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HELLISHLY GOOD DEVIL MAY CRY 2 BIG PS2 REVIEW!

ISSUE 114
APRIL 2003

HYPER



next



BEACH BABES!

DOA: XTREME BEACH VOLLEYBALL
STRIP 'EM DOWN,
DRESS 'EM UP



SPACESHIPS!
FREELANCER
EXPLODES ON PC

NINJAS!
TENCHU 3 SNEAKS
ONTO PLAYSTATION 2

BIG GUNS!

UNREAL II: IS THE FIRST PERSON SHOOTER DEAD?

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YAGER
DEVELOPMENT

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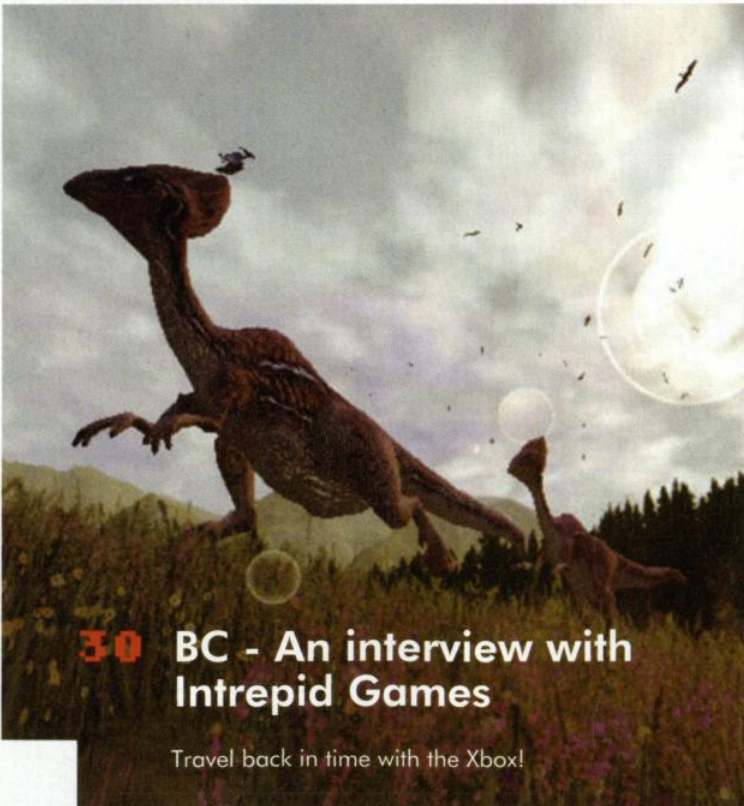
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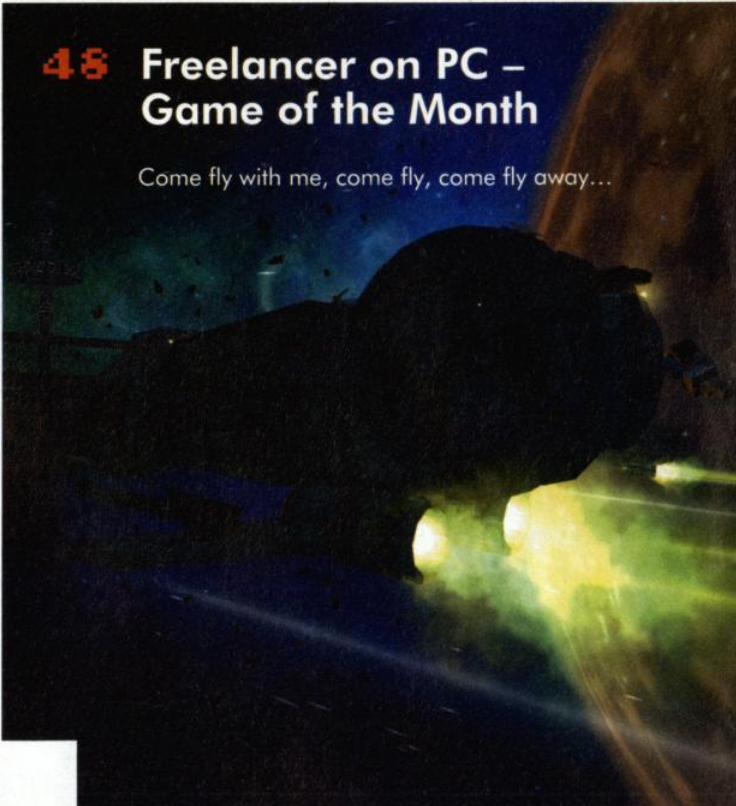
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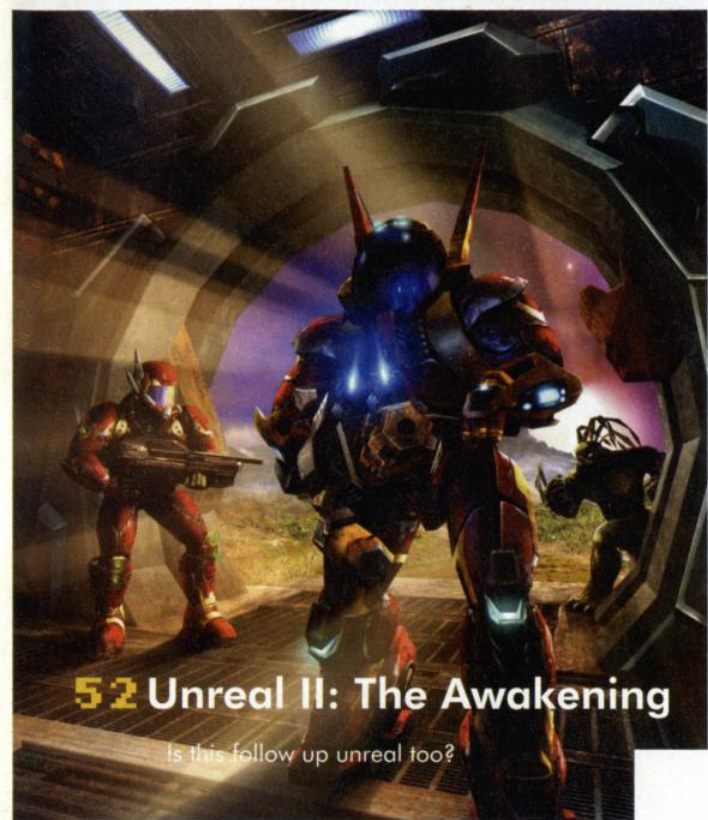
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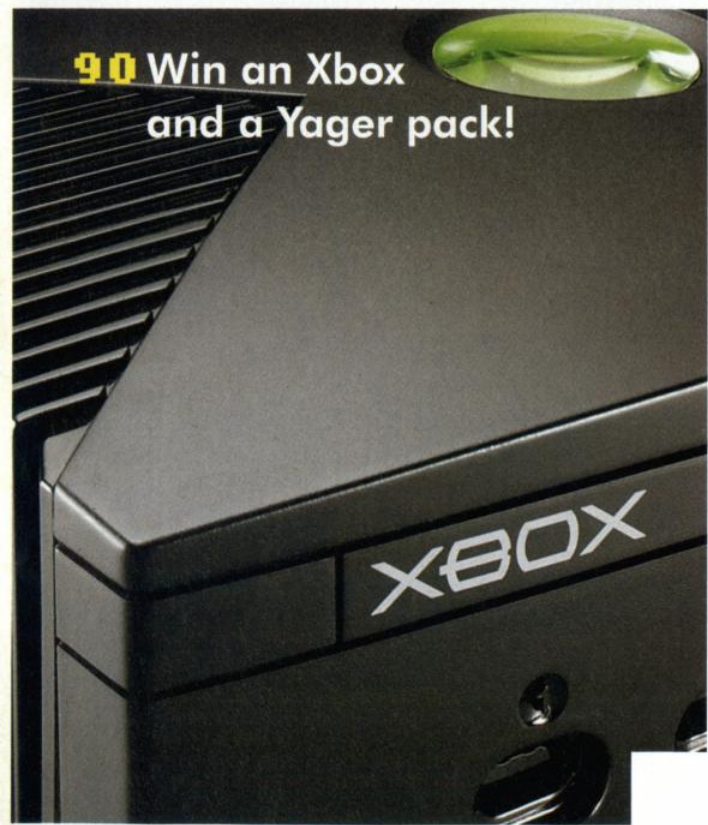
Come fly with me, come fly, come fly away...

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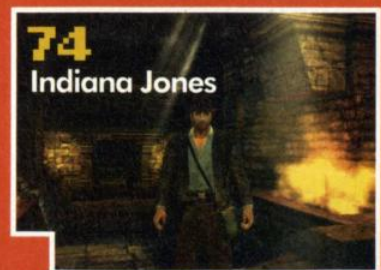
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HYPER»



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Hyper reader,
Duncan Legge's
fan art spectacular

EDITORIAL

>> Whilst mature gamers across Australia clamour for an R rating, just take a look at the highest scoring game this issue... Rayman 3: Hoodlum Havoc. A G8+ rated game if ever there was one, but of substantially greater gameplay value than most of the games this issue with the highest classification of MA15+. It's just a small point that proves that games don't have to rely on graphic violence and sex to be entertaining to gamers above the age of 18. Sure, it would be nice to have some games in the market place that do offer that kind of thing, but there's also the reasoning that "mature" titles tend to rely on their shock value in many cases and leave the gameplay for last. We shouldn't forget that it's what happens between the hands and the eyes in the end that matters, otherwise they wouldn't be games would they? If adult storylines and hot cutscenes are all you're after, go rent a DVD.

Ironically, those same mature gamers that are pushing for an R18+ rating are generally also the ones complaining about the loss of the golden days of early console gaming – the heady days of the Atari 2600 and other twitch arcade games and platformers; all G rated efforts at best.

Let's have an R18+ rating, because as adults we deserve the right to have access to that material if we want it, but let's not forget just how much fun and how much better some games are with the humble G slapped on the box. Or maybe we just need to remind the developers that.

Eliot Fish » Editor

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Meet the world's most notorious drivers on the streets of LA, Paris, and Tokyo.



Choose from the latest performance enhanced vehicles and compete to make a name for yourself.



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"(An) insane urban racing experience... it's ultra-illegal stuff that you've dreamed of doing." - PSM DECEMBER 2002



PlayStation 2



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NEWS

IN THE NEWS: Japanese gaming ■ Pokémon rebirth ■ FFX-2 controller ■ Pitfall Harry returns ■ Driver 3

PS2 for PEACE

»» A TV ad pleading for peace has recently been put to air by Sony's PlayStation division. The ad features a variety of PS2 game characters putting away their weapons and backing off from combat, and then the words "No War, please" fade onto the screen, followed by the PlayStation buttons complete with peace symbol.

EXCLUSIVE GIZMOS

JAPAN GETS ALL THE COOL STUFF

Isn't it always the way?

»» It seems that every second day we hear about some new gadget, gizmo or game that is about to launch in Japan that promises to seriously enhance the gaming scene. Either that or it's something kooky and different that might be a novelty but which looks like fun. Unfortunately, living in a PAL territory, and one that is significantly less important than Europe, niche gaming products fail to see the light of day here. We've heard recently that Steel Battalion will not be released in Australia, which gives us very little hope for the following cool releases...

DOGS AND ROBOTS

A Smart Media Adaptor is in development for the Game Boy Advance and Game Boy Advance SP,

by technology developer AM3. This will allow gamers in Japan to download data onto small Smart Media Cards for use on the GBA. This will include E-Books, small animated cartoons, and so on. Gamers will be able to insert their cards into machines at their local store to purchase and download the latest software, and then whack it straight into their GBAs. Company Hori have also announced that they will release a Soul Calibur II arcade stick for the GameCube. Just what the doctor ordered.

On the PlayStation front, Sony are releasing a voice-activated PS2 game called Deka Voice, in which you play as a detective with a pet German Shepherd. At various points in the game, an icon shows that voice commands are available, and

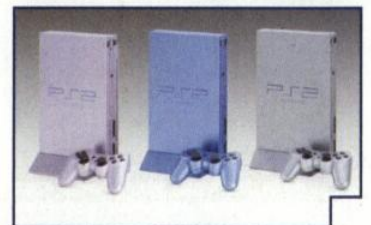


your timing will dictate how successfully things play out. Amazingly, if Japanese gamers have a Sony Aibo, it can be used with the game and will respond to commands as the German Shepherd!

Sony are also releasing three special PS2 colours in Japan - Silver, Sakura and Aqua. Nice!

As we reported a few issues ago, the Xbox will also be getting a voice-activated game, N.U.D.E, in which you teach a robot girl named P.A.S.S to behave like a human being. Whereas the Sony game will come with a USB mic, the Xbox game can be played with the Xbox Live headset voice communicator.

One of these days Australian gamers will be rewarded with something... one of these days.



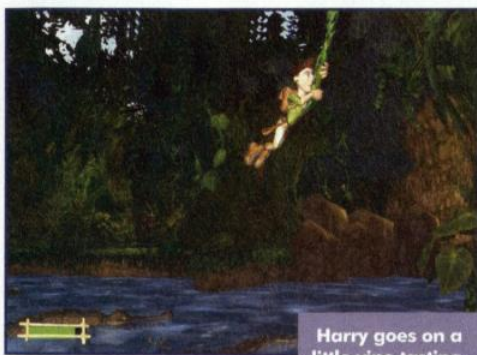
»» Sony are releasing a voice-activated PS2 game called Deka Voice, in which you play as a detective

SWINGING!

PITFALL HARRY RETURNS

Activision wring it for all its worth

»» If playing Pitfall and Pitfall II on the Activision Anthology wasn't quite enough for you, then you'll be pleased to know that another 3D Pitfall is on the way. Pitfall Harry (the game) is coming to all platforms, and will return the series to its croc hopping, swamp jumping, vine swinging roots as Harry competes against a fellow adventurer to hoard as much ancient treasure as he can get his hands on.



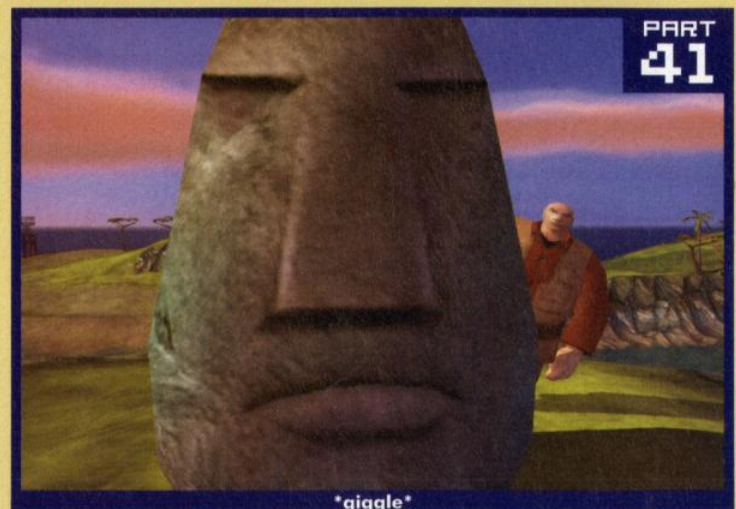
Harry goes on a little vine tasting, ho ho.

What we want to know is whether they will bring back Bruce Campbell

as the voice of Pitfall Harry (as featured in Pitfall 3D: Beyond the Jungle) even though this incarnation is more cartoony than the last.

CAPTION THIS!

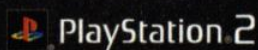
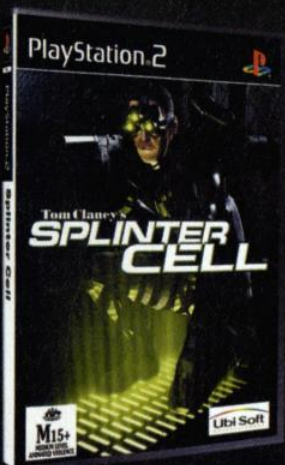
Hey there faithful readers - think you have the wit to make the Hyper team chuckle? Then think of your best caption for this screenshot and email it to Captionthis@next.com.au with Caption This Part 41 in the Subject line.



giggle

Coming Soon On PlayStation®2....

Tom Clancy's
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CELL™**



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Meet Sam Fisher at: www.splintercell.com

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GOD HELP US

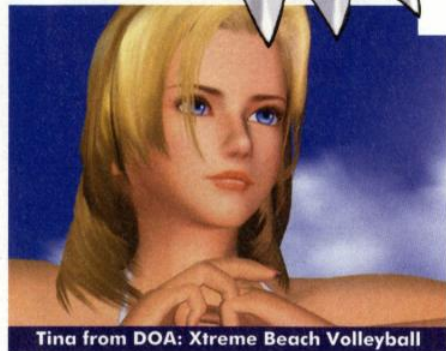
THEY'RE BAAACK!

Pokémon Pop Up Again

 Pokémon Ruby & Sapphire are due to hit the Game Boy Advance and GBASP on April 3rd (the same day as Metroid Prime hits GameCube in fact). Whilst the formula is essentially the same for this incarnation of Pokémon, Ruby & Sapphire will be the first Pokémon games to feature two-on-two battles thanks to the GBA Link cable. We imagine this will create even greater love for this continually charming series. With more Pokémon in the mix, combat becomes all that more tactical. Addictive as hell! It looks like we'll have to catch 'em all over again.



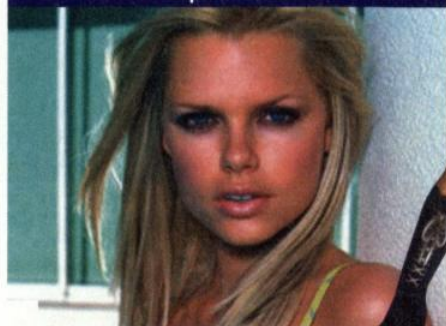
Malcolm, Eliot, Cam, Jackson and Frank



Tina from DOA: Xtreme Beach Volleyball

↑ SEPARATED AT BIRTH? ↓

Sophie Monk




BANG BANG

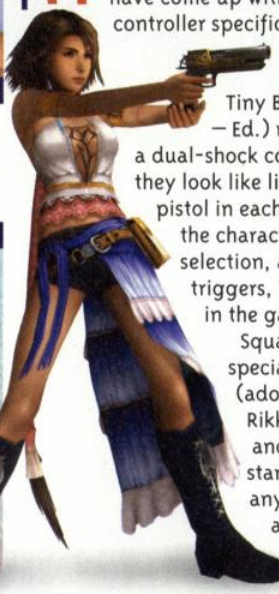
YUNA'S PACKING HEAT

FFX-2 Controller Madness!



 To help promote FFX-2 in Japan, Square have come up with a crazy idea for a controller specifically for use with the game. Modelled on Yuna's dual pistols, the Tiny Bee controller (Tiny Bee? — Ed.) mimics the functions of a dual-shock controller even though they look like light guns. You hold a pistol in each hand, and fully control the characters and menu selection, and when you fire the triggers, Yuna will fire her guns in the game.

Square are also selling special FFX-2 memory cards (adorned with pictures of Rikku, Yuna and Paine), and a funky FFX-2 PS2 stand. It is doubtful that any of this cool stuff will be available outside of Japan. Waaah!



OVERFLOW

Retro Studios have begun work on a sequel to Metroid Prime (or simply a continuation of the Metroid license on GameCube, if you will). Great news for GameCube owners! Expect to see a "Metroid Prime 2" sometime down the track. 2004, perhaps?

Word in the industry says that Electronic Arts are warming up their bank balance for a major spending spree. The question is "what are they buying?" It looks like some small developers and/or game publishers might be ripe for a buyout. And no, it's not Nintendo as some may have suggested...

A Norwegian MP, Trond Helleland, was busted in parliament playing a game of Metalion on his PDA. Cameras zoomed in on him whilst Parliament was in session discussing Norway's involvement in Afghanistan, embarrassing him on national television. Go Trond! What score did ya get?

The release of Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic has slipped. Initially due out this month, the game has fallen into a vague release date of Spring 2003 in the USA, meaning that we probably won't see it until sometime around late May or June.

The Matrix game has finally got a website. Go check out www.entertthematrixgame.com for details and some tasty screenshots. Everyone see that Superbowl trailer? Wow.

The Xbox and PS2 versions of the first person shooter, Ecks Vs. Sever, have been officially canned. We haven't even seen the movie yet! Ahh well, we can still play it on the Game Boy Advance...

Fans of the bald-headed guy will be chuffed to hear that IO Interactive have already begun development on Hitman 3. The game reportedly has a huge budget in the tens of millions.

The Academy of Interactive Arts & Sciences announced its pick of finalists for the 2003 Interactive Achievement Awards, with Metroid Prime on GameCube garnering a massive 10 nominations including Game of the Year! GTA: Vice City nabbed six nominations along with Battlefield: 1942.



Play where you want.

Finally, a cordless controller that gives you all the freedom you've been looking for, no strings attached. The new Logitech® Cordless Controller for PlayStation® is the only cordless controller officially licensed by Sony Computer Entertainment. Performing flawlessly from 6 metres away, it uses precise 2.4GHz RF technology to give you over 50 action-packed hours of gameplay. And with all the thrills of vibration feedback, the time has come to cut the cord.



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MAXIMO!

GHOSTS N' GOBLINS ONLINE

Crazy Japanese Idea No. MXXXVI

Capcom and Game Factory have announced the upcoming release of a cross platform MMORPG based on Ghosts n' Goblins, Makaimura Online (Ghosts n' Goblins Online). The game is slated for Spring 2004, and is being developed with the Terazona and Renderware 3D engine.

There will be 11 playable characters for gamers to choose from, and up to six job classes, including knight, archer, vampire, fighter, beastman and dragon-man! The game will debut on PC, with console versions following at a later date.

The chances of this coming to PAL territories may all just depend on how online gaming continues to grow in popularity. What we want to know is how many different types of boxer shorts they'll offer for players to wear under their armour!

WINNERS

Hyper 112

DRAGONBALL Z

David Hoyland, Port Kembla, NSW

LORD OF THE RINGS

Benita Green, Warwick, Qld
Ben Moore, Research, Vic
Krishna Satpati, Parramatta, NSW
Daniel Kuerschner, Whyalla Stuart, SA
Mitchell Killham, Leeton, NSW

NO ONE LIVES FOREVER 2

C. Gossan, Prospect, SA
Christopher Lin, Glen Waverley, Vic
Ben Wynn, Stockton, NSW
Aaron Nguyen, Mitcham, Vic
Adam James, Sefton Park, SA

FIRST LOOK!

DRIVER 3 FOR XBOX

INFOGRAMES



FIRST LOOK!

WORMS 3 FOR PC

ACTIVISION





Over 150 games With more being conceived every day

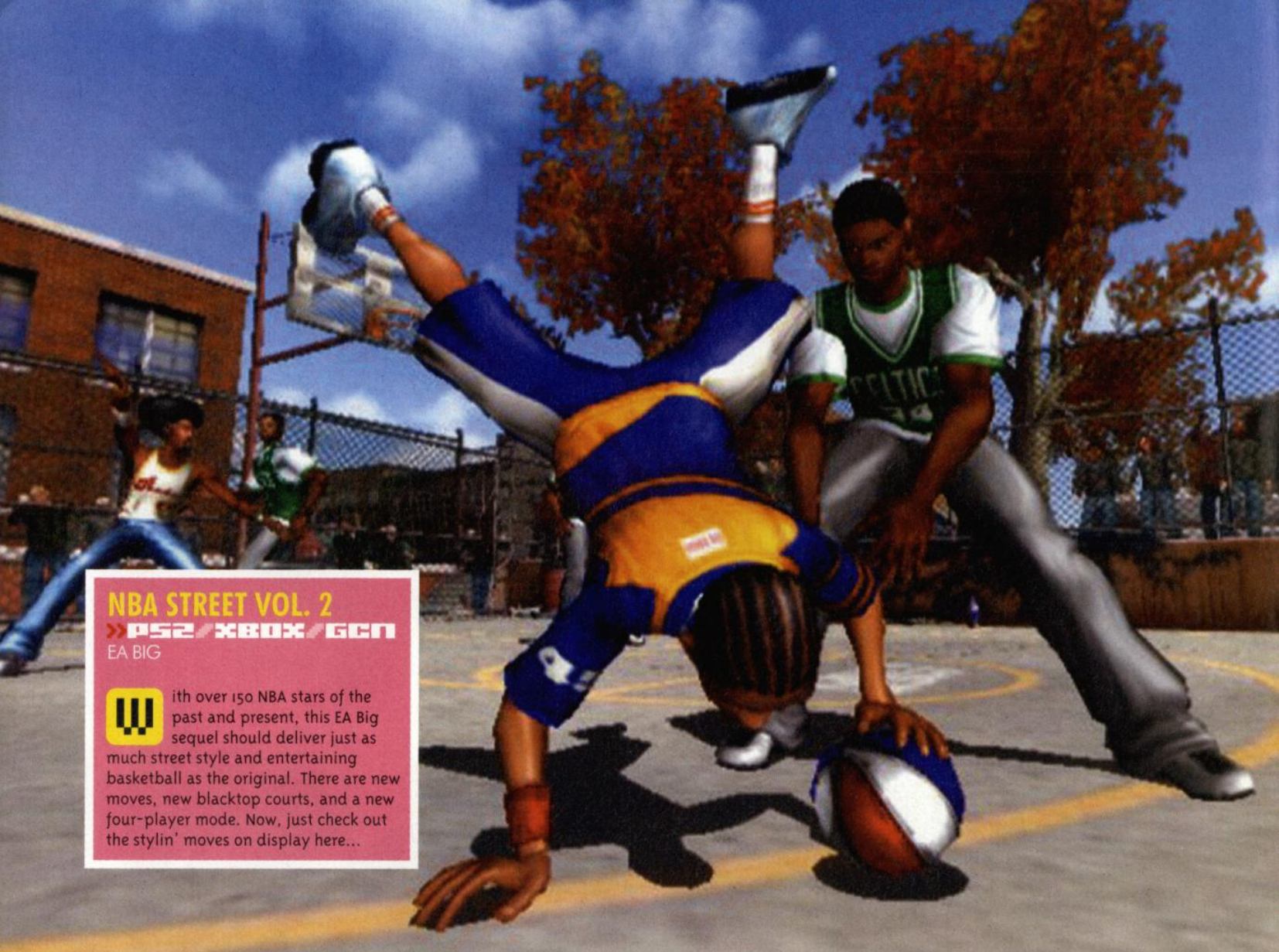
LOOK OUT FOR:

Dead to Rights™, Panzer Dragoon™, Metal Gear Solid® 2 Substance, ao Feng, Brute Force, DOA Extreme Beach Volleyball



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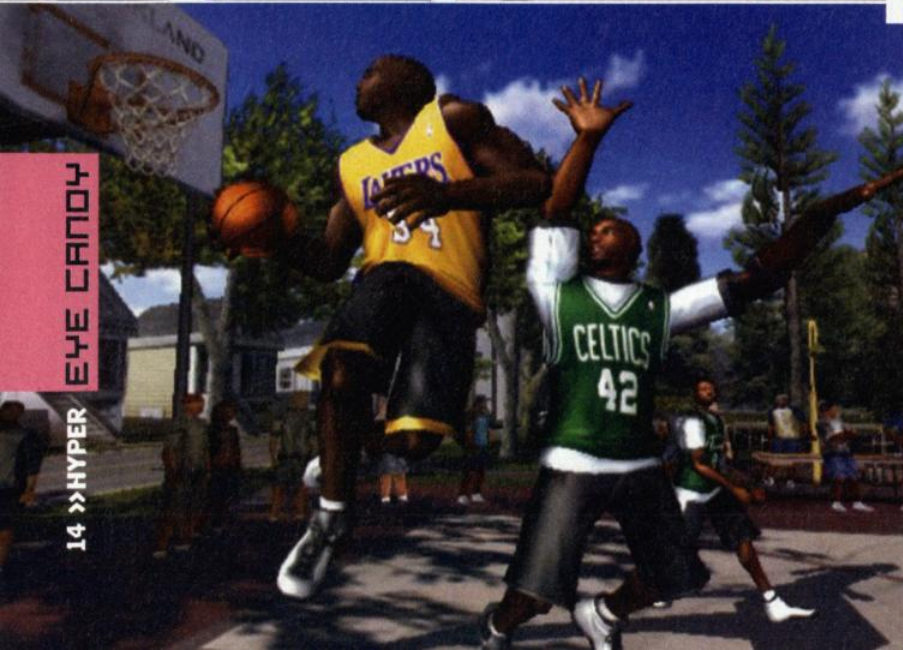
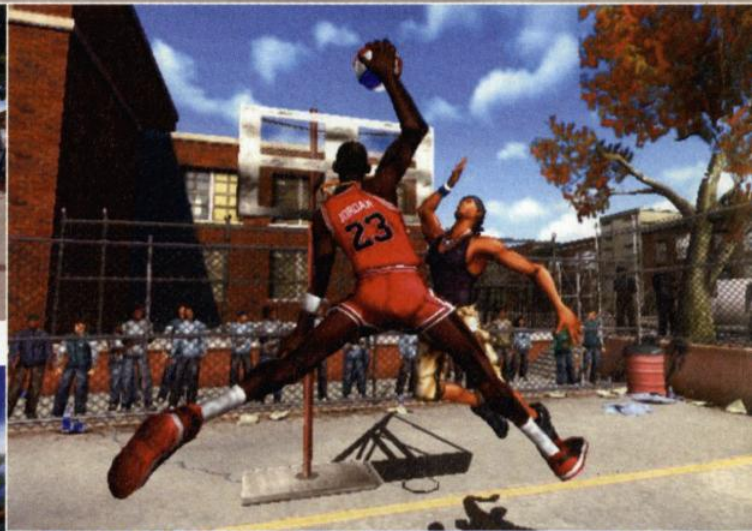
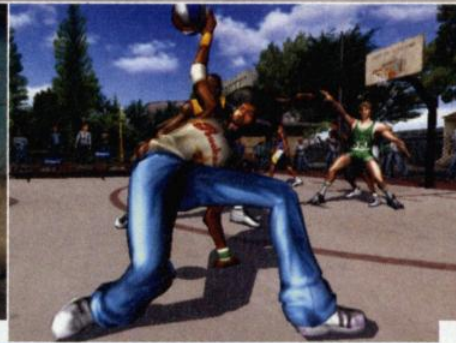
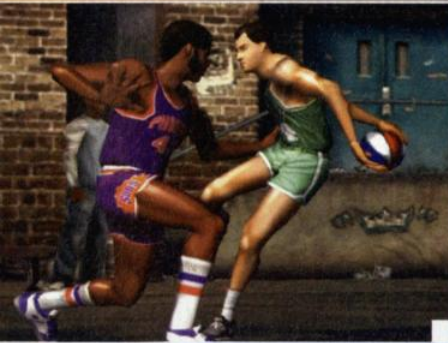
NBA STREET VOL. 2

» PS2 / XBOX / GCN

EA BIG



With over 150 NBA stars of the past and present, this EA Big sequel should deliver just as much street style and entertaining basketball as the original. There are new moves, new blacktop courts, and a new four-player mode. Now, just check out the stylin' moves on display here...





TAO FENG: FIST OF THE LOTUS

WB GAMES MICROSOFT

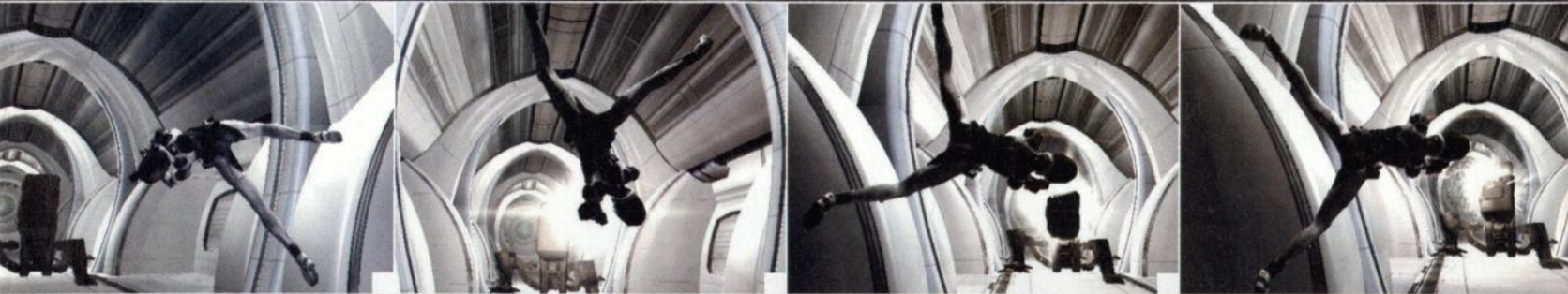


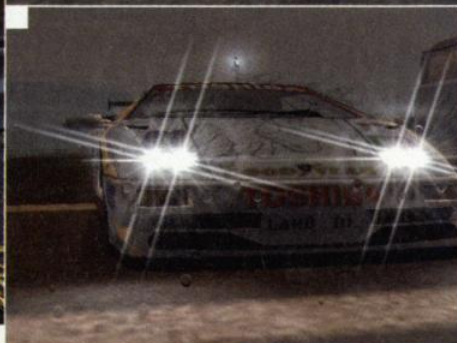
John Tobias, one of the co-creators of Mortal Kombat, has been busily preparing another 3D fighting game to go up against Ed Boon's *Deadly Alliance*. *Tao Feng* features characters that get bruised, bloody and lose parts of their clothing as they fight, as well as a destructible environment that makes for some crazy bouts of carnage. Check it out.



P.N. 03
»»GCN CAPCOM

This mysterious action title for GameCube was one of many announced by Capcom as coming in 2003. Featuring very Matrix-looking acrobatic gunplay, you play the role of Vanessa Z. Schneider, a "mech killer". Vanessa is sent on a mission to prevent an entire planet from being overrun by a computer system gone haywire, although she also has a personal vendetta to fulfil. With its sleek white sci-fi styling, this is looking like one very cool cucumber.





LAMBORGHINI

»»XBOX/PS2 RAGE

Another sweet racing game to add to the golden Xbox lineup... except it's coming to the PS2 as well. Rage software have been cooking this one up, and they appear to be doing an exceptional job with this official license. Featuring all the Lamborghinis of past and present, including the new Murciélago, you'll be racing through the streets and doing your best to test out the wonderful damage model...

Once upon a story

BY SHAKIL "SHAK" AHMED

**WE'RE NOT STUPID.
OR SO I HOPE, ANYWAY,
DESPITE RECENT WORLD EVENTS.**

Humanity might be inherently power hungry, but surely not generically stupid. So why is it that we seem to have such a severe lack of games with a brilliant storyline, let alone those bordering on the intellectually challenging? Aye, we've faced clichéd plots almost every step of the way — Baldur's Gate couldn't have been much more predictable, despite being among the best the western world has come up with so far. And let's not even think of Diablo II. I wouldn't admit I had a problem with the incredible addictiveness of that game until I ran a 24-hour multiplayer stint as a necro and wound up missing the next day. An entire day, wasted on losing my forefinger to a terminal twitch and a few brain cells with the appropriately demanded head mashing when I lost my green set to a particular rowdy set of bovine monstrosities.

The experience left me slightly scattered, and wondering why Blizzard couldn't have incorporated a somewhat more educational experience into the game. Or perhaps a few more cut scenes, anything to spark a creative thought. It wouldn't have made it any less of a game. As is, all I gained was a healthy disrespect for button-mashing blasé wonderlands. Oh, and the twitch.

Curious, and missing my darling Katrina from the tragic Quest for Glory IV, I went seeking the secret of the lost RPGs, of the tales that once carried us away on the wings of imagination.



“Let us sit upon the grass
and tell sad stories about
the death of kings.” —

SHAKESPEARE (RICHARD II)

Once upon a time, the RPG was a great thing. Colossal Cave Adventure was among the not-so-obvious starts of a Golden Age in storytelling, and Roberta Williams's Mystery House marked the beginning of a series we fondly remember as Kings Quest and its wonderful ilk — Hero's Quest, otherwise known as Quest for Glory, and SpaceQuest, amongst many, many others.

“In the old days, if we put out a game that took 300 hours to complete, we'd have buyers. A LOT of buyers, at least in comparison with the overall market. Pretty much it was impossible for someone to own almost everything out there,” says Neal Hallford, the independent writer behind Betrayal at Krondor and Return to Krondor. He's also responsible for the immense and beautiful background story of Dungeon Siege, and today he's staying home 'sick' so he doesn't have to get back to work on two separate EverQuest projects currently under development for Sony Online. “[The casual player has] been around for a long time, but it's only been in the past five or six years that we've really paid much attention to them. By and large, we didn't have to. Casual players weren't the average computer owners. They played Street Fighter 2 down at the arcade, and maybe might have stolen some time on their son's Nintendo playing Zelda, but by and large they weren't the pot of gold that most gaming companies now perceive.”

But as the age of the arcade faded out with its games shifting to the household, things began to change. “The arcade children have grown up, and now they are controlling the game production market,” Neal says. When the gaming industry realised the profits in making simpler games for a less demanding gamer, story-driven games and RPGs began to fade. Baldur's Gate broke a long RPG drought in '98, as predictable as it was, and won Bioware huge acclaim and a better sequel in Baldur's Gate II. But such brilliance is rare. There has been a serious lapse in RPGs released for the consoles in the past year. That partly depends on how you define an RPG, of course — there are still those who believe Diablo II falls into that category.

In popular fiction and at the cinema, though, gaming of the future is always taken to be an immersive, role-playing genre-blending experience. Take a look at the Matrix. Okay, so it's not quite a game so much as an interactive prison, but you get the point. Do big boobs and big guns or blades sell games? Obviously, as some games find them their only saving grace.

“Role-playing is STILL viewed as a niche market. When you compare the sales of something like Unreal or Doom to almost any RPG, you're going to find that story-lite games sell far better than those that require strong role-playing from the player. This in turn gives those of us who favour storytelling very little ground to stand on when we go to the people with the money and say we want to make strong, storytelling games.” Neal frowns in virtuality. “There was a time when I was doing games and I could put lots of text up on the screen, and players loved it.



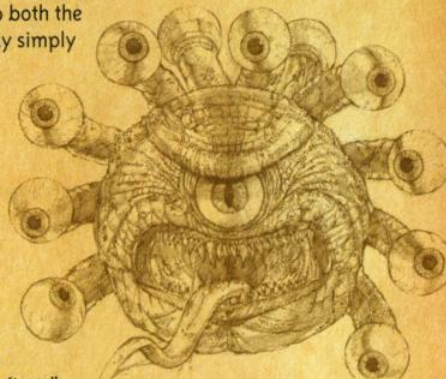
Dungeon Siege: The mule hasn't been bored to death... he's just dreaming of the good old days.

Today, you put too much on the screen and people just tab past it. It's a Neanderthal thing. Me big. Me tough. Me want kill. Hate words. Stupid, stupid words. Go away. Hit spacebar. Slap, slap. Slap. Bad words gone. Now me kill again.”

WHICH CAME FIRST, THE STORY OR THE GAME ENGINE?

The way in which game stories evolve has changed drastically in the past ten years. Once there was a time that the story came first, and the game was built to make that story possible. Neal explains that in modern game development, the reverse tends to be true. “It's hard to say where the plot for Dungeon Siege really got started, but the basic outline started with CT [Chris Taylor, the top chap at GPG]. At the beginning he handed me an outline of things like, here is where you start, you run into character X, they give you the vibrating blue squirrel, you then have to go to Y, go through this ice cavern...and so on and so forth until we got to the big fiery dungeon at the end where we kill Gorn. A few of the principals were also named at that point. What I did was that I took this list of go here, go here, go here, get this, go here instructions, and then I sat down and psychoanalysed the world.” Although there's always a few slight changes to both the story and the game and along the way simply because of how a game evolves, this stands as a perfect example of story developed around a game engine, rather than vice versa.

Looking back less than a decade, one cannot help but remember the classic adventure games — none of which came across as if the game engine came first. Perhaps unimpressive graphics and sounds meant that story was the medium that carried the game. “Actually, in those days, story DID actually come first,” Neal reminisces. “There was a very different attitude back in ye olde days. No one thought a thing about strongly linear games because there just wasn't a lot out there that WASN'T strongly linear. Adventure games were still common to see on the shelves.





Xenosaga promises to be convoluted, insane, bewildering and quite entertaining all the same.

Dynamix's parent company was Sierra Online, king at that time of the adventure format, so they didn't have a problem at all with storytelling."

So where are our games of tomorrow? With the huge applause for the somewhat recent release of games like *NeverWinter Nights* and *Morrowind*, why don't we see a flood of cloned adventure games return to this plagiarist dominated industry like we did with *Doom* or survival horror games? Perhaps because you can't quite clone a good RPG story and get away with it. Or perhaps because the official campaigns of even these two jewels of western RPG developers fall a far cry from the beauty and epic scale of any Square RPG release, fantastic game engines obviously designed around stories. Why haven't there been any western attempts at creating *Final Fantasy* clones? Why don't their incredibly successful eastern concepts, whether art or animation, echo across the world into the US and vice versa? After all, the large eyes you see in most anime were inspired by Osamu Tezuka's (the founding father of modern manga) love of Betty Boop's eyes. And the *Matrix* is largely based on an 80s anime called *Megazone 23*.

"By the way, didn't anyone in Australia mention that the leg depilatory cream 'Nads' would be taken very strangely in the U.S.?" —

NEAL

EAST MEETS WEST

As Neal so aptly points out, along with Richard Bartle (one of the two fellows behind the first MUD, but you should know that now) and Bert Bingham (a designer for Gas Powered Games), the definition of smart and the market vary across cultural boundaries, and not just with leg cream. Although we've started absorbing concepts from the East within the context

of 'genre fiction', from *Godzilla* to *Sailor Moon* and *DragonballZ* in the mornings (ugh), Neal explains, "by and by these things are still isolated within bubbles of context." And sadly so. The Jackie Chan cartoons, on the other hand, are wonderfully well targeted to a western audience, but they are among the few done well. Censorship of anime and manga when delivered on western platforms is rampant, let alone the fact that it can take years for anime to reach western shores. A classic example here would be the US version of *GoLion* — rather, *Voltron* — and its deletion of all references to the death of one of the protagonists. Therefore the large underground (and surprisingly non-profit) fan-subbing industry. Why delete such references? Most likely because it went against the comic censorship regulations of the 1950s and later that stunted the evolution of the American comic industry. Despite the rules being far more lax today, it's still recovering, and the rules had their repercussions on game development, moreso with the recent denial to grant games the right of free speech.

Contrary to what some believe, anime isn't stolen from western arts; the manga it draws from has developed over a long period of time, with peculiar Japanese ink drawings of caricatured animals and people dating back a few hundred years. It would be unfair to claim anime solely their domain however, as the art form is now a general Asian phenomenon, and one that has borrowed from some aspects of western cartoons. Osamu Tezuka was influenced somewhat by Disney and Max Fleisher, for example. The main difference that splits eastern and western forms of comics/manga and animation, however, is the attitude the public adopts towards it. While the US generally seems to believe that cartoons and comics are for kids (we could use more *Shreks!*), an attitude still annoyingly reflected in the vast majority of games targeted at prepubescent teenagers, both eastern art forms caters to all ages (and all tastes, we might add) and are by and large not as simple-minded as their American counterparts. This is mostly due to the aforementioned censorship laws in the West, and partly due to differences in culture. For example, in anime, the work ethic hovers in the background and technology is a much loved play thing (mm, mecha. Er, that's giant robot transformer thingies). In US cartoons and comics, anything technological in nature still tends to be either simplified or left well alone.

THE MEANING OF LIFE

"One advantage of having two so differently evolved production mentalities between the east and west is that it's so much easier to get perspective on one by contrasting with the other. If everything looked like Japanese anime, then most people would probably assume that it is the only way to succeed in making games, which is clearly not the case," says Bert Bingham (otherwise known as Sleepy, and no doubt stifling a yawn). Fantasy in the west is regulated largely by a *Dungeons & Dragons* mindset, its roots in northern European mythology. As Bert explains with the help of Joseph Campbell's works on mythologies common throughout the world and the ages, it helps provide a certain universality of ideas and mental images. If I suddenly shouted "Goblin! Orc! Dire wolf! Bloody huge dragon!" you'd know exactly what I was talking about, though not



necessarily why I mentioned it.

The East, however, tends to take such western systems and mythology, look at them, and then innovate further rather than just rehash. Every Square RPG has provided a host of new critters to play with, new concepts in games, and usually unpredictable plot twists. Philosophy, spirituality, symbology and debating the purpose of religion tend to be rampant devices in the better eastern games, leaving one musing over the meaning of life after playing long stints. They're also far more open to a romantic storyline and killing a character you've spent hours creating, something that really hooks you into the story, though it's somewhat distressing. The West, though, remains focused on the casual gamer. When it's obvious that concepts are travelling one way and greatly improving the gaming industry in the East, what remains confusing is why the West doesn't think to learn likewise.

"I would say it's largely because Americans are (sadly) egocentric," Neal points out. "They tend to believe that unless it's European, it's not of much interest."

But by the same measure, the Japanese purportedly tend to perceive the symbology inherent in some of their best products as beyond the comprehension — or rather, as beyond the willingness to attempt to comprehend — of the Western masses, with Xenogears never released in Europe or Australia, the same fate likely to fall Xenosaga, feebly claiming localisation issues. Most of us already know that the first few Final Fantasy games weren't released overseas and Square originally just threw a horrible dungeon crawl in our direction, thinking it'd satiate our simple minds. It would appear that both east and west generally agree that the western gamer population just isn't capable or willing to experience stories that make them think!

We're not all sex-crazed teenagers after another Lara Croft fix (or rather, such a fix isn't enough!), nor are we all fifty year-old puzzle gamers. Most of us are educated people somewhere in between, capable of appreciating stories that grow from the characters, tragic events, or a plot that questions the existence of God.

Fortunately, there are a few Japanese companies who disagree with the stereotyped perceptions of the player, as Square and a few other companies see the advantage in catering towards the intelligent market outside Japan. More importantly, there would seem to be an increasing number of western companies that excel at merging funky engines with a brilliant concept and story. Deus Ex was widely acclaimed as the best game of all time, for example. For myself, I don't think it could get any better than the sad, vengeful story of Max Payne and the perfect, tragic ending to Rockstar North's Mafia. Don't we all want smarter games displaying such brilliance, be they RPGs or otherwise?



“where we had thought to travel outward, we shall come to the centre of our own existence; where we had thought to be alone, we shall be with all the world.” —

JOSEPH CAMPBELL

LONG LIVE THE STORY

"In the US, there is a very powerful contingent of designers who would like to eliminate the designer's role as storyteller. They say storytelling is emergent.

Max Payne: The story was told "graphic novel" style, which made for a nice change.





Final Fantasy: Each game does its best to deliver interesting characters instead of just generic heroes.

'Just give people a powerful system and they will create their own stories,' is the basic philosophy," Neal replies. "Unfortunately a lot of what they point at as examples of storytelling... i.e. players telling other players how they evaded monster X in area Y... end up sounding more like sports reporting to me than story. Funny if you were there, but not at all compelling." Emergent storytelling has existed in PC games since the beginnings of MUDs, with communities of uploaded minds relishing the chance to tell their story, and discovering the beauty of writing it as an interaction with others. As MUDs moved into the age of graphics, developers began to realise that they could skimp on the need for providing story on a one-to-one basis, for the players seemed eager to write their own. Build it, and they will come. And they will write. Well, they might. The hardest bit is to keep them. Bugs and poor implementation aside, one would think it depends solely on the talent of the player and the versatility of the medium.

Not so. The two real key factors are Motivation, and The Number Of Idiots About Who Don't Feel Like Role-Playing, both intricately linked, although there's no denying the importance of the first two for a higher level of excellence in the creative output: many people have managed to tell their stories wonderfully in older mediums like Ultima Online, a game still on par with other MMOGs out there for its immersive skills. With the vast majority of MMOGs, player death is not permanent. The lack of any sort of finality, a solid risk of 'the End' removes most of the meaning of 'reap what you sow,' and consequences for one's actions pale in comparison to the deed itself. With the casual gamer (and others) turning into the player-killer of your worst nightmares, perma-death as it's called isn't quite a viable option. It'd do interesting things with an economy of bodyguards, assassins and political intrigue, where even a murderer would think twice if they could be tracked down, but when you well and truly 'lose' something within the virtual world, it's far too easy to simply give up on it. All too often, your irritation (to say the least) seeps into the Real World, as the media has all too often revealed. One healthy difference with guided storylines or

otherwise single player games is that if anything, you vent your frustrations at the developer. And thus, in your fury, you immortalise the efforts of the writer.

"Probably the one storyline I'm best known for is Betrayal at Krondor and I kill one of the player characters at the end. He has to make the big sacrifice to save the world. On the one hand, I definitely pushed some buttons with that. On the other, I also ended up upsetting a lot of people. The big "problem" there is that players have a much greater investment in their characters than they do to characters in books. Not that they are somehow uncaring about people in movies or books... but they are vested in computer game characters in a way they never are with non-interactive characters. You spend 60, 80, 100 hours with this person, nurturing them, teaching them, and then they have to DIE? For a lot of people, you might as well tell them to make the old Biblical sacrifice," says Neal.

There's no denial that it makes a good story, however. Without the threat of death, there is no substantial challenge, no fear, and subsequently no real drive or motivation to accomplish much. A death orchestrated by that beyond your control really smacks you in the face and sets you on the path to seeking vengeance. How'd you feel when that level 50 babe named LeetEater wandered by and randomly knocked you off in your last online gaming session? Right. Now, how did you feel when Aerith died, Sephiroth's blade through her bosom?

NO ASSEMBLY REQUIRED

Yet there are what Neal calls the "Rule Designers - these are the people who read a lot about chaos theory in college, and came to believe that the rules system should do everything. Storytelling is some kind of fascist necessity of the industrial overseers, and that true gaming will only emerge once the proletariat rise up and get rid of the evil storytellers. As silly as that sounds, I've heard designers espousing those same virtues. I've got a theory though, and it's not popular with the establishment," Neal continues. "Relying on emergence to produce story is like creating a big park called Disneyland, but when everyone gets there, they're expected to entertain each other. That's not escapism, that's not entertainment. That's a social experiment. That's not what I do for people. People play a game that I've created for them, I take them on a RIDE. No assembly required."

"Of course, [this] is not just something symptomatic of the games industry. It's all over popular culture. Television has become almost exclusively the domain of the rules designers, except that they're TV programmers. The hard point here is that you can't effectively argue against those other viewpoints. They ARE valid. Rules based products make LOTS of money. There are numerically far more casual players out there than hardcores, so the future money is going to be THERE. The trouble here is arguing that the baby doesn't have to be thrown out with the bath water."

In essence, to ensure the concept of emergent storytelling works, developers have to recognize that the idea that you can just build a world, leave it alone and let it run amuck is seriously flawed (and we'll argue with you existentialists any day). Among other things. They have to keep getting their fingers dirty. As Raph Koster mentioned in his presentation on Two Models for Narrative Worlds, some games are

[BELOW] Aerith. Her death was somewhat unexpected for most gamers.



more about letting the player express themselves with the blocks designers give them, while others are about the designers expressing themselves to the player. Good story is a possibility in both, but players need some guidance at least to begin with. We might not be able to switch realities, but games are another matter.

"For all the Big Brothers, and Survivors, and so on, there's plenty of room for X-Files, and Sex In the City, and other story based stuff on television, so clearly the casual market doesn't HATE storytelling. Instead, I think in very short order, we're going to have to start putting up those rides in Disneyland. We've got the folks in the door, but not everyone out there is interested in building their own guild. Time to sell those hot dogs, get that roller coaster up, time to have something for all these new people we've lured in."

"Games with great stories are like King Arthur. They're just sleeping out there, waiting for the time when the world is ready for them again." —

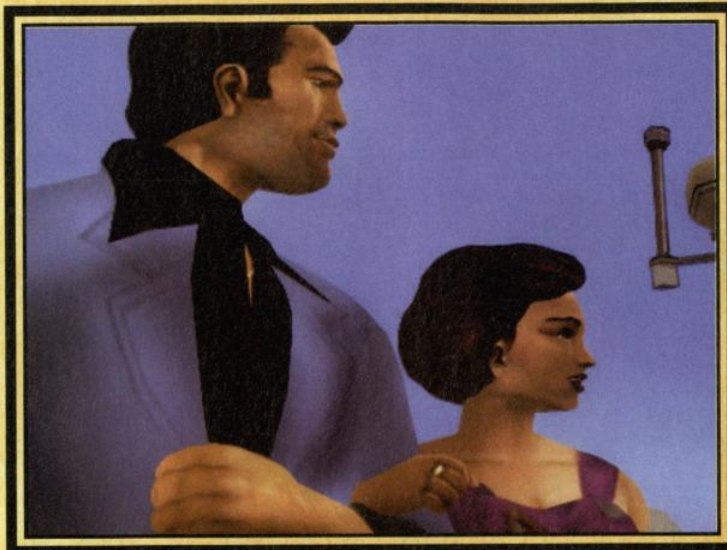
NEAL

VISUALS, SOUND, GAMEPLAY

"So when will the world be ready?" one might be inclined to ask. The moment the western gamer 'grows a brain'? Once the developers get their acts together and plagiarise across cultural borders to then innovate? On that magical day designers come up with a way to deal with P-Kers in games, yet fairly so? Or when enthusiasts of emergent story telling realise that the best way to cater to their players is to not kill the narrator, but let him guide with a gentle prod?

The key to these seem to lie elsewhere — within the Media, to be precise. None of the above would make a successful difference without the media changing its attitude, or at least taking note. With games being accepted as an art form, one has the argument of it already being realised as such in the East and the valid arguments of how photography and cinematography both evolved, fighting artists who feared losing their profession, censorship, and everyone who feared change. All reported by the media, from varying perspectives, of course. Recognising the advantage of well crafted story within games is a lesser realised issue, for the difference in what games recognised for is echoed in the media, if not caused by it. Players tend to buy what the media rates highly, and whaddaya know — publishers chase the cash cow, developing more and more of what players buy. Anyone notice how the market choked up with Doom clones, Civilization clones, survival horror clones, real-time-strategy clones?

"Americans want to see themselves in the mirror of the media, and they're uncomfortable when they DON'T see themselves. And unfortunately there's no easy answer on how to get us out of that mindset," Neal explains. Some might say it's just a matter of



In GTA: Vice City, they attempted to thread a more linear storyline through the non-linear mission structure.

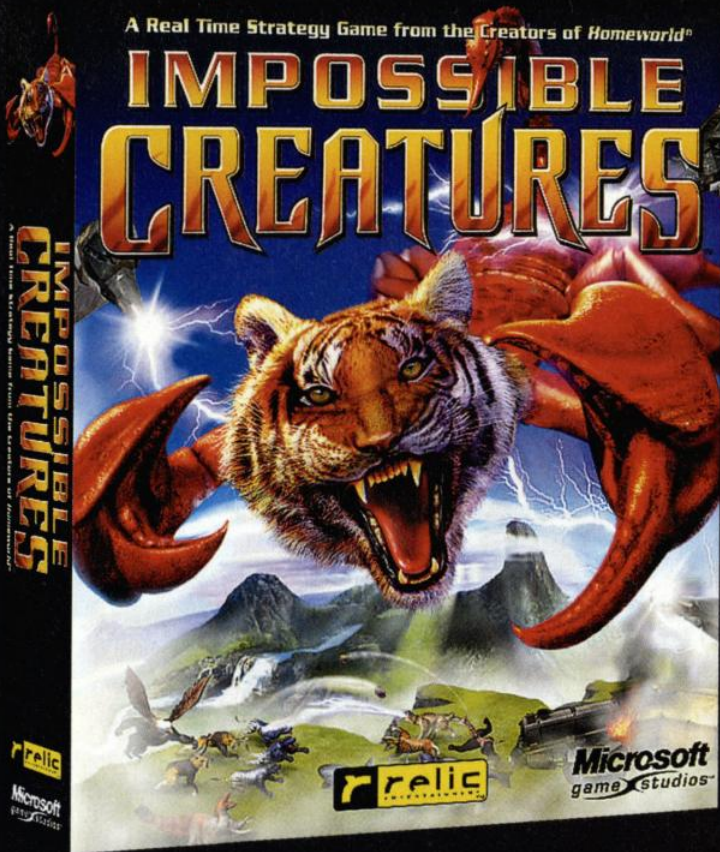
time and gradual nudging placed within the right context. "When are we going to see a major blockbuster about the Mayans? About aborigines? About the Opium War? We're not, unless we can somehow get an American in there as the hero."

As electronic and print media grades on the three categories of Visuals, Sounds and Gameplay, following a trend of grading in accordance to the manipulation of the latest technology, these tend to become the defining characteristics. That in itself is one reason intelligent, story driven games were a bigger thing back in the day, for it wasn't all about the eye candy. Myst is still the best selling game of all time. What defines an RPG is not its visuals, sounds or gameplay, so much as the story it tells and the beauty inherent — interactivity, aesthetics and narrative. Myst most definitely scored top marks on the latter two. The Game Developers Choice Awards reward Original Game Character of the Year and Excellence in Writing, so recognition is present within the industry, just not beyond. Take a look at your average fan site awards or magazine polls, for example. Genre, visuals, gameplay, overall winner — no narrative awards. There is still a stigma against the gamer. "It's cyclical. We are going through a growth period right now, and in the process of trying to convince the mainstream market that gaming is something for everyone, not just the "ahem" geeks," adds Neal.

Of course we're not saying to do away with fun, button mashing, tension relieving games. There is no reason an RPG or story-driven game cannot be fun, or vice versa. Grand Theft Auto: Vice City was a work of art, gameplay, visuals, sounds, narrative, aesthetics, interactivity — you name it, it had it (within reason — and sometimes without!). The beginning of 2003 saw the same game getting Rockstar North a nomination for a £25,000 Designer of the Year award from the London Design Museum — not particularly a surprise, except that they're up against the likes of the designer of the Apple iMac and iPod range, limited edition chandeliers and jewellery! As we enter an age where videogames dominate the entertainment industry, I really only have one thing to say to any would-be or full-fledged developers out there: We're not stupid. Give us smart games. <<



IF THEY'RE ONLY GAMES, WHY ARE YOU SWEATING?



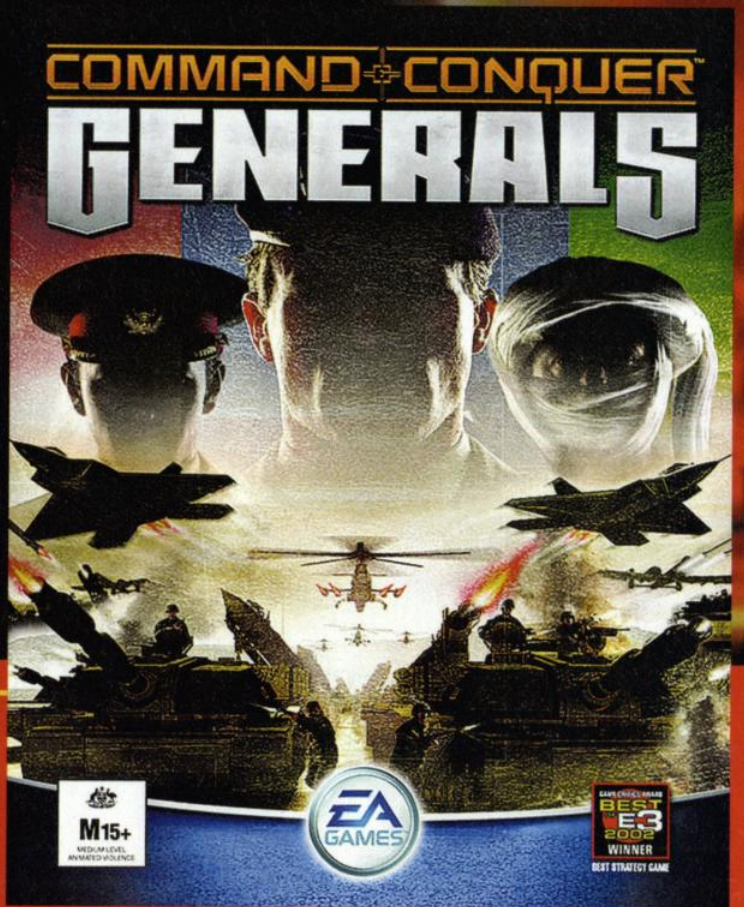
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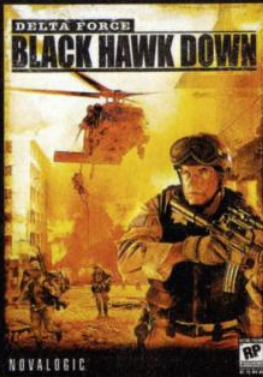
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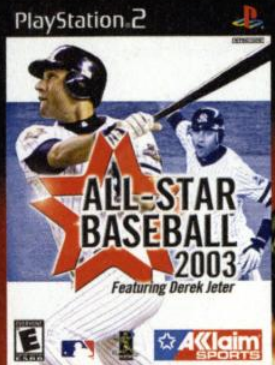
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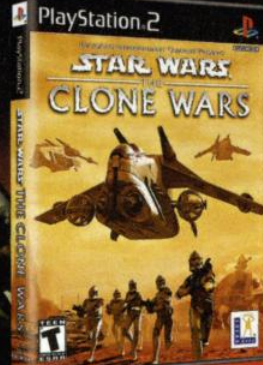
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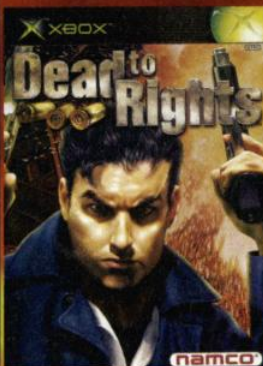


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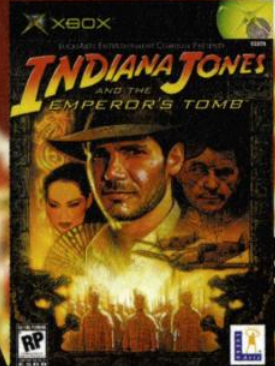
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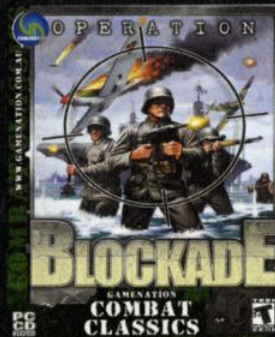
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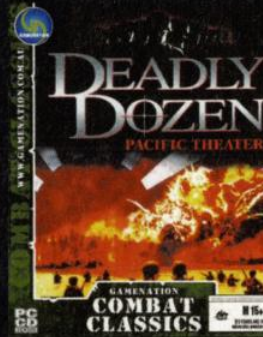
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HAAROWA

NOKIA N-GAGE FIRST IMPRESSIONS

» We recently had the chance to attend the official Australasian media launch of the N-Gage, and we came away excited about the handheld's prospects. Rather than going head to head with reigning kings Nintendo, Nokia will be hoping to offer a value-added alternative, combining both advanced phone capabilities and gaming in one. But can they get the three key elements (games, hardware and ergonomics) right?

UNDERCOOKED?

In terms of size, the N-Gage is quite large for a phone but sits in the hand very comfortably when navigating the OS, typing in an SMS or playing a game. The good news for gamers is that the D-pad is quite good and the backlit 12-bit colour TFT screen is very crisp, while the bad news is that we can't believe there are no shoulder buttons. If Nokia are serious about the N-Gage as a gaming platform, this could be a big mistake - making games with any kind of complexity in control very cumbersome.

At this stage Nokia are keeping very quiet about the gaming hardware in the N-Gage. All we really know is that it utilises a 104MHz IBM ARM CPU for apps and handset management, paired with a DSP for audio and telephony. We have no idea what the GPU is, and given how important this component is, the absence of information is a little strange. It's also worth mentioning that the 104MHz ARM CPU is also the one used in most PDAs... or it at least it was until the 206MHz model was introduced. We really hope that Nokia haven't undercooked their hardware.

TAKE SCREENSHOTS

Games will come on Multi Media Cards (MMC), and it will be interesting to see what kind of price point they're sold at. Although this format is quite funky, a blank 64MB MMC alone costs close to the price of a full cost console game, so game sizes will have to be kept right down to keep manufacturing costs low for publishers. We wonder how long it will be until publishers offer cheap downloads of their games onto your own MMCs to avoid hardware and retail expenses.

In addition to its gaming abilities, the N-Gage is also a great phone, with all the features that you'd expect. It runs on Nokia's Symbian OS-based Series 60 platform with tri-band GSM 900/1800/1900 functionality, HSCSD and GPRS data carrier support, SMS/MMS, full email support, J2ME application support, an XHTML mobile profile, WAP 1.2.1 browser, mp3 playback, polyphonic ring tones and an FM receiver. You can even take screenshots in game and MMS them along with text and sound to friends. We think that one may come in handy for proving Super Monkey Ball high scores.

The N-Gage will be out at the end of the year, and we'll keep you up to date on any important developments and news.



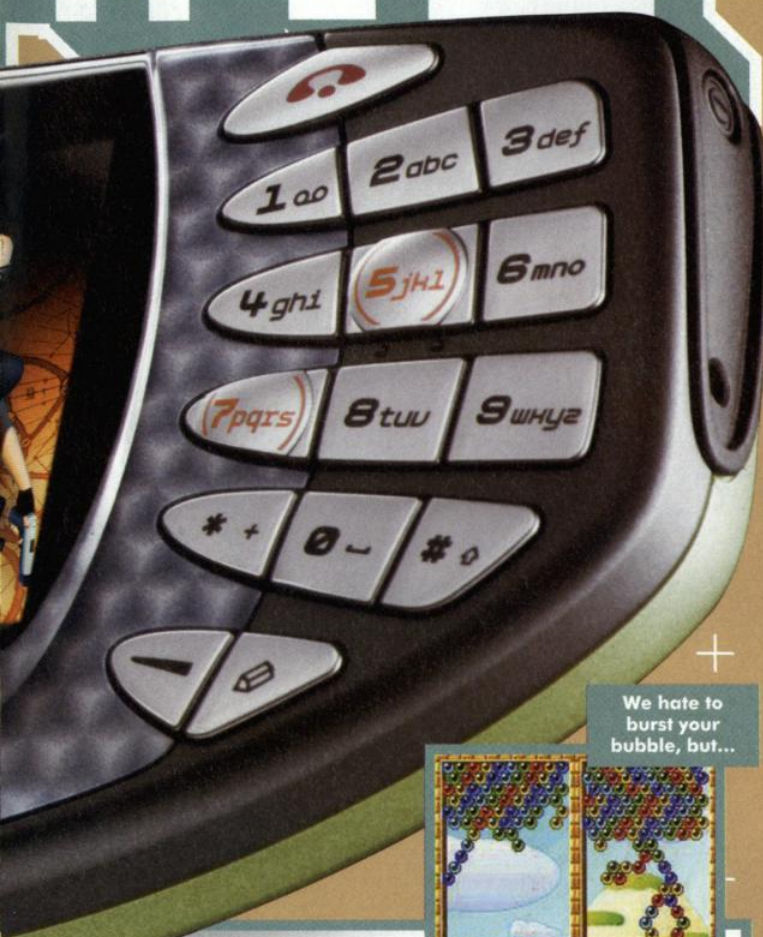
DIGITAL RIGHTS BOLLOCKS

» Nokia are yet again are playing it politically correct with their implementation of Digital Rights Management (DRM) technology into the N-Gage. As far as we can tell, the Music Management system on the N-Gage will be identical to the 5510... meaning it's VERY time consuming and limiting. Basically the software allows you to either rip directly from a disc or import your mp3s into the software. This is where it gets painful. Nokia have developed their own file format to protect the music you're about to download from being passed on to another device... it only works on that phone. This means you now have all of your music in both mp3 format and the Nokia format - goodbye free hard drive space. It's especially ridiculous trying to prevent people sharing music as the battle is already lost! Why would anyone bother trading from a device with a tiny 64MB card when most people have burners anyway? And for those of us with all their music in the mp3 format, adding in an unnecessary second step that drastically affects ease of use is insulting.

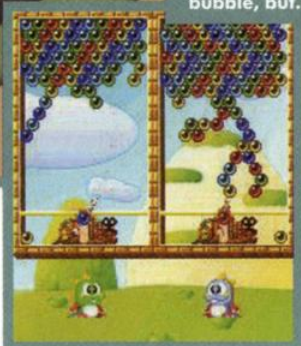
To make matters worse the connection between mobile and computer is USB v1.1. Those of us used to firewire or USB 2.0 are in for a tedious wait. If Nokia want people to use their mobiles as their walkman, these issues will have to be addressed or the music function simply becomes a gimmick that holds back the evolution of device convergence.

Not more Tomb Raider games?! Ahhh!!

FREE



We hate to burst your bubble, but...



DA GAMES

»» Activision, Eidos, Sega, Taito and THQ are all on board with N-Gage game development, which is certainly a good sign. The games we've tested so far are Tomb Raider, Puzzle Bobble, Virtually Board Snowboarding II, Pandemonium and Super Monkey Ball. Other games on the way include a number from Nokia themselves (such as, *sigh*, a kart racing game), as well as Space Invaders, Sonic, Puyo Puyo, Sega Rally, Red Faction, Moto GP, Major League Baseball, and others that haven't been announced yet. Word is that Namco will be developing for the system too, which is good news indeed.

All the games we've tested were really early, but one thing is clear – the N-Gage can definitely handle 3D. Tomb Raider, for instance, wasn't a port of the GBA title like we were expecting, but a port of the original Tomb Raider. Yes, in full 3D. Pandemonium (now there's a game that we wish had stayed dead and buried), Super Monkey Ball and Virtually Board Snowboarding II (VBS2) also sported polygonal graphics.

For early demos they were all (except for *cringe* VBS2) technically very impressive, but the big test is going to be how much the developers can polish them up over the next nine or so months. At this stage they all suffer from VERY low frame rates and aren't really all that playable. However, the potential is clearly there.

One of the most exciting angles that Nokia are pushing with the N-Gage is that of wireless multiplayer, with Bluetooth for local gaming and GPRS for internet multiplayer. Multiplayer out of the box is a very exciting concept for handheld gaming, so here's hoping Nokia can get the killer titles to support it.

UNDER THE HOOD

You know a company is trying desperately hard to be hip when they list their product's technical specifications as "Tech Spex". Nokia – you're already cool – don't try so hard! Either way, here they are for your inspection:

N-GAGE TECHNICAL SPECS:

Platform

- Series 60 Platform Smartphone

(mono)

- Integrated recorder (AAC) from analog stereo line connector and FM radio
- Hands-free speaker for music listening

Processor

- 104 MHz ARM Processor

Memory

- 4 MB internal + external memory cards (32, 64 and 128 MB available separately)
- 64 MB game card (MMC) provided in the sales package.
- Shared memory for images, contact data, calendar, messages, and add-on applications

Operating System

- Symbian OS with Java 2 Micro Edition (J2ME™) support

Size

- Weight: 137 g (with standard battery)
- Dimensions: 133,7 x 69,7 x 20,2 mm, 139cc

Design

- Ergonomic game controls for two-hand use (keys divided on both sides of the screen)
- Five-way directional controller (works eight ways in games)
- Internal antenna
- Built-in vibrator (say what? - Ed)
- IHF speaker for calls, game sounds, music

Display and User Interface

- Illuminated high-contrast, full-graphics color display (size 176 x 208 pixels)
- Screens displays in 12-bit colour (4096 colours)
- Series 60 graphical user interface enabling application multitasking with five-way navigation
- Separate application key, music and radio short cut keys, highlighted game keys

Interactive Games

- Single player games, local multiplayer Bluetooth games
- Games available on game cards (MMC)
- 4MB user memory on device flash

Personal Information Management

- Calendar
- To-Do list
- Contacts/Address book
- Pinboard

Digital Music Player

- Digital music player for AAC and MP3 files
- Stereo line in for audio recording (analog)
- Slave USB 1.1. for digital music download from PC
- High fidelity stereo headset for music player, FM stereo radio, and voice calls

Stereo FM Radio

- Automatic next/previous channel seek
- 20 radio channel memory-Integrated recorder (AAC)
- Hands-free speaker for radio

Polyphonic Ringing Tones

- Mono ringing tone composer
- MP3, AAC, Midi, WAV ringing tones

Voice Features

- Voice dialing; memory for 20 names and numbers
- Voice recorder
- Integrated hands-free speaker

Enhanced Messaging

- Email protocols (IMAP4, POP3, SMTP, MIME2)
- Multimedia messaging (send, reply, forward, play audio, stop audio, insert multimedia content)
- Enhanced SMS support including: Multiple SMS sending, SMS concatenation, templates, smileys, and picture messages

Wireless Connectivity

- Data support HSCSD, GPRS Multislot Class 6 (2+2, 3+1, class B)
- Bluetooth
- Wireless phone-to-phone or phone-to-PC connectivity
- Send/receive pictures, graphics, and business cards
- Play games
- SyncML

High Speed Data

- HSCSD up to 43.2 kilobits
- GPRS up to 40.2 kilobits (Class B, 3+1, 2+2)

Java Technology

- Supports the standard Java 2 Micro Edition (J2ME™)

Triple Band Operation

- GSM 900/1800/1900; automatic switching between bands

WAP

- XHTML over GSM data, HSCSD, and GPRS
- Access current WAP services with the XHTML browser

Content with XHTML Browser

- XHTML with iMode extension
- Over-the-air download of new Java™-based games/game levels



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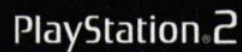
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BOB

>> XBOX

CATEGORY: Action/Adventure >> PLAYERS: 1 >>
PUBLISHER: Lionhead/Microsoft >> AVAILABLE: TBA

An interview with **Ben Cousins**, lead designer on BC at Intrepid Games.





HYPER: What can we expect from BC? Is it an out-and-out console action romp, or a game with significant depth and strategy?

Ben Cousins (BC): Our desire from the outset with this title was to provide both types of experiences, giving the player the freedom to choose to be clever or go in guns blazing (metaphorically of course. Maybe that should be 'spears blazing').

The basic character control and interface for BC is deliberately simple, comfortable and intuitive, we want the player to experience no difficulties at all interacting with the world, moving around, picking up objects and attacking creatures. The viewpoint is a typical third-person camera that players of many action adventure games will be familiar with. On top of the simple input system we have created a world of unprecedented depth and richness. The player can use items and the abilities of the characters in an almost unlimited amount of ways.

In addition to this, the missions in the game can be completed in any way the player chooses. Some players may move through the missions, killing indiscriminately and attacking every creature on sight, destroying all vegetation in their path. Some players may choose to employ sneaky but violent tactics, such as poisoning fruit, using the cover of darkness or sniping enemies with a bow and arrow. Some players may try to move through the game doing the minimum amount of damage to the environment, sending creatures to sleep rather than killing them and trying to avoid damage to plant life. Any path is available to the player.

HYPER: Can you tell us a little about the rival race?

BC: We are trying to keep this enemy secret. It is unlikely that anyone will see these creatures until they play the game. I can say, however that they are a terrifying, organised and vicious enemy.

HYPER: Does the main premise lie in the hunter/hunted dynamic?

BC: The battle for survival amongst creatures is certainly one of the mechanics that has the largest impact on the gameplay. Creatures attack humans for food, and the player attacks creatures for the same reason, or to protect themselves from being eaten. The creatures all have different attitudes to others in the environment (some species may be ambivalent of others, while some are arch enemies), these complex animosities and grudges are sometimes able to be exploited by the player.

HYPER: Can you give us a few more details on the control system, such as controlling other members as well as yourself?

BC: While in camp, the player can select up to 5 other tribe members to join the 'team'. While moving around the world, these 4 other team members follow the character the player is controlling wherever he goes. The player can switch to control any of the team by hitting the right trigger button.

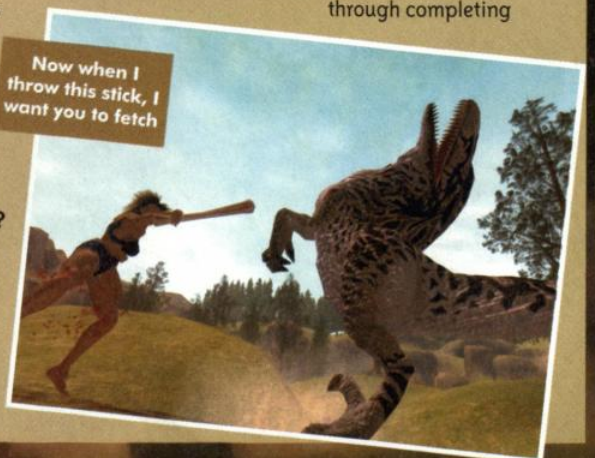
Using the Y button the player can issue simple orders to the rest of the team, these are context-sensitive, and include orders like 'Attack!', 'Retreat!' and 'Collect this food'. The player can also tell some team members to stay where they are and guard the area. If the player wants to use one of the unique skills of a team member, they just have to switch to directly control them, and then they can carry out the task. Whenever possible, we want the player to be doing the 'cool stuff' rather than issuing orders and watching others do it.

HYPER: Evolution appears to play a significant role, can you elaborate on what forms this takes in the actual game?

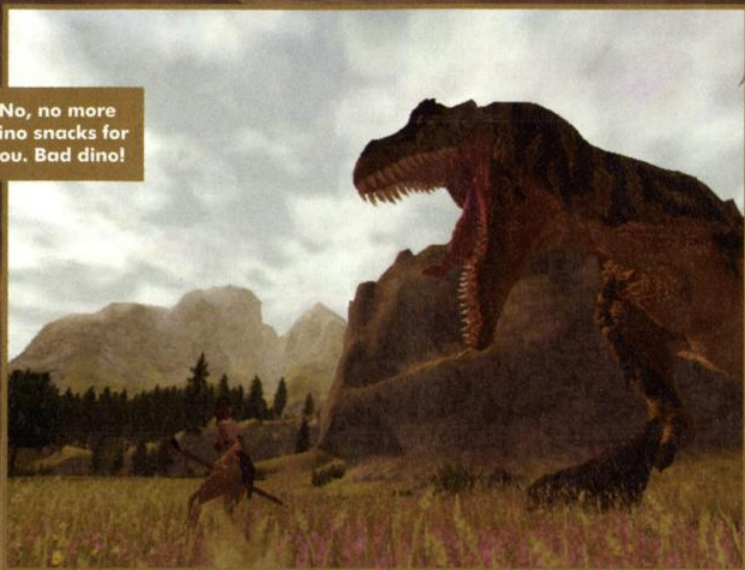
BC: One of the player's key tasks is to find objects in the world that could be used to upgrade the technology of the tribe. These items are usually obtained through completing

"At the dawn of time the very survival of the human race hangs in the balance. Cowering in caves and running from predators, your species faces the ultimate threat - extinction at the hands of a vicious, rival race of apemen. If humanity is to have a future, your tribe needs to evolve into a thinking, resourceful unit with a strong leader. That leader is you..."

Now when I throw this stick, I want you to fetch



No, no more dino snacks for you. Bad dino!



missions. For example we may have a mission to find five examples of a special plant that grows in an inaccessible part of the environment. When these items are taken back to camp the tribe may discover that the plant can be used to string a bow and arrow, and the player is now able to purchase this

weapon from the camp with food collected in the world outside. There are a huge amount of technological upgrades like this, which mean the initially poorly-equipped cavemen are quite powerful and advanced by the end of the game.

HYPER: Is the highly talked about simulated eco-system as deep as people are making out, can you give us some specific information on how this works?

BC: The power of the eco system is the way the mechanics combine to make a complex world. For example, all creatures in the world have a favoured food (it could be pine cones, leaves of a certain plant, or meat). The creatures actively forage and hunt for this food stuff. At certain times of the day they will also look for water or they may sleep through the day or the night. If you set the game in motion with a few creatures in the world you will begin to see these desires and routines making a complex simulated environment. A group of predators may happen upon some herbivores at a drinking spot one day and attack them, killing one and eating it. Another day they may not be in the right place at the right time. Also a large creature may knock down all the trees that bear a certain fruit, meaning one creature could go

Me. Grog. Me hit animal. Grog Eat. Gaaah!



Lara Croft's ancestors go cave raiding.



The luckiest Dinosaur in the whole world.



hungry and begin to forage further away, becoming the prey for another creature. If you combine these desires for food, social activity and rest with the fear (or liking) of water, a fear (or ambivalence) to fire, etc, then you can begin to see a huge amount of possibilities for interacting with and also for simply watching the world.

HYPER: We've heard that every item in the game can be picked up. Is this purely for combat purposes or for other reasons, i.e. combining wood with stone to make a simple axe perhaps?

BC: Every item under a certain size can be picked up and used as a weapon, thrown as a weapon or given to another team member. In addition the player can (later in the game) add chemicals to these items. They can add any chemical to any item. These chemicals include fire, poison and sleeping drugs. Thus the player can add fire to a tree branch and use it as a torch or to ward off predators. They could add fire to a pine cone, and throw the burning object into long grass to scare creatures away. They can also add poisons and drugs to objects that they know are favoured foods for certain creatures. This means the player can lead creatures around the level with a trail of food and then poison them, or they can drug the foodstuffs in a certain area, wait for animals to eat them and be sent to sleep and then sneak past them without being noticed. The item system is central to the game, and there is a lot more I am not able to talk about at the moment.

HYPER: Peter Molyneux has talked of a 'sea of blood' when large dinosaurs are killed, can we really expect to see this much gore or will it be toned down?

BC: Currently we are working on a blood and gore model, which like the rest of the game is a slightly exaggerated version of reality. The life of prehistoric men and creatures is an extremely violent one naturally and we don't

want to hold back in terms of representing this brutality. In instances where large creatures are killed with edged weapons, like spears and arrows, there will be a huge quantity of blood, just as modern day whalers and elephant hunters experience this when killing large animals. We hope the players will experience a combination of revulsion and pity when they kill the large creatures in the world.

HYPER: The combat system sounds to be revolutionary; can you really hit dinosaurs out of the ballpark with a burning tree branch?

BC: Yes, if you have a big enough branch, and you hit a small enough creature they will tend to travel a long distance. We want the player to have the freedom not only to attack creatures head on, or with a bow or spear at a distance, but also let them use the environment creatively to kill creatures. An example would be pushing a boulder off a cliff onto a creature, or felling a tree, setting light to the tree trunk and rolling it into a pack of creatures, setting them on fire in the process. We set up the world so that in any instance where the player is expected to fight creatures, they are able to use a variety of fun and creative methods to do so.

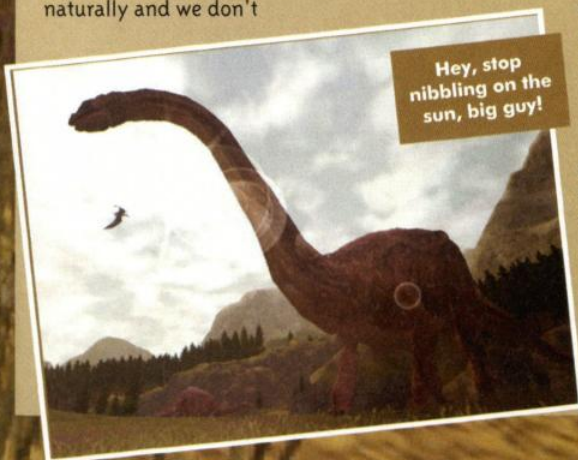
HYPER: What is the dev team's expertise and how do they interact with Peter Molyneux?

BC: The team at Intrepid is made up of some of the most seasoned and experienced people in the business, with several million selling games in their past, and we are also made up of the cream of the young talent available in the industry. Matt Chilton and Joe Rider, our directors, worked with Peter at Bullfrog on titles like Theme Park and Theme Hospital.

In addition to English staff we have extremely talented developers that we've found from all over the world, including China, the US, Italy, France and Hong Kong. We are all amazed at how everyone has risen to the occasion and produced even better work than in their past on this project.

Peter's involvement with the game is one of a very enthusiastic and hands-on overseer. He frequently looks at the game, and visits us to give his own unique angle on videogames. He has, in the past made suggestions that have radically changed the game's development (for the better) and we are continually looking to him to use his huge experience and creativity to help us move forward. We are in a separate office from the rest of the Lionhead teams, and the day to day design of the game and the development is very much the baby of the close-knit Intrepid team. <<

the players will experience a combination of revulsion and pity when they kill the large creatures...





- War Cry
- Savage Slice
- Lightning Strike



PLAYER03



DUNGEONS & DRAGONS: HEROES

WOW-O-METER



PS2 / XBOX / GCN

CATEGORY: Action/Adventure >> PLAYERS: 1-4 >>
PUBLISHER: Infogrames >> AVAILABLE: Late 2003

Someone's been playing Baldur's Gate: Dark Alliance. Someone at Infogrames, that is. They must have loved it so much, they decided to pull their Dungeons & Dragons license out of a dusty draw and get their lackeys to make another "Dark Alliance", but with official D&D content. And so, Dungeons & Dragons: Heroes was born. Okay, well maybe it didn't happen that way, but there's no doubting that D&D: Heroes bears more than a passing resemblance to Interplay's great Baldur's Gate title. Let's venture forth into the dark and dirty tunnels to see what lies ahead...

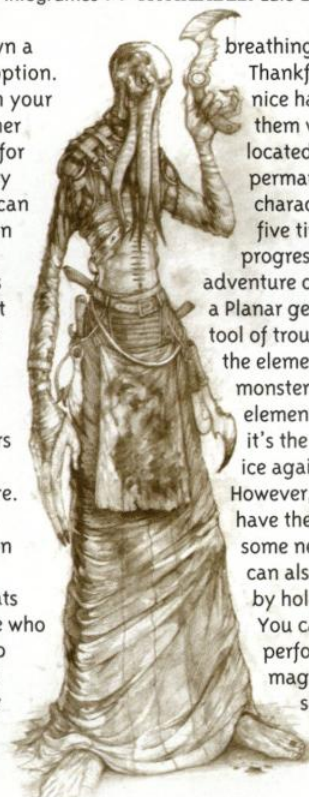
AWESOME FOURSOME

There are four characters to choose from in Heroes: Aradin the fighter, Cyndryn the elven wizard, Barltok the dwarven cleric and Akio the rogue. Your typical D&D selection. Each is moulded from the rich D&D universe, and each character will begin with a few levels (five to be exact) of experience already under their belt to allow for some decent abilities from the moment you pick up the controller.

The four characters can be played by four players, simultaneously, in a potentially vibrant co-operative mode. Naturally, poor old PS2

owners will need to own a Multi-Tap to use this option. However, if you live on your own and rarely see other human beings except for when the pizza delivery guy arrives, then you can tackle the adventure on your lonesome too. A cool feature though, is that four players won't have to squabble over only the four classes. You can play co-operatively as four wizards, or two fighters and two clerics — any combination you desire.

Because the game is based on the 3rd edition rule set, many of the monsters, skills and feats will be familiar to those who still play D&D. Expect to step on the toes of Iron Golems, be spooked by the odd Lich and get toasted by fire-



breathing Gold Dragons.

Thankfully, you'll have some nice hardware to dispatch them with. Hidden runes located around the levels can permanently upgrade each character's weapon up to five times, so you get progressively beefier as the adventure continues. There is also a Planar gem system for your tool of trouble, so you can utilise the elements to help hurt monsters of the opposing element and so forth. Yes, it's the predictable old "use ice against fire" system.

However, your character does have the ability to pull off some neat combos, and you can also charge your attacks by holding a button down.

You can also use skills and perform feats — and cast magic, of course — with a simple press of the other buttons on the face of the



Let sleeping Orcs lie.



Is this the way to Baldur's Gate?



Ahh, there's nothing like the winds of hell on your face...



Get up you lazy, good-for-nothing!



I want my mummy.



Obligatory ice level. Check.

As we all know, floating castles are bad and usually contain evil bad guys

controller. Expect to also smash many a barrel (and crate, we pray) to reveal gold pieces and scrolls and the like.

BACK FROM THE DEAD

Interestingly, one player can be designated the party leader, which will give them control over the rotation of the overhead camera. Hopefully, this should resolve any

confusing moments in combat when everyone is trying to see what they're doing — as long as you relinquish control to the person in your party with +20 Intelligence.

WHAT WE'D LIKE TO SEE:
Change the god awful music!! Lame, tuneless heavy metal blended with lame, tuneless classical just doesn't really cut it.

So what the hell are these four heroes doing, going around and tearing up the place? Well, it goes like this... A floating castle has appeared in the land, hovering over the location



Fire spell + wooden bridge = bad



Argh, my pace maker!

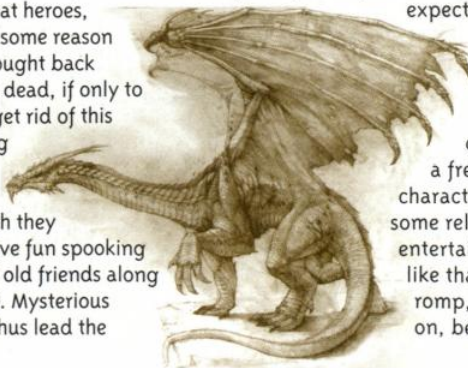


Quick, call Ghostbusters!



Heh, I can see down her top.

of where there once stood the Baelle Castle. As we all know, floating castles are bad and usually contain very magical and evil bad guys. Just ask anyone from the Belmont clan. The four adventurers, who were actually once great heroes, have for some reason been brought back from the dead, if only to go and get rid of this annoying floating place (although they could have fun spooking out their old friends along the way). Mysterious portals thus lead the



adventurers to strange places, as they journey towards their fate all over again.

The aim with D&D: Heroes is definitely to deliver a high-action piece of console gaming. Don't expect any great perplexing puzzles or any in-depth role-playing (you can't even create a fresh custom character), but do expect some relentlessly entertaining combat, just like that other great romp, Dark Alliance. Go on, be a hero. <<<



RTX RED ROCK

PS2 GEN CATEGORY: Third Person Action/Adventure >> PLAYERS: 1-2 >> PUBLISHER: LucasArts >> AVAILABLE: TBA >>



It's a pleasure to see LucasArts shrug off the need to continue pumping out games based on *Star Wars* or many of their other fairly successful licences. The LucasArts of old used to establish original new characters and gaming worlds all the time (Full Throttle, Grim Fandango), so we know they're capable of more than just rendering battledroids and re-cutting John Williams music. RTX Red Rock may be set in space, but there aren't any lightsabers or Gungans to be seen in this sci-fi tale. This is a science-fiction concept loosely based on actual

emerging space technology, and it's docking with a console near you in the very, very near future...

BOTH WEAPON AND TOOL

The main brain behind RTX Red Rock is Hal Barwood — a LucasArts veteran who may be familiar to some as the project lead on the classic Indiana Jones and the Fate of Atlantis point and click adventure. His first transition into action games was Indiana Jones and the Infernal Machine, but RTX Red Rock will be his first truly original

gaming concept, as the man is a self-professed "Mars nut". Set one hundred years in the future (the year 2103 to be exact), the blend of semi-futuristic NASA technology with more outlandish alien designs will throw the player into vaguely familiar and yet puzzling situations.

Earth has just been saved from an invading alien force

called LEDs (Light Emitting Demons), however, after the

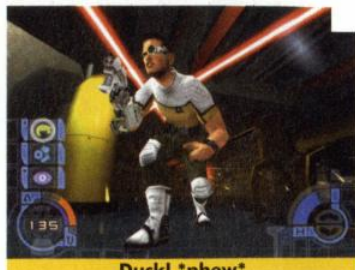
battle, contact with the Mars colony, Red Rock, is lost. Have the LEDs now taken Mars instead? Well, that's for you to find out. You get to play the role of E.Z. (Eugene Zeno) Wheeler, an astronaut with a synthetic eye and arm that provide him with some pretty handy super abilities. In fact his arm can be used as both weapon and tool — from a grappling hook to a grenade launcher. His eye will give him an opportunity to spy out

WHAT WE'D LIKE TO SEE:
Plentiful Lucasfilm in-jokes, just like the good old days...



INSIGHT

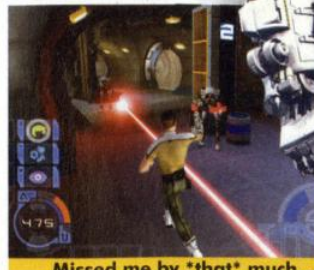
36 >> HYPER



Duck! *phew*



How do I take a piss in this thing?



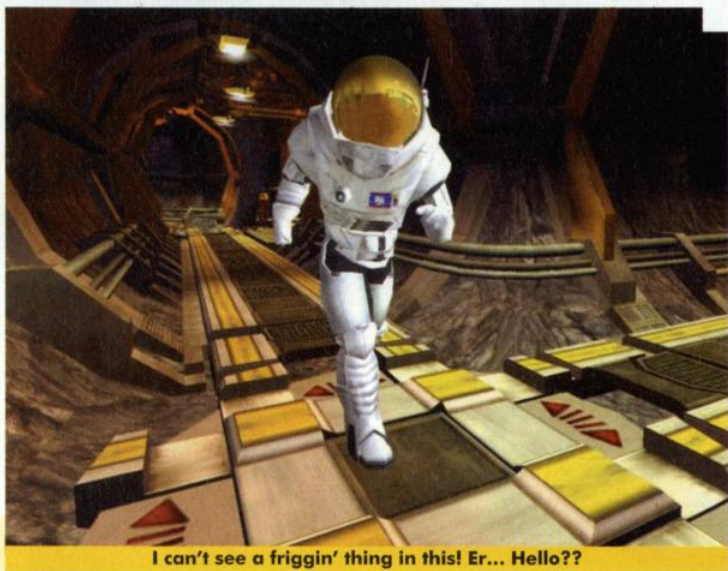
Missed me by *that* much...



In search of alien stuff.



EZ Wheeler - The human swiss army knife.



I can't see a friggin' thing in this! Er... Hello??



Gonk. Gonk.



Worse shots than stormtroopers.

IRIS will help you through the game (and flirt with you endlessly)

traps, hidden aliens and other powers of observation that only a nifty cybernetic eyeball can offer.

The guy truly is a human can opener.

His official job description is "Radical Tactics Expert" (hence the RTX that's slapped on the box), a futuristic commando who is a one-man war machine, specially trained to get in and out and execute his objectives efficiently. Wheeler, however, has a bit of a reputation for being a loose cannon.

You won't be operating totally alone, however. A female AI guide named IRIS (Independent Removable Information System) will help you through the game (and flirt with you endlessly), and you'll get to know a few survivors of the Mars colony when you make it to the moon Phobos — including another rather attractive young lady. In fact, despite her age, the lady in question, Cimmeria Rajan, has

somehow become the colony commander.

ROBOT LIASONS

You'll also have access to a small worker droid, Martian rover or two that can help get around in areas that Wheeler can't risk adventuring into. Naturally, a variety of action puzzles are the result of these robot liasons. Whilst Hal Barwood wants to create a fast-paced action game, he still can't help adding a few adventuring elements and intelligent side-tracking. Good old Hal.

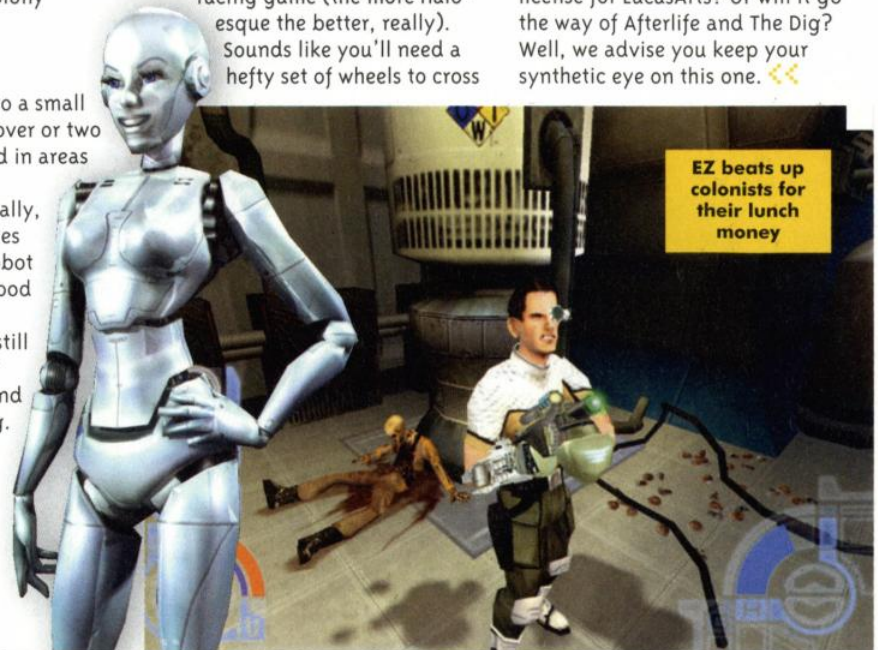
An interesting development is the inclusion of the multiplayer mode. At this stage, it appears that only a two-player option is available

(although we really hope the GameCube will take advantage of the four controller ports), but it will include a Capture the Flag of sorts and a Halo-esque vehicle-based racing game (the more Halo-esque the better, really).

Sounds like you'll need a hefty set of wheels to cross

those frozen Martian wastelands, so there should be some cool alien crafts as well as the utilitarian NASA buggies to slam into gear.

Will RTX be a successful new license for LucasArts? Or will it go the way of Afterlife and The Dig? Well, we advise you keep your synthetic eye on this one. <<<



EZ beats up colonists for their lunch money



>> PC XBOX APOCALYPTICA

CATEGORY: Shooter >> **PLAYERS:** 1-Multi >> **WOW-O-METER**
PUBLISHER: Konami >> **AVAILABLE:** TBA >>

Contrary to initial impressions, Apocalyptica is not, we repeat not, a Metallica cover-band. Rather it's a new third person action game heading our way on PC and Xbox courtesy of Konami. So why the angsty name?

ON A MISSION FROM GOD...
Simply put, things are not cool with the world. Earth has gone to pot, resulting in the big bad himself (Satan), ascending to Earth to raise an army, ensnaring vast numbers of humans, and forcing all others to flee. Now, as everyone knows, when you've got a hard earned thirst, you need a big cold beer. In other words, the only being that can take down Satan is the G-man, and that's exactly what happened. God stepped in, the forces of heaven rained fire on Earth, and Satan was smote.

Since then, the remaining humans have spread throughout space, setting up colonies such as New Babylon, Red Bethlehem and Golgotha the Cathedral World. Religious are we? In any case, the

hope was that Satan would never return, but it wouldn't be much of a game if that was the case, so Satan has been reborn as, we kid you not, "Neo-Satan", and has renamed the Earth Nu-Hades — and made it an outpost of hell.

All this, in a roundabout way, brings us to the game. Your task, unsurprisingly, is to take Satan and his forces down once and for all. To do this, you head a crack squad of soldiers, armed to the teeth with weaponry, religious zeal, a vast stockpile of pre-emptive penance and passages from the bible to take literally.

WORDS AND CHAINSAWS
There are four character types for the forces of good — Templars, Nuns, Seraphs and Combat Droids, and two individuals of each to choose from. Each is ranked in four areas — firepower, melee combat, faith and speed, so you have a reasonable range of strengths and strategic options within your team.

For instance, Nuns are lightweight and very fast, making them ideal scouts, but rather weak in combat. Let's hope the differences between characters run deep and actually impact the way you approach situations.

Ranged attacks and melee combat will both be integral in Apocalyptica, and the weapon selection reflects this, with the usual high powered guns mixed in with an array of nasty looking swords and chainsaws.

Hopefully players will have enough moves and abilities to raise the hand-to-hand combat in Apocalyptica above the hack'n'slash common in the genre.

Apocalyptica runs on the Quake 3 engine, and it really does look like a marriage of Q3A and UT 2003... with a little FAKK 2 thrown in for good measure. The aesthetic is very much gothic/medieval meets high tech, so settings are littered with satanic/religious imagery, and range from crumbling medieval castles

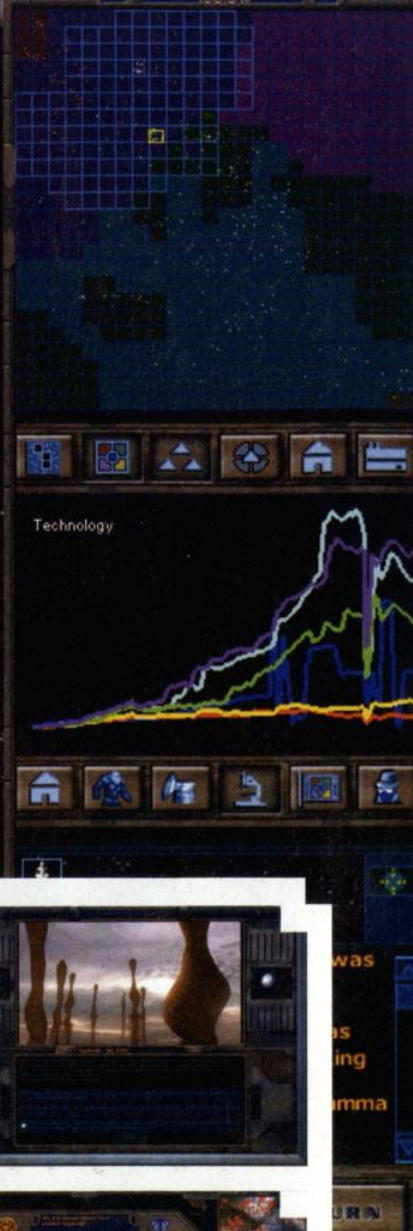
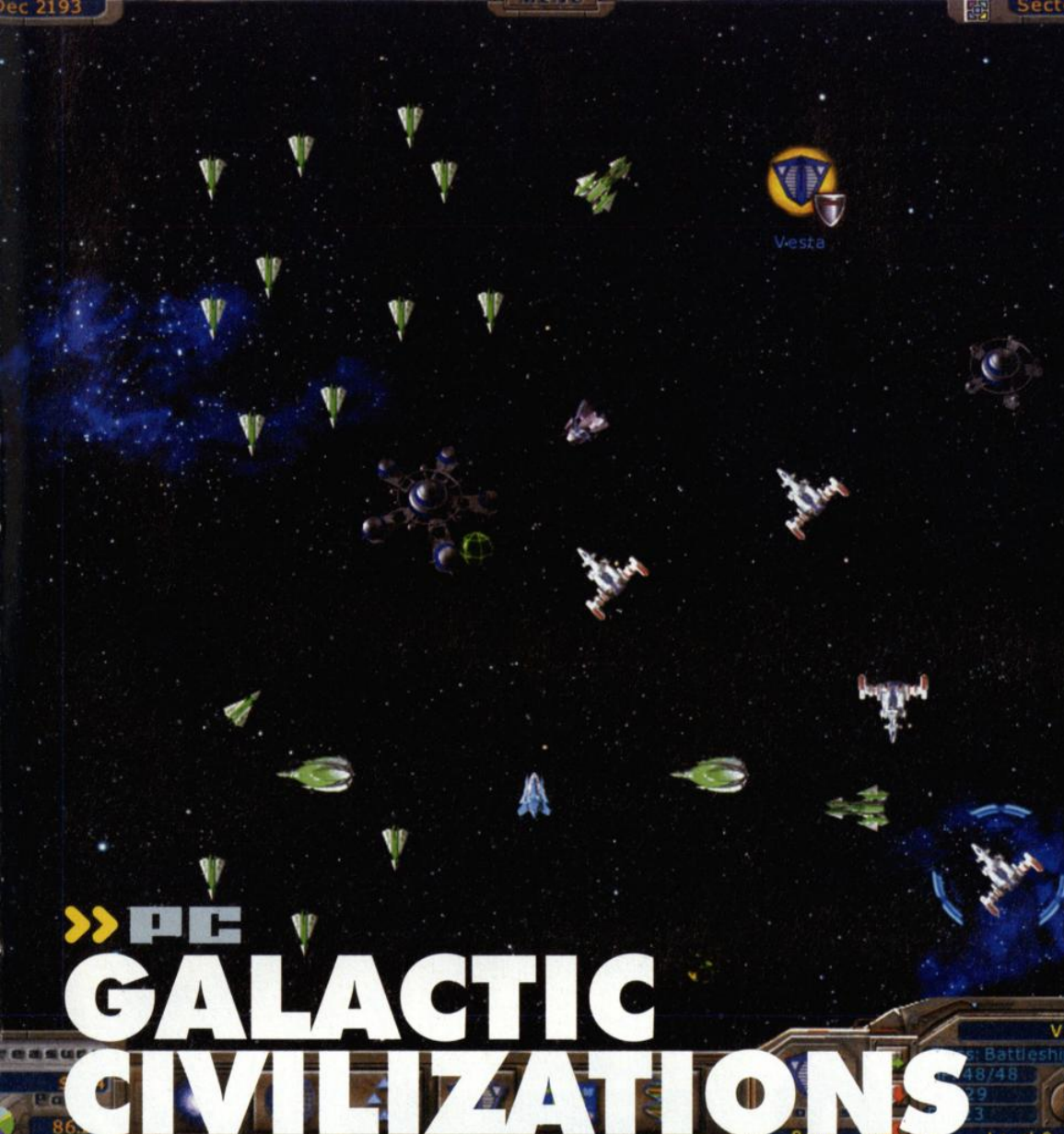
WHAT WE'D LIKE TO SEE:
Good team AI and novel mission objectives.



Nuns in thigh-high boots. Mmmm...

with arching stained glass windows to techno industrial complexes, orbiting spaceships, and the ultimate cliché - the depths of hell.

That said, we're sure Konami have plenty of cool stuff up their sleeves. If the skills system and team mechanics are fleshed out properly, and backed up by compelling and varied missions, this could be a new breed of third person action game. Also cool is that you'll be able to play through the single player game co-operatively. This one could be a must-have for Xbox Live owners! We're expecting Konami to implement some cool team-based multiplayer modes too. After all, with such an epic, good vs evil setting there's great scope for interesting playmodes. <<<



>> PC GALACTIC CIVILIZATIONS

CATEGORY: Strategy >> PLAYERS: 1-Multi >> PUBLISHER: Strategy First >> AVAILABLE: TBA >> **WOW-O-METER**

Master of Orion? Never heard of it. Galactic Civilizations is where you should be directing your eyes, my friends. As the leader of humanity, it's your job to conquer, colonise and dominate the galaxy. Who cares about those peaceful weird-lookin' aliens — you must pave the way for humans to successfully pollute, terrorise and cripple the galaxy and its natural resources. President Bush would be proud, y'all.

STRANGE OBJECTS

Victory can come to you in a variety of ways. Either research technologies and build an unstoppable military force, crush the universe with your economic might, or use your political

power to manipulate your way to success. So... why should you care to do any of this? Well the developer, Stardock, are the experienced brains behind The Corporate Machine, and the original Galactic Civilizations that was released in the early 90s for OS/2. The multi-threaded AI they've developed is exceptionally impressive, and the depth of play that Galactic Civilizations offers will have any strategy fan absorbed for weeks.

One the most important aspects of the game is the need to investigate and explore the galaxy you exist in, sending out scout ships and survey vessels to analyse strange objects and locations in your vicinity. Eventually, you'll discover the other alien races (who you won't even understand

until you research a language translator), and crucial resources. You'll then have to contend with a complex research tree and choose how you develop your civilisation depending on the personal objectives you wish to achieve.

Naturally, space combat becomes a big part of winning your way with stubborn aliens, and you can even build your own version of the Death Star to keep neighbouring star systems in line with the United Earth. However, there are far more insidious ways of seizing control than just utilising firepower...

LIFE-SUCKING

When you start the game, you have the choice of sticking with the life-sucking single-player option, or playing on stardock.net where your game can become part of the Metaverse. In the Metaverse, your victories and defeats will be recorded and ranked, so you can see how you stack up against other players. You can also take part in



Stats. You know you love it.

WHAT WE'D LIKE TO SEE: Think they could sneak the original on there somewhere?

multiplayer games between a variety of players that are "saved" on stardock.net so you can come back and continue your quest later. Other players will even be able to look at your game, check the statistics and see how each player is developing. You might even pick up ideas and strategies from observing other players' techniques.

But multiplayer strategy gaming isn't really the focus of Galactic Civilizations. It's simply a way of extending the shelf life of a game that will undoubtedly rule your life for many moons. If you're tired of waiting for Masters of Orion 3, then set your sights on Galactic Civilizations — a game that has the potential to offer an even more in-depth single player space conquest experience. <<<





Hold on... where's the good guy gone?

>>GBA CASTLEVANIA: ARIA OF SORROW

CATEGORY: Platformer/RPG >> PLAYERS: 1 >>
PUBLISHER: Konami >> AVAILABLE: Late 2003



et another Castlevania game is on the cards for the Game Boy Advance. We may still be waiting for Harmony of Dissonance to come out locally, but it looks like we'll already have to add another to the waiting list.

Aria of Sorrow will be the first Castlevania game to be set in the future, to not feature a hero who is related to the Belmont clan, and to allow the player to absorb the souls of their enemies. On top of the usual armament of melee weapons, the enemy souls can provide the player with a variety of unique abilities and attacks. Using the GBA link cable, you'll also be able to trade enemy souls with your friends (there are over 100 in the game).

At this stage, Konami have been

careful to not mention the appearance of Dracula, so it could be there is another evil threat this time around. You play the role of high school student, Soma Cruz, who awakens inside a mysterious castle after passing out during a solar eclipse, so despite its classic Castlevania appearance, there could be a lot more to Aria of Sorrow than meets the eye.



WOW-O-METER



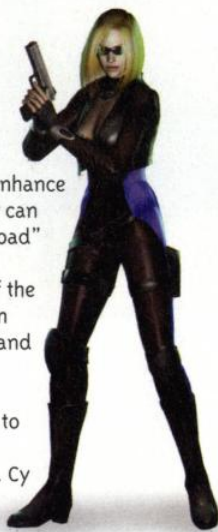
>>PS2 CY GIRLS

CATEGORY: Action >> PLAYERS: 1 >>
PUBLISHER: Konami >> AVAILABLE: Mid 2003

Take a couple of sexy girls, add some skin-tight costumes, a dash of Metal Gear Solid style gameplay, a pinch of cyberspace adventuring, and a kooky Japanese story line, and you'd have Cy Girls. This is a game based on, of all things, a set of action figure toys that are very popular in Japan as "fighting heroines".

The two girls sport some very different combat abilities. One is brawny and handy with long-range weaponry (a girl who loves guns), and the other is more of a ninja, better at stealth and hand-to-hand combat (and deadly with a katana). Both, however, are acrobatic assassins who are able to jack — or "dive" — into

the internet to enhance their skills. They can literally "download" new fighting techniques. Half the game is based in the real-world, and the other in a virtual reality where you have to contend with enemy "divers". Cy Girls looks like a very stylish piece of work, so start warming up those Dual Shocks.



WOW-O-METER



We must fight for this... icy seat... thing.



>>PC WARCRAFT III: The Frozen Throne

CATEGORY: RTS >> PLAYERS: 1-Multi >>
PUBLISHER: Blizzard >> AVAILABLE: Mid 2003

If you've been exhausting your copy of Warcraft III: Reign of Chaos, desperate for something to breath new life into your tired little humans and orcs, then dance your little dance of joy — an expansion pack, The Frozen Throne, is coming our way.

Featuring new heroes and units (one new unit, the Blood Mage, are high elves driven by a lust for power and teetering on the brink of madness, but still faithful to the Alliance) for all the playable races, you'll be returning to the war-torn land of Azeroth to stop an evil Lich King from being revived from his

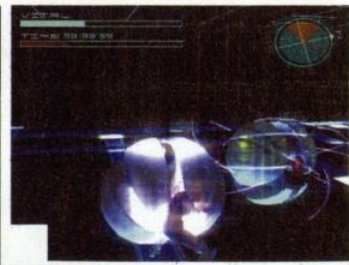
WOW-O-METER



icy imprisonment.

The expansion pack will also come with an advanced world editor, new multiplayer maps, three new tilesets (with a host of new beasts to hack to pieces), player built shops unique for each race (featuring new unique items), more battle.net options, and both neutral buildings and heroes for everyone to take advantage of.

Blizzard are well known for the quality of their expansion packs, so start tucking a few dollars away for this one.



Distracting the enemy with fan service.

WIN WIN WIN

ENTRIES CLOSE APRIL 9TH

WIN TENCHU III!

■ Tenchu III: Wrath of Heaven is a return to that good old sneak 'em up ninja action that we enjoyed so much in Tenchu and Tenchu II: Birth of the Assassins. With its grappingly good co-operative play mode and intense single player game, you should definitely try to nab one of FOUR packs we have to give away! Not only will you get the game, but a cool Tenchu poster too!

To be in with a chance to win, just put your name and address on the back of an envelope and write:

❏ In 50 words or less, describe how your Ninja abilities would get you inside Hyper HQ to steal your copy of Tenchu.

Send your entry to: Tenchu! Bless you, Hyper, 78 Renwick St, Redfern, NSW 2016.

FOR
PS2



WIN RAYMAN 3: HOODLUM HAVOC!

■ Ahh oui! Rayman returns in all his limbless glory. Yet another great fun platformer has been added to the Rayman series, and it's possibly the best so far. Thanks to Ubisoft, we have five copies of the game on Xbox and five cool Dark Lum toys to give away!

If you'd like to win, just put your name and address on the back of an envelope along with your answer to this question:

❏ Name the band who have contributed a song to the Rayman 3 intro.

Send your entry to: Rayman Havoc, Hyper, 78 Renwick St, Redfern, NSW 2016.

FOR
XBOX



Terms & Conditions: 1. Entry is open to residents of Australia and New Zealand except employees and immediate families of Next Publishing Pty Ltd and its agencies associated with the promotion. 2. Only entries completed with these terms and conditions will be eligible. 3. Competition begins 9am Feb 25 and entries close at 6pm April 9. 4. In determining eligibility the judge's decision is final and no correspondence will be entered into. 5. The winner will be drawn at 9am April 10 at Next Publishing Pty Ltd 78 Renwick St, Redfern NSW 2016. 6. Prizes must be taken as offered and are not redeemable for cash. 7. The promoter is not responsible for misdirected or lost mail. 8. The winners will be notified by mail and results published in the June issue of Hyper on sale May 7th. 9. Nine winners will each receive a Tenchu III or Rayman 3 game. Total prize value is \$899.55. 10. The promoter is Next Publishing Pty Ltd ABN 88 002 647 645 of 78 Renwick St, Redfern NSW 2016.

TAAAWL

>> CAM SHEA



Uru: Online Ages Beyond Myst

<http://uru.ubi.com>

At E3 last year, Cyan Worlds and Ubi Soft announced that the next chapter in the Myst series would be online. The game now has an official title - Uru: Online Ages Beyond Myst, and bit by bit more information has been filtering out regarding this intriguing title.

THE GAME URU... OR GURU FOR SHORT

When Uru was announced, we must admit we were sceptical. Myst as a massively multiplayer online game? At first it sounds like a very poor fit for the franchise. After all, Myst and Riven were profoundly "mainstream" games. These were games for people who had never played games before. Bearing that in mind, it makes sense that despite the already sizeable online gaming

market, that the core Myst demographic will be among the last adopters for online gaming. Is the time right for them to start playing online yet? We'll see. The other potential issue is simply that Myst and Riven were such solitary experiences. You sat back, soaked up the atmosphere, worked on arcane puzzles and moved around at your own (often very slow) pace. Surely translating this experience into a persistent online universe wouldn't work!

However, all the information coming out of Cyan Worlds indicates that they've really thought this one through - as you'd hope from a game that's been in development for around five years! Original Myst creator Rand Miller is once again at the helm of Uru, and he's hoping to create a new breed of online game; one based on

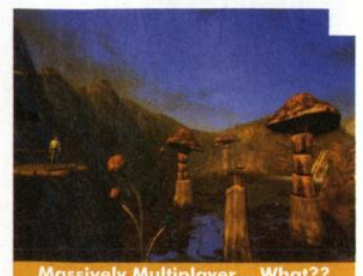
exploration and community.

Uru has a very different focus from the traditional online gaming milieu. It's not an RPG - you're not preoccupied with stat building, character classes or combat. Instead, it's an exploration game - discovering new areas to access and solving puzzles along with other players. Even puzzle solving will not be a focal point. You won't have to solve puzzles to progress, but they will be there as side quests for those inclined. We're already imagining that Rand and his team will include a few mind-bendingly difficult puzzles that the entire Uru community will work on to crack - resulting in a common sense of achievement when they're conquered. There will also be mini-games that players can compete against one another in, but by and large the gameplay is about

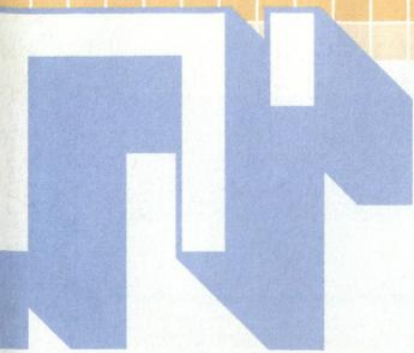
discovery. Weird eh?

The game is based around the original Myst mythology, but set in an all-new world. The main hub is an underground city that predates human civilisation and was built by the D'ni empire. Passage to other places will be via books, just like in the first two games, and by discovering books in the city players will be able to venture far and wide.

Uru is taking an interesting approach to the persistent world



Massively Multiplayer... What??



Bustling Online Community. Eh?

concept. From what we've seen, players will actually have three main, and very distinct, areas that the experience takes place in. These move from the micro to the macro scale. The smallest is your own personal Age, which is where you keep track of the books and items you've collected. This is basically a chill-out and organise area. Next up is the neighbourhood level, which will function much like a chat room. You can either hang out and talk to other players or use it as a space to meet up with friends before going out adventuring together. From there it's out into the big wide world of Uru, where you'll meet other players and NPCs, solve puzzles and find books. Incidentally, real-time voice communication is supported, but you can also just chat via text.

ALTHOUGH JOSH IS NOWHERE IN SIGHT...

Perhaps the element that most separates Myst from other online games, and also the element that will ensure that it succeeds, is the team's commitment to new content for those playing the game. Cyan Worlds are resolved to adding new content EVERY DAY, with something substantial every week and an entirely new Age every month. Thus, the driving gameplay principle of exploration can be fulfilled indefinitely. As Rand himself puts it "The Myst Online universe will provide players with a journey that will never end".

Quite how the "rich storylines" that Cyan Worlds have also spoken of will fit in with this is yet to be seen. Indeed, given the fact that



A player hangs out online with all his friends! now, wait a second...

this is a massively multiplayer game, we're intensely curious as to how Cyan Worlds will be dealing with storyline in general.

All things considered, Uru is a bit of a gamble for Cyan Worlds. They're backing their own ability to create compelling worlds that people will want to discover, explore and talk about. And they're hoping

that it will be the sense of community that will help this game succeed. Of course, it doesn't hurt that the franchise is one of the more recognisable in PC gaming (almost 12 million copies sold worldwide thus far)! Uru: Online Ages Beyond Myst is undergoing closed beta testing as we speak, and should be on store shelves before the year is out. <<

VISIT HYPER ONLINE AT WWW.HYPERACTIVE.COM.AU

it's no IGN, but, you know, hey.



hyperactive 3.1
www.Hyperactive.com.au

BACK OF THE NET



**JACKSON
GOTHE-
SNAPE**

*"The internet?
Is that thing
still around?"*

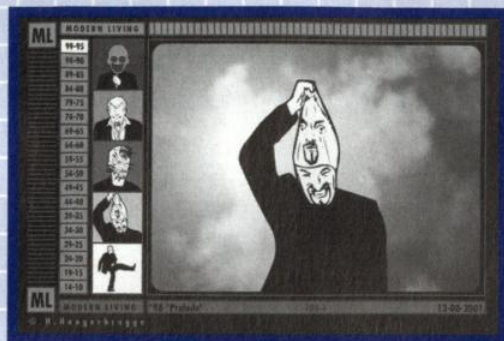
>> Due to Ms. Information's sojourn into the South East Asian actual reality, Hyper's internet column has fallen into my lap. But there's a problem. You see, it's damn near impossible to share tales of internet practice without delving into the clichés of novelty porn, a middle-aged man's pitifully manipulative virtual identities, Napster, spam, and the broadband farce that we call Australia. So great is the number of netly paths, and thus so unique is each individual's experience, the few common features of users' net experiences rise (or descend) to infamy.

These features, and the media's propagation of them, are, to a degree, offenders in the proliferation of a flawed and limiting net perception. The internet does and has always promised so much – although, for many, this gleam of potential is becoming obscured. Originally, it was to be the medium that was to revolutionise our way of being. But now, like the kids who have never set foot in a dishwasher-less household, the internet generation knows no different. Now, the net is taken for granted, because that flawed and limited perception is, in fact, a self-inflicting disease. The tentacles of familiarity and routine have infiltrated our browsers, and have drained the wonder from the web.

There's the usual humour to be gained from those amusing online comics, while the pop-philosophy exchanges common on your favourite forum's off-topic message board can be compelling, but, (de)evolving past the awe of net novelty numbs a user's optimism, drawing a lid over once wide eyes. We all get to the stage where our bookmarks/favourites act as double-lines on the information superhighway.

Why not try an internet romance, research ekranoplans, feel lucky on Google, or converse with a pensioner. Heck, have cybersex with them. It is, after all, a web of wonder.

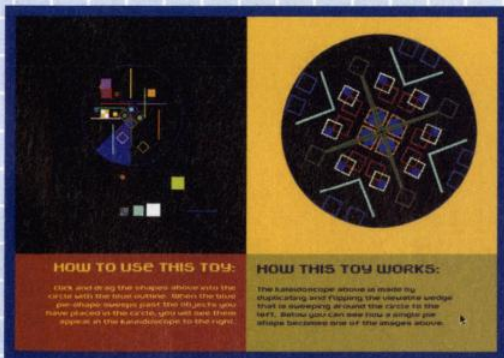
Links



MODERN LIVING

www.hoogerbrugge.com/ml.html

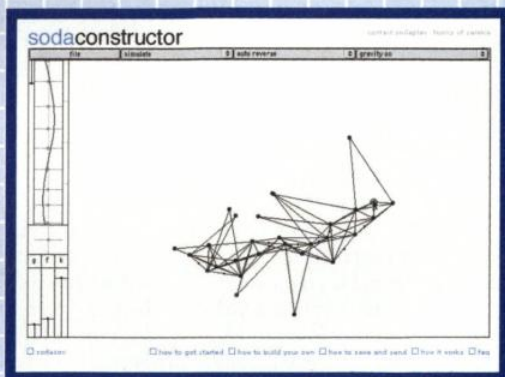
>> God, there are just so many design sites out there! Modern Living is yet another one, and very cool to boot. From a minimal control panel, you have access to around 100 (semi)interactive flash animations. The style of art changes a fair bit, but they all revolve around the one character (presumably the artist) in a variety of bizarre situations and skits. Some have a message, some are wacky, some inspired and many hilarious.



ZE FRANK

www.zefrank.com/

>> Zis is ze frankly hilarious site ya? If you're looking for a way to wile away an hour or two at work – without actually doing any work – then good ol' Frank may be able to help you. From the instructional videos on dancing and dating etiquette, through to a huge selection of flash tools and games to muck around with, this site is a good way to get you through those oh so long gaps between durry breaks.



SODAPLAY

sodaplay.com

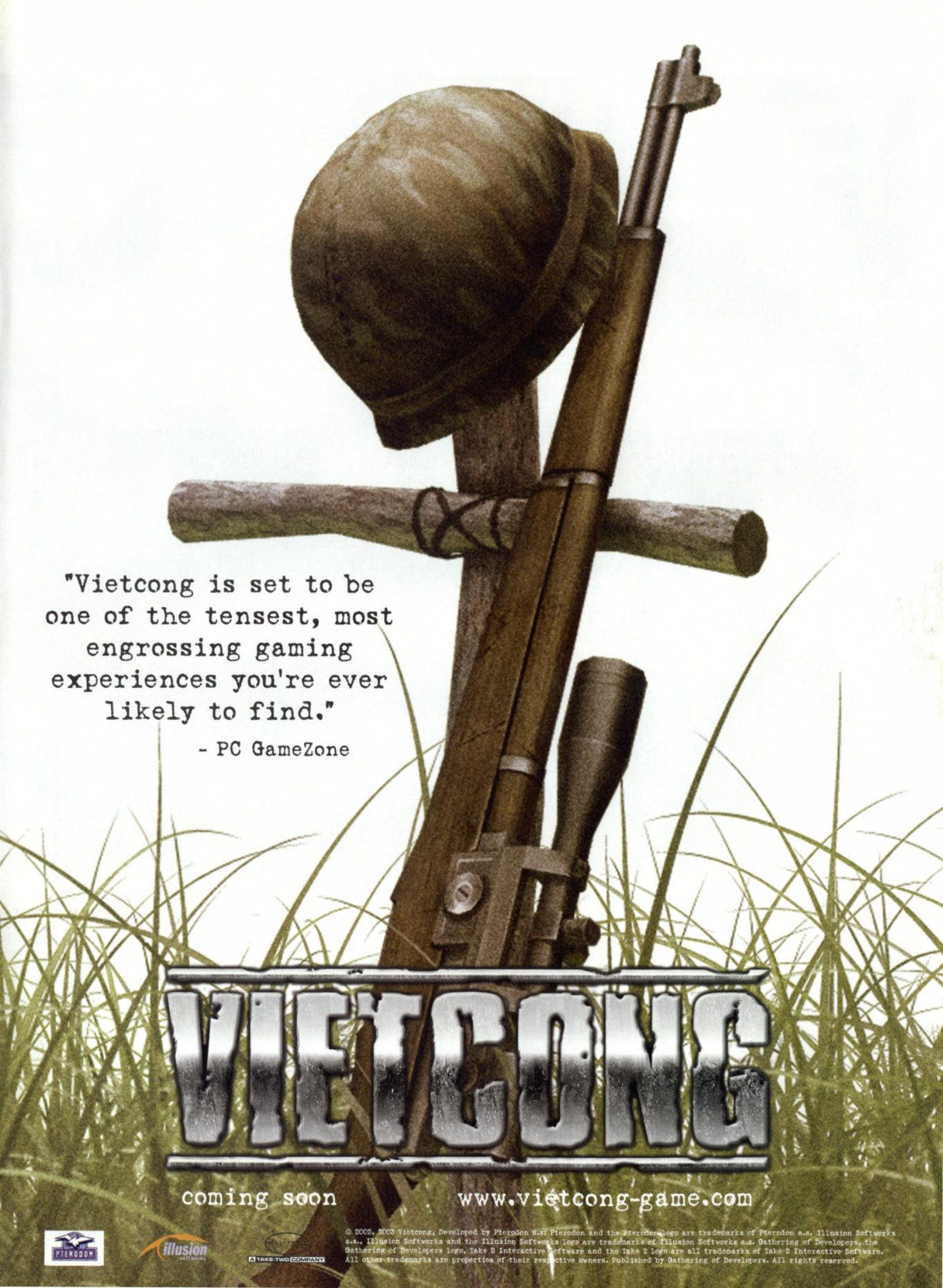
>> Well, this site is a bit of a trip, and if you didn't appreciate just how cool physics were before coming, you will by the time you leave. The main attraction is the "soda constructor", a tool that lets you construct and play with complex arrays of springs and weights in a virtual environment. It really is a lot more fun than it sounds, allowing you to create bizarre animalistic structures and perpetual motion machines. Plus, you can tinker with gravity, friction, spring stiffness and muscle power. Great fun just to muck around with, as well as a cool study of emergent behaviour.



HOW STUFF WORKS

howstuffworks.com

>> Those of you with an inquisitive mind will love this site. How Stuff Works is the ultimate online resource for information on... stuff. Ever wanted to know exactly how a Segway works? Or a stun gun? Or digital TV? Or the beer brewing process? Or how about how to put together a proper home theatre setup? This site will tell you – in detail too. It has a sizeable archive of articles on a vast range of subjects, from the workings of the body through to weaponry and home entertainment, all written by leading people in the respective fields. If Dr Carl was a website, this would be it.



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one of the tensest, most
engrossing gaming
experiences you're ever
likely to find."

- PC GameZone

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REVIEWS



»PC

GAME OF THE MONTH

48

Freelancer

Chris Roberts bangs his digital anvil and forges an epic piece of space adventuring.

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GAME THEORY

DANIEL STAINES



» So, I see that Goldeneye managed to snare the coveted number one position in this year's Readers Top 50 list. This is interesting, because Goldeneye (for all its brilliance) doesn't sport any of the iconic characters usually associated with the greatest video games of all time. Sure it stars the irrepressible Mr. Bond, but he's hardly what one would consider gaming royalty.

And here's where we come to the focus of this month's article: why is it that a lot of the best games in history are also those that are driven by some of the best characters our medium has produced? Is there some kind of intrinsic correlation between an excellent game and an excellent character to star in it? Or are good games simply so powerful that they bias our opinion to the point of making us think that the characters that star in them are brilliant when in fact they're actually quite average?

Addressing the first question, it seems unlikely that there is a fundamental connection between excellent games and engaging digital personalities. One only has to look at the latter Tomb Raider titles to see that a truly fabulous character can star in an utterly average game without any really noticeable incongruity. Similarly, some of the best games ever may feature a cast of characters that are – for the most part – completely forgettable. Just take a look at Halo and Perfect Dark. And it isn't just because these games are first-person shooters either, because Garrett and SHODAN have shown categorically that a FPS persona can be as interesting and appealing as they come.

One the most interesting examples of the interaction between characters and the status of the game they star in can be found in Final Fantasy VII. It's been said on more than one occasion that FFXVII is just an average RPG hiding behind a cast of spellbinding personalities and this, I think, can be quite a convincing position if argued properly. Of course, one might respond by saying the exact opposite; that FFXVII is a masterpiece of gameplay that glorifies what is essentially a rather trite collection of fantasy clichés. After all, brooding loner Sephiroth is hardly the most original villain in the world is he?

Why not write and tell me what you think?
game_theory@whentitsdone.com

HYPER CREW TOP 5

Eliot - Editor

1. Super Metroid – SNES
"Ooh... Samus in her undies!"
2. Freelancer – PC
3. Rayman 3 – GameCube
4. Shadowrun – Sega Megadrive
5. Sim City 4 – PC

Cam - Deputy Editor

1. The Simpsons – TV
"Like a fine wine, it just gets better with age (mmm... season 14)."
2. Indiana Jones - Xbox
3. Guilty Gear X2 - PS2
4. Sim City 4 - PC
5. Tactics Ogre - GBA

Malcolm - Art Guy

1. Guilty Gear X2 - PS2
"Heaven or hell? Let's Rock!"
2. Sly Raccoon – PS2
3. Panzer Dragoon Orta – Xbox
4. Eternal Darkness – GameCube
5. Pro Evolution Soccer 2 – PS2

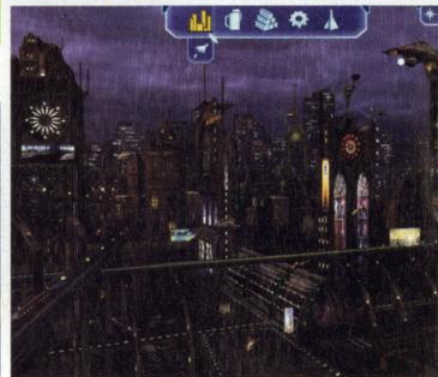
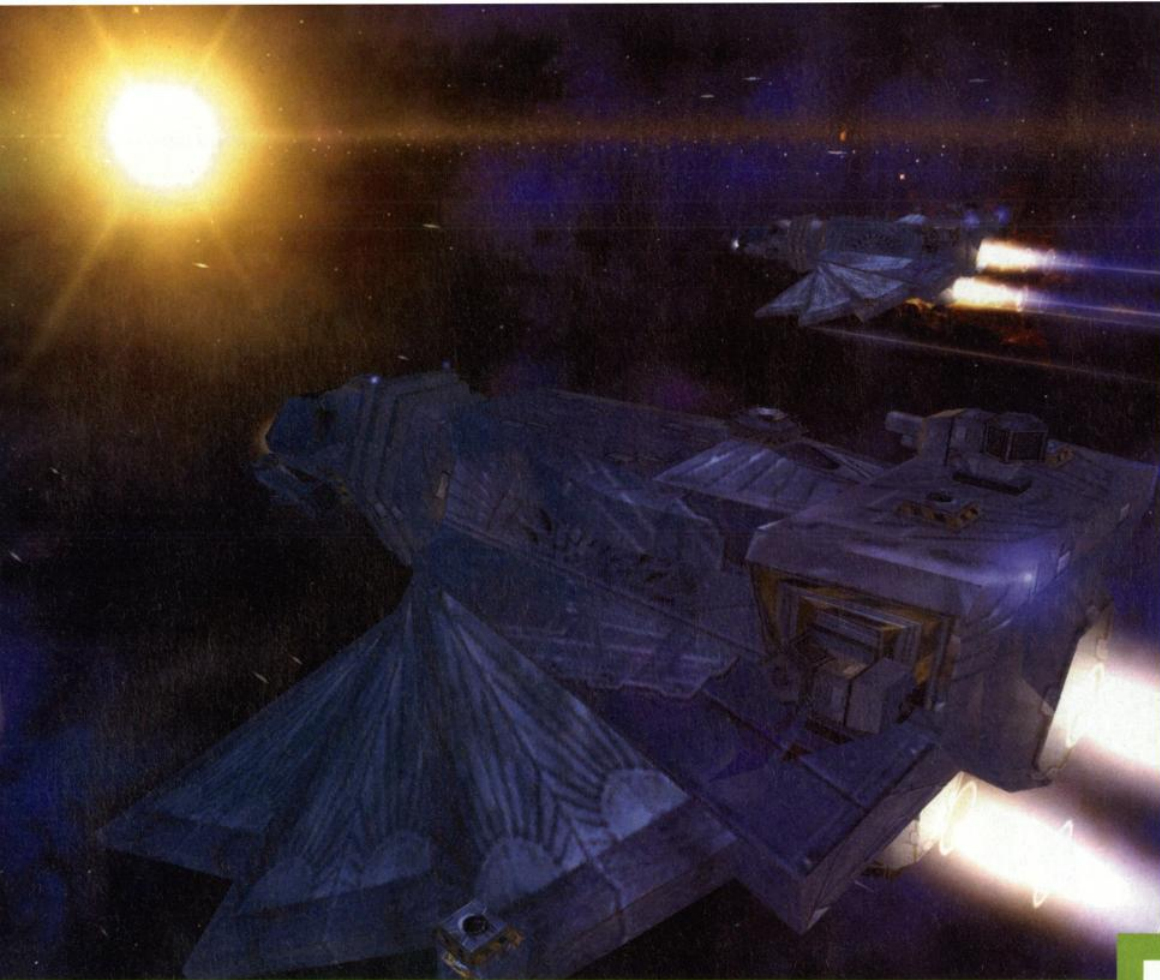
Daniel Staines - Reviewer

1. Planescape: Torment - PC
"What can change the nature of a man? Playing Torment for the first time..."
2. Hitman 2 - Xbox
3. Super Monkey Ball - GameCube
4. Zelda: A Link to the Past - GBA
5. Castlevania: HoD – GBA

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!



PC

Freelancer

CATEGORY: Space Combat >> PLAYERS: 1-16 >> PUBLISHER: Microsoft >> PRICE: \$99.95 >> RATING: M >> AVAILABLE: TBA >> REQUIRED: PIII 600

ELIOT FISH does his best to become an elite privateer...

Ever since movies like *Star Wars* and *Star Trek* awakened the space adventurer in all of us, gamers have been looking for something to let them really live out their sci-fi exploration fantasies. Sure, we've made and killed friends in the soap opera that was *Wing Commander*, we rose through the ranks of the Empire in the brilliant *TIE Fighter*, tried to command a crew in *Freespace*, we cruised around the galaxy hocking our wares in *Privateer* and we tried to dock our spaceships countless times in *Elite*, but it seemed the time was ripe for a game to try and combine all the best bits into one truly believable universe. Well, it seems the time was ripe for a game like *Freelancer*...

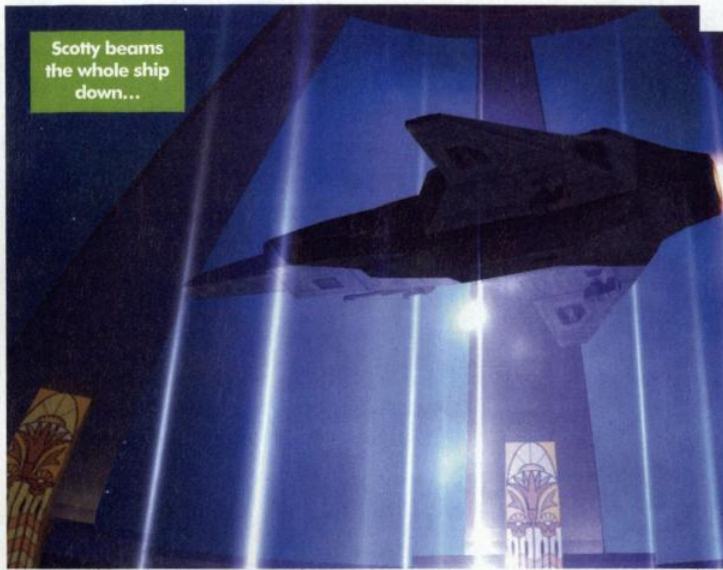
THE EXACT INGREDIENTS
If you've ever played the brilliant piece of Mac Shareware from Ambrosia Software, *Escape Velocity*, then you've played *Freelancer*. Yes, it really is that obvious. *Freelancer* is a glorious 3D version of *Escape Velocity*, whether developer Digital Anvil will admit it or not. Whilst you could say that *Escape Velocity* was simply a 2D top-down update of the old classic space combat/trading games such as *Elite* and *Privateer* anyway, there is still the fact that the combination of gameplay elements in *Freelancer* match too closely the exact ingredients in *Escape Velocity*. If *Freelancer* wasn't in 3D, it would be hard to tell the two games apart. Basically, it's a shameless rip-off. Maybe no one at Microsoft thought anyone actually

played games on Mac? Oh well, it looks like that's for Ambrosia and Microsoft to worry about... If it's a 3D *Escape Velocity* you've always wanted, then step right into that cockpit, pilot.

Your name is Trent (shame, really) and you're one of very few survivors of the destruction of a space station that was attacked by space terrorists. Naturally, before you know it, a grand conspiracy theory is breathing down your neck and you start to question who you can trust. The great thing about *Freelancer* is that you don't necessarily need to trust anyone if you don't really want to. Hell, you can ignore the story

completely, and fly around the galaxy plundering other ships for their cargo or just doing the odd freelance mission. The freedom to do what you want is the key to the whole concept. If you don't like the ship you start the game with, you just have to earn enough money to

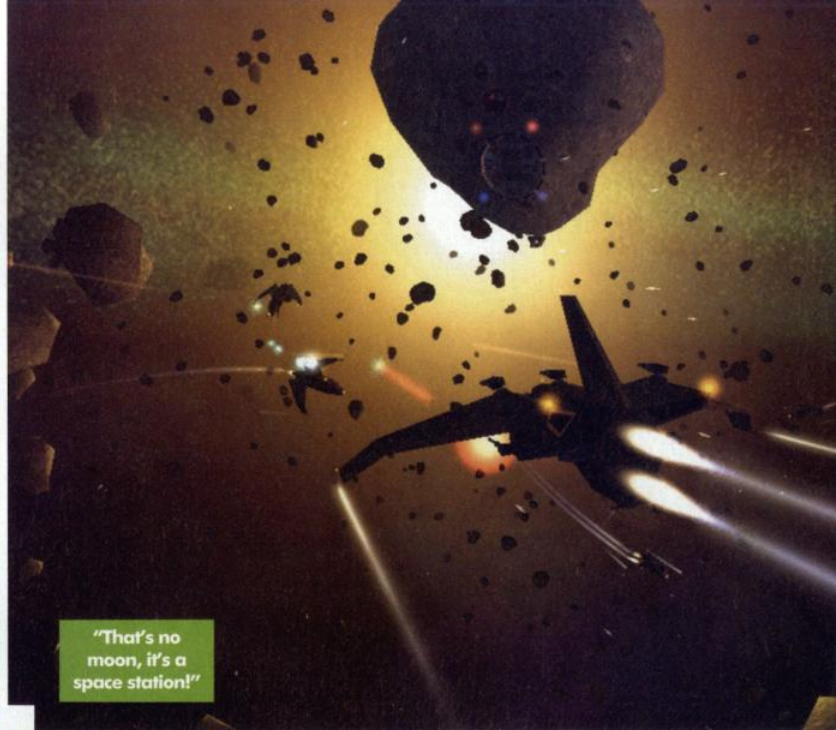




Scotty beams the whole ship down...



"That blast came from the Death Star...!"



"That's no moon, it's a space station!"



Han Solo's little known sister, Juni.

buying new weapons and gadgets always makes venturing back out into that inky galaxy an exciting journey

get a new one, or just upgrade the hell out of it to make do for the time being. The idea is to progress at a pace that is comfortable for you, the player. And when you've got the hankering for a more meaningful existence, there's always the main story to continue...

SCRAM BEFORE THEY BREAK YOUR LEGS

The structure of Freelancer is very straightforward. When you're docked at a location, you have the option to buy and trade in commodities, upgrade your ship with new weapons and custom parts, read the news in the bar, check the mission board for freelance jobs and chat to the various patrons who are sitting around sipping on space ale

for rumours or under-the-table deals. When you launch back out in space, you then can fly to any location on the star map you currently have access to (you need to be authorised to travel down certain warpholes), take part in some space combat and then land somewhere and see what that particular port of call has to offer and who's hanging out there. Repeat. That's the basic formula. Of course, when you figure in the fact that there are 48 galactic systems (each one littered with many, many places to visit) and almost 2000 NPCs in the game to chat to, you can see that things will eventually become slightly more complex than you'd at first expect.

Oh, and of course there's your

own personal reputation system to keep an eye on. Does the Bounty Hunters Guild like you at the moment? Will they offer you the odd mission or tell you to scram before they break your legs? Should you keep doing what the Liberty police want you to do, or start helping out the Rogues who have been systematically shut down by the powers that be? The intricate web of decision making in Freelancer is what will drive most gamers to continue to plunder its galactic depths. When you truly feel like you're in control of the evolution of your character is when a game tends to have really got its hooks into you. Freelancer does that very well.

But this seemingly endless role-playing in space doesn't quite feel as fleshed out as it should. For starters, besides the main story line (and its associated characters) that progresses extremely linearly, there are no Wing Commander style relationships to build with anyone else in the universe, which is a surprise coming from Chris Roberts (the man who brought us Wing

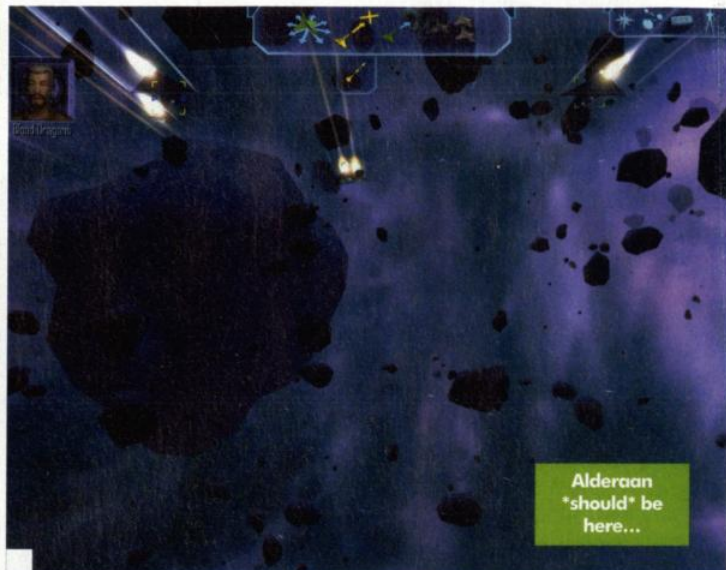
Commander in the first place, and who always seemed to value character over meaningless combat). Almost every single person you meet in the game may as well be randomly generated, as conversations tend to be almost identical (they are dynamically generated) and you never ever get offered anything other than pertinent game information. No one ever discusses their personal

MULTI PLAYA

»»The Multiplayer aspect of Freelancer is quite intriguing. Unfortunately, at the time of writing this review there were no servers operating to test out the potentially brilliant co-operative play. Yes, you and a friend can cruise around together and ambush innocent trade vessels, or take a difficult seek and destroy mission and try to complete it together. The possibilities here sound very cool, and we look forward to meeting you all out there... somewhere...



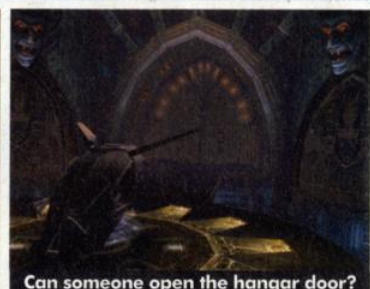
"That's no moon! It's... two moons..."



Alderaan *should* be here...



Han Solo's little known brother, Trent.



Can someone open the hangar door?



Time for some booze and fast women.



Hey big boy, want to buy some booty?



TRUE ESCAPISM

»» Go check out Ambrosia Software's website at www.AmbrosiaSW.com and download some of their shareware and demos. Great company, great games. Most importantly, take your time to investigate their brilliant game, *Escape Velocity Nova*, which is available for both Mac and PC. This is the third game in the EV series; the series that seems to be the blueprint for *Freelancer*.

struggle with the system, or makes any bond with your player character, so they might as well be ATM machines and robots that offer up missions just as the mission board itself does. The universe may be heavily populated, but it feels strangely lonely at the same time.

The illusion of life does hold up well for most of the game — ships fly in and out of systems, going about their business, chirping up on the comm about where they're headed or what cargo they're carrying. You'll also get responses when you randomly hail a passing vessel, as long as your reputation is good with them. The game also looks fantastic, and that always helps immerse the player in the fictional world they're been thrust into. But it's still disappointing that there are no recurring characters outside of the singular story thread to pose the player with the odd crucial decision and sub plot. The reputation system is intriguing, but if there are no friends to be made within any of the

factions, then why bother aligning yourself with any of them? It makes the player's actions in the game feel less important than they should. The way you personally evolve is handled well, so there really should

be other sub characters in the game to evolve along with you and be affected by the player's decisions. That's what made *Wing Commander* so effective, and it's sad to not see that concept be continued in a game that is practically begging for it.

DEBRIS FOR THE SPACE SLUGS

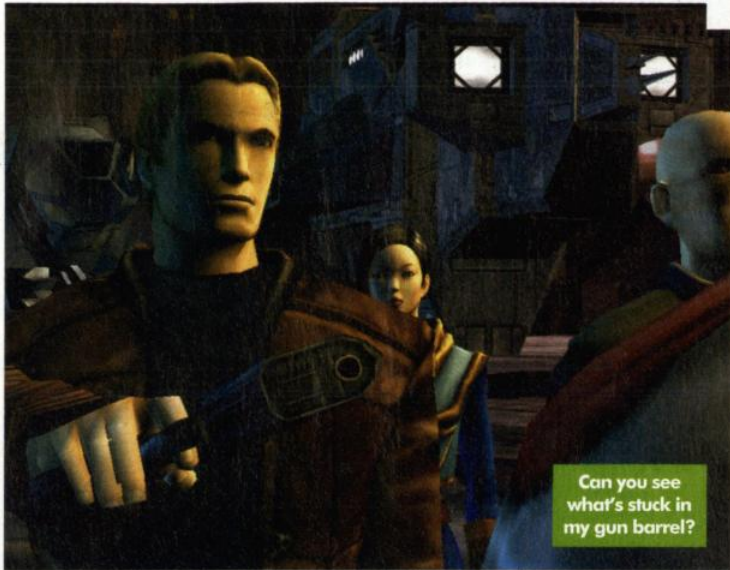
Begone foul joystick, as this game is entirely keyboard and mouse controlled. Thrusting and strafing is handled with the good old "WASD" keys, and the mouse will direct your ship as well as handle the speed in which you turn. When travelling longer distances, an autopilot can be used and then you can switch to manual free mouse control when combat appears to be on the menu. During combat, you can even still click on items in your on-screen HUD

For Freelancer stuff, check out Lancer's HQ: www.3dactionplanet.com/lancer

menus with the mouse, as mouse flight can be enabled by holding down the right mouse button, making switching between selecting and aiming a breeze. It takes a small amount of getting used to, but the mouse control suits the space combat perfectly well and it's a natural progression for most gamers from years of first-person shooter play. With your hand resting on the keyboard, you then have quick access to every single command and hotkey you can think of. It works a treat, and the way combat plays out feels just like any space combat game before it — except with a far greater degree of user friendliness.

Getting yourself a new ship and/or buying new weapons and gadgets





Can you see what's stuck in my gun barrel?



Wow, who knew space was brown?



"Coruscant. The whole planet is one giant city."



Man, your ship needs a new muffler.

decision making in Freelancer is what will **drive most gamers to continue to plunder its galactic depths**

always makes venturing back out into that inky galaxy an exciting journey. And combat plays out smoothly, is exciting and very fast-paced. Just like older space combat games, a small targeting reticule will help you lead your shots in order to attack moving targets at varying distances, and non-turret weapons such as missiles can be fired with the keyboard once you have lock-on.

Likewise, any countermeasures are simply dropped with the press of a key. The AI of the enemy craft is also pretty challenging and fairly unpredictable. Gone are the days when you could memorise the flight path of other ships during space combat. These suckers really manoeuvre around the place as if their life depends on it. Oh, and once they've become debris for the space

slugs out there, just remember to tractor in their loose cargo... you'll never know what you can sell off for an inflated price later.

As you might have expected, there are naturally a limited amount of variations on the space combat mission. There are the dogfighting missions, the escort missions, the seek and destroy missions, the capture missions and then a variety of combinations of those types. Some may find that Freelancer becomes too repetitive after extended play — especially if you're not following the main story missions and being rewarded with cutscenes and major changes to the political structure of the galaxy.

If you have a strong imagination, then Freelancer will definitely be a satisfying play and almost reach the dizzying expectations that have come from a "go anywhere, do anything" style of game that's been in development for as long as this one has. There's much to explore, a good story and hours of just fooling about the galaxy. Finally, another decent space combat game for the PC. <<<



PLUS: Huge sprawling universe, nice role playing, good combat.

MINUS: No sub plots, repetitive missions, ugly ship designs.

VISUALS SOUND GAMEPLAY

90 89 85

OVERALL

86

A great game that falls a little short of its promise.

REVIEW >> HYPER 51





Unreal II: THE AWAKENING

CATEGORY: Single-player FPS >> PLAYERS: 1 >> PUBLISHER: Infogrames >> PRICE: \$89.95 >> RATING: MA15+ >> AVAILABLE: Now >> REQUIRED: PIII 733, 256mb RAM, 3D card

JACKSON GOTHE-SNAPE limbers up his sniping finger.

In many ways, the original Unreal ushered in a new era for first-person shooters. Known for its ethereal alien environment, created by the first PC graphics engine capable of portraying a sense of the sublime, the original Unreal challenged the player's traditional expectations, empowering the terror of the Skaarj menace. The game forced reassessment of a FPS player's Quake-bred assumptions, transporting the player into a bold new FPS world — paralleling the experience of the game's stranded character.

features. There's been the crap, the fair, the great, the Deus Ex, the multiplayer-focused, the single-player adventures, the squad-based tactical shooters and Deer Hunter. Legend Entertainment, the developers of Unreal II, seem to have played them all. Because, you see, Unreal II has been seen before. And no, Hyper's not reviewing PC platinum titles all of a sudden; the game is, essentially, a compilation of great shooting moments from the recent past. Just as Unreal broke the FPS mould, Unreal II, symbolically, glues it all back together.

Yet, thankfully, it uses some fairly super glue. The visual richness and the graphics engine's versatility are the game's strongest suits. In the very first level, upon exiting a lofty command post, a stunning green

expanse will stretch out hundreds of feet below, reminding you that you are indeed playing Unreal. This near-obsession with scale continues throughout, as mighty vistas present themselves time and again for your exploration. Even indoor areas are marked by those unmistakably Unreally cavernous chambers.

However, don't for a minute think that this somehow jeopardises the detail in quality of each interior. Exhaustive textures and varying light conditions give a degree of character to each sci-fi setting, including some very

tasty dirty mirrors in one particular level. The depths of many buildings are intricate but oppressive, making the discovery of that crucial exit

truly liberating. Each environment offers something new by way of architectural style and function, and unique ecosystem, made up of both specific flora and fauna, and some levels, such as the early stormy night-time forest recovery mission, simply ooze atmosphere. The planet-covering organism, complete with surface hairs and internal chambers, is also a treat.

Having said that, the range of environments,

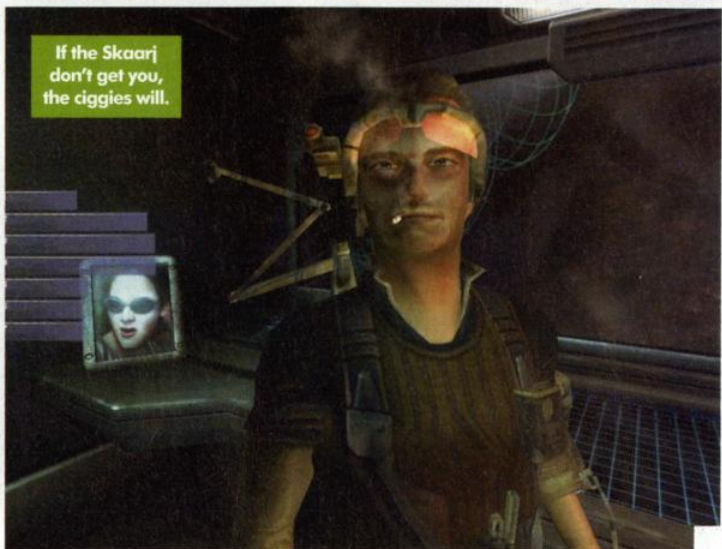


GLUE THAT

But that was then, and, they keep telling me, this is now. Since Unreal we've endured more first-person shooters than Hyper best-game



Surely, that's got to hurt...



If the Skaarj don't get you, the ciggies will.



Hey, you seen Master Chief around? No?



Tribes 2 eat your heart out, eh?

just as Unreal broke the FPS mould, Unreal II, symbolically, glues it all back together

mostly linked from mission to mission by seemingly random plot developments, fail to provide a sense of the aesthetic whole, a proper relationship between planets, corporations, military and alien menace, let alone references to the first game. While general coherence is admirably attempted through between-mission strolls around your ship the 'Atlantis', the range of levels, particularly in the first half of the game, seem to offer little more than variety for variety's sake — or, if you were more cynically inclined, variety for the sake maximising attention focused on the game as visual achievement (which, by the power, requires El Beasto of a machine). The general simplicity in level objectives, combined with the almost exclusively single-path levels, only aid a sense of

progression, not, unfortunately, a greater consideration of the Unreal universe that might have been gained through environments which dare players to discover. Is such an RPG-like worldly scope, if only for trivially explorative purposes, an unattainable ideal for a humble action-oriented first-person shooter?

SKAARJ ME 'ARTIES

There exists a anonymity of many enemies, that even spreads across the supposedly hierarchical Skaarj. Too rarely do we see them have any meaningful interaction with their slave race the Izarians, particularly in combat. But, then again, too rarely do we see more than a handful of enemies together, at all. The other new races are slightly more interesting, in particular 'the N', but all are generally

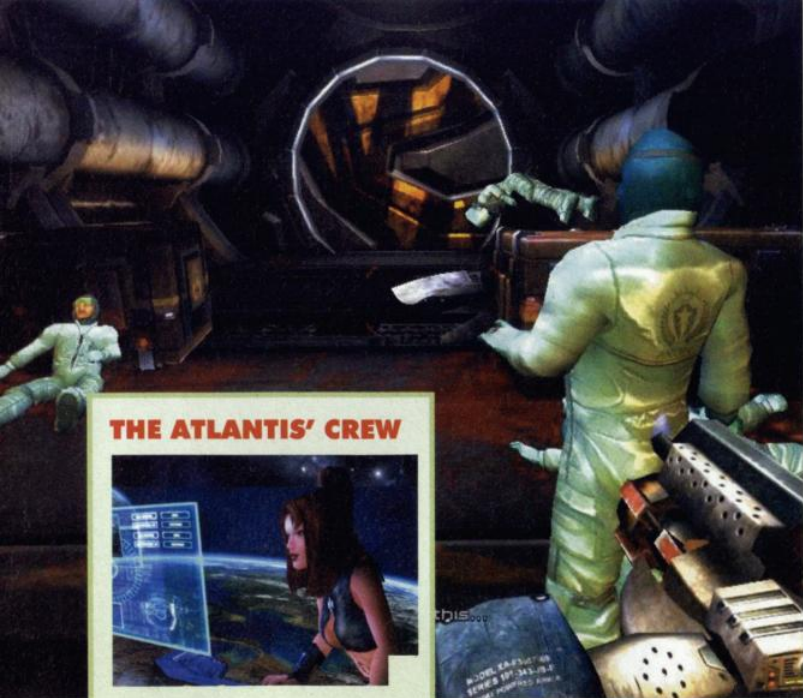
one-dimensionally scary — that which only draws from the common notions of alien. They have too weak a motive, and are too plainly characterised through aggressive but basic battle AI.

Yet each enemy does offer some impressive snarls. When in close proximity, your foes will seem to unleash a torrent of phlegm, according to your PC's speakers, in the form of some of the throatiest growls ever heard, and rattles, and gurgles, and squeals. Of course, this doesn't apply to your human opposition, who'll call out all the terribly normal oh so intimidating, coolly efficient milit-speak to their squad mates. But it is the alien noises in particular, next to some Half-Life-esque scripted sequences (such as one's helpless observations of some tech worker being torn apart by a couple of blue claws obscured from view by a malfunctioning door) and in particular, the synth-violin horror soundtrack, that can get the blood curdling in some of the more claustrophobic, dank interiors. It is at this point, when the enemies are, funnily enough, out of view, that the

game is at its most absorbing and, thus, frightening.

It's not that the Skaarj and co. — when they finally show their faces — appear overfriendly or anything, it's just the level of immersion created by the scripted suspense is lost in a single moment of realisation, as the revelation of the simplicity of the enemies' behaviour spoils the illusion. Predictable AI for each brand of nasty, most of which involve a general charge mentality, fails to create a menacing foe. Playing Unreal II, there won't be many occasions where you'll be so incredibly pumped that you load a couple of extra shottie blasts into every second placid corpse, just coz the f***er took off 100 shield points. The Skaarj are an impressively ominous foe while





THE ATLANTIS' CREW



Aida Shen

Aida, the token busty leather-clad babe with attitude, is the Atlantis' first officer with a background in intelligence. A colourful history with authority, she now appears satisfied with her Terran Colonial Authority post. She briefs you before each mission, and drops the odd hint about the past.



Isaak Borisov

Rumoured to have been discharged from the military after a stress-related breakdown, Isaak is the ship's rough engineer. Generally withdrawn, he'll pipe up any chance he gets when it comes to weapons. He uses his extensive network of arms connections to stock you up before each mission.



Ne'Ban

A goey blob in a humanoid suit, Ne'Ban is a Hex-Core alien on an exchange program with the Terran Colonial Authority. A fairly hot pilot, Ne'Ban lacks plenty when it comes to human interaction. But what are exchange programs for....



some of the other new races do offer something different, but corporate soldiers and mutated giant spiders (with some pre-battle "there's something down there, something big" radio communication, naturally) are unintentionally B-grade.

TWICE UPON A TIME...

Unreal II does offer a compelling narrative, involving multiple characters and organisations, whose motives and background are the source of many a question throughout the game. Oh, and those mysteriously powerful alien artifacts? Check. The game opens with you, as Terran Colonial Authority (space police) Marshal John Dalton, discovering that your latest marine transfer request has been rejected. As it goes, you and your ship's crew had once enjoyed the superior rank, but an unidentified incident saw you have your status downgraded. There's also a strange Hex-Core alien pilot call Ne'Ban on an exchange program, cynical buxom first-mate Aida and one of those hard-ass guys in charge of the armoury. Conventionally enigmatic crewmates? Check.



Time for some open heart surgery!



Oooh, is that a hand in the sand?



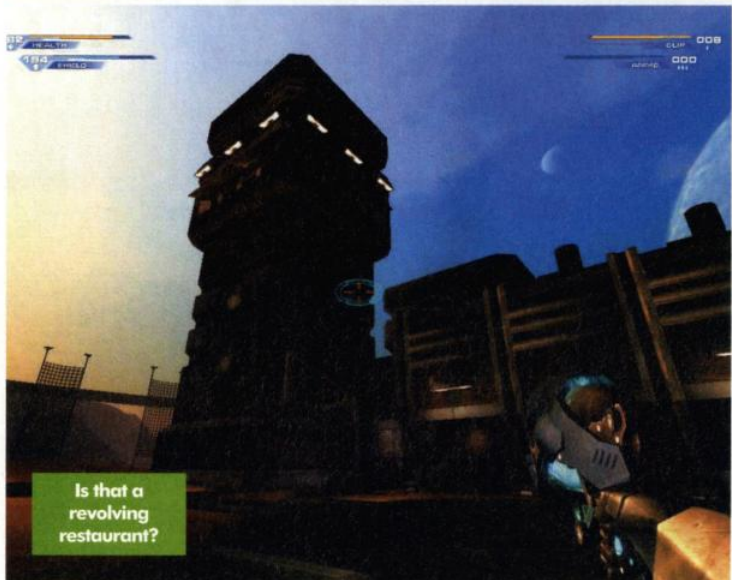
One way to get rid of mosquitos.

Each serves a purpose on the Atlantis between missions, both in terms of story development and functionality, whether it be through your weapon restock, mission brief or just hunting down a bit of extra background info. Conversation is dealt with in stages, relative to your text box responses that appear on screen. The freedom that these boxes seem to offer is only superficial, as not only are their responses to your different approaches arbitrary, often the conversation will loop back to a

pervious query, only with the option last used removed.

These text boxes double as a squad command system. Walking up to an ally, you can issue certain orders, the only problem being that you have to be next to them. Give them a radio already! Apart from this, the conversation system creates a fairly useful way of uncovering information from the characters. Oh, and you can, I guess, pretend to mould your character





the game may be superbly polished... but it is terribly unmemorable

throughout the story by always picking either the most inquisitive or direct question, or something.

The game's narrative does build nicely in the latter stages as the player is forced to return to settings explored earlier, armed with further knowledge and a different set of circumstances. The problem is that the story throughout explores terribly well worn topics. Discovery is predictable, and just when you think everything is okay, things go wrong. Complications due to a large-scale Skaarj assault? You know it.

CROONTOWN

The game's fifteen weapons are fairly run of the mill, from the generic assault rifle, to the shotgun, charge-up dispersion pistol, rocket launcher, alien pulse weapon, flamethrower and sniper rifle. You see, there exists a

ninth spatial dimension, called the weapon plain [sic], that is common to every FPS universe. In this unique realm of the cosmos, special laws limit the invention and reassessment of a character's armoury. But seriously, in a multiplayer game it might be important to offer only these essential aforementioned weapons, as they provide a solid foundation and tap into an establish bank of knowledge, enabling refined competition.

Surely though, in an exclusively action-based, low-level license-limited, single-player shooter such as Unreal II, we can be treated to some highly irrational, outrageous weapons. Some of the later weapons show promise, but the presence of effective stock guns makes these jewels nothing more than a novelty.

!!! You can get your fan-full of Unreal II gooeyness at www.planetunreal.com

Unreal II: The Awakening, is tired. The game may be superbly polished, with scripted sequences that successfully build tension, while also offering varying environments and even including a worthy climax (if questionable ending), but it is terribly unmemorable. The game resembles a well-compiled highlights reel of past shooters, yet critically, it also carries the straightforward structure of the traditional level-based FPS. Lifting the great element out of the past's great shooters might seem like a flawless idea, but Unreal II's failure to captivate is an important advertisement for the power of innovation.

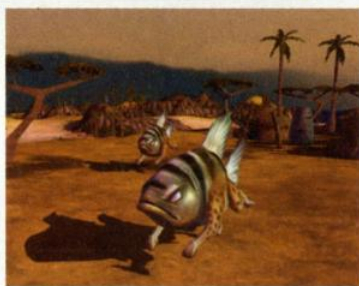
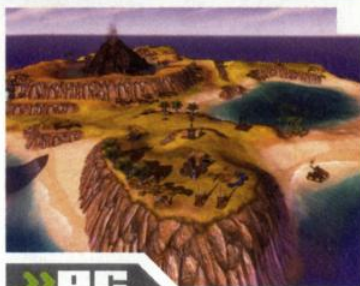
While Hyper applauds Legend's decision for a solo story focus, and even enjoys blasting Skaarj and collecting artifacts, digging below the attractive exterior, we also believe this to be an unremarkable title, and certainly not the benchmark for which we were so yearning. Still, the past refined can be compelling... <<<



PLUS: Grand visuals, general polish.
MINUS: I've seen you before, John.

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY
92	86	82
OVERALL		
81		

A fairly engaging, pretty shooter. No more.



>> PC

Impossible Creatures

CATEGORY: RTS >> PLAYERS: 1-6 >> PUBLISHER: Microsoft >> PRICE: \$89.95 >> RATING: TBA >> AVAILABLE: Now >> REQUIRED: PIII 500, 128 MB RAM, 32 Mb 3D Card

DANIEL STAINES experiments with animals in the privacy of his bedroom.

Assuming they keep developing at their present pace, it is entirely probable that real-time strategy games will evolve into a state of functional perfection within the next two or three years. Think about it for a second. Almost every major RTS that has been released over the past couple of years has shamelessly cloned all the elements of past greats in the genre and made them better via incremental embellishments. Age of Mythology was Age of Kings but with 3D graphics and god powers. The new Dune game (whatever it was called) was the old Dune game with less crap visuals and more big sand worms. Command & Conquer: Generals will probably end up being Command & Conquer: Red Alert

minus the mind-controlling communists. It's all about improvement.

GODLESS CREATIONS

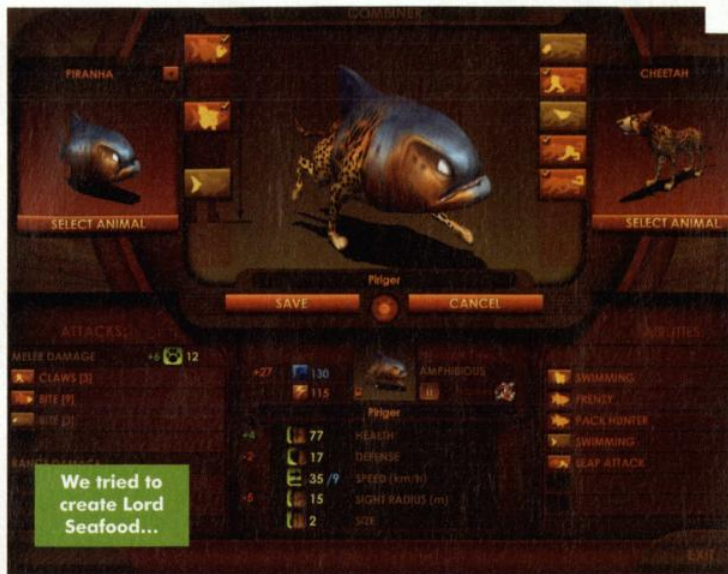
And Impossible Creatures? Well, that's pretty much any 3D RTS game you'd care to name plus the added bonus of being able to create your own brand of bizarre troops out of the body parts of wild animals. This is undoubtedly an interesting addition, but whether or not it makes Impossible Creatures a necessary purchase really comes down to the individual. Have you played Age of Mythology or any other recently released RTS? Yes? Then we'd strongly recommend you give this game a miss or otherwise leave it for a few months until it has undergone a price drop or two. The

simple fact of the matter is that the ability to put together genetically modified freaks of nature is fun for a while, but hardly a big enough improvement to distinctly differentiate Impossible Creatures from the current crop of strategy titles already out there. It is, to put it bluntly, nothing we haven't really seen before.

Of course, having said that, it is important to note that Impossible Creatures is not by any means a bad game. It is, in actuality, quite a good game. For example, the previously discussed animal creation system is extraordinarily well designed and implemented beautifully. Walking a fine line between simplicity and complexity, it

allows one to tweak the stats of their monstrous animal hybrids to an extent that is deep enough to be satisfying without being overly complicated. Two animals per godless combination may seem a bit limiting to the more adventurous gamer, but it does keep the whole process of making monsters as simple and straightforward as you could possibly want it to be. Maybe Relic will release a





We tried to create Lord Seafood...



The Bearogs attack the Chamelears.



Aww, ain't he cuuute?



Surely they messed with his DNA too...



Kill, my pretties, kiiiiiiiiiiii!



Next I'm splicing them with Jet Li.



Isn't science just wonderful?

patch in the future to let crazy scientist types throw as much fauna into the genetic melting pot as they want — who knows? For now, we think it works just fine the way it is.

Oh but wait — that's just designing the eponymous impossible creatures. What about when they're actually out and about on the battlefield? Well see, that's the thing because controlling the creatures in combat really doesn't feel any different to controlling troops in any standard strategy game. The half-wolverine/half-ox hybrid (who I call Stampy Bigclaws!) certainly looks a lot cooler than your average infantry man, but functionally they're identical and so the whole big gimmick that this game is based on ends up feeling just a little bit shallow and unrewarding. Of course, precious few other RTS games give the player this much control over their unit production, so that's something to be happy with. But, you know, some of us were maybe expecting a little bit more from Relic on this front.

there are resources to be gathered and **little fat men with bald heads** to gather them

LITTLE FAT MEN

Okay, so enough with the creatures already. We've spent more than half the review discussing this game's big selling point and now it's high time we got onto the gameplay mechanics that underpin it. As was made evident above, the RTS part of Impossible Creatures is strictly standard stuff. There are attack units, air units and sea units. There is a tech tree and several levels of tech-research available. There are resources to be gathered and little fat men with bald heads to gather them. There are big maps, small maps, multiplayer maps and maps with snow on 'em. In short, there is every single piece of material needed to make a smooth running real-time strategy machine and

!!! At least Homeworld 2 is being made...

everything works exactly as one would expect it to. Unexciting? Yes — but undeniably comfortable as well.

The word 'standard' has popped up numerous times in this review already, but just to drive the point home I'm going to say it again: Impossible Creatures is a standard strategy game and very little else. The whole 'create a creature' feature is certainly creative and a welcome innovation, but it is unfortunately a tad drab in practice and really the only thing that differentiates this game for a strong collection of previously released competitors. Pick it up if you're craving an RTS with a smidgen of individuality — just don't expect anything very original or exciting. <<<



PLUS: Combining creatures is easy and interesting for a while...

MINUS: ...but quickly gives way to utterly average RTS gameplay.

VISUALS SOUND GAMEPLAY

80 75 79

OVERALL

78

Standard strategy gaming with added animals.



PS2

Devil May Cry 2

CATEGORY: Stylish Action >> PLAYERS: 1 >> PUBLISHER: Capcom >> PRICE: \$99.95 >> RATING: M15+ >> AVAILABLE: Now

BRYCE MCDONOUGH may cry after playing this one...

Capcom, of all companies, know when they're on to a good thing. When Devil May Cry (DMC) hit the world just a fraction over a year ago, it didn't take long for the Capcom boffins to realise that the sooner a sequel hit, the better. So here it is, sooner. Though not, unfortunately, better.

UNEARTHLY BEASTS

DMC2 is not a 'sequel' in the traditional sense of the word — the story does not continue where it left us fourteen months ago, nor does it answer any previously unanswered questions. In this regard, it is more akin to a game (or Jackie Chan movie) where the only real continuation is the name and face of the main character. Dante, Son of Sparda, is back in a whole new

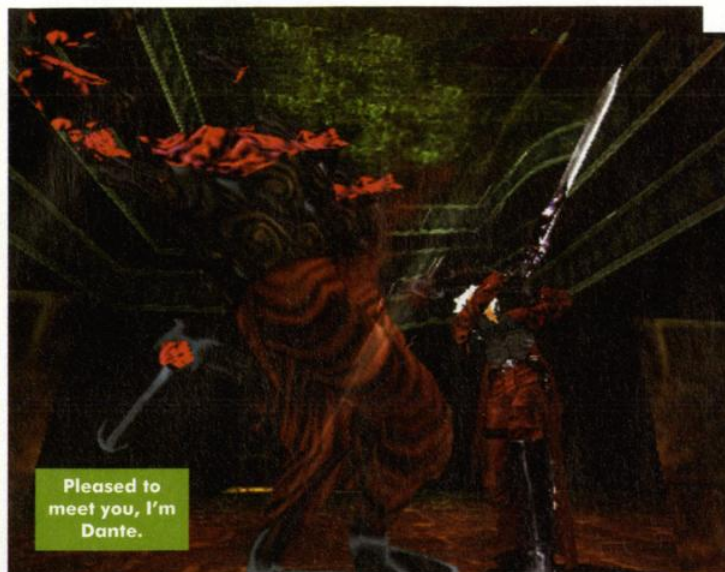
adventure, bringing along a bunch of new moves, a ridiculously large sword and the demonic strength required to handle it, and of course, a second disc with a red-hair-in-braids heroine to play through the game with as well.

Devil May Cry 2 is the second title in Capcom's 'Stylish action' genre, their own variation on their own Resident Evil/Onimusha formula. Both style and action are very much prevalent in the games, with the primary goal of all levels being to kill as many unearthly beasts as possible and clear the level in the shortest time. 'Action' is dealt from the other end of Dante's sword, or from one of his variety of guns. Both characters also have a Devil Trigger — the ability to change into demon form for a short period of time which

boosts attack power as well as giving them other special powers. There are almost as many bosses as there are levels (although they pale in comparison to their predecessors) and bonus power-ups await those who like to explore a little. It's a fairly linear experience, however the way you go about your fighting is entirely up to you. The amazing mobility of the characters Dante and Lucia, from the double jump to the side-flip and strafe, to the wall climb and large variation of canned combos means that you are rarely in a pinch in battle. With a hop, skip and a shotgun, you can be back on your feet and dueling again. Of special note is that there are even several ways to get up after being knocked down, and choosing the right one — especially versus a boss

— is incredibly important in preventing yourself being knocked back down again. With all the skills at your disposal, you'd assume the controls would be equally complicated, yet somehow it all falls into place after only a few minutes of jumping about. Learning all the attack combos will take longer, but then that's the whole point of the game now, isn't it?

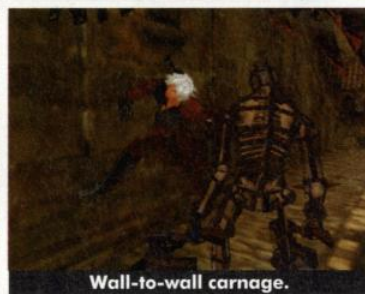




Pleased to meet you, I'm Dante.



I'll cover my eyes and count to ten.



Wall-to-wall carnage.



He's sponsored by Gillette.



Birdie num num.

Dante is summoned by a little old lady with a big stick and a gorgeous daughter

EBONY AND IVORY

The default guns are Ebony and Ivory, the twin handguns that never require reloading (his gunsmith is the same as Lara's, I imagine). Unlike the first game, when Dante is being attacked from multiple sides he can now also multi-target

enemies with his two guns, which looks very cool (although the damage is negligible). Even cooler, is when he picks up his shotgun, he will actually keep a handgun in his other hand and use it for other targets while he is reloading the shottie. The rest of the weapons, unfortunately, aren't nearly as good as the first game, and this is another major reason why the character of the game itself doesn't quite hold

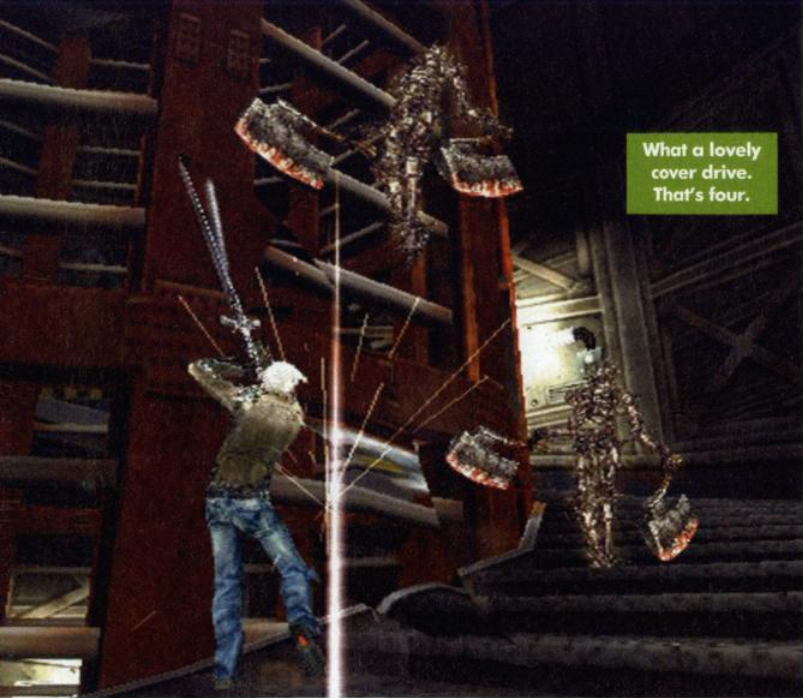
true. In the first DMC, there were two main weapons, each of which distinctively changed the way the game was played, and both were important to your progression. But now the same powers are delivered through your amulet and the actual physical weapon you use is almost irrelevant. Also, no longer can you purchase new moves to use, you simply upgrade the weapons you have. Choosing new moves was a great facet of the original, and it's a shame to see it gone.

The new system with special powers comes in the form of Dante's (and Lucia's) amulet. It contains 3 slots of different shapes, allowing different pieces to be added to obtain different powers. Powers similar to the lightning and fire of the original are there, as well as the ability to fly, boosted speed, healing power, and even swimming ability. Throughout the game, small pieces can be found which fit into the amulet (more than one per slot), and choosing which to equip at what times changes your powers and is very important during boss battles.

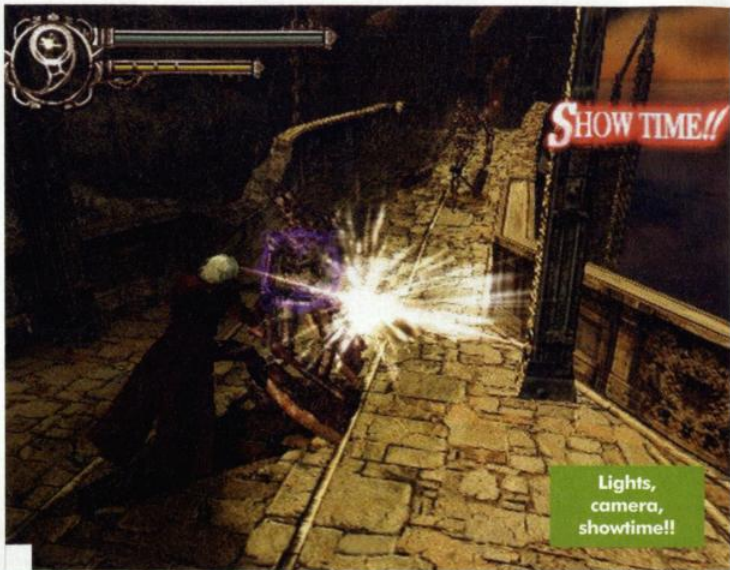
TASK OF ANNIHILATING

Dante in DMC2 looks pretty much like he did in the first game — from the long flowing crimson overcoat and huge broadsword on his back, right down to the scuff-marks on the toes of his boots from all that wall-jumping. However, he is obviously a changed man. No more laughing in the face of someone who runs him through with a sword, brave wise cracks, one-liners for every occasion and more than enough attitude for your average public high school. He's grown. He's matured. Now, he has become more the brooding type, living the goth-life Capcom gave him and treating everything else with a sullen side-glance. We're not too sure we like





What a lovely cover drive. That's four.



Lights, camera, showtime!!



Want me to re-tile your roof?



I "may" also laugh, or dance...



"Devil inside, devil inside..."



Look, it's Mary Poppins!

the new Dante — he simply isn't interested in being friends.

The new character, Lucia, allows you to experience the same game from a female perspective, wielding two short swords (which she calls cutlaseers) and throwing daggers instead of guns. Her design seems to suit the pace and style of the game well, with her melee fighting being much faster. She only has 13 levels (Dante has 18), however her objectives and locations (such as secret rooms) are often different. She certainly adds a lot of spice to that second disc.

The Devil May Cry 2 storyline, so help me, actually seems rather more coherent than the original. This time

around, as a Demon Hunter, Dante is summoned by a little old lady with a big stick and a gorgeous daughter, who

promises some stories about his dad and the key to her daughter's chastity belt in exchange for the menial task of annihilating an international conglomerate intent on world domination and opening up a portal to the demon world. Obviously he signs up.

A SIMPLE SLASH

Although the levels are much more open and spread across larger areas this time around, there's no real improvement in the design over the first DMC. The open areas give you a lot more space to manoeuvre (and manoeuvre you will, unless you actually

enjoy suffering pain and death), however it also makes it a lot harder to use the ever-so-cool juggling system that we adored so much in the first game. Without as many walls to literally stop your opponent from getting away from you, sometimes a simple slash will send them too far away to follow up at all, making the longer combos required for an S rank all but impossible on some levels. Whilst the action and fighting is still the best reason to get this game, it seems as though, in all honesty, it has been toned down and simplified this time around. Compared to this sequel, DMC still seems to be the more rewarding, enjoyable and challenging game.

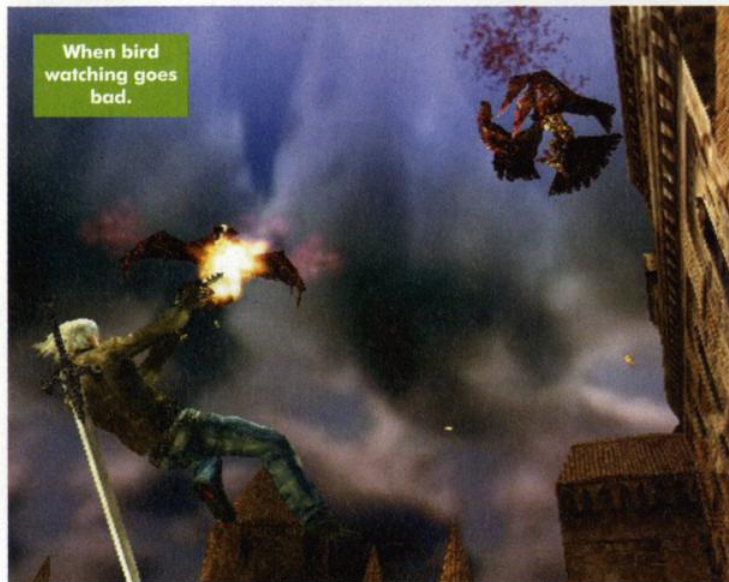




Now that's a *real* time splitter...



Damn Redfern mutant pigeons!



When bird watching goes bad.



The devil made him do it, I bet.

Although the levels are much more open and spread across larger areas this time around, there's **no real improvement in the design**

Graphically, however, Devil May Cry 2 does not disappoint. The main characters are well designed and well animated; the levels are large and open (though the eerie 'fog' is sometimes quite thick) with a wider variety of textures than the first game, and often there are more than 10 bad guys on screen at once. The designs of the demons are great too, and the effects of the Devil Trigger



look fantastic. Dante and Lucia are a dream to watch in motion with all the cool variations in their attacks. The funky soundtrack is also back from the original game (the same fighting track has remained intact) and the music is just as polished as the visuals. Slip on the headphones and pump up the volume for maximum tension.

However, there are obvious flaws to Devil May Cry 2 that prevent it from matching up to the first game. These

!!! Dante and Lucia both have alternate outfits designed by fashion label DIESEL (below, screenshots)



DIESEL

include the bosses – so formidable and nasty in the original, they are barely more than a pest in this one. The weapon upgrades also cost such an incredibly huge amount of red orbs that you must really choose only one weapon and concentrate on improving it – which doesn't exactly

offer the player variety. And then there are the more subtle problems. Devil May Cry 2 is lacking that level of imaginative coolness that was present in the first

game, and there is a mood and some indescribable essence that is absent.

If you never played the original, you'll still be pretty impressed with Devil May Cry 2. But Capcom really should have delivered something greater the second time around. <<<



PLUS: Fast, fun, furious, heaps of replay value.

MINUS: Outdone by its predecessor, still a short game.

VISUALS SOUND GAMEPLAY

86 85 79

OVERALL

79

Not quite as good as the original, but still lots of fun.

REVIEW

>> HYPER 61



Tenchu 3: WRATH OF HEAVEN

CATEGORY: Ninja Sim >> PLAYERS: 1-2 >> PUBLISHER: Activision >> PRICE: \$99.95 >> RATING: M15+ >> AVAILABLE: Now

BRETT ROBINSON always sneaks up on us here at the office.

Like the samurai with whom their history is intertwined, ninja are firmly entrenched in modern popular culture. Interest in these enigmatic figures shows no sign of abating, which is hardly surprising given the fact that ninja make such terrific source material for just about all forms of entertainment media. Ninja-related games were prevalent on the previous generation of consoles, and with a number of titles undergoing development for the current generation, that trend looks set to continue. Tenchu 3 is the first ninja game to sneak onto the PS2 this year, and it sets a very encouraging precedent.

DISPATCHING ENEMIES SWIFTLY
Tenchu 3: Wrath of Heaven picks up where the original Tenchu: Stealth

Assassins left off (Tenchu 2 was actually a prequel), continuing the adventures of ninja Rikimaru and Ayame and introducing an unlockable third character, Tesshu. As retainers of Lord Gohda, Rikimaru and Ayame begin the game undertaking routine assassination and surveillance missions, but they soon become embroiled in a conflict whose outcome will determine the fate of the nation. In the course of their travels, they meet Tesshu, a doctor whose intimate knowledge of human anatomy is put to good use after surgery hours — the enigmatic fellow is also an assassin, and a devastatingly effective one at that.

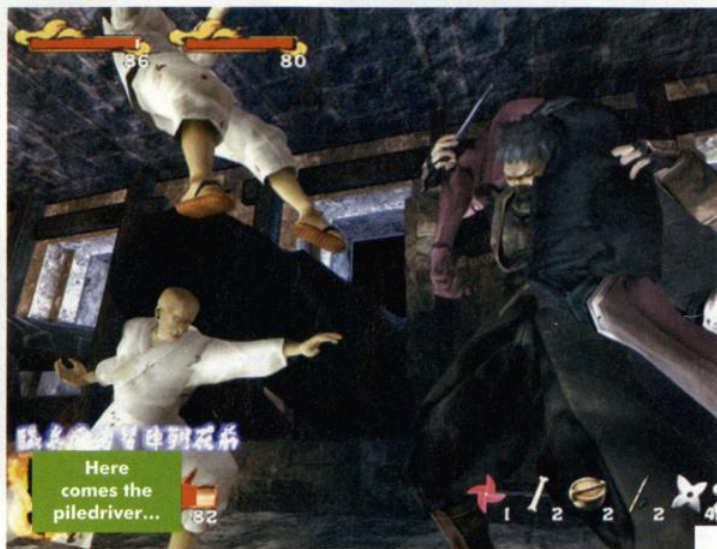
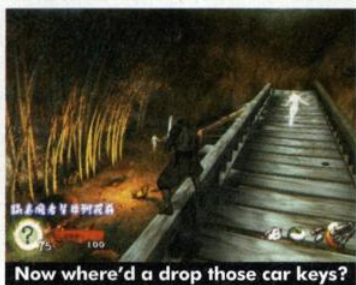
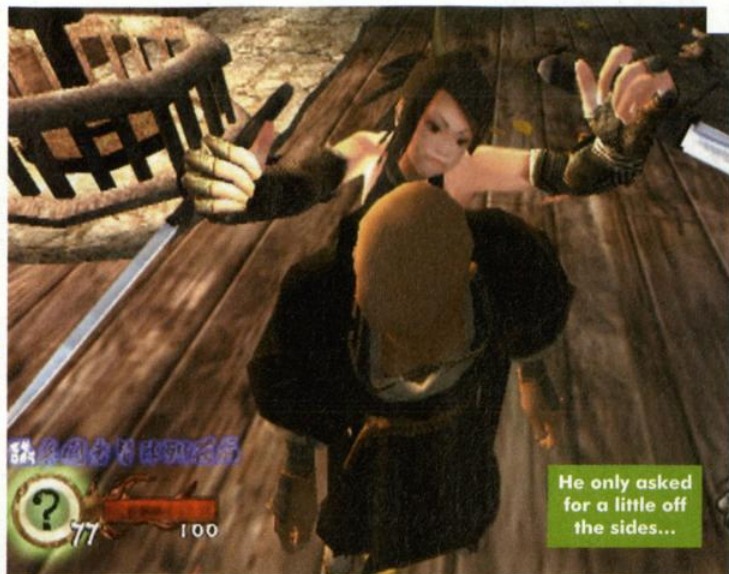
First impressions of Tenchu 3 are somewhat mixed. Graphically, it doesn't disappoint; the character models look terrific (especially up

close), and there is a predatory efficiency to their movements. Furthermore, the painstaking effort that went into building the game's massive levels is readily apparent, particularly when traversing the unforgettable shrine level.

Wrath of Heaven's controls are a dramatic improvement on those of the previous two games, but they still aren't as refined as they could be, which may well turn off some players before they've begun to appreciate the game's strengths. Perseverance pays dividends, as mastery of the tricky control scheme allows the player to execute a bewildering array of combos and special moves, but there are some actions — leaning up against walls, for instance — that remain slightly problematic regardless of the player's proficiency.

The franchise's trademark stealth kills make a welcome return, and as usual they're damn cool to watch. An on-screen meter now keeps a tally of the number of stealth kills perpetrated by the player, and when this meter is filled, the player is rewarded with awesome new special moves that can be put to use in all previous and subsequent single-player levels, as well as in multi-





leaping onto low rooftops and ledges remains an all too simple means of evading detection

player. Though sometimes difficult to earn, the special moves are always worth the effort, and range from Rikimaru's crafty 'seppuku' ruse — whereby he slits his own throat (at the cost of some health) and lies in wait for a hapless sentry to investigate — to Ayame's ability to cling to ceilings.

INFAMOUS POISON RICE

Many of the secondary weapons and items — shuriken, caltrops, grenades, the infamous poison rice — have carried over from the previous games, and the player's already considerable arsenal is bolstered by the addition of a decoy whistle, a blinding spell, fireworks, a chameleon spell and several other devices. Achieving high mission rankings unlocks bonus items and weapons, and this time around the player can pick up and wield

enemy weapons like spears and bows. There are a number of ways to complete every mission, and when revisiting completed missions the player can select from three different enemy layouts. Even discounting the dozens of special moves to be learned and Tenchu 3's terrific multiplayer mode, all this translates to long-term value that's off the charts.

Marked improvements in the AI make for a more rewarding experience overall, but there are some unwelcome inconsistencies. For example, when fighting with or hunting for the player, adversaries seem to fix their gaze at ground level. Consequently, leaping onto low rooftops and ledges remains an all too simple means of evading detection. Forget that "a true ninja can

hide in plain sight" crap: the temporary blindness that afflicts alerted enemies does little to enhance the player's sense of immersion.

Tenchu 3's multiplayer component offers two different modes — cooperative and adversarial — and five multiplayer-specific levels. Adversarial mode is engaging if both players refrain from charging at each other with swords drawn, but cooperative mode is where the real action's at. Working together to distract and dispatch enemy sentries is especially thrilling, and the satisfaction of performing the special two-player stealth kills is unmatched.

It's no secret that the overly ambitious Tenchu 2 failed to live up to expectations, but Wrath of Heaven will undoubtedly restore jilted fans' faith in the brand. Minor flaws aside, Tenchu 3 is an excellent game that'll keep players enthralled for weeks. And if it's any indication of where the series is headed, we're already looking forward to the next instalment. <<

!!! www.realultimatepower.net — The ultimate in ninja websites.



PLUS: Cool new moves and items. Solid multiplayer.

MINUS: Fiddly controls and inconsistent AI.

VISUALS SOUND GAMEPLAY

85 86 83

OVERALL

84

Sneaking and slicing action at its best.

REVIEW

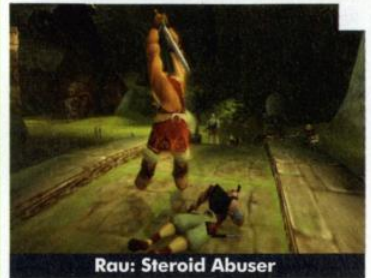
>> HYPER 63



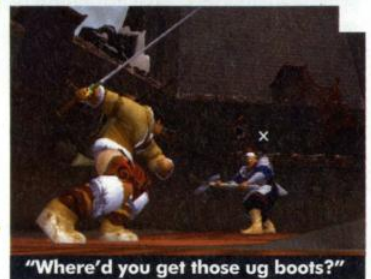
Rau: Ewok Hunter



That'll teach you to shut up!



Rau: Steroid Abuser



"Where'd you get those ug boots?"

PS2

The Mark of Kri

CATEGORY: Action Adventure >> PLAYERS: 1 >> PUBLISHER: Sony >> PRICE: \$99.95 >> RATING: M15+ >> AVAILABLE: Now >>

BRETT ROBINSON makes his mark.

If there's one thing all videogame journalists like, it's surprises; be they invitations to embark on lavish press junkets, mysterious boxes containing cool promotional gimmicks, or great games that seem to come out of nowhere. The Mark of Kri falls into the latter category, and we're at a complete loss as to why Sony hasn't been much more vocal about it.

PLEASING TO THE EYE

The game's main character, Rau, is a young barbarian who hungers for adventure, and for a chance to prove himself. His tribal affiliations are never clear, but Maori, Pacific Islander and Mayan influences are evident in the distinctive visual style of TMOK. The simplistic and cartoon-like graphics are pleasing to the eye, but TMOK isn't some generic adventure game for kiddies. In fact, nothing could be further from the truth.

Part beat-em-up and part sneaker, TMOK delivers gameplay mechanics that are unusual to say the least. The game is worth picking up for the revolutionary combat system alone, which initially allows

Rau to focus on and attack up to three adversaries simultaneously. Rau's movements are controlled using the left analogue stick, while the right analogue stick is used to lock on to enemies. Targeted opponents are assigned to the X, Circle and Square buttons respectively, and any unassigned buttons serve as 'attack modifiers' that enable Rau to unleash even more elaborate and devastating assaults.

This intuitive system, while intimidating at first, quickly becomes second nature. Consequently, battles that were once frenzied hack-and-slash affairs become intricate ballets of death. Players with a taste for the old ultra-violence will undoubtedly revel in TMOK's graphic, often shocking depictions of death and dismemberment. As Rau plunges into his enemies' midst, wielding his weapons with terrifying efficiency, limbs are separated from torsos, blood gushes from open wounds, and decapitations occur with gratifying regularity.

!!! It is rumored that TMOK is the first game in a planned trilogy. Bring on the sequels!

SPIRIT GUIDE

Rau is clearly a force to be reckoned with, but he's not invincible, and there are many occasions when survival hinges on an ability to remain inconspicuous. In such instances, Rau can direct his spirit guide — a raven named Kuzo — to perch on designated spots throughout each level. Switching to Kuzo's viewpoint then allows Rau to observe enemy

movements and plan his own actions accordingly. When confrontations are unavoidable but discretion is paramount, Rau can silently dispatch single and multiple adversaries in an astounding number of ways, many of which are visceral enough to give Tenchu 3's stealth kills a serious run for their money!

With a total of six missions on offer, most players will complete TMOK in just under ten hours. The game's longterm value is boosted slightly by the fact that there are plenty of bonus items and combat arenas to unlock, but for some people that may not be enough to justify a purchase. <<



PLUS: Superb fighting and stealth dynamics, beautiful cut scenes.

MINUS: Limited longterm appeal.

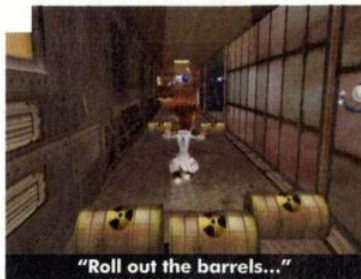
VISUALS SOUND GAMEPLAY

86 78 84

OVERALL

83

Short, but oh so sweet.



XBOX GCN PS2

Dr Muto

CATEGORY: Platformer >> PLAYERS: 1 >> PUBLISHER: Midway >> PRICE: \$99.95 >> RATING: TBA >> AVAILABLE: Now >>

BRETT ROBINSON experiments on... himself!

Fh, mad scientists – will they ever get the respect they deserve? Without them, mankind wouldn't be reaping the benefits of time travel, nor would Australian citizens enjoy the peace of mind that only a defence force equipped with a full complement of battle mechs can provide. And without the expertise of meddling geneticists, people such as myself couldn't enjoy the companionship of pet Dwarf Velociraptors, which are really quite amiable when well-fed.

BIZARRE CREATURES

So, you see, mad scientists really are quite valuable (fringe) members of our society – hell, at the very least they keep the hunchback unemployment rate below ten percent. Of course, there are exceptions: the accursed Dr Muto, for example. The man would be something of an intergalactic laughing stock, were the consequences of his mistake not so dire. Muto tried to alleviate the planet Midway's energy crisis, but his invention malfunctioned and reduced Midway to several bite-sized chunks of charcoal.

All is not lost, however, for Dr Muto

claims to have come up with a solution. That solution is to travel to the four planets that used to be Midway's neighbours and collect as many isotopes, DNA samples, pieces of scrap and chunks of terra as he can get his hands on. Back at Muto's lab – which, incidentally, rests on the scorched remains of Midway – these items will be used to manufacture gadgets and weapons to aid him in his quest. They'll also allow Muto to transform into a variety of bizarre creatures, and serve as the building blocks for the Genitor 9000: a powerful device designed to reverse the explosion that destroyed Midway and its inhabitants. Let's just hope it works!

HOPPING AROUND

At its core, the game is a fairly conventional platformer, but a number of factors elevate it above the likes of *Toe Jam & Earl III* and *Spyro: ETD*. The game's use of humour is nothing short of masterful, and the caustic remarks of Muto's computer – delivered in a HAL-esque deadpan – will bring a smile to the lips of even the most

morose gamer. Using his Splizz Gun, Dr Muto can transmogrify himself into a mouse, a spider, a fish, a horsefly or a gorilla. In these alternate forms, Muto gains new movement and attack capabilities that grant him access to new areas and put him on a more

even footing with adversaries and bosses. As a mouse, for instance, Dr Muto can crawl through narrow pipes, while the spider form enables him to ascend vertical surfaces and launch various venom-based attacks.

On the whole, Dr Muto's signature transformation dynamics are well executed, and the all-pervasive humour is certainly a major bonus, but in the end the gameplay still boils down to hopping around, killing baddies and collecting thousands of objects. Most players probably won't have any difficulty finding the motivation to complete the game, but when it comes to tracking down every last item, tedium rears its ugly head. Dr Muto falls short of achieving classic status, but its ambitious design and polished presentation are to be commended. Well worth a look. <<

!!! Concept art and interviews with the developers can be found in the bonus Making Of section.



REVIEWED ON:



PLUS: Quality animations, excellent voice work.

MINUS: Repetitive gameplay and a twitchy camera.

VISUALS SOUND GAMEPLAY

80 81 78

OVERALL

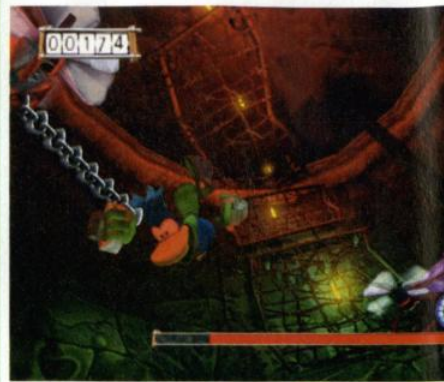
79

Amusing and unconventional, but not for everyone.

REVIEW

>> HYPER 65

00180



GCN PS2 XBOX PC

Rayman 3: HOODLUM HAVOC

CATEGORY: Platformer >> PLAYERS: 1-4 >> PUBLISHER: UbiSoft >> PRICE: \$99.95 >> RATING: G >> AVAILABLE: Now

ELIOT FISH gives Rayman a big French kiss.

Q Disturbingly Rayman starts the game without his hands. Now it's bad enough that the little guy has to get through life without limbs, but this is just cruel! Thankfully, it doesn't take long before you're equipped with digits. And even better, Rayman gets some seriously powerful glove power-ups this time around too. It's all as surreal as ever. The best thing since sliced garlic bread...

A GORGEOUS TREAT

When the Rayman 3 intro blasts onto your screen, you'll wonder just what that rather out-of-place piece of pop music is. That, friends, is Groove Armada's song "Madder" which for some reason, someone at UbiSoft thought should be stuck onto the game intro to help with marketing

(or some reason). It's not a bad song, but it seems completely at odds with the cute fantasy land of Rayman. That's the only time you'll hear it, and it's a shame that they didn't just stick with the music that was composed for the game, as it's some of the best videogame music we've heard in a long time. The pure inventiveness, variety and colour in the incidental music throughout the game perfectly echoes what Rayman 3 has to offer in terms of its gameplay. There's a lot of love in this game, and you can hear it firstly in the quirky and well composed music, and you can see it in the abundance of character and detail in the sprawling levels, right down to the strange little animations of bugs innocently stuck to walls.

Intense love for the game that

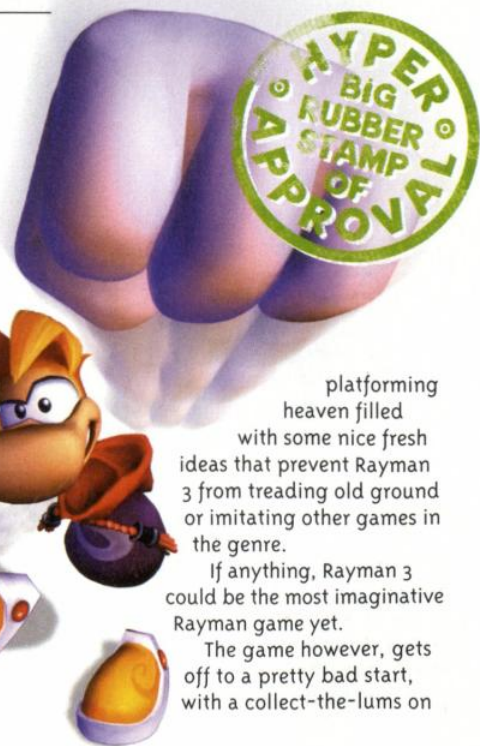
you're developing doesn't mean that you're immune to flawed game design, however. Luckily, there aren't many bad bits to Rayman 3 at all, and the problems are fairly few and far between.

Rayman 3 continues the Rayman series in fine style, and manages to sustain the level of quality that has been present in the earlier games in the series. The main body of the game is a fast-paced slice of

platforming heaven filled with some nice fresh ideas that prevent Rayman 3 from treading old ground or imitating other games in the genre.

If anything, Rayman 3 could be the most imaginative Rayman game yet.

The game however, gets off to a pretty bad start, with a collect-the-lums on





Rayman gets into sadomasochism



Just give him a bit of fisting, Rayman!



Waaaay too ugly to live.



Someone's pulling Rayman's chain.



Great gameplay – it's a shoe-in.



"Gandalf? Is that really you?"



"Sippin' on gin and juice..."

your muppet-like buddy, Globox, seems to be a bit of an alcoholic

rails level. Why UbiSoft thought it wise to start such a good game with such a horrid piece of "gameplay" as an introduction is utterly bewildering. The further you get into Rayman 3, the more impressive in design the game becomes. The lazy, weak start turns into a gorgeous treat.

One of the first things that alerts you to Rayman 3's odd character is the fact that your muppet-like buddy, Globox, seems to be a bit of an alcoholic. Throughout the game, you'll regularly stumble across barrels of fruity liquid that Globox chugs down with the skill of a college student, evoking some rather odd behaviour. Sometimes he'll float away, a bloated human balloon, and other times he'll hiccup a few bubbles for you to use as steps. Otherwise, he

just tags along, jonesing for some more of that evil juice.

KEEP YOU HOOKED

The two of you have set out across the land to put a stop to a band of suspicious looking Hoodlums. Hoodlums that just happen to sprout forth a dark lum once you've knocked them out. You see, they're all rather pissed off that Globox has gone and eaten their leader, the Dark Lum Lord. Yes, the big bad guy is inside Globox's stomach, getting to know the blue fella's intestinal juices rather intimately, we gather. Your journey will take you through some of the most fiendishly conceived bits of platforming outside of those few golden Nintendo efforts.

We're not kidding when we say

that the level design in Rayman 3 is imaginative, although "Trippy" is probably the word. Ramshackle wooden palaces, spiralling staircases of light, gloomy marshes and witches kitchens – every single moment in Rayman 3 is different to the last. It's this incredible variety that will keep you hooked. It's probably near impossible to get bored paying this game. The pacing is fast (many of the levels are short, but sweet) and rarely are ideas repeated. When you add to that the variety of glove powerups, you have some very entertaining and challenging gaming.

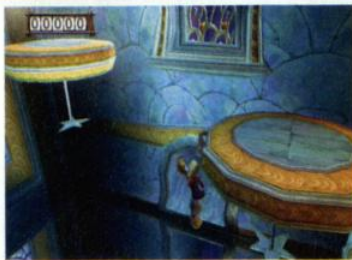
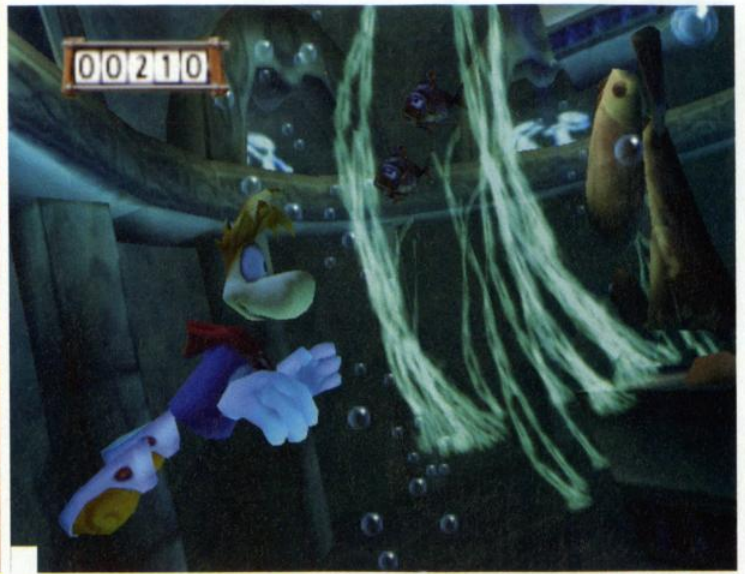
Rayman can acquire powerups that give him the power of grappling hooks, enhanced helicopter hair,

power fists, and the ability to cast mini whirlwinds that will lower platforms and send enemies flying. You can even turn into a human rocket. Naturally, powerups are located just when you need them, although, as they are mostly timed, you'll sometimes have to race across levels to use them in the required





Rayman: He looks before he leaps.



BONUS GET!

>> Bonus games include 2D madness (a very simplistic 2D platformer), Racket Jump (a bizarre pong-like tennis game), Razoff Circus (a simple first person target shooter), Crush (in which you squish frogs with a wrecking ball) and Sentinel (no, not the old PC classic, but a rather dull bomb lobbing game)... on the whole the bonus games really are pretty awful, and will only provide a very brief and minor diversion. Better than nothing, however.

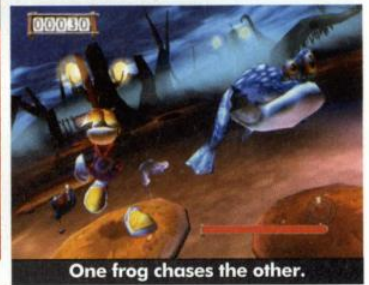
Other extras include bizarre "Wanna kick Rayman" clips that are well made and should provide some chuckles. It seems the cinematic artists had a fair bit of spare time on their hands...

place. Usually, when you're wondering what to do next, the arrival of a power up points the way.

Rayman's windmill fist attacks can now be curved around corners with the aid of the lock-on. If an enemy is blocking your attacks, or hiding behind an object, you can curve your shot around the obstacle as you strafe left or right. It works a treat, as long as you can deal with the faulty lock-on feature. Targeting is totally unreliable at times... you can usually always see something and yet be unable to lock onto it. Usually, it's because you're not close enough, or you're facing it at a slightly awkward angle. It's pretty annoying to be unable to lock onto something that you can plainly see. This adds unnecessary frustration in the most crucial moments, as you're jiggling your character around



"Screw you guys, I'm going home."



One frog chases the other.

trying to avoid being hit by projectiles and frantically trying desperately to lock on to your attacker. Camera problems can sometimes make this even worse...

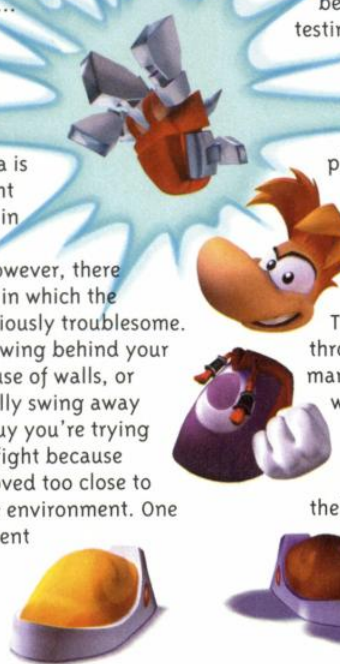
FUN AND CREATIVE

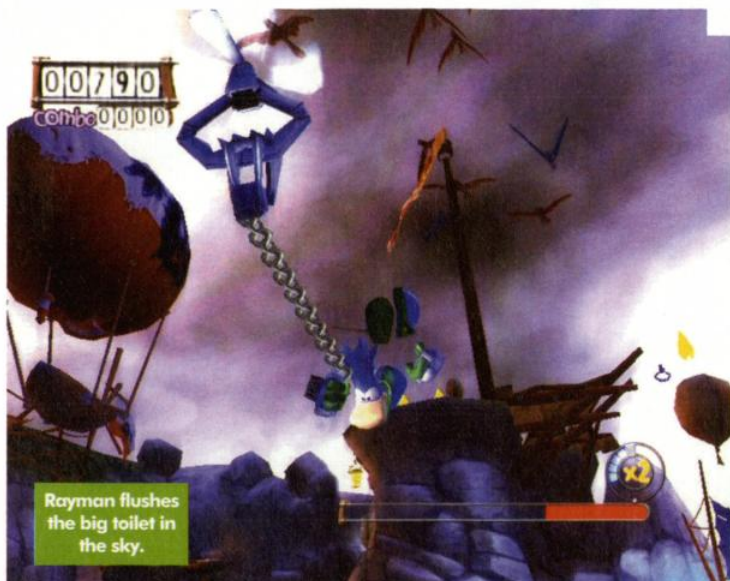
Overall, the auto-panning camera is pretty intelligent and rarely gets in the way of your platforming. However, there is the odd level in which the camera is notoriously troublesome. Either it won't swing behind your character because of walls, or will automatically swing away from the bad guy you're trying desperately to fight because Rayman has moved too close to an object in the environment. One particular moment has you performing crucial leaps

across sinking columns from a rather ridiculous far away camera angle that even requires you to jump across the block diagonally. Problems such as these should really have been ironed out in play testing.

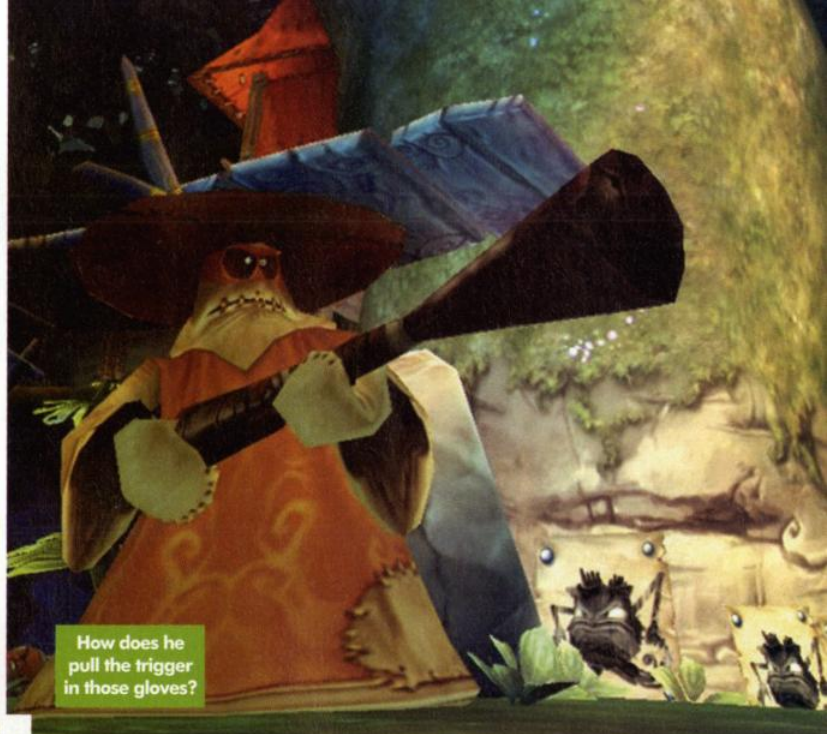
Boss fights in Rayman 3 are a real highlight.

Not only are they plentiful, but each one is fun and creative. There's even a boss to fight underwater without Rayman being able to attack. There's also a chase through a maze-like mansion level, complete with dodging shots from a hidden sniper. The developers at UbiSoft were certainly wearing their creative thinking caps for this one. Inbetween levels, you can enjoy some

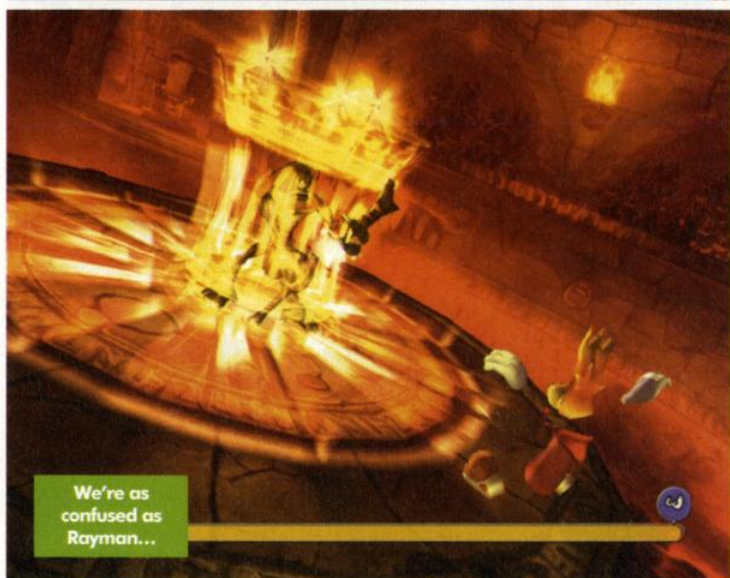




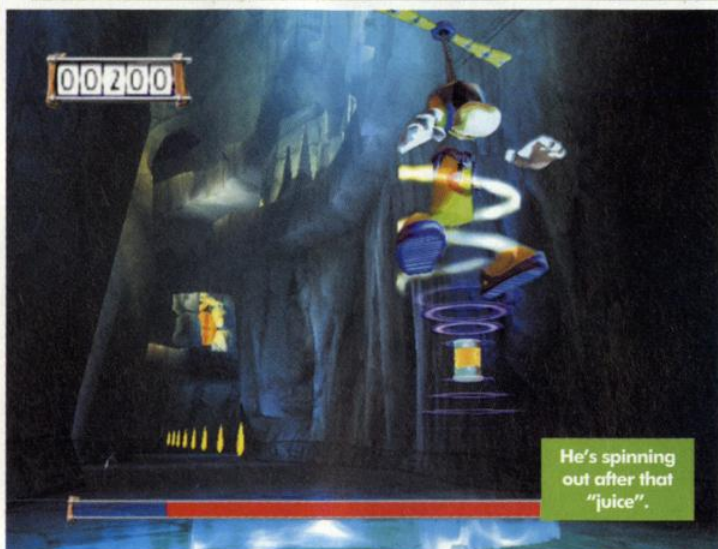
Rayman flushes the big toilet in the sky.



How does he pull the trigger in those gloves?



We're as confused as Rayman...



He's spinning out after that "juice".

Rayman's windmill fist attacks can now be **curved around corners** with the aid of the lock-on

truly psychedelic rail riding, as well as enjoy the various unlockable content (which can even be accessed mid-game if you feel like a break).

As you complete a level, you're given a rating out of 100% encouraging you to replay and fully complete the game when you feel up to it. The effort here has been to never leave the gamer feeling stuck, bored or frustrated with overbearing

difficulty, and Ubisoft have achieved that goal with flying colours. Rayman 3: Hoodlum Havoc is a ball.

MAKE YOU LAUGH

The different versions of Rayman sport a few very minor differences and one major one. The GameCube version is the only one that can offer the link-up play with the GBA — a truly

For the GBA Link-up feature to work, you must buy Rayman 3 on GBA, naturally.

remarkable and cool multiplayer option. Four players can play at once — two on GBAs and two on the GameCube. As the GBA players complete Tetris like lines, it creates racing track for the two players on the GCN. The GCN version of the game also has two bonus maps and two bonus unlockable video clips. The differences between the other versions are purely aesthetic, with the PC coming out on top with the best graphics (thanks to high resolutions). With

Rayman 3, no one really loses out (well, unless you really want to play the link-up games but don't have a GameCube).

The Rayman series continues to offer fun, inventive platforming. It still lacks a certain degree of polish, and it does suffer a few minor control and camera problems, but the overall impression is a good one. Rayman 3 should keep you hooked for a while and it'll even make you laugh.

Now that's a good thing. <<

REVIEWED ON:



PLUS: Some wacky humour, interesting level design, bosses.

MINUS: Lock-on and camera problems. Bad mini-games.

VISUALS SOUND GAMEPLAY

86 86 88

OVERALL

90

A fun and imaginative romp. Singulier!





DOA XTREME BEACH VOLLEYBALL

CATEGORY: Barbie's island resort >> PLAYERS: 1-2 >> PUBLISHER: Microsoft >> PRICE: \$99.95 >> RATING: M15+ >> AVAILABLE: Now >>

CAM SHEA is a Dead or Alive fan who demands service!

Qespite audibly cringing (which is hard to do) when Dead Or Alive Xtreme Beach Volleyball (DOA:XBV) was first unveiled at last year's E3, we still had some hope for the game. Although opinion within the Hyper crew was definitely divided as to the potential merits of this title, on some sick and twisted level we desperately wanted to play it. After all, beach volleyball has the potential to be a wicked multiplayer sport (hello Beach Spikers!), and there's nothing wrong with pairing a great game with some serious eye candy, now is there?

THAT'S SOME DAMN FINE CHERRY PIE...

That said, we were concerned that Team Ninja might focus exclusively

on the visual angle, and let the gameplay fall by the wayside, hoping that nicely rendered women in bikinis would be enough to sell the game. So what's the end result? Well, let's get one thing clear - there is nothing "xtreme" about this game. In fact, this is one of the least "xtreme" games in the history of videogames. Another salient point is that this game really isn't about beach volleyball either. Instead, we have a baffling mix of gameplay elements paired with graphics that don't live up to expectations. In short, DOA:XBV is nothing like what we were expecting, and outside Japan we suspect the game's appeal will be seriously limited.

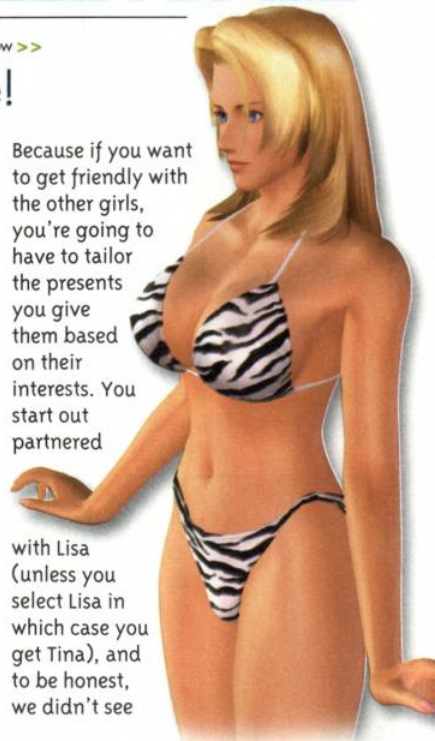
The premise is that you have 14 days to kill on an island, and basically bugger all to do. Each day

is divided up into morning, day, evening and night. Various activities will take up a slice of the day. Give one of the other girls a gift, play a game of beach volleyball or lounge by the pool, and you'll move on to the next segment of the day. But what's the point exactly? Well, it's all geared around earning money and using that money to collect all the items and gizmos the game has for sale, and in keeping your volleyball partner (or prospective partner) happy.

The characters in DOA:XBV are Kasumi, Hitomi, Ayane, Tina, Leifang, Helena, Christie and Lisa. Lisa is the new girl, and damn is she fine! Her hobbies include surfing, her favourite food is cherry pie, her favourite colour is crimson red and her birth stone is ruby. Why does this matter?

Because if you want to get friendly with the other girls, you're going to have to tailor the presents you give them based on their interests. You start out partnered

with Lisa (unless you select Lisa in which case you get Tina), and to be honest, we didn't see

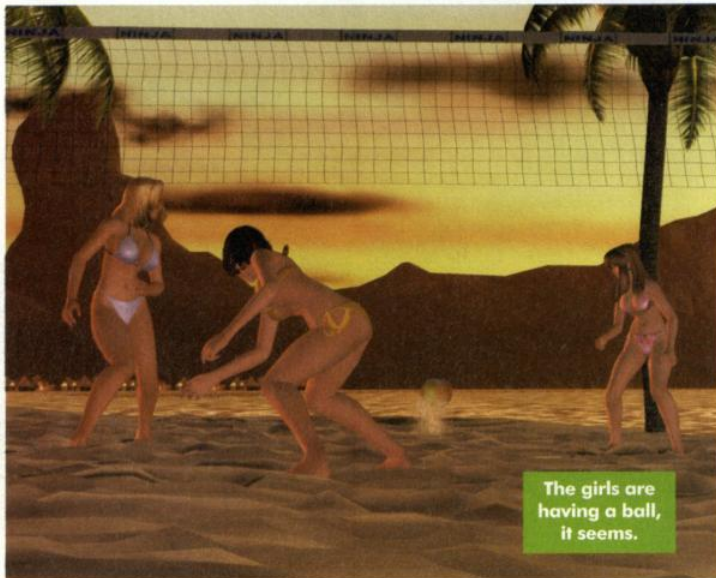




I knew there'd be pussy in this game...



Here, let me rub this suntan lotion on...



The girls are having a ball, it seems.



A STORYLINE SAYS WHAT?

»» The "storyline" in DOA:XBV can best be described as placeholder. The plot is this: Zack won the DOA3 tournament, gambled his winnings into a huge sum, bought an island resort, then fooled all the girls from DOA3 into coming for the next tournament. Except that there is no next tournament! Wow, what subterfuge! Unfortunately, it seems Zack wasn't sure what to do with the girls when they arrived, as he's completely absent from the game! There are no devious plot twists, he doesn't try and seduce them, and he doesn't even offer challenges. Why not? Surely having Zack pop up and say "the first team to win seven matches in a row gets one million zack dollars" or perhaps challenge everyone to compete in a mini-game would have added much needed structure and spice to the game. As it stands, the only times Zack even exists in the game are in the intro and outro videos. Speaking of which, the end of the game is completely bewildering. For no apparent reason a volcano consumes the entire island! Why god why? And quite why Tecmo made a big deal out of getting Dennis Rodman to do the voice of Zack is a mystery to us. First of all, he says like, three lines in the entire game, and second of all, he completely screws up all three of those lines! Worst voice acting EVER!

we didn't see any reason to woo other girls – Lisa plays well and looks great – so why complain?

any reason to woo other girls. Lisa plays well and looks great – so why complain? Just regularly win matches and buy her a trinket or skimpy bikini every so often and she'll be happy. That said, there is some perverse fun to be had in buying items that will please another girl then dumping Lisa and shacking up (in a volleyball sense) with the new one. Variety being the spice of life and all that.



There are three stores to buy stuff from: the Sports Shop (over 100 swimsuits and bikinis); the Accessory Shop (exciting items like hair clips, sun tan lotion, high heels and dog collars); and the miscellaneous wackiness of Zack Of All Trades (ninja stars, guitars, recipes, food, you name it). Items change regularly at these stores so you need to check them quite often.

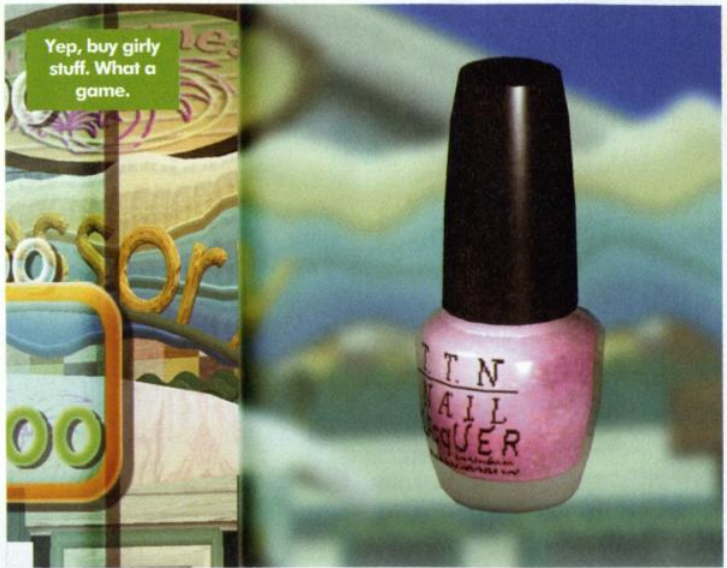
PLAYING WITH YOUR BALLS
The actual volleyball is somewhat fun, but nowhere near good enough to carry the game. There are a grand total of two buttons to worry about – one that sets the ball for your

partner or does a drop shot, and one that spikes the ball back to the other side. They are pressure sensitive, but this basically boils down to soft and hard. You can also move your partner around with the right stick... although this is rarely useful. The rules are greatly simplified – there are no side or end lines, games are played to seven, and a point is scored on every rally regardless of who is serving. Compounding things, positioning your player is made very difficult by the swinging camera angle that moves from one side to the other with each point, and manages to obscure a fair bit of your court when the ball is on the other side. Not that positioning really matters all that much anyway – strategy is very, very simple. Even aiming is a little pointless. Sure you can roughly aim the ball to one side or the other, but there's no pinpoint spiking to be found, which results in rallies that go on for longer than they should (and become boring

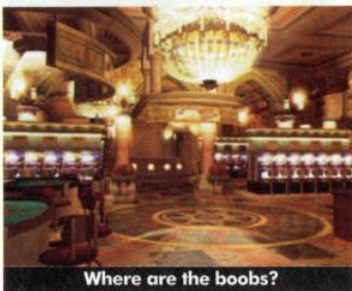
!!! There's no four-player mode in DOA:XBV. Beach Spikers remains the far superior beach volleyball title – in both single and multiplayer.



All American. Other than that she's hot!



Yep, buy girly stuff. What a game.



Where are the boobs?



You must be wet in there, "cough".



Just lean forward a bit closer...

BUMPING, SETTING AND SPIKING TUNES... NOT.

»» Make sure you have a good selection of music on your Xbox HD before going into this game. DOA:XBV has a soundtrack tailored for teenage girls if ever we've heard one. We're talking Christine Aguilera, B*Witched, The Spice Girls, Innosense, the Baha Men and Meja. As bad as this sounds, it does suit the game to some degree, but will definitely annoy far more gamers than it will please. Tecmo really missed a good opportunity here to do something quirky and fun. A Jap Pop soundtrack would have worked a treat! As would other Japanese artists like Fantastic Plastic Machine or Mondo Grosso. In the end, just like everything else in this game, the soundtrack is at best unremarkable.

Oh, and don't even get us started on the speech and dialogue! There's basically no English speech in the game - it's all Japanese with English subtitles (some of the time). On court you'll have to put up with English like "naisu supaiku!" and "naisu serbu", and so on. But perhaps the most disturbing comment we came across was after selecting "go to bed" on the final night on the island, and our character (Tina I think) said "He he, I wonder what daddy's doing now?" - is it just us or is that totally sick?

quickly). This is simplistic beach volleyball in every area, and once you've played for a bit, winning matches is a breeze. The only real reason to play volleyball is to earn money anyway. The greater the winning margin the more money you are awarded. And that's what this game is about - making enough money to collect items and dress your girl up. What is this... Barbie?

CORR... SHE'S A BIT OF ALRIGHT INNIT?

So given that the actual volleyball isn't that compelling, what else is there to do with your time? Well, you could always lounge by the pool, in the jungle or on the beach. Indeed, if you're playing this game for voyeuristic purposes, then this is the "best" it gets. Wow, check it out, Ayane is seductively lying on a log in the jungle! Phwoaar, Tina is doing push-ups in high heels and a G-string by the pool (actually that was kinda nice)! Holy catsuit Batman, Leifang is rolling about on the beach! During these sections you're given very limited control over three

camera angles, and can zoom and rotate around the girl to a limited extent. We're really surprised that Team Ninja didn't implement more free form camera options, as this is what your average fan-boy will have bought the game to see. A fully-fledged replay mode for volleyball games should have been included too. So many missed opportunities!

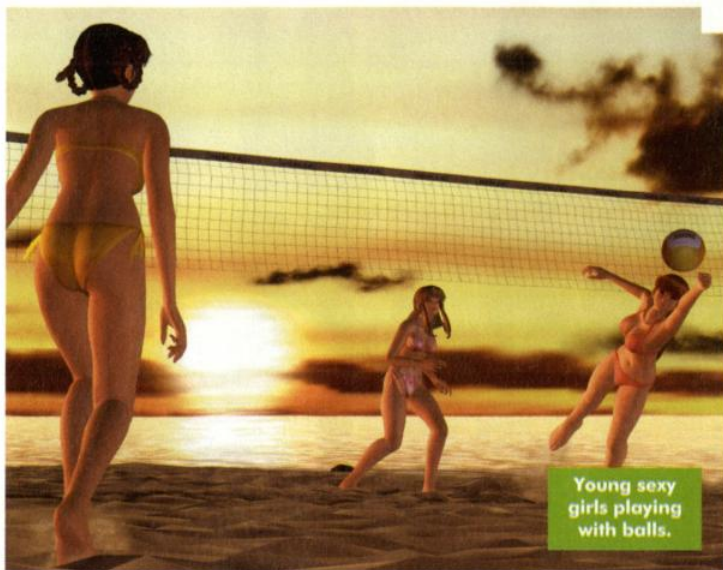
The only other activity of note during the day is the pool hopping mini-game. Basically you have to get your girl to jump from floating cushion to cushion all the way across the pool. It's designed to hone your use of soft versus hard button presses, with cushions that are positioned either close or far from one another. This mini-game is an okay novelty but it costs a whole day segment and you earn so little cash doing it that there's little point. Why is there only one mini-game anyway? If there were a whole host, perhaps involving more of the girls (making it a less lonely experience), then Tecmo may have been able to salvage some degree of longevity from this title.

Night time sees you head back to the hotel, and here you only have gift giving and gambling options available. Unfortunately, visiting the casino is an exercise in boredom. The games available are poker, blackjack, slots and roulette. The presentation is comprised of largely static screens, so there's no sense of interaction or of being in a real place. The games themselves are really basic too, and once the novelty (very quickly) wears off, there's no reason to play them again, other than trying to milk a little Zack cash.

GOING ALL THE WAY

Indeed, it's the lack of interaction that really destroys this game.

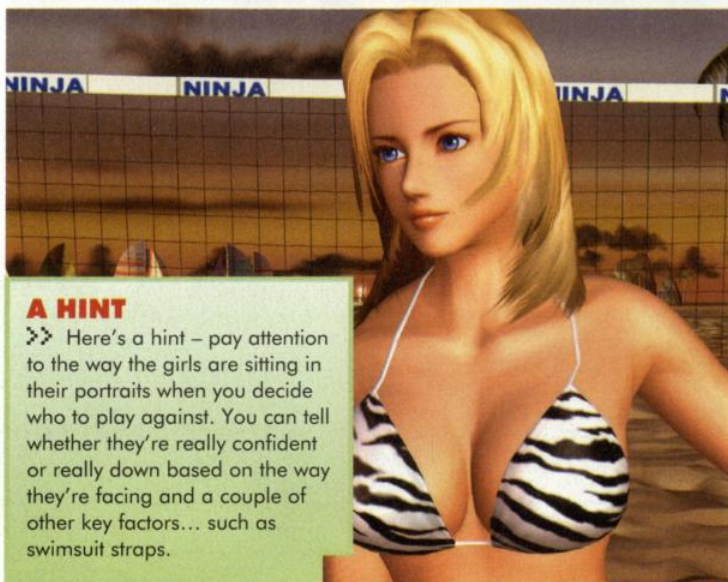




Young sexy girls playing with balls.



Who the hell needs BMX XXX?



A HINT

➤ Here's a hint – pay attention to the way the girls are sitting in their portraits when you decide who to play against. You can tell whether they're really confident or really down based on the way they're facing and a couple of other key factors... such as swimsuit straps.



Perfect to spank you with, my dear.

we couldn't resist the allure of kitting up the girls in outfits that would make Cher blush

Looking at static screens is not exciting! Half the time (such as at night) when you give a gift you have no direct indication of whether the girl liked it or not. And even when you actually give it to a girl in a specific location (what a rude sentence! – Ed.) and get a degree of feedback, there's no real sense of your character being there – and it wastes a section of your day. It's a pity that Team Ninja didn't go all the way in one direction or another. One approach would be to model everything in 3D and give you actual interaction with the girls and locations. Make it more like an RPG in other words. The other would be to keep things static but to at least give you some stats on how the other girls feel about you in a whole host

of areas. After all, you are meant to be competing with the other girls for affections. Either approach would have made for a more consuming experience than the wishy-washy effort we currently have.

So the gameplay isn't there. Surely the visuals are mindblowing right? Not exactly. For the most part the girls look great, but they don't move all that smoothly. Especially when on court, the animations are quite stiff and unwieldy looking. And it won't take more than a couple of games before you are thoroughly sick of seeing the same three or four reaction animations that each girl sports. More definitely wouldn't have gone astray. Same goes for the

!!! Amazingly, Onimusha 2's gift giving system was better than this one!

various beachside, poolside and jungleside animations – there just aren't enough, so they end up looping, and aren't at all natural looking. We're stunned that the animation in DOA:XBV is noticeably less polished than it was in DOA3.

The visuals may not be perfect, but there are definitely some nice elements. The lighting in particular is great, and the courts are set in vividly lush surroundings. The girls are definitely ogle-worthy too. Team Ninja must have done something right, as even we couldn't resist the allure of kitting up the girls in outfits that would make Cher blush.

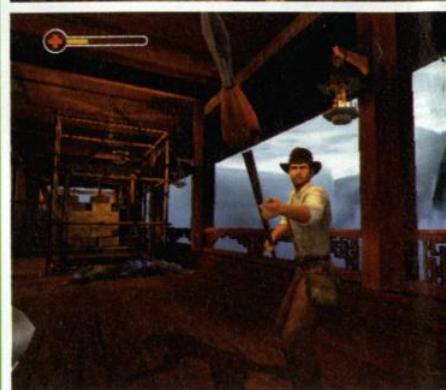
However, the vicarious pleasure to be had in G-strings and jiggling is only ever fleeting, leaving very little else to hold your attention. DOA:XBV badly needs a more compelling structure – as it stands the entire game feels aimless. When the fourteen days finish, you simply start over again, and only get to keep your item collection. Tecmo really lost the plot with this one. <<



PLUS: Jiggle factor (come on... irony!)

MINUS: No nipples. No real fan service.

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY
87	68	63
OVERALL		
68		
Nice graphics. Pity there's little trace of gameplay.		



>>> XBOX PS2 PC

Indiana Jones AND THE EMPORER'S TOMB

CATEGORY: Third Person Action >>> PLAYERS: 1 >>> PUBLISHER: EA >>> PRICE: \$99.95 >>> RATING: M15+ >>> AVAILABLE: Now >>>

CAM SHEA may not like indie music, but he does like Indy gaming.

The Collective are rapidly establishing a name for themselves in the world of third person action/adventure games. Buffy was a hugely enjoyable slice of beat 'em up action, and very faithful to the license. Now we have Indy — an even bigger license that just begs for a proper videogame treatment. We've had reasonable Indy games in the past, so how does this one shape up? Slap on the fedora and find out...

HAT GET!

The Emperor's Tomb runs on a modified version of the Buffy engine and it's not hard to tell. Similarities with Ms Summers' Xbox outing abound, extending beyond just the base technology. For instance, a wide selection of animations have

been reused (or perhaps "fine tuned" is more appropriate) such as the celebrated "kicking crates" animation, the award winning "trying to open door" animation, some of the fighting moves and more. Much of the interface and game structure is also familiar, whether it be the way weapons and items are selected via the D-pad, the ability to pick up various objects and use them as weapons, or the use of fountains to fill Indy's canteen (as opposed to Buffy's super soaker).

Yes, Indy may share a few moves with Buffy, but he's still very much his own man. His whip, for instance, features prominently and can be used to latch on to hooks and swing

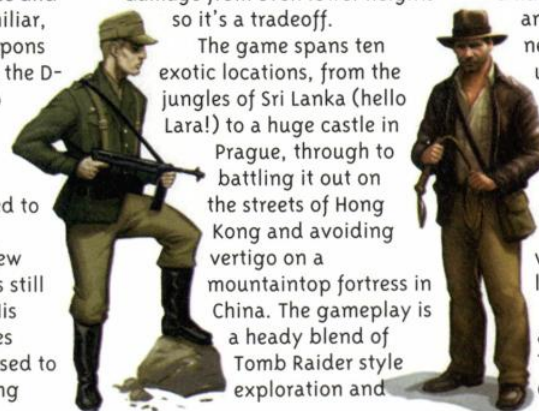
across gaps, as well as whipping the weapon out of an enemy's hand or lashing it around his throat and dragging him over for an uppercut. And unlike Buffy, Indy can actually swim... although he takes fall damage from even lower heights so it's a tradeoff.

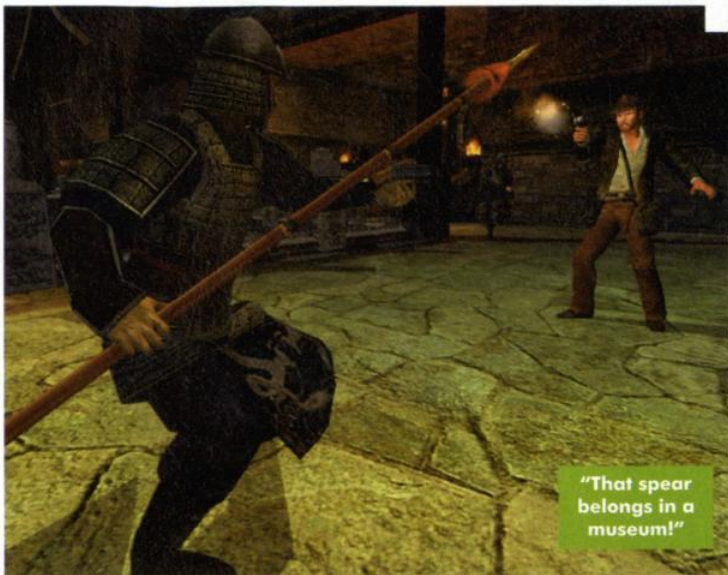
The game spans ten exotic locations, from the jungles of Sri Lanka (hello Lara!) to a huge castle in Prague, through to battling it out on the streets of Hong Kong and avoiding vertigo on a mountaintop fortress in China. The gameplay is a heady blend of Tomb Raider style exploration and

puzzle solving, mixed with an intuitive hand to hand combat system and chunky gunplay (although more ammo would have been nice).

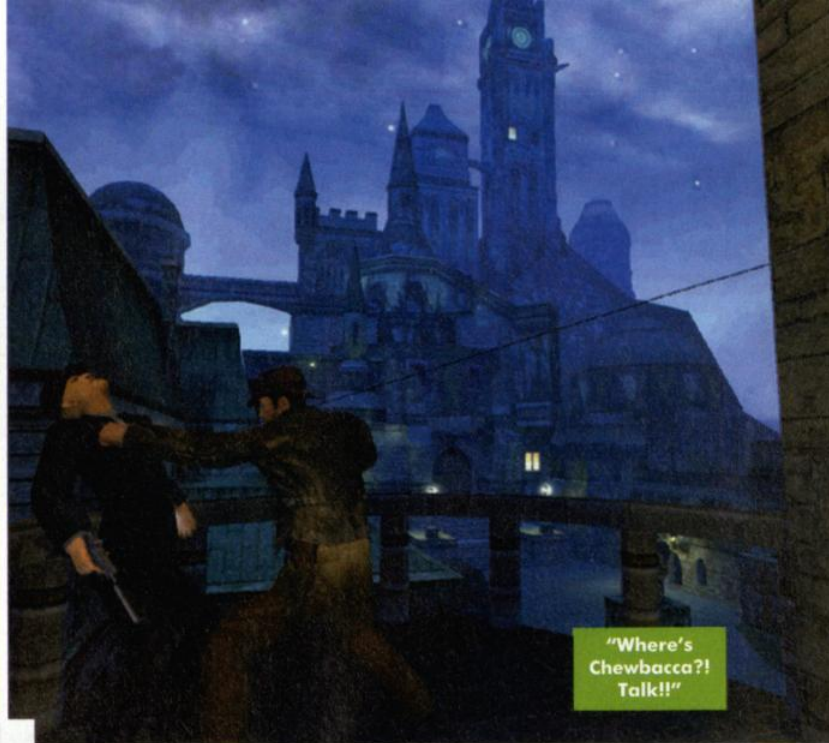
One moment you're edging along a narrow ledge high up in an ancient underground temple, the next you're fighting for your life, unleashing a flurry of punches before throwing your opponent off the nearest precipice. But best of all, if Indy's hat is knocked off during a fight you can collect it afterwards. It wouldn't be Indy without some inanimate fedora loving!

The Emperor's Tomb is quite an impressive looking game - The Collective captured the character well in the model and





"That spear belongs in a museum!"



"Where's Chewbacca?! Talk!!"

NOT ENTIRELY UNEXPECTED

»» The Emperor's Tomb is set in 1935, and before you ask – yes it does feature Nazis. Hurrah! The basic plotline sees the Black Dragon Triad teaming up with a German mercenary to find a black pearl called the Heart of the... yadda yadda yadda... great powers to he who wields it. In order to get it Indy must retrieve the three pieces of the Dragon Seal, blah blah blah. You get the idea. It all adds up to a classic Indy romp, filled with daring deeds, funny accents, zany museums and not entirely unexpected plot twists.



"Y'know, I hate you guys!"



"That dress belongs in a museum!"



"I'm getting too old for this..."

best of all, if Indy's hat is knocked off during a fight you can collect it afterwards

some of the large scale environments are fantastic. Just as impressive, however, is the Harrison Ford sound-alike that voices the character. He does a great job, keeping you believing that you're taking part in a rollicking Indy adventure. The use of music in the game is excellent as well, with the orchestral score reacting dynamically to events in the game.

BREAK IT DOWN Y'ALL

All is not perfect in Jones-town, however, as The Collective have let some amazingly frustrating design elements slip through the net. They're less apparent early on when the game is easy, but it's not long before enemy AI ramps up, the distance between save points increases greatly and jumpy jumpy

sections get longer.

Let's break the problems down. For a start, collision detection is very sketchy. Whether it's that ledge that Indy simply refuses to grab on to, or the fact that you can auto target an enemy at point blank range, yet somehow miss repeatedly, it's hard to have faith in the logic of the gameworld when you can't rely on basic game mechanics. And it doesn't help that the camera mechanics are completely unstable too.

The illusion of freedom is also vexing. Many levels look so full of possibility, yet there's generally only one way through, with completely arbitrary rules determining which ledges Indy can

climb and which he can't. If you try going the "wrong way" you're punished. At one point Indy actually spontaneously died halfway down a slope because it was deemed the "wrong way". It would be nice if exploration was rewarded.

Level design is mostly good, but the way the gameplay is structured between save points could have been a lot better. There's nothing worse than trial and error gameplay or lots of tenuous jumps after a long and involving combat sequence. You often feel cheated when you die, which makes replaying sections all the more annoying.

As negative as this review may sound, we're probably just being harsh because a) we love the Indy movies, b) this game has so much potential, and c) The Collective really should have learnt from the mistakes they made in Buffy. There's still a good game on offer here, and who are you to resist the lure of an Indiana Jones adventure? <<<

!!! Why are bad guys always crate collectors? Not only are the levels littered with crates, but they're almost always empty! What's the point? Why do developers bother putting them in at all?

REVIEWED ON:



PLUS: Indy looks and sounds spot on. Action packed.

MINUS: Just a bit more polish, and this could have been classic.

VISUALS SOUND GAMEPLAY

84 87 81

OVERALL

84

Action-packed adventuring for fans of the real tomb raider.

REVIEW

>>> HYPER 75



Toe Jam & Earl III

CATEGORY: Platform >> PLAYERS: 1-2 >> PUBLISHER: SEGA >> PRICE: \$99.95 >> RATING: TBA >> AVAILABLE: Now >>

BRETT ROBINSON checks between his toes. Ewwww...

Way back in 1991, one of the finer titles to grace the Megadrive system was Toe Jam & Earl, an ingenious little platformer featuring two quirky aliens with a penchant for all things funky. It lagged somewhat in the graphics department, but Toe Jam & Earl's compelling gameplay and copious quantities of 'attitood' won over a fair few gamers, and even spawned a sequel, Toe Jam & Earl: Panic on Funkotron. Why the lads never continued their adventures on subsequent consoles is anybody's guess, but the franchise's long-awaited third iteration is finally here.

THE POWER OF FUNK

The game begins with a lengthy cinematic in which Toe Jam, Earl and series newcomer Latisha are

summoned by the illustrious leader of planet Funkotron, the Funkopotamus. Someone or something has stolen the Funkopotamus's cherished funk albums and scattered them across Earth, and he wants them recovered quick-smart. Equipped with a shiny new ride, the intrepid trio must journey to Earth, retrieve the stolen vinyl and, while they're at it, school the decidedly un-funky Earthlings in the ways of funk.

Like many platformers, TJ&E III employs a system of interconnected hub realms. The somewhat surreal floating realms are filled with hostile and friendly NPCs and powerups, and are also host to doors galore. Collecting keys allows the player to unlock these doors, which lead to island-like levels, mini games, and

other realms. The mini games offer timed challenges such as taking on a flock of egg-hurling chickens, and using spring shoes to hop around a circuit of skyscrapers. Some levels also allow the player to engage in rhythm-matching challenges where pressing buttons in sync with beats sets their character dancing. The rhythm-matching games are a great deal of fun, so it's a pity there aren't a lot more of them.

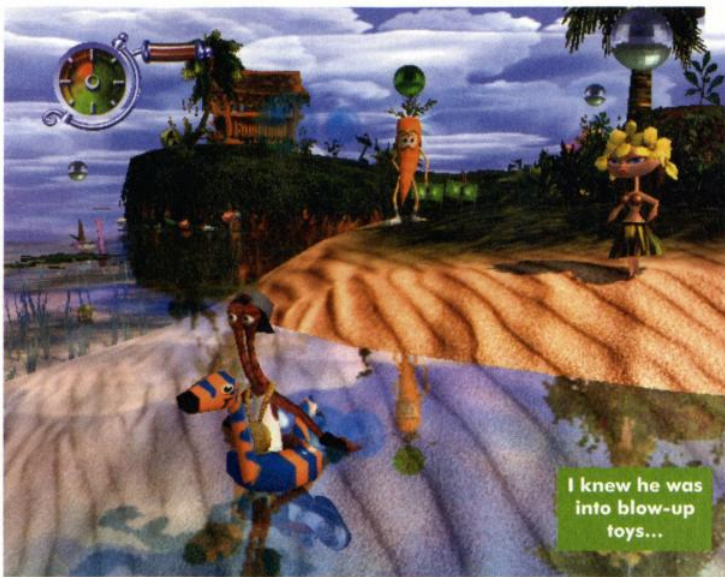
In most cases, the xenophobic earthlings that populate the game world aren't particularly happy to see Toe Jam, Latisha or Earl, and will either attack them ceaselessly or run away screaming. Neither reaction is desirable, but all three characters can use their divine powers of Funk Fu to convert humans from aggressive or fearful annoyances into funky,

helpful galactic citizens. Some of the tougher NPCs are resistant to Funk Fu, but can be placated with Funkify Notes fired from boomboxes.

AUDITORY HELL

From the default perspective, the game's graphics are crisp, but it isn't until the player shifts the camera closer to the action that TJ&E III's visuals can be appreciated. The character models for Latisha, Earl and Toe Jam are nicely detailed, and their animations are quite fluid. Close up, the NPC models look much less refined, but the landscapes are another matter entirely. Bump mapping is evident in the terrain





I knew he was into blow-up toys...



That's the worst implant job I've ever seen.



Just funk off will ya?



Split-screen boredom!



Take me to your dealer.



They'll wipe that smug look off her face.



Eww, she pulled them off! Gross!

the rhythm-matching games are a great deal of fun, so it's a pity there aren't a lot more of them

textures, and bodies of water look very inviting. The sharpness of the visuals comes at a price, however; the limited draw distance occasionally makes spotting neighbouring 'islands' very frustrating. Peering at expanses of empty sky ain't no fun!

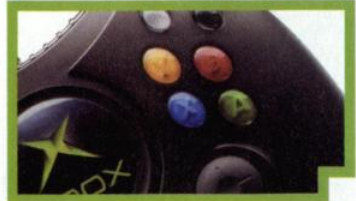
Toe Jam, Earl and Latisha are able to converse in ebonics-laden English with the denizens of Earth by way of the Xbox controller's black button. Chatting with certain converted NPC's yields presents and cash, but it's the innuendo that peppers the conversations which is the player's true reward. Many of these verbal exchanges are certain to elicit a chuckle from those in the right (or perhaps wrong) frame of mind, TJ's lascivious invitation to female earthlings — "Hey, baby,

check out my third leg!" — being a prime example.

The voice acting for the characters and NPC's is of a high standard, and their personalities shine through as a result. Loud-mouthed and supremely overconfident Toe Jam sounds a lot like Chris Rock, homegirl Latisha's voice would not seem out of place on the stage of the Ricki Lake show, and unflappable Earl's measured baritone suits his chilled demeanour to a 't'. The game's speech won't be to everybody's taste, though. Phrases like 'bling bling' and 'aight?' feature prominently (actually, excessively so) in the dialogue, so anyone who bristles at the mere thought of enduring them will be in auditory hell playing TJ&E III.

!!! TJ&EIII supports Xbox Live, but it'll be a while before we can get our hands on the extra levels and powerups on offer.

TJ&E III's soundtrack is utterly forgettable, which is a damn shame considering how heavily funk figures in both the plot and the gameplay. The superb gospel singing that precedes each mission partially makes up for this deficiency. However, other problems are harder to overlook, primary amongst these being the static nature of the gameplay. From the outset the player collects keys and converts humans, and while the mini games and occasional boss fights inject some much-needed variation, ultimately the player always returns to the tiresome task of collecting keys. The game does offer an unusual co-op mode, and many of the levels are randomly generated, but the effect of these features on Toe Jam & Earl III's longterm appeal is negligible. Hardcore TJ&E fans might stick with it for longer, but most players will find their attention wavering after a few hours. Disappointing. <<<

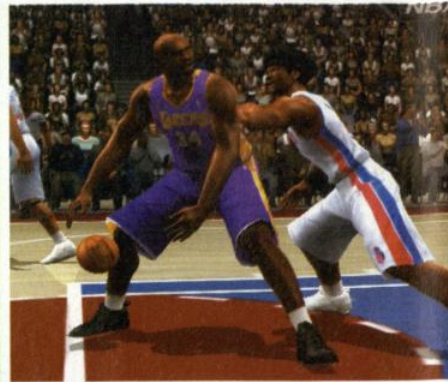
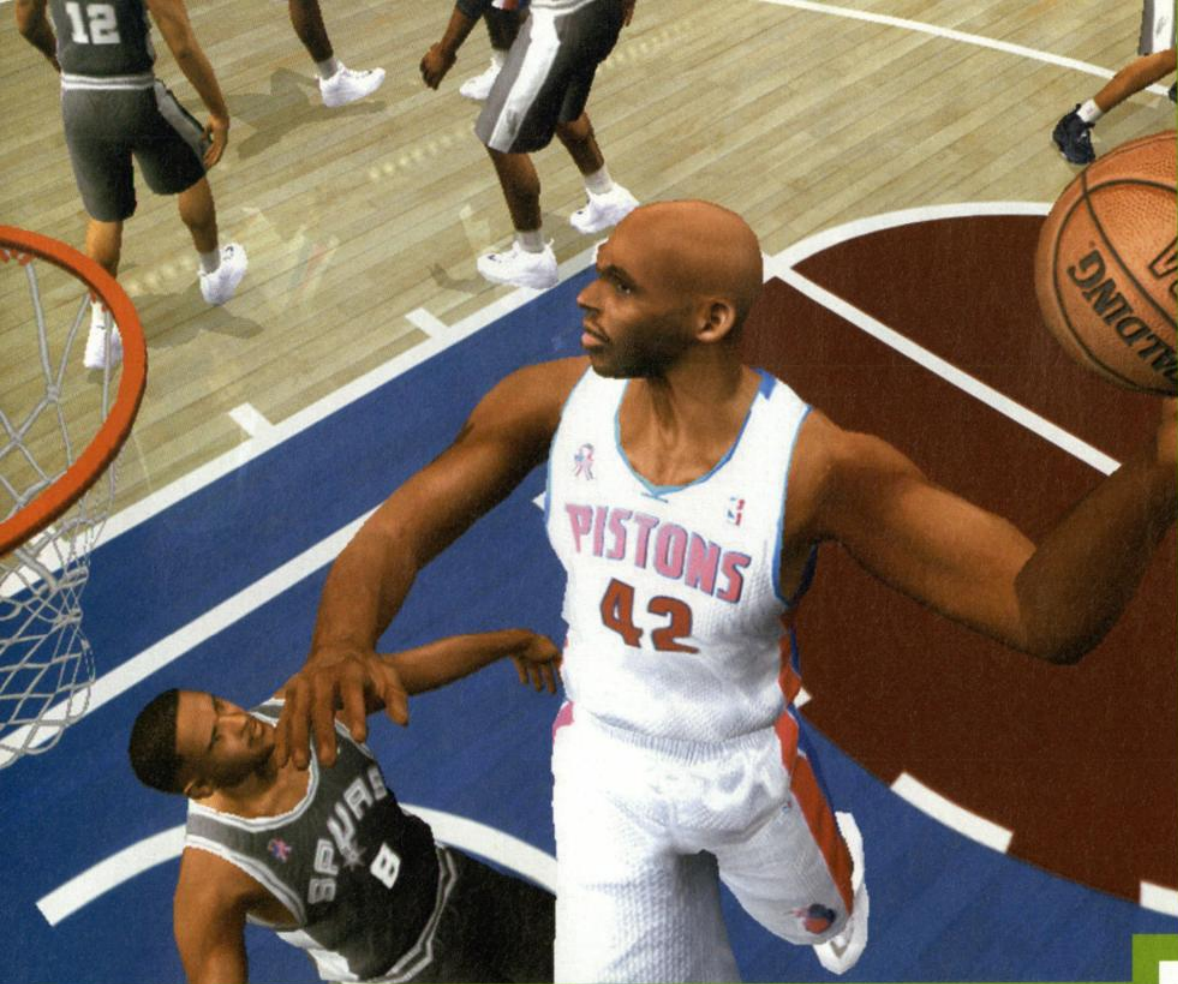


PLUS: Great voices, plenty of humour, cool mini games.

MINUS: Extremely repetitive core gameplay. Lame-arse boss.

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY
80	74	68
OVERALL		
69		

Style over substance, all the way.



» XBOX PS2 GCN

NBA 2K3

CATEGORY: Sport >> PLAYERS: 1-4 >> PUBLISHER: Sega Sports >> PRICE: \$99.95 >> RATING: G >> AVAILABLE: Now >>

ERIC CABRERA dribbles around the place.

It took a while but finally the Sega Sports range has seen the light of day in Australia. One of these titles has been long regarded as the king of simulation basketball but its predecessor never graced Australian Xboxes. Thankfully, the people over at Sega have come to their senses and have authorised a PAL release for the latest instalment, NBA 2K3. It may have been late but at least it's here, and we've popped it in to see if it flies like Mike or bricks like Shaq's free-throws.

JAW-DROPPING DUNKS

NBA2K3 is as close to NBA basketball as any other game to date. From the pace of the action to the sights and sounds in your team's stadium, any basketball enthusiast will not be disappointed. Visually, NBA 2K3 is

second to none. Although some of the lesser-known players may look somewhat generic, the superstars are presented perfectly. Along with the incredibly accurate faces there are finer touches that any fan will appreciate. You'll crack up laughing at John Stockton's tiny shorts, see Ben Wallace with a huge afro one game and cornrows the next and if you look close enough you can see variations in Allen Iverson's cornrows. As well as this, you will notice the players getting sweatier as the game goes on. How's that for realism? The player movements are smooth between transitions and there are so many jaw-dropping dunks that even after extended amounts of play, you will be surprised by one that you haven't seen before.

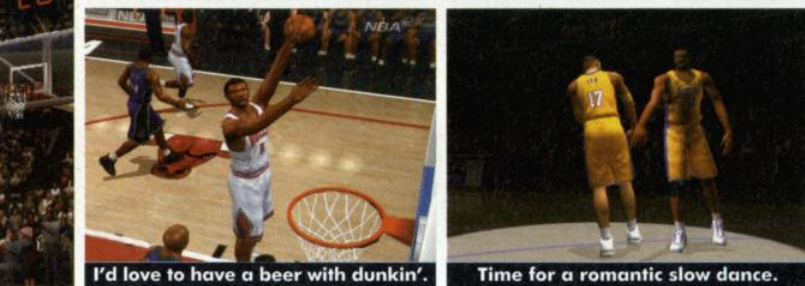
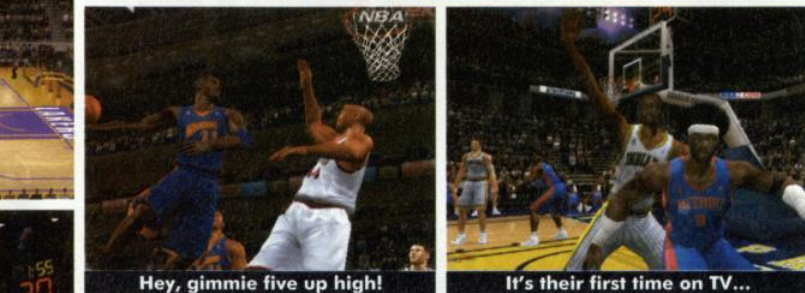
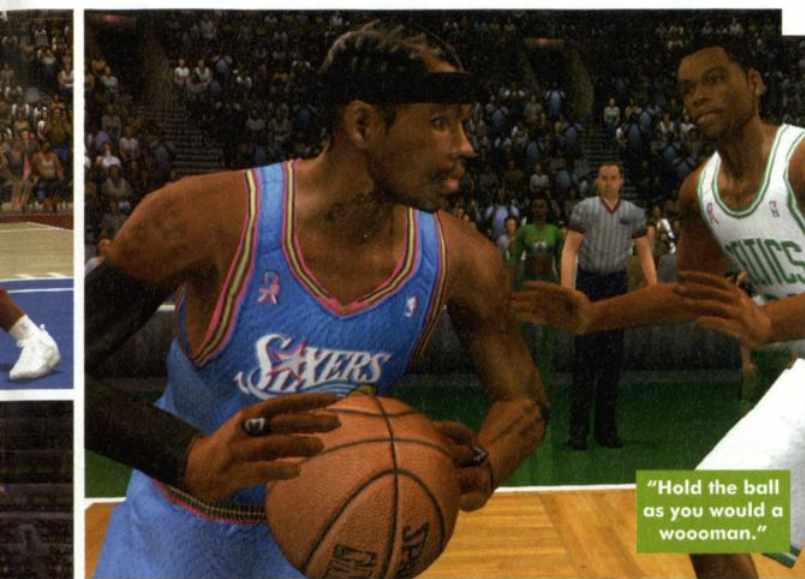
With your eyes attempting to differentiate between the game and reality, your ears won't be far behind. The crowd respond to the action taking place, as you'll notice them getting very quiet if their team is in a slump while they become boisterous if their team is on top. Along with this, you'll be able to hear the players talking trash, calling plays and even grunting as collisions occur. The commentary is insightful, but it does get repetitive after a while.

The game looks and sounds good, but what sets it apart from any other basketball game is the way Visual Concepts backs this up with brilliant gameplay. The emphasis, as in real NBA basketball, is on the half court game. This means you will need to move the ball around to create an open shot or a chance to drive to the

lane, since shot percentages have been lowered to the point where even superstar players can't hit consistently with hands in their faces. As a result, you'll want to have a look through each team's playbooks and learn to use the play-calling function during the game to effectively run the offense. It does go to extremes as you will sometimes see players like Vince miss wide open dunks — seriously, how often does that happen in real life?

One aspect of basketball that does occur in real life is the newly implemented change of shot. As you go up for a dunk and see Dikembe's outstretched arms waiting to send the ball off to Congo, you can quickly change your shot to avoid the block. You have to take the good with the bad, however. The passing in 2K3 is troublesome at times. Every





even superstar players can't hit consistently **with hands in their faces**

so often, when trying to pass in a certain direction the ball won't go to the person you want, so it is really worth your time learning how to use icon passing. As well as this, in fastbreak situations, you might want to pass it up to a teammate running towards the basket but they'll stop where they are, turn around and catch the ball giving the opposition enough time to get back on defense. This gets very frustrating at times and is something Visual Concepts should look to fix in 2K4.

SCOUT AND DRAFT

If you want some variation in your ballin' you may want to try out the Street Mode, featuring actual street courts like Rucker Park. Perfect for those multiplayer games, the relaxed rules allow for a free-flowing game

and consequently you'll see more highlight-reel material. You can also fine-tune your game in Practice Mode, where you can work on your jump shot, free-throws or offensive plays.

Although these modes are great, the aspect of this game that excels is its Franchise Mode. It is without doubt the most comprehensive Franchise Mode ever seen in any basketball game to date. You are really put in the General Manager's shoes as you have control over the usual aspects like rosters, trades and salaries, but now you have control over the coaching staff. Don't want Doug Collins coaching your Wizards anymore? No problem, just release him and hire a young hot-shot. I don't think MJ will be too happy

!!! Sega just recently announced that they will no longer develop Sega Sports titles for the GameCube.

though. Another addition to Franchise Mode is your ability to scout and draft rookies. You can assign workouts for the prospects you have your eye on and your Scouting Manager will give you detailed analysis on each player based on their performances. After a couple of workouts you will know who's got game and who doesn't, so you know who to pick when it's your turn in the draft.

Overall, NBA 2K3 is a solid basketball game that will have you playing until 2K4 comes out. The franchise mode will keep you busy, but once again

multiplayer enthusiasts are eagerly awaiting the arrival of Xbox Live to our fair shores. First, NBA 2K3 and now Xbox Live — do we get anything on time? So if you are looking for a basketball simulation, go and get this game right now. If you want a fast paced, run-and-gun, sir-dunk-a-lot, kind of game you may want to try out NBA Live 2003 first. <<

REVIEWED ON:



PLUS: Great gameplay and fantastic Franchise Mode.

MINUS: No LIVE play... yet.

VISUALS SOUND GAMEPLAY
89 81 93

OVERALL

90

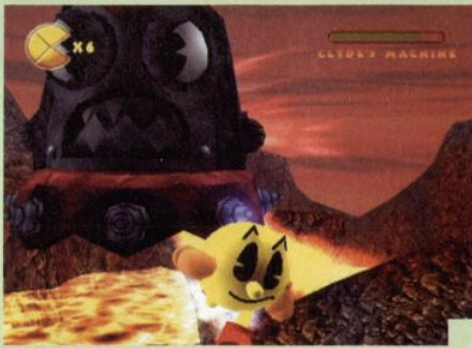
The best Basketball sim out there.

REVIEW

» HYPER 79



Oh jeez, he's popping pills again.



PS2/XBOX

Pac-Man World 2

CATEGORY: Platformer >> PLAYERS: 1 >>
 PUBLISHER: Namco >> PRICE: \$89.95 >>
 RATING: G >> AVAILABLE: Now >>

Our favourite little yellow tennis-ball-looking creature is back! Those nasty ghosts are at it again and this time they've stolen golden fruit from a tree, and consequently released the big-daddy of all ghosts — Spooky. Yes, you read that correctly. Pac-Man needs to retrieve the golden fruit and send Spooky back to where he came from.

Graphically, the worlds are colourful and beautifully rendered with that Pac-Man style we've all grown to love. The music and sound effects are also reminiscent of the old-school arcade games. But in terms of gameplay, it's your average platform game. Pac-Man has learnt some new moves, and it seems that maybe he's been playing some other video games for some pointers — he can stomp on enemies much like an Italian plumber, and can perform a charging roll much like a blue hedgehog.

Although many platform games suffer from bad camera angles, this one seems to suffer the most. The camera is so horrendous that at times you can't see little Pac-Man on the screen. Even worse, sometimes you can't see what's ahead of you and you have to jump blindly, hoping you'll land on some ground. Ultimately, you'll lose many lives because you can't see what you're doing.

The saving grace is the ability to collect tokens in the game to unlock the original Pac-Man arcade games. Overall, younger kids might get a kick out of the new game, but for the older folk, the retro aspect of playing the original games will be the only incentive to play. **Eric Cabrera**



Ahh spontaneous combustion!



GCN

Summoner: A Goddess Reborn

CATEGORY: RPG >> PLAYERS: 1 >>
 PUBLISHER: THQ >> PRICE: \$99.95 >>
 RATING: M15+ >> AVAILABLE: Now >>

If you've always wanted to be a queen, but wanted to try it out first in the privacy of your own home, now is your chance. And you won't even have to squeeze into the thigh-high boots. Thanks to THQ, you can see how you fare as Maia, the Queen of Halassar, on the GameCube. PS2 owners will know of this game as Summoner 2, the follow-up to the mixed bag that was Summoner. Naturally, as this is a port and the first time the game has appeared on GameCube, it's been re-titled A Goddess Reborn.

Whilst we all wait patiently for The Legend of Zelda: The Wind Waker — the RPG we REALLY want to play — it wouldn't hurt to check Summoner out. This is the kind of Action/RPG that the GameCube needs more of. There's strategy, action, puzzles and some true fantasy creations to meet and greet, as well as some interesting environments and lavish visuals.

You have the ability to control a party of up to three characters, with some simple AI behaviour commands to set for each one. Naturally, you're always controlling one of the three manually, and you can switch to the others using the shoulder buttons, making it pretty easy to utilise all the characters' skills when you specifically want to use them.

There's plenty of depth to A Goddess Reborn, and the deeper you go, the more hooked you'll become. It might not be the best Action/RPG to come along, but the way things are on GameCube at the moment, we'll take whatever we can get. **Frank Dry**



Oh look, he's lost. Better take him to the pound.



PC

Morrowind: Tribunal

CATEGORY: RPG expansion >> PLAYERS: 1 >>
 PUBLISHER: Bethesda Softworks >> PRICE: \$TBA >>
 RATING: M15+ >> AVAILABLE: Now >>

The multi-award winning Morrowind might have provided a story too loose for such an epic world for most of us, and a messy journal system that didn't help to sort through the piles of plot fragments, but Bethesda Software's official expansion, the much applauded "Tribunal" promises to alleviate some of those woes.

Tribunal doesn't alter the original storyline, providing a large but tight-fitting side-quest stretching out from Vvardenfell to the capitol of Morrowind, Mournhold and the Clockwork City of Sotha Sil that keeps you personally involved from the word "Go", beginning with a rude awakening directly after installation.

The journal has been revamped to make working out the next step of your life that much easier, and the map now lets you plonk in notes next to locations so you can remember plot tidbits.

If you didn't like Morrowind the first time round, Tribunal just might make you change your mind. You'll still need a beefy piece of hardware to run it. If it was the clunky feel that bugged you, however, Tribunal doesn't change much, and plays more like a huge, official plug-in, adding 20 hours minimum to the epic game. Be warned, however, that many unofficial Morrowind plug-ins are not yet compatible with the expansion, and you'll need a high level character to work your way through it. **Shakil "Shak" Ahmed**

VISUALS

75

SOUND

72

GAMEPLAY

63

OVERALL

68

VISUALS

79

SOUND

82

GAMEPLAY

83

OVERALL

82

VISUALS

82

SOUND

76

GAMEPLAY

82

OVERALL

79

ARCADE

>>TIM LEUY

Tsurugi KONAMI

What is a car driving sim without a steering wheel?
What is a sword fighting sim without a sword?

— (unattributed ancient Japanese riddle)

Set in 1563 Japan, you don the wooden platform shoes of a Samurai who has just had his sister kidnapped by a sinister warlord. But being the Katana wielding sword fighting bad-ass you are, instead of just sensibly paying the ransom, you go in search of her through treacherous terrain infested with people who are keen to see you sliced and diced into itty bitty pieces and fed as compost to their bonsai-tree collections.



A foot pedal allows you to 'rush' at opponents, thus closing the distance allowing you to strike first or rapidly counter attack. Your sword's motions are actually mimicked on screen so that you can see that diagonal slash or the Zorro inspired Z chopping pattern that you like to emblazon in your enemies' chests and/or foreheads. And remember, the more you chop your opponents using one of the various authentic slashing combos, the higher your score.

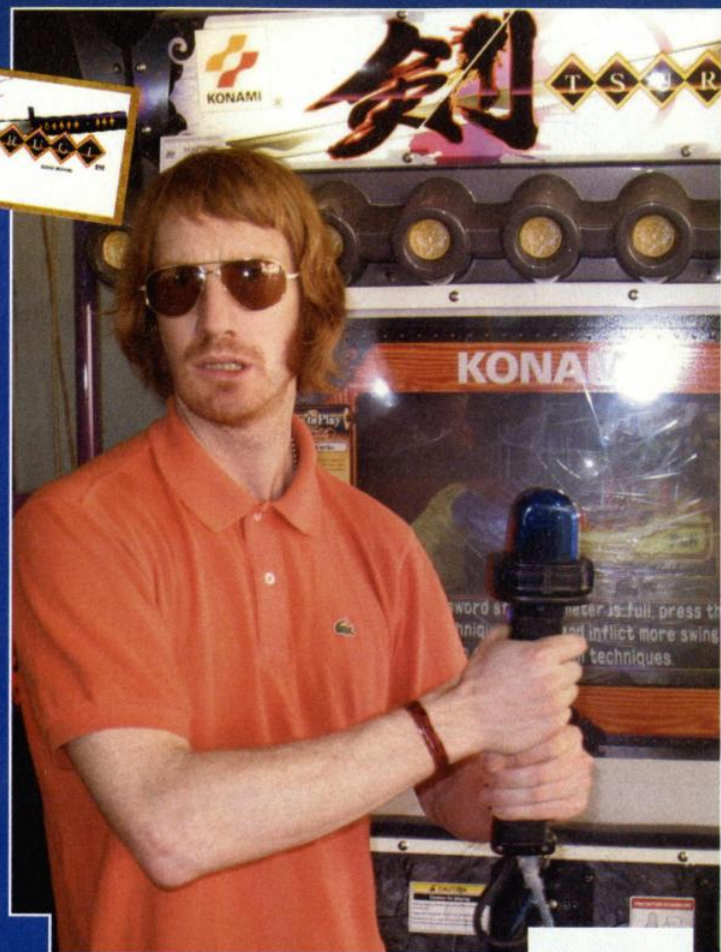
One unrealistic addition to the game, apart from the one of you being able sustain several hits from hefty bladed instruments (see health meter), is the 'sword strength' meter, and that when full, allows you access to 'mysterious special techniques'. It is best to save this deadly move for when you are facing a boss.

ZORRO INSPIRED

Tsurugi is a sword fighting fan's dream game. A motion capture sword interface, which looks slightly like a police baton with a blue light attached to it, allows you to wield an on screen 'blade' so that you can block other weapons, make various slashing and stabbing manoeuvres, as well as deflecting incoming thrown weapons.

COUNTER STRIKES

Some of the environments you will travel through include villages, a bamboo forest, a castle, a cave, on a river raft and open plains. The early stages will find you dispatching enemies quite easily, though further into the game you will have to deal with opponents who are fairly skilled

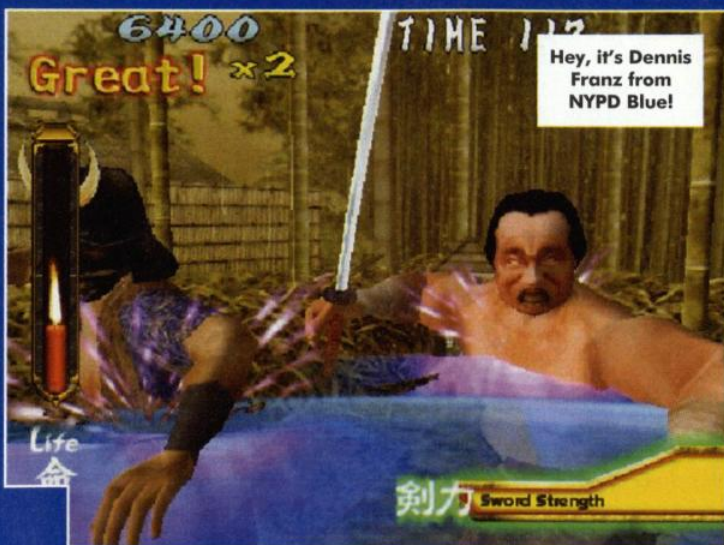


Tim, there's a bit missing...

and will block your moves thus placing a far greater emphasis on exact moves and counter strikes.

What really makes this game is the attention to detail, as your opponents all use authentic martial arts weapons from the period. Each of the six end of stage bosses have their own unique weapons, and to be defeated, you will have to find their weaknesses through trial and error.

To complete this game you will find you'll have your work really "cut" out for you and by the time you are finished hacking your way halfway across Japan, your arms will have made over 500 slashes, which is - quite tiring! So what next? Can someone please, please make the next Soul Calibur with a Tsurugi inspired interchangeable sword interface please. Please? <<



OVERALL

9/10

COIN-OP

>>HYPER 81

Crash Bandicoot 2: N-Tranced

CATEGORY: Platformer >> PLAYERS: 1-2 >> PUBLISHER: Universal >>
 PRICE: \$79.95 >> RATING: G >> AVAILABLE: Now >> TTC: 0 seconds

Crate scott! Crash is back and packing more crates than ever. In fact, this game is a crate spotter's paradise. The average level has 66.7 crates (we counted... maybe), which is a higher density of crates than just about any other game on the planet. Even more amazingly, every Crash game has had this level of crate intensity. How do they do it?

Putting aside the all important topic of crates for a moment, one could be forgiven for thinking that Crash Bandicoot's second outing on GBA is a tribute to god awful dance music "artists" N-Trance. Fortunately, this is not the case. Rather, it refers to a new villain introduced into the Crash Bandicoot fold. N. Trance is a master hypnotist recruited by Uka Uka and Dr N. Tropy (he's part of the



Yep, he's going to crash, alright.



We're rooting for Jaws.



The true stars of this game...



Second Law of Thermodynamics crew) to help brainwash Crash's friends and turn them against him. But what does this all mean?

Bugger all. Crash 2 has the same blend of levels as every other Crash platformer to date. There are the traditional side on levels - running, swimming and flying, paired with levels going into or out of the screen (this time around it's wakeboarding, but functionally there's no difference to other iterations), as well as isometric levels in the atlasphere ball (which are actually a nice diversion). And surprise surprise, you're still collecting apples and crystals, and (hold the phone!) smashing crates. Oh the humanity! Crash's moves are nicely varied but very familiar, while the sound effects seem to be exactly the same as his previous outing. To be fair, the storyline does help

provide progression in the game (by definition really), and the boss battles against Crash's bizarre crew add an interesting twist on the formula. N-Tranced is a polished game, but not recommended for anyone over ten. **Cam Shea**

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY	OVERALL
80	76	81	75

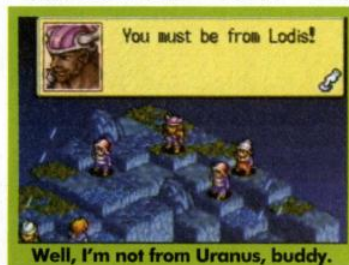
Tactics Ogre: THE KNIGHT OF LODIS

CATEGORY: Strategy >> PLAYERS: 1-2 >> PUBLISHER: Atlus Software >>
 PRICE: TBA >> RATING: G >> AVAILABLE: Now >>

Anyone who has played any of the Tactics Ogre or Ogre Battle games raise your hand. You all get a star. No, better yet, you all get a medal. You see, despite considerable critical and commercial success overseas, when it comes to the Ogre games Australia always seems to be overlooked. But screw it, we want you guys in the

loop on these fantastic titles... hence this month's import review of Tactics Ogre.

Tactics Ogre is at its core a turn-based strategy game, where the battlefield is presented from a pseudo-3D isometric viewpoint. You place up to eight men (or woman, mermaids, octopi, dragons etc) on the map, then move them



Well, I'm not from Uranus, buddy.



Excuse me whilst I take a map.



individually to try and out-think the opposition. A whole host of strategic elements come into play, including elevation, terrain, weather, unit facing, elemental powers, team make-up and so on. Of course, before battle, the options are even more extensive. You can train your soldiers, buy and kit them out with new weapons, abilities and spells, and much more. Particularly cool are the extensive options for character classes. You can change classes at any time provided you meet the requirements, which range from very basic to incredibly stringent (which is, of course, part of the fun). It all adds up to incredibly engrossing, but very slow paced gameplay, so twitch gamers need not apply.

Best of all, this in-depth combat is complemented by an engrossing storyline. As the title suggests, you play a knight of the mighty Lodis empire. You're sent to the island of Ovis with a small crew to investigate reports of an insurgency. It's not long, however, before your character is doubting the motivations of both his superiors and his "friends", and rethinking his own loyalty to the order. Those of you looking for an old school strategy experience to tide you over until Final Fantasy Tactics arrives, look no further. **Cam Shea**

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY	OVERALL
84	77	85	86



Castlevania: HARMONY OF DISSONANCE

CATEGORY: Side scrolling action >> **PLAYERS:** 1 >> **PUBLISHER:** Konami >>
PRICE: TBA >> **RATING:** TBA >> **AVAILABLE:** TBA >>

It was with Symphony of the Night (SotN) on PlayStation that the Castlevania series finally realised its potential. Not since Super Metroid had a game combined huge environments, non-linear exploration, kick-ass abilities and a dash of RPG so cohesively. SotN proved that 2D will never die, and now with the GBA, the series has found the ideal home.

Harmony of Dissonance (HoD) follows the excellent Circle of the Moon (CoTM), and very much conforms to the typical Castlevania blueprint. Story-wise all you need to know is you're in Dracula's castle (again!) and you kick ass. Nuff said. The main character is Juste Belmont, and he's a pretty lithe chap. The new dash ability (by tapping the left or right



Reefer madness!



Just whip it, whip it good.



When in doubt, run.



shoulder buttons) in particular gives you much greater versatility in combat and faster foot speed.

As usual there are whip upgrades and armour to find and equip, as well as a host of moves that unlock new areas in the castle(s).

The most significant change from CoTM is that the DSS magic system has been ditched in favour of a more traditional approach – there are five spell books to find, and each can be combined with any of the six secondary weapons (y'know, cross, holy water, axe etc) to create a unique effect. Of course you can only have one of the secondary weapons equipped at once.

If you've played a Castlevania game before you'll know what to expect from the bestiary and level design in HoD. The visuals are of a

similarly high standard – much brighter than in CoTM and featuring some truly cool looking bosses. Downsides? It's a little on the easy side, and still can't match SotN, but hey, on GBA you can be a rogue demon hunter wherever you go.

Chad Sexington



Skull Knight

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY	OVERALL
85	78	89	88

Speedball 2

CATEGORY: Future sports >> **PLAYERS:** 1-4 >> **PUBLISHER:** Wanadoo >>
PRICE: \$79.95 >> **RATING:** G >> **AVAILABLE:** Now >>

The Bitmap Brothers were obviously heavily influenced by the classic 1975 film "Rollerball" when creating the Speedball games back in the '80s. The setting is a hundred or so years in the future, at a time when traditional sports have been usurped by a brutal underground death sport known as

Speedball. Five heavily armoured players per team face off in an arena, and battle over possession of a steel ball. Points are scored through goals as well as a number of multipliers and switches in the arena. The gameplay is simple but works well, with a good balance between strategy and out and out violence.



Does this thing do SMS?



They've been doing speedballs...

The overall goal of the league mode is to take your team – Brutal Deluxe, and lead them from the bottom of second division to glory in the first division. Importantly, there's also a management aspect to it. Cash collected during games can be spent upgrading the abilities of your players in a heap of areas, and you can even trade players on the transfer market. Underlining that this is a very British game, there's also a pure management option where you don't actually play, just manage the team.

This port is based on the Commodore Amiga and Sega Mega Drive editions of Speedball II, and from what we remember it's very faithful in gameplay and presentation. A slightly more zoomed out camera would have been good though, as you can only see a tiny slice of the arena at any one time.

Speedball II is the first of a flood of classic Bitmap Brothers titles on



Pick your face!

their way to GBA, thanks to a deal between the BBs and GBA tech gurus Crawfish Interactive. These guys were a truly legendary dev house back in the Amiga and Atari ST days, so we're quite excited at the prospect of The Chaos Engine, Xenon II, Gods, Cadaver and Magic Pocket getting re-released. Worth a look.

Lance Uppercut

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY	OVERALL
70	70	76	76





THIS LOOKS JUST LIKE LAST YEAR'S MARDI GRAS



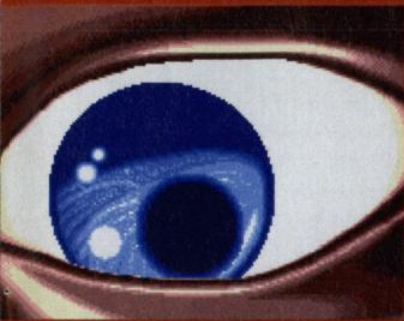
ARE YOU CALLIN' ME YELLOW?



LOOK BEHIND YOU, A THREE-HEADED MONKEY!

Altered Beast

>>ANDREW HUMPHREYS



(TOP) THE EYE IS A WINDOW ON THE SOUL... SO WHAT THE BLOODY HELL ARE WE LOOKING AT?

The Ancient Greeks

as Herodotus once wrote, were a funny lot. A conquest here, a pillage there, a ride in a wooden horsey — they knew a good time when they saw one and they weren't afraid of getting their hands dirty (or even bloody) when it came time to pay the bill. And yet somehow this motley collection of emerging city-states became the cradle of Western civilisation, the home of democracy (you know — that thing that allows an unelected hereditary leader to wage war on behalf of the peace-loving people of the Free World), the Olympics, souvlaki and less important things like history, philosophy, mathematics and music.

The Greeks also loved a good story, and they must have put something funny in the ouzo back then because they came up with the surreal collection of stories — of gods and monsters and gods who had sex with monsters — that we know today as Greek mythology. Without Greek mythology there would be no Hercules, and without Hercules there would be no Xena: Warrior Princess (Zeus, protect us!) and Kevin Sorbo's television career would almost certainly have never reached the heady heights of Andromeda, thus depriving Star Trek geeks of one more peripheral program to obsess over in Internet chat rooms. More importantly, without Greek mythology there would be no Altered Beast, and without Altered Beast the world as we know it — a world of laughter and smiles and consoles in every home — may have never come to pass.

KICK DEMON BUTT

Altered Beast is not a good game, but it is an important game. It's also a game that's hard not to love — full of great ideas and novel touches — and, despite its many flaws, gamers of a certain vintage will always remember it fondly.

Altered Beast was originally released as an arcade game on the Sega System 16 board in 1988. A big pair of eyes — one human, the other... the Altered Beast! — was painted on the front of the cabinet. There was a joystick and three buttons (punch, kick, jump) to control the main character, a butch Greek type raised from the dead to battle the demons of the Underworld and rescue Zeus's daughter. It was your standard horizontal scrolling arcade beat 'em up — punch, kick, jump, kick, jump, punch, take out the boss at the end — except that it featured an ingenious series of power ups that turned your character from a slightly buff reincarnated Greek warrior to a mega buff reincarnated Greek warrior (from Van Damme to Schwarzenegger) and finally into...the Altered Beast!

Even more ingeniously, you got to be a different beast in each of the game's five levels: a werewolf, a flying dragon (with a funky electric shock attack), a big old bear (Not So Gentle Ben), a tiger and, finally, the cool-looking Golden Werewolf. The trick was to power up to the Altered Beast as quickly as you could, kick demon butt until you reached the first mid-level boss, pick its pattern, defeat it and continue on your merry reincarnated Greek way.

Versions of Altered Beast were released for the NES, Amiga and Sega Master System, but it was the Megadrive version, bundled with the machine's launch in 1991, that promised gamers arcade perfection in the comfort of their own homes. Virtually every Megadrive gamer had a copy of Altered Beast and virtually every one of them saw it as vindication of the system's relatively high price tag.

BIG CHUNKY SPRITES

For an arcade conversion, Altered Beast was as good as it got. It wasn't arcade perfect, but it was close. It had digitised speech ("Rise from your grave!" and the very descriptive "Power up!"), big, chunky sprites, an atmospheric soundtrack and multiple layers of parallax scrolling. (It also allowed fledgling game journalists to use terms like "digitised speech", "sprites" and "parallax scrolling" without really knowing what they meant. When "voxel space technology" hit the gaming landscape there was no looking back.)

The Megadrive version's main attraction was that it added a two-player cooperative mode. That made it great for family fun, but it also made it even easier than it already was. If two half-decent gamers couldn't sit down in front of Altered Beast and finish it within an hour or so, they simply weren't trying. And once they were done they'd start to notice that the colour palette was a little limited, that the controls were clunky and that, while the character design was kinda cool, the animation (such as it was) kinda sucked. When the next generation of Megadrive games (like Sonic the Hedgehog) came along, Altered Beast looked positively primitive.

In many ways Altered Beast marked the beginning of the modern console market in Australia. It provided a generation of gamers with their first 16-bit experience and was, for a short time, the showcase game for a hugely successful system. When Nintendo entered the 16-bit war with the Super NES, video games were suddenly a serious business. Then Sony launched the PlayStation and changed everything forever. And they couldn't have done it without Altered Beast. And the Greeks. Don't forget the Greeks.



Son of Son of Altered Beast!

That would be THQ's Altered Beast: Guardian Realms, now playing on a Game Boy Advance near you. It looks better and it plays better than the original ever did, so if you're looking for an all-new dose of man-beast action, look no further than Guardian Realms. If you're looking for any other kind of man-beast action, you should probably seek some sort of counselling. If that doesn't work, there's always the internet.



Son of Altered Beast!

Legend has it that US power-pop godhead Matthew "Big in Japan" Sweet was such a fan of Altered Beast that he named an entire album in its honour. Sweet's 1993 Altered Beast (which featured "Time Capsule" and "The Ugly Truth" among other pop gems) was followed by Son of Altered Beast, a seven-track EP, in 1994. None of his subsequent records have been named after video games. Sales have suffered accordingly.



Reviews

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! All scores are out of 10.



Swingers / Made

MAGNA PACIFIC, MA 15+

Son Favreau is a terrific writer, and his two produced screenplays, *Swingers* and *Made*, are hugely entertaining and very funny.

Swingers (1996), directed by Doug Liman, is a simple, almost plotless tale of out-of-work actors trying to pick up girls in Los Angeles. What's great is the hilarious, snappy dialogue and the superb performances from Favreau and Vince Vaughn, who steals

the movie as an egomaniacal best buddy with a hidden, but honest, heart of gold. This was Vaughn's breakthrough role and he's unforgettable, playing an overbearing loudmouth with his buddy's best interests at heart. The LA setting of actual bars and nightclubs is a fascinating and realistic portrait of nightlife in that strange city.

Made (2001) — which Favreau also directed — puts Vaughn in the centre of the action. He and Favreau play extremely small-time hustlers who are

given a break by their mob boss (Peter Falk) and sent on an apparently simple errand to New York. Favreau's Bobby tries to do the right thing, but Vaughn's Ricky, an uncool, overbearing loudmouth (again!), threatens, with his ineptitude, to destroy their mission at every turn. It's a very brave performance because Ricky is an exceptionally unlikable character, but Vaughn pulls it off with amazing comic instincts. It's uncomfortable comedy; everything Ricky does

makes you cringe and squirm, and some people may find him, and Vaughn's performance, too much. I love it, and am impressed that Vaughn can make such a despicable character even remotely sympathetic.

The films are very similar. *Swingers* is funnier and easier to like; *Made* has more edge, and takes more risks with character and genre. Rent them both and watch them in chronological order to enjoy the growing, brilliant rapport between two extremely gifted comic actors.

Unfortunately *Swingers* has no extras beyond a trailer; *Made* has superb extras, including three good docs and a huge amount of very entertaining out-takes, deleted and alternate scenes.

SWINGERS:

MOVIE: 8 **EXTRAS:** 1

MADE:

MOVIE: 7 **EXTRAS:** 7



Let me sniff your armpit.



That tie really doesn't suit you.



Heard of the mile high club?



Bend it like Beckham

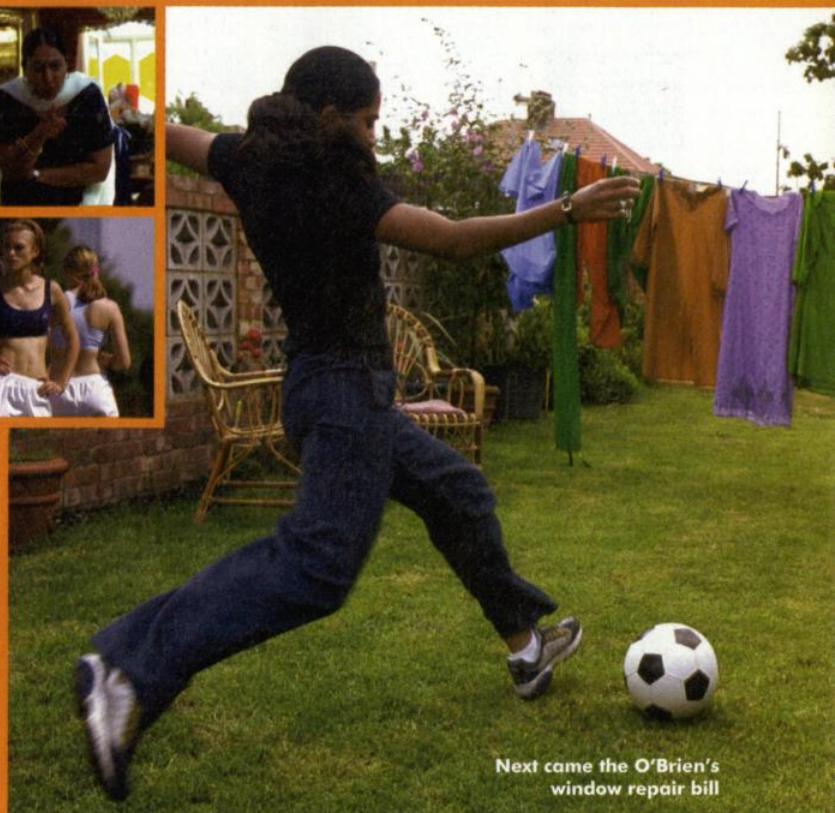
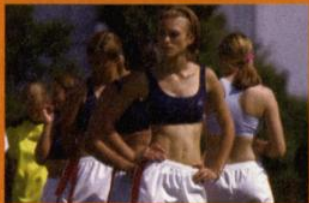
WARNER VIDEO, PG

End *It Like Beckham* is a thoroughly enjoyable comedy that examines the differences between traditional Indian cultural values and those of modern anglo-Britains. The story revolves around the soccer-obsessed Jess, who dreams of one day playing alongside her idol David Beckham. She joins a local women's soccer team, but must keep the fact hidden from her family, who want her to go to find a boyfriend, learn to cook and succeed in school so that she can attend law school. Of course it all reaches a climax after her parents find out and forbid her to play any more, not to mention the fact that the season final (which will be attended by an American scout) falls on the same day as her sister's wedding.

This all boils down to a feel good comedy, but it's a well crafted and entertaining one that avoids the typical pitfalls of relying too heavily on stereotypes for laughs. Instead, it's filled with clever dialogue and excellent performances (Parminder Nagra as Jess is particularly noteworthy), as well as great use of sound and intertwined yet contrasting footage.

Extras features include full-length feature commentary from director Gurinder Chadha, a behind the scenes featurette, a cooking featurette (ever wanted to make Aloo Gobi?), deleted scenes and music videos. — Cam Shea

MOVIE: 7 EXTRAS: 6



Next came the O'Brien's window repair bill

Lies

NEWVISION, R18+

Lies indeed. This amazingly boring film picked up some prizes at some of the festivals, and some kudos in some of the more pretentious media. Don't let it fool you. Stay away.

Lies, is without a doubt, the most explicit non-porno sex film I have ever seen; it is also the most boring and unerotic. Telling a boring story of two boring people having supposedly saucy sex in boring hotel rooms in a boring city, and telling it by extremely long boring scenes of long boring sex, is my idea of a really boring time. There is nothing here to turn you on;



Honey, I found this long steel dildo...

indeed, there is nothing here.

Perhaps it is "brave" that this very explicit film was made in conservative South Korea. It doesn't matter. Seven bucks is seven bucks, and I'd spend mine renting something else.

The "extras" include a hilarious "Director's Statement" trying to convince you that he's made a piece of art, not trash.

MOVIE: 2 EXTRAS: 2

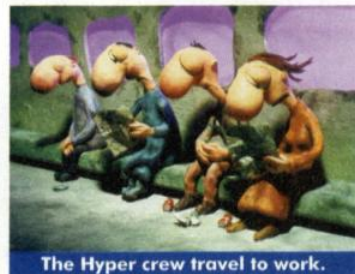


Leunig Animated

MADMAN ENTERTAINMENT, G

Every care has been taken to faithfully capture the surreal spirit of Michael Leunig in these fifty minute-long claymations. Like the cartoons they're based on, some are funny, some are poignant, some are downright depressing, but they're all exquisitely crafted. The puppets and sets are beautiful and colourful, the original music by Hyton Moday is suitably whacky, and the narration, by Sam Neill, is dry and intelligent.

Great care has also gone into this DVD presentation. On one disc are all fifty films, which you can watch in order or randomly (great for parties!) There's also a gallery of the original cartoons, heaps of production notes and biographies,



The Hyper crew travel to work.

as well as "out-takes" — watch the puppets stuff it up! The second disc contains a fifty-five minute documentary which offers a pretty good glimpse into the Leunig mind. The menus, the packaging — it's all done with a lot of love.

Essentially, if you like Leunig's cartoons, you'll love this.

MOVIE: 7 EXTRAS: 7

HYPERVISION

»HYPER 87

DVD



Ring, ring, why don't you give me a call?

Ring 2

AV CHANNEL, M 15+

Those expecting a terrifying journey into the supernatural along the lines of the sublimely scary original film (the Japanese one, that is) will be disappointed - *Ring 2* is not so much a sequel as a direct extension of the first film and as such adds a good deal to the overall story but lacks the necessary impact of the original. Kicking off from the end point of *Ring*, *Ring 2* follows the story of Mai, the girlfriend of Ryuchi (the ex-husband of the reporter in the first film), trying to discover the cause of and events leading up to her lover's death. Her search eventually leads her to a sanitarium where a patient has had a run in with Sadako and



eventually on to Reiko (the heroine of the first film) whose young son may be the key to ending the curse of the videotape.

Ring 2 is a little like a game expansion pack in terms of appeal - if you love the original it adds a whole layer of depth to the mythology whilst still delivering up a fair number of scares. If you haven't seen *Ring*, however, *Ring 2* is an obtuse, slow and confusing affair. — Daniel Wilks

MOVIE: 8 EXTRAS: 3



They finally watch the tape. Yes. It's Barney The Dinosaur.

Powerpuff Girls THE MOVIE

WARNER HOME VIDEO, G

Fans of Craig McCracken's quirky TV cartoon, *The Powerpuff Girls*, will inevitably be disappointed with this DVD. The movie itself delves into the Powerpuff Girls' origins in greater detail, and has enough wit, action and charm to please anyone who's had a passing interest in the awesome TV show, however, annoyingly the DVD is not presented in widescreen, making this a package aimed at the kiddies. Why else would they not include Widescreen, as the film played at cinemas? Blossom, Bubbles and Buttercup do their best to deal with Mojo Jojo, and in less than 90 minutes you'll probably just want to watch it all over again. This is much, much more than a children's show, Warner. If you can get past the fact that Warner have denied the superb animation the chance to be displayed in its full widescreen glory, the movie is



"Oh, I am but a homeless monkey..."



Buttercup uses her puffs of power, er...

great fun, hilarious, and there are a tonne of great extras.

The extras include commentary by Craig McCracken, interviews with the "cast", deleted scenes, behind the scenes, plus bonus games and screensavers and the like, if you have PC DVD-ROM drive.

Frank Dry

MOVIE: 8 EXTRAS: 7

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ANIME

His and Her Circumstances

CATEGORY: ROMANTIC COMEDY/DRAMA
PRODUCTION: GAINAX/TV TOKYO

A simple love story, under normal circumstances, doesn't cut the mustard. Usually, there has to be some complication thrown into the mix, like mecha turtles, or one of the pair being an extra-terrestrial, or being able to read minds. Is it because the anime viewers aren't interested in anything so down to earth?

EMOTIONAL UNCERTAINTY

Testing this theory is Gainax, a studio that's demonstrated a rare talent for capturing the essence of the human experience through the Wings of Honneamise, Gunbuster and Neon Genesis Evangelion. Together with the directorial expertise of Hideaki Anno, they have crafted a most thoughtful and heart-warming piece of serialised drama that defies cliché and convention.

Yukino Miyazawa is a 15-year-old girl who's obsessed with being the

school's most perfect student, and as such absolutely hates the sight of Souichirou Arima, who seems to beat her at every turn. Their love story essentially begins when Yukino resolves to "defeat" Souichirou. Their interactions lead them both on a sobering journey of self-discovery, and the two eventually find themselves in a very unique relationship.

His and Her Circumstances is a microcosm of emotional uncertainty, masterfully dissected and told as Anno remains conscious of perspective and dramatic irony. There is no underlying theme to speak of — the two main characters are just extremely well conceived. This allows the story to flow along on a day by day basis, clinically exposing the folly of their self-obsessed lives, and their gradual awakening to each other and the world beyond.

Productions this intelligent rarely happen. His and Her Circumstances is a true diamond in the dung-heap.



If only there were Mecha Turtles.



Anger management class.

ANIMATION 9 PLOT: 10 OVERALL: 10

Burn Up Excess

CATEGORY: FUTURISTIC ACTION/COMEDY
PRODUCTION: AIC CULTURE PUBLISHERS

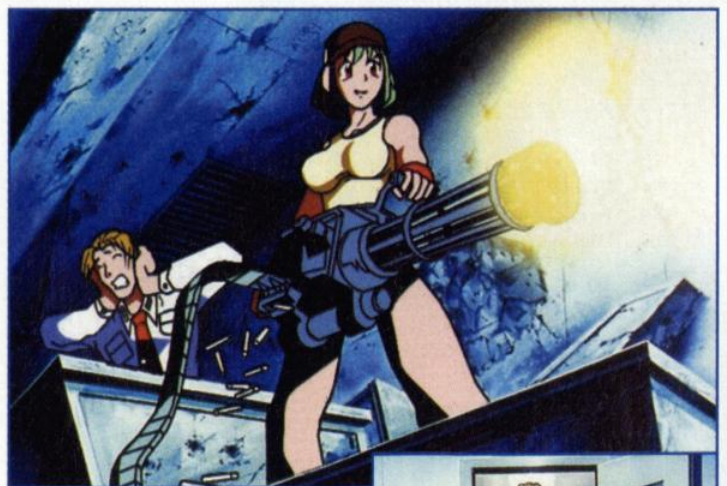
Burn Up Excess lives up to its name for all the wrong reasons. The follow-up to Burn Up W, it centres on an eclectic squad of long-legged, large-breasted women (and one man) who act as futuristic specialist law enforcers-for-hire. Every episode, they are pitted in life-and-death situations against various acts of terrorism, all of which is viewed from afar by some giggling criminal mastermind a la Doctor Klaw from Inspector Gadget.

BOUNCY-BREADED

The ideas in Burn Up Excess are as old as cartoons like MASK and Centurions, taking advantage of

every known cliché in the anime business to create some kind of fan base amongst sex-deprived male teens. The female leads conform to well known stereotypes — the bouncy-breasted skank who'll do anything for a buck, the bouncy-breasted dominatrix in charge, the bouncy-breasted weapons specialist who could be reasonably suspected of using her firearms as sex implements — but why stop there? There are some fairly explicit references to schoolgirl hentai, bukkake, cross dressers, and other non-desirables in the anime business. Even at that level, it's pretty awful.

And with today's heightened political climate in mind, the release of Burn Up: Excess couldn't have come at a worse time. Terrorism isn't



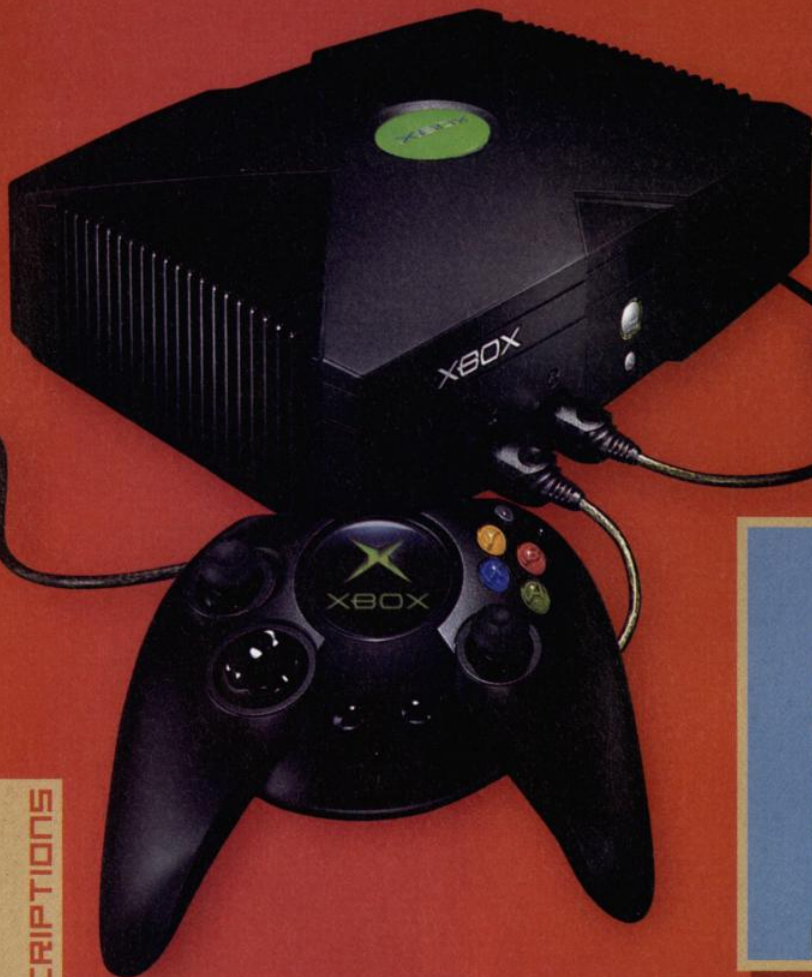
much of a laughing matter, and even if you did embrace it as a palatable subject matter, this is the kind of show that sacrifices political intrigue for just a few more shots of bouncing breasts. Burn Up: Excess has "bad taste" written all over it.



"Oh a man in uniform! *Giggle*"

ANIMATION 7 PLOT: 1 OVERALL: 2

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FORUM

✉ **HYPER FORUM:** 78 Renwick St. Redfern, NSW 2016 Australia
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Q. THE MOST OVERRATED GAME I'VE EVER PLAYED IS...?

The Getaway, The Bouncer, Rise of the Robots, Masters of Teras Kasi... hoo boy, there have been some hyped up games that have sucked. This month we turn to you to tell us of those bitter disappointments, and when you wished you could get your money back.



HYPER FORUM

We all have 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...

“My favourite piece of dialogue in a videogame is...”

Responses will be printed in Hyper 116.

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.

IT'S A TRAP!

One game instantly comes to mind in regards to this topic. Night Trap on the Mega CD for Sega Megadrive. There was so much publicity and controversy when it was released (back in 1992 I think). Being a young teen in those days, the promise of seeing a scantily-clad buxom blonde and an invading squad of terrorists was very exciting to say the least. But sadly, this one scene was unadventurous, perplexing, and mundane as was the rest of the game. Needless to say, the game was banned as I found out on the nightly news (rare for a video game to make headline news...) I think it would also take the cake for the worst game ever prize... well, along with Barbie's Race And Ride. Why can't terrorists mutilate her...?

Marcus

ANNOYING LOSERS

The most overrated game I have ever played? Easy! Final Fantasy X. Guide a bunch of annoying losers through some irritating puzzles that a retarded monkey could complete all the while bashing the X button.

Why are there random battles? I mean, I just wanna get down this path and if I could see the enemies I could avoid them but noooo, I'm on

2 health and I get attacked by uber-beastie. Not fun.

Turn based battle system: Why does it take me 10 minutes to kill this piddly ant that only has 5 health? It could be argued that it's because you have more than one person, but who wants to hang around with the losers in that game? Oh well, I've had my rant, now it's back to Morrowind.

Dean Churchman

SHOOT ME

The most over-rated game I've ever played happens to be the Gran Turismo Series.

I like driving games and all but if I wanted realism I would just take my car out for a drive. I want to be able to do things that I wouldn't be able to do in real life (well without consequences). I want to steal cars, drive very very fast, run people over (I'm sick, shoot me :P), things like that. With the GT series it's all a bit too boring and normal.

Pete Pap

DULL AND SIMPLE

Black and White. The reviews lead me to believe it was "fantastic", "excellent" etc. First of all there are too many glitches and not enough freedom. You would think that as

god you could do what you want, but even playing as an evil god there are too many restrictions. As an evil-overlord you would expect to be able to go everywhere, but your circle of influence is just too small. No matter how influential you become, you'll never be satisfied because the worlds are just so dull and simple. Burning and killing is no fun at all, the only thing that it does is make work for yourself because in order to gain influence you have to have lots of people - alive.

The controls are terrible and your creature is just plain annoying. The whole game is lacking freedom and the plot seems to repeat itself again and again. The villagers are so stupid and never learn from punishments. The graphics are poor. Miracles aren't that fun to cast, I mean it's a miracle, you would think they would be a little more impressive. You are called the Holy One but that's just to humour you, because really the villagers have no respect or loyalty. Watching them worship you is just boring and repetitive. Basically you are called a god, but you have no real power or control over the game. Silver and Gold scroll tasks are irritating and the rewards aren't good enough. The game is also misleading, at first you get the impression that evil

is the easier choice, but in the end it is the harder path and the game punishes you for it. Basically the game is too long and drawn out.

Anonymous

LACKING IN DEPTH

For this I would probably have to answer *TimeSplitters 2*.

First of all, the story mode really did not flow well. Since it was more like a series of short stories, you never really got to know much about the characters. With only one mission for each time zone, they felt somewhat abrupt and lacking in depth.

The second major gripe I had about it was the control. It's not a stealthy kind of FPS, but it has a crouch button and no jump? The lack of crosshairs was annoying but the aiming mode may have made up for it if it wasn't like the Goldeneye style of aiming where it would constantly centre and the crosshair went all over the screen instead of staying in the middle.

The multiplayer did allow more control than other FPS, but I found the AI to be somewhat lacking in CTF when they would just let the enemy pass without shooting until they got the flag. The create-a-map was meant to be its crowning achievement but it was disappointing since it was only indoor environments and not many objects to place on the ground. A lot of people have found it fun, but I've found that multiplayer has not been as intense as it was with Halo. It is a very good game compared with some other others right now, but it didn't quite live up to its hype for me.

Kami

A TERRIBLE GAME

When I think of the most overrated game I've ever played, I generally tend to think of games that were said to be excellent, but turned out lacking in many areas. I can safely say that the most overrated game (in this aspect) that I've played that turned out crap was Rare's *Donkey Kong 64* for the Nintendo 64.

We were told of massive levels, which would dwarf Mario's outing by titanic proportions. We were told of an all-star cast of FIVE playable characters. And it was also said to be the best platform game ever.

Sadly, it fell short of its hype over and over. The levels were huge, some even bordering on "too big", but they seemed empty. The main world is a barren wasteland save for the odd

beaver or crocodile, tree or boulder. The mini games were, for the most part, crap. Each mini game set out to frustrate you as best it could. In many games, you can sense some kind of improvement when trying something over and over, but in *DK64*, you'd just give up and go do something else. Who didn't want to hurt someone after failing *Beaver Bother* in "Creepy Castle" for the 50th time?

The characters didn't add that much variety to the game, as most of their moves could only be used at certain points anyway. Their only use was to make the game longer and force you to backtrack to the earlier levels to get stuff that was previously inaccessible. The game's shortcomings were nothing compared to the excessive amount of glitches the game had. Chunky would walk through walls, Lanky could bypass the B Locker to get into levels with his long arms, and game saves would disappear from the cart at times, without you even needing to shake it!

Many people liked the game, and I did too... for a while. The first level was great; the rest of it was not. The hype was very strong, but not strong enough to blind me from the fact that *Donkey Kong 64* was a terrible game.

Jerec

SUCKED ASS

Dear Hyper,

Firstly, I consider the first *Tomb Raider* one of the best games I've ever played. The freedom with which you could control Lara on screen and the scale with which many of the levels encompassed made it one of the most engrossing games ever made. That's why it is with great disdain that I nominate its first sequel as the most overrated game I've ever played. Perhaps it was due to the heightened expectations based on the brilliance of the original, or perhaps it was the fact there was almost no "Tomb Raiding" in the game proper, but one thing was for sure, *Tomb Raider 2* sucked ass.

For starters the locations were all wrong. One thing that made the original so damn riveting was the fact you were hunting down priceless artefacts in believable and historic locations, not oil rigs and romantic Italian cities! The level design was also appalling and incongruent. Why was there a pool in the middle of the Opera House? Why do I need to pull three levers to open a door which contains another lever in it? Why am I stuck on an invisible wall and



Snake shoots up a few bad reviews...

jittering like I'm doing the Hokie Pokie? Why, oh why, oh why? Why did they even bother is the real question? Add to this the frustratingly non-logical puzzles and the consistently inconsistent AI and you have the most overrated game I've ever played - a blatant cash-in.

Paul Simao

STOP AND START

I put a lot of thought into this, I really did, and I couldn't come up with anything except for *Metal Gear Solid 2*. Now please just hear me out before you move on to the next forum response and think "This guy's crazy".

As soon as I heard about the release of this game I thought "okay, this is reason enough to buy a PS2". So I did. When I got it after reading rave reviews from Hyper and many other reliable web sites I began thinking "this is truly going to be spectacular". After playing *MGS* on PSX, *MGS2* didn't produce the gameplay elements or give me the same excitement as the first.

Don't get me wrong, it is still possibly one of the best PS2 games around, it's just that it had weaknesses in its storyline and I felt I was watching a movie rather than playing. It's very stop and start and it had tendencies to drift away from the problems at hand and go into a subject that seemed unnecessary for the game.

Just my thoughts on the subject and I apologise to anyone I may have pissed off for paying out on what most would call an outstanding game. Cheers.

Troy Walker

WASTED OPPORTUNITIES

At this moment I am locked in my garden shed arming myself to the teeth with any weapon I can lay my hands on, preparing myself for the inevitable onslaught of insults, derision and "Have at you, fanboy!" comments. Because for me, the most overrated game I have ever played would have to be Bungie's (near) masterpiece Halo.

Now before you crucify me and force me to listen to Mariah Carey or whatnot for my opinion, let me explain the logic underlying that conclusion.

For a game that was touted as the best FPS ever, with awesome team AI, all-out action and "phat" weapons, I found myself being let down by samey levels, team members that couldn't be, in any way, commanded for strategic assistance (Rogue Leader managed this, why couldn't Halo?), endless sidestepping permeated only by "busting" caps in the asses of irritating (yet not scary) enemies, and generic weapons that can be discovered in pretty much any FPS to date. So many wasted opportunities! Bungie had the chance to make some truly awesome alien weapons in the vein of *Perfect Dark*, and Master Chief's suit was not exploited in any way (Jango Fett could so kick his ass), but instead they simply turned out a (just) better-than-normal shooter.

Possibly the only game in recent times that could beat Halo for "overratedness" (despite the game's phat multiplayer) was *Turok Evolution*, in its pre-release campaigns, but we'll leave that discussion for another time. My rant is over, you may now tear my opinions to shreds.

Jackson Balme

MAIL

✉ HYPER LETTERS:

78 Renwick St. Redfern, NSW 2016 Australia
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GENIUS CAMPBELL

The Hyper Bunch,

First things first, let me say that I think the design for your mag is really great. It makes me want to open it just so I can look at the pretty pictures and graphics. Malcolm is a genius.

I've got a few questions regarding all the things I thought I should write a letter about, but never got around to it. So please publish this letter as I am likely to forget them rather soon.

1. Do you think we'll see a port of The Lost to the PC? I really liked what Irrational Games did on System Shock 2, and The Lost looks really cool.
2. Can you get rid of Reverse Engineering for something a little more substantial? That may sound a little harsh, but I believe we should be looking towards the future and not the past... or something.
3. Could you devote a whole Eye-Candy page to Enter the Matrix?
4. Do you think that Cam's love of skating could be affecting his reviews of the THPS games? It's rare that a game which comes out yearly

can still get such high scores from Hyper. Don't get me wrong, as I trust your reviews, but I was just wondering what you think...

5. Would you consider putting a Most Wanted List in Hyper, just like in PC Powerplay?
6. How come you promised uncensored BMX XXX pics on the cover (issue #112), and censored them in the preview? Not that this was the only reason I bought the mag. Ahem...

I've probably taken up half of the Mail section already, so I'll stop now. Thanxx a lot,

Jaxx

Dear Jaxx,

1. At the moment, The Lost appears to be a console only title. PS2 and Xbox, in fact. If it sells millions, then things may change...
2. Well, 2 pages of past history amongst 98 pages of the future, I think is fair enough!
3. If you're good and eat your greens.
4. Well, the Tony Hawk games have been consistently good. Although, the scores "have" been going down with each release if you've noticed...

5. Why would we want to be like PC Powerplay?
6. Well, they were uncensored pics - as in, pics from footage that was cut from the game and that you won't see anywhere. And hey, we made those Hyper arrows nice and smaaaaall.

EIGHT IS ENOUGH

Dear Hyper,

I'm one of your loyal subjects who purchases your monthly mag and reads all the wise knowledge written within.

- I have a few small questions I would like to ask you wise and great... bugga my crap groveling.
1. I have heard rumour of a Fallout 3. If true, who is creating the game and will the game be using the same mechanics as the previous Fallouts or similar to Fallout tactics?
 2. I want my Metroid Prime!
 3. Are there any recent Beam releases? I haven't seen one since KKND 2, bless its golden little heart.
 4. What is the PlayStation doing? STILL ONLY 2 Controller ports?
 5. When will we see the Kongs again, Nintendo did keep their contract?
 6. What's the Hyper crew's favourite song?
 7. Guess what the "R" & "H" stand for in RHWWarrior.
 8. If this is printed, why the hell did you print it?

Thanks oh great creators of Hyper. I would have enclosed concubines to pay for your service but they refused to fit in my disk drive.

Crates out Hyper,
RHWWarrior

Dear RHWWarrior,

1. Yes it is true. Fallout 3 is in development by Black Isle Studios, but it is not "official" yet. From what we can gather, it will feature real-time combat (with a pause function), and a new 3D engine (yet still an isometric Fallout-style perspective) that will allow rotating and zooming... Of course, many a game sometimes never escapes development hell. Let's hope they confirm it soon.
2. You'll get it! On April 3rd.
3. Well, Melbourne House have been

developing Grand Prix Challenge, did you know? Looks awesome too.

4. Yes, sad isn't it? Let's cross our fingers for PS3.
5. Oh, the Kongs are very much Nintendo property...
6. We don't have a collective favourite song. Except for maybe the cheesy yet jubilant goal scoring music in Pro Evo 2.
7. Right Hand. Right? Right!
8. Because we can.

PS2 UPGRADE

Dear Hyper

I have no PS2, Xbox or GameCube. I don't even have a lousy Dreamcast. All I have is a bloody PSX and a GBA and one game. I just buy your magazine for entertainment, and it has amused me and informed me each month since I was 13. I just want to ask you a couple of questions about "trading up" and a bunch of other stuff.

1. Is trading your PSX and ten games to take off \$200 off the price of a PS2 worth it?
2. Do you think I should just keep my PSX and buy a PS2 separately?
3. Is it possible to transfer PSX Memory files from PSX Memory Cards into PS2 Memory cards? Or, can I use a PSX Memory Card to play PSX games on a PS2?
4. How many mini-games does Ape Escape 2 have?
5. What score did the original Ape Escape get?
6. Do you know if Namco has decided to make Tekken Tag Tournament 2 or Tekken 5?
7. What do you think about

CAPTION THIS!

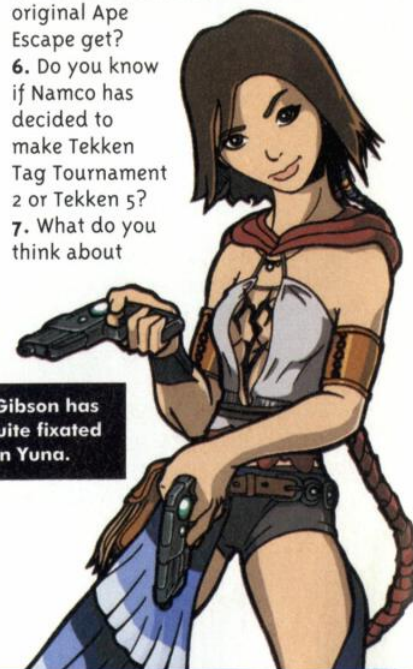
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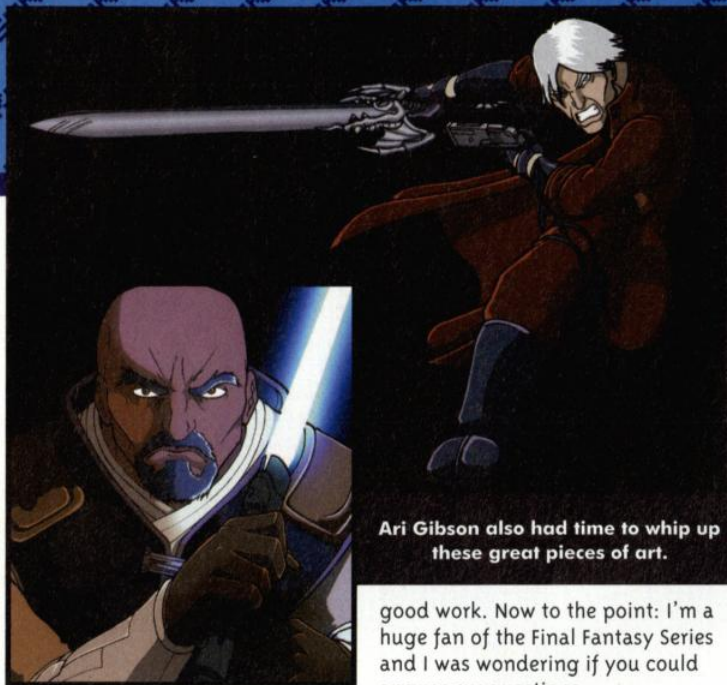
This month, Hyper reader **Pete Barker** scored the winning caption. And if you don't know who Devo are, well, you need to whip it and whip it good...!



The DEVO Appreciation Night really took off when the monkeys donned their Power Domes

Ari Gibson has us quite fixated on Yuna.





Ari Gibson also had time to whip up these great pieces of art.

Impossible Creatures? Or was it Impossible Animals?

PS: Oh yeah, and Pete the Elite from issue 112: Actually, that really happened to me after playing Half-Life on a friend's computer. I had a feeling that I could do something stupid because I had already saved. I need a friggin' doctor.

PPS: What the hell is wrong with your magazine covers? Some times they are really eye-catching, like issue 112. Other times they are stupid. Like the one with the bloody rock on the cover. Or the massive Spiderman with a yellow background.

From Yao

Dear Yao,

1. You did know that the PS2 can play old PSX games didn't you? I think what you're suggesting is definitely worth it - just hold onto any of those PSX games that you really love!

2. There's no reason to. The PS2 can do it all.

3. To be honest we've never tried either. Best call Sony and ask.

4. Three. And they all rock.

5. We gave it a huge 92%.

6. We would be surprised if they didn't. But nothing is confirmed yet.

7. Read our review this issue...

As for our covers, you must understand that without a balance of good and bad, light and dark, yin and yang, the world would cease to exist!

FANTASY LAND

Hi ya Hyper,

First thing I'll say is great mag. You guys have saved me from buying really overrated games (The Getaway, Kingdom Hearts and Stuntman) and help me decide to buy great games like (Final Fantasy X, GTA: Vice City). So keep up the

good work. Now to the point: I'm a huge fan of the Final Fantasy Series and I was wondering if you could answer my questions.

1. Are there any Final Fantasy games aside from 7, 8, 9 and 10 available in Australia?
2. Have you any news on the Australian release date of FFX-2?
3. What were your ratings for Final Fantasy 7, 8, 9?
4. What is your favourite Final Fantasy game?

Thanx all people at Hyper. Hope you can answer my questions.

LONG LIVE HYPER

Mark Butler

Dear Mark,

1. Yes! You can now buy Final Fantasy 6 for PSX/PS2.

2. It's not on the release schedule yet, unfortunately. There's still no confirmation of a PAL release.

3. 95%, 93% and 95% respectively.

4. Personally, it used to be 7. But 10 equals it, now.

KENGO MYSTERY

Dear Hyper,

Great mag, but I'll get to the point. Will there be an Australian release for Kengo 2 on either PS2 or Xbox? I saw "The Way of the Samurai" at my local EB, just wondering is it the same game or is it different? I have already seen the Jap version of Kengo 2 out in a local import shop for about a year now. I think the original Kengo Master of Bushido was awesome and would like to see more samurai games in the future.

Cya,

StridingCloud

Dear StridingCloud,

Yes, there was a bit of confusion surrounding this one, as there are two games: Way of the Samurai and Sword of the Samurai. The one you want is Sword of the Samurai... here's the explanation from Owen at

PATIENCE IS A VIRTUE

It absolutely annoys me that my friends and family (cousins, nephews, nieces and various other people) have the patience to last oh say about 3 milliseconds.

They play my games, completely skip the helpful tutorials and go straight into the game, and then when they get stuck on a simple problem (such as "moving") they ask me, when they could have gotten their answers in the little button marked tutorial. Same with stories. In some of these games they skip the cutscenes then ask "why do we have to kill this, get that, save this person?" it pisses me off.

If only they had a little more patience they wouldn't have to rely on me for answers every half second. The worst part is that almost every gamer I know is like this - it's like living a constant nightmare where all I hear is "Why? How? What?" *shudder*

Anyway, there is my rant of the year. Thanks for your time. Great mag by the way.

Democromentor

Dear Democromentor,

It could be they're skipping the cutscenes because videogame stories these days are becoming tiresome, clichéd and predictable - have a read of the feature this issue. However, there's no excuse for skipping a tutorial - they are usually there for a reason other than to simply tell you what a controller is!



You've won an exclusive 360 Modena Racing Wheel for PC! Replica of the wheel in a Ferrari 360 Modena.

Don't forget to include your contact details in your letter.

THRUSTMASTER

<http://au.thrustmaster.com>
Wheel valued at \$99.95.

Ubisoft: "Sword of the Samurai is the unofficial sequel to Kengo 2 (Kengo was a Crave title and they still own the name - this is a Genki/Ubisoft title). It's developed by members of the team that made Bushido Blade for PSone." And as far as we know, it's no longer scheduled for Xbox.

INTEL VS AMD

Hey Wierdos - I mean Hyper dudes.

First and foremost, you guys haul

ass. Ok, now that the pleasantries are over, let me get on with the letter. I am writing because I feel somebody should address the issue of Intel.

To be completely honest I used to like Intel, but since AMD have been keeping up, I have started to lean towards the Duron and Athlon processors. The issue is that Intel just charge so damn much for their processors. I have some prices here from a magazine. The average price at the moment for a Pentium 4 2.0



MAIL



Ratchet, pencil-style, comes to us from Sarah Strachan. Any relation to a certain Southampton manager?

GHz processor is about \$330. Now let's have a look at its AMD equivalent, the Athlon XP 1800. You would be looking at paying about \$150 for it. That's more than half the price! I don't see why you would bother with Intel's version when you can get an AMD CPU for a shite-load less. It just doesn't make sense. The other thing that ticks me off about Intel is that they are in cahoots with Microsoft (but that's another story). Anyway, this letter is getting to be too long. The last things I'd like to know are:

1. What do you

guys use — Intel or AMD? And 2. What's your opinion on this topic? Again guys, great mag. Keep it up.
Gandalf[DwD]

Dear Gandalf,
We went straight to our office brain for the answer to this one. I bring you our PC whiz, Jere Lawrence: "Actually Gandalf, AMD haven't been keeping up with Intel and if anything, it's Intel that's way ahead of the pack. A lot has to do with bus speeds and it may pain you to know that the maximum bandwidth of the AMD processor is only 333Mhz. This is quite ironic seeing that KT400 boards (the 400 represents the 400MHz bus) are available but the processor can only use 83% of it. The Intel Pentium 4 on the other hand has a maximum bandwidth of 533MHz which the processor can use in its entirety. On a more expensive front (for now), Intel has recently introduced Hyper Threading technology into their processors which can process 2 threads in hardware simultaneously for amazingly fast multi-tasking. Although you're right about AMD's significantly lower price, the old adage still stands, you get what you pay for."

GAMECUBE GOODNESS

Yo Hyper people!

First of all, I've been reading Hyper since issue 98 and I've been subscribed since issue 101 and will continue to subscribe for as long as I can. Secondly, I'd like to say something to the people out there who are giving crap to the GameCube. In case you haven't noticed, it has most of the good games that are coming out on Xbox and PS2 (Timesplitters 2, Splinter Cell (it's not a rumour!), LOTR: The Two Towers etc.) plus it also has many good quality exclusive games (Super Mario Sunshine, Metroid Prime, Final Fantasy: CC, Zelda etc.)

1. I have an idea for a computer game but I don't know where I should go to tell someone about it. Do you know anywhere I could go or call?

2. Do you think a GBA game will ever get game of the month?

3. Which did you like better: FF8 or FF9?

4. What score did you give FF8?

5. What's Metroid Prime like?

6. Do you know whether the URA Zelda/Ocarina of Time deal will come out here?

7. Is a Pentium 4 2.4G, 512MB DDR, 40GB hard drive, Ge-force 4 good for online gaming?

Thanks guys you rule!
Lachlan

Dear Lachlan,

1. Unfortunately, there's no such things as a "Good Computer Game Idea Hotline". Maybe you should consider doing a game developer course (like the ones offered at www.qantm.com.au).
2. Doubtfully. But hey — never say never!
3. You know, I think it might be FF8.
4. 93% my friend.
5. Surely you read our 6-page review last issue...?
6. We've asked Nintendo, and we have tentative confirmation.
7. It sure is! That's a killer set-up. As long as you've got broadband, you'll be laughing. You do have broadband, don't you?

WISE WORDS

Dear Hyper,

I don't know about your other readers but I greatly dislike paying \$100 or more for a console game. These days there are so many ways you can play more and pay less. I thought I might share some of the great ways to save on playing console games. Even though some tips may seem obvious, how many people are still paying \$100 for their games?

1. Rent it. Some games are so short these days why pay full price to finish them?
2. Swap it. You and a mate buy games you both like then swap. Saves \$\$\$.
3. Buy Pre-loved. Places like pawn-brokers and Electronics Boutique sell used games for less. So what if you don't have the plastic wrap. Trade in games to save even more.
4. Read a Paper. Sometimes you can find the game you want in the classifieds or trading post. The trading post is online these days. You can sell old games there too.
5. Wait for % off days. Many major retailers have percentage off days. If you are used to getting junk mail every week and suddenly you don't get it from that store... it may be that there is a percentage off day that week.
6. Online auction. The best way to save money if you are an adult is on ebay.com.au. Sell your old games and bid on the next game you want with low changeover. You can even find brand new sealed games there for less.

So buy more games for your buck,
David

Dear David,
We have nothing more to add. :)

The Official Australian Games Chart

Compiled by Inform in association with IEAA

TOP 10

PlayStation 2 Games Over \$50

W/E 2 February
2003 RETAIL SALES

1	◆	GTA: Vice City	Adventure
2	▲	Grand Theft Auto 3	Adventure
3	▲	The Getaway	Adventure
4	▼	LOTR: Two Towers	RPG
5	▲	Dragonball Z: Budokai Fghtrs	Action
6	▲	Kingdom Hearts	Adventure
7	▼	Harry P Chamber Of Secrets	Adventure
8	◆	V8 Supercars	Racing
9	⊙	Sly Raccoon	Adventure
10	▼	Cricket 2002	Sports

TOP 10

PlayStation Games Over \$40

W/E 2 February
2003 RETAIL SALES

1	◆	H Potter Chamber Of Secret	Adventure
2	◆	Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 4	Sports
3	◆	Treasure Planet	Adventure
4	▲	Stuart Little 2	Adventure
5	▲	Tomb Raider 3&4 Clictrs Pk	Adventure
6	◆	Lilo & Stitch Trouble Pardse	Adventure
7	▲	Digimon Rumble Arena	Action
8	▼	Digimon World 3	Adventure
9	▼	FIFA 2003	Sports
10	⊙	Harry P Philosopher Stone	Adventure

TOP 10

Game Cube Games Over \$40

W/E 2 February
2003 RETAIL SALES

1	◆	Harry P Chamber Of Secrets	Adventure
2	▲	Starfox Adventures	Adventure
3	▲	Bond 007: Nightfire	Action
4	▼	Mario Party 4	Family
5	▲	Medal Of Honor: Frontline	Action
6	◆	Star Wars Bounty Hunter	Adventure
7	▼	Super Mario Sunshine	Adventure
8	▼	Super Smash Bros: Melee	Action
9	⊙	Luigi's Mansion	Adventure
10	▼	Need For Speed Hot Prsult 2	Racing

TOP 10

Xbox Games Over \$40

W/E 2 February
2003 RETAIL SALES

1	◆	Tom Clancy's Splinter Cell	Adventure
2	◆	Medal Of Honor: Frontline	Action
3	▲	Dead Or Alive 3	Action
4	▼	Harry P Chamber Of Secrets	Adventure
5	◆	Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon	Strategy
6	▲	Mech Assault	Sports
7	◆	WWE Raw Is War	Sports
8	⊙	Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 4	Sports
9	⊙	Hitman 2	Action
10	▼	Blinx	Adventure

TOP 10

PC Games Over \$30

W/E 2 February
2003 RETAIL SALES

1	▲	The Sims Deluxe	Strategy
2	▼	Sim City 4000	Strategy
3	◆	The Sims Unleashed	Strategy
4	▲	Age Of Mythology	Strategy
5	▼	Harry P Chamber Of Secrets	Adventure
6	◆	The Sims Vacation	Strategy
7	▲	WarCraft 3	Strategy
8	▼	The Sims Hot Date	Strategy
9	◆	Medieval Total War	Strategy
10	◆	Battlefield 1942	Action

TOP 10

Game Boy Advance Games Over \$40

W/E 2 February
2003 RETAIL SALES

1	◆	H Potter Chamber Of Secrets	Adventure
2	◆	Zelda: Link to Past/4 Swords	RPG
3	◆	Dragonball Z: Legacy Goku	Action
4	◆	LOTR: Two Towers	RPG
5	▲	Yoshis Island: SMA 3	Adventure
6	◆	Mario Kart Super Circuit	Racing
7	◆	Game & Wtch Gilery Advnce	Compilation
8	▼	Super Mario World Advncd 2	Adventure
9	◆	Metroid Fusion	Action
10	◆	Colin McRae Rally 2	Racing

TOP 10

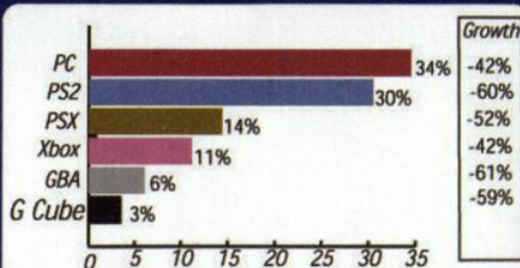
All Full Priced Games

W/E 2 February
2003 RETAIL SALES

1	◆	GTA: Vice City	PlayStation 2
2	▲	Grand Theft Auto 3	PlayStation 2
3	◆	The Sims Deluxe	PC/MAC
4	▼	Sim City 4000	PC/MAC
5	▲	The Sims Unleashed	PC/MAC
6	▲	The Getaway	PlayStation 2
7	▼	LOTR: Two Towers	PlayStation 2
8	⊙	Dragonball Z: Budokai Fghtrs	PlayStation 2
9	▼	Tom Clancy's Splinter Cell	Xbox
10	⊙	Age Of Mythology	PC/MAC

MARKET WATCH All Games by Platform

Dec 02 vs Jan 03
RETAIL SALES



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

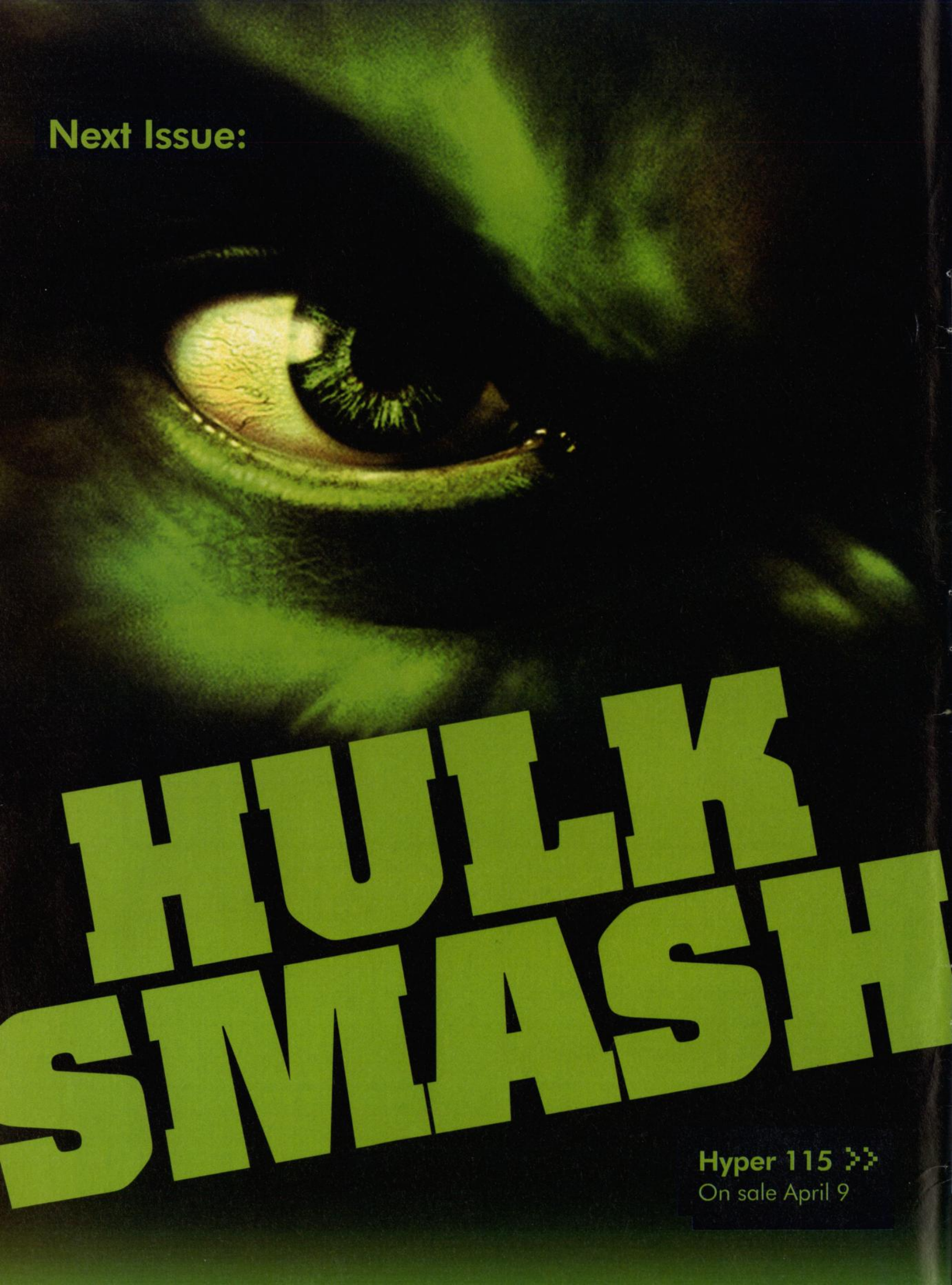
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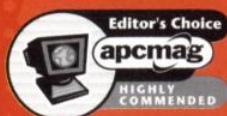
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