MASSIVE REVIEW ISSUE! • ANIME TOP TEN

HYPER

Soul Calibur III

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GUIDE

MAKE YOUR OWN GAME

Who says the days of the lone designer are over?

REVIEW

SHADOW OF THE COLOSSUS

From the team behind the PS2 classic ICO

REVIEW

KING KONG

The King of the jungle? Or just monkey business?

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READERS' TOP 50

Your say on the best games of all time

A next MAGAZINE

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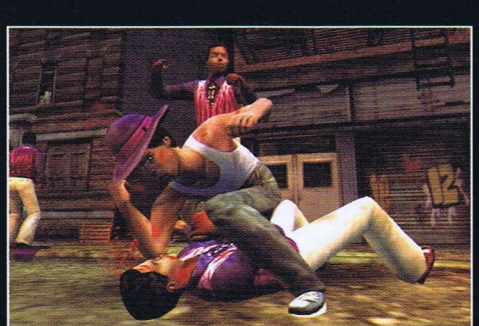
27 HUGE REVIEWS!

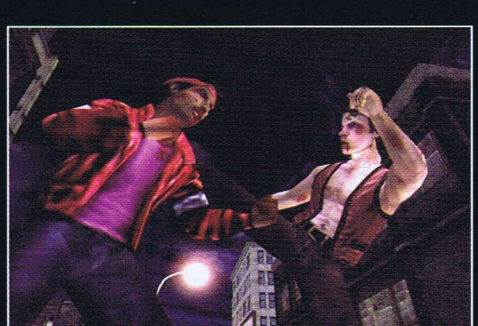
PSP GTA Liberty City
PS2 Shadow the Hedgehog
PC The Movies
XBOX Gun
PS2 The Warriors
PS2 Tony Hawk's American Wasteland
PC Age of Empires III

PROJECT GOTHAM RACING 3

XBOX 360

We talk to the Aussie company that's shaping a next-gen classic





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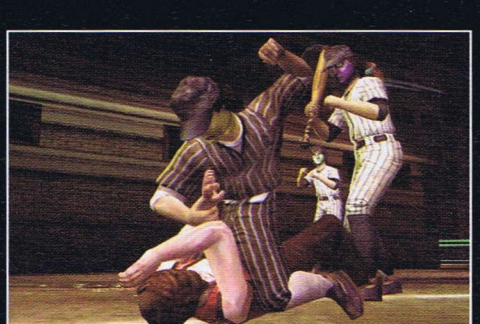

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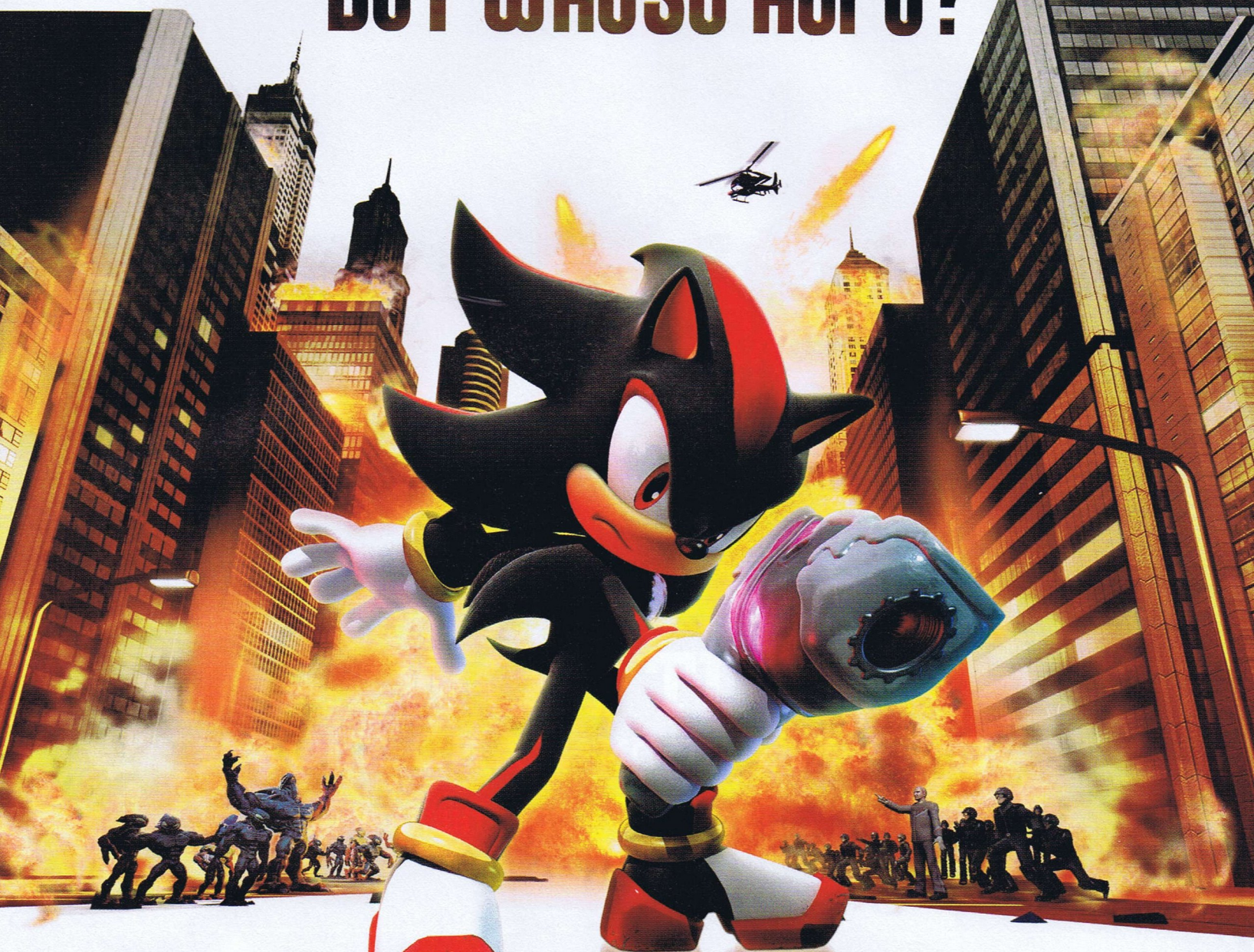

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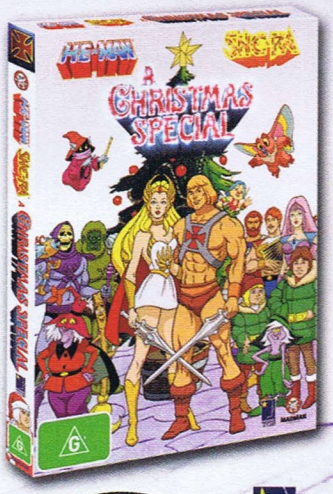

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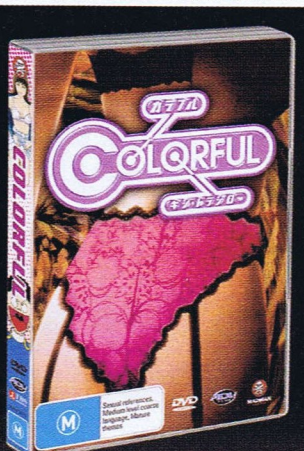

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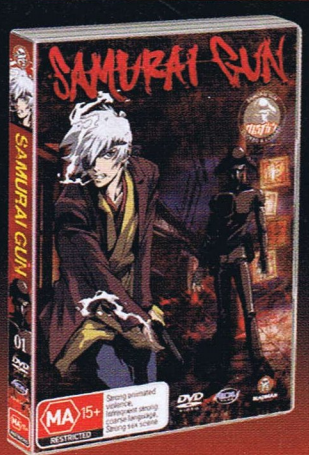

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32 SOULCALIBUR III

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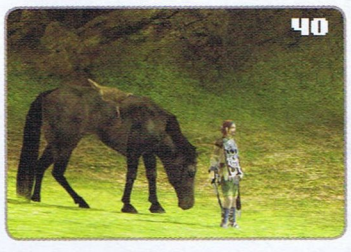

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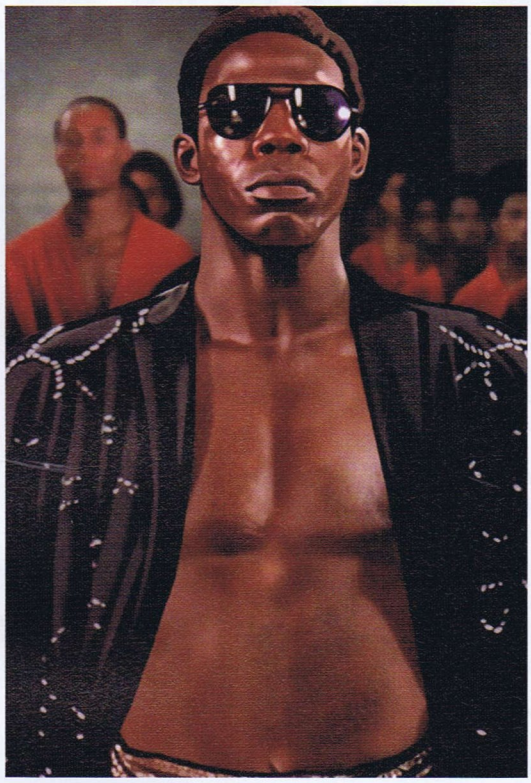
EDITORIAL



[above] The only difference is, Cam was shot and lived...

>> It's been a great month. The IEAA have published the results of their survey into Australians and computer games (see page 13), which clearly show that not only do a large slice of Aussies play games in the first place, but that the average gamer age is 24 and a significant percentage are girls. What this means is that we finally have some solid figures to back up the push for an R 18+ rating for videogames, so now would be a good time to get in touch with your state Attorney General about it. Not only that, but the arguments about the destructive influence of videogames become harder to sustain given that such an expansive cross section of the community play them. Are we all being subconsciously trained as killers? I think not.

The other reason this month falls into hells yeah territory is simple. So. Many. Games. You know it's the end of the year when your desk starts getting swallowed by code. Fortunately (or unfortunately depending on how much spare cashish you have), the majority of the titles are pretty damn good too - Soulcalibur III, Liberty City Stories, Civ IV, The Movies, King Kong, Shadow of the Colossus, American Wasteland, Prince 3, Fire Emblem, the list goes on. Sure, Shadow the Hedgehog isn't exactly Sonic Team's finest hour, but that's called balancing out the universe my friends. I guess all that's left to say is "can you dig iiiiiiiit?" Enjoy.

Cam Shea >> Editor

HYPER CREW Monthly Top 5 Games

Cam Shea - Editor
1. Shadow of the Colossus – PS2
   "Almost the best thing ever."
2. Soulcalibur III – PS2
3. Prince of Persia: The Two Thrones – PS2
4. King Kong - Xbox
5. Need for Speed: Most Wanted - Xbox

Daniel Wilks - Deputy Editor
1. Soulcalibur III – PS2
   "Fear my l337 tambourine skills!"
2. Shadow of the Colossus – PS2
3. Tony Hawk's American Wasteland – PS2
4. World of Warcraft - PC
5. Call of Cthulu: Dark Corners – Xbox

Malcolm "DD" Campbell - Art
1. WipEout Pure – PSP
   "The Omega Pack is 100% pure dope."
2. Resident Evil 4 – PS2
3. Star Wars Battlefront 2 – Xbox
4. King Kong – PS2
5. Pro Evo 5 – PS2

Adam Phillips - PCPP Art Guy
1. Everybody's Golf – PSP
   "Most. Frustrating. Thing. Ever!"
2. Battlefield 2 – PC
3. Ridge Racer – PSP
4. Total Overdose – PC
5. With myself – non PC

HYPER>>

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News

IN THE NEWS: Hyper: now with more pie charts! / Sony to re-release ICO alongside Shadow of the Colossus in February!

GAME ON

VENTURE CAPITAL FOR OZ GAMING

A shot in the arm for local developers

On November 7, Australia's first venture capital fund for the games industry was launched by Senator Helen Coonan, Federal Minister for Communications, Information Technology and the Arts. Known as the Electronic Games Investment Fund (EGIF), the fund was started with $47,000 from the Queensland Department of State Development and Innovation, and the aim is to raise at least $5 million a year for the next five years for a total of $25 million in share capital. Australian games development represents a fast growing $100m sector, and this fund will help strengthen it.

The fund launch was welcomed by the President of the Game Developers' Association of Australia (GDAA), Evelyn Richardson, who said: "local funding for Australian game development has long been an issue and now we have an opportunity to fundamentally change the face of the industry". She also highlighted that: "Globally, the industry is experiencing double-digit growth, with a recent 2005 report by PricewaterhouseCoopers estimating the 2004 market for interactive video game software at $34.5 billion, compared with film takings of $33.2 billion."

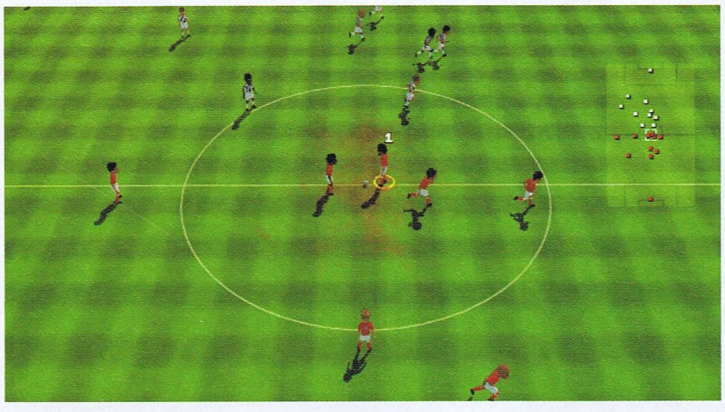
Rather than jumping into the deep end, the fund will initially be used to invest in games made for handhelds such as the PSP, GBA and NDS, which traditionally have a lower development cost ($500,000 - $1 million) over a 12-18 month development period. Once the system proves itself, however, funding offers will be extended to PC and console game development, which is more lucrative, but also sees games cost as much as $10-15 million to make over several years.

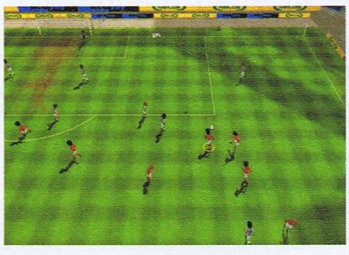
One of the biggest advantages of the fund is that it breaks the usual publisher-funded development model, which, although seeing the risk borne by the publisher, also sees the publisher keep the intellectual property spoils. As Tom Parkinson, EGIF Chairman puts it: "As a result of EGIF funding, developers will be released from the onerous constraints publishers impose, retain their intellectual property and be able to negotiate higher royalty rates from publishers. Australian developers will now be in a position to retain their talent pool knowing that potentially funding will be available and this will aid in the growth of the industry in Australia." There are advantages to the publishers too, mind you, as Parkinson states: "Publishers will be supportive of EGIF given that their risks are mitigated through the non-provision of development funding. Their money will not be tied up for the years in development and can be spent on Marketing. Through EGIF's investment, all sides in the Games industry can increase their profits, EGIF will share in the gains and provide franked dividends to its shareholders."

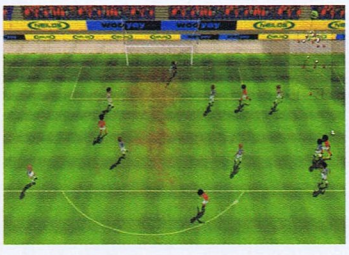
[above] Australia is good at making robot games. More money means bigger robots!

FIRST LOOK! SENSIBLE SOCCER!

Sensible Soccer PC, PS2, Xbox • **Developer:** Kuju Entertainment (with John Hare – the creator of the original game) • **The Hype:** One of the all time classics returns, still packing the top down view and fast paced gameplay.







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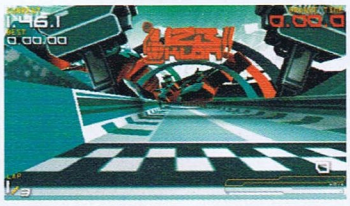
WipEout Pure Omega Pack PSP • **Developer:** Sony Liverpool
The Hype: The Omega Pack comes with funky new skin, craft and track designs by four of Europe's most respected visual artists - Burgerman, James, Macfarland & 123 Klan. It's online now!



SURVEY

IEAA GETS ITS FACTS STRAIGHT

Some great new stats on Aussie Gamers!

For years Australian gamers have been clamouring for an R 18+ rating and now it looks like things may finally be going our way. The problem in the past has been that getting the rating requires all of the state Attorney-Generals to agree to the rating but until now there has been no local data to back up the claims that gamers are getting older and there are few (if any) adverse effects to gaming, making it easy for the detractors to ignore the arguments presented in favour of the rating. Earlier this year the IEAA and Bond University undertook an extensive survey of 1601 Australian households to find out the average Australian gaming habits. Not only did the finding strongly back up everything we have understood from American and European surveys in recent years, it also showed some rather uniquely Australian gaming habits.

The first and most basic finding was that out of all of the households surveyed, a staggering 76% has some form of gaming device. Of those 1222 households:

- **91% have a PC**
- **57% have a console**
- **14% have a handheld gaming device**
- **42% are homes with children**

This final statistic, only 42% of the households having children (defined as being under 18 years of age) is the most telling part of the basic survey findings – less than half of the houses surveyed that played games had children. This goes a long way to dispelling the "games are only for kids" stigma. The basic findings go further to show that the average age of an Australian gamer (taken from all of the surveyed households containing gamers, irregardless of age) is, in fact, 24. The age number also showed something else very interesting; the average age of a non-gamer was just over 50, showing that there is a real generation gap between gamers and non-gamers. It seems to indicate that people who grew up in the console/PC age have continued to game and that those non-gamers never had exposure to games. The basic findings also show that the male/female divide is closing, with 38% of the gamers being female and 62% being male.

As far as behaviours go:

- **70% of surveyed gamers said they played at least once a week**
- **62% said they played for up to an hour a go**
- **42% said they played socially or with others**
- **55% said they would be playing as much or more in ten years time**

For regular leisure activities, Australian gamers partake in the following:

- **47% play sport**
- **55% are avid readers**
- **62% shop**
- **43% go to the park**

Australian attitudes towards gaming also seem quite advanced with:

- **78% of adults in gamer households saying that computer and videogames are educational**
- **59% of adults in gamer households saying computer and videogames are part of a normal leisure cycle**
- **58% of adults in gaming households thinking that gaming is a social activity**

Now, to the topic I'm sure you've all been waiting for – how does the Average surveyed Australian feel about an R 18+ rating and general games classification in games? Parental attitudes towards games and ratings showed:

- **66% of parents played games with their children at least once a month**
- **61% of parents monitor their children's gameplay "a lot" and a further 26% monitor it "a little".**
- **76% of parents set rules about the kind of games their children can play**
- **71% of households mandated that games had to be purchased by parents**
- **87% of parents said they had to be present or have given permission for a child to purchase a game**

Now on to actual classification:

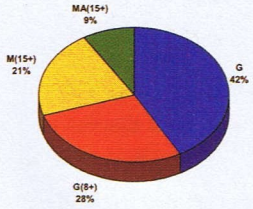
- **68% of Australian parents say that classification information is very important when they hire or purchase a game for their children**

Shockingly, only 27% of Australians (regardless of being gamers or not) know that there is no R 18+ rating for games but on the other hand, a massive 88% of people surveyed (regardless of whether they play games or not) believe that Australia should have an R 18+ rating for games.

If 88% of people surveyed believe that Australia should have an R 18+ rating for games (keeping in mind that the survey has a +- 2.4% margin of error) then that definitely shows that the recalcitrant Attorney-Generals who have been vetoing the bill (not mentioning any names or states) should maybe rethink their stance. The IEAA have been busy travelling around the country lobbying the various Attorney Generals to rethink their views. Considering that the Victorian Attorney General has recently started actively campaigning for a R 18+ rating there may be a change in the wind. Fingers crossed.

ieaa
INTERACTIVE ENTERTAINMENT ASSOCIATION OF AUSTRALIA

Games Classified by the OFLC



[above] The IEAA Gameplay report had lots of informative graphs. Here's one! Mmm... pie

WINNERS HYPER 145

DOOM

WINNERS

- Bill Larson, Coorparoo, QLD
- Karl Hosken, Geraldton, WA
- Kacey McManus, Forest Lake, QLD
- Darren Hing, Maroubra, NSW
- Ian Gielen, Yarra Junction, VIC
- Michael Ward, Westcourt, QLD
- Sasha Liu, Alexandria, NSW
- Craig Heath, City East, QLD
- Marlow Family, Bassendean, WA
- Luke Turner, Chadstowe, VIC

RUNNERS UP

- Jen Curtis, Sefton Park, SA
- David Garrett, Doncaster East, VIC
- Ben Moore, Research, VIC
- Ron Ferguson, Carina, QLD
- Pamela Jackson, Stones Corner, QLD
- Daniel Parker, Tieri, QLD
- V. Bollas, Hoppers Crossing, VIC
- D. Gloede, Queenstown, SA
- Benita Green, Warwick, QLD
- Corey Wright-Steele, Springfield, QLD

EVIL DEAD

WINNER

- John Dean, Eltham North, VIC

RUNNERS UP

- Trish Jacobs, Aberfoyle Park, SA
- A. Minnikin, Birkdale, QLD
- Beau Hansen, Mullumbimby, NSW
- B. Bridle, Mudgee, NSW
- Alita Pereira, Glenmore Park, NSW
- Ben James, Bayswater, VIC
- Jason New, New Lambton, NSW
- James Hearnes, Drouin, VIC
- Meaghan O'Brien, Shepparton, VIC
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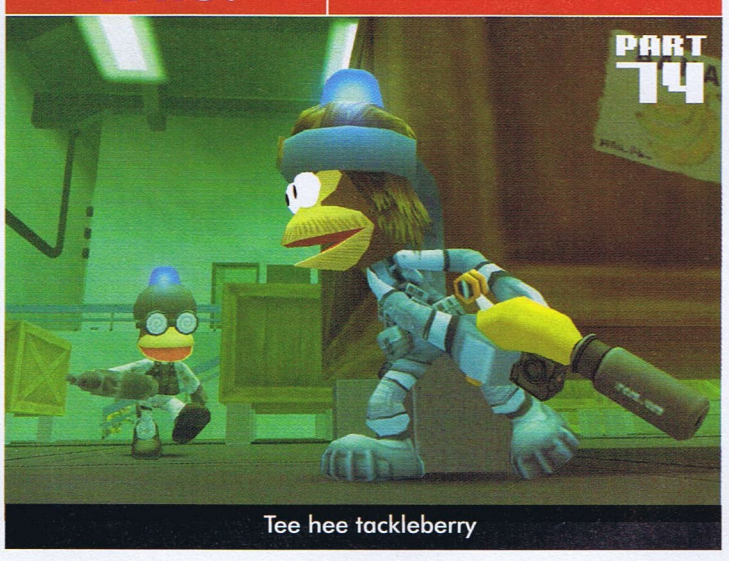

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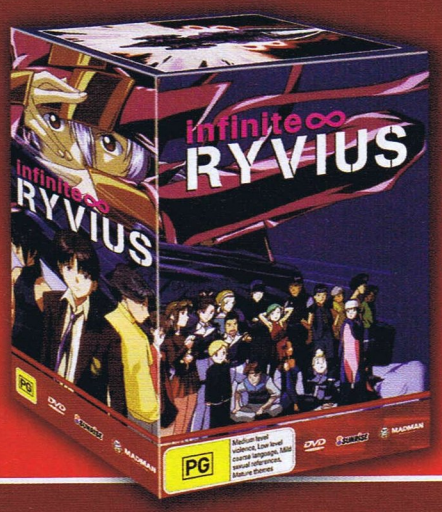

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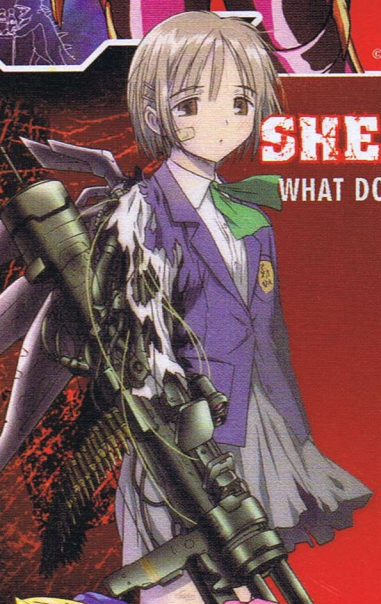

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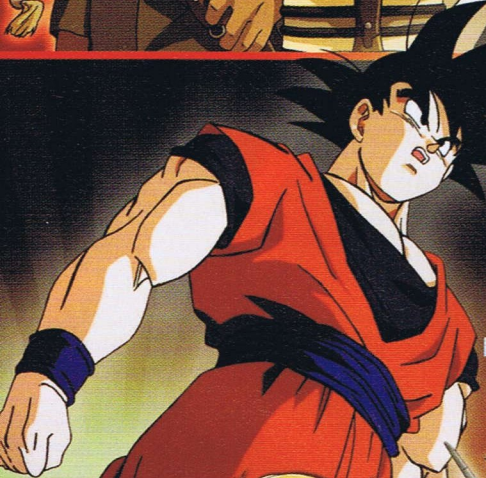

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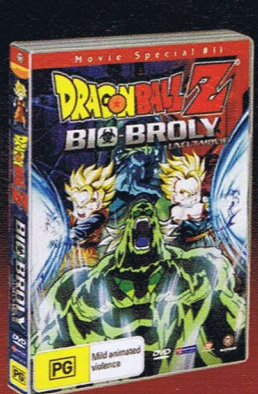

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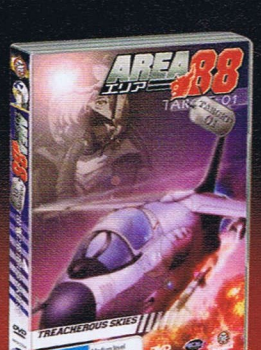

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PGR3

There's little doubt that Project Gotham Racing 3 is one of the most anticipated Xbox 360 titles, and to celebrate its imminent release, it's time to go on a virtual test drive. Hop in.

DOING LINES

First things first. PGR2 fans will definitely notice the tweaks to the driving mechanics. Cars have a greater sense of weight now and there's more subtlety in the variation in handling across the range of cars. Overall the feeling leans more towards realism than previous Gotham games, so it may take a little while to adjust. Underlining this shift is the overhaul of Gotham 3's Kudos system. As we said in our TGS wrap up last month, you'll still be rewarded for driving with flair and style – for pulling 360s, catching air and getting on two wheels, but you'll be judged on technical driving skills too. This side of the Kudos system is very much about staying on racing lines - how you approach a corner, your positioning in the corner and your exit out. You'll be judged on all of them and rewarded accordingly. In all, the new system looks to have something for everyone.

Another big change is that you can forget class-based racing because PGR3 is all about giving gamers a taste of the greatest supercars on the planet. The criteria for inclusion? Every car must be able to reach at least 170mph. Nice. So we're talking 80 fully licensed and authentically modeled cars from the likes of Lamborghini, Ferrari, Astin Martin and Dodge.

But hey, as anyone with a small penis will tell you, it's what you do with it that counts, and PGR3 is neatly divided into two main options - Career mode and Playtime. Career mode can be played entirely offline, but if you want you can hop online and tackle races against players of similar skill. Also cool is that you're now completely in control of your career. If you don't want to use a certain car you don't have to (you can even just stick with one car all the way through if you want to), and you don't have to struggle all the way through the game just to see one of the cities. The way you approach the Career mode is up to you.

Playtime, on the other hand, is all about having fun without worrying about rankings, and can also be played both on and offline. From Playtime you can hop into a whole host of cool modes. These include the likes of Street Race, Team Street Race, Eliminator and Team Eliminator, but there are two that we particularly like the sound of. In Capture the Track, the course is broken up into sections and you must try and capture more than your opponents by getting the best split time through individual sections. And then there's the other mode, which we're calling Take That, Kudos McTimelimit, where you must beat a really harsh time limit by racking up Kudos points which temporarily freezes the timer. Keep that Kudos rolling in! Of course, there are a bunch of other modes that Bizarre Creations haven't announced, but hey, ya gotta have some stuff left to discover right?

CHOOSE YOUR ROUTE

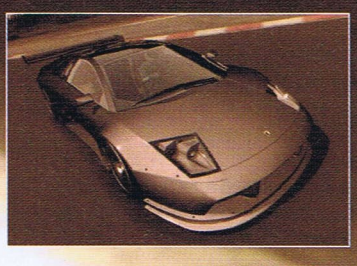
We're also really looking forward to giving the Route Creator mode a try. In it, you can view city courses from a top down perspective and set your own route to race, whether it be a circuit or a point A to point B race. From there you can either race it on your own (choosing from easy, medium and hard opponent AI) or take it online to play against friends. The online option is what's going to make this mode – even if, somehow, you start to tire of the Bizarre Creations courses, there will always be people trying to devise new courses, the best of which will then get their own following online. There's even a random course generator function for the truly apathetic.

All the courses take place across four cities - New York, Tokyo, Las Vegas and London, plus (as seems to be standard these days in any racing sim) the Nurburgring – the most demanding race track in the world. All four of the cities are massive and stunningly detailed thanks to high resolution textures created from the thousands of photos the team took of each location. Of course, there's a danger that while this approach may look technically impressive, that it will fail to capture the "soul" of each city, so to help make each location feel more alive, Bizarre Creations have included highly reactive crowds of fully polygonal spectators – cheering when you pull off a nice move and jumping out of the way if you slam into a barrier near them. Admittedly GT4 did it first, but this is at a whole new level of detail.

And then there are the cars. Mmm... the cars. Simply put, they look incredible. Each car is composed of 80,000 polygons, and sport the most detailed interiors we've ever seen (accounting for 40,000 of those polys for those that are counting) with working and accurate dashboards, plus real-time reflections off the car exteriors, bumpers, mirrors and even the inside of the windshield. You're going to want to play from one of the internal viewpoints too, not just because it looks so real, but because of the added immersion – the way the sound of your engine changes when inside the car (the engine sounds for each car have been individually recorded – so you want to get the most out of them), the changes to visibility and the way the camera moves with the suspension of the car.

We're also pleased to report that all the cars in the game feature damage modeling. Although mostly for show, it's still cool seeing bumpers getting dented and mirrors breaking. Take that Gran Turismo! Indeed, that may well be the rallying cry from gamers all over the world when they slide their copy of PGR3 into the slot of their brand new Xbox 360. ≪

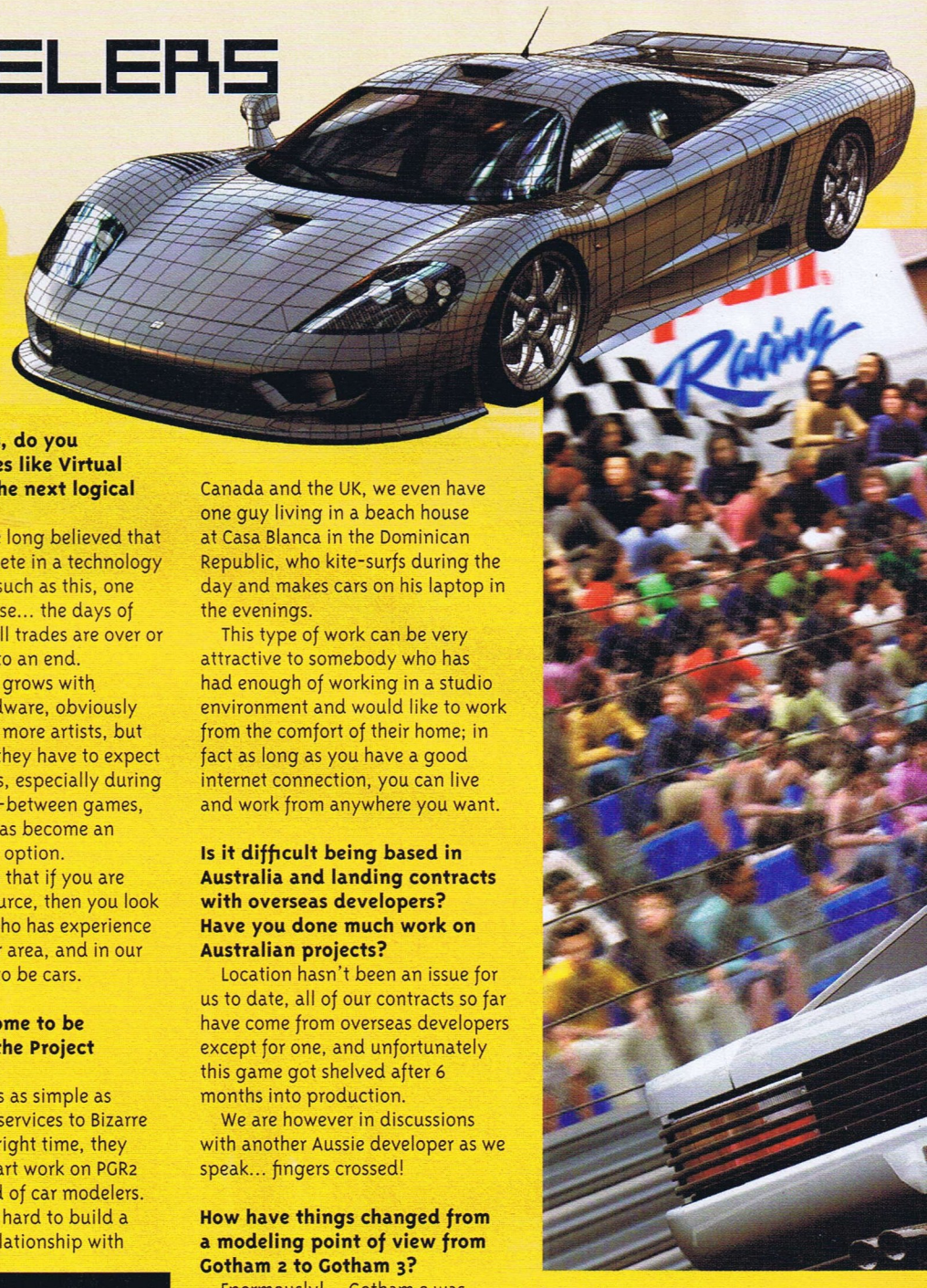
WHAT WE'D LIKE TO SEE: Obviously if the game ran at 60fps that would be nice, but hell, even at 30 it's going to be a dream to play...



SEPIA TONED Much like Gran Turismo 4, PGR3 has a Photo mode which enables you to take screenshots anywhere in the game. In a single player race? Just pause the game and go straight into photo mode! There are a hell of a lot of options to play with too, from basic arrangement options that allow you to pan around the car, zoom in and out, adjust height and angle and so on, through to changing focus points and shutter speeds, changing exposure and contrast levels, the obligatory sepia tone option and more. It's going to be great fun to tool around with, and we have our fingers crossed that you'll be able to post shots online and send them to friends.

SUPERMODELERS

Hyper talks to Gotham's Aussie connection, Virtual Mechanix's **Chris Wise**



» Project Gotham Racing 2 and 3 feature some of the most gorgeous car models ever to grace the world of videogames. But here's an interesting fact you probably don't know – they were modeled by an Australian company called Virtual Mechanix. We had a chat with **Chris Wise**, the founder and managing director of the company, to find out what's involved.

HYPER: Tell us a little about Virtual Mechanix. How did you get a start in the industry? What kinds of backgrounds do the staff have?

Chris: I started in the games industry during the 90's as an artist working for a Melbourne games developer, who incidentally had just started working on an Australian Touring Car game, so this was a dream come true because one of my great interests in life is cars and motor sports.

I loved modeling cars and eventually started thinking 'why not try to make a business from this' so when the time was right, I parted company and formed Virtual Mechanix.

I managed to secure a contract fairly quickly which involved making cars for the Atari/Milestone Xbox game 'Racing Evoluzione'. This was a huge break because we were able to prove ourselves in the marketplace which in turn helped us to get more contracts and begin to grow as a company.

We're still relatively small with 11 people including 9 car modelers at present. Most of the artists are experienced game industry car modelers, having worked for companies such as EA, Atari and Codemasters in the past, yet we also have a few young artists with no previous studio experience. We make a high priority of sharing knowledge regardless of one's level of experience so that everyone benefits.

Above all, I believe that having a deep passion for cars is a must if you wish to succeed in this line of work... if you don't you'll eventually go nuts ;)

3D vehicle modeling is a very specialised area to work in, but considering we already have a wide range of developers licensing engine and middleware for their games, do you think companies like Virtual Mechanix are the next logical step?

Definitely, I've long believed that in order to compete in a technology driven business such as this, one needs to specialise... the days of being a jack of all trades are over or quickly coming to an end.

As art content grows with advances in hardware, obviously developers need more artists, but the downside is they have to expect higher overheads, especially during the downtime in-between games, so outsourcing has become an extremely viable option.

It makes sense that if you are looking to outsource, then you look for a company who has experience in that particular area, and in our case it happens to be cars.

How did you come to be involved with the Project Gotham series?

That really was as simple as introducing our services to Bizarre Creations at the right time, they were about to start work on PGR2 and were in need of car modelers.

We've worked hard to build a good working relationship with them over the past few years and I think it's paid off for both parties.

TYPICALLY EACH GOTHAM 2 CAR TOOK AROUND 2 WEEKS FROM START TO FINISH, BUT GOTHAM 3 CARS WERE INITIALLY TAKING UP TO 10 WEEKS EACH!

Why does it make sense for Bizarre Creations to outsource work like this rather than do it in-house?

I think first and foremost it's very difficult to find good car modelers, plus it removes a large burden off their shoulders which allows them to concentrate more on other areas of the game.

We have an added advantage in that we will employ staff as sub-contractors, for instance we have car modelers working externally for us from countries such as Canada and the UK, we even have one guy living in a beach house at Casa Blanca in the Dominican Republic, who kite-surfs during the day and makes cars on his laptop in the evenings.

This type of work can be very attractive to somebody who has had enough of working in a studio environment and would like to work from the comfort of their home; in fact as long as you have a good internet connection, you can live and work from anywhere you want.

Is it difficult being based in Australia and landing contracts with overseas developers? Have you done much work on Australian projects?

Location hasn't been an issue for us to date, all of our contracts so far have come from overseas developers except for one, and unfortunately this game got shelved after 6 months into production.

We are however in discussions with another Aussie developer as we speak... fingers crossed!

How have things changed from a modeling point of view from Gotham 2 to Gotham 3?

Enormously! ...Gotham 2 was very straight forward compared to Gotham 3.

Gotham 3 has been a huge learning process for everybody involved, not only in terms of detail on the car models themselves, but the way in which the cars were modeled to the techniques for texturing and shading them and the amount of time involved in creating each car.

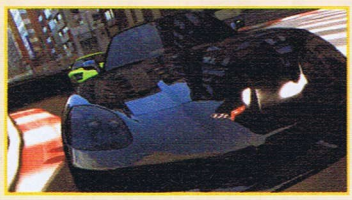
Typically each Gotham 2 car took around 2 weeks from start to finish, but Gotham 3 cars were initially taking up to 10 weeks each! With some fine tuning and getting over the learning curve, we were able to eventually get this down to around 5-6 weeks per car.

Could you run through the process of modeling a car from start to finish?

Sure, we're supplied with all the reference material we need, which can be a combination of photographs, blueprints or technical drawings and sometimes actual automotive manufacturing CAD models.

If for example we only have photos to work from, it can be very difficult to get a good approximation of the vehicles proportions in relation to each elevation (due to focal distortion), so we account for this by splicing a series of photos taken at increments along the side, top, front and rear of a car together to give us a clear undistorted image to use as a template. We can then trace each elevation during the process of forming our 3D model.

We're now using a modeling technique known as Subdivision



HEY MA, I'M ON TV! The Live functionality is greater than ever for PGR3. This time around Bizarre Creations are really trying to give the game the kind of coverage and allure that "real" sports do. Hence, Gotham TV. This enables you to watch live feeds of the best players in the world, get up to the minute news when friends break records or when a tournament is about to start, and of course, compete online and try to climb the ranking system. Races can be watched in real-time or later as a replay, and you can watch from a whole host of viewpoints, whether you want to be in the passenger seat of your friend's car, toggling through all the racers or just lapping it up in the grandstands. And check this out – spectator mode can host 30,000 viewers, so when there's a big race you could truly be competing on a world stage! We can't wait for Bizarre Creations to start announcing the first tournaments – we'll see you there.

Surface (sub-d) modeling for next-gen cars, whereby we can build a relatively low detail base model and use an automated algorithm that increases the detail at the push of a button. This effectively smoothes out the surfaces of the 3D model by adding many more polygons and appropriating their positions in-between the existing polygons... the end result is that curves are rounder and smoother.

I guess one aspect of this type of modeling that's good news for our clients is that we are now building cars that are in some ways future proof, cars that can be re-used and given more detail at the push of a button once future generations of hardware can handle the extra levels of detail... I don't think we're too far away from seeing cars with 1 million plus poly budgets being utilized as in-game player cars.

Something we are now using often are material 'Shaders', these are materials that affectively replace the use of simple texture maps. A shader can have many individual properties that can be altered and adjusted, for example if I want to replicate the leather on a seat I can apply a shader designed to reproduce the appearance of leather and I can have full control over its colour, texture, depth of grain, transparent and reflective properties etc.

So in a nutshell, we build polygonal car models, apply shaders/textures to them and then we have all the associated work of naming all the parts correctly (so they can be identified by the game engine) sometimes there are parts that have to be animated, we have to make damageable components

and apply position markers for many parts such as lights etc so they'll work properly in-game.

Real-time next-gen car models are very complex, and therefore have to be checked thoroughly if they're to work as expected... it only takes a single spelling mistake in a named part for it to not work as it should, therefore the bug fixing process can be extremely long and drawn out.

The car manufacturers themselves have the last say in how their cars are represented in a game, so there are times where they request alterations here and there, sometimes they alter parts on the actual car so we must follow suit.

All in all, building 3D car models for games can be a slow and a sometimes monotonous experience, often requiring a lot of late nights. Having a passion for cars certainly helps keep the motivational levels up throughout the process, but it's the end result that's very rewarding... seeing your cars in a game like PGR3 in all their glory is extremely satisfying. <<

MASS EFFECT

System: **Xbox 360** ■ Category: **Action RPG** ■ Players: **1** ■ Developer: **Bioware** ■ Due: **Late 2006**

Mass Effect is a new Xbox 360 exclusive sci-fi action RPG from Bioware, the developers behind such classics as KotOR and the Baldur's Gate series. The setting is the 23rd century, at a time when humanity is expanding further out into the galaxy and trying to establish itself as a galactic power.

The crux of the story will deal with the ultimate showdown between the organic and the inorganic, as you battle to try and stop armies of artificial life forms from decimating innocent planets. But here's the kicker – they're led by a legendary human agent who has gone rogue.

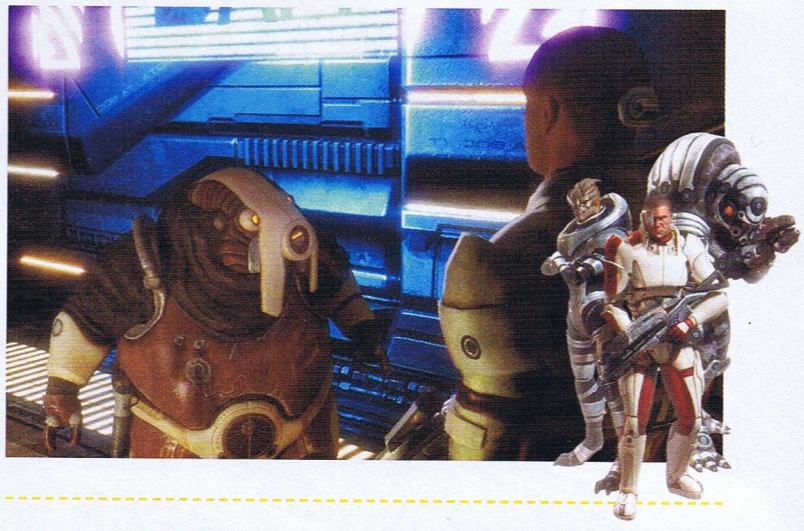
You play as a human "Specter", the leader of an elite team tasked with taking the invaders down, and you even have a starship (the flying kind, not the knee deep in the hoopla kind) at your command. When on missions the action will take a three person squad real-time combat form, but there will be plenty of RPG aspects too. As your character evolves you'll have countless choices of upgrades, from tech skills to biotics (which give you super human abilities).

As you'd expect, your actions and decisions will have ramifications, and broadly speaking you'll have good and evil options, as well as a plunder-the-lot-of-em self serving option which essentially allows you to abuse your position. Sweet!

The galaxy is a huge place too, so when you want to take a break from the main story arc you can go off exploring uncharted worlds in search of resources and powerful technologies, both of which could help your main quest. Or just buxom alien babes, whatever floats your boat.

Bioware are really gunning for a big new franchise for Mass Effect. Not only is it a planned trilogy (which means that you'll be taking the character you create at the start of the first game all the way through!), but there's also talk of episodic content for download over Xbox Live, which could give gamers even more of an insight into Bioware's stunning new world.

Here we see Glen, modeling the latest in Biowear



Cheesy caption? No tanks

TOO HUMAN

Systems: **Xbox 360** ■ Category: **Action** ■ Players: **1-Multi** ■ Developer: **Silicon Knights** ■ Due: **Late 2006**

How long has this game been on the cards? Nintendo fans have been talking about it for years, but finally Silicon Knights' adventurous new project looks set to finally see the light of day on Xbox 360. And thanks to some great design work and the Unreal Engine 3, it's looking stunning.

Another game that's the first part in a trilogy and that deals with the overriding theme of man versus machine (see above), Too Human sees players take on the role of the last defender of the human race as it faces an onslaught of monstrous war machines. But here's the coolest bit – you're a cybernetic god.

We're not really sure exactly what that means at this stage, but we do know that you're a seriously kick ass character who can be augmented as the game progresses, and is pitted against overwhelming numbers of enemies. The focus is squarely on high impact third person action, which switches smoothly between rapid-fire melee combos and gunplay. There will be a host of context sensitive moves to keep the death dealing varied, and the animation is already looking incredible.

Silicon Knights are determined to make this as cinematic as possible an experience, and to that end they've taken camera control out of the hands of the player. While that sounds like a disaster waiting to happen, they've said the system that will determine the camera's perspective will keep things intuitive for the player, while also freeing up the second analogue stick for extra player controls. We'll know more about this next year, but if it plays as good as it looks we're in for a treat.

we play seriously...

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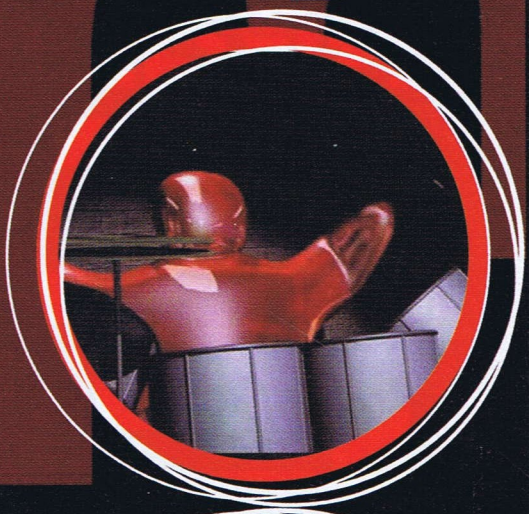

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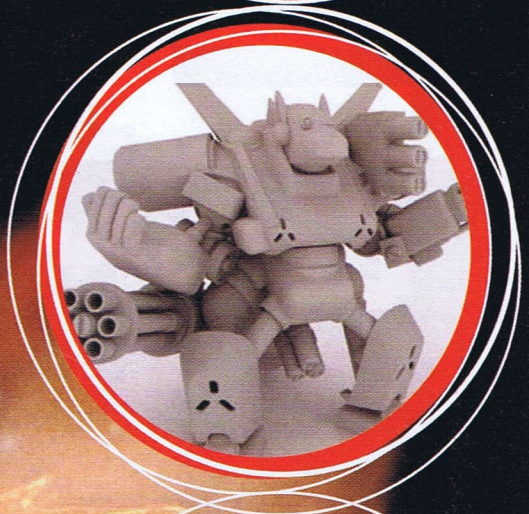

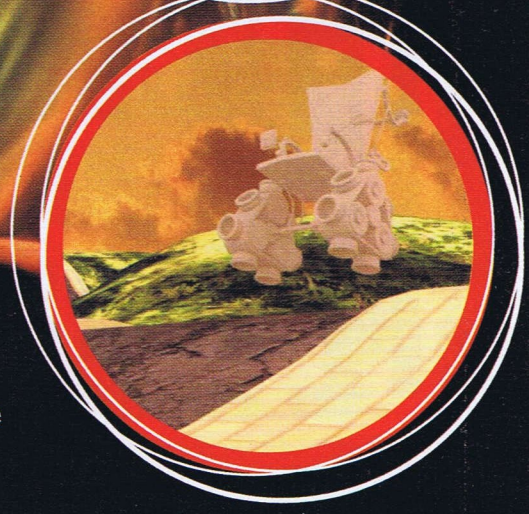

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THE HYPER READERS' TOP 50 GAMES OF ALL TIME

Tournament on the Megadrive as the ultimate multiplayer game. Four player compatibility, easy to pick up and play controls and next to no load times made for the best fun a bunch of friends could have. The fact that you could record best lap times added single player motivation to hone your skills for the next multiplayer session." **Jeremy Kinsella**

48. PLANESCAPE: TORMENT
PC. 1999

47. BATTLEFIELD 2
PC. 2005

46. SUPER METROID
SNES. 1994

45. GUILTY GEAR X2
PS2. 2003

44. CIVILIZATION III
PC. 2001
"When I first started playing Civilization 3 I remember thinking that if I wasn't already un-employed, I would have been fired by now. Only other Civ fans can fully understand the amount of time and concentration needed to build cities, research technology and repel evil Gandhi's fascist attacks. From trade agreements to mutual protection pacts, this addictive mix of war and diplomacy will have you begging for just one more turn. Oh and folks, hand in your resignations now, Civilization 4 is coming." **Surgeon**

43. THE LONGEST JOURNEY
PC. 1999
"Funsoft came close to a Graphic Adventure renaissance with this epic gem of gaming. Sure, Lucasarts were the king of offbeat, with their monkeys, tentacles and the fandango (we didn't know Mr. Beardy did hentai – Ed.) – but The Longest Journey created a serious fantasy narrative of two worlds of science and magic colliding and crafted an engrossing storytelling experience like no other." **Rob Something (sorry mate, we couldn't read your signature)**

42. STARCRAFT
PC. 1998

41. PAPER MARIO: Thousand Year Door
GCN. 2004

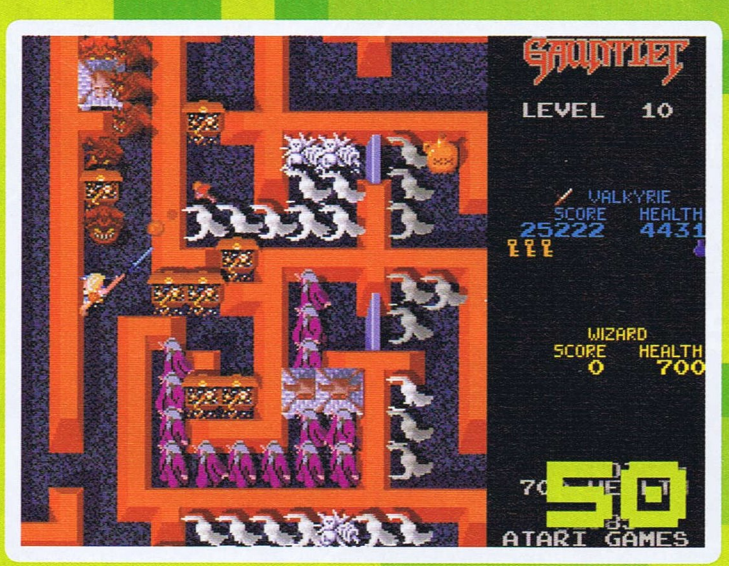
40. MORROWIND
PC. 2002

39. IKARUGA
DREAMCAST. 2002

38. DIABLO 2
PC. 2000
"I've been playing Diable and Diablo 2 for some time now. It all started when I got my first PC. I was looking for Internet games to play when I picked up a copy for, like, $20… What followed was really near to an addiction. I just couldn't get enough hack and slash action. I still remember killing Diablo for the first time." **Bulkerking** (sorry if the name's wrong – your handwriting is kinda messy)

50. GAUNTLET
ARCADE. 1984
"Mighty machines that transported friends and strangers (soon to be friends) into a living D&D world to hack through monsters, solve mazes, compete for treasure, share healing and make the most of magical artefacts. As they taunted us to insert more of our allowance we fled from deaths, cursed Lobbers, accidentally shot potions, slew dragons (in part II), played a deadly form of tag, stumbled on secret rooms, got poisoned and descended ever deeper into the dungeon. Never since have I played a game that inspired the same camaraderie or provided such a perfect mix of excitement, fear and fun!" **Adam Williams**

49. MICRO MACHINES 2
SEGA MEGADRIVE/SNES. 1994
"I still think you'd have to go a long way to top Micro Machines 2: Turbo



37. NIGHTS INTO DREAMS
SEGA SATURN. 1996

36. POKEMON RUBY/ SAPPHIRE
GBA. 2003

35. SUPER MARIO WORLD
SNES. 1990

34. GRAN TURISMO
PLAYSTATION. 1997

33. BURNOUT 3: TAKEDOWN
PS2. 2004

32. METAL GEAR SOLID
PLAYSTATION. 1998

31. LEGEND OF ZELDA: Majora's Mask
N64. 2000

30. TETRIS
GAMEBOY. 1989

29. PRO EVOLUTION SOCCER 4
PS2. 2004

28. HITMAN 2: Silent Assassin
PC. 2002

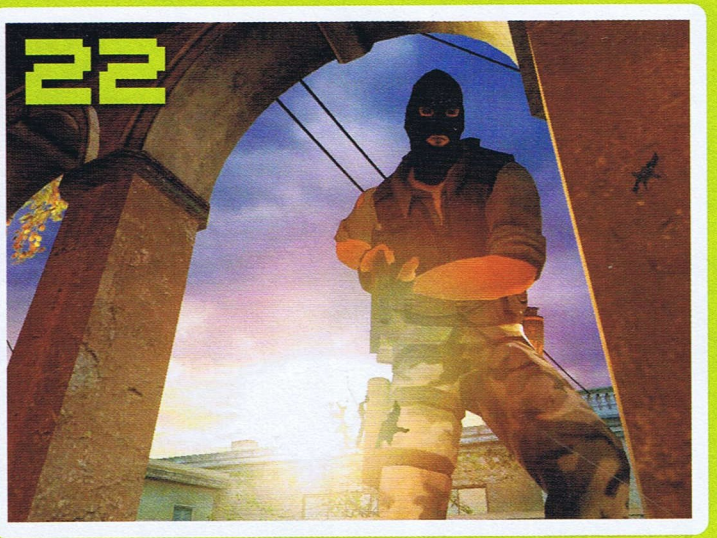
27. GTA: VICE CITY
PS2/XBOX/PC. 2002

26. FINAL FANTASY 8
PLAYSTATION. 1999

25. DEUS EX
PC. 2000
"Where to start? One of the first titles to offer branching story paths, not to mention an absolutely amazing story overall with more attention to detail than almost any other game out there (point in case, go read the "News" articles on how the world was responding to terrorism in the game, considering this was created pre 9/11, the foresight is almost spooky) on top of an original mix of RPG, FPS and stealth elements makes this one of the most unique and immersive titles I've ever played." **Eibach**

24. SOULCALIBUR
DREAMCAST. 1999

23. SILENT HILL
PLAYSTATION. 1999
"Konami took on Capcom in the survival horror genre and came out on top with a true psychological horror experience that brought more than 'jump out at you' scares to the plate. Along with a brilliant industrial/orchestral score from Akira Yamaoka, who brought a serious edge to game music which has yet to be topped. I will never forget the first time I saw the bloodied hospital gurney sitting in the rainy, dark alley. Superb." **Kiroshiya Keefu**



22. CS: SOURCE
PC. 2004
"The greatest online game ever made better? Yes please. Counter-Strike brings everything we love about various FPS titles into one neat little package. It requires a great deal of skill, strategy and patience. It also took E-Sports to new levels through its dynamic, incredibly deep gameplay." **Lordage**

21. CHRONO TRIGGER
SNES. 1995

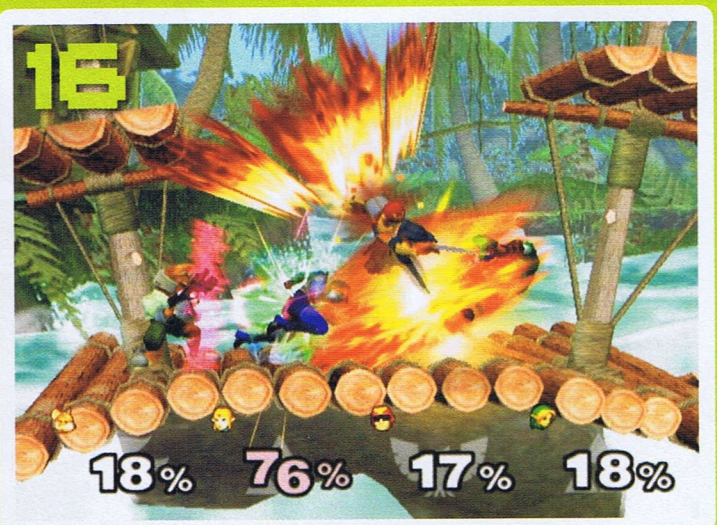
20. VAGRANT STORY
PLAYSTATION. 2000
"Vagrant Story really took me by surprise when it was released. At first I thought it would be a boring, generic and complicated RPG but man, how I was wrong. What really did it for me with VS? The battle system. It was so deep, yet easy to get the hang of. The chain combos made each battle challenging, even against the easiest foes." **Margo**

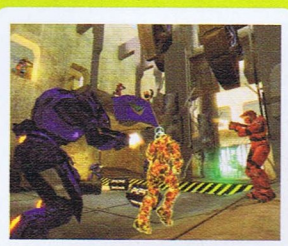
19. WORLD OF WARCRAFT
PC. 2004

18. ICO
PS2. 2001

17. GTA 3
PS2/XBOX/PC. 2001

16. SUPER SMASH BROS: MELEE
GCN. 2001
"This game has consumed more time than any other game I have played and the best thing about it is that most of that time has been multiplayer. It has a great combination of fast paced gameplay, kick ass moves and characters so varied every time you play it's a different experience." **Travis Dark**





15. HALO 2
XBOX. 2004

14. ETERNAL DARKNESS
GCN. 2002

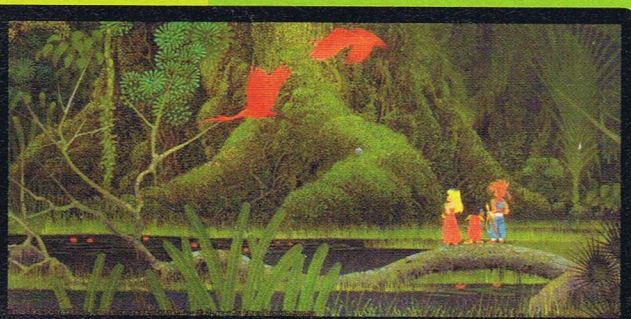
13. CURSE OF MONKEY ISLAND
PC. 1997

12. STREET-FIGHTER 3: THIRD STRIKE
ARCADE/DC/XBOX. 2005

11. METROID PRIME
GCN. 2002

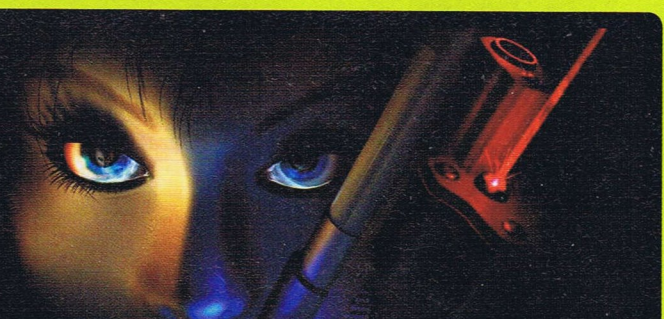
10. HALF-LIFE 2
PC. 2004
"Half-Life 2 represents the most significant evolution in the first person shooter genre in years. Not only did it integrate physics effortlessly into gameplay, but it was exquisitely paced and a blast to play from start to finish." **Cyphernaut**

9. SECRET OF MANA
SNES. 1993
"Practically the only Japanese RPG to break away from the turns-based battle regime. Mana's unique real-time combat system had a substantial amount of depth (certainly more so than what was to appear in the sequels), plus it was coupled with a riotous multi-player mode and undeniably charming aesthetics." **mantis*ant**



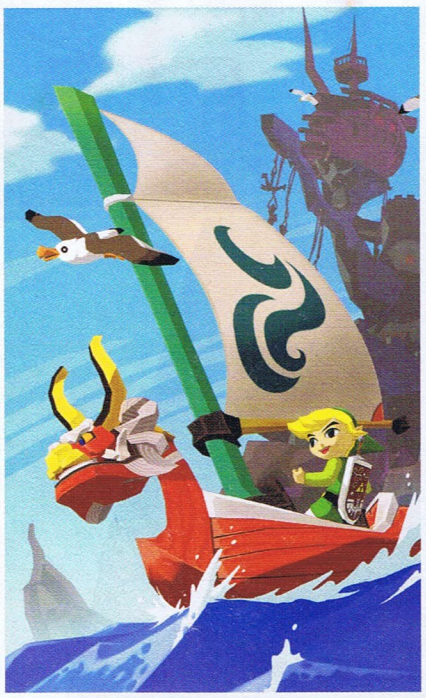
8. MGS3: SNAKE EATER
PS2. 2005
"Sheer brilliance by Hideo Kojima. The entire package of this game works so well – gameplay, boss fights and cutscenes make it the best MGS yet." **Glenn Jackson**

7. PERFECT DARK
N64. 2000
"Perfect Dark was the ultimate farwell for the N64. Rare pulled out all the stops - cool storyline, extensive multiplayer options and smart FPS gameplay that changed heaps depending on difficulty level. Even the frame rate can't hold it back." **Super Dude**



6. FINAL FANTASY 7
PLAYSTATION/PC. 1997
"Damn, and I mean DAMN! The only game that ever made me cry, and it's not like I cry very often. Everything about it, from the brilliant and lovable characters to the marathon gaming sessions I've had with friends trying to finish it in one sitting. The first real RPG I ever played, before this I didn't even know that a game could have a plot, it was all platformers, fighters and shooters. A revelation from high above." **please salt the fries**

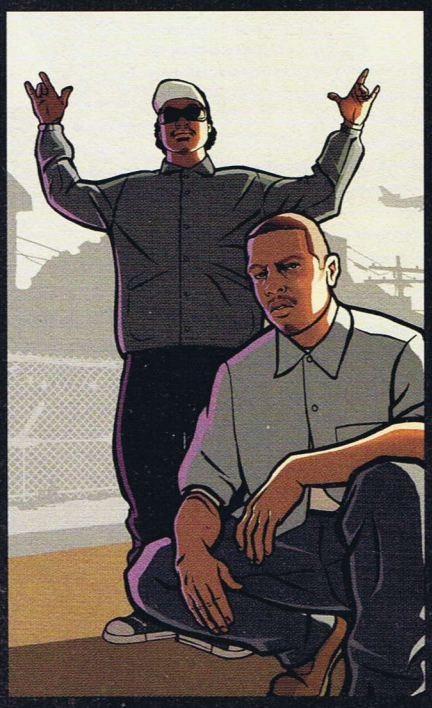
5. SUPER MARIO 64
N64. 1996
"Super Mario 64 was the first game where I really felt freedom, with a convincing 3D environment; responsive, intuitive controls; well designed, diverse levels. A truly revolutionary game that has set the benchmark for many other games." **Robert Haynes**



4. LEGEND OF ZELDA: WIND WAKER

GCN. 2002

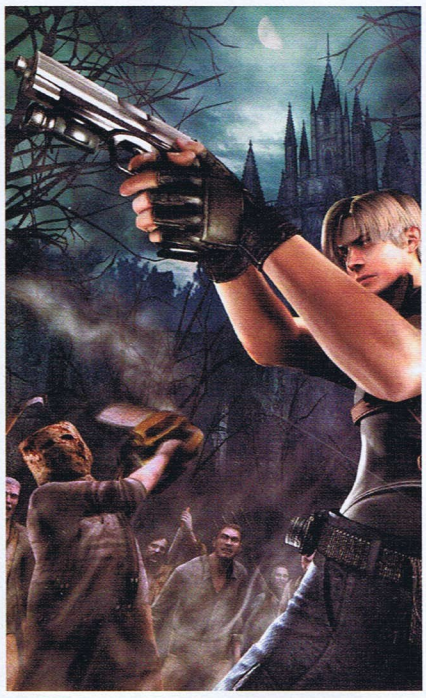
"Most people wouldn't agree, but I've never had more fun with a game. It wasn't as hard or as long as some Zeldas, but every last second of the game I was absolutely rapt with the characters, the fighting, the environments, the plot, everything. From the moment I first took Link off to go find his sister to the moment I plunged the Master Sword into Ganon's skull, I was in Gaming Heaven. This game is one of the main reasons I still love Nintendo." **Jickle**



3. GTA: SAN ANDREAS

PS2/XBOX/PC. 2004

"Simply put, this game is BLOODY HUGE! Even if you don't feel like doing any missions you can waste hours just flying around the country, or hooning through the mountains on a dirtbike. The game gives the ultimate freedom to do what you want with absolutely no consequences... apart from those pesky cops chasing you occasionally." **Stevo**



2. RESIDENT EVIL 4

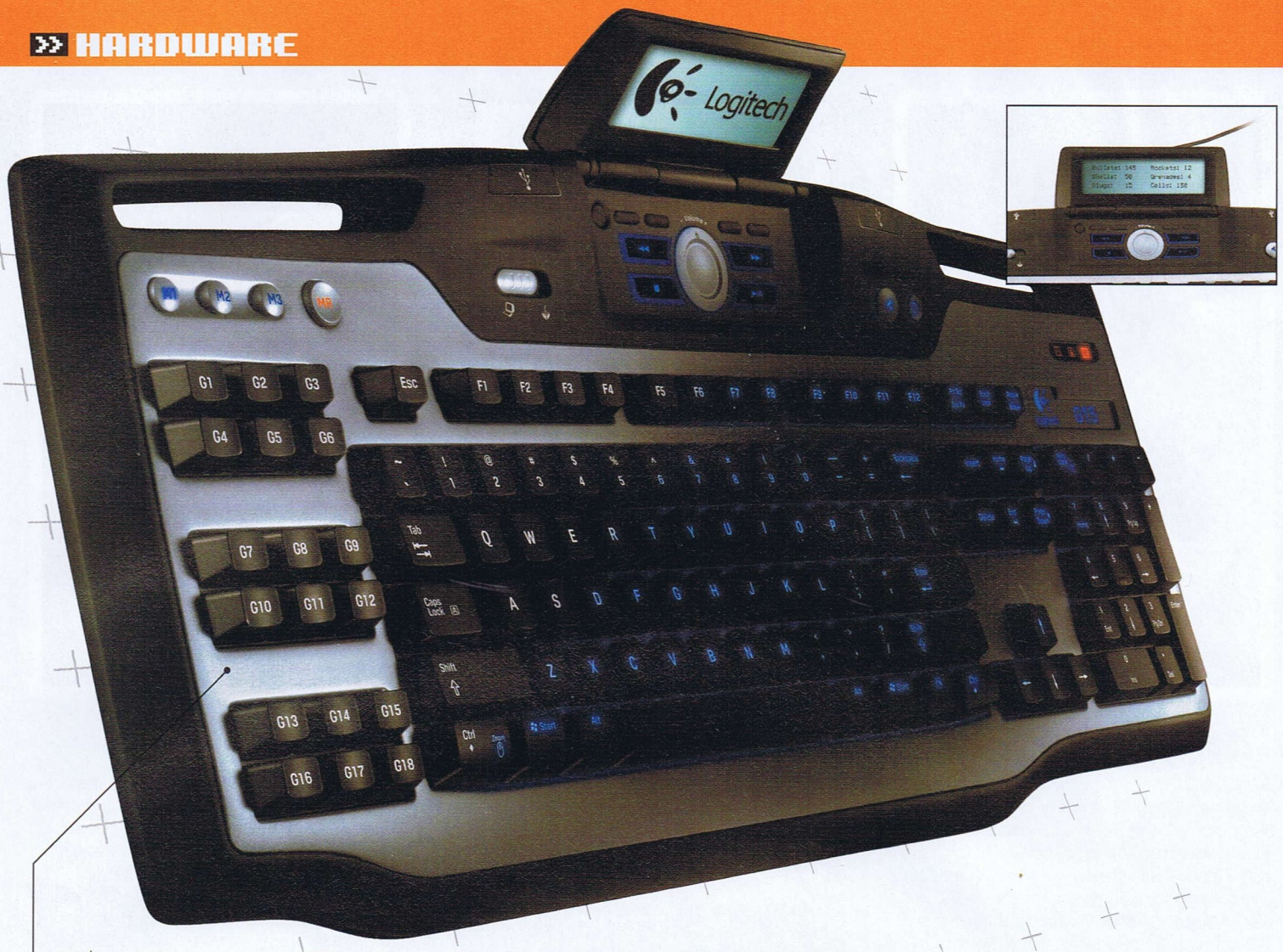
GCN/PS2. 2005

"RE4, starring Zombies 2: The Next Generation, is the king of all action games. It's every bit as tense and creepy as survival horror should be, only this time you're kicking ass – not walking around for hours trying to solve random puzzles. You're taking on nasties in numbers, barricading doors and kicking down ladders. You're upgrading your weaponry, you're taking on massive bosses and you're still needing the brown undies every time you hear a chainsaw start up." **Chareth Cutestory**

1. LEGEND OF ZELDA: Ocarina of Time

N64. 1998

"I've said it dozens of times before - Ocarina of Time is one of the most immersive, fantastic games created. Ever. I had a genuine care for each of the characters, and really felt a need to explore every part of the land of Hyrule. I love the time-travel aspect allowing players to revisit characters seven years down the track to see the many changes which they have gone through during that time. This game gives the player that inner feeling of warmth that few games manage to provide. Seven years since its release, I don't believe one game has toppled it off its number one perch." **Butch**



LOGITECH G15 GAMER'S KEYBOARD

RRP: $139.95 / DISTRIBUTOR: LOGITECH

For quite a while now peripheral companies have been making mice designed for gaming but have been neglecting the left hand for the most part. Ultimately any old keyboard can be used for gaming but to be really good and to get that little edge you need something made for gaming. Something like the G15. Aside from a standard key layout there are two things that give the G15 a head start over the competition – 18 fully programmable keys for saving macros or actions for games (there's a quick macro function that even allows you to code and save macros during gameplay) and a customisable LCD display that can be used to show things like ammo/health remaining and other game stats without having to enter menus or scroll through options. It also looks pretty damn bad-arse. Sure the price tag is quite hefty at $139.95 but you get what you pay for. Fingers crossed that Logitech keep stepping up their keyboard technology like they have with their recent mice – then we'll be in for something really special.

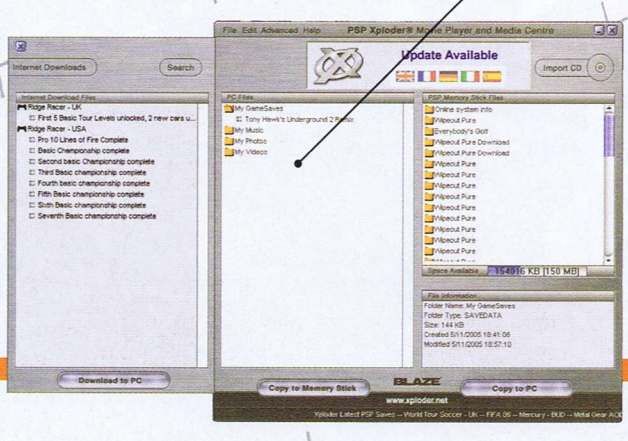
XPLODER PSP MOVIE PLAYER WITH MEDIA CENTRE

RRP: $49.95 / DISTRIBUTOR: BLUEMOUTH INTERACTIVE

The Xploder PSP kit aims to be an all in one solution for managing your media between your PC and PSP. You can drag and drop your movie or TV files (whether they be DivX, MPEG 1&2, AVI or MOV), and they'll be automatically converted for viewing on PSP. You can manage all your audio files, rip CDs directly to your PSP, and even drag and drop directly from iTunes.

The software also links to an online database of saves and cheats, and utilises real-time RSS technology to keep you updated on the latest files via a ticker that scrolls along the bottom of the software panel. Unfortunately, the online component is disappointing. While you'd think it would make sense to be able to browse the company's entire cheat/save database from within the software and just download everything you may one day want to use, you can't. Instead, you must search for each game one at a time. Compounding things, the selection of games with files is really sparse and far from up to date. Not only do there not seem to be any Japanese save games, but the European and American ones are very limited. You'd think that most would be "everything unlocked" but instead they're often "the first few levels".

It's a straightforward solution for converting your video files, but until the database is drastically improved, the online side of things is a big disappointment. The kit comes with a software CD, manual and USB cable. You can find out more about the software and database at www.xploder.net.



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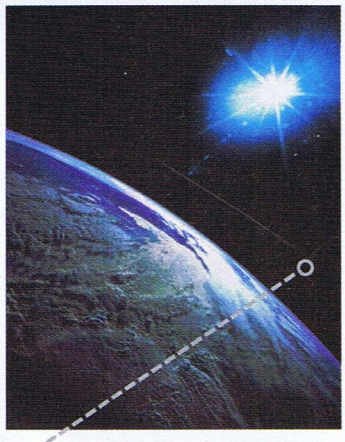

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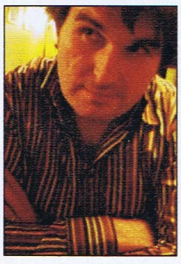
A fairytale wrapped in an enigma… and you're gonna love it!

Game Theory

SEAMUS BYRNE

Did you hear that?



Sound in games has a pretty eventful history. The early bleeps and bloops had a kind of magic to them, in that early phase sitting somewhere between the truly digital and the analogue. Then along came the 8-bit days and suddenly we heard music. New music. Like the depth of gaming at the time for so little processing power, the game sound designers did a lot with so little. Their anthems still ring in our ears to this day.

Things were good for a time, until we hit the early days of 'real sound'. The PC had a lot to answer for in the efforts to produce real voice effects on the 'Sound Blaster Compatible' platform, most of which sounded like mud. Anyone remember the attempt at a blood-curdling scream in Police Quest 3? It could have curdled milk, perhaps.

We got past those days, none too soon. With the advent of modern consoles and PC sound we have some spectacular audio available to us now. Between licensed and composed music, the suite of choice for developers has taken a great leap. So too has their need to get it right. Good music enhances. Bad music sticks out and ruins games.

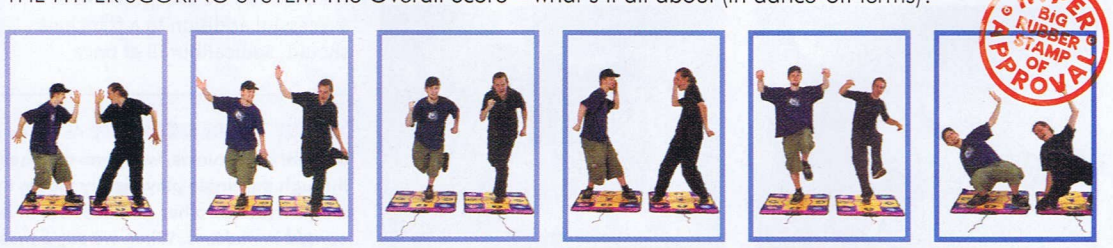
There is a lot of mixed opinion on the subject of licensed popular music. But when you've got the music pumping during a fast and furious session of driving or sports game action, it's hard to fault this kind of music — when the right track comes on. Many of these track listings have some disappointments that just don't seem to keep the vibe flowing. It can be different songs for different people. That's the hard task of these licenses. We all have different taste in music.

The real art of modern game sound design is in the composition of interactive music. The ability for a composition to provide a backing score that assists in our complete immersion into an environment, and also change seamlessly in real-time as scenario action changes, is an underrated aspect of today's game development. Such is the respect for this kind of sound design, many great film composers are now being drawn to the challenge. When done just right, it's hard to detach the audio in any way from our physical involvement.

The current gen consoles did a lot to develop the importance of audio in gaming and the next gen can only help take things further. Surround sound environments are often designed with far greater finesse in games than in film, as they can be important for those who use these audio cues to assist in their comprehension of the 3D space. Always good to know where that last shot came from.

In some ways, high-def 96k audio production just can't push the best of 8-bit music out of our minds to become immortals of game music. Today's game music is often great, but it is hard to stand out as unique. According to the fundamentals of sound design, this is as it should be. It shouldn't draw attention to itself, but it should complement and amplify the general game experience. So it is then that in the grand gaming nostalgia of the noughties, early game music proudly takes a bow. There was a warmth to the 8-bit digital experience that you just knew was 'digital'. And here we are today with the latest in smart phones, sharing the glory of those early days through our polyphonic ringtone renditions of Pac-Man and Super Mario Bros. It doesn't take a moment to know what it is you're hearing.

THE HYPER SCORING SYSTEM The Overall Score – what's it all about (in dance-off terms)?



0-49 **50-59** **60-69** **70-79** **80-89** **90+**

SOULCALIBUR III

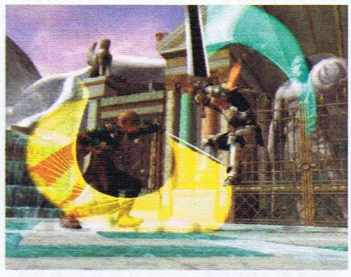
DANIEL WILKS made a saint dress like a pirate

The fact that we ended up with Soulcalibur III review code this month came as quite a bit of a surprise. We didn't realise it was finished for a start – Sony hadn't been all that forthcoming as to details of the game. We expected to get preview code first, play that to death and then maybe get a little sick of it by the time our review code arrived. This was not the case. The review code arrived and the tempo of the office went up a notch. Everyone wanted a piece of the sweet, sweet weapons based combat action. Of course, Cam and I are greedy so we hoarded all of the fightingest goodness to ourselves and wasted many a day playing. Did we get sick of it as we first expected? Well, three weeks on and countless battles later all we can say is "hells no!", pick up a gamepad and have another go at it. Soulcalibur is back and it's in damn fine form.

MAKE IT TWO WORDS AGAIN!

Since the franchise really hit the gaming awareness after its move and retitling on the Dreamcast, the Soulcalibur series has been acclaimed for the incredibly fast and precise fighting mechanics, open ended combo structure, beautiful character models and a user friendliness that encompasses both the button mashing casual player and the dedicated technical stalwart, and the current incarnation is absolutely no exception. As any successful addition to a franchise should, Soulcalibur III at once feels pleasantly familiar as well as intriguingly different. All of your favourite characters have returned from the previous games as well as three new characters and a host of additional, unlockable characters. The returning characters play much like they did in previous games but with enough tweaks and new attacks to make relearning their skills a fun and rewarding experience. The three new characters, the scythe wielding

[up] She is teh NINJOR!!!11!!eleventy!

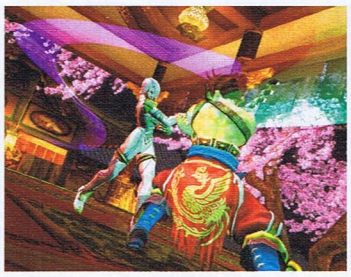


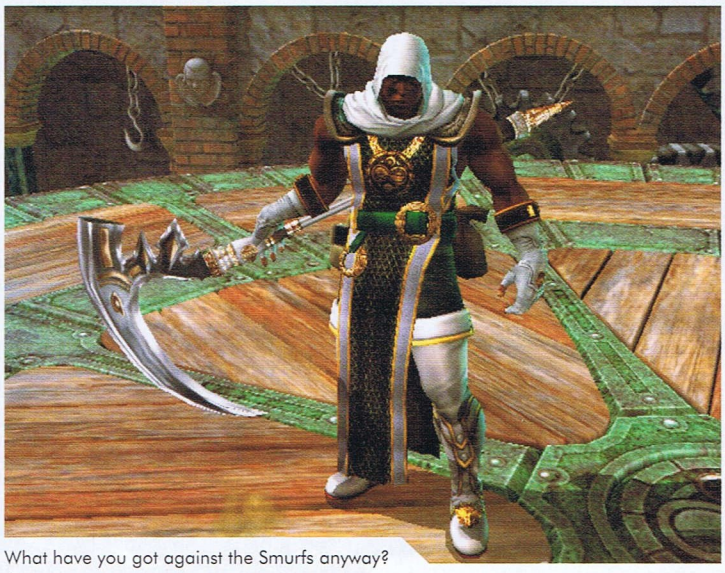
[up] Welcome to the Stage of Glow Sticks

[up] Totall sweet armoured arse

[up] Hula Hoop Vs. Farming implement

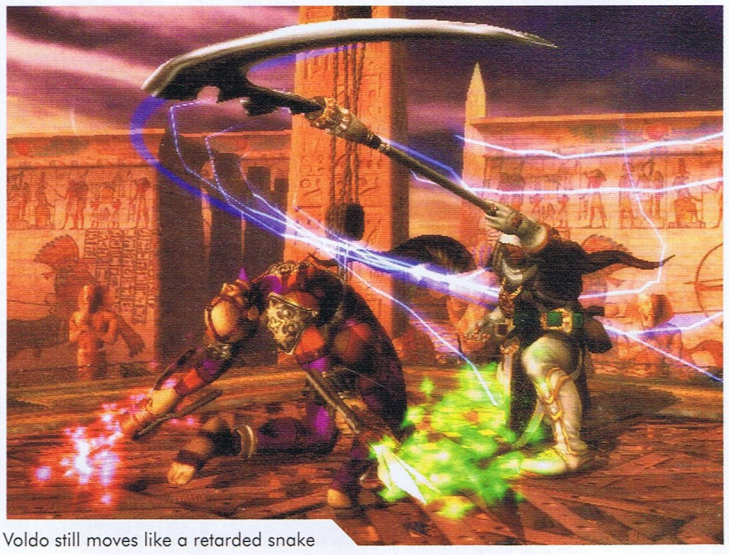
GET YOUR GEAR ON As far as unlockables go, there are a truly massive amount of costumes, weapons and the like that can be garnered from playing through the single player story mode, through Chronicles of the Sword, vs. mode and the various other game modes or by buying them from the shops with money earned in matches. When we say a massive number we truly mean it – Cam and I have played, at a conservative estimate around 30 hours of Soulcalibur III at the time of this writing and we have maybe uncovered half of the unlockable content.





What have you got against the Smurfs anyway?

Stabity



Voldo still moves like a retarded snake

TIRA SHOULD APPEAL TO FANS OF VOLDO AS HER MOVES ARE CHAOTIC AND JUST AS MESMERISING

Zasalamel, the geisha like Setsuka and Tira, the obligatory weird chick, play kind of like old characters but bridge a gap between a few different fighting styles, making them both tempting and fun to play.

Zasalamel hits almost as hard as one of the big fighters like Nightmare or Astaroth but with faster combo attacks and excellent range, making him also similar to characters like Seung Mi-Na and Kilik. Setsuka specialises in lightning fast attacks, much like Taki but hits slightly harder, also giving her similarities to the other Japanese fighter, Mitsurugi. Tira doesn't really play like any of the other characters but should appeal to fans of Voldo as her moves are chaotic and just as mesmerising to watch as the freaky combat gimp - imagine a homicidal rhythm gymnast and you're on the right track. On top of the 30 available characters, Namco has also added the ability for players to create their own characters, either randomly in the vs screen or through a detailed character creator.

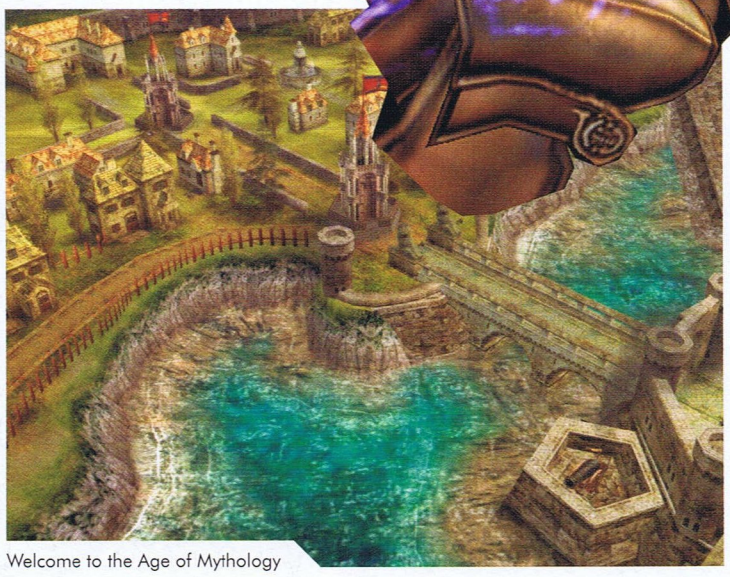
Created characters fall into one of a number of different professions such as Barbarian (proficient with two handed swords), Ninja, Thief, Samurai and even Dancer, who wield a variety of deadly tambourines. Playing through single and multiplayer modes unlocks a wealth of new weapons, articles of clothing, faces and other variables giving you access to a huge range of customisation. Each profession plays close enough to the style of the fighter it most resembles (Barbarians fight similarly to Seigfreid, Ninjas similarly to Taki) so veteran players should be able to get a handle on the new characters quite quickly. Whilst creating your own character is definitely appealing, there are a few problems with the mode that could have been ironed out before the final release. On a basic level, there are so many costume choices that it's not a rare occurrence for articles of clothing to clip through the character models and weapons. Like we say, it's only a small gripe but the rest of the game is so well detailed that flaws like this stand out like the proverbial sore thumb. The created character also don't function as thoroughly as the normal story characters – the sameness that makes them approachable to begin with can erode the appeal of playing a created character versus one of the pre-made characters with their full repertoire of moves.

THE CHRONIC

Although they may be more of a pleasant diversion in the versus mode, created characters are the heart and soul of the new single player mode, Chronicle of the Sword. Playing like a cross between a simple 2D strategy game and Soulcalibur, Chronicle of the Sword revolves around the player conquering battlefields with their team of created fighters. Each level tasks the player with achieving one primary goal, taking over the enemy headquarters, and a number of secondary goals such as not losing a man, taking over all of the enemy buildings, winning a certain number of perfect victories and the like. Each map is presented in simple 3D and the player can give simple orders to their characters – go here, attack this building, fortify this

>> FILM AT 11 **When you beat one character's story mode you are able to view all of the cutscenes in that mode. Try to hold on to your excitement. Although watching the cutscenes may not exactly float your boat, the viewer gives you a good indication of what you have left to unlock for the character. The story mode uses branching paths so after beating the game with a character once you may only have seen 50% of their cutscenes. As more are seen in the game, more places are filled in the viewer, giving you a reminder of which branches to take next time to see even more.**

Ph34r my 1eet tamboirune skillz



Welcome to the Age of Mythology

position. When the player meets an enemy the game changes to more familiar territory, launching the player into a Soulcalibur style battle. As the player wins more fights they will gain in level and skill, gaining more hit points, doing more damage and moving faster. So does the enemy, keeping the battles challenging throughout all of the scenarios. To keep things interesting, as well as Chronicle of the Sword enemies, the game mode also features a number of characters from the main game. Each of the traditional characters are level 60, making them a difficult fight. If the enemy is cloistered in a building during the battle, chances are that the fight will also have modifiers, such as a slippery stage, making it easier to get ring-outs, earthquakes that occasionally stun the player, regenerating enemies, the inability to block or poison attacks.

Not all fights in the Chronicle are one on one – multiple enemies can attack at once and the player can send a number of their fighters against a single enemy. Rather than turn the game into a free-for-all, SCIII instead opts to keep each round one on one, adding the extra fighters as "lives"; when one fighter falls the next steps in to continue the fight in the next round. The technique works well and leads to some excellent moments. In one of the later maps, the commander of the enemy force pulls the majority of the named (and thus more powerful) troops back to base early in the fight but sends them all out to attack when you kill his second in command. Successfully fighting off five or six powerful enemies with only one or two defenders is an achievement that you will remember for a while.

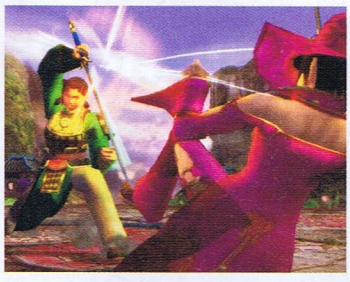
Although the major new game mode works well, there are some decisions in Soulcalibur III that leave us scratching our heads. One of the strangest is that there is absolutely no way to port your character from the Chronicle of the Sword mode to the vs. mode, even though the character creation process is identical in every respect. In the single player story mode, there is no way to skip cutscenes and what's more, many of the cutscenes feature split second timing action sequences in them that require you to hit a button or combination of buttons when they flash up on screen to avoid taking damage. It's understandable that Namco wanted to liven up their cutscenes a little but the fact that you have to sit through what is essentially the exact same scene time and time again with different characters and perform the same action becomes a little grating. There's also a small issue with the AI. For the most part it functions well, giving the player a good challenge without becoming too frustrating, but there are some wildly schizophrenic times where the enemy will go from being a braindead zombie who does little other than stand in place while you wail on them to being a whirling dervish who can take you from fully alive to a bloody smear in one combo starting as soon as the battle begins, giving you roughly enough time to do jack and squat.

>> MASHTASTICALLY MASHTACULAR **Playing Soulcalibur is quite a visceral experience – the addition of weapons to a fighting game seems to give it that little more sense of immediacy lacking in unarmed fighting games (not that we don't love some Tekken, VF and DoA action). It's funny watching people in the office, SC veterans at that, playing against each other. The fights all seem to go the same way – each player starts off very precise, pulling off finesse moves and natty little combos until their health gets low, then the fight devolves into randomly mashing the buttons in the vain hope that something cool will happen. About half of the time it does.**

Romanian Mountains blah, blah, blah

This win loss ratio is not Cam's (he sucks)

[up] Not pictured: Extreme Jiggle



[up] Spin, thrust, parry, riposte, thwack?

Ultimately, all of these flaws can be overlooked due to just how damn good the game really is. The Chronicles mode is strong enough to warrant being a game in its own respect and the story mode features some great battles. The tournament mode allows you to make your way through the ranks to be number one and the vs. mode is as outstandingly addictive as you could want. The progression of unlocking new characters and items is well timed so you always feel as though you are achieving something, making you want to play that one more game to see what comes next.

Soulcalibur has always been a beautiful looking series and Soulcalibur III more than lives up to expectations. The character models are wonderfully detailed as are the animations. Whilst the stages are nowhere near as detailed and interactive as those in a game like Dead or Alive, the level design in SCIII is remarkably solid with a few real standouts, a Hyper favourite being a level entirely in darkness that only shows the two fighters in spotlights. As the level is entirely dark it's nigh on impossible to tell where the edge of the level is so the fights take on a more thoughtful approach than usual as too much movement could send you off the edge.

The sound design isn't nearly as accomplished as the look of the game. It's not that the music or sound effects are bad, more that they are all very familiar, seeming as though they have traveled unchanged from the last game in the franchise. There is a nice nod of the head to fans when it comes to the voice acting, as players can choose between both the English and Japanese vocal tracks. <<

>> PREPARE TO DEFEND YOURSELF At different times during the story mode, the player will be asked if they want to head on with their adventure or to wait. IF you choose wait, more often than not you will be entered into a special battle. There battles may be against a special enemy, against multiple enemies that must be killed within a time limit, a doppelganger, a special villain or a combination thereof. These battles rank as some of the hardest in the game but you're guaranteed to get something cool if you complete it. Unlike other battles, if you lose one of the special matches the game continues to the next story event instead of taking you to the dreaded "Game Over" screen.

AVAILABLE ON:

PS2 / XBOX / PC / GCN

DETAILS:

CATEGORY: Fighting
PLAYERS: 1-2
DEVELOPER: Namco
PUBLISHER: Sony
PRICE: $99.95
RATING: M 15+
AVAILABLE: Now

HYPER VERDICT:

PLUS: Soulcalibur, Chronicle of the Sword, Create-a-Fighter.

MINUS: Can't move characters between CotS and Vs. modes, no online.

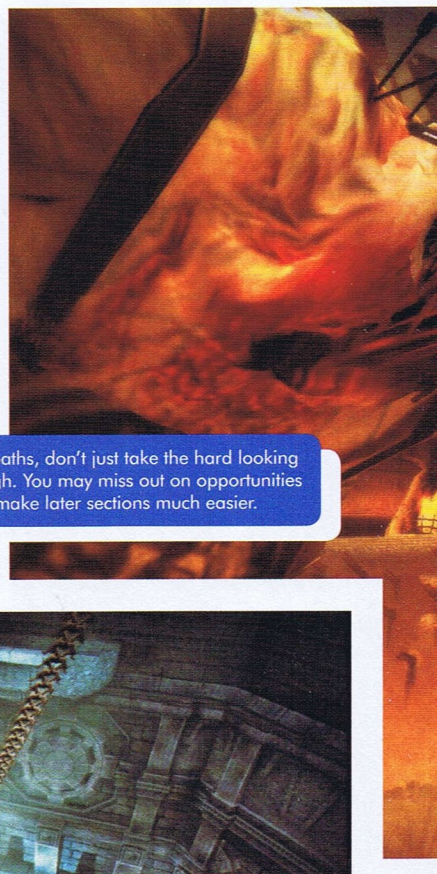
VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY
94	82	95

OVERALL

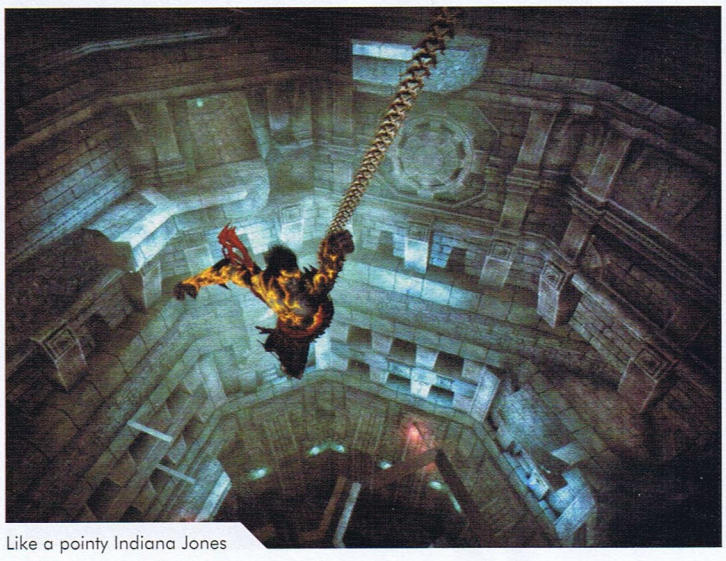
95

The best Soulcalibur yet. Bring on next gen!

HYPER BIG RUBBER STAMP OF APPROVAL



!!! Here's a hint – if you have two paths, don't just take the hard looking ones like we did first time through. You may miss out on opportunities to boost your lifebar, which will make later sections much easier.



Like a pointy Indiana Jones

PRINCE OF PERSIA: The Two Thrones

CAM SHEA chain whips it good

So, I think I know why Babylon lies in flame and ruin at the start of this game. It's not because of an invading force or all the tinkering with time that the Prince has been indulging in. It's simple city planning and economics. You see, it was probably a bad idea to build the entire city as a gymnastic playground for the Prince. All those sections that can only be navigated by hurling yourself along walls, across ledges and over gaps. I mean, aside from the inevitable fatalities as less agile people try to get to work, only to be sliced by spinning blades as they walk down a corridor or fall into a spiked pit, no one would be able to get to each other in this labyrinth anyway. Imagine – mum pops out to pick up a loaf of bread and is never heard from again. Best case scenario is she's been killed by a sand monster. Worst is that she's starving on some ledge, her old bones not up to the task of jumping across the twenty foot gap to the convenience store. It's no wonder the place is in bloody chaos!

[up] Now on Ten: Pimp My Chariot

I AND I BEEN IN... OH, WE'VE DONE THAT ONE ALREADY

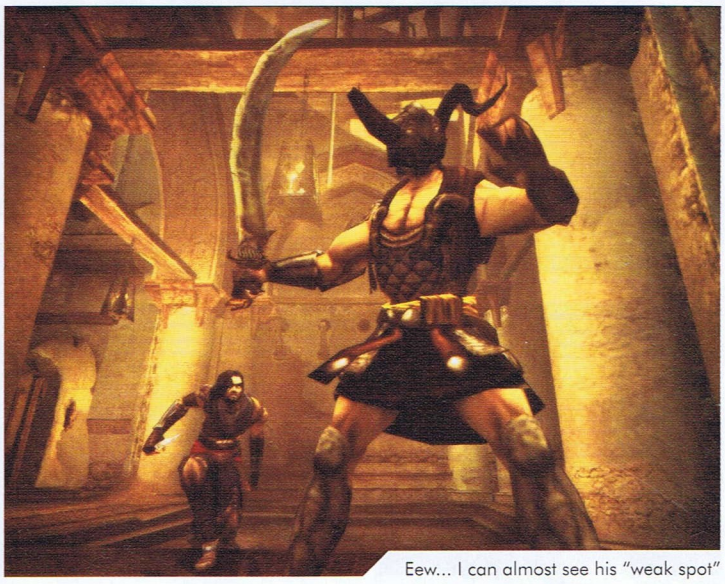
In any case, the Prince returns to Babylon after that unpleasantness with the Dahaka, only to find the place trashed. Long story short, the sands of time are once again unleashed, the Prince gets infected and Farah is back in the picture, only she has no idea of what alternative universe Farah and the Prince got up to in the first game.

[up] Gotta practise my stabbing

[up] Combat that's actually fun!

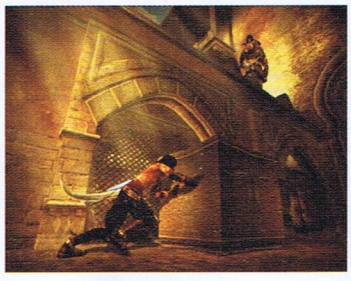
What does all this mean for the gameplay? Well, the Prince is part sand monster now. One of his arms is all glowy and barbed, and at regular intervals he transforms into the Dark Prince, a chain wielding bad-ass who's a whole lot more powerful than vanilla Prince. The Dark Prince can do some really nifty stuff – he has powerful chain and weapon combos, can strangle guards for his speed kills (more on that in a bit) and has some great movement abilities based around his chain whip – using it to swing from poles, using it as an anchor point while wall running and using it to pull stone blocks from walls to form a ledge to jump to. The Dark Prince's health is constantly falling too, so you'll have to move swiftly through his movement puzzles and top up on sand whenever possible.

In storytelling terms, the addition of the Dark Prince represents the inner turmoil of the Prince as he tries to reconcile the conflict between his noble former self (Sands of Time Prince) and his brutal out-for-himself hardened killer side (Warrior Within Prince). He even has his darker side talking to him in the form of an inner voice, pushing him to take care of number one. The Prince's dual nature



Eew... I can almost see his "weak spot"

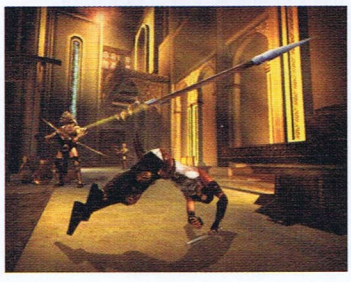
Insert Spartacus reference here



definitely keeps things interesting – adding variety to gameplay and opening up story possibilities.

PRINCE GET!

Of course, there are new moves that can be used by both characters too. You can slide down curtains, wall jump back and forth Mario Sunshine style, perch and slide down between narrow walls, tightrope walk along beams, and grab on to chains and slide down them (upside down no less). Perhaps the coolest new moves though, are the diagonal jump off points and dagger points. These see you executing smooth runs where you'll wall run, leap diagonally across to a parallel wall, jam your sword into the wall and then use it to start a new wall run. Throw in all the Prince's old moves and you've got an acrobatic melting pot. Just as it should be.

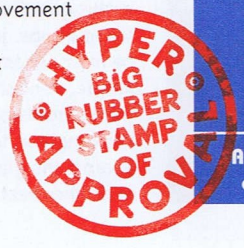


The speed kills are a critical inclusion too. If you can sneak up behind, or get above a guard without him seeing you, the screen will flicker and you can initiate a speed kill. Time your button presses correctly (each time the Prince's sword flashes) and you'll quickly dispose of the guard. There are a few different sequences, and you'll have to learn the timing for each. For instance, you may kick a guard in the back of the knee to get him down then grab him in the head and stab him in the windpipe. Then there are double speed kills where the Prince jumps from one enemy to another and back. Most speed kills require one or two timed hits but there are some that take up to five which are pretty satisfying to pull off. Although there's plenty of normal combat, the speed kill system can make some sequences much easier, and can give you the jump on multiple opponents. It also adds another element to the Prince's acrobatics, with many sections having both a ground level path and a higher option that can be used to get in position for speed kills.

THERE ARE DOUBLE SPEED KILLS WHERE THE PRINCE JUMPS FROM ONE ENEMY TO ANOTHER AND BACK

Thankfully, the combat in The Two Thrones plays second fiddle to the movement puzzles for the most part. There's nothing too out of the ordinary here - plenty of combos, dual wielding, some environmental interaction, you know the drill. As a secondary focus it's good fun, and the more sand powers you have the more entertaining it becomes.

While levels are still essentially linear, and most of the movement puzzles won't take long to work out, The Two Thrones is a bit like Shadow of the Colossus: there's something so innately satisfying about the experience itself - a grace and exhilaration in movement - that it really doesn't matter. Babylon might be designed like a playground for the Prince's amusement, but we wouldn't have it any other way. <<



AVAILABLE ON:

PS2 / XBOX / PC / GCN

DETAILS:

CATEGORY: Time traveling Prince sim
PLAYERS: 1
DEVELOPER: Ubisoft Montreal
PUBLISHER: Ubisoft
PRICE: $89.95 (PC), $99.95 (console)
RATING: MA
AVAILABLE: December 8

HYPER VERDICT:

PLUS: A joy to control, Prince fans will love the plot.

MINUS: Crate moving puzzles are soo 95.

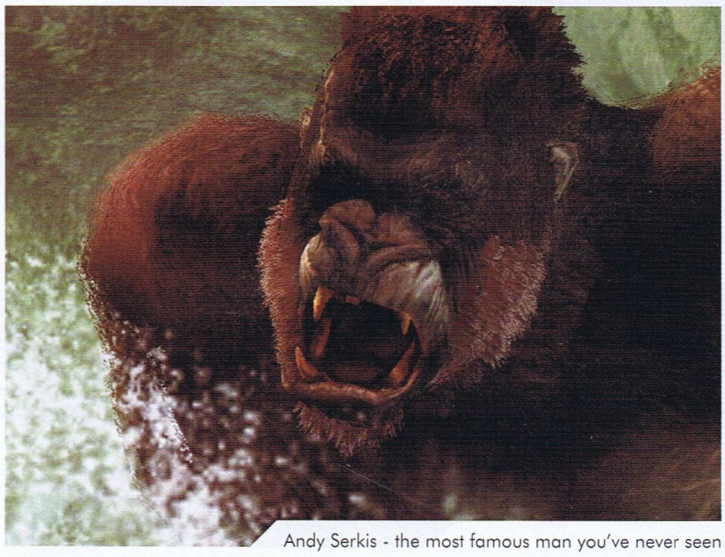
VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY
85	87	90

OVERALL

91

A great balance between acrobatics and combat.

!!! The full title is actually "Peter Jackon's King Kong: The Official Game of the Movie" which is a title of almost Capcom proportions (although then it would be Peter Jackson's Hyper Fighting Gorilla Adventure Neo Megamix 4), so we're just calling it King Kong.



Andy Serkis - the most famous man you've never seen

[up] Not Pictured: Things trying to eat you

[up] Quick, kick it in the balls!

KING KONG

CAM SHEA wonders how much play time is enough

The King Kong game. The lovechild of Michel "Frenchie McFrench" Ancel and Peter "Meet the Feebles" Jackson. It's every bit as good as we thought it would be. In fact, in many respects it's fantastic. It's also $100 for about five hours of gameplay. Throughout the course of those five hours, you'll experience one of the best movie to game conversions ever – an intuitive, highly atmospheric piece of design that tugs you along and that works hard to keep you immersed in the gameworld. But is it good value for money? We'll get to that later.

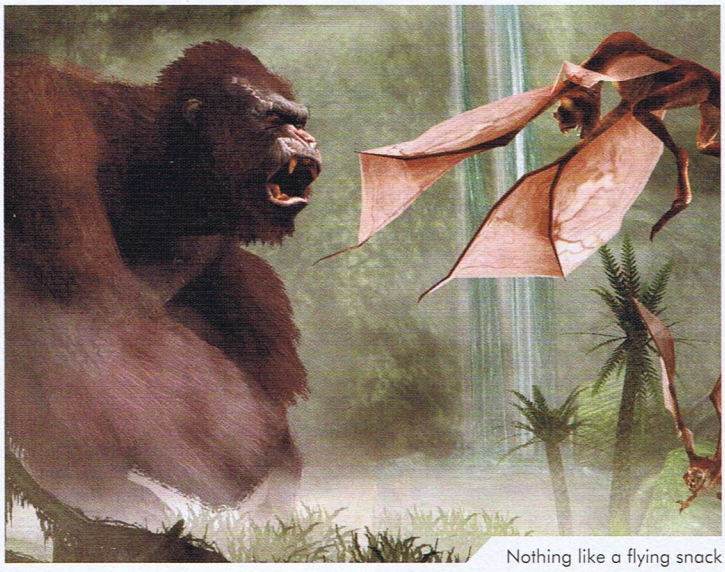
GIVE KONG A HAND

What makes King Kong special is that it tries hard to never break the rules of the world. In other words, it's all about immersion and making it out alive, not becoming a gun toting Rambo. Thus, from the moment you make it ashore, you become Jack Driscoll, a man who is most certainly mortal, and must think on his feet, using the logic of this strange island to survive. While firearms do play a major role in Kong, you can only ever carry one at a time, and you'll never have huge amounts of ammo. In other words, this game is less about killing and a whole lot more about survival.

Indeed, two of your best friends in this game will be fire and pointy sharp things, just as they should be in an inhospitable primeval jungle. Bone shards can be ripped from carcasses and spears grabbed, allowing you to defend yourself against the giant scream-apillas and other nasties on the island, either by jabbing at them to keep them at arm's length or skewering them. You can use the ecosystem of the island to your advantage too – distract a raptor by killing a bat and giving it some easy food, or just use a spear to skewer a bug and throw it away from you, letting you pass by while all the creatures in the area are briefly distracted. Spear tips can also be lit, and burning brush is a great way not only to clear a path ahead, but also to kill off the wildlife, especially once you've lured them into the brush with a shish kebug.

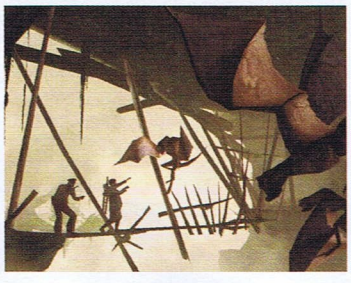
It all makes sense within the world that Jack's in, and means that each new area brings with it new possibilities. Sure, shooting everything is usually the most straightforward option, but it's more fun playing cat and mouse. Or prehistoric cat and pyromaniac mouse as the case may be.

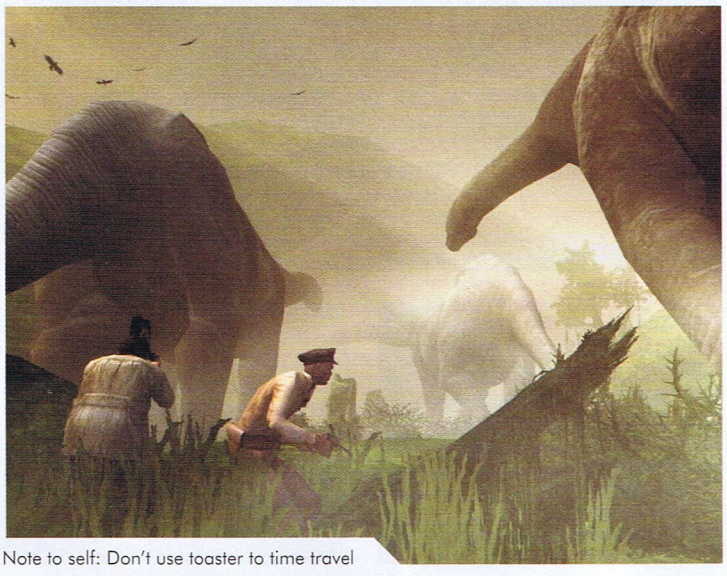
Like Far Cry Instincts, King Kong goes to great lengths to keep you immersed in the gameworld. Everything is from a true first person perspective, so that means no HUD and no targeting reticle. Want to aim a spear? Line it up with Jack's index finger. The system works really well with some clever workarounds. There's no health bar, for instance, but you'll know when you're in trouble, as your vision is majorly affected, and after a short while you'll return to normal. Want to know how many magazines you have left? Hit a button and Jack tells you. Weapons aren't lying around



Nothing like a flying snack

Like Jurassic Park, only good





Note to self: Don't use toaster to time travel

arbitrarily either, instead they're air dropped in. It all adds up to a game that's far more immersive and believable than most. If only they could have eliminated those oh so pesky load screens!

MEET THE GANG

It may seem like overwhelming odds being a guy with a stick struggling through an island populated by prehistoric nasties, savage natives and a giant gorilla, all to rescue a girl, but you're never really alone. Kong is very much a squad-based game. You're constantly in touch with the other survivors, whether you're actively traveling with one or all of them, or split up and trying to get to a common point. The dynamics are constantly shifting too. One minute you're protecting Ann from attacking raptors, the next she's alongside you, using her athleticism to get to spots you can't reach to open up the path ahead. They're not useless in a fight either – these guys can hold their own, and when you're wading waist deep in water through a spooky underground cavern, with roars from the jungle overhead echoing down below, you'll be glad they're with you. There's plenty of chatter too, giving you insight into each character, and actually making you care about what happens to them.

THIS IS A GAMEWORLD THAT'S WILD AND INHOSPITABLE AND AT THE MERCY OF THE ELEMENTS

And then there's Kong. At regular intervals throughout the game you get the chance to play as the big guy, which is obviously a dramatic change of scale and pace. These sections are fun, but as cool as swinging through the jungle and ripping a V-Rex's jaw apart sounds, the reality is that the Kong levels aren't as clever as the Driscoll missions, and have a few frustrating elements – the idiot proof movement puzzles, the "cinematic" camera and sometimes stubborn controls. Fortunately the actual combat is pretty cool, and rescuing/protecting Ann makes it all worthwhile. She a hottie.

The visual design throughout King Kong is nothing short of superb. This is a gameworld that's wild and inhospitable and at the mercy of the elements, and all the more beautiful for it. Mist swirls around ancient trees, shafts of light plunging through the murky canopy keeping many parts of the island in a perpetual state of twilight. Rain pounds down intermittently, birds and bats flitter overhead, rickety wooden walkways threaten to fall and crumbling pagan structures command a strange sense of awe. The game takes a pretty big visual hit on PS2, but looks great on the other systems.

But back to the question I posed earlier. Is five hours enough? On the one hand, Kong doesn't outstay its welcome. The game is compelling for its entire playtime, and that's most certainly a good thing. It's tight, it's holistic in design and it's fun. On the other hand, Ubisoft could have priced it at $60 and we'd be telling you to run to the store to pick it up. So I guess there's no good answer. $100 is really steep for such a short game and ultimately it's your decision whether you think it's worth it. <<

AVAILABLE ON:

PS2 / XBOX / PC / GCN

DETAILS:

CATEGORY: FPS/Kong sim
PLAYERS: 1
DEVELOPER: Ubisoft Montpellier
PUBLISHER: Ubisoft
PRICE: $99.95 Consoles, $89.95 PC
RATING: MA 15+
AVAILABLE: Now

HYPER VERDICT:

PLUS: Immersive, great game and visual design.

MINUS: Short, average PS2 visuals, disappointing end.

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY
87	86	86

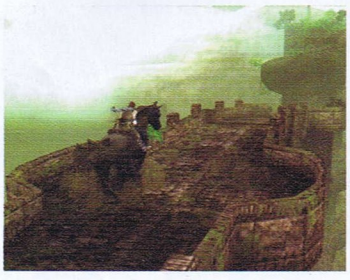
OVERALL

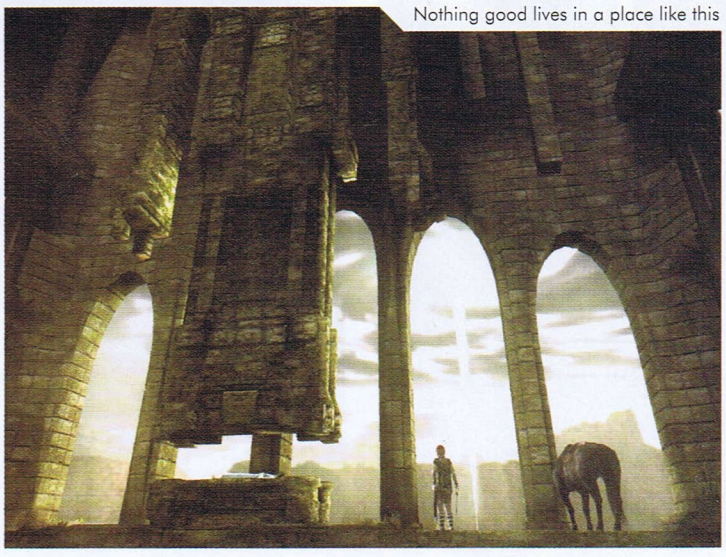
88

An absolute must-play title. Pity about the price.

Just a hint – this is one game where it's probably best to read the manual. Oh, and gamefaqs is your friend.

Something tells me it's a trap





Nothing good lives in a place like this

SHADOW OF THE COLOSSUS (IMPORT REVIEW)

CAM SHEA tears his hair out but keeps playing anyway

Shadow of the Colossus is yet another masterful exercise in aesthetics and minimalism from the dev team behind ICO. It's an instant classic, the kind of title that's so different from everything else out there and so visually rich that you'll get goose bumps from playing it. This is game design stripped of its normal conventions, and game design as art. It's pretty damn good too.

[up] So pretty, so damn deadly

[up] Insert tasteless necrophilia joke

[up] Yes, you're meant to kill that thing

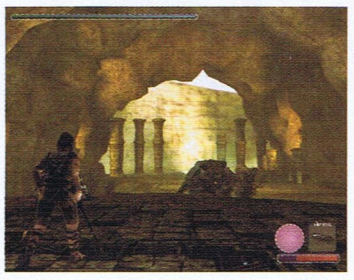
SWEET SIXTEEN

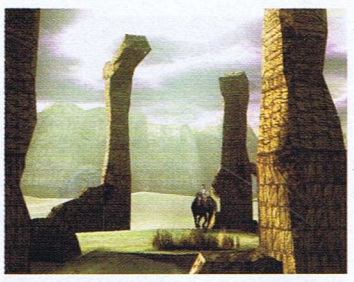
Shadow of the Colossus begins with a boy on horseback who has traveled to the farthest reaches of the realm to find a temple, carrying with him a dead girl. He has journeyed this far in order to speak to the god that resides there, who, it is told, has the power to restore the souls of the dead. The boy calls on the god, and is told that to grant his wish he must kill the sixteen colossi that roam the land, and that even then, he must pay a high price. And that's basically it as far as story goes. Much like ICO, this game isn't about telling you a detailed narrative or building characters; it's about the world and the spectacle. You're left to immerse yourself in the act, not the reasoning behind it.

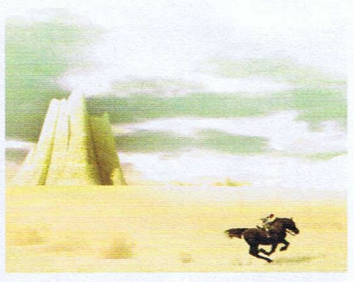
And boy, is the act ever special. To get an idea where each colossus awaits, you must channel the sunlight off your sword and focus it to get the direction you need to go, and you can do this while galloping across the vast, sometimes desolate, always epic landscapes, where massive canyons, hidden lakes and blighted ancient structures are your points of reference. The environments are a great backdrop, but of course, it's the colossi that are the true stars of the game. There's something so ancient and sacred about these mammoth beasts; they look like they've stepped straight out of a fairytale. The creature design is nothing short of enchanting too – the rugged fur, the embedded slabs of fashioned rock serving as armour, feet or teeth, the glowing points that must be discovered then attacked, the dim light of comprehension behind the eyes. It's rare that you see an enemy as impressive as just one of these beasts in a game, and Shadow of the Colossus has sixteen of them.

The actual gameplay is a little different from what we were expecting. We figured the game would be a lot like a giant lumbering puzzle. You'd climb on, then work out how to get to the weak points. Instead, the hardest part is generally working out how to get on in the first place. It's rarely

Riding that horse really can't be comfortable







obvious either. You may have to exploit one colossus' curious side, lure another to a certain point or just piss one off to get it close. No matter the technique, the climbing and killing is usually the easy part. There are some puzzle-like elements – you can only grip onto fur or hold your breath underwater for so long, but there is little of the Prince-esque movement puzzles we were perhaps hoping for.

MUCH LIKE ICO, THIS GAME ISN'T ABOUT TELLING YOU A DETAILED NARRATIVE OR BUILDING CHARACTERS

ONLY THIS TIME, DAVID WON

That's taking nothing away from just how cool it actually is though. If you think the colossi look amazing in the screenshots, actually being on them in motion is incredible. Shadow of the Colossus is as close to a giant climbing sim as we'll ever get. You truly feel like you're on something huge and alive, which is thanks, in large part, to the incredible art direction and outstanding animations. When a colossus hurls its head from side to side to try and dislodge you, while you're holding on for dear life, you completely believe it. When you stumble from its movement, roll and tumble along its back, then grab on at the last second before falling all the way to the ground, you hold your breath. And when you're in the sky, making your way along the back of a massive winged colossus, the wind whipping through its fur and your hair... well, you'll rarely have felt so free in a game. This game is all about the atmosphere, the immersion, the spectacle, the strange new world it sucks you into.

It's far from perfect however – the camera mechanics are shocking at times, working out how to get on each colossus and actually doing it can be hair pullingly frustrating, and the lack of more environment and colossus-based puzzles is, well, a little puzzling. But here's the thing – we love it anyway. Shadow of the Colossus is a triumph of aesthetics. It rips out most of the things that videogames are meant to have – story, characters and levels, and just cuts straight to the boss battles, and does them on an incredible scale. With a few things done differently, this would have been a 90 plus game. As it stands, it's a gorgeous, but often amazingly frustrating experience. <<

>> MEATMASHER AND CHILDCHEWER SCEJ's story-lite approach definitely has its downsides. At first you wonder why you should feel empathy for the situation - we don't know who the characters are and why we should bother to save the girl. This is compounded by the first couple of colossi who seem to be of the gentle, lumbering giant variety, and not the gnashing and gnawing at flesh and bone types. Fortunately, it's not long before they become far less innocuous. You'll encounter colossi that charge you, that fire electrical bolts at you, and that try and smash you to bits with an impossibly large stone sword. It also becomes clear that your character may not come out the other side - with each colossus you kill, mysterious black beams emanate from the corpse that you then absorb... and it ain't mother's milk that's for sure.

AVAILABLE ON:
PS2 / XBOX / PC / GCN

DETAILS:

CATEGORY: Giant climbing sim
PLAYERS: 1
DEVELOPER: SCEJ
PUBLISHER: Sony
PRICE: $TBC
RATING: TBC
AVAILABLE: February 2006

HYPER VERDICT:

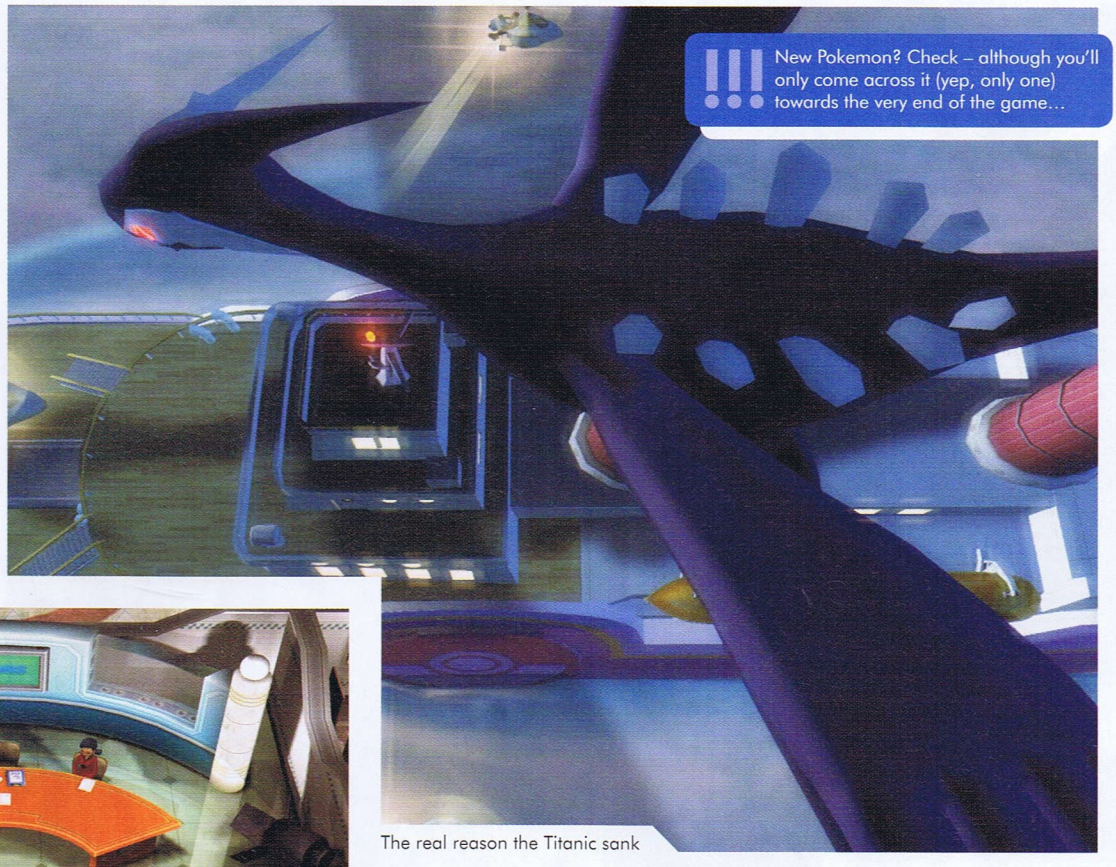
PLUS: Stunning design and art direction, great animations.

MINUS: Camera, colossus 11 is a triumph of terrible game design.

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY
93	90	75

OVERALL
86

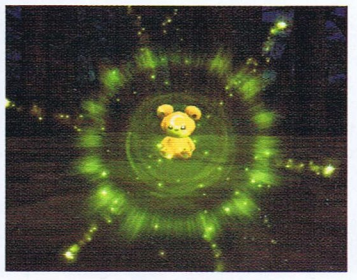
A triumph of atmosphere and visual design.



!!! New Pokemon? Check – although you'll only come across it (yep, only one) towards the very end of the game...

The real reason the Titanic sank

Prepare to batte DESKEMON!



POKÉMON XD: Gale of Darkness

MARCH STEPNIK dons his Peter Pan costume...

The call of the Pokemon (that is, their actual vocalisation) is so iconic that with its second fully-fledged RPG release on the GameCube (after Pokemon Colosseum on the GCN and a score more various RPG and spin-off releases on the Game Boy and up), The Pokemon Company again chose to stick with the old 8-bit sound samples used in the original Game Boy release. Now while we're sure The Pokemon Company wrestled with bringing the little shi... monsters' calls into line with the rest that technology has to offer (and indeed, XD's visuals are pretty in a clean, minimal sorta way), we're guessing the developers just didn't have the confidence to mess with the tried and tested formula, which is a philosophy that perfectly describes the whole Pokemon XD experience; this is another Pokemon RPG, people, – please shoot me now - just as you either love it or loath it. In fact, XD looks a helluva lot like last year's Pokemon Colosseum...

NEW BITS!

Of course, there have been some changes – well, tweaks really. Gale of Darkness again focuses on Shadow Pokemon, those poor little good critters that've been beaten into submission and used as agents of evil. This time around, the purification process is a little easier while at the same time being more interesting (purification is vital as while you can use Shadow 'mon in battle, they won't level up until made good again).

Secondly, unlike Colosseum you can now actually catch Pokemon in the wild – but before you rejoice this one's laden with restrictions. There are only three spots you can find them, and you have to carefully lure them out – not like the random anywhere mechanics of the GBA titles at all.

Other than that the game's design is the same: the battle mechanics are the same, as are the RPG levelling-up mechanics. Apart from being a longer game this time around and featuring different characters, Gale of Darkness could have passed for last year's Cube effort. And like Colosseum, Gale of Darkness is a real gas to play if you feel like something a little light and can ignore the sense of déjà vu that's niggling like a sledgehammer to the head.

Gale of Darkness will only be a disappointment if you were expecting a massive change to the Pokemon formula. Nope, The Pokemon Company is again sticking with what it knows best: producing fiendishly addictive games of rock paper scissors poured into a slick and simple RPG mould. That its audience grows up and wants to move on is probably not a major concern in the grand scheme of gaming things – there's an army of willing kids ready to take their place.

AVAILABLE ON:
PS2 / XBOX / PC / **GCN**

DETAILS:

CATEGORY: RPG Adventure
PLAYERS: 1-4
DEVELOPER: The Pokemon Company
PUBLISHER: Nintendo
PRICE: $99.95
RATING: G
AVAILABLE: Now

HYPER VERDICT:

PLUS: Clean design, cool dialogue, battles, Peter Pan syndrome.

MINUS: Peter Pan syndrome, mostly generic use of RPG clichés.

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY
79	69	82

OVERALL
71

And so there's this game, where you battle pocket monsters...

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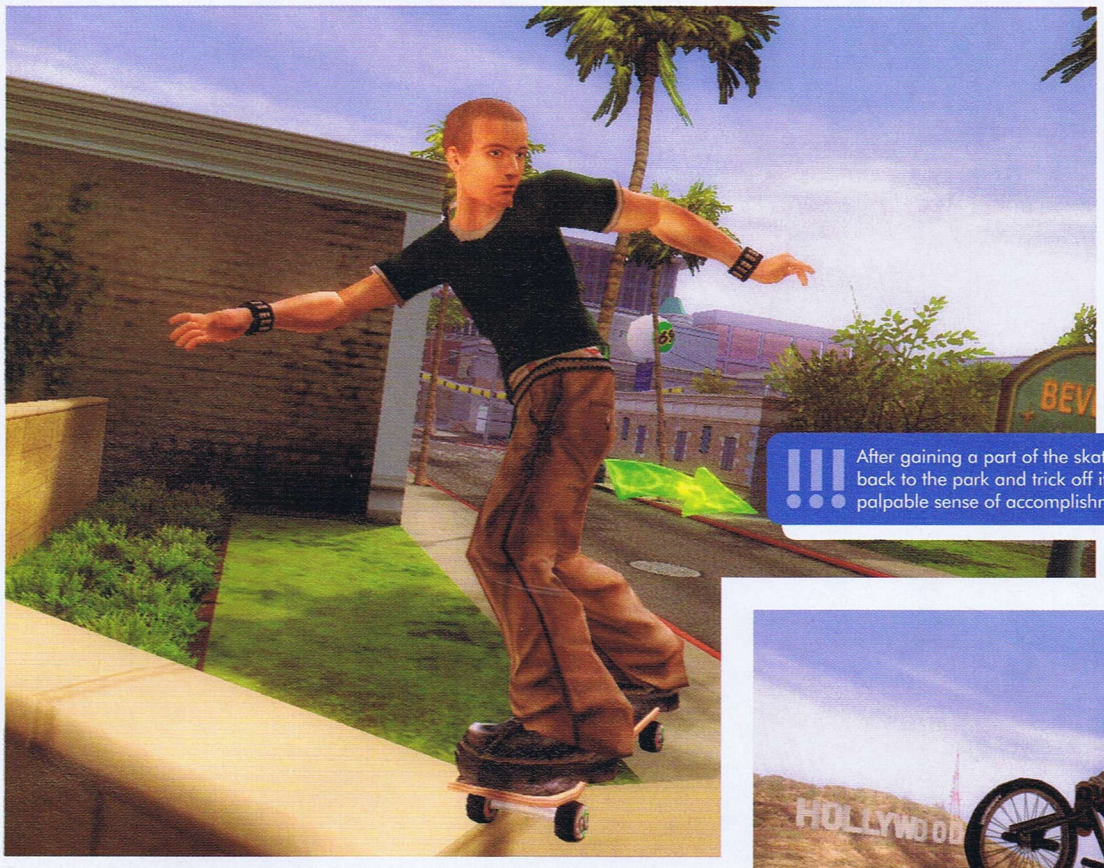
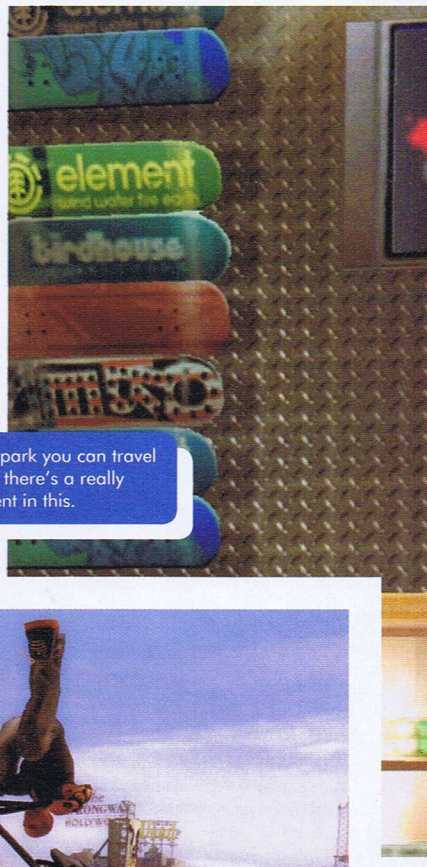
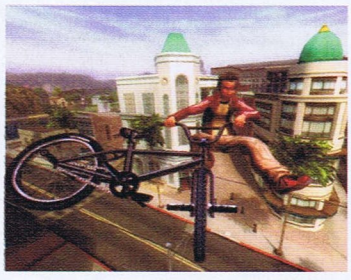
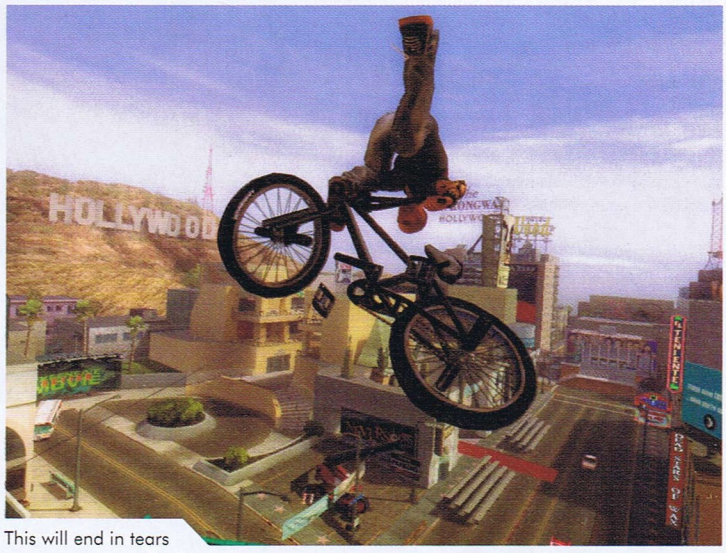




!!! After gaining a part of the skate park you can travel back to the park and trick off it - there's a really palpable sense of accomplishment in this.





This will end in tears

TONY HAWK'S AMERICAN WASTELAND

DANIEL WILKS is back on board

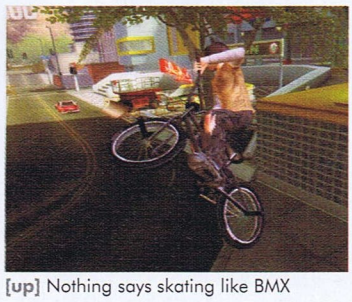
Some of you were rather critical of us for coming down on the Underground incarnations of the Tony Hawk franchise but we stick by our opinion that both games were more centered around Jackass and gimmicks than they were the heart and soul of the franchise – skating. When American Wasteland was first announced we were dubious to say the least, fearing that it would be another step further towards the death of one of our favourite series. We feared more wacky vehicles, stupid gimmicky objectives and Steve-O showing his ugly tattooed mug at every turn and challenging us to ollie piles of shit or vomit on command in a combo. Thankfully we were dead wrong. American Wasteland is, to put it plainly, a welcome return to form.

I'd like a tat that says "Wilks sucks" please

YOUNG HAYSEED

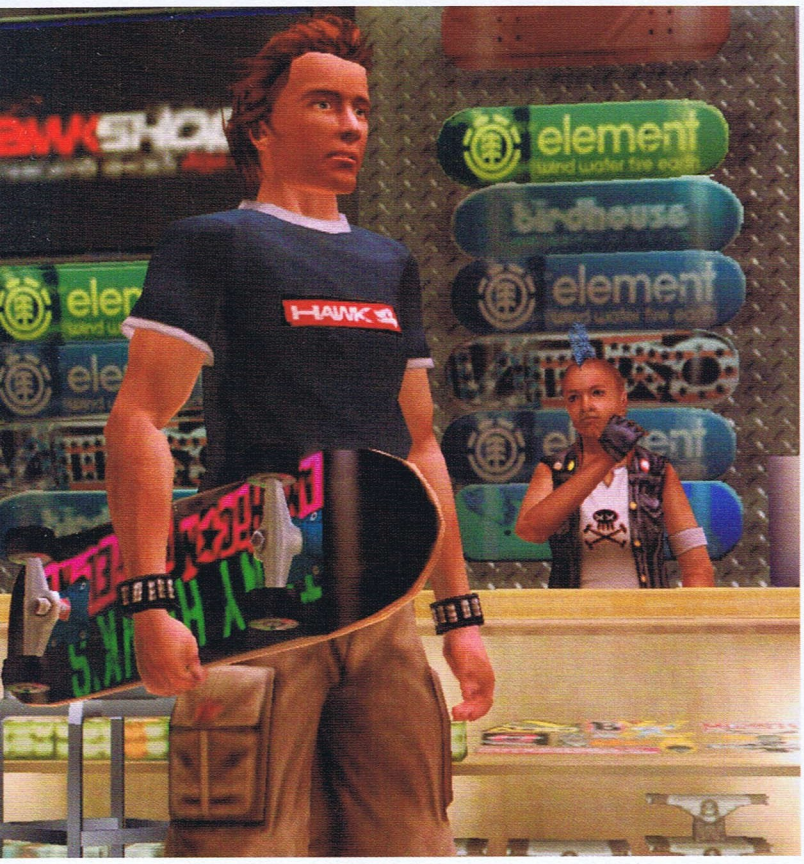
You can never accuse a Tony Hawk game of having a particularly good story to go along with their single player mode but American Wasteland does the best it can with what it has. Set some time in the 80s (obviously a rather anachronistic period of time due to the numerous recent pop-culture references), American Wasteland tells the story of a young hayseed from the sticks taking his board to the big bad city to become a champ, falling for a punk girl and helping to build the biggest and best skate park around. It's simple but moves the action along nicely. It also works particularly well in the fact that you can go to the park and skate the new additions as the game progresses, giving you both a feeling of completion and a great place to skate with ever increasing trick lines.

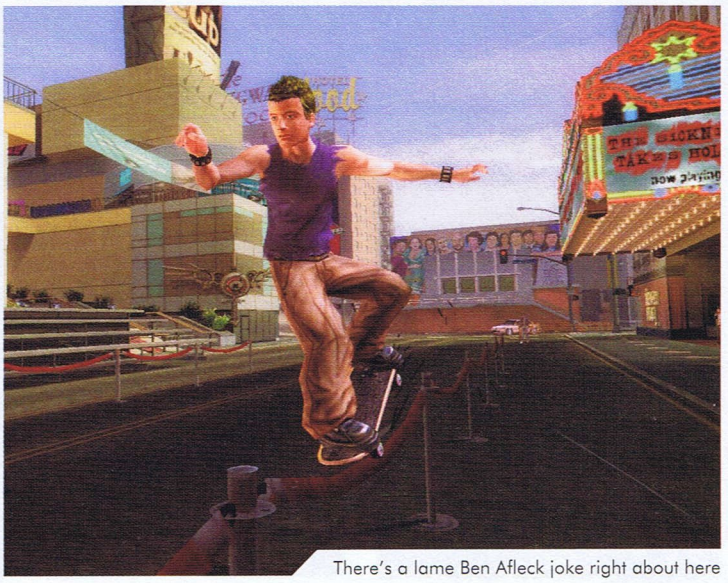
[up] Awesomely 80s threads available



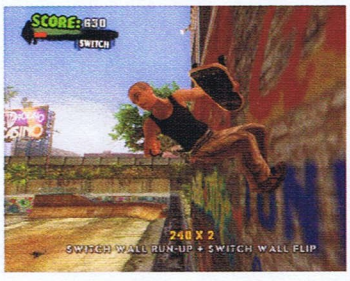
[up] Nothing says skating like BMX

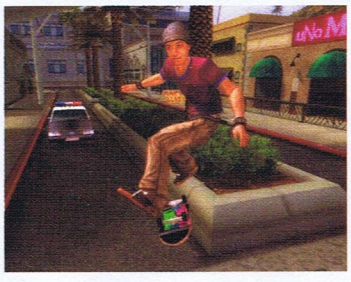
What makes American Wasteland such a great return to form is the gameplay progression and the objectives. Unlike other games in the series, THAW casts the player as a new skater, not one who already knows all of the angles, so the first half of the game is made up of objectives to learn the skills that you need to pull off big combos; reverts, manuals, boneless, grinds, focus, specials and the like. You don't have the skills until you unlock them. Sure, if you've played the series before you may know how to do these but it's still a satisfying way to get back into the swing of things as well as being a great introduction for new players. Even better news is that probably 95% of the objectives involve technical tricks. No more do you have to ride a souped up Segway, ollie off the aforementioned piles of shit or race hospital gurneys, instead you will find yourself having to pull off massive trick combos, perform technical tricks on cue and follow some pretty impressive lines. That said, bizarrely, one





There's a lame Ben Afleck joke right about here





Gleam that cube!

of the mainstays of the series – competitions, are nearly totally omitted from the game. The only competition in the story mode is the rather simple Tony Hawk AMJAM about one third of the way in.

CLASSICALLY TRAINED

As well as the relatively short story mode (it can be completed in about six hours), THAW ships with a large classics mode, encompassing a number of levels similar to previous games, complete with time limits, collect SKATE runs, find the hidden tape and other objectives familiar to those who have played the series before. While the classic mode adds nothing to the franchise it does add a good long sense of playability and some needed familiarity.

One of the much talked about features in American Wasteland is the seamless world with no load times. Although the game does aim towards that end it simply isn't true. Each area in THAW is connected by a relatively featureless tunnel, clearly placed there so it can stream the next area to skate in. This wouldn't be so bad but there is one small thing that can make these tunnels just as frustrating as a load screen. It's possible to travel through the tunnels faster than the game can stream the level so instead of seamlessly transitioning from one area to another you will frequently find yourself bouncing off the door leading to the next area instead of having it open for you as you approach (as it should do). This is especially frustrating in the few missions that require the player to move from one area to another within a time limit.

CHARACTER MODELS RANGE FROM SIMPLY UGLY AND JAGGY TO LOOKING LIKE GERIATRIC BURNS VICTIMS

One area in which the Tony Hawk franchise hasn't evolved is the graphics. While the levels may be nicely detailed and the animations smooth and well thought out, the actual character models range from simply ugly and jaggy to looking like geriatric burns victims. The soundtrack is good for what it is, a compilation of a few 80s tracks and some more modern low-fi punk/rock tunes. The voice acting is also decent, aside from the fact that all male skaters sound like Peter Parker, even if they are buff, black and have a massive afro and muttonchops.

The bottom line, however, is that Tony Hawk is a skating game once again, and a great one at that. <<

>> BMX BANDITS The other big addition to the franchise, BMX, works extremely well. Unlike skating where everything is controlled through face buttons and triggers, BMX stunts use a combination of buttons, triggers and the right thumbstick. Although the BMX objectives are only tenuously related to the story mode (there is one mission that requires you to have completed the first few BMX objectives), going back through the game after finishing the story mode and doing all of the BMX objectives is a huge amount of fun and just different enough to keep you interested.

AVAILABLE ON:
PS2 / XBOX / PC / GCN

DETAILS:

CATEGORY: Skating
PLAYERS: 1-2
DEVELOPER: Neversoft
PUBLISHER: Activision
PRICE: $49.95 (GCN), 89.95 (others)
RATING: M 15+
AVAILABLE: Now

HYPER VERDICT:

PLUS: Good levels, technical objectives, it's a skating game again.

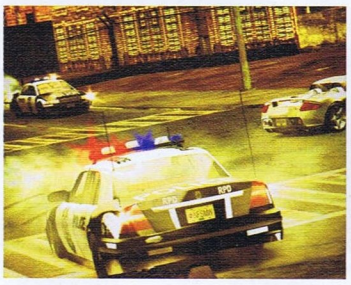
MINUS: Load tunnels, burn victims, short story mode.

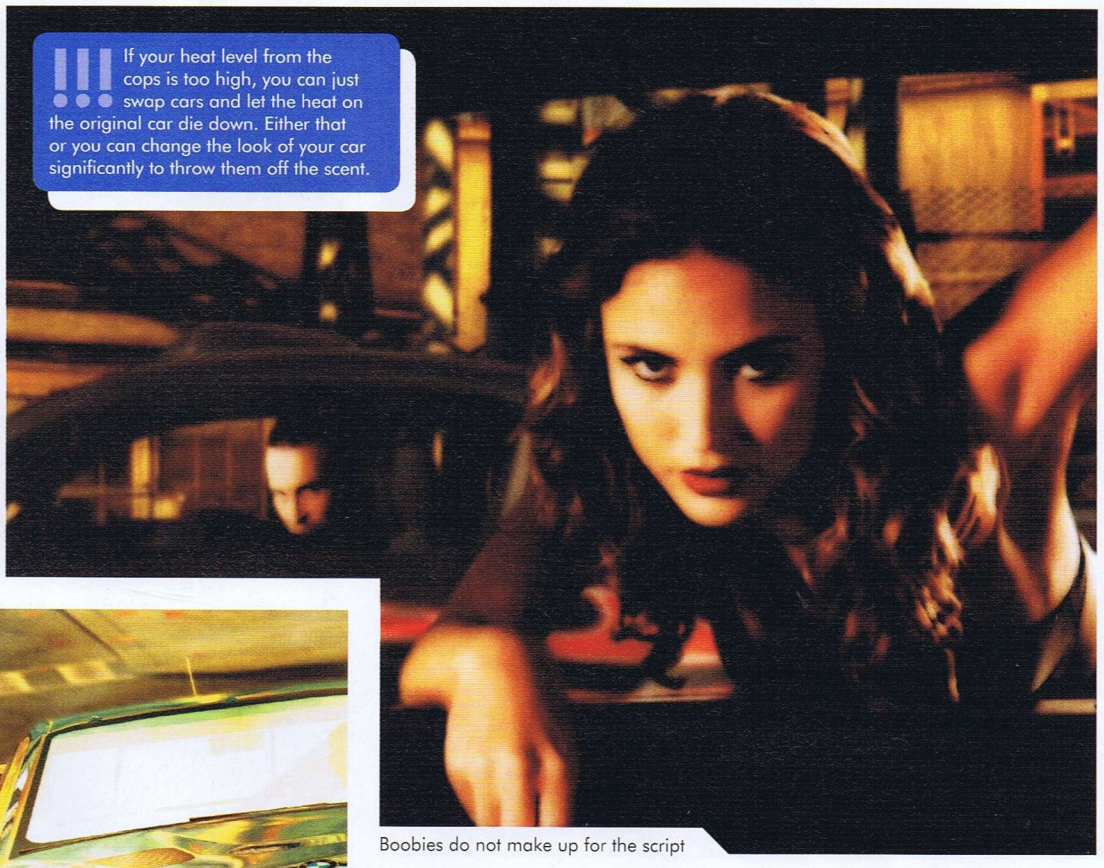
VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY
80	86	91

OVERALL
90

A fine return to form for Neversoft.

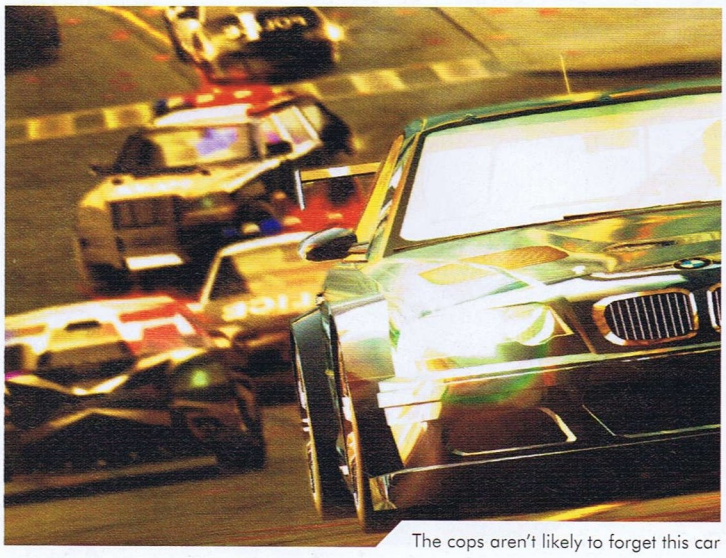
HYPER BIG RUBBER STAMP OF APPROVAL



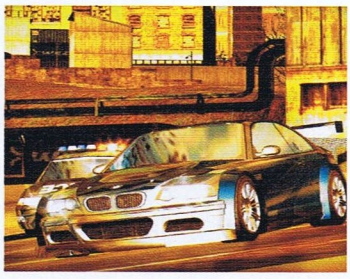


!!! If your heat level from the cops is too high, you can just swap cars and let the heat on the original car die down. Either that or you can change the look of your car significantly to throw them off the scent.

Boobies do not make up for the script



The cops aren't likely to forget this car



NEED FOR SPEED: Most Wanted

CAM SHEA thinks "Big Lou" should be the new mascot

The setup for Most Wanted is that you've had your super hotted up car taken from you by some rich white boy racer, and in order to challenge him to get it back, you need to work your way up the "blacklist". There are fifteen racers on the blacklist – each of whom requires you to complete a certain number of race events, milestones and reach a certain bounty level before you can challenge them. The characters may be straight out of The Cliché Street Racer Handbook, but it's actually a pretty smart way to structure a racing game, giving you a goal and making each race count towards something.

SMOKED

Most Wanted feels a lot like the NFS: Underground series got together with the old school NFS titles and had a good long chat. You've got the freedom to roam across a huge area, choosing from a number of events at any one time. You can buy or win a whole garage full of cars, upgrade their performance and customise their look. But unlike the Underground games, where there wasn't much point driving around the world, aside from getting to races, Most Wanted gives you cops to play with. If you don't feel like doing a more traditional event, you can just start driving recklessly and kick off a police pursuit, which ties into the milestones system. These are challenges that score you bounty for completing them. They're things like getting clocked above a certain speed by a police speed trap, maintaining a police pursuit for a certain length of time and so on. They're a great addition to the game because they can be completed at any time.

The cop AI is just about right too. They're aggressive, but not overbearing. Pursuits are almost always fun and drama filled, and although it can take a while, shaking the cops is a good challenge. The most sensible aspect of the cop mechanics, though, is that it's quite hard for them to actually bust you. If you do get busted, you have the option to either pay for all your outstanding infractions or use a "get out of gaol free" style card. Either way, if you keep getting busted you'll eventually have that car confiscated. Thus, it's a good idea to have a few cars in your garage at any one time.

World design is a great mix of the old and the new. There are heaps of long flowing freeways, as well as more grid-like urban and industrial areas. Race events cover almost every kilometre of the maps, with the usual sprint, circuit and knockout races, as well as a great new addition - Speedtrap. In this, there are a host of speed cameras along the course and it's the highest total speed score at the end that wins. Maximising your speed for each camera is a great challenge, not only requiring a good line at the right moment, but judicious use of nitrous too. There are a few weaker aspects to Most Wanted, but it's strong in the areas that count.

AVAILABLE ON:
PS2 / XBOX / PC / GCN

DETAILS:

CATEGORY: Racing
PLAYERS: 1-Multi
DEVELOPER: EA Canada
PUBLISHER: EA
PRICE: $99.95 (PS2, Xbox), $69.95 (GCN, PC) • **RATING:** TBC
AVAILABLE: Now

HYPER VERDICT:

PLUS: Huge world, lots to do, all the fun of police chases without the death.

MINUS: Drag races, sucky start, focus not that useful, acting and script.

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY
85	84	85

OVERALL
85

Lacks the flair of some arcade racers, but still great fun.

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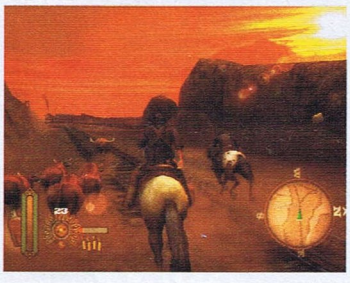
Old West drive-by



Race you to the ominous looking gap

GUN

MARCH STEPNIK hunts for the nearest pay 'n' spray...

Gun's a lot like a nagging other half; you'll do what you ultimately want to do regardless of how much they moan about it, but you'd really rather do it without all the fuss and trouble.

BE WHO YOU WANT TO BE YEAAAH

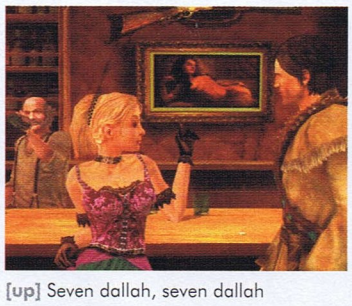
On the one hand, Gun teases you with its hyped "open ended" play; that is, if you want to leave the main story missions aside and explore the rather funky world Neversoft has created and take part in all the side missions on offer (Privateer or Grand Theft Auto style), you can. Similarly, if you want to avoid all the extraneous stuff you can focus on the story missions instead and see the whole grand tale through to the very end.

On the other, while Gun feels and often behaves like a game where you've got real choice, there's this nagging (and sometimes screaming-bloody-murder) sensation that something's not quite right. You soon discover that Neversoft's perched there in the background shattering the precious illusion of freedom by telling you to do it their way.

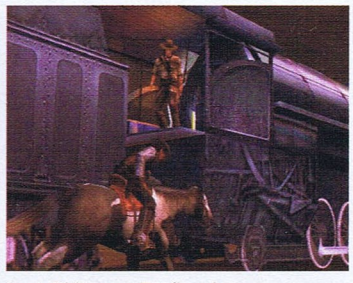
Fortunately there's plenty to like about Gun. The production values are top notch – the vocal performances, script and story, as well as the rather sprawling depiction of the Wild West are all strong. Sure, the story may move at a slightly breakneck speed at times - introducing a character, revealing him as an antagonist after a rather predictable twist, then pitting you against him in that same mission's climax - but on the whole it's entertaining enough to compel you through all the action.

The missions themselves are nicely varied too, guiding you through multiple objectives that'll take you to all corners of the frontier land acting as aggressor, defendant and terrorist (depending on your point of view of course). Horse riding is particularly well handled, as both a mode of transport and during action seqeunces, and combat itself is respectable in its own third person kinda way – it's much better than GTA's but still suffers from control quirks and has a similarly clunky feel to it. The bullet time inspired Quick Draw is also a smart way to handle the l33t skills of the fabled Wild West gunman, and works to good effect in the game in offering a timed super-attack to help turn the tide of battle.

And of course, there are the much talked about side missions (see boxout). The main reason to complete these is the reward of cold hard cash which can be spent on upgrading your weapons (reload speed, power, ammo capacity, etc) and stat increases (which also increase with the main story missions).



[up] Seven dallah, seven dallah

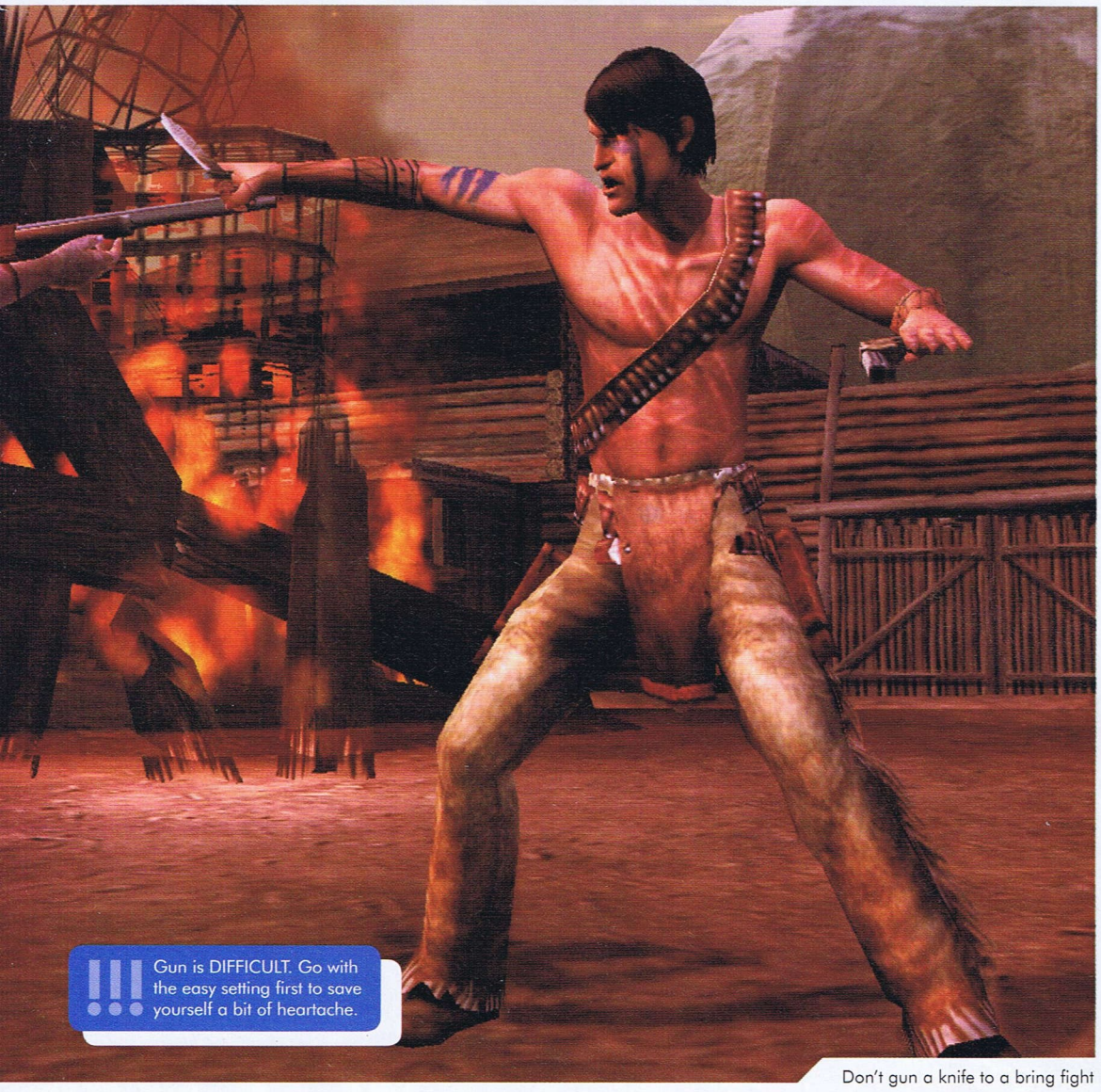


[up] Obligatory Firefly reference

NOT SO OPTIONAL

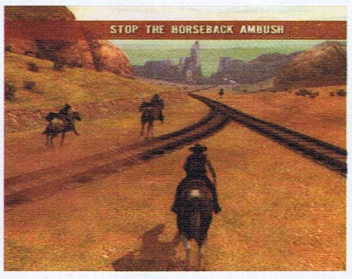
This leads us to Gun's first big sin – that you're essentially forced to play these side missions to make your character powerful enough to face not only the bread and butter missions of Gun, but the particularly challenging boss duels later in the game. Heck, you'll need to upgrade your character so that you can complete some of the side missions in the first place.

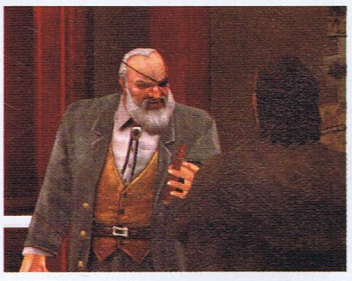
Which leads us to Gun's second big sin – mission difficulty. Around half of Gun's missions are difficult,



Gun is DIFFICULT. Go with the easy setting first to save yourself a bit of heartache.

Don't gun a knife to a bring fight





QUICK DRAW IS A SMART WAY TO HANDLE THE 133T SKILLS OF THE FABLED WILD WEST GUNMAN

and unfairly so, which is mostly a result of giant waves of enemies (aren't we past that?), weapon reload times which are painfully slow (hence the need to upgrade) and environmental cover which is generally sparse. What's more, if your character does survive the initial onslaught, most missions task you with protecting another character. Unfortunately these guys cark it way too easily, so get used to the mission failed screen as you'll be seeing it often.

Furthermore, the game is quite particular as to how you complete each mission. One objective had us protect a character at a stationary gun, and after more than a dozen attempts at the mission (you're supposed to snipe attackers from a rocky outcrop), success was found after another half a dozen attempts of taking the lower ground and standing near the gun. That the game chastises you repeatedly for the duration for not taking the original sniper's position is just a real insult, and we wish we could say it only happens once throughout the game.

Gun's last major sin is its sloppy interface design. In particular, the radial mini map in the screen's lower left corner handily points the way to mission objectives. Was it really necessary to stress the location of the next story mission though? With a large flashing red indicator on the map, and instructions on the game screen proper (just in case you missed the map) to go to a location to trigger the next story mission, it's hard to shake the feeling that Neversoft don't really want you to explore in the first place... at the very least it's a highly visible and annoying reminder that sours the feel of a free-form world to explore at your own leisure.

Ultimately, Gun is an ambitious and slickly produced rendition of GTA done in the Wild West – an idea with plenty of merit and potential – which is unfortunately layered on a decidedly inelegant game system. This is only disappointing because the main problems of Gun aren't fundamental – at least, nothing that six months or so of further polish couldn't have fixed. <<

>> **ON THE SIDE** **As a concept the side missions get two enthusiastic thumbs up. Not all are particularly thrilling (the gold-mining operations for example, are a bit of a drag) but they offer a nice alternative to the main story action. Bounties and Marshall missions test your shooting skills while the Pony Express missions form the 'driving' component of the game, tasking you with hooning about on your horse to complete each delivery. Our favourites, however, are the Ranch-Hand and Hunting missions available, giving a totally different feel to the rest of the game. Herding (for the local ranch) is almost Gun meets Zen with its horseback coaxing of bovines and equestrian, while hunting has you slow right down and an engage in stealthy dance with some formidable frontier opponents like the grey wolf.**

AVAILABLE ON:
PS2 / XBOX / PC / GCN

DETAILS:

CATEGORY: Cowboy Sim
PLAYERS: 1
DEVELOPER: Neversoft
PUBLISHER: Activision
PRICE: $49.95 (GCN), $69.95 (PC), $89.95 (PS2, Xbox)
RATING: MA15+ **AVAILABLE:** Now

HYPER VERDICT:

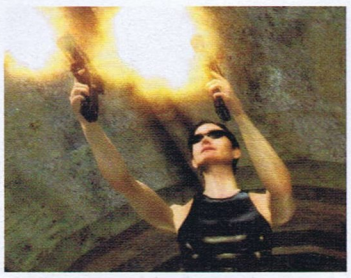
PLUS: Looks and sounds like the Wild West, cool story, lots of side missions.

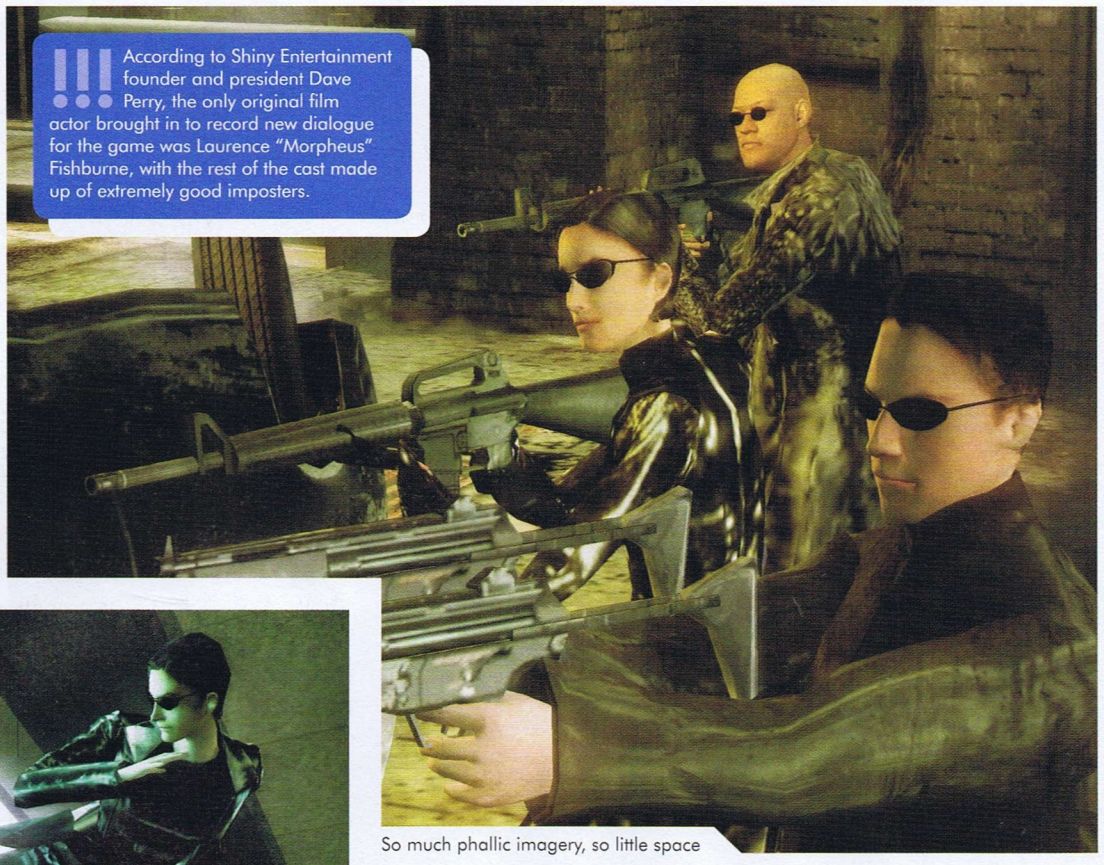
MINUS: Frustrating mission design, lack of a free-roam feel, radar.

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY
88	89	73

OVERALL
79

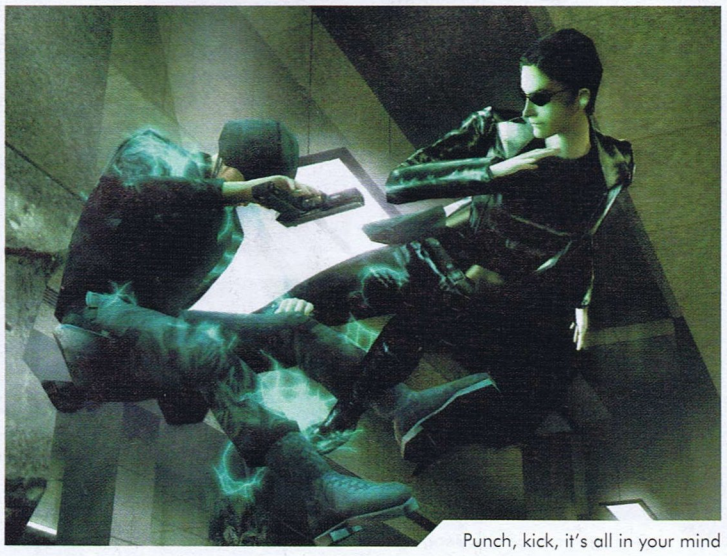
Not quite cool enough to get away with a single word name.



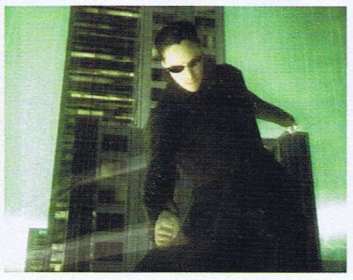


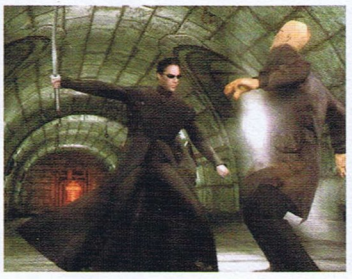
!!! According to Shiny Entertainment founder and president Dave Perry, the only original film actor brought in to record new dialogue for the game was Laurence "Morpheus" Fishburne, with the rest of the cast made up of extremely good imposters.

So much phallic imagery, so little space



Punch, kick, it's all in your mind





THE MATRIX: Path of Neo

MOESMARS BRANCOMBES explores the gameplay matrix

Our rocky six-year relationship with The Matrix has been oft documented within the pages of this publication. It's not that we don't want to love the series like a man should love a trio of beautiful, if a little dim, triplets, it's just that the two weakest filmic siblings and their partially retarded interactive progeny consistently conspire to keep us apart. Then along comes The Matrix: Path of Neo. We may just be in love again.

PAPA'S GOT A BRAND NEO BAG

No it's not a lie, The Matrix: Path of Neo is surprisingly fun, the kind of fun you always knew The Matrix should have been but were too afraid to hope for. If however you are expecting a game that will let you experience the Matrix - to explore the digital playground where the possibilities are limited only by your imagination, then this is not that game. Neither is it particularly about puzzle solving or exploration, although both feature fleetingly. Instead it is an out-and-out actioner.

Assuming the role of the trilogy's protagonist, Neo, you'll finally get to play through all of the most iconic action sequences from all three movies, brawling, slashing and shooting your way through hundreds of agents and other Matrix villains. It's a completely entertaining prospect, and one that Shiny has embellished with beautiful graphics, cinematic sound and authentic level design.

As fun as it is, Neo's unnecessarily complex control system does seem mismatched with the simple gameplay mechanics. For example, to shoot some objects you'll need to press no less than three buttons at once whilst using the game's rudimentary lock-on system to aim your gun. It's not at all intuitive, but once mastered some spectacular combat is possible including double and triple grapples, special weapon attacks and of course, the inevitable bullet-time.

To tell the game's story the Wachowski brothers have re-edited much of their original film footage into music video-styled montages. They've also changed key story events to provide the game with a multi-pathed design. Choosing any number of the multiple paths typically does not alter the course of the game substantially, but it's certainly refreshing to see familiar sequences re-worked to accommodate new, more gameplay-friendly outcomes.

The other new addition, the new ending, will prove a positively revelatory moment for Matrix fans. We won't spoil it, but needless to say the new conclusion involves far less self-sacrifice and far more Smith-sacrifice.

The emphasis on individual action set pieces at the expense of a more free flowing exploratory game will perhaps not win every player over and the consistently intense battles do mean that it's often hard to tell were the bullet-time ends and the sloppy framerates begin, but while it may be an imperfect world, Matrix fans should definitely take the red pill.

AVAILABLE ON:
PS2 / XBOX / PC / GCN

DETAILS:

CATEGORY: Action
PLAYERS: 1
DEVELOPER: Shiny Entertainment
PUBLISHER: Atari
PRICE: $99.95 PS2, Xbox, $79.95 PC
RATING: TBC
AVAILABLE: Now

HYPER VERDICT:

PLUS: New content by the Wachowski Bros, varied and customisable combat.

MINUS: Controls more convoluted than its plot, intense battles can lag.

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY
85	89	81

OVERALL
81

Worth another trip down the rabbit hole.

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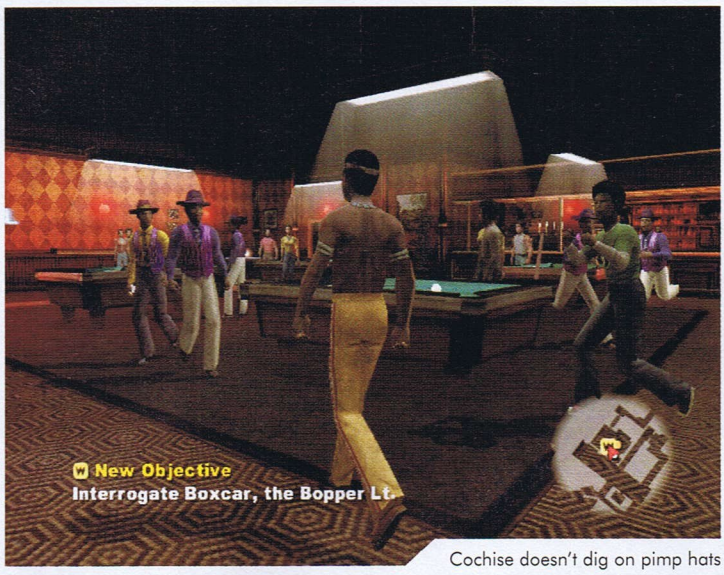
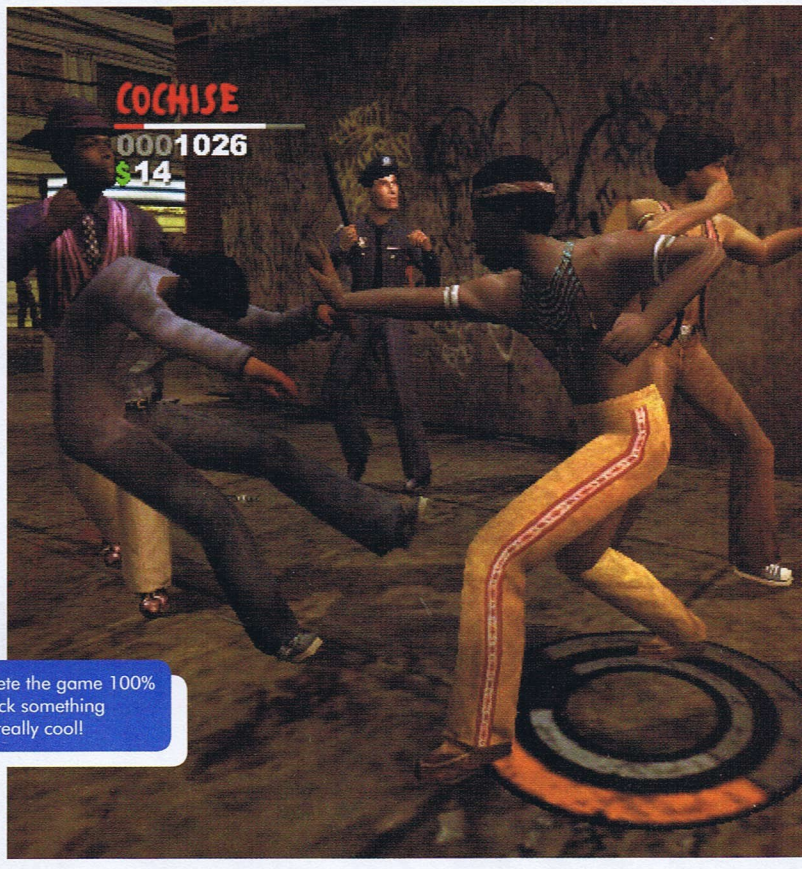
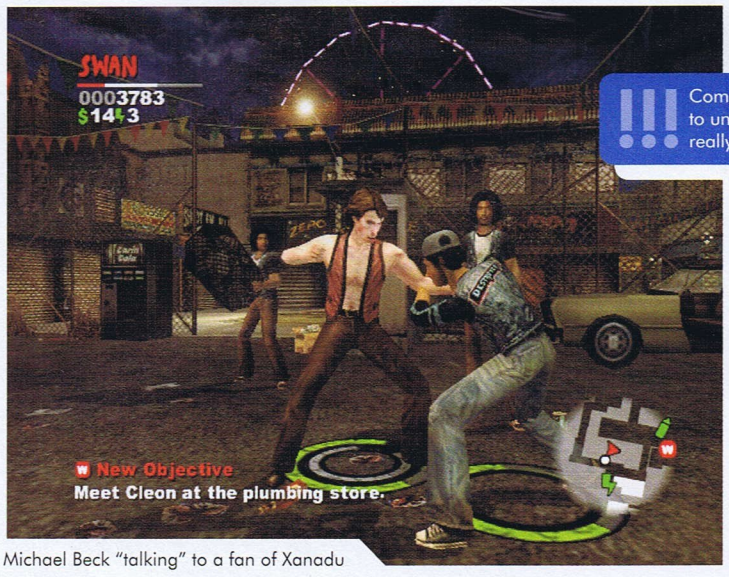


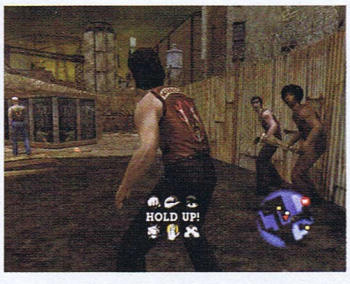
Cochise doesn't dig on pimp hats

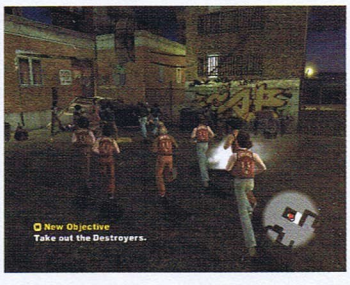




Michael Beck "talking" to a fan of Xanadu

!!! Complete the game 100% to unlock something really, really cool!

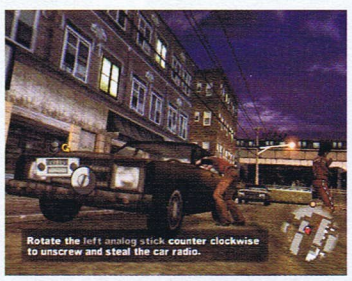




THE WARRIORS

DANIEL WILKS went on to star in Xanadu II: Electric Boogaloo

Anyone who has been reading the mag for more than a couple of issues will know that I love the film The Warriors. I don't mean love as in I like it a lot and watch it every now and then. If it weren't against the laws of both state and god I would marry it and father some very stylish but rather shallow children who would go on to form a gang, beat some people up, wear brown leather and run away a lot. Why am I saying this? Well, I thought I would love the game based on the movie. I tried really hard to find the love in me but it's not there. I'm gonna have to settle with like.

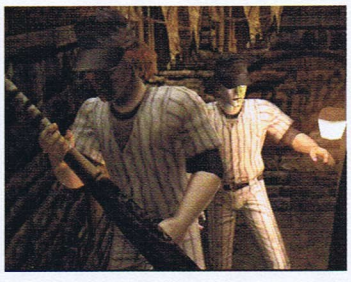


Been caught stealin' once, when I was five

THE CATERING BUSINESS

It's not that the game doesn't cater to my fanboyish nature that is disappointing – it does that in spades with the game starting a full 90 days before the events of the film to give you a grounding in the world of The Warriors. The game goes even further adding a number of optional flashback missions telling the story of how The Warriors were first founded by Cleon and how all of the key members joined. Before going any further we should start at the beginning for those silly people who have not seen the movie. The Warriors is based on the 1979 film of the same name telling the story of a Coney Island gang who must make their way from Central Park back to Coney through enemy gang territory after being framed for the murder of the leader of the largest gang in the city. The game charts events leading up to the film as well as the events of the film.

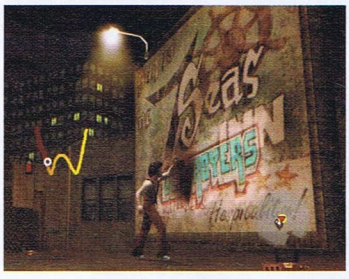
Throughout the game players take the role of all of the key members of The Warriors; Cleon, the Warchief, Swan, the silent and serious 2IC, Ajax, the muscle, Rembrandt, the graffiti artist, Fox the scout and more, making their way through a number of gang related scenarios. Although a beat 'em up at heart, The Warriors also features elements of strategy as you have limited control over the other gang members running with you at any time by barking simple orders such as "Waste Them All" or "Stay". These commands come in handy in the vast majority of the missions as you will need to have your crew watch your back as you lay a burner (although it sounds like the after effects of a curry, it actually means to put The Warriors tag on a wall), to have them help trash and loot shops (you need money for spray paint and Flash, a healing drug) or to simply stomp on a rival gang.

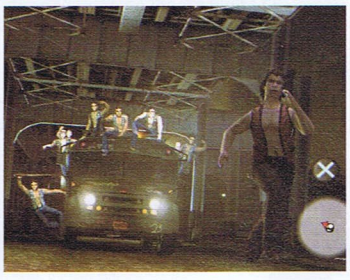


[up] Baseball Furies - 'nuff said

The combat in The Warriors is very visceral. It's mean and not at all pretty. The people you are playing and fighting are gang members. They're criminals with little in the way of empathy and morals so don't expect to encounter mercy (aside from the sole named female character Mercy). Instead you will see brutal punches and kicks, stabbings, clubbings and stompings. The look of the combat is dead on but the feel of it is where The Warriors doesn't really live up to its promise. Each of the warriors has different statistics and different looking fighting styles but they all fight the same. The same combos, the same throws, the same grapples. Sure, they may look different but they don't play different. After

Everyone's an art critic





a while all of the Warriors blend into one. Even though Ajax is the muscle and Fox is the scout, both of them are equally adept at taking out enemy gang members.

Luckily the combat mechanics are quite robust so there's still a lot to enjoy even if there is a feeling of sameness that runs through the characters. Each player has access to a number of two button combos, a few grapples and throws and can wield pretty much anything they can pick up as a weapon, from broken bottles to garbage cans. For added fun, two gang members can team up to do a spectacular, bone crunching combo move when one member has an enemy in a grapple. By mixing up attacks, Warriors fill an energy bar that can be tapped to enter a rage mode, giving the player more powerful attacks for a limited duration. Unfortunately many of the boss fights against leaders of different gangs fall somewhat flat as they are superhuman fighters who follow set patterns and can seemingly only be killed by running about like a fool and throwing bricks at them.

YOU CAN SEE HOW BEATEN UP YOUR WARRIOR IS BY LOOKING AT THE CUTS AND BRUISES ON HIS BODY

YOU'RE ALL WINNERS

Presentation wise, The Warriors is a winner. While the graphics may lack a little of the gloss we're now seeing in games, the settings and character models are a perfect representation of the film. It's dirty, dark and mean and when people get hit they stay hit. Aside from the damage meter in the HUD you can see how beaten up your Warrior is by looking at the cuts and bruises all over his body. The soundtrack and voice acting are both brilliant, the former comprising a number of tracks heard in the film and the latter sees the return of numerous cast members, including Michael Beck as Swan and James Remar as Ajax. Unfortunately David Patrick Kelly doesn't reprise his role as Luther, leader of The Rogues but his sound alike does a good job filling his shoes. <<

>> GANGS OF NEW YORK There are a huge number of unlockables found throughout the game, most of them multiplayer modes and characters. The multiplayer modes available are by and large variants of those seen in most shooters – King of the Hill, Capture the Flag (here titled Have Mercy) and deathmatch. Although the games are distracting, they don't really have the appeal to make you want to go back to them. Aside from the Warriors, all of the gangs in the game, and the members thereof can be unlocked for the multiplayer modes, from the Grammercy Riffs right down to people on the street. Co-op is also available in the story mode. Both Co-op and multiplayer have a similar problem – the default camera switches between single screen and split screen depending on the proximity of the players. It's a great idea in theory but in practice it leads to no end of trouble with players not being able to see anything, the camera switching at random times and one player having control of the camera when the screen is not split. The camera can be swapped to a permanent horizontal split but that also proves to be a problem as neither player gets much of a view of the terrain.

AVAILABLE ON:
PS2 / XBOX / PC / GCN

DETAILS:

CATEGORY: Beat 'em Up
PLAYERS: 1-2
DEVELOPER: Rockstar
PUBLISHER: Take 2
PRICE: $89.95
RATING: MA 15+
AVAILABLE: Now

HYPER VERDICT:

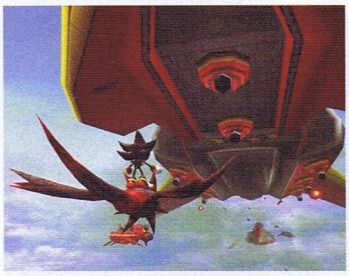
PLUS: Faithful recreation of the movie, great voice acting, visceral.

MINUS: Combat gets samey, boss battles, multiplayer feels tacked on.

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY
89	92	88

OVERALL
86

"Warriors! Come out to pla-e-ay"



!!! There are more than 50 stages of this drivel to unlock, if you can bring yourself to play it for that long. *sigh* Well, there's always next year, I guess.

He's a Hedgehog, WITH A BAZOOKA!

Guns = Gameplay Innovation

SHADOW THE HEDGEHOG

PATRICK KOLAN sees his childhood slip away

The anti-hero Shadow the Hedgehog rears his head and dons his rollerblades, in another sinful, irritating foray into what could have been. This time, Shadow is out for blood – harassed by aliens bent on invasion, an army out to stop him, and afflicted by amnesia.

GIVING CRATES A BAD NAME

Sonic Team, in a move that we can only attribute to a misguided boardroom brainstorming session, determined that gamers these days really just want guns and explosions, and that this will somehow make the game more mature. Sorry, but guns and vehicles aren't a natural fit for this franchise, and if you're going to introduce them, you'd better make damn sure they work. Unfortunately in Shadow, they just don't - stopping every ten feet to blast the crap out of giant crates is not gameplay.

Sure, such a change of direction could be justified in the name of experimentation – the Sonic games aren't exactly known for taking risks with the formula, so we can see the logic, but it all comes back to the plain fact that this game is horrible to play, and there is nothing new about any of this.

Attacking enemies after leaping into the air is not the light-footed ballet of pummelling dives and kicks it should be. Instead, Shadow hurls himself at his opponent again and again until it is in a state of submission before flying at the next nearest opponent. Sounds alright, but once you're out of baddies to pound, Shadow flings himself out and away from your last target. And over an edge. Where you fall. Forcing you to redo the section. And this nonsense happens over and over again throughout the game.

Shadow rolls around levels with all the precision of a block of butter tilted around the surface of a hot skillet. All too often, the clunky, cumbersome controls and equally poor camera will team up to hamper your progress, sending you over ledges or into the path of your enemies, spilling rings and causing screams.

It's not like the sense of speed or visuals help make it more tolerable either. The frame rate struggles at times and the texturework is – amazingly enough - a step backwards from the Dreamcast incarnations.

Then there's the voice 'acting'... and we use that term very loosely, as it's as embarrassing as ever. It's a wonder why Sega would let their star franchise be soiled so. How hard is it to find an actor that knows how to use emphasis and change the tone of their voice?

So we're left asking ourselves the question: why, Sega, why? Why would you unleash this monstrosity on the public? A public that wants to play a Sonic game, not for the guns and exploding crates, but for the thrill of speed, the smooth flow of the course, and the clink of rings. It's fine to want to change up the franchise, but this is a poorly conceived approach.

AVAILABLE ON:
PS2 / XBOX / PC / GCN

DETAILS:

CATEGORY: Action
PLAYERS: 1
DEVELOPER: Sonic Team
PUBLISHER: Sega
PRICE: $79.95
RATING: TBC
AVAILABLE: Now

HYPER VERDICT:

PLUS: Well, the intro is kinda cool. The disc makes a nice drink coaster.

MINUS: Severely flawed design and implementation, no fun.

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY
68	55	45

OVERALL
56

Yuji, either put this franchise out to pasture, or fix it. Please.

PLAY AS MAN. PLAY AS KONG.

PETER JACKSON'S KING KONG

THE OFFICIAL GAME OF THE MOVIE

Break jaws, slam enemies, and throw massive objects in Kong's third-person battles.

Use weapons, traps, and your team wisely to survive in first-person as Jack.

November 2005

www.kingkonggame.com

Moderate violence

PlayStation 2 PSP XBOX XBOX 360 NINTENDO GAMECUBE PC CD-ROM NINTENDO DS UBISOFT™

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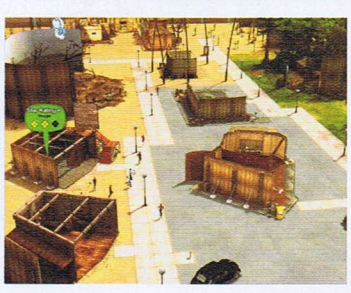
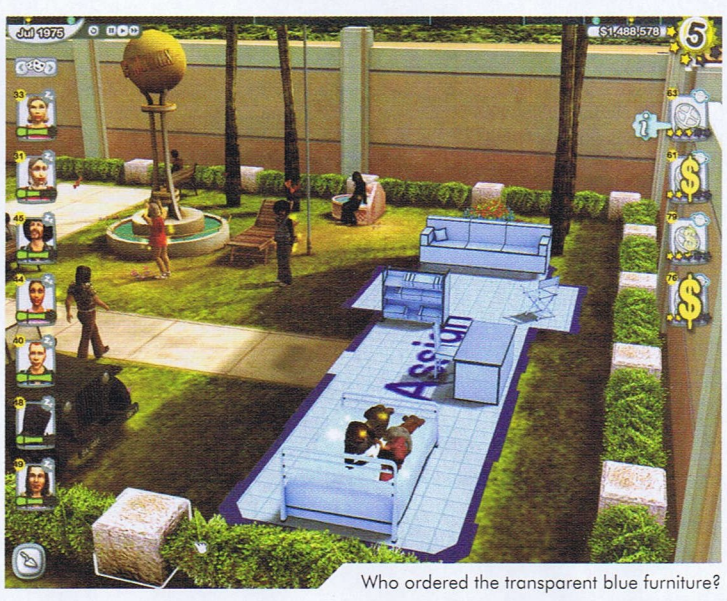
and PlayStation , PSP , UMD and are registered trademarks of Sony Computer Entertainment Inc. All Rights Reserved.

In terms of the radio DJs in the game, the 1940s DJ who spouts anti-communist propaganda is particularly entertaining...



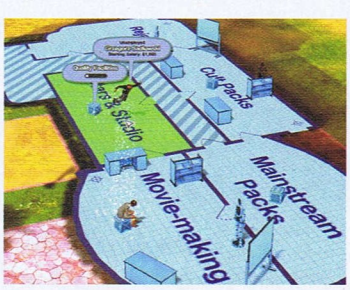


Who ordered the transparent blue furniture?

THE MOVIES

KOSTA ANDREADIS is a big fan of witty banter

There's no sane reason out there why someone wouldn't want to be the big cheese at some Hollywood Studio. You'd be able to make whatever the hell movie you'd want, cast it and market it in such a way that the idiotic public at large would pay big money to see it. For example, one could make a Driving Miss Daisy meets Police Academy type movie and cast Morgan Freeman as the limo driver and that black guy who does those cool sound effects (Michael Winslow – Ed) as the cop who accidentally hops into his limo. Together they'd solve crimes and meet aliens posing as supermodels and save the President's life - standard Oscar winning fare. Or better yet, Passion of the Christ meets Pretty Woman or... okay, we're starting to get off track here, but the point is that thanks to The Movies, these masterpieces may actually see the light of day.



[up] All the fun of architecture at home!

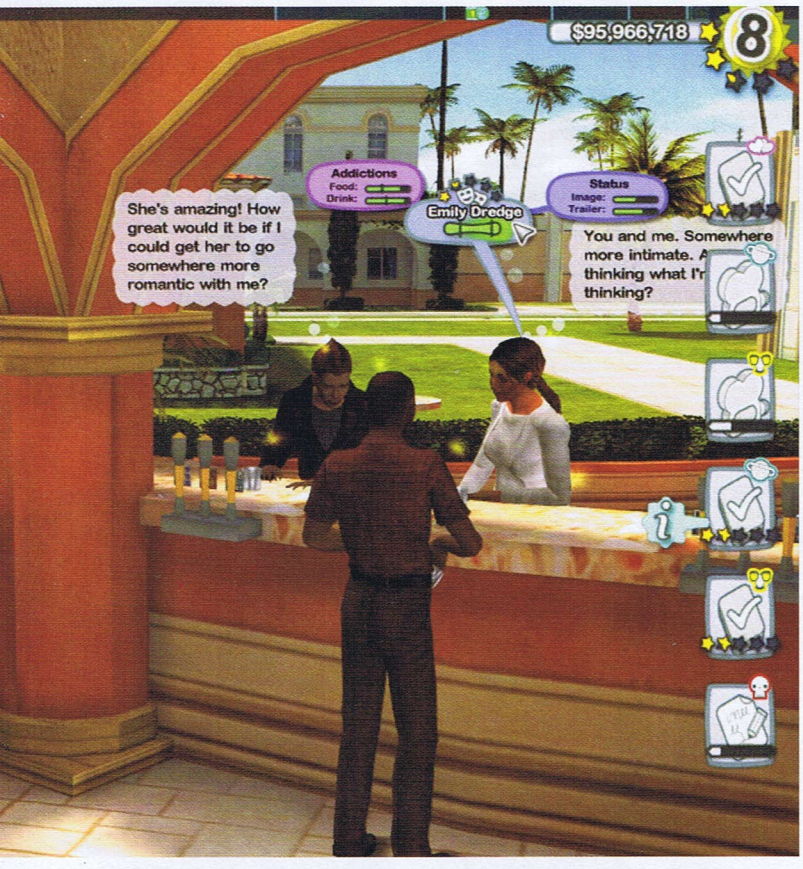
PITCH #14: HOME ALONE MEETS A CLOCKWORK ORANGE

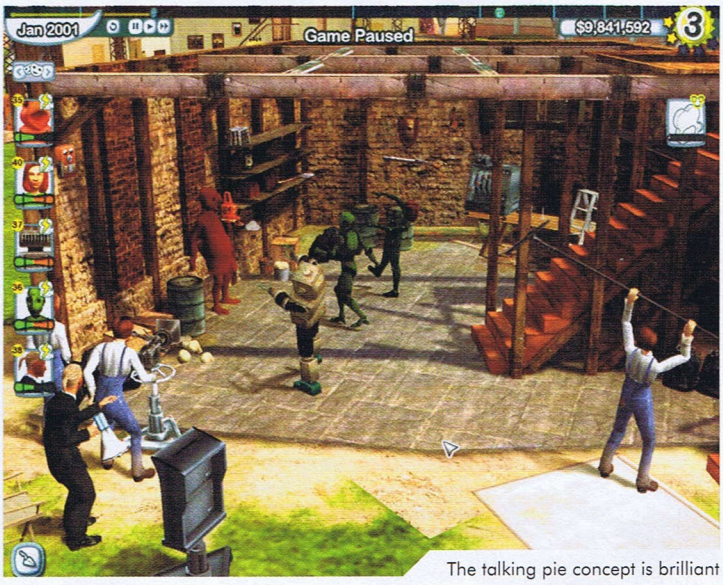
The Movies puts players in charge of their very own movie studio as they cultivate their stars and production facilities from the silent era to current day and beyond. It features so much content that there simply isn't enough room to cover everything in a single review. But the gist of it is this; the game is part detailed simulation game that covers the main aspects of the movie production process and running a studio, and part movie making software where players can control virtually every aspect of their studio's output from casting, props, sets, editing and dialogue. And as far as gists go that's damn good gist.

The myriad of features and choices players have in The Movies is certainly impressive, but the game's intuitive interface lets players interact with their studio in a very simple drag and drop fashion. With the movie industry still in its infancy, things start off simple enough with construction split into three categories: facilities, sets and landscape/decoration. To get your first movie made you'll firstly need a stage school to hire prospective star talent (actors, directors and extras) as well as a scripting office, a casting office, and at least one set. Before you can cast and shoot your movie you'll need to have a script, which you can get via picking up a screenwriter and placing them into one of the five genres that you want your film to be (Action, Horror, Comedy, Romance and Sci-Fi) in the script office. Once the script is written it'll appear outside the scripting office and you'll simply need to pick it up and drop it into the casting office to begin casting. Filling roles is also done via picking up director and actors and placing them in the casting office, once again actions are all kept very simple and intuitive.

Hiring people is done in the same fashion: prospective employees will line up outside specific offices and to hire them you simply need to pick them up and place them in the building. Need to know a little more info on the twenty year old blonde you want to turn into your latest scream queen before you hire her? Simply hold you mouse over her and all the info you need will pop up in little information bubbles - a handy tool to measure all facets of your studio and stars.

With the sole source of income for your studio being the box office, maintaining your studio is a lot more involved than hiring a few janitors - you'll need to keep close tabs on your stars too. This part of the game





The talking pie concept is brilliant

Filmed in front of a live studio audience

becomes remarkably engaging as your stars will evolve according to the way you run the studio. You don't have to keep them happy but in most cases it pays to do so. Stars will build relationships with each other, good and bad and they'll also get bored and stressed. A stressed out director may decide in the middle of a shoot to duck out behind the set and get drunk. You can either pick him up and make him continue the shoot drunk (adversely affecting the quality of the movie), or put a halt on the production and place the director into rehab. All the classic Hollywood quick-fix remedies are available in the game from rehab clinics to cosmetic surgery ranging from a nip and tuck to full blown liposuction.

A STRESSED OUT DIRECTOR MAY DECIDE MID-SHOOT TO DUCK OUT BEHIND THE SET AND GET DRUNK

So if your favourite romantic actress has become fat thanks to you always dropping her next to the food van when she's stressed, you could either put some weights next to her trailer (your stars will get unhappy if you don't build them one, or build better ones for other stars) or take her to the liposuction clinic to suck her dry.

PITCH #35: TURNER & HOOCH 2: ELECTRIC BOOGALOO

Every five years an award ceremony will be held providing bonuses and prestige to a studio in many categories such as the best film, star, studio lot and so forth. With the ultimate goal of the game to try and create and sustain the best studio over the course of a century or so, there's an amazing wealth of gameplay on offer. The current time period not only affects the look and feel of your film (new technologies, sets, facilities and costumes will become regularly available) but also the genres which the public are thirstiest for, as well as the in-game music and radio DJ. Watching your films being shot on set is quite entertaining thanks to the wonderful animation and with the countless sets, costumes and scene set-ups available The Movies will be a sure fire hit with movie and simulation fans everywhere. Although the movie making portion of the game will no doubt spawn a large online community, The Movies works as well as it does because it's a game first and foremost - and a pretty damn good one at that. <<

>> THE MOVIES' MOVIE MAKER As the game progresses new facilities will allow players to create their own scripts as well as complete post production on their movies. Scripts are created using an interactive tool that lets players select scenes, actors, genre and title and give them full reign on props, costumes and character interaction. Post production is equally intuitive allowing players to adjust the impressive title sequence, scene length, fades, sound effects, subtitles and yes, dialogue (assuming you have a microphone attached to your PC). When using dialogue samples players can assign them to a specific character which will in turn cause their mouths to move whilst the course of the sound file plays out. And best of all movies created in the game can be exported and uploaded online where they can be rated by other users and the makers of the game, Lionhead Studios. Cool!

AVAILABLE ON:
PS2 / XBOX / **PC** / GCN

DETAILS:
CATEGORY: Simulation
PLAYERS: 1
DEVELOPER: Lionhead Studios
PUBLISHER: Activision
PRICE: $89.95
RATING: M
AVAILABLE: Now

HYPER VERDICT:
PLUS: Interface, colourful presentation and wonderful animation.

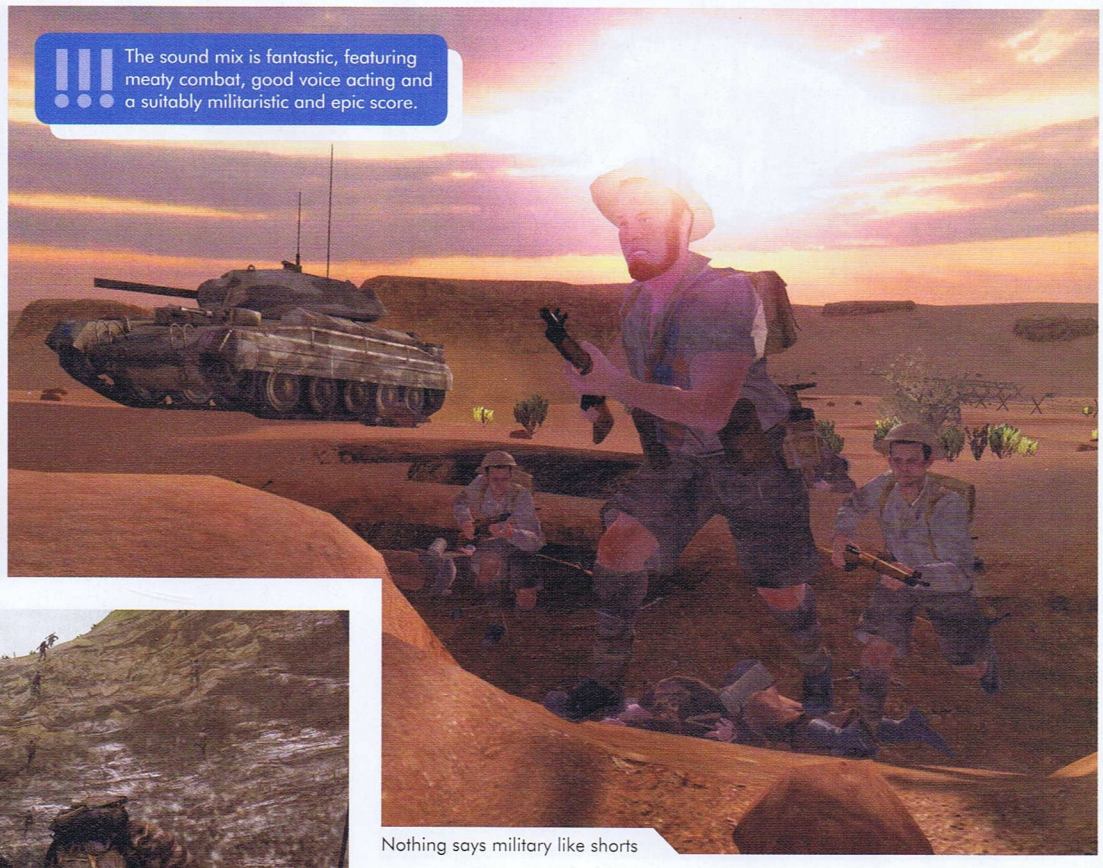
MINUS: Inability to control specific camera movements in movie making.

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY
86	88	92

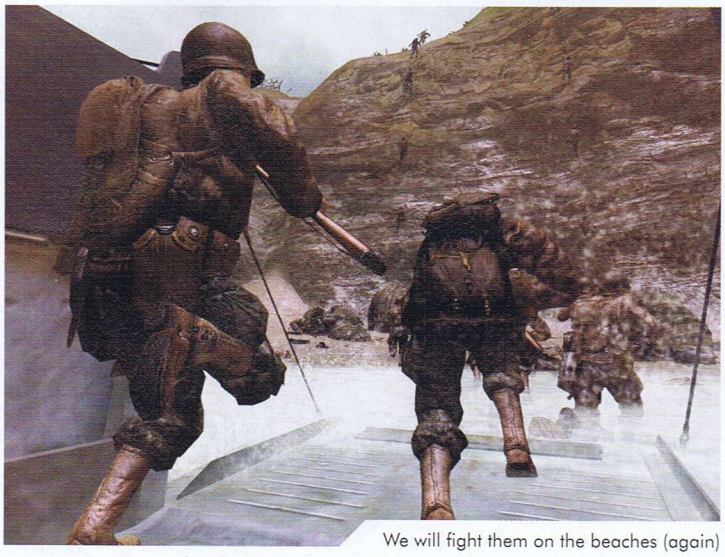
OVERALL
90
A comprehensive and intuitive movie business sim!

HYPER BIG RUBBER STAMP OF APPROVAL

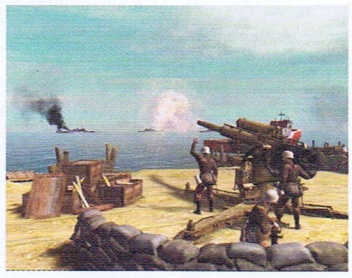
!!! The sound mix is fantastic, featuring meaty combat, good voice acting and a suitably militaristic and epic score.



Nothing says military like shorts



We will fight them on the beaches (again)



CALL OF DUTY 2

DANIEL WILKS is a battle hardened veteran by now...

Call of Duty came out at the perfect time. The gaming public was getting jaded with the fact that every second game seemed to be set during WWII and the press even more so. Although initially sceptical, all of us were swayed to the cause of CoD due in equal parts to the incredible scripting, thrilling missions, good looks and excellent atmosphere. Now, a few years on it's time to enter WWII again, biffing the bosh and hammering the hun. After the initial excitement of re-entering one of the best WWII games ever wears off you're hit by a realisation. Take away the flashy new graphics engine and you've played the game before. This isn't necessarily a bad thing if the game you played before was as good as Call of Duty; the sequel definitely is a good game, but one held back from the heights attained by the original by a definite case of sequelitis.

KNOWING THE BATTLES

Like the original game, Call of Duty 2 sees players making their way through a number of key moments in WWII through Russian, British and American campaigns, each with a very different feel and aesthetic. Although tight and well conceived, there is one thing lacking from the missions in Call of Duty 2 (with the exception of the British Campaign) – the sense of immediacy and immersion that comes from knowing the battles and setting of said battles.

Unlike the original game which was made up of a number of corridors with scripted events triggered as you near them, CoD2 gives players more choice of how they want to approach an objective. The maps for a start are bigger, giving more possible routes to objectives, but many missions also have a number of objectives that can be done in whatever order the player desires. The freedom to approach objectives in a non-predetermined manner is excellent but does lead to a slight problem at some stages. It's possible for the player to actually outpace the scripting of events so you may storm a house, be the first one in only to discover a friendly soldier taking point in an upstairs window, something that is obviously meant to happen after the house is cleared. Friendly soldiers also seem incapable of finishing objectives by themselves, so even though they may storm a house with you it will be up to the player to find and kill the final target to secure the objective, breaking some of the conceit that you are just a soldier in a unit, not an army of one.

Call of Duty was a beautiful game when it was released, and Call of Duty 2 goes a step further. It's a staggeringly good looking game. The models are excellent, the textures well rendered and appropriate but it's the incidental touches – the broken furniture laying incongruously in a bombed out Russian street, a perfectly made bed in an otherwise demolished building, that really set the mood.

AVAILABLE ON:
PS2 / XBOX / **PC** / GCN

DETAILS:

CATEGORY: FPS
PLAYERS: 1-32
DEVELOPER: Infinity Ward
PUBLISHER: Activision
PRICE: $89.95
RATING: MA 15+
AVAILABLE: Now

HYPER VERDICT:

PLUS: Beautiful, freedom to move, awesome soundscape.

MINUS: Some dubious scripting, feels too samey.

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY
93	96	88

OVERALL
87

It's a pity there's only so many famous battles in WWII.

THE CLASSIC ACTION SHOOTER RETURNS

GUNSTAR FUTURE HEROES

VOTED **BEST GAME** AT **E3** BY:

BEST OF SHOW E3 2005 EDITORS' CHOICE

1UP.com BEST OF E3 2005

"THIS GBA GAME IS PUSHING SOME OF THE MOST ELABORATE 2D SPECIAL EFFECTS EVER SEEN ON THE SYSTEM."
IGN

"THE VISUALS ARE, IN A WORD, STUNNING"
GAMESPOT

PG Mild Violence

GAME BOY ADVANCE

TREASURE VIDEO GAMES

SEGA

THQ

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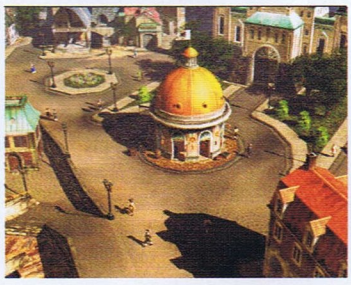


Pretty sure this is where Cam went for his holiday

!!! Check out www.agecommunity.com for the latest news and downloads

AGE OF EMPIRES III

KOSTA ANDREADIS has a tale for the Agers...

You've surrounded a large building with an infantry squad throwing fire and ammunition into its walls to bring it down. The walls continue to crack and right at the end it explodes in a great example of pyrotechnics, lighting and physics thanks to a wonderful graphics engine. It's here that you think to yourself, 'oh shit, my men are done for', only to realise that the impressive explosion was only a superfluous effect and the fire and rubble caused zero harm to your squad who were within inches of the blast zone. In a nutshell, Age of Empires III is amazing to look at and at a glance one would be expecting a complete overhaul of the tried and true formula of its predecessors. Instead, AOE III sees the series remaining true to its roots with only a handful of notable improvements in addition to its visual overhaul.

[up] Spot the incongruous item

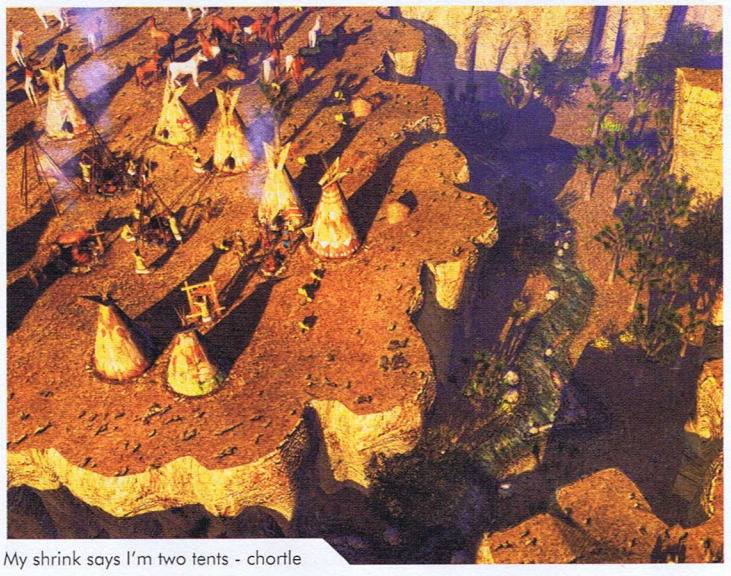
OK, BUT IS THIS A BAD THING?

In a quick and succinct response to that sub heading, no, it isn't a bad thing. But then again it's not a great thing either. Fans of the series will find themselves right at home with the resource gathering, infantry building, and tech tree setup that is synonymous with the franchise. As per its namesake a typical match will span multiple ages, with each new age bringing with it military improvements (like gunpowder) as well as improvements to your civilisation through new structures and upgrades. The extensive single player campaign lets players get a good feel for all of the ages on offer as well as provide quite a long and involving quest that focuses on myths and treasure hunting in a historical setting. The story follows a Scottish knight's travels to the new world hot on the heels of an Ottoman force only to find a much larger and sinister plot that culminates many years later with one of his descendants living as an American pioneer. Although not entirely new, the character driven quest displays the implementation of the explorer system, whereby an indestructible unit acts as a sort of 'hero' able to collect treasure scattered across the map and command special abilities. The new setting gives the game a very different feel - more imperialistic than the previous Age of Empires titles.

The most notable and well implemented new feature in AOE III is in the 'Home City' a virtual representation of your civilisation's bustling capital that adds a quasi

RPG element to the proceedings. The setup is that your conquests carry with them prestige and success that travels all the way back to your home country, and as you play the single player campaign or as a specific civilisation in skirmish/multiplayer you gain experience that accumulates allowing you to buy upgrades to your city and more importantly cards. From your Home City you can send various shipments and upgrades to your town center using these cards at regular intervals during the course of a match. Cards can range from a shipment of resources to Artillery units to structures such as Strongholds and Factories. As your Home City levels up your collection of cards will also grow, which can all play a part in various strategies employed on each

The more adult version of Red Vs. Blue is not really taking off



My shrink says I'm two tents - chortle

map. For example if you were to primarily collect militaristic cards that allows you to send squads of new units to your town center then there is less emphasis placed on training them yourself and more on building defensive structures, walls and so forth. The other side to the Home City feature, that by the way is virtually pointless, is the ability to 'upgrade' and change the look of it. Initially this may sound great, in a Civilization II throne room kind of way, but apart from the fact that you can't roam the city with the camera and that most of the changes are simply in the colour of certain structures, it leaves you wondering what exactly the point is. As fresh as the Home City stuff is the regular game tends to feel a little stale in comparison as it's essentially the same strategy game we've all played before, except prettier.

[up] The latest in the Deerhunt series

THE NEW SETTING GIVES THE GAME A VERY DIFFERENT FEEL - MORE IMPERIALISTIC THAN PREVIOUS TITLES

HOME SWEET HOME

The new graphics engine employed is wonderful to look at with great model detail, animation and physics. The physics comes into play with the 'semi line of sight fire' found on artillery units allowing a cannon ball to quite effectively plow through a line of troops, knocking them over like pins. The water effects are also quite impressive and the implementation of naval units paves the way for some great sea battles that are always impressive to watch even if this portion of the game is a little infrequent. The battles themselves can become quite large and squad formations and general AI is all automated and for the most part impressive; rifle men will use their bayonets in close range or against cavalry and the artillery units will almost always fire strategically at enemy units. Enemy AI still displays many of the usual predilections noted with this genre - they'll constantly attack in the same fashion allowing for quick retaliation and domination across the board. When multiple enemies engage in combat the frame rate tends to dip, especially if they're in the midst of town, which immediately points out one of the most glaring omissions in the game, the inability to micromanage a squad into unit types and groups with any sort of ease leaving too much reliance on mouse selection in the heat of battle.

Taking the game online however is great, as the Home City feature allows you to take one of the numerous civilisations on offer and evolve it to suit your play style through the unlocking and strategic deployment of cards. In the end Age of Empires III is a very solid RTS game that doesn't break the mould anywhere near as much as it should have, which is a shame as we'd have loved to see the physics engine and graphics used for more than animation. <<

AVAILABLE ON:

PS2 / XBOX / **PC** / GCN

DETAILS:

CATEGORY: RTS
PLAYERS: 1-8
DEVELOPER: Ensemble Studios
PUBLISHER: Microsoft
PRICE: $99.95
RATING: G8+
AVAILABLE: Now

HYPER VERDICT:

PLUS: Great and varied campaign mode, Home City adds a new element.

MINUS: Same old, frame rate and annoying AI/micromanagment issues.

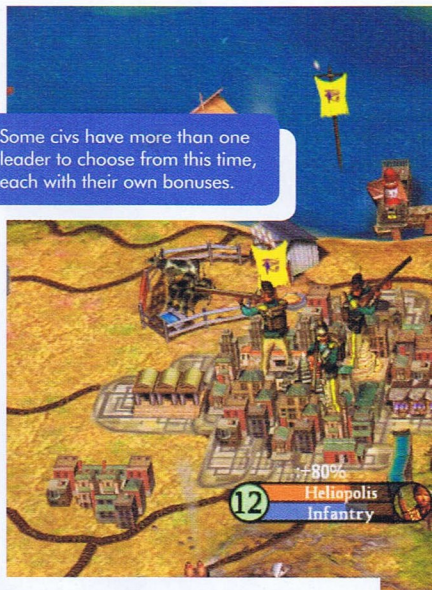
VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY
88	75	83

OVERALL

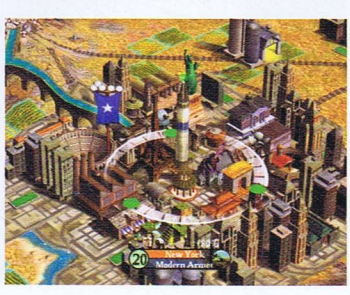
84

AOE goes 3D and sets its sights on the New World.

Heretofore known as the Mushroom Kingdom



!!! Some civs have more than one leader to choose from this time, each with their own bonuses.



John Madden's Civilisation

CIVILIZATION 4

ELIOT FISH pretends to be nice and then... WHAM!

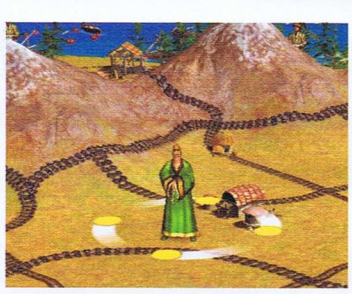
The original Civilization came out in 1991, which seems just like yesterday (er, if you're an old bastard that is). It's had its fair share of obligatory nips and tucks over the years, but Civ has never needed a major gameplay overhaul, because the core mechanics are so darn elegant. Civilization 4, however, feels like a truly rejuvenated game.

WELL ROUNDED

What we're looking at here is the most well-rounded, most improved and prettiest game in the series. The changes that have been made are clear improvements in every sense of the word, not just meaningless fiddle in order to slap an extra number on the box. Firaxis has dug deep and made some important changes to the smaller details, as opposed to only small changes to the important details.

First up is religion. Your growing civilisation is now responsible for discovering, founding and spreading, one of up to seven different religions. Over time, your people will be influenced by those outside of your borders; however you can set your "state" religion which will grant bonuses to the cities that are practising your approved choice of god-fearing. Hence, it becomes advantageous for you to send missionaries out to spread the good word, even in your opponents' territory.

If you share a common religion with another civ, then your trade relations will be smoother too – likewise, they won't like you as much if they think you've fallen under some heathen practice. If you control the holy city for a religion and manage to generate a Great Prophet (more on Great People later), you can build a special shrine and pull in money from all the cities in the world that follow the religion you founded. Budding Scientologists will love it (well, except for the fact that you can't research the Brainwashing tech).



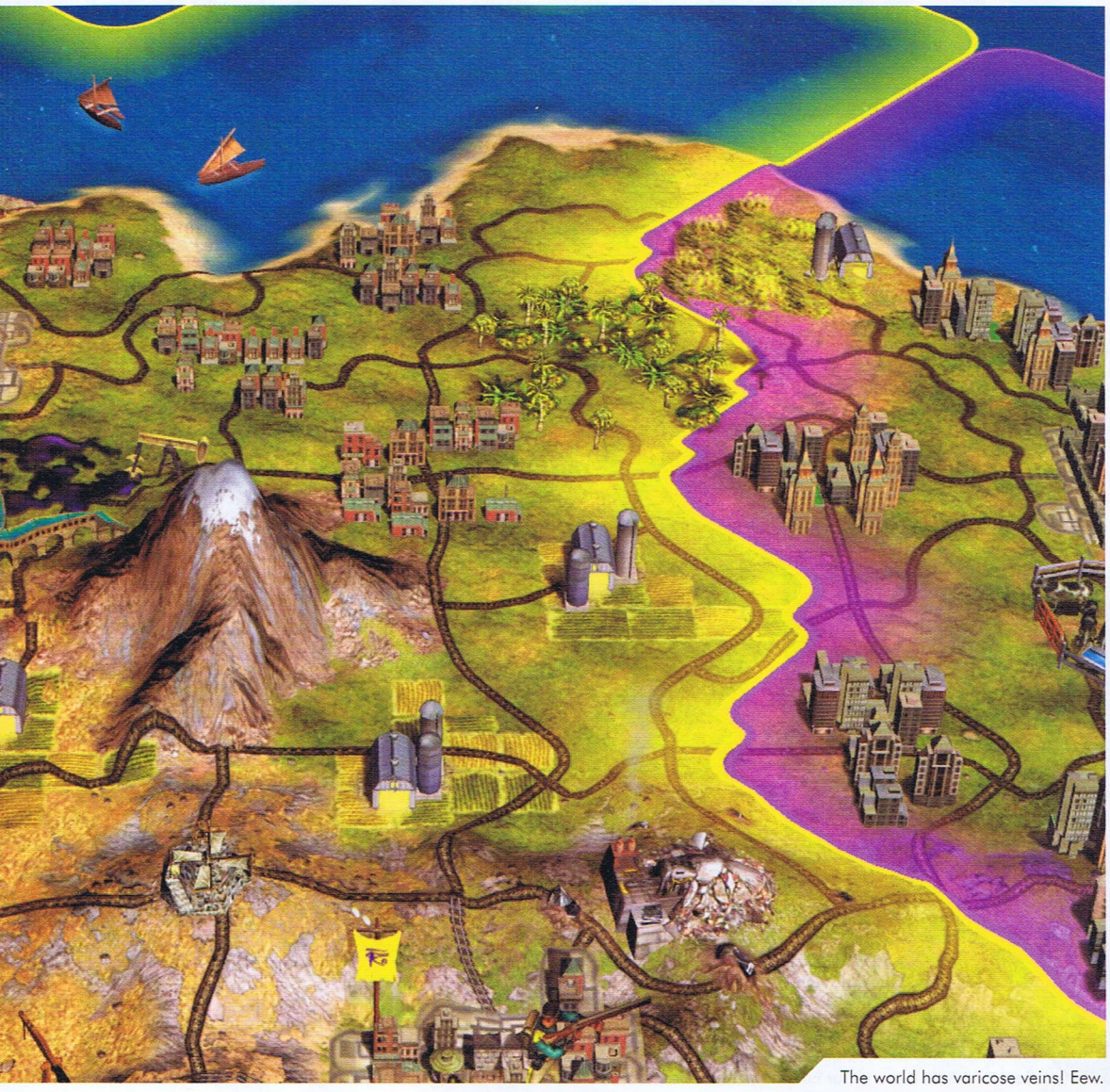
[up] Beware of giant Asians

[up] By da gardens of Babylon...

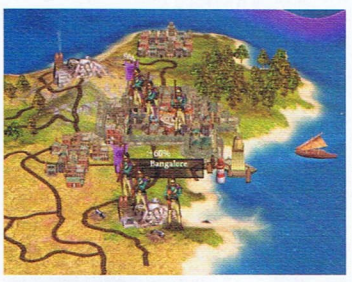
Another feature that's blossomed in Civ 4 is the way that your army units acquire experience and promotions. Instead of having separate Attack and Defense ratings, a unit's power is simplified into a single number for much easier at-a-glance comparisons. However, if they've been built in a city with a barracks, or have survived a number of battles, you'll be able to grant them promotions – enhancing their effectiveness in a number of areas. Make them better at defending – or attacking – cities, make them better in jungles or hilly areas, grant tanks and catapults greater collateral damage (inflicting hits on every unit in a stack, as opposed to just the one on top), or make them more effective against other specific unit types.

Ahh, now those warring units are no longer so dispensable. You'll start to move them around the map like pieces on a chess board, ensuring their strengths are not wasted and weaknesses not exploited. Great stuff.

Back to the Great People. These are special units – artists, philosophers, scientists, merchants - that will

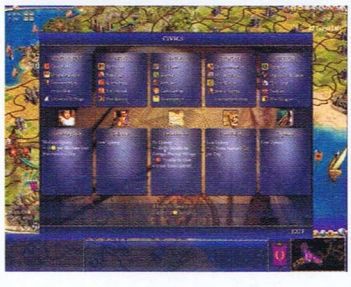


The world has varicose veins! Eew.



be born in certain cities at various stages in your development. These units can be "spent" to discover new technologies, create works of art that give you enormous boosts to your cultural influence, "hurry" a building's production, or even do a special trade mission that will dump a huge load of gold into your treasury. You can also use them to enforce a golden age, in which commerce and production go into overdrive for eight turns. These guys matter.

Civ 4 also allows for a range of new civic options, with five categories that can be combined in different ways, depending on the style of civ you'd like to proliferate. Try an environmentalist theocratic police state, or a slave-driven bureaucratic pagan society – whatever rocks your boat. You're also never locked into your choices, because if you change your mind it's always possible to undergo a brief turn or two of anarchy and switch over to another system – or even convert your state to another religion.



IF YOU SHARE A COMMON RELIGION WITH ANOTHER CIV, YOUR TRADE RELATIONS WILL BE SMOOTHER

CONQUER THE VIRTUAL WORLD

The multiplayer options in Civ 4 are strong. There's internet play, LAN, direct IP, hot seat, and even play by email for the freaks who enjoy just how painfully laborious that really is. Players can also join a game at any time (if it's not password protected) and take over the reins of a civ that was under the control of an AI – which also means there's no horrendous drama if someone drops their connection in the middle of a game. Turns are taken simultaneously which negates as much waiting around as possible. The option to form "locked" alliances – effectively making two civs form a team – will also make some games quite interesting.

There's no doubt that this is also the prettiest game in the series so far. An attempt has been made to ensure all the units animate nicely, with proper 3D unit and building models (yes, you can rotate the map in any direction). There's more life in the map than ever, and context sensitive sound effects for whatever you've zoomed the camera on.

The best visual enhancement is without a doubt the improved interface. Everything in the game has optional tool tips, pop-up info, recommended choices and some level of automation that can be switched on or off. This should make the game easier for newcomers, as well as take away some of the drudgery from veterans who are sick of fiddling with everything for the umpteenth time.

Everyone with a PC should own a copy of this game. Even if you've had long love affairs with this game in the past, it's time to reignite that lustful fire one more time. <<

AVAILABLE ON:

PS2 / XBOX / **PC** / GCN

DETAILS:

CATEGORY: Strategy
PLAYERS: 1-8
DEVELOPER: Firaxis
PUBLISHER: 2K Games
PRICE: $89.95
RATING: PG
AVAILABLE: Now

HYPER VERDICT:

PLUS: Endlessly playable, new improvements, Leonard Nimoy.

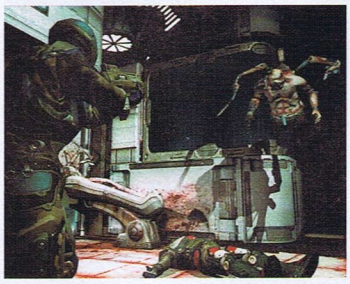
MINUS: New interface still needs some minor tweaking.

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY
85	85	97

OVERALL

96

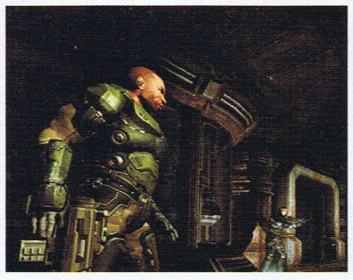
Give me your clams and spice or I'll nuke you.



While Quake 4 multiplayer is a hoot, there are no bots included with the game. Bummer.

We call it the Fleshturret 5000

Cover me while I search for bots!



QUAKE 4

DIRK WATCH wants to be a Shambler when he grows up

Eight years after the ending credits rolled on planet Stroggos in Quake 2, the series finally returns to the singleplayer storyline. Forget dystopic gladiatorial-style arena battles; in Quake 4, we're back to going toe-to-claw with the Stroggs. And boy, is it one hell of a reunion.

In fact, now that I write that word – reunion – it seems to epitomise the whole experience. Like meeting an old school chum twenty years later, Quake 4 is feelings of familiarity mixed with ones of freshness.

COMPANY LOVES MISERY

Take the visuals. With situations weaving in and out of dark hallways, rocky trenches, blood-splattered facilities and towering structures, the game constantly gives the DOOM 3 engine a stern talking to, making it do things that were never even hinted at in that fateful Martian base. Refreshing, yes, and certainly welcome, but seeing areas that bear an uncanny resemblance to said base is unfortunate, and evokes images of the Raven team scouring over the contents of id's cutting room floor. But if this is your first experience with the Texan's new graphics workhorse, or you're keen to see what else it's capable of, you'll be impressed.

It carries over to the gameplay. While DOOM 3 was a solo trek throughout Hell in space, Quake 4 remembers to give you some company. You might happen upon a group of marines looking to take down a defense turret, or a squad who needs you to escort an engineer. The constant human contact in an alien world is refreshing, and lends a serious air to what would otherwise be standard fanciful sci-fi shooting. And it's not just window dressing: your fellow marines will help you out in firefights, give you room if you're feeling cramped, and heal you if you're injured. Of course, there are the obligatory grunts who barely get through one line of dialogue before they're ground into mincemeat, with the occasional scripted moments presenting such slaughters. Only rarely do they break the immersion as characters freeze in wait, ready to spring to life when you trigger an invisible marker, but for the most part it works.

Then there's the vehicles. In an almost resigning nod to current FPS design, Quake 4 features two – the Hover Tank and a bipedal Mech-like device – which you're able to harness against hordes of Stroggs, droids and gun turrets. Then there's the multiplayer. Plugging the gameplay of Quake 3 into the DOOM 3 engine results in an "if it ain't broke..." experience, and plays extremely well in a variety of maps, some of which are almost direct remakes of classic Q3 arenas. Then there's the combined result of all of the above: great action, gorgeous graphics, nice variety and tight gameplay. It may not break any new ground, but it excels in what it does do.

AVAILABLE ON:
PS2 / XBOX / **PC** / GCN

DETAILS:

CATEGORY: PC
PLAYERS: 1-Multi
DEVELOPER: Raven Software
PUBLISHER: Activision
PRICE: $89.95
RATING: MA 15+
AVAILABLE: Now

HYPER VERDICT:

PLUS: Great graphics, action a-plenty, polished multiplayer.

MINUS: Can get repetitive, occasional deja DOOM, no multiplayer bots.

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY
91	89	80

OVERALL
84

Want a deep, groundbreaking game? Look elsewhere.

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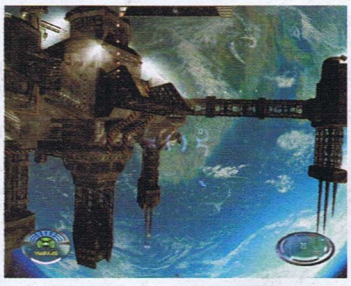
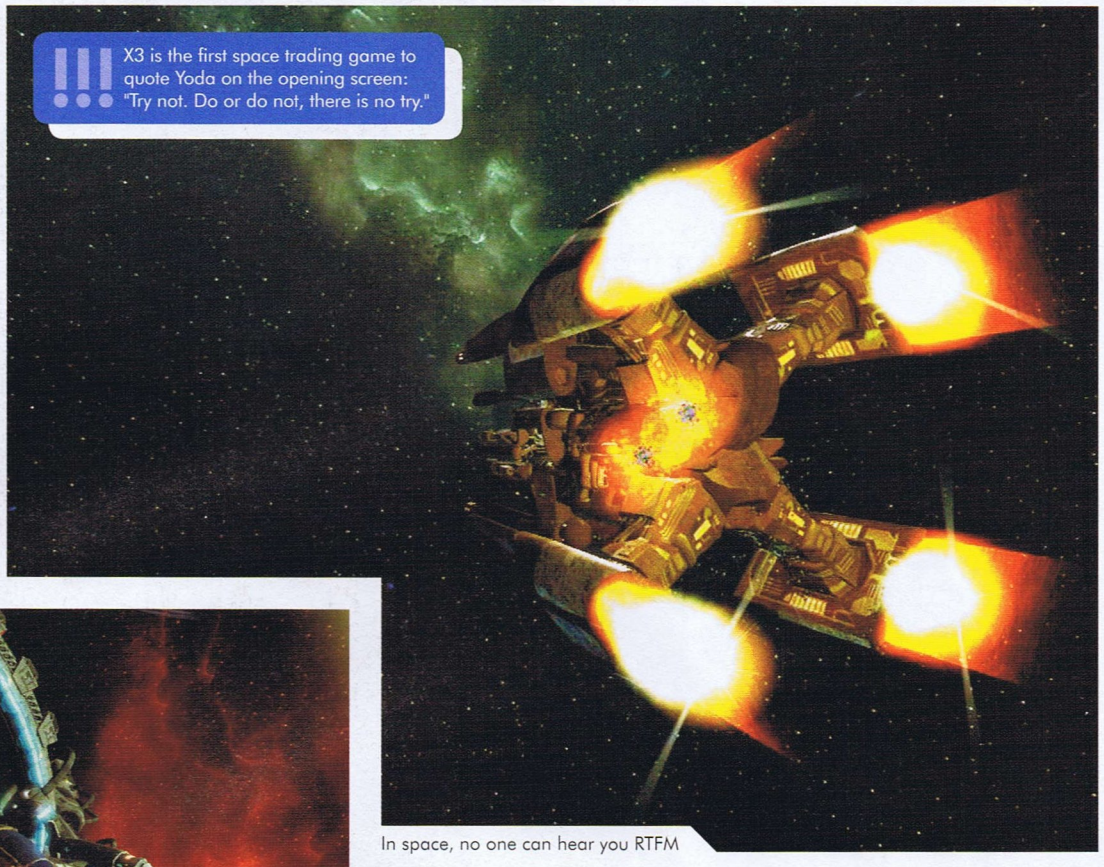
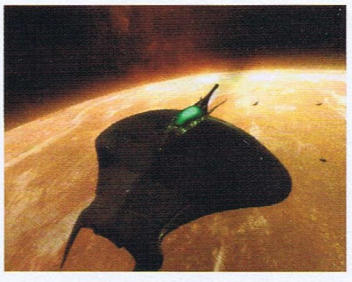




X3 is the first space trading game to quote Yoda on the opening screen: "Try not. Do or do not, there is no try."

In space, no one can hear you RTFM

Look out captain, it's a giant space monocle!



X3: REUNION

ANTHONY FORDHAM needs to write his own standfirst

Before you read this review, check out the score. X3 gets a massive 95 for gameplay yet only scores 79 overall - what gives?

Let's back up for a second. X3 is a space trading game that emphasises total player freedom and choice in a massive universe. Unlike Freelancer, where you pretty much just flew a fighter ship with a cargo bay, X3 allows you to own multiple ships at once, have transporters autonomously trade across the whole universe, build and deploy stations, factories and satellites to meet economic supply and demand, and even commission destroyers and carriers to go out and destroy pirates or hostile alien bases.

If it sounds kind of complicated, that's because it is. X3 is one of the hardest games currently on shelves. Because not only are there hundreds of things to learn and do in the game, almost none of them are explained in the manual.

PAGING MASTER INTUITION

Which is the first part of why X3 gets kind of a low total score. Unless you are the master of intuition, your first few days with this game will be days of baffled frustration. How the hell are you supposed to do anything at all? Never mind, just follow the storyline missions. That's good, two hours of fairly straightforward space shooter action. But then at the beginning of mission four you're supposed to go and meet someone in a sector called Freedom's Reach. Problem is, Freedom's Reach is not on your map, which makes finding it next to impossible.

If you're determined to buy this game, bookmark forum.egosoft.com. This is your game manual - the experiences of players who are insanely dedicated enough to just try everything in the game until something works for them. There are some essential newbie guides in here, without which the game is almost impossible to get into (except for X2 veterans).

The other part of X3's overall score is that it's broken. Not completely broken. In fact, the Oz release will come with patch 1.2 which makes it a lot less broken that it was when it came out in the UK. But hit up the forums and you will discover a whole lot more still to be fixed. Mining, for instance. Mission 7, without which you can't even finish the game story.

And yet, despite all these problems, it's hard to deny that X3 is the best space trading game ever. If you can get your head around the way you interact with the universe, it can be amazing. You can make so much money in this game that you can buy a destroyer and a whole fleet, warp to a major industrial sector, destroy everything and replace all the factories with your own, thus monopolising a key trading route.

It may only be 79% finished, but it's so massive that there's still plenty to do even if you can't actually finish it until patch 1.3. Get it, if you dare.

AVAILABLE ON:

PS2 / XBOX / **PC** / GCN

DETAILS:

CATEGORY: Space Trading
PLAYERS: 1
DEVELOPER: Egosoft
PUBLISHER: QV Software
PRICE: $89.95
RATING: M 15+
AVAILABLE: Now

HYPER VERDICT:

PLUS: Incredibly deep and involving, the best space trading game out there.

MINUS: Useless manual, unfinished content.

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY
90	75	95

OVERALL

79

Take the seriously good with the seriously bad.

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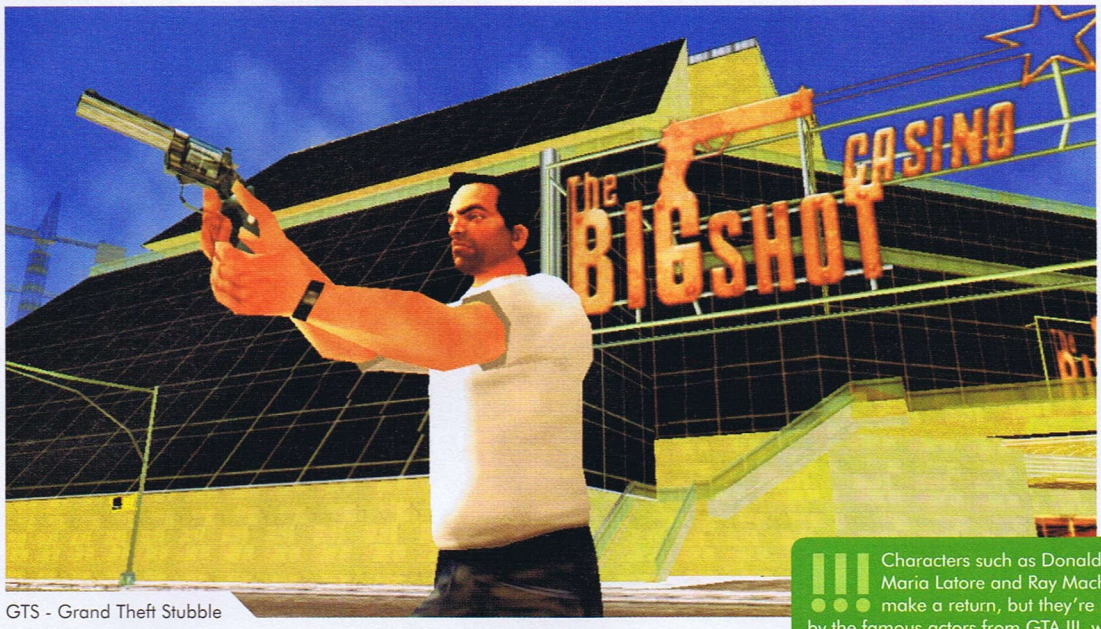
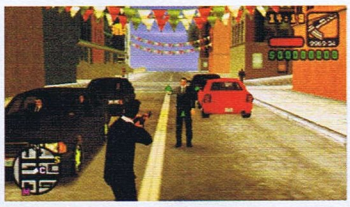
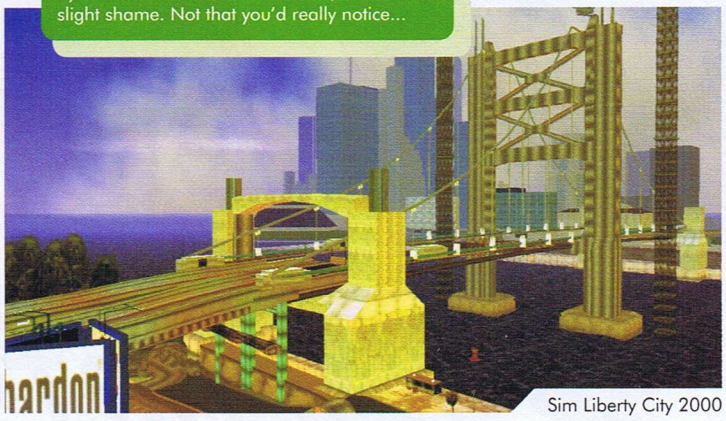


GTS - Grand Theft Stubble



!!! Characters such as Donald Love, Maria Latore and Ray Machowski make a return, but they're not voiced by the famous actors from GTA III, which is a slight shame. Not that you'd really notice...



Sim Liberty City 2000

GRAND THEFT AUTO: Liberty City Stories

Who remembers Toni Cipriani? Alright, you up the back in the Lazlo t-shirt with your hand in the air... what's that? Yes, correct – he was the Mafioso in GTA III who lived with his mother above a restaurant in Saint Mark's. Well, it's time to see what Toni went through before you rocked up on the scene in GTA III. That's right, in Liberty City Stories, you ARE Toni "Triad hater and mama's boy" Cipriani.

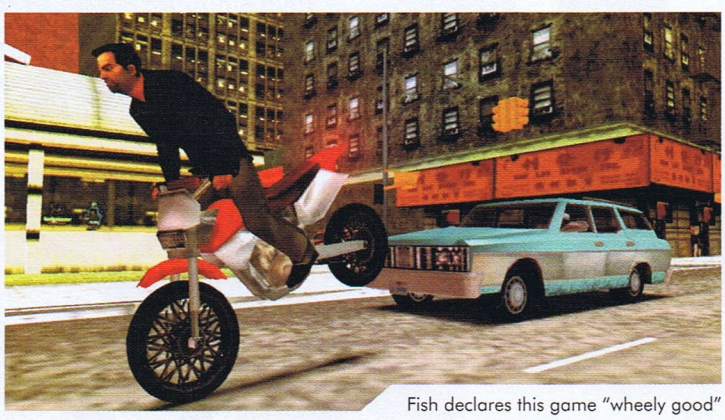
FISH TURNS CAR SALESMAN

In case you weren't exactly sure about it yet, this is very much an all-new GTA game, not a collection of missions or some kind of GTA mini-game mish-mash. Being set in Liberty City, it's closest in playing style to GTA III (nope, none of those San Andreas style shenanigans with tattoo parlours and hairdressers) which also makes this quite a nostalgia trip for those of us who remember the first time GTA III stole our hearts.

As you explore the city again, you'll start to notice that there are a few small differences to the place we got to know in GTA III. One or two streets are different and there are some "new" locations, thanks to some slight reconfiguring of the map. The changes mean you'll be teased into exploring the whole place from top to toe again, discovering all of its hidden secrets, even if you think you know it backwards. The pay off is worth it too, with some new side-missions tucked away, such as the hidden motorbike that launches you into "9mm Mayhem" where you're driven around on the back of a bike and must destroy as many targets as possible within a time limit. Then there's one of our favourites: "Car Salesman", in which you must drive prospective buyers around and impress them with various tricks. It doesn't take long for you to be back in that "GTA rhythm" again.

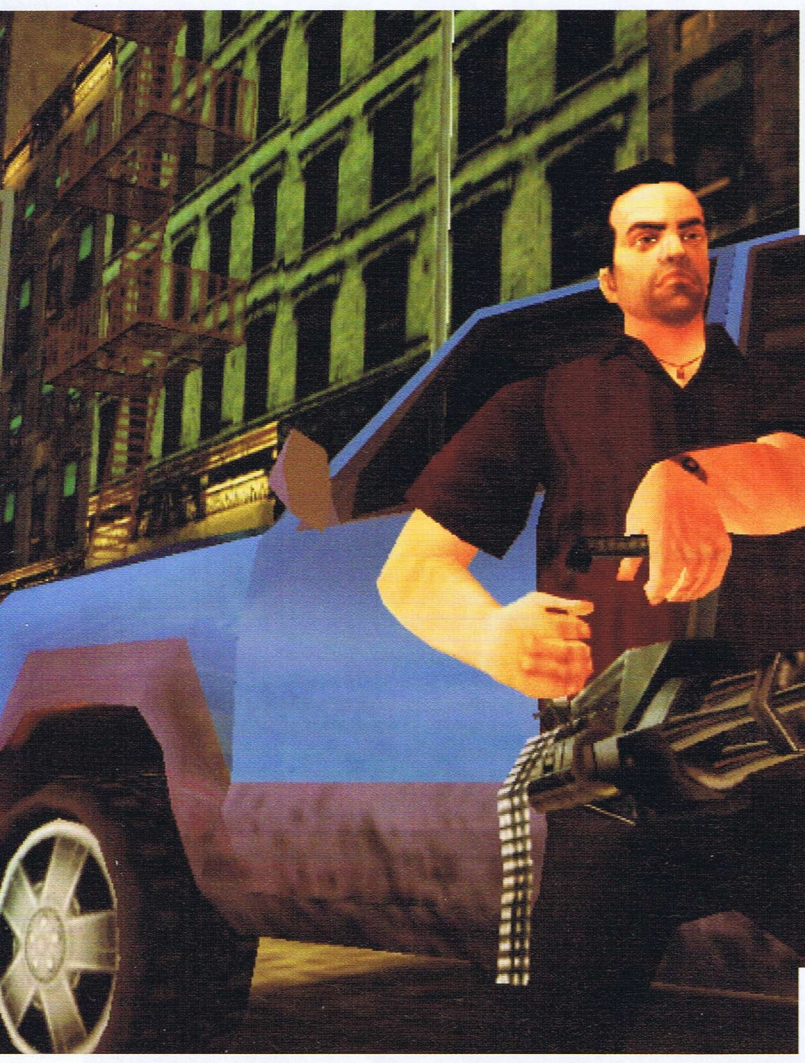
Mere minutes after launching into Liberty City Stories, you'll totally forget that you're actually playing on the PSP. All the radio stations, stunts, story, characters, side-missions, vehicles and hidden delights are here – and on a bloomin' handheld. You can even drive around the entire city without the PSP needing to load any content – like GTA III, the only loading points are when you cross over to one of the other islands or trigger a mission. This is GTA in all its glory, ready to be carried to the toilet or taken on the bus. Rockstar has managed to deliver the experience they're so famous for without any watering down of play mechanics, which is a remarkable achievement.

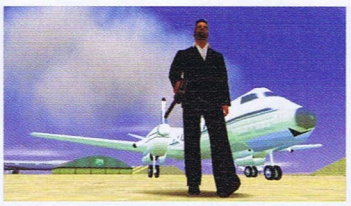
Sure, the visuals are a bit of a mixed bag (sometimes it looks better than GTA III, sometimes worse), but the smaller screen hides most of the flaws, and generally you'll find

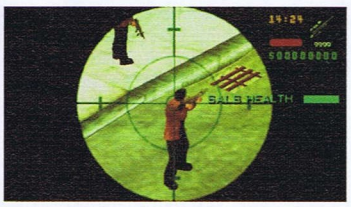


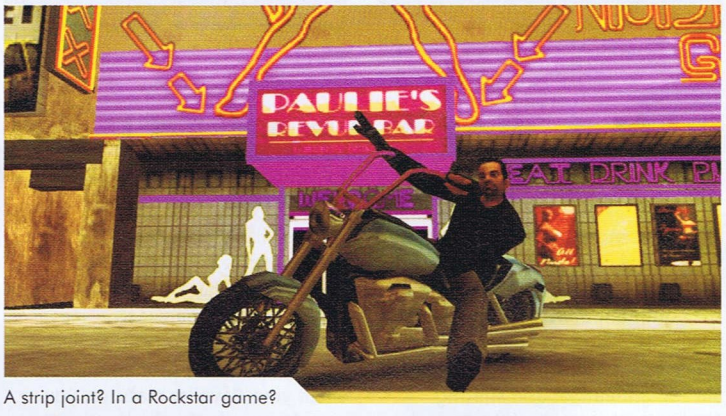
Fish declares this game "wheely good"

GANG WARFARE Wireless multiplayer is on offer here, with up to six players being able to form teams or go head-to-head in a series of game modes. There's deathmatch (Liberty City Survivor) and variations on Capture the Flag (Get Stretch, Protection Racket), as well as racing (Street Rage) and other crazy games that involve tanks and stealing cars. Multiplayer results in a bit more slowdown, plus there are a few annoyances (such as dying a slow death if a car is parked over the top of you), but overall there are some good times to be had here if you know enough people to get a game together. Not a killer drawcard for LCS, but a nice feature to have, and multiplayer that's unlike anything else on PSP.









A strip joint? In a Rockstar game?

yourself continually amazed that it all feels so natural and so true to the console versions of the game.

But before we get too carried away, we should point out that as good as Liberty City Stories is, it probably wouldn't stand up to a direct comparison with any of the "big" GTAs, purely for the fact that some corners have had to be cut to get the game onto a single UMD. For instance, the radio stations run much shorter loops, so it doesn't take too long before you're hearing the same talk-back and advertisements again – thankfully, they're so bloody funny that you won't mind it one bit (and of course, the repetition only becomes that noticeable if you tend to listen to the same station every time you jump in a vehicle). But this is an example of how the game has had to be condensed to some extent, which overall means there's slightly less depth to the experience here. Slightly.

But the fact that we would even consider to compare the game to the console versions is testament to just how close it really is. No handheld game has achieved this before. In terms of value for money, Liberty City Stories has almost the same amount of game time as any of the big console versions, so that alone is an amazing statistic.

One of the bonuses here, is that unlike GTA III, Liberty City Stories allows you to ride motorcycles around Liberty City, which means you can now try some of those stunts you wished you could all those years ago. There are also indoor environments, such as your apartment, which was not possible back in the days of GTA III, which is easy to forget.

INTELLIGENT ENUFF, SAYS FISH

The GTA control set-up has been transferred to the PSP's single analogue stick input with few problems. The game's camera is intelligent enough that you never really worry about moving the camera from its trailing viewpoint. The option is there if you want to manually adjust it, but whether on foot or in a vehicle (yes, all the camera angles for vehicles are here, except for the bird's eye view) you can get by with never messing with the camera at all. Of course, not everyone will agree with me in regards to this, but all I can say is that I had no problems with it.

Targeting is the same as always, with the R button locking on to the nearest target and the d-pad being used to cycle through them – which sometimes includes various ambling civilians instead of your attackers with the big throbbing arrows above their heads. To manually target, it's as easy as tapping Down on the d-pad, so you can always get out of a fix. Again, dexterous gamers really shouldn't have a problem. It might not be perfect, but GTA has always had this kind of clunky combat and whilst it can cause frustration, it also makes it a challenge to figure out how best to utilise and exploit the game engine to solve some of the wackier missions.

It may be some time before the PSP has another game that can offer the same level of entertainment, stylish presentation and memorable gaming as this. Now, I'm off to buy a copy of "Vivisection" for Christmas... <<

AVAILABLE ON:
GBA / DS / **PSP** / N-GAGE

DETAILS:

CATEGORY: GTA, baby
PLAYERS: 1-6
DEVELOPER: Rockstar North/Leeds
PUBLISHER: Rockstar
PRICE: $89.95
RATING: MA 15+
AVAILABLE: Now

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY
90	93	94

OVERALL
94

HYPER BIG RUBBER STAMP OF APPROVAL

Hot monster on monster action

[up] Fado - what a kingly name

[up] Eirika - like Erika, only mispelled

!!! We'll have a review of the GameCube Fire Emblem game next issue...

FIRE EMBLEM: The Sacred Stones

The Sacred Stones are five royal heirlooms that lie in the castles of each royal family on the continent of Magvel. But mere heirlooms? A rogue king sends his troops north, breaking long-standing alliances and smiting innocents, in search of the Sacred Stones. Our heroes are the royal twins Eirika and Ephraim, whose homeland of Renais has been razed. They rush to face a murderous empire and its tyrannical prince. When the last Stone is destroyed, will an ancient evil be unleashed on the ravaged continent?

COSMOLOGY BE DAMNED

If saving the world from ancient demons sounds familiar then you've played the first Fire Emblem title. The Sacred Stones is the second and like Advance Wars 2: Black Hole Rising, the game is more of an evolution than an actual sequel. The visuals and music are to the same high standard, the lengthy Days-of-Our-Lives cutscenes are intact and battle is almost identical. So what has changed in the Fire Emblem mix?

Fire Emblem's real focus is character. The Sacred Stones give players much greater control over the growth of each of your units. There are 42 character classes in the game and when each comes to be promoted, you can choose the course of unit promotion, so when your Cavalier matures, you can choose whether he becomes a Great Knight or a Paladin; your Troubadour can become a Mage Knight or a Valkyrie. In this way, you can customise the units to compliment one another and your preferred battle style.

Another cool innovation is the inclusion of two dungeons that allow you to level up your characters outside of the story mode missions. In the great RPG tradition, this is best done entirely before the final boss. The Tower of Valni is the first, revealed when the twins part company. It's of a moderate difficulty but is great for improving new recruits to match the strength of the rest of your party. Lagdou Ruins, the second random dungeon, is mercilessly hard presenting a challenge far above anything in the single player game. The final level has you battling about 10 DracoZombies.

The Sacred Stones suffers from many of the flaws of the first game. The Support option (that strengthens adjacent units' abilities) forces you to move your group around in a huddle – decidedly unstrategic. There are also a number of classes that are clearly stronger than others, slimming your range of real choices. The visuals are also a little uninspiring by comparison to the rest of the current gaming world.

I can give no other recommendation than the time I've given The Sacred Stones: well over forty hours. Once through using Eirika's path, another using Ephraim's, repeated times through the dungeons maxing out all of my characters and now once again on the hard difficulty. What can I say? If it's your thing, you won't be able to put The Sacred Stones down. A must for the fans and certainly worth a look for all GBA players.

John Dewhurst

AVAILABLE ON:
GBA / **DS** / PSP / N-GAGE

DETAILS:

CATEGORY: Strategy combat
PLAYERS: 1-4
DEVELOPER: Intelligent Systems
PUBLISHER: Nintendo
PRICE: $69.95
RATING: PG
AVAILABLE: Now

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY
70	87	92

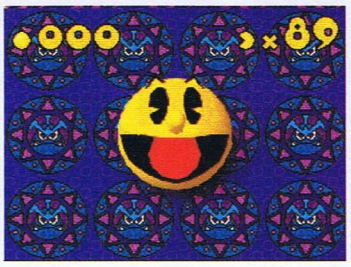
OVERALL
87

PAC'N ROLL

While there's so much that's utterly generic about Pac 'n Roll – the forgettable (at best) music, the insipid storyline and worlds called things like "Sweet Land" (oh goody, find me a gumdrop house on Lollypop lane), the reality is that these just represent the unimaginative garnish on a game that really helps deliver on the potential of the DS.

In Pac'n Roll, instead of waka waka waka-ing across the screen, you roll, and it's entirely stylus controlled. The game takes the overall format of so many platformers – collect enough of what might as well be coins to open gates to beat each level, utilise powerups, work your way through a few levels per themed world and face off against occasional bosses.

But then the Pac-Man flavour comes in. Levels are viewed from an almost top down perspective and for the most part the ghost enemies must be avoided – you can only take them out when you've eaten a power pellet. But what makes Pac'n Roll so much fun is controlling Pac-Man. Just move the stylus around on the touch screen to move the little yellow fella, hold it in the center to stop him or flick it in any direction to dash in that direction. It's that simple but it feels smooth and intuitive. The level design has some shining moments too – sequences of bounce pads see Pac-Man springing along, and swooping paths with boost pads see you rolling at speed along a rollercoaster like path. The level design also has its share of average moments however, and later in the game the difficulty level jumps up a little higher than is actually fun. Fortunately, you can unlock the time trial option for each level, as well as the Challenge variant, which may be as simple as taking out a certain number of ghosts or as hard beating the level without rolling over a single pellet. It's not brilliant, but it's definitely solid – worth checking out.



Game Cat

[up] Winners don't use drugs

AVAILABLE ON:
GBA / **DS** / PSP / N-GAGE

DETAILS:
CATEGORY: Ghost eating sim
PLAYERS: 1
DEVELOPER: Namco
PUBLISHER: Nintendo
PRICE: $69.95
RATING: G
AVAILABLE: Now

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY
75	50	79

OVERALL
79

TRAUMA CENTER: Under the Knife (IMPORT REVIEW)

Slicing people up, removing pre-malignant tumors and stitching them back up, are but some of the many things players will get a chance to do in Atlus' new Nintendo DS sim, Trauma Center: Under the Knife. Now the premise of a surgical simulation game may make a few people puss out at the mere notion of having to cut into vital organs, but much in the same way the classic board game Operation was able to lighten up this serious subject so too does Trauma Center. And it makes wonderful use of the DS's touch screen and stylus to boot, allowing patients to be put, literally, under the knife.

[up] It's not just you K... *ogle*

As expected the story follows a relatively inexperienced, cocky but talented young surgeon as he embarks on his career in medicine and ogling hot anime nurses (or was that just me?). Essentially the game plays out in a series of operations whereby players will use one of many surgical tools and techniques that they come to grips with early on in the game to get through each procedure. For example to remove a broken glass shard from a patient's torso, one would use the forceps and slowly take it out, stitch it up the wound with a needle, clean it with antibiotic gel and finally apply a bandage. With all of these actions being performed with the stylus, Trauma Center always feels fresh and consequently just that little bit more authentic. Each operation varies greatly and with a time limit and intermittent environment changes (such as a heart stopping or microscopic bad guys multiplying) getting through each one can prove to be quite an intense gaming experience. Initially Trauma Center may seem like a novelty title for the DS, but stick with it and you'll realise it's one of the more interesting and well executed titles to be released so far on the handheld.

Kosta Andreadis

AVAILABLE ON:
GBA / **DS** / PSP / N-GAGE

DETAILS:
CATEGORY: Simulation
PLAYERS: 1
DEVELOPER: Atlus
PUBLISHER: Nintendo
PRICE: $TBC
RATING: TBC
AVAILABLE: Early 2006

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY
70	81	87

OVERALL
82

CALL OF CTHULHU:
Dark Corners of the Earth

I first wrote a preview of DCotE back when I started working at PC Powerplay over five years ago. I was excited then and was still excited when I finally got to get my hands on the finished code. Was it worth the phenomenal wait? Not quite but it's really quite good anyway; if you have the patience.

Set in the Lovecraftian Cthulhu mythos, DCotE casts players as Jack Walters, a PI recently released from a psychiatric institute where he spent six years after encountering something otherworldly. Going back to work, Jack is hired to investigate the disappearance of a young man in the Massachusetts town of Innesmouth. This being a Cthulhu story, you can expect danger, madness and things that should not exist. You get them all.

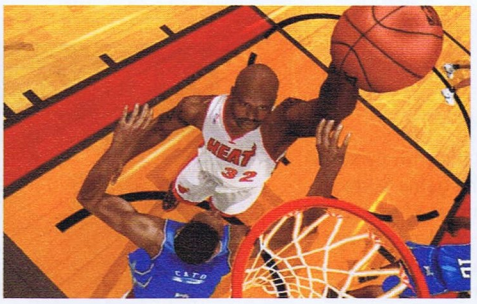
Although presented in a first person perspective, DCotE is an adventure game at heart and a pretty good one, with strong elements of survival horror thrown in for good measure. For the most part the game is made up of sleuthing, sneaking and running the hell away, roughly in that order, but the controls sometimes leave the last part more than a little frustrating as timing and accuracy have to be spot on if you don't want to have to do the same sequence of actions again. Frustrations aside, if you like a good slow burn, creepy as hell and some times downright nerve wracking story, you could go a lot further wrong than Call of Cthulhu: Dark Corners of the Earth.

Daniel Wilks

AVAILABLE ON:
PS2 / **XBOX** / **PC** / GCN

DETAILS:
CATEGORY: Adventure/Survival Horror / **PLAYERS:** 1 /
DEVELOPER: Head First / **PUBLISHER:** Bethesda /
PRICE: $79.95 / **RATING:** MA15+ / **AVAILABLE:** Now

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY	OVERALL
86	81	84	82



NBA 2K6

Competing directly with the NBA Live juggernaut, NBA 2K6 does more than hold its own – it slays its bigger brother.

On the surface, NBA 2K6 looks like it doesn't compare to Live – it's noticeably worse in the graphics department. Not horrible visuals though, they're like Jennifer Lopez in the early '90s when she had bushy eyebrows. Still attractive, just not stunning.

However, it's what's in the game (to steal an old EA slogan) that counts, and NBA 2K6 is essentially two games in one – a standard NBA sim and a streetball-style game. It's this "247" (twenty-four seven, get it?) streetball mode which helps 2K6 rise above the pack. Taking a nobody streetballer, you have to face off against various NBA players and celebrities in street courts around America to gain skills, jewels and credibility, trying to take your guy to the NBA. It's in this mode where NBA 2K6 delivers a "gaming moment".

You ever have one of those "gaming moments"? Where something happening in the virtual world before you just makes you go: "Oh hells yeah!" NBA 2K6 has one of these moments. The first celebrity you play in the 247 mode is none other than Flava Flav – complete with viking helmet. This alone makes 2K6 the best NBA game on the market.

Thankfully, the standard NBA sim style of play rocks as well. You will need to be patient as it's quite tough to just run-and-gun, but if you play fundamental basketball, you'll get the most out of your squads.

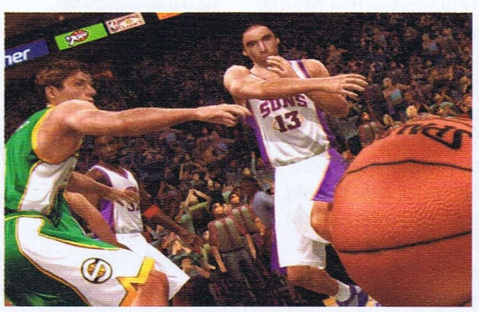
With 247 mode for the arcade/dunk fans and the regular season/franchise modes for the NBA stat-nerds, NBA 2K6 is the must-have NBA game.

Big Leon Smith

AVAILABLE ON:
PS2 / **XBOX** / PC / GCN

DETAILS:
CATEGORY: NBA Sim / **PLAYERS:** 1-2 /
DEVELOPER: Visual Concepts / **PUBLISHER:** Take 2
PRICE: $69.95 / **RATING:** G / **AVAILABLE:** Now

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY	OVERALL
77	85	92	90



THE SIMS 2

The premise is simple enough – create a human, build a house, and then manipulate their existence with a variety of objects, chores and other sim beings. It's that smug satisfaction of superiority, of playing God, and of having the final say.

Featuring a new Story mode in addition to the traditional Free Play, you can tool around with the lives of several pre-fabricated characters, or create your own bulbous, green skinned monstrosity and guide them through their days. Or you can choose to simply let them get on with things by activating their AI.

Cooking is now featured heavily in the console version. Ordering stock for your fridge and creating unique recipes out of odds and ends adds yet another facet to explore. Sadly, Sims no longer age, and if you had your heart set on birthing a couple of Sim-babies, then you may be disappointed. But the host of new and retooled features more than compensate for this loss.

The console version actually exceeds the visual quality of the PC version in some respects. The texture work and modeling seem slightly improved, and small details like the rush of clouds on the horizon are subtle but appreciated. A host of extra items, clothing and accessories have been tossed into the mix too, making up for the lack of community-created mods and items that are available online.

The Sims 2 works well as a console adaptation. The changes are sensible, though it loses a little bit of the finesse and complexity of its PC counterpart. If you already own that version, then move along. But for the uninitiated, timid, or Sim-curious, step right up and invest a few dozen hours of your life.

Patrick Kolan

AVAILABLE ON:
PS2 / **XBOX** / PC / **GCN**

DETAILS:
CATEGORY: Sim sim / **PLAYERS:** 1-2 /
DEVELOPER: Maxis / **PUBLISHER:** EA /
PRICE: $89.95 / **RATING:** M15+ / **AVAILABLE:** Now

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY	OVERALL
84	82	86	84

HYPER BIG RUBBER STAMP OF APPROVAL

SSX ON TOUR

Forget the shotgun battle-axe, we have a new contender for "coolest thing ever" in a videogame. Ask yourself this question. What's cooler than a bad-ass unicorn wailing on an electric guitar? A bad-ass unicorn wailing on a double neck electric guitar! Well, SSX On Tour has got one. It's part of a very successful attempt by EA to give the series a completely new sheen. Thus, menus look like ink scribbles from a scrapbook and animate simply but stylishly. It's definitely meant to have a rockin' 'tude, but the great part is that it's not patronising – it's genuinely pretty cool. So nice work on the menus and character intros guys.

The game itself is very much what you'd expect. It follows on nicely from SSX 3 with one massive mountain that contains a wealth of truly epic runs. It continues the move away from a purely racing-based game too. Sure, you're still pulling off insane tricks to get boost to go faster to pull off even more insane tricks, but it's feeling more and more like a snowboarding game with each iteration – which may or may not be a good thing depending on how much you liked the first couple of games. This time you create your own character and go on the tour, working your way up through the rankings by winning events and creating hype for yourself, and buying new boards, clothes and tricks along the way. There are always a host of challenges to attempt at any one time, and in addition to the usual suspects there are some interesting new inclusions such as getting to the finish line without touching the snow for longer than a certain period, chaining together as many tricks as possible, avoiding snow police (not so enjoyable) and collecting doohickies. Oh, and the option to ski is also included this time around. It's hardly earth shattering but it's a very solid game.

Game Cat

AVAILABLE ON:
PS2 / XBOX / PC / **GCN**

DETAILS:
CATEGORY: Snowboarding / **PLAYERS:** 1-Multi /
DEVELOPER: EA Canada / **PUBLISHER:** EA /
PRICE: $89.95 / **RATING:** G / **AVAILABLE:** Now

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY	OVERALL
84	80	82	83

CASTLEVANIA Dawn of Sorrow

Where do you go once you're reached perfection? Konami adapted to a lesser platform after the brilliant Symphony of the Night, and after a smart yet underdeveloped debut it cranked out another two excellent 2D action scrollers on the GBA – and each kept the spirit of the PlayStation classic absolutely intact. That Konami has since struggled putting its franchise into full 3D is irrelevant – you can come back for a fix of SotN-style Castlevania magic on the portables every year and the gaming world is most definitely better for it.

Dawn of Sorrow – a direct sequel to the fantastic Aria of Sorrow – is careful not to mess with the proven and highly successful 2D Castlevania formula, irrespective of whether it has two screens to deal with or one. Each of the half-dozen or so new features brought to the series care of the DS are certainly welcome (except for one) but the core experience certainly wouldn't have suffered if they had all been removed. On the welcome side, the ability to permanently display the castle map or protagonist's Soma Cruz's statistics on the upper screen is absolutely handy, while being able to direct summoned creatures by touch or carving new paths through the appropriate areas via the stylus offer more interactivity. The only hit-and-miss touch feature is the magic seal system, which requires particular shapes to be drawn on screen to finish off a boss battle - having to abruptly switch control methods to draw a shape in the thick of heated battle is rather frustrating - particularly when failure is rewarded by the boss regaining health.

Otherwise, this is a masterful game in the mold of Aria of Sorrow. This time around though, the game world is bigger, the enemies more challenging, the RPG elements better integrated, the graphics crisper and the overall experience more polished than ever.

March Stepnik

AVAILABLE ON:
GBA / **DS** / PSP / N-GAGE

DETAILS:
CATEGORY: Action RPG / **PLAYERS:** 1-2 /
DEVELOPER: Konami / **PUBLISHER:** Atari /
PRICE: $79.95 / **RATING:** M / **AVAILABLE:** Now

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY	OVERALL
88	91	90	89

TALES OF ETERNIA

The first real RPG we've seen so far on the PSP and it's a pretty good one. The dual worlds of Inferia and Celestia (they both appear to be flat worlds facing each other with a magical membrane in between keeping them separate) are going to crash into each other if something is not done so it's up to the player, taking the role of a rather obnoxious hunter, his tomboy friend, a ditzy chick from Celestia and one other party member to hunt down all of the magic widgets needed to put a stop to the catastrophe.

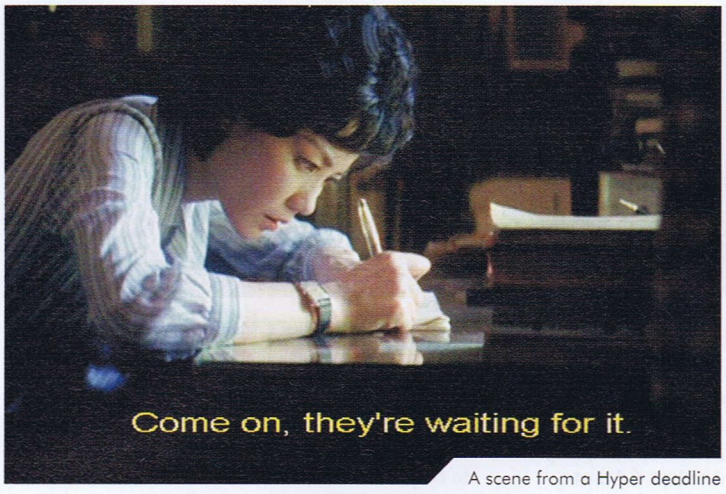
As far as story goes, Tales isn't much but mechanics and adventure wise it has oomph where it counts. The biggest hook for the game is the real time combat system that mixes a nice amount of button mashing in with the strategic use of special skills and blocking, stopping combat from becoming boring; a good thing considering the amount of random combat you will take part in when traveling anywhere. The game also suffers from the Japanese RPG syndrome in which characters will have interminably long conversations made up of nothing but ellipsis and the occasional bit of crosshatching to indicate that the previous ellipsis left the recipient cranky. If you can get past the little frustrations there is a lot to like about Tales – a good lengthy adventure, good combat system, some charming presentation and anime style cutscenes. And, of course, you can take it on the train with you.

Daniel Wilks

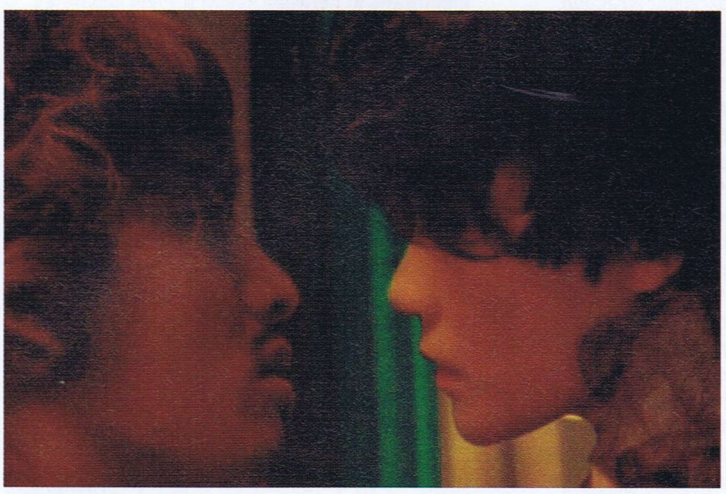
AVAILABLE ON:
GBA / DS / **PSP** / N-GAGE

DETAILS:
CATEGORY: RPG / **PLAYERS:** 1 /
DEVELOPER: Namco / **PUBLISHER:** Ubisoft /
PRICE: $79.95 / **RATING:** PG / **AVAILABLE:** Now

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY	OVERALL
82	76	80	79



A scene from a Hyper deadline

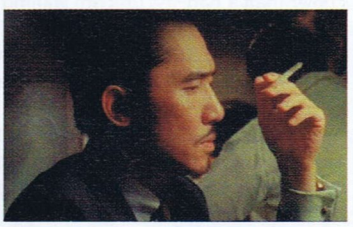


2046

MADMAN, MA 15+

» A sequel/companion piece to the astoundingly good *In the Mood for Love* (2000), *2046* tells another story of love, loss and the search for human contact, this time centering the drama around a downtrodden pulp novelist (Tony Leung Chiu Wai), Chow Mo-Wan and a series of relationships he has with the women in the hotel room next to his, room 2047. Although set at a similar time to *In the Mood for Love* (a nebulous 1960s), *2046* plays with time to an interesting extent with extended fantasy sequences set in the novel that Chow is writing in which a train travels to 2046, a place where people can regain their lost memories. If you always need something to be happening in your entertainment then you may not find much to like in *2046*, as the themes and mood center more around a fragile search for purpose and love that achieving anything concrete.

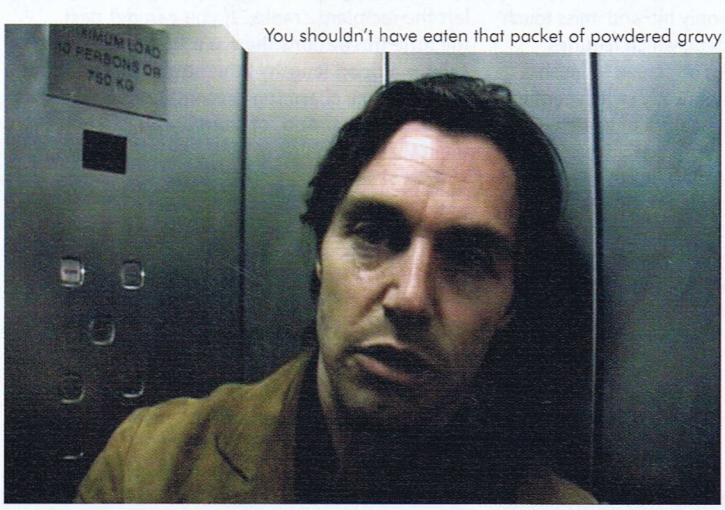
It's a film of mannered performances, with Tony Leung once again showing he is the HK equivalent of Cary Grant, exuding a crazy cool with a real soft, sad edge, but the women are the real stars of the show. Faye Wong and Gong Li are great as



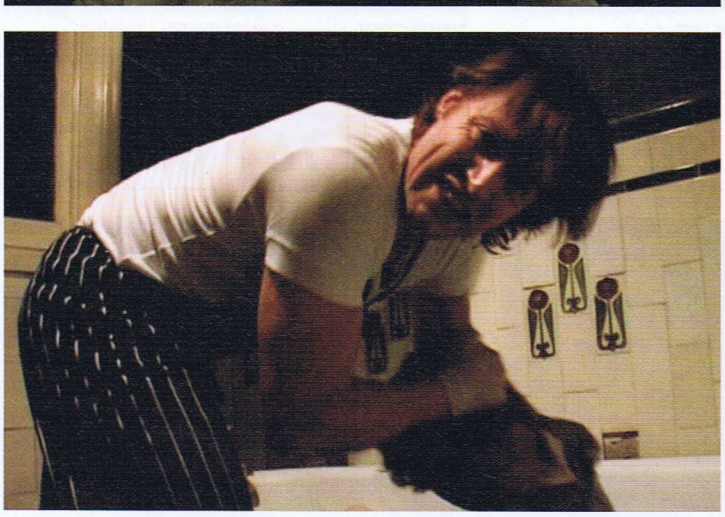
a lovesick landlord's daughter and unrequited love interest respectively but it's Zhang Ziyi as a spirited call-girl who steals the show. She's fully realised, radiantly beautiful and we get the feeling that she may just be the right one for Chow.

Daniel Wilks

MOVIE: 8 / EXTRAS: 6



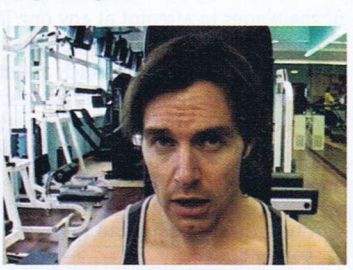
You shouldn't have eaten that packet of powdered gravy

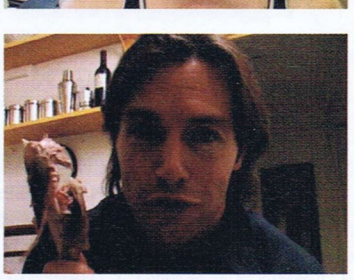


The Last Horror Movie

MRA, MA 15+

» Sometimes a great idea is brought low by execution. *The Last Horror Movie* is an example of such a film. The premise itself is brilliant. The Last Horror Movie is a cheap and cheerful slasher film – about five minutes into the film the footage turns to snow and a man appears, obviously recorded over the video. His name is Max and he says he has recorded something that you may be more interested in. Max is a serial killer and a pragmatic cannibal (it's the best way of disposing of corpses), making a documentary/horror movie unlike any that have been made before – showing the audience real death, all the while questioning who is more bent – him for living out his desires or the audience for living them vicariously. This is one of the points in which the great idea falls flat – Max is too smug and too ambiguous with his condemnation of the audience to leave a real impact. As a character in a straight film, Max could have been the next Patrick Bateman but in his frequent asides he just comes across as a slightly camp ham. There just isn't enough meat in the questions about the audience/participation





divide. Another realm where the film falls flat is the medium. Made ten years ago, *The Last Horror Movie* could have been the *Blair Witch* of the day but now it's a curio. The reason? DVD. The main hook and twist of the film center around video. The film comes on DVD, taking two of the strongest elements of the film and transforming them into nothing but a novelty.

Dirk Watch

MOVIE: 6 / EXTRAS: TBC

Little Britain SEASON 2 Rock Profile

ROADSHOW, M

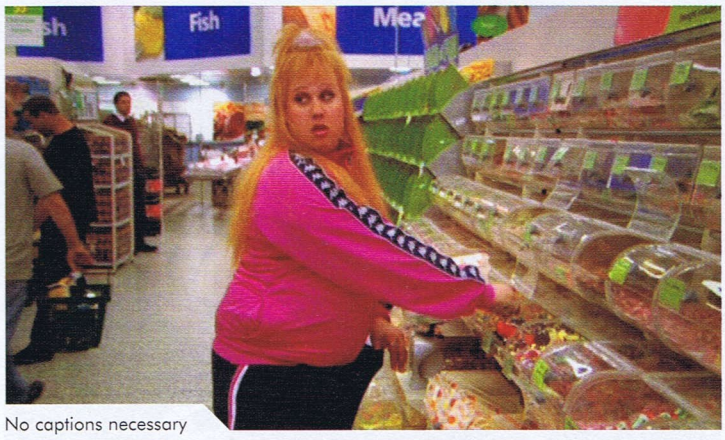
Before *Little Britain*, the comedy duo of David Lucas and Matt Walliams created a series called *Rock Profile*; short sketches lampooning musicians. Although not the best at impersonations (Lucas is a little too heavy to be a convincing George Michael, though he does make a decent Boy George), the series is very funny in a slightly surreal kind of way. One of the most enjoyable parts of the series is the unpredictability of the skits, who would have though that an interview with Boy George would turn into a petty crime spree?

Little Britain is great for the exact opposite reason – the predictability of the sketches. The formula from series one of *Little Britain* remains intact, as do all of the familiar characters such as Daffyd, the only gay in the village and West Country minger, Vickie Pollard. Some new characters join the mix, including the horrendously overweight and oversexed Bubbles de Vere and Maggie, a prim and proper woman who cannot stomach food made by anyone not white, middle class and heterosexual. The formula of characters building to a familiar punchline through different situations still works brilliantly. Although there are only six episodes in the season, the disc is nicely rounded out with a making of documentary, commentary on all episodes, deleted scenes, comic relief sketches and more.

Two comedy gems to check out this month.

Daniel Wilks

SERIES: 8 / EXTRAS: 8



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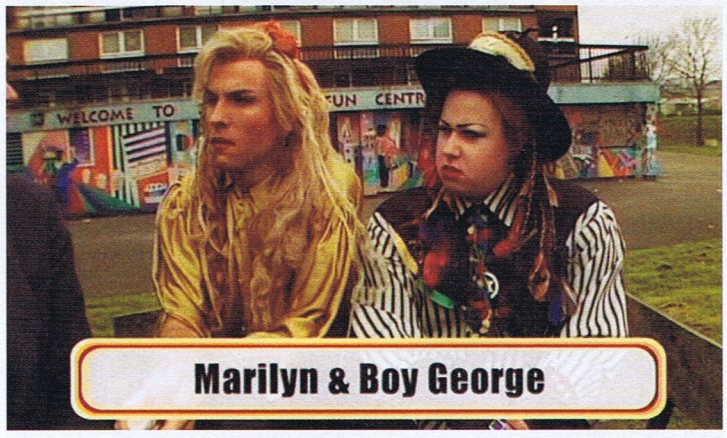
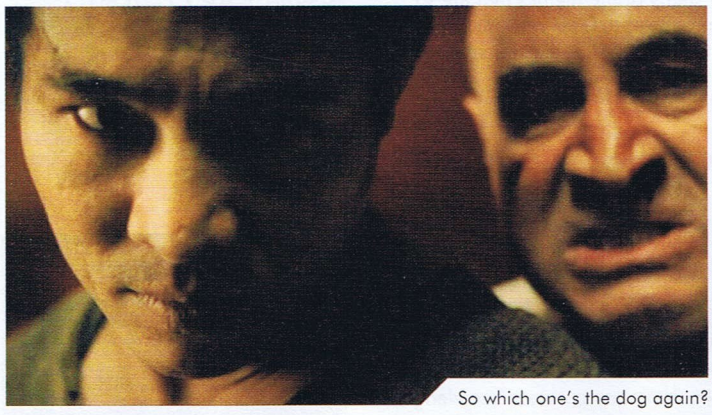




So which one's the dog again?

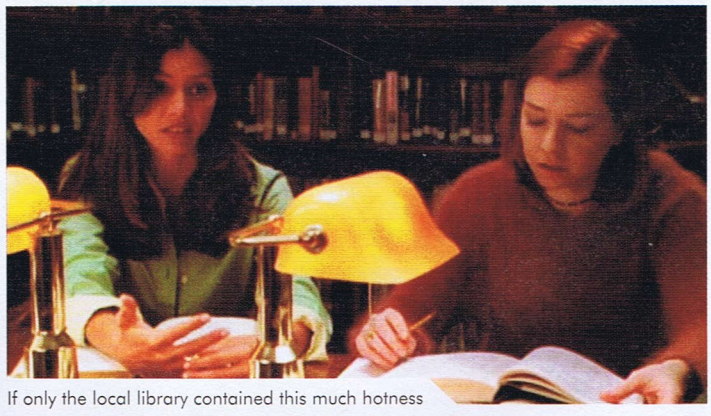
Unleashed

UNIVERSAL, MA 15+

After a string of rather lackluster American action films, Jet Li finally hits his stride in Western films with the flawed yet satisfying *Unleashed* (the original title, *Danny the Dog* is a much more fitting title). Raised by a sadistic low rent gangster like an animal and trained to kill, Danny (Jet Li) is an innocent monster, capable of acts of hideous violence unmindful of the consequences or morality of his actions. After some of the aforementioned consequences wind up freeing Danny from captivity, he is taken into the home of a kindly and wise blind piano tuner (Morgan Freeman) and his daughter, and Danny slowly learns about the world, morality and family. The transition from brutality to gentle stranger in a strange land style drama works well and forms the crux of the film, hinging on the gentle humanity of Freeman's character Sam and the horribly savage Bart, played to the bone by Bob Hoskins, echoing some of the brutal intensity of his first starring role in *The Long Good Friday*. Li himself does a good job portraying the ageless and innocent Danny – but it's not much of an acting stretch as most of the time he only need look sad or confused and occasionally confused and sad at the same time. Be that as it may he makes a sympathetic hero. There is less action than you would normally expect from a Jet Li film but when it kicks in you'll be appeased - Li is as nimble as ever.

Daniel Wilks

MOVIE: 8 / EXTRAS: 4



If only the local library contained this much hotness

Buffy the Vampire Slayer

THE COMPLETE BOX SET

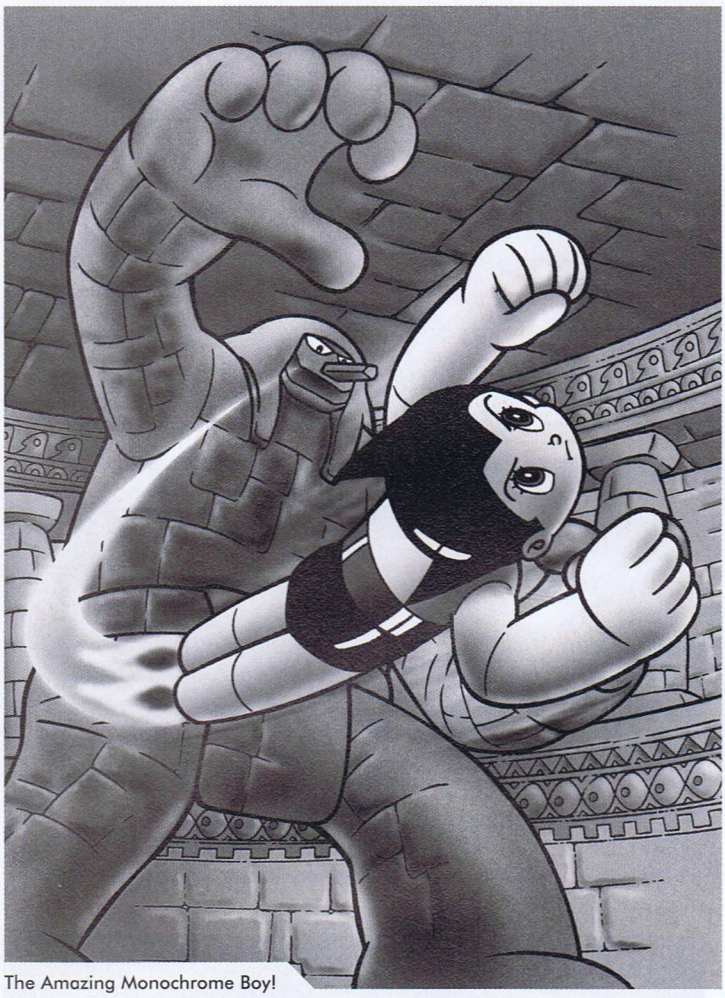
FOX HOME ENTERTAINMENT, M

All the *Buffy* fanboys (and fangirls) out there raise your hand. Good. Now why is it that a few of you still have your hands down? If you've never seen the show then that's a pretty good excuse, and one that can be easily remedied now that 20th Century Fox are releasing the complete *Buffy* run in one collector's box. That's 39 discs of goodness for those counting - the entire Scooby Gang Chronicle in one sweet hit.

Why should you buy it? Simply put, *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* was a breath of fresh air when it first screened, finally giving the ditsy blonde chick who gets killed in every horror movie the chance to stand up and be counted. Over the course of its seven seasons it remained compulsory viewing, thanks to a cleverly constructed mythos, flawed but loveable characters (both good and bad), compelling story arcs for each season paired with consistently good one shots, witty dialogue and pop culture references, an engaging mix of humour and action, and of course, a great ensemble cast with more than a few hotties. Simply put, this is one of the most influential, and just plain entertaining shows of recent years. Time to watch it all over again...

Kosta's evil twin

MOVIE: 9 / EXTRAS: 6



The Amazing Monochrome Boy!

Astroboy (1960) DELUXE DVD COLLECTION 1

CATEGORY: ASTROBOY!
PRODUCTION: MUSHI PRODUCTIONS

The year 2000 is a scary time – automohovercars speed along magnetic freeways, killing young boys, robotrons work in factories full of beeping and buzzing dials and lights, and interplanetary exploration steams ahead. At least, the year 2000 according to the 1960s series of Astroboy looks and sounds like this. We know that the reality is a far cry from this world, but it's hard not to get sucked into Osamu Tezuka's vision of the future from the distant past.

Yes, although most of our readers grew up watching the classic 1980s Astroboy episodes, there was in fact a series made in black and white, that aired almost 20 years earlier, and Madman are bringing it to the masses. This new release comes as a special deluxe DVD collection, packing 52 episodes, and a whole host of extras (including an interview with English language producer Fred Ladd and a booklet packed in). Fans will be surprised just how familiar this Astroboy is – many of the themes that are so important to later versions are intact (they were, after all, transposed from the manga), as are many of the characters... although there are some differences in the origin story.

Although the animation is primitive, it's still quite impressive for a TV series from the 1960s, utilising some nice posing and pans, and a good sensation of movement when Astro flies. The picture and audio quality aren't the best (the English language masters were destroyed in 1975 so this collection has been put together from copies that were tracked down and remastered – hence the variability in audio quality), the voice acting is typical of the time, so pretty awful and there are many elements in the presentation – the inconsistent pacing, the many surrealist sequences, the bizarre sci fi/percussion sound effects and the zany physical comedy – that will be alien to today's sensibilities, but that's kind of beside the point. This is one for the collectors, for the people who want an insight into Astroboy past, to see how he was first brought to life. This is a celebration of one of the pioneers of anime, and well worth a look.

Dirk Watch

ANIMATION: 7 / STORY: 7
EXTRAS: 6 / OVERALL: 7

Alright, now's your chance...kick it in the nuts!

Macross Plus: COMPLETE COLLECTION

CATEGORY: ACTION
PRODUCTION: MACROSS PLUS PROJECT

Although part of the Macross/Robotech canon, Macross Plus is a stand alone series not requiring any previous knowledge of the world or mythology of Robotech. Set roughly 40 years after Robotech, Macross Plus tells the converging stories of two brash test pilots, Isamu Dyson (a hot headed extrovert) and Guld Bowman (a strong silent type) and their mutual ex-girlfriend Myung, the manager of virtual reality pop-star, Sharon Apple. In amongst the bizarre love triangle, some interesting developments turn Sharon into more than just an artificial musician, leading to more than a fair share of action. Created just over 10 years ago, Macross Plus more than stands the test of time, ranking up there as one of the finest pieces of anime around. Even though the running time is only 170 minutes, the characters of Isamu, Guld and Myung are some of the best realised characters you will see in animation. All of their actions are entirely believable and never once do you find yourself having to justify leaps in character or logic. The action is also spectacular, showcasing some of the finest dogfights around. Character and mecha design is a little stylised (everyone has suspiciously pointy noses) but the actual animation is wonderfully smooth and used to great effect during the action scenes.

The two DVD set delivers pristine sound and picture quality but is disappointingly light on special features with only a few character profiles, musical still image montage and original trailers. A retrospective of the series, interviews and the like would have been welcomed.

Daniel Wilks

ANIMATION: 8 / STORY: 9
EXTRAS: 4 / OVERALL: 9

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- AT THE MOVIES, ABC TV

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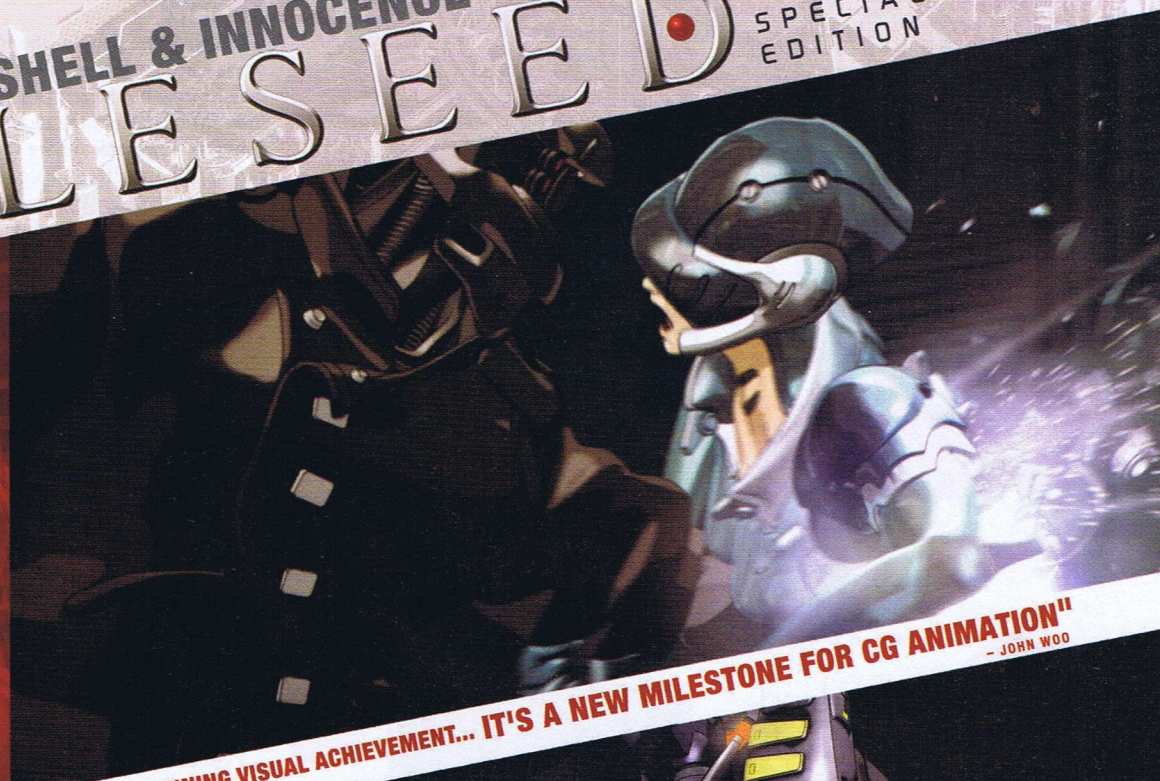

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– JOHN WOO

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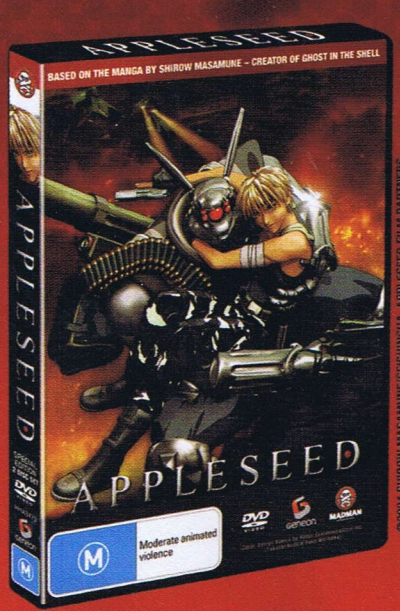

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M Moderate animated violence

hyper's top 10 anime dvd releases of 2005

8 Gantz

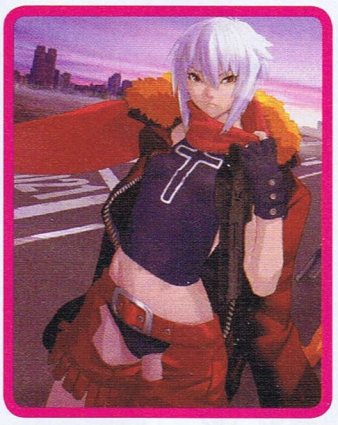
Setting: Some people who may or may not have been killed may or may not have been brought back from the dead by a mysterious black sphere that can't spell are pitted in a game against each other and people who may or may not be aliens to win their old lives back. Maybe.
Characters: Kei Kurono: A selfish and slightly cowardly student who thinks about little else other than sex and himself, not necessarily in that order. Masaru Kato: Kurono's childhood friend and his opposite – he thinks of what is best for others and feels strongly about helping people. Kei Kishimoto: A suicide victim, she develops a crush on Kato after he saves her from an attempted rape. Kurono in turn has a crush on her.
Why it rocks: Bizarrely brilliant. It's grotesque, bloody and densely plotted enough to have you coming back for more just to find out what the hell is going on.

10 Elfen Lied

Setting: A world in which sick experiments are conducted on young diclonius girls - mutant killing machines who are kept chained and naked, covered in blood.
Characters: The story revolves around an escaped diclonius and her twin identities – Lucy, the brutal immoral killer and Nyu, an innocent speechless girl. Nyu is taken in by two clueless college freshmen – wackiness ensues.
Why it rocks: Young female killers are nothing new in anime, but this is more twisted than just about any other series out there. It moves from brutal gore to sickly sweet in a heartbeat, and although obviously going for shock value, it's cool anyway. With great action scenes and slick animation, Elfen Lied is a must for older anime fans.

7 Burst Angel

Setting: In the future, Japan is a violent place. To combat the upswell of crime, laws are passed allowing everyone to carry weapons. To combat this a new police force is formed to cut down the number of gun related crimes. All the while cyborg monsters are being created in secret to enforce the new world order.
Characters: Sei: Leader of the Burst Angels, she understands the big picture and never loses control, Meg: She may not be the fighter that Jo is but she has a humanising effect on the group, Jo: Detached and powerful, Jo is the primary fighter in the Burst Angels, Amy: The youngest member of the team and a computer expert, Kyouhei: an innocent young man who works as the personal chef of the Angels.
Why it rocks: Burst Angel is the Bubblegum Crisis of 2005.

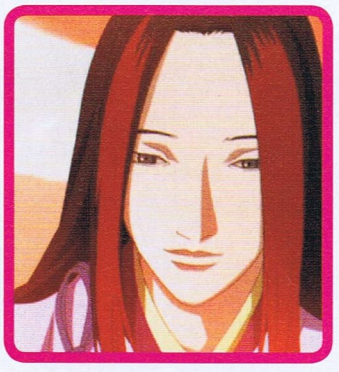


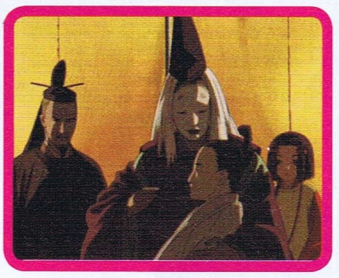
9 Samurai Champloo

Setting: A brash and wild warrior and a well mannered ronin are forced to team up when a ditzy waitress saves their heads from the chopping block. They agree to help her search for "the Samurai who smells of sunflowers" and their journey begins. Deliberately anachronistic, Samurai Champloo contains numerous pop-culture references as well as a hip-hop soundtrack.
Characters: Mugen: A very strong, almost berserk fighter with a quick temper and a faster mouth. Jin: A disciplined and honourable ronin from a samurai family, Jin is usually reserved, seeming only to come alive when fighting. Fuu: A fifteen year old waitress, little is known about Fuu aside from the fact that her mother is dead, her father is missing and she really wants to find the samurai who smells of sunflowers.
Why it rocks: Excellent character design, great action, fun soundtrack, enigmatic plot. What more could you want?

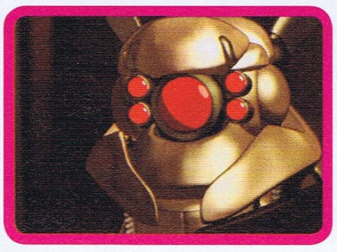
6 Otogi Zoshi

Setting: The Heian era of Japan sees the populace suffering from famine, disease, selfish samurai and corrupt Onmyoji.
Characters: Hikaru: A young girl who disguises herself as her famous samurai archer brother to help save the people, Watanabe no Tsuna: Hikaru's loyal retainer and bodyguard.
Why it rocks: Beautiful character design, deep court politics, clever storytelling and moments of excellent action make this one to watch.



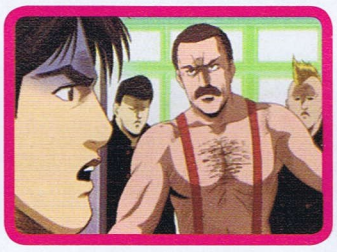


5 Appleseed



Setting: The futuristic city of Olympus, a place where half the population are artificial lifeforms called Bioroids and balance is maintained by a computer network and council of elders.
Characters: Main character and combat veteran Deunan Knute is unknowingly tied into the events that threaten to shake the city to its core and potentially kill off half the populace.
Why it rocks: Amazing CG animation, great setting, plenty of twists and turns. Fans of Ghost in the Shell will love it!

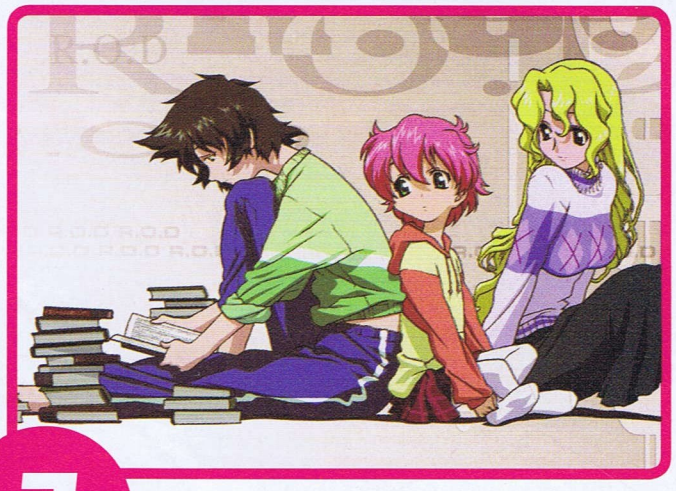
4 Cromartie High School



Setting: Cromartie High School, the last stop for delinquents kicked out of other schools.
Characters: Kamiyama: A seemingly innocent student surrounded by thugs, Mechazawa: A robot mistaken for human, Freddie: A muscle-bound Freddie Mercury who never speaks but travels with his own theme music, 400lb Gorilla: A 400lb gorilla.
Why it rocks: Disjointed and nearly without plot, Cromartie is some of the funniest anime we have ever seen.

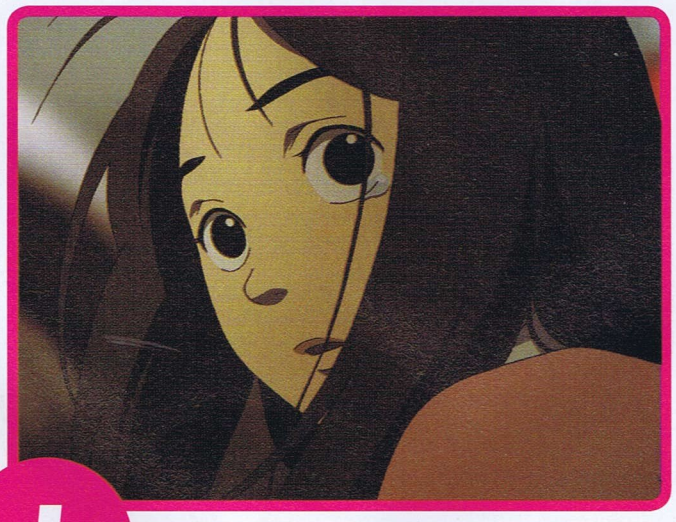
3 Samurai 7

Setting: Take the Kurasawa classic Seven Samurai and transplant it to a strangely futuristic yet familiar world. A great war has just ended, and bandits that are more machine than man roam the land, robbing peasants of their precious crops. One such group of peasants decides enough is enough and recruit seven samurai to fight off the bandits.
Characters: As the series progresses we get to know each of the samurai, as well as many of the villagers. It's a compelling mix of characters, from the helpless to the powerful, and from the apprentice to the master.
Why it rocks: Gonzo have created an intoxicating series - engaging characters, an interesting world where steampunk meets ancient Japan, capped off by wonderful animation.



2 R.O.D the TV

Setting: Set in present day Hong Kong and Japan, but with a magic realist approach. Advanced technology meets old school aesthetics and results in an intriguing story revolving around Paper Masters (people who have incredible control over paper, using it as weapons, tools and vehicles), the British Library and a sinister plot to unify all world's knowledge and resurrect a dead leader.
Characters: Author Nenene Sumiragawa, best friend of "The Paper" from the OVA (who has since disappeared), winds up hiring a trio of sisters, all of whom are Paper Masters: Precocious youngest sister Anita, quiet and tall Maggie, and ditsy oldest sister Michelle. They believe that nothing can shake their bond, but once Dokusensha and the British Library come into the picture, nothing is certain anymore.
Why it rocks: R.O.D the TV is a wonderfully animated, super stylish series with an interesting plot and great action scenes. More importantly however, it's character driven, and takes the time to explore each character.



1 Paranoia Agent

Setting: Modern day Tokyo, a place where you can be surrounded by millions of people but still feel alienated and trapped.
Characters: The main villain and to some extent savior of the piece is Lil' Slugger – a kid on inline skates who clocks people on the head with a golden baseball bat. Is he real or is he some kind of myth? That's what the police want to know as more people fall victim to Lil' Slugger and his infamy spreads like wildfire.
Why it rocks: Offbeat, very cool storyline that never goes quite where you think it will, paired with gorgeous animation, all delivered in Satoshi Kon's inimitable style. This is a true classic and the perfect antidote to all the "paint by numbers" anime around.

WinWinWin

WIN SOULCALIBUR III!

6 PACKS UP FOR GRABS!

PlayStation 2

>> As you've no doubt gathered from the whopping 95% that we awarded Soulcalibur III this issue, we like this game. We like it a lot. Not only does it look incredible, and comes toting all the depth and awesome weapons-based fighting of the previous games, but there are stacks of characters, hundreds of items and weapons to collect, and a fantastic new single player mode that's engrossing from start to finish. Hell, you can even create your own characters now, so finally, Hootie McBoob will be at your beck and call.

There's not much else we need to say except – you need this game, and thanks to our friends at Sony we have six copies of Soulcalibur III and six sweet SCIII t-shirts to give away. To be in the running, just send us some funky Soulcalibur fan art, and the six pics we like the most will win! Simple!

Send your art, plus your name and address to: **Mitsurugi Blah Blah Blah, Hyper, 78 Renwick St, Redfern, NSW, 2016.**

WIN KING KONG ON XBOX!

UBISOFT

>> Peter Jackson's King Kong: The Official Game of the Movie is such a long title that it leaves very little space for any kind of blurb about the game. Fortunately, being the accomplished wordsmiths that we are, very little space is all we need to tell you how cool this game is. Here goes: Turn to page 38 and read our review. Ha! Cheating? Maybe. Clever? Definitely.

Of course, the film is going to be just as brilliant as the game. Would you expect any less from a film directed, produced and co-written by academy award-winning director Peter Jackson, and starring the ever sexy Jack Black and the always funny Naomi Watts? No, you'd expect huge nuggets of filmic gold, and that's exactly what you'll get on December 14 when King Kong opens around the country. To help celebrate the release of King Kong, we have ten prize packs from Ubisoft and UIP to give away. Five lucky winners will receive the game on Xbox and a specially made t-shirt, while five runners up will win a t-shirt. To be in the running, just answer this simple question:

>> What building does Kong climb in the original film?

Send your answer, plus your name and address on the back of an envelope to: **Kong Was Irrepressible, Hyper, 78 Renwick St, Redfern, NSW, 2016.**

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 November 22 and entries close at 6pm January 4. 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 January 5 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 will be notified by mail and results published in the March issue of Hyper on sale February 1. 9) 6 winners will each receive a copy of Soulcalibur III on PS2 (RRP $99.95), and a Soulcalibur III t-shirt (RRP approx $30). 5 first prize winners will receive a copy of King Kong on Xbox (RRP $99.95) and a King Kong t-shirt (RRP approx $30), while 5 runners up will just receive the t-shirt (RRP approx $30). Total value of competitions is approx $1580. 10) The promoter is Next Publishing Pty Ltd ABN 88 002 647 645 of 78 Renwick St, Redfern NSW 2016.

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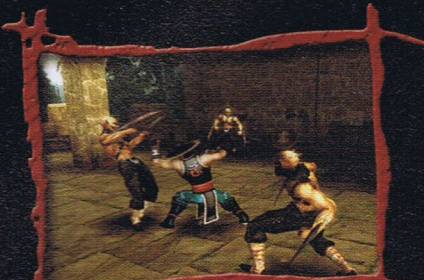

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The Sensitive New Age Avatar

by ALEXANDER JAMES BURKE

"Shake 'em, baby. Wanna dance?"

For all his wit and charm, Duke Nukem was always a bit of a one-trick walking penis. Once his sleazy ass-kicker sheen oozed away like so much hair gel in the L.A. heat, there was little left but a floating gun. Such is the case with most videogame avatars. Whether you're an aloof elven dragon-slayer, a voiceless, helmeted alien-splatterer, or a buxom raider of tombs, chances are your character isn't much cop when it comes to D&Ms.

THE ARCHETYPES

In need of evidence? Let's take a look at genre stereotypes. In your typical action fluff, the boys are big, ripped, and undeniably The Rock-y. Game's got stealth? Slim him down a bit. It's like whittling, only with a harder grade of wood. If you're after fantasy fare, just mine Tolkien — androgynous Legolas, stoic Aragorn, and gruff Gimli are the only three archetypes you'll ever need. (Take away all references to "manhood", and you've got yourself a girl.) If your avatar deviates from these identikits, chances are s/he's still not going to win the Toastmasters Annual Award anytime soon.

You might wonder why. Surely, out there in videogame land, there's a designer that can put together a character with a tad more complexity than Bob the Builder? Well, you're probably right. And there have been numerous examples of admirable character design — look at LucasArts' adventure games, the Final Fantasy series, or even GTA: San Andreas for inspiration (and consolation).

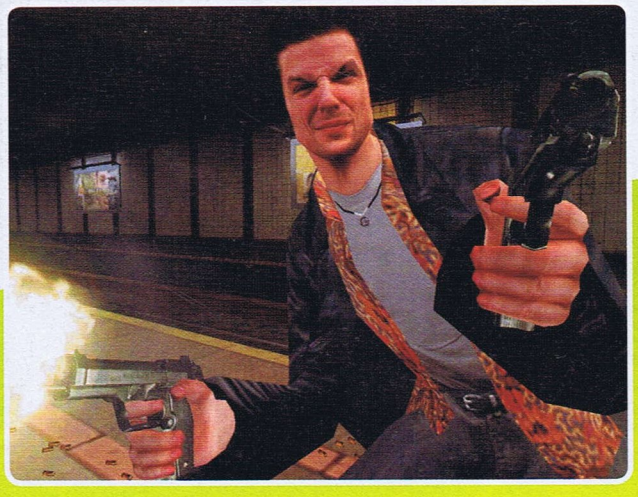
Furthermore, there have been many characters that could've been interesting if it weren't for their lazy creators. Take Sam Fisher, for example. Hasn't anyone noticed that a guy who creeps up behind drug dealers for a living is probably a paranoid, sociopathic, spouse-free zone? I'm not asking for Splinter Cell 5: Sam Goes to Therapy, but you'd think the series could scratch a bit below the surface in terms of plot and dialogue. Not convinced? Have a look at Link. Despite his epic adventures, nothing he ever says or does extends too far beyond cookie-cutter heroics. And let's not even get into the fact that he spends his life chasing a girl who's clearly unavailable.

Truth is, ladies and gentlemen, the quality of our virtual counterparts often borders on the embarrassing. And when you've got Persian princes yelping out "SLAUGHTERED!" and, "You bitch!" in the heat of sweaty conflict, you know it's time to get smart.

So what's the first step? Well, let's take a look at why we're stuck with such numbskulls in the first place. Truth be told, it wasn't always the fault of the designers. As we all know, developing a cinematic, open-ended masterpiece would've been rather difficult in the 8-bit days. Games weren't about story. They were about quick, cheap, addictive thrills. Even as technology got its act together, most people — save for the text-adventurers - only played games to zap a few spaceships and butt-slap a few Koopas. Voice-overs weren't really an option 'til the CD-ROM, so all dialogue was text-based — who wants to scroll through the ruminations of their ponderous avatar when it's demon-smackin' time?

SUPER HAPPY VIOLENCE ROBOTS

Aside from technical limitations, the other problem was marketing. Let's face it — up until recently, most games were for kids and possibly teenagers with far-too-idle hands (if you get my drift). It's not easy to sell a work of literary gaming



Max Payne

Okay, so his name's cheesier than brie. But Max Payne's a uniquely complex hero in amongst the ocean of Rambo copycats. Why's he killing? His wife's dead and he wants payback. Why's his wife dead? He's a cop and some very bad guys have a few bones to pick with him. Why's his face always scrunched up like a sphincter? Well, you can't blame the guy for needing to pee.

With Payne, Remedy managed to stuff a gritty, engaging, noir-ish plot and one passionate and determined antihero into the claustrophobic confines of the action genre. What's more, the gameplay rocked. Remember the days when bullet-time was solely associated with that Keanu Reeves flick? Max Payne was one of the first to make it work.

If there's anything to be learned from Remedy's vapourware-turned-masterpiece, it's this – you can have a guns-blasting, thug-smashing, bullet-timing action hero who's also dynamic enough to carry a decent storyline. Even if he looks like he's passing a kidney stone.

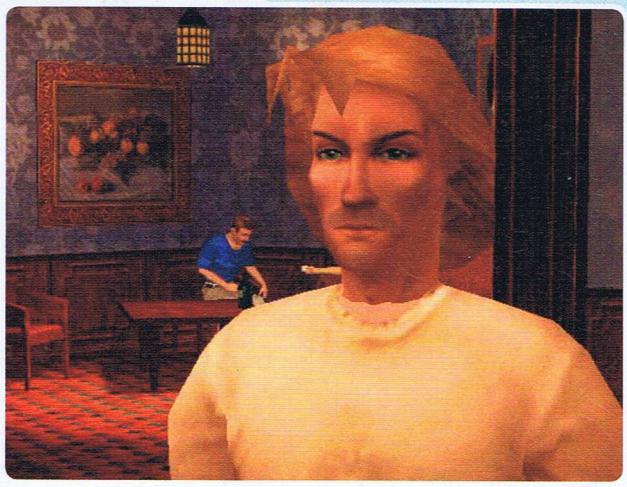
Surely there's a designer who can put together a character with a tad more complexity than Bob the Builder?

genius when everyone's buying Super MoonSpace Alien Destroyer With Big Robots And Laser Dinosaurs 2500.

Finally, we, the press, haven't exactly been a big help. No matter how many Planescape: Torments, Broken Swords, or Max Paynes you stick on the shelves, there'll always be some greasy, potbellied, aging reporter who wants back the "good old days". Is he secretly mourning his dwindling masculinity, or does he just have it in for creativity? Who knows? The fact is that the more we go on about how we want to win back "simple fun", the less of an effort you're going to see from the developers.

The end result of all this bad juju? The very definition of "character" is compromised within the gaming context. Rather than being a living personality with a purpose to the narrative, our player-character is merely a vehicle through which we experience the artwork, programming, and music of a game's developers. If it weren't for the shooting/slashing/jumping sequences, you'd swear you were at an installation. With this framework, how can we ever expect our avatars to extend beyond tacky one-liners and abhorrently unclear motives?

Simple answer? It's impossible. Things need to change. Developers need to create more room for their characters. If we're just running and gunning, there's not much to differentiate one player character from the other. Games need to mature to a point where there's more to them than mindless action.



Gabriel Knight

"Gabriel who?" Sadly, not even being voiced by Frank-N-Furter himself could save poor ol' Gabe from taking the rickety road to Obscurityville. To adventure gamers, though, he's a legend. He's a boozer, a womaniser, and a sometime horror writer – a loser, if you don't mind me saying so, and definitely not of the "Lovable Loser" variety (see: Guybrush Threepwood).

What's the appeal? Well, Knight's affected by real-world problems, rather than a blood-curse on his ancestors. The fact that he was so clearly a wreck made his character development all the more engaging. It's a tribute to Sierra On-Line and Jane Jensen that after not long at all, you're rooting for the guy.

Cloud Strife

New to Final Fantasy? I'll fill you in. Yes, he's a boy. No, that's not an echidna on his head. And the reason he's remained in the hearts of ravenous Nihongophiles for so damn long is because of the elegance with which Final Fantasy VII tells his story – amoral mercenary to good-hearted hero to lonely recluse. Sure, as far as journeys go, Cloud's not exactly a card-carrying member of the Originality Squad, but those clever boys and girls at SquareSoft (now Square Enix) made it all work brilliantly.

Perhaps the reason Cloud's little quest is so engaging is because of the support he gets from, well, his supporting characters. Tifa's a treat, Aeris' a tragedy, and Sephiroth, well, let's just say no videogame character is more hated. They served to enhance the story and the player's character, rather than just act as RPG combat drones.

Cate Archer

For an action game with a serious case of Austin Powers-itis, No One Lives Forever certainly sported an engaging player character. She may have been a joke-a-minute, but Ms. Archer certainly had a dark story – after enduring the death of her mother and the drug addiction and eventual suicide of her father, Cate was forced to become a thief. Luckily, however, a nice fella from an organization called UNITY decided to take her on as his apprentice.

Sure, it's not exactly Shakespeare, but Archer's ascent to special forces operative at once makes sense when you consider her childhood. Not impressed? Well, you can always go back to gun-toting Paris Hiltons.

Agent 47

As far as action heroes go, 47's complicated. Having been saddled with the task of killing countless drug barons, militia leaders, and other assorted nasty guys, the knowledge that he's just a carbon copy of other hitmen, the loss of the church that briefly became his home, and soon the fear of being uncovered by some pesky reporter, he's got a lot on his mind. And he's bald.

The Hitman series managed to give the repetitive killing intrinsic to the action genre a bona-fide purpose - you're a hitman. It's your freaking job. Added to which, the game actually shows to you the effects of your violence: not only are you rewarded based on how few people you dispatch (rather than how many), but 47's constant brooding illuminates the many moral dilemmas that arise in his profession. He's a uniquely emotional hero in a world of condoms-full-of-walnuts. Just don't say anything about his hair.

DARK SECRETS

It would seem, then, that the way to develop player characters is to make the environment adapt to them. If the only way Sergeant Asskicker can interact with the world around him is by shooting at it, then how are we ever going to discover his dark past as Mrs. Asskicker? Don't just rely on cutscenes and cinematics to drive the exposition forward. Even if you're tinkering away at a bare-knuckle shooter, give the player some talkative NPCs, some opportunities to make his own decisions, and perhaps even a few dialogue choices. Yeah, sure it's unconventional. Deal with it, dude.

Oh, and if you do feel the need to get busy with a few cutscenes, get some help. Unless you know you're a good writer, don't pretend to be one. Hire a scriptwriter, preferably someone with a bit of gaming experience. You may think that "Guns don't kill people; I am the guy who does the killing!" is a good line, but most people won't.

Your next goal? Inject the art direction with a bit of class. The leather bikini look you've got going for your female orc-smasher may work well in a softcore porn film, but it's probably of little use on the battlefield. Similarly, the hard-as-nails grimace you're plastering onto your World War II lieutenant doesn't cover up the fact that he secretly has a thing for spandex, Bratz, Wham!, and David Hasslehoff.

Also, when you're redesigning your avatar(s), don't ride waves. Just because Gordon Freeman's popular doesn't mean you should tear off his glasses and rename him Jack Mason. (Pariah, I'm looking in your direction.) Often, you'll find that doing this only ends up with their game making your derivative, forgettable, uninspiring waste-of-disc-space look like... just that, actually. Comparisons are odious.

What's in a name? Your gateway out of cliché-dom. If you can, try to avoid monickers like "Jack Kane", "Max Slade", and "Bullet Gunston". And don't think "Cindy Slick" is a good name for a girl, either. Okay, we get it – they're tough. You know what? It's okay to be subtle.

ONCE UPON A TIME

Lastly, spruce up those back-stories. Unless you've been living in a soundproof solitary confinement chamber in Atlantis for the past

The leather bikini look may work well in a softcore porn film, but it's probably of little use on the battlefield

century, you really have no excuse when it comes to this sort of thing. Need a hint? "Ordinary boy discovers he's the last node in an ancient demonic bloodline and decides to save the world" is not a new idea. Then again, BioWare have been pushing slight variations on that plotline for years, so you might just make it big. But I'll still hate you.

Mind you, there's one type of avatar I'm not addressing: the player-created character. Where in action games you'll usually find yourself in someone else's thigh-highs, most (Western) RPGs let you assemble your own virtual romper-stomper. This has its advantages and its pitfalls. On the one hand, you've got yourself a character with whom you uniquely identify. On the other, it's hard for the game to adapt to your uniqueness.

What's the answer? The best thing you can do is make your title cover all bases. If you don't have the moolah, you shouldn't be making this kind of game. Need a hand? Have a look at Troika's Arcanum. You can experience that game over and over again because it constantly adapts to how you play your digital pawn.

Developers, you may think these tasks are monumentous, and they probably are. But if things don't change, we're just going to find our shelves stuffed with more and more crap. The games do suffer as a result of their unimaginative characters. What's more, we're never going to make our hobby mainstream if the only thing we have to offer are avatars and dialogue at which Uwe Boll would turn up his nose. If developers start making more meaningful characters and we start buying their games, we'll soon see the scope for improvement is gigantic. And it can only get better. Maybe Duke will even show us his feminine side. <<

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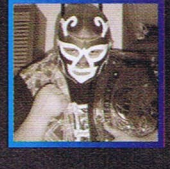

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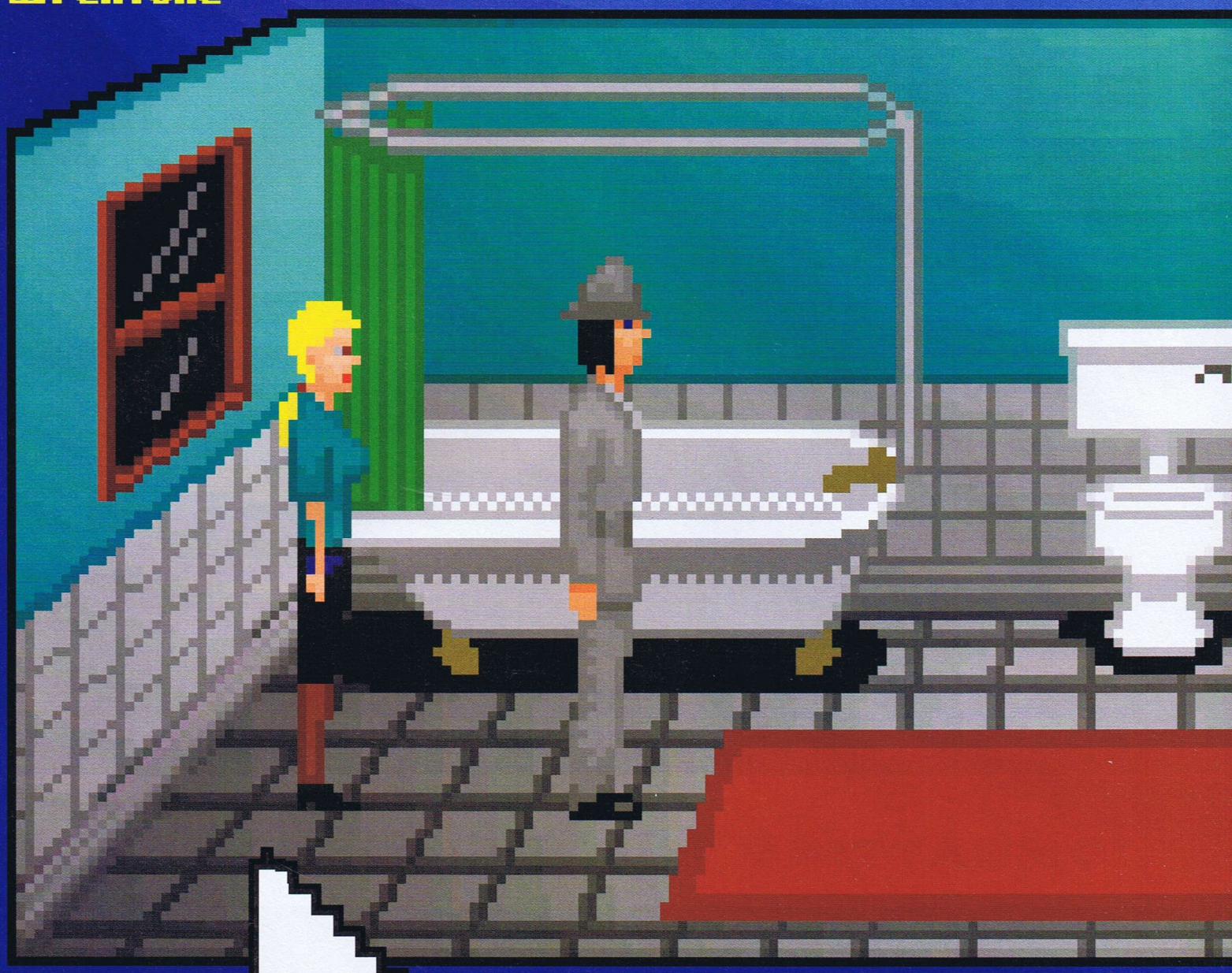


DESIGN YOUR OWN ADVENTURE

>> Ben "Yahtzee" Croshaw

When did it start going wrong for adventure games? When did audiences collectively decide they were tired of Use Key In Door and fled to the whorish arms of first person shooters?

It wasn't that long ago that adventure games were really popular, and LucasArts were still churning out their Monkey Islands and their Grim Fandangos. But then something changed. Computers and consoles began to bleed into the mainstream, and the new lucrative breed of casual gamers were less interested in adventure gameplay. Game engines became more sophisticated, and suddenly a game needed more than just a great storyline to generate appeal. Whatever the cause, commercial adventure games faded away. The genre hasn't picked itself up since LucasArts delivered a one-two punch by cancelling their planned Sam and Max and Full Throttle sequels. Adventure games were filed with 2D platformers as yesterday's news.

But adventure fans, conditioned for years by the irrational logic of their favourite games, never say die, and the internet is all about nostalgia when it isn't about porn. The release of freeware adventure game design tools has created an expanding community of amateur adventure game developers, a motley crew of independent coders who want nothing more than to relive their younger days in the early to mid 90s, when they would sit in an acne-ridden trance at the family IBM and adventure long into the night.

My name is Yahtzee, and I am an amateur adventure designer. In 2003 I released a game called 5 Days A Stranger which has become one of the most well-known titles in the amateur adventure community, and which has been featured on magazine cover CDs in four European countries that I know of, so I know what I'm talking about. I'm here to tell you about making adventure games.

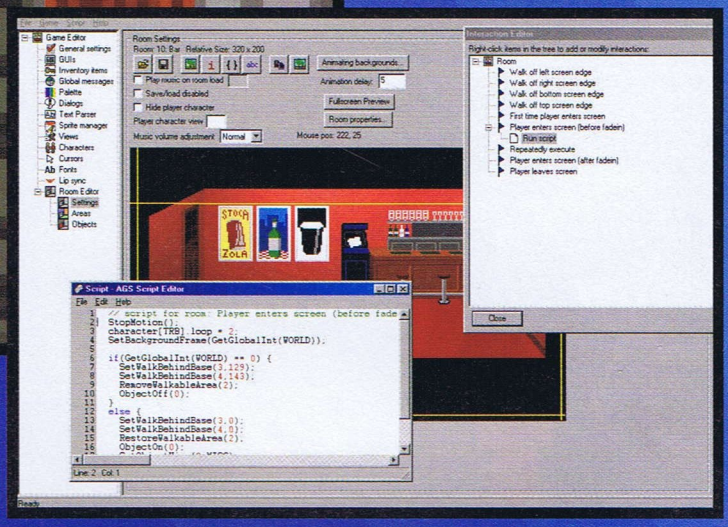
THE TOOLS

I'm going to assume that, if you've read this far, and not moved on to look at the latest screenshots of Blood Murder Orgasm III or

NOOBS

Even more common than the 'ESCAPE FROM MY HOUSE' newbie is the 'I've never made an adventure game but I've got an idea for a 15-disk monster game and I need artists and programmers for this awesome project' newbie. I know it's really keen that you can finally make an adventure game like the ones you loved as a child, but over ambition is not your friend. Start with some short and sweet games to showcase your ability, push yourself a little harder with each subsequent release, and then you can start thinking about blowing our socks off.

Don't release your very first game. There, I said it. I don't expect anyone to follow this advice, because I didn't, but you'll really, really wish you had after you've made a few games of increasing quality and can realise, with hindsight, that your first game was a load of old snot.



whatever, you have an at least foundational interest in adventure games. In that case I'll start by telling you about the different design tools available.

Adventure Game Studio, or AGS (***www.bigbluecup.com***) is probably the most popular engine out there, and a personal preference. Created by English programmer Chris Jones, AGS has one of the largest and most supportive communities. Its appeal lies in its user-friendliness and flexibility. Default Sierra and LucasArts-style interfaces are included, and it's quite possible to make a game with no coding at all, but once you do pick up a bit of the language, everything is totally reprogrammable from the ground up, allowing you to create interfaces from beyond your wildest imagination, providing your imagination is very boring and mainly concerned with computer programming. AGS users have created hundreds of games between them, available in a huge database on the website.

If AGS has a flaw it's that it doesn't exactly exploit the capabilities of modern PCs, generally producing games that would have really made a splash around the time dinosaurs ruled the Earth but which nowadays seem pretty retro. A more recent engine, Wintermute (***www.dead-code.org***), fills this gaping hole in the market by utilising 3D acceleration, and including experimental support for full 3D characters in 2D environments, a la Grim Fandango or Longest Journey. There haven't been many completed games from WME users, but what is out there is undeniably impressive.

Other available engines include AGAST (***www.allitis.com/agast***), a more scripting-based engine, and SLUDGE (***www.hungrysoftware.com***), which was used to create the acclaimed title Out of Order (***http://outoforder.adventuredevelopers.com***). For the really old-fashioned, there's SCI Studio (***www.bripro.com/scistudio***), a tool for creating games with Sierra's ancient SCIo engine; the one they used for games like Space Quest 3 and Leisure Suit Larry 2. If you have a highly advanced and terminal case of nostalgia you can get an equivalent design tool for the prehistoric AGI engine (***www.agidev.com***), which produced games like King's Quest 1 and 2 in glorious 16 colour 160 x 200 resolution graphics. I admit I dabbled around with AGI Studio for a bit, but I pretty much only used it to hack into the old Sierra games and replace all the dialogue with swears.

So, assuming you're not an expert in any of the major programming languages, those are pretty much the options when it comes to what you design an adventure game with. The next thing to do is to pick an engine and familiarise yourself with it. Practically all the utilities listed above have tutorials and manuals to help you get to grips, and even if they don't, they generally have messageboards and communities to hold your newbie hand. Dive in and see which one you like.

[top] Adventure Game Studio - the meat and two veg of the amateur adventure game world [above] SCI Studio - old fashioned, but it's the script and design that count...

De Morte

Destinies

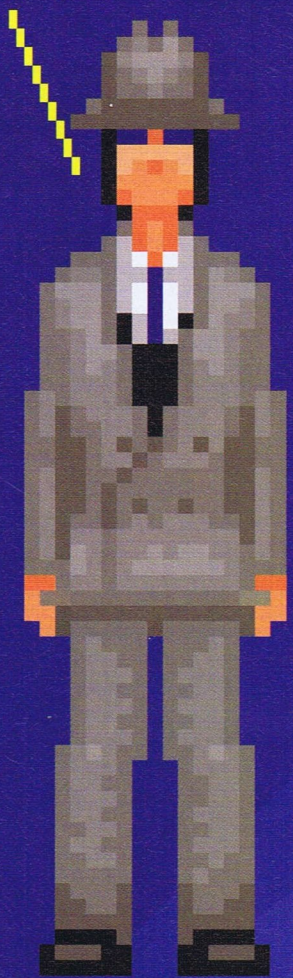
Juniper Crescent - The Sapphire Claw

No-Action Jackson

CHEATING GAME?

So, what if you want to make a character but lack the patience or aptitude to make eight or nine walking sprites from at least four different angles? Well, don't worry, because there are ways to bypass the tedious animating process. Just make your character one of the following:

- A Tibetan mystic and guru who has mastered the art of levitation and who has developed an irrational phobia of the ground.
- A man who is utterly paralysed but possesses the ability to shift his centre of gravity, so that he doesn't so much walk as fall from place to place.
- An ordinary man cursed with total invisibility by the Gods because he was too lazy to make proper walking sprites for his adventure game.



THE TALENT

The first thing you need, after the design tool, is an idea for a game and a story to tell. Adventure games are probably the most story-oriented genre in videogaming. In fact, the adventure game is probably the closest thing you can get to an 'interactive movie', while still being a 'game'. If an adventure game has a bad story then it's fallen at the first hurdle and brained itself on the astroturf.

Hang around the messageboard for an adventure design engine long enough and you'll see a lot of people posting games with some variation of 'ESCAPE FROM MY HOUSE' for a title, with sprites ripped from other games and backgrounds made with the MS Paint freehand tool. These arise when people like the idea of making an adventure game but don't have a story to tell. It's like trying to make a jam tart with no jam. You may succeed, but no one would eat it.

THE PLAN

Once you have an idea, the next thing you need to do is plan out the game. So you have a beginning point and an end point for your story, but now we need to put some delicious creamy filling in the intervening time. If you've played any adventure games before, you'll know that this will involve a lot of carrying around inventory items trying to find where they all fit. Occasionally an adventure game comes along (like Loom) that challenges this convention, but for the most part adventure gameplay will involve picking things up from one place and putting them in another place.

There are probably a lot of ways you can plan an adventure game. What I generally do is start from the end and work back to the beginning, adding puzzles as I go. To demonstrate this method with an example, let's say that Jack Hero has to win the favour of a baby harp seal called Norman. Start from the end and work back, thusly:

- Norman refuses to become our friend until we bring him some fish.
- A fish can be found in the possession of a fisherman by the docks.
- The fisherman will not give you the fish, so he needs to be distracted.
- By talking to him we learn that he has an irrational fear of red onions.
- There are onions in the marketplace, but they're not red.
- The onions need to be dyed by putting them in a washing machine with a beetroot.
- The beetroot can be found in the vegetable patch.

There, right off the top off my head. From this we can also make a list of all the rooms we need, too, and can arrange them into a little grid map for future reference.

- Harp seal enclosure (Norman)
- Docks (fisherman)
- Marketplace (onion)
- Laundrette (washing machine)
- Vegetable patch (beetroot)

Whoa, I might hang on to this, this is actually starting to sound pretty good. The forbidden love between a man and hungry marine life... it's a story for the ages.

When working out your puzzle structure, try not to let it become too repetitive. We don't want to be collecting inventory item A, using it to acquire inventory item B, then using that to acquire item C ad nauseum. Research a few professional adventure games and see how the designers mix things up a bit. Maybe item A needs to be combined with something else first. Maybe item B only becomes available once the player has talked to Colonel Horseradish about the lost city of Rotherham. No good adventure game designer ever relies heavily on the 'use A on B to get C' format - if you want to win our hearts forever, you need variety.

Now we have our plan, it's time to make this damn game.

Is it possible to make any money from this? Short answer: no

WHERE THE ART IS

If you want to make an adventure game with no graphics, there's a place for you: it's called 'the last train to Loserville'. Oh sure, text adventures still have their own following, but an animated image of a scary monster leaping out carries a lot more weight than the word 'BOO' spelled out in urgent lettering.

Graphics come in two flavours - backgrounds and sprites. The sprites are what will be picked up, moved, interacted with, loved, lost and forgotten. The backgrounds are what they do it all on top of. The game won't work without them, and even a simple game will require quite a lot. If you have no artistic ability whatsoever, you're going to have to find someone who does. Personally, I do everything myself, which is why my graphics tend to look like a whole lot of arse smeared with Photoshop light filters. In all honesty, amateur adventure game audiences tend to be forgiving of poor graphics, so long as plot, puzzles and dialogue are solid. This is, after all, amateur development, and poor graphics can give a game a certain retro charm. But there's no reason why you can't wow everyone with fantastic visuals, if you have the means.

There are some good sprite and background tutorials on the internet (***http://kafkaskoffee.com/tutorials.shtml would be a good place to start***), but anyone with any artistic leanings should already know their own preferred method for making background graphics. As for character sprites, walking animations aren't that difficult once you understand the principles of movement, but if you really are completely hopeless with that sort of thing, here are some general guidelines:

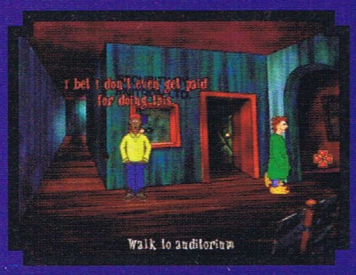
STEP ONE: Open a new document in your favourite art program.

STEP TWO: Send it to an animator and get them to make some sprites.

DIALOGUE

We've got a plan, a story, and graphics. But we still need one more ingredient, or our cake of adventure will not rise in the oven of awkward metaphor. Remember that really popular adventure game that had no dialogue at all? No? Well, I'm not surprised, because it DIDN'T EXIST.

Now, good dialogue can really make a good game. If you can't



Out of Order

Project Joe

The White Chamber

King's Quest 2 remake

7 Days a Skeptic

draw for toffee but can write well, this is where your skill will come across. For every possible interaction the player may try, there's going to have to be dialogue.

There are two major pitfalls people fall into when it comes to dialogue. The first is having every action except the correct ones solicit the phrase (all together now) 'That Doesn't Work', with no variation. This turns an adventure game into one of those toys where you have to push wooden shapes through appropriate holes. Being outsmarted by a videogame is frustrating enough without that sort of discouragement. Reward logical thinking and drop enough hints to kick the player in the right direction.

The second pitfall is to have ridiculously poor descriptions. If your game has an 'Examine' function, and I use it to examine a door, and the game dialogue reveals to me that 'It's a door', I'm going to be cross. I KNOW that it's a door. I can SEE that it's a door. I want to know where it leads, what it's made of, its hopes and dreams and fears. I want to know if it's happy with its status as a door. Tell us something interesting about every interactive object and you can't go wrong.

BENJAMINS

Now you know the programmes available and the skills involved in making an amateur adventure game. There's not much left to do except put it all together and release it to a grateful public. But sooner or later you're going to ask yourself the question we've all asked ourselves at some point:

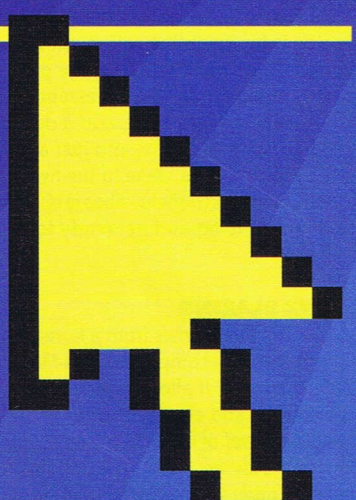
IS IT POSSIBLE TO MAKE ANY MONEY FROM THIS?

Short answer: no.

Most amateur adventure designers release their games as freeware, out of a desire to impress their peers and enrich the freeware scene with their presence, and profit motive rarely comes into it. Few publishers nowadays would want to take a chance with a game that would have seemed passé five years ago. There is one case - Adventures of Fatman - of an AGS game being published for real cash moneys, but it was a frankly unremarkable title and was released as freeware after about ten minutes on the shelves.

Now, I was pretty hurting for money, so I tried asking for donations from people who enjoyed my games. From this I learned that people are scum. Then I came up with my cunning plan. I made a Special Edition of my game and its sequel with new features and DVD commentary to give to donators as an incentive. This worked out a bit better, and now I make almost enough to pay one third of my phone bill every month.

So don't come into this game expecting to retire at 20. If we made any money from it, it wouldn't be called 'amateur' design. But don't be disheartened; if you're good enough, having some strong amateur titles can be impressive on a CV, and there is precedent for them serving as a stepping stone into professional game design. By this method, the filth of adventure gaming can infect the industry. Perhaps that'll be enough to help drag the genre back into popularity. More likely not. But there'll always be the underground scene, because there'll always be nostalgia, at least before the pod people invasion of 2017 suppresses our emotions. <<



SOME GOOD AMATEUR GAMES

KING'S QUEST 1 & 2 VGA (*www.agdinteractive.com*) – AGS remakes of Sierra's original classics. Very professionally made, snap them up before Sierra's legal team find out.

NO-ACTION JACKSON (*www.talesofinterest.com/no-action*) - An excellent game with graphics and design worthy of LucasArts around their Day of the Tentacle phase. You play a gamer nerd, so a lot of you should relate to it.

THE WHITE CHAMBER (*www.studiotrophis.com/wc.php*) - One of the first games to be made with the Wintermute engine, this could well be the best-looking amateur game out there. It's a pretty hefty download, but I guess that's the price for quality.

And just in case I haven't been plugging myself enough, here're my games: *www.fullyramblomatic.com/games.htm.*

GUNZ: the Duel

JAMES ANDERSON GETS HIS DUEL ON...

Welcome to Cooking up Gaming Goodness! Today's recipe is for an online action game called Gunz: The Duel. Take one part Matrix Online, mix in some essence of Unreal Championship, add a dash of Phantasy Star Online and just a little pinch of Woo. Bake in the heat of an online battlefield, decorate with anime icing and get ready to get sick.

GUNZ BLAZING

Gunz: The Duel comes from a Korean based software company called Maiet Entertainment. It allows you to create a character and engage in online deathmatches of up to 16 players. Imagine playing Max Payne online against other people with bullet time replaced by hyper-fast gun and swordplay and you will have a pretty good idea of what Gunz has to offer. Now add Matrix-style wall running, duel wielding, and razor sharp samurai swords. The weapons in Gunz fall into three categories. These are melee, ranged and explosive. Melee weapons include a variety of swords and daggers, while ranged consist of pistols, Uzis, machine guns, shotguns, rifles and even bazookas. Sound Exciting? It is.

What separates Gunz from similar titles are its RPG elements. The hero that you create in Gunz will compete against other people online to gain experience and become stronger. The kills you score in deathmatch earn you experience and bounty to spend in the Gunz Store. As you gain experience you can purchase more powerful weapons and equipment to outfit your fighter with. These can be anything from more powerful guns, to leather jackets and trench coats. If you stick with the game and obtain higher levels, you will transform yourself from a shoeless gat-holding punk, to a boot strapped, flame-sword wielding bad ass force of nature. The question is, will you stick with it?

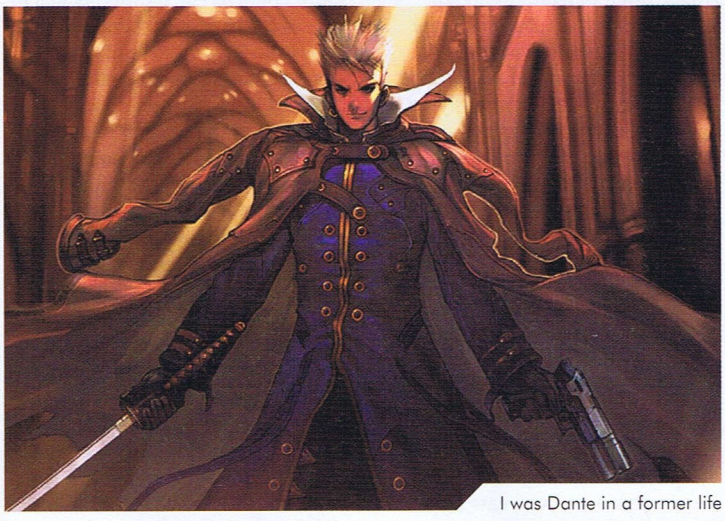
Lag and server space is already an issue, causing some of the moves in the game to be unresponsive at times and occasionally you may not even be able to get into the game at all. The patience of the hardcore will be rewarded but casual gamers will most likely pass on the game after the first few levels. At the moment the game is still in its BETA release so hopefully these issues will be addressed in further releases. Gunz is just over a 10MB download and the best part is that the game is 100% free. Free to own and free to play. Just go to the official GUNZ website, ***www.gunzonline.com***, and download the international version.

The website has already got a decent following with message boards and game FAQS already posted. Searching around for more information about the game, I read that there is even a quest mode in the works. Hopefully this will transform Gunz into a sort of John Woo style, Phantasy Star Online. This is the most exciting news for Gunz players, considering that the gameplay is restricted to player versus player battles at the moment. If and when the quest mode is released, Gunz could become the game that Matrix Online wished that it was.

IF LOOKS COULD KILL

The graphics in Gunz may not blow your skirt up. This is a game that can be played on mid to low range computers. If you have a 3D card and a decent amount of processing power you should have no problems running the game at top spec. There are eight arenas to fight in - a mansion that may as well belong to the Merovingian, a train station, a factory, a prison, a Romanesque coliseum, a garden, an island and some city streets. All of the level layouts are excellent. The Mansion level, for example, will have you running across banisters and walls, guns blazing, all while

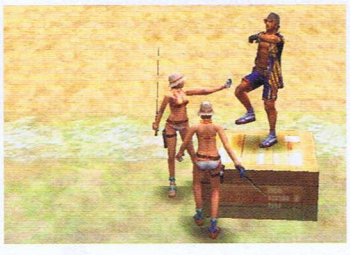
Captionz: The Writingz

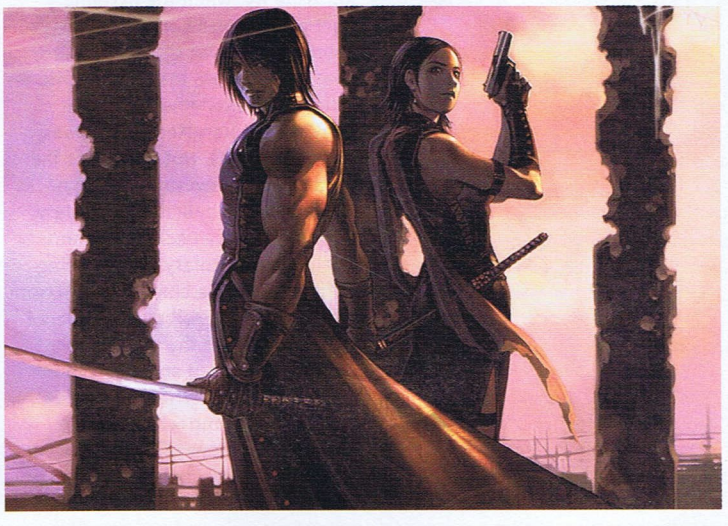


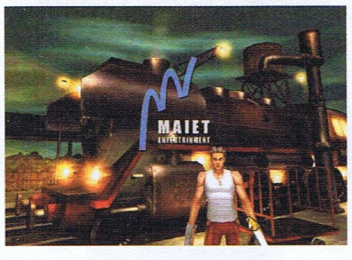
I was Dante in a former life

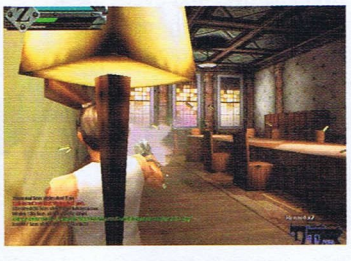
LOVE ANGEL MUSIC BABY

The soundtrack of the game fits perfectly into the rich anime style and settings. All fun and fast paced, the music matches the game's mood and you will definitely be singing the songs in your head if you spend a decent amount of time with it. The sound effects of all of the guns in the game are also very satisfying. The rattling of machine guns, mixed with sword slashes and explosions are all loud and full of impact.







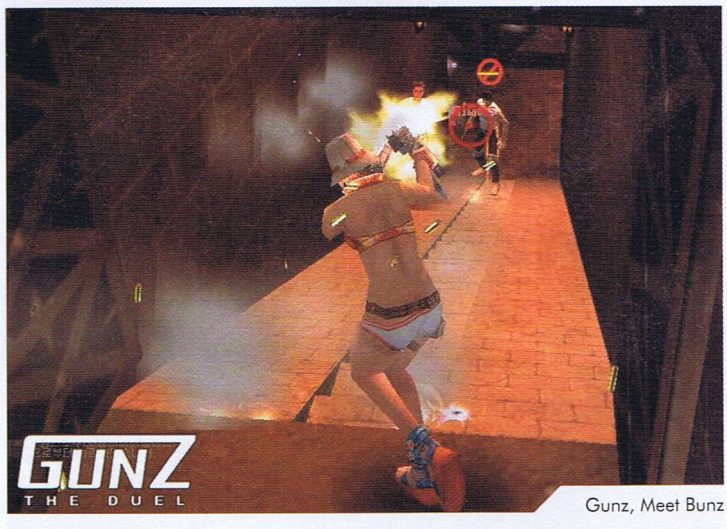


diving between pillars as if you were Neo himself. Sadly, there are no destructible elements in the levels at all. You won't be diving through panes of glass, or scarring up the walls with bullet holes. And the only thing affected by the constant tossing of grenades all around will be the players themselves. To be honest, you won't have much time to stop and look at your surroundings anyway, with people diving around you in every direction, desperately trying to get the experience and bounty from your death at their hands.

The game also sports some cool special effects to keep things interesting. Executing double kills and headshots while diving will cause glowing angel wings to burst from your character's back. Special kills will make "Fantastic", and "Excellent" appear onscreen, giving the game an old school Mortal Kombat feel.

There is an issue with joining games with a mix of high and low level characters. It can be very frustrating when you're giving it everything you've got to take someone down only to have another player swoop in out of nowhere and steal your kill. A system needs to be implemented that allows you to see the level and health of your enemies so that you can pick your battles. Doing this would create an interesting dynamic in situations where targets need to be prioritised. If there was a way to see the levels of opponents in battle then perhaps the lower levels could put their differences aside for just a split second to take down the big fish before resuming their own battle. Thankfully the servers are regulated by level so you won't have to face anyone higher than a level ten when you first start out.

All in all, Gunz is a pretty good game. It has okay graphics, balanced controls and fun gameplay. If the developers fix the minor lag and server issues this game could become a cult classic. The quest mode that is being talked about would also be an excellent addition. Take ten minutes and download Gunz. It's pretty rare to find freeware like this. <<



Gunz, Meet Bunz

MAIL HYPER!

POSTAL:
78 Renwick St. Redfern,
NSW 2016 Australia

EMAIL:
freakscene@next.com.au

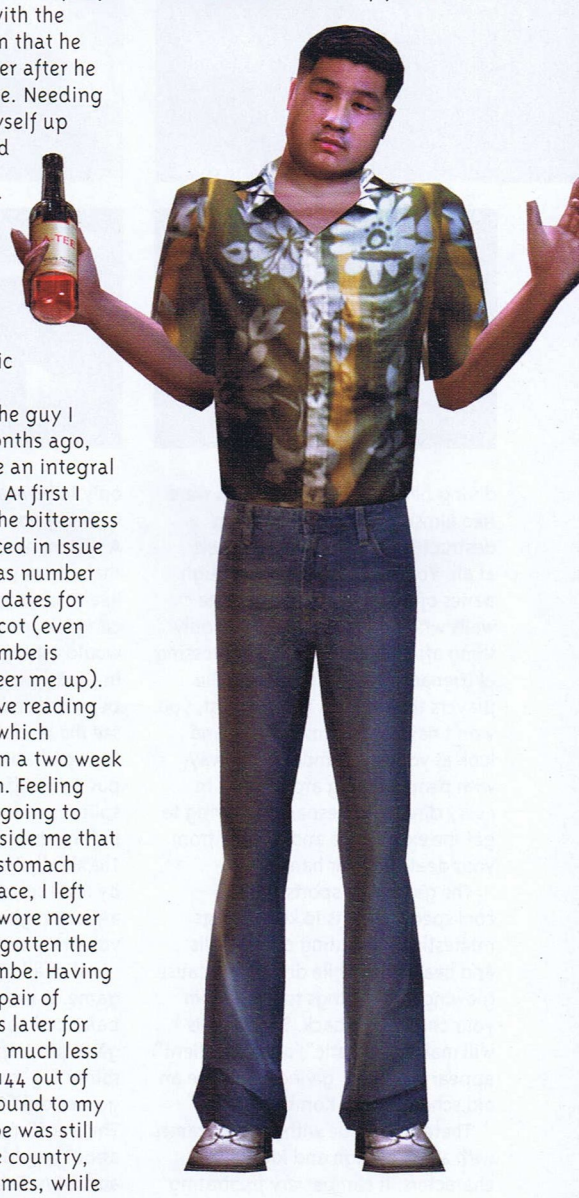
SWEET CHIN MUSIC

So this is where I would normally write, 'Dear Hyper.' However, flicking through some of your past issues, often thinking to myself, 'Holy Zombie Jesus, I wish I wrote for Hyper,' I came to a sudden realisation, the kind of realisation akin to leaving your house, flying out of the country and then remembering you left all your windows open. In other words, a bad realisation - one that has forced me to think of Hyper in a way that is anything but 'dear.' "But why, why has this happened, oh dear God in heaven?!" I pretend to hear you scream so loud that it reaches me here in Perth. There's a very simple answer to that imaginary deafening question, only two words in fact, and here it is: Maurice Branscombe.

My close-to-being-epic tale of woe begins over two years ago in Issue 119, when the extremely generous Mario Kart Double Dash competition was offered, and my hat flew off into the air-conditioner suction in excitement (in case anyone is interested, yes, it was a cowboy hat). Not only were the usual, albeit awesome, prize packs consisting of delicious chocolaty Cadbury Triple Decker bars and delicious chocolaty games being offered, but the chance to fly (from Perth) over to Melbourne (where I heard, through the wireless, that they've invented some sort of in-doors toilet) to write an article for Hyper! Along with what I'm sure was trillions of other excited Hyper readers, I sent off my entry and spent an excruciating two months awaiting Issue 121 - the announcement. And when it came, what did I find? A bit of talent, and a lot of luck, had placed me at the top of the runners-up list, just underneath some other slightly more talented (or slightly luckier) guy who had scooped the first prize trip. At that point, I was far too busy whooping in excitement and blasting my shotgun into the air for the name of that guy to register, but it was a name that would come back, donned in slightly nicer bed sheets than mine, to haunt me - Maurice Branscombe.

Time went on, Mario Kart Double Dash was played extensively, Triple Deckers were nibbled at and found to be rubbish (but still, free!), and the competition became a distant happy memory. Then, flicking through Issue 138, I received the first hint that something was amiss. "Why does that Employee of the Month's name leave me with a slight feeling of bitterness even though I'm eating this fossilised Triple Decker bar?" I asked myself. My second hint came with the employee's explanation that he started writing for Hyper after he won a trip to Melbourne. Needing more hints, I locked myself up in my room and re-read the employee's profile over and over and over again, no sleeping, no eating, just reading. After several months, it dawned on me. While I had become a borderline psychopathic malnourished hermit, Maurice Branscombe, the guy I had lost to all those months ago, had gone on to become an integral part of the Hyper crew. At first I wasn't too upset, but the bitterness intensified when I noticed in Issue 139 that Branscombe was number two on the bill of candidates for new Official Hyper Mascot (even telling myself 'Branscombe is number two' didn't cheer me up). My mood didn't improve reading the following issue, in which Branscombe was sent on a two week long European vacation. Feeling that the bitterness was going to form a little creature inside me that would burst out of my stomach and doom the human race, I left my home behind and swore never to return until I had forgotten the name Maurice Branscombe. Having worn through my only pair of shoes I returned months later for a pedicure, and feeling much less bitter, I chiselled Issue 144 out of my letterbox. Inside I found to my dismay that Branscombe was still being flown around the country, getting paid to play games, while the only thing anyone would pay me for is medical experiments. This awakened the kind of bitterness inside me that you've only ever read about, probably in 'Bitterness Monthly Digest.'

So, 'how can we help you in your time of need and will this email ever end?' you ask. There is a simple, win-win solution to it all - elevate Maurice Branscombe to the position of Official Hyper Mascot, so I can embrace my bitterness and realise my role as his arch-nemesis. I'm thinking I'd be called Bitter-man but that's the kind of thing that can be workshopped. Don't get me wrong, I'm extremely thankful for all the happiness that Hyper has brought me, especially the prizes it has brought me, but I now realise that winning the runners-up prize has set me on the path to villainy - a path intertwined with the slightly nicer, more successful path of Maurice Branscombe. Epic battles await, in which I blast concentrated lasers of bitterness from my eyes - rumour has it the only force

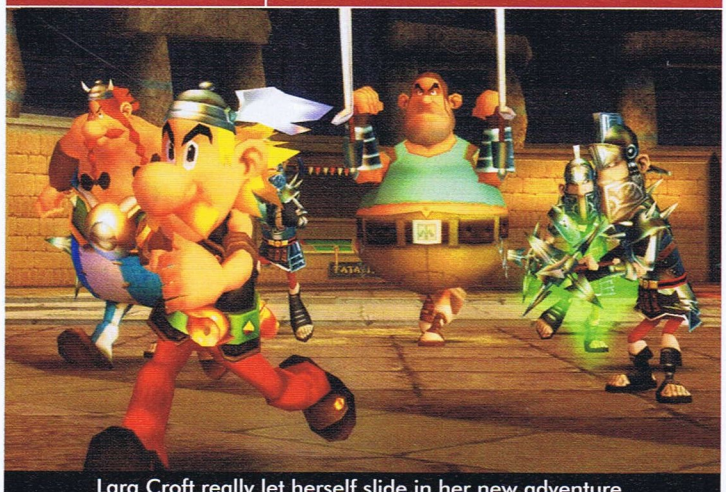


[up] Love him or hate him, Amos is actually going to be in the Scarface game...

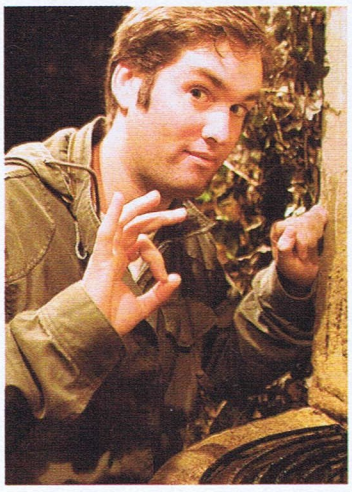
CAPTION THIS!

PART 72 WINNER

Comedy gold doesn't just fall from the sky, it requires a quick wit and sharp eye, as **Bret Sammut** demonstrates...



Lara Croft really let herself slide in her new adventure, Tomb Raider - Fattius Maximus



[up] We're working on getting Moe in a game too, but processors aren't yet powerful enough to render his chin...

strong enough to combat the power of Branscombe's mighty chin. This is just an example; it could also be something much better. But the fact remains that none of the other potential mascots have their almost-equal-force-who-knows-their-weaknesses-but-will-inevitably-be-defeated-in-an-amazing-apocalyptic-battle built in the way that Maurice Branscombe does. So I leave the choice in your hands, hoping that you didn't delete this message in the fear that it was another nonsensical essay by an angry ranting fan (well, I'm not angry, at least). Just know that I'll be waiting, always waiting, to unleash my bitterness on the world, because mine is an evil laugh.

John Todd

P.S. I'm sorry if this was in any way offensive to Maurice Branscombe, or anyone other person living or dead.

There's really nothing we have to add to this save to tell you that we're gonna send you some stuff we found in our bottom drawer. Cheer up tiny dancer.

FEEL GOOD HIT OF THE SUMMER

Whenever some stupid gaming contest pops up in hyper, a reference is often made to "gaming becoming a real sport". this always makes me mad. gaming will never be a sport. sports celebrate physical excellence, not photographic memory of a game (combined with bastard reflexes). Julian Danaher touched on the inadequacies of the people behind "l33t" gaming (or whatever the hell it is), in his pot-shot piece, but it is also the subversion of good-old fashioned multiplayer fun that makes all the LAN stuff crap. once a friend of the family was over at my house. it transpired he was in some BF1942 clan. i asked him if he felt like playing some cube with me. he declined, on the grounds that it might 'hurt" his skills. i have never seen the buzz about counterstrike. it's impersonal, based on a ridiculous hierachy, and populated by people i mostly wouldn't invite into my house. trying to pass it off as "sport" irritates me. as The Bad would say - "DELETED!!!!"

yours parsimoniously,

S.A.C.K.

Sorry Sport but we've got to disagree with you here. Words evolve through time so can have multiple different meanings depending on the context it is used. As a basic definition, sport is a physical activity governed by skill and a set of rules. Gaming actively fits into that category when played competitively, such as in the World Cyber Games. Sport can also mean a companion. It can also mean to play with. It can also mean to wear, to joke, to gamble or mutate. A changing definition can definitely include gaming. In South Korea, Starcraft is almost considered a national sport and has television programs (there are not one but two gaming channels, one that only shows competitions). Chess is considered a competitive sport. Why not games? You may want to buttonhole only strenuous physical activity and excellence as a sport but that then cuts out a number of activities. Lawn bowls isn't the most strenuous activity but that's a sport. Same with darts. Or snooker. All of those sports require a keen eye, practise, reflexes and the ability to adapt to a changing scenario. Sounds kinda like gaming to us.

VIVA TEH REVOLUTION

I just want to convey my extreme happiness and good will towards Nintendo for the direction they are taking with their upcoming Revolution console. I admit, like many others I was unsure and a little (read hugely) worried about what ideas Nintendo might have come up with for this next generation but they have completely and utterly allayed my fears. The new Revolution controller is an amazing development in gaming technologies and a great insight into the forward thinking and brave minds that reside at Nintendo HQ. Instead of churning out a console virtually identical to their competitors they have chosen to pursue a new direction in interactive entertainment and reinvent the industry which, let's face it, was becoming somewhat stagnant and repetitive. The possibilities that this new type of control opens up is mind boggling and we can only hope that the third party developers rediscover their passion for original games and fully support this innovation. It would be a shame to see this idea go the way of the N64 and to a lesser extent Gamecube and bid an early exit through a lack of third party support. I think the evidence that this control is the future of video games will be shown when Microsoft and Sony release their inevitable imitations of this device. The 'remote' gamepad just shows that Nintendo is a company OF gamers who develop FOR gamers. Nintendo truly will bring ex-gamers back to gaming and get non-gamers excited to try it. The best thing is, as usual, Ninty are playing their cards very close to their chests and there are still more secrets!!! Who knows what other developments they have left to unveil that will complete this 'Revolution'?

My it is an exciting time to be a gamer!

Thanks for listening

Tony Rugari

P.S. I think I'll still get a Ps3 or an Xbox360 because I believe in having the best of both worlds but not all 3 machines, I'm not rich you know (And with the price of these new machines I might have to mortgage my house, or in the case of the PS3, my soul).

We here at Hyper are all Ninty fans at heart but there are still some things that we find a little unsettling about the Revolution. Whilst we can appreciate that Nintendo do like to play their cards close to their chests, playing them so close that no information is available leads to rampant speculation which, for the most part is not healthy. On a more worrying note (and this may just be pessimism talking) the new controller, whilst being full of potential could wind up being one of the sorest points in the new console. The problem with a new and proprietary control (especially for a Nintendo system) is that third party developers are going to have to make games exclusively for the system to take advantage of it, cutting down on a game's profit margin due to the difficulty/impracticality of porting to another system. Add to this the traditionally very high Nintendo licensing fees and there may be a lot of alienated developers. Fingers crossed that it will work out for the best though – we don't want the Revolution and the controller to turn into the next Virtual Boy and Power Glove.

thompson with a 'p'

(or)

you don't know jack

by

david mcdermott

maccad @ ubergoth . net

[up] Goth does satire shock!
Goth reads Hyper double shock!

The Passion of the Gamer

The Impulse Purchase

By Dylan Burns

Buying games is not a casual thing. It can cost serious money to the passionate gamer, and can even result in many hours of debasing physical slavery (or parent-begging) to be able to pay for those beautiful plastic parcels of perfect pleasure. Such indenture is often an evil necessity, but one that must be endured nonetheless.

The passionate gamer is an observant and sophisticated beast, one who perspicaciously examines all the relevant media on upcoming releases and who always has rainy-day funds ready for the next essential purchase. Indeed, much fun actually comes from greedily devouring every tidbit of information available online and in magazines and then impatiently waiting for the game to appear on store shelves.

Therefore, this management of game-money (i.e. all your money) is a delicate process. Disposable income must be kept secret from parents or spouses, as they unfairly demand money for things like rent or victuals. This is by no means duplicitous, and you should feel no guilt; without your money game developers would surely be forced to live on the street and beg for food! Thusly, a smooth flow of game purchases can quickly be established and a warm glow of contentment will settle on your broad, though pale, gaming shoulders. How could it get any better? Surely it couldn't.

"Ah", I hear you say, "but there must lurk some hidden caveat", and you are quite correct. There exists an incorporeal entity whose actions threaten to interrupt this delicate balance. I am of course talking about the impulse purchase.

Not to be confused with the compulsory purchase, the impulse purchase most often occurs in those rare moments of weakness when the need for new gaming experiences far outweighs your common sense. Sadly, it also seems to happen when your funds are experiencing a period of severe depletion (though for many that may be the usual situation), which may result in a lack of funds when the games you actually plan to buy come along. Thankfully, there are a few identifiable forms of the impulse purchase; recognition of these situations may help to stem their occurrences.

The Gaming Slump: This occurs when you've finished the latest and greatest electronic adventure and know there is a fair wait until the must-have next release. During this difficult period almost any game, no matter how base, can seem a good purchase, and the unwary gamer can easily be snared by 15% off sales and bargain bins. As much as it pains me to say, perhaps these periods are best spent doing something other than playing games. I know it may seem heretical to talk so, but it is rarely long between good game releases anyway.

The Non-Existent New Release: This is a much more difficult situation and one that requires a large amount of will power to resist. Let's set the scene: you approach the well-lit gaming section of your favourite store, replete with excitement for the new release that you've been anticipating and is finally being released today – only it's not there, and the indifferent store worker has no idea what you're talking about. Tantrums won't work (trust me), and once you've scoured every store you can think of and come up empty you may feel that you deserve an impulse purchase to dull the pain. The only advice I can give to get you through those terrible few hours or days is to just play the best games you own, or perhaps even the previous game in the series if it is a sequel you await, in order to both quench your craving and build your excitement for its release.

The One That Slipped Between The Cracks: This occurs when a game you perhaps were only mildly interested in, have heard little about, or thought was not due for ages, appears suddenly on store shelves with little or no fanfare. But beware, for they have a purpose: their gleaming new artworks taunt you and draw your eye, and the 'New Release' sticker cheekily lets you know that you could be one of the first people to enjoy it. You haven't planned for it, no reviews have been released, and you know you shouldn't – but it looks so damn tempting sitting there. So, like seedy old men drawn to a topless car washing fundraiser, gamers give in to temptation, and often pay the price for their folly. Soon you may be left clutching your hair and screaming, "Why, god, why?" at the darkened sky when you realise that there was a reason why the game was released ahead of any media critique.

Sales: Firstly, sales can be both a blessing and a curse. It seems that there is a price for games that aren't must-haves where inbuilt frugality denies their purchase. But when that barrier is broken it becomes much harder to deny that you're willing to ignore it. There may arise a situation where three, four, or even more games come below this level and suddenly your delicately managed funds are threatened by their existence. And it's not as if you can just ignore them – they're half price! Double the amount of gaming fun for your money? Just tread carefully.

The Unexplainable Purchase: It happens to every shopper - they can't actually explain how certain items made their way into the shopping trolley. Games are no different. Perhaps you thought Barbie in Plastic Land looked like a good present for a younger sibling, or that you could sell it for profit. On rare occasions, gamers can find themselves entering a trance-like state whereby they can remember entering a store and leaving it, but nothing in between. What's worse, they're left clutching some worthless piece of crap they cannot explain. Perhaps it was silly to think that the hot sales woman would talk to me if I bought something. So, like consuming a spiked drink at a dodgy nightclub, you awaken from your stupor to find you have been taken advantage of, and have a useless game to show for it. Some of us hide the evidence of these occurrences in a dark corner of our minds, or the wardrobe. Others never recover and spend the rest of their gaming days sniffing through software bargain bins and espousing useless knowledge about shit games. Poor souls.

These examples may paint a glum picture for those of you who suffer from excessive impulse purchasing. But it should be possible for the smart gamer to find a balance between essential purchases and bargains, without the need to become a slobbering slave to buying urges. If successful, you can expect many enjoyable hours as you gleefully get all your money's worth out of your latest bargain.

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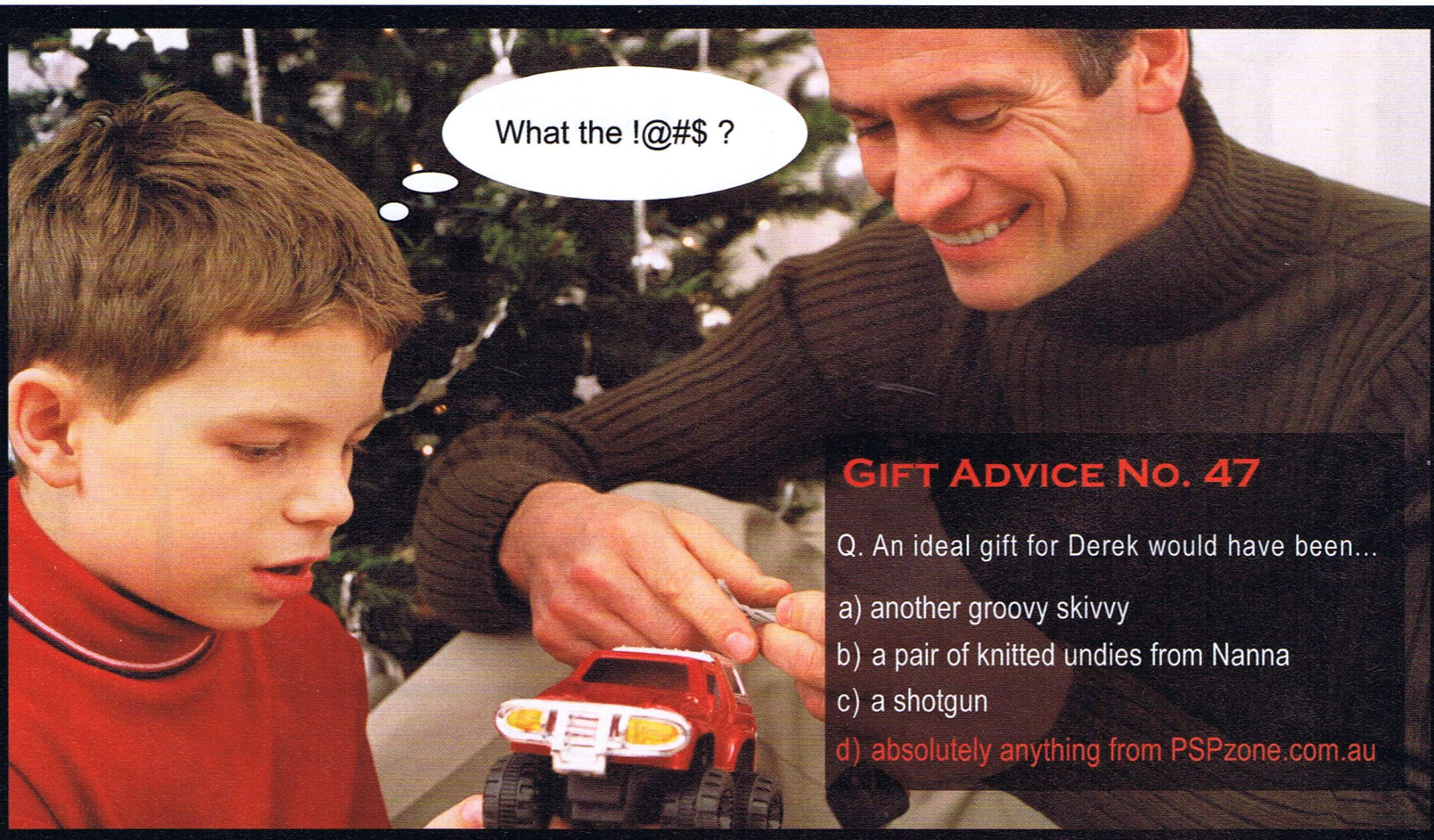

GIFT ADVICE NO. 47

Q. An ideal gift for Derek would have been...

a) another groovy skivvy

b) a pair of knitted undies from Nanna

c) a shotgun

d) absolutely anything from PSPzone.com.au

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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 30th Oct 2005 RETAIL SALES

1	✪	Tony Hawk USA Wasteland	Sports
2	▼	Ricky Ponting Int Cricket 05	Sports
3	◆	FIFA 2006	Sports
4	✪	Buzz: The Music Quiz Bundle	Family
5	✪	The Warriors	Action
6	▼	AFL Premiership 2005	Sports
7	▼	Tiger Woods PGA 2006	Sports
8	▼	NBA Live 2006	Sports
9	▼	SingStar Pop Bundle	All Other
10	✪	Midnight Club 3 DUB Ed	Racing

TOP 10 Nintendo DS Games Over $40

W/E 30th Oct 2005 RETAIL SALES

1	◆	Nintendogs Lab & Friends	Simulator
2	▲	Nintendogs Chihuahua	Simulator
3	▼	Nintendogs Dachschund	Simulator
4	▲	Super Mario 64	Adventure
5	▼	Madagascar	Adventure
6	◆	Advance Wars Dual Strike	Strategy
7	▲	Ultimate Spider-Man	Adventure
8	▼	Yoshi Touch & Go	Action
9	▲	Pokémon Dash	Racing
10	✪	Spider-Man 2	Adventure

TOP 10 Game Cube Games Over $50

W/E 30th Oct 2005 RETAIL SALES

1	◆	Mario Party 6	Family
2	▲	Mario Kart Double Dash	Racing
3	▼	WWE Day Of Reckoning 2	Sports
4	▼	Pokémon Colosseum	RPG
5	◆	Starfox Assault	Adventure
6	▲	Sonic Gems Collection	Adventure
7	◆	Resident Evil 4 CE	Adventure
8	✪	Metroid Prime 2: Echoes	Adventure
9	▼	Paper Mario 1000 Year Door	Adventure
10	✪	Hulk: Ultimate Destruction	Adventure

TOP 10 Xbox Games Over $50

W/E 30th Oct 2005 RETAIL SALES

1	◆	Ricky Ponting Int Cricket 05	Sports
2	✪	Tony Hawk USA Wasteland	Sports
3	▲	FIFA 2006	Sports
4	✪	GTA: San Andreas	Adventure
5	▲	Tiger Woods PGA 2006	Sports
6	✪	The Warriors	Action
7	✪	Fable	RPG
8	▼	NBA Live 2006	Sports
9	▼	WWE WrestleMania XXI	Sports
10	✪	Brothers In Arms Rd Hill 30	Action

TOP 10 PC Games Over $20

W/E 30th Oct 2005 RETAIL SALES

1	◆	Quake 4	Action
2	◆	FEAR	Action
3	◆	The Sims 2: Nightlife	Strategy
4	◆	Bratz Rock Angelz	Adventure
5	▲	Rome Total War Barb Inv	Strategy
6	▼	The Sims 2	Strategy
7	◆	World Of WarCraft	Strategy
8	▲	Battlefield 2	Action
9	✪	Half Life 2	Action
10	▼	The Sims 2: University	Strategy

TOP 10 Game Boy Advance Games Over $30

W/E 30th Oct 2005 RETAIL SALES

1	◆	Bratz Rock Angelz	Adventure
2	◆	Pokémon Emerald	RPG
3	▲	Pokémon Fire Red	RPG
4	▲	Ultimate Spider-Man	Adventure
5	▲	Pokémon Leaf Green	RPG
6	✪	Scooby Doo 2 Monsters	Adventure
7	◆	Charlie & Chocolate Factory	Adventure
8	◆	Pokémon Ruby	RPG
9	◆	Pokémon Sapphire	RPG
10	✪	Simpson's Road Rage	Racing

TOP 10 All Format Games Over $50

W/E 30th Oct 2005 RETAIL SALES

1	◆	Nintendogs Lab & Friends	Nintendo DS
2	▲	Nintendogs Chihuahua	Nintendo DS
3	✪	Tony Hawk USA Wasteland	PlayStation 2
4	▲	Ricky Ponting Int Cricket 05	PlayStation 2
5	▼	Quake 4	PC/MAC
6	✪	FIFA 2006	PlayStation 2
7	▼	FEAR	PC/MAC
8	▼	Nintendogs Dachschund	Nintendo DS
9	✪	Buzz: The Music Quiz Bundle	PlayStation 2
10	◆	Bratz Rock Angelz	GBA

TOP 10 PlayStation Portable Games Over $40

W/E 30th Oct 2005 RETAIL SALES

1	◆	NFS Underground Rivals	Racing
2	▲	FIFA 2006	Sports
3	▼	Burnout Legends	Racing
4	▲	Midnight Club 3 DUB Ed	Racing
5	▲	Untold Legends	RPG
6	▼	V8 Supercars 2	Racing
7	▲	Medievil Ressurection	Adventure
8	▼	Coded Arms	Action
9	▼	T Hawk Undergrnd 2 Remix	Sports
10	✪	NBA Live 2006	Sports

✪ New Entry
◆ Non Mover
▲ Up from last week
▼ Down from last week

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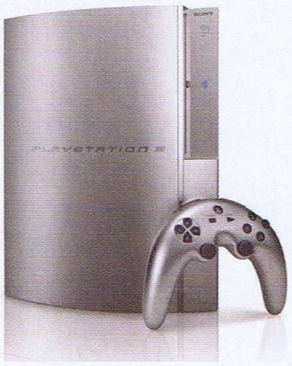
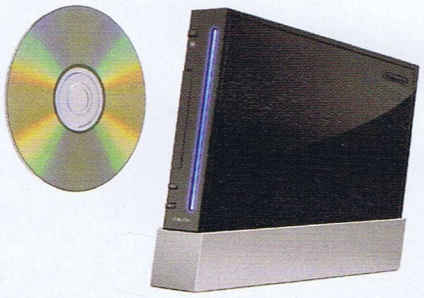


Repairs



Accessories

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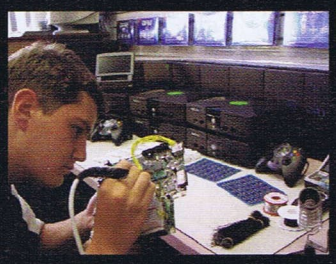

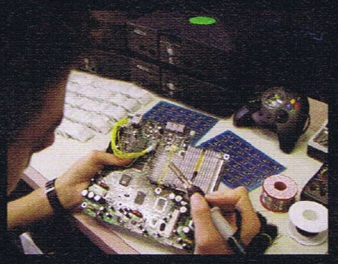

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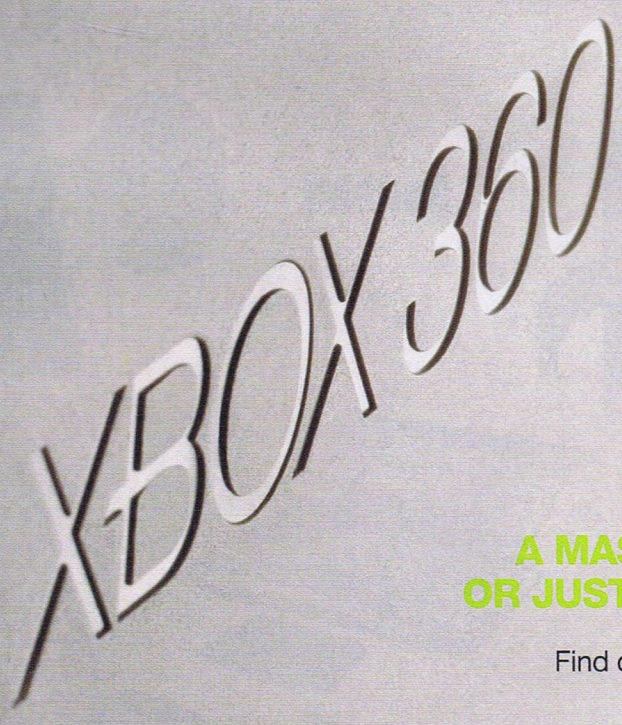

A MASSIVE STEP FORWARD, OR JUST MORE OF THE SAME?

Find out in our huge hands-on feature on the hardware and the launch titles.

PLUS: THE HYPER HANDHELD GAMING SHOWDOWN, NON-LINEARITY IN GAMES AND REVIEWS OF MARIO KART DS, MARIO & LUIGI: PARTNERS IN TIME, WE LOVE KATAMARI AND MUCH MORE.

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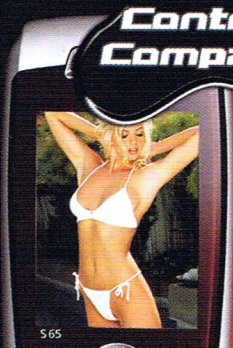

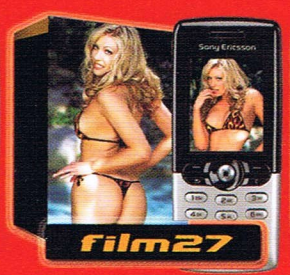

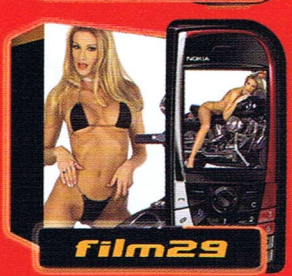

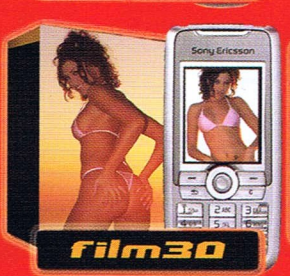

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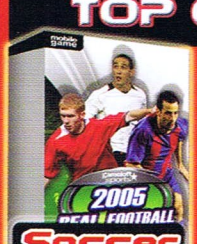

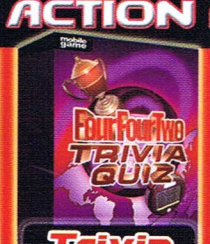

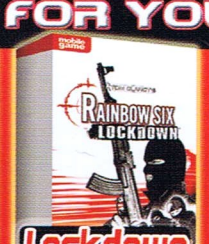

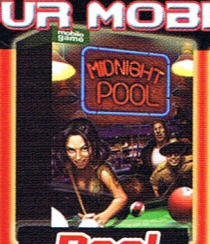

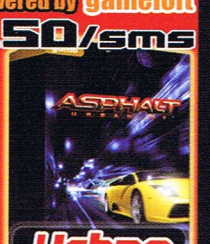

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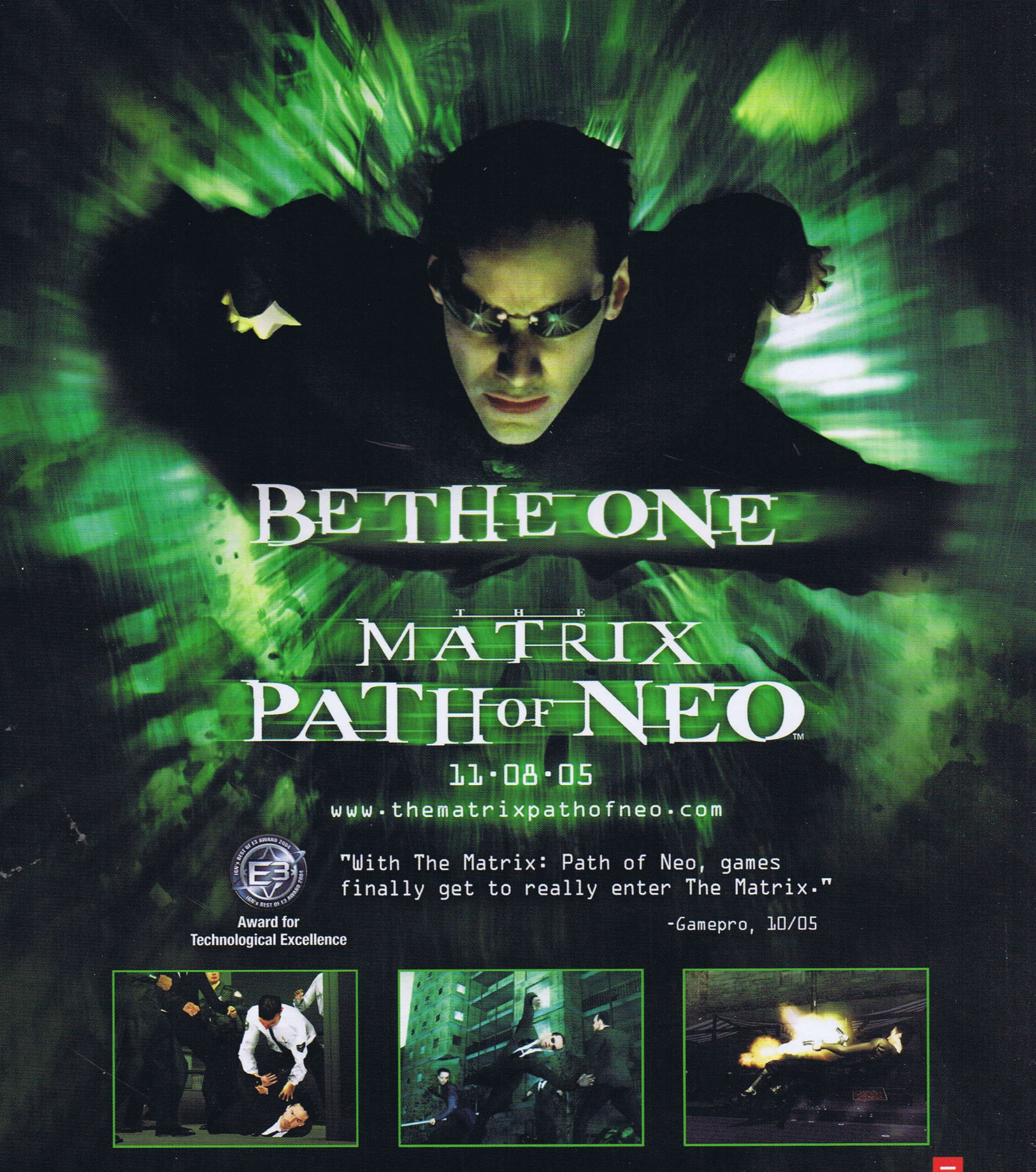

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PlayStation 2

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