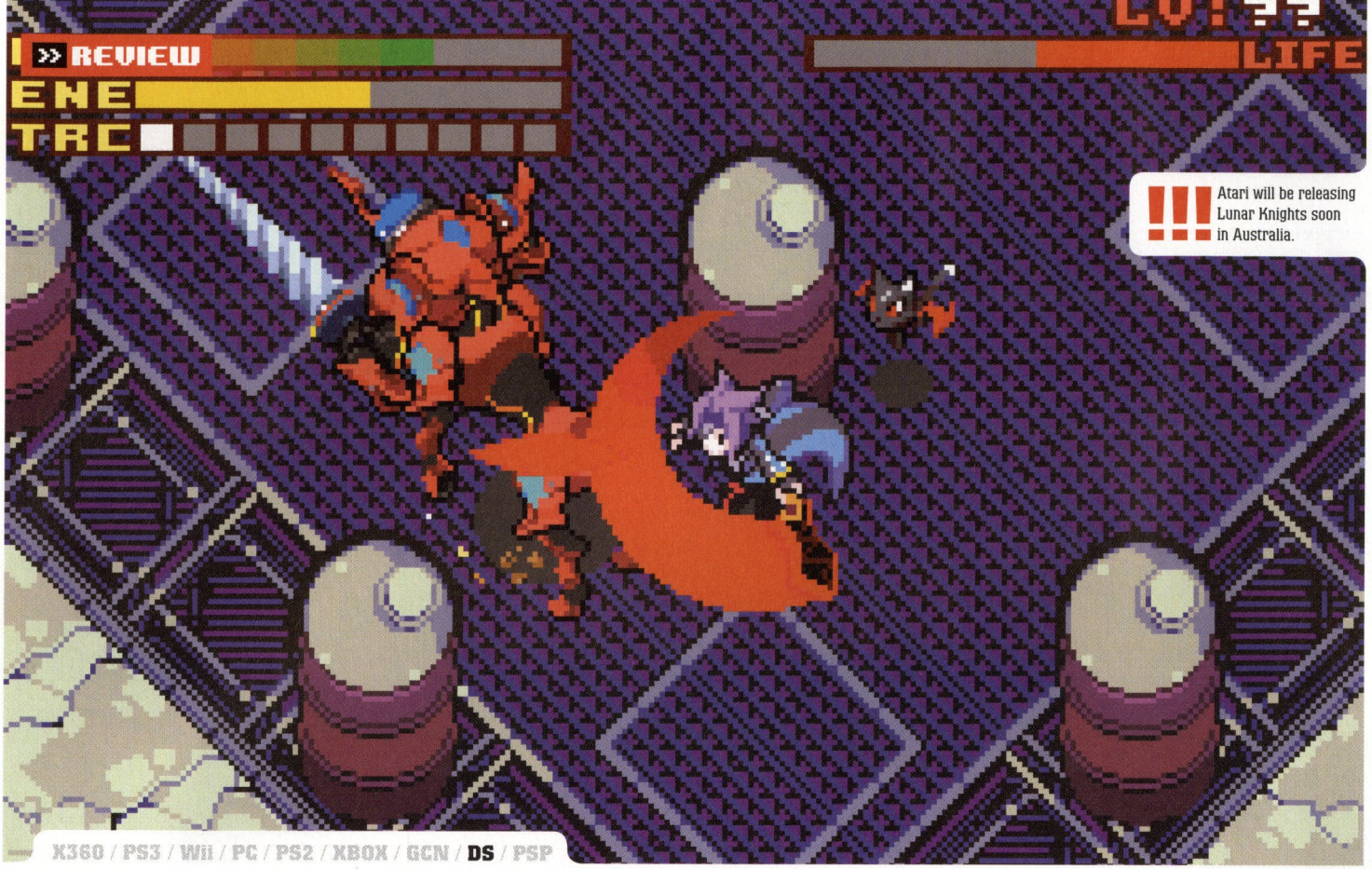
Looks great, plays well, plenty of mini-games and upgrades

Camera and controls frustrating, repetitive main missions

HYPER VERDICT

It's no Daxter, but it's still worth playing.

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY	
86	80	79	**79**



!!! Atari will be releasing Lunar Knights soon in Australia.

X360 / PS3 / Wii / PC / PS2 / XBOX / GCN / **DS** / PSP

Lunar Knights [IMPORT]

SALLY WOELLNER puts on her pixel-sneaking suit for Kojima's first DS title

category: **Adventure**
players: **1**
developer: **Kojima Productions**
publisher: **Konami**
price: **US $29.99** / rating: **N/A**
available: **Now, on import**

There are certain universal truths that will always hold true - the sun will rise; Uwe Boll will fail to discover untapped directorial talent; Hideo Kojima's games will be complicated, lovingly detailed, and full of misanthropes wearing eye-patches.

Enjoyable though it is, this game is really difficult to sum up; "top-down anime styled Vampire-hunting weather-influenced stealth flavoured occasional space-shooter action-puzzle hack and slash with brains" doesn't really roll off the tongue. But through all of that, you'll follow two vampire-hunters, the one-eyed Lucian and gunslinger Aaron, who spend the game battling together to save humanity from slavery in an undead utopia.

Lunar Knights follows on from the Boktai games, a revolutionary series of GBA titles whose downfall was a solar sensor built into their carts. It controlled the sun within the game, and therefore the power of the protagonist and his vampiric enemies. Fans found that in order to survive, they had to weigh their enjoyment of the game against the risk of heat stroke - so to avoid fear of sunburn, Konami have chosen to distance Lunar Knights from its predecessors with a new name and a re-vamped storyline.

[below] When we think vampires we think shmup

NO TABLE HERE

This time around, the sun rises and sets without any outside help. There are also a myriad of different climates to unlock with the help of elemental spirits, known as "Terrenials" - little pets who follow you around and aid your attacks. The effects of the climate swaps aren't always obvious, but little details change each time you switch. Health-giving fruit in your inventory will spoil more slowly in cold or more quickly in heat, and your in game chocolate will melt and coat half your inventory if it's hot, turning everything into indistinct chocolately blobs. Your Metal Gear-style sneaking mission will be harder in the rain or snow, too, as patrolling enemies won't hear you whistling to attract their attention.

In contrast, the rhythm of day and night more directly effects gameplay - Lucian draws power from the moon, Aaron from the sun. The sunset and sunrise within the game encourage you to switch between the two characters to survive, and it serves as an excellent way to mix up the gameplay as you progress. The differences in their weapons forces you to adopt different strategies to deal with the enemies - and strategy is essential. If you go in mashing, you'll die.

[above] This just screams "slayer of undead"

This does highlight one of the greatest strengths and weaknesses of the game: the difficulty. It's refreshing to have to think while carving through the hordes, but sometimes the sharp difficulty jumps will leave you wanting to hurl your DS out the window. The voice acting can be alternatively cringe-worthy and hilarious as well, but fortunately it's relatively rare.

Lunar Knights does show its GBA roots too, when you realise you don't need the stylus to play — except for the bizarre and rare space-shooter stylus segments (it makes sense in game!), where you try to simultaneously steer your ship and fire at the same time with one stylus. It's fun, but unlike the rest of the game it's made needlessly difficult by bad stylus controls.

In the end, it's a pleasingly complex and fun game with a heap of Kojima quirks. If you can deal with the occasional maddening increase in difficulty, it's an involving adventure/puzzle game that's definitely worth your time. <<

↑ It's Smart mash-ey fun that's detailed and involving; it's Kojima	↓ Difficulty jumps; really bad voice acting

HYPER VERDICT

Vampires Metal Gear style are actually a whole lot of fun.

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY	
85	80	90	**89**

ANIMEBLITZ

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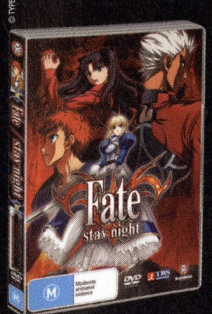
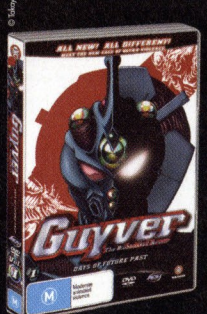


Shirou must come to grips with the reality of the secret world of war mages and their summoned servants when he unknowingly summons his own servant, Saber; the one said to be the most powerful servant of them all.

BIOBOOSTED AND BLOODY: DESTROY OR BE DESTROYED!



Sho Fukamachi happens upon a techno organic suit of bio armor known as the Guyver. Sho is soon forced to call upon the fearsome power of the Guyver, and rip his opponents limb from limb in a desperate struggle for survival.

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!!! Don't forget: F.E.A.R. also has multiplayer modes so you can get scared pantsless with everyone on the interwebs. The PS3 version comes complete with three previously unreleased maps and one new weapon, an automatic shotgun, two more token content additions that almost keeps F.E.A.R. PS3 fresh.

X360 / **PS3** / Wii / PC / PS2 / XBOX / GCN / DS / PSP

F.E.A.R.

MAURICE BRANSCOMBE is not an acronym

category: **First Person Shooter**
players: **1-16**
developer: **Day 1 Studios**
publisher: **Vivendi Games**
price: **$99.95** / rating: **PG**
available: **April**

When it was first unleashed on the world, F.E.A.R. was an almost revolutionary step in PC games. Its then-amazing visuals, horror-steeped narrative and seemingly lifelike A.I. earned it acclaim from gamers and critics alike.

Here we are almost two years later, and F.E.A.R. is receiving its second and probably final port, this time to Sony's PlayStation 3 – but is it worth playing the third time around?

SAME OLD SAME OLD

The answer to this question is both yes and no, and here's why. F.E.A.R. on PS3 may not look as good as the likes of Resistance: Fall of Man, but it looks every bit as good as its PC and Xbox 360 counterparts, which makes it a great introduction for anyone who missed it the first (or second) time around. However, the gameplay itself has barely changed, meaning that if you played it before, you won't want to play it again.

F.E.A.R.'s great strength was always its immersive storyline and frightening atmosphere, and these things make it to the PS3 untouched. You play a member of a secret strike force sent into a hijacked aerospace facility to clear out the mysterious and horrific forces that have infiltrated the base. As you play the game takes you deeper into the story, while trying its best to scare the trousers off you at the same time. The canned scares do start to wear thin after awhile, after all, there are only so many times you can get the spooks from seeing a ghostly little girl standing at the end of a blood-soaked hallway, but while it lasts F.E.A.R. is certainly an engaging experience, and that remains in this PS3 release.

The only notable new content is two bonuses; an unlockable bonus level that lets you discover what happened to the S.F.O.D. squad that the F.E.A.R. team were sent in after, as well as a new game mode called 'instant action', a kind of arcade mode that lets you loose on wave after wave of increasingly hard to kill enemies and then gives you a score for your performance.

[above] Particle Effect Man does whatever a Particle Effect can

Again, in the gameplay department things haven't changed. The enemy A.I. is still just as ruthless as before and you'll need to use plenty of bullet-time and bullets to dispatch the ungodly hordes. In terms of controls, the aiming is a little slippery and will take some practice to acclimate to, while the motion-sensitive aspects of the SIXAXIS go untouched. The loose controls make the gunplay a little less precise, but it's still highly playable.

On a technical note though, F.E.A.R. PS3 doesn't tick every box on the perfect port checklist. The load times are particularly long, and when you have to wait close to a minute to get into a so-called instant action match that may be over in less than a minute, it does get irritating. Similarly, the game's framerate can drop to noticeable lows in some situations. These few issues aren't complete joy killers, but we do have to question the effort put into optimising this port for the PS3.

Nevertheless, F.E.A.R. is a passable port of a fantastic original game, and as such is worth giving a shot. Be warned though, the additional content is scarce, so if you've already played any other versions of the game you won't find anything new here. <<

[below] I wonder if he gets called 4-eyes a lot

Compelling narrative, excellent enemy A.I. and gun combat

Scarce new content, framerate and load times needed more work

HYPER VERDICT

Nothing new, but F.E.A.R. still stands up pretty well.

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY	
85	88	82	75

No word as yet if and when Gundam: Musou will be released in Australia

X360 / **PS3** / Wii / PC / PS2 / XBOX / GCN / DS / PSP

HYPER BIG RUBBER STAMP OF APPROVAL

Gundam Musou [IMPORT]

JONTI DAVIES officiates a happy marriage.

category: **Action**
players: **1**
developer: **Bandai**
publisher: **Bandai**
price: **¥5800** / rating: **TBC**
available: **Now (Japan)**

Dynasty Warriors is, to some people, the Second Coming of strategy action gameplay. No doubt about it, Koei's series of feudal feud games is the master of its domain. Gundam games, at the other end of the hall, are difficult to predict: Gundam: Crossfire is thoroughly awful, but Gundam Zeon on the Dreamcast is absolutely brilliant.

All the games can't be good all of the time, of course, but we're glad to say that this one – a cross-developer DNA splice of the Dynasty Warriors and Gundam games – is a certifiable Good One.

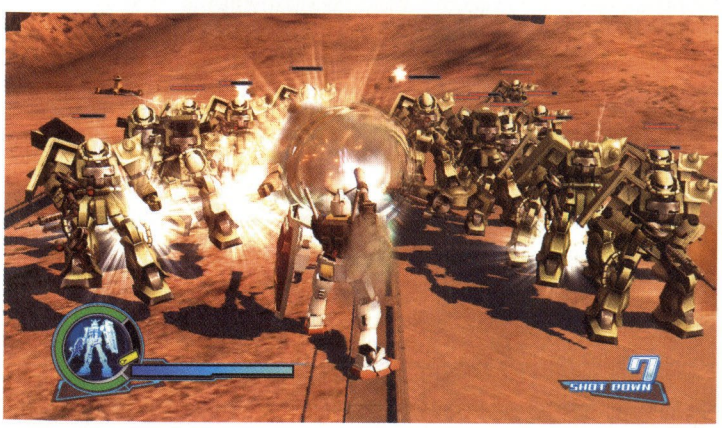
In Gundam Musou you have control of countless Gundam mech units and are embroiled in a war that takes you from planet to planet, with stops in outer space for weightless battles. Wherever you find yourself fighting, the key is to direct your units with some evident wisdom and – crucially – to slash the hell out of your enemies by using special musou attacks and the inherent powers of your Gundam battalion.

It's not as easy as it sounds, though, with boss characters providing a solid challenge at the end of each mission and, before you even get there, hundreds of enemy mechs armed with the same potent powers as your good self. Gundam Musou is a game that lives by the 'more is better' ethos of Koei's Dynasty Warriors titles.

Fortunately, quite unlike the trundling mess that is Gundam: Crossfire, this brand new take on the IP is backed by technology that realises the developer's ambition. There is no slowdown here, even when hundreds of mechs are in battle on-screen simultaneously. There's almost a level of cockiness to how Bandai plays with the PS3 hardware, delivering the most impressive lighting outside of Virtua Fighter 5 and still managing to convey a sense of scale that outdoes the battle scenes of Armored Core 4. In the PS3 arena, there's nothing else quite like Musou.

Gundam Musou is repetitive, but then so is Tetris. The key to Musou's success, though, is that it has the power to satisfy players – those looking for tactics in battle will find a game that is deeply strategic, while action-hungry gamers need only wait till the battle plan screen fades for their fill – by virtue of its depth and the quality of its presentation. There's nothing new here, other than the marriage of licenses, but that's not the point. Gundam Musou just does what we expect of it, very well. <<

[above] Nice helmet you've got there, Tiger



[below] Super robot bowling league

HYPER VERDICT

Engrossing tactical gameplay; challenging action.

Little in the way of innovation.

Gundam Musou delivers where Gundam: Crossfire comprehensively fails.

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY	
90	90	90	**90**

!!! There is no firm plan for anyone to release Pro Baseball Spirits 4 in Australia at this stage.

X360 / **PS3** / Wii / PC / PS2 / XBOX / GCN / DS / PSP

Professional Baseball Spirits 4 [IMPORT]

It's just not cricket to **JONTI DAVIES.**

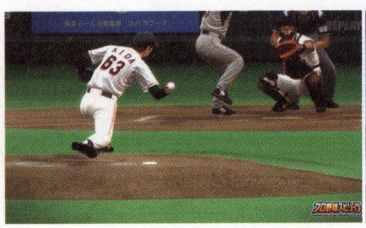
What the Americans revere as a national institution, we play as 'rounders' until moving from infant to primary school. There's probably a thesis to be written about the Aussie graduation from rounders to cricket and its parallel with the American obsession that is baseball. But let's concede for a moment that there is some entertainment to be gained from playing baseball (rounders was quite fun, come to think of it) and give Konami a clean slate. Entertain us.

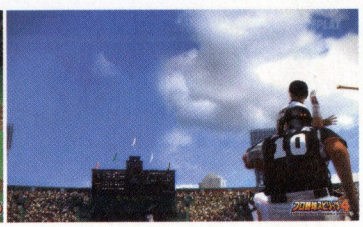
Pro Baseball Spirits 4 is, as its name suggests, a new addition to an established series of baseball sims. Konami has another line of baseball games that it markets under the Powerful Pro umbrella, and these titles feature cartoonishly big-headed players. Pro Baseball Spirits is the straight sim. Here, both of Japan's major leagues — the Central League and the Pacific League — are replicated down to the tiniest details (namely, the formation of players' facial hair) and with the official backing of those leagues.

In many ways, Pro Baseball Spirits 4 comes across as the Pro Evolution Soccer... of baseball games. Pitching (bowling) and batting (batting) are controlled with the analogue stick in combination with the SixAxis' face buttons, and both actions feel precise and tight. Fielding is slightly less well poised, as the control of players sometimes feels too loose and as a result fielders are prone to nearly making catches when you could have sworn that they were on a perfect course to meet the ball.

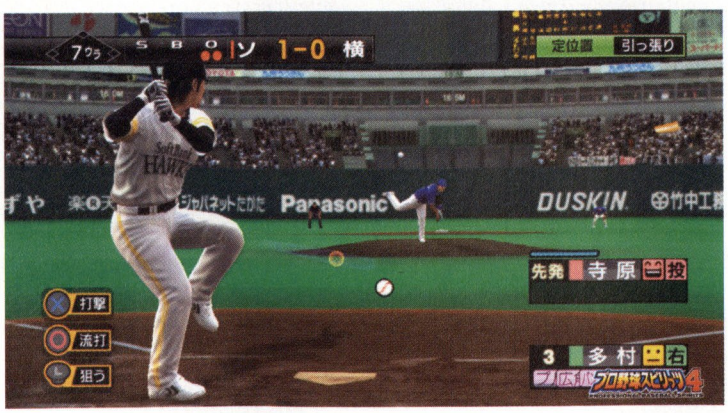
In terms of options, though, Pro Baseball Spirits has almost everything. Both leagues can be played through in season format, exhibition matches cater for one-offs and two-player games, and there are a number of solo career modes in which you can develop the stats of a single pro baseball player. There are statistics on almost every screen, and for players who aren't familiar with the intricacies of baseball terminology this can be overwhelming. But it's all for the greater good, treating fans of the sport to something that rivals Pro Evo as a comprehensive simulation.

Slightly disappointing is the cap imposed on multiplayer action: for whatever reason, Pro Baseball Spirits supports only two-player games. Three or four player action is a no-go. Still, there is a solid online game that goes some way towards compensating for this — two-player match-ups over the PlayStation Network are lag-free and in all respects identical to offline two-player games. We'll admit to still being left unimpressed by the sport, but Pro Baseball Spirits 4 does a worthy job of ensuring that, in future, we won't simply write it off as a fake version of rounders. Promise. <<





[above] Real time cloud physics



[below] Pictured: Pitcher
Not Pictured: Catcher

category: **Sport**
players: **1-2**
developer: **BandaiNamco/Koei**
publisher: **BandaiNamco**
price: **¥5800** / rating: **TBC**
available: **Now (Japan)**

Looks fine; a comprehensive simulation of Japanese baseball	Multiplayer only goes up to two-player; it's baseball.	HYPER VERDICT
A decent but unspectacular take on a sport.	VISUALS 85 / SOUND 60 / GAMEPLAY 65	67

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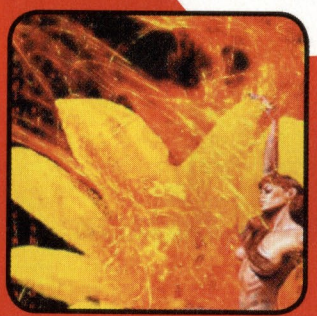
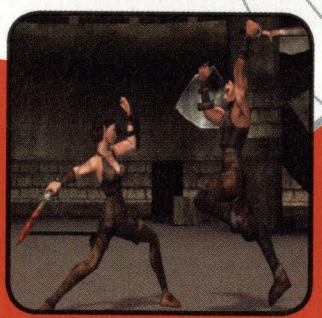

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INDIE GAME REVIEW

!!! Hyper readers get a discount! Type the code WCU00001 (that's WCU followed by 3 zeros followed by capital O followed by capital I) at the bottom of the screen to get 20% knocked off the full price! It's the first Aussie game we've covered in the Indie reviews section, and well worthy of purchase if you're after something light 'n easy.

X360 / PS3 / Wii / **PC** / PS2 / XBOX / GCN / DS / PSP

Snaky Jake

TIM HENDERSON clicks on Mario and nothing much happens.

category: **Platformer**
players: **1**
developer: **Charlie Dog**
publisher: **Charlie Dog**
price: **US $14.99** / rating: **N/A**
available: **TBA**

The very thought of playing a side-scrolling platformer with a mouse seems like a contradiction to the genre's very defining characteristics; the digital precision that we all grew up with that opened up moments of pivotal concentration, timing and occasional trial and error moments being dusted away with the one swift sweep of a device more commonly associated with first person shooters and strategy games. But that's the current age for you: hardcore increasingly perceived as a niche, casual games are gaining more steam with every 'non-gamer' that begins playing them.

COLLECT STUFF TO MAKE YOUR SNAKE GROW

It's inevitable that a lot of the challenge commonly associated with platforming has been ironed out and simplified a lot in Snaky Jake. The mouse control takes what were once careful, controlled leaps and turns them into momentary reflex reactions. No longer is it possible to mistime a jump and fall to your doom – platforms are either highlighted or they aren't: click on a highlighted one and Jake will bound safely onto it. Click on one that isn't and Jake will stay put, waiting for you to find him something more within his ability.

Challenge isn't completely forgotten, though. While Snaky Jake won't keep you up until the sun replaces the stars outside your window, its array of simple foes and a screen that often forcefully scrolls forwards inject a greater element of timing into the proceedings. It's still a case of clicking – of initiating an action – rather than manually ensuring you land upon your foe's head or back, but then this simplicity is largely the focus. Snaky Jake isn't out to be a defining experience, nor does it want to captivate you for hours comparable to unmonitored sessions of Civilisation – Snaky Jake simply wants to provide some light entertainment for people with a little time to kill, or some quick, low-stress enjoyment for those too bushed by their jobs to make a proper effort with the latest Square-Enix epic.

And you know what? For what it is (a simple, user-friendly platformer), Snaky Jake is actually pretty good. It's certainly one of the better casual games we've played. Once you come to terms with the more restricted approach to the core platforming mechanics, and the uninspired-but-acceptable cuteness that smothers the game's visual style and audio offerings, it becomes apparent that Snaky Jake functions pretty well. A smattering of power-ups that range from the generic to the mildly creative, as well as a clever spin on the typical collectable items that results in a double-edged usefulness add a small sparkle of innovation to the package.

As an secondary title to enjoy between breaks in your main gaming diet, or just as something to play before bed that won't threaten to steal too much of your sleep, Snaky Jake delivers quite a worthwhile experience. Take it as what it is, and while you won't be taken aback, you may be pleasantly surprised. <<

Round wheel keeps on turning

50 Cent makes cameos in a lot of games nowadays

Easy to get into; low stress; scattered moments of originality

Occasional collision issues

HYPER VERDICT

Snaky Jake is the new desktop solitaire.

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY	
70	70	76	**77**

X360 / PS3 / Wii / PC / PS2 / XBOX / GCN / **DS** / PSP

Castlevania: Portrait of Ruin

category: **Action/ Adventure**
players: **1-2**
developer: **Konami**
publisher: **Konami**
price: **$79.95**
rating: **M**
available: **Now**

Portrait of Ruin marks the 20th anniversary of the Castlevania franchise so you know there is a lot of expectation riding on the shoulders of the game. Thankfully the game lives up to those expectations. For the most part anyway. A kind of melding of the old and the new, Portrait of Ruin combines the short platform/action level designs of the older games in the franchise with the more free-roaming exploration and RPG style gearing and levelling that has been seen in more recent games (most notably on the PS2). Like we say, for the most part this combination of styles works very well and proves to be a massive selling point. Unfortunately the sometimes rather clumsy interaction between the two styles of gameplay detracts from the overall experience. The idea of the level design is brilliant; Dracula's castle serves as a central adventuring hub that branches off into eight distinctive levels but the execution leaves a lot to be desired. The design of the actual levels is cookie-cutter and more than a little dull, featuring numerous samey rooms populated by retarded monsters that pose no threat after the characters have levelled up a bit. The lack of challenge wouldn't be so bad if the exploration element of the game was massively fun but unfortunately it is not. Don't get us wrong – there is a lot to like about PoR; the two character switching mechanics and boss battles are brilliant, as are all of the tips of the hat to previous games in the series that pop up throughout play time – it's simply a case of the level design not keeping up with everything else.

VAN HAMERSLEY

HYPER VERDICT

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY	
87	89	85	79

X360 / PS3 / Wii / PC / **PS2** / XBOX / GCN / DS / PSP

Everybody's Tennis

category: **Sport**
players: **1-4**
developer: **Clap Hanz**
publisher: **Sony**
price: **$79.95**
rating: **G**
available: **Now**

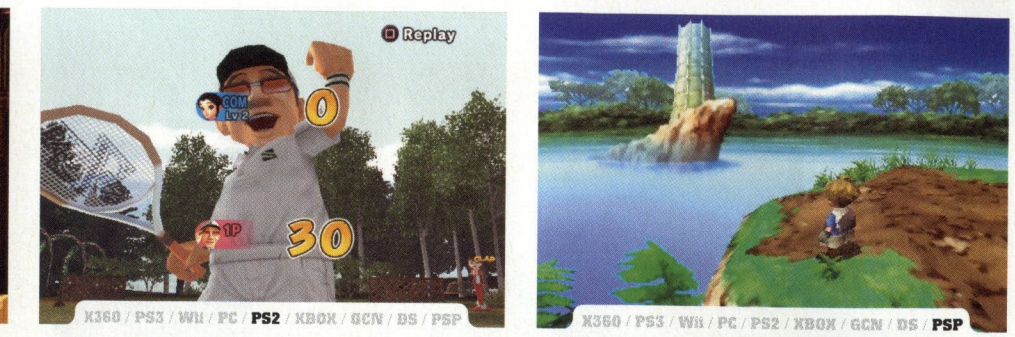
Apparently tennis is the new socialism, communism or other all encompassing "ism" if you believe what the name of the game is telling you. Everybody is tennis. Of course "tennis" in this case could be a Japanese word for "smiling happily at big headed anime style tennis players and dressing them up to look rather stupid after winning a few matches" but that seems like a little bit of a stretch. Everybody's Tennis isn't one of those games that concerns itself too much with the fineries and nuances – it's a game about big headed anime characters bashing a ball across a net for the chance to win a new costume, new court, new announcer or the like. As an immediately approachable hit and giggle Everybody's Tennis proves to be quite a decent little title but there are numerous shortfalls that harm long-term playability.

There simply isn't enough meat to the bones of Everybody's Tennis to make it anything more than a passing fancy. In the single player game there is no real challenge and no real reward aside from an extra character or two who plays like the characters you already have in your stable, an extra outfit or court. While this sounds like affair bit of reward they have no real impact on the game aside from the aesthetic so wear thin pretty quickly. In multiplayer the game simply lacks either the more deliberate gameplay or something like Smash Court or the stupid amusement value of Mario Tennis. Truth be told, Clap Hanz developed the game over five years ago and put it on the backburner to concentrate on their similar golf title (Everybody's Golf). The dating shows.

DIRK WATCH

HYPER VERDICT

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY	
78	80	76	75



X360 / PS3 / Wii / PC / PS2 / XBOX / GCN / DS / **PSP**

Innocent Life: A Futuristic Harvest Moon

category: **Manual Labour Simulator**
players: **1**
developer: **ArtePiazza**
publisher: **Marvelous Interactive**
price: **$79.95**
rating: **G**
available: **May**

The main draw of the Harvest Moon series has always been that it took you away from the far-flung futuristic settings that so many games fall into, and instead took you to a rural locale where you could make your fortune in the fields during the day and woo the ladies by night. It was somewhat disappointing then to discover that Innocent Life is set in the year 2022, and the protagonist is a farming robot.

Apart from the new setting and character though, the futuristic period really has almost no effect on Innocent Life's gameplay. You'll still have to till the soil, sow and water the seeds and then sell your veg to reap a rich harvest of cash money. The romantic angle plays less into this game than before, but in its place is a Pinocchio-like sidequest in which your robot becomes more human the more you farm.

If you love the Harvest Moon formula then this will deliver what you need, but Innocent Life can be an all too familiar experience, and not only that, but it gets a number of things very wrong. Firstly, Innocent Life is slow even by Harvest Moon's dawdling standards, particularly in the first few hours of gameplay. The controls are also needlessly complex, requiring you to access menus to change tools rather than doing it with a single button press as in previous games in the series.

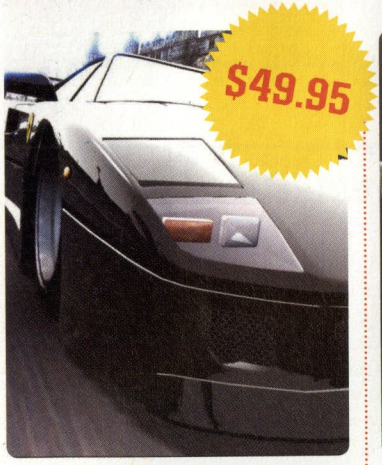
Problems aside, if you're content to do the same thing in a different era, then Innocent Life can be fun. We just wish the developers could think of a way to keep the series fresh other than transporting it to another time.

MAURICE BRANSCOMBE

HYPER VERDICT

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY	
74	53	70	67

El Cheapo Gaming



Project Gotham 3

XBOX 360 / Developer: Bizarre Creations

■ Without doubt PGR3 is the best racing game on the X360. With some gorgeous visuals, huge roster of cars and realistic, yet accessible controls it beats out all comers – and now it's cheaper than ever. The official RRP may be $49.95, but we've seen both PGR3 and DOA4 (also on this list) for less than thirty-five dollars at certain retailers – and that's not a sale price. So hunt around and you may be able to save even more cash!

Dead or Alive 4

XBOX 360 / Team Ninja

■ It may not be Virtua Fighter 5 good (what 3D fighting game is?), but it is good, and as far as 3D fighting games on the Xbox 360 are concerned, it's the best. With a tight combo-based fighting system and some of the most beautiful fighting game visuals around (and we're not just talking about the jiggle physics) Dead or Alive 4 is well worth paying half price for.

Deus Ex: INVISIBLE WAR

PC / Ion Storm

■ Not only is it hard to believe that Dues Ex: Invisible War didn't sell like some kind of heated cake product upon its initial launch, but it's baffling that a game this good can be picked up today for less than a twenty. With a conspiracy-packed storyline and the series' trademark hybrid RPG/first-person shooter gameplay this is something you wouldn't want to miss at any price.

God of War

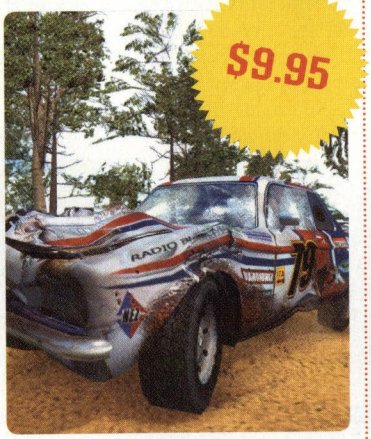
PS2 / SCE Studios Santa Monica

■ The imminent release of God of War II means two things: the first of course being that we'll soon be playing GOWII, but the second is that the first GOW is being sold like it went out of style with mullet haircuts. With some of the most cinematic action sequences seen in a game – ever – an amazingly intuitive camera and one of the gaming world's biggest badarses, Kratos, in the lead role, this is too good, and too cheap, to miss out on.

Daxter

PSP / Ready At Dawn

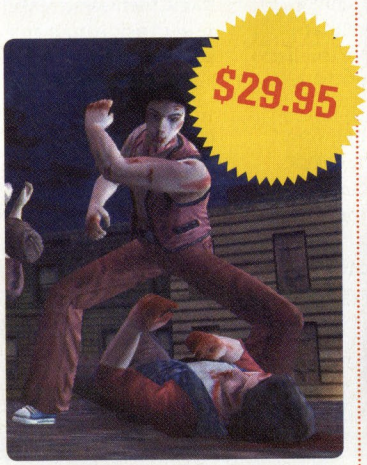
■ He may be the annoying sidekick of the Jak and Daxter pair, but when it comes to PSP platform games, none beats Daxter. It's a pleasant surprise then to discover that Daxter is now hovering around half the price of a normal PSP game. With a futuristic open-world city to explore, plenty of gadgets to toy with and vehicles to ride, Daxter is fun at any price… but as always, the cheaper, the better.



Flat Out

PC / Bugbear Entertainment

■ These days you can't get much for less than a tenner, except of course a copy of Flat Out. This racing/crashing simulator didn't sell too many copies when it was first released, but don't let that fool you – it's a high-octane blast. How could you possibly say no to a game that requires you to crash and then scores you on how far can make your driver fly through the windscreen?



The Warriors

PS2/XBOX / Rockstar

■ As of going to print we couldn't confirm that the RRP of the Xbox version had dropped as low as the PS2 version (because we couldn't find a copy of the game at all), but at $29.95, this game is giving itself away. Based on one of the greatest cult films ever made, The Warriors is pure beat 'em up action set against the backdrop of 1979 New York City. If you don't come out and play at this price, then you really can't dig it.

Doom 3

PLATFORM: PC / id Software

■ It may have been a display of technological muscle over game design, but for a paltry $19.95 you can finally enjoy all of Doom 3's corridor-crawling goodness and not feel gypped when you finish the game in a weekend. This game is worth grabbing if you haven't done so already, with a deeply absorbing atmosphere and slowly unravelling narrative, as well as plenty of freaks to frag, it's good value.

THE BEST GAMES $50 OR LESS CAN BUY...

Gaming is the kind of hobby that can take a man's wallet, tear its insides out and leave it a broken soulless shell lying dead on the game shop floor. Even amongst today's lofty game prices though, where a new title can set you back almost 120 clams, there is a thriftier alternative – the budget range. Join the Hyper team as we take you through some of the best value for money games, that even the most battered wallet will survive.

Psychonauts

PS2, XBOX, PC / Double Fine Productions

■ Even if Psychonauts was at full-price we'd still tell you to buy it, but now that you can get one of our favourite games of last year for under thirty bucks, you'd have to be as demented as some the game's characters not to pick it up. With the distinctive art style and influence of Tim Schafer (Grim Fandango, Day of the Tentacle), a great story and near-flawless platforming action – you really need to play

Dark Messiah of Might and Magic

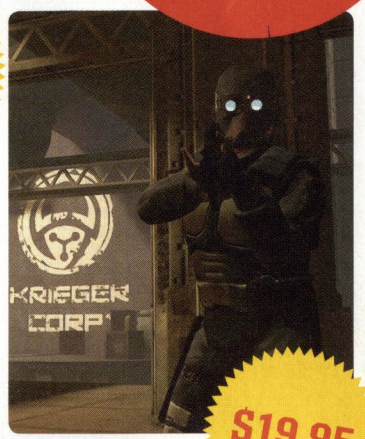
PC / Arkane Studios

■ It may have been overshadowed by the similarly-styled Elder Scrolls IV: Oblivion, but this first-person RPG, Dark Messiah of Might and Magic, is still worth a look for role playing fans, especially at half the price. Visually, the game looks a treat and the action-based combat, exploration and character development will hook you in. It's no Oblivion, but then again what is?

Dragon Quest: THE JOURNEY OF THE CURSED KING

PS2 / SquareEnix

■ Another game on the slashed prices pile is one of our favourite PS2 RPGs of all time – Dragon Quest: The Journey of the Cursed King. With an amazing story and art design by Akira Toriyama (creator of Dragon Ball), if you haven't yet discovered why the Dragon Quest series is more popular in its native Japan than even the Final Fantasy series, then now's your chance!



Far Cry

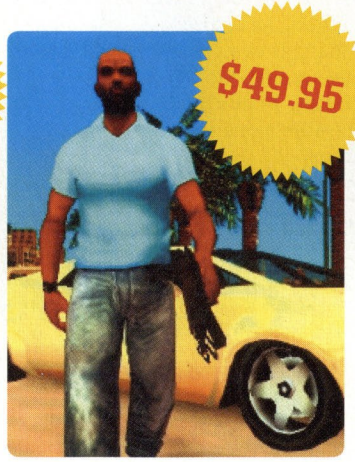
PC / Crytek

■ It may be getting on a bit, but the original Far Cry still looks amazing and plays like a dream. If you want refresh your memory of what developer Crytek are capable of before you get into Crysis later in the year, then taking a visit to their original sun-soaked tropical paradise is essential. At this price, it would be a crying shame if you didn't.

Ghost Recon: ADVANCED WARFIGHTER

XBOX 360 / Ubisoft

■ When it first released in May of last year GRAW was one of the best tactical shooters we'd ever seen, and now that it's received a sequel the original game has become part of the Xbox 360's "classics" range. With this budget release it's shed almost seventy dollars from its original $119.95 price tag – making GRAW one of the best-value games for the system.



Grand Theft Auto: VICE CITY STORIES

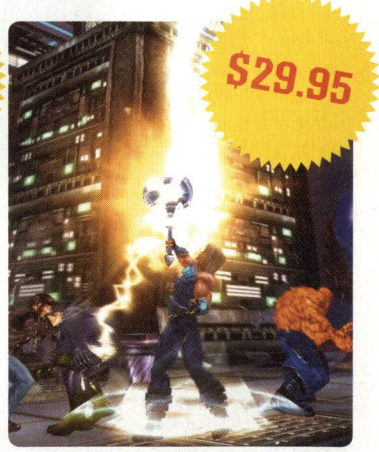
PSP, PS2 / Rockstar Games

■ It's not often that a game in one of the leading franchises releases at such a dirt-cheap price, but with GTA:VCS, that's exactly what has happened. Taking you back to Miami in the 1980s, VCS isn't anything new but it has all the free-roaming, car-stealing, crime-waving goodness the series is famous for. The PS2 version is particularly good value at half the cost of a standard PS2 game.

Ultimate Spider-Man

PS2, XBOX / Vicarious Visions

■ With a free-roaming (or should that be free-swinging) Manhattan Island to explore, some gorgeous comic-book inspired cel-shaded graphics, hundreds of criminals to pummel into submission and the chance to control both Spidey and Venom, Ultimate Spider-Man is a steal at less than thirty bucks.



Marvel Ultimate Alliance

PC / Ravensoft

■ When Marvel Ultimate Alliance launched late last year, we could hardly believe the price of the PC version. While the console versions clocked in at around a hundred bucks, the PC game was under thirty! Featuring a huge roster of classic Marvel characters battling it out in action/RPG gameplay, getting this should be an easy choice for PC-bound comic-book guys.

Warhammer Online: AGE OF RECKONING

Christian Read laughs at pervy hobbit fanciers

Alright! I'm going to explain this only once. J.R.R Tolkien invented a world where elves and midgets and trees ran around in an effeminate fashion. This was the first modern fantasy novel and it was called King of the Ring something. Because this book sold roughly in the area of well over a billion million copies, it got imitated. A lot. Then D&D got invented and it was one of those copies.

Then Warhammer was invented. It started off as Tolkien rip and D&D rip off but very quickly evolved into something far, far cooler. Germanic and French history got slavishly reaped for inspiration. Acid casualty and genius novelist Michael Moorcock was mugged of his ideas and thus was born the forces of Chaos. Hell, Warhammer quickly moved away from its roots and evolved into the darkly splendid world that exists today in the form of a war-game, endless computer games, CCGs, comics, role-playing games and more and more beside.

Now, it's becoming a MMPORG and it looks like it's going to have the sheer grunt, fire and power that nub friendly WoW just doesn't.

For those of you who like things with a dark and razored edge and the PvP junkies, Warhammer Online: Age of Reckoning is sending out serious shockwaves. This looks like the business.

No jokes - chaos giants are just rad

NO SKAVEN?

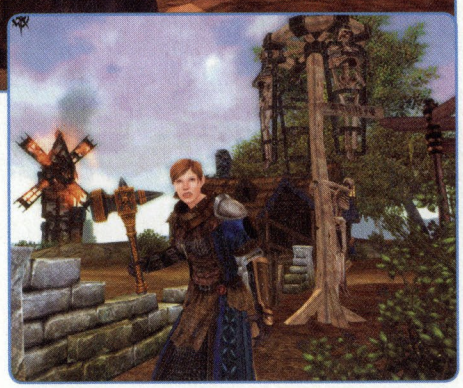
The Warhammer world practically sells itself. Sinister and sadistic dark elves, the puritanically mad Witch Hunters, the barbaric Greenskin shamans, the brutal Chaos knight, are not only presented, these are your character classes, baby. Details aren't out for everything yet but each class seems to have some genuinely unique gameplay features. Chaos magicians have a unique buff and debuff array, called Marks of Chaos. Placing those for maximum support and damage will be the primary responsibility of those death-crazed cultists. Goblin Squig-herders are all about allies, releasing their pets in hordes, even wearing them as armour. Dwarf Ironbreakers act as tanks but geared totally towards defence.

Not only are the classically flavoursome Warhammer character classes present but there's a strikingly unique way to quickly assess character levels. Visual cues are present rather than skulls and numbers. An orc who stands half a foot higher than his companion is probably a hell of a lot meaner than his mates.

Beware the dwarf with many braids in his beard. These customisable toons are short hand for bad ass.

Character progression is clearly modelled after the all-time classic Warhammer Fantasy Role-playing game. There, you weren't a fighter or fighter/thief. Rather as you got more experience, you simply started a new job. Plus, avoiding the grind for new skills is handily avoided as each rank has several rewards. Curiously, Mythic looks like they'll be avoiding symmetry between races. A race with strong healers won't necessarily fight a race with equally balanced nurse classes. Game balance, yes, homogeneity, no. There's one area

Greenskin Halitosis shock troops are just scary



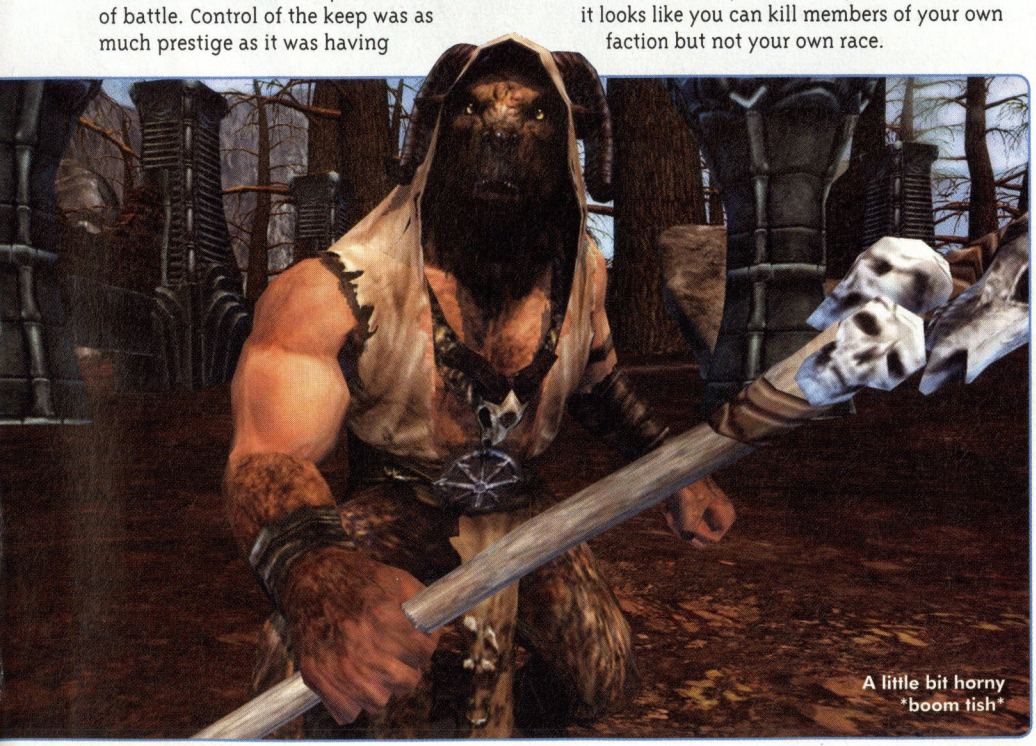
that everyone is looking at greedily and that's Realm Vs Realm play. Mythic, who bought us Dark Age of Camelot, pretty much invented, then perfected the idea. How it works is that in each zone, many areas are fiercely fought over in PvP battles. The Warhammer world is decidedly bloodthirsty in character and so this is mete and fitting. And it means that your happy capital city in which you're trading in today might be a destroyed hulk tomorrow. Warhammer characters are soldiers in an army, not freelance grave-robbers. RvR drives everything. Each quest, each battlefield, each instance, everything a player does contributes to the ever-thirsting war.

A FRIEND OF MY FRIEND IS JUST THIS GUY

For those of us who have never played Realm Versus Realm, it bears a little investigating. All it really means is PvP but with a lot more structured goals and teamwork than running about whacking nubcakes. In Dark Ages of Camelot, castles and keeps were the main areas of battle. Control of the keep was as much prestige as it was having useful binding locations. Control of castles also influences terrain for your faction.

Access to siege weapons, personal armaments, all sort of goodies, really. Perhaps the finest inducement was allowing your guild's banner to fly from the flagpoles of captured locations.

Warhammer, however, looks to up the ante. DAOC, with its semi-historical setting basically pitted Celts verus Brits Versus Vikings in a three-way dance. Bah, says Warhammer. There's a six way battle going on in this land, where allies aren't necessarily friends. Reports conflict but it looks like you can kill members of your own faction but not your own race.



A little bit horny *boom tish*

MMO DOWN LOW

CHRISTIAN READ

TEH RAWK!

Hello. Welcome to the first in a series of monthly columns wherein I discuss, deconstruct, critique and... no, no, no.

Hi. My name is Christian Read and I want to scream my lungs out about MMOs. MMPORGS. Whatever the hell you call those things I use as a substitute for friendship, sunlight, a girlfriend, pets, what have you.

Bizarrely, I'm still not convinced I even like MMOS, which is the official word around these parts. Oh, they are all masterpieces of invention, of programming. Each one of them represents countless man hours of coding, drawing, writing, scamming free lunches on the PR expense account. I certainly respect them.

No, there's two things that bug me about MMOs. The first is people. I mean, what's worse than a person? Nothing. A wasp can just sting you, a tiger can just eat you but only a human can call you D00D3. The other is genres. Look, I've read more shitty fantasy novels than any human alive. I have a stack of comics as big as Gardulla (now that's commitment to metaphor.) But sometimes a brother just can't handle any more elves and swords and poncing around the mystical forest looking for the Pubic Sword of Mortadella the Thoroughly Syphilitic.

MMOs need something more than space ships and homicidal midgets. I know what they need.

ROCK.

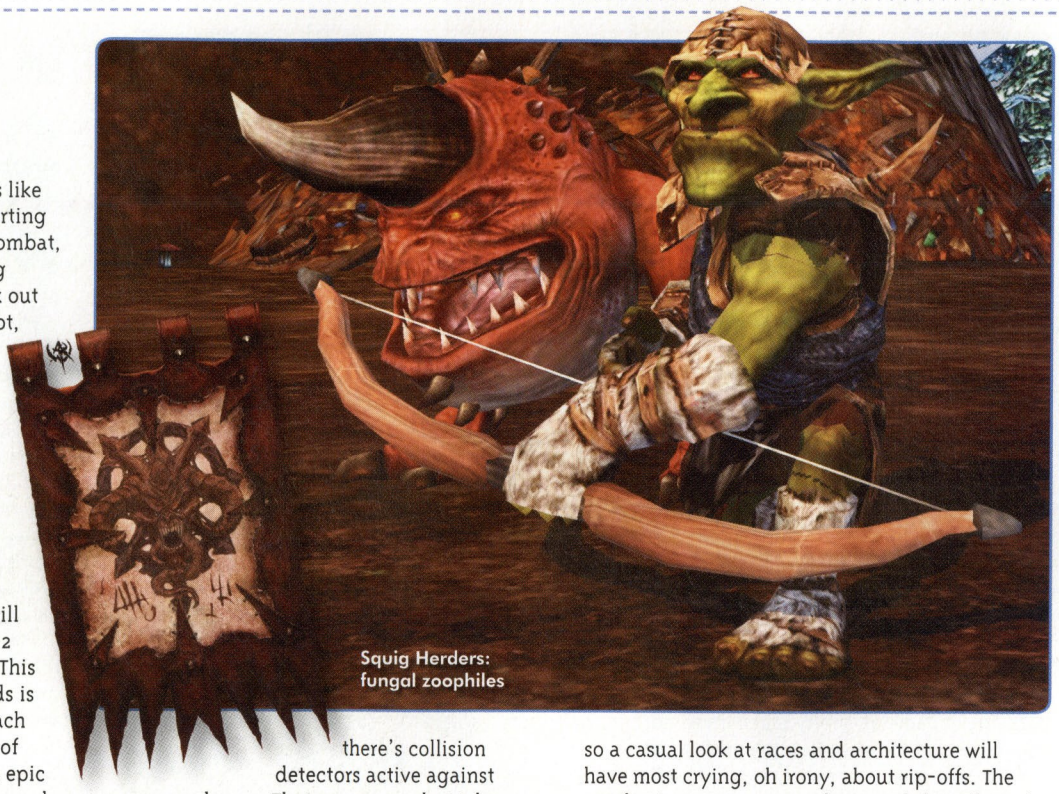
I want to see a MMO based on trying to get a band together. Think of it. Character classes like Singer, Guitarist, Drummer. My god, the bassist would be like the priest. No one really notices they're there until they suck! The drummer, perfect for kids. Hell, they only have to count to four. Then, you get to pick your genre. Will you be some mopey emo kid, capable of selecting a truly terrifying fringe and girlish eye-makeup combination or is it tattoos and leather pants for you, my hard rocking amigo? Kick it old school with some Maiden/Priest style metal or simply go for the plain and utterly banal James Blunt?

Or would you go for the support class. The engineer, who buffs bad musicians and singers with is +1 board of mixing. The Sleazy Manager, who has access to mind control powers, and can debuff your bank account. Or the Groupie, who has some outlandish animations to reward and improve live performances.

The skills, my friends. Face Melting! 20 Minute Solo! Splits! Over the Shoulder Boner Holder! Soulful Look and Christlike Pose and Hip Thrusting Strut and Sustained Falsetto. Imagine the button mash on that...

Better still, getting a group together could end up with some interesting results. Will that metal guitarist team up with the relentlessly early Iota-esque singer while the Jazz Pianist eyes the New Romantic drummer with his octagonal high hat? All this plus the high-end content of Wembley Arena. Many Sleazy Managers would have to sort out hundreds of hopeful bands. Only the most spec-skilled mixers could take on this task. And only the most elite bands, geared up with Purple Epic Fenders could ever keep the fans happy.

Warhammer Online:
continued...



Squig Herders: fungal zoophiles

A good example of RvR is Greenskins vs. Dwarves. Neighbours, they battle over areas like Karak Eight-Peaks and Blackfire Pass. In starting areas, there's hardly any Realm vs. Realm combat, meaning you can take your time in levelling and learning your character but as you seek out challenges bearing more experience and loot, you'll want to enter higher areas wherein RvR zones are more widespread.

Zones are ranked by tiers, 1 being easiest 4 being hardest, roughly representing which character levels will be present per tier. A unique gameplay feature is battlefronts. The tier 1 is the first battlefront, where new players try out combat. Controlling a tier means gaining victory points. Victory points not only reward the players in that battlefront but will spill over and add victory points to the tier 2 battlefront. Tier 2 spills to tier 3 and so on. This means that every player from level 1 onwards is contributing to the war. By the time you reach tier 4 areas, you'll be battling from control of the capital cities of your enemies. These are epic battles and won't be won easily. Sadly, no word yet on how you'll be able to move characters over to participate in other racial wars or even how player numbers imbalance will be treated. Pity the poor humans who must battle the doubtless fan favourite, Chaos.

EVERYONE SAYS WITCH HUNTER

Add to this incidental combat (which just means ganking), as well areas in the game world that require capture and control, shedding victory points, then instance-like battlegrounds scenarios, this is the mano-e-mano heaven.

Not that there's no PvE stuff. It's just not as important and PvP will have its own experience rewards. How this is going to work for the new and the casual gamer is a bit up in the air but Mythic promises to have it sorted.

There's also a rather neat mechanic where there's collision detectors active against enemy players. That means combat takes on a whole new dimension of tactical play. Tanking means acting like a tank. This may seem like a minor mechanic to make a big deal over but a little imagination shows how armoured warriors like the Marauder will be able to create shield walls, allowing your squishie classes to attack and buff, safe behind the iron.

Of course, soft carebears may wish to abstain and go play Animal Crossing. It's a man's life in the Warhammer Army and PvP is the show. Hell, there's not even any support classes. Not everyone will be a great melee master but everybody fights.

The elephant in the room for WAR is World of Warcraft. Will it topple the giant? Nah. For starters, Warcraft successfully stole much of the imagery of Warhammer long ago so a casual look at races and architecture will have most crying, oh irony, about rip-offs. The emphasis on RvR may not be casual-friendly and the horror and gore and black comedy themes of Warhammer will scare of the weak and feeble. For the more hardcore players, though, WoW may just become a distant dream.

I suppose the best compliment I can pay this upcoming game is that even as I write, I'm growing excited at the idea of playing a Chaos Lord or a Witch Hunter. Of trading blows between Dark and High Elves, driving my enemies before me and hearing the lamentations of their women.

You should be too. <<

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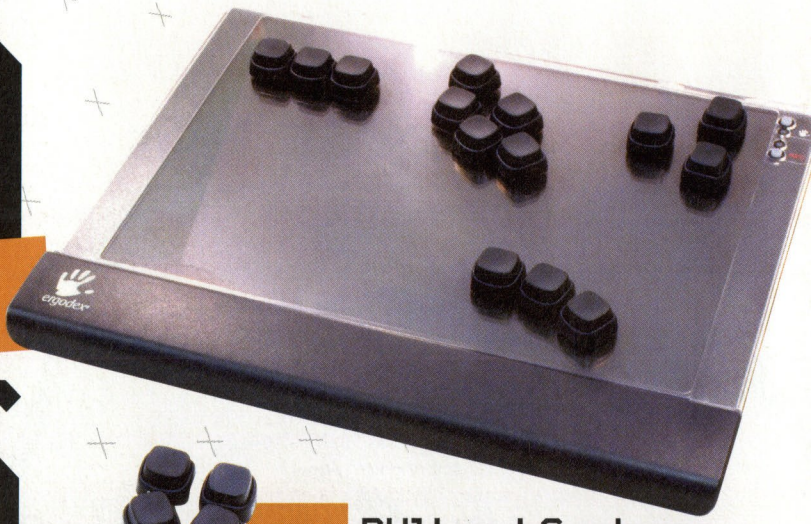
TOP 10 [mostly useless] GADGETS WE STILL WISH WE HAD



7 DX1 Input System

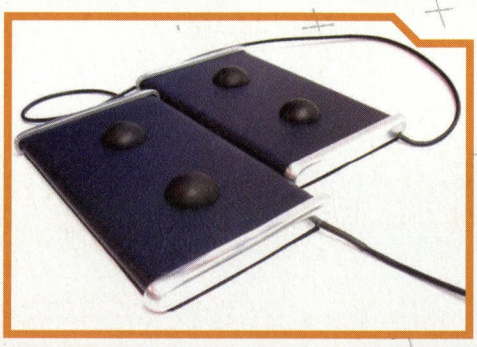
DISTRIBUTOR: **WWW.EGRODEX.COM**
PRICE: **$170 APPROX**

A certain former editor of this magazine whose name rhymed with Spam used to be rather infamous for bashing his keyboard when things didn't do as planned or his slow and rather crappy Mac (that Wilks inherited much to his chagrin) acted all slow and crappy. A keyboard like the DX1 may not have helped with his problems but the keys would have flown all around the office when he bashed it and that would have been awesome. Essentially a pad with 25 placable, programmable buttons, the DX1 is the ultimate programmable keyboard – as long as you're not using it to type because then it would be pretty useless.

10 Hamster Powered Paper Shredder

AVAILABLE: **UNFORTUNATELY NOT**
PRICE: **PRICELESS**

OK, so it's not actually a real bit of tech but actually part of an art installation by Tom Ballhatchet (which is an awesome name by the way). What's not to love about a hamster cage with a built in paper shredder powered by the hamster wheel, making it easy to furnish the bottom of the small rodent's cage with the tax records you wish to hide from the government? Nothing.



9 Fragpedal Deluxe

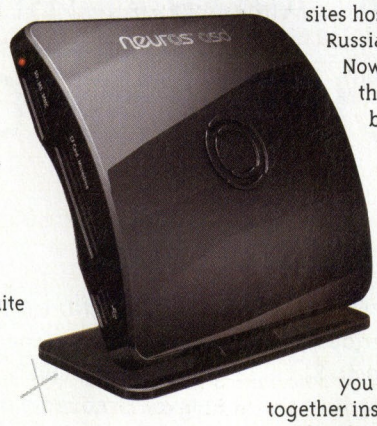
DISTRIBUTOR: **WWW.THINKGEEK.COM**
PRICE: **$85 APPROX**

When you don't have enough fingers to use all the buttons you need there is only one solution. Fragpedals are foot pedals made specifically for the FPS crowd, enabling you to hammer away like that one-armed drummer from Def Leppard to keep up your machine-gun beat. Fragpedals also mean that our long dreamed of game adaptation of "My Left Foot" can also become a reality. Daniel Day Lewis will be in our dreams tonight.

6 Neuros OSD Linux Media Recorder

DISTRIBUTOR: **WWW.NEUROSAUDIO.COM**
PRICE: **$275 APPROX**

Everyone loves to illegally copy entertainment media, whether it be taping something from TV, "backing up" DVDs you've borrowed from the video store or downloading music from reputable sites hosted in former Russian territories. Now you can do that with one box, as long as you know how to program Linux. The Neuros OSD apparently does work out of the box but to get the most out of it you need to kludge together instructions in the OS. On the plus side Neuros is offering cash rewards for the best coding on their open source media recorder. On the negative side we'd prefer not to buy electronics designed like IKEA furniture.



8 Titanium Spork

DISTRIBUTOR: **WWW.SNOWPEAK.COM**
PRICE: **$10 APPROX**

Titanium is hard. As hard as a really hard thing but still not quite as hard as someone that uses a spork, arguably the most socially unacceptable and wussy of all cutleries (say what you will about the splade but at least it's man enough to have a blade on one edge) in a public setting. On a more serious note, the Titanium Spork is guaranteed to increase your eating efficiency by sheer dint on its lightness and the fact that you can multi-task instead of cumbersomely using both a fork and a spoon as you did in the past. Be warned though, such an implement is seen as being an unfair advantage in Forkey-Spooney so you probably won't be able to compete in any FS league competitions.

5 Bluetooth Virtual Laser Keyboard

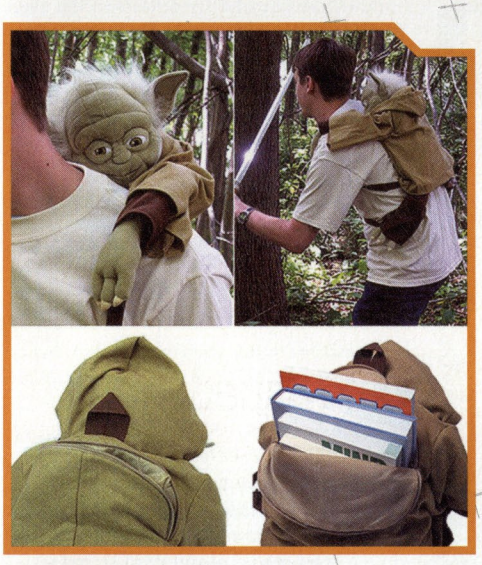
DISTRIBUTOR: **WWW.VIRTUAL-LASER-KEYBOARD.COM**
PRICE: **$215 APPROX**

I was going to make a joke about how cool Fisher Stephens was as "The Plague" in Hackers with his natty facial hair, toattly rad sk8brd and laser keyboard but some stupid blogger beat me to the punch so instead I'm going to say that Fisher Stephens also appeared in Short Circuit wearing blackface playing an Indian dude. Read into that what you will. He also boffed Michelle Pfeiffer so he at least has something going for him. Now for some simple math. Lasers = awesome. Keyboard made of lasers = hella awesome.

4 Mazu Kan

DISTRIBUTOR: **WWW.MAZUKAN.COM**
PRICE: **$60 APPROX**

Nothing is funnier than seeing overweight people pretending to be superheroes, throwing punches at invisible enemies, blocking their attacks and adjusting themselves as their sweaty spandex bodysuits ride up into the great and smelly beyond. Game companies should love the Mazu Kan fighting system as they can use it as an excuse – it's not games teaching children to kill, it's cheap plastic sensor based super-heroic non-contact fighting games that are teaching our children to kill. Our very own Maurice "Gangster of Love" Branscombe is at this very moment running around the office using a "2x Power Punch" on all and sundry. What more proof do you need? Ban them!



3 Plush Yoda Backpack

DISTRIBUTOR: **WWW.LATESTBUY.COM.AU**
PRICE: **$69.95**

Ever since it was released in 1980, the phenomenally successful Empire Strikes Back has been fondly remembered for three things; Luke getting all whiny after having his arse handed to him by the ultimate sci-fi badarse, Vader, Han Solo getting frozen in carbonite and Yoda. Now you can share in that warm and fuzzy feeling of having an incoherent green midget humping the small of your back with this backpack that will ensure (if you are male) that you never have sex again or (if you are female) you will be stalked by sweaty throngs of Star Wars fanboys.

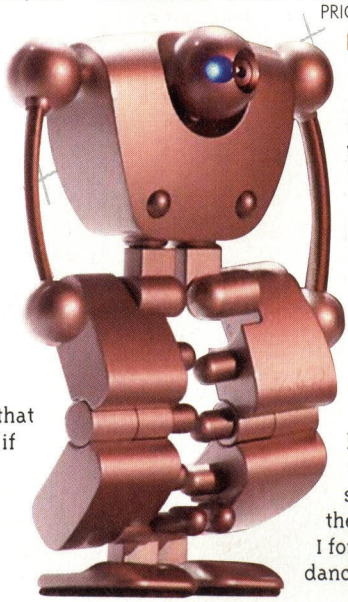
2 Swissbeat MP3

DISTRIBUTOR: **WWW.SWISSARMY.COM**
PRICE: **$260 APPROX**

We have often wanted to stab some people in the office for their rather shitty taste in whiny emo music and we're sure that people have wanted to stab us for our apparently shitty taste in music but thanks to the Swiss Army, the most chocolate flavoured of all armies (they go fantastically with Liechtenstein's nougat flavoured army by the way) we can now stab people with our shitty taste in music. A knife and a 1Gb MP3 player in one – who could ask for a more aurally pleasing weapon?

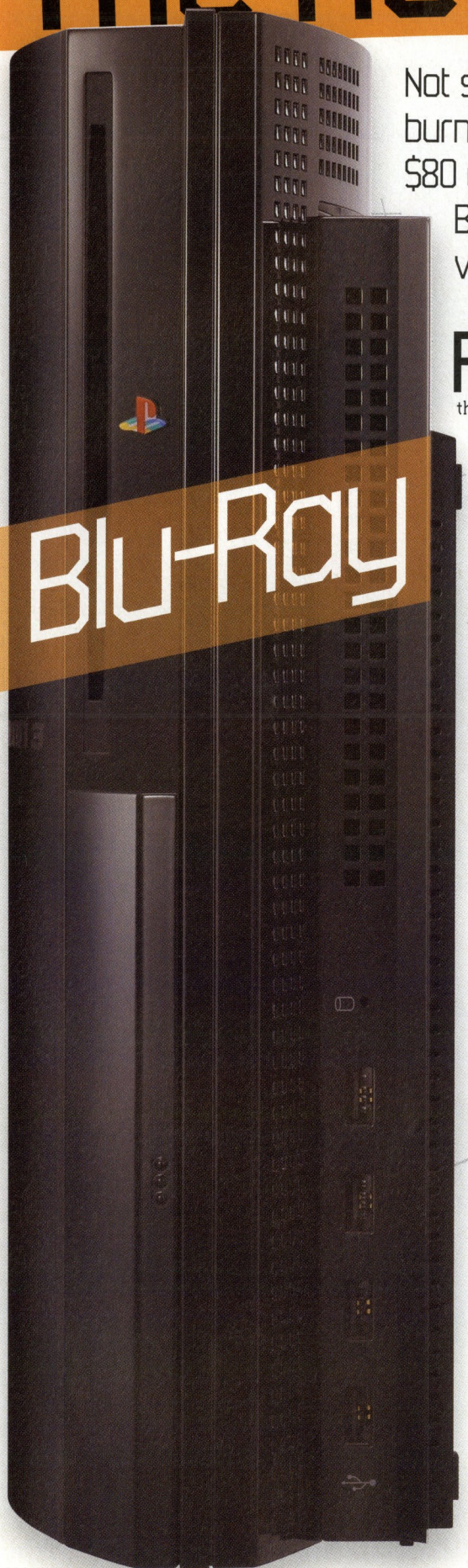
1 Nuvo Humanoid Robot

DISTRIBUTOR: **WWW.NUVO.JP**
PRICE: **$8500 APPROX**



From the website: "nuvo" is the first-home-use-type humanoid robot in the world, which means "the humanoid robot for everyone", not in the movie, drama, or novel, but in your daily life. "nuvo" is developed under the concept of "Always be Together", resulting in small and light---39cm in height and 2.5kg on weight--- to realize safety and mobility at the same time."
I for one welcome out new dancing robot overlords.

The Revolution Will Blu-Ray



Not so long ago, **Anthony Fordham** did a round-up of CD burners that cost $500 each. Today, DVD burners cost $80 and the future of optical storage is high definition. But of the two competing formats, which will be the victor? Blu-ray vs HD-DVD. Big fight tonight!

Remember when DVD first came out and there were all these articles about whether DVD+R or DVD-R would win the format wars? How DVD was kind of standardised but fiddly details in the even fiddlier electronics would be fought over for months, even years?

Let me tell you: DVD early adopters had it easy. Just look at us now. A DVD burner for your PC or a DVD set-top player for your TV can play every format and costs peanuts. And just now that we've really sorted ourselves out with a super-fancy player with HDMI, along comes a new optical standard.

Or, to be more precise, two new optical standards that both claim to be the next big thing for home entertainment. You, the self-confessed geek, should be familiar with their names at least: Blu-ray and HD-DVD.

Both are optical discs that superficially resemble a DVD. Same size. Same basic materials. Still sits on a motorised spindle and gets spun around at ridiculous speeds while a laser reads information stored on little pits etched into the read-surface (or surfaces, since they are multilayered). The lasers are different, and the data on the disc is encoded differently, and this is where the clever futurespeak stuff comes in.

Because both Blu-ray (cool folks in the know call it BD) and HD-DVD hold much more data than a regular DVD, both formats can be used to store material in high definition. Instead of the comparatively low-res 576 vertical lines of a DVD movie, these discs offer nearly double the vertical resolution at 1080 vertical lines - either progressive or interlaced.

Let's briefly recap the specs of each format.

IN THE BLUE CORNER

Blu-ray discs, or BDs, come in a blue plastic box. It's called Blu-ray because it uses a blue-violet laser with a short wavelength of 405 nanometres (which equals very short). Compare that to the DVDs 650nm red laser. The laser tech is related to Sony's more mature business backup tech, PDD.

Like DVDs, BDs are double-layered. Unlike DVD which holds 9GB, a BD holds 25GB on a single layer, or 50GB on a typical commercial double-layered disc.

That means you can store about nine hours of HD (1080p) video on a 50GB disc, or a massive 23 hours of standard definition and compressed video (like your totally legitimate Buffy collection).

Of course, that's using heavy-duty compression for both HD and SD. When it comes to commercial movies, such as Casino Royale which Sony is using to pimp BD via the PlayStation 3, the disc can hold about 135 minutes of HD encoded using MPEG-2 on a single layer. Dual-layer discs will hold a three hour HD feature, plus a massive additional nine hours of SD bonus material.

Region coding on BD is different from DVD. We're in Region B/2, which includes Europe, the Middle East, Africa and (yay) Greenland. Sweet Greenlandish movies for all!

IN THE RED CORNER

HD-DVD movies come in a red box with a weird little safety catch thing that makes them hard to open but presumably stops your disc unexpectedly falling out. It used to be called the Advanced Optical Disc (AOD) until the DVD Forum decided it would be the successor to DVD and so allowed it to be named HD-DVD.

An HD-DVD holds 15GB of data per layer, with double-layer discs obviously holding 30GB. And it still uses a red laser like a regular DVD.

Apart from this, HD-DVD is very similar to Blu-ray. A commercial disc holds about the same amount of 1080p feature material because almost every HD-DVD release has been in dual-layer format while many BD releases have been in single-layer format (25GB).

HD-DVD also uses a more up-to-date and advanced codec for video compression which means it can fit more material of the same quality per gigabyte than BD can.

HD-DVD players must also support Dolby Digital Plus audio at 3Mbps while on BD players Dolby Digital Plus is optional at 1.7Mbs.

FIGHT IT OUT!

What we can see from the specs is that we have one disc with more space and a more advanced laser system (BD) versus a smaller disc that uses more advanced software and decoders to overcome its size shortcomings (HD-DVD).

Each camp has its own argument for coming out the eventual winner. HD-DVD claims the name "HD-DVD" is more intuitive and will achieve better market recognition. Blu-ray, on the other hand, points out how almost

Be Televised! (IN HD)

every major film studio has signed to support the format. HD-DVD counters that HD-DVD discs are cheaper to make because you don't have to spend as much retooling your factory for BD. Blu-ray snaps back to point out that nevertheless most releases are indeed in Blu-ray, not HD-DVD.

There's more to it than that, though. Looking at the various players that are currently on the market, and at what companies have to include in their players to get the requisite official logo, HD-DVD does have a more stringent set of requirements.

The HD-DVD camp understands that these new formats are complex. So every HD-DVD player must have internet connectivity, to accept firmware updates. BD players don't have to.

Furthermore the BD JAVA interactive elements of BD are not yet finalised, while the HDi interactive layer of HD-DVD is. This means the BD player you ran out and bought after reading this article may not be able to play all the extra features on a BD released two years from now.

Food for thought indeed.

THE EXPERIENCE

Yes, the HD movie experience is much, much better than DVD. It's like the difference between a very high quality phonograph and CD. Except a BD or HD-DVD is no more convenient than a DVD, it just looks a hell of a lot better.

Especially long and mid shots, that's where DVD's lack of detail really shows. You probably didn't even realise that in Casino Royale you were recognising Bond in the distance only because of his suit - on BD you can see the determined expression on his face.

And King Kong on HD-DVD is almost insanely detailed, a veritable overload of visual information.

But there is one disadvantage - for some reason, seeing a CGI-heavy film in HD really shows up the CGI effects. Without the "blurring" effect of 576i, you can really see how the giant bugs and dinosaurs, even the ape himself, have been pasted in later. Something for the studios to worry about.

GET IT NOW!

Want HD-DVD or BD but don't want to pay $1500 for a player? There are two excellent solutions that just happen to be direct rivals as well - the PlayStation 3 and the Xbox 360. The PS3 comes with a slot-loading BD drive as you know, and the 360 has a $250 add-on drive.

The consoles are easily the most economical way to get BD or HD-DVD, even if at the moment the PS3 has the video edge because it supports 1080p via HDMI, while the 360 only does 1080i via component. Stay tuned though - the Elite 360 is on the way, with HDMI. It will also be black, although Microsoft says it has no plans for a matching black HD-DVD drive.

THE PREDICTION

So which format will win? We've followed the war as it has progressed and there's little to divide the two formats. Mark our words: this is NOT the VHS vs Betamax battle. Betamax didn't have a one-hour tape when VHS did. Various other market forces played against Sony back in the day. Today though, we have two formats that have been well designed, have good players available for them, and support from important content providers.

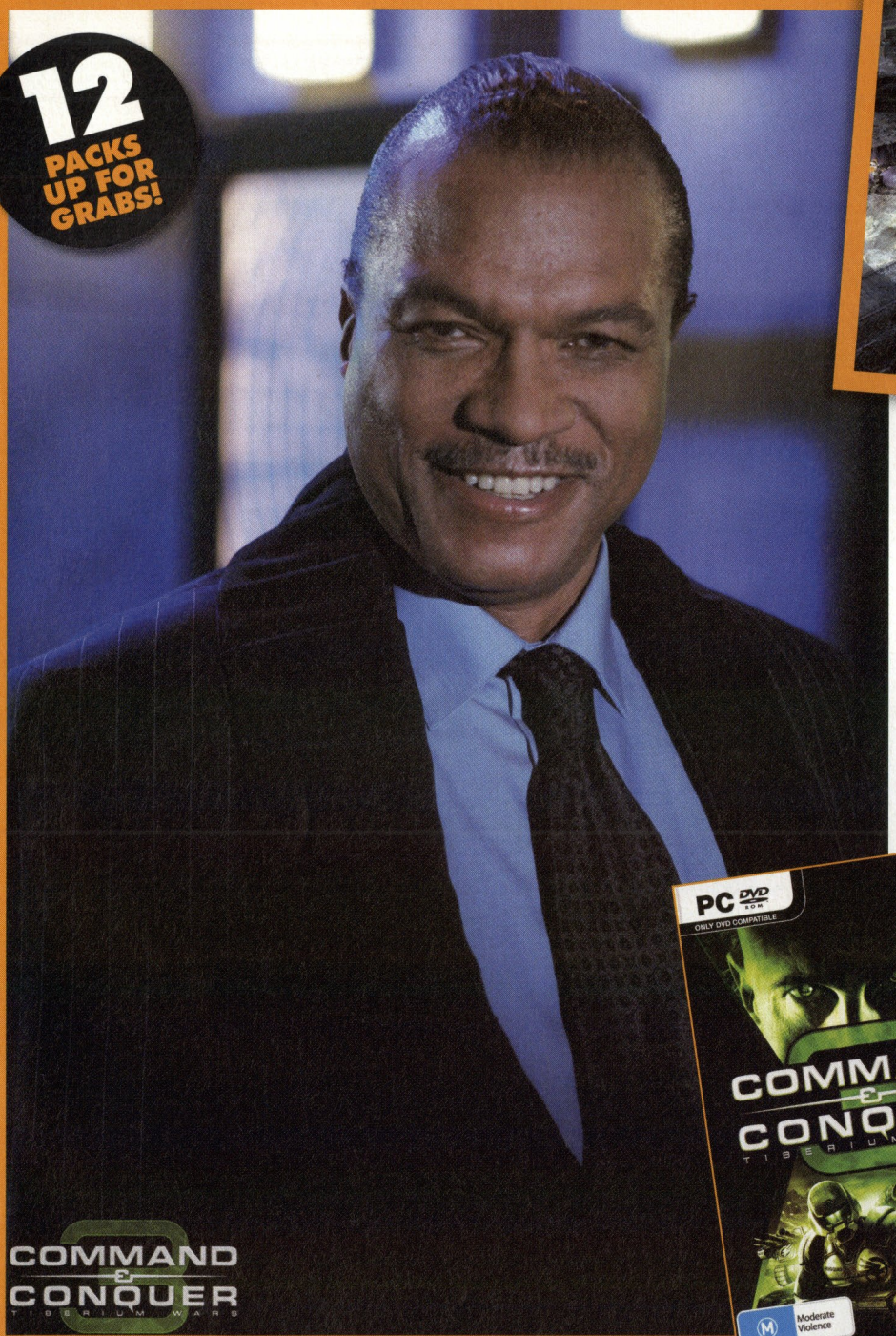
But there's a paradox. Blu-ray has more titles right now, but the hardware could be considered a potential minefield of future incompatibility. HD-DVD has a solid spec and great hardware, but where's the content?

So which do you buy, right now? The safest option is to get the Xbox 360 HD-DVD player. It's only $250, you can use it with your PC too (if it's HDCP compliant in both the video card and the monitor) and if HD-DVD crashes and burns, well, $250 down is a lot better than losing $1500 on a set-top player.

If you're an Xbox hater, the PS3 is a good BD option because when all's said and done it's only $100 more expensive than buying an Xbox 360 Premium plus the HD-DVD drive. And if BD fails, well you can still use your PS3 to play games, right?

Set on a set-top box? Our advice is to wait and see. Watch this space... especially around Christmas! <<

WinWinWin

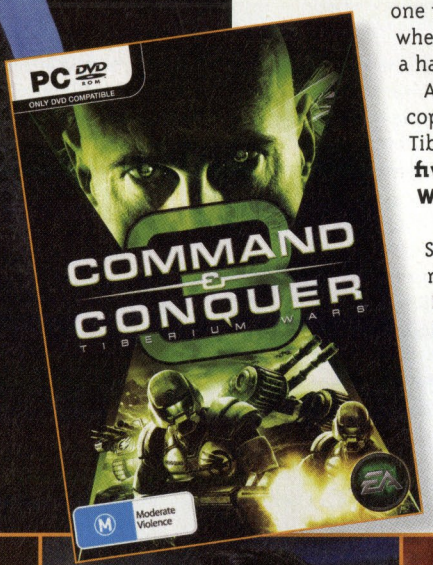


WIN A COPY OF COMMAND & CONQUER 3: TIBERIUM WARS!

>> That guy from LOST! Grace Park, that hot Korean chick from Battlestar Galactica! That other hot chick from Battlestar Galactica; you know, the evil blonde one! Billy Dee! Michael Ironside playing Michael Ironside! EA's Director of Dramatic Assets Joe Kucan being a bald badarse! Even if the game didn't rock the proverbial house how could you pass up a chance to see all of these people who would have been famous if their careers had been different, or used to be famous until a few bad role choices relegated them to direct-to-video purgatory in the one place at the one time? It's like a fan convention where you don't need to pay $20 for a hastily scribbled signature.

All you need to do to win a copy of Command and Conquer 3: Tiberium Wars for the PC is **name five movies starring Billy Dee Williams.**

Send your answer, with your name and address to: **Billy Dee, Billy Dee, 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.



WinWinWin

WIN VALKYRIE PROFILE: LENNETH FOR PSP!

8 COPIES UP FOR GRABS!

>> Norse mythology is pretty awesome. If you look at the stories they basically all centre around either a god (sometimes demi-god) who likes to get drunk, have sex and hit things, not necessarily in that order, or a mortal who likes to get drunk, have sex, hit things and then blame the gods for their desire to get drunk, have sex and hit things. Throw in some giants, dragons and a pretty rad apocalyptic battle against said giants and you have a mythology and religion that should still be practised today by people other than dirty crackpots who live in Southern California or somewhere equally Nordic.

What does this have to do with Valkyrie Profile: Lenneth? Basically nothing but I had to get it off my chest. Thanks to Ubisoft we have 8 copies of the best RPG available on the PSP to give away. All you need to do to win a copy of this rather awesome and original Square Enix game is answer the following question in 50 words or less:

>> Who is your favourite Norse god and why?

Send your answer, with your name and address to: **Norse Code, Hyper, 78 Renwick St, Redfern, NSW, 2016**, or email your entry to

UBISOFT

WIN F.E.A.R ON PS3!

5 COPIES UP FOR GRABS!

>> You know what would be really scary? How about a game called PH34R in which an aerospace facility is overrun by supernatural online gamers and b-net kiddies who scream at you in an arcane combination of leet speak and puberty inspired vocal hitches? Instead of whispering secrets and death into your ear they will just keep reminding you how much they pwnxor! Thankfully such a game does not exist...yet.

Thanks to the lovely people at Vivendi we have 5 copies of F.E.A.R. on PS3 to give away as well and 2 copies on Xbox 360 and 2 copies on PC.

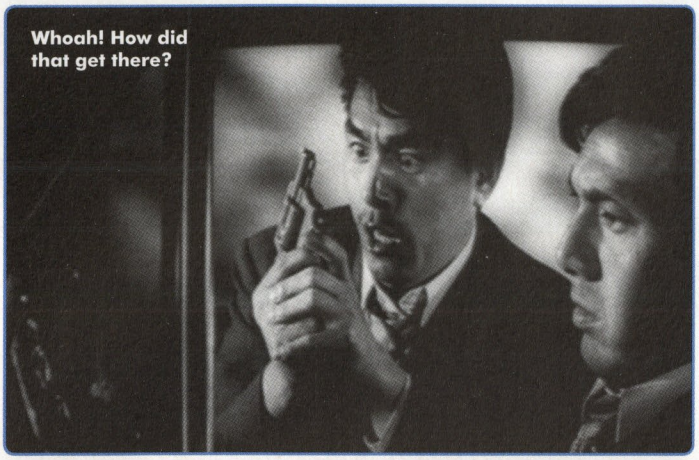
All you need to do for your chance to win a copy of F.E.A.R. is answeer the following question in 50 words or less. Please be sure to specify your preferred format for the game.

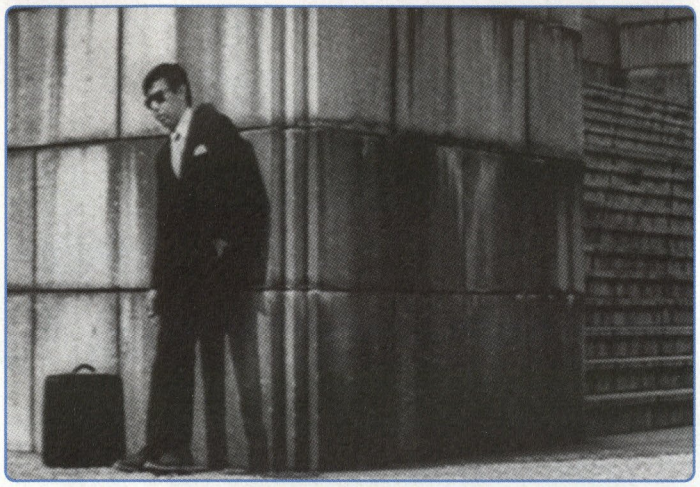
>> What fills you with fear?

Send your answer, with your name and address to: **Spring Loaded Cat!, 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.

VIVENDI UNIVERSAL games

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 May 8 2007 and entries close at 6pm June 20, 2007. 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 June 21, 2007 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 June issue of Hyper on sale July 11. 9) 12 Winners will receive a copy of Command & Conquer 3: Tiberium Wars on PC (RRP: $99.95) plus. Total competition value $1199.40. 8 winners will each receive one copy of Valkyrie Profile: Lenneth for PSP (RRP: $69.95). Total value of the competition is $559.60. 5 winners will receive a copy of F.E.A.R. on PS3 (RRP: $99.95). 2 winners will receive a copy of F.E.A.R. on Xbox 360 (RRP: $ 109.95). 2 winners will receive a copy of F.E.A.R. Gold on PC (RRP: $89.95). Total competition value $899.55. The promoter is Next Publishing Pty Ltd ABN 88 002 647 645 of 78 Renwick St, Redfern NSW 2016.


Whoah! How did that get there?

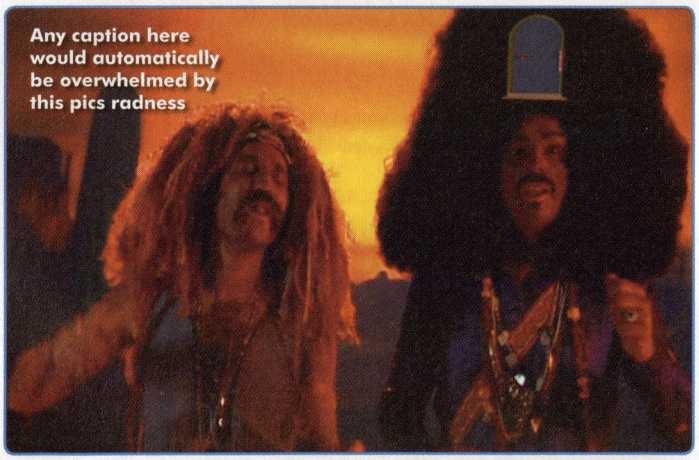


Branded to Kill

EASTERN EYE, M

Seijun Suzuki was fired after directing Branded to Kill as the head of Nikkatsu Films considered the film to be a nonsensical flop. Not only that, Suzuki was black-banned from the Japanese film industry for a decade. That's quite some backlash for a film that is widely considered a true classic. Well, the film is nonsensical, but nonsensical in a good way – like early David Lynch, Goddard, Alejandro Jodorowsky or Ken Russell. Saying Branded to Kill is a surrealist film is a step too far – the aims of the movie aren't quite as ethereal as that but there are definite elements of surrealism in both the plot and the imagery that add a definite otherworldliness to the proceedings. Partially a satire of hard boiled Yakuza films and partially a systematic deconstruction of the same, Branded to Kill tells the story of the Number 3 Killer, Goro Hanada, a taciturn and effective hitman with a fetish for smelling boiled rice before sex, who, after nearly botching a protection job meets a strange a beautiful woman who collects butterflies and is constantly followed by rain. Although Hanada is happily married he quickly falls in love with the mysterious Misako who hires him to kill a foreigner but once again he botches the job and getting himself marked for death by the Yakuza. What follows are numerous crosses, double-crosses, shootings, crazy jump cuts and nightmarish images. While the film makes little sense it's an amazing tour-de-force of style and almost existential cool reminiscent of Le Samurai.

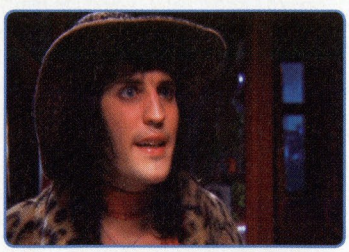
FILM: 8 / FEATURES: 4


Any caption here would automatically be overwhelmed by this pics radness

The Mighty Boosh 2

ROADSHOW, M

If Branded to Kill is too weird for you, you may want to stay well clear of the second season of The Mighty Boosh, a deliberately bizarre British semi-sitcom that uniformly fails to make a lick of sense but succeeds admirably in making you laugh simply due to the strangeness of it all. Howard Moon and Vince Noir, a Jazz Maverick and Goth Fairy respectively live in a rather nice flat in Dalston and have adventures, sometimes accompanied by their friend Naboo, a South London Shaman and his talking gorilla familiar who can't drive because he lost his license due to a speeding offence that led him to cut off his best friend's feet. Got all that? Now make the adventures strange with mountain men, horny Yetis, multi-phallused Mexicans with doors in their oversized afros, rabid old women and coconut genocide. In amongst the deliberately strange stories are numerous very funny one-liners that serve to both offset and heighten the overall bizarre nature of the show. Boosh is a show that demands repeat viewings as there are numerous sight gags and jokes that aren't immediately accessible in the midst of all the strangeness. The 2 disc set also contains and excellent suite of special features including some actually funny deleted scenes (mostly one-liners cut from the show for pacing), outtakes, footage of stars Julian Barrett and Noel Fielding (Howard and Vince respectively) on the road doing publicity and the pilot of The Mighty Boosh filmed, rather bizarrely (in keeping with the rest of the show) in front of a live studio audience.



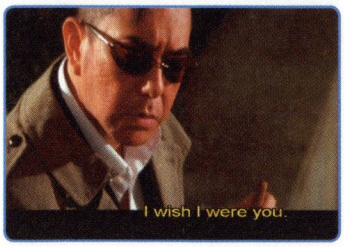
[above] Mo dresses like this on weekends

FILM: 8 / FEATURES: 9

Exiled

EASTERN EYE, MA 15+

Johnny To is quickly proving himself to be the saving grace of the floundering Hong Kong film industry. His name is becoming synonymous with cool, with sweeping epics, with heroic bloodshed and parables of loyalty, honour and male bonding. Exiled is yet another fine example of why To is a director that deserves recognition. The year is 1998 and Wo, a former triad exiled for attempting to kill his boss returns to Macau with his wife and child. When word of his return reaches his former masters they quickly dispatch two of his former friends Fat and Blaze to kill him. To complicate matters further, two more of Wo's former friends, Cat and Tai come to his aide, looking



[above] Doesn't everyone, darling?

to protect him. When the five men come together they start looking for a way out of the situation in which nobody has to die. Of course such a thing is not to be so, leading to some truly breathtaking gunfights and equally powerful meditations on friendship and loyalty.

While the cast is uniformly excellent, the brilliant Anthony Wong as Blaze and Simon Yam as Boss Fay steal every scene they are in, Yam especially delivering an incredibly intense performance but this is unsurprising – the man can put out a compelling performance in his sleep. We can't wait to see what Johnny To will come up with next.

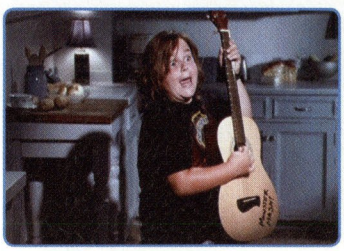
FILM: 9 / FEATURES: 6

I haven't aged in 20 years

Tenacious D: The Pick of Destiny

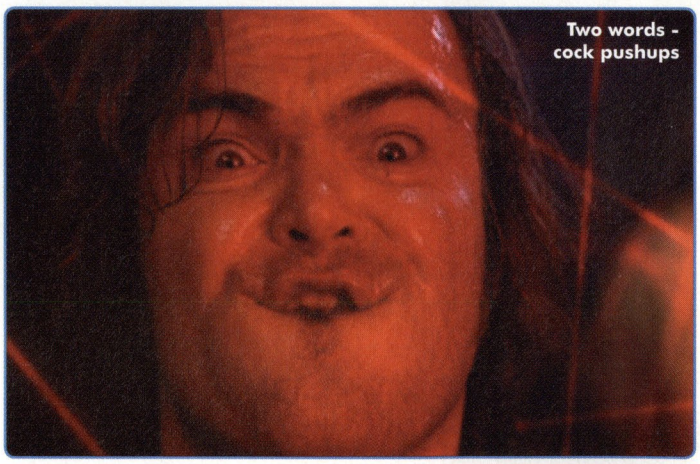
ROADSHOW, MA 15+

How much you enjoy Tenacious D: The Pick of Destiny will ultimately come down to your tolerance for Jack Black mugging at the camera and whether or not you've seen any of the short lived Tenacious D TV series. Black makes an effort to steal every scene he is in (and also one in which he ends his voice to the child version of JB) but luckily he is charming and hyperactive enough to carry the story of the greatest band in the world questing to steal he Pick of Destiny, a guitar pick carved from the devil's tooth that is responsible for all of the tastiest licks in the world of rock. Essentially a string of musical numbers punctuated by some gross-out comedy, Tenacious D succeeds in keeping

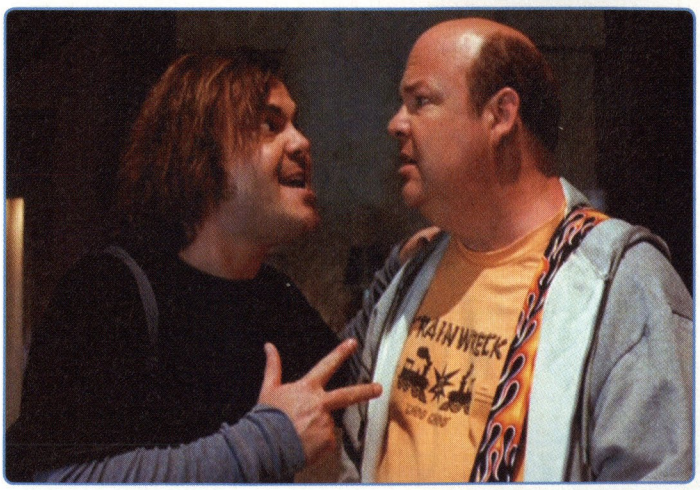


the audience entertained more through the energy the cast puts into it and the array of cameos that pop up, ranging from Meatloaf as JBs puritanical religious father, Ronny James Dio as a poster of Ronny James Dio, Ben Stiller as a frazzled guitar tech and, of course, Dave Grohl as the rockingest devil around. Unfortunately if you've seen any of the short lived HBO series then the quest to rock out at an open mike night, the obsession with sasquatch, cock-pushups and Lee come across as a little too familiar. Still, if you're looking for a fun way to spend 90 odd minutes, can groove to some funny rock and enjoy Jack Black's off the wall charisma then you could do a hell of a lot worse.

FILM: 7 / FEATURES: 7



Two words - cock pushups



One "long slide" you won't come back from

Hellsing Ultimate VOLUME 1

PRODUCTION: GENEON
GENRE: HORROR/ACTION

Vampires, guns and explosions. Those three words pretty much sum up Hellsing making he series pretty cool. Scientifically speaking the show could only get cooler if it featured vampires fighting nazi-cyborg-ninjas with lasers on a zeppelin being flown by polar bears that crashed into RON PEARLMAN and exploded. It does not have any of those extraneous cool things unfortunately so has to ride on story and animation alone.

Thankfully the story of Hellsing is pretty damn good. By the time the series starts, the Hellsing Organisation has been protecting the British Isles from the threat of the undead for a century but the war is ongoing and it seems to be a losing fight as the vampires have become far more organised in recent years. Being a Protestant organisation the Vatican holds no love for Hellsing and poses almost as much of a threat as the vampires but thankfully Hellsing have an ace up their sleeve, their very own vampire, Alucard, a gangly grinning badarse with a powerful gun, bullets made from the silver of a cross and a penchant for killing the hell out of other vampires.

Sticking far more closely to the manga upon which it is based, Hellsing Ultimate retells the Hellsing story but in a far more satisfying way than the previous Hellsing series. Animation and character design is crisp and stylised with some excellent action sequences but most importantly the characters are likable and believable. Ceres, a young woman transformed into a fledgling vampire by Alucard is inquisitive and only a little fragile rather than a whiny basket case and the interplay between Alucard and the head of Hellsing is fantastic.

ANIMATION: 9 / STORY: 8
EXTRAS: 7 / **OVERALL: 8**

Fate/Stay Night VOLUME 1

PRODUCTION: STUDIO DEEN
GENRE: SUPERNATURAL ACTION

[above] "What?! Cool jackets don't make you fly?"

Atmosphere. Aside from helping you breathe, atmosphere can really help to draw you into a fictional world. The world of Fate/Stay Night is absolutely dripping with atmosphere; wonderful gothic imagery, an almost ambient soundtrack punctuated by semi-choral tracks and wordless dirges, ramping tension. The atmosphere is brilliant and addictive. It's a pity that the characters are not. They're bland, generic and uninteresting making it pretty hard to care or even invest in any of them. The basic plot of the series revolves around a goody-two-shoes named Shirou, a self-proclaimed champion of justice and the survivor of a great tragedy who one day witnesses a battle between two supernaturally powerful warriors. Slowly but surely he is drawn into the battle between rival wizards and their warrior companions, taking his lace as the seventh wizard.

While the plot has a great deal of potential the series seems to boil down to two things; spectacular fight scenes and run of the mill romantic conundrums between captain bland Shirou and a string of cookie cutter love interests. Athletic tomboy? Check. Painfully shy woman? Check. Childhood friend? Check.

The animation, whilst not exactly state of the art is generally good and the character designs, especially for the warrior companions are excellent. The fight scenes, it must be said are genuinely spectacular but they often come as too little too late. The atmosphere builds the audience up for far more than they are delivered and ultimately it's too hard to care about any of the characters.

ANIMATION: 8 / STORY: 7
EXTRAS: 2 / **OVERALL: 6**

Bleach VOLUME 1

PRODUCTION: STUDIO PIERROT
GENRE: SUPERNATURAL ACTION

What is it with series that have names that truly fail to conjure up what a show is all about? The name Bleach brings to mind cleaning products, warning labels, hairdressing and things you shouldn't try to feed your younger siblings before it conjures up images of a heroic but rather cranky young man who can see ghosts and fights against the monsters that try to steal souls. Ichigo Kurosaki is a 15-year-old schoolboy who happens to be able to see ghosts. He also happens to be something of a martial arts master thanks to his father who seems to delight in attacking him at random intervals to keep him alert. Although his life has never been particularly normal thanks to being able to see ghosts and frequently getting beaten by his father, Ichigo's lot takes a turn for the strange when he runs head first into the world of Shinigami (Death Gods), Hollows and good spirits waiting to be sent to the other side.

Although it may be dismissed as yet another series here fighting demons makes up the bulk of the entertainment, Bleach has a very disarming sense of humour that does wonders for the rather run of the mill subject matter. Jokes range from slapstick to puns and some very clever dark humour but the overall effect is to elevate the series above he "school student fights demons" genre. Character design and animation is good throughout the episodes we've seen but for some reason it seems as though that the artists have really held back when designing the demonic Hollows – a little more wow factor would have been great.

ANIMATION: 8 / STORY: 8
EXTRAS: 2 / **OVERALL: 7**

[above] Her expression says no, but her artwork says yes

"Oh man, these floorboards smell so good"

WIN A $100 VOUCHER FOR REELTIME GAMES!

ReelTime.TV is Australia's only legal site for downloading movies but that is not all the company does. They also sell games. Lots of games at remarkably competitive prices. Games in boxes they will ship direct to your door. The good people at ReelTime have been kind enough to give us 10 vouchers valued at $100 each to give away. Vouchers you can redeem for games. Games sent to your door.

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COLLECTIONS

BY ERIN MARCON

This month we open the crimson locker of Eden Games designer Paul Narducci. He was introduced to our favourite pastime by a certain moustachioed Italian and his adventures in the Mushroom Kingdom sparked a lifelong fascination with videogames. "I began to be interested in video games when I was very young," he says.

"Super Mario Bros' was the very first game that I finished. I did not realise that I had just played for such a long time non-stop. I was completely grabbed by the rising universe of Miyamoto and Nintendo."

His devotion to Nintendo never waned and his collection now incorporates virtually every title developed by the company over the past two decades. This, along with his interest in a range of other consoles and developers, has resulted in his collection growing by some 30 titles per year. Has this created any storage difficulties? "Seriously, it is a real problem," he says, "especially for my wife!"

Narducci's solution to the problem may surprise you. "I store my games at other people's houses," he says, "even those which I have not played."

He would rather see his games "...amaze another friend rather than gathering dust!"

If, like me, you would like to volunteer to store Narducci's collection at your house, please form an orderly queue.

The advent of downloadable games has enabled Narducci to expand his collection without testing his wife's goodwill. He recently took his Nintendo Wii online and has already downloaded five titles from the Virtual Console. "How could I resist the idea of playing the very first Zelda?"

Considering his reverence for the greatest games of the eighties, it is intriguing to discover that Narducci considers the more recent 'Grand Theft Auto' and 'Animal Crossing' franchises as among his primary influences. The reason soon becomes apparent. "The freedom, the atmosphere, the gameplay," he enthuses, "they are such strong elements."

Eden Games' own 'Test Drive Unlimited' has benefited from a similar design philosophy, complementing a spacious setting with the freedom of non-linear gameplay.

Narducci also mentions recent critical darlings 'Okami' and 'Katamari Damacy'.

"Many games influenced me," he says.

"We are obliged to take inspiration from these classics."

Narducci may appear to be happy. Why wouldn't he be? He has a rewarding job, happy marriage, effortlessly stylish appearance... Don't believe it. Narducci has a problem, a Ben Cousins type problem. Sadly it is an addiction that has afflicted many over the years, including several Hyper writers and a veritable army of its readers. As of this writing, there is no known cure. However, it is said that the first step towards recovery is to concede the existence of a problem. Today, Narducci is ready to face his demons. "I must reveal a secret," he says.

"I have been addicted to a game for about 10 years. It is Pro Evolution Soccer, "the real football simulation!"

We would like to thank Paul Narducci for participating in this month's column. Be sure to join us each month as we delve into the collections of the industry's most exciting talents.

(top) Some plumbing game (above) Test Drive Unlimited (bottom left) The curse that is Pro Evolution Soccer

Meet Paul Narducci

Paul Narducci works for Eden Games, an Atari-owned studio located in Lyon, France. He cut his teeth testing and debugging Game Boy Advance titles such as 'V-Rally 3' and 'Lucky Luke: Wanted', before being assigned to the company's most important project for 2006.

He experienced his first taste of the big time as a game designer on 'Test Drive Unlimited', a multi-format release credited with bringing massively multiplayer sensibilities to the racing genre.

Narducci's enthusiasm for his field may be tempered slightly by his pragmatism, but it remains genuine and infectious. " What I find fabulous with video games," he says, "is that there is no limit to the creativity."

"The only limit is money!"

ASUS recommends Windows Vista™ Home Premium

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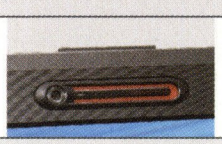

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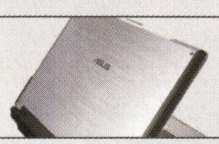

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The WOW Chronicles

All good things must end

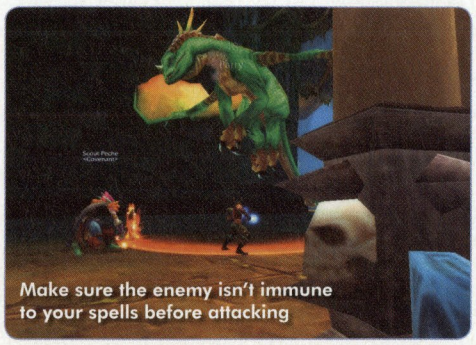
When you've levelled one sixty, make no mistake, you haven't levelled them all. If you've got a good enough memory, you'll be able to make some smart decisions about which quests to choose and which to skip. You'll have the basic tactics of pulling, crowd control, aggro management, kiting, all that stuff down neat.

That's the theory anyway. There's an old saying, 'everyone has a plan until they get punched in the face.' Because you're still going to have all the fun of doing the elite quests, the undeniable horror of the endless halls of Jin'thalor and those vicious ogres in the keep in Arathi. Hordies are going to have all the fun of the first time the goddamned Son of Arugal sneaks up on you. If you've played a caster-character, learning all the tricks of melee fighting are yours to master and if you've been into hand to hand, distance fighting is a whole different ball game. No longer do you smell the sweat and bad breath. Instead you'll play a new and sometimes complex game I call 'target acquisition'.

But it all moves quicker. If you're smart and not like me, you'll make characters on the same server so you can share gold and twink 'em up. You can call in the friends you've, hopefully, made and ace those difficult red quests. Best of all, you should have learned how to use the interfaces and add ons that make the game so very, very much easier.

The best resource, ever ever ever, is other players. Jack the Grin was very lucky indeed to get himself in a good guild this time. Levelling with Betee, a priest makes everything so much easier. Lawl the pallie, played by a chap with multiple 70s shared a hell of a lot of secrets he learned over the last two years. Peche the shaman happily cleared out Shadowfang Keep, Blackfathom Depths and the other early instances and geared me up. Valid the warrior, perhaps the nicest guy I ever met in this game, gave me invaluable advice on how to spec a rogue. On the day of writing, the guild is about to disband for a lot of reasons but Covenant has been a fine group of men and women to play with. Because sure, you can get escorted instance runs until the cows come home to roost and haunt the WoW Wikki for tips and Thotbott for hints every night. but its people who bring the real smarts.

So it came to pass that I looked up at Jack the Grin and discovered, much to my surprise, that I'd hit 45 less than three weeks into starting the character. El Bastardo took something like five months to hit sixty. I got a whisper from a player in game who reads this column congratulating me on the speed I levelled. A shock. Was I getting good at World of Warcraft?


Make sure the enemy isn't immune to your spells before attacking

Bam! Guild run through Jin'thalor breaks the fifty barrier. Into the Plaugelands, taking the quests slowly and surely, handing in those tokens. Strathholme and easily beating the Baron with two seventies. Oh my!

Then 58 somewhere in the fungus ridden depths EPL and the giddy power of knowing that the Dark Portal will embrace me like a long lost child. Halfway through a quest and the lure of new content calls like a siren. Should I finish up? Yes? No?

Yes. So it was, Jack went to face the Burning Legion on a broken planet far away.

And get his arse handed to him in a sling. No, I wasn't getting good.

Next month – *Outland! And Failure...*

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To place an offer in the next issue, please contact Chris at Next Media

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DISEASES OF THE

It's probably the most tiresome argument of our time. "Video games are Bad For You," thunders the hypersensitive society. "Nuh-uh," replies the gaming community. "They corrupt our children," continues society. "Most of them aren't even aimed at children anymore," comes the counterpoint. "Also, tests show that video games can help develop reflexes and map-reading skills." "Sorry, I cannot look at your tests right now," goes society. "My eyeballs have burst from how enraged I am." And so on and so on.

But whether gaming expands your mind or infects you with the evil gene, I don't think anyone can plausibly claim that it's any good for you physically. Oh, maybe the Wii and things like Dance Dance Revolution encourage a bit of actual movement but those will probably only ever leave you with one absurdly overmuscled wrist or a tendency to dance like you're trying to kill cockroaches. In the interests of keeping your pixellated violence bright and healthy, I'd like to take a moment to warn you of all the horrible conditions to which gamers put themselves at risk.

Nintendo Thumb

This was the name given by the liberal media to a form of repetitive strain injury that appeared in kids during the 80's and 90's who played too many video games with thumb-centric controls. This was the period when non-gaming types would just use 'nintendo' to mean any console and attempts to correct them would only result in arrogant snorts and people mouthing the word 'loser' silently to their friends standing behind you. Of course, the term isn't used much nowadays because the condition has started occurring among rabid text message fans whose thumbs rattle constantly away at warbling cellphone keypads while they sit behind you at the cinema. And cellphones are so endemic it's impossible to make a health risk stick.

Basically this ailment manifests as a painful swelling at the base of the thumb. Certainly nothing an ice pack and a couple of hours can't fix. If you keep gaming regardless it could become more complicated but if you really are retarded enough to do so while your thumb hurts like the dickens then you probably deserve it. All in all it's hardly worth classifying as a disease. I like to think of it as more of an early warning system. The moment your hand starts looking like an inflated surgical glove, you know it's time to stop playing Okami and go for a bike ride or something.

It's also worth remembering that physical ergonomics are a fairly large contributing factor in repetitive strain injury, so always try to sit up straight while playing and maybe mix things up by holding the controller with your feet for one hour out of every four.

There's a related condition termed Mouse Elbow, which I won't go into except to note that the name gets funnier every time I read it.

Guitar Hero Wrist

In late 2006, Joel Sumaya, a relief pitcher with the Detroit tigers, missed three games due to an unspecific wrist injury. The examining doctor apparently identified the complaint as something seen more in guitarists than baseball players, and it transpired that Sumaya had been playing marathon Guitar Hero sessions every day. Thankfully in this case he was old enough for it to be judged his own stupid fault.

I have to say that, as one of the superstars of my circle of friends' weekly Guitar-Hero-a-thons, I have first hand (no pun intended) experience with the Guitar Hero Wrist and sympathise with Sumaya completely.

No-one can argue that playing Guitar Hero is even close to playing a real guitar but it feels sufficiently like doing so to still give you a heady adrenaline rush after rattling and squeaking your way through Ace of Spades. I wouldn't go as far to say that it's addictive but you'll certainly catch yourself occasionally fingering an imaginary fretboard for up to several days afterwards. And niggling pains in the wrist and elbow aren't enough to make you give it up for long.

I find that the best way to ameliorate the pain that comes from Psychobilly Freakout on anything above easy mode is to hold the controller loosely and move your arms as much as possibly while playing. And immediately afterwards, making the devil horns is a good way to stretch your tired finger muscles. So in other words, showboat. Showboat yourself stupid. I don't consider a victory valid until I've made stupid celebratory gestures to my opponent until he dreams of stoving in my head with a miniature plastic Gibson.

GAMER

By Yahtzee Croshaw

Game Addiction

There seems to be a lot of debate over this one. At time of writing if you look up 'game addiction' on Wikipedia you'll find five or six disclaimers crowding the top of the page reminding you that the content is being debated, cleaned up, of dubious neutrality and written by chimps. I guess the debate is coloured by right-wing nutjobs with agendas on one side – I promised myself I would try to get through this without invoking Jack Thompson – and obsessive neckbeard shut-ins on the other who won't hear a single bad thing said against their beloved MMORPGs.

There are some real horror stories in countries where online gaming is infinitely more widespread than in the west. In 2005, a 28-year-old man dropped dead after a marathon Starcraft session in a Korean gaming café, having absent-mindedly forgotten that the human body requires sustenance to live. Tragic in an entirely different way was an incident three months earlier when a four year old girl was left alone while the parents went off to play World of Warcraft and ended up suffocating to death. There was another case of an obese man in Beijing, China breathing his last while in the gaming hotseat quite recently, and while we can discuss these silly foreigners with a comforting sense of distance it doesn't take much digging to turn up similarly obsessive cases all around us.

No-one seems to be denying that game addiction exists. These news stories see to that, as well as too many people having personal experience with it. The debate comes over whether there is something in the game that draws people in like some kind of scheming hand-wringing child catcher or if the fanatics just have addictive personalities, and would be obsessing over something else if not MMOs.

Obviously both arguments are flawed so the best thing we can do is fall back on anecdotal evidence. I know that when I was fixed up with 3 free months of World of Warcraft (you didn't think I did this game journo thing for the integrity of it, did you?) that those were the least productive three months of my life. Rehab centres worldwide are starting game addiction programmes – the Smith and Jones Clinic in Amsterdam was the first to do so – so there must be a demand for it.

It's difficult to imagine how killing a big make-believe dragon or acquiring the Sword of Diabetes or whatever gives the same kind of unbelievable high as an armful of high grade Dutch heroin, and that users will stop at nothing to experience it again. Then again, people really do let the games take over their lives. Maybe it's addictive or maybe it's just a bit of harmless fun but ask yourself if you've ever met a former MMO addict who seriously regretted giving it up.

Hand Arm Vibration Syndrome

With the march of technology comes new and interesting ways for the technology to wreck us up as part of the ongoing conquest of the machine overlords. Force feedback is arguably one of the more lasting developments in gaming technology, what with rumbling controllers becoming practically standard around the time of the last console generation. I'm sure we all have fond memories of holding trembling controllers to our crotches for the first time, and who would think that such innocent fun could lead to physical injury?

In February 2002 the BBC reported that a 15 year old boy in Britain was admitted to hospital with blanching of the fingers, episodic numbness and painful tingling. The condition was found to be Hand-Arm Vibration Syndrome, also known as Vibration White Finger, a condition hitherto seen only in workmen who used power tools on a daily basis. Turned out the boy was playing rumble-heavy gaming for seven hours a day. It led to a brief call for statutory health warnings by the usual crowd of whiners which Sony, to their credit, completely ignored, this being one isolated case in millions, and let's face it, no kid who games that much is going to grow up to be a concert pianist.

The solution to avoiding this problem is already given in every game manual in the world: take regular breaks of about 15 minutes out of every hour. You know, that little health warning at the beginning that nobody reads and nobody expects you to obey. It's also worth noting that the controllers only rumble under certain conditions, like when shooting people, so perhaps you could try to reach a peaceful resolution with your enemies instead.

None of this touches on the real danger of vibration, however: that if you vibrate fast enough, you might just contract the ability to phase through solid objects, and become some kind of shrieking man-sofa hybrid.

Death

While not a condition that befalls gamers themselves they are frequently a 'carrier' of it, as it tends to strike unfortunates in close proximity to gamers, particularly gamers who play a great deal of Grand Theft Auto and ultra-violent first person shooters. I felt this perplexing phenomenon deserved a little scientific examination, which is why I locked a 15-year-old boy in a room consisting of nothing but TV screens for walls endlessly displaying clips from violent games and scenes of genuine murder taken at crime scenes with amateur video. I let him out this morning and gave him access to combat knives as a show of trust, and hopefully I can start to examine the effecoafehujk;;;;;;;;;;;;;;;;;;;;;;;;

ENGRISH

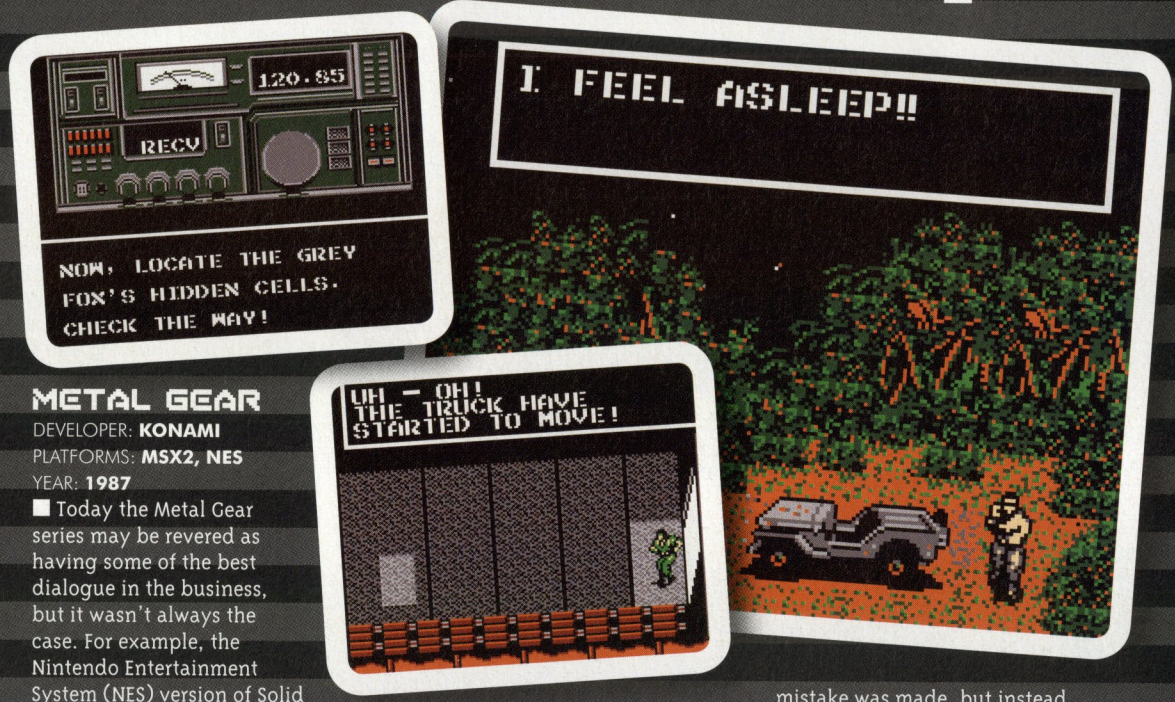
Maurice Branscombe be attitude for gains!

The English language is a strange beast. If you're effortlessly reading the words on this page then you may not believe that your native tongue is among the world's most difficult to grasp, but for anyone who didn't spend the better part of their childhood learning their As, Bs and Cs, English can be a formidable challenge.

With its unpredictable, often non-phonetic spelling and pronunciation, difficult-to-grasp grammar and almost innumerable variations of plural and singular forms, not to mention words that are spelled the same, but mean completely different things, English can stump even the most practised linguist. It's not surprising then that mistakes get made, and it just so happens that these mistakes can be hilarious.

The resulting spelling and grammatical errors, particularly when made by Japanese game designers, are often called Engrish, something that has become somewhat of a popular phenomenon of the Internet age. Everything from misspellings, to poor grammar, to what-the-hell-was-that-supposed-to-mean have become prime targets for gaming humourists, who have made phrases like "All Your Base..." nerd catchcrys.

The golden age of video game Engrish is well and truly past, but join us, if you will, on Hyper's trip down the poorly spelled memory lane that is Engrish Get!



METAL GEAR

DEVELOPER: **KONAMI**
PLATFORMS: **MSX2, NES**
YEAR: **1987**

■ Today the Metal Gear series may be revered as having some of the best dialogue in the business, but it wasn't always the case. For example, the Nintendo Entertainment System (NES) version of Solid Snake's first adventure was littered with top-quality Engrish. The game opens with the line "Attempt to contact missing our Gray Fox!" and it only gets funnier from there. The command "Now locate the Grey Fox's hidden cells. Check the way!" had us confused, wondering which of his cells we should look for and puzzling over what the hell "Check the way!" was supposed to mean.

Then of course there is the part where Snake expresses his distress about a moving vehicle with the line "Uh — Oh! The truck have started to move!".

Last but not least is the enemy soldier that, quite courteously tells Snake when he feels tired, and then when he is eventually asleep comes out with the line "I feel asleep!!" Not only is the phrase Engrish, but the fact that the soldier says it AFTER he is asleep is just too strange to not draw a laugh.

SAMURAI SHODOWN 4

DEVELOPER: **SNK**
PLATFORMS: **ARCADE, NEO GEO AES**
YEAR: **1996**

■ SNK games have always been riddled with poorly translated English text, although the fourth in the Samurai Showdown series has some of the most blatant Engrish you could imagine. Instead of the winning screen proclaiming victory, as it should, the game instead proclaims "Victoly!"

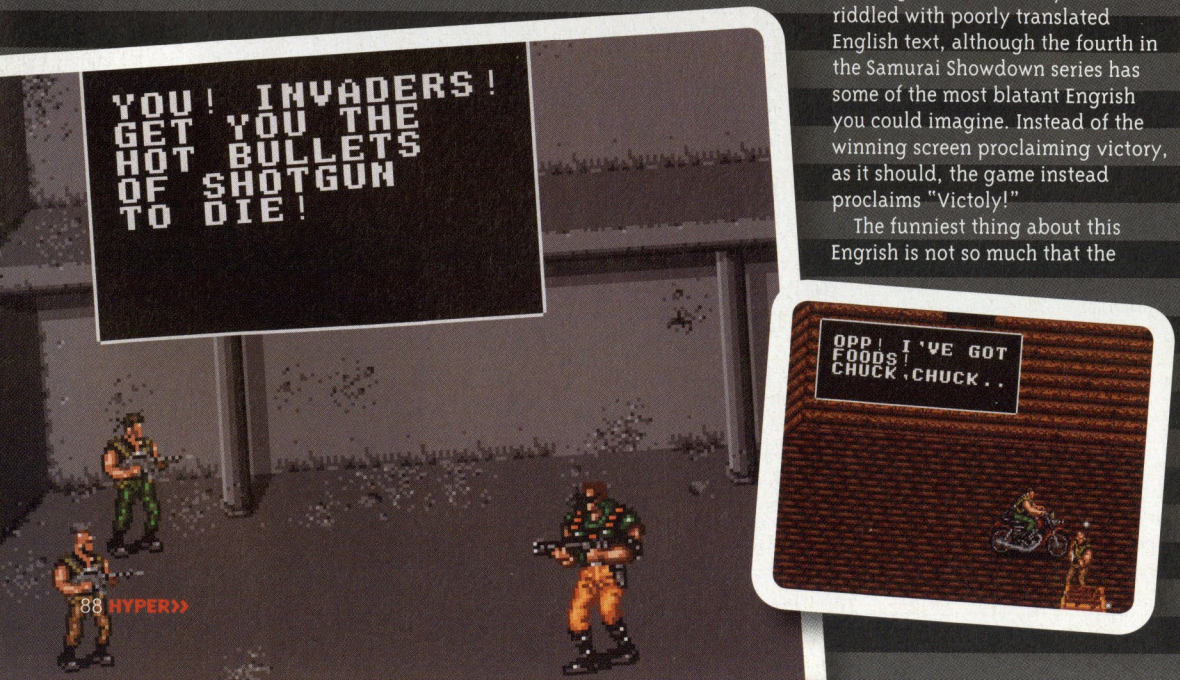
The funniest thing about this Engrish is not so much that the mistake was made, but instead that SNK actually managed to spell victory correctly in the previous Samurai Shodown games!

BATTLE RANGERS

DEVELOPER: **DATA EAST**
PLATFORMS: **ARCADE**
YEAR: **1988**

■ Battle Rangers (also known as Bloody Wolf) was never a popular game, even in its prime, but its use of Engrish is so hysterically spectacular that we had to include it on this list. The dialogue spoken by the game's first boss is enough to cement this game's place in Engrish history — the unforgettable "You! Invaders! Get you the hot bullets of shotgun to die!"

Other examples of English gone awry include the dying cries of the game's final boss as he screams "Me to lose?" and the completely bizarre "Opp! I've got foods. Chuck, chuck..."

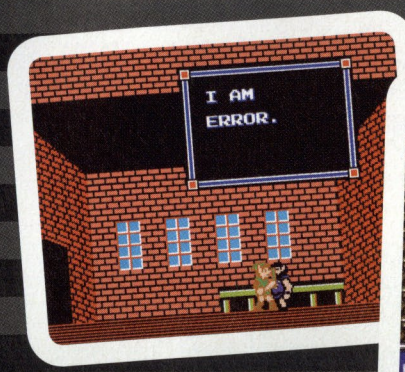


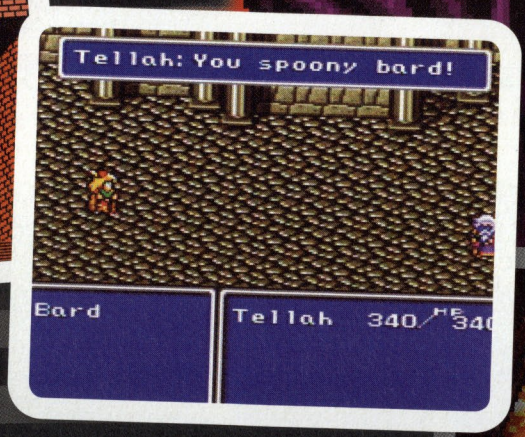
FINAL FANTASY IV

DEVELOPER: **SQUARESOFT**
PLATFORMS: **SNES**
YEAR: **1988**

■ Final Fantasy IV was the first in the series to be translated to English and make it outside of Japan under the name Final Fantasy II. Most of the game is fairly well translated, however, one single line has become somewhat of a legend

GET!





amongst fans to the series. Upon encountering a rival your character, Edward, is called what we can only assume is an insult: "You Spoony Bard!"

We're still not sure if we should take offence or not...

ZELDA II: THE ADVENTURE OF LINK

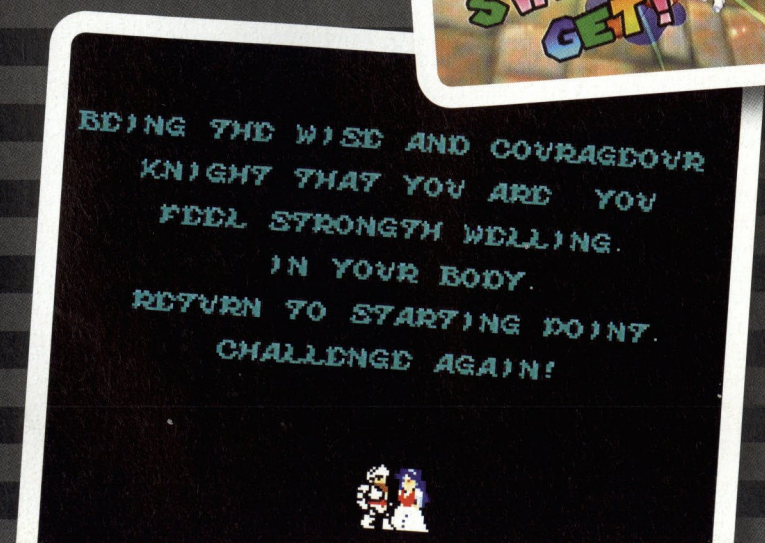
DEVELOPER: **NINTENDO**
PLATFORMS: **NES**
YEAR: **1987**

■ Look at that screenshot of Zelda II and tell me you don't see something wrong with it. Like thousands games before and after it, this game got hit with the Engrish stick. Perhaps Nintendo were trying to make this character express that he was wrong about something, whatever they intended, we got "I Am Error" instead.

GHOSTS 'N' GOBLINS

DEVELOPER: **CAPCOM**
PLATFORM: **ARCADE, NES, MORE.**
YEAR: **1985**

■ Apart from the fact that it is nearly impossible to finish without using about a million continues, Ghost 'n' Goblins had a particularly special Engrish reward for you when you finished the game: "Being the wise and courageour knight that you are you feel strength welling in your body." and "Congraturation. This story is happy end." To just finish the game you definitely would have need a lot of "strength," which makes these some of the most satisfying Engrish phases you'll ever find.



SUPER MARIO SUNSHINE

DEVELOPER: **NINTENDO**
PLATFORM: **GAMECUBE**
YEAR: **2002**

■ This article is called Engrish Get! So you knew this would appear on the list somewhere. The congratulatory "Shine Get!" that Super Mario Sunshine gave you upon successfully finding the game's main collectible was immediately endearing, and we still maintain that you should say "Get!" immediately after obtaining anything cool. Did you just get this issue of Hyper? Then you should shout "HYPER GET!".

Sadly though, this Engrish phrase was removed from the Western release of the game and replaced with the comparatively charmless "Shine!"... but we wish it had stayed in.

ZERO WING

DEVELOPER: **TOAPLAN**
PLATFORMS: **ARCADE, SEGA MEGADRIVE**
YEAR: **1989**

■ This is the big one. If you've ever been on the Internet, the odds are that you know at least a few lines from the opening dialogue of Toaplan's side-scrolling-shooter Zero Wing, but it's more than likely that you can already recite the entire stript word-for-word. With classic Engrish phrases like "Somebody set up us the bomb", "You have no chance to survive make your time" and of course, the ubiquitous "All your base are belong to us", Zero Wing sparked an Internet phenomenon that may have been over before it began, but left an indelible impression on the world, with countless references to the Engrish phrases popping up in other games, songs and even in TV shows like Futurama, Now, move Zig. For great justice...

hotseat

Developers answer your questions about stuff

You asked the questions, now **EA Black Box** spills the beans on their next game!

Grinding the world of its axis

TAT

What is it that Skate has going for it that is going to separate it from being just another Tony Hawk clone?

The biggest differences become apparent from the moment you pick up the controller and play. A reality based physics engine and amazingly intuitive new control system. Yeah, that sounds like marketing hype, but everyone that touches the game seems to agree so we're confident you will too. Specifically, the game isn't about pressing some buttons and watching canned animations. It's about finding that speed that you want then using the sticks to pull tricks with the finesse and style that you dictate.

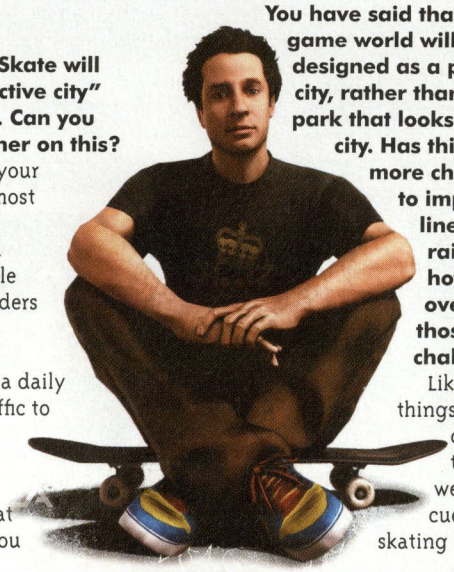
Mark

I've read that Skate will feature a "reactive city" environment... Can you elaborate further on this?

Take a rip on your board through most cities anywhere in the world and watch how people react. Skateboarders experience a "reactive" environment on a daily basis....from traffic to pedestrians to security guards. Skate emulates this with cars that swerve to miss you (some nasty ones may swerve to hit you), pedestrians that comment on your skills or lack thereof, and security guards that do their private property protecting duties are all in the mix. The residents of San Vanelona assuredly know you are skating...for better or worse, I suppose depending on your point of view.

Mr M

You have said that the game world will be designed as a proper city, rather than a skate-park that looks like a city. Has this made it more challenging to implement lines, jumps, rails etc. and how do you overcome those challenges?



Like most things we're doing with the game, we take our cues from skating itself. Skaters don't have trouble finding lines and fun stuff to skate in a city, so going over the top with ridiculous contrived lines and jump ramps everywhere isn't necessary. Having said that, we are building the city and challenges with both skaters and non-skaters in mind, so there will be ample clues as to what's fun to skate and where the special opportunities can be found. The challenges, audio, and visual look will all help educate gamers where the good times lie...but the reality of skating is that everything has potential, it's up to you to unlock that potential.

Lazlow

The last, and possibly only, game to attempt some resemblance of realism in the Skating genre, was Thrasher: Skate and Destroy on the PSone. Despite giving skating a more down to earth grass roots feel (and a thumping old school hip hop soundtrack) was hampered by an overcomplicated control scheme, and garish visuals.

With Skate do you intend to follow a similar mould by utilising a realistic physics engine?

Ah, the lessons of Thrasher. Lots of the skaters on the team were stoked on the OG Thrasher game,

but also realized why it missed the mark with so many, the big reason being it was hard to pick up and play. The learning curve was super steep. Our philosophy is make it easy to pick up and play, but hard to master. Our controls are accessible. Tricks and actions aren't hidden from you. But once you are empowered with the basics, it's up to you to explore the possibilities.

Ghost42

Skating games usually have either a timed run on each level (Tony Hawk) or some sort of gauge that requires tricks to fill (Juice bar in Aggressive Inline), do you intend to use one of these methods or something else to limit the amount of time spent skating in SKATE?

We think skating is fun so we don't see a need to limit the time you spend having fun. However; there will be time limits and such when the challenge or the event calls for it. Skate is focusing on context to provide the cues for what needs to be done and how much time you have to do it in.

Slapshakle

Does SKATE cater for real skateboarders creative minds? I ask because since the Tony Hawk series has done away with a 'proper' level creator the replay value of the game has dropped from unlimited to about 2 weeks in my books.

We're finding that Skate's physics engine is providing the tools for creative types to run wild with. It is crazy how many non-skaters on our team have started to adopt a skater's creative mindset. They are looking at the world that we're building, grasping the obvious stuff to skate and then coming up with whole new ways to skate the world. The modelers are constantly getting sent video clips and screen grabs by team members showing off new lines, gaps, and even tricks.

Gaselite

Concisely, and speaking like a gamer and not a marketer, what are you guys going to do to make Skate fun to play?

Broken record time, I guess, but it's all about the feel. The visceral sensation of cracking ollies, boosting big airs and locking into satisfying grinds are the core of what make Skate fun to play. Throw ingreat cameraangles, smooth animations and an unbelievably huge world and you have hours upon hours of fun.

Dr. Crucidicks

It seems that in this day and age, physics engines are becoming increasingly common in video games. Will Skate follow this trend, and do we expect to see it effect gameplay in a more important fashion than simply having ragdoll stacks?

Physics is the foundation of skateboarding. A great skater has mastered the laws of physics and has learned to play with them and push their boundaries. Same thing applies in the game and physics will be a part of everything you do. The speed you push, the hills you bomb, the airs you get, the length of your grinds, the speed of powerslides, how your body moves and how it all reacts to different surfaces. Of course, it also gives us great wipeouts. It totally amps up the feeling of skating and creates a familiar set of rules for the player to master.

Sir_Psycho

I've read that you've avoided using a "traditional" control scheme, and instead have opted for a button combination per single trick. How are you going to implement this without causing clunky gameplay?

We most definitely have avoided using a "traditional" control scheme, but I'm not so sure on the button combination per single trick concept. We've developed a whole new way of using the sticks to control your skater and board, much like Fight Night and Tiger Woods revolutionized their respective video game sports. It's pretty simple really. The left stick controls your body, the right stick controls your board, and grabs are up on the triggers or shoulder buttons. We've got one button to push with your left foot and another for your right. That's it. When people play, they tend to marvel at all that can be done with such a relatively simple control lay-out.

Not pictured: Hideous pain

MAIL HYPER!

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2016 Australia

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LETTER OF THE MONTH!

The T-shirt of mystery - fear its mighty powers and ability to make women swoon (or men if that's your bag; the t-shirt of mystery cares not for sexuality).

★★Letter of the Month!★★
HERE IN MY DAY...

I'm hoping it hasn't simply been my imagination, but with increasing frequency, Hyper seems to be publishing certain letters in the mailbag that all share a common theme: they were written by old gamers. The most recent of these was the May issue's Jul0, who lamented his aging process, and discussed all of those classic defining memories oft associated with said oldies.

My dilemma is that I'm a young gamer. Sixteen, to be precise. My earliest gaming memories are of watching my mother traverse the water levels in Super Mario Brothers 3 and of helping my neighbour finally beat K.Rool in Donkey Kong Country 2 on SNES. And my first console was a Pokemon edition N64.

From around the age of fourteen, I've been an avid0 gamer. I follow the medium relentlessly and I also aspire to one day be a games journalist. But from the few gaming media outlets I take my information from, all of them always seem to be laden with references and jokes about the past, a time of 8-bit games and E.T. landfills. I think. I'm a little fuzzy on the details, as you may have guessed, seeing as I didn't entirely exist during the 80s.

So why are all of these jaded thirty-somethings so hell-bent on viewing their age (and incomparable experience) as a curse? I'd give anything to properly understand the yesteryear of gaming as they do, instead of simply through a series of nostalgic retrospectives. Still I suppose that's where the Wii Virtual Console comes into play.

I don't suppose any of these readers, or even the Hyper crew themselves, have ever paused to reflect on your amazingly lucky position in the world of gaming. You know more. Can understand more. And I suppose the bastards at your local games store don't speak to you in the same condescending tones as they do me.

Still, I'll be old one day. Far away as it may be. Perhaps then I will have backflipped on my position. And another youngster in my stead will be hitting the games publications to whinge about the hand they've been dealt. Or perhaps Virtual Reality will have made all life obsolete by then.

Either way, I'm not fussed.

Cheers,

Adam

Just as we said in response to Jul's letter last issue ("Back in my day...") there are certain advantages to having lived through the better part of the videogame industry's entire existence. Seeing the medium evolve from the early years of Atari, ColecoVision and the Intellivision, through to the Nintendo and Sega 16-bit era, the PlayStation age and right up to today's three-console race, is a special position to be in.

However, just because you didn't live through the golden age of videogames, doesn't necessarily mean you are missing out. Sure, the formative years of gaming were filled with blocky spites and backgrounds that were mere abstract approximations of the things they were meant to represent, and the sounds were limited to a few beeps and boops – but the gameplay itself really was the only thing that mattered.

Despite the focus on playability, many of the games from that era just don't hold up today. There are of course the immortal classics, but in many cases their game mechanics and designs have long since passed into the realms of the clichéd, and for many gamers the classic pixelated look and beeping soundtrack just doesn't cut it anymore when compared to the gorgeous marvels of modern technology that are abundant today.

Essentially, we here at Hyper don't look back at the past through rose-coloured lenses, and neither should you Adam. Enjoy the games that are around today, because the odds are that in the future, they'll be considered classics – and youngsters will be wishing they could have been around in your day.

As for the "bastards" (as you so eloquently call them) at our local games store not speaking

CAPTION THIS!

Fusion got his CAPTION on, with this number...

Yo, just throw me in. I gots to get my WASH on!

HYPER 163 FEEDBACK

The feedback just keeps rolling in, and for issue #163 you let us have it! Here's what you thought, and remember – if you've got something to say, you can let us know at www.hyperactive.com.au

mantis*ant
I loved the majority of the design - the game book covers in Henderson's piece came across quite well, but Moe's San Francisco feature looked utterly gorgeous. The new uniform look of reviews is good, too, but contrasts badly with some of the enlarged main screenshots for some reason. I've no clue when it comes to graphic design, so don't take my word as gospel, but... chuck a border around them, or scrap one main pic for a few smaller ones, maybe?

Jickle
Something I noticed was that the review scores seemed harsher than normal, which, to me, is a welcome change. Conscious effort, or did it just sort of happen?

Michaelangelo
I just want to thank Hyper on their response to my letter (re: self censorship). It was pretty much exactly what I wanted to hear. Keep up the good work.

KickyFunkFresh
it looks like a good issue. Plentiful God Of War II content, what appear to be some great features and previews/ interviews and the changes to the design are definately a step in the right direction.

lothar1
Really enjoyed Staines' opinion piece. I know I'm fascinated to read opinions on the industry itself – the goings on and machinations – and I found the piece engaging and thought-provoking.

to us in condescending tones, you obviously overestimate our powers of influence on the general public, since they give us twice as much lip!

ENKC ♥ CELDA

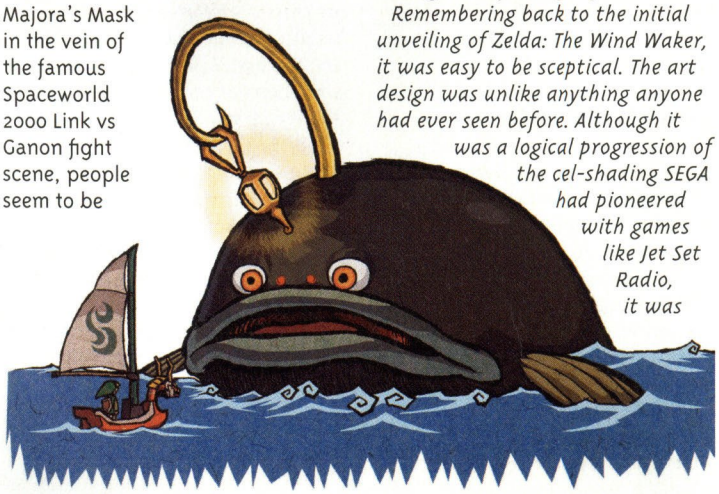
If there's one thing gamers are good at, it's thinking we know what we want. But if there's something we're not so good at, it's actually knowing what we want. The mixed reaction to Twilight Princess recently has highlighted just how ignorant many gamers are to what makes a good game. Though I must backtrack somewhat to elaborate.

From the moment the Wind Waker was announced, the gaming public devolved into a festering mass of discontent at the revelation of the new cel-shaded graphical style. Suddenly and inexplicably, any sense of confidence in the developers who'd brought us the most critically acclaimed game ever evaporated in the controversy.

I was utterly astounded that people were so ready to assume that the game would be utterly devoid of worth simply because it didn't look the same as Ocarina of Time. What kind of fans were these people? Extremely dim ones at best. The sales figures for WW tell a sad tale indeed. People genuinely gave up on one of the most breathtakingly beautiful titles ever, indeed one of the greatest achievements of gaming as an art form, because it didn't fit their narrow expectations.

I would also add that I believe the graphical style of Wind Waker was far truer to the fairytale spirit Miyamoto always intended for the Zelda universe, and more consistent with the appearance of the older games than the more 'realistic' versions have ever been. The point I'm getting to here is that now Twilight Princess is out and people have had time to digest it, something strange is happening.

After at least six years of clamouring for a 'realistic' style successor to Ocarina of Time and Majora's Mask in the vein of the famous Spaceworld 2000 Link vs Ganon fight scene, people seem to be disappointed at finally getting what they've wanted for so long. There are complaints emerging that the visuals lack impact and charm. That the game seems to be missing that special something.



As far as I can see, the same people making these complaints are the same people who refused to play Wind Waker through some bizarre conviction or other (apparently acting like an ignorant moron counts as a 'principle' these days). But now, a realisation seems to be growing that maybe – just maybe – a realistic Zelda isn't a cure to all ills in the world, and that maybe Wind Waker in fact wasn't the spawn of the devil. Perhaps there is something to be said for 'Celda' after all.

As much of a Ninty Fanboy as I am, I'm yet to have the privilege of playing Twilight Princess. I've no doubt that it will prove to be an excellent game and a worthy successor to its illustrious forbears. But if some fans feel as though a 'realistic' Zelda hasn't quite cured cancer and solved world poverty like they were expecting, then perhaps, to paraphrase Warnie, it's their own stupid fault.

Kind Regards,
Ian Casey

Well, we certainly wouldn't say that Zelda: Twilight Princess was without impact or charm, but we can see your point.

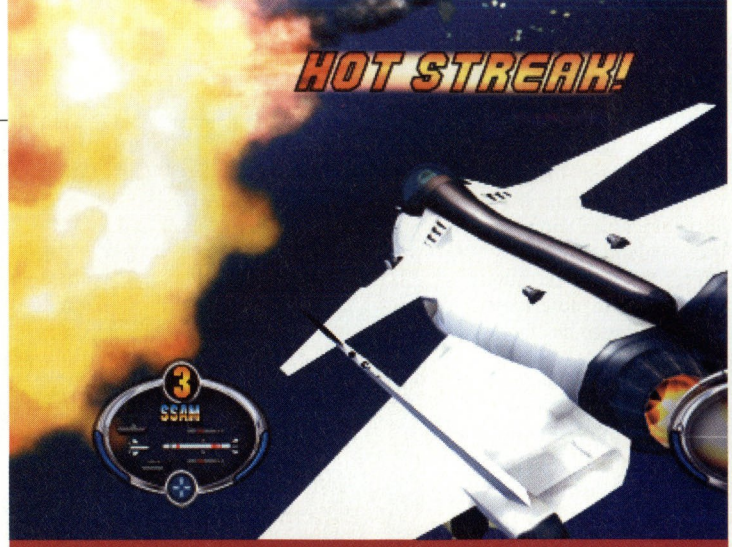
Twilight Princess was less striking visually, and was also too similar in design and style to Ocarina of Time, making it seem less unique in appearance overall.

There were a few notable things that made the game stand out from the rest however, for example the traditional Japanese clothing and design was, at first, an amazing new addition to the game. Of course, once Link loses his Japanese threads, dons his usual green tunic and leaves his home village the Japanese influence was left by the wayside and the game returned to a more generic fantasy style.

Remembering back to the initial unveiling of Zelda: The Wind Waker, it was easy to be sceptical. The art design was unlike anything anyone had ever seen before. Although it was a logical progression of the cel-shading SEGA had pioneered with games like Jet Set Radio, it was better, more cartoon-like and yes, it was gorgeous. The problem was that many fans of the series had become accustomed to Link's newfound mature "Ocarina" look and they couldn't imagine, or didn't want to imagine, that the game's new style could be successful.

Of course, immediately after sitting down to play the game even the most anti-Celda gamer would have to admit that not only was the game amazing to look at, but it was amazing to play as well. In terms of visual flair Twilight Princess can't compete with The Wind Waker, and even when it comes to game design Wind Waker once again takes the win, with its completely original nautical theme beating out Twighlight Princesses tried-and-true fantasy land.

In the end, if Zelda: Wind Waker is the spawn of the devil, then you can sign us up for eternal damnation right now.



hotseat

It's that time of the month again, time for you to ask the hard questions of the developers. This month int he Hot Seat sits the collective arse of IR Gurus, developers of the rather fun little arcade style combat flight sim, Heatseeker for PS2, PSP and Wii. So get to writing in your questions - we'll collate the top 10-15 and send them off to IR Gurus. Answers will be printed in a future issue of Hyper.

Questions can be sent to: *hotseat@next.com.au*

Questions can be posted in the Hot Seat area of the Hyperactive forums *http://forums.hyperactive.com.au/*

Jaxen
The Wii games didn't recieve particularly good scores unfortunately, leaving me sad. I thought Sonic could have been really good. Although it's kind of a good thing, because I can't afford to buy any games at the moment anyway.

Jay
Big ups to Malcolm Campbell. The layout and design of the "Gaming Days In San Fran" article is excellent. Slick and clear, it is my non-graphic design trained opinion the best a piece has looked in the magazine for a long time.

9warbane
Def Jam Icon 55! Wow it's bad? Specrtrobes got only 53, while Nintendo gamer gave it in the 80's. Well? Is it good or bad? Did each magazine know what the other was giving Specrtrobes?

The Moe
In the case of Spectrobes it was just painfully average - for all the reasons given in the review. Hyper is still very much a believer that 50% of 100 is the average score, so in essence Spectrobes scored very slightly above average.

ROCK 'N' ROLL AIN'T CHEAP

So I forked out another shitload of money and got myself Guitar Hero 2 on the Xbox 360 because I heard that there would be songs I could download from Xbox Live Arcade. I thought I'd hooked myself up with a pretty sweet deal so what's with the stupid price of the songs? 500

Guitar Hero 2 - breaking hearts and consoles everywhre

Microsoft points for 3 songs?

Now I understand there's licensing issues and stuff that needs to be worked out for the songs but surely it would make more sense for the songs to be cheap to entice people to buy the rather expensive (and faulty – stupid whammy bar) controller rather than turning them off by pricing the additional content at too high a level. And now I read that Red Octane has released a patch that supposedly fixes the whammy bar making it more sensitive but this improvement comes at the cost of breaking your 360 to such a point it has to go back to Microsoft for repair.

It makes me wonder who to blame – Microsoft, Activision or Red Octane. For my money the blame lays with Activision, a company that has time and time again shown themselves more interested in the bottom line than they are in the product. Witness all of the lame ports on next gen systems that look no better than their last gen counterparts and price points at the top scale of stupid. I had some clever way of summing up my email but I've forgotten it. Just assume it was very incisive and put he guilty parties in their places.

Not Ian Casey.

So let's see, 500 Microsoft points equals about AU$8.25 at the current exchange rate. All three packs with nine songs in total will cost you $24.75, which means that if Activision do eventually release the entire 30-song track list (not including bonus tracks) from the original Guitar Hero it would cost you a staggering $82.50 to download them. That's a bad deal in anyone's mathematics, especially since buying the original PS2 game on a physical disk costs you less than $50 these days.

We were thinking that $10 would have been a tidy sum for the first game's entire set list, so seeing that downloading the songs over Xbox Live is actually more expensive than the original game gave us a huge surprise – and not the pleasant kind. With any luck though, most gamers will vote with their wallets and avoid these exploitative prices, maybe then Activision will lower the cost of entry to an acceptable level.

As for the whammy bar issues, if you read our review last issue you'd have seen that we experienced the exact same problems with our X-Plorer controller as what has become endemic after the game's release. We haven't tried the patch yet, for the very reason that reports are flooding in from around the world that it can brick your console.

With any luck Activision will have new X-Plorer units on the shelves before long, or at least a patch that doesn't destroy your entire system , but it does kind of make you wonder about what kind of monkeys they've got working for them in the peripheral and patches departments.

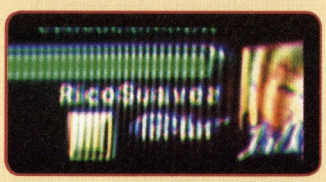
RE: RICO SUAVEZ

In issue number 162, April 2007, in the review of Virtua Fighter 5 the writer said that he played the game for 30 hours and could not find the character Rico Suavez. The writer said that the first person to send pictorial evidence would win a prize.

On the 29th my boyfriend Todd found the character Rico Suavez while playing the game. Please see attached.

Thanks,

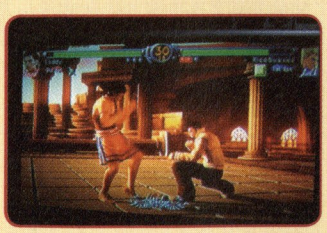
Ratsamee



Those photos are a little blurry Ratsamee, but there's no mistaking it – that's our Rico!

He looks even better than we could have possibly hoped for, what with that jet-black, greased-up pompadour and a stylish jacket/pants combo it's no wonder the ladies go wild for a bit of Rico loving.

For bringing us this joy of joys, we thank you Todd and Ratsamee, and to show our gratitude we'll be sending you something special from Hyper HQ. Don't ask us what it will be though, since that would ruin the surprise. Plus, we just don't know what it is yet... but you like games right? Maybe we could find some of those...



METAL... GEAR?

I just want to be the first to say I know the secret behind Metal Gear Solid 4. Metal Gear Solid 4 is not the game we think it's going to be. I believe Hideo is purposely releasing false footage in order to keep the real project a secret until it is released.

Why do I think this? Well, how clichéd is the situation? Snake's old, it's his last mission and it's set in the Middle East with hundreds of Metal Gears walking around. To me this does not seem to be a realistic situation for a Metal Gear game, especially the supposed "last". Hideo has released footage and artwork to drop hints about the game. This is to keep people speculating what the story is and what's going to happen. All this is done in order to keep the real project a tight secret.

A similar situation has occurred before with previous game Metal Gear Solid 2. No one knew about Raiden until the release of the game. They kept that a secret all through production and released gameplay footage replaced with Snake's character model.

Anyway, these are my thoughts on the upcoming MGS game. Also what's up with Otacon creating a stupid robot to follow Snake? As far as I'm concerned we have not seen a single piece of Metal Gear Solid 4, and won't until it's released.

P.S. I know I have no support for this argument, it is complete speculation. Also, if I am wrong I am a complete idiot and will regret writing this email to you guys. No matter what MGS4 will rock.

Anthony McKeown

We wouldn't be so quick to dismiss Metal Gear Solid 4's premise as a clichéd sham, intended to distract us from what Kojima really has planned for the fourth in the Metal Gear Solid series. So far, MGS4's story of an aging Solid Snake taking it to the Middle East to stop a Metal Gear invasion seems entirely credible, and may turn out to be a very interesting direction for the series, since the story is both topical and holds plenty of potential for the kind of action the Metal Gear series is famous for.

Have no regrets though Anthony, you may not be a complete idiot, since Mr Kojima undoubtedly has more in store for us than he's letting on. It's not out of the question that the footage shown so far is only a small part of the game, and that the story may span more than one time period or focus on more than one protagonist. Of course, Hideo himself is the only one who knows what the final outcome of his game will be, and he's unlikely to spill the beans until the game is finished and on store shelves.

As for what is up with Otacon creating a "stupid robot" to follow Snake around, have you never played Hideo Kojima's cyber punk adventure game, Snatcher? It was originally released in 1988, but

FORUM

sidochrome
Tekken 6 (AC)
The new characters aren't doing a lot for me just yet, but then again, I thought the same about Lili and Dragunov and soon warmed up to them.

I doubt the fighting mechanics will see much of an overhaul, but I'm more interested to see how the fighters' movesets evolve, and how far they're taking character customisation (the new Jack shown in the trailer looks encouraging).

VindaiLiu
Resident Evil Umbrella Chronicles + RE4 Wii Edition
Porting RE4 is a smart move. How many of the people here seem to be strongly considering buying the game even though they already played it on PS2 or Gamecube? A Lot. I'm sure a whole new Resident Evil game in the same style as RE4 will be on the way eventually.

Umbrella chronicles seems like a smart move as well. The Wii is screaming for a good light gun game and I bet the designers saw it as a safe way to begin designing for the system.

ProdigalChild
Guitar Hero II
I recently bought the game and havent had any trouble with it. However after looking around online at all the trouble people are having with the whammy bar i checked the model number, lo and behold it's the infamous model 95055. I haven't had any problems with it, should i attempt to take it back and swap it for another model?

Manny M
Guitar Hero II
You'll be hard pressed to find any other model at the moment. If it's fine, keep it.

However, if the whammy bar isn't completely responsive, in that you need to jiggle it a bit for it to 'kick in', then it's not working properly.

AnTrAxX
Why do you hate the PSP?
I dont really use my PSP for games, just usually movies and photos, and occasionally music. I use my DS for games. There havent been many PSP games that I've wanted.

I dont hate the PSP, but I much do prefer the DS.

Maxi
Why do you hate the PSP?
I sold my DS. I kept my PSP. The only thing that the DS really has over the PSP is Zelda, and that's not out yet. But when it is, I'll pick up a DS.

Marcu
World of Warcraft
Just uninstalled WoW, finally I'm quitting. The game just takes too much time away from me, and now I'll go back to doing stuff I used to do instead of only WoW all the time. It was fun while it lasted, anyway.

has been re-released several times over the years, including a SEGA Mega-CD version that made it all the way to Australia. The miniature robot that follows Snake around in MGS4 is a nod to Snatcher, in which the same little robot, named Metal Gear Mk.II, follows that game's man character, Gillian Seed, around, offering him advice and saving his game for him. It's quite a cool reference, particularly for fans of Kojima's earlier works, and something that makes MGS4 even harder to wait for...

EMOTIONLESS

Have you ever bought a product or played a game and noticed some small, seemingly insignificant detail that most people would not even pay attention to, yet it exists only for the purpose to make your use of that product an even more enjoyable experience?

It's simply what is known as attention to detail, that fine line between tossing something out there for the consumers to get their money or to make something wonderful and a labour of love and then having pride in what you have created knowing that you have done your best.

When you take those extra steps, it shows you care more than any advertising campaign that money can buy, it shows that the company behind it are honest and want the best for you.

Sony has forgotten that by removing the emotion chipset from the PS3 and what is more, they are openly practising disdain for PAL enabled regions by offering us less than not only what was promised but also less than the rest of the world.

I am aware that Australia especially pays a higher financial output for their latest creation but the issue that irks me the most is that like a shoddy car dealer, they tried to sneak in the changes on the sly in the obvious hopes that nobody would seriously notice it or if they did, would keep it to themselves.

The tragedy is that this isn't even the full story which is that the emulator is in itself a rush job that has had little R&D and no thought to testing and improving until it became an after thought.

Sony, your image as far as I'm personally concerned is not only tarnished by your actions, it's lying in a total shambles and has left me seriously doubting your ethics on all of your other products and I have no doubts in my mind that our exclusion from the so called world wide launch window was nothing more than a sham to perpetrate this bodgey act.

Mark Tyrrell

That was certainly an emotional letter Mark, but we have to admit that this is a topic worth getting emotional about.

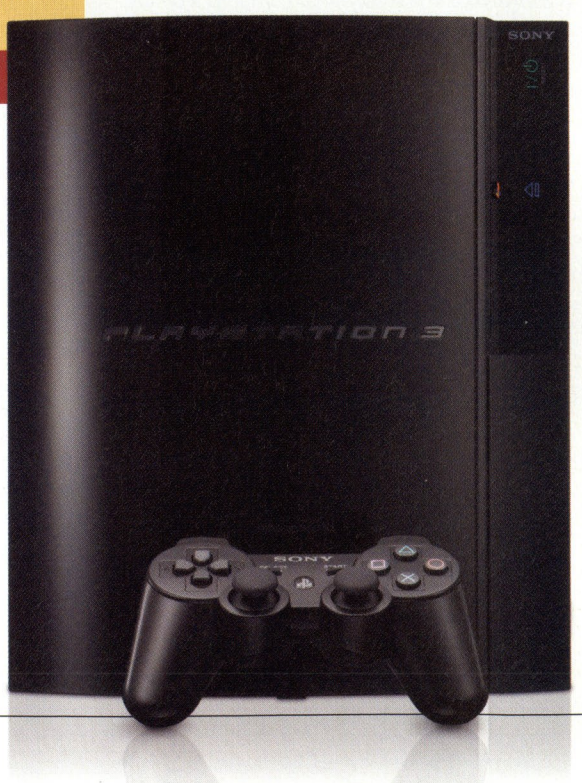
Sony's decision to remove the Emotion Engine from the PAL version of the PlayStation 3 is not only disappointing but it's downright insulting – and we, for one, are furious about it.

Essentially, Sony's PlayStation 3 marketing technique in PAL territories amounts to nothing less than a bait-and-switch scheme. The bait was the PS3, an all-encompassing entertainment system that would make your other boxes obsolete. They enticed us for months and years with promises of flawless backwards compatibility for our sizable PSone and PS2 game libraries and convinced us that the price payed would be worth it based on the inclusion of these features. Then, a mere 28 days before the console launched in PAL territories, Sony give us the switch. SCEE's president, David Reeves, confirmed that Europe and Australia would receive a doctored version of the console with one of its vital components amputated, and all in an effort to pinch a few more pennies.

It goes without saying that Sony could not have developed the software replacement in a single month, and yet it was kept a guarded secret until the last possible moment. The question must be asked, then – why were we kept in the dark? Whatever the reasons, both for the reluctant acknowledgement of the Emotion Engine's removal and the removal itself, this whole situation has only served to damage Sony's reputation and that of their product, as well as expose the company's indifference towards the PAL market.

Dedicated Sony supporters may well protest by arguing that the Xbox 360 also has software-based backwards compatibility. This is of course true, but the fact remains that when you buy an Xbox 360 you're not paying a significant amount more for a feature that isn't there.

In all other respects the Australian PS3 may be identical to those found in other corners of the world and we still maintain that the PlayStation 3 is an excellent piece of hardware with great potential, but unless Sony knock at least $199.95 from the PS3's price tag (the cost of a PS2 console, with full PSone compatibility), then they are swindling the Australian public.

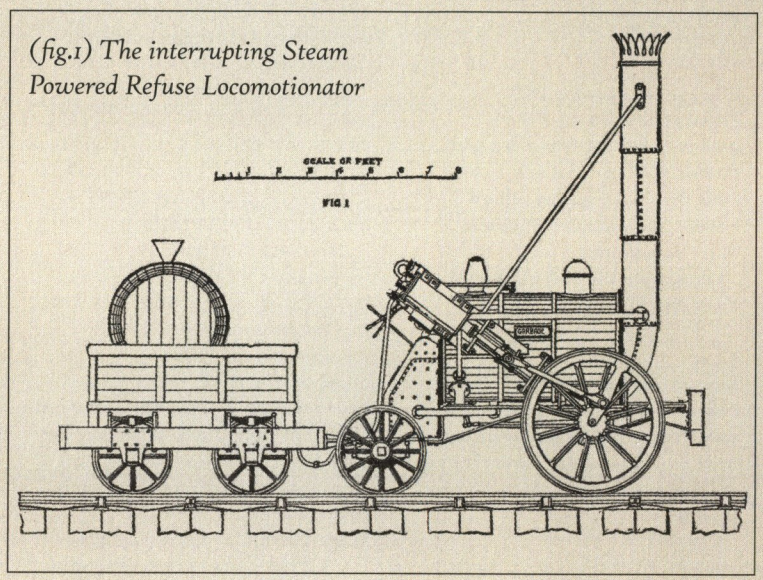


The Passion of the Gamer

Interminable Interruptions

By Dylan Burns

Did I ever tell you about the time the garbage truck (Fig.1) backed into my house? Well . . . it backed into my house one morning. Don't ask me why the stupid garbo was reversing down our driveway but needless to say the event itself provided me with an intimate knowledge of the smell of fear, so loud was the CRAAAAACK that shook the very beams of my house. That's nice, I hear you think, but what has this got to do with games? Everything I tell you, and it ties into my current grumpy obsession with interminable interruptions.



(fig.1) The interrupting Steam Powered Refuse Locomotionator

Anyway, back to the moronic garbo and his non-existent driving skills. There I was early in the morning, enjoying a game of (surprise, surprise) Oblivion, when the moment itself happened. Of course, luck being what it is to me, the corner that the truck backed into just happened to be the exact same corner that my TV and 360, plus all my games, are in. Now, self preservation ensued as a first reaction – hey, I thought it was a darn earthquake or something – but once I peeked outside to see the real culprit, then concern for my possessions took over. I tell you, not even Flash Gordon could have beaten me at pulling out power cords and moving my consoles out of harm's way.

In the end, the damage was mostly to the outside, but I wasn't going to risk losing the tools of my passion to some council worker's stupidity. And the reason I'm even sharing this is because it's a perfect example of an interruption that totally ruined the rest of my day and, as a result, reduced the amount of gaming hours available to me. I'll never have those hours back, and no amount of "Oh, I'm sorry, we'll fix it up of course" will get them back.

Interruptions: they suck – but in this day and age they're things that need to be dealt with. Along with our ability to consume entertainment devices like candy comes the attached ability and sometimes necessity to communicate with other human beings. Playing on the PC will see you interrupted by MSN messages, ICQ, email (whichever instant messaging client you prefer really), all of it aimed towards allowing you to chatter on about what's hot and what's not in saddlery (or is that just me?). Having all your mates available at the press of a few buttons is almost too much to resist. And I'm sure I'm not alone in getting distracted for an hour when all I actually want to do is play S.T.A.L.K.E.R.

Of course, consoles are no longer the bastions of solitary play that they once were. Nay, technology has ensnared even this medium, with instant messaging and voice communication available with little fuss at all. You could be playing Gears of War only to become ensnared in an e-penis conversation with some guy called AusSiEAwEsoMeFluFFyBuM360 about how you got those last two achievements in Hitman: Blood Money. Play the Wii and the urge to see how your mini Bruce Willis is going in the Mii Parade is almost too much, not to mention the somewhat addictive nature of entering fifteen digit numbers and telling your friends to enter yours otherwise you won't be able to communicate. Ah, it's all so integrated how can we not take advantage of it?

Away from internal operating options, there are plenty of other interruptions to consider when all you want to do is play games for eight hours. The first of these is family. Not only do they insist in hanging around the house, but old Uncle Gerald always seems to choose your only free weekend to bloody visit. Older cousins will inevitably bring round their rug rats, who will play with your controllers and game boxes as you watch with your heart in your mouth.

A second breed of interruption falls under what I like to call 'unasked invasions'. Why on earth people even think that walking around the neighbourhood on a Sunday afternoon with pamphlets that describe our salvation will ever get them a favourable reaction, I do not know. What I do know is that whenever they knock on my door they're met with a string of expletives that would make a Tourettes sufferer blush . . . and then I apologise profusely if it's actually my mum dropping round for a visit.

Yes I'm a grumpy gamer, and it stems from all these darn interruptions that impose themselves upon my gaming time with a precision that seems almost conspiratory. And so it was the day the truck smashed into my house: "Here we go again," I thought with rolled eyes . . . well, that was after I changed my underwear.

How we react to these interruptions can tell us a lot about our personality. If you throw your controller to the ground, stomp on it and then swear violently at the person who happened to come in and ask if you'd like a coffee while the kettle's hot, then I suspect you have a few issues. If, on the other hand, you take a deep breath, pause the game and then give your full attention to the rude bastard who interrupted you, then I'd say you're a better person than I.

My own reaction tends to sit somewhere in the middle of the two. I seem to be able to feign interest in what's being said or asked of me whilst still maintaining my full attention on the game being played. Then, three hours later when I haven't taken the rubbish out, I'm completely confused when people turn irate and admonish me for stuff I never even heard them ask of me. The rubbish can wait, my complete and utter domination of fictitious lands cannot.

There will always be interminable interruptions to our passion. The trick is to manage them with a semblance of interest in the outside world. Garbage trucks may slam into houses and the darn dog will need to be walked, so thank God for the pause function. Without it, we'd be lost.

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THE OFFICIAL AUSTRALIAN GAMES CHART

Compiled by GfK in association with the IEAA

TOP 10 PlayStation 2 Games Over $50

W/E 18th March 2007 RETAIL SALES

1	◆	Final Fantasy XII	RPG
2	◆	Cricket 2007	Sports
3	▲	Singstar Legends Bundle	Family
4	▲	Buzz: Junior Jungle Bundle	Family
5	▼	Guitar Hero 2 Bundle	Family
6	▼	WWE Smackdown vs Raw 07	Sports
7	▼	Avatar: The Legend Of Aang	Adventure
8	▲	Dance Factory + Mat	Family
9	◆	Lego Star Wars 2	Action
10	▼	Need For Speed Carbon	Racing

TOP 10 Nintendo DS Games Over $40

W/E 18th March 2007 RETAIL SALES

1	◆	Bratz Forever Diamonds	Adventure
2	▲	Happy Feet	Adventure
3	▲	Nintendogs Dalmation	Simulator
4	▼	Scooby Doo Whos Watching	Adventure
5	▲	Nintendogs Labrador	Simulator
6	▲	Mario Kart	Racing
7	▲	Nintendogs Dachschund	Simulator
8	▼	New Super Mario Bros	Adventure
9	▼	Nintendogs Chihuahua	Simulator
10	▲	Animal Crossing Wild World	Strategy

TOP 10 Nintendo Wii Games Over $50

W/E 18th March 2007 RETAIL SALES

1	◆	Sonic And The Secret Rings	Adventure
2	◆	Zelda Twilight Princess	RPG
3	◆	Warioware Smooth Moves	Family
4	▲	Red Steel	Action
5	▲	Tiger Woods PGA 2007 Tour	Sports
6	▼	Rayman Raving Rabbids	Adventure
7	▲	Super Monkey Ball	Adventure
8	▲	World Series Poker Champs	Family
9	▼	Call Of Duty 3	Action
10	▼	Excite Truck	Racing

TOP 10 Xbox Games Over $50

W/E 18th March 2007 RETAIL SALES

1	◆	Need For Speed Carbon	Racing
2	◆	Lego Star Wars 2	Action
3	▲	Spyro A New Beginning	Adventure
4	▼	Scarface	Action
5	▼	Call Of Duty 3	Action
6	◆	FIFA 2007	Sports
7	▲	Eragon	Adventure
8	▲	Tiger Woods PGA 2006	Sports
9	▲	GTA: The Trilogy	Adventure
10	▼	Tiger Woods PGA 2007	Sports

TOP 10 PC Games Over $20

W/E 18th March 2007 RETAIL SALES

1	◆	The Sims 2: Seasons	Strategy
2	▲	WoW: Burning Crusade	RPG
3	▼	The Sims 2: Pets	Strategy
4	◆	World Of Warcraft	RPG
5	◆	Supreme Commander	Strategy
6	▲	The Sims 2	Strategy
7	◆	The Sims 2 Life Stories Dvd	Strategy
8	▲	The Sims 2 Open For Busines	Strategy
9	▲	Arma Armed Assault	Action
10	▼	Age Of Empires III	Strategy

TOP 10 Xbox 360 Games Over $50

W/E 18th March 2007 RETAIL SALES

1	◆	Ghost Recon Advanced 2	Action
2	◆	Crackdown	Action
3	◆	Gears Of War	Action
4	▲	Saints Row	Adventure
5	▼	Lost Planet	Action
6	▲	Test Drive Unlimited	Racing
7	▲	Sonic The Hedgehog	Adventure
8	▼	Fight Night Round 3	Sports
9	▼	Battlestations Midway	Strategy
10	▲	WWE Smackdown vs Raw 07	Sports

TOP 10 All Format Games Over $50

W/E 18th March 2007 RETAIL SALES

1	◆	Final Fantasy XII	PlayStation 2
2	◆	The Sims 2: Seasons	PC/MAC
3	▲	Sonic And The Secret Rings	Nintendo Wii
4	▲	Ghost Recon Advanced 2	Xbox 360
5	▲	WoW: Burning Crusade	PC/MAC
6	▼	Bratz Forever Diamonds	Nintendo DS
7	▲	Zelda Twilight Princess	Nintendo Wii
8	▼	Cricket 2007	PlayStation 2
9	▲	Happy Feet	Nintendo DS
10	▲	Nintendogs Dalmation	Nintendo DS

TOP 10 PlayStation Portable Games Over $40

W/E 18th March 2007 RETAIL SALES

1	◆	GTA: Vice City Stories	Adventure
2	▲	WWE Smackdown vs Raw 07	Sports
3	▲	Cars Ptm	Racing
4	◆	Sega Mega Drive Collection	Action
5	▲	Daxter Ptm	Adventure
6	◆	V8 Supercars 3 Shootout	Racing
7	▼	GTA: Liberty City Stories	Adventure
8	▲	Syphon Filter: Dark Mirror	Action
9	▼	Tekken Dark Resurection	Action
10	▲	Sid Meier's Pirates!	Adventure

✪ New Entry
◆ Non Mover
▲ Up from last week
▼ Down from last week

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KANE & LYNCH DEAD MEN

Get ready for a bit of the crazy

PLUS: Crossfire, Wilks in San Francisco, Shopping for games in Japan, Spiderman 3, Conan: Hyborian Adventures and maybe a little Halo 3

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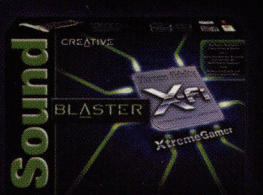

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