

❖❖❖ NINTENDO DS FIRST LOOK! SONY PSP ❖❖❖

ISSUE 129 JULY

HYPERR

FULL SPECTRUM WARRIOR

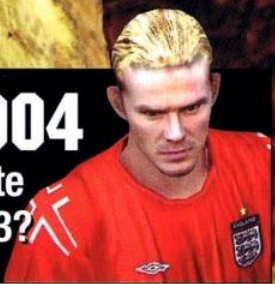
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42 RED DEAD REVOLVER

The Wild West has never been this much fun...



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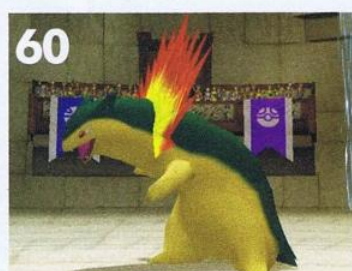
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[above] Chilling at the Skybar. If only it was L.A.'s Skybar and not Redfern's

EDITORIAL

» Sometimes I really hate magazine lead times. You see, the fact of the matter is that we finish off Hyper at least two to three weeks before it gets to you, the readers. This means that when something like E3 comes along, we're already going to be behind – even if the timing with our deadline is perfect. This year, however, you're all going to have to wait. Daniel and a few other guys are over there right now, so we've been able to squeeze in the breaking reports on the Nintendo DS, the Sony PSP and a few other choice announcements, based on what Daniel had to say about the various pre-E3 press conferences. But we've held up the mag too long already. This ship has to sail, and as such, it won't be until next issue that we bring you our rich tapestry of E3 coverage. The good news, however, is that we're going to do things a little differently this year. This year's E3 report is going to be very cool, so no matter how much juicy info you read online, we think Hyper's look at E3 2004 will be worth waiting for.

But hey, that's next month. For now, you've got another bumper issue in your hands, packed full of goodies, and a very special subs prize. Can anyone say Blau?

Cam Shea » Editor

HYPER CREW MONTHLY TOP 5 GAMES

Cam Shea - Ed

1. Burnout 3 – PS2
"A gift from the arcade racing gods. Brilliant."
2. Painkiller - PC
3. Smash Court 2 – PS2
4. DJ Console - PC
5. Full Spectrum Warrior – Xbox

Daniel Wilks - Dep

1. Anything with Amos in it
"Playing with Amos is its own reward"
2. Transformers – PS2
3. With my new laptop
4. With my new iPod
5. Chronicles of Riddick - Xbox

Malcolm Campbell - Art

1. Burnout 3 – PS2
"Just don't drive anything for about an hour after playing it."
2. Transformers – PS2
3. R-Type Delta – PSone
4. Red Dead Revolver – PS2
5. Smash Court 2 – PS2

Amos Hong - Hyper Mascot

1. MVP 2004 - PC
"So real, you can smell the hot dogs. Mmm...hot dogs."
2. Fight Night 2004 - Xbox
3. Smack Down: HCTP - PS2
4. James Bond: Everything or Nothing - Xbox
5. Deus Ex: Invisible War – PC

HYPER»

ISSUE 129

JULY 2004

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Printed CTP by: **WEBSTAR**

Distribution by: **Gordon & Gotch**
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ACN 002 647 645
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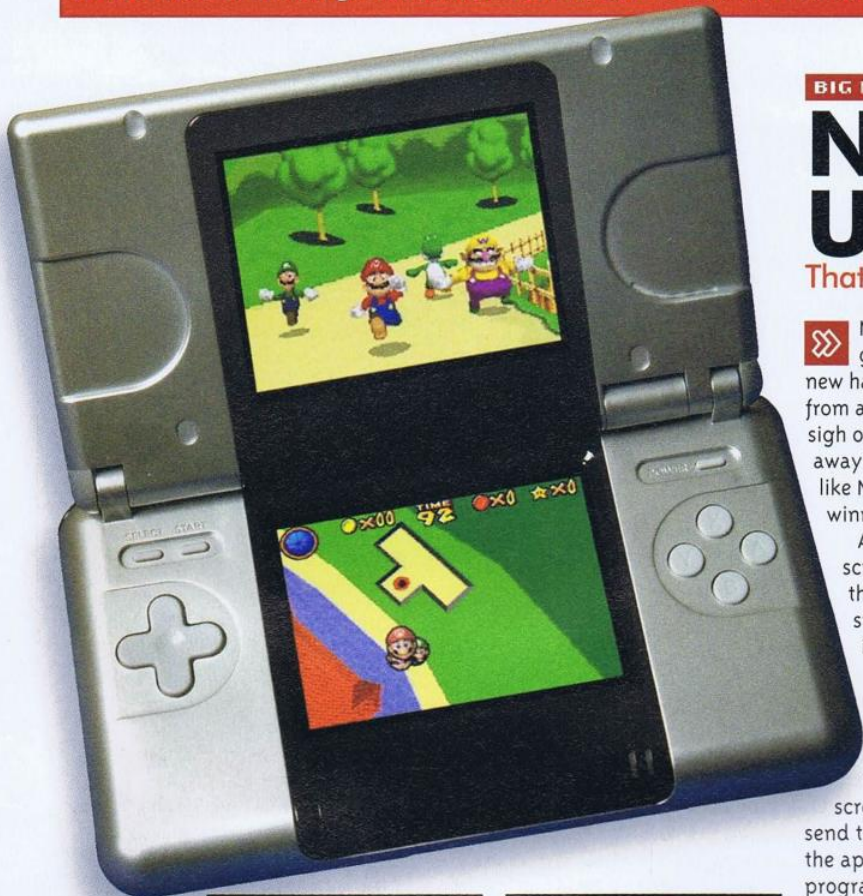
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News

IN THE NEWS: The first good look at the PSP and DS! ■ Nokia QD ■ Zelda matures on GameCube ■ Prince of Persia 2 in development



BIG N

NINTENDO DS UNVEILED!

That's a spicy meatball!

» Nintendo have come out all guns blazing to show off their new handheld — the DS, to journalists from around the world. The resulting sigh of relief could be heard as far away as outer Mongolia, as it looks like Nintendo are onto another winner with this one.

As was rumoured, the lower screen is touch sensitive, and the system will ship with a stylus, allowing for precision input. The touch screen will be used for everything from navigating menus and rotating perspectives, through to interacting with what's happening on the top screen and drawing pictures to send to your friends. Indeed, one of the applications unveiled was a chat program (called PictoChat) that allows you to draw pictures and write messages to send to your friends over Bluetooth. It's even possible you'll be able to play a game on the top screen while you write messages on the bottom screen. In short, the DS is going to give developers a lot to think about, and give them a fair bit of scope for new game ideas.

Voice recognition via the included mic port is another innovative inclusion in the DS's design, adding another layer of interactivity to the way we'll be playing games on the system. Hopefully you'll also be able to record messages to send to friends, or chat while gaming online, but that hasn't been confirmed yet. Up to 16 DS gamers will be able to play against each other via Bluetooth in a local wireless network that extends to at least 30 feet, as well as over the net via the IEEE 802.11 standard for online play.

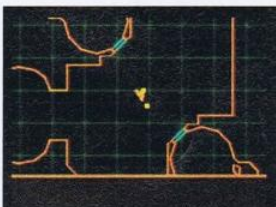
What kind of performance can we expect from the system? Well, Nintendo have stated that the graphics surpass the power of the Nintendo 64 and games will be able to run at 60fps. To prove this, they've shown off some great looking games and tech demos to demonstrate both the visual potential and game design

possibilities. We'll have hands-on reports of many of the games next issue, including *Metrodroid Prime: Hunters*, *Super Mario 64x4*, *PictoChat*, *WarioWare Inc* and the tech demos. Also unveiled for DS is a new Mario Kart game, a new *Animal Crossing* and a new *Super Mario Bros* game! We were also stoked to hear that Hudson are developing a new *Bomberman* title, Sega are developing a new *Sonic* game, Capcom are working on *Viewtiful Joe*, and that Square-Enix are working on a new *Final Fantasy: Crystal Chronicles* title, among many others!

As a quick example of a game in action on the DS, however, let's take the new *WarioWare*. The GBA version was already pretty innovative, throwing mini-game after mini-game your way and giving you a couple of seconds to beat each. On the DS, this concept hits an all new level. You'll be using the stylus to drag a net and catch fish, drawing and erasing pictures, slicing at food that's thrown at you and so on. Nintendo will really be able to let their imagination go wild, and we can imagine this title being the perfect showcase for how many different things the DS can do. They might even include some voice recognition elements!

We should also mention that the DS is backwards compatible, with a slot at the front for GBA carts and a slot at the back for DS games. The DS carts will be small — about the size of an SD card. And as for the name, the DS is still a code name — it may yet change. The unit design is also not final and may undergo some cosmetic alterations before launch too. Finally, although the unit is still on track for a late 2004 release in the USA and Japan, what a surprise — think early 2005 for a launch in Oz and Europe. But aside from a slightly longer wait, we're really refreshed by what the DS represents. While the PSP may be the new walkman, the DS looks far more likely to take gaming into new territory, and really, that's something to get excited about.

[above] This is the handheld favoured by Cyber-Men universe-wide



[right] Shiggy was so responsible for that pic top left

[left] Ridge Racer and Wipeout are coming to this puppy!



SONY! PLAYSTATION PORTABLE REVEALED!

Powerful 3D games on a handheld

Now that we've had a chance to take a good look at the PSP, we're very impressed. It's an incredibly slick looking piece of design, with a 4.3 inch 16:9 widescreen TFT LCD with a resolution of 480x272, and a colour palette of 16.77 million. Size-wise, it measures 170mm x 74mm x 23mm and weighs 260g. The specs inside the machine are a 333Mhz proprietary CPU with 32MB main memory (as opposed to the 8MB that developers complained about in the initial specs) and 4MB embedded DRAM.

Interaction with the system will be familiar to anyone who has used a PlayStation controller – it should feel comfortable and be very functional. The system supports USB 2.0 so you'll be able to connect it to devices like your PC and PS2, but more importantly it also has 802.11b Wi-Fi wireless connectivity for multiplayer gaming and other apps. Let's not forget IR Remote (SIRCS) and IrDA infrared connections either, which presumably mean we'll be able to use it as a remote for other Sony products. It also has a Memory Stick slot that will presumably be used for save games and downloading new content to.

It's a gorgeous looking unit, but the real test is in the games, and the PSP doesn't disappoint. Some of the games (we're not sure which versions yet) coming to the system include Gran Turismo 4, Metal Gear Acid, Ridge Racer, Wipeout (yay!), Tony Hawk's Pro Skater, Medieval,

Ape Escape (an interesting decision given the lack of dual analogue sticks) and Spider-Man. EA have also thrown their support behind the system, showing off NBA Street, NFL Street, NFS Underground and Tiger Woods – all of which will be ready for launch.

As previously announced, this isn't just a games machine, the UMD discs can hold 1.8GB and will allow for movie and music playback as well. Sony showed off the movie capabilities by playing a Spider-Man 2 trailer and clip from the Final Fantasy VII: Advent Children movie, and they were both sharp and ran smoothly. We're left wondering whether Advent Children may get an official release on UMD. That'd be cool. Mind you, you'll only get 2.5 hours of video playback out of the rechargeable lithium-ion battery, which isn't much, but the reported eight hours of gaming time is pretty reasonable.

The PSP will be launched in Japan later this year, with the rest of the world following in early 2005. While it's not as innovative as the DS, the PSP will represent the power of the next gen consoles in a handheld, which is nothing to sniff at.

[right] The PSP GT4 disc. Sexy no?



REDESIGN NOKIA CUTIE?

The N-Gage hits MkII

Nokia made some massive errors in judgement with their N-Gage game deck, but some of them are fixable, and that's exactly what they're doing with the next iteration of the hardware, the N-Gage QD. Aside from the obvious cosmetic differences (it's slicker and smaller), you can now hot swap games (no more turning off the unit and taking out the battery), the layout is a little more intuitive to use, the screen is a little brighter and the battery life is better. One of our favourite changes, however, is that you can talk into this one like a normal bloody phone, instead of having to hold it on its



side. We're certainly not going to praise Nokia for coming back with what the N-Gage should have been in the first place, but at least it's a step in the right direction. We should also mention that they've removed mp3 playback and the FM radio, but that's no biggie as far as we're concerned.

Of course, the tech specs in regards to games are the same, so they're still going to seriously pale in comparison with what the PSP and DS will be able to do. We think it's time to unveil N-Gage 2 Nokia.

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 56 in the subject line.

PART
56



hardy ha ha *whistles*

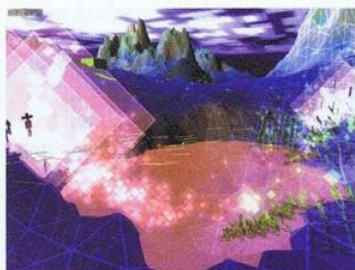


MUST-BUY

HALO SUNSHINE!

Final Release Date

☞ Mark down November 9 2004 in your diaries right now! And if you don't have a diary then scrawl it across your forehead or get a big sign to go on your front door! Why, because that's when Halo 2 comes out! And this isn't an airy fairy release date – this is the real deal people! Better still, Microsoft are planning a campaign where if you preorder the game, you'll get a funky metal game box and an extra DVD with a behind the scenes look at making the game, featurettes on game design, animation, music and more, as well as an art gallery, cinematics that didn't make it into the final game (videogame deleted scenes – we like it!) and commentaries from the dev team.



RETRO

DARWINIA

Small studios can still make killer games

☞ We've just had a peak at the latest title from Introversion, the guys (or guy – the entire game was made by Chris Delay) responsible for the highly addictive hacker sim Uplink. The new game is called Darwinia and although it's being developed for PC, the game takes place in a virtual wonderland – inside the belly of a network of old school consoles where a virus has taken hold. As such, the visuals are incredibly trippy, with plenty of iconic retro sprites making appearances, not to mention some famous sound effects. Think Rez, but rather than playing like a shooter, it's more real time strategy. Should be awesome.



WOOHOO

EA GO LIVE

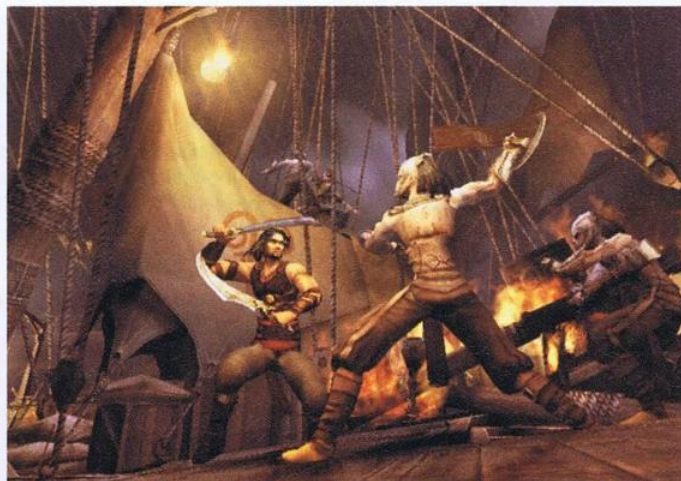
Microsoft and EA – Buddies At Last

☞ Finally! EA have signed on with Microsoft to include Xbox Live functionality for their upcoming Xbox titles. We're not sure what the terms of the agreement were, as EA have previously held off Live and gone exclusively with PS2 Network Entertainment because they weren't happy with the lack of control over centralised Microsoft servers and the financial situation (gamers pay Microsoft to play on Live, not EA). What's changed since then is that Microsoft have moved to create the Live Server Protocol which will allow publishers to run their own servers and setup their own tournaments, features etc, which has obviously played a considerable role in brokering the deal.

Whatever the machinations

between the two giants, however, we're just stoked that the agreement has finally happened. It means that (among others) Madden NFL 2005, NBA LIVE 2005, FIFA Soccer 2005, Need for Speed Underground 2, Burnout 3, Goldeneye: Rogue Agent and TimeSplitters Future Perfect, not to mention Battlefield Modern Combat, will all be online. Indeed, we'll be able to start playing EA's new games on Live within a couple of months. Happy days!

This agreement is certainly a massive blow for Sony, whose online service isn't as user friendly or powerful as Microsoft's. Indeed, up until now, it has largely been the EA titles that were the real draw for PS2 online. Xbox Live really has the advantage in the online console gaming arena now.



POP2

A PRINCELY SON

Ubisoft exercise common sense

☞ Given that Prince of Persia was one of the standout games of last year, it's no great surprise that Ubisoft have unveiled a sequel. Gamers can expect a much darker game this time around, not just in environments and the Prince's grittier, more mature look, but in storyline too. Ubi have told us that all the prince's time manipulating antics have corrupted the flow of time, so he'll have to travel back to

when the dagger was first created and stop it!

The element we're most excited about, however, is the new "Free-Form Fighting System" and the inclusion of a whole range of weapons for the Prince to use. The repetitiveness of the fighting was one of the only elements that let down the original, so if Ubisoft Montreal can implement a deep fighting system, they can expect even greater praise.

Bad Cop No Doughnut

DANIEL WILKS - THE WORLD'S MOST DANGEROUS DEPUTY EDITOR



The interweb hates my birthday. Up until relatively recently I used to do all my writing on either a word processor or

typewriter – including correspondence. That's right, none of this new fangled email crap for me. Call me a luddite if you will but I was always worried about the system. Not my privacy – I couldn't give too much of a tinker's toss about that. I was more worried that all my hard work and interesting words would fly out into the ether never to return or worse still that someone may want to contact me and my email server would be down and I wouldn't find out until it's way too late. As far as I was concerned if you needed to contact me you could use the bloody phone, or if it was something that required some careful thought you could write me a letter. Now that I'm doing what I do I can't avoid spending half my life using email but my fears have been proved time and time again. Last year I emailed all of my friends about my birthday so I could have a party – on the day that I was meant to be having said party my ISP rang me up and informed me that I was sending spam and their internal filters had blocked the outgoing message. On the upside though, due to the interweb I'm still only 26.

WINNERS

Hyper 127

TRUE CRIME FOR PC AND SWAT

Victor Supica, Moe, VIC
Con Saharoff, Strathfield, NSW
Ian Hawkins, Toowong, QLD

DUEL MASTER

Christopher Matthews, Mt Louisa, QLD
Nic Huntington, Brisbane, QLD
Matt Ralston, North Balwyn, VIC
Marco Brunato, Coraki, NSW
Brendan Cheung, Croydon, NSW
Harry West, Summer Hill, NSW
Thomas Kauschke, Prospect, SA
Peter Branchi, East Vic Park, WA
John Doolan, Runaway Bay, QLD
Connor Wheatley, Macquarie Hills, NSW

ATARI DVD

Alan Owen, VIC

8-BIT

NES SP

New GBA SP design kicks it old school

☞ Gawd bless Nintendo! They really know how to tap straight into our obsessive fanboy vein don't they? This time it's with a funky new SP design, based around the Nintendo Entertainment System. Better still, alongside the new design's launch will be some classic NES software. We're talking Super Mario Bros, Donkey Kong, Ice Climbers, Legend of Zelda, Excitebike, Pac-Man, Xevious and Bomberman. Pricing is uncertain at this stage, but if Nintendo keep it cheap they'll definitely be onto a winner.



[right] Time to get yet another SP! *calls Nintendo*

OVERFLOW

Sometimes we get a little carried away here at Hyper. It seems that a few of you who read our write-up in Links for www.realgamer.com.au last issue didn't quite get that we were joking. We'd just like to state for the record that Realgamer is a great Aussie website with cool products, low prices, excellent service, as well as FULLY SECURE transactions.

There's a lot of paranoia out there about online shopping, but the vast majority of it is just that – unfounded fear. That's what we were poking fun at – we did not mean to infer that www.realgamer.com.au is not a safe place to shop. In fact, it is a completely safe place to shop – we recommend that you check them out!

Sony have recently announced EyeToy Chat – a program that allows EyeToy and PS2 Network Entertainment users to communicate with other users all over the world. You can use text, video, video mail and one to one video chat. You can even play one of three games (Chess, Draughts and Naval War) while in one to one video chat. In a similar vein, Xbox have announced Xbox Live Video Chat, which will allow video conferencing over Live using USB cameras. We'll have more on both new services soon!

Eidos have a title called "Get On Da Mic" on the way where you come up through the ghettos and become a rap superstar. The game mechanic? Rapping through a USB headset. This could either be really funny... or incredibly lame. Expect a full photo review as soon as we can!

Timesplitters Future Perfect has finally been unveiled and will be heading to stores sometime in 2005. Once again you'll be traveling through time as Cortez, battling your way from the year 1914 through to 2401. One cool concept is teaming up with past and future versions of yourself during some missions.

Xbox, Atari and Big Pond are currently holding a V8 Supercars 2 Xbox Live championship. Although you've missed the first round, it's not too late to start posting lap times for the second! So get cracking. For further info visit: www.gamearena.com.au/V8supercars or www.xbox.com.au.

LINK!

ZELDA GROWS UP

Nintendo change the game yet again

☞ As much as we loved The Wind Waker's visual style, it's still very cool to see that Nintendo are taking the next title in the Legend of Zelda franchise in a much darker and more mature direction. The game has no name just yet, but as these screens attest, it's looking awesome! Link's all grown up now, and the world is in severe peril. Fortunately, Link has a few new moves at his disposal, including the ability to fight while on horseback! Nintendo are shooting for a release date sometime in 2005, and as soon as we know more – so will you!



[right] Let the frothing at the mouth begin!

STOP PRESS! FIRST SCREENS! GTA: San Andreas

PS2 Developer: Rockstar



State of Play

THE CONSOLE WARS IN 2004

>> DANIEL STAINES

Invisible Hand

■ According to independent market analysts, the console games industry in Australia has grown by approximately 34% since the beginning of 2004 and is now worth over \$100 million. Interestingly, console gaming's sister industry — PC games — has only grown by 9.7% and is worth a comparatively meagre \$20 million. What reasons can be given for this disparity? Well, there's obviously the fact that a desktop PC capable of playing top-of-the-line games is a lot more expensive to buy than a shiny new Xbox, PS2 or GameCube. There's also the fact that PC games are considerably more hardcore and unwelcoming for the majority of the casual gaming public. However, details like these only serve to explain why PC gaming retains a relatively stable demographic of dedicated users — what can account for the exponential increases in sales of both console hardware and software?

In a word: competition. From the moment the GameCube and Xbox landed on our shores in 2002, Microsoft, Sony and Nintendo have been engaged in a running battle for the hearts, minds and money of Australian consumers that has had unanimously positive results for wallet-conscious gamers all over the country. Since the spark of this latest generation of console wars ignited, all of the major consoles have undergone significant price reductions and have been sold in numerous value-added combo packs such as the Xbox Beast and PlayStation 2 GTA 3 pack. When the Xbox came out, the machine would cost you \$649 by itself. Halo (which you'd obviously want to purchase) would set you back an additional hundred bucks on top of that. Now you can get a green Xbox and a copy of Halo in a pack for just under three hundred smackers.

That's a difference of around \$450. While massive price drops such as this are partially attributable to the age of the consoles and games involved, their primary impetus comes from the forces

of capitalism and the attendant desire of each of the major companies to topple their competitors by offering the best value-for-money product around. It's really quite simple: if Console A is outselling Console B, then the makers of Console B either institute a significant price cut, throw in some extra goodies for added value, or do both at once. Happily for us gamers, this is a cyclic process and the competition is essentially perpetual, meaning that we generally keep getting more for less. If ever there was an example of a free market "invisible hand" guiding business to the benefit of consumers, then the current console war is most definitely it.

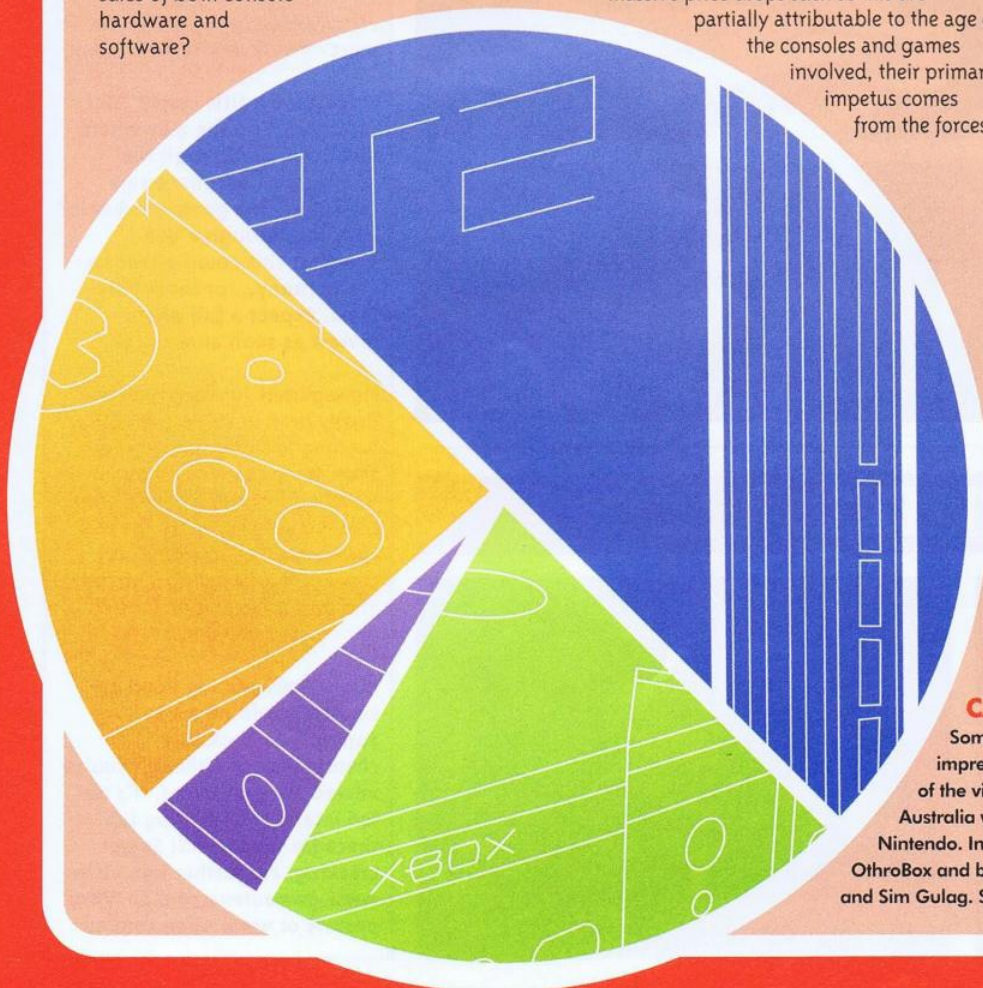
A Disclaimer

■ Contrary to what the above introduction may lead you to believe, it is not the goal of this feature to provide a beginner's guide to modern capitalism and how it steers the growth of interactive entertainment. Nor is it intended to serve as a celebration of one particular company's success over another. What we are trying to do here is present you with a quick snapshot of the state of the console games industry in Australia. Before we begin, however, it should be noted that none of us here could be considered market analysts by any stretch of the imagination. With the exception of the commentary provided by corporate representatives, all of the information contained in the following three pages or so is public domain and freely available over the internet. All we've done is collect it, compile it and present it in a format that (hopefully) won't bore you to tears.

Essentially, this is console gaming in Australia — in the here and in the now. If you've ever wondered what the future might hold for games in this country, then trust us when we say that there's no better place to start your speculations than right here. After all, there can't be a tomorrow without a today...

CAPITALIST PIG!

Some of our more politically sensitive readers may get the impression that this feature is unapologetic in its celebration of the virtues of capitalism. That would be because it is. If Australia were a socialist society, there'd be no Microsoft, Sony or Nintendo. Instead, we'd all be the proud owners of a Politburo OthroBox and be playing such great games as Super Stalin Brothers and Sim Gulag. So stop your bloody whining, you damn pinkos.



Fun, Anyone?

■ There's no denying it: the PlayStation 2 is the undisputed king of current generation console sales across the world. At the time of writing, Sony has sold upwards of 1.3 million PlayStation 2 units in Australia and commands approximately 50% market share

with this console ALONE. The word "alone" is emphasised because — incredibly — the original PlayStation One (with 2.5 million units sold since launch) remains a reasonably lucrative aspect of Sony's business. Although hardware sales have dropped considerably (only 3117 units moved this year), game sales remain high — occupying 11% of the total console software market and growing up to 25% in recent months.

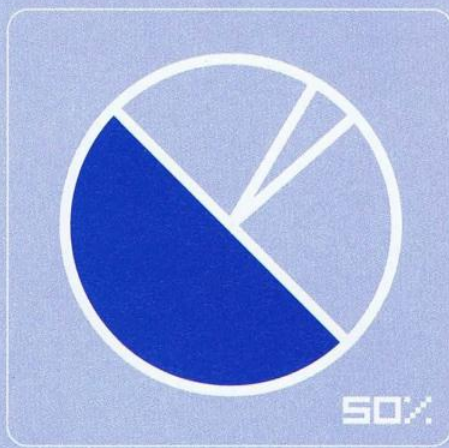
In fact, it is the PlayStation 2's much vaunted backwards compatibility with its older sibling that has been repeatedly cited by industry insiders as one of the major reasons for the console's considerable accomplishments in both local and overseas markets. "There are many factors that have contributed to the success of PlayStation 2," says Adrian Christie, PR Manager Sony Computer Entertainment Australia. "Backward compatibility is a key factor, particularly in the initial sales period, because it meant that the large library of games already in homes did not become obsolete and many PS2 owners were still able to enjoy their original PSone titles".

Other factors responsible for the PlayStation 2's sales dominance include its considerable head start on the current crop of competitors and —

more importantly — the console's expanded multimedia functionality. Sony was the first to imbue a games machine with the ability to play DVD movies and there can be little doubt that this move has proved exceptionally popular with consumers. "Out of the box DVD movie playback is very important to us," explains Adrian. "SCE has always marketed the PlayStation 2 as an entertainment device and the ability to play DVD movies (and CD's for that matter) is a very important feature. We have always considered our consoles as a device for the delivery of entertainment and not just games."

This conception of the PlayStation 2 as an "entertainment device" instead of a mere "games console" has arguably been the main reason for the machine's success as well as the primary rationale underpinning many of the products released for it in recent months. In particular, the Eye Toy — a little USB camera device that lets you interact with the PS2 by jumping about like an idiot — is an excellent example of this philosophy in action and has been predictably well received by the game buying public. Adrian emphasises that "active interactivity" devices like the EyeToy and the SingStar karaoke game reviewed in the last issue of *Hyper* figure significantly in Sony's future plans for both this generation of consoles and the next. "We are committed to making gaming accessible to a broad audience," he says "We want to ensure there is always a sense of energy and vitality to welcome people into the PlayStation community, inspiring and exciting them as we continue to evolve and re-invent gaming and entertainment."

And that, ladies and gentlemen, is precisely why Sony has dominated this round of the console wars. But can they retain their apparently unassailable lead? Well, let's have a look at the competition and find out...



It's Good to Play Together

■ From the moment Atari effectively lost all credibility as a games machine manufacturer in 1984, the console market has been dominated by products produced in one country and one country alone: Japan. Nintendo, Sega and Sony are all Japanese companies and — with brief interludes for abortive failures like the Jaguar — have remained unchallenged in their ownership of the videogame industry for 20 years. Given this fact, it is hardly surprising that Microsoft's attempt to stake a claim in this very lucrative marketplace was initially greeted with such scepticism and outright derision from industry pundits and hardcore gamers alike. After all, Bill Gates' software spewing behemoth was wading into hostile waters with little experience and even less support from respected games development studios. How on earth could it hope to succeed?

Well, you know, you'd be surprised what a little determination and a whole crapload of money can do. In Australia, the Xbox currently occupies second place in the sales hierarchy with approximately 21% market share and just over 490,000 units sold. With the obvious exception of Japan, this position is generally reflected globally and marks a significant change from the big black box's undeniably lacklustre beginnings. The fact is that the Xbox has

has cemented for itself a place in a cutthroat industry many presumed it incapable of surviving. David McLean, Regional Director for Microsoft Home Entertainment Division Australia and New Zealand, attributes the console's shifting fortunes to the determination and perseverance of the company responsible for it.

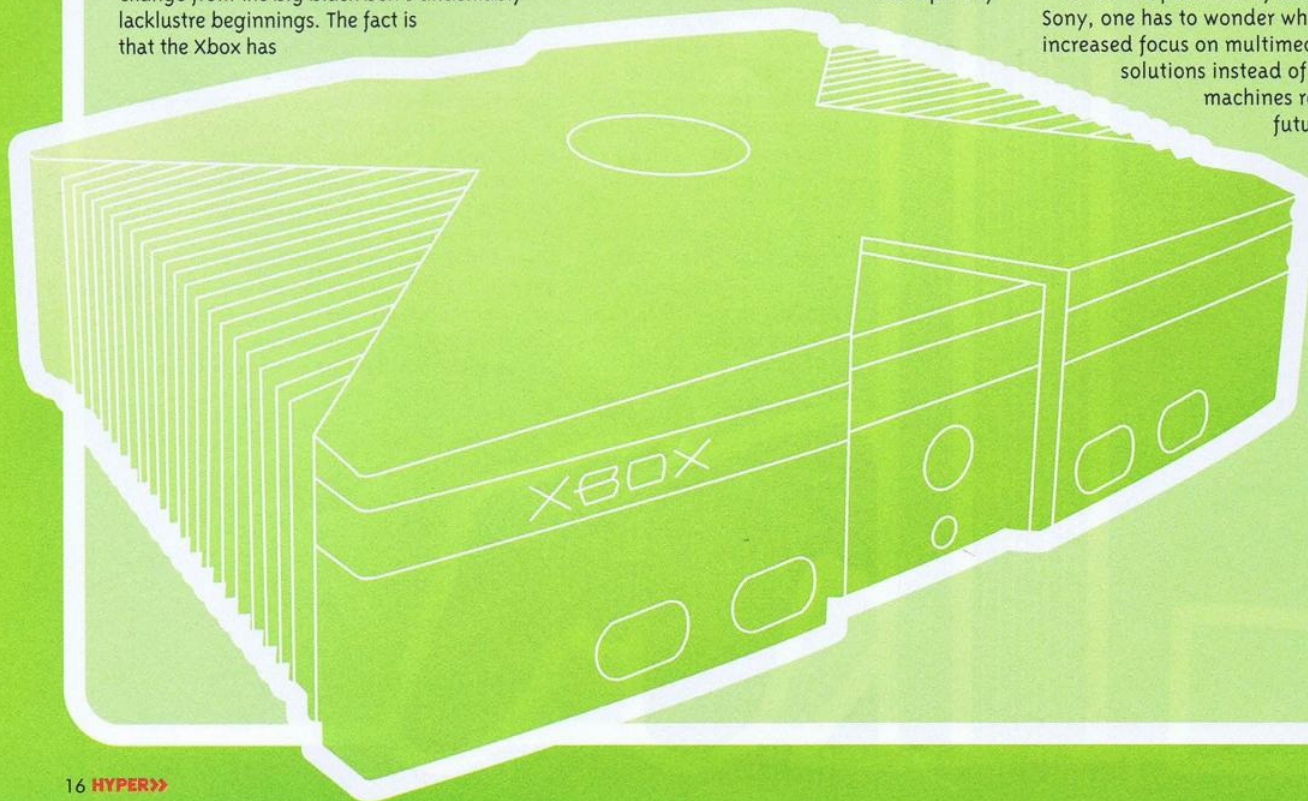
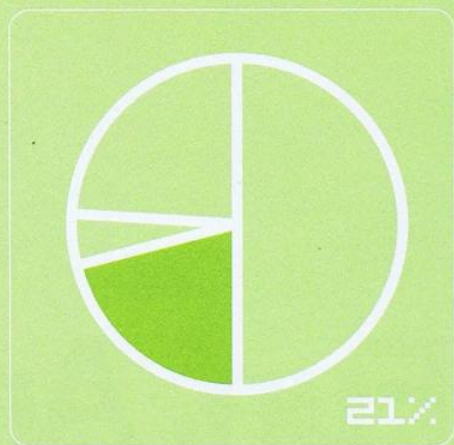
"Our commitment to always pushing the boundaries and the capabilities of the traditional console has helped us forge ahead," he says. "We never rest on our laurels and we're determined to always explore the latest in cutting edge technological advancements. The market appreciates that commitment we've always had to pushing the boundaries and giving them the latest and greatest thing, which is why I think we've done so well."

Of course, a few healthy and rather substantial price cuts didn't do the Xbox any harm either. On April 19th 2002, just 35 days after the machine initially hit local retail shelves, Microsoft Australia announced a massive price cut for the Xbox and slashed the console's RRP from \$649 to a much more attractive \$399. Consequently, Xbox sales spiked dramatically and peaked at 12,700 units in the following week — a huge increase on the meagre 1,500 sold at the beginning of that April. By

the end of May, these figures had stabilised to around 3,500 units a week and have continued to rise steadily. This huge boon for the Xbox has been further capitalised on with the numerous Xbox bundles released since launch. A quick glance at independent figures reveals that a rather large proportion of Xbox owners bought their machines as part of a combo-pack — a fact that is completely unsurprising in light of the heavy marketing campaign launched for these packs during the Christmas holiday period.

However, a competitive price-point and glitzy bundles aren't the only factors attracting consumers to Microsoft's console. As with the PlayStation 2, the Xbox's expanded multimedia functionality has gone a long way in winning over gamers both here and overseas. When asked just how important the machine's DVD, MP3 and CD playback was to its increased success, David McLean is quite clear: "Our research shows that the purchase of the Xbox console is typically for more things than just a straight games machine — it is typically purchased as a home entertainment solution. The Xbox is bought to solve multiple home entertainment needs from all members of the family".

Given the positions of both Microsoft and Sony, one has to wonder whether an increased focus on multimedia entertainment solutions instead of straight games machines represents the future direction of the console gaming industry as a whole. And if so, where does this leave the last surviving manufacturer of pure console gaming devices — Nintendo?



The Nintendo Difference

■ Let's not beat around the bush here: the GameCube is failing in Australia. Despite its top-of-the-line hardware and selection of AAA first-party titles, Nintendo's latest games machine occupies a miniscule 5% of the local console market and has only sold a little over 100,000 units since launching here in May 2002. Bolstering this bleak situation somewhat is the fact that the so-called "attach rate" for the GameCube is higher than any other console on the market, with Australian Cube aficionados owning an average of 6.2 games each — which is 0.5 more than PS2 gamers and a significant 2.2 more than Xbox owners. This disparity between software and hardware sales seems odd, but is easily explainable when one considers the nature of the GameCube in relation to its competitors. Basically, people who buy a GameCube are obviously doing so solely because they want to play games on it. Consumers interested in the

consoles produced by Microsoft and Sony, however, will often make their purchase based on considerations directly related to the previously discussed multimedia aspect of those machines. Games are simply part of the overall multimedia kit the Xbox and PS2 provide, and this fact is reflected in their attach rate.

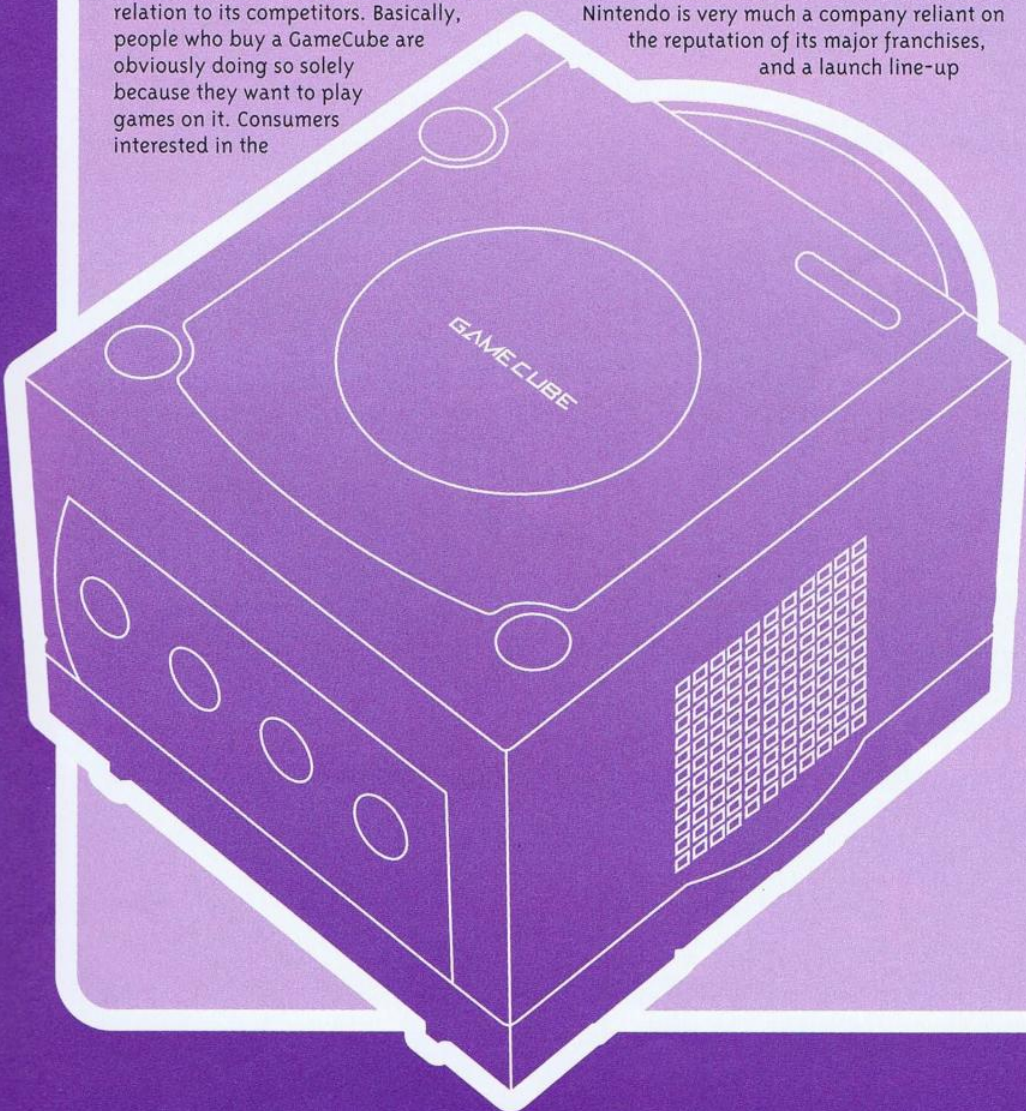
But what can we say about the GameCube console itself? Why has it simply failed to compete in the Australian marketplace? As can be expected, there is no easy answer to this question. The fact that the GameCube was the last of the next generation consoles to launch in this country certainly didn't do it any favours, and a lack of any really compelling first party launch titles only exacerbated this. It is reasonable to say that Nintendo is very much a company reliant on the reputation of its major franchises, and a launch line-up



entirely bereft of these big drawcards would have deflated consumer enthusiasm for the machine significantly. Regardless, the GameCube did have a reasonable launch — scoring higher sales than the Xbox did during its first two weeks on the market — but these numbers dropped quite quickly and the machine subsequently failed to compete with its similarly priced, multifunctional competitors. For most consumers, it appears a price point of \$329 was simply too much to ask for a straight games machine — especially one without any big name titles to back it up.

"There is no denying that the console market in Australia has been one of the, if not THE most aggressive market places in the world," concedes Nintendo Australia's Marketing Manager, Greg Arthurton. "Whilst we are behind our competitors on sell through figures, the Nintendo GameCube is still a viable business and will continue to be a viable business. Nintendo has been making consoles for over twenty years and has seen every change this industry has seen and has historically always been the innovator and force behind its development, direction and growth".

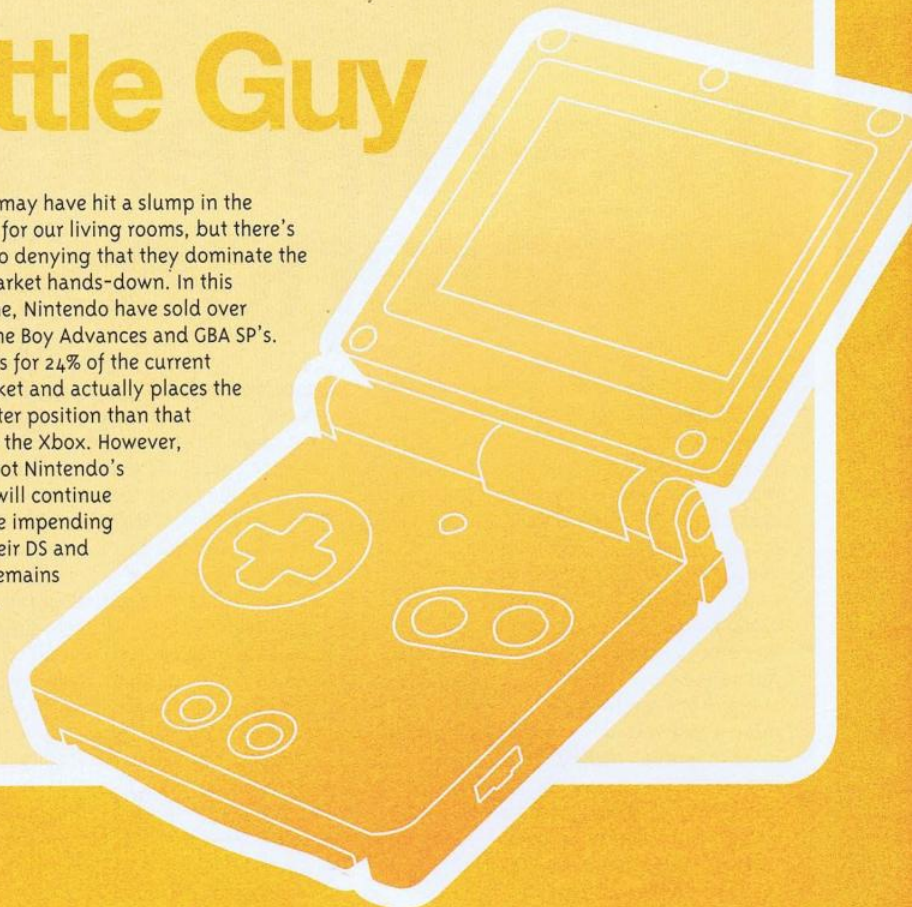
One of the key ways in which Nintendo has attempted to boost sales with the innovative streak referred to by Arthurton is with a much-advertised focus on connectivity between the company's two major consoles — the GameCube and Game Boy Advance. Although it is too early to judge whether or not this strategy has been particularly successful in encouraging more people to buy either machine, the moderately impressive sales of games such as *Final Fantasy: Crystal Chronicles* suggest that it is quite popular amongst a core contingent of Nintendo fans. "Connectivity is something that no other home or portable console can offer," says Arthurton. "It is the Nintendo difference".



The Big Little Guy



■ Nintendo may have hit a slump in the competition for our living rooms, but there's absolutely no denying that they dominate the handheld market hands-down. In this country alone, Nintendo have sold over 540,000 Game Boy Advances and GBA SP's. This accounts for 24% of the current console market and actually places the GBA in a better position than that occupied by the Xbox. However, whether or not Nintendo's dominance will continue following the impending release of their DS and Sony's PSP remains to be seen...

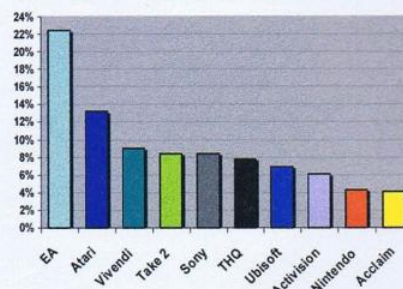


Where to Now?

■ It's hard to say whether or not the Nintendo difference will ultimately be enough to re-establish the dominance of this gaming giant in the industry it helped to create. The Game Boy Advance has shown that the big N is still capable of pulling in huge sales – but does the company still have what it takes to win the battle for our living rooms? Sales figures for the GameCube make it hard to be optimistic, but Nintendo still has a lot of money and a lot of innovative talent to make use of... who knows what they've got up their sleeves in Kyoto?

At any rate, predictions and individual successes aside, we can definitely say one thing about the console industry in Australia and that is that it's healthier than it has ever been before. We live in a golden age of gaming, friends – an age where the choices are varied and the prices are right. We don't know who will survive and who will fail in this brutal marketplace of ours, but history leads us to suspect that the results will be good for gamers no matter what happens. And in the end, that's really what it's all about.

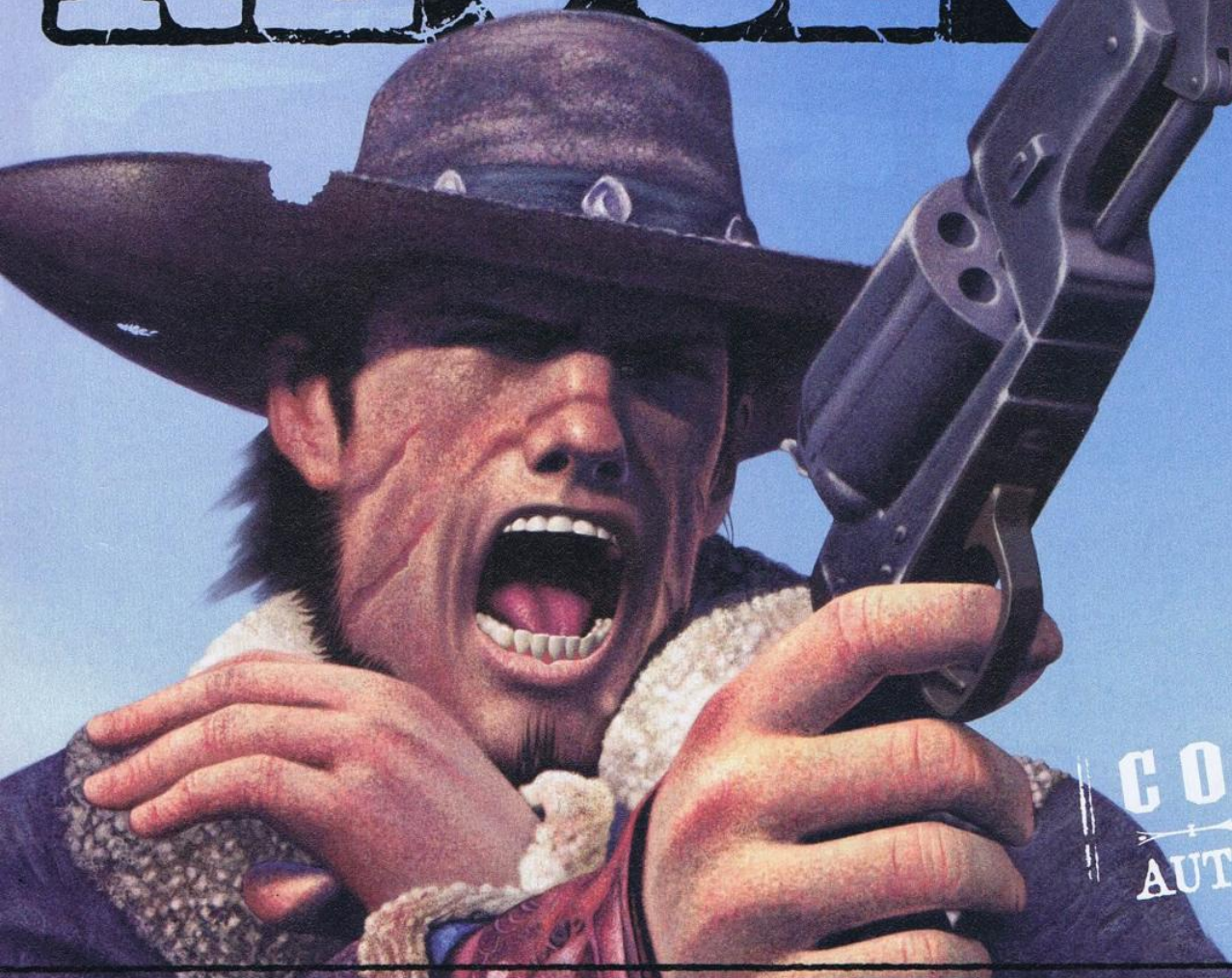
Distributor Market Share Year-to-date



WAR OF THE PUBLISHERS!

Console manufacturers aren't the only companies embroiled in the videogame wars – games publishers are also slogging it out on the frontline in a desperate bid for sales supremacy. Here's a nice little sales chart that neatly summarises the competition as it stands today...

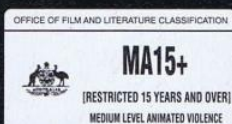
RED DEAD REVOLVER



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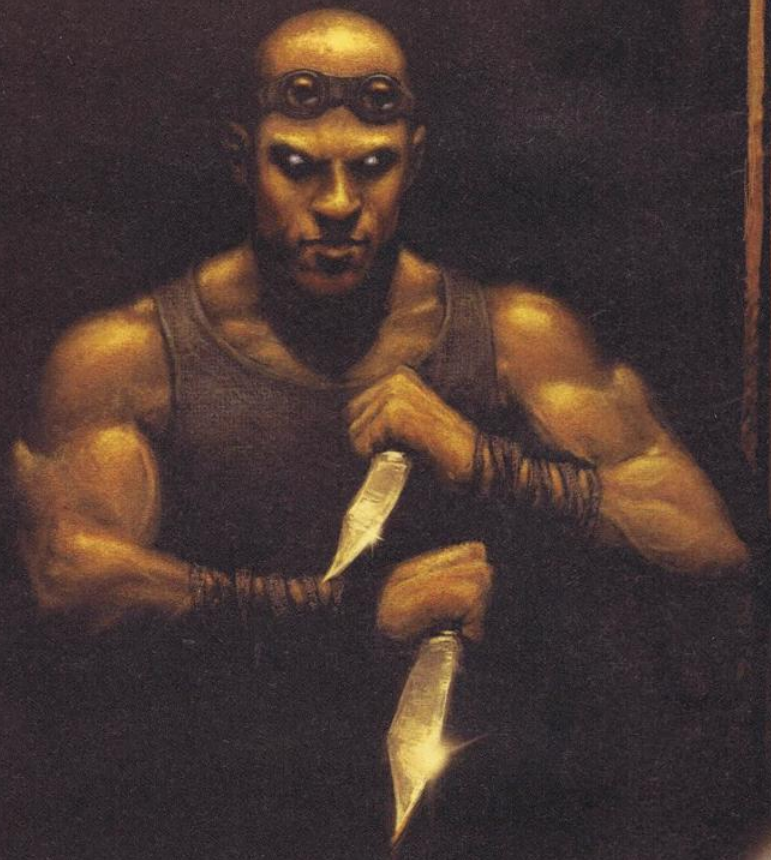


PlayStation 2



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REID



the chronicles of **DICK:** **ESCAPE FROM BUTCHER BAY**

AVAILABLE ON:

PS2 / XBOX / GCN / PC

DETAILS

CATEGORY: Action Adventure /
PLAYERS: 1 / DEVELOPER: Starbreeze /
AVAILABLE: Late 2004 /

WOW-O-METER



WHAT WE'D LIKE TO SEE:

More licensed titles of this caliber dammit! And perhaps a name change. Cover page 20 and the title becomes very appropriate for a game set in a male prison...

FOUR SHORT YEARS AGO A SLEEPER **CULT SCIENCE FICTION** FILM THAT CROSSED CONVENTIONS WITH THE **HORROR** GENRE

BROUGHT A NEW STAR INTO THE SIGHTS OF **NUMEROUS** **HOLLYWOOD EXECUTIVES**. THAT RISING STAR WAS THE

IMPROBABLY NAMED BUT INTIMIDATINGLY **CHARISMATIC VIN DIESEL** AND THE MOVIE WAS **PITCH**

BLACK. THE IDEA FOR THE FILM WAS SIMPLICITY ITSELF -

APOLOGIES TO ANYONE WHO HASN'T SEEN IT BUT

THERE ARE SOME SPOILERS COMING - A PASSENGER TRANSPORT

SHIP FLIES THROUGH A CLOUD OF MICRO-METEORS AND IS FORCED TO CRASH
LAND ON A SEEMINGLY BARREN PLANET WITH MULTIPLE SUNS.





Prison isn't so bad when you can take breakdancing classes

HE IS SIMULTANEOUSLY ONE OF THE SCREEN'S GREAT PREDATORS AND ONE OF ITS GREAT ANTI-HEROES

WHEN THE LIGHTS GO OUT

The survivors of the crash include a couple of Muslim pilgrims, the co-pilot (played by Aussie Radha Mitchell), a foppish art collector, a drug addicted bounty hunter and Riddick, possibly the most dangerous man alive if rumours are to be believed. Although they complain about the sun and thin atmosphere there is something far worse waiting for them when the suns go down. During the darkness the real denizens of the planet come out to play and feed – huge horrendous bat-like creatures with massive appetites and an aversion to light. When the lights go out the survivors of the ship must try to make their way off the planet before they are all killed.

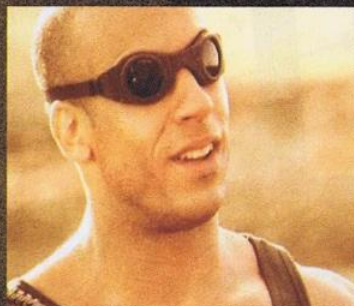
As thrilling as the film is and as compelling as the narrative there was one thing about Pitch Black that garnered more attention than anything else, the enigmatic Riddick. Little is revealed about the near silent killer in the film aside from the fact that he had killed a lot of people, seems to have no sense of guilt to speak of, escaped from a double maximum security prison called Butcher Bay and has had his eyes "shined" so he can see in the dark. Never once is the audience shown his reasons for his crimes and the only times he acts seem to be

purely out of hate, boredom or self preservation. At various times in the film Riddick is shown to possess nearly superhuman senses, strength and quickness.

He is simultaneously one of the screen's great predators and one of its great anti-heroes – definitely deserving of a sequel. Lo and behold a few years down the track The Chronicles of Riddick, the first film in a planned trilogy based around the mysterious killer is due for release and even more interestingly, Starbreeze Studios (creators of the so-so Enclave) and Vivendi Universal have teamed up to create a prequel to the original film, detailing the events leading up to Riddick's capture and his place on the transport ship.

ESCAPE FROM THE HARDEST SLAM IN THE GALAXY

Part first person shooter, part fighting game, part stealth and part RPG, Escape From Butcher Bay looks as though it is trying to have a little something for everyone. Whilst this approach to creating a game may be fraught with difficulties, often leaving one or more areas lacking, the code we have played so far shows no such problems, effortlessly segueing from one style to another without the slightest hint of being forced. Like the name says, Escape



[above] Having the initials V.D. really can't be good for his sex life
[below] And telling girls he's the star of a videogame probably isn't either

From Butcher Bay sees the titular anti-hero trying to break out of the most secure and supposedly escape proof slam in the galaxy. Much like The Great Escape, EFBB features a number of escape attempts, each one of them teaching the main character a little more about the institution in which he is incarcerated. Each subsequent escape attempt adds complexity to the story and game development as well as enriching the universe in which it is set.

The combat mechanics in the game cleverly restrict the weapons the player has access to and the situations in which they can be used. Early in the game, Riddick must make do with his fists unless he is lucky enough to find himself a set of knuckle-dusters or a shiv. Most of the enemies you will be facing will be similarly armed in these sections (the fellow prisoners) but the prison guards are a different matter altogether and require stealth and cunning to take down rather than brute force. When using his hands as a weapon, Riddick has access to a number of fighting moves and combos that can be strung together using a combination of the attack button and thumb-stick movements. Up close to gun wielding assailants, Riddick can use a number of disarm and counter





[above] Vin Diesel and the Injectors

moves. Different button and thumbstick combinations can take the gun out of the enemy's hands or can even reverse the gun, place it under their chin and pull the trigger painting the wall behind them with blood and little bits of brain matter.

OH IT'S ON!

Escape from Butcher Bay is one of the first games to fully take advantage of the advanced processing power of the Xbox and it really shows. The entire game is



nothing short of beautiful (in a bleak, industrial, F you in the A penitentiary kind of way) and utilises a technique known as "normal mapping" in which a high resolution skin can be placed over a low poly mesh without sacrificing any framerate. As the screenshots can attest, the end result is brilliant. Vin Diesel reprises his role as Riddick supplying his distinctive voice talent and likeness to the game.

The likeness in particular is very impressive — Riddick looks just like Vin and even moves like him thanks to motion capture. Little flourishes also add to the overall feel of the game — when Riddick crouches to enter his stealth mode the screen irises out slightly and is tinged a shade of blue to indicate that he is currently hidden.

The HUD is also hidden for the most part, only popping up when Riddick takes damage, picks up an object or the like. Whilst these little touches are nice, the most impressive effect we have seen in the game so far (and we've only played a small portion of the code) is the "eye shine" effect. Although the end result of the eye shine is being able to see in the dark, the effect is unlike any other night

vision effect seen in a game. Instead of simply using a green starlight scope effect or infra-red highlights, the eye shine view saturates the screen with vibrant yellows, reds, blues and purples. It's quite ethereal. If you've seen the film then you'll be familiar with what the effect looks like but playing a game with it is a whole different story.

Along with Vin Diesel, a host of Hollywood second stringers are also lending their voice talent to the game. Cole Hauser, son of uber B-grade actor Wings Hauser reprises his role as the bounty hunter William J. Johns, Kristen Lehman (veteran of many appearances on *Ally McBeal*, *Judging Amy* and *Felicity*) vamping it up as Shirah (not to be confused with Sheera Princess of Power) and Hyper's favourite overworked and under utilised character actor Ron Pearlman as the enigmatic Jagger Valance.

It's come somewhat from out of the blue, but trust us — *Escape From Butcher Bay* is a game to get excited about. Not only does it exhibit incredible production values and push the Xbox like few other titles, but its gameplay is a great mix of FPS, beat 'em up and stealth 'em up, with a little thrown in for good measure. ❖



WHAT WE'D LIKE TO SEE:
The morale system work fluidly and intuitively!

WARHAMMER 40,000: DAWN OF WAR

AVAILABLE ON:

PS2 / XBOX / GCN / PC

DETAILS

CATEGORY: RTS / **PLAYERS:** 1-Multi / **DEVELOPER:** Relic / **AVAILABLE:** TBA /

WOW-O-METER



Attention 40K fans — it looks like you might finally have a worthy Warhammer game on your hands. Yep, Relic's (the guys that did Homeworld and Impossible Creatures) latest effort looks to be the real deal... and might even inject a little new life into the RTS genre while it's at it.

There'll be four factions in the game — the Space Marines, the Orks, Chaos Space Marines and one other that's yet to be revealed, and it seems certain that each will have their own single player campaign to work through. At this stage, we only really know about the Space Marines. You'll be heading up a new Marine Chapter

— the Blood Ravens, as Space Marine Force Commander Gabriel Angelos. The war will be epic — a battle to save an entire planet from an Ork invasion.

SO WHAT'S THE DESSERT?

But of course, for many the single player game will only be the entrée. Relic are planning on serving up a serious course of multiplayer gaming, and are even confident in largely eliminating the rush tactics that are so prevalent in RTS games. The way they plan to do this is by taking the focus away from simply destroying the enemy's base, and instead focusing the play on several strategic points. Capturing and holding points will allow you to requisition more units, and capturing enough points will win you the game. Rather than resource gathering, it will be these key points that will allow you bring in more units, and hence, battles will be spread across a wider area, which should hopefully make for a more lively game.

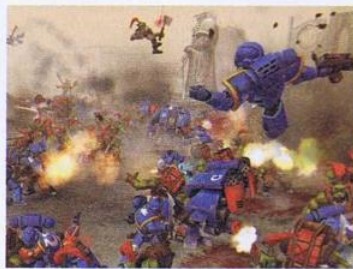
The maps will be mostly urban in nature — cities that have been

brought to their knees by the horrors of war, and now lie gutted and burning, rubble strewn shells of their former glory. It will be dark, it will be gritty, and boy, will it be violent. Just check out the screenshots. Have you seen a battlefield this chaotic in an RTS before? We sure haven't. And the level of detail is insane. Not only can you have up to a couple of hundred units fighting at any one time, but you can scale all the way from a more traditional RTS viewpoint right down into the thick of the action; so close you can almost smell the fetid Ork breath.

Better still, everything looks just as convincing at this level as it does zoomed out. The range of animations on the various units, whether they be Marine Commanders or Dreadnoughts, are just incredible. 40K is going to set a new benchmark for RTS games — armies that simply stand and shoot at each other just won't cut it anymore compared to the the heady depiction of chaotic warfare here. In Dawn of War, explosions rock the battlefield, units



Other games (im)pale in comparison



get flung into the air or sent skidding back by gunfire. Units get impaled, stomped and crushed — especially when you have towering daemon units on screen. Best of all, units will automatically switch to melee weapons when they get close enough to the enemy, bringing a new level of believability to proceedings, and making the combat look all the more compelling. We can't wait. <<

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GAME OF LIFE AND DEATH...

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The first live action feature film
from **MAMORU OSHII** director of
GHOST IN THE SHELL

An illegal and potentially lethal
computer program....

A virtual reality battlefield simulation
where players compete for money,
and prestige.



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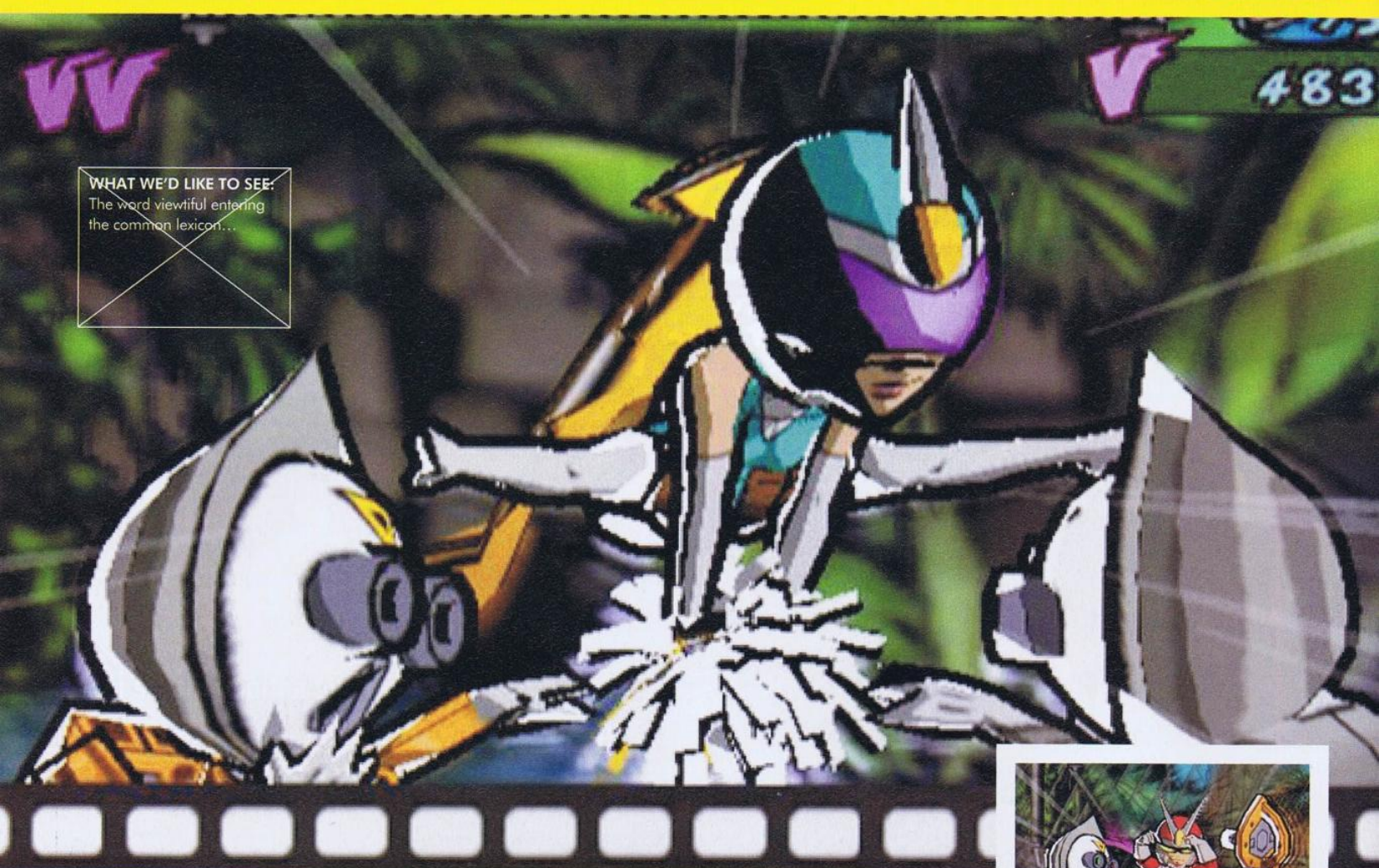
and check out these extra features

- > Interview with director Mamoru Oshii
- > 'Beyond Avalon' featurette
- > Theatrical trailer
- > Special Effects Report
- > Eastern Eye trailers

Rated M, Polish with English subtitles



distributed by
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WHAT WE'D LIKE TO SEE:
The word viewtiful entering the common lexicon...

VIEWTIFUL JOE 2

AVAILABLE ON:
PS2 / XBOX / GCN / PC

DETAILS
CATEGORY: Fighting / **PLAYERS:** 1-2 / **DEVELOPER:** Clover Studio / **AVAILABLE:** TBA /



Viewtiful Joe was easily one of our favourite games of the last year. It was an incredibly stylish, incredibly fluid old school fighting game blessed with a new school flair. Although it was very difficult, and ultimately quite niche, the good news is that Joe has done well enough to warrant not only a port of the original to PS2 (including Dante from DMC as an unlockable character), but a sequel too – for both GameCube and PS2.

A DAMSEL IN DISTRESS NO LONGER...

What's changed? Joe's girlfriend Silvia will be playable right from the start of the game this time, and this

leads into one of the sequel's sweetest new features – co-op play! While it's a little hard to imagine how all the VFX powers will work with two people on screen, we imagine the solution will be team-based moves, which should hopefully open the door for truly spectacular combos. Silvia on her own will be no slouch, however, and will have twin pompoms for close quarters and a gun for ranged attacks, to bring a little differentiation between the heroes. Capcom are definitely onto a winner here... after all, is there anything sexier than a superhero with cheerleader style pompoms and a big gun? We don't think so... although that might be more of a sad indictment of modernity than anything else.

One of the really unique and cool features of the original Viewtiful Joe were the VFX powers – Zoom, Mach Speed and Slow. They'll all return of course, but what use would a sequel be if it didn't at least add in a little more spice to the combat system? In that spirit, Viewtiful Joe 2 will have a new VFX power called "Replay". This allows you to record slices of the

action then play it back! You could, for instance, record Joe punching an enemy then replay it for triple damage, or record eating a hamburger then play it back for triple the health boost. It's a cool idea that can also backfire – accidentally record yourself taking damage, for instance, and you'll take three times the damage when it's played back.

Joe 2 looks to run on pretty much the same engine as the original, but there'll be a range of new environments and over 40 different enemies to ensure it's as fresh an experience as possible. As you can see from the screenshots, a jungle environment (or Jurassic Park inspired Dinosaur park from the looks of things) is one of the new locations, and it'll be joined by an underground temple, feudal Japan, treacherous snow covered peaks and outer space. It's going to be viewtiful folks... <<<



(left) Hmm... I thought cheerleaders were meant to be sexy?

TWO WARRIORS UNITE AGAINST
THE LEGIONS OF HELL



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PlayStation 2

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Athens 2004

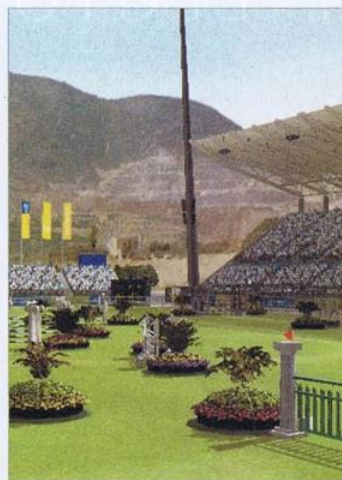
A very special Hyper preview...

⌘ The Olympics. It's a time when very fit men and very fit women (and some overly "fit" women who look like men) come together to celebrate the absurdity and opulence of humanity, and to compete for beautiful gold, so-so silver and shameful bronze. It's also a glorious time for comedic wordsmiths, when "ring" jokes get thrown about with gay abandon. Fortunately, we've been training for the ring-jokathon ever since Bennett "Benton" Ring joined the PC Powerplay crew. We've been knee deep in ring you might say.

To help celebrate the commercial side of the games, there's also an official "tool of videographic edutainment" on PS2 to accompany this spectacle of spectacles. We've gone hands on with "Athens 2004" the game (as opposed to "Athens 2004: The Games"), and thought we'd represent to you, in pictures, what we think.



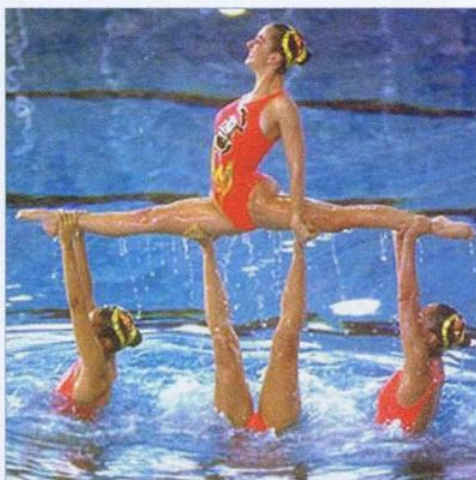
Of course, the most worrying thing about a game based on the Athens Olympics is whether there will actually be an Olympics to go with the game. Fortunately, the code we're previewing from contains a cunning in-joke about how incomplete the Olympic facilities are.



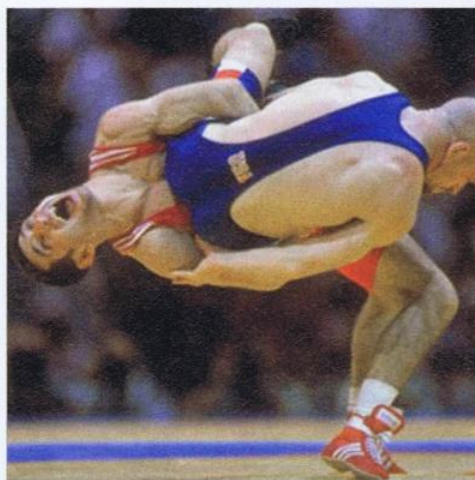
Will the actual facilities be ready in time? Take a look at this pic, it's a shot of the Equestrian stadium from in-game. This is as close as we'll get to knowing what it may or may not look like in real life. If they build it. Which they won't.



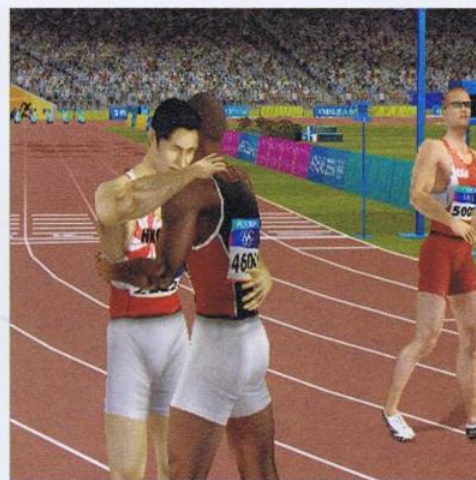
And here's a "3D render" of what the Olympic Village may or may not look like. This isn't from the game though, this is from the IOC... but it might as well be from Will Wright about ten years ago it looks so advanced.



Assuming the Olympic facilities will be ready in time and the games (and hence "game") will go ahead (not that it will be anywhere near as good as the Sydney Olympics, mind you), jumping into the menu shows a veritable treasure trove of events to compete in. We're a little disappointed, however, that some of our favourites aren't represented.



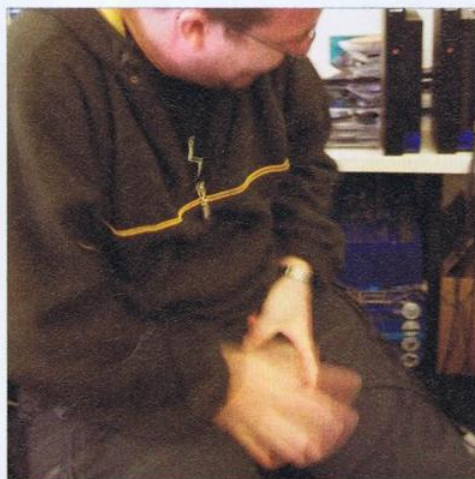
I mean, what happened to Greco-Roman wrestling? Surely at the birthplace of the Olympics and of this fine wrestling tradition, it should be held in some prominence. Perhaps they're just worried about the man-love jokes that magazines such as this will no doubt indulge in. Honestly though, where would we be without homoerotic captioning? Not into year 11, no sir.



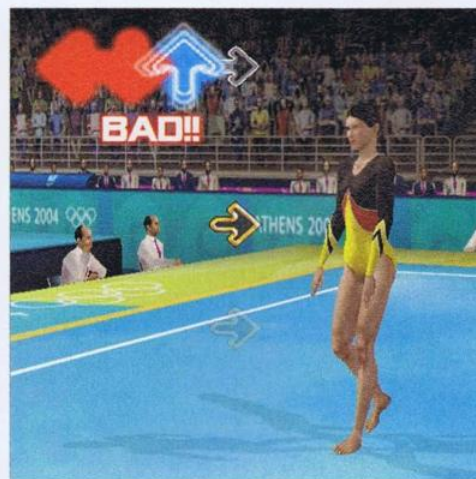
Still, they have put in a little "male bonding" in the celebration animations in many sports. And we thank them for it. Just check out how happy these guys are to have finished the 100 meters. Either that or they're so puffed they need to lean on each other to stop themselves falling over. We've all been there...



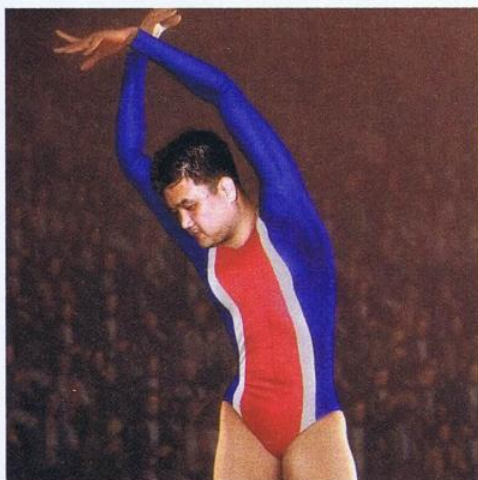
They've also cleverly moved away from the "button mashing" you'd expect from a title like this. Instead, they've made it a "buttons masher". See the difference? Instead of just hammering one button, you alternate between two! Now that's progress! Here's a photo of Amos's sister from Sydney 2000 for your trouble.



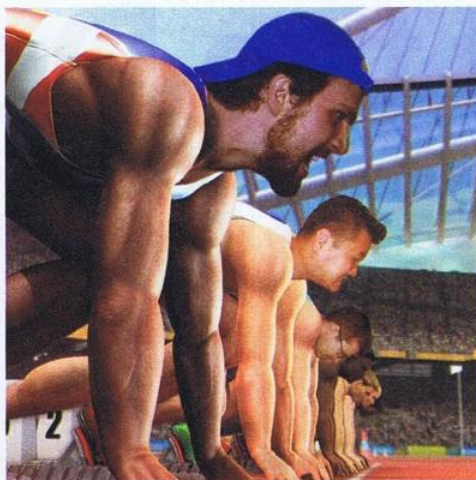
To be fair, the developers have actually varied the gameplay a whole lot more than previous titles in this genre. Some sports require timing and others judicious use of the analogue sticks. The discus, for instance, requires quick rotations of your stick, leaving Wilks to comment that it looks like you're "rubbing one out".



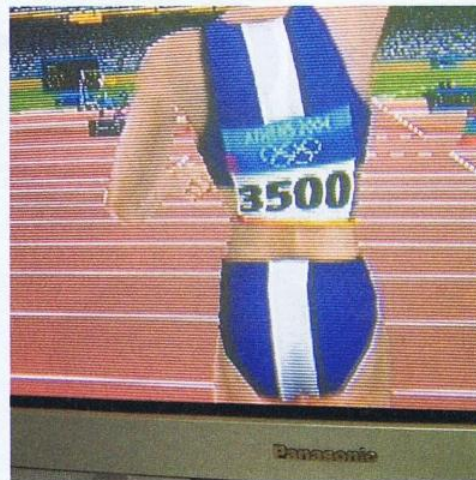
Some of the events/mini-games are even compatible with dance mats - giving literal meaning to "Dance Dance Revolution". Ho ho ho, what a rib tickler!



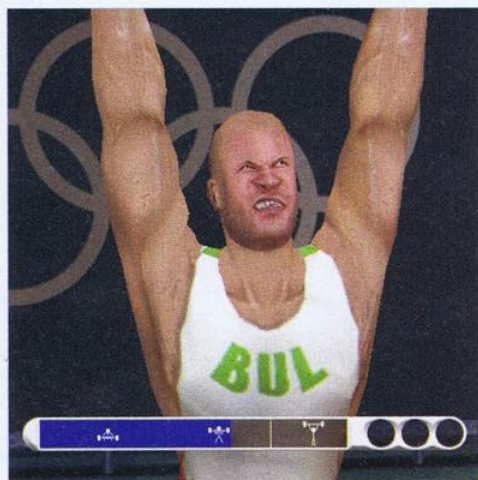
But we've been "serious" long enough. It's time for a flight of fancy. Here's a Photoshop artist's impression of what Amos would look like as an Olympic gymnast. Getting a little misty down there? Us too.



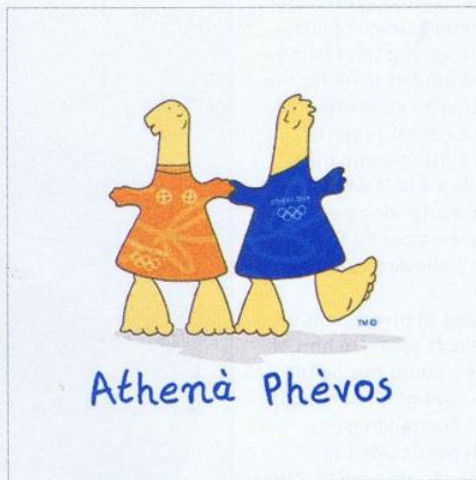
And hell, while we're on a Photoshop trip, have you ever wondered who would win in a 100 meter dash between Cam, Daniel and Amos? Of course you haven't. And why would you? But for the sake of this article, let's assume you have. Athens 2004 just got a whole lot prettier. And Cam just got a whole lot blacker.



Unfortunately, the in-game graphics aren't quite as stunning. The whiter athletes all seem to be covered in weird old person liver spots, which is really off-putting. We tried (rather poorly) to take a photo of this athlete's old woman legs but it didn't really work out the way we wanted it to. But hell, none of the official screens show off this phenomenon any better, so in the absence of any motivation to simply take another photo, it'll have to do.



One sport that the graphics engine does capture with great tenacity, however, is weight-lifting. The pain, the glory, the sheer spleen bursting roid raging insanity of it all. Now that's a man. If only Kegs (and Judo) was in the game, we'd be laughing.



An Olympic games wouldn't be complete without a mascot (although all the games before Munich 1972 seemed to do okay). The new mascots "Phevos" and "Athena" are like beneficent hosts throughout the game, and they're certainly more likeable than Syd, Olly and Dickhead. They're no Fatso though.



Take a few steps back into Olympics-past, mind you, and you'll come across some really weird mascots. I mean, I thought the Atlanta "Whatizit" was just a Simpsons joke but lookee here mah, there it is! And it's as inscrutable as ever.



But you gotta give props to L.A. for their 1984 mascot, the Snoop Dogg. They even managed to avoid the inevitable Crips vs Bloods war by clothing him in nice neutral white. The lack of hoochie side-kicks and blunt/40 attachments was a bit disappointing though.



The best part about both the Athens Olympics and the game, however, would have to be that Nikki Webster has nothing to do with it. Mind you, we'd kill for some hidden Roy and HG colour commentary in the game.



Damn, I just realised we've done an entire Olympics preview without a single Dick Pound gag. How could I be so remiss? Not only is Dick Pound synonymous with ring work but there's nothing better than Dick Pound slipping into our article.

THQ let the Dogs Out

THQ COULD BE THE REASON YOU GET A JOB IN THE GAMES INDUSTRY.
BY ED DAWSON

There's been much talk in recent times about Australia becoming a hub for local games development. Foreigners often have very flattering things to say about our artists, designers and programmers - and some say our unique economic position generally puts us in a very good place to become a "new Silicon Valley" of hot games production. It's an attractive idea, isn't it?

For young Australian people who see the bright lights of the games industry shining like a glittering Hollywood beacon, is this a realistic view? Should they devote the considerable time and energy required to get qualified in the skills of the games development business? If they did, would they be able to get a job? This kind of advice isn't available from high-school careers advisors, or your parents. For answers, we've gone to one of the major US developers who are pumping cash into the Australian economy - THQ Inc.

TOY HEAD-QUARTERS

The name THQ will be familiar to many Hyper readers. Like Nintendo, they once sold toys and other tangible distractions. Originally standing for "Toy Head-Quarters", the Californian THQ have been a constant in the games publishing business since 1994, when they began exclusively selling and creating videogames.

You will have heard of many of these games - THQ are famous for Summoner, WWE Smackdown! and Red Faction. And there's world-beaters on the way - THQ are soon to launch S.T.A.L.K.E.R.: Shadow of Chernobyl and Full Spectrum Warrior, as well as a Warhammer

40,000 game... alongside close to ninety other titles this year.

LETS GET COOKING

THQ have studios around the world, but one in particular is growing as fast as a man who lives in a Kentucky Fried Chicken restaurant. THQ's Australian Studio in Brisbane has been gathering steam of late, with quite a string of games being developed and funded there for the world stage. They're currently funding three external projects, developed by a list of companies which reads like a who's who of Australian games development houses, with even more on the way, which we aren't allowed to know about just yet.

This spearhead of investment in Australian projects seems to hint at things to come - could this be the first lapping waves of a Tsunami of investment for Australian game developers? Hyper decided to investigate. We caught up with THQ Producer Derek Proud to find out all about THQ's operations here in Oz, now and in the future.

HYPER: First of all Derek, can you please explain your role at THQ Australia and the elements within your sphere of responsibility?

Derek Proud: My role at THQ is Producer. This means I'm responsible for the Quality, Time and Budget for all the projects I'm assigned. At the moment, I'm working on several external titles, including The Polar Express (all formats), Destroy All Humans! (PS2, Xbox), and Jimmy Neutron GBA. I'm also working on some other titles, but if I told you I'd have to kill you, and all your readers. So from a time management point of view, I'm not going to.

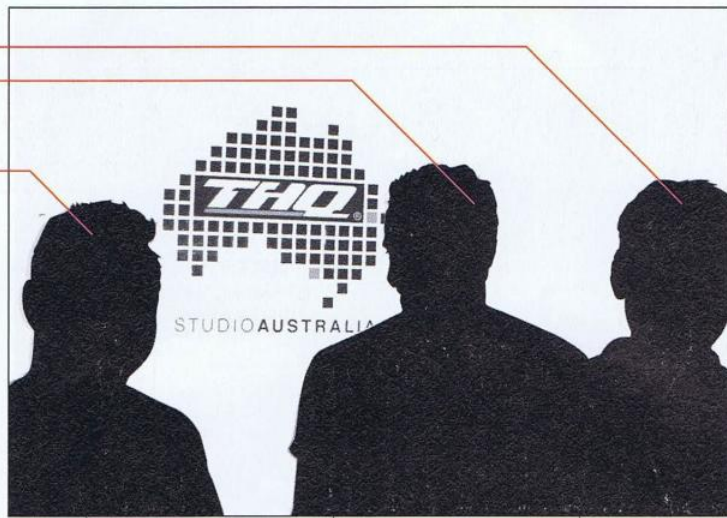
THQ'S AUSTRALIAN STUDIO IN BRISBANE HAS BEEN GATHERING STEAM OF LATE, WITH QUITE A STRING OF GAMES BEING DEVELOPED...



Matthew Riek

Derek Proud

Dave McMinn





HYPER: How long has the THQ studio been established here in Oz? And what does it do specifically?

DP: The studio has been up and running for just over a year. Originally set up by Steve Dauterman, I was hired in January of this year (best decision he ever made). We're here to build a world-class studio and show the rest of the world that Australia is set to become a creative centre for the computer games industry. We're already working with great Australian developers like Tantalus, Blue Tongue Entertainment and Pandemic.

HYPER: Tell us about the local projects underway within the Australian THQ studio.

DP: We have one title being created internally, Jimmy Neutron: Attack of the Twonkies. It's looking really good and will be out later this year. We're also ramping up to take on our second project, which also falls under the "kill you and all your readers" category.

HYPER: Do you agree with the claims that there's a large "pool of talent" waiting to be tapped here in Australia?

DP: Yes, but it's more than just that. Australians are frequently great to work with, they are creative and hard working, and like a challenge. It's these qualities, along with a large talent pool, that make the future look so exciting for us.

HYPER: Tell us about the "external projects" the Australian THQ studio is running. Are these being produced by Australian teams?

DP: We're only focused on

Australian developers in Studio Oz at the moment. There is such a massive talent pool here. The first game - The Polar Express (PC/NGC/PC) - is being developed by Blue Tongue in Melbourne. It's based on a movie released at Christmas this year starring Tom Hanks and directed by Robert Zemeckis. It's about a boy who travels to the North Pole on Christmas Eve to meet Santa. The GBA version of the game is being done by Tantalus, who are also working on the GBA version of Jimmy Neutron: Attack of the Twonkies. Lastly, we're working with Brisbane developer Pandemic on a game called Destroy All Humans!, which is a game where the player gets to play as an alien invading race in pseudo 1950s America.

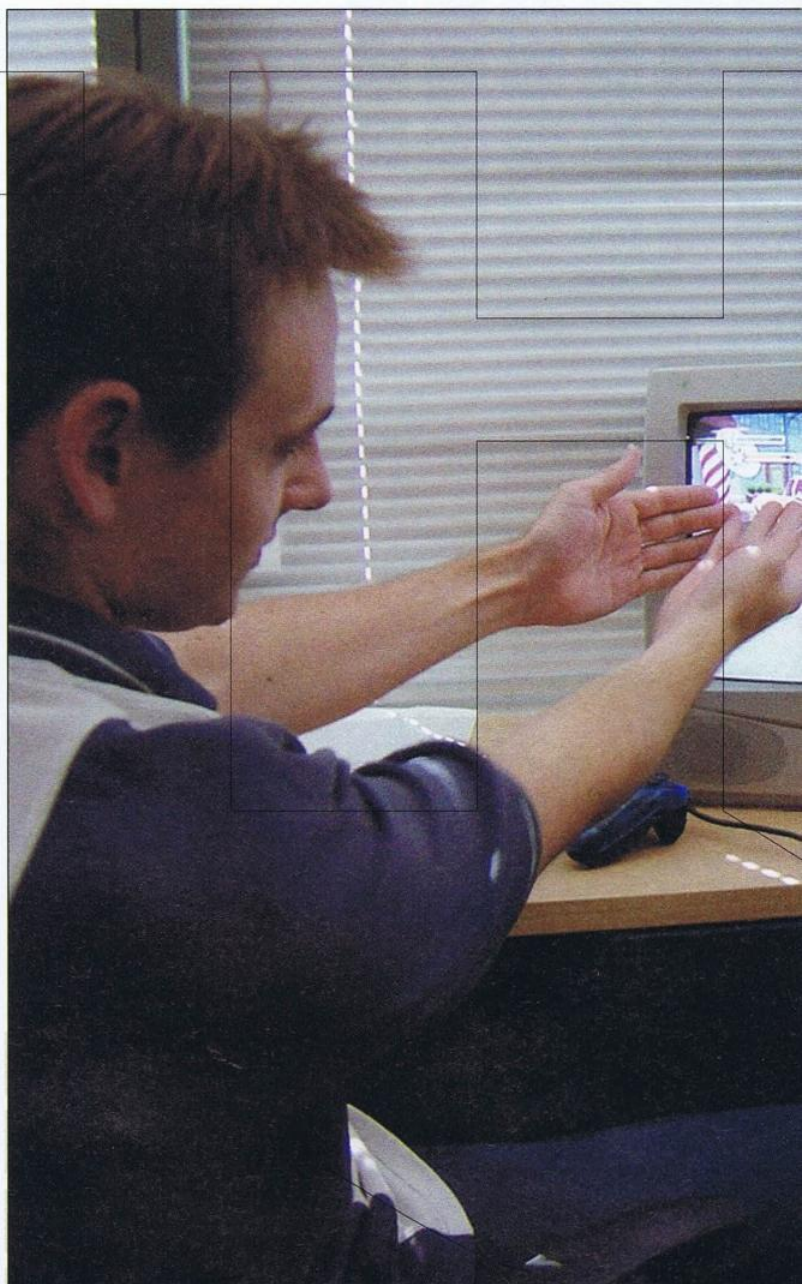
HYPER: Do you think Australia is a good place economically for producing videogames?

DP: The changes in the Australian dollar over the past two years have certainly made it more difficult, but we still think it's more economically viable to make games here than in America or the UK. The distance from the rest of the world is sometimes a negative factor.

HYPER: Do you think certain States within Australia are economically better locations for making games than others? Which are the good ones in your opinion?

DP: Melbourne and Brisbane seem to be the hotspots for game development in Australia. I believe the local governments there are willing to encourage game development and see it has potential for future growth.

[right] This is what game development looks like, apparently. God, our TV in the bathroom is bigger than that.



HYPER: Technology companies seem to be doing well at the moment. Does this mean there's a lot of new games projects underway right now? And do you think investment in games will increase?

DP: There is a lot of consolidation going on in the computer games industry at the moment. Teams are getting larger, games more complex and I think the smaller, independent developer will have a much harder time in the future. So the answers are a little mixed; yes there is more investment going on in the games industry but this investment is in the form of a fewer number of more focused titles.

HYPER: What sort of games do you think will be the big money-makers in the years to come? Care to make a few predictions for us?

DP: I'm really bullish about the PSP. The machine is pretty complex and perhaps isn't sure what it wants to be; games machine, MP3 player,

movie player, wi-fi port, web browser, etc. Even so, I think it opens up some great possibilities from a game design standpoint and I really like what it promises.

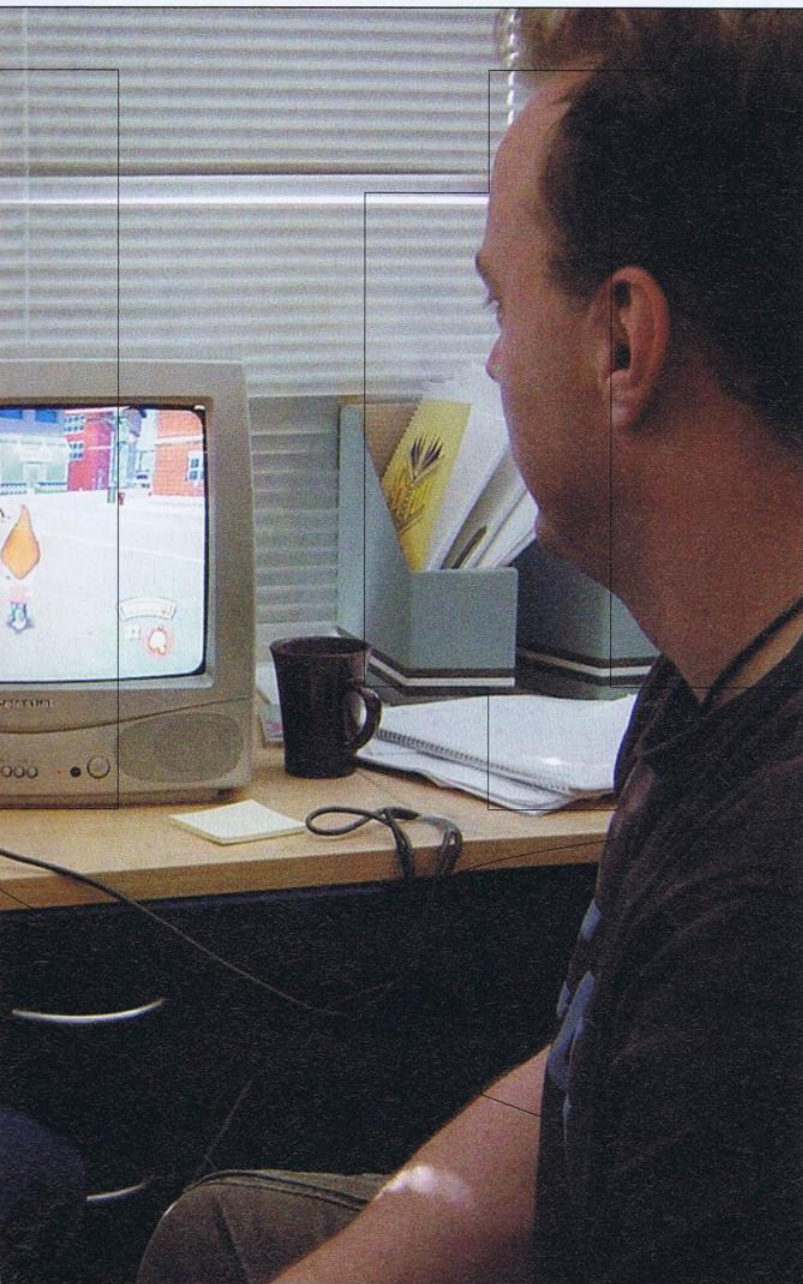
HYPER: You have a lot of experience producing games with a major licence attached. Do you think that such games have an inherent market advantage and why?

DP: They do have a market advantage in that people are aware of the property and know what to expect from a game that contains a license. A lot of the hard work is already done for you.

HYPER: Do you prefer to work on games with such licensed content?

DP: Each license is different and each has its own advantages and disadvantages. I do like working with established licenses because it's creatively a challenge to mould it so that it works as a game, I get a lot of satisfaction out of that. On the

TEAMS ARE GETTING LARGER, GAMES MORE COMPLEX AND I THINK THE SMALLER, INDEPENDENT DEVELOPER WILL HAVE A MUCH HARDER TIME IN THE FUTURE



other side, creating a game without any limitations is fantastic too, but it's much harder to convince others of the vision and potential of such games. In short, they are both different yet interesting challenges.

HYPHER: Can young development teams submit their ideas to THQ Australia for appraisal? And would you have any advice for those people?

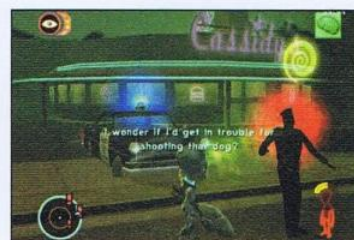
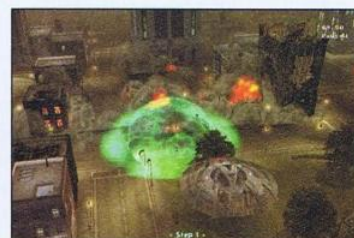
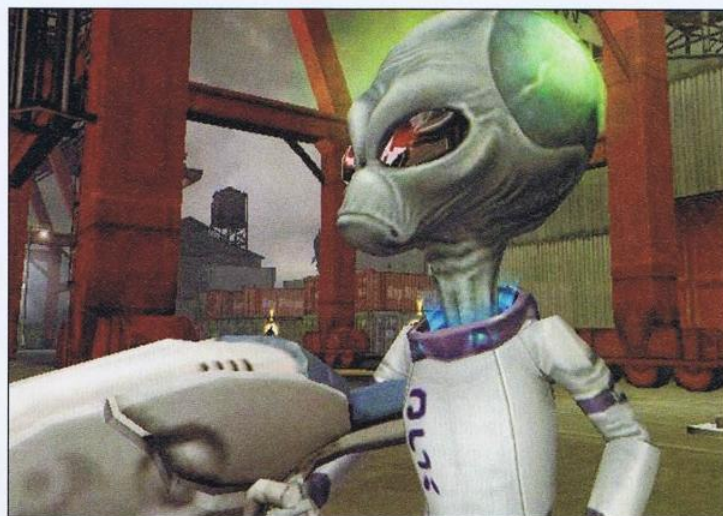
DP: As a rule we don't take unsolicited submissions. As for advice, if you have a completed game, you can shop it around and try to get a publisher to pick it up. If you have a game idea and are looking for funding, that's a lot more difficult.

HYPHER: When you're hiring people to work in games development, what do you look for? Give us a picture of your ideal industry employee's skills.

DP: Your portfolio and skills will depend on the type of job you want

to get. Programmers should have industry experience on consoles, specifically PlayStation 2. Experience with Xbox and Gamecube development is a plus. Obviously solid C++ and object oriented programming skills are necessary. It is also important to have strong problem solving ability. Communication skills are crucial as this feeds into the team dynamics at the lowest level. An entry-level programmer would definitely benefit from having a Computer Science degree from an accredited university.

Designers should have an open mind and be able to bend their skills to any genre that might pop up. Some technical literacy is required to deal with ever changing tools and numerous development pipelines, file formats and technical documentation. Having experience with script or programming languages is a huge advantage. Designers need to be able to write clearly and creatively,



communicating ideas.

If you want to animate, concentrate your folio on animation, even if the models are boxes. Artists should demonstrate great models or textures (people who can do both are extremely valued). A strong illustration background is recommended so we know the applicant can communicate an image quickly on paper. Graphic design, architectural, industrial or packaging design are good backgrounds for the differing roles an artist might take in a game; from level creation and composition, to front end UI design. Maya knowledge is a bonus.

Finally it's our belief you must play games to build good games. If you don't know the difference between a good game and a bad game to start with how can you discern if what you are doing is right or wrong?

HYPHER: Derek, thanks for your time. <<

DESTROY ALL HUMANS!

The most promising game on the locally developed roster from THQ would have to be Destroy All Humans for PS2 and Xbox. As the name suggests, it's about alien invasion, and you get to control the all conquering alien... who's name, fortunately, isn't Alf (then it would be called "Destroy All Cats" right?). We've had a sneak peek at the game, and it's already evident that Pandemic Studios (yes, the Full Spectrum Warrior guys) are doing a great job with it. In it, players take the part of an Alien, who has landed on Earth in 1950s USA. He has a number of ways of taking over the Earth, from assimilation and mind control through to simply hopping in his UFO and blowing everything up. The visual style is very reminiscent of the fears and pop culture of the era it's set in, with a nice cartoony tinge, but better still, it's a nice original concept and looks to be a superb example of what Australian developers are capable of. The images above are all from Destroy All Humans!


WinWinWin

Entries close July 14th

Win Ninja Gaiden for Xbox!

»» After reading our review last issue and drooling over the screens, can there be any doubt that you have to own Ninja Gaiden? Of course not! But then you look in your wallet. And it's empty. Rather than crying on your Xbox's shoulder (or god forbid, working "shudder"), do yourself a favour and just enter our Ninja Gaiden comp! Thanks to our chums at Microsoft, we have six copies to give away.

To be in with a chance to win one of our six copies, just answer the following question:

 Name two other games in the Ninja Gaiden series.

Put your answer on the back of an envelope along with your name and address, and post it to:
Shuriken Showdown, Hyper, 78 Renwick Street, Redfern, NSW 2016.


6
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GRABS!



Win a Hercules DJ Console!

»» If you're an aspiring DJ with a good PC and many an mp3, then the Hercules DJ Console is practically made for you. We've had heaps of fun with our test unit (although the neighbours might not have appreciated it), and we dare say anyone else who's into electronic music will too. Thanks to Tech Pacific we have two units to give away.

To be in with a chance to win one, just tell us in fifty words or less:

 What would your DJ name be, and what style of music would you play?

The most creative and funny answers will win! Put your answer on the back of an envelope along with your name and address, and post it to: **DJ Assault, Hyper, 78 Renwick Street, Redfern, NSW 2016.**

2
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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 May 25 and entries close at 6pm July 14. 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 July 15 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 September issue of Hyper on sale August 4. 9) 6 winners will each receive Ninja Gaiden on Xbox (RRP \$99.95). 2 winners will each receive a Hercules DJ Console (RRP \$499). Total value of competitions is \$1597.70. 10) The promoter is Next Publishing Pty Ltd ABN 88 002 647 645 of 78 Renwick St, Redfern NSW 2016.

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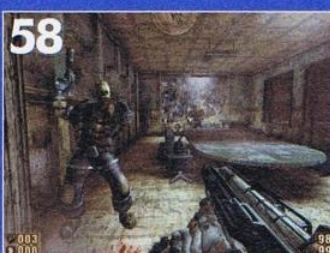




38 FULL SPECTRUM WARRIOR

Great action/strategy gaming on Xbox!





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Reviews

Game Theory

DANIEL STAINES



As technology has become more powerful and given designers the freedom to flex their creative muscles, the number of approaches to implementing game mechanics has also increased and game design itself has evolved into

a bustling battlefield of conceptually distinct "design schools". Over the course of the next few months or so, I intend to use this column to explore the benefits and disadvantages of particular competing design philosophies and explore what each means in terms of churning out actual games. So, let's begin by looking at what I think are two diametrically opposed means to designing action games: the "global" approach and the "particulars" approach.

The global approach has probably been made most famous by games such as Deus Ex and Grand Theft Auto 3. This school focuses on principles of emergence in that it favours establishing global laws for the behaviour of a given gameworld and then letting these laws interact with each other to give rise to specific gameplay elements. For example, let's say within the general canon of high-level laws governing a given game's behaviour, there are two laws dictating that certain enemies explode when killed and also that certain doors can be opened with explosions. These two laws aren't explicitly connected to one another, but they can be linked by creative players who realise that blowing up an exploding soldier near an explosion-sensitive door will result in said door being blasted to smithereens. What we have here is a situation in which general game laws have interacted and given rise to a particularly cool moment of discreet gameplay.

How does this differ from the "particulars" approach to game design? Well, the particulars approach favours explicitly concocting discreet gameplay functions like the one discussed above. Instead of global laws giving rise to specific "chunks" of gameplay, you get games where the design team will set up discreet situations in which a particular game mechanic may be utilised. A game designed according to these principles wouldn't rely on the interactions between a general "door rule" and a general "exploding soldier rule". A game designed according to these principles would ordinarily have a specific exploding soldier as well as a specific door

susceptible to explosions and these two things would most likely be formally linked to make an exploding soldier obliterate a destructible door. It all basically comes down to a differentiation between "see what happens" and "make what happens".

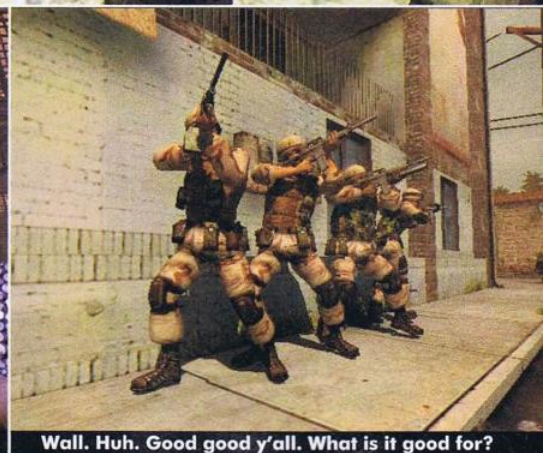
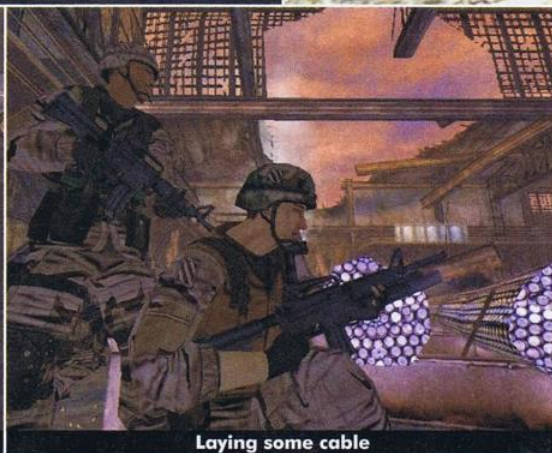
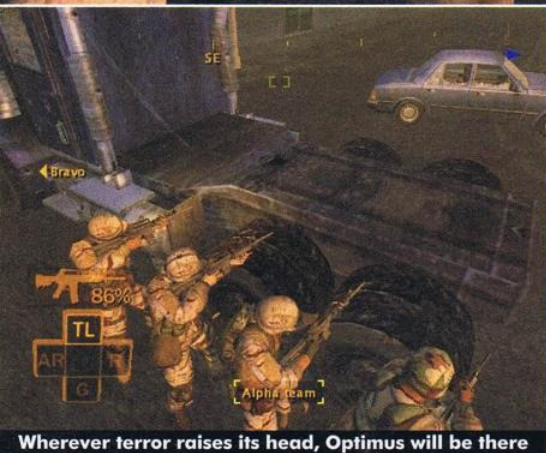
Each of these approaches has its advantages and disadvantages. Beginning with the global approach, the benefits of creating a globally consistent system with which players can experiment should be obvious. Games built on these principles allow players the freedom to interact with and manipulate the gameworld in ways entirely unique to them. These games tend to feel more "real" simply because the world they present is governed by a canon of laws very much like the ones that govern our own. On the downside, making sure that even a very limited set of global laws remains consistent is an arduous task and entails that designers are often limited in the scope of their implementation. Simple laws are easier to manage and capable of giving rise to reasonably complex behaviour, but it would require a very complicated global system to give rise to the kind of behaviour exhibited by Sam Fisher in Splinter Cell.

The particulars approach has just the opposite pros and cons. Games designed to be sequences of discreet gameplay chunks are only limited by the imagination of their designer, but the fact that they are limited by their designer's ability is precisely why they never feel as compelling as their emergent cousins. There are lots of neat situations in games like Splinter Cell that wouldn't be possible under the emergent systems we have now, but the designers are always the ones responsible for anything interesting that happens. Blowing up a door with an exploding soldier may not be as cool as split-jumping a corridor and leaping down on an oblivious patrolling guard, but at least it's something we as players are responsible for discovering. The sense of achievement one feels when they've discovered a way to exploit the rules of a game to their benefit is one significantly superior to the simple satisfaction of second guessing a designer. Surely good gaming is about doing what you want as opposed to what somebody else wants?

Until next month,
daniels@next.com.au

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

0-49	50-59	60-69	70-79	80-89	90+
Chop your own hands off rather than play these abhorrent titles.	There's an old Hyper saying, "fifty ain't so nifty".	Look average up in the dictionary, and you'll see these games.	These games rise up above utter mediocrity. Worth testing.	You can actually get excited about these games! Almost brilliant.	Like Charisma Carpenter distilled into game form...



Wherever terror raises its head, Optimus will be there

Laying some cable

Wall. Huh. Good good y'all. What is it good for?

FULL SPECTRUM WARRIOR

BRETT ROBINSON locks, loads and slaps on some SPF30+



Back in the 1990's it was not uncommon for game developers to dabble in a bit of defence work. For example, Digital Image Design — the studio behind the legendary EF 2000 flight sim — created a weapons systems training simulator for the pilots of Britain's Tornado fighter-bombers. Across the Atlantic, Sonalysts developed a strategic carrier group simulation for the US Navy that was later adapted for the civilian market and sold as Jane's Fleet Command. And let's not forget id Software's famous Marine Doom exploits, which invariably got a mention in mainstream media stories on videogame violence.

PIE-MAN

These days, however, fewer game developers are getting a slice of the lucrative defence pie, despite an increasing reliance on simulator-based training amongst many of the

world's armed forces. One developer that has bucked this trend is Pandemic Studios. With a rumoured US\$10 million-plus grant in hand, Pandemic created a squad-based tactical combat simulation for the US Army. The Army's design brief called for a program that was realistic in its depiction of military tactics and urban warfare; a program that was easy to use yet also an effective training tool; and one that could be run on inexpensive, commercially available hardware. The good news is that Pandemic's program meets those criteria, and better yet is now available (with minimal modifications) to the civilian market in the form of Full Spectrum Warrior.

Pandemic's chosen locale for the events that take place in FSW is Zafarra, capital of Zekistan, a fictional Middle Eastern nation ruled by a ruthless dictator. The developer certainly won't win any awards for

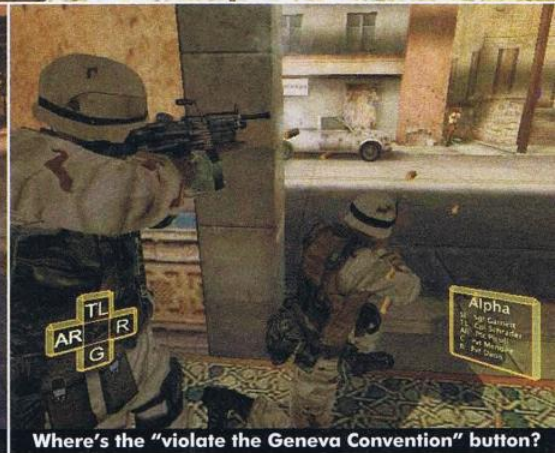
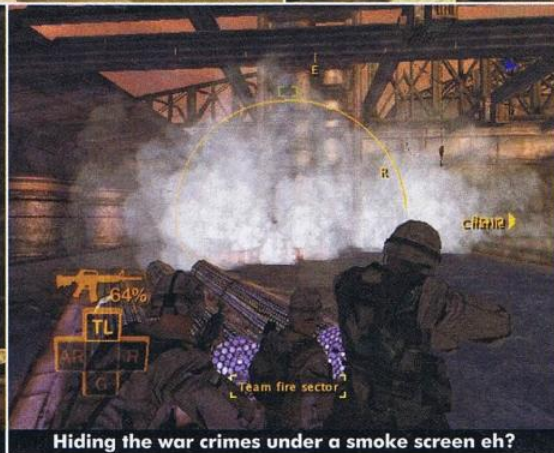
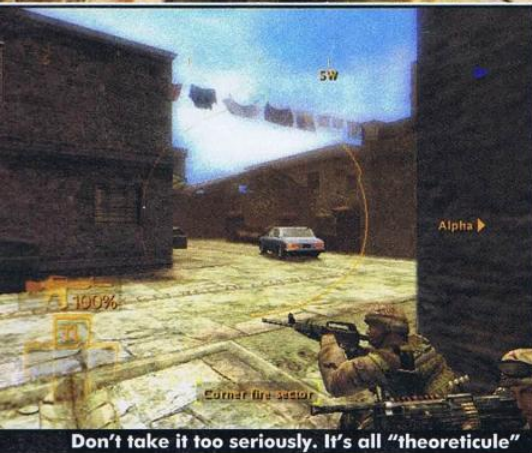
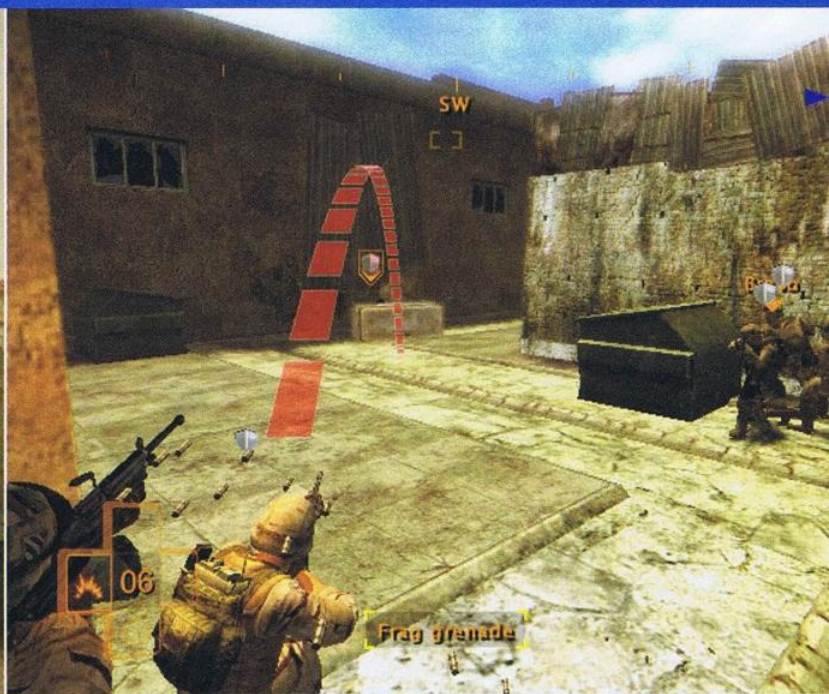
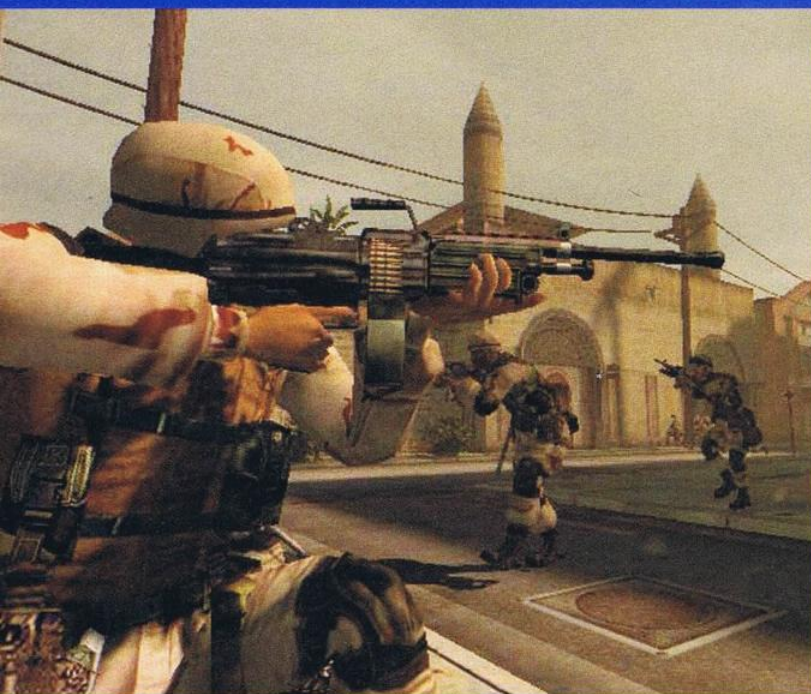
originality in this regard, but Pandemic is at pains to make it clear FSW isn't a cash-in on the present situation in Iraq. Indeed, development of FSW commenced 4 years ago — prior even to the events of 11 September, 2001.

Before you and your men set foot on Zekistani soil, you'll have to undertake five MOUT (Military Operations on Urbanised Terrain) training missions. Well, technically they're optional, but unless you want to get your arse handed to you in Zafarra, you'd better sit down, shut up, and do what your commanding officer tells you, soldier! The MOUT missions provide a step-by-step introduction to the game's simple but powerful interface, and give you a chance to practice some basic manoeuvres. FSW is played from a third-person perspective and you command two squads — designated Alpha and

Bravo teams — of four soldiers. Each squad consists of a sergeant who packs an M4 Carbine and communications gear, a machinegunner armed with an M-249 Squad Automatic Weapon (SAW), a grenadier equipped with an M-4 and underslung M203 grenade launcher, and a rifleman with another M-4 Carbine. Both squads also carry a small number of fragmentation and smoke grenades.

HEY MAN, SQUAD DOWN!

In the case of the Xbox version, the controller's Y button switches between Alpha and Bravo teams, and the left thumbstick controls a cursor that, in concert with the A button, allows you to direct each squad to any point within its line of sight. The movement cursor is intelligent in that it alters a squad's formation, depending on where that squad's deployed. Out in the open, for



Don't take it too seriously. It's all "theoreticule"

Hiding the war crimes under a smoke screen eh?

Where's the "violate the Geneva Convention" button?



THE MISSIONS **CULMINATE** IN AN ASSAULT ON THE FRIENDLY **DIKTATOR** HIMSELF

instance, the squad will adopt the standard echelon left formation, and when ordered to take up a position behind cover, your men will bunch up accordingly. Squads will also huddle up against walls, and when ordered to move to the corner of a building or other large object, they'll take a quick peek around that corner and report back on the situation.

With a tap of the B button you can designate firing arcs for your squads, and they'll attack any enemies within that arc. And there are modifiers that expand on the orders you can issue. For instance, holding down the B button brings up the grenade selection box and an aiming reticle, while a hold of the A button will issue a 'bound' order, whereby two members of a squad will move carefully toward the designated position, aiming their weapons in a nominated direction. The other two members will do likewise, following

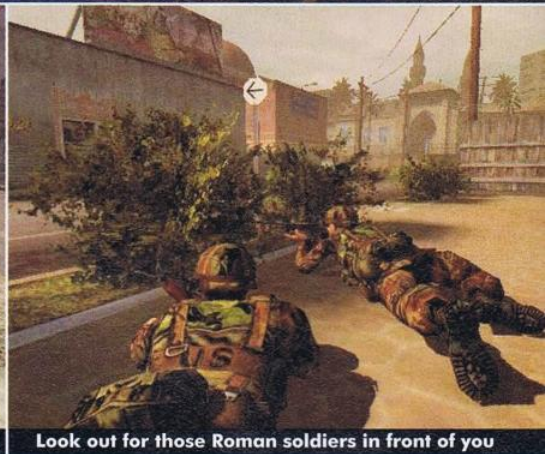
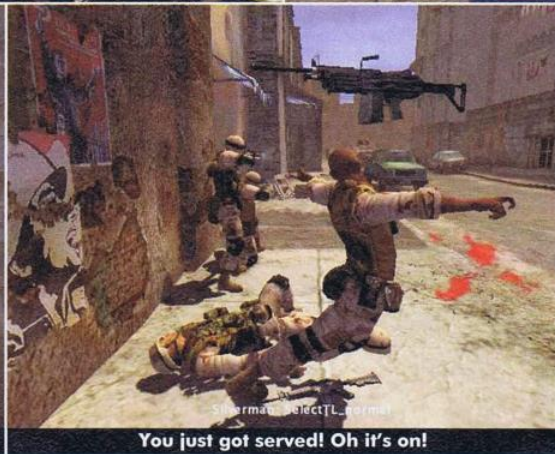
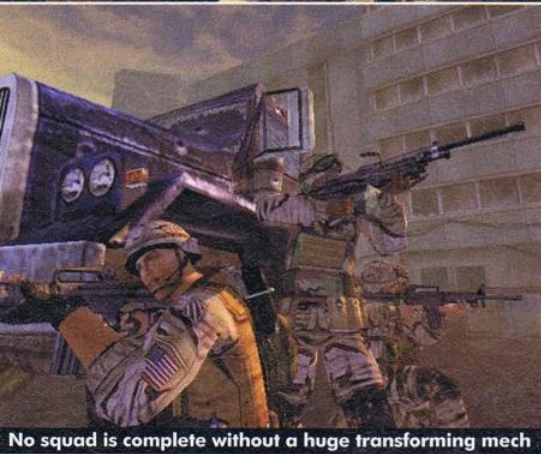
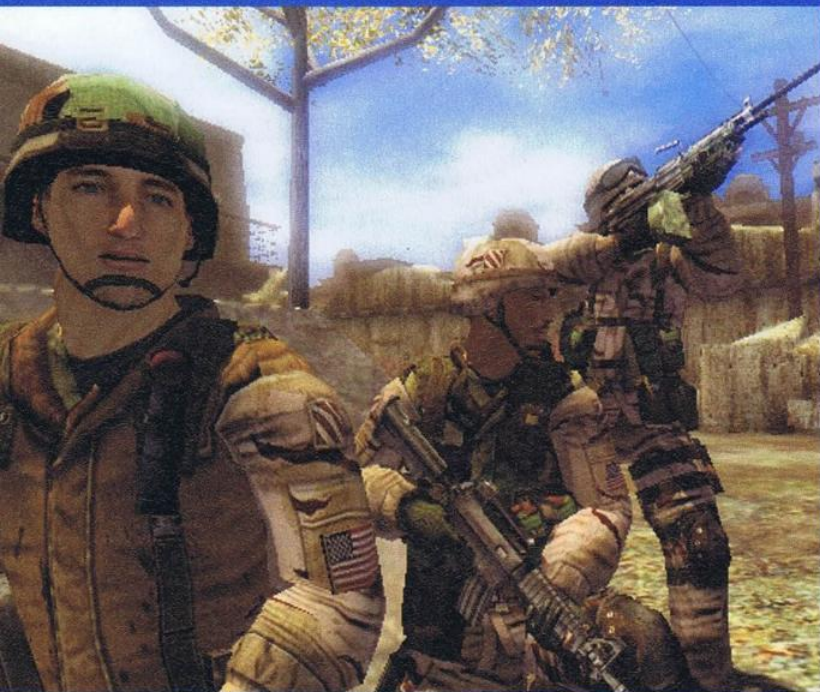
only when it's safe to do so. It's also possible to order one squad to suppress an enemy with massive volleys of gunfire. This obviously chews through ammo like there's no tomorrow, but gives your other squad the opportunity to flank and eliminate the threat.

If you happen to get lost, the black button allows you to refer to a GPS map of the area, and the white button will send through a radio call to your CO, who'll reiterate your orders for the mission. The white button also allows you to radio in SitReps (situation reports) at certain points, which act as save points where you can resume a mission when your men get killed.

And killed they will get, because the Zekistani soldiers you'll encounter (or 'Zekes' as your squaddies call them) might not love the man who rules over them with an iron fist covered with barbed wire



and acid and other nasty stuff, but they'll be damned if they'll stand idly by while foreign invaders take over their country. Zekistani civilians, on the other hand, are pretty much content to do a runner when the bullets start flying. FSW's campaign is an interesting one,



No squad is complete without a huge transforming mech

You just got served! Oh it's on!

Look out for those Roman soldiers in front of you

THE CIVIL(IAN) VERSION

Now, something tells us the US Army isn't likely to just let civilians play around with its training tools, and some might speculate that mucho classified material was excised from the military version of FSW for its commercial release, but Pandemic assures us the differences between the two versions are minimal. According to Pandemic, most of the changes were made in order to eliminate aspects of the program that would most likely frustrate players. For instance, in the military version members of the player's squad could be killed outright by stray bullets, regardless of whether or not they were adhering to military tactical doctrine. Harsher still, each mission was instantly declared a failure if a squad member was injured or killed. That's the real world for you, but as gamers we're sure you'll agree that such conditions wouldn't have made for an enjoyable play experience.

consisting of 11 different missions that represent a total of 12 hours in the lives of the men of Charlie 90, your fire team. The missions begin on the outskirts of the capital and culminate in an assault on the friendly dictator himself. Along the way, your men will escort allied convoys to their destinations, rescue injured soldiers, provide backup in assaults on key infrastructure, and pave the way for some of the heaviest of heavy weapons.

KICKING IT ON THE STREETS

Squad-based combat at street level is what FSW is all about, and it's in the heat of battle that the game's strongest attributes really come to the fore. If you think you've seen men behave like real soldiers in other games, you ain't seen nothin' yet! In FSW, your men prop their backs against abandoned cars to avoid enemy fire, then pop up and return fire at your command, their weapons propped on the hood, roof and bonnet of the vehicle. They lower their weapons when squadmates cross their line of fire, and they duck out from cover to lob grenades at entrenched adversaries. They also let

you and their squadmates know when they're reloading, and they shoot in a controlled fashion, thereby conserving precious ammunition.

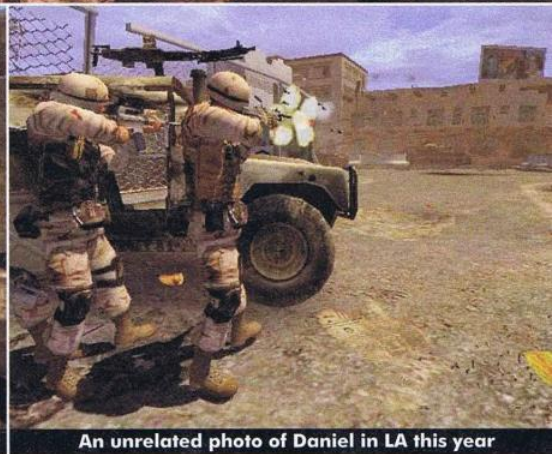
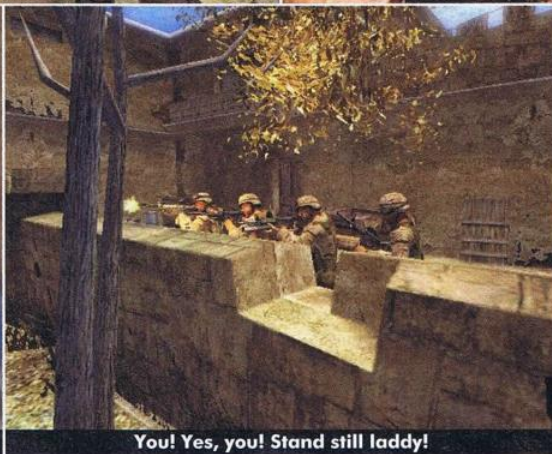
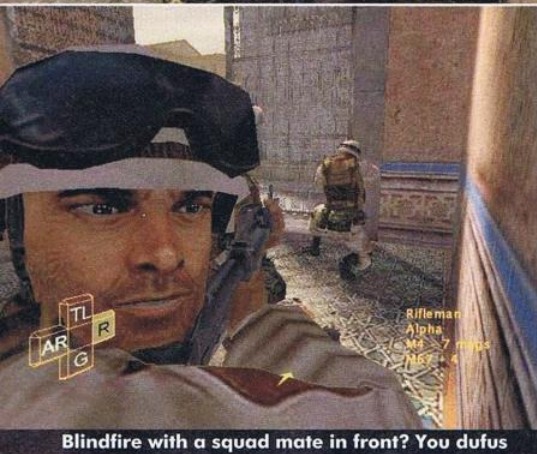
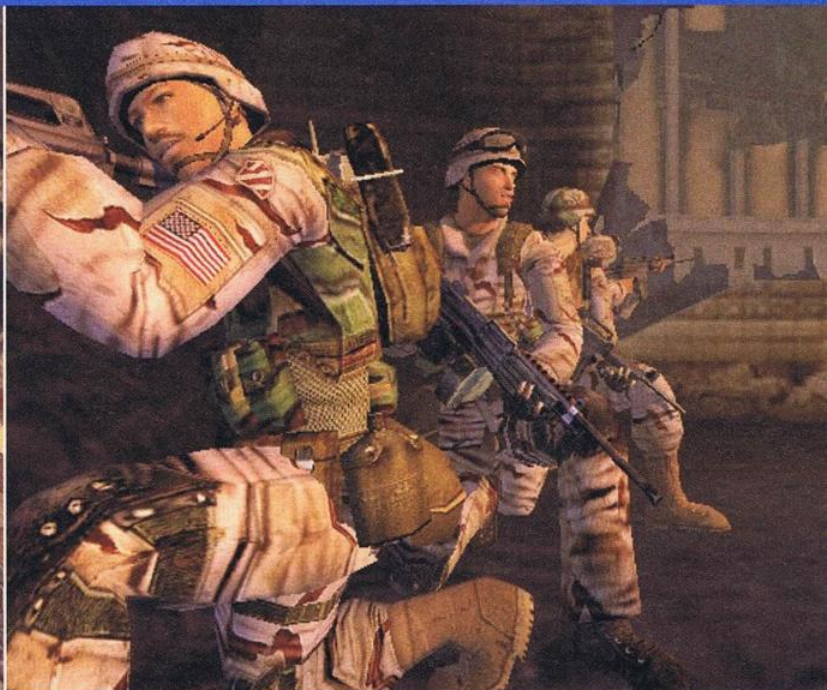
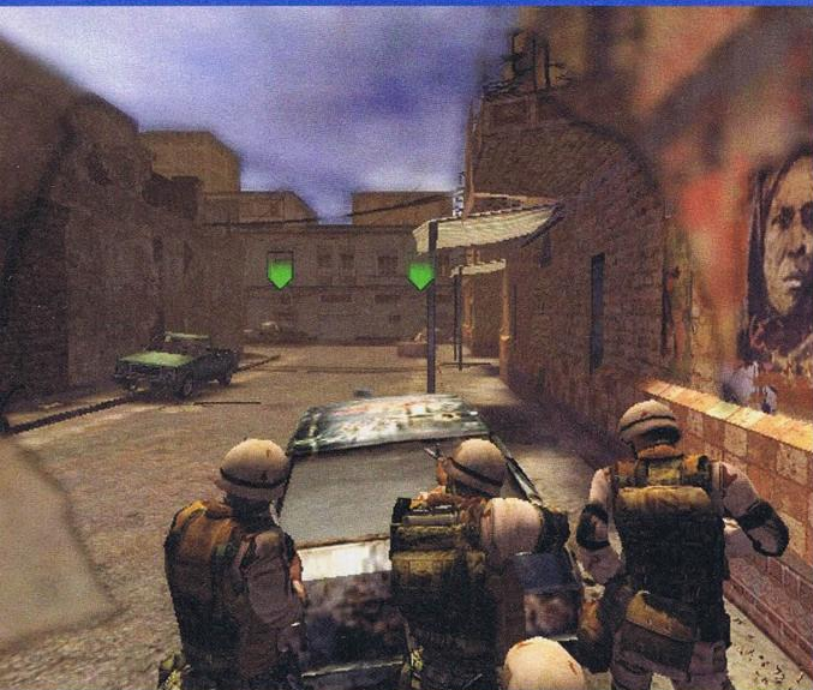
And not only do your men walk the walk, they talk the talk in a way that few movies and even fewer games have ever gotten right. Your men have distinct personalities, and thus react to certain situations in very different ways. When relaxed and assured of their safety, they all engage in witty banter and smack-talk each other incessantly. Under heavy fire, it's another matter entirely. The quietly confident members of Charlie 90 tend to grit their teeth as their cover is eaten away by bullets, while some of the more vocal squad members shout with a mixture of abject terror and bravado. The meeker squaddies even panic on occasion, imploring you, their CO, to get them out of there. And your men swear, too, even dropping in the f-word, as many of us would under the same circumstances. We're glad Pandemic didn't pull any punches in this regard as, far from seeming gratuitous or unnecessary, the profanity brings a whole new level of realism to FSW.



Visually, the game is in a league of its own. The character models are intricately detailed, right down to their individual facial features and combat accessories. The particle effects are terrific, with the modelling of smoke and dust deserving of a special mention, and the lighting system imparts an almost photorealistic sheen to the objects in the game world. As your men dash between points of concealment, the screen shakes in a manner reminiscent of warzone news footage. Interestingly enough, it's this simple and subtle effect that lends an almost disproportionate degree of authenticity to the proceedings.

WHAT, NO PARTY FAVOURS?

Most of the time we absolutely revelled in FSW's raw and at times



Blindfire with a squad mate in front? You dufus

You! Yes, you! Stand still laddy!

An unrelated photo of Daniel in LA this year



MILITARY AND STRATEGY BUFFS, YOU AND THIS GAME WERE MEANT FOR EACH OTHER



brutal action, but there were occasions where we were less than enthralled by some of Pandemic's design decisions. The limited arsenal available to your squads, whilst realistic, feels a little restrictive at times, and there were many occasions where we just wanted to break out the LAW rockets and Claymore mines, but couldn't. And a game of this type just cries out for night ops, but there are none, even in the context of instant action-type missions. Our final criticism is of the game's length. On the default difficulty setting, most players will hit the closing credits within 12 hours. As such, all but the least experienced gamers should probably tackle FSW on the higher difficulty setting, where combat becomes even more intense and there's a greater emphasis on the strategic deployment of your troops.

!!! FSW is also being developed for PC. It's due out later this year.

Progression through the game is slower then, and the game's longevity gets a boost as a result. In terms of multiplayer support, FSW allows an extra player to enter or leave the campaign at any time, making for some interesting cooperative play. There's no adversarial mode, which stands to reason really, but we're hoping Pandemic will take the opportunity to address some of the game's weaker points in the extra missions it's promised to distribute online. Military and strategy buffs, you and this game were meant for each other. And firstperson shooter fanatics will undoubtedly find a lot to love about Full Spectrum Warrior too. It's a feast for the senses, it'll give the old grey matter a bit of a workout, and it should have PS2 and GCN owners glowing green with envy right... about... now. <<

AVAILABLE ON:
PS2 / XBOX / GCN / PC

DETAILS
CATEGORY: Tactical Strategy /
PLAYERS: 1-2 / DEVELOPER:
Pandemic Studios / PUBLISHER: THQ /
PRICE: \$99.95 / RATING: MA15+ /
AVAILABLE: Late June /

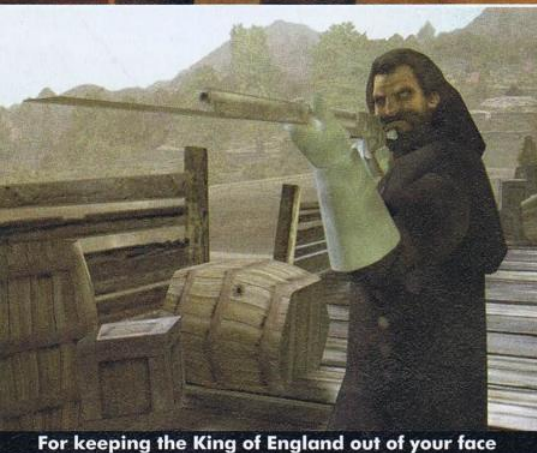
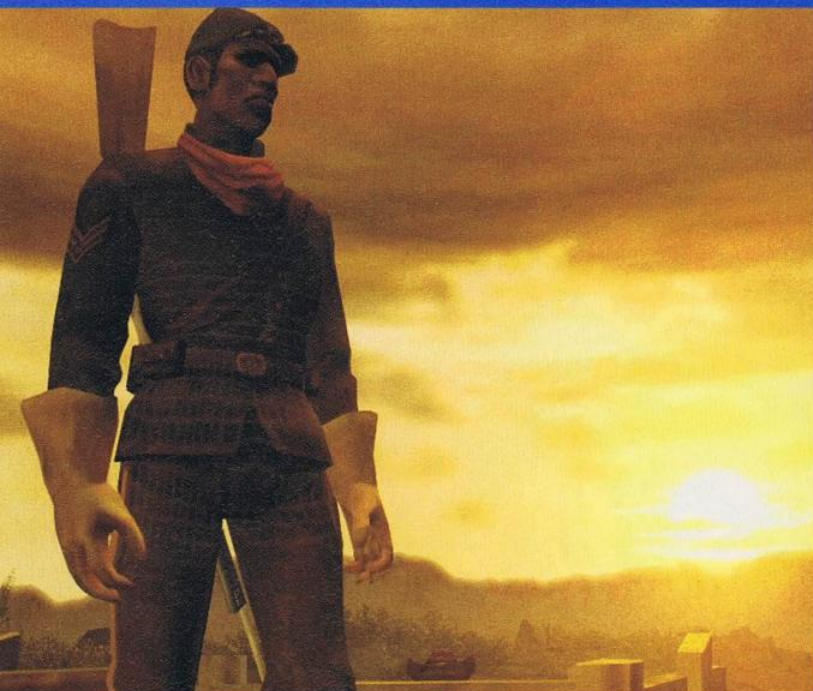
HYPHER VERDICT
PLUS: Great interface, awesome physics, loads of authenticity

MINUS: Shorter than expected, and a bit too straight-laced

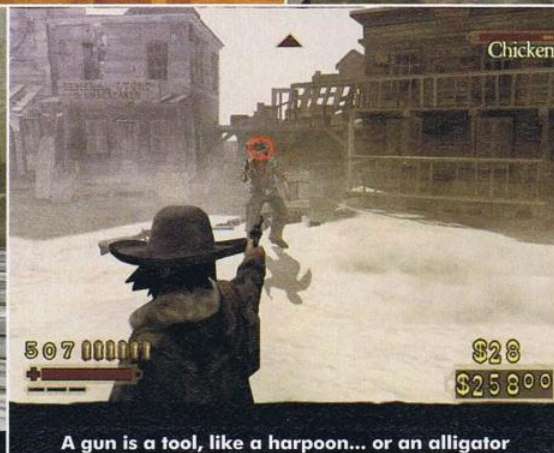
VISUALS SOUND GAMEPLAY
91 95 86

OVERALL
87

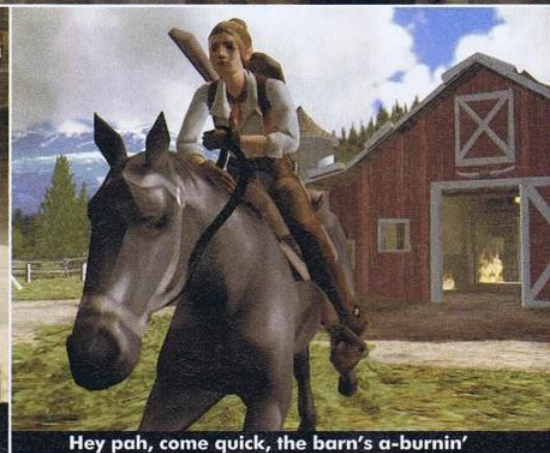
The most realistic representation of urban warfare yet. We love it!



For keeping the King of England out of your face



A gun is a tool, like a harpoon... or an alligator



Hey pah, come quick, the barn's a-burnin'

RED DEAD REVOLVER

DANIEL WILKS thinks midget clowns should sue Rockstar

Rockstar have developed a reputation for being a bit on the borderline when it comes to morality. Most recently the developer has been under fire from the Haitian government for the mission in GTA: Vice City subtly named, "Kill All Haitians". If this trend of social groups, minorities or nationalities being offended by Rockstar game content is going to be continued then Red Dead Revolver firmly points a finger at the next group — midget circus performers, a staple of any Wild-West adventure as you well know. In Rockstar's latest opus of moral ambiguity, players take the role of Red, a lone bounty hunter driven by a burning need for revenge on the man who killed his parents. Throughout the tale of two fisted vengeance players make their way through a number of archetypal Wild-West situations including the obligatory train robbery, bar room

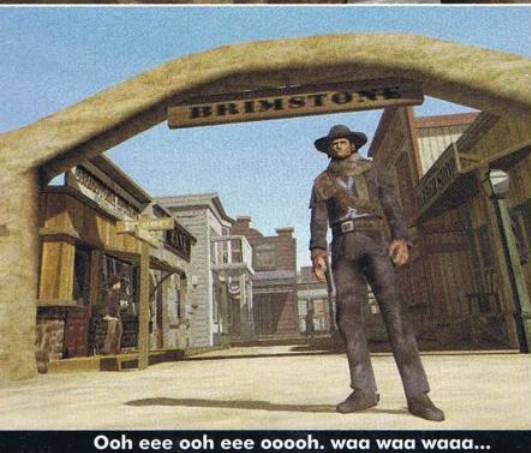
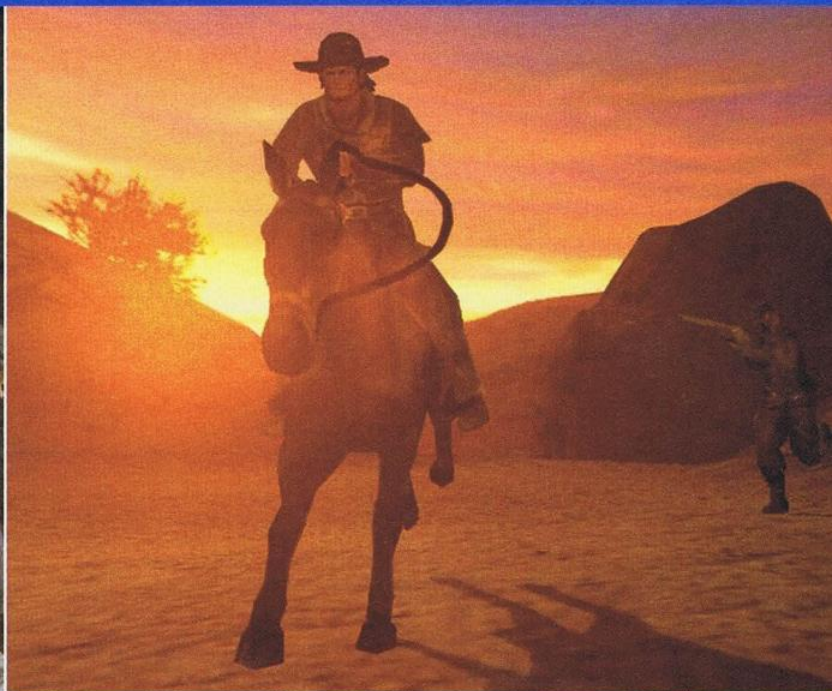
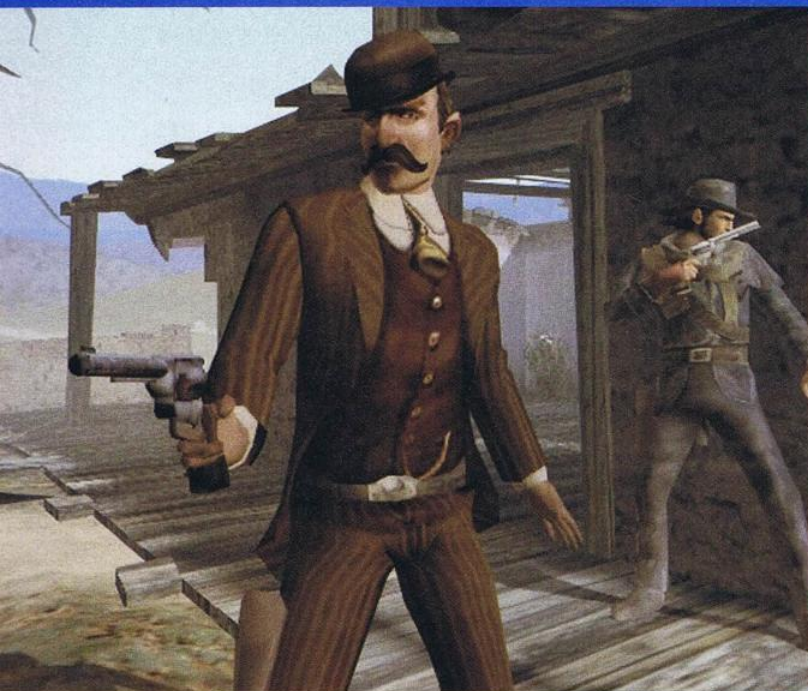
brawl, the aforementioned battle against an evil circus and its unending supply of midget clowns and the now iconic battle against a man carrying a gatling gun around in a coffin (thank you Django the Bastard, wherever you are). To keep things interesting the game is also dotted with special levels dedicated to other characters, each with their own special skills to bring to bear.

IT'S A HELL OF A THING KILLING A MAN.

The Wild West has become the new WWII as far as game developers seem to be concerned and the setting brings with it all sorts of fun little quirks. As can be expected, all of the weapons are quite retro in feel. You'll be running around with some severely old school weapons such as revolvers, double barrel shotguns, single shot rifles and even dynamite — you'll be reloading often but this is not

necessarily a bad thing. The action is simultaneously sped up and slowed down due to the nature of the weapons, with the player and AI alike emptying their six-shooters in rapid time to try and beat the other to the proverbial punch and then frantically running around trying to avoid incoming fire when reloading. Unlike most shooters, players are unable to simply pick up the weapons of fallen foes to extend their arsenal and instead have to purchase them from the gun shop between missions. Due to this mechanic ammunition is scarce so you need to keep an eye on the number of rounds you have remaining. Each of the major characters also has access to a special attack unique to them. In the case of Red he can enter what is called "Dead-Eye" mode, a quasi bullet-time style effect that allows the player to lock on six individual shots in slow motion before firing them off in real time.

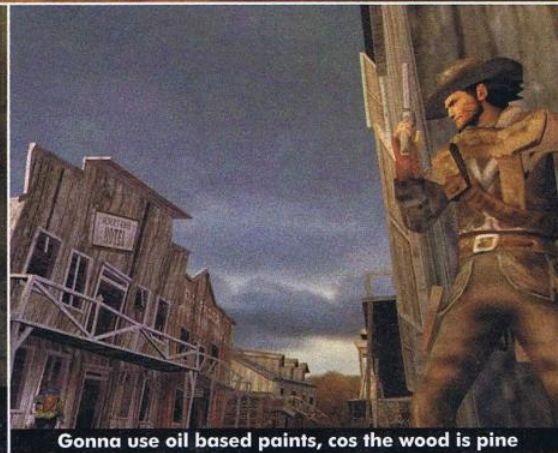
Actual gameplay is based around a series of themed missions, all revolving around Red's quest for vengeance against the ornery dog that killed his pa. To keep things from getting stale the mechanics of many of the missions vary a great deal — you may find yourself in straight run and gun action in one mission only to have to use cover and snipe with a rifle in the next, then run across the roof of a train dodging enemies and obstacles. After each set of linked missions there is the obligatory boss battle which range from great fun to incredibly frustrating. Each boss has their own signature weapon and taunt, but conform to similar patterns of attack so after a while you shouldn't have too much trouble. One interesting gameplay mechanic is dueling. In many (read most) westerns, being quick on the draw can mean the difference between life and death



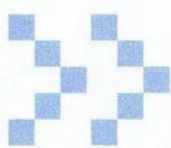
Ooh eee ooh eee ooooh. waa waa waaa...



The jokes on you buddy, there's no bullets in that thing



Gonna use oil based paints, cos the wood is pine



THROUGHOUT THE COURSE OF THE GAME THE PLAYER WILL HAVE TO TAKE PART IN A NUMBER OF QUICK DRAW DUELS.

MULTIPLAYER

RDR has three multiplayer modes, a points based and time-based deathmatch and a quick-draw game. Although the deathmatch modes are fairly standard run and gun there is one small thing that sets them apart. Every time a player scores a kill the fallen foe will turn into a card. Individual cards are worth small powerups or extra weapons but the cards continue to accumulate until a full poker hand is displayed. Depending on the hand the player grabbing the last card will gain a bigger powerup. The addition of poker keeps things interesting for a while but ultimately the multiplayer is fairly routine. The quick-draw mechanics especially, show off the flaws, with players simply mashing the keypad and doing little more to hopefully score a kill. They definitely could have made more of this mode.

and Red Dead Revolver is no exception. In such cases, pulling back on the right thumb-stick grabs the gun and pushing forward draws it. After the gun is drawn the player has a short time to lock on up to six shots in slow motion before the game cuts to real time and bullets begin to fly. Whilst this sounds fun, in practice the mechanic is essentially flawed as the game doesn't always register a lock and often the game will drop into real time and blaze away before the player has a chance to do anything. Whilst this latter problem may well illustrate the true nature of a quick draw contest it doesn't necessarily make for enthralling gameplay.

ALL MEXICANS LOOK THE SAME (APPARENTLY)

For a company renowned for their

wicked and oft-times morbid sense of humour, Red Dead Revolver is a surprisingly dry affair. Sure there is the occasional flash of wit but by and large the storytelling and characters are broad and rather dull caricatures of common western archetypes — the hard-bitten bounty hunter, the foppish gun slinger, the tough as nails yet still feminine widow and the like. Graphics and sound are similarly middle of the road. Many of the character models are quite nice looking and the terrain looks brilliant but after you've shot the same cowboy a few dozen times the novelty wears off. The real saving grace are the cutscenes — they are overlaid with a brilliant filter that gives everything the slightly sepia toned look of archival footage, complete with artefacting and negative scratches. <<

!!! Speaking of Rockstar, check out the first gangsta lean pics of San Andreas on page 13!

AVAILABLE ON:
PS2 / XBOX / GCN / PC

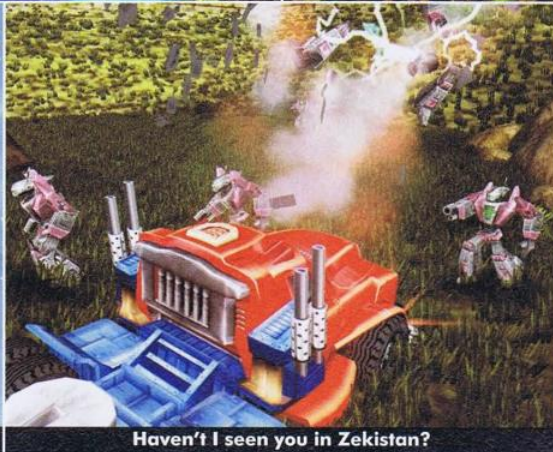
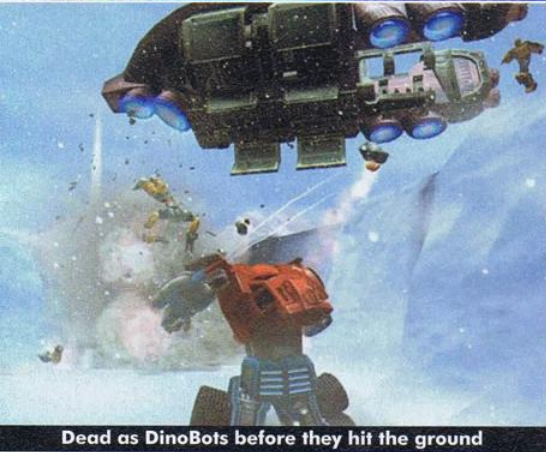
DETAILS
CATEGORY: Action / PLAYERS: 1-4 /
DEVELOPER: Rockstar /
PUBLISHER: Take 2 /
PRICE: \$99.95 / RATING: M15+ /
AVAILABLE: Now /

HYPER VERDICT
PLUS: Furious gunplay, cutscene filter, tumbleweed.
MINUS: Lifeless characters, dull story.

VISUALS SOUND GAMEPLAY
81 80 86

OVERALL
84

The best western game available right now but hardly perfect.



Dead as DinoBots before they hit the ground

Haven't I seen you in Zekistan?

Punch Giant Robo!

TRANSFORMERS

DANIEL WILKS transforms into a panel van (with mattress in the back)

W We all know the theme song from childhood – “Transformers; robots in disguise – the Autobots wage their battle to destroy the evil forces of the Decepticons. Transformers; sexy robot thighs...” or something like that anyway. It’s doubtful that another toy (aside from maybe GI Joe, although that toy line was only moderately successful in this country) has such a profound and lasting effect on the psyches of Australian children.

WHAT ABOUT MY LITTLE PONIES?

The story of Good robots from a distant planet with the ability to transform into various Earth vehicles burnt its way into the memory of countless youngsters across the wide brown land, children who have now grown to an age at which they can afford to shell out around \$100

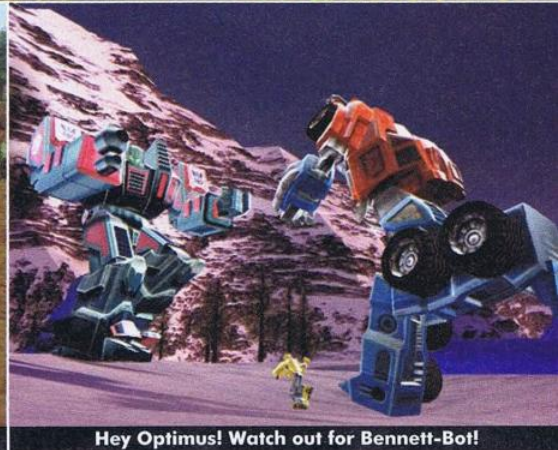
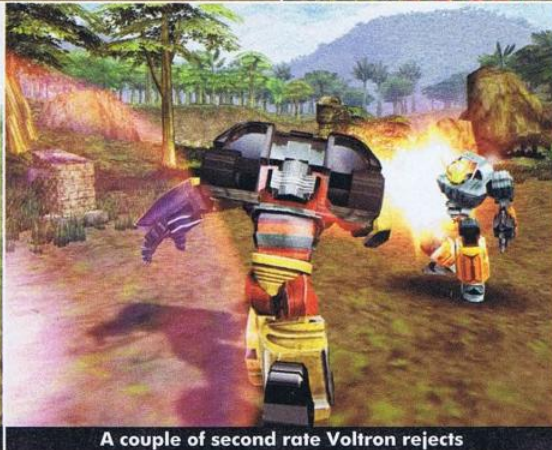
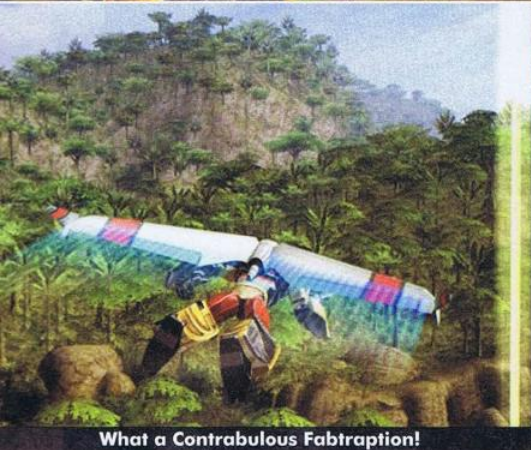
commemorating the mid 80s (and to a lesser extent early 90s) phenomenon. More than just a cunning stab at cashing in on a popular fad that is beginning to become mainstream again with the release of a new comic, cartoon and line of action figures, Transformers, developed by Australia’s own Melbourne House is one of the most accessible and effortlessly enjoyable games to come along in quite a while.

Players can choose to play one of three Autobots at any given time. There’s the leader, Optimus Prime, who’s a Mack Truck capable of the most damaging attacks of the three at the cost of speed, Red Alert, a strong defense character that can turn into an emergency rescue SUV, and Hot Shot, a hotrod capable of moving really fast but possessing the weakest attack and defense ratings. It transpires that around one million years before the game, a lost race of

Transformers crash landed on Earth and went into hiding. These ancient Transformers, the Minicons, are incapable of transforming by themselves (or anything else it seems, useless little bastards should get a job) but can combine with one of their larger brethren to increase their powers, either giving them new attacks and weapons, armour or special abilities. All Transformers can link with up to four Minicons at any given time.

Naturally Megatron and his nasty Decepticons want the Minicons for their own nefarious purposes so the heroes must step in to save the day. You do this by running around a number of huge levels destroying wave upon wave of Decepticlones, the faceless (and next to mindless) robotic foot soldiers of Megatron, finding Minicons and using their powers to access different parts of the map to get even





What a Contrabulous Fabtraption!

A couple of second rate Voltron rejects

Hey Optimus! Watch out for Bennett-Bot!



MEGATRON AND HIS NASTY DECEPTICONS WANT THE MINICONS FOR THEIR OWN NEFARIOUS PURPOSES

more Minicons. Every map contains one or more boss battles against one of the real Decepticons. No matter which difficulty level you play the game on we can guarantee that they'll give you a good run for their money. Unfortunately the different maps and objectives are strung together in a very haphazard way with no real plot apart from the central conceit of the Minicons. Whilst the action remains quite thrilling throughout and collecting Minicons is incredibly addictive (wait till you get the flight pack and tractor beam gun), the lack of any real plot hook can make the game feel a little hollow at times.

THEY WERE HELLA COOL RIGHT?

Be that as it may, Transformers contains some of the biggest and best designed levels we've ever seen on the PS2. They really seem to go on forever and are packed full of enemies, terrain features and flora. Whilst some

areas may be inaccessible at the beginning of the game the real joy of the level design comes from backtracking to maps you've previously explored and accessing these new places with help from your newly acquired Minicon powers such as gliding or double jump. Aside from Minicons, each of the maps is also dotted with Infocons, small information dumps that unlock extra features such as toy profiles, videos, music files and the like. The extra content is varied enough and such nostalgic fun that you'll want to find them all.

Melbourne House hasn't skimped on the character models either. All of the Autobot characters look fantastic with Optimus Prime being the real standout. It's a little disappointing that there are only three characters to choose from (and two of them are

!!! The transform sound in itself is one of the most compelling aspects of the game. Ki-ke-ka-ku!

second string characters in the first place) but the fact that the three characters can transform goes some of the way to making up for this. The

scale of the characters is also breathtaking — you can literally feel the size and power of the giant robots in every step they take. Likewise the Decepticon boss characters look fantastic with Tidal Wave, a massive aircraft carrier being a true standout. Unfortunately less effort has gone into the sound design of Transformers. Aside from the occasional coms message from HQ and cutscenes the characters are largely silent and lacking of any of the witty banter often heard in both the old and new cartoons. Still, the incidental music is a fun mix of guitar fuelled rock and ambient electronica and the weapon noises and explosions are suitable chunky and satisfying. <<

AVAILABLE ON:
PS2 / XBOX / GCN / PC

DETAILS
CATEGORY: Shooter / PLAYERS: 1 / DEVELOPER: Melbourne House / PUBLISHER: Atari / PRICE: \$99.95 / RATING: G / AVAILABLE: Now /

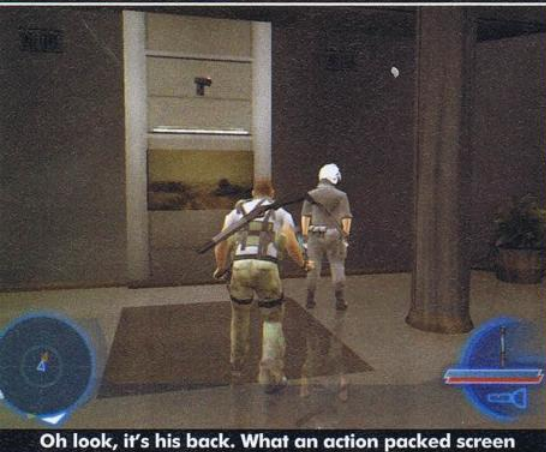
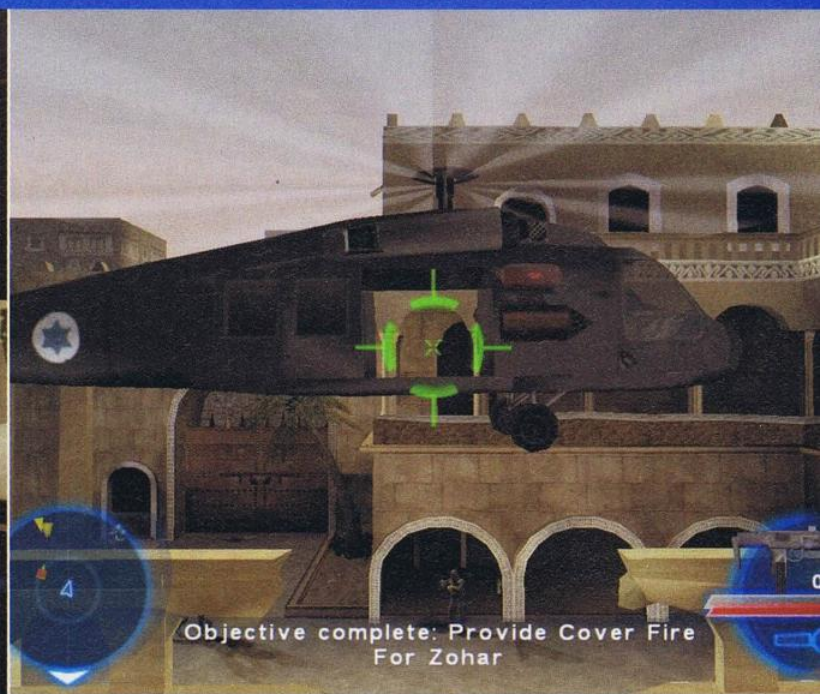
HYPER VERDICT
PLUS: Transformers, huge levels, replayability.

MINUS: No plot, not enough voice acting.

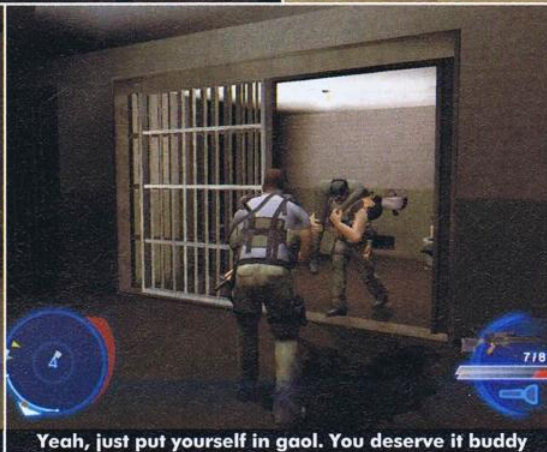
VISUALS SOUND GAMEPLAY
91 74 86

OVERALL
88

Best game based on a toy ever.



Oh look, it's his back. What an action packed screen



Yeah, just put yourself in gaol. You deserve it buddy



A shot where we see someone from the front! Almost

SYPHON FILTER: OMEGA STRAIN

ANDREW BULMER just discovered a new virus...

A smooth continuation of the series, Omega Strain puts you in the driving seat of a rookie agent under the direction of Gabe Logan, the protagonist of previous titles. Starting as a rookie agent you create your own character, customising a variety of options and work your way through the ranks unlocking weapons as you go. Been there done that? You said it.

Omega Strain is full of political intrigue, but at the heart of it after three games they still haven't managed to destroy the Syphon Filter virus (If I was an American taxpayer I think I'd be pretty pissed right about now). Omega Strain does, however, do a good job of creating a realistic political geography through news reports, intelligence files and background political information that you can view or totally ignore at your discretion before starting each mission.

IT BEGINS...

So we have this game, right. It has a really detailed story and even goes to the length of allowing you to customise your player, yet when you get to those meaty bits, you know this thing called gameplay... well, anyone ever see Cold Mountain? Oscar buzz my arse.

If there is a key shortcoming in Omega Strain it comes with the controls. The left stick controls the player and the right stick the camera. The square button is fire and the D-pad will change weapons and use items. And they suck why? Well for starters the camera won't rotate 360 degrees and you can't operate the camera and fire at the same time. You can only cycle weapons one way, which leaves you in limbo when you run out of ammo during combat because you can't run and change weapons at the same time!

You can use a shoulder button to bring up the crosshairs but you can't move while they're up, so it's easier to run straight at enemies gun blazing, a tactic which tires easily. Speaking of manual aim I once tried it with a sniper rifle equipped with infra-red and it turns out that heat is visible through one meter pillars of concrete, so you can take pot shots at a seemingly vulnerable enemy only to discover that you are shooting at a pillar, oh joy.

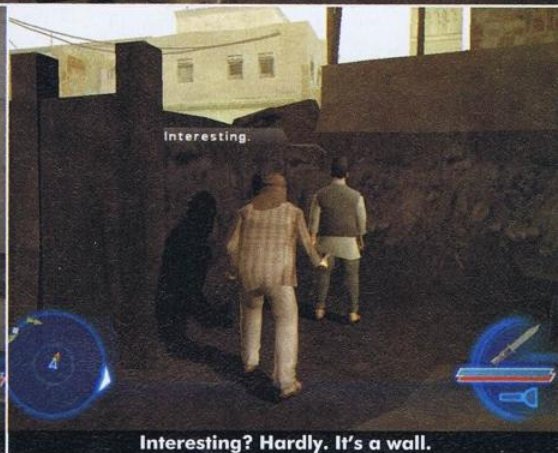
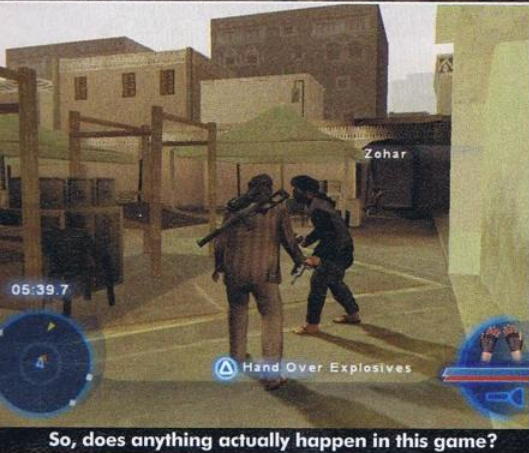
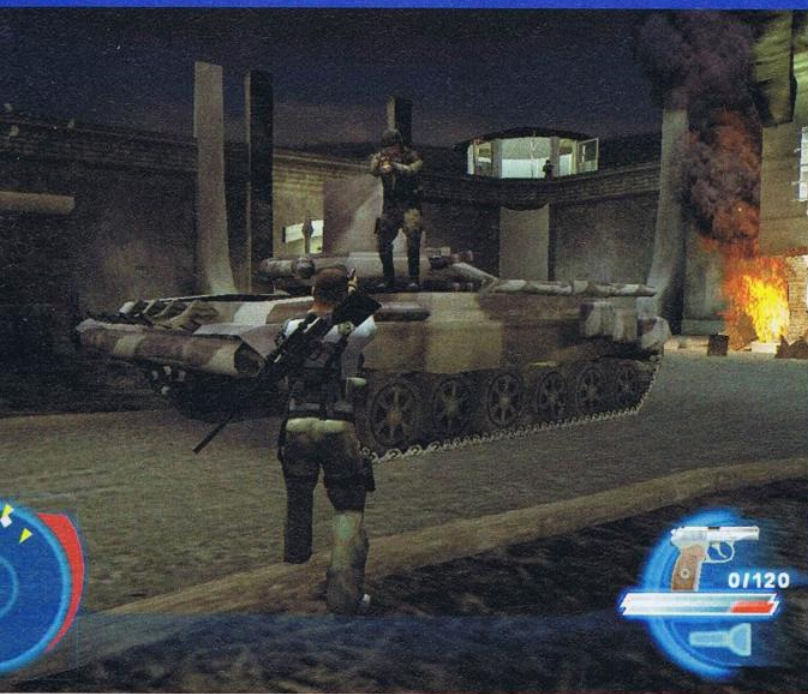
While the controls exemplify the game's shortcoming the graphics are no packet of Tim Tams either. At first the environments are spectacularly grey and dull but they expand as you progress, yet never gain any real detail or texture. There is also a noticeable lack of visual effects including real time lighting and muzzle flashes. Even the character animations are poor, not just with dead bodies and their rag doll effects

(ever see anyone fall off a building standing up?), but the protagonist has very awkward animations and as for strafing... it looks and feels incredibly goofy. The centre of gravity just doesn't work.

AN OBJECTIVE DRAMA

On top of these nagging control shortcomings enemies don't recoil when shot, they spawn continuously and are constantly low on ammo. Omega Strain also takes an unusual approach in that if you die you





So, does anything actually happen in this game?

Is this an American "interrogation" room?

Interesting? Hardly. It's a wall.



ENEMIES **DON'T RECOIL** WHEN SHOT, THEY **SPAWN CONTINUOUSLY** AND ARE CONSTANTLY **LOW ON AMMO**

ONLINE SAVIOUR?

The online aspect of Omega Strain may just be the game's saviour, the saving grace, the coup-de-grace, the Cher to the single player's Sonny. Well it could be that, but then again it could just bring the game up to average. The online component allows you to play cooperatively with up to four players and certain areas can only be accessed with more than one player. While this opens the game up for those who play online it leaves the single player mode as a skeleton of the entire package, being devoid of all but the least enjoyable aspects, taking away hidden areas and shortcuts. But single players can rest assured that yes, the controls are just as much of a struggle in multiplayer too.

respawn at your last checkpoint with the same equipment you died with, and if you are on a countdown the clock will not restart. While this adds an appreciated aspect of realism it constantly runs you low on ammo and as opposed to collecting more off dead bodies, you must swap weapons for one with more ammo in it, yet when twenty dead bodies have less than ten rounds each this proves a drama.

Omega Strain gives you objectives on the fly, but not all of them are core objectives. Secondary objectives are usually relegated to time-based tasks such as having to lock down a mall so a SWAT team can't attack the terrorists inside and be slaughtered wholesale, boy did I cry when I missed that one. Another example has you analysing a tissue

!!! They should have called this game "Syphon Filter: Oh, Mega Strain". Boom-tish.

sample that you collected via autopsy. If goons come along and destroy the power generator then you can't complete the objective thus ruining the very tissue sample you went to the painstaking effort of playing the game to collect.

With an in-depth story and popular legacy backing this game up you would expect a lot more than has been delivered. Omega Strain is a step forward in terms of online play but the single player experience is dull, frustrating and rather boring. While the controls lay at the crux of why this game is difficult to enjoy, the animations themselves are poor and the environments lack any degree of interactivity beyond what is required to complete the game. <<<

AVAILABLE ON:

PS2 / XBOX / GCN / PC

DETAILS

CATEGORY: 3rd Person action / **PLAYERS:** 1-4 / **DEVELOPER:** Sony Bend / **PUBLISHER:** SCE / **PRICE:** \$99.95 / **RATING:** M / **AVAILABLE:** June /

HYPER VERDICT

PLUS: *does mannerism*

MINUS: The control style is flawed, the animations bite.

VISUALS SOUND GAMEPLAY

60 65 62

OVERALL

58

Rambo 2 was a better sequel. Ouch.



Swept off his feet by Jackman's "charms"



There's an old saying down on the bayou... bleeah!



Just be thankful it's not Frinkenstein

VAN HELSING

DANIEL STAINES leaves his brain at the door...

W The film version of Van Helsing has certainly been copping a lot of flack for a movie that is unashamedly about famous B-Grade horror monsters. From what I can gather, film critics and movie buffs are flamboyantly fluttering their hands and swooning at the fact that Stephen Sommer's latest feature doesn't sport any kind of in-depth narrative or character development at all. 'Oh no,' they cry, 'this movie's all about special effects and action sequences! Where's the profound dialogue? Where are the poignant moments to ponder while I'm at home sipping my tea and eating my crumpets?'

FRUITY GOOD TIMES

The answer to both of those questions should be obvious — 'shut up, you big fruit'. As a film, Van Helsing was never supposed to be big on poignancy and this is very much applicable to the game as well. This, ladies and gentlemen, is a straight shooting action-fest that is completely

unapologetic in its button-mashing cheesiness. There aren't any lengthy cut-scenes exploring the ethical implications of using Frankensteinian science to toy with the foundations of life. There isn't any in-depth background fiction or mythology to flesh out the gameworld. There's just lots of monster killing.

This is simple and unsophisticated gaming. You're Van Helsing, right? Your job is to go around killing the world's worst monstrosities in the most entertaining, visually spectacular way possible — and developer Saffire has made damn sure that this goal is achievable without any unnecessary complications muddling things up. So, while this may be the thirtieth time you've used a grappling hook to pull a werewolf in close enough to kill with your shotgun, it's still fun because... well... you're using a goddamn grappling hook to drag a

werewolf in close enough to kill with your freaking shotgun. It is visceral videogame goodness distilled to perfection.

However, the game does suffer from a few foibles. For one thing, the mini-games are really quite awful. Jumping's generally a fidgety nightmare, so they've decided to include a mini-game based on platform jumping. Bravo. Also, with a game time of just above five hours, the whole experience may be over a little too quickly for some. I'm

inclined to think brevity's a good thing in an action game, but there are some gamers who like everything to be a forty-hour epic and Van Helsing definitely isn't that.

But what is Van Helsing, then? It's good. It isn't a classic by any stretch of the imagination, but it is a perfect companion for the film and an enormously fun way to spend a few action packed hours. <<

!!! Developer Saffire have been around for a while, but Van Helsing is far and away their best title so far. Good one!

AVAILABLE ON:
PS2 / XBOX / GCN / PC

DETAILS
CATEGORY: Action / PLAYERS: 1 /
DEVELOPER: Saffire /
PUBLISHER: Vivendi Universal Games /
PRICE: \$99.95 / RATING: M15+ /
AVAILABLE: Now /

HYPHER VERDICT
PLUS: Simple action gaming done right.
MINUS: Can be slightly repetitive.

VISUALS SOUND GAMEPLAY
80 85 88

OVERALL
84

An excellent action romp that never takes itself too seriously.

YUKIKAZE

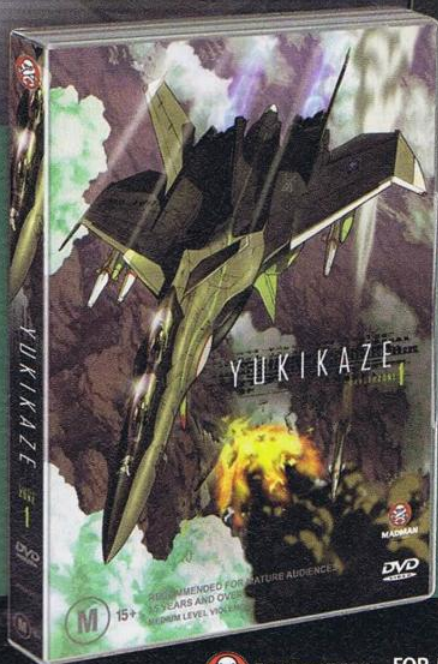


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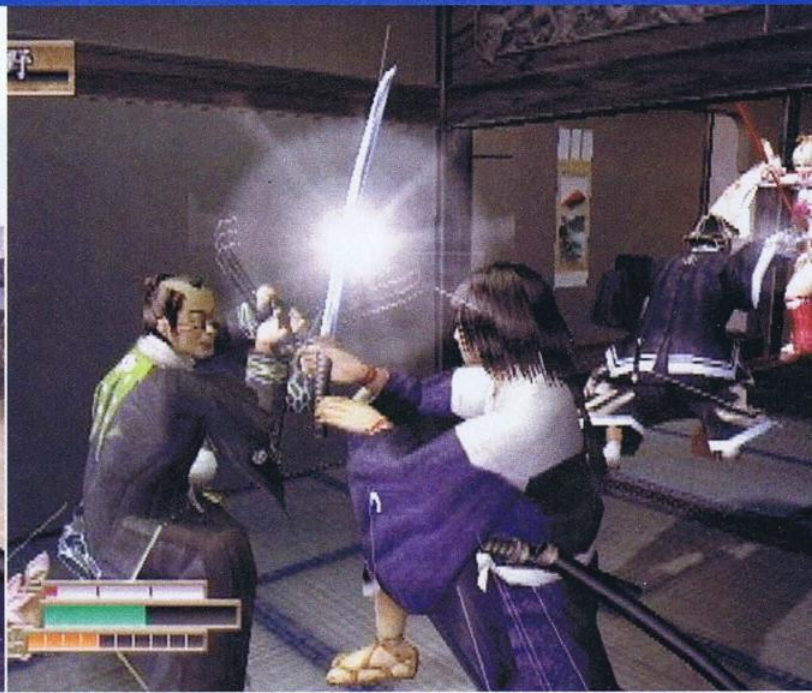
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That's our Amos!



You just know he's about to do something bad ass



Most annoying mute child in a game ever

WAY OF THE SAMURAI 2

DANIEL WILKS knows a Ronin named Amos...

W The original Way of the Samurai allowed players to live three days in the life of a Ronin in the mountainside town of Rokkotsu Pass. Whilst the idea of day to day life as a wandering swordsman doing odd jobs around the town had a definite appeal, the somewhat iffy engine, short game life-span and abrupt and irreversible game termination at character death made it less than accessible to say the least.

10 DAYS IN THE LIFE

Although the sequel is still far from being a must have, Way of the Samurai 2 shows a great deal more polish than its predecessor as well as a much greater scope for adventure. For a start the setting has been changed to a larger town and the game spans ten days instead of three. Player actions have a lasting effect on the world, not simply through completing jobs but how you go about completing them and how you interact with the NPC AI in

between missions - become engaged in too many fights and the public may shun you, steal from a shopkeeper and the law may start keeping an eye on you and other shops may increase their prices. The combat system has also undergone a significant revamping with the addition of three new sword styles (duel blade, quick slash and the Ninja-like "kodachi") and an emphasis put on timing, dodging, parrying and combos. The combo system is especially interesting as enemy AI will learn your moves if you use them too often making attacking all the more difficult. By learning different sword skills, players can reportedly access up to 400 or so fighting moves.

Unfortunately as good as the above may sound there is a down point to the game - the enemy AI is dotty to say the least and can wildly vacillate between sheer

incompetence and a whirling dervish of nasty pointy ouchies the next. Missions are similarly haphazard - in one day, Amos, the trusty Hyper Samurai was asked to retrieve the same kidnapped baby three times and although he succeeded every time he was only paid once (presumably Amos now has one or two babies following him around allowing him to recreate some

memorable scenes from the Baby Cart series). The shop system is no end of trouble as choosing an item automatically puts it in your inventory and

then asks you if you want to pay for it - if you can't afford it you're automatically a thief and there is no option to give the item back. Finally the voice acting is truly atrocious - think the 60's TV show Samurai, make the voices more annoying and then have every second character sound the same and you'll have some idea of the aural pain. <<

!!! Spike also developed Riding Spirits II... but best to stay away from that one.

AVAILABLE ON:

PS2 / XBOX / GCN / PC

DETAILS

CATEGORY: Action/Adventure /
PLAYERS: 1 / DEVELOPER: Spike /
PUBLISHER: Capcom / PRICE: \$99.95 /
RATING: MA15+ / AVAILABLE: Now /

HYPER VERDICT

PLUS: Interesting concept, good combat, lasting character impact.

MINUS: Iffy AI, buggy missions, horrible voice acting.

VISUALS SOUND GAMEPLAY

81 67 78

OVERALL

74

If the trend of improvement keeps up, Way of the Samurai 3 will be pretty damn good!



Mario goes the tonk... no, that's not right

Is that Yoshimitsu and Taki going at it?

Now that must be Raiden!

ONIMUSHA: BLADE WARRIORS

DANIEL WILKS loves Smash Bros

Everyone loves Super Smash Bros (aside from dirty communists that is). After playing *Onimusha: Blade Warriors* it becomes fairly obvious that Capcom love Nintendo's frantic character based bash 'em up as well, as their latest game echoes many of the same concepts — only without the lovable silliness. Although the structure of the two games are similar — a largely redundant but sometimes engaging single player mode used to unlock special items and characters for the multiplayer game, and a multiplayer game consisting of a number of players trying to bash each other to death through some deceptively deep fighting mechanics — the real difference lies within the characters. Although samurai and ninja are cool and zombie ninja and mechanical demon samurai are even cooler, and the *Onimusha* mechanic of sucking up souls has a certain charm, they are still not as memorable and fun

as Nintendo's stable of characters, leaving the finished game feeling like more of a filler to kill time before *Onimusha 3*, than a full and memorable action fest.

MARIOMUSHA

After choosing a character for the single player mode, players fight their way through a number of scenarios in which they must complete a certain objective either within a time limit or before they die — basically you have to kill a set number of enemies or absorb a set number of "victory souls". Attaining objectives within a set time limit can unlock new weapons and skills and victory souls can be used to level up the character stats and buy items to upgrade the character. Although this approach is dull the story for the single player is dull to say the least and the repetition and lack of defining character make slogging through it more of a chore than anything compelling or

particularly fun. Luckily the combat system is deceptively deep allowing for a number of moves, disarms and simple combos as well as magic attacks, special dodges and critical attacks. Like *Smash Bros*, the various levels take the form of multi-tiered environments littered with objects that can be used to clobber the enemy. A multiplayer game having a lackluster single player portion is forgivable when the multiplayer is truly outstanding — but unfortunately the multiplayer in *Blade Warriors* is about as average as the single player campaign.

Players choose their characters and bash it out in a number of multi-level environments, collecting souls to heal or win and using objects found in chests to bash other players. Rinse and repeat and you have the entire multiplayer game. Unless you're an *Onimusha* die-hard, skip it and wait for *Onimusha 3*. <<

Our *Onimusha 3* review will be published next issue. Best. FMV. Ever.

AVAILABLE ON:

PS2 / XBOX / GCN / PC

DETAILS

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

HYPER VERDICT

PLUS: Zombie Ninja, Mechanical Demon Samurai.

MINUS: Lacks charm, no character, endlessly repetitive.

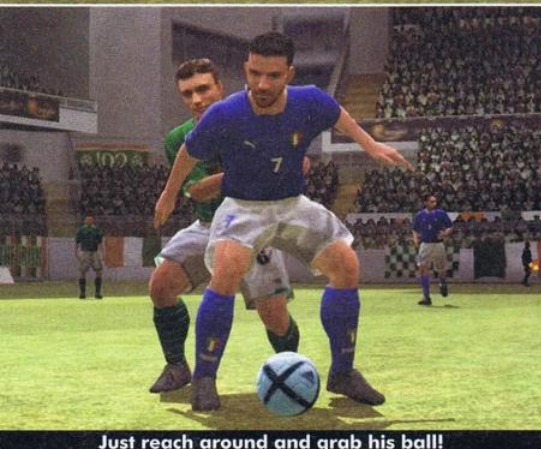
VISUALS SOUND GAMEPLAY

76 75 60

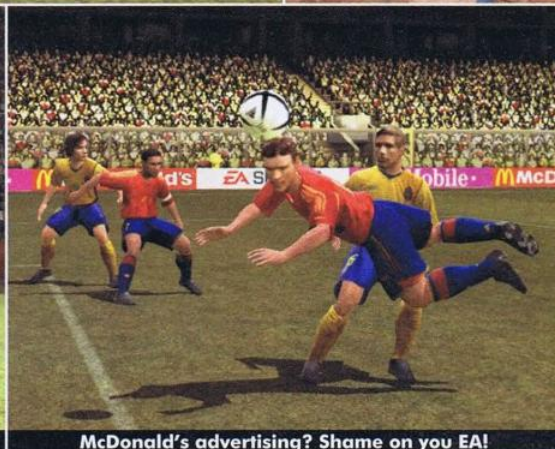
OVERALL

60

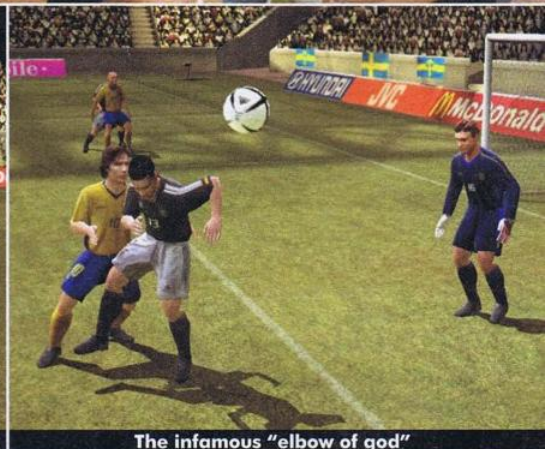
Samurai are cool. Ninja are cool. *Blade Warriors* is only lukewarm.



Just reach around and grab his ball!



McDonald's advertising? Shame on you EA!



The infamous "elbow of god"

UEFA EURO 2004

ELIOT FISH gives James Beattie the England call-up he deserves...

It's no great secret that EA Sports lost the plot with last year's FIFA. There were plenty of problems with the game - most notably the sluggish pace and the clunky off-the-ball system. Who knows what will happen to the next instalment of FIFA, but if UEFA Euro 2004 is any indication, then EA Sports are back on the right track.

ENOUGH TO WARRANT A PURCHASE?

The cynics amongst us would assume that this is nothing but a re-packaged FIFA '04 with some different in-game presentation and the Euro tournament structure. However, there are some subtle differences in Euro that for our money make it a better game than last year's FIFA. However, if you already own FIFA '04, you might not find there's enough different here to warrant another purchase.

So how does it feel better? The speed of the game has definitely taken a small step back up, and there is now

some real flow to the football. At a glance, it has the pace and dynamics of a televised match. EA always nail the presentation, but it's good to see that the "feel" of the game hasn't been lost on them this time.

The off-the-ball system is still there if you want to utilise it, but thankfully it seems to have taken a bit of a back seat. Your AI teammates appear to make better runs and generally get themselves in position for key passes which didn't seem all that apparent in FIFA '04. This results in a faster

moving and more satisfying passing game - call it realistic if you want - that allows a single player to make plays and pull off one-two's or chipped throughballs without ever having to go beyond the standard controls. Interestingly, EA Sports have included a few more moves that have been lifted straight from Pro Evo - you can perform a fake shot, as well as hold L1 and press triangle for the

mentioned chipped throughball. FIFA may be becoming more Pro Evo-esque, but if it makes for a better game, then let it be so.

UEFA Euro 2004's only real problems lie in set-pieces and with the in-game menus and options. Attacking or Defending corners still feels somewhat arbitrary (you still can't short-pass from a corner!) and free-kicks feel clunky. The in-game menus are also rather perplexing. For instance, you can see a player's morale rating before a match, but when making

substitutions during the game you can't see the morale of your players on the bench - forcing you to rely on memory. Formations and tactics are also extremely lightweight, and you can't manually edit anything. And why is there still no controller configuration option? Overall, though, Euro 2004 feels like a better game than FIFA '04 - it's been tweaked all over, there's no doubt about that. <<

!!! Whoever gave Wayne Bridge such a low skill rating in the game is an idiot!

AVAILABLE ON:
PS2 / XBOX / GCN / PC

DETAILS
CATEGORY: Football / PLAYERS: 1-8 / DEVELOPER: EA / PUBLISHER: EA / PRICE: \$89.95 / RATING: G / AVAILABLE: Now /

HYPER VERDICT
PLUS: Looks fabulous, animation is quite realistic, squads are accurate.

MINUS: Poor in-game menus and options, set-pieces.

VISUALS SOUND GAMEPLAY
86 85 82

OVERALL
83

An improvement over FIFA '04, thank goodness!

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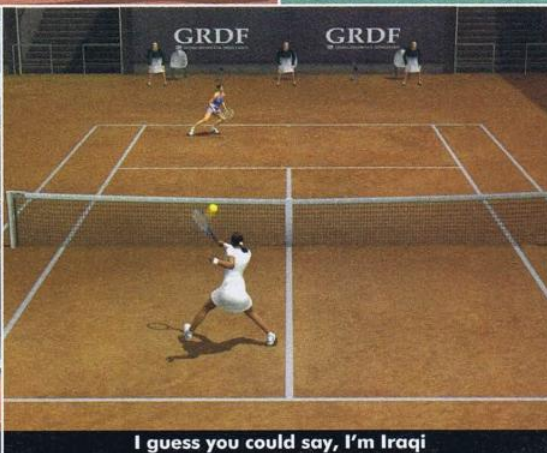
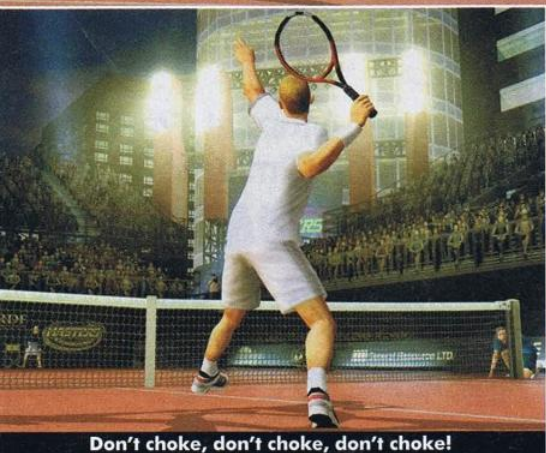
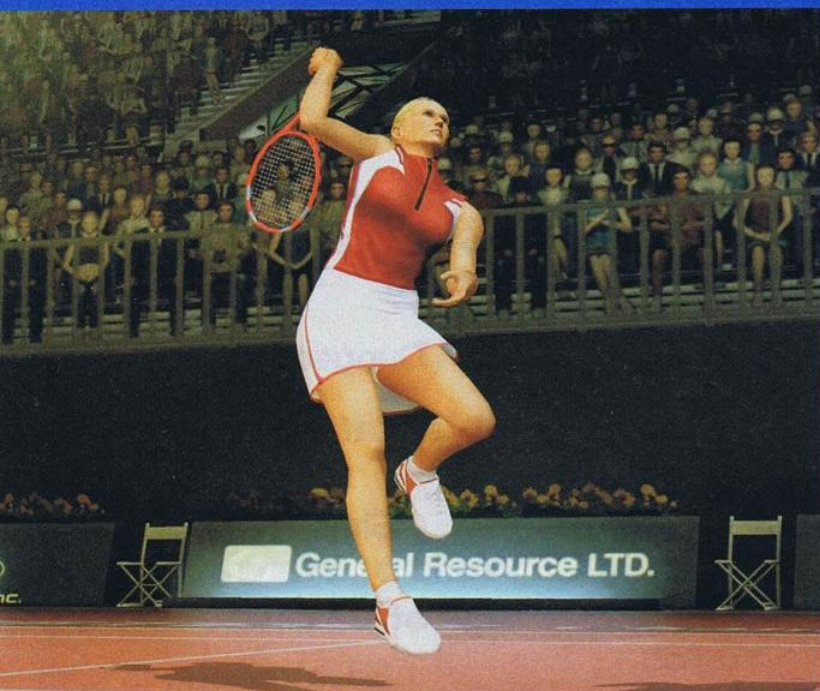
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Don't choke, don't choke, don't choke!

I guess you could say, I'm Iraqi

Soon to be converted to a human chess board

SMASH COURT TENNIS 2

CAM SHEA gets arrested for racquet earrings...

Be warned — Smash Court 2 doesn't make a great first impression. In fact, after ten minutes with this game, we were ready to take issue with the head of Namco Japan ("you have offended my honour, sir"), then turn off the PS2 and hop straight into some Top Spin goodness on Xbox to help us forget all about the woeful experience that was Smash Court 2.

THAT'S WHY PENCILS HAVE ERASERS

But of course, we didn't turn it off — we kept playing... and lo and behold, Smash Court 2 grew on us. At first it seemed slow and stilted, but after a while we finally started getting into Smash Court's groove. The pacing is much slower than Top Spin, and the mechanics are less forgiving. But before you get too settled into the idea that this is a straight-up simulation, Namco have

spiced things up somewhat with the Pro Tour mode.

Sure, the concept sounds like oh so many other sports titles. You create a character, he (Amos) or she (Amosina) starts out ranked 250 in the world, and you must train and play in tournaments to earn EXP which can be used to level up your character and gradually better his stats. So far, so good. But then you hop into a game. Suddenly the word "Highlights" comes up and the first set whizzes by. The game then cuts in with the score at 4-5 with the words "Turning Point" and you're given a mission. Complete the mission (or sometimes just win the game) and you'll go on to win the set. This happens two or three more times with the outcome of the match coming down to how you performed in each mini-mission. Weird eh?

In essence, Namco have boiled the matches in the Pro Tour mode down

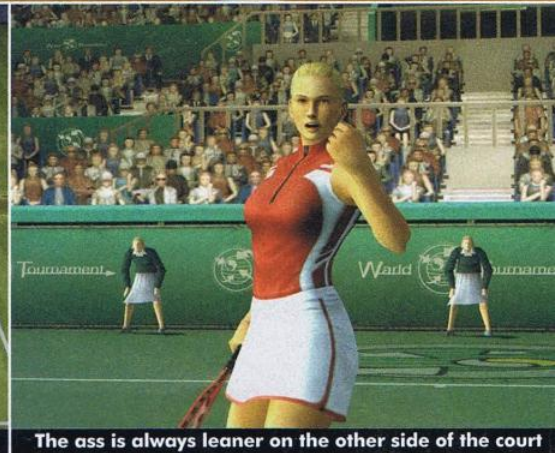
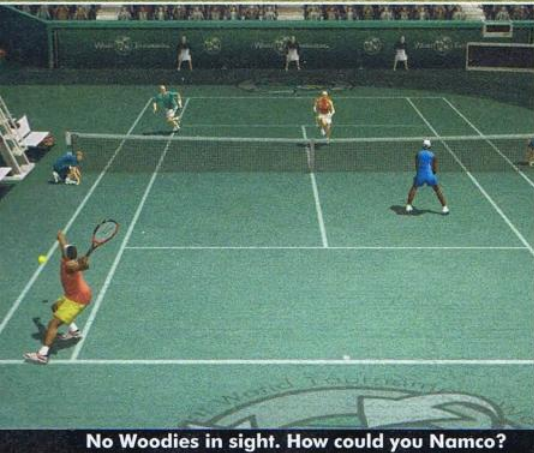
to the critical moments in the game. Playing snapshots of a match seemed bizarre to us at first, but in terms of progressing through many tournaments quickly, it actually works very well, and brings something of an RPG flavour to the game. Instead of focusing on winning the matches for the sake of playing tennis or getting a trophy, you actually start thinking about the bigger picture, moving from tournament to tournament and gaining EXP so you can level up, improve your character's stats and hopefully go up the rankings too.

That said, thrusting the difference between winning and losing into your face, with only a couple of chances to twist the outcome in your favour, can be frustrating — especially when a match comes down to one point. Is it any wonder we didn't know quite what to think when faced with simulation style

gameplay paired with such an arcadey structure? Fortunately, you can turn off the missions and simply play proper tennis games if you want, but we were too busy leveling up our character to bother.

SIPPIN' ON GIN AT DEUCE!

So what are the kinds of "missions" you're given in the game? Well, examples include hitting a certain percentage of "nice" shots (ie time your shots well), coming back from 30-40 down to win the game, winning three consecutive points, winning two points with volleys, hitting a winner off your opponent's serve, winning the game within a time limit, and so on. They're varied enough to keep things entertaining and gradually get harder as you ascend the rankings. Best of all, you don't always have to beat the mission, as long as you win the game. It'll mean less EXP but if a



No Woodies in sight. How could you Namco?

Hey check it out, I'm surfing the net!

The ass is always leaner on the other side of the court



NAMCO HAVE BOILED THE MATCHES IN THE PRO TOUR MODE DOWN TO THE CRITICAL MOMENTS IN THE GAME

STATISTENNICIAN

The stat system in *Smash Court 2* is quite interesting. If you allocate all your EXP from leveling up to one stat, others will go down. Thus, it's a balancing system where you can boost one stat a fair way then use the rest of your points to rebuild the stats that went down, or you can increase each stat a little. It's definitely a long road to having a killer player, as the stats cover everything from individual skills to speed on the court and stamina. Beating tournaments will also earn you points that can be spent on stat raising equipment.



mission is too hard you can just focus on getting through the game. *Smash Court 2* plays a pretty good game of tennis too. We particularly like the way the gameplay emphasises the importance of timing your shots well. There are, however, a couple of things that hold this game back from being a high 80s title. These basically come down to slight polish issues. Your player isn't always aware of where the ball is, for instance, making getting to easy smashes harder than it should be sometimes — whereas your opponents have no such difficulty. Also, your player will occasionally swing on the wrong side, which is both farcical and very annoying. We're also not huge fans of games that lock away important options. In *Smash Court 2*'s case, it takes quite a

!!! Smash Court 2's music ranges from elevator music in menus to awful dueling guitars in-game. Turn it off!

while before you unlock the ability to set the high camera angle so that you're always on the baseline.

The player animations aren't the best either — particularly in their reaction shots. You see the same over the top reactions again and again... at entirely inappropriate moments (either that or they're just major drama queens). In-game is a little better, and occasionally you'll see some real flourish in a player's movement (successfully executing a running shot with R1, for instance), but if you switch to Top Spin, you'll see just how wooden the players in *Smash Court 2* look. Even so, if you want a tennis game that plays at a more realistic speed and has more for the solo player to sink their teeth into, *Smash Court 2* is well worth a look. <<

AVAILABLE ON:

PS2 / XBOX / GCN / PC

DETAILS

CATEGORY: Sports / PLAYERS: 1-4 / DEVELOPER: Namco / PUBLISHER: Sony / PRICE: \$99.95 / RATING: G / AVAILABLE: June /

HYPER VERDICT

PLUS: Gets better the more you play it. 16 pro players.

MINUS: No Q. Wang, bad music, weird British announcer.

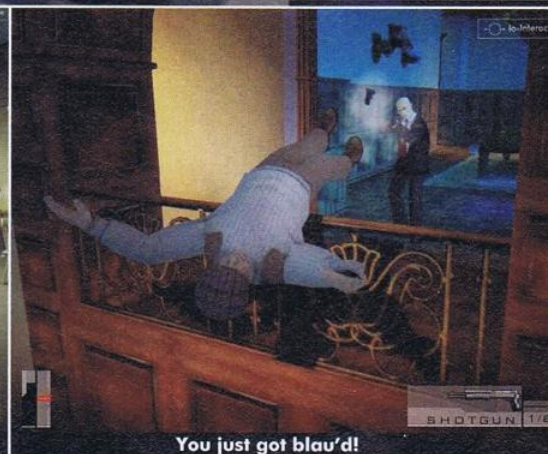
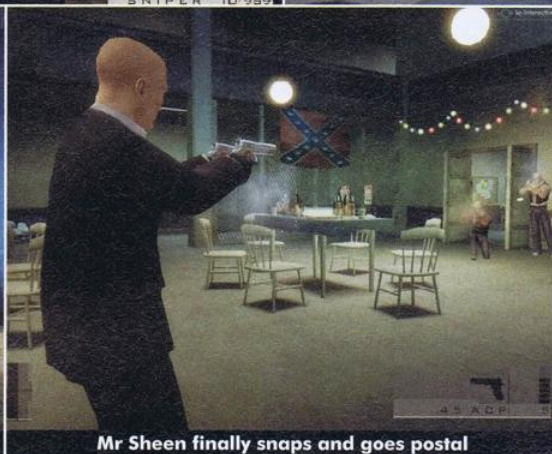
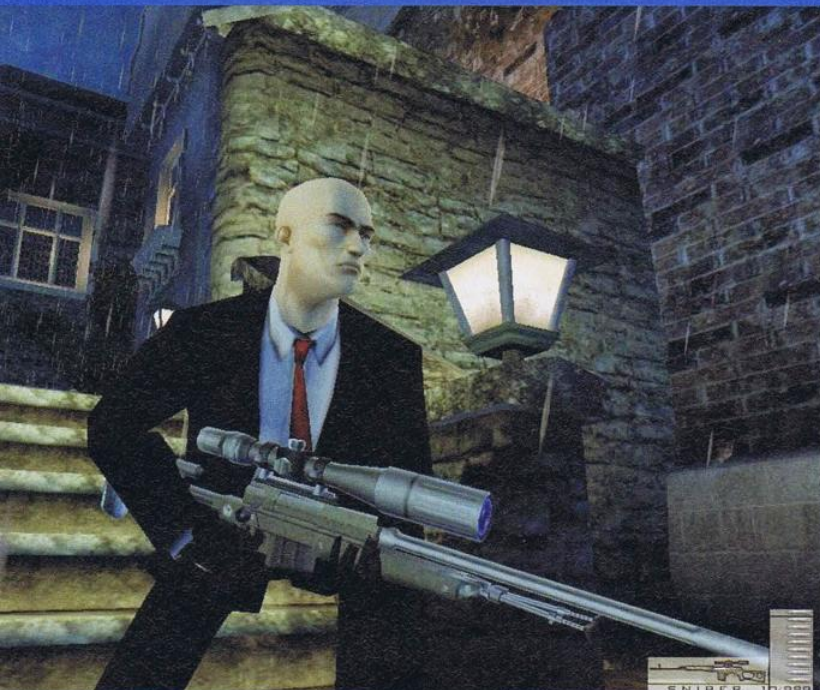
VISUALS SOUND GAMEPLAY

79 50 82

OVERALL

83

Namco deliver a much improved sequel.



Farmer Hoggett didn't take too kindly to pig rustlers

Mr Sheen finally snaps and goes postal

You just got blau'd!

HITMAN: Contracts

ELIOT FISH takes a contract out on IO Interactive...

Agent 47 hasn't changed much over the years. He's still contemplating a visit to Ashley Martin, still wearing the same old moth-eaten suit, still addicted to fondling his Hardballers and unfortunately still stuck in the same old gameplay rut. If he takes his job seriously, he really should pay a visit to his own developer's studio and give them a final warning - start producing the goods fellas, or it's goodnight. Lights out. Sayonara.

WHO LOVES YA, BABY?

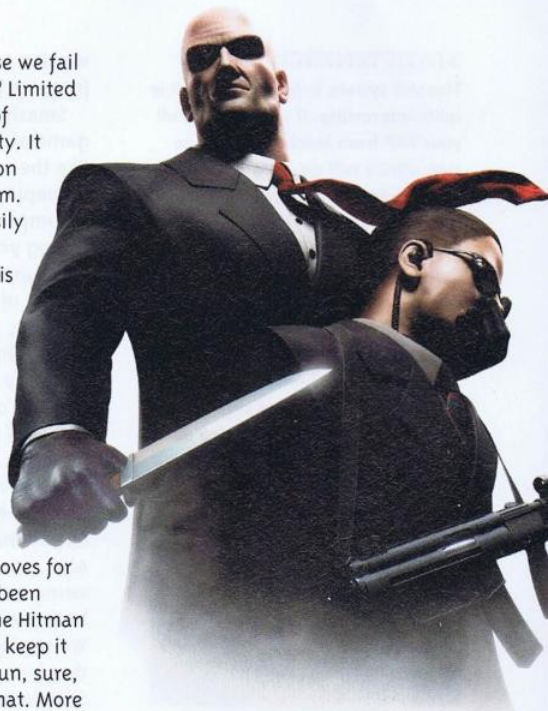
There's just so much that should have been improved upon from Hitman 2, and yet Contracts makes the same old mistakes, sticks to the same old interface and flounders in the same old gameplay that was done to death in the last instalment. Why? It's strikingly clear that absolutely no effort has gone into improving Hitman's gameplay. The

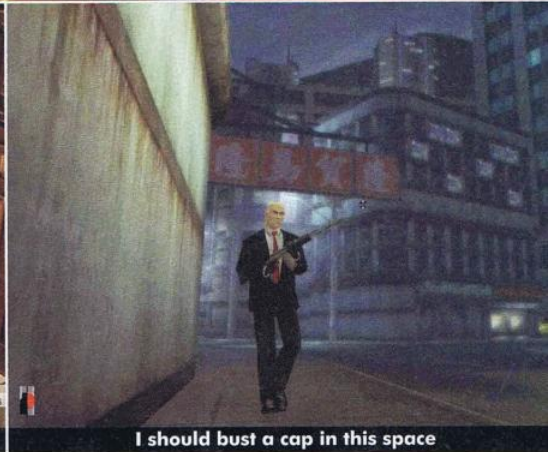
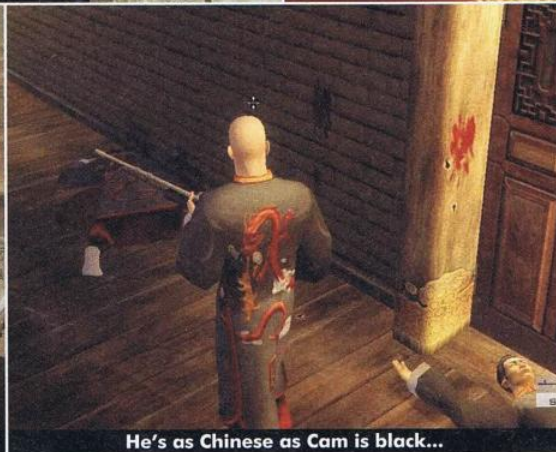
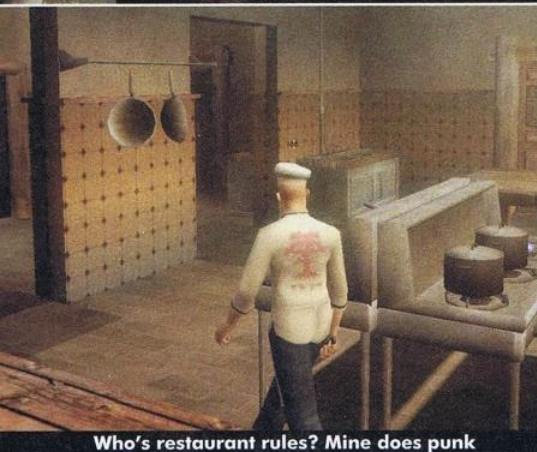
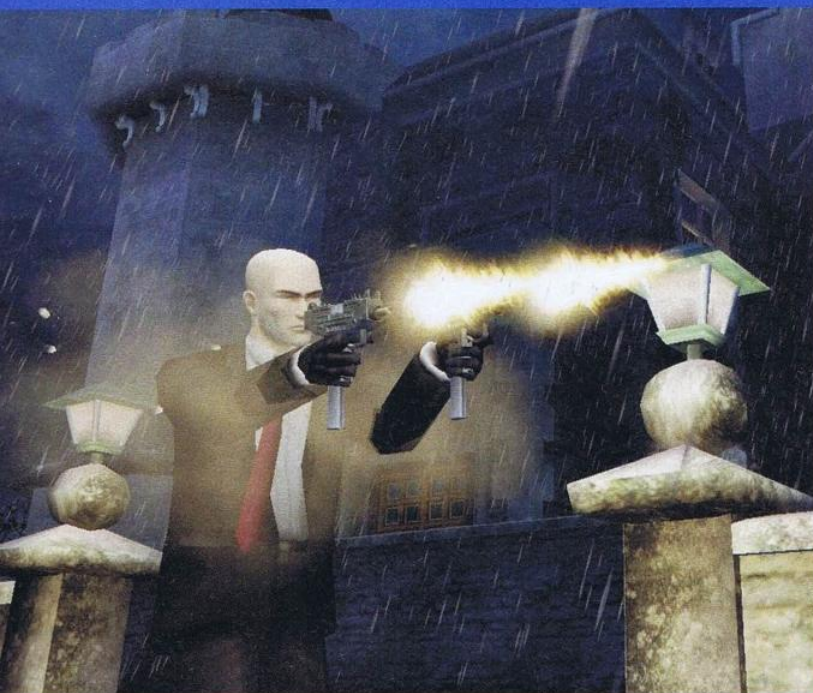
only thing that's changed is the inclusion of a few graphical effects to somehow try and fool us into thinking the Hitman engine has been updated. But we're not that easily fooled. And neither are you.

For starters, Agent 47's animations and his interaction with the world around him should really have been improved. For example, it's still annoyingly difficult to garrot someone if you're not exactly lined up behind them perfectly - Agent 47 will happily swing the wire near or around the victim's head as if he doesn't know what you want him to do. Limited saves still mean that you'll have to replay certain long sections of missions over and over again if you've used up your quota. Come on, IO Interactive, what about "checkpoint" auto-saves at the completion of single objectives? If we succeed in doing something once, should we really have to prove it

again and again just because we fail the objective that follows it? Limited save points is a cheap way of increasing a game's difficulty. It boils down to pure frustration and - to be honest - boredom. But this could have been easily avoided with a bit of effort.

The guts of the gameplay is unchanged from Hitman 2, which is disappointing for a sequel. It makes Contracts feel more like an expansion pack than a new Hitman experience. IO Interactive really should have come up with new ideas, and new elements to the same old sneak and kill gameplay - even all-new controls and moves for Agent 47. They should have been ambitious enough to push the Hitman series in a new direction and keep it feeling fresh. Hitman 2 was fun, sure, but we've been there done that. More





Who's restaurant rules? Mine does punk

He's as Chinese as Cam is black...

I should bust a cap in this space



THERE'S DEFINITELY ENJOYMENT TO BE HAD IN **DONNING A DISGUISE...** AND PERFORMING A **SLICK SILENT HIT**

of the same just doesn't cut it - especially when many of the glitches in the gameplay remain. Even worse, most of the missions in Hitman: Contracts are lifted from the first Hitman game. Yes, Agent 47 spends the entire game with his life literally flashing before his eyes - and you play it all over again. Fans of the first game might feel a little miffed to be revisiting old scenarios.

DON'T SMOKE

What Hitman continues to do well, however, is offer the player a fair amount of freedom in how they choose to go about completing their objectives. There's definitely enjoyment to be had in donning a disguise, slipping past a bunch of guards and performing a slick, silent hit on your clueless victim. The level design allows for players to complete their tasks in a variety of ways. There are usually multiple entry points, a

huge selection of weapons to choose from and the odd "puzzle" to overcome. The game also manages to set up some nice, creepy atmosphere in certain locations to make your stealthy work even more absorbing. If you're new to the Hitman series, then you'll find this style of gameplay quite enjoyable, even though it's been well surpassed now by Sam Fisher and his exploits in Splinter Cell.

Technically, Hitman: Contracts does suffer from some problems. On the ninja PC we played it on (PIV 3GHz, 1Gig RAM, ATI Radeon 9800 Pro) the graphics were choppy on 1024x768 resolution, even with details turned down to medium. What exactly is causing the problem here, we're not entirely sure, but this is very poor performance for a game with fairly average visuals. There are

!!! You can vent your Hitman frustrations at <http://forums.eidosgames.com> - or pick up some mission tips if that's what you're after.

some lovely effects in the game - such as reflective pools of blood and so forth - but if the game was not running smoothly on even a high end system, IO Interactive really should have held off its release and worked on tweaking these visual glitches. Hopefully a patch will be available soon for those of you suffering massive migraines from the slideshow graphics. If you're looking at playing Hitman: Contracts on console, then you obviously won't face the same problem.

Overall, Hitman: Contracts can't be recommended to anyone who's played Hitman 2 - or even the first Hitman. The content here is too recycled - visually, technically and in terms of gameplay. Only those new to the series will get something out of Contracts. <<<

AVAILABLE ON:
PS2 / XBOX / GCN / PC

DETAILS

CATEGORY: Stealth/Action / **PLAYERS:** 1 / **DEVELOPER:** IO Interactive / **PUBLISHER:** Eidos Interactive / **PRICE:** \$99.95 / **RATING:** MA15+ / **AVAILABLE:** Now /

HYPER VERDICT

PLUS: Multiple ways of completing objectives. Atmosphere.

MINUS: Nothing's changed since Hitman 2. Repetitive objectives.

VISUALS SOUND GAMEPLAY
79 84 75

OVERALL
74

Agent 47 is stuck in a rut.



I'm Quaking in my Space Marine boots

Painkiller stakes a claim for best weapon in an FPS

The strong must protect the sweet

PAINKILLER

CAM SHEA wonders why Buffy never had a stake gun...

⌘ Serious Sam proved that there was still room for the spirit of Doom in modern first person shooters. However, what Serious Sam did so well was to take the concept out into the open. Massive open areas were the fertile grounds for Sam's slaughter. Beasts and demons charged from every direction, leaving the player spinning on his virtual heel, constantly evaluating who to take out next as enemies got ever closer.

SPAWNING IN WAVES

Painkiller is very much from the same mold as Serious Sam, only this time, harking back to Doom and Quake, the action takes place at closer quarters. You're still facing off against large numbers of enemies, only we're back to more of a room-based approach. In fact, Painkiller is even more room by room than Doom was. Rather than having a level to explore and keys to find, you'll be locked in an area, enemies will spawn in waves, you'll

kill them, then you'll be allowed to move on, before getting locked in the next area. Yep, it's seriously linear.

There's just nothing particularly satisfying about simply seeing enemies spawning all around you, fending them off, then seeing more spawn. We appreciate People Can Fly's decision to try and give the game pacing, but rather than making us feel like we've beaten the developer when the monsters run out, it would be nice to feel like we've beaten, y'know, the monsters. What we mean is, instead of demons that keep spawning until the developer says stop, the game would have been much cooler if they'd gone with the tricks and traps that made Doom famous. You know, hidden rooms packed full of demons that are opened just after you go past. That was what made Doom so terrifying, and what would give you a sense of accomplishment to beat.

!!! Painkiller also has an interesting Black Tarot card system where you can assign special abilities and attributes to use in the game.

Fortunately, the weapons in the game are very cool. Of course there's a shotgun, but there are also gems like the stake gun. Better yet, enemies don't just get hit by stakes, they get pinned by them. Shoot a stake into a creature who's in front of a wall and it'll get knocked back and pinned to it. People Can Fly have designed great alternate fires for each weapon too. The stake gun, for instance, has a

grenade secondary fire, so if you time a stake shot after a grenade, you can actually pin grenades to enemies!

This is a fantastic looking game as well.

The settings are really quite eclectic, as are the enemies. And despite the linearity, the design and graphics engine really help bring atmosphere to the game — as does the excellent sound design (generic heavy metal aside).

If you're after a fast-paced, old school FPS, then you could do a lot worse than Painkiller. <<

AVAILABLE ON:
PS2 / XBOX / GCN / PC

DETAILS
CATEGORY: FPS / PLAYERS: 1-32 /
DEVELOPER: People Can Fly /
PUBLISHER: QV Software /
PRICE: \$TBA / RATING: M15+ /
AVAILABLE: Now /

HYPER VERDICT
PLUS: Fast, furious and good looking.
MINUS: Too linear and too much spawning.

VISUALS SOUND GAMEPLAY
87 89 79

OVERALL
82

Good fun, and pretty to boot.



RISE OF NATIONS: THRONES & PATRIOTS

ELIOT FISH pushes some little people around...

Some people may feel uncomfortable admitting that Microsoft Game Studios have published some absolutely killer games, but you can't deny how well they've chosen their development partners and nailed certain genres. Just take a look at Halo, Links, AoE, Dungeon Siege, PGR2, and of course, Rise of Nations — probably the best historical strategy game of 2003. Thus, it should come as no surprise that Thrones and Patriots is an impressive expansion pack that sets out to improve — not just enhance — the original.

CHEAPER, FASTER, FATTER

Thrones and Patriots isn't just a collection of new features bunged into a box in order to increase the shelf-life of the franchise. This is an expansion that offers new fiddly bits, sure, but it also looks to plug holes, patch flaws and improve upon what was already a great game. Does it make Rise of Nations a better game,

then? Yes, it absolutely does.

Six new nations have been brought to the table, shorter and more easily digested single player campaigns have been included, and a few ideas from Civilization 3 have been poached in order to give the game a greater sense of historical and political accuracy. The new nations are the Americans, Persians, Indians, Dutch, Lakota and Iroquois — naturally each having a number of unique units, such as the awesome Elephant units of the Persians and Indians or the Iroquois Elite Mohawk spearmen. Each nation also gains specific bonuses during play — such as the Lakota not having to build within any borders, the Dutch gaining free commerce research, and the Americans getting certain techs cheaper and faster. Different styles of government can also now be used — such as switching from Despotism to Democracy — which affect your

resource management and unit farming. Each type of government also produces a unique General unit that will give you bonuses in combat. There's plenty of new stuff here to play with.

The best change to Thrones and Patriots, however, is probably the way that the single player campaign is now structured. You can still tackle the entire world if you so

!!! Thrones and Patriots has an entirely speech-driven tutorial. Gone are the days of reading reams of text!

desire, but there are now four specific historical campaigns (such as Alexander the Great or the Cold War) which include shorter, more objective-based

missions. It's no longer just a matter of build, build, build, and it makes Rise of Nations a far more palatable and entertaining experience — especially for gamers who don't necessarily want the long, slow grind of pushing for victory over the entire planet. <<<

AVAILABLE ON:

PS2 / XBOX / GCN / PC

DETAILS

CATEGORY: Real Time Strategy / **PLAYERS:** 1-8 / **DEVELOPER:** Big Huge Games / **PUBLISHER:** Microsoft Games Studios / **PRICE:** \$49.95 / **RATING:** G / **AVAILABLE:** Now /

HYPER VERDICT

PLUS: Great new campaign structure.

MINUS: No graphical improvements.

VISUALS SOUND GAMEPLAY

89 90 88

OVERALL

90



Thrones and Patriots ups the ante. An awesome RTS blend.



So... this is the darker Pokémon is it?

The Free Willy director's cut ending...

New meaning to the words "flaming queer"

POKEMON COLOSSEUM

Resistance is futile. **MARCH STEPNIK** tries anyway...

There are three certainties in life: death, taxes and Pokémon. Cruising past what would have normally been a very generous used-by date for new found fads, the insane popularity of last year's Ruby and Sapphire on the GBA proved that there's plenty of life in the ol' franchise left. And although you may sincerely doubt where Pokémon can go from here, Nintendo certainly do believe; Pokémon Colosseum is the first of three new Pokémon titles to hit the Cube this year - and that's not counting the two new versions of the GB adventure on the GBA either.

Curiously though, there's been a strong delineation between the handheld RPG adventures and what's appeared on the home console. Pokémon Stadium on the N64 was more an experiment on Nintendo's behalf, offering a refined extension to the GameBoy Pokémon experience (the transfer pack link-up a testing ground

for the Cube's more robust connectivity with the GBA). Lacking any single player adventure, it allowed you to take the Pokémon you lovingly collected and developed on the GameBoy and use them in battle in more lavishly presented arenas on your television screen - no more, no less. And the thrill of seeing your Pokémon in vivid colour and animated in 3D was not to be underestimated. Fiendishly simple, Pokémon Stadium clicked so well with Pokémon fans that it spawned an immediate sequel.

And now Pokémon Colosseum is the Cube's opportunity to do sexy Pokémon battles on yer telly-vision screen. But the question remains: is this a real game?

GOTTA SNAG 'EM ALL

Oh, indeed it is. While it might have been possible (if not a little risky) to offer nothing more than what Stadium offered on the N64 and keep the real

Pokémon experience on the GameBoy, Nintendo has gone the extra mile and put together a whole new single player adventure to traipse through - with a bunch of new Pokémon to collect to boot. And the team behind Colosseum put their thinking caps on too: the story mode on offer here introduces a handful of new concepts to the series, and although they don't alter the Pokémon formula in any radical way, they're substantial enough to offer fans a refreshing take on the Pokémon universe. And dare we say, the Pokémon game may be showing signs that - in its own very cautious sorta way - it is evolving, even maturing a little itself.

The most noticeable differences are the Pokémon themselves, and how you go about acquiring them. Where the GBA games allowed you to capture only wild Pokémon (snatching a trainer's Pokémon during battle was certainly taboo),

Colosseum handles this in exactly the opposite way. In fact, there are absolutely no Pokémon to be caught in the wild, no matter how hard you look. Instead, the only way to boost your collection of Pokémon is to snag them from the care of trainers during battle. But there is a catch. You can't catch any old Pokémon: they have to be Shadow Pokémon.

These poor bastards are Pokémon that have had "the door to their hearts' closed" at the hands of cruel Pokémon trainers (so snag away without guilt). Their maltreatment proves to be quite significant: once in your arsenal you discover that Shadow Pokémon are severely limited in their ability, offering only one form of attack (which also happens to drain their own health in the process) and are restricted from gaining levels. Of course, there are methods to "purify the hearts of Shadow Pokémon", and this is central to the single player



相手の ジュカインの リーフブレード!



Weed Head's flower power attack is totally trippy



I imolate you Pikachu



You'll have a whale of a time... Sigh



THERE ARE ABSOLUTELY NO POKEMON TO BE CAUGHT IN THE WILD, NO MATTER HOW HARD YOU LOOK

story mode. Indeed, if you want to see your Pokemon evolve and develop — an essential mechanic of the Pokemon experience — then you'll have to master the process of engaging with your Shadow Pokemon and bringing them back from the dark side.

Nintendo also made an interesting choice in regards to the characterisation and story of Colosseum. Rather than the sweet innocence and free-form exploration of the handheld adventures, Colosseum pits you as an experienced trainer who has just defected from an 'evil' Pokemon team, not before blowing their old HQ into smithereens. This darker tone is reflected not only in the lead characters design itself (ambiguously edgy) but in the entire world in which Colosseum is set — plenty of rough characters to meet and wrong sides of the tracks to visit.

But don't be deceived - Pokemon

Colosseum's story mode never really cashes in on its promising direction. Minus the Shadow Pokemon and strongly presented world is a formulaic, tried and true Pokemon battling game. Even with the darker edge, the story mode never matches the quality of character or depth evident in the handheld adventures. Oh, sure, if it's Pokemon you want to collect and train then it's hard to be disappointed — just don't expect too much else.

GOTTA SAVE 'EM ALL

Of course, there's always the other half of the game. The colosseum mode allows you to import Pokemon from either Ruby/Sapphire on the GBA or from the story mode of the game (Shadow Pokemon are excluded — you'll have to purify

them first). Up to four players can battle out the pride of their Pokemon collection (players two to four at least will need to hook their GBAs up to the Cube to play) in a collection of preset games or their own versions, where all manner of rules can be edited to taste. Old Pokemon Stadium hands will be familiar with this mode, and delighted at just how sweetly the Cube can render and animate their beloved pocket critters — a definite highlight of this game. Although this

mode doesn't pull any punches, it does what it does well.

Overall, Pokemon Colosseum is a strong Poke-venture that retains all the magic of the paper/rock/scissors mechanic of battling Pokemon — even though Nintendo held back on the story mode. <<<

!!! The other two Pokemon games coming soon are Pokemon Channel (a bizarre, sim-style spin-off) and Pokemon Box (PokePorn, no, ha-ha, a Pokemon manager "game").

AVAILABLE ON:

PS2 / XBOX / GCN / PC

DETAILS

CATEGORY: Adventure/Battle / **PLAYERS:** 1-4 / **DEVELOPER:** The Pokemon Company / **PUBLISHER:** Nintendo / **PRICE:** \$99.95 / **RATING:** G / **AVAILABLE:** Late June /

HYPER VERDICT

PLUS: Solid Pokemon game mechanics, gorgeous visuals.

MINUS: Story mode a little weak, GameBoy sampled sounds!

VISUALS SOUND GAMEPLAY

89 68 81

OVERALL

78

Yeah, go on, try to resist.



BREED

It's the 27th Century and the Earth has been plunged into a terrible war with the bio-mechanical Breed, a race of aliens bent on killing us all. While the forces of Earth were off fighting what was meant to be the decisive battle of the war, the main force of the Breed crept past and invaded Earth. Now it's up to a bunch of faceless and incredibly dull grunts to save the day, retake the planet and try to stay awake through the outrageously long loading times. Whilst the plot doesn't exactly get the heart racing in anticipation it does accurately depict what you can expect from the game – generic characters in generic (though admittedly large) levels shooting some run of the mill guns at enemies you've killed countless times before in Halo. Nothing in Breed feels even remotely original – take the vehicles of Halo and UT2K4, whack them in any squad based shooter you can name and there you go. Although the shooting element of the game will leave you wanting more, paradoxically, when the player has the opportunity to jump in one of the aircraft within the game it truly comes alive – an FPS that makes a better flight sim, now there's one for the books. Add to the characterless gameplay a host of bugs, truly moronic AI and some of the worst voice acting you'll ever hear and you've got a game much better avoided than played. Breed does feature a multiplayer component but the lack of people playing made it all but impossible to test, suffice to say that much like the single player game you've seen it all before.

Daniel Wilks

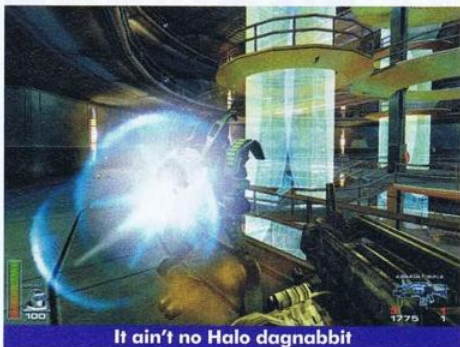
AVAILABLE ON:

PS2 / XBOX / GCN / PC

DETAILS

CATEGORY: FPS / **PLAYERS:** 1-32 / **DEVELOPER:** Brat / **PUBLISHER:** CDV / **PRICE:** \$89.95 / **RATING:** M15+ / **AVAILABLE:** Now /

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY	OVERALL
70	50	60	58



It ain't no Halo dagnabbit



DINOTOPIA: THE SUNSTONE ODYSSEY

Children's franchises have long been the subject of game translations and the Dinotopia brand is just about perfect fodder for a kids game as it contains two things they're just about guaranteed to love, dinosaurs and being able to beat things up. The Dinotopia universe has been around for years, first appearing as a series of illustrated books and then making a leap to the small screen with a mini-series and a short lived TV series as well as one previous game for the GBA. The basic idea of the series is that there is a secret island somewhere where humans and intelligent dinosaurs live in harmony with each other but must constantly defend against aggressive carnivorous predators or dinosaur hating humans (called Outsiders). In The Sunstone Odyssey, players take the role of a young human trying to prove himself as a guardian of Dinotopia. Unfortunately this is nowhere near as interesting as it sounds as all of the early missions seem to revolve around courier work with the player picking up and delivering packages all around the isle. If you can soldier your way through the initial boredom the game does improve at later stages with Drake (the hero) having to venture out into the wilds to combat all manner of evil. The pretty graphics and frequent dinosaur appearances are sure to appeal to the kiddies but unless you're a die-hard fan of giant thunder lizards there's not much more to recommend.

Daniel Wilks

AVAILABLE ON:

PS2 / XBOX / GCN / PC

DETAILS

CATEGORY: Action / **PLAYERS:** 1 / **DEVELOPER:** Vicious Cycle / **PUBLISHER:** TDK Interactive / **PRICE:** \$49.95 / **RATING:** G / **AVAILABLE:** Now /

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY	OVERALL
82	79	65	64



Yeah, cos kids love killing dinosaurs



DRAKENGARD

If you're a fan of the Dynasty Warriors series or have a fondness for Panzer Dragoon you'll probably find a lot to like in Drakengard. On the other hand, if you don't like either of the above two titles you may as well stop reading now because Drakengard will have absolutely nothing to offer you. Players take the role of Caim, a hateful young man rendered mute when he made a life pact with a dragon to avenge the death of his parents and kill just about anything that looks at him sideways. This killing is accomplished in one of three ways – on the ground with Caim hacking into enemies, with Caim strafing ground targets on the dragon or flying through the sky dog-fighting with other flying creatures (riding the dragon of course). To keep things from getting too repetitive (although they still do), players can pick up a number of different weapons throughout the game, each with their own combos and magical attacks. Caim, the dragon and weapons level up through experience unlocking more powerful attacks and abilities. Somebody should tell Square Enix that having impressive looking cutscenes doesn't mean they can skimp on the rest of the game. Whilst the cutscenes are vintage Square beauty the rest of the game looks sparse, dull and uniform.

Daniel Wilks

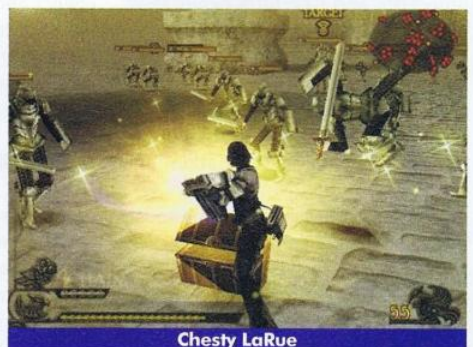
AVAILABLE ON:

PS2 / XBOX / GCN / PC

DETAILS

CATEGORY: Action / **PLAYERS:** 1 / **DEVELOPER:** Square Enix / **PUBLISHER:** Square Enix / **PRICE:** \$99.95 / **RATING:** M15+ / **AVAILABLE:** Now /

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY	OVERALL
79	85	70	72



Chesty LaRue



CORVETTE

☞ We've been kicking around the office playing Burnout 3 alpha code pretty much all month this issue. It's good. It's damn good. It's so good in fact, that we really pity any other racing games that have to come after it, because chances are, it'll make them look like they were developed by the work experience kid when he was having an off day after being taken out to the pub the night before by the rest of the dev team and forced to drink way too much beer and eat way too many kebabs.

In any case, we were really quite relieved when we put Corvette on, because we knew that no matter how good Burnout 3 may be, that this game was always going to look terrible. Hell, this game looks bad next to R: Racing, and that ain't a compliment, if you know what I mean.

On the surface, Corvette sounds like a great idea. Accurately model over 100 production, concept and racing models from the famous manufacturer, from 1953 through to 2003, and then race the hell out of them! Sounds awesome right? You even get some relatively detailed information about each model. This isn't just entertainment – it's education too! Except that someone forgot to put the entertainment part in. The handling mechanics are horrible, with the cars lurching about from the front, and there's little to no finesse to be gained from practice. Throw in some very average course design and you have a game that could have been cool, but most definitely isn't.

Joey Tekken

AVAILABLE ON:

PS2 / XBOX / GCN / PC

DETAILS

CATEGORY: Racing / **PLAYERS:** 1-2 / **DEVELOPER:** Steel Monkeys / **PUBLISHER:** Take 2 / **PRICE:** \$49.95 / **RATING:** G / **AVAILABLE:** Now /

VISUALS

60

SOUND

40

GAMEPLAY

40

OVERALL

41



Hey, it's a Corvette! Who'd a thunk it?



RIDING SPIRITS II

☞ Riding Spirits is the sequel to the critically unacclaimed Riding Spirits, and is just as unremarkable as the original. To be honest, however, the racing mechanics in Riding Spirits II aren't that bad. In fact, like any game that purports to be a simulation, you're always going to need a fair bit of playtime to get into the mechanics. There are quite a few options you can turn off in RSII too. There's the usual break assist nonsense, but you can also manually lean into corners (which is a separate mechanic to steering) and lean forwards and backwards, which adds a little more complexity to the handling. Plus, there are something like 330 bikes across all CC levels, from the likes of Honda, Kawasaki, Yamaha, Suzuki and Ducati, all of which can be customised.

There's also a full career mode and an interesting mode called "100 Battle" where you work your way through 100 different scenarios. But it really doesn't matter when so much of this game is so half-arsed. The graphics aren't bad, but you'll notice a lot of flickering and aliasing, and the collision detection and stack animations are both pretty awful. And why is it that when there's a crash and several riders come off, the AI riders always get put back on the track a good two seconds ahead of the player?

RSII also has some of the worst motorbike sound effects ever in a game. Shut your eyes and you could be forgiven for thinking you were listening to an arcade racing game from 20 years ago.

D. Mannerism

AVAILABLE ON:

PS2 / XBOX / GCN / PC

DETAILS

CATEGORY: Racing / **PLAYERS:** 1-2 / **DEVELOPER:** Spike / **PUBLISHER:** Capcom / **PRICE:** \$99.95 / **RATING:** G / **AVAILABLE:** Now /

VISUALS

70

SOUND

23

GAMEPLAY

56

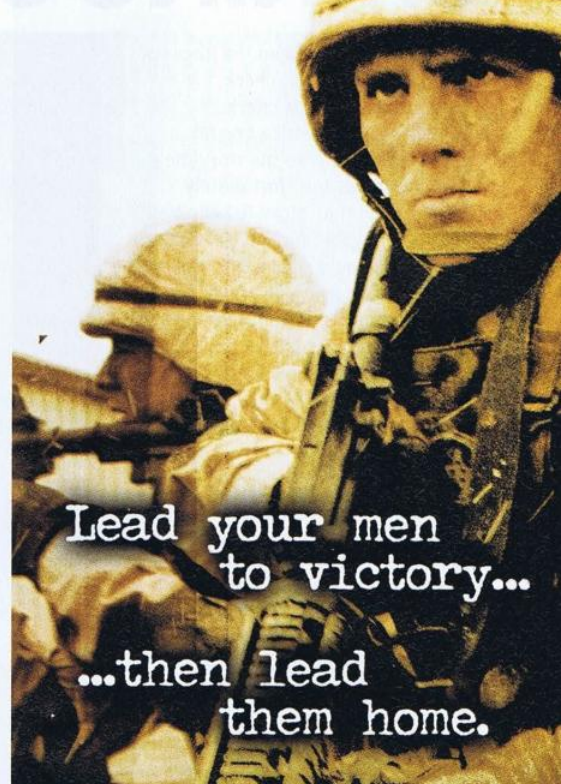
OVERALL

67



Boredom at 200Km/h, now that's a shame

Their lives
are in your
hands.



Lead your men
to victory...
...then lead
them home.



Based on a training aid
developed for the U.S. Army

*This game is not sponsored or endorsed by the United States Army.

THQ
www.thq.com.au

XBOX
LIVE



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Available from

BIG W

WE SELL FOR LESS

SHINING SOUL 2

☞ Struggle between the forces of light and dark: check. Kidnapped princess: check. Something to do with a crystal ... yep, check. Okay, so the storyline's hardly original but, fortunately, there's more than story to keep you interested in *Shining Soul II*. Like a good RPG should, this game delivers an impressive level of control over your character's development, as well as balancing the number-crunching with a healthy dose of action.

I WILL NOTICE THAT, YES MR SCORPION SIR

One of the first things you'll notice about *SSII* is that there are eight playable characters to choose from (as opposed to four in the original *Shining Soul*), each, of course, with his or her particular strengths and weaknesses. Character classes range from Warrior and Wizard to Archer, Ninja and some kind of... I'm not exactly sure. It's debatable as to whether every one of these characters is a worthwhile inclusion but, hey — it's nice to have the choices there. The freedom of choice offered in character selection is carried through into the game's experience system. When your character levels up, you'll be rewarded with Status and Skill Points to spend on the stats and abilities of your choosing. Even the little things, like the ability to select your character's hair and clothing colour, help to give a sense of ownership over the character you've worked so hard to develop. He's not just any Dark Wizard, he's my Dark Wizard.

Creating a character that's uniquely yours is immensely satisfying. So is bashing the crap out of things, another area in which *SSII* excels. The real-time combat is good, frantic fun and will feel very familiar to veterans of handheld editions of the *Zelda* series. The use of spells and other special techniques (depending on the character's class) injects a little bit of strategy into what could have easily degenerated into nothing more than an A-button mash-fest. Equipped weapons and items can be switched at any time using the shoulder buttons, which allows for a change of attack plan (such as switching between physical and magical attacks) without disrupting the flow of combat.

Weapons, armour and other assorted items can all be purchased at Klantol Castle, which functions as something of a home base for your character. In addition to the shopping facilities, the castle also boasts a bank (for storing items that you don't want to lose if you die in a dungeon), a psychic (for identifying



unknown items that you earn in battle) and a blacksmith (for modifying your equipment). Another neat feature available at Klantol Castle is the Monster Dictionary, where you can store data about enemies by collecting the "Monster Cards" sometimes dropped by enemies. Structuring the game around a central hub gives it a different feel to a game based around an epic journey. While it's convenient to have all the various shops and facilities together, venturing out in an unexplored land doesn't seem quite as exciting when you're always returning to the same place.

YOU WILL DIE

When your character dies, he or she will be returned to the castle, fully healed. It's then possible to return to the dungeon you were just exploring and continue your quest from where you left off. This is especially fortunate, because the lack of a pause function means you'll be dying a lot. Surely *SSII*'s designers must have realised that it's really annoying to watch your character get knocked out while you're in the item subscreen attempting to heal them?

As frustrating as it is, the inability to pause is the only major flaw in this well-executed blend of role-playing and action. *SSII* is both charming and challenging, offering players plenty to sink their teeth into.

Eleanor Eiffe



DETAILS

CATEGORY: Action RPG /
PLAYERS: 1-4 / **DEVELOPER:** Sega /
PUBLISHER: THQ / **PRICE:** \$69.95 /
RATING: G8+ / **AVAILABLE:** Now /

VISUALS

85

SOUND

83

GAMEPLAY

90

OVERALL

90





[above] It's a robot... from space!



[above] We should scrap the Arcade page and just have a Levy page...

Gundam Z: AEUG vs. Titans CAPCOM

»» Tim Levy

Debuting in 1979 on Japanese TV, Mobile Suit Gundam was a refreshing take on the giant robot anime genre. Instead of indestructible 'super human' robots, humans piloted super robots a.k.a Mobile Suits (MS). Set somewhere in the 22nd Century (U.C 0079), the storyline, characters, animation and robot design combine to paint an in-depth fantastic futuristic struggle for world domination between the rebel space colony of Zeon and the Earth Federation. The 'Gundam' title itself refers to the original 18 meter high model 'RX-78', and although numerous models and upgrades have occurred over the past 25 years (or over U.C time), Gundam still denotes the top of the line mobile suit for the Earth Federation.

As this alternate future reality is so immersive, it is easy to see why Gundam has spawned nine television series, four video series, ten movies, countless novels, comics, figurines, shops full of paraphernalia, a theme park ride and of course several video games!

MORE SUITS THAN MARTIN PLACE

Originally released the arcades in 2002, Capcom's Gundam Z is actually the sequel to Gundam Federation VS Zeon. Gundam Z takes place 7 years after the original 'one year war' and although it's basically the same in gameplay and graphics, it has new stages, moves, suits (over 30) and can also be played as a 2 VS 2 co-op game.

After choosing which side you are on (A.E.U.G, ZEON, E.F.S.F or TITANS), type of suit, weapons and map (earth/space/water), you find yourself on the battlefield trying to seek enemy MS in the distance. Once spotted, you can press the lock button to keep that particular enemy's location in view. As there are multiple enemies, it is best to fight the enemy nearest you, and once you hit them, try to lock on another enemy and fire at them using your main long range weapon. By that time, the closest enemy you have hit has recovered and you can attack or evade. Just try to be aware of what is around you otherwise you can be

caught in cross-fire. Not only are there other 'suits' to deal with but there are other computer controlled robots (some huge, others small) that are dishing out punishment to your ever decreasing armour.

The main thing is to keep moving, and by double tapping you can evade range attacks, and by using the (limited) boost you can jump out of harms way or hover long enough to get a clear shot at an enemy who is behind an obstacle. Weaponry varies widely from suit to suit. But generally you have a primary range weapon and a weaker (usually shorter range) secondary weapon, as well as swords, flails, fists or feet to deal out close range attacks. If you make a successful close range attack, you get a very cool slow motion alternate angle view of your attack.

A stage is completed after one side has depleted the opponent's military capacity meter to zero. Destroying more powerful mechs will deplete the opponent's meter more quickly, though don't forget to be aware of all of the enemy forces around you.

MAX FACTOR

By pressing boost jump and tapping twice on the joystick, certain MS can now transform into flying machines. A new feature called hyper combination has also been added. In 2 player co-op, if both team members' combination meters are maxing out and they hit the 'start' button, both players gain extra power for a limited duration.

If you are a fan of the Gundam world, or 'Virtual On', no doubt you will find this latest installment giving you hours of entertainment. Just playing with all the different Mobile Suits and weapon combinations would take ages to master. Even if you are new to this genre, the game fits nicely between a shooter and a fighting game. The only caveat is that the arcade game has not been given worldwide release and is only available as a Japanese import, which means, of course, EVERYTHING is in Japanese. Check it out anyway! <<<

SCORE: 9/10

SONIC 3 ADVANCE



Published by SEGA,
distributed by THQ



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Arcade Gaming in Japan

» Bryce McDonough



You may remember our old pal Bryce. Once upon a time he looked after Hyperactive and worked here at Hyper HQ. But those halcyon days are long past, torn down by an epic feud – a battle for control of the known Universe if you will. A confrontation of Harkonnen and Atreides proportions, between Bryce and Kosta. Unfortunately for Bryce, he lost the battle and fled into exile, into the bosom of the schoolgirl – Japan.

He's been living there on and off for years now, speaks fluent Japanese (whereas we speak effluent Japanese) and loves gaming, so we've asked him to put together a semi-regular insight into the unique gaming culture of Japan. This month, the arcade scene...

Cam

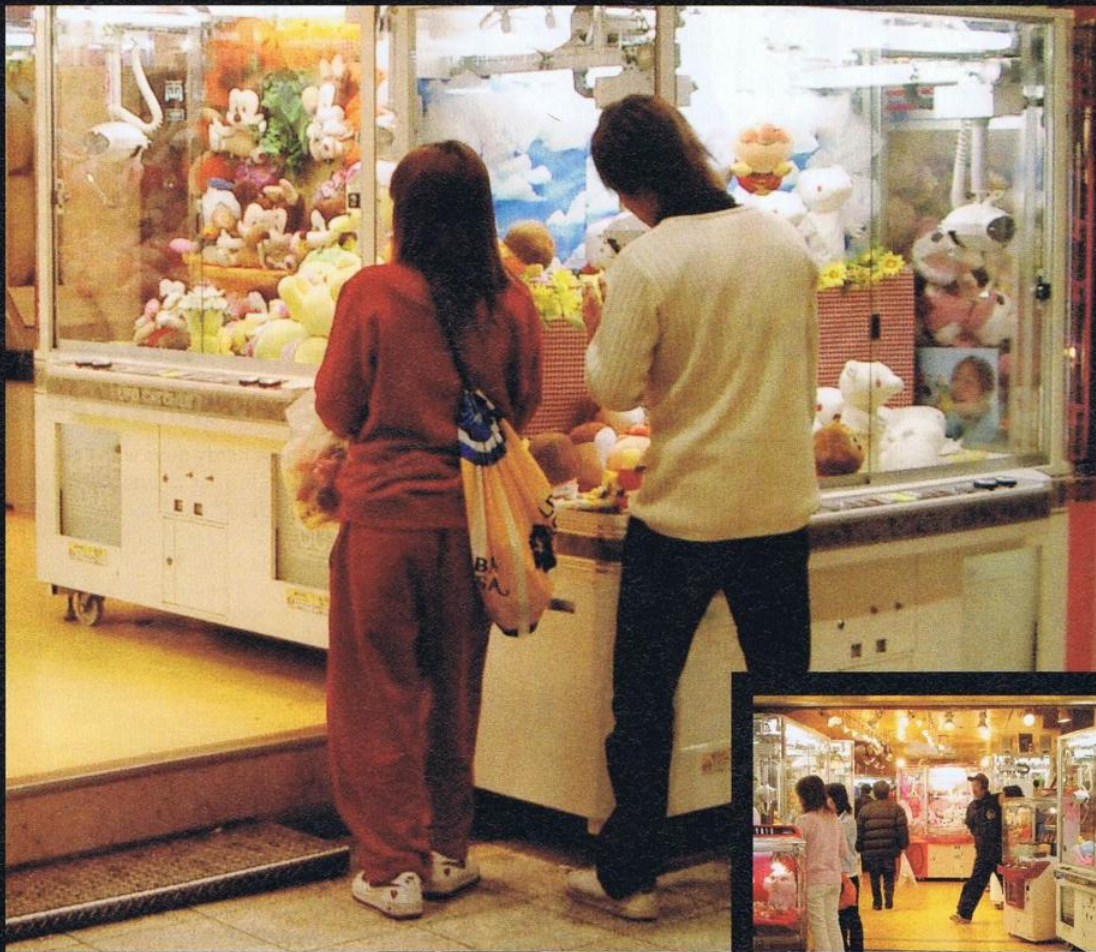
TRADITIONAL GEE-SEN:-

Poor lighting, a smoky haze in the air, and the deafening echoes of 20 special moves being performed on 20 different machines simultaneously. All machines are seated battle cabinets and come equipped with ashtrays. If you are a fighting game fan, this is where it's at. The atmosphere is one of competition – play hard or pay 100 yen to play again.

Although fighting games make up a large percentage of their library (and other 1-on-1 games such as Sega's arcade soccer series and a few baseball games), puzzle games are well represented, as are retro titles and shooting games. Also, in virtually every arcade in Japan, you will find several machines where you can play Mahjong and the more you win, the more some girl (real or animated) has to take her clothes off.

These are quite crowded at all times of the day with males aged about 18-25, and account for approximately half of Japan's 100 yen coins (although some arcades are only 50 yen!). You cannot sit at any machine long without being challenged, and you will rarely face a 'scrub' – the general level of competition is incredibly high. Japan's population density means that you get to play a wider variety of people at the same arcade – and despite the prolific sales of PS2s and software in this country, virtually everyone still visits the arcade to play other people.

To examine the gaming scene in Japan, one must first look at the cornerstone on which it is all built – the arcade. What began as a dinky little room with a couple of table-tops squeezed in has now escalated to a multi-faceted industry that has had to adapt repeatedly in order to maintain profits. The geemu-sentaa (coming from the English words 'game centre' and simply gee-sen for short) now comes in several distinct flavours to cater to several distinct markets.



UFO GEE-SEN:-

Almost the exact opposite of the male-only world above, the gaudy fluorescent UFO catchers crammed full of cutesy Pooh, Snoopy and Disney stuffed toys (not to mention a decent collection of Japanese characters) are frequented by girls in short skirts and high boots who point at things and say 'kawaii!!!!' until their accompanying boyfriend with funky hair puts about 2000 yen into the machine and either produces a prize, or pronounces it impossible.

Unlike their Australian counterparts, the Japanese UFO catchers are not simply stuffed as tightly as possible full of crappy ugly toys which are completely unwinable – there is a single 'target' placed near the hole (other older toys are used as balance and obstacles) which is then replaced when it is won. And it's not like they stop at Tigger and friends. You can win everything from an Xbox to a DVD player, live lobsters (really!), electric scooters, sound systems, schoolgirl/nurse outfits, tea sets – yes, even adult videos in some places. BB guns too if you feel like staging a hold-up.

PURI-KURA GEE-SEN:-

Print Club sticker photos are in my estimation the biggest growth market in non-gambling entertainment machines in Japan. Print club machines have been creeping their way around the world over the last couple of years, but the level of technology has never equaled the domestic market. There are so many machines, series, themes, designs to these things that you would think people would lose track – but they don't. The biggest problem is with most machines the rakugaki ('graffiti') time limit barely lets you get started exploring all the different stamps, backgrounds and effects before it kicks you off.

Boys be warned – this is a girl's market. The soft-focus cameras and chance to remember every time they ever went shopping together – ever – appeals to their feminine needs. My girlfriend was upset because we didn't have time to go and get print club after watching LOTR:ROTK, and thus, we 'wouldn't remember it'. I'm not kidding. This is so dominated by young girls that there are many arcades which have signs prohibiting males (unless accompanied by a responsible girlfriend) from entering their print club section.



These are the most popular types of games in Japan, though there are a couple more which you are most likely only going to find at much, much larger arcades. The remnants of the 'rhythm-action' boom several years ago are still floating about and even have some Japanese instrument versions too. Driving games and shooting games can be popular at release, but quickly fade into obscurity. Token slot machines and pseudo-gambling also take place in many venues, including betting on fake little plastic horses, and the current #1 coin-eater in Japan – a soccer tamagotchi where you build, develop and manage your own Serie A team. <<<

BUILD IT AND THEY WILL COME

A STRAIGHTFORWARD GUIDE TO BUILDING YOUR OWN PC

»» BENNETT RING

Don't let those nerdy guys with Coke bottle glasses in your computer science class fool you. You don't need to sacrifice your social life, have an abundance of pimples nor remember every single line from the first episode of Dr Who to be able to build a PC. In fact, compared to working on a car or even painting a room, building a PC is surprisingly simple. Even Daniel Wilks could do it!

There's one main benefit to building your own PC — cost. You can save yourself hundreds, if not thousands, of bucks, which you can then sink back into your PC in six months time when it's out of date. It'll also give you a great understanding of the different components in your PC, which will come in handy when you need to swap them out come upgrade time. It'll also help you pull members of the opposite sex, provided they're the kind of people who like to talk about Star Wars vs Star Trek and have a Wookiee costume hanging in the closet at home.

Before you buy your components, do a little research to find out which bits will offer the most bang for buck. Our advice is to check the latest hardware reviews in PC Powerplay (nice plug — Ed), or you could always use one of the ten billion or so hardware websites which make up 38% of the Net.

It's not always wise to go for the latest and greatest generation of hardware — buy one generation back and you'll save yourself a wad of cash. The flipside of that argument is to check to see that your components aren't on the verge of obsolescence, which can make upgrading more difficult. Most importantly of all, make sure all your bits of hardware are going to play nicely together, and check that you can get a refund if they don't.

It might take a little while to get it all up and running, but the satisfaction of playing games at high velocity on a PC you've bled over (the inside of PC cases can be a finger unfriendly zone) is hard to beat. And before you know it, you'll be building PCs for all of your friends and family at absolutely no cost, sucking up any free time you might have had in the past. Yippee!

Please note that this is a very simple guide to building a PC. Once you're comfortable with this you can start tackling more advanced features such as setting up a RAID hard drive array, partitioning your hard drive or tweaking your BIOS functions.

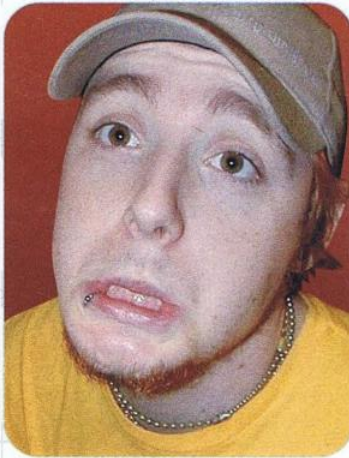


SYSTEM SPECS

- 2.6GHz CPU
- ABIT IC7 motherboard
- 2 x 256MB DDR-SDRAM 400MHz
- GeForce FX 5950 Ultra video card
- 200GB hard drive
- Creative Audigy 2 ZS Platinum Pro
- Antec LANboy case
- Pioneer DVD-RW drive

1. BLOOD SACRIFICE

The first step, and some might say the most important of all, is to slay the sacrificial gaming freelancer. The Silicon Gods™ can be a temperamental bunch, so offering them the fresh blood of your nearest Stephen Farrelly or David Wildgoose, and making sure you drink the symbolic shot before it has scabbed over, should keep them nice and happy. If you can't find a gaming freelancer, which shouldn't be hard – just check your local lockup – a small kitten or puppy will suffice, provided it's loved by at least three innocent children.

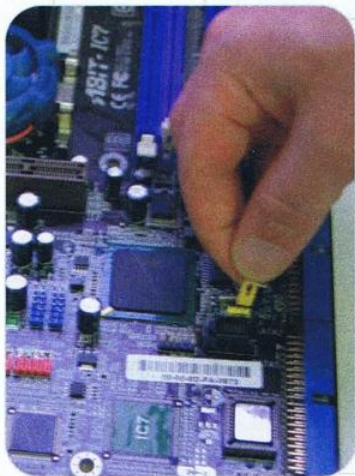


2. KEEP IT CLEAN

Now this sounds really Nana-ish, but it's a good idea to get your work area nice and clean, before laying out all of your components. If you don't want to scratch your workbench, cover it with newspaper as PC cases like to damage things. Make sure there's no dust or dirt on the surface, as PC components don't tend to enjoy ingesting that sort of crap. Likewise with water. Finally, have a nice long read of every manual that came with all of your components. It can't be emphasised enough how important it is to RTFM.

3. NO MORE MR FRY GUY

If your Mum's a doctor and your Dad's a solicitor, you can probably afford to go and buy one of those anti-static cables that computer shops sell. If you're like the rest of us, there's a much cheaper solution. Simply plug your PSU into the wall, and tap the outside of it. Voila, you're now static free! However, even though bolts of lightning shouldn't be jumping from your fingertips anymore, it's still prudent to hold all components on the edges, away from the delicate chips they house.

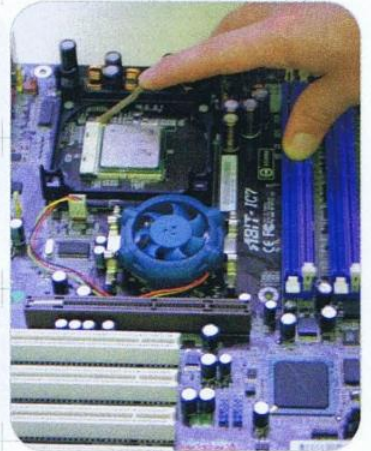


4. WIPING THE SLATE

The CMOS is the persistent memory on your motherboard that stores all of your basic hardware settings while the machine is off. You should clear this memory before building begins. Consult your motherboard manual to find out where your CMOS jumper or contact points are. If it's a jumper, simply move the jumper to the alternate pins for a few seconds. If it's two contact points, use a bread knife or flat head screwdriver to short the gap between the two for a few seconds. Your motherboard now has a bout of amnesia any Neighbours character would be proud of.

5. BRAIN TRANSPLANT

The pins under your CPU are quite fragile, so be careful not to bend them. Lift the lever on the side of your CPU socket so that it's vertical, as this 'opens' the socket. Look on top of the CPU for a small triangle or two on the corners, and line this up with the triangles on the CPU socket. Drop the CPU into the socket, using no force. If it won't go in, you've got it round the wrong way. Once it falls in easily, lower the lever on the side of the CPU socket, which will lock your CPU in place.

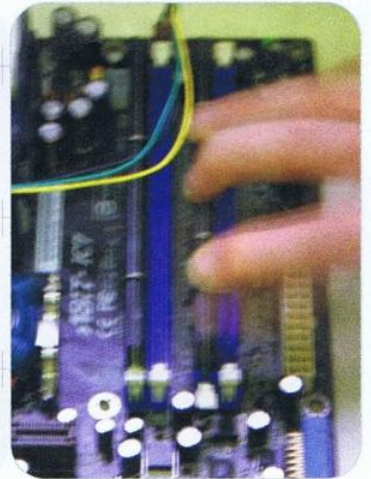


6. TOO COOL FOR SCHOOL

Spread a very thin layer of thermal paste over the part of the heatsink fan base that will make contact with the CPU. You want this layer thin enough that you can almost see the metal through it – any thicker and you'll be causing more harm than good. Now install the heatsink fan over the CPU, making sure that you mount it perfectly flat before tightening the clips. This is especially important on older AMD Athlon XP chips, as you can easily crack the CPU if the heatsink isn't perfectly flat.

7. INVESTING AT THE MEMORY BANK

Now it's time to install the memory into your motherboard. Try to use sticks that are the same, as this lowers the chances of compatibility issues. If you're running a motherboard that has dual channel memory support, install the sticks in alternating memory slots (1&3 or 2&4) to enable this feature. It's pretty hard to install memory the wrong way around – a small notch or two (depending on whether you're using SD-RAM or DDR-RAM) will line up with a raised section within the memory socket. Push the memory all the way in and the clips on either end should click into place.

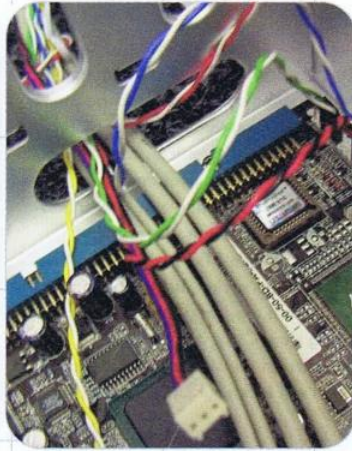


8. CASING THE JOINT

Your case should come with brass or plastic risers that keep your motherboard off the case. Screw these into the holes in your case that match up with the holes on your motherboard (use a texta to mark the relevant holes). Then place your motherboard's backplate over the I/O ports on the motherboard, and slide your motherboard into place in the case. It can be a tight squeeze, so you might need to get another person to hold it in place as you screw it down. If you've used the risers correctly, your motherboard shouldn't touch the case at all. If you've used them incorrectly, you'll be smelling smoke when you power on the PC, as it'll short out against the side of the case.

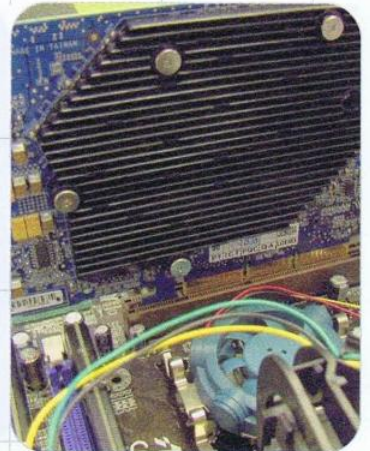
9. SPAGHETTIFIED

This is probably the hardest part of the job... which shows how simple it actually is to build a PC. There will be a bank of pins on the board that you need to connect your Power and reset switch to, as well as your power and hard drive activity LEDs. If these aren't labelled clearly on your board, the information will be spelt out in the manual. At this time you also want to install any additional USB or FireWire ports, which should plug straight into your motherboard.



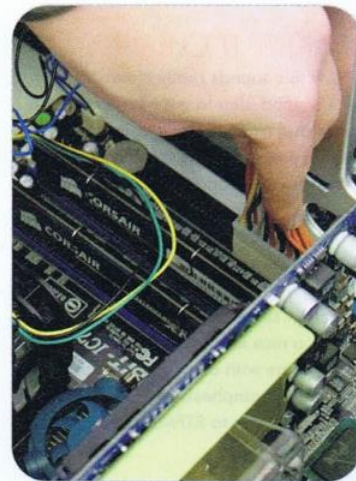
13. GAMES NEED GRAPHICS

The reason why you're building a gaming PC probably has something to do with the advanced graphics they offer. So you'll be needing a video card. Plug the video card into your AGP port (there's only one of them, and it will be next to several PCI slots), before screwing it firmly into place at the end that touches the PC case. Finally, if you've got one of the uber fast video cards, plug in a single molex connector from your PSU into your video card (two if you're running the new NVIDIA GeForce 6800 Ultra).



10. THE JUICE IS LOOSE

Computers don't tend to run too well without electricity. Hence the inclusion of a PSU (Power Supply Unit). Check that the red switch on the rear of the PSU is set to 220V (not 110V!) and then screw the PSU into place within your case. There's a special bay just for the PSU, usually at rear top of the case.



14. THE JUICE IS LOOSE PART II

Your motherboard probably needs two power plugs, one large rectangular plug and a smaller square plug. Find the two corresponding plugs on the PSU and plug them into the board. Then attach a single molex power plug (the small rectangular power plugs coming off your PSU) into each drive. If you're using a Serial ATA drive, you'll need to use a special SATA power plug - if your PSU doesn't have these you can pick up a cheap SATA adaptor for around \$12. If your box is starting to get really messy and cluttered, don't stress, unless you're a hardcore case modder chances are your PC will be ugly on the inside.

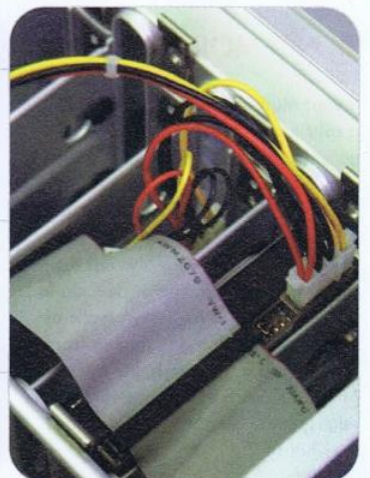
11. HARD DRIVIN'

This part is too easy. Simply grab your hard drive, set the jumper on the back to cable select (or master if it's an older one) and install it in your case's hard drive bay (that's the narrow bay). Use two screws on each side to fix it in place nice and firmly, making sure that you keep the plugs on the rear of the drive facing your motherboard. That's it. Told you it was easy!



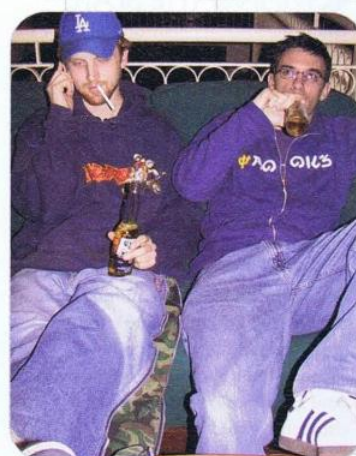
15. CABLETASTIC

Chances are you'll be using IDE cables, which are the long ribbon cables. There are three plugs on each of these cables, two of which are closer together. Plug the connector that is on its own into the PRIMARY IDE port on your motherboard (if it's not labelled on the board it will be in the manual), and then the opposite end into your hard drive. Do the same with another cable, but plug it from your SECONDARY IDE port to your optical drive. If you're only using one hard drive and one optical drive, it's best to keep them on separate IDE ports. If you're using SATA cables, you don't need to worry about making sure you're plugging the right end into the drive.



12. OPTICAL ILLUSION

Now, if you found the last part difficult, you probably shouldn't be building PCs. Or dressing yourself. Installing your optical drive (CD-ROM, DVD-ROM, etc) is just as easy - in fact, follow the exact same steps as you did for the hard drive. Except this time, you'll need to use the larger drive bay - good luck fitting an optical drive into one of the hard drive bays though. Oh, and we're not bothering with a floppy drive. In this day and age they're more of a liability than a utility.

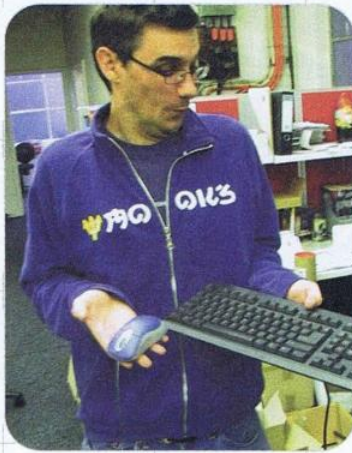


16. MAINTAINING THE FACADE

You don't want your friends and family to think this PC building thing is too easy, so it's best to take a break half way through it (ie go to the pub). If you don't, you'll probably finish the job within an hour or so, which makes the favours your relatives are willing to do in return much less demanding. Obviously you don't want to get caught slacking off, so tell them you're off to the local computer shop to buy a new inverse kinematic convertor, as the anisotropic googleplexer seems to have some problems with its flux capacitors. Bask in their respect and techno-envy.

17. I/O TIME

Geez, these PC building shenanigans are hard work. Not. We're almost done already! Stand your case upright and plug in the monitor, mouse and keyboard. If you've got a particularly annoying motherboard you might need a PS2 keyboard to get into the BIOS, but the vast majority are now happy to work with USB keyboards.

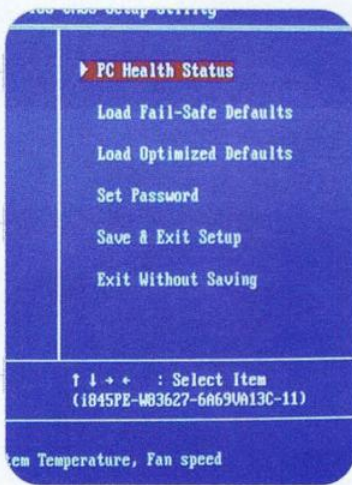


18. BOOM!

Plug the PSU into the wall outlet, and flick the switch on the back of it from the O to the I. Drum roll please. Hit the power button on the front of your case and pray to god that the PC powers up. When it doesn't, remember to turn on the power at the wall outlet. Power on again and watch all the little LEDs on the front of the case flicker into action. Weep tears of joy at your amazing accomplishment.

19. INTO THE BLUE ZONE

Before the PC boots up and detects you've got an empty hard drive, hit the delete key to open your BIOS. There should be an option to set everything to fail safe defaults – do so. It's also wise to disable the onboard peripherals such as onboard modem, sound, etc. We'll reenable these later. Make sure your CD-ROM/DVD-ROM drive is set to be the first bootable device, followed by your hard drive. Save your BIOS options and reboot. (Note – we've found on some motherboards that it's best to disable HyperThreading before installing Windows, which you can reenable once you're done.)

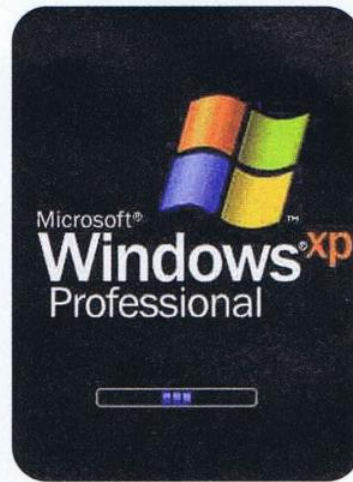


20. MAKE BILL HAPPY

Whack your Windows installation disk into the drive quick smart. The PC will boot off this disk and start installing. You can pretty much use all of the default options. If you're running decent hardware it should only take around 35 to 40 minutes to install Windows. If you want to install Linux go read another mag, as I don't have a freaking clue. In fact, go ask one of the nerds in your Computer Science class – if they're a true nerd they'll probably have contributed code to the Linux source. Losers.

21. SOFT DRIVIN'

Once Windows has finished doing its thing, you'll need to install drivers and service packs. I find the following order leads to the least amount of hair pulling: Windows service pack, motherboard drivers, latest DirectX, and then the graphics card drivers. Remember to reboot your PC between every driver install, and be patient when it's installing drivers. Often you'll think it's finished, and hit the reboot button, just as another dialogue box pops up telling you that you're actually only half way through the install process. Which is bad. Oh, and don't install in Japanese.



22. ALL ABOARD

Now it's time to head back into your BIOS and to start re-enabling your onboard devices. Do it one at a time, before booting into Windows and installing the relevant drivers. This makes it easier to troubleshoot any problems you might have, as you'll know exactly which onboard component is the troublemaker.

23. HEAR YE, HEAR YE

I tend to leave the sound card until last, as it's common to have a few issues with it. Before installing it I make sure I've used the System Restore feature, so if things go bad with the sound card install I can roll back to the last good point in my PC's short history. The sound card will plug into one of your PCI slots. The general rule of thumb is to start with the PCI slot furthest from your AGP slot, then use every second slot. So if you have a sound card and network card put them in the first and third slots. We should also mention that onboard sound has actually come a long way, so if you have a nice new hoopy frood MoBo you don't necessarily need a sound card.



24. STABLE AND ABLE

You should now have a fully functioning PC, but it's wise to do some stability testing just to make sure it's all working ok. While you're at it you might like to try your BIOS' performance mode, but chances are this will cause crashes. 3DMark2001 in looping demo mode is a nice test, and you can download this for free from www.futuremark.com. However, the most enjoyable way is to stay up for the next 24 hours playing all of the great PC games that you can't get on the consoles.

HERCULES DJ CONSOLE

RRP \$499
DISTRIBUTED BY: Tech Pacific

It's about time a product like this came along! Most people who are serious about electronic music have a pretty large collection of digital music, yet there's always been a massive barrier to entry if you want to learn to mix. In short, if you want to mix with mp3s, you'd need to buy i200s, a mixer and Final Scratch, or for a similar cost, pick up a couple of Denon S5000s and a mixer. Sure, there are plenty of PC programs that allow you to mix, but most of them are half-baked, and it's the tactile nature of mixing, the ease of use, as well as the rich sound you get from professional hardware, that makes it rewarding.

We've been wondering for ages just when someone is going to bring out a cheap hardware solution for PC, and finally, it has arrived... well, almost. The Hercules DJ Console is a great first step, but there's still room for improvement. Even so, this little package can do quite a bit for the price.

The unit itself comes with its own sound card which plugs into your PC or laptop via USB. It also comes with a suite of programs you can use in conjunction with it, but we found Virtual Turntables offered the best features and best layout. Once you're all plugged in and installed, it's a simple matter of dragging and dropping tracks into the left and right turntables on screen. You can then auto match the BPM and

even auto beat match if you're feeling particularly lazy. If not, you can use the jog dials on the DJ Console to quickly align your tracks and listen to the result through your headphones. Virtual Turntables also shows the wave files moving along on top of each other at the top of the screen, which makes beat matching really straightforward as you can simply align the peaks and adjust with the jog dials if they go out of phase.

The auto beat matching is usually pretty on the money, and although serious DJs would say that beat mixing is an essential skill, the reality of the DJ Console is that you're better off letting the program do the initial BPM count for you. The reason being that although it's a hardware solution, the DJ Console doesn't really have the tactile response necessary. The jog dials are useless for throwing into a beat mix (or for scratching – hip hop DJs beware!). That said, they work well for slight adjustments to keep your tracks in time. The software we tested is far from perfect though. It didn't have many problems with a steady 4/4 beat, but completely freaked out when we tried to mix some garage.

Along with beat recognition software and beat matching, Virtual Turntables also lets you loop anything from a quarter of a beat through to two bars. This is

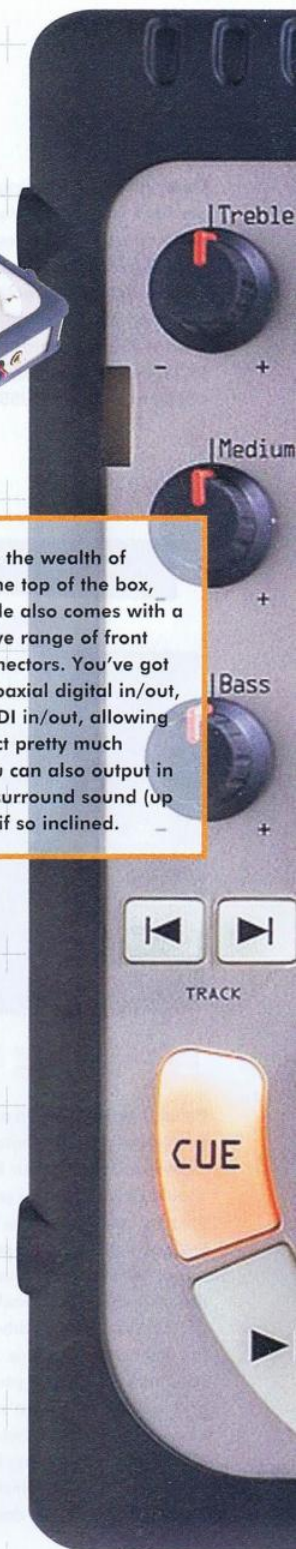
especially useful when you just want a steady baseline or percussive element to layer onto the track that's playing. You have three knobs for bass, mid and treble, allowing you to isolate or enhance elements of each track. There are also three buttons for FX (you can pick which effects you want in each slot), including reverse and flange. As you'd expect, you can also set cue points, allowing you to come in exactly when you want to. It's a nicely rounded set of features.

As great as the DJ Console is, I'd love to see something a little more heavy duty, with software designed specifically for it, rather than existing PC software adapted for the unit. As it stands it's often easier to do things on screen with the mouse rather than on the unit. The jog dials are also too close to the cross fader, meaning that it's easy to shift them as you cut between tracks, throwing the mix out of whack. By far the biggest problems with the DJ Console, however, are sound issues – both in quality and in consistency (the track speeds often waver). This definitely isn't hardware that you can use to play out, but then, it's not meant to be. For bedroom house freaks, this is damn good fun, and something that we'll go back to again and again... until we get fully fledged decks to test that is. Great value for money.

Cam Shea



In addition to the wealth of features on the top of the box, the DJ Console also comes with a comprehensive range of front and rear connectors. You've got optical and coaxial digital in/out, as well as MIDI in/out, allowing you to connect pretty much anything. You can also output in 5.1-channel surround sound (up to 6 outputs) if so inclined.





DELL INSPIRON 8600 NOTEBOOK

RRP \$3000+
DISTRIBUTED BY: www.dell.com.au

Up until fairly recently laptop computers conformed to the standard 4:3 aspect ratio but of late more and more widescreen (16:9) multimedia laptops have entered the market. Whilst the extra desktop space may be little more than filler for the average user, anyone with an interest in multimedia will get a great deal of use from the extra real estate. Usually with the extra screen size comes an exponential increase in

weight but the new Pentium M, or Centrino chipset alleviates much of this weight differential as well as battery life due to the small size of the chip itself and the fact that it only needs a fraction of the power to run compared to its desktop counterparts.

Based around the 1.7Ghz Centrino processor, the Inspiron 8600 neatly bridges the gap

between desktop replacement power and portability and the addition of a Mobility Radeon 9600 and support for up to 2Gb RAM (the model tested featured 1Gb of RAM) means that it can double as quite a nifty portable gaming machine as well – if you can get over the motion blur caused by the relatively low pixel response time of the screen. To give some indication

of the gaming power of the machine we ran it through a standard suite of benchmarking programs (all at default), including Aquamark 03, 3Dmark 03 and 3Dmark 2001SE. The results, whilst not spectacular compared to desktop systems were still quite impressive, boasting an overall Aquamark score of 14096, 3Dmark 03 score of 1871 and 3Dmark 2001SE score of 6836. Whilst ephemeral numbers may be all well

SYSTEM SPECS

- 1.7GHz Pentium M Processor
- 1Gb PC 2700 RAM
- 128Mb DDR ATI Mobility Radeon 9600
- 80Gb Ultra ATA HDD
- 4x DVD-RW/+R drive
- Intel PRO Wireless 2100 WLAN (802.11b)
- 15.4" Widescreen WSXGA+ TFT display (max res. 1680x1050)

and good, in real world term they translate to mean that the 8600 can run most modern games smoothly with the detail set to medium. Also impressive is the fact that the machine comes equipped with a DVD-RW drive and can get up to five hours of battery life from a single charge.

Unfortunately the processing power comes at a price. The 8600 may not be as heavy as some of its similarly specced competitors but it still weighs in at a hefty 3+ kilograms (depending on configuration), making it a bit of a strain to lug around for any extended length of time.

Daniel Wilks <<



PHILIPS HDD060 1.5GB HDD MP3 PLAYER

RRP \$449

DISTRIBUTED BY: www.philips.com.au

✂ The face of portable music players is changing. Not too long ago we were marveling at 128Mb players, and then Creative changed everything with its enormous (in size and storage) Nomad Jukebox players. Time went by and the choice remained either small and sleek players with minimal storage capacity or enormous, barely portable monstrosities in which you could store all of your music. Then came the iPod and the second revolution of HDD based players. It proved that you could have a sexy lightweight player without sacrificing massive storage capability.

Now comes the Philips HDD060 MP3 player – the name may not exactly roll off the tongue but it's a great little machine nonetheless, though it does have a few problems.

The player contains a 1.5Gb HDD (which can hold about 1.2Gb of files) which translates to around 375 MP3 tracks encoded at 128kbps (if you like your music flat and tinny) or around 250 at 192kbps. The interface is excellent, controlled with four easy access buttons on the face allowing users to quickly scroll through their tracks, browse artists, albums or genres and the like. The interface is excellent and nearly as comprehensive as that of the much more expensive (but with far higher storage capacity) iPod. Sound quality is excellent all round but lacks enough grunt to pump tracks loudly through anything but the supplied ear-bud style headphones. That said, the supplied ear-buds are

just about the best we have ever used. Not only are they extremely comfortable (a definite rarity), they produce crystal clear sound at all registers, only ever showing a hint of distortion at the very highest notes - not that you'll be hearing them too often unless you're one of the three fans of Diamanda Galas, the scary tall Goth-opera diva. Unlike the iPod, the HDD060 features a removable battery so you won't have to send it into the shop at the end of the battery lifespan.

The player can also be used as a portable storage device by simply opening the player like a removable drive and dragging the desired files into it but we had some problems transferring files between different computers.

Occasionally the player



wouldn't allow the transfer of files between PC (no reason given) and would not work on Macs at all. The music transfer software is quite easy to use but relatively featureless for the size of the install. Whilst the creation of playlists and track selections is easy the program had problems importing files, sometimes failing to pick up album and artist names and does not have any capability for either downloading music files from an online shop or ever ripping them from CD. The USB 1.1 connection is also very slow for this day and age, taking around half an hour to completely fill the player. Hopefully the next iteration of the player will feature a far zipper firewire or USB 2.0 connection, allowing the player to be filled in a fraction of the time.

Daniel Wilks ✂



[left] We think this is what's known as a "lifestyle" shot...



[above] At night, the sexy girls come out...



[above] Or is it freaks? I can never recall




[above] Poking the giant evil Badger with a hot poker will surely only enrage him further...

Guild Wars

//www.guildwars.com

>> Eliot Fish

 If you've never been one to taste the massively multiplayer experience, we ask: What is it that's prevented you logging on and goofing off? Are you put off by the idea that you'll have to invest countless hours a day just to level up your character? Are you worried that you'll find it too difficult to link up with other like-minded players and have an enjoyable co-operative experience? Or is it that you simply refuse to pay a monthly online subscription fee on top of shelling out for the cost of the game disc? If you can relate to any of these concerns with online gaming, then maybe you've been waiting all this time for something like Guild Wars.

BRAIN SLAPS BRAWN UPSIDE THE HEAD

Guild Wars is the pet project of ArenaNet, a wholly-owned subsidiary of NCsoft Corporation — the company behind City of Heroes and Lineage I & II. ArenaNet was founded by key members from various Blizzard projects, namely

the Diablo, StarCraft, WarCraft and Battle.net teams. The aim of ArenaNet is to pool their experience into creating state-of-the-art online gaming networks, and obviously the kick-arse games to run on them. Guild Wars is set to be their first stab at it, and they might be onto a winner already.

The fully 3D world is typically fantasy-based, but players will be able to focus on a set group of character professions, including: Elementalist, Mesmer, Ranger, Monk, Warrior and Necromancer. The classes have been designed to perfectly compliment each other in combat, encouraging players to form "guilds" and adventure in groups. The Monk, for instance, plays the all-important healing role, whilst the Mesmer can use magic to confuse and corrupt your opponent's attacks and abilities, sabotaging their tactics. But if you desire to adventure on your own, that option will still be available to you. Guild Wars will offer plenty of single player missions — and even player-versus-player missions — so

you can set out to prove you're the best in the land without an iota of help from anyone. As far as co-operative play goes, players can meet up for the first time, band together and just complete one-off missions, or for something more permanent, seek out guilds to join for more long-term objectives. Teams will also be adventuring in private areas to remove the problem of being harassed by player-killers or your typical online dickhead who's out to spoil the game for other players.

It seems the combat will be down as much to gaming skill as specific character experience, which should ease the frustration on capable players who don't want to feel they're being treated as newbies. This is possible due to the way combat has been designed. Success comes down to what eight specific skills and abilities you choose to take into battle (in some ways, it's similar to selecting which cards to play in a game of Magic: The Gathering), and each character class will eventually have access to

hundreds of class-specific skills. As soon as you know what kind of opponent you're up against, forward planning becomes essential to victory. Brain, you see, will have a chance to overcome brawn. This also highlights how team-play will become such an important factor to victory — players will have to communicate and develop strategies based on what different skills they can bring into battle in order to come out on top.

It's crucial to ArenaNet that players will have plenty of options, and that first-timers can log on and find something cool to do even if they're not as experienced as other players. Also, because the gameworld can be accessed via a world map, you never have to walk for hours to get to your mission objective, allowing for quick, fun online gaming no matter how much time you have to spare every day.

EVEN CHEAPSKATES CAN JOIN IN THE FUN

Guild Wars is certainly no slouch in the graphics department either.



This is a truly lush looking game, with gorgeous character models and suitably atmospheric environments. Clever lighting tricks such as "Bloom" (if you've played Invisible War you'll be familiar with this effect) help create a smooth, entrancing and truly mesmerizing feast for the eyes. Amazingly, most of the game will be "streamed" to the player as they adventure — only ever sending you the data that you need at any given time. It's the Dungeon Siege concept taken to a whole new level.

As good as all this sounds, we've saved probably the best piece of information for last. ArenaNet promise that Guild Wars will not require any monthly subscription fee to play. In fact, rumour has it that it may not have any initial fee either! Word is that ArenaNet are hoping to make their money from future expansions that you WILL pay for. Presumably if you don't want to download it, there'll be some retail presence for the game, but what a great concept! Let you get into the world and build up

your loyalty to the game, and then offer extra content at a price. Even if this isn't true, once you have the game, you can still play as much or as little as you want without paying another cent. Now your MMORPG addiction won't ever again be a costly experience (at least financially). That's the coolest feature, for sure.

At this moment in time, the required specs for Guild Wars are surprisingly modest. If ArenaNet are to be believed, the game will run on a PIII 800 with 256MB of RAM and a 32MB video card. They even insist that players still on 56k dial-up accounts will be able to log on and enjoy the game as much as anyone else! With the amount of experience ArenaNet have behind them, we get the feeling that Guild Wars will give Worlds of Warcraft a serious run for its money. Could it be a case of ex-Blizzard staff coming back to bite their former company on the arse? Expect Guild Wars to find release on PC towards the end of the year, with future console versions in the planning stages. <<<

KEEN AS MUSTARD

The game isn't out yet, but there are already a bunch of fan sites popping up all over the internet. If you want to get in early on a potential Guild, or just see what other gamers are saying about Guild Wars, then check out these websites:

- www.guild-hall.net,
- www.photics.com, gw.stratics.com,
- www.theguildwars.net,
- gw.warcry.com,
- guildwars.rpgstars.com.



[below] It's like Voltron, only different



Links

»» Kosta Andreadis



Mc Urban Legends

<http://www.snopes.com/>

»» Urban legends get around, like the one Cam once told the crew - back in the day when he was still flipping burgers a Mickey D's. He said that legend has it that a Filet O' Fish is actually flavoured chicken and that a Mc Chicken is made out of flavoured fish and the Big Mac is made out of cardboard and cow tongues. As with most urban legends Cam was wrong, even about the Big Macs - turns out they're actually made out of cardboard, cow tongues as well as their inner rectum. Here's a site that chronicles many of these urban legends and the validity of their claims.



80's Commercials and ALF

<http://www.x-entertainment.com/downloads/>

»» As of late there's been a definite boom of all things 80's, everything from fashion to electro - but sadly there's still no sign of an Alf's resurgence into popular culture. What good is an 80's revival without the phrase "No Problem!" or "I Kill Me" becoming part of popular culture again. The triumphant return of Gordon Shumway aside - one good thing that did come out of the material excess of the 80's were the commercials. From Rambo and Centurion action figures, C-3PO cereals, Tonka Trucks and Honey Smacks! - it became apparent that even after all of these years we still want our parents to buy us these products.



The Boom Box Museum

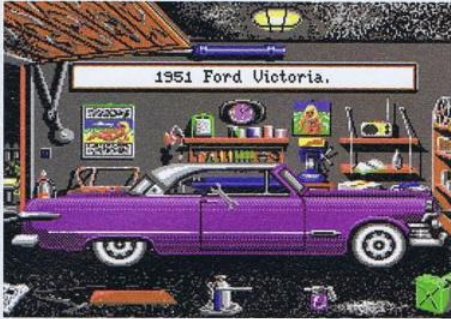
<http://pocketcalculatorshow.com/boombox/>

»» The Boom Box, or Ghetto Blaster, is essentially a portable cassette/radio - albeit a rather big one. Back in the day every crew used to have one, and the person whose responsibility it was to carry it (whilst the other members popped and locked to the latest dope beats) was the expendable member of the crew and more often than not a rich suburban kid trying to "slum it" with those of us from the streets. Thankfully there's a site out there that has chronicled this wonderful machine from its rise in the late 70's to its demise in the late 80's.

*Minimum monthly cost for this broadband and telephone package is \$73.45 per month (\$39.95 for starter 300MB plan and \$33.50 Optus phone line rental with 15¢ local calls). Quoted broadband price is only available when you take an Optus local and long distance home phone service. For technical or commercial reasons, broadband is not available to all areas. Not all homes can be connected to all Optus services and will depend on customer's location. **OptusNet Broadband:** ^Exceeding monthly Data Allowance will see your speed limited between 20Kbps and 28.8Kbps until the first day of the next billing month. Unused Data Allowance cannot be rolled into subsequent months. Use of the service is subject to the Customer Terms and Acceptable Use Policy. See www.optus.com.au/optusnet_sfoa for details. \$300 pro-rata early disconnection fee applies. **OptusNet Cable:** Optus reserves the right to quote for non-standard installations. A \$2.20 monthly fee applies if account is not paid by direct debit. Minimum total cost is \$628.40 for 12 months (includes \$179 installation and a \$30 direct debit rebate) plus current monthly line rental. **OptusNet DSL:** Minimum total cost is \$628.40 for 12 months (includes \$149 installation) plus current

OPTUSnet
BROADBAND





Street Rod 3

<http://www.streetrod3.com/>

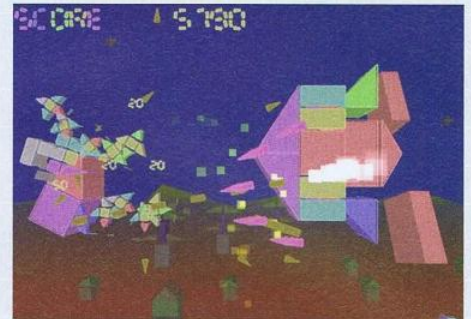
»» Any fan of Street Rod has asked themselves time and time again - why hasn't anyone made a modern rendition to this most sacred of games? The ability to buy your car and parts from the local paper, modify the engine, race for pink slips (in an aqueduct no less!) and fill up at the local gas station is not only genius but an untapped market. As good as NFS Underground is, let's face it - it's no Street Rod 2. Although unofficial, this group of young developers sent down from heaven in a 1969 Shelby GT500, have taken it upon themselves to create that very sequel - with Street Rod 3!



Picasso Head

<http://www.mrpicassohead.com/>

»» A lot of you out there, at one stage of another, would have harbored aspirations to become an artist. Or perhaps some of you are artists, and if that's the case, bugger off Snooty McSnoot - this link won't appeal to the arty farty crowd you so passionately won't let me be a part of. Picasso, who according to legend was a cybernetic robot sent back through time to teach the world about the futility of depth perception, was probably the most well-known paint-guy of the 20th century. Apparently he promoted cubism long before the GameCube came about and here's a site that lets you create your very own wacky portrait - Picasso style!



Hey Look! Free Game! Free!

http://www.asahi-net.or.jp/~cs8k-cyu/windows/tf_e.html

»» Free stuff is good, but not all free stuff is, well, good. For example, free lap dance from a stripper - good. On the other hand, a free ticket to go see Guy Sebastian perform Tom Jones ballads in a celebration of all things unholy - bad. But unfortunately it's not always as clear cut as that, as a free lap dance whilst a Tom Jones love ballad is a grey area. Here's a site with a free game you can download for your PC, and it's definitely good. Called Tumiki Fighters, this side-scrolling shooter features tried and true gameplay with enough charm and quirkiness to make it as addictive as crack (which sadly isn't free).

monthly line rental. Optus Local Telephony: Call charges are extra. Free standard installation of your telephone line(s) applies to applicable call plans. A New Number fee applies if you do not transfer your existing phone number. *On the 15¢ call plan you receive your first 100 standard local calls free per month. General: A \$99 pro-rata disconnection fee may apply to some Optus Local Telephony plans &/or preselected Long Distance if disconnected within 12 months. Full terms & conditions apply. All information correct as at 1 March 2004. Prices subject to change without notice. 'yes' rewards March 2004 Terms and Conditions apply and the offer expires 30th June 2004 unless withdrawn earlier. SingTel Optus Pty Limited trading as Optus Communications 101 Miller Street North Sydney 2060. Optus, the Optus logo, 'yes' and Optus FreeTime are trademarks of SingTel Optus Pty Limited. Optus Communications services are provided by Optus Networks Pty Ltd ABN 92 008 570 330. OPT3125/FLY

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LIFE ■ ■
MAGIC ● ●

EQUINOX

ELIOT FISH GETS LOST IN A BRIGHTLY COLOURED MAZE OF NOSTALGIA.

▶ The year is 1993. Michael Jackson reaches an out-of-court settlement with a young boy he's accused of molesting, River Phoenix tragically drops dead from a drug overdose, and Eric Clapton is winning awards for his wretched Tears In Heaven single. But it's not all bad news. You realise that you've finally finished your obsession with The Legend of Zelda: A Link to the Past, exhausted your patience with Actraiser, thrown out your cart of Mystic Quest, and beaten Super Castlevania IV one too many times. It's time for a new SNES game.

NAC

That warm, fuzzy feeling of excitement washes over you as you realise you've got just enough money to buy a fresh cartridge, so you throw on some clothes (sorry, I should have mentioned you start out this story naked) and make your way down to the nearest games shop. Of course, back in 1993, the nearest games shop is a good 30 minute bus ride away because the big retail stores in town have the most pitiful collection of game carts you've ever seen. It's like they have no idea how amazing the Super Nintendo is! You finally make it to the quirky little independent games shop and pray to the 16-bit gods that they have some new carts in, otherwise you just might be tempted to pick up that copy of *Zombies Ate My Neighbors* that's been slowly reeling you in with its funky 50's style box art. What you really want, though, is a new RPG... The SNES has opened your eyes to the wonderful fantasy lands concocted by Nintendo, Enix, Squaresoft, Konami, Capcom et al. You're hungry again to be enveloped in the rotating sprites of some imagined land overrun by evil wizards, bathed in the warm colourful glow of the Super Nintendo's 512x448 resolution

display. You snap out of your day dreaming and stare at the long shelf full of game boxes, your eyes lingering over each one as if it were a giant block of chocolate breasts. And then you spot it. Equinox.

You've not heard of it before - it certainly hasn't been reviewed in any of the games mags you've read lately. But one look at the fantasy-style box art and you're convinced it must be worth checking out. You read the back of the box, and it says 'Sequel to the NES smash hit *Solstice*'. You vaguely remember it. Before you can think twice, the guy behind the counter says, "Awesome game. Just came in. That's my last copy." You know he's bullshitting, but you're sold. You hand over your bucks and head straight home, reading the instruction manual on the bus ride back... "You take the role of Glendaal, the only son of Shadaal. Your task is to journey to Sonia's icy fortress and rescue your father from the clutches of the evil witch, thus bringing peace to the land. As a novice wizard, you begin with no magic or weapon. You must learn and find whatever you can in your quest..."

Then you look back over the bullet point list on the back of the box: Stunning 3D graphics; Superb stereo soundtrack; Unique rotating map scene; Mind-bending puzzles; Hidden spells and weapons; Over 450 rooms to explore; 8 underground dungeons; 8 evil guardians; Great long-term challenge; Battery-backed save game. You simply cannot wait.

THE METRIC SYSTEM

Upon booting up Equinox, you're greeted with a rather fancy bit of scaling and a flashy main menu that urges you to 'Press Start'. You jump right in. Your character is a small Elven-looking boy/man with green hair and a fetching white turban, standing in the middle of a large



world map. You walk around a bit and fall into a dungeon. The adventure has begun! The graphics are some of the best you've seen on the SNES, with an amazing pseudo-3D environment - it's an "isometric" perspective you note, having read that somewhere in a games mag. As is typical of SNES games, the colours are rich and the sprites huge. In fact, you've not seen a SNES adventure with such an attractively large character in such a detailed environment. Then the eerie soundtrack begins to swell. Already the atmosphere has set in. The dungeon feels ancient - obviously full of tricks and traps - and the unsettling ambient soundtrack is the coolest thing you're heard in years. Why has the world not been raving about this game? No matter. You venture forth and explore the bizarre interconnected rooms, realising your character has the ability to jump across gaps, push big stone blocks, wield a weapon (you find a dagger in an adjoining room) and eventually, you ascertain, cast spells (there are spell slots on the inventory screen).

Enemies populate some of the areas, but they don't always chase you down. Some of them appear stuck on predetermined paths, allowing you to skillfully dodge their movements and make your way past unnoticed. Some doors won't open unless you figure out a way of dispatching all the spooky creatures in the room. In fact, you realise that every room of the dungeon is its own unique puzzle. Sometimes cracking it will reward you with a key or potion to replenish your health, and other times a glowing blue orb drops down - "You now have one of the twelve tokens". Aha. Each dungeon, an increasingly difficult gauntlet of puzzles, twelve tokens scattered throughout, eventually unlocking a boss chamber...

A CLASSIC FOR MINERS

Before you know it, hours have passed. You've been utterly absorbed by the ingenious puzzles and tricky platforming. Whilst some of the game feels unnecessarily difficult because of the strange isometric perspective - it's easy to miss jumps or try to reach platforms that aren't aligned where you think they are - you're convinced you're playing a minor classic. You reach the third dungeon (another five more to go), and discover that the

environments continue to hold new challenges. Now you're up against moving platforms and conveyor belt-style puzzles, shifting blocks around and timing your runs under slamming grates, dispatching the oddest monsters with your newly found throwing axe. Some of the rooms have you stumped, but that's okay, the dungeons have been designed so that you can travel elsewhere and tackle a different puzzle at any time. Maybe later you'll figure that tough one out, or be up for the ruthless platforming challenge.

Leaving the dungeon automatically saves your game, and you explore the world map for an easy random monster fight in order to stock up on magic potions and life-giving apples. Upon returning to the Aztec-themed dungeon you're currently exploring, you thank the game developer gods that monsters don't respawn. In fact, every room you've 'conquered' forever remains so, allowing you to safely return to the point where you gave up the ghost earlier. Equinox has you completely under its spell. Its elements of role-playing, puzzle-solving and platforming are so cleverly combined, you might have mistaken it for a Miyamoto game had you not breezed through the credits to find it was coded in the UK at Software Creations Ltd by a John and Ste Pickford, and published by Sony Imagesoft. You make special note of the soundtrack composers, Tim and Geoff Follin - you remember their names from some of the Commodore 64 games you used to play such as Bionic Commando. Their inventive, ambient music still bounces around your head, even as you turn off the SNES and put the cartridge back in the box. It's 2am! Time to crawl into bed and dream of fantastical dungeons, bizarre boss characters and the eerie gauntlet of puzzles that is Equinox. You know you'll get up early and play it tomorrow anyway...<<<

[right] Prince Ali.
Fabulous he! Ali
Ababwa...



JAGGED ALLIANCE Wildfire



WILDFIRE takes you back to Arulco – its economy has completely collapsed and the country has now become a base for international drug cartels. The North American Drug Agency has been unable to affect the export of drugs through regular diplomatic channels due to the cartels' influence and has been forced to take more drastic action.

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Good Luck...

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Some of the awards picked up by Jagged Alliance 2:





Cottonmouth tells The Bride to "give her an F", cos she's f**ked

Kill Bill Volume 1

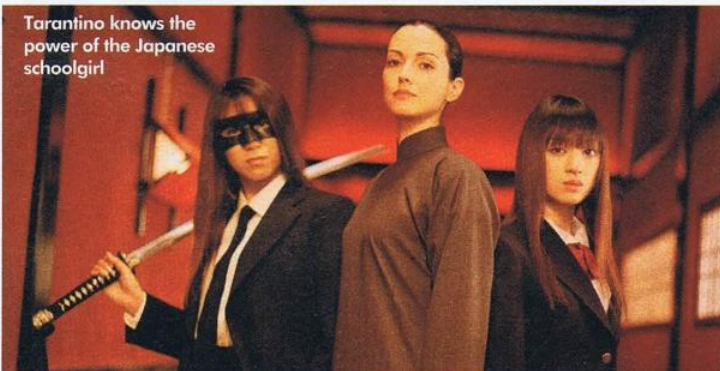
BUENA VISTA, R 18+

Quentin Tarantino is an interesting figure in cinematic circles, widely hailed as something of a wunderkind but the fact remains that if you look at his track record he's only hitting a 50/50 average when it comes to commercial and critical success. Compare this to someone like Kevin Smith or Robert Rodriguez (his true contemporaries in low budget and genre-esque filmmaking) and they have much stronger track records. Why is it then that Tarantino is praised above them? Whilst I don't pretend to understand the inner most workings of the Hollywood system it seems as though Tarantino has become the poster boy for the new generation, despite the flaws in much of his work. Kill Bill is a perfect example of this. Sure the film is a good deal of fun but it is something of a hollow

experience. There is a definite lack of depth to the film. Whilst it can be argued that the fact that he is making a tribute to grind-house film of the 70s, people like the Wayans brothers have been making just as clever parodies/tributes of genres (not including the abominable Scary Movie series) for years without a hint of the critical or commercial success of the homely geek. If anyone else had made Kill Bill it's doubtful that it would have received a fraction of the acclaim. If you're a fan of the film though the transfer is superb and the sound mix is just about perfect – unfortunately the special features are sorely lacking and only include some music clips and a very short and annoying making of doco in which either Tarantino or some of the stars talk about how darn clever he is.

Daniel Wilks

MOVIE: 8 / EXTRAS: 3



Tarantino knows the power of the Japanese schoolgirl



Jack does his best Eliot Fish impression

School of Rock

PARAMOUNT, PG

School of Rock is one of those incredibly rare family films that manages to be sweet without being saccharine, have a message without being preachy and most importantly feature an ensemble cast of kids who manage to be genuinely likable without being precious. Add to that mix the irrepressible Jack Black in a role literally tailor made for him and you have one of the funniest films of recent years. After being kicked out of his band, a down on his luck Dewey Finn (Black) pretends to be his responsible flatmate to get a job as a substitute teacher and make some much needed money. Seeing the talent some of these students possess, Dewey comes up with a

plan to use the kids as a backing band in a battle of the bands competition and sets about teaching them how to ROCK! After 90 minute of seeing and hearing Jack Black evangelise that a great rock song has the power to change the world it's hard not to be a believer and this is perhaps the greatest strength of the film. Never at any stage do you question Dewey's motives or love for music and the emotion is so strong that it transfers straight through to the audience. After a lackluster showing in the terrible Shallow Hal it's great to see Black land a starring role that allows him to make full use of his prodigious talents for comedy, improvisation and music.

Daniel Wilks

MOVIE: 8 / EXTRAS: 8

The Return of the King

ROADSHOW ENTERTAINMENT, M15+

▶▶ The trilogy comes together wonderfully in ROTK, culminating in Frodo and Sam arriving in Mordor and an incredible battle for the future of Middle Earth. What's refreshing about this series is that Peter Jackson realises that incredible CG is just a tool, a means to an end, with the real story still being told through great acting performances and remaining faithful to the source material. Thus, although the battles are fantastic, it's what happens to the characters that you really care about. If we were to criticise it though, we'd mention how obvious many of the hobbit little person doubles are, and the many many endings... but that would be nitpicking.

While The Two Towers felt like an all new (and far superior) film when it was released on DVD, thanks to the inclusion of stacks of scenes that were

cut from the cinema release, The Return of the King is a different story. It was great on theatrical release and it's great once again on DVD. That said, we're actually a little disappointed with the lack of surprises in this two disc set. It's fair enough that there's no commentary on disc one (given that they're packing such a long film onto a single DVD), but the second disc is made up of rather generic featurettes that cross over each other in terms of content a fair bit, and that fail to get to the nitty gritty of the film making process. But let's face it — this two disc set isn't for the hardcore fans anyway. It's for people who just want to see the film again. The rest of us will hang out for the four or five disc package that will undoubtedly be released later this year.

Q. Wang

MOVIE: 8 / EXTRAS: 3



His little pony, he loves his little pony...



Is it any wonder we like this show so much? Mmm... Fred!

Angel SEASON 4

FOX HOME ENTERTAINMENT, M15+

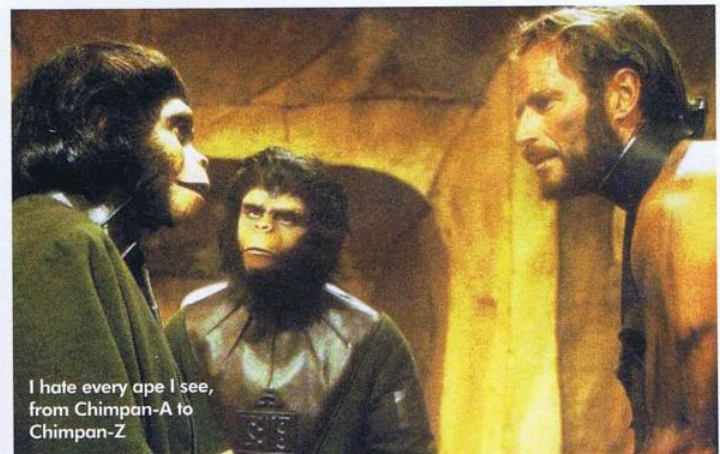
▶▶ Season 4 of Angel seemed a little disjointed on TV, but watching through it again from start to finish as a box set reveals just how well structured the story arcs really are. Joss and co have brought together everything that's happened over the three previous seasons of Angel and even the seasons of Buffy before it, and tied it all in to the events of season 4. The devil (essentially) comes down to Earth, bringing fire from the skies and eternal darkness with him. He's impossibly strong, but the best part is... he's only the errand boy for the real big bad, a being that threatens to enslave all of humanity by creating a utopian world.

We won't spoil any more for those

of you who haven't seen the season, but trust us — Angel hits new peaks in season 4. Better still, even though the fight scenes are slicker than ever, many of the best episodes are driven entirely by dialogue. The return of Angelis, for example, is masterful, and rather than being an old faithful episode filler, is used wonderfully to bring many things that have been lurking beneath the surface out into the open. The characters keep getting better too. The continued evolution of Wesley is one of the best aspects of this season — he's dark, sleeping with the enemy and a serious ass kicker now. Round it all off with the return of Faith and you have one wicked season.

Cam Shea

MOVIE: 9 / EXTRAS: 3



I hate every ape I see, from Chimpan-A to Chimpan-Z

Planet of the Apes SPECIAL EDITION

FOX, PG

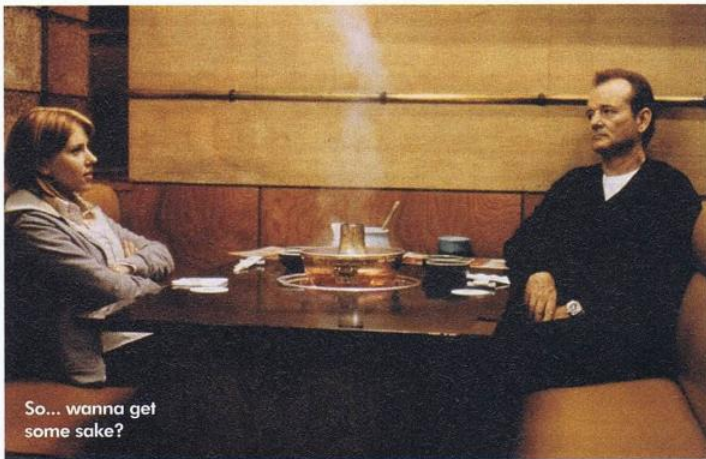
▶▶ Sometimes revisiting an old classic is a mistake, as the film turns out to be much better when filtered through hazy memories. Other films simply get better with time. Planet of the Apes, made in 1968 starring Charlton Heston before he went crazy and started loving guns a little too much, is a bit of both. Some of the film is as poignant today as it was when it was released (or back when I first saw it at any rate) but the heavy handed nature of the politics and contrived allegory becomes cheesier by the day. For those of you unfamiliar with the plot, a NASA astronaut is caught up in an anomaly and hurled far off course, eventually crash landing on a planet ruled by intelligent apes

who hold humans with contempt and give them few more rights than common animals. The themes of racism are handled without subtlety but won't unduly effect your appreciation of the film as a whole.

Whilst primitive by modern standards, the ape makeup is still an impressive achievement and the kicker at the end of the film may have been parodied countless times but still retains a punch. The film comes packed with features including two audio commentaries (Heston is notable in his absence) and a second disc. If you're a fan of sci-fi you can't pass it up. If you've only seen the abominable Tim Burton version, do yourself a favour and pick this up.

Daniel Wilks

MOVIE: 7 / EXTRAS: 8



So... wanna get some sake?



Lost in Translation

UNIVERSAL, PG

Set against the impressive backdrop of modern Japan, *Lost in Translation* is a film about many things. It's about the isolation and loneliness one would feel in a foreign country. It's also an unconventional love-story, where middle-aged actor Bob Harris (Bill Murray) commences a week-long relationship with Charlotte (Scarlett Johansson) - a recently married soul-searching twenty-something. Whatever the synopsis, *Lost in Translation* isn't a wonderful film based on subject matter alone, with deft direction by Sofia Coppola and wonderfully nuanced performances by Bill Murray and Scarlett Johansson, *Lost in Translation* is a remarkably honest and melancholic look at the lives of two seemingly different people drawn together in the most foreign of places. The honesty between the two leads becomes

apparent not whilst conversing but in the silences, as the two characters engage in an almost quiet repartee. Bill Murray delivers a particularly amazing performance as Bob Harris, a role tailor-made for the gifted comedian and actor - here he effortlessly moves from his signature dry wit one scene to emotional restraint the next. Shot entirely on location in Japan, *Lost in Translation* features some remarkable cinematography - making the country itself seem like an additional lead in the film. From the wondrous bright-lights and alienating aspects of modern Tokyo to the somber tranquility of Kyoto, everything is here - quirky Japanese television shows included. The DVD comes with an informative, if short, interview with Bill Murray and Sofia Coppola.

Kosta Andreadis

MOVIE: 9 / EXTRAS: 6



Gay cowboys eating pudding

Tears of the Black Tiger

MADMAN, MA 15+

If you were to cross-breed a Roy Rogers western, Doris Day bedroom comedy, Sam Peckinpah style violence and Andy Warhol pop-art you may get some inkling as to the overall look of the disjointed but wonderful Thai crowd pleaser, *Tears of the Black Tiger*, a gentle parody and tribute from virtually any old film style you can think of, from virtually anywhere in the world. The plot echoes those seen in many of the film styles being parodied - Dum, a handsome gunslinger and unwilling bandit is in love with the highborn Rumpoey but she in turn has been betrothed to an up and coming police officer by her father, the governor. Can Dum and Rumpoey ever be with the one they truly love? Will Dum, the Black Tiger

be able to free himself from the rule of his bandit masters? Will the honest police officer profess his one sided love to Rumpoey? Will loads of people be shot in slow motion? You bet, on all counts. Whilst the plot may be nothing spectacular, the cinematography and art direction is exactly that, spectacular. Every scene is awash with saturated pastels making the entire film look like a garish painting. Many of the outdoor scenes are shot on obvious sound stages complete with even more obvious painted backdrops. The end result is so different and charming that you can't help but be sucked in. Unfortunately at 113 minutes the joke goes on for too long and outstays its welcome.

Daniel Wilks

MOVIE: 7 / EXTRAS: 5



Hey Malky, who's this loser?

Ten Seasons

A DECADE OF GREAT MATCHES

VISUAL ENTERTAINMENT, EXEMPT

This compilation of classic games from the last decade English Premier League will probably be familiar to those that regularly get up to watch the live matches on Fox or SBS - the short 15 minute match overviews are frequently used as filler programmes at half-time. There's 12 matches included here, a lot of them see-sawing goal-fests, with a good range of teams represented. The 1996 clash between Liverpool and Newcastle was voted by a panel of "experts" to be the best of the lot, with good reason, but whatever personal allegiances you have will colour your own judgement. As per usual, Man United gets a good amount of screen time and Alan

Shearer's exploits seem to feature a lot. Viduka's four goals against Liverpool will remind Leeds fans of happier days, while Kanu's comeback hat-trick against Chelsea ranks highly on my personal favourites.

The magazine styled presentation, with interviews and commentary breaking up the on-field action, is very slick throughout, but the DVD format is wasted. While the drama and tension of the matches is palpable, it's hard not to feel they could have added more highlights and saved the interviews for the extras. Instead it plays out like a three hour version of the weekly highlights show.

Malcolm Campbell

MOVIE: 7 / EXTRAS: 1

Akira Kurosawa Collection: The Seven Samurai & Yojimbo

AV CHANNEL, PG

» Akira Kurosawa was one of the first Japanese directors to bring his country's film industry to the world's attention. He did so with *Rashomon* (1950), an unconventional and innovative drama that recounted a heinous crime from several different viewpoints. But it wasn't until *The Seven Samurai* arrived in 1954 that the director was entrenched as one of the great filmmakers of the 20th century. Later remade as *The Magnificent Seven* in the USA, *The Seven Samurai* tells the story of a small village in feudal Japan that hires Samurai to protect their village from Bandits. Like most of Kurosawa's films, *The Seven Samurai* is remarkably palatable to western audiences' sensibilities as it deals with universal themes, realistic characters and wonderfully staged action set-pieces. Although running well-over three hours, *The Seven Samurai* is not a film one would quickly forget, as it defines a genre and structure reproduced in a number of films today.

Yojimbo (1961), which features a friendlier running time of 110

minutes, is another classic film set in feudal Japan – starring legendary Japanese actor Toshiro Mifune (who can also be seen in *Seven Samurai*) as the Samurai with no-name. Later remade by Sergio Leone as 'A Fist Full of Dollars', *Yojimbo* is rife with wonderful character development, humour and atmosphere. Certain Japanese films can alienate most non-Japanese viewers in their characterizations and structure – Kurosawa's films don't. And that may be the genius behind all of his work – their accessibility. Akira Kurosawa has had a profound influence on a number of today's filmmakers, and now with these two pivotal Australian DVD releases – everyone can have the chance to see why.

Kosta Andreadis

SEVEN SAMURAI:
MOVIE: 10 / EXTRAS: 3

YOJIMBO:
MOVIE: 9 / EXTRAS: 3



[above] His name is Tikashi. He's in my book club!



THE *Greatest* MOVIES YOU'VE NEVER SEEN

PART 3:

Zatoichi (IMPORT)

PANDORA ENTERTAINMENT, CATEGORY III (R 18+)

» Takeshi "Beat" Kitano is something of a legend in art house film circles with an incredible filmography including *Sonatine*, the truly remarkable *Hana-Bi* (*Fireworks*) and the truly bizarre nonsense comedy "Getting Any?" as an actor/director, and countless other roles as an actor including a truly memorable turn as an evil and insane teacher in *Battle Royale*. Whilst he has been praised worldwide as one of the true greats of modern cinema, mainstream appeal has always eluded the Japanese auteur – until now.



Zatoichi marks Kitano's first critical and commercial success and quite rightly so. It is, for want of a better term, pure cinematic magic, so exuberant in its energy and feeling that you can't help but get swept up in the majesty of it all.

If you know anything about Japanese cinema the name *Zatoichi* will be familiar to you – a blind swordsman, masseur and gambler who shuffles from town to town getting involved with the downtrodden, the needy or simply killing those who need to be killed. Although the character has a great deal of history (including 26 movies and countless comics and novels), Kitano has made the character his own and revitalised the flagging *chambara* (Samurai swordplay) genre to boot by filling the story with weird and wonderful post modern touches, explosive yet restrained action complete with CG blood, slapstick comedy, *Zatoichi*'s bleached blonde hair and a show



stopping dance number in the vein of *Stomp*.

The plot is simplicity in itself with the blind swordsman somewhat unwillingly/unwittingly coming to the aid of two geisha hunting down the murderers of their parents. Whilst the cinematography is undoubtedly beautiful it pales in comparison to the genius of the soundtrack that subtly samples everyday sounds and creates a driving beat made up of peasant's hoes, pelting rain and the like,

giving us an insight into how *Zatoichi* sees the world. With any luck the film will make an appearance on the big screen some time later this year as it is doing excellent business worldwide on the festival route and is pulling excellent box office (for a foreign subtitled film) in the U.S. Fingers crossed.

Daniel Wilks

MOVIE: 10 / EXTRAS: If you understand Japanese 8, otherwise 3

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HYPER»

»HY0129

Q. Who is the greatest fighting game character of all time, and why?



Fighting games are one of the major staples of any gamer's diet. There's something reassuring about the rhythm of combat in a one on one fighter, whether it be 2D or 3D. How many hours has the average gamer spent honing their skills and combos in their favourite fighting game? Too many. But in doing so, we've all bonded with certain characters. Here at Hyper, we're huge fans of Giant Doctor Bag Head from Guilty Gear X2 (our name, not theirs), not to mention Akuma, Shun Di and Wang (Tekken). But over to our readers...

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...

? "What's the worst game you've ever played and why?"

Responses will be printed in Hyper #131



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.

RYU FANBOY

Well, I'm going old school and saying Ryu from any of the Street Fighter games. Any other fighting game character can have their swords, 5 million hit combos and whatever other special moves they can come up with, but in the end, a good old fashioned fireball is gonna screw them up big time.

Most new fighting games have a Ryu clone in them. Why? Because he's the BEST. He can Hadoken till the cows come home, Shoryuken with the best of them and tatumakisan-majigggythingo... (you know, whatever he says when he does that helicopter kick) til his heart's content.

Now if you'll excuse me, I'm going to dust off my copy of SFA3 for psone and relive some memories.

Stevo

PRIMAL THERAPY

Since I'm not savvy with the latest fighting games (poor sad me) I will take a step back through time to answer this question. Does anyone remember a game called Primal Rage? If so, you will know why I chose Diablo as the greatest fighting game character ever.

In the golden days of SNES beat-em-ups, all of the combatants were Ninjas or some variation on the human form. However, Primal Rage was a breath of fresh air, using Dinosaur Gods as its characters. For the first time in a video game, I could assert my authori-tah with the Tyrant Lizard King. Yes, Diablo was a T-Rex, but not just any T-Rex. Diablo was the fire-breathing King Of Evil, who had the option of tearing his enemies to shreds with his teeth and

claws, or burning them to death in searing Hellfire, and during his colossal one-on-one battles to conquer the Earth and make it a new Hell, he could eat the foolish human worshippers who believed that he would give them Salvation - but all they gave him was a light snack.

Another 16-bit character that springs to mind is Fulgore from the undisputed classic, Killer Instinct. He was a Terminator built for combat, who also had some of the easiest and strongest combos that you could pull off in the game, and his back story kicked arse too. Ultratech, the company responsible for the tournament, built him as a prototype and used the other contestants as guinea pigs to test his fighting ability. How cool is that? Not to mention that the "Gun 'Em Down" remains one of the best fatalities of all time!!!

Mr M

COMEDY VALUE

I believe that the best fighter game character ever created does not need to be a strong muscular character like Ryu or Guile from Street Fighter or Goro from Mortal Kombat. In my opinion the best character would be one that stands out from the crowd. One that is different to the others. One character found in the game, "Tekken 3", suits this to a tee. The character is "Gon", and he is in my opinion, the greatest fighting game character of all time.

Who is "Gon"? He is a short cute dinosaur that first appeared as a character in a humorous Japanese Manga. Namco, being the good company they are, decided to place him into this game as an unlockable

[below] Primal Rage, a game set in Middle Earth apparently





[above] Guilty Gear X2, featuring Giant Dr. Bag Head

character. And even though he can only perform low attacks, he compensates by using his comedic abilities.

So if you are able to play Tekken 3, try to unlock Gon, because even the smallest characters can reach the greatest heights.

Craig Davidson

HOW ABOUT SAKURA?

Ken is the man. Sure Ryu may hit harder but Ken's got style to the MAX. He's fast, furious and with his multiple hit specials, chaining moves together is pure pleasure. Chuck a fierce punch in just before a dragon punch for a killer four hit combo! And name another character that hit eight times with one move that isn't a super move pre 1995 (use the hurricane kick as your opponent is

getting up, works best on Bison). Other contenders for best fighter (bar Ryu & Akuma) include Haomaru (the greatest swords man), Morrigan (cool morphing abilities), Evil Iori (range, power and manic laughter), those Tekken dudes that copy every ones fighting style, like the log woman in T3 or Inferno from Soul Calibur (why bother picking anyone else?) and of course those two knuckle heads Sub and Scorp. Now, who is the sexiest fighter of all time? Kasumi, Mai or Chunners?

Jose.

ZEN BOY

The greatest fighting character of all time is Ryu, hands down. I mean, what's cooler than a wandering ass-kicker who is ready to dish out some whoop-ass if need be, or teach people the ways of his style and of peace also? No one, that's who! Ken is great, but Ryu is the greatest of all time...there is no other.

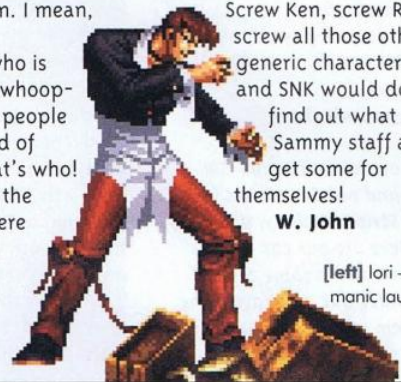
Nathan Crick

FEELING GUILTY?

The greatest fighting character of all time? Screw that man! I'm choosing EVERY character from the Guilty Gear series. People who say there's no innovation in character design in fighting games today obviously aren't looking in the right direction! Just look at Brigette, the girl with the funky yo yo moves who's actually a guy! Plus, Guilty Gear has some of the most memorable finishing moves too. Who can forget Faust's move where he puts the other character in a bomb shelter, then nukes the world, with the round ending with the other character poking his/her head out of the bunker and looking sad at the destruction all round.

Screw Ken, screw Ryu and screw all those other generic characters. Capcom and SNK would do well to find out what drugs the Sammy staff are on and get some for themselves!

W. John



[left] Iori - better with manic laughter

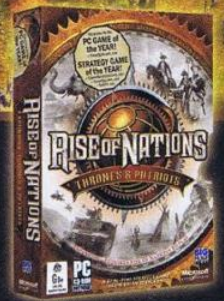
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MAKE HISTORY



CARMAGEDDON

To the Men of HYPER magazine, Long time reader, first time writer, it's funny how assumptions can sometimes bite you in the ass. When I first saw issue 1 of your mag at my local news agency I decided not to buy it and instead opted for good ol' Super Play. I apologise for that. My bad. But I've changed my ways since then so fear not.

Anyway, just curious as to The Crew's taste in automobiles :) so I'm basically asking:

What cars would you list into your top 3 if money was no object?

My Top 3:

1. Lotus Elise III R
2. Ferrari 575M Maranello
3. MINI Cooper S

P.S What do you guys think of the new MINI Cooper S?

Kudos guys,
project_wonderboy

Ah, dude, you do realise this is a game mag and not Fast Fours (or Street and Strip you dirty, dirty boy). That said here are our car choices.

Cam would want some type of cliché Lowrider but ultimately the sound system would be more important than the actual car. Speaking of which, why is it that as a person's sound system gets better their taste in music gets exponentially worse? HI-NRG and Happy Hardcore are dead people!

Daniel wants something with a built in spa, fully functional bar and preferably a sexy valet. It wouldn't hurt if the car could turn into a

giant battle droid capable of levelling cities either.

Malky wants a Skyline GTR with the intelligence of K.I.T.T. from TV's Knight Rider but a super-happy-crazy female Japanese voice.

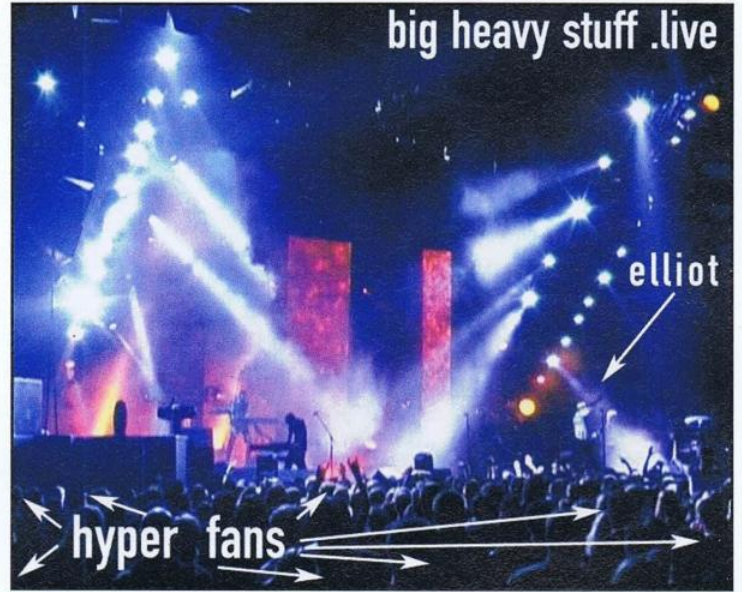
Finally Amos wants the car Avril stood on in the Sk8er Boi film clip.

As for the new MINI Cooper S...um...it's small? Malcolm's a bit of a fan, though.

WAR IS HELL

Dear Hyper,

The other day I was browsing along in my local Electronic Boutique, gazing nonchalantly at the array of PC titles. My eyes flickered across the many war-based games on display, when suddenly something slowly crept into my head. Holy F%\$#! Where the hell were the games set on WWI, the Great War? There were stacks of games set in WW2 and plenty of games about the Vietnam struggle, even a few Korean games, but nothing about the 1914-1918 war. The fact that the guys at EA totally ignored WWI over Vietnam really pisses me off! And then I heard the news about Star Wars: Battlefront! JESUS CHRIST MAN! What is wrong with WWI? Must you result to a fictional universe for inspiration? It is a well known fact that American developers are the force behind war games, mainly due to the Japanese mindset about war after their "ahem" Greater East Asian Co-Prosperity Sphere came burning and crashing down at the end of



[above] Jake Stollery busted out this semi-accurate vision of Eliot rocking out

WW2. Most Japanese want to forget their militaristic past and so don't make games about it. This leaves America, and WWI is not a highlight to them.

First of all they entered at a very late stage for their own personnel interests (German U-boats had continued to destroy American merchant ships sailing to Britain), secondly they lost less than a tenth that the French lost, and thirdly they didn't achieve anything that they could be overly proud about. I've come to notice over the years that the Americans are a very self-conscious people with a perceived image of themselves. For example Master and Commander (starring Russell Crowe) was supposed to be about the naval war between Britain and America, but the producers were too scared to offend the American market and made it Britain versus France (the French don't mind apparently). What is wrong with having a game not involving Americans as the heroes! Some might say that the technology back couldn't offer the exciting gameplay as post WW2 games, but I think that's a ridiculous assumption.

Imagine slithering along the ground before falling into the safety of a trench, suddenly the entire line is blown apart by enemy artillery! Upon trying to regroup the enemy suddenly gasses you. Grabbing your gas mask in time you watch in horror as comrades around you start coughing up bits of their lungs. A whistle is heard and you see the dreaded Hun charging upon you. Machine gun at the ready you mow them down. But soon your overpowered and you find yourself fighting hand to hand armed with your trusty bayonet and trench

shovel. It's not enough and the enemy captures your spawn point. No! You pound the keyboard in frustration and selecting either a plane or tank return to the front. Just think about all the campaigns, developers could have fun with! Gallipoli, the Brusilov offensive, Flanders, Somme and so much more! So please don't shove away such an important war. It led to the rise and defeat of Hitler and the Cold war. And it was the first thing Australia could really be proud about. And it would be so refreshing in a stale corner of the games industry. Another thing I want to complain about is the lack of recognition Australians get in any of these games. Many Australians died in WW2 and still the developers of Battlefield had the cheek to ignore this and decided to put a Union Jack in the Tobruk level. Even though it was mainly an Australian garrison (Australian 9th division) that defended the city for 242 days against Rommel and his Afrika Korps. Successfully stopping his forces from attacking the all-important British Egypt. He called our troops 'the rats of Tobruk' out of respect. The developers ignore our sacrifice out of ignorance.

Anyway thanks for listening.

Kaiser Wilhelm II

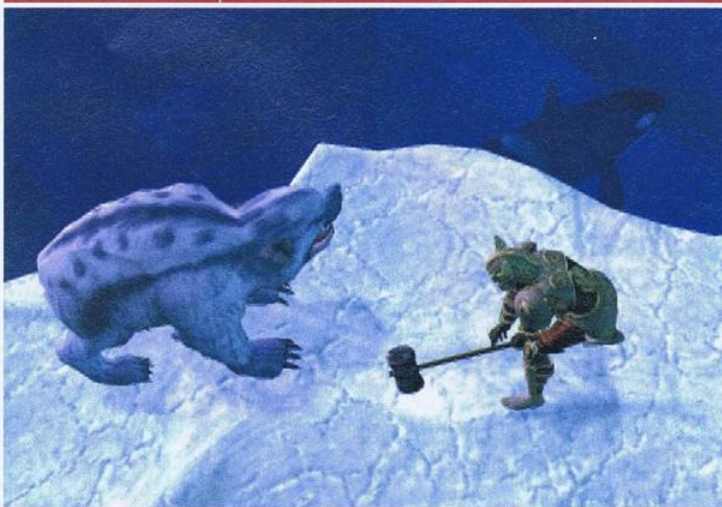
P.S Fifty bucks that the next Battlefield will be about the American Civil War. Yay! (Not)

Kaiser, whilst we can appreciate your love of military history (which is shared by Daniel who will expound on military history at the drop of a hat), we here at Hyper feel that WWI has widely been ignored in FPS games simply because of the pacing rather than the historical bias. You may

CAPTION THIS!

PART 54 WINNER

Trevor Van As tickled our funny bones the most this issue. Bravo.



I don't like the new Wack-A-Mole

LETTER OF THE MONTH

CRAP GAMES CAN LEAD TO COMEDY GOLD!

Dear Hyper,

It hardly needs to be said that when one flicks through your magazine, the first thing you notice about a game review (other than the purty screenshots) is the score you give to the game. You can't help it: that one little glance tells you not only whether the game is worth getting, or renting, or even watching in the nearest EB store or KMart, it also lets you know what kind of review you're in for.

Specifically, I'm talking about crap games. Whilst reading issue 127, I was delighted to see that Underworld on PS2 received a total score of 12. This is always excellent news, because it means that you're in for some good reading. Although I must admit, I felt the slightest twinge of apprehension before reading, because some reviewers just don't know how to review a crap game. Thankfully, Daniel Wilks came through for us. The only pity is that it didn't get a full page or even 2-page spread to allow him to really vent his stuff.

Because, since reviewing crap games is such a horrible task, it's the reviewer's right and privilege to let fly. We're not talking movie or music reviews, where it's up to subjectivity. A film reviewer may feel that 2 hours of their life is gone and will never return, and they get really nasty

about those 2 hours, but these same reviewers thought that Fight Club (for example) was crap. Whereas with games, it's a lot less difficult: almost anyone can tell when they're playing a crap game. And the reviewer has to spend 10 - 20 hours on the game, and that time will NEVER be returned.

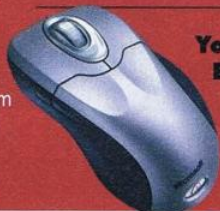
Thus, the reviewer is almost obligated to tell us how crap these games are. A good game review is a good game review, but there are only so many words you can use to convince the reader that it's a good game. Fortunately, the reviewer's imagination is the only limiting factor in how he or she tells us just how bad a crap game is, and that review of Underworld is a prime example. After all, who wants to read a review of a crap game that isn't funny? Who wants to read, "I really can't recommend this, and I fail to understand why they would release it" when such gold as "no matter how much you polish a turd it's still a turd" makes far more sense.

So this is an invitation to all game reviewers out there: when you're forced to sit through 20 hours of steaming Underworld, LET US KNOW

ABOUT IT! Let the Carmen Sandiego remake fly. So long as the Simpsons Wrestling doesn't hit the fan, everyone wins... We-ell, except for the faceless corporation who published it - although chances are, they've thrown plenty of well-polished turds at the wall for some of them to stick.

keeponrockin
Tom Hauville

Hey Tom - believe it or not, reviewing a truly bad game is one of the most coveted tasks in the office for the very reasons you labeled above. When reviewing a good game you're limited to what you can say so the review doesn't sound like complete advertorial or arse kissing, and average games are even more limiting simply because there are only so many ways you can say something is average. Bad games on the other hand give you free reign to say what you want (within the bounds of the law) and allow you to go crazy New York style with the verbal bitch-slapping. Of course actually having to play the piece of crap in the first place is usually a remarkably painful experience.



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poo-poo the idea that the weapons are slow but the simple fact is that they are. Combine that with the fact that WWI was all about massed combat compared to the average FPS which is usually based around a central hero character. WWI vehicles are also not particularly suited for action gaming. Sure there were tanks on the field but driving around in something that moves at a snail's pace and is prone to break down at the drop of a hat would simply be no fun. That said WWI planes would be a hoot to fly around in.

WWI on the other hand is the



[above] Sam found this on engrish.com. Who's Sam? He's not Amos that's for sure

perfect setting for RTS and strategy gaming - large fields of battle, massed troops, weather conditions that can truly turn the tides of battles. Personally we feel that one of the most interesting wars to base an FPS in would be the Mexican American War. Not only could you play either a Rough Rider or Buffalo Soldier, two of the coolest modern military units ever - interestingly enough they are also now both brands of condom (coincidence? You be the judge), the advent of the smokeless carbine changed the face of war forever. Combine that with the fact that the war was about guerilla fighting and small unit action and you have the makings of a great game. As far as Australian involvement in a war goes, whilst we do support showing the Australian contribution to the great wars the simple fact is that you sell to your market - if the majority of your market is American you pitch to Americans. It stands to reason. That said, we have it on fairly good authority that Australian soldiers will make a strong showing in the next

Home / Spelers / Blaauw	
PASPOORT	
Voornaam: Arjan	
Achternaam: Blaauw	
Geboortedatum: 08-01-1974	
Geboorteplaats: Stadskanaal, Nederland	
Nationaliteit: Nederland	
Speler van: Emmen	
Linie: Middenveld	

Medal of Honor game and we have even been teased that there may be a full Aussie campaign in one of the later iterations in the series. Stay tuned.

BLAU...UM...BLAAUW!

Dear Hyper, are I this way receive pleased for your illustrated magazine in the Netherlands here. It is very well. But one thing writes I to tell you! I weet you a large aerator of my favorite football player Arjan Blaauw is, but you spelt its found oneseif name!

Hendrije Vanderdonk



MAIL HYPER!

Postal:
78 Renwick St. Redfern,
NSW 2016 Australia

E-mail:
freakscene@next.com.au

[below] It'll take the next generation of machines to calculate the jiggle physics here



Hey Hendrijke - wow, the first letter we've ever received from the Netherlands (although Daniel apparently has quite a number of fans there thanks to his comic - go figure). Not only does your letter show us that Babelfish is not exactly 100% accurate when it comes to translating Dutch it also gives Hyper a new mascot. Ladies and gentlemen, we present to you the greatest football (soccer) player who ever lived, the mighty ARJAN BLAAUW! Without a doubt he is the greatest person ever. Blau!

STILL RAIDING TOMBS

To Hyper,
Dear Cam,
Love the magazine, you do a great job. I've been subscribing for about two years now. Sorry to hear Elliot [sic] has left, his very amusing captions made me wonder if his talent should have some other outlet.
What I am writing to you about is Final Fantasy soundtracks and their availability. Does anyone know where I can get a copy of the FFXIII soundtrack CD?
That Wall Market theme cheers me up a bit sometimes, but using a

memory card is a bit of a nuisance.
There were a couple of other things I wanted to know:
1) How to get that medipak on a ledge above a pool with a crocodile, in Palace Midas (TR)?
2) How to get the grenade launcher at the start of Lud's Gate (TRIII)? I kept sliding down the slope.
Michael Jordan

Hey Michael, thanks for your words of support for the great and kindly Fish. He's certainly moved on to bigger and better things - working for us! Mua haha! And just so you know, his talent does have another outlet - witty banter with the crowd during Big Heavy Stuff shows! Regarding Final Fantasy soundtracks, there are plenty of places you can order them online, but we'd recommend www.gamemusic.com. FF fans who live in Sydney can just go to Cartoon Gallery in the QVB. Voila!
Now, onto your questions.
1) Bugged if we know.
2) Bugged if we know. Dude, you're still playing Tomb Raider! Time to move on! Get yourself a next gen system, stat! If you're still desperate, check out some faqs online.



[above] This sweet piece of art came from an un-named assailant. Okay, so he had a name and we've lost it. Sorry!

UNSURE RE AMOS

To Hyper,
Who the hell is Amos and why do you guys keep going on about him? I mean, he's obviously some kind of Korean demi-god, but isn't this supposed to be a videogame magazine?
I have a question too.
1) I heard a rumour that there's going to be another Goldeneye game. Is this true?
Readatron 87

Dear Readatron, Amos is Hyper's unofficial mascot.
In answer to your question, yes, there is. It's not a sequel to the Rare classic, however, and is being developed by EA. You'll actually get to play the role of a villain in this one which is kinda cool. Why's it called Goldeneye? Because you lost an eye and had it replaced by a golden one... no, we're not kidding.

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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 2 MAY 2004
RETAIL SALES

1	◆	Simpson's Hit & Run	Adventure
2	★	AFL Live Premiership Ed	Sports
3	★	Fight Night	Sports
4	▼	Need For Speed:Underground	Racing
5	◆	GTA: Vice City Ptm	Adventure
6	▼	SOCOM 2 US Navy Seals	Action
7	★	Dragonball Z: Budokai 2	Action
8	★	SOCOM: US Navy Seals Ptm	Action
9	★	Final Fantasy X-2	RPG
10	▼	TC Ghost Recon Jngle Storm	Strategy

TOP 10

PlayStation Games Over \$30

W/E 2 MAY 2004
RETAIL SALES

1	▲	YuGiOh Forbidden Memories	Strategy
2	▼	Simpson's Wrestling	Sports
3	▲	Grand Thft Auto Collectors Ed	Adventure
4	▼	H Potter Chamber Of Secrets	Adventure
5	◆	FIFA 2004	Sports
6	▲	Medal Of Honor 2 Pack	Action
7	▲	Disney Triple Pack	Adventure
8	▼	Beyblade Let It Rip	Adventure
9	▲	Lomu Rugby + Warne Cricket	Compilation
10	★	Jonah Lomu + WTC	Compilation

TOP 10

Game Cube Games Over \$50

W/E 2 MAY 2004
RETAIL SALES

1	◆	Simpson's Hit & Run	Adventure
2	◆	Final Fantasy Crystal Chron	RPG
3	◆	Mario Golf Toadstool Tour	Sports
4	◆	Mario Kart Double Dash	Racing
5	◆	Mario Party 5	Family
6	◆	Prince Of Persia:Sands Time	Adventure
7	▲	Dragonball Z: Budokai	Action
8	★	Animl Crssing w/Mem Crd 59	Strategy
9	★	Sonic Heroes	Adventure
10	★	Legend Of Zelda: Wind Waker	RPG

TOP 10

Xbox Games Over \$50

W/E 2 MAY 2004
RETAIL SALES

1	◆	V8 Supercars 2	Racing
2	▲	Simpson's Hit & Run	Adventure
3	◆	GTA Twin Pack	Adventure
4	▼	TC Splinter Cell Pandora Tom	Adventure
5	★	Fight Night	Sports
6	★	Finding Nemo	Adventure
7	▲	AFL Live Premiership Ed	Sports
8	▼	Need For Speed:Underground	Racing
9	★	Manhunt	Adventure
10	★	Unreal 2: The Awakening	Action

TOP 10

PC Games Over \$20

W/E 2 MAY 2004
RETAIL SALES

1	◆	The Sims Deluxe	Strategy
2	★	Dita Frce:Black Hwk Dwn Clsc	Action
3	★	V8 Supercars 2 DVD	Racing
4	▲	Far Cry	Action
5	▲	Counter Strike Condition Zero	Action
6	▼	The Sims Unleashed	Strategy
7	▲	Battlefield Vietnam	Action
8	★	Need Speed Hot Prsuit 2 Clsc	Racing
9	▼	The Sims Superstar	Strategy
10	★	CSI 2: Dark Motives	Adventure

TOP 10

Game Boy Advance Games Over \$30

W/E 2 MAY 2004
RETAIL SALES

1	◆	Yu-Gi-Oh World Champ 2004	Strategy
2	▲	Pokmon Sapphire	RPG
3	▼	Pokmon Ruby	RPG
4	▲	Simpson's Road Rage	Racing
5	▼	Scby Doo 2 Mnsters Unlshed	Adventure
6	★	Pokmn PinBl Ruby&Sapphire	Action
7	★	Tak & The Power Of Ju Ju	Adventure
8	★	Finding Nemo	Adventure
9	▼	Dragonball Z:Legacy Goku 2	Action
10	★	Yu-Gi-Oh World Wide	Strategy

TOP 10

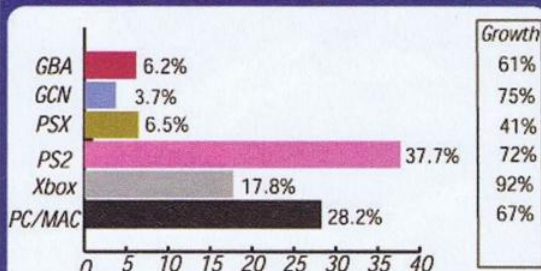
All Full Priced Games

W/E 2 MAY 2004
RETAIL SALES

1	▲	Simpson's Hit & Run	PlayStation 2
2	▼	V8 Supercars 2	Xbox
3	★	AFL Live Premiership Ed	PlayStation 2
4	★	Fight Night	PlayStation 2
5	◆	Need For Speed:Underground	PlayStation 2
6	▲	Simpson's Hit & Run	Xbox
7	▼	GTA Twin Pack	Xbox
8	★	GTA: Vice City Ptm	PlayStation 2
9	▼	The Sims Deluxe	PC/MAC
10	▼	TC Splinter Cell Pandora Tom	Xbox

MARKET WATCH All Games by Platform

APR 04 vs MAR 04
RETAIL SALES



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

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Next Issue:



THE GAMES & SYSTEMS OF THE FUTURE!

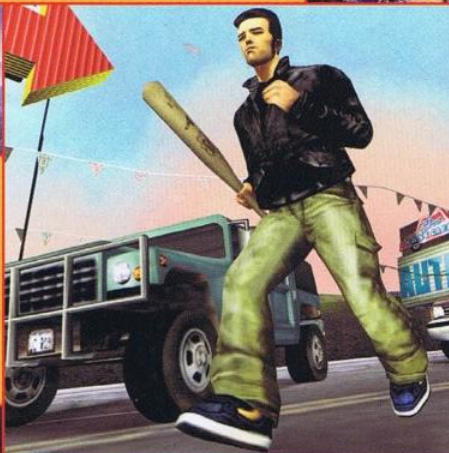
We preview the hottest titles on the horizon.

Plus: Thief 3, Onimusha 3 and Galleon all reviewed! Oh, and Daniel hits Los Angeles in a Fear and Loathing kind of mood. It's going to be great!

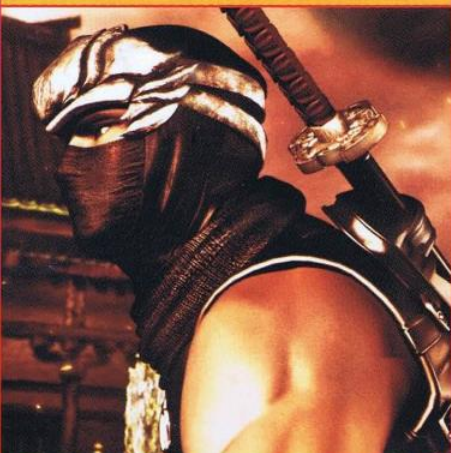


Hyper 130  On sale July 7th

THE SIMS



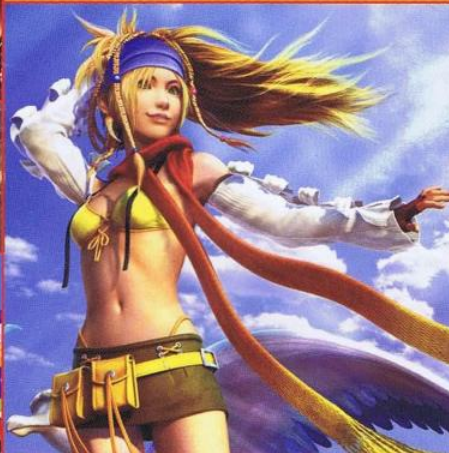
GTA3 & VICE CITY



NINJA GAIDEN



DEUS EX 2



FFX-2

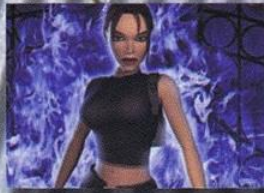
SIMPSONS HIT & RUN



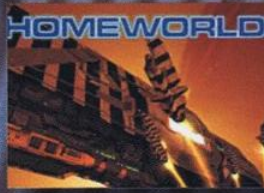
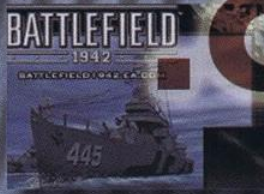
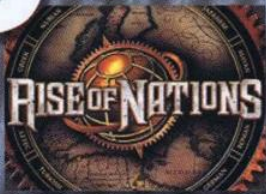
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