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Let's have one more lap before PlayStation 3

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REVIEWED ON
PC & XBOX



FINAL FANTASY XII NEWS

Meet the brand new heroes!



OVER
33
PAGES OF
REVIEWS

CASTLEVANIA ON PS2

3D or not 3D?
That is the question



LEGACY OF KAIN: DEFIANCE

It's an Xbox, PC & PS2 bloodbath!



OLD-SCHOOL GAMING

Were games better then?

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The Oz Developers Conference

ISSUE 124
FEBRUARY '04



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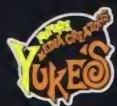
next
GAMING



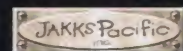
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PlayStation 2 NOVEMBER 2003



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**48 CASTLEVANIA:
LAMENT OF INNOCENCE**

Whip it, whip it good...



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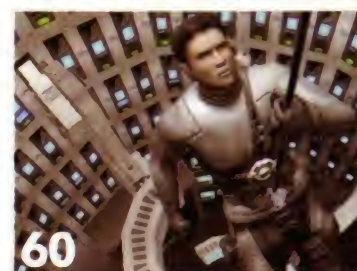
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EDITORIAL

»» 2004. What a year this promises to be! The delights of Half-Life 2 are merely a few months away, and Halo 2 is hot on its tail. We'll also get a look at the Sony PSP handheld at the Electronic Games Expo in May. However, Nintendo also have a brand new gaming device to show the world at the same event. Could it cause an upset and steal the show? What was that about Rockstar readying a brand new Grand Theft Auto game for the end of the year? There's also word that 2004 is the year that Duke Nukem Forever will get released... Oh no wait, that's 2024. We will however get to finally play Doom 3, Far Cry, Gran Turismo 4, Metroid Prime 2, Fable, Killer 7, Resident Evil 4, STALKER: Oblivion Lost, Pro Evo 4 (surely), Final Fantasy X-2, Splinter Cell 2, Full Spectrum Warrior, Thief 3 and all those other games we've so far only been able to fantasise about. I think my head is going to explode. Oh that's right, Metal Gear Solid 3, we shouldn't forget that one!

Whatever reason you have for looking forward to the rest of 2004, it's going to be a great year and we'll be with you all the way. Now get stuck into this delicious issue.

Eliot Fish »» Editor

SETTLE THE SCORE...

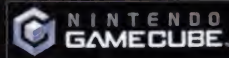
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PlayStation 2



PC CD-ROM



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News >>

IN THE NEWS: FF XII ■ GTA3 on Xbox ■ Wax Mario ■ Fallout 3 cancelled ■ Galleon update ■ Max Payne 2 on GBA ■ Plus more



[Right] That's the spunky Ashe, and Vaan the Tidus look-a-like

PS2

FINAL FANTASY XII

SquareEnix reveal the next in the series...

Although Australia is yet to savour the delights of FFX-2 (due in March), and the release of Final Fantasy XI – the controversial online installment – is still up in the air for this territory, we can console ourselves by looking ahead to the next full game in the series – Final Fantasy XII. Set for release in Japan by the end of 2004, Final Fantasy XII promises to offer a fresh take on the tried and true FF mechanics with a brand new approach to combat that appears to take more from Final Fantasy Tactics Advance than previous FF games.

A FAR MORE SINISTER ROLE

Yasumi Matsuno is the man behind Tactics Ogre, Final Fantasy Tactics Advance and the critically acclaimed Vagrant Story. As director of FFXII, he brings with him years of experience and a distinctly different perspective on the fantasy RPG. Most importantly, the world he created for FF Tactics – the land of Ivalice – will now take centre stage in FFXII. This also means the return

of the Bangaa and Vierra races, as well as the Judges that preside over combat in FF Tactics. The Judges appear to play a far more sinister role in FFXII, acting as a kind of secret police and terrorising the average citizen to "follow the law". Final Fantasy fans will be pleased to know that Chocobos and Moogles will also return.

The two main characters will be the humans, Ashe and Vaan. From the style of artwork, it may at first appear that not much has changed since Final Fantasy X, however, the character design is not being handled by Tetsuya Nomura this time around. Instead, Akihiko Yoshida, who has worked with Matsuno on Vagrant Story and FF Tactics, is bringing the cast to life – though it appears he's certainly followed many stylistic rules set by Nomura.

Ashe is the princess of the kingdom of Dalmasca during a sudden invasion by an evil Empire (a theme that seems to recur in many Final Fantasy games). She somehow teams up with the humble

thief, Vaan, who secretly harbours dreams of being an airship pilot. There are certainly some very similar character types and situations here that will seem familiar to those who played Final Fantasy IX, and that link will continue in the return of Art Director, Hideo Minaba. The world of Ivalice continues Minaba's preference for a blend of futuristic and Medieval styles, a visual approach that will definitely stray from the FFX experience, although these early screenshots strangely look incredibly similar to the world of Spira. The cutscenes we've observed, however, do yet again induce slack-jawed drooling, with another step-up in the quality of the animation (the Bangaas look incredible) and character likenesses that now seamlessly match between the CGI and in-game graphics (which was a notable flaw in Final Fantasy X).

STRAIGHT TO THE TOP

Combat will be the most interesting development, with the possibility of

a more turn-based tactical style of play, as seen in Vagrant Story and FF Tactics. Although the battle screenshot does reveal a typical Final Fantasy style Real-Time Battle display, there's nothing at this stage that really indicates to us how the combat will play out. SquareEnix are still very tight-lipped on that subject. We have noticed, however, that some screenshots appear to show Vaan exploring the environment with his health bar displayed – something that has been unnecessary in previous Final Fantasy games, as combat has always been kept separate to the world map. Could this be an end to random encounters? We will know more soon enough, as SquareEnix have plans to continually leak information on the game over time as we progress closer to the Japanese release. From what we've seen so far, the bar has been raised again, and Final Fantasy XII has rocketed straight to the top of our "most wanted" list! We can't wait!



SCARY THE WORLD'S SEXIEST GAMERS

Isn't Sexy Gamer an oxymoron?

Get yourself over to www.sexiestgamer.com to see who the sexiest gamers in the world are! Yes, we couldn't believe it either, but Gamer.tv recently ran a competition to find the world's most shagadelic gamer. Visitors to the website could vote by cycling through pictures that contestants had submitted and scoring them out of ten — a similar system to the classic "Am I hot or am I not?" days. Amongst the plethora of desperately earnest and deluded entries, we were surprised to see some pretty hot girls and a few buff guys, proving that gamers aren't all anaemic and spotty. Both a UK and US site took entries, so you can see how the Americans fare against the Poms.



[Above] The winners are grinnerers, it seems. Really, is that the best they could find?

Go check out the top 10, and even run a search based on what games the entrants noted were their favourites. It's at least 20 minutes of fun!

ALREADY? PS3 & XBOX 2 GAME(S) UNDERWAY

Huge climax set for debut

British developer, Climax, have surprisingly confirmed that work is well underway at their Brighton Studio on a racing game codenamed "Avalon" for the PlayStation 3 and Xbox 2. The game uses the Blimey 2 engine and features land, sea and air vehicles. Apparently, "Avalon will boast groundbreaking graphics, sensational sound and gripping gameplay". Thanks for that, Climax. Weird to hear that PS3 and Xbox 2 games are in development already though...

SEQUELS CALL OF DUTY 2

The goodness continues...

Activision have revealed a number of sequels that are already in the works for a selection of their current hits. Call of Duty 2 will be the next big one, following a few console ports of the first Call of Duty that will hit shelves in 2004.

Activision also have plans to "franchise True Crime for years to come", no doubt hoping it's their very own Grand Theft Auto that they can milk until the cows come home. We're not so convinced on that one.



ONLINE JOIN THE MATRIX

Virtual world of virtual world takes shape

The forums have opened up for all to discuss Monolith's upcoming Matrix Online MMORPG (<http://matrixforums.ubi.com/>), and it's the place to be if you want to learn about the new game features and discuss the pros and cons of said features with the developers themselves. The Development Roundtable forum is frequented by a number of Monolith staff, and you might even just influence the final product if you go and throw your 2 cents into the ring. You are the architects!



[Above] It's a crazy dance party. Either that, or they're killing each other.

CAPTION THIS!

Come on, make us laugh. Do your best. You can do it! Just send your funny screen captions to us at captionthis@next.com.au with Caption This Part 51 in the subject line.

PART 51



Whahaha



[Above] Hanging out with your new higher-poly homies. Cool.



WINNERS

Hyper 122

SNES AND GAMES

Brandon Connor, VIC

ALIEN COMP

First Prize:

Ben Rodda, NSW

Runners up:

Jeremy Kinsella, WA
Garrett Townsend, NSW
James Jenner, QLD
Paul Graham, SA
Dion Creaney, QLD
Sharon Robertson, NSW
Kevin Smith, WA
M. Higgs, QLD
Geoff Clingan, NSW
Troy Baker, QLD

TOP SPIN

Ben Fogarty, NSW
Marcos Arias, VIC
Laura Parry, QLD
Roman Skuja, QLD
George Brent, NSW

VIEWTIFUL JOE

Luke Eller, NSW
Tracy Best, SA
Ross Winston, NSW
C. Chase, NSW
Grant Higgins, QLD

GTA

ROCKSTAR'S SECOND COMING

Xbox improvements looking good



Rockstar got in touch with us recently to give us the low down on all the changes they've made to Grand Theft Auto 3 and Grand Theft Auto: Vice City for the Xbox. Here's a list of just what they've added to these versions which are available in a special double pack this month.

Specular Lighting: Stunning visual improvements with the use of Specular Lighting redefine Grand Theft Auto 3 and Grand Theft Auto: Vice City. Adding to the dramatic vibe of each city and fully immersing the player into the game, this feature allows for objects to be illuminated by the light that is cast from every street lamp and headlight in real time.

Reflection Maps: Reflection Maps result in smooth graphics throughout both Liberty and Vice City and are particularly noticeable on the 50+ vehicles. To further

highlight the differences between the vehicles, Real Time reflections are cast of varying degree. The result is high-end sports cars looking the part with a styled gloss, while the older, low end cars are naturally not quite as slick.

HDTV 16x9 480P Support: Essential for obtaining the best-looking graphics and bringing the game to life is the use of Progressive Scan. The Xbox version of Grand Theft Auto has taken advantage of the technology available and now has HDTV 16x9 480P Support. The end result is a larger viewable frame that is considerably sharper.

Custom Soundtracks: Players can make multiple custom soundtracks by ripping their favourite CDs onto the Xbox hard drive. From there, the game recognises each soundtrack as a CD or tape that can be changed by the new CD changer/Tape Deck (in vehicle).

Texture Re-Insertion: Brilliantly detailed environments are the result

of almost every texture in the game being reinserted at a much higher resolution. The end result is a game that looks very sharp with intricately modeled areas and landscapes.

Higher Polygon Models: Every single vehicle in the game has been vastly enhanced due to a higher poly count. In addition, each major character has been updated and skinned using higher polygon models making for a much more seamless look.

Enhanced Audio: The sound in both Grand Theft Auto 3 and Vice City was meticulously put together and each audio effect is at its best as a result of the Xbox supporting Dolby 5.1.

Enhanced Particle System: All of the game's particle effects (from smoke to water sprays) have been enhanced to give off a more realistic reaction and look. Raindrops now cling to the game's camera and fire gives off more radiosity resulting in a more realistic appearance.



WAXY

MARIO IMMORTALISED

Hollywood hails Nintendo hero

☞ Nintendo are proud to report that their uber-icon, Mario, has been inducted into the "legendary" Hollywood Wax Museum in California. Mario himself was on hand to help unveil the wax statue, as well as a bunch of American kids who were doing their best to win a Mario Look-a-Like competition. It's-a Waxy!



[WAXY] You know, you could just whack a Mickey Mouse head on him...



MARVEL

GET READY TO BE PUNISHED

THQ set to cash-in on new movie

☞ Another Marvel Comics character, the Punisher, is set to hit the big screen in 2004, from Marvel Studios and Artisan Entertainment. The movie stars Thomas Jane as the Punisher, as well as John Travolta and Rebecca Romijn-Stamos. Naturally, when a movie such as this comes along, so

must the licensed games. THQ are the publishers who've managed to tackle this one (surprising given Activision's stranglehold over all Marvel licensed games so far), and the game will be handled by the very capable Volition (Red Faction, Summoner). So far, only PlayStation 2 and Xbox versions are planned.

[Above] As usual, the game model looks nothing like the film actor or comic character!



GEEK CHIC

DUNGEONS AND DREAMERS

Cool new book on gaming

☞ McGraw Hill recently released *Dungeons and Dreamers: The Rise of Computer Game Culture - From Geek to Chic* (RRP\$39.95) written by Brad King and John Borland. This is a fascinating read on how gaming has gone from a hobby of bedroom programming to the heights of huge social events such as LAN parties and an industry that now earns over US\$10 billion dollars a year. It's a nice insight into the sub-culture of gaming, and you should check it out.

OVERFLOW

Sony's PSP handheld may yet have its specs changed before its big debut at E3 this year. Developers have been letting Sony know loud and clear that 8MB of RAM is simply not enough to get the results that are necessary for games on the handheld device. Let's hope Sony listens to them...

Pokémon Ruby & Sapphire on GBA appears to have a bug that only appears after it's been played for a year. The internal clock function becomes corrupt, preventing certain features of the game from working correctly, such as the growth of berries. Nintendo are working on solutions for customers who want it repaired...

Operation: Live Connections: Microsoft has sent a bunch of Xbox systems and Live kits to soldiers serving in Iraq so that they can play games and chat in real time with their friends back home. Microsoft were quoted as saying, "This is truly a landmark effort to help boost morale and show the troops and their families our support and appreciation for their dedicated service and sacrifice in being apart, especially during the holidays."

Sammy Corporation has acquired the shares of Sega Corporation held by CSK Corporation. The investment gives Sammy Corp. 39,148,600 additional shares, or a majority stake of 22.4%, in Sega Corporation. The two companies have been collaborating on various projects. With this acquisition of the shares, Sammy plans to solidify its business relationship with Sega.

Firaxis Games have confirmed that work is underway on Civilization IV! Let's hope they can freshen it up without breaking the great gameplay.

Rockstar have had to edit out graffiti from future copies of Grand Theft Auto: Vice City that says "Kill Haitians" after pressure from the Haitian community and New York's Human Rights Commission. Fair enough.

More woes for Rockstar. *Manhunt* (reviewed this issue on page 50) has been banned in New Zealand. The OFLC thought the game was "injurious to the public good".

BLAU!
MAX PAYNE SEES A SHRINK

Now fits onto the GBA...

☞ One game we never really pegged as a possible GBA port was Max Payne. A psychological nightmare wrapped up in gratuitous bloody gunplay. Yet here it is! Rockstar games have gone and signed up developer, Mobius, to bring this third-person shooter to the Nintendo handheld, and based on the screenshots, it looks like they might have somehow pulled it off in style. It has retained the graphic novel style presentation and the bullet time and somehow packed it into 10 levels of high-octane Payne-style action. It is, in case you were wondering, a take on the first Max Payne title, so it's a return to Mr. Carrot-up-the-date in the role of Max, but we imagine the game will play out somewhat differently. We can't wait to get our hands on this and give you all the low down. Look out for it soon.



NOOOO!
FALLOUT 3 CANCELLED

Black Isle sacks all staff...

☞ In one of the saddest pieces of gaming news that's ever made it to the Hyper HQ in-tray, Black Isle studios – as we know it – has been put to bed by Interplay, with all staff made redundant and their unannounced project, which just happens to have been Fallout 3, getting canned. A very dark day, indeed. Black Isle were responsible for some of the best PC RPG games ever made, including Fallout, Planescape Torment, Icewind Dale, Baldur's Gate I & II and more. We wish all ex-staff the best of luck in the future, and hope that some day they can get back together and bring us another magical game. Sob. Interplay will now re-shape Black Isle Studios into a console only arm.



Star Wars: Battlefront

PS2, Xbox, PC Developer: LucasArts Publisher: LucasArts



Perimeter

PC Developer: K-D Lab Publisher: Codemasters

FIRST LOOK! FIRST LOOK! FIRST LOOK! FIRST LOOK! FIRST LOOK! FIRST LOOK! FIRST LOOK! FIRST LOOK! FIRST LOOK! FIRST LOOK!



Painkiller

PC, Xbox Developer: People Can Fly Publisher: Dreamcatcher



Cold Winter

PS2 Developer: Swordfish Publisher: Vivendi

FIRST LOOK! FIRST LOOK! FIRST LOOK! FIRST LOOK! FIRST LOOK! FIRST LOOK! FIRST LOOK! FIRST LOOK! FIRST LOOK! FIRST LOOK! FIRST LOOK! FIRST LOOK! FIRST LOOK! FIRST LOOK! FIRST LOOK!

SHOCK!

GALLEON – IT STILL EXISTS!

Development hell or heaven?

☛ Toby Gard, creator of Tomb Raider, recently took part in a damage control Q&A with C&VG to ensure the rest of the world that the once-hyped action adventure, Galleon, was still going to see the light of day in 2004. Even since it was announced back in the late 90s, Galleon is a game that's always showed a lot of promise, yet has somehow never quite made it to "gold" status. In light of the closure of Black Isle Studios, it doesn't seem any great surprise that Interplay's financial status was one problem. Toby Gard explained, "Interplay has always been strongly behind Galleon, but its financial situation prompted it to sell it on. SCI saw the game and liked it very much, and now everyone is happy." Gard also went on to explain that the dev team was simply too small to get the job done, slowing the development process down considerably.

We can now look forward to getting our hands on Galleon mid-2004. Here's hoping.



ARTY

MARVEL TEAM-UP!

Spider-Man gets the Capcom treatment

☛ In a very cool move, Marvel comics have enlisted the talents of legendary Japanese Capcom artist, Shinkiro, to illustrate the cover of their new Spider-Man series, Spider-Man Unlimited. Shinkiro is renowned for working on a number of classic Capcom games, including Street Fighter and Resident Evil, and his style is quite distinctive. In any case, it's certainly a very cool Spider-Man cover, and Marvel hope to continue this alliance with Capcom for further editions.





[Left] Check out the awesome new environments... amazing

GRAN TURISMO 4

Just in case you were wondering what Polyphony Digital — the creative team behind the insanely popular and respected driving/racing sim series Gran Turismo — has been up to since the release of Gran Turismo 3 A-spec back in 2001, well, the answer's obvious: they've been slogging away at the sequel, GT4. But what's in store exactly? Which direction is the series heading in?

At a recent press conference, Polyphony Digital's director Kazunori Yamauchi dropped fans a bit of a hint, revealing that he hopes Gran Turismo 4 might be used in the future as an introductory training tool for motorsport drivers. Ambitious claims indeed — but with GT4 doing the game convention rounds and the recent release of Gran Turismo 4 Prologue in Japan (don't bother sweating it, it's not getting a release anywhere else in the world — see the boxout for more details), we've been fortunate enough to have plenty of hands on time with the game to see just how close Polyphony Digital is coming to realising Yamauchi's bold claim.

WHAT'S UNDER THE HOOD

And it seems that they're onto something — from the moment you get behind the wheel (so to speak) it's obvious that this is a superior game, and not only to the previous

versions in the series. The changes aren't entirely superficial either; yes, the game is looking absolutely amazing, with a number of key enhancements to the graphics engine and general presentation, but it's what's under the hood that should get fans of the series feverishly sick with anticipation.

A staggering amount of work has gone into making the most realised car driving/racing sim available on any console. To that end, Polyphony went back to the drawing board and re-designed the physics engine. With plenty of work still to go (tweaking the performance and handling of all the cars featured will continue until the day it goes gold), GT4 already feels solid. Make no mistake, most of the changes to the driving engine will be lost on casual players; it's the real purists that'll be able to appreciate the evolution of the series. One of the more obvious differences that we noticed was suspension — the Celica we drove down a bumpy rally track threw us around more aggressively than in previous versions. And to give the vehicles featured in GT4 that extra element of authenticity in terms of performance, most of the vehicles have been tweaked to offer course times within a second of their real-world counterparts.

Then there are the cars themselves. There'll be over 500 of them to race

AVAILABLE ON:

PS2

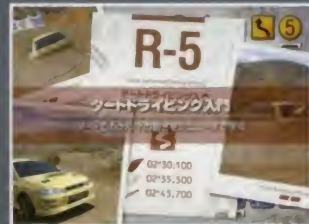
DETAILS

CATEGORY: Racing sim / PLAYERS: 1-6 / DEVELOPER: Polyphony Digital / PUBLISHER: Sony / AVAILABLE: TBA /

WOW-O-METER



(though this will obviously include some multiples in the same model series), spanning everything from modern day prototypes back to the classics of the thirties and forties. Open-top convertible vehicles will now feature a driver and passenger model to flesh things out (regular cars will still be empty), and it'll be possible to see wheels move independently of the main chassis in all vehicles (something already accomplished in games like Project Gotham Racing and Stuntman). Unfortunately, though, vehicle damage (crumpled body kits) will not make it into GT4 because of the substantial performance hit this incurs. But this could also be partly explained by the tweaking of the AI — computer controlled cars will apparently no longer rigidly stick to their pre-determined path. Instead, they'll now do their best to avoid collision. They'll also prove to be more evenly matched and



GRAN TURISMO 4 PROLOGUE

Polyphony Digital released a teaser/demo of GT4 for purchase in Japan in early December of 2003. Offering two play modes (Arcade and School Mode) and 12 cars, the demo is but a very small taste of what's to come in GT4. Five courses are on offer, including New York, the Grand Canyon, Fuji Speedway, the Tsukuba Circuit and the Italian Citta di Aria. And perhaps as a first, the teaser release features a fairly substantial secret mode: finish the handful of tutorial courses (much like the license tests of GT3) and you'll unlock another set of more challenging School Mode tests. As we mentioned in the article though, don't hope for Prologue to be released here in Oz, as there are currently no plans for it to make it outside of Japan.



[Above] Spot the Macca's? It's a shame the game has to be that realistic...



[Above] Kazunori Yamauchi. You can thank him for all of this.

competitive than before thanks to a database of performance that the game will calculate based on your own driving.

DRIVING FOR SUCCESS

Further detail can be seen on the courses themselves. There will be 50 of them in the final release, ranging from rally tracks and speedways to inner-city courses. The most noticeable change is that a number of GT4's courses are vaster and more open than anything seen in GT3: A-Spec. Track design has also become a bit more varied, with the narrow roads of New York's Times Square or the Italian Citta di Aria course requiring much tighter driving for success.

Apart from that, the cosmetic changes are more subtle yet just as welcome. The textures are sharper (oh, how we've been gushing over the sky box!), and more life has been injected into the previous static backdrops. Spectators now move, and in the rally courses in particular, will even run out on the road to catch a snap of you before they scurry back off to safety.

The one area of GT4 that PD have been very quiet about is multiplayer. Very little has been said up to this point, save that online play will be supported, and that the usual maximum of six cars (and therefore racers) can compete

in the one race. Introducing this human element into GT4 has the potential to revolutionise the series, as no longer will you be stuck racing against the predictable AI for race after race. With the option to go online and race against other GT4 fanatics, we'll finally get to experience the beauty of the racing in the best context possible. Every race will have the unpredictable tension of real-life encounters...

Stamping out annoying players is obviously something that has crossed Polyphony's mind, as one telling feature of GT4 Prologue that might indicate how the online component of the full game will shape up is the inclusion of a new penalty system in the single player races. Bump into a car at too high a speed or get too intimate with barriers or walls and you'll be forced to drive at the speed limit of that course for a period of ten seconds. While it seems a bit harsh for the single player game, the idea makes perfect sense in multiplayer; it'll keep the odd troublesome driver from spoiling the race for everybody else. After all, Gran Turismo has always been about squeezing the best performance out of your car relative to the course you're on to win a race. And while we applaud the efforts at keeping the competition honest, we hope that the penalty system found in



GT4 PROLOGUE CAR LIST

It's all about the cars. Here's a list of the vehicles featured in the Prologue demo release. Expect these in the final version of the game along with hundreds of others!

- Honda Odyssey (2003)
- Nissan Skyline Coupe 350GT (2003)
- Subaru Legacy Touring Wagon 2.0GT specB (2003)
- Mitsubishi Lancer Evolution VIII (2003)
- Nissan Skyline GT-R V-spec II Nur (2002)
- Subaru Impreza WRX STi Version VI (1999)
- Toyota MR2 GT-S (1998)
- Honda Integra Type R (1998)
- Mitsubishi Lancer Evolution IV Rally Car (1997)
- Nissan Silvia K's Aero (1996)
- Toyota Celica GT-Four Rally Car (1995)
- Nissan Fairlady 240ZG (1971)





[Right] The driver must be black, wearing black, in a black helmet.



Prologue is removed from the singleplayer modes of the game for the final release of Gran Turismo 4, otherwise we suspect it could be more frustrating than fun. Let's at least hope it's optional.

STREET MACHINES ON OFFER

Of course, the best way to experience Gran Turismo is with a chair/wheel combo (or at the very least with the steering wheel), and advancements have been made on this front too. Logicool (the name Logitech trades under in Japan) will be releasing an updated version of its GT Force steering wheel to coincide with release of GT4. Called the GT Force Pro, the big difference this USB wheel has over its predecessor is that the wheel can rotate through 900 degrees (two and a half times 'round) — matching the range of motion of many real contemporary sports cars. This feature alone makes the GT Force Pro a must-have toy if you're a wheel-only player, offering

a vastly updated experience over previous efforts. Our first experience with the wheel (see boxout) was a little frustrating given that we were used to the more sensitive nuances of other racing wheels and the PS2 control pad; it was far too easy to over-steer, resulting in loss of control of the car. But it didn't take us long to appreciate the power of the wheel — it's larger range of movement actually offers greater precision than ever before. The trade-off here being that you'll have to work a lot harder to recover from the loss of control of a car (like a spinout, for example) by turning the wheel hand-over-hand as quickly as possible. As testing as this may be, the obvious benefit here is that it should encourage drivers to be more graceful with their movements and avoid the need for recovery tactics in the first place.

Logitech have also dropped the paddle gear-shifts from behind the face of the wheel and added a stick-shift base at the right side of the Pro. We're as yet undecided — the familiar and ergonomic position of the paddles work well, whereas the new stick works in the context of the street machines on offer. Personal choice, really.

FIGHT THE WHEEL

The other major change from the GT Force is that the Pro features a heavier feedback setting, giving

GET TOO INTIMATE WITH BARRIERS OR WALLS AND YOU'LL BE FORCED TO DRIVE AT THE SPEED LIMIT

more realistic tactile responses to the driver. The results are impressive; you'll actually have to 'fight' the wheel to manage some maneuvers.

Combine the more powerful feedback with the 900 degree rotation and you've a wheel that perfectly complements the 'sim' nature of the Gran Turismo series. If you were a control pad only player of the GT series, now's a good time to see what a good quality wheel can do for the game.

But the ultimate GT4 setup — and the one currently used for promotions (at events such as E3) — will now also be available for home use, but for a price. At just under US\$850 it ain't cheap, but the Sparco Racing Cockpit Pro is a class act. Combine this with the GT Force Pro wheel from Logitech and you're in GT heaven.

Gran Turismo 4 is shaping up to be a very classy act indeed. Polyphony Digital might even succeed in meeting their own lofty ambitions, and with a release later in the year, we won't have to wait too much longer to find out. <<<

[Below] The spare gives you a bit of a buffer in collisions...





R: RACING EVOLUTION

Namco made their name in the racing genre based largely on the strength of the superb Ridge Racer series. While fans may be desperate for a super slick sequel after the somewhat disappointing Ridge Racer V, they'll have to wait because Namco are just putting the finishing touches to a far more simulation orientated experience that goes by the rather perplexing name R: Racing Evolution. Perhaps they tacked the extra R on the front to distinguish the title further from Racing Evoluzione, but who knows? Those zany Namconians!

TWISTS AND TURNS

In any case, R: Racing Evolution (RRE) has more in common with the Gran Turismo games than Ridge Racer, thanks to more realistic physics and a far more conservative driving model. If this sounds like your kind of thing then the good news is that RRE is coming to Xbox, PS2 and GameCube, so no matter what console you own there's gameplay to go around. Better still, Namco have really focused on giving the single player game some depth.

Taking their cue from V8 Supercars, Namco have given R: Racing Evolution

a story mode, complete with sexy cutscenes. Sexy you say? Yep, no oily-overall-trucker-cap-wearing-grease-monkey for you! Instead, your character is the sassy Rena. Once upon a time an ambulance driver, Rena has made the move to race car driving and it's up to you to guide her to fame and fortune in her new career. The story mode takes place across fourteen chapters and you can expect many twists and turns, and probably even a couple of catfights before it's done. Oh please let there be catfights! You can also expect to feel like a bona fide member of a racing team, with your manager talking to you throughout the races, letting you know when he's pleased and criticising you when you take a corner poorly. The other racers will also chatter in your ear, hopefully spurring a sense of competition and not simply resulting in a hurried search for the mute option.

Perhaps the most interesting touch in RRE, however, is the Interactive Driver AI System, which elegantly attempts to recreate the pressures of real world racing. Basically, if you're sitting on someone's tail - putting real pressure on them, the meter at

the bottom of the screen will fill up to reflect this. Once it's full the driver in front will be more likely to make a mistake, allowing you to pass him. Cool idea huh? Of course, it also applies to you, so if an AI driver has tailed you for long enough you'll notice a slip in your handling precision. This system should make for some interesting dogfighting and tactical decisions during races, and it's nice to see something genuinely fresh brought to the racing genre.

JUST ENOUGH VARIETY

In addition to the story mode (and the obligatory time trial, arcade and versus modes), the other mode of note is the challenge mode. This houses a vast number of time and

objective-based challenges, and will be the place to sample the various driving styles that R: Racing Evolution has to offer. These cover GT style races as well as rally racing and drag racing, and from our time with the game offer just enough variety in handling and style to ensure you won't be putting the game down any time soon. Mind you, RRE isn't



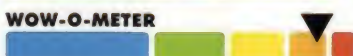


You'd almost expect Batman to step out of it



AVAILABLE ON:
PS2 / XBOX / GCN

DETAILS
CATEGORY: Racing / PLAYERS: 1-4 /
DEVELOPER: Namco /
AVAILABLE: Early 2004 /



WHAT WE'D LIKE TO SEE:
Namco answer Burnout's challenge with an awesome new arcade racer.



as comprehensive as it should be. One feature conspicuous by its absence across all three platforms is online play. Bad Namco, bad!

Racing fans should also be forewarned that Namco aren't attempting to compete with the Gran Turismo series with RRE's car lineup. Instead, they're focusing on quality over quantity, with a healthy selection of cars to choose from and unlock, spread across GT1, GT2, GT3, Rally 1, Rally 2, Drag Racing, Privateer and Prototype classes.

We haven't seen all three versions running yet, but we're confident that the visuals will be comparable across the systems — although the jaggies that are present (and unfortunately expected) on PS2 should be ironed out on GameCube and Xbox. Overall, we'd say that RRE is about on par with GT3 in terms of visual quality, with some great high-poly, reflective surfaced car models, and detailed environments that range from hicksville racing

courses to real life circuits like Suzuka and Monaco. Fingers crossed there are some of Namco's trademark city and beach runs too.

We should also mention that gamers who purchase the GameCube version of R: Racing Evolution (or Pac-Man World 2 — but who'd buy that?) in the U.S. will actually get Nintendo and Namco's four player update to Pac-Man (see Hyper 118, page 39) as a free bonus disc. We haven't heard whether we'll get the same deal here, but we certainly hope so. Full review soon. <<<



THE JAGGIES THAT ARE PRESENT ON PS2 SHOULD BE IRONED OUT ON GAMECUBE & XBOX





Best Ninja arse in a game ever



I guess futuristic Ninjas use jetpacks



NIGHTSHADE

Question: what's cooler than a fast and deadly ninja? Answer: a fast, deadly AND sexy female ninja! At least, that seems to be Sega's rationale, and we're inclined to agree with them. Nightshade is the sequel to Shinobi on PS2, and rather than playing as Hotsuma, the lead is now the spunky Kunoichi.

THE DEMON WORLD AND EARTH

The game picks up a year after Hotsuma's defeat of Hiruko. In accordance with the law that states "Tokyo must constantly be on the brink of an apocalypse", one of the seals between the demon world and Earth has been reopened, threatening to once again plunge the city into anarchy. The interim government gives Kunoichi the task of protecting the city and defeating the evil scourge. Fortunately, as a deadly (and fast and sexy) ninja she's armed with some pretty sweet skills — both martial and mystical. Much like Hotsuma she can move with lightning speed, run along walls and combo stealth dash kills in rapid succession for the ultra stylish "Shadow Dance" attack.

Sega are taking it another step further, however, with a range of new attacks that include an air-based paralysis attack, kicks, juggles, a sonic boom stomp, counters (such as the ability to kick projectiles back to meet their maker), and sweetest of all — spawning shadow image Kunoichis to fight alongside you. Hand in hand with these are even greater acrobatic abilities and a more versatile combat system that supports unlimited combos. Unlike Hotsuma's blade (which craved the souls of victims and would start to suck his own life if not regularly satiated), combos will serve to fill Kunoichi's "Chakra Gauge", which is the key to using her powerful magic attacks.

BOTTOMLESS PITS

The environments will once again be very urban in nature, with battles taking place on high rise rooftops, in construction sites, industrial areas, subways and the like. Combat will also take place in more dynamic environments, such as on top of fighter planes, industrial cranes and moving trains. Sounds good to us.

We're hoping that the level design rises above the rather drab and repetitive standard in Shinobi, however. With such a cool skill set for Kunoichi we really want to see level design that works in tandem with her abilities, emphasizing deft and fleet footed ninja movements and action, with less platform jumping and fighting in corridors. Sega have said that the game will have an increased focus on aerial maneuvers and combat, so we have our fingers crossed they're thinking along the same lines.

Developers Overworks are also trying to cater to less experienced players with Nightshade. Many gamers (ourselves included) found Shinobi very unforgiving, thanks to long missions (without mid-level save points) combined with tough combat and jumps over bottomless pits. We suspect that Overworks will address the save point issue, but one change that will definitely be included is an alternate control scheme for beginners which auto-locks on to enemies. Hopefully Nightshade will be the game that Shinobi should have been... we'll know early next year. <<

AVAILABLE ON:

PS2

DETAILS

CATEGORY: Action / PLAYERS: 1 / DEVELOPER: Sega Overworks AVAILABLE: Early 2004 /

WOW-O-METER



WHAT WE'D LIKE TO SEE:

More character in the environments.



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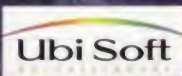
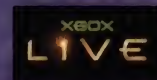
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* Xbox Gamer UK April 2003



MA15+

Ubi Soft

Hey look, I found this arm on the ground back there

BREAKDOWN

Breakdown puts you in the shoes of the unfortunately named Derek Cole. Not only have his friends nicknamed him "D-Cole" (geddit?) but he's been the subject of mysterious experiments that have left his arm glowing with a strange energy. The game begins with Derek waking up in a military base, bereft of memory and in a weakened state.

The game's initial sequence really serves to show why Namco have chosen a true first person perspective — immersion. This isn't simply a "shoulder cam" (as opposed to a "writing Cam" ho ho) but a "behind the eyeballs" viewpoint. In Breakdown, every sway, dip and turn of your character's head is tracked by the camera. Indeed, after waking up, Namco really show this off, with Derek taking a swig from a can of drink, eating a (poisoned)

AVAILABLE ON:

PS2 XBOX PC

DETAILS

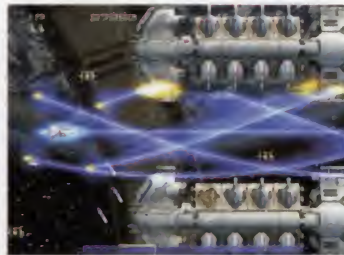
CATEGORY: Action / PLAYERS: 1 / DEVELOPER: Namco / AVAILABLE: Early 2004 /

WOW-O-METER



hamburger, then later throwing it all up into the toilet. We kid you not.

Fortunately, Derek's rescued from this predicament by the game's femme fatale Alex, and it's escaping the base that gives a real taste of Breakdown's unique style of action. Although weapons will certainly come into play, the focus is very much on hand-to-hand combat, and it looks like Namco have worked hard to inject some depth into the mechanics. More on this one soon.



GRADIUS V

Let's take it back to the old school! Or perhaps it should be "this series never left the old school!" In any case, Gradius V is the latest installment in the classic shooter franchise from Konami, and although the gameplay is still very much 2D, Gradius V sports some beautiful 3D visuals, making it easily the best looking game in the series to date. The humble Vic Viper also has more firepower, and importantly, more options than ever before. Indeed, this is where Gradius V's replay value will come from, as purists will no doubt want to play through using each of the five different weapons system apiece. Powerups can be activated immediately or held on to, as the more you have the better the abilities

AVAILABLE ON:

PS2 XBOX / GCM / PC

DETAILS

CATEGORY: Shooter / PLAYERS: 1-2 / DEVELOPER: Konami / AVAILABLE: Early 2004 /

WOW-O-METER



you can upgrade to. Granted, these take pretty predictable forms — speed boosts, double lasers, missiles etc, but it's still good to see Konami really packing lots of options in. Speaking of which, the familiar "option" (yes, that's what it's called) powerup has also returned, which is a rotating orb (or orbs) that supplement your firepower. You can even use the right analogue stick to control the options now too, which is a nice touch. Should be fun.



EVIL GENIUS

Just as Dungeon Keeper turned the tables on heroic adventurers by putting you in control of the evil overlord, so too does Evil Genius. You play the megalomaniac super villain who thirsts to take over the world. In your quest to do just that you'll be able to steal precious national treasures from around the world, hire vicious henchmen and build an imposing lair full of elaborate traps to capture that dashing secret agent and take him out once and for all. Just remember not to reveal the details of your ingenious world domination plan first!

The game is played from a typical strategy viewpoint, allowing you to instruct your various henchmen and lay out

AVAILABLE ON:

PS2 XBOX / GCM / PC

DETAILS

CATEGORY: Strategy / PLAYERS: 1 / DEVELOPER: Elixir Studios / AVAILABLE: 2004 /

WOW-O-METER



traps with ease. The visual style of the game is reminiscent of old school Bond films — very kitsch, with sleek futuristic control panels, mainframe computers and the like. You can bet there'll be lashings of humour to go along with it too.

In your quest to build the most streamlined secret agent killing sequences, you'll even be able to send your own henchmen in as guinea pigs to see just how well those spinning blades work. Sweet.

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URBAN FREESTYLE SOCCER

✂ In the ghettos, you might think that basketball would be the dominant sport. Or perhaps boxing. But Urban Freestyle Soccer is here to tell you that on "da streets", hoods is goin' crizazy wit' da socca. Yeah right. No matter though, because Urban Freestyle Soccer plays a great game of arcade soccer. Think Sega Soccer Slam on concrete, with four jive talkin' playaz (as opposed to "players") per side, and you'd be on the right track... or perhaps the wrong side of the track. Chortle.

In Urban Freestyle Soccer, gang allegiances determine your team, and matches are apparently battles over turf, with the ultimate goal being control of the city. What a pleasant way to end all tha fussing and a fighting! Each "team" has their own gang colours, bumpin' beats and playing style (including signature moves and tricks), and the

AVAILABLE ON:

PS2 / XBOX / GCN / PC

DETAILS

CATEGORY: Arcade soccer / PLAYERS: 1-4 / DEVELOPER: Silicon Dreams / AVAILABLE: Early 2004 /

WOW-O-METER



gameplay serves up a nice mix of brawling and sports action. Want an example of some of the teams? How about the all-female, all-booty "Hardcore Honeys"? Or the blunt smoking Jah Warriors? We'd really like to see some more imagination in the final game though. What about a team called The Crack-heads? Or the fearsome Pimp Mack Daddies, with their Southernplayalisticadillacmuzik special attack? Ah well, it's still good to see Acclaim "representing"... all the wiggers are going to love it.



SABRE WULF

AVAILABLE ON:

GBA / PS2 / XBOX

DETAILS

CATEGORY: Platformer / PLAYERS: 1-4 / DEVELOPER: Rare / AVAILABLE: Early 2004 /

WOW-O-METER



✂ Sabre Wulf originally came out on the Spectrum, C64, Amstrad and BBC in 1984, back when Rare were known as Ultimate. It's very much a classic in the hearts and minds of old school gamers, so it comes as no surprise that Rare are remaking it for modern audiences. It's been a long time coming too. Sabre Wulf was first unveiled for GBA back in 2001, but the game was put on hold during the Microsoft buyout, and the publishing rights have now been picked up by THQ. Fortunately, it's going to be worth the wait!

Sabre Wulf once again stars Sabreman (where do they come up with these names?), but Rare have done a fantastic job updating the basic principles and exploration heavy gameplay of the original to

the GBA. One of the things that's impressed us most is the strong puzzle element. You'll be able to collect and buy the various creatures you find on your quest — each with its own unique ability or property that you can use. Like Pokémon, some creatures will be common, whereas others will be very hard to find. Essentially, this will mean that the play mechanics will be very open, allowing you to find your own solution to puzzles.



MTX MOTOTRAX

✂ Dirt-bike racing games are a dime a dozen in the games industry, but MTX Mototrax is looking special. Not only have Left Field Productions (yes, the former Nintendo second party developer) whipped up some really sharp visuals, but they've also implemented a non-linear career mode that brings motocross, supercross and freestyle dirt bike riding together. Each is obviously a very different discipline, so there should be a lot of gameplay depth to master in Mototrax.

Fans of the sports will also dig the fact that the game has authentic vehicles from the likes of Yamaha, Suzuki and Thor, and you'll be starting out with 2 stroke 125cc bikes and moving all the way up to 4

AVAILABLE ON:

PS2 / XBOX / GCN

DETAILS

CATEGORY: Racing / PLAYERS: 1-8 / DEVELOPER: Left Field / AVAILABLE: 2004 /

WOW-O-METER



stroke 450cc beasts. Oh, and what extreme sports title would be complete without a list of pros? Mototrax includes the likes of Travis Pastrana, Kenny Bartram and Carey Hart... which means bugger all to us but presumably someone out there is getting excited. With 25 courses and online play for both PS2 and Xbox, Mototrax is looking solid.

REC

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THE FINAL CUT



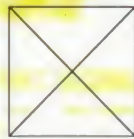
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PlayStation 2



agdc 20



The Australian
Game Developers
Conference



003



Ian Fischer
Lead Game Designer
Ensemble Studios

What projects are you working on at the moment?

I can't say. We're unannounced on everything we're doing right now. We're working on a project but that's pretty much all I can tell you.

Coming to Australia for the first time, what have been your initial thoughts about the local industry?

I'm pretty ignorant. Everything I've found out about the Australian industry has been through the last two days being here, talking to people here. The developers and publishers seem to know what's going on, they seem to know how to do games. I've had a lot of good conversations. This really seems like a place with confidence, the technology, the skill sets and costs. I think it's going to really take off a little bit for Australian developers in the future. I think they're going to do good.

What are the major advantages of developing a game here?

What I'm hearing from talking to developers here is that they have the advantage of lower costs but they still have a really high skill base. Which I think actually works both for and against Australian developers. [Publishers] looking for lower costs aren't looking for AAA titles. But I don't think that's going to stay that way for very long. Of course these are my grandiose predictions based on two days here.

Have you been particularly impressed with any projects you've seen here?

I haven't actually had an opportunity to really look at any work that anybody's doing. The only project I've actually seen was yesterday in a presentation by the guys from Melbourne House who are doing the Transformers Armada game. It looked pretty impressive to me. When they told me they have a good amount of development time left... well! It looked kind of complete. The toolset they have is pretty advanced.

How does Australia's development industry compare to other developing industries, say in Eastern Europe or Asia?

I think it's one of the advantages that Australia has. If the Australian developers keep pushing the lower cost thing. Australians speak English. If you're an American business it's easier to communicate with the people you're going to work with. How to navigate the ins and outs of Bulgaria or South Korea, it's very difficult to figure out what the local laws are, what you're going to do when something goes wrong. Australia is close enough to the States to see a good relationship form.

Can you identify any areas where the Australian development industry could improve?

I think Australia needs to have a break-out hit. If someone has a triple-A title coming out of a development house in Australia then people are going to start paying attention to Australia. I mean, breakout hits are luck as well as a lot of hard work. I think if you have one of those then all of a sudden Australia gets an opportunity to shine.

» The Australian Game Developers Conference was held recently over the weekend of the Rugby World Cup Final in the Melbourne Convention Centre. An annual event, it attracts hundreds of representatives from groups as diverse as developers, publishers, students, media, educational institutions, government and internationally renowned gaming dignitaries. Established five years ago, the AGDC stands as the primary local game development event, and continues to grow every year.

The conference proper runs over three days, with an extra day held beforehand, strictly for students and those considering game development as a career. On each of the three days, half a dozen or more sessions are held, each containing presentations in the areas of Art and Development, Platform Specific, General Design and Business Development. For a non-developer, much of the subject matter does prove overly technical, but the conference is one of the few events in Australia that attracts international gaming stalwarts such as Phil Harrison from SCEE and Laura Fryer from the Xbox Advanced Technology Group.

CURRENTLY RIDING HIGH
Having said that, AGDC 2003 began

in unfortunate circumstances. Late withdrawals are to be expected, but the absence of opening keynote presenters Ian Livingstone (Creative Director of Eidos) and Seamus Blackley (a man the AGDC website says was "the visionary behind Microsoft Xbox who persuaded Bill Gates to make a game console"), was notably disappointing to many who attended.

While the 40 or so addresses and presentations provide the meat in the AGDC sandwich, many extra flavours simmered around the edges. As AGDC founder John De Margheriti says, "we focused really hard on getting good quality technical tracts in art, design and programming. That solves the problem for the developer side. But the CEOs, the business guys are looking for more than that. They're basically looking for deals."

For the first time, AGDC 2003 was not just a developers' conference. He adds, "if those CEOs aren't going to presentations, they're happy, because they're going to deal meetings." It's set to go even further down this path in the future, with discussion of a multi-publisher, E3-like national trade expo even being tossed around.

The Australian development industry is currently riding high on



Phil Harrison
Executive Vice President,
Development
Sony Computer
Entertainment Europe

What is your role at Sony Computer Entertainment Europe?

I look after our region's studios – internal, external and international product development. At SCEE, we have a very strange map of Europe, which includes Australia and New Zealand, the Middle East, South Africa.

What are your thoughts on the Australian game industry and what do you think about events like this. Do you think they're beneficial?

Oh hugely. I think this is great. This is my first time in Australia and my first time at the AGDC so this is based on a fairly intense four or five days of exposure so far, but there's a great community down here, there's a great catalyst of companies working together, the community seems to be very self-supporting as well. Companies which are traditionally seen as competitors are working together to help forward the industry.

What can we expect to see for the rest of the PS2's life, and can you offer any games to look out for?

Three years since the PS2 launched, we're at 60-odd million machines worldwide and over a million in Australia. So we've just got to what I consider to be critical mass, and we are now ready to exploit that critical mass. Innovation is arriving in piles. On the pure game side, not hardcore games specifically, but very much in the game category, we are putting more products into development now on PS2 than ever before. We're going to have something like 35 games come out next year. We've got 60 in active development right now, which is more than we've ever had. That's before we even get to the PSP, EyeToy, and seeing other products that will have multiple skews.

Is the PSP a gaming platform or is Sony's plan for it broader?

Broader functionality is absolutely essential to the design of PSP. It is a mobile network device. It happens to be focused at games but it is fundamentally a mobile network device. We're going to drive the adoption of Wi-Fi and Wi-Fi is going to enable lots of applications on PSP.

Have you been particularly impressed by any games you've seen here in Australia?

I've seen some things. I think there is, in any market – Australia is not unique in this respect – there is some really good stuff, and there is some really average, run of the mill stuff. I think that my one criticism of the Australian market so far is it may lack a little bit of global ambition. It seems to be making apologies for itself sometimes, which I don't think it needs to. I think it has the technical resource. I think it has the infrastructure. I think it has the talent to make games that will compete on the global stage. But there isn't that creative drive and determination to really build something for a global market in every meeting I've had so far. There are obviously exceptions to that and I have seen some really great stuff.



[top] In between business deals, why not chat up the cute waitresses?
[above left] Mmmm, cookies. Brain food, obviously.
[above right] It's a bloody horrible thing! Gee, it's really not that hard!

a number of fronts. While the holy grail of the 'breakout hit' still seems some way off, several ventures in Australia have gained international attention in 2003. First, the return of Brendan McNamara to Australia heralds the dawn of a new era. After finishing up as Director on The Getaway, McNamara is set to head a new studio, backed by Sony, in Sydney's eastern suburbs. It was quite obvious what an impact McNamara's return will have on the scene, simply from talking to other Australian Developers at the conference.

The local industry looks forward to his arrival, expecting him to generate greater acknowledgement for Australian development. Between the major development houses there exists minimal competition. Companies work together, shouldering responsibility through co-operation in industry bodies, outsourcing, and respecting each other's undertakings.

SHROUDED IN MYSTERY

Supposedly, Australia benefits from its isolation. As De Margheriti states, "we don't have the publishers here playing us off against each other. They're over there [overseas]." So companies like Krome, Ratbag, Blue Tongue,

Auran, Irrational Games and Micro Forte don't actually compete. De Margheriti adds "We might compete for people, but we're very gentlemanly about it. Why? Because, at the end of the day, if he does well, I do well. A project means publishers come to town. Although I might not get that project, I might get the next one. That's how it works."

De Margheriti has been around the gaming block a number of times. He was renowned as the most respected games man in Australia, even before his company, Micro Forte, grabbed the deal to produce the Xbox's first massively multiplayer game, based on the famed BigWorld technology they have sold across the world. The AGDC is very much his child. It is organised by the non-profit educational institute he founded, the Academy of Interactive Entertainment. Even his wife Vicki is involved – she was manning the front desk for the duration of the weekend. His enthusiasm is endless, his openness refreshing.

And though he's prepared to talk at length about the nature of the industry, his background and his thoughts on the future, he draws the line at 'the Xbox deal'. Micro Forte's responsibility for the first massively



[top] Intrepid reporter, Jackson Gothe-Snape.
 [above left] Fancy a quick Battlefield 1942 LAN match?
 [above right] Transformers Armada. Aussie made!

multiplayer Xbox title still remains shrouded in mystery. While the agreement has been common knowledge for the best part of a year, we're still to see much beyond old tech demos and speculation. The latest information from Micro Forte at AGDC suggests we won't even get to see it at E3 2004, but that it is indeed heavily influenced by Citizen Zero, the PC MMG that was set aside when the Xbox deal came along. Certainly, Microsoft are pulling out all stops for this product, their first console foray into massively multiplayer. An Australian development team in command of such a keystone console product is unheard of. It could be the game that gets the world to sit up and take notice of Australia's development scene.

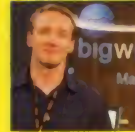
THE BREAKOUT HIT

Apart from the ongoing Micro Forte Xbox MMG saga, and McNamara's arrival, hope for Australia's breakout hit lies in the near future — in the hands of Melbourne House. Transformers Armada was indirectly demonstrated at the conference, giving the public a chance to see the game that has been gathering considerable international press momentum. Still the best part of six months away from release, Armada

comes from the studio responsible for the best Aussie console games in the recent past, Le Mans and Grand Prix Challenge, as well as the PC's GP500, a game that remains the standard in motorcycle simulators several years after release. Hyper will have more on Transformers Armada within the next two months.

Even beyond the quest for the breakout hit, AGDC made clear that Australian companies are looking to take advantage of gaming and gaming-related opportunities. Micro Forte are hoping to become not only a primary developer, but also a prominent publisher in the area of mobile games. Joe McDonagh (see interview box) heads Micro Forte's Canberra studio, which intends to grow from around ten people to a couple of dozen or more in the next year. Their long-term goal is adapting the BigWorld technology to wireless devices. Together with the arrival of McNamara's studio in Sydney, it's clear opportunities exist for local developers.

Another, perhaps more obvious theme in business at AGDC is the confirmation that Asia is being increasingly considered for Australian game development ventures. Auran's recently announced deal with Hanbitsoft, a



Joe McDonagh
 Studio Head, Canberra
 Micro Forte

What exactly is your role within Micro Forte?

I'm Studio Manager for Micro Forte, I run the Canberra studio.

How long have you been there?

I've been here for six months.

Where were you before?

Basically I was a founder and director of a company called Elixir Studios in the UK. We developed the game called Republic: The Revolution on PC.

So you were involved in that the whole way through?

Yeah, it was my company with a few other people. I was the design manager at Elixir, basically I ran all the designers. I was pretty much involved in everything from starting it up.

Coming to our industry from the UK, how does it compare?

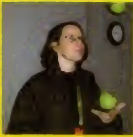
I think it's really exciting. It reminds me of the UK games industry about ten years ago, in a very positive way. It's small, it's very creative, it's very enthusiastic and passionate, and it's highly co-operative as well. Perhaps somewhere along the line in the UK the English have lost that. Because the English ten years ago were renowned for being very creative. I think [UK developers] have kind of been eaten up by a corporate monster in the last ten years.

Micro Forte's BigWorld is currently one of the world's leading MMOG technologies. Do you see any hope for the everyday person getting into the massively multiplayer side of gaming?

Yeah, if it's done properly. At the moment, massively multiplayer is really niche. If you played Dark Age of Camelot or EverQuest, there are probably 700 000 people in North America and Europe in these games, and they don't appeal to people outside of that niche. But then, what we've got to do is innovate, and come up with massively multiplayer games for people who aren't in that 700 000. I can't pretend to know all the answers now, but I've got a few strong ideas about the direction it's going to go. But we've got to actually test that out. That's why it's exciting for us, to actually find out what those things are.

So what else is hot in the Australian development industry right now?

I think what Auran is doing is very exciting, in making a massively multiplayer game with Hanbitsoft, a Korean publisher. It's the first example of collaboration between Korean publisher and an Australian developer. I don't know whether this is public knowledge yet, but there is a very distinguished Australian game developer called Brendan McNamara coming down here. I think that's huge. It's massive because he'll have about 60-70 people both from the UK, as well as a lot of Aussies. And he made The Getaway, which was a very cool game.



Laura Fryer
 Director, Xbox
 Advanced Technology
 Group
 Microsoft Xbox

Why are you out here?

The point of us coming here is actually a chance to meet with all the developers and get all of the information we can because another big role for us is understanding what the development community wants in the form of tools and samples and that sort of thing. One of our goals is to come in here and ask the developers what they would like in the XDK that would make their life easier, what we could do to help them, so this is a chance for us to come and meet everybody, and really meet the Australian game development community. One of the great things about this community is that it's so strong. The community here is so enthusiastic.

So what are you personally excited about on the Xbox in 2004?

Well, obviously all the games! Probably the most exciting game for me that's coming out quickly is Ninja Gaiden by Tecmo, I'm really looking forward to that. For the holidays, Project Gotham 2, Amped 2 and Top Spin.

Any other titles in 2004?

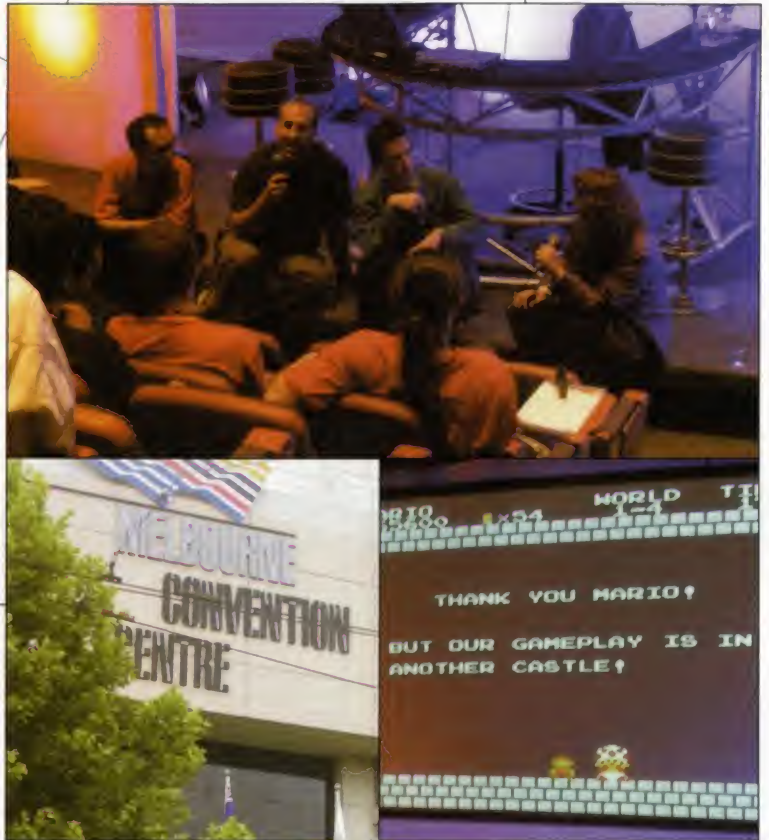
Well we've got Halo 2. I'm a huge Halo fan, and Halo 2 is obviously going to be Live enabled, so that is going to be very exciting. Fable's coming out: I love the Blue Box guys - they make great games. Peter Molyneux and his team are probably the people that sucked me into games. Populous was my game. I just played and played and played. And everything Bullfrog released after that.

Syndicate Wars!?

Oh yeah. Even Magic Carpet was cool at the time. No one had really done that yet. There's so much they do and explore on any title they're working on I get really excited to try out.

What are we lacking here in the Australian game industry? Why have we not made our breakout game yet?

For me, I think it's just a young industry. And that's not a bad thing. In fact I like it, because you're going to get some crazy ideas coming up. Games that people haven't thought of before, genres that are different. I've worked with Russian teams, I've worked with Japanese teams, I've worked with different teams from all over Europe. They come up with very different ideas because they come from very different places and I think that's one of the things Australia needs to capitalise on. You guys might have a new idea about what would make a cool game or what would make a fun game. You could bring that to bear for the rest of the world. I actually like coming here because it feels like GDC [in America] of old, back in 90s, when it was a close-knit community. This feels like that because everyone knows each other and everybody's your friend. I think you're going to see a lot come out of Australia.



[top] Getting down and personal with the talented folk.
 [above left] If only they'd hold E3 there one day.
 [above right] Oh ho ho, those wacky devs!

Korean publisher, to develop a massively multiplayer game for the equally massive Korean market is the major example of this. Each of the major Australian developers with whom we spoke also highlighted the geographical advantages of Australia compared to the US and Europe in tapping into the massive markets of Korea and China. As De Margheriti confirms, the opportunities in these markets are "intoxicating". He also admits however that consideration has not yet been converted into concrete commitment for most of the Australian parties.

SHARING AND CARING

Still, most of the international guests were frank in pointing out the lack of experience of developers in Australia. For most senior roles, John De Margheriti and his peers tend to look overseas. And while De Margheriti claims diplomatic relations with fellow developers are a major motive, the reality is that few developers in Australia have any experience of projects the size of what is being increasingly demanded by major publishers.

But the overriding theme of the conference in general is the Australian development industry's spirit of collaboration, loyalty,

mateship and co-operation. The international visitors continually highlighted the current Australian industry's resemblance to the UK and US industries of a decade ago. Yet only SCEE's Phil Harrison dared question this situation's merit: "there isn't that creative drive and determination to really build something for a global market". Realistically, if Australia cannot close that time gap with the rest of the world, major products will continue to elude them. There is by no means a sense of impending doom for the local industry, in fact the opposite is true, but for the everyday gamer, Australia will remain irrelevant unless this 'breakout game' arrives. Whether the breakout game can be produced in the current climate is questionable. Is this culture of sharing and caring really beneficial? Only the games we produce can answer that question. Sony, with the funding of the return of McNamara, Atari, with their ongoing backing of Melbourne House, and Microsoft, with their support of Micro Forte, appear to be raising the stakes in local development. With the support of publishers of this magnitude, the breakout hit will likely be here sooner rather than later. <<

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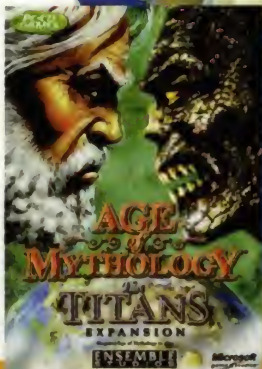
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Name the new race that's introduced in Titans.

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10 lucky Hyper readers have the chance to win a mystical Darksteel prize-pack courtesy of our friends at Wizards of the Coast. Each prize-pack contains a Magic: The Gathering Darksteel Theme Deck and 3 Booster Packs worth over \$40!

For your chance to win just answer the following question:

10
UP FOR
GRABS!

In what year did Magic the Gathering launch?

Put your answer on the back of an envelope along with your name and address, and send it to: **Mailing for Magic, Hyper, 78 Renwick Street, Redfern, NSW 2016.**



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PlayStation 2

GAME BOY ADVANCE



38 DEUS EX: INVISIBLE WAR

Memorable, surprising, captivating... expect the unexpected.





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Reviews >>

Game Theory

DANIEL STAINES



>> Immediately after the release of Deus Ex: Invisible War in the US, developer Ion Storm copped a lot of flack from disgruntled fans for what was perceived to be major problems intrinsic to the game's design philosophy. Of the myriad of complaints that surfaced just hours after the game hit store shelves, the most interesting are those that rebuke Ion Storm for not including in-game rewards for players who choose to adopt a non-violent approach to hostile situations. The basic rationale behind this is that gamers who go to all the trouble of not shooting enemies – when it is obviously the easiest thing to do in most cases – should be rewarded for their pacifistic predilection.

I not only disagree with comments like this, but I also believe that they are entirely off-the-mark when it comes to an Immersive Reality Simulator like Invisible War. The idea underlying the non-violent aspects of the Deus Ex games is that players should be allowed to express themselves and be rewarded in ways not expressly connected to a game's play-mechanics. Pacifism is an ethical decision, not a practical one – and the only reward it offers is the personal satisfaction of maintaining your own moral integrity in relation to the game you're playing.

This brand of highly individualistic player expression is, I believe, what Ion Storm was aiming for when developing Invisible War. Players are given the opportunity to interact with the gameworld on a level that goes beyond merely manipulating objects within it. One can form an ethical or philosophical opinion of the events and characters in almost any game, but the ability to effectively express those views via in-game action is rare and Ion Storm shouldn't be chastised for giving us the opportunity to do so.

And remember, it is only that: an opportunity. If you don't care about the ethical implications of blowing a simulated person's face off, then go for it – shoot anyone you want. Just don't expect to receive a bunch of power-ups for behaving otherwise. After all, when was the last time somebody gave you a pat on the back for simply NOT behaving like a trigger-happy psychopath?

Until next month,
daniels@next.com.au

HYPER CREW TOP 5 GAMES

Eliot Fish - Editor

1. Deus Ex: Invisible War – PC
"As soon as you finish it, you'll start it up again..."
2. Pro Evolution Soccer 3 – PS2
3. CM 03/04 – PC
4. Castlevania: Lament of Innocence – PS2
5. Star Wars: K.O.T.O.R – PC

Cam Shea - Deputy Editor

1. Beyond Good & Evil – PS2
"Ce jeu est très bon. Il est français, oui?"
2. Deus Ex: Invisible War – PC
3. Need for Speed: Underground – PS2
4. Tony Hawk's Underground – PS2
5. Worms 3D – Xbox

Malcolm Campbell - Art Guy

1. Final Fantasy Tactics – GBA
"What's this Ivalice place like then?"
2. Beyond Good & Evil – PS2
3. Prince of Persia – PS2
4. Maximo vs. Army of Zin – PS2
5. Pro Evolution Soccer 3 – PS2

Daniel Staines - Reviewer

1. Star Wars: K.O.T.O.R – PC
"Force neutrality rules. Balance is the only true order."
2. LOTR: Return of the King – Xbox
3. Mario & Luigi – GBA
4. Donkey Kong Country – GBA
5. Sword of Mana – GBA

THE HYPER SCORING SYSTEM The Overall Score – what's it all about?

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



DEUS EX: INVISIBLE WAR

ELIOT FISH grabs himself a cup of QueeQueg's coffee...



When the original Deus Ex debuted in the year 2000 (appearing in style on the cover of Hyper #81), it nearly changed the face of PC gaming. I say nearly, because clearly there are dozens of lazy developers out there who didn't learn a damn thing from it; their mediocre cookie-cutter first person games piling up in the streets. Well, at least Deus Ex altered the minds of the gamers, because after playing it (multiple times) very few other PC games have even come close to offering the same kind of satisfying gameplay experience. No surprise then that Ion Storm Austin had to go create a sequel, Invisible War, to give gamers another intelligent and engaging adventure to sink their teeth (and minds) into.

A HANDY ESCAPE ROUTE

You may have heard the term "emergent gameplay" being

bandied about by Ion Storm in regards to Deus Ex: Invisible War. What is it? Well, it's what happens when a great physics engine, creative level design, good artificial intelligence, a comprehensive tool-set of gadgets and weapons and a player's imagination collide.

Take this scenario: two guards are patrolling a room, watched over by a security camera and sentry gun turret. There's also a gas canister in the middle of the room. You sneak under the camera, carefully keeping out of its line of sight, but any second now the guards will see you there. Quickly, you crouch down and sneak over behind the gas canister, trying to keep yourself out of view, but darn it, the camera has spotted you now. Suddenly, an alarm goes off and the previously dormant turret springs into life, peppering you with bullets. Because you're behind the gas canister, it

gets shot and pops various leaks, so you spring to your feet, knocking the canister over. The canister rolls away across the floor, colliding with the first guard who was attempting to get an aim on you — except now he's choking on the leaking fumes. Well, how fortunate, that's one down! The other guard takes a few shots at you from the other direction, but his bullets shatter a window behind you. What was previously inaccessible is now a handy escape route.

Accidents, unexpected AI behaviour, player creativity... it all results in a game that never plays the same way twice. We got a taste of this in the first Deus Ex, but with the introduction of the new physics engine in Invisible War, the emergent gameplay is now more fascinating than ever.

This goes hand in hand with the





Obi-Wan Kenobi, you're my only hope



Let me guess. You want to phone home?



Got any aspirin?



INSTALL THE NEURAL INTERFACE AND BOT DOMINATION BIOMODS AND BECOME THE MASTER OF MACHINES

blend of gameplay styles that are available to the player in the Deus Ex universe. You can arm yourself to the teeth and run and gun, you can lurk in the shadows and snipe yourself a clear path, you can use your gadgets to cause havoc and get bots to do the dirty work for you, or you can even be so benevolent as to remain unseen and hack your way out of trouble without hurting a soul. Usually, you'll be inspired to try a little bit of everything or just use the tactics that appear best for the job at hand.

With *Invisible War*, Ion Storm's priority was to give the player as much freedom as possible, so that they can play the game the way they want to — even more so than in the first *Deus Ex*. This player freedom even extends to deciding which mission objectives to complete and which ones to ignore, which persons to trust and which

characters to punish with extreme prejudice. No other game has ever allowed a player this much freedom to creatively make their way through the story, uncovering as much depth as they choose to. It's a first-person action game, an RPG, an adventure and a spy sim all wrapped up into the one package.

A WARM GLOW

Invisible War definitely messes with your expectations. This isn't a "safe" sequel by any means. If you're just expecting *Deus Ex 1* with new graphics then you'll be in for a big shock. No doubt that's what happened to the plethora of fans who downloaded the demo in November, only to discover that *Invisible War* is notably different to the first *Deus Ex* in many ways.

This is the result of Ion Storm's determination to develop *Invisible War* as both an Xbox and PC game

simultaneously, as well as a desire to offer a brand new experience instead of just rehashing a game they've already made once before. The result is a remarkably fun journey that retains the core of what people loved about the first *Deus Ex* whilst presenting it in a whole new way.

But we'll be honest — the dual development has resulted in a game that does make a few concessions for the limitations of the Xbox hardware, most notably in terms of the size of the maps and the level of

graphical detail. However, even though a few corners have obviously been cut, *Invisible War* still looks remarkably good — even quite amazing at times. You can certainly see some rough edges in the PC version, and performance will vary wildly on the different

configurations of PCs out there, but on the whole, this is a game that manages to capture enough atmosphere to keep you engrossed. And when has it ever been about the graphics, anyway? It doesn't take very long in the world of *Deus Ex* to very quickly forget that some of the architecture and details are somewhat blocky. You're having way too much fun to notice.

There is also an incredibly impressive new lighting system that really helps to add mood to the





Dance for me, suckers!



So, you enjoying Mardi Gras tonight, Sid?



Hey guys, where's the loo around here?

sometimes spartan environments. Hanging light globes cast eerie shadows across a room as they swing back and forth when bumped. Burning barrels cast a warm glow as shadows from surrounding objects dance across the walls, the subtle bump-mapping creating cracks and jags in the brickwork. Even approaching guards can be spotted by their

shadows looming up from behind corners...

All you really need to know is that Invisible War has been designed purely with the gameplay in mind, and a good game is a good game, no matter what system you're using to play it.

CREEP THROUGH A LEVEL

The brand new interface has been designed as a circular 'retina'-inspired HUD. It takes up a fair bit of the screen, but as you can see in the screenshots, it's possible to reduce the opacity to the point where you don't even notice the toolbelts until you select a new weapon or use a biomod function.

Whilst US gamers have had their game (and HUD) tweaked through patches, the local Aussie release of

Invisible War will include all these significant tweaks and bug fixes right out of the box. Nice.

Other design changes to Invisible War over the first Deus Ex include switching from multiple ammo types to a unified ammo system. This allows you to use any of your weapons at any point as long as you have enough ammo clips to go around. This actually results in a more flexible combat experience, as you're able to experiment with anything from your varied arsenal on the fly. Now you're not restricted by whatever ammo type the level designers thought to leave hidden behind the garbage bins. It's all about player choice.

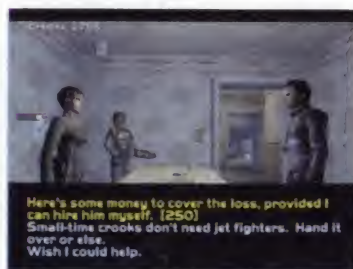
The Biomods in Invisible War – along with weapon mods – replace the skill system from Deus Ex. A variety of "legal" and black market Biomods allow you to upgrade your character throughout the game into a virtual superhero. The Biomods and weapon mods are also plentiful enough that you can abandon a certain style of play halfway through the game if you so desire.

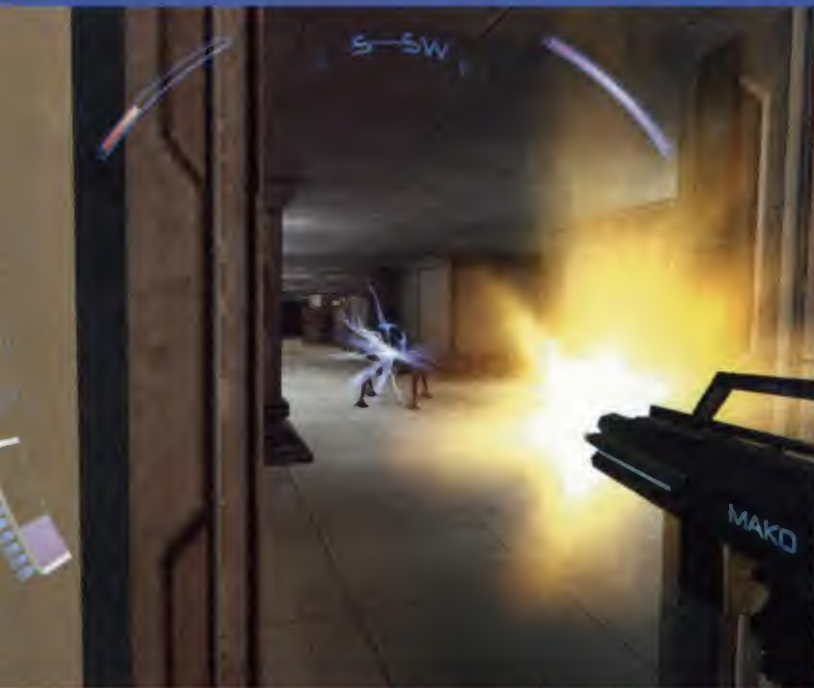
No longer want to creep through a level using your Cloak and Move Silent Biomods, hoping to knock out

a guard with your increased melee strength and your riot stick? Just install the Neural Interface and Bot Domination Biomods and become the master of machines instead. The choice is always yours – not what the developers have scripted for you. No longer will you spend half the game donating skill points to an ability that you never end up needing to use. It's this flexibility that makes Invisible War so darn engaging. You'll play through certain areas and make a mental note to try a completely different approach on your next play through. And play through the game multiple times you most definitely will.

EXACTLY WHERE YOU STAND

Four different factions – the WTO, the Order, the Omar and the Templars – are vying for your attentions throughout the whole game, leaving you torn between a selection of mission objectives (e.g. WTO: Interrogate her, Order: Kill her) that seriously influence the way the story plays out. But more importantly it comes down to how YOU want to experience the game, and how you've chosen to role-play





The new Black & Decker multitool.



Did I ask you to talk? No.



Poor Sophia, her narcolepsy has kicked in



HALF THE FUN IS FIGURING OUT EXACTLY WHERE YOU STAND. YOU'LL HAVE TO MAKE SOME TOUGH CHOICES

your character. Are you willing to go along with the powerful WTO, or do you empathise with the struggle of the Order? Maybe you prefer to ally yourself with the seemingly neutral cyborgs, the Omar? On the other hand, the idea of a pure human race free from biomodification might appeal to you, and the Templars are the only faction willing to offer you that alternative. I won't even get started on how you might handle the "coffee wars"...

Listening intently to conversations is once again crucial to piecing together the web of conspiracy enveloping you, and one small flaw in Invisible War is that your Datavault no longer keeps a record of conversations. Stay alert, as many of the NPCs tend to churn through their dialogue quite quickly, not giving you time to savour the information that they share with you.

As the story gets its hooks in, you'll seriously question your loyalties. Invisible War is a far more "grey" experience than Deus Ex, and it takes quite some time to get your head around what — and who — you're willing to believe. But half the fun is figuring out exactly where you stand. You'll end up having to make some tough choices, and this is what makes Invisible War the engaging experience that it is.

Some may think Invisible War is shorter than it should be — clocking in around 15-20 hours (depending on how carefully you explore) — but really, it's a more dense experience than the first game. The variety of objectives on hand also mean that there are whole areas within each level that you'll never see and aspects of the story you'll not witness

until you play through the game differently a second or third time.

There's genuine replayability here.

There are also some pretty cool surprises for fans of the first game. Surprises that we'll definitely not go into in this review, because

that's for you to enjoy when you play.

Overall, Deus Ex: Invisible War is no better or worse than the first Deus Ex. It doesn't eclipse the classic that is the first game, but it definitely won't be anything less than what you've been hoping for. It's a little different, sure, but that's because Ion Storm have always sought to innovate and explore new territory.

Invisible War is one of the best games on Xbox, and a must-play experience on PC. It's just damn cool. Bring on Deus Ex 3. <<

!!! Our advice to fans of the first Deus Ex is to play through on Harder or Realistic difficulty for that added challenge.

AVAILABLE ON:

PS2 XBOX GCM PC

DETAILS

CATEGORY: RPG/Stealth/Action / PLAYERS: 1 / DEVELOPER: Ion Storm Austin / PUBLISHER: Eidos / PRICE: \$99.95 / RATING: M15+ / AVAILABLE: Feb / REQ: P4 1.3, 256 RAM, hot 3D card

HYPER VERDICT

PLUS: Story, player freedom, physics, overall gameplay.

MINUS: Inconsistent performance, loading screens.

VISUALS SOUND GAMEPLAY

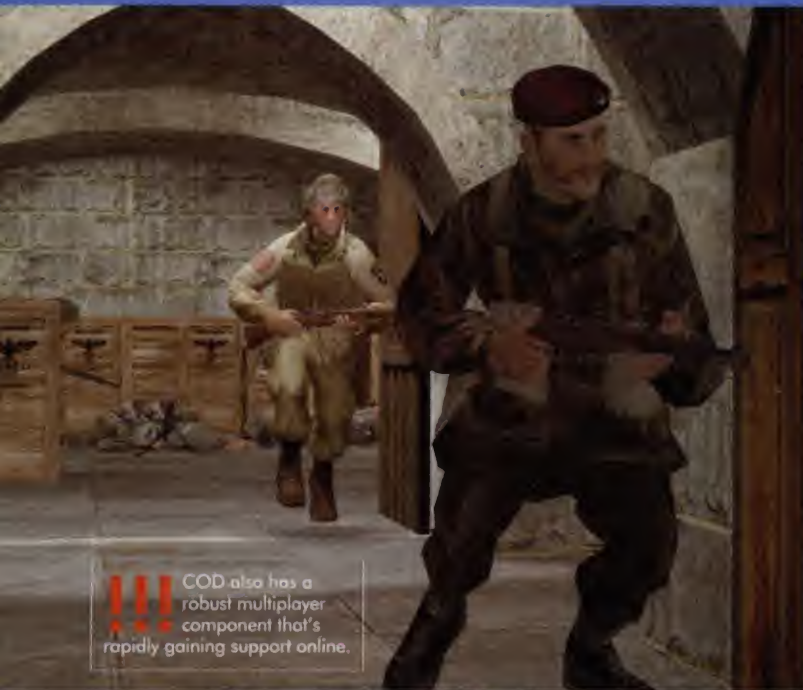
91 93 94

OVERALL

93



You'll get out of it what you put in.



!!! COD also has a robust multiplayer component that's rapidly gaining support online.



I think I'll just hang back here and... guard.



That gun has some serious blau factor



Who said shooters were full of phallic imagery?

CALL OF DUTY

JOEY TEKKEN heeds the call...

After Medal of Honor: Allied Assault, over 20 members of 2015's development staff jumped ship, and started their own company – Infinity Ward. Call of Duty represents the first fruits of their labour and very much fulfills the role of a sequel to Allied Assault, returning once again to the battlefields of WWII, and taking AA's cinematic style of gaming to a new level.

THE ACTION NEVER LETS UP

Indeed, this is cotton candy gaming at its finest. Gameplay is straightforward, with no real brainpower required, as your path is essentially linear and all your objectives are clearly signposted. Call of Duty makes no apologies for this approach, instead focusing entirely on creating an overwhelming spectacle. No other WWII game to date has captured the intensity of war quite as successfully as Call of Duty. To some it may feel

like moving from one set piece to another, but in our minds it has allowed Infinity Ward to pace the game beautifully, ensuring the action never lets up.

Hand in hand with this approach is the fact that you're simply a grunt – just another faceless soldier, trying to stay alive and do your bit for the war effort. Combine this with the large-scale destruction all around and you really get an overwhelming sense of being a tiny cog in the huge war machine. Fortunately, enemy and buddy AI is good enough that you don't feel like you always have to take the lead. Your teammates will take cover realistically and their path finding is good enough that the illusion of independence is well sustained. Mind you, this is lost somewhat when you realise that certain members of your team can't be killed and that a fair amount of spawning goes on behind the scenes, but the reality is that Call of

Duty is a game to be experienced, not critically picked apart.

Call of Duty runs on a highly modified iteration of the Quake III engine, but you'd be hard pressed to tell. At close range some of the models and environments are a little blocky, but it's the large scale impact that Infinity Ward have gone for, with firefights between large numbers of soldiers, squadrons of planes making strafing runs overhead and explosions rocking the surrounding areas. Best of all, those of you with modest PCs should be able to get decent performance out of Call of Duty.

There are three separate sets of missions, covering American, British and Russian campaigns, all of which can be completed in around eight hours. Do yourself a favour, however, and play this game on the hardest difficulty setting first time through – without quick saving. You'll get a lot more out of it if you do. <<

AVAILABLE ON:

PS2 XBOX360 PC

DETAILS

CATEGORY: FPS / **PLAYERS:** 1-32 / **DEVELOPER:** Infinity Ward / **PUBLISHER:** Activision / **PRICE:** \$89.95 / **RATING:** MA15+ / **AVAILABLE:** Now / **REQ:** PIII 700, 128MB RAM, 32MB video card

HYPER VERDICT

PLUS: Intense and streamlined gameplay.

MINUS: Eight hours and it's all over...

VISUALS SOUND GAMEPLAY

89 89 88

OVERALL

89

Call of Duty is a thrilling ride while it lasts...

They needed a hero...
So they built...

HEAT GUY J



A special agent to combat crime who initially appears to be human. This illusion quickly disappears in clouds of scorching steam whenever Heat Guy J fights.



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RUGBY LEAGUE

JACKSON GOTHE-SNAPE goes the head-high tackle...

1992 was a great year for Rugby League. Meninga, Clyde, Sironen, Brasher and company destroyed all in the World Cup in England, while Brisbane beat St. George to capture their first Premiership (okay maybe it wasn't such a great year). Beyond the actual field of play though, 1992 was great because it was the year we shoved ET's Rugby League's 5-inch floppies into our 386s. A fairly garbage game, it was, nonetheless rugby league. We played merrily.

Move now to 1996, and the arrival of ARL '96. Sure, Super League was ravaging the sport, but we couldn't get away from the monitor for long enough to pick up the paper and care. Based on the isometric Rugby World Cup 95 engine, ARL was a pretty decent little game. With some head-wobblingly entertaining commentary from Fatty and Rabs, league fans were happy once again.

But that was seven years ago. The rejuvenation of the code has since occurred, and, barring novel Rugby World Cups, its status as Australia's eastern seaboard's favourite brand of football has been proven once and for all. The time is right. Home Entertainment Suppliers, distributors of MadCatz peripherals, are the somewhat unlikely publishers of NZ-based developers Sidhe Interactive's latest attempt to capture (cash in on?) the lucrative Aussie league market. But, credit is due for both, as this game is a true-blue down under ANZAC success story. Rejoice friends, because Rugby League is actually decent to play.

WHERE'S MY KICKER?

But, it's important to firstly make one thing very clear: Rugby League in no way offers a simulation of the sport. The speed of the play-the-ball and momentum in general — so critical in

the actual sport — are made irrelevant, while the game's very serious flaws in its AI and interface (whether it be the illogicality of the passing mechanics, the inability to telegraph the positions of your more important players on attacks, the unpredictable player switching system, the lack of a 'play on' ref call, the inconsistent responsiveness of the players or the ease of being held up over the line) mean Rugby League can be utterly frustrating. When the stakes are high, these gremlins might just ruin a player's experience.

They are certainly the flaws that should ward off all non-league fans. But HES and Sidhe know, and the recent sales performances have proven, that there are plenty of





RAB 6 SYD 0 1st HALF 3:02 TACKLE 1

NEW 0 CAN 4 1st HALF 2:52



He's actually kicking someone's head in



Gee, I think the Vindaloo just kicked in



Is that a tackle or a friendly hug?



THESE POINTY, DRUNKEN, WEBBED-FINGERED MEN COME FROM A LAND OF TERRIBLE 3AM INDIAN TAKEAWAY

league fans out there. So thanks to its highly accessible, arcade-like representation of the code, the game is a winner for the masses. It is the only game that puts you, fellow faithful Tigers supporter, in control of Darren Senter, Luke Covell and co. (even if Benji Marshall is sorely missing in the game's 2003 squads), on Leichhardt Oval (without the parking problems), facing off against thirteen stupid Bulldogs, with commentary from Channel 9's Andrew Voss. For long-term sufferers of irrelevant American football and hockey games, this is localised heaven. You can fend, you can step, you can offload, you can

put up bombs, you can put through grubbers. You can do almost anything you can in the actual sport. As the list of gameplay features on HES's Rugby League website will tell you, if you can measure realism cumulatively, then this game is spot on.

GO HOME TERRY 'KORMA' LAMB

Yet, Rugby League is the blow up doll for rugby league: it appears to have all the necessary features, but it's really not the same. Fun yes, realistic no. But, just like any blow up doll, it's twice as fun with friends... or something.

Okay, depending on your orientation, maybe we're stretching the metaphor a touch, but the good news is that multiplayer is where Rugby League is by far at its best.

Playing the faceless AI with all the control frustrations outlined above can get trying.

But playing with friends, equally league-minded of course, will bring you simple joy, laughs: the good things in life. Replay the grand final and send your Panther mates back to the foot of the mountains with their tails between their legs. Bust through lines, make ankle taps. It all

means so much more with a mate (or seven for the PS2 and PC, and three for the Xbox) next to you. Watching someone else struggle

with the player switching is sickly sweet, even if you know at the end of this set of six you'll be suffering just as much. In single player, the controls and mechanics appear in league with your opposition. In multiplayer, at least you can revel in your united misfortune.

And with a mate next to you, you'll be able to fully appreciate the hilarity of the player models. These pointy, drunken, webbed-fingered men come from a land of terrible 3am Indian takeaway, where their sidestep shuffle suggests diarrhea comes standard, and players from an early age learn that tackles are actually mimes that need not be performed with/on/at an opposition player. Whose blank, lifeless expressions only point to the pain of another mango chicken. Oh, and likenesses? Hardly — it looks like everyone's got a stunt double. Their faces? Absolutely nothing like their actual counterparts. Luckily, from standard game cameras (that is, from a safe distance) the game looks fairly clean and bright, although certain tackle animations definitely get repetitive.





RAB 6 SYD 0 1st HALF 2:55 TACKLE 2



BUL 0 BRI 6 1st HALF 35:26 TACKLE 2



Feeling his way to the touchline



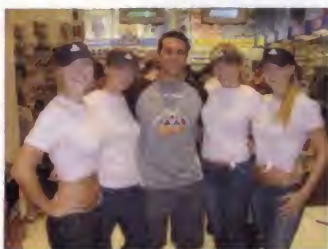
He's just a dummy... er, dummying



You'll swear a rabbit can fly

XMAS LAUNCH MADNESS

"After 2 years of effort it's a relief to finally see this great product hit the market," said the Managing Director of Home Entertainment Suppliers, Sebastian Giompaolo. And with those words, thousands of units of Rugby League flew off shelves all around the country. Not only were the pre-orders insane, but we were hearing reports of shops selling out of their entire stock on the very first day the game went on sale. Just goes to show you how long Aussie gamers have been hanging out for a Rugby League game, eh? Below is a glimpse at the glamour and glitz of the game's launch at the Eastgarden's EB. Just get rid of the bloke in the middle, and we're talking.



GOOD SIMPLE FUN

Thankfully, the twenty-odd UK and Australian stadiums (and, for you Warriors fans, one New Zealand one) are reasonably accurate. The designs are mostly spot on, although they would have benefited from more detailed crowds with more natural placement and spacing. Though the varying attendance works well (Telstra Stadium's mid-season banks of blue are refreshingly accurate), the less sterile suburban grounds would benefit from some sign of life, be it flags on Leichhardt Oval's hill, or movement along its terraces. Still, for a guy who grew up down on Leichhardt's bank on Sunday afternoons, each corner is instantly recognizable. Little old Leichhardt in a game! Who would have ever thought? That there is Rugby League's biggest achievement.

And fortunately, despite the varying quality of the game's visuals, the sound adds a significant

level of polish to the game. The use of NRL referee Steven Clarke's voice mimics league's TV coverage superbly. Hear him shout all the familiar calls: held, fifth tackle, and listen to him send players off. Then add to that Andrew Voss' solid commentary and it's just like being on the couch watching. Instead of, you know, playing. Or something.

In the end, Rugby League is obviously a low-budget game. But throughout it there is evidence of care, of love, of real league fanaticism. More polish on the gameplay side, and certainly in its

presentation would have been nice, but as it is, it will still keep the league fans happy. Unlike EA's recent rugby union game that seemed to get lost up the arse of its own code, Sidhe's modeling of league reflects the sport's simple attraction. Many might want a little more refinement in their sports, but Rugby League, like rugby league, is good simple fun. <<



AVAILABLE ON:

PS2 / XBOX / PC

DETAILS

CATEGORY: Sport / **PLAYERS:** 1-4 (Xbox), 1-8 (rest) / **DEVELOPER:** Sidhe Interactive / **PUBLISHER:** TruBlu (HES) / **PRICE:** \$99.95 / **RATING:** G / **AVAILABLE:** Now /

HYPER VERDICT

PLUS: Vossy. Gameplay even leaguies will understand.

MINUS: Ugly mugs these virtual footballers. Stupid too.

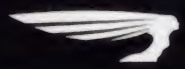
VISUALS SOUND GAMEPLAY

69 81 75

OVERALL

79

League. Sort of.



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Mission: hunt down and kill the hairdresser



Vomiting skeleton heads. Great!



That's an innovative home alarm system

CASTLEVANIA LAMENT OF INNOCENCE

ELIOT FISH squeezes into the black leather pants.

W Lament of Innocence is the first in a new era of 3D Castlevania games and fans are justifiably terrified that Konami have once again screwed things up (as we all witnessed in the train wreck that was Castlevania 3D on the Nintendo 64). Well, surprisingly, Lament of Innocence isn't a total re-working of the tried and true Castlevania gameplay, but rather, a transition from 2D to 3D that retains the same elements that made the series famous... You just don't whip the candles anymore.

BETTER AND BETTER

Once again, the forces of darkness are irrepressible. It seems that there's a nasty Vampire holed up in a big castle on the hill, fitting the place out with tricks, traps and hideous monsters. He's also stolen your girlfriend. With your whip of alchemy and horrible fashion sense, you set out to retrieve her from the jaws of evil.

Lament of Innocence uses a hub system, allowing you to jump between different parts of the castle at will from a central antechamber. Whilst the 2D games had everything interconnecting ala Metroid, levels in Lament of Innocence are more self-contained. However, that's not to say there aren't secret areas and hard to reach places within those levels, requiring just as much exploration and observation.

It still pays off to experiment with your surroundings, as small clues in the contents of a room will reveal hidden rooms or items. Scratches on the floor might indicate a bookcase can be moved, or a wall ornament might look suspiciously "whippable". There are also numerous traps that can take a little more work than is first thought. It's basically a translation of all the cool elements from the old 2D games into a new 3D environment. You'll even

be able to check out your percentage of completion in the save screen, and dedicated gamers will replay the game over just so they can try to get that elusive 100 percent. The level design might not be quite as elegant or as well imagined as Symphony of the Night, but it's an indication that future 3D Castlevania games will only get better and better.

Combat is still the main meal, and fans will be pleased to see all the old classic Castlevania enemies make a return. For the most part, the same old tactics are needed to smite them, but the new combat engine makes for far more interesting bouts of whip action. You could call the 3D gameplay a tad Devil May Cry inspired, and you'll uncover a whole host of whip attack combos as you progress through the game. You can also block, use holy items and utilise a few magic attacks as always. It's commonplace to be confronted with multiple enemies at





For those about to rock. We salute you!

The new Sunday School teacher. Creepy.

...and I thought the date was going well!



WITH YOUR WHIP OF ALCHEMY AND HORRIBLE FASHION SENSE, YOU SET OUT TO RETRIEVE HER FROM THE JAWS OF EVIL

once, but the whip is incredibly versatile and you can switch from slapping one monster around, to twirling your whip 360 and making multiple hits. Whilst dispatching the evil creatures is no more evolved than the 2D games, the bosses in Lament of Innocence make more use of the full three dimensions and are once again a highlight. From the annoyingly nimble Succubus to the thick as two planks Fire Demon, the boss fights will require tactics and efficient use of your potions.

THICK OF COMBAT

Whilst Lament of Innocence is addictive and fun to explore, there are some problems with the game that really take the shine off the experience. For starters, the 3D engine brings with it the annoying fixed camera problems of games such as Devil May Cry and Resident Evil. Trying to get a good look at your

environment can be frustratingly difficult – there's no free-look option – and often you'll be stung in combat because the camera isn't tracking the action properly and you lose where some enemies are in relation to you. Whilst it's something you certainly get used to as you play through the game, one annoying feature is the real-time menu system. The right analogue stick is used to cycle through the various sub-menus where you equip items, use potions and so forth. Amazingly, you can't use the paused inventory screen to do any of these actions. What

results is a frenzied attempt to use life-saving potions and the like in the thick of combat whilst you're moving with the other stick. This really can become quite frustrating, and the only reason it appears to be implemented this way is to increase the difficulty of the game!



Konami have stated that this is the beginning of a whole new series of Castlevania games!

Whilst it's doubtful you'll get 100% on your first play through (and there are unlockable characters to play with), Lament of Innocence might be over before you're ready to part ways with it. Probably one extra area would have helped, but at least there will be reasons to play through it again. Of course, if the game was still 2D, no doubt we would have received more hidden locations and areas to uncover...

Even for these niggles, Lament of Innocence is the kind of game that gets better and better the further you delve into what it has to offer. You learn more combos, you find cooler weapons and armour, and the bosses get progressively more dastardly. You'll also become more obsessed with finding all the hidden areas and items. A pretty good start for this 'new' 3D series. <<

AVAILABLE ON:

PS2 / XBOX / GCN / PC

DETAILS

CATEGORY: Action/Adventure /
PLAYERS: 1 / DEVELOPER: Konami /
PUBLISHER: Konami /
PRICE: \$99.95 / RATING: M15+ /
AVAILABLE: January 30 /

HYPER VERDICT

PLUS: Engaging combat and puzzles, great music.

MINUS: Annoying fixed camera, lots of backtracking.

VISUALS SOUND GAMEPLAY

84 86 85

OVERALL

84

Fun, addictive and spooky. It's Castlevania in 3D!



That's not a knife, THIS is a knife!



Too ugly to live. Ah-yup.



Aww man I have to sleep on that tonight!

MANHUNT

DANIEL WILKS is rated MA 15+ for frequent and unnecessary violence.

Boy howdy does Rockstar love their place in the spotlight. After the release of their critically acclaimed GTA3 and GTA: Vice City, the powerhouse developer could do no wrong and their publishing of Max Payne 2 has served to further their stranglehold on the top. Now with the release of Manhunt, Rockstar is definitely destined to be in the spotlight again, only this time with even more controversy than their previous two outings combined. Manhunt is a brutally violent game and quite repellent. At the same time, it's also very addictive.

SOLID SNUFF

Players take the role of James Earl Cash, a death row inmate supposedly executed for his (unnamed but presumably horrific) crimes. It turns out that the injection given to Cash was simply a

strong sedative, and he suddenly finds himself in a nightmare dominated by an unseen madman known as Starkweather. Starkweather, an insane ex-director, now makes his fortune creating elaborate and sickening snuff movies for a very select clientele. Like it or not Cash is the star of his new production. Waking in a small room filled with cameras, Cash is issued a headset so he can take direction from Starkweather and is then released onto the streets of Carcer City (it's no accident that the text in the game makes the name appear to be Carcer City, a broken urban wasteland teeming with violent gangs, corrupt cops and the ever-present stench of death) and forced to kill his way through a number of increasingly more violent and extreme "scenes".

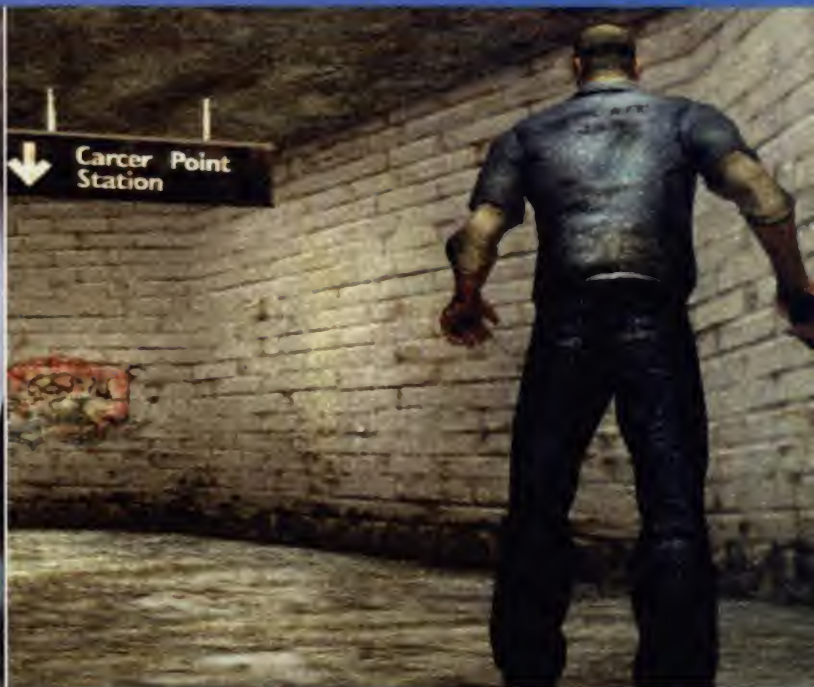
Manhunt has been unofficially dubbed Metal Gear Snuff by a

number of journalists and it's easy to see why - Cash needs to sneak around the levels to kill all of the target gang members and achieve his objectives. Whilst it is possible to go toe-to-toe with enemies, the action of Manhunt is more based around the idea of sneaking up behind targets and performing one of the three executions available with each weapon, all shown in a lurid handheld camera style. Although there are many weapons in the game ranging from plastic bags used to asphyxiate the victim through to meat cleavers and even a chainsaw, the lack of more death animations is one of the downfalls of Manhunt. Before anyone goes and accuses me of being bloodthirsty for wanting more death animations, the gripe is not about the lack of violence in the game, simply that within 10 minutes of getting any one of the

weapons you will have seen all there is to see and considering that executions are what the game is ultimately all about, the fact that you'll see the same ones over and over lessens the impact of the violence and doesn't really reward the player for approaching the game in a stealthy manner.

URBAN DECAY

Although stealth is a major element of Manhunt, the actual stealth gameplay elements are actually very stripped back, only leaving Cash with the ability to creep, slide against walls and hide in shadows. A radar on the bottom right of the screen shows the location of nearby hunters and also alerts the player with an expanding, flashing red circle if they are making noise that the hunters may hear. Most encounters take the form of the player hiding in some nice



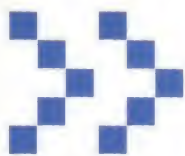
Oh, it's the gameplay police again...



Just like GTA except you can't get in the cars.



Well aren't you a nice chap.



LATER LEVELS INCREASE THE INTELLIGENCE OF THE HUNTERS AND EQUIP THEM WITH MORE DEADLY WEAPONS INCLUDING GUNS.

CAREFUL, HE MIGHT HEAR YOU

Probably the most interesting feature of *Manhunt* is the option to use a PS2 headset with the game. Aside from having Starkweather's voice piped directly into your ear making the game feel a whole lot more personal, the mic can be used to interact with the game as it will actively pick up any sounds you make. The ability to attract hunters by cussing them out or taunting instead of throwing bottles and banging on walls is great. For an extra challenge try playing in hardcore mode with the mic sensitivity set all the way up. Don't breathe too heavily or they might hear you.



shadows, making some noise to cause the nearest hunter to approach, waiting until their back is to you and then striking them down. Later levels increase the intelligence of the hunters and equip them with more deadly weapons including guns. Unfortunately the advent of guns in the game kills the most compelling aspect of the game and simply turns it into a fairly straightforward third-person shooter.

Although the gameplay of *Manhunt* lacks a certain degree of polish the same cannot be said of the sound and visuals, both of which are exemplary. For the most part, *Manhunt* looks like a far grimmer version of *GTA 3* but suffers from none of the framerate problems that plagued that title. The animations are also excellent

and show that some real demented imagination went into creating the executions. More impressive still is the aural landscape of the game. It's a stark and nasty world in Carcer City and it really sounds like it. Wind howls through the streets, doors bang and rattle and rats scurry through the refuse flowing out of upturned garbage bins. Members of each of the different

!!! Harder difficulty mode loses the radar, making awareness of your surroundings crucial.

gangs Cash encounters have their own conversations and dialogue but all of them pale in comparison to the searing performance by Brian Cox (William Striker in *X2*) as the malevolent Starkweather. The amount of menace and demented glee he puts into the role nearly makes it worth the price of purchase alone. <<

AVAILABLE ON:

PS2 / XBOX / GCN / PC

DETAILS

CATEGORY: Stealth/Action / PLAYERS: 1 / DEVELOPER: Rockstar / PUBLISHER: Take 2 Interactive / PRICE: \$99.95 / RATING: MA15+ / AVAILABLE: Now /

HYPER VERDICT

PLUS: Headset integration, tense, addictive.

MINUS: Repetitive, somewhat offensive, lacks polish.

VISUALS SOUND GAMEPLAY

89 91 72

OVERALL

77

Not quite a must-have but definitely compelling.



Like a female version of Monkey!



Like an Ubi Soft version of Star Wars!



Like a better-looking version of Jackson!

BEYOND GOOD & EVIL

CAM SHEA went from jaded to Jade...

After bringing the world the first couple of Rayman games, Michael Ancel has already made quite a name for himself. Hell, Rayman was one of the only things that Ubisoft had going for itself for a while there. Over the past three years Ancel has been slaving away on his latest project, and in that time Ubi Soft has matured greatly as a developer. This Christmas in particular they have a veritable litter of awesome games. Ancel may no longer be the sole saviour of Ubi Soft, but *Beyond Good & Evil* (BG&E) certainly proves that the funny Frenchman knows how to craft great games.

AT YOUR OWN PACE

BG&E takes gamers to the quaint world of Hyllis, a planet that marries the waterfaring city of Venice (minus the regular flooding and pollution) with large expanses of water dotted with both gorgeous islands and

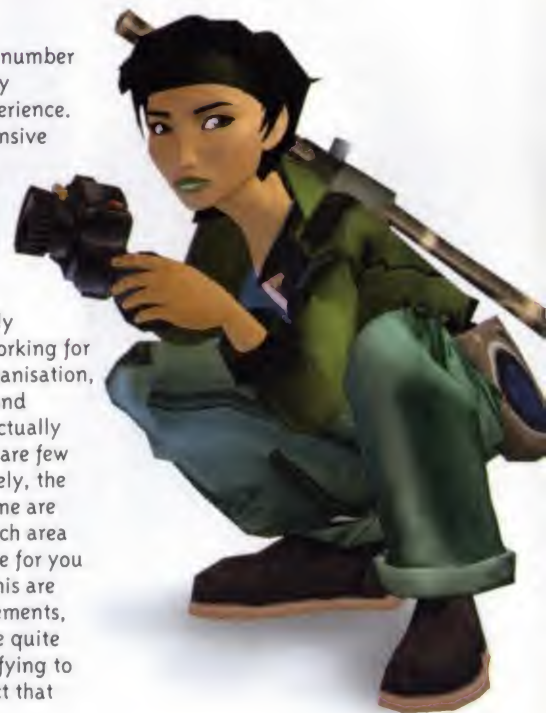
industrial factories. It's a world where technology is very steampunk — advanced, but gritty and threatening to break down at any time. Ancel and his team have breathed real life into this world too, with plenty of side quests to explore, a thorough ecosystem to observe (more on that in a minute) and some memorable characters to interact with.

The main protagonist is a lovely lady named Jade who looks after children orphaned during the (supposed) war between the mysterious Domz and the government backed Alpha Sections. Jade is soon recruited into IRIS, an underground organisation fighting to expose the truth of the situation on Hyllis. We won't spoil any of the plot for you, but suffice to say that this is a narrative that you'll be quickly sucked into.

Although *Beyond Good & Evil* is, at its heart, a simple game, it

gracefully borrows from a number of genres to produce a very compelling gameplay experience. Jade gets around the expansive world of Hyllis in a hovercraft, giving you the freedom to take things at your own pace and spend plenty of time exploring.

The actual missions themselves are very cleverly conceived. Since Jade is working for a ragtag underground organisation, stealth is her best friend, and instances where you can actually take out the Alpha guards are few and far between. Fortunately, the stealth elements in the game are well implemented, with each area representing its own puzzle for you to overcome. Along with this are more traditional puzzle elements, which although simple, are quite logical in design and satisfying to solve. Part of this is the fact that





Looks like she can smell something baaad.



I'd run like hell too.



...and then she sneezed. D'oh!



COMPLETING YOUR PEARL CHECKLIST AND SNAPPING EVERY ANIMAL IS SO COMPELLING

you're accompanied on several missions by another IRIS operative (the loveable Double-H), and many puzzles are designed around utilising both ability sets.

PAID IN PEARLS

Although there are a few camera issues (as is to be expected for a third person perspective game), the team have implemented some sensible measures to make play more intuitive. Whenever you're crouched down behind a ledge, for instance, moving the right analogue stick up and down will raise and lower the camera parallel to the ground, giving you the perfect view for analysing the movements of the guards. Nice.

Jade also has a camera of her own, and this is definitely her most important piece of equipment in the game. The camera is tied in to all elements of the game, and really

helps give BG&E a fresh gameplay angle. Most infiltration missions, for instance, are actually about taking photos of what Alpha Sections are up to. Not only does Jade use the camera to snap evidence, but she can use it to take photos of encrypted passcodes which can then be sent to the relevant people and decoded. She also uses it to document all the different life forms on the planet – which is a game in itself – and gets paid in pearls for her trouble.

Pearls are the main currency of the game and allow Jade to purchase upgrades for her hovercraft (from rasta rhinos no less), which in turn allow her to reach new areas. Most of the time, however, you'll be out searching for pearls just for the fun of it. It really is a testament to the design of the game that completing your pearl

checklist and snapping every animal is so compelling.

Beyond Good & Evil is presented in widescreen (with no option to switch to 4:3), which may annoy people with smaller (non-widescreen) TVs, but we thought it lent a nicely cinematic air to proceedings. What will annoy, especially given how much of your screen's real estate is black, is that

!!! The pot references disappeared in between the beta and finished code... strange that!

BG&E runs rather slowly. Controlling Jade feels a little on the sluggish side and there are frequent small stutters in places that you wouldn't expect.

A damn shame when compared to the likes of Prince of Persia. As a whole, however, BG&E is less of a technical achievement and more of an artistic one. This is a wonderful world filled with funky design and characters that you'll come to care about. Play it. <<<

AVAILABLE ON:

PS2 / XBOX / GCN / PC

DETAILS

CATEGORY: Platform/Adventure /
PLAYERS: 1 / DEVELOPER: Ubi Soft /
PUBLISHER: Ubi Soft /
PRICE: \$99.95 / RATING: G /
AVAILABLE: Now /

HYPER VERDICT

PLUS: Great characters, voice acting and gameplay.

MINUS: Quite a short game.

VISUALS SOUND GAMEPLAY

84 88 86

OVERALL

88

Another stellar French production. Enchanting.



Well, if you'd remembered to feed them...



Ohh the deadly dandruff attack. Eww!



Kain gets kicked out of the goth nightclub

LEGACY OF KAIN: DEFIANCE

MARCH STEPNIK continues his legacy of being late with reviews...

Crystal Dynamics has been teasing fans of the Legacy of Kain series for years now, with each installment of this multi-title series (which includes the Soul Reaver games) progressing the story between the two main protagonists but never resolving it. Legacy of Kain: Defiance is an important title for a number of reasons, not least of all that it finally tackles a number of the plot's loose ends that fans have been itching to see come to a head.

BLOODTHIRSTY VAMPIRE

It's also the first Legacy of Kain title that allows players to control both the vampiric Kain and his former underling, the corporeally-challenged Raziel. The game progresses through the eyes first of Kain, then after a few levels as Raziel, with frequent switches (on a fairly even ratio) between these two

characters throughout. This dual character control serves two primary functions: firstly to better carry the narrative, and secondly, to offer different gameplay experiences dependent on the character being played.

There are two distinct flavours of gameplay to Defiance. The basic idea goes something like this: Kain – as your bloodthirsty vampire – provides the combat quotient of the game, while Raziel – who lacks any physical substance – provides players with more of a cerebral challenge (although there's plenty o' fightin' to be had here too).

Raziel is clearly the more interesting character here: his recently discovered ability to morph into a solid mass from spectral form is constantly utilised in the types of puzzles offered to players. The trick here is that Raziel can only morph into flesh form at

certain points, while he can morph back at any time – which leads to plenty of exploration puzzles exploiting this mechanic. Meanwhile, Kain's antics involve general 'find-the-key/switch' style puzzles interspersed with plenty of melee and ranged combat sessions.

The other differences are mostly cosmetic – Kain drinks blood, while Raziel sucks souls (their life meters diminish over time, even in the absence of combat; feeding keeps them going); Raziel can swim whereas Kain drowns in water.

From a control standpoint however, both Raziel and Kain are almost exactly the same, so when you make that character switch you won't have to re-adjust. And the controls are effortless on the most part – with the exception of the telekinesis ability. TK is a neat idea that allows you to throw enemies from a distance, with the aim of

either casting them into depths below (much of Defiance is set in the ceiling of a sweeping city) or guiding them over pointy objects in the environments to their gruesome death. It's just so frustrating that TK is a bit of a bummer to master – half the time the enemy in your grip will hit a low wall as you pull him towards you and you'll lose the control. Otherwise, combat is initially a whole of fun.

There's a scoop attack which launches your opponent into the air where you can unleash a devastating flurry of attacks against it, as well as some nicely presented magic using each main character's primary weapon.

The enemies are quite thoughtful too – while you stop to feast on either their blood or their souls (a relatively lengthy animation sequence), the remaining comrades



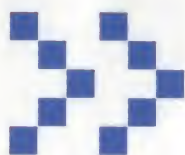
Stop! In the name of love!



That's a serious hickey!



Shouldn't they be flapping their arms?



THE CONTROLS ARE EFFORTLESS ON THE MOST PART – WITH THE EXCEPTION OF THE TELEKINESIS ABILITY

stand around patiently waiting for you to finish. How nice!

A LOT OF BACKTRACKING

For a series that's always prided itself on classy visuals, *Defiance* is the most beautiful iteration of the series yet. The game world abounds with beautiful architecture and texture mapping; marking the strongest aspect of this game besides the story.

Crystal Dynamics opted for a fixed, swiveling camera with *Defiance*, reminiscent of games such as *Ico* and *Devil May Cry 2*. The camera system compliments the environments perfectly; towering structures and bizarre otherworldly chasms are shown off to full effect here, offering an immense sense of scale to the experience.

However, the system doesn't compliment the finer points of gameplay, highlighting the game's

most crucial flaw: Camera-Controlus Crappiolus. The movement of the camera is automatic, and oftentimes it simply doesn't position itself in the most appropriate place. Disorientation with the constant camera changes (as you move out of the current camera's field of view) is common, as is getting stuck in corners that you can't exactly see. There is the option to move the perspective in a limited fashion using the pad's right thumbstick, however this is rather cumbersome, and rarely gives you the scope that you need.

More often than not you'll be guessing your way through the next critical jump. Thankfully, there are plenty of checkpoints scattered throughout the game, so when you cark it, there's not too much backtracking. But discovering the

right path to jump through negative re-enforcement isn't the most sophisticated of systems.

Legacy of Kain: Defiance marks an interesting design choice by the developers: the visuals are beautiful, the action competent – even fun at times – yet mostly uninspired. There's a lot of backtracking in this game (the interface lacks a compass or map to guide you), so you'll soak in the gorgeous design by necessity more than anything else – although it's a shame that the constant camera changes make it easier

for the player to get lost.

Ultimately, it seems Crystal Dynamics designed this game more as a vehicle for the narrative than anything else; fans will need to get this, everybody else should try before they buy. <<

!!! Crystal Dynamics are now in charge of the Tomb Raider franchise. Who knows what they'll do?

AVAILABLE ON:

PS2 / XBOX / GCM / PC

DETAILS

CATEGORY: Action/Adventure / PLAYERS: 1 / DEVELOPER: Crystal Dynamics / PUBLISHER: Atari / PRICE: \$99.95 / RATING: M15+ / AVAILABLE: Now /

HYPER VERDICT

PLUS: Beautiful, strong story, atmospheric.

MINUS: Poor puzzle design, shite camera.

VISUALS SOUND GAMEPLAY

92 80 75

OVERALL

79

A classy, Anne Rice stylin' gothic adventure.



!!! Don't get this mixed up with Ghostmaster from Empire Interactive.



Who ya gonna call? Ghostbus... er, hunter!



Er, don't look behind you, but...



No really. Don't look behind you!

GHOSTHUNTER

JOHN DEWHURST sleeps with the light on.

Ghosthunter is a spooky third-person shooter that takes a new path through the survival/horror heritage of video games. Avoiding the (somewhat endearing) stupidity of the freaky Resident Evil series and the white-knuckle terror of the Silent Hill games, Ghosthunter prefers ghosts and time travel with a faster pace and a Buffy-style melodrama.

WHOLESONE FUN

Here is a deserted school where murder and mayhem occurred. Just as the wrecking crew steps to tear it all down for a new Westfield, spooky rustlings begin. Enter rookie cop Lazarus Jones to investigate. Before long he finds a talking computer sidekick, a pulse rifle and a swag of ghosties to hunt down. He is the Ghosthunter.

The game follows the established formula of cutscene exposition of the story interspersing goal-based missions. The production values of the

animated cutscenes are very high. The voice acting in particular is well executed. Subtle grades of emotion: confusion, annoyance and uncertainty are carried through facial expression and strong vocal performances from the leads. The ghoulish Phantom of the Opera whispers of the big bad villain are superb.

The dingy, odd locales in low light are perfectly unnerving. Light sourcing is excellent, with long shadows and creepy effects reminiscent of the grime of Silent Hill. The music is very good, with well-conceived intense strings and creepy mechanical noise. The two combine to create a tense world for Lazarus to pass through. There are also some wonderful ghostly effects that are beautiful to watch and really add weight to the world of Ghosthunter.

The basic elements are very strong in Ghosthunter so it's a pity that the controls aren't as effective. There are three different control modes to

enter/exit, including a combat and 1st person mode, all while directing a haphazard camera. Every time Lazarus enters a room, the camera refocuses to face him. Big problems here: as Lazarus I can't see what I'm facing (though I can often hear it growling towards me). Grappling with a camera and an incoming ghost is more than a little frustrating. There's also no subtle auto-aiming help, something that makes the analog stick combat trickier than it should be.

Older gamers have experienced hammy frights (Res Evil) and genuine terror (Silent Hill). Ghosthunter doesn't up the ante on these games, instead focusing more on the excitement of gunslinging and a hip, teen-style storyline. Veterans of these games seeking terror might be let down but the target audience of teens looking for their first frights on a console will find some gunplay, a nice story and good wholesome fun in Ghosthunter. <<

AVAILABLE ON:

PS2 XBOX / GCM / PC

DETAILS

CATEGORY: Action/Adventure / PLAYERS: 1 / DEVELOPER: Studio Cambridge / PUBLISHER: SCEE / PRICE: \$99.95 / RATING: MA15+ / AVAILABLE: Now

HYPER VERDICT

PLUS: Competent shooter action.

MINUS: Not too frightening, cumbersome controls.

VISUALS SOUND GAMEPLAY

87 88 68

OVERALL

78

Some control issues, but solid supernatural fun.



WORMS 3D

From the desk of **CAM SHEA**...

Dear Team 17, it was with high hopes that we've followed the development of Worms 3D over the last couple of years. We've downloaded each new batch of screens, read every development diary and spent a great deal of time savouring the prospect of your delightful series moving into three dimensions. After all, Worms has been responsible for some of our most treasured times in gaming — it was fiendish in its simplicity, devilishly well balanced and a multiplayer triumph. Now that we've played Worms 3D, we thought we'd get in touch to say "good show old boy" (that's how you cobblers talk in the motherland isn't it?). You've somehow managed to translate the essence of Worms into 3D, and playing it is very much like returning home.

SHEDDING A TEAR

But here's the tricky bit. Even though you've found elegant solutions to

almost all the problems in going 3D; retaining the cartoony look and personality; developing an engine with deformable terrain; and translating the mechanics... something has been lost along the way.

You see, in two dimensions Worms was very clear-cut. Everything was easily viewable and you could quickly surmise what you had time to do. In 3D, once simple things like getting a good view of the map, navigating the terrain, and aiming with wind affected projectiles has become a right pain in the "bollocks". Cor Blimey.

Worst of all, the combination of explosions that don't feel meaty enough, very little splash damage, and worms that stick to the landscape has resulted in the death of large scale chain reactions. You can no longer set up multi-worm kills with the vision of a seer and the precision of a surgeon (only to have it backfire about half the time of

course), making Worms 3D far less chaotic... and far less charming than it could be.

We also understand the logical reasons why maps with ceilings had to be eliminated, and why there's no more tunneling and no more blowtorch, but that still didn't stop us shedding a tear when we realised the epic battle between lightsiders and darksiders was over. It's also disappointing to see that the two mainstays of the Worms tool set — the shotgun and ninja rope, are now pale shadows of what they once were.

To be fair, it's clear that you've put a lot of effort into the single player missions, and these back up the multiplayer game admirably. Indeed, the game as a whole is still fun, and remarkably faithful to the series. It's just a shame that Worms 3D lacks the simplicity and deviousness that won us over in the first place. <<

!!! The air strike looks phenomenal in 3D!

AVAILABLE ON:

PS2 / XBOX / GCN / PC

DETAILS

CATEGORY: Turn based shooter /
PLAYERS: 1-4 / DEVELOPER: Team 17 /
PUBLISHER: Atari / PRICE: \$99.95 /
RATING: G / AVAILABLE: Now

HYPER VERDICT

PLUS: It's Worms.

MINUS: Simplicity has been lost.
Bad main theme song.

VISUALS SOUND GAMEPLAY

81 75 82

OVERALL

80

Not as good as 2D Worms.



Jackson likes to remain Neutral when reviewing.

Stop reading today's paper, and help me out here!

Can I have a McOz and some fries thanks?

WRC3

JACKSON GOTHE-SNAPE burns rubber.

⚡ We complained last year when WRC II Extreme arrived that there was no need to jazz up an already desirable product title. That the second in Sony's flagship rally brand on PS2 was only superficially authentic. That its damage model was overly robust. That its handling was too darn simple. That there was little long-term to hold the attention of all but the sternest of rally fans. WRC3, barring its more mellow title and improved incentives, fails to significantly improve the majority of these areas. It is still the choice for the casual rally fan — the FIFA gamers out there — with its genuine licenses and content and extremely accessible handling. However, Colin 04, even with its weightier handling and fictitious setting, remains the choice for the serious rally player.

CONSTANT DRAMA

Still, barring some medium-range object and long-range scenery pop

up, WRC3 looks epic. The textures are only adequate — Colin 04's are marginally superior — but the scale and grandeur of the stages is incredible. The constant drama of the locales will have you questioning the 'real to life' claims of the Sony press people. In fact, so sublime are the cliffs and precipices of some, you may not be able to resist fanging straight off the edge and gleefully plummeting down hundreds of feet.

And if that sounds strange, it should. Because the crucial problem in WRC3 is its lack of enforced discipline. Flying off said cliff features minimal punishment, as you are more likely to puncture the radiator or get gearbox trouble hitting a fence. Thus, the temptation can often prove overwhelming and thus, the intensity of the rally experience, the threat of mortality, is lost.

Fortunately, WRC3 is structured quite well. For every 100km you drive

in one of the seven WRC vehicles, its performance will be increased. Realistic? No. Compelling? Yes. The more difficult championships are impossible without these advancements, giving upgrades essential status, and strengthening the incentive for play. Not to mention the fact that until you get a couple of upgrades, the game putters along in the slow lane. And then there's the promise of future WRC beasts and concept cars down the line, and keener plays have substantial reason to continue playing.

While Colin and WRC strive for slightly different rally experiences, the most telling aspect of their tenuous rivalry is this: while WRC II and Colin 3 might have been approximately on par, Colin 04 improves more on its predecessor than WRC3 does on its. For all its spectacular scenery, WRC3 as a game is unspectacular. Still, if you're a rally fan you're spoiled for choice. <<

AVAILABLE ON:

PS2 / XBOX / GCM / PC

DETAILS

CATEGORY: Rally / PLAYERS: 1-4 / DEVELOPER: Evolution Studios / PUBLISHER: SCEE / PRICE: \$99.95 / RATING: G / AVAILABLE: Now /

HYPER VERDICT

PLUS: Superb stages, good presentation.

MINUS: Basic handling, poor damage system.

VISUALS SOUND GAMEPLAY

86 82 79

OVERALL

80

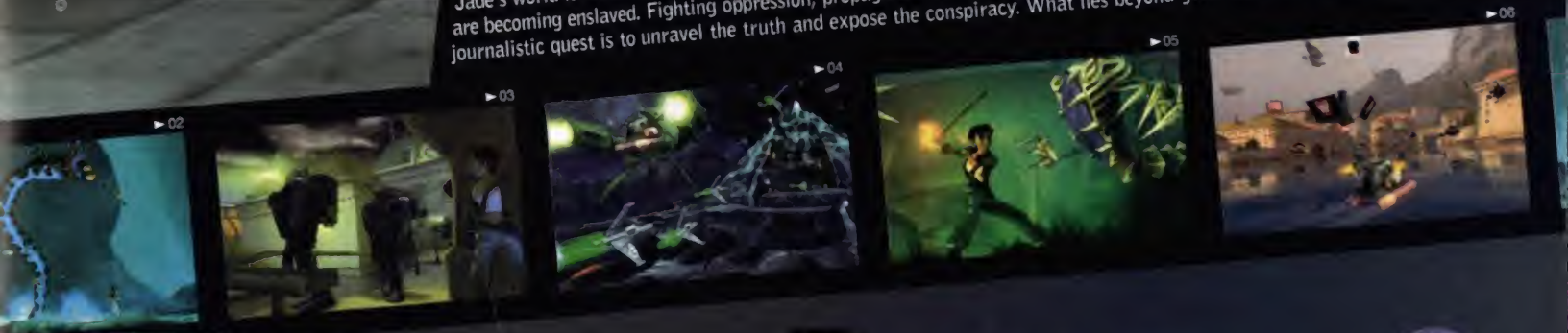
Get well soon, Richard Burns.

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*The Government will protect you.
The Government will defeat our enemies.
The Government is your friend.*

...OR DO YOU WANT THE TRUTH?

Jade's world is under attack from an alien force. Her government claims to be defending the people, yet more and more of them are becoming enslaved. Fighting oppression, propaganda and deception, not to mention fighting those intent on killing her, Jade's journalistic quest is to unravel the truth and expose the conspiracy. What lies beyond good and evil? You are about to find out...



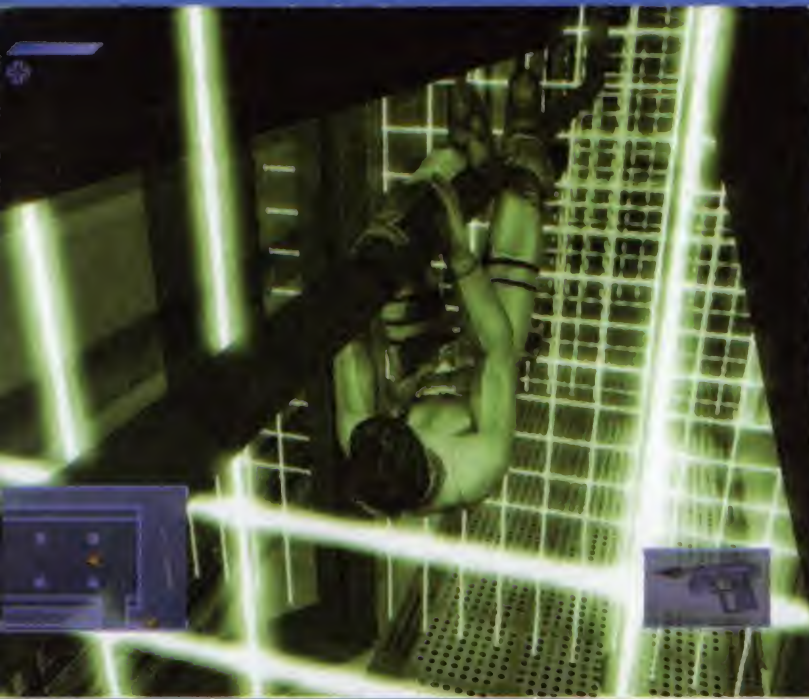
PlayStation.2

PC CD-ROM

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It's a new form of male-bonding Yoga...

Hey Sam! Er, I mean, Tom! Er, no... Ethan...!

In 25 years, they still haven't cut his umbilical

MISSION IMPOSSIBLE: OPERATION SURMA

MARCH STEPNIK knows nothing is impossible.

Now, the really impossible mission is to ignore how much of a rip-off *Mission Impossible: Operation Surma* really is. Because it "cough Splinter" looks and plays a lot like another action stealth game that was released a year ago now. This older title also featured "ahem, Cell" a multi-gadged hero who thrived on subterfuge rather than all out warfare.

Sam Fisher, meet Ethan Hunt. You see Sam, Ethan's been looking up to you for some time now, and as they say, imitation is the most sincerest form of flattery. Look after him, Sammy, eh?

HOME RENOVATING

Once you've moved beyond just how much *Operation Surma* borrows from *Splinter Cell* (read: what doesn't it borrow?), you'll be surprised to find a thoroughly decent action stealth game to be enjoyed. The game's not

totally devoid of originality or spark; au contraire, in the case of controls, *Operation Surma* surpasses *Splinter Cell* in offering a more streamlined and logical control layout which becomes second nature even before you realise that you're not playing an expansion to SC. It even makes good use of the *Mission Impossible* license — the Tom Cruise flavoured MI, not the older one — in taking players through a bunch of scenarios straight out of the series. Remember the ol' wire suspension computer hack that Ethan pulls off in the film? Well, you get a version of that in the game. Remember the bit when Ethan gets caught in the public bathroom getting all... wait a minute, that was George Michael. Anyway, the game makes good use of hi-tech gadgets (even Sam would be jealous here if he wasn't such a bad-arse operative compared to that vain and poncey Tom-err...Ethan), and even film

elements such as spiffy disguises and the endless home renovating.

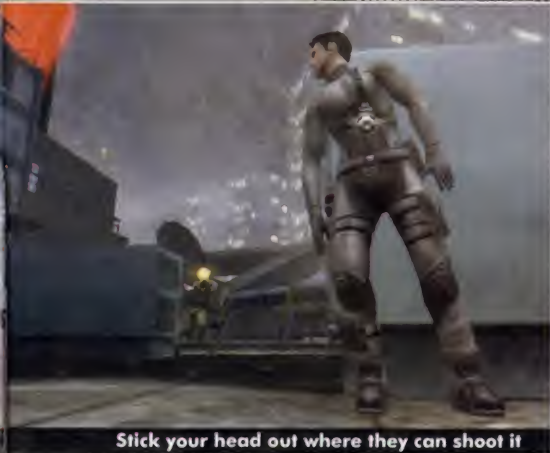
There's a suitably MI plot attached to the game and it involves politics, the military, corruption, crappy moustaches and unwieldy eastern-European accents. It's actually not so bad if you don't mind the films — just don't expect to be engrossed. What does matter here is that you've got a colleague — voiced brilliantly here by none other than Ving Rhames — who guides you, via earpiece, through the game in a way not dissimilar to a parent holding their children's hands as they cross the road. You depend on him and all, but it's not long before you wished he'd at least let go of your hand to make it look like you were just a tad more independent.

Because this game is rather idiot proof, not only are you constantly told what to do — eliminating a lot of the need to work out what could

have been some decent puzzles — but the game is highly forgiving of all those things that would have had Sam Fisher killed on the spot. It makes the game easier to play, sure, but it also dilutes some of the tension — the currency that games like these so heavily rely upon.

It's also rigidly linear. Developer Paradigm has done a good job in presenting an interesting world to explore, but if you stray from the pre-determined path you get a decent slap to the wrist and are





Stick your head out where they can shoot it



"What the...? 'Windows Exception Error?'"



He's always got a grip on someone's hot pipe



IT MAKES THE GAME EASIER TO PLAY, SURE, BUT IT ALSO DILUTES SOME OF THE TENSION

brought back into line. What with emergent gameplay possibilities being introduced into gaming (*Deus Ex* springs to mind), it's disappointing to see that this option was completely overlooked in *Operation Surma*. Case in point is a mission early on in the piece. You're infiltrating an installation to reach the heavily guarded computer core. You enter a large room and see sentry guns a-blasting in an area ahead of you through some windows. A console feature in this main room, with the only obvious action being to flick the switch. Doing so turns off the sentry guns and opens a door. Nothing else happens, so you go through the only open door into the gun room, triggering a cut scene where a lone scientist in an adjoining room (who also seems to be entirely oblivious to your presence) wanders in and turns the sentry guns back on. Now you're

stuck in the sentry room, and the most obvious course of action is insta-death by sentry guns. So a different strategy is attempted: disable guns, hide behind corner, wait for the scientist to come out, knock him out and then use his open door to bypass the entire sentry gun room. Nope, no dice. The developers want you to negotiate the sentry gun puzzle, so you're going to have to wander haplessly into the gun room to trigger the scientist event. Sigh. A bit more freedom would have gone a long way in helping immerse the player in the game world.

SOME WICKED ZOOM

Still, this game isn't even close to being a dud despite much of its mediocrity. One of the pleasures of *Operation Surma* is using the many gadgets on offer to the highly athletic

Ethan Hunt. There's all sorts of good stuff here employing some fun technology — one device lets you "see" what's beyond that closed door in front of you, for example. The binoculars — apart from having some wicked zoom and a camera feature — allow you to overhear incidental conversation too, which can be a powerful device in a stealth action game. It's just a shame that this isn't better utilised in the game — the stuff you overhear really is entirely incidental.

Which sums up *Operation Surma*. It's got plenty of great ideas, and it even plays quite well if you don't mind being told exactly what to do. It never reaches its full potential though, so you can't help but feel a little underwhelmed by the whole event. Stealth action virgins though — oh, lucky you. You'll be absolutely stoked. <<

!!! Mission Impossible used to be a TV show. Check this out: www.geocities.com/TelevisionCity/1574/

AVAILABLE ON:

PS2 XBOX

DETAILS

CATEGORY: Stealth Action /
PLAYERS: 1 / DEVELOPER: Paradigm /
PUBLISHER: Atari /
PRICE: \$99.95 / RATING: M15+ /
AVAILABLE: Now /

HYPER VERDICT

PLUS: Excellent interface, varied mission objectives, Ving Rhames.

MINUS: Poor camera controls, linearity.

VISUALS SOUND GAMEPLAY

78 82 70

OVERALL

71

Back to training, Ethan; Sam's head of the class.



Blau attack!



Beam us up, Scotty.



I'm dreaming of a white Christmas...

D&D HEROES

Dungeons & Dragons by the numbers. **MARCH STEPNIK** investigates...

H Dungeons and Dragons Heroes gets a lot of things right. It's an updated version of the old Gauntlet formula of hacking, slashing and character advancing for the Xbox, and it makes good use of the D&D license. It's a blast in multiplayer and there are enough things to tinker with — in particular the numerous character skills — that you won't see everything this game has to offer on the first play through.

It's also a relatively easy game to play — which definitely is not a bad thing here. A big part of this game's charm is the Zen-like repetitiveness of hacking, hacking and hacking your way through thousands of monsters and an even greater number of barrel and crate-like objects. It's the type of game where if expectations are realistic (and definitely not too high) then you'll be rewarded with a fun yet relatively mindless romp through a

nice presented fantasy world. Just don't expect to be too challenged.

A TIDY SET

Heroes is based on the Forgotten Realms universe of Dungeons and Dragons and utilises a modified version of the 3rd Edition rule set to dictate the various mechanics that underlie it. Wisely, experience with D&D isn't at all necessary to enjoy Heroes — most things are explained well enough during the optional tutorial mission. The only real knowledge of D&D that's needed here is the grammar of armour, item and weapon equipping (and how it effects your characters abilities), and the developers have implemented a tidy set of inventory and statistics screens that helps you keep track of these elements with ease.

There are four pre-made characters to choose from, including a Dwarven Cleric, a Human Fighter, a

Halfling Rogue and an Elven Sorceress. Character customisation — an essential element of the D&D experience — is limited to the choice of skills/feats as your character goes up a level, offering a mixture of generic ability updates and class-specific feats.

Is it all sounding a bit familiar? Well, yep — if you ever played Baldur's Gate: Dark Alliance then it should. And if you have, it should even look familiar to you. For Heroes comes across in many ways as a blatant rip-off of BG:DA. In level design, in locations, in graphics, in the skill system, in the relatively bland storyline — heck, even in the look of the inventory/stat screens — let alone the flavour of the action,

Heroes feels decidedly second-hand. But a good second hand: enhancements have been made to the basic model used in





Are these gates Baldur's?

I didn't think she'd bring her family on the date...

Now that's a powerful Zippo



THREE OF YOUR MATES, A CASE OF BEER, AND TRUDGING THROUGH THE ADVENTURE IS DEFINITELY MORE ENJOYABLE

Dark Alliance, and although minor, they're welcome indeed.

Rather than having one melee attack button to constantly mash, Heroes allows for four attacks using the A, B, X and Y buttons on the control pad. The A button is always the melee attack irrespective of class, with the remaining buttons customisable to the various feats/skills that players accumulate. Another nice touch to Heroes is the 'time-slow' function attached to the right trigger of the Xbox pad. Its primary function is to allow you to change the settings of the three action buttons whilst still playing (although in slow motion), but it proves invaluable during the thick of combat. The ability to slow down the action just as your health bar drops violently towards death so that you can pop a few potions, let loose a healing spell or even get a bearing on what's going on is excellent.

A CASE OF BEER

Another enhancement is finishing moves. Each character has access to these (if selected during level up), and they can be executed once a string of three successive melee attacks are achieved (indicated by the meter below your health bar). Most are brutal, and all consume mana so for the first time, fighters will need to carry the odd magic potion with them.

The other big feature – and the one saving grace of Heroes – is multiplayer. Very few games of this type allow you to play co-operatively (Dark Alliance allowing two players), yet this one gives you not one but the ability to let three other people play through the adventure with you. And the act of getting together in the same room with three of your mates, a case of

!!! We won't be waiting much longer for Baldur's Gate: Dark Alliance 2. Just hold on!

beer, and trudging through the adventure is definitely more enjoyable than the single-player version of this game. Heroes supports four players reasonably well (item exchange is painless), however only one player can access their inventory/stat screens at a time – which seems a step back from BG:DA. The other noticeable problem is the drop in frame rate when four players are battling multiple enemies; not severe but frequent enough to annoy.

Dungeons & Dragons Heroes is the perfect fantasy action party game. Sure, it's been done before, but never with four players. If you want something reliable you won't be disappointed with Heroes, just don't expect fireworks if you're playing it on your own. <<<

AVAILABLE ON:

PS2 / XBOX / GCM / PC

DETAILS

CATEGORY: Action / PLAYERS: 1-4 / DEVELOPER: Atari / PUBLISHER: Atari / PRICE: \$99.95 / RATING: M15+ / AVAILABLE: Now /

HYPER VERDICT

PLUS: Co-operative multiplayer is where it's at. Good D&D action.

MINUS: Generic, repetitive gameplay.

VISUALS SOUND GAMEPLAY

82 83 78

OVERALL

80

Just remember, it's NOT Baldur's Gate: Dark Alliance.



Oh, pretty star-producing guns!



Look out, he's about to counter your strike!



I think I'll join the Village People.

COUNTER-STRIKE

DANIEL STAINES says "go, go, go!"

So, it's finally happened — someone's gone and released an online-only first person shooter for a console. Although it's arguable that Unreal Championship already broke that barrier over a year ago, it at least had a structured (albeit pointless) single-player component that gave the solo gamer a sense of progression. The same can't be said for Counter-Strike, where the single-player game — such as it is — consists entirely of straightforward bot matches of the type that PC gamers usually use to practice for their online confrontations. This really is a game made exclusively for the Live Enabled.

GRAPHICAL FACELIFT

As it stands, Counter-Strike is still one of the tightest and most enjoyable multiplayer games ever made and the Xbox version is almost as good as its PC forefather in this regard. It's worth noting that the interface actually feels completely natural and intuitive on

an Xbox control-pad. It's essentially the same setup standardised by Halo: left stick moves, right stick looks and right trigger shoots. Our only complaint is that it isn't possible to assign crouch to a thumbstick button because having it on any of the face buttons feels clumsy and a bit uncomfortable. It's a minor oversight, granted, but one that's sure to irritate Counter-Strike gamers accustomed to complete customisation.

This new version comes replete with a complete graphical facelift. Unfortunately, the engine powering this version of Counter-Strike appears to be slightly on the spartan side of things. The models and textures generally look better than their PC counterparts, but they're hardly what we'd call Xbox quality graphics. Perhaps this minimalist approach was necessary to maintain the smooth and pleasingly consistent framerate we noticed, but that just bespeaks of an engine that hasn't been optimised for

the hardware it's running on. Honestly, some of the maps looks just as sparse and dull as the originals they're based on.

Let's just make one thing very clear about Counter-Strike on the Xbox: it is a multiplayer game only. While the single-player bots are reasonably intelligent and good fun to muck around with for a while, they're definitely not impressive enough to keep you interested for more than a week or so. However, Live enabled gamers with a passion for solid shooter fun have absolutely no reason to pass this up. Finding a game tends to be a little bit difficult at the moment, but the community currently playing is friendly and bereft of the elitism that plagues PC based CS servers.

Counter-Strike is definitely a step in a new direction for console gaming — whether or not it was step in the right direction, however, remains to be seen. <<

AVAILABLE ON:

XBOX

DETAILS

CATEGORY: Multiplayer FPS / PLAYERS: 1-16 / DEVELOPER: Ritual / PUBLISHER: Microsoft / PRICE: \$99.95 / RATING: M15+ / AVAILABLE: Now /

HYPER VERDICT

PLUS: It's Counter-Strike minus the wankers... so far.

MINUS: No real single-player to speak of, spartan graphics.

VISUALS SOUND GAMEPLAY

72 84 89

OVERALL

80

Great if you've got Xbox Live, but pointless otherwise.



TONY HAWK'S UNDERGROUND

CAM SHEA plays another game with McDonald's advertising...

On the surface, *Underground* varies from the usual Tony Hawk formula. The premise sees you create your own skater and take him on a journey from unknown to pro, winning comps, getting sponsored and travelling the globe on the way. Unfortunately, you can forget free roaming environments, forget driving cars and forget a revolutionary new approach. *Underground* is simply more of the same.

SPACE FILLERS

You still move from (disappointingly small) level to level, and the gameplay is still very much about gimmicky objectives given to you by hilariously animated low polygon idiots. Getting off your board is an interesting addition, but really only adds comedy value to your combos, rather than changing the way the game is played.

By far the biggest crime in *Underground*, however, is the fact that Neversoft have done nothing new with the objectives. The vast majority are space fillers, plain and simple. Rather than analyse what makes the skating mechanics fun, Neversoft have simply tossed in a mess of utterly dull challenges that wouldn't be out of place in a third rate platform game.

In amongst the dross are some genuinely cool objectives, but even many of these are marred by Neversoft's inability to streamline their gameplay. For instance, like *Tony 4*, the best objectives are those that are like real life skating. One objective had us no complying into a manual across a bench then flip tricking out. Sounds great right? Pity that Neversoft haven't taken into account the fact that the physics in the game are exaggerated. In other words, you take off faster and ollie

higher. Instead, they've given you a realistic sized bench with little room to move around it. It's mystifying that they could be five games into this series, yet fail to match the physics of the game with the level design.

Indeed, we really think that this would be a better title if they just slowed it down a little and focused on making a skating game. As it stands, the trick-based objectives and skate competitions are far and away the most entertaining, yet the vast majority of objectives are collectathons. What the hell is going on?

Underground is also incredibly rough around the edges. Level design is really mixed and the graphics are patchy at best. The collision detection still feels really glitchy, as do numerous other elements in the game. We even managed to crash the retail code. Another mediocre update. <<

AVAILABLE ON:
PS2 XBOX GCN

DETAILS

CATEGORY: Platformer/skating /
PLAYERS: 1-8 / DEVELOPER:
Neversoft / PUBLISHER: Activision /
PRICE: \$99.95 / RATING: M15+ /
AVAILABLE: Now

HYPHER VERDICT

PLUS: The skate mechanics are still great.

MINUS: The "American tribute" grind, visuals, objectives.

VISUALS SOUND GAMEPLAY

77 81 79

OVERALL

79

It's official - we've fallen out of love.



Metal arms, legs, head...



In search of Metal Mickey



I think there's a glitch in my pants

METAL ARMS GLITCH IN THE SYSTEM

STEPHEN FARRELLY wants metal body parts too.

➤ This quirky action/adventure game serves up an energetic mix of varying gameplay styles that gel into a solid gaming experience that should appeal to most seasoned gamers. Metal Arms stars Glitch, a robot with a mysterious past and an affinity for violence. Armed to the teeth with an array of futuristic (and cool) weapons, he traverses over 30 interactive levels, blasting enemies and solving puzzles in the hope of putting an end to the dark war that has been raging for the whole time he has been inactive.

KOOKY YET BRUTAL

The meat to this game is in the intense firefights; the explosively exciting action sequences that are guaranteed to entertain. There is a huge array of upgradeable weapon types that help to keep the gameplay feeling fresh, and the visuals are good enough to continually surprise you. That isn't

to say that you'll only be shooting stuff in Metal Arms. Far from it. The game also offers a delectable collection of puzzles that help to break up the action and give the game more of an adventurous feel, plus you'll get to command some troops and use the odd vehicle. It really is a great blend of gameplay ideas.

Unfortunately, Metal Arms does suffer a little bit in the controls department. It takes a while getting used to the way you access each weapon, plus targeting feels somewhat twitchier than it probably should. There also isn't a great deal of freedom found within the game — it's all a bit linear — however, there are plenty of hidden areas to discover if you're willing to put the effort into exploration.

Still, Metal Arms is a memorable

addition to the end of year releases, and stands as a breath of fresh air on all platforms.

Performance-wise, GameCube and Xbox walk away ahead of the PS2, each offering a more consistent framerate as well as a shinier level of visual polish that goes a long way to realising an intensely futuristic world wrapped in a kooky yet brutal war.

Metal Arms also has a four-player deathmatch option in its reasonably deep multiplayer mode, which proves to be a lot of fun, despite a few camera issues. If you're looking for a refreshing game that promotes quick thinking, fast action and a bit of strategy, Metal Arms will definitely please. <<

Check out the bizarre and yet cool website for the developer: www.swingingapestudios.com

AVAILABLE ON:

PS2 XBOX GCN PC

DETAILS

CATEGORY: Third-person shooter / PLAYERS: 1-4 / DEVELOPER: Swingin' Ape / PUBLISHER: Vivendi Universal / PRICE: \$99.95 / RATING: M15+ / AVAILABLE: Now /

HYPER VERDICT

PLUS: Charismatic, lighthearted fun. Good blend of game styles.

MINUS: A few control problems.

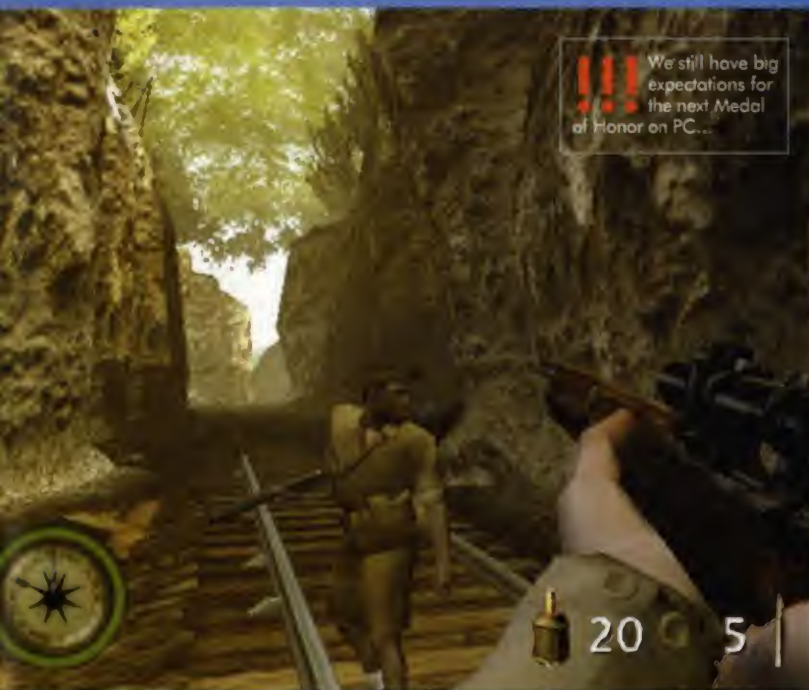
VISUALS SOUND GAMEPLAY

82 85 79

OVERALL

80

No real glitches in this system. Lots of fun.



What a lovely view! Now, let's kill shit.

Peek-a-boo!

I'm bored. I'm going to kill you guys.

MEDAL OF HONOR: RISING SUN

DANIEL STAINES is never up early enough to see the rising sun.

There should be a law passed that makes it mandatory for all first-person shooters to include Nazis. Everybody loves to shoot Nazis because... well, they're Nazis and they shout comical pseudo-German phrases whenever they get shot. But — ach nein! — there are no Nazis to be found in Medal of Honor: Rising Sun. It's set in the less famous but equally bloody pacific theatre of World War II, so all the Nazis have been replaced by their less amusing Japanese counterparts. I'd like to think that this lack of Uncle Adolf's finest is the main reason for Rising Sun's relentless mediocrity, but unfortunately that's not the case. There are far more important reasons.

TREES OR BRICKS OR WOOD

As soon as the mildly impressive Pearl Harbour mission is out of the way, levels usually consist entirely of long corridors filled with seemingly endless

hordes of very stupid Japanese soldiers to gun down. The fact that these corridors are sometimes made out of trees or bricks or wood doesn't change the fact that they're all still corridors. And on the rare occasions that the game actually gives you a bit of open area to explore, you'll likely find yourself wandering aimlessly for extended periods of time in a desperate attempt to find out where you're supposed to be going next. It's not that these sections of Rising Sun are particularly large — it's just that the level design is completely unintuitive. Compounding this monotony is an almost comically bad enemy AI. Oftentimes, individual enemies will stand around in a blithe ignorance while you repeatedly shoot at them and their comrades with a high-powered sniper rifle.

It is also worth noting that standard architectural features such as doors

and walls present to the average grunt an almost insurmountable challenge. Sometimes they'd get so confused that they'd lose their sanity completely and just run straight into them endlessly as if on an invisible treadmill.

It's also worth mentioning that co-op play in Rising Sun is utterly poor. Aside from being as tedious and poorly designed as the single player game, it's also got bugs up the wazoo. We're talking weapons not working properly, random respawns to different areas of the level and major graphical glitches all over the place. There were even several occasions where an entire level would simply break and disallow us any further progress without a reload.

Fans of the MoH franchise are going to be massively disappointed in this game because it isn't a patch on its predecessors. <<

AVAILABLE ON:

PS2 / XBOX / GCN

DETAILS

CATEGORY: FPS / PLAYERS: 1-4 / DEVELOPER: EALA / PUBLISHER: EA / PRICE: \$99.95 / RATING: M15+ / AVAILABLE: Now

HYPER VERDICT

PLUS: The Pearl Harbour mission is kinda fun.

MINUS: The rest of the game isn't.

VISUALS SOUND GAMEPLAY

72 80 60

OVERALL

63

Rising Sun is a blemish on a fabulous franchise.



If only she was real. She could bake me cakes.



I think Mario just invaded another country.



Not the most subtle golfer on the course.

MARIO GOLF TOADSTOOL TOUR

CAM SHEA hates people who think "golfing" is a verb...

⚡ The golf competition is certainly hotting up on console at the moment. Both Tiger Woods and Links 2004 offer up exceptional golf experiences with their own individual strengths. Mario Golf, however, puts its own spin on the formula — with old school mechanics and the zany antics we expect from a Nintendo game.

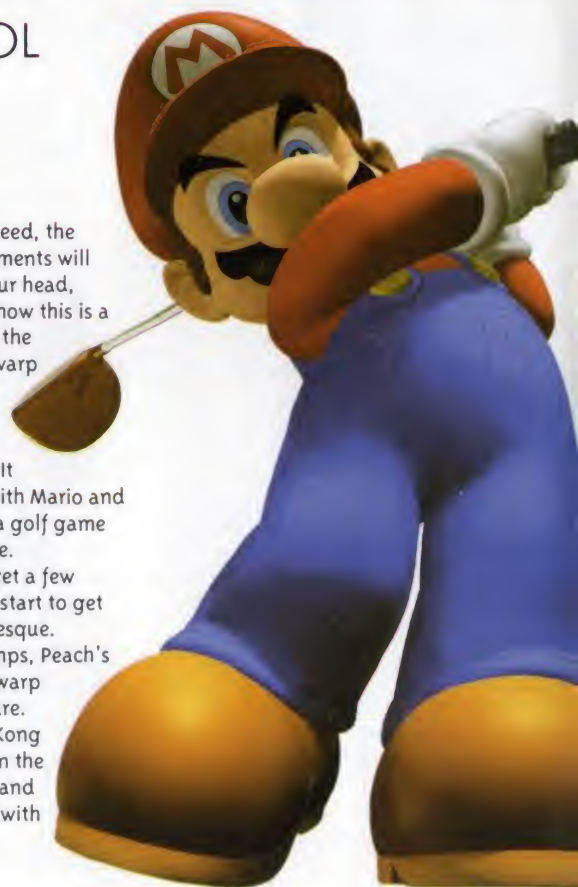
NICE ON!

What Mario Golf perhaps does best is to provide an experience that is truly pick up and play — with both auto and manual options, yet with numerous variables for more experienced players to take into account. Newbies, for instance, can usually rely on the automatic club selection and aiming, and need only hit A to get the power bar going, then A again at its apex to hit the ball. More advanced players, however, will need to take into account the ball's lie (the game gives you an estimate of

how much your shot will be affected by the terrain), the direction and strength of the wind, where you want to strike the ball (do you want to get right under it to send it higher, or hit it on one side to send it curving around an obstacle), as well as adjusting the club and the estimated trajectory the ball can take. Plus, if you hit B to stop the power bar, you switch to manual mode, and can then either hit a normal shot or put topspin or backspin on the ball. Mistime a manual shot, however, and the ball will veer off the intended path.

It's a good system that forgoes the more naturalistic method of a game like Tiger Woods (where you actually swing using the analogue stick) for a more old school approach, but still succeeds. And learning the intricacies of the controls are just phase one, since as you progress through the game the courses get harder and harder, and more

demanding of skill. Indeed, the initial couple of tournaments will have you scratching your head, trying to work out just how this is a Mario game. Instead of the crazy mushrooms and warp pipes you'd expect, you're playing on plain old vanilla flavoured golf courses. It feels like a golf game with Mario and friends, as opposed to a golf game set in the Mario universe. Fortunately, once you get a few tournaments in, things start to get decidedly more Mario-esque. Mushrooms, chain chomps, Peach's Castle, bob-ombs and warp pipes all enter the picture. There's even a Donkey Kong inspired course set up in the canopy of a rainforest, and an Isle Delphino course with mermaid and dolphin shaped bunkers.





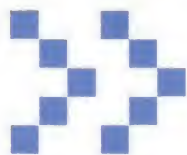
Yoshi, you're meant to LOOK at the ball!



Waluigi pulls a hamstring. What a dickhead.



Now that is a cool course.



THERE'S EVEN A **DONKEY KONG** INSPIRED COURSE SET UP IN THE CANOPY OF A RAINFOREST, AND AN ISLE DELPHINO COURSE

In the end, it's actually a good mix of courses, although be warned, some of the later tournaments can be very frustrating as you watch your hard fought lead disappear into the ether after a multi-bogey. Fortunately, there's a wealth of play modes to explore beyond the tournaments, including character matches (where you can unlock "star" versions of each character), ring attack, club slots (you play with a limited and random selection of clubs), coin attack (collect as many of the coins littered throughout the course as you can), speed golf, near-pin, mini-games, skins and more.

VERY SHORT SKIRT

While the game mechanics are good, they're not without their eccentricities. It's fair enough, for instance, that the estimated trajectory of the ball doesn't take into account the wind and the lie of the

ball, but it also doesn't seem to account for certain differences between characters. Some characters hit low straight drives, whereas other hit higher, with more spin and thus are more affected by wind. Most of the time it's not a problem, but when you have to hit over or around a tree and clearly set your trajectory wide of the obstacle yet it jumps out into your ball's path, it's rather annoying.

There are other minor problems associated with other areas of the game too. The camera often switches to less than opportune angles to display your shots — especially when putting. Often you won't even be able to see where your ball goes, while the camera focuses on something else. Quite how Camelot managed to take the focus away from where the ball is going is beyond us. It's also a little

bemusing that there are no auto tap ins for balls a few inches from the hole, instead requiring you to do a super fast double tap... or you can easily knock the ball over the hole. Auto tap ins would have sped gameplay up as well.

Camelot have put together a pretty good engine for Toadstool Tour, allowing you to pan all the way from a bird's eye view down to grass level. Characters are detailed and well animated, although the visuals may be a little sickly sweet for some. Still, cheers to Camelot for putting Peach in a very short skirt.

!!! Mario Golf has been delayed until April 2004 now... doheth.

The bottom line, however, is that while Mario Golf has good mechanics and is actually pretty faithful to golf, this is a party game first and foremost, and best played with three friends. The more accomplished your friends are at trash talking the more fun you'll have. <<

AVAILABLE ON:

PS2 XBOX GCN PC

DETAILS

CATEGORY: Super Happy Mascot Golf / **PLAYERS:** 1-4 / **DEVELOPER:** Camelot / **PUBLISHER:** Nintendo / **PRICE:** \$99.95 / **RATING:** G / **AVAILABLE:** April /

HYPER VERDICT

PLUS: Fun with friends, plenty of game modes. Waluigi.

MINUS: Very kiddie in looks. Waluigi's bizarre noises.

VISUALS SOUND GAMEPLAY

82 79 82

OVERALL

82

Good fun with friends, but it's no Double Dash.



DUNGEON SIEGE: LEGENDS OF ARANNA

From a story-telling perspective, what was Dungeon Siege all about? Do you remember? Nope? Neither do we, and that's no help to Gas Powered Games. Dungeon Siege, for all of its technical and visual splendour, featured a cast of generic and forgettable characters and a pretty dull storyline.

But then, it really wasn't about the story now was it? It was about cutting a swathe through thousands of beasties and emerging somewhere at the other side — without encountering a single load screen, once! Well, except when you die and have to reload, oh, and when you load the game each time.

The expansion pack doesn't pull any punches. It's a whole new adventure with a tenuous link to the original Dungeon Siege, and the hero of this game starts way back at first level. There are a bunch of new monsters, spells and items (these are now more unique and powerful pieces to be found), as well as some enhancements to AI and to character/party management. But the main issue regarding the gameplay of Dungeon Siege hasn't been addressed; this is still a stupidly pretty action game on rails.

So Legends of Aranna is absolutely a case of more of the same old, same ole. But there is one incentive here. This expansion pack features the entire Dungeon Siege with it, so if you're a first time buyer there's plenty of value to be had.

March Stepnik

AVAILABLE ON:
PS2 / XBOX / GCN / PC

DETAILS
CATEGORY: Action/RPG / **PLAYERS:** 1-8 / **DEVELOPER:** GPG & Mad Doc / **PUBLISHER:** Microsoft / **PRICE:** \$TBA / **RATING:** TBA / **AVAILABLE:** Now / **REQUIRED:** PIII 500, 128MB RAM /

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY	OVERALL
85	75	60	64



It's Shelob's brother, Crabob! Aiiieee!



NEED FOR SPEED: UNDERGROUND

The premise of Underground is working your way up through an illicit street racing scene, so fans of the series can expect something a little different this time around. Indeed, the entire game is set at night, in and around a massive city environment. It's certainly an excellent looking game, with slick and reflective road surfaces, a huge number of distinctive sections and a wonderfully complex city center, packed full of unique architecture and blazing neon signs. There's plenty of polish in the execution too, with very realistic looking motion blur on street lights and a cool shuddering effect as you gain speed in the drag races.

Drag races you say? Yes, the main race styles are drag, drift and variations on street racing. The game has 111 events all up that you'll work your way through, each with three selectable difficulty levels. As you earn money, increase your rep and complete events, you'll unlock access to better and burlier racing equipment and all sorts of options for hotting up the look of your car.

NFSU not only shamelessly apes *The Fast and the Furious*, but it also takes on board many an element from the likes of *Burnout* (near misses and slow-mo crashes) and *Project Gotham Racing* (earning style points) as well. This isn't necessarily a bad thing, but in the end we're left thinking that this title doesn't have much soul... Definitely worth a look for arcade racing fans.

Cam Shea

AVAILABLE ON:
PS2 / XBOX / GCN / PC

DETAILS
CATEGORY: Fully Hardcore Street Racing / **PLAYERS:** 1-4 / **DEVELOPER:** Black Box / **PUBLISHER:** EA / **PRICE:** \$99.95 / **RATING:** G / **AVAILABLE:** Now /

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY	OVERALL
88	87	85	86



Who's the sucker in yellow?



ROADKILL

It's tough to see how the OFLC (otherwise known as "The Office") came to approve Roadkill. This passable Driver style crime-fest is so in love with foul language and degenerate behaviour, it's hard to like anyone in the game.

A chemical apocalypse has brought society to its knees and now hoodlums run the world... well, certainly America. The protagonist is a grim lackey looking to escape to Paradise City. For reasons not clear, he begins working for a cockney thug who beats people with a 5-iron golf club and apparently has sex with scores of obliging young women. Every woman in Roadkill is a prostitute, apparently. Every man is a criminal, a gang member or a dead body. The bad language is so rife as to be beyond ambience or character — it's just gratuitous.

Under all of that is a fair driving action game with simplistic mission objectives and a plodding path to unlock cars and upgrades. Through the various missions you can take control of the wheel or a back-mounted machine gun to lay waste to other degenerates. The raw mechanics of the game are good but the content is dire.

GTA 3 presented a sprawling, non-linear game world and numerous ways to play. All of which, Roadkill interprets as bad language and gore. With so much effort required to create and distribute a game in this day and age, Roadkill is a morally bankrupt game with not a sniff of gameplay innovation.

John Dewhurst

AVAILABLE ON:
PS2 / XBOX / GCN / PC

DETAILS
CATEGORY: Crime Driving / **PLAYERS:** 1-2 / **DEVELOPER:** Terminal Reality / **PUBLISHER:** Midway / **PRICE:** \$69.95 / **RATING:** M15+ / **AVAILABLE:** Now /

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY	OVERALL
60	54	60	49



Wake me when it's over



CONTRACT J.A.C.K

☞ This is a fun little FPS that would've been much better if it wasn't a full-priced game. Well, okay, the game itself wouldn't have actually been any better, but the prospect of the average gamer picking it up would have increased substantially. See, Contract J.A.C.K is the kind of repetitious shoot 'em up that's really fun to play for about three hours... and then it gets quite boring. As such, it's really not worth the full price of admission that Sierra's asking for it. What a shame it is that nobody hires out PC games anymore.

Since there isn't much space to work with here, I'll keep the description of the game mechanics brief: you're a contract killer named J.A.C.K; you walk around some reasonably well designed levels shooting the crap out of some reasonably intelligent enemies with a bunch of reasonably well conceived weapons; there are some bits where you can drive vehicles but they're kind of crap; oh, and it's "the official prequel" to N.O.L.F 2 and therefore sports a narrative that ties in with that game. Sadly, however, J.A.C.K isn't a patch on Kate Archer. In fact, he's actually one of the more boring protagonists we've seen lately... and videogames are hardly renowned for their engaging characters.

Contract J.A.C.K is a fine title that would probably make a good gift for a casual gamer that likes to shoot the shit out of stuff. For the more hardcore, however, there are definitely more attractive options out there.

Daniel Staines

AVAILABLE ON:

PS2 / XBOX / GCN / PC

DETAILS

CATEGORY: FPS / **PLAYERS:** 1-Multi / **DEVELOPER:** Monolith / **PUBLISHER:** Sierra / **PRICE:** \$TBA / **RATING:** M15+ / **AVAILABLE:** Now / **REQUIRED:** PIII 700, 128MB RAM, 64MB card /

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY	OVERALL
80	80	70	70



I ain't got Jack, I swear!



SONIC HEROES

☞ If you know nothing else about Sonic, know that he was undeniably the fastest critter on the MegaDrive. Like Sonic Adventures, Sonic Heroes takes the Hedgehog into 3D, and this time Sonic teams up with Knuckles and Tails in a trio of devastating coordination... and a certain amount of speed.

That's the premise. No longer does Sonic run alone through 3D landscapes where he barely interacts with anything, now he's joined by two mates to do the same. It's the same Sonic vibe though — run along until you hit a zip where Sonic proceeds to launch around the world, completely out of your control.

There are four teams that can pursue the Story Mode: Sonic Team, Dark Team, Rose Team and Chaotix Team. The difference? Largely cosmetic. There are three kinds of characters in each team: a runner, a flyer and a tank. Your runners are fast but pretty useless in battle, so you spend most of your battle time as the tank — the slowest of the three. Of course, there are also obligatory flying sections. But furious speeds? Hardly. Both the rudimentary flying and simplistic combat serve to slow down the game incredibly. Sonic has never been slower.

The mish-mash that is Sonic Heroes is obvious, slow, dull and repetitive. The charm and pace of the earlier Sonic has been pushed aside to allow more characters screen-time. The result is a tepid jog through 3D platforms that is certainly not the equal of the Sonic heritage. **John Dewhurst**

AVAILABLE ON:

PS2 / XBOX / GCN / PC

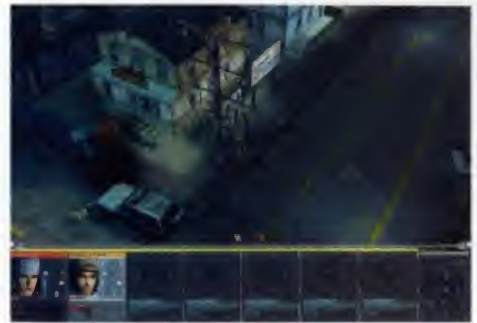
DETAILS

CATEGORY: Platformer / **PLAYERS:** 1-2 / **DEVELOPER:** Sonic Team / **PUBLISHER:** SEGA / **PRICE:** \$99.95 / **RATING:** G8+ / **AVAILABLE:** Now /

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY	OVERALL
80	60	57	67



Sonic's just not the same after the operation.



UFO: AFTERMATH

☞ It's been almost a decade since X-Com: UFO — Enemy Unknown graced the PC. But its legacy lives on, due to an ingenious blend of micro-management, turn-based combat and environmental interaction. UFO: Aftermath, a copycat of the original, removes many of the features that made that game great.

The aliens have invaded Earth, and in a novel twist, rain death from the skies before they set foot on the surface. Most of human civilisation is dead and only those who sought shelter underground now emerge to fight back. Now small pockets of resistance join together to regain the planet.

The combat is a clever melding of real-time and turn-based combat. The player can cue commands for the squad to carry out while the game is "paused", then time can be advanced. Should you run out of orders or if something else occurs (a death, an alien sighting, etc) then automatically time stops again. With a maximum of seven squad members and the odds stacked firmly against you, this control system is very suitable.

It's a pity that the micromanagement aspects of this X-COM clone have been entirely removed and the levels lack any kind of interaction (entering buildings might be exciting). The result is a game without a great deal of depth, as strong as the combat mechanic is.

A competent combat strategy game but certainly not the equal of its inspiration.

John Dewhurst

AVAILABLE ON:

PS2 / XBOX / GCN / PC

DETAILS

CATEGORY: Action Strategy / **PLAYERS:** 1 / **DEVELOPER:** Altar Interactive / **PUBLISHER:** Cenega / **PRICE:** \$99.95 / **RATING:** M15+ / **AVAILABLE:** Now /

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY	OVERALL
66	60	70	68



Unidentified Frying Omelettes, right?



NHL 2004

It's no surprise that NHL 2004 is arguably the best ice-hockey sim currently available on the market. EA has been making this officially branded franchise for over ten years now, so you'd expect the games to be pretty good at this point. However, as one might also expect from over ten years spent making new variants of the same game, there really isn't that much to differentiate this latest iteration from the last annual instalment.

That's a good thing and a bad thing. It's a good thing because 2003 was a superb ice-hockey sim that featured some rather kick arse multiplayer options and finely crafted, accessible game mechanics. NHL 2004 has got all of that along with the extra bonus of a more realistic game engine for the hardcore purists out there. Playing through an entire 80+ game season with a friend or relative is pure gaming bliss on an extended scale.

On the other hand, however, are the downsides. Chief among these is the goalie AI, which — like in 2003 — lacks balance. Leave goalies on the default AI setting or above and they'll become indestructible Terminators capable of stopping thousands of pucks in a single second. Tweak their intelligence down a notch and you'll suddenly be smacking slapshots at what might as well be a sack of potatoes decked out in pads and a hockey-mask.

As ever, NHL is a fine game for fans looking for a pure ice-hockey simulation smattered with EA's customary pizzazz. **Daniel Staines**

AVAILABLE ON:

PS2 XBOX GCN PC

DETAILS

CATEGORY: Sports / **PLAYERS:** 1-8 / **DEVELOPER:** Black Box / **PUBLISHER:** EA / **PRICE:** \$99.95 / **RATING:** G / **AVAILABLE:** Now /

VISUALS

82

SOUND

85

GAMEPLAY

87

OVERALL

85



I just need a shoulder to cry on



OUTLAW VOLLEYBALL

Outlaw Volleyball is a match made in heaven for those of you who liked Xtreme Beach Volleyball but thought that there wasn't enough of a game there, and that the "titillating" aspects didn't "go far enough". In short, Outlaw Volleyball takes this whole beach volleyball phenomenon to the next logical step, with girls that not only wear g-strings and have pendulous breasts, but that also feel themselves up in their introductions at the start of a match. Hell, you can even stop the match to have a poorly animated catfight! What an age we live in.

Of course, Outlaw Volleyball is very self-conscious in its trashy-ness, with deliberately skanky girls (including a disturbing Dolph Lundgren lookalike) and an over the top announcer making bad jokes throughout. This doesn't necessarily make it clever or ironic, mind you, and we definitely spent more time laughing at it than with it. Oh, and for the love of gawd — don't use the big breast cheat, there's simply no need.

Behind all the tits and jokes, however, is some pretty solid gameplay. The action is presented from one end of the court (rather than the far less playable side-on perspective in other games) and the bumping, setting and spiking feels quite intuitive, and requires good positioning and timing — just as it should. Live is supported too. .

Cam Shea

AVAILABLE ON:

PS2 XBOX GCN PC

DETAILS

CATEGORY: Volleyball / **PLAYERS:** 1-4 / **DEVELOPER:** Hypnotix / **PUBLISHER:** Simon & Schuster Interactive / **PRICE:** \$99.95 / **RATING:** MA15+ / **AVAILABLE:** Now /

VISUALS

79

SOUND

80

GAMEPLAY

75

OVERALL

73



"Uhh, Voll-ee-bawwwl? Whaaa?"



RAILROAD TYCOON 3

Before the Rollercoaster Tycoons, Zoo Tycoons and Sims, the average simulation title was a more concentrated affair. The original Railroad Tycoon (courtesy of Bruce Shelley and Sid Meier no less), was a deep economic puzzle, as much as a train simulation. The Tycoon genre has become more abstract and gimmicky, less about real world interactions. Thus these games became less attractive to the older players who first gave it an audience. But behold! The third iteration of Railroad Tycoon (which is the second in the hands of developer Pop Top) is a welcome return to a Thinking Person's PC game.

The most obvious improvement is in the visuals, which take on new stature, rivalling the enthusiasts camp of Trainz and the like. The engines are drawn in detail and are either historically accurate or demonstrate a great verisimilitude (check the dictionary).

Basic play is quickly grasped, so that deeper facets of turning a profit, playing the stock markets and controlling debt, can be approached easily. A tight, well-designed system of control, extensive campaigns and online play mean that this is a train sim with a good lifespan.

I dare say Railroad Tycoon 3 is good enough to break out of the purist's circle and into the larger PC community. If you've never played a sim and you've had enough of WWII FPS titles, give this one a go, you won't be disappointed.

John Dewhurst

AVAILABLE ON:

PS2 XBOX GCN PC

DETAILS

CATEGORY: Rail/Economic Sim / **PLAYERS:** 1-16 / **DEVELOPER:** Pop Top / **PUBLISHER:** Take 2 / **PRICE:** \$79.95 / **RATING:** G / **AVAILABLE:** Now / **REQUIRED:** PIII 500, 128MB RAM, 16MB vid card

VISUALS

85

SOUND

75

GAMEPLAY

88

OVERALL

84



Scuse me, I gotta make tracks...!

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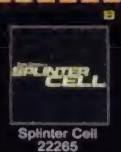
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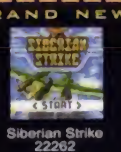
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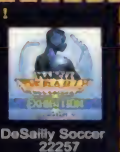
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007: EVERYTHING OR NOTHING

Props have gotta go out to EA for going the extra mile and not rehashing the same formula of their previous and rather woeful 007 adventure on GBA, *Nightfire*. Cheers. Rather than a half-arsed first person shooter with stealthy bits, what we've got here is a fully-fledged modern spy/action/adventure with stealthy bits — lotsa stealthy bits. Replete with all manner of gadgets, a stealth meter and the ability to execute one-button ambush kills, Bond's but the latest pop icon to have benefited from playing a whole lotta *Metal Gear Solid* and *Splinter Cell* between flicks.

Which is a good thing in this case — *EoN* offers a nice variety of mission types (from straight run and gun to stealth; there's even the chance to drive the ol' Martin in a *Spy Hunter*-style action sequence) that generally transcend point and shoot tedium. And blow me down — games really are evolving — *EoN*'s even got RPG elements in it! Accomplish mission objectives (and non-critical secondary ones too) and you're awarded 'Style Points' (read: XP) to spend to better some of Jimmy's key skills and abilities.

Which is all good and well, but something's lost in the translation. Control really is rather sluggish and the isometric perspective often harms the stealth sections of the game — stealth just doesn't seem to work on the GBA so much. And the less said about the B's painfully recycled and comatose cut-scene dialogue, the better. Just pretend you're playing Sam, already.

Bond's latest outing on the GBA really tries to be everything, and the effort is duly noted. But as you can't simply reverse engineer games designed for more powerful home consoles, *Everything or Nothing* ends up being quite an acceptable Little Bit of This and That.

Frank Dry

DETAILS

CATEGORY: Action / **PLAYERS:** 1-4 / **DEVELOPER:** EA Redwood / **PUBLISHER:** EA / **PRICE:** \$69.95 / **RATING:** M15+ / **AVAILABLE:** Now /

VISUALS

75

SOUND

68

GAMEPLAY

65

OVERALL

69



Just like *Deus Ex*, only in third-person and kind of crap



Have a five finger sandwich



This is what happened to 006

LORD OF THE RINGS RETURN OF THE KING

Okay, just so that we're on the same page here: EA's *Lord of the Rings* series is absolutely in every way *Gauntlet* or *Diablo* for your GBA, but with a Tolkien jacket on. You know the drillz: smack monster, collect loot, level-up, upgrade skills and items. This one's officially called *The Return of the King*, but between mates it's known as *The Two Towers 2004*, because, really, it's almost exactly the same game.

Oh sure, there are cosmetic differences of course, more characters to play through with and a smarter gameplay system (locations vary depending on which character you choose). EA has even managed to squeeze a few more enemy sprites on screen to ramp up the action quotient just a tad.

But these are just subtle enhancements to what EA did the first time around, which is nail the action/RPG translation to the GBA. *RotK* offers the same kind of hypnotic flow that sees you sink hours into it at a time — which is not a bad thing at all.

That's not to say this game doesn't suffer some from the inherent limitations of the GBA: the

levels are short and simply designed and the graphics are rather dull and repetitive. Oh, and there's a rather nasty bug that sees enemy loot stick to environmental items out of reach, which given that a lot of this game's charm comes from collecting uber-powerful items is rather off-putting. But at the end of the day *TRoTK* presents a highly addictive form of short-burst gaming, even if it's a little rough around the edges.

Frank Dry

DETAILS

CATEGORY: Action RPG / **PLAYERS:** 1-2 / **DEVELOPER:** Griptonite / **PUBLISHER:** EA / **PRICE:** \$69.95 / **RATING:** G8+ / **AVAILABLE:** Now /

VISUALS

75

SOUND

70

GAMEPLAY

85

OVERALL

83



I love it here in Orc-land, New Zealand



Lots of ring touching going on



Stairway to heaven

CRASH NITRO KART

Given that we regard Crash Team Racing (PSone) as one of the only kart racing titles to come close to matching Mario Kart, the news that a sequel was finally on the way was met with some measure of excitement at Hyper HQ. While Crash Nitro Kart on console has since proven to be fraught with mediocre design and hollow gameplay, the GBA version is certainly a better game.

Nitro Kart on GBA adheres to many of the solid design principles of its PlayStation forebear, this time in a mode 7 style. For instance, the old system of collecting apples for extra speed and (in this game) hyper-charged powerups has returned. Also, powerslides have a power gauge which you can fill to get a speed boost. Better still, you can do it three times in a row to hit maximum speed out of the corner.

Vicarious Visions haven't really maximised the potential of this mechanic, however, as courses are oddly lacking in hairpins or many really long corners for powersliding. Indeed, the track design is quite drab all things considered — courses tend to be wide and featureless, and

slowdown is a little too frequent to be easily forgiven.

We're also not particularly enamoured with the structure of the game (which is the same on console), where you explore and enter portals in a hub world to activate races. The single race format fails to bring any tension to proceedings, as you can just repeat each race over and over until you win. A championship structure would have been better. Oh, and the less said about the boss battles the better. In the end, Crash Nitro Kart is a competent game but Super Circuit still reigns supreme.

Cam Shea



The back of his head has a moustache

DETAILS

CATEGORY: Kart Racing / **PLAYERS:** 1-4 / **DEVELOPER:** Vicarious Visions / **PUBLISHER:** Vivendi / **PRICE:** \$69.95 / **RATING:** G8+ / **AVAILABLE:** Now /

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY	OVERALL
75	73	76	75



I saw this on drugs once



Looks like Crash has crashed

TIGER WOODS PGA TOUR 2004

Tiger Woods on GBA would have to be one of the most fully featured golf titles on a handheld to date. It eschews the lush 3D courses of its console cousin for a much plainer graphical style, but still manages to maintain a fair proportion of the gameplay depth. This is a good thing — and just what handheld ports should do.

To start with, almost all the options players need on the course are there. There are a bunch of different shot types to select from (such as "Blast" for when you're in a sand trap and "Approach" when you only want moderate power), and the interface for aiming on the course and selecting clubs is uncomplicated. Actually hitting the ball is achieved by holding down then up on the D-pad. Draws, fades, power shots and spin through the air can then be added through combinations of left and right on the D-pad and the shoulder buttons. It's a good system that forces you to really think about how to approach every shot, and it won't be long until you'll be getting some consistency in your game. Just make sure you don't rely on the auto-aiming as it's

useless — much better to aim your shot manually every time.

The only real downside to the mechanics come on the putting green. Like the console version, putting is a rather mechanical affair. Rather than reading the green, your caddy will do it for you, so getting putts right comes down to judging where to aim when your caddy tells you 9" Left, 11" Short. Making up for this is a comprehensive career mode with both tournaments and challenges, five courses to play through and a good stat-based progression system for your player.

Q. Wang

DETAILS

CATEGORY: Golf / **PLAYERS:** 1-4 / **DEVELOPER:** EA / **PUBLISHER:** EA / **PRICE:** \$69.95 / **RATING:** G / **AVAILABLE:** Now /

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY	OVERALL
80	76	83	83



Wow how did he balance all those balls on top of each other?



Bird shit cam



Like a tiiigerrrr



[below] Not as good as the Three Sheets at the Lord Nelson



[above] There's treasure out there... somewhere...

Pirates of the Burning Sea

//www.burningsea.com

>> Daniel Wilks

» Pirates have long been a source of endless entertainment and camp humour in literature, film and television and have even recently been making a welcome return to the field of games. Whilst most of the modern material that uses pirates as their central conceit rely on gentle (and not so gentle) parody to keep the

punters happy, Pirates of the Burning Sea, a new MMORPG from Flying Lab Software, is set to take a far more serious look at the life of a salty seafarer, casting players as not only dashing, parrot wearing ragamuffins but as traders and navy in a studiously real world setting. Flying Lab have taken great care to code a very real setting for

the game – the Caribbean. Complete with small island chains, uncharted stretches of land and the three major naval powers – England, France and Spain all vying for their piece of the pie – it's a setting ripe for adventure and the perfect opportunity for a wily seaman to make a handsome profit and maybe a name for himself.

REIGN OF TERROR

In keeping with the realistic setting of the game, Pirates of the Burning Sea will feature an entirely skill based character system that will do away with both character classes and leveling. In this way players can truly choose the path of their character. A conceivable character path could see the player start out as a simple Trader, join the navy in a time of war, be dishonourably discharged, become a pirate, get hunted down by one of the great nations, agree to act as a royal privateer, give up their life of crime, rejoin the navy under an assumed title as an officer with a somewhat shady past and retire as a merchant prince. The learning of

skills looks as though it will be a nice balance of book learning and active learning – players can't master a skill without first knowing the fundamentals and then repeated experience. If Flying Lab manages to pull off this feat you could very well be seeing a number of MMORPG titles in the future adopting this totally malleable style of character development. Don't worry about having to work your way up to being the captain of a ship either – all players start with their own ship which is totally upgradeable and throughout the course of their adventures will have the opportunity to purchase bigger and better ships from a range of over 20 – from the fast and manoeuvrable Ketch to massive 78 gun Galleons. Players will also be able to make their own alliances, both between each other and the seafaring nations using a detailed political and commercial system.

Potentially one of the most interesting things that Pirates will launch with is a full legal system in the game. Whilst most MMORPGS have a certain code of laws written





into the history of the world to add to flavour, Pirates will feature an AI legal system that will keep a track of what the player has done, who has witnessed it and what the correct punishment should be. Minor infringements may simply mean fines, or some NPC characters being unwilling to talk to the player, whilst grievous legal blunders could lead to one of the great nations sending out a fleet to track you down and end your reign of terror.

BROADBAND ONLY

Now something has to be said about the level of technology needed to run Pirates of the Burning Sea. The developers are definitely not shooting for the lowest common denominator PC for system specs. The game is set to be fully DirectX 9.0 compliant and features massive ships with up to 350000 polygons each. Understandably it's going to take a bit of a beast machine (and connection) to run it. The developers state that the very minimum needed to run it will be a

1.0GHz processor and a Geforce 3 but that can be taken as the absolute grass roots system and it can be safely assumed that at least twice the processing power and one of the latest generation video cards will be required to have it running as they envision it. Pirates of the Burning Sea will also require a broadband connection to play so don't go expecting to be able to cope with reliable old dial-up. Interestingly, broadband will also

be required to simply purchase the game in the first place, as Flying Lab are taking a truly independent route, self publishing the title and distributing it through Valve's Steam service. Whilst the lack of any boxed copies may turn some players off, the developers are planning on taking full advantage of Steam and offering frequent updates full of user-created material. Expect to see Pirates of the Burning Sea surface sometime in 2004. <<>

!!! Q: Where do you keep your Buccaneers?
A: On the side of ya buckin' head.



[above] Looks like a ghost ship. Woo!



Back of the Net

JACKSON GOTHE-SNAPE



In breaking news this month, a pair of San Diego college students and their company D-Squared Solutions are

challenging the US Federal Trade Commission's attempts to charge them with unlawfully exploiting a technical aspect of Windows which can be used to create pop-up ads even while the user is not browsing the internet. On the back of a wave of complaints from consumers, the Commission claims that the pop-ups disrupted people's computers, and that users didn't know how to turn them off. D-Squared's defence? It centers around the content of their pop-ups. See, they advertise the software that blocks advertisements like pop-ups.

Yes, that's right, it's another weird and wacky day in the life of the web, where the bizarre and funny are commonplace, and the future is still yet to arrive. Excuse my disdain, but sometimes I get frustrated with the internet. Exciting technological advances that are continually hyped (a critical mass of broadband users, widely-employed multimedia web content, mass use mobile internet, fully online Championship Manager) never seem to arrive in as dramatic a fashion as promised, or even at all. Instead, my experience of the internet is the same old google, the same old Soccernet, and the same communicatory functions.

And so I look towards the web's humour with scorn. As if the "FW: The Diffrence b/w chix and a case of apple cidar" emails in my inbox are somehow delaying the future's arrival. I look at my stupid browser that stupidly hasn't changed its stupid design for ten years and think 'how stupid this browser's stupidity is for stupidly limiting people's experience of the stupid internet'.

I'm sick of The Onion. I'm tired of Maddox' Best Page in the Universe. Bored of the same old Unnovations. And, on the local front, I'm fed up with the Chaser's best efforts.

I'm sick of all these classic websites whose words might change but never progress. It's not that I don't enjoy them. There are grins, chuckles, chortles and laughs in every visit. Most are updated frequently, and are rich in their relevance and sarcasm. But sometimes, I just want the internet's entertainment to stop joking around and get back to its revolutionary work.

Links



Game Wallpapers

www.gamewallpapers.com

>> Chances are, if you haven't got a half-naked Buffy or Willow decorating your desktop your wallpaper of choice will be game related. But let's face it, most of the time the official wallpapers are pretty crap. You know the ones - game logo on black background with "Coming 2004" written underneath. Boooring. That's where this site steps in. The vast majority of the 1200 wallpapers they host are created from scratch using official promo artwork and are of the highest quality. Liked that render Hyper featured on the cover but haven't been able to find it online? Chances are Game Wallpapers have it in your choice of desktop size.



Online Confessions

grouphug.us

>> If you've got a few minutes to kill, need a reminder on how stupidly shallow people in this world are, or just want to laugh at others, anonymously, enter the world of group hug - the online confession site. Some samples: "Lately I am really into unattractive and full figured girls. I don't know what is wrong with me. Maybe I'm starting to see the inner beauty like Shallow Hal." And then there's "I have over 283GB of illegally downloaded music, software, and movies on my computer..." Or "I often eat a spoonful of Milo from the office tin. I don't always wash the spoon in between." And "I'm going to break up with my fiancé tonight, and he has no idea." A lifetime of entertainment. Click now.

>> Kosta Andreadis

ADVENTURE GAME STUDIO

About | Games | News | Download | Forum | Docs | Links

The engine behind Larry Vales King's Quest VGA and Pleurburgh
Current Version 2.56

What is Adventure Game Studio?

Adventure Game Studio (AGS for short) allows you to create your own point-and-click adventure games, similar to the early 90's Sierra and LucasArts adventures. It consists of an easy-to-use development environment, and run-time engine.

The game interface is fully customizable, although the classic Sierra and LucasArts interfaces are supported by default. You need no programming experience to make a game using AGS - setting most game options is just a matter of point-and-click! AGS manages most of the game so that you don't have to - it provides load/save game functions, inventory management, and more. All you have to do is draw the graphics and think of a plot!

Add in a few interactions (ie, what happens when the player clicks on various things) and you're done. You can even create a standalone EXE file containing your entire game, which you can then distribute.

So, how much does it cost? Nothing. That's right, AGS is free, and you can even create commercial games with it (subject to license terms).

Adventure Game Studio

www.agsforums.com

>> In their heyday, point-and-click adventures were as popular as any genre, providing deep interactive stories, complex puzzles and above all, hours of entertainment. Sierra and LucasArts were the big guns when it came to the P and Cs, with Sierra's Quest series and LucasArts' tongue in cheek Monkey Island series leading the pack. Eclipsed by the interactive 3D worlds of today's adventure games, someone ought to resurrect this almost forgotten genre. And that someone could be you, ok maybe not you with the dopey look on your face, but somebody else out there, with the help of this site that provides all the tools needed to create the next Leisure Suit Larry.

MOST POPULAR

DX: Invisible War for the PC will be released on 12/2 from Eidos Interactive. It has been reviewed by 2 websites and magazines including GameSpot, GameSpy and Stuff Gamer. The average review ratio for all 2 editorial reviews has been 80.0%. A title needs at least 10 reviews in the database before it is placed into the overall rankings, so check back soon to see where this title stands compared to all the others.

DX: Invisible War	PC	80.0%
Drake	XBOX	19.2%
Star Wars: KOTOR	PC	93.9%
Need for Speed Underground	PS2	86.0%
Call of Duty	PC	93.5%
Manhunt	PS2	78.8%
Final Fantasy X-2	PS2	85.2%

RECENT TOP GAMES

On 11/10 the PC received a new game from LucasArts titled Star Wars: KOTOR. Since then 12 sites and magazines have reviewed it including IGN, GameSpot, GameSpy, Game Zone and Computer Games R.O. Together their reviews have resulted in an average ratio of 93.9%. That ratio has resulted in this title becoming the 23rd best game of all time and the 4th best game on the PC.

Star Wars: KOTOR	PC	93.9%
Project Gotham 2	XBOX	93.4%
Mario Kart: Double Dash	GC	88.7%
Mario & Luigi	SBA	88.5%
Need for Speed Underground	XBOX	86.4%
Need for Speed Underground	PS2	86.0%
Final Fantasy X-2	PS2	85.2%
Need for Speed Underground	GC	84.2%

Rotten Tomatoes & Game Rankings

www.rottentomatoes.com
www.gamerankings.com

>> Even though these sites may be as old as Old Man Fish's old lady, in this holiday period where studios and companies are releasing movies and games faster than you can reach for your wallet, people with money to burn need a place to look. So if you're serious about playing a decent game or watching a decent film, these two sites should leave you plenty of time to enjoy the holiday.

Online Console Gaming Update



XBOX LIVE

Aussie Halo Tourney winner

>> Microsoft Games Studios has announced Josh Hall of Donvale, Victoria as the winner of the national online Halo for PC Tournament. Josh has been awarded \$1,000 in cash plus a trip to the USA, sponsored by AMD, to test his skills against American pros in the Worldwide Halo Tournament in Los Angeles in February 2004. Josh said, "It was a tough tournament, up against 15 of the best Halo players from around Australia. I still cannot believe that I have won and it is a spinout that I am off to Los Angeles to take on the American and European finalists. I can tell you now that I am planning to spend the next month practising so that I give myself the best chance possible in the world championships." Good luck, Josh.

Live Kits Sell Like Hot Cakes

>> Microsoft recently let us know that "To date, actual unit sales of

the Xbox Live Kit have exceeded its competitor's offering, and when compared per capita based on cumulative console sales, the uptake of the Xbox Live service is more than double." In other words, although the user base for the PS2 console is far higher than that of Xbox, it seems Xbox users are more inclined to want to go online. No surprise really, considering that the structure of the Live service is far more user friendly, and includes downloadable content thanks to the Xbox hard disk. Which brings us to...

New Downloadable Content

>> New downloadable content has been pumping out for Xbox, with Splinter Cell recently getting two brand new levels - Vsleka Infiltration and Vsleka Submarine. There's also the Kola Cell mission available if you haven't yet logged on to download more Sam Fisher goodness.

>> Also available: Midtown Madness

3 - new car and track packs.

>> A bit of a fuss was also made over Microsoft's new premium Mech Assault downloads which incur a download fee - albeit a small one at US\$4.99. It does however contain two new game types and three new maps.

\$25,000 Up For Grabs

>> Microsoft have enticed Live gamers worldwide with the announcement of a whopping US\$25,000 first prize haul in their XSN Sports World Championship which will conclude in Los Angeles on February 12. Now that's a prize to play for...!



[above] Halo freak is awarded for wasting his life playing videogames



PS2 NETWORK ENTERTAINMENT

EverQuest Online Adventures

>> The latest games to launch with full PS2 Network Entertainment support include My Street and Everquest Online Adventures. EverQuest Online Adventures comes with a free 30 day trial, but you do need a credit card to register and you will start getting charged if you continue to play after your free 30 days are up. The pricing seems somewhat steep by our standards, and is as follows: 1 month - \$19.98, 3 months - \$55.99, 6 months - \$99.99, 12 months - \$174.99. You'd want some pretty exciting adventuring for that, we reckon. Especially after forking out \$99.95 for it in the first place...

Hardware Online Arena Tourney

>> Sony kicked off their very first PS2 Network Gaming tournament on December 1st. It was a Hardware Online Arena comp entitled "Hardware Mayhem". The prize was

a cool limited edition Silver PS2 console, Logitech headset and a few other PlayStation goodies. The final took place on December 10th and lasted for 28 minutes, with the winner, Spooksniper, finishing up on 60 points. Congrats Spooksniper, whoever the hell you are!

FIFA Online Probs

>> If you're one of the many PS2 gamers unable to connect to online games of FIFA 2004, then make sure to check out the official site for PS2 network news here: au.playstation.com/ng/network_news.jhtml - you'll find some handy info on how to reconfigure your settings to get the game to connect.

Destruction Debut

>> As of January 9th, Destruction Derby Arenas will be unleashed for PS2 Network gaming. Many will remember that the original Destruction Derby was one of the very first games on PlayStation 1,

and this is the series debut on PS2. Up to 16 players will be able to go head to head in the many arenas, and if you have a multitap, you'll be able to play offline with three friends for a bit of praccie.

Get Your Face In

>> Bought Tony Hawk's Underground? Then what are you waiting for? If you have a PS2 Network Entertainment kit, you can log on and download your face into the game to use on your own character. There are some pretty freaky results possible...



[above] Just like those PSX days...





[above] Surely that guy is too young to have a license.



[above] One-eyed Levy. Ooh he's a menace!

Wangan Midnight R NAMCO

>> Tim Levy

It's 4:15 am in your factory race spec WRX on a 4 lane raised superhighway. In the distance looms the glowing towers of Shinjuku Tokyo. Most of the cars on the highway are an assortment of boorish businessmen's Mitsubishi Magnas returning home from a night of Karaoke and Suzuki Carry Vans taking their loads to market. Up ahead, you can hear the fine-tuned exhaust note of a twin cam engine with its high-pitched turbo whine. Ah ha — a competitor. Pulling up beside the fully customised red Skyline GT-R 34, the driver coolly nods his head, puts his cigarette out using his eyeball and tightens his 5-point racing harness. It's on.

HIGH SPEED FREEWAYS

Wangan Midnight R, like the excellent Initial D, was originally spawned in manga form. The story, by Kusunoki Michihara and published by Kodansha, also deals with street racing, except that the 'battle grounds' are located on the straight, high speed freeways in the Tokyo Bay (Wangan) area as

opposed to the winding mountainous passes towards Mt Fuji.

The story's main hero, Asakura Akio, drives a Datsun Fairlady s30Z and looks for races against a motley assortment of other car fanatics driving their own customised racers, such as Skylines, MR2s, RX-7s, RZs, Lancers and WRXs.

Each stage starts off giving you 20 seconds to find an opponent on the road ahead of you, and unless you are checking your hair for someone taking photos of you, this should be no problem. After catching your opponent (who happens to be from the Midnight R manga), you take off and attempt to wind your car up to top speed. Alternatively, you can race human opponents in the 2-player mode.

While the first 2 stages are fairly idiot proof, by the third stage the game finally becomes challenging as your opponents start to make ballsey moves which are sure to wreck your precious duco.

LOCKING FENDERS

On the top of the screen are 2 health bars representing each player. If you

lag behind the leader for too long, your health diminishes and you lose the race. Alternatively, the race is also over if you are behind after the time limit expires. You lose and don't progress to the next stage. This "next stage" business is what makes the game compelling, as your opponents become more and more ruthless. Eventually you find yourself veering away from your opponent and then driving back into them to get extra momentum in an attempt to ram them into slower moving cars or closed exit ramps, or try to cut them off as they attempt to overtake at speeds of up to 330kph. One major crash late in the race can often be enough to seal the game. Often you will find yourself being pipped at the post, so using your rear vision mirror becomes as important (if not more) as looking through the front windshield.

While comparisons to Initial D are unavoidable, they both play as different games. Initial D's roadways are more picturesque and tight winding roads are always going to be far more exciting than Midnight's straight stretches of freeway.

Wangan Midnight R is more battle orientated and is about outwitting your opponent. So if you like locking fenders at high speed and skillfully colliding with other cars in an attempt to make them crash then this is the game for you. Just make sure you play the game long enough to make it into the higher stages.

SCORE: **7.5/10**

[below] I never knew Saddam Hussein liked racing cars



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R.KELLY: IGNITION	50085
BLACK.E.PEAS: SHUT UP	52063
50CENT: IN DA CLUB	50006
50CENT: 21 QUESTIONS	50084
EMINEM: BUSINESS	50087
EMINEM: WITHOUT ME	50041
SEAN PAUL: GET BUSY.....	50081
JUSTIN T/IAKE: SENORITA	51611
P!NK: FEEL GOOD TIME	50070
I KNOW WHAT YOU WANT	50068
H/DUFF: SO YESTERDAY	51816
A.PEREZ: ANGEL	50125
JUNIOR/SNR: MOVE YA FEET	50996
LINKIN PARK: NUMB	51863

TOP TONES

GUY SEBASTIAN: ANGELS...	52097
50 CENT: P.I.M.P	50121
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KYLIE: SLOW	52059
BEYONCE: BABY BOY	50141
DELTA G: NOT ME, NOT I	51985
KELLY CLARKSON: LOW	52052
ME AGAINST THE MUSIC	51993
WHERE IS THE LOVE?	50074
SHAKE YA TAILFEATHER	50130
CHINGY: RIGHT THURR	50143

HIT PICKS

P!NK: TROUBLE	52018
BIG BROVAX: BABY BOY	51794
SUGARBABES: HOLE IN HEAD	52031
NICKELBACK: SOMEDAY	52029
HOLLY V: STATE OF MIND	52021
ELVIS: RUBBERNECKIN'	51950
OUTKAST: HEYYA	52004
DIDD: WHITE FLAG	51616
XTRNA: CANT HOLD US DOWN	51619
SEAN PAUL: LIKE GLUE	51580
SNOOP DOGG: BEAUTIFUL	50019
COLDPLAY:.....	50005
CHINGY: HOLIDAY INN	52037
J.WESS: BANG THIS	51981
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DELTA G: INNOCENT EYES	51536
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ACDC: THUNDERSTRUCK	10531
ACDC: BACK IN BLACK	11064
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G&R: SWEET CHILD OF MINE	10475
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RINGTONES

TOP 20!!!

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LINKIN PK: BEHIND BLUE EYES	11577
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BEYONCE/SEAN PAUL: BABY BOY	11463
FABOLOUS: INTO YOU	11501
MADONNA: ME AGAINST THE...	11475
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CATCHY #1

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How to become an Old-School Gamer in Five Easy Steps

>> Daniel Staines

Let's imagine for a second that you've just signed up for the Hyperactive forums. You've chosen an obscure nickname by picking a word at random out of your physics textbook, you've got your moody Sephiroth avatar and your signature features no less than three profound quotes from the latest Japanese RPG you're obsessed with. What next? Since you're a forum rookie, you'll probably want to begin by starting an interesting and intelligent topic to announce your presence and impress the powers that be. After a quick breeze through the Off Topic archives, you notice that old games – particularly ones from the late 80s and early 90s – always make for well populated threads full of respected posters gleefully waxing nostalgic about their fondest childhood memories. Seems like the perfect way to make your grand entrance...

But wait! Oh, no! You're a late PSX-generation gamer! Your earliest gaming memories consist entirely of Metal Gear Solid, Final Fantasy VII and Super Mario 64 – you don't know anything about the Intellivision, Atari 2600 or Super Nintendo! Whatever shall you do?

Don't fret, little padawan. With Hyper's Easy Five Step Guide to Becoming an Old School Gamer, you'll be just as jaded, cynical and irrationally nostalgic as the most wizened of elder gamers! Ingest our easy-to-follow advice and you too will be capable of engaging in extended discussions on the virtues of archaic text adventures and 16-bit platform games that are actually thinly veiled advertisements for multinational fast-food conglomerates. So if you don't know a Colecovision from a Commodore 64, then read on – and prepare to be educated.

Step One: "Would you like to see my mint-condition Intellivision?"

■ Nothing screams "old-school" like a bedroom closet full of disused and obsolete gaming hardware – particularly if they come replete with the original peripherals, packaging and instruction manuals. It doesn't matter if you've actually played any of the machines you own, just as long as they still work and therefore could theoretically be pulled out at any moment for an impromptu nostalgia-fuelled gaming session. Of course, you'll never actually do that. In fact, it is absolutely taboo to so much as think of plugging in any of the old consoles you own. The only time these electronic dinosaurs should see the light of day is when you open your closet to show disinterested visitors your totally killer collection of "classic" hardware.

It is also necessary to own at least three games for each of the consoles you own. Once again, it is not necessary to actually have played any of these games or even heard of them. All you need are boxes, instruction manuals and the ability to talk about every game you own as if it were a matchless classic that could never be reproduced by the capitalist pigs that run today's game studios. And remember: the more obscure a game is, the more old-school points it's worth for you.



Step Two:

“You mean they had magazines back then?”

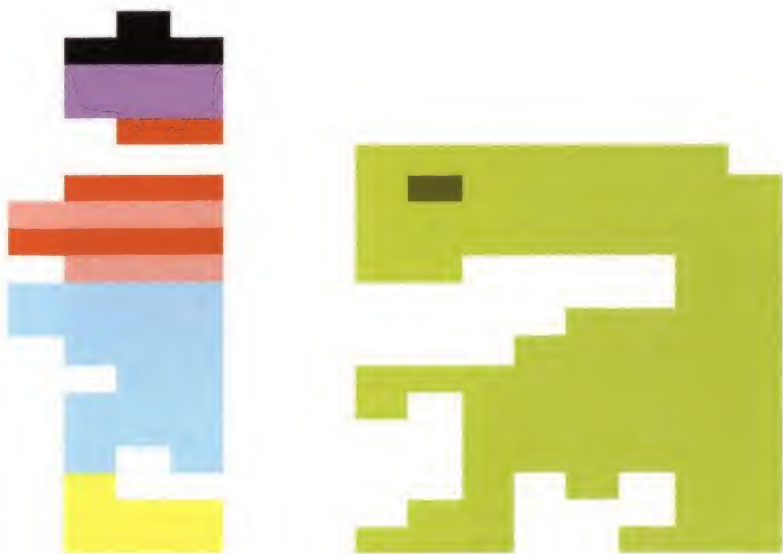
■ Before the Internet came along, there was only one place a self-respecting hardcore gamer could go to get their fix of gaming news and reviews: magazines. As such, it is expedient for anyone wishing to claim the status of “old-school” to have a favourite games magazine from the same era as the consoles that now inhabit your bedroom closet. The only proviso on this is that the games magazine you choose as your elder tome must be British. The old English games rags offer a distinctive style of gaming journalism – the type that went out of fashion when people stopped using the term “naff” to describe things they don’t like. They are therefore the connoisseur’s choice, with archaic rags like Zzap, Super Play and CVG enjoying an almost legendary status in nostalgic gaming circles. If you can find these mags, buy them and stack them up conspicuously in your room. You don’t have to read them. In fact, it’s better that you don’t. Like parchments from a lost civilisation, they are better left untouched and preserved in their original state for the benefit of future generations... or, you know, something like that.



Step Three:

“It’s all about the graphics now...”

■ Now that you’ve gone out and acquired all the possessions necessary for an old-schooler, it’s time to cultivate the attitude of one. The first thing you must learn as an aspiring elder gamer is that all games made after 1995 suck. Why 1995? Well, it was around this time that gaming apparently went “big-business” and became “commercialised” by “suits” that were only interested in dollars over the art of creative game design. Modern gaming, you must understand, is entirely focused on technology. Everything is about producing pretty graphics, with gameplay taking a backseat to the whims of slaving polygon junkies desperate for their next frame-per-second fix of pixel-shaded pixie dust. Gaming today is run by corporate fatcats and is incapable of capturing the grandeur of forgotten classics such as E.T., Burning Desire and Super 3D Noah’s Ark. It’s all about the graphics now, man – it’s all about the graphics.



Step Four:

“All new games are just clones of old ones.”

■ There are times when even the most zealous old-school gamer has to take off their rose-coloured glasses for a moment and reluctantly admit that some new games can actually be quite good... even if they're not coded by a lone garage programmer over one sleepless weekend of Jolt Cola and Domino's Pizza. This is where Step Four of our five-step plan comes into action. You see, it's quite reasonable to assume that the cogs of corporate hegemony are capable of grinding out good game ideas because the fact is that they can simply steal old ones and redress them in their precious polygons. So, like, Diablo for example? That's just Telengard with better graphics. Tomb Raider is simply Last Ninja with extra breasts, EverQuest is a glorified MUD and every bizarre Japanese game ever released can be traced directly back to Wizball. Now you don't have to drop that haughty disdain you've been cultivating when faced with a quality new release — after all, odds are it's probably just another Pac-Man clone!



Step Five:

“Games are much better when you don't have to play them!”

■ The final step to true elder gamer enlightenment is also the most important. In order to remain a true old-school gamer, you must NEVER actually play any of the old games you spend so much time rhapsodising about. There's a marked difference between fond memories and uncompromising reality, and this distinction is never more evident than in the case of old videogames. The unfortunate fact is that most old games are pretty crap. Actually playing them will simply make this reality uncomfortably evident and hinder your ability to talk them up with the maniacal zeal to which all old-school gamers become accustomed. Heed our advice: playing old games is dangerous and will inevitably lead to a crisis of faith. Instead, stick to playing new ones and vigorously complaining about them on every gaming forum you've ever heard of.

After all, this is the tradition of the old-school.

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PlayStation 2





Alien Quadrilogy

MA15+, FOX HOME ENTERTAINMENT

Holy crap on a stick — if this is an example of what we can expect for special edition boxed sets in the future there are going to be a lot of poor people. Not content with

simply digitally remastering the famous film series for DVD release, Fox has gone the whole hog and included both the original cut and a special edition cut of each of the four films as well as a massive five extra discs crammed full of special features.



UNBEARABLE TENSION

Although it's fairly common for reviewers to say that there are far too many special features to list in such a limited space, in the case of the Quadrilogy it's the truth — there are hours and hours of features (though most of the individual features are no longer than half an hour) so simply listing them would take up the rest of the page. Without going into too much detail, the features cover all aspects of the development of each of the films from conception through post production, and include screen tests for various characters, special effects work and a number of talking head style features with the various cast members about their experiences during the making of the four films.

Although all of the material in the box set is excellent, including the often unfairly maligned *Alien Resurrection*, the real star of the show is the new special edition of



the movie that started the series. Although the additional scenes don't really add any more to the rather simplistic haunted house style plot they do serve to heighten the already almost unbearable tension. It's impossible to give away any specific examples without lessening their impact so you'll just have to believe us when we say it makes one of the greatest sci-fi/horror films of all time that little bit greater.

Daniel Wilks

MOVIE: 9 / EXTRAS: 10



Scratch

MAGNA PACIFIC, E (EXEMPT FROM CLASSIFICATION)

There have been some great documentaries about hip hop in the past, but *Scratch* takes the focus onto the technical skills of the DJ, and is a must see for anyone into hip hop. Starting out with the original innovators such as Grand Wizard Theodore, Cool Herc and DXT and moving on to more contemporary artists such as Qbert, Mix Master Mike, Cut Chemist and DJ Shadow, *Scratch* explores the cultural significance of hip hop and scratching, and the journey from underground block parties to turntablists.

If there's one criticism we'd level at *Scratch*, it's that it skips from the old school to the modern day a little too quickly. The period when DJs were first on the bill and the MCs were

second is almost absent, with DJ legends Cash Money and Jazzy Jeff only making the bonus material. Even so, *Scratch* is worth purchasing for the footage of Shadow digging for records and Roc Raida ripping shit up at the DMC championships alone.

Bonus material includes several sections that were cut from the documentary, as well as longer interviews with Afrika Bambaataa, DJ Shadow, DJ Premier, DJ Cash Money and DJ Jazzy Jeff.

Cam Shea

MOVIE: 8 / EXTRAS: 5



Narc

PARAMOUNT, R 18+

Ray Liotta is a criminally underused actor, continuously landing roles that simply call on him to act a little crazy or chew on the scenery. When given a role he can really sink his teeth into and some adequate direction, Liotta can turn out some truly amazing performances, with Henry Oak being one of them. Oak is a hard nosed cop with no care for the rules if they stand in the way of getting his man, but rather than coming across as a simple loose cannon, Liotta transforms the character into a truly driven man, determined to clear the name of a dead friend and punish those responsible for his death. In essence Oak is the most pure of

policemen, not worried by the vagaries of law, concerned instead only with justice. Although Jason Patrick has a bigger role than Liotta he is really more of a supporting character in this unrelentingly dark tale of cops gone bad, drug addiction and the pursuit of the truth, and through it finding redemption. The depressing mood of the film may turn away a number of punters expecting some action but stick with it — this is one cop story you won't soon forget.

Daniel Wilks

MOVIE: 8 / EXTRAS: 7



Six Feet Under SEASON 1

4 DISC BOX SET

WARNER BROS, M15+

Six Feet Under is yet another wonderful HBO production, and one of the most refreshing series to hit our screens in recent years. In many ways it's based around a familiar dysfunctional family dynamic, but what sets it apart is just how engaging every single character is. Patriarch Nathaniel dies a few minutes into the first episode but hangs around for the rest of the season with a bemused look on his face. The mother Ruth has been secretly having an affair and must deal with guilt, grief and the chance to rediscover herself. Daughter Claire is a 16 year-old underachiever who's recently discovered sex and drugs. Uptight son David has ignored his dreams and stayed within the family

business, and is secretly gay. Older son Nate escaped to Seattle but is now back in search of meaning and seeing the cryptic Brenda (played with great verve by Rachel Griffiths). Oh, and did we mention that the Fisher family runs a funeral home?

Six Feet Under is morbid, darkly amusing and wonderfully surreal at times, but it's the fact that it's character driven that makes it so compelling. Extras include a 20 minute behind the scenes featurette, a 15 minute making of featurette, a deleted scene from the pilot and two audio commentaries by series creator Alan Ball.

Cam Shea

MOVIE: 10 / EXTRAS: 4



Bowling for Columbine

AV CHANNEL, M15+

Bowling for Columbine is an intelligent and biting documentary that tackles the very serious question of why America has so many fatalities related to fire arms. It's a fascinating film, as it follows Michael Moore's own thought patterns on guns and gun control — debunking myths along the way and coming to an understanding about the "culture of fear" that's bred through the sensationalist American media. Highlights include taking victims of the Columbine shooting to return the bullets still lodged in their bodies to the K-Mart that sold them, the cartoon depicting America's glorious past, and Michael's adventures in the seemingly utopian society of Canada.

This special edition has a wealth of extras, including Moore's thoughts

on the reactions to the film and his acceptance speech at the Oscars (footage of which, incidentally, the Academy wouldn't let him use — so he reads it out again). There are also interviews, two audio commentaries (from an intern and receptionist), a segment from the Awful Truth II and an emotional return to Littleton, Colorado, where the Columbine shootings took place.

Cam Shea

MOVIE: 9 / EXTRAS: 7



Alexandra's Project

FOX HOME ENTERTAINMENT, MA 15+

Rolf de Heer's newest foray into the world of Australian society is something of a mixed bag, being full of excellent dialogue and amazingly brave performances (from both Gary Sweet and Helen Buday as the titular Alexandra), but it's also incredibly confused in content. The idea of the film is obvious from the outset — Gary Sweet is a typical Aussie bloke in an emotionally abusive marriage and on the evening of his birthday, his long suffering wife, Alexandra gives him a taste of his own medicine. Unfortunately, whilst maintaining this nihilistic momentum, the film fails to keep a narrative cohesion and the viewer is left wondering if de Heer was aiming to make a

feminist film of spousal retribution, a straight psycho-thriller about a woman pushed too far by her neglectful but undeserving husband or simply a story about a mad woman deciding it's high time to ruin the life of the man who cares for her. It's all well and good for a writer/director to allow the viewer to make up their own minds about the themes of the film but when the end result is so muddled you can't help but think that de Heer may not have been entirely sure himself.

Daniel Wilks

MOVIE: 6 / EXTRAS: 0

Christmas with the Simpsons

FOX HOME ENTERTAINMENT, PG

Whilst this Simpsons release actually has some semblance of an appropriate theme across the five episodes (as opposed to the seemingly random four on "Risky Business") we're still left thinking (again) that Fox are just milking this landmark cartoon series for all it's worth. The episodes are certainly good, but the reality is that two are essentially dead weight. "Simpsons Roasting on an Open Fire" was already on the Season 1 box set, which no self respecting fan would be without, and the classic "Mr Plow" is from Season 4, so we can expect to get our grubby hands on that in juicy boxed form within a year.

This leaves us with three episodes, which hardly justifies paying a premium. The remaining eps are season 9's "Miracle on Evergreen Terrace" where the Simpsons discover "It's a Wonderful Life"; season 11's "Grift of the Magi" starring the irrepressible Gary Coleman as himself and the toy-killing Funzo ("now, let's see... this'll make three Christmases I saved versus eight I ruined... two were kind of a draw..."); and season 13's "She of Little Faith" where Lisa becomes a Buddhist. As per normal with these single DVD compilations there are no decent extras to speak of.

Cam Shea

MOVIE: 5 / EXTRAS: 1

NieA Under 7

PRODUCTION COMPANY: TRIANGLE STAFF
GENRE: COMEDY

Set in the not too distant future, NieA Under 7 is an offbeat comedy series about the uncertain times faced by a young woman who's struggling to make ends meet. Mayuko juggles several part time jobs, barely scrounging together enough money to send herself to college while also renting a modest room upstairs from a public bath house. There's just a hitch: her life is complicated on a day to day basis by NieA, an alien girl who's essentially taken up residence in her closet as a freeloader.

THE ALIEN UNDERCLASS

NieA is quite possibly the most annoying being on the face of the planet. While poor Mayuko counts every last penny she has before she can even agree to go on a social outing, NieA clears the house of every last morsel of food and destroys practically everything she touches. Any sane individual would have booted NieA's arse into the next suburb without a second

thought, but Mayuko's tolerance reveals an inner strength and kindness that gives us genuine hope for her existence. Each episode reveals something different about the class system and where we all fit in — where our old friends are, what they're up to and what people do just to get by. It's an appropriate foil to the alien underclass who dwell in a local meteorite crater, where most of the aliens live.

Being a suburban story with a very slight sci-fi twist, NieA Under 7 isn't a series with many bells and whistles, but shows that an anime needn't be outrageous to be funny. Some of the funniest moments in our lives come from the most ordinary, everyday and mundane occurrences.

ANIMATION: 8 / PLOT: 6
OVERALL: 7



[above] I think they want their noses back



Astro Boy

PRODUCTION COMPANY: SONY PICTURES ENTERTAINMENT, TEZUKA PRODUCTIONS
GENRE: SCI-FI, ACTION

Astro Boy, a flying robot boy with the power of 100,000 horses, became Japan's first animated 30-minute feature in 1953. The black and white animated series, which captured the imagination of a nation, was brought to Western shores in 1963. The series was remade in 1980 — it's the series most Hyper readers who watched the ABC re-runs ad infinitum should be familiar with. 50 years on from Astro's debut, and also to commemorate his fictional birthday on April 6, 2003, a brand new series was produced of the hero that hardcore anime fans like to call Mighty Atom.

WONDROUS SUPER-POWERS

Several story elements have been changed, but the core messages behind Astro Boy remain the same. Set in a futuristic world where humans and robots live amongst each other, Astro Boy forms an empathetic bridge for better

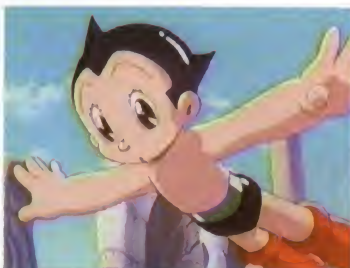
relations between humans and robots, finding a peaceful solution to all the problems he faces despite his wondrous super-powers. Parallels can be drawn between Astro Boy's adventures and many real-world injustices, making his stories all the more powerful.

Some of the differences old-time fans will notice is that Dr. Elefun is now Dr. O'Shay; and Uran, who is renamed Zoran, has the ability to talk to animals. The quality of animation has been updated with all of the latest computerised effects and it looks absolutely gorgeous throughout. It'll be a definite kick for anime connoisseurs who know how the designs of creator Osamu Tezuka have influenced everything from Giant Robo and Megaman to Ninja Resurrection.

ANIMATION: 9 / PLOT: 8
OVERALL: 8



[above] The coolest Anime haircut ever. I just can't make fun of it.



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Two of the best games released at Christmas would have to be Ubi Soft's **Beyond Good & Evil** and **Prince of Persia: The Sands of Time**. Both are awesome games that were previously only available on PS2. However, this year (February, to be precise) they'll also be hitting the Xbox, and to celebrate the occasion, Ubi Soft and Hyper would like to offer you the chance to win your very own **Limited Edition green Xbox system and a copy of each game!** Five runners-up will also win a copy of each game for Xbox! All you need to do to be in with a chance to win, is subscribe from this issue of Hyper. For \$50 you'll get Hyper for 12 months (that's a saving of \$33) and you could also win this awesome prize!

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Q. The first videogame I ever played was...

Hanimex Tennis. It was basically Pong, and I spent all Christmas day playing it. From here on in, I was hooked. We all started our gaming addiction somewhere, and whilst the first game you played may not be your most memorable gaming experience, for most of us it is where the medium got its hooks in. Let's take a look at where a selection of Hyper readers got their first videogaming thrill...



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...

? "The best RPG ever is..."

Responses will be printed in Hyper #126



MAIL THE HYPER FORUM:

78 Renwick St. Redfern, NSW 2016 Australia
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.

HAIL TO THE SPIKY BLUE ONE

The first game I ever played is also, in my opinion, one of the greatest ever made.

At the tender age of seven I experienced something truly incredible. It was a blue hedgehog and a yellow mutant fox. Reading that sentence, I'm amazed that I even looked twice at the TV, let alone sat down and played it. But I did and what would follow is my awakening to the glories of videogames and the SEGA experience.

From that first hit I was hooked. Several months later I was fortunate enough to have a console for my own, and Sonic 2 would be the most played game on it. Sonic would go on to be my favourite franchise of 16 bit-dom and transform me completely and utterly into a SEGA fanboy. Such was the profound effect of that first play.

Sonic Team is the reason I played videogames yesterday, why I play them today and why I'll play them tomorrow. All hail to the Spiky Blue One!

Anticipating Sonic Heroes,
Andronicarse

A STRANGE DEVICE

Dear god that's a tough question! Can all you guys at Hyper answer this? If so I'm surprised. After literally days of combing the deepest recesses of my mind I found what I believe to be the answer. Long ago (15 years ago in fact) an uncle of mine lent the family a strange device that hooked up to the TV and used what appeared to

be 5 1/2 inch floppy disks. It wasn't until years later I found out that it was a Commodore 64. There were literally TONS of games for this and for the life of me I can't remember many! I'm fairly certain however the first one (and the one that stays in my mind the most) was Head Over Heels. An interesting top down isometric pseudo-3D platformer/puzler. I read that there is even a fairly recent remake of it. It was fun... however I had a lot of trouble remembering it. Why? Because this wasn't the game that got me into gaming. I didn't play the game as a gamer would. I played it as someone who didn't have any interest in games. I believe a better Forum subject would have been "What game really got you into gaming?" In which case it would have been Super Mario Bros for the NES, which is what I was going to instinctively write down.
Thomasuwo

REAL LIFE TURTLES

The year was 1990. I was in the third grade at primary school, a time where video game advertising was more frequent than reruns of M*A*S*H. More on that later. Anyway, this kid who I was friends with brought his NES to school for show-and-tell, and Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles (the first game). I remember my teacher would let us go and play it in class time and at lunchtimes as well. There we were, this group of kids crowded around a TV screen and this great game. The storyline basically followed that of the cartoon; travel through New York and the sewers, beating up on

Foot Clan, Bebop and Rocksteady and of course, the evil Shredder. Oh, and don't forget April O'Neill; in the cartoon she always needed rescuing, and the game was no different. I was a massive fan of the Turtles back then, and I'd watch the original cartoon every weekday. Take note that I don't give a crap about the new cartoon, cos it sucks. Which brings me to the TV ad for the Turtles. At the end of the ad they'd say "the only turtles you'll find on Sega... are these" and they show a Sega Mega Drive with real-life turtles crawling all over it. One of the funniest ads I had ever seen. Sadly I never did buy a NES, but recently I have been able to revisit the game (thru emulation), and it's still bloody hard!

Protis

SWIMSUIT CALENDAR

I would have to say that I remember getting my Atari 2600 and playing Ping Pong for the first time, I was completely transfixed by 2 rectangle blocks and a smaller block acting as the ball. Getting excited by the fact it was going faster and faster with every hit you were trying to make sure that the little block never made it past you. I was amazed that something so basic like that could have been so much fun!

Since those days I've played nearly every system that has come out and I still get a buzz from playing games. I'm 30 now and still going strong.

Whether it's Ping-Pong in the early days to GTA nowadays, games are and will be a matter for all to absorb themselves into another

world and let a fantasy be their realm in their bedroom. Must get that swimsuit calendar down.

Zoomer_73

ADDICTIVE RPG

Dear Hyper,

The first game I ever played was on Super Nintendo. It was nothing but Secret of Mana. Secret of Mana was — and is — a truly addictive and great game and I am very pleased that it was the first game I ever played. This game had everything from upgrading magic weapons to magical spells. Also the bosses and the exciting, addictive RPG gameplay. This game won my attention for so many great months. This game took 70 hours at least, even for the most experienced gamers. Whoever made this game should definitely make another one with top-notch graphics but keeping that great addictive gameplay.

Alex Lane

PUNCH YOUR TV

If there ever was a game that was frustratingly impossible, yet

frighteningly playable, Snokie on the Commodore 64 was it.

It's bullshit hard, and very unforgiving. It's a mystery to me why I actually enjoyed other games after having played it. I've thrown joysticks, learned new swear words, and developed an appreciation for unfortunate penguins thanks to this (very addictive) piece of software.

Snokie was a penguin on a mission to find his mother. And he gave you f**k all time to do it in. Requiring reflexes sharper than any pod racer would dream about, your 3 lives could (and more often than not, would) be depleted in under 30 seconds.

Keeping you constantly under the hammer, and your heartbeat racing throughout your short-lived attempt at rescue, you had to jump pot holes, slide down slopes, avoid rolling boulders, and time iceberg jumps to perfection, all while your lines of time got snorted up quicker than a crack-addict's last hit... with checkpoints that popped up seldomly enough for you to have just enough time to shit your pants at the next set of fast paced objectives to tackle.

Sliding into a ditch, or having

cute, young Snokie set his pixelated foot into icy water will kill our hero... bringing you face to face with a winking skeleton, eager to poke fun at your stuff up, making you want to punch your TV set for displaying such a smart ass.

But (like any old classic C-64 game) he kept you coming back for more and more punishment. In fact, I owe it to this game teaching me my first words as a child, "just one more go."

Anon

GAMING HISTORY

Gee that question brings back memories... and I think the first game I ever played was Mario and the 6 golden coins on Game Boy, or maybe it was something on the Atari... Nope it was definitely Mario, and then once I gained my inner gamer I shifted to the good old NES! It was then that I found Zelda. I had always enjoyed watching my Mum play Zelda (she was a pro, mind you it was the only game she played) but discovered there was much joy in playing it myself. We then got a N64 as well as a Game Boy Colour and now I have a GameCube. Yay for

gaming history, I wouldn't be the same without it!

Thanks,

Robyn Grellet

4 VERSIONS OF PONG

Easy, it was Pong. I remember being a young fella, and my Uncle showing off his new TV, with this amazing in-built game, Pong. So simple, but so fun. My sister and I played for hours, only occasionally throwing at each other the control pads that were wired directly into the TV.

It wasn't much later, that my Dad bought us a 12-in-1 video game system. It came complete with 2 controllers and a light gun. The 12 games consisted of 4 versions of Pong, 4 Shooting games (shoot a white square as it bounced around the screen, speeding up the more accurate you were), and finally, my favourites, 4 motorbike games, where you had to accelerate your motorbike over a ramp to jump some barrels (maybe crates?).

Today, these games would look ancient, however I spent many hours enjoying them... until I got my first Commodore 64!

Ben Jammin

Shit
^
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EXAM TIME

Hi Guys,

I had some questions that I put in test format — enjoy.

Problem Solving

Q1. Johnny has a shelf that's 35 cm tall but his Hyper collection measures 45 cm tall, what should Johnny do with the remaining old issues of Hyper? He realises the importance & historical significance of these old issues but also understands that knowing that Revolution X managed an overall score of 62% in March 96 on SNES is fairly irrelevant.

Q2. Johnny is watching GMA when he notices a product by the name of "Arcade Action". It seems to be a cheap and quick attempt to rip off the unsuspecting public by promising hundreds of games at one low, low price. It is apparent to Johnny that he could probably download all these games for nothing without buying this useless item. What should Johnny do?

Multiple Choice

The "It's good to play together" slogan is the brainchild of

- A. The Hitler Youth
- B. Cam Shea, sensing the opportunity of an threesome
- C. Michael Jackson
- D. Eduardo Rosini, Head of Xbox Europe

The average Hyper reader believes

that "Girl Gamers"

- A. Don't exist
- B. Are so ugly that they shouldn't exist
- C. Need to wear more skimpy outfits "Shake it baby"
- D. Girl?

Language

1. Does Hyper employ any Taiwanese children in the textile industry at minimum wage?

Translation: Does Hyper produce any t-shirts, caps or anything like that?

Chris "inanimate carbon rod" Clifford

Dear Chris,

Agh, my brain hurts. No t-shirts or caps, sorry. We're not into that slave labour thing.

FREAK SHOW

Dear Hyper,

Is it just me or is the world a strange and dangerous place for gamers these days? I am an 18 year-old female who is shunned by every one else who thinks they are "normal" and I am not because I am more interested in games than getting around looking like a "hooker". Just because I like games everyone else thinks I'm some sorta freak or something. Well not everyone, the few gamers that I know think it's great, but how did the gamer get this image of being a nerd or outcast? Or am I the only one who has noticed? But then again

your email is "freakscene" so maybe we are a bunch of weirdo freaks!

Oh and by the way Mario Kart Double Dash kicks ass!

Regards,

Robyn Grellet

Dear Robyn,

Yes, join our elite group of gaming freaks. Shunned from society and sunlight, we'll always be here for you.

BROTHERS OF THE BOOT

Ai'yo Hyper,

I gots to know which part of Italy would Mario and Luigi be from? Cuz if they were from Milan that'd not only be ironic (the fashion capital of Europe) but one could be an AC Milan fan (Mario) and the other an Inter fan (Luigi). Heh heh and Princess Toadstool would wanna be miles away when the two sides face off at the San Siro. Man I love football.

BluntMan

Dear Bluntman,

Now you're just being silly... Mario would obviously support AS Roma and Luigi is clearly a Juventus fan.

SIZE MATTERS NOT

Hyper,

After reading a few of your reviews recently, I began to think about the whole reviewing process. It strikes me as a difficult process to go through. How exactly does one rank the qualities that determine a games final score?

For example, with your Zone of Enders 2 review, you made mention of the shortness of the game, and regarded that as negative. However, what if a truly innovative game is published with a game time of about 10 hours and at the same time a game that has a playtime of 50 hours but is not excellent is published? Do you rank these games similarly or do you think about whether a truly excellent game albeit with a short playtime is better than a very good game with long playtime? I guess I'm just getting at that I think fun is the most important part of games, and that games reviewers and games manufacturers need to remember this, after all, we play games to enjoy ourselves don't we?

Cheers,

Nathan

Dear Nathan,

A game can be short and still be great — usually if it is replayable. Invisible War is a good example of that this issue. The length of a game is not that important to us if the excellent gameplay is there. Of course, it's the short games that



[above] Kami spots where the Hyper crew do a bit of moonlighting.

lack any kind of challenge that really irritates.

TO 3D OR NOT 3D?

Hey to all you Hyper people,

Graphics is what I'm here to talk about.

As I flip through the 10th birthday mag (I know I'm behind here, but I read these things in godless amounts, I've re-read almost all the ones I own). Anywho, I got to the section where you interview all different game producers and designers, and something got me. Almost all of them thought that 3D graphics are great, like it's the best thing that's ever hit gaming...

I have a problem with it... it's not that I don't like it, it's just... all style, no substance. When I play games, even crud ones, I try to find something good about them... but somehow, most of the new games are throwing me off. I'm losing that same passion I had for "new-age" gaming, and I start playing my old SNES again.

I'm sucked in by Super Metroid at the moment... Super Metroid, such an awesome game, even without great graphics, it just sucks me in... In fact, I'd much rather play the old one than Metroid Prime.

When I play a 3D game, I feel uninspired... I'm not motivated to keep playing, I just yawn and put down the controller, mainly because it lacks the substance that games had back when graphics weren't everything.

Here is my idea: bring back the old feeling... bring back great storylines, characters, and vibes. Push boundaries; explore what gaming and gaming worlds have to offer, don't rush games out in an attempt to make more money... Spend more time, make it worth my 90 dollars...

That's all I have to say, and I don't even mind if this letter isn't printed, as long as somebody reads it and gets where I'm coming from, nods and says "yeah". Then at least I've gotten through to one person.

Thanks for the time, and keep making this great mag.

Nathan C

Dear Nathan, (nods) yeah...

CAPTION THIS!

PART 49 WINNER

Our winning caption this month (yes it was Part 49, not part 50 d'oh) comes from **Ian Haldin**. Good on ya, Ian.



"Gee, it looks like your girlfriend's a real dog!"

LETTER OF THE MONTH

"THIS BELONGS IN A MUSEUM!"

Yo Hyper,

I just read with great interest your article on abandonware. For mine, the ESA's stance on what is perceived to be piracy is a well intentioned although premature and slightly shit code of practice.

What I'm about to say may sound incredibly naive, but why shouldn't a forum of all the old games imaginable be set up for public access? Simply protecting copyright of property is, in the end, not valid enough for me to justify locking these old works of art away from public access, just so that whoever owns the rights to these can (but probably won't) make a profit sometime in the unspecified future.

By fiercely protecting stagnant copyright laws, they risk shutting a good portion of potential gamers away from the roots of the industry and oh, good god, the pure gold that some of us got to experience on our C64s and Amigas.

Why not create an international forum where all these games are available for download? Done

correctly, the owners of the games' licences could still make a tidy profit and people could understand the roots of some of today's great titles. It would also be a real eye-opener, and proof for the generations to come that gaming really did evolve from challenging and fun playability, and the graphics weren't (as) important.

Believe me, there will be more money to be made in a general forum that provides access to games for the gaming public than in waiting for a single title to become the new coke.

Last points - believe it or not, videogames have built up their own massive following. Protecting static laws at the very possible expense of the culture's growth is sad. Sorry for the obvious bias, but it's where I'm at. Also, the less said about the 'undermining respect for intellectual property' argument, the better. It's bullshit. That sort of behaviour (downloading current games and ignoring the rights of the developer) is obviously out of line and warrants prosecution.

Do the people who own a Picasso

keep it to themselves? Well, obviously some do, but others are willing to sell or donate their pieces to these things called museums, so that the public can enjoy and appreciate the art for everything that it is - a link to the past.

Dave

*Dear Dave,
An official online videogame museum - which also lets you download the games to play - would be a sensational thing. However, as usual, getting the various corporations to agree on it would be near impossible. Let's hope the world is sane enough to one day ensure that the classics aren't lost forever.*

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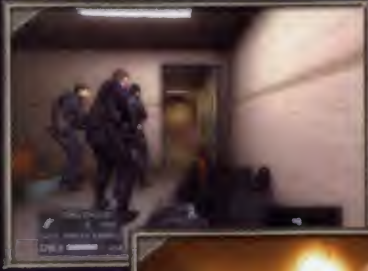


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XBOX LIVE



The Official Australian Games Chart

Compiled by GfK in association with the IEAA

TOP 10

PlayStation 2 Games Over \$50

W/E 7 DEC 2003
RETAIL SALES

- ◆ Need For Speed:Underground Racing
- ▲ Medal Of Honor Rising Sun Action
- ▲ Tony Hawk Underground Sports
- ▼ Eyetoy: Play Compilation
- ▲ True Crime Streets Of LA Adventure
- ▼ LOTR Return King Adventure
- ▲ Simpson's Hit & Run Adventure
- ▲ WWE Smckdn Hre Cmes Pain Sports
- Mega 4 Pack Of Games Compilation
- ▼ Dragonball Z: Budokai 2 Action

TOP 10

PlayStation Games Over \$30

W/E 7 DEC 2003
RETAIL SALES

- ▲ YuGiOh Forbidden Memories Strategy
- ▼ Beyblade Let It Rip Adventure
- ▲ Hi Potter Chamber Of Secrets Adventure
- ▲ Simpson's Wrestling Sports
- ▼ FIFA 2004 Sports
- ◆ Gmd Thft Auto Collectors Ed Adventure
- ◆ Disney Triple Pack Adventure
- ◆ Bond: TWINE Pack Action
- ◆ Dragonball Z: Ult Battle 22 Action
- Digimon World 3 Adventure

TOP 10

Game Cube Games Over \$50

W/E 7 DEC 2003
RETAIL SALES

- ◆ Mario Kart Double Dash Racing
- ▲ Need For Speed:Underground Racing
- Legend Of Zelda:Wind Waker RPG
- ▲ Dragonball Z: Budokai Action
- Mario Party 5 Family
- ▼ Simpson's Hit & Run Adventure
- ▼ LOTR Return King Adventure
- ▲ Soul Calibur 2 Action
- ▲ Animl Crssing w/Mem Crd 59 Strategy
- Medal Of Honor Rising Sun Action

TOP 10

Xbox Games Over \$50

W/E 7 DEC 2003
RETAIL SALES

- ◆ Top Spin Sports
- ▲ Halo - Combat Evolved Action
- ▲ FIFA 2004 Sports
- Str Wrs Knights Old Republic RPG
- ▼ Crimson Skies 2 Simulator
- ▼ Buffy: Chaos Bleeds Adventure
- ▲ Conflict Desert Storm 2 Baghdad Action
- ▼ Finding Nemo Adventure
- ▼ NBA Live 2004 Sports
- ◆ Tom Clancy's Splintr Cell Cisc Adventure

TOP 10

PC Games Over \$20

W/E 7 DEC 2003
RETAIL SALES

- ◆ The Sims Makin' Magic Strategy
- ▲ The Sims Deluxe Strategy
- ▼ Need For Speed:Underground Racing
- ▼ Call Of Duty Action
- ◆ The Sims Superstar Strategy
- ▲ The Sims Unleashed Strategy
- ▲ Finding Nemo Adventure Adventure
- ▼ Nemo Underwater World Fun Adventure
- ▼ Age Mythology:Titans Exp Pk Strategy
- Str Wrs Knights Old Republic RPG

TOP 10

Game Boy Advance Games Over \$30

W/E 7 DEC 2003
RETAIL SALES

- ◆ Pokmon Sapphire RPG
- ◆ Pokmon Ruby RPG
- ◆ LOTR Return King Adventure
- ▲ YuGiOh World Wide Strategy
- Game & Watch Gallery Adv Compilation
- ▲ Finding Nemo Adventure
- ▼ YuGiOh Dungeon Dice Mnstrs Strategy
- ▲ Dragonball Z: Legacy Goku 2 Action
- ▼ Super Mario Advance 4:SMB3 Adventure
- ▼ Final Fantasy Tactics RPG

TOP 10

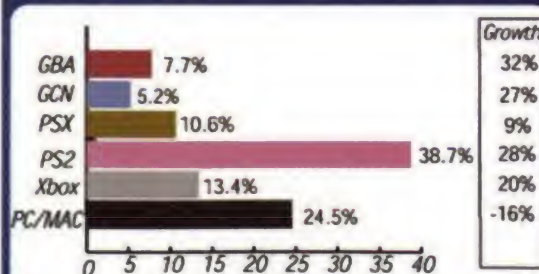
All Full Priced Games

W/E 7 DEC 2003
RETAIL SALES

- ◆ Need For Speed:Underground PlayStation 2
- ▲ Medal Of Honor Rising Sun PlayStation 2
- ▲ Tony Hawk Underground PlayStation 2
- ▼ Eyetoy: Play PlayStation 2
- ▲ True Crime Streets Of LA PlayStation 2
- ▲ Need For Speed:Underground Xbox
- ▼ LOTR Return King PlayStation 2
- The Sims Makin' Magic PC/MAC
- ▲ Simpson's Hit & Run PlayStation 2
- ▼ Mario Kart Double Dash GameCube

MARKET WATCH All Games by Platform

NOV 03 vs OCT 03
RETAIL SALES



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



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Next Issue:



MACHINIMA

The fascinating rise of filmmaking using computer games

PLUS! Maximo: Army of Zin, I-Ninja, Wrath Unleashed, Broken Sword: The Sleeping Dragon, ARC: Twilight of the Spirits, kill.switch and lots more.

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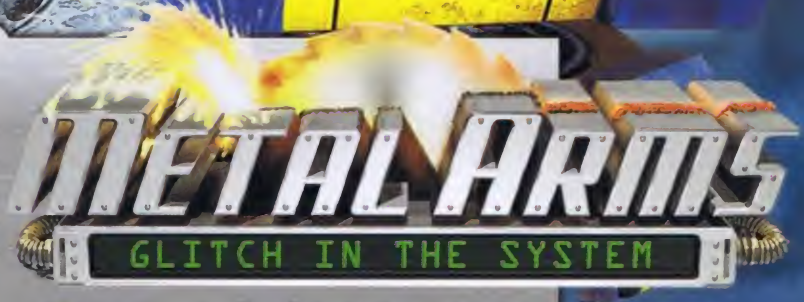
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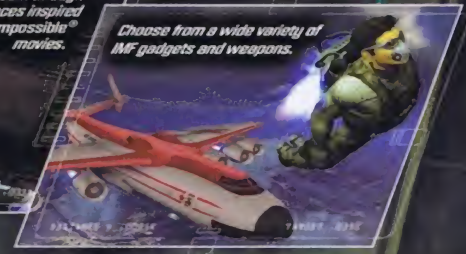
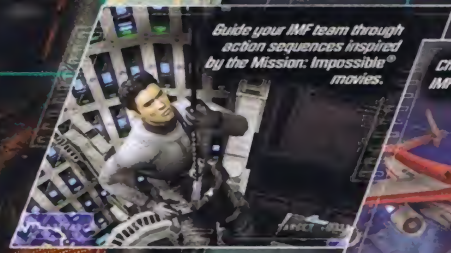
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Publisher	Developer	Rating	Platforms

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PlayStation 2



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