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FINAL FANTASY THE SPIRITS WITHIN
From game to movie: The dawn of the digital actor

Reviews

PC Half-life: Blue Shift
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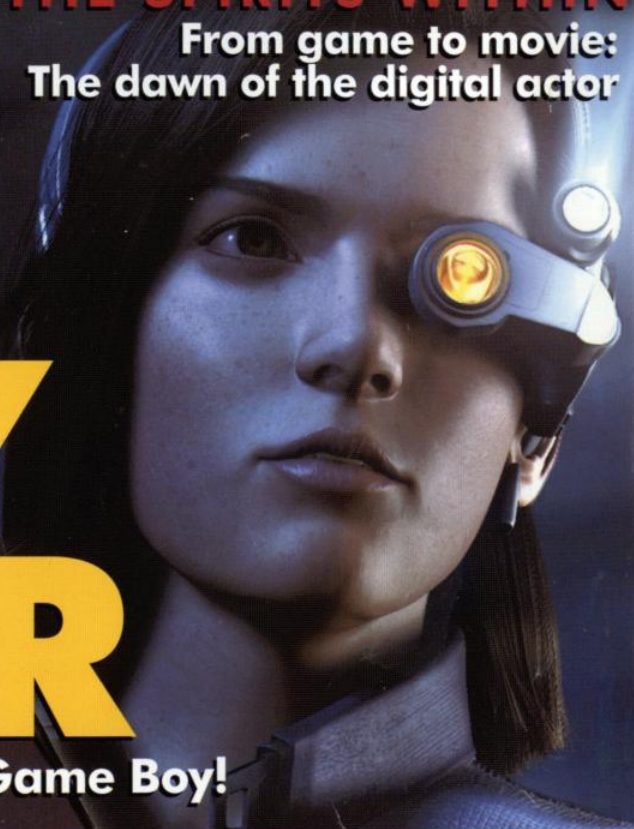**PC** Operation Flashpoint
PS2 Dark Cloud
PS2 Bloody Roar 3

next

EXCLUSIVE INTERVIEW
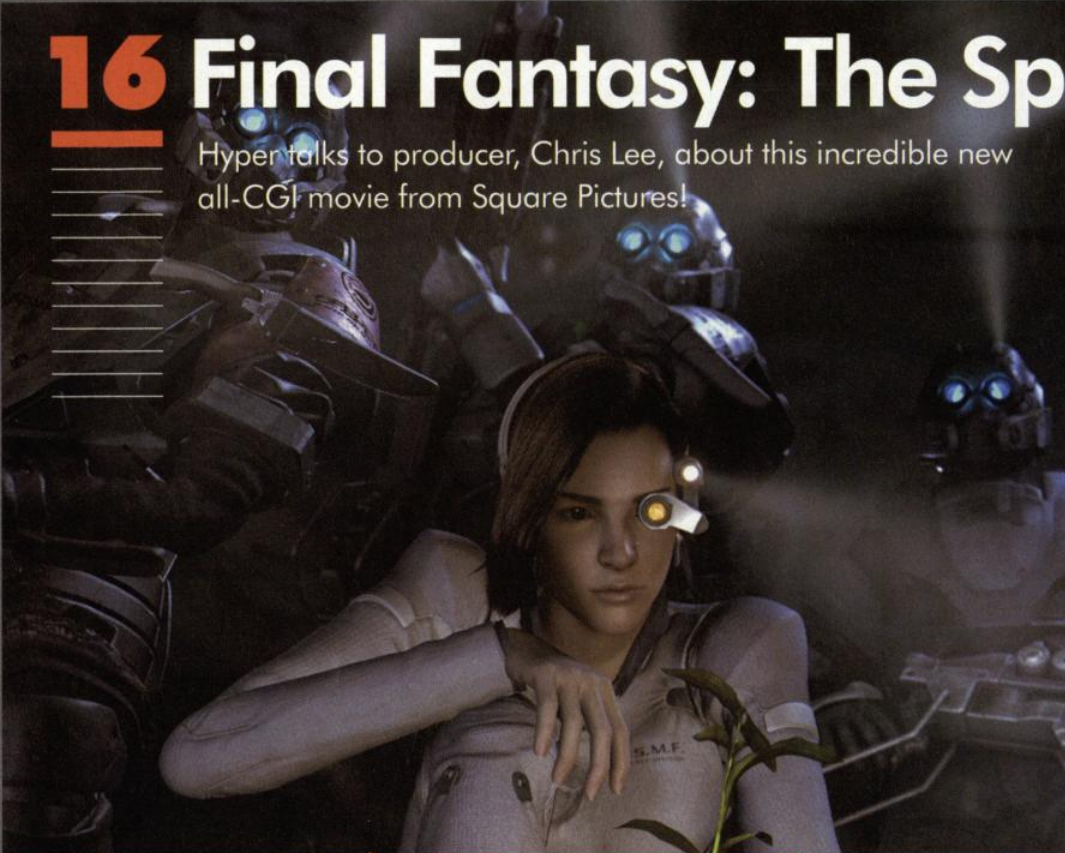# HARRY POTTER

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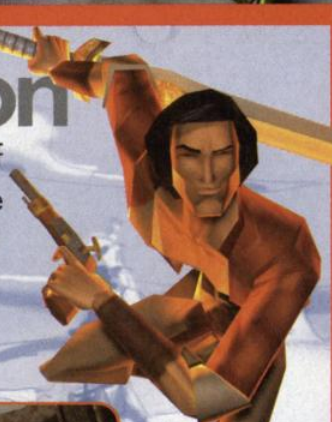
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Codemasters thrill us with their engaging new tactical warfare sim.

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You could win a PS2, GT3 and a limited edition GT3 shoulder bag, simply by subscribing to Hyper!

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HYPE IT UP

Hey guys, we have a magazine to make here... guys?

I tell you, that's the last time I bring Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 2 for Game Boy Advance to the office. If you find a few things missing from this issue, you can blame it on that dastardly new handheld from Nintendo. I mean, who exactly is paying for this bill on my desk for six packets of Energisers? Next time I'll just turn off the lights. That'll teach 'em...

Well, the odd few seconds we weren't playing the office GBA this month, we were on the phone to some of the coolest people in the world. We spoke to the creator of Galleon, the producer of the Final Fantasy movie, the guys behind the Harry Potter games from EA... there's just so much to tell you about this issue.

Now if I could just wrestle that Game Boy Advance from Cam's hands, maybe he'll do some work, and I can – ahem – confiscate it.

Eliot Fish >> Editor

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NEWS

Tekken 4 enters the ring
Namco unveil the long awaited sequel

In a private screening to arcade operators in Japan on the 20th of June, Namco showcased the latest instalment in their marquee fighting series, Tekken 4, a mere month before it was expected to arrive in arcades. The secrecy in the development of this game would give only Nintendo a run for their money — the very existence of it was little more than rumour until a teaser video was shown at E3. Now the world is literally flooded with news about the game, which we hope to see in Australian arcades any day now.

BACK FOR REVENGE
Three new characters have been named, whilst seven old favourites are confirmed to be returning to the fray. The three new characters are Steve Fox (originally named 'Dean Earwicker' but he was renamed due

to bad feedback) a boxer from England, Craig Marduk (a Bill Goldberg lookalike) an American Vale Tudo fighter, and Christie Monteiro, Eddy's Capoiera student. Returning fighters are Paul Phoenix, Marshall Law (from Tekken 1 and 2, his son Forest was in 3), Xiaoyu, Hwoarang, Yoshimitsu, King and surprisingly Kazuya Mishima from Tekken 1 and 2. Supposedly killed by Heihachi after Tekken 2, Kazuya somehow survived and is now back to exact his revenge. Jin, who is Namco's poster boy nowadays, is a favourite to be the boss this time around, possibly in his semi-possessed form. There are blocks for at least 20 characters all up, so it will be interesting to see who is time released, as a lot of popular characters are yet to show themselves.

There are a couple of major changes to the fighting system, perhaps the most significant being the inclusion of walls in the new arenas. All previous Tekken games have taken place on an eternal fighting plane, with the backgrounds detached from the foreground. In the gameplay demonstrations we've seen, walls are indeed an integral part of the game, making for some insane juggles. This should put an end to the turtling tactics that plagued T3 and TTT so badly.

The tri-dimensionality of T3/TTT is debatable, however a new control system in Tekken 4 makes a

much greater use of 3D than in previous games, at least for novices. A simple tap up or down will still result in a sidestep, however, the side step

Looks like someone is tekken a serious beating.

can now be extended much more, similar to the effect of the 8-way run in Soul Calibur. If both characters are walking the same direction, they keep facing each other, and if they are walking opposite directions, then they circle each other much like in a real fight.

The third major new feature is a 'position change' which is done in much the same way as a standard throw, in conjunction with the direction you wish to push your opponent. What this means is that if they have you pinned in a corner, a simple change will put them in the corner with their back facing you. It doesn't appear to give anyone a huge and unfair frame advantage, but until we have played, it will be hard to tell. It definitely has the potential to radically change the outcome of a match.

With the game out now in arcades in Japan, we can optimistically expect to see it not long after this issue is on the stands. So what are you waiting for? The King of Iron Fist Tournament 4 is ready to begin...

>> "Tekken 4 makes a much greater use of 3D than previous games"

Who the hell are these people anyway?
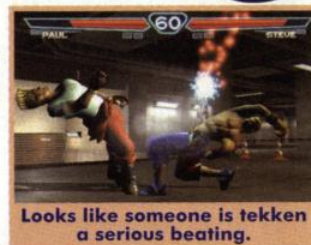
GBA TOO DARK? DON'T TOUCH!

Void your warranty and kill your screen!

>> There have been reports of a hidden contrast control on the rear of the Game Boy Advance, masked by the sticker above the battery slot. It has been suggested online that adjusting this hidden "pot" can brighten your GBA screen to improve the contrast with some of the darker games available. However, this is FALSE. Whatever you do, don't touch that hidden control. Hyper recommends you leave your GBA how it is, and find a decent light source instead. Why?

Nintendo have explained to us that this control is for Nintendo technicians only, and that adjusting it can permanently damage the Liquid Crystal Display. The Nintendo press release explains, "A positive and negative voltage controls Liquid Crystal Displays (LCDs), The 'contrast control' that you are referring to is actually a flicker control. The adjustment is used to synchronize the positive and negative

voltages. If these voltages are out of adjustment then the LCD will no longer respond correctly. The result will be an excess charge built up in the liquid crystal and it will permanently damage the LCD. The excessive charge gives the appearance of a brighter screen because the liquid crystal is not reacting properly to the voltages applied. When the adjustment of the voltages is correct the changing polarities will not allow a charge to build up, which prolongs the LCD life."

So, like we said, don't fool around with it. You think a particular game is a little too dark? Buy a worm light!

Advance Australia Fair

After months of waiting (and thoughts of importing) the Game Boy Advance launched in Australia on June 22nd. Okay, so we knew that. But while eager fans were crowding their local video game stores, Nintendo employees, members of the press and a few invited celebrities were celebrating the official launch of the new handheld at the All Star Café in Melbourne.

Kicking off the celebrations were the 'Advance Dancers', a trio of girls in tight pants who danced with their Game Boys to the tune of 'I Want Advance', thanks to the Johnny Young Talent School.

Guests were able to play the Game Boys themselves, with F-Zero and Mario Advance on offer. But the highlight of the event was the 'celebrity' competition, with the stars of Neighbours, Big Brother and several football players competing in an F-Zero race (does Australia need some real celebrities or what?). The winner had the honour of choosing the charity that would receive the prize money.

Atari Reborn

Hands up how many of you knew that Infogrames actually owned the Atari brand name? Surprising, isn't it? Well, crazy as it may sound, Infogrames plan on using the Atari brand name on a select range of games they will be releasing in the future. No longer will Atari mean a dodgy new 3D version of Centipede or Asteroids... you may find that Unreal II and Unreal Championship are Atari games! Bizarre yet somehow logical.

WHOOPS!

Hyper would like to apologise to Roadshow Home Entertainment for not crediting them as the correct distributor for the Red Planet DVD in issue 93. Sorry guys. We love you, really!

CAPTION THIS!

Our monthly Caption This competition has made it to 22! This time around we bring you a stunning moment from Half-Life: Blue Shift. Hmmm... Send all entries to **captionthis@next.com.au**
You must write CAPTION THIS PART 22 in the subject line!

PART 22

ROTFLMAO!

studios CRICKET 2002 ... vodaf

Bowl Me Over!
ELECTRONIC ARTS RETURN TO THE CREASE

>> Cricket. Fans of the sport have never been truly satisfied by any videogame representation of it. The fact is, besides being an incredibly tricky game to replicate as fast-paced entertainment, the sport doesn't have the huge world-wide following that would result in a big fat development budget for the programmers who are trying to bring it to life. Electronic Arts have brought us a few cricket titles in the past, and they love us so much that they're having another go at it with Cricket 2002.

The arvo Hyper indoor cricket game

Due in October for PlayStation 2, Cricket 2002 is going to be EA's most genuine attempt yet at satisfying the hardcore fans out there. Featuring all the teams, players, playing styles and even an animated duck, we'll make sure we suffer through a few tests and bring you a sweet preview soon so we can all get some sleep. Bowlin', Caaam.
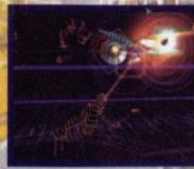
Textures? Bah! Who needs 'em?

SEGA GO HI-REZ!

>> The creators of the eternally groovy Space Channel 5 on Dreamcast are returning with another bizarre sci-fi music game for both Dreamcast and PlayStation 2. Titled, Rez, the game is being dubbed a "musical shooter", a game where you play a little wire-frame character that races through a series of freaky psychedelic worlds. As you travel through, you shoot at objects which in turn produce musical sounds — the more accurate you are, the better the music, which again in turn will affect the environment surrounding you. Kind of like a cross between Vib Ribbon and Space Channel 5. Hopefully, the final result will be another stunning slice of originality.

Square: What a bunch of teasers.

FINAL FANTASY XI ON XBOX & GCN?

>> Hironobu Sakaguchi, the creator of the Final Fantasy series, has confirmed that Final Fantasy XI (the upcoming online multiplayer instalment in the series) will not only just be released on PS2 and PC. Without naming any names, he indicated that the game would see release on other consoles. Sakaguchi's vision is that the game will be playable online across different platforms, bringing the gaming community together in the Final Fantasy universe. Will it be Xbox, Gamecube or both? We'll all have to wait and see. Awww!

WINNERS
HYPER » 93

EA RUGBY – PS2
R. Boeltcher, ACT
H. McNeal, NSW
A. Campbell, VIC
M. Ashurst, NSW
K. Leckovski, NSW

QUAKE III: REVOLUTION – PS2
A. Turner, SA
M. Berkelmans, QLD
M. Cooper, Vic
S. Gill, NSW
D. Leombruni, VIC

❤ OVERFLOW

Ion Storm in Austin (opposed to Ion Storm in Dallas, who may be getting shut down), have licensed the Unreal Warfare engine (that's the spunky 3D engine AFTER the Unreal II engine... goodness!) for their next two big games — Thief III and Deus Ex II. Now if that doesn't give you wood, what could?

Did you know that the Nintendo Game Boy Advance is now the fastest selling game device in the UK? At launch, it sold 81,000 units in a weekend, along with 90,000 games. The previous record was held by the PS2 launch, which shipped only about 60,000 in the same period of time. Also, in its first week on sale in the USA, the GBA sold through 540,000 units. Woah.

You may have guessed that the Dreamcast version of Black & White has been canned. The PlayStation, PS2 and Xbox versions are all still in development, with the PlayStation version coming out very soon.

The PlayStation 2 has taken an official price drop in Japan. The console has been reduced from 39800 yen to 35000 yen — a 13 percent price drop. No word on a local price cut yet.

Zone of the Enders is coming to the Game Boy Advance! Officially titled, Z.O.E 2173 Testament, the game most probably takes place after the PlayStation 2 game which was set in 2172. It is not exactly known whether the same Konami team will be working on this new Z.O.E game.

Tekken, Soul Calibur and Ridge Racer on Nintendo GameCube? It could just be. We've been seeing rumours that Namco are preparing these big titles for the GameCube. No doubt more information will be announced at Nintendo's Spaceworld show later this year.

News reports in Japan indicate that Sega will soon open a facility that will encourage children to explore and improve their intelligence. How exactly? Well, we're not sure... possibly they'll sit them all down and make them play Shenmue. Or something.

The Nintendo GameCube launch titles in Japan will be Luigi's Mansion and Wave Race Blue Storm. That's right, just two titles from Nintendo at launch. Quality over quantity, remember?

The ruling to split-up Microsoft has been struck down in the appeals court. The previous judge, Thomas Jackson, was found to be biased against the company from the very beginning of the "landmark" case, and all restrictions against Microsoft have been lifted. The courts will now find another judge to evaluate the Microsoft case and determine the penalties the company will incur. Sounds like Bill can get a good night's sleep now...

PS2 40 Gig (!) HARD DRIVE RELEASED

›› In Japan, Sony have released the brand spanking new PS2 Hard Drive with Ethernet Adaptor. The size of the thing is a whopping 40 Gig! Some games that will support the HDD include: Final Fantasy X and Capcom Vs SNK2!

GOING OUT WITH A BANG

›› Get Bass Fishing, House of the Dead 2... pretty good games, right? They were made for the DC by WOW Entertainment, a division of Sega. WOW has just announced their final game for the DC in Japan, and it's not even vaguely related to the action genre. It's a love sim called Candy Stripe.

You start the game in your dingy little apartment and proceed to woo your choice of nurses at the local hospital. We're sure the gameplay is dynamic and requires non-stop, twitch-like, analogue stick skillz. Well, actually, you spend the entire game in conversation. Don't expect a local release... *cough*.

HOT!
EVERQUEST: SHADOWS OF LUCLIN! FIRST SCREENS!

HOT!
SPIDERMAN ON PC! FIRST SCREENS!
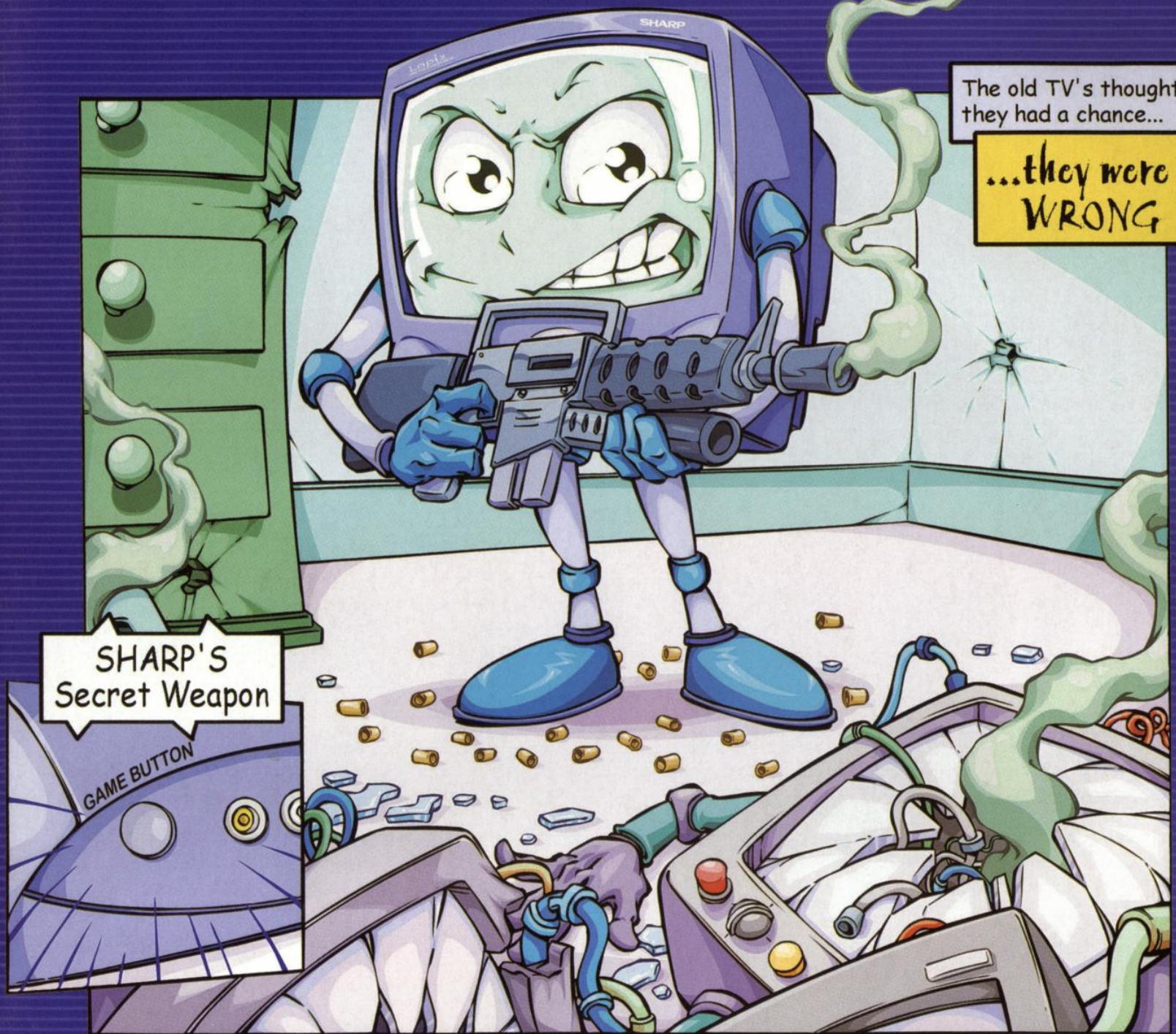
Super Smash Bros. Melee
»GAMECUBE NINTENDO

Super Smash Bros. Melee is set to be a smashing good time indeed, especially with an updated graphics engine thanks to the meaty GameCube. All your favourite Nintendo characters are crammed into one game for your button-mashing pleasure. Bring on 2002!

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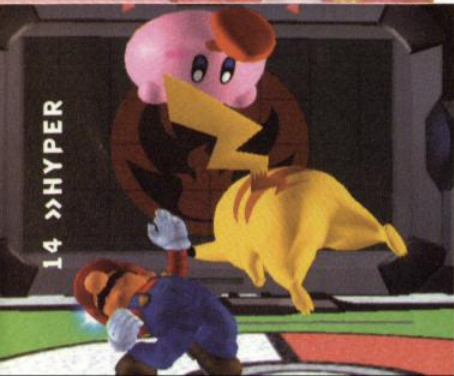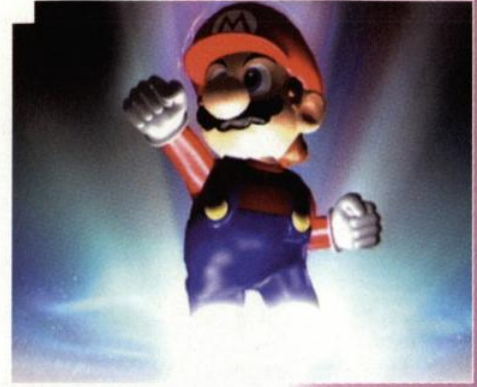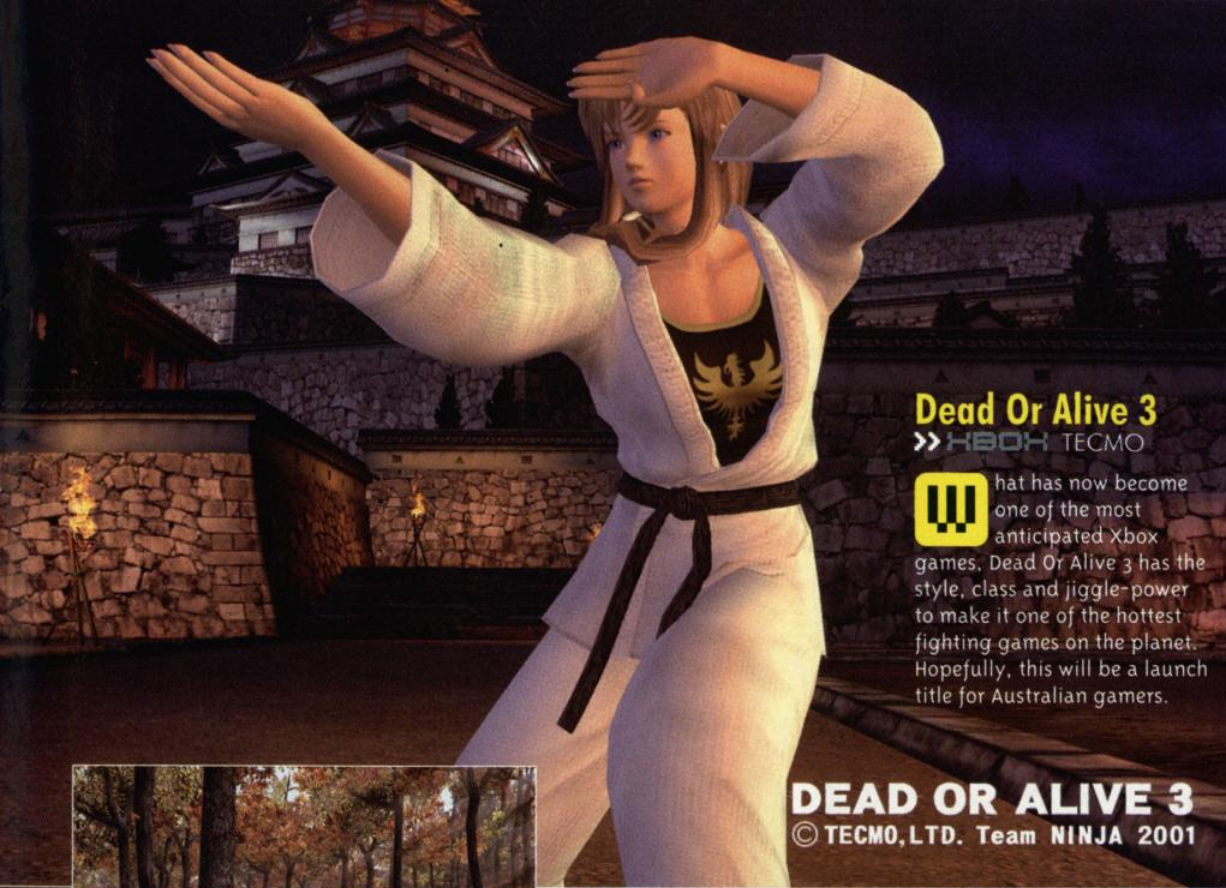
Dead Or Alive 3
>> XBOX TECMO

hat has now become one of the most anticipated Xbox games, Dead Or Alive 3 has the style, class and jiggle-power to make it one of the hottest fighting games on the planet. Hopefully, this will be a launch title for Australian gamers.

DEAD OR ALIVE 3
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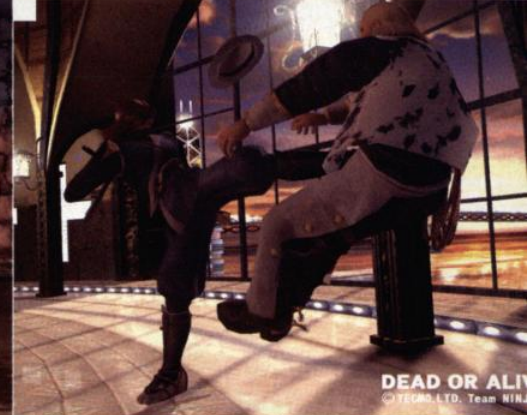
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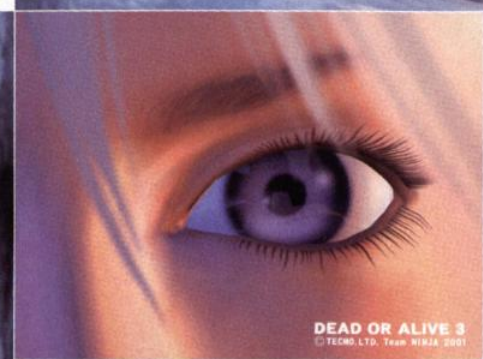
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DEAD OR ALIVE

DEAD OR ALIVE 3
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Behind the Scenes of
Final Fantasy: The Spirits Within

>> KEVIN CHEUNG
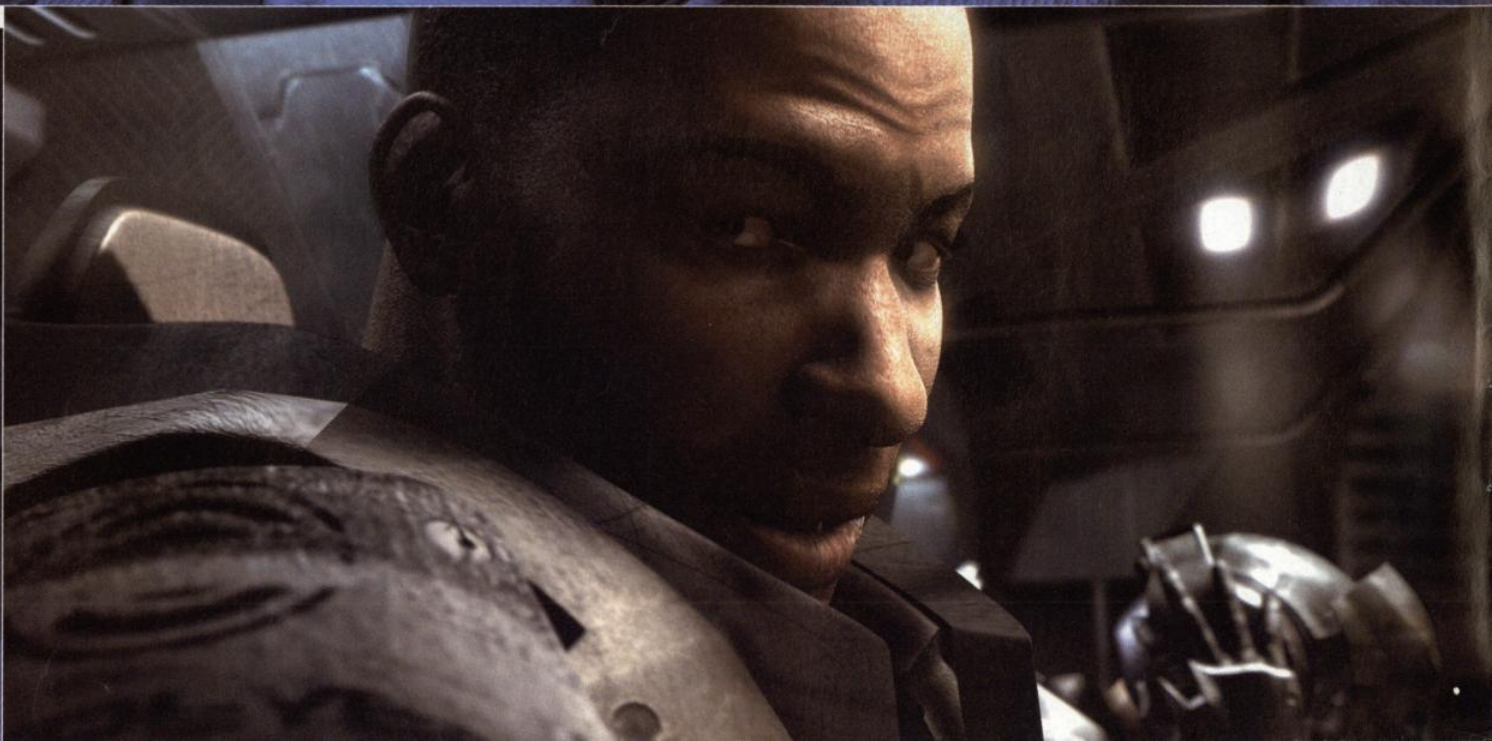
ideogame movies have been done before, but not on this grand or epic a scale. For all the talk that Hideo Kojima made of Metal Gear Solid being his interactive movie, it turns out that Hironobu Sakaguchi, the creator of the Final Fantasy series, is the first game developer to take complete control of a full-blown theatrical film derived from a videogame.

The film is *Final Fantasy: The Spirits Within*, a fully computer generated film that combines some of the greatest special effects the world has ever seen with Sakaguchi's unique brand of philosophy-infused storytelling.

Hyper was fortunate enough to speak with the film's producer, Chris Lee, who let us in on the secrets behind the film's production and the upcoming DVD...

By 2065, scientific advances have allowed life to be analysed and expressed as a form of energy. Earth itself has a living spirit that all living things are born from, and return to in death. However, the Earth and its people are invaded by alien phantoms that drain this life energy, with the intent of eliminating all life on the planet.

Of the humans who survive, Dr. Aki Ross is a scientist who's on the verge of cracking the language code of the aliens. With the help of her mentor, Dr. Sid, and a military friend, Aki sets herself on a path against political enemies and terrifying aliens to save her beloved Mother Earth.
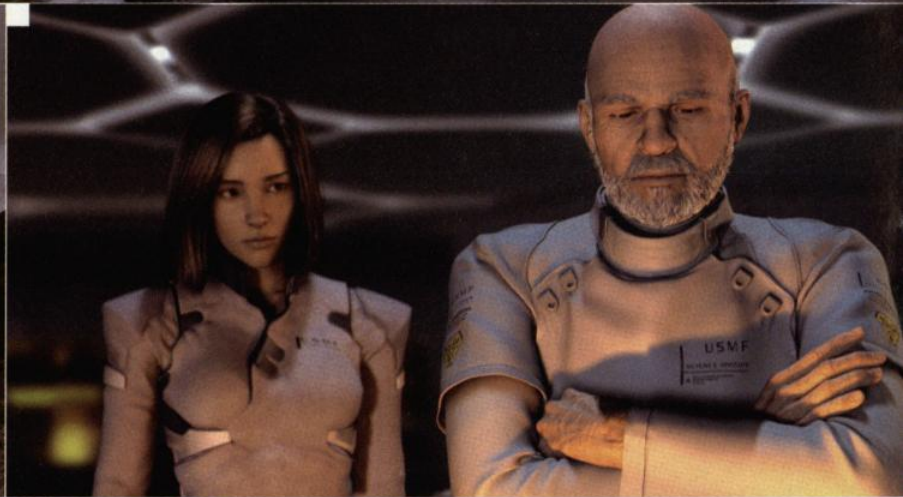
Each character was motion captured.

HYPER: What's it like to work with Mr. Sakaguchi?

CHRIS LEE: He's a lot of fun, about as far from a geek as I can imagine - he really enjoys life. He's also a master storyteller. I first got involved with him about 4 years ago, when I was the President at Tristar Pictures. What was intriguing to me, was that I was told there was a gentleman who'd been telling all these great stories with great visuals in the digital medium of gaming since 1987, and even though he wasn't a film director per se, he

clearly was reaching out and achieving a broad level of popularity with a generation that had grown up with gaming as part of their lives.

HYPER: Because of Final Fantasy's popularity as a videogame, what kind of considerations did you make in turning it into a movie?

CHRIS LEE: It is an incredibly popular game. I think it sold something like 33 million copies. What fascinates me about it as a franchise, though, is that unlike any other game franchise I've ever heard of, the characters and the worlds change with each subsequent game. FFVII, was very different from FFVIII, and that was very different from FFIX. Sometimes the games are set in a more fantastical 'Lord of the Rings' setting, other times it's set in the future. This particular Final Fantasy is the first time the story has been told on Earth, and it was very important for Sakaguchi that he be

able to create the most realistic looking people possible, because he wanted to deal with the mature themes, the spiritual themes, which are the constants of the Final Fantasy franchise. I think Final Fantasy isn't so much about a person as it is about a sensibility; and so to tell this story, he set about to bring people to life through digital animation technology.

HYPER: Were there any concepts from the game that were deemed unsuitable for the movie?

CHRIS LEE: Not really. Final Fantasy changes so often that there isn't anything that's really missing, because every game is a new experience. On the other hand, this isn't for instance a Final Fantasy where you have the Chocobos — the giant chickens that people ride — because even though it's a science fiction adventure, it is set on a recognisable Earth, in the year 2065. But things

pretty much look the way we know it to be today, except they've been suffering through 30 years of alien infestation.

HYPER: So there aren't going to be any Chocobos?!

CHRIS LEE: (laughs) Not in this particular movie, no. There actually is a Chocobo hidden somewhere in the movie but I can't say where because I think it'll turn into some kind of contest for the fans.

HYPER: How do you feel the movie will differentiate itself from, say, Tomb Raider or Mortal Kombat?

CHRIS LEE: I think that with Mortal Kombat, and to a stronger extent Tomb Raider, those movies are really about a character. As I said, Final Fantasy is about a world and a sensibility, and a spiritual and emotional nature. There is very much a romance at the heart of our story here,

between Dr. Aki Ross and one of the soldiers Capt. Gray Edwards. But I think that whereas *Tomb Raider* and *Mortal Kombat* are very traditional motion picture adaptations that a third party producer/director/studio buys the rights to, and then sets about trying to figure out what the story is going to be and how to shoot it on film, Final Fantasy has the creator of the game directing the movie and executing it in the medium of the game. Obviously, as gamers you'd be familiar with how Chris Roberts made a

The Square animators hard at work.

movie out of *Wing Commander*, and I think one of the problems with it was that it was so close to the game it didn't let anybody else in, in terms of understanding or appreciating the world in which the movie was set. In this case, I know one of the earliest things Sakaguchi said to me was 'I recognise that I can't recreate in a motion picture theatre the interactive experience of somebody sitting at home with a controller'. So the goal has been to find the emotional equivalent of that, to engage the audience in the same way when they're playing the game.

HYPER: How do you think Western audiences will respond to such a mature plot in what's essentially an animated film?
CHRIS LEE: In countries like Japan, they don't necessarily relegate animation to the kids or the family unit, and they can have pictures like

Akira, *Ghost In The Shell* and *Princess Mononoke* for a mass audience. We've taken the route of 'we don't have talking animals, we don't have singing toys, and we're not doing comedy'. The concept of our animation is pretty reserved. It's supposed to be as lifelike as possible. And it's something new, but I think what's not new is what gaming is doing. Gaming in its own way is a form of animation, in my opinion, and story telling. The huge generation gap that you see with the stronger platforms, like PS2 and the Xbox and Nintendo Gamecube - this is really a couple of generations beyond our time. I mean, particularly with Final Fantasy, there are people in their thirties who've been playing it since they were six years old. So I think what you're seeing is an evolutionary step for Sakaguchi as a film director, for someone who's incidentally involved in creating popular culture. I think in terms of Western animation, it's a

pretty revolutionary film in technique, execution and story; but I think that the audience is going to embrace it because they've been on this curve for a long time already. So much Western popular culture, which is really global popular culture now, is driven by the East. There are literal examples like Pokémon or *Crouching Tiger, Hidden Dragon*, and signs of subtle influence like *The Matrix*, which owes as much to Eastern culture and storytelling as anything else.

HYPER: How then were the voice actors cast?
CHRIS LEE: They were cast like any other live action actor. We basically wrote the script, and we said 'You know what, it would be great if we could get Steve Buscemi for Neal', or 'it'd be great to get Jimmy Woods, or Alec Baldwin as the leading man'; and it was sent to them that way.
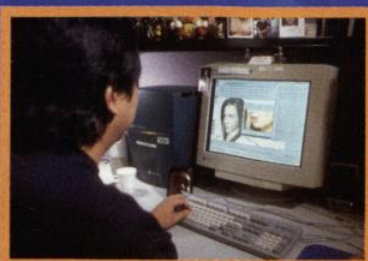
HYPER: Were they familiar with the games?

CHRIS LEE: No. A lot of them have kids though (laughs). And I think the kids might've known what it was. And I gotta tell you, I was actually very pleased because we pretty much got everyone we wanted for the movie first off. And we're thrilled with the performances that we got, because if we didn't get actors of this calibre, it just wouldn't be the same experience.

HYPER: Some animated films often fashion their characters against the live actors. Was anything like this done when creating the characters for Final Fantasy?

CHRIS LEE: Not really. You see, as I mentioned before about the project taking four years, the reality of it is that the first year and a half is split into three things. In Honolulu they were creating the software to bring the characters to life, which didn't exist before. They were also creating the

characters themselves in the character group. And one of the toughest jobs is that the studio had to come up with a cast that doesn't exist in real life, and yet are still pleasing to the eye on screen. Then of course we're working on the script at the same time. So when all those three things came together — the look, the ability to do it, the technology, and the confidence in the story — we all said, okay, let's go forward with it.

The actors actually didn't really see much of what they were going to look like until they came back to do some re-records about six months ago, when they were doing some ADR and replacing some dialogue, and they were really quite tickled. In fact, the main comment from all the guys was 'oh look, I'm so handsome'.

HYPER: (laughs)

CHRIS LEE: They're actors. I don't blame them.

HYPER: Given that the whole movie is in CG and you have complete control of what's happening in every frame, how much temptation was there to demand greater perfection for each shot? How far could you go with the control?

CHRIS LEE: Well, as artists, which everyone on the production group is, we're never satisfied with our work. And at some point, we just have to get up and say 'let's move on now'. There is a tremendous amount of detail that goes on in the movie that, unless you have one of those things in *Bladerunner* that allows you to focus closer and closer to something, you're never going to see it all. But the DVD will show a lot of things you wouldn't have picked up on a first glance of the picture. One of the nice things about that amount of detail is that every time you see the movie, it's always a new experience, there's always something new to see. So I think that they worked well beyond their limits.
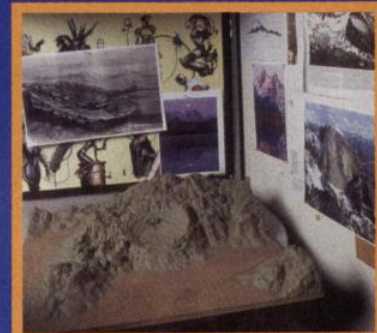
Reference models were still required.

HYPER: How many people were employed to work on the film?

CHRIS LEE: About 200, from 22 different countries, primarily the United States and Japan. The reason the studio was built in Honolulu was that Sakaguchi felt very strongly that this was going to take several years to do, and he wanted to be in a place where he could comfortably reside for that time period. No one wanted to be

in Los Angeles for four years; no one wanted to be in Tokyo for four years. And of course, there's James Rogers (from Australia), our head of compositing, and has been with the project since the earliest days. He did a fantastic job for us because we spent about a year and a half doing research and development on the picture, then a year animating the characters, and the last year and a half has been about the compositing process. We have up to about 500 individual layers on a single shot, all of which contributes to the complexity of the film.

HYPER: We saw the 20 minute preview of *Final Fantasy* a couple of months ago and were quite amazed.
CHRIS LEE: Great. What you saw there was almost done. It had sound and everything — we had it scored over in London with the LSO (London Symphony Orchestra) with Elliot Goldenthal as the composer, and they're just finishing up the mix right

now at Skywalker Ranch over in California, but otherwise everything else is done in Honolulu.

HYPER: The alien effects and military equipment were pretty awesome to watch. Were there any creative influences from iconic films like *Aliens* or *Starship Troopers*?
CHRIS LEE: It's funny, you know, I actually worked on *Starship Troopers*. I also really loved *Aliens* - I really loved the movie as a science fiction epic, and I think for the last 20 years now, all of us have revered *Alien* and *Aliens*, and rightly so. But I think for *Final Fantasy*, we've hopefully broken the mould in terms of what the creatures are supposed to look like — they don't look like H.R. Giger creations to me. And I think that one of the things that a lot of the fans liked about *Starship Troopers* was the concept of the power suits, which we tried to do, but the reality is, and this is an example of where technology is better suited for

making this kind of movie, if you put live actors in the equivalent of what you see our characters wearing in battle, they'll collapse after one take, and they certainly can't do martial arts or jump out of planes. The computer allows us to put them in any kind of clothing we want. A lot of our new software and algorithms came out of the wardrobe department, taking clothing apart scene by scene and seeing them put it back together. Then they come up with leather outfits that move like leather, tight T-shirts, jeans, combat suits and so on.

HYPER: What are the DVD plans for *Final Fantasy: The Spirits Within*?
CHRIS LEE: We've been working on it for about 5 months already. There's a lot of extras going in, some things that would be the equivalent of outtakes I suppose. There's a lot of special material, it's going to be a 2-disc set, it'll be highly interactive, it'll have DVD commentary I did where we

looked at some of the earlier work. They'd ask me 'what do you think' and I'd say 'I don't know how I could've approved this stuff' (laughs). But it's really remarkable to see how quickly the artistry improves in bringing the characters to life.

HYPER: Are there going to be features like additional scenes that can be spliced into the original movie?
CHRIS LEE: There is going to be a feature that lets you re-cut scenes somehow. I don't really understand it, but it's in there. Whatever the latest things are that you can do on DVD, it will be on these two discs.

HYPER: Chris, that sounds like it's going to be awesome! Thanks for your time.
CHRIS LEE: My pleasure.

Final Fantasy: The Spirits Within is in cinemas from July 26.

TRAWL

>>ELIOT FISH

"Bombs away, in old Bombay..."

Make friends, lose friends, kill friends...

Sovereign

HTTP://SOVEREIGN.STATION.SONY.COM/

erant Interactive are not satisfied with being the legends behind the incredibly successful online RPG, Everquest. Nor do they seem content with the baffling workload they must have in front of them as they tackle the development of Star Wars: Galaxies, the first MMORPG set in the *Star Wars* universe. Ohhh no. They're also engulfed in the

development of a 3D MMORTS (Massively Multiplayer Online Real Time Strategy game) entitled, Sovereign. If you like your games epic in scale, then look no further...

SEEK AND DESTROY
So how the hell does a massively multiplayer RTS work? Well, Verant would like to draw comparisons to the slow development and growth players will enjoy with their units and technology in Sovereign to the maturing of a character in an online RPG such as Everquest. The more you play, the more your units will develop, the more your homebase will expand and as a result, the more power you will have in the game. However, a player only controls one character in an RPG, whereas in Sovereign, players

will be in control of potentially hundreds of units and buildings.

Work began on Sovereign a few years ago, and since then the game has succumbed to a complete re-design. Initially, the units were based upon real-world equivalents — tanks, helicopters, battleships etc. — but eventually it was decided to give the game a more unique

More than meets the eye... wouldn't you agree?

look, which has resulted in a more sci-fi bent to most of the designs. What this has done for the gameplay mechanics is open up new options in terms of unit technology, research and customisation. Now that the designers don't have to follow any real-world rules, there is more freedom in the development of unit types, and as a result there will be more for the end-user to play with and enjoy.

Verant describe the game

"Hey Bob, you ever feel insignificant?"

"Barren desert secure, sir."

Take over the world, in your own special way.

"Bloody great big mechs with f**k off guns have entered the compound sir."

itself as a mixture of elements from Civilization II, Command & Conquer and Diplomacy, with an emphasis on making and breaking alliances. Who better to lull and deceive in a game than some stranger on the other side of the world, eh? With support in the game for anywhere between 4 to 500 players at the one time, the potential for huge leagues, guilds and armies of players taking on other player unions will be quite a spectacle and no doubt, a potential headache for all involved. Naturally, Verant are aiming to revolutionise the RTS genre, and many weeks of testing will be required to adjust the gameplay balance.

When you log onto a Sovereign server (games will be hosted only by Verant, much like Everquest), you will be able to choose to join a game currently in progress and take up an open resource slot. Each player will have their own empire that exists in a Homeworld (much like an offline home base) from where you can research new technologies and manage your units. You can't attack another player's Homeworld (Verant decided to offer players a safe haven for when they are offline), but excursions will remain persistent. Technologies such as Satellites, though, will allow you to spy on other players and maybe even discover what they are up to in their Homeworld.

BIG BROTHER

Verant describe the element of espionage in Sovereign as being key to the nature of the game, "...chatting with others, negotiating treaties, agreeing to trade routes, and the sharing of resources and borders is all vital information. If any of this information falls into the wrong hands, it can lead to an attack that has more than just power behind it, but crucial and potentially devastating knowledge."

Clint Worley, Sovereign's producer, also explains, "What we can't do is fall prey to the easy course of building just a Massively Multiplayer version of any other Real Time Strategy game out there. What we are doing is redefining the concept of Real Time Strategy in light of the Massively Multiplayer elements."

The success of a game such as Sovereign, could hinge upon on how well Verant Interactive evolve the game features as players discover holes or break the game through hours of fiddling about with everything. Beta testing can of course solve many of these problems, but Verant have committed themselves to expanding upon the game as it is played, so new ambitious features will be introduced even after the game has been unleashed upon the public. Clearly, there's potential here for huge multiplayer war games that have you lying awake at night plotting tactics. Sovereign could turn out to be far more addictive and challenging that any other MMO game before it. Check out the website for the latest on Sovereign. ❮❮

Phwoarr!

ANARCHY ONLINE, ONLINE!
www.anarchyonline.com
In other Massively Multiplayer Online news, Funcom have announced that their MMORPG, Anarchy Online, has gone gold and servers are up as you read this sentence. A local release date for the Sci-Fi RPG has not been set.

MULTIPLAYER MACS
www.wwiionline.com
Strategy First have announced that the Mac OS version of World War II Online is ready for consumption. This is one of the first games of its kind to be available to Mac users. Whoo-hoo!

ONLINE OPERATIONS
operationflashpoint.com
The ambitious do-it-all war game, Operation Flashpoint, from Codemasters will be receiving an online "update" thanks to Codies, to improve network code and enhance some of the online features of the game. The upgrade will be available for free from the codemaster website.

Up, up and awaaaay!

TRIBES 2 TOUCH UP
www.tribalwar.com
There is a new Tribes 2 patch out now that is essential. You can use the auto-updater in the game to get it, however there are also manual patches available for those of you who want to do it by hand. Check out Tribal War for details, a very cool fan site that's a good starting point for Tribes freaks.

LINKS

DIRECT CONNECT

www.neo-modus.com/

>>Peer-to-Peer communication has started to take off in a big way since the success of programs such as the almost-now-useless Napster. If you're looking for a powerful tool that will allow you to share any type of file whether it be MP3s, movies, pics or whatever you fancy, then check out Direct Connect. Using a simple Windows Explorer style interface you can connect to the service and snoop through the thousands of other users out there with a powerful search tool. Naturally you can also choose to share a folder on your own computer for others to browse. Whilst you can have hours of fun grabbing all sorts of stuff with Direct Connect, we advise you to seriously consider setting up a firewall before you use it. Make sure your PC's security is rock solid to prevent any malicious users snooping through the rest of your hard drive!

My goodness... you do have a long snake.

SNOK!

www.tihlde.org/~torbjorv/snok/

>>Who could forget the thrilling, addictive pleasure that was the old Atari classic, Snake? Well, actually, if it hadn't been for this strange 3D accelerated "first person" version of it, we probably could easily have forgotten it. Snok is a brilliant 3D version of the old game you have to play to believe.

Silly and useless. Just the way we like it.

SIM SANDWICH

www.simsandwich.com

>>Ever wanted to play with your food but don't want mummy slapping you on the wrist? Simple! Just go and make your own Sim Sandwich. Mmmm... honey, mayo and bacon! While you're there you can even find out about the history of the donut and ducks... and stuff.

MAX PAYNE LIVES

maxpayne.godgames.com

>>In anticipation of its release, God Games have unleashed a brand new Max Payne website to showcase all the reasons why we would want to play this game. They've done it in the style of a comic book, and it's pretty cool. Check out the screenshots!

Taste the Payne! Coming to PC, PS2 and...?

But will you have to pay to play? Hmmmm...

THE SIMS ONLINE

thesimsonline.ea.com

>>If you want to get an early peek at the game that's going to ruin your life (socially, at least), then get on over to the official Sims Online site hosted by Electronic Arts. There are some screenshots, links to fan sites and some tasty snippets of info.

G

alleon

CATEGORY: Third Person Adventure >> **PLAYERS:** 1 >>
PUBLISHER: Interplay >> **AVAILABLE:** March 2002

WOW-O-METER

Galleon is the next genre-busting game from the creator of Lara Croft, Toby Gard, and his hot new development house, Confounding Factor. They're setting out to redefine the meaning of the word swashbuckling and they're making a game as well. Err... sorry. Galleon is set in the age of nautical adventures, when heroes had hair on their chests, and bad guys came in industrial size only. The game has a very cool cast, sweet graphics and is sporting some of the most user-friendly controls and options yet seen in a game. But we might as well let Confounding Factor explain it themselves. We spoke to Hayden Duvall (lead artist on Galleon), as well as creator, Toby Gard.

> Did someone forget to give her internal organs?

> "One more step back? Just take the damn photo!"
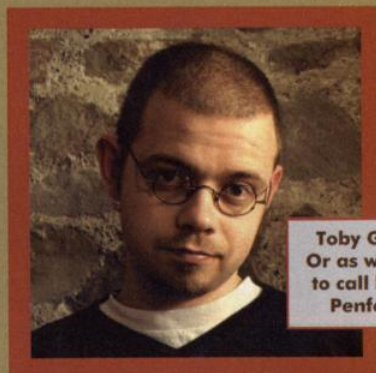
> Toby Gard. Or as we like to call him – Penfold.
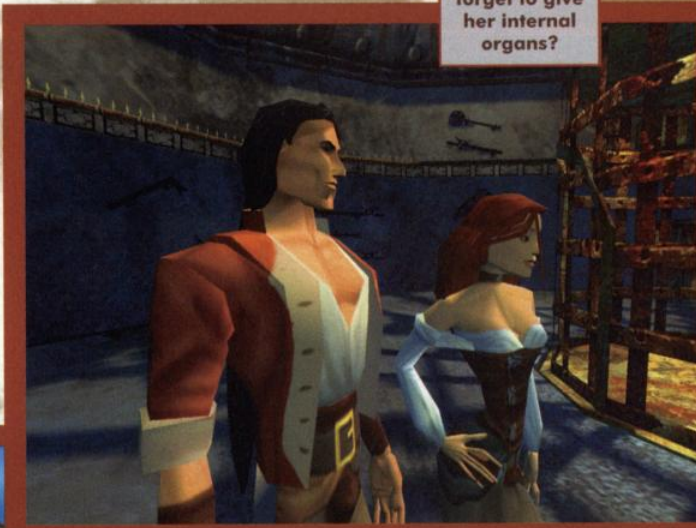
CANNONBALL RUN

We asked Hayden to describe the game, "Well, it's a third person action adventure set in a fantasy world. We've tried to style it so that it's not 100% realistic. It's got a very distinctive graphic style, and a lot of effort has been put into the animation of the characters, and also the movement system. We've tried to give as much personality to the different characters as possible. The story is quite a large one, it's based around quite a large selection of characters, and it's quite important for us to make more of the actual individuals in it than just, you know, NPCs that you have to talk to.

"What happens, is at the beginning of the game you're a sea-faring captain named Rhama Sabrier, who has a wide knowledge of the world that the game's set in, and you're summoned to an island by this wise man who's discovered a mysterious ship that's washed in to the port. Everyone's been killed on it, and he wants your opinion. When you arrive in the game you're on the way to go and see him, and suddenly it all goes wrong and this bad guy comes in, gets

hold of the ship and he's off. The idea of the whole story is that you are trying to stop him from getting to the final destination. He's discovered this source of power, and in the bad guy style, he's off to get hold of that and be super evil boy. So, you're trying to track him down and also beat him to his objective. In order to do that there's a whole load of stuff that you've got to find out about, and that's how it unfolds. It's actually quite complex, but that's essentially what goes on."

Galleon has been a long time in the making, so what have Confounding Factor been doing all this time? "Well, to be honest, it was two years in development of the tools and the system before we really started to put the game together. So it was a long haul, and it will effectively have been a four year project. The last two years we've been starting to actually physically work on getting the game together. But before that it was pretty much figuring out the best way to implement it all. But now we've got a system, we've got our game creation tools settled so that we can use the same tools to create our next game, employing the same style. So while it took a long time in the first place, it'll be worth it. We'll continue to update and improve it, but essentially the core of how we want to go about putting things together is there."

TINY LITTLE POLES

One of the most impressive aspects of Galleon is the level of control given to
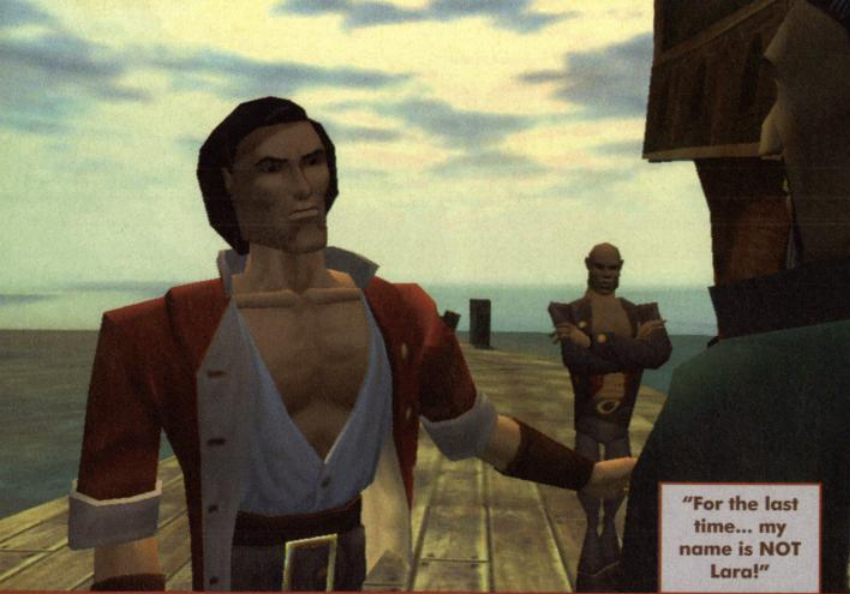
"For the last time... my name is NOT Lara!"
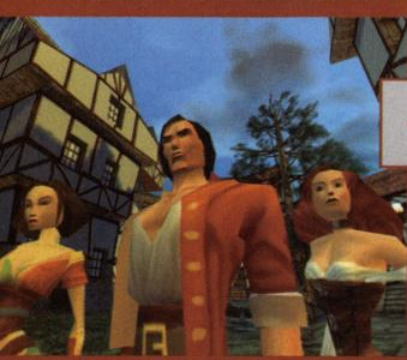
Dashing... on so many levels.
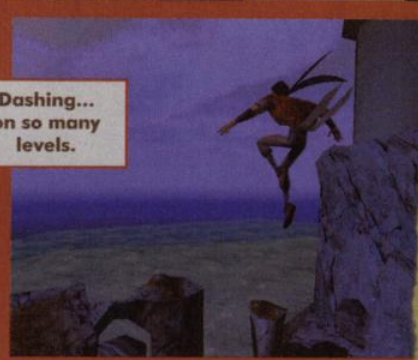
> "GameCube and Xbox are pretty evenly matched."
> – Toby Gard

Here comes the drunken master... hoooerrrggh!
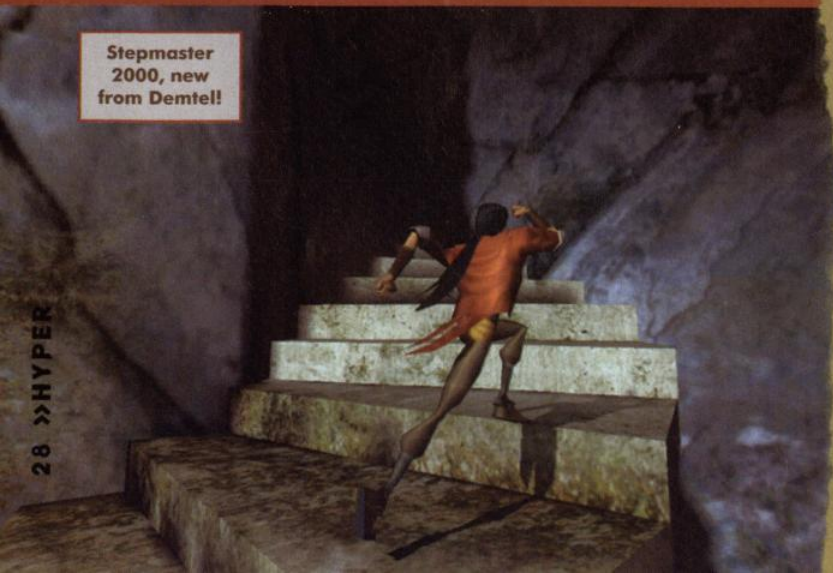
Stepmaster 2000, new from Demtel!

the player. As Hayden explains "Everything's open to you, and one of the nice things about the game is for every type of movement we have two levels. There's a safe level which means just pressing forward on the stick will take me through complex geometry. Rather than me having to make every single footstep decision myself, he's able to place himself. If I was to try and move through this with a lot of games, I'd have to line every single move up." The example of this given at E3 was moving Rhama over a complex series of narrow stone spikes. If you kept the analogue stick within the safety level of movement, Rhama would carefully step along the stones. If you wanted to explore what lay below, simply push the stick out of the safety zone and Rhama would jump down. "So it doesn't take control away from the player, but it means if they want to be careful, to move through a tricky section, it will automatically take account of the geometry and it won't do stupid things. So it means that they can just enjoy moving around some more rather than just thinking 'oh shit, I've got all of these poles, I'm going to have to do every single tiny movement accurately'. It's those little tiny things that just make sense."

Confounding Factor have worked very hard to give the player as many options as possible. Their philosophy is that you're meant to be controlling a hero, so you shouldn't have to struggle to get around environments. As Toby said, "To an extent, Rhama's an intelligent character, because he knows what he should be doing. We don't want to limit the player, we want to give them as many options as they can have in order to get around - and that includes the ceilings as well. Again it's the same concept with the control system."

One of the examples we were shown was inside a cave. Rhama was able to go from a walk straight into a climb up the rocky wall, then into a hang on the ceiling. In a gameplay situation, however, this doesn't make him infallible. If there are guards around, he can try to avoid them by going up and over their heads, but if you alert them, they can follow you. As Hayden explains, "All the characters in the game — whether they're under your control or whether they're enemies — have access to every movement that your main character has. So if you were trying to escape by climbing up a wall, all other characters can follow you in exactly the same way. We've tried to do it so the options for combat are fairly wide. They don't just have their own set of movements. A lot of the enemies are based on Sinbad the sailor type characters. Some are really huge types of monsters that you have

to physically climb onto, then stab in the head. Some of them are so large that you need several people to take them on at once. So it's not all just character to character combat in the traditional style."

LOCK ON, DUDE
Speaking of combat, that's another angle that Confounding Factor have worked hard on, and have made easier than most other games. The principle once again seems to be introducing some intelligence to the situation. As Hayden explains "With a simple fight control button, depending on where opponents are and how many of them there are, he'll keep track of them and do different combos and different types of attack". While it may seem that this takes skill away from the player, the secret is that "it's to do with the timing of the movement and your positioning relative

Something tells me this is going to hurt...
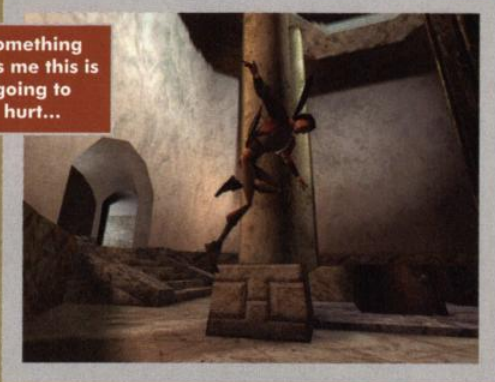
to them, rather than remembering a button sequence combo. So we're trying to do a combination of making it seamless for the player, but also not restricting them to one or two boring kind of moves." Thus, positioning Rhama and anticipating attacks is crucial to success. And if you can get it right, the fighting in this game looks unbelievable.

The fighting is seamless, but there's a lot more to Galleon than combat. "It's an adventure game. The fighting is not the focus of the game. We've put it in there because it's important for the enjoyment and fun of the game, but it's absolutely not a fighting game. It's puzzle and mystery based. There're a lot of puzzles and situations where you're going to have to use some of these other characters and their powers. What we've tried to do is stay away from pull the lever, push the crates, because we hate that kind of idea!" We agree. One of the ways that Galleon is escaping those old school play mechanics is by integrating a lock-on feature. This way, you can lock-on to an object and bring up a list of possible actions. You can even use lock-on to ensure that you don't miss a crucial jump. As Toby said "What we've done is taken the idea of locking on, and we've made it so that it's totally integral to the whole of the gameplay. The way you use items is by locking onto them. It can also be used when fighting."

There she goes – butting in again...

Can I clean your chimney, guvnor?

KEEPING THE FAITH

Adding further to the gameplay are the two party members that Rhama meets up with during the game — Faith and Mihoko. Faith comes with magic powers, but she's not very capable in hand to hand combat situations. Mihoko, on the other hand, was described by Hayden as "a female warrior ninja girl — she can use all the weapons you can". You don't control either of these characters directly, but can issue orders and interact with them in a variety of ways. That interaction is largely context dependent, and of course, dependent on which of the two girls you choose. Faith, for example, can heal, melt ice and cast fire spells, whereas Mihoko can guard people, watch your back and help out in combat. They're very much a double-edged sword though, as Toby elaborates, "One of the things with opening up Rhama's ability to get places is that we then limit the player by making them need to take Faith with them, and then it's like herding her through the level which is the trick. Rhama can just go anywhere, and that's the whole point, that he can deal with anything. So it means that the player will have fun, but at the same time there's still real challenge going on."

The game takes place across six islands, but how linear will the game be as a whole? "Whilst we have a linear progression in the sense that the story has to follow one part to the next, we try to widen out in-between areas so that the player is flexible enough to find his own way through.

WHAT WE'D LIKE TO SEE: Galleon blow Lara out of the water.

And that's the central idea, to try and interfere as little as possible with what the player can do. Whether it's fighting or movement or whatever."

Galleon will hopefully be released on both Xbox and GameCube early next year (for Australia at least). How do the two systems compare? "They're very evenly matched. For this particular title, the only concession we've had to make when considering any of the platforms, was that the PlayStation 2 version was going to have to suffer quite badly with the textures. But no, GameCube and Xbox are pretty evenly matched."

From our play of the game at E3, Galleon looked to be one of the stand-out titles of the show. Amongst a sea of been-there done-that games, it was refreshing to see the creative team behind Tomb Raider bringing fresh ideas and gameplay not only to the adventure genre, but to the industry as a whole. We'll have more on Galleon in future issues. <<

"The fighting is not the focus of the game..."

- Toby Gard

FINAL FANTASY X

» PS2 CATEGORY: RPG >> PLAYERS: 1 >>
PUBLISHER: Square >> AVAILABLE: March 2002

WOW-O-METER

Final Fantasy has come a long way... from the humble sprites of the NES and SNES to the FMV-soaked PlayStation sequels, every gamer and his dog has probably played one of these games at some stage. If you haven't then you probably need a good spanking. The Final Fantasy games are all about interesting characters, intertwining stories and intriguing adventure and we're all fascinated to see what Square have been able to do with the PS2 and the tenth instalment of the game, right? In the wake of *Final Fantasy: The Spirits Within* (which has opened at cinemas across Australia this month), the Final Fantasy name could very well have now penetrated a sector of the populace who have never played games before. This could mean the onus might be on Final Fantasy X to live up to the hype like never before, or simply introduce novice gamers to its elaborate worlds. Will FFX usher in a brand new era for the series, or will Square stick to the formula yet again? Is FFX going to pander to the mainstream or is this going to be the most complex and interesting game Square have ever produced? Could it be all these things rolled into one?

DARK FORCES
The most obvious change between FFIX and FFX is the return of character designer, Tetsuya Nomura, the man behind the more realistic looking characters in FFVIII. You may also have noticed that he is the same designer behind the characters in Square's flawed fighting game, The Bouncer (clearly the best thing about the game were his designs). After a slight detour to super-deformed heads in FFIX, the decision to return to more human-like characters in FFX has allowed Square to feature some of their most intricate and detailed FMV yet seen in a videogame.
After developing a feature-length

Did I forget my bra AGAIN? Sigh...

Did you bring the brown undies?

I said make him vain, not veiny!

CGI movie, it's no surprise that Square have the skill and experience to produce cutscenes that are nothing short of awe-inspiring. Most surprising though, is that for the first time in the series, the FMV will actually include character speech. Yes, every character will have a voice actor (although you can turn them off and read subtitles if you prefer to use your imagination) — which is possibly another sign of Square's dabble in film, or just a natural evolution of the series.

The game will be set on the water world of Spira, a world that was once rich with technology but long ago devastated by a horrendous fiery ball from the heavens. The inhabitants now fear technology and the possible consequences that may occur from its use, instead opting to immerse themselves in the Ebon religion.

The lead male character is named Tidus, a champion Blitz-Ball player (Blitz-Ball will be a playable mini-game) whom Square describe as "optimistic". It seems they genuinely wanted a "happy" lead character this time around to contrast with their usually moody or smart-arse characters like Zidane or Squall. Tidus at some stage becomes a travel companion to Yuna, a summoner who is seeking to

learn Aeons (Aeons are the same as Guardian Forces from FFVIII) from the various Ebon temples scattered throughout the land in a bid to fight back against the mysterious force that destroyed their land. Naturally, Tidus and Yuna come from very different social classes, much like Princess Garnet and Zidane in FFIX, and we can expect some tension between Tidus and Yuna's guardian, Kimari, the beefy beastman creature you can see in the screenshots. The evil force in the game, named "Sin", manifests itself as typhoons or earthquakes, and in essence it is the force of nature, but a dark manifestation of that force. If anything, the characters are setting out to restore balance to the world by defeating these restless forces and restore the world's confidence in technology and its development, hopefully returning Spira to a land of magnificent cities.
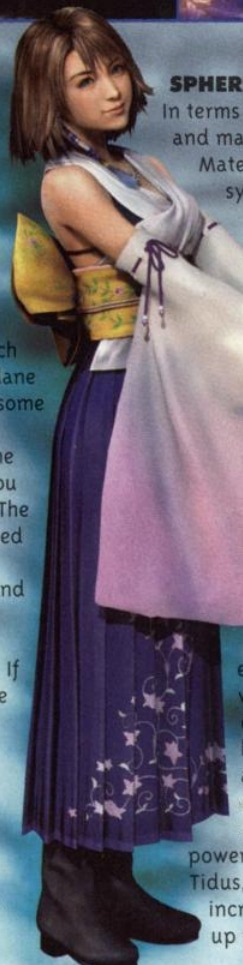
SPHERES OF INFLUENCE

In terms of character development and magic ability, FFVII had Materia, FFVIII had the Draw system and in FFIX there was a traditional Job (skills based) system; well, in FFX Square are introducing a brand new character customisation tree that they call the Sphere Board System. As you adventure through the game, you will find special spheres that once placed on each character's "sphere board", open up new abilities or bonuses. For example, with Yuna you would naturally choose to boost her magic abilities and give her new summoning powers, whilst with Tidus, you may choose to increase his strength and open up new attacks with his Water

Blade. Only specific spheres can open up certain abilities. You can attribute Ability Points to different spheres to increase your power in that particular ability, Ability Points being your reward for successful battles in place of an experience point system. The Sphere Board system will apparently make character development that much more customisable than any previous Final Fantasy game. Also, what we knew as a Limit Break in FFVII, is now called an Overdrive in FFX, but it has the same effect — a special move for each character at some stage in combat.

As the world in FFX is fully polygonal, it is the first in the series to not have static pre-rendered backgrounds as the environments. This allows the camera to swing around and provide far more cinematic viewing options for the player, as well as a more realistic sense of exploration and travel. What we've seen so far is stunning, and FFX could be as big a leap forward for the series as it was when it went from the SNES to the PlayStation! How long will we have to wait to play it? We can probably expect a launch in March, 2002. ◄◄

WHAT WE'D LIKE TO SEE: More crazy *Star Wars* references. Bring back Wedge and Biggs!

No wonder people call him "fruity".

Look out, the boss is watching.
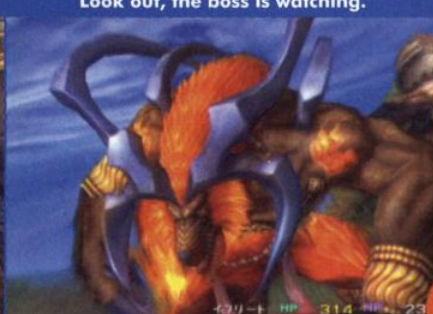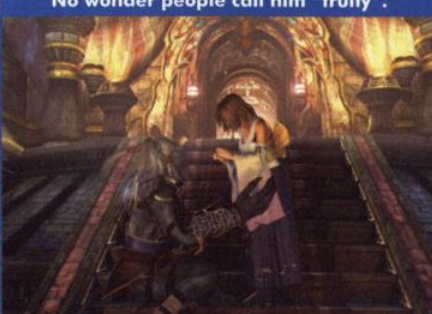
BOMBERMAN TOURNAMENT

e think its kind of suitable that Hudson Soft have dubbed this game an "explosive action RPG", since the GBA scene is in the midst of "explosive 16-bit diarrhoea", with every game ever made for SNES and Genesis recently confirmed as being in development. Fortunately, Bomberman is one series that we've been dreaming about for GBA since the four-player link cable was first announced. Finally, we can forget about the woeful attempt to take Bomberman out of his multiplayer habitat with Bomberman Tournament. Finally, we can stop searching for our SNES multitap and controllers. Finally, we can play Bomberman anywhere, anytime.

DA BOMB

Bomberman Tournament has perhaps the most gripping storyline yet in the Bomberman saga. You see, there's some planet called Fantalion where something has err... happened, and umm... your mate Bomberman Max (no relation) has disappeared, so you go and err... blow shit up. As you can probably tell, we're not all that likely to be spending much time in the single player mode, but hey, for those of you looking for some RPG questing in between bites of your multiplayer pie, this will suffice. In order to make the quest a little more compelling, Hudson Soft have "borrowed" a little from the Pokémon concept. The creatures are called Charabon and you collect, raise

and put the little freaks into battle. They also function very much like party members. The Pomiu, for example, can teleport Bomberman to villages and the Elephan can move heavy objects. Better still, you can combine the Charabon to create hybrid breeds with new powers. We would mention that you can link up with a friend and pit your Charabon against his, but who'd bother when you could be playing deathmatch Bomberman?

In console terms, the Bomberman series is near the peak of multiplayer gaming nirvana. Like Worms, it's a simple concept executed with such balance that the resulting gameplay is fiendishly addictive. The basic setup is this — top down perspective, grid-like map packed with obstacles and powerups, and four bomb-happy freaks going the tonk. Bomberman is all about outsmarting your opponents and trapping them between a bomb and a hard place... except that it regularly backfires -which is what makes it so much fun. We've played

the Japanese release, and Bomberman Tournament comes with a heap of multiplayer maps in a wide variety of terrains. All the old powerups are back too — you can expand your blast radius, lay several bombs at once and skate across the map. Bomberman Tournament will also be another GBA game that only requires a single cart for multiplayer madness. Let's hope the conversion to the small screen works as well as we're hoping. <<

WHAT WE'D LIKE TO SEE: Well, actually, we'd just like to SEE! Let's hope this GBA game isn't too dark, like some other titles.

Absolute carnage!

Watch the crossfire, Bomberman!

It's a bird, it's a plane... yep it's a plane

WINWINWINWIN

WIN EDGE OF CHAOS: I-WAR 2!

FOR PC

Cruising the galaxy for bounty, booty and booze is a job solely reserved for the loveable rogue known as the "Space Pirate". That space pirate, my friends, could be you. If hijacking cargo sounds like the way you'd like to spend a Sunday afternoon, then you should enter this competition to win I-War 2 for your PC, thanks to Ozisoft.
To win one of five specially shrink-wrapped boxes, answer the following question...

>> **The lead character in I-War 2 is named...?**

Put your answer on the back of an envelope with your name and address and send it to: **I Want I War, Hyper, 78 Renwick St, Redfern, NSW 2016.** Good luck, Space Pirates!

WIN MTV MUSIC GENERATOR 2!
Special Collectors Edition

FOR PS2

Amateur DJs and rock stars, queue here. Now you can turn your gaming addiction into an almost justifiable — and maybe even profitable — creative hobby. Whack MTV Music Generator 2 into your PS2 and you'll be cooking up the beats, rustling up riffs and creating some godawful racket we're sure of it. If you want to be one of these musical criminals, then answer the following question to win one of five Special Edition copies of MTV Music Generator 2 we have to give away thanks to Ozisoft.

>> **Which Aussie rock band is Hyper's editor in?**

Put your answer on the back of an envelope with your name and address and send it to: **Gruesome Grooves, Hyper, 78 Renwick St, Redfern, NSW 2016.** Rock on.

Harry Potter

Ever since the first Harry Potter book was published back in 1997, people all over the world have been obsessed with J.K. Rowling's creation. And not just kids either… The Harry Potter series of books have been phenomenally popular with all ages. So when we heard that not only a film, but a whole series of games were on the way from EA, we figured some investigation was in order.

Harry potters around Hogwarts in the PC version.

Puzzles, potions and Potter... on PSone!

Harry advances cautiously in the Game Boy Advance version.

For those of you who haven't read the books — go read them now, the rest of us will just chill for a minute. They're for kids you say? Trust us, they're a good read. Still not convinced? How about if we phrased the request as if Mr T himself were asking? Okay then, "I pity the fool who don't read Harry Potter. That kid alright". Done? Ah whatever, here's a rundown on the Harry Potter universe anyway.

WIZARD BLOOD

The Harry Potter books are set in the modern day, in a world that, on the surface, is much like our own. Only, alongside "our" world, is "their" world — witches, wizards and magic. The inhabitants of this world have their own legal system, government, shops, schools, cuisine, sports and forms of transportation, and work very hard to keep their existence a secret from the "muggles" (us).

Harry Potter finds himself thrust into this world on his eleventh birthday. Raised by his unpleasant muggle relatives after his parents were slain by the evil sorcerer Voldemort, it's only when he receives an invitation to attend Hogwarts School of Witchcraft and Wizardry that Harry learns of his wizard blood, and indeed, the existence of the magical community.

Although the Harry Potter books could hardly be described as great

literature, especially given many of the established genres the books borrow from (ie. boarding house adventures) and somewhat stereotypical characters often employed, there's just so much to like about them. The world is creative and surprising, yet logically consistent, the storylines are compelling with twists galore, the characters are engaging and there's a vitality that's somewhat reminiscent of Roald Dahl's work. Rowling doesn't sugar coat the world too much either. Indeed, it's the seriously dark edge (particularly in book four) that gives Harry Potter so much bite.

A good setting for a videogame then? Well, yes and no. The first book, and hence the subject matter for the film and videogames, is very much an introductory experience, and probably the least exciting of the four books thus far. Retaining all the qualities of the books is also a tall order. Then again, being able to explore and interact with that world is something that all Harry Potter fans would love to do.

To see how the games are coming along, Cam Shea caught up with the Executive Producer of the Harry Potter games, Chris Gray.
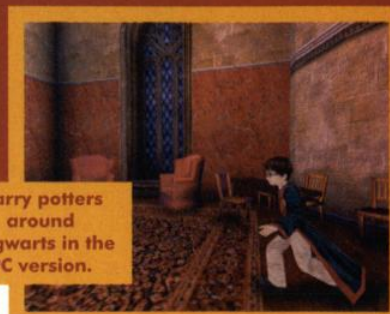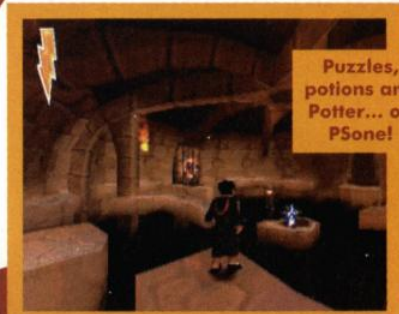
The obligatory mine cart level makes an appearance...
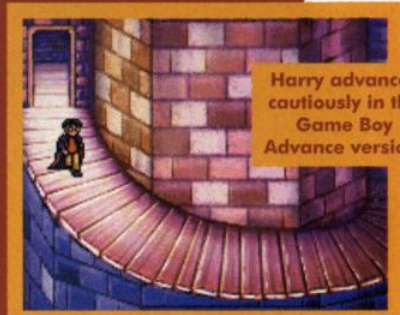
HYPER: First of all, could you give us a rundown on the Harry Potter games in development, what systems they are on, and what styles of game they are?
CHRIS GRAY: Well first of all, they're all completely different games. None of them are versions of the other games, so the only thing they share is the fiction, and obviously some of the visual reference and maybe the audio. Whereas the PC is a puzzle adventure, the PlayStation version is much more of an action adventure, the GBA game is probably more of an isometric version of the PC experience, and the GBC version is actually an RPG adventure with wizard cards and trading.

HYPER: Cool. Tell us a little more about the PC game.
CG: Ok. Well, the PC game is what we call a "be Harry Potter" experience, so you play the part of Harry Potter. You don't play his friends in this game. It's based on book one and the film, which is the Sorcerer's Stone or the Philosopher's Stone depending on which country you live in. You do everything that Harry does in the first
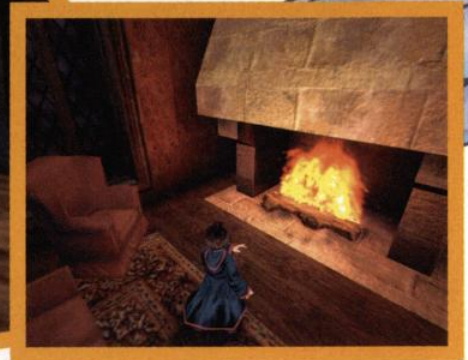
book and in the film. You go to Hogwarts, you take lessons, you learn magic, you gain or lose house points depending on whether you behave yourself or not. You run into all the teachers – McGonagal, Snape, Dumbledore. And the ultimate overall objective is to defeat Lord Voldemort just like it is in the book.

HYPER: Umm... dude, don't you mean "He who should not be named"?
CG: Well, we're not afraid yet, but maybe we should be.

HYPER (doing lame Yoda impersonation): "You will be. You will be..."
Does the game actually start at Hogwarts, or with Harry's surrogate family?
CG: Well, this is the only version where you start with Harry at the Dursley's. You actually have to find the letter inviting you to Hogwarts and escape the

Dursley's. That's the tutorial level. So, it's probably one of the first games that takes place in a suburban house! The style of gameplay is, obviously it's 3D, and it's a puzzle adventure game, although we do have some other action elements there. You do get to ride a broomstick and play Quidditch. There's a broomstick chase and a really intense Quidditch game, where you play Harry as the seeker. So it's not full Quidditch, as you can't play every position, only the seeker.

HYPER: Any chance of seeing a multiplayer component, where you have different members on the Quidditch team?
CG: Not in this version, but of course, anything's possible with EA in the future. We have big plans for Harry Potter.

HYPER: Tell us about the challenges of creating a game based on the Harry Potter world. And who is your target audience?

CG: Well, speaking about the PC version, it's aimed at Harry Potter fans, first and foremost, so y'know, we're not really designing a game for the typical gamer or the hardcore gamer. So we're really thinking about what

Harry Potter fans want, and we're being incredibly sensitive and trying to be really authentic about the fiction. We're working with J.K. Rowling. Obviously she didn't design the games, but she's giving us feedback and input, and she has actually given us some unique fiction which doesn't appear in the books or the film. It's just for the games, so we're very excited about that. And we know that the fans, they read the books several times, they know the fiction inside out, so we're not doing anything that would occur outside the scope of Harry's adventures, which is actually a really fascinating way to develop a game because Harry's not really a very powerful wizard. I mean, he's only 11, it's his first year at Hogwarts. He can't really hurt anybody, and you know, he can't really levitate things that are much larger than a breadbox. So there's a great challenge in coming up with gameplay where you can use spells creatively and explore the world, unlock the world, and that's what really makes it unique.

Harry Potter on PSone

"It's made up of about 25 unique mini games, and is not as much of an adventure game as the PC. It's a bit more action oriented, but very cool visuals, really pushing the limits of the PlayStation. And Quidditch the game is really outstanding. The troll battle in particular will catch people by surprise, some fun things there."

Polygonal Potter does his thing on the PlayStation
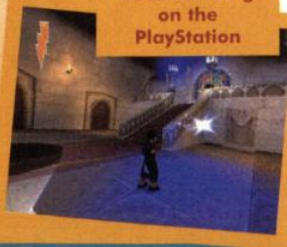
HYPER: I was playing the demo earlier, and Harry had access to two spells. How many will he learn in the course of the game?
CG: I think we've got about ten right now, but it's not just the sheer number of spells that you'll have, it's

Harry Potter on Game Boy Advance

"Obviously Game Boy Advance is a new platform so everybody's trying to find how to push it. What we're trying to do there is create an action adventure game... more of an isometric version of the PC experience. Probably a bit more Zelda like. It's got some intense action in it as well."

> "Harry's not really a very powerful wizard. I mean, he's only 11. He can't really hurt anybody, and you know, he can't really levitate things much larger than a breadbox."

got a lot of situations involving levitating objects, hidden rooms, you have a spell that allows you to unlock or magically lock doors or chests. We have puzzles that are kind of abstract where you might have to help out the Weasely brothers. Fred and George Weasely act like a general store, and they might ask you to get them a wizard card or say, 50 vomit flavoured Bertie Bott beans, and in exchange for these, and we don't know what they're going to do with the beans — they'll probably dump them in the Slytherin bean bowl, but if you get these items to the Weasely's they'll give you a password that'll open up a portrait leading into a new section of the game, so that's one example. Or if

more about creating puzzles based around the spells that you can use. And you use them in combination with each other so there's quite a lot there.

HYPER: What kind of puzzles can we expect?
CG: Well, just in general, we've

you go to potions class, we've created a mini game out of mixing your potions in the correct order, and Malfoy's there trying to get in the way, and you've only got a certain amount of time to do it or Snape will deduct house points. It's all very much in line with the books.

HYPER: How much of an emphasis on mini games is there?
CG: I would say it's a balance, I mean a large percentage of the game is exploring Hogwarts and all of its secrets. The lessons are all based on mini games. Also when you have situations like the troll battle, or the six challenges at the end of the first year after you've managed to sneak past Fluffy. Those are all mini games, just in terms of how we use spells and create more of a pressure environment. But by and large there's a lot of time to explore the

appropriate times. It's not a totally open world where you can just go anywhere. I mean, there are plenty of areas of Hogwarts that you're not allowed to see until later in the game.

HYPER: Yeah, well there are plenty of areas that no one knows about.
CG: Right, and the whole point of the game is opening up Hogwarts and eventually finding Fluffy, which leads you to the stone.

HYPER: Will you be able to explore the grounds? Go down to Hagrid's cabin?
CG: Uh, yeah Hagrid's in there. In the game we also have a broomstick chase with Malfoy, where you do chase him through the grounds and over the Forbidden Forest.

HYPER: Will there be any party-based sections where you're with Ron and Hermione, and they're helping you get through? Or will they be there just as NPCs to talk to and maybe get clues from?
CG: Yeah they just act as NPCs, so they help establish some of the situations. They do help you out. Obviously, Ron and Hermione are very much part of the troll encounter. I don't want to give too much away, but they're there to help you and give you advice, and obviously Hermione's very knowledgable, and Ron knows some magic as well, but sometimes his will backfire.

HYPER: Of course! Does Scabbers the rat make an appearance? You could hint at later events by zooming in on his missing toe.
CG: He will be there somehow. We'll allude to Scabbers, and we may well see Scabbers make an appearance.

HYPER: What other NPCs will be included?
CG: We also have Peeves the poltergeist who shows up from time to time and he'll try to block your progress, either by putting himself inside objects or throwing things at you. He won't let you go where you want to go, so you've got to get rid of Peeves sometimes as well through various means.

HYPER: What is J.K. Rowling like to work with?
CG: She's fantastic. She's been incredibly supportive of the games in particular, because the game is the only experience that allows you to be Harry Potter. That's what's so important.

She recognises that and we obviously recognise that. We can't say enough great things about her and Warner Brothers and the support we've had in trying to do something authentic.

HYPER: Will the games be coming out at the same time as the film?
CG: Yep, same time.

HYPER: How much of an influence has the film been in guiding the visual style of the game?
CG: A lot of the visuals are really digital assets, and inspired by the film. Because we know that when the film comes out a lot of people will see that version of Harry Potter and it'll stick in their heads, so we've created a digital world but we're obviously inspired by the film because we want Harry to be the Harry that people recognize.

HYPER: Will cutscenes use the in-game engine, footage from the film or pre-rendered FMV?
CG: The majority is cut scenes and real game dialogue along with some FMV. The games will not feature any footage from the film.

HYPER: Will the voice acting be provided by the actors in the film?
CG: No.

HYPER: Any plans for GameCube and Xbox?
CG: There are lots of things in the works, but these are the only games for this year. There are lots of other exciting developments in the future. We've made a long term commitment to Harry Potter and we've got a great relationship with J.K. Rowling and Warner Brothers and we want to continue that. ◄◄

environment without feeling like a typical game where you go through the wrong door and you die - that's not what Harry Potter is about. He never dies. He might run out of energy once in a while, but he'll restart quite happily.

HYPER: How linear is the game as a whole? I mean, you've got to go to classes and so forth. Is it mostly linear with subquests or…?
CG: Yeah, what we've tried to do is really create the feeling of an adventure game, but at the same time we want to present the fiction in a way that people will expect it. Obviously there's a certain amount of progression, where you've got to explore an area, but then we move the story ahead. So it's linear in so far as the major plot elements will happen at the

Harry Potter on Game Boy Color

"The Game Boy Color version is an RPG adventure with wizard cards, and wizard card trading as a central element. We have 101 unique wizard cards created by J.K. Rowling just for the games, and the player goes through and follows the fiction of book one. But as you're going through 120 locations, with all of Hogwarts totally mapped out, you can collect rare wizard cards, and you can use the wizard cards in unique ways to enhance your magical abilities. We are working with the RPG style there, so you'll have magical encounters with other character's creatures, and you'll have to know which spells to use or how to enhance magic. But it's very cool and you can trade with your friends as well."

REVIEWS

>> PC

p44 Operation Flashpoint: Cold War Crisis

One of the most engaging PC games to be released this year would have to be Operation Flashpoint: Cold War Crisis. Find out what makes this game so addictive in our feature review.

HYPER #95
REVIEW INDEX

READER REVIEW

63 NHL 2001 for PC
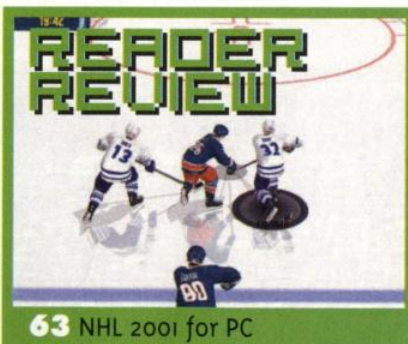
THE HYPER CREW'S TOP 5

Eliot Fish – Editor
1. Operation Flashpoint – PC
"The horror! The horror!"
2. Doom II – PC
3. Tony Hawk 2 – Game Boy Advance
4. Zelda: Oracle of Seasons – GB Color
5. Arcanum – PC

Cam Shea – Deputy Editor
1. Tony Hawk 2 – Game Boy Advance
"I'm stunned. No really!"
2. Sonic Adventure 2 – Dreamcast
3. Crazy Taxi 2 – Dreamcast
4. Operation Flashpoint – PC
5. Castlevania – Game Boy Advance

Malcolm Campbell - Art guy
1. Tony Hawk 2 - GBA
"New York. Secret Tape. Hard."
2. Castlevania - GBA
3. Super Mario 64 - N64
4. Alien vs. Predator - Arcade
5. Zelda: Oracle of Seasons - GBC

Dan Toose - Reviewer
1. Emperor - Battle for Dune - PC
"It's not innovative, but it's gobs of RTS fun in a box. Die Atreides do-gooders, die!"
2. Crazy Taxi 2 – Dreamcast
3. Edge of Chaos: I-War 2 – PC
4. Alone in the Dark 4 – Dreamcast
5. Skies of Arcadia – Dreamcast

THE HYPER SCORING SYSTEM

The Overall Score — what's it all about?

90 +	Excellent and worthy of a Big Rubber Stamp. Buy it!
80-89	Very good. This is a quality game, but not perfect.
70-79	Good, verging on average. Try before you buy.
60-69	Average, verging on bad. This game is badly flawed.
50-59	Bad game design and possibly not even worth renting.
0-49	These games simply suck. A total waste of money!
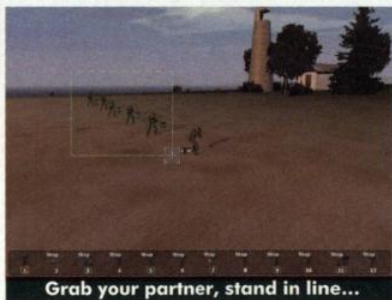
Grab your partner, stand in line...

Take this, Avon Lady!!

HYPER • GAME OF THE MONTH

Operation Flashpoint

»PC

CATEGORY: Soldier Sim >> **PLAYERS:** 1-Multi >> **PUBLISHER:** Codemasters >> **PRICE:** $89.95 >> **RATING:** MA15+ >> **AVAILABLE:** Now >>

Want a real PC game? ELIOT FISH hands you the M16...

Operation Flashpoint: Cold War Crisis is one of the most ambitious PC games you'll play this year. Bohemia Interactive and Codemasters have set out to deliver an all-round seamless simulation of first-person and vehicular-based warfare, and the result is a game that succeeds flamboyantly where countless other PC games have failed.

There is no friendly HUD, no smart targeting, no split-second weapon switch or fancy firepower... this is about as real as a computer game can get to simulating the feeling of being right there when the shit hits the fan. This is the reality of war at its most brutal. When you're in the thick of it, lying on your stomach in the mud, trying to figure out if the soldier in your gun sights is the enemy or a lost member of your own squad, dare you pull the trigger?

DYNAMIC, DANGEROUS, DIFFICULT

You begin your single player campaign as a Private with NATO stationed on a make-believe European island. It's 1985 and tensions between Russian and the USA are high, and the threat of nuclear warfare is very real. The pseudo French countryside is about to become the mother of all battlefields in a struggle for power that could result in World War III.

You're no superhero in Operation Flashpoint. You're no faster, no more powerful, no more accurate and debatably no smarter than the enemy soldiers encroaching upon you. When the bullets are whizzing over your head and it dawns on you that your rifle is out of clips, you realise that survival comes down to how clever and creative you are as a gamer. Use the terrain,

remember your training, conserve your ammo... it's all crucial to survival, but in Operation Flashpoint you can improvise like almost no other PC game before it. The aim here is to survive first and foremost, with enemy kills most definitely a second priority. It's rare these days that a computer game can compel you to run and grab someone else to come and share in the excitement that you're feeling as you first start playing. There are so many cool moments whilst playing Operation Flashpoint that you'll be annoying your friends for days with your first-hand war stories.
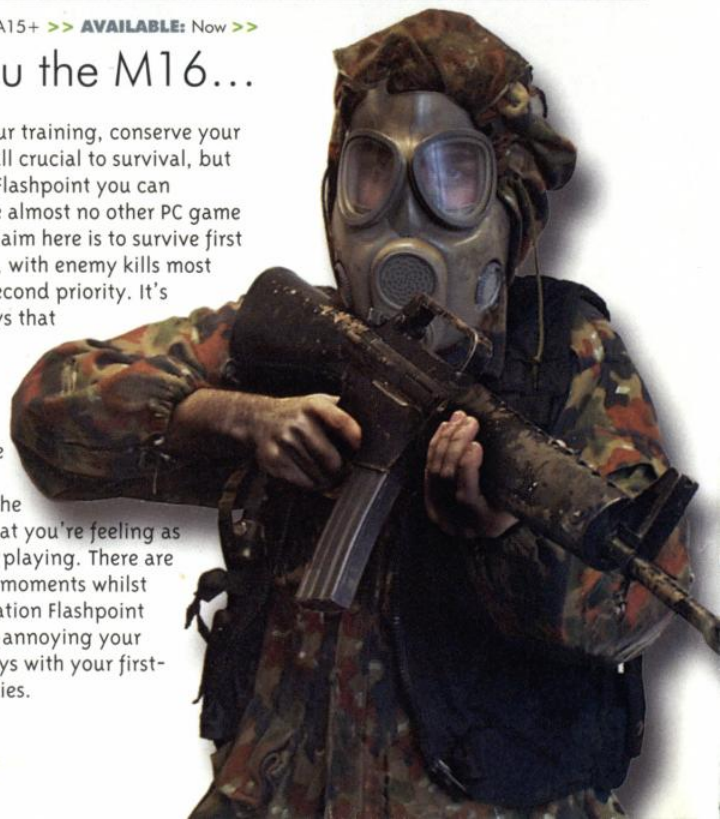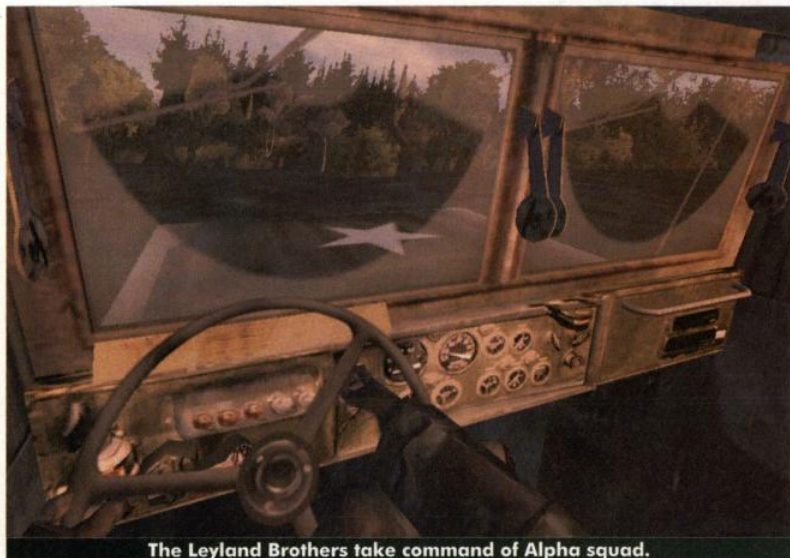
The Leyland Brothers take command of Alpha squad.

Budding cartographers will love this.
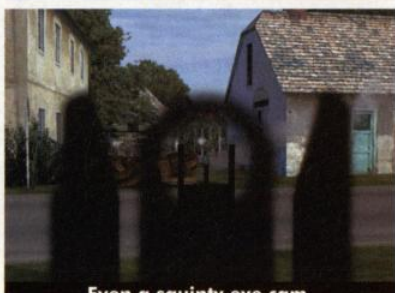
Even a squinty eye cam.

>> The multiplayer potential for Flashpoint is inspiring, and rest assured, this game is going to be **modded to buggery.**

Naturally, for some gamers, this kind of "realistic" gameplay will not wash. You can't go in guns blazing, and you certainly can't break from your direct orders like Rambo and expect to achieve the mission goals. You're a member of a team, and if you fight like a true soldier, you'll soon be commanding that very same team. Impatient gamers who dismiss Flashpoint as too slow or too glitchy, or not visually impressive enough, will be missing out on an incredibly satisfying, engrossing, entertaining and admittedly, sometimes mentally draining experience. The gameplay in Operation Flashpoint is incredibly varied, but it is so well paced and balanced that you'll be gripped throughout the entire campaign to see what tasks will be placed before you next.

Starting out as a foot soldier, you'll quickly be trained in some basic moves — getting prone (lying on your stomach), staying low, sprinting with your weapon at the ready, staying in formation, and reading the terrain for cover or tactical advantages over your enemy. Basically, you'll learn everything you need to know in the field. What you don't realise early in the game, is that deeper into the campaign you'll end up playing a tank commander, a helicopter pilot, a squad commander, an elite Black Ops agent, a pilot at the controls of an A10 and more! The amazing thing is that you may even play out half those roles in the course of events in a single mission — with no loading screens. The transition from foot to vehicle and back again is all seamless. If you see a vehicle in the game, you can hop in and drive, fly, steer or shoot away, even from a variety of camera angles, all with the freedom you would expect in real life.

TENSION, TARGETS, TERRAIN
Whilst the main body of the game is spent on foot with the controls functioning much like a standard shooter, you do have to learn a new way of playing from the first person. For starters, you'll learn to use the numpad to access a variety of camera controls that allow you to turn your soldier's head to look back over his shoulder whilst he's running. You'll need this. You can also switch to the third person, which is most useful in vehicles for a slightly elevated view of the terrain. When you become a squad leader, you'll even have access to a tactical view that takes you up to a higher perspective, looking down on your commander and his troops, allowing you to rotate the camera so you can see what's happening to your men.

Each vehicle is controlled using a very similar set-up of keys, and it's all pretty intuitive. Most controls, like

And on our right, war torn Kulgojev
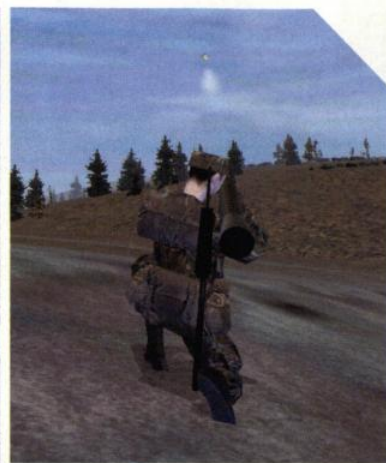
Fart cloud at 11 o'clock.

Patch me up!

>> Codemasters have announced their plans for some regular updates for you to download that will add some serious extra value to the game. Check this out...

First add-on (JULY)
- A double-barrelled Civilian hunting rifle (brand: "Kozlice").
- A NATO transport helicopter.
- The Soviet SU-25 aircraft.
- Two new official SP missions.
- Five official MP missions.

Second add-on (AUGUST)
- Dedicated server support.
- Two new official SP missions.
- Five official MP missions (Co-op campaigns).
- Online security
- More support for certain types of hardware devices.
- New MP features like a MP mission generator for the Mission Editor.
- NATO and Soviet grenade launchers.
- NATO Vulcan AA gun (maybe the M163).
- A new attack helicopter.
- A second public demo (MP) which continues where the SP demo ended.

Third add-on (SEPTEMBER)
- Two new official SP missions.
- Five official MP missions.
- Two new vehicles.

Missed me by *that* much.
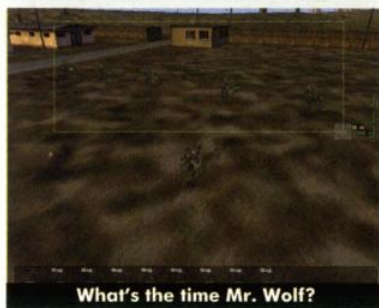
What's the time Mr. Wolf?

targeting and movement, are done with the left and right mouse buttons, with the wheel button on your mouse acting like an "action" key. If you don't have a wheel mouse, you can hit the Return key on your keyboard, but we recommend you get a wheel mouse for this game! Even on foot, the action key is your access to commands such as swapping weapons, getting into vehicles, healing at medics, using binoculars, and many, many more actions. You also have a radio that utilises the number keys to perform a variety of tasks, such as confirming your orders, asking for co-ordinates,
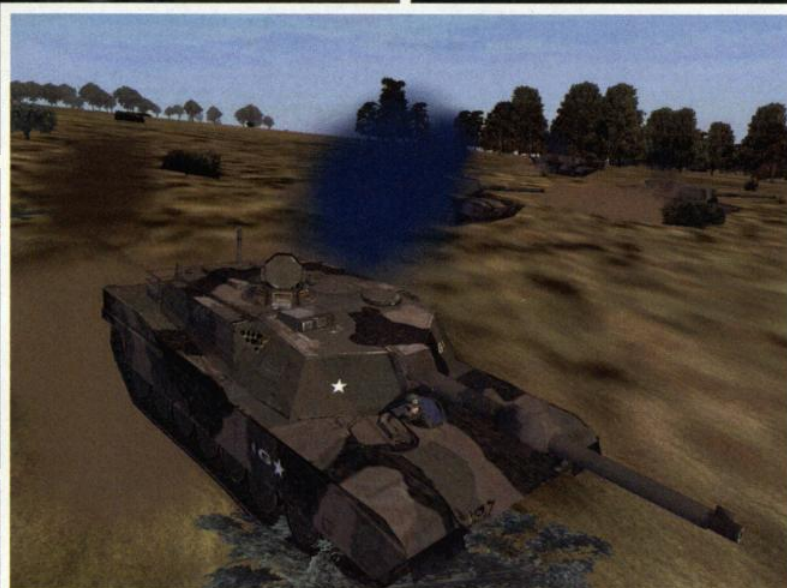
ordering your squad, yelling for a medic and more. The deeper you get into Operation Flashpoint, the more complex the controls and game becomes. But the learning curve is perfect, and you'll feel daunted but never overwhelmed, which is what makes such a realistic game as this so enjoyable. You'll virtually never be fighting with your controls, but you WILL be challenged. The controls have been simplified but not dumbed down, and flying an A10 still feels almost like a flight sim, even though your controls are stripped back to about 5 keys.

INSPIRED, IMMERSIVE, INTRICATE
Flashpoint's weakest feature is probably the visuals. The environment, whilst absolutely massive, is fairly drab with simplistic

flat bushes and trees and some bog standard textures on most objects. The game doesn't really look bad, but it does appear a little dated. All the vehicles, however, look fabulous, and the weapons are nicely detailed. In Bohemia Interactive's defense, you could say they were going for a more real-world look anyway, which can unfortunately sometimes just be a little dull. Once you get over this initial disappointment and concentrate on experiencing the game, you'll soon forget about how unrealistic the trees are, or that you can float through some walls in the glitchy houses. I guarantee that you'll be lost in the game world. It feels very real indeed when your legs are shot and you're trying to crawl away from an oncoming Russian T80 tank. You don't notice flat 2D bushes in situations like that.

Spontaneous combustion in the field can be pretty disturbing.

Truck off, you Russians!

Hey, who put glue on my gun sight?

>> It feels very real indeed when your legs are shot and you're trying to crawl away from an **oncoming Russian T80 tank.**

Certainly, there are some very visually pretty moments... like fighting at night and having the countryside light up intermittently from explosions, or the red glow of dusk bleeding over the horizon as you hike up to a camp set into the guts of a ruined castle.

Flashpoint also features 3D sound, and you can use it to your advantage — like figuring out which direction a vehicle is approaching from. Aurally, Bohemia were certainly aiming for some realism and the sounds themselves are excellent — you can really become immersed in the atmosphere, like chirping crickets in the bushes, and the distant hum of approaching choppers. It's also a nice touch that the Russians actually speak in Russian (with subtitles naturally)! However the cheesy cutscenes and American yabbering is a little too

much to bear sometimes; rather than setting a more serious tone, you might be stifling chuckles. But we're straying from the point. The visuals and audio are not what you're paying for here. The magic in Operation Flashpoint lies solely in the excellent game design and gameplay.

JUST BUY IT, OKAY?
The multiplayer potential for Flashpoint is frightening, and rest assured, this game is going to be modded to buggery. There is also an extremely powerful editing tool included with the game that allows you to build complex custom missions. With simple pop-up menus, and a point-and-click map interface — hours of fun can be had building crazy scenarios. It's powerful, streamlined, and a true bonus.

In terms of an overall single player experience, Operation Flashpoint is unique to all the shooters on the market. The variety of the missions is fantastic, the depth of tactical play is there, the non-linearity that we all crave is there, and the unforgiving realism is pretty refreshing. You may have only one manual save per mission (the game also autosaves "retry" points), but nothing ever becomes too tedious or frustrating that you'll stop playing.

!!! Bohemia Interactive, the game's developers, have all served in the Czech army. No wonder this is realistic!

Operation Flashpoint is a true success, and you'll forgive the multitude of strange quirks and bugs that have shipped with the game, because the overriding fact is that you'll rarely stop having fun to really notice any of the problems. This game is gold. <<

PLUS: Open, non-linear gameplay and huge multiplayer potential.

MINUS: Annoying bugs, cheesy cutscenes and some AI flaws.

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY
88	89	94

OVERALL

93

Thank the maker this is only a game... because it feels real!
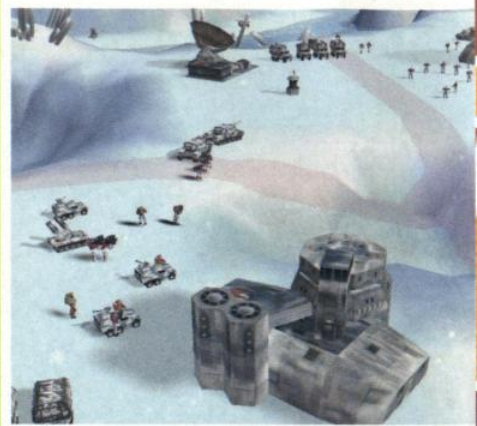
Zzzzzz indeed.

Z problem is my french accent.
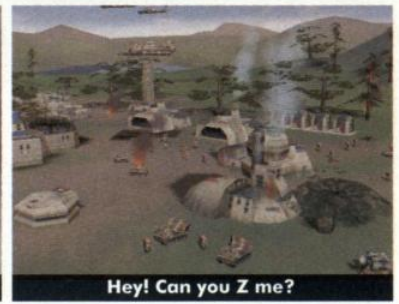
Hey! Can you Z me?

Z: Steel Soldiers

>>PC

CATEGORY: Real Time Strategy >> PLAYERS: 1-8 >> PUBLISHER: Eon >> PRICE: $89.95 >> RATING: M >> AVAILABLE: Now >> REQUIRED: PIII 600, 64 MB RAM >>

JAMES COTTEE is always keen to catch some Zs...

The Bitmap Brothers, once proud leaders of the 16-bit software scene, have fallen into ill repute in recent years. Distant, hazy memories of Speedball 2 have been desecrated by the travesty that was Speedball 2100. When a great software house hasn't produced anything of note in a whole decade, one can't help but wonder if it's time to call it quits and put us all out of our misery.

Z IS FOR ZEITGEIST

Since Steel Soldiers is little more than Z in 3D, it's worth looking at what Z was, and where it went wrong. After the massive success of Dune 2, everyone was scrambling to come up with their own blockbuster RTS. Blizzard came up with Warcraft, which eventually mutated into Starcraft. Westwood refined the Dune formula

into Command & Conquer. But the Bitmap Brothers skewed away from micro-management and base building, taking the formula in a different direction.

Rather than spend an hour building up an expeditionary force, carefully nurturing a preposterous string of buildings, only reaching catharsis at the very end of the mission, Z was all action from the instant the level loaded. By tying the speed of resource production to the proportion of territory held, Z became a mad land grab. It felt less like some ponderous game of chess, and more like an old-school arcade game in a huge arena.

Unfortunately, Z made a few critical errors. For one, it was ludicrously difficult. The human player's troops were all given arbitrary intelligence levels, which could spectacularly

impede one's progress. In contrast the computer player was relentless, with the bulk of the AI clearly on its side. To make matters worse, your men were so small you could barely see them, let alone divine the disparate soldier types in the heat of battle.

Z was a traumatic experience, loathed by all who played it. Its failure all but buried the concept of a rapid-deployment RTS, leaving its competitors free to fashion increasingly baroque

tech trees and build queues. Now, after five long years, the sequel is upon us. Improvements have been made, but many of its shortcomings remain. Some traits that could pass off as quirks in '96 now seem dire oversights. For instance, there are no discernable differences between the sides. Whether you play against the computer or your friends, the only way you can differentiate your sides is by colour. While this is inherently a matter of taste (the same can be said for chess), many will

Tank god we don't use those old tank jokes anymore
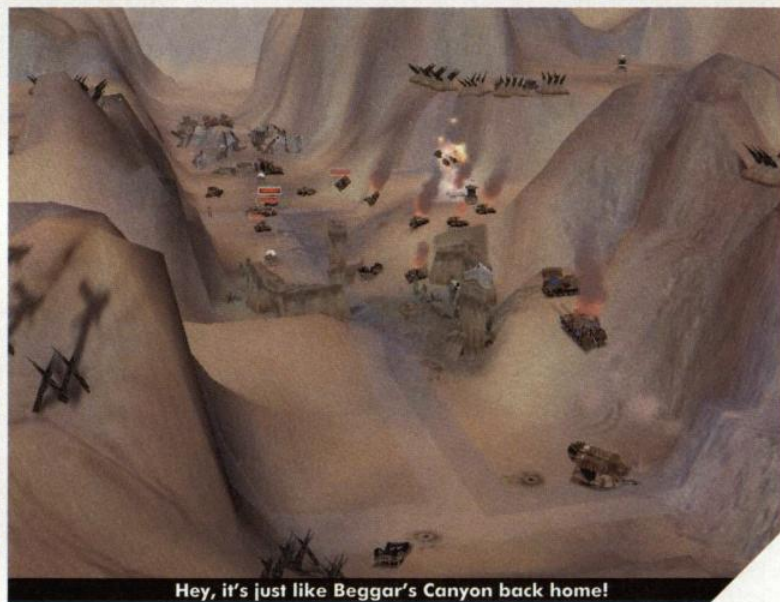
Hey, it's just like Beggar's Canyon back home!

A sniper bot can **free up an enemy vehicle** for use by one of your own men.

interpret it as being cheap.

Your men, little mass produced robots, are portrayed on screen at a realistic scale to the buildings, vehicles and landmarks around them. That is, they're tiny. There are several distinct classes of troop, such as Psycho, Pyro, Tough, Sniper and Spy, and in a typical map view you'll be hard pressed to tell them apart. The glint of a single pixel of colour may clue you in to their side, if you're lucky, but don't hold your breath.

Again, the AI shows no mercy. Be prepared to fail each level several times as you experiment with different battle plans, and be prepared to fail some more when they fail due to a stray mouse click or a second wasted swinging the map around. The camera options are fairly comprehensive, but everything on screen is almost exactly

the same shade of grey. Situational awareness is crucial in any game that pans out in real time, and here it's sorely lacking.

TAKING UP THE REAR

Notable improvements include the new additions to the tech tree. Once you've had your construction robots lay down the necessary, near-identical looking structures, you can churn out air and sea units to complement your foot soldiers. The distinction between a vehicle and its driver is maintained from Z, so a sniper bot can free up an enemy vehicle for use by one of your own men.

The missions are also more elaborate. The madcap characters who make up your troops no longer confine their zany antics to the cut scenes;

!!! The Bitmap Brothers are also known for the minor shoot 'em up classic, Chaos Engine, which was released on most platforms.

they get into all manner of trouble while you're trying to sure up the map. Thus objectives chop and change all over the place, making the campaign mode feel more like a warzone populated with Californian deadbeats than a glorified arcade game.

While the first Z, on the surface at least, seemed like a well realised 2D RTS, the sequel seems unsure of itself, wearing its new graphics engine like an ill-fitting suit. Somewhere amidst the hazy graphics, the confusing radar display, the undulating terrain and the sameness of the actors is a challenging game.

It's certainly unique; a rare vision of combat that comes thick and fast, pounding the player mercilessly. You may even enjoy it. For the truly mental RTS fans only: Steel Soldiers takes no prisoners. <<

PLUS: Unique take on RTS genre, challenging, silly voices.

MINUS: Resource hog, tricky interface, stupidly difficult.

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY
79	90	70

OVERALL

73

For the sane, Z is an acquired taste at best.

Captions on images:

"Klingons on the starboard bow..."

Asteroids. I love this game!

WARNING: MISSILE LAUNCH DETECTED

PROXIMITY ALERT

SHIELD STATUS

HYPER BIG RUBBER STAMP OF APPROVAL
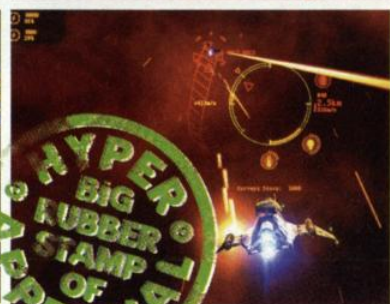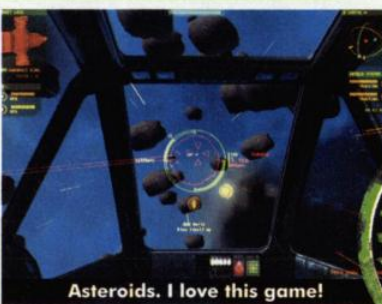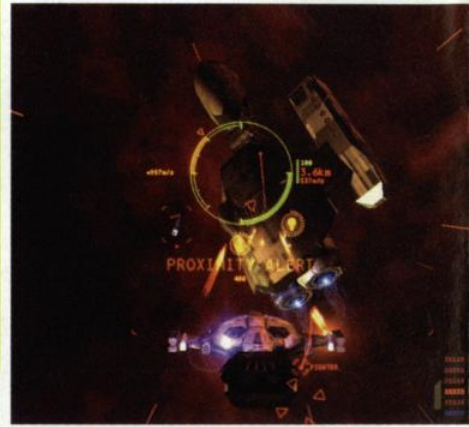
Edge of Chaos: I-War 2 >>PC

CATEGORY: Space Combat >> **PLAYERS:** 1-Multi >> **PUBLISHER:** Infogrames >> **PRICE:** $89.95 >> **RATING:** M >> **AVAILABLE:** Now >> **REQUIRED:** PII-300, 64MB RAM, 3D card, Joystick. >>

DAN TOOSE tries his hand at computer game piracy, so to speak...

hen I-War arrived on the PC gaming scene, it gave sci-fi nuts the chance to play a far more realistic space combat simulator than they'd ever seen. The folks at Particle Systems thought it'd be a nifty idea to have inertia play a role in the way your spacecraft handled, and their game was thus loved by those who wanted some realism, but it made things difficult for those who weren't that familiar with flight simulators. Co-ordinating the various departments of your ship was also a bit much in the thick of things, and thus I-War became a game for the experts rather than just the sci-fi fans. Now the sequel is upon us, and it's a far more playable affair, with a superior plot and a more open ended gaming experience, making this a must for any aspiring star-fighter pilot.

TAKING TO A LIFE OF CRIME

You play the part of Cal Johnston, the son of a miner out on an uncivilised edge of the galaxy who witnessed the death of his father at the hands of a corporate named Caleb Maas. Cal was too naïve to avoid a set-up from Maas, and winds up in prison at the tender age of twelve. Fifteen years later he busts out of jail with some other star faring types, and enters a life of piracy, following in the footsteps of his grandmother.

Unlike most space combat simulators, I-War 2 does not present its missions in a strict military fashion, which makes sense since you're a pirate. From the outset your objective is to get yourself out of trouble and then set up for a lucrative life of crime. The first I-War game only gave you the opportunity to

pilot one type of ship, but as a pirate who escapes prison in a stolen tug, you'll take what you can get and build from there. Your ships can be improved piece by piece, with a wide variety of systems that can be upgraded, including weapons, engines, sensors and counter-measures. You might find these out in the field but more often than not, you'll have to trade for them.

Acquiring goods for trade is as simple as finding freighters, and liberating their

cargo. This tends to involve hanging around Lagrange points (places ships use to jump from system to system) and encouraging ships to dump their goods with a nudge from your weapons. Naturally, most freighters have an escort, so you're taking an obvious risk every time you try for something. The traffic in space helps make you feel like you're in a real working universe, where things are going on all around you. There are different corporations and factions that will not take kindly to any movement against them, but there are also groups that will welcome an alliance with you. This is how you get most of your missions, through emails sent to your base of operations by

That's no moon!

ENCYCLOPEDIA
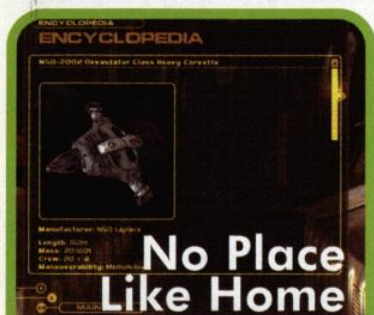
No Place Like Home

>> Your grandmother Lucretia was a woman with a vision, and has left you the perfect hidey-hole for a pirate's life. Besides being secreted away in a dense nebula that protects it from scanners, it has recycling and manufacturing facilities, so you can turn junk into something useful, as long as you have the blueprints for it. From here you can organise trades, check for new messages, or learn about pretty much everything in the game through the encyclopaedia available on computer.

If you see the flash... it's too late.

Oergh, I had one too many drinks before I got in the cockpit...

>> The powerful graphics engine **keeps track of planets and stars** from a huge distance.

those wanting your services. It's not all aimless piracy though, as a second Independence War is on the horizon from the outset, and your involvement is inevitable.

YOU'LL BE SEEING STARS

Edge of Chaos is a joy to play, with every aspect of the visuals being quite commendable. The powerful graphics engine keeps track of planets and stars from a huge distance, so they'll seamlessly go from being a dot to something that fills up your screen as you approach them. Slowdown isn't too common in I-War 2, although once you've got enough objects around, whether they be spaceships, asteroids, debris, or whatever, things can get chuggy. Of course this can be avoided with a grunty PC, or by turning down some visual features, but you'd be missing out on wonderfully detailed

models, textures and special effects. The lighting and weapon effects are outstanding, and the motion lines help convey the inertia effects perfectly, so your sense of motion is spot on. With a half decent system, this is a truly gorgeous game.

Edge of Chaos: I-War 2 sounds as good as it looks too, with plenty of speech throughout the missions, both from your crew and also those who you encounter in your travels. Add to that the excellent sound effects and a really classy soundtrack, and you have a game that will have you totally immersed.

So, what are our gripes? Well, it appears that even though you can go do your own thing, the main storyline won't progress unless you take on some missions, which are not only very hard, but

which really shouldn't stop the story from progressing. It's also very easy to die swiftly if you're not approaching combat in a secure manner, which is realistic, but frustrating in a long mission where you may not have the opportunity to return to your base to save the game.

Overall, Edge of Chaos: I-War 2 is an excellent space combat sim that plays much more like a flight sim than its predecessor, but retains enough realism to separate it from the other titles in the genre. The multiplayer options also add value to what is an already outstanding single player game.

Edge of Chaos: I-War 2 really takes the very best elements of games like Privateer and the original I-War, and leaves us with something far better. <<

!!! If you enjoy I-War 2, keep your eye on an upcoming title called Freelancer – its coming from Chris Roberts who made Privateer.

PLUS: Allows much freedom. Both realistic and playable.

MINUS: Some really tough missions that are hard to figure out.

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY
90	**92**	**93**

OVERALL

92

All the realism of I-War, with all the playability you could hope for.

(2) Re[...]
(7) Bazooka
(4) Marine
(1) Tank
(1) Anti-tank helicopter

tination reached.
sir.
e view

"Hey, who swapped my helmet?"

Coming up on 10 after the carnage...

...Sandra Sully presents *Elephant Sex.*

"All units target James Packer!"

Conflict Zone »PC

CATEGORY: Real Time Strategy >> **PLAYERS:** 1-8 >> **PUBLISHER:** Ubi Soft >> **PRICE:** $69.95 >> **RATING:** M >> **AVAILABLE:** Now >> **REQUIRED:** PII 300, 128 MB RAM >>

JAMES COTTEE knows the power of bad press...

The media is a dangerous thing, kids. When its consolidation goes unchecked, it can lead to a single fat man owning an entire country. When plied by spin-doctors, it can make heinous organisations like the PLO and the Republican Party seem justified in their actions. Worst of all, when we're bombarded with advertising, it can make useless products seem appealing - the horror!

The last two big wars for the West, Vietnam and The Gulf, were lost and won respectively by the media. It's this effect that Conflict Zone, the new Command & Conquer clone from UbiSoft, attempts to capture. Astute gamers may remember the way the Brotherhood of Nod would concoct fake news coverage, a la Wag the Dog, to keep GDI on the back foot. Well, now in the battle between ICP (the good guys) and GHOST (the bad guys), the media has broken out of the cut scenes into the play mechanics.

NEW WORLD ORDER

In the course of purging a level of the enemy, the resources allocated to you will be directly proportional to subjective, political factors. That is, what your superiors and the media think of you. It seems that in the year 2011 the world is on the verge of turning into a giant refugee camp, so your expediency in carting displaced citizens to safety is as important as your tactical prowess.

The game engine is quite powerful, taking shortcuts in the way of standardised map elements. Rivers and plateaus may appear to have jagged edges, but when viewed from your radar reveal themselves as having right angles. A map editor is included, so you can indulge in all the old Sim City excesses, like spelling out your name in landmarks.

As a campaign progresses you can get assigned up to four sub-commanders; these may be delegated to run a part of your base, or even perform entire missions, whatever you feel is beneath you at a given time. They have their own specialties, and while are obviously not as versatile as the human player, they have the uncanny CPU ability to do ten things at once, and as such can free you up to more cerebral tasks.

!!! The EU is forming it's own joint army - let's hope they call it GDII

GOOD AND EVIL, RIGHT AND WRONG

All the units are highly detailed, with obvious clones of the Commanche and the B2 in with your jeeps and tanks. The aggression level of friendly troopers can be adjusted, a welcome upgrade from the artificial stupidity of units in many a name-brand RTS. Bases can only be built on certain designated parts of the map, encouraging a fluid play style. Also, because you can't keep track of enemy units when they're not in your line of sight, they can sneak up on you if you're unwary.

The media element is a welcome addition to the RTS canon, but in most cases your objectives fall into the usual categories. Control an elite commando force, clear out the map of enemies, find X, rescue Y, destroy Z. There's nothing wrong with that, it's just that Conflict Zone isn't quite as revolutionary as the back of the box would have you believe. Unless of course, this whole paragraph is reverse psychology, goading you towards a purchase... <<

PLUS: Innovative economics, military-grade AI, cheeky.

MINUS: Not that visceral, samey action, plagiarises C&C.

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY
90	85	85

OVERALL

87

Balkansise your next LAN party in style.

Stop throwing sauce at me or I'll get real mad.

"Wanna cruise for chicks, Barney?"

Have at you, yellow crystal shard thing!

85 43 27
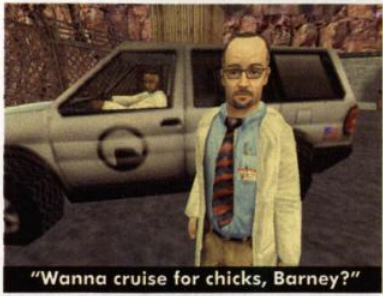
Half-life: Blue Shift »PC

CATEGORY: FPS >> **PLAYERS:** 1-Multi >> **PUBLISHER:** Sierra >> **PRICE:** $49.95 >> **RATING:** MA15+ >> **AVAILABLE:** Now >> **REQUIRED:** P 233, 32MB RAM, 3D Card >>

ELIOT FISH discovers there's more to life. Half-Life that is.

There was a time when we thought that Half-Life: Blue Shift would be entertaining us first on the Dreamcast. Well, here we are halfway through 2001 and not only has the DC version of the game been scrapped, but the poor old Dreamcast itself seems to have suffered the same fate. The first thing that springs to mind is whether Blue Shift is going to play like a console port rather than an expansion designed specifically for the PC. After the spine-tingling experience that was the last expansion pack, Opposing Force, and months of Counter-Strike, are we "over" Half-Life? Is playing as the security guard, really any different to being Gordon Freeman or an elite government soldier?

BLACK MESA MEMORIES

Blue Shift begins at the start of your shift as a security guard in the Black Mesa complex. If you remember the beginning of Half-Life, there was a guard banging on a door as you cruised past on the rail system. Well, in Blue Shift, that guard is you, and you'll find yourself having exactly that dilemma when the game begins. There are plenty more of these

moments in Blue Shift to delight gamers who've played through Half-Life and Opposing Force, from references to Gordon Freeman by the soldiers, to actually seeing Freeman in the game.

As we expected, playing as a security guard is no different to the previous Half-Life adventures. You use mostly the same weapons (although you actually don't get to use any of the energy weapons), you shoot at the same enemies (there aren't even the extra enemies from Opposing Force), you do the usual crate-smashing with your crowbar. Oh, and there are some obligatory jumping puzzles.

Of course, all of this has been packaged with some brilliant scripted events and the level design and puzzles are original and even rather difficult. But if you're a gamer who's going to sit up all night playing through, you'll find that you can almost finish the game in one session. Unfortunately, Blue Shift lasts a total of about five or six hours of gameplay. When you reach the end of the game, it feels like you're more at a half-way point. Then the credits start

!!! Strangely, there is not even a final boss in Half-Life: Blue Shift. What were Valve thinking?

to roll and you realise just how little you got out of the experience.

PLASTIC SURGERY

Included in the Blue Shift box is a High Definition pack that once installed upgrades the player models, monsters and weapon models into far more detailed versions, bringing your Half-Life experience more into line with what today's PCs are capable of. This upgrades the engine permanently so your future games of Counter-Strike or Half-Life will be similarly improved. Also packed in is the previous expansion pack, Opposing Force — a far superior product. You also don't need to have Half-Life installed to play these games.

The problem here is that anyone who is a Half-Life fan has probably already played Opposing Force, leaving the only value here in the High Definition pack and the enjoyable but staggeringly brief romp that is Blue Shift. Unfortunately, for those fans, we can't really recommend this is worth your money. If you've never played the original Half-Life, then by all means get this. «

PLUS: High Definition pack is a great improvement.

MINUS: No new enemies, no new weapons and way too short.

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY
90	92	87

OVERALL
72

Only a worthy purchase for the Half-Life newbie.

53 »HYPER

So bigfoot does exist.

Who has to clean up this mess?

Hot enough for ya?

Diablo II: Lord of Destruction

CATEGORY: RPG >> **PLAYERS:** 1-8 >> **PUBLISHER:** Blizzard >> **PRICE:** $49.95 >> **RATING:** MA15+ >> **AVAILABLE:** Now >> **REQUIRED:** Diablo II >> »PC

Expansion or exploitation? DAN TOOSE finds out...

I t's becoming typical these days for the better RPGs to have expansion packs released for them, and this has to be one of the most heavily anticipated of the lot. The legions of Diablo II fans have been craving more of their favourite game, and whether or not you will appreciate Lord of Destruction is really dependant upon whether you're looking for new lands to venture through, or an elaboration on the items, classes and play mechanics.

LIKE A ROLLING STONE

At the end of Diablo II, we see Diablo's brother Baal acquire his Soulstone, and head off to wreak some havoc. His goal is the World Stone, the thing the Soulstones were created from. Baal has already moved on past the barbarian stronghold of Harrogath, which guards the path to Mount Arreat, the home of the World Stone. Your task in this fifth and final act of Diablo II is to stop Baal from bringing Heaven and Hell to your world through use of the World Stone.

The greatest changes in gameplay have to do with your items and inventory. For starters your stash doubles in size, meaning you can store a lot of extra equipment, and you can now also store a huge amount of gold. For a change, gold is useful at high levels, as you will often need it to resurrect your hirelings. Why would you want to do this? Well now they can be given equipment to make them more effective, and they can also earn experience as they travel with you. In fact, you can keep a hireling through the whole game if you so wish.

In addition to the ability to hold more (including a new 2nd weapon slot, where you can switch between the two freely), the main change is with the equipment itself. There are now a host of new items, and also new item properties. There are class specific items, new sets, and more details on what percentages various effects on items bestow upon the user. There are also items that have an effect simply by keeping them in your inventory. The scope to improve your character with the new items and effects is huge, and that's what makes this expansion worth having for any Diablo II fan.

!!! After installing, if you discover a character missing, get the new patch.

A TOUCH OF CLASS

The Assassin and Druid are quite powerful, and will be well loved by Diablo fans everywhere. The assassin is essentially a melee fighter with some spell like abilities. She specialises in martial arts, the use of elemental magic traps, and shadow disciplines. Her favoured weapons are claw-class weapons that are commonly used in pairs. By combining some of her martial arts skills in clever ways, she can unleash tremendous damage.

The Druid, on the other hand, is a warrior-mage whose power comes from nature, rather than drawing upon the arcane arts. His disciplines are in elemental magic, summoning abilities, and shapeshifting, taking on the form of either a werewolf or a werebear. The summoning skills can have the druid leading a small army around, not dissimilar to the necromancer.

Overall, the fifth act is a bit disappointing, but the extra classes, higher resolution (you can play in 800x600), and the improvements with equipment make this a worthy purchase for any staunch Diablo II fan. ««

PLUS: Resolution increase, big improvements to items.

MINUS: The new fifth chapter is a bit on the dull side.

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY
89	90	85

OVERALL
87

An excellent way to breathe new life into your Diablo II exploits.

Partly cloudy, with a few showers.
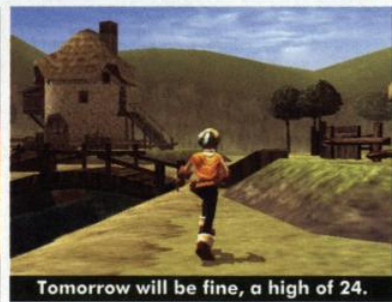
Tomorrow will be fine, a high of 24.

Dark Cloud » PS2

CATEGORY: RPG >> **PLAYERS:** 1 >> **PUBLISHER:** Sony Computer Entertainment >> **PRICE:** $99.95 >> **RATING:** G >> **AVAILABLE:** Now >>

KEVIN CHEUNG brings us this weather report…

ark Cloud isn't a game that makes a great first impression. The first hour or so of gameplay is spent muddling about in what one later realises to be a long-winded tutorial for what's ultimately a very simple set of controls. During that time, being thrown into the deep end and all, one can't help but curse at the camera problems and the obvious similarities to The Legend Of Zelda. But once that obstacle is overcome, and you start gaining some allies and decent fighting equipment, Dark Cloud reveals inner beauty, and you appreciate it as being more of a cross between Diablo II, Zelda and Sim City.

COCONUT SHAPED
Players assume the role of Toan, one of two survivors of an arcane disaster in which his entire village disappears in a

flash. It turns out the village has been broken into fragments, and then sealed individually in scores of floating coconut-shaped objects called Atla. Entrusted with a magical gauntlet called the Atlamillia, Toan has the power to crack open the Atla, absorb what's inside — whether it be a house, a person, a fence or a windmill — and then release it to freedom once he reaches safety. The goal for Toan, then, is to recover the fragments and reassemble his entire village. Then, of course, kill the bastard that started all this trouble.

The similarities to Diablo II arise when it becomes apparent that Toan has to fight his way through descending levels of underground caves. Each level contains a set number of Atla to recover, a monster bearing the key that unlocks the door to the next level, a map, and a

gemstone that highlights the position of all the other monsters and treasure chests on the floor.

Any time Toan runs low on supplies, he can retreat to town either by using his Escape Powder, or by linking minds with his geriatric guardian elf. The latter only works after you've cleared the level of evil. When you want to return to the cave, you can enter on any level you've gained access to. The catch is that the levels are all randomly generated, so apart from finding the Atla, you'll have to search for the keys and doorways from scratch.

And why would you put yourself through this nonsense? Because Toan gets hungry; and he gets hungrier when he's hurt. He also gets thirsty. And if you get too slash-happy, his weapon will break. That's why you have

to regularly go back for Repair Powder, Water Bottles and Bread. Occasionally a level will be blessed with a wellspring that fixes everything except your weapon.

At first you'll have to rely on the charity of the town mayor for these items (he was the other survivor of the disaster). After a little time, you'll rescue the local Item Shop, which you

And over here we see some high pressure areas...

Better stay indoors today.

Expect some heavy rainfall, possibly hail.

»» Dark Cloud's gameplay comes full circle when you start **reconstructing your village in earnest.**

can place in town and thenceforth freely stock up on supplies. You can also buy weapons like bombs and lightning runes, which can be hot-keyed alongside other supplies on your belt. All you have to do is use the D-pad to switch between them.

CLOSE ENOUGH
Toan will also acquire runes that can be attached to his weapon. Over time, his weapon will absorb the magic abilities of those little gemstones (like fire, wind, +3 against undead — that kind of stuff). When the weapon reaches its absorption limit, you can level-up the weapon by hitting the Upgrade button. When you reach the upgrade limit, the weapon can be turned into a crystal rune and then attached to your next weapon. All of these items are incidentally shared with the allies Toan picks up along the way. These allies can only be used whilst

inside the dungeon, and they're mostly useful for getting past things that Toan cannot — such as jumping across a river.

Thankfully, combat is a much simpler affair. When close enough to an enemy, hit the Circle button to lock on, then press the X button to attack. Toan actually has a stamina bar that limits the time he can spend slashing, so it pays to learn the attack patterns of the enemies. Toan also has a charging attack, and pressing the R1 button lets him block. L1 switches between multiple enemies in the field. When facing bosses, players take part in a choreographed QTE ala Shenmue.

Dark Cloud's gameplay comes full circle when you start reconstructing your village in earnest. You can put the buildings, trees, rivers, bridges and so on in any position you want. The beauty of it is

!!! There's an unofficial Dark Cloud site at www.angelfire.com/games3 /darkcloud/.

that once you start populating it with villagers again, they'll give you extra mini-quests to go on, or provide you with new advantages (like being able to shop for items). It gives Dark Cloud a satisfying human element that rewards you for the first hour or so of effort.

With all of that in mind, it should be noted that Dark Cloud isn't a game driven by cutting edge graphics or mind-blowing sound. In fact, it's more like Ocarina Of Time with a much higher polygon count and resolution mode. Its primary faults are all design-related, such as questionable camera controls that make life very difficult in a skirmish. However, Dark Cloud is a very cute game, eventually finding its form as a decent adventure/RPG, offering additional depth as the village is reconstructed. «

PLUS: The game starts to open up once you repopulate the village.

MINUS: Confusing control system, needs more real-time combat.

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY
82	76	87

OVERALL

86

Excellent concept, but has some pacing and control problems.
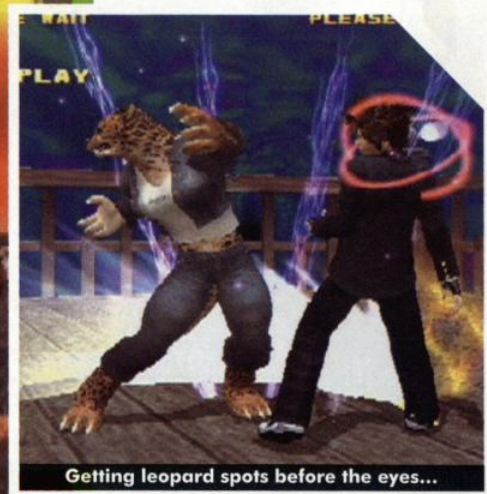
Getting leopard spots before the eyes...

That's one forceful bottom burp.

Hey... where did everyone go?

Bloody Roar 3 >> PS2

CATEGORY: Fighting >> **PLAYERS:** 1-2 >> **PUBLISHER:** Virgin >> **PRICE:** $79.95 >> **RATING:** M >> **AVAILABLE:** August

BRYCE MCDONOUGH is a beastie boy...

Y ou can understand my trepidation with Bloody Roar 3. The Bloody Roar series didn't do too badly on the PSone, it was one of very few direct-to-console fighters that was any good (Tobal and Smash Brothers are all that come to mind), but the PS2 has a slight reputation so far for churning out sequels that are nothing more than old games in new clothing.

IMPOSSIBLE TO BEAT?

Taking the 'supers' of mid-nineties 2D fighting games, each character builds up their 'beast' bar which then gives them the ability to morph into their alter-ego. The creatures are all pretty funky and, in their own way, reflect the stereotypes you would expect. Alice the resident cute girl, with a simple tap on your beast button, becomes a rabbit — fluffy tail and all. Long, the Chinese martial artist (who bears more than a passing resemblance to Lei Wulong) pulls on his tiger outfit for extra tonking power. In fact, everything from a mole to a wolf, even a bug, are finally given the ability to prove they are the true kings of the animal kingdom.

The game operates on a simple punch-kick-block button system, with a fourth button for morphing. Sidestepping is possible with a quick down-down or down-up motion, but to be honest isn't really fast enough to be of any real use. The control system whilst apparently simple, is in fact quite complex if you don't want to sit there and mash buttons. Having no one in the immediate vicinity to play against, I switched to the ironically labelled 'Arcade Mode' hoping for a quick bash to come to grips with the characters, controls, moves, and physics. No such luck. On all but the easiest of settings, the AI is virtually impossible to beat. The longevity of a game is not in its ability to frustrate and make the unlocking of features as drawn out and painful as possible, it's in an intuitive control system whereby everyone is as balanced as possible and ability is rewarded. In BR3, even though all the characters are diverse, 95% of people will play the same way... mashing out combos hoping it has a higher priority than the one the AI/opponent just executed. To compound on this, the cheesy guitar

music has taken my vote for 'Worst In-game Music Ever', and the story and cut-scenes are low-budget to say the least.

THE JOY OF JUGGLING

After spending a long while familiarising myself with the moves of characters, things did start falling into place. Two player battles became fun and more calculated, and launching the opponent became a joy. The ability to juggle your opponent almost indefinitely presents itself. Juggles themselves become more complex, and well-timed air recoveries are soon an important part of play. The AI never gets easier, but the ability to deal more damage in combos is definitely an advantage.

For fans of the series, I really have no hesitation recommending this game. For fighting game fans it is definitely worth checking out, but it will become an incredibly frustrating experience unless you have friends to play against and learn with. The depth is nowhere near that of Tekken or Virtua Fighter, nor even DOA, but is pretty enjoyable nonetheless. <<

!!! Don't forget that Sega's Virtua Fighter 4 is coming to the PS2!

PLUS: Cool characters. Unbelievable juggles.

MINUS: Stupidly hard AI, and the worst in-game music ever.

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY
85	45	82

OVERALL

80

Fun if you have the time and the competition. But be warned.

Look, there's an island! I can see an island!!

Can you see Kevin Costner?

Engine reverse

Mmmm... Subway...

Another enemy has appeared invading my territory
It won't be like this the next time

Would you like to see my torpedo?

Player ship
Enemy torpedo closing in
Impact in 07 seconds

Deputy captain

DANGER
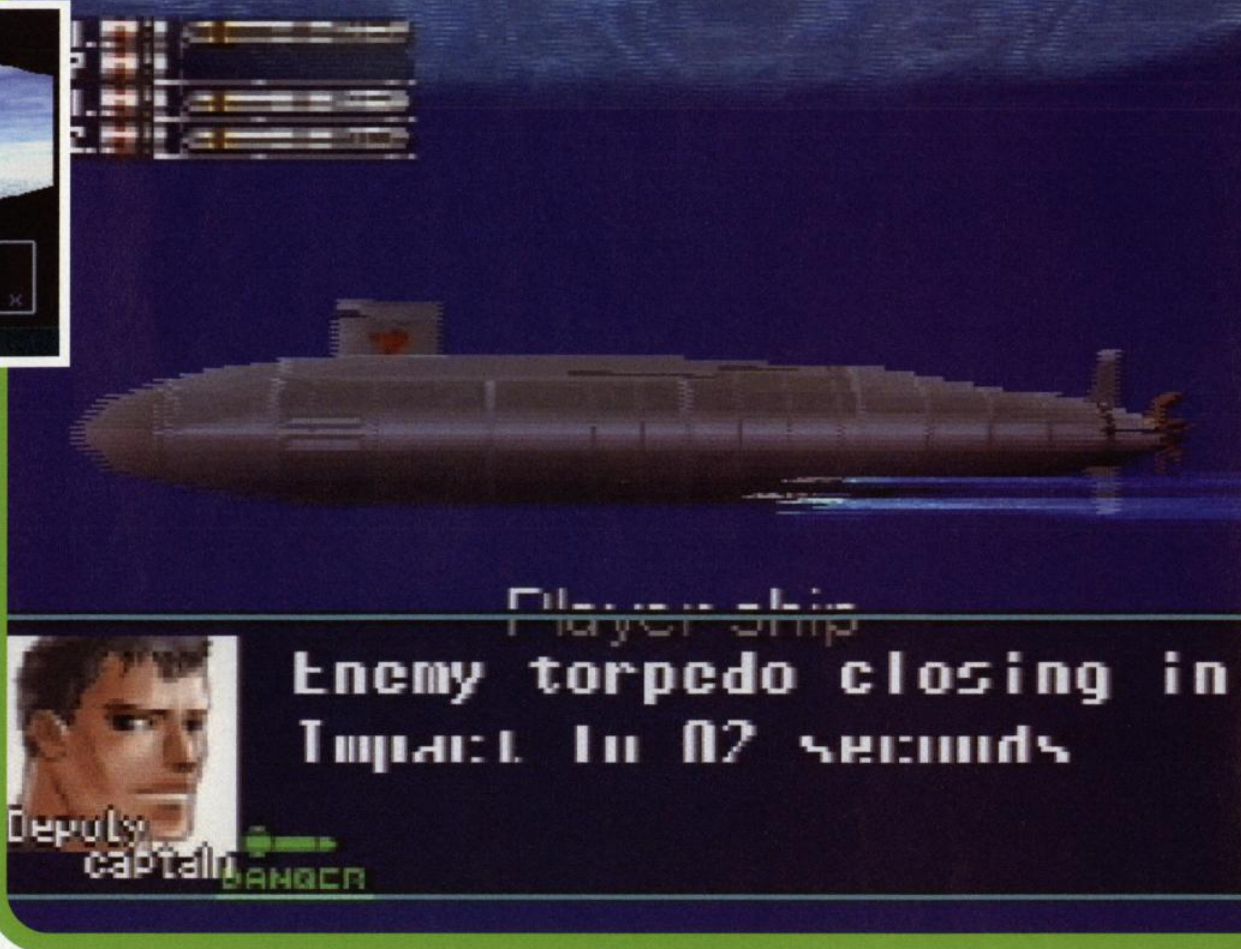
Submarine Commander

CATEGORY: Sub Sim >> **PLAYERS:** 1 >> **PUBLISHER:** JVC-Europe >> **PRICE:** $69.95 >> **RATING:** G >> **AVAILABLE:** Now >>

»PSone

GEORGE SOROPOS unleashes his torpedo…

Some smart toff once said that war could be described as long periods of boredom broken up by short bursts of terror, or something like that, and it pretty much sums up the essence of submarine combat in a nutshell. Which probably explains why game developers have been so enthusiastic about the genre. All that lurking about, being patient and of course that pinging noise, it's all a bit dull isn't it? Perhaps, if you were in charge of some old WWII rust bucket… but this is the future! You see Kevin Costner was right all along, one day all the ocean levels will rise due to the ever-increasing levels of hot air being blown around by American politicians and subs will rule the world. Kind of like the way hotted up Falcon's rule in *Mad Max*.

OCEAN BOOTY

Of course not everything is submerged and a few human outposts remain atop mountains and floating platforms, one of which is your new home…Plant 9. Plant 9 is an old floating platform that managed to survive the changes and now houses a community of survivors who provide you with a handy base of operations. Plant 9

is the central hub for your missions in Sub Commander and also provides all your upgrade requirements through the local torpedo shop and dry dock while the Steel Exchange acts as a sort of pawn broker for your ocean booty, and we're not talking mermaids.

The sub upgrades and torpedo varieties allow you to adjust your tactics for each mission, for example a mission where you'll be facing surface vessels will involve air attacks so you'll want to carry some anti air torps along with some acoustic torps for the ships. The anti air torps shed their casing when they breach the surface and become surface to air missiles while the acoustic torps are good for ships as they can't stop their engines to fool them.

If you're going to be involved in sub to sub combat on the other hand you'll probably want to add a depth hull, allowing safe operation at great depth but at lower speeds, a few extra torpedo tubes and maybe some special weapons like a sonic cannon. There are quite a few different torpedo types apart from the dumb fire and acoustic. Active homing torps have

their own sonar but are slow and easily fooled by chaff torps, mine torps travel a set distance away and then arm themselves to trigger when another vessel passes by and interceptor torps are designed to take out other torps on their way to your sub.

ECCENTRIC CHARM

The combat interface is simple and easy to use in a pinch. You control the loading of individual torpedo tubes, your sub can have 2, 4, 6 or 8 tubes, their launch timing and of course the navigation of your boat. There are also two sonar modes to help you find the enemy, a wide beam that tells you the general direction of your opponent but gives your position away as well and a narrow beam which is safer but focused into a small area.

Submarine Commander is not what you'd call mainstream and it won't appeal to everyone. The graphics are quite average and the Japanese factor pretty noticeable, but in a charming way. It's a quirky, odd little game, so check it out if you're in the mood for something different. <<

!!! JVC recently released another military sim, Panzer Front, a port of the PC game.

PLUS: Original concept and design, strangely addictive.

MINUS: Niche appeal – not for everyone's taste.

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY
65	80	74

OVERALL

70

This will appeal to freaks, but it's a bit hard to fathom.

Crazy Taxi eat your heart out!

A shadow of his former self.
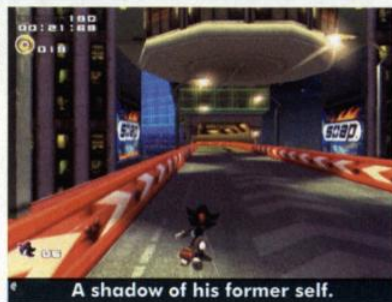
Sonic Adventure 2 »DC

CATEGORY: Platformer >> **PLAYERS:** 1-2 >> **PUBLISHER:** Sega >> **PRICE:** $89.95 >> **RATING:** G >> **AVAILABLE:** Now >>

CAM SHEA took two days off work to go on an adventure...

Sonic Adventure 2 is the definitive Sonic the Hedgehog experience, no doubt about it. At the same time however, it's NOT the definitive Knuckles, Eggman, Rouge or Tails experience. Don't get us wrong, Sonic Team have crafted a tasty game, it's just a shame about the hanger-ons. Let me explain.

A DOWNHILL SLIDE...

At the beginning of the game you're given a choice between two sides, the heroes and the dark. Each has their own set of missions moving through the overall storyline, and each has a team of three. Representing the heroes are Sonic, Knuckles and Tails. Representing the dark are Shadow (bizarro-Sonic), Rouge (a trailer trash bat) and Dr Eggman (after all this time Robotnik's Japanese name has finally

gone worldwide). It's a nice touch having two intertwined yet unique sets of missions, and you can work on both simultaneously.

From here things start to go downhill somewhat. Instead of a hub system, Sonic Adventure 2 is totally linear, with cutscenes tying levels together. Don't ask us what the cutscenes were about because as valiantly as we tried, we just couldn't handle the voice acting. In any case, each character has a unique style of mission. Sonic/Shadow's are speed based, Knuckles/Rouge's are glide and seek, and Tails/Eggman's are shoot 'em ups. This is all well and good, except that the levels must be completed in order... so what if, hypothetically, two of these styles of mission were utterly boring? Yep, sorry folks. You blaze through a level

with Sonic, then spend what seems like an eternity searching for hidden gems as Knuckles, then another eternity blowing up anything that moves in Tails' mech, then a boss battle or three before finally getting back to Sonic. Aargh!

Hell, the whole reason we play Sonic games is for fast, relentless, twitch-based, balls-out speed. Actually no, that could be phrased better: the

reason we play Sonic games is for SONIC. Unfortunately, Sega missed this little nugget of consumer feedback, and have failed to relegate the other characters to bonus level status where they arguably belong.

Whilst these levels aren't bad, they could have been a whole lot better. Take Knuckles and Rouge for example.

Dr. Eggman chasing tails again...

Don't try this at home. Find a rail.

>> Is this the future of videogames? Sonic's new grind move is devastatingly sweet, but it comes with an interesting catch - sponsorship! You may be familiar with Soap shoes, they come with a concave groove on the underside designed especially for grinding rails, and this is Sonic's footwear of choice. It's also the Hyper Team's footwear of choice and if anyone from Soap is reading this, I take a US size 12. Thanks.

Can you make me a Knuckle sandwich?

Bouncy.

>> the whole reason we play Sonic games is for fast, relentless, **twitch-based, balls-out** speed.

They have a great set of moves - multiple attacks, gliding, the ability to climb walls and to dig into walls and floors. Yet all you're doing with these characters is wandering around large maze-like levels trying to find hidden gems. They could be so much more. The final Knuckles stage (Meteor Herd), for example, is absolutely awe-inspiring in size and layout... but its potential is wasted.

BUT ENOUGH ABOUT ME...
Despite the mixed gameplay, there is still a huge amount to like about Sonic Adventure 2. Each character unlocks new moves as they progress, and Sonic in particular has some very cool ones including a bounce attack, fire somersault and magic hand. These are well integrated into the level design, but it's the grind which makes the biggest impact on the gameplay.

Spread liberally throughout the courses are rails and insane transitions that work well to expand the options available to the player.

Sonic Team have upped the ante big-time in almost every area. The frame rate is top notch, all while pumping out seriously large and detailed environments. Course design is superb, and if you were impressed by some of the loop the loops in the original, then the wild twists, turns and general insanity of these courses will definitely impress. We're talking corkscrews, loops with huge gaps, rails galore, and a sense of scale unseen in this genre. The last two Sonic levels in particular are worth the price of entry alone. Crazy Gadget is a wild excursion into gravity flipping on a space station, and Final Rush is pure free-form rail madness. Imagine

!!! Check out www.soapshoes.com for the dope on Soap.

stacking every rollercoaster in the world on top of one another and suspending it in space - that's Final Rush. The sense of scale is really hammered home when you miss a rail and free-fall for a good ten seconds only to connect with a rail lower down. Brilliant.

In addition to 16 hero levels, 14 dark levels, a heap of boss battles, a kart racing mode, and an all new and improved Chao garden to frolic in, Sonic Adventure 2 also comes with a competent two player mode.

Sonic Adventure 2 is yet another showcase for Dreamcast, both technically and aesthetically. For a game based on such simple play mechanics its amazing how much replay value Sonic Team can pack in. The game structure may be flawed, but the pure Sonic goodness still shines through. <<

PLUS: Sonic hits a new level of cool. Pretty darn addictive.

MINUS: Unfortunately... Knuckles, Rouge, Eggman and Tails.

VISUALS 89　SOUND 79　GAMEPLAY 83

OVERALL 87

This is a fantastic romp, but more Sonic would have been nice.

Bad time for an earthquake to hit. **PS2**

ATV Off-Road Fury

CATEGORY: Racing >> **PLAYERS:** 1-4 >>
PUBLISHER: Sony >> **PRICE:** $89.95 >>
RATING: G >> **AVAILABLE:** Now >>

Rainbow Studios are back, fresh from creating two of the most engaging extreme sports games ever made for PC — Motorcross Madness 1 & 2. They've now turned their attention to the PS2, and blessed the masses with one of the best off-road racing games seen on a console.

ATV Off-Road Fury will be instantly familiar to anyone who has played either of the Motocross Madness games. The undulating hills, detailed physics, kickass driving mechanics, slightly floaty feel and huge air are all back, as are the events. From Cross-Country Enduro and Freestyle Stunt, to Maxxis Nationals and Stadium Supercross, the different events really broaden the scope of the gameplay tremendously. You may be riding the same vehicles, but moving from one event to another requires surprisingly different skills. For instance, Supercross demands great timing through tight turns and unforgiving courses, whilst Enduro, is more a matter of reading the larger landscape and using it to your advantage.

Another alluring aspect of ATV Off-Road Fury is the great four player splitscreen mode. The courses may be a little more foggy than normal, but the game maintains its speed and the graphics are detailed enough to keep your interest levels up.

But how does ATV Off-Road Fury stack up against the Motocross Madness series? Very well, actually. Although Motocross Madness 2 has the edge in terms of visual complexity and raw speed, ATV's gameplay is equally compelling - grace and insanity all in one.

Cam Shea

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY	OVERALL
86	80	86	86
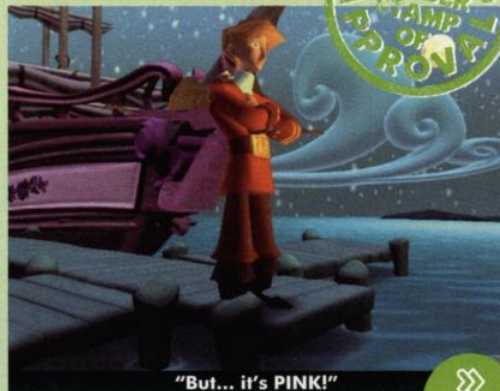
"But... it's PINK!" **PS2**

Escape from Monkey Island

CATEGORY: Adventure >> **PLAYERS:** 1 >>
PUBLISHER: LucasArts >> **PRICE:** $99.95 >>
RATING: G >> **AVAILABLE:** Now >>

What is considered a return to form for the Monkey Island series, Escape From Monkey Island has finally made its way from the traditional adventure gaming platform of the PC to the new PS2. An unusual decision to be sure, bringing a slow-paced adventure game to a console, but Escape From Monkey Island is a hilarious romp that entertains all the way. Essentially a humour-filled piratey adventure that manages to take the piss out just about everything, Escape From Monkey Island features a series of mind-boggling puzzles that will truly test your lateral thinking and your patience. Most of the puzzles here are quirky to say the least, so be prepared for many strange combinations of items in your inventory.

The game takes place in a 3D environment, so you won't be struggling with the analogue stick to point and click at anything. Simply move Guybrush Threepwood around the environment as you would in any 3rd person action game, and use the buttons on the control pad to look, use, pick up and play with your surroundings. The fact is, Escape From Monkey Island on PS2 actually plays more intuitively than it did on the PC. LucasArts have also tweaked the visuals, by smoothing out the player models and upping the detail, with the only minor drawback being that the frame-rate in the animation of the characters is sometimes is a little under par.

There is currently nothing like Escape From Monkey Island on the PS2, so if you love adventure games and have a good sense of humour, you'll go — ahem — bananas over this one.

Eliot Fish

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY	OVERALL
86	94	90	91

You talkin' to me? **PC**

Gangsters 2

CATEGORY: RTS >> **PLAYERS:** 1-8 >>
PUBLISHER: Eidos >> **PRICE:** $89.95 >>
RATING: M >> **AVAILABLE:** Now >>

Ahhh, the mystique of the underworld. Every man and his dog likes to think they're a big bad mob kingpin, even if they're just taxing road signs and silent cops. So Hothouse Creations have refined the formula of their stillborn '98 tactical crime simulator, Gangsters, allowing every closet criminal a new and improved means of nurturing their inner toe-cutter.

The retro look comes from two angles. First, the whole interface is designed to look like something out of a 1920's Chicago broadsheet. Second, The graphics are so chunky and primitive they look like they belong on a 386. Oddly enough, this superficial air of dodginess permeates deeper into the more important area of gameplay.

The gameplay sucks. In the little isometric gangland world at your feet, you must simultaneously manage your front operations while hiring gangsters, exterminating the opposition, and balancing the books. There are several different ways to view the city and your status, and they don't fit together very well. Control over your men is indirect, and the combat element is laughable.

If you manage to get past the awkward controls and lack of gratification for a job well done, Gangsters 2 will present a long and challenging campaign structure. If you find a like-minded individual, the standard multi-player options exist. But there are better strategy games out there, better action games out there, and if you want a gangland atmosphere then hop on a train to sunny Cabramatta and soak up all you want. Like the real-life face of crime, Gangsters 2 is ugly as sin.

James Cottee

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY	OVERALL
50	40	55	51
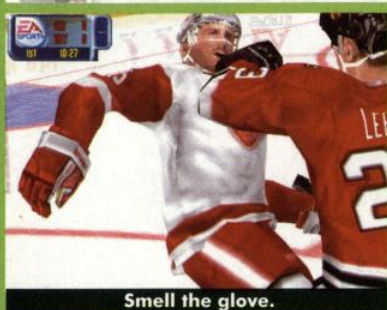
Smell the glove.

NHL 2001

>> PC

CATEGORY: Sport >> **PLAYERS:** 1-5 (2-15 over Internet) >> **PUBLISHER:** EA Sports >> **RATING:** G >> **AVAILABLE:** Now >>
REQUIRED: P 200, 32 MB RAM, 100 MB disk space. >>

GIUSEPPE MARINO is just looking for a quick puck...

omething I've always found interesting about EA Sports' NHL games in the Aussie market is the strong following and relative popularity of the titles. A lot of ice hockey game reviews in this country seem to start with something like, "Despite the fact that ice hockey is not a mainstream sport in Australia...", and go on to (usually) praise the game regardless. The fact is, with a team as talented as EA putting it all together, the content isn't really what draws people to these games. They just have great gameplay, pure and simple.

SWING YOUR STICK

This latest release in the popular NHL series follows the usual formula. Better graphics and sound, more options and features, and a few tweaks to the gameplay to boot. Putting aside for a moment whether this latest instalment is worth the update, the game itself delivers the complete package in terms of full NHL player rosters, teams (including the new outfits from Minnesota and Columbus), international squads, and of course the obligatory statistics and competitions. Hardcore NHL fans will require multiple pairs of underpants and some form of drool collection

device once they see everything that NHL 2001 has to offer.

The PC version also includes some features that aren't in the PS2 title, most notably the ability to play online via EA Sports match up system where you can take on the best from around the world. Unfortunately, playing with my sad little 56k modem wasn't exactly smooth sailing (even with all the graphics options turned down). You'll notice a lot of "DSL/Cable Only" games being hosted on the match up screen, a less then subtle hint that slow connection users aren't too populag... I mean, popular.

CHECK YOUR HEAD

The gameplay is typical NHL. Fast passing, body checks, one-timers, long range shots, one-twos... the lot. One gripe though is the infuriatingly difficult goalie opponents. These guys must have eyes in the backs of their heads. There are occasions when you'll receive a pass in front of a totally open net with the goalie facing the other way, but despite the hopeless situation, the goalie's psychic powers prevail, and he dives to block your shot. Annoying, but not enough to spoil the fun.

> **!!!** We look forward to reading more of what YOU think. Keep sending your reader reviews to freakscene@next.com.au with READER REVIEW in the subject line.

For the most part though, the gameplay is classic NHL, drawing more from the faster, more arcade style of the titles from the mid-nineties, rather then the slightly slower, clunkier style that seemed to creep into the series over recent years (mostly due to major changes to the graphics engine).

As usual, going head to head with a friend is where the real fun is, particularly with a good pair of PC gamepads. The chance for a bit of biffo is also included, with the classic fighting sequences thankfully included in 2001 (more loving, caring types have the option to turn this feature off).

Fans of the series will be asking then, is it worth the purchase? Like a lot of EA Sports releases, new titles are often a lot more impressive if you haven't been updating your collection each year. Needless to say, if the last game you played was NHL '94 on your old Megadrive, you're going to be pretty impressed by this latest offering. Owners of NHL 99 or 2000 though, probably aren't going to notice such a dramatic improvement. NHL 2001 is nonetheless another success for EA, and easily the best in the series. <<

PLUS: Fast action, impressive graphics & sound, great multiplayer.

MINUS: Unrealistic goalie A.I., need a fast connection for online.

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY
89	85	87

OVERALL

87

Not revolutionary, but an impressive NHL release from EA.

Atari Lynx

Pac Land

Rampage

California Games

Suppose your friends laugh at you because you can't afford a Game Boy Advance. Relax: according to **JAMES COTTEE**, the best way to think handhelds is to think big…

A lot of crazy, impressionable kids out there are getting all worked up over the GBA. Since Nintendo have ruled the handheld roost since most of them were in Kindergarten, they assume that a colour handheld from Nintendo means it's the first of its kind. Not so; just in the recent past we have the Neo Geo Pocket, and in the early 90s many a Sega nut held hope for the Game Gear. But the first ever colour handheld came from the first ever video game company, way back in 1989.

In its dying days the Atari Corporation released some truly stunning hardware, and were it not for the mismanagement of the tightwad Tramiel family, might still be rocking

the gaming world today. In the early 90s the Atari logo was on the Falcon, a killer multimedia PC; the Jaguar, the world's first 64 bit game console; and the Lynx, a handheld game machine a decade ahead of its time.

A HANDY LITTLE GADGET
Originally conceived in 1987 by Epyx, Atari stepped in to complete production of the project in '89, and also acquired the Epyx back catalogue of games to run on it. The working title of the system was the "Handy", and as a tribute to this the leading PC emulator for the Lynx shares that name. Two of the men who created the system were Dave Needle and R. J. Mical, who also were on the original Amiga design team. They brought to

the project their innovative method of using multiple chips specialised for graphics and sound, along with their penchant for giving chips code names.

Mikey and Suzy were the two custom 16-bit chips that powered the Lynx, and not only could they display 4096 different colours, there were several graphical effects built into the hardware. Scaling and rotating, unlimited sprites, tilting effects, hardware decoding of compressed sprite data, and more, all at up to 75 frames per second! To see these effects in action compared to the Game Boys of the time was the difference between night and day. The screen was a mighty 3.5 inches across, and resolution could go up to 480 by 102 pixels!

Atari's Lynx still stacks up well, even compared to the GBA, and it may surprise some readers that in many areas it is clearly the superior machine. The first trait that meets the eye is its size, a good ten times bigger than the GBA. Or, for the construction minded, about the size of a house brick. Not that weight or ergonomics were issues; it had gentle curves and featured sensuous rubber finger grips. By contrast the petite GBA confounds players who struggle to get their giant barbarian hands around the tiny Japanese device.

Innovative design features catered to all tastes. The Lynx to this day is the only handheld to offer left-handed support. The press of a button would flip the image on the game screen, and

Double Dragon
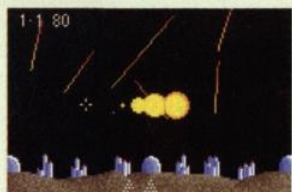
Missile Command

Lemmings

Blue Lightning
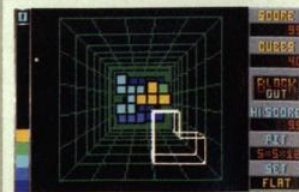
Blockout

Dirty Larry: Renegade Cop

Gauntlet 3

Shadow of the Beast
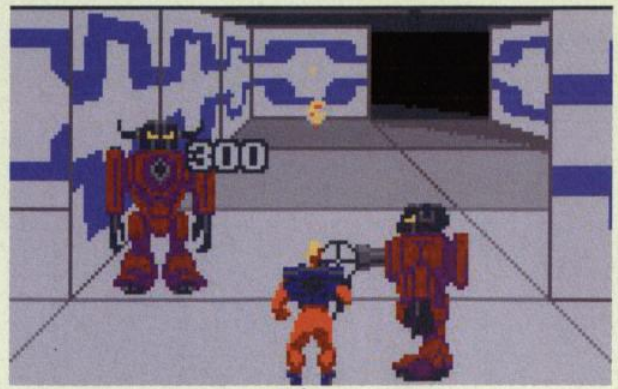
Xybots

Batman Returns

Battlezone

Paperboy

Road Blasters

"Judge me by my size, do you? Hmmmm?"

> **But most important of all, you could beat someone to death with it.**

second set of A and B buttons would then come into play. Some games even took advantage of the unit's screen in a vertical configuration, more in line with the displays in traditional arcade cabinets.

POWER UP!
There were one or two down sides to the unit, though. Like a giant American car, it consumed batteries ferociously. You couldn't even switch it on until you had fed it six AAs, and this would buy you about five hours of play time. The guilty party here was the backlit display, but this option could be turned off to conserve power. A 9-volt power source, such as a car's cigarette lighter, could see the Lynx purring away indefinitely. You could even get

a colossal proprietary battery pack, cram it full of D-cells, and clip it to your belt for long-range pedestrian missions.

Multiplayer functionality came from the use of "Comlynx" cables, and while there was no spawning, up to 18 (!) Lynxs could theoretically be linked up for network play. To think some folks are wetting their pants over four-player action on the GBA... Numerous add-on peripherals were planned for the Lynx, perhaps the most ambitious being converting it to a specialised controller for the Atari Jaguar.

The game selection was culled mostly from the Arcade hits of Atari, Midway and Tengen. Old-school action came from Robotron, Joust, Defender, Missile Command and the

like. A good spread of mid-eighties retro also reared its head, with titles such as Rampage, Pac Land, Rygar and California Games. There were ambitious conversions of Lemmings and Shadow of the Beast, and a host of original titles for the system. These include flight simulators with proper 3D graphics, a feat Nintendo is only now catching up with.

If handheld game systems continue to evolve in their current direction, then within a decade we'll have machines we can use as bookmarks and subsequently lose. It's worth remembering that there's more than one way to skin a cat. The biggest complaint everyone has with the GBA is that without a backlit screen, enjoyment of it hinges on finicky

lighting conditions being met. GBAs and Palms are difficult to hold, fragile, and somewhat at odds with what we expect from advanced technology.

The Lynx lets you think a little differently about how you play your games. It feels substantial in your hands, has rockin' stereo sound, and comes in any colour you like, as long as it's black. But most important of all, you could beat someone to death with it. Hyper advises all right-thinking readers to proceed straight to their local pawn shop and snap up one of these gaming monoliths before they disappear from the Earth. The great thing is, even if you run out of juice, you can still intimidate anyone with it: just shove it down the front of your pants. <<

Checkered Flag
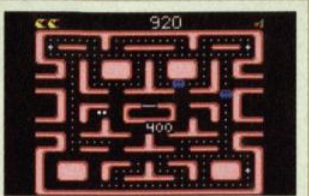
Ms. Pac Man

European Soccer Challenge

Rygar

Malibu Bikini Beach Volleyball

F Zero: Maximum Velocity

>>GBA

CATEGORY: Racing >> **PLAYERS:** 1-4 (link-up) >> **PUBLISHER:** Nintendo >>
PRICE: $69.95 >> **RATING:** G >> **AVAILABLE:** Now >>

Nintendo's original SNES tech demo is back... and it's never looked better. In many ways Maximum Velocity serves a similar purpose to the original F Zero — it demonstrates the power of mode 7 scrolling, as well as being an excellent game at the same time.

As expected, Nintendo have tweaked the handling mechanics and upped the speed from the original. They've also created 20 devious new courses, with all the design elements you'd expect from the series, such as shortcut jump pads, the ever popular speed boosts and lines built around serious speed. While we're happy with the courses on offer, we would have liked to see more crazy shortcuts, but hey, that's just us... lovers of hijinks and madcappery.

The handling mechanics are solid, and you'll need to learn the "tap turn" technique to stave off the frustration of constantly bouncing into and between the track edges. This is simply tapping accelerate rapidly when going around the sharper corners to maintain traction. It's a nice touch and makes Maximum Velocity a huge amount of fun to play, as you never have to drop your speed.

The only real issues we have with the game is that races are a little long. The amount of concentration required on the harder difficulty levels is just silly, so it's a little frustrating having to maintain it through so many laps. Also, the holy grail of single cartridge link-up games has turned out to be something of a mirage in the proverbial gaming desert. You CAN play multiplayer link-up with only one cartridge BUT yo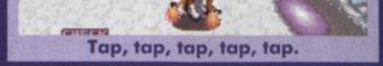u're limited to a single course and a single type of vehicle. Anything more than that requires multiple copies of the game. Oh well. Even so, this is fast, slick, and the ultimate handheld anti-gravity racer.

Cam Shea

Tap, tap, tap, tap, tap.

Come back here you varmint!

"Medium Right!"

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY	OVERALL
79	70	84	84

GT Advance

>>GBA

CATEGORY: Racing >> **PLAYERS:** 1-2 >> **PUBLISHER:** THQ >>
PRICE: $69.95 >> **RATING:** G >> **AVAILABLE:** Now >>

Mario Kart. Mario Kart. Mario Kart. Sorry, had to get that out of my system. Mario Kart isn't with us yet, but games like this help make the pain go away. GT Advance is an odd little title, with the focus of a serious racing game, but drastically restricted gameplay.

There are four increasingly difficult championships, 32 tracks and 48 cars to unlock and upgrade. Circuits range from dirt track rally settings through to city-based races. There's some variety in conditions as well, with day and night, as well as weather effects. All these options seem a little silly once you get into the game, however, as GT Advance is really just another mode 7 kart racing game in disguise. Even so, there's an okay impression of speed, the powerslide mechanics are fun and there are enough options to keep you satisfied for a while.

The graphics really are quite flawed, but we're not going to bitch and moan too much because they do the job. A greater level of polish would have been appreciated though, because the sprite-based cars often break up or appear in the wrong proportions, and the game suffers from chronic interlacing in the foreground. Oh, and the return of invisible walls isn't appreciated either.

Gran Turismo this is not, but for a first generation GBA game, GT Advance is pretty good fun. If you like your racing with real cars in the real world, then this is a good way to get that fix on the move.

Cam Shea

Stats, stats and more stats.
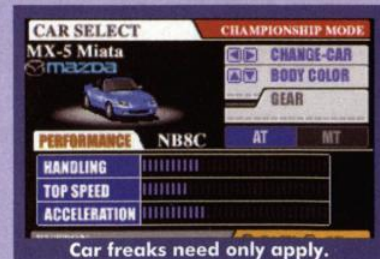
Car freaks need only apply.
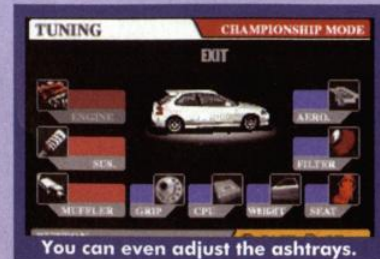
You can even adjust the ashtrays.

"Easy left!"

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY	OVERALL
68	72	78	78

Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 2

» GBA CATEGORY: Skating sim >> PLAYERS: 1 >> PUBLISHER: Activision >> PRICE: $69.95 >> RATING: G >> AVAILABLE: Now >>

HYPER BIG RUBBER STAMP OF APPROVAL

T he THPS juggernaut rolls on! First PlayStation, then Dreamcast, then PC and now... Game Boy Advance? You'd be forgiven for snorting derisively and going back to high polygon nollie hardflips, but the truth is that THPS2 on GBA not only works, but is as fun and maddeningly addictive as its big brothers.

Vicarious Visions have packed an amazing amount of the original onto this cart. All 13 pro skaters are there, the gap checklist is extensive and it seems most of the tricks remain, although the ability to customise them is quite limited. Seven levels are playable (including the warehouse from

Tony Hawk 1), but no Philadelphia unfortunately. The create-a-skater and create-a-skatepark features are also understandably missing, and the soundtrack has been reduced to simple yet catchy tunes.

The new fixed camera isometric view takes some getting used to — it's often difficult to gauge height and perspective. Player model animation, on the other hand, is amazing; flip tricks and grinds still look authentic, even on the miniscule screen. The levels also look great, though the realism here contributes to the game's biggest problem. Gritty, dirty street scenes mean gritty, dirty colour schemes, which means severe eye-strain for players already trying to cope with the darkish screen.

This being such a fine game, it's not difficult to forgive the faults. Once worries about long-term eye health are forgotten and hands are deformed enough to deal with the controls, THPS2 on Game Boy Advance is as fun as the previous versions, and a great example of what can be done on the new handheld.

Malcolm Campbell

Sick.

Dope.

Massive.

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY	OVERALL
85	78	92	91

Kuru Kuru Kururin

» GBA CATEGORY: Puzzle >> PLAYERS: 1 >> PUBLISHER: Nintendo >> PRICE: $69.95 >> RATING: G >> AVAILABLE: Now >>

If you stick to it, you'll love it.

Go on... give it some stick.

Stick 'em up.

T he Game Boy Advance is off to a strong start with this interesting title, conjuring as it does the glory days when gameplay was everything and concepts were dreamt up by drunken developers huddled in seedy sake-yasan. Kuru Kuru Kururin follows the adventures of a little duck with a coil on his head, as he guides his slowly rotating helicopter through a series of progressively more difficult mazes in search of his lost brothers and sisters.

Similar in structure to the classic Marble Madness, the player must race against the clock to guide the helicopter to a goal. It must be noted that while the game calls this vehicle a helicopter, it's really a slowly rotating stick which is too wide to fit through most passages unless movement is timed exactly right; as the stick spins, corridors are accessible. Hit the wall three times, and it's back to the start for another attempt.

The game builds difficulty across a series of lands, and adds elements such as springs, which change the direction of rotation, and various hazards such as cannons, mines and crushing pistons. It's a constantly challenging, entertaining

little title that can be picked up for five minutes, or played continuously for hours. Once each land has been defeated with no errors there are more than 30 'challenge levels' which are much shorter, but far more difficult. Finally, numerous items can be collected throughout the lands which can be used to customise the stick; from wiggly shafts to stars to spikes.

Kuru Kuru Kururin is fresh and original, and is a nice example of the potential variety on the GBA.

Justin Hoffman

Just stick it, stick it good.

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY	OVERALL
81	82	90	87

Super Mario Advance

>> GBA CATEGORY: Retro Platforming >> PLAYERS: 1-4 >> PUBLISHER: Nintendo >>
PRICE: $69.95 >> RATING: G >> AVAILABLE: Now >>

Mario, Mario, wherefore art thou Mario? The launch of a Nintendo system just wouldn't be the same without a Mario adventure and all the head-jumping, coin-collecting fun that comes with it. That said, a brief frolick in the fields with the new advanced Mario will tell you that "gasp" you can't jump on their heads!!!

That's right, what we have here is a pocket version of the old Super Mario 2, which for some reason was never released in Japan. Mario hangs his plumber overalls up for a more agricultural approach... all things growing can be harvested for ammunition against the constant onslaught of hopping, crawling and flying drones.

As far as platformers go, SMA is pretty good. However, having played pretty much every Mario game so far, this is probably the weakest of the lot. This doesn't mean it's not fun — it is, it just isn't as much fun as the more traditional head-bopping games. There's plenty to do, a selection of characters (Mario, Luigi, Toad and Peach each with differing stats on jump, speed and power) to make sure you get the most out of the game, and literally too much speech. The sound definitely deserves a mention. Each character has plenty to say, whether it be power-ups, finishing the level, or even just jumping... it gets to the point where you wish you could turn it off.

The real bonus here is that SMA comes not only with Super Mario 2, but also with the original Super Mario Bros arcade game. More than a simple distraction, this game allows for up to four players to battle it out via the link cable.

Super Mario Advance is a good start for Nintendo... but when can we get All-Stars?

Bryce McDonough

He's always looking up someone's pipe.

Choose your freak.

"Everybody jump, jump..."

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY	OVERALL
83	89	85	85

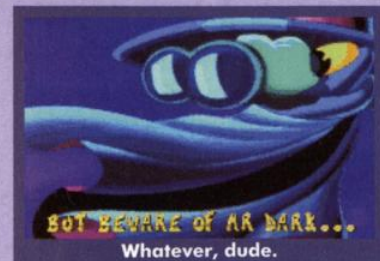# Rayman Advance

>> GBA CATEGORY: Platform >> PLAYERS: 1 >> PUBLISHER: Ubisoft >>
PRICE: $79.95 >> RATING: G >> AVAILABLE: Now >>

With the GBA now fully upon us, there are two games you simply must see. Graphically speaking, Tony Hawk and Rayman Advance give us a taste of what we can expect from the system in the future, and that future is very sweet indeed. The amount of life in the backgrounds of Rayman alone will leave you drooling. Flowers and mushrooms sway and bounce back and forth, butterflies flutter by, jewels sparkle, and everything has a beautifully animated cartoony feel to it. Rayman himself bobs up and down, perfectly at home in his surreal 2D world.

Okay, we've established that it's pretty, but how does it play? Well, it's a straight-forward 2D gem collecting platformer, in particularly nice surroundings. Apparently Mr Dark has stolen the protoons, and it is up to our limbless friend Rayman to save the day. Not really the most innovative story, but it suffices for the purpose at hand, which is of course to drive Rayman through more than 60 levels of butterflies, street worker toons, bad guys and little blue gems. The problem here is... well, that's ALL you do. Whilst there are more than 60 levels, a lot of them look virtually identical, to the point that we suspect they actually are. The action is slower than your average platformer, which also hurts Rayman. Without the speed of upcoming games such as Klonoa and Sonic, Rayman becomes little more than a scenic tour, never really building up to that adrenaline rush we all know and expect by now.
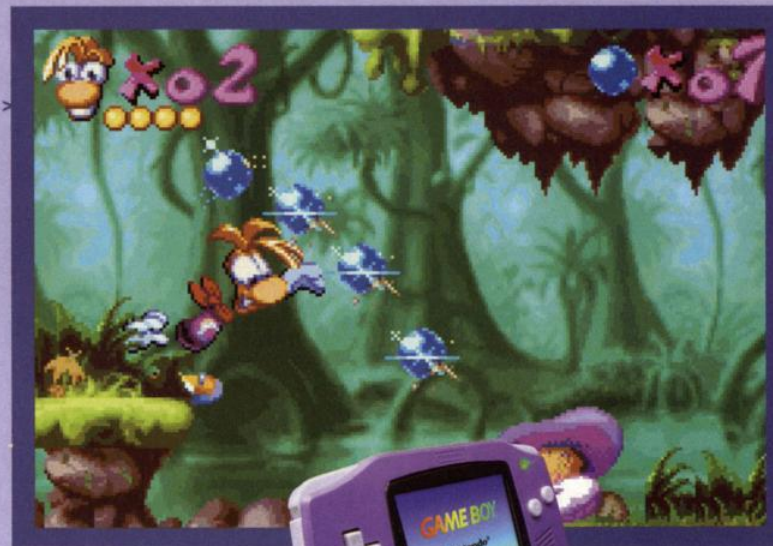
Rayman is definitely not everyone's cup of tea. The graphics are gorgeous, but the platforming is a tad predictable. For the die-hard Rayman fans only.

Bryce McDonough

The limb-less freak returns.

Whatever, dude.

That's some scary subliminal imagery.
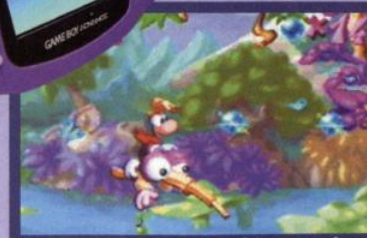
What's that between his... woah.

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY	OVERALL
86	82	75	79

Castlevania: Circle Of The Moon

» GBA **CATEGORY:** Platformer >> **PLAYERS:** 1 >> **PUBLISHER:** Konami >>
PRICE: $69.95 >> **RATING:** G >> **AVAILABLE:** Now >>

Castlevania: Symphony Of The Night (SOTN) was one of the great games on PlayStation. In the age of 3D, this 2D gem was a fine marriage of the old and the new. And so it is again. Circle Of The Moon is an all new Castlevania game, but plays very much in the same mould as SOTN... which is definitely a good thing.

As Nathan Graves, you once again find yourself going in stake first in a quest to defeat a freshly resurrected Count Dracula. The gameplay is expertly crafted, with a great ability curve. Starting out with just a whip and very basic moves, Nathan learns valuable skills and attacks throughout the game that are necessary to progress. It's not long before he can double jump, dash attack, breathe underwater, use secondary weapons (axe, holy water, dagger and clock), and master the DSS magic system. DSS stands for Dual Setup System and it really expands the scope of your abilities. It's based around combining two different sets of cards — action cards and attribute cards, and leads to about 80 unique spells. With a few cards and some experimentation, you'll be able to create some devastating new attacks. Along with all these new techniques, you're also trying to gain experience points and increase your various stats. Konami have hit a nice balance with this game - there are just enough RPG elements to make it compelling, but not so many that it gets confusing.

Unfortunately, the graphics aren't quite up to the same standard. Character animation for one, is really lacking. The big problem, however, is how dark the damn thing is. Konami shouldn't forsake playability for aesthetics. If it was easier to see, this would be a big rubber stamper. It's still a must-have game, just don't expect to be dusting vampires on the bus.
Cam Shea

Can someone turn up the lights?

Um... what the hell is going on?

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY	OVERALL
76	79	90	89

The Legend Of Zelda:
Oracle of Ages / Oracle of Seasons

» GBC **CATEGORY:** Action/RPG >> **PLAYERS:** 1 >> **PUBLISHER:** Nintendo
PRICE: $59.95 >> **RATING:** G >> **AVAILABLE:** Now >>

Playable on both the GBC and the GBA, the dual release of Oracle of Ages and Oracle of Seasons is a dream come true for fans of the Zelda series who have been hankering for the return of Link and the magical puzzles that inevitably he gets caught up in. Although the development of both these titles has been handled by Capcom, they still have that Zelda quality that we've come to expect.

For starters, it goes without saying that if you intend to buy either of these games, you should buy them both. Unlike the Pokémon versions of Red and Blue, Ages and Seasons have very different quests, different characters, bosses, items and more... but best of all, they link together to provide you with even more. When finishing one game first and using the password you are rewarded with, you can unlock new characters and quests in the other game. Finish that and you can then return to the first game you played with a new password to unlock more goodies! Eventually, you'll even face off against Ganon himself.

In Ages, the main item is a magical harp that can warp you through time. You can use this to change the map and open up new areas or solve puzzles. In Seasons, your item is a wand of seasons that alters the weather on the map, to again change your surroundings to solve puzzles or open up new areas. Both of these add to the gameplay substantially, as much experimentation is needed to uncover some of the secrets.

Whilst there are plenty of traditional Zelda-style puzzles here that we've solved before in other Zelda games, the new items like the magical Rings that you have to collect, help to transform these games into something new and addictive all over again. There is simply no hesitation in recommending both these games to any gamer, young or old. Just remember that playing on the GBA will give you access to some cool hidden bonuses.
Frank Dry

Link is the coolest bunch of pixels ever

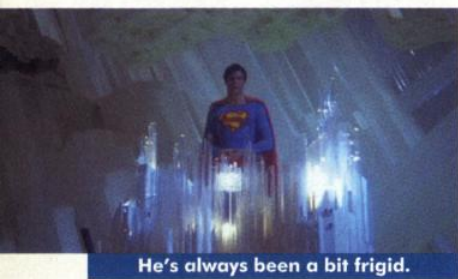| VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY	OVERALL
83	85	94	94

» KEVIN CHEUNG

DVD

DVD is the format of choice for anyone who's serious about their home cinema experience. Every issue we review the latest movies as well as the latest in anime. Kick back and let Hyper help you decide what you should watch!

Superman: The Movie
VILLAGE ROADSHOW, RATED G8+

He's always been a bit frigid.


"Wow, tricky disguise there Supes."

Now that's fresh breath.

Before *X-Men*, before *Batman*, the definitive film about a comic book superhero was Big Blue himself, *Superman*. Filmed concurrently with its sequel, *Superman: The Movie* chronicles the life of our hero from his days as a wee lad on planet Krypton to his high school years in Smallville, and then finally Metropolis, where he writes newspapers under the guise of squeaky-clean nancy-boy, Clark Kent.

The *Superman* DVD is a true collector's item, including all the clips from the extended edition, sound that's been remastered into Dolby Digital 5.1 surround, and a fascinating collection of screen tests where different actors and actresses try out for the main roles. They even interviewed poor Christopher Reeve from his wheelchair.

By today's standards, the story is just a few shades shy of being ridiculous; and although everyone should know the *Superman* theme off by heart, the rest of the musical score is just a tad dated. But we still love our Superman, as will all of his fans.

MOVIE: 7.5/10   **EXTRAS: 9/10**
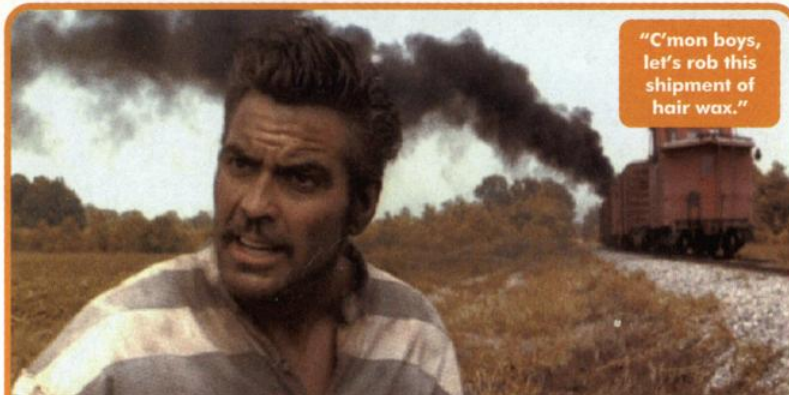
"C'mon boys, let's rob this shipment of hair wax."

O Brother, Where Art Thou?
UNIVERSAL, RATED M

George Clooney, John Tuturro and Tim Nelson are a trio of chain gang escapees hot-footing it through the American countryside. With the ultimate goal of reaching home to find untold treasures, the three encounter all sorts of crazy people, ranging from blind radio DJs and sexy sirens to a one-eyed Bible salesman. Little of these bizarre happenings make sense, unless you pick up on the opening credit that says the movie is based on Homer's 'The Odyssey'. That said, there's little reason for Clooney to take his role seriously. And he doesn't.

The film was also digitally altered to appear like an old-style movie, the ones that are somewhat faded or lacking in colour from chemical treatment. Oddly enough, the featurette about this process, amongst other special features that were in the Region 1 version, are not in the local Australian disc.

MOVIE: 7.5/10   **EXTRAS: 3/10**
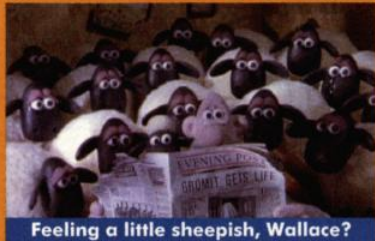
Wallace & Gromit

20TH CENTURY FOX, RATED G

Chicken Run was the pinnacle of Aardman's brilliant work in the field of claymation, and now fans can enjoy their earlier work with Wallace & Gromit on one convenient DVD. A Grand Day Out sees our two protagonists flying to the moon in search of a new flavour of cheese. The Wrong Trousers, Aardman's second work, is the one that attracted huge crowds with the criminal penguin that convinced everyone it was a chicken. A Close Shave, the last major animation before Chicken Run, sees Wallace create a Knit-O-Matic machine, only to have it used in a criminal conspiracy.

Without even considering the amazing special effects that have been accomplished with mere clay, Wallace & Gromit is filled with creativity and wry British humour. Its supporting characters are memorable for all their quirks and idiosyncrasies; as is Gromit whose role as Wallace's ever-faithful intelligent dog make him a most unlikely hero.

Feeling a little sheepish, Wallace?

MOVIE: 9/10   EXTRAS: 7/10

Gromit finally gets sick of all the cheese.

"Ahh! I bit my tongue again!"

Shadow of the Vampire

AV CHANNEL, RATED MA15+

Shadow of the Vampire brings together two of Hollywood's greatest actors, John Malkovich and Willem Dafoe, who play director F. W. Murnau and Max Shreck in a 'making of' film about Nosferatu, the first great vampire film. Shreck is portrayed as a mysterious method actor who lives by the persona of his vampire character. He'll appear in full makeup, and only at night. Suspicions are raised, though, when Murnau's crewmembers begin disappearing.

The film is part documentary, part satire, and part fiction. There are

"Sure you don't want my nail clippers?"

loads of in-jokes from the film industry, and it provides a fascinating insight into the golden days of film production. Dafoe's spellbinding performance, however, is what really makes the film work. His creepy appearance is the splitting image of the original Nosferatu. And Malkovich? Well, we've all seen him go nuts before. He does it just as well here. Extras includes interviews with the cast and crew, including producer (of all people) Nicholas Cage.

"Really, you should get some sun."

MOVIE: 7/10   EXTRAS: 6/10

The Emperor's New Groove

DISNEY, RATED G

The last time Disney made a film that was actually funny was Aladdin, but only because it had Robin Williams at the helm. The Emperor's New Groove, however, features a whole cast of funny people. There's David Spade, his Just Shoot Me co-star Wendy Malick, and Patrick Warburton from Seinfeld. Anchoring the cast are John Goodman and Eartha Kitt as the villain Yzma.

This film is a chalk-and-cheese match-up as local villager, Pacha, helps emperor-turned-llama, Kuzco, back to his castle. However, the two have unfinished business to settle along the way, specifically the construction of Kuzcotopia right on top of Pacha's house. Kuzco, in case you're wondering, is one of those rulers who's let power get to his head, and is spoilt out of his mind.

The hilarious exchanges between Pacha and Kuzco border on Bugs Bunny humour, with oh-so subtle CG effects that add sparkle to the polished animation. Tom Jones also puts in one of the best opening theme songs ever.

"Lay off the steroids, Frank."

MOVIE: 8/10   EXTRAS: 7/10
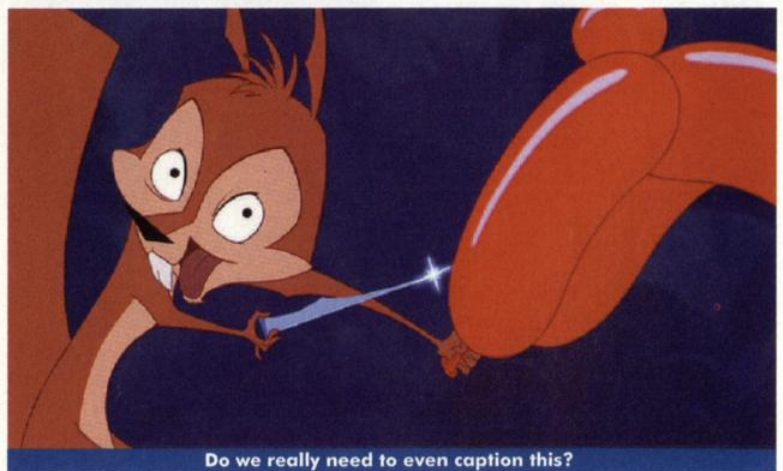
Do we really need to even caption this?

"And what is so funny about my platform shoes?"

Seven Samurai

TOHO, RATED M

A desperate farming village hires seven samurai to protect it from looters and raiders who steal their food and kidnap their wives and daughters. There is no reward for protecting this village, and it's in so remote an area that there's no chance of fame either. All they are promised is a few bowls of rice to feed themselves through the duration of the job.

"I'll be the tiger, you be the dragon."

Filmed in 1954, this Kurosawa classic weaves a triumphant tale of philosophy, human emotions, and the cost of waging a war — even one as small as this. The film is over three hours and twenty minutes long, but the time flies by in its own unique pace, thanks to Kurosawa's superlative direction that keeps the entire plotline story in check, and allows every character — not one or two grandstanding actors — to fully develop. Even if you prefer *The Magnificent Seven*, *Seven Samurai* is an enlightening film and an unforgettable cultural journey.

MOVIE: 10/10   **EXTRAS: 2**/10

The Magnificent Seven

20TH CENTURY FOX, RATED G8+

B ased on Akira Kurosawa's *Seven Samurai*, *The Magnificent Seven* is the movie that started the career of screen legends like Charles Bronson, Robert Vaughn and James Coburn. With Yul Brynner and Steve McQueen as the lead roles, this movie tells the tale of seven cowboys who are hired by desperate Mexican farmers to defend their embattled town. There's no huge reward or fame to be gained from the job — just satisfaction that good has been done.

Notwithstanding that the film was re-run to death on free-to-air TV during the Eighties, *The Magnificent*


"Whatever you do, don't... cowpoke."

Seven remains one of the best Westerns ever made. The picture quality has been restored to its original beauty, and sound remastered into Dolby Digital 5.1.

Commentary from still-living members of the cast sheds a great deal of light on the stars of yesteryear. Especially funny is the confirmation of in-fighting and scene-stealing between stars, such as Steve McQueen fanning himself with his hat behind Yul Brynner's back.

Look out, it's the *Three Amigos*.

MOVIE: 9/10   **EXTRAS: 7**/10
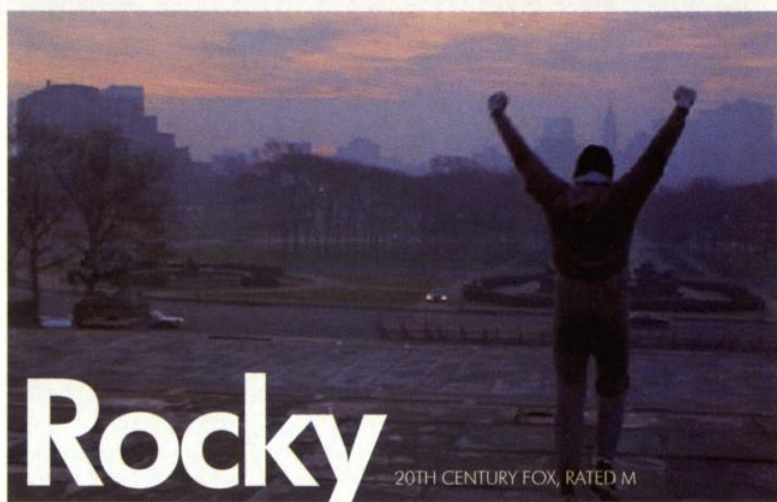
Rocky

20TH CENTURY FOX, RATED M

S et in Philadelphia, *Rocky* is a fairytale journey of a down-and-out pugilist who is given that one chance to challenge the world heavyweight boxing champion, and stand on top of the world. His struggle for recognition and acceptance typify what Americans have claimed as their own "American Dream", which is reached for a brief flash of a moment, when he actually floors the world champion.

If this dream went as originally scripted, *Rocky* would've disappeared into obscurity with Adrian, but instead he walked away with an Academy Award for Best Picture and spawned countless sequels for its star, Sylvester Stallone. Unlike the sequels, though, the original *Rocky* was not about glorifying violence in the ring. It's actually slower-paced and focuses a great deal on the development of the people around him.

This DVD has some great extra features, including audio commentary from the cast and crew, video commentary from Stallone, and featurettes on the making of the film.

MOVIE: 8/10   **EXTRAS: 7**/10

"You sure I look intimidating in this?"

Hey, it's just like Super Punch Out!

ANIME

Lupin III: Castle of Cagliostro

CATEGORY: ACTION, COMEDY, DRAMA • PRODUCTION COMPANY: TMS KYOKUICHI

Now that it's been locally released, self-respecting anime fans with DVD players have no excuse for not owning *Castle of Cagliostro*. Originally released in 1980, this film is an enduring example of the charm and wit of anime legend Hayao Miyazaki. It's one of his earlier works, and easily the best of the three *Lupin III* films that were based on the manga by Monkey Punch.

VAST TREASURES

To bring you up to speed, Lupin is a master thief with a heart of gold. He'll break into national casinos, archaeological digs, and heavily guarded bank vaults with the aid of his sidekick, Jigen. His adventures are made all the more amusing with regular appearances from supporting cast members like Fujiko, a beautiful spy-for-hire; Goemon, a stoic samurai warrior; and Zanigata, the captain of a band of keystone cops who's obsessed with catching Lupin.

In this film, a chance encounter with a runaway bride leads Lupin to the castle of Cagliostro, fabled to be the location of one of the world's most prolific production sites of counterfeit currency. Anyone who's attempted to break in has never returned. It's also the home of the local regent, who is about to be married to said runaway bride. With the lure of vast treasures, a mountain of counterfeit cash, and a helpless girl to rescue, Lupin takes it upon himself to break into the castle.

Even after over 20 years, *Castle of Cagliostro* is still delightful to watch. The film doesn't seem to have aged a bit. The animation and direction are simple and effective, with brilliantly placed humour throughout. *Castle of Cagliostro* deserves a place in every DVD collection.

Are we there yet? Are we there yet?

ANIMATION: 9/10 **PLOT: 8**/10 **JAPAN-NESS: Low** **OVERALL: 10**/10

Lost Universe

CATEGORY: ACTION, SCI-FI, COMEDY • PRODUCTION COMPANY: TV TOKYO/SOFTX

Lost Universe is *Slayers* in space. Well, not by name, but it might as well be - fans will spot the similarities right away. Millie Nocturne is a not-so well-endowed private eye with a superiority complex, doing it tough to prove to the universe that she's the best in the universe at everything. She is inadvertently teamed up with a half-witted Trouble Contractor (read mercenary) named Kain Blueriver, who solves problems with brute strength and spends a disturbing amount of time fawning over his cape. He's no buffoon when it comes to combat, though. Kain is a master of the Psi-Blade, a psychic lightsabre of sorts that demands superhuman concentration.

SPACE-RELATED

Kain has a sidekick, a cute and resourceful lass named Canal who turns out to be the holographic manifestation of their spaceship's central computer. She is obsessed with cleanliness, hates people running around inside her, and likes to mother poor Kain. She also happens to be voiced by Megumi Hayashibara, who also sings the opening and closing theme songs.

Apart from being in space, the other main difference from *Slayers* is the use of computer graphics to animate spaceships and space-related phenomena like warp speed, phase-shifting, and so on. It looks quite incredible, but at the same time it looks ultra-crisp, and doesn't blend very well with the rest of the animation.

Each episode is a self-contained adventure, so one's love for the series is bound to grow as long as one sticks with it for the long haul. With three egos clashing and constantly putting themselves in danger, *Lost Universe* should amount to a pretty entertaining series.

I thought when you said she had "crabs"...

ANIMATION: 7/10 **PLOT: 7**/10 **JAPAN-NESS: Low** **OVERALL: 7**/10

PlayStation®2

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FORUM

Q. MY MOST MEMORABLE GAMING MOMENT WAS…?

We all have a particular gaming moment from our past that we still cherish. Actually, we probably have multiple memories that remind us of why we fell in love with gaming. So naturally, we wanted to know yours…

– THE END –

CONGRATULATIONS!
YOU'VE FINISHED ANOTHER GREAT
GAME FROM BANDAI

HYPER FORUM

Everyone has a different opinion and the Hyper Forum is where you can get your thoughts out of your head and onto the page for all to see. Don't forget that we have a new topic every issue! The next topic of discussion…

? "I want to buy a Microsoft Xbox because…"

Responses will be printed in Hyper 97.

E-mail: FREAKSCENE@NEXT.COM.AU with Hyper Forum in the subject line, and the topic of discussion at the top of your response. Please note that very long contributions may be edited.

SOMETHING PONGS

My most memorable moment would have to be when I first achieved an org… Oh, you said 'gaming' moment. That's a little more sane a question, but just as stupid as 'What is your favourite 16 bit game?'

There are many memorable moments, for as many reasons. But I am trying to think along the difficult line of 'What really stands out?' The first thing that comes to mind is watching the Pandora spell for the first time in FFVII, or even the emotions felt when Aeris died. But, I can think of better than that. It might be when I performed my first ten-string combo (with Yoshimitsu) in Tekken 3, or when I blew up three people at once with a tank in MMV3 which won me the tournament, but I feel it is something other than a PlayStation moment (though the controller use in Metal Gear Solid's Psycho Mantis and torture scenes is worth reflecting upon).

Maybe it was on the N64 when I popped someone in the head with the Farsight in Perfect Dark, or when I accessed the exhilarating Birdman in the under-rated Pilotwings. No, still feeling nothing major. How about piecing together the final bits in Riven so that everything else made sense.

Close, but not quite. The Otherworldly Being invasion in Half-Life…

The list could go on and on (I seem to have done so already). The problem is that I am thinking too recent. What about the first time I pressed the Nuke button in Lemmings, or seeing the smoothness, speed and frame rate of Sonic chugging along on the Master System. The latter was impressive, but not outright memorable.

No, I am drawn to a time further back when I sat down in front of the family black and white, Atari in hand and played Pong for the first (of many) times. Even though it may not be the best game of all time (but it sure beats some of the tripe that is coming out nowadays), it would have to be my most memorable gaming moment of all time.

Adam
Urutsini@hotmail.com

CHEESY MEMORIES

My greatest gaming memory….

Put simply, attaining and subsequently flying the Cheese in Mercenary. Nothing can be said to describe the feeling to those who have never experienced the joys of a wireframe environment on the C64/A500, total freedom, and FEELING

THE CHEESE!

Having worked tirelessly to get it (in a time where saves were time consuming, but crashes rare), I must say that nothing has ever compared to hopping into a piece of cheese and destroying the landscape at tremendous speeds.

[miscreant]
risden@pimplike.com

NIGHT OF THE LIVING DEAD

My Most Memorable Gaming Moment Was…? Very easy. I was about 8 and I was playing Alone In The Dark. It was only a demo, so all I could do was go around the attic at the start. Then, all of a sudden, the music changed and a monster jumped in the window! After fending off the monster with my trusty karate, a zombie came out of

AHHHHHHHH!!!!

Lara and her "boxy butt".

Battletoads. Well, at least someone played it.

the trap door and slaughtered me. I was so frightened with this that I just about had a heart attack. Then I had to have my parents board up my window just so I would sleep in my room at night. It was the only time a game ever gave me pure fright.
Jaxson Bateman
Jaxson_bateman@hotmail.com

INTENSELY FUN
Hyper dudes,
It would have to be in Zelda: Ocarina Of Time, when you fight Gannondorf, then Ganon. The bit where the castle has collapsed, and Princess Zelda is talking, (then Navi butts in and says, "He wont hold me back this time" but still doesn't help you at all) then you hear this hollow boom. Link goes to investigate, then the mongrel bitch Ganon bursts out lookin' like he's just watched Pokémon. Then he goes psycho and transforms into Ganon. At this point me and my friend are gaping, then he says to me, "How the f*ck are we gonna beat that?!" That cutscene and the subsequent battle is the most

intensely fun sh*t ever!
Shae Palandri
Calypso4@iinet.net.au

BUTT CAM
Dear Hyper,
I couldn't restrain myself from bursting out laughing when I read what this month's topic was. As soon as I read the topic, "My most memorable gaming moment was...?", a picture flashed through my head as I remembered what it was.
I was sitting at home with nothing to do, so I decided to play my Sony PlayStation. Flipping through my large collection of games, I came across a game that I'd hardly ever played. It was the first Tomb Raider! I had played the second and third games before and found them nearly impossible! So I thought at least this game will get the time rolling by. After the game loaded I began to play. All was fine until those stupid bats attacked my head. After a while I got stuck in a corner, so I thought that maybe Lara would shoot the bats if she was looking right at them. So I looked around and vooom! I was

staring at her boxy butt!
I suppose she couldn't really shoot at her own head now can she.
Thanks Hyper,
adleebra@mbox.com.au

BLESS THE NES
The second I read the discussion topic my (gaming) life flashed before my eyes. I saw the Atari, Commodore-64, Master System, NES, MegaDrive, SNES, PlayStation, N64, PlayStation2.
Where did my most memorable gaming moments come from? The NES. The one game that I will compare all others to for the rest of my life is... BATTLETOADS! The game had everything.
The graphics were amazing compared to other NES titles and I think they still look good toady (sic). The controls were responsive the action was fast paced and no level was quite like the previous. Whenever you advanced to the next stage you where in for a whole new experience. The game style varied from Beat Em Up to Racing to Platformer. All mixed together in a perfect blend. The lastability was amazing. This is the

longest game I ever completed. It took me two years.
Why? Because it was HARD! I have never played a game that had this games difficulty and not got bored with it. The game had twelve levels. The next one was always more exciting then the pervious. When I finally reached the last level I was blown away! It was semi-3D! (You had to climb a huge tower that you could run all the way around.) The sound and music I still adore, especially the pause music.
Multiplayer? YES! Although almost impossible to complete (me and my friend played it for five hours with a game genie) it was so much fun you just did not care.
If you guys at hyper never experienced this game, you never really experienced gaming. Don't think I'm talking about the SNES version because it was a big disappointment (I finished it in 5 hours). The NES version IS the BEST GAME EVER. It is my MOST MEMORABLE gaming moment.
TOMCAT
Thomasuwoo@yahoo.com

MAIL

MYTH OF EPIC SIZE

Hey all at Hyper,

I'm gonna skip all that "you've got such a cool magazine" crap (although it is a cool magazine), and ask u some questions.

I was wondering if there were any follow-ups in the making for the Age Of Empires series, as well as the Settlers series. I just bought Settlers 4 — you guys really underestimated it. I think it's a cool game. Anyhow, are there any follow-ups to these big games?

Ben, super genius to be
Blizzard_ben@hotmail.com

Dear Ben,
In our E3 feature last issue you may have noticed a title called Age Of Mythology for the PC. This is Ensemble Studios' next game, combining the game structure of AOEII with a new 3D engine. Expect it next year, possibly after their Star Wars RTS, Star Wars: Galactic Battlegrounds, which uses the AOEII engine.

CAPTION THIS!

PART 20 WINNER

ZEO (toulinet@trust-me.com) is our winning reader caption this month. It seems many of you were a bit stumped by this one.

"Call the search off... we've found the big banana!"

QUESTION TIME

Dear Hyper,

I just have some questions I would like to ask you.
1. When will Half-Life: Blue shift be out in Australia?
2. Do you know what Half-Life 2 is about?
3. When will the GameCube be out, and how much will it cost?
4. Will the GameCube be able to play audio CDs?
5. Does the Xbox use mini discs?
6. Do you think PlayStation 2 is dodgy?
7. Will the Game Boy Advance have the same graphics as a PlayStation, or does it just have 16 bit graphics?
8. Did you review Half-Life: Opposing Force? If so, what did it score?
9. Will Perfect Dark 2 be on N64 or GameCube?

Thanks, love the new look! Bye!
Snoogadie
Address withheld.

THE MUSIC MAN

Hello Hyper,

I'm a 21 year-old who plays games on the side, but my main focus is writing electronic music on my PC. I was wondering if you guys could please do an article on the techniques employed for creating game sound, e.g. are there people employed specifically to write the in-game music? How are the sound effects created - sample CDs or synth tweaks? (I swear I've heard a few shared samples from different games). Are there game companies where budding electronic musicians such as myself can send demos to for possible employment? It's an area rarely covered in your interviews with game developers.

Also, a couple of questions if you will:
1. Is it illegal for me to sample sound from games that I have purchased?
2. Who writes the tracks that you hear on the demo CD?

Thanks for your time,
Tim
tlarner@hotmail.com

Dear Tim,
Game music is often integral to the enjoyment of a game yet so often overlooked. We may have to investigate it for you in the future. Usually, a composer is employed to write music specifically for a game, and there is sometimes a sound designer for the sound effects. There are also sound libraries that developers would go to for some effects which would explain why you've heard similar sounds in some games.
1. Yep, it's illegal. You didn't create it, so it's not your property. It's probably

Dear Snoogadie,
1. Now. Review on page 53.
2. Valve have been incredibly secretive about it. We don't know much yet.
3. Probably around March 2002, possibly around $499. But we're totally guessing at this stage.
4. No, they wouldn't fit in the GameCube's custom size DVD tray.
5. No, it uses standard DVDs.
6. Nope, we've had great fun with ours!
7. It has SNES-like graphical capabilities.
8. Yep, we reviewed it in Hyper #76. It scored 88%.
9. GameCube without a doubt.

only an issue if you use it in something for commercial use though.
2. Sometimes we use MP3s from the demos on the disc, although recently a gentleman by the name Andrew Maher provided the song snippets you may be referring to. Andrew just recently signed a record deal, so look out!

HELLO FROM JAPAN

Please create a section in your magazine entitled "most stupid game title". Here's one:

"SENGOKU TURB Fanfan I Love Me Dunce Doubblentendre"

I'M NOT KIDDING! I bought it immediately just because of the name. Something this strange must be good!

Actually the DC games here are all heavily discounted, most under half price. The console is $120! I'm REALLY happy that I paid over $300 in Australia.

On another topic, I have changed my mind about what Australia doesn't get in the way of games. What we don't get, we are lucky not to receive. LET ME COME HOME! This place is a little too weird for me.

Samuel Mason
mason8nosam@hotmail.com

Dear Samuel,
While you're there, can you grab me a copy of "Major Wave 1500 Series Burger Burger 2" for PlayStation? Cheers.
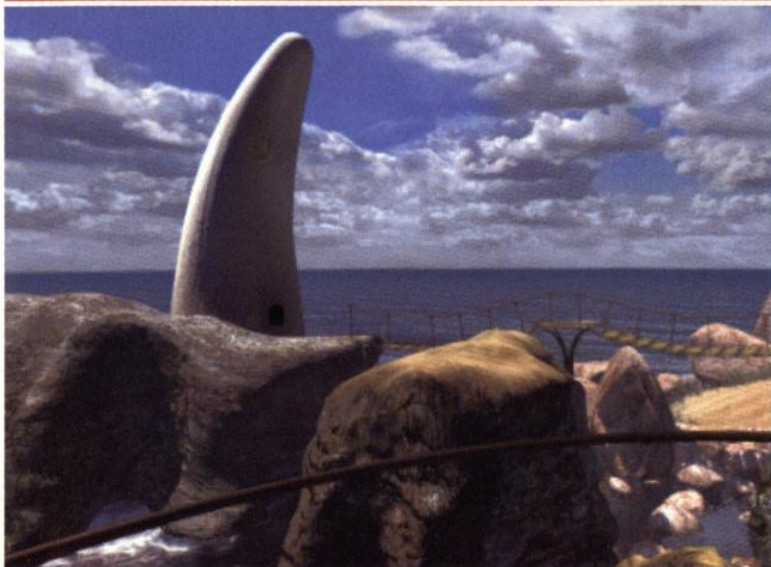
MATRIX MADNESS

Dear Hyper Crew,

What's the deal with the Matrix Game!? Argh! I don't want to buy an Xbox (being the Nintendo loyalist that I am), so I'm being penalised for it. This is a very sneaky and cruel move from Microsoft. Not only do they have a six month exclusivity to the game, but other versions are going to be inferior! And, also, the Xbox title will be the only net-active title. This is discrimination against those who feel that they want to buy another console. What on earth made Shiny decide to go into a deal like this? The only one who profits is Microsoft. Not only do they (Microsoft) get royalties from the game, but Shiny has to produce not one, but three different variations on the same game! Argh! This means that all three games will be inferior, as Shiny has to create
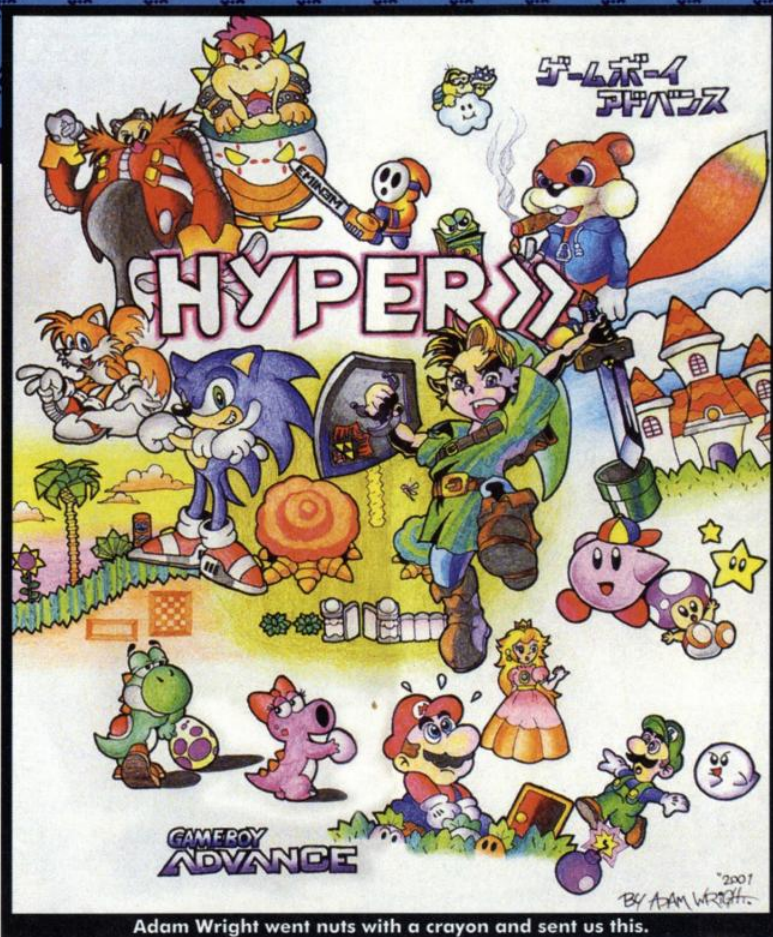
Adam Wright went nuts with a crayon and sent us this.

THE CAPCOM CALAMITY

Dear Eliot and the Hyper gang,

I need your help. I need to find out, and I hope you'll pardon my French, what the f**k is going on with Onimusha and Devil May Cry? As far as I know, Ozisoft used to distribute Capcom games, but after much asking around, it turns out they don't do it anymore, and there's actually NO-ONE that distributes Capcom games. Not EA, not Sony, not anyone.

I've heard various explanations from "the license costing too much" to "just wait and see", but now that it's been 3 months, and our European brothers will apparently get Onimusha at the end of June, I'm beginning to wonder whether anything's going to happen at all.

How can Aussie companies just sit on their hands like this? It's utterly disgraceful! Exactly the same goddamned thing happened to Parasite Eve, Einhander and Brave Fencer Musashi when Squaresoft did a little license-switching. But for me - the company that provided me with Street Fighter and Resident Evil, the company that's going to resurrect the legendary Ghost n' Goblins with Maximo - Capcom is ABSOLUTELY SACRED to the gaming creed.

I don't have a PlayStation 2, and I WAS planning on getting one just to play some Onimusha and the sweet, sweet looking Devil May Cry. Somebody PLEASE talk some sense into these idiot distributors.

And do you know what f**ks me off even more? It's this recent campaign to stamp out modchips, piracy and grey imports. I'm all for stamping out piracy, and I'm all for keeping my money on Australian soil, but for Australian companies to look the other way when it comes to one of the most important developers in the industry? They may as well start ringing the dinner bell for offshore online stores that have zero legal problems in selling me their wares.

Please help, Eliot. You're my only hope.
Photon Earth
Papacharinonanadan@hotmail.com

Dear Mr. Earth,
We made a few calls and found out that UbiSoft will distribute Capcom's Game Boy Advance titles here, whilst the PS2 games (Onimusha, Devil May Cry etc.) will be distributed by Sony. There will probably be no more Dreamcast or N64 Capcom games, so forget about those. As for Gamecube and Xbox... well, we'll know next year sometime.

Gamester PS2
Dual Force 2 Wheel.
Don't forget to include your contact details in your letter.
You've won a Gamester Steering Wheel!

---

all three almost separately. Does this spell doom and gloom for the rest of us gamers, with DOA3 also exclusive to Xbox, I ask, "What's Next?"

(Off-screen) "Now doesn't that feel better? Just let the anger flow..."
Chris Thorpe
thorpeworld@smartchat.net.au

Dear Chris,
Is it really so shocking? I'm sure the differences won't be horrendously huge. Every system has exclusive games, and obviously Microsoft got in first and offered to make it worthwhile for Shiny to do it this way. Sony, Sega and Nintendo have all done similar things in the past.

SPOOKED GAMER

Dear Hyper,

Here is my case. A couple of weeks ago I came into the possession of Black & White. It's awesome and hence is my new religion. However I noticed something strange. That is, once I got to about the 3rd land in the game it started to whisper my name! Weirdly, my name is not the username for the game. Weirder still it would only do this after midnight. What I'm talking about is a voice, similar to the female voice that whispers "DEATH" in the game, saying "SIMON", except it is a male voice. Obviously when it first started to happen it was freaking the

hell out of me. And no one believed me. However a few people stayed up with me and can concur that it's happening. It's nuts!

I have 2 questions:
A. Have you guys had any similar experiences while playing it?
B. Is it possible for the game to find the name of the owner of the computer and then turn that into an audio output? What's going on? My only other theory is that my computer is possessed!
OURPAIN
Ourpain@yahoo.com

Dear Ourpain,
Holy shit! Call an exorcist! Ahem... you're not hearing things. Apparently, the secret is that Lionhead programmed in hundreds of common names and if the game detects that you have one of those names typed into the game (I believe it can also detect your computer name like you suggest), it will do exactly what you have just described. Clever, eh?

OBTUSE AND INEFFECTIVE

Greetings and salutations,

First and foremost, to ramble is to put forward your opinion in the most obtuse, ineffective, easily ignored and insane way. With that in mind, do you know what my *mother* did? She took all of my computer game boxes and threw them in the bin! I was most understandably

distraught and inconsolable for days. Baldur's Gate, Half-Life, StarCraft (for which I specifically asked for the Protoss box for a Christmas, oh sweet Capitalist Christmas), Abe's Exoddus to name but a few of the beautiful cardboard WORKS OF ART. Not to mention the pungent 'new' smell that reminds me of what it is to legitimately OWN a game.

Still with the original statement in mind, what the flying-jackhammers Batman is Jack of All Games (I think?) thinking by not giving us a nice box and all the paraphenalia associated with such a delicious item? Putting it in a gay looking *compact* PlayStation/(insert other console here) style case! It is unthinkable! Where do they hide the most revered manual?

And no, how am I supposed to refer to a PDF file mid-game? I'm sure it's all William Gates' fault. For that I will punch a geek. But so as not to mortally wound him. Only teach him not to stand in the way of a fist. What? Who are you? I'm leaving now. What part of the word 'know' don't you understand?
My name is Greg.
Address withheld

Dear Greg,
I love the fact that once you have a hefty collection of old style game boxes, you can build a little castle out of them in the backyard and sleep in it – like a tent! Or maybe that's just me. Oh well, at least these new cases take up way less space.

SIZE MATTERS NOT

Dear Hyper,

I enjoyed reading your Game Boy Advance feature in the July issue; it looks like Nintendo's latest hand-held has got a lot of potential. One thing that really hit me though was how bloody small the thing is! The photos of you big blokes hunched over these tiny little screens made me wonder what kind of market the big N had in mind when they were designing it. As Cam said in the piece, it's "very much made for Japanese hands", and I wonder how the Aussie gamer, who's grown up on a diet of steroid rich beef and poultry products, is going to cope. And the matchbox size game carts? I would have added a bit more plastic around them just so they don't get lost. Undoubtedly though, they're going to sell a shit load of the things (and rightly so).

I think it's important though for Nintendo not to put too much emphasis on doing old SNES ports. The proliferation of (illegal) ROMS and emulators on the net means that if people want a bit of nostalgia, they will probably just illegally download and play these titles for free (did I mention that this is against the law...). Lots of original titles would really make the GBA a must have item — I find it hard to get excited about tired old games like Super Mario Advance (which is essentially just Super Mario Bros 2). Anyway, here's hoping Nintendo deliver the goods.

All the best,
Giuseppe Marino
Gmarino@tpg.com.au

Dear Giuseppe,
The size of the original Game Boy certainly didn't hinder its acceptance in the Western world. After spending all week playing Tony Hawk 2 on the GBA when we should have been working, I can safely say that you shouldn't worry about the size – more than anything it's actually just a little too dark with some games. Overall, we think it's something you'll just have to have... there are going to be plenty of amazingly cool new games (like Tony Hawk 2!) – not just old SNES ports. GBA rules.

RUROUNI KENSHIN

Dear Hyper,

I was just reading issue 93, happily scanning pages after pages of news and reviews when suddenly my eyes were fixed on the anime review page. You guys rate Rurouni Kenshin 5 out of 10!!! At first I didn't believe it, but after blinking my eyes a thousand times and pinching myself trying to get back to reality, I still can't believe it!! In my opinion, it's a great anime. I know that the animation is average, and you guys had just watched the OVA, but it can't be that bad. The animation in the episode where Kenshin (that reverts back to Hitokiri Battousai) and Saitou Hajime fights, is particularly impressive, almost on par with the OVA. This makes me wonder whether you have watched the whole series (95 episodes), because the animation becomes better and better.

You wrote also that Kenshin is trying very hard to be funny, as if he has a multiple personality disorder. Well for your information, the series is very faithful to the manga up to the end of Kyoto Arc (Shisio Makoto story). The manga itelf has already achieved legendary status, and it's a good thing the anime follows the manga so faithfully.

Kenshin's what-you-called multiple personality and the plot are what makes the manga great, and the anime, too. Personally, I really like the anime. It's funny, the music in the series is also good (the series has 10+ soundtrack CDs) and my overall feeling after watching the series is very satisfied. My suggestion for you guys at Hyper is to find the manga, read it, and you'll appreciate the anime more. Arigatou gozaimasu.

Rizky Chandra
D_golem@
yahoo.com

Dear Rizky,
In response to your letter, Kevin our anime reviewer says, "I've read the whole comic book series, and in my opinion, the TV series has always been arse. By virtue of the production standards inherent to television animations, it doesn't come anywhere close to the artistry, direction, or cinematography of the OAV. It loses a lot in the transition from manga to anime." Different strokes for different folks, Rizky.

BIG GAZZUNGAZZ

Dear Hyper dudes,

I recently saw the Tomb Raider movie and I must say: it's very close to CRAP! There were a lot of good effects... er, a kinda short story... another game-to-movie let down. As I watched Angelina Jolie in the role of Lara Croft... all I could think of is BOOBS... BOOBS and BOOBS. You have to admit, if you have seen it, that's really all you're thinking about all the time. Without Angelina Jolie in the movie with her tight costumes... the movie would be a total let down. Angelina Jolie is a great actress with big guzzungazz.

I sure hope that *Final Fantasy: The Spirits Within* isn't shit... since the Final Fantasy games are my favourite. Let's pray that it isn't shit. Well that's all the stuff I had to bitch about.

Cajun Joe
Cajunjoe1099@yahoo.com.au

Dear Mr. Joe,
The best bit was when Lara knocked that guy down with the back wheel of her bike. We cheered.

The Official Australian Games Chart

Compiled by Inform in association with AVSDA

TOP 10 PlayStation 2 Games Over $50
W/E 17 JUN 2001 RETAIL SALES

#		Title	Genre
1	✪	Rugby	Sports
2	◆	Crazy Taxi	Racing
3	▼	Formula 1 2001	Racing
4	▼	Extermination	Adventure
5	◆	SSX	Sports
6	▲	Tekken Tag Tournament	Action
7	▼	Heroes Of Might & Magic	RPG
8	▼	Star Wars Starfighter	Action
9	▼	Moto GP	Racing
10	▼	FIFA 2001	Sports

TOP 10 PlayStation Games Over $40
W/E 17 JUN 2001 RETAIL SALES

#		Title	Genre
1	◆	Time Crisis Project Titan	Action
2	◆	Mat Hoffman's Pro BMX	Sports
3	◆	Alone In The Dark 4	Adventure
4	▲	Final Fantasy IX	RPG
5	▼	The Emperor's New Groove	Adventure
6	◆	Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 2	Sports
7	✪	Formula 1 2001	Racing
8	▼	WWF Smackdown! 2	Sports
9	▼	Colin McRae Rally 2	Racing
10	▼	Driver 2	Racing

TOP 10 Game Boy Games Over $40
W/E 17 JUN 2001 RETAIL SALES

#		Title	Genre
1	▲	Zelda: Oracle Of Ages	RPG
2	▲	Zelda: Oracle Of Seasons	RPG
3	▼	Pokemon Gold	Game Boy
4	▼	Pokemon Silver	RPG
5	▲	Donkey Kong Country	Adventure
6	▲	Pokemon Yellow	RPG
7	▼	Super Mario Brothers Dlx	Action
8	◆	Pokemon Blue	RPG
9	◆	Pokemon Red	RPG
10	✪	Game Boy Gallery 4	Compilation

TOP 10 N64 Games Over $40
W/E 17 JUN 2001 RETAIL SALES

#		Title	Genre
1	◆	Conker's Bad Fur Day	Adventure
2	◆	Pokemon Stadium 2	Action
3	▲	Bond: TWINE	Action
4	▲	Donkey Kong 64	Adventure
5	▼	Banjo Tooie	Adventure
6	▲	Zelda: Majora's Mask	RPG
7	▼	Mario Tennis	Sports
8	▲	Mario Kart 64	Racing
9	✪	Star Wars Battle For Naboo	Action
10	▼	Goldeneye 007	Action

TOP 10 PC Games Over $30
W/E 17 JUN 2001 RETAIL SALES

#		Title	Genre
1	✪	Emperor Battle For Dune	Strategy
2	▼	The Sims	Strategy
3	▼	Myst III: Exile	PC/Mac
4	▼	The Sims Collectors Edition	Strategy
5	▼	The Sims House Party	Strategy
6	▲	The Sims Livin' Large	Strategy
7	▼	Sim City 3000 Unlimited	Strategy
8	▲	Sim Mania Pack	Strategy
9	▼	Diablo 2	RPG
10	▼	Black & White	Strategy

TOP 10 All Full Priced Console Games
W/E 17 JUN 2001 RETAIL SALES

#		Title	Platform
1	▲	Zelda: Oracle Of Ages	Game Boy
2	▲	Zelda: Oracle Of Seasons	Game Boy
3	✪	Rugby	PS2
4	◆	Conker's Bad Fur Day	N64
5	▲	Time Crisis Project Titan	PlayStation
6	▼	Pokemon Gold	Game Boy
7	▼	Pokemon Silver	Game Boy
8	✪	Crazy Taxi	PS2
9	✪	Mat Hoffman's Pro BMX	PlayStation
10	▼	Formula 1 2001	PS2

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4	✪	Emperor Battle For Dune	PC/Mac
5	▼	Conker's Bad Fur Day	N64
6	▼	The Sims	Strategy
7	▲	Time Crisis Project Titan	PlayStation
8	▼	Pokemon Gold	Game Boy
9	▼	Myst III: Exile	PC/Mac
10	▼	Pokemon Silver	Game Boy

MARKET WATCH All Games by Platform
MAY v APR 2001 RETAIL SALES

Platform	Share	Growth
Pc	40%	-22%
PS2	6.2%	-10%
N64	8.10%	-29%
G Boy	12.7%	-34%
PSX	31.6%	-19%

(chart axis: 0 5 10 15 20 25 30 35 40)
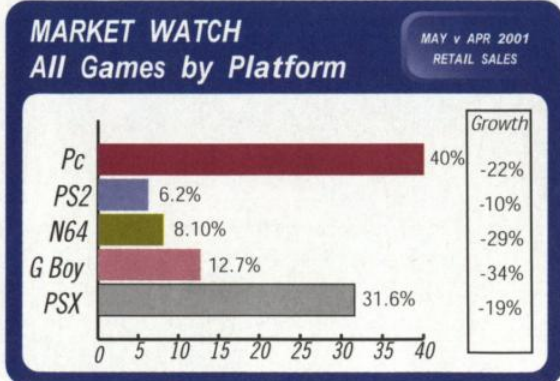
Legend:
- ✪ New Entry
- ◆ Non Mover
- ▲ Up from last week
- ▼ Down from last week

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