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HYPHER 134 DECEMBER 2004

HYPHER

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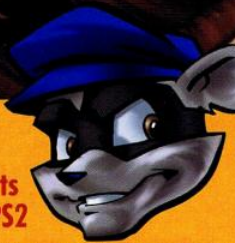
next GAMING

PAPER MARIO 2

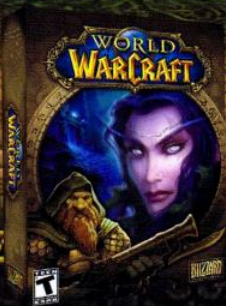
Shock Horror! Princess Peach kidnapped again!

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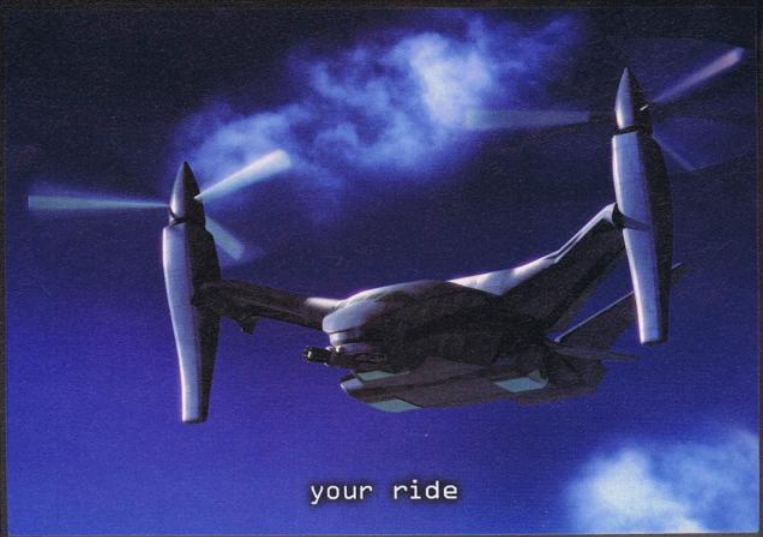
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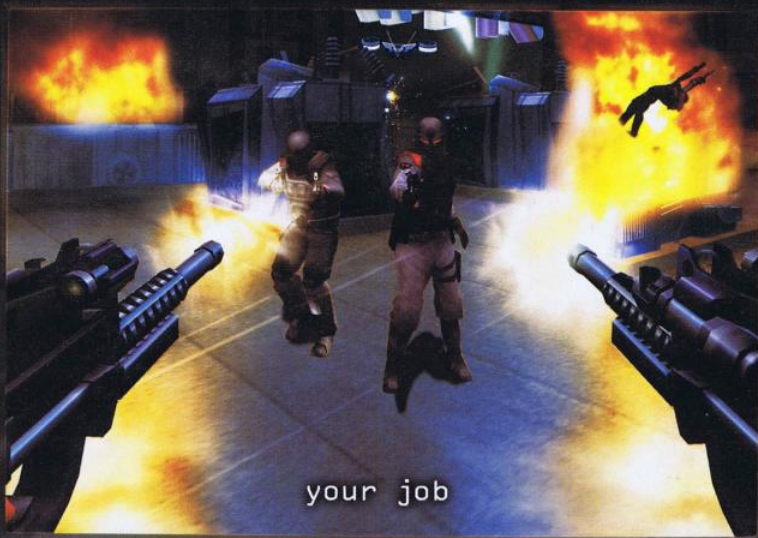
PlayStation 2



PlayStation 2 Online play requires internet connection and Network Adaptor for PlayStation 2 (sold separately). Xbox Live™ requires broadband internet service, connection via Ethernet cable (not included) and Xbox starter package (sold separately). GoldenEye: Rogue Agent Interactive Game (all source code, all other software components and certain audio/visual components only) © 2004 United Artists Corporation. James Bond, 007, James Bond Gun and the Logos and all other James Bond related properties © 1980-2004 Danjaq, LLC and United Artists Corporation. GoldenEye: Rogue Agent is a trademark of Danjaq, LLC and United Artists Corporation. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED. "PlayStation" and the "PS" Family logo are registered trademarks of Sony Computer Entertainment Inc. GameCUBE are trademarks of Nintendo. © 2001 Nintendo. All other trademarks and the property of their respective owners. EA GAMES™ is an Electronic Arts™ brand.



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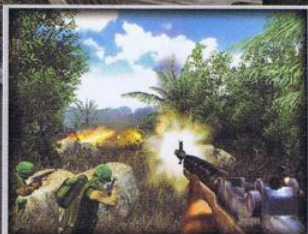


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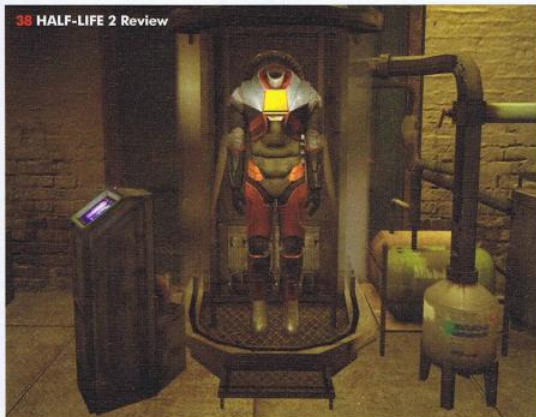
13 Action-Packed Combat Missions Spanning Four Authentic Operations



22 Final Fantasy XII

"Highly anticipated" is an understatement...

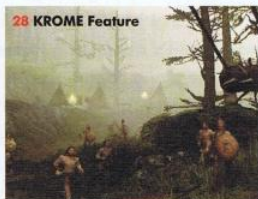
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Sporting a new direction, this is shaping up to be the best FF game yet.

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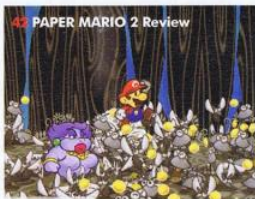
Win yourself a copy of Halo 2 and an Xbox. You know you want it!

76 Hardware

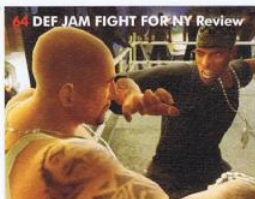
A sweet DVD recorder and some crazy peripherals.

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EDITORIAL

» This time of year really is one of conflicting emotions. On the one hand, I find myself reinvigorated and coursing with excitement for this wonderful hobby of ours, as title after title floods through the hallowed doors of Hyper HQ, inspiring a veritable frenzy of gaming in the office and at home. On the flipside, however, it's depressing to see publishers once again save a huge slice of their titles for one third of the year, resulting in many A grade games not getting the attention - or sales, that they deserve. Surely the market has matured to the point where spacing out releases would make more sense, giving them room to breath in retail. I understand that this is the "silly season" and a time of year when people like to spend money, but let's face it - it's an uphill battle to get your game noticed with the likes of Half-Life 2, Halo 2 and San Andreas hitting shelves, not to mention a million other games. But hey, hopefully after reading this issue (and the next one) you'll all be in a good position to decide just how you want to spend your Christmas dollars. Not only is there a bumper crop of games, but the percentage of very good titles is also unusually high... just check out how many games have been awarded the Big Rubber Stamp this issue!

Cam Shea » Editor



[above] From the ongoing adventures of Evil Malky, as drawn by Amos. From left: Cam, Evil Malky, Steve "sm" Farrelly, Daniel Wilks.

HYPER»

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WRITE TO HYPER!

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HYPER CREW MONTHLY TOP 5 GAMES

Cam Shea - Editor

1. GTA San Andreas - PS2
"Hanging out with Eliot playing this game... it's just like old times!"
2. Halo 2 - Xbox
3. Paper Mario 2 - GCN
4. Sly 2: Band of Thieves - PS2
5. Need for Speed Underground 2 - Xbox

Daniel Wilks - Deputy Editor

1. Rome: Total War - PC
"Finally I can beat up Gauls without being arrested."
2. Tribes: Vengeance - PC
3. Need For Speed Underground 2 - Xbox
4. Mario Pinball Land - GBA
5. Fable - Xbox

Malcolm Campbell - Art

1. Def Jam Fight for NY - PS2
"A lot more complex and involving than first impressions suggest. And you can play as Crazy Legs! I'm sold!"
2. Street Fighter Alpha 3 - PSone
3. Pro Evolution Soccer 4 - PS2
4. Street Fighter 3: 3rd Strike - PS2 (Import)
5. Fable - Xbox

Bennett Ring - Hyper Lackey

1. Rome: Total War - PC
"I came, I saw, I conquered"
2. Burnout 3 - Xbox
3. Counter-Strike: Source - PC
4. Silent Hill 4 - Xbox
5. Desert Combat mod for BF1942 - PC

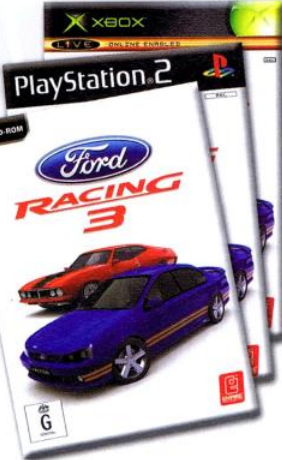


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PlayStation 2

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IN THE NEWS: DS launch details / Sam & Max back in business? / Halo 2 pre-orders / NES Classics coming to Australia!

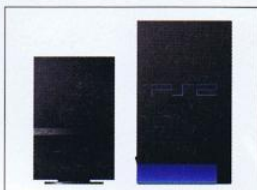
PSTW0

PS2 GETS REDESIGNED

Slim and sexy wins the race

PS If you wander down to your local games store or electronics retailer right now, you'll find a new look PlayStation 2 on store shelves. Yes, just as Sony redesigned the PlayStation late in its lifespan, so too have they redesigned the PS2, and the results (as the images attest) speak for themselves! This new design is the result of a complete overhaul of the internal architecture, creating an incredibly small (2.8cm wide as opposed to 7.8) and streamlined unit that weighs in at just half the weight of the original.

The downside to the new design is that you won't be able to use the PS2 HDD, but on the upside, it comes sporting network connectivity out of the box. Nice one Sony!



We know which of these we'd rather cuddle up to at night. Not that we would



IT'S OFFICAL

NINTENDO DS HITS USA AHEAD OF JAPAN

Although the Australian date is still MIA...

PS The Nintendo DS will be released on November 21st in the USA, for the very reasonable price of US \$149.99, while Japanese gamers will be waiting until December 2nd. Bear in mind that this is the first time a Nintendo system has launched first outside of Japan, and demonstrates just how determined they are to succeed... and get a lead over PSP.

There's still no sign of a release date for the system in Australia, but the details of the American launch are finally coming together. The unit will come with PictoChat installed as part of the native software, allowing users to draw and write on the

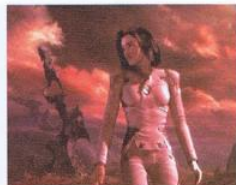
screen then send it as a message. Plus, packed in with the unit will be a demo for Metroid Prime: Hunters. The launch titles that will most likely be available are Super Mario 64 DS, Spider-Man 2, Feel The Magic: XY-XX, Ping Pals, Tiger Woods PGA Tour, The Urbz: Sims in the City and Madden NFL 2005.

It's also been confirmed that the DS will have a "Game Sharing" system, which enables wireless downloads between units, allowing for instance, four player Super Mario 64 DS multiplayer using one cart. There's also talk of wireless game demo downloads in retail. We'll have plenty more on the DS next month.

[below left to right] Madden 2005, Feel The Magic XY-XX, Mario 64 DS and Pingpals. Can you feel the magic?



SIGH...
IDIOT, THY NAME IS THOMPSON
Further proof that Americans are stupid



News is usually meant to be straightforward and unemotional reporting of the facts but sometimes you just can't help but be outraged. In a new outburst about how violent games are destroying society a dumb-ass Miami attorney has stated that a boy planning a Columbine style school massacre used GTA 3 to plan his attacks. The attorney, one Jack Thompson stated, "The technique of killing civilians and then first-responders when they get there is the primary scenario to win in all the Grand Theft Auto games," he said. "They are killing simulators actually used by gangs." It's almost like he's heard of the game at some point. How could such an informed opinion be wrong.

If the name Jack Thompson rings any bells with readers it's because he's the same knuckle-head that is trying to sue Rockstar North over the so called Manhunt murder in which 14 year old Stefan Pakeerah was beaten to death with a claw hammer. Thompson claims that the killer was obsessed with Manhunt and was quite eager to ignore the facts when it transpired that it was the victim who had Manhunt, not the killer.

YAMAUCHI
NINTENDO GO TO THE MOVIES
The Big N to expand onto the big screen

In a surprise move, former Nintendo head honcho Hiroshi Yamauchi is proposing that the videogames giant make their first foray into the film business with an animated feature based on the works of a famous Japanese poet. Although a movie based on a collection of Japanese poems may sound a little niche to non-Japanese audiences, Hiroshi Yamauchi believes the material will have a universal appeal, perhaps hoping that they will have the same international effect of films by such animation luminaries as Miyazaki. It is unknown at this point whether the proposed film will utilise traditional cell animation or will move to a more computer generated style à-la Final Fantasy: The Spirits Within. Rest assured if the film does go ahead then we will bring you all the news as soon as we find out for ourselves.



[above] Upon hearing the news they may not be dead

ADVENTURE
NOW THAT'S FAN SERVICE!
Sam and Max aren't dead yet!

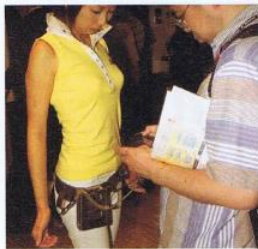
Everyone lamenting the sad loss of Sam and Max: Freelance Police may just be able to put a happy little smile on their face. The game may not actually be as dead as we were lead to believe. The former LucasArts developers, Dan Connors, Kevin Bruner and Troy Molander who quit the company soon after the game was canned and set up their own design firm, Telltale Games, are currently on the hunt for investors so they can buy the license and hopefully bring a completed game to shelves in early 2005.

Kevin Bruner has been quoted as saying, "When we saw the petition and how upset people

were, we knew we had to start Telltale Games". It's nice to see that someone in the development community is truly willing to put their money where their mouth is and really care about what gamers think and want. Dan Connors has also been quoted as saying, "There is a whole segment of the (video game) market that craves a richly crafted narrative that challenges the intellect and provides a range of emotions. That's the type of game we are building." About a second license they are currently looking into. Could this mean a resurgence in adventure games? Fingers crossed.

WARPATH
WHEN NINTENDOS ATTACK
The name calling begins

Nintendo, a company known for their respectful demeanour and habit of ignoring the competition has made a surprise attack at Sony's first handheld, the PSP. Reggie Fils-Amie, Nintendo of America's outspoken and apparently rather blunt head of sales and marketing spoke out at a recent press conference in Seattle stating, "Let me tell you something, those little women at the Tokyo Game Show with those portable consoles strapped to them... What you didn't see is that those women were having to go recharge the batteries every two hours!" He then continued his tirade by saying, "We have gone on the record to state that the Nintendo DS will have battery life comparable to the Game Boy Advance SP. Nowhere will you find any mention of the other machines power life. And you have to wonder why..."

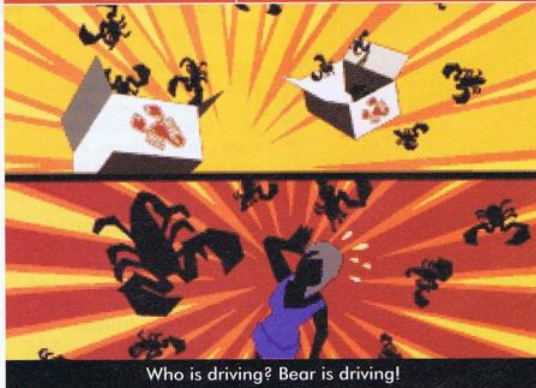


[above] Japanese girls make ideal "play stations"

CAPTION THIS!

PART 61

Come on, make us laugh. Just send your funny screen captions to us at captionthis@next.com.au with Caption This Part 61 in the subject line.



Who is driving? Bear is driving!

IT'S ALL CHINESE TO ME

EA look to the future, and it ain't here

China is looking to be the way of the future as far as games are going. If current predictions are accurate, by 2007 China is expected to be the biggest online games market in the world, boasting more online gamers than America, Europe and Australia combined. With these numbers in mind a number of games studios are beginning to set up Chinese offices. First Sega paved the way and now games juggernaut EA are following close behind, looking to set up a Chinese regional branch to make games specifically for the Chinese market. Whilst this move may make very sound financial success it could also mean the death of most of the small Chinese companies already making games for the local market as undoubtedly their talent will be poached and they will not be able to face the sheer economic clout of the games giant.



[above] No matter what colour or creed... you're still a geek!

WINNERS

HYPER 132

N-GAGE QD

- Erin Tuckey, Kardinya, WA

BASS MASTER FISHING

- Peter Benger, Salisbury North, SA
- Pat Toovey, Welby, NSW
- Steve Millich, Plympton, SA
- James Beauchamp, Castle Cove, NSW
- Baden Shipp, Campbelltown, NSW

SIMPSONS DVDS

- Richard Hughes, Mindarie, WA
- Pete K, Seaforth, NSW
- Ken Bell, Brighton, SA
- David Shearston, South Windsor, NSW
- Kelsie Doyle, Sunshine, VIC



BYE BYE

THE HONEYMOON IS OVER

Star Wars Galactic Disappointment

There are rumours flying around at the moment that LucasArts is, to put it mildly, rather disappointed with the way Sony Online Entertainment are handling their flagship MMORPG Star Wars Galaxies, and it comes as no real surprise considering the behaviour of some of the staff - the infamous post about why gamers suck from one of the game admins and the banning of all players who happened to come in contact with hacked credits being two of the prime examples. The rumours state that with the release of Jump

to Lightspeed, LucasArts will soon announce the next expansion and will break from SOE, maintaining the game themselves and hopefully doing something to help the game reach its true potential as the first massively multiplayer Star Wars game. Of course having Mr. Beardy directly in charge of the game is something of a mixed blessing - sure he's passionate about his money spinning franchise but considering his inability to leave well enough alone SWG could become the most frequently patched game of all time.

SUPER SIZE

GET FITNESS LARDY!

Dialling wand not included

In an attempt to do something socially acceptable with the Xbox, developers responDESIGN are about to bring us the linguistically clumsy Yourself!Fitness, a virtual gym instructor targeted specifically at women. The program will feature a number of exercise routines tailored to the varied needs of the player and will have features that will allow players to use exercise equipment they already own such as weights or yoga mats. Whilst Yourself!Fitness will probably fall flat on its well toned face, it does show an interesting integration between gaming and other facets of



life. Considering that some schools in the US have actually bought DDR machines for their phys-ed classes we could very well see more fitness themed games making their way to all consoles in the near future.

DELAYED

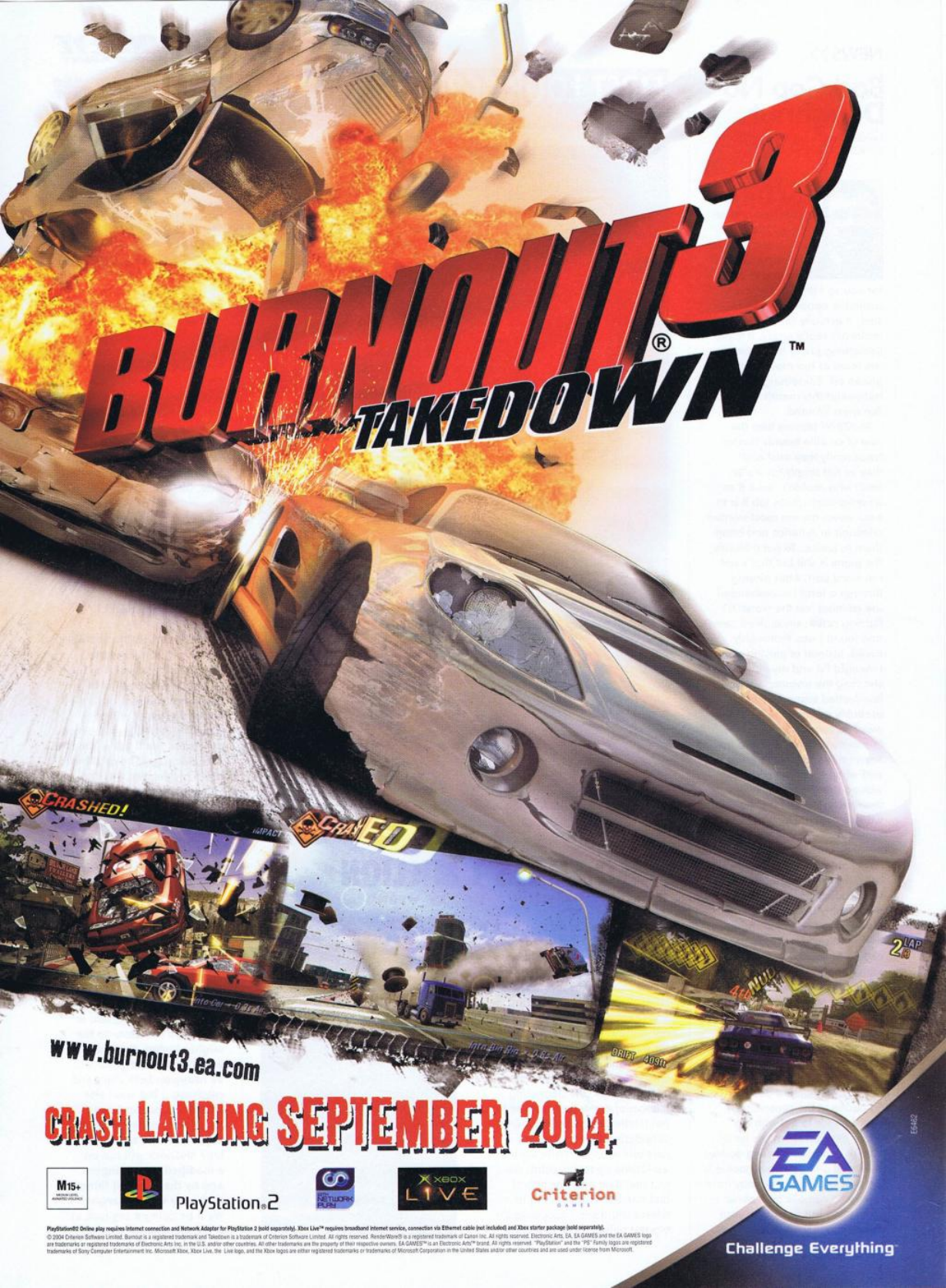
MORE INFINIUM TROUBLES

The never-ending story

The Infinium Labs Phantom console is quickly becoming the Duke Nukem Forever of the hardware world. The latest news is that the inevitably doomed console system has had its release date pushed back from November 2004 to some as yet unspecified date in 2005. Infinium chief Kevin Bacchus says this delay is due to the desire of his retail and marketing partners to hype up the console more before release. Obviously the delay has nothing to do with the lack of money in Infinium's coffers, the astounding amount of bad press the company has been receiving from international games press or the lukewarm response the gaming community has had towards the ill-fated PC in a box system. No, it's nothing to do with any of that. It's all about the desires of his retail and marketing partners.



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IMPACT

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CRASH LANDING SEPTEMBER 2004



PlayStation 2



Challenge Everything

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Bad Cop No Doughnut

DANIEL WILKS - THE WORLD'S MOST DANGEROUS DEPUTY EDITOR



As you may have noticed by now, I'm basically an angry person. I believe that bottling up your hatred is bad

for you so I let it out at every available opportunity. That said, it actually takes a lot to make me really angry. It takes something pretty big to make me foam at the mouth I'm that pissed off. Something like that happened this month. America's Ten Most Wanted.

In ATMW players take the role of an elite bounty hunter (apparently they exist and they're not simply fat trailer trash who couldn't make it as a rent-a-cop) whose job it is to track down the ten most wanted criminals in America and bring them to justice. To put it bluntly the game is shit but that's not the worst part. After playing through a level I apprehended the criminal (via the worst 3D fighting action since...well...ever) and found I was thoroughly bored. Instead of playing on I thought I'd end my pain by shooting the unconscious and handcuffed suspect in the head, probably earning me a "game over" screen for breaking the law or something. Much to my horror not only did the game not end when I shot the guy (there was no proof as to his guilt apart from the fact that he didn't want to get shot by a heavily armed sociopath) it actually rewarded me for murdering him. I got an execution bonus as well as a "splash" bonus for standing close enough to presumably get sprayed with his hastily exiting brain matter. It then charged me with finding enough evidence to prove the man I had just murdered was guilty of something. Why the hell is it that a game that rewards the murder of prone individuals is granted a release where something harmless aside from the occasional f-bomb, fart joke and digital tit like Leisure Suit Larry is banned outright? Someone at the censorship board needs to get with the damn times. It seems as far as they're concerned, killing darkies is all well and good but nookie is the root of all evil. You may have repression catholic guilt about fornication but don't take your bloody inadequacies out on us.

FIRST LOOK SCREENS! BLAU!

Alien Hominid PlayStation 2 / GameCube Developer: The Behemoth

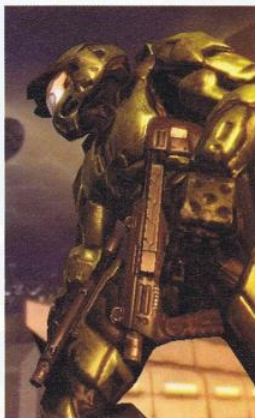


HALO GUVNA

HALO 2 HITS 1 MILLION

A million pre-orders can't be wrong

According to the Seattle Times the much anticipated Xbox game Halo 2 hit nearly 1 million pre-orders early in October, taking it ever closer to the records held by Japanese behemoths Final Fantasy and Dragon Quest. Whilst this may not come as much of a surprise to the gaming community (to which Halo 2 could quite favourably be compared to the second coming of the messiah) the staggering number of pre-orders are sure to put retailers into a serious frenzy. Considering that the original Halo sold around 5 million units worldwide up to this point, the fact that Halo 2 hit one fifth of that number in advance of its release could see it becoming the biggest selling game of all time.



GOLDENEYE
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OVERFLOW

NES Classics for GBA will be launching on November 18 in Australia. What's included in the lineup? Zelda, Excitebike, Donkey Kong, Super Mario Bros, Pac-Man and Final Fantasy 1 & 2. They'll retail for \$29.95 each, and DK, SMB and Pac-Man will all support the wireless adapter, which is pretty cool. Unfortunately there's no sign of the NES inspired GBA casing... although the "Tattoo" model should be out by the time you read this.

It's going to be out before Christmas, but the downside is that Gran Turismo 4 has lost its online capabilities. This is a huge blow for those hardcore fans that bought the network adapter specifically for Polyphony Digital's new title. Oh well... GT5 then.

It's been revealed that Xbox 2 peripherals will work on PCs, pointing to a straight-up USB input into the machine... not to mention increased integration between (presumably) black and beige boxes.

Fans of Rainbow Six 3: Black Arrow will be pleased to hear that the recent free map (Village) download over Xbox Live was just the entrée. The main course will cost you AU\$6.99/NZ\$7.99 but for that price you'll get a four-map package, and countless hours of gaming. Oh, and Full Spectrum Warrior also has a new mission available for premium download.

THQ has picked up the worldwide publishing rights to Juiced, so it should be hitting our shores soon. Now, how about someone pick up Red Star - we want it!

Now that Irrational have finished up work on the excellent Tribes Vengeance, they've revealed some details on their next big project. It's called BioShock, and is a spiritual successor to the mighty System Shock 2. As you'd expect the game will be heavy on both story and suspense... but what else would you expect from a game that concerns genetic experiments in a biotech lab? BioShock will run on a modified Unreal engine and by the sound of things is already well underway. We'll be doing a big look at it the first chance we get.

FLAT OUT



"FLATOUT AND BURNOUT 3
ARE THE NEXT GENERATION
OF CONSOLE RACERS."

5/5 - T3

"BURNOUT SHOULD BE
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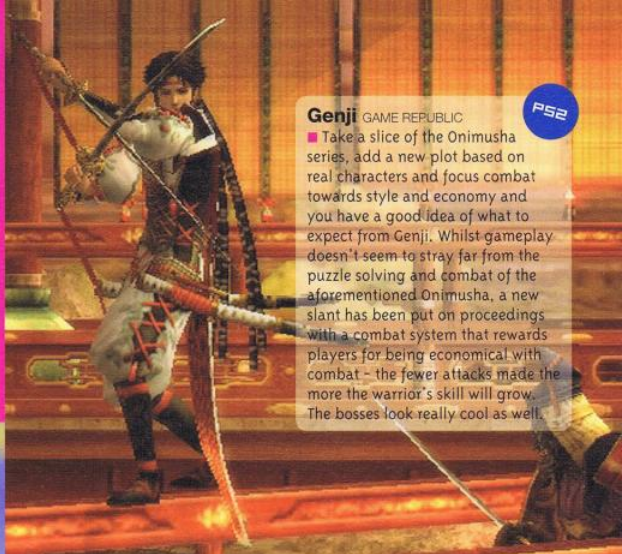


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Tokyo Game Show

EYE CANDY SPECIAL

Hyper's roundup of the biggest titles from the Tokyo Game Show



Genji GAME REPUBLIC

PS2

Take a slice of the Onimusha series, add a new plot based on real characters and focus combat towards style and economy and you have a good idea of what to expect from Genji. Whilst gameplay doesn't seem to stray far from the puzzle solving and combat of the aforementioned Onimusha, a new slant has been put on proceedings with a combat system that rewards players for being economical with combat - the fewer attacks made the more the warrior's skill will grow. The bosses look really cool as well.



PS2

Dragon Warrior VIII LEVEL 5

Forget your Marios, Zeldas and tentacle rape hentai, the Dragon Warrior RPG series is true Japanese gaming obsession, so much so that there are apocryphal stories of laws passed to ban any iteration of the Dragon Warrior series from being released on a work day. Whether this is true or not it doesn't change the fact that when Dragon Warrior VIII is released there are going to be some severe staff shortages for a couple of days and for good reason. VIII is the first Dragon Warrior game to be in full 3D and is aiming at a slightly faster pace than previous games. Hopefully the inevitable success of the game in Japan will prompt Square Enix to translate it into English. We can only hope.



PS2

Metal Gear Acid KONAMI

Konami are putting a fresh spin on the Metal Gear franchise by serving up an interesting turn-based tactical take for PSP. Despite graphics that are almost on par with those seen in MGS2, Acid plays very differently. Once again you'll find yourself in military-style bunkers and grimy industrial warehouses, but this time you have a limited number of cards with which to take out guards and get to objective points. Each turn Snake can only move a certain number of spaces, and with ever-dwindling cards/attacking options, you'll have to carefully think out your strategy. Refreshing.



PS2

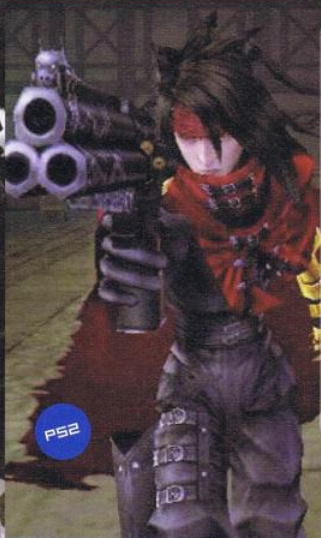
Lumines Q ENTERTAINMENT

Lumines is the latest title from Tetsuya Mizuguchi (perhaps best known for Rez) and his new studio Q Entertainment. At first glance it looks like another Tetris clone, except this time with a much wider play area in which to drop blocks. However, it's not long before you realise that not only is the presentation much funkier than any other puzzle game (with a graphic equaliser bumping away in the background), but that the music is integral to the play mechanics. Blocks of the same colour only get cleared every few bars, giving you extra time to chain up combos, which in turn influences the music.

Wanda and Colossus SONY

The team behind one of the true sleeper hits on the PS2, ICO are back with another strange excursion into the realm of fantasy. No plot has been released yet but here's what we know - a warrior must protect a woman (probably the Wanda of the title) from giant (and we mean giant) monsters. Gameplay wise the trailer showed snippets of horse back riding and, far more interesting, monster climbing. You read that right, monster climbing. From what we've seen the monsters are so big that much of the gameplay will focus on actually making your way up their bodies to find a vulnerable spot. We can't wait for more.

PS2



PS2

Dirge of Cerberus: Final Fantasy VII SQUARE ENIX

From the brief bit of gameplay footage shown of Dirge of Cerberus at TGS, Vincent May Cry could be a more appropriate title for the newest member of the Final Fantasy VII series (also containing the original game, the animated film, Advent Children and the Japan only mobile game Before Crisis). Starring everyone's favourite whiny goth dreamboat vampire with guns, Dirge of Cerberus appears to be something of a balls to the wall action game with numerous guns for the bloodsucking live journal addict to collect and multiple enemies to mow down.



PSP

Need For Speed Underground Rivals

TEAM FUSION

Despite only having one course on display, Rivals was one of the PSP standouts at TGS, thanks to seriously impressive (and rain slicked) visuals, a good impression of speed and a track with plenty of jumps. Definitely one to look out for at launch.



PSP

Shin Ridge Racer

NAMCO

Another very limited demo (featuring the RRV remake of the original course), but damn it's good to see the Ridge Racer franchise back on track after R: Rubbish Racing. It's fast, the handling is tight and it's locked in at 60fps. The PSP's analogue nub also works a treat, and everything looks wonderfully sharp on the sexy PSP screen.

1200 ARMS BOMB 20 10 60

Metal Slug 4 & 5

BRÉZZASOFT

After all these years one of the greatest side scrolling shooters of all time is going to make it to the Ps2. Metal Slug 4 and 5 will be released as one double pack giving players hours of over the top shooting, alternate routes, strange weapons and bosses big enough to fill the screen.



PSP

CREDITS 05

Rumblefish

SAMMY

A new 2D fighting game is always something looked forward to with baited breath here at the Hyper HQ, especially one coming from Sammy, the demented geniuses behind the sublime Guilty Gear series. Somewhat disappointingly Rumblefish does not seem to contain the weird and wacky characters from the Guilty Gear series, but we are confident that the brilliant gameplay will remain. All we need now is a copy of Guilty Gear Isuka for the office (hint hint).

PSP

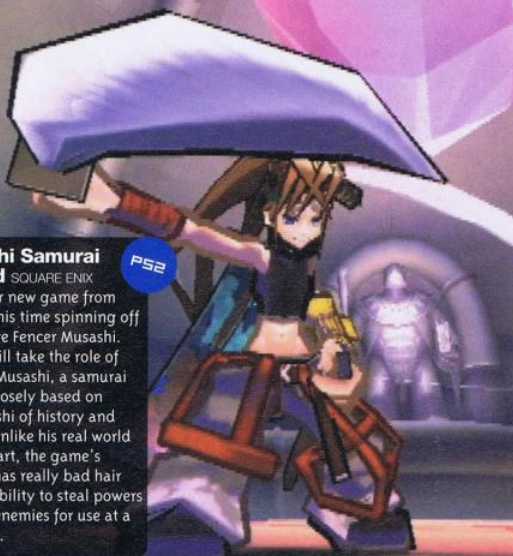


Musashi Samurai Legend

SQUARE ENIX

Another new game from Square, this time spinning off from Brave Fencer Musashi. Players will take the role of a young Musashi, a samurai warrior loosely based on the Musashi of history and legend. Unlike his real world counterpart, the game's Musashi has really bad hair and the ability to steal powers from his enemies for use at a later time.

PSP

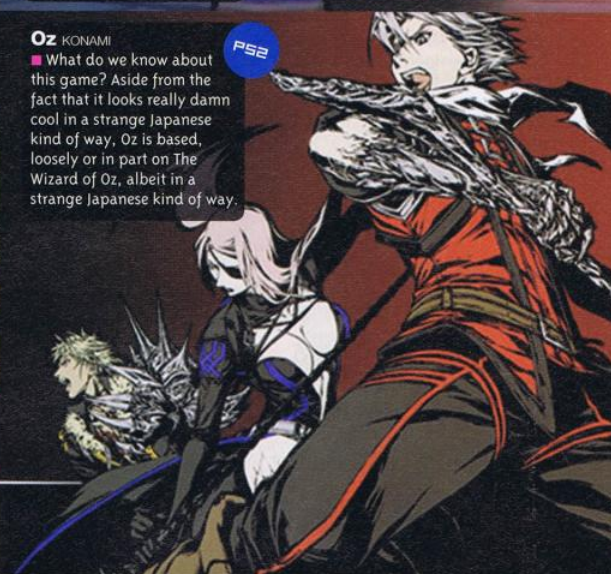


Oz

KONAMI

What do we know about this game? Aside from the fact that it looks really damn cool in a strange Japanese kind of way, Oz is based, loosely or in part on The Wizard of Oz, albeit in a strange Japanese kind of way.

PSP

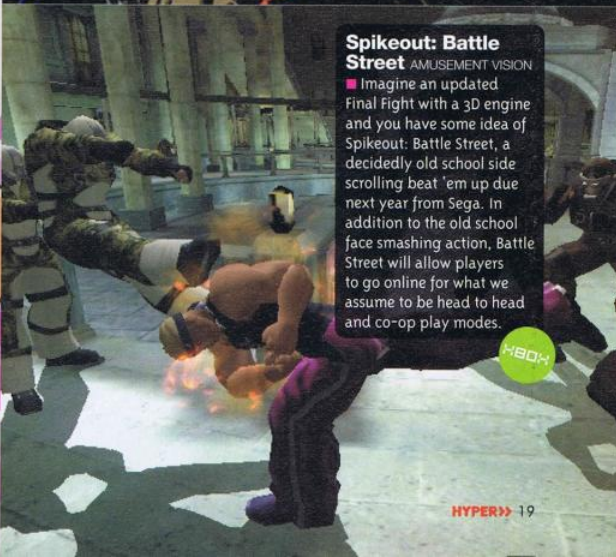


Spikeout: Battle Street

AMUSEMENT VISION

Imagine an updated Final Fight with a 3D engine and you have some idea of Spikeout: Battle Street, a decidedly old school side scrolling beat 'em up due next year from Sega. In addition to the old school face smashing action, Battle Street will allow players to go online for what we assume to be head to head and co-op play modes.

PSP





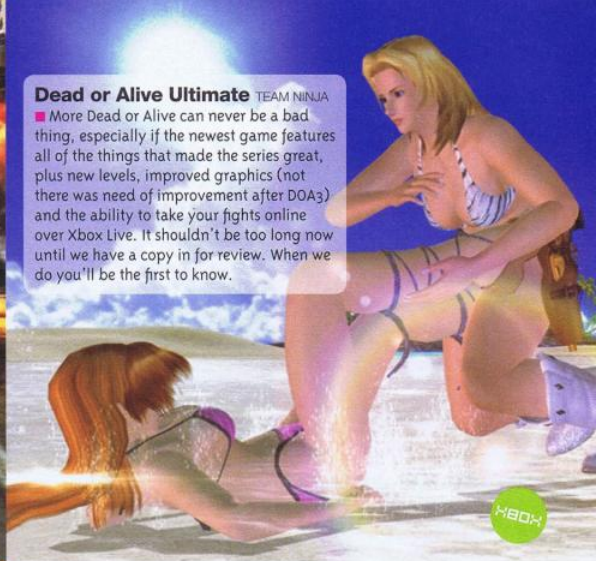
MetalWolf Chaos FROM SOFTWARE

■ Terrorists have taken over the Whitehouse and America is in a State of panic. Sounds like a headline from the not too distant future. What comes next is straight out of the pages of a cheeseball gung-ho comic. Instead of cowering in fear or calling for a coalition of the willing to help defeat the terrorists, MetalWolf Chaos sees the president strapping on a powerful battle suit and proceeding to take out the trash in action reminiscent of Gunggrave and Mech Assault. The story may sound like pure flag waving crap but nevertheless it is a pretty cool basis for a game.

XBOX

Dead or Alive Ultimate TEAM NINJA

■ More Dead or Alive can never be a bad thing, especially if the newest game features all of the things that made the series great, plus new levels, improved graphics (not there was need of improvement after DOA3) and the ability to take your fights online over Xbox Live. It shouldn't be too long now until we have a copy in for review. When we do you'll be the first to know.



XBOX

Phantom Dust MICROSOFT

■ What makes Phantom Dust unique is the fact that apart from the ability to jump, none of the characters in this Microsoft developed single and multiplayer game has any set skills. Instead, players pick up random skills during play and assign them to the controller face buttons. Phantom Dust still hasn't been mentioned for a Western release but we should keep our fingers crossed.

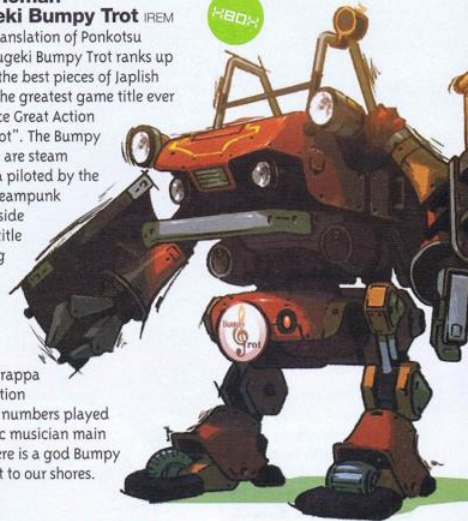


XBOX

Ponkotsu Roman Daikatsugeki Bumpy Trot IREM

■ The English translation of Ponkotsu Roman Daikatsugeki Bumpy Trot ranks up there as one of the best pieces of Japlish ever as well as the greatest game title ever - "Junk Romance Great Action Story Bumpy Trot". The Bumpy Trots of the title are steam powered mecha piloted by the player in this steampunk action game. Aside from the great title and cute setting the most interesting thing about Bumpy Trot is that it also incorporates Parappa style rhythm action during musical numbers played by the amnesiac musician main character. If there is a god Bumpy Trot will make it to our shores.

XBOX



GunGriffon: Allied Strike GAME ARTS

■ If you're unfamiliar with the GunGriffon franchise then you should hang your head in shame as it is one of the most forward thinking series ever, often hampered in its efforts to bring giant mecha action to the gaming public by the fact that technology could not catch up with their vision. Finally the Xbox seems to be able to keep up, bringing frantic, arcade/twitch mecha combat our way in 2005.

XBOX



Armored Core: Formula Front FROM SOFTWARE

Despite its odd name, the latest Armored Core takes the series away from action and into pure strategy territory. You build your squads of mechs, tune them, then send them into battle... which you get to watch. We're not convinced that keeping the customisation but doing away with the action is a good idea, but even so, it looked fantastic and ran incredibly smoothly.

PSP



Ape Escape Academia SONY

■ The new Ape Escape is shaping up to be a great party game, with a seemingly endless supply of mini-games, ranging from boxing to shooting galleries to dodgeball. There's even a Kung Fu Master inspired mini-game! Sweet. Multiplayer is going to be this title's greatest strength, and two people can even play on a single PSP (one on the D-pad, one on face buttons). This is only one of the Ape Escape PSP games - there's also a more traditional Ape Escape platformer on the way.

PSP



PSP

Coded Arms KONAMI

Imagine a first person shooter set in a gritty metallic-grey neo-Hong Kong style city, where your foes are cyborg warriors and Half-Life 2 style over-sized insects and you've got Coded Arms. It's not looking all that exciting at this stage, but definitely has potential.



PSP

Vampire Chronicle: The Chaos Tower CAPCOM

2D fighters will never die, and this latest title in the Darkstalkers series is further proof. Gameplay is fast and furious, with some outstanding animations and high resolution backgrounds. Now all we need is Guilty Gear on PSP...

Radiata Stories TRI-ACE

Radiata Stories is an endearing looking action RPG. You'll lead a party of four through real-time battles, and have the ability to set formations during battle which is a nice touch. One of the game's greatest strengths from what we've seen so far, however, would have to be the visual style - Radiata Stories has a warm and childlike look to it with some interesting techniques used, such as pop up windows during battles that highlight what characters are doing. It also doesn't hurt that the game's producer is Yoshinori Yamagishi, best known for Star Ocean and Vagrant Story.



PSP

Gran Turismo 4 POLYPHONY

Gran Turismo 4 will essentially be a portable version of the PS2 game, so the underlying mechanics will be very faithful to the series, and the number of cars and courses will be huge!



PSP

Dynasty Warriors OMEGA FORCE

Is anyone else getting sick and tired of this series? Once again you hack and slash your way through entire armies, but this time a significant proportion of the screen is taken up by a map and menu. Way to utilise the 16:9 screen guys.

**Killer 7** CAPCOM

At TGS in video form only, Killer 7 continues to impress and confuse. Is there a game in there? We don't know, but it sure looks funky.

PSP

GCN



GCN

Resident Evil 4 CAPCOM

Despite having the same playable demo that was available at E3, the new trailer that debuted at TGS was an eye opener. While we've already seen a fair bit of the action in the village, it's worth mentioning again just how creepy it is having a village full of flame and chainsaw wielding freaks hunting you down in a much more organised and intelligent fashion than we've seen before in the franchise. This definitely isn't "just another sequel" - this is the sequel to rule them all.

The new scenes were just as impressive, and included taking down scythe-wielding, robe wearing freaks in what looked like a monastery. It has also become apparent that the female character (and President's daughter - sigh) Ashley Graham will play a pivotal role, as you'll be protecting her throughout. Enemies will even pick her up and try to run off with her, so you'll need speed and accuracy in taking them down. She may also be of tactical use, as one scene showed you controlling her to get through a narrow crawl space. RE4 is also looking like one of the most visually impressive games on any console system, sporting some massive enemies and amazing lighting effects.

FINAL FANTASY XII



AVAILABLE ON:
PS2 / XBOX / PC / GCN

DETAILS:
CATEGORY: RPG
PLAYERS: 1
DEVELOPER: Square Enix
AVAILABLE: 2005 (we bloody hope)

METER-O-METER

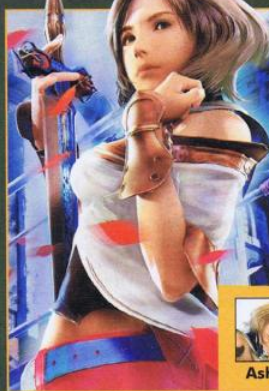


Now that we're over the speed bump that was Final Fantasy XI (the 'online only' installment in the series), it's time to reignite those warm fuzzy feelings that Final Fantasy X left us with, as we anticipate the next true incarnation of the single-player RPG the world adores. Final Fantasy XII is guaranteed to be wildly different to any previous Final Fantasy game, and yet there are familiar locations and character designs in XII which might surprise some fans. Final Fantasy XII takes the unusual step of setting the game in a land that was introduced in Final Fantasy Tactics. That's right, it's time to revisit the land of Ivalice. But this familiarity belies the fact that this will be the

most different Final Fantasy game yet - at least in terms of gameplay. We're talking completely revamped game mechanics, specially designed to make Final Fantasy XII a truly fresh Final Fantasy experience.

HITTING THE HUME HIGHWAY

The master brain behind FFXII is Yasumi Matsuno, whose credentials include Tactics Ogre (1995), Final Fantasy Tactics (1997), Vagrant Story (2000) and Final Fantasy Tactics Advance (2003). It's no wonder then that the land of Ivalice is the setting for FFXII, having been the world created for Matsuno's Final Fantasy Tactics. More notable though, is Matsuno's hand in the development of Vagrant Story, one of the PlayStation's most underrated RPGs. Fans of Vagrant Story will attest to the game's complexity and detail, something that we hope he brings to Final Fantasy XII (minus the unnecessary micro-management of course). Whilst Final Fantasy XII is set in Ivalice, the story takes place in a different time period to any of the Final Fantasy Tactics games, allowing Matsuno to use all-new characters and devise completely new regimes and political conflicts.



ASHE

Ashe is a princess and heir to the throne of Dalmasca, however, much like a certain Star Wars princess, she's also part of the resistance movement against the Arcadians and willing to take great risks to save her people. She's also the one who looks like she's picking her nose in that first round of concept art that got released...



Ashe



Princess Leia



Yuna

Let's just start by pointing out that because there is no official English translation of Final Fantasy XII yet, having not even been released in Japan, the spelling of the character names will most likely be different when the game finally launches here. The spellings we use here are what

a cool-arse Sky Pirate and owning his own Airship (what would a Final Fantasy game be without Airships?). Vaan is also a 'Hume', Final Fantasy XII's term for humans, one of many races that co-exist in this fantastical land. Similar to humans in D&D, Humes are an average race that exist

VAA N DREAMS OF BEING A COOL-ARSE SKY PIRATE



VAA N

Vaan is the 'Tidus' of Final Fantasy XII, a young man who dreams of becoming a sky pirate. Both his parents were killed by an Arcadian invasion two years earlier, an event that has been forever burned into his memory, inspiring him to join up with an anti-Arcadian resistance, and fuelling his desire for revenge.



Vaan



Tidus



Hilary Duff

have appeared in trailers for the Japanese version of the game, and not the proposed Anglicised versions that may finally appear when the game is released here (because those are not officially determined yet). However, because many of the game's ideas come from the Final Fantasy Tactics universe, we will use the spellings of the races and locations from the local version of that game. Now that confusing disclaimer is out of the way, let's get on with it!

The story in Final Fantasy XII seems to revolve around the down-and-out petty thief, Vaan (voiced in the Japanese game by Kohei Takeda), a golden-haired boy with a pure heart who dreams of becoming

in the middle of the scale, bettered only by beings of higher intelligence and skill, of which in Ivalice there are many.

Moogles are a good example of a more highly evolved race in Final Fantasy XII, as they've always been in the Final Fantasy series. Moogles are somewhat mysterious, but always seem to pop up to lend a helping hand when they're needed. They're responsible for many of the more magical elements to the game, including the impressive technology of the Airships and are also highly dexterous creatures. The Viera are the rabbit-eared females that also rank above the Hume in regards to skill and physical perfection. The

FRAN

She may have the name of someone who works in a school tuck shop, but Fran is the rabbit-eared Viera and a fearsome warrior that favours a bow and arrow style weapon. She's Balthier's partner, but we think that's in a Chewbacca style role, not a romantic one.



Fran



Jessica Rabbit



Storm

BALTHIER

Balthier is the sky pirate that Vann wants to be. He's a bit like a 22-year old Han Solo - he packs a gun and is a gentlemanly rogue, but has grown somewhat cynical of the world around him.



Balthier



Han Solo



Justin
Timberlake



PENELO

Penelo is a dancer and singer and seems to fulfill that ditzy and adorable role that Rikku played in Final Fantasy X. It's thought that she could in fact be Vaan's girlfriend or romantic interest, but she could even turn out to be Vaan's sister for all we know at this stage, especially as it's more logical for Vaan to get it on with Ashe...



Penelo

=



Rikku

+



Mandy Moore



[above] Left screen: Before the Ricki Lake makeover. Right screen: After. What a change!

Viera are remarkable warriors, with agile limbs and heightened senses, similar in effect to Elves in D&D.

Ranking just below Humes are the Bangaa, the lizard-like beasts that are surprisingly intelligent and skilled in combat, despite their gruesome appearance. We also expect to run into the Nu-Mou - or at least an incarnation thereof - a race highly skilled in the magical arts that featured prominently in Final Fantasy Tactics.

So, back to the foppish Vaan... Vaan is caught up in epic events surrounding the marauding Arcadians, also known as the Empire (another common Final Fantasy theme being the imposing Imperial force and the 'good' rebels who rise up against it). The Arcadians have long been at war with the Rosalia Empire, and have invaded almost every single territory in Ivalice in their advance upon the land that is ruled by the Rosalians. The peaceful kingdom of Dalmasca is unfortunately positioned directly between the two Empires, and thus it is invaded by the unstoppable Arcadians. But not everyone in the kingdom is willing to put up with Arcadian rule, and a resistance movement is started to



fight off the Imperial invaders. This is where you step in.

FINAL FANTASY ISLAND

The game's two main characters will be Vaan and Ashe, so we expect at least one of them will be in your party at all times. But there's a whole host of characters in Final Fantasy XII that will be joining your adventures at various stages in the story, most notably, Fran, Balthier, Basch and Penelo. Square Enix have hinted that Final Fantasy XII will have even more characters than Vagrant Story, so expect to have to remember all sorts of kooky names - just how many can join your party is yet to be revealed. The land of Ivalice has a distinctly Arabic influence, which was noticeable even in Final Fantasy Tactics Advance, although the design is mixed with the usual art deco and fantasy influences that have permeated earlier Final Fantasy games.

Whilst Final Fantasy XI might not have been the big online hit that Square Enix were obviously hoping for, its development has still influenced the design of Final Fantasy XII. Yasumi Matsuno has admitted that there were many game mechanics in XI that he looked at incorporating into XII, from the way the camera works to the design of the combat - he just didn't like the socialising that's required in a MMOG.

For the first time in a Final Fantasy game, you will now be able to directly control the camera in full 3D, as it will now be fixed behind your player as it would be in a third-person action game. This will allow you to look around the environment



BASCH

Basch is a bit of a dark horse. A loyal Dalmascan royal guard, Basch commits a heinous act in the early part of the game, assassinating a 'good' character. What will his fate be, and will his actions ever prove to be justified?



Basch



Anakin Skywalker



David Beckham

at any time in the game, giving players the opportunity to check out the detail on the ceilings of rooms, or easily determine which path to explore. This direct control now has an effect on how you navigate the environment and choose to enter into combat. Instead of random battles interrupting your adventuring when you're unlucky enough to step onto the invisible trigger, monsters will now be seen in the world at all times, giving you the option to try and avoid them if you're not up for a battle. This also allows you to consider your targets carefully, and not attack anything that's currently out of

previous Final Fantasy games, so attacks or magic spells will still only be executed once a character's bar fills up, giving you enough time to adjust tactics on the fly. But the ATB system has mostly been discarded for the fancy new ADB (Active Dimension Battle) system, which is just a nice way of describing how each character can split off and do their own thing based upon the aforementioned Gambits.

As is expected from Matsuno, Final Fantasy XII will also continue the job classes that feature in Tactics, such as white and black mages, songstress, thief, gunner, and so on. This should allow you to

IVARICE HAS A DISTINCTLY ARABIC INFLUENCE

your league, much like players can assess monsters before attacking in MMORPGs. Gone are the blurry, swirly combat transitions (designed to distract you from the fact the game was loading data) and say hello to instantaneous combat.

Once in combat, the action is played out primarily based on how you've set up each supporting character's AI using a variety of 'gambits' that can be bought and traded like tactical cards. You could, for instance, have Ashe set to play a healing role for the other melee characters, so she plays out her duties automatically whilst you directly control the character of your choice. You could set Penelo to mirror what you do, making her utilise the same styles of attack that you choose. Meanwhile, Fran might be avoiding melee, and attacking with ranged attacks as you've instructed her to. However, this all takes place with the ATB (Active Time Battle) time bars from

develop each of the characters in your own way as they level up. The intimidating Judges will also factor into the game, although it seems their role is more plot-related as opposed to being incorporated into the combat in any way. From what we can tell, one of the big bad guys in the game is an Arcadian Judge who's out to impose his will, Darth Vader style.

Whilst the release of Final Fantasy XII was delayed in Japan, this was apparently just to trim some of the excess fat (including a few small mini-games) that were unnecessarily delaying the overall development of the game - a delay to stem further delays, it seems. Based on how Vagrant Story turned out, a bit of streamlining of Matsuno's ideas sounds like a good idea to us. In any case, we expect Final Fantasy XII to be the most detailed - and thus the most satisfying - Final Fantasy game yet. <<

SWEET SWEET MUSIC The soundtrack to a Final Fantasy game is just as important as any rousing score from a big Hollywood feature film, and again the main theme will be handled by the genius composer, Nobuo Uematsu. Most of the incidental music in the game, however, will be scored by Hitoshi Sakimoto, who has penned music for *Breath of Fire*, *Bloody Roar*, and of course *Vagrant Story* and *Final Fantasy Tactics Advance*.

WHAT WE'D LIKE TO SEE:

More on Irrational's new title *BioShock: Guilty* - we'll definitely be talking to you soon.

**THE BEST
LOOKING SWAT
GAME SO FAR**

SWAT 4

AVAILABLE ON:
PS2 / XBOX / PC / GCN

DETAILS:

CATEGORY: Realistic FPS

PLAYERS: 1-Multi

DEVELOPER: Irrational Games

AVAILABLE: Q1 2005

METER-O-METER

>>> As far as realistic shooters go, there has always been one series that stands head and shoulders above the pack. If one shot kills and brutally realistic detail are your bag then chances are you will have played one of the critically acclaimed SWAT games in the past. If you haven't then the name of the game will certainly give you some indication of what you can expect. SWAT teams are widely regarded as being one of the most highly trained

and disciplined police forces in the world - they are, as the crappy film of the same name stated, the police force that the police force call when in trouble.

COMPLETELY FEATURED

Recently we were lucky enough to see *SWAT 4* running at the Vivendi Universal Games Summit in Singapore and we can safely say that *SWAT 4* is not only the best looking SWAT game so far, it also looks to be the most feature complete and tense. As the commander of a four-man SWAT unit (or Element as it is called in the trade) players will be given around 14 missions of escalating difficulty in the campaign as well as having the option to jump into quick action and multiplayer. As the leader of the squad the player can issue orders to their subordinates and may even allow the player to control all of the action from the start point, using the AI to complete all objectives.

Like in a real SWAT scenario snipers will be placed around the building in which the action takes place before the mission and players will be able to take control of these snipers throughout the campaign to pick off any exposed enemies. As yet there has been no mention of how many players multiplayer will support or what type of game modes will be available.

SWAT 4 runs with a highly modified Unreal engine capable of full normal mapping, giving the game a look that rivals the incredibly detailed *DOOM 3* and *Half-Life 2*. Every surface has real texture and as a result the levels feel much more natural than ever before. The game also features integration of everyone's favourite physics engine so objects will fall and break when shot and



[above] Bad cops, bad cops

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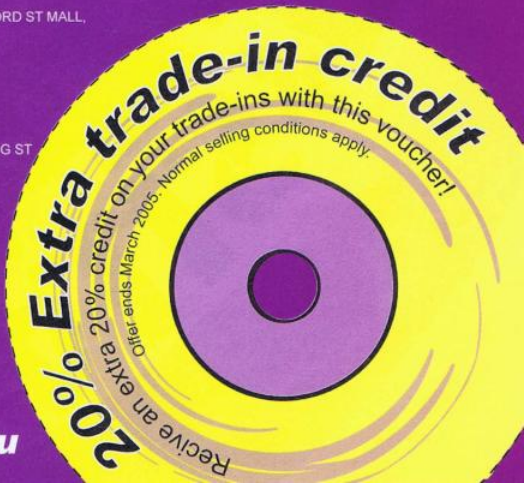
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Queensland-based Krome Studios have been creating console titles for years, with some of the best known surfing and bodyboarding games proudly hanging ten in their line-up. They're also the author of classic old-school titles such as Halloween Harry. Independently owned, Krome are perhaps best known for their recent successes with "TY the Tasmanian Tiger", the hot-selling platform action title to which a sequel has just launched. In a fascinating twist, Ty is also soon to become the star of an animated TV series - produced in the US by a company involved in producing The Simpsons. He may not be Lara Croft, but Ty will soon boast an audience of a similar size to the British-made queen of pixel augmentation. Krome's success story shows a string of recent achievements, with Krome now employing over a hundred people, planning multiple new projects and winning the contract to create a game based on the Hollywood film, King Arthur.

Hyper recently had a chat with John Passfield, Steve Stamatiadis and Robert Walsh from Krome Studios to find out what makes an Australian development studio tick.

HYPER: How did Krome Studios begin?

John Passfield: Krome Studios began in 1999 when Steve Stamatiadis and myself joined forces with Robert Walsh. We worked with Robert on Mike Stewart's Pro Bodyboarding and found that we got on really well, so we decided to join forces and create a new company with the goal of making original and licensed games for consoles. We started out with a team of five and have grown to a company of over 130 in just four years. In that time we've managed to release nine games, which is no mean feat!

Tell us about the process of setting up a game development studio in Australia.

John Passfield: At the very start Krome Studios was completely self-funded. We ran off credit cards and an oily rag. We did receive some government funding for the surfing game we were developing at the time, which was very helpful. But it was still fairly tough at the start, we worked for the smallest amount of money we could, and spent every cent on game development.

Despite having many highly successful titles under our belt as a nation, do you see the Australian development community to still be in its infancy?

John Passfield: The industry has matured a lot over the last five years. Australia now has a few large sized developers capable of developing AAA quality games, and for the first time ever people can study games and have a chance of landing a job when they graduate.

That was unheard of less than ten years ago. But, when compared to the other countries, we still have a lot of growing to do. We need more larger development houses that can withstand the transition to the new consoles and can survive the inevitable situation when a publisher cancels a contract. Hopefully we'll have more of these in the next five years.

Following on from that, what are the best and worst aspects of making games in Australia?

John Passfield: Our location is our best and worst asset. Australia is a great place to live, but the key publishers are all based in the US so to stay in business you have to spend a lot of time over there. We also still struggle with finding experienced programmers and artists here in Australia, but every year it gets better as developers grow in size and people gain more experience.

John, you're the head honcho at Krome - what does your job entail?

John Passfield: Well, I'm one of the head honchos. I'm Design Director, so I look after the design team and help develop Request For Proposals that we get from publishers. I'm also one of the lead designers on the TY the Tasmanian Tiger series. We currently have three teams at Krome, each with their own designers, but we're moving toward sharing ideas across each project and fostering a company approach to game design. This is a direction that I'm pushing Krome in. We share technology and the quality assurance and sound/music departments across all teams.

How would you describe the kinds of games your studio is good at creating?

John Passfield: We excel at creating really

IN THE GAMES INDUSTRY YOU ARE ALWAYS TYPECAST BY YOUR LAST GAME



DEVELOPER PROFILE

fun console games. We've produced a number of sports titles like Championship Surfer, Sunny Garcia Surfing and Goofy Skateboarding, we've also done a few kids games like Barbie Beach Vacation and Barbie Sparkling Ice Show, and we've done good solid action platformers with TY the Tasmanian Tiger and it's sequel, Bush Rescue. We've also produced our first adult action title with the game based on Jerry Bruckheimer's King Arthur.

It seems that you are primarily console developers. Did you do any work on the old-school 16-bit consoles?

John Passfield: Krome as a company hasn't created any titles on the old school systems, but prior to forming Krome Studios some of our development team have developed games for the Sega Master System, Nintendo Entertainment System and the Commodore Amiga system.

Krome is currently finishing up work on TY the Tasmanian Tiger 2: Bush Rescue. Did the runaway success of the original take you by surprise?

Steve Stamatiadis: Yeah, we

WITH TY 2 WE HAD ABSOLUTE FREEDOM TO DO WHATEVER WE WANTED

really weren't expecting TY the Tasmanian Tiger to be anywhere near the success it was, mainly because we were the new kids on the block going up against established characters. That said we always did aim to take those guys head on and we tried our best to make TY a worthy contender. It's cool to see that we were on the right track and it worked.

What certain qualities made TY the Tasmanian Tiger such a successful console game? Where did it shift the most units?

Steve Stamatiadis: The fun Australian environments and characters, good solid gameplay and a level of polish that's usually only seen in big budget overseas games. We went all out to make it good and I think it shows in the final game.

North America was the largest market but Europe comes a close second as far as units sold. So I guess we managed to have a pretty much universal appeal. We even managed to sell out of units in Australia.

Has the success of the first TY game changed the way you are approaching the creation of the sequel?

John Passfield: Not really. When we were making TY 1 we wanted to make a game that could sell 5 million copies. We were aware that this was an almost impossible goal, but it meant that the game had to be accessible to anyone who owns a console. As it turns out we've managed to sell around 1.5 million copies so far, which is great. For the sequel, we've kept that goal, but we've also listened to our fans and made sure that TY 2 is an even more amazing experience than before.

Now that TY is essentially a franchise property, does it limit Krome as a studio? Is there a danger of being typecast as "the TY guys"?

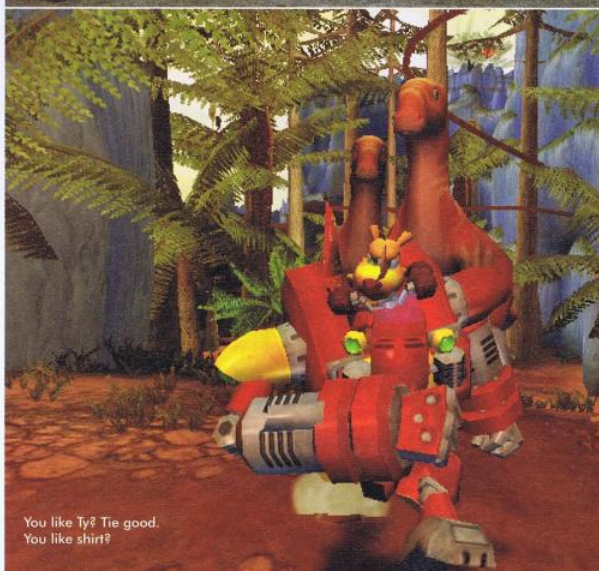
John Passfield: In the games industry you are always typecast by the last game you've done, no matter how diverse your track record is. When we did Champ Surfer we were typecast as surfing or extreme sports guys. So we got offers to do Barbie's Beach Vacation and Extremely Goofy Skateboarding. We had to lobby hard to do TY, and when we finally landed a publisher, we were typecast as the platformer company. So, with King Arthur we

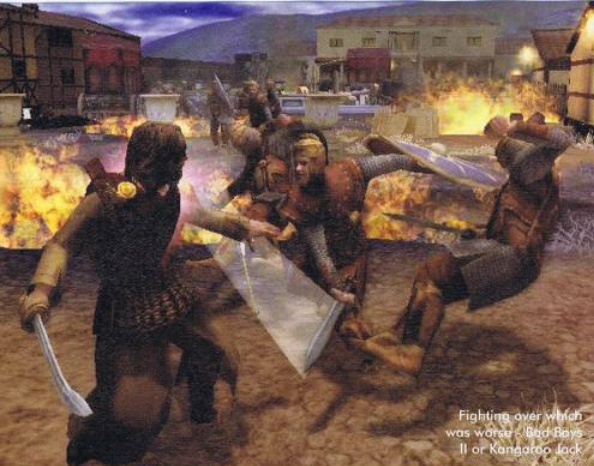
had to prove we could do realistic adult games, which took a lot of time and effort. But we've pulled it off, so now we'll probably be typecast as medieval movie license guys. It's always a struggle to prove that you can do something different.

For the TY sequel - how much freedom are you given in terms of game design? Is it limiting working with what is now an established property? How about for King Arthur - how rigid are the guidelines for what you can and can't do?

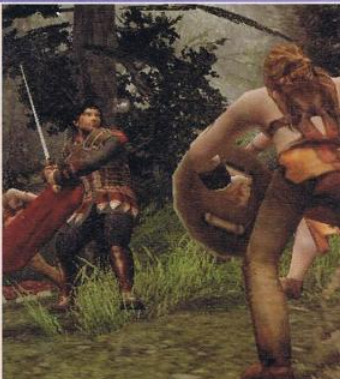
John Passfield: With TY the Tasmanian Tiger 2: Bush Rescue we had absolute freedom to do whatever we wanted to do. We've kept the spirit of the game in tact so the fans will like what we've done. King Arthur is different altogether. Because we don't own the intellectual property we have to be very respectful of it and make sure that everything matches the integrity of the film. It's challenging, and is a different kind of fun to that involved in making an original title.

With TY slated to become enshrined in a major cartoon TV series, this is a bit of a "Lara





Fighting over which was worse: Bed Boys II or Kangaaroo Jack



I thought it was women who usually carried mace?

Croft" achievement for Krome, isn't it? In that your video game character has broken out of the boundaries of the video screen and expanded into other major forms of entertainment.

Robert Walsh: Yes. It now puts Krome in the unique position of being one of the very few developers that have been able to create content that has appeal across multiple interactive mediums. The fact that you've put us in the same basket as Lara Croft still makes us hard for us to comprehend.

How did the "Ty" TV show deal come about?

Robert Walsh: It's very similar to the games industry, it required constant pitching and refinement of our materials, and about 60,000 miles of travel. Finding a partner like Film Roman really paid off, because they understand and embellish what Ty is. In addition, EA did a tremendous job in publishing the first title and generating awareness of the brand.

Krome is also working on King Arthur. What kind of vision are you creating alongside the film?

IF PART OF A GAME SUCKS WHEN WE IMPLEMENT IT, WE'LL CHANGE IT

Robert Walsh: Our brief in creating the King Arthur game was to play the movie. We've embellished all the best gameable moments from the movie by having early access to the script and being on the movie set during production. The result is a total action game experience.

Could you break down the stages of an average development cycle for us?

John Passfield: It varies from game to game, but generally you have the design phase where you break the game down into the key elements, working out what it's all about and how it will play. We generate a design document during this stage while working on a technical document that describes how the game will be made. We also build a schedule based on the design and technical documents and we start producing quality assurance test plans. We tend to use iterative design at Krome, so the design document is never treated as gospel. If part of a game sucks when we implement it, we'll change it. We also start building the game as soon as possible, aiming to have a demo or prototype that captures the feel of the game. Recently we've moved toward creating vertical slices - a piece of

the game, which has all the polish of a finished game, but developed over a few months. We use this to get the publisher excited and work out the game play before committing more resources to the project. We start testing our games as soon as we can, so we have a quality assurance team working full time early on, playing the game. Once we have the game in a playable state we'll also start game play testing with outside people, videotaping the results to see what needs changing. Communication across the team is super important. We haven't perfected this yet, but every game we do, we get better at it.

What do you look for when hiring new staff members? Is raw talent more important than experience?

John Passfield: For us at Krome, raw talent and experience are very important, but both are useless unless you have a burning desire to make games.

Any other projects coming out of the woodwork? Can you give us some hints as to what's next for Krome?

Steve Stamatiadis: Well we can't

talk too much about future stuff but we're always working on lots of new Tech at Krome some of that is going into secret projects. I can say that this is not the last time we'll be making a game with a certain Tasmanian Tiger. He has a lot of adventures ahead of him still.

Outside of Krome, what do you think is the greatest Australian game made to date?

John Passfield: That's a tough one. I'd have to hand it to Beam's "The Hobbit" because it was such a popular game when it was released and I didn't even know it was made here in Australian!

Finally, could you give us a few predictions about the future of consoles and handheld gaming systems?

Steve Stamatiadis: I think the advance we see in the next generation handheld systems will end up impressing people far more than the next iteration of console titles. The consoles will of course be more impressive but it's going to be harder to see the advances. Either way though gaming is just going to get better and better.

Thanks for your time guys. <<



So much fun, but so many smacktards



The Hottest Online Shooters

>> Scott Emerton

If you're keen to whet your whistle in the world of online shooters, but have been a little overwhelmed by just how many games there are on offer, then here's a bit of a primer for the best online shooters out there right now. These puppies are what make the internet's frag-o-meter tick.

Counter-Strike

www.counter-strike.net

>> The best just got better. Counter-Strike is by far the most played online shooter, with around ten times as many players as other games. This has resulted in a rather high smacktard ratio, but that's humanity's fault, not the game's. The original Counter-Strike's characters are starting to have hip problems, and more than a few of the terrorists have been seen visiting Advanced Hair Studios, so it was about time the game got a facelift.

Counter-Strike: Source drags the blocky models and sparse maps into the twenty first century, with bump-mapped this and specular-highlighted that. It retains the good old Counter-Strike gameplay that so many people know and love, but feels fresh and new. The inclusion of physics, allowing you to artistically arrange the corpses of your felled enemies as well as change up some of the level's geometry, helps to

make it feel more realistic.

In case you've never played the game before, the core gameplay is relatively simple. Two teams, goodies and baddies, face off on opposite sides of a map. With lots of exotic modern weaponry. The aim is usually to take out the other team, or plant a bomb/rescue hostages without dying. It's pretty simple compared to some of the newer online shooters, but this simplicity belies the months of practice necessary before you'll become a 1337 h34d5h07 master. Or something like that.



Call of Duty: United Offensive

www.callofduty.com/unitedoffensive/main.html

>> Wow. That's pretty much the only word we can use to describe this masterpiece of online shooters. The original Call of Duty was pretty damn good, being a prettier Counter-Strike set in a WWII environment, but UO is in an entirely different league. In fact, it could well be the online shooter of the year.

Once again it's in the same WWII setting, but the scenery looks like it was ripped straight from a scene in Band of Brothers. The maps are some of the finest we've ever seen. And it's not just that they look great but they also play brilliantly, always giving the player a range of hotspots to choose from.

Unlike the original, vehicles have been included, but they're fairly limited in their scope when compared to the vehicle-laden BF1942. A handful of tanks and

jeeps are littered throughout most of the maps. Hearing the squeaking treads of a lumbering tank around the next corner is not a pleasant experience. Thankfully they're not the invulnerable death traps they could have been due to their sluggish speeds - a quick rocket or two up the backside sorts them out nicely.

One of the coolest features is the ability to gain ranks if you play well. As you rise in rank more weaponry and ammunition is made available, with the ultimate prize being the ability to rain death on your foes with a well-timed artillery raid. A wide variety of game modes are available, from the beloved Capture the Flag through to new modes such as Base Assault. Definitely one to check out.



Battlefield 1942 and Desert Combat

www.eagames.com

>> If running around on foot all sounds a bit too strenuous for you, the mechanised battlefield of BF1942 might be just what the Nazis ordered. A huge variety of mobile death dealers are included, such as tanks, mobile artillery, battleships, and aircraft. It's this mix of vehicles and infantry fighting that makes BF1942 such an innovative take on the shooter genre.

Obviously you'll need a bit of leg room to make the most of the vehicles, so the maps are huge. If you do decide to take a stroll it can take upwards of ten minutes to get from one side of the map to the other.

If you happen to miss out on getting a vehicle due to a plane-camping tool, it doesn't mean you'll be trudging across the landscape for half of the round, as the game uses a series of spawn points spread across the map that can be captured. This keeps the action focused on a few

key points, even though the maps are so huge.

A popular modification for BF1942 is Desert Combat. Based around a "fictional" Middle Eastern conflict, it updates all of the weaponry in the game to reflect modern equipment. Not only does this make the game more identifiable to those not interested in yet another WWII game, it also gives it a major boost in speed.

Desert Combat has become so popular that the mod-team behind it has been snatched up by the developers of BF1942. The upcoming Battlefield 2 pays homage to the mod's esteem by using the same setting and vehicle types.

SERVE UP ANOTHER ONE While all of these games have their own built-in server browsers, these pale into comparison when compared to the elegance and simplicity of All Seeing Eye. This free server browser supports nearly every online shooter, and its best feature is the ability to limit your server lists to only display Aussie servers. Head over to www.udpssoft.com to grab this excellent utility.



Unreal Tournament 2004

www.unrealtournament.com

>> While team based shooters are all the rage, sometimes you just wanna tear shit up on your own. That way you don't have to put up with the incompetence that is a regular occurrence when playing with other, lesser, humans. Aka smacktards, the bane of online gaming. If that's the case, the pure deathmatch action of UT2K4 could be just what you're looking for.

Sure, it does have other team based modes, but one of the most popular modes is good old deathmatch, the game mode that started this whole online shooter thing.

Set in a sci-fi setting, UT2K4 takes the content cake for having more stuff to blow people up with, in more places to blow them away in, than any other online shooter. We're literally spoiled for choice thanks to this game and the several free map packs that have been released.

The action is fast and furious, and is all about who has the best reflexes. Sure, a little map knowledge doesn't go astray, but at the end of the day it's the guy who has the truest aim who won't be reduced to a pile of smouldering meat chunks.



Links

>>> Kosta Andreadis

**Amos Toys**<http://www.amostoys.com/index.html>

>>> Amos 'Everyman' Hong, the official mascot of Hyper magazine can blend into almost any crowd, adapt to any living condition, can potentially learn new languages and boasts a skill set most people would need a lifetime to amass (or Amos as it were). Do you have your own toy line? Amos does. Are you an aspiring comic book artist/prodigy? Amos is. Are you a world renowned Korean cellist? Well Amos would be if he decided to play the cello. Amos is the real deal - in fact he's so big in his homeland that he's more popular than Starcraft and Diablo II combined. And he makes a hell of a toy.

**Project God**<http://www.projectgod.com/index.html>

>>> Finally, a blend of the two things that I love most - short films and the word of God. It's been a long time coming, the closest cinematic equivalent to the book of Matthew, Luke and what's his face we've had in past decade was that Mel Gibson movie 'What Women Want'. Films can be a great learning tool, and the films on this website provide modern lessons for a modern audience. Such as what should a responsible Christian do if they were confronted by Internet porn? If you chose option a) Unleash your man meat and get reacquainted, your soul would be on a one way ticket ride to Hell. If you chose option b) obliterate your PC like a crazed ape, your soul could be well onto its way to Heaven.

**Real Ultimate Power**<http://www.realultimatepower.net/index3.htm>

>>> "My name is Robert and I can't stop thinking about Ninjas. These guys are cool; and by cool, I mean totally sweet." One of the funniest websites in existence, one that we're sure you've all visited many a time. It features some great insights into what it must be like to be a Ninja. For example Ninja's fight ALL the time and cut off heads ALL the time. If you're feeling down then this website will pump you up HARD, and maybe if you're lucky it'll make you FLIP out and totally kill people. Just like a ninja.

CELEBRITY SITE OF THE MONTH**Vanilla Ice**<http://www.vanillaice.com/main.shtml>

>>> How do you go from being one of the biggest selling and most respected hip hop artists in the business to a laughing stock? It brings a tear to my eye when I say this but Vanilla Ice has gone all extreme sports on us. This means no more 'Ice Ice Baby' or 'Havin a Roni'. Sure we have Eminem to fill the void of white boy rappers but as solid as 'The Marshall Mathers LP' may be, at the end of the day it's no 'To the Extreme'. I remember the first time I had a Roni. It was a pretty good Roni, not an overbearing or overlong Roni, just the right amount of Roni.

**Pongland**<http://flashy.stupidshit.org/pong.swf>

>>> Warning: this write-up may feature a slight overuse of the word 'Pong'. Pongy McPong likes to play Pong, sing a Pong and smoke his Pong all day Pong. Pong is a funny word if nothing else, and it isn't. Oh wait, looks like it's also some sort of ancient 'videogame'. Never heard of it to tell you the truth, must be one of those nerdy niche games where you need 110+ magic beards to banish evil Level 46 Gnome Wizards from Elfland. This write-up obviously has very little to do with the website listed.

**A sucker born every minute**www.sanguinarius.org/vampire.shtml

>>> It's a relatively universal truth that goths are pretty sad. Not sad in the "woe is me boo hoo" sense, sad in the pathetic kind of way. Well there is hope. Everyone who looks down on goths can focus their ire in a different direction and give you the opportunity for a good bit of schadenfreude at the same time. Sanguinarius is supposed to be the world's foremost website for real life vampires but after reading it for five seconds any self respecting creature of the night would go outside and get a good tan whilst simultaneously jumping onto a pointy wooden object, gargling holy water and decapitating themselves rather than spend any time with these whiny morons.



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38 Half-Life 2

We've finished it... and loved every minute.



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REVIEWS



Game Theory

DANIEL STAINES



The History Channel - or, as it's commonly known to anyone who's ever watched it, "The Hitler Channel" - announced recently that it has licensed Rome: Total War for use in a program on the greatest battles of all time. Aside from being a rousing endorsement for the historical accuracy of Creative Assembly's

strategy masterpiece, this development brings to light the immense and underused educational potential inherent in many of today's games.

I'm not talking Edutainment here - Barbie's Magical Counting Adventure is not what I have in mind when I say that games today have educational potential. I'm talking about actual games. I'm talking about GTA and Halo and KOTOR and Deus Ex. The thing with interactive entertainment is that it just doesn't work unless you're willing to engage with its content and interact with it in a meaningful way. For example, when you're playing KOTOR and decide to be an evil Sith, you have to think about your actions and assess their validity within a particular moral framework. You have to consider the nature and consequences of your behaviour and in so doing you're giving yourself a practical lesson in philosophical ethics. This is what I mean when I say that games have an inherent educational potential.

And this educational potential isn't limited to a game's content either. Gaming technology can also be instructive in its own unique way. For example, have you heard of Quake Done Quick? It's a website dedicated to "speed-running" the original Quake, which I guess is a polite way of saying "obsessively playing Quake until you're freakishly good enough to finish the entire game in under five minutes". At any rate, in this site's rather extensive articles archive (located at www.planetquake.com/qdq/) you will find an instructive little piece entitled 'Zigzagging Through a Strange Universe' that details the physics of the Quake universe to a degree ordinarily reserved for

science journals. You think I'm exaggerating, but I'm really quite serious: the guy who wrote the article in question actually defines the laws that govern Quake physics and experiments with them to determine the best way they can be exploited for speed-running. It's a fascinating read because it quite clearly demonstrates the type of critical analysis that can arise when individuals decide to apply themselves to understanding gaming technology.

Of course, you might argue that experimenting with Quake isn't exactly the same as experimenting with real world variables and I'd agree with you. It's not the same, but that doesn't mean there isn't educational worth in it. When we experiment with variables in a game - even if it isn't as systematic and comprehensive as the experimentation detailed in the Zigzagging article - we are using and developing methods of critical thought that are useful in real world situations. And surely it's not too difficult to see how considering the ethical implications of your actions in a game like Planescape: Torment could help inform your moral reasoning in reality?

But perhaps the most important lessons gaming can teach us are about ourselves. Gaming allows you to experiment with the extremes of your own personality in a setting safely removed from the consequences of the real world. I'm not claiming that the way you act in a game has some kind of direct correlation with the way you act in society, but there can be little doubt that the way you play certain games reflects the nature of your character to a degree and this can be instructive in personal analysis. What do you think it says about someone when the only thing they enjoy doing in GTA 3 is running over innocent people? And what do you think it says about a society when it deems that miniscule aspect of the game to be its primary focus?

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+
Games that should be pulled from shelves and burned post haste	We suspect they let the work experience kid "help" on these	But hey, the work experience kid was pretty smart and knew C++	Sell these games for a budget price and you've almost got a plan	Into the realm of games that you really oughta check out. Now!	The gaming equivalent of a sex romp with Ulala from SC5





Dr. Freeman, I'm coming with you.

SQUAD FOLLOWING

AMMO

HALF-LIFE 2

TIMOTHY C. BEST is back from a whirlwind trip to Valve in Seattle...

Since you've been waiting almost six years for this game I won't beat around the bush: Half-Life 2 rocks.

What's even better is that it is a true sequel to the first game. It takes off after the events at Black Mesa and explores the extreme consequences of the fallout. Walking into Half-Life 2 is like walking into a terrific, vaguely arthouse TV series half-way through. You know it's Half-Life and you know that extra-dimensional wiggins have escaped from the first game, but you're a little unsure how it all fits together. What is certain is that the fascist-sterile Combine is creepy. An almost "headcrab painted white and dressed up as a surgical mask" creepy.

When Freeman is on the case you also know that everything is going to get blown wide open. He didn't go through all of those teleporter jumping puzzles just to wake up ten years later and find

that the Earth has been punk'd by alien upper-management. In true sequel fashion we see the return of favourite characters from the first game, and all the way through there is a good balance between the old and the new, even in the way the action plays out.

It's not all creeping through narrow passages and waiting five minutes between headcrabs (although there is a little of that), but, just like the original, the action weaves back into the atmosphere and story to make those memorable moments where gaming just clicks. This isn't just senseless running and gunning; at its best this is constructing stories to tell your gamer friends, one bullet at a time.

LOVE AND ROCKETS

When it comes to action, HL2 goes for anything that might make a cool scene. It has rally driving with and without guns. Players zoom over ramps, through windows and over

dams. They take on other vehicles and leap out at strategic points to blast their way through road blocks, to release gates and clear blocked tunnels that are too creepy not to be hiding masses of shambling undead.

Players take on survival horror-style creatures attacking in rotting buildings, sewers, graveyards and old mines. Your old 'crab zombies get new friends in the form of skeletal critters which move like a combination of greased lightning and a greased monkey and make sounds that are about as pleasant as a combination of the two.

Headcrabs also get a new friend in the form of a little hugger that floods your body with neurotoxin, knocking you down to one hit point in a split second. Sure, your suit can counter the toxin given time, but for heart-stopping moments you know that one hit from anything will send you back to your last save.

Once you hit the sunlight you're generally in the domain of the

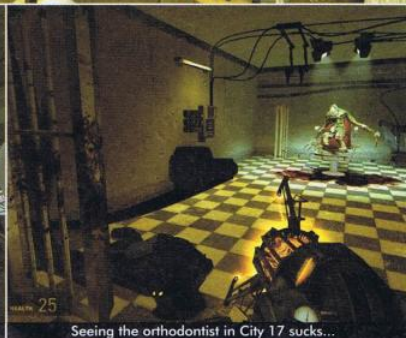
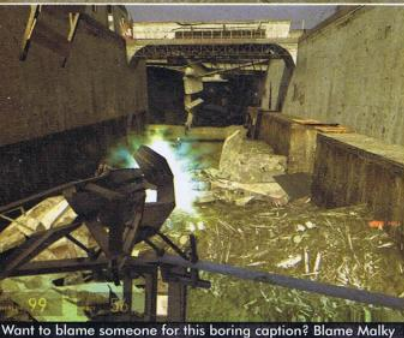
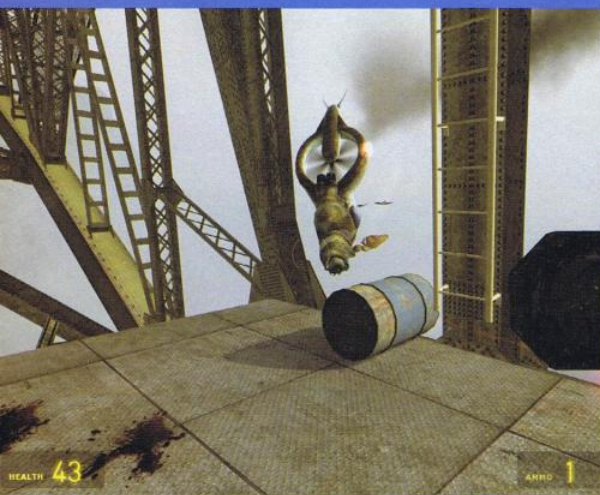


[below] Half-Life 2: Crates and Crowbars



[below] Halt Rebel Scum...





Want to blame someone for this boring caption? Blame Malky

We love warehouses (there's always many a crate)

Seeing the orthodontist in City 17 sucks...

» Seeing a conga line of undead fall into two pieces is a real sight to behold

creepy Combine. These guys get all military with army manoeuvres, grenades, attack choppers, gunships and tripod-like striders.

The action covers everything from holding make-shift forts with the help of sentry guns, to military base assaults, classic survival horror sequences, bug hunts and classic boss encounters filled with dodging and unloading clip after clip of ammo. The story neatly ties the horror and military loving into something a little nastier than either could manage on its lonesome by sitting them side by side.

GETTING INTO THE GROOVE

Most of the time this works really well, but not all of the time. Some of the missions go on too long, especially early on as the story gains momentum. In the beginning Gordon gets several doses of: "it's not safe for you here Gordon, you had better run for it ... hmmm ... take the really dangerous way to the next checkpoint and then we'll work out what we should do next."

It's not that the level design is bad or the action lags it's just that you get all of these hints about this brilliantly twisted world ripe for saving and all you're doing is bouncing around like a deadly pinball. All of this changes in the second half, and the final stages are a blast from wall-to-wall. I admit that this might actually be a part of why the game is so good, since it has a knack of annoying you just enough and then giving you something really satisfying to wipe away your cares.

All of this well-placed payback is made possible by the linear story line that lets Valve set up scene after scene for the players. You always know you have to go through the door at the other end of the room to continue or that getting in the skimmer is the only way forward. Honestly, it's all done so well that you hardly notice the linear nature of the game and things are kept lively through choice in exactly how you get to that next door.

Most fights unfold in such a

way that that players can tackle situations head-on with insane shooter skills or they can use cover, physics, tactics and clever weapon choices to control the pace and create a much different battle.

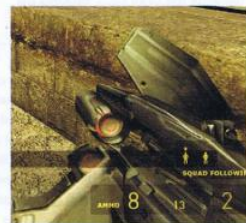
OH THE NU-GRAVITY!

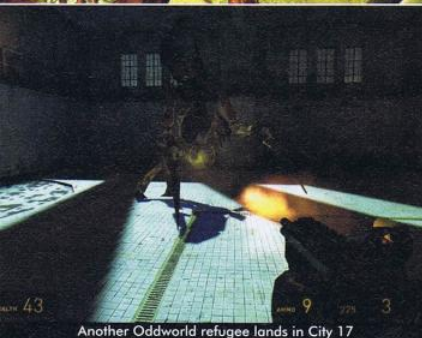
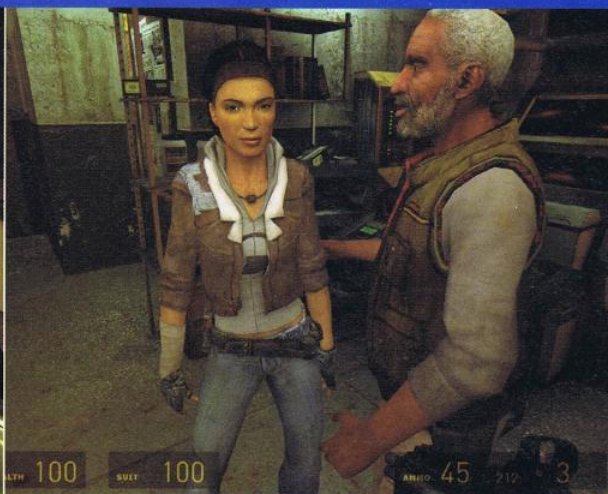
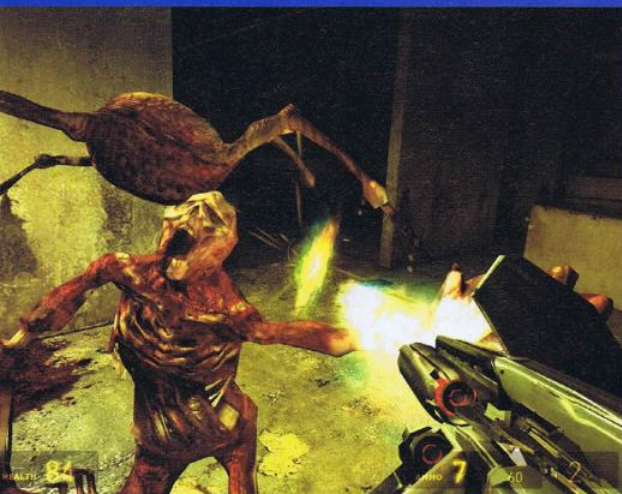
One of the things that puts players into the driver's seat in these battles is the Gravity Gun. Once you pick it up, it lets players attract, repel, toss and carry objects throughout the game. For some reason it's crazy fun knocking zombies off their feet using paint cans and dressers as projectile weapons. Sure, it'll take a lot of hits from a paint can to kill one, but that's hardly the point.

If you, say, choose a buzz saw blade instead of a paint can, then the Gravity Gun becomes one of

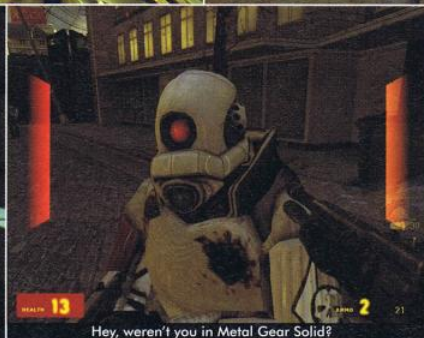
THINGS THAT GO BANG IN THE NIGHT

The weapons in HL2 aren't really that whacky in and of themselves (with one kick-arse exception that I'll let you discover on your own). You have the basics like the pistol, magnum revolver, SMG, shotgun, rocket launcher, grenades, and, of course, the crowbar. It's a real sword-in-the-stone feel-good moment when Gordon gets reunited with that chunk of metal. The standards are rounded out by the cross-bow for sniping, the Civil Protection "Standard Issue Pulse Rifle" for an ammo-gulping assault rifle with grenade attachment, as well as the awesome Gravity Gun. Everything has a place and they give you a decent fork for every occasion.

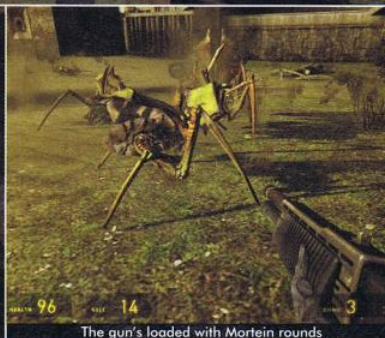




Another Oddworld refugee lands in City 17



Hey, weren't you in Metal Gear Solid?



The gun's loaded with Mortain rounds

the most awesome weapons in the game. Seeing a conga line of undead fall into two pieces is a real sight to behold and knowing that you lined them up just right produces an extra warm glow.

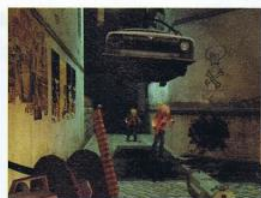
The Grav Gun is all-purpose tool and it's all-purpose cool. You can repel nearby cars to turn cover into a nasty surprise, you can knock planks from across doorways, hold a filing cabinet as a shield or suck health packs to you from behind cover. The Grav Gun highlights the understated physics in the game. Things get really interesting at the extreme range of its pull. It is there that we see how various forces interact in the game. You'll see barrels be tugged on gently and then maybe fall over. Then they'll start rolling towards the Grav Gun, picking up speed until leaping up into the



[above] Have at you quiet country town!



[up] Lure him out with a plate of milk



[up] Harry Potter's come to rescue me!

field in front of the gun. Sometimes you'll do dumb things like tug a health pack off a ledge and then watch as natural gravity overwhelms the range-weakened force of the Grav Gun and causes the pack to topple down and out of range.

The physics system allows for a number of puzzles that are so logical and straight forward that they just flow into the game without calling

too much attention to themselves. In some puzzles you have to load a see-saw up with bricks and barrels into order to raise the far side, or you have to position floating barrels under a ramp to buoy it up, or arrange crates to block doors or raise you up to the next ledge. Of course you can get more creative by arranging odds and ends so that when you shoot the flammable

barrel in the middle, debris flies out in every direction - except yours.

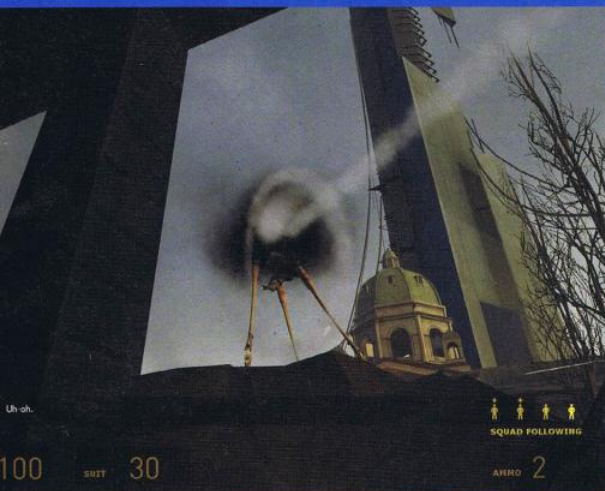
The physics even extends to working out damage from hitting troopers with your buggy. If you're going slowly enough you just push them along, if you hit them with enough speed they'll go flying with a painful crunch.

This isn't one-way traffic, however. If you figure that you can just back away from the sluggish zombies you'll get a nasty surprise as they start batting furniture and hard-edged barrels in your direction. Of course, if you're quick enough on the Grav Gun you can always catch the objects out of the air and send them back with interest.

The physics additions to the game make for a lot of fun, without

THE COMBINE The Combine is the creepy force that's behind all of the guys in masks and new technology that's making everyone's life better... like the force fields that keep everyone in the right parts of the city, the flying scanners that keep an eye on them and fields that suppress the desire to make little resistance fighters. Maybe we should listen to the nice Administrator. If only we get rid of all of those nasty instincts that lead to fatal injury I'm sure the Combine will make us immortal and as well as providing fresh OJ every morning. The Combine is our friend. Welcome to City 17; it's safer here.



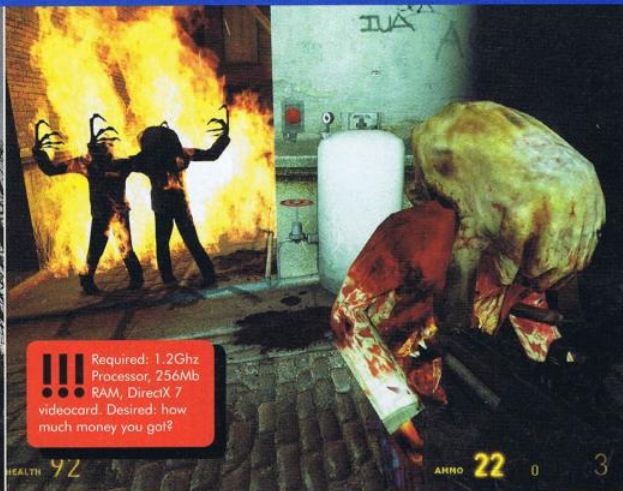


Uh oh.

100 SHOT 30

SQUAD FOLLOWING
4

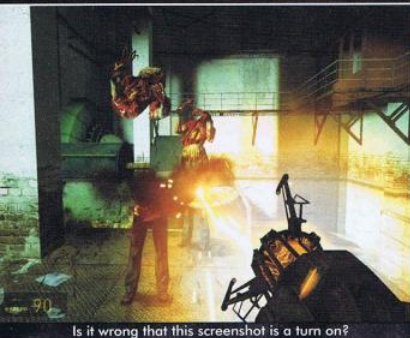
ARMED 2



Required: 1.2Ghz Processor, 256Mb RAM, DirectX 7 videocard. Desired: how much money you got?

HEALTH 42

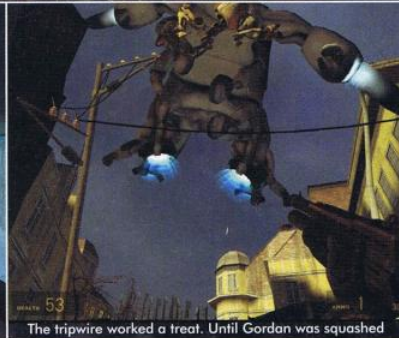
ARMED 22 0 3



Is it wrong that this screenshot is a turn on?



Now... type "/A/S/L...LOL!!!!11111111"



The tripwire worked a treat. Until Gordon was squashed

getting gimmicky. Before you get too carried away, not everything is a physics item in the game, and you can't just shoot the base of any wall and collapse it on someone (I guess that would mess with level design too much and would let players trap themselves in levels). Even with the limitations, physics is a big player in HL2 and the basic things that flow from it add a new depth to the world.

NOTHING BY HALVES

Half-Life 2 is big and ambitious. While the story line weighs in at pretty decent, the background of the Combine-infected world is amazing. You just want to explore all of its secrets, but Valve knows what to keep to itself and that makes it all the more gripping.

Watching Alyx's face tells you about fifty times more than her dialogue

Now, HL2 doesn't do everything perfectly. As I've mentioned the pace in the first half of the game gets a little lost, and there other some other issues as well. When you get a squad they sometimes do odd things and get in the way more than they help; the guns could have a little more beef; the racing sequences could either be tighter or more truly free roaming and Gordon could do with a little more direction from time to time, but ultimately all of these niggles fade as the game swings into high gear. By the final stages, everything has come together and there's an

awesome momentum that carries you right through to the end.

Personally, I also think the facial animation was under-used, but then again I had to keep reminding myself that HL2 wasn't an RPG whenever the other characters were on the screen. At one stage the beautiful but tough freedom fighter, Alyx, has a disagreement with the pompous and controlling Dr Mossman (who thinks that Gordon stole her job at Black Mesa). Watching Alyx's face tells you about fifty times more than her dialogue and it makes her so much more endearing. One little knowing glance or a wink and you're pulled right into the middle of things.

Ultimately, that's Half-Life 2 all over: you're having fun, playing a shooter, and then one knowing glance, a wink, or a Dawn of the Dead piece of mayhem and you'll forget the outside world exists. Go buy it. <<

GOOD TIMES Everyone's going to have their own favourite moments from the game and while I don't want to spoil them for anyone I figure I'll just give you a sketch of two of mine. The first is a brilliant tribute to the old arcade shooters with bullets and bombs raining down, which I like to think of as Source 1942. Then there's the roof-top wait while a mad priest sends a pulley car across to get you. Things look pretty safe until you hear and then see a drain pipe rattle. You look over the edge and the new super-agile Alien-style zombies are climbing up to get you. A shotgun blast knocks the first one free, but then you hear a similar rattle from behind you. You know that one decent hit could knock you from the roof; you also know that things are about to get messy.

AVAILABLE ON:
PS2 / XBOX / PC / GCN

DETAILS:

CATEGORY: Action
PLAYERS: 1
DEVELOPER: Valve
PUBLISHER: Vivendi
PRICE: \$89.95
RATING: M
AVAILABLE: TBA

HYPER VERDICT:

PLUS: It's a fantastic world that sucks you in. Freeman and crowbar reunited.

MINUS: The action occasionally skips a beat before getting into the groove.

GRAPHICS SOUND GAMEPLAY

95 90 94

OVERALL

95

Innovative and fun. It's Half-Life through and through.





PAPER MARIO: The Thousand-Year Door

CAM SHEA hopes we never live in a paper-less society

For one reason or another, Australian gamers have pretty much missed out on the various Mario RPGs of years past. The original Mario RPG (developed by Nintendo and Square) on SNES never came out here, while Paper Mario on N64 did come out, but so few copies came into the country that hardly anyone played it. Hopefully that's all about to change. The superb Mario and Luigi: Superstar Saga on GBA is in stores Australia-wide right now, and with the imminent release of Paper Mario 2 you have two Big Rubber Stamp titles to get stuck into. Go get them both, and help ensure the future success of Mario RPG titles in this country.

STARRING SOME SAUCY MUSTACHED GUY

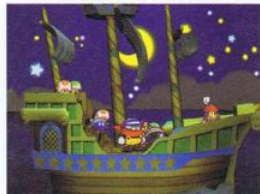
But let's move onto the game shall we? Paper Mario 2 essentially picks up where the original left off. As per normal, Princess Peach has been kidnapped, but this time

Bowser's not responsible - it's an all new gang of nasties known as the X-Nauts led by the bulb-headed Grodus. It seems the X-Nauts have kidnapped Peach because they believe she has information about the seven Crystal Star pieces, which, when gathered together, will open the Thousand-Year Door, beyond which lies something ancient and incredibly powerful. But yes, I hear you groaning - once again a Paper Mario game boils down to finding star pieces. Honestly though we don't care, because the individual chapters and gameplay are anything but run of the mill.

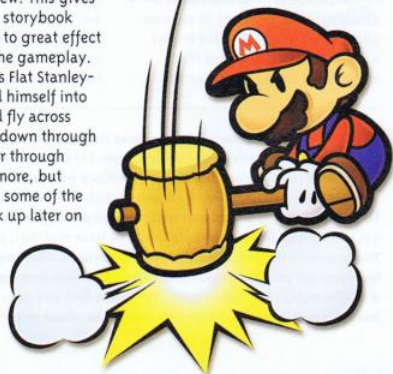
That said, at first glance Paper Mario 2 is very much a typical RPG. You wander around the towns talking to people, you stay in inns to regain health, you buy items at stores, you battle enemies as you work your way through labyrinthine environments, you level up and you gradually put together a party. But it's through presentation and clever

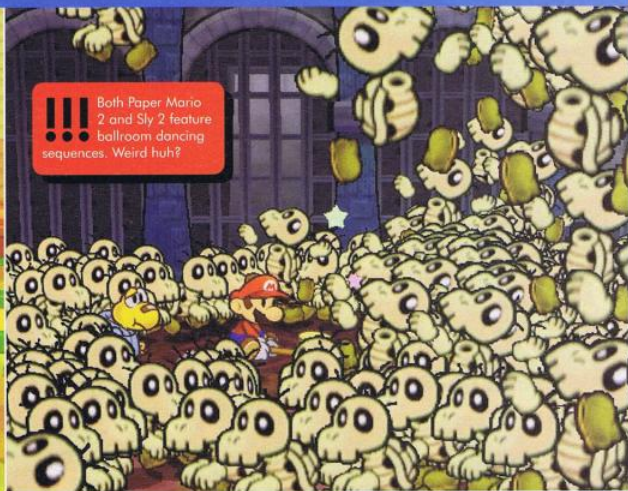
ideas that it really comes into its own. As the name suggests, all the characters in the world (apart from the pigs in Twilight Town for some reason) are paper thin. Each time a character turns you'll see them almost disappear when they're side on. Similarly, when you go into a house or shop, the front wall will fall down or be pulled out from the side to give you a better view. This gives the game a wonderful storybook feel, but it's also used to great effect in countless areas in the gameplay.

For instance, Mario's Flat Stanley-ness allows him to fold himself into a paper aeroplane and fly across certain spaces, to slip down through grates in the ground or through the bars of a cell and more, but we don't want to spoil some of the other abilities you pick up later on in the game. Other instances where the paper thin concept is used to great effect are objects in the



[below] Mario BLAUs it up! Or is it down?

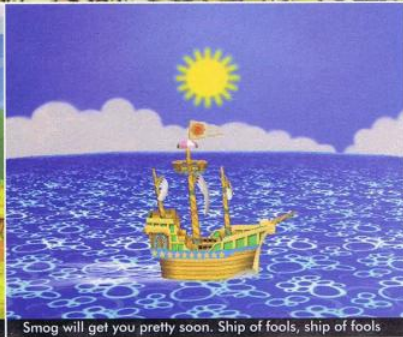




Nothing like blowing some wood for a sweet reward



Must. Resist. Second. Blowjob. Caption. In. A. Row.



Smog will get you pretty soon. Ship of fools, ship of fools

»» One significant twist is that you're now fighting up on stage in front of a crowd

environment that look 3D but can be manipulated like a large sheet of paper. Flick a switch for instance, and you may see a staircase peel off the wall and re-orientate itself to face the opposite direction, or a bridge may build itself across a gap in the path, where each part is revealed like the page of a book flipping across the space. One of your party members can even literally blow away a thin slice of the world, revealing hidden doors, switches and other goodies. In all, the paper concept is far more than a gimmick - the implementation is clever and consistently surprising.

Like most RPGs, you'll spend a lot of time fighting enemies, and to a large extent the battle mechanics are very similar to the previous game. One significant twist, however, is that you're now fighting up on stage in front of a crowd. This brings in a new performance aspect, which adds several more layers to combat, making it even more compelling. The basic idea is that the greater your renown, the more of a spectacle your fights become and the more people will travel to see you fight. Of course, not everyone in the audience will be friendly to your cause, and during battles you'll have to watch out for audience members with rocks and other projectiles. When you see one, just hit X to vault down into the audience and take him out! Depending on where the battle is initiated, the stage is decorated just like the environment you were just in, but it's built as a set, with paper thin trees and other props in the background. Occasionally, after particularly large attacks, the scenery will actually fall down and you'll

have to time an action command to prevent taking damage.

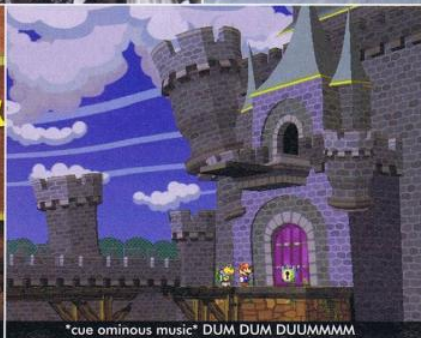
GOTTA LOVE 'BOATING

At the start of the game you may only have twenty people watching your fights but it won't be long until you have a hundred plus. Pleasing the audience gains you star points which fill up your Star Power stars. Special moves (you'll get one after each chapter, as well as an extra star in your Star Power bar) require star power to use, so pleasing the crowd is necessary to quickly fill those stars again. And this is where the motivation to really showboat during battles comes in. You can use a turn to appeal to the crowd to help get them onside, and you have a wide variety of action command possibilities to really show you know your stuff. Speaking of action commands, these really help keep battles interesting. Instead of being purely turn-based, action commands allow you to put a little extra oomph into attacks and to take less damage when being attacked. The basic idea is the same as in Paper Mario, but this time there's more variety in the types of action commands, and there's even B

PAPER LUIGI 2 Paper Mario 2 begins with Mario receiving a letter from Princess Peach and dashing off on an adventure, leaving Luigi behind to tend to the house (yes, they live together). You later bump into Luigi in the game's main hub world Rogueport, and it turns out that another letter from a princess in distress turned up just after Mario left, so Luigi took on the adventure himself! After each chapter you'll return to Rogueport and be able to hear the latest about Luigi's very amusing adventure. Later on in the game a book about his adventures even goes onsale in one of the stores! There's plenty of tongue in cheek humour like this throughout the game, so be sure to talk to everyone.



[above] Rabble rabble rabble rabble



More entertaining than your average STC performance

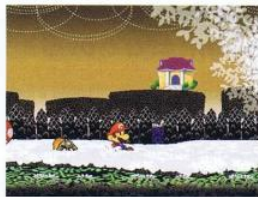
"cue ominous music" DUM DUM DUUMMMM

This caption's got me stumped. Hardy ha ha



button defensive action commands that are harder to time correctly, but that will actually damage your enemy. And if you want to really win over the audience, you can do "stylish" action commands, which require another well timed button press sometime during the attack.

Once again the battle mechanics have something of a rock, paper, scissors feel. If an enemy has a spike on its head, for instance, you won't be able to use jump attacks, while you may only be able to get to an enemy that's hanging by



[up] Mario finds another hurt shrew



[up] Mario's take on the wave motion gun

the rafters with one of your party members or an item. Another cool aspect of the battles is that Mario's moves are mostly determined by the badges you've equipped. There are 85 badges to collect/buy in the game, and they give you all sorts of abilities, from a huge range of new attacking options through to increased health/flower points, or heightened stats for your party. The fact that you can swap badges around whenever you like means that battles never have to get boring, and with every 100 Star Points (exp) gained you level up, and are given a choice between extra health, flower points (most badge moves use up a certain number of flower points) or badge points, which means you can

steadily increase the number of slots available for badges.

TIT FOR TATTLE

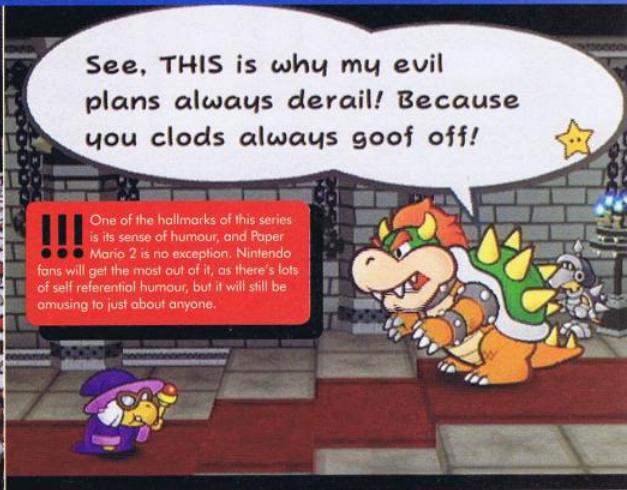
It's your party members, however, that ensure that Paper Mario 2 is always interesting. As an example, the first character to join your cause is Goombella the Goomba, and she's able to use her "tattle" move in battles to give you info on your opponent and to see its health points. Outside of battle she can give you background information on the area you're in and any of the characters you meet, which is often both funny and useful. All of the other party members that you'll acquire on your travels have custom abilities like these, leading to many puzzles based around them, and

THE GREAT GONZALES Now that you're fighting in front of an audience, Intelligent Systems have tied the concept into one of the game's chapters, where Mario becomes a professional wrestler called "The Great Gonzales", and must fight his way through the ranks to become the champion and uncover the mysteries surrounding the fighting arena. Thus, the battles on stage become just that - battles on stage. Nice.





Mario felt "nice" after the dragon blew him. Sorry...



!!! One of the hallmarks of this series is its sense of humour, and Paper Mario 2 is no exception. Nintendo fans will get the most out of it, as there's lots of self-referential humour, but it will still be amusing to just about anyone.



Super Happy Bowser World 1-1

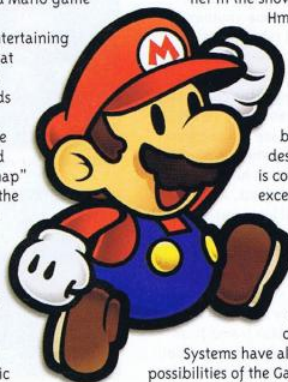


Super Blau Brothers: Extreme Croquette

many areas you can go back to once you have the right ability.

Each chapter in Paper Mario 2 has its own distinct flavour, both in storytelling approach and visual theme, so you're always keen to see what's around the corner in this game... and it rarely disappoints. Whether it's the great twist to the plot in Twilight Town, Mario's rise to prominence as a wrestler, or guiding 101 Punnies around the black and white weirdness of The Great Tree, this certainly isn't a Mario game by the numbers.

Another really entertaining aspect is the role that Bowser plays in the game. When he finds out someone else kidnapped Peach he flies into a rage and sets out to "re-kidnap" her. You could cut the sexual tension with a knife between those two. You'll even get to play as Bowser for short periods, including fire breathing rampages through recreations of classic



» You'll even get to play as Bowser... through recreations of 2D Mario Bros levels!

2D Super Mario Bros levels! And then there's Peach. Like the original Paper Mario, you get to play as Peach between chapters, and she'll find out some valuable info from inside the belly of the beast. It's all a little strange though, as her side story is mostly about a supercomputer falling in love with her (after seeing her in the shower, no less).

Hmm. Not only is Paper Mario 2 well designed and entertaining, but the art design throughout is consistently excellent. The worlds themselves are gorgeous - rich in colour and style and deliberately minimalist in detail. Intelligent

Systems have also used the possibilities of the GameCube's

hardware to good effect, creating some massive characters and also putting many many sprites on screen at once to heighten the impact of certain sequences. We also really loved the use of foreground and background in the game; seeing Mario go down a pipe only to pop up as a silhouette running along the 2D horizon is very cool.

Characters are really sharp and well defined too, and although animated simply, have stacks of personality. This personality even carries through to the way speech is presented on-screen. Text can waver, jitter and become incredibly bold depending on the emotion of the situation. As per usual for first party Nintendo titles, the translation into English is first rate, and characters have distinct personalities and use plenty of amusing slang. Don't let the cutesy look put you off, this is a thoroughly absorbing and clever game. <<

AVAILABLE ON:
PS2 / XBOX / PC / GCN

DETAILS:

CATEGORY: RPG
PLAYERS: 1
DEVELOPER: Intelligent Systems
PUBLISHER: Nintendo
PRICE: \$99.95
RATING: G
AVAILABLE: November

HYPER VERDICT:

PLUS: Stylish visuals, great gameplay. A more than worthy sequel.

MINUS: Puzzles and battles a little too easy. A little more challenge please!

GRAPHICS SOUND GAMEPLAY
89 85 92

OVERALL

92

Another very clever and very entertaining Mario RPG.





TALES OF SYMPHONIA

STEPHEN FARRELLY has achieved the title of "RPG Lover"

Let's face it. The GameCube's RPG action is paper thin. Apart from the early releases in *Lost Kingdoms I and II*, a few oddball titles here and there, and *The Legend of Zelda The Wind Waker* (which isn't really a traditional RPG, anyway) the GCN is missing out on some sweet action.

In years passed the likes of Square-Enix, Capcom, Namco and more have shied from the Nintendo format for one reason or another, and more recently, though Nintendo has been reasonably aggressive, the format has still been starved of some truly engrossing experiences. Sure *Final Fantasy Crystal Chronicles* was a revelation, but it didn't stop it from being too niche. The same can be said of the *Resident Evil* series - stunning and visceral (on a "B" level), but it didn't exactly ignite sales, which resulted in no other traditional Capcom games coming to the system. Now Namco's turn; we already know the company has been

working on *Star Fox* and *Donkey Kong*, but two games out of left field are going to help root some more innovative support behind *The Big N*, those being *Tales of Symphonia* and *Baten Kaitos*.

PSEUDO CEL

As the latter won't make it here in Australia until next year, hardcore RPG nuts and RPG starved Nintendo enthusiasts have more than enough time to get the most out of the former, *Tales of Symphonia*. *Tales* (as it shall be formally recognised from here on in), is the brain child of the famed Namco development sister team, Namco Tales Studio Inc, and one Kosuke Fujishima, the man responsible for *Ah! My Goddess* and countless other popular anime series'.

As *Tales*' art-direction is firmly rooted in anime themes the game itself is presented in pseudo cel-shading with chibi-styled characters; it might seem overly cute, but thanks to some nice

animation and incredible character and game scripting, *Tales* is anything but.

While *Paper Mario* pokes fun at itself and the world in which it is set, *Tales* takes the time to familiarise you with a cast of characters, their worldly plight and their unique relationships with one another.

Initially you'll take control of Lloyd, and he'll remain the focus of the game from then on in, acting as a leader amongst the characters who join your team while slowly uncovering his place in the grand scheme of things, which is much more important than he initially thinks. As you progress, a number of characters will join your side and the most enticing aspect of *Tales* is the game's ability to throw you off track only to reveal an even bigger road ahead.

The preliminary situation has you following a dear friend from the village where you go to school. Her name is Collette and she is the



[above] Moonwalking down the isle...



[above] Watch out, she's got a parasoll





On the eve of his sex change operation

Shades of Chun-Li?

You smell like pea soup

Chosen of Regeneration, which means it's her job to undergo a pilgrimage to restore the world of Sylvarant's much depleted mana. However, the world itself is a dangerous place and as Lloyd and his close friend, Genis, are exiled from the village, they catch up to Collette and her party to help protect them against the woes of the land, and your adventure begins.

MORE THAN MEETS THE EYE
As an RPG, Tales' management system is extremely extensive, as is the amount of information stored within the game. There is a Synopsis option in the game's menu which is constantly updated, meaning you'll never be lost or wondering what to do next. Equally, levelling up and achieving character titles is another

» The game is presented in pseudo cel-shading with chibi-style characters

deep facet to gameplay, as some titles reward characters with more strength, intelligence, evasiveness etc, while other titles (achieved with numerous and fun side-quests) will have comedic effects in terms of character relationships, party stature and costumes. Battle in Tales is actually performed in real-time. Like a traditional RPG, from the World Map you're whisked away to a battle screen to face whatever monsters stand in your way, and within battle you can control any one member of your party while arranging a number of strategies for your AI chums. The battle system itself is extremely fun and rewarding with a combo system helping to emphasise the chaotic nature of your situation and helps keep things lively throughout your long journey. Tales has somewhere in the vicinity of 80+ hours available to the truly hardcore RPG fan, and anyone willing to give a portion of their life away will absolutely love this idea (you can even play

through again once you've finished the game and choose to carry over a number of abilities and items). The adventure spans two disks with two absolutely wonderful anime cut-scenes being more than worth your effort at important intervals in story, while the rest of the game's plot is unveiled through well directed speech (all streaming in real-time without a hitch). It's all streamlined, with a complete lack of any loading, and saving your progress is actually quicker in Tales than it was in Metroid Prime, which is saying a lot. Tales is one of the most engaging RPGs we've played here at Hyper and is a game the GameCube sorely needed. The refreshing approach to the genre and deep story and character relationships make for a truly immersive experience. This is one of the best adventures you'll ever undertake, pick it up as soon as it's released! <<

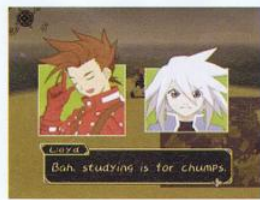
AVAILABLE ON:
PS2 / XBOX / PC / GCN

DETAILS:
CATEGORY: RPG
PLAYERS: 1
DEVELOPER: Namco Tales Studio Inc
PUBLISHER: Namco
PRICE: \$99.95
RATING: G8+
AVAILABLE: November

HYPER VERDICT:
PLUS: Deep and involving story, huge worlds, deep real-time battle system.

MINUS: You'll never want the game to end.

GRAPHICS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY
89	88	94
OVERALL		
93		
Loveable and immersive, a must-buy for GCN RPG fans.		





SLY 2: Band of Thieves

CAM SHEA was voted "most likely to become a thief" when he left high school

Although the original Sly garnered a fair bit of critical acclaim, to us it just seemed like a missed opportunity. The stylish graphics, great animations and pseudo-stealth platforming gameplay all added up to a game that looked great, but was ultimately a little shallow for our tastes. Welcome to a sequel done right. All the best aspects of the original game have been carried over, but this time they're tied into some very tight design and much more interesting gameplay. It's still a platformer, sure, but now the stealth is fleshed out and the gameplay is a whole lot more freewheeling.

IF MILHOUSE WAS A TURTLE...

Once again Sly is back with his crew: fat-boy Murray the pig and nerd-boy Bentley the turtle. In the original game they were really just there to provide support for Sly, which meant Bentley giving you advice

during levels and a few mini-games that they were involved in. This time they're much more integral to proceedings, and are fully playable in the main game. The structure of missions is also much more organic in feel. As you'd expect, you once again have a main objective in each world to liberate (this time it's the pieces of their Clockwerk adversary from the original), but missions are elegantly crafted to lead up to the final heist. Basically you move through several stages of planning and reconnaissance before finally coming up with the plan. Thus, you may have to sneak into the heart of the enemy operation to take some snaps of what's going on, or you may sneak into the big bad's office and plant a bug so you can keep track of his plans. Bentley will then come up with an elaborate plan that requires several things to be done to work, each of which becomes a mission. So at any one stage there may be several objectives to choose

from, and a simple click on the left analogue stick will highlight where those spots are, and which team member is needed to do them.

This time the threesome really function as a team, with complementary abilities that give controlling each character a unique flavour. Murray is very much the muscle: he's used whenever something heavy needs lifting... or paaanching. Bentley is the brains, but totes a crossbow with darts that can put enemies to sleep, and bombs that can finish them off. Neither of them have the range of movement that Sly does, so often Sly will need to go in first to open up the way for the other two. Both the additional characters are well fleshed out, and you'll find yourself really enjoying playing as both Bentley and Murray. You'll even get to take on the odd boss with the extra characters.

Of course, Sly himself is still the main draw, and he's an absolute



[up] Why's he wearing a belt but no pants?



[above] Sly's foxy arch-nemesis

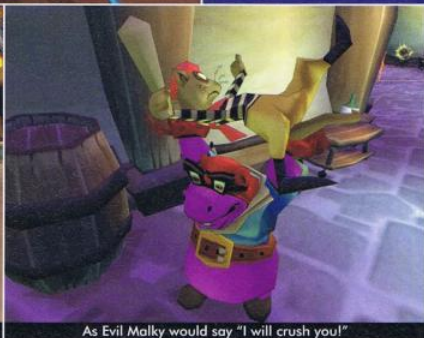




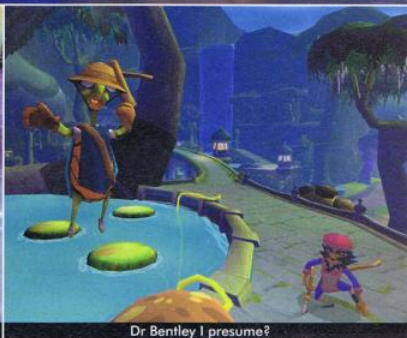
!!! Whenever you do something stealthy, Sly's movement is accompanied by a wandering bass. It's small touches like this that make Sly so endearing.



Fans service for all the furries out there



As Evil Malky would say "I will crush you!"



Dr Bentley I presume?

joy to control, giving you a sense of freestyle movement around the environments. Many of his abilities from the first game return - running along wires, perching on top of poles/spikes, pressing up against walls to move along narrow ledges, swinging from hooks using his sickle, and a whole host of offensive moves.

Sly also has a few new moves up his sleeve (such as pick pocketing - which is a masterful addition), but the biggest change is in the quality of the level design. Every world in Sly 2 is basically a big open plan environment, where the possibilities for getting around are almost limitless. Combine this freedom of design with Sly's freedom of movement and it's not long before you truly feel like a sure footed cat burglar, making his way through



»» Every world in Sly 2 is basically a big open plan environment

an unsuspecting world. You'll run along rooftops, vault from highwire to highwire, hop down to the ground to stealthily pick an enemy's pockets, jump back up onto the roof via an awning, then jump onto and along a narrow ledge to get to your mission entry point... or just for fun.

At your fingertips you have a jump button, two basic attack buttons, three assignable special move buttons (you purchase/unlock extra moves as you go), a run button and binoculars, but the most important context element is the circle button which is used for context sensitive stealth moves. Indeed, it's the circle that gives you so much freedom in movement, allowing you to leap from point to point without fear of falling, and even to leap into a wall hug on a narrow ledge. Sly is, after all, a master thief, so it makes sense that he should be able to move with ease, and instead of dumbing down the skill required, simply means that you can concentrate on the task at hand, rather than struggling with the basics.

LESS MINI-GAMES HURRAH!

In addition to the wide open levels, you'll also venture indoors regularly, so it's a good combination of open and more linear gameplay. It's also a good combination of basic platformer gameplay (collect the keys, hit the switches) and more interesting objectives (bust Sly out of prison). There are also a whole lot less mini-games this time around, which we think is a good thing. Rounding the improvements off are enemies that feel much more integral to the game, with the more powerful ones carrying flashlights to clearly highlight their field of view, allowing you to avoid or engage as you see fit.

And here we are, at the end of the review, with barely even a mention of just how fantastic Sly 2 looks, and just how much personality has been packed into the game. That, more than anything, is a huge endorsement for just how well this game plays. <<

AVAILABLE ON:
PS2 / XBOX / PC / GCN

DETAILS:

CATEGORY: Platformer
PLAYERS: 1
DEVELOPER: Sucker Punch
PUBLISHER: Sony
PRICE: \$99.95
RATING: G8+
AVAILABLE: Now

HYPER VERDICT:

PLUS: Great level design, stylish visuals, cool characters.

MINUS: All the levels are constructed in the same way so it gets a little repetitive.

GRAPHICS SOUND GAMEPLAY
88 87 90

OVERALL

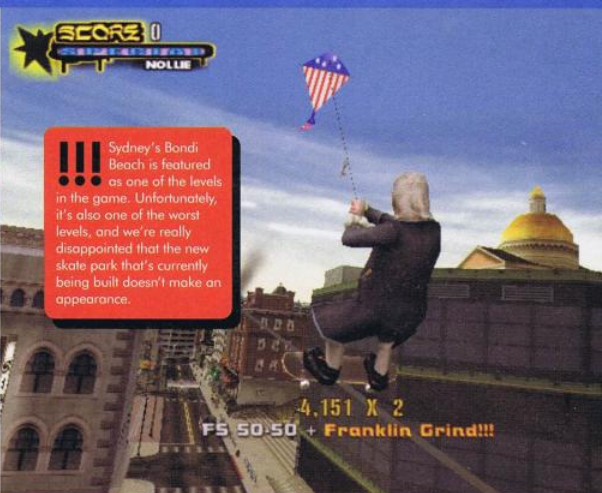
90

There's just so much to like about this game...





3,218 X 3
Nose Manual + Truckstand + Pogo to Hair Flip



4,151 X 2
FS 50-50 + Franklin Grind!!!

!!! Sydney's Bondi Beach is featured as one of the levels in the game. Unfortunately, it's also one of the worst levels, and we're really disappointed that the new skate park that's currently being built doesn't make an appearance.



480 X 3
Jump It + Spine Transfer + BarSpin

Not pictured... the Star Wars Kid (but he's in there!)



He would be heaps cooler if he was called Blau Margera



Mike V does a Metallica and "writes the lightning"

TONY HAWK'S UNDERGROUND 2

DANIEL WILKS wants to bitch-slap Steve-O

It's no secret that the Hyper crew have long been fans of the Tony Hawk franchise, with the love affair starting with the very first game and only growing with the release of Tony Hawk 2. It's also no secret that we've long said that the franchise needs to streamline the objectives and focus more on the skating, but our desires seem to have fallen on deaf ears as is evident with the release of Tony Hawk's Underground 2: World Destruction Tour, a game equal parts Tony Hawk, Jackass and themed platformer. This is not to say that THUG 2 is a bad game - there's still a lot to like, but if you're looking for a true skating game you may want to look elsewhere.

THUG LIFE

THUG 2 follows the story based formula of the first THUG game, this time seeing two teams of skaters, one lead by Tony Hawk and the other by the lovably horrible

Bam Margera and their World Destruction Tour of eight cities. THUG 2 features more gimmicky objectives and secret characters than ever and has, for the most part in the campaign omitted the high score objectives, opting instead to include such feats as throwing tomatoes at bulls, vomiting on cops or freeing ghosts by painting a mural. The running and climbing from THUG also reappear. These new objectives are reflected in the level design - each of the eight new levels seem a lot more cramped than they have been in previous Tony games with a lack of good long freeform runs, focusing players on missions to unlock the next level rather than simply skating for the sheer fun of it. There is still a good deal of fun to be had playing through the missions, but more open level design would have done the title a world of good.

Underground 2 adds a few new gameplay mechanics into the

mix to keep things interesting. The "sticker slap" is an airborne wall plant that allows for a quick change of direction so players can continue combos back the way they came. A good addition. "Focus Time" is a bullet time-esque technique that allows players to slow time when the special meter is full giving them added control over their skater for a short period of time. This skill adds a certain amount of accessibility for new players keen to learn the mechanics of the game, while veterans will dig watching flips, spins and grinds in super slo mo. Aside from the World Destruction Tour, THUG 2 contains a classic mode that gives the player the opportunity to play over all of the stages in the game as well as some stages taken from previous Tony games, all with old school objectives and a time limit.

Although the skate mechanics are still great, there's less true skating in THUG 2 than ever before. Damn. <<

AVAILABLE ON:
PS2 / XBOX / PC / GCN

DETAILS:

CATEGORY: Skating
PLAYERS: 1-2 (8 online)
DEVELOPER: Neversoft
PUBLISHER: Activision
PRICE: \$99.95
RATING: M15+
AVAILABLE: Now

HYPER VERDICT:

PLUS: Sticker slap, focus time, old courses in classic mode.

MINUS: Too gimmicky, Steve-O, cramped levels.

GRAPHICS SOUND GAMEPLAY

81 89 77

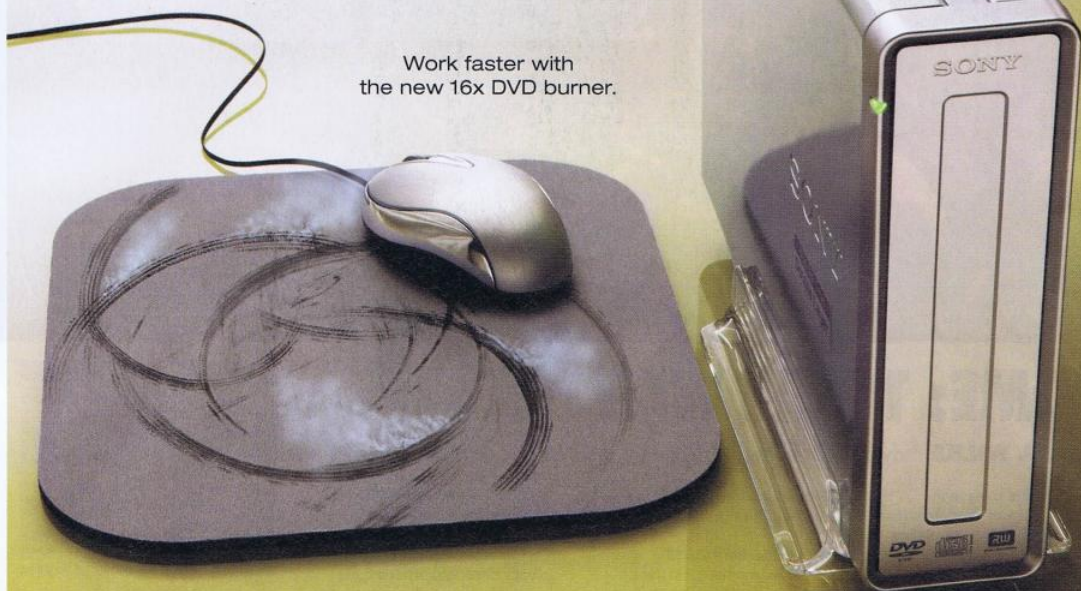
OVERALL

79

A great game for Bam fans, but so-so if you just want to skate.

SONY

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ROME: TOTAL WAR

DANIEL WILKS may be descended from dirty Gauls but he still hates them

There are some in the fraternity of journalists that believe we as a group should be entirely objective expositors churning out reviews that just give you the facts of the game in question and little more. I, quite obviously am not one of these people, and a game like Rome: Total War is one of the reasons why. It would be possible to sit down and list the phenomenal number of nationalities available for play, the staggering size of the battles, the depth of the turn based conquest, the beauty of the graphics and the brilliant way the game cuts quasi-random speeches at the beginning of each battle that can't fail to stir the blood, but that would miss out on the all important X-factor. That little bit of the game that makes you sit back in your chair, let out a contented sigh and think to yourself, "holy crap on a stick this is good", or, if you're anything like Next's resident Snoop

Dogg impersonator D-Stiz (Daniel Staines), "This be tha shiznit!"

A TRIVIAL PURSUIT?

There are two distinct styles of gameplay that make up the bulk of Rome: Total War. Much like the game's illustrious predecessors, Shogun and Medieval, players control the movement of armies, the maintenance of cities and assorted administrivia such as taxes, making sure trade routes are secured, diplomacy and the like in a turn based structure deep enough to be a full game on its own. This could be considered to be the Rome part of the game, the building of the Empire. The Total War component is the exact opposite of the slow and thoughtful turn based portion of the game, featuring massive battles comprising hundreds (even thousands) of troops, all beautifully animated and all played out in real-time where sound tactical knowledge and good grasp of

terrain is far more useful than an early rush and simply having more troops than the enemy (every single RTS I've ever played, I'm looking in your direction). After a quite lengthy but very informative tutorial the single player game kicks into the campaign mode in which the player takes the role of one of the three great Roman families, the Julii, the Brutii or the Scipii vying to extend the borders of the Empire and basically conquer Europe, a task you will realise is no small ask when you see the size of the map.

Within the campaign mode the player is by and large left to their own devices when it comes to their conquest of Europe but will occasionally be contacted by a fourth, unplayable Roman faction, the city of Rome itself to perform a task for the senate. These tasks range from sacking enemy settlements, setting up trade routes with rival nations, blockading enemy ports and forming alliances

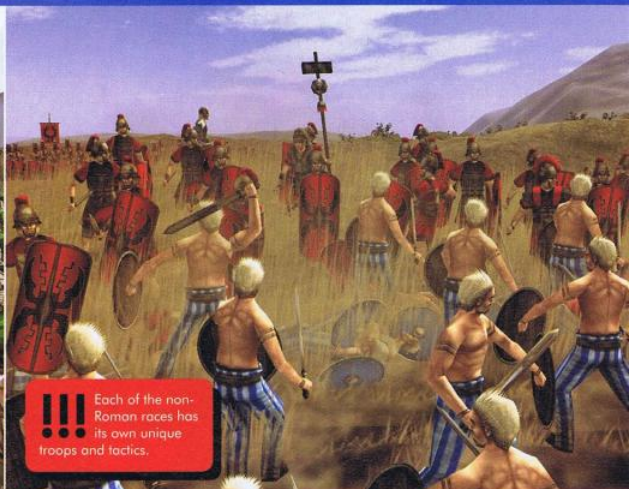


[I&S] Field of Screams

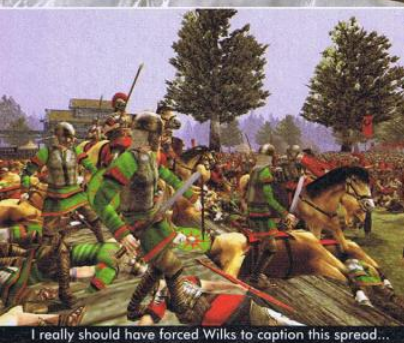


[above] Can't we all just get along?





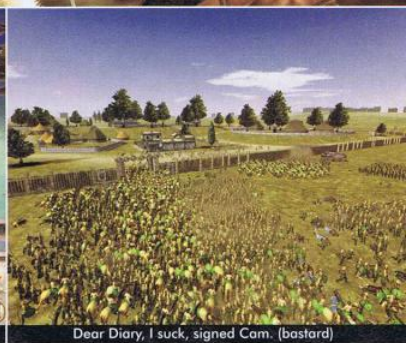
Each of the non-Roman races has its own unique troops and tactics.



I really should have forced Wilks to caption this spread...



"Hey Wilks! Give me a good caption quick!"



Dear Diary, I suck, signed Cam. (bastard)

to strengthen the power of Rome. Rather than feel like an arbitrary addition to the game, these Senate missions add a framework to the otherwise amorphous campaign and can often steer the player into a course of action that will keep them enthralled for hours. Each of the missions must be achieved in the time limit to keep the Senate happy - achieve your goal and they may reward you with money, gladiatorial games thrown in your faction leader's honour, free troops or power in the Senate. Disappoint them and you could face anything from a severe tongue lashing through to trade disputes and accounting audits.

SLOW BUT ENGROSSING
The true genius of the campaign

➤ A good grasp of terrain is far more useful than an early rush

mode is the freedom it gives the player to tailor the action to suit their needs. If you're into the slow but engrossing turn based mode you can automate all of the battles leaving yourself free to build your cities and administrate your empire. On the other hand if you couldn't care about the minutia of day to day life you can put the majority of your cities under AI control and concentrate exclusively on the epic and tactically brilliant battles. Of course you can also opt to play both. Be prepared to lose vast tracts of your life if you do. As well as the lengthy and incredibly replayable campaign, Rome: Total War also

includes a number of historical battles as well as a skirmish mode for anyone with a hankering for a bit of spur of the moment epic bloodshed.

Rome: Total War is the first game in the series to move to a fully 3D engine and this change shows in both the gameplay and look of the title. Just one look at the screenshots and you can see that Rome is synonymous with epic battles but the beauty of the engine goes past the aesthetic, allowing players to get a greater grasp of the terrain and their forces than in previous titles. The soundtrack equals the visuals for the most part and sometimes even betters them, especially in the clever speeches that act as a prelude to each battle which are randomly cut from a vast trove of sound-bites. Keep an ear out as well for all of the advisor's accents - it's nice to hear some Australian voices in an international title. <<

THE EMPIRE Simply listing all of the factions, units and buildings in the game would take more pages than we have available but rest assured there are a hell of a lot. As well as the three Roman houses that are playable in the campaign, players can also choose to take control in multiplayer and custom battles of the Gauls, Germania, Egypt, The Greeks, Carthage, Parthia, Britannia, the Seleucid Empire, the Dacians, the Thracians, The Scythians, Numidians, Spanish, Armenians, People of Pontus and, of course, the Roman Empire and Senate. For those so inclined, Rome also features multiplayer battles for up to six players online or in a LAN.

AVAILABLE ON:
PS2 / XBOX / PC / GCN

DETAILS:

CATEGORY: Strategy

PLAYERS: 1-6

DEVELOPER: Creative Assembly

PUBLISHER: Activision

PRICE: \$89.95

RATING: M15+

AVAILABLE: Now

HYPER VERDICT:

PLUS: The shiznit, beautiful, epic.

MINUS: No Visigoths, not enough hours in the day.

GRAPHICS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY
92	90	96
OVERALL		
93		

Some will conquer your PC and rule all of your leisure time.





WARHAMMER 40K: Dawn of War

KOSTA ANDREADIS gets hammered

>>> The idea of a game set in the Warhammer 40,000 universe tends to excite only a certain type of person, namely anyone that visits their local Games Workshop on a regular basis. Far be it for me to judge someone who spends their free time painting tiny Orc models and arranging them in a faux table-top battlefield, but if the introductory cut-scene that sets the scene for Dawn of War is anything to go by, these nerds may be on to something. Futuristic and very violent no holds barred combat with Space Marines, Orks, Tanks, Mechs, and Chainsaws set in a universe ravaged with war. For those of you not too familiar with Warhammer 40,000, Dawn of War is not the first videogame to be based in its expansive universe, but it may very well be the best. Dawn of War is a forward thinking strategy game, one with a clear focus on the heat of battle, and thankfully one that does not sacrifice intensity for strategy.

54 **HYPHER**>>>

A UNIVERSE AT WAR

The single player campaign found in Dawn of War follows the exploits of a particular band of Space Marines (servants of the Imperium), the Blood Raven as they assist in the defence of a planet overrun by Orks called Tartarus. It's the 41st millennium, a time where the Imperium (mankind) has spread its reach across the known universe, and consequently war has been spread to a thousand different worlds. With war comes numerous enemies, from bloodthirsty Orks, to the dark forces of Chaos, to a technology driven alien race called the Eldars. All races play an integral role to how the story unfolds within the game but only one of them is playable during the single player campaign. Although very similar to the bulk of RTS titles on the market, namely campaign missions revolving around building a base, amassing units and destroying your foe - Dawn of War recreates this

tried-and-true gameplay style with such finesse that it becomes almost impossible to resist.

Dawn of War focuses heavily on strategy, one that is almost completely on the offensive side of the spectrum as the gameplay dictates a forward motion, one that involves exploration and the conquering of your enemy - one small step at a time. With your standard base setup of command, barracks and armoury resource gathering is where Dawn of War differs from most RTS titles on the market. Littered across each map are 'strategic points' that when occupied allow you to earn resources, where the more of these points on the map you occupy the more resources you receive. It's not a wholly original concept but it does put the focus on action, as your troops will almost always be located on the front line and consequently enemy engagement will be frequent, bloody and

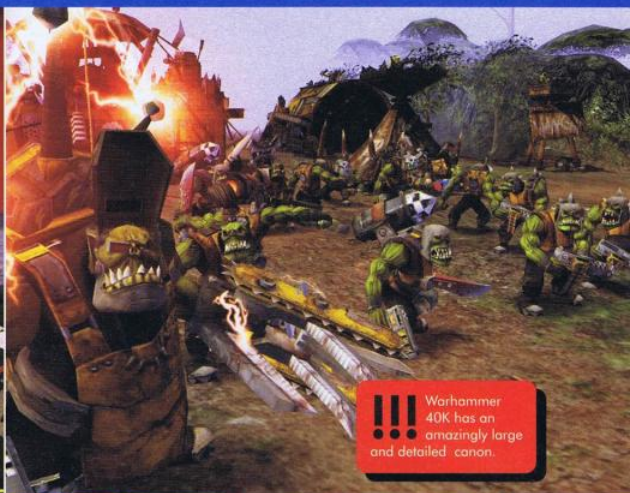


[up] There's marine life in space! Amazing!

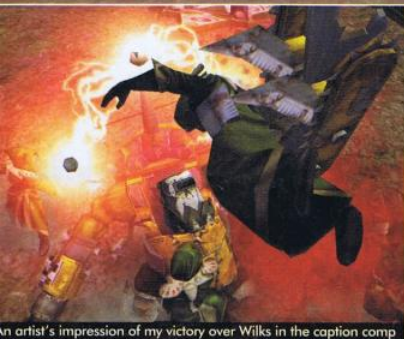


[down] Come get some toilet brush head!





!!! Warhammer 40K has an amazingly large and detailed canon.



An artist's impression of my victory over Wilks in the caption comp



If ever there was a candidate for "Extreme Makeovers"...



(the old stand-by) War! Huh! Good god y'all!

intense. Your troops are divided into squads, with each squad given the ability to reinforce - meaning what started with four could easily be eight. And with the ability to reinforce once a particular unit has been lost, means that after a victory you can be back to full strength in no time. The simplicity of the resource mechanics paves the way for a game heavily focused on battle tactics with a large number of different unit types, upgrades, and configurations on offer. Weapon upgrades can range from grenade launchers, sniper rifles to plasma beams - and with multiple upgrades available per squad there's definitely a lot on offer.

YOUR 12-SIDED DICE WON'T HELP YOU HERE

Although not playable in the single player campaign, each of the four different races featured in Dawn of War offer drastically different battle tactics and with the multitude of upgrades and units on offer, the mastery of a particular race would take quite a while. With only a dozen or so missions on offer during the campaign one has to wonder if so much work has gone

➤➤ **Weapon upgrades can range from grenade launchers to plasma beams**

into balancing each race, unit and strategy, why they opted to keep the single player aspect limited in its focus. As such the single player aspect of Dawn of War feels almost incomplete, like the opening act to a much larger conflict - something that does hamper the overall experience. Thankfully the multiplayer and skirmish modes available do much to rectify this, and place dead centre the incredible detail and focus that has gone into keeping this title heavily focused on battle strategy.

Much of the praise however goes to the visual representation of Dawn of War, not only in the models and textures used but most importantly to the incredible art direction and animation featured within the game. Drawing from such an expansive universe as Warhammer 40,000, Dawn of War is a title that looks and animates every bit as epic as fans could hope for. During the heat of battle the action is every bit as chaotic as expected, and with the ability to zoom in on a

fantastically detailed Mech unit impaling an Ork, you can either take an expansive view of the action or get up close and personal. The various animations for each unit are all fantastic, and leaps and bounds ahead of most of the stuff seen in RTS titles today. Musically, the title features the prerequisite sweeping orchestral score that suits the mood fine, even if it comes across as a little generic.

Dawn of War is a very polished title, one that succeeds very well in emulating and animating the detailed models and table-tops that Warhammer 40,000 is best known for. For fans of the genre Dawn of War excels where most fail - the action and strategy blend brilliantly. But ultimately due to the unfulfilling campaign mode and other shortcomings, such as the non-inclusion of a map maker of some sort and a shortage of maps in general, the end product feels like the good version of a great game. If ever a strategy title needs an expansion, then this is it. <<

AVAILABLE ON: PS2 / XBOX / PC / GCN

DETAILS:

CATEGORY: RTS

PLAYERS: 1-Multi

DEVELOPER: Relic

PUBLISHER: THQ

PRICE: \$89.95

RATING: M15+

AVAILABLE: Now

HYPER VERDICT:

PLUS: Great focus on battle strategy, great unit detail and animation.

MINUS: Not enough maps, single player campaign over too quickly.

GRAPHICS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY
91	78	89
OVERALL		
87		
Great strategy title with seriously hectic battles.		



PRO EVOLUTION SOCCER 4

ELIOT FISH discovers it's a whole new ball game

▶▶ The return of Pro Evo every year is genuine cause for celebration. Like the proverbial fountain of youth, Pro Evo rejuvenates us football mad gamers for an entire gaming year until the next installment comes around. The thrill of a new Pro Evo isn't just excitement over a new lick of paint either. Konami go out of their way to make each version of Pro Evo noticeably different to the last. Already the debates rage over whether the solo heroics in Pro Evo 2 made for a better game than the more team dependent wide game

that was Pro Evo 3. Pro Evo 4 will again inspire further wild debates, because it alters the Pro Evo gameplay yet again, but this time we think it's a bit of a blend of each Pro Evo before it. Does that make it the best one yet?

SOCK ROCKERS

The first thing that rocked our socks with Pro Evo 4 was the noticeably improved loading times. Gone are those agonising waits and that interminable teasing loading bar of Pro Evo 3, and say hello to zippy transitions. The radically different main menu is a delightful collection of big happy icons that make us think of the glory days of 16-bit football games, such is the SNES-ness of it all. The only drawback is the new background music that sounds like Bon Jovi on a bad day. At least it's not quite as aggravating as that insane disco loop from Pro Evo 3's master league menu.

To get right to the point, here are

some new changes: the ref is now on field for the whole game and will sometimes caution players after a foul but not hand out a card; free kicks can now be both direct and indirect; the shot bar fills up slower than previous Pro Evos, and more power is generally necessary; players have a tendency to shoot directly at the keeper if you have no angle on the shot, rather than the automatic placement in Pro Evo 3; crosses now feel slower and more looped, allowing for more jostling in the box and making successful headers down to pin-point timing; the AI makes better runs off the ball, and even defenders will push up and overlap more often; your touch of the ball is more crucial than ever, and it's possible to knock the ball one way and run the other (you can easily lose possession with less talented players who don't control the ball very well); offsides sometimes get called late - even after a player celebrates their goal - making for some classic

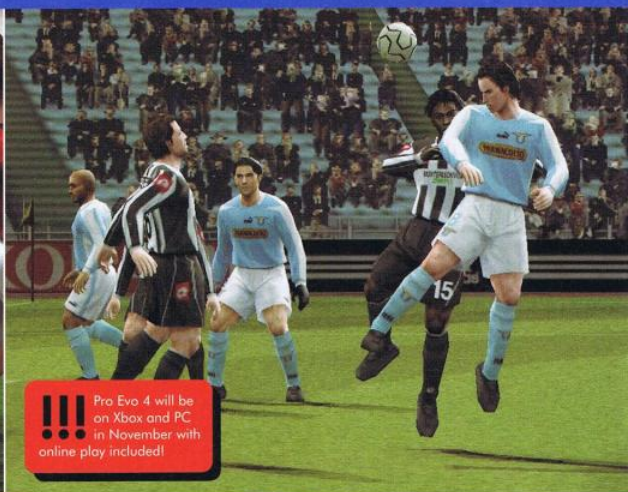


[above] Huge crowd for England v Brasil

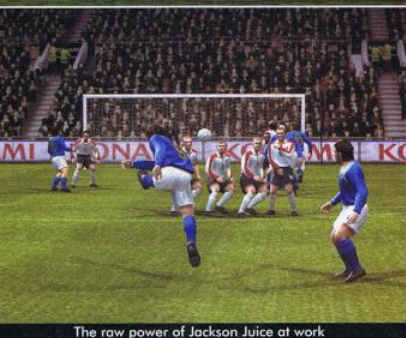


[above] Now there's a ring kisser

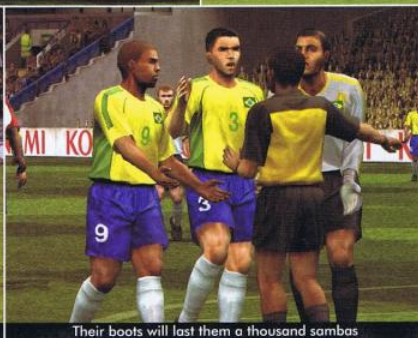




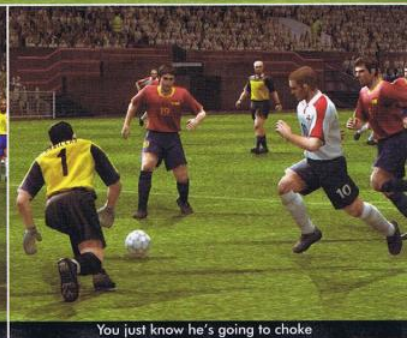
!!! Pro Evo 4 will be on Xbox and PC in November with online play included!



The raw power of Jackson Juice at work



Their boots will last them a thousand sambas



You just know he's going to choke

➤➤ General play feels more open, allowing for more flexible tactics through the middle

moments of despair; through balls are now deadlier, thanks to the more sprightly AI's attacking awareness; animation on all the players is significantly improved, and some fouls result in players being thrown into the air or rolling barrel like across the pitch; goalkeepers can now drop the ball and start dribbling; general play feels more open, allowing for more flexible tactics through the middle; gone are those silly handballs; subs can be made from the pause menu; okay, shall we stop there and catch our breath?

KICK OUT WHO?
The new Master League has also had a tweak. It's now possible to either start with the default ML team (welcome back Minanda, Castolo et al) or use an original team which is the default ML team but with three player trades of your choice - yep, kick out Njorgo and get Mpenza instead. Even better, is that you can play through the Master League with any of the club teams! The leagues on offer, however, are now a mixture of English and European clubs, making it a true Master

HOW MUCH IS ROONEY? For a new dash of realism, players over the age of 30 will continue to age and have their stats deteriorate across seasons. Likewise, young players will earn Experience Points as you play them in matches and slowly have their stats increase, encouraging you to give them more time on the pitch. Thus, the transfer hunt for players who are still youthful and have potential to grow is more tempting than just buying Shearer who might only be good for another season or two. Oh, and rosters are very up to date, except for transfers that happened in the last few days of the window. Owen is at Madrid, for instance, but Ibrahimovic is still at Ajax. Actually using training will now also regulate your players' form, ridding you of having to begin a match with too many downward blue arrows - it's not essential to do so, but it's good before a big final to know the players are mentally prepared.

League. Of course, the game has its League mode, so you can still go and play a Premier League or Serie A season if you desire - just not in the Master League mode. We did mention that just about every player name is correct and most of the clubs have their real names and actual kits? Yes.

The only real criticism we can level at Pro Evo 4 is that if you play with the Wide camera option, there is noticeable slowdown when balls get crossed into the box. What's bizarre, however, is that after playing the game for a few days, what was once extremely obvious slowdown, almost ceased to exist - we began to either not notice it, or somehow it noticeably improves if you turn off stadium effects (which is the only change we made). Maybe, the magic of Pro Evo 4 is so strong that we were having too much fun to notice.

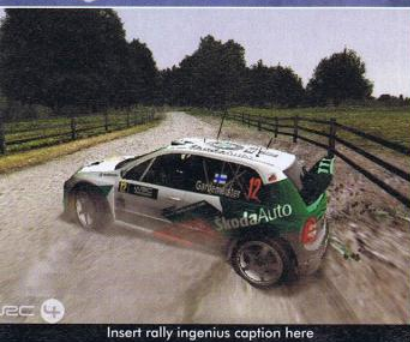
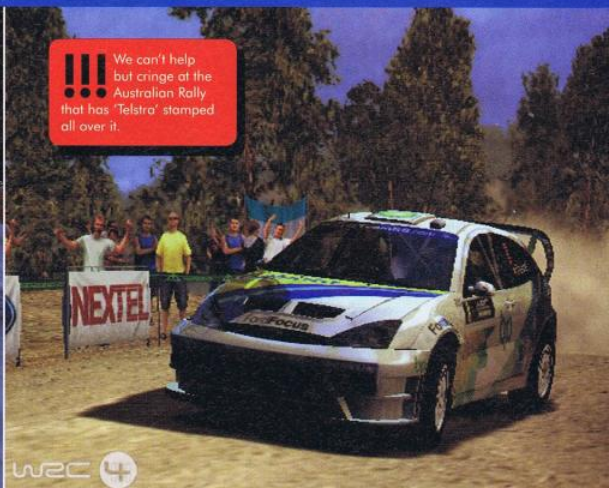
If you found Pro Evo 3 more frustrating than it should be, then you'll love how much more freedom you have in Pro Evo 4 to play an even more realistic game of football. <<

AVAILABLE ON:	PS2 / XBOX / PC / GCN
DETAILS:	
CATEGORY:	The beautiful game
PLAYERS:	1-8
DEVELOPER:	KCET
PUBLISHER:	Konami
PRICE:	\$99.95
RATING:	G
AVAILABLE:	Now

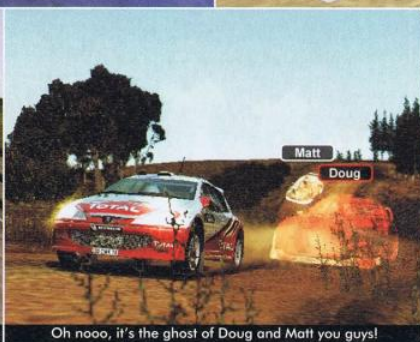
HYPER VERDICT:
PLUS: Amazing animation, more realistic control, faster loading times.
MINUS: Some slowdown, the pace of AI defenders sometimes feels assisted.

GRAPHICS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY
89	80	95
OVERALL		
94		
The most elegant Pro Evo yet. How do they do it?		

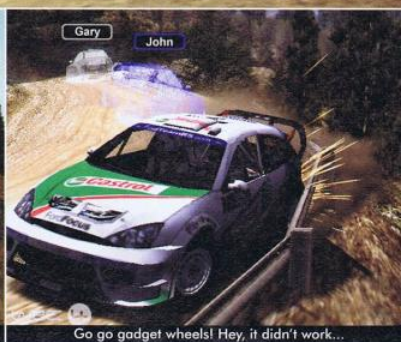




Insert rally ingenious caption here



Oh nooo, it's the ghost of Doug and Matt you guys!



Go go gadget wheels! Hey, it didn't work...

WRC 4

ELIOT FISH fishtails across the finish line

It doesn't seem that long ago that WRC 3 was revolving in our PS2, pumping out its polite take on the rally sim and clocking in at a respectable 80% on the Hyper Amos-o-meter. Well, before they could even make a cup of tea, Evolution Studios were obviously put straight back to work by Sony on cranking out number four - just in time for this year's Christmas rush. With so many decent rally games seeing release lately, WRC 4 is faced with having to impress an already satiated gaming crowd. Has it beaten the pack or are its wheels spinning in the mud?

SUPER HAPPY CHALLENGE FAMILY WISH MODE

Knowing that a standard selection of rally championship and time trial isn't enough these days, WRC 4 includes an Events menu that offers a tasty side dish to the main course. Take part in a Pro Driver Challenge, a Test Track challenge,

the Super Special challenge, or race a single rally for a snack sized event. The Pro Driver Challenge puts you in a variety of situations, such as having to race for the team when their first choice driver is out of action, giving you the pressure of maintaining the team's ranking and returning the car without any damage. Others tests include racing in awful weather conditions or putting a prototype car through its paces. These bite-sized challenges are a nice way of providing the gamer with an evening's challenge without the stress of racing stage after stage of the main championship. Any kind of variety is welcome, so these Events are a good addition. Aside from those, however, the options are what you'd expect: Time Trial, Quick Race, a full Championship that takes you through every country and stage, and an Online option for those using the PS2 network, where you can take part

in Time Trial races and see how your time compares with other gamers.

Aside from the Events, it's your standard rally package. WRC 4 has an attractive graphics engine (although, we must say the car models don't look all that great) and some seriously crunching sound effects, but the car handling is not up to the Colin or Dick standard. It's solid enough to not disappoint - just be prepared to put up with some flakey braking and steering that feels like it oversteers with the analogue stick, yet is stiff and unresponsive with the d-pad. The level of difficulty is also fairly steep, with almost faultless racing needed in order to beat the pack, though in stark contrast the Super Special stages are too easy to win. WRC 4 is all there, but feels a little unbalanced and lacks that spark of addictiveness, despite its slick presentation. <<

AVAILABLE ON:
PS2 / XBOX / PC / GCN

DETAILS:

CATEGORY: Rally sim
PLAYERS: 1-Multi
DEVELOPER: Evolution Studios
PUBLISHER: Sony
PRICE: \$99.95
RATING: G
AVAILABLE: Now

HYPER VERDICT:

PLUS: Events mode is a good distraction, online options.

MINUS: Unbalanced gameplay, car handling doesn't really satisfy.

GRAPHICS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY
79	83	78
OVERALL		
79		
An above average rally package.		

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GAMESPY
(Editor's Choice - 2004)

"Best of E3"

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(Most Innovative Design - 2004)

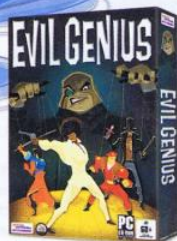


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MORTAL KOMBAT: Deception

DANIEL WILKS though he could spell

▶ An inability to spell correctly and a penchant for extreme violence may not sound like much of a shtick but as far as the Mortal Kombat franchise is concerned it seems to have worked quite well. This is not to say that the games have always been great, as many of the Mortal Kombat titles so freely attest, but the move to 3D and a new gameplay bent, first seen in Mortal Kombat: Deadly Alliance has entirely revamped the series, bringing new life and depth to the flashy but otherwise quite lackluster gameplay. This time around players not only have the standard arcade combat and the quasi-training Konquest mode, Mortal Kombat devotees can immerse themselves in Kombat Chess, a watered down but nonetheless amusing strategy/fighting game loosely based around chess and Puzzle Kombat, a direct (and frankly less fun) rip off of Capcom's Puzzle Fighter II Turbo. You can even take the game

online on Xbox Live or PS2 Online and battle it out over the internet. There's also around 700 unlockables ranging from new characters and costumes through to production art and movies. Without a doubt Deception is the biggest Mortal Kombat game as far as content is concerned. Bad spelling or no (and we'll leave the Ks here), the Mortal Kombat franchise seems to have some legs yet.

WAIL ON THAT FO'

Gameplay mechanics for the fighting remain faithful to those established in Deadly Alliance with a few important exceptions. The four face buttons control the major attacks with the black button (on Xbox) being a catch all throw/grab, right trigger block and left trigger style change, allowing the player to cycle through the available martial arts the character has access to. Unlike the previous game, all of the fighting styles are well

balanced and the smooth switching between styles to wail on your foe is the order of the day rather than finding the most powerful style and sticking to it. Each character has a number of style branching combos that illustrate this mechanic. The crew behind Deception have wisely chosen to omit the impale moves featured in Deadly Alliance, an excellent move considering how much of an early advantage an impale could give to a player. Of course, all of the fatalities that made the series so controversial/famous are back, though this time many of them are amusing and in character than some of the silly deaths we've seen in the past. As well as fatalities, all characters have access to another death move aptly titled Hara Kiri. These moves are pulled off in the same way as fatalities, allowing a player to commit suicide before the rival has a chance to kill them. Whilst they have no effect on overall gameplay,

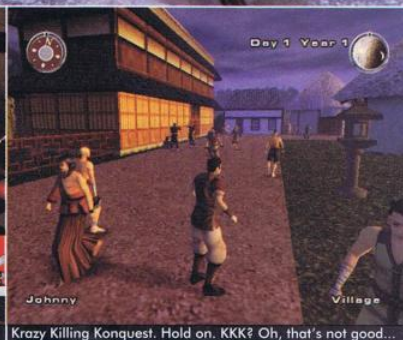
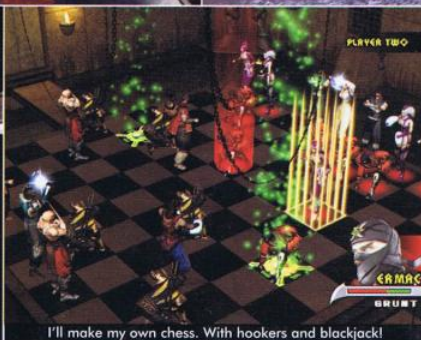
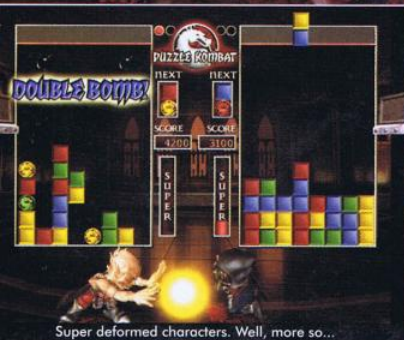
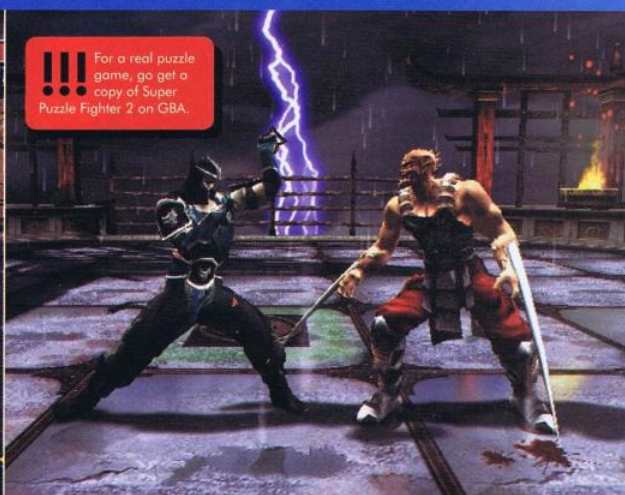


[up] Don't push me cos I'm close to the edge



[above] Whip it. Whip it good





Super deformed characters. Well, more so...

I'll make my own chess. With hookers and blackjack!

Krazy Killing Konquest. Hold on. KKK? Oh, that's not good...

Hara Kiri moves add a certain something to the game - it's always good to be able to go out in a blaze of glory, or failing that, a blaze of sour grapes.

Konquest mode makes up the bulk of the single player game and serves the dual purposes of training how to play the various characters as well as unlocking the wealth of supplemental material in the game. Players take the role of Shujinko, a young man tasked by the Elder Gods to search for a number of magic widgets. Shujinko's story is about as subtle as a boot to the head but it ably tells the back story of the game and makes for an accessible training mode. As well as training, Konquest features a number of run and fetch style missions and themed fights that all carry koin rewards that can later be used to purchase unlockables from

PORTAL KOMBAT Deception marks the first Mortal Kombat game with online capabilities and the results are very good as far as response times are concerned. The game plays smoothly online but unfortunately the online modes are limited to simple one on one combats with no ladder modes, no knockout competitions or the like. Lack of online modes aside, battling it out online is a blast and it won't be at all surprising if Deception becomes something of a sleeper hit in the online community.

Go out in a blaze of glory, or failing that, a blaze of sour grapes

the Krypt. The idea of Konquest may be sound but the time spent playing it can be quite frustrating as each of the areas is huge and unlocking some of the characters can be like finding the proverbial needle in a haystack.

THE BLOODY CONCLUSION

The major problem with Mortal Kombat: Deception is the enemy AI in the single player game. It is, to put it politely, very erratic. On all difficulty levels the enemy AI veers wildly between timid punching bag and rampaging dervish with little or no warning. The only time when the AI is consistent is when it finally comes time to fight Onaga, the Dragon King, the new boss of the

game. No matter the difficulty level, Onaga is an almost insurmountable obstacle, not through being a tough competitor but because of his uncanny ability to block almost every attack thrown his way and counter with some devastating combo (or combo as the case may be) and basically cheat you out of the game. Not in recent memory has there been a game more likely to have you wanting to throw the controller out the window. A smaller but no less frustrating flaw is the inclusion of terrain based fatalities in many of the arenas. Whilst the idea is solid it is way too easy to knock an opponent into a pool of acid, a pit of spikes or giant squishing machine and conversely to be knocked in yourself. The problem seems to lay in some slightly glitchy code - instead of necessitating a specific move to activate these fatalities, the game will often allow a simple punch or kick to activate it, quickly bringing the fight to an unsatisfying but bloody conclusion. <<

AVAILABLE ON:
PS2 / XBOX / PC / GCN

DETAILS:

CATEGORY: Fighting
PLAYERS: 1-2 + Online
DEVELOPER: Midway
PUBLISHER: Midway
PRICE: \$99.95
RATING: MA15+
AVAILABLE: November 19

HYPER VERDICT:

PLUS: Balanced fighters, online, Puzzle Kombat.

MINUS: Enemy AI, Konquest unlockables, still looks plastic.

GRAPHICS SOUND GAMEPLAY

82 78 85

OVERALL

83

Deep and engrossing but still far from a flawless victory.



X-MEN LEGENDS

CHRISTIAN REED dons his spandex outfit

>>> X-Men, eh? You've seen the films. You might have even read the comic. Most guys I know, even if they are not comic readers, dig the X-Men. Me? I'm down for life. I read the X-Men continually as a kid, teenager, and on. I remember when Jubilee was hunted by the M-Squad, Jean Grey in the Hudson, the Brood and the cool Starsharks. Wolverine nailed to a cross by the Marauders. The Onslaught cross-over and the Riot at Xavier's. So, when you hit me with an X-Men game, I can't help but be pretty damn picky about how much research and respect goes into it. Making Colossus strong, giving Storm a cool power animation, it's just not enough. Forty years of comic history are rich material for a game, after all.

BUT HOW STRONG IS COLOSSUS?

Thankfully, X-Men Legends comes to fight. It's a good game and better yet, a good X-Men game. Legends is a top down RPG, very similar to

Baldur's Gate or even Gauntlet. There aren't many great superhero games of this style, although there damn well should be. You control one character while up to three other characters support you. All the usual bag of tricks are here. Levelling up for new powers, team and single combos, customisable powers and skill elements, multi-player and an engaging storyline. With up to four players on screen, you'll be thinking carefully, weighing up the tactical advantage of powerhouse versus finesse characters. Thankfully, game AI is reliable so things run smoothly. The combo technique is very well handled, allowing powers to be combined in a new move. Colossus and Nightcrawler, punching and teleporting at the same time, do the "Catastrophic Flurry", for more damage, more XP and a satisfying sense of killing your enemies with style.

Character creation is where Legends shines. Take, for example,

Wolverine. You start out with a few of the standard powers from the books. Claws, healing factor, like that, but as the game progresses, you are offered specialisation. Do you want to be more effective against a large amount of enemies, or devastating to just one at a time? Do you want to max out the healing factor or add on to your stats? The techniques are nothing foreign to any RPG gamer, but the combination of these comic books skills and powers combined with a large number of classic characters makes this one of the cooler elements of the game. It becomes even more delicate when you begin to collect unique elements like armour, stat boosters and power-ups that elevate particular stats and powers. As the game progresses, you end up with a great deal of playable characters, so you'll be doing a lot of tweaking.

There are two plots in Legends. In the first, a young girl named Alison becomes a kidnap victim of the



[up] The back entrance to Spandex R Us



[above] You look like pea soup!





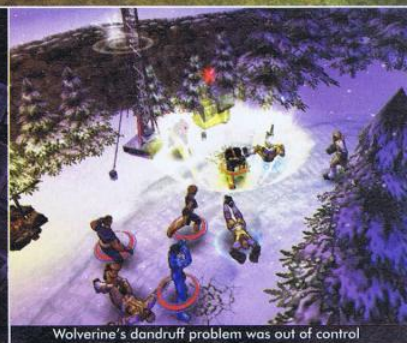
!!! While Legends is very strong on action, it's rather light on your ability to shape the plot, so if you are looking for KOTOR depth, move on. There are a few puzzles and a few quiet levels but those are the minority; this is strictly for the smash 'em fans.



"What happens to a load when it's hit by lightning?" - jeez



An enemy takes offence to Gambit's attempt at frottage



Wolverine's dandruff problem was out of control

Brotherhood (of naughty mutants). She'll go on the train to become an X-Man, with devastating potential. In the other storyline, the team proper tries to sort out exactly what the Brotherhood is doing. Good, solid X-Men stories that interweave with some really chunky X-history and atmosphere. Many of the sequences in the Mansion are reverential towards the personalities of the crew. Colossus' sketches, Storm's flowers, the War Room, even bloody Alpha Flight get a look in. Things like that are littered throughout the game to make your geeky little heart happy. The design is part comics, with a generous influence from the films.

PLAYING AN X-CARTOON

It's an impressive job visually, keeping the aesthetic of comics by using a lightly cel-shaded look. It

❖❖ **Colossus' sketches, Storm's flowers, the War Room, even Alpha Flight get a look in**

looks like you are playing a very good cartoon, essentially. Solid levels, great power animations and good character design. You do get a bit of slowdown with multiple enemies on screen but there's not much you can do about that.

It's the sound effects that really stand out, though. Good heavy guitar background works hand in hand with some very mood setting sounds. Wolverine's claws have the steely ring that promises murder. Cyclops' famous "zark" is in there. And while some of the in game voice acting is a little bodge (listen carefully, Wolverine lisps!), there's nothing quite like listening to Patrick Stewart's calming tones

commanding you to go and kick some evil mutant's friggin' trachea in. Oh my.

However, even though it looks great and has enough fan-action to keep you hitting those back issues for a while, I have to say, after a few days solid, it does get a little old. There's flashback missions, there's solo missions, and team missions but after a while, it all gets a bit samey, a bit dungeon crawl-esque, really. The multiplayer modes are really what will keep you going after five or six levels.

Don't get us wrong, X-Men Legends is a great game, but it's the hardcore X-Men fans that are really going to get the most out of it. <<

NAKED AND ANGRY Surprisingly, the basic character designs for Legends come from Ultimate X-Men, rather than the more traditional look. The Ultimate line was an idea Marvel Comics had to keep their books relevant and fresh and removed from thirty of forty years of back story and more appealing to modern tastes. A reboot. Out went the buccaneer boots, the green skirts and orange spandex; in came sexy leather and PVC. For traditionalists, you get to unlock old costumes as the game progresses, including my fave, naked angry Weapon X. Oh yes.



AVAILABLE ON: PS2 / XBOX / PC / GCN

DETAILS:

CATEGORY: Action RPG
PLAYERS: 1-4
DEVELOPER: Raven Software
PUBLISHER: Activision
PRICE: \$89.95
RATING: M15+
AVAILABLE: Now

HYPER VERDICT:

PLUS: Respectful to the comics, sweet four player action!

MINUS: Gets a bit samey after a while.

GRAPHICS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY
82	90	73
OVERALL		
81		
Probably the best game based on the X-Men to date.		



DEF JAM FIGHT FOR NY

TONY MONTANA knows a thing or two about kicking ass...

>>> Hip-hop and violence goes together like Cypress Hill and weed, Lil' Jon and pimp cups and... wait, that's how the Def Jam Vendetta review began. Regardless, the aggressive nature of hip-hop does make for a perfect match with a fighting game, and the word "fighting" automatically gives Def Jam Fight for NY more props than Vendetta - it's a straight fighting game, with more emphasis on street brawling, rather than Vendetta's "wrestling game with hip-hop personalities" style.

S-N-DOUBLE O-P-D-O- DOUBLE DA G

The timeline of Fight for NY picks up exactly where Vendetta left off - with D-Mob being arrested after being pounded at the final showdown. As he's being driven to the police station, the police car carrying him is rammed and he escapes. The guy who helps D-Mob escape? You. Which is a very

cool change of pace, considering that in Vendetta D-Mob's team is considered the enemy, and now you're on the other side of the fence.

Your enemy is now Crow, aka Snoop Dogg (while the game features real hip-hop artists, a few go under aliases - Method Man is Blaze, Redman is Doc, Fat Joe is Crack). Crow has his fight clubs and fighters, and the more fights you win the more fighters and clubs come under control of your crew.

What makes Fight for NY a cut above Vendetta or a generic fighting game is what happens in between the organised fights. Integrating cut-scenes with action is just the tip of the iceberg - most games do this now - but you will find yourself battling overeager opponents in car parks and train stations between organised bouts. Oh, did we mention that all the environments are destructible and interactive? If you're fighting Busta Rhymes in a car park, you can pick

him up and throw him on his SUV, smashing the front windscreen. You can then put him in a headlock, open his car door and close the door on his head. Again. And again. And again.

Even the fights that take place in the organised fighting arenas feature destructible barriers that will deteriorate the more you and your opponents smash into them (usually head-first). Once a barrier is completely smashed, being thrown through the gap will result in you losing the fight due to a ring out violation.

Some of the fighting pits don't even have walls or barriers, but instead you are surrounded by onlookers - very interactive onlookers. If you are knocked into the crowd you will either be thrown straight back into your opponent (similar in result to being flung into the ropes) or held, meaning you can expect a few cheap shots. The crowd will also offer weapons, such as bolt



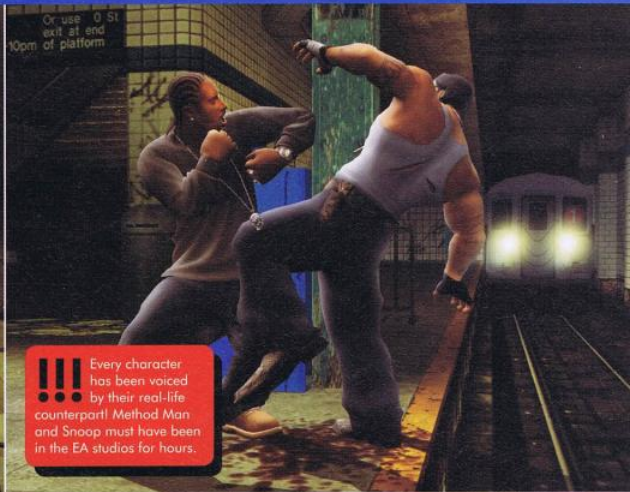
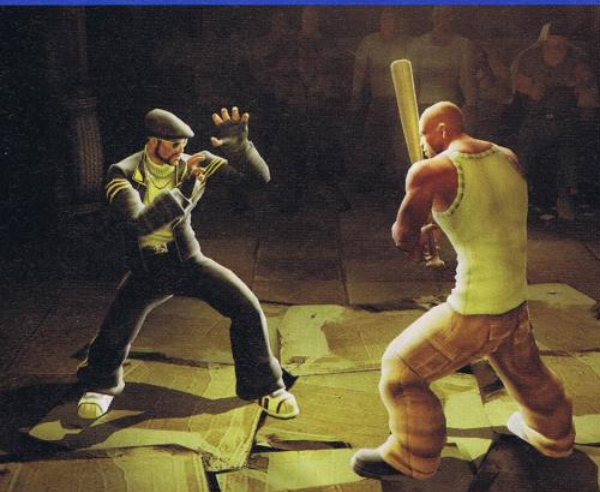
[above] Hey man, smell my Sticky Fingaz



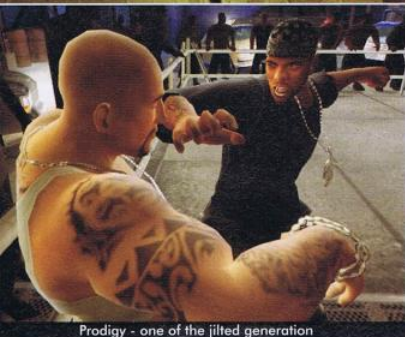
[above] Redman - he's no Clubber Hong

cutters and bottles, which can be used to great effect.

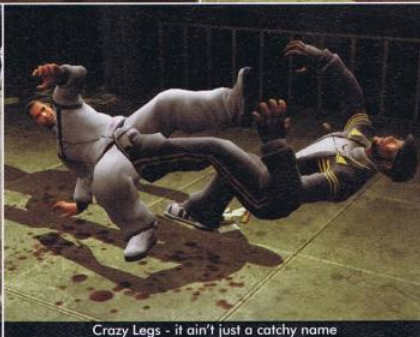
The control system has pretty much been carried over from Vendetta, which means there's one button for punch, one for kick, one for grapple and one is a burst of speed. Using these in combination results in various attacks and special combos, and you really



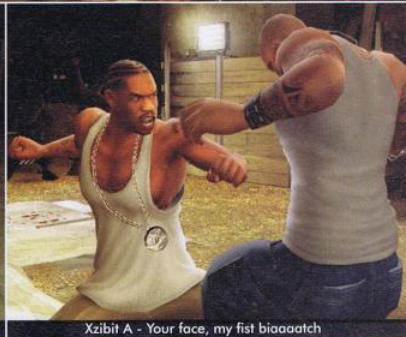
!!! Every character has been voiced by their real-life counterpart! Method Man and Snoop Dogg must have been in the EA studios for hours.



Prodigy - one of the jilted generation



Crazy Legs - it ain't just a catchy name



Xzibit A - Your face, my fist biaoatch

need to concentrate on what kind of style your fighter is a specialist in to succeed. Running all over the place with a fat wrestler (eg. Bone Crusher) isn't a good idea, and trying to go toe-to-toe when you're using a quick, light fighter (eg. Lil' Flip) will have equally horrible results.

As mentioned before, the cut-scenes between fights deliver some of the more memorable moments of the game, especially the ones where you have to choose a girl. Once you've selected which one of the hoiez at the bar you want, you'll approach her and then her boyfriend will approach you - fight time. Win the fight, you get the girl. Lose the fight and you'll get picked up off the ground and taken home

» Lose the fight and you'll be taken home by the black version of Kim Clijsters

by the black version of Kim Clijsters.

To make sure you don't go home with Black Kim, your fighter has to perform at his peak, which is where your trainer - Henry Rollins - comes in. After every fight you are awarded fighter points which can be exchanged for skills. If you are in need of a tune-up, Henry will page you and demand you go to the gym to work on your keezle.

LOST IN THE CROWDS

While Fight for NY features very slick gameplay, there are a few changes from Vendetta that take a while to get used to. The character

models are noticeably smaller in some of the venues, and while that isn't a problem in itself, the fact that these smaller characters can get lost behind the crowd is. Also, in the fights that feature more than two fighters, you can literally lose your character in the action. More than once I had to squint to work out who I was controlling amongst the action.

Oh, and the music is awesome, as it should be. As you progress through the game and unlock fighters and arenas, you also unlock songs - some of it is brand new stuff by Def Jam's younger acts, and there's a few classic older tracks as well. Including one by Big Daddy Kane, which is weird because I can't remember him ever being on Def Jam's roster and he's not in the game.

Fight for NY will appeal to pretty much anyone who enjoys non-stop action in a fighting/wrestling game. If you're part of the "rap is crap" posse you won't even give it a chance, but that's your loss. <<<

THE EMCEES Bone Crusher, Busta Rhymes, Capone, Comp, David Banner, Erick Sermon, Fam-Lay, Fat Joe, Flava Flav, Freeway, Ghostface Killah, Havoc, Ice-T, Joe Budden, Lil' Flip, Ludacris, Mack 10, Memphis Bleek, Method Man, N.O.R.E., Prodigy, Redman, Scarface, Shawna, Slick Rick, Snoop Dogg, Sticky Fingaz, Warren G, WC, Xzibit

THE DJs DJ Enuff, DJ Felli Fel
THE DREADS, Elephant Man, Sean Paul
THE ACTORS, Danny Trejo, Omar Epps
THE BREAKERS, Crazy Legs
THE HOEZ, Carmen Electra, Kimora Lee, Lil' Kim
THE WHITE GUYS Bubba Sparxxx, Henry Rollins

AVAILABLE ON:
PS2 / XBOX / PC / GCN

DETAILS:

CATEGORY: Fighting

PLAYERS: 1-2

DEVELOPER: EA Games

PUBLISHER: EA

PRICE: \$79.95

RATING: MA15+

AVAILABLE: Now

HYPER VERDICT:

PLUS: Great fighting mechanics and story, over the top violence.

MINUS: Can lose your character occasionally.

GRAPHICS SOUND GAMEPLAY
84 95 90

OVERALL

89

Yeah boeeee! Kicking ass with Flava, it gets no better.



TRIBES: VENGEANCE

DANIEL WILKS wants vengeance on the Arxel Tribe

▶▶ If stellar games such as Melbourne House's *Transformers* or Irrational's *Freedom Force* haven't put us on the map as far as game design goes then if there is a god, Buddha, Allah, Supreme Pumpkin or what have you, Tribes: Vengeance will. It's that type of game. Something that comes from left field, taking a tried and true, critically successful but niche game and revamping it, making it so much more than it was ever before. A game that makes you stand up and take notice.

FLEDGLINGS

What makes Tribes: Vengeance such a landmark game in the Starsiege canon is that it is the first of the multiplayer shooters to contain a fully-fledged single player campaign and a good one at that. With a script by Ken Levine, the man behind *System Shock 2*, the single player campaign of Tribes: Vengeance tells the story of the

wars between the Imperial faction and the Tribes, charting a course across two distinct time periods, cutting backwards and forward to tell a story of secret conspiracies, betrayal, illicit love and burning revenge. The script isn't the best in the world but far more competent than usually seen in a shooter and should keep players enthralled throughout the 10-12 hour play time.

The cutting between time periods not only gives Levine scope to flesh out the history of the game and give context to the inter-Tribal rivalry that makes up the basis of the multiplayer game but also gives the developers the chance to put together a number of well conceived and interesting missions through the different characters introduced. Players will take the role of two Imperial princesses, two Tribal brothers and an enigmatic robot assassin at different times, each with their own spin on events and play. One mission may see the robotic

wrecking machine stealthily making his way across a huge aboveground area taking out strategic targets for an assassination and another will see you as a young princess, too small to fight, running for her life from enemy forces intent on her death.

Aside from involving the player in the deep history of the Tribes world the single player campaign also serves to introduce the player to all of the gameplay mechanics that will come up in the multiplayer component, still arguably the crux of the game. Although more than a mere scripted tutorial the single player campaign ably teaches new players how to control their jetpacks, how to drive vehicles, how to play the multiplayer modes and most importantly, how to ski.

If there is one thing that makes the Tribes franchise unique it is the ability to ski - a combination of jetpacking and sliding down slopes on frictionless boots gain momentum to move swiftly and jump even higher



[below] When paleontologists attack

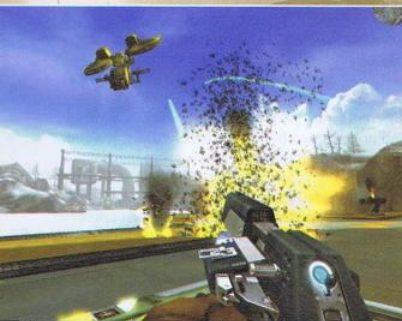


[below] I think you missed yo douche





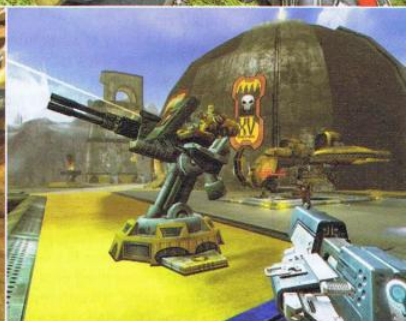
!!! Tribes: Vengeance should have excellent local server support, so use it!



Vengeance is a dish best served with a side of napalm



He's been gunning for queen bee ever since he buzzed into this hive



Hang on a sec... Jere, is that you?

if launched off a slope. Skiing is without a doubt the most valuable skill a player can learn in Tribes and is vital if you want to survive in either the single or multiplayer game as it is the only way to travel fast and prevent yourself from being an easy, ground-based target. The level design, both interior and exterior is geared towards skiing with sweeping vistas of mountains or base designs that incorporate great curved walls perfect for sliding down, or up if the mood and a jetpack takes you.

LOCAL PINGS

The multiplayer game supports up to 32 players online over around 15 maps spread throughout the available game modes. Online play

❖❖ **Skiing is without a doubt the most valuable skill a player can learn in Tribes**

is fast and furious and local servers ensure that pings are quite decent. Multiplayer offers a nice and tactical departure from standard online FPS play as assaulting the enemy base is as valid a tactic as actually capturing a strategic point, flag or what have you. Destroying an enemy base can limit the enemy ability to heal, change weapon loadouts or what vehicles can spawn, giving the other side a definite advantage during the remainder of the game. Unfortunately there is no bot support for the multiplayer game at the current time - a pity considering

that the AI in the single player game is excellent and able to navigate the terrain very well, not an easy task considering how much time players spend in the air. Undoubtedly someone in the modding community will code in bot support sometime soon but it would have been a nice feature out of the box.

Vengeance is a beautiful game, make no bones about it. The level design and amount of detail seen in weapons, textures and armour is superb. Each of the levels is big and well designed with multiple surfaces perfect for skiing or jetting without ever seeming like they were tacked on to take advantage of the unifying game mechanic. The only downfall in the general aesthetic of Tribes: Vengeance is one that befalls many Unreal engine games - the character models in the cutscenes look a little too smooth in parts, making them seem more like animated Barbie dolls than hardened warriors. <<

ARMOUR Tribes: Vengeance sticks with the tried and true three-armour formula set by the earlier Tribes games. In a match players can choose from three types of armour, light, medium and heavy and outfit their gear accordingly. Light armour moves more swiftly than the other types and is the only loadout capable of equipping the sniper rifle. Medium armour serves as the jack-of-all-trades option, capable of decent movement speed and equipping all but the heaviest weapons. Heavy armour offers the most protection and firepower at the expense of speed. As well as the standard weapons such as the Spinfusor (the default weapon kind of like a rocket launcher) and Chaingun, Tribes: Vengeance also introduces a few new weapons including the Grapple and Buckler, a shield that can be thrown a limited distance for excellent damage.

AVAILABLE ON:
PS2 / XBOX / PC / GCN

DETAILS:

CATEGORY: FPS
PLAYERS: 1-32
DEVELOPER: Irrational Games
PUBLISHER: Sierra
PRICE: \$89.95
RATING: M15+
AVAILABLE: Now

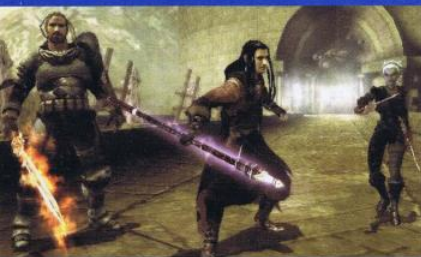
HYPER VERDICT:

PLUS: Great level design, awesome terrain, skiing

MINUS: Load times are atrocious.

GRAPHICS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY
91	87	92
OVERALL		
90		
A brilliant piece of home grown shooting action.		





FORGOTTEN REALMS: Demon Stone

>>> You could be forgiven for thinking Forgiven Realms: Demon Stone was part of the Lord of the Rings action series from EA for good reason; the developers of Atari's latest Dungeons and Dragons game were responsible for the Two Towers game. Nevertheless, Demon Stone still has a fair bit going for it including quite a rousing story, beautifully designed levels, fun combat and a great, if highly derivative leveling system.

Players take the role of a party of adventurers, a warrior, mage and half-Drow thief/assassin tasked with defeating two outsider villains bent on ruling all. Throughout the adventure the player must battle through near overwhelming odds, solve a couple of very simple puzzles and battle some gorgeous and enormous bosses with a giant red dragon being a true stand out. Unfortunately Demon Stone never really transcends the straightforward nature of the action and after the umpteenth level that necessitates the player kill wave after wave of the same enemy to progress to the next area to do the same thing once again you'll quickly tire of the game. It's unfortunate that the gameplay becomes so dull after a while because the level design is always spectacular with a sense of depth that really gives the impression that there are other things going on in the game world aside from the actions of the three protagonists (and three million cloned enemies).

DANIEL WILKS

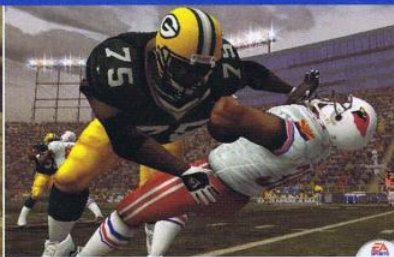
AVAILABLE ON:
PS2 / XBOX / PC / GCN

DETAILS:
CATEGORY: Action RPG / **PLAYERS:** 1 / **DEVELOPER:** Stormfront / **PUBLISHER:** Atari / **PRICE:** \$99.95 / **RATING:** M15+ / **AVAILABLE:** Early 2005

GRAPHICS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY	OVERALL
89	78	72	73



[Forgotten Captions]



MADDEN 2005

>>> Okay, so the animations are smoother and the many aesthetic changes are obvious, but to truly appreciate the intricacies of Madden '05 you have to have a lot of time, and be completely bleeding nuts about this game. The changes start on the defense, with the ability to shift defensive schemes and call audibles, with new options allowing you to scheme each defensive group. You can crash the defensive line, call your linebackers to blitz or take zone coverage, and have a safety give help to a CB. You can also individually call a player to blitz, cover deep, cover under, or QB spy. On the offense the audibles have been expanded to include formation changes.

The franchise mode that appeared for '04 reappears, and you have the ability to set various prices and completely control your roster, releasing and signing players at will, but you now need to keep an eye on player morale. The new story aspect has you checking newspapers for the latest league news and you will receive emails from various people related to the management side of things, or tune in to EA Sports radio for interviews and opinions. In the off-season the game has been tweaked to allow you to use franchise and transition tags and also trade during the draft.

Undoubtedly '05 is an upgrade, but there is still room for improvement in the AI, especially blockers who make impossible decisions and punt returners who can't catch. GameCube owners will once again be slogged with huge memory usage, so when I mocked the Xbox for having a hard drive all those days ago in Nintendo Gamer, well... oops.

BUTTERCUP

AVAILABLE ON:
PS2 / XBOX / PC / GCN

DETAILS:
CATEGORY: Sports / **PLAYERS:** 1-4
DEVELOPER: Tiburon / **PUBLISHER:** EA Sports
PRICE: \$99.95 / **RATING:** G / **AVAILABLE:** Now

GRAPHICS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY	OVERALL
92	88	94	93



[up] Marge and Lisa painting eggs. Did that work for you?



STAR WARS: Battlefront

>>> The most amazing thing about Star Wars: Battlefront is the fact that this is the first real multiplayer shooter to arrive in the Star Wars franchise, a games juggernaut that encompasses nearly 100 games on every system you could imagine. To break it down to brass tacks, Battlefront is a Star Wars themed version of such tactical shooters as Battlefield 1942 and Battlefield Vietnam.

Much like the aforementioned multiplayer shooters, Star Wars Battlefront suffers from many issues in the single player game, notably woeful AI, poor vehicle control and unbalanced weaponry. Online however, Battlefront is a different story, playing more smoothly, balanced and not crippled by the moronic AI units. It's still not brilliant but at least it's not going to have you throwing your controller at the TV in disgust. The poor vehicle handling still causes some of the combat to bog down but playing against other people mostly makes up for it. Hell, the fact that you can finally blow the crap out of Mr. Beady's mistakes like Ewoks and Gungans is worth a few extra points.

It should be noted that the game plays quite differently online on the three different formats with PC being the worst with unstable netcode and an artificial framerate cap that makes much of the action jerky and inaccurate. Damn shame too, as it should be a lot more fun to play in high resolution with a keyboard/mouse combo. But it ain't.

DANIEL WILKS

AVAILABLE ON:
PS2 / XBOX / PC / GCN

DETAILS:
CATEGORY: FPS / **PLAYERS:** 1-16
DEVELOPER: Pandemic / **PUBLISHER:** LucasArts
PRICE: \$89.95 / **RATING:** M15+ / **AVAILABLE:** Now

GRAPHICS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY	OVERALL
81	78	79	76



[above] The only Walker cooler is Texas Ranger

UNHINGED

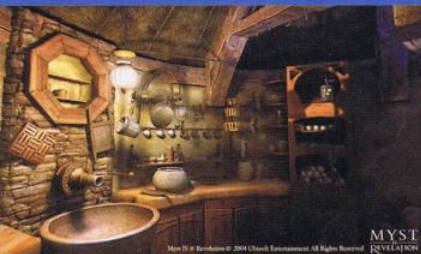


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MYST IV: Revelation

After the disappointment of last year's *Uru* (what were they thinking with the third-person perspective?), the latest game in the *Myst* series will come as quite a relief for fans. In fact, *Revelation* is going to be a hard one to beat.

One characteristic of this much-loved series is the immersive environments, and *Revelation* is no exception. The levels (or "ages") are so densely layered and lush that they seem real. With the image detail of 1997's *Riven* and the 360° free movement of 2001's *Exile*, the new worlds are really quite breathtaking. Put simply, *Revelation* is a thing of beauty. Contributing to the attractiveness is the sound and music. The developers have used this element wisely, as the ambient sounds help reflect each land's unique wildlife, terrain and climate.

As with all *Myst* instalments, much of the gameplay is a solitary affair. However, *Revelation* makes fine use of live actors in FMV sequences. Plus, the inclusion of animals adds life to the landscape. You're never entirely sure what's dwelling around each corner.

It's clear that *Myst*'s creators seek not to patronise their fans. As a result, the puzzles are, well... bloody hard! But to prevent players from hurling their computers against the nearest wall in frustration, assistance has been introduced. Firstly, players are equipped with a camera and picture viewer to save clues for later use. But most importantly, there is an in-built, three-level "help map" section... for when the wall beckons.

So, if you have the patience, then *Revelation* should prove thrilling. A great sequel for the fans.

MARISE WATSON

AVAILABLE ON:

PS2 / XBOX / PC / MAC / GCN

DETAILS:

CATEGORY: Puzzle / **PLAYERS:** 1 /

DEVELOPER: Ubisoft / **PUBLISHER:** Ubisoft /

PRICE: \$89.95 / **RATING:** G8+ / **AVAILABLE:** Now

GRAPHICS

93

SOUND

90

GAMEPLAY

85

OVERALL

90



[up] You can die of old age trying to solve the puzzles



ROCKY LEGENDS

You'd think that teaming up everyone's favourite steelworker-greatly-in-need-of-speech-therapy-turned-heavyweight-greatly-much-in-need-of-speech-therapy and arcade style boxing action would be surefire hit but *Rocky Legends*, the second Ubisoft *Rocky* title proves otherwise. To put it in words that the champ himself might like, *Rocky* ain't no bad game, it's just kinda same-old same-old.

The gameplay of *Rocky Legends* is, to put it bluntly, quite shallow comprising mainly of button mashing combos and the occasional big hit. Initially entertaining, *Legends* loses its charm after the first few hours when you master the combos and have little trouble winning fights from there on in.

The real saving grace for *Legends* is the career mode that allows you to play through the life of four of the beloved characters from the films; *Rocky Balboa*, *Ivan Drago*, *Apollo Creed* and the mighty *Mr. T* himself, *Clubber Lang*. The career will be of special interest for fans of the films as it gives alternate stories depending on who wins. Fans of the films can finally see *Clubber Lang*'s prediction of pain for the night's fight come true or see evil Russian *Ivan Drago* actually crushing the champ.

In other areas *Rocky Legends* is reasonable, with serviceable visuals and animations, and decent thuds accompanying the fights.

DANIEL WILKS

AVAILABLE ON:

PS2 / XBOX / PC / GCN

DETAILS:

CATEGORY: Boxing / **PLAYERS:** 1-2

DEVELOPER: Venom Games / **PUBLISHER:** Ubisoft

PRICE: \$79.95 / **RATING:** M15+ / **AVAILABLE:** Now

GRAPHICS

73

SOUND

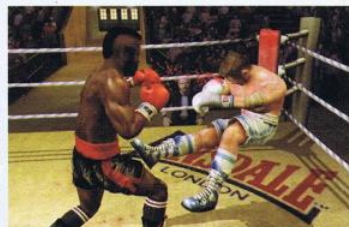
80

GAMEPLAY

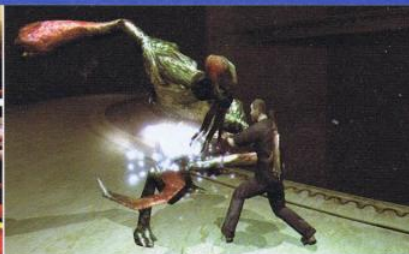
71

OVERALL

71



[up] Didn't want to be a tough guy. Want to be a dancer



SHADE: Wrath of Angels

Making a survival horror game for PC is no easy task and neither is making a *Tomb Raider*-esque action/adventure game for that matter, so it comes as something of a surprise that *Black Element Software* have chosen to combine the two into a not entirely coherent but surprisingly OK game.

Shade: Wrath of Angels walks an uneasy line between bump in the night style scares and find the switch style gameplay without ever really meshing together as a whole. Players take the role of a hardened mercenary (or soldier, or someone who knows how to use every weapon ever made) searching for his missing archeologist brother. After stumbling into an ancient temple he is tasked by an angel to release three other angels so they can remake the world. Apparently this is a good thing.

If you've ever played *Alone in the Dark* or *Tomb Raider* you know exactly what type of game *Shade* is; this is not necessarily a bad thing, though a little originality would have been nice. The graphics engine does a good job and provides some nice visuals but the voice acting ranks up there as some of the worst in recent memory with flat dialogue, mispronounced words and "jokes" that are so bad they make baby Jesus cry.

Still, it's better than another game we could mention with "angel" in the title...

DANIEL WILKS

AVAILABLE ON:

PS2 / XBOX / PC / GCN

DETAILS:

CATEGORY: Survival Horror / **PLAYERS:** 1

DEVELOPER: Black Element / **PUBLISHER:** Cenega

PRICE: \$89.95 / **RATING:** MA15+ / **AVAILABLE:** Now

GRAPHICS

86

SOUND

78

GAMEPLAY

75

OVERALL

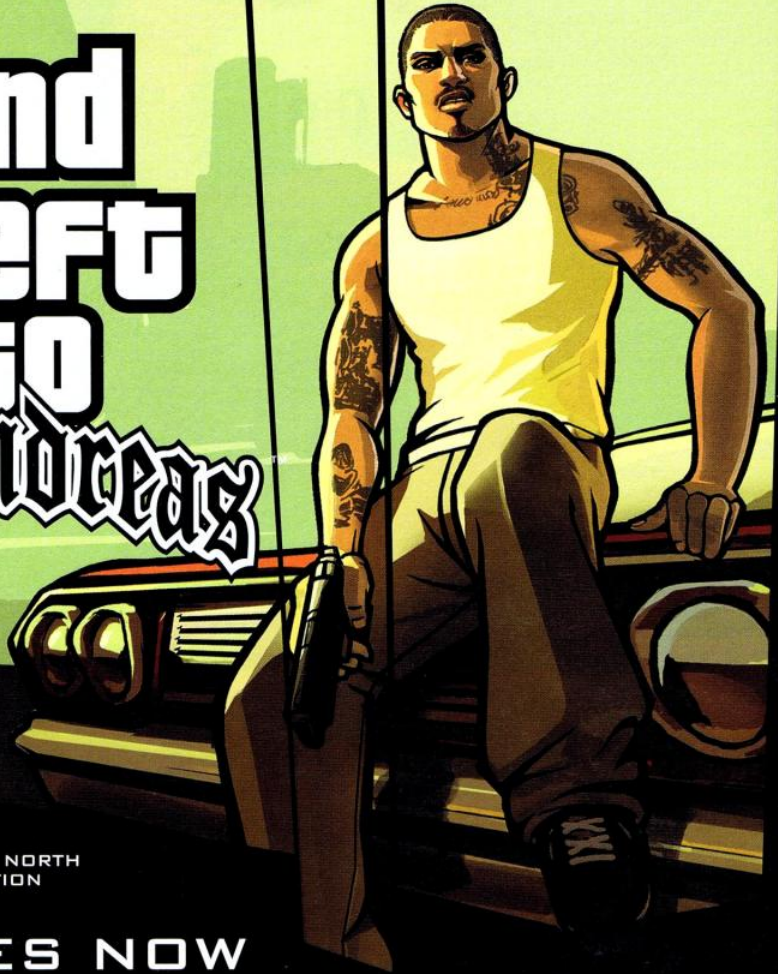
73



[above] Shade: check. Wrath of Angels: pending

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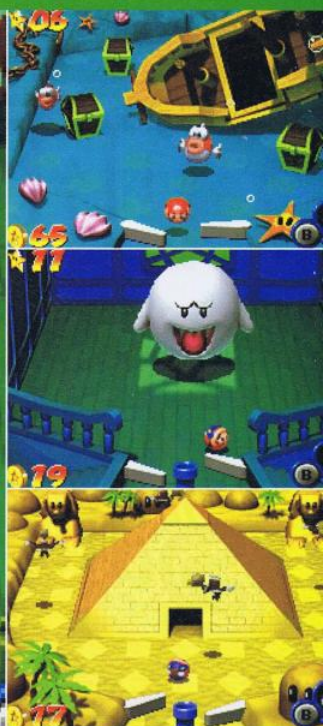
SOUNDTRACK AVAILABLE ON INTERSCOPE RECORDS



PlayStation®2



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MARIO PINBALL LAND

>>> Mario has been many things during his 20 year career as the world's foremost princess rescuing, head-stomping, goomba-bashing fat Italian plumber. He's been a side scrolling hero, a fur-suited freak, a glorified cleaner and a 2 dimensional adventurer. Mario Pinball Land marks the first time that Mario has ever been a ball. We've always known the little guy is a little fat but now he's completely round thanks to a nonsensical invention in the Mushroom Kingdom that can smooch anything safely into a sphere, ostensibly, if the intro movie is to be believed, so they can be shot out of a cannon into a large target. If the only form of entertainment in the kingdom is getting shot out of a cannon after being squished into a ball it goes a long way to explaining why Peach gets kidnapped all of the time - she's bored and only Bowser can spice things up a bit. With that in mind it should come as no surprise that the Princess is once again kidnapped in the newest Mario title and our freshly smooched continental hero must once again leap, or more precisely roll, to her rescue.

BOWSER LOVIN'

Mario Pinball Land is something of a misnomer as far as titles go.

Whilst it is true that the game works around the standard pinball formula - each single screen stage has flippers down the bottom that must be used to propel Mario around - the heart and soul of the game is objective based action. The original Japanese title of the game, Super Mario Ball is more indicative of what the player should expect in that although the action has changed form it remains similar to what we have already played in the Super Mario franchise, with the only real change being that instead of having to jump on enemies this time around you need to hit the Mario Ball into them. Pinball Land is broken up into five areas, each of which is in turn broken up into multiple single screen pinball style tables. Each table has a number of exits that can only be unlocked with the requisite number of stars, objects that can be collected by performing tasks on each of the tables. At the end of each level is a boss that once defeated drops a key necessary for getting into Bowser's castle to rescue Peach.

The greatest weakness of Mario Pinball Land is how bloody frustrating the game is. There are many small components that add up to the frustration but one that stands head and shoulders above

the rest - the table reset. The way the game is designed is that the only way to lose a ball is if it slides down the drain at the very bottom screen of the area. If the ball slips between the flippers on a higher table the only thing that happens is that the player is knocked back to the previous screen and must open and knock the ball through the door again to progress. This may sound all well and good until you discover that as soon as you leave a table without completing the objective everything resets back to default leaving you to go through the same thing all over again. The empty table design often makes it all too easy to miss the ball so it's not uncommon to have to try an objective a dozen times in a row to get it done. Conversely the strongest feature of Mario Pinball Land is the beautiful design. Using a forced perspective reminiscent of many an RPG, Pinball Land uses large, wonderfully animated sprites coming in from a number of angles to give the impression that the game is 3D.

Overall though, Mario Pinball Land is something of a missed opportunity for Nintendo. It's not quite pinball enough for pinball fans, and not quite Mario enough for plumbing fans.

DANIEL WILKS



[below] YOU GOT SERVED!



DETAILS:

CATEGORY: Pinball / PLAYERS: 1

DEVELOPER: Nintendo

PUBLISHER: Nintendo

PRICE: \$69.95 / RATING: G

AVAILABLE: Now

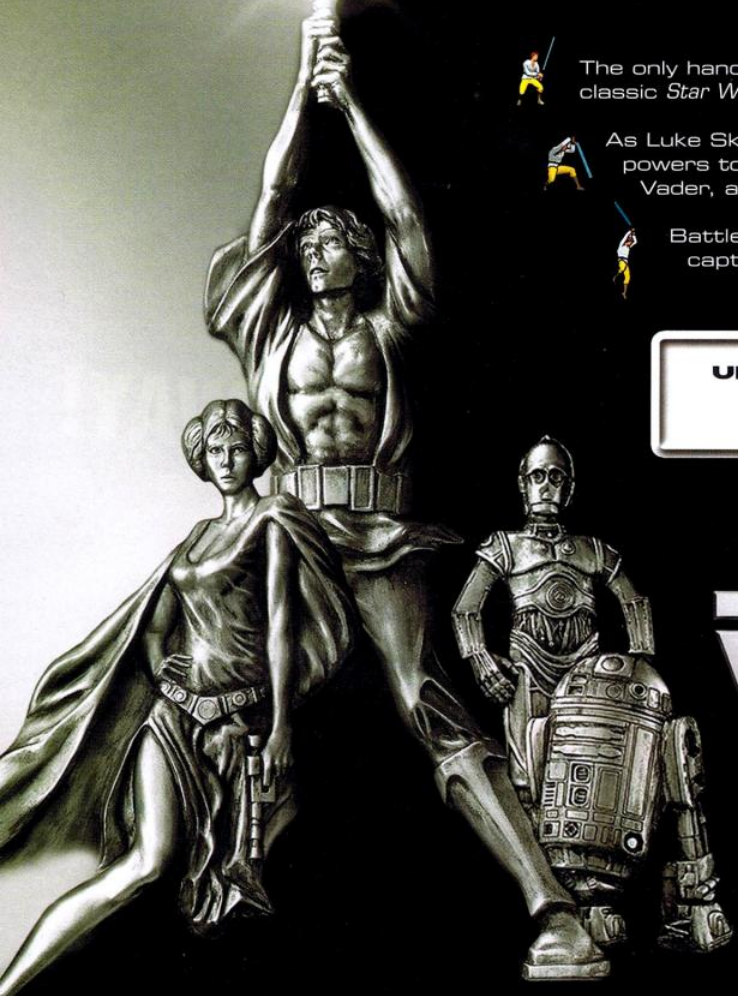
GRAPHICS SOUND GAMEPLAY

90 78 76

OVERALL

82

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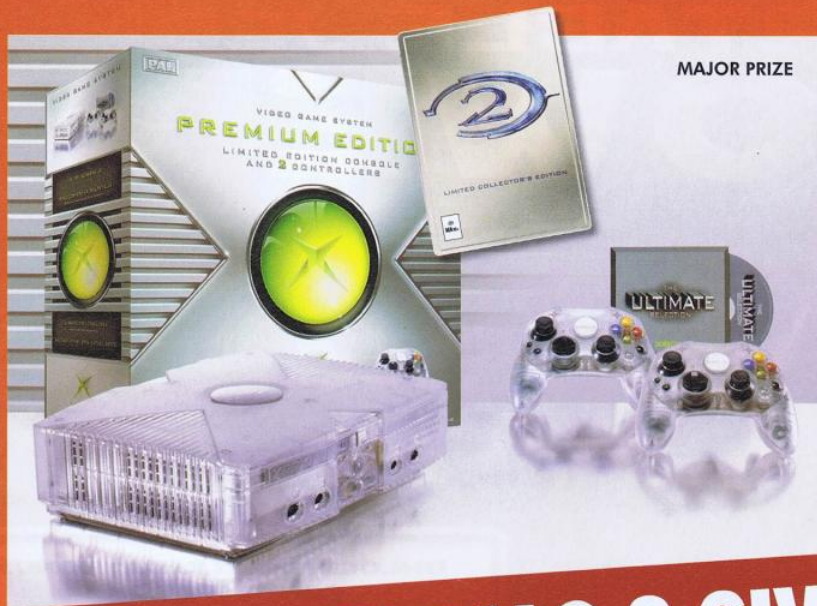
STAR WARS TRILOGY

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GAME BOY ADVANCE





MAJOR PRIZE

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There's no bigger event in this year's gaming calendar than the arrival of Halo 2 on November 9. Quite simply, it's going to be the best Xbox game of the year, if not the best Xbox game ever. To help kick things off with a bang, midnight launches have been scheduled in Myer Stores in Sydney and Melbourne CBDs for the night before, and once the

THE GREAT HALO 2 GIVEAWAY!



RUNNERS-UP PRIZE

morning comes... Earth will never be the same. In a good way of course.

Along with the release of Halo 2, Microsoft has also got a couple of funky new Xbox bundles hitting retail. There's the Xbox Premium Pack which comes with a limited edition Crystal coloured Xbox and controllers, as well as an "Ultimate Collection" DVD which includes 14 playable Xbox demos and 15 videos of the coolest new releases. The other new pack is the Xbox Ultimate Entertainment Pack, which comes with an Xbox, Type S controller, a copy of Halo and Top Spin, the Ultimate Collection DVD and a silver Halo 2 CD tin.

The best news is - we're giving away all of them! Thanks to our friends at Microsoft, ONE major prize winner will receive a Limited Edition copy of Halo 2 and a Limited Edition Xbox Premium Console Bundle, while TWO runners-up will each receive a copy of Halo 2 and the Xbox Ultimate Entertainment Pack. Sweet!

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WACKY JOYSTICKS

Last month we were sent the 4gamers fishing controller, which got us to thinking... what other wild and wacky controllers are out there?

4GAMERS FISHING CONTROLLER

RRP: \$79.95

Out of all the controllers we're looking at, the 4gamers controller is the only one we've actually been able to test and it became something of an office favourite. As you may have guessed, the fishing controller is made specifically for fishing games, a niche but surprisingly addictive field. The controller comes with the standard assortment of PS2 buttons as well as a reel that actually acts like the X button when turned and a copy of the Bass Master Fishing game. Although it is possible to play fishing games with the standard Dual Shock the activity is made much more enjoyable with the controller. It feels natural and strangely cute, a feeling heightened by the odd little force-feedback rod at the top of the controller that jerks spasmodically every time you hook a fish.



ONIMUSHA 3 SOUL CONTROLLER

RRP: \$119.90 (US)

As far as flashy PS2 controllers go none of them are quite as cool or look as good as the Onimusha 3 Soul Controller, a nifty sword that comes complete with an authentic looking display stand. The controller has a D-pad and buttons but the coolest thing about it is that swinging the sword will actually make Samanosuke or Jaques (it is very much a game specific controller) attack. Swinging the sword once in a second will make the character attack once but with strong arms and good timing you can pull off attack combos. Because we haven't been able to test one we're not sure how exactly you control the rest of the game but it's still pretty darn sweet nonetheless.



FINAL FANTASY X-2 TINY BEE CONTROLLER

RRP: \$149.90 (US)

Based on Yuna's Tiny Bee guns from Final Fantasy X-2, the Tiny Bee controller uses two guns to make one controller. Each gun can be considered to be half of a Dual Shock with the left gun featuring all of the buttons of the left side of the Dual Shock and the right gun having the rest. The triggers on both guns work and apparently pulling each trigger will cause Yuna to fire the corresponding gun. The idea of the controller is sound but you have to wonder about the comfort of the controllers as each weighs more than a dual shock and requires you to control everything with just the thumb. This is one for Final Fantasy nerds and people who want accurate replicas for dirty cosplay antics only.



ONE HANDED CONTROLLER

RRP: \$19.90

We can only think of two uses for the One Handed Controller - enabling people who have lost appendages in horrible boating accidents to play their favourite game or if you're doing something you shouldn't be doing with your free hand. You know what we mean you dirty little perverts. The controller is designed so it can be used by both left and right handed people so everyone can enjoy fapping away to their favourite hentai without the hassle of having to be ambidextrous.



PIONEER DVR-320-S DVD RECORDER

RRP: \$699

Now that DVD Recorders are finally reaching a critical mass, we decided it might be a good time to check one out, and see if they really do have all the advantages of VHS, without the crap image quality and disorganised tapes. Well, after using this model for about a month, I'm definitely impressed.

The DVR-320 is one of Pioneer's new range, and is at the more affordable end of the spectrum. It doesn't have a hard drive, so any recording you do will have to be direct to disc, but this doesn't mean you miss out on some of the cooler functionality that this generation of machines brings. You can, for instance, watch from an earlier point in a recording - while you're recording it. So if you had a timer set for The Simpsons, but

got home after it had started, no problem, just watch from the beginning of the episode! Better still, after you're done, hop into the editing suite and crop the ads out! Editing functions are very basic to say the least, but the interface is straightforward and it enables you to do what you need to easily.

Something else that's fun to do is run your PS2 or Xbox through the DVR-320's inputs and record your own physics experiments in Halo 2 or straight-up gangsta moments in San Andreas, then edit them into a slick package. Quick cuts are out of the question, as there's a noticeable pause between scenes but there's still some fun to be had.

When recording you have a choice of several quality settings, from Fine which will only give you about an

hour per disc, through to Extended Play which can cram a good six hours onto a DVD. Once you stop recording, the machine pauses to burn the material to disc, which is an incredibly speedy process - we were very impressed. Once you've got some content recorded to disc, navigating through it is very straightforward thanks to the thumbnail viewer and range of customisation options.

The slim-line design of the unit is also a strong point, sitting gracefully underneath your TV and alongside your consoles. Throw in component outputs and support for progressive scan, and you've got a slick looking unit with great recording functionality and excellent DVD playback.

MAX POWERS





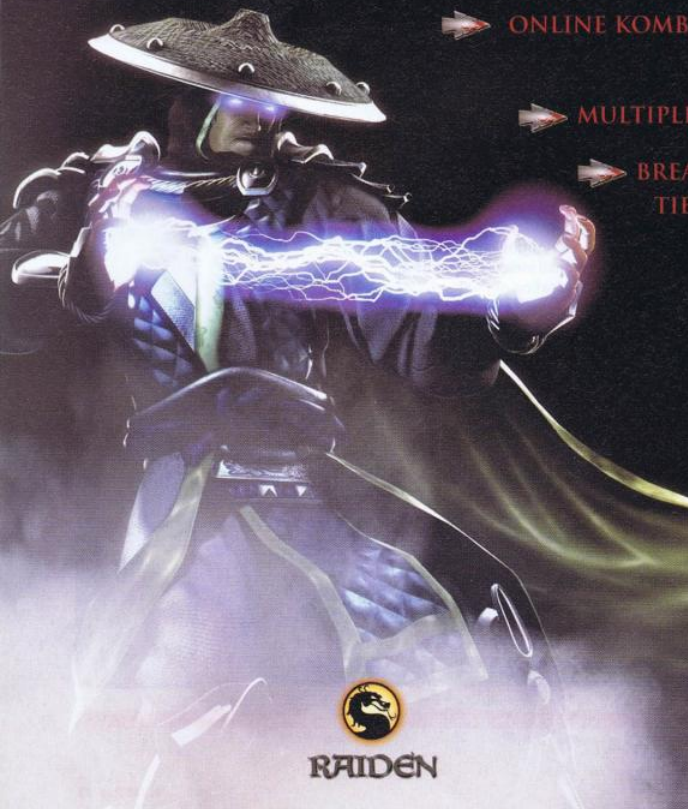
BARAKA

SHOCKING & EVIL,

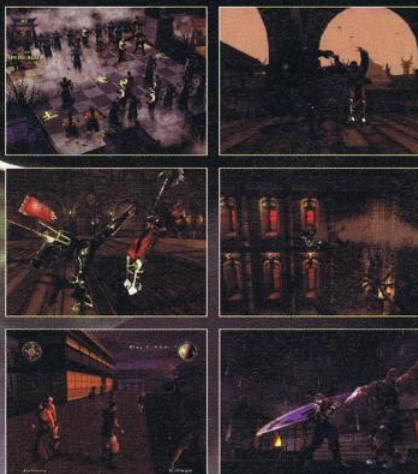
MORTAL KOMBAT: DECEPTION PUSHES MARTIAL ARTS-STYLE FIGHTING AND THE MORTAL KOMBAT FRANCHISE TO NEW HEIGHTS WITH AN INNOVATIVE FIGHTING SYSTEM, UNPARALLELED DEPTH AND BRUTALLY INTENSE ACTION THAT WILL APPEAL TO LONG-TIME MORTAL KOMBAT FANS AS WELL AS NEXT-GENERATION GAMERS

FEATURES

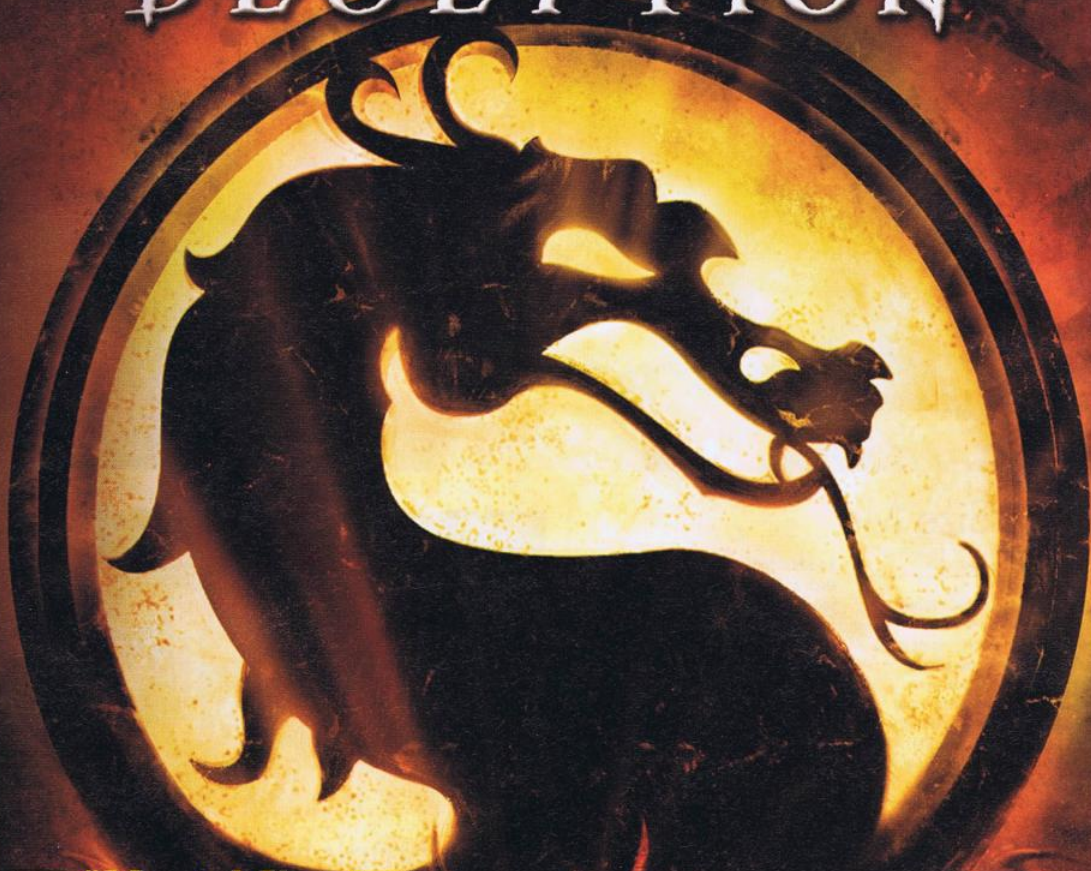
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"Mortal Kombat:
Deception is looking...
Outstanding"

(OP2M ISSUE 30 AUG 2004)

KOMING NOV 19



PlayStation 2



Presented exclusively by:





Super Size Me

MAGNA PACIFIC, M 15+

▶▶ Morgan Spurlock's debut documentary is gonzo journalism at its finest - sometimes blisteringly funny, sometimes annoyingly preachy but never anything less than entertaining - if somewhat obvious in intent. The subject of the documentary is Spurlock himself and his quest to eat McDonalds three squares a day for 30 days to illustrate the effect the junk food culture is having on American society. Scenes of Spurlock stuffing his face with his McDiet are moments of true genius including a few very informative vox-pop style interviews with the average Joe on the street, interviews with a number of medical professionals and a horrifying look at a few American school canteens. Also explored are the links between government

and fast food, how big businesses such as McDonalds and other food conglomerates hold enough financial power to ensure that there is little regulation to their food and advertising conduct.

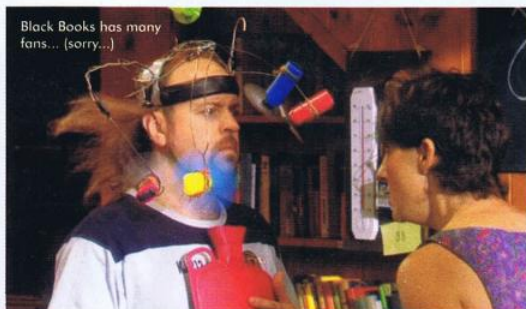
Although his intention is good and Morgan is an excellent host, always charming and quite witty, his approach to the subject is purely sensationalism and his amazing conclusion that eating nothing but junk food for 30 days straight will be detrimental to your health will have you scratching your head thinking, "no shit Spurlock". Be that as it may, Super Size Me is an incredibly entertaining if somewhat sickening film, more akin to a well natured gastronomic jaccass rather than a true documentary.

DANIEL WILKS

MOVIE: 8 / EXTRAS: 1



No shit Spurlock. Damn, you beat me to it...



Black Books has many fans... (sorry...)

The Complete Black Books: SERIES 1, 2 & 3

SHOCK, M15+

▶▶ Containing all three seasons of the brilliant British comedy Black Books (that's a whole 18 episodes by the way), this box set is a must-buy for anyone who likes acerbic, character-driven comedy.

Most of the episodes take place in Bernard Black's (played by Dylan Moran) second hand bookshop (hence, Black Books), where he hides away from society, whiling away his life with a book in his lap, a cigarette in one hand and a glass of red in the other. With nothing but derision for his customers, he's a nasty main character with a tongue like Black Adder and little regard for anyone but himself. Moran plays the role brilliantly,

managing to be a complete bastard that you can't help but like.

Like Men Behaving Badly, although many of the funniest scenes involve copious amounts of alcohol, it's the ensemble cast that bring it together. Bernard's drinking buddy Fran (Tamsin Greig) tries to coax Bernard into a little more social interaction, while the good natured Manny (Bill Bailey) starts work at the store and soon finds himself the butt of Bernard's wit and cruelty. Must-see comedy.

Extras include audio commentaries and behind the scenes footage.

LUCKY AKA CITIZEN SNIPS

MOVIE: 9 / EXTRAS: 5

The League of Gentlemen: CHRISTMAS SPECIAL

ROADSHOW, M15+

▶▶ The League of Gentlemen is easily one of the creepiest black comedy series' of recent years. Unsettling and disturbing in equal measure, it's also very clever and consistently entertaining, thanks largely to the writing team and their amazing breadth of characters.

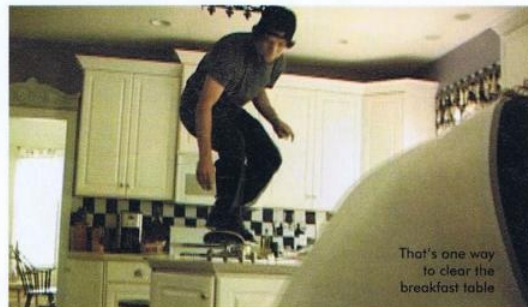
The three seasons of the show released on DVD to date are all set in Royston Vasey, and although highly exaggerated, the stories are still anchored to reality. For the Christmas Special (originally screened in 2000), however, the boys have a little more freedom to stray from their usual constraints.

Thus, the Christmas Special takes the form of a portmanteau horror film, with three main stories tied together by a central

character (the Reverend Bernice). There's Charlie and Stella and their ongoing marital conflict: his way of dealing with it is line dancing, hers is voodoo. There's Matthew, who tells the story of his stay in Germany with a gay choirmaster whom he comes to believe is a vampire. And finally, there's the origin of Royston Vasey's infamous vet Dr Chinnery. It's highly entertaining stuff, although bear in mind you're really only getting an hour of new League... and the extras are pretty dull.

CAM SHEA

MOVIE: 8 / EXTRAS: 4



That's one way to clear the breakfast table

411VM #61 THE BAM ISSUE

STOMP, M15+

▶▶ The success and popularity of one Bam Margera doesn't seem to be faltering at the moment. The antics of the crazy pro skater keep punters on the edge of their seats at the best of times, but more often than not his CKY, Jackass and Viva La Bam exploits don't expose his skating ability, leaving all to wonder just why Bam Margera is so loved, besides his insane clowning around. The truth is, Bam is a more than accomplished skater, and has actually been featured in 411VM since his early days as a grommet pro (when he was 14 years old), so it's befitting the video magazine feature skateboarding's most popular entity since Tony Hawk.

Throughout issue 61 of the DVD we see a lighter, more relaxed side

of Bam, as he talks openly about his skating, his favourite spots and what turns him on in the scene the most. Beyond the Bam overload, however, the issue also features A Day In The Life with Jason Dill (which is actually a little boring - the guy's pretty much a dick too) as well as a trip with the Adio Team, and an amazing highlights section in Wheels Of Fortune, showcasing skateboarding's rising stars. Bam nuts will love the bonus DVD, which is all Bam interacting with stupid kids, but skating enthusiasts should get a rise out of the more 'skater' side of the zany legend.

STEPHEN FARRELLY

MOVIE: 7 / EXTRAS: 4



[above] Rip roaring time eh what? What's that Billy? Married my cousin? Absurd...



At least their shack is better than Chef's Love Shack...

Dark Days

MADMAN, M15+

▶▶ Beneath New York city lies an extensive rail system, and along with it a rabbit warren of tunnels and spaces. Near the Amtrack tracks and Penn Station, there's an underground area that squatters have been calling home for years. Dark Days is a documentary about many of the people that live here; about how they ended up living in the darkness, about their hopes and dreams, and about how they deal with being homeless.

It's a pretty squalid way to eke out an existence, but the people down there are resourceful. They've tapped into the power, so have fridges and stoves, they've built basic shacks with locks on their doors, and they've even got pets. Some have been down there for

close to a decade, and they span a wide spectrum of ages, ethnicities and backgrounds. Many are crack-heads, some had their lives ruined by drugs and alcohol, and others ran away from destructive homes. This is a powerful film that reminds you that everyone is a human being and deserves to be treated as such.

The extras are just as interesting, if not more so. The story of how Dark Days was made is a triumph of independent film making, and essentially a way for first time director Marc Singer (who started living in the community out of curiosity) to help give the people there a second chance.

CAM SHEA

MOVIE: 8 / EXTRAS: 7



[above] "Yes, I have women's panties on. So what?"



The Hidden Fortress

EASTERN EYE, PG

Kurosawa films have a long history of being remade for western audiences; Seven Samurai became the Magnificent Seven, Yojimbo became For a Fistful of Dollars and The Hidden Fortress became Star Wars. Ok, so maybe the latter may only be somewhat inspired by, but the similarities in both story and visuals are unmistakable in this classic tale of two greedy peasants who help a man (General) and woman (Princess) across enemy lines - unbeknownst to their real identities.

Kurosawa's importance to cinema is unquestionable, as so was his framing and editing and although Hidden Fortress may not be Kurosawa's most recognisable work, it certainly is his most fun, and the first using a widescreen

aspect ratio. From the wonderful comic set pieces to the character interaction and action, this is Kurosawa at his most mainstream and audience friendly. From the comic relief of the two peasants, to the young and brash Princess (sporting some very short shorts for a film made in 1958) and the ever sturdy and confident General (played by Kurosawa stalwart Toshiro Mifune) the story is told through from the perspective of the two peasants (aka C3Po and R2D2).

This is very entertaining film filled with adventure, great chase sequences, and the right amount of action. Extras include an interesting interview with George Lucas who avoids most similarities between this classic and his, interestingly passing most off as coincidental.

KOSTA ANDREADIS

MOVIE: 9 / EXTRAS: 5



Looks like an authentic porn set to us

Making Venus

MADMAN, MA 15+

There has probably never been a more troubled production in Australian film history than The Venus Factory, a film that originally started off as a three minute short for Tropfest before first becoming a feature length comedy (The Venus Factory) then being recut into a feature length romantic drama (Starring Duncan Wiley) and then finally being once again recut again as "The Money Shot". So far, after years of work and a budget that rapidly spiralled out of control, no distributor worldwide has expressed any interest in the product.

Making Venus is one of the funniest and uncomfortably fly on the wall documentaries you'll ever see. Nothing is sugar-coated by director Gary Doust and no

participant in the making of the film escapes unscathed.

It's quite a uniquely human doco - everyone is clearly passionate about their craft but a mixture of miscommunication, ego and bad timing turns the making of the film into a virtual cinematic car crash. And really is the ultimate testimony on how not to make a movie, making it invaluable viewing for anyone interested in low budget film making.

DANIEL WILKS

MOVIE: 8 / EXTRAS: 8



It's like Teen Wolf but with more smack.

The Basketball Diaries

ROADSHOW, R18+

Sometimes performances are the only thing that can hold a film together. Sometimes films try too hard and fall far too short and are only redeemed by the strength of the leads. The Basketball Diaries is definitely one of these films. Charting the life, downfall and eventual redemption of American junkie/poet/rocker Jim Carroll the film takes the audience into a seedy world of personal degradation and plays more like a tour guide to existential angst rather than a real bio-pic about a very talented young man.

That said the cast is brilliant. It's obvious that back in 1995 Leonardo DiCaprio could actually act and his performance as Jim Carroll ranks up there as one of his best.

Veteran character actors Lorraine Bracco and Ernie Hudson turn in excellent performances as Jim's one dimensional mother and the kindly (if overly stereotyped) black ex-junkie that drags Jim out of the gutter after his descent into a drug addled personal hell. On a side note, Juliette Lewis fits the role of a skanky hooker to a T but that may have more to do with genetics than actual talent. Basketball Diaries is definitely worth a look but only to remind yourself that before he became the next big thing, starred in Titanic and (shudder) The Beach, DiCaprio was truly talented actor.

DANIEL WILKS

MOVIE: 6 / EXTRAS: 1

THE *Greatest* MOVIES YOU'VE NEVER SEEN

Musa

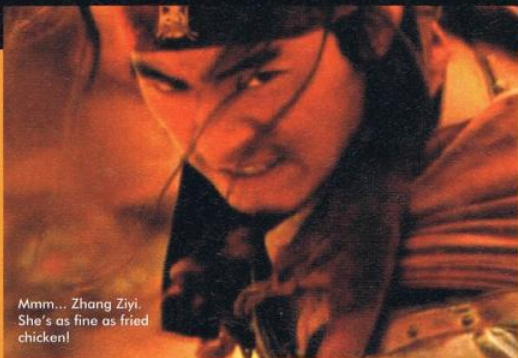
EASTERN EYE, M15+

▶▶ I've been saying for a while now that South Korea has the most exciting cinema in the world at the moment. *Musa*, one of the best war movies from either the East or West in recent memories ably confirms this speculation. *Musa* tells the story of a number of Korean soldiers in ancient China tasked with protecting a group of Korean diplomats during their journey. After being betrayed by the Chinese, the surviving Koreans start a long journey to the sea to find a boat to take them back to their beloved country.

During the journey the soldiers, made up from the archetypal assortment - the kindly older gentleman, the arrogant general,

the silent warrior, the conscript who simply wants to get home to his family and the like - come across a Ming princess (played by the ethereally beautiful Zhang Ziyi of *Crouching Tiger* fame) who has been abducted by the Yan army. After rescuing the princess in the hope of finding favour with the Ming who betrayed them in the first place the Koreans find themselves chased by the vengeful Yan, at the mercy of the elements and eventually deciding to protect a town full of Chinese peasants they owe nothing to.

The real genius of *Musa* lies not within the brilliant and bloody fight scenes or the exceptional cinematography but within the characters themselves. Whilst they may be archetypal, all of



Mmm... Zhang Ziyi. She's as fine as fried chicken!

the soldiers serve to illustrate a different aspect of the effect war has on people, elevating *Musa* from simply being a great war film to being a truly great film, regardless of genre.

DANIEL WILKS

MOVIE: 10 / EXTRAS: 5



How sweet. Fresh meat

Freddy Vs. Jason 2 DISC SPECIAL DELUXE EDITION

ROADSHOW, MA 15+

▶▶ The idea of pitting two of modern horror's most enduring stars against each other has a brilliance that recalls the heady days of the Universal monster films when it was not at all uncommon to see more than one of the famous film monsters such as *Dracula* and *Frankenstein* show up in the same film. The choice of veteran HK director Ronny Yu to helm the film is genius. The method for resurrecting the two icons is clever. Hell, even the tagline "Winner Kills All" is pretty damn cool. Why is it then that the actual film is so disappointing?

Exactly where *Freddy Vs. Jason* falls short is hard to pinpoint but ultimately it seems to come from the fact that the film simply fails to go far enough. Even though the basis

of the film is the conflict between the unkillable hockey-masked Jason and the wisecracking, razor-fingered Freddy the majority of screen time is focused, as usual, on a bunch of thoroughly uninteresting teens whose only purpose is to die in creative ways. When the pair finally get to fight at the end of the film there is a real spark but it ultimately comes too little too late and teases the audience with what *Freddy Vs. Jason* might have been if the monster on monster antics were kept at the forefront rather than the periphery. The two disc set features a full compliment of extras including a commentary, deleted and alternate scenes and a bunch of featurettes on the making of the film.

DANIEL WILKS

MOVIE: 6 / EXTRAS: 8



Ah well, it's only the planet of the apes

The Day After Tomorrow

FOX HOME ENTERTAINMENT, M 15+

▶▶ Of all the people who had anything to do with *The Day After Tomorrow*, only star Jake Gyllenhaal seems to take it with a grain of salt, often stating in interviews that the film is nothing but a big disaster movie, an unashamed blockbuster, not a horrible portent of things to come if we don't fix up the environment. Telling the story of a new ice age arriving in a few short weeks it's pretty obvious that *The Day After Tomorrow* is a dumb film. It's big, flashy and uses real science as a basis for simply ludicrous scenes such as one where ice literally chases the characters until they manage to shut a door.

As a sheer spectacle there's a lot to like about *The Day After Tomorrow* - the special effects

are superb (aside from the aforementioned magic chasing ice) and Gyllenhaal makes for a charming and unassuming hero, the son of a climatologist trying to keep a group of people alive in a flash-frozen New York. Randy Quaid as the father is equally likeable but is given little to do apart from yell or look worried.

Better than the film are the extras, aside from two rather pretentious audio commentaries, *Day After Tomorrow* features 10 deleted scenes, an interesting documentary of the science and politics surrounding super storms, an interactive look at climate catastrophes around the world as well as a few good making of featurettes.

DANIEL WILKS

MOVIE: 6 / EXTRAS: 8

Eh wolfie, put down the hors deu, it's time for the main course!



Wolf's Rain Vol 1: LEADER OF THE PACK

PRODUCTION: BONES
GENRE: ADVENTURE/DRAMA

Legend has it that paradise will appear when the world is about to end. Legend also tells that the only beings capable of finding paradise are wolves, a race thought to be extinct after being hunted down by humans who fear their power. The wolves are not dead, however, they are in hiding, taking on the appearance of humans to blend in with their enemies. This is the world of Wolf's Rain, a society on the verge of destruction held in the iron grip of the Nobles, a mysterious group of powerful individuals with their fingers in every pie.

In this world we are introduced to four wolves in human form, all loners long since having lost the instinct to run in packs. Kiba is a spiritual wanderer looking for a better world, Tsume is a bitter warrior incapable of forgiving or forgetting, Hige is a happy go lucky soul more interested in the welfare of his stomach than his soul and Toboe is the innocent child of the group and ultimately serves as its

emotional core.

Although the plot of the series, the search for paradise on a blasted wasteland may seem to be the perfect avenue for an action/adventure story, Wolf's Rain is more interested in telling personal stories of friendship, redemption and forgiveness. The friendships and rivalries of the wolves play a more important role than the sporadic action scenes but rather than making the series slow it serves to make it all the more engrossing, drawing the viewer into the lives of wolves in human form. The animation serves the story brilliantly using a mixture of vibrant colours and understated backgrounds. The colour palette moves from harsh primary colours through to subtle watercolours depending on the scene, lending a slightly dreamlike quality to the proceedings.

DANIEL WILKS

ANIMATION: 9 / STORY: 8
OVERALL: 8



Star Blazers SERIES 1

PRODUCTION: ACADEMY
PRODUCTIONS/CLUSTER TELEVISION
GENRE: DRAMA/SCI-FI

It's time to put those rose coloured glasses on and take a trip back to your childhood, because a whole host of classic anime series are being released locally. There's Battle of the Planets (yes, the heavily sanitised 7-Zark-7 Western version), Voltron, original Astro Boy and, of course, Star Blazers. Chances are if you're in your late twenties or early thirties you'll have fond memories of at least one of these shows, but how do they hold up today?

Well, in the case of Star Blazers, relatively well. Season one takes the form of a trip across the galaxy in the year 2199 to get the technology to save the Earth from the toxic radiation poisoning that has transformed it into a wasteland after sustained bombing by the evil Gamilon forces. This box set contains season one in its entirety (there were three seasons and several films made), and for an animated show from the seventies, still has a lot to offer.

Star Blazers is essentially a sci-fi

soap opera. Although each episode is self contained, the overall plot of saving Earth gave it a meaningful backdrop, and as you came to know each of the crew members you came to care about them. Throw in some great design, decent animation, lots of space dogfighting and a ship with the Wave Motion Gun - the most powerful weapon in the universe (that seems to get them out of scrapes pretty much every episode) and you have the makings of great TV. It also didn't hurt that the English language version had decent voice overs and localisation changes that were respectful to the source material.

It's not hard to see that this is an old show though. The picture quality is very grainy, and you'll regularly see marks and smudges on the animation cels, but in some ways this adds to the nostalgia factor. Fans of the show will also dig the art on the box set - it really is outstanding (although not as cool as the new Battle of the Planets box set art).

CAM SHEA

ANIMATION: 6 / STORY: 6
OVERALL: 7



Flying high in the sky, they may be small but only in size

Laputa: Castle in the Sky

PRODUCTION: STUDIO GHIBLI
GENRE: ADVENTURE

With Studio Ghibli releasing their latest offering to us early next year (Howl's Secret Castle) Hayao Miyazaki's past greats are being released in Australia for the first time. Laputa: Castle in the Sky was first released in Japan in 1986, and this hand drawn masterpiece has not aged in the slightest.

Often compared to Gulliver's Travels with the floating city above Balnibarbi, Laputa is the floating Kingdom of which Sheeta is the heir. She is earthbound while her homeland drifts undiscovered up above the clouds with the only way of discovering it via a blue "levistone" that points the way to her ancestral home.

Pure adventure from the opening scene, when sky pirates attack the Government ship that Sheeta is travelling on, Laputa: Castle in the Sky is filled with chase scenes, exotic locations, evil guys with plans to conquer the world, and

a young heroine and hero who save the day thanks to some quick thinking and the magical powers of the levistone.

Hayao Miyazaki's forte is creating creatures and worlds, and Laputa: Castle in the Sky is no exception. Giant floating flying machines cut straight from 1920s science fiction magazines seem to gracefully move without the restriction of gravity.

The villains in contrast are awkward and haphazard with a quirkiness that endears even the most evil of genius to a list of favourite characters. While Miyazaki is best known for Princess Mononoke and the recent Spirited Away each of his feature films is worth looking out for. While some, like My Neighbour Totoro and Kiki's Delivery Service, are suitable for children, all will be enjoyed by an older audience who are keen to let their imagination run wild.

VANESSA MORGAN

ANIMATION: 9 / STORY: 8
OVERALL: 9



Is it time to crack his head open and feast on the goo inside?

Princess Mononoke

PRODUCTION: STUDIO GHIBLI
GENRE: DRAMA/ADVENTURE

Studio Ghibli's Princess Mononoke is a film of huge acclaim. Not only did it receive numerous awards, but it also broke records at the box office, and during its run became the highest grossing film within Japan through cinema sales alone.

A cursed Boar God wounded by a ball of iron attacks Ashitaka's village. In killing the Boar he becomes cursed. Cutting off his topknot he journeys to the creature's homeland to lift the curse and see with "unclouded sight" the source of the evil that could damage a God. His pilgrimage takes him to Lady Eboshi who operates a giant ironworks on the edge of the forest, which has killed many of the forest creatures, and to San who, raised by the Moro Wolves works with the animals to protect them from destruction.

Japan's history and landscape are a large influence on Miyazaki's

work on Princess Mononoke; he and his art directors devoted countless hours to research and planning. Not only taking pictures and making sketches but working with archaeologists as well as introducing new approaches to computer graphics and musical arrangement.

All of this attention, time and creative thinking is rewarded with a film that holds you in its thrall from its opening hand drawn frame through to the last. Not just a visual and storytelling masterpiece, Princess Mononoke's music rounds out the package, giving life to each movement. Fantastic.

Vanessa Morgan

ANIMATION: 9 / STORY: 9
OVERALL: 10

Win 3 Studio Ghibli Classics!

>> To celebrate the release of Princess Mononoke, Laputa: Castle in the Sky and Kiki's Delivery Service on DVD in Australia, our friends at AV Channel have given us three of each to give away. To be in with a chance to win one of these must-own anime sets, just answer the following question:

>> **What is the latest Studio Ghibli film called?**

Put your answer on the back of an envelope and send it to: **DVD Delectations, Hyper, 78 Renwick St, Redfern, NSW, 2016.**



Terms & Conditions 1) Entry is open to residents of Australia and New Zealand except employees and immediate families of Next Publishing Pty Ltd and its agencies associated with the promotion. 2) Only entries completed with these terms and conditions will be eligible. 3) Competition begins 9am October 26 and entries close at 6pm December 8. 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 December 9 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 February issue of Hyper on sale January 5. 9) 3 winners will each receive Kiki's Delivery Service (RRP \$29.95), Laputa: Castle in the Sky (RRP \$29.95) and Princess Mononoke (RRP \$34.95) on DVD. Total prize value is \$284.55 10) The promoter is Next Publishing Pty Ltd ABN 88 002 647 645 of 78 Renwick St, Redfern NSW 2016.

WinWinWin

Win THUG 2 on Xbox!

>> If there was a magical multimedia mixing machine, and you took a copy of Tony Hawk's Underground, a DVD of The Matrix and the entire first season of Viva La Bam, and threw them all in together, the result might be something like THUG 2. THUG 2 pits Tony Hawk's team against Bam Margera's in a skate competition around the world. The skating mechanics are as solid as ever, and the influence of Bam means that Jackass fans will find a lot to like. Thanks to our buddies at Activision, we have five copies of THUG 2 to give away on Xbox.

To be in with a chance to win, just answer the following question:

What's Bam's dad's first name?

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

5
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Win Magic The Gathering Unhinged Booster Packs!

>> If you like gathering magic as much as we do, then you'll be ever so excited that by simply entering this comp you could soon be in possession of 6 Magic the Gathering Unhinged booster packs! In fact, thanks to our friends at Wizards of the Coast, we have 6 packs of 6 to give away... funnily enough, to 6 lucky readers! It's the number of the beast!

To be in with a chance to win, just answer the following:

Name another Magic The Gathering set that starts with "un"

Put your answer on the back of an envelope along with your name and address, and post it to: **Give me a Boost, Hyper, 78 Renwick Street, Redfern, NSW 2016.**

6
PACKS
UP FOR
GRABS!



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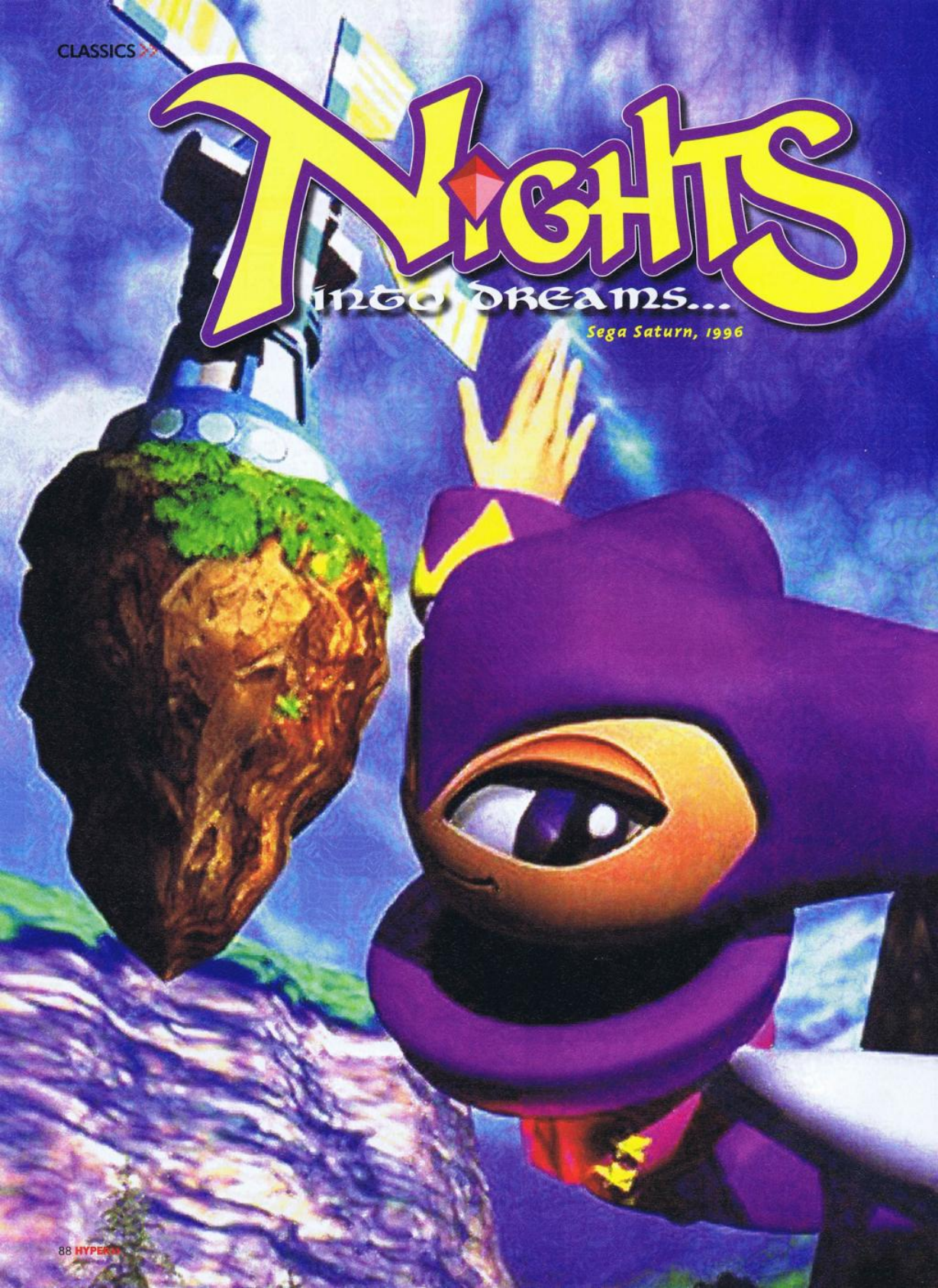
GORKY ZERO
BEYOND HONOR

CLASSICS

Nights

into DREAMS...

Sega Saturn, 1996



Anthony Corbett

Once upon a time, a man named Yuji Naka and his dev. crew, Sonic Team, set about creating a game in which "the flight you experience in your dreams" would be replicated. A title showcasing the birth of the next gaming mascot superstar (no, not the Next gaming mascot superstar, ie Amos - Ed). A piece of software that could completely make up for the absence of a "proper 3D" Sonic game and allow the luckless Sega Saturn to stand tall against its rivals - spear-headed by Naughty Dog's brash, seminal hit and Miyamoto's opus respectively. Rather obviously, things didn't turn out that way. But we love NIGHTS to death all the same.

ANDROGYNOUS FREAK: CHECK. ISRAELI PHILHARMONIC ORCHESTRA: CHECK...

One's first few moments in the land of Nightopia were typically spent deciphering exactly which way was up, as the initial ability to roam the landscape with Claris and Elliot in true 3-D dissolved to a quasi-2-D "circuit" once the main character, NIGHTS, was encountered. This annoyed the hell out of many, particularly those who had experienced Mario 64's free-form flight sections, but it was necessary to accommodate the raft of loops, drills and stunts that formed our hero/ine's repertoire. The confusion eventually passed and it was then to the sole task of collecting spherical blue objects and depositing them in a bizarre receptacle. Once so were off-loaded, you returned to point-A... primarily because there was no point-B. The linear nature of the levels made them feel horribly short-lived and, to be honest, a little uninspiring. But boredom was quickly alleviated once your grades came back - invariably D-. To gain a higher ranking you had to make as many laps of the seemingly circular track as possible and "link" every item in sight. Looping around grouped items allowed you to make swift, concise collections and your dash meter was pushed to the absolute limit every time you hit a blank stretch. Infinite chains were easily performed on the opening levels, but nothing

less than ninja gaming skills (and a lot of luck) would obtain high-yield bonuses on the later stages, particularly the dreaded Stick Canyon "titter" with its mass of pointy edges just wide enough to screw-up your racing line.

Of course, all this could only be construed as "fun" if you picked up your copy along with Sega's 3-D Pad. Developed in tandem with NIGHTS it gave the player greater control through analogue precision and made sure they didn't dislocate their left thumb playing with the regular Saturn pad...

It was hard enough pin-pointing a genre for NIGHTS, let alone its audio department. Perhaps "eclectic" would be the best way to describe the sublime fusion of jazz, sacchrine pop and thumping beats that somehow created a soundtrack, but no matter how good it was it paled in comparison to the magnificence of the visuals... Judicious use of the spanking-new Sega Graphics Library 3.0 gave NIGHTS an evolutionary step-up on even the most prettifful Saturn games before it (including a few Model 2 arcade board ports!) and made everything after seem decidedly monochrome. It would be pointless trying to convey the visionary application of hues in this title by mere words, suffice to say that it stands as a resolute testament to the supposed myth that Japanese programmers own prescription pads...

EFFORTLESSLY CHARMING, WITH ADDED CLIPPING

On top of ridiculously addictive gameplay, NIGHTS was undoubtedly an audio/visual extravaganza, the former wonderfully complimenting the latter to produce an effortlessly charming title that - no matter how bad a day you'd had - always managed to cheer you up. Not with the sadistic happy you get from Vice City, this game was true love - even if it was perhaps too twee for most gamers' tastes. Plus slap happy textures and more clipping than a deranged barbershop quartet kinda hamstrung the graphical idyll. But it's still the only game to date that allows you to beat up an opera diva rabbit that has teeth on its breasts... <<



[above] Elliot always did love a bit of ring work



[up] Not jester pretty face



[above] Prescription pads you say?



[above] Sound of Music: The Game

SEGAGAGA A free time-release demo that worked with the Saturn's internal clock - NIGHTS Short Version was full to the brim with Nightopian goodness including: Time and Link Attack modes, a karaoke centre and a new route for Elliot. But come "that time of year" the Christmas NIGHTS feature would activate, coating the landscape in snow and decorating everything with a cheesy, though beautifully crafted festive motif. Perhaps the best present was the ability to hoon 'round Spring Valley as Sonic and battle Puffy wrapped in an Eggman skin, but hardcore fans virtually self-combusted once April 1st rolled around - they got the chance to play as NIGHTS' similarly gender-neutral foe, Realat



Q. What's the best film of all time, and why?

Whenever you pose an "of all time" question, debate tends to get heated. Arguments and counterarguments flow like a tumultuous river of logic, until the banks burst and everyone gets wet. Or something. For us, it's a little hard to boil down our favourites to a single film. I mean, do you reward the fried chicken eating antics of Barbershop? Or the alcohol consumption of Drunken Master 2? Or how about the unscripted doggy style action of Best In Show? We can't decide, so we'll just let you guys argue it out...



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 game are you most looking forward to in 2005 and why?"

Responses will be printed in Hyper #136



MAIL THE HYPER FORUM:

POSTAL:
78 Renwick St. Redfern,
NSW 2016 Australia

EMAIL:
freak@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.

LETTERHEAD

I have been a fan of the cinema for many years, and the question you have asked us will provide many different answers from the many who read Hyper. But while I have many films that I have seen and liked, there is one film that stands out from the rest. It is in actual fact not a live action movie but an Japanese anime film called, "The Wings of Honneamise". There are many things to like in this film. Rather than go for graphic violence and other exploitative materials like in other well known anime titles, the makers of this film, Gainax, opted to tell a real story, and use the technology they had to create a real believable other world. That's right, Gainax, the makers of Neon Genesis Evangelion, made this film, it was their first and the show's creator Hideaki Anno was among the head animators. The film which for its time was the most expensive anime film ever made, shows the Gainax team in their prime. They used all of their resources to create not just another world, but one that you are surrounded in. It has its own religion, its own currency, its own political system, even the art direction and costume design help make look unlike anything you've ever seen yet look like you've seen it a thousand times in real life. They even modelled characters after real life Hollywood stars, for example, the male lead is based on Treat Williams. But above all things, "Honneamise" has one thing that you would not find in most Hollywood pictures, a story. The characters in it have real emotions and feelings, and the story is a complex look at the trials and tribulations of a young astronaut through his life and struggles, yet it is simple enough to get to you, unlike their later works like "Evangelion" which drown in psychobabble. So find it, watch it, and you'll see what I mean, because the greatest films don't necessarily have to be the most well known.

Craig Davidson



[above] A second later his William Tell trick went horribly wrong and Frodo was dead

LETTERHEAD

TOMBSTONE. Val Kilmer should have won an Academy award for this. I hate westerns in general but I never tire of watching this film.

Rodna Davies

LETTERHEAD

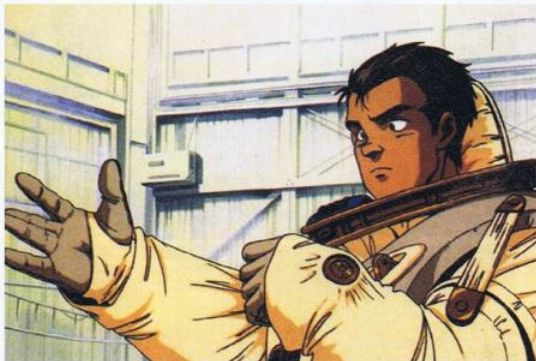
Do you guys know that is the hardest thing to answer, but I'll try "Brain clunks and churms" Okay, I'd have to say a Fukasaku Kinji film, 'Battle Royale', it's a film that inspired the great Quentin Tarantino (whom has some of the best films). So a legend movie that inspires a legend. A movie that earned the right to be one of the best subtitled films and has a sequel that is no mere shadow. Plus what's better than being able to take a class of school kids, put them on an island, and tell them to kill each other in 3 days. All because you have an over-grown population. Thus the Hyper Forum award for "Best Film EVER!" should go to the bloody BATTLE ROYALE.

Miscellaneous Mel.

LETTERHEAD

Another forum question to respond with joy with! And it is easy too! The Lord of the Rings trilogy! Although if I had to pick one of them, it would

be the third film: Return of the King! For those of you who have seen it [and praised it] can obviously tell why it's the best. Here's a good story: One night, my dad and brother were going to see Lord of the Rings. Mum and I were just wondering what they were excited about as I have heard of Lord of the Rings, but had never read it, nor "The Hobbit". When Dad rented it on its release, I started to watch it! And POWOW! The opening battle was enough to suck me in, and then followed what was a good story. Then I read "The Hobbit" and furthered my love of Tolkien's world. I just couldn't wait for Film Two [I didn't know it was a trilogy at first] and saw it in the cinema; MY GOD, Lord of the Rings just keeps getting better. The battle at Helm's Deep, Gollum, and the Flooding of Isengard just to name a few moments. Then I just kept wondering why this trilogy was so loved, so I read the trilogy from beginning to end [I found out who "she" was in the end]. Even though I finished the third book a few days before the last film, giving me a few spoilers, I enjoyed Film Three the best, very emotional, and the battles were brought to life as terrific as ever before. Still wondering how much I love the trilogy? Okay, how about



[above] Artificially inseminating cows is a thankless job, but hey, the suit is cool



[above] Battle Royale. One of Amos' favourites, so it must be good. Now that's logic!

this? I own the extended editions of Films 1 & 2 and I am diehard looking forward to 3 [C'mon Peter Jackson, make it the best DVD ever]. And better yet, I travelled to Sydney with my family to see the Lord of the Rings Symphony in the Opera House. Howard Shore brings the audio of the films to brilliant life. And thanks to the Starlight Foundation, I got probably the best seats in the hall and an autograph from Howard Shore whom I met briefly, thanked,

and shook hands with. Yes, I can read the jealous expressions on all yer faces. Big ups to Richard Taylor for the weapon and armour creation, and big ups to Peter for bringing it to life. Overall, big ups to Tolkien for writing the books these terrific films are based on!

Thank you all for listening
Aragorn

LETTERHEAD

Asking me what my favourite movie

of all time is a bit of a Sophie's Choice (geddit) but I shall do my best to cut a very extensive list down to as few choices as possible. There are literally so many films that I have seen or am dying to see that it is nearly impossible to say which is the best of all time - honestly, how can I do that when the best film of all time may be right around the corner, just waiting for me to shell out some money to watch. In all honesty when the day comes that I can no longer expect the next thing I see to be the best film of all time is going to be the day I stop watching films. Enough with the crap, onto the film (or films) that I think are the best. To cut a long list down I would have to say that Ichi the Killer would currently have to top my list. If you look at it as a straight bloodbath then you're missing the true genius of the film. In reality it is something of a love story, a very screwed up love story but a love story nonetheless. The protagonist and antagonist (the line is often blurred) are essentially the lovers of the film - Kakahara (played by the truly brilliant and existentially cool Tadanobu Asano)



[up] Ichi the killer... WTHIWJJP?

loves pain and by extension of this fact is in love with the idea of Ichi, the only person he sees as being strong enough to give him the pain he so truly craves. Ichi on the other hand sees Kakahara as something of a salvation, the embodiment of the trauma that turned him into a killer in the first place. Director Takashi Miike's themes of being an outsider also play a strong role in the film with the only real community being that created by the outsiders themselves, cementing their place as being the archetypal other. Of course it's also a brilliantly shot film sure to provoke a reaction, both positive and negative (sometimes simultaneously) from any viewer.

Agitator



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THE LUNCHBOX THAT ROLEPLAYED

Hey Hyper crew!

I was reading through issue 132 (October) and saw the letter 'Large Purple Headed Monsters'. I agree with That Funny Guy - there is a lack of modern RPGs today. I find that Gamecubers such as myself are the ones who are complaining the most about this. However, what I found disturbing was the newest Official Australian Games Chart (the one you guys print in the back of your mag) only listed RPG games in the Nintendo categories - that is, GBA and Gamecube! There are no listings whatsoever for RPGs in the Top 10 games for PS2, Xbox or PC! Is this because other platforms, when they do get RPGs, only receive crappy ones, or is it that the only decent Gamecube games are the near-non-existent RPGs? I'll have to think over this a bit more, but can you answer my questions first?

- 1) Is there a set release date for Starcraft: Ghost?
- 2) I heard a crazy rumour that after Ghost is released, Blizzard are going to make Starcraft 2 for PC. Is this true?
- 3) Any chance of doing a list of Amos' Top 10 games of all time? Thanks for your time, you guys rock!

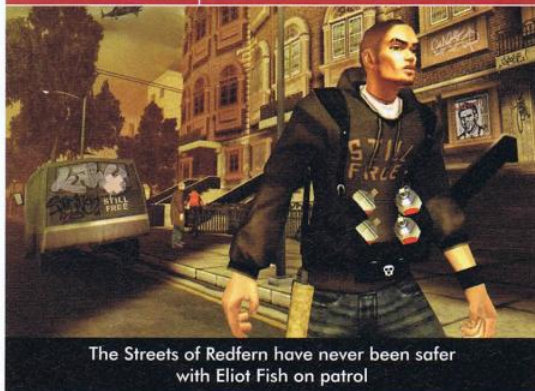
From Optical_Injury

- 1) Nope.
- 2) We've heard the rumour as well but as far as we can tell that's all it is.
- 3) We are proud to present the

CAPTION THIS!

PART 59 WINNER

Patrick Williams is all about cleaning up the streets of Redfern. Our saviour!



The Streets of Redfern have never been safer with Eliot Fish on patrol



[above] One of Natalia Silva's recent pics. Fortunately no-one's naked this time.

Amos top ten games of all time:

1. Leisure Suit Larry 3: Passionate Patti In Pursuit of The Pulsating Pectorals (PC)
2. Smackdown: Here Comes the Pain (PS2)
3. Final Fantasy VIII (PSOne)
4. Madden 2005 (Xbox)
5. The Sims 2 (PC)
6. Mario Golf Advance Tour (GBA)
7. Halo (Xbox)
8. MVP Baseball 2004 (PC)
9. Police Quest 1 (PC)
10. Kings Quest 4: The Perils of Rosella (PC)

This list was written whilst Amos was watching Teen Wolf 2 on TV which he refers to as a "Horrible horrible movie".

HEAVY MEMBER IN 110 SEC!

This oil is a brand modern burning lubricating substance built up to forthwith increase the power and capacity of your phallus, and offer you a much more overwhelming and satisfying intimate adventure.

Claudius Oeymo

Hi Claudius
Whilst Hyper could certainly use a larger penis, we find your

claims of boosting the size of the office phallus in only 110 seconds somewhat hard to believe. And the burning part doesn't exactly sweeten the deal.

MODERN SHAKESPEARE

"There is no knowledge that is not power
That's why i'm powerless hour after hour.
I'm left in the dark and i just have to know.
MK Deception on Gamecube: yes or no?

I've heard the rumours, they all sound great.
Please let me know, I must know my fate.
Now it's your turn, "choose your destiny"
Finish him now, FRIENDSHIP or FATALITY?

Either way I'll be getting the game, X-box or Gamecube, to me its all the same.
Though X-box will mean 200 bucks more,
I'll pay the price, i'm awaiting the gore.

So you better choose friendship, and better make it quick
Before I call Jade to find her pogo stick.

Then Scorpion will arrive with his flames and his spear
and in your eyes, I'll see tears of fear.

Just let me know and you won't be afraid
of the Dragon King's army holding grenades
I'll call them all back if you answer one question:
If I keep my Gamecube, will I see MK Deception?"

Sam Poidomani (aka Scorpion)

OK Sam, since you took the time to write us a poem with a simple AABB rhyme scheme I thought it only fitting to reply in the form of the most advanced form of poetry available, the mighty limerick:

*There once was a boy from Victoria
Who knew enough about MK to boreya
His question about Nintendo
Seems quite unlikely so
You lose if you want to keep scoreya*

*To paraphrase, we don't think it's going to come out on GCN here.
Sorry champ.*

OCARINA

There is a certain issue I have been throwing around in my mind for the past month, and the Game Theories in Issue 131 and 132 have finally made me write in about the issue. Graphics over Gameplay. Now, let me begin by saying I would much rather gameplay over graphics. Eye candy is good and all, but if there isn't any gameplay to back it up, it just gets boring and so the visuals are wasted. For example, True Crime: Streets of LA "shivers" had pretty decent graphics, but after the second mission I was nearly asleep. On the other hand, Zelda: Ocarina of Time has pretty low graphics by today's standards, but I still play it and it is one of the most immersive pieces of gaming gold ever. Hell, I would play a game with a red circle dancing around a green square, as long as the gameplay is there. In conclusion, I urge anyone who turns down the chance to play a game because it doesn't look good to GIVE

LETTER OF THE MONTH

SWEET SEQUELITIS

Just doing some constructive thinking. If you piece together all (or most) the titles from the Street Fighter series you get "ahem" -

Hyper Super Turbo Street Fighter 2 3 Third Strike EX3 Alpha Anniversary Turbo Revival Double Impact EX2 Plus 2010 Zero 2 Special Champion Edition.

That sounds like a good sequel, doesn't it? Don't forget the Resident Evil and Megaman series (and others) though.

From JM?

Best. Sequel. Ever. Or at least it would be if the "Super" part had "Happy" after it.



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IT A GO! It might do you some good.
Lochlan Morrissey

We agree with you on gameplay over graphics champ but you need to realise that whilst Ocarina of Time looks dated now it didn't when it was first released. To us the purest examples of gameplay

over graphics include such greats as Tetris, Civ, Puzzle Fighter, Arcanoid and the like. We do agree with you that Ocarina is a rocking good game though. But hey, so is Wind Waker, which has sweet graphics to boot!

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HYPER STALKER NUMBER 186

Dear Hyper gang minus Evil Cam, I'm a big fan of your mag, but I live on the Central Coast of NSW, so what I did, I caught the train down to Sydney Terminal aka Central station. I could've got off at Redfern but I forgot. So I have to powerwalk up Elizabeth street, really surging towards Renwick street. Then, when I arrive, I wonder around a bit, but I can't find Hyper HQ. There's a heap of beggars asking me for money and calling my bro, and I'm thinking, that ain't the Hyper gang, is it? Thankful I make it outside Hyper HQ, number 78. And I'm standing out front, just looking real uncomfortable, a little obsessed, but you know, justified for being there. I don't wanna go in; I'll just wait. But nothing happened. I guess it was a bit over indulgent so I just went home after an hour.

From Dan Spicer

P.S Where were you guys?

Dude, you do realise that what you were doing could be classified as stalking? At any rate, it may have worked better if you came into the building and asked at reception for us. Next publishes a bunch of mags aside from Hyper and simply standing outside the building will do little to gain our attention (we rarely "kick it on da curb"). As to where we were, we were probably inside working, just like we do most days (when we're not at the pub that is).

HONORARY TURK

How's it hanging C-dawg?

How's Amos? Tell him he's fully sic and I'm trying to convince my mate to make him an honorary Turk! I thought I'd write in to all youse in hyper to point something out. I've been a little bored the last couple of week and have logged into gamefaqs.com. The things I've checked out most is the San Andreas boards. I pre-ordered the game at EB a week ago. I got it for \$10 pre-ordered fully paid off by trading in 3 games (including Vice City). The people there are obsessed, at least 30 people are skipping work and school to buy the game? I love videogames, but skipping school? I'd rather wait a week and get the game and be a success than get the game, possibly fail high school and have my parents kill me. Plus pre-ordering doesn't cost anything!

From Amos' new cause, Sushi

It's good to see you put your education in front of gaming. As far

as Amos being made an honorary Turk, we're all for it. If you can't convince your friend maybe we can get Fahri, our resident Turkish IT stud to do it for us. That would be sweet - Amos could be our in house Korean/Turkish love god.

THANK YOU MR FANCY PANTS

Did you know that the leader of the secret police (aka murder squad) in "The Three Stigmata of Palmer Eldritch" by Philip K Dick is called Felix Blau?

You do now.

Skip

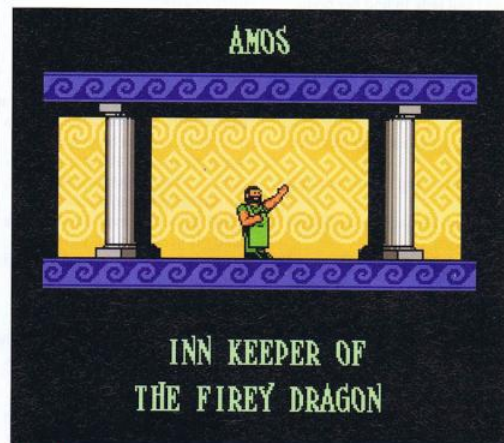
Even if we said we knew that before you told us nobody would believe it. Thanks for ruining our know-it-all reputation buddy. Thanks a lot.

EVIDENCE AGAINST US

How come you changed your address from freakscene to just freak? Not in the scene anymore? (This was in my original mail, but it looks like you made ANOTHER typo in the magazine) In your review of wario ware, someone complains that it's too little for a \$100 game but it's not \$100 - it's \$50. Does that change your opinion of the game? The stats down the side say the right price, but the review is different. And how come Wario Ware got 63 when a few pages down, a random music game got 92? And how come there's an "n" at the start of the review for The Singing Detective, and another "n" missing from the word "drawn" on the next page? And how come there's bolding missing from the answer to the letter "Graphics Whore II"? Well? Not replying will be taken as evidence against you...Hyper has gone downhill lately. Cam, lift your game. Editor means you're supposed to pick up shit like that.

We like constructive criticism, we really do but you need to understand that sometimes mistakes get by us - a pity but the truth. Sometimes that problem has nothing to do with us like fonts being corrupted when we send them to the printers (like the N boxes you referred to). Sometimes we pick up on the mistake but cannot afford to change it. Sometimes we don't have time. We're not making excuses but shit happens. If you want to make some constructive criticism then go for it. If you simply want to snipe and make accusations the door's to your left. Also, "Not replying will be taken as evidence

DEPT. OF MISC. BLAU/AMOS SIGHTINGS



[above] Deku Scrub found Amos in Wizards & Warriors 3. What a jolly old fellow Amos is!



[left] Poh-Ling Ng discovered this at Parliament House in Canberra; a memorial plaque for the coat of arms.

against you" - what the hell does this mean? Evidence of what? Of some vast conspiracy to ruin your day with a few spelling mistakes? Evidence that we are too busy to respond to every letter sent to us? Not responding will be taken as evidence against you.

ELLIPSIS AND EXCLAMATION OVERLOAD

Whoa..... I've seemed to gone back in time..... what the hell is going on? One minute I've just seen something on the net about Star Wars Battlefront being released... the next thing I'm hearing about is that Command and Conquer: Renegade is soon to be released.....at the end of June 2001?!?!?!?!?!?!?!?!?! Aren't we in 2004??

Hang on a sec, I better start form the start and explain myself a bit more. After logging out of hotmail I got presented with the usual MSN

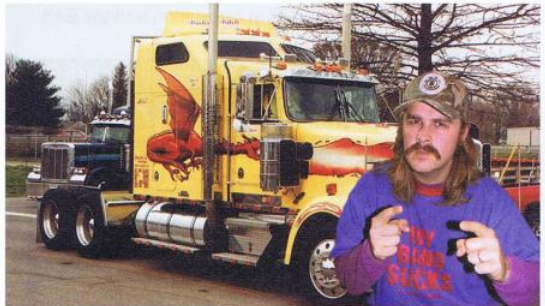
news website, but for once it had some decent news... about Star Wars Battlefront being released. The article itself was brief and didn't give too much info about what the game was really like, so I thought why not visit the Hyper website... I've never been to it before, but the mag is damn good (I buy it pretty much every month), and it might at least have a little bit more info on it to keep me tied over until I get the latest version of the trusted mag... But nope, instead I get dragged into some time warp. First thing I notice on entering the PC side of the site is that the last piece of news was posted in April, and before that August 2003! This didn't look too promising! Next thing I notice is the "Caption This" picture for the month... hang on I'm sure that's been used before.... Many, many, many issues ago. Anyway.... I then went down to PC Previews.... Whats this? Command and Conquer: Renegade??? Isn't that an old game?!?!?!? Maybe the good guys

at Westwood are releasing a sequel? Nope, sure enough on having a look at the preview it was the good old version from way back. And heres the hyper article saying "So get ready because soon you will be in control of a renegade, and this time, you'll make your own rules!" Release Date June 2001! [Time for the scolding] Hyper... I'm very disappointed in you! For an organisation that presents such an awesome mag with all the latest info, I would expect your website to be right up there too (its design is pretty funky though, I'll give you that). I mean you've even got an advert advertising that your January issue is out now (with pic of the cover of the mag).. January 2003 that is!! Have you just abandoned the website or something? Or are you just so under resourced that you don't have anyone to look after it??? (hey I'm a website/database developer, I'll go for the job if its available!!!!!! It would be a dream come true working at Hyper!!) In any case something needs to be done, as it's a bad mark on the hyper name and surely commercially doesn't make much

sense (for advertising your mag and for the potential of gaining money from online advertising). Anyway, keep up with making the great mag. Hopefully there won't be a review of Command and Conquer: Renegade in the next issue!

George A.

You're not the first person to notice that the site has not been updated in ages (it's only sporadically been updated since Bryce left) but currently it's out of our control. Neither of us have the time to maintain the site and we don't have the budget to hire someone to take care of it - as much as we'd like to. If you want to donate your services for free, let us know but apart from that the site is, for the time being, defunct. Our advice is - ignore the front end and go straight to the forums! They're the reason the site is still there. Just a brief word of advice - there are only a limited number of exclamation and question marks in the world, don't use all of them.



GENUINE RIG JOCKEY

Hey Hyper

I'm a big rig driver by trade and just wanted to drop you guys a letter to say thanks for keeping me sane. It's nice to be able to pull into a truck stop and have something that's funny and informative that isn't porn to read while I have a bite to eat. And there's nuttin' like getting home after a long trip and hunkering down in front of the latest Mario game.

Anyways, I won't be able to read the mag for a while as I'm off on a trip around the world pretty soon with my missus. I might send you

some photos of my adventures though. To kick things off, here's my attempt at a "trucker mannerism". What do you think?

That Guy

PS Amos is a spunk. I totally don't hate him.

*Hi That Guy,
If your travels OS can produce photos of that caliber - send away! We could have a regular "where's That Guy?" section. One question though - could I call you Tony Randall from now on? And could you call me Greenhorn?*

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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 3rd OCT 2004
RETAIL SALES

1	▲	Burnout 3	Racing
2	▼	Eyetoj:Play	Compilation
3	▲	Athens 2004	Sports
4	▲	Star Wars Battlefront	Action
5	▼	SingStar	All Other
6	◆	Conflict Vietnam	Action
7	▲	GTA:Vice City Ptm	Adventure
8	▲	Crisis Zone G Con 2 Bundle	Action
9	○	Tiger Woods PGA 2005	Sports
10	▼	Madden NFL 2005	Sports

TOP 10

PlayStation Games Over \$30

W/E 3rd OCT 2004
RETAIL SALES

1	◆	Disney Triple Pack	Adventure
2	▲	Bratz Dolls	All Other
3	◆	Grand Theft Auto Coll Ed	Adventure
4	▲	FIFA 2004	Sports
5	▲	Yu-Gi-Oh Forbidden Mem	Strategy
6	▼	Simpson's Wrestling	Sports
7	▼	Beyblade Let It Rip	Adventure
8	▲	NBA Live 2003	Sports
9	○	Celebrity Deathmatch	Action
10	○	Colin McRae Rally Ptm	Racing

TOP 10

Game Cube Games Over \$50

W/E 3rd OCT 2004
RETAIL SALES

1	◆	WWE Day Of Reckoning	Sports
2	◆	Pokémon Colosseum	RPG
3	◆	Mario Kart Double Dash	Racing
4	▲	Shark Tale	Adventure
5	▲	Simpson's Hit & Run	Adventure
6	▼	Mario Party 5	Family
7	▲	Final Fantasy Crystal Chron	RPG
8	◆	Shrek 2	Adventure
9	○	FIFA 2005	Sports
10	○	Spider-Man 2	Adventure

TOP 10

Xbox Games Over \$50

W/E 3rd OCT 2004
RETAIL SALES

1	◆	Star Wars Battlefront	Action
2	◆	Burnout 3	Racing
3	◆	Tiger Woods PGA 2005	Sports
4	◆	Conflict Vietnam	Action
5	○	FIFA 2005	Sports
6	○	The Sims Bustin Out	Strategy
7	○	Colin McRae Rally 2005	Racing
8	▼	GTA Twin Pack	Adventure
9	○	Driv3r	Racing
10	○	Shark Tale	Adventure

TOP 10

PC Games Over \$20

W/E 3rd OCT 2004
RETAIL SALES

1	◆	The Sims 2	Strategy
2	▲	Rome Total War	Strategy
3	▼	Warhammer 40K Dawn War	Strategy
4	▲	The Sims Deluxe	Strategy
5	◆	Star Wars Battlefront	Action
6	▼	Call Of Duty Untd Offensive	Action
7	◆	The Sims Unleashed	Strategy
8	▲	The Sims Superstar	Strategy
10	○	Rollrcoastr Tycoon 2 Thrill Pk	Strategy
9	▼	Doom 3	Action

TOP 10

Game Boy Advance Games Over \$30

W/E 3rd OCT 2004
RETAIL SALES

1	◆	Pokémon Fire Red	RPG
2	◆	Pokémon Leaf Green	RPG
3	◆	Yu-Gi-Oh Resh Of Dstrction	Strategy
4	◆	Pokémon Ruby	RPG
5	◆	Pokémon Sapphire	RPG
6	○	Shark Tale	Adventure
7	▼	Simpson's Road Rage	Racing
8	▼	Crash Bandicoot Fusion	Adventure
9	○	Finding Nemo	Adventure
10	▼	Spyro Fusion	Adventure

TOP 10

All Full Priced Games

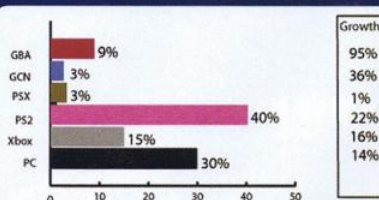
W/E 3rd OCT 2004
RETAIL SALES

1	▲	The Sims 2	PC/MAC
2	▼	Pokémon Fire Red	Game Boy Adv
3	▲	Pokémon Leaf Green	Game Boy Adv
4	▲	Rome Total War	PC/MAC
5	◆	Warhammer 40K Dawn War	PC/MAC
6	▲	Burnout 3	PlayStation 2
7	▼	Eyetoj:Play	PlayStation 2
8	▲	Athens 2004	PlayStation 2
9	▲	Star Wars Battlefront	PlayStation 2
10	○	The Sims Deluxe	PC/MAC

MARKET WATCH

All Games by Platform

ALL G VS SEP RETAIL SALES



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



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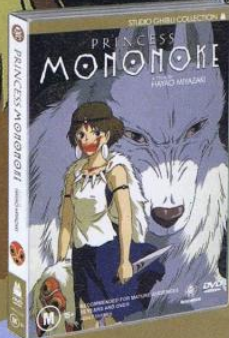
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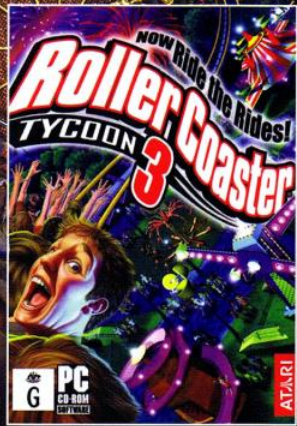
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