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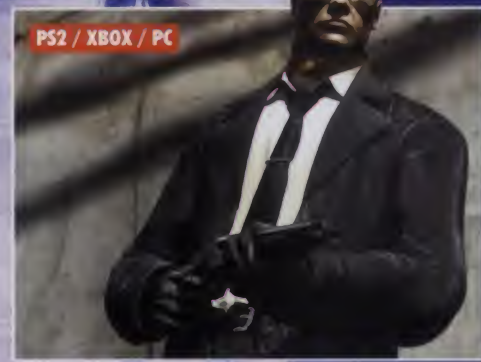
FINAL FANTASY X-2

Why you shouldn't miss this bizarre sequel to the PS2's best RPG...



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GTA 3 killer



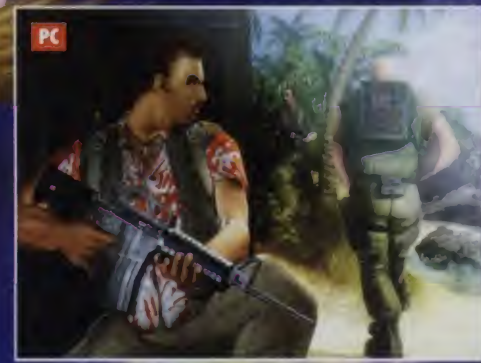
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SPLINTER CELL 2

PANDORA TOMORROW
All the sequel's secrets

ISSUE 125
MARCH '04



next GAMING

FIGHT CLUB:
THE GAME

Sorry, we can't talk about it

THE WORLD OF
MACHINIMA

Filmmaking with videogames

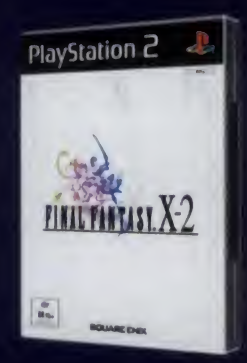
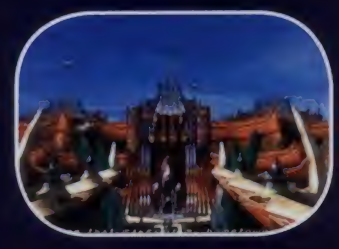
WHY SHOULD THE BAD GUYS HAVE ALL THE FUN?



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Publisher		Developer	Rating	Platforms			
 							

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Official Australian Xbox Magazine

"Near perfect. Combining a hilarious single-player experience with a solid multiplayer mode, it's pretty hard to ask for more - 8/10"

Official Australian PlayStation Magazine

"Bursting with energy and a strong sense of humour... Gorgeously detailed environments that are as stylish as they are expansive... The game's cult status seems assured"

Australian gamesTM

"Hugely entertaining... Few who sample its cheeky robot-blasting will leave unimpressed - 4 Stars"

Sydney Morning Herald



www.metalarms.com

**16 SPLINTER CELL:
PANDORA TOMORROW**

Don't be afraid of the dark...



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HYPER»

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WRITE TO HYPER!

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EDITORIAL

>> If my sister's barbie dolls had costumes as cool as those worn by Rikku, Yuna and Paine in Final Fantasy X-2 (see review page 38), I might have been more inclined to play with them when I was a little tacker. Instead, I just chewed their feet off and shoved them down the back of the sofa.

Final Fantasy X-2 may incorporate an element of playing dress-ups into its combat system, but once you get past the initial embarrassment of checking out the different outfits, you realise just what a great game it is and start to really enjoy leveling up the different job classes. This is the first direct sequel in the Final Fantasy series and a somewhat bizarre experience, but it's one of the most fun RPGs you'll probably play this year, such is the strength of the characters and the gameworld. It would be great to see some Machinima (see feature page 28) made with the Final Fantasy X assets...

Eliot Fish >> Editor

You've played the spectacular game, now experience
Final Fantasy Unlimited on 



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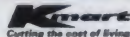
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Check out FINAL FANTASY X2 - Out Now through Electronic Arts

News >>

IN THE NEWS: CES run-down ■ Silent Hill 4: The Room ■ WWX: Rumble Rose ■ Jak III in development and more



FUTURE

CES 2004

Not just for Tech gurus anymore!

While it may not be as exciting as Computex in Taiwan, the Consumer Electronics Show (CES) is still the largest technology exhibition in the US, held annually at the Las Vegas Convention Center and featuring more than 2,300 exhibitors, each fighting for the chance to get their products out to a broader audience. In what can only be described as a good thing after the disappointment that was Comdex, CES has recently announced that the 2004 outing (8-11th January) has been the most successful yet, with over 129,000 industry professionals in attendance. What's all the fuss about, you ask?

MOVING TOWARDS A "CONNECTED PLANET"

Well, brushing aside the copious hardware releases and newfangled TV technologies on offer, brandishing no more than a notebook and digi-cam we took to the floor in search of anything and everything gaming related. Having

braved the crowds, we're pleased to be able to report back with some very interesting findings. Now, you can't say we don't look out for you!

Day 1 of CES was dominated by Microsoft, with Bill Gates' keynote speech signalling the opening of the show. Gates' speech revolved around his vision of the year ahead in consumer electronics, which naturally included a plethora of Microsoft-enabled hardware such as the new Xbox Media Center Extender Kit. Put simply, this kit adds a host of multimedia features to your Xbox, including the ability to connect to a Media Center-enabled PC in order to transmit and access digital music and photographs, watch TV and even access DVDs. Exact pricing and release information is as yet unknown, however, we'll be sure to keep you updated on any progress. Gates did not mention anything new regarding the Xbox 2 in his speech; however, the release of the Media Center Extender Kit is a sure sign of things to come.

CINEMATIC GAMING - FINALLY A REALITY?

Did you ever imagine that you'd be playing a game of Doom 3 or Half-Life 2 on a 180" display before, say, 2010? Neither did we, but Toshiba surprised us all with a product at CES that allows those fortunate enough to a) have a money tree growing in their backyard or b) strike oil in the middle-east, to enjoy such an experience today with the MT800 DLP projector. Using the same technology as your local cinema, the device offers a 2200:1 contrast ratio (read: awesome image quality), a resolution of 1280x720 and a seven segment colour wheel. This, coupled with the in-built image enhancer results in true cinematic image quality, however, at \$US8000 it'll obviously be well out of reach for most gamers.

Similarly, in an attempt to standardise audio/visual content in games, the previously cinema-exclusive THX has made some excellent progress since we last heard from it in October 2003, with many games such as Need for Speed: Underground and MOH: Rising Sun having a THX-approved logo plastered across their packaging. Into the future, standardisation can only mean better things for gaming, such as 360-degree surround sound

and on-screen visuals that are noticeably better than regular stereo TV. Are you drooling yet?

VIA JOINS THE CONSOLE FRAY

One of the big announcements of CES was VIA and Apex Digital's entry into the console market with the ApexXtreme "personal gaming console". Featuring an Apex Digital DVD player, a VIA 1.4GHz CPU, 256MB of memory, an in-built hard drive and a DirectX 9.0-supporting graphics chipset from S3, this console is certainly more powerful than the current crop, but is it better? Well, it's firstly important to note that the console only plays regular PC games (installed automatically using DISCover technology), and therefore needs to be coupled with a keyboard/mouse combo which can be connected to one of the six USB ports on the unit. Additionally, being PC-based, don't be expecting any multiplayer support (unless it's over a LAN or online, of course), as only one person is able to play per machine. Furthermore, while it's technically more powerful than the Xbox and PS2, it's certainly no match for even a mid-range PC, so until we see it run the likes of Doom 3 and Half-Life 2, we'll definitely remain skeptical about its practical use to hardcore gamers. However, the fact that it costs \$US399



"I don't know where Halo 2 is either"



WHERE THE HELL ARE THE GAMES!?

While there were plenty of gaming peripherals and other gaming-related hardware devices on display at CES, we couldn't help but notice the lack of any interesting games themselves. Although there were a number of pre-release titles on display such as Splinter Cell: Pandora Tomorrow, Ninja Gaiden and Full Spectrum Warrior, this was nothing that we hadn't seen or read about before. Suffice to say, we were disappointed. Fingers crossed that this is rectified come next year's show.



[above] The ApeXtreme gaming console

and doubles as a DVD player, jukebox and photo album as well as its 1080p HDTV support may make it an ideal purchase for PC gamers on a budget. Only time will tell.

QUAKE ON YOUR MOBILE PHONE?

If ATI gets its way, we could be playing Quake on our cell-phones in no time, as the company was displaying its new Imageon 2300 graphics processor at CES, running a live demonstration of MotoGP. ATI says that the device will be able to run GLQuake without issue at 35-40fps, which is very impressive indeed, given its highly mobile nature. That said, ATI should expect some serious competition from Nvidia, as the company says that its GoForce chips will be capable of high speed 3D graphics and video capture by the end of 2004.

PERIPHERAL MAYHEM

Sweaty gamers rejoice, as there were a number of products introduced at CES targeted at those with sweaty palms. Firstly, Nyko has introduced its Wireless Air Flo controller for the PS2, which features an internal fan that serves to cool your hands during play. Similarly, the same company has also introduced a wireless optical



[above] Better than facial handlebars...

mouse with similar functionality, ensuring that you'll never again miss that crucial frag due to a slippery mouse. Expect both devices to hit resellers in the Winter of 2004.

Logitech was also in attendance at CES, announcing among other products a new force-feedback joystick for the PS2. Bearing a close resemblance to the company's PC line, the new joystick will retail for \$US49.95 and is expected to hit stores by the end of January. Other console hardware news includes Spherex's DDXbox 5.1 speaker system, as well the Qmotions-Golf device which is a very interesting peripheral that attempts to increase realism in the current crop of PC golf titles (e.g. Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2004) using an immersive golf club/ball setup. Heck, there was even a Yamaha-licensed motorsports controller on display – what will they think of next!?

Asher Moses



[above] The weird Nyko Air Flo controller



[above] The weird Nyko Air Flo mouse



[above] Toshiba's MT800 DLP projector



[above] Logitech's latest joystick. Joy!

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 52 in the subject line.

PART 52



Whahaha



PHEW

SAM & MAX LIVES

Still in development...

After LucasArts pulled the plug on the next-gen sequel to their classic PC adventure game, Full Throttle, fear rippled through the gaming populace that the same fate would befall the anticipated Sam & Max sequel. Thankfully, we can report that Sam & Max: Freelance Police is getting nearer and nearer to completion as these new screenshots prove. The game is also still on target for a 2004 release. Thank the maker.



OVERFLOW

Certain sources say that Naughty Dog have been hard at work on Jak III for quite some time, with plans to reveal the game at this year's E3 Expo in May.

Sid Meier has been inducted into the Computer Museum of America Hall of Fame for his contribution to interactive entertainment, most notably the Civilization series. Firaxis games are currently working on Civilization IV, which will no doubt screw productivity worldwide when it's finally released.

The Dance Dance revolution continues to be televised. Yes, Dance Dance Revolution Extreme will be coming to the PlayStation 2 this year, thanks to Konami. All new modes, more calories to be shed... we can't contain our excitement. Ahem.

Videogames based on the sad 1980s TV shows, Miami Vice and Knight Rider, have been announced by Davilex Games. Miami Vice is predictably described as "free-roaming" and "third person" with "numerous missions"... when will the GTA clones end?

The N-Gage might find a small boost in sales with the announcement that The Sims Bustin' Out will be released for the handheld. It doesn't get any more mainstream than that, folks.

More EyeToy games will be coming your way this year. EyeToy: Fight and EyeToy: Sports and another two unannounced novelty games will be hitting shelves throughout 2004.

Hitman 3 is underway. Io Interactive have been working on an all-new graphics engine to take Agent 47 into the future. Hitman: Contracts should be available this year.

Rockstar have made another of their early PC games available as a free download on their website. Wild Metal Country is now available should you go to their website and sign up — www.rockstargames.com.

IGN are reporting that Metroid 2 on GameCube will have a multiplayer mode. We did a bit of digging and can only say that so far it's an unfounded rumour... unless Retro are purposely keeping quiet until E3.

WINNERS

Hyper 123

TERMINATOR 3: RISE OF THE MACHINES

First Prize:

Leo Pashenko, Condell Park, NSW

Runners up:

Tania Foster, Kuraby, Qld
 Paden Hughes, Armadale, WA
 I. Ashurst, Milperra, NSW
 Christopher Matthews, Townsville, Qld

PRINCE OF PERSIA

Jayson Chalker, Point Clare, NSW
 Narelle McCray, Wynyard, Tas
 Jordan Gastev, Thornlie, WA
 James Phelan, Warrandyke, Vic
 Karen Orr, Yangebup, WA

WAR!

COMBAT ELITE

Become a virtual paratrooper

Acclaim entertainment have cast aside their plans for endless Turok sequels to publish a new original title! In conjunction with developer, Battleborne (which employs team members from the Fallout 2 and Dark Alliance teams), this new console shooter entitled Combat Elite: WWII Paratroopers, looks like taking EA and their Medal of Honor franchise head on for a fight to the death. The difference with Combat Elite is that it's set in the third person and uses a top-down perspective, much like the Action/RPG Baldur's Gate: Dark Alliance. The game features two-player co-op on the same screen,

recreations of classic World War II battles, historically accurate weapons, and the spanking award-winning Snowblind Studios graphics engine. Combat Elite is for both the PlayStation 2 and the Xbox, and should launch in June this year.



[above] Ooh spooky staircase!

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PlayStation 2

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JONES JR
Fight Night

PC, Xbox Developer: TBA Publisher: EA



Rainbow Six 3

PS2 Developer: Ubisoft Shanghai Publisher: Ubisoft



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PRICE LOISELLE WEBER

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

HANDY

PSP POWERS ALONG

Developers in frenzy...

» Sony's anticipated PSP (PlayStation Portable) handheld gaming device is generating a huge amount of interest amongst developers, including a few key Japanese companies. The big names have started to sign on, with Namco, Capcom and Konami all promising to have games ready to go at the system's launch, with Sega and SquareEnix hinting that they already have games in development. It goes without saying that Sony will have a pretty tasty collection of their own first-party games ready for launch also. The launch date is now the biggest mystery, with Sony Japan saying a November launch in Japan, and Sony Europe saying a worldwide simultaneous release.

CHICKS

WWX: RUMBLE ROSE

Girl on Girl Action...

» It's the world's first all-women wrestling game, and it promises to be pretty much everything you'd expect from such a title. Konami and Yukes have teamed up for this one, and want to offer gamers the chance to play "naughty or nice" by grappling, groping, taunting and pounding their opponents in the ring (as they say). The game will feature a variety of themed female wrestlers, and an all-new wrestling combat system so you can hold your opponents in "compromising positions". Phew, I'd better go have a cold shower.





SPLINTER CELL: PANDORA TOMORROW

There are cynical rush-job cash-ins, there are money raking expansion packs and there are sequels that make good games even greater. Naturally, the latter is the rarest of the lot, but it does happen to apply in the case of Splinter Cell: Pandora Tomorrow. You can literally start smashing your piggy banks already, because Sam Fisher wants your money again and you'd be crazy not to give him what he wants. He'll show you a pretty good time, after all. He's even learnt a few new moves to make your experience all the more exciting. Now get your mind out of the gutter and remember that we're talking about a videogame here!

A MOCKERY OF SECURITY

No, it's not a new Cure album, or a line of women's skin care products. Pandora Tomorrow is a code word. There you go, you can stop wondering about that one now. You see, if this code word doesn't get reported back by a bunch of evil agents to the megalomaniac pulling the strings, he'll unleash a deadly small pox on the world because he'll know someone's interfering with his plans. Biological terror is the name

of his game, and it's not very nice at all. That's where George Clooney comes in. And if Clooney is indisposed with a trailer full of nubile young personal assistants, then Sam Fisher gets the call. So look out. He's half Spider-man and half Solid Snake, and he's got a pretty cool tight black outfit just bursting at the seams with fancy gadgets that can open a tin can from ten feet.

Indonesia and East Timor are at it again, and as usual, the USA decides to interfere to try and set things right. Enter Sam the Man. He'll be investigating a number of locations around the world to help stop this threat of biological warfare, from Jerusalem and Paris to Los Angeles and Jakarta. He'll be crawling through marijuana crops in the Indonesian jungle and hanging from the underside of a speeding train. He'll make a mockery of the security at Los Angeles airport and show us just how handy night-vision goggles can be in the depths of a stinking sewer system. He'll be planting explosives on aeroplanes and interrogating fat bad guys.

He'll also show what a little extra training can do between outings.

Sam Fisher is now more athletic than ever. If you thought the stealth play was cool in Splinter Cell, then you'll be even more impressed with Pandora Tomorrow. For instance, when peeking around corners, Sam can now do a swat turn — quickly spinning over to the other side of the doorway. Now when he's in the midst of a split jump between two walls, Sam can do a hold jump and launch himself up even higher. Now Sam is strong enough to lower himself down through open trap doors. He can also hang upside down like a vampire and pick off hapless guards with his new laser-sighted pistol. He's everything he used to be, and more.

MORE FUNKY GADGETRY

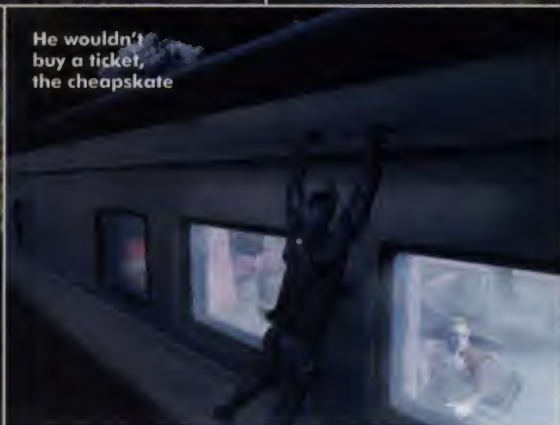
Whilst the rest of the single player game is pretty much just more bigger and better Splinter Cell goodness, the most exciting addition to the game is the inclusion of a robust multiplayer mode. Every platform is promised multiplayer, with both Xbox and PS2 offering full headset support. One team can play as Agents (the good guys) and the other team plays as Mercs (bad guys). The agents are not all Sam Fisher clones, but young

agents with the same skill set. They are played in third-person ala the single-player game, and do everything that Sam Fisher can do. The Mercs, however, play from the first-person, and don't have the same set of stealth skills. It's their job to spot and hunt the near-invisible agents lurking about the place. However, they will have their own gadgets to help achieve this, such as movement detectors, head lamps and so forth. The tension will be unbearably good. In a way, it's a style of play that might reward camping (for the Agents at least), although their mission objectives will generally involve having to be active — such as hacking the Mercs computers, which should minimise long periods of nothing happening. There will

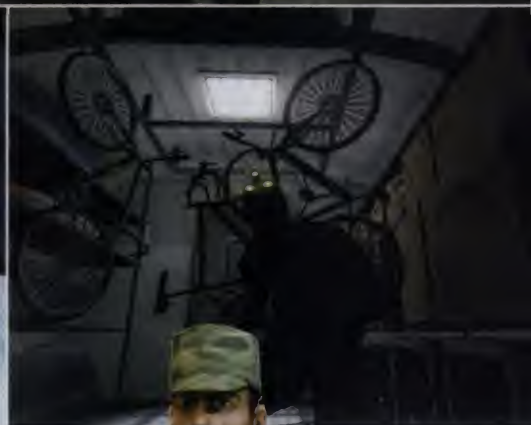




Sam goes on a Cane Toad hunt



He wouldn't buy a ticket, the cheapskate

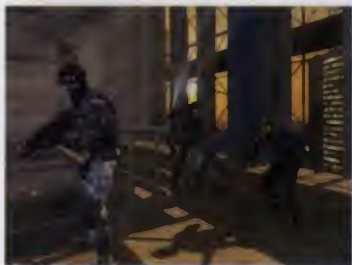


AVAILABLE ON:
PS2 / XBOX / GCN / PC

DETAILS
CATEGORY: Action/Stealth /
PLAYERS: 1-4 (TBC) / DEVELOPER:
Ubisoft / AVAILABLE: Late March /



WHAT WE'D LIKE TO SEE:
Ubisoft keep the hilarious placeholder French voice acting that's in the preview code.



[above] These four screenshots are all from the multiplayer mode between Agents and Mercenaries. It really has the potential to be absolutely killer.

IN THE MIDST OF A SPLIT JUMP BETWEEN TWO WALLS, SAM CAN DO A HOLD JUMP AND LAUNCH HIMSELF UP EVEN HIGHER

actually be a Hide and Seek mode especially for those wanting to perfect their shadow-play. It's first-person action versus third-person stealth. Playing with the headsets promises to be the way to play, as they will be fully integrated into the team play. Each team has their own channel, but using more funky gadgetry, your opponents can eavesdrop on what you're saying if they can get close enough to one of your players. You can also take an

opponent hostage and jam their team's communications. It sounds like there will be some truly inspired multiplayer action to be had. With an even greater sense of atmosphere, enhanced weapons, more creative and varied level design, more stealthy moves, amazing set-pieces and exciting multiplayer potential, Splinter Cell: Pandora Tomorrow should shoot straight to the top of your shopping list. Look for our review soon. <<<





DRIV3R

What do you get if you cross Grand Theft Auto 3 with The Getaway? You get Driver 3 – or, DRIV3R – that’s what you get. DRIV3R (as it’s unfortunately going to be known because it’s “hip” with the kids, or something) is the next game in the Driver series and another notch on the bed-post of UK developer, Reflections. After the wreckage of Stuntman, Reflections have gone back to the series that brought them more notoriety than any of their previous car-fests (which includes the Destruction Derby series). This time, the Driver experience will be even more fitted out than the hottest street machine in your local McDonald’s car park. And that’s saying something.

ALL SORTS OF TROUBLE

Let’s get some of the numbers and marketing lingo out of the way first. DRIV3R promises over 70 different playable vehicles, including a variety of cars (we’re also talking buses, forklifts, flatbeds and more), bikes, boats and so forth. There will be a coooool “Thrill Cam” for, well, thrills I guess, as well as the Director mode in which you edit your replays, Survival mode and a Take A Ride (freeplay) option. The game will span 30 missions, all tied together with a cinematic story that features the voice talents of Mickey Rourke (Jericho, the bad guy), Michelle Rodriguez (Calita, a Miami car thief), Ving Rhames (Tobias Jones, your lackey) and Michael Madsen (Tanner, that’s you). And people thought



AVAILABLE ON:

PS2 / XBOX / GBA / PC

DETAILS

CATEGORY: Driving/Action /
PLAYERS: 1 / DEVELOPER:
Reflections / AVAILABLE: March /

WOW-O-METER



WHAT WE’D LIKE TO SEE:

A decent, smooth framerate. The game looks gorgeous, so let’s hope that once chaos ensues your console doesn’t have a coronary.

Mickey Rourke’s career ended with *Harley Davidson and the Marlboro Man!* You show ‘em, Mick! Actually, I think it ended with *They Crawl!* (2001) and some pretty bad plastic surgery, but we’re getting a little off topic... With the addition of licensed music and the inclusion of Miami as one of the game’s locations, you’d be forgiven for thinking that Reflections were virtually following the Grand Theft Auto: Vice City blueprint for this one. Well, we can probably forgive them, considering that Driver’s debut in 1999 probably provided some inspiration for Rockstar when developing GTA3. Tit for tat, and all that, eh?

Besides Miami’s palm-tree lined boulevards, DRIV3R will also take you to the very nice Nice on the south coast of France (*Been there! – Cam*), and the run-down huts and temples of Istanbul (not Constantinople) in Turkey. Whilst realism is an important ingredient to DRIV3R, the



>> IN FACT, THE PHYSICS MODEL COMES STRAIGHT FROM THE CARCASS OF STUNTMAN



There goes our shipment of Hyper "Blau!" t-shirts...



This should get a taxi cab's attention



Lucky, I'm with AAMI...



One serious motorbike courier.



cities aren't street-for-street replicas, but rather, fun levels designed to look as if they could be parts of those real-world locations. This game is all about spectacular car chases, after all. You don't want to have to get your street directory out just to complete the damn mission.

Now, in case you were wondering, Tanner, the undercover cop and "driver" is back as the main playable character, but he's not alone. Tobias Jones, the obligatory sidekick returns, and there's the tough-yet-sexy female potential love interest. This will be the most fleshed out Driver game yet. The plot is being kept fairly under wraps until the game ships, but we do know that Tanner is out to stop a ring of car thieves. By joining up with them to find out who their big international boss is (that would be our mate, Mick), he naturally gets in all sorts of trouble.

SMASH A BOTTLE

Whilst the comparisons to Grand Theft Auto are inevitable, DRIV3R actually strives more to evoke a gritty realism that's reminiscent of Sony's The Getaway. Where GTA was popcorn and neon lights, The Getaway was grey skies and humourless crims just itching to smash a bottle over your head. Likewise, DRIV3R takes a more mature approach to depicting the life of an undercover cop. There's a photorealism with the visuals, serious voice acting, "bad ass" cutscenes and a general grim crim atmosphere. This stab at realism extends to the car physics handling and a comprehensive damage model that's sure to delight the more aggressive personalities out there. In fact, the physics model comes straight from the carcass of

Stuntman, and it really was probably the only thing about that game we liked. Now, with plenty of inanimate objects and speedy innocent traffic to smash into, you can expect some pretty intense (and destructive) car chases in DRIV3R. This game will be all about Big Action. Reflections have wanted to ensure that DRIV3R is a fine balance between pick up and play entertainment and a more realistic driving/crashing simulation.

Of course, the whole game isn't spent behind the wheel of a vehicle. You'll be able to hop out and stretch your legs whenever you feel like it, as well as sample an array of nasty weapons — eight, in fact, including a grenade launcher. Something tells me we'll be camping out on the street corners picking off passing cars in an attempt to cause peak-hour mayhem. <<<

GREAT SCOTT!

Legendary film director, Ridley Scott (*Alien*, *Bladerunner*, *Gladiator*), runs a commercial production company called RSA (Ridley Scott Associates) who have been called upon by Atari to produce a three-minute live-action short film entitled "The Gauntlet" inspired by the story and gameplay of DRIV3R. "The Gauntlet" will then be used by Atari to promote the game on television, in cinema and on the Atari website. Ridley, unfortunately, won't have a hand in the production, instead being directed by RSA's Sean Mullens. Episode 1 should be available for download as you read this. Just head to Atari.com...



V8 SUPERCARS 2

H Matthew White, Chief Game designer for Codemasters' Juice Studio, recently sat down for a chat with Hyper about the anticipated sequel to V8 Supercars...

HYPER: So, Matthew, what major changes have been made to the game this time around?
Matthew White: There're two main changes to the game — the first is the physics. The new physics engine has

taken us a long time to write because what we wanted was a physics handling system that would enable us to throw different types of cars into the game — for example, big heavy stock cars or more small lightweight single seater cars — to emulate the real thing a lot easier. The physics system has been completely re-written from scratch to give us a more realistic driving experience and it works really well as

it maintains a level of finesse and fun. The second thing we've added overall is a new car damage system, something PlayStation 2 owners have been screaming out for since our last game. So we wanted to make it more extensive, but we also wanted to make it more fun, there's nothing more entertaining than crashing a car!

With the V8 Supercar license we haven't been able to include all the tracks we wanted to because of cross licensing, especially with Formula One. However, we have a good relationship with AVESCO, so we've put in every possible thing we could with that license, and through that and our other licenses we have 54 circuits in the game. There are even a few fictional tracks we've included — we won't say anything except that they definitely suit this style of game.

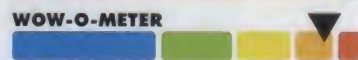
HYPER: Will the new story mode and FMV reflect the real-time gameplay?

Matthew: Absolutely! After your first race when you watch that FMV sequence you'll see the car you were driving all smashed up. And that continues throughout the game.



AVAILABLE ON:
 PS2 / XBOX / GBA / PC

DETAILS
 CATEGORY: Racing / PLAYERS: 1-Multi / DEVELOPER: Juice / AVAILABLE: April /



WHAT WE'D LIKE TO SEE:
 We're assuming the game will be coming to PS2... right?

>>> THE PHYSICS SYSTEM HAS BEEN COMPLETELY RE-WRITTEN FROM SCRATCH TO GIVE US A MORE REALISTIC DRIVING EXPERIENCE



Hey, does that Red Bull car have wings?



If I were the cameraman, I think I'd move



Am I getting experience points for this or what?



[Falcon] The Ford Falcon creams the opposition, muhaha

HYPER: What online features are you offering?

Matthew: We have a whole leader board set up and you'll be able to add and omit times and details from that and any other interface we develop for the game — each online component will obviously differ depending on how the online component works out, but it'll be nice for both Xbox and PS2 console owners.

HYPER: So what cars can we expect?

Matthew: There are, from memory, 35 cars. Obviously, we have the AVESCO cars, Aston Martins — we have the new Aston Martin no one has ever seen before — a range of Ford muscle cars, like GT and Mustang. We have rally cars for their respective events including the Mitsubishi Evolution and the Subaru Impreza. We have a few single seater cars, like the Formula Ford as well as our own fictional grand prix car, which is based loosely on F1. That fictional idea continues through most styles of racing within the game as well.



HYPER: What will players get the most out of, Simulation or Career?

Matthew: It depends on the player really — they're both equal parts of the game. A player can play through the Career and experience loads of different racing types, play through the storyline and make lots of different choices and there are just loads of different styles of racing. You can then go back to those races in Simulation and enjoy those races how you see fit, it really works for the player, you can play them Single Player, Time Trial or Multiplayer — we've tried to give the player as much choice as possible.

HYPER: What we've seen so far is great, but will we see more life on the tracks?

Matthew: Yeah totally. Basically, the stage we're at, at the moment, we have all of the tracks completed, we have all the cars modelled, we have all the sound effects done, the



music licensed, all the physics and AI is sorted. In fact all that's really left is fine-tuning, and we have a lot of time to do that, and adding more life and more features is at the top of our lists upon lists of features we want to add. As it stands, we already have the game running at 60fps, and the engine doesn't need much more tweaking, so it's a case of adding and not killing what we've done so far.

HYPER: Finally, for those without broadband, will the game support LAN play?

Matthew: For sure, you won't miss out on gaming in any measure with your console of choice. The first game was great and something we were really proud of, this time around we did whatever we could to give the fans of the series what they wanted. We involved ourselves in Forum discussions and learnt what the rights and wrongs of the first title were and went above and beyond to get all of the information we needed to excel in the next step of the V8 license. I think we've done that this time around. <<<



FAR CRY

Far Cry has to be one of the most anticipated games here at Hyper HQ. The reason? It looks like gaming paradise, and better still, it's actually set in paradise! You see, Far Cry takes place across a fictional tropical island chain in Micronesia, and we haven't seen a more glorious gameworld in a long time — this puts Isle Delphino to shame. Mind you, the fact that the island is controlled by bloodthirsty mercenaries kinda puts a stopper on any plans you might have for lying around on the beach.

TAKE ME DOWN TO PARADISE CITY...

You play as the rather fictionally named Jack Carver (our apologies to anyone out there who's actually called Jack Carver but it just sounds



so made up), a man who runs a boat charter business in the area, but also has a somewhat mysterious past that will undoubtedly be unraveled during the course of events. The game opens with you reluctantly escorting a leggy young journalist named Valerie to the island of Cabatu. Jack is apprehensive, but hey, the price was right and what could possibly go wrong? Plenty — your boat is blown up, Valerie is taken hostage and you wake up tied to a chair in an old WWII aircraft carrier. The game begins with your escape and flight into the jungle, and you can probably take it as a given that there'll be deep dark secrets for you to uncover before it's all over.

We've seen the opening section of the single player game several times now, and on each occasion it gets more impressive. The world of Cabatu is simply stunning — it really is a tropical paradise... except for the guns and imminent death at every turn of course. The first thing that strikes you in Far Cry is the incredible view distance — you can see for over a kilometer, and better yet, there's no detail draw in — every object, every tree, every enemy and every blade of

grass is there in the distance.

Developers Crytek have really worked hard to utilise this tech within the gameplay too. In other words, there's going to be a lot of long distance sniping and surveillance to indulge in. You'll have a radar, for instance, but it can allegedly only track enemies that you've already seen, meaning that scoping out the situation from afar will pay off in more ways than one. Your radar will also show you what level of alertness your enemies are at. Oh, and your binoculars also have the handy ability to give you audio from the spot you've zoomed in on too. Realistic? No. Cool? Definitely.

MAGICAL KNOWLEDGE

What looks so enticing about Far Cry, however, is the balance between short and long range action, as well as action and stealth. We're not talking stealth as in MGS — but in the sense of being in thick jungle that provides a natural cover. This is married to some rock solid AI too. Yeah yeah, we know that the words "awesome AI" get bandied about a lot these days, but in Far Cry's case it's actually true. The

AVAILABLE ON:

PS3 / XBOX 360 / PC

DETAILS

CATEGORY: FPS / PLAYERS: 1-32 / DEVELOPER: Crytek / PUBLISHER: Ubisoft / AVAILABLE: March 25th /

WOW-O-METER



WHAT WE'D LIKE TO SEE:

The first wave of physics experiments after the game's release!

>>> THE GAME OPENS WITH YOU RELUCTANTLY ESCORTING A LEGGY YOUNG JOURNALIST NAMED VALERIE TO THE ISLAND OF CABATU

Ok, who set my sub-woofer on fire?!



We will stop this beach party at all costs!



I'm having Halo flashbacks



Wanna play some volleyball?



enemies' actions are based on a complex web of information about the environment – available cover, proximity of reinforcements and so on. Thus, they'll take cover, try and flank you, man vehicles and communicate with each other using voice, walkie talkies and hand signals, meaning that once you're spotted, it won't be long until everyone knows about it and a coordinated counter attack is launched. Enemies won't be able to rely on a magical knowledge of where you are but will realistically work from your last known position – a strategy that you can exploit with diversionary tactics. We should also mention that new enemies are never spawned into the gameworld. When you begin a section, so too do the enemies, hopefully resulting in different chains of events each time.

Of course, Far Cry is more than just tropical forests and beautiful beaches.

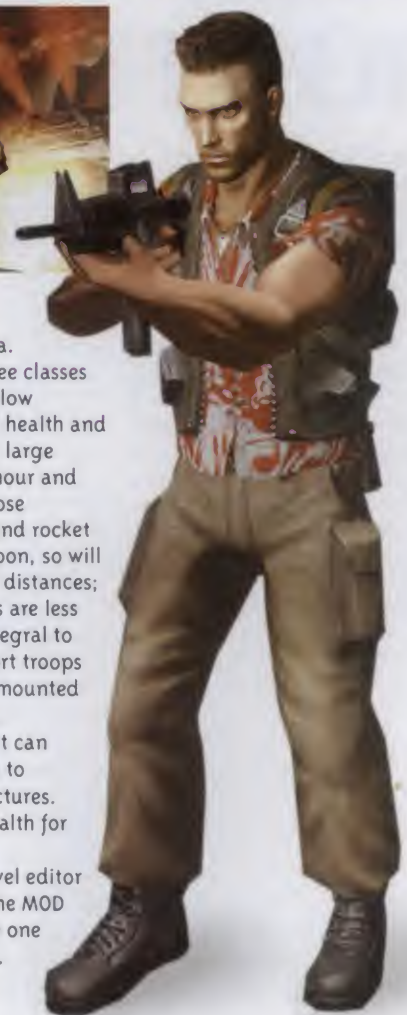
There are also lagoons, caves and mountain trails, not to mention temples, facilities and shipwrecks. Oh, and some of the latest screens also indicate that you won't just be going up against humans, but some very Doom III-esque abominations of nature called Trigens.

Far Cry should also ship with a robust multiplayer component – beta testing on this has just begun, in fact. There are three game modes – Deathmatch, Team Deathmatch and Assault. You all know the first two, so we'll just talk about Assault. In Assault, gamers are split into attackers and defenders with three capture points on each map – which must be taken (or defended) in order. Assault maps then, will take place across large sections of outdoor environments, and as one team progresses through the capture points, spawn points will also change, keeping the action

centered around that area.

In Assault there are three classes to choose from: Grunt – slow moving but has plenty of health and armour, not to mention a large armory; Sniper – less armour and health, and can only choose between the sniper rifle and rocket launcher as primary weapon, so will be devastating over long distances; and Support – these guys are less glamorous but will be integral to dominating maps. Support troops can build structures like mounted weapons, walls, bunkers, roadblocks and so on, but can also use heavy explosives to destroy the enemy's structures. They can also dole out health for teammates.

Throw in a powerful level editor and serious support for the MOD community and you have one appetising looking game. Full review soon. <<<





The boy band auditions weren't going well...



I love the smell of new pants



FIGHT CLUB

⊞ Fight Club is one of those films that has gone on to attain cult status, and for good reason. It was a great treatise on the modern condition, and the search for identity and meaning in our SNAG and technology dominated world. It was also wonderfully paced, visually arresting, and brutally violent. It's most likely this last (and in terms of the film's message — least important) component that has resulted in the development of Fight Club the game, and we've got to say (against all the conventions of the form known as "the preview") we're a little worried.

BRAD'S RIPPLING CHEST

It's not that we don't think that Fight Club would make a good fighting game, it's just that if it's "just" a fighting game, the film's soul will very much be sucked from the license and blown out into space through a very narrow straw. Metaphorically speaking of course. On the other hand, the prospect of a game where we might be able to beat up Meatloaf (he plays Bob in the film) is undeniably alluring.

The game is being made by Genuine Games and published by Vivendi, but at this stage information is a little thin on the ground. All we really know is that Fight Club will be a no holds barred fighting game that will apparently (according to sources with a vested interest we might add) stay true to the characters, setting and visual style of the film. After looking at the screenshots, however, it's clear that they've got a fair way to go (and quite why the bar of soap from the promotional posters is currently residing between the health bars is a mystery to us).

For now, however, we'll give Genuine the benefit of the doubt. Fight Club is still very early on, and we're expecting the look of the game to improve a lot. At this stage the environments are very sparse — with barely a lone spectator to be seen, let alone a cheering crowd. The claustrophobic environments we were hoping for are also nowhere to be seen. Instead, most of the arenas we've seen so far are pretty open, covering locations like abandoned city lots, leaky basements, modern industrial areas, and an airport. Just

like the film. Or maybe not.

That said, the character models look good, with Brad's rippling chest well accounted for. Oh Brad, give it to me big boy! There's no evidence of damage modeling yet, however, which must surely be a core component of the final game. If it's Fight Club there's got to be blood, bruises and teeth flying or it just won't work!

The fighting mechanics should be pretty unconventional too — these aren't professional athletes, just regular blokes who need an outlet for their frustrations and neuroses. Imagine a fighting game without polished moves, where all you can do is belt the opponent! We suspect Genuine might bend the license on this point. Let's hope they throw in an in depth grapple system and plenty of environmental interaction too.

All the Fight Club fans out there should collectively cross their fingers on this one, and if it turns out to be as bad as we suspect it might, there'll be two new rules in the Hyper offices, and both of them will be "You don't talk about the Fight Club game". <<

AVAILABLE ON:

PS2 / XBOX / PC

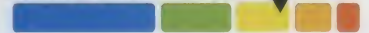
DETAILS

CATEGORY: Fighting / PLAYERS: 1-2 /

DEVELOPER: Genuine Games /

AVAILABLE: Late 2004 /

WOW-O-METER



WHAT WE'D LIKE TO SEE:

The film packaged with the game.



[Backlog] ...and this is for being a better actor than me!



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All he did was rub his feet on the carpet

PSI-OPS: THE MINDGATE CONSPIRACY

Well, what do you know? It's been a while, but finally — we've found a Midway game that actually looks interesting! I guess statistically speaking they were bound to make a good game sooner or later, and at this stage Psi-Ops looks like their best bet.

From the screenshot and the title you've probably already guessed what this game is all about, but for those of you who are a little slower on the uptake, Psi-Ops is an action game that integrates psionic powers alongside traditional weaponry. In the fight against the terrorists known as The Movement you'll be able to use: telekinesis to lift and hurl people (not to mention to hover about on objects through the environment); pyrokinesis to spew forth flames and incinerate those dastardly terrorists; and mind control to take control of enemy soldiers and

AVAILABLE ON:

PS2 / XBOX / PC

DETAILS

CATEGORY: Action / PLAYERS: 1 / DEVELOPER: Midway / AVAILABLE: Mid 2004 /

WOW-O-METER



make them tapdance for your own amusement. There will be a whole host of powers to earn, and we suspect that they won't change much in an action context, but could prove to be very cool puzzle-wise. The developers are actually promising non-linear gameplay, so chances are they're thinking the same thing.



NFL STREET

If NFL is as baffling a sport to you as it is to at least one of Hyper's staff members, then NFL Street could be the game for you. In the tradition of NBA Street, NFL Street is a pick up and play version of the American pastime, and is actually being developed by the team behind Madden, so should offer both solid gameplay and attitude in abundance.

The game itself is a 7-on-7 affair, and the focus is entirely on out and out action. The rules are out the window, so there are no penalties, no punting, kicking or field goals. Instead, NFL Street is all about the big hits and stylish plays. Well executed plays are rewarded with showboat points, which in turn flow on to gamebreakers, which are uber

AVAILABLE ON:

PS2 / XBOX / GCN / PC

DETAILS

CATEGORY: Arcade sports / PLAYERS: 1-Multi / DEVELOPER: Tiburon / AVAILABLE: Early 2004 /

WOW-O-METER



moves that will allow you to storm through any defensive line or intercept any pass.

NFL Street comes with 300 of the NFL's biggest names from all 32 teams. As you'd expect, there are also some legends thrown in to spice up the broth, as well as an extensive create-a-player mode. As per normal for EA titles, the only version of NFL Street with online support will be the PlayStation 2. Sigh.



Cheap appendix surgery

WAY OF THE SAMURAI 2

Way of the Samurai 2 takes place over ten days (as opposed to three) in feudal Japan during the end of the Edo period. The setting is the fictional island of Amahara — a community that continues to trade with the west, despite the isolationist policies of the time. Thus, the influence of foreigners is strongly felt in Amahara, and should add another layer of complexity to the factions and power struggles that you'll inevitably get wrapped up in. Like the original, this will be reflected in a branching narrative and the numerous decisions that players will have to make.

Since combat is the heart of the

AVAILABLE ON:

PS2 / XBOX / GCN / PC

DETAILS

CATEGORY: Samurai sim / PLAYERS: 1 / DEVELOPER: Acquire / AVAILABLE: Mid 2004 /

WOW-O-METER



game, Way of the Samurai 2 strengthens this aspect considerably, and you'll be able to train in three different styles of combat (including the two sword technique made famous by Miyamoto Musashi), along with a better blocking and countering system. Looking good.

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Rise of the Machinima

>> Maurice Branscombe





Disappointed with the *Matrix* sequels? Couldn't sit through *The Phantom Menace*? You're not the only one. Thanks to a new filmmaking technique though, you may yet be able to show the Wachowskis and the Lucases of the world exactly how things should be done, all while playing your favourite videogames...

It's virtually impossible to overlook the influence that cinema has had on today's videogame industry. Videogame conversions of popular film and television licenses are never in short supply, and even original titles like *Deus Ex*, *Half-Life*, *Metal Gear Solid*, *Halo*, and innumerable others owe much of their existence to their celluloid influences, not to mention *Grand Theft Auto*'s nigh-on plagiarism of Martin Scorsese and Brian De Palma's body of work. In their own way, videogames too have had some influence on the film industry. Videogame properties regularly make the transition to the silver screen, for better or worse, and many new films such as *Spider-Man*, *Hulk* and *The Matrix* flaunt their digital sequences of videogame-inspired biff as a badge of pride. Until recently, however, the influence of videogames on cinema can be regarded as relatively

superficial, having little, if any, impact on the development of cinema as an art form. That is until Machinima came along.

VIBRANT AND DEDICATED Machinima (a contraction of "Machine-Cinema") is formally defined as simply being the process of filming movies in virtual reality. The innovative process used to create these movies incorporates elements of both traditional live-motion filming and computer animation techniques, but by far the most unique aspect of Machinima is that all of these filming techniques are executed from within a videogame.

Taking root in the heady days of 1996, Machinima techniques were originally pioneered by Quake clans wanting to document their deathmatch prowess, and were later adapted to create short animations. The earliest of these primitive Machinima films is widely regarded to be the now legendary *Diary of a Camper*, a short film teaching the follies of camping, the hard way. Over the years Machinima has

evolved from its modest beginnings as a bragging ground for Quake clans, and has developed into a legitimate cinematic medium that is supported by a vibrant and dedicated community of filmmakers.

With Machinima, videogames are no longer simply the inspiration for a few poor Hollywood films; they are actually a means of producing film. Not only that, but Machinima is quite possibly the most cost and time effective vehicle for film production ever conceived. Essentially, Machinima allows game players the ability to create their own movies, complete with special effects, on the kind of budgets that wouldn't even come close to covering most film studio executive's lunch bill.

A STRANGE HYBRID

"Machinima isn't your daddy's animation technique" says Hugh Hancock, Artistic Director of Strange Company, a Scotland-based Machinima film studio.

"It's something totally new, a strange hybrid of old techniques pulled from the real world into the virtual one... It's a film form where you can make any film you like, and for the first time, provided you're willing to live with a few restrictions, that hyperbole-filled description is actually true".

Strange Company's own portfolio of films is surely a testament to Machinima's versatility. Hancock has directed no less than eight Machinima films since the company's founding in 1997, many of which are some of the most noteworthy pieces of Machinima ever to be shot. Highlights of Strange Company's career include films like *Eschaton*, a series based on legendary horror writer H.P. Lovecraft's Cthulhu Mythos; *Tum Raider*, a Tomb Raider piss-take featuring Lara's overweight, bumbling, cross-dressing brother, Larry Croft; and *Ozymandias*, a haunting adaptation of Percy Bysshe Shelley's 1818 poem of the same name.

By far Strange Company's most popular films though, are the *Matrix 4x1* series, a quartet of short films set in the Wachowski brothers' *Matrix* universe. The films feature many familiar characters from the original movies and showcase a variety of alternate scenarios in the never-ending war between humans and their artificial captors, and despite the film's distinctly videogame-like appearance (no doubt one of the "few restrictions" Hancock mentioned), the results are surprisingly authentic.

In part at least the level of artistry seen in *Matrix 4x1* and many other Machinima films is due to the fact that many of the limitations that are placed on filmmakers working in traditional mediums, both financial and creative, simply don't apply to Machinima. Hancock's *Matrix 4x1* films for example manage to capture much of the *Matrix*'s dark atmosphere, and even include many potentially expensive special effects including bullet time, pyrotechnics, and acrobatics, and yet it took only three weeks, and a staff of four to take from concept to reality — and all on a budget that probably wouldn't cover more than a second's worth of film in the original *Matrix* movies.

"Put it this way" boasts Hancock, "over the last six years, I've directed something like four hours of animation. That would be a hell of a lot for a head honcho at Pixar — for a small animation company in Scotland, that's unheard-of!"

QUAD-DAMAGE... FLAK CANNONS... ACTION!

In its final form a Machinima movie looks far more akin to a CG animation, however the actual process of filming Machinima is in fact much more similar to filming a traditional motion picture. Props and sets still have to be made in pre-production, costumes have to be designed, and actors have to be cast. In a Machinima film however, the props and actors are 3D models, the costumes are modified player skins and the sets are custom-built levels for some of the PC's finest games. First-person shooters such as *Half-Life*, *Quake 2* and *Unreal Tournament* currently rank as the most popular filming locations, their inherent subjective viewpoints are perfect for filmmakers to capture the appropriate shots, and the extensive multiplayer options makes including plenty of actors in each scene a breeze.

Working over a LAN, the cast and crew access their created sets and props within the game world. Once the director calls for action, the actors (also known as "puppeteers") manipulate their in-game avatars in real-time, while the director's computer, with the aide of some customised software, acts as a sort of camera to capture the action. Because everything occurring within the virtual world is recorded as data, instead of film, almost every facet of the movie can be edited in post-production. Meaning that camera angles, character animations,

textures, special effects and much more can be edited long after the original shoot has taken place, something that would be a painstaking task using traditional CG animation techniques, and would be a virtual impossibility in live-motion filming without a re-shoot.

TWO DIM-WITTED LUMBERJACKS

Given that the nature of most first person shooters are firmly grounded within the realms of science fiction and action, the end product of many Machinima films tend to reflect these genres. Action films such as the *Blood Gulch Chronicles*, a series of more than twenty comedy-tinged action shorts made with Bungie software's *Halo* have proved quite popular. The film is a fan-sequel of sorts, and documents the eruption of a civil war between factions of human marines sometime between the end of the first *Halo* game and the beginning of its sequel, yet it also somehow manages to combine the action with the kind of inane banter that wouldn't seem out of place in a Kevin Smith film.

While *Blood Gulch Chronicles* retains as much of the original game's character as possible, many Machinima films are almost indistinguishable from their filming locales. For example, the dark techno-medieval atmosphere of *Quake 2* is absolutely banished by the ILL Clan's *Larry and Lenny* series of comedy films. Although the films about the haphazard adventures of two dim-witted lumberjacks are made inside the *Quake 2* engine, with the film's bright and cartoony visuals and offbeat comedy antics you'd be hard pressed to detect it.

First person shooters aren't the end of the road for Machinima filmmaking either, and ambitious filmmakers are hardly limited to a single genre. The online role-player *Dark Age of Camelot* is fast becoming one of the most popular non-shooter filming locations, and one of the most noteworthy Machinima films of late, the feature-length *Anachronox* was filmed entirely within Ion Storm's third-person adventure of the same name. As long as there's someone out there to modify the game to record movies, almost any videogame can be used to make Machinima.

AND THE AWARD GOES TO...

Mainstream recognition of Machinima as an emerging art form is still very much in an embryonic state, but

MACHINI-WHA?

According to Strange Company's Hugh Hancock, videogame developers have themselves been making their own Machinima unintentionally for years, and whether you realise it or not, if you've played a game you've probably seen more Machinima films than you've had hot showers... providing that you are filthy of course.

"I still get surprised sounds from publishers, in particular when I call them about Machinima events where I want to show their films" says Hancock, who considers trailers and cut-scenes for commercial videogames just as artistically valid as independently produced Machinima films. Trailers for *Metal Gear Solid 2* and the forthcoming *MGS3: Snake Eater*, as well as the trailers for *Halo 2*, and *Half-Life 2* are among many of the commercial videogame movies available for download at Machinima.com, and the trailers for *Halo 2* and *Tron 2.0* were even entered by their respective developers into this year's Machinima Film Festival, in the "best commercial/game Machinima" category. Proof enough that Machinima is more than simply a cult medium.



[above strip] Some stills from the *Matrix 4X1* machinimas.

[right strip, top to bottom] *Tum Raider*, *Hardly Workin'* (Larry and Lenny), and some examples of what the Unreal engine is capable of.



[right strip] Zero 7's *In The Waiting Line*. Very cool stuff.



[top] *Ozymandias*: An experimental machinima. [above] The film festival, complete with scary goths in leather pants.



[left strip] *Steelwight* – certainly a very stylised approach to machinima.

MACHINIMA ONLINE

So you'd like to be able to watch some of these newfangled films? Or perhaps try your hand at making some of your own Machinima masterpieces? Look no further.

www.machinima.com

The Machinima super-site! Machinima.com is a hub for the entire Machinima community, and features hundreds of films from a variety of filmmakers, as well as utilities, and tutorials on how you can create your own Machinima films. If you only visit one Machinima website, make it this one.

www.strangecompany.org

Strange Company's online headquarters. This site has downloads of much of Strange Company's work including the *Matrix 4x1* series and *Ozymandias*. The site also hosts a variety of utilities for creating your own Machinima films... freeware of course.

www.fountainheadent.com

The home of Fountainhead Entertainment, producer of the award winning "In the Waiting Line" music video, among other films. The studio's Machinima films and documentaries are available at the site, and there are even a few playable games that the studio has produced up for download.

www.illclan.com

Another popular Machinima film studio, The ILL Clan are the creators of the comedy series "Larry and Lenny". Various exploits of the hapless lumberjacks can be downloaded from the site.

thanks to the accessibility afforded by the World Wide Web many Machinima films are quickly becoming noticed in all corners of the globe, and Hancock and Strange Company have already earned overwhelming acclaim for their movies.

"I'm very flattered," says Hancock of the positive reaction, "I originally came at Machinima from a theatre background – hence, one of the major reasons I make films is to see our audience react, and enjoy. All the praise and popularity of *Matrix 4x1* has been great". Many of Hancock's other films have also similarly positive receptions, *Ozymandias* was even reviewed by respected film critic Roger Ebert, in which he favourably compared it to the 1988 anime classic *Grave of the Fireflies*. "I think the word I'm looking for is gobsmacked" says Hancock of Ebert's recognition.

The Machinima filmmaking community have even set up an equivalent to the Oscars, aptly titled the Academy of Machinima Arts and Sciences. The academy is the organiser of the Machinima Film Festival, an annual event that showcases the year's new films and to allows Machinima filmmakers from around the world to meet, and even to hold roundtable talks in front of the festival's audience, and there is of course an awards presentation for the year's most outstanding Machinima films.

The most recent of the academy's Machinima Film Festivals was held at the American Museum of the Moving Image in New York City, and was without doubt the most successful one yet, hosting more than 700 visitors and screening more than 20 films.

"[The show was] fantastic!" says Hancock, who made the long flight from Scotland to the U.S. to attend. "The venue was great, the films were awesomely high-quality, and the talks were damn fine."

One Machinima studio that left their mark on this year's Machinima Film Festival more than any other was undoubtedly the U.S. based Fountainhead Entertainment. Their two films 'In the Waiting Line' and 'Anna' wowed both audience and judges, coming away with 4 of the total 10 awards, or "Mackies" as they are affectionately known. Receiving three of the studio's prizes was *In the Waiting Line*, a narrative music video set to the sounds of British electronica duo Zero 7. The film was honoured in three categories taking away the prizes for best direction,

best visual design and best commercial/game Machinima film. A further award for best technical achievement was given to *Anna*, a gothic fantasy fairytale.

"It's always nice to be recognised," says Fountainhead's CEO and former director of business development at id software, Katherine Anna Kang. "The most rewarding thing [however] is to see Machinima working as a whole to improve in both visual quality and story telling. It's good to see Machinima grow."

This growth of the medium could be no more apparent than in Kang's own productions. Both *In the Waiting Line* and *Anna* push not only the creative potential of Machinima, but have also forged new avenues for future Machinima producers. The *In the Waiting Line* music video received airplay on none other than MTV and *Anna* has recently been submitted to screen at the Sundance Film Festival, the ramifications of which could be quite revolutionary for the medium as a whole.

"If we're accepted, it could open a lot of doors for current and future Machinima filmmakers," says Kang, "Sundance is one of the most important film festivals for Independent Film Makers, and Machinima Film Makers are as Independent as they come. Being embraced by Sundance would give the medium a level of acceptance that it currently lacks."

THE FUTURE OF FILMMAKING?

The future certainly looks bright for Machinima both as an art form and for those that produce it. New films and filmmakers are emerging constantly and there has even been some commercial interest in Machinima both from within and outside of the videogame industry. Strange Company themselves have numerous projects on the boil at any one time. In between producing animated films for the likes of Electronic Arts and the BBC, they also have time to work on new projects like the intriguing-looking *Steelwight*.

"[*Steelwight*] is going to be Strange Company's big work for the next four or five years," says Hancock of the gothic animated series about an entire city sent to Hell.

We're describing [it] as *Dangerous Liaisons* meets *The Matrix*, although one of my co-writers insists it's more like *Buffy the Vampire Slayer* in the 18th Century."

Katherine Kang and Fountainhead Entertainment are continuing to promote their film, *Anna*, towards its acceptance in the Sundance Film Festival, but are also working on commercial films for Armadillo Aerospace (a small research and development company working on computer controlled rockets) among other potential projects.

IMPROVING AND EVOLVING

The fundamental question in Machinima's long-term future however is whether it will ever be able to stand alongside traditionally animated or live-action films as equals, or whether it's destined to be merely a cult genre. According to both Hancock and Kang though, Machinima's future is certain.

"Have you seen the Half-Life 2 previews? They're at a level where Joe Public probably won't realise that they're made using a different technique to *Toy Story*" assures Hancock. "There's plenty of CG on television right now – which could be copied or bettered in quality using Machinima techniques, and as the graphics curve accelerates – and more importantly, the AI curve – Machinima will become more and more indistinguishable from conventional CG."

Katherine Kang may not be as adamant about Machinima's future as Hugh Hancock is, but she's still confident that the medium's full potential is yet to be reached.

"I believe there's a good chance that Machinima will make it to the success and acceptance level of CGI someday," agrees Kang. "The only thing that will probably keep that from happening is the filmmakers themselves. They have to continue making films, improving and evolving."

Even more importantly though, Hancock believes that not only will Machinima become accepted as a cinematic medium in the future, but that Machinima will ultimately help all cinema to become a true art form that is no longer governed by commercial restrictions.

"I hope that by reducing the cost of production it will also help free film from the current tyranny of the distributors," says Hancock. "[Machinima will] ensure that we get closer to what Francis Ford Coppola called "the time when film can truly be called an art form" – a time when anyone can make a film of any story they can imagine, and have their success based on their talent, not their cash-flow". <<

WinWinWin >>

Entries close March 10th

Win Counter-Strike for Xbox!

>> Xbox Live will never be the same now that Counter-Strike has been unleashed upon the masses. It's an addiction that's hard to quit, so whilst you're having a ball with your friends, keep an eye on the clock lest you lose a few days without realising it. To ensure good times, Hyper are offering 10 copies of Counter-Strike for Xbox to our readers, so if you want to be in with a chance to win one, just answer this question:

10
COPIES
UP FOR
GRABS!

▶▶ Name three Counter-Strike weapons.

Put your answer on the back of an envelope along with your name and address, then post it to: **Fraggin' Rights, Hyper, 78 Renwick Street, Redfern, NSW 2016. Good luck!**



Win Final Fantasy X-2 for PS2!

>> The magic of the Final Fantasy X universe has returned! This is one of the most polished and enjoyable sequels you'll have a chance to play on PS2, and should whet your appetite for Final Fantasy XII. We're offering you the chance to win one of 5 copies we have up for grabs. Just answer the following question:

5
UP FOR
GRABS!

▶▶ Name the three lead female characters in Final Fantasy X-2.

Put your answer on the back of an envelope along with your name and address, then post it to: **Fantasy Freebies, Hyper, 78 Renwick Street, Redfern, NSW 2016. Good luck!**



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1. Entry is open to residents of Australia and New Zealand except employees and immediate families of Next Publishing Pty Ltd and its agencies associated with the promotion. 2. Only entries completed with these terms and conditions will be eligible. 3. Competition begins 9am January 27 and entries close at 6pm March 10. 4. In determining eligibility the judge's decision is final and no correspondence will be entered into. 5. The winner will be drawn at 9am March 11 at Next Publishing Pty Ltd, 78 Renwick St, Redfern NSW 2016. 6. Prizes must be taken as offered and are not redeemable for cash. 7. The promoter is not responsible for misdirected or lost mail. 8. The winners will be notified by mail and results published in the May issue of Hyper on sale April 7. 9. 10 winners will each receive Counter-Strike Xbox game (RRP \$99.95). 5 winners will each receive Final Fantasy X-2 PS2 game (RRP \$99.95). Total prize value is \$1499.25. 10. The promoter is Next Publishing Pty Ltd ABN 88 002 647 645 of 78 Renwick St, Redfern NSW 2016.

Live the Movie, Be the Hero

THE LORD OF THE RINGS THE RETURN OF THE KING



Team up with co-op multiplayer mode.

9 playable heroes including Gandalf, Frodo and Aragorn.

15 interactive environments from Minas Tirith to The Crack of Doom.

Enemies include The King of the Dead, Shelob, and The Witch King.



PlayStation 2

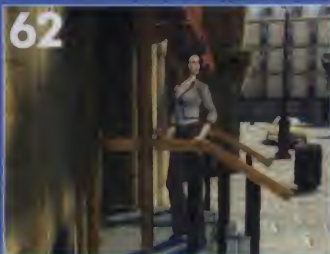
GAME BOY ADVANCE



38 FINAL FANTASY X-2

Play dress-ups, you'll love it...





Reviews >>

Game Theory

DANIEL STAINES



>> Given the reaction last month's column provoked – both on the Hyperactive forums and in my inbox – I think some further discussion of Deus Ex: Invisible War is in order. The flurry of criticism Ion Storm's anticipated sequel provoked upon release has raised some very interesting issues about the nature of game design that we'd do well to have a look at here. This month, I'd like to discuss the role of AI within a gameworld, the way it interacts with the overall design of a given game and the effect this interaction can have on the player.

One of the major criticisms leveled at Invisible War by critics and players alike is that the AI in the game is broken – i.e. the characters in the game often behave in ways that shatter the suspension of disbelief and therefore jar the player into realising that they are "just playing a game" after all. For example, some characters in Invisible War won't react if you walk into their private office and happily ransack their personal possessions while they're standing right next to you. This is apparently bad AI – after all, what kind of person would let this kind of thing happen right in front of them?

The answer to that question is obvious: an abnormal person. The kind of person that acts in ways contrary to what you'd expect from an average human being. This is a very telling point, because it shows that a lot of people playing Invisible War do so under the expectation that the AI within the game is going to react in ways consistent with everyday human behaviour. What could lead to such high expectations? Nobody plays KOTOR, Final Fantasy or even Half-Life expecting the characters to behave like normal human beings. Why is the AI in Invisible War subject to such intense scrutiny?

I think the answer to this question can be found in the quality of Invisible War's overall game design. Players have high expectations of Invisible War's AI because the game is designed well enough to make those expectations reasonable. The world of Invisible War is dynamic, expansive... believable. Ion Storm has crafted a game where the player can interact with the gameworld in a fashion that reasonably approximates reality, so it's no wonder people got upset when the AI failed to behave like a real person might. On the other hand, nobody expects the AI in KOTOR to behave realistically because that game never gave the impression of being in a real, living, breathing universe – it always feels like a game. The same cannot be said for Invisible War, and so complaints about its supposedly poor AI are actually something of a testament to its impeccable design. Good games can be funny like that.

Until next month,
daniels@next.com.au

HYPER CREW TOP 5 GAMES

Eliot Fish - Editor

1. Civilization III – PC
"You don't deserve my stinking territory map, scumbag!"
2. CM 03/04 – PC
3. Final Fantasy X-2 – PS2
4. Pro Evolution Soccer 3 – PS2
5. Cricket 2004 (for comedy value) – PS2

Cam Shea - Deputy Editor

1. GTA Double Pack – Xbox
"Kill the Maitians indeed!"
2. Deus Ex: Invisible War – PC
3. I-Ninja – PS2
4. PuyoPop Fever – Xbox
5. Links 2004 – Xbox

Malcolm Campbell - Art Guy

1. Final Fantasy X-2 – PS2
"I can really relate to Wakka..."
2. Maximo vs. Army of Zin – PS2
3. Rebel Strike – GCN
4. Finding Nemo – PS2
5. PuyoPop Fever – Xbox

Jackson Gothe-Snape - Reviewer

1. Project Gotham Racing 2 – Xbox
"I'd been flirting with Live for a while. It pulled me the other night."
2. GTA 3 – Xbox
3. Downhill Domination – PS2
4. GTA Vice City – Xbox
5. Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2004 – PS2

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- 50 I-Ninja
- 52 Spawn Armageddon
- 54 The Sims: Bustin' Out
- 56 Urban Freestyle Soccer
- 58 Magic the Gathering: Battlegrounds
- 60 Wrath Unleashed
- 62 Broken Sword: The Sleeping Dragon
- 64 Lord of the Rings: War of the Ring
- 66 X2: The Threat
- 68 Horizons: Empire of Istar
- 70 Commandos 3
- 70 Harry Potter: Quidditch World Cup
- 70 Empires: Dawn of the Modern World
- 71 Smackdown! Here Comes The Pain
- 71 Puyo Pop Fever
- 71 Kya: Dark Lineage
- 72 Cricket 2004
- 72 Red Faction
- 72 Splinter Cell
- 74 Max Payne
- 75 Dragonball Z: Taiketsu
- 75 Terminator 3: Rise of the Machines

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!



Maybe cheer her up with a massage... yeah

Confusing at first, but it's good... trust us

Hey kid, come back with my balloon!

FINAL FANTASY X-2

MALCOLM CAMPBELL imagines Yuna in a fantasy of a different kind..

☞ Square, by now, must be quite familiar with the old saying starting 'you can please some of the people all of the time...' With each new instalment of Final Fantasy there is an inevitable vitriolic backlash, if not about how much the lead character sucks then the relative suckiness of the other characters, or the battle system, or the story, the FMV, music, the fact it's not a sprite-based SNES game anymore, blah blah blah. Even the generally well-regarded Final Fantasy X had a boatload of detractors, and Square look determined to polarise opinions even further with its sequel. For starters, "Final Fantasy" and "sequel" aren't terms that have mixed before. Then there's the opening ten minutes of the game, featuring scantily clad heroines singing bubblegum pop in a scene more reminiscent of Video Hits than Final Fantasy. This is not your typical FF game, in more ways than one...

PLUCKY GALS

It's two years since Yuna and her Guardians defeated Sin, bringing the Eternal Calm to Spira. Yuna and cousin Rikku have taken employment as "sphere hunters", travelling the land with the gruff and enigmatic Paine trying to piece together Spira's forgotten history. When one of these spheres shows up containing images of what looks like a certain blond Blitzball player thought to be lost, our plucky trio of gals set forth to solve the mystery.

For once, Square have tried to introduce a degree of non-linearity into the narrative structure by dividing Ffx-2 into missions. From your airship (piloted by wacky Keith Prodigy lookalike, Brother) you can select from a number of locations around Spira. Missions marked "Hotspot" advance the plot directly, while dialogue in the optional missions flesh out the background. It

soon builds into quite an intriguing tale, but again is quite different from previous efforts. Without a world-destroying menace for our heroines to combat, there's a rather laid-back atmosphere to proceedings. Early missions in particular are full of relaxed discussions with old friends and Square's often-misguided attempts at humour. This real attempt to 'lighten-up' the game occasionally veers horribly into giggling frivolity that is frankly embarrassing, but Square should be commended for trying to inject something fresh into a very predictable genre. It's not long before events start getting serious anyway...

The actual gameplay component to these missions is much more straightforward. You can forget any preconceptions that Ffx-2 had a major platform-jumping element. Simply hold circle and Yuna will





Rikku: Pushy, isn't he?



Garik: High Summoner Yuna. It is Garik's honor.



Baralai: A pleasure, Lady Yuna. I am Baralai, Praetor of New Yevon.

...and I had an accident with a bottle of hair dye



Quick! Slip into something more comfortable!



Let's bomb a few third world countries



THE COMBAT SYSTEM HAS BEEN REMODELLED TO FEATURE THE RETURN OF THE ACTIVE TIME BATTLE GAUGE

climb or jump to areas you're allowed to access. Useless, really. With the exception of a decent number that play like mini-games (of varying quality), missions will involve the usual mix of exploration and fighting fiends. The combat system has been remodelled to feature the return of the Active Time Battle gauge, a Final Fantasy staple that lends encounters an almost real-time feel. Aside from speeding battles up considerably, the ATB now allows characters, with a little timing, to chain attacks and even interrupt those against them. It's fast, frantic and fun and is further enhanced by the game's other major innovation, the Dresssphere system.

GET A NEW JOB

Contrary to cynical opinion, the ability to change clothes mid-battle does not turn FFX-2 into a Sparkly Princess Barbie Dress-Ups game. Admittedly, changing Dresspheres

mid-battle is accompanied by a cutscene featuring flashy effects and ample fan service (easily skipped if it gets annoying), but it's merely a visual representation of another Final Fantasy favourite — the Job System. Changing Dresspheres (jobs) is necessary in battle and works much like character swapping did in FFX. Need some health? Just swap to the White Mage Dresssphere. Tinkering with the abilities each of the seventeen Dresspheres unlock and the Garment Grids that house them quickly becomes hugely addictive. New abilities are always just a few battles away and the acquirement of a new character class will see you running in circles trying to get into a random battle (who would have thought?) just to test it out.

Perhaps the biggest problem FFX-2 faces is one that afflicts so many

sequels — the thrill exploring a brand new world with brand new characters is gone. Sure, it's got an interesting story and plenty in the character advancement and combat systems to muck around with, not to mention the lengthy side quests, mini-games and optional boss battles to while away the hours. But the recycled graphics, characters and locations

make FFX-2 feel like an expansion pack at times. Even the music sounds a bit half-hearted.

That said, FFX-2 is still a fine addition to the series. While some may find it difficult to get past the too-cute antics and cheesy dialogue, there's plenty here to like, especially if you enjoyed Final Fantasy X. And for once, it's good to see a game that explores events after you've killed the baddie and saved the world. <<

!!! As far as we know, there's still no plan for FFX1 to be released in Australia.

AVAILABLE ON:

PS2 / XBOX / PC

DETAILS

CATEGORY: RPG / PLAYERS: 1 /
DEVELOPER: Square Enix /
PUBLISHER: EA / PRICE: \$99.95 /
RATING: TBA / AVAILABLE: Late
February /

HYPER VERDICT

PLUS: Dressphere and battle systems, usual Square quality.

MINUS: Very un-macho tone will turn more than a few away.

VISUALS SOUND GAMEPLAY

94 87 88

OVERALL

88

A fun, fresh break from the Final Fantasy mould.



I wonder if I can land like this?



Okay, maybe we were going too fast back there...



Big me up, ma man!

DOWNHILL DOMINATION

JACKSON GOTHE-SNAPE is the deadliest man on two wheels...

Once upon a time, the gaming scene was overcrowded with Downhill Dominations. In the wake of Tony Hawk's success, we were inundated with mostly extreme recreations of every sport on the planet. Most sucked, some were great, but all were so accessible that even your one-thumbed great grandfather could set a top score (as long as you muted the animal in distress soundtrack). Okay, so maybe that doesn't give the best description of one of the major gaming trends in the last few years, but you get the gist. Extreme was in, and at the time we hated it.

How things have changed. These days it's all 'stealth this, stealth that', stealth/action, stealth ate my baby etc. Even bloody Carmen Sandiego has stealth in it. Why? How we yearn for a return to sweet novel twitch gaming and characters with Afros and national stereotypes.

Cue Downhill Domination, and then applaud. You'd better be quick though — blink and you'll miss it.

INCOG NEATO

It comes to you from the same guys that made Twisted Metal: Black and the hilarious War of the Monsters, Incog Inc. Both featured curious choices in their subject matter, but offered gameplay with depth and reward. There's nothing more disinteresting than car combat and stupid comic book monster fighting — or so we thought. Downhill mountain biking is, then, thanks to our stealth-brought malaise and nostalgic craving for the extreme, their wisest choice of genre yet.

So if you were designing a mountain biking game, what would you put in it? A big f***-off mountain. No wait, lots of mountains. Downhill Domination: check. Some runs last for more than

five minutes. That's a lot of hill. Next, maybe lots and lots of speed. So much speed that the Drugs Unit has taken out a warrant for the game's arrest. So much speed that you can't even see it, let alone control it. There are times when you're getting close to 100mph down the hill, and THEN you hit the speed boost powerup.

Next, what about some tricks? Of course they're in. But, even better, they don't get in the way — this is not about tricking. Downhill Domination is about racing, and pulling tricks helps you go faster. What about moose? Well, they're in there as well, next to people, foxes, polar bears, boulders, stalactites and other obstacles that move, run or tumble in front of you, enlivening the runs and upping the action ante a hundredfold. Hot babes? Not really, but this game is so fun it doesn't matter. Fortunately,

Downhill Domination does feature sex's close friend, violence, so you can punch, kick, throw bottles and just generally slam your opponents. Even better, the more you do it, the more powerful your attack. It's nice to be rewarded every now and again. And then there's the unlockables! Buy riders, animal bikes, prototype bikes. Animal bikes?! Certainly, as well the most unlikely and predictably pointless unlockable of all, the fog editor.

HE ACTUALLY SAID ANIMAL BIKES

The game's intricate, multi-pathed environments feature fantastical waterfalls, cliffs, geysers, helicopters and houses. While sometimes the course narrows to one small, walled-in, forgettable path, the rest of them are so crazy you'll easily forgive. Each track is splattered with bonus black runs, powerups, and the aforementioned obstacles, but their



Yeah, a typical Australian...



ET cam



Hey, do you like my new watch?



DOWNHILL DOMINATION DOES FEATURE SEX'S CLOSE FRIEND, **VIOLENCE**, SO YOU CAN PUNCH, KICK, **THROW BOTTLES**

real attraction is their monumental slope. Some crisscross down the hill, offering the opportunity to take a shortcut as the (suicidal) crow flies — straight through the overcrowded forest, all the time actually pedaling like a madman, down the bloody slope. Insanity. It's the only way to describe it.

There are plenty of races to sink your teeth into, all tied together under the career mode guise. Most aren't terribly difficult, and it seems the AI never gets too far ahead for the sake of competition, but the variety in courses and the bike upgrade system still keep things interesting. Well, that's not totally true. What actually keeps it interesting is the mental racing. Pedaling down what would mathematically be defined as a cliff? Jesus. Split-screen multiplayer for up to four players is also included, and is fun, if a little foggy with the odd chug.

But in the end, when the race is over, and the hairy midgets have finished off hosing down the bikes, Downhill Domination will not find a place in the big old book of great games. I thought I'd never utter something so apparently impossible, but this extreme sports game is refreshing. Unfortunately, it is not all that much more. The game's been out in America for more than six months. Not so much that it's taken so long, but the fact that nobody really cares, says plenty about Downhill Domination's mildly pleasing nature. The visuals, although bright, colourful and diverse, are utilitarian, with an edgy, blocky feel reminiscent of a PSone game. The bike physics, too, are at best hilariously unrealistic and at worst stupid. You very much float across the courses with little

!!! If you're anything like Jeff Minter and you've always wanted to ride a Llama, this is the game for you.

interaction with the track, barring the odd window-breaking stunt and the SSXish trail left behind by your tyres. The tracks as well range from edge-of-your-seat splendour to dad's backyard, and can sometimes be confusing and deceiving.

Still, having completed the necessary game review weighing up pros and cons thing, kudos must go to Incog for surprising us once again.

After we struggled down the slope ignorant of the finer controls and nuances in the game's mechanics for first few times, it was like we were playing Shaun Palmer's Pro Snowboarder all over again. Don't remember it? Neither do we — that's the point. But, thanks to good old fashioned gameplay, Downhill Domination jauntily climbed our ladder of opinion as we descended the mountain again and again. <<

AVAILABLE ON:

PS2 / XBOX / PC

DETAILS

CATEGORY: Mountain biking /
PLAYERS: 1-4 / DEVELOPER: Incog
Inc / PUBLISHER: Codemasters /
PRICE: \$89.95 / RATING: G /
AVAILABLE: Now /

HYPER VERDICT

PLUS: Genuine mountain biking madness.

MINUS: It's not Halo 2. Or Half-Life 2.

VISUALS SOUND GAMEPLAY

80 78 83

OVERALL

80

Whoah. It's cra-azy. And more fun than frying fish. Really.



Hiiiyaah!



Let's try spinning, that's a good trick



The world famous freeballer, Maximo

MAXIMO VS. ARMY OF ZIN

DANIEL STAINES ain't afraid of no ghouls or ghosts...

H You wouldn't think it just by looking at the box or whatever, but Maximo: Army of Zin is a game all about greed. Greed, greed, greed — Greed with a capital "G". Grizeed, as office favourite Snoop Dogg might say. Oh sure, there's no denying that Army of Zin is a meticulously solid third-person action platform game. It's got the combo based battle system, the lightweight RPG elements and the fluid (if slightly uninspired) level design. But those things alone aren't enough to keep you playing until four in the morning. No, for the kind of dangerous addictiveness you need something else. You need a bit of incentive. You need something to goad you on and keep you fixed in a "one more level" mind-set for hours at a time. Basically, what you need is some cold, hard currency.

RAVENOUS MONEY-LUST
You need gold coins and you need things to spend them on. You need to be possessed by the kind of ravenous money-lust that will cause you to risk your last life jumping over a gaping lava flow for the sake of nothing but a few gems. And when you die and have to do the whole level over again, you will not have learned a single thing. You will take the same deadly risks again and again until you finally get your greedily tantalising loot you can find. This, you understand, is what makes Army of Zin so gripping. More money means more things to buy; more things to buy means more powers for Maximo; more powers for Maximo means more ways to bash up enemies and more ways to bash up enemies means more fun overall.

This desire to acquire is self-

perpetuating and imbued into almost every facet of the entire game, making it significantly deeper and more rewarding than your average 3D action romp. Not that we're implying that the rest of Army of Zin is somehow shallow or lacklustre — quite the opposite, in fact. With access to a broad selection of (purchasable) weapons and armour upgrades, Maximo is given ample opportunity to interact with his world and lay the smackdown on its inhabitants in a wide variety of unique and interesting ways.

Different varieties of boxer shorts, for example, can imbue our little wild-eyed hero with a number of different abilities with their own respective pros and cons to be considered by the player. So, one could opt to don the swanky dollar sign boxers for their hidden treasure detecting powers and use them to

acquire more money to purchase weapon upgrades. Or, alternatively, you could whack on some iron boxers and enjoy the ability to wear a coveted suit of gold armour. But hey — why not play through a level once with one pair and then try it again with another pair to see how things differ? Choices like these lend Army of Zin a certain level of flexibility, making what is essentially a linear experience feel less constrained and more open to bit of creative experimentation.

TURN THEM TO DUST

The same can be said for Army of Zin's combat, which manages to walk that fine line between instantly accessible and rewardingly complex. Yeah, you can basically get through the whole game just by pressing the X button a lot, but there is some tactical depth to be found in the choice of weapons



Ever eaten a sword, doggy?



Is it a bit chilly in here, or is it just me?



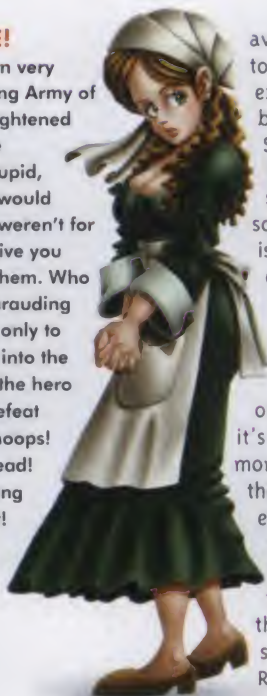
Lucky it's not wearing it's monocle



A WAR-HAMMER IS BETTER FOR OPEN AREA ENCOUNTERS WHERE YOU CAN GIVE IT A FULL SWING AND SMASH ENTIRE GANGS

HELP MEEEEEE!

One thing you learn very quickly while playing *Army of Zin* is that every frightened townspeople in the entire world is a stupid, stupid moron that would deserve to die if it weren't for the fact that they give you money for saving them. Who escapes from a marauding horde of monsters only to wander right back into the swinging blade of the hero that's battling to defeat said monsters? Whoops! There goes your head! And my money along with it, goddamn it!



available and how you choose to develop them. As you'd expect, different weapons do better in different situations. Swords are quick and great for tight engagements with small packs of enemies, but something like a war-hammer is better for open area encounters where you can give it a full swing and smash entire gangs of foes at once. And because it's rare to ever have all the money necessary to upgrade them all, one must choose to either specialise with one or two weapons or spread out and become a jack-of-all-trades but master of none. In this way, *Army of Zin* is somewhat similar to the *Ratchet and Clank* games –

!!! The artist who does those cool illustrations is Susumu Matsushita.

and hey, you won't hear us complaining about that!

As a sequel, *Army of Zin* is an excellent piece of work – delivering more of the same goodness that made us fans of the first game and then refining it to the point of perfection. But even if you haven't played the original, there's

absolutely no reason to pass up this game. It's an absorbing action romp: good, simple gaming that never takes itself too seriously and delivers the kind of straightforward fun that makes for a welcome break from the noir laden narratives so prevalent in today's big titles. Oh yeah, and Maximo can summon the Grim Reaper himself to help you strike down his enemies and turn them to dust. That's gotta be worth something, right? <<

AVAILABLE ON:

PS2 / XBOX / PC / VC

DETAILS

CATEGORY: Action/Platform /
PLAYERS: 1 / DEVELOPER: Capcom /
PUBLISHER: Capcom /
PRICE: \$99.95 / RATING: G /
AVAILABLE: Feb /

HYPHER VERDICT

PLUS: Great greedy gameplay, satisfying combat.

MINUS: Can be a bit repetitious, largely unoriginal.

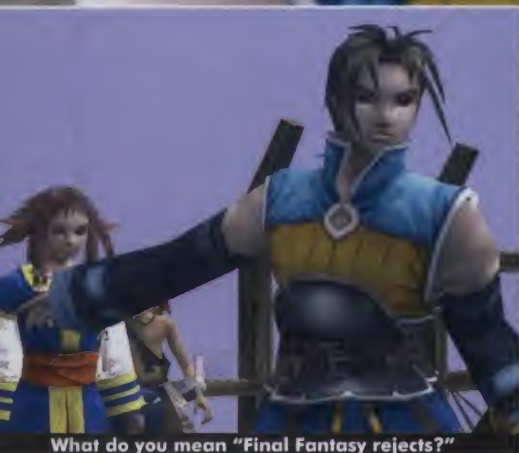
VISUALS SOUND GAMEPLAY

80 75 88

OVERALL

85

A great action romp and a fine follow-up to the original.



What do you mean "Final Fantasy rejects?"



Kill him if you can stop laughing long enough...



Kiss me, I'm really a beautiful prince!

ARC: TWILIGHT OF THE SPIRITS

DANIEL STAINES is always getting stuck into the spirits...

It must be pretty hard for developers to make a name for themselves in the games industry these days. It's not like the 80s, you know, where genre frontiers were still being established and word of mouth was pretty much all the advertising a developer could ever need. Now game makers have to establish their work as a brand. A sellable product is the bottom line, and often the best way to sell a new product is to make it just like an old one with a few minor embellishments for good measure. This is where we come to Arc: Twilight of the Spirits.

WACKY JAPANESE HUMOUR

As a whole, Arc is a lot like Final Fantasy. The male leads are effeminate cry-babies driven by romantic notions of heroism that are underpinned by a burning lust for revenge. Their female counterparts are mostly attractive, young and

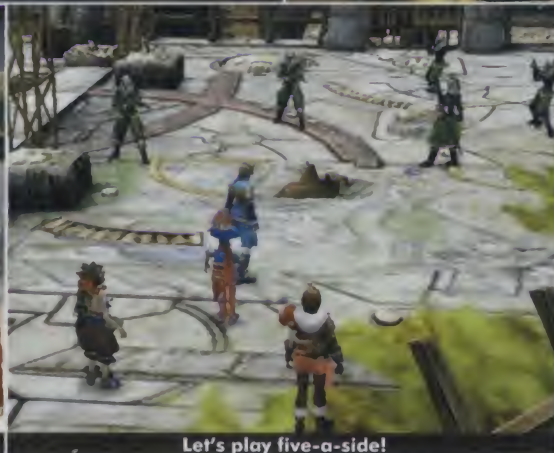
chock-full of that deep emotional turmoil that hides itself behind a mask of flirtatious vivacity. The gameplay and narrative are both extraordinarily linear and the gameworld itself can be manipulated only in ways expressly delineated by the designer. There's a battle system that combines equal parts FF: Tactics and Vagrant Story, a simple magic-focused character development dynamic and a mania for extremely long cut-scenes full of drawn-out, poorly written conversations lightly peppered with wacky Japanese "humour". Sound familiar?

Of course it does — and developer Cattle Call probably knows this. In fact, they probably knew it the whole time they were developing Arc. That would explain the myriad of minor embellishments they've introduced to differentiate it from Final Fantasy while producing a product familiar enough to cash-in on the success of

that franchise. This isn't a bad thing. There are plenty of good games out there that have done exactly the same and improved an entire genre by doing so. For example, Deus Ex was pretty much System Shock 2 with a whole swag of neat improvements. Guilty Gear XX plays a lot like a highly refined version of Street Fighter 2. Square-Enix has even done it with FF Tactics Advance and Tactics Ogre. But the trick, you see, is to make sure that the changes are actually worthwhile — and Arc doesn't quite cut the mustard in this regard.

Here's an example of what I'm talking about: instead of just receiving items at the end of a battle, Arc





Together we can seek revenge on our stylist

Let's play five-a-side!

Is that what a Fanta headache looks like?



MOST OF THE DIALOGUE WE ENDURED WHILE SITTING IN FRONT OF ARC WAS COMPLETELY SUPERFLUOUS AND LONG-WINDED.

makes you walk your character around to where they were dropped and actually pick them up manually. After picking up an item, you can't move your character any more and either have to hit whatever's closest to you or simply end the turn. If there are any items left at the end of the fight, they inexplicably disappear forever. This is a change that differentiates Arc from the games it is so blatantly stealing from, but it's not a GOOD change. It's actually rather silly for a variety of reasons — the chief one being that it's completely unnecessary. It doesn't add anything to the game. In fact, it actually detracts from what is essentially a decent tactical turn-based battle system. So why have it?

NOTHING BUT TALK

Another way Arc attempts to differentiate itself from its competitors is through the use of

dual protagonists. So there are two main characters instead of one and each has their own unique story that interlinks with the other — that's great to put on the back of the box, but what does it do for the game? Well in our estimation it simply means that there are two half-baked narratives instead of a single complete one. The fact is that the sections of the game that advance the plot for each protagonist are so long and self-contained that one doesn't get a real feel for the connections between the two narratives. By the time you get to the end of Darc's side of the story, you'll probably have forgotten what happened in Kharg's.

Perhaps our memory would have been better if the game hadn't featured so many mind-numbingly long cut-scenes. It is not an

Remember Arc the Lad? It debuted on PlayStation in 1995...

exaggeration to say that we only spent three of the first five hours into Arc actually playing the game. Well, that is unless you count simply walking from point-to-point in order to trigger the next extended conversation "playing the game". We're not opposed to narrative heavy games, but most of the dialogue we endured while sitting in front of Arc was completely superfluous and long-winded. At least, that's how we saw it after thirty minutes straight of nothing but talk.

Even though I've bashed it quite a bit in this review, you should know that Arc isn't all that bad. Ultimately, it's a paint-by-numbers Japanese RPG with numerous annoying quirks it could've done without. Rabid fans of the genre will doubtlessly enjoy it. The rest of us, however, can wait until FFXII. <<

AVAILABLE ON:

PS2 XBOX / GCN / PC

DETAILS

CATEGORY: RPG / PLAYERS: 1 / DEVELOPER: Cattle Call / PUBLISHER: SCEI / PRICE: \$99.95 / RATING: M15+ / AVAILABLE: Now /

HYPHER VERDICT

PLUS: It's a solid Japanese RPG...

MINUS: ...that adds nothing worthwhile to the genre.

VISUALS SOUND GAMEPLAY

80 72 80

OVERALL

78

A derivative but solid RPG, rife with annoying quirks.



Where in the world is the level design?

Where in the world is the gameplay?

Where in the world is the shame?

CARMEN SANDIEGO: THE SECRET OF THE STOLEN DRUMS

JACKSON GOTHE-SNAPE could have a future playing drums...

TRANSPARENT SERMONS
I'm protecting the integrity of an icon of my youth. Perhaps an icon of many youths. A good icon. A whole, noble icon. That of the Carmen Sandiego series of games. And sure, I'm choosing to forgive (youth-borne naivety?) both the original series' unashamed American outlook and the fact that even these educational titles were designed to

make its publishers money. But this stand is less about politics and commercialism and more about gameplay, etiquette and heritage.

See, Carmen Sandiego: The Secret of the Stolen Drums is a kids platformer. It's a linear affair, with some combat, stealth, robots, spirits, switch-flipping and comic book storytelling. There's nothing particularly wrong with it, (apart from, predictably, the camera) but it is fairly boring, visually bland and aurally plain. You can jump, double jump, attack, pole vault, solve puzzles and shoot things. There's even smashable crates. Anyway, the problem is not the game itself per se. It's what the game represents. This is formula at its worst. See, Where in the World/Time/Etc. is Carmen Sandiego?, the legendary titles that informed a generation, were compelling if basic detective stories,

grounded in the material world thanks to their novel use of real-world research tools (such as Where in Time's pocket Encyclopaedia). Carmen Sandiego: The Secret of the Stolen Drums is a generic platformer starring an idiotic spikey-haired ballsy rookie Carmen-chaser. See the difference? While there is the odd puzzle in today's Carmen, there's much more pop-stealth gameplay, jumping and whacking. And I don't like it one bit.

But that's not even the worse thing. With the arrival at each location around the world, you're given a bit of an educational background of the place. Instead of reconciling Carmen Sandiego with contemporary action/platformer, these additions only serve to show how horribly shallow and despicable this game is. Tellingly, you can skip these brief, transparent sermons. <<

AVAILABLE ON:
PS2 XBOX GCN

DETAILS
CATEGORY: Platformer /
PLAYERS: 1 / DEVELOPER: A2M /
PUBLISHER: BAM! /
PRICE: \$49.95 / RATING: G8+ /
AVAILABLE: Now /

HYPHER VERDICT
PLUS: Solid controls, crisp graphics, cheap price.
MINUS: Dumb, direct, your character Cole.

VISUALS SOUND GAMEPLAY
73 67 67

OVERALL
53

Where in the world is my Carmen?

LEAD THE BEST !



You're the commander of **Rainbow Six**, an **international elite SWAT team**. With the **new voice communication system**, use your microphone to control your fellow agents and accomplish your mission **together**.

Tom Clancy's **RAINBOW SIX 3**

Get the team spirit



www.rainbowsix3.com



UBISOFT



Deaf, dumb and blind fire



Lucky I wrapped gaffer tape around my knees...



Don't disturb him when he's enjoying his cover

KILL.SWITCH

JACKSON GOTHE-SNAPE puts his finger on the switch.

Keeping track of all the difficult spellings in gaming can be difficult. Space in Game Boy. None in GameCube. Capital X, lower case b in Xbox. Capital S in PlayStation. Obviously, all were chosen after extensive uses of focus groups and market research, and while accuracy is of the utmost importance in maintaining any respectable publication, people have this great knack of understanding either way. You wouldn't have this problem speaking. Is there a difference in pronunciation between PlayStation and PlayStation (or, for that matter, pLayStAtion)? Hell no. But, as putting Hyper on 'easy listening' tapes is out of the question, we'll have to put up with things as they are.

And put up we will, as we come across a whole new title headache in Namco's delightful new action shooter, kill.switch. No capitals, full

stop in between. Sounds easy (and is, if bloody MS Word stops auto-correcting it). But then Namco go and make the official logo all capitals, and we lose concentration. Fortunately, kill.switch itself is far less taxing. This is the shooter for the everyman. Simple, compelling, fast-paced. It's good clean fun.

GET BLIND

You play as Bishop, a mysterious commando haunted by poor quality CG FMV flashbacks of a strange lady. Yet, upon waking, you seem to be under instruction from some shady character. Anyway, it's suspicious, as will be confirmed to you later, but also totally and ultimately irrelevant. See, kill.switch is all about shooting, and taking cover, and shooting some more. And, make no mistake, kill.switch is raucously good fun. Much like an arcade SOCOM with more firepower and

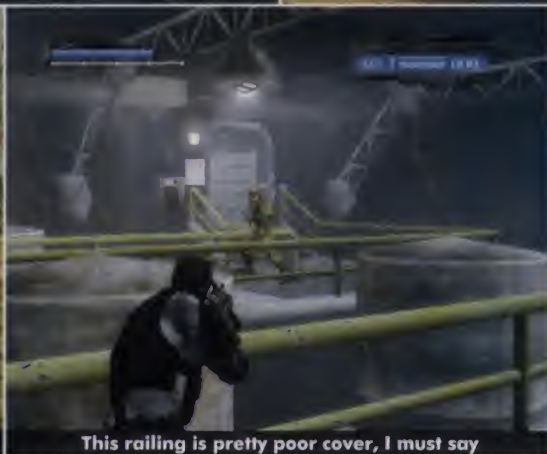
more artificial environments, it's a third-person shooter that successfully manages to encourage — no, demand — the basic combat principle of taking cover. Sure, you can blast through Rambo-style, and you can be effective to a degree, but when taking cover is as fun as it is in kill.switch you won't really want to (as much).

Two words: blind fire. Okay, maybe just 'blindfire' is acceptable as well, but as the intro has already proven, it's unnecessary to get bogged down in word games. Remember Hyper's prediction: blind fire is the next big thing in arcade tactical shooters (admittedly not a huge genre). And if it's not, it bloody well should be. Who needs to risk their finely crafted crew cut by sticking their head out from cover when you can just fling your gun out and blast away at random. Sure, it's less accurate, but infinitely cooler.





DIE! DIE! Er... hello?



This railing is pretty poor cover, I must say



If you're going to kill... do it stylishly.



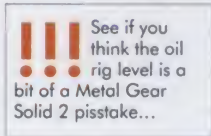
THINGS DO GET REPETITIVE, WITH UNINSPIRED OBJECTIVES SUCH AS **AVOIDING EXPLOSIVE TRIPWIRES**

See, kill.switch is superbly balanced to emphasise the importance of cover. Together, the health system, weapon accuracy, control system and environments make taking cover the only acceptable strategy. As the game's slogan boldly states: "Take cover. Take aim. Take over." With each hit you take, your max life drops a fraction, but your actual life drops significantly, before recharging over a few seconds back up to the (now slightly reduced) maximum. Thus, you can get killed within a second after receiving a handful of hits out in the open, but the odd lucky shot while taking cover doesn't hurt too badly. The risks and benefits of blind fire and popping out are refined appropriately, and everything about the control is very smooth and easy. Your character efficiently backs up to walls, pops out, runs,

aims, dives. It's a beautiful shooting extravaganza. And although the environments are in no way realistic, sparse, blandly textured and sometimes appear to be designed by a 15 year-old using a Quake 1 map editor, each is designed with cover solely in mind. Car doors, tables, columns, crates — everything can be hidden behind, with varying degrees of success.

POP COMBAT

And sure, it's not the best looking game. And its sound is no more than appropriate. And it won't win the Nobel Prize for physics or... peace. What it will do is offer its players a tremendous, if basic, romp. The only combat many of us will ever see is in the cinema — so why not have a game that recreates that?



But, falling on the basic side, things do get repetitive, with uninspired objectives such as avoiding explosive tripwires. Apparently they need to tell us to avoid them these days. Also, the lack of a realistic basis for many of the missions, means you'll be shooting for shooting's sake, and little more. And while enemy soldiers run and find different cover, lob grenades and generally become a nuisance, you'll never feel intimidated by their presence. They are little more than glorified, weapon-equipped ducks.

In the end though, it's one and a half thumbs up. kill.switch is the perfect renting game, and one that takes all the boring crap away from good old shooting combat. Duck, flank, frag, and fire. Just a pity you can't go online. Boo! <<

AVAILABLE ON:

PS2 XBOX PC

DETAILS

CATEGORY: Shooter / PLAYERS: Only 1... / DEVELOPER: Namco / PUBLISHER: Namco / PRICE: \$99.95 / RATING: M15+ / AVAILABLE: Now /

HYPER VERDICT

PLUS: Blindfire, emphasis on cover.

MINUS: Even taking cover gets boring.

VISUALS SOUND GAMEPLAY

78 73 79

OVERALL

77

An accessible, action-packed, arcade shooter.



Style-conscious villains... nice.



Ninja's new 10-foot plasma screen



Have a problem with motion-sickness? Uh-oh...

I-NINJA

CAM SHEA gets his ninja on...

I-Ninja is yet another game that hedges its bets by including something for everyone. It rolls a whole host of game styles into one, but fortunately does so quite successfully. You play the aptly named "Ninja", and although the press release may have described him as "an ultra cool ninja with extreme attitude", we won't hold it against him, as he's actually a pretty quirky leading character.

MASSIVE MECH ROBOT

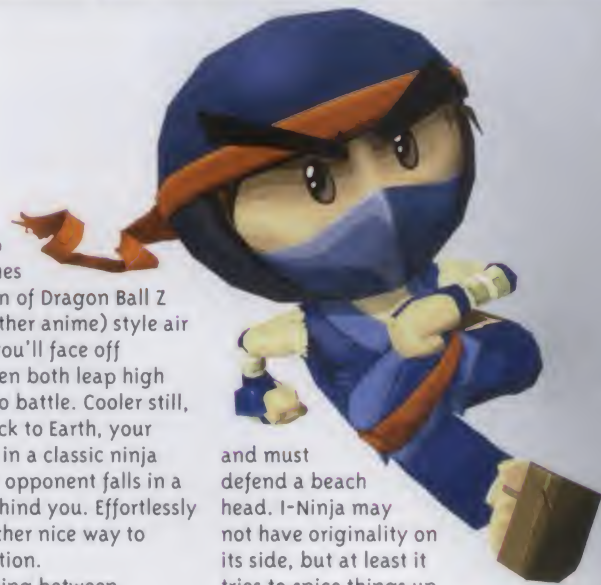
Ninja is your typical platform hero in many ways — he runs, he (double) jumps and he collects coins. He's also super deformed, and from a distance is a relatively cute little critter. Get up close, however, and you'll find that although he has a bulbous head and enormous eyebrows, Ninja does indeed have attitude to an Xtreme degree. In the first cutscene in fact, he accidentally kills his sensei while

hepped up on a rage stone. Not that it matters — sensei just comes back as a ghost and continues to guide (and annoy) him. But yes, Ninja's an aggressive little brute, constantly cackling to himself and tersely spitting out one liners.

He also has a versatile range of moves. Ninja can run up and along walls, use a grappling hook, grind rails, wall jump, roll about Super Monkey Ball style, build up height in half pipes, hover glide, pilot rockets and so on. While the sheer number of borrowed elements may creatively bankrupt the game to some extent (hell, there's even a couple of "stealth" sections, they're implemented in a lively fashion. The grappling hook, for instance, can be used to swing from ledge to ledge, but it can also be used on high speed Sonic inspired sections of track to fling Ninja around vertically inclined U-turns. Very cool.

There are also some nice touches like the inclusion of Dragon Ball Z (and so many other anime) style air battles, where you'll face off against a foe then both leap high into the air to do battle. Cooler still, as you come back to Earth, your character lands in a classic ninja pose while your opponent falls in a broken heap behind you. Effortlessly stylish and another nice way to break up the action.

Indeed, jumping between different styles of gameplay is very much what I-Ninja is about, and for every couple of traditional action platform levels there's a completely different mini-game to contend with — most of which are pretty cool. There's one inspired by Super Punch Out for instance where you box with a massive mech robot. There's also an underwater shoot 'em up and a mission where you man a turret gun



and must defend a beach head. I-Ninja may not have originality on its side, but at least it tries to spice things up somewhat.

INTO BESERKER MODE

The heart of the game, however, is running around ripping your enemies to shreds — and there's plenty of hapless cannon fodder to test your blade on. Side weapons include shurikens and darts, but most of the time you'll be cutting loose (bits of your enemies that is)



That's one ostentatious cigar clipper

Hey Ninja found the Dragon's Tooth!

Sure beats Monkey's fluffy cloud



AS YOU MOVE THROUGH THE GAME, NINJA'S SWORD GETS **PROGRESSIVELY MORE POWERFUL**

DEVELOPED WITH MALICE...

I-Ninja's developers Argonaut have a very interesting history. On the one hand they were responsible (along with Nintendo) for the Super Nintendo's FX chip, as well as both Starwing and Stunt Race FX. Hooray for Argonaut right? On the other hand, they've cursed the planet with dross like Croc and (the still yet to be released) Malice. Fortunately, I-Ninja sits closer to Starwing than Croc.



with Ninja's razor sharp katana. He has a good range of attacks and combos to utilise in battle, and the combat system allows you to take on several enemies at once, and attack in all directions.

Ninja's animations are great, showing him springing back and forth, stabbing enemies behind with reverse thrusts and so on. We also particularly liked the animations for enemies sliced in two, as their halves gradually slide apart and slump to the ground. Better still, as you move through the game, Ninja's sword gets progressively more powerful, and you unlock bonuses that can be earned through combat, such as the ability to recharge your health, ride a massive shuriken or go into berserker mode. Perhaps what's most lacking in combat is a variety of

opponents, but at least you're usually taking on a few at once.

Level design is good overall, but for every series of speedy runs, winding grinds and half pipe action, there's usually also a hallway fest or jump jumpy section that brings things back to Platform-ville. Indeed,

while I-Ninja is certainly a fun game, it lacks enough truly compelling design to make it a must-play. We do, however, really like the way Argonaut have combined what looks like a kiddie game (bright colours married to simple textures and geometry, and enemies with green blood) with a slightly darker vein of humour and design. Ninja especially is a very likeable lead, and absolutely seething with rage – he's like Oscar the Grouch on Ritalin, and how that could ever be bad we don't know. <<

Argonaut have a new jetski game called *Carve*, which will be reviewed soon!

AVAILABLE ON:

PS2 XBOX GCN

DETAILS

CATEGORY: Platformer / PLAYERS: 1 / DEVELOPER: Argonaut / PUBLISHER: Namco / PRICE: \$99.95 / RATING: G / AVAILABLE: Mid-February /

HYPER VERDICT

PLUS: Hyperactive and angry lead, variety.

MINUS: Forgettable music, still a standard platformer in many ways.

VISUALS SOUND GAMEPLAY

80 78 80

OVERALL

80

Not hugely innovative but it's better than Croc, that's for sure...



Let me burn that wart off for you...



He learnt this move in Cheerleader class



"Unchain my heart... hoooh, let me go..."

SPAWN: ARMAGEDDON

DANIEL STAINES suggests Armageddon might not be such a bad thing.

⏏ This is one of the worst games I've ever played. It is a game so bad that should you suffer the misfortune of actually playing it, you will invite other people to watch just to confirm that the absolute awfulness isn't some kind of bizarre hallucination. After all, a full-priced game couldn't possibly be this terrible. There have to be laws that prevent this kind of thing from happening — like the ones that stop people from manufacturing cars without breaks or selling Rat Sack as delicious candy. If there was any kind of justice in the world, Spawn: Armageddon would come with a giant warning sticker telling you not to buy it. But since that's unlikely to happen, I guess that job's been left to me. So, here goes...

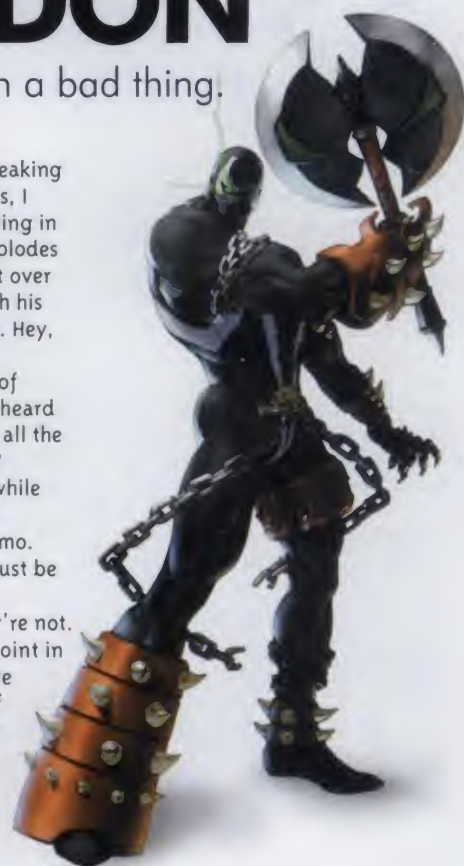
CRAFTY HELL MONSTERS

Most of the problems with Armageddon can be organised into

two broad categories. First of all, there are the problems intrinsically related to the atrociously bad design decisions made by the developer, Point of View. How's this for brilliant game design: the only way Spawn can interact with the world around him is by hitting it with something — usually his big axe. This isn't a snide commentary on Armageddon's mindless beat 'em up gameplay. This is an actual fact. So, for example, let's say Spawn has to pull a lever or hit a switch — what does he do? If you answered "he pulls or pushes it like any sane person would", then you're dead wrong. When Spawn wants to hit a switch, he hits it with his axe until it explodes! It really is cost-effective game design at its finest. Why bother with time-consuming animations when you can simply have your protagonist bash everything?

Oh yes, and while we're speaking about exploding switch boxes, I should point out that everything in the world of Armageddon explodes when hit. See that houseplant over there? Get Spawn to hit it with his axe and watch what happens. Hey, would you look at that — it exploded! Must've been one of those gunpowder plants I've heard so much about. And who put all the TNT into this office furniture? Perhaps the bad guys did it while they were busy stuffing said furniture with health and ammo. Those crafty hell-monsters must be smarter than they look!

Or, you know, maybe they're not. After all, I don't recall any point in our time with the game where Spawn was ever in danger of dying. In fact, most enemies will simply run straight at our symbiotic-suited friend and wait until he





Spawn is sprung by an away team

He's been trying to wash that face paint off for years

Hell. Just like playing this game, really



POINT OF VIEW GOT CONFUSED AND MADE OPENING DOORS CHALLENGING AND KILLING ENEMIES SIMPLISTIC AND REPETITIVE

hits them with his axe or blasts them into tiny pieces with his arsenal of corny weapons that all seem to do the same thing. Boss monsters — who are identified as such by being big and having an energy bar — are slightly less obliging, but still incredibly gracious in that they'll intentionally miss Spawn with almost every clumsy attack they make. At least, it LOOKS like they're intentionally missing, but it could just be that Armageddon's AI is laughably bad. We'll let you make the call on that one.

INEXPLICABLY VANISHED

Okay, so that's the first category of problems out of the way. There are actually quite a few more I could mention, but I simply don't have the space. The second lot of problems we'll look at in this review fall into the "broken game"

category. This refers to instances in which the game appears to be... well... broken, in that it's obviously not functioning the way the developer intended. For example, there are many, many instances in Armageddon where level architecture will simply disappear at random. Sometimes this architecture will be incidental, but other times it will actually be

necessary to progressing forward — like on one level where a crate (!) we needed to jump on (!!)

inexplicably vanished when we walked at it from a certain angle. It came back after we jumped around aimlessly for a bit, but we suspect that most gamers won't have the patience to endure such ridiculous shenanigans. We certainly didn't.

But wait, there's more: crates aren't the only things that go

haywire when you approach them from the wrong side. Some doors just won't open until you figure out the right way to go through them. You wouldn't think that going through a door would be that hard for a superhero, but

apparently it's a very precise process. It's almost like Point of View got confused and made opening doors challenging and killing

enemies simplistic and repetitive.

Spawn: Armageddon is pointless, frustrating, repetitive, bug-ridden and tedious beyond all measure. It's so bad that I'm actually kind of surprised that it was released for public consumption. I'd end this review by saying that hardcore Spawn fans could only appreciate this game, but really — are there even any Spawn fans left anymore? <<

See Spawn toys and things at www.mcfarlane.com

AVAILABLE ON:

PS2 / XBOX / GCM/PC

DETAILS

CATEGORY: Action / PLAYERS: 1 / DEVELOPER: Point of View / PUBLISHER: Namco / PRICE: \$99.95 / RATING: M15+ / AVAILABLE: TBA /

HYPER VERDICT

PLUS: Um...

MINUS: Everything.

VISUALS SOUND GAMEPLAY

60 55 30

OVERALL

33

Armageddon is a bad game — simple as that.



The Hyper HQ rooftop is party central

Ahh, I wish I had a few multitools...

A good lookin' bird...

THE SIMS: BUSTIN' OUT

CAM SHEA has written way too many Sims reviews...

Well, here we are again — another issue, another Sims game. Last year represented The Sims' first foray onto console, and a good representation of Will Wright's little person classic it was too. What The Sims on console did was to take the (somewhat) aimless sandbox gameplay of The Sims on PC and combine it with a goal orientated play mode. The introduction of structure essentially gave the console version a purpose... and was a good tradeoff for some of the extra functionality and ease of use that the game had on PC. The visuals also went 3D, considerably sprucing the look of the game up, with increased detail and much better lighting. What then, is there left for The Sims to achieve on console?

WHEN TO GIVE THE FINGER

From the looks of things not all that much. The Sims Bustin' Out is more

like an expansion pack than a new game. The main "innovation" is that you can now visit other locations whenever you like. While the original console game was linear, moving you from location to location, beating all the objectives in each as you went, you can now flit back and forth, visiting friends or moving to another house on a whim. So what "bustin' out" brings to the table is a little extra freedom in the way you play, not to mention locations that are career specific and locations that are good for improving skills and relationships. Hell, there's even a nudist colony!

If it sounds gimmicky, that's because it is. After all, you still don't get to go to work, so it's not like there's anything drastically new on offer here — there's just a little more variety and uniquely themed locations. Even so, the changes do bring greater longevity and replay

value to the title... but whether it's enough to warrant purchase is another question altogether.

Indeed, backing up all this zany "bustin' out" is the ye olde Sims gameplay just as you remember it, and the entertainment value is still very much built on a compelling foundation of voyeurism and anthropomorphism. Once again you'll need to look after your sim's needs and ensure you send him or her off to work in a good mood in order to get promotions. Once again you'll have to negotiate the treacherous world of inter-sim relations, judging when to talk, when to entertain, when to flirt and when to give the finger (yes, there's a new category called "sign language"). And once again the ultimate aim is to rise up through the ten levels of your chosen career path and become an opulent little sim.





A slight fire hazard maybe?



Ahh the Death Star plans are miine!



Cam gets ready for work in the morning



IT STILL SEEMS TO TAKE AN ETERNITY TO GET ANYTHING DONE, AND THE ENTIRE GAME EATS UP A LOT OF TIME

ONLINE... ON PS2

You can also play the PS2 version of *Bustin' Out* online, but we only recommend it if you have a keyboard or a headset, as typing without one is a nightmare. Gee, wouldn't it have been nice if you could play this one on Xbox Live, what with its 100% voice support? The incentive for playing online is pretty slim anyway. You can unlock new interactions, new items and take a tour of other people's houses. Woo hoo. This can also be accomplished by taking your memory card around to a friend's place.



ANTICS IN LOVE

As you'd expect, there are plenty of new options and items to keep die hard Sims fans happy, and when you factor in the differences between the seven new career paths (plus five others in free play mode) spanning everything from Fashion Victim to Gangster, there's a fair bit of gameplay on offer... it's just beginning to feel a little stale. *Bustin' Out* also suffers from many of the problems that has plagued the series as a whole — characters still stand around doing nothing, it still seems to take an eternity to get anything done, and the entire game eats up a lot of time for questionable reward. The frame rate is also sluggish and unreliable on PlayStation 2, which, combined with overly long load and save times, results in gameplay that

!!! Make sure you choose a career path that suits your sim's natural disposition. If you're playful and nice, for instance, don't become a model...

simply doesn't flow as well as we'd like it to.

That said, *The Sims* still has an uncanny ability to be fascinating, and during our playtest we had people dropping by just to see what was going on... which soon turned into an extended stay as they laughed at our sim's (the honourable Q. Wang) antics in love and life, and offered advice. Mind you, whether this was simply a case of our colleagues trying to avoid doing actual work, or a bona fide example of being won over by the charm of the game it's hard to say. It probably doesn't matter though — you already know what to expect from this game. It's as good as *The Sims* gets, just don't go into it with any illusions of a fresh gameplay experience. <<<

AVAILABLE ON:

PS2 XBOX GCN PC

DETAILS

CATEGORY: Normality sim /
PLAYERS: 1-2 / DEVELOPER: Maxis /
PUBLISHER: EA / PRICE: \$99.95 /
RATING: M15+ / AVAILABLE: Now /

HYPER VERDICT

PLUS: It's not without its charm...

MINUS: Same old, same old.

VISUALS SOUND GAMEPLAY

80 83 76

OVERALL

79

Our love/hate relationship with *The Sims* continues



Let me score or no crack for you

The tricky crucifixion move... impressive!

Ahh! They pumped it up with helium!

URBAN FREESTYLE SOCCER

JACKSON GOTHE-SNAPE kicks the keeper to the curb.

How can a game get released when its development company has disbanded? Can any sport retain its dignity in the face of Acclaim's extreme sports juggernaut? And when do we get to play Pro Evo again? These are the questions that surround Silicon Dreams-developed, Acclaim-published Urban Freestyle Soccer.

In the end though, there are two kinds of people in the world: those that have played soccer on some dusty alley/garage/playground with the hoods down at the mall and those that desperately want to. It's that simple. And so Urban Freestyle Soccer might well be the perfect premise for a game. Maybe.

A HARDCORE HONEY

The game is football, and the setting is the gritty urban playground. It's a four on four turf war between teams like the Taggin' Crew, Skater Boys

and the Hardcore Honeys. Each field is a loosely walled-in rectangle with a goal at either end. There are no fouls. Your aim is twofold: primarily, to score goals, but also to link passes and tricks and build your combo meter, bringing the potential devastating Netbuster into the game. If you know NBA Street's Gamebreaker, all will be very familiar. In fact, the game plays much like the excellent NBA Street vol. 2, but is more limited, much rougher and includes a soccer ball. It is however sorely missing NBA Street's excellent use of the basketball culture and history to enfunk the game. While the game does include Adidas sponsorship and licensed tracks from Queens of the Stone Age, TLC, Feeder and Method Man, it would have been great to see professional and ex-professional players in the game a la NBA Street. We fantasise about Pele

and Garrincha versus Lineker and Gascoigne. As it stands, the game lacks personality.

As a game, Urban Freestyle Soccer is the typical unrefined modified sports fare. Player switching is often frustrating, your players movements are unpredictable and unresponsive, the goalkeeping mechanics are not only inconsistent but, over time, exploitable, and the AI is of such a poor standard that the opposition managed to — in three consecutive matches — upon picking up a loose ball in front of the keeper, proceed to pull a trick and run straight into its own goal.

But, playing with a mate you won't care (as much). Because, for all the entertainment that the game's single player modes offer (or, lack of), we're all aware that games like this are only really designed for multiplayer. And, predictably, Urban Freestyle Soccer plays much better





"Man, that's a weird-lookin' basketball!"

Pass the bizall, homeboy!

They score whilst the keeper is breakdancing



WHEN THE BALL GOES IN THE AIR, YOU'LL HAVE **VERY LITTLE CONTROL OVER EXACTLY WHAT HAPPENS NEXT**

when both you and your human opposition are battling all the aforementioned issues.

UNFUNDAMENTALS

You'll enjoy the fairly crisp and diverse visuals. While things hardly look fantastic, the skill moves are great, though the real stars are the bustling, gritty, diverse environments. The sound is unremarkable, with a repetitive soundtrack and some crap one-liner Pommy commentary which will have you dreaming of better days. "Overambitious". "Sort it out". "Have a strike". Great, isn't it?

Even in two-player though, there are a few major mechanical problems with the game. First, passing, and in particular quick passing, cannot be controlled with a direction. Instead, it loops between your three field players. Secondly, when the ball goes in the air, you'll have very little

control over exactly what happens next: positioning does not play a factor. Thirdly, when dealing with a loose ball, you can't 'queue' a command — if you press a button even a couple of inches before you touch the ball, you'll perform the defensive action (slide tackle, change player etc.). Maybe not so bad you think, but when you have to endure the overelaborate 'controlling ball' animation, and two opponents slide tackle you before its over, you'll curse at the lack of freedom this 'Freestyle' soccer actually offers. It's the same problem that FIFAs of years gone by have suffered from — there'll be times where you and your opponent tackle each other a couple of times, especially considering tackles from behind are, like everything else in the game, legal. Finally, the game's balancing is

!!! Silicon Dreams also made Worldwide Soccer 2000 for Dreamcast.

perhaps the best example of UFS' lack of refinement. You need to use a substantial portion of your sprint meter to pull off any trick, but your teammates all seem to sprint when you're not controlling them.

Consistent tricking therefore is out of the question, and pass-combos appear to be the only feasible method of building your Netbuster meter. The computer AI also has a strange habit of pulling a trick despite not having sufficient sprint meter, handing you the ball on a plate.

Overall, it's just not quite there. And, perhaps most critically of all, it overuses the same lame FMV of some footballing street punk actors and dares to offer several re-edited versions as 'Extras'. As mildly enjoyable as multiplayer might be, you'll have more fun kicking a ball around the backyard (gasp). <<

AVAILABLE ON:

PS2 XBOX GCN PC

DETAILS

CATEGORY: Street Soccer / PLAYERS: 1-4 / DEVELOPER: Silicon Dreams / PUBLISHER: Acclaim / PRICE: \$69.95 / RATING: M15+ / AVAILABLE: Now /

HYPER VERDICT

PLUS: Trash can and box obstacles.

MINUS: Game mechanics, some slowdown.

VISUALS SOUND GAMEPLAY

79 71 68

OVERALL

69

As the commentator says, "sort it out".



A ruthless headache cure...



Am I playing Wrath Unleashed or what?



I think he's gathering his magic

MAGIC THE GATHERING: BATTLEGROUND

DANIEL STAINES slaps his cards on the table.

HI'm going to come right out and confess that I'm a big fan of Magic: The Gathering. I've been playing the card game for around eight years now (that's since Revised Edition, for those of you in the know) and I've played every digital iteration of the phenomenon released thus far — from the very first Microprose game to the recently released online version. Given this experience, I think it's pretty reasonable to assume that I "know" Magic. And you know what? Battlegrounds ain't Magic. No sir, not by a long shot.

CALLING THE SHOTS

Developer Secret Level has basically removed everything that makes Magic enjoyable and replaced it with a tedious, repetitive and frustrating button-mash fest that lacks any kind of depth or longevity at all. The good thing about the Magic card game, is

that you can build your own decks and use combinations of the cards therein to compose effective strategies and play-styles. It's all about control, basically: YOU decide what cards your deck will have and YOU decide when and how to use them in play. Battlegrounds doesn't give you any of that choice at all.

Player autonomy is restricted to building tiny decks out of the useless cards the game deigns you worthy of possessing. Actual duelling consists of two wizards standing on a flat field, collecting "mana-crystals" and casting spells — usually creature summons and sorceries. Players have no control over their creatures beyond bringing them into play. Summon a Goblin King and it'll run off and attack whatever it wants to regardless of your screaming pleas to the contrary. No control at all. The same goes for sorceries. If you want to cast

an Engulfing Flames, it'll simply hit the closest creature or wizard. There's no opportunity to target it, no chance to use it strategically ... no opportunity to do anything that would make you think you're the one actually calling the shots.

The kind of game that results is one where you essentially press a lot of buttons really quickly and hope that whatever you've cast actually does what you hope it will. On most occasions it doesn't, and so a good deal of your time in Battlegrounds will be spent swearing at the television.

Frankly, Battlegrounds is a game that'll appeal to very few people — if any at all. Magic fans will hate it for its treatment of the card game they love and the general public will find nothing interesting about its repetitious and irritating gameplay. What a terrible waste of a good license. <<

AVAILABLE ON:

PS2 XBOX PC

DETAILS

CATEGORY: Card battling sim / PLAYERS: 1-2 / DEVELOPER: Secret Level / PUBLISHER: Atari / PRICE: \$99.95 / RATING: G / AVAILABLE: Now /

HYPER VERDICT

PLUS: Some of the spells look quite nice...

MINUS: Monotonous, frustrating and repetitive.

VISUALS SOUND GAMEPLAY

80 70 45

OVERALL

48

A poor game and a wasted license.

 TDK

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Hey look, it's Don King's white cousin, Fred



Hexagons of scintillating action!



Must cost him a fortune for a manicure

WRATH UNLEASHED

FRANK DRY unleashes his wrath upon this game...

When LucasArts released their heaven and hell sim, *Afterlife*, in 1996, it was just as unexpected and sat just as uncomfortably on their release schedule as *Wrath Unleashed* does today. It's noble of LucasArts to take a gamble on a game that doesn't feature Stormtroopers or rehash trendy gameplay mechanics, but is this strategy/fighting game hybrid really what the world is looking for?

CRUCIAL MAGICAL SPELLS

The idea behind *Wrath Unleashed* is that four very different deities are ready to — yep, you guessed it — unleash their wrath upon each other in order to claim a throne of ultimate power. Whilst they ultimately probably just want to smash each other to pieces, there's also a bit of a soap opera going on between the male and female deities, as the lust for power and body parts of the

opposite sex complicate their quest for dominance.

The Light Order god, Aenna, is essentially the "good" god and has the power of water on her side; the Light Chaos god, Epothos, is a more unpredictable chap and wields the power of fire; the Dark Order god, Durlock, is arrogant and devious, controlling the powers of the earth and metals; and finally, the Dark Chaos god, Helamis, is an evil chick if ever there was one, with the power of storms to smite her opponents. They argue and bitch like schoolchildren (or elemental deities, what do we know?), but when it comes to the battlefield, they're more than happy to put their words into action.

The game is played on a strange floating world map made up of hexagonal tiles, each player beginning the game with a collection of beastly units with which to control the map or obliterate their

opponent. The gods take part in each round and are usually there to make crucial magical spells at varying stages of the battle, such as spawning new units, healing injured ones, or employing a number of more tactical spells such as transforming terrain or freezing the enemy in their tracks. Most of the hard work will be done by the creature units, which vary in power and ability. You can move them about the map and use them to control mana points (which are crucial to your overlord having enough mana to cast his or her spells), control temples (which will win you the round if you control them all) or just simply try to take out the enemy god at the other end of the map. It all looks and controls very much like other fantasy strategy games until you realise that when units clash, you actually have to do the fighting yourself rather than the

computer evaluating a bunch of numbers and declaring someone the victor. This is where the fighting game comes into the picture.

THE EDGE IN BATTLE

Regardless of the unit you're using, the controls are the same — there's a light and heavy melee attack, and a slow and fast magic attack, as well as a block move and a special move. Of course, some units are rated higher than others, and are able to inflict more damage, or use more





Soul Calibur 2 eat your heart out. Not.



Someone wake me when this game is over...



Talk to the hand!



IF YOU'RE PLAYED YOUR CARDS RIGHT, YOU'LL ALSO BE FIGHTING ON TERRAIN THAT MIGHT GIVE YOUR CREATURE AN ADVANTAGE

effective magical attacks. If you've played your cards right, you'll also be fighting on terrain that might give your creature an advantage — for instance, if you're playing as Aenna, the god who is aligned with water, and you're fighting in a swamp, you'll have the edge in the battle. The fighting mechanics are respectable enough, but it's annoying to think that all your careful strategising on the main map can be rendered null and void if you're not skilled enough to win the

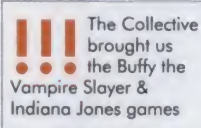


real-time fighting bouts. Sometimes you'll be beaten by a far weaker creature just because the controls aren't responsive enough or you get caught in one of the arbitrary "traps" in the fighting arena. Kinda makes the strategy game almost completely pointless when it all comes down to button mashing.

Repeated play will bring you up to speed with all the different types of creatures, and eventually, you should find that you can win each fight if the odds are stacked in your favour. You can even try such tactics as to whittle some of the energy off an opponent's unit by fighting them with a weaker creature, only to close in on your next turn with a more powerful unit.

The creature designs are definitely a highlight, and a lot of work has gone into creating the armies of

each deity. It's a shame then that the deities themselves look as ridiculous as they do — Epthos in particular looking like a Tekken sequel reject. The world map is also pretty ugly to stare at for hours on end, and is no more exciting than moving pieces



around a tabletop board game. The fighting game is where the thrills take place, but if Wrath Unleashed was just a fighting game, it would

end up in the bargain bin pretty quickly. Combining the two has created an experience that might amuse some strategy gamers who don't mind mashing their controllers in Tekken, or other such games, on the side. We suspect however, that Wrath Unleashed will appeal to neither strategy gamers nor fighting game fans, leaving it placed awkwardly in some very forgettable middle ground. <<

AVAILABLE ON:

PS2 XBOX GAMECUBE

DETAILS

CATEGORY: Strategy/Fighting /
PLAYERS: 1-4 / DEVELOPER: The
Collective / PUBLISHER: LucasArts /
PRICE: \$99.95 / RATING: TBA /
AVAILABLE: Late Feb /

HYPER VERDICT

PLUS: Cool creature designs.

MINUS: Lame deity designs,
flawed game design.

VISUALS SOUND GAMEPLAY

75 70 65

OVERALL

65

A hybrid of genres that fails
to impress either way.



Man, you should see a doctor



Stealing valuable crates! Yesss!



"Not enough cleavage" say the marketing men

BROKEN SWORD 3: THE SLEEPING DRAGON

DANIEL WILKS thinks his name is sexier when said by a French woman.

There has been a lot of responsibility placed upon the shoulders of this third Broken Sword game. In recent years, point and click adventures have become scarcer and scarcer (unless you include the ever-present tide of crappy French and German imports) making the release of a big name sequel something akin to the second coming. Luckily, The Sleeping Dragon has managed to live up to a great deal of its pre release hype, and although it may not be the rebirth of a flagging genre as many pundits have speculated, Broken Sword 3 is an attractive, charming, easily accessible and newbie-friendly adventure sure to draw new fans to the series and hopefully guarantee another sequel.

THE SECRET TO FREE ENERGY

As with the first two games, players take the roles of George Stobart, an

adventurous patent lawyer from Idaho, and his sometimes significant other the freshly sexed up (for the third game that is) French investigative journalist, Nicole (Nico) Collard. In fine adventure tradition, The Sleeping Dragon begins with George flying to a remote tropical location to get in contact with a scientist who may have discovered the secret to free energy. Of course things can't go smooth in an adventure, so soon George and his drunken and embarrassingly ocker pilot are forced by a freak storm to make an emergency (read crash) landing in the middle of the forest, leading to a very Indiana Jones-ish style introduction. Meanwhile, back in France, Nico is meant to be interviewing a pimply computer nerd who has just translated an ancient and mysterious scroll. Just before Nico arrives, the nerd is shot

dead by a mysterious woman disguised as Nico. Could the source of unlimited energy, a freak storm and a mysterious murder in France have anything in common? It's also pretty obvious from the outset that there are bad things afoot and the Templars are back. Seeing how all of these disparate plot elements and characters tie in together is a real treat and you'll be hard pressed not to fall in love with some of the quirky characters and be swept up in the sly sense of humour.

Whilst most of the action in Broken Sword 3 revolves around searching areas, using objects on one another, solving an interminable number of box puzzles and talking to everyone you meet, every now and then the protagonists are faced with challenges more akin to those found in action adventure titles such as Tomb Raider. The opening scenario sees George jumping from ledge to ledge to reach a cave opening and a later level sees Nico scaling scaffolding to reach the roof of a





A deleted scene from 28 Days Later...



But what was the Time To Crate??



Those lighting effects are a conspiracy I say!



MANY OF THE HIGHLY CINEMATIC CAMERA ANGLES MANAGE TO **OCCLUDE VITAL BITS OF INFORMATION**

theatre. This gives us the feeling that the game is trying to be a little too much to too many people, wanting to appeal to a more action obsessed crowd but not quite staggering over the line that borders the two genres. Unfortunately when the game crosses over the line into real time action it serves only to frustrate and in some cases infuriate the player. Every now and then the player is met with a split second decision to make to save them from certain death. An early example sees Nico having to



dive out of the way of a car intent on running her down. If the player fails to hit the "use" key in the split second it pops up, they are dead and they have to go through the whole process again. It's basically Dragon's Lair (or Shenmue to a lesser extent) all over again.

STEPPING AND JINKING

The move to 3D for the series is only partially successful. If you'll pardon the pun, the extra dimension ultimately fails to add any real depth to the proceedings. Although the player can move around the screen in third person there is really little more to see than what we used to get in the old 2D titles. To add to the disappointment is the fact that many of the highly cinematic camera angles manage to occlude vital bits of information or items, leading to some

!!! Umberto Eco's Foucault's Pendulum has great conspiracy theories...

infuriating double stepping and jinking to try and get a good view of something. Although the mechanics may not be up to scratch, the new graphics engine is a thing of beauty, delivering a game that looks much like an animated feature film. The animations for all of the characters are top notch and the overall character design is good. A brilliant script and equally good voice actors compliment the great new look. All of the characters are well voiced and some will stick in your mind long after you've finished the game — when you first

meet a certain drunken Irish television host you'll understand what I mean. Broken Sword 3 may not be an entirely successful 3D translation of the popular adventure franchise but it's still a fun game and leaves us wanting another sequel at the very least. <<<

AVAILABLE ON:

PS2 XBOX GOW PC

DETAILS

CATEGORY: Adventure / PLAYERS: 1 / DEVELOPER: Revolution Software / PUBLISHER: THQ / PRICE: \$89.95 / RATING: M15+ / AVAILABLE: Now /

HYPER VERDICT

PLUS: Accessible, charming, great plot.

MINUS: Too easy, too short.

VISUALS SOUND GAMEPLAY

89 88 83

OVERALL

84

Keeping the adventure genre alive.



"Can't help myself, bad hobbits..."



You mean we're fighting over a piece of jewelry?



Get some orc on yer fork, as they say

WAR OF THE RING

DANIEL WILKS likes the movies but not the books.

War of the Ring fills a niche market by offering RTS fans the chance to play in arguably the most famous of all fictional worlds (besides heaven and America). Developed by Liquid Entertainment, the company responsible for the fabulous Battle Realms, War of the Ring pits players against the forces of either good or evil during the key battles of the Lord of the Rings trilogy. The difficulty with using such a strong license as Lord of the Rings is that the appeal is going to be strongest for gamers who are fans of the books, the very group who are going to be the most critical. Unfortunately Liquid haven't managed to recapture the magic of Battle Realms and create another standout RTS, instead delivering a fun but fairly generic genre offering.

BUILDING MORE TROOPS

Although it contains two robust and well-scripted 10 mission single

player campaigns — as well as multiplayer — War of the Ring does not feature anything you haven't seen umpteen times before. Start off with a handful of units, establish a base, collect the two resources (wood and ore) and start to produce troops. Although the campaigns start strongly with various missions fleshing out the fellowship — such as how Boromir managed to make it to Rivendell in time to become part of the ragtag group — the missions later become more and more generic, eventually degenerating into recognisable yet simultaneously generic levels. The map design seems to be most to blame for this, and you get the feeling that this game was created more to cash in on the current LotR craze rather than work with the license.

As disappointing as many of the levels may be, the defense of Helm's Deep stands as one of the most

impressively tense pieces of RTS scripting in recent years. Players are charged with defending the walls of Helm's Deep for a deceptively long 35 minutes with only a handful of men. Once the player has completed the two campaigns they can also jump into the thick of the action with a handy skirmish mode but this just goes to highlight one of the other significant problems with War of the Ring, the lackluster AI in the single player campaigns. Whilst the AI in skirmish is quite sly and will beat

seven shades of crap out of you if you're not on your toes, on any setting other than hard the campaign AI is unforgivably easy to beat. After one or two games it becomes obvious that virtually every scenario (with the obvious exception of those such as Helm's Deep) can be easily beaten by simply adopting a defensive stance, building more troops than the enemy and rushing.

BARRELS WITH LEGS

Although it is more of a license gripe





It's okay, the ring is safe inside my ring

Can't wait for a hot bath tonight

Why do we want to protect these ruins anyway?



HELM'S DEEP STANDS AS ONE OF THE MOST IMPRESSIVELY TENSE PIECES OF RTS SCRIPTING IN RECENT YEARS

than a dig at the overall mechanics, LotR purists are bound to be offended by many of the unit and army choices available in War of the Ring. Whilst the books took great pains in explaining the old alliances and the segregation between the races, War of the Ring relegates Elves and Dwarfs to being ranged units and tanks respectively. The ability to summon either Ents or Balrogs to fight for you will also sit ill with friends. Although these super units make for an interesting

tactical option in multiplayer they seem totally out of place in the normal campaigns. Finally although the balance between the sides is very good it just feels a bit wrong to have equally numbered sides of Gondorian swordsmen and Orcs and still have the outcome in doubt.

Both the books and the movies (the two things that will draw players to the game) show the vast superiority of the allied troop over those of Sauron. Surely it would have made more sense to make the Mordor troops cheaper and more expendable and good troops tougher and more expensive to achieve balance and keep the flavour of the game.

Although the tweaked Battle Realms engine that the developers have chosen to use to power the game can deliver great animation

and excellent framerates, the boxy nature of the rendering seems at definite odds with the desperate nature of the story. It's hard to be

swept up in a tale of a last ditch attempt to save the world from the forces of Sauron or in turn kick some goodie two-shoes

arse for the dark lord when all of your troops resemble barrels with legs equipped with swords bigger than their bulbous bodies. Whilst the cartoony look and feel of the graphics worked perfectly with Battle Realms it simply detracts from the seriousness of the Tolkien license. Comparisons to Warcraft 3 and Lords of Everquest (itself a Warcraft 3 clone) are also inevitable — in a genre that essentially trots out the same mechanics time and time again, often the only way to differentiate between titles is the look. <<



!!! EA have Lord of the Rings: Battle for Middle-Earth coming this year too...

AVAILABLE ON:

PS2 / XBOX / PC

DETAILS

CATEGORY: RTS / PLAYERS: 1-8 / DEVELOPER: Liquid Entertainment / PUBLISHER: Sierra / PRICE: \$89.95 / RATING: G8+ / AVAILABLE: Now / REQUIRED: PIII 800, 256MB RAM /

HYPER VERDICT

PLUS: Helm's Deep, good Pathfinding, stable.

MINUS: Simple campaign AI, dull level design, cartoony.

VISUALS SOUND GAMEPLAY

78 80 70

OVERALL

68

A bit of a Tolkien let-down.



Blau blau b-b-blau!



Earth... ahh, I think I'll let them destroy that one



I guess this is "the threat"

X2: THE THREAT

In space, no one can hear **DANIEL WILKS** scream.

Games journalists have had a very annoying habit for the last couple of decades — comparing every space sim to the old warhorse, *Elite*. Although it was created nearly 20 years ago, *Elite*, to many of us still stands as the greatest space flight simulator of all time due to its epic scope, total freedom of play and incredible innovation. Now comes *X2: The Threat*, a game that promises to deliver everything that *Freelancer* didn't. Whilst it does go some way to filling some of Microsoft's space sim's holes, it still rests a long way from the glory of *Elite* — it looks as though we're still going to have to wait another few years for the ultimate space combat/trading game.

HOONING AROUND SPACE

Players step into the shoes of Julian Gordna, a vaguely obnoxious ship-jacker prompted to spend a little time at the leisure of the authorities

after being busted for one theft too many. Prematurely released by the authorities due to being hand picked by the defense force to do some work for TerraCorp, Julian is thrust into a lengthy and not particularly engrossing plot about saving the universe, searching for his missing father (whose disappearance is responsible for forcing him into a life of crime in the first place, boo hoo) and generally hooning around space in an admittedly huge number of fully upgradeable ships.

Although *X2* does contain what can roughly be passed off for a plot, the real point of the game is non-linear trade, combat and to a lesser extent, exploration. To this end, Julian is able to pick up a number of random missions, trade freely between planets and space stations, perform policing duties for any of the six races present in the game (if their opinion of you is high enough that is), or

simply fly around until you find something that interests you. Players can also build up their own fleets to patrol space, trade or perform escort duties, giving *X2* an interestingly RTS style twist. Once the player has played long enough to amass a small fortune and kit out a couple of ships, *X2* is a remarkably fun, though still somewhat frustrating experience — it's just unfortunate that everything up to that stage is less than accessible. Although the idea of flying around a massive universe may sound appealing, and it is, there is one massive problem that stops the game from being particularly enjoyable to all but the most dedicated of space flight simulator fans, the degree of difficulty and the terrible controls/interface.

UNDERWEAR IN A TWIST

Before anyone gets their underwear in a twist, the fact that a game may be

difficult is not a bad thing — usually. The problem with *X2* is that it's unnecessarily difficult and often obtuse, leaving the player not quite knowing what they're meant to be doing next. Unless you have scoured through the manual and memorised every one of the trillion or so commands in the game, you'll hit this steep learning curve right off the bat when the ever so helpful "tutorial" tells you that you passed all of the flying exams or some such hogwash and proceeds to tell you that you know all you need to know from then





Should have filled the tank last galaxy



Use the Force, er... whoever you are



Sir, we've entered the pumpkin soup system



TO FULLY DOCK, PLAYERS MUST NAVIGATE THEIR WAY THROUGH THE INNARDS OF THE STATION

WHAT HAPPENED?

For the most part, X2 looks spectacular. The ships are beautifully designed, planets look interesting and approachable and space is filled with vibrant, almost ethereal colours. Unfortunately all of this splendour goes out the window as soon as X2 hits one of their unforgivably amateur cutscenes. To say they look terrible would be an absolute understatement. Seemingly rendered using an alpha trial version of the first iteration of Maya, the cutscenes feature poorly animated figures created entirely out of simple geometric shapes with faces that look like they've been pulled directly from The Sims and roughly stretched into 3D. The dialogue that accompanies these scenes is, if anything, even worse. The less said about it the better.

on in. Whilst it is admirable that Egosoft care enough about their printers to demand that every player scour through the manual for hours to learn how to play, the simple fact remains that the vast majority of gamers like to leap straight into the action and learn that way.

The next example of pointless difficulty comes the first time the player tries to dock with a space station. Unless your navigation computer is really good, even attempting to manually dock with anything is tantamount to suicide so players have to rely on the docking computer (which again can be upgraded to make docking easier and more automated from long range). Once the automated process is complete the player's ship is safely docked inside the station but it doesn't end there (although the game doesn't

!!! We are already hearing a few rumours of a Freelancer 2...

actually inform them of this fact). To fully dock, players must navigate their way through the innards of the station and fly their ship into one of the available berths, a task made more difficult by the fact that the berths are all spinning and one crash means it's time to do it all over again. This difficulty is exacerbated by the controls and interface. The interface uses a series of drop down menus that basically cover the entire cockpit area, leaving little visible. This wouldn't be bad if the game paused whilst you use the menu but unfortunately it doesn't, so memorising the hordes of shortcuts is all but essential if you wish to progress to the latter and far more enjoyable portions of the game. Owing a good joystick is also essential if you want to get the most out of X2 as the mouse control is horribly fiddly and floaty. <<

AVAILABLE ON:

PS2, XBOX, PC

DETAILS

CATEGORY: Space Sim / PLAYERS: 1 / DEVELOPER: Egosoft / PUBLISHER: Deep Silver / PRICE: \$89.95 / RATING: G8+ / AVAILABLE: Now / REQ: PIII 800, 128MB RAM, 32MB VRAM /

HYPER VERDICT

PLUS: Open ended, great space visuals.

MINUS: Needlessly difficult, terrible cutscenes.

VISUALS SOUND GAMEPLAY

85 60 70

OVERALL

67

Too many rough spots



Even though it says 56k on the box, broadband is the only sensible option.



He's just taking his pet for a walk



Mummy, is that you?



Those whites won't stay clean for long

HORIZONS: EMPIRE OF ISTARIA

PHILIP KENAN has a thing about maggots.

It seems like you can't turn around nowadays without falling over a pile of recently released MMORPGS. It seems as though every developer under the sun (as well as some that we've never heard from before) are doing their best to compete in what is at best a limited and already glutted market. With this in mind, along comes Horizons: Empire of Istaria, a project first started way back in 1999 promising to revolutionise the genre. Finally we get to see the finished product and whilst it isn't a revolution in the genre it still manages to carve out its own interesting niche by including a number of features that compel the player to strive harder than nearly any other MMO game around.

THE BIG BONUSES

One of the true high points of Horizons is the intuitive and clever character advancement system. Any race other than Dragons can choose two classes,

one active class such as warrior, healer and the like and one crafting class such as blacksmith, outfitter or scholar. Using the skills from either one of these careers levels up the relevant class. Before you start to ignore the crafting skills, players should take note that there are no shops in Horizons — all trade is player based and the ability to create powerful items will not only add to your survivability but to your wallet as well. As well as the nine races available at time of character creation, Horizons introduces an excellent way of integrating "prestige" style races.

These so-called "subjugated" races exist all over the world of Istaria but as yet have not been liberated from the evil pervading the realm. As such these races will be enemies when first encountered, but after certain conditions have been met they will become available to play. It has not been revealed how this is to be implemented as yet

but it is a much better system of rewarding play than simply giving players who spend more time online the big bonuses (Star Wars Galaxies, we're looking in your direction). Unfortunately, much of the rest of the game isn't as user-friendly. Combat is a fairly simple matter of clicking on an enemy and maybe using a special technique if you're skilled enough. This repetition and dullness is exacerbated by the fact that each area only has a handful of respawning monsters. After leveling up a character a few times in the opening areas you'll never want to see another maggot again.

Although the net-code is stable the graphics engine still manages to chug severely on all but the most top of the range machines. On the flip side you couldn't want better sound in a MMO. Horizons features a nice dynamic score that transitions smoothly between different areas, peace and combat. <<

AVAILABLE ON:

PC / XBOX / GMA / PC

DETAILS

CATEGORY: MMORPG / **PLAYERS:** Lots / **DEVELOPER:** Artifact / **PUBLISHER:** Atari / **PRICE:** \$89.95 / **RATING:** M15+ / **AVAILABLE:** Now / **REQ:** PIII 850, 256MB RAM, 32MB VRAM

HYPHER VERDICT

PLUS: Good crafting, dragons, stable.

MINUS: Maggots, chuggy, dull combat.

VISUALS SOUND GAMEPLAY

75 88 72

OVERALL

71

A noble attempt to enter the MMO marketplace.

SETTLE THE SCORE...

URBAN FREESTYLE SOCCER



SKILL... RESPECT... FREESTYLE... POWER... URBAN... GOALS



PlayStation 2

NINTENDO GAMECUBE

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PC CD-ROM



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COMMANDOS 3: DESTINATION BERLIN

» If there's one aspect of the Commandos series that will remain engraved in our minds long after we've retired it to the venerable Hyper CD rack, it's without a doubt the difficult, intense gameplay on offer. I repeat, this is not your mother's strategy title. However, that's what's made the series so fun and satisfying to play, so much so that it was not uncommon for us to resort to hand-drawing some of the harder scenarios of the original game in order to formulate methods of defeating them.

That said, although the latest installment in the series continues the Commandos legacy, there are a number of downfalls that prevent Destination Berlin from being a must-have title. Firstly, there really isn't anything new to make the game stand out from its predecessors. In fact, in many cases it's taken a step back, looking more like an expansion pack for the original game than a worthy sequel to Commandos 2. Display resolution is locked at 800x600, while the mish-mash of part-2D, part-3D environments as well as the often clumsy camera implementation can make some scenarios a confusing and frustrating affair. This frustration is only further heightened by the lack of hotkeys, as well as the seemingly rushed tutorials which tend to gloss over a number of minor, yet imperative details. Overall, there are definitely more attractive options out there for everyone but the most die-hard of Commandos fans.

Asher Moses

AVAILABLE ON:

PC

DETAILS

CATEGORY: RTS / PLAYERS: 1-8 / DEVELOPER: Pyro Studios / PUBLISHER: Eidos / PRICE: \$99.95 / RATING: M15+ / AVAILABLE: Now / REQUIRED: P700, 128 MB RAM, 16 MB VRAM /

VISUALS

73

SOUND

82

GAMEPLAY

75

OVERALL

75



Like two giant floating tits...



HARRY POTTER: QUIDDITCH WORLD CUP

» For those that haven't read the books or seen the films, Quidditch is a fictional sport that is best described as a cross between basketball and soccer played in the air atop broomsticks. Players are able to score points by throwing balls through one of three hoops, while the opposing team attempts to stop them by using their bats (known as "beaters") to beat other balls (called "bludgers") at attacking players (known as "chasers"). Confused yet? Join the club! While all this is going on, one player on the team known as the "seeker" has the task of keeping an eye out for the "golden snitch" which, if caught, gives the team an extra 150 points and usually the win.

That said, although Quidditch is a fairly complex sport, EA has dumbed it down somewhat, leaving you with the responsibility of controlling only the chasers and seeker. However, this, coupled with the game's sluggish controls results in a gameplay experience that is far less chaotic than what one would imagine after reading the books. Therefore, although the game is sure to be a hit amongst Potter fans, for everyone else it will be fairly difficult to overlook the game's gameplay flaws and lack of online multiplayer, despite the awesome graphical detail on offer.

Asher Moses

AVAILABLE ON:

PS2 / XBOX / GCN / PC

DETAILS

CATEGORY: Sports / PLAYERS: 1-2 / DEVELOPER: Electronic Arts / PUBLISHER: EA / PRICE: \$99.95 / RATING: G / AVAILABLE: Now /

VISUALS

79

SOUND

65

GAMEPLAY

60

OVERALL

65



Touchdown! Or something...



EMPIRES: DAWN OF THE MODERN WORLD

» Although it essentially provides the same RTS experience as Age of Empires and Empire Earth in terms of combat, resource gathering and upgrading (after all, they're designed by the same people), Dawn of the Modern World has far more depth thanks to its highly refined nature (there are now only four time periods and nine civilizations, as opposed to the 21 civilizations and dozens of time periods seen in Empire Earth). As such, each civilization is vastly different, with absolutely no units in common and extremely different styles of play — increasing the game's longevity immensely. Additionally, the single-player game is spread across three different campaigns, with missions that usually revolve around completing difficult objectives with scarce resources using complex strategy. Although this makes the game difficult to pick up and play for those that are new to the series, its strategic depth is truly unparalleled, with players being forced to re-think their strategies depending on the civilization they're playing against.

Finally, just when you thought things couldn't be any better, Dawn of the Modern World's multiplayer mode is even more impressive than the single-player campaign, as is its AI (characters are able to work effectively with minimal supervision) and pathfinding. While its graphics and sound effects need a little work, DotMW is without a doubt a must-have for all serious strategy gamers.

Asher Moses

AVAILABLE ON:

PC

DETAILS

CATEGORY: RTS / PLAYERS: 1-8 / DEVELOPER: Stainless Steel / PUBLISHER: Activision / PRICE: \$99.95 / RATING: G8+ / AVAILABLE: Now / REQUIRED: P600, 128 MB RAM, 32MB VRAM /

VISUALS

78

SOUND

65

GAMEPLAY

90

OVERALL

89



Don't cross the road without looking



KYA: DARK LINEAGE

☞ If generic videogame characters don't totally bore you to tears, then Kya: Dark Lineage might just be good enough to satisfy your cravings for another Rayman-esque platform romp. Kya is your typical American teen videogame character, complete with flared jeans and white sneakers. If American teens were the target market, then surely they'd rather play as something they can't be in real life, right? I'll never understand this dumb approach to character design. In any case, she's a horribly dull character, and there's nothing remotely cool about her.

Thankfully, the gameworld she exists in is vibrant, full of strange creatures and some pretty enjoyable and challenging adventure platforming. Just think Rayman with a dose of Zelda and a splash of Beyond Good & Evil... but not quite as good as any of them. The world is quite well designed, with a healthy variety of gameplay styles, but there's nothing here that will really impress anyone who's played a handful of decent platformers before.

Kya can fight, use her Boomerang to hit switches, glide through the air on gusts of wind and use a magic board to go sliding around the environment. There's enough of a blend of action here to keep more casual gamers entertained. On the downside are some pretty terrible camera problems and some very glitchy environments. The game also crashed, which is pretty disappointing in a final boxed product. Caveat Emptor.

Frank Dry

AVAILABLE ON:

PS2 /

DETAILS

CATEGORY: Platformer / **PLAYERS:** 1 / **DEVELOPER:** Eden Studios / **PUBLISHER:** Atari / **PRICE:** \$89.95 / **RATING:** G / **AVAILABLE:** Now /

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY	OVERALL
80	79	72	70



Am I really that forgettable? Sob!



PUYO POP FEVER

☞ Long time readers will know that I have an unquenchable fondness for all things Super Puzzle Fighter II Turbo. This fascination, strangely enough, is not accompanied by a rabid passion for all things puzzle gamey, but actually operates in a relative puzzle game vacuum. I like other puzzle games sure, but none of them quite do it for me in the same way. A few games have come close, mind you, such as Pokémon Puzzle League, and now Puyo Pop Fever.

Many of you would already be familiar with either Puyo Puyo or Puyo Pop. Puyo Pop Fever takes the basic tenants of the series, and all the conventions of the genre and expands on them ever so slightly. Coloured blobs that can come in combinations of two, three and four mini-blobs fall down on your half of the screen and it's up to you to combine like with like. Link up four blobs of the same colour and they disappear and the blobs above fall down. Of course, it's all about chaining together attacks, which will both drop inert blobs down onto your opponent's side and build you up towards a "fever". Going into fever mode sees the game lob easy chain setups your way for a limited period, theoretically letting you lump your opponent with blobs by the barrel full. It's a big blob thing basically. Throw in some bizarre characters, dumb dialogue, repetitive sound effects and a nifty 3D zoomed view when busting out chains and you have yourself a game with good mechanics, but not a whole lot of soul.

Cam Shea

AVAILABLE ON:

PS2 / XBOX / GCN /

DETAILS

CATEGORY: Tetris clone / **PLAYERS:** 1-4 / **DEVELOPER:** Sonic Team / **PUBLISHER:** Atari / **PRICE:** \$89.95 / **RATING:** G / **AVAILABLE:** Now /

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY	OVERALL
78	75	79	79



Whatever happened to Dr. Mario?



WWE SMACKDOWN! HERE COMES THE PAIN

☞ It's a common perception that wrestling games are made for the wrestling fans first and the fighting game connoisseurs a very distant second. Wrestling games are traditionally concerned with the drama, the soap opera storylines, the customisation and the aspirational angle much more so than the fighting mechanics, which tend to be simplistic arcadey drivel. Fortunately, with the latest Smackdown game there's something for both camps.

To strengthen the fighting mechanics, Here Comes The Pain (HCTP) has introduced a much more involved grapple system. In short, when entering into a grapple you can press in one of four directions on the D-pad to initiate four different grapples — power, submission, signature and quick. Each of these then flows on to other moves and chains, all of which can potentially be reversed at any time.

Fans should bear in mind that the visuals are only a slight improvement over the already reasonable Shut Your Mouth. Likewise, the play modes are as extensive as ever, but really haven't changed much aside from some new storylines, and a couple of new additions. Our two favourite new modes are First Blood, which charges you with belting your opponent until he starts bleeding — always fun — and Bra & Panties matches, which let you strip down divas to their bare essentials. Blood and boobs — it's a revolution!

Joey Tekken

AVAILABLE ON:

PS2 /

DETAILS

CATEGORY: Wrestling / **PLAYERS:** 1-6 / **DEVELOPER:** Yukes / **PUBLISHER:** THQ / **PRICE:** \$99.95 / **RATING:** M15+ / **AVAILABLE:** Now /

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY	OVERALL
85	83	86	86



He's gonna take him home for some lovin'



CRICKET 2004

Cricket 2004 represents the worst side of a money-hungry games industry. This is a game that has been continually pumped out on a yearly basis with virtually zero improvements upon its previous incarnations. It looks the same, it sounds the same and it plays the same as it did four years ago. Yet, each year, a legion of cricket loving gamers trudge to the games shop and buy it in the optimistic hope that it will provide them with entertainment, or even better, improve upon the crappy game they had bought the year before. Suckers.

There are so many flaws that plague this piece of software, it's impossible to list them all. For starters, this is probably the worst-looking PS2 game ever made. Players look like they're made up of six polygons, sporting different coloured hair to differentiate between world-famous players. Everything else is equally as ugly.

When it comes to the actual play mechanics, well, they're so glitchy and unpredictable that we were too busy laughing to care. Batting is nigh on impossible to master, and yet the computer will happily slog you for consecutive sixes as you struggle to determine how exactly the bowling is meant to be at all tactical. The AI is so poor that fielders will run alongside balls until their animation to collect it kicks in, bowlers will charge down the pitch to collect dead balls that sit harmlessly at the wicket keeper's feet, the... ahh, bugger it, just don't even think about buying this game.

Frank Dry

AVAILABLE ON:

PS2 / PC

DETAILS

CATEGORY: Sports / **PLAYERS:** 1-2 / **DEVELOPER:** HB Studios / **PUBLISHER:** EA / **PRICE:** \$99.95 / **RATING:** G / **AVAILABLE:** Now /

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY	OVERALL
33	42	40	39



The crowd is mesmerised (or asleep)



RED FACTION

It's a little odd to see Red Faction rapidly turning into a franchise, because to be honest, it was never really a triple A title. But here we are. Let's face it, however, we're not reviewing this game because we're interested in seeing whether this by the books "miner uprising sim" will have a new lease of life on handheld, we're doing it because we have a perverse fascination with anything involving John "Daikatana" Romero. Yes, Red Faction on N-Gage comes to us from Monkeystone Games, a dev company led by ex Id Software staffers Tom Hall and John "shoot the frogs" Romero.

These were two of the guys that helped invent the modern FPS back in the day, but sadly, it looks like they're still living in the past. Red Faction is certainly a competent game, and it shows that the N-Gage can handle 3D environments better than the GBA, but there's nothing here we didn't do back in the mid nineties. Let's see... wander through corridors, shoot guards, find key, use charges to get into secret areas, hit switch, shoot guards, jump across platforms, go through door. Repeat. It's still fun, but the identikit gameplay is missing the polish to make it compelling. Load times are long; you hear the same two or three sound bites over and over again; enemies disappear when you shoot them; the story is moved along via dull text boxes that interrupt the flow of the game, and so on. Newbie gamers may like this one, but other N-Gage owners should hold out for a more progressive FPS.

Cam Shea

AVAILABLE ON:

N-GAGE

DETAILS

CATEGORY: Shooter / **PLAYERS:** 1-Multi / **DEVELOPER:** Monkeystone / **PUBLISHER:** THQ Wireless / **PRICE:** \$59.95 / **RATING:** M15+ / **AVAILABLE:** Now /

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY	OVERALL
70	60	64	65



It got a few extra points for the crates



TOM CLANCY'S SPLINTER CELL

You remember how we reviewed Splinter Cell on GBA many months ago? Well, welcome to part two of that review. Splinter Cell on N-Gage is essentially the same exact game. Changes? Um, well the screen orientation now means you see a little more of what's above you, and a little less of what's in front of and behind you. And that's about it.

Sam's got a pretty good range of moves at his disposal, such as a sticky camera to scope out the environment ahead, and a number of different modes of vision, but it's really only garnish on what is actually a very straightforward pseudo stealth platform game. Despite being able to creep around and duck into certain dark areas to become hidden, most of the time you'll simply kill the guards, which makes the main challenge of the game actually navigating through the levels, and this can get frustrating, especially given the trial and error gameplay.

That said, Splinter Cell is a pretty solid title. There's plenty of variety in the visuals, complete with enough incidental detail to give the levels a more lived in feel. Sam's animations are perhaps the weakest element in this area. His walk in particular makes it look like he's got a bad case of gastric, and is concentrating on holding it in. Maybe he just had a bad curry the night before. The highlight of the game, however, is the triumphant return of agent Blaustein. Best. Character name. Ever.

Joey Tekken

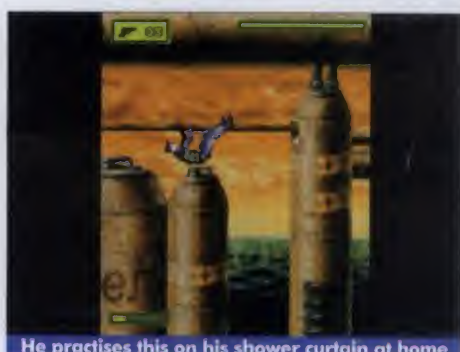
AVAILABLE ON:

N-GAGE

DETAILS

CATEGORY: Platformer / **PLAYERS:** 1-2 / **DEVELOPER:** Gameloft / **PUBLISHER:** Ubisoft / **PRICE:** \$59.95 / **RATING:** G / **AVAILABLE:** Now /

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY	OVERALL
79	75	79	79



He practises this on his shower curtain at home





Tom Clancy's GHOST RECON™ ISLAND THUNDER™

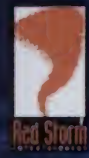


XBOX'S BEST WAR GAME*

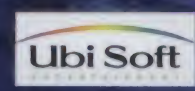
Official Xbox Magazine UK - APRIL 2003:
"the best Live-enabled game"

Xbox World:
"Island Thunder should, no, WILL be
one of this year's best online games.
Quote us on that!"

-  Engage in combat down gritty urban streets, in dense jungles, and across lush mountainsides
-  Join intense multiplayer battles on 12 dedicated maps, including new desert terrain and 4 fan favorites from Ghost Recon™
-  Get access to exclusive downloadable content with Xbox Live™
-  Prove your strength & skill on Xbox Live™ with real-time stats tracking & enhanced game match-making features



* Xbox World UK, April 2003



MAX PAYNE

Max Payne was genre defining in many ways. Sure, one aspect it defined was just how cheesy the dialogue in a third person shooter could be, but more importantly, it defined a new breed of third person shooter. It was far from complex, but the combination of a gritty world and balletic gunplay made for compelling gaming. And now Rockstar and developer Mobius are out to prove that Max Payne can be done on a handheld — and to a large extent they've succeeded.

PAIN IN STYLE

It really is quite striking how faithful Max Payne on GBA is to the original game. Sure, it's no longer in 3D and is instead presented from an isometric perspective, but everything that matters is still there — bullet time gun battles against large numbers of thugs, graphic novel stills with Max's voice narrating over the top, dirty dilapidated environments, and that classic "use painkillers" sound effect. The story is very much the same too, reusing much of the script and even the stills (highly compressed of course) from the original game. Indeed, simply fitting all that speech and all those still images into this cart is an achievement in itself.

The gameplay is largely intact too, and we must admit feeling a guilty thrill from getting stuck into a more mature title on GBA. Mobius really haven't pulled many punches. The storyline still revolves around Max taking down crime lords and Valkyr addicts, he's still as bitter and disillusioned as you remember him, and he still inflicts pain in style.

Yes, the all important bullet time is back and actually more integral than it was on PC. You see, on PC, bullet time was the icing on an already highly digestible cake. On GBA, bullet time is the lifeblood of the gameplay. Without it, Max Payne would be no fun at all. The reason is simple — with limited visibility in the environment you need to go into slow motion dives regularly just to scope out where the enemies are. The big bonus is that on top of this practical reason, bullet time looks almost as cool on the small screen as it does on the medium sized screen. There's still nothing quite like leaping into a slow motion dive, swiveling to take out two or three guys in the one smooth move, showering the air with red pixels and plastering the walls with blood. Oh, and there's a dozen or so weapons to get stuck

into, and cycling between them is simple thanks to the drop down menu on the L button.

SHOOT AND HOPE

Another area that Max on GBA "makes its mark" is in interactive/destructible environments. Not in any new or profound sense mind you. It's just cool that you shoot a wall and see the impact point. You shoot a couch and it gets ripped up. You shoot a crate (and there's lots of 'em for all you crate-aholics) and it's destroyed, often revealing a goodie inside. Interactivity is similarly limited but still a step above most GBA shooters — flick switches, read paperwork, check out the news on TV, answer phones and flush toilets, it's all good.

The level of detail in the environments is pretty good all things considered too. Textures may not be that detailed but most rooms feel unique, avoiding the identikit vibe that so many handheld shooters often have. That may be because Mobius have a clear template in the PC game to work from, or it may be because they care, who knows.

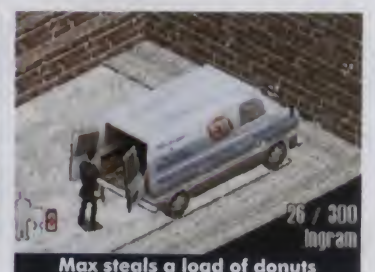
Max Payne is good, simple fun, but there are a few things that prevent it from being a classic. For one, you're always getting shot at by guys off screen, forcing you to shoot and hope. This reduces the fun factor a fair bit, and also means that there's almost zero strategy involved in gunplay. A strafe option and more objects to take cover behind might have been good. Another major problem is the frame rate, which frequently stutters and dips below an acceptable level. This isn't usually noticeable during firefights because you're in slo-mo anyway, but once the dust clears and there are a few dead bodies on screen it's Chugfest '04. Rounding our bitch list off is a problem synonymous with this franchise — it's too damn short! Four to five hours really isn't good enough. Even so, Max Payne is a refreshing entry on the GBA scene.

Cam Shea

DETAILS

CATEGORY: Action / **PLAYERS:** 1 /
DEVELOPER: Mobius /
PUBLISHER: Take 2 / **PRICE:** \$79.95 /
RATING: M15+ / **AVAILABLE:** Now /

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY	OVERALL
80	87	76	80



DRAGONBALL Z: TAIKETSU

✎ The GBA isn't necessarily the best platform for fighting games, and while there have been a few great titles like Tekken or Street Fighter Alpha 3, the overall library is pretty poor. Enter the latest lame fighting game, DBZ: Taiketsu, and prepare to cringe, because while fundamentally flawed and poorly executed, this little game is going to make a lot of cash. Sigh.

The DragonBall Z gaming franchise hasn't exactly shown much potential to date, and Taiketsu certainly isn't going to do much to turn things around. There have been a few notable ideas and branches within most of the games to at least redeem them to some degree, but honestly, we can't imagine why you'd want to play them. Taiketsu is probably the worst entrant in the stable yet, both as a DragonBall Z game and as a fighting game.

For fans, there's very little meat to this gaming stew (or perhaps we should say "gruel"). There's no storyline, nothing at all exciting visually and really none of the show's charm. For fighting enthusiasts, the game's engine struggles to keep up and is incredibly unbalanced. There's

none of the flair of the show in the in-game mechanics, and nothing really works on an offence/defence/counter level. Combos rarely reflect the damage of the moves, and as such, the game seems completely unfair. It's also button-mashing heaven, as there really is no skill required to beat your opponents.

In terms of visuals, the models, while 3D, are chunky and ill designed, and the backgrounds are equally bland and have no bearing on gameplay. And the less said about the sound the better. Simply put, this game is a hastily cobbled together papier-mâché affair that happens to feature DBZ characters. Avoid it, and hopefully the message will get through that we expect more of licensed titles.

Frank Dry

DETAILS

CATEGORY: Fighting / **PLAYERS:** 1-2 / **DEVELOPER:** Webfoot / **PUBLISHER:** Atari / **PRICE:** \$69.95 / **RATING:** G8+ / **AVAILABLE:** Now /

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY	OVERALL
50	49	40	40



I'm going to beat your little egg head



Spontaneous combustion!



Smell my foot!

TERMINATOR 3: RISE OF THE MACHINES

Note: For proper comedic effect, please read the following text aloud in your best Arnie voice.

✎ Before I was Governor of California, I was... The Terminator. This is my third turn as Terminator, I am very good at the role, this moofie, is the perfect part for me, because you see, I was in the first and second Terminator moofies, so it makes sense for me to be in the third. In this moofie, I have to fight off another terminator from the future, the TX. I like this idea because we used the letter "X" to make it sound extreme. From now on, everything I do will be "X". I said to Maria, this is my wife, I said, "asta la vista Maria, you are now Maria X" and all of my decisions as governor of California will be branded with an "X" because my new moofie, Terminator 3 Rise of the Machines, is going to crush the competition. If not at the box office, we'll do it with the DVD, now called, "DVD X".

And we're making videogames from this moofie, everything will be crushed by my moofie, Terminator 3 Rise of the Machines. The games are going to be on all of the consoles, Xbox (my favourite because of the

"X"), PS2X and GBAX, I don't know how a big moofie like Terminator 3 Rise of the Machines is going to fit on the GBAX, but if machines can make me into a terminator, they can make a big moofie fit inside the GBAX. Even if the game is slow and looks old and crappy, we'll crush the competition! Someone told me the music in the game is so bad, the competition will crumble when they hear it, so there is no use resisting - buy my boring, stupid Terminator 3 Rise of the Machines game for GBAX if you don't want me to run you over in my HummerX.

And don't forget to buy Terminator 3 Rise of the Machines on DVDX - we're going to crush the competition, just like I did when I ran as governor of California, now called "California X."

ArnieX

DETAILS

CATEGORY: Action / **PLAYERS:** 1-2 / **DEVELOPER:** Black Ops / **PUBLISHER:** Atari / **PRICE:** \$69.95 / **RATING:** G8+ / **AVAILABLE:** Now /

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY	OVERALL
61	60	65	63



I think it's time to terminate this game cartridge...



Oh, just truck off



Turn around, dude

[below] Poor lonely rock monster. It just wants to smash heads...



[above] Gee, I hope you're wearing a helmet

Ninth Domain

//www.ninthdomain.com

>> Daniel Wilks

It's getting to the point where you can't take a step without falling over a pile of new MMORPGs destined for failure due to their generic nature or frightening similarity to games that have been released before the "new" game had been conceived. Ninth Domain shouldn't have to worry about feeling too similar to any other

offering as it not only offers up one of the most compelling premises seen in the genre so far, but it also features a number of truly interesting and quirky (in a good way) races.

AFTER THE WAR

The basic premise of Ninth Domain is that the final war between good

and evil, the event that many MMOs seem to be working up to as part of their ongoing plot, has already been fought. Nobody won. Instead the wrath of the gods of the eight domains left them drained and the worlds over which they were fighting over in the first place as a near desolate ruins. After seeing the destruction they had caused, the gods agreed to withdraw from the worlds and allow the various races to make their own way unhindered, confining their divine intervention to giving advice and wisdom rather than taking an active and terrifyingly physical role. What makes the premise doubly compelling is the fact that one of the supposedly good gods, Palas, the God of Life was responsible for kicking off the war in the first place, exhorting his followers and allies to destroy Caini, the Goddess of Death and Void as he did not want the world to feel the sting of mortality.

1000 years after the war, the game begins on the sanctuary world of Aridaen, the only bastion of peace and civilisation left after the devastation. It's up to the

players to restore the fallen worlds to glory, reclaim their lost birthright and generally let the gods know that even though they are still worshipped by the masses they better not interfere again or there will be big smacks for them.

From the structure of the game it's obvious that the developers of Ninth Domain, Tektonic Studios, have done their market research when it comes to what MMO players want to see in an upcoming game. Instead of taking a straight quest based system such as Everquest or virtual sandbox style system such as Shadowbane, Tektonic has wisely chosen to combine the strengths of the two, providing enough scripted content to satisfy the casual gamer (defined by Tektonic as those who only log on for an hour or two at a time), as well as the ability to build cities, lead clans and generally steer the direction of the game for the more hardcore.

BEAUTIFUL SNAKE HYBRIDS

Instead of the standard orcs, elves, dwarfs and the like, Ninth Domain is populated by a number of





strange and fantastical races. The Palandri – tall and beautiful antlered humanoids descended from the original worshippers of Palas, the God of Life; the Amarthae – a strange race of liquid metal humanoids created by Amrathos, the God of Order who use special magics to levitate and manipulate objects (as they believe physical contact can soil the purity of their forms); the Mashai – a catlike race created by Mattashai, the Goddess of Chaos in response to seeing the horrible order that Amrathos has placed upon the world with his creation of the Amarthae and the Cainnen. Whilst the worshippers of Caini, the Goddess of Death and Void, were once human, the generations of worship have changed them into severely beautiful snake hybrids with an extra pair of eyes in their temples.

Each month, the developers will also be implementing a massive saga – a large scale quest that can only be played once by a single group – that will have a lasting effect on both the world and the

characters. Tektonic have not stated how players will be chosen for the saga but it can be fairly safely assumed that the characters will be flagged through their previous actions and the player will be informed ahead of time so they can participate. Rest assured that high level characters are not one of the prerequisites to joining a saga, as Tektonic have openly stated that due to their dynamic scaling system, a group of level 12 players are just as capable of changing the world through a saga as a group of 112th level players.

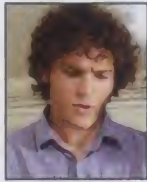
Another interesting facet of Ninth Domain is the fact that the map size is essentially unlimited. Instead of exploring a single world, Ninth Domain allows players to explore all of the planets lost in the war through use of teleportation gates. Each new area will be zoneless and randomly generated by the server so you'll never be quite sure where you'll end up, aside from when you're teleporting back to Aridaen of course. <<<



[above] You're standing in a pool of your own urine, dude

Back of the Net

JACKSON GOTHE-SNAPE



Earlier today I remarked to my co-workers over a morning coffee that discussion of the internet these days is like talking about tables and chairs. A technology that has enabled much in society, but that is itself fairly boring to discuss. You might be able to talk about maximum supporting weight, or future potential (chairs in, say, lifts), but after that you're really scratching around.

So is the internet the new table and chairs? Well, no. The caffeine this morning just made me melodramatic. There are still plenty of applications for the net that will change the way we live, work and play. What about the promised integrated connected living room entertainment device and method of distribution. A critical mass of Australian online console gamers. Or Microsoft's Media Center software, intent on linking every device in every room in your house to you, wherever you may be. There's still good shit coming. And anyway, as Google will tell you 4840 times, "the journey is the destination".

This month I had some fun trying to post myself on the single sites match.com and rspv.com.au. Heck, I even spotted a guy I went to school with on there. Sure, these sites are old hat, but, like ratemypicture.com (and its many variations), good for a laugh (no matter how much this approach disrespects their actual function and trivialises their social implications). A day later, after not having slept all that well the previous night, I removed my profiles and regained my dignity. It's bloody difficult trying to portray yourself as something desirable when you have no respect for anyone on these desperate sites. I think I ended up sounding arrogant and dismissive. And, obviously, oh so desperate. I feel much better now with my profile removed.

My experience of friendster.com, a site bringing together networks of friends (six degrees of separation-style) was a bit better, but I'm still trying to wade through the consistent unremarkable funkiness of its users to find someone that actually stands out. I've got a stupid picture up there as well. I'm eating a donut. I haven't received any message yet. Hopefully, more on that next month. But probably not. I probably will have lost interest. Maybe I'll go back to file sharing. Cool. L8r.

Links

>> Kosta Andreadis



Ocarina of 2D

www.oot2d.com

>> Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time, great game. Took one of the most popular videogame franchises around and took it to the third dimension, as opposed to the ninth — a festering crap-yard of a dimension if there ever was one. And now it seems the game is about to take another cross-dimensional leap back into 2D, in this fan made recreation of what some believe to be the "greatest game of all time" (personally my vote stays with the soon to be released Might and Magic XXXVII: Out of Magic and only a Glimmer of Might Left). Not yet complete you can still gaze at screenshots and download an early demo.



Villain Supply

www.villainsupply.com

>> Designing, creating, storing (and hopefully using) a doomsday weapon is no easy feat. In fact its damn near impossible. Weapons grade plutonium isn't something you can find along the "Baby Food and Sub-Atomic Particle Accelerator" aisle at the local Safeway. But hope is not lost, and with internet shopping replacing the modern shopping centre as we know it (Yeah right!) finally an online store has appeared that caters for the needs of the villains, baddies and super evil geniuses of the world. Everything from lairs, weapons, robot sex-killers and yes doomsday devices can be found here, and at great post-Christmas prices!



Who You Gonna Call?

www.ghostbusters.net

>> As a film, Ghostbusters has everything a good film should have — ghosts, busting and Bill Murray. This site dedicated to the franchise lets fans discuss the films, write their very own Dr. Venkman fan fiction, and view or buy props from the film. So then, it's not a site that would appeal to a broad audience like www.ratemyboobs.com would, and such can be filed under "for obsessive fans only". But you can download a Ghostbusters Doom 2 mod that if you're willing to search through hundreds of old "legitimate CD-ROMS" looking for a copy of the original is only moderately worth it.



Outkast, Saddam Hussein, and Arnie Sound Boards

www.liquidgeneration.com/poptoons/saddam_outkast.asp

www.giantmonster.com/arnold/ARNOLD_soundboard2.swf

>> At its height, Outkast's recent hit single "Hey Ya!" could be heard all over the airwaves. It's insanely catchy and has artistic merit to boot, a rare combination to find in pop music. At the same time, the news of Saddam Hussein's capture was almost everywhere you turned. Combine the two media nuggets and you get "Hey Allah!" When you're done watching that, plug that phone back in, load up the Arnold Schwarzenegger sound board. Most of you may have already seen or heard it in action, but like all great things it can be revisited time and time again.

Online Console Gaming Update



XBOX LIVE

Free Live!

» If you stocked up on Xbox titles over the Christmas break, you're likely to have noticed a little orange card wedged in under the manual of some games. That's right folks; Microsoft is offering a two month free trial offer for its Live service, ending March 31 2004. If you haven't gotten around to jumping into Live yet, this is a perfect opportunity to do so!

Downloadable Content Mayhem

» As promised, Microsoft has pumped plenty of new downloadable content down the Live pipes in recent months. Firstly, there are two new Counter-Strike multiplayer maps available for download, including the venerable Inferno and the old-school favorite, Office. Those that have played the PC version should be fairly familiar with both of these maps.

» Crimson Skies fans also have some new content to play with, in the form of the brand-new Fury plane, the Caverns multiplayer map and a Windows Media Player skin.

» From the rumour mill this month is the supposedly imminent downloadable content for Links 2004. Daryl Welsh of Microsoft has confirmed that an additional course – Hawaii's Kapalua Plantation – will be made available as a premium download very soon, at the cost of \$US4.99. Let's hope that this rumor becomes reality by the time you read this.

A Thriving Xbox Community

» Recently hooked up to Live and looking to battle it out with some fellow Aussies? Check out www.aussieuxbox.net – a tight-knit Xbox community with over 1,000 members, helpful support forums and plenty of tournament news, as

well as fan clubs for some of the more popular games. Heck, there's even an entire forum area dedicated to the organisation of clan scrimmages! If you, like us, have had trouble finding local, low latency Live games, this is a very handy service indeed.

ESPN Game Issues

» There appears to be a bug that exists in all ESPN games (e.g. NFL 2K4), whereby you are only able to play against gamers who have the same video settings as you. Specifically, this means that those with Pal 50 televisions cannot see Pal 60 gamers, and vice-versa. Thus, if you've had problems getting online with friends in the past, this is probably why. Let's hope that these issues are rectified in the near future.



[above] Counter-Strike shenanigans



[left] The little orange card we were talking about



PS2 NETWORK ENTERTAINMENT

Sony being generous

» Sony has recently informed us that, unlike Xbox Live, it will feature locally hosted Network Entertainment servers for many of its bandwidth-hungry games – including titles such as SOCOM and Destruction Derby. What does this mean? No more being shot around corners by LPBs in the US – yay!

Getting to know you

» Looking to build a fearsome reputation online? This might just be possible with the new Network Gamer's profile page at www.playstation.com.au, whereby individual users and clans alike are able to add their names, photos, rankings, and biographical info to a massive online database. Beware, however, that if you happen to find any strange looking people hanging outside your bedroom window, it may be a disgruntled opponent that you've recently thrashed online.

The Next Big Thing

» As mentioned in last month's update, the next big thing for Sony's Network Entertainment service is Destruction Derby Arenas, which is now available across the country. Rather than being penalized for driving like a maniac and smashing up your car, Destruction Derby rewards you for doing so. Although it's essentially the same game in a prettier shell, with up to 20 players competing simultaneously and full compatibility with the PS2's USB headset, this might well be the title that pushes Sony's online service into the limelight with the venerable Xbox Live.

Angels Brought Me Here

» You'll have to excuse the cheesy Guy Sebastian reference; however, Sirius Telecommunications has recently announced its appointment by Sony as 'umpires' for PlayStation

2 Network Entertainment. In the words of Sirius themselves, "belligerent players who prey on inexperienced players or flaunt the rules will be sidelined by Sirius operators dubbed Sony's angels". Need technical support or other related assistance? Get in touch with one of the angels that will be constantly lurking around PS2 cyberspace.



[above] Chat to your friends about destruction, or something



[left] Doubtfully a real gamer. Probably a hired model or someone who works at Sony.

Freak Speak

JANUARY 2004

>> Tim Levy

☞ Shooting, driving, fighting, playing music... All these things that 'normal' people love to do, yet find it a hard to afford, let alone the time to do in 'real' life. For example, who has the budget to prang a car at 280 kph, even if it's a Datsun 120Y with a cracked dashboard? If you could somehow find a way to get it up to 280 kph, it would still cost at least \$500 per stack, and that doesn't even include the medical bills. As for time, who can afford to do all the paper work involved with killing 600 bad guys if you were a policeman involved in a gangster shoot out? And as for having a band, even though there are the rewards of the adoring fans, riches and drug dependency if you make it to the big time, ultimately, it can take too long to make it happen. Really, it's much cheaper and safer to do all these things in the virtual world.

So who are some of these people that enjoy living in the virtual world of the arcade? Hyper sent our specialist down to Playtime George Street in Sydney to check out who is hanging out at the local arcades, what they are playing and if they are busting their budget.



Jimmy

2. Retail – music store
3. Guitar Freaks
4. It's fun to play guitar without having to have a band, and it's different to the violent video games
5. \$50-60
6. Space Invaders table top



Kid

2. Arcade supervisor
3. Soul Calibur II
4. Gameplay is near perfect. I like the epic soundtrack
5. \$50
6. Soul Calibur



Ami

2. Just finished High School
3. Mostly music games, Drum Mania and Guitar Freaks
4. I love music
5. About \$80
6. Drum Mania



Gerry

2. Just finished High School
3. Virtua Cop 3
4. I like shooting stuff – especially bad guys who had it coming
5. \$15-20
6. The Metal Slug series

Questions:

1. Name?
2. Occupation?
3. What are you playing at the moment?
4. Why?
5. How much a month do you spend on arcade games?
6. What is your favourite arcade game of all time?



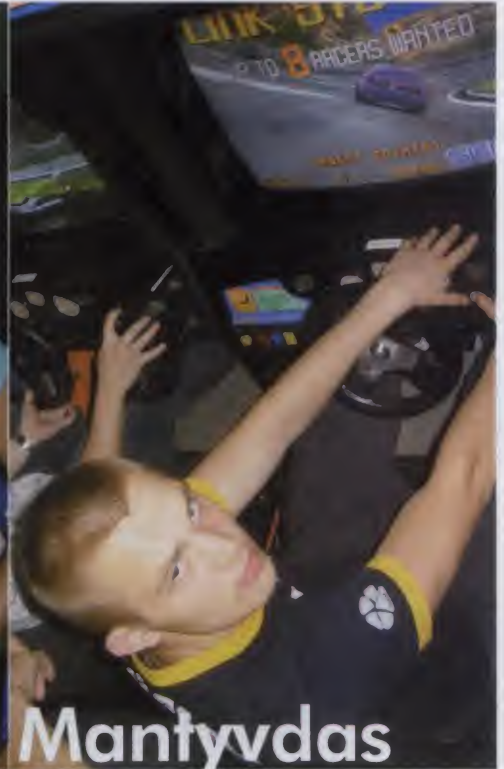
Jarrood

2. Economics student
3. Soul Calibur II
4. Because you get to use awesome weapons
5. \$10
6. Golden Axe



Anna

2. Design Student
3. Point Blank 3
4. It's fun shooting stuff and the game has comedy value
5. \$5-\$10
6. Space Invaders



Mantyvdas

2. Building Industry
3. Driving games
4. I love cars
5. \$50
6. Daytona - It's still great after nearly a decade



Sandra

2. Retail at a seafood shop
3. Fighting games
4. Because it's cool and the male characters are so buff
5. Depends on how much money I have - \$70
6. Thrill Drive



Mantas

2. On holidays (always)
3. MoCap Boxing
4. Cause it's good exercise and quickens your reflexes
5. \$40
6. Tekken 3



Tim

2. Real Estate and News Agency
3. Street Fighter II
4. Classic pop-culture characters and gameplay
5. \$20
6. Street Fighter II



WHERE IN GAMING HISTORY IS CARMEN SANDIEGO?

>> DANIEL STAINES

Throughout much of the 80s and 90s, school was a hard place to be for a gamer...

What we're talking about here is the era before Sony and Microsoft showed up and made gaming cool by marketing it to vacuous twenty-something yuppies with disposable incomes and short attention spans. This was when gaming was considered the pursuit of anti-social geeks — outcasts who spent their time fiddling with arcane techno-gadgets because they lacked the necessary people skills to participate in more "normal" pastimes. As such, openly discussing videogames in the schoolyard was a dire social faux pas. Last Ninja, Mario, Wizball... these things simply didn't exist within the confines of a classroom. Games were something you just didn't talk about.

SURRENDER MONKEYS

Except, of course, Carmen Sandiego. Everybody could talk about Carmen Sandiego because everybody had played Carmen Sandiego. These educational detective games were on every Apple II in every school computer room in the country. Kids would come to computing class, muck around on some shanty word processor for a few minutes to please their ignorant teachers and then amuse themselves for the next half an hour or so with Carmen. What was ordinarily an esoteric

hobby suddenly became a communal activity, with most of the class working together in groups to decipher clues and solve cases. You could almost say that the Carmen franchise marks the first instance in which computer gaming appealed to a mainstream audience.

It's all about accessibility, you know. What made the Carmen games so broadly popular — aside from the fact that they were more fun than doing work — was their intuitively straightforward nature. The premise was simple: you are a rookie flatfoot working for the ACME detective agency. Your assignment is to track down a world famous thief by the name of Carmen Sandiego. Depending on what installation of the franchise you're playing, Carmen will be located somewhere in the world, somewhere in Europe, somewhere in America, somewhere in space or somewhere in the nooks and crannies of time itself. To find her, you travel to the various locations within the area specified on the title screen and solve thefts committed by her cronies by interviewing people and gathering clues. As this was supposed to be some sort of edutainment, all the clues you got would be trivia about the subject the games were based on. So, in the World version,



[Above] If you're my pilot, I think I just decided to walk...

someone might say: "I think the thief mentioned he wanted to get sneered at by frog-chomping surrender monkeys", and you'd be like "Oh! He's going to France!"

It was a pretty straightforward setup, and developer Broderbund further simplified their work by coating each of the Sandiego titles with an interface intuitive enough for anyone to comprehend. Use the mouse, drag the pointer to the big words in boxes and click — presto, you're an instant gamer. Add to that the sense of achievement gained when your profile went up an ACME rank, and it's not hard to see why so many of us skipped figuring out the intricacies of Lotus Works in favour of tracking down jewel thieves and artefact bandits.



The Original Carmen Sandiego Gameography – 1985-1993

WHERE IN THE WORLD IS CARMEN SANDIEGO?

Released: 1985
Subject: Geography

WHERE IN THE USA IS CARMEN SANDIEGO?

Released: 1986
Subject: Geography

WHERE IN EUROPE IS CARMEN SANDIEGO?

Released: 1988
Subject: Geography

WHERE IN TIME IS CARMEN SANDIEGO?

Released: 1989
Subject: History

WHERE IN THE WORLD IS CARMEN SANDIEGO? DELUXE EDITION

Released: 1990
Subject: Geography

WHERE IN THE WORLD IS CARMEN SANDIEGO? ENHANCED EDITION

Released: 1991
Subject: Geography

WHERE IN AMERICA'S PAST IS CARMEN SANDIEGO?

Released: 1991
Subject: American History

WHERE IN THE U.S.A IS CARMEN SANDIEGO? ENHANCED EDITION

Released: 1992
Subject: Geography

WHERE IN SPACE IS CARMEN SANDIEGO?

Released: 1993
Subject: Astronomy



[above] Upgrade your PC for this one
[below] Just tell your parents you're doing homework – they wouldn't know the difference

MILKED FOR ALL ITS WORTH

Of all the Carmen games, the original Where in the World is Carmen Sandiego (released in 1985) is the one the majority of us remember most fondly. Subsequent Sandiego adventures – which include Where in Time is Carmen Sandiego and the universally maligned Where in American History is Carmen Sandiego – were exceptional pieces of edutainment in their own right, but they lacked the wide appeal of their predecessors. Everybody knows where the Taj Mahal is and what country uses Pounds as its national currency, but who the bloody hell knows what date John Wilkes Booth shot Abraham Lincoln or what the volcanic moon of Jupiter is called? Well okay, the volcanic moon of Jupiter is called Io. But I only know that because I'm an astronomy geek... and there weren't that many astronomy geeks in my seventh grade computers class.

After a few years of mediocre new releases, updated re-releases and a cartoon show that made Widget look good, Broderbund eventually sold the Carmen license to a subsidiary called The Learning Company who then produced scores of bargain bin titles nobody liked or cared about. These new games – including the ridiculously titled Secret of the Stolen

Drums reviewed in this issue – are usually bog standard edutainment knock-offs that resemble their venerable predecessors in name and nothing else. Of course, we're not saying that the original Carmen games were masterpieces incapable of being emulated, but they were certainly clever enough to appeal to adults as well as kids. The same, however, cannot be said for something like Carmen Sandiego's Great Chase Through Time.

And that's quite sad really. Like a lot of things we enjoyed as kids, Carmen Sandiego has gone from being a name you could respect to just another brand that's been milked for all its worth by bozos who couldn't care less about the integrity of the product they're producing. If you've never experienced Carmen and feel the need to maybe brush up on your geography skills, just skip the new games and download an Apple II version of Where in the World is Carmen Sandiego instead. It's probably a bit out of date by now, but what it lacks in accurate content it makes up for with charm and accessibility. And hey, you could probably get way with playing it instead of doing your homework. It is educational, after all... <<<



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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

**BEYOND
GOOD & EVIL**

www.beyondgoodevil.com





Spinal Tap get together to chat about old times



Wha-hooopen to your dress sense?



A Mighty Wind

WARNER BROS, PG

» A *Mighty Wind* is yet another triumph for Christopher Guest's improvisation-heavy faux documentary filmmaking style. The basic story (developed by Guest and the brilliant Eugene Levy) sees three classic 60s folk music groups returning to the spotlight for a memorial concert.

NO WEAK LINK

There's the impossibly cheery and saccharine sweet New Main Street Singers and their overbearing manager (played by Fred "wha' happened" Willard — who seems to steal the show in every one of Guest's films). There's The Folksmen, comprised of Michael McKean, Christopher Guest and Harry Shearer, and it's obvious that the chemistry that they developed as the world's most inept rock group (Spinal Tap) almost twenty

years ago hasn't abated. The film's lynch pin, however, is very much Mitch and Mickey (played by Eugene Levy and Catherine O'Hara) — a duo known for their once very real romance, but long since estranged, with Mitch spending much of the intervening time in a mental hospital. Mitch and Mickey's reunion after such a long period is both funny and touching — a description that often fits Guest's films.

Indeed, the reason that they're so successful is that they don't mercilessly take the piss out of their subject matter, but are instead gentle parodies, full of irreverent humour and characters that are eccentric, but only a tweak away from being completely believable. Of course it's the cast that makes it happen, and with largely the same ensemble group from Guest's last two films (*Waiting For Guffman* and *Best In Show*) there's no weak link.

Every one of these actors has honed the challenge of improvised comedic dialogue within the constraint of a realistic character to a fine art. And this is in addition to learning their instruments and actually putting on the concert.

The DVD has a decent selection of extras including commentary from Levy and Guest, additional scenes (although a few more wouldn't have gone astray given how much footage they must have), and all the songs and banter from the concert in full in a mock TV presentation. Don't let the fact that this is a film about folk music put you off — *A Mighty Wind* is champagne comedy, and gets better with each viewing.

Cam Shea

MOVIE: 9 / EXTRAS: 7



Adaptation

COLUMBIA TRISTAR, MA 15+

Adaptation is a film destined to polarize audiences — you either love it or you don't see what's so special. The problem lies with the fact that the film itself is more of a play with the conventions of writing and structure than a traditional comedic narrative. Nicholas Cage plays Charlie and Donald Kaufman, identical twin screenwriters and opposite in all respects apart from physical. Whereas Charlie is neurotic and unsure, Donald is larger than life, just stupid enough to be charming and popular with the ladies. Based on the success of his previous script, *Being John Malkovich*, Charlie is offered the job of adapting the novel, *The Orchid Thief* by Susan Orlean into a screenplay, but a crippling case of inferiority complex inspired writer's block prompts him to write himself

into his screenplay. In other words, the real life Charlie Kaufman has written a screenplay about a fictional Charlie Kaufman writing a fictional version of himself into his screenplay. The brilliant play with convention and structure starts before the film does — the screenplay is credited to both Charlie and Donald Kaufman, the latter being a fictional character from the film. It goes even further with real people playing themselves in a cast of actors playing real people, fictional conceits to give real conclusions and one of Nicholas Cage's best ever performances. Unfortunately the special features are a bit light — an audio commentary by the real Kaufman, Cage's Kaufman's (Kaufmen?) and director Spike Jonze could have been a surreal icing on the cake. **Daniel Wilks**

MOVIE: 9 / EXTRAS: 5



Matchstick Men

WARNER BROS, M15+

2003 has been the year the big screen conman has made his comeback with such excellent fare as *Confidence*, *The Good Thief* and now the charming and thoughtful *Matchstick Men*. A definite change of pace for director Ridley Scott, *Matchstick Men* tells the story of an unlikely partnership of confidence tricksters — true opposites in every sense of the word. Frank (Sam Rockwell) is smooth, stylish and talks a good game but Roy (Nicholas Cage), the smarter, more experienced of the two is an emotional and mental wreck, plagued by neuroses left, right and center. Roy is obsessive compulsive, agoraphobic, prone to anxiety attacks and a mass of

nervous ticks. An open door can spiral him into paroxysms of terror and a stain on his carpet can leave him gagging for air. After a visit to a friendly psychiatrist, Roy sets about to contact his now 14 or so year-old daughter who he has never seen. What follows is a bitter sweet tale of a neurotic man who hates himself for his work slowly learning to love his daughter, a synopsis that may sound a little twee but is a beautiful thing to behold. All three stars turn in wonderful performances, especially Cage who deserves a second Oscar. A decent making of doco supports the superb feature.

Daniel Wilks

MOVIE: 9 / EXTRAS: 6



Cypher

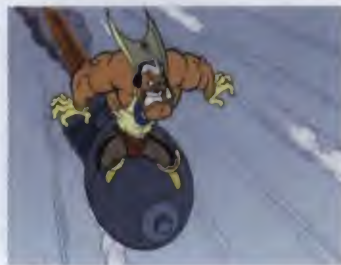
WARNER BROS, M15+

A lot has been expected from writer/director Vincenzo Natali since his amazing debut film *Cube*. In the four years between films (*Cypher* was given limited release way back in 2002), Natali has learnt something that was missing from *Cube* — subtlety. To try and describe the plot in any coherent detail would do the film a disservice and would also be impossible in such a small space. Suffice it to say that the near future thriller tells the tale of a man who may or may not be brainwashed and may or may not be who he, the audience and the other characters in the film think he is. All of the limited cast act their chops off with special kudos to going to Jeremy Northam, an actor usually known for his gentle

period piece films. Northam undergoes an amazing metamorphosis during the film — it's like every swig of single malt scotch and puff of cigarette is scouring away the facade to show the man he really is. Lucy Liu, aside from being heart-stoppingly sexy can really turn in a good performance when called upon to do so and it's obvious Natali has made that call. Although some pundits have billed *Cypher* as a *Matrix* wannabe the two films could not be further apart — whereas *The Matrix* relied on action and spectacle to entertain, *Cypher* instead uses subtle character nuance, tricks of perception and character progression to keep the viewer hooked.

Daniel Wilks

MOVIE: 8 / EXTRAS: 5



Ripping Friends



AV CHANNEL, M15+

Ren and Stimpy was one of the most influential cartoon series ever when it first blazed across TV screens back in the early 90s. It was also one of the most disturbing and just plain strange — the product of John Kricfalusi's deranged mind. Unfortunately, due to battles over censorship with Nickelodeon, John K. and Spumco were fired. From that point on Nickelodeon owned the rights to Ren and Stimpy and the show became a pale imitation of its former glory. The good news is that John K. has recently done some new Ren and Stimpy episodes (under the name Ren and Stimpy: Adult Party Cartoon) for a different network and hopefully we'll see the entire, unedited John K. collection released on DVD.

Until then, however, the next best thing is probably John's 01/02 series

The Ripping Friends. The Ripping Friends are a group of impossibly buff and super "smart" superheroes who fight for the usual manly ideals, but against a typically surreal and bizarre cast of nemeses — men with giant thumbs protruding from their chests, invertebrate life forms and evil underpants... not to mention a rival superhero named Man Man who delights in putting his sidekick Boy Boy in extreme danger. The usual John K. stuff, really. This would all be well and good if John K. hadn't already covered this territory in Ren and Stimpy — with much more interesting characters and edgy content to boot. This two DVD set contains all 13 episodes of The Ripping Friends, and little in the way of extras.

Cam Shea

MOVIE: 6 / EXTRAS: 1



Cabin Fever

WARNER BROS, MA 15+

Although the central conceit of the terror of a flesh eating virus a-la necrotising fasciitis (the flesh eating bacteria that spread widespread panic in the late nineties) may be a bit out of date to be topical, writer/director Eli Roth's debut horror film has a kind of enthusiastic nihilism associated with 70s horror that makes it an absolute joy to watch. A group of young stereotypical horror movie victims take some time off from college and head to a remote cabin in the woods for some quiet time shooting local wildlife, fornicating like the proverbial rabbits and getting trashed, but everything goes pear-shaped when a strange sickly hermit attacks the revelers. Soon one of the

teens is stricken with the flesh eating disease. Paranoia and self-preservation kick in when the unaffected realise that their only chance of survival lays in them staying away from possible contamination and getting out of the area — preferably to a hospital. Inevitably it all devolves into a bloody frenzy of violence as minds snap under the pressure and suspicious locals look to take matters into their own hands. There's a certain cheapness to the film but it only adds to the charm. The supplemental features will be of great interest to anyone interested in making low budget film.

Daniel Wilks

MOVIE: 8 / EXTRAS: 7



League of Extraordinary Gentlemen



FOX HOME ENTERTAINMENT, M15+

It's a sad moment on the special features of League of Extraordinary Gentlemen (LXG) when we find out that Sean Connery turned down parts in both The Matrix and Lord of the Rings because he "didn't understand what they were about", and thus accepted the part of Quatermain in LXG because he didn't want to miss out on another potential smash hit movie just because he didn't "get it". Sadly, it isn't a case of third time lucky for Connery; LXG is a dismal plodding adventure flick with impressive scenes of high action and little else.

Based on the graphic novels by Alan Moore and Kevin O'Neill, League of Extraordinary Gentlemen is another Hollywood disaster where it appears

the filmmakers had absolutely no idea how to handle the material. All they saw were a collection of "cool" literary heroes and went about cashing in on it in the most hackneyed way possible.

It's difficult watching Connery on autopilot throughout the whole affair, although he's supported by a fairly lively supporting cast that help to keep you from falling asleep. You'll enjoy seeing Mr. Hyde, Mr. Invisible, Captain Nemo, Dorian Grey et al, and you'll marvel at some of the fantastic production design, but it's all flash, glitz and shiny objects to disguise a pretty darn clumsy plot and hammy dialogue. Go read the graphic novels and leave this DVD on the shelf.

Frank Dry

MOVIE: 5 / EXTRAS: 4

Neon Genesis Evangelion: Movie Collection

PRODUCTION COMPANY: GAINAX
GENRE: MECHA ACTION

Like Akira and Ninja Scroll, Neon Genesis Evangelion is often blindly quoted as one of those shows that defined a generation. Its mixture of slick mecha action with a visceral and raw take on youth psychology was a bold, edgy formula that audiences were instantly drawn to, except there was one catch: production studio Gainax managed to run out of budget.

ORGY OF ANGEL-KILLING

It's been over half a decade since the show finished, but you do remember the final few episodes of Evangelion, don't you? The cheap live footage, the slipshod pencil-drawn images, the inexcusably long exposition posing as an exploration of psychology... the bottom had clearly fallen out and episode 26 just left everyone hanging.

Fortune smiled on Gainax when they were allowed to release not one, but two feature films to properly close out the story; and

with this Movie Collection now available on DVD, you'll be able to enjoy the satisfaction of complete closure in one fell swoop with Death & Rebirth and End of Evangelion.

We're spared the psychological mumbo jumbo for just long enough to be treated to an orgy of Angel-killing and a grizzly resolution to all of the story threads. It's not a happy ending, though, at least not in the traditional Ewok-dancing Return of the Jedi sense. The underlying philosophy of the show is taken to its logical conclusion which, if you know where it's heading, is a bit like watching a train wreck in slow motion.

Digital surround sound and director commentary are available for both movies.

ANIMATION: 8 / PLOT: 7
OVERALL: 8



[above] Just don't call it "four eyes".



Last Exile

PRODUCTION COMPANY: STUDIO GONZO
GENRE: ACTION/DRAMA

If you're the kind of anime enthusiast whose faith in the medium grows weary after all the Pokémon clones and the umpteenth Dragonball re-run, particularly when the US has a few marks of creative genius like Justice League and Invader Zim, then cast your eyes on Last Exile. Produced by Gonzo, the same outfit responsible for Blue Submarine No. 6 and Vandread, Last Exile marks a glorious return to the steampunk genre with a story that's best described as a cross between Laputa and Blue Submarine No. 6.

SHEER BEAUTY

Taking place in a richly conceived alternate world, Claus and Lavie are a pair of talented young pilots who work together in a trade union. They take up all the odd delivery jobs they can to get by and to pay for maintaining their vanship — which looks oddly like a Star Wars pod-racer — but a series of missions inadvertently sees them tangled in a magnificent aerial war between two nations.

The story is captivating and fascinating in that Claus and Lavie are the vehicles for introducing viewers to all the visual details in this strange new world where cannons, steam-powered musketmen and gigantic airships fill the skies. These are all icons of the steampunk genre of old, which will be heart-warmingly nostalgic for anyone who loves Miyazaki's earlier works. Together with Gonzo's trademark animation style of mixing cell animation with computer-generated effects, Last Exile will sweep you off your feet with its classiness and sheer beauty.

Last Exile is also presented in anamorphic 16:9 — perfect for the home cinema.

ANIMATION: 10 / PLOT: 7
OVERALL: 9



[above] Now THIS is podracing!



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Q. What was the best game of 2003?

Taking our first steps into a new year that promises another shelf-full of good times, it can be somewhat difficult to cast the impatient mind of a gamer back far enough to remember what it was we actually played in 2003. However, we're pleased to report that enough of you did indeed manage to do that. Here then is but a small sampling of what Hyper readers thought were some of the best games of last year.



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...

? "Which game has the best soundtrack?"

Responses will be printed in Hyper #127



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.

GOLDEN GAMING

Hey Hyper,

During 2003, I witnessed many gaming miracles. Need For Speed: Underground, True Crime: Streets Of LA... But the best game of 2003 must be divided into 2 categories. The best game on GBA was Golden Sun: The Lost Age. The best on PS2, was Need For Speed: Underground. I know most of you will disagree, but if I must choose out of them both, it would be Golden Sun: The Lost Age. The game was a continuation of my other favourite game (Golden Sun). The series is simply amazing! Well that's enough from me, plz print this.

From your everyday Hyper Addict,
GoldEnSuN (a.k.a Michael Flisowski)

BEAUTIFUL BATTLEFIELD

Well gather around everybody. The best game so far in 2003 would have to be Battlefield 1942, plus most of the mods like "Road to Rome" and "Secret Weapons of WWII". Some might say it is crap but this game can hold a lot of enjoyment and playable time. I have lately been using a non-official mod "Desert Storm". The reason I like this is because of the weapons and only the weapons.

Onto other things, Battlefield is a great game "if non of yas believe me ya can go get stuffed". The game has many of fun and exciting aspects, e.g. the planes good for suicide bombing, and the tanks and vehicles for killing your own team members for fun and laughs. The second best game would be Grand Theft Auto: Vice City. The missions are fun but can get frustrating –

with Tommy not moving on after shooting for some reason and the occasional death... tops off a great game by Rockstar and Rockstar North.

From the slow minded brain of the lazy green turtle,
zyther44@hotmail.com

GOOOAL

The best game of 2003... what a hard choice it is. There were a lot of great games in 2003, such as Mario Kart: Double Dash!!, Zelda: Wind Waker, Halo, among others. But in my mind, there is only one true game that comes out victorious. This game is "Pro Evolution Soccer 2" this game has it all.

The graphics are one of the best ever seen in a soccer game, the gameplay is to die for. This game is far superior in gameplay and the ability to be realistic than that of "Fifa" and "ISS." In other soccer games it is far too easy to score a goal, as you can just run the field, but in PES 2, you have to use through balls, switches and well timed passes to succeed. It is far ahead of other soccer games and it shows when you return to it again and again. (Thank god Pro Evolution Soccer 3 is here)

Thanks,
jastone

GOOD TO PLAY TOGETHER

Oh god! It was such a great year for games! How do I choose? I'll have to categorize!

MULTI CATEGORY: My mates and I have wasted away countless hours

on the GCN with the likes of Sega Soccer Slam, Phantasy Star Online, Soul Calibur 2 and more recently Mario Kart:DD!!. The PC version of Halo and Generals: Zero Hour have also been big guns at our LANs.

The winner would have to be Phantasy Star Online. For clocking up the most hours of play and for being the hardest bloody game to track down a copy of!

ONLINE CATEGORY: As for Online games, I've been brought back to the infectious Narfell thanks to Neverwinter Nights new expansion(s). Desert Combat is also played extensively by myself. It's been around a while but since it changes every month or so I feel it can be brought up here!

I'd have to give this one to Narfell (Neverwinter Nights) for taking away more time from my life than any other game.

SINGLE PLAYER CATEGORY: I really enjoyed Eternal Darkness... That's the only game that comes to mind! Guess I just don't have the time to play with myself anymore. Microsoft is right. It really is GOOD to play together!

Thomasuwoo@yahoo.com

[below] Battlefield 1942: A huge hit that continues to provide good times.



F-F-FABULOUS!

Hi Hyperettes,

What a question! We have been treated to so many great games this year that there are dozens I haven't even experienced yet. But the best game of 2003 I believe must be Final Fantasy Tactics Advance on the GBA. This game made me buy a GBA SP and so far has treated me with hours of entertainment. The way Square-Enix were able to bring the elements and feel of the PlayStation classics to a portable device were awesome.

With so much customisation available, along with a great story, this game is my 2003 Favourite!

GOD BLESS

Mr Chocobo

PRIME GAMING

Is this including games released in 2001 as well? If yes, Halo. If no — Metroid Prime. Y'see, this game for me was the most immersive experience ever!

Back in my younger days (in the era of the 16bit wars) Super Metroid was the best game I have ever played. It was filled with puzzles that wasn't too hard but not so easy to solve. Now, Metroid Prime

completely blew me away on the GameCube! I first bought this game when it was released sometime in March 2003 (me thinks) and have been playing it ever since. Haven't finished yet 'cos I want to get all the missiles and energy tanks before I face off the last boss (y'know... METROID PRIME ;)).

Why do I think this is the best game of 2003? It is because of all the little things that you have to pay attention to... for example: the reflection of Samus' visor after a bright blast — IT'S WIKKID! Them sexy eyes... Damn they're sexy!!! Hee... hee... hee (I hope ur not reading this, May "my other half").

Oh and one other thing... you can actually see her skeletal structure of her hand when the X-ray visor is activated — damn cool or what?! Ah well enough ramblings, after a session of R63 I'm gonna go back playing it some more now.

Keep up the quality, Hyper!
Xiathan aka Raja

ZELDA, OF COURSE!

What was the best game of 2003?

No need to think. Zelda the Wind Waker was my favourite game this

year easily. Firstly the storyline is a killer! It just links with everything in the other Zelda games and it just sucked me in. The gameplay, GOD the gameplay! What could be better than shoving a sword into Gannon's minions, figuring out extremely fun puzzles and of course sailing around the seas!?

Nothing! Graphics. I don't think I even need to say anything here, but I will. Just look at the graphics.

Nintendo have done a fabulous job with the cel-shading (cartoon you may call it) and it just fits the Zelda world perfectly! Soundtrack. If you have played a Zelda game you will know what I'm about to go on and on and on about here... Most. Catchiest. Tunes. Ever. Hey I restrained myself from going on too much! That's a first. Anyway, that's why I think it was the best game of 2003.

Great magazine!

Patrick M

ZELDA PART 2

Some may dismiss it as a port but Ocarina of Time: Master Quest, was the best game of 2003. Those who believed there would just be



[above] Final Fantasy Tactics: it's many other gamers' favourite as well.

different enemies, including me initially, were sadly mistaken. The temples are harder than before and the emphasis on quality not quantity of enemies increases the difficulty. I am still amazed this game was free as it betters Wind Waker in the temples, the only reasonable basis of comparison for Zelda titles. MQ, as well as Resident Evil remake are proof that ports can better the original title, even across different generations of console.

Al Christie

And on the 7th day he didn't rest,

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KOTOR DREAMS

Hey Hyper! I've been a loyal follower of your magazine since mid '97. I consider your magazine as my bible so if you get lots of praise from me don't be surprised. Anyway I recently played Knights of the Old Republic on Xbox and I was amazed by the entire game. The story however is not quite finished, as it seems to imply there will be a second game. Could you please tell me if LucasArts are constructing a KOTOR 2? If not, could you keep us posted on this subject? Thanks a lot guys. You are the true GODS of GAMING.

Luke O'Donoghue

Dear Luke,

Luke... Luke... go to Dagobah, Luuuuke. Er... sorry. Yes, Knights of the Old Republic 2 is in development (although it might not be called that, obviously). We'll learn more about it at E3 in May.

SEX OBJECTS

After re-reading your review, and a recent price drop, I bought DOA: Xtreme Beach Volleyball. All jokes aside, why is there a nudity rating on the classification sticker?

Bikinis and tight fitting costumes, women being depicted as sex objects... isn't this just an episode of Video Hits? Perhaps the creators should have added an R&B icon or two and the whole thing would have been overlooked.

Calum Morrison

Dear Calum,

Because sex sells. Surely you should know that by now!

THE CLASSICS

Dear Hyper,

I would like to thank Daniel Staines and (everyone else for that matter) for writing the article on Abandonware games. I think it's important for people to be aware of these classics, the games that have literally shaped the gaming industry today. These days, its all about how many copies you can sell and what markets to reach and in the midst of the dynamic lighting, surround sound and advanced AI, we are forgetting the classics. The truth is, the next generation of gamers, the "woot woot iam teh uber 1337 at cs" 12 year-olds you see at internet cafes, are not aware of these games and we really are the only ones who can remember them, so when we're gone, who will remember them?? And I'm not just talking about the excellent adventure games Sierra pumped out, games like Elite, Beneath a Steel Sky, the ever addictive Ultima 1, these games deserve to be remembered.

Once again, thank you and I hope that organizations such as ESA open their eyes and act a little more empathetic to this issue.

Stickman

Dear Stickman,

As games become more and more accepted as an art form, we should

hopefully see these old games resurrected and preserved - maybe even packaged in with modern remakes.

OR SOMETHING

Ahoy to all at Hyper.

I don't know about you, but I am becoming a little worried about the health of our beloved games industry. You see, I liken the games industry to a fat old man. If he doesn't get up and start running, he'll die in his sweaty vinyl recliner. But why would he get up, when he gets his meals delivered and he uses a broomstick to change channels on the telly? Someone has to kill the delivery boy and disconnect the cable, or we may very well end up playing EA Sports FIFA 2054. Or something.

Cheers,

Geffen

Dear Geffen,

We hear you, man. I go even further, I'd call the old man obese. Morbidly obese.

KONG'S BANANA

"Umm, what's Kong doing?" was what my friend said when playing Mario Kart: Double Dash. We looked over and laughed our heads off. What you do is press the slide-button when on a straight with Diddy driving and Kong at the rear, and, umm, you'll see what happens. Most of the other racers "do it" anyway, but Kong's the best. Another favourite is Mario with Peachie driving. And you thought they were just cute critters! Now there's a whole new definition to the phrase of "Kong's showing us his banana".

1. Speaking of sliding in MKDD, is it just me, or do you guys have a problem having to press the shoulder button fully? Damn stupid idea. I'm often caught losing my slide because I inadvertently release it. Of course Nintendo has no controller config. Damn I hate that obstinance they have with their first party games. Never any options. Not even gameplay ones. So many of their games' lifespans are ruined by this. This game, MK64, Starfox 64 (level select), 1080 (multi-player modes), Waverace GC (lap and buoy-miss settings).

2. Where the hell did the abbreviation of GCN come from? Surely it should be just GC for GameCube or NGC for Nintendo GameCube. Maximum bizzaro.

I demand answers
The Master Baiter

Dear Master Baiter,



[above] Tim Chmielewski took this snap to brighten up our lives

1. Maybe you need to work out your finger muscles a little more. But we agree that Nintendo should really include controller configs in every game.

2. Nintendo want it that way. The other acronyms were already registered by companies. You wouldn't see Sony releasing a system that abbreviated as WWF, for instance.

XBOX 2 QUESTION

Dear Hyper

Hey guys, great magazine, your reviews have helped me out a lot in the past. If I could just suggest one thing, it would be good if you could cover the length or longevity of a game in each review e.g. "This game has about 20+ hours of play". This would be much appreciated. Could you please answer these questions?

1. I have read on the internet that Prince of Persia may not come out on Xbox in Australia. Please tell me this is a rumour. If it is coming out on Xbox do you know exactly what month?
2. What in your opinion would be the game with the best value for money out of Project Gotham 2 and Prince of Persia Sands of Time (Xbox version) I like both racing & action games equally & I don't own Project Gotham 1.
3. When the Xbox 2 comes out will Xbox 1 games continue to be released? Thanks for your time,
Mathan Sathiyamoorthy

Dear Mathan,

1. Prince of Persia for the Xbox goes on sale on February 26. Don't believe the stoopid internet!
2. Both are awesome, and you can't lose. I would tend to go for Prince of Persia first, only because it's more original.
3. We have heard rumours that Microsoft will ensure that the Xbox 2 is fully compatible with Xbox 1, so there's a good chance that Xbox 1 games would dribble out for a year or so after Xbox 2 launches. I mean, there are still PSone games getting released...

CAPTION THIS!

PART 50 WINNER

Jason McDonald is the happy camper who provided us with our monthly Caption This chortle. Thanks Jason.



"The force surrounds us, it's between you, me, the slippery dip, the gumball machine, everywhere."

LETTER OF THE MONTH

GAMEPLAY IS IN THE STARS

Hey Hyper,

I've noticed an interesting phenomenon... Sure games are evolving and the graphics are improving, but does this mean gameplay is too? The reason I'm asking is that this phenomenon pertains to an old game over a decade old (which is like a hundred in computer game years). This game is Star Control 2.

I've met numerous people throughout the course of my travels that say that this game is the best they've ever played, and I'm one of 'em. There are more of these people out there than you think, and I suspect they may be forming a cult. Anyhow, since then, I've only really been impressed by Fallout 2, and possibly Deus Ex, and others games have just seemed good, not mind blowing.

Basically I just wanted to know if you knew what's happening with the people that made SC2 (I'm not talking about the abomination that was SC3, I'm pretty sure that was made by different people anyway)

and if they had/have any other projects.

And do you know anything about Star Control Timewarp? I seem to hear rumours on the net that fans are getting together to resurrect the series...

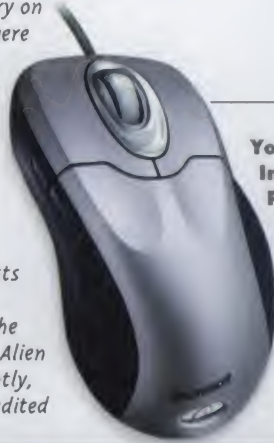
Thanks.

The Fat Controller

Dear Fat Controller, You're correct - Fred Ford and Paul Reiche III, who were responsible for the design, programming and some of the artwork and story on Star Control 2, were not involved in the development of SC3. Both have continued to work together over the years, however, on a number of projects as diverse as Pandemonium, The Unholy War and Alien Logic. Most recently, the two were credited

as the inspiration for a small game called Strange Adventures in Infinite Space - a sci-fi strategy adventure game developed by Digital Eel and published by Cheapass Games. You can find out more at the publisher's website www.cheapass.com.

For the latest on Star Control Timewarp (which is a fan-made sequel, not a remake) you should check this out: www.classicgaming.com/starcontrol/timewarp/



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[above] Chris Nixon amused us greatly with this "screenshot"

Shit
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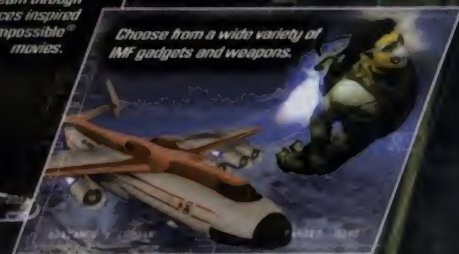
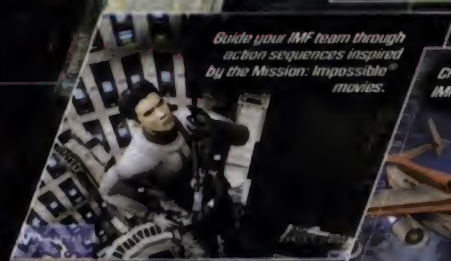
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PlayStation 2



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The Official Australian Games Chart

Compiled by GfK in association with the IEAA

TOP 10

PlayStation 2 Games Over \$50

W/E 4 JAN 2004
RETAIL SALES

1	◆	Rugby League	Sports
2	◆	Need For Speed:Underground	Racing
3	▲	LOTR Return King	Adventure
4	▲	Cricket 2004	Sports
5	▼	Eyetoj Play	Compilation
6	▼	Medal Of Honor Rising Sun	Action
7	▲	GTA Twin Pack	Adventure
8	▼	True Crime Streets Of LA	Adventure
9	▼	Simpson's Hit & Run	Adventure
10	○	WWE Smckdwn Here Comes Pain	Sports

TOP 10

PlayStation Games Over \$30

W/E 4 JAN 2004
RETAIL SALES

1	◆	YuGiOh Forbidden Memories	Strategy
2	▲	Grnd Theft Auto Collectors Ed	Adventure
3	▼	Beyblade Let It Rip	Adventure
4	▲	Harry P Chamber Of Secrets	Adventure
5	▼	Simpson's Wrestling	Sports
6	▲	FIFA 2004	Sports
7	▼	Disney Triple Pack	Adventure
8	▲	Action Triple Pack	Action
9	▼	Bond: TWINE Pack	Action
10	◆	Dragonball Z: Ult Battle 22	Action

TOP 10

Game Cube Games Over \$50

W/E 4 JAN 2004
RETAIL SALES

1	◆	Mario Kart Double Dash	Racing
2	◆	Mario Party 5	Family
3	▲	Metroid Prime	Adventure
4	▼	Need For Speed:Underground	Racing
5	▲	LOTR Return King	Adventure
6	▼	Simpson's Hit & Run	Adventure
7	▲	Dragonball Z: Budokai	Action
8	▼	Animal Crssing + Mem Crd 59	Strategy
9	○	Star Wars Rebel Strike	Action
10	▼	Legend Of Zelda: Wind Waker	RPG

TOP 10

Xbox Games Over \$50

W/E 4 JAN 2004
RETAIL SALES

1	▲	Classics Pack	Compilation
2	▼	Need For Speed:Underground	Racing
3	▼	Rugby League	Sports
4	◆	LOTR Return King	Adventure
5	◆	Project Gotham Racing 2	Racing
6	▼	Simpson's Hit & Run	Adventure
7	○	Triple Pack	Compilation
8	▼	Medal Of Honor Rising Sun	Action
9	▲	Top Spin	Sports
10	▼	True Crime Streets Of LA	Adventure

TOP 10

PC Games Over \$20

W/E 4 JAN 2004
RETAIL SALES

1	◆	The Sims Deluxe	Strategy
2	◆	The Sims Makin' Magic	Strategy
3	◆	The Sims Superstar	Strategy
4	▲	The Sims Unleashed	Strategy
5	○	The Sims Vacation	Strategy
6	▼	Need For Speed:Underground	Racing
7	▼	Call Of Duty	Action
8	◆	Cricket 2004	Sports
9	○	The Sims Hot Date	Strategy
10	○	The Sims House Party	Strategy

TOP 10

Game Boy Advance Games Over \$30

W/E 4 JAN 2004
RETAIL SALES

1	▲	Pokmon Sapphire	RPG
2	▲	Pokmon Ruby	RPG
3	▲	Mario & Luigi Superstar Saga	Adventure
4	▲	Dragonball Z: Taiketsu	Action
5	○	Final Fantasy Tactics	RPG
6	▼	Finding Nemo	Adventure
7	▼	Donkey Kong Country	Adventure
8	▼	Super Mario Advance 4:SMB3	Adventure
9	▼	LOTR Return King	Adventure
10	◆	YuGiOh World Wide	Strategy

TOP 10

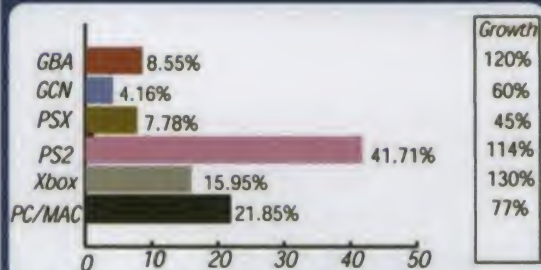
All Full Priced Games

W/E 4 JAN 2004
RETAIL SALES

1	◆	Rugby League	PlayStation 2
2	○	Classics Pack	Xbox
3	▼	Need For Speed:Underground	PlayStation 2
4	◆	LOTR Return King	PlayStation 2
5	▲	Need For Speed:Underground	Xbox
6	▲	Cricket 2004	PlayStation 2
7	▼	Eyetoj Play	PlayStation 2
8	▼	Medal Of Honor Rising Sun	PlayStation 2
9	○	The Sims Deluxe	PC/MAC
10	◆	GTA Twin Pack	PlayStation 2

MARKET WATCH All Games by Platform

DEC 03 Vs NOV 03
RETAIL SALES



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



Charts can be viewed at www.informbd.com.au as part of Inform's comprehensive database of online market intelligence, updated weekly



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You will fight them in the jungles...

Tom Clancy's
**GHOST
RECON**



...in the cities...



Tom Clancy's
RAINBOW SIX


...in the darkness.

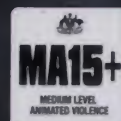
Tom Clancy's
**SPLINTER
CELL**



It's not a game.

It's Clancy.

PlayStation.2 



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