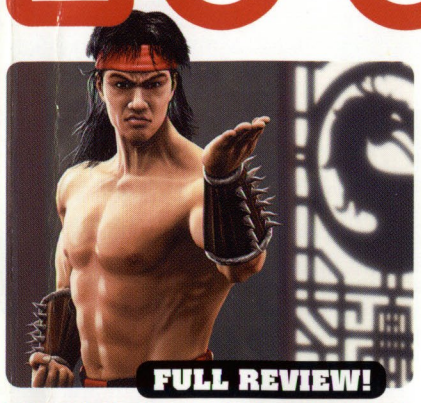
FIRST IMAGES

NINTENDO'S REVOLUTION CONTROLLER!

HYPER



FULL REVIEW!

MORTAL KOMBAT: SHAOLIN MONKS

A new lease of life for the venerable fighting series!

INTERVIEW

NEED FOR SPEED: MOST WANTED

The cops are back! Old skool rams headfirst into next-gen...

SONY'S PS3

Everything we know about the hardware and upcoming games

METAL GEAR 4

IN-DEPTH XBOX 360 PREVIEWS

KING KONG

GUN

DEAD OR ALIVE 4

DS REVIEW

ADVANCE WARS: DUAL STRIKE

Double the screens, double the strategy? Find out inside...

HANDS ON

THE MATRIX: PATH OF NEO

Stop the presses! Matrix in good licensed game shock!

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THE ARMY. THE EDGE.

54 PSYCHONAUTS

Intensely creative? Check. Varied and brilliant gameplay? Check. Laugh out loud funny? You'd better believe we have a check. Psychonauts arrives down under and announces itself as a serious game of the year contender.

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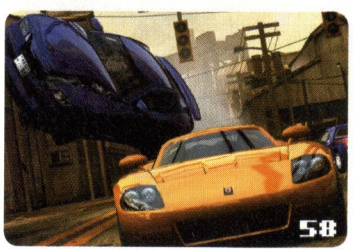

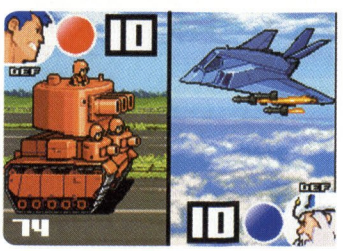

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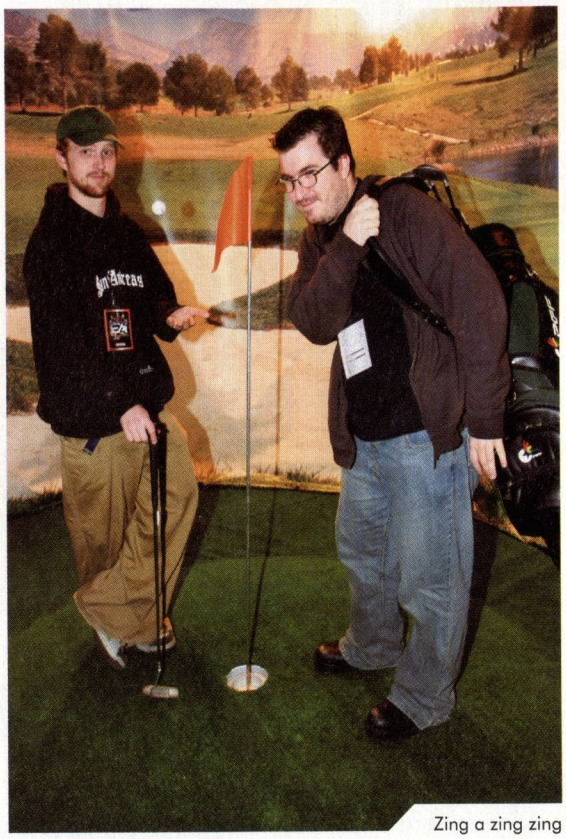
EDITORIAL



Zing a zing zing

>> It's been a Street Fighter and Mortal Kombat kind of month here at Hyper. We've spent an unhealthy amount of time playing Street Fighter III: Third Strike with our shiny new SF Anniversary Edition arcade sticks (subscribe this month for your chance to win one), but that's not at all unusual – Street Fighter being one of the most played games in the Hyper offices since the mag's inception. What is unusual, however, is our rekindled love for the Mortal Kombat series. Wilks and I have disemboweled, decapitated and erm, defibrillated our way through Mortal Kombat Shaolin Monks in co-op this month and can heartily recommend it. It's still a bit of a button masher, but the freeform combo system means you're constantly pulling off bullshit (sickness) moves, finishing each others combos (we've been working together too long I guess), tag teaming, unleashing fatalities and earning EXP to spend on new moves. Seriously, it's great fun.

Of course, it's not like that was all there was to play this month. Psychonauts is finally coming out here and is brilliant, Burnout Revenge will keep virtual panel beaters in business for the next hundred years (while Burnout Legends on PSP arrived *just* too late to squeeze in), Advance Wars DS rocketed out of the gate doing very little new but doing it well nonetheless, and even Darkwatch proved to have a few surprises up its sleeve. So much to play! Can you feel the love?

Oh, and a big congratulations to Malks and Ildi who are celebrating the birth of their second child, James. Unfortunately our petition to have him called Lando mustn't have arrived at the hospital in time.

Cam Shea >> Editor

HYPER CREW Monthly Top 5 Games

Cam Shea - Editor
1. Resident Evil 4 – PS2
   "Dirk may have the shotgun-battleaxe, but I have the individually blood splattered PS2 chainsaw controller!"
2. Street Fighter III: Third Strike - Xbox
3. Mortal Kombat Shaolin Monks – PS2
4. Burnout Revenge – PS2
5. Burnout Legends - PSP

Daniel Wilks - Deputy Editor
1. Psychonauts – Xbox
   "Gold plated genius."
2. Burnout Revenge – PS2
3. Mortal Kombat Shaolin Monks – PS2
4. Ridge Racer – PSP
5. Darkwatch – PS2

Malcolm Campbell - Art
1. Metal Gear Solid 3 – PS2
   "Mmm... tasty. I want some more!"
2. Pro Evo 5 – PS2
3. Street Fighter III: Third Strike – Xbox
4. Psychnauts – Xbox
5. Stuart Little 3 – PS2

Glen Downey - Malky II Electric Boogaloo
1. Resident Evil 4 – GCN
   "Beautifully brutal. Although I sleep with the lights on now."
2. Grand Theft Auto San Andreas - PS2
3. Amplitude - PS2
4. Mashed - PS2
5. SSX3 - Gamecube

HYPER>>

ISSUE 145
NOVEMBER 2005

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Printed CTP by: **WEBSTAR**
Distribution by: **Gordon & Gotch**
Customer Service Ph: 1300 65 0666
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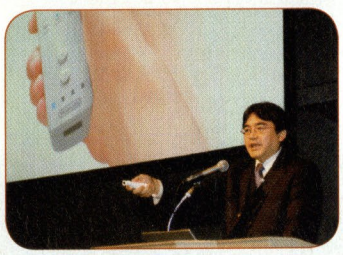
News

IN THE NEWS: Mario gets an Xtreme afro for his SSX On Tour appearance / Cam and Wilks in zany editorial photo shock!



NINTY NEXT GEN

REVOLUTION CONTROLLER!

Nintendo unveil the key to the Revolution!

Nintendo have finally unveiled the control solution for their new Revolution console, and they weren't kidding when they said it would be different! As you can see, it looks like a TV remote, is designed to be held in one hand, and thanks to sensors it tracks movement and orientation, allowing you to, for instance, rotate the device to steer a car, pull it back to reel in a fish, or swing it to wield a sword. Good ol' Ninty believe that this will fundamentally change the way we interact with games, and that just about anyone will be able to instinctively use it. It may look a little sparse, but that's where the "nunchaku" configuration comes in, where a controller with an analogue stick and triggers is plugged into an expansion port, allowing you to play more traditionally. Imagine Metroid Prime 3 - moving with the analogue stick and looking by waving around the remote! Could be very sweet. Unfortunately Nintendo only had tech demos at the unveiling, no Revolution titles, but they certainly helped whet our appetite. More on it next month.

[above top] Shiggy wants you to get your stick in hand and wave it! **[above bottom]** The nunchaku config - spanky!

A NIGHT IN FANTASIA 2005

ANIF 2005

LIVING IN A FANTASIA LAND

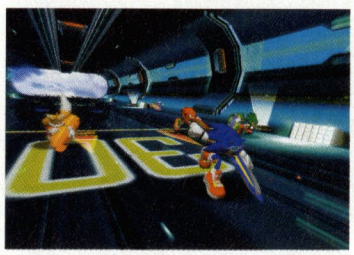
Gaming and anime tunes in Sydney

Don't forget to get your tickets for A Night in Fantasia 2005. It's being held on October 30th at the Sydney Town Hall, and once again the Eminence Orchestra will be whipping up a delightful night of tunes, including some absolute gaming and anime classics. We're talking Zelda, Halo, Gran Turismo, World of Warcraft, Final Fantasy, Mario Bros, Howl's Moving Castle, Gundam Seed and Rurouni Kenshin to name a few. We'll be there and it's going to be sweet.

Then there's the gaming mini-expo that Eminence have organised for the day. Kicking off around 11am (again at the Sydney Town Hall), here's what they've confirmed will be on offer. F.E.A.R. will be set up for play, and there'll be a comp and prizes. There will be PSPs with a range of games to check out. There'll be a Tekken 5 PS2 competition (with requisite prizes), as well as tournaments for V8 Supercars on PSP and Bomberman DS, and plenty more. If you're up for some gaming on the day, come on down - and bring this copy of Hyper to get a free showbag.

FIRST LOOK SONIC RIDERS SCREENS! BLAU!

Sonic Riders GCN, PS2, XBOX **Developer:** Sonic Team • **The Hype:** "Integrates extreme sports, high-speed racing and head-to-head battles." Eeshk!



WINNERS
HYPER 143

KILLER 7

Main Prize:

- Andrew "Coal Mine Man" Brewer, Aberfoyle Park, SA

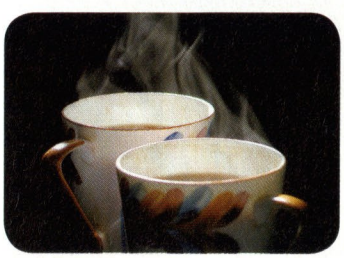
Runners up:

- Bob "Lord Cloudfoot Miyazaki III" Lee, Donvale, VIC
- M. "John Hindsight" Sanderson, Thornlands, QLD
- Jamie "Dr Tongue" Campbell, Camp Hill, QLD
- Sasha "Gertrude Funklestein" Liu, Glossodia, NSW
- Sam "Gastronomo" Lovejoy, Bendigo, VIC

HOT COFFEE

EXCREMENT MEETS AIR AGITATOR

The ESRB get crankier

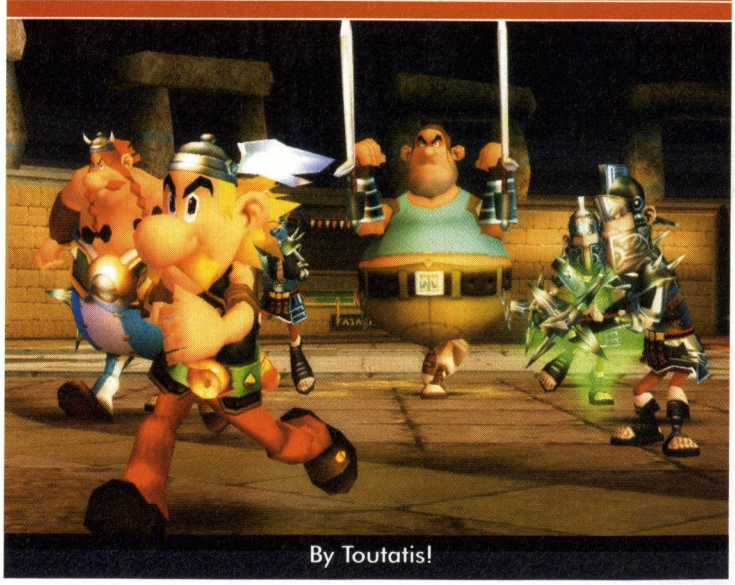


The crap flying around from the Hot Coffee scandal has really started to rain down from a great height on the American games industry. An email was recently sent around to all major games developers stating that they need to perform a comprehensive review of all games released since September 1, 2004 and disclose all of the hidden material in games accessible by cheat codes or easter egg unlockables. Although the ESRB claims that "Fully disclosing hidden content accessible as Easter eggs and via cheat codes has always been part of ESRB's explicitly stated requirements when submitting games to be rated" it doesn't seem to have really worked as the furor of recent months has shown. The email also specifies that, "If you fail to notify us of previously undisclosed, non-playable, pertinent content by January 9, and such content becomes playable through a subsequent authorized or unauthorized release of code to unlock it, rendering the original rating assignment inaccurate, punitive in addition to corrective actions may result." There is the question as to what form of punitive action the ESRB is capable of carrying out but the email goes even further stating, "(the) ESRB remains concerned about third party modifications that undermine the accuracy of the original rating, and we are exploring ways to maintain the credibility of the rating system with consumers in light of modifications of this nature."

CAPTION THIS!

PART 72

Come on, make us laugh. Just send your funny screen captions to us at captionthis@next.com.au with Caption This Part 72 in the subject line.



By Toutatis!

WIN AN OFFICIAL STREET FIGHTER ARCADE STICK FOR PS2 & XBOX!

Just subscribe for your chance to win!

If there's anything sexier than an arcade stick then we haven't found it, and Nubytech's Street Fighter 15th Anniversary stick is easily one of the best we've ever used. If you're into fighting games then you really can't go past this sturdily constructed competition grade beast. With eight specially designed convex buttons on the face, a great feeling stick, aggressive tilted playing surface and unique artwork by UDON on the casing and box, this is the stick to own your friends with. It even comes with a huge Street Fighter wall frieze poster (see art below).

Whether you're a fan of Street Fighter, SNK Vs Capcom, Guilty Gear, Soul Calibur, Dead or Alive, Tekken or any one of the countless fighting game series' out there – if it's on PS2 or Xbox, this stick will do it justice. Of course, this baby isn't just for fighting games – it's perfect for just about any old school arcade game too, which is why we're giving away a copy of Metal Slug 4 on your system of your choice (PS2 or Xbox) along with each stick.

At the moment the Official Street Fighter Anniversary Edition Arcade Sticks are only available at JB HiFi for the princely (but definitely good value) price of $150 a pop, but thanks to our friends at QV Software, we have eight packs to give away, so get subscribing!

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) Entry is by subscribing to Hyper from issue 145 within the magazine and also online. 4) Competition begins 9am October 4 and entries close at 6pm November 16. 5) In determining eligibility the judge's decision is final and no correspondence will be entered into. 6) The winner will be drawn at 9am November 17 at Next Publishing Pty Ltd, 78 Renwick St, Redfern NSW 2016. 7) Prizes must be taken as offered and are not redeemable for cash. 8) The promoter is not responsible for misdirected or lost mail. 9) The winners will be notified by mail and results published in the February issue of Hyper on sale December 28. 10) Eight winners will each receive an Official Street Fighter Anniversary Edition Arcade Stick compatible with both PS2 and Xbox (RRP $149.95 each), and a copy of Metal Slug 4 on the system of their choice (nominate PS2 or Xbox) (RRP $49.95 each). Total first prize value is $1599.20. 11) The promoter is Next Publishing Pty Ltd ABN 88 002 647 645 of 78 Renwick St, Redfern NSW 2016.

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System Preference for Metal Slug 4: ☐ PS2 ☐ Xbox

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SONY
RESET
PLAYSTATION 2

PS3 THE MISINFORMATION SUPERCOMPUTER

It's inevitable with the announcement of a new platform that information will slowly trickle to the gaming public through press releases, propaganda, bad-mouthing, leaks and rumours. Ever since we heard the slightly insane Ken Kutaragi proclaim that the PS3 was not a games console but an entertainment supercomputer we've been mindful to keep an eye out for actual real facts about the machine. Unfortunately these are few and far between. That's the nature of a launch – you don't want to give too much away in case you can't live up to the hype or your competitors are listening in and taking notes. Sure, we have a list of system specs that appear to be final (see issue 142) but Sony themselves have stated that they may be subject to change prior to release. We've seen breathtaking footage of PS3 games... or more precisely we've seen breathtaking footage of games running on debug PCs with something approximating the power of a PS3. Maybe. That doesn't include the pre-rendered footage such as the incredible trailer to Killzone 2. Will games like this be possible on the PS3? We won't really know until the console is released to the media or the public and we can see what it can do with our own eyes.

The other information on the console is vague at best, through no real fault of Sony. They're playing most of their cards close to their chest, giving out information when necessary or to keep interest up. There's nothing wrong with that. Nintendo could take a leaf out of their book with the Revolution and actually let us know anything about the console. Microsoft has gone in the opposite direction with an overdose of information that is leaving a lot of people confused with the multiple versions available through retail, the quasi-backwards compatibility, the range of games that will be appearing on both the Xbox and the 360, the old school storage medium that may be upgradeable in the future and something we only recently learned, bizarrely, the 360 wired controlled will be available here months before the actual console (as a PC peripheral).

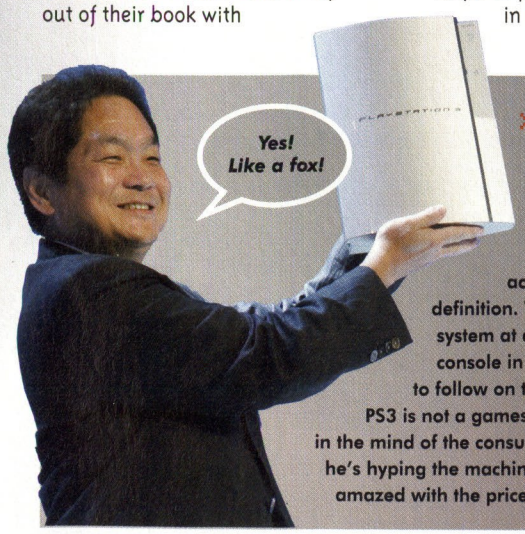
So what do we know about the PS3? Quite a bit in an off-hand way. The console will be powerful. Very powerful as far as graphics rendering is concerned. In recent weeks a little bit of internet controversy has sprung up over a supposed quote from an nVidia rep saying that the PS3's RSX chip would be slightly slower than their next generation 7800 video cards but it turns out to be a misquote – the rep actually stated that the RSX chip would be a little faster than the 7800. There are also claims that the final hardware will be more powerful than what was (kind of) shown off at E3. What does that mean for consumers? Potentially a higher price tag and... very little else. We still don't really know what games running in real time and actually playable on the PS3 look and perform like and until then talk of being less or more powerful is just a bunch of words strung together.

As far as price is concerned, in June a Merril Lynch financial analyst postulated that each of the three main components of the PS3 – the Cell Chip, RSX GPU and Blu-Ray drive will cost around US $100 each. This is one of the pieces of information bandied around on the internet as proof positive that the PS3 will be prohibitively priced (well that and Ken Kutaragi's comments on having to work overtime to afford it) but such speculation should not be taken as fact. The quoted estimate is not the complete story (though assuredly the actual analyst did a more thorough job than what has been reported) – there are no quantities for the order so there is no real idea if the price will greatly drop and it doesn't seem to take into account that Sony either own or are major shareholders in both the Blu-Ray drive and Cell CPU so in-house manufacture will drive costs down. Naturally this does not mean that the machine will be inexpensive but random numbers thrown up without any real support material cannot be used a benchmark for price.

WE'VE SEEN BREATHTAKING FOOTAGE OF GAMES RUNNING ON DEBUG PCS WITH SOMETHING APPROXIMATING THE POWER OF A PS3. MAYBE.

Speaking of the Blu-Ray, the move to the new, much higher capacity disc format has been one of the major talking points when comparing the PS3 and Xbox 360, considering that the latter has foregone next generation formats and has instead stuck with dual layer DVD. In recent weeks the Microsoft decision to both go with the older format and to potentially offer an upgrade to HD-DVD or Blu-Ray in the future has been met with scepticism and not a little scorn. For a start, the dual layer DVD is proving not to have enough storage capacity for next gen games – some developers have claimed that they are not even able to fit their game on two dual layer DVDs let alone one, clearly earmarking the Blu-Ray disc as a superior format for next gen games as far as storage capacity goes. What we do not know for sure though is how much the discs are going to cost to author and current speculation puts the cost of PS3 games anywhere from $50 to $90 US. It's quite conceivable that the higher price ranges will be those for PS3 games and that Microsoft will be able to undercut them as far as price goes due to the older and cheaper DVD format. Once again this is speculation but will it really matter in the long run if a game requires you to swap discs occasionally if it costs $20 odd dollars less?

Sony may not be telling us a whole lot right now, but with a launch date (in Japan at least) around the middle of next year, the information dam has got to burst sooner rather than later, and with Tokyo Game Show just around the corner we'll hopefully have a whole lot more on PS3 very very soon.



>> CRAZY LIKE A FOX! **The rumour mill and misinformation machine has not been helped by Ken Kutaragi, a man who should be more interested in selling the machine on its actual merits than on strange predictions and mysterious comments. Instead of simply stating that the pricing on the PS3 would not be announced until closer to the release date, Kutaragi instead commented that people would have to work overtime to be able to afford one. And then there was his patently impossible claim that using the Cell chip's down cycle, PS3 owners would be able to upload their DVDs to a secure server that would access the combined processing power of the Cell chips linked online to somehow upgrade the film to high definition. Then there's his attack on Xbox 360 claiming that it was simply an Xbox 1.5 and not a next generation system at all. Microsoft officials took the statement to mean that Sony were doing their level best to belittle the new console in the eyes of consumers due to their fear of losing market share to a real competitor. This idea can be seen to follow on through the rest of Kutaragi's statements. Maybe his claims that you will have to work overtime and that the PS3 is not a games console but a multiple OS running entertainment supercomputer are carefully designed to position the PS3 in the mind of the consumer as a premium grade device instead of a budget machine like the apparently cheaper Xbox 360. Maybe he's hyping the machine as being so expensive so closer to release they can announce a relatively low price and consumers will be amazed with the price drop. Or maybe, just maybe he's a little nuts.**

PS3 GAMES UPDATE

Some new faces join the club, while some old friends are re-examined.

LAIR Developer: **Factor 5**

■ Factor 5, the dev team known for their amazing Rogue games for N64 and GameCube recently revealed that they're developing an exclusive title for the PS3 to be published by SCEA. Known as Lair, all we've seen of it so far is a brief trailer showing off in-game footage. The game so far in a word? Dragons. The trailer showed off an impressively detailed player controlled dragon soaring through the skies, surrounded by literally hundreds of others, as well as a mid-air grappling showdown between two dragons and an interesting side on view as they faced off. More on it as it comes to light.

VISION GRAN TURISMO

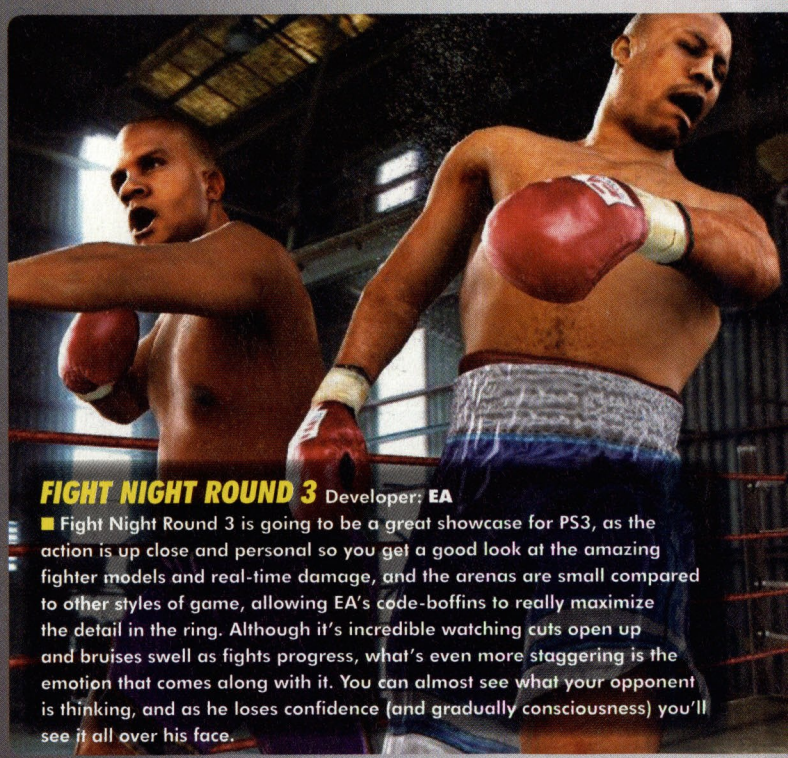
Developer: **Polyphony Digital**

■ The next installment of the Gran Turismo series is going to be huge, and we can only imagine how much detail Polyphony Digital will be able to wring out of the PS3 given what they've done on PS2. Even in the very early screenshots there's already nicely rendered pit crews and haze effects out on the track. Fingers crossed they'll also overhaul the AI and make it an even more accurate simulation. Don't get too excited just yet though, it's entirely possible the world won't be playing Vision GT until 2007.

WARDEVIL: Unleash the Beast Within

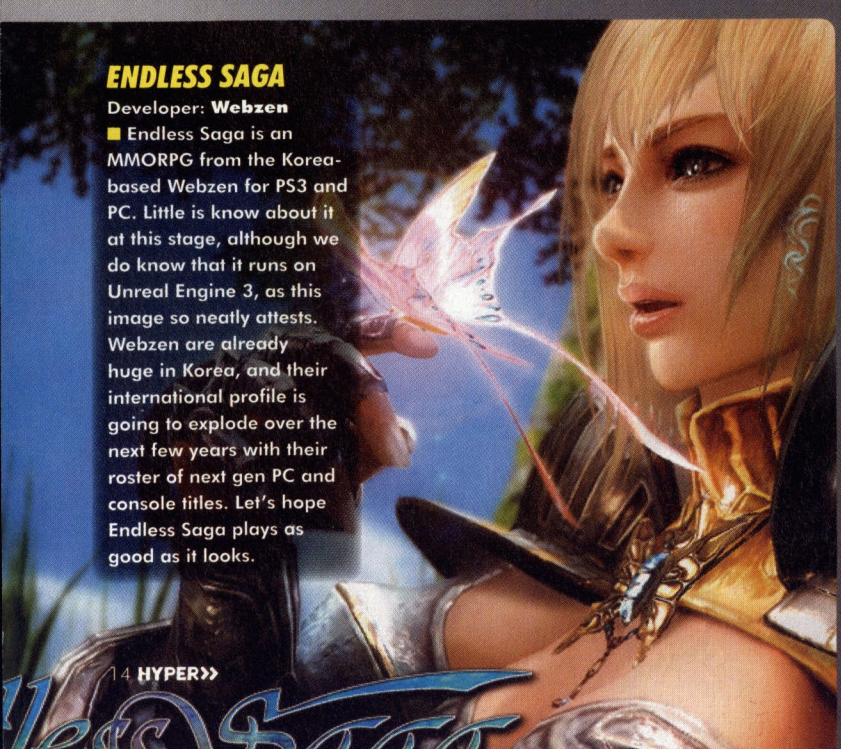
Developer: **Digi Guys**

■ Coming from the UK-based dev team Digi Guys, this is another title we don't know much about. Most probably coming to both PS3 and Xbox 360, the images we have show off a nice and post apocalyptic world with some very Star Wars prequels influenced character design. The game will run on Digi Guys' proprietary RTE 1080 engine which is designed around running at 1920x1080 resolution and features real-time depth of field effects, true dynamic motion blur and countless other next gen effects.



FIGHT NIGHT ROUND 3 Developer: **EA**

■ Fight Night Round 3 is going to be a great showcase for PS3, as the action is up close and personal so you get a good look at the amazing fighter models and real-time damage, and the arenas are small compared to other styles of game, allowing EA's code-boffins to really maximize the detail in the ring. Although it's incredible watching cuts open up and bruises swell as fights progress, what's even more staggering is the emotion that comes along with it. You can almost see what your opponent is thinking, and as he loses confidence (and gradually consciousness) you'll see it all over his face.



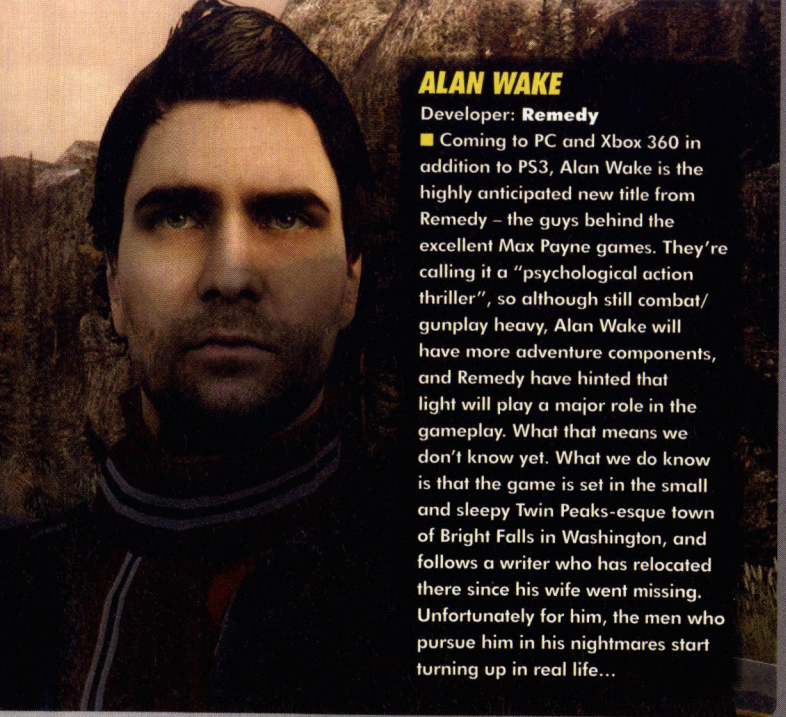
ENDLESS SAGA

Developer: **Webzen**

■ Endless Saga is an MMORPG from the Korea-based Webzen for PS3 and PC. Little is know about it at this stage, although we do know that it runs on Unreal Engine 3, as this image so neatly attests. Webzen are already huge in Korea, and their international profile is going to explode over the next few years with their roster of next gen PC and console titles. Let's hope Endless Saga plays as good as it looks.

PROJECT FORCE Developer: **From Software**

■ Yes, it's another giant robot game from From Software. Surprised? No, neither were we. Even so, this one does look rather tasty and the screens featured are almost certainly real-time (as opposed to Bandai's Gundam footage from E3) and at the PS3's top resolution of 1920x1080. With ultra detailed mechs and fully destructible cities, this could be the next gen mech shooter we've all been waiting for.



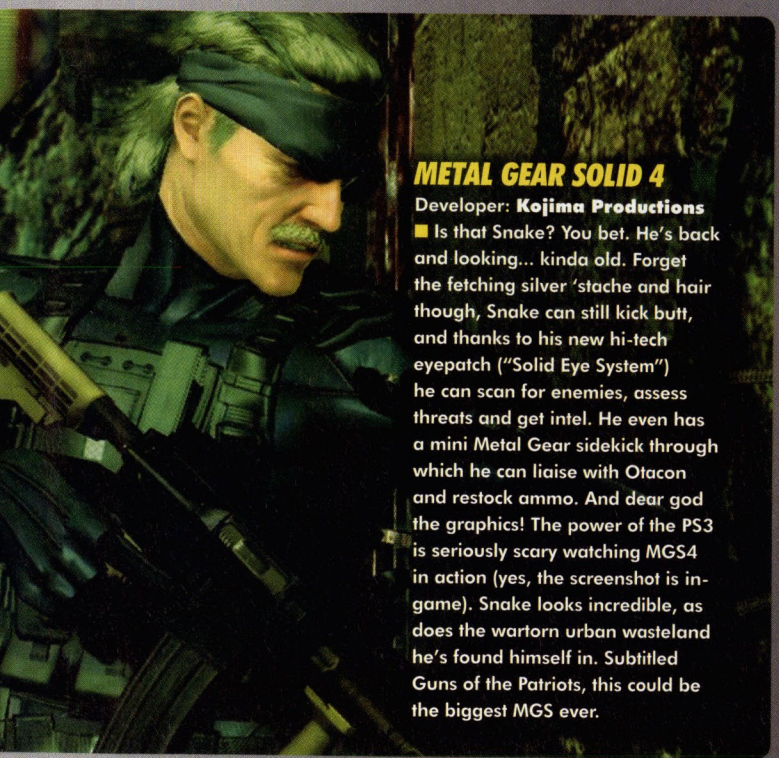
ALAN WAKE

Developer: **Remedy**

■ Coming to PC and Xbox 360 in addition to PS3, Alan Wake is the highly anticipated new title from Remedy – the guys behind the excellent Max Payne games. They're calling it a "psychological action thriller", so although still combat/gunplay heavy, Alan Wake will have more adventure components, and Remedy have hinted that light will play a major role in the gameplay. What that means we don't know yet. What we do know is that the game is set in the small and sleepy Twin Peaks-esque town of Bright Falls in Washington, and follows a writer who has relocated there since his wife went missing. Unfortunately for him, the men who pursue him in his nightmares start turning up in real life...

KILLING DAY Developer: **Ubisoft**

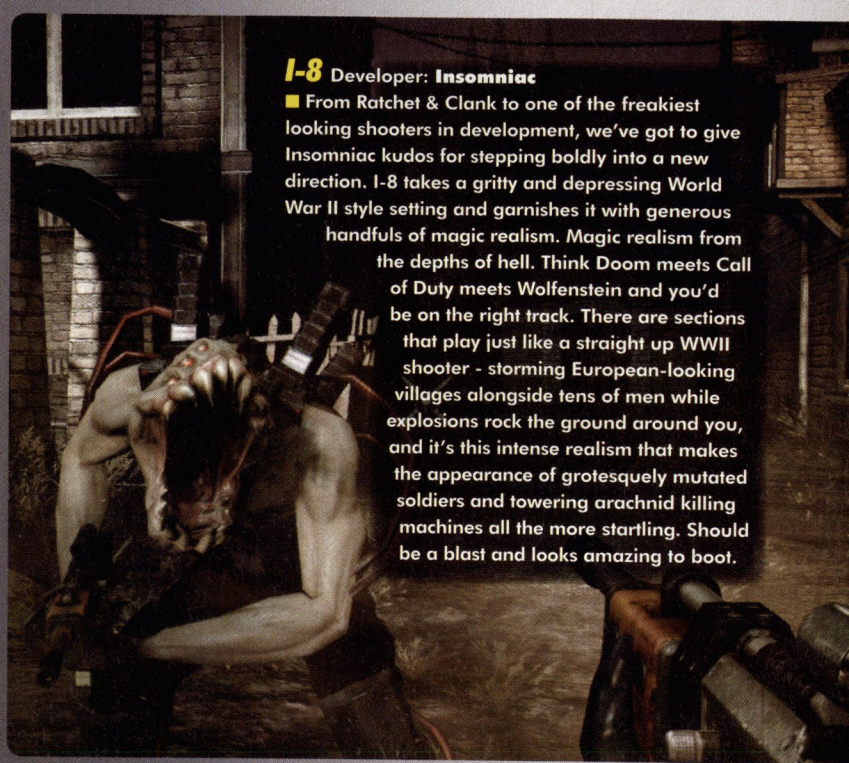
■ Surprisingly enough the first Ubisoft developed title announced for PS3 isn't from the Tom Clancy stable but an all new creation. Killing Day is a first person shooter that not only boasts some incredibly detailed graphics, showing off shiny surfaces that accurately reflect the world around them, incredible lighting/shadow and particle effects, next generation shaders on the clothes and skin of the characters and some of the smoothest animation we've seen in ages, but also incorporates many of the features that will be the hallmark of the PS3 generation. We're talking about intelligent use of your environment and real world physics. See some enemies on a glass walkway? Shoot out the glass from under them! This one is going to be huge.



METAL GEAR SOLID 4

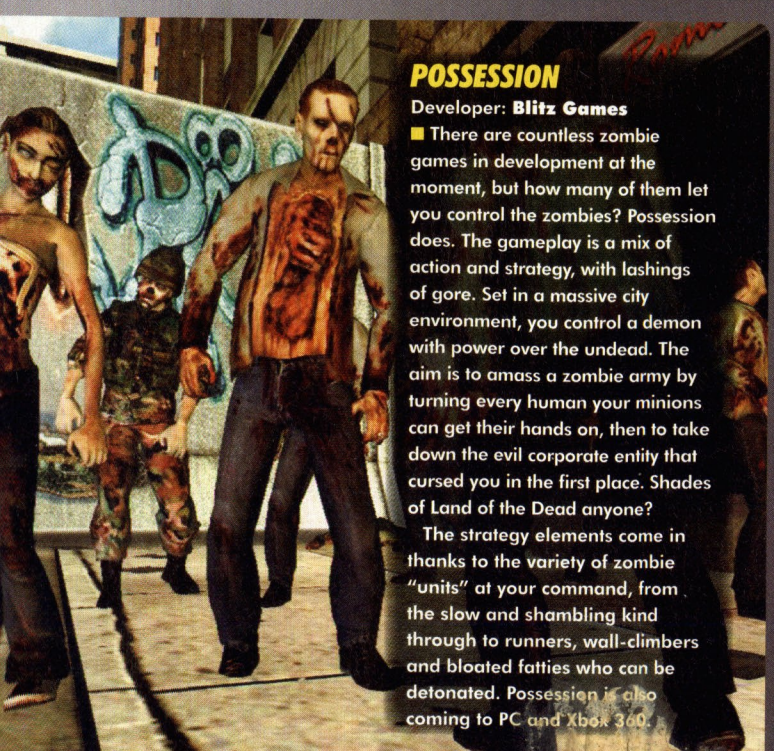
Developer: **Kojima Productions**

■ Is that Snake? You bet. He's back and looking... kinda old. Forget the fetching silver 'stache and hair though, Snake can still kick butt, and thanks to his new hi-tech eyepatch ("Solid Eye System") he can scan for enemies, assess threats and get intel. He even has a mini Metal Gear sidekick through which he can liaise with Otacon and restock ammo. And dear god the graphics! The power of the PS3 is seriously scary watching MGS4 in action (yes, the screenshot is in-game). Snake looks incredible, as does the wartorn urban wasteland he's found himself in. Subtitled Guns of the Patriots, this could be the biggest MGS ever.



I-8 Developer: **Insomniac**

■ From Ratchet & Clank to one of the freakiest looking shooters in development, we've got to give Insomniac kudos for stepping boldly into a new direction. I-8 takes a gritty and depressing World War II style setting and garnishes it with generous handfuls of magic realism. Magic realism from the depths of hell. Think Doom meets Call of Duty meets Wolfenstein and you'd be on the right track. There are sections that play just like a straight up WWII shooter - storming European-looking villages alongside tens of men while explosions rock the ground around you, and it's this intense realism that makes the appearance of grotesquely mutated soldiers and towering arachnid killing machines all the more startling. Should be a blast and looks amazing to boot.

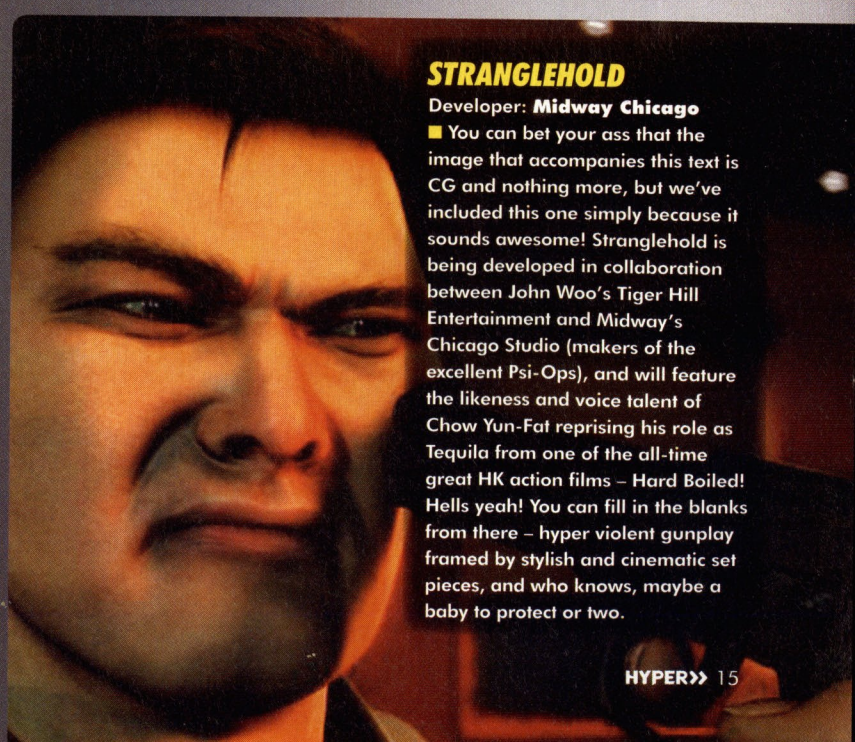


POSSESSION

Developer: **Blitz Games**

■ There are countless zombie games in development at the moment, but how many of them let you control the zombies? Possession does. The gameplay is a mix of action and strategy, with lashings of gore. Set in a massive city environment, you control a demon with power over the undead. The aim is to amass a zombie army by turning every human your minions can get their hands on, then to take down the evil corporate entity that cursed you in the first place. Shades of Land of the Dead anyone?

The strategy elements come in thanks to the variety of zombie "units" at your command, from the slow and shambling kind through to runners, wall-climbers and bloated fatties who can be detonated. Possession is also coming to PC and Xbox 360.



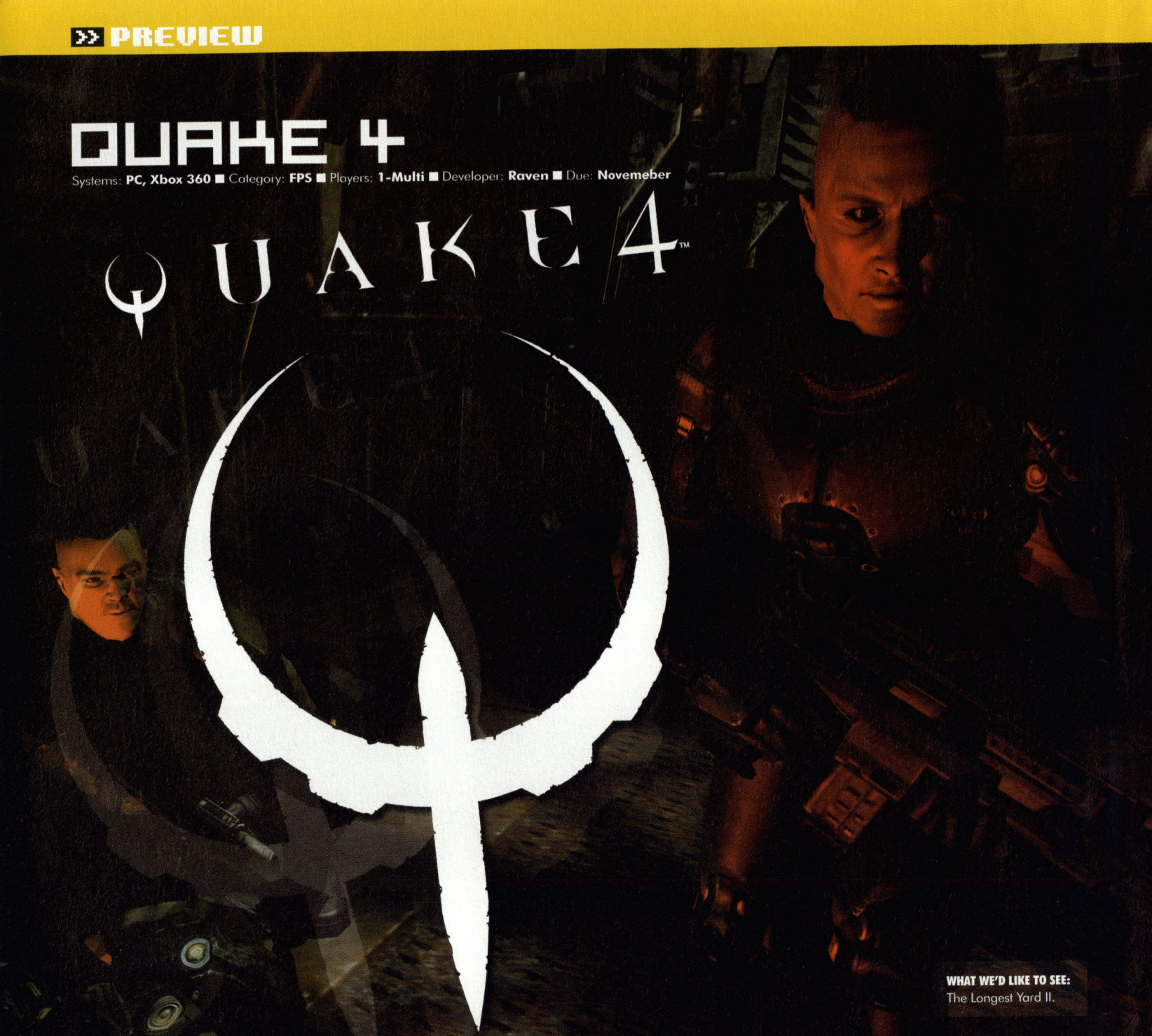
STRANGLEHOLD

Developer: **Midway Chicago**

■ You can bet your ass that the image that accompanies this text is CG and nothing more, but we've included this one simply because it sounds awesome! Stranglehold is being developed in collaboration between John Woo's Tiger Hill Entertainment and Midway's Chicago Studio (makers of the excellent Psi-Ops), and will feature the likeness and voice talent of Chow Yun-Fat reprising his role as Tequila from one of the all-time great HK action films – Hard Boiled! Hells yeah! You can fill in the blanks from there – hyper violent gunplay framed by stylish and cinematic set pieces, and who knows, maybe a baby to protect or two.

QUAKE 4

Systems: **PC, Xbox 360** ■ Category: **FPS** ■ Players: **1-Multi** ■ Developer: **Raven** ■ Due: **Novemeber**



WHAT WE'D LIKE TO SEE:
The Longest Yard II.

It's been more than five years since we received the last instalment of the eminent Quake series, Quake III: Arena, and almost a decade since Quake II, the last game in the series that attempted to tell a story. The aim for Quake 4 is to combine the best features of both those titles, and hit gamers with compelling single and multiplayer gaming in the Quake universe. Co-owner and CEO of id Software Todd Hollenshead and the company's lead game designer Tim Willits sat down with Hyper to nut out exactly what Quake 4 is about, why they're not developing it, and why it looks so similar to Doom 3...

AN EVISCERATING TRANSFORMATION

"Quake III: Arena definitely missed out on a sector of the gaming public that wasn't playing online." says Todd Hollenshead. "But I don't know how much that played into our plans for Quake 4. How Quake 4's single player element developed is that had we written the treatment for what would become Quake 4 right at the end of Quake II, and we just took that treatment and used it a basis for the new story we are trying to tell in Quake 4."

What that new story entails is Strogg and plenty of them. But not only do you crash land on the Strogg's home planet and have to nail-gun and rocket-launcher your way out, but the game also has a painful surprise for volunteer marines. "One of the key things that we think is going to be fun about Quake 4 is that we completely change it up in the middle of the game." says Hollenshead. "You get to have a whole new perspective because eventually you'll actually get to play as a Strogg."

The incident to which id's CEO refers is the now notorious scene that debuted at this year's E3, an intensely gory sequence in which your Marine is captured by the Strogg and forced to witness the rest of your battalion's eviscerating transformation into half-human, half-Stogg automatons, right before you have the exact same procedure executed on yourself. It's nasty, but it does have some exciting side effects, as id's Tim Willits informs us. "[After the transformation] you can run faster, jump higher, you have more health and armour, and you can read all the Strogg's computer interfaces. Essentially you become the key to winning the war because you can infiltrate the Strogg brain-structure and use all of their weapons."

Other new additions for the series include a squad-like dynamic, where you'll have to defend your teammates, and in turn they'll defend you when times get rough, as well as the inclusion of controllable vehicles including hover tanks, and a menacing-looking mechanical walker, both heavily armed of course. Hollenshead and Willets also assure us that the game's multiplayer will not disappoint the fans of the five-year-old Quake III: Arena, allowing for fast-paced warfare between both Marine and Strogg in a variety of disciplines including single and team deathmatch, and capture-the-flag competition. Something that should satisfy players disappointed by Doom 3's barebones multiplayer game.

Strike a pose. Vogue

They're coming right for us!

BAAADAAASSS

Along with Doom, Quake is id Software's signature series, and it was somewhat surprising then when they announced that the game's development would be outsourced to long-time collaborators Raven Software. As Hollenshead and Willits explain the decision was not only one of quality, but of time and resources.

"The reason we went with Raven for Quake 4 was that we were working on Doom 3 at the time, and we only have one internal studio at id, and that's the way we wanted to keep it." says Hollenshead. "So to be able to develop another Quake game we needed to have another studio work on it. We've worked with the Raven guys going back over ten years – and they were enthusiastic about the project and we could have the important level of quality control on the project."

Both men also agree that Raven have brought many attributes to the project that id itself may have been hard pressed to accomplish. Willits cites Raven's talent for coding great "buddy" AI, which Raven have been putting to good use in games such as Star Trek: Elite Force and Soldier of Fortune for half a decade or more, as one of the team's strongest contributions.

"One of the coolest things about working with Raven is that they come to the table with a massive wealth of experience." says Willits "There are guys on that team that have been in the industry for twelve years now, and they have fifty guys on their team and over a hundred people in their entire company - which is four times the size of id."

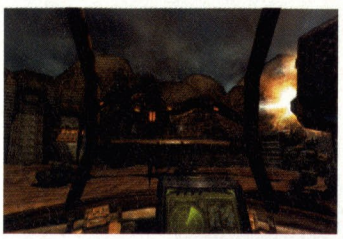
"Above all we knew that Raven could make an awesome game," adds Hollenshead, "and in the end I think the decision was a good one."

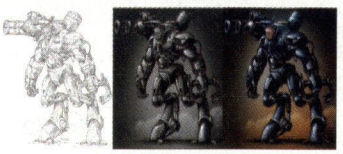
Another of the many issues hovering over Quake 4's production is the recycling of their own Doom 3 technology. "The Doom 3 engine was, and still is, the best game technology available. It still has the best graphics on the PC still to this day." boasts Hollenshead. "So from that standpoint our choice was pretty simple, it just made a whole lot more sense to start with the Doom 3 technology for Quake 4 rather than just try to start with an engine from scratch."

Doom 3's engine has proven to be a highly flexible technology within which to create several different games. It's the same engine behind upcoming projects like id's own Enemy Territory: Quake Wars, as well as Human Head Software's promising-looking Prey. Although both men emphatically promise that the technology is capable of doing the Quake series justice, the game's almost identical visual resemblance to Doom 3 already has some detractors, with some contending that the game may end up seeming like little more than a Doom 3 expansion pack. Naturally, Hollenshead disagrees.

"The art itself is completely different, and the reason it looks so similar is because nobody else is using all real-time lighting and bump-mapping on all surfaces and characters in-game to date on the PC today." contends id's CEO. "I think that people may pick up on a few things that are telltale signs of the underlying technology. Like the way the shadows work and things like that, and maybe they'll feel like that looks Doom-ish... But from my standpoint that's ok, because Doom 3 looked pretty damn badass!" <<

IT MADE A WHOLE LOT MORE SENSE TO START WITH THE DOOM 3 TECHNOLOGY FOR QUAKE 4 RATHER THAN TRY TO START WITH AN ENGINE FROM SCRATCH





Sexy guys with sexy guns

They obviously forgot his "normal" mapping

GUN

Systems: **GCN, PC, PS2, Xbox, Xbox 360** ■ Category: **Action adventure** ■ Players: **1** ■ Developer: **Neversoft** ■ Due: **November**

Emerging finally from the shadow of the Tony Hawk series, GUN comes screaming at you out of the gate like Neversoft have a point to prove. And from our time with the game, that point is pretty emphatic.

LOTS OF PROSTITUTES IN THERE!

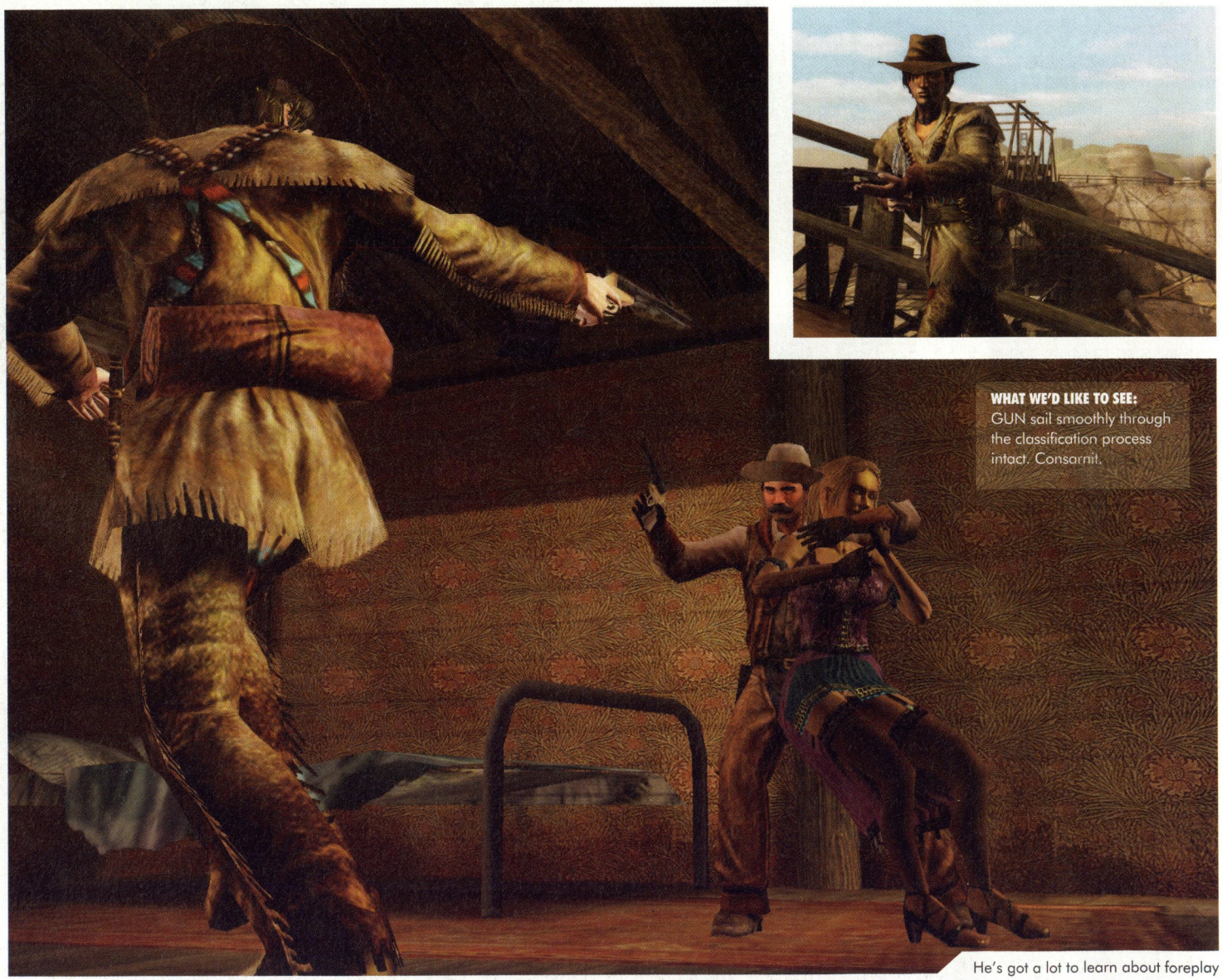
GUN takes players back to the late 1800s to the lawless West, with a setting and tone that's very similar to HBO's Deadwood series. Think a warts and all adventure in the Wild West, with wide open landscapes dotted by frontier gold rush towns where gambling, drinking and 'houses of ill repute' are the main forms of entertainment, and where power hungry and corrupt men have clawed their way to the top. It's a fantastically gritty world, and Neversoft are hoping to balance their quest for an authentic setting and narrative with intuitive and arcadey gunplay.

You play as Colton White, a man who early in the game sees his mentor killed and quickly develops a taste for vengeance. Although the main story in GUN is strictly linear, there are a huge number of side quests and other peripheral activities to try out. In fact, the approach has a lot in common with the sandbox gameplay of the GTA games; it's about giving you the freedom to play the game at your own pace and explore as much or as little as you want. You can check out wanted posters for bounties and go out and bring them in, dead or alive. You're able to take courier missions with the Pony express or work for the sheriff going on raids and escort missions. You can go out trophy hunting for buffalo, elk and countless other animals, or take on herding jobs for local ranchers. You'll be able to play - and cheat at – Poker. Hell, you can even indulge in a spot of gold prospecting from time to time.

Not only are there monetary benefits, but many of the side quests and other available activities will help you build up your stats in five important areas: horse, health, gun handling, quickdraw and melee, all of which will help you become the real Wild West package by the end of the game.

THINK OPEN LANDSCAPES DOTTED BY FRONTIER TOWNS WHERE GAMBLING, DRINKING AND 'HOUSES OF ILL REPUTE' ARE THE MAIN FORMS OF ENTERTAINMENT

There's plenty to do, and one hell of a setting to do it in. From the bustling town of Dodge City, where fights break out with or without your help, and where a trail hand can spend a month's pay in three minutes, you can hop on horseback and go and explore the Badlands, Canyons or Piper Lake in the huge swathe of land that comprises the game world. There's some breathtaking scenery to take in too – from verdant forests and rivers framed by huge mountain ranges through to parched and inhospitable rocky terrain. Even on PS2 the draw distance is impressive and the attention to incidental details like wildlife and vegetation help flesh out the world.



WHAT WE'D LIKE TO SEE: GUN sail smoothly through the classification process intact. Consarnit.

He's got a lot to learn about foreplay

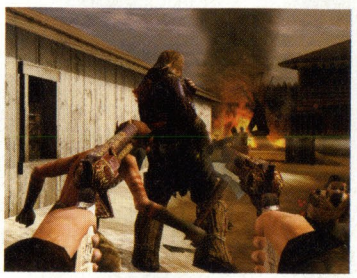
YOUR HOODED EYE LOOKS LIKE A...

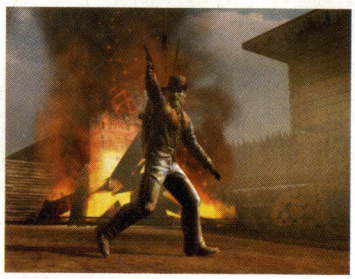
As mentioned earlier, the gunplay is arcadey and easy to pick up. As is now standard in pretty much every game, Colton has a handy Quick Draw mode (a.k.a. bullet time), which slows down everything around him for the accurate dispatching of enemies. It's not an unlimited resource but fortunately skillful moves like headshots top up the meter, which makes going for the stylish kills all the more satisfying. Quick Draw is only available for six shooters (which you'll also be able to dual wield), but there are plenty of other weapons to use, such as shotguns, gatling guns, hunting rifles and a number of melee weapons, including a scalping knife. In the pursuit of fun Neversoft aren't afraid to throw lots of enemies at you either, making for some hectic shoot outs. We had a criminal amount of fun lobbing grenades at groups of enemies, then entering Quick Draw mode and charging twin six shooters blazing to cut them down as the explosion ripped them apart. Good, clean fun.

And then there's the combat on horseback. One scenario we played had Colton riding with a group of Native Indians and taking on a host of no good double crossin' Americans on horseback. Essentially a free for all on an open plain it quickly became chaotic with horses everywhere kicking up dust and charging in all directions. Yet it was still remarkably simple guiding and spurring your horse on in the midst of the confusion, while simultaneously slowing down time and swiveling to track and pop enemies as they flew past. Great fun.

GUN is coming on a huge number of platforms, and Neversoft have done a great job scaling the game so that whether you're playing on PS2 or Xbox 360, the atmosphere and intensity carries across. It looks like Neversoft are well on the way to shaking off their "the Tony Hawk guys" label. <<

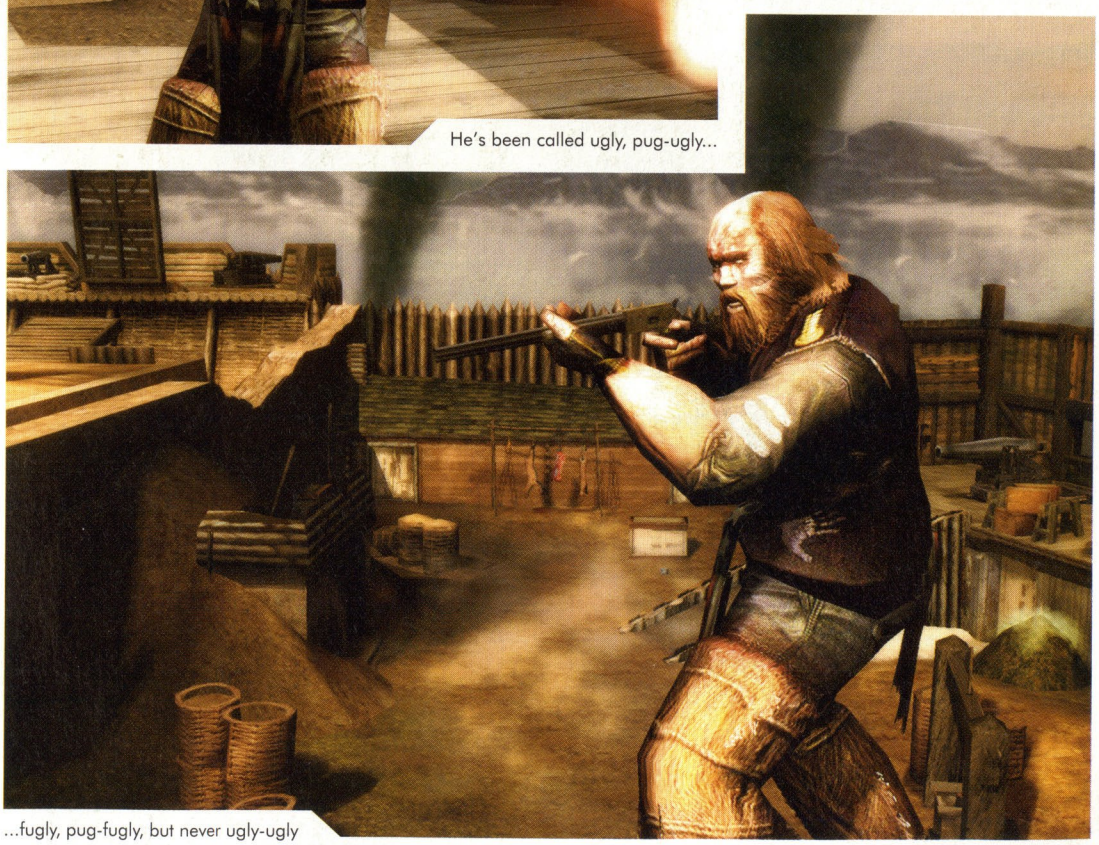
The Xbox 360 version bolts out of the gates





"Mysterious Dave" from the Dodge City Gang. Really.

He's been called ugly, pug-ugly...



...fugly, pug-fugly, but never ugly-ugly

BUT WHERE'S WILD BILL?

GUN mingles real world history and locations into its world in the search for an authentic backdrop. GUN's scriptwriter Randall Jahnsan gives a few examples: "Hoodoo Brown, one of GUN's villainous bosses, was a real person. For a short period, he and his gang ruled Las Vegas, New Mexico, which was a wild town in the late 1870s. He apparently did serve as the "unofficial" mayor, and as both justice of the peace and coroner. He was in cahoots with the police force, which was composed of assorted shady characters, most of whom had been pimps, thugs, gamblers, lawmen or all four back in Dodge City. Hoodoo's two favorite deputies in GUN - "Arkansas" Dave Rudabaugh and J.J. Webb - were real too. Prior to coming to Las Vegas, they'd been on both sides of the law and they continued that fine tradition once they joined Hoodoo's "lawdogs." Eventually, their greed and misdeeds caught up to them." Cool.

PETER JACKSON'S KING KONG

Systems: **GCN, PC, PS2, PS3, PSP, Xbox, Xbox 360** ■ Category: **Action adventure** ■ Players: **1** ■ Developer: **Ubisoft Montpellier** ■ Due: **Late 2005 (GCN/PC/PS2/PSP/Xbox), 2006 (PS3/Xbox 360)**

It speaks volumes that Peter Jackson, director of the upcoming remake of King Kong essentially forced Ubisoft and Michel Ancel into collaborating on the official game of the film with him by announcing in a press conference that Ubi and Ancel would be working on the game before the agreement had been finalised. It shows how much Jackson believes in his film and how much faith he has in the development team working on it. It shows that rather than simply making some money off a cheaply bashed out game of the movie (Fantastic 4, shudder) that he knows a little about games, especially considering much of his decision to work with Ancel hinged on his love of Beyond Good & Evil. After having a chance to play some of the game we can definitely say that his faith has been well placed. Not only is King Kong shaping up to be one of the best film to game transpositions, it will be a damn fine game independent of the movie.

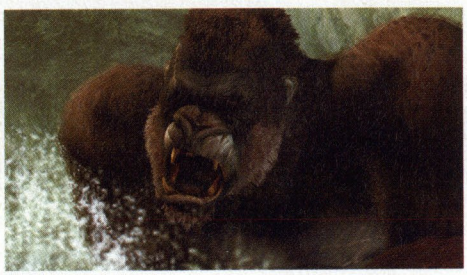
SQUISHY PINK THING

In keeping with the film, Peter Jackson's King Kong: The Official Game of the Movie (heretofore known simply as Kong) focuses both on the human protagonists and the slightly larger, definitely grumpier giant ape/force of nature, switching gameplay between the two perspectives. When playing as Jack Driscoll (played by Adrian Brody in the film) the action is taken from a first person perspective. As you could imagine, being a tiny little squishy pink thing on an island populated with dinosaurs, giant apes and feral tribesmen, human beings are way down the bottom of the food chain. To say that the levels we played as Jack Driscoll were tense would be something of an understatement. Although the action takes place in a first person perspective the action is anything but the typical FPS fare. For a start guns are hard to come by. More often than not Jack will find himself having to use spears, pointy sticks and dinosaur bones to defend himself. The spears can be used in one of two ways. Jack can jab, effectively fending off creatures but doing no damage. Naturally Jack can throw spears as well, damaging some of the smaller dinosaurs and other nasty creatures inhabiting the island. Spears can also be used to set objects/dry plant matter on fire if there are places with a fire to light them or can be used as bait if you spear a giant bug or fish before throwing it. This final function proved to be one of the most vital in our time with the game, distracting raptors and pteradons giving us some much needed time to find cover and more weapons.

Not all creatures are susceptible to spears or even bullets. In the final level we played as Jack Driscoll the action revolved around a T-Rex.

IT'S HARD TO DESCRIBE THE SENSE OF SCALE WHEN PLAYING AS KONG. HE IS HUGE; A FORCE OF NATURE CAPABLE ON DEMOLISHING ANYTHING IN HIS WAY

More precisely the action revolved around getting the hell away from a T-Rex. In the level Jack is charged with keeping the T busy whilst Carl Denham (Jack Black's character in the film) and another member of the crew open a gate so you can escape. By this stage we had a tommy-gun and felt rather confident in our ability to take the beast down. How



WHAT WE'D LIKE TO SEE: The PSP version of this game is said to be almost identical to the console versions. We can't wait to play it!

Monster island is actually a peninsula

Kong Extreme Dentistry Advance

This is the story of Wonderboy

wrong we were. The gun did nothing to the colossal lizard aside from piss it off. Instead of feeling like a typical boss battle, the tension of the encounter is incredible. You feel like the bottom of the food chain, doing everything to survive, all the while trying to distract a monster that can kill you in an instant. We have no idea where the action falls into the grander scheme of the game but it is shaping up to be amazing.

REVENGE

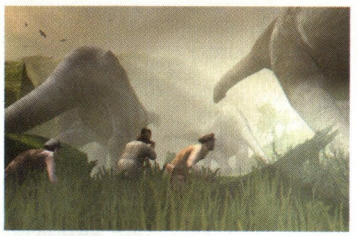
After our encounter with the T-Rex we had the chance to take our revenge. As Kong. The perspective jumps out to third person for the King Kong levels and for good reason – the action is entirely different, based around brutal hand to hand combat and movement puzzles rather than running away. It's hard to accurately describe the sense of mass and scale you have when playing as Kong. He is huge and feels it; a force of nature capable of demolishing anything in his way. The Kong combat controls are deceptively simple but you can pull off a huge variety of moves ranging from simple punches and grabs through to devastating finishing moves, a favourite being grabbing both sides of a dinosaur's jaws (see the screen top left on this page) and wrenching them open to a point that they split, and the very gorilla-like rearing up and smashing down with earth-shattering force. Unfortunately we only had a short time to play as Kong but it was more than enough to whet out appetites for more crazed giant ape action.

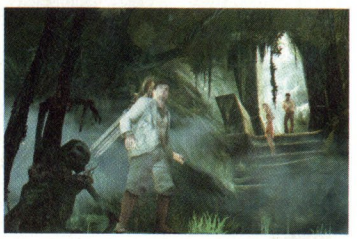
Kong is a beautiful game on all formats with various filters that can be placed over the game to alter the look. The basic graphics mode simply renders a scene (which is remarkably attractive by itself) but other filters add a hazy corona of light around everything that enhances the dream-like, surreal atmosphere of the island or transforms it into black and white, complete with scratches and artifacts for those who dig the original black and white movie. Character animations are excellent, especially Kong, who swings, bounds and fights with a ferocious strength. It may be a licensed title, but this game is going to be amazing. <<

YOU DON'T KNOW JACK

Jack Black's character, Carl Denham plays an important role in the game as both a kind of guide showing you (as Jack) where to go next in the game as well as a kind of comic relief. Aside from numerous funny lines and the fact that he is played by Jack Black, Carl adds to both the tension and the humour by frequently stopping to take a few feet of footage – even when you're being followed by hungry raptors or a rampaging giant ape. The other NPCs, such as Ann Darrow, the ingénue object of affection for Kong play vital roles in the game as well – not only do they drive the plot forward, they will also help distract or fight dinosaurs or, in the case of when you're playing as Kong, become something that needs to be protected at all costs. All of the NPCs will be voiced by the film actors in the final version of the game so we assume that the voice acting will be top notch – unfortunately, though humourously, much of the acting in the code we played was place holder.

Insert Oz/Lupin reference here





Cue running and screaming

DEAD OR ALIVE 4

Systems: **Xbox 360** ■ Category: **Fighting** ■ Players: **1-2** ■ Developer: **Team Ninja** ■ Due: **Late 2005/early 2006**

As far as easy to pick up yet hard to master fighting games go, the Dead or Alive series has been taking leaps and bounds since the release of DoA 2 on Dreamcast. Once simply a button mashing series, Dead or Alive has increased in depth with the addition of a counter system and multi-tiered levels. Dead or Alive 4 looks to increase this complexity again with the addition of more defensive moves. We still have little solid information about how this new emphasis on defence will work but popular opinion has it that instead of having the 50 odd offensive moves for each character, there will be an offensive and defensive stance, each with an equal number of moves allowing for more counters, dodges, side-steps and other assorted escape/negation moves. There are also hints that players will have an easier time getting out of wall juggles by using the terrain itself to manoeuvre away.

AFOREMENTIONED

As we said in our E3 issue, the new levels will not only feature multiple tiers as in the previous games, they will also feature dynamic elements, such as speeding cars that can bowl over fighters thrown into their path or falling debris that can damage and distract players. As our new screens can attest, the level design is even more intricate and beautiful than what we have seen in previous games and should really do justice to the graphical processing power of the Xbox 360. The character roster we've seen so far sees the return of a number of fan favourites; Kasumi, Ayane, Jann Lee, Hayabusa, Hitomi, Lei Fang, Bass, Tina, Brad Wong, Christie, and Zack but it can be fairly safe to assume that footage of Leon, Bayman, Helena, Hayate, Ein, and Gen Fu will be released closer to the game's release date or Team Ninja risks severely pissing off fans of the series by actually cutting the amount of playable characters rather than increasing them. Can't see that happening.

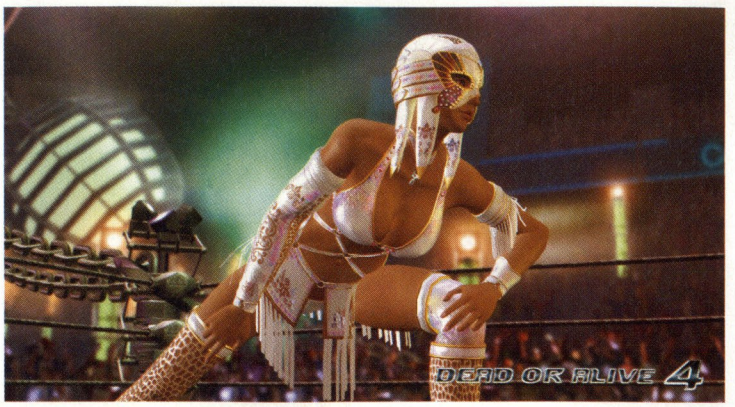
LEVELS WILL ALSO FEATURE DYNAMIC ELEMENTS, SUCH AS SPEEDING CARS THAT CAN BOWL OVER FIGHTERS... OR FALLING DEBRIS THAT CAN DAMAGE PLAYERS

Speaking of increasing the number of characters, three new characters have been revealed so far and there is still a possibility that more may surface. The three new characters are Kokoro, a young woman converse in the Baji Quan style (similar to that of Akira Yuki in the VF series), the not particularly tough sounding Elliot (unfortunately the spelling precludes him from being of the Lord Seafood variety), a Pi Qua Quan fighter who resembles Helena both in moves and looks so may be related in some way and Lisa who makes her way from the spinoff game in the franchise, Dead or Alive Xtreme Beach Volleyball. Much like Tina and Bass she uses wrestling moves but should prove to be a nice

WHAT WE'D LIKE TO SEE:
Team Ninja's Xtreme Beach Volleyball sequel actually have some gameplay...

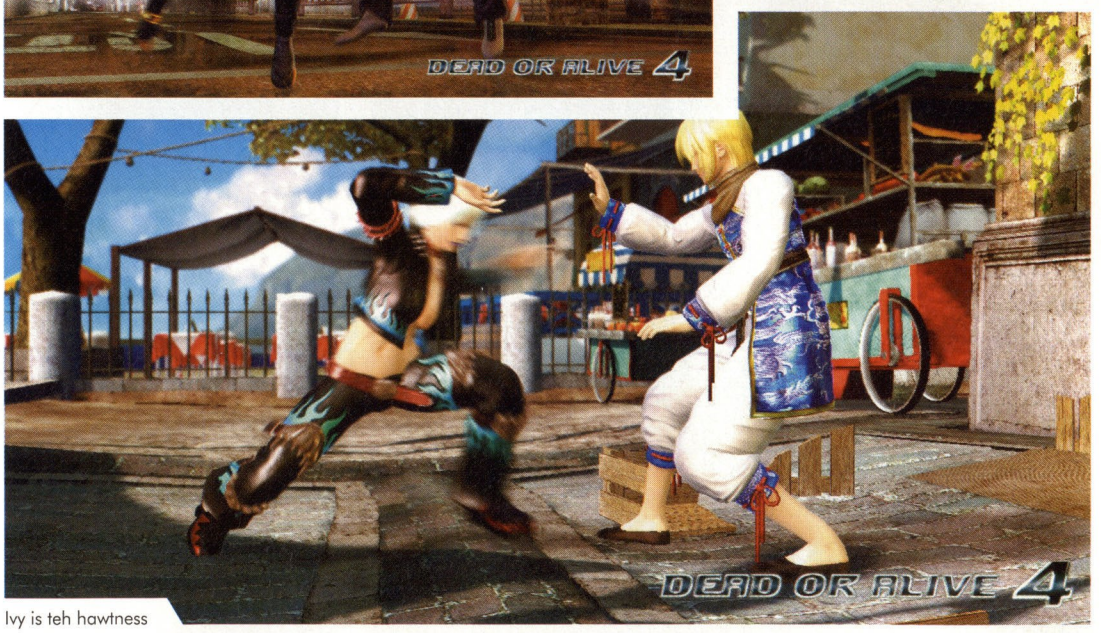
What can we say but PAAANCH!!!!!

Tasteful costuming is still a must



change of pace due to her leaning on the faster and flashier Mexican wrestling Lucha Libre style.

Although as you can see from the new screenshots Dead or Alive 4 will feature motion blurring on animations, an effect that makes the whole thing look more dynamic and cinematic. Rest assured we will be doling out more information on what could be one of the first blockbuster Xbox 360 titles when it comes to hand. <<



Ivy is teh hawtness

GoGo Yubari anyone?

PRO EVOLUTION SOCCER 5

Systems: **PS2, Xbox, PC, PSP** ■ Category: **Sports** ■ Players: **1-8** ■ Developer: **Konami** ■ Due: **October/November**

It's hard to believe, but Pro Evolution Soccer is another classic series that somehow manages to impress year in, year out. Whilst the hardcore fans revel in the tiniest tweaks to the dribbling animations or small improvements to kit textures, casual players or newcomers continue to be delivered an impossibly refined football game that will challenge them for as long as they're game to stick with it. Pro Evolution Soccer 5 (called Winning Eleven 9 in Japan) is set to delight us all yet again.

IT'S IN THE DETAILS

But what in Maradona's name could they possibly improve upon this time around? As Pro Evo 4 introduced more impressive animation, number 5 in the series brings us more and more detail. They way players go in on the ball, shoulder away opponents and fly into tackles is even more like the real thing – we even noticed a few overly theatrical responses to slide tackles, though there's certainly nothing such as diving in the game (thank goodness). Players now strike the ball in a variety of new ways, plus make some very tasty looking first touches.

Running alongside opponents with "pressing" (X button) permanently held down will now also be punished more often by the referee, as it makes for a stronger attempt to get the ball than in past versions.

Keen eyes will have already spotted that some of the big English clubs now have officially licensed kits. Arsenal, for instance, are sporting their fetching "farewell to Highbury" kit, plus Chelsea will be represented in all their glory. Smaller clubs will still need to be edited, despite also sporting improved likenesses all round. Outside of England, there are now new licenses for Rangers, FC Porto, Dynamo Kiev and Galatasaray, amongst others.

New weather conditions should make for some rather interesting matches. Pitches can now be almost completely covered in snow (yep, you'll need to use an orange ball), with players puffing steam from their mouths. You'll also notice that close-up shots of the crowd now include fully polygonal supporters!

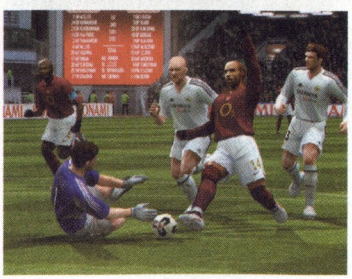
PITCHES CAN NOW BE ALMOST COMPLETELY COVERED IN SNOW (YEP, YOU'LL NEED TO USE AN ORANGE BALL) WITH PLAYERS PUFFING STEAM FROM THEIR MOUTHS

More detail has gone into the tactical side of the game also – with new positions such as Wing Backs and the ability to play someone in the "hole" behind the two strikers. Master League is also set to offer a more thorough system for player development – could we see the return of the promising young player? We hope so.

Oh, and the beautiful game is coming to the PSP too... there goes any chance of getting a good night's sleep. We look forward to finding out about any possible interaction between the PSP and PS2 versions of the game. Meanwhile, we'll bumble off to an A-League game and have a pie.

Cocaine fueled jumping power

WHAT WE'D LIKE TO SEE: More elaborately animated goal celebrations, such as players doing backflips, tearing off their shirts or taunting the opposition's supporters.



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FOOTBALL MANAGER 2006

Systems: **PC, PSP, Xbox 360** ■ Category: **Football Management** ■ Players: **1-Multi** ■ Developer: **Sports Interactive** ■ Due: **November**

Roughly 90% of readers this issue will happily flip past this preview without bothering to even read this first sentence. Why? Either the thought of football management bores them to tears, or they already own Football Manager 2005 (or various versions of Championship Manager before it) and don't see the need to read a preview that will tell them to go buy it. Again.

EXCITING TWEAKS

But this year it's a little different. Believe us. Football Manager 2006 (FM2006) makes some fairly major changes and some exciting tweaks.

Firstly, Sports Interactive has once again taken a good long look at Training and decided it needed another re-design. This time they've really got it right. Setting up training schedules has never been easier, and this time you'll actually enjoy doing it. Slider bars have been incorporated into the interface, so you can easily create specific schedules, simply by moving the sliders up or down in the appropriate categories you want players to focus on. You can track each player's individual progress through a handy season-long graph.

Then there's the tantalising inclusion of Half-Time and Full-Time team talks. Here you gauge how your side has performed, and then give them individual or overall team pep talks – such as urging them to fight for a result, or telling them you don't want their performance to drop in upcoming games. You can also vent your spleen and tell them they're rubbish, or try to give them encouragement if their morale is low. Exploring this aspect of the game should make a season in FM2006 all the more intriguing, especially as it will also tie into your personal relationship with some players (who might love you or hate your guts for various reasons) and what they might then say to the media, which comes back to bite you on occasion.

There's now a higher degree of interactivity in your day-to-day duties. For example, you'll have to decide whether to give players injections to get them through upcoming matches, or send them home when they have viruses so they don't get their teammates sick. There are also more mind games you can play with other managers in the media. You can even start the game unemployed if you wish, leaving you free to negotiate a contract with a new club, agreeing on transfer budgets and other details that will in turn reflect what will be expected of you in the job.

Revamped match commentary (including player celebrations etc.) and more accuracy in the match engine (that better reflects the style of football you're playing), makes sitting through match highlights even more enjoyable than ever before.

REVAMPED MATCH COMMENTARY AND MORE ACCURACY IN THE MATCH ENGINE MAKES SITTING THROUGH MATCH HIGHLIGHTS EVEN MORE ENJOYABLE

In their usual way, Sports Interactive has tried to introduce more, more, more. And you'll love them for it.

They said "ball"... hehe

WANT ANSWERS? GET THE LOST CHAPTERS*

MOLYNEUX'S **FABLE** ARRIVES ON PC, GREATER NOW THAN EVER

Players: One
Developer: Lionhead Studios
Publisher: Microsoft
Release date: October

Fable on Xbox adorned the cover of this very magazine not one year ago. At the peak of the Christmas rush, Molyneux's much-anticipated epic stole the show. Daniel Wilks deemed it "a brilliant piece of game design" and awarded it Hyper's Game of the Month. But the story of Fable was just beginning... While Fable was wowing Xbox gamers across the world, developer Lionhead was already back at work expanding, extending and upgrading Fable. Now their toil is complete and the result is breathtaking – Fable: The Lost Chapters is the new benchmark for PC adventure.

Stain and Fable

On top of the original's well-received role-playing innovations, satisfying combat and reactive world, Fable: The Lost Chapters extends and expands Albion, refining the game for the PC and adding a raft of new features. Make no mistake, this is the Fable that Molyneux always wanted to create.

The first iteration of Fable was celebrated for its revolutionary social gameplay, where Albion's inhabitants would respond intelligently to your achievements, appearance and actions. Play the game and you'll love hearing the townsfolk call your name as you embark on another heroic quest, or take pleasure from them cowering in fear at first sight of you. Fable: The Lost Chapters adds new actions and communications to your repertoire. Now, among a mass of new choices, gamers can do the chicken dance or play air guitar to wow the kids or perform the flamenco to woo the ladies.

New geography and quests both expand the main story and offer additional side stories that reveal more of Albion's finer mysteries. From demon doors to Dragon Coasts – all the questions that Fable only threatened to answer will be resolved.

Players will be faced with monumental new foes like the Ice Troll and the Summoners, as well as new structures, like brothels! While the Ice Troll (pictured) will prove formidable, Albion's hairiest madams and pushiest pimps will bring with them their own challenges. Fortunately, you'll be given access to some spectacular new magic spells whichever side of the good or evil fence you fall, that will help you meet The Lost Chapters' new challenges.

FROM DEMON DOORS TO DRAGON COASTS – ALL THE QUESTIONS THAT FABLE ONLY THREATENED TO ANSWER WILL BE RESOLVED.

The improvements are not simply gameplay-based either. Lionhead has taken advantage of the capabilities of top-line PCs to ensure the game mixes it with the best available of PC shelves. Fable: The Lost Chapters is blessed with higher-resolution textures, improved character models and environments and supports 16x anti-aliasing. PC optimisation means that all extended loading times have been removed, keeping players seamlessly immersed in the Albion wonderland. Keyboard shortcuts and refined mouse-based precision control also grant the player freedom to take advantage of their combative instincts.

More new features specifically designed for the PC include the Online Scoreboard and tattoo importation. Now players can compare themselves with fellow heroes or villains from around the world, or use their favourite image editor to make their unique mark on the game with tattoo designs that any self respecting rock star would be proud of.

And make sure to look out for the much-anticipated appearance of one of Albion's most revered myths. Intrigued? Maybe you'd just prefer to dress up as a lady of the night and use your talents in other ways. With Fable: The Lost Chapters, out in October, the choices are yours...along with the consequences!

For more information visit www.microsoft.com.au/fable

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FABLE THE LOST CHAPTERS

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PATH OF NEO

>> MAURICE BRANSCOMBE

Systems: **PC, PS2, Xbox** ■ Category: **Action** ■ Players: **1** ■ Developer: **Shiny Entertainment** ■ Due: **November**

Despite any reservations you may have about The Matrix, its sequels or previous attempts to bring the property to the interactive arena (Enter the Matrix, The Matrix Online), there's definitely no denying that the license provides the perfect premise for a videogame. Lets face it, the last two films in the trilogy were essentially videogames waiting to happen anyway, with scene after scene of gratuitous computer generated action, explosions and fisticuff tomfoolery. The only thing they did lack was interactivity, that and a compelling narrative (ooh, zing - Ed).

The one thing that Shiny Entertainment's latest project, The Path of Neo, aims to provide is to do what no other Matrix game has attempted, to recreate a complete movie experience, charting all the significant events of the three films as well as the animated spin-off, The Animatrix. Surprisingly enough, although this will be the third game based on the movie trilogy, it will be the first to actually put you in the shoes of the story's protagonist - the one – Neo, and judging from the latest build of the game we played at Shiny's Newport Beach, California studio, the operative word is definitely "whoa".

THE NATURE OF NEO WAS... IRREPRESSIBLE

As Dave Perry, Shiny Entertainment's founder and president, turns on his office's wide screen TV and plunks a newly pressed build of the company's latest project, The Matrix: Path of Neo, into the office PS2 he reminds us once again that we're the first journalists in the world to be seeing and playing the near-final version of the game.

As the familiar green code scrawls down the screen, we begin to thoroughly appreciate this fact, as the tiny scrolling characters make way to reveal one of the most authentic and promising licensed games in recent memory.

Graphically the Path of Neo is extremely polished. Each character from the films has the distinct appearance of their respective actor and recognisable environments like the dojo, lobby, and in general any location featured from the film is exactly as you would have imagined it to look like in three dimensions. Being the first PlayStation 2 game to ever utilise bump-mapping as well means that every surface looks about as realistic as the aging console will probably ever produce, and other versions of the game should be even better. But most impressive of all, from the time we've had with the game it seems irrepressibly fun.

IT'S HARD TO IMAGINE A BETTER CONCEPT FOR A MATRIX GAME THAN DELIVERING US ONLY THE MOST SPECTACULAR SEQUENCES IN ALL THEIR GLORY

It's hard to imagine a better concept for a Matrix game than taking all the series' stories, cutting out the filler and delivering us only the most spectacular sequences in all their interactive glory, and finally giving us the chance to play as the series' ultimate hero Neo. If not for the inspiration of the Wachowski brothers however Shiny Entertainment's second foray into the world of The Matrix might not have been so promising.

"We did not expect to be doing the Neo game to be honest." says Dave Perry on the subject of just how Path of Neo came to be. "We had ideas on doing a game that was based on the third movie instead, because since we had done the game of movie two it made sense to do the game of movie three. We had already started on a design to present to the Wachowskis on an idea for how we could make a game based on the Mechs from the third film, but it really wasn't a Neo based game, instead you would've just been a soldier defending Zion.

"We had started down that road when the Wachowskis, who were supposed to be on vacation at the time, suggested that they give us all three movies for one game - where you got to be Neo through all of them. That basically killed the other idea stone dead – it was like, well, I wont even bother telling you what we were thinking of doing!"

LETS ALL GO TO THE LOBBY

Upon starting the game you are thrust into one of the most spectacular and memorable scenes from any of the films, The Matrix's lobby sequence. As well as being iconic in itself the sequence is inherently intense and to the unschooled eye it may even seem to be an unnecessarily punishing way to start the game, especially when you aren't given even a word of instruction or advice before being plunged into a crowded room full of trigger-happy security guards and deadly agents. But as Dave Perry reveals the game's explosive start is all about grabbing your attention from the word go.

"The first scene of the game was going to be set in Thomas Anderson's office, since we wanted you to go through the whole arc of being completely useless to being the one." says Perry. "The problem is that starting the game with you being really weak and useless, is a dangerous thing, because everybody forms their opinions in the first ten seconds, so the player would be like, is this it?

"We didn't want people to start in the office with no gun, and get beat up by every security guard and then it would be game over. That would be a very strange start to the game. So instead we decided to start the game with the lobby sequence. So when Neo's asleep at the start of the movie you actually start inside his dream, that lets us throw you right into a fight."

The trick of this dream sequence is that it also silently rates your skill level while you play so when you do eventually die, and the odds are stacked heavily in favour of that happening, you will be given a selection of difficulty levels according to how skilfully you played. This way the game keeps you from biting off more than you can chew by selecting a difficulty level you're not ready for.

After you've been on either the receiving or delivering end of an arse kicking in the lobby you do eventually get to play Thomas Anderson's office level, following orders from Morpheus, as voiced by original actor Lawrence Fishburne, to avoid the gaze of Agent Smith and henchmen. The most interesting

part about this level, and indeed every level in Path of Neo, is that it promises to have multiple paths that, should you wish, can set you on an entirely different course than that shown in the films. For example in the original office sequence Neo is captured by the agents because of his fear of heights, but in Path of Neo you can choose to ignore that fear and take him up to the roof and to an entirely different rescue.

In a humorous feat of non-linearity you can even choose the blue pill at the very start of the game, returning Thomas Anderson to his dull existence inside the Matrix, and ending your adventure before it's even begun. If however you do choose the red pill you'll get to experience a few of the game's most entertaining additions – Morpheus' training programs. Each of the five or so training programs are inspired by a classic Kung-Fu or samurai movie, with Neo having to face off against ninjas, karate kids and blind swordsmen, all while wearing a ridiculous black and red jumpsuit and bandana.

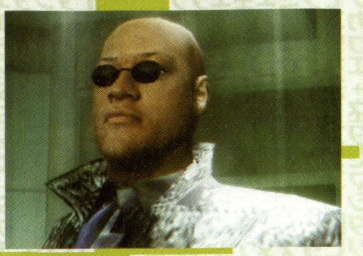
"It a very, very large game." adds Perry. "As you can see just playing through the training levels takes ages, and that's before you've even got to any of the movie levels!"

JUST BROTHERS SPOONING

Along with new gameplay sequences like the training missions and dream sequences the Wachowski brothers have also re-edited much of the film's footage and audio together creating entirely new scenes from existing footage from all three films.

"If we were to show people something they've completely seen before, like just giving them a straight clip from the movie just as it was, it's not quite as interesting as seeing the Wachowski's take on what the Path of Neo is." says Perry.

"They have interesting cuts in there like the scene with the spoon bending boy saying 'it's not the spoon that bends it's yourself' but showing Neo bending over backwards instead of the original scene. They have a lot of interesting cuts like that to show you how they've been tying the story up in their own minds."



Along with contributing re-edited movie footage to the game Shiny and the Wachowskis have also engineered numerous completely new additions to the game that promise to provide compelling gameplay situations, whilst also keeping the story fresh for Matrix junkies.

IN TECHNICAL DEMONSTRATIONS SHINY ACTUALLY MANAGED TO GET 1500 SMITHS ON SCREEN AT ONE TIME... WHICH CREATED A VIRTUAL "WHERE'S WALLY"

"I think the one new idea that's in the game that is most surprising is the concept of 'red-pills' – which is the idea that there is people in the Matrix who are questioning their surroundings – who have found a bug, or seen something that they can't explain." says Dave Perry. "These people actually first appeared in the Animatrix. They know there's something weird going on, but whether or not they escape the Matrix is up to you... Neo has to get in there and help out in these situations."

Of course amongst all this new content is what you really want to do: you want to be Neo, and you want to kick Agent Smith's arse. In the level based on the centrepiece sequence from The Matrix Reloaded, the Neo Versus Smiths fight, you get to do just that. In technical demonstrations Shiny actually managed to get 1500 Smiths on screen at one time, a staggering amount by any standard, but as Dave Perry informed us that number of Smiths was just impractical and created a virtual "Where's Wally" of a level where you could spend more time finding Neo than actually playing as him. Instead the pool of Smiths has been narrowed down to 350 at a time, which is still probably more than you'll ever need. Having this many enemies on screen simultaneously allows you to really open up with Path of Neo's fighting system, which while it relies on multiple button combinations is surprisingly easy to pick up, thanks in part to on screen prompts and context sensitive moves. Single, double and triple grapples are possible with some quite spectacular results, one in particular that had us all giggling, including Dave Perry himself, was one in which Neo grabs two Smiths by the feet and uses them as a pair of nunchaku, beating back other Smiths with them.

SECRET NEO SAUCE

As great as the game is looking now, Perry knows better than anyone that the Path of Neo has a few obstacles to overcome before it can truly reach the mainstream audience. The

Big Swirly Kick style kung fu

second and third editions of the movie trilogy left many filmgoers feeling gypped and while Shiny's last Matrix game, Enter the Matrix, sold extremely well it received the kind of critical reception that probably should have spelled its doom.

"The dangerous thing with licensed games is that they have a stigma." recalls Perry. "For example, with a Nintendo game the reviewers will generally start at five stars and review downwards from there, but with movie games they start at zero and review upwards, so you really have to fight past one star to get to two and fight even harder to get to three. It's tough, and it's a common theme that licensed games are difficult to make, if it was easy we'd be seeing a lot more successful licensed games."

"There's definitely a secret sauce that we're still trying to work out. Enter the Matrix showed that we had some of that secret sauce, because we attracted a lot of people towards the game. They obviously felt that it had something, whether that is because of the director's involvement or the exclusive movie footage or whatever - they were attracted to it. The question we asked ourselves when making Path of Neo is what can we do to make a better game, to improve it and do better than we did before."

It seems that making The Path of Neo a better game has also included taking a good hard look at the two films taking the most heat from the series' detractors, Reloaded and Revolutions. "We actually went out of our way to find out how we could cater to people who were disillusioned by the second and third movies." says Perry.

"We asked gamers which movie they preferred and they always said number one, because there was so many new ideas in that one, there were things we'd never thought of or seen before, on many visual, spiritual and emotion levels it was so new and fresh and amazing that today it's still their favourite movie of all time. It was really impossible to sequel that."

As a result of this research a large proportion of Path of Neo has been dedicated to levels based on events from the first movie, with only the key sequences being taken from the other two films. Even more interesting is that it seems that the Wachowski brothers not only endorsed this pleasantly unbalanced design, but they demanded it.

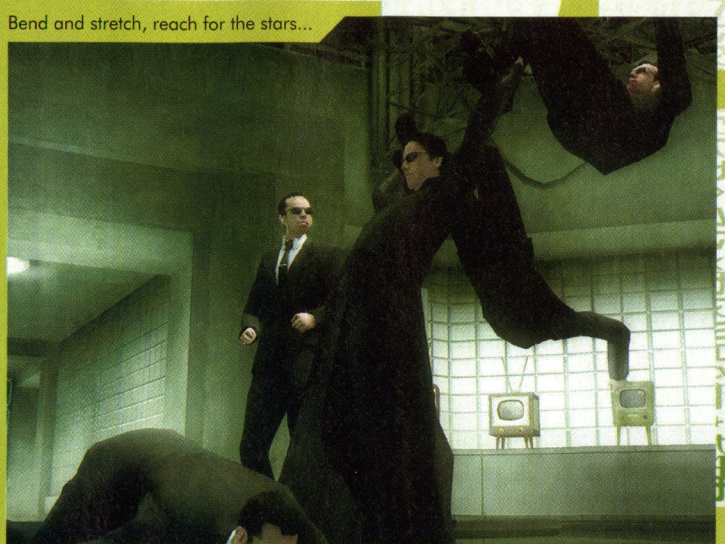
Batter up! (thanks Darren)

"I have to be clear in saying though that the scenes that we turned into levels for Path of Neo were not chosen by me, they were chosen by the Wachowskis - and how interesting is it that the directors chose the most scenes from their first movie rather than the other movies... In the end the balance of the game was determined by them and it's dramatically balanced in the direction of the first film."

BAD ENDING COMES GOOD

In a move that will undoubtedly become the game's most controversial feature, at least with Matrix purists, Larry and Andy Wachowski have decided to re-write the ending of their trilogy. The argument is that although Neo sacrificing himself may make a nice ending for a film, the main character's death doesn't make a particularly good videogame ending. Although Dave forbade us to reveal any explicit details about the new ending we can tell you that the new ending to the game is very, very different to that of the film in many strange and exciting ways that will guarantee that no one will put down the controller disappointed.

Bend and stretch, reach for the stars...

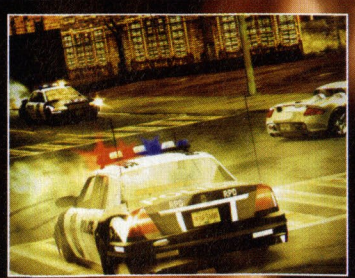


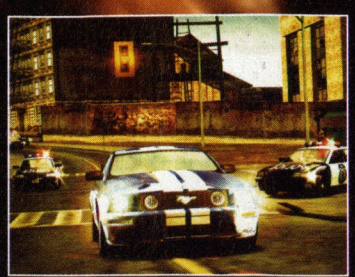
Dave Perry hopes that additions like this will make the complete package impressive to the entire spectrum of gamers, but he does admit that the Path of Neo may be just a little too authentic for newcomers to the series to completely appreciate the game's finer nuances.

"The truth is that the game probably isn't going to work for you if you're not a Matrix fan." admits Perry. "It relies on rules and concepts from the Matrix, it relies on a feeling of nostalgia when you enter a certain space that you remember and it relies on your knowledge of how things work in the matrix."

"It's definitely built for Matrix fans," Perry reiterates, "but I really do believe that the combination of having the Wachowskis directing the game, expanding the world, editing the story and changing the ending and all the other stuff they've done for the game, if you're a matrix fan then that has to be tantalising for you."

Before the year is out we'll be able to find out for ourselves whether The Path of Neo has what it takes to be the one...





NEED FOR SPEED: MOST WANTED INTERVIEW

Systems: **GCN, PC, PS2, Xbox, Xbox 360** Category: **Arcade racing** Players: **1-Multi** Developer: **EA Canada** Due: **November 2005 (Xbox 360 TBA)**

EA successfully resurrected the Need for Speed series with the Underground games, tapping into tuner culture and putting extensive customisation options and gameplay freedom at the player's fingertips. And while they're certainly building on the Underground titles for Most Wanted, old school NFS fans are in for a treat because the most important change in gameplay has been inspired by the NFS back catalogue. Yes, the cops are back. And they're back with a vengeance. EA Canada want Most Wanted to be one long Hollywood chase sequence, and after our appetites were whet at E3 we thought we'd get in touch with Most Wanted Producer Michael Mann to find out more...

Most Wanted seems to be a return to an older style of Need for Speed game with the cops playing a major role. What inspired the decision to go in this direction whilst still retaining the tuner angle from the Underground games?

Michael Mann: The EA driving team is always striving to find ways to innovate and provide fresh game play experiences. While Need for Speed Underground 2 was about secret races in the dead of night, in Need for Speed Most Wanted we are exposing that night-time sub culture to an environment where stakes are heightened, and opportunities for bragging rights enter a new dimension - the more extreme side of illicit racing.

Throughout the development of Most Wanted we have been in constant communication with our NFS fans and the number one requested feature was Cops. We've had in-depth discussions with NFS fans about cops and skill-base cop evasion, and how the cops interact with you in a persistent open world.

Tell us a little about the dynamics of the cat and mouse gameplay in Most Wanted.

Need for Speed Most Wanted takes place in an open world where the cops are always present patrolling the streets. Once they latch onto you, you'll have to keep your wits in order to shake them loose. There are several levels of cop escalation or "heat" countered by skill, and strategy-based tactics you can use to out maneuver them. Need for Speed Most Wanted is the first game that delivers on the emotional buildup and rollercoaster experience of a police pursuit. We will pull the emotional strings of the user, put them in situations that are dramatically real and intense, provide escalation of police vehicles and tactics, and wrap everything up with dramatic pursuit climaxes - all while placing the player's fate in their own hands.

What kinds of tactics will the cops use?

Need for Speed Most Wanted delivers on the 'smart cop' experience. The tactics the cops will use are based on how 'wanted' you are – your car's heat level. Tactics range from rolling road blocks, where the cops try to get out in front of you to create a rolling wall, then collapse down on your car to bring you to a stop, to box formations where 4 cops each get into position left, right, front and back of you and collapse in to bring you to a stop.

Could you give us some examples of the tactics you can use to keep the cops off your tail?

Most Wanted builds upon the open city idea in Underground 2, including creating a more rich driving and interactive experiences. We are building the world in such a way that it is even more open. We are allowing the player to leave the standard, road network and drive down alternate routes and open areas by cutting through ship yards, golf courses, and city parks to get the best line or to lose the cops. As well, we are making the world way more interactive and tying game play moments to skill-based pursuit evasions. The cops will always be around, patrolling the streets. Players will have to keep their wits about them; once the cops latch-on, it'll be hard to shake them loose. There are many levels of cop escalation, or "heat", countered by multiple, skill-based and strategic tactics the Player can use to outfox and get away. There'll be cool, evasion techniques to learn-- like jackknifing a semi trailer-truck and have it lose its pay load in order to take out the cops in pursuit, or out-smart the cops and send them into sand traps & water holes as you cut through the golf course, or take out an abandoned water tower or construction scaffolding and have the resulting mayhem take out the cops trying to catch up to you. Also, if you just got away from the cops and you need to lay low – you can drive into a hide-out, bank your bounty, and wait for the cops to move on.

NEED FOR SPEED MOST WANTED IS THE FIRST GAME THAT DELIVERS ON THE EMOTIONAL BUILDUP AND ROLLERCOASTER EXPERIENCE OF A POLICE PURSUIT

How many cops can be chasing you at any one time? And will this number be significantly different on Xbox 360?

We are still tuning the total number of cops that will be in pursuit at one time. Currently the pursuit can build up to 7 or 8 cops, and of course, let's not forget about the helicopter. More importantly, you will need to out run/out smart the cops before backup arrives. In playing the game we have had pursuits where we have needed to outrun 40+ cops and 10+ roadblocks. There is risk reward mechanic to the pursuits in Need for Speed Most Wanted. In order to move up the Blacklist you need to earn bounty – the larger the pursuit you evade the more bounty you earn. However, the risk is that you are more likely to get busted. Get busted too many times and you can kiss your fancy ride goodbye until you bail it out.

Due to the horsepower of the Xbox 360 we are designing for more cop cars to be in the pursuits and including additional strategies where the cops can take advantage of their numbers.

Tell us a little about the Speed Breaker – how does it work?

A key addition to NFS Most

Wanted is the new game play mechanic called "Speedbreaker". Speedbreaker is a slow-down effect that also gives you heightened control and power to avoid the ridiculously close calls you'll encounter as you weave through traffic, avoid police, road blocks, and various other obstacles, and to make those sharp race corners. Speedbreaker is a limited resource so you will need to earn the recharge.

Tell us about the Blacklist and the kinds of challenges players will face in order to get to the top of it.

In order to become the Most Notorious and Elusive Street Racer you'll need to work your way up to the top of the Blacklist. There are 15 Blacklist street racers to beat, and to be able to challenge each rival you will need to prove yourself by winning races, beating challenges and earning bounty. To defeat a Blacklist racer you need to beat the racer at his own game via a series of events.

The Rap Sheet sounds like a great concept. What kinds of things will contribute to it?

THE NEXT GENERATION VISUALS FOR THE WORLD AND CARS IN NEED FOR SPEED MOST WANTED XBOX 360 ARE MIND BLOWING...

Sgt. Cross, the head of the illegal street racing police force, is putting a stop to illegal street racing in Rockport and has created a police database that keeps a tally of all your served and unserved infractions: cost to state, the bounty on your head (car), and also an internal ranking of each violation. Via your street connections you'll be able to access the Cross database via a backdoor.

The look of the game is very sepia toned and gritty. Tell us about the settings for the game and the kind of world you're trying to portray.

The West Coast cityscape was the inspiration for the world in the Underground series, so we thought that this time around we'd explore a complementary setting and visual style. This year, Most Wanted is focused on East Coast landscapes and vibes. We have really gone for a lot more diverse world; the game encompasses a lot of different environments and a variety of cool drives that I think people will really enjoy.

How will the game be structured? Will it be based around one massive city or will you be moving from city to city?

For Need for Speed Most Wanted we spent more time than any other Need for Speed title on building the world and ensuring the drives are memorable.

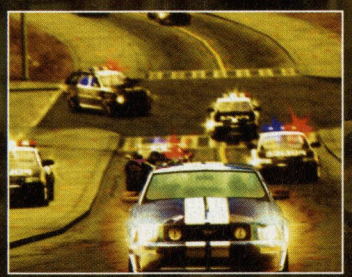
Most Wanted takes place in one large, open, urban area that's comprised of multiple regions. Each region has a large variety of drives - from city grids and city highways, to technical seaside routes, and we added more undulation, table tops, jumps, and large open areas to ensure you get the white knuckles, controller experience.

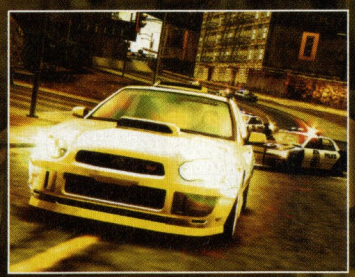
We already know that drag races will be in the game. What other game modes return from Underground 2, and what new ones will be included?

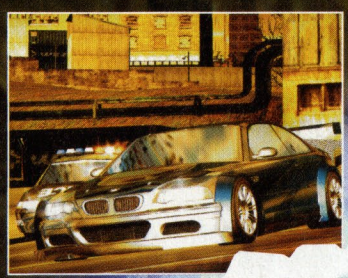
There are several new races in Most Wanted. So far we have only revealed the Toll Booth race, Sprint, and Drag.

How about online modes?

It's still early to confirm anything, but I can share with you that we are looking at how we can enhance online modes, and that core mechanics like the 'Blacklist' and reputation will be part of the online experience







WHAT WE'D LIKE TO SEE: Less exposure to *tards when racing on Live.

How different will Most Wanted be on Xbox 360 as opposed to current gen? What does working with next gen hardware enable you to do that you simply can't do on current gen?

The first noticeable difference is the significant increase in visual fidelity that the Xbox 360 brings to the experience. The next generation visuals for the world and cars in Need for Speed Most Wanted Xbox 360 are mind blowing. Hi Definition is like a magnify glass which highlights anything that is not made for high resolution. Initially there was some thinking that props and some textures could be shared between CG and NG; however, once we reviewed them in-game there was no question that that we needed to make unique content for Next Gen. I mentioned in a previous answer there will be a unique number of cops and additional strategies for the Xbox 360, but another feature that gets me excited is that the road is no longer a flat plain. The road for next gen is 3D; with the use of normal maps/height maps and increased geometry – you can see and feel the cracks, pot holes, and man hole covers, and these effect the way the car feels and sounds on the road.

How many licensed cars will there be? How will you take car customisation to a new level?

I'm unable to reveal the full car list or classes at the moment, but I can say Need for Speed Most Wanted will definitely offer gamers more variety in cars than in Underground 2. We have a broad selection of vehicles to choose from, including import tuners, super cars, muscle cars and sports cars. Customization is a huge part of the experience. In Need for Speed Most Wanted, players will be able to customize their vehicles to race against any class of cars. You will have a full offering of visual and performance modifications, but one key difference from past Need for Speed Underground games is that we have put a lot of effort into making the customization easier to navigate and use. I love the fact that I can visual and performance-tune my Ford Mustang GT and take it up against the Porsche Carrera GT – in fact, out-race the Carrera GT. We also tied customization to the player's management of their car's heat level. If the heat is too high on your car, you can take your car into the shop and change its appearance to lower the heat of the car – the car's 'wanted' level.

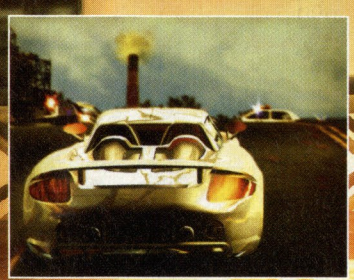
All the cars in the game have been laser scanned. What exactly does this procedure entail and what is the advantage of doing it this way?

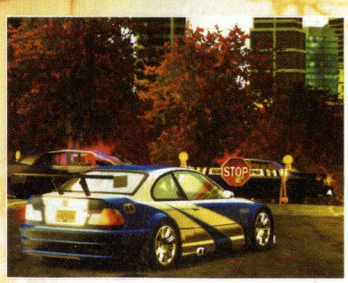
It is very exciting to be working on another generation of consoles. The infinite detail that can be visually achieved on the cars and in the environment is mind-blowing; plus, you add next-gen game play features, car physics and high definition on top of that, and Need for Speed Most Wanted is truly an addictive experience. Next gen technology has required us to revamp the process on how we make our cars. The source materials that we need in order to create the next generation car have to be extremely high resolution; so, MW is using the latest, innovative technology -'laser scanning' licensed cars to generate the best reference possible. How this works is that a laser wand scans over the car to provide geometry and surface textures of the vehicle with the resolution of 250 microns, (a pin head); amazing details, like flecks in the paint, can be detected. And yes – you can see the paint flecks on the in-game cars as well. The detail of the cars in Need for Speed Most Wanted is phenomenal!

This new process has also benefited current gen; since our source art is so accurate it has brought the look of our current gen licensed cars to a whole new level of quality.

Thanks for your time and good luck finishing the game – we can't wait to play it!

Thank you. <<





MP3 PLAYER Roundup

There are so many mp3 players available these days that it can be next to impossible to decide which player is going to be right for you. We decided to cut through the hype and test some of the top players on the market for ourselves...

iPOD

RRP: $449 (20GB), $598 (60GB)

What more is there to say about the iPod? Well, for those that don't know, iPod and iPod Photo are now one and the same so every model now comes with a colour screen and photo viewing functionality. The screen itself isn't spectacular (and pales in comparision to the size and sharp image quality of the Gigabeat's) but does the job. As you'd expect sound quality is excellent, the jog dial control method works a treat, and if you use iTunes for desktop playback you'll be set (and even if you don't it's easy enough to set up playlists). Nice options like "recently added", "recently played" and "top 25 most played" help keep things streamlined. Unfortunately playback is a little slow to pick up when starting tracks (or after fast forwarding – which in itself is very slow - through long mp3s), although the response is generally quite good moving from track to track. In short, it's the benchmark for a reason.

LOOKS: ★★★½
PC SOFTWARE: ★★★½
USABILITY: ★★★★
SOUND QUALITY: ★★★★½
EXTRA FEATURES: ★★★½
OVERALL: ★★★★

TOSHIBA GIGABEAT F20/F40/F60

RRP: $439 (20GB – F20), $529 (40GB – F40), $599 (60GB – F60)

With models ranging from 20GB to 60GB, we love the Gigabeat mp3 player range. We love them for their gorgeous industrial design – slim with a brushed metal finish, and stylish "plus touch" controls on the front and blue lit buttons on the side. We love them for their large (2.2"), amazingly bright (264,000 colours) and sharp (240x320 resolution) screen. We love them for their great sound quality and great EQ presets. We love them for the fact that you can navigate your music by the folders you dropped onto the hard drive, not just through the usual messy playlist/album/artist method.

BUT. The reason these systems don't get a full 5/5 rating is because in our week with a test machine the "plus touch" navigation system froze up several times, and we experienced several "fatal errors" when walking around with the Gigabeat in our pocket that required resetting the device (while it played fine when stationary). We may have just been unlucky with the unit we were sent, but it's enough to make us uneasy about wholeheartedly recommending this potentially cutting edge player.

LOOKS: ★★★★★
PC SOFTWARE: ★★
USABILITY: ★★★★
SOUND QUALITY: ★★★★½
EXTRA FEATURES: ★★½
OVERALL: ★★★★

SONY HDD WALKMAN (NWHD5)

RRP: $479 (20GB)

This compact little player from Sony won't win any beauty competitions with its grainy monochrome screen, but what it lacks in overt style it makes up for in reliability and utility. Menu navigation is straightforward and the face buttons are nice and clicky. The "initials search" function makes trawling through large amounts of music a little more manageable, as does the "new tracks" listing. It also has excellent pick up on playing selected tracks, although fast forwarding is a little slow. Sound quality is excellent with good bass response, and the custom EQ option makes up for the lack of many presets somewhat. The included Sonicstage software has decent drag and drop support, although we'd hardly call it intuitive. In all, Sony's HDD Walkman doesn't do anything out of the ordinary but what it does it does solidly and reliably.

LOOKS: ★★★
PC SOFTWARE: ★½
USABILITY: ★★★★
SOUND QUALITY: ★★★★½
EXTRA FEATURES: ★½
OVERALL: ★★★★

M:ROBE 100

RRP: $299 (5GB)

Incredibly small and incredibly sexy, the M:Robe 100 is white and silver on side and back, with a gorgeous glass fronted black faceplate. Navigation is via red LED lights – it feels fantastic running your thumb up and down the smooth LED scroll bar or tapping a light to play a tune. There's a good variety of ways to browse music (although no browse by folder option), although the red and black screen is a little on the small side. The machine also takes a while to boot up, sometimes has slow pick up on selecting and playing tracks through the menus (although skipping through an album is fine), and fast forwarding is also slow. Perhaps the biggest fault of the M:Robe, however, is that it simply isn't loud enough – especially if you use bin headphones.

The included software for managing and transferring from PC is clunky at best and completely unintuitive at worst. Once you're used to it is okay though, and the sheer style of the machine definitely helps make its faults more bearable.

LOOKS: ★★★★★
PC SOFTWARE: ★½
USABILITY: ★★★½
SOUND QUALITY: ★★★★
EXTRA FEATURES: ★★
OVERALL: ★★★½

iPOD MINI

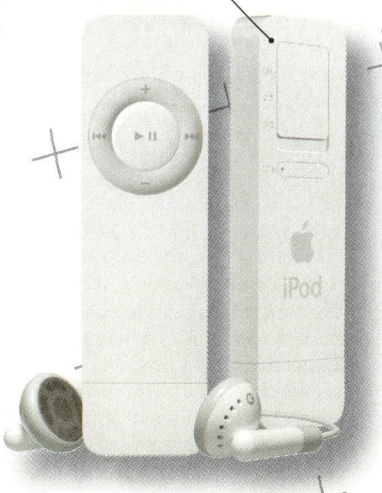
RRP: $299 (4GB), $359 (6GB)

Aside from being something of an icon as far as MP3 players are concerned, the Apple iPod has also become an ersatz benchmark for consumers, with everything judged using them as a baseline. The iPod mini is a superb player with excellent sound quality and good bass response. The aesthetics are a little less streamlined than the full grown iPods and confusingly features a number of hard, sharp and uncomfortable metal edges. On the up side the aluminum shell is a lot hardier and less prone to fingerprints than the sleek white exterior of the iPod. The iTunes software is fairly easy to use leaving the only real down sides for the player being the fact it does not support voice recording and the typically inflated Apple price. The iPod mini is also soon to be replaced by the ridiculously small iPod nano, which comes in 2GB and 4GB varieties.

LOOKS: ★★★★★
PC SOFTWARE: ★★★★
USABILITY: ★★★★½
SOUND QUALITY: ★★★★½
EXTRA FEATURES: ★★★½
OVERALL: ★★★★½

iPOD SHUFFLE

RRP: $149 (512MB), $199 (1GB)



The iPod shuffle is an interesting player to say the least. On the one hand the player is little more than a gimmick and that gimmick isn't a particularly good one. The idea of the shuffle is that the player will randomly play the music loaded. There is no screen or track listing to view so what comes next is a mystery. This is all well and good if you are in the mood for all the music loaded onto the player but if not, expect to be hitting the next song button a lot. On the other hand the player is light, small, reasonably priced and designed with the same clean aesthetics as all of the other iPods. The sound quality is excellent with less bass distortion than the older generation of full sized iPods. Battery life is also excellent with around 12 hours of usage after a full USB charge.

LOOKS: ★★★★
PC SOFTWARE: ★★★★
USABILITY: ★★★
SOUND QUALITY: ★★★★½
EXTRA FEATURES: N/A
OVERALL: ★★★½

MSI MEGA PLAYER 522BT

RRP: $250 (256MB), $300 (512MB)

There are so many MP3 players on the market at the moment that sometimes the only thing that sets them apart are the looks and the extra functionality they can provide. The 522BT stands out from the other small players with Bluetooth telephone functionality. The player can sync in with a large number of Bluetooth enabled mobile phones allowing for voice controlled remote activation, taking calls remotely and recording telephone calls. The usefulness of this is questionable for the most part but it certainly is pretty cool. Aside from the base memory capacity, the 522BT can support SD cards for extra storage. Overall the Mega Player 522BT is a decent player and the phone interaction, voice/phone recording and FM radio make it fully featured, although there is little to recommend it over other players, unless of course you love OLEDs as much as us or have a hankering to answer your mobile phone from up to 10 meters away.

LOOKS: ★★★
PC SOFTWARE: ★★★
USABILITY: ★★★
SOUND QUALITY: ★★★★
EXTRA FEATURES: ★★★★
OVERALL: ★★★½

MSI MEGA STICK 528

RRP: $189 (512MB)

Whilst it's not the most attractive player in the world, the MSI Mega Stick is quite a viable choice for a small scale player for a number of reasons. For a start, music playback for WMA and MP3 files is very good, comparable to that of the iPod shuffle but the player features a whole lot more functionality. For a start the player has a screen so you can see your song choices with a range of backlight colours you can choose from. The player runs off a single AAA battery but can get around 8 or so hours of life from it with heavy use, up to about 18 for casual use so battery costs shouldn't come near to breaking the bank. The player also functions as a voice recorder and FM radio.

LOOKS: ★★½
PC SOFTWARE: ★★★
USABILITY: ★★★★
SOUND QUALITY: ★★★★
EXTRA FEATURES: ★★★★
OVERALL: ★★★★

IRIVER H10

RRP: $359 (5GB), $399 (6GB), $459 (20GB)

As far as looks go, the Iriver H10 is a winner. The streamlined body of the player is light, attractive, sleek and houses anything from 5GB to 20GB on its HDD. The player uses a touch pad similar to the iPod or earlier Zen players but unlike the latter two players the sensitivity of the pad seems to be odd making for a little frustration navigating the menus. The software is also something of a frustration, adding a few too many steps to adding music to your library and uploading them to the player to make it altogether user friendly. Frustrations aside, the H10 is an excellent player with fantastic sound, a wide range of EQs, the ability to view photographs (though with the small screen this functionality remains rather iffy) and an excellent battery life – a single charge can see you playing music for up to 12 hours.

LOOKS: ★★★★★
PC SOFTWARE: ★★★½
USABILITY: ★★★★
SOUND QUALITY: ★★★★★
EXTRA FEATURES: ★★★½
OVERALL: ★★★★½

MSI MEGA PLAYER 521

RRP: $215 (512MB)

This is not a player for everyone. The MSI Mega Player 521 has a very set target market – those looking to listen to music while exercising or the like. As a player the 521 performs much like the other MSI products, giving good sound quality and decent bass. Where the player stands out from the pack is the extra functionality it brings to the table. The Mega Player can function both as a pedometer and stopwatch to help you with your exercising. Interestingly, the player features a bright OLED screen. The choice to go with OLEDs over a standard LED is a good one as the screen is good and sharp as well as being visible in all lighting conditions.

LOOKS: ★★★
PC SOFTWARE: ★★★
USABILITY: ★★★½
SOUND QUALITY: ★★★½
EXTRA FEATURES: ★★★★
OVERALL: ★★★

IRIVER T30

RRP: $115 (256MB), $159 (512MB), $219 (1GB)

If there's a 1GB player that has the potential to give the iPod shuffle a run for its money it is the Iriver T30. Attractive in an industrial design sort of way, the T30 is a robust little player with excellent sound quality at all ranges and includes compatibility with OGG files. Powered by a single AAA battery, the player can supposedly squeeze out 20 odd hours of charge. We haven't run a battery flat but the charge left at around the 8 odd hour mark indicates that the hype may in fact be true. Like most of the other small players, the T30 can function as a voice recorder. Much like the H10, the T30 uses some rather fiddly drivers that involve too many steps to be user friendly. They are also Win XP only so if you're a Mac or Linux user you're out of luck.

LOOKS: ★★★★
PC SOFTWARE: ★★★½
USABILITY: ★★★★
SOUND QUALITY: ★★★★½
EXTRA FEATURES: ★★★½
OVERALL: ★★★★

IRIVER T10

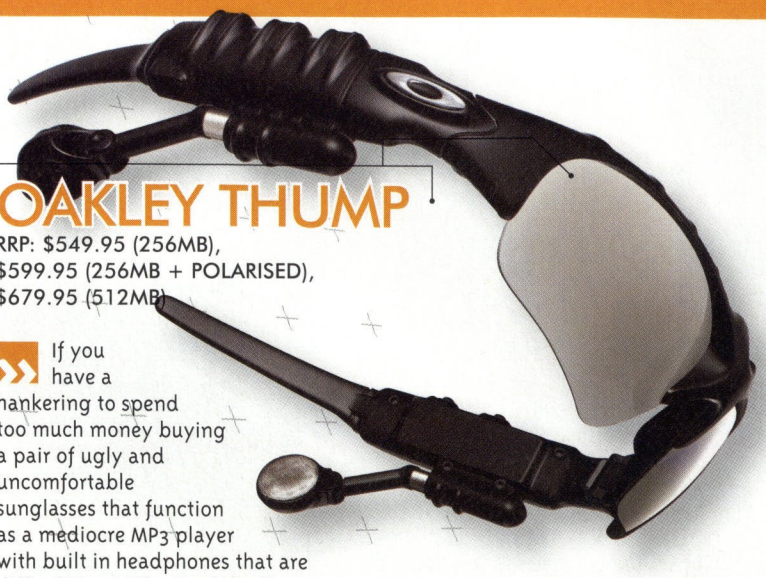
RRP: $199 (512MB), $279 (1GB)

In an age where MP3 players seem to be getting smaller and smaller by the generation the T10 looks something like a dinosaur. For a 512MB-1GB flash player it is huge and quite heavy at around 50g. That said, the design is once again quite attractive in an industrial design kind of way and the player itself is very solidly constructed, the only gripe being that the control ring is a little small so you can expect a little difficulty in selecting tracks or menu options cleanly. The playback functionality is excellent and surprisingly long – Iriver promises that at base settings the player will be able to squeeze around 45 hours of play from a single AA battery. One really nice touch with the player is the inclusion of a colour screen making it nice and easy to see what is going on in all lighting conditions.

LOOKS: ★★★½
PC SOFTWARE: ★★★½
USABILITY: ★★★★
SOUND QUALITY: ★★★★½
EXTRA FEATURES: ★★★
OVERALL: ★★★½

OAKLEY THUMP

RRP: $549.95 (256MB),
$599.95 (256MB + POLARISED),
$679.95 (512MB)



If you have a hankering to spend too much money buying a pair of ugly and uncomfortable sunglasses that function as a mediocre MP3 player with built in headphones that are difficult to position and don't provide enough sound this is the product for you. Convergence entertainment devices are definitely the way of the future and points should be given to Oakley for giving it a shot but the sunglasses/player are just not up to the task at the moment. The player itself is decent but the lack of volume and the fact that the earbuds are hard to position without discomfort make them a luxury cool item for people with more money than sense – like Lil' John, the world's most annoying musician and poster-boy for the Thumps.

LOOKS: ★★½
PC SOFTWARE: ★★½
USABILITY: ★★
SOUND QUALITY: ★★½
EXTRA FEATURES: ★★★½
OVERALL: ★★

CREATIVE ZEN MICRO

RRP: $379 (5GB)

Aside from the fact that the player we were sent for testing was a particularly garish and ugly shade of pink, the Creative Zen Micro is an exceptional player in nearly all aspects. The design is very nice and solid, looking and feeling much like a clamshell mobile phone when closed. Before getting to the performance of the player there is something we need to praise – a removable rechargeable battery. This feature automatically gives Creative a leg up on Apple as the iPods need to be taken to a service centre to have their batteries changed. Sound quality is excellent throughout and a clever automatic volume control function allows the player to keep music volume constant between tracks without having to access the controls. The only potentially negative aspects of the player is the very sensitive touch which takes a bit of practice to use well and the software that offers a lot of functionality but is not super user friendly.

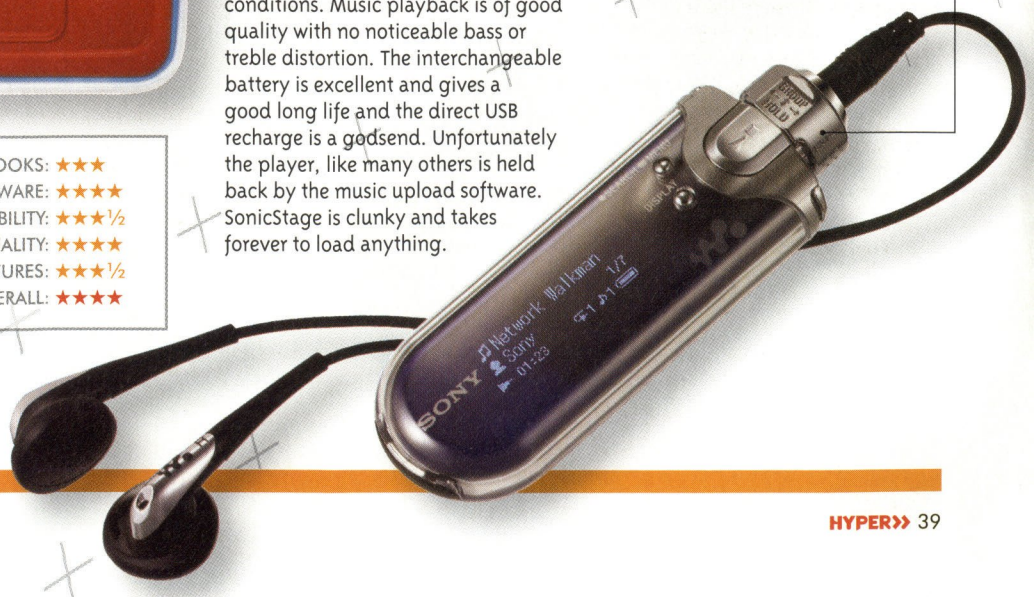
LOOKS: ★★★
PC SOFTWARE: ★★★★
USABILITY: ★★★½
SOUND QUALITY: ★★★★
EXTRA FEATURES: ★★★½
OVERALL: ★★★★

SONY NWE407 FLASH NETWORK WALKMAN

RRP: $299 (1GB)

For the longest time Sony would only support its proprietary AC3 format on its network walkmans because, you know, it's a Sony product and they like their proprietary applications and formats but the Sony NWE407 Flash Network Walkman also supports MP3 and that's most definitely a nice thing. The player is attractively designed and features a great screen that is easy to see under most lighting conditions. Music playback is of good quality with no noticeable bass or treble distortion. The interchangeable battery is excellent and gives a good long life and the direct USB recharge is a godsend. Unfortunately the player, like many others is held back by the music upload software. SonicStage is clunky and takes forever to load anything.

LOOKS: ★★★★
PC SOFTWARE: ★½
USABILITY: ★★★½
SOUND QUALITY: ★★★★
EXTRA FEATURES: ★½
OVERALL: ★★★★



MSI MEGAVIEW 566 PORTABLE MULTIMEDIA PLAYER

RRP: $649 (20GB)

The Megaview isn't just an mp3 player – it also supports DivX, WMV and MPEG4 video playback, as well as viewing photos. The best part though is that no proprietary software is necessary, you just drag and drop your music, videos and photos onto the HD. The unit comes with a remote and tripod, has voice recording and an FM tuner, and can even record video directly from your TV. The LCD screen is large (3.5") but unfortunately is really low resolution – making video viewing far too granulated for our liking. In all, it's easy to use, but decidedly no frills.

LOOKS: ★★
PC SOFTWARE: N/A
USABILITY: ★★★½
SOUND QUALITY: ★★★½
EXTRA FEATURES: ★★★★
OVERALL: ★★★

MPIO HD200

RRP: $350 (5GB)

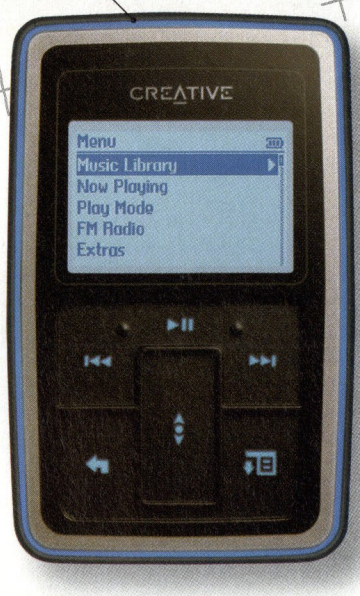
While the MPIO's sound quality is reasonable and the voice record and FM playback (and record) may be handy, and while we love the fact that you can simply plug this into a USB port then drag and drop your music onto it and navigate on the device via folders, the MPIO is something of a trial to use. The interface and button functions just aren't intuitive, making it very hard to recommend.

LOOKS: ★★
PC SOFTWARE: N/A
USABILITY: ★★
SOUND QUALITY: ★★★½
EXTRA FEATURES: ★★
OVERALL: ★★

CREATIVE ZEN

RRP: $439.95 (20GB)

Looking like something that should snap on to the chest plate of Darth Vader (at least in the black version), the Creative Zen could most generously be described as cute – mostly thanks to the blue illuminated rings of colour around the interface. But is it, to paraphrase Peter Moore "the zen of mp3 playback"? Well it's certainly a nice feeling unit to use – the buttons and slider (in the middle) are super responsive and although the screen is monochrome, information is clearly displayed. You can view id3 info, set bookmarks to your favourite tracks and best of all skip easily through long tracks. Easy to use software too. This one is a winner.

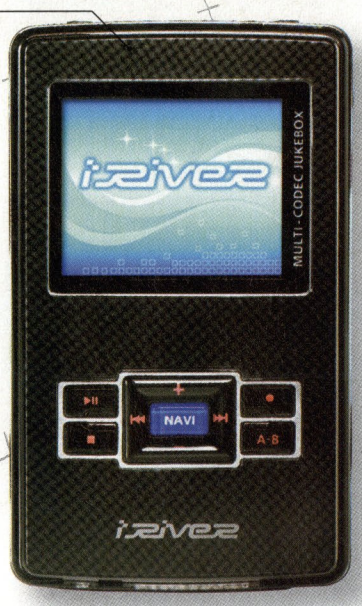


LOOKS: ★★½
PC SOFTWARE: ★★★★
USABILITY: ★★★½
SOUND QUALITY: ★★★★
EXTRA FEATURES: ★★★½
OVERALL: ★★★★

IRIVER H340

RRP: $549 (40GB)

Nowhere near as stylish as the H10 series (which comes in 5, 6 and 20GB models), the 40GB H340 is quite chunky and very 80s in styling – which isn't a compliment. That said, the 2" colour screen is quite nice, sound quality is good and no proprietary software is required. Just drag and drop music onto the HD then navigate through the directory tree. It's utilitarian, but could you could do worse.



LOOKS: ★½
PC SOFTWARE: N/A
USABILITY: ★★★
SOUND QUALITY: ★★★½
EXTRA FEATURES: ★★½
OVERALL: ★★½

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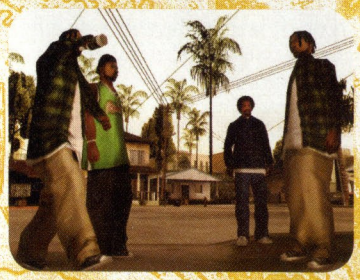
A NEW GAMING WORLD

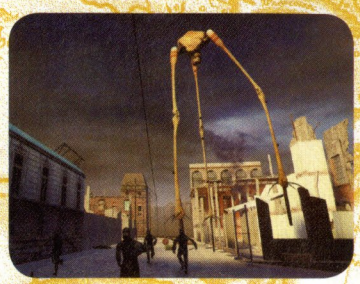
Maurice Branscombe

Amidst withdrawing revenues and accusations of receding product quality the Japanese games industry has hit its lowest point in almost a decade. But what will the next generation be like when the rest of the world is experiencing unheralded growth...

[RIGHT AND BELOW] Pokemon and Final Fantasy - two of the leading Japanese franchises still going strong

[RIGHT, TOP TO BOTTOM] Halo 2, San Andreas and Half-Life 2 - Western developers flex their muscles





In May of this year it was announced that Japan's videogame industry had hit yet another in a series of ominous milestones. The findings from the Japanese Computer Entertainment Supplier's Association (CESA) showed that the industry's total revenues for 2004 had withdrawn dramatically to 909.1 billion yen, equivalent to approximately US$8.4 billion. For most local industries, this sum would be a staggering amount, for Japan however it was a loss of almost 20 percent from the previous year. If this loss were an isolated incident there would be little to worry about, but it wasn't.

Since the mid 1980s onwards Japan has been the beating heart of the global videogame industry. Beginning with Nintendo's timely resuscitation of the game business with the spectacular success of their NES console, and continuing on to the unparalleled highs of the PlayStation generation, Japanese developers had dominated the console market both creatively and financially for more than a decade. Since the peak of the PlayStation craze in 1997 however the Japanese videogame industry as a whole has consistently posted receding revenues, year after year. Today the industry that was once the paradigm of financial prosperity is now reported to be at fifty percent of its previous wealth, and seemingly shrinking.

In stark contrast, the industries in North America and Western Europe are experiencing a period of growth unlike any other in their histories. Western games are at the height of gaming chic with titles like Halo 2, Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas, World of Warcraft, Half-Life 2 and numerous others leaving empty wallets and occasional controversy in their wake, and the Microsoft Xbox has proven to be the first successful non-Japanese console in almost two decades. In the same seven-year period of the Japanese game industry's recession profits in the American industry alone have almost doubled, and according to market researchers the NPD Group, they now eclipse Japanese revenues by more than a billion dollars.

While the East vs. West dichotomy wears on there are yet more opportunities opening to smaller game developing regions. With lower development costs and a passionate and talented workforce game developers in Central and Eastern Europe, and even Australia look to benefit in a next generation that is increasingly dominated by Western games.

DECLINE, DEMOGRAPHICS AND DESIGN

Exactly why the Japanese industry is withdrawing so consistently is a difficult question to answer, but at least one good reason is given by the Secretariat of the CESA's Research and Public Relations Committee, Taro Machitani.

"It may be attributed to Japan's current demographic structure as an aging society with few children, as well as to people's diversified interests." contends Machitani, "In the context of Japan's demographic structure, former major game players have [grown older], inevitably changing their lifestyles and gaming environments."

The changing demographics of the Japanese population are undoubtedly part of the cause behind Japan's gaming industry slump. According to the nation's most recent census (conducted by Japan's Ministry of Internal Affairs and Communications) the country's birth rate is now its lowest ever in the post World War II period, with the numbers of the Japanese population aged 65 and over at more than 24 million, a record high of 19.5 percent of the entire populace. The majority of the Japanese population is also aged between 15 and 64 years old with the greatest spikes in population between 30 and 60 years old. The implications for the domestic industry in Japan is that players who may have played games in the 8, 16 or even 32-bit eras are now of working age or older, and have far less time to devote to console games that are becoming increasingly time consuming and complex. Furthermore there are now fewer children and teens than ever before to replenish the market with dedicated gamers.

According to some however, shifting demographics are only part of the problem. As Gary Knight, one of Japanese gaming giant SEGA's representatives in the West informs; "It's definitely harder now than it was say 10-15 years ago to make Japanese games a hit." says Knight, head of SEGA Europe's marketing division. "The whole industry has become much more hit driven and so less games are becoming more successful and selling more units. The same has happened to Japanese titles."

Are gamers leaving Japanese games behind because they've lost their innovative edge?

Although a smaller number of games are becoming successful, the hits that are driving the Japanese industry abroad today are the exact same ones that have been succeeding for years; Pokemon, Metal Gear Solid, and Final Fantasy among others, while at home many of the same RPG, Pachinko and other niche series make up an inordinate proportion of domestic chart toppers. This current market climate has seen developers produce a constant stream of sequels, prequels, remakes and licenses based on either existing games or popular anime and manga, with the majority of the latter two never leaving Japanese shores. Which begs the question; are gamers leaving Japanese games behind because the industry's collective game design has lost its innovative edge?

"From a purist viewpoint, I think there is a lack of new development and creativity." says SEGA's Gary Knight. "The difficulty for the business side of our operations is that if you look at the charts for the past 2 years - nearly all of the top 20 sellers are either sequels or licensed product, so that says something about the consumer needs as well as

any potential lack of creativity."

As always consumers dictate industry output, and in this case, we demand sequels while we leave innovative and original games in obscurity. It is no wonder then that game developers in every industry, not just those in Japan, often aren't willing to put up the amount of money it takes to develop a modern console game - millions of dollars - on an untested original idea when they know they can release the twelfth rendition of an established one, even if it doesn't sell quite as well as the same idea did last year. Trying something new is a million dollar risk, and it's a risk that is easily avoided with monotonous regularity. As the CESA's Taro Machitani echoes; "The final sales outcomes are determined solely by consumers..."

JAPANESE TENDRILS GO WEST

Regardless of whether or not the Japanese industry slump is due to changes in the domestic market or a response to some perceived reduction in creative potency, one thing is certain; game production in North America and Europe has flourished in spite of it. American retail revenues are reported to have totalled more than US$9.9 billion for the 2004 year, and they appear to be growing even higher for 2005, with comparative sales rising to over $4.1 billion for the first half of this year compared to $3.4 billion in the first half of 2004 (NPD Group, USA). Similarly, the industry in Europe has reportedly grown to the value of €5.6 billion, equivalent to more than US$6.9 billion. (Screen Digest, UK).

The ongoing success of the Western industries is undoubtedly due to the increased profile of locally made games. In years gone by console sales charts the world over were dominated almost exclusively by Japanese games, but these days it's more likely to be titles hailing from the USA and UK. In the US, last year's top selling game charts were filled with the likes of GTA: San Andreas, Halo 2, Madden 2005 and Need for Speed: Underground 2 with the only Japanese game to rate a mention being Nintendo's Pokemon: Fire Red/Leaf Green. In the UK charts it was a similar story, with only two games of Japanese origin selling enough to make it into the year's top twenty, Pro Evolution Soccer 4 and Sonic Heroes.

The growing success of Western made games in the global market has encouraged many large Japanese publishers to invest heavily in international developers to further strengthen their position in a global market that is increasingly favouring Western styled games. Sony Computer Entertainment have had tendrils in the West for years, Nintendo have allowed one of their most precious franchises, Metroid, to be developed by American outfit Retro Studios, and even SEGA Japan have taken numerous Western game makers onboard.

"SEGA Europe still works very closely with SEGA of Japan, and along with our North American colleagues we construct global plans," says Gary Knight, "SEGA have identified that to be globally successful in the video games market, it is essential to have a very strong US and European operation... I think the majority of the top third party publishers these days are Western based, which is also where the bigger markets are so it's to be expected that the development is growing and is suited to the customer."

To this affect SEGA have recruited a number of talented studios in North America and Western Europe including the likes of Sports Interactive, Monolith Productions, Pseudo Interactive and others to work with them on current and next generation projects. The most recent and possibly highest profile example is SEGA's acquisition of The Creative Assembly, the Sussex UK and Brisbane Australia located developers behind the Total War series. With acquisitions such as this sure to only be the beginning, Japanese publishers like SEGA may yet recapture their place in the Western market, even if only vicariously so.

"It's fair to see we are aggressively pursuing Western development and content," admits Knight, "and we'll be hoping to build this sooner rather than later."

[CLOCKWISE FROM TOP LEFT] S.T.A.L.K.E.R., Serious Sam 2, Battlestations Midway and Heroes of Might 5...

times will be longer, development teams will become larger, and most detrimental of all, development costs will skyrocket to an estimated two to three times more than the current generation of software.

"It's not a very big secret that production values for next-generation games will grow twice, to say the least," says Max Maslov, lead organiser of the Russian Game Developers Conference. "It's much cheaper here [in Russia] than in America. A small team can make a good PC game for $200,000 or even less within a 1-year production cycle... we also have really professional people working in this industry here in Russia. I'm sure that our programmers are

Trying something new is a million dollar risk, and it's easily avoided...

IN MOTHER RUSSIA, GAME DEVELOPS YOU

Not only has the expansion of the games market outside of Japan opened new doors to North American and Western European game developers, but greater opportunities have also been created for developers outside the three dominant regions. In countries like Russia, Hungary, Croatia, the Czech Republic and more, game development is finally becoming a viable and potentially lucrative industry driven by talented and enthusiastic programmers and designers, and most crucially of all, a drastically reduced cost of development. Something that will be vitally important in the next generation, where development

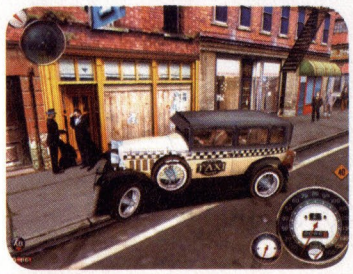
the best in Europe and Asia, and artists are becoming more and more experienced year over year. And most importantly, our designers have a whole bunch of new and cool ideas!"

Although these industries are young, already some Central and Eastern European developers are producing original game content that are on par with many games developed in the rest of the world, and some have even gone on to become international success stories. One such success story is that of Czech developer Illusion Softworks whose Hidden and Dangerous series and Mafia both proved successful with critics and consumers around the globe, and whose forthcoming military simulation Enemy in Sight (tentative title) looks to continue their impeccable track record. Another developer that Hyper recently had the great privilege of visiting is Hungarian developer Mithis Entertainment, whose latest game Battlestations Midway is being published later this year by Atari. Not only does the game look and play fantastically, but the team of developers at Mithis also seem to have a real passion for original game design, as well as more than enough talent and dedication to back that passion up.

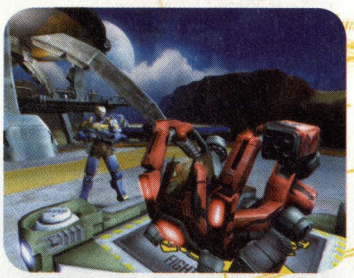
Possibly the most anticipated game to be developed in Eastern Europe is Ukrainian developer GSC Gameworld's S.T.A.L.K.E.R.: Shadow of Chernobyl. Although the game's numerous delays have frustrated some and prompted others to suggest that the game may yet turn into vapourware, the fact that the game has managed to create such a buzz that gamers actually care whether or not it gets delayed is somewhat of a triumph for the Eastern European developer.

As Max Maslov informs us, many developers in Russia are also reaping the benefits of the heightened interest in the region. Russian developers are now succeeding with original products, while some have been contracted by American and Western European publishers to develop licensed games for the world market, and even some sequels to established franchises.

"We've proved we could make very successful PC games that sell well, such as IL-2 from 1C Company, or Etherlords from Nival, and now we are trying to tap console market." says Maslov. "The latest examples of this are American Chopper developed by Creat Studios for Activision, or Pirates of the Caribbean developed by Akella for Bethesda. And you know, Heroes of Might and Magic 5 is being made by Nival for Ubisoft - I guess this fact speaks for itself."



[ABOVE] Mafia and Etherlords, from Illusion Softworks and Nival respectively...



[ABOVE] Tribes: Vengeance should have been a massive Aussie hit. Go get a copy!

THE EASTERN EUROPEAN EXPERIENCE

SEGA's Gary Knight agrees that game production in Eastern Europe has a lot of potential in the next generation, and that just as SEGA have recruited promising Western European and North American developers in the past, Eastern Europe is definitely on the company's radar for the future.

"As part of SEGA's global strategy, we are pursuing many different types of games and speaking to many types of developer. This includes the Central and Eastern European based developers," comments Knight. "[In Eastern Europe] they have a very wide base of quality developers. These are very talented people with cutting edge skills and technology. It's a very good employment market, in a rapidly growing marketplace."

As talented and skilful as they are and as rapid as the marketplace is growing, there are still some definite limits to what game developers in Eastern Europe can achieve at this point.

"It's lack of experience," says Max Maslov of the region's main disadvantage. "Because of that, we can't make AAA-titles yet, although the money is not a big problem."

"We also can't make great console games" continues Maslov, "because the domestic console market is very, very weak - only 6% against PC's 94%. Our programmers, designers and artists know little of consoles, but they do know what PC games are all about, and they want to make PC games. The market, in its turn, also demands PC games. I'd love to see a lot of fun and furious console games made by Russian companies – but we still have a lot to learn about them."

The gaming industries in Eastern and Central Europe are in a stage of relative infancy when compared to other regions. In countries like Russia game development has really only been viable on a large scale since the late 1990s and early 2000s, unsurprisingly this lack of experience makes it difficult to compete with developers with decades of experience, although the quality of the games leaving the region do seem to be improving markedly year upon year. The knowledge of consoles is a setback that will only be overcome with such experience, and as consoles are typically unpopular in Eastern Europe it may take the region longer than most to acclimatise to the quirks of console development. Regardless, countries like Russia are presented with the unique opportunity to make quality, low-cost software that may very well provide a real alternative to game development inside the three big regions.

"We can - and hopefully will - become a haven for creators of very good PC games and in the future low-cost and mid-budget console

titles." concludes Maslov. "We just need more experience."

DOWNUNDER ON THE UP

Amongst the growth in areas outside the three traditional territories, Australia may too be able to play a larger role in the global game industry, as Evelyn Richardson, Executive Director for the Game Developers Association of Australia contends.

"We have over 40 studios in Australia and over 1000 people employed with exports of AU$100 million per annum. We're looking to double our staff numbers and increase exports to at least AU$500 million by the end of the decade." states Evelyn, quite confidently outlining the Australian industry's potential for the future. Although producing a game in Australia is undoubtedly more expensive than what is possible in Eastern Europe, it should theoretically be less expensive in terms of development costs than producing the same game in the U.S. or U.K. Despite this however Evelyn does not see Australia as a cut-price alternative to the larger industries, and instead sees Australia standing alone on its talent, technical expertise and reliability in the next-generation.

"We don't market ourselves as a cheaper location to develop games. We do however argue that we represent better 'bang for buck' in terms of output and quality." says Eveyln. "We've been in business over 20 years, have shipped over 200 titles and we have a stable industry environment with well-established studios and highly talented teams. We also have similar legal and financial structures to North America, which is currently 75% of our export market. All of these factors make us an attractive place to make games."

An attractive place to make games that has already produced developers like Melbourne House, Krome Studios, Irrational Games Australia, Ratbag, IR Gurus, Torus Games, Tantalus Interactive, Team Bondi and numerous other successful ventures. Local developers have produced a number of domestic and international success stories including Melbourne House's fantastically playable Transformers, Krome's popular Ty: The Tasmanian Tiger, Irrational Games Australia's Tribes: Vengeance and IR Gurus' ongoing AFL Live series, putting the Australian industry in a healthier state, both creatively and financially, than at any other time in its history. Expanding from this base into the oncoming next generation will be a challenge, but one that Evelyn and the GDAA thinks is achievable, providing that we prepare appropriately.

"A key issue for Australia right now is investing for future growth now." says Eveyln. "With next gen already upon us and the need for greater skills and more investment, we need to ensure we're growing talent and attracting capital for concept development, licenses and production. The industry has the potential to leverage a greater share of the global game space but we don't have a lot of time to position ourselves. We do require some Government assistance to ensure we can compete in the next gen space; for a modest investment of $50m over 3 years and some tax incentives we believe we'd deliver significant returns for Government, the industry and the broader community in terms of more employment and greater deal flow back into Australia."

THE NEW GAMING WORLD

Kenzo Tsujimoto, the President of Japan's CESA and also President and CEO of high-profile game developer Capcom, has been quoted as saying that the Japanese industry should recover its former level of profitability with the launch of next-generation consoles including Xbox 360, PS3 and Nintendo Revolution. Expectedly, Taro Machitani agrees.

"To please as many consumers as possible, the [Japanese] game industry strives constantly to create new gaming machines which meet consumers' needs. Thus, new products are highly expected to appeal to consumers."

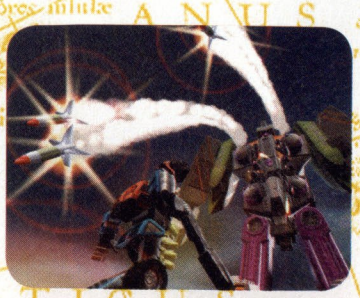
This is an optimistic outlook to say the least, especially considering that the Japanese industry has continued to wither despite the launch of the PlayStation 2 and GameCube consoles in the year 2000 and 2001 respectively, but it is still a possibility. At the very least the launch of the Nintendo DS and Sony PSP should be reflected in 2005's CESA industry report as increased hardware sales, as should also happen when the next-generation machines are introduced. Critically though, Taro Machitani agrees that to push the Japanese industry forward they will have to pursue new, previously untapped markets and encourage them to pick up the controller.

"Under these circumstances, new approaches to regenerate the demand of former game users and to appeal to game-beginners, seniors and women, who have not been familiar with games should be the most prioritised long-term issues to be dealt with." concludes Machitani.

The issue of making Japanese games once again most attractive to international audiences should also be considered as a means of improving the industry's revenues.

"The key would seem to be in building a clear business strategy that understands what it takes to be successful in the local Japanese marketplace versus what will be commercially attractive in the Western markets." says SEGA's Gary Knight. "The Western markets obviously now represent a larger share of the global turnover, therefore I'm sure all Japanese developers will be considering their content for International markets - in addition to creatively building for success in the local industry."

If the industries in North America and Western Europe maintain their current course, which seems overwhelmingly likely, years of financial growth and expansion await. Eastern European developers will no doubt succeed in providing preferable economic solutions to game development problems in an increasingly expensive industry, and Australia will hopefully capture a larger slice of the international game market with both locally made and owned franchises and established licenses.



[ABOVE] Transformers from Melbourne House was genius..

[BELOW] Ty The Tasmanian Tiger had plenty of charm

Local developers have produced a number of domestic and international successes

Whatever the future holds for any number of the game producing nations of the world, in the end the spoils will always belong to the developers who strive to create the most compelling and diverse gaming experiences for the global consumer.

"I think the most successful global software companies will be those that can build culturally relevant games for their key markets and who can have a strong product line up across all key genres." concludes Knight. "This will be the case for our industry, wherever the company HQ is based." <<

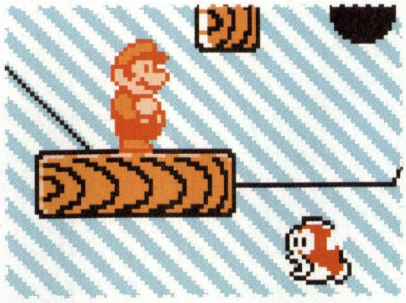
Links

>> Writing Unit 3 & Comedy Bot 2 with 'anti-human' corrections by Kosta Andreadis

X-Box 360 Leaked, Friends Made, Daddy Fired.

igotdadfired.ytmnd.com/

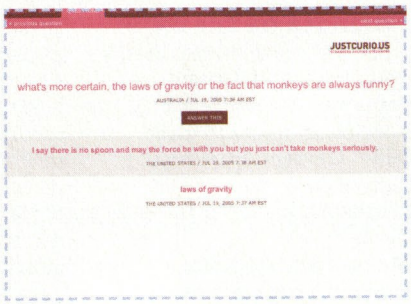
>> If you're not gifted with the ability to converse in the latest street slang or emit a somewhat unsatisfying odour then you'll most likely find it hard making new friends. Lord knows I did, but thankfully when growing up I was rich, and not in the stuff that doesn't count like 'true love' and 'happiness' but with the realio dealio – cold hard cash. And so it goes, you buy a whole heap of awesome new gadgets and friendship is but a phone call or invite away. Popularity is yours, and the Yin Yang loses another battle to capitalist cosmic interference.



The Lost Levels of Mario 3

www.classicgaming.com/tmk/smb3_lost.shtml

>> "I've already played The Lost Levels of Super Mario Bros in Super Mario All Stars on the SNES". Well that was for the first game so why did you have to go and say that? It's not because I cleverly put in quotation marks in the statement as a natural segueway to this small write-up. No sir, it was to point out your lack of encyclopaedic knowledge on all things Super Mario Bros 3. It's not merely the game that helped launch Fred Savage's career it's also one of the best games of all time. So that means when someone offers you lost hidden super dodecahedron secret levels to such a fine piece of interactive entertainment you don't conjure up a snide remark. You say, thanks sir, can I please have a whore (you mean 'some more' - Ed).

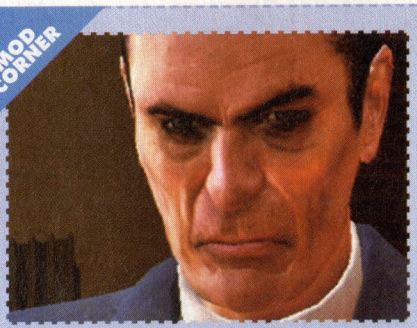


Just Curious

http://justcurio.us/
http://justcurio.us/WhatsMoreCertainTheLawsOfGravityOrTheFactThatMonkeysAreAlwaysFunny

>> I'm not one to contemplate, not because I'm not looking for any answers per se but because I frankly didn't know the meaning of the word until now. You see I thought 'to contemplate' meant to you know, do the horizontal nasty with a fine feminina. So it's no wonder phrases like "we contemplated in my car" or "we went back to her place and contemplated for hours" didn't get the response I was looking for. Oh well, here's one place on the interweb where "contemplating" doesn't mean you have to draw the blinds or shut the door. Unless you're one of those sickos who likes to contemplate in front of an audience. Man that's just plain wrong.

MOD CORNER



You Can't Handle the Truth!

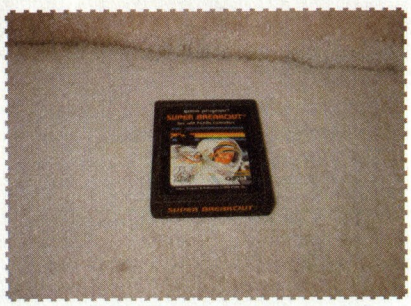
www.nailbiter.net/gman/
www.xenu.net/

>> The Half-Life 2 mod community isn't small, nor is it of a moderate size. It probably best fits into the 'quite large' category, along with that fat guy from hit TV show Lost. And what better way to use Valve's powerful graphics engine and development tools than to remake hit scenes from popular Tom Cruise movies from the mid-nineties. On a side note did you know that Cruise-control, apart from being a great actor, is crazier than a shit-house rat? It's true - he's a Scientologist, a sect of people whose highest ranking members believe that 75 million years ago there was an alien galactic ruler named Xenu who was in charge of 76 planets in our sector of the galaxy, including planet Earth. Sure there was.

Holy Geekgasm! Best. Keyboard. Ever.

www.artlebedev.com/portfolio/optimus/

>> Someone mentioned to me when they saw this gob-smackingly awesome design for a keyboard that it reminded them of 'something from Star Trek'. You know the show, the lame excuse for science-fiction loved by freakishly overweight bespectacled nerds and Steve Farrellys the world over. Sure I can see the connection, but c'mon, with every new technological invention we have to mention Star Trek? Which by the way looks as technologically advanced as a cassette player. Why can't people learn and instead when they see something futurey and cool reference the one true Nostradamus-like TV show of the last 50 years, Beyond 2000.



Your Mama is so Poor

www.lastminute-auction.com/

>> Being cheap is something you're born with, scraping every penny and only reaching for your wallet when it's absolutely required. More commonly such a person is known as a 'tight arse', the genetic offspring of a monetary hording humanoid man and woman. These people are the reason why $2 shops exist, places where you can buy crap, cheap affordable crap. And forget about going out to dinner with these people, because entrees, drinks and desert would be out of the question. What good is money if it's not spent on perishables like fine wine, food, lavish flower arrangements, croquet lessons, and high-class hookers?

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Cyberone	$59.95	Unlimited	N/A	www.cyberone.com.au
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Supernerd	$59.95	Unlimited	Nil	www.supernerd.com.au
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Bendigos.net	$89.95	Unlimted	N/A	www.bendigos.net
TPG Regional 512	$49.99	10GB + 500VoIP	shaped	www.tpg.com.au
TPG Regional 512	$49.95	20GB	shaped	www.tpg.com.au
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Tel Pacific - Lite 512	$29.95	200MB	10c MB - Capped $55	www.telpacific.com.au
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Aspark Pty Ltd S05 - Bundled Phone/Internet	$57.00	35GB	$2 / MB capped at $72	www.aspark.com.au
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www.mkmonks.com

MIDWAY

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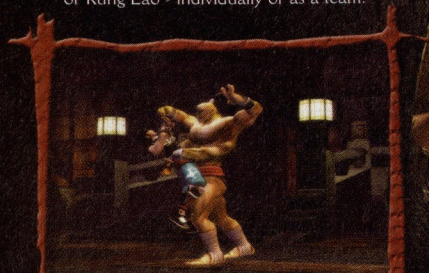

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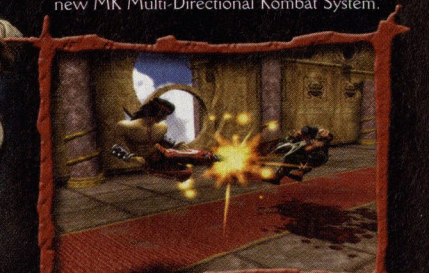

Execute classic MK II attacks, plus more Fatalities, new Multalities and vicious Brutalities.

XBOX

PlayStation 2

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Strong violence

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56 Mortal Kombat: Shaolin Monks

Midway put the fun back in Mortal Funbat. Errr... yeah.

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SEAMUS BYRNE

Causes, effects and old chestnuts

Yes, it's that time of season, kids. Men and women in white coats have released their latest studies into videogame violence and the results are irrefutable. You are more aggressive after playing violent videogames (the APA study) and you aren't more aggressive after playing violent videogames (the University of Illinois study). Depending on which side of the argument you prefer to support, pick your research result and bash your opponent over the head with it.

For many reasons, we're never going to have a definitive answer. Studies operate in correlations, for a start. One of the biggest problems here is that, even if you find a correlation between violent games and people, you can never be sure the violence hasn't simply attracted more participation from already violent people in the first place.

Still others look at the player's arousal. But I doubt anyone needs a study to know gameplay of almost any kind causes arousal. That's the nature of participative media. You get involved. Arousal as indicator of violent tendencies could easily be used to shut down weekend sport for kids across the globe.

The nature of the question — do violent games make for violent people — begs so many better questions that it is perhaps this very question that makes many gamers madder than Postal or Manhunt ever could. It's like 42. You've got to know what you really need to ask before you can actually understand the answer you need.

All our games come with ratings, which are much more enforceable here in Australia than in the US. Ultimately, the ratings are supposed to be a guide to age appropriate gameplay and the number one tool for policing such availability should be the guardians of underage gamers. Just like television, there is only so much a rating can do. Where are the studies on parental involvement with a child's social activities and their influence on a child's aggressive tendencies? Questions of parental responsibility aren't as juicy or as simplistic as required by the typical 6.30pm TV timeslot... and I'm not talking about Neighbours.

Here's another perspective the Jack Thompson's of the world (the rabid anti-gaming lawyer, not the great Aussie actor) will never understand but every gamer will. The one part of any game most likely to result in a fit of anger is bad gameplay. For most, games are a release of tensions and a form of mental and reflex exercise. Throw in some frustrating controls, bad cameras or nasty responsiveness and you've just turned the gamepad into a molatov cocktail just itching to be flung across a room.

In fact, one study that believed it had found violent games led to violent behaviour was later found to have had a major design flaw. The test revolved around a non-violent and a violent game and looked to measure subject aggression before and after each game was played. After the results were announced, some participants decided to come forward and state that it was their frustration with the controls of the violent game used that had caused them to feel aggressive. They were happy to admit their aggression, but that it was entirely formed out of frustration, not exposure to game violence.

So how about we get some knowledgeable gamers into the classification office and have them label games based not on content, but on playability. Let's ban games that could lead to TV, console and sibling injury through terrible design. That's the kind of ban that could help save gamers from themselves. As the bumper sticker says... Guns don't kill people, people who play videogames kill people.

THE HYPER SCORING SYSTEM The Overall Score – what's it all about (in a roundabout way)?

0-49	50-59	60-69	70-79	80-89	90+
These games lurk in the darkness waiting to snare clueless shoppers	You probably won't die from playing these games...	Like a few mild chuckles in an unremarkable sitcom...	If a budget price is involved you may just find some value...	Worth working extra hours at at a menial job to afford it...	Hook these games straight to your veins for a sweet hit...

With looks like that she must have a heap of emotional baggage

Play it again and you'll find even more jokes to laugh at.

PSYCHONAUTS

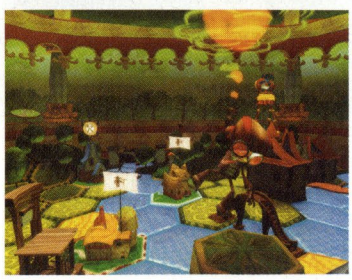
The seas will run white with **DANIEL WILKS'** rage

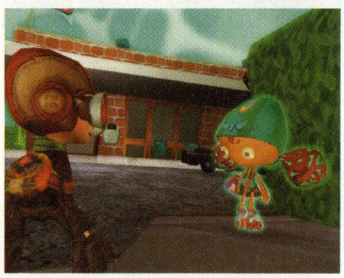
It's hard to pin down Psychonauts into a genre. It's an adventure game with players finding and using different items, objects or psychic powers to solve puzzles and advance the plot. It's also a platformer with players having to navigate difficult jump paths and use various kinds of forms of movement to get from one object to the next. It's kind of like an RPG with the huge amount of character development and a massive cast to talk to and interact with. There's also a fair amount of combat, both hand-to-hand and using psychic powers. Like I said, it's hard to pin down one genre that Psychonauts falls into so we have come up with a new genre of our own to give it a label. Sublime.

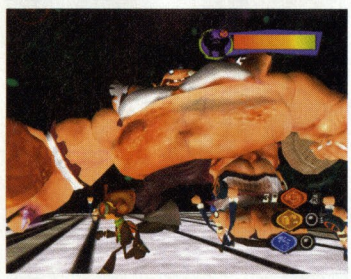
GRIM TENTACLES

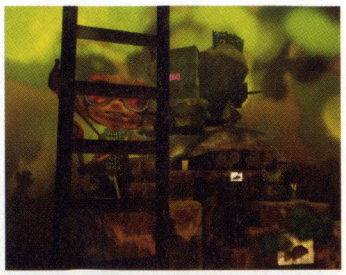
The name Tim Schafer may not mean anything to some of you but it should. Tim Schafer is responsible for some of the greatest moments of LucasArts gaming history, most notably Day of the Tentacle and Grim Fandango, the latter proving without a doubt that games can be laugh out loud funny. Psychonauts continues this vein of irreverent, clever and thoroughly adult humour, even though the setting is a children's summer camp. Well, not just any old summer camp, a psychic summer camp where children "gifted" with mind powers can learn the skills necessary to become Psychonauts, psychic soldiers capable of delving into the minds of others to unlock their emotional baggage and fight their inner demons. Into this summer camp, a place that Tim Burton probably wishes he dreamed up comes Razputin, a cocky kid who has run away from home to become a Psychonaut. He's cocky for a reason – not only does Raz have a huge amount of potential, he also has some boss goggles and a totally sweet victory dance. Although he has no parental permission to be at the camp the trainers see the potential in Raz and begin to train him – at least until his father comes to pick him up in a few days.

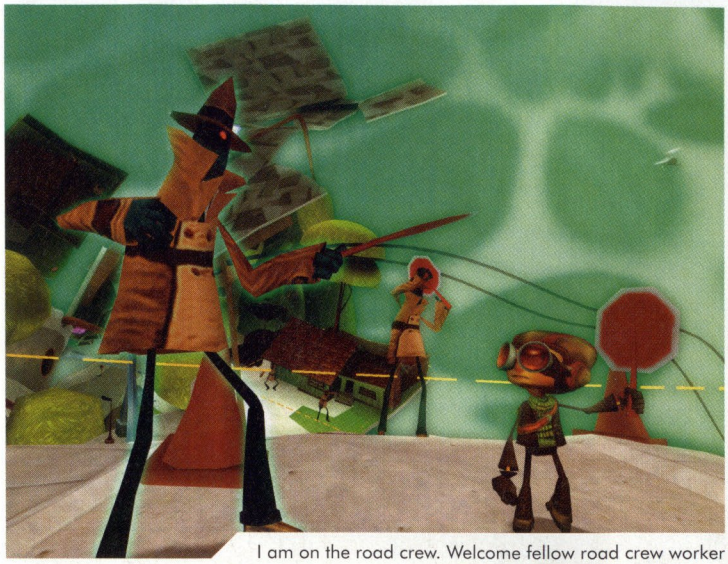
Of course things run a little off track with a megalomaniacal villain stealing the children's brains to power an army of psychic tanks bent on world domination but Raz is up to the task of saving the world, finding the brains, defeating the enemy and making you stain your trousers with laughter. As far as gameplay mechanics are concerned, there really isn't much in Psychonauts that you haven't seen before. Most of the elements, the platforming, inventory/skill management and combat are virtually identical to those seen in Ratchet & Clank 2 and the puzzle aspects will be familiar to anyone











I am on the road crew. Welcome fellow road crew worker

Wilks is right, they are boss goggles!

who has played another Tim Schafer puzzle game. What makes the game so outstanding is the way these elements are combined and the way that it seamlessly intertwines with the plot and feel of the game. Whilst most humourous games necessitate the player making their way to the next joke, in Psychonauts the gameplay is in on the joke. It's not a journey between laughs, the journey itself is damn funny.

One of the major reasons for this is the brilliant level design based around the conceit that Psychonauts can enter the minds of others. As you can image the minds of the many Burton-esque characters that populate the camp are a little on the odd side. Some highlights include the mind of a hyper-evolved mutant lungfish that sees Raz transformed into a giant city stomping force of nature known to the tiny populace as Goggalor and is so evil that he "destroyed the puppy orphanage!" and "hates children", the mind of a conspiracy theorist that is filled with creepy little Rainbow Sprites (evil girl guides) and g-men pretending (badly) to be road workers, grieving widows, gardeners, harassed housewives and the gaudy black velvet painting mind of a failed varsity wrestler. Each of the minds has a different feel and gameplay style – some are nearly purely platformer whilst others are more combat or puzzle focused, constantly keeping the player interested and amused.

EVERY CHARACTER IS VOICE ACTED AND RARELY WILL THEY SAY SOMETHING THAT ILLICITS LESS THAN A SMILE

CREEPY LITTLE IDIOT

The level design and character design are intricately intertwined so it's really impossible to separate one from the other. Luckily the characters are the levels' equal in all aspects. The characters are as wonderfully skewed as their minds both in look and what they say. Every character is voice acted and rarely will they say something that will illicit less than a smile. One of the first characters the player meets, a creepy little idiot who has to wear a tin-foil hat because he accidentally made someone's head explode has a piece of incidental dialogue that perfectly encapsulates the funny, quirky and unnerving feel of the game. He's talking quietly to a group of squirrels. Cut to a close up of his inbred face and he says, with all of the seriousness of a b-grade actor, "no, I can't do it. I can't... KILL THEM ALL!". Turn away and the squirrels are torn apart. What more could you want? <<

>> **STATING THE OBVIOUS** There are some jokes in Psychonauts that are so obvious that you can't help but laugh at how damn simple they are. In each person's mind there are a number of things to collect to upgrade powers and unlock new abilities. Figments are exactly that, glowing figments of the imagination that can be collected to gain psi rank. Mental Health pickups keep you alive and mental cobwebs can be cleaned up to release new memories. All of these pale in comparison to emotional baggage however – crying luggage that can be cheered up by finding their corresponding bag-tag.

AVAILABLE ON:
PS2 / XBOX / PC / GCN

DETAILS:

CATEGORY: Adventure
PLAYERS: 1
DEVELOPER: Double Fine
PUBLISHER: Majesco
PRICE: $99.95
RATING: M 15+
AVAILABLE: TBA

HYPER VERDICT:

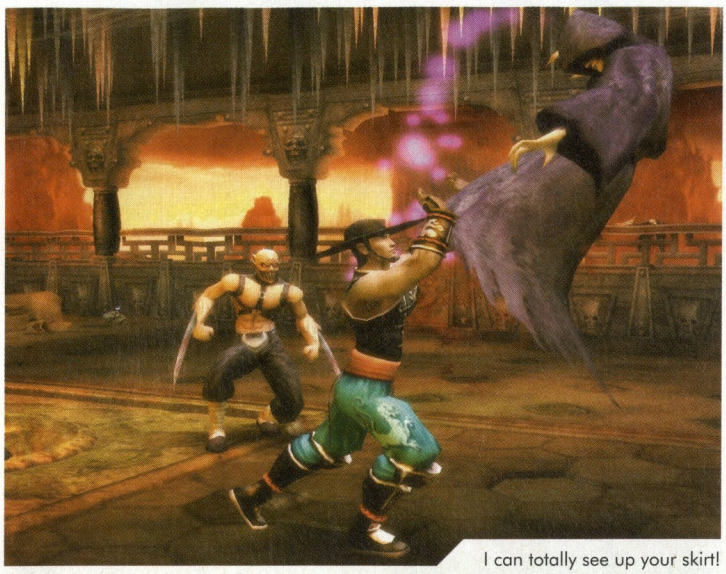
PLUS: Level design, character design, everything else.

MINUS: Some camera issues, a little frustration.

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY
90	92	94

OVERALL
94

Who is the milkman? What are the goggles for?



I can totally see up your skirt!

Where do you hang a hat like that?

MORTAL KOMBAT: Shaolin Monks

DANIEL WILKS wins – Flawed Victory

It's always a bit unnerving sitting down to play a game in a franchise that departs radically from the formula set in other games in the series. Especially fighting games. Witness Death by Degrees, the failed attempt to take the world of Tekken into an action game format, or, closer to home, the abominable Mortal Kombat Mythologies games that took the canned combo fighting game and made it into a third person steaming pile of crap.

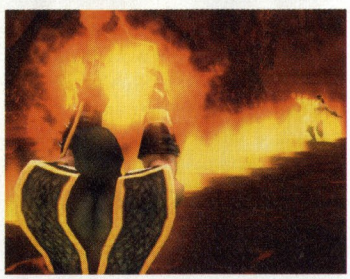
TELL US WHAT YOU REALLY THINK

When we first heard about Mortal Kombat: Shaolin Monks we couldn't help but think that another Mythologies style game was going to be inflicted on the gaming public. Then we saw some footage and it actually looked pretty good – lots of environmental/movement related puzzles, frantic multi-opponent combat and all of the things synonymous with the Mortal Kombat franchise – the characters, the blood, the special moves and most importantly the fatalities. Now that we have had a chance to play Shaolin Monks we can definitely say that the footage we saw was actually indicative of the gameplay, not just a highlight reel.

In single player, players take the role of either Liu Kang or Kung Lao and set about traveling through outworld kicking a hell of a lot of arse. Sure, there's a "plot" in there somewhere but it's inconsequential. Shao Khan and Shang Tsung are up to their old tricks (or new in terms of where the game falls in the continuum) trying to take over Earthrealm or some such nonsense and it's up to you to beat up everyone who may be thinking of helping them.

The bulk of the game is made up of either kicking arse or getting to a new area to kick arse. The arse kicking, the best aspect of the game, is cleverly handled, combining both the canned combos that have become synonymous with the MK franchise as well as open ended custom combos. All of the special moves from the fighting games return in some form or other but only require the player holding down the special attack button then the corresponding face button, making for a more streamlined and intuitive experience. To stop players from abusing their powers, all special moves drain a quickly replenishing energy bar. Using a variety of strikes, specials and canned combos, players can create long strike combos, increasing the amount of experience earned in the fight allowing them to purchase more powerful special moves, longer combos and the like. It's not the most complex fighting engine in the world but the ease with which you can pull off spectacular moves and long combos is certainly appealing.

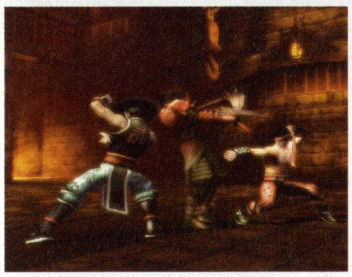
Throughout the game players unlock new skills and powers that enable them to progress. Fatalities,



brutalities, multalities (and presumably animalities, babalities and friendships) allow players to instantly kill single or multiple enemies or increases the amount of damage they do for a short time. The other abilities relate to environmental interaction or movement, such as allowing the player to destroy certain objects to open up new paths or the ability to climb, wall run,

You can unlock two other playable characters by completing the game.

Arses preparing to be kicked



double jump or jump long distances. Although the environmental puzzles are nowhere near as complex as, say, Prince of Persia, they are often more difficult to navigate for a few reasons, not the least of them being a camera that is, to put it mildly, not your friend. The camera is static with no player control, switching angles depending on where in the area the player positions the character. This seems all well and good but sometimes the camera decides to take up an arbitrary and thoroughly unhelpful position, sometimes leaving the player obscured behind an object or reduced to a tiny figure fighting in the background. Many of the jumps require nearly pixel perfect positioning to not run the risk of falling into the ubiquitous pits of spikes/thorns.

THE BULK OF THE GAME IS MADE UP OF EITHER KICKING ARSE OR GETTING TO A NEW AREA TO KICK ARSE

GOLD STATUS?

The single player game may be fun but it won't really set the world on fire. If the game was solely single player it may score in the mid 70s but there's one thing that elevates the game to almost gold status – co-op, or Ko-Op for those who like to misspell things the MK way. Two players can team up to kick the crap out of the baddies and explore areas inaccessible without another player to stand on switches. The basic levels and gameplay are exactly the same in co-op as in single player but having two people able to pull off crazy combos and juggles, swap targets in the middle of said combo or trade opponents is brilliant and perhaps one of the most enjoyable times we have had playing cooperatively. Ever. <<

>> BOSSES, BACKTRACKING AND BLAME As you can expect, MK:SM features a number of boss battles against opponents from the fighting game. The battles are interesting and staged so you'll have to learn attack sequences, patterns and the like. Most bosses will drop new movement skills enabling players to go back into areas they have already been to unlock new areas/characters, etc. In perhaps the cleverest move we have seen in a long time, in co-op, players share a life bar so it forces the players to work together rather than act as two individuals with roughly the same goal. If your life is dwindling, more than likely you're both to blame.

AVAILABLE ON:
PS2 / XBOX / PC / GCN

DETAILS:

CATEGORY: Action
PLAYERS: 1-2
DEVELOPER: Midway
PUBLISHER: Midway
PRICE: $79.95
RATING: MA 15+
AVAILABLE: Now

HYPER VERDICT:

PLUS: Co-op, custom combos, custom juggles.

MINUS: Unfriendly camera.

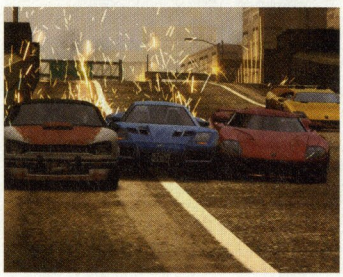
VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY
83	85	88

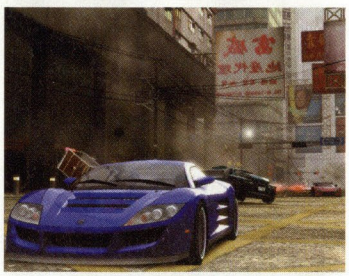
OVERALL
85

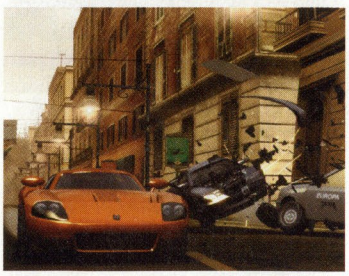
Co-op is the way of the future. Brilliant fun.

Death from above = coolest. thing. ever.

Cam's pimp-mobile in action







BURNOUT REVENGE

Isn't **CAM SHEA** getting sick of this series yet?

To answer my own subhead — no, no I'm not. And the reason for that lies largely in the effort that Criterion make with each new Burnout game to take the series further, to seriously distinguish the feel of the new game from that of the old. Burnout Revenge is no exception. It may have moved the series further away from its pure speed arcade racing roots - which won't necessarily be to everyone's taste - but the point is that once again Criterion have done enough to make Revenge feel fresh.

POINTY REVENGE

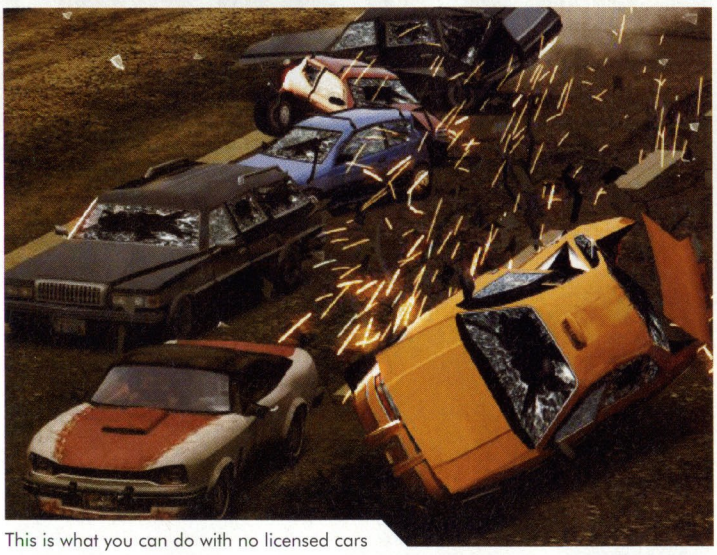
After introducing the concept of the takedown (i.e. forcing other AI cars to crash) in the last game, Criterion have upped the ante in a major way for Revenge. The game structure is now based around "revenge points", encouraging aggressive driving at every turn. While earlier games in the series rewarded you for seamlessly maneuvering through traffic, you're now rewarded for running into it. Yes, any cars (but not trucks and buses) traveling in the same direction as you can be brushed aside by your (seemingly) diamond encrusted and titanium reinforced range of ultra fast cars. This ties into a number of new and reworked game modes, and into the revenge theme of the game. The other cars are no longer objects to be feared, but weapons in your arsenal. Ramming cars not only gives you boost, but can be used to catapult them forwards and into your opponents for spectacular traffic takedowns, or left behind as wreckage that must be avoided.

Criterion have focused so heavily on the combative nature of the gameplay for Revenge that coming first is now a secondary objective. During events there are four stars up for grabs. These are earned through aggressive and showy driving — checking traffic, takedowns, dueling, drifting, boosting and so on. It's only at the end of the race, after you've been awarded your stars for your aggression levels that your place comes into play. Get gold and you'll get an extra star (with five stars being a "perfect" rating), get silver and your stars remain the same, and for bronze you'll have one taken away. So you can see how the game has moved even further towards a focus on being a complete shunt. Drive flawlessly but not aggressively and you won't get that five star rating.

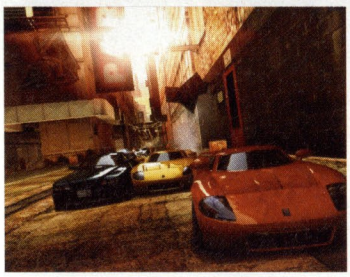
Revenge stars are used to climb your way up the ranking system. Each rank requires a certain number of points to conquer it and move up to the next slightly more extreme-titled rank. It's a good system that means you're always eyeing off the next rank and completing events to get stars. Or at least, it would be if the ranking system didn't max out well before the end of the game. When we made it to Elite there were still 150-200 or so stars left to be won. Where's the incentive to go back and pick up stray stars if they're not counting towards anything? Sure, there's probably another rank when you hit 100% but it's disappointing that after spending the game counting down points to get to the next level, it all ends rather abruptly.

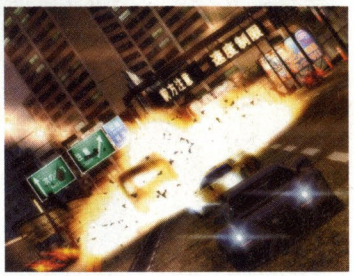
The changes to the gameplay are heavily reflected in the game modes

Unfortunately there's now no real point in driving on the wrong side of the road – the reward simply isn't worth the risk.



This is what you can do with no licensed cars





on offer. New mode Traffic Attack charges you with racking up the highest damage total you can by ramming, shunting and crashing into as much traffic as possible. Trick shots (sending traffic careening into other vehicles – preferably buses and trucks going in the opposite direction) quickly become your best friend as they'll give you the greatest score and time boosts. It's a good new mode, if a little samey after a while. Many of the familiar modes have been given makeovers too. Road Rage is even more entertaining now, as there are so many more ways to get takedowns thanks to traffic checking. Eliminator is no longer lap based but timer based, making it more unpredictable and freewheeling. Burning and Preview Laps are also back, as are a variety of GPs. Any one of the events included can also be modified to include the ability to use Crashbreakers – blowing your car up to try and score takedowns after crashing (like aftertouch takedowns but more visceral) which is a fun inclusion. Sometimes you can take out the entire field and re-start with a full boost meter, but if you miss you'll lose any boost you had.

THE OTHER CARS ARE NO LONGER OBJECTS TO BE FEARED, BUT WEAPONS IN YOUR ARSENAL

Crash mode has been given yet another makeover for Revenge, losing the icon system, but gaining a goofy starting mechanic, wind pressure while in the air, the potential for multiple Crashbreakers if you get enough stuff burning and of course, the ability to barge same way traffic while on the way to your final crashing destination. While still fun, the changes won't set the world on fire, and we were left feeling that Criterion could have done more with the junction designs.

COMPLETE SHUNT

While the new ranking system and ability to plough through traffic is fun, it has the unfortunate side effect of making Burnout Revenge far too easy. You'll rarely (if ever) have to attempt an event twice, as coming third with a good aggression rating will still unlock the next event. We also found that there's a seriously industrial strength rubber band at work with the AI. Crash repeatedly and you can still catch them, while race flawlessly and they'll always be right on your tail. While ensuring the racing is always tense, it starts to feel hollow after a while. Some courses aren't well suited to certain events either, and while there are plenty of alternate paths as part of the more open course design, there really aren't that many courses on offer. In all, while Revenge is great fun, it requires less skill than any previous Burnout game and doesn't last as long as it should.<<

>> **IT STILL LOOKS PURTY** **Revenge isn't a big step up graphically from Takedown, but considering the amount of carnage you can unleash on the road as you literally plough through traffic, Criterion have once again eked incredible performance out of both systems.**

AVAILABLE ON:

PS2 / XBOX / PC / GCN

DETAILS:

CATEGORY: Arcade racing
PLAYERS: 1-Multi
DEVELOPER: Criterion
PUBLISHER: EA
PRICE: $89.95
RATING: TBC
AVAILABLE: Now

HYPER VERDICT:

PLUS: Super fast, incredibly pretty, combative gameplay.

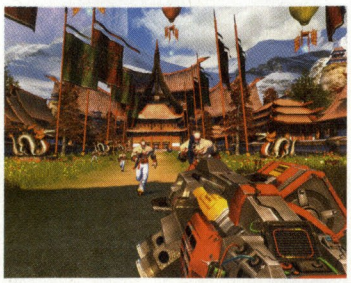
MINUS: Too easy, quite short, less skill required.

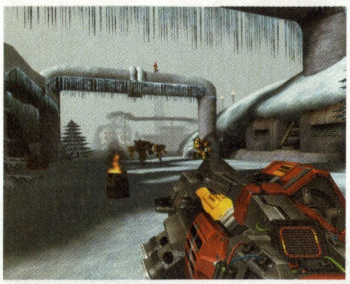
VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY
92	85	90

OVERALL

89

Awesome game but a little too easy for the hardcore fans.





!!! Just to tick you off even more, Serious Sam II features an annoying British female voiceover delivering some "classic" lines like "secret large poo has unfortunately been found". This was in the Land of the Giants mind you.

This coolness is not evident in 90% of Serious Sam II

Note to self: don't eat the mushrooms again

SERIOUS SAM II

CAM SHEA is seriously disappointed

To quote the great Fred Willard in A Mighty Wind - "wha' happened?" We always knew that Serious Sam was a game with its digital tongue firmly planted in its digital cheek, but it appears as if Croteam thought that the humour from the first game was the most important thing to push for the sequel, while ensuring all the staff had a full frontal comedy lobotomy before development commenced, cause if there's one thing this game isn't – it's funny. And yet we've got fuzzy fluffy sickly sweet worlds, wind up enemies and a Tinkly Winkly score that wouldn't be out of place in a second rate kiddie platformer. Regardless of whether this is some bizarre in-joke we just don't get, or the settings are poorly executed parodies of existing game genres (which is the analysis we're leaning towards), or Croteam just ran out of ideas in a major way, the reality is Serious Sam II has lost all the charm of the original. Even the gameplay feels watered down.

LIKE A RECORD BABY

Yes, when Serious Sam first hit PCs around the world, we loved its straight up approach to the FPS genre. It threw hundreds of enemies at you and had you spinning on the spot, wheeling around trying to take out everything as it approached, or back pedaling frantically trying to get some distance between you and the screaming army of kamikaze bombers coming up over the rise. Now, however, there are less massive outdoor areas and more cramped quarters fighting, and villages where enemies spawn on top of buildings all around. Even though there are some cool set pieces, even they're no longer compelling. As cool as being beset by enemies on all sides while riding a moving platform may sound, when it's done in a bright and shiny Ewok village it loses the tension somewhat. And indeed, that's what the new cartoony Serious Sam is completely lacking – atmosphere, and by the time you get to a legitimately cool setting (a Mortal Kombat inspired city of shrines and temples), it's too little too late.

It's not just the settings and music either. The coolest enemies are recycled from the original game, with a forgettable assortment of new creatures coming into the fold. There's the zany witches riding around on their broomsticks, there are neon balls that roll towards you, and there are clowns on unicycles. Yes, clowns on goddamn unicycles. So what if you can mount gun emplacements, use a number of vehicles, tote some pretty cool weapons and solve the most basic of physics puzzles? The core drive to get through the game just ain't there.

Even the much vaunted new engine (from makers of old engine) is wasted – aside from a couple of bright sparks, the worlds and level design are so messy that even running on Source we wouldn't want to come back to this one. Croteam have dropped the ball. <<

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

DETAILS:

CATEGORY: FPS
PLAYERS: 1-16 (PC), 1-4 (Xbox)
DEVELOPER: Croteam
PUBLISHER: 2K Games
PRICE: $69.95 (PC), $79.95 (Xbox)
RATING: MA15+
AVAILABLE: October 14

HYPER VERDICT:

PLUS: Cool temple level, weapons.

MINUS: No atmosphere, action is far from compelling.

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY
79	40	65

OVERALL
66

Serious Sam just ain't what it used to be.

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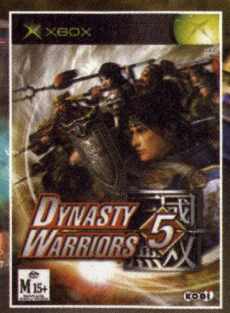
DYNASTY WARRIORS 5 真・三國無双



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M Moderate violence

XBOX DOLBY DIGITAL PlayStation.2 DOLBY DIGITAL PRO LOGIC II Produced by Omega Force

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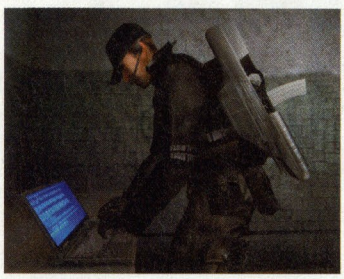
He's already dead buddy, you're just being mean now

The Hoth level was a bit of a shock



CONFLICT: Global Storm

PATRICK KOLAN does a slight double take

Conflict: Global Storm, set in the near-future, pits the original heroes of Conflict: Desert Storm, your standard outfit of generic anti-terror specialists, against 'March 33' – appropriately, a global terrorist threat. Thankfully, the generic aspects of the game pretty much end with the characters.

SUBTLE BUT EFFECTIVE

This the first significant overhaul the series has seen, and the improvements are many and laudable. The game is a real looker, with sharp textures, increased poly counts, much improved animation and a subtle but effective physics engine.

Level design is excellent, and while progression is fairly linear, there are always a number of ways to deal with any given situation. Latter levels see diverse locations with very nifty set pieces, such as burnt out villages, various warehouses and interior sets, lush jungles, snowfields, and plenty of street-level combat.

Controls have been remapped, providing more intuitive and logical input. The new targeting system feels tighter and more accurate, and the added ability to 'cook' grenades is very handy if you're outnumbered and outgunned. Ammo conservation has been scaled back a little bit too. There's usually plenty of guns to pilfer from downed enemies, and though you can only carry a sidearm and two rifles or heavy arms at a time, making use of your team mates' innate abilities ensures you've pretty much always got enough rounds.

AI, a major sticking point for many stealth-action games, is some of the most surprising I've seen to date. Gone are the stilted and repetitive routines of yesteryear, replaced by enemies that know when to stay put, when to evade, and when to flank you and pop you one in the rear. Enemies cooperate, prioritise and use logical tactics.

On more than one occasion, I was guiding my team along with the revamped, vastly improved 'command' controls, carefully watching for Charlies, when my sniper drops down and proactively starts picking off guys. Your team mates are gung ho, carefully using cover, conserving ammo, and making sure their shots count. As good as the AI is, even on normal difficulty, the enemy is very unforgiving. Combined with the limited saves and the expansive levels, getting overwhelmed in a firefight toward the end of the level is going to make you wish there was a quicksave option.

Use of vehicles is a little clunky, too. You must still 'inhabit' each member of the team and guide them onto the vehicle – there's no way to call them to assemble automatically. This is surprising, considering how much polish was applied to most aspects of the game.

Pivotal have given this series CPR and defibrillated this sucker back into 'hot game' territory.

AVAILABLE ON:
PS2 / XBOX / PC / GCN

DETAILS:

CATEGORY: Action
PLAYERS: 1-Multi
DEVELOPER: Pivotal
PUBLISHER: SCi
PRICE: $89.95 (PC), $99.95 (PS2, Xbox)
RATING: MA 15+
AVAILABLE: Now

HYPER VERDICT:

PLUS: A much needed revamp for the series.

MINUS: Can be frustrating, vehicle mechanics.

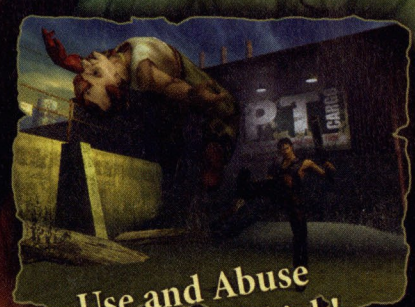
VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY
86	85	89

OVERALL
88

A very pleasant surprise and well worth your time.

New Adventure. New Sidekick. Same Ridiculous Amount of Carnage!

Nonstop Deadite-Blasting Action!



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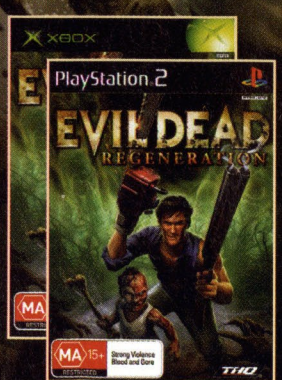

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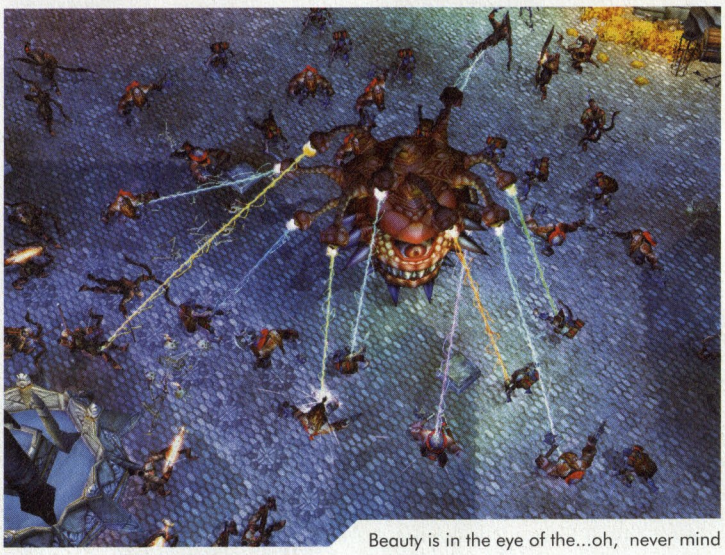
!!! D&D was the first gaming system to get sued for killing a teenager who was too stupid to realise that just because his Level 25 Elf was dead, he didn't need to be.

We have no idea what's going on either



Beauty is in the eye of the...oh, never mind

DRAGONSHARD

ANTHONY FORDHAM gets his drag on... erm, is that right?

Throughout the history of RTS, we've seen some pretty whacky resources. We've seen alien crystals from beyond the moon (C&C), ore that just oozes out of the ground to be scraped off by garbage trucks (Red Alert), we've even had plain, ordinary water (Dark Reign). But this is the first game to use the decaying corpse of a celestial dragon, in orbit around the planet, as the source of periodically regenerating resource fields.

COLLECTING CRYSTALS AGAIN

Okay, so the actual "shards" are just familiar crystals, like you find in everything from C&C to Starcraft. But the point is that they rain down from a dragon. They are, in fact, dragon shards.

Dragonshard is a fantasy RTS by Liquid, and uses D&D's new Eberron campaign setting. The whole world is a dead dragon, on top of its evil brother Khyber.

The double-layer nature of the world is important. While the surface is pretty traditional - grass, trees, resource fields - it's the underworld that sets the game apart from its RTS brethren. The underworld is full of gold, power-ups and of course plenty of NPC monsters to slaughter. Combine the upper world and the underworld, and you've got a blend of trad RTS and equally trad RPG dungeon crawling.

The units in the game reflect this. Rather than pumping out hundreds of anonymous units, each player creates captains. These captains can be reinforced - above ground - by soldier units. The number of soldier units each captain controls depends on the captain's level. Yes, you level-up units, just like in an RPG.

Of course, Warcraft 3 has this kind of thing as well, in its heroes, but in Dragonshard, EVERY unit is a hero, except the Champions, which are better. Champions don't level up but they sure do pack a punch, and they can be further augmented by items and buffs found in the underworld. Each player can also summon a Leviathan, which is basically a tank unit that makes assaulting a base more than a little difficult.

So each game of Dragonshard involves summoning a Champion, recruiting and levelling up a few captains, then travelling to the underworld to kill monsters and collect power ups. Then it's back to the surface to assault the enemy with this augmented force.

Some might call this hybridisation of RPG and RTS kind of awkward, and it is, a little. There's an element of "jack of all trades" syndrome in Dragonshard. It's not the greatest RTS ever and it sure isn't an RPG.

It is different, though. It's a break from the over-familiar RTS mechanic, and questing through the underworld is satisfying. The above-ground RTS element is less so, because armies are a little too perfectly balanced. One for gamers who like D&D, but hate all that tedious messing about with safety throws and combat tables. <<

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

DETAILS:

CATEGORY: RTS
PLAYERS: 1-8
DEVELOPER: Liquid Entertainment
PUBLISHER: Atari
PRICE: $89.95
RATING: M15+
AVAILABLE: Now

HYPER VERDICT:

PLUS: It's different, and the underworld is fun.

MINUS: Jack of all trades.

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY
79	75	85

OVERALL
81

A smooth and moderately enjoyable RTS-RPG cocktail.

DARKWATCH™

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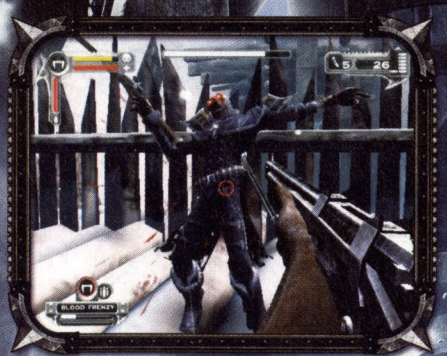
Exciting mix of Gothic Horror and the Wild West



Killer arsenal of weapons and vampire powers

Killer arsenal of weapons and vampire powers

www.darkwatchgame.com

MA 15+ RESTRICTED

Strong horror violence

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XBOX

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PlayStation 2

UBISOFT

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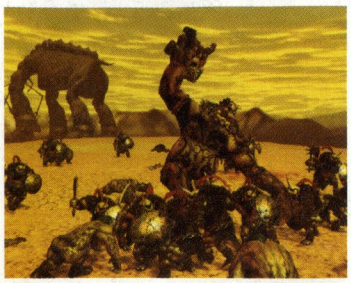

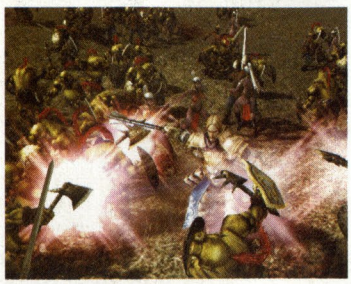

Right. We get it. Rain drops on the game's metaphorical camera is a really neat little graphical trick and absolutely the flavour of the moment. When it's rain falling on Samus' visor, it's cool and plausible. But c'mon guys! A camera floating about in the middle of high-fantasy medieval combat? Now that's just bad pants.

Dynasty Warriors called - they want their schtick back

It's a sawed fight - geddit!

KINGDOM UNDER FIRE: Heroes

MARCH STEPNIK preps for the metal air guitar world championships...

It's always a real treat to witness the induction of a new staple into any game genre. In last year's Kingdom Under Fire: Crusaders' case, it was the cock-rock soundtrack to button-mashing battle that was not so much a nod but an all-out pilfer of Koei's masterful design choice to put the rock 'n' roll back into high fantasy combat. Ahh, it's just so good to hack at orcs and dark elves with four on the floor. So much so that from this point onwards any feudal/fantasy third-person button-mashing war game just won't feel right without squealing guitars and thumping double kick-pedal drums to paint the totality of medieval combat.

DUELLING GUITARS

However I digress; Kingdom Under Fire: Heroes is a follow-up to Crusaders - a curious hybrid of Koei's Dynasty Warriors style action play and the KUF series' own roots as a PC real-time strategy game. The mix was intriguing; rather detailed RTS mechanics (such as origins of attack - archers, for example, didn't like firing into the sun) sat alongside simple hack 'n' slash gameplay to rather impressive and addictive results. With some really strong visuals and a well written story, the game got a huge following. It was, however, a flawed experience - the execution of commanding not just a single character but entire groups of units left a bit to be desired.

Heroes is essentially The Crusaders 1.5. But rather than being a cynical exercise, there's been some good, honest upgrades made to the game system. You can now set waypoints on the game's overlayed mini-map, allowing you to better take advantage of the lay of the land and all the related combat bonuses and penalties. There's now the ability to vary the camera distance from the action a few extra notches, and control has become easier although you'll still need to dive into direct control of your hero units to do any serious damage.

It's a little disappointing, then, to see that the tutorials are so basic; there's a surprising amount of depth here that is easily glossed over or missed unless you've a natural affinity with such concepts. The interface too has been kept as simple as possible, and if the desired effect was a more immersive experience then Phantagram has succeeded. You'll have to study your surrounds carefully and learn to read a fairly threadbare map and plan accordingly.

With a massive single player campaign (set five years before the original), a good custom mission system and support for six people in multiplayer, Heroes is an absolutely massive game. While the setting and story is utterly familiar, the dialogue is top notch – if not a little dry. If you like stalking the woods cautiously with an army of willing, then running headlong into button mash-tastic battle, Heroes is most definitely for you.

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

DETAILS:

CATEGORY: Strategy Action
PLAYERS: 1-6 (Xbox Live)
DEVELOPER: Phantagram
PUBLISHER: HES Interactive
PRICE: $89.95
RATING: TBC
AVAILABLE: Now

HYPER VERDICT:

PLUS: Gorgeous graphics, massive single player, fleshed out multiplayer.

MINUS: A bit unforgiving and still a bit chaotic in the midst of combat.

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY
85	80	79

OVERALL
81

A medieval button masher with a bit of brain.

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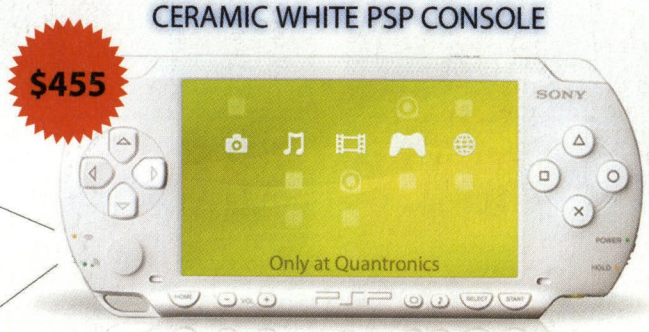

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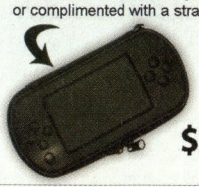

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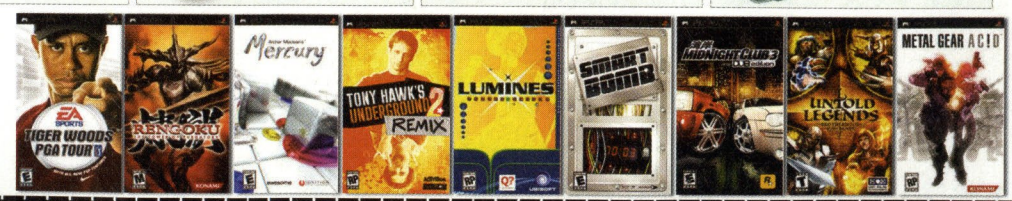

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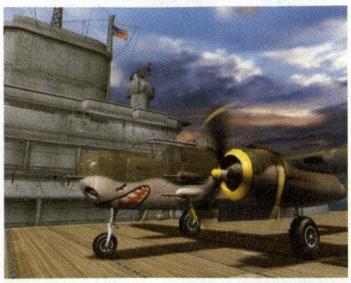
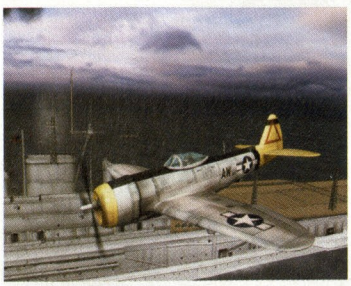




!!! Check out Tora! Tora! Tora! (1970) a movie romp that poos all over Pearl Harbor (the film that is).

Ooh, you sunk my battleship

It's just captivating - plane and simple

HEROES OF THE PACIFIC

JOHN DEWHURST gets higher than he's ever been in his life...

Heroes of the Pacific is a thrilling, arcade action flight "sim" which uses the War in the Pacific as its canvas. Now I'm no war expert, so US fighter pilots may well have been called to take down "Japs" in jeeps, while repelling incoming bombers and strafing landing vessels. And so what if Warspeed allows you to throw your P-40C Warhawk into afterburner mode? Uncle Sam needs all of it to take down the Japanese fleet...

FIGHTIN' ROUND THE WORLD

Heroes of the Pacific follows the exploits of one Lt. Crowe, an American fighter pilot who debuts at the infamous Japanese invasion of Pearl Harbour. There he witnesses the death of his brother Charlie, a sailor aboard the sinking USS Arizona. Fuelled by the need to avenge his brother, he flies around the Pacific, destroying the Japanese fleet as he rises through the ranks of the air force.

Bland story aside, Heroes of the Pacific is about dog fighting: spiraling in pursuit of targeting arrows, above sandy shores and lagoons, through clouds and plumes of gunfire. There are the familiar variations in play, including the defense of a ship or plane from incoming enemy attack, and the pursuit of enemy targets. Crowe is often called on to destroy stationary targets like radio towers or submarines as well, but these aren't nearly as interesting as chasing down enemy fighters or heading off a squadron of enemy bombers.

Each mission follows a strictly linear progression but some drama is achieved from the steady increase in workload and the introduction of different tasks. Destroy anti-air units and stationary bombers on the ground as fighters emerge to protect them. Direct your wingmen to take out targets while you protect a different craft. The pacing is fairly spot on within each mission.

Also thrilling is the beautiful Pacific Ocean and its islands. The gameworld has a wonderful sense of space. The flying model has a strong sense of motion and the detail on the ground (as you zoom down, ever closer to your little prey) is really nice. The ocean laps in convincing fashion, clouds are blind cover and when you begin to take a good deal of damage, your view becomes clouded by flames and smoke.

Rounding it all off, the game boasts some stunning art direction. The comic book menu design and exciting archival newsreel footage evoke the excitement of gung ho WWII propaganda. Bright colours, a thrilling and colourful musical score, and streaks and artifacts on the title screen create a strong sense of era. It's a pity that the voice of our hero is a nasal, brooding child of the '90s, not a plucky, naïve enlistment.

Heroes of the Pacific is a Top Gun style game that mixes the movie matinee of a lost era with exhilarating aerial maneuvering. That said, limited variation means the campaign is best on its first run. <<

AVAILABLE ON:
PS2 / XBOX / PC / GCN

DETAILS:

CATEGORY: Combat Flight Action
PLAYERS: 1-Multi
DEVELOPER: IR Gurus
PUBLISHER: Codemasters
PRICE: $89.95 (PC), $99.95 (PS2, Xbox)
RATING: M
AVAILABLE: Now

HYPER VERDICT:

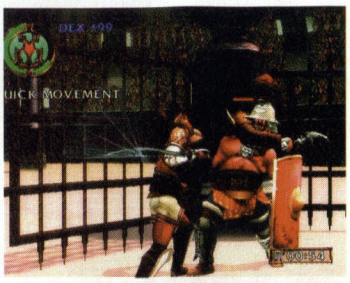
PLUS: Great sense of flight, beautiful locations, good missions.

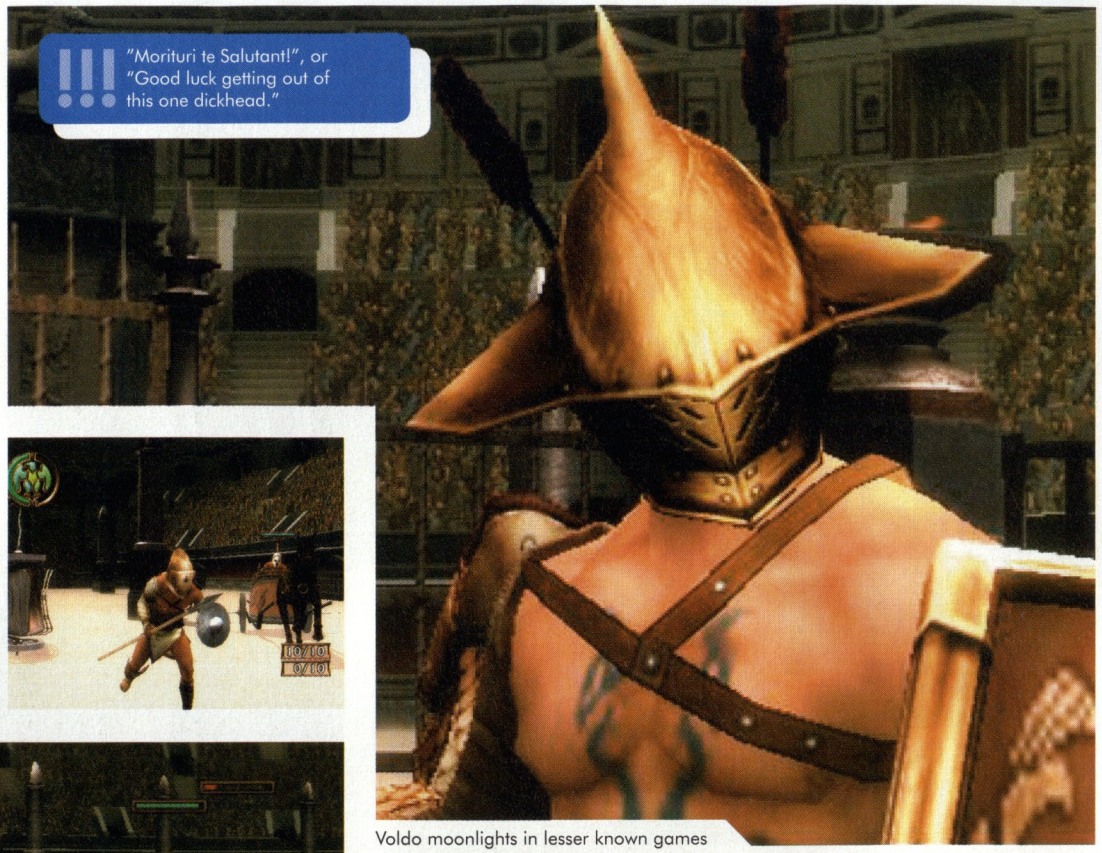
MINUS: Bogus story, campaign missions are strictly linear.

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY
80	80	70

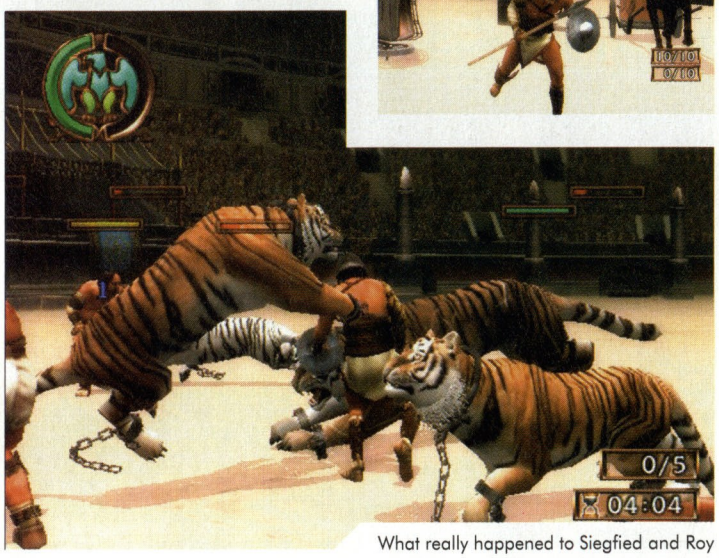
OVERALL
75

A solid arcade action flight sim with some great design.





Voldo moonlights in lesser known games



What really happened to Siegfied and Roy

COLOSSEUM: Road to Freedom

DANIEL WILKS can almost smell the man musk

Koei, known for their seemingly annual Dynasty Warriors series have taken a break from publishing action games set in ancient China to publish an action game set in ancient Rome. The plot, identical to countless Italian Sword and Sandal epic of the 60s sees a slave turned gladiator fighting in the arena to buy his freedom. Apparently you're something of a hot commodity – you have to pay one million cisterces to your owner/trainer to buy your freedom, no small feat considering that the most successful Roman sportsman, Diocles the Red only made 36 million cisterces during his career in which he won an unprecedented 1500 or so (reports vary) chariot races (thanks for the history lesson, nerd. Ed.) and you, the player, have only 50 days to make your money.

HOT DUMPING ACTION

The basic framework for the game is excellent – choose your style of gladiator by answering a couple of questions before being dumped into the middle of the action but you quickly come to discover that once the initial joy of being able to kill other oiled up men in the arena (along with the occasional bull or tiger) there is no real depth to the game. Gameplay is broken up into two distinct parts – fighting in the arena and training.

We'll start with the training because it's the least interesting part of the game. Every other day the player has a chance to train their character by joining in either a number of mini-games or mock battles. The mini-games, by and large are simple rhythm games that see you backing buttons in time to do sit-ups, pushups, squats, bridges, duck rotating poles and the like. Each training day the player can do two of these mini games. How successful you are at training dictates the number of training points you can spend to buy different kinds of food to level up your attributes. Mock battles are identical to normal arena combat aside from having special criteria such as knocking an opponent unconscious in under a minute. Whilst the ability to train adds some needed depth to the game, the games are dull and repetitive making for a tedious break in gameplay rather than anything fun.

Arena combat on the other hand is something of a hoot, though not without some serious flaws. Players can equip their gladiator with numerous weapons and pieces of armour either bought from a vendor or picked up from fallen foes, making sure not to overburden the character. The fighting engine is quite deep, featuring two buttons for each limb (high and low attacks) and numerous weapon styles including dual wield, unarmed, sword and large shield and sword and small shield, each with their own special abilities. <<

AVAILABLE ON:
PS2 / XBOX / PC / GCN

DETAILS:
CATEGORY: Action
PLAYERS: 1
DEVELOPER: Goshow
PUBLISHER: Koei
PRICE: $69.95
RATING: MA
AVAILABLE: September 30

HYPER VERDICT:

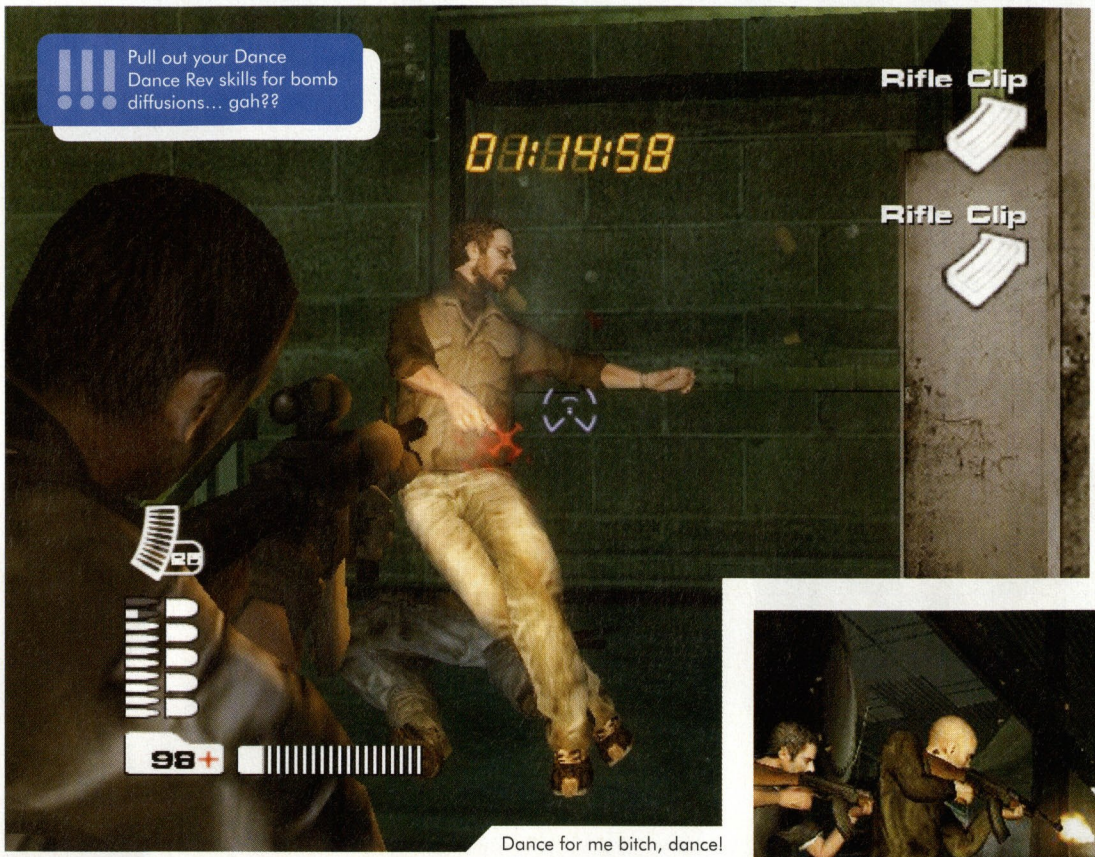
PLUS: Strangely addictive, decent fighting engine, hugely customisable.

MINUS: Terrible camera, dull mini games, goes nowhere.

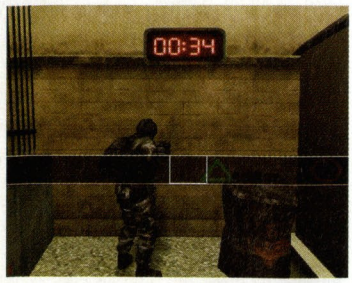
VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY
78	82	73

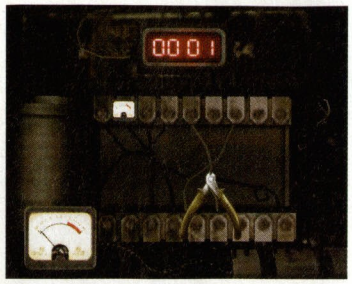
OVERALL
71

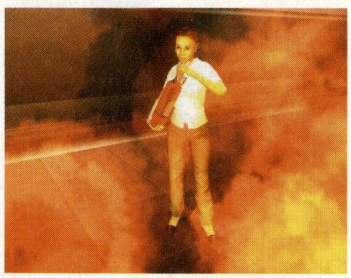
We need more gladiator games.

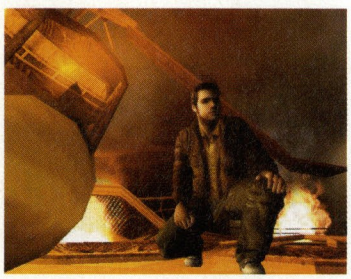


Dance for me bitch, dance!









Stand and deliver, I'm yours (blame Cam for this one)

WITHOUT WARNING

Does **JOHN DEWHURST** really want to be Jack Bauer?

You can see where Capcom is coming from. Who didn't love "24"? Sneaking around, against the clock, Jack filled to the eyeballs with drugs, against the clock, double-crossing, his beautiful daughter waiting for me to save her from the captors and always the ticking of the clock... Here we have a third person action game that has you controlling a cast of characters who find themselves amid a terrorist attack in a chemical plant. Switching back and forth between a number of characters, over just a few tense hours? Sounds cool.

JIVE TURKEYS?

The six characters are made up of three US covert ops who've been assigned to deal with the threat, and three civilians, unlucky turkeys that they are. Each character starts in a different location around the plant and moves through their own story. The military guys are following orders obviously, so they go about disarming bombs and whatnot. The civs have their own agendas – the security guard Dave Wilson, for example, is looking for his buddy. Additionally, some enjoy very limited use of weaponry, which changes the gameplay up quite a bit. They cross paths and join forces to stop the terrorist threat.

There's a great deal going on, so the characters are distinguished by their weaponry if nothing else. Only one unit ever has the shotgun, same with the sniper rifle. So you're forced to play discreet episode differently due to your arsenal. This gives a nice variety as you progress beyond the six different hair-dos.

Without Warning doesn't avoid linear play, which isn't necessarily a bad thing. Hit that switch and out come the target dumbies from stage left. Unfortunately, it's full of the sort of inconsistencies we've come to know in games. Spawning enemies, blue keys, yadda yadda, you know the drill. And sadly, the ticking clock element is largely for drama's sake, adding little to actual play.

It can feel artificial at times but Without Warning hardly ever feels downright bad. The camera in particular is very strong. While it's a third person game, you actually play as if it were an FPS and your character bobs around trying desperately to not block your view. The firefights are very immediate and brutal. For such fast paced, intense and sporadic combat, the enemy AI is passable (even if their entrances aren't), and when your character receives damage, the screen glosses over red and the view is violently shaken.

There's not a lot of hunting for keys and the like, most obstacles like bombs to diffuse or locks to pick are solved by simple rhythm games and trial and error jigging. These are nice mini-game touches but come across as light and a little hammy.

Circle Studios make a strong case for a serious presentation of a very simple game style. It's a bit silly, it's also fast-paced and fun. <<

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

DETAILS:

CATEGORY: Action
PLAYERS: 1
DEVELOPER: Circle Studio
PUBLISHER: Capcom
PRICE: $89.95
RATING: MA 15+
AVAILABLE: October 28

HYPER VERDICT:

PLUS: Variety in play, easy to pick up, great controls.

MINUS: Very linear, little replay value, lightweight.

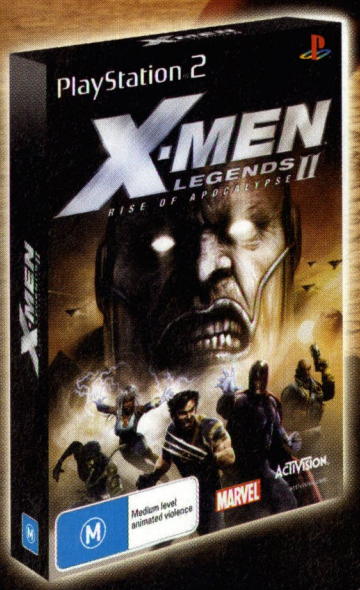
VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY
82	64	75

OVERALL
76

Without Warning is certainly fun but it won't change your life.

A COMMON ENEMY

AN UNCOMMON ALLIANCE



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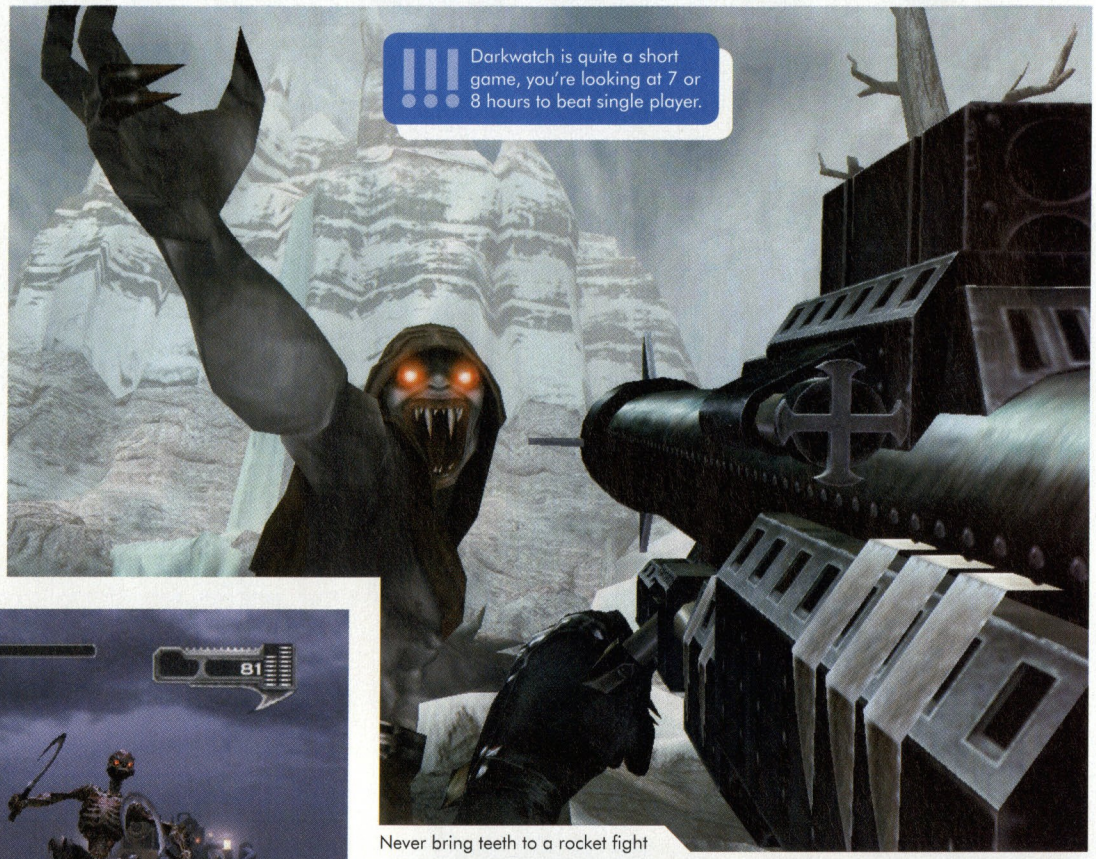

Darkwatch is quite a short game, you're looking at 7 or 8 hours to beat single player.

Never bring teeth to a rocket fight

The Man With No Name meets the Men With No Skin

DARKWATCH: Curse of the West

DIRK WATCH thinks they spelt his name wrong

Shotgun-battleaxe. Ponder for a second the true awesomeness of that phrase. Shotgun-battleaxe. We used to think the coolest thing in the world would be a ninja fighting a polar bear in a zeppelin that crashed into a vampire and exploded but now I have to amend that vision to have the ninja wielding an old-timey Japanese shotgun-battleaxe. Although Darkwatch doesn't appear to contain any ninjas or polar bears, the main character, Jericho Cross is a vampire who can wield the shotgun-battleaxe and hijack a war-train, which everyone knows is the spiritual brother of the zeppelin.

HOT GAMEPLAY INJECTIONS

Although the Wild West is not the most common setting for FPS games, Darkwatch steers clear from alienating players who may not be fans of the western genre by injecting a little of everything into the game world. There are vampires, demons, zombies, vampire zombie demons and the like as well as high technology and low moral standards. The game closely resembles Halo in most aspects – the ability to carry two weapons as well as grenades/dynamite, a recharging shield, levels comprising of long corridors/canyons leading to either a choke point for a set piece or an open area for a long fight, a Warthog-like drivable vehicle and a disembodied female sidekick, but if you're going to steal ideas, you may as well steal from the best. While unoriginal, the combination of familiar gameplay and gritty setting make Darkwatch a compelling experience.

Controls are good and tight for the most part with only one slight gripe – apparently vampires are rather floaty creatures. Cross can double jump using his vampire strength, allowing you to get to high areas quickly or utilise the Y axis in gun battles but the second half of the jump floats for a huge amount of time, making it more than a little odd. Throughout gameplay, Cross can learn a number of vampire powers to use when his blood meter is filled. He has a choice between good and evil paths to gaining these powers but other than selection it has little effect on the course of the game. The only real thing that stops Darkwatch from being a classic is the fact that it doesn't take advantage of its own setup. Jericho Cross is vulnerable during sunlight hours (unable to double jump, use his powers or regenerating shield) but only two short levels play with this concept. Later in the game he can drive a weapon laden buggy around for some mayhem but the level only lasts a few minutes. All weapons double as melee weapons (shotgun–battleaxe) but the range of weapons is small. It's also quite a short game. On the upside, Darkwatch does contain a fairly robust Xbox Live enabled multiplayer for up to 16 players. All of the maps are custom made for multiplayer and feature a great mix of indoor and outdoor areas.

AVAILABLE ON:
PS2 / XBOX / PC / GCN

DETAILS:
CATEGORY: FPS
PLAYERS: 1-16
DEVELOPER: High Moon
PUBLISHER: Ubisoft
PRICE: $99.95
RATING: MA 15+
AVAILABLE: Now

HYPER VERDICT:

PLUS: Shotgun-battleaxe, great multiplayer maps, battleaxe-shotgun.

MINUS: Short, derivative, fails to capitalise on strengths.

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY
88	86	84

OVERALL
84

The game that invented the shotgun-battleaxe. Bravo!

BROTHERS IN ARMS™

EARNED IN BLOOD

TAKING COMMAND ISN'T EASY.

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MA 15+ Strong violence
RESTRICTED

PC DVD

XBOX

XBOX LIVE

PlayStation.2 NETWORK PLAY

DELL

THE WAY IT'S MEANT TO BE PLAYED NVIDIA

gearbox software

UBISOFT

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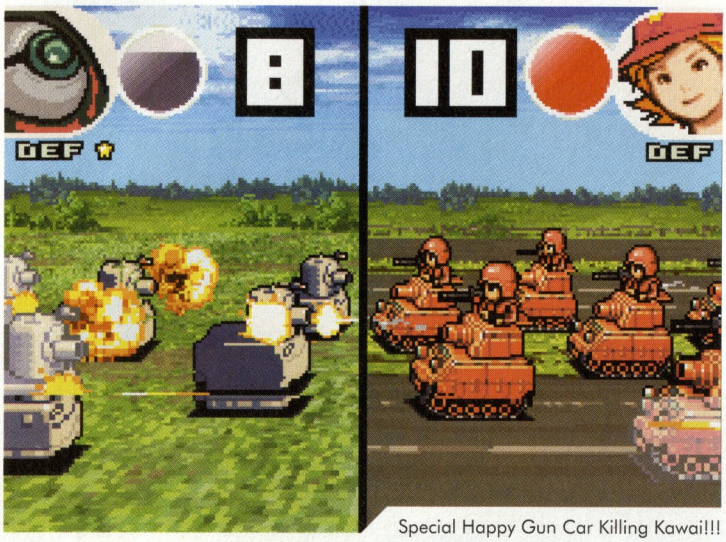
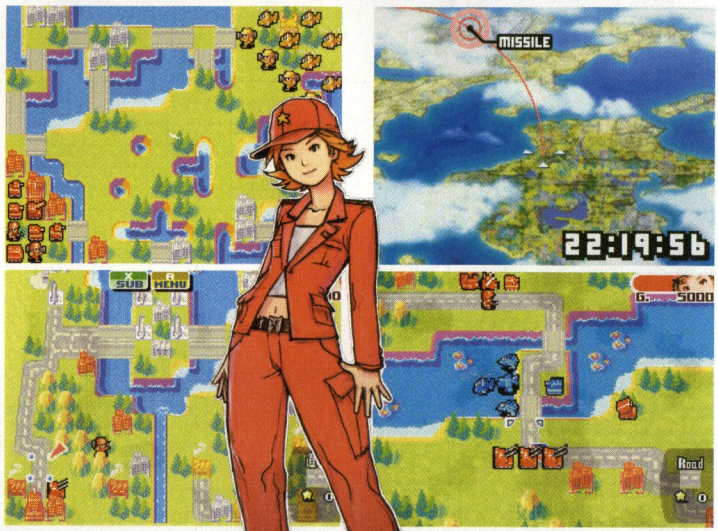


Special Happy Gun Car Killing Kawai!!!



ADVANCE WARS: Dual Strike

Taking a look at the screenshots you may notice that Advance Wars: DS reuses a fair amount of the sprites and animation seen the GBA original. Couple this with the fact that the game only has a handful of new features that take advantage of the dual and touch screen setup of the DS, it's fair to say this is essentially more of the same. But before you look at the score then back at well, wherever this sentence is on the page, there is one thing about this series that needs to be mentioned. It's been said before, but Advance Wars is the turn-based strategy equivalent of crack cocaine, or for some, a day at a theme park with unlimited fairy floss. Ok, so even though Dual Strike doesn't break the mould, nor make any fundamental changes to the mechanics, it's still a solid entry to the series and the best strategy title to see a handheld release since, well, the last Advance Wars.

BET YOUR ASS

It's hard to imagine that there are people out there that haven't played Advance Wars, and for those that haven't (and can read) here's a quick summary - Advance Wars provides fantasy-based modern strategy combat with infantry, tanks, choppers and artillery guns all under the command of a CO, whose own unique attributes affect each unit on the grid-like field of combat. Sound absolutely awesome? You bet your ass it does, and it plays like a dream with Japanese twins (or Thai sisters - Ed) come true and it's only second to Sid Meir's Civilisation in the addictive stakes.

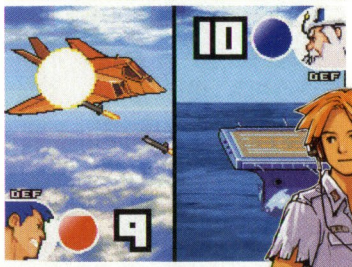
Dual Strike continues the storyline first laid out in the GBA original, with the many factions and armies we've all come to know (and love) like Orange Star, Yellow Comet and Blue Moon joining forces to battle the Black Hole Army. Those of you that may have thought that the Black Hole Army was disposed of last time around, you forgot, much like they did, that they were in possession of some sort of secret super weapon allowing them to regain their global-conquest footing.

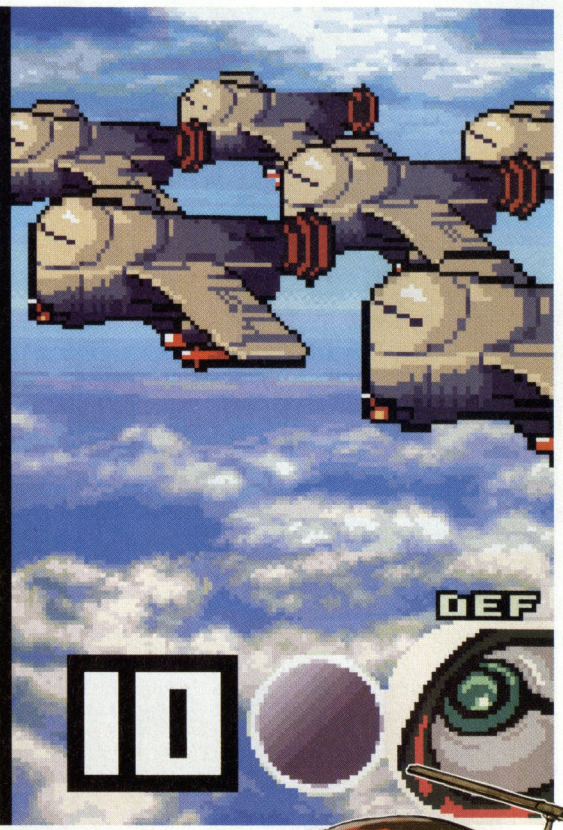
Plot nonsense aside, having one foe does pose an interesting change to the overall structure of the campaign mode. In the original title there was a large number of opposing forces and to avoid a sense of repetition with this new setup, and possibly to inject a little bit more variety, there are several non-progressive maps that pit allied armies against each other, usually to develop friendships and give the large number of COs the chance to show off their abilities. As per previous outings each mission in the campaign is essentially do or die, leaving no room for defeat on the battlefield and hence making the campaign mode quite linear, as seen in Intelligent Systems' other flagship strategy series, Fire Emblem.

With the new handheld format to work with, Intelligent Systems have added a few new notable features, such as utilising the dual screens and the ability to use more than one CO on certain maps. However these additions only bring slight variations to the table; for example the dual screen maps essentially provide two separate battlefields whereby the player has the option to command both armies or leave the secondary work to the AI. The biggest addition however is the ability to have two COs on a map and be able to switch between them at regular intervals, which leaves room for some interesting combinations of land, air and sea specialists and helps add a new layer to the strategy. For example if you use Max to draw out enemies with his superior tank firepower you could then switch to Grit and let his vastly superior artillery skills finish off the job.

BE WARNED

As such the missions themselves vary quite considerably due to the larger number of COs, map types and





Super Happy Fun Explosion Massacre!!!

Super Gun Tank Big Happy Satisfaction!!!

!!! Combat mode eschews turn-based and puts you in control of a single unit in real-time.

weather conditions, and bring in a hefty dose of difficulty in the latter missions. It's worth noting though that veterans of the series should have no problem breezing through the first half of the campaign mode, paving the way for some easy ranks and upgrades. Apart from the campaign mode the game does offer an almost limitless number of options, from countless maps to buy, various multiplayer modes to play and the all new Survival mode.

VETERANS OF THE SERIES SHOULD HAVE NO PROBLEM BREEZING THROUGH THE FIRST HALF OF THE CAMPAIGN

Survival mode, although great, is a definite test of endurance and unless you're looking to kill 24 hours or so, selecting this mode is a serious investment, so be warned.

With the stylus, two screens, improved graphics and other features, the initial thought of seeing Advance Wars on Nintendo DS definitely exceeded the end product. But strategy titles, especially those that are turn-based, are so set in their genre and rules that it comes as little surprise that Dual Strike looks and plays like very much like an Advance Wars game. Dual Strike is a more than worthy entry to the series and once you take away the sense of familiarity, the improved variation, tighter mission design, and minor additions make this arguably the best entry into the series and a must for strategy fans everywhere.

Kosta Andreadis

>> WHEREFORE ART THOU NEW UNITS? Most new entries into established strategy series' usually bring a fair number of new units to the fold. Although there are new units to be found in Dual Strike, essentially all we get is a new tank (the way too expensive Megatank) among a few other land and sea additions such as a repair boat and a large floating bomb. Although it seems strange, probably the main reason behind the lack of change to the unit structure lies in the static nature of the series. The core design of Advance Wars follows a simple chess/pen and paper like setup where each unit has its counterpoint, forming an almost perfect balance.

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

DETAILS:

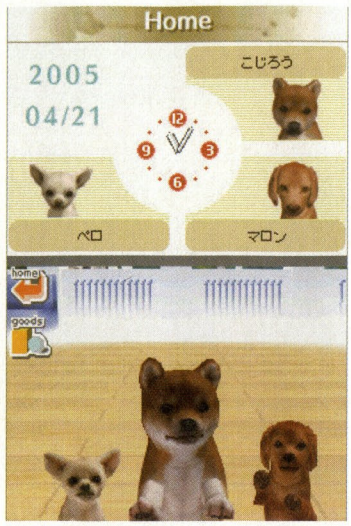
CATEGORY: Strategy
PLAYERS: 1-8 (Combat), 1-4 (others)
DEVELOPER: Intelligent Systems
PUBLISHER: Nintendo
PRICE: $69.95
RATING: G8+
AVAILABLE: October 6

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY
80	78	92

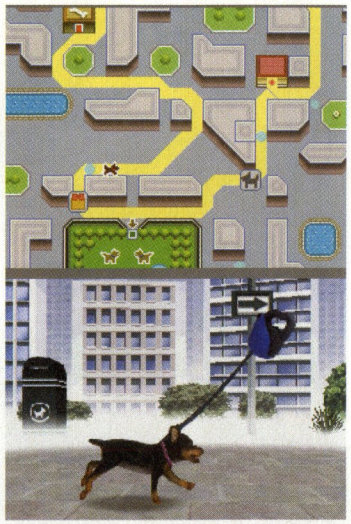
OVERALL
91

HYPER BIG RUBBER STAMP OF APPROVAL

!!! Nintendogs is available in three versions: Dachshund and Friends, Chihuahua and Friends, and Lab and Friends.



Nintendo are balls. Hehe



NINTENDOGS

Scoring Nintendogs is next to impossible. As the evolution of the tamagotchi it's brilliant. Nintendo have captured everything that makes this style of software compelling and it's all wrapped up in wonderfully realised animations and behaviour for each of the dogs. It takes the concept much further too, with touch screen and microphone interaction that helps connect you to your pet in a way that few, if any, other games like this have. Hell, you can even have wireless playdates with other Nintendogs owners (their pets that is). That said, however, it's difficult to score because you'll get out of it what you put in. For some, this is going to be their sole reason for purchasing a DS and they'll compulsorily carry around their machine and attend to their pet several times a day. For others, myself included, it's a fascinating product, but one that holds limited appeal.

NEGLECTARINO?

I've had my copy of Nintendogs for a couple of weeks now, and while Charlie the Wonderdog is everything I could have hoped for in a pet (he comes when called, brings me presents when we go on walks, obeys a number of commands and is a mean Frisbee player), I've found myself attending to him less and less. It may just be because I recorded his voice and initial commands in an embarrassingly high pitched voice and thus am remiss to take the game outside of my house for fear of looking (or more accurately, sounding) like an idiot, it may be the repetition of the gameplay – feeding, bathing, brushing, walking and teaching over and over, or it could just be that you can't rocket jump, hadoken or crash at over 200km/h in this title. Whatever the reason, Nintendogs is certainly enchanting, but I'm unlikely to spend much time with it after this review is done.

There are plenty of people who will, however. The game has sold like crazy in Japan and 250,000 units were snapped up off store shelves in its first week on sale in America. This is going to be the game that gets the Nintendo DS into the hands of every man and his erm, dog, and with a choice lineup of other DS titles on the way, should single handedly ensure the success of the system. Nicely done Nintendo.

And as I said earlier, Nintendo really have done a great job with Nintendogs. Each version has six breeds initially available, from the lovable Golden Retriever to the headstrong Beagle. You choose a pup from the kennel, take it home, teach it its name and get to know it, give it love and attention, take it on walks, enter it into competitions (which gives you more money to spend on necessities like food and water, as well as toys and zany afro wigs etc) and gradually teach it more advanced tricks (breakdance!). The way your dog rolls over to get its belly scratched, leaps around with other dogs at the park and barks to get your attention really is adorable. There's even incentive to interact with the dogs of other Nintendogs owners – doing so will unlock their breed in the kennel. It's not for everyone, but if you have the time and inclination, Nintendogs may just consume your life.

Cam Shea

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

DETAILS:

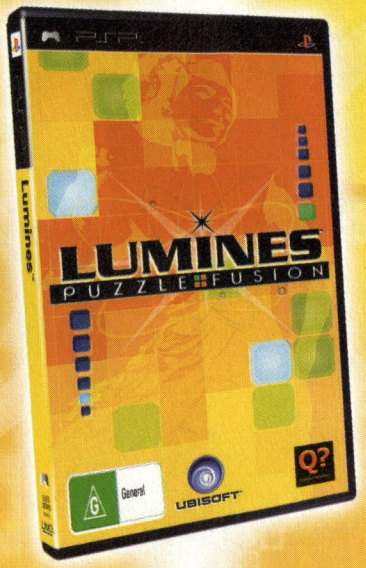
CATEGORY: Sim
PLAYERS: 1-2
DEVELOPER: Nintendo
PUBLISHER: Nintendo
PRICE: $49.95
RATING: G
AVAILABLE: Now

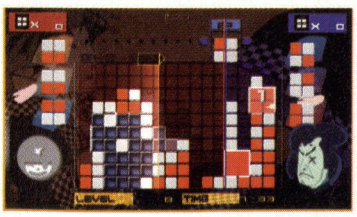
VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY
80	70	82

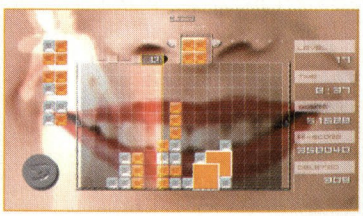
OVERALL
82

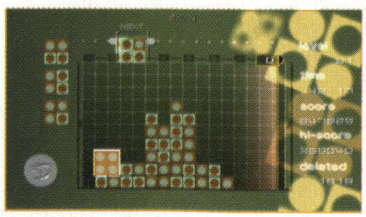
Perfect mix

The game many are already calling the best game for PSP.
IGN









Addictive, musical & fun block game

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General

PlayStation Portable

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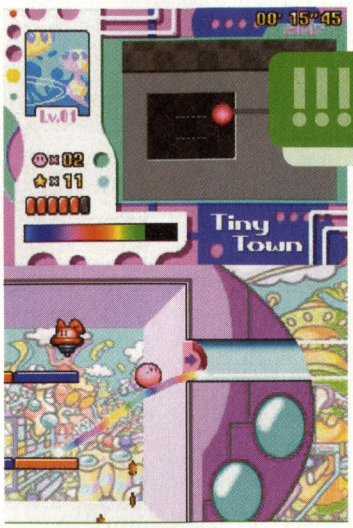
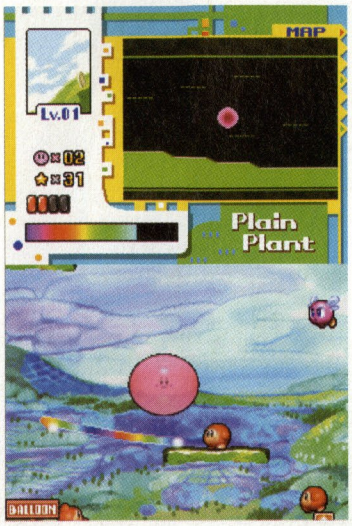
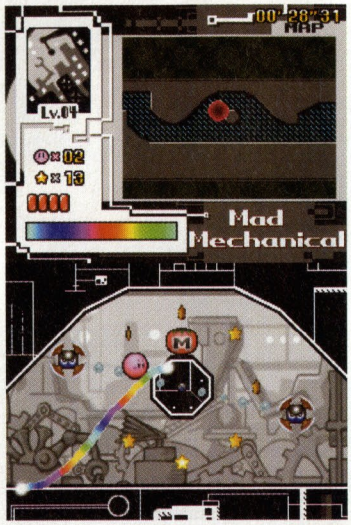


*Note: Fictional names chosen by Hyper may vary from those chosen by Nintendo, its subsidiaries and shareholders.





I'll just follow the yellow drip road

KIRBY CANVAS CURSE

We all know what a rocky history Kirby has had over the years. There have been some absolutely appalling games in his name, but thankfully Kirby Canvas Curse isn't going to be remembered amongst them. Instead, HAL Labs are back on form with a great title that really has some fun with what the Nintendo DS can do.

The entire game is stylus controlled and you're charged with guiding the little pink blob that could through some expansive side-on platform levels. You don't really control Kirby directly, instead you direct him by drawing in a technicolour line for him to follow. Draw left to right and he'll go right, right to left to go left, draw a wall and he'll change direction, and yes, you can draw loop the loops for him to follow for no apparent reason. Tapping him gives him a dash boost which can be used to take out enemies or you can simply tap enemies directly with the stylus to freeze them for a short period. These basic mechanics are a huge amount of fun and gives the game a frantic freeform feel (much more so than Yoshi's Touch & Go) as Kirby bounces and spins around on screen as you tap enemies and Kirby and look for secrets.

GRAND THEFT KIRBY

Of course, it wouldn't be a Kirby game without the ability to steal the attributes of your enemies and Canvas Curse is no exception. Simply stun an appropriate enemy with a tap then run into him and you'll get his power (until you're hit or decide to manually discard it). As expected this opens up the gameplay and fun factor even more. From being able to jet across the screen as Flaming Kirby*, bounce around like a beach ball as Even More Fat-ass Than Before Kirby* or electrocute enemies as Texas Style Kirby*, there are plenty of abilities to discover, many of which are needed to get to the many secrets in the game.

As you'd expect each level is themed and charming in a HAL Labs kinda way, and each presents unique obstacles and inclusions. There are shimmering areas where you can't draw lines, goopy platforms you can't roll along, lava areas to avoid, cannons to vault from, water to swim through, explosive blocks to destroy, switches to hit, lasers to block, lanterns to light and so on.

There are three boss battles (each with two levels) too: Cart Run where you can adjust the path of a high speed mine cart (yes, that old chestnut) to get speed boosts, Paint Panic, which requires you to memorise the order the boss paints a picture, and our favourite, Block Attack, a Kirby rendition of Breakout where you draw in the paddle for him to bounce off. It's all coming together DS fans!

Game Cat

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

DETAILS:

CATEGORY: Platformer
PLAYERS: 1
DEVELOPER: HAL Labs
PUBLISHER: Nintendo
PRICE: $69.95
RATING: G
AVAILABLE: Now

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY
84	81	85

OVERALL
86

resident evil™
SADDLER'S SAWS
IF IT'S MOVING
WE'LL CUT IT
0800 666 RESI4
MA 15+
RESTRICTED
Strong violence
PlayStation 2
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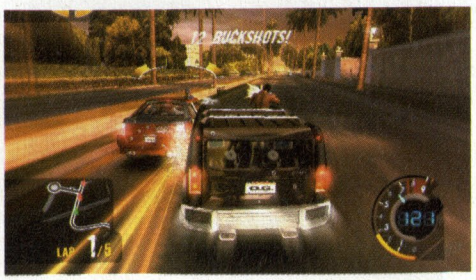


187: RIDE OR DIE

Wow. You know, it's one thing being a lame white guy pretending to be a black gangsta for fun (hell, we add "izzles" to the ends of words and randomly call people "biatches" ourselves), but 187 has to take the cake for being the whitest whitey mcwhite product that ever pretended to be black. Ever. In fact, this game is so painfully full of "authentic" street slang that it's embarrassing. Sentences like: "that's how G ride gangstas get down and dirty wit it"; "don't pop your collar yet homie"; and "Buck, you did you G dizzle, gang.. sta!" can't help but have you cringing. It's so painfully "gang.. sta" that Ubisoft Paris have even included a normal English translation beneath the gobbledegook on each loading screen. It might say something like: "Peep dis shizzle. Git yo' 64'n' buss caps in tho' punk-ass biatches izass brace yourself foo'! Sheeit!" and underneath it will say "Drive after your enemies and shoot them."

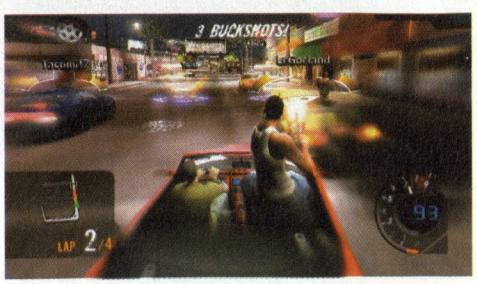
Of course, we'd forgive this rampant attempt to market the gangsta lifestyle if the game was any good. It's not. It consists of driving around and around dull city courses picking up ammo and gradually shooting the crap out of your opponents. Or you may have to lose the cops by driving around and around dull city courses. Or take down a boss along a long coastal road by somehow getting past his respawning minions and avoiding his rocket launcher lock on. It's not that 187 is out and out bad, it's just uninspired and frankly, boring as hell. But hey, at least it's only $50.

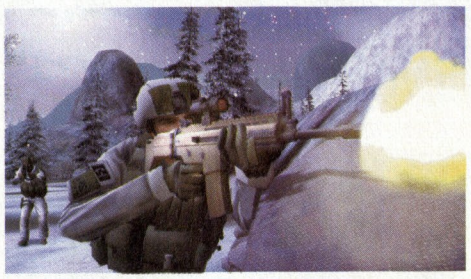
Cam Shea

AVAILABLE ON:
PS2 / XBOX / PC / GCN

DETAILS:
CATEGORY: Combat racing / **PLAYERS:** 1-Multi / **DEVELOPER:** Ubisoft Paris / **PUBLISHER:** Ubisoft / **PRICE:** $49.95 / **RATING:** M15+ / **AVAILABLE:** Now

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY	OVERALL
70	50	46	48





GHOST RECON 2: Summit Strike

A bold warlord on the fringe of Russian Territories has moved his forces into neighbouring Kazakhstan, causing a UN-scale crisis. He's a problem. A problem that can be solved by the Ghosts.

Summit Strike transports the Ghost Recon 2 experience into a fascinating new setting. The Ghosts are haunting snow-carpeted mountains, near-vertical ravines and beautiful alpine forest with your camera scopes and OICW air-bursting grenades. You'll hound the target across frosty wastelands, culminating with a hellish showdown at the Baikonur Cosmodrome, the Russian space program's "Houston".

Being Ghost Recon, the tempo of the action is high. As the AI aggressively advances, you'll find yourself in deadly exchanges of fire, fighting the urge to spray a volley of ammo so you can deliver that one killing shot. Ghost Recon 2 has an energy and immediacy that is lacking in many recent titles.

Thanks to the non-fundamentalist powers that be, you can now save game within a mission - which is wonderful news for anyone who has endlessly played 39 minutes of a 40 minute mission in the original, only to get "BOOM!" headshotted at the last minute.

There's many amendments to the multiplayer options, most notably co-op missions, which now include chopper hunts and assaults on endless tank columns.

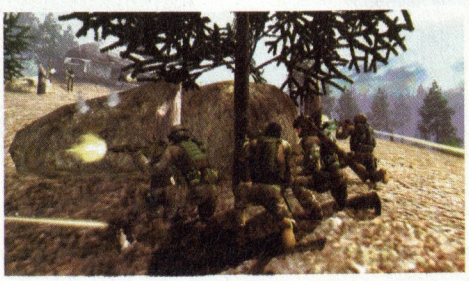
Despite the improvements, Summit Strike is a small step forward. It's got new missions which are brilliant, rounds out multiplayer options and incrementally fleshes out the game as you might expect. But there's no dazzling upgrade or shocking advancement of gameplay or AI. That said, this is one of the best military games available right now. At $50, Summit Strike is an especially good buy.

Ed Dawson

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

DETAILS:
CATEGORY: Military FPS / **PLAYERS:** 1-12 System Link, 1-16 Online / **DEVELOPER:** Red Storm / **PUBLISHER:** Ubisoft / **PRICE:** $50 / **RATING:** M15+ / **AVAILABLE:** Now

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY	OVERALL
90	95	90	92



RAINBOW SIX: Lockdown

Ding Chavez returns in the fourth iteration of the Tom Clancy-birthed series. And like the runt of the litter, Lockdown came out a little prematurely, and a little deformed. The plot centres on terrorism – that old chestnut again - only this time, it's bioterrorism. Hey, a team's got to have something to foil.

The addition of Silent Scope-style sniping sections is a boon – they break up the stealth action sequences nicely. But four games into the series there's still no jumping, still no going prone. Come now, Red Storm. I'd take an overhauled movement engine over Ken-doll CG cutscenes any day.

Much like the last game you can direct your support to specific points on the ground by lining up the crosshairs and hitting 'A', and they can be told various manoeuvres via the context sensitive crosshairs. It makes controlling your team nice and intuitive. Then there's the 'heartbeat monitor', which really should have been called the 'killjoy button'. It's as good as having X-Ray specs. Steer clear of it if you value gameplay.

Some nice graphical touches such as light blooming, rag doll physics and the ever-popular rain droplets-on-your-goggles effect put a nice spit-shine on a reasonably smooth engine.

The much-touted AI still errs on the side of shoddy, causing your team mates to toss grenades into walls, doorframes and chairs, blowing themselves to digital kingdom come. And they usually take you out with them. Aargh.

But on the upside, the multiplayer is still awesome fun. You can now create your own PEC (Persistent Elite Creation) character. Tweak everything from weapons and armour to outfits, insignias and colours, and then train him up by putting him through his paces online. The more you use him, the more experience he gains, RPG style. Nifty.

Even so, this is a big letdown.

Patrick Kolan

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

DETAILS:
CATEGORY: Shooter / **PLAYERS:** 1-Multi / **DEVELOPER:** Red Storm / **PUBLISHER:** Ubisoft / **PRICE:** $99.95 / **RATING:** MA15+ / **AVAILABLE:** Now

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY	OVERALL
79	80	75	76

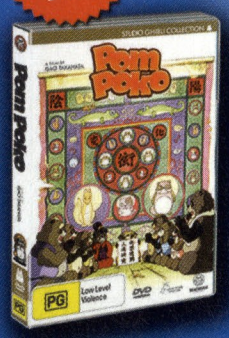
THE MASTERWORKS OF ISAO TAKAHATA

STUDIO GHIBLI COLLECTION

CELEBRATE THE MAGIC OF THE FOREST

POM POKO

ON DVD FOR THE FIRST TIME!



"POM POKO treats the subject of environmental conservation with humour and wisdom."
-ROGER EBERT

STUDIO GHIBLI's amazing tale of the clash between modern society and nature. In POM POKO, a group of spritely raccoons decide to fight back when their homes are threatened by rapid urban growth.

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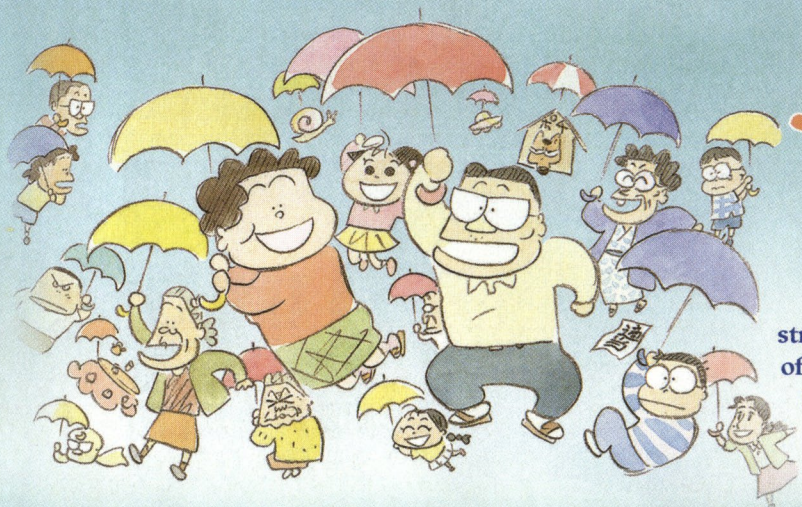
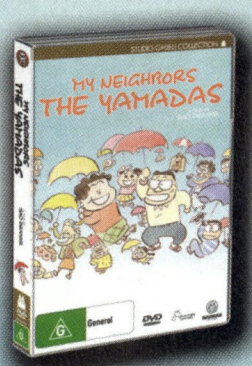
EXPERIENCE LIFE'S LITTLE VICTORIES WITH THE YAMADAS



MY NEIGHBORS THE YAMADAS

The hilarious misadventures of the Yamada family are brilliantly captured in a visually striking comic-book style. The ups and downs of work, marriage and family life are rendered both comical and touching in this masterful animated feature by critically acclaimed director Isao Takahata.



"The family encounters a series of funny but universal episodes with comic timing. [We] quickly grow to like this irresponsible, slovenly and lazy family and their down-to-earth way of life." YOMIURI SHIMBUN

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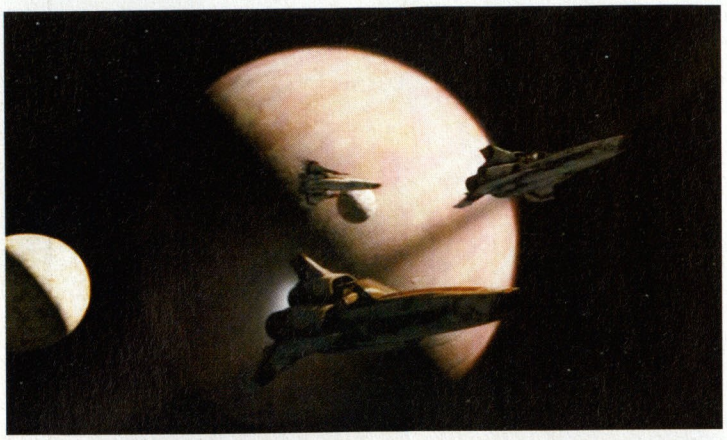


Almost as good as Firefly says K-Man

Battlestar Galactica SEASON ONE

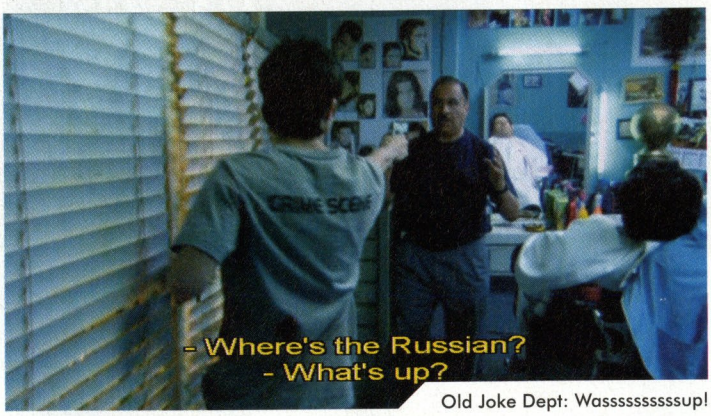
UNIVERSAL, M15+

» Never being a fan of the original 70s series, or better yet, even having the slightest inclination to watch a single episode – the news about a *Battlestar Galactica* remake didn't exactly set my world on fire. But being a fan of science fiction, one of the most overlooked genres on the entire planet (Earth that is, not Omega Kronos 8 where Science Fiction is what Reality TV is to America), I thought, hey why not give it a shot? For those that know of or have seen the original series, the remake essentially takes the core story about a group of humanoids roaming the galaxy in search of a mythical planet as their race is being wiped out by the Cylons. Ah the Cylons, large kooky robots who used to be their friends who then grew too smart for their cold metallic boots and said hey, what the hell, lets destroy the twelve colonies and genetically engineer a super race.

But unlike this write up this new *Battlestar Galactica* is quite serious in tone which is reflected in the pacing, writing, direction and acting displayed in each episode. Currently in its second season abroad it's easily one of the best shows on television, regardless of genre and along with the documentary style action sequences that provide tense surrealistic space battles the show also raises and eloquently handles many intelligent moral and ethical questions about the nature and value of life, religion and survival. Sci-fi fans everywhere should definitely pick this up, as *Battlestar Galactica* has arguably done more for science fiction in one short year than *Star Trek* could do in ten – just make sure you watch the excellent mini-series first.

Kosta Andreadis

MOVIE: 9 / EXTRAS: 3



Old Joke Dept: Wassssssssssup!

Faramir in the days before his dad went nuts

Nicotina

MADMAN, MA 15+

» The one major problem with the Mexican crime comedy *Nicotina* is how often is will be compared, both by reviewers and viewers to *Pulp Fiction*. Whilst undoubtedly a post Tarantino film combining highly ironic and clever dialogue, multiple story arcs intertwining and a healthy dose of pop-culture, the film owes more to Guy Ritchie's *Lock, Stock and Two Smoking Barrels* than it does to Tarantino's work. It's about a crime (never really revealed but has something to do with diamonds and Swiss Bank accounts), how it goes inevitably wrong and the consequences thereof. The story really goes no further than that. Early in the film, the nominal main character, chain-smoking, semi-philosophical Nene opines that nobody dies before their time and that it's not the final stroke that kills you it's the series of consequences leading up to that point that do the real dirty work. The film then spends the next 90 odd minutes proving his point.

Whilst the actors are good for the most part and the characters are well written, with special mention given to Thompson, the enormous and gruff gangster afraid of dogs, *Nicotina* does begin to believe in its own cleverness towards the end and as such involves a number of events that are undeniably clever but also entirely expected.

Daniel Wilks

MOVIE: 7 / EXTRAS: 4

Three Dollars

MADMAN, M

» Eddie (David Wenham) is a compassionate, ethical and moralistic father and husband. The world has been good so far to Eddie, he has a job as a chemical engineer, a mortgage and a chance encounter with a childhood friend Amanda (Sarah Wynter) every nine and a half years. But in a world where financial security is fickle and we are subjects to the economic machine, nothing is final and all things can be transient, including your sanity.

Three Dollars is an insightful portrayal into the dehumanisation of both political and public contemporary Australia and the potential demise of each individual's financial foundation. It is a sensitive look into the way a man's life can be swept away before his eyes and is unable to change the course of the tide. It is a gentle reminder that all too many of us are only a few weeks income away from that financial obscurity and this teetering above the poverty level is all too important in the current climate of work place reforms.

Wenham provides a depth to the character of Eddie that lifts the film's sometimes slowly drifting pace, and Frances O'Connor's warm portrayal of Tanya (Wenham's wife) is outstanding. Although the ending is a little disappointing and cheesy, *Three Dollars* is well worth checking out.

Rebecca Izard

MOVIE: 6.5 / EXTRAS: TBC

The Simpsons SEASON 6

FOX HOME ENTERTAINMENT, PG

Why is season 6 a classic? The following people are gay... It is a fine barn, but sure 'tis no pool, English... If only the sugar were as sweet as you sir... We need more Bort license plates in the gift shop. I repeat, we are sold out of Bort license plates... No TV and no beer make Homer go something something... Hehehe, jokes on them, I'm still alive... With a dry cool wit like that, I could be an action hero... Stupider like a fox!... Television! Teacher, mother, secret lover... Stupid bug, you go squish now!... Crisatunity!... Let us all bask in television's warm glowing warming glow... This is indeed a disturbing universe... But Football in the Groin had a football in the groin... Ah, washbasin fresh... I see you've played knifey spoony before... Sunrise sunset... Me fail English? That's unpossible... I'm. Going outside. To. Stalk. Lenny and Ka-rl... There'll be no accusations, just friendly crustaceans under the sea... Good Time Slim, Uncle Doobie and The Great 'Frisco Freakout... My name is Guy Incognito... Who makes Steve Guttenberg a star? We do, we do... Resist the temptation to read or talk to loved ones... My cat's breath smells like cat food... Oh, every week there's a canal, or an inlet, or a fjord... Way to play the boss's head like a bongo Homer!... Did you say boo, or Boo-urns?... You just go in and do it really half-assed. That's the American way... Shredded newspapers add much needed roughage and essential inks... HACK THE BONE!... In this house, we obey the laws of thermodynamics!... I'd've called 'em chazwazzers... bonjourrrrr, ya cheese eatin' surrender monkeys... tute on son, tute on!...

Cam Shea

MOVIE: 9 / EXTRAS: 8

Down here everything floats

WIN DOOM!

Something has gone wrong at a remote scientific research station on Mars. All research has ceased and the messages that do get through are less than comforting. It's a level 5 quarantine and the only souls allowed in or out are the Rapid Response Tactical Squad – hardened marines armed to the teeth with enough firepower to neutralise any enemy... or so they think. The research being done at Odluvai station has unwittingly opened a door and all hell has broken loose. A legion of nightmarish creatures of unknown origin lurk behind every wall and stalk the countless rooms and tunnels of the facility killing what few people remain.

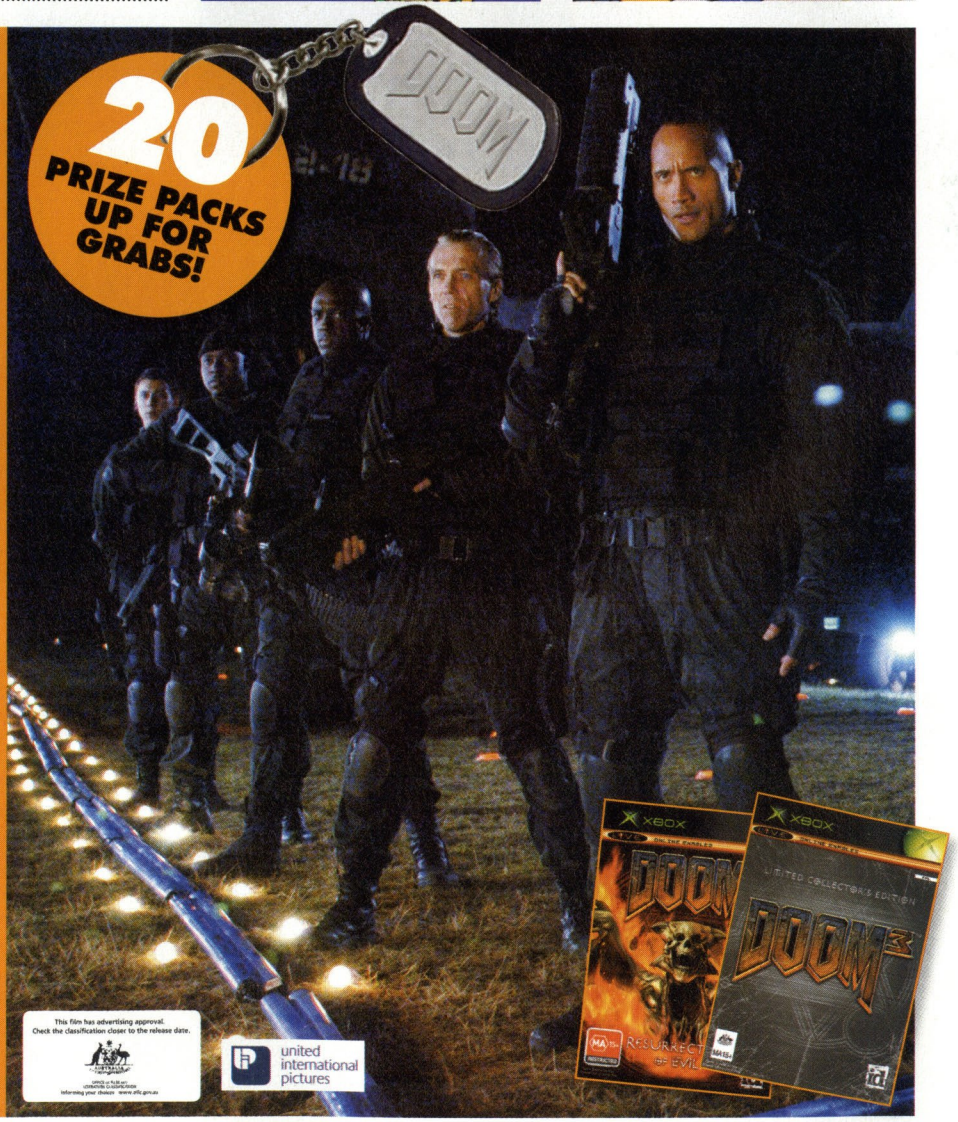
And that, in a nutshell, is the set up for Doom the movie, starring The Rock, Karl Urban and Rosamund Pike. Utilising an interesting mix of traditional horror shots and first person perspective action, Doom is shaping up to be pretty cool, and thanks to United International Pictures we have 20 Doom prize packs. 10 major prize winners will receive a double in season pass to the film, a copy of Doom 3 Ltd Ed on Xbox, a copy of Doom 3: Resurrection of Evil on Xbox and a special Doom keyring. 10 runners up will receive a double in season pass and a keyring. Sweet! The film is out on the 27th of October so send those entries in quickly because we'll be drawing the comp on the 21st. For more information you can check out *http://www.doommovie.com/*.

To be in the running, just tell us:

Who does The Rock play in Doom?

Put your answer, as well as your name and address, on the back of an envelope and send it to: **We're all Doomed!, Hyper, 78 Renwick St, Redfern, NSW, 2016.**

WWW.DOOMMOVIE.COM.AU
IN CINEMAS OCTOBER 27



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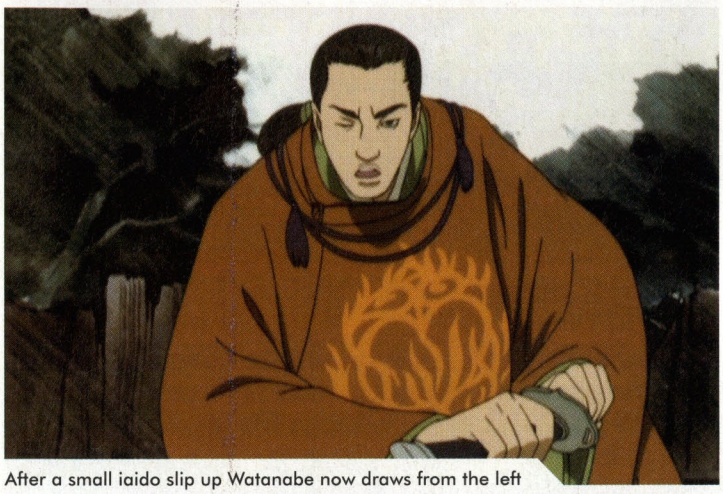
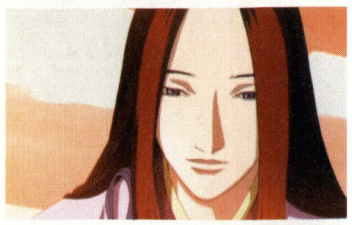


After a small iaido slip up Watanabe now draws from the left

Otogi Zoshi VOLUME 1: LEGEND OF THE MAGATAMA

CATEGORY: ACTION
PRODUCTION: PRODUCTION IG



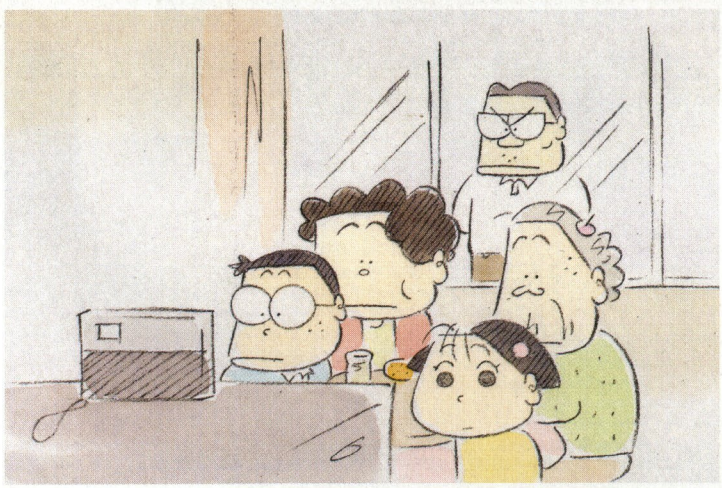
» Even though we've classed *Otogi Zoshi* as an action series, if you approach the show looking for that only you'll inevitably come away disappointed. It's part action sure, but it also contains elements of a political thriller as well as a true sense of history. Whatever you wish to classify *Otogi Zoshi* in genre, it's still a great watch.

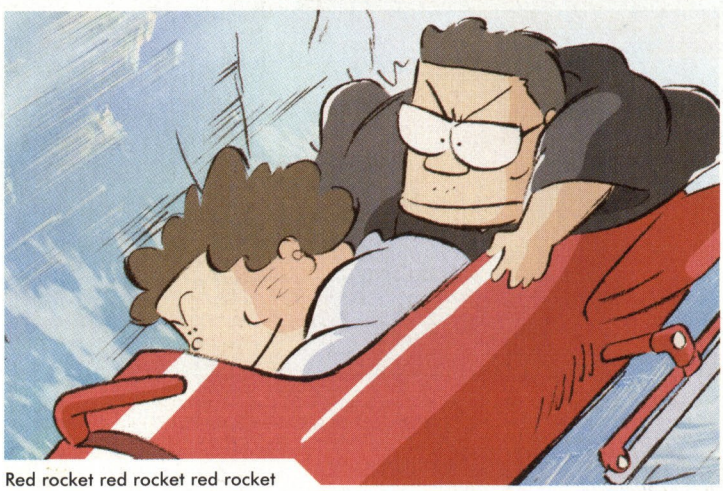
Set in the Heian era of Japan (around 970AD), *Otogi Zoshi* tells the story of a young noblewoman Hikaru posing as her older brother, famous samurai/archer Minamoto who fell sick before being able to set off on a journey to retrieve the Magatama, a mystical stone believed to be able to assuage the suffering of the people. Along with loyal family retainer, Watanabe no Tsuna, Hikaru ventures across Japan to retrieve the stone which she believes will cure her beloved brother of his illness.

Each episode sees another hero joining the quest and this is where the real greatness of the show shines through. All of the characters are flawed in a real and believable way, ranging from a skilled samurai who has given up fighting because it's all too hard and not a little bit dangerous, a mysterious woman who doesn't think of the consequences of her actions and a famous dancer so arrogant he doesn't even seem to notice the world around him. Of course the animation by Production IG is gorgeous if somewhat odd with the character design being rather simple yet simultaneously very elegant with special attention paid to hair and clothes.

Daniel Wilks

ANIMATION: 9 / STORY: 8
EXTRAS: N/A / OVERALL: 8





Red rocket red rocket red rocket

My Neighbors the Yamadas

CATEGORY: DRAMA COMEDY
PRODUCTION: STUDIO GHIBLI

» *My Neighbors the Yamadas* is the latest Studio Ghibli film to see a DVD release in Australia, and it's about as far from what we've come to expect from the esteemed animation studio as you could possibly imagine. In contrast to the lush animation and rich adventures of the likes of *Laputa* or *Spirited Away*, *My Neighbors the Yamadas* is animated in a very simple sketch and watercolour style, and is a series of vignettes about a quirky Japanese family living in the suburbs of Tokyo.

While many of the observations are rooted in Japanese culture and the archetypal Japanese family unit (the salaryman father, the housewife mother, the son who's pressured constantly by his parents to study, the cute daughter and the sharp tongued granny who lives with them), it's still quite charming regardless of your background because each of the family members' roles is subverted somewhat. The wife, for instance, isn't really interested in cooking or housework, and devises ways to get other family members to do these things for her.

Most of the scenes muse over the idiosyncrasies of the family and their domestic life, with particular attention paid to the relationship between the parents, and as is Studio Ghibli's way (and in this case *Grave of the Fireflies* director Isao Takahata's way), it's both touching and amusing. The scene in which the parents (Matsuko and Takashi) are fighting over which TV channel to watch and Takashi keeps using his newspaper to block Matsuko's attempts to use the remote is a classic.

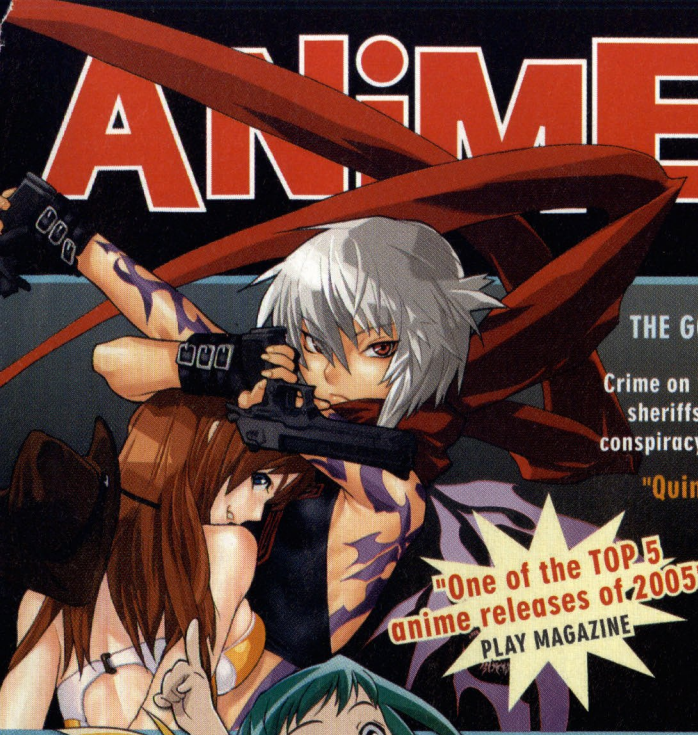
The animation, while looking simple on the surface, is quite accomplished too. There are some fantastic scenes – the symbolic journey from marriage to a family in which the parents ride a bobsled and build their home amongst pitched waves on the open sea is wonderfully realised, as is the sequence with the bike gang towards the end.

Whilst Ghibli didn't quite succeed in maintaining my interest levels throughout the entire run time, there's a lot to like about My Neighbors the Yamadas.

Cam Shea

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

ANiMEBLiTZ



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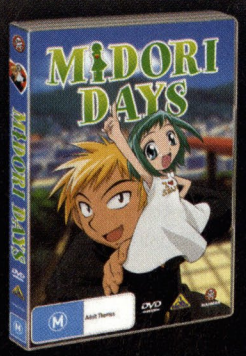

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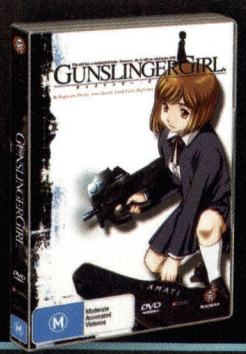

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WIN EVIL DEAD GOODIES!

>> We love Evil Dead and we love Bruce Campbell. It's that simple. And now, thanks to THQ we can spread some of that love your way. Evil Dead Regeneration is a straight up action game that sees Ash incarcerated in an insane asylum where the evil Dr Vingo performs twisted "scientific" experiments with the Necronomicon, creating a new breed of deadites which, naturally, it's up to Ash to sort out. Hail to the king baby. Regeneration is all about over the top chainsaw and shotgun wielding action, the humour that the film series is known for, and erm, midget Deadite sidekicks. No, we're not kidding.

We have a killer first prize for this comp with the winner walking away with a copy of the game on PS2, an Evil Ash figurine and a Good Ash figurine. Ten runners up will also receive a copy of the game.

To be in the running, just tell us:

>> What is the name of Bruce Campbell's new book?

Put your answer, as well as your name and address, on the back of an envelope and send it to: **Groovy Gaming, Hyper, 78 Renwick St, Redfern, NSW, 2016.**

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>> If you're keen to turn your Sony PlayStation Portable from a gaming device into a personal multimedia player, then the new range of SanDisk Memory Stick PRO Duo™ game cards are a must have.

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SanDisk Memory Stick PRO Duo game cards are available now in capacities ranging from 128MB to 1GB with the following recommended retail prices: $89.95 for 128MB, $109 for 256MB, $169 for 512MB and $339 for 1GB. For more info check out www.sandisk.com.

But here's the best bit. SanDisk have been kind enough to give us two 1GB cards to give away. To be in the running, just tell us:

>> How many bytes are in a Gigabyte?

Put your answer, as well as your name and address, on the back of an envelope and send it to: **Rockin' Gig, Hyper, 78 Renwick St, Redfern, NSW, 2016.**

STOCKISTS CONTACT: 1800 807 807 OR (03) 9845 2660

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NO ONE GETS OUT ALIVE
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In Cinemas October 27

THE LESSER KNOWN REVOLUTION

The Dodo. Point-and-Click Adventures. The last remaining shred of integrity displayed by Australian prime time television. What's the link?

They're all gone. Deceased. Kaput. They've all decided that their day has gone, packed up their bags and sauntered off into the sunset. Having said all that though, which one of those things differs from the other two? Yes, that's right. The Point and Click Adventure game actually existed during our lifetime (ho ho – Ed).

When you mention the Point and Click (PAC) adventure to any gamer who owned an old PC, Amiga or Atari ST, you'll see their eyes glaze over, a twinkle will glint near their iris and they'll babble something about pirates, tentacles and bunnies with violent dispositions.

Revolution Studios was one of the few developers who stuck with the PAC adventure, right up until it stood atop the industry's virtual gallows and waved goodbye.

Although probably best known for their Broken Sword series, and also responsible for the throwaway In Cold Blood, Revolution have a rich back catalogue in the Point and Click genre. In fact, Revolution was responsible for some of the most charming, detailed and downright brain numbing PAC adventures. Their ability with this style of game earned them enough respect that Sierra even used them to port Kings Quest VII to the flailing Amiga platform, and at one point an Amiga magazine placed a screenshot of the Amiga version and the PC version side-by-side, claiming they couldn't tell the difference between the 32 colour and 256 colour screenshots.

IT'S ONE OF THOSE, BABY

Not content with simply relying on outward wackiness to slap the gamer forward, Revolution titles used intrigue, splashes of style and sarcasm to slowly draw you in, hinting at you like a tour guide just itching to show you what's around the next corner.

Lure of the Temptress was one of Revolution's first ever sojourns into the realm of point, click, darn (the most common things you'll notice from someone playing a PAC adventure), introducing what Revolution dubbed as "Virtual Theatre".

Virtual Theatre was (at the time) an advanced way of immersing the player into the world. It provided the illusion that no matter what the player did; the world still lived on around them. NPCs carried on their daily duties as though you weren't there at all, and would hold conversations with each other, often referring to something that you might've had a hand in, or sometimes offering little hints. Whilst primitive by today's standards, it was still quite effective in convincing you that the non-player characters didn't just spend their days standing around waiting for your avatar to arrive.

Using a typical swords and sorcery setting, Lure of the Temptress lured (haw, haw) gamers into a world where you played as Diermot, an unwilling fop who gets hauled into saving a small town from the clutches of an evil sorceress. As we just mentioned, what the Virtual Theatre engine added to the PAC adventure genre was that some puzzles required you to eavesdrop on NPC's to get that vital clue to move on with the game. Very cool.

It was a very refreshing take on a genre largely dominated by static environs and slapstick humour.

THE APPLE ISLE

Revolution's follow up to Lure of the Temptress was a far departure from the mythical world they had conjured before, instead turning to influences like Blade Runner to create their next step.

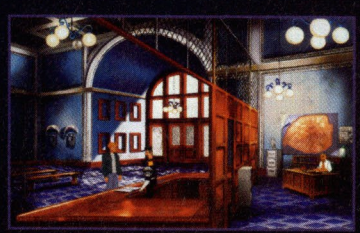
Beneath a Steel Sky was a very elaborate, detailed and stylish PAC adventure, which placed you in the shoes of Robert Foster and took place in and around Hobart. Mind you, if you were expecting to mill about Bellerive Oval, you'd be disappointed as Hobart was depicted as an industrial powerhouse, whose noxious fumes provided the steel coloured sky for you to adventure beneath.

The science fiction setting lent itself well to a comic book method of story telling, and as such, Dave Gibbons who worked on DC Comic's The Watchmen forged much of the

BY ANDY HUNT

Lure of the Temptress (1992)

Beneath a Steel Sky (1993)



Broken Sword/Circle of Blood (1996)

artwork. Also, Beneath a Steel Sky's backgrounds were integrated by using the new (at the time) method of digitising painted pictures and then retouching them to better fit the on-screen characters. The result was a very convincing, and very stylish comic book feel.

Speaking of appearances, the world in which you wandered was alive with incidental detail and animations; fans rotated, machines whirred and cars zipped by on distant highways. Revolution did nothing by halves with this title, with even a simple matter of a door opening being animated with Disney-esque fastidiousness. In rival Lucasarts games, the characters would disappear behind screens to change their clothes, but not with Beneath a Steel Sky. Robert would change in front of you, placing his jacket in a locker before donning his other clothing. This attention to detail immersed yourself in a way that you'd never experienced before in a Point and Click adventure.

Again, Revolution relied on the Virtual Theatre engine to assist in drawing the player in and surrounding them with the BASS game world. The enhancement to the Virtual Theatre engine for BASS extended to the control interface, which ensured a very elegant, simplistic and friendly experience. Whilst previous PAC adventures relied upon the gamer to choose the correct verb before selecting the item they wanted to manipulate, the Virtual Theatre engine pioneered the "context sensitive" interface. You left clicked to look at something, and right clicked to use it. To use an item from your inventory, you moved the mouse to the top of the screen, selected the item and then clicked the play area to use it. And of course there was more interaction between the non-player characters, who often spoke about some of the mischief you'd been up to. It was quite amusing to nearly cause an explosion, only to later peer through a window and watch the maintenance man bitching about you to the cops.

Again, Revolution tried to keep all the puzzles logical so that no obscure thinking was required from the player. BASS's story was also one fraught with peril. Whereas other adventure games simply refused to let the character die, in BASS, Robert would be quite susceptible to disintegration, neck snapping and the north end of a north-bound bullet.

A TURN OF THE WHEEL

Since then, Revolution have tried oh so hard in keeping the point and click adventure alive, bringing out the brilliant Broken Sword games. Although the Virtual Theatre tag doesn't feature quite so heavily in these games, the dry wit, scintillating dialogue and charming bonds between characters that were established with BASS remains.

Revolution's skill with graphics and attention to detail still carries forth in today's titles, as every game produced displays a certain love in every pixel.

So when you're remembering the ill-fated Point and Click Adventure game, don't just reminisce on the offerings associated with Quests, Monkeys and Road Hitting with dogs and rabbits. Revolution were responsible for some key moments in the genre, and supplied many a gamer with intriguing, funny and sometimes downright adult gaming, yes even on the old Amiga. <<

MAIL HYPER!

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RANDOM BAFFLED

Being the avid RPG fan that I am, I tracked down a copy of Final Fantasy Anthology. I'm now up to FFV and the amount of random encounters in this game is, to put it nicely, infuriating. Then I got to thinking, how come it is only now that Square are (allegedly) changing the battles in their Final Fantasy games, when gamers have been cursing this RPG staple for the last 10 years? You could ask ANY RPG fan what they hate most about their favourite genre and they will undoubtedly say, accompanied with a curse word, RANDOM ENCOUNTERS! Theres nothing more annoying than trying to work out a puzzle (or find the switch/key/chest as is the case most of the time) while constantly getting harrassed from another battle. So here's my suggestion, halve the amount of random encounters and double the experience points gained each time. Simple. If not, in a few years time, there is going to be one hell of lot of freaked-out and crazy geeks on square-enix's hands...

Jamie

We hate random encounters as much as the next guy. As to why Square haven't changed the formula in 10 years we have no idea. It is true, however, that random battles are a thing of the past come Final Fantasy XII as all of the enemies will be visible to the player and avoidable.

THE LONG TWILIGHT

Please, please, please disprove the rumour I have heard, that Zelda Twilight Princess's launch is going to be held back till March next year... Its just not fair... its damn right insulting to the Australian gaming public, I have been waiting for this game since my disgust of the last Zelda game (windwaker). Wait... no, that's the anger talking. I didn't hate the game I just hated the kiddie approach eg cell shading, not the best approach.

The game was supposed to be launched in December before the Christmas rush ended. Every time I walk into EB the whole store mocks me, not verbally, not even realising it, they just haven't taken the game cases off the coming soon case, I walk in and see the cases and can only dream about playing it.

Okay, hopefully by the time you get this email I find my sources wrong and all will be well in the world. On a lighter note Tales of Symphonia is one of the best games I have ever played on the Gamecube, it revived the lost art of the RPG genre on the Gamecube and it was a godsend.

Also are you at the Hyper team excited as I am with the new Advent Children being released soon? Watching the trailers makes me want it even more. I have to say that I absolutely adore your magazine with all the titbits in (blah), doesn't matter what others say. Hyper is much more than a magazine, it's also one of the funniest mags around. I could not stop laughing at the Star Wars Episode III: Revenge of the Sith review it hit all the faults in the game and a few I didn't realise, and the captions... oh the captions, each one funnier than the last.

Can you also answer me when Final Fantasy XII is coming out and... please tell me when the true Zelda release date for Australia is. To recap no Zelda bad, ff crystals bad and tales, magazine good, and for the mascot why not David Hasselhoff, I hear he is free and looking for some work.

Kyle Suitor, Qld.

Sorry to break it to you Kyle but Twilight Princess is not going to be released anywhere until some time in 2006. It's got nothing to do with being in Australia. Oh, and cel shading does not necessarily equal kiddie - Wind Waker was brilliant.

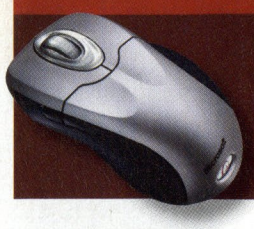
LETTER OF THE MONTH

LOYAL READER

I have been a loyal reader since the vivacious Chun-Li graced your holy cover those many moons ago. Yours is one of only two gaming 'zines I now purchase with religious regularity. The insurmountable Edge being the other. I'll get to my point (and I do have one), or more appropriately my conundrum. With the advent of photo realistic graphics, and fully realised simulated worlds looming mouth wateringly near; will gaming as a whole go through a renaissance of sorts? Will developers push their creations to lofty new heights beyond mere emulations of reality? And if so, what then will the benchmark or 'measuring stick' be for future games to surpass? This is a debate of epic proportions that has raged between my brethren and I for nigh on five generations (or approximately 17 minutes, whichever is the more believable). They strongly believe that it is not a matter of 'if', but of 'when', and they wait longingly for said renaissance to wash over them like the finest of oils and creams. Disturbing imagery aside, I do not share their vision of a gaming utopia. As a self proclaimed geek, I am burdened with a trait that many of my/our kind carry. This of course being pessimism. I personally believe that once this graphical-realism plateau has been reached and conquered, we will encounter a very real gaming crash, not dissimilar to that of the early eighties. With every current genre and sub-genre being explored and exploited to their limits, and the future publishing super powers (EA, Ubisoft etc) no doubt producing sequel after unadulterated sequel, rarely venturing into the foray of true originality through a combination of fear, greed, and short sightedness; this bleak future is all but guaranteed. I beg you, oh mighty men of Hyper, share your shaman like wisdom. Are my fears of gaming Armageddon ill-founded? Will the gaming renaissance ever materialise, and if so in what form? Will my underpants return from the deepest and darkest of places it frequents, and if so will it bring with it spices and silks the likes of which have never been seen? These are questions for the ages, perhaps never to be answered by mortal man. I hope to have you soon for tea.

Professor Chocolate

We don't think you really have anything to fear about a gaming crash any time soon. Sure, there aren't likely to be any revolutions like moving to 3D in the foreseeable future (barring workable virtual reality) but that doesn't mean gaming is going to slump. From a purely financial standpoint, gaming is the most successful entertainment medium in the world at the moment and that doesn't look like it will change, no matter how much Jack Thompson wants it to. From a development standpoint there are still a number of innovative games being made but by and large many of them are not particularly commercially successful. Although big companies are churning out sequels at an alarming rate you can't deny that the vast majority of sequels are games people want to play. They sell. The market speaks.



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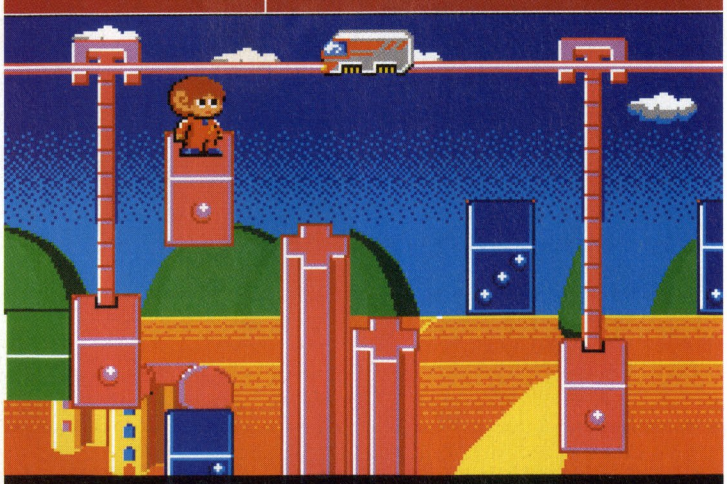

Pixel monkey was... irrepressible!

we play seriously...

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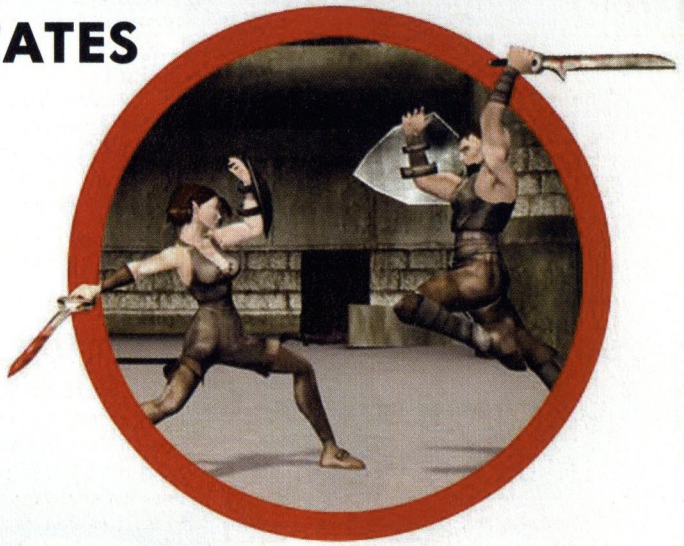

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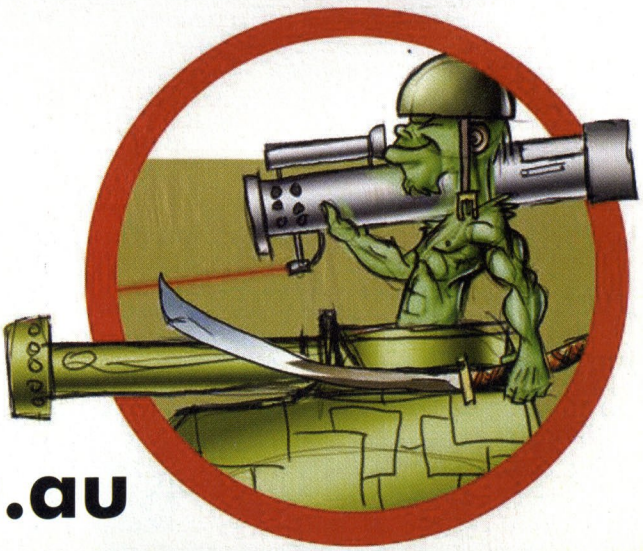

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FPS FOLK

SMALL HANDS. SMELL LIKE CABBAGE

>> JULIAN DANAHER

After spending approximately twelve minutes trying to come up with a witty introduction or some form of legitimate justification as to why I have written this study on the rich cultural tapestry that is the FPS, I realised that deep down my motives for writing this social commentary are purely negative. You see, while a lot of people these days have warm and fuzzy associations with what they think is a happy and welcoming online community, the truth of the matter is, when it comes to FPS games, there is only anger and frustration. Individuals that are absolutely content, secure and happy with their lives simply don't play FPS games. When you log on for your daily FPS fix, you aren't competing against good looking, content, stable people. You are playing against ugly, unbalanced angry males. However, just like how high schools have their own social pyramid with clearly identifiable sub-groups, online FPS communities also have their fair share of common groups and characters. Being able to clearly identify these groups and individuals is a key step toward minimising anger and improving your gaming experience. Thus, as our esteemed government reminds us: "Be alert, but not alarmed"

NOOB ALERT!

The first character that a modern gamer always needs to be wary of is the noob. Lacking any shred of maturity or common sense, the noob's sole purpose in life is to annoy you and gain attention while they do it. The noob often manages to confuse gamers by camouflaging himself as a 'newbie' However, there are distinct differences between the two. A 'newbie' is a player who has just started his online experience. He will usually ask a hundred and one simple but reasonable questions and while he won't show any skill to begin with, give the poor guy a few weeks and he will soon earn his stars. The noob on the other hand has no desire to learn. In fact, he does actually know how to play the game, he simply lacks any real skill at it and thus takes on a simplistic "If I can't win then no one will" train of thought. Team killing, bind spamming, suicide killing and spawn camping are the tools of the trade for the noob. A good player should be able to dispose of the noob with a well placed headshot or two but if you continually find yourself being thwarted by his cheap and sleazy tactics, then you really do need to ask yourself whether or not the game is for you.

Possibly even more annoying than the noob is the Haxor. This sod gets his jollies from using every single aimbot, wallhack and anti-recoil hack known to man in an effort to boost his own pathetic ego. Thankfully, anti-cheat programs are hard at work keeping scum like this out of our community, but if you see any individuals popping headshots off at an alarming rate through walls, please contact your local authorities. The real problem this idiot causes the community however is a breakdown of trust. No longer can one admire a beautiful snap headshot or a well executed knife/bash kill. Instead you're too busy demo recording the bastard and flaming him three ways from Sunday.

On the other end of the spectrum we have the Pro Gameor. The Pro Gameor is in the prime of his gaming career and has achieved perfection in the game of choice. Just like animal rights activists, these individuals are a minority and yet they seem to have the greatest say on all issues affecting the game. They also usually belong to a suitable top ladder clan with sponsors, a web page, forums and their own game server to practice on. Speaking of practice, these guys will have 'pracs' 'scrims' and 'wars' until they have a million and one 'strats' (game plans) developed for each and every game type and map. Having put in these hard hours of practice, the Pro Gameor is suitably arrogant in nature and rarely acknowledges any other player's existence until the dark day when someone actually kills him, after which the Pro Gameor is quick to reassure himself about just how 'random' the hit boxes in the game are.

Another oddity of the FPS environment is the Tri-Hard. Tri-Hards come in many different shapes and sizes but are typically either guys that got kicked out of the army reserve, couldn't get into the army reserve or people who fantasise about being in the army reserve. They are thus

characterised by a very serious manner with which they approach FPS games. It might only be a simple public server on a Friday night, but these guys will somehow confuse it with a Vietnam skirmish and will promptly go into overdrive shouting orders and trying to apply what they consider 'tactics' to an unrealistic arcade shooter. Thus, while you're busy pwning noobs and having a good time, they're shouting out flanking procedures, calling for non-existent artillery and demanding people respect them because of their higher rank. These sad little men are also identifiable by their in game names which are so cliché' in nature it's laughable. "Dark Assassin" "Silent Killer" and "Death Knight" are just a few examples that come to mind. Tri-Hards are also very fond of official ranks and will often start clans with such complicated member ranking systems that it ends up having more ranks then actual players. Overall, Tri-Hards are rather harmless if not annoying. As long as you ignore them and let them have their fun, they will simply consider you to be another 'soldier'.

The final character to definitely watch out for is the Server Admin or Game Officer. These guys are the most anal people in the world when it comes to abiding by the Terms and Conditions of Use as outlined in either the game manual or server host homepage. With a suitably bright official looking tag attached to their name and an ego to boot, they love nothing more then to pick up random players on the most insignificant misdemeanours such as cursing or spawn killing. Thus, it is no surprise that the noob is the usual victim of his onslaught. The profile of the Server Admin can differ but there is one defining character trait they all share and it is a "by the book" mentality. Yes you guessed it: these clowns are the people you see stumbling around looking for their front row allocated seats in a completely empty cinema. Avoid getting into arguments with these guys at all costs, even if they are one of the biggest dickheads to ever walk the face of the earth and when you do happen to get into a heated argument, be sure to watch what you say as you can bet your bottom dollar they are screen shotting every single word you type.

INSECURITY AND RAGE

Ultimately, the vast network of different characters and groups you can find in online FPS communities is infinite and impossible to catalogue fully. However, having read this guide, you are now better armed to deal with the more common denizens you are likely to run afoul of. However, the golden rule to remember when dealing with FPS folk is that the majority of these characters are quite pathetic in the real world and the FPS game is merely the conduit through which they express their insecurity and rage. So no matter how much smack they talk or how many headshots they get, your real life is likely to be superior to theirs. When trying to structure my final conclusion line, I realised my piece lacked any ghetto influence or language which seems to be all the rage these days and thus, I will close with a simple yet relevant quote to live online by:

"Don't hate the player, hate the game!" <<

The Official Australian Games Chart

Compiled by GfK in association with the IEAA

TOP 10 PlayStation 2 Games Over $50

W/E 4th Sept 2005 RETAIL SALES

1	◆	Cricket 2005	Sports
2	▲	Gran Turismo 4	Racing
3	▼	SingStar Pop Bundle	All Other
4	▲	MOH European Assault	Action
5	▲	Rugby 2005	Sports
6	▼	Tekken 5	Action
7	◆	Juiced	Racing
8	▼	Metal Gear Solid 3 Snake Eat	Adventure
9	▼	Eyetoy: Play 2 Pack Ptm	Compilation
10	✪	Star Wars Ep 3 Revenge Sith	RPG

TOP 10 Nintendo DS Games Over $40

W/E 4th Sept 2005 RETAIL SALES

1	◆	Super Mario 64	Adventure
2	▲	Rayman	Adventure
3	▲	Pokémon Dash	Racing
4	▲	WarioWare: Touched!	Action
5	▼	Yoshi Touch & Go	Action
6	▼	Madagascar	Adventure
7	▼	NFS: Underground 2	Racing
8	▲	Bomberman	Action
9	▼	Star Wars Ep 3 Revenge Sith	RPG
10	✪	Spider-Man 2	Adventure

TOP 10 Game Cube Games Over $50

W/E 4th Sept 2005 RETAIL SALES

1	◆	Resident Evil 4 CE	Adventure
2	◆	Starfox Assault	Adventure
3	◆	Pokémon Colosseum	RPG
4	▲	Mario Kart Double Dash	Racing
5	▼	Paper Mario 1000 Year Door	Adventure
6	◆	YuGiOh Falsebound Kingdm	Strategy
7	▲	Legend Of Zelda 4 Swords	RPG
8	✪	SRS Street Racing Syndicate	Racing
9	✪	MOH European Assault	Action
10	✪	NFS: Underground 2	Racing

TOP 10 Xbox Games Over $50

W/E 4th Sept 2005 RETAIL SALES

1	◆	Cricket 2005	Sports
2	◆	Halo 2	Action
3	▲	Rugby 2005	Sports
4	◆	Doom 3 Limited Edition	Action
5	▼	WWE WrestleMania XXI	Sports
6	✪	MX vs ATV Unleashed	Racing
7	▼	Juiced	Racing
8	▼	Delta Force Black Hawk Dwn	Action
9	✪	Crash Twinsanity	Adventure
10	✪	MOH European Assault	Action

TOP 10 PC Games Over $20

W/E 4th Sept 2005 RETAIL SALES

1	◆	Battlefield 2	Action
2	◆	World Of WarCraft	Strategy
3	◆	The Sims 2: University	Strategy
4	▲	Half Life 2	Action
5	▼	The Sims 2	Strategy
6	◆	The Sims Deluxe	Strategy
7	✪	Dungeon Siege 2	RPG
8	▲	MOH Pacific Assault	Action
9	▼	Empire Earth 2	Strategy
10	✪	Doom 3	Action

TOP 10 Game Boy Advance Games Over $30

W/E 4th Sept 2005 RETAIL SALES

1	◆	Pokémon Emerald	RPG
2	◆	Pokémon Fire Red	RPG
3	✪	Charlie & Chocolate Factory	Adventure
4	◆	Madagascar	Adventure
5	▼	Pokémon Leaf Green	RPG
6	◆	Pokémon Sapphire	RPG
7	▼	Pokémon Ruby	RPG
8	▼	Fantastic Four	Adventure
9	▲	Star Wars Ep 3 Revenge Sith	RPG
10	▼	Lego Star Wars	Adventure

TOP 10 All Full Priced Games

W/E 4th Sept 2005 RETAIL SALES

1	✪	NFS Underground Rivals	PSP
2	✪	Ridge Racer	PSP
3	✪	Untold Legends	PSP
4	✪	V8 Supercars 2	PSP
5	✪	Medievil Ressurection	PSP
6	✪	Wipeout Pure	PSP
7	✪	Metal Gear Acid	PSP
8	✪	T Hawk Undergrnd 2 Remix	PSP
9	▼	Pokémon Emerald	GBA
10	✪	Ape Academy	PSP

TOP 10 PlayStation Portable Games Over $40

W/E 4th Sept 2005 RETAIL SALES

1	✪	NFS Underground Rivals	Racing
2	✪	Ridge Racer	Racing
3	✪	Untold Legends	RPG
4	✪	V8 Supercars 2	Racing
5	✪	Medievil Ressurection	Adventure
6	✪	Wipeout Pure	Racing
7	✪	Metal Gear Acid	Adventure
8	✪	T Hawk Undergrnd 2 Remix	Sports
9	✪	Ape Academy	Action
10	✪	Spider-Man 2	Adventure

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

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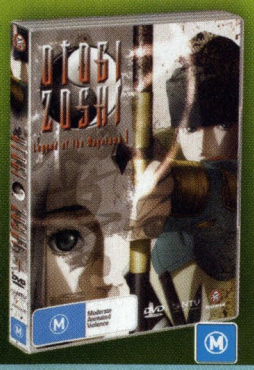

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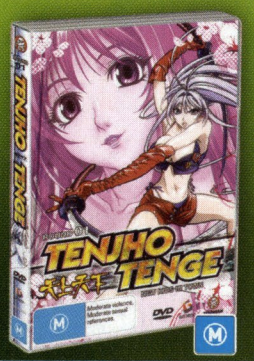

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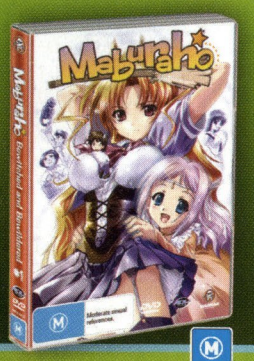

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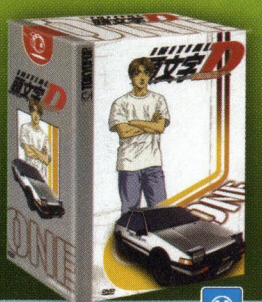

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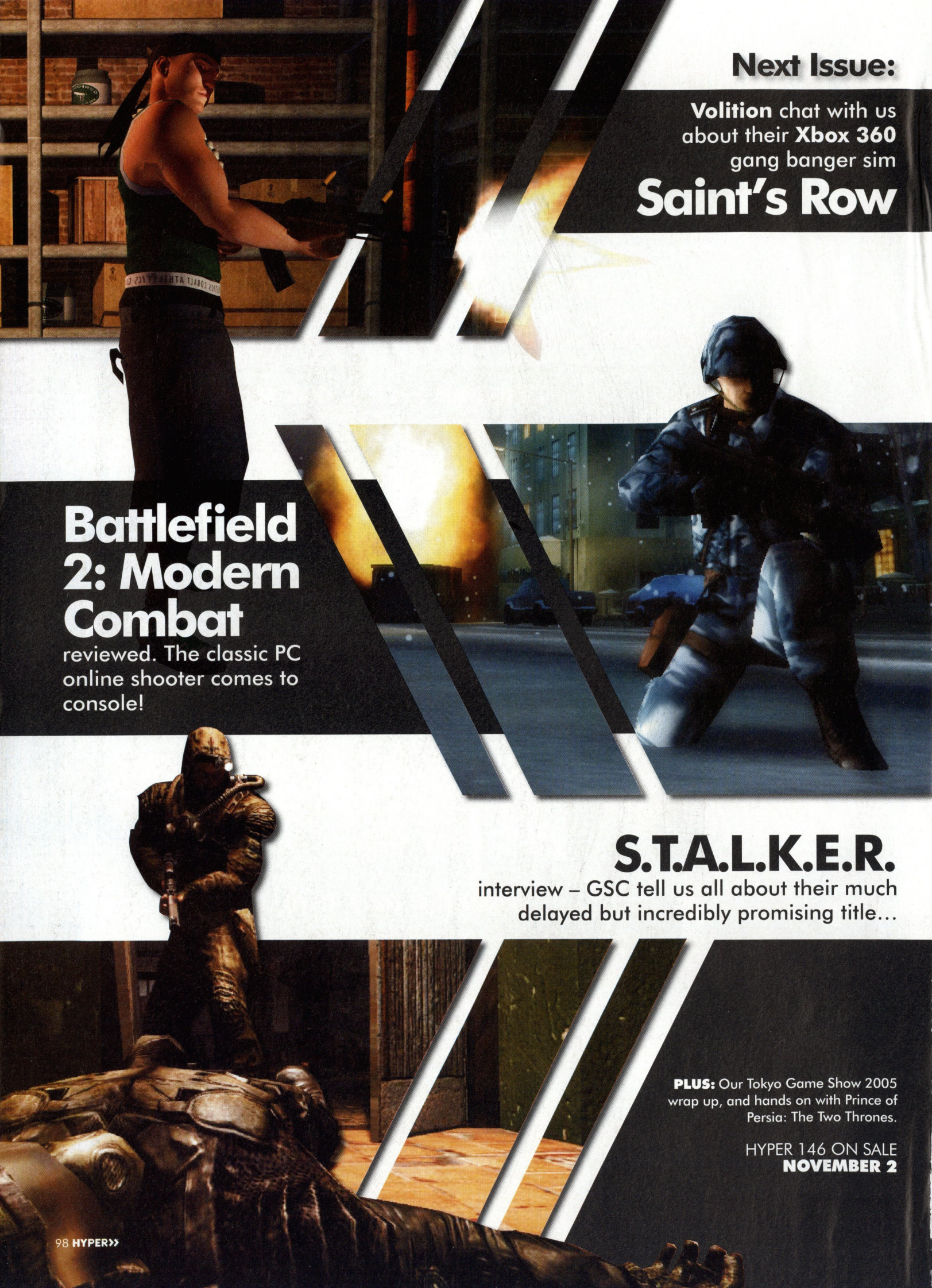

Next Issue:

Volition chat with us about their **Xbox 360** gang banger sim

Saint's Row

Battlefield 2: Modern Combat

reviewed. The classic PC online shooter comes to console!

S.T.A.L.K.E.R.

interview – GSC tell us all about their much delayed but incredibly promising title...

PLUS: Our Tokyo Game Show 2005 wrap up, and hands on with Prince of Persia: The Two Thrones.

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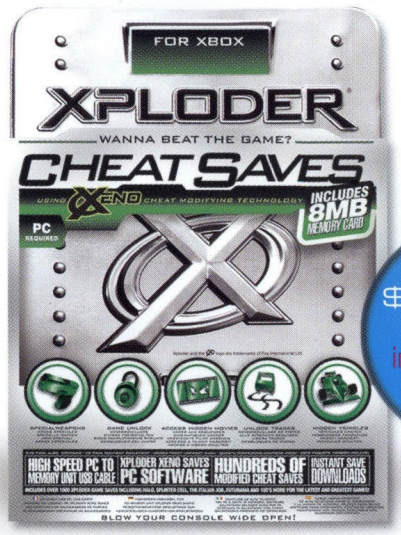

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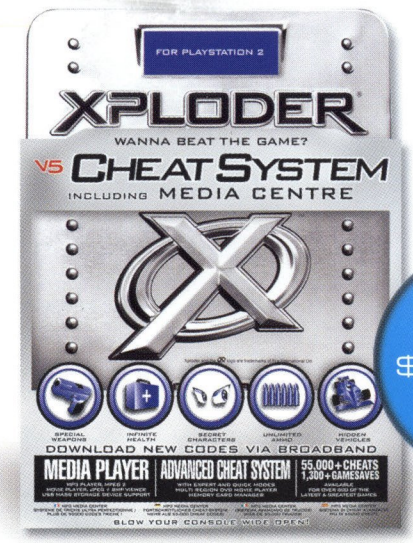

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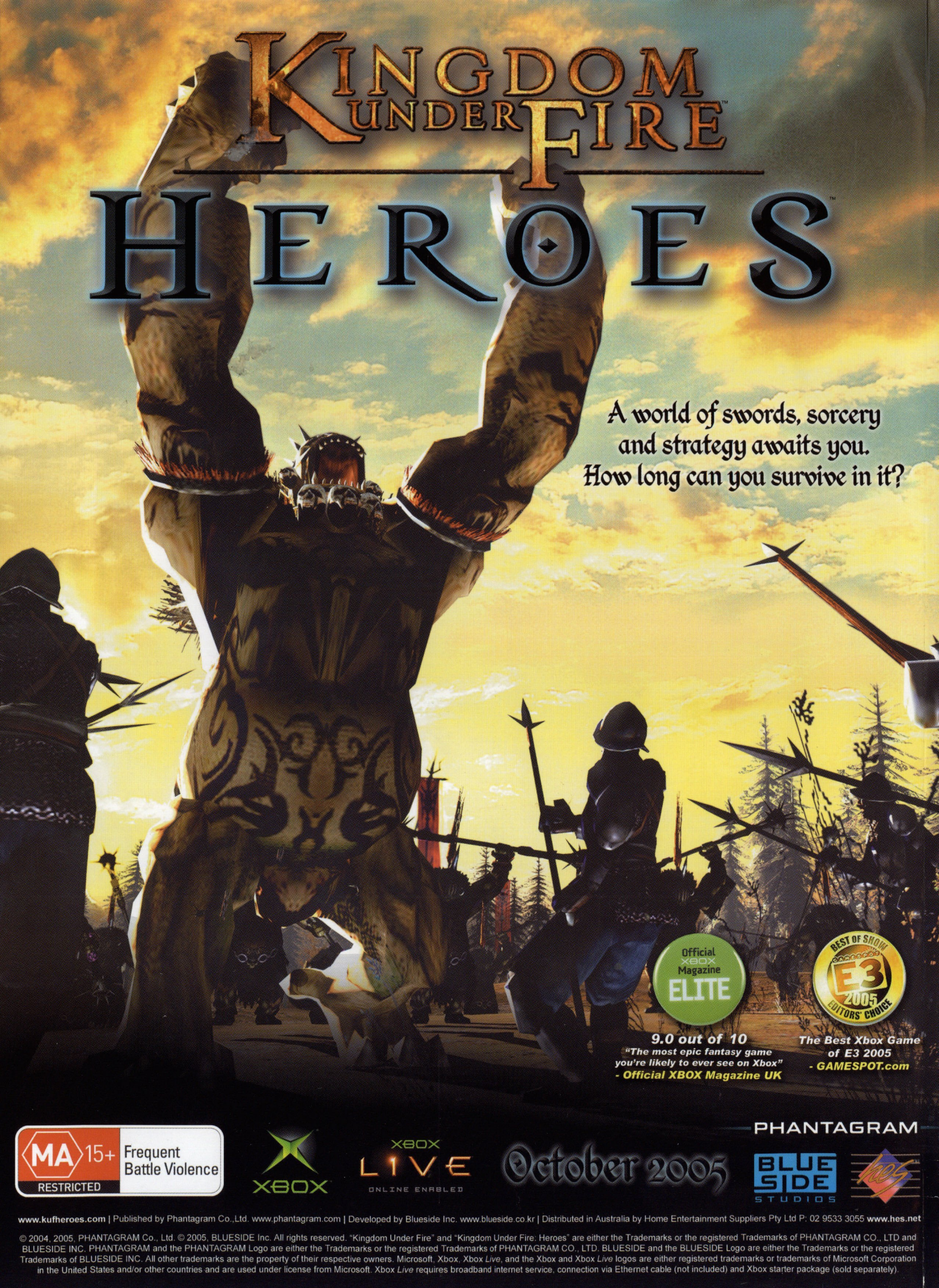

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