

HYPHER

GT4

GRAN TURISMO 4

The greatest racing game ever made for PS2?

NOBUO UEMATSU

The legendary Final Fantasy composer comes down under

FORZA MOTORSPORTS

The Xbox's answer to Gran Turismo



GTA REVIEWED ON GBA!

YUJI NAKA & SONIC TEAM

How Sega ruled the world with a spiky hedgehog

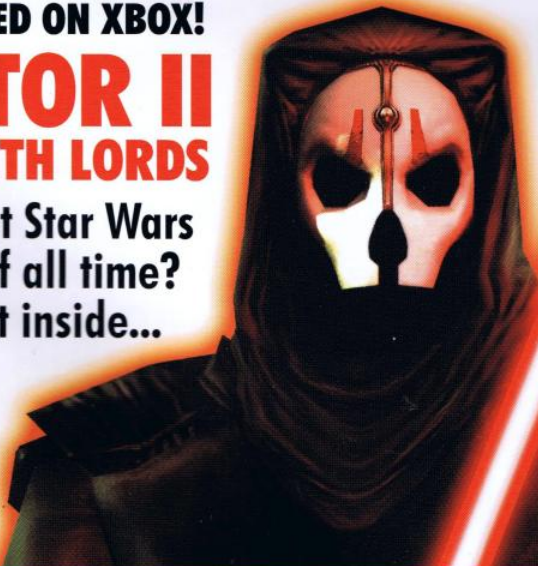
CALL OF DUTY: FINEST HOUR

Spectacular WWII gaming comes to PS2 and Xbox

REVIEWED ON XBOX!

KOTOR II THE SITH LORDS

The best Star Wars game of all time? Find out inside...



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HANDS-ON WITH THE

NINTENDO

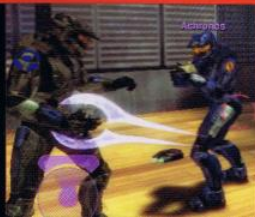
DS

The dawn of a new era or quirky gimmick?



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next GAMING

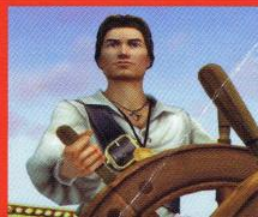


HALO 2 ONLINE

The Hyper Verdict

SID MEIER'S PIRATES!

The PC classic returns. Arrr



KOF

MAXIMUM IMPACT

TM





The field of battle goes 3D!

A city lay in ruins...
 Rival gangs are at war - all vying for the chance to rule the underworld of Southtown. A small group destined to take the city back has established a meeting with the maniacal leader of the most powerful gang, 'Mephistopheles'.
 The only condition to this meeting taking place, is they must prove themselves by defeating the greatest fighters in the world.



Customise your own unique KOF character!

Costume 1 Costume 2

A variety of costumes have been prepared for 2-player character models to bring a smile to SNK fans, like the model for Terry of **FATAL FURY—MARK OF THE WOLVES** and that of Ralf from **IKARI WARRIORS**.

In addition to this, you can add other items to characters that allow you to customise your very own player character.

Here it is, the first ever 3D version of the most popular fighting franchise in history. **KOF Maximum Impact.**
 Gamers from around the world will finally be able to play as their favourite SNK character in full 3D with beautifully rendered backgrounds and full flowing animation.
 Starting with the new lead characters Alba and Soiree Meira, you'll meet a number of interesting newcomers to this event.
 They'll be the old favourites, too-Kyo, Iori, Terry, Mai and more. All with colourful entrances and between-match sequences that detail the new world of KOF!

Courage. Passion. Strength

A total of 20 characters, including all new entrants and some returning favourites take to the streets to do battle across Southtown!



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PlayStation 2



OUT NOW!

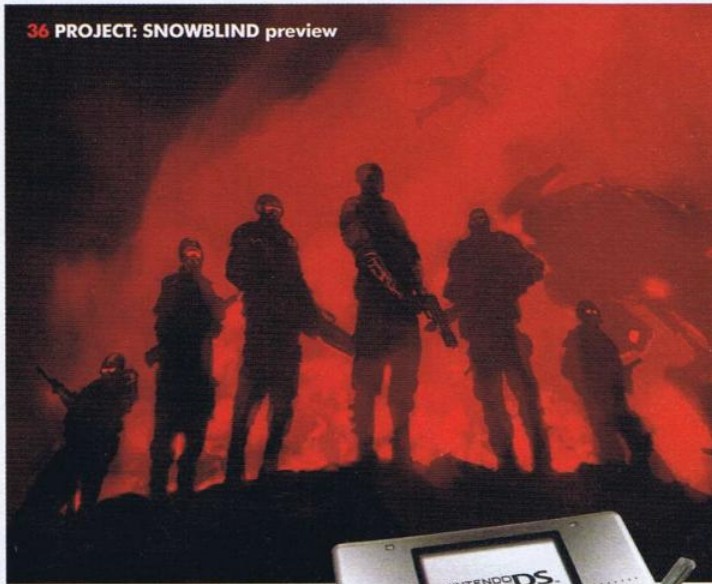
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Hands on with Polyphony Digital's latest masterpiece.



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EDITORIAL

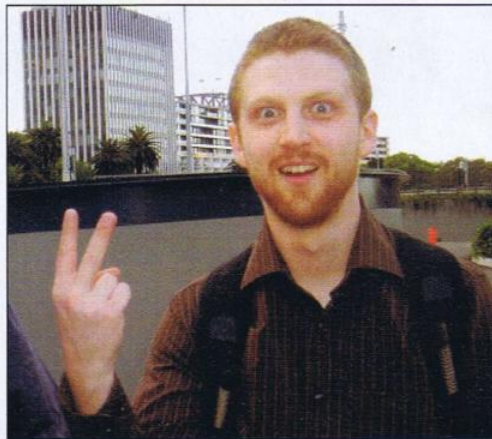
Over the last couple of days I've spent a fair bit of time reading through back issues of Hyper. Ostensibly the reason was to find the best Hyper captions ever for an upcoming feature, but I also found myself dwelling on the nature of the reviewing system in this, and indeed any, games magazine. You see, an opinion of a game is always going to be just that - an opinion. Even if an expert in the genre reviews a game (which is almost always our goal), subjectivity is part and parcel of the process, and don't let anyone convince you otherwise. It's not a bad thing; it just means there's no such thing as a "right" review or a "wrong" review. Sure, you can be factually correct or incorrect, but the meat of a review is born of a particular writer's own opinion, and gaming being the complex interactive medium that it is, there's a great deal of scope for individual experiences and interpretations.

What I'm getting at is - the score is not the be all and end all of a review. It's a necessary evil that boils down a knowledge base and set of experiences into a quantifiable meter. It's the words that give it context; that really help you understand where the writer is coming from, and whether you're likely to agree or not. Knowing the writer and being able to trust their opinion when it comes to game reviews is thus paramount, so even if you don't agree with their opinion, you can respect it. This is why Hyper isn't about being a faceless game reviewing automaton - it's about the people, as well as the games. If you just want the facts, go read a press release. But if you want to be entertained and part of a community, read Hyper. And as always, if you want to offer a counterpoint to something we've said, hop onto the forums or send us an email.

I guess all this ruminating ties back in to my original caption search. It's a real privilege to work on a magazine that not only has heritage and honest opinions, but can also make you laugh out loud. And believe me, trawling through some of the old issues - there's some absolute captioning gold.

There's plenty more to talk about when it comes to scoring games and the review system, but I'll leave that until next month. Enjoy!

Cam Shea >> Editor



[above] Pictured: Vivian. Not pictured: Wilks - cos he sucks

HYPER >>

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WRITE TO HYPER!

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HYPER CREW MONTHLY TOP 5 GAMES

Cam Shea - CEO

1. Half-Life 2 - PC
"Game of 2004 - Easy"
2. Mario Power Tennis - GCN
3. Gran Turismo 4 - PS2
4. Guilty Gear X2 Reload - Xbox
5. PictoChat - Nintendo DS

Malcolm Campbell - Senior Creative Chieftain

1. GTA: San Andreas - PS2
"Amazing. Just when you think you've seen it all, blau! Surprise!"
2. Football Manager 2005 - Mac office LAN
3. Half-Life 2 - I wish :-(
4. Guilty Gear X2 Reload - Xbox
5. Street Fighter 3: 3rd Strike - Xbox

Daniel Wilks - Co-executive Vice President

1. KOTOR II: The Sith Lords - Xbox
"Great story, great characters"
2. Vampire the Masquerade: Bloodlines - PC
3. Pirates - PC
4. Guilty Gear X2 Reload - Xbox
5. Mario Power Tennis - GCN

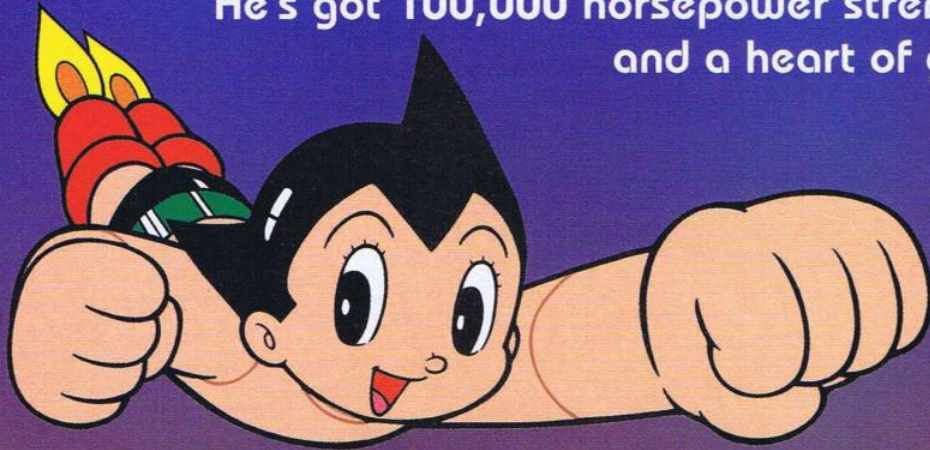
Toadovsky - Musicological Adviser

1. Half-Life 2 - PC
"Good game, poor physics. When you have a Phd in 'Super Science Knowledge' it's hard to be impressed"
2. Pikmin 2 - GCN
3. Paper Mario 2 - GCN
4. Need for Speed Underground 2 - Xbox
5. Scrabble with porn stars - NAC

Here comes ASTROBOY!

The Original
1980s
Series

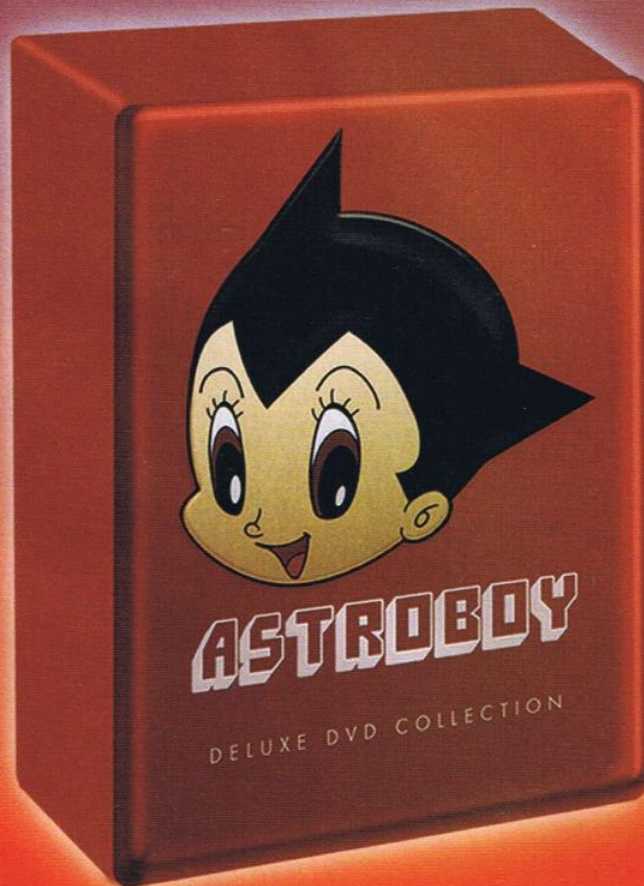
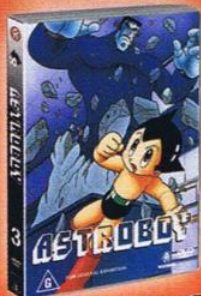
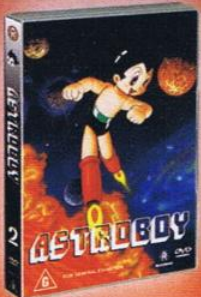
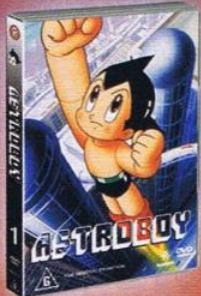
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IN THE NEWS: Amos's family tree traced back to Adam & Eve / 20ft robot rampages through Redfern, destroys Hyper HQ



FUJI

ATARI BACK IN THE CONSOLE RACE!

Let's take it back to the old school

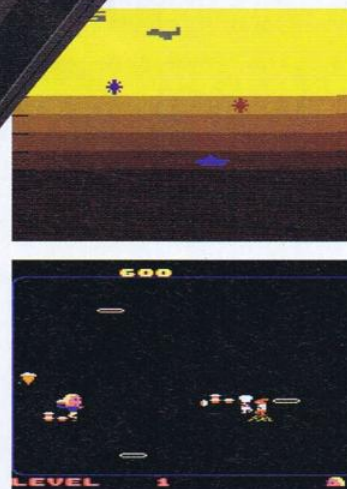
Way back in the day, before Link was even a gleam in Shiggy's eye, one company dominated the home console landscape. That company was Atari, and their systems were the phenomenally popular Atari 2600 and the Atari 7800. It was a simpler time. Pac-Man Fever was racing up the charts, the sweat band was fashion dejour and gamers were known as "masters of the stick". It was in this environment that many of the games that are now

retro classics were first brought into chunky pixelated life.

It's been 20 years since the Atari 7800 first hit the streets, and Atari are getting into the spirit of things with the announcement of the Atari Flashback Classic Game Console, or AFCGC (pronounced aff-ker-gerk) for short. It's designed like a smaller version of the 7800, and is actually a hybrid of both the 2600 and 7800. The unit comes with two joysticks, a power supply and TV cable, as well as 20 preloaded games on the

system (there's no cart slot), including one never released title - Saboteur. Here's the full list of titles: Adventure, Air Sea Battle, Asteroids, Battlezone, Breakout, Canyon Bomber, Centipede, Crystal Castles, Desert Falcon, Food Fight, Gravitar, Haunted House, Millipede, Planet Smashers, Saboteur, Sky Diver, Solaris, Sprintmaster, Warlords and Yar's Revenge. Not bad eh? And the whole thing will only set you back \$79.95. Grab a can of Mellow Yellow and enjoy.

[left] It was all about the stickwork...



PS3

SONY & NVIDIA GETTING COSY

More details come to light on Sony's next system

Sony Computer Entertainment and NVIDIA have announced joint GPU development for the next generation Sony computer entertainment system (presumably this is PR speak for the PS3). The two companies are currently in the process of developing a custom GPU that will incorporate both the power of GeForce graphics processors and features of and compatibility with the Cell processor technology co-developed by Sony, Toshiba and IBM. The new custom GPU is slated to be used in not only their next gen console systems but also a range of broadband

ready PCs and notebooks as well as some undisclosed devices. Ken Kutaragi, a.k.a. Sony's "Mr PlayStation" was quoted as saying, "In the future, the experience of computer entertainment systems and broadband-ready PCs will be fused together to generate and transfer multi-streams of rich content simultaneously. In this sense, we have found the best way to integrate the state-of-the-art technologies from NVIDIA and SCEI. Our collaboration includes not only the chip development but also a variety of graphics development tools and middleware, essential for efficient content creation." Word.

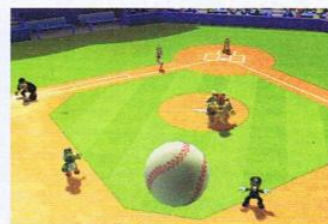
GCN

NEW NINTENDO GAMES

Kirby is back again - but do we care?

As well as releasing a few new pics of the next Zelda (see the Forum section), Nintendo also recently announced Donkey Konga 3, Mario Baseball and a new Kirby game with the working title of Kirby Adventure. There are scant details at the moment, but we're definitely most excited about

Mario Baseball. Given Nintendo's excellent treatment of both tennis and golf, we're really looking forward to their take on baseball. And after the disaster that was Kirby Air Ride, Kirby Adventure is going to have to be something special to redeem the franchise. More details as they come to light.



OVERFLOW

As a follow-up to last issue's piece on Tetsuya Mizuguchi, we've just learned that he's heading up a new publishing label at Bandai (called qb), through which his Q Entertainment development studio will release their games. Speaking of which, his first PSP title Lumines (hands-on next issue) will feature music by Shinichi Osawa, who you may know from our favourite Japanese electronica group EVER - Mondo Grosso! Wicked!

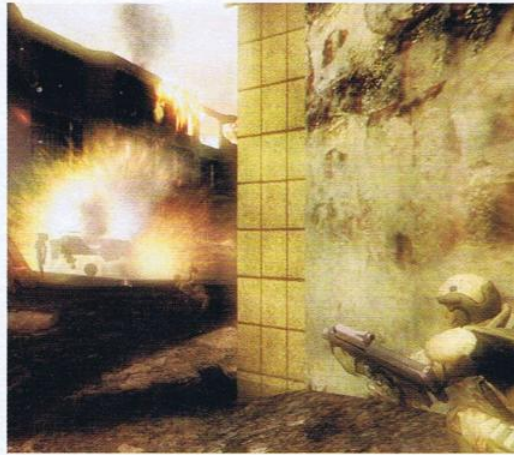
KOEI have announced they're working on a PS3 game to tie in with the film Oni. Cooler still, Oni the film is actually based on a script by the late great Akira Kurosawa, which Akira's son Hisao Kurasawa and game producer Kou Shibusawa will be completing. The film is set in 16th century Japan and will mark Hisao Kurasawa's directorial debut. Both the game and film are due in 2006.

As we mentioned in the Mail section, MGS3 will be getting some extras for the Oz release. There's Dual Mode which allows the player to play through the game's boss battles separately, and Demo Theatre which lets you watch through all the cutscenes. Word is that there will be other additions so watch this space.

THQ have purchased Australian dev house Blue Tongue Entertainment. The move is aimed at strengthening THQ's internal development capabilities, and seems like a good fit for the company. After all, THQ seem to be moving more and more into licensed properties these days - an area that Blue Tongue have plenty of experience in.

New Zealand's OFLC have banned Postal 2 from sale, with hefty fines in place for those that possess or sell the game. As you've no doubt heard, the game is offensive for the sake of being offensive, and we're more than happy to see it banned. After all, it's preventing rubbish like this from being sold that the classification system is for. Now, how about America's Ten Most Wanted?

Namco's Monolith studio have confirmed that Xenosaga and Baten Kaitos will both be appearing on Nintendo DS sometime in the future. Great news for RPG fans.



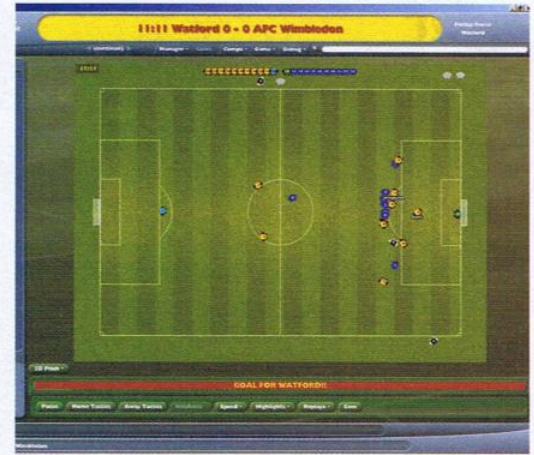
BAN

NO AMOS LOVE

One pissed off mascot

In a move sure to anger our resident mascot and Korean Love God, Amos "Wilkeson Jr" Hong, South Korea has recently decided to ban Ghost Recon 2 on both PS2 and Xbox. The reason for the banning is quite simple - the sequels take place in the near future in a conflict with Korea. Whilst no official statements have been made to the press by the Korean government it can be safely assumed that the plot of the game was not seen to portray Korea and the Korean people in a positive light, much like the way that any game involving Nazis is edited to remove such content in Germany.

In defending the game's storyline an Ubisoft representative has been quoted as saying, "when we developed the story background, we aimed at staying away from key current or specific events while still having a reasonable setting for a conflict." Whilst the current ban won't have too much effect on global sales due to the relatively small number of PS2 and Xbox consoles in Korea it could prove to be quite damaging when the PC version is released in 2005 as South Korea is one of the largest PC gaming markets in the world due to the prevalence of cheap broadband and professional gaming culture.



BAN II

CHINA HATES SOCCER MANAGER

No stat screens for you!

In another interesting bit of banning news, China has recently banned Soccer Manager 2005 (Football Manager 2005) the football management sim created by Sports Interactive, as the game classifies Taiwan, Hong Kong, Macau and Tibet as countries and not as Chinese territories. The potentially seditious game has been banned outright and any website offering downloads of the game will be fined up to US\$1210 (\$1575AUD) per download and cyber-cafes that "fail to prevent patrons from downloading, installing or playing the game" will be levied with a fine of US\$1815 (\$2360AUD).

The main reason for the banning is that China views Taiwan, Hong Kong and Macau as official Chinese territories even though Taiwan has been politically separate from the communist country for 55 years. The problem with the classification of countries is further exacerbated by the fact that Tibet is called Chinese Tibet in Soccer Manager 2005, something that the Chinese authorities feels makes Tibet look like an equal to China, an idea they strongly dispute.

WINNERS

HYPER 134

TONY HAWK'S UNDERGROUND 2

- Petya Peneva, Ultimo, NSW
- Nathan King, Dimboola, VIC
- Joseph Davis, Port Macquarie, NSW
- Joanne Emery, Dry Creek, SA
- Cherie Stokes, Carindale, QLD

MAGIC UNHINGED

- Cameron Faulks, Mickleham, VIC
- Tenika Evison, Mittagong, NSW
- Matthew Scorch, Parkdale, VIC
- Sam Chesterfield-Evans, Busselton, WA
- Adam Williams, Randwick, NSW
- Andrew Turner, Mt Gambier, SA

STUDIO GHIBLI DVDS

- Lee O'Neill, Dubbo, NSW
- Edward del Villar, Hornsby, NSW
- Scott Tindall, Werribee, VIC

CAPTION THIS!

PART 63

Come on, make us laugh. Just send your funny screen captions to us at captionthis@next.com.au with Caption This Part 62 in the subject line.



No Voldo entries allowed - that would be too easy...

Bad Cop No Doughnut

DANIEL WILKS - THE WORLD'S MOST DANGEROUS DEPUTY EDITOR



With the recent influx of Hollywood remakes of Asian films and the continuing trend of games

studios making pretty bad games based on movie licenses I was pondering why it is that we haven't seen any games based on films remade from Japanese stock in the last few years. It only seems logical that we should. Of course a Ring game, or The Grudge would be an unplayable but undeniably moody little piece and a game based on the upcoming Dark Water would only have you looking at water marks and puddles (as well as a cute little bag) for the entire play time. Not exactly the most thrilling experience.

Another Hollywood trend at the moment is making remakes of 70s and 80s TV shows and films. Maybe games should jump on the same bandwagon for licenses. Sure we already have crappy Starsky & Hutch, Dukes of Hazard and Knight Rider games but I'm talking about delving a little deeper than that. Rockstar has already announced their The Warriors game but there are some other gems that deserve star treatment. What about a Black Belt Jones game in which you play the coolest man of all time, big Jim Kelly, the man who, in an era of perfectly spherical afros had perhaps the most perfect. Using your astounding karate skills and ability to mack the pants off every woman, Jones (Belt to his friends) has to stick it to the man in this 16 hour non-linear beat 'em up. Or maybe Dolemite: The Game, in which players take the role of a fat and hideously ugly but rather funny pimp/bad karate proponent and must use their army of kung fu ho's to once again stick it to the man. Even better, we could have a game based on the unknown classic Welcome Home Brother Charles. After enduring all manner of trials in prison, a proud black man decides to get his own back against the establishment with his enormous prehensile penis. As Brother Charles, it will be up to the player to get revenge on those what done him wrong and, of course, stick it to the man, or more precisely, to the man's wife.

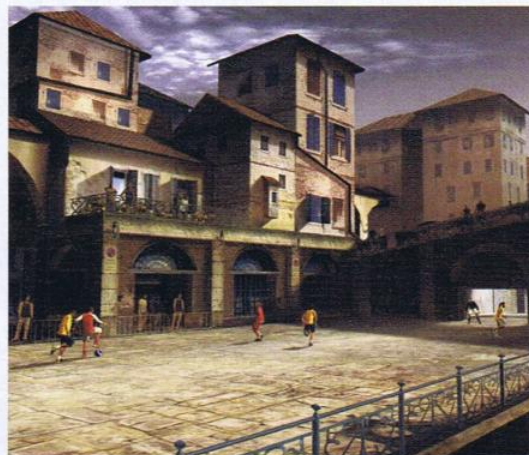
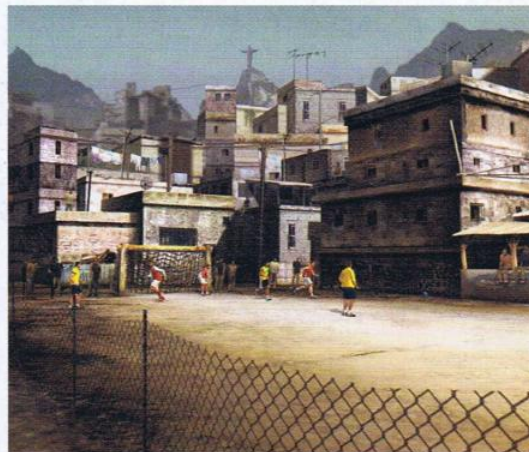
FIRST LOOK SCREENS! BLAU!

Quake IV PC Developer: Raven Software



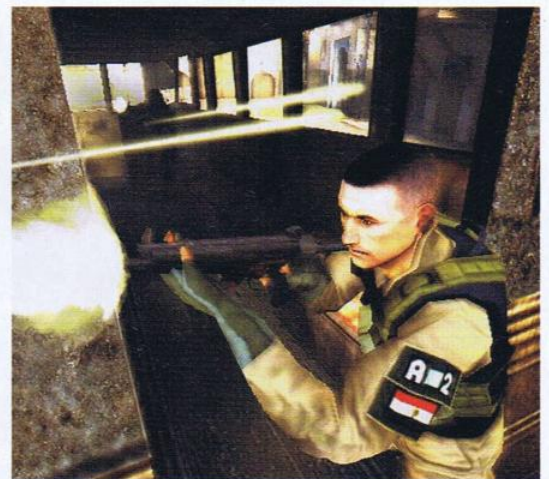
FIRST LOOK! BLAU!

FIFA Street Console Developer: EA Canada



FIRST LOOK! BLAU!

Rainbow Six 4 PS2/Xbox/PC Developer: Red Storm/Ubisoft Montreal





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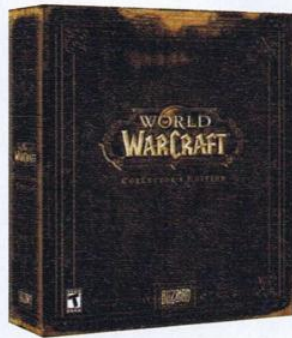
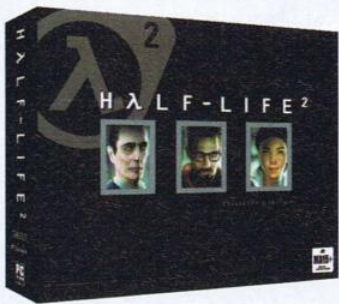
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THE ULTIMATE PC SETUP!

In the past Hyper has bought you some kick-ass prizes but this month we are proud to present **THE BIGGEST PRIZE IN HYPER HISTORY!** That's right, this month we bring you a state of the art PC, all the peripherals you could want, as well as enough games to keep you busy for 2005 and beyond!

We have a lot of people to thank for this prize: Sony, Abit, Altech, Western Digital, Thrustmaster, Creative, Vivendi, Microsoft, Logitech, Ubisoft, Eidos, Atari, Samsung, Thermaltake, Red Ant, Activision and more!



THE TOTAL PRIZE LIST:

- Pentium 4 3.0Ghz +
- 1Gb RAM
- Abit IC7-G Mobo
- Abit RX800XT video card
- Creative Audigy ZS Platinum Pro
- Western Digital Raptor 10000 RPM 73Gb HDD
- Microsoft Optical Desktop Elite (Bluetooth)
- Thermaltake Xaser 5 Damier
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Nintendo DS

We're touched...



Well, as of going to print there's still no sign of a price or release date for the Nintendo DS in Australia (although hopefully there will be by the time you read this), but you can rest assured it won't be far away. We've had our hands on a machine and several of the launch titles for a while now, and have been playing the hell out of it in order to bring you our hands-on look at the system. It's been such a chore, honestly. The things we do...

IMPRESSIONS

The unit itself is quite large, measuring 5.85" wide, 3.33" long and 1.13" high. Comparatively, it's about the size of two GBA SPs side by side. This isn't something that's going to fit all that comfortably in your pocket, but that's not to say it's cumbersome, as it's not.

We quite like the DS's design too. It has angular lines and a silver finish that seem to be a nod back to the 80s (and perhaps the Game & Watch), while still being sleek enough to fit into the design expectations of a new generation of gamers. That said, we wouldn't be at all surprised if this was a Mark I design and Nintendo eventually bring out something slightly smaller and sexier.

In terms of ergonomics, it's very comfortable to hold and a whole lot less cramped in the hand than the GBA SP, with a much bigger D-pad and shoulder buttons. It



would have been nice if the face buttons weren't so tiny, but it's about time Nintendo went back to a SNES style button system with four face buttons, so we're happy.

You can tell as soon as you boot up the DS that Nintendo are going for a more mature tone for this system. Upon turning the machine on (which is near instantaneous) you'll reach the

[above] Comparison - like apples and erm, apples from the future that taste like candy and come with a stylus...

main menu. There's a clock and calendar on the top screen, and play options/settings on the bottom screen, giving you quick touch screen access to any DS or GBA games in the slots, as well as Pictochat and DS Download Play (which allows you to play

▶▶ The DS screens are crisp, colourful and uniformly lit

PLAYING WITH STYLE The DS stylus slots neatly into a compartment next to the DS cartridge slot, but fortunately the retail package also comes with a spare, which we recommend sewing into the lining of your cap - just to be safe. The feel of the stylus is definitely one of the standout features of the DS - it's accurate and is a pleasure to use. Nintendo have also included an alternative to the stylus (pictured). It's a wrist strap with a little nub that you can secure to your thumb, allowing you to simply run your thumb across the touch screen. This method will definitely come in handy for FPSs and the like, but at the moment it feels a little ungainly next to the refined touch of the stylus.



Hyper Crew Impressions

Cam Shea

Editor

■ God. Is there no bad cop working here at Hyper? Just have a read through all the impressions, they're all so unanimously positive! And while I'd love to be the voice of dissent, the reality is that I too, feel that the DS has the potential to be another feather in Nintendo's cap. And all this positive thinking - despite how uninspired much of the US launch lineup was! The reason is simple. Software like PictoChat and games like *Feel The Magic* and the *Mario 64* mini-games are an early indication of just how refreshing it is when something genuinely interesting comes along. Let's just hope developers around the world rise to the challenge.

Daniel Wilks

Deputy Editor

■ It's hard for me to write about the DS without sounding like a raving fanboy but you really need to know where I'm coming from to understand how impressed I am with the DS. I look at the machine and all I see is potential, the potential to make some truly outstanding and revolutionary games. All you need to do is look at what the handheld has to offer and you can't help but agree. As it stands there is no other format available that offers a touch-screen, built in microphone (making voice command possible), two screens and built in wireless communication. Sure, we probably won't be seeing anything within the first year of release that will take full advantage of these features but when developers finally cotton onto the idea of so many control and interaction options the possibilities become impressive to say the least. I look at the DS and see games in which interacting with the environment becomes an actual physical ability rather than a button press. Imagine a game, an RPG for example, in which the player needs to forge a person's signature to get access to some valuable information. Instead of simply finding a forger to do the work for you or simply building up a skill to do it, wouldn't it be far more interesting to be able to pull out a stylus and try it yourself? There may be some initial frustration trying to get it right but wouldn't the end result be so much more satisfying?

Similarly you could play a gridiron game where instead of controlling the individual players you choose your plays between turns and direct your team by drawing plays on the screen. The microphone opens up possibilities of entirely voice controlled games or even something like Vib Ribbon in which the player's voice, its pitch and timbre decide the layout of the stage.

Ratings aside, the DS is still an impressive little machine. Around 10 hours of battery life will never go astray and the unit sits comfortably in the hand. The small redesign post E3 has done a world of good, changing the then uncomfortable shoulder buttons to a standard and comfortable configuration and all of the face buttons seem to have been moved slightly making them sit more naturally beneath the thumb. The only real gripe with the design of the unit is the fact that it feels a little too plastic - not nearly as solid as the SP or even the original GBA.

Daniel Staines

Editor - Total Gamer

■ As I expected, I'm more impressed with what the DS seems capable of rather than what it can do at the moment. Don't get me wrong: Mario 64 and Metroid Prime: Hunters are good fun in their own ways, but they don't really display the kind of dramatic innovation implied by the DS's unique features. PictoChat, on the other hand, is totally goddamn awesome. THAT, my friends, is where the future of the DS lies - in sending obscene doodles to your friends and chatting to complete strangers on public transport. Why? Because it showcases exactly the kind of stuff the DS can do that other consoles can't. It shows that Nintendo isn't afraid to take advantage of their radical new machine to create compelling and original software that isn't just "Mario 64 + Stylus".

I like the DS - it has enormous potential. We're just going to have to wait a while until it's fulfilled, that's all

Bryce McDonough
Japanese Correspondent

■ As I'm writing this, Nintendo have just launched the DS in Japan, and the initial response has been quite strong. In the lead up to the launch, Nintendo held several events around Japan to show off their new toy. Called "Touch!DS", they were a great day out with free admission and you could play



multiplayer games using one cart). From the main menu you can also access numerous settings, such as the alarm, setting whether to view GBA games on the top or bottom screen, colour scheme options, and calibration for the touch screen. Of course, you can set the machine to go straight into a game if you'd prefer not to go through the menu.

Play a game and you'll notice just how crisp, colourful and uniformly lit the DS screens are. The reasons for this are twofold. Firstly, while the SP screen is front-lit, the DS's screens are both back-lit. Secondly, the DS screens have a .24mm dot pitch, so the pixels are more densely packed than on the GBA. Thus, the actual viewing area is smaller when playing a GBA game on the DS, and the picture looks noticeably sharper. You'll also notice that not only is the viewing area smaller, but GBA games on the DS are letterboxed. This is because the DS has 256x192 pixel displays, as opposed to the GBA's 240x160 screen.

As you probably know, the DS has two CPUs - an ARM9 and ARM7, with reasonable 3D capabilities and can display 260,000 colours (as opposed to the GBA's 32,768). Definitely a big step up. Despite having two screens and two CPUs, you're still looking at close to a 10 hour battery life for the DS, although a full recharge will take about 4 hours.

Sound has been given a

shot in the arm too. Not only does the system output stereo sound through the twin speakers on either side of the top screen (as well as faux surround in games that support it), but this time Nintendo have sensibly included a standard headphone jack. Huzzah for Shiggy! There's also the promise of voice recognition/interactivity via the embedded microphone, but the only title we have that supports mic related stuff is Feel The Magic, and that's more gimmicky than anything else (you can record your voice at the title screen and one mini-game requires you to blow candles out using the mic), so we can't really make a call on voice

OVER 1 MILLION UNITS SOLD...

The American launch has been a huge success for Nintendo, with most stores halting pre-orders a couple of months out from launch, and a sell-through of 500,000 units in the first week. By the time you read this, Nintendo expect to have sold over 1 million units in North America. To put things in perspective though, during the Thanksgiving week launch, although Nintendo sold 500,000 units of the DS, they ALSO sold over 800,000 GBAs and GBA SPs, so it looks like the humble GBA is still going to be around for quite some time to come. Let's just hope that developers are brave enough to embrace the lower install base and much more exciting possibilities of the DS. We'll have a good enough indication of the level and quality of developer support soon enough. By the end of March, the DS library will feature 20-25 games, and there's another 125 in development worldwide.

The Japanese launch has also been successful, with around 500,000 units selling in the first four days.

interactivity yet.

What we can tell you, however, is how seamless and simple using the wireless multiplayer functions are. Connecting to other machines is as straightforward as entering a chat room in PictoChat or starting/joining a multiplayer game in Metroid Prime: Hunters. The range is 30-100 feet, which was confirmed by our scientific tests (i.e. sending each other rude pictures in PictoChat from across the office).

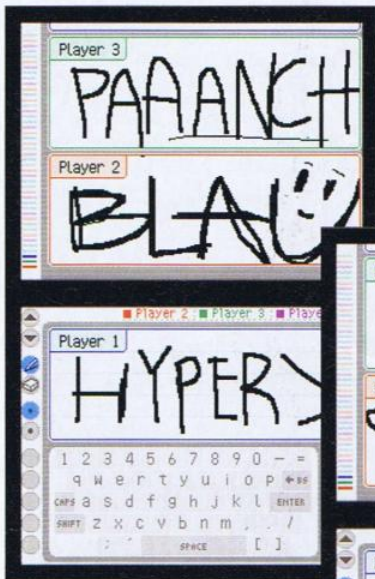
All in all, the Nintendo DS is a very intriguing and likeable machine. Once developers start really utilising its unique strengths, we're going to be in for a very fun ride indeed.

THE GAME CARDS The DS game cards, as Nintendo have taken to calling them, are small, cute and light - and as the photo attests, sized somewhere in between a GBA cart and an N-Gage game. We're also very impressed with the game cases for the DS. Forget that cardboard rubbish we've put up with on GBA for so many years - the DS cases are made from hard plastic and are basically like slightly fatter, slightly shorter GCN cases. We like.



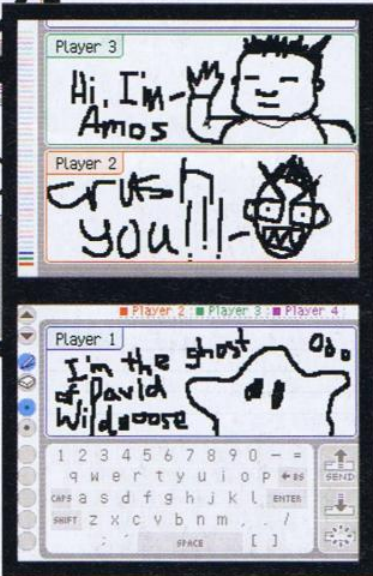
The Games

We'll have full reviews of the DS games closer to the Australian launch, but for now, here's an initial rundown on the more interesting of the US launch titles.



PictoChat

■ This, right here, is the highlight of the launch package. PictoChat is an unassuming little program that allows you to communicate with any friends within range. Just setup a chat room and up to 16 people can join in. From there you can either type stuff in using the QWERTY keyboard or simply draw/write on the screen. Once you're happy with your message, hit send and everyone else gets to see it. Right now we only have three DS's in the office, but once everyone has one, PictoChat is going to be riotously good fun. And odds are the system will be banned from classrooms across Australia within months of local release.



!!! The DS is backwards compatible with GBA games but not Game Boy or Game Boy Colour. Time to move on folks!

anything - as long as you were willing to line up for it (par for the course in Japan). The biggest shocks for me were the quality and sensitivity of the touch screen, plus the miniscule size of the new "cartridges". The games on display were all finished or near completion, and there was no doubt that Nintendo were well prepared for this launch. Industry reports in Japan are measuring up the DS against Sony's PSP due out less than two weeks later (I'll have one by the time you read this and will be writing up some impressions for next issue), and it's very close. A lot of shop owners believe Nintendo's launch titles will give them a slight edge going into Christmas (also the target audience is younger, and only kids get Christmas presents in Japan) with strong franchises like Mario and Made in Wario leading the pack. A lot of older gamers are looking at the PSP due to its more mature image and lineup, or at both. It doesn't look like either company is going to come out on top any time soon, but any discerning gamer is going to need both anyway.

Andrew "Butters" Bulmer

Hyper writer

■ Heavier and larger than expected? Perhaps just a little after the small and lightweight design of the GBA SP, but the inclusion of a second screen and the overall added features makes it naive to think that it would be feasible to make it more compact - for the time being at least. That being said the design is sleek and modern with an obvious emphasis on ergonomics. It's no NES controller, that much is certain.

PictoChat comes included on the handheld and the enjoyment of scrawling simplistic, crude, idiotic and bizarre messages cannot be overstated. The touch screen is instantly responsive and in gameplay held up to frantic multiplayer in *Metroid Prime: Hunters* (which, incidentally, looks and runs great). *Mario 64 DS* was a great showcase with the mini-games making expert use of the touch screen.

Of course, it's all up to the software now, and believe me, GBA games with improved graphics won't cut it once you start thinking about the possibilities. Nintendo have once again hit pay dirt with hardware design. Bring on the games!



Super Mario 64 DS

■ Mario DS expands on the original game by including an extra 30 stars - bringing the total up to 150, as well as adjusting the story a little. You begin the game for instance, as Yoshi, and rather than picking up and throwing Big Bob-omb at the top of the mountain, you swallow bob-ombs he throws at you, then shoot them back. A small change certainly, but it's a nice touch that's repeated throughout the game.

The touch screen comes in to play only a little in the main game. It displays a top down map of the world you're in, and you can use it to move your character around - although we prefer using the D-pad. It's the mini-games, however, where the touch screen comes into its own. Included are traditional card games like memory and blackjack, as well as numerous puzzle and action games - 36 in all, which can be unlocked by finding the rabbits in the main game. Our favourite right now is probably "Bob-omb Squad", where you fire cannonballs out of a slingshot at bob-ombs floating down with parachutes. The mini-games are quite simply fantastic, have a really broad appeal and almost represent a game in themselves.



Stephen Farrelly

Hyper writer/Ninty fanboy

■ Having missed out on the E3 incarnation of the DS, I was very, very psyched to get my hands around the unit, which is a lot bigger than I had actually first thought. But this is a good thing, the size of it lends well to comfort and the screen is a little bigger than your SP. It also feels sleek, like nothing is overly crammed and everything is where it should be. The interface, upon starting it up, is user-friendly, clean and not much like Nintendo. It feels more grown up than what we're used to, but that's the idea methinks.

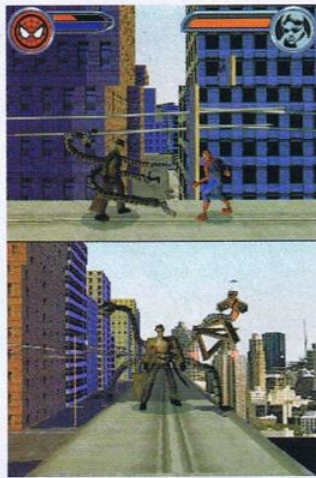
So we jumped straight into Pictochat, an obvious choice that was a lot of fun. It's extremely fast and we tested the distances out - 30 feet? No problem. I can see this working well in the classroom, though I'm not exactly sure how practical the chat software is for my demographic, but it's free and included as part of the package, so that's cool.

Firing up Mario next, I jumped straight into the main game - no loading, brilliant. This is where I bumped heads with the DS. While the touch-screen and stylus can be as precise as the original N64 analogue stick (and then some), it's difficult to use with the button layout of the system, so I switched to the D-Pad and found Mario to be ok, but not as enjoyable as it once was. But it was within the sweet embrace of the Mario 64 DS mini-games that I found love for the stylus; each game may only be small, but the enjoyment accrued from them could equal a full game. Bob-omb Slingshot was a standout and from there I was hooked.

Okay, onto the meat of the system in Metroid Prime Hunters. This game is incredible. It's difficult to master the art of using the stylus at first, so expect some adjustment, but once you've got it nailed the near mouse-like precision of utilising the touch-screen is sheer heaven. Before the DS I hated playing FPSs on handhelds, now I feel they have a new home and with the system's powerful 3D rendering technology, this could be the beginning of something big.

Nintendo needs to nurture the wireless multiplayer like nothing else, and they need to educate the average joe and explain to them how much fun the likes of MPH can be with a bunch of friends, and they need to do it soon.

So the DS is a great piece of hardware, and with the right games, could be a very successful venture for the Big N.



Spider-Man 2

■ Before you get too excited, this version of Spider-Man is much more faithful to previous GBA versions than the recent free-roaming console iteration. Thus, you'll be web swinging, wall crawling and leaping through levels from a side-on perspective, which is definitely more fun than you might think. There are some rudimentary but effective 3D effects, such as turning corners,

that show off the capabilities of the machine. In terms of using the touch screen, however, Spider-Man doesn't really do anything in real-time, instead offering you what is essentially a menu, where you can choose between different moves to assign to the R shoulder button. Tap the move and it's assigned. It's not a great game to show off the DS's possibilities, but it's fun nonetheless.

[left] Doc Ock eventually left the Big Apple to become a hentai star in Japan



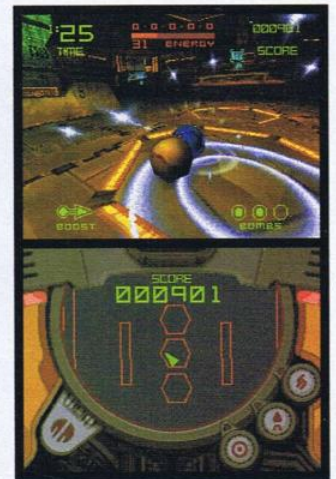
Metroid Prime Hunters: First Hunt

■ Included with the US retail packaging of the Nintendo DS was a demo of Metroid Prime: Hunters. The main draw for the demo are the three multiplayer maps for up to four players. You move forwards and backwards and strafe with either the D-pad or the face buttons (depending on whether you're right or left handed, or whether you're using the wrist strap or stylus), look around with the touch screen, jump by double tapping the screen, and fire with the shoulder buttons. At first you'll stagger around like Samus is drunk, with your viewpoint lurching as you adjust to looking with the stylus, but it's not long until finer movements become second nature. It's still not going

to compete with a keyboard and mouse, but it's a pretty cool solution nonetheless. We're also happy to report that the network functionality ran without a hitch - setting up games was very easy and lag was non-existent.

Also included are three single player training options: Regulator and Survivor which both take place on the same map and throw some enemies at you to take down, and Morph Ball which introduces you to controlling the morph ball through a nice level run-through - and feels fantastic.

So how does it look? Obviously the visuals are much plainer than in the GCN versions, but it runs well and we can't wait to get our hands on the full game.



[above] Ladell out steaming bowls of ball rolling justice



[above] Note to self: don't step on landmines to try and impress girls



Feel the Magic XY/XX

■ Feel The Magic will unfortunately be known as "Project Rub" when it arrives on our shores. It's a name that makes little sense. Why would you be "rubbing one out" in a game about wooing your dream girl? Surely "Feel Her Magic" would be the best title? Oh well, all that really matters is that this game DOES arrive on our shores. You see, it may be short, it may not have vast reservoirs of replay value, but there's gold in them that Feel The Magic hills.

Feel the Magic is essentially a weird Japanese love story. You're trying to get busy with the aforementioned girl, and this boils down to a series of mini-games, such as protecting her from charging bulls, knocking scorpions off her back, spraypainting love hearts, teasing fish out of a guy's throat (no

really), riding unicycles and more.

Perhaps our favourite one so far though, would be the mission where your rival has literally carried your girl off, hopped in his car and is racing away. You chase after him in a truck equipped with a giant slingshot and must use the wheel on the touch screen to avoid other cars on the road, while running over pedestrians to scoop them up onto your car, which you then fire at your rival using the big lever that's also on the touch screen. Hell yeah!

It's also the presentation that helps makes this game such a winner - it's very funky, sporting silhouette/cel-shaded style graphics wrapped in a retro kitsch aesthetic... with lots of people with rabbit ears. There are also some cool bonuses that you can get by having other Sega games inserted in the GBA slot. Very cool.

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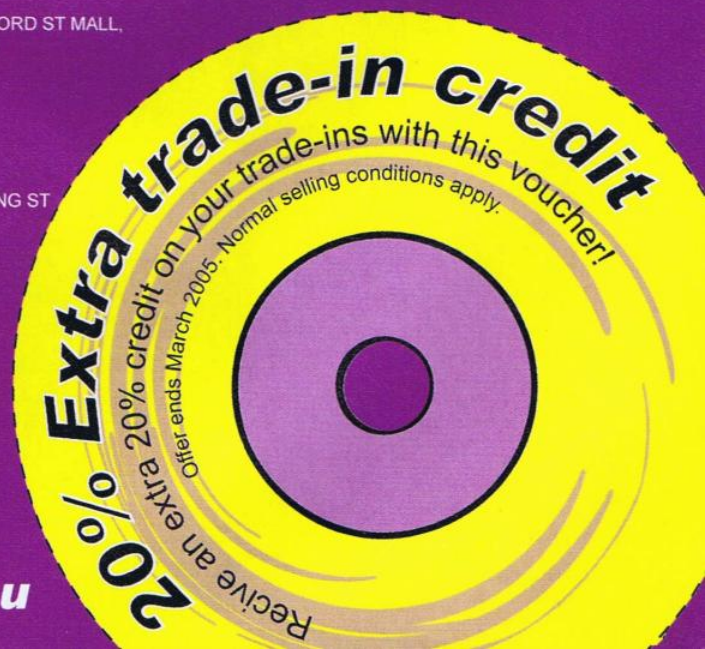
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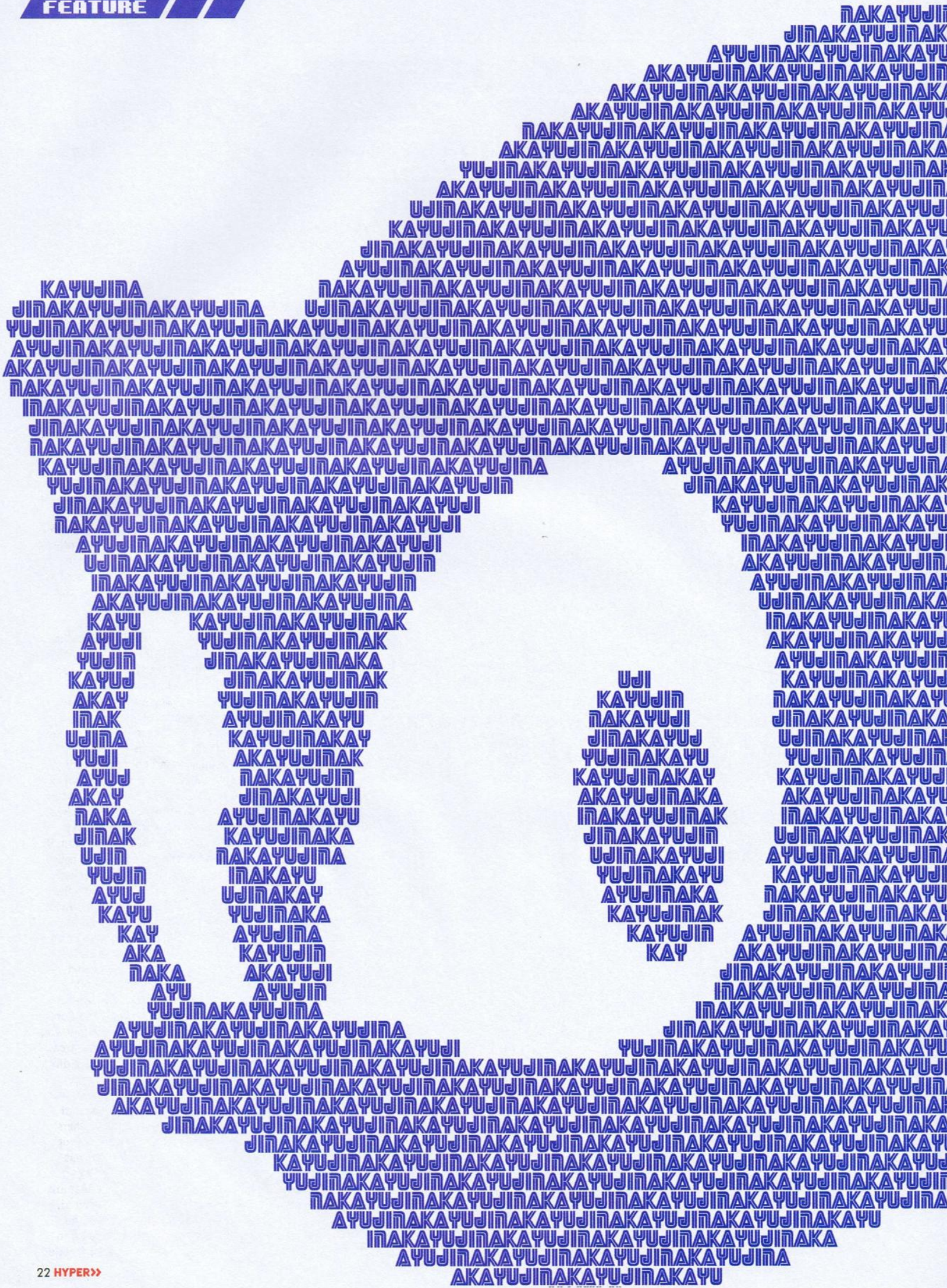
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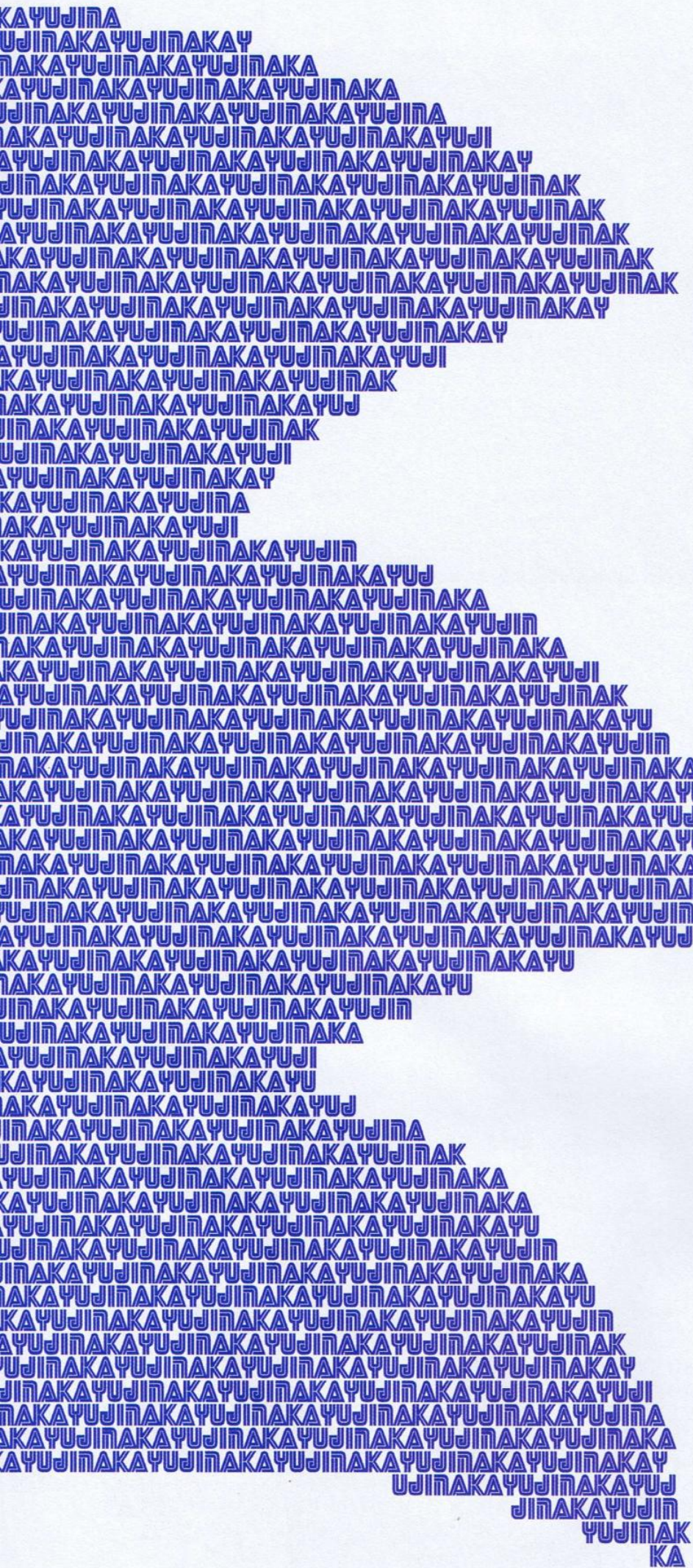
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From Hash Functions to Hedgehogs The Career of Yuji Naka

» KOSTA ANDREADIS

It would be a few years yet before polygons and textures would replace conventional two-dimensional sprite based gameplay. It's the early 1990s, 2D gaming is at its height as both the Super Nintendo and the Sega Mega Drive flourish in Western markets. By the time the Super Nintendo hit shelves, Mario had already been established as a platform gaming icon, and in many ways the face of Nintendo. So when Yuji Naka and his team released Sonic the Hedgehog for the Mega Drive its success quickly propelled the blue hedgehog to become the face of Sega in the West. Sonic's success was undeniable and it thrust Yuji Naka and his Sonic Team into the development spotlight. Naka-san didn't create Sonic with the intention of it becoming Mario's direct rival - Naka was simply commissioned by Sega to create a game that would appeal to Western audiences. With the Mega Drive's flagging sales in Japan, Naka-san embarked on a quest to create a game that would captivate the Western market and by that token become a success in Japan. So to say he succeeded would be an understatement as Sonic the Hedgehog quickly became Sega's flagship franchise.



OF CODER ORIGINS

Yuji Naka was born in 1965 in the provincial city of Osaka, Japan. As a teenager he was captivated by electronic music, in particular the works of Japanese synth pop legends Yellow Magic Orchestra and it was as a teenager that he began to play piano. Naka-san quickly gave up on the instrument when he realised he wasn't very good and instead turned his sights on using a PC to create music. He ventured into the city and bought his very own PC with the intention to create music, until he realised later on that making music in any form was a difficult task - his musical aspirations were quickly abandoned. It was around this time that Naka-san began to use his PC to play videogames, a pastime which quickly turned into a passion. He wasn't simply concerned with being entertained by this new form of interactivity, as he took it upon himself to study each game he played, how it worked and why it was designed the way it was. It was here in the early 80s that Yuji Naka's love for programming, in particular game programming, was born. As a programmer you can make something from nothing and the feeling that accompanies this accomplishment is quite exceptional, akin to omnipotence as you get to create and control the game world as you see fit. Naka-san was quite a gifted programmer but opted to skip spending four years at college to get his degree and simply hit the industry head on. His first choice for employment in the gaming industry was with Namco, who at the time were a strong force in the arcade scene. Ironically, Naka-san's lack of degree was the deciding factor in Namco passing on hiring him. After applying for many jobs and spending his free time coding, Yuji Naka was finally offered the position of entry-level coder at Sega, at a time (the mid 1980s) when the company like many others in Japan were struggling to find their feet in the shadow of Nintendo's huge success. As a programmer Naka-san was meticulous in his approach; he spent a great deal of effort ensuring all aspects of the game, in particular those that are somewhat separate from the code like graphics and sound, were of the highest order. His first programming effort for Sega was Girl's Garden, a title that was originally going to be used by Sega as part of the training program for female



[below] Thankfully Sonic's ring is nowhere in sight. Yeah yeah, one day we'll do a non-ring related Sonic caption...



employees. However the title was deemed to be too good for a training program and Naka-san was commissioned to refine the game for a commercial release.

DESIGNER, PROGRAMMER AND PRODUCER

Throughout the 80s Naka-san was gaining respect as a programmer and designer and his credits during this period included renowned RPG series Phantasy Star and coding duties on titles like Space Harrier and Outrun for the Master System. During this period Naka-san felt a bit disillusioned as to why his games were selling a lot less than Nintendo's, a feeling that was well known at all levels within Sega. When the Mega Drive was released in 1989 Sega put forth the challenge to their employees to create a title that would become a huge success in the Western market - a game they hoped could become synonymous with Sega. So although Naka-san began developing his game without the intention of creating a direct rival to Mario, it quickly became apparent to Sega when Sonic the Hedgehog was taking shape that this was indeed the game and character they were looking for. Sonic the Hedgehog was an entirely different style of platformer to Mario, one of the original design concepts was to create a game where the player would be in control of the speed as opposed to the uniform speed found in the Mario series. Naka-san was a fan of Miyamoto and his team of

developers at Nintendo, and instead of trying to imitate them with Sonic he felt it was best to create an alternative. In his game the sense of speed would become a primary design focus and in choosing their star they looked to the hedgehog as once it began rolling, much like in the game, it was invulnerable. The colour blue was chosen for the character as it was the colour of the company's logo, and the name Sonic came from a fellow Sega employee's reaction to the speed of an early game demonstration Naka-san gave his fellow employees.

THE BIRTH OF SONIC TEAM

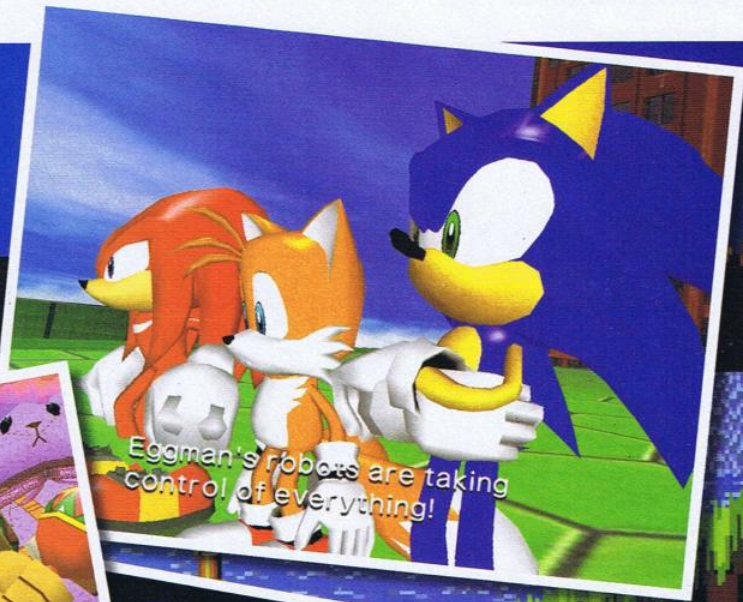
In the minds of gamers worldwide the sense of rivalry between Nintendo and Sega seemed to be an omnipresent force, but Naka-san recalls the time when Sonic and Mario dominated the sales charts as fruitful for both companies. He saw

to the United States and work on the sequels there. The Sonic Team we see today is quite different from the one we saw at its inception as Yuji Naka remains the only member left of the original team. As people departed and came aboard Sonic Team, Yuji Naka would always serve as the main creative force in the group and as the years went by Sega would promote him to the position he still holds today as the President of Sonic Team with a team of developers that has expanded to over one hundred working in both the USA and Japan. These days Yuji Naka finds himself overseeing quite a number of development projects within Sonic Team as well as overseeing the day to day operation of the studio, leaving him little time to have much creative input on the latest titles from Sonic Team. Whenever Naka-san is promoted he secretly wishes they demote him so

In his game the sense of speed would become a primary design focus...

Sonic the Hedgehog as a different style of game to that of Mario and he was happy to see both games become successful for different reasons, so when he went to work on the sequel he never felt that he had to top Miyamoto's creations. The 15-man team responsible for Sega's new mascot dubbed themselves Sonic Team, with Yuji Naka in the position of lead programmer. Yuji Naka would serve as both the lead programmer and producer for the sequels to Sonic the Hedgehog but due to some internal disputes at Sega Japan, Naka-san would move

he can go back to coding games. In fact, during his spare time Naka-san also saw fit to create one of the very first console emulators, as he developed a way to get such NES titles as Dr. Mario working on the Mega Drive. Created simply for his own personal amusement, Naka-san felt a sense of accomplishment in the fact that he was playing an in-house developed Nintendo title on a Sega console, a feat that would prove to be quite ironic for himself and his development studio after Sega's demise as a home console manufacturer.



In the mid 90s, a short time before Sony would rise to market dominance with their PlayStation console, Sonic Team would find themselves with a new sense of creative direction as they abandoned their blue hedgehog to begin work on an entirely new creation. NiGHTS into Dreams would serve as the last game that Yuji Naka would be lead programmer on, and would be the development studio's most critically acclaimed game to date and proof that Sonic Team were one of the most creative and innovative forces within the industry. Sadly the title failed to reach the same commercial success as Sonic the Hedgehog did but sparked a few years of intense creativity within the team with titles like Burning Rangers, Samba De Amigo, Chu-Chu Rocket and the immensely popular Phantasy Star Online. The latter brought the burgeoning world of online PC gaming to home consoles in a way never before seen. From this point on Yuji Naka would begin to serve as producer on all of Sonic Team's creations, most notably of which, the Sonic Adventure series, would see Sega's blue mascot enter the 3D realm on Sega's last home console, the Dreamcast.

BRANCHING OUT

Since Sega bowed out of the home console race, Sonic Team began to shift focus on developing for both Nintendo's home and handheld consoles. Yuji Naka has found the transition to be quite painless as

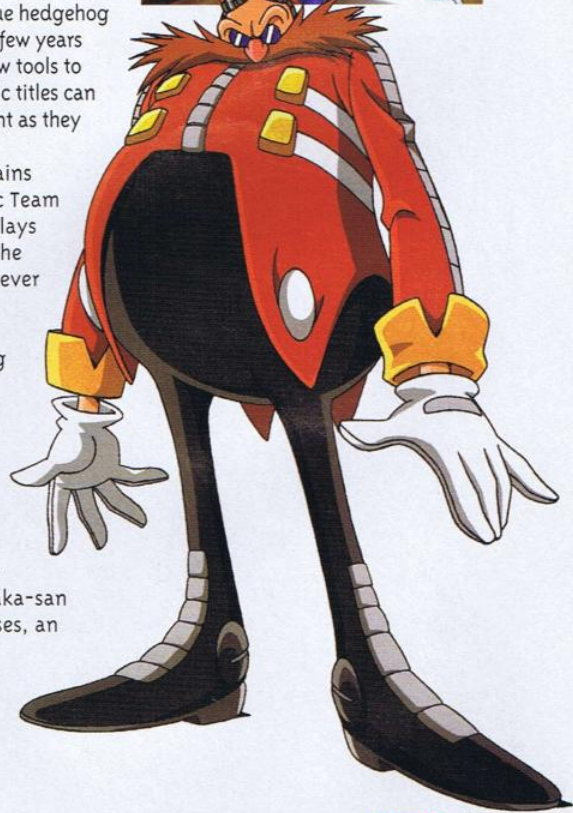


his great admiration for the works of Nintendo's Shigeru Miyamoto resulted in a console that became home to both Sonic and Mario in 2001. Since then Sonic Team have become a multi-platform developer creating titles for PlayStation 2, Xbox and GameCube. To Naka-san this would prove to be a definite sign that the market today is quite different to the one he worked in when he began his career. Today a lot of money is required to create the complex visuals and game worlds and consequently corporations and the financiers have a lot more input into game creation. As such developers like Naka-san are finding it increasingly difficult to create the games they want to create and if it were up to him, a radical shift back to the mid 1980s would be a welcome change. Single developers could focus on all aspects of game creation from design to coding to graphics and audio - working with NES and Master System hardware of course, because sometimes in order to take a step forward you need to take a step back.

Of the newest technology available on the market Naka-san is most impressed with devices such as Sony's EyeToy, the PSP handheld and the Nintendo DS. Naka's view is that the EyeToy provides a very simple input device that allows people who don't normally play games the chance to enjoy the experience. The Nintendo DS on the other hand, with its dual-screen and touch screen

has opened up the door for new creative concepts which Sonic Team has embraced with their quirky handheld dating game, Feel the Magic: XY/XX. Naka-san was quite impressed when the handheld unit was unveiled to developers and felt a real sense of something new for developers everywhere to flex their creative muscles on. Over the last few years Sonic Team's output has been relatively hit and miss, most notably with the Sonic franchise. Naka-san is a firm believer that the blue hedgehog will be around for quite a few years yet and hopefully with new tools to work with like the DS, Sonic titles can once again be as important as they once were.

Today, Yuji Naka remains President of Sega's Sonic Team where he oversees and plays the role of producer on the studio's output. It was never his ambition to become the leader or even serve as a producer overseeing the development of multiple titles; his heart remains to this day in programming, and being directly involved in the creation of the game. Outside of Sega the past few years have found Naka-san racing Ferraris and Lotuses, an activity that has quickly grown into a passion - an experience he hopes to one day become the basis of a Sonic Team game. <<



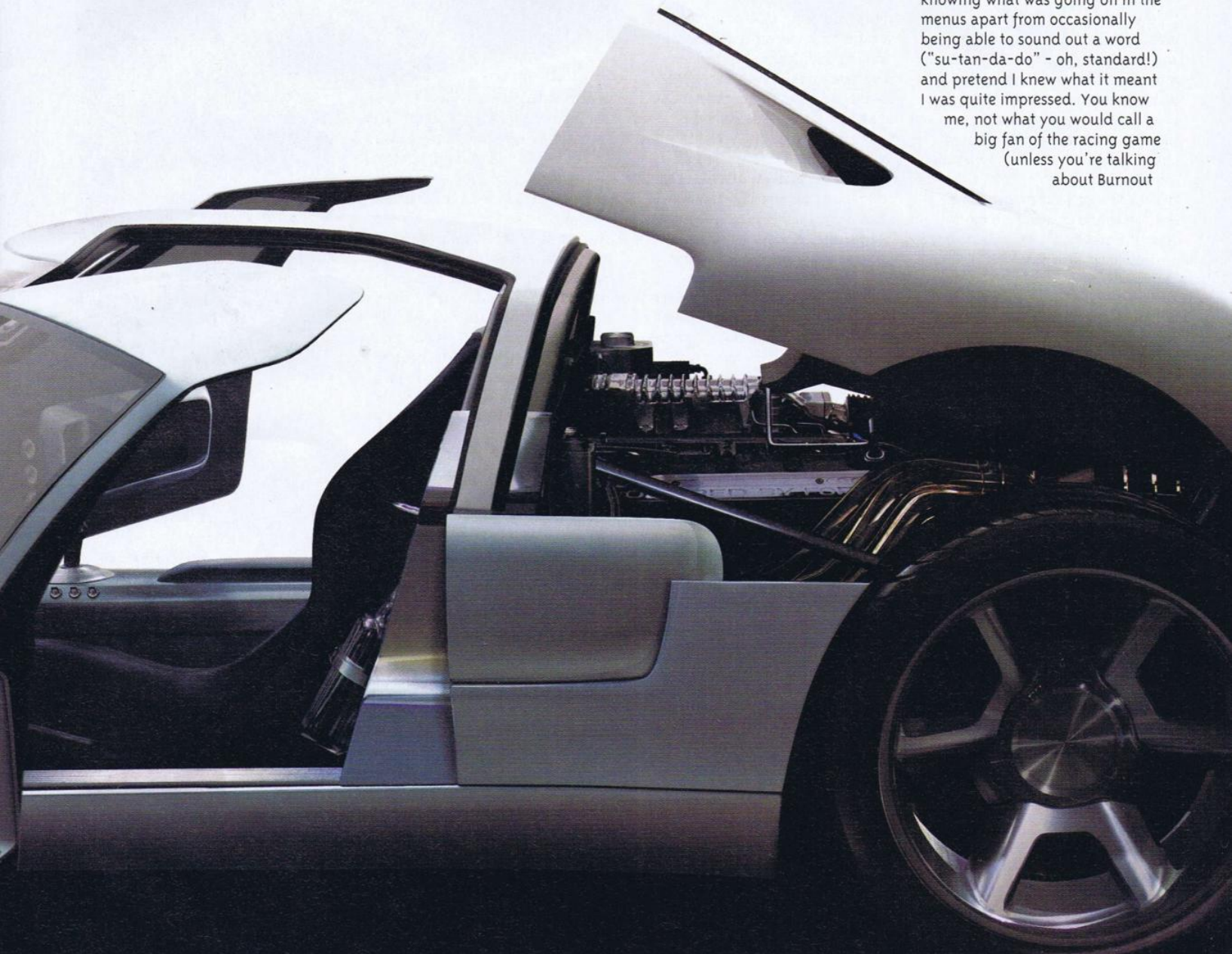
gran turismo 4

Available on PS2 ■ Category: Racing sim ■ Players: 1-6 ■ Developer: Polyphony Digital ■ Available: Early 2005



Cam: Daniel and I were lucky enough to take a trip out to Sony recently to spend a day with some Japanese code for Gran Turismo 4. Rather than hit you with a dry and uninteresting preview pointing out GT4's features and presenting you with much of the information that's already available out there, we've decided it would be more interesting (for us and you) to give you more of a hands-on report. Thus, this conversational piece is less about the numbers and more about what it's actually like to play the game. It's getting damn close too, and whilst the build we played was far from feature complete (and took a bit of experimentation to fight our way through some of the Japanese menus), it gave us a good insight into the game. So dude, what did you think?

Daniel: Aside from not actually knowing what was going on in the menus apart from occasionally being able to sound out a word ("su-tan-da-do" - oh, standard!) and pretend I knew what it meant I was quite impressed. You know me, not what you would call a big fan of the racing game (unless you're talking about Burnout



3 and then I will own your ass) but I can actually see myself playing GT4. Especially when I get to the stage when I can unlock some of the sweet, sweet muscle cars. They might handle like dogs (I've been assured that that is an accurate representation of how these cars handle in real life) but hell, they at least look like something that should accelerate like a fat person running towards a slice of chocolate cake.

Cam: I guess that was the cool thing about the code we were playing. We had a massive range of cars to choose from right off the bat, which gave us ample opportunity

When you take a corner close to a line of spectators, they all lean back as you careen past

to really taste the differences between the various classes and makes. You went straight for the muscle cars (to comic effect I might add), whereas I got stuck into the rally cars and ultra-fast sports cars. When there's somewhere in the vicinity of 650 cars in a game you don't really expect them to accurately model the handling of every single one, but even more than the previous Gran Turismos, the subtlety and variations in handling was impressive - as it should be considering the handling and physics have been rebuilt from the ground up for this game.

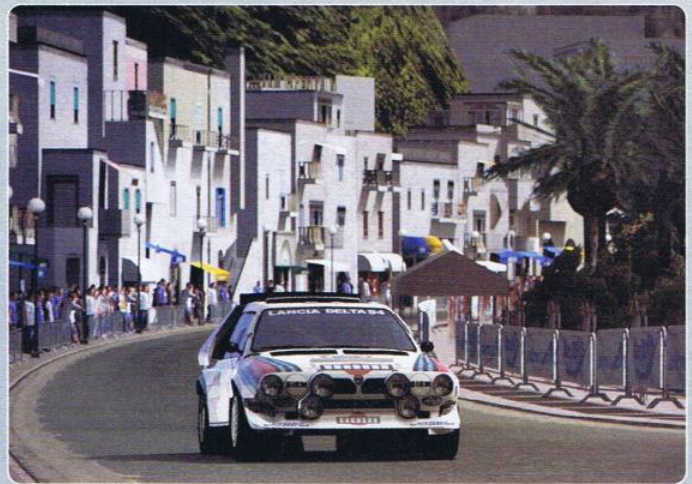
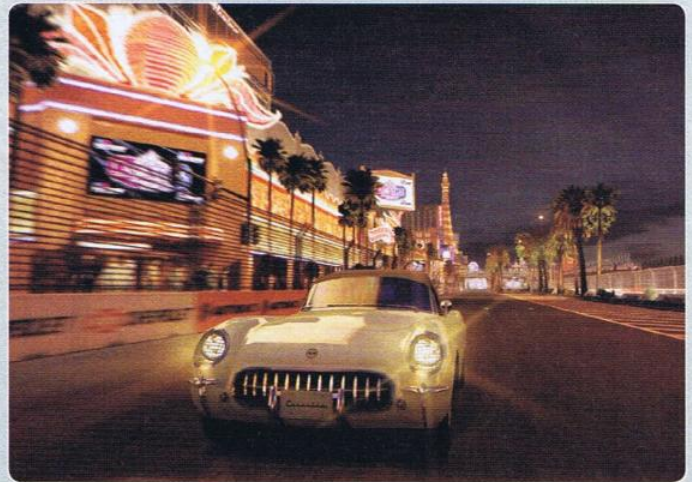
Car freaks are also going to love the fact that you can sort your

collection by country of origin (so yes, Australia will be represented) or by date, so whether you only want to drive German made cars or models from early last century, you can.

Daniel: For those new to the franchise like me (never played a GT game before now) there is the Hot car selection category which nominates around 10 or so cars that are perfect for the track. Unless you're a great driver or have discovered a way to influence your PS2 with nothing but sex appeal and one of those awful vodka aerosols you can pick up in dodgy bottle

shops you will probably want to stick to the cars recommended - taking a high powered concept car through narrow and winding streets may sound fun but Cam had more fun laughing at my expense then I did actually trying to steer the monstrosity. There's also a Favourite category for cars you have already chosen on the track so you can keep a tab on the cars you've already tried and jump back to one you like without having to remember the make and manufacturer.

Cam: Speaking of narrow windy roads, how awesome is the Costa Di Amalfi course? It's set in a gorgeous little Mediterranean town with the trademark stonewash white houses and crystal clear blue water. You wind your way down through the village, around a number of hairpins, then along by the water, then snake your way back up again. There are a couple of moments there where you can see the whole village and mountainside laid out before you that are just breathtaking. Challenging and gorgeous - that's GT4. It's also really obvious that Polyphony have tried to bring the human element into the game in a major way. Your pit crew is now fully animated, so you can watch them go to work, and there's also now an actual model behind the wheel of each car. More immediately noticeable, however, is that in many of the courses fully polygonal



spectators line the side of the road, waving their hands in the air, taking photos and even moving to a vantage point on the track then running off as you come past. Most effective though, is when you take a corner close to a line of spectators and they all lean back as you careen past. The animations are pretty basic, but the overall effect works really well, and on courses like the Grand Canyon there are literally hundreds of them.

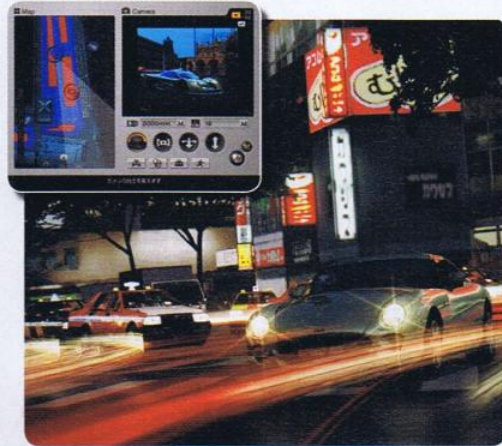
Daniel: You know, if they really wanted to add the human element they should have included some Race Queens. But I digress. Amalfi is a great looking course but I had more fun driving around some of the speedways, especially the Fuji circuit - nice simple long curves and long straights so I could really put my foot down and see how fast my current car of choice could go before the inevitable screw up that leads to me crashing into a wall at 250kmph. Strangely enough my handling did get a lot better when I switched to

Online?

Gran Turismo 4 won't ship with any online play, which is a damn shame, but for the truly passionate there is the option for 1-6 person LAN play (as well as splitscreen). That said, it's entirely possible that an "online version" of the game may surface sometime later in 2005.

Taking it back to the old school

Polyphony are really working hard to ensure that the player has as much freedom as possible in GT4. To that end, they've actually thrown out many of the specific race regulations from previous games (such as maximum power limitations), so you'll be able to enter races with overpowered cars relative to your competitors. But, and this is the cool part, alongside this change is the introduction of a points system (used to unlock cars). You go into a race with an advantage and you'll earn less points. On the flipside, if you really want a challenge, you can go into a race at a disadvantage, and if you win - you'll be rewarded. Thus, advanced players will really be able to test their skills.



P-Mode

One of the funkiest new features in the game is the Photo Mode. A celebration of the beauty of automobiles, Photo Mode allows you to essentially "pose" your car in any one of fifteen locations then take an ultra crisp snapshot of it. It's a little like taking a photo for the cover of a car mag in NFSU 2 but with many more options and with an end result that's a whole lot more impressive. You initially position the car and camera, then adjust the wheels, the height, position and rotation of the camera, adjust the focus, zoom, add in motion blur and so on. Once you're happy with the result, you take the shot and save it to your memory card. Better still, you can even plug in a USB printer and print it out! There are 15 locations in all, including Times Square in New York, Shibuya in Tokyo and the Piazza San Marco in Venice. You'll also be able to take photos of your car on all the normal courses, via the replay mode, so the possibilities are almost limitless.

B-Spec

B-Spec, a.k.a. the Director Mode is a very cool new addition for Gran Turismo 4, which caters to the racing fans out there that love everything about motorsports but are... well, not that good at the actual racing. It's a little like Championship Manager for racing fans, as you become the Race Team Manager, and get to prepare your car before each race (testing your settings and tire selections beforehand until you're happy), then make all the crucial decisions on the course without actually driving.

Essentially the idea is to give you all the information you need, and good visibility so you can instruct your A.I. driver. You'll have three main viewpoints to follow the race - the replay view, the car-mounted camera, and the race monitor, which gives you information like lap times, sector times, time differences, when your car pitted etc.

The instructions available will include a broad "pace command", which is a five level scale that varies from telling the driver to take it easy, through to go hard and risk mistakes, as well as extra fuel consumption and wear on the tires. More specifically, you can instruct your driver to overtake, which overrides the pace command and focuses your driver on getting to and beating the car ahead. You can also choose when to pit and adjust the volume of fuel to put in the car and the selection of tires.

If this sounds like your kind of thing, then the best news is that you can complete all of the races in the GT Mode in B-Spec, essentially allowing you to go all the way through the game without every having to take a single corner!

All the way through Manhattan - to Broadway, Fifth Ave, Central Park and Times Square

manual gears. I don't drive and I don't play racing games as a whole so the idea of having to manually switch gears was foreign to me but after a race or two I had the hang of it and was going like the proverbial.

Cam: Damn straight. Manual is the ONLY way to drive in this game (no surprise there). Or perhaps for you, the B-Spec mode (see boxout) - ie, not driving. Chortle. I also really loved some of the city courses. They're hard as hell, but man, both Hong Kong and New York looked superb. The New York course in particular takes you all the way through Manhattan - to Broadway, Fifth Avenue, Central Park and through Times Square.

You end up spending half the race just gazing up, watching the reflections shift across the office block windows and the signs flashing. Very cool.

Daniel: I was very impressed with the landscapes (some of which are so realistic that they only vary a matter of centimeters from the real courses) and the incredible reflections seen in the cars and street windows. I was a little disappointed, however that there is still no damage modeling on the cars. It would have been nice to see the engine rendering some hellishly cool crashes but the task would be next to impossible due to PS2 hardware limitations. Even if it was possible it would still

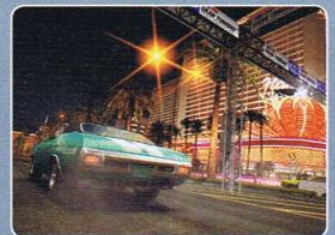
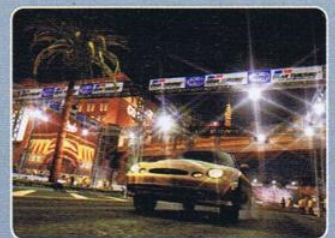
be a logistical nightmare to get permission and statistical data for crash damage on 650 cars. That said when you do crash into a car coming the other way going 200kmph you still feel it. The way the screen jolts and careens around is nothing short of impressive.

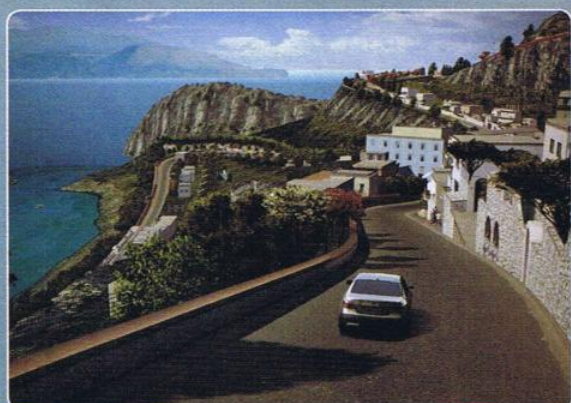
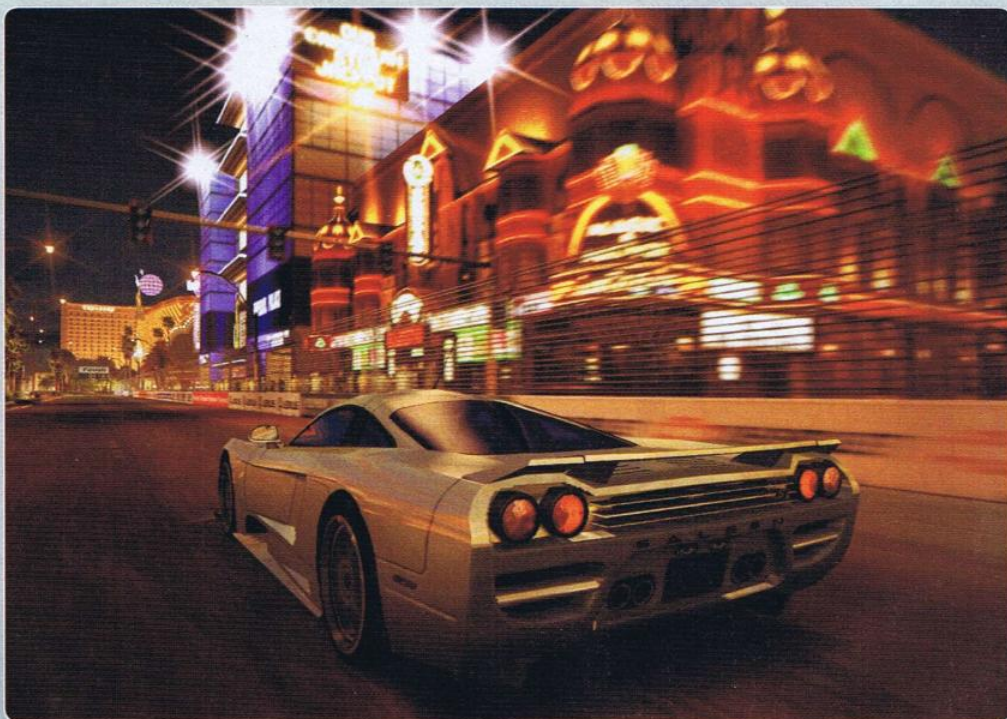
Cam: True. In fact, "nothing short of impressive" is an excellent way to describe the entire game. We're talking 650 cars from 80 manufacturers and 50 courses to race, as well as a much expanded GT Mode, the License tests, B-Spec, Photo Mode and the Mission Races. Then there's the more realistic handling, the more sophisticated enemy AI (which admittedly still isn't perfect, but is certainly an improvement from GT3) and so on. This is going to be one game that will keep us going for a long while. In fact, what do you say we give Sony a call and pop over for a little more GT4 action? <<<



Keeping it real

Renowned as being one of the toughest courses in the world, the Nurburgring Nordschleife in Germany is 20.8 punishing kilometers long, with 176 turns, and it's coming to GT4 in unbelievable detail. Every inch of the course has been reproduced, down to an accuracy of 15mm. No really. In fact, Polyphony's test driver raced the course using a Skyline GT-R (R34) in both real life and the game, and the difference in lap time was under 5 seconds, which is only a 1% variation, and demonstrates just how spot on the recreation of both the course and car are.





Gran Turismo Resort

For GT4 Polyphony Digital have expanded the GT Mode considerably. You'll have a home base that acts as your garage (in which you'll be able to store 1000 cars!), and from there you can go out to dealerships for the various car manufacturers (as well as second hand dealerships), to a range of car tuning shops (Superchargers and Nitrous here we come) and around the globe for the actual races.

Then there's the courses themselves. As you'd expect, there's a whole host of accurate renditions of real life courses, including two versions of the Fuji Speedway (pre and post renovation), the Suzuka Circuit in Japan, Sears Point Raceway in the States and the Norburgring in Germany. We're more excited, however, about some of the other locations you'll get to race through, such as the Los Vegas Drag Strip, George V Paris, the Grand Canyon, Tahiti, New York, Hong Kong and even the Swiss Alps, as they tend to show off the graphics engine the best. You haven't lived until you've burned alongside the myriad skyscrapers of Hong Kong in a Lotus Elise 111R. It's just that impressive.

Perhaps of most interest to fans of the series though, will be the courses that return from previous incarnations. The Laguna Seca raceway, for instance, is back. The team revisited it, re-measured it and changed the setting from late afternoon to the middle of a gloriously sunny day. As if it didn't look great in previous titles - it now looks stunning. Other tracks that return include Tokyo R246 and the Seattle course.

FORZA MOTORSPORT

Available on Xbox ■ Category: Racing sim ■ Players: 1-Multi ■ Developer: Microsoft Game Studios ■ Available: Early 2005

▶ If there's one game in development that can dethrone the Gran Turismo series, it's Forza Motorsport. In development at Microsoft Game Studios, Forza is a wet dream for Xbox racing fans, taking racing simulations to a whole new level of accuracy and visual splendor. To find out a little more about what's going on behind the scenes, we spoke to Garrett Young, Forza's Lead Program Manager.

HYPER: What racing titles have the team there worked on previously?

Garrett: We've built a team here that's full of game development experience, automotive enthusiasm and bucket(seat)s of innovation. We've hired guys from developers including EA, DICE, Boss Games, Nintendo, Crystal Dynamics, and Neversoft. Mixed in with these are great newcomers from other areas of Microsoft. Our computer opponent programmer is a PhD Learning AI researcher from the Microsoft Research group. Our audio guy is from the Xbox ATG team. Our networking guy was instrumental in building Direct Play for Windows.

The team is filled with car fans as well. Two guys road race motorbikes, one guy races his Mini in rallies and auto-cross events and there's another guy who actually left a top (Star Wheel if you're interested) open-wheel racing series to build Forza.

The great thing about Microsoft Game Studios though is the external teams with which you can build these really strong relationships with. Bizarre Creations (Project Gotham Racing) is a great example. We share reference material for cars and tracks (like the epic Nurburgring), tree technology and can collaborate on solutions for a whole range of technical or performance problems. While all that's well and good, the best part about the relationship with Bizarre Creations is the friendly competitiveness. Like us, they're huge car fans totally committed to making the best possible car games. Our two teams relish trying to better each other, whether it's pushing the Xbox hardware, higher review scores or breaking new ground in cutting-edge development areas such as Live.

Speaking of Live, one of the most interesting inclusions in Forza is the ability to take the Career mode both online and offline. This blurring of the single player and multiplayer boundaries is an important step for videogaming. Tell us about how it will work.

Forza's career mode and all its different elements are glued together with money. Receive money for winning races. Receive extra money for winning without driving aids. Whether you're racing with the game's AI, or against a guy from Ireland, you're still rewarded in the same currency.

Where this gets interesting is applying all the other on and offline nuances and intricacies to your racing career. You might be building relationships with Ferrari offline to get access to the Enzo, while simultaneously by racing co-operatively with a team-mate online or enjoying the latest challenge in the dynamic Live Forza community. All your racing will count in your progression.

I can't wait to see everyone putting all this into action: The ability to win money for single player car upgrades and customization while online. The

Xbox Live is a huge thing in Forza Motorsport, as it is with all of our MGS racing games. We have heard from gamers that they would really like to trade cars with their friends in a car-collection game like ours, so this is something we need to think hard about. After talking about the career mode above and how integrated online is it's hard to talk about multiplayer modes in isolation. However, you can expect co-operative racing, car clubs, trading, plus a few more surprises - and it's all designed with a view to underline the unique personality of each player's car.

One of Forza's most vaunted features is its physics engine - tell us about what it's simulating and how that will affect the realism of the game.

Forza Motorsport's physics were designed and developed to bring simulation on the home console to the next level, while providing assists to help new players. We've got advanced audio, damage and performance systems designed to offer simulation like it's never been seen before. Where our physics system really shines though is in the way we have simulated tire characteristics.

▶▶▶ WE'RE PUSHING THE XBOX HARDWARE TO ITS ABSOLUTE LIMIT

ability to bring cars created and customized in single player into the online space - to really support our vision where "you are what you race". The ability to trade these cars and connect up with other enthusiasts in car clubs. It's going to be incredibly involving.

Trust that there will be much more to this game than just racing in circles. Forza Motorsport is an entire world of Motorsport. Think of Forza Motorsport more like an entire playground - there's more than just a set of swings.

Online is obviously a major focus for Forza. Beyond the career mode, are there any other multiplayer modes you'd like to mention?

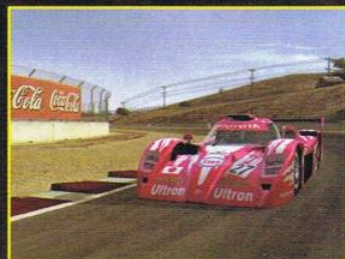
In the real world, tires do not follow the standard Newtonian physics rules taught in high school. Any accomplished simulator is based around a sophisticated tire simulation. PC games like NASCAR and Grand Prix Legends have incredibly refined tire simulation. Forza Motorsport's physics developer spent over a month on the tire physics alone.

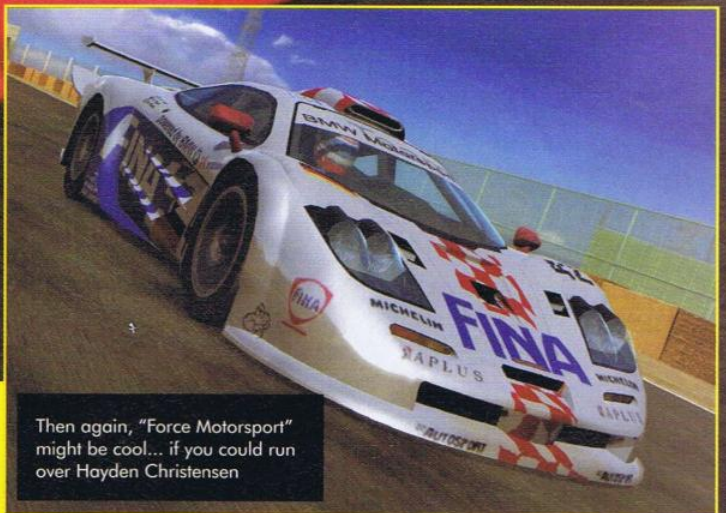
We've collaborated with Toyo tires to make sure we really got it right. They have provided their real world test data on several different rubber compounds and tread patterns across multiple loads, pressures and heat ranges. We've modeled the relationship between pressure, heat and wear for each tire compound. We even modeled



[above] Next up - "Fonzie Motorsport" where you ride a motorbike and bang jukeboxes. Ehhhhh!

[below] Or perhaps "Fozzie Bear Motorsport" where you ride Miss Piggy





Then again, "Force Motorsport" might be cool... if you could run over Hayden Christensen

the improved traction provided by the rubber left on the racing line.

Then there's the damage modeling - was it difficult to get car manufacturers to agree to full damage modeling on their cars? Traditionally other developers have cited this as the reason that it hasn't been included in their games - what's your response to that?

We have great relationships with our manufacturers. We've already partnered with most of these companies to create previous MGS franchise titles - Midtown Madness 1-3, Rallisport Challenge 1 & 2 and Project Gotham 1 & 2 for example. Our mission on Forza was to make the definitive console racing simulator. How can you make a simulator without damage?

With this in mind, we approached the manufacturers early on in the product cycle with full mock-ups of our damage as well as design docs to make sure they understood fully our point of view and the need for damage modeling. While they may have been hesitant to begin with, they were very excited about being featured in such a tremendous simulation.

I'm sure Yamauchi-san and his team at Polyphony would love to incorporate vehicle damage if Sony had built the relationship with manufacturers. Fortunately, thanks to our relationships, we can.

The damage modeling looks quite stunning too. Tell us a little about the graphics engine the game is running on.

While PGR2 and RSC2 did great

things graphically, we are moving up a notch with Forza Motorsport. We are offering an unprecedented level of photo-realism and accuracy. Our racetracks and city courses are meticulously modelled to within inches of their real world counterparts. Thousands of photos were taken at every location to ensure incredible levels of accuracy. It's with our vehicles discerning players will really be able to notice the improvement though. In Forza Motorsport it's all about the cars, and we're pushing the Xbox hardware to its absolute limit by using many layers of complex pixel and vertex shaders. We've

had a single graphics programmer working on our vehicle shaders for over a year to get them "just right". We're able to realistically reproduce the surface properties of a variety of materials including painted metal, glass, rubber, plastic, fibreglass, carbon-fiber, etc. We've also studied hundreds of wrecked cars to really understand how these cars sustain damage so we could better and more accurately represent it visually in the game. Cars can be scratched, dented and crumpled. Glass can break and fall out, and parts can flap and eventually fall off. The damage will even appear differently depending on the

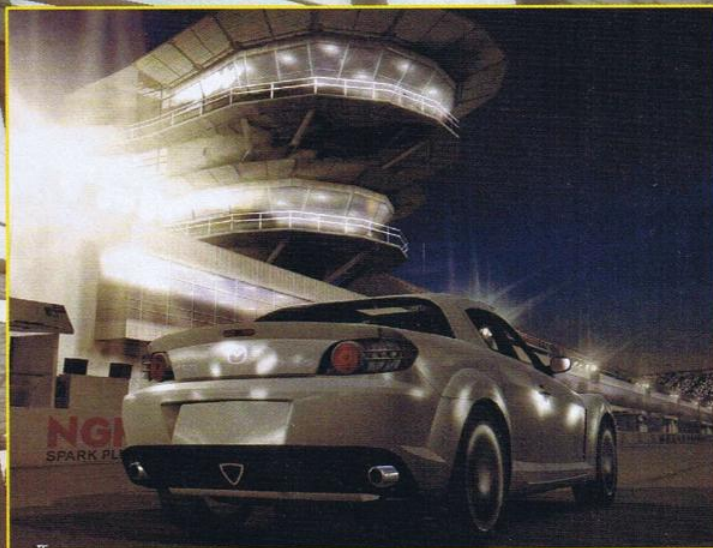
material type, metal, fibreglass, plastic, etc.

This damage doesn't stop with the cars. We also represent damage to a variety of surfaces in the environments themselves. If you brush against a wall you'll see scrapes of paint on the wall that matches the color of your car as well as dented and scratched guardrails. Persistent skids appear realistically on all surfaces the player can drive on. We don't want anything to stand out as "not real" or "missing" visually from our game. This all helps with the immersion.

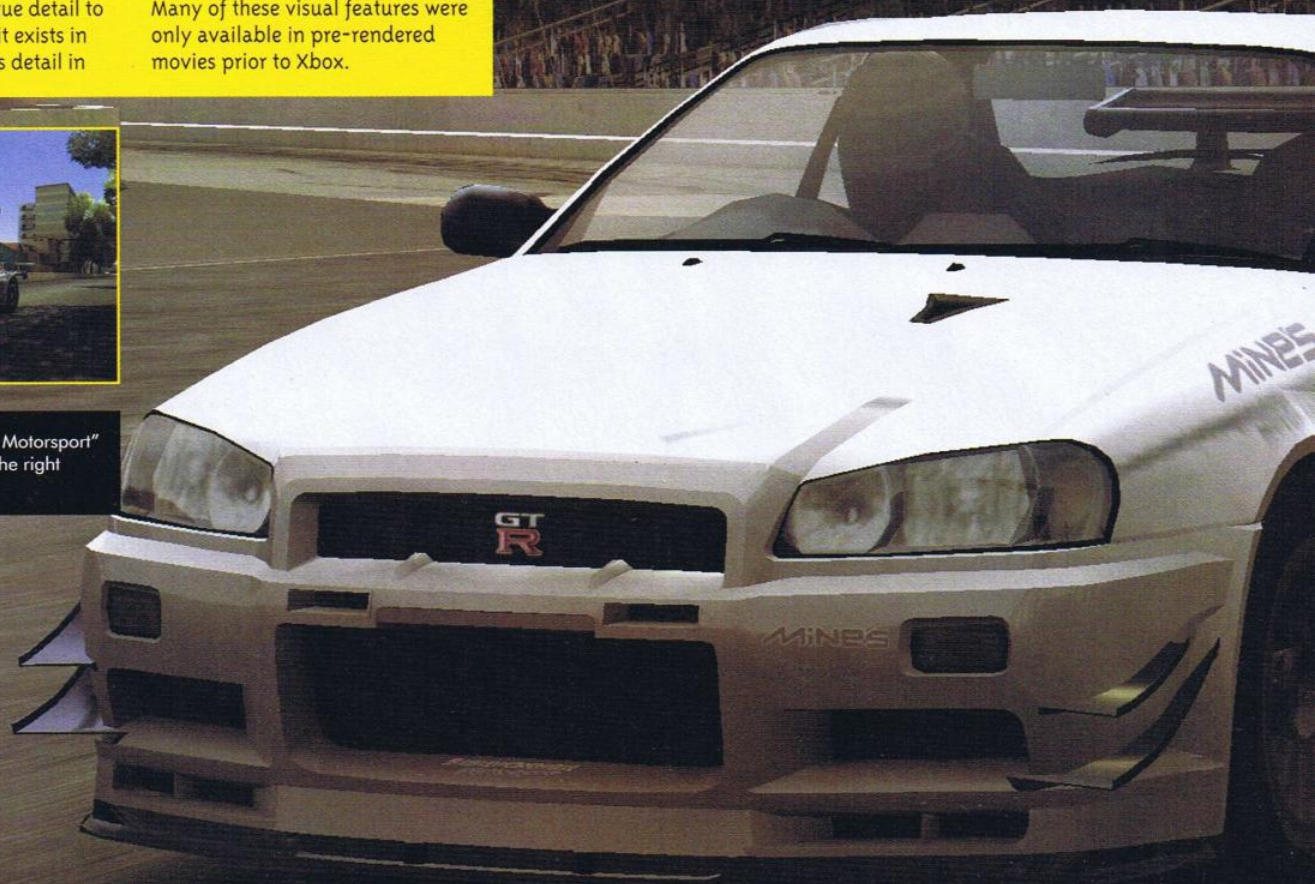
When we started Forza we re-examined how we do everything visually. We didn't want to just do things "the way they've always been done." We carefully studied real racetracks and worked to capture the essence of a real racing environment. Having several "real world" racers on the team, we know how critical actual racing surface detail is to fast and precise driving. We therefore came up with a system, utilizing the Xbox's hard drive, to stream mesh and texture data that allows us to use completely unique textures around every inch of every circuit. This way we're able to add unique detail to the driving surface as it exists in real life. Racers use this detail in

several ways but most importantly as "reference points". A player's recount of taking a particular corner in Forza might be as follows: "I lift off the gas just after the 3rd brake marker, I'm hard on the brakes just before the seam for the new patch of pavement, I "turn-in" a foot inside the oil stain near the outside of the track, I start applying the throttle just after the crack in the pavement, I apex so my left wheels are just on the edge of the curbing, I finish the corner where the rubber tire marks run onto the curbing". This not only helps drivers learn tracks quicker and become more precise racers, all of this unique detail in the track surface gives players a proper sense of speed. Now you'll actually tell the difference between 50mph and 150mph.

We also utilize lightmaps rendered with "radiosity" for every surface in our environments along with complex blending of Xbox's many texture stages. Radiosity is the phenomenon of light bouncing off of surfaces and casting light and color onto nearby surfaces. This allows us to have incredibly detailed and photo-realistic environments. Many of these visual features were only available in pre-rendered movies prior to Xbox.



[above] I guess "Fosters Motorsport" probably wouldn't send the right message





[above] I'd love "Orca Motorsport" though. Bastards of the sea I tell you...

Your "Drivatar" AI system sounds quite ambitious. What's the rationale behind the system? How difficult has it been to implement?

There are a lot of ways to advance through in Forza Motorsport. The ability to train AI Drivatars and then compete with/against them is another great example of the many things to do in the game. Not many game video game companies research departments spread around the world include PhD AI developers incubating great ideas such as learning AI. Fortunately, we have this resource, and it allows us to make better games. The technology behind learning AI in games was brought to us by our Microsoft Research team in Cambridge, England. These guys are not game developers, they're technology guys that have been learning AI specialists for years.

To create our AI, we created a full learning system that can learn to drive any car on any track. It can apply what it has learned on one track to other tracks it's never driven before. It can also mimic any player's driving style. It emulates the player's racing line, brake usage, and use of weight and traction. This is the benefit of having a PhD in Robotics and Artificial Intelligence researcher developing our AI full-time.

Drivatar technology is the foundation of all the AI in the game. The AI opponents that players will compete against in the single player events are AI drivers that learned how to drive by observing the developers, testers

AI DRIVERS OBSERVE AND LEARN TO DRIVE JUST LIKE THE PLAYER

and designers driving. You might end up racing me in Drivatar form.

Because this system is so neat (and robust), we've made it available for the player to use as well. In our Career mode, there is an AI Training area. In this area, AI drivers observe and learn to drive just like the player. Once you have your Drivatar file, you can set it loose in races and hope it's good enough to bring some cash home.

Is this a game only for hardcore motorsports fans? Will there be something for arcade racers too?

Ah... the age-old question! At heart, this game is a track-based simulator. Of course

Hehe Polyphony might just be wishing it was "GT Forza Motorsport"



Forza Motorsport is a beautiful game with tremendous audio. However, first and foremost, Forza Motorsport is a simulator. We spent several months on the tire physics alone. This level of depth in the physics makes each car incredibly realistic. People will be blown away by the depth of our driving model.

Making a simulator with such depth and realism runs the risk of having an extremely long learning curve. To help players get into the game more easily, we've included real-world driving assist such as anti-lock brakes, traction control and anti-spin management. We've also spent a considerable amount of time on the player feedback system, using 5.1 and the controller to communicate independent tire feedback. We use 5.1 audio to give the player feedback on all four tires simultaneously. Players will really feel when they're driving on the edge.

Speaking of which, what other downloadable content might we be able to expect in the future?

Forza Motorsport will definitely support downloadable content after release. We've found that gamers really enjoy the "extended life" this provides. The game doesn't end when you've finished everything we shipped on the disk.

I've mentioned the possibility of tracks, but consider what makes up a car game and the emphasis we're placing on online, and use your imagination. The great thing about downloadable content means that we certainly will be.

GT4 is probably your closest rival - what do you believe will make Forza the superior game?

We think the thing that PS2 owners - and all gamers - will love Forza's level of customization & personalization they can do to their cars. Changing bumpers & side skirts, painting stripes and flames, adding decals for after-market parts manufacturers like Brembo, Sparco, Wings West and hundreds of others, adding a hood scoop and a rear wing - this is just the beginning. No two gamers are the same. When you're racing against other people online in Forza Motorsport, no two cars will be the same either.

What will be the most unique and rewarding Forza feature? Customization. We have hundreds of cars with hundreds of mix-n-match real-world body kits and a fully featured paint shop and decal editor.

It takes a significant investment to create hundreds of damageable cars with upgrades and tuning, environment damage, car customization, learning AI, jaw-dropping visuals and innovative Live elements. Thanks to the resources we have here, and the Xbox hardware, we're able to do things no-one else can. <<

Colin McRae Rally 2005

Available on **PSP** ■ Category: **Rally sim** ■ Players: **1-Multi** ■ Developer: **Six By Nine** ■ Available: **Early 2005**

▶▶ The PSP isn't far away now, and one title that we're really looking forward to is Colin McRae Rally 2005, PSP-style. To get an insight into the world of PSP development, we spoke to Callum Godfrey, Assistant Development Manager for Codemasters, working on the title with Six By Nine.

HYPER: How will Colin on PSP differ from its last outing on PS2? Is this a port or a true sequel?

Callum: The game has had its models and textures reworked for the new widescreen ratio and size. Because of the portable nature of the PSP you can be playing it in any number of lighting conditions, and so getting a balanced looking game in any environment was of paramount importance to us.

The multiplayer modes offered on PSP will be some of the most comprehensive in the Colin McRae franchise to date with additional features exclusive to PSP which will be announced at a later date.

You guys were responsible for the PC editions of Colin McRae 3, 04 and 2005. Does this mean you're starting with the PC version of 2005 as the foundation, or the PS2 version?

In all truth we're using the best of both. Bits of the PS2 code, working alongside the PC code. The biggest surprise was how well much of the code has moved across to PSP - a true testament to the versatility of the hardware.

How much have you had to adapt the Colin engine for the PSP?

A lot of the behind the scenes

code has changed, but its been done by a team that knows the code base for Colin McRae intimately. Thanks to Six by Nine's expertise in PS2, Xbox, PC and in learning new technologies you'll be hard pushed to tell the difference. The game looks, sounds and most importantly feels like Colin McRae on console.

What can you do on PSP that you couldn't do on PS2? Both technically and in terms of gameplay.

PSP allows designers and developers that chance to create much more focused multiplayer experiences. Initial PSP launches will only scratch the surface of what the hardware is capable of, just like PS2 launch titles compared to current ones. As we go through the hardware's lifecycle we'll see PSP to PS2 cross over, custom audio and images from Memory Sticks, online interactivity through WiFi hotspots... the list of future PSP possibilities is very encouraging for both consumers and developers alike.

And how about vice versa?

With PSP being a mobile device one of our key concerns has been that players can be using the game in all kinds of different lighting conditions. Therefore, we've tried to balance out the colour palette used in the game, to make it look much more alive regardless of what lighting conditions you are playing in.

Traditionally the Colin McRae games have been titles that you sit down and play for hours. With the move to a portable format, could you tell us about some of the changes you've

made to make the game a little more friendly for commuters!

The average rally stage in Colin McRae takes about 4-5 minutes, which is the ideal amount of playing time for gamers looking for something to fill a 5 minute bus ride, a coffee break or waiting in line at a supermarket. Colin PSP allows the consumer to drop in and out of the game as and when they please with the auto save system keeping track of the players progress without them ever having to worry.

Should the player want a longer challenge they simply keep on playing.

Colin McRae has always had very deep handling mechanics - how effectively will the PSP's analogue nub be able to translate the subtleties of the handling?

The analogue control on PSP is surprisingly responsive and allows for a good degree of fine control. The handling model for Colin PSP is true to its console forbears and whether you play with D-Pad or analogue, fans of the Colin McRae series will be sliding round corners to their hearts content.

How will the game be structured? Will Career mode still be the main focus? And will it work in the same way as it did on console?

As with Colin 2005 the game will be focusing on the player winning championships and other titles in the career mode. We have made no changes to the Championship structure, as it was already so well suited to the style of gaming offered by PSP.

How many cars will be in the game, and how many locations and tracks?

34 fully licensed cars: Audi A3 3.2 Quattro, Ford MK1 Escort, MG Mini Cooper S, Subaru 44S - WRX, Volkswagen Polo, Ford Escort RS Cosworth, MG ZR, Volkswagen Beetle RSi (new), Citroen Xsara, Lancia Stratos,, Lancia Delta Intergale, Toyota Celica GT 4, Ford Fiesta Concept MKII, Mitsubishi Shogun Montero, Alfa Romeo Alfetta, Ford RS200, Volkswagen Golf MK5, Subaru 22B Sti., Land Rover M-Sport Freelander Rallye, MG Sebring Special, Peugeot 206, Renault Clio



[above] Buy this game and Colin McRae will be your best friend. Honest

V6 II, Volkswagen Golf R32, Citroen Saxo, Toyota Celica GTS, Peugeot 205 Ti6 Evo 2, Alfa Romeo 147 GTA, Mitsubishi Evolution VIII, Ford Sierra Cosworth, Lancia 037, Ford Focus, Metro 6R4, Audi Sport Quattro and Nissan Pick up.

Up to 8 stages in the following countries: UK, Greece, Japan, Australia, USA, Spain, Finland, Sweden and Germany.

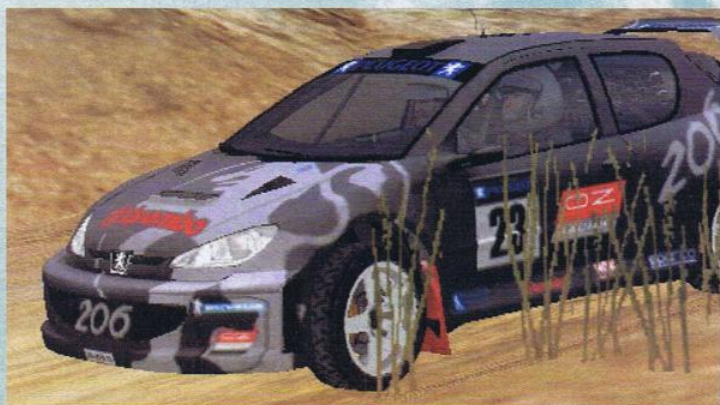
One of the great strengths of the PSP will be wireless multiplayer. What will you be offering in this area, and is this one of the major development focuses?

The wireless multiplayer is an area in which we have focused a lot of our attentions. With it being one of the big features of PSP it would be foolish to ignore it, and to that end we've spent some considerable time getting the traditional Colin multiplayer modes running on the console, as well as a few extra modes to really showcase what can be done with the technology. Expect future information from Codemasters to detail exactly what extras we'll be squeezing on to that UMD!

What kind of battery life do you expect from this title?

We expect Colin to be well above the average times for battery life, mostly thanks to the huge experience Six by Nine have in optimizing code during the porting process. This in itself is a huge task, and one which the team have tackled head on, leaving us in a very strong position and with longer battery life than many PSP horror stories may claim.

Thanks for your time! <<<





PSP ALLOWS DESIGNERS AND DEVELOPERS TO CREATE MUCH MORE FOCUSED MULTIPLAYER EXPERIENCES



PROJECT: SNOWBLIND

Available on **PS2/Xbox/PC** ■ Category: **FPS** ■ Players: **1-16** ■ Developer: **Crystal Dynamics** ■ Available: **Q1 2005**

▶▶ We get to see a lot of games at Hyper, an admission that I'm sure comes as no surprise to you, the readers. What may come as a surprise is the fact that after a couple of years in the industry it becomes harder to get enthusiastic about the titles we see - so many of them fade into obscurity before release and others still show great promise at the first viewing and then somehow devolve into the basest form of entertainment by the time it reaches the box. Imagine our delight then when we first got to see code running for Project: Snowblind, an upcoming FPS from Crystal Dynamics. Set in the year 2065 in a Bladerunner-esque Hong Kong, Snowblind casts the player



[above] A Frosty reception. Ho ho

as Nathan Frost (if you're destined to become a great hero then a cool name like Nathan Frost definitely won't go astray), a grunt nearly fatally wounded in an engagement with the enemy who volunteers to have some experimental technology grafted into his body to keep him alive, effectively turning him into a super-soldier. As far as plot goes it doesn't seem to be straying too far from a very tried and true mold but honestly, does anyone truly play FPS games for the plot?

GUNS AND SPADES

Not often. We play them for the action and Snowblind has action in spades. The code we played demonstrated five different levels and the two major modes of play in the single player game. Along with solo missions in which Nathan is charged with infiltrating a location, there are also missions made up of large scale battles in which Nathan is but one of the soldiers. From what we've seen so far the balance and pacing of these two major game modes is excellent; difficult without being frustrating

and fast without being rushed or railroaded. Enemies range from normal human soldiers through to bipedal combat robots that pack a serious punch. All of the units we have encountered so far, both enemy and friendly, have shown a fair amount of sophistication in the AI, which sees them using cover to their advantage, working together to flush out enemies and using weapons intelligently instead of simply spraying in the player's general direction.

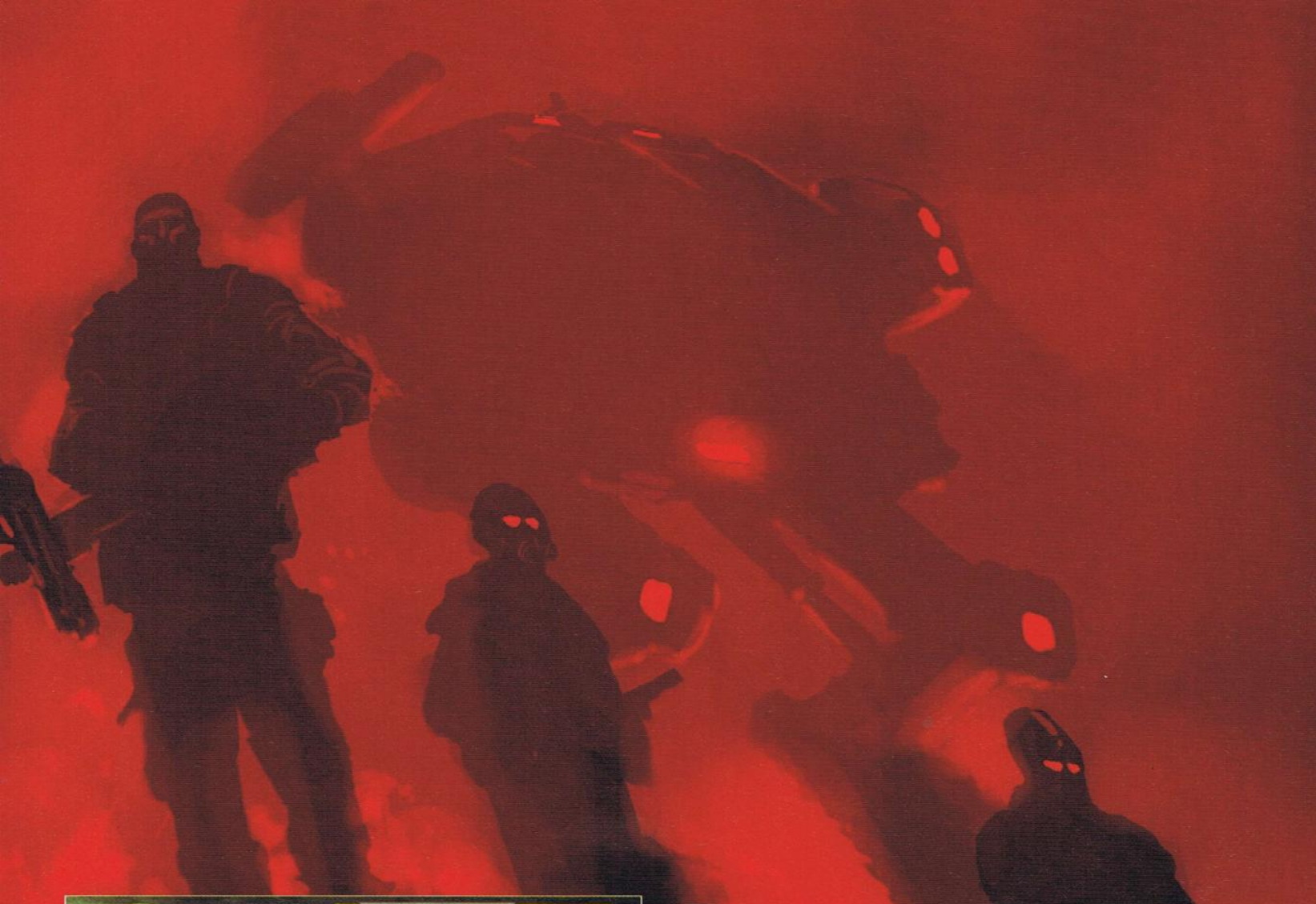
While the quality of the action is really the main selling point of FPS games, most live or die on the strength of their weapons and Snowblind has an arsenal that shouldn't disappoint. Armament consists of around fifteen weapons ranging from a nicely silenced pistol invaluable for stealth missions through to a massively destructive rocket launcher. These two weapons may be nothing new but everything that falls in between is pretty damn cool too. Other weapons the player will get their grubby little hands on include the Flechette, a rapid fire energy weapon that fires balls of



[tenuous Family Guy reference]

We can rebuild him. We have the technology. But I don't want to spend a lot of money...

plasma that can bounce off walls, the Rail Laser, a powerful and highly accurate weapon that can shoot through walls when charged up, and a groovy Mine Launcher, just the thing to make yourself a little more unapproachable. Each of the weapons also has an alt-fire function to increase the weapon's use. Effects we have seen so far are a cloud of enemy seeking projectiles from the Flechette, a cluster of explosive rounds from the Shotgun and an underslung grenade launcher for the



standard weapon, the Carbine, a light automatic rifle. Players will also have access to a range of grenades such as EMP, Flash and Frag. Much like Deus Ex, Snowblind also features a Spider Bomb, a small device that transforms into a mechanical spider when thrown. Once transformed the spider will chase enemies and stun them with small bursts of electricity. These shocks can't kill opponents but they do slow them down enough to make mowing them down a far easier task.

BILLION DOLLAR MAN

Nathan Frost isn't simply a super-soldier because he's not dead - far from it. The experimental implants in his body give him access to a

number of special powers including the ability to exponentially speed his movement (effectively slowing time for a short period of time), see in a range of different visual spectrums, become invisible for around 15 seconds and more that we haven't seen yet. All of these powers can only run for a short amount of time and require energy to power then so clever use of the nano-augmented abilities will be key to beating the game.

At this stage of development, Project: Snowblind is a lovely looking game with some truly outstanding environments (the rain and neon soaked streets of HK are a prime example) as well as some

❖ CLEVER USE OF THE NANO-AUGMENTED ABILITIES WILL BE KEY TO BEATING THE GAME

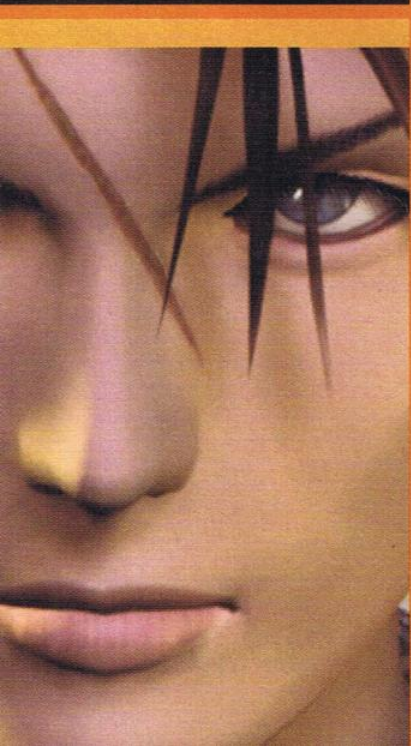
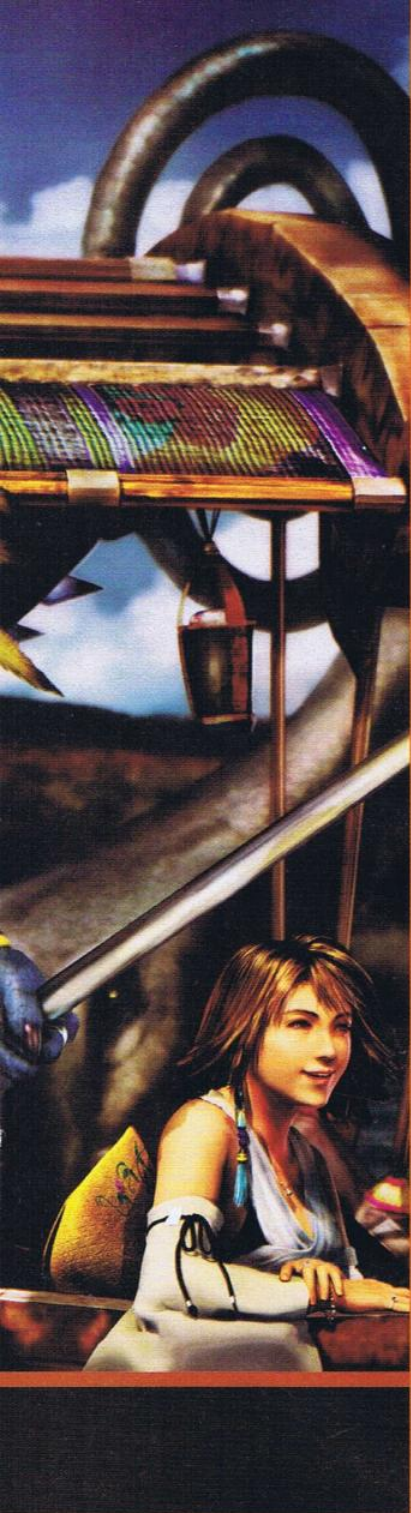


nice detailed enemy models. In the current build there seems to be little weapon impact for most kills (aside from grenades and the Rocket Launcher that can send enemies flying across the screen) but we assume that by the time of release all of the weapons will feel as meaty as they deserve to. Definitely one to look out for. ❖❖



MULTIPLAYER Snowblind promises to have multiplayer for up to 16 people available over PS2 Online and Xbox Live. The final package should contain around 16 maps based around levels seen in the game and will include all of the standard favourite gameplay modes as well as something designed specifically for the game world. Unfortunately we can't offer any more details at the moment. PC gamers should probably expect more in the way of multiplayer with more players per server.





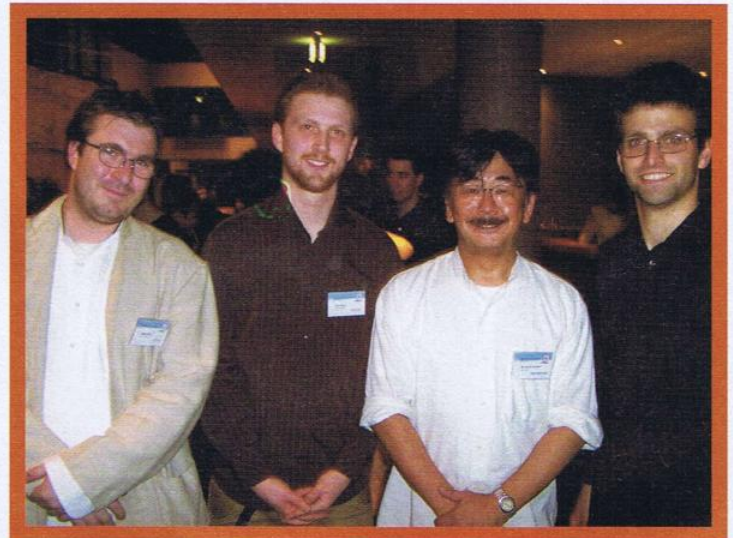
Nobuo Uematsu

and the Rise of Videogame music in Australia

Nobuo Uematsu is one of the most important people in the world of videogame soundtracks. He joined Square back in 1986, and immediately made his mark with the score and sounds for Final Fantasy I in 1987. Since then, Uematsu-san has gone on to write music for over 30 games, and has had a huge role in shaping the musical tone of the entire Final Fantasy series, especially the first nine games. Such is his influence that he was named as one of the "Innovators" in Time Magazine's "Time 100: The Next Wave - Music" feature, as well as winning Hyper's "Best Mustache" award. Handsome and talented. What a combo.

We recently had the chance to sit down and talk with Nobuo (through a translator - although we suspect he understood more than he let on), and found him to be a humble, good humoured man. There was, however, something that he wasn't telling us, something lurking behind that porn star mustache, and only a few short days after our meeting, Nobuo officially announced his departure from Square Enix, and his plan to set up his own independent studio, called "Smile Please" (could the name be any more Japanese?). When he made the announcement, Uematsu said that he had left on good terms with Square and will continue to create music for videogames, as well as making CDs and performing at concerts with his Final Fantasy rock band The Black Mages.

Although he may not have clued us in on leaving Square, we think you'll agree it was a particularly appropriate time to talk to Mr Uematsu about his career and about the art of writing music for videogames.



[above] Wilks, Cam and Dewhurst, gushing like schoolgirls...

HYPER: Tell us a little about your background, before you started doing videogame soundtracks.

Uematsu: I didn't start out doing high budget music or anything like that, I actually got my start doing a lot of pornographic films! [everyone laughs] So I guess that kind of cheesy music...

You mean like "chik-a-wow, chik-a-wow-wow"? [Everyone laughs again]

And commercials. Just short little bits.

So I guess you could say that the move from porno soundtracks to Final Fantasy was a big step up!

When I was in the porno business, I was told my music was too beautiful. So maybe there's not that much of a change in the music I made then and the music I make now!

Tell us a little about how you made the transition to videogames.

I was interested in making a living out of music, so whatever opportunities came in I would take it. I had a friend at Square who told me about a game they were making

and asked if I wanted to help out. And it went from there.

How has the music composition side of the games industry changed over the time you've been involved? For example the move from MIDI to a full Redbook audio score. Or more specifically, take "One-Winged Angel" and "Liberi Fatali", as both are stirring orchestral pieces, but one is MIDI and one is orchestral. Is there a significant difference in the way you work, and in your mindset? Both are meant to evoke the same emotions, but using different technological means.

I don't know if this will answer your question, but both are really similar, it's just that with one, the game sounds like a MIDI soundtrack, and is restricted to 24 sounds. But the basic idea is all the same. Making music with an orchestra is just an extension of me. For example. I myself, am the same person right? It's just the difference of changing my outfits. For the MIDI version it's like wearing one outfit and for the orchestral version it's wearing something different. The

A Night in Fantasia

Videogames and anime aren't just another form of entertainment in Japan - they're institutions. Indeed, they're more of a true mainstay of Japanese culture than the oft-cited business man singing karaoke, and a damn sight more interesting. Such is the importance and maturity of both art forms that there's a large subculture for videogame and anime music throughout Asia, and it's only going to keep growing. Here in Australia, there's also a dedicated fan-base, and as anime like Spirited Away receive wider cinema releases, and games like the Final Fantasy series continue to grow in popularity, so too will the audience for the music.

Helping to highlight the quality of the music is Infinity8lue. They're bringing the music to life in Australia through events like A Night in Fantasia, a recent series of concerts in which scores by Joe Hisaishi (Studio Ghibli) and Nobuo Uematsu (Final Fantasy) were performed by the cream of Australian talent in the form of a fifty piece orchestra, known as the Eminence Orchestra. Hyper recently caught up with the Eminence Orchestra founder and Concertmaster Hiroaki Yura to ask him about putting an Australian face on Japanese music.

HYPER: How did the Eminence Orchestra come about? What's your goal for it?

Hiroaki: The Orchestra has come about to be able to introduce classical music to the younger generation - our generation. Our secondary objective is to keep the high quality of Australian Musicians in Australia, not overseas. The third objective is maybe to own the world... in our fields!

How did you go about getting the musicians together?

The musicians are gathered by contacts, friends and networks. It



is a small community and we know each other pretty damn well =D

Is it a breath of fresh air getting away from the Mozarts and Beethovens of the orchestral scene and playing something genuinely contemporary?

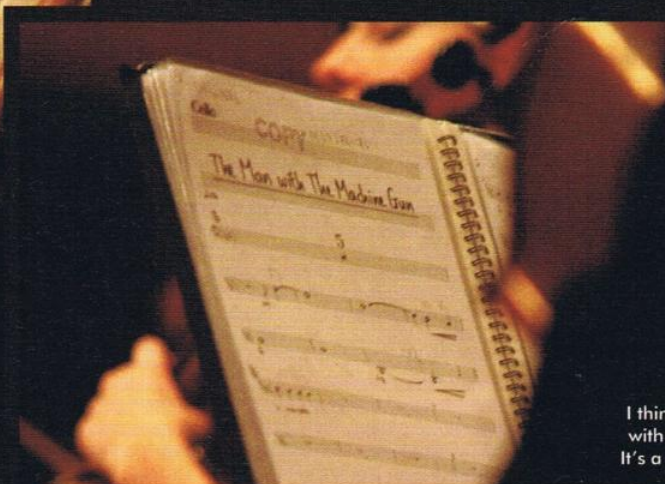
We hate to play stuff too much. Like Beethoven's Ninth Symph or Mozart's Eine Kleine. Every time we play in Weddings (i.e. Pachelbel's Canon) we throw up in our minds. Yes we love this new contemporary music!

It's obvious from the success of these concerts that there's an audience for videogame and anime scores - were you surprised by how passionate the response was?

We were! We want to do it again next year. Some musicians were so astounded and they were the snobbiest elites!

What's next for the Eminence Orchestra, and what game or anime music would you like to play in the future?

I personally want to play Gundam's Symphony by Tishihiko Sahashi. It rocks!



I think it says "The Man with the Malcolm Grin" It's a song about Malky!

original thing is that the main music is the same. What I want to tell the audience is the same.

Do you compose primarily for a Japanese audience, or do you have a worldwide audience in mind? Do you deliberately make your symphonies multicultural?

There's no barrier, as far as music for an orchestra goes, between International and Japanese audiences. I just make up whatever I think would be appropriate. Music that appeals to me and hopefully to other people!

Tell us about creating a piece of music for a videogame, and what the process is between yourself and the development team. How does that relationship work? Do you compose from say, character sketches or story arcs or the game itself?

I get a kind of script of the sequences in the game, so I get information about the main character and what will happen to that character. And I use that.

So it's essentially the story arcs in the game? So you have a good idea of sections that are meant to be uplifting and sections where something bad happens - you're writing to suit that mood.

Yes.

WHEN I WAS IN THE PORNO BUSINESS I WAS TOLD MY MUSIC WAS TOO BEAUTIFUL

Your involvement in the Final Fantasy soundtracks has decreased over the last few releases. You used to write the entire soundtracks, then for Final Fantasy X, like Final Fantasy XII, you've only written the main theme. Is it your decision to take a step back from the series and if so, why?

In the past games, I'd do Final Fantasy I and then there'd be a break. Then I'd do all the songs in the second one and there'd be a break. As the popularity became bigger and bigger, and after Final Fantasy IX there was a new team that came in for X, and they started making XII at the same time, so there had to be more people to come in and help with the songs. It was impossible to do it all myself. So I had three people working with me for X and XI, and when they started making XII there was also the DVD [Advent Children], and it was a personal choice that I wanted to work on the DVD.

What's your level of involvement with Final Fantasy XII?

There's the main song in it, which I've already written.



[above] Uematsu samples the local ales

Do you prefer composing for composition's sake, or do you like working to a game's framework and composing accordingly? For example, do you prefer writing music for your band The Black Mages or is it more enjoyable writing music for a game where you're given a definite structure and a theme to work to?

They're both fun to work with. I'd get tired if I just did games all the time, and I'd also get tired if I just did the Black Mages all the time.

What differences do you see between music composed for games and music composed for films?

You have less control over the music in movies because there's a certain time limit and the viewer can't control what's happening in a movie. So there might be an established song for a certain period

for an action scene or whatever, but for games the player can decide by himself on whether they want to go, say, into the city or into a battle scene. So that's the difference, the control.

What about stylistic differences? For instance does a film composer have the skills to write a game score?

Yes, and the other way around. A game composer has the skills to write a movie soundtrack.

What piece of music are you most proud of?

Probably the main theme from Final Fantasy X.

Do you play games in your spare time and if so, what are your favourites?

I don't really have time to play videogames now, but in the past when I did I used to like Super Mario.

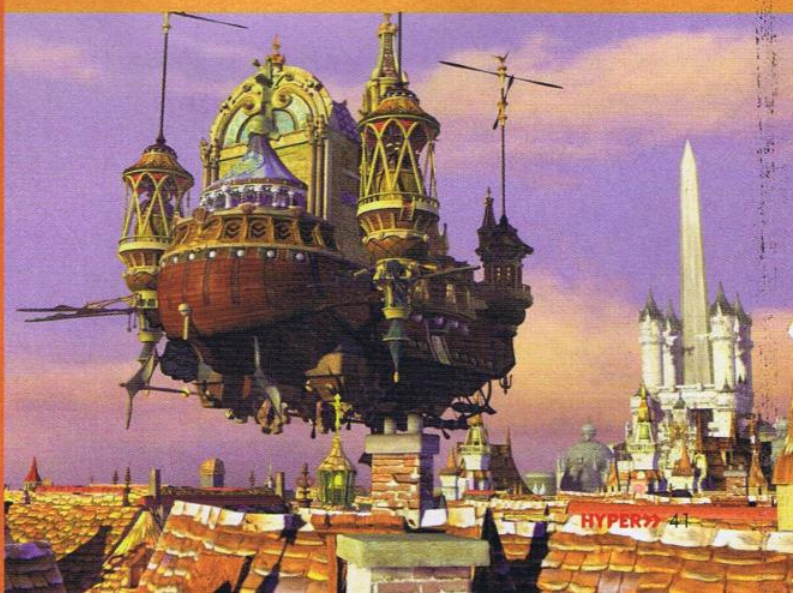
Good choice. What music do you listen to in your spare time?

I listen to everything from jazz and classical to rock'n'roll.

Thanks very much for your time.



[below] Can anyone spot Hyper writer John "Delhurst the Funky Homosapien" Dewhurst?





Halo 2 on Xbox Live

» March Stepnik

➤ The original Halo was without a doubt the one killer app that single-handedly helped establish the Xbox. Bungie has done it again with Halo 2, although this time they've provided the killer app for Xbox Live as well.

Even with excellent support by gamers during the debut year of the service (with more than a million accounts worldwide), it's taken Bungie's sequel to provide the most compelling reason for Xbox owners to finally give Live a go. We're not usually impressed by statistics but sales of Xbox Live kits increased ten-fold during the week of Halo 2's release, and as of going to print, gamers have clocked up over 28 million hours of Halo 2 on Live (with the average session length being a VERY healthy 91 minutes). Put that in your pipe and smoke it Sony!

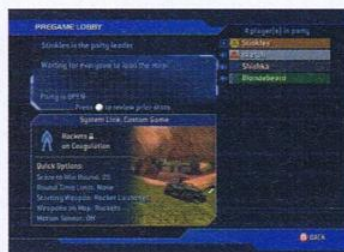
The most important thing about Halo 2 Live is that it lets a helluva lot more people in on a little secret that those of us with the hardware

and numbers have been in on since the release of the original: that Halo multiplayer rules. So is Halo 2 Live all that it's cracked up to be?

Absolutely, but it's not all sweet, sweet loving. We're surprised that a couple of features have been omitted, especially given that some of these have been around since the debut of Xbox Live. So let's get the gripes out of the way first, shall we?

Firstly, there's no way to play co-op single player through Live - so it's a split-screen, single-Xbox co-op, at least for now.

Secondly, apart from post-game statistics (which Bungie has nailed: these are really quite detailed) and caching the results of the most recently played match (much like My Recent Documents in Win XP) in the pre-game lobby, you're going to have to leave your Xbox to access your player profile and standings at Bungie.net on a PC. That you can't access your stats through Live detracts a tad from the experience.



[top] Crazy King - now there's an inventive name. Not like Wilks' nick, or should I say Sir Ballspank's

The logic behind the move at least is clear: to keep the non-game related data transfers on the Live service to a minimum, but honestly, for the sake of a cohesive system, we'd take a little extra load to have that info at our thumb-tips.

And last, but definitely not least, Bungie hasn't taken the opportunity to integrate any aspect of the single player game into Xbox Live. The benefit of such integration has clearly been shown by Project Gotham Racing 2 - the way you can take results from the singleplayer game and post them online to share and gloat over certainly adds to the experience (and especially to replayability).

Even so, by no means should you feel short-changed by Bungie. If Bungie's mission statement with

Halo 2 Live is to provide players with the easiest, smoothest and most trouble-free method of playing Halo 2 against other people then it has been a resounding success. Within moments of logging onto Live through Halo 2 you can be playing a game against real live opponents, and the performance of the game with large groups of players holds up very well most of the time. During the usual periods of heavy congestion (weekends and school holidays), expect a bit of lag but more than anything else it's the voice communication that seems to take the biggest hit, rendering most taunts into incomprehensible garbling. Ahh well, not always a painful loss.

Bungie's added a party system to Halo 2 to make co-ordinating games

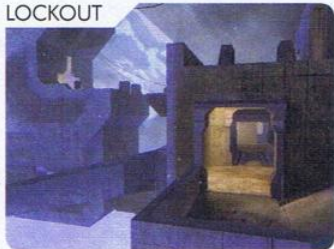
THE MAPS

The recently revealed bonus map, available via the Halo 2 Autoupdate on Live, or completing the game and activating the 'training event' on the final level in single player

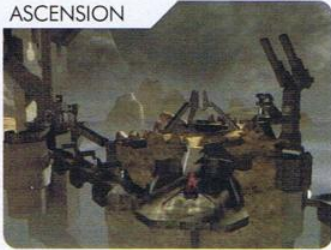
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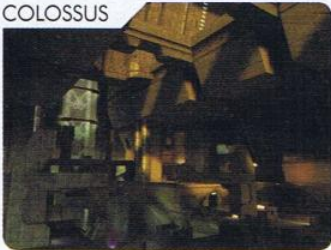
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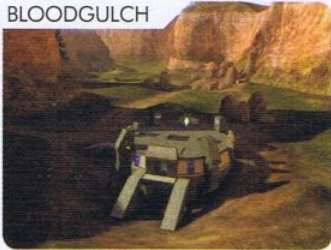
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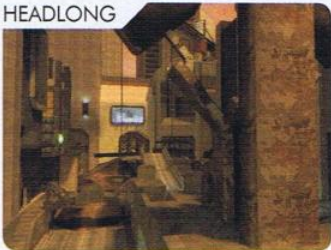
MIDSHIP



BLOODGULCH



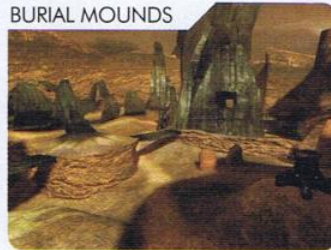
HEADLONG



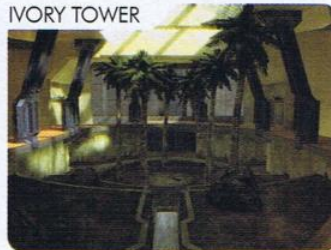
WATERWORKS



BURIAL MOUNDS



IVORY TOWER



ZANZIBAR



with friends a breeze. Simply invite people into your group and you'll move through the service together as long as you care to.

IT'S LIKE RSVP!

The real magic of Halo 2 Live though lies behind the scenes, with Bungie's supremely intelligent match-making system. Using a level system (you earn levels by getting wins) Live searches for similarly skilled players to pit you up against, reducing the hit and miss nature of finding worthwhile opponents. The system is newbie friendly too: in large team games, low level players can be placed amongst more experienced players to watch and learn. We've even been in situations where a larger group of new players was matched against a smaller, more experienced team.

And troublesome players? Bungie's thought of that too - you won't see a



premature end to a session in Halo 2. Bungie assigns hosts to players in the game automatically, so if one host abruptly leaves, Bungie simply makes another player the host and the game continues to its natural conclusion.

And it's not all static either. Apart from free and premium downloadable content like new maps and the like, Bungie has already updated Halo 2 Live twice in the first month of release. Adding new gameplay modes (like unranked training sessions) it highlights the fact that Bungie

are not only willing but able to make Halo 2 Live an even better experience as time progresses.

Halo 2 on Live is a remarkable achievement, even though it's not the complete package we were expecting. It's also not the same as having a dozen or so of your mates in the same room taking part in multiplayer shenanigans (which we think is still the ultimate way to play Halo 2), but for most people it's the only - and most convenient - way they're able to experience Halo 2 multiplayer. Get it. <<<

WHAT'S NEW

Here are some cool things about Halo 2 multiplayer:

- There are seven main multiplayer game types (Slayer, Capture The Flag, Assault, King of the Hill, Oddball, Juggernaut and Territories), with multiple variations within each type. This means heaps of possible combinations.

- In-game voice communication is proximity based, so those players (whether friend or enemy) within a certain radius will be able to hear you while others will not. The sound will come out the speakers too, alongside all the other sounds of battle.

If you have a surround sound speaker setup you'll even be able to hear where the voice is coming from, adding another dimension to the game.

Proximity speech also means you can trash talk dead foes, as they're able to hear you for a few seconds after dying.

- You can transmit your voice to team mates only by hitting the white button. Just be aware that it resumes normal transmission after a brief period of silence.

- Crouching while moving takes you off the in-game radar, making stealth kills a lot more prevalent than before.

- If you have some friends around, you can all hop on Live via the one machine and take part in online games in splitscreen!

PLANTRONICS GAMECOM HALO 2 EDITION HEADSET. Less a headset and more an earpiece, this limited edition Live accessory for Halo 2 really is all class. Modelled on mobile phone ear pieces and solidly constructed, this toy from Plantronics (the US manufacturer specialising in telephone earpieces for call centres) is definitely the most comfortable way to experience Xbox Live. But there is a price for looking so cool while you sit at home and play online - this earpiece will set you back the same amount as a new game.



Links

»» Kosta Andreadis



Beatnik Art

<http://www.cyphic.net/zoomquilt/zoom.htm>

»» All art is, is a bunch of colours and stuff arranged to look nice and make you feel stupid. Nobody actually 'gets' art, and if they say they do they're nothing but a liar. There's no reflection of society veiled within the strokes, or hidden statement on the hardship of living under the rule of the Byzantine Space Monkey Horde. The fact is the Horde did more for the human race than a painting by a Ninja Turtle ever could. So even though you may like what you see when you see this so called work of 'art', you'd be a fool to think it means anything.



Forget the PSP, meet the PS2P

<http://www.benheck.com/Games/PS2p%201.htm>

»» Both the Nintendo DS and the Sony PSP look extremely promising, boasting features and capabilities that will definitely thrust the handheld format into the third dimension. But at the end of the day the graphics still won't look as good as what we get on our home consoles, and I'll be damned if we're going to go back to the days of bilinear filtering, slight pixelation, artefacts, colour bleeding, texture warping, and aliasing. Welcome to the mid-to-late 1990s Sony and Nintendo, maybe you'd like some overused lens-flare with that. When it comes to portable gaming there's no need to take a graphical step back, simply void some warranties, tamper with electronics and dimensional forces you know little about, and you too can get your very own Playstation 2 Portable.



USB Sucks, bring back 96-pin COM Ports

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

»» To most USB is an acronym for 'Universal Serial Bus', to terrorists it's an acronym for 'Usama Bin Laden'. Everything seems to be going USB these days, and if your PC has less than 250 USB ports then it's not worth a damn. And no, that wasn't an over-exaggeration masked as a joke, because you're going to need at least 250 if you plan to make room for the USB cup warmer, ashtray, vacuum, aquarium, massage ball, photo frame, aroma pot and air purifier. And yes we know its Osama Bin Laden not Usama - way to ruin a perfectly crafted joke numb nuts.



How a Computer Works

<http://ueba.net/go/1087>

»» You'd think that a book on how a computer works published in 1971 would have little relevance today due to the massive technical leaps made in the last three decades. Well prepare to be shocked because for the first time in your life you're actually right. The book itself is fascinating and one can learn that both the computer and the common garden variety politician have a lot in common. Lesson 1: Computers do not have brains and cannot really think for themselves. Lesson 2: They are automatically controlled to do the work of many human beings and are programmed to carry out operations.



It's big, but it's not 2.5 Giga-Pixels big

<http://www.tpd.tno.nl/smartsite966.html>

»» So you say you bought yourself the latest digital camera? Sounds pretty good, 5 mega-pixels then? That's pretty impressive... for a walking talking turd! Because you'd have to be insane to get buy anything less than 2.5 Giga-pixels, that's 500 times the size of your pitiful 5 'mega' pixels. Bet you saw the word 'mega' and thought you were buying some high-tech gizmo. If you can't take a panoramic photomagraph of a city and zoom in to read the license plates on the vehicles parked in the streets, then what you have in your hands is a children's play thing.



A Robot Could Finish This Game

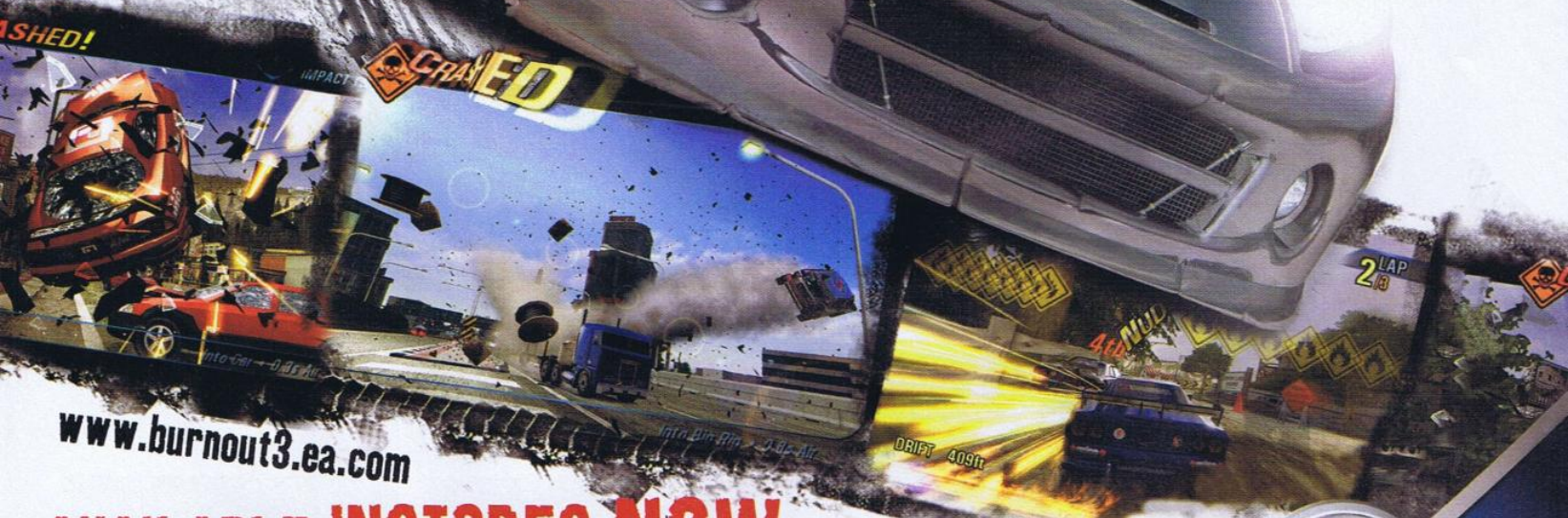
<http://community.middlebury.edu/~tdooley/>

»» Shopping for Lego can be a very expensive task, even those tiny packs featuring a medieval dude and a pot plant will set you back \$20. What a medieval Lego dude would want with a pot plant is anyone's guess, but it's always been a mystery to me as to why Lego is so expensive - after all they're only tiny bits of plastic. And those Lego sets with bits of electronic equipment will cost you a fortune, and why would anyone need their Lego to be juiced up? An electronic Lego robot programmed to complete the very first level in Super Mario Bros is a good an answer as any.

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PlayStation 2



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Challenge Everything™

E6670-C

PIONEER DVJ-X1

RRP: \$3999

In what has been hailed as the future of DJ technology and equipment, the Pioneer DVJ-X1 adds DVD to the DJ experience, and is the first ever true coupling of digital video and music. It may not sound like much on paper, and in essence features many of the same functionality found in Pioneer's CD turntables (the CDJ setup was used as a template for the DVJ), but once demonstrated, the DVJ-X1's importance is unquestionable. It allows the DJ to manipulate video as they would the music, paving the way for synchronised audio and visual cut-up in a way you never thought possible.

THE MUSIC VIDEO

The rise of hip hop and techno has also seen the rise of the superstar DJ, where a headlining DJ can become the main drawcard for a club. Alongside the rise of the DJ musical act came the rise of the VJ (Video Jockey) where images and visual effects accompanied the music. The DVJ-X1 combines both of these skills on a level that hasn't been seen since the birth of the music video, as all the features that have predominantly been associated with turntables and mixing are transformed to incorporate the image. Scratching now not only manipulates the speed and direction of audio but also the images. Looping phrases in a track, cueing up points to instantly replay images and sound, as well as the ability to instantly reverse the images and sound - the DVJ-X1 is a powerful piece of DJ equipment. The saved cue and loop points can also be previewed, searched and selected using a preview monitor. And all of this incredibly without any latency issues, which is remarkable considering the bit-rate of DVD video and audio. With all of this at your fingertips, theoretically a commercial

DJ could mix a set of pop tunes using their music videos with relative ease.

However, where the DVJ-X1 truly comes into its own is when video production is specifically arranged with the music tracks. For example when demonstrated by renowned Australian DJ Phil K, sampling Justin Timberlake's 'Rock Your Body' over a driving breakbeat track no longer means a vocal sample but instead a clip taken directly from the music video remixed and cut-up on the fly to create a stuttering effect that is impressive to say the least. Sampling has always been a corner stone of DJ culture, throwing in a movie sample here or there, a guitar phrase, a bass line, or a vocal sample. With the DVJ-X1 this will take on a whole new meaning and will literally thrust open the door for a wave of DVD white labels. It could pave the way for a whole new type of DJ set that mixes films with music - an idea that conceptually could spawn a whole new sub-genre. The DVJ allows the DJ to have complete control over both audio and video - it can be used to strictly mix audio or video. Imagine sampling a line from your favourite movie and cutting it up live for all to see, imagine building up to a massive beat drop using a stunning contrast of visuals to accompany the music - the DVJ allows for all of this.

Beat-matching visuals with music has always had a hypnotic effect, but until now this process has only really used coloured shapes and mathematical representations. With true digital video beat-matched to music, manipulated, scratched, and tempo altered - the end result is an experience that club goers have felt before, but never at such an intensity. The ideal setup for the DVJ-X1 is definitely expensive, as you'd need two DVJ-X1's, a mixer, two preview monitors (displaying a time information and thumb nailed



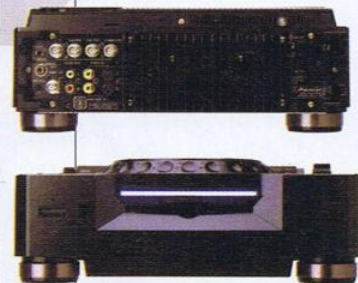
[above] Funky fresh music, served up on a platter...

cue points), a main video monitor (preferably a large plasma screen or projector) and a Pioneer video mixer to allow seamless mixing between two image sources. All up this could potentially cost in the tens of thousands, making the unit inaccessible to most, which is a shame. The DVJ-X1 can play all the standard optical media formats from DVD-R/RW to CD-R/RW and features a memory storage system using SD Memory Cards, allowing for a vast number of cue and loop points to be stored for each particular disc (the unit ships with a 32MB card).

A NEW ERA

The DVJ-X1 may not replace the standard DJ setup as we know it, but it will definitely give birth to a new era for the live DJ experience. With literally hundreds of music DVDs available on the market it will be interesting to see what eventuates from this unit. For world renowned DJs this means a new weapon for their arsenal and one that is definitely set to captivate the club scene worldwide. Pioneer is extremely satisfied with the unit and it's not hard to see why, because it represents something new, something that the DJ experience has only touched on in the past.

Kosta Andreadis





POWER OFF ON

Pioneer

STOP UNLOCK LOCK EJECT

TITLE 01:001 CHP 003 REMARK 18 15 02 VIDEO P -0.12%
132 RPM

PROFESSIONAL DVD PLAYER
DVJ-X1

SRS

DOLBY DIGITAL

DTS

VIDEO

DVD VIDEO

TITLE + TIME MODE/TEXT/AUTO CUE WAVE DISPLAY ANGLE SUBTITLE AUDIO DELETE MEMORY MENU T.MENU SETUP RET.

HOT CUE

IN/REALTIME CUE

OUT

RELOOP/EXIT

EMERGENCY LOOP

CUE/LOOP CALL

ENTER

TOUCH/BRAKE

A

IN/REALTIME CUE

OUT

LOOP

RELOOP/EXIT

EMERGENCY LOOP

CUE/LOOP CALL

TOUCH/BRAKE

B

REC MODE

C

RELEASE/START

HYPERJOG MODE

DIRECTION

FWD

REV

JOG MODE

VINYL

WIDE

±16

±10

±6

TEMPO

MASTER TEMPO

PREVIOUS NEXT

REV FWD

REV FWD

REV FWD

CUE

PLAY/PAUSE

PLAY/PAUSE

REV

FWD

TEMPO RESET

TEMPO

Pioneer

TDK NX-02CD SLIMLINE SOUND SYSTEM

RRP: \$299

Without a doubt the NX-02CD is a sexy looking bit of kit, made even more so by the low RRP of \$299. Utilising TDK's proprietary speaker technology, NXT, the sound system offers a slimline package with built in subwoofer and flat-panel speakers. Aside from having a rather clunky name, the NX-02CD features CD-R and CD-RW compatibility, a nice remote that can adjust every feature offered in the unit, four equalisers, a backlit LCD display and AM/FM digital radio.

The built in subwoofer is surprisingly powerful and clear for its size, giving a full range of low end tones and deep bass with little or no distortion. The NXT speakers utilise the entire surface of the clear side panels to deliver the sound but unfortunately there are some drawbacks to the design. The large surface area of the speakers make for a more uniform sound-scape, avoiding some of the directional sound problems associated with standard speakers. The fact that the entire surface of the side speakers vibrate basically means that there are few, if any dead spots in the room. This approach brings with it its own drawbacks unfortunately - whilst

the projection of sound is good the speakers have a little trouble with some of the upper register, creating some slightly muddy tones. This problem is exacerbated if there is anything too close (within about 10cm) to the speakers and very noticeable if there is anything in contact with the unit (aside from the surface upon which it stands).

If you are thinking about purchasing one of these setups you should also be quite careful about how you handle the unit, not because it is fragile - the entire thing is very solidly put together - rather because greasy fingerprints on the clear side panels just look tacky. Ultimately it comes down to a "you get what you pay for" style situation. For \$299 TDK are offering a very attractive standalone unit with good (for the most part) sound quality. If you're looking for something with brilliant sound quality then it's doubtful you're going to be restricting yourself to such a low price point, but if you're looking for a sound system that looks good in your room and can pump out some decent noise then you could do a lot worse than the NX-02CD system.

Daniel Wilks



NOKIA 9500 COMMUNICATOR

RRP: \$1499

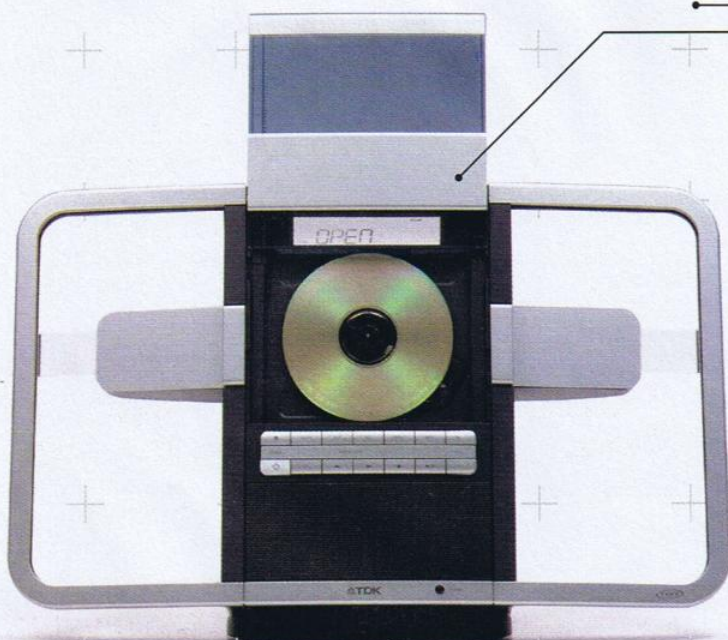
After you get around the steep, steep price of the unit and the rather cumbersome, early 90s size of the 9500 there is something else that hits you - just how damn useful this phone is. Around 15cm long, 5cm wide and 2cm thick doesn't sound that big and 230g doesn't sound the least bit heavy, but compared to the mobile phones of the current era it's a behemoth and when opened up it looks a little like some type of qwerty keyboard primordial phone that survives by eating lesser phones and make no mistake, compared to this, pretty much everything is a lesser phone.

The 9500 is the latest in the line of Nokia's Communicator phones; convergence devices that combine mobile phone utilities with PDA like functions. Featuring a full qwerty keyboard and 640x200 widescreen internal LCD, the 9500 can send and receive email, open and edit most basic office documents and browse the

internet via GPRS or linking to a wireless network. 80mb of internal memory gives enough room for most email and office functions and MMC hotswap support allows users to expand the memory capacity even further. The unit also features triband support so it can be used worldwide.

As seems to be standard now, the phone also features a 640x480 camera also capable of taking video footage. Now if someone would make a version of mame for the 9500 it would be heaven. Sound quality is excellent and the phone is surprisingly comfortable for its size - to put it simply, the 9500 feels like a real phone, not a flimsy piece of plastic you need to push into your ear to be able to hear anything being said on the other end. Although the 9500 is pitched strictly towards the business market it is still a great device (aside from the steep price) for consumers.

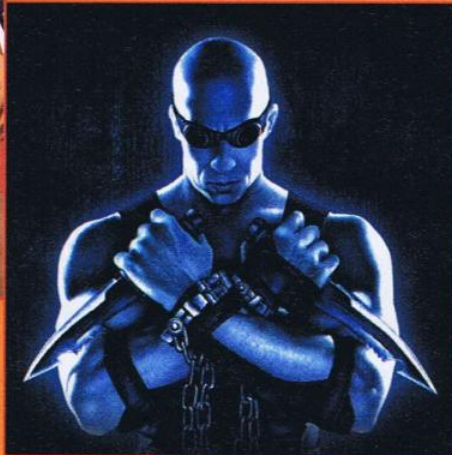
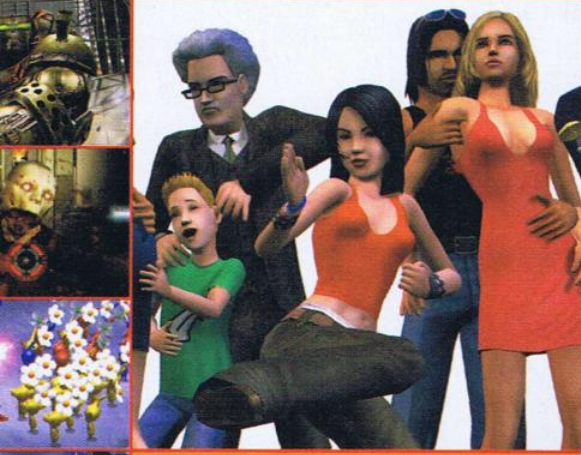
Daniel Wilks



TRANSFORMERS



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CHRONICLES OF RIDDICK

THE SIMS 2



FABLE

POKEMON RED/GREEN



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68 Guilty Gear
X2 Reload
Shit yeah!



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Reviews

Game Theory

DANIEL STAINES



So, here I am in a dingy goth nightclub in downtown LA. I can see why I don't come to these places very often. The music's too loud, the people are all assholes and there's never a decent drop to drink. Resting my elbows on the bar, I place my head in my hands and wonder what the hell I was thinking coming here in the first place. I'm a busy guy. I've got things to do and people to see. There has got to be a better way to spend my time. Right?

Right. I get up to leave, but as I do so I notice the bartender - an old-school goth chick with big eyes, big lips and big tits - staring at me intently. Somewhat unnerved, I acknowledge her with a slight nod and she responds by asking in a matter-of-fact English accent if I have a "confession" to make. A confession? What, do I look guilty or something? Oh, but wait a second... the name of the club: 'Confessions'. Okay, I get it now. This must be a schtick. I decide to play along. After all, I might as well try and salvage something from tonight and this gal looks like she might have a few good contacts. If I play my cards right, I might even score some decent work.

I could get end up getting some good experience points from this.

And - bang - there it goes: the atmosphere has been destroyed. One moment I'm talking to a charismatic vixen in a seedy gothic underworld, and the next I'm thinking about assigning numbers to abstract categories on a character information sheet. All of a sudden, the façade has been removed and I'm completely aware of the code-powered clockwork that hums underneath the surface of the world I'm immersed in. It's a jarring experience and one that role-playing games would be better without. But how do you do it? How do you design an RPG so that the mechanics never become overtly apparent and negatively impact on the experience as a whole?

One solution is to justify and contextualise mechanics with fiction. Take the unjustly maligned Deus Ex: Invisible War as an example. In that game, instead of receiving experience points for completing

tasks, you'd get augmentation canisters that you could use to grant your avatar varying levels of useful abilities. The basic mechanical structure is still the same - you're still rewarded with 'tokens' that can be exchanged to improve your character - but the key difference is that you're not forced to recognise that fact. It's all nicely masqueraded behind a fictional context. The Final Fantasy games do much the same thing: in lieu of manipulating Cloud's mechanical attributes directly, you get to choose what kind of Materia he'll equip. You're not changing Yuna, but the Sphere Grid she carries. It's an elegant solution. But unfortunately, it only solves half the problem.

See, the thing to remember about good RPG character development is that it's equal parts mechanical and personal. On the mechanical end of the spectrum you've got all the stuff discussed above: levelling up and so forth. On the personal end, you've got stuff like maintaining a consistent character and emotional growth. The problem arises when these two facets become mutually exclusive and one must be concentrated on at the expense of the other. Should my Lawful Good Paladin do a quest for the local pimp and thus earn valuable experience points at the expense of character consistency? Or should he do only those tasks that befit his persona and stunt his mechanical progression in the process? Of course, it'd be nice if he could do the Pimp's quest in a manner consistent with his personality - but that would require a level of sophistication that is ordinarily absent from most RPGs. Indeed, in most RPGs, players are faced with a stark black and white choice: play mechanically or personally. It is rare that one can successfully do both at once.

And that's a shame, because when the two halves of an RPG click and work together seamlessly, the result is an immensely engrossing experience completely unique to the genre. What you get, essentially, is an RPG that is less of a role-playing game and more of a role-playing experience. And when it comes down to it, that's exactly what I'm after. How about you?

Until next month,
daniels@next.com.au

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

0-49

These games are as appealing as a full rectal examination

50-59

Playing these is like wearing sandpaper in your undies

60-69

Similar to being stuck in a boring conversation with an actuary

70-79

A bit like an engaging chat with a mildly attractive woman

80-89

Who gets hotter and hotter the more you talk (and drink)

90+

These games are like a party in your mouth and everyone's invited



KOTOR II: The Sith Lords

DANIEL WILKS has been past the Outer Rim

When the original Knights of the Old Republic was released it was met with both critical and fan acclaim. A few years on and the mystique of the first true RPG based in the Star Wars universe has worn off and people are beginning to see the cracks in the game - overly convoluted boss battles, rather formulaic party members and an overly simple approach to the nature of the light and dark sides of the force. This is not to say that KOTOR was a bad game - it was far from it - it's just a round about

way of introducing Knights of the Old Republic II: The Sith Lords, a game that trumps the original in all the places that it fell flat. Obsidian Entertainment have definitely done their homework in their approach to the Star Wars universe, understanding that the greatness of the series lay not simply in the flashy lightsaber and space battles but in the gradual development of character and the rich story veins that run throughout the movies and extended universe novels/comics.

BEYOND THE RIM

KOTOR II takes place five years after the events of the first game. Revan has travelled past the Outer Rim leaving all that the Jedi cared about behind and creating a strange power vacuum in the Republic, an institution crippled by the Mandalorian War and Jedi Civil War. Into this vacuum steps the Exile, a Jedi that followed Revan and Malak to war. For five years the

Exile has been travelling beyond the Rim, desperate to come to terms with the atrocities she committed during the war, culminating with the destruction of Malachor V. Struggling to regain her connection to the force after being exiled by the remains of the Jedi Council, the Exile has been targeted by the re-emerging forces of the Sith as the last of the Jedi, a target that must be silenced at all costs. This is where you come in. As the Exile, it's up to the players to decide the destiny of the last Jedi (something of a misnomer considering that you travel with at least two other Jedi and meet a handful of others). Will you become a force for good in the galaxy, a new shining hope for the Jedi and the Republic or will you turn to the dark side and become a new and far more dangerous threat to the force than has ever been seen before?

On the surface this may sound awfully similar to the first game



[down] Page 52 for KOTOR II

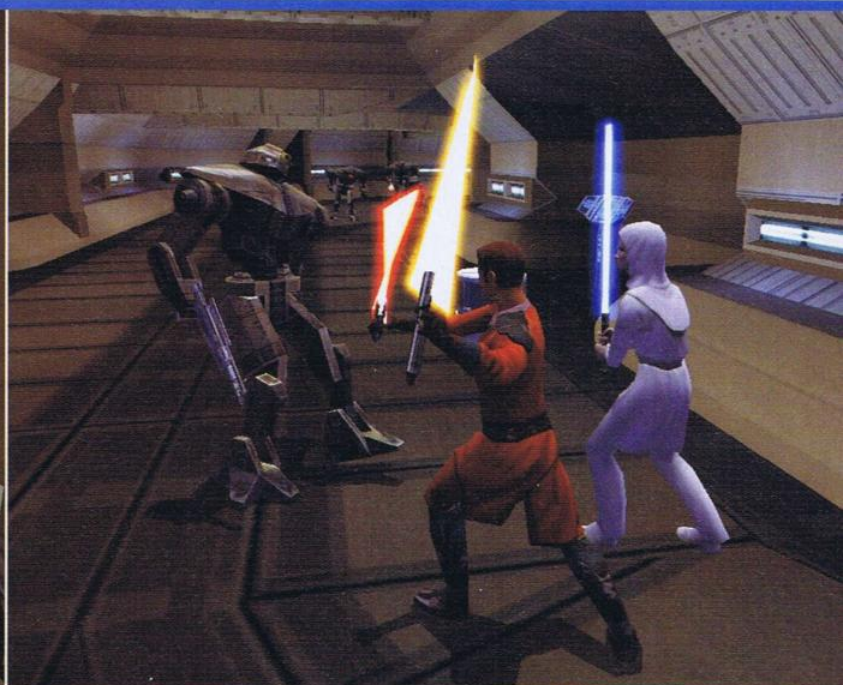


[up] "DIE METAL MICKEY! DIE!"

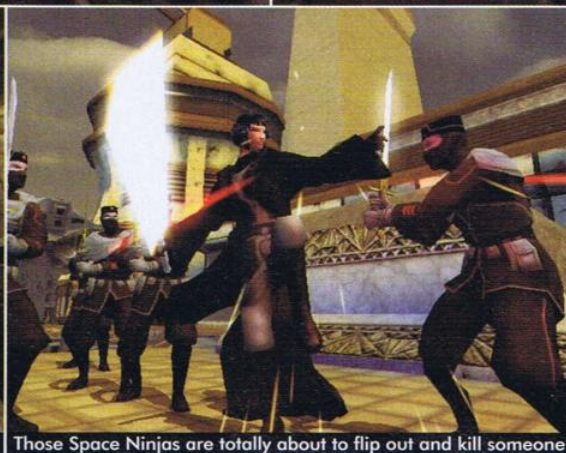


[up] "So... is 7-Zark-7 really gay?"

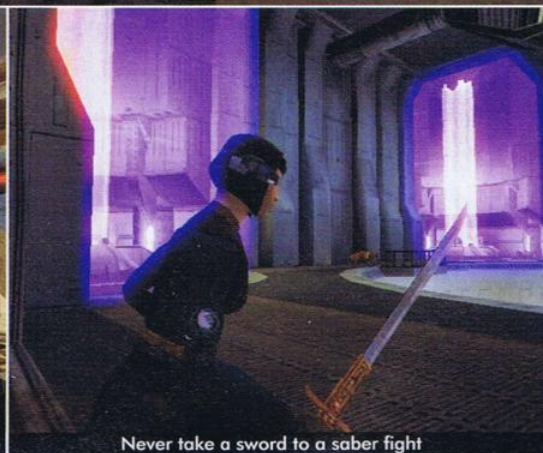




Sit Ubu sit. Good dog



Those Space Ninjas are totally about to flip out and kill someone



Never take a sword to a saber fight

but as I said before, The Sith Lords takes a far more mature approach to the light and dark sides of the force. Instead of every act being entirely cut and dried there is more of a grey line in between and every action has an equal and opposite reaction as well as consequences that can echo through the galaxy. This new approach is typified in a brief interaction on the Smuggler's Moon, Nar Shadaar, the biggest conglomeration of criminals and lowlifes in the galaxy. At one point a homeless man will approach your character and ask for a few credits. Naturally the giving of credits appears to be the charitable thing to do and thus is in tune with the light side of the Force. If you do give the man the money you will see a Force vision of the man being mugged moments later and fatally stabbed, raising the question as to

» The cast of The Sith Lords is a fascinating and richly layered bunch

whether charitable acts really help anyone or if they simply weaken the individuals who are the recipients of said charity, taking their ability to fend for themselves and thus grow as a sentient being. This question is core to much of the game - does selflessly helping people really help them in the end or does it simply weaken them in the long run?

Along with the more mature and interesting approach to the Force comes a more mature and interesting cast of companions. Instead of conforming to simple (though enjoyable) stereotypes as in the original, the cast of The Sith Lords is a fascinating and richly layered bunch. HK-47, the cynically hilarious and seriously twisted

assassin droid makes a welcome comeback and brings with him a funny subplot about his horror of finding that his supposedly unique specs have been used to create a line of cheap knockoff assassin droids, the HK-50 series. Kreia, a truly neutral Jedi manipulates all around her and has intimate knowledge of Jedi training and has a Force bond with the Exile, forever linking their thoughts and powers. Vissas, a blind Jedi from a nearly extinct race forsakes the dark side to protect the Exile from her master, the aptly named Darth Nihilus. Atton, a dashing scoundrel has more skeletons in his closet than he would like to admit and is seeking redemption through truth and blind devotion to the Exile. Bao-Dur, a softly spoken and introspective tech who lost an arm during the Mandalorian War and is responsible for creating the weapon that destroyed Malachor V. The Disciple, a scholar of Jedi history and training methodology who turned his back on the order

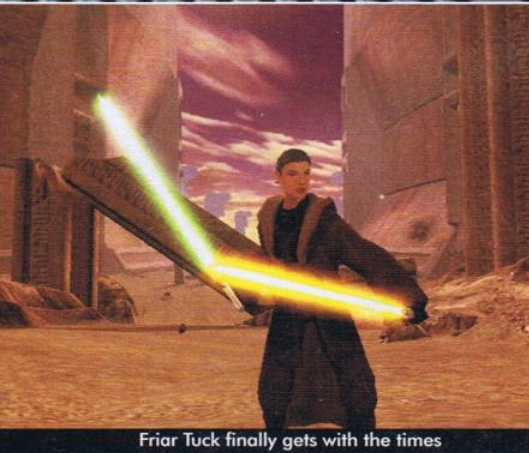
when the council condemned those who went off to fight in the Mandalorian War and saved the Republic in the process. Mira, an ex Mandalorian Slave turned bounty hunter who refuses to kill and is hunted throughout the galaxy by a crazed Wookiee whose life she once saved. T3-M4, an astromech droid who has definitely seen better days but has seen and remembered far more than anyone could expect. GO-TO, the droid emissary of an elusive crime boss with skills in droid control and interrogation. Mandalore, the last hope for unification and glory for the near dead Mandalorian race, seeking glory and honour through battle.

Throughout your adventures the player delves into the lives of

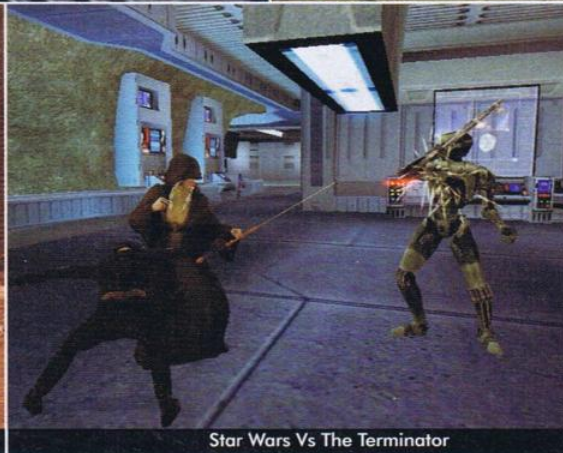
XBOX LIVELINESS The developers have promised that additional content will become available for *KoTOR II* over Xbox Live. Although the additional Xbox content for the original game became something of a joke in the long run, taking months to roll out and finally only turning out to be the extra content from the PC version, the additional content for *KoTOR II* should be a little different. Not only will the content be unique to Xbox, it should also be available to download within a few weeks of the game being released in the US.



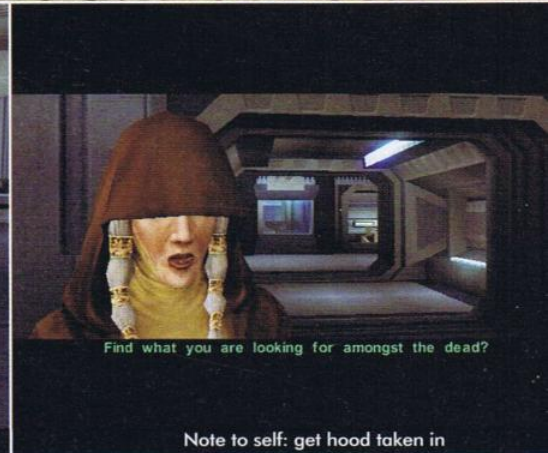
[above] I am TEH EVILXOR



Friar Tuck finally gets with the times



Star Wars Vs The Terminator



Note to self: get hood taken in



THE DARKNESS. No, this is not a boxout about the faux cock-rock band but rather on turning to the dark side. With *The Sith Lords*'s increased focus on conversation and character interaction comes a much slipperier slope on which to stand. It's quite possible, simply through conversation to begin your path to the dark side. If you're the type of gamer who skims a lot of conversation, consider yourself warned - a wrong word at the wrong time and you may find yourself slipping. Of course, if that's your objective then so be it.

these disparate characters and becomes a friend, confidant and sometimes mentor. Unlike the original game the player's actions in *The Sith Lords* truly have an effect on your companions.

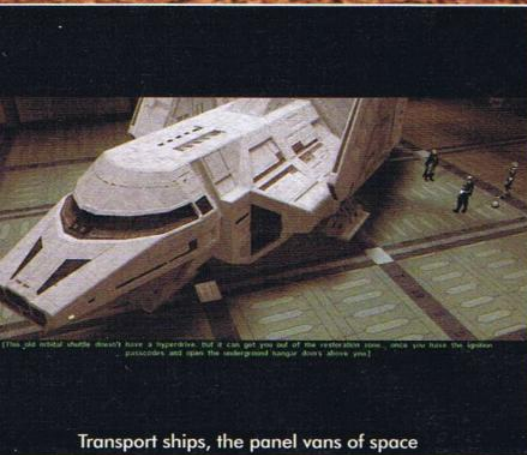
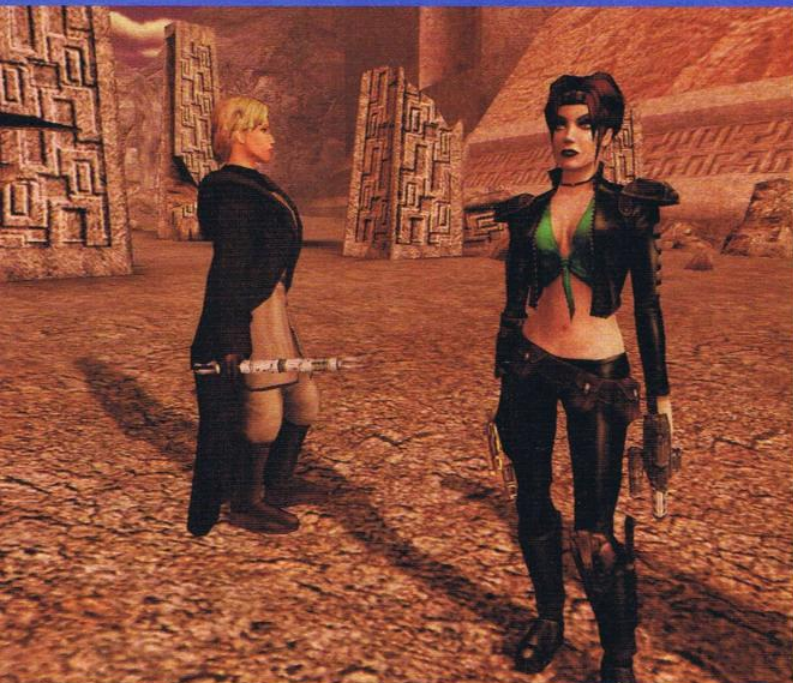
The alignment of the Exile plays a major role in interaction between companions, swaying their alignment and in turn unlocking different aspects of their past or potential for career changes. Moving closer to the light side allows you to discover the true history of Atton and the Disciple and even allows you, through deep conversation and interaction to train them to become Jedi like yourself. Moving the other way and you can discover the truth about GO-TO or have some spectacularly funny conversations with HK-47. It is also possible through diligence to sway characters from their initial alignment by convincing them through remarkably coherently written arguments that your course is the correct one. Another important aspect of the companions is they all have special skills that necessitates you take more into account than sheer combat abilities when assigning characters to go on missions with you. Kreia, for example

grants every member of the party more experience if she is in your group and any force power either of you uses effects both characters. Bao-Dur, on the other hand has the ability to destroy force fields with his cybernetic arm making him invaluable for exploration and combating shielded adversaries. Atton is a born survivor and cannot be knocked unconscious if at least one other member of the party remains standing in combat making him a great character to have in a pinch and HK-47 is capable of doing massive criticals due to his assassination protocols making him one of the most deadly characters in the game, able to seriously damage even the most powerful of adversaries. A little over 600 words on companions may seem like overkill but the interaction between the characters and seeing their growth is truly something special indeed. The voice acting echoes the fantastically written characters serving to truly bring them to life.

DON'T FORGET TO SAVE!

The basic mechanics of the game remain the same but options for character development have been

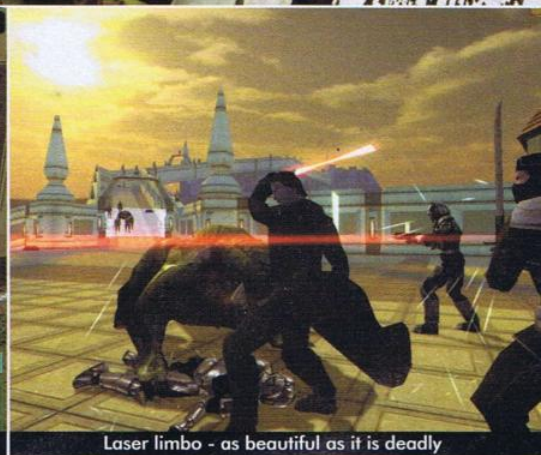
increased with new force powers, feats and Jedi prestige classes. New Force powers include camouflage, allowing the player to use their stealth skill without the need for a stealth generator and a nifty little precience skill that will give you a brief flash of difficult areas to remind you to save without breaking from the game world. Jedi Prestige classes allow the player to choose a specific role once they have reached level 15, enhancing their weapon skills and attacks, their skills or their force powers. Sith characters also have access to similar Sith prestige classes. Along with the base sets of feats and new powers, prestige classes also allow the character to learn specific lightsaber styles that can have effects as various as speeding the regeneration of force points, increasing your defensive ability against multiple opponents or increase your ability to deflect blaster bolts. Combat still plays a major role in the game but unlike *KotOR* the vast majority of the battles are quite straightforward. Boss battles are now merely more powerful characters instead of being powerful characters with a stupid gimmick that requires you



Transport ships, the panel vans of space



Hey Human Torch, wrong game. Come back next issue



Laser limbo - as beautiful as it is deadly

to perform tasks more at home in a platformer than an RPG (Malak, I'm looking in your direction). Whilst this is good news in the fact that the nature of combat allows you to focus on the more important ingredient that is the plot and characters it can sometimes become a little too easy.

Action ranges across a number of planets, some returning for a cameo appearance after the fanfare of the first game as well as some new ones. Players make their way through Telos, the planet decimated by the Mandalorians in the first game, Nar Shadaar, the smugglers moon, Onderon, a planet on the verge of civil war, Dxun, the Mandalorian held forest moon of Onderon, Dantooine, the seat of an old Jedi training facility, Peragus II, a highly

»» The Ebon Hawk is for all intents and purposes another character in the game

unstable planet mined for fuel and Korriban, the ancient home-world of the Sith and the site of many of the old Sith Lord's tombs. Each of the worlds is quite unique in look and culture and can be tackled in any order the player so chooses. Also returning is the Ebon Hawk, Revan's ship from the original game. Slightly worse for wear after years of travelling beyond the Rim, the Ebon Hawk is still a great piece of design and for all intents and purposes is another character in the ongoing plot. Finally cameos are also made by numerous characters from the original game. Whilst this has no real effect on the flow of the narrative it's a nice tip of the hat to fans to see what has happened to some of the individuals they became fond of in the first game. Who would have thought that Carth Onassi, the devil may care rogue with a heart of gold would end up becoming one of the most respected leaders in the Republic fleet? Not I.

SPRUCE CABOOSE

The Sith Lords utilises the same engine as the original but adds a couple of new lighting and texturing tricks to spruce things up a bit. Even so, The Sith Lords is still one of the best looking console RPGs around, especially in the world design. As mentioned earlier, all of the worlds have a unique look and feel to them shown through their native flora and fauna as well as their architecture. Whereas Onderon is quite archaic, almost feudal in design and temperament, the world of Korriban is a blasted desert filled with the decaying ruins of an ancient civilization. Dxun on the other hand is a lush forest teeming with hungry predators, and the mining facility on Peragus II is utilitarian to the extreme. The overall effect of the difference between worlds truly makes the player feel as if they have gone on a journey, not simply moved to another level. <<<



[where else? up you fools] Stuff. hehe

AVAILABLE ON:
PS2 / XBOX / PC / GCN

DETAILS:

CATEGORY: RPG
PLAYERS: 1
DEVELOPER: Obsidian Entertainment
PUBLISHER: LucasArts
PRICE: \$89.95
RATING: M15+
AVAILABLE: 17 Feb 2005

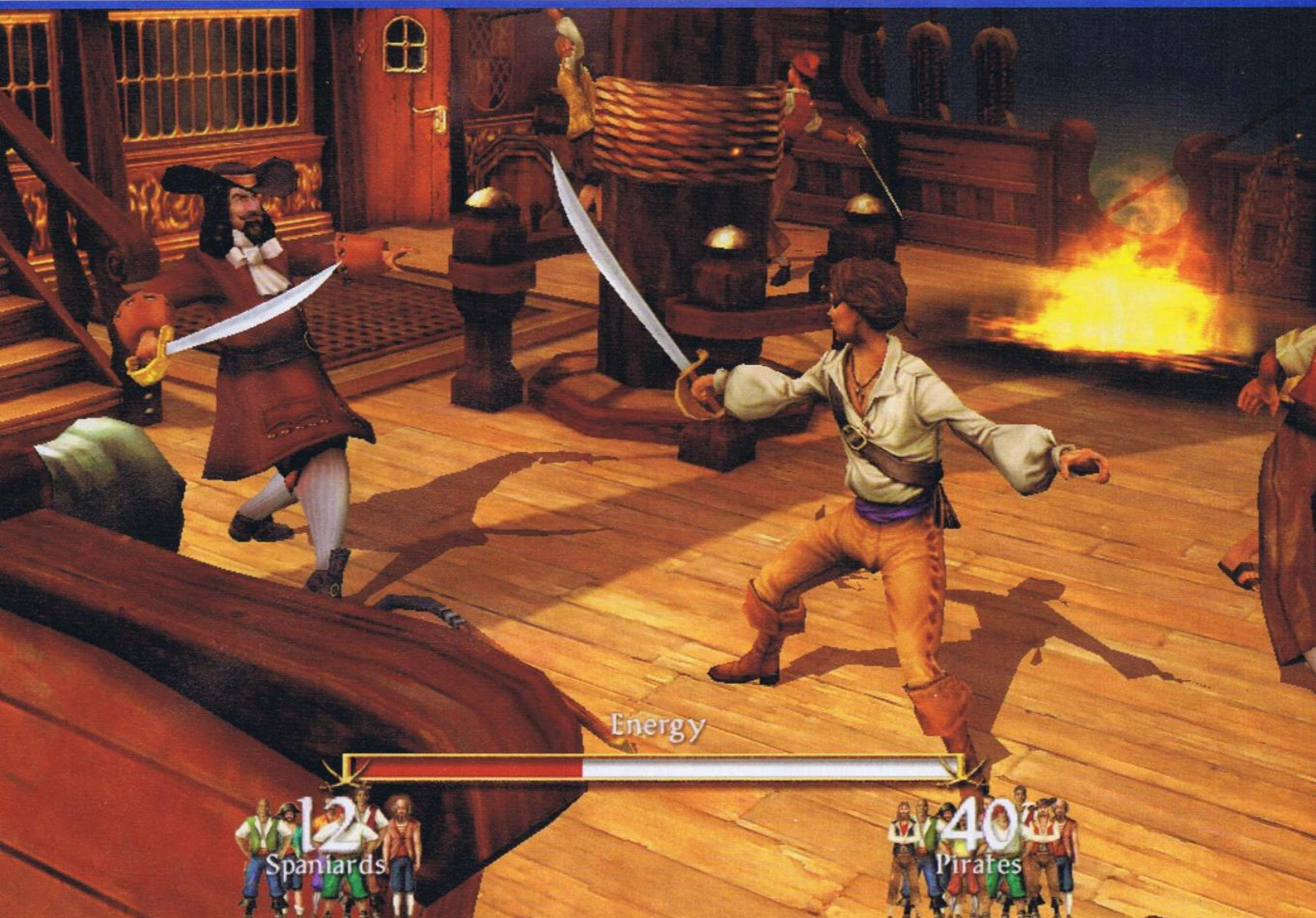
HYPER VERDICT:

PLUS: Brilliant plot, deep character interaction, interesting NPCs.

MINUS: A little easy.

GRAPHICS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY
88	91	93
OVERALL		
91		
Effortlessly captures the essence of Star Wars.		





SID MEIER'S PIRATES!

ELIOT FISH goes in search of booty...

▶▶ Sailing the seas, romancing fair young maidens and digging up wild treasure sure sounds romantic, huh? That's because they never mention the bits about running out of food and having to eat diseased rats, copping a cannonball to the back of the head, being on barrel duty or getting your legs torn off by sharks. In Sid Meier's Pirates, however, the adventuring stays well within the realm of storybook stuff. This is a charming and whimsical pirate romp, where the hero that gets the girl, the gold and the fearsome reputation, is you.

LANDLUBBERS AHOY

The original Pirates debuted back in 1987 and was an instant hit with PC gamers for the way it delivered an innovative mix of game styles - it was actually quite a non-linear game for its time. This remake is largely unchanged in terms of gameplay - Firaxis has just

added some pretty new graphics, thrown in a little more depth and added some new options. The idea is that you can sail your way around the Caribbean and pursue a multitude of piratey objectives that all revolve around the accumulation of wealth, fame and the love of many, many women.

You begin your career working for one of four factions: The English, Spanish, French or Dutch. Of course, being an aspiring pirate, you can switch loyalties whenever it suits you. However, doing things that make your faction happy will gain you a promotion in rank (accumulation of fame), a reward of land (wealth) or the chance to take the governor's daughter to the ball (romance). Whilst the pursuit of these objectives is an important part of a successful pirate career, one of your main goals in Pirates is hunting down the villain that attacked your family when you were a child, and searching the Caribbean for your

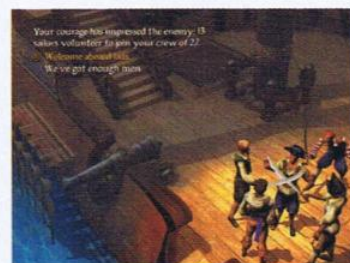
long forgotten family members.

Sailing your ship across the seas is done within a simplistic and yet quite beautiful 3D engine that's viewed from a bird's eye perspective. Steering your ship - and just about every other function in the game - is done by using the numbers on your keyboard's Numpad. You simply steer your ship left and right in order to catch the wind in the sails and pick up a bit of speed. It's very arcade-like, yet it's done with such style that you'll almost think you can taste the salty wind whipping across your face. The wind always seems to travel East to West too, so traveling back across to the Eastern part of the map can be quite a slow battle against the forces of nature - you'll wish the outboard motor had been invented.

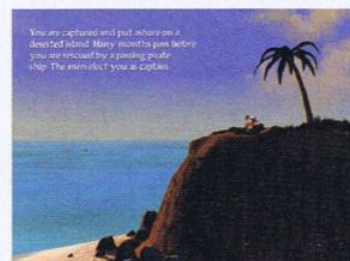
Attacking another vessel takes you in to a closer view of the action, where you simply steer your ship into position so you can broadside your opponent with your

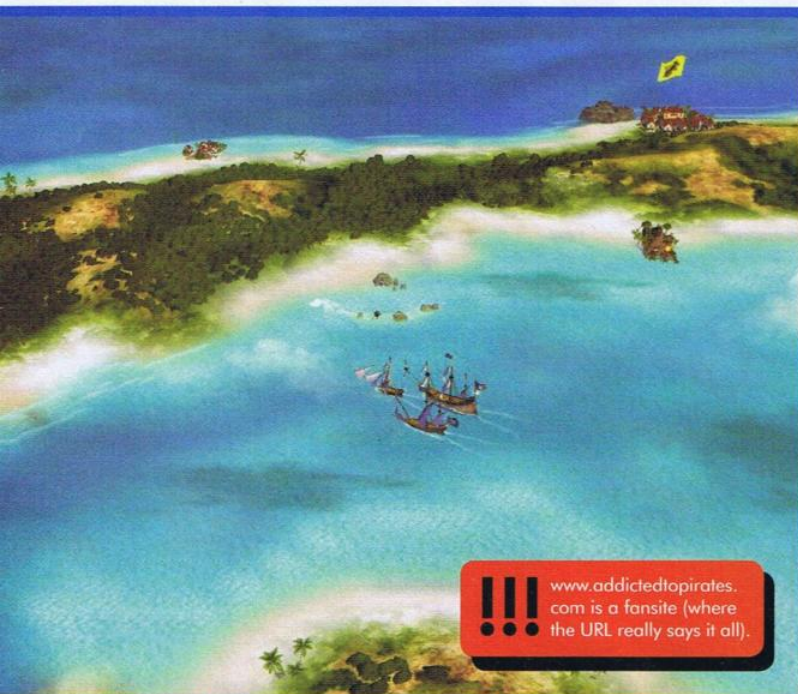


[up] Just like Overboard on PSone. But fun

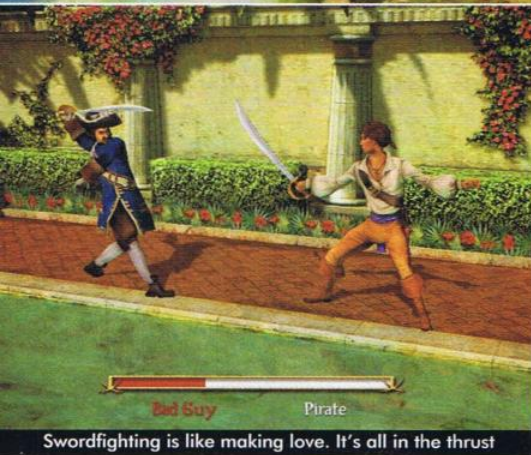
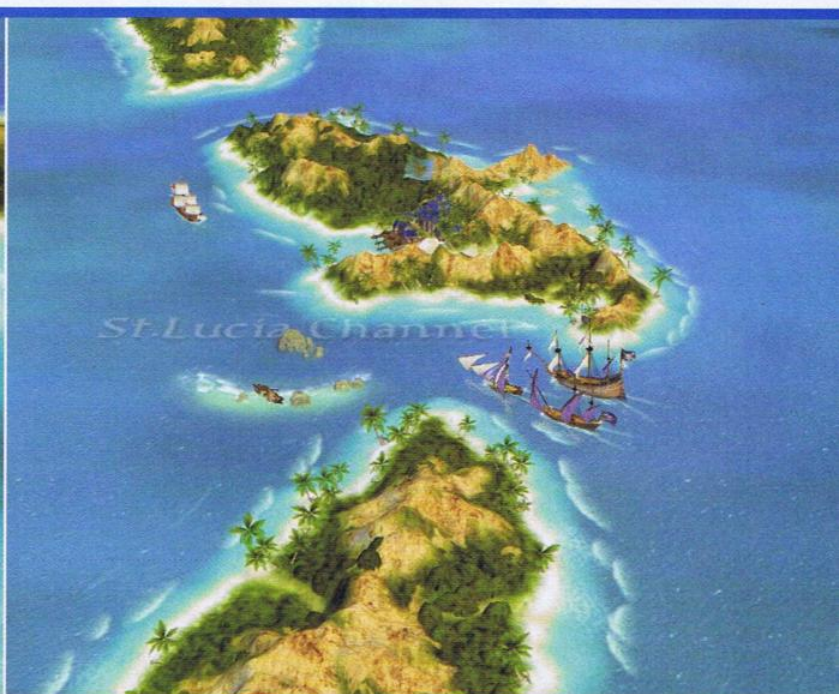


[up] Arr... it be barrel duty for you

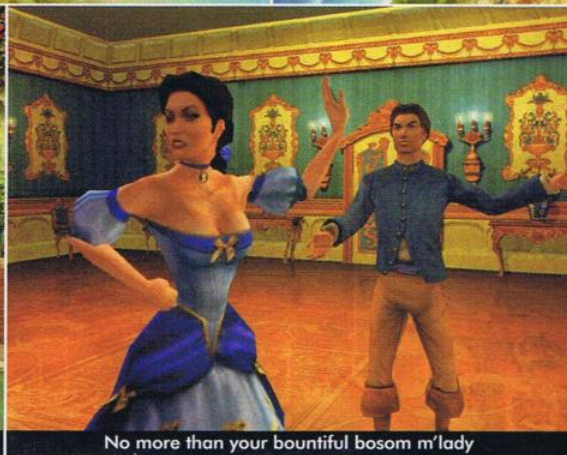




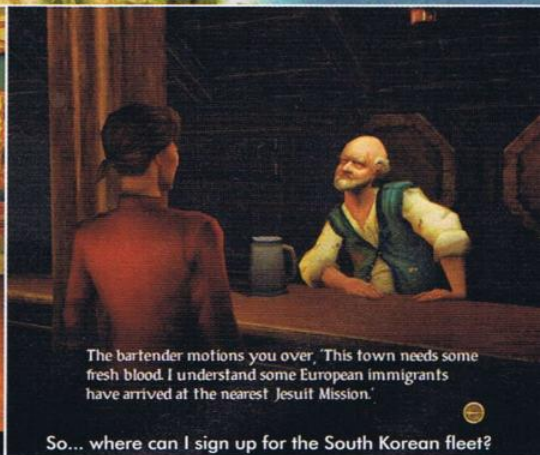
!!! www.addictedtopirates.com is a fansite (where the URL really says it all).



Swordfighting is like making love. It's all in the thrust



No more than your bountiful bosom m'lady



The bartender motions you over. 'This town needs some fresh blood. I understand some European immigrants have arrived at the nearest Jesuit Mission.'

So... where can I sign up for the South Korean fleet?

cannons. The bigger the ship, the more cannonballs you can rain down on your foe. Of course, the smaller ships maneuver better in less windy conditions, so it can sometimes be better to board your opponent and challenge their captain to a swordfight. If you win, you can plunder their hold and maybe even add the ship to your growing armada.

YO HO HO AND A BOTTLE OF PIMS

The key to *Pirates'* addictive gameplay is that it is essentially a collection of mini-games, but when combined, they make for quite a compelling adventure. The sailing, the ship warfare, the turn-based land battles, the sword fights, the hunt for treasure upon land, and the ballroom dancing that you can take part in when romancing girls in various ports, are all simple games that mostly revolve around a very basic use of strategy or simple well-timed keystrokes. Swordfights, for instance, involve observing your opponent's animation so you know when to thrust forward with your own sword. It's really very simple stuff, and the animation in

It's the control over your own fate in *Pirates* that becomes so addictive

each encounter is an exact replay of the last, aside from the physical appearance of your character. What really makes these games fun, is the context that they take place in. Is this a swordfight that might get your hands on a crucial piece of map, or is it just to win a dozen sacks of sugar for trading? It's the decision making and control over your own fate in *Pirates* that becomes so addictive - should I sail here and visit this port, or chase down that pirate who's hauling lots of loot? Should I woo this governor's daughter, or that prettier one in that other port? Should I sell my goods here with this merchant or hold out for better prices elsewhere? Do I go looking for my lost uncle, or waste my years becoming filthy rich instead? In a way, all of the charming mini-games are just frosting on a much more important cake.

Because your character ages as the game progresses, you can only achieve as much as you manage to squeeze into his short lifetime,

so there's a chance that you might be forced into retirement without actually finishing all your objectives, such as finding all of your family. Because playing the game is so effortless, it's easy to just jump right in and start a new career to see how things play out differently. However, a problem with *Pirates* is that smart players may well achieve almost everything on their first play through, and because the gameplay becomes quite repetitive, it's doubtful you'll jump straight into another game after completing the game successfully (which might only take a few days of play). Once your character retires, *Pirates* might just end up on the shelf collecting dust until that rainy day a few months down the track when you've forgotten enough of the game to want to fire it up and go in search of adventure again, much the way you can continue to come back to the simplicity of Tetris. It's not an all-consuming PC experience, but *Pirates* has enough simple charm to win your affections for a dirty weekend. <<

AVAILABLE ON:
PS2 / XBOX / PC / GCN

DETAILS:

CATEGORY: Adventure

PLAYERS: 1

DEVELOPER: Firaxis Games

PUBLISHER: Atari

PRICE: \$89.95

RATING: G8+

AVAILABLE: Now

HYPER VERDICT:

PLUS: Humour, wit, charm and plenty of addictive exploration.

MINUS: Very repetitive gameplay.

GRAPHICS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY
78	75	82
OVERALL		
80		
The charm might not last long, but it's still a great romp.		



VAMPIRE THE MASQUERADE: Bloodlines

DANIEL WILKS is an angst ridden creature of the night

White Wolf's World of Darkness was one of the most popular roleplaying franchises in the world during the late nineties and early naughties, with Vampire: The Masquerade serving as their vanguard title. It's easy to see the appeal of the game and the world. Players take the role of Vampires (and other creatures of the night) in a world ruled by ancient beliefs, demonic forces and conspiracies only slightly younger than time, all wrapped in a deep and compelling mythology revolving around Caine,



Batter [up]

the biblical brother killer and the coming of the end days when the oldest of all Vampires will once again rise and drown the world in a sea of blood. Vampire the Masquerade: Bloodlines, developed by Troika, best known for the excellent Arcanum, drops players into the middle of this world ripe with intrigue.

CRAZY PERSON

If you've ever wanted to play an angst-ridden creature of the night then Vampire is the game for you. If you have ever wanted to play a happy go lucky sex fiend of the night then Vampire is also the game for you. Hell, if you want to play a crazy person with some of the funniest dialogue choices yet seen in a game then Vampire will also fit the bill rather nicely. Instead of races and classes, players choose to make a character in one of the available Vampire bloodlines - special clans that carry with them specific merits, flaws and powers. Not only does this

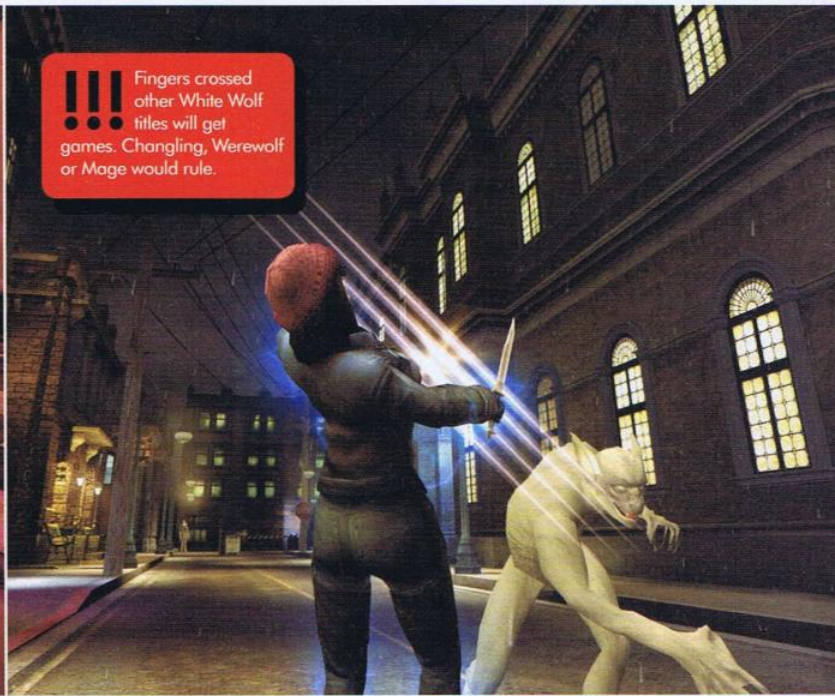
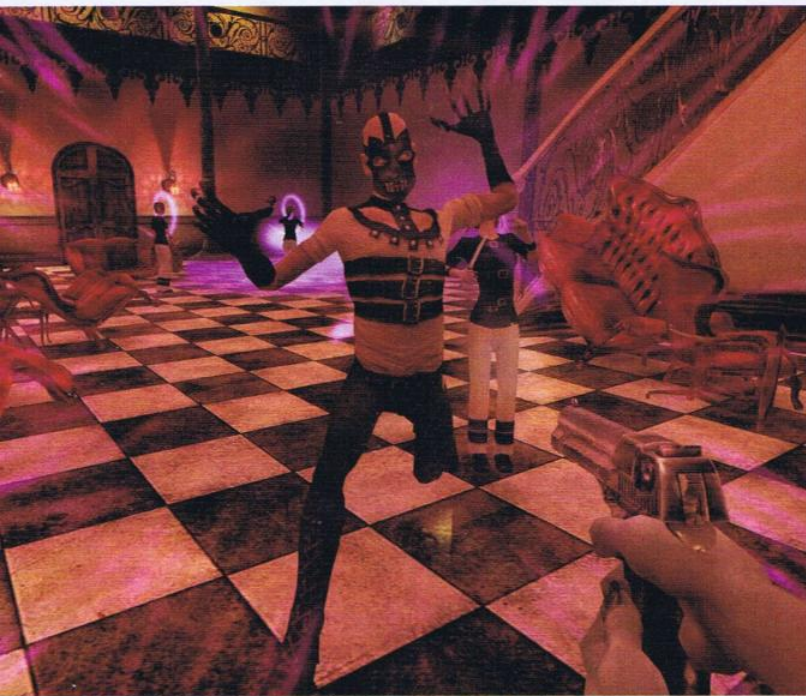
allow players to tailor the experience to their own gameplay needs, it also quite drastically changes the flow of the game, giving a good deal of replay potential. Vampire plays in a manner similar to Deus Ex - players are dropped headfirst into a city with a vague notion of the plot and can discover the larger conspiracies and missions through interacting with NPC characters, exploring, researching and the like.

Although the game looks like a rather attractive first-person shooter for the most part don't go into it thinking you'll be running and gunning your way through hordes of the undead. In the World of Darkness, guns are more of a nuisance than a true threat and skill definitely determines their effectiveness. Although a player may be good at first person shooters, unless the character dedicates a number of skill points into firearms they won't be able to hit the side of a barn. Vampire powers may

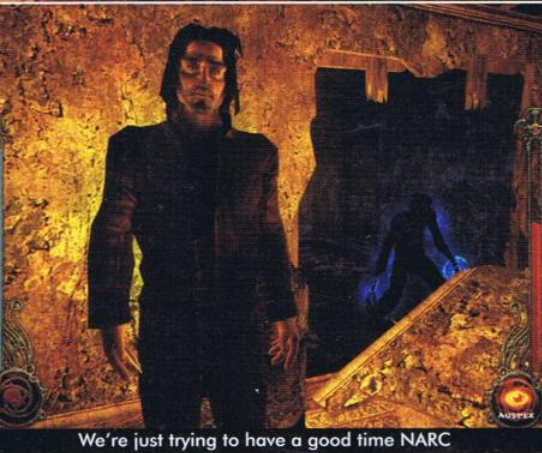


[up] He's got a face like a smashed crab

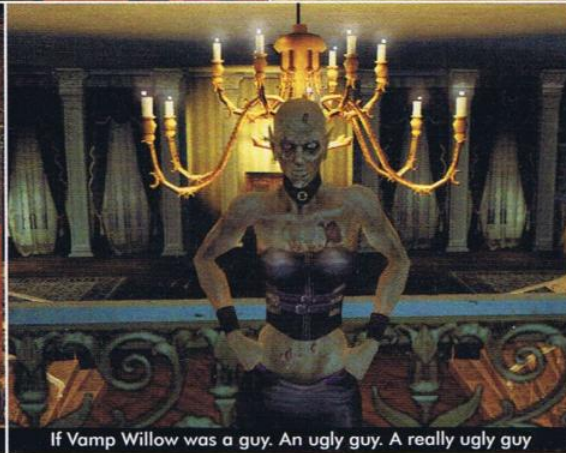
sound like the be all and end all at first but skills are really where the game comes into its own. Boosting up different social skills will open up different dialogue options when speaking to NPCs, intelligence based skills may allow you to spot clues or give you an easier time hacking into a computer, or physical skills can turn you into a whirling dervish of destruction. Like the Vampire bloodlines, allocation of skills can greatly effect the flow and direction of the game. It's unfortunate that players can't always avoid combat as there are quite a number of boss battles, for want of a better



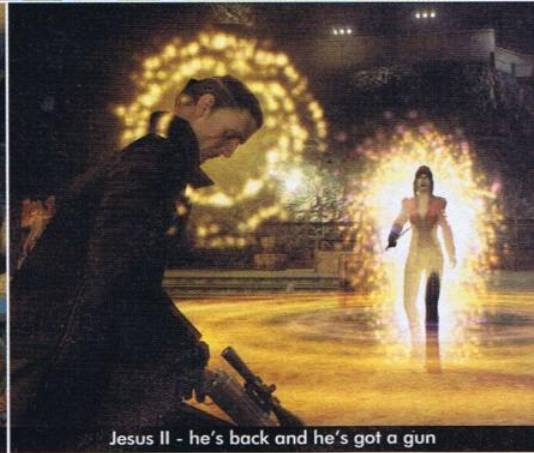
!!! Fingers crossed other White Wolf titles will get games. Changing, Werewolf or Mage would rule.



We're just trying to have a good time NARC



If Vamp Willow was a guy. An ugly guy. A really ugly guy



Jesus II - he's back and he's got a gun

term. That said, when these bosses do come the script to that point is so tight that rather than think that you've been railroaded into a battle you're far more likely to be thinking, "he needs killing".

The freedom the game gives in allowing players to discover the plot in their own way is a great framework but this would all fall apart if the actual story and characters are dull. It's no exaggeration to say that the writing and characters in Bloodlines rank up there as some of the best ever to grace a game. The writing is plain brilliant, simultaneously rich in nuance as well as being straightforward and entertaining. The amount of conversation in the game, all of which is brilliantly voice acted, is quite staggering, not to mention bloody funny in parts - after helping a young

» The writing and characters rank up there as some of the best ever in a game

Japanese girl fight the demon that killed her master how many games can you name that give you the option to say "I bet you're glad that thing didn't have tentacles!"

NEARLY UNFORGIVABLE

By now you've probably looked at the score and are wondering why Vampire only scored in the low 80s after such a positive review. The reason for this is simple. Vampire is riddled with bugs, some small but some catastrophically big, most of which seem to be caused by a somewhat rushed implementation of the Source engine. Throughout the game players will notice many and varied texture problems - walls disappearing, flashing textures, torn

textures, parts of character models randomly disappearing and the like. Numerous clipping issues also rear their ugly heads in the latter half of the game where it is not uncommon to be attacked through a wall or by an enemy immune to damage because it has fallen into the floor. Though frustrating, none of these bugs are game killing. Unfortunately the same cannot be said about a fatal crash bug that brings the game to a grinding halt in the latter stages of the game. With any luck there will be a patch available to assuage some of these problems by the time you are reading this but the simple fact that the game was released in such an unfinished state is nearly unforgivable. <<

THE WORLD OF DARKNESS If you're not familiar with the deep back story of the Vampire mythology then don't worry, you won't be left in the dark. As a fledgling vampire the player will have no problem finding numerous NPCs willing to expound at length about the Camarilla, Sabbat, Anarchs, Antideluvians, Caine, Gehenna, prophecy, bloodlines, the war between kindred and kine, Hunters and everything else you could ever want to know about the world of darkness.



1. Funny. Is NARC Rodriguez around here?
2. If you don't get out of my face, Anarch, I'm going to tear your eye out.
3. Willow? You're not even worth the vampire comeback. Later.

AVAILABLE ON:
PS2 / XBOX / PC / GCN

DETAILS:

CATEGORY: RPG

PLAYERS: 1

DEVELOPER: Troika

PUBLISHER: Activision

PRICE: \$89.95

RATING: MA15+

AVAILABLE: Now

HYPER VERDICT:

PLUS: Excellent plot, great voice acting, real roleplaying.

MINUS: Bugs galore, fatal crash near end.

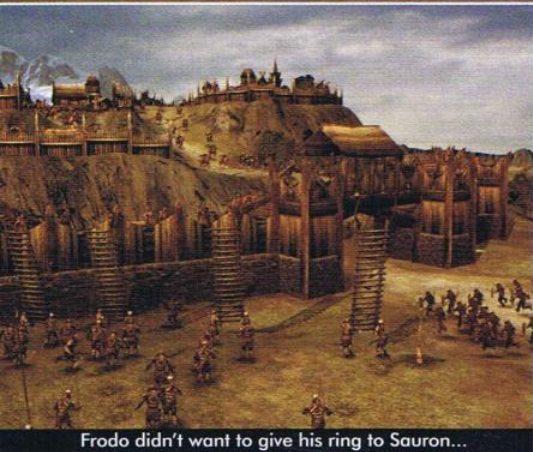
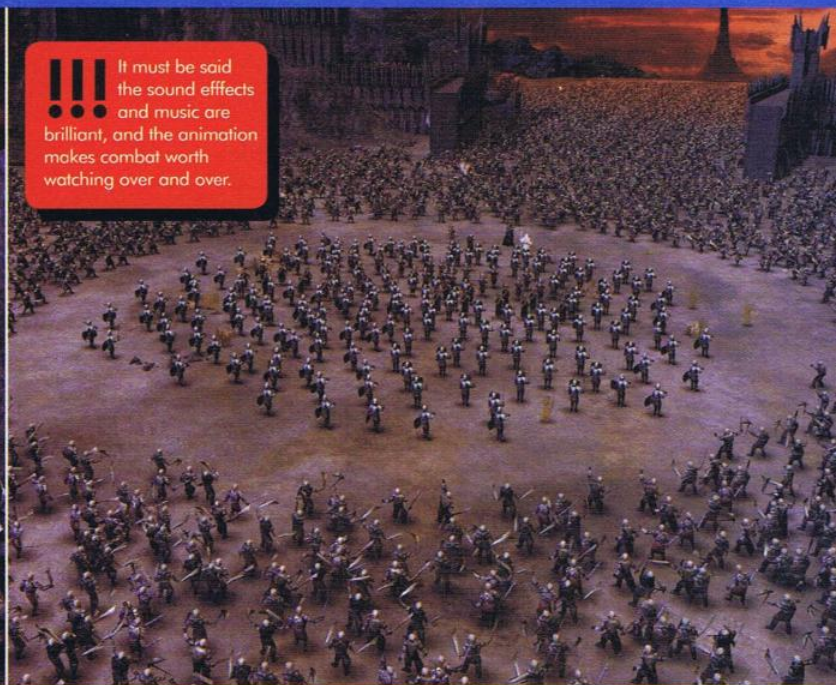
GRAPHICS SOUND GAMEPLAY
85 91 90

OVERALL
83

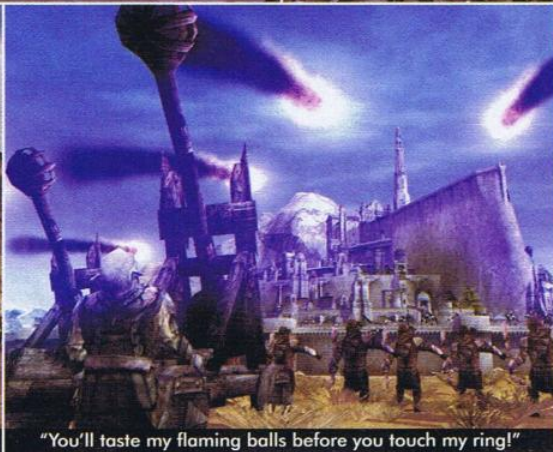
An excellent RPG with a hideous number of bugs.



!!! It must be said the sound effects and music are brilliant, and the animation makes combat worth watching over and over.



Frodo didn't want to give his ring to Sauron...



"You'll taste my flaming balls before you touch my ring!"



But the great brown eye in the sky had other ideas...

THE BATTLE FOR MIDDLE-EARTH

ELIOT FISH checks his ring for hobbits...

After seeing the incredible battle scene from Return of the King, expectations for this Lord of the Rings RTS conjure up thoughts of a game to rival Rome: Total War in terms of epic action on a grand scale. However, after slaying a few thousand orcs we can't help but feel that EA missed an opportunity here to bring something truly memorable to the genre. The Battle For Middle-Earth (TBFME) is a game that fails to offer any true challenge or strategic depth. Basically, hardcore RTS gamers may as well turn the page and forget this game exists. And yet despite its failings as a strategy game, TBFME still has a level of polish that makes the experience so lush and absorbing that you can't help but want to see the adventure play out to its well-worn finale.

NEVER TOSS OFF A DWARF

Whether you choose to call it a 'dumbing down' of the genre (or 'streamlining' as EA might rather

dub it), the strategy in TBFME is as simple as clicking on a build icon, waiting, and then marching troops to various points on a map. Sure, there are slight variations to this, but you'll mostly end up doing the exact same thing on each and every map in order to achieve victory. Once you figure out the winning approach, it's virtually impossible to lose, and you'll cruise through the game. This is mostly because the strategy on offer here never really involves anything more demanding than 'keep your archers at a distance and rush your melee units in'. It's rudimentary stuff.

You don't need to harvest resources or do any other kind of micro management in TBFME. You simply build farms to earn gold, and then build the troops. You can't even decide where to build things - there are predetermined icons on the map that say 'you must build here'. Then you go ahead and start fashioning your

units, keeping in mind that you have a limited number of command points which will prevent you from generating an army larger than the number predetermined (once again) by the game's designers. There's very little room for error.

The game doesn't even recognise or reward basic RTS tactics such as flanking the enemy, nor can you arrange your troops in a variety of formations to best suit the terrain (other than to switch archers to 'skirmish' for example) - TBFME just wants you to sit back and watch the spectacle unfold. And yes, it looks marvelous. Although we must say, a maximum resolution of 1024x768 is pitiful on today's hardware - especially those of us that use LCD monitors!

TBFME is a game that is obviously designed for the mainstream consumer. Drawn in by the license, you can take the game home and be victorious without ever needing to have played an RTS before. <<

AVAILABLE ON:
PS2 / XBOX / PC / GCN

DETAILS:
CATEGORY: Real Time Strategy
PLAYERS: 1-2
DEVELOPER: EA LA
PUBLISHER: Electronic Arts
PRICE: \$89.95
RATING: M15+
AVAILABLE: Now

HYPER VERDICT:
PLUS: Gorgeous presentation, actual movie cast voice-overs, good interface.

MINUS: Repetitive objectives, lacks true strategic play.

GRAPHICS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY
84	92	75
OVERALL		
77		
Grab your popcorn and enjoy the spectacle.		



CALL OF DUTY: Finest Hour

MAURICE BRANSCOMBE apparently hates hippies

Face the facts hippies; humans as a species get a buzz out of war. If the current trend in trigger happy international relations isn't proof enough of this fact then surely our enduring fascination in replaying and enjoying some of the most horrific and traumatizing events in human history is. How else may we explain the present deluge of World War II (and Vietnam War) themed shooters? That's right hippies, you can smoke as much of that sweet weed, make as much of that free love, hug as many trees,

and bath your filthy bodies as little as you please, there'll always be another game like Call of Duty: Finest Hour waiting on the horizon...

THE HUMAN WANG IS A BEAUTIFUL THANG

As with the previous Duty release COD: Finest Hour is made up of three distinct campaigns, each taking place in a different part of the world, and each featuring the armed forces of three different nations. First up is the Russian infantry, the inclusion of which is one of the more refreshing things about the Call of Duty series. The American viewpoint is all too often the only one that we get to see of the war (as with most games...) and it's to the game's credit that each of the nation's campaigns have been given much attention to detail, for example you'll start the Russian campaign as a back up for a higher ranked soldier, since the Russian infantry did not have enough guns

for every soldier you're left to carry your superior's bullets until he dies and you can thief his rifle from his corpse. Small details like this help to make the game far more engaging.

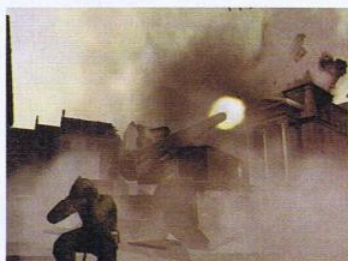
Second in line is the British Commando's in North Africa, and finally the Americans get the last word in Belgium. Each of these campaigns have about eight missions each, and within each mission there are numerous objectives to complete. The least inventive of these mission objectives involves slaughtering your way through a sea of Germans to get to a specific point on the map, and the more inventive usually involves finding an object of some description, and either obtaining it, or destroying it. Neither kind takes much power of deduction to complete, and puzzling is strictly out of the question. Instead, COD: Finest Hour relies heavily on your ability to shoot Germans in the sauerkraut with a variety of



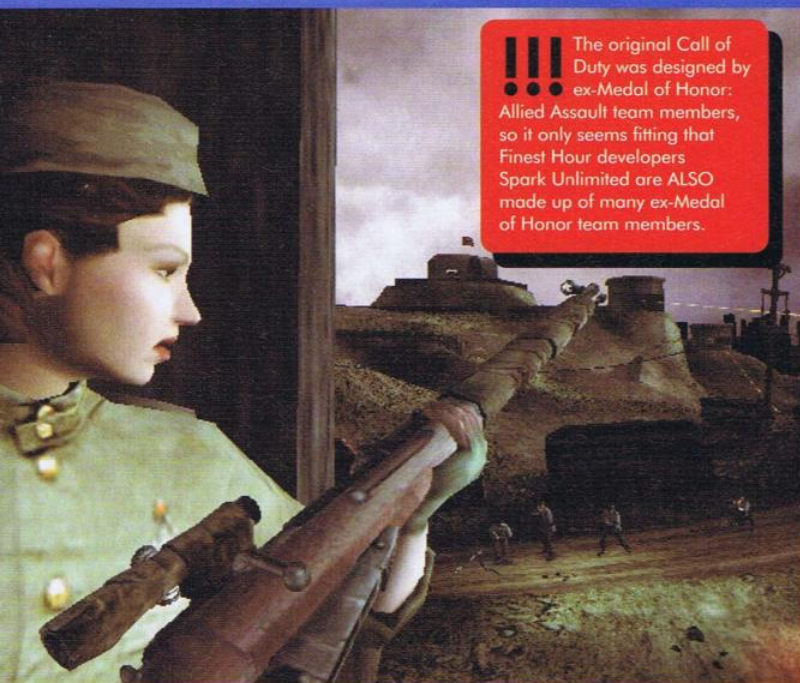
[above] Well hello sailors!

real period weapons, each one unique to the particular nation you control. You'll also have license over a number of authentic wartime vehicles, predominantly tanks, which although they control awkwardly, dole out a fantastic amount of hurt to the hapless German forces. All this is certainly fun, but it soon becomes apparent that the missions in Finest Hour offer little to no room for experimentation and that the game is indeed extremely linear. Coupled with the fact that Finest Hour doesn't attempt to step beyond the conventions of its genre and the game's long term enjoyment takes a significant hit.

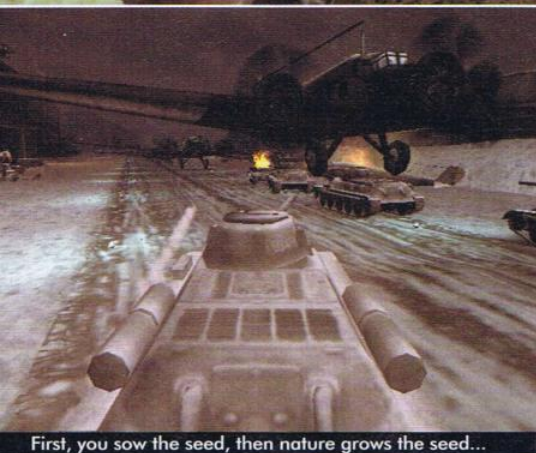
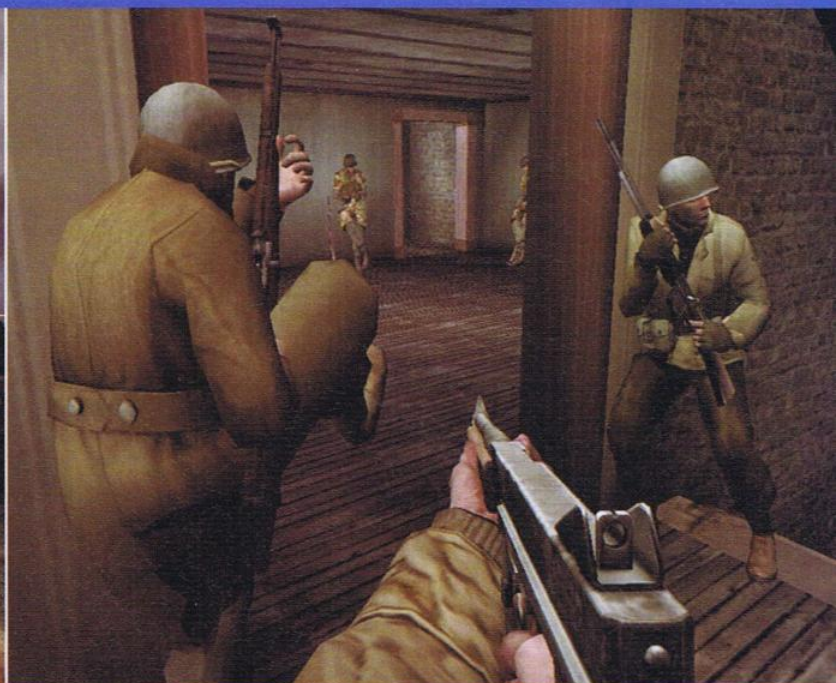
The visuals in Call of Duty: Finest Hour are somewhat of a paradox. At one edge of the spectrum the



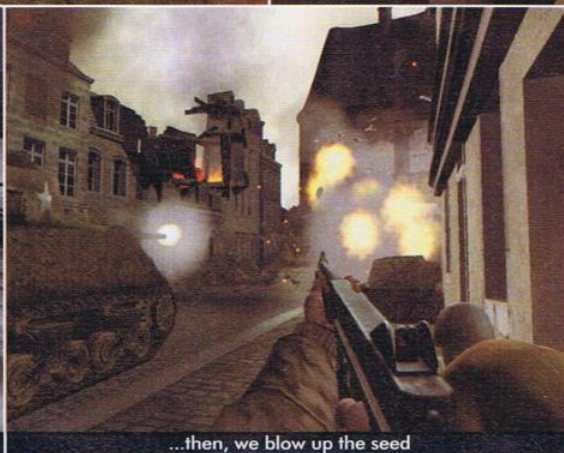
[up] Hide in the corner hippy!



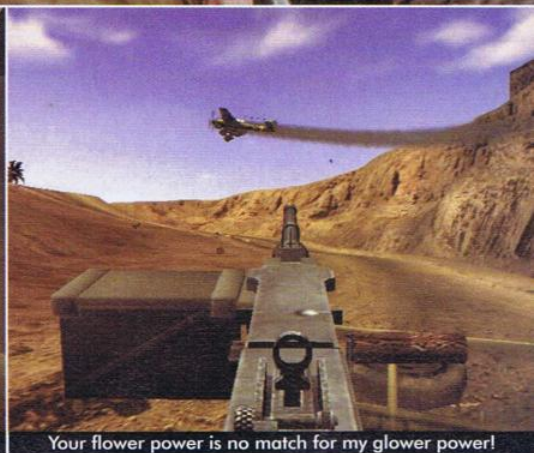
!!! The original Call of Duty was designed by ex-Medal of Honor Allied Assault team members, so it only seems fitting that **Finest Hour** developers Spark Unlimited are ALSO made up of many ex-Medal of Honor team members.



First, you sow the seed, then nature grows the seed...



...then, we blow up the seed



Your flower power is no match for my glower power!

game is quite a highly polished product, the level architecture is reasonably detailed and suitably decrepit, with rubble-strewn streets and shelled-out buildings, and particular attention has been paid to the historical authenticity of the uniforms, weapons and vehicles. At the opposite edge however the game's cross-platform development does show through, and many of the graphical effects even appear amateurish. The fog and smoke effects are of the kind they used in GoldenEye 64, and although impressive for 1997, today groups of slightly transparent circular bitmaps spinning slowly in the ether looks much less like smoke and much more like crap. The ocean effects too amount to little more than massive flat planes of polygons with a solid, completely static "I can't believe it's not waves"

»» Finest Hour doesn't attempt to step beyond the conventions of its genre

texture applied to it. At one point of the game you'll even come across the sewers beneath the city of Stalingrad, somewhere that you would expect to be literally awash with water, but alas not a drop of the wet stuff can be seen, even the water coming from drainpipes is a solid, unmoving bitmap.

AURALLY COMMA KINDA

Aurally Finest Hour once again resides rigidly within the conventions of its genre, but is entirely adequate nonetheless. The usual orchestrated score appears liberally throughout the missions, and sets the appropriate mood with success, and you'll also receive the traditional melee

of background noise, including gunfire, explosions and the cries of either victory, or agony, from your fellow countrymen. We would have liked however to see far more attention paid to the sounds of the player's weaponry as the gunshots are all muffled to a dull pop, and for all the noise they make you may as well be shooting a potato gun.

Despite the game's overly conventional design and multiple flaws it really is quite fun. The main risk is that better players will finish the game rather quickly, and due to the linearity of the missions, have little to no reason to return for seconds. Having said that, Call of Duty: Finest Hour is certainly better than some other recent console WWII-themed shooting games (here's looking at you Medal of Honor: Rising Sun). In the end if you're a devotee of the World War II themed FPS genre you could do a whole lot worse than Finest Hour. If you're not already a fan though, give peace a chance. <<

AXIS VS. ALLIES There may not be much replay value in the single player game, but Call of Duty: Finest Hour does offer both system-link and Xbox Live (or the Playstation Network for that matter) multiplayer options, including free-for-all and team deathmatches, capture the flag and the Counter-Strike-styled Search and Destroy. As unfortunate as it is, the game does not support any split-screen play though, and for those who only have access to the GameCube version, none of the multiplayer features are available, but them's the breaks.

AVAILABLE ON:
PS2 / XBOX / PC / GCN

DETAILS:

CATEGORY: First Person Shooter

PLAYERS: 1-Multi

DEVELOPER: Spark Unlimited

PUBLISHER: Activision

PRICE: \$99.95

RATING: MA15+

AVAILABLE: Now

HYPER VERDICT:

PLUS: Polished, playable and action-packed, historically convincing.

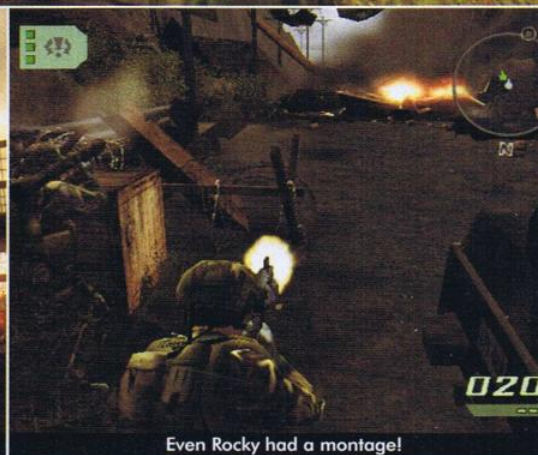
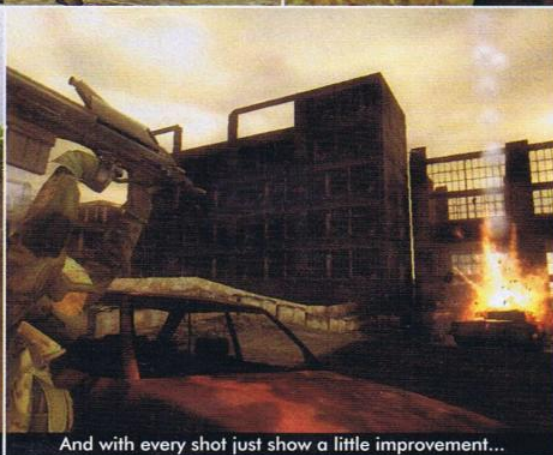
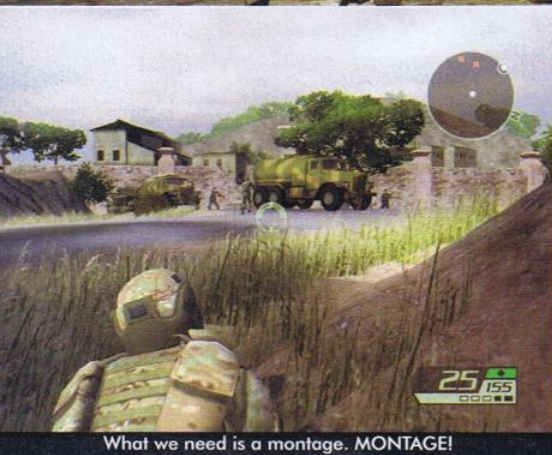
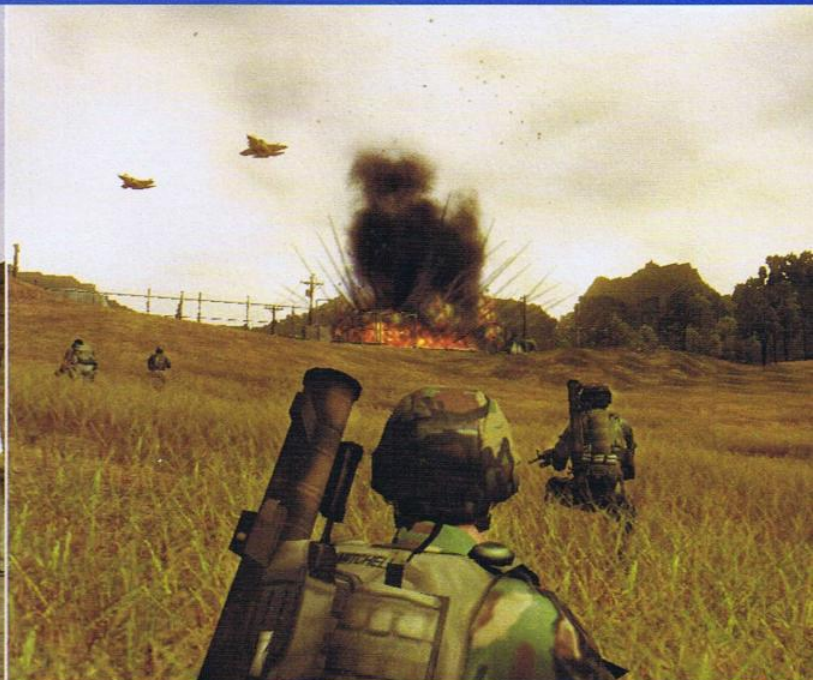
MINUS: Formulaic and linear design, little replay, sad environmental effects.

GRAPHICS SOUND GAMEPLAY
80 73 76

OVERALL
79

A fine game, but hardly the finest hour for this series.

!!! As Christian said last issue: "If you want your fun smart, hard and mean, you need this", and it's just as true on PS2.



What we need is a montage. MONTAGE!

And with every shot just show a little improvement...

Even Rocky had a montage!

TOM CLANCY'S GHOST RECON 2

MARCH STEPNIK goes prone...

Ghost Recon 2 is an interesting sequel on many fronts. Not only does it vary quite substantially from its PS2 predecessor released two years ago, but in a display of creative marketing Ubisoft have come up with three different versions of the sequel - one for each of the formats released (with the PC version coming soon).

LUIGI'S MANSION: RECON

The Xbox version (Hyper 135, 83%) tells the story of a future North Korea that after funnelling most of its spending into its military, is in social turmoil. After pressure from the world community to ease back on its stockpiling, NK goes a bit nutty and the Ghosts are called in to make things right.

The PS2 version is set four years before the events of the Xbox version, and is set around a hacked North Korean missile being used against an American navy vessel. As you can expect all hell breaks

loose and before long countries are being invaded all over the place.

While both games feature compelling missions of a similar nature we have to give the tick of approval to the PS2 version's story; the Xbox's one with its politically correct conceit seems the yin to the PS2's more gritty and warrior-like yang. Broken up into a dozen or so missions, Ghost Recon 2 is a more intimate, straightforward affair than the original. Much of this has to do with the fact that you're playing one main character and aren't able to switch between party members at will. This tighter focus does wonders for the atmosphere and better immerses you in the battlefield.

Still, most of what was said in our Xbox review rings true for the PS2 version - GR2 features less overriding strategy, nicely varied missions and intense skirmishes that can and often do prematurely end thanks to terrific accuracy on the part of your enemy.

The more important thing to consider about this multi-format release is that each version of the game features not only unique missions but was developed to the strengths of each console. The PS2's visuals are a vast improvement over the original Ghost Recon, while the Xbox version handles its visuals effortlessly. The lack of a first-person perspective in the PS2 version gives the Xbox a big green tick, while the save-anywhere system of the Xbox seems a cheap cop-out to the lack of a mid-level save option on the PS2. In this respect the PS2 feels a lot more challenging, if not at times highly frustrating.

So the question remains: which version should you get? Ubisoft would suggest getting all three. If you're a fan, then sure - they complement each other well. But if there could be only one we reckon the Xbox has the slight edge overall, however PS2 owners have no reason to feel short-changed at all. <<<

AVAILABLE ON:
PS2 / XBOX / PC / GCN

DETAILS:

CATEGORY: Action/Strategy

PLAYERS: 1-Multi

DEVELOPER: Ubisoft Shanghai

PUBLISHER: Ubisoft

PRICE: \$99.95

RATING: MA15+

AVAILABLE: Now

HYPER VERDICT:

PLUS: Challenging, atmospheric, and smart.

MINUS: Very tough at times, virtually useless squad members.

GRAPHICS SOUND GAMEPLAY
84 78 79

OVERALL
80

A worthy sequel, but with a different flavour.

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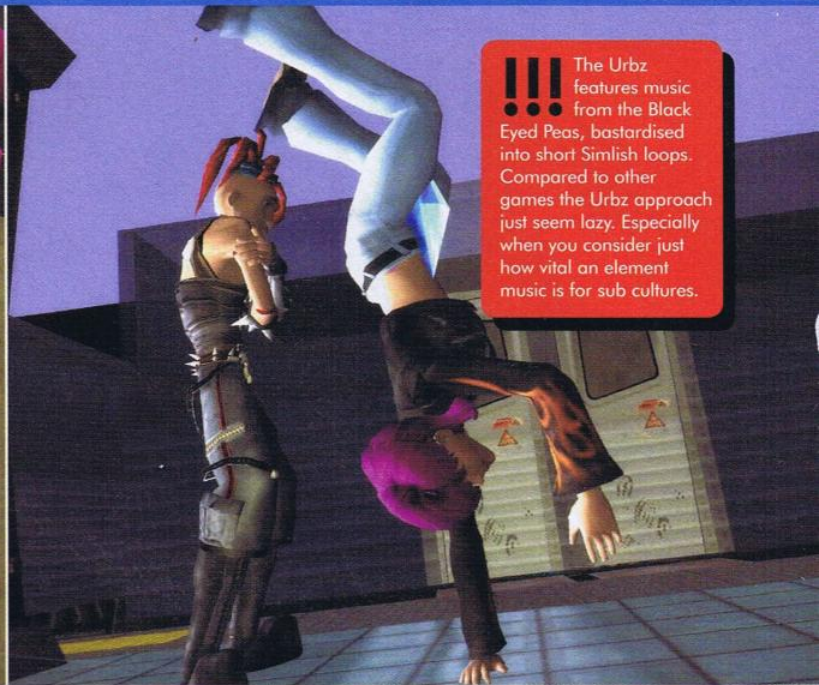
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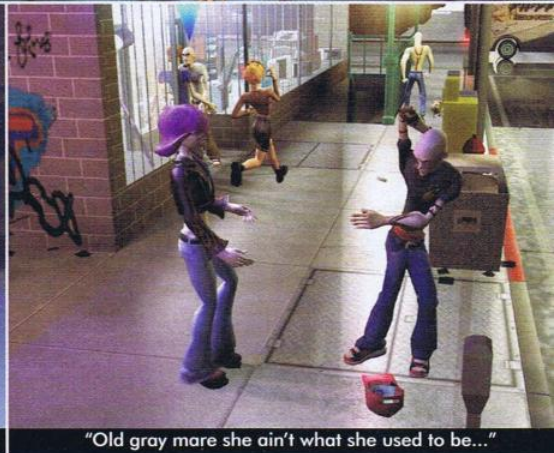
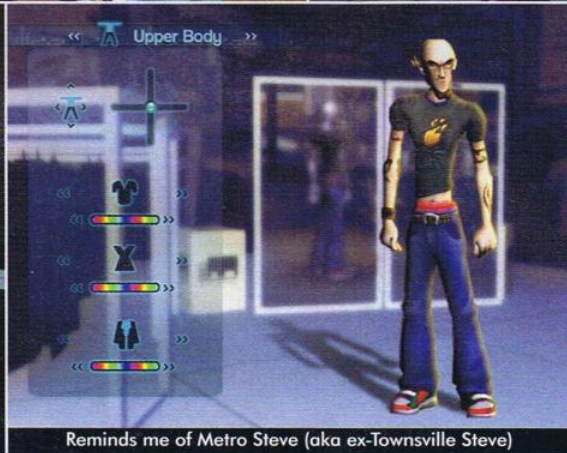
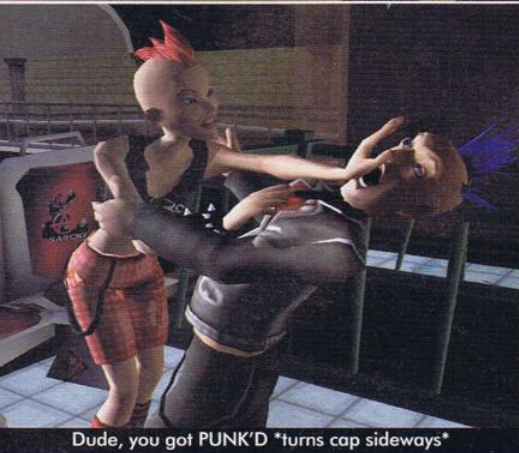
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!!! The Urbz features music from the Black Eyed Peas, bastardised into short Simlish loops. Compared to other games the Urbz approach just seem lazy. Especially when you consider just how vital an element music is for sub cultures.



Dude, you got PUNK'D *turns cap sideways*

Reminds me of Metro Steve (aka ex-Townsville Steve)

"Old gray mare she ain't what she used to be..."

THE URBZ: Sims in the city

MIKOLAJ learns how to vogue. Again.

Lets face it. For all its acclaim and sales, The Sims is a little, well, suburban. The idea of throwing dinner parties and property investment is a foreign concept to those of us raised in bus shelters. Hoping to push the license into new territory, The Urbz is aimed at a younger target market and forgoes the suburbs in favour of the inner city. Dispensing with much of the free form gameplay the series is known for, The Urbz sees home renovations and character development take a back seat to the endless pursuit of popularity. Unfortunately in a bid to make the game more accessible, Maxis have removed all the elements that made the Sims games so engrossing.

THE DO WHAT WE SAY FESTIVAL

The gameplay now revolves around fitting into your environment and interacting with other characters, however, the way in which you do this is depressingly shallow and

linear. My initial hopes of trying to make it in the Urbz world as a 20 something slacker were soon dashed as I realised you have no say in your character's development. While I was planning on getting my Urb some ink, a 2-day growth and a dash of Nihilism, the game instead starts in a high-rise complex populated by yuppie fashion designers and extras from Sex And The City. Somehow my planned slacker had morphed into a metrosexual who likes to vogue. Huh?

Unfortunately if you want to get past the first level you've got to play along and that means you'll have to vogue, take a job as a male model and wear a garish pastel suit in order to 'fit in'. It's Queer Eye For The Straight Urb. The game's remaining levels play out in a similar vein with your Urb shuffled from one parody of sub culture to another and the player given little option but to play along.

Even worse than the linear game structure is the complete lack of challenge. When you interact with

other characters your options are colour coded: green, yellow and red. Green responses will always result in a favourable outcome and see your popularity grow. Yellow options will usually work and red will piss off the other Urbz. Progression is simply a matter of buying the right clothes and opting for the green option. Or yellow option if you want to live dangerously. If you have the patience you can finish Urbz in a matter of days without once having to stop and consider your actions. The game's only challenge is the need to accommodate your Urbz weak bladder and constant food cravings.

Clearly, The Urbz is aimed at a younger demographic but that doesn't excuse the fact that there's barely a game to be found here. Without the scope of the proper Sims games or the charm of Animal Crossing, Urbz is as shallow as the notion of conformity it pushes. There's more to life than being popular. <<

AVAILABLE ON:
PS2 / XBOX / PC / GCN

DETAILS:

CATEGORY: Life Sim

PLAYERS: 1-2

DEVELOPER: Maxis

PUBLISHER: EA

PRICE: \$69.95

RATING: M15+

AVAILABLE: Now

HYPER VERDICT:

PLUS: Eye Toy compatible, er, lots of dancing.

MINUS: Shallow and linear, long loading times.

GRAPHICS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY
70	65	60
OVERALL		
65		
A disappointing take on the Sims Franchise.		

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Hey, he stole that move from Evil Malky! CRUSH U!

This screen is boring. Where are the slapstick comedy doors?

Uematsu's lesser known "Two-Winged Angel"

GUILTY GEAR X2 #RELOAD

MALCOLM CAMPBELL has a clear conscience...

➤ The first thing most people notice about Guilty Gear is the graphics. Quite simply, they are stunning. Drawn in double the resolution of most beat-em-ups, the sprites look like they've been ripped straight from an anime, shrunk down and slapped on screen. Throw in some spectacular screen-filling special moves and you've got probably the best looking 2D game ever made.

WAVE YOUR FREAK FLAG HIGH

The second thing most people notice is that the majority of these beautiful little sprites are complete freaks. The original cast had only a handful of characters that were vaguely normal and X2 (the #Reload subtitle signifies only a minor change) ups the ante to new levels of freakdom with five new superfreaks. Robo-Ky, Slayer the dapper vampire and I-No the guitar-wielding witch are accompanied by two characters who give Giant Doctor Baghead (© 2004 D.Wilks)

a run for his freak crown. To the naked eye Bridget is a yoyo-wielding schoolgirl in a nun's habit, but in reality 'she' is the son of an aristocrat who is fighting to prove he's no mummy's boy! Not to be outdone is Zappa, the poor Aussie lad who's been possessed by evil spirits, his inner demons contorting his body to produce moves such as "Say Hello to the Three Centipedes". Experimenting with all the characters is really a lot of fun. Even getting smacked in the head by Baghead's 'disappear into parallel universe and re-appear via slapstick comedy door' trick is funny the first ten or so times...

Dig a little deeper though, and it becomes apparent that the real heart of the gameplay lies in learning the game's myriad techniques. Along with the typically flashy Overdrive super-moves and Instant-Kill techniques, advanced players will want to master Dead Angle attacks, Roman Cancels, Dust Attacks, and Psych Bursts (amongst

many others). It's hard enough remembering all these moves, never mind applying them with intention in the mayhem of battle. And while there's undoubtedly a lot of geeky satisfaction in countering perfectly and following up with an Aerial Dust Attack, there is also a lot to be said for tooling around with a friend, seeing who can perform the wackiest move. Thankfully the game works on both levels. GGX2#R also has enough variety in its various Story, Mission and Medal of Millionaire modes to keep the solitary gamer busy, with two powerful bosses and a gallery full of great artwork to unlock.

After years of neglect, fans of 2D fighters are suddenly spoiled for choice. Xbox owning Capcom fans already have the excellent Street Fighter III: 3rd Strike, while SNK die-hards have reason for cheer with several King of Fighters games on the horizon. Guilty Gear X2 #Reload should be considered an essential purchase no matter where your allegiances lie. <<

AVAILABLE ON:
PS2 / XBOX / PC / GCN

DETAILS:

CATEGORY: Fighting
PLAYERS: 1-2 (Xbox has Live support)
DEVELOPER: Arc System Works
PUBLISHER: HES Interactive
PRICE: \$89.95
RATING: M15+
AVAILABLE: Now

HYPER VERDICT:

PLUS: Pretty as a peach. Crazy like a fox. Deep as the ocean.

MINUS: Widdly music suits, but can grate. Maybe overly complicated.

GRAPHICS SOUND GAMEPLAY
95 72 85

OVERALL
86

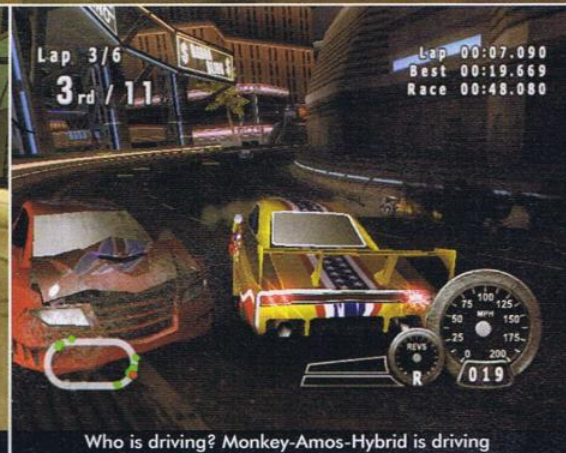
2D fighters will never die!
Heaven or hell? Let's Rock!



Hmm... I think I'll paint it "Berocca Piss" orange



Crashing AND burning? It's got it all



Who is driving? Monkey-Amos-Hybrid is driving

CRASH N BURN

DANIEL WILKS prefers the giant robot film of the same name

With a name like Crash N Burn you can be pretty safe in the assumption that the game will feature a number of crashes and things on fire. In this respect, Crash N Burn delivers, with crashes and burning wrecks all but inevitable in every event. It seems that finally there is some truth in advertising, but unfortunately telling the truth isn't always enough. Crash N Burn is a racing game at heart. It's also a demolition derby game at heart and as we all know from the perverted and godless biological experiments we all perform in the basement whilst trying to create the ultimate Amos/Monkey hybrid, a creature with two hearts just can't quite work - the two sides of its nature will often clash.

SOUNDS LIKE A CRASH BANDICOOT VILLAIN

Crash N Burn (CnB) is set up much like any other racing game with players able to jump into

championship races (the default career mode) to unlock new tracks and modifications for your car or play single events on tracks you've already unlocked in the championships. After winning races you can also modify the cars in your garage with engine upgrades, new tires and the like, as well as after market cosmetic mods, a strange addition in a game that is all about destroying cars.

As a racing game, Crash N Burn is a moderate success but the aforementioned problem of the game having a dual nature kicks in with track design. Put simply the vast majority of tracks are way too narrow (or reach artificially bottlenecked points) to make for a satisfying experience. It's obvious the designers have implemented these features to take advantage of the crash mechanics in the game but this only serves to increase the frustration as destroyed cars remain on the track, further bottlenecking

the course. It's not uncommon to see areas on a number of tracks so congested with car wrecks that the only way through them is to go at ramming speed and hope you don't destroy your own car in the process.

As a crashing game CnB fares a bit better, especially in the crash specific game modes like Kamikaze, Last Man Standing and Bomb Tag. Kamikaze sees a full complement of 16 racers on the track but with eight heading in each direction making for some rather spectacular head on collisions. Last Man Standing is an arena based total destruction race with the simple object of being the last car in motion. Bomb Tag is another arena bound race with a bomb on a short timer that can be transferred to another car by touching it. As fun as these modes are the inclusion of the crash dynamics (and incredibly aggressive driver AI) detracts from what could have been quite a decent little racer. <<

AVAILABLE ON:
PS2 / XBOX / PC / GCN

DETAILS:

CATEGORY: Racing

PLAYERS: 1-16

DEVELOPER: Climax

PUBLISHER: Eidos

PRICE: \$69.95

RATING: G

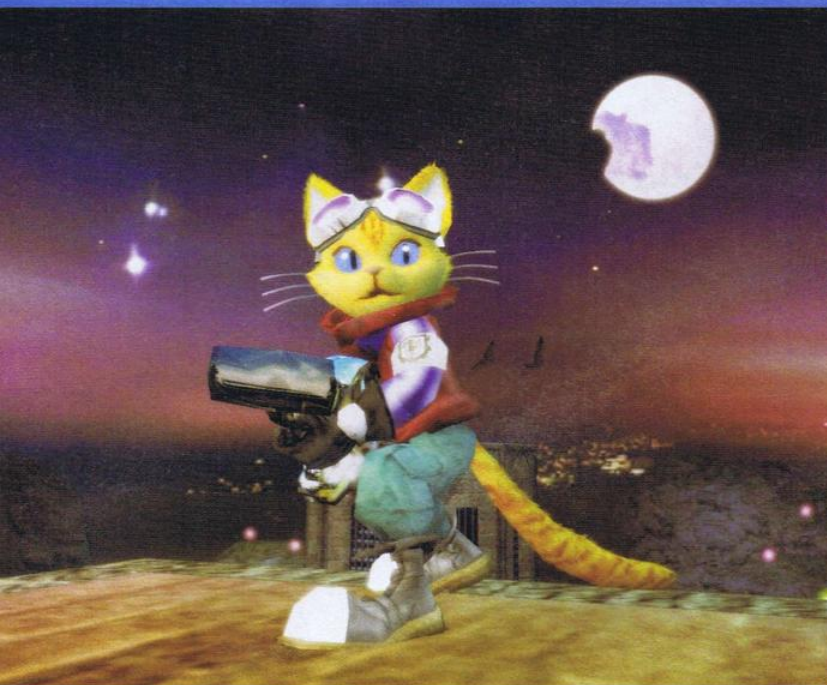
AVAILABLE: Now

HYPER VERDICT:

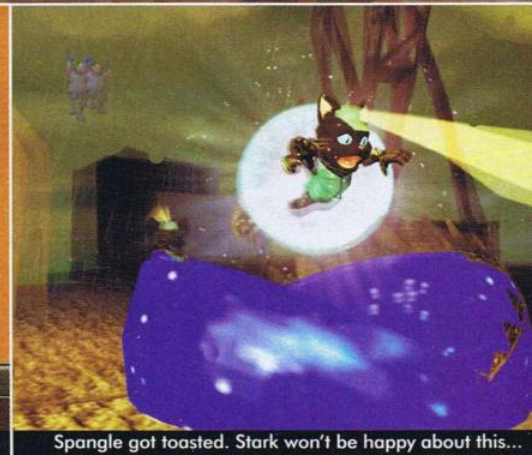
PLUS: Some good tracks, Pickup racing.

MINUS: Cluttered tracks, doesn't quite know what it wants to be.

GRAPHICS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY
81	78	76
OVERALL		
74		
We're still searching for the perfect Amos/Monkey hybrid.		



!!! Good spin physics. Although it's a pity that in fact forward you don't have super spin physics. Another missed opportunity



Over-sized bat vs. vacuum cleaner. Good luck dude...

Personally I prefer a hairless pussy

Spangle got toasted. Stark won't be happy about this...

BLINX 2: Masters of Time & Space

CAM "CLAMPS" SHEA explores a world full of cats and pigs

▶▶ If ever there was an Xbox game that squandered its massive potential it was Blinx. For all its claims of fully utilising the Xbox hard drive and reinventing platformer gameplay, it was one hell of a dull game. Blinx 2 falls into many of the same traps that the original did, but at least developers Artoon have injected a little more substance.

Game time in the sequel is evenly divided between playing as both Time Sweepers and Tom Tom Gang members. For each side you get to design a squad of four (there are the odd deathmatch style levels where you fight alongside your squad). Like any good "create-a-character" mode, you can craft some pretty freakish looking creatures, as well as decking them out in a team uniform, choosing a team name, emblem and flag design. As you progress through the game you'll gain new moves (through tedious tutorials) and earn money that you can use to upgrade weapons and buy items and clothes.

SUPER HAPPY VACUUM

The Time Sweepers are the bastions of time, so during their missions the majority of your moves revolve around stopping, slowing, speeding and rewinding time, as well as sucking stuff up with your hyper-future-super-space-vacuum device and spitting it back out, usually at an enemy or switch. Gaining time control options is much easier this time around. You no longer have to pick up the time shards in a particular order - get three of one type and you'll get one use of the corresponding ability.

Like the original though, Blinx 2 really doesn't integrate the time control into the gameplay. There simply aren't many situations where you're allowed to creatively use your powers, so it largely comes across as garnish on a straight up platformer. This is exacerbated by the fact that the game tells you what to do at every turn. Sillier still, these instructions are given to you by the "operator" back in HQ, a fellow Time

Sweeper. Shouldn't he have some rudimentary understanding of the time related moves at your disposal? Yet he's always going like "wow, that enemy is moving too fast for you to attack, you'll have to find some way to slow down time or something if you want to take him out". Well duh. Gee you think? You think that maybe I should use these clamps that I use every day at every opportunity? You're a freaking genius you idiot!

Breaking the gameplay up somewhat are the Tom Tom Gang levels. In these missions you'll get the chance to muck around with some pretty interesting weapons and items. You can send out doppelgangers to distract guards, use the slingshot to knock out lights, open up warp tunnels to circumvent treacherous sections, lay banana peels and so on.

Blinx 2 isn't a bad game, it's just a shame that Artoon have targeted such a young audience, rather than making a game for platform veterans with open ended time control puzzles. <<

AVAILABLE ON:
PS2 / XBOX / PC / GCN

DETAILS:

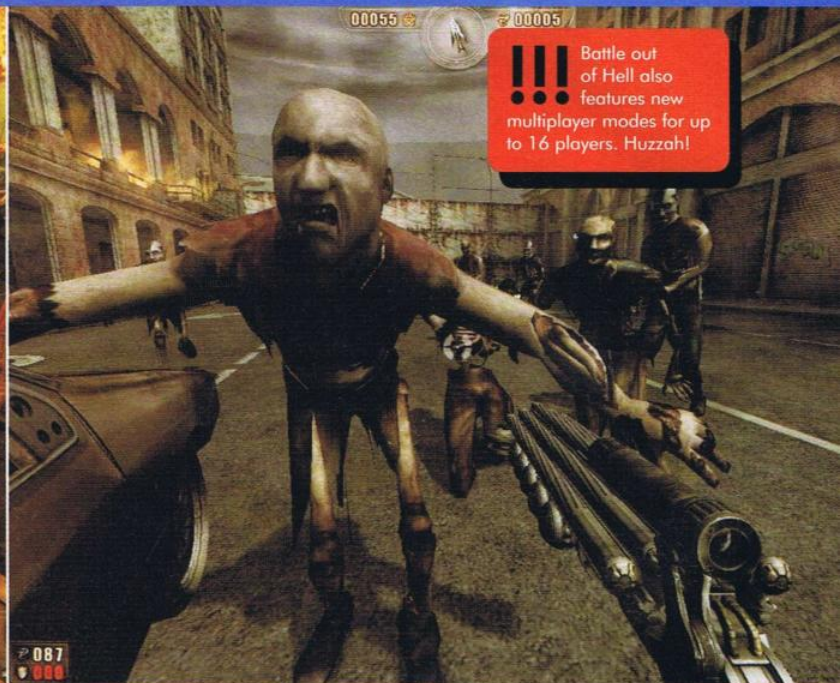
CATEGORY: Action platformer
PLAYERS: 1-4
DEVELOPER: Artoon
PUBLISHER: Xbox
PRICE: \$69.95
RATING: G8+
AVAILABLE: Now

HYPER VERDICT:

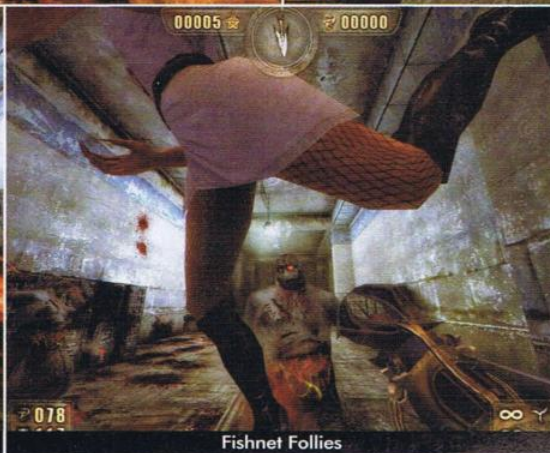
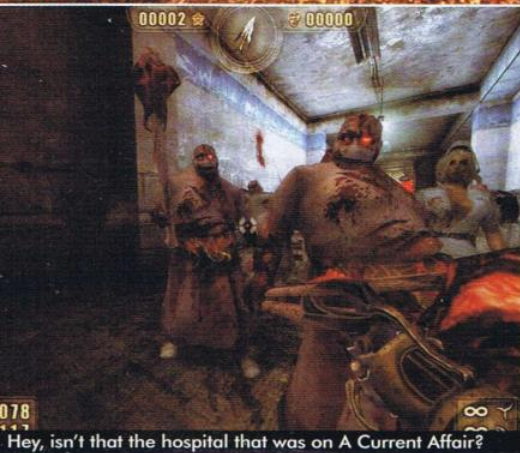
PLUS: Good idea, more variety than the original.

MINUS: A little too much hand holding.

GRAPHICS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY
80	75	77
OVERALL		
80		
A competent game that falls short in the time control stakes.		



!!! Battle out of Hell also features new multiplayer modes for up to 16 players. Huzzah!



Hey, isn't that the hospital that was on A Current Affair?

Fishnet Follies

Painkiller, starring the Insane Clown Posse

PAINKILLER: Battle Out of Hell

DANIEL WILKS doesn't feel pain, he kills it

Some games benefit from being intricate - take Half-Life 2 for example, the integration of physics and brilliantly clever puzzles on top of the great shooting and plot is what makes it a good game. Some games benefit from the opposite approach. Battle Out Of Hell (BOOH), the first expansion pack for the surprise hit FPS Painkiller, is one such game, an FPS that strips back all of the pretense of the last few development cycles and presents the player with a series of sometimes brilliantly designed levels cut up into frantic action set pieces. That's it. No devious physics puzzles, no plot, no character aside from the occasional grunt or moan, everything in the game is devoted towards giving the player the chance to blow some shit up with a variety of supremely cool weapons, a personal favourite being a weird sniper rifle thing that shoots five sharpened steel bolts with the primary fire and a scattering of explosive balls with the alt fire.

GUN DOWN THE BEASTIES, BOYS Each level is quite huge and broken up into a series of arena like combats in which the player is forced to gun down all of the beasties before the way is opened to progress. It's not an original tactic, but it works well and some of the gimmicks the developers have used to open up new areas are truly spectacular. Combat in BOOH is pure adrenalin and no subtlety. The AI for most enemies seems to be of the "charge at the player and try to hit them" variety though every now and then the developers have seen fit to spice things up with AI routines such as, "charge at the player and stab them", "charge at the player and explode" and the ever popular "stand back and shoot the player a couple of times before charging in and trying to hit them". Clever it is not but gamers worldwide should thank People Can Fly for bringing the venerable circle strafe back into vogue. Although this old school approach to the

action is great fun the developers have also taken a rather old school approach to some of the level design with a number of tricky and annoying jumping puzzles. It may not be up to current standards as far as graphical mastery is concerned but BOOH is still a great looking game, thanks, for the most part going to the great level and monster design as well as the well implemented physics engine. Each of the levels is based around a certain theme such as a city of the dead, haunted amusement park of Leningrad and are populated by monsters fitting the locale so you can expect to fight killer clowns in the amusement park and everyone's favourite undead villain, the Zombie Nazi in Leningrad. The ideas for most of the monsters (aside from freaky little kids with killer Pinocchio noses) aren't original but the art team has gone to town in their realisation making them strangely beautiful to behold. <<

AVAILABLE ON:
PS2 / XBOX / PC / GCN

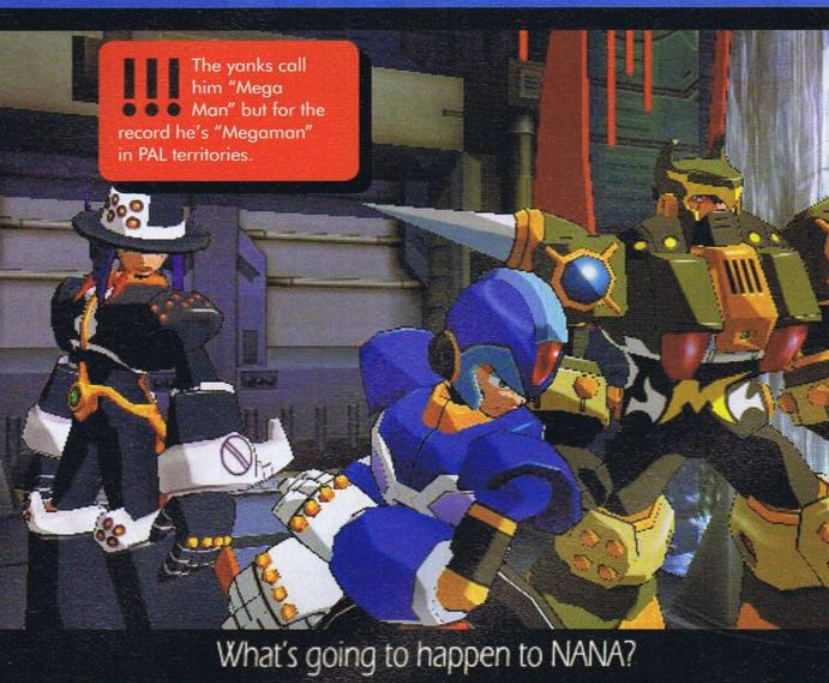
DETAILS:

CATEGORY: FPS
PLAYERS: 1-16
DEVELOPER: People Can Fly
PUBLISHER: Dreamcatcher
PRICE: \$49.95
RATING: MA15+
AVAILABLE: Now

HYPER VERDICT:

PLUS: Great levels, good weapons, fast action.
MINUS: Atrocious load times, bad jumping puzzles.

GRAPHICS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY
86	81	80
OVERALL		
79		
As dumb as a bag of hammers but still a lot of fun.		



What's going to happen to NANA?



Yeah yeah, so I held up a Redfern 7-11, so what?



Dear Diary, today I'm going to grow great big puncy hair



I am SPIDER. If you like to gamble, I tell you I'm your man

MEGAMAN X Command Mission

MARCH STEPNIK wants more of that old-time, trashy J-pop goodness.

It's pretty damn bleedin' obvious, isn't it? His name is Shadow, goddamnit! Don't you think that's a bit of a giveaway? Of course this valuable party member of yours is bloody evil! Of course he's going to turn on you! Geeeezus! You could see it coming a mile off!

"YEAH-HAH, I WIN!"

Okay, so Shadow's true nature isn't the main revelation of Command Mission (CM). This is: this Megaman release is the first fully-fledged console RPG in the thousand-strong Megaman series, and full of all the expected random battles and character upgrade options that console RPG fans could ask for. It's also half decent; much like Megaman X8 the presentation's fantastic but it's ultimately let down by a number of key under-developed areas.

The trick with any Megaman title is not to take it all too seriously, and CM is no exception. The story's a bit limited in scope and the dialogue

is mostly cheesy posturing, but all the basics are there. You wander around a very linear environment interacting with everything you can, the only interruption coming from the random battles. As you gain exp you become more powerful and new combat techniques open up. You can also buy weapons and items to help you vanquish your foes and get to the bottom of Epsilon's rebellion against society. Who's Epsilon? It doesn't really matter; all you need to know is that he's not on your side.

Command Mission's combat engine is well-conceived but ultimately flawed. Using an initiative system much like the one used in FFX, CM's turn-based combat lends itself more to paper-rock-scissors style strategy than anything else. There are enough secondary attacks to make up for the shortfall in character variety (CM lacks the usual RPG convention of multiple character classes), as well as a number of modifier items which

once equipped increase the number of abilities in combat. Capcom has also borrowed from its Street Fighter series with flashy combo attacks.

The trouble is that once the combat system has been worked out, Command Mission loses its challenge. Most battles are quite easy, and this is not helped by the very forgiving save system. And once the tension from combat is taken away, the lack of depth and polish in the story and characters becomes all the more apparent.

As is typical of the console-based Megaman games, CM is an absolute joy to explore thanks to its strong visuals and world design. It's Capcom's bold design choice here that redeems Command Mission somewhat - the unique feel alone makes it worth a look. But that doesn't negate the fact that while Capcom gets the genre right on paper and it's certainly entertaining to play, Command Mission is a perfect example of style over substance. <<<

AVAILABLE ON:
PS2 / XBOX / PC / GCN

DETAILS:

CATEGORY: RPG

PLAYERS: 1

DEVELOPER: Capcom

PUBLISHER: THQ

PRICE: \$79.95

RATING: G8+

AVAILABLE: Now

HYPHER VERDICT:

PLUS: Fantastic design, cool combat, strobe goodness.

MINUS: Easy, short and relatively shallow. Megaman then.

GRAPHICS SOUND GAMEPLAY
86 78 66

OVERALL

70

Megaman gets an RPG.
Results are promising.



Imagine bizarre mecha-bosses that are a cross of cute animals and Rainbow Brite... that's Megaman X8.



He's not the man they think he is at home...



...Oh no no no he's a Megaman...



...Megaman burning out his fuse up here alone

MEGAMAN X8

MARCH STEPNIK gets in on some crazy Mecha-Panda action

Megaman is the sort of game character that would be sitting in some back-lot dressing room, drinking whisky, sucking down the cigs and cursing like a drunken sailor in the few moments he gets between projects, such is the proliferation of the Megaman series.

Indeed there are so many off-shoots, special and regular versions that we've given up getting too specific. So let us put it this way, nice and easy: Megaman X8 is better than the last one that came out but still not as good as some of the ones released around the SNES and PSone days.

PANDA-BOT, GO!

While they haven't always got it right over their long history with the genre (especially the Megaman series), Capcom know platformers and knows how to make them interesting. Take the sublime Viewtiful Joe or even their 3D Castlevania conversion, Devil May Cry as evidence. While the core of Megaman X8 is 2D platform

jumping action, it's been dressed up in such a way that anybody who thinks the 2D platformer is dead has another thing coming.

Using a hub-based system, Megaman X8 feels more like an RPG at times than a simple platformer. Collecting currency from fallen comrades allows you to spend in R&D at the main base, the fruits of which increase your overall power and the hit points available.

Given the freedom to tackle the eight main missions in any order, you're also given a choice in the composition of your attack party, as well as the navigator that oversees your mission. Communicating via radio, these navigators advise either on boss strategy or hidden pathways.

You see, MMX8 belongs to the school of quality over quantity. The game's been designed to encourage repeat play, right down to the inclusion of a completion meter and a score at the end of each level.

It's quite smart - played as a linear platformer X8 is clearly lacking; played like an adventure game X8 really opens up. Capcom should also be commended for being creative in their level design: apart from the occasional on-rails shooter levels, there are some well conceived puzzle levels. It's a shame then, that MMX8 lacks the finesse required in the control department, because it's this that lets the whole experience down.

Still, there's something undeniably charming about Megaman X8. Think of it as the embodiment of cheesy and trashy Japanese pop culture. There's the design of Megaman X himself, which harkens back to early days of Astro Boy, as well as the overall world which is bright and colourful and never stands still. Think awful dialogue supported by squealing guitar riffs.

Playing MMX8 is an assault on the senses, but in an absolutely endearing way. All Capcom needs to do now is fix the controls... <<

AVAILABLE ON:
PS2 / XBOX / PC / GCN

DETAILS:

CATEGORY: Platform
PLAYERS: 1
DEVELOPER: Capcom
PUBLISHER: THQ
PRICE: \$79.95
RATING: G8+
AVAILABLE: February 2005

HYPER VERDICT:

PLUS: Bright, colourful, entertaining. Some cool level design.

MINUS: Iffy character control, iffy combat.

GRAPHICS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY
85	80	67
OVERALL		
70		
Another Megaman. Capcom are getting closer though.		



CRIMSON TEARS

▶▶ This game meant well, surely. Sometimes fusing two genres together can yield some fantastic results, with Diablo being a noteworthy example of a successful blend of RPG elements with action. But sometimes there is a reminder that when you place a foot in two yards, you might end up knackered yourself on the fence in between.

Crimson Tears tries admirably to forge new ground by weaving the Japanese RPG ideals with beat-em-up elements, and whilst it achieves this on a certain level, it lacks that extra punch to keep it compelling. The staples of each genre are prevalent here. There is the levelling up, item buying, hit points and town levels that you'd find in an RPG, and there are the combos, special moves and jiggly breasts normally at home in a beat-em-up. However, the balancing act required to make both these genres work seems to have taken focus from some key factors.

The characters in the game lack the charm of most other Japanese RPGs, so when the main character conveys her torment at being a biological weapon, you really don't care. The combat system feels simplistic, and whilst you can upgrade your weapons and combos, the best result is achieved by simply mashing away at the two attack buttons. On top of that are the randomly generated levels, comprised of a chain of cloned rooms which would normally be disorientating if not for the tiny map in the bottom corner.

Which is a shame, as Crimson Tears obviously tries so hard to offer something new, but unfortunately entertainment isn't reliant on good intentions.

Andy Hunt

AVAILABLE ON:

PS2 / XBOX / PC / GCN

DETAILS:

CATEGORY: Beat 'em RPG / **PLAYERS:** 1 / **DEVELOPER:** Dream Factory/Spike / **PUBLISHER:** THQ / **PRICE:** \$79.95 / **RATING:** M15+ / **AVAILABLE:** Now

GRAPHICS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY	OVERALL
80	75	65	70



[above] When fan service gets scary



SPYRO: A Hero's Tail

▶▶ The Spyro games have always been solid, entertaining games that hit their target market right on the head, and A Hero's Tail is no exception. Unfortunately though, the reality is that the Spyro target market... well, it ain't you guys. Put simply, Spyro is a game for kids, and as such won't hold much appeal for the vast majority of Hyper readers. That said, if you've got a younger sibling and think that maybe GTA San Andreas isn't the best of influences, then you could do a lot worse than picking up a copy of A Hero's Tail.

One of the reasons why is that Spyro has an effortless charm that franchises like Crash seem to have lost. It's hard not to like Spyro - it's bright, it's colourful, the dialogue and characters are actually quite funny, and the gameworld is logical (to the extent that finding eight light crystals to operate the Professor's "Ball Gadget" can be). It's also well designed - you've often got several areas to explore, and they all link together in quite an organic way. Spyro's move set contains some classics of the genre (the double jump and the horn dive aka the butt stomp), as well as gliding, breathing fire and charging enemies. You'll also get to play an assortment of fun mini-games as other characters. Saving is integrated seamlessly into the game and collecting gems serves a purpose, allowing you to purchase things at the shops.

Spyro still looks like a very polished PSone game, but nice nonetheless. The animations are also great, and Spyro has some fantastic spin physics. Always important. Oh, and did we mention getting your hands on Professor's Ball Gadget?

Joey Tekken

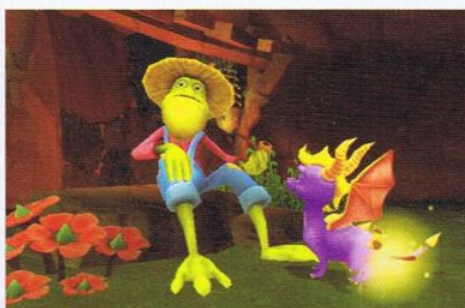
AVAILABLE ON:

PS2 / XBOX / PC / GCN

DETAILS:

CATEGORY: Gay Icon / **PLAYERS:** 1 / **DEVELOPER:** Eurocom / **PUBLISHER:** Vivendi / **PRICE:** \$69.95 / **RATING:** G8+ / **AVAILABLE:** Now

GRAPHICS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY	OVERALL
75	76	77	77



[above] Spyro getting some tips from Jumping Jack Flash



ZOO TYCOON 2

▶▶ Zoo Tycoon 2 is an example of a well-titled game. It is a strategy outing in the style of Theme Park and the other Tycoon games, and involves building up a successful zoo by managing the animals, staff, guests and amenities. The object of course is to rake in as much money as possible from your guests, and increase the size and fame of your zoo.

The game presents you with three main ways to interact with your masterpiece of zoological wonder: the classic top-down view, the first person guest mode (complete with optional poop scooping and trash sweeping fun) and the safari mode. The safari mode revolves around taking photos of your animals to share with your friends, and also to fulfil certain challenges in the game (for example getting a photo of a Zebra playing with its scratching post).

Zoo Tycoon 2 makes good use of the step up to 3D. The terra-forming aspect of the game is fun and powerful, and allows you to create diverse and convincing habitats easily. It really is quite cool how you can turn a square block of green turf into an Antarctic paradise complete with ice floes. Right from the start you are given the options of playing free form with everything unlocked and unlimited cash, a slow progressive campaign mode or the safari challenge mode. Finally the addition of the Zoopedia provides accurate information on the 30 different animals (also the basis of their in game behaviour), making the game work well as either an educational tool or a bit of fun or perhaps both.

Vaughan Smith

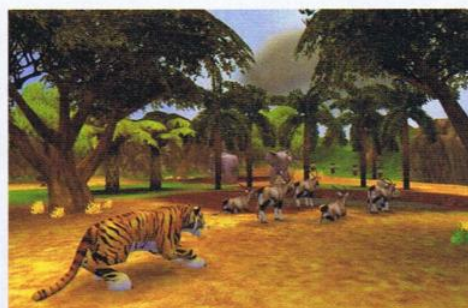
AVAILABLE ON:

PS2 / XBOX / PC / GCN

DETAILS:

CATEGORY: Zoo Keeper sim / **PLAYERS:** 1 / **DEVELOPER:** Blue Fang / **PUBLISHER:** Microsoft / **PRICE:** \$69.95 / **RATING:** G8+ / **AVAILABLE:** Now

GRAPHICS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY	OVERALL
75	80	76	76



[above] Smoke up Tony, they're grrreat!



GRAND THEFT AUTO ADVANCE

Grand Theft Auto for Gameboy Advance is in many respects the doppelganger of the very first GTA game, something that is bound to attract veteran GTA'ers and the curious alike. Top-down is the go, and the GBA pulls off the pseudo-3D Liberty City with surprising style, even managing to better the original in some respects. Vehicles and character animations for example are much better this time around, with cars



[house] "Way down, to the underground"

visibly leaning in the appropriate direction when turning instead of rotating like a cardboard cutout, and characters now have a more cartoon-like quality to them.

It may look and feel much like the GTA games of old, but thankfully the gameplay has been thoroughly updated to closely mimic the structure of more recent games in the series. Missions for example are issued by various underworld figures who have a part to play in the overarching plot, instead of those anonymous telephone boxes, and many of the side quests such as taxi driving, vigilante missions and street racing have made it across too.

The presentation doesn't quite have the series' typical level of polish, and the static cutscenes and humourless atmosphere are particularly disappointing. None

of these foibles however can match the astonishing mediocrity of the game's soundtrack. Unlike recent GTAs where music has been of utmost importance in both establishing the period and providing something to cruise to, GTA advance assaults your ears with tinny, repetitive music that is poor even by GBA standards, and that will immediately have you reaching for the volume dial.

For those that can remember that there actually was a Grand Theft Auto series before GTA III, GTA advance will be somewhat of a nostalgic journey, albeit with a subtle newschool flavour. San Andreas this is definitely not, but it's certainly worth a look for those wanting a bit of miniature mafia mayhem on the move.

Maurice Banscombe

AVAILABLE ON:
GBA / DS / PSP / N-GAGE

DETAILS:
CATEGORY: Action Adventure
PLAYERS: 1
DEVELOPER: Digital Eclipse
PUBLISHER: Take 2
PRICE: \$49.95
RATING: M15+
AVAILABLE: Now

GRAPHICS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY
85	67	84
OVERALL		
85		

ASPHALT URBAN GT

To be perfectly honest, there aren't too many good games on the N-Gage. This is not because the N-Gage is a bad machine (just utterly average - Ed), it still has a lot of potential to give us good games, but N-Gage game developers seem to ignore the fact that the screen orientation is different from any other available games format and that the control system necessitates that the player can only hit one button at a time making for some very frustrating and nearly unplayable games. Fortunately Asphalt Urban GT is not unplayable. Far from it, it's

probably one of the better games to grace the N-Gage at the moment and certainly one of the more enjoyable handheld racing games.

Asphalt features four main gameplay modes, each of which have a number of sub-games to keep you busy. Arcade mode gives you the option to jump straight into the action with Instant Play, Free Race, Time Attack and Cop Chase. Instant Play randomises all of the variables in the game (such as car, traffic, game mode and the like) and drops you straight into the action. Time Attack sees the player racing

only against the clock and Free Race sees you battling through traffic. The most enjoyable of the Arcade modes is Cop Chase which puts you behind the wheel of a Lamborghini Gallardo police car chasing after illegal street racers. The other game modes all combine to form a career, giving players the chance to race, make money, buy new cars and tweak them in the garage for extra performance. Pretty impressive for a hopped up mobile phone.

Next to the gameplay the most impressive feature of Asphalt are the remarkably good graphics that are quite comparable to those seen on the PSone (in its early years). The framerate remains smooth



throughout the game and the sense of speed is excellent. All of the vehicles in the game are quite detailed and handle differently, giving players a good range of cars in which to hoon around the tracks and drift around corners.

Joey Joe Joe



[above] A good N-Gage game? *dm*



[Homer] So I said "kiss my asphalt"

AVAILABLE ON:
GBA / DS / PSP / N-GAGE

DETAILS:
CATEGORY: Racing
PLAYERS: 1-4
DEVELOPER: Gameloft
PUBLISHER: Nokia
PRICE: \$54.95
RATING: G
AVAILABLE: Now

GRAPHICS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY
79	74	84
OVERALL		
82		

Betrayers

of kamigawa™

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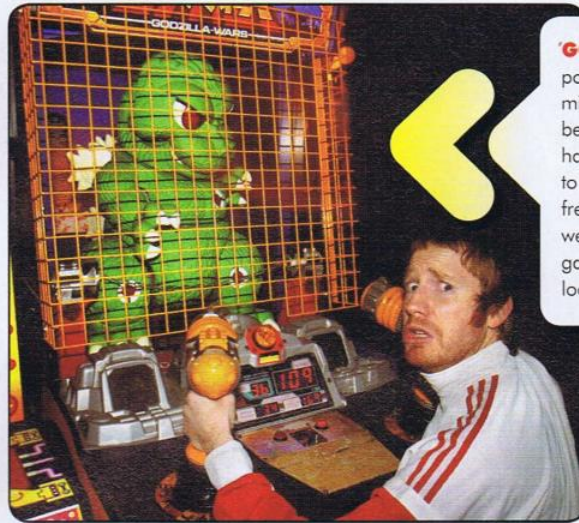


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Ticket Redemption Machines

Melbourne Crown Casino

While we may love arcade games - what have they done for us, apart from teach us how to smash cars, kill generic bad guys, dance badly and fill in vast tracts of spare time? Ticket redemption machines not only help you fill in time and test your skills, they also enable you to win stuff at the same time!



GODZILLA WARS (Namco) >> Everything has its weak points (except for myself and Hyper of course). Even the mighty Godzilla has his weaknesses (a lack of subtlety and being pussy whipped by Goddesszilla). In this game, Godzilla has somehow been caged and he doesn't like it. He is trying to escape and in a pathetic attempt to thwart his bid for freedom, you try to slow his pace by shooting at his flashing weak points (knees/heart/hands) with your laser pistols. The game ends when Godzilla breaks free. Definitely the best looking/designed game around. **8/10**

HAMMER CHAMP (Namco)

>> No - it's not a game to see who is the best at using heroin, but a test for your lightning fast Kung Fu reflexes. Although you are meant to use the rubber hammer provided, it is much tougher to use your fists of steel (if you are a real man). In any one of the 8 scenarios (with 3 different difficulties) you may have to fight off sharks, or UFO's or anything else that gives you a reason to hammer one of the 4 buttons at the bottom of the screen. **8/10**



CHICKEN DASH (Konami) >> This game has the principals of the classic game 'Frogger', though instead of an animated frog, you attempt to roll a 20 cent piece across 6 lanes of traffic (little cars glued to conveyor belts), which technically makes it 'Platypus Dash' in Australia. The further you manage to roll the coin, the higher the ticket payout. Unfortunately the coin has to be moving at some speed to make it over the second median strip, and this game requires A LOT of skill/luck to make it to the 100 credits hole, and the cool thing is, you always seem to just miss it. Very addictive. **9/10**

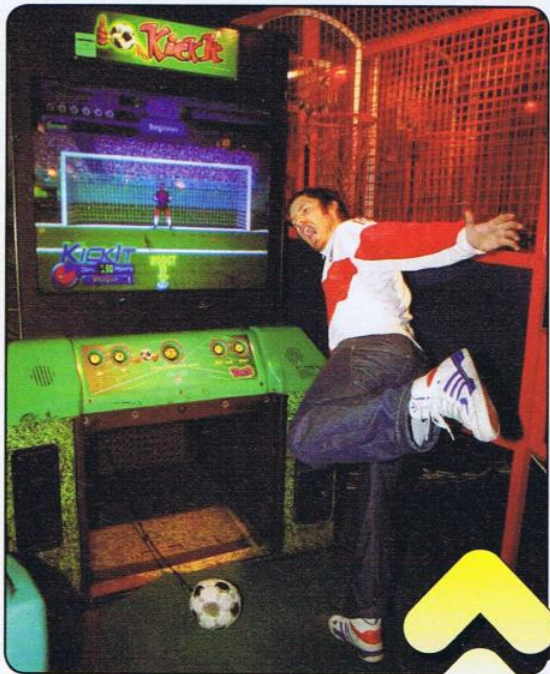


SMOKIN TOKEN (Seidel)

>> Classically basic, yet fiendishly difficult. Roll a 20 cent piece down a ski ramp through a spinning wheel to receive the corresponding points on the wheel. **8.5/10**



CROCO CROCO PANIC (Namco) >> Somewhat of the analogue version of hammer champ, I found this game best for practicing my rapid elbow strikes of death (RESOD's). Little crocodiles emerge from their fake river embankment and you must crush them (Best. Game. Ever. - Evil Malky) before they attack you. **7.5/10**



FIREBALL (Baytek) >> Also known as 'ski ball'. You have to bowl a solid heavy ball and 'ski jump' it into the highest scoring holes. Or, you can just put the balls in the holes yourself. **6/10**

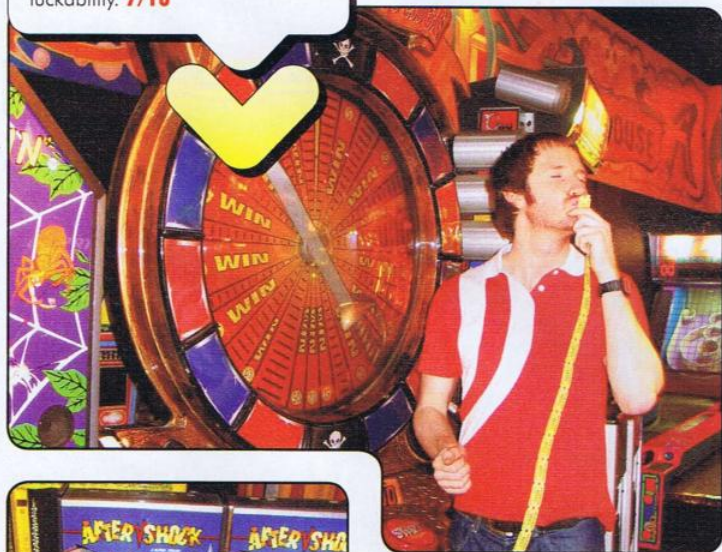


PIRATES REVENGE (Five Star Redemption Inc) >>

Feeling lucky? Have all the other skill games got you frustrated or injured by now? Place your money and spin the sword. You can stop the spinning sword by depressing either the 'Rapid Stop' or normal 'Stop' buttons. If you have lightning fast reflexes, and can work out approximately how long it takes for the sword to stop VS the corresponding number to hit it on, you can increase your luckability. **7/10**

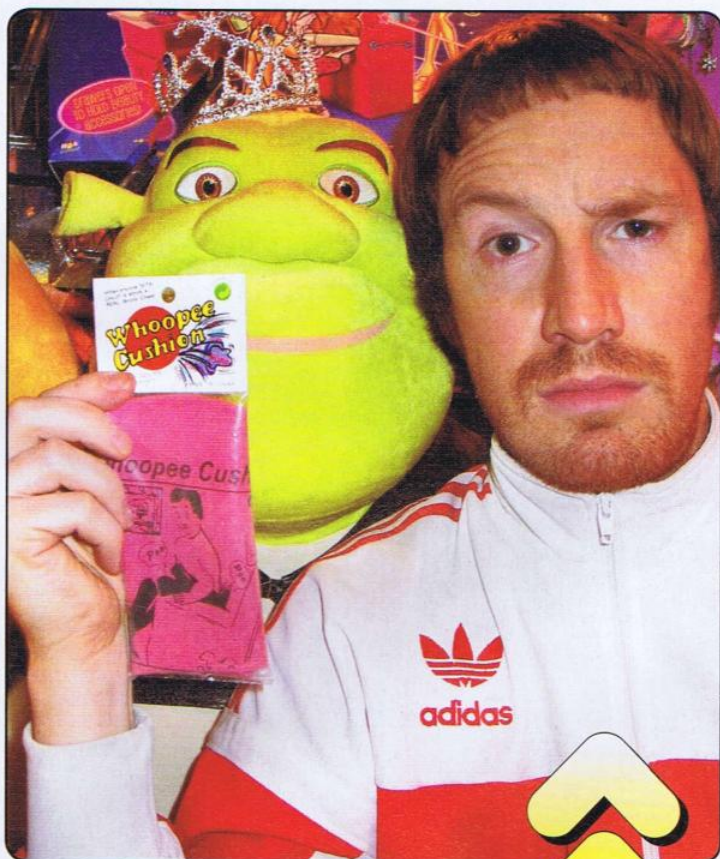
KICK IT (Interactive Light)

>> After giving your arms, fists and elbows a workout, it's now time to have a leg workout. This soccer game has a number of scenarios ranging from the traditional direct 'spot' kick to shooting from various angles and distances. Magically, the machine knows how hard and what direction you kick the ball. My first kick was so powerful that I put my hip out. **7/10**



AFTERSHOCK (Laser-Tron)

>> Your 20 cent piece falls onto the playing board which begins to rumble furiously. You attempt to manoeuvre the coin into a hole via handle bars to receive a payout from 5 to 30 tickets. Old sticky coins with high adhesion levels that probably have been used in XXX peep shows seem to be more controllable. Also doubles as an arm massage machine. **6.5/10**



>> After having a full body workout and winning a small paper mill of tickets, you get to trade them in for prizes which denote your physical and mental prowess. You could go for the giant Shrek doll (20,000 tickets) or an electric racing car set (9,900) or even a mirrorball keychain for just 30, but one of the best prizes you can win is the old skool Whoopee Cushion. For the cost of \$1-\$2 (60 tickets), you can get over \$10,000 worth of laughs. The Whoopee Cushion is best deployed in a dark, quiet, packed cinema. Inflate it and hide it from view. Then place it on the seat of an unsuspecting patron (or friend) as they sit down. Hilarity ensues as a loud violent diarrhoeary fart erupts and you try not to laugh as they will know it was you, but that of course just makes the situation even funnier and even more hilarity ensues. Total Gold! **Whoopee Cushion 10/10**

The rise and fall of the Shmup

By Mikołaj Napieralski

2D shooters may be regarded as a retro curiosity by today's game buying public, but for a brief period in the early 90s they reigned supreme. Amongst the first games to arrive on Sega's Megadrive, shmups (short for Shoot'em Ups) played a vital role in the machine's early days. Releases like *Truxton* showed the potential of 16bit technology and helped convince a generation of N.E.S. fans to upgrade. And while Sega's system would eventually be flooded with sub par examples of the genre, the short-lived reign of shmups on



(main pic)

Gynoug/ Wings of War NCS Corp. 1991

»» At the time of its release *Gynoug* was considered one of the must have shmups for the Megadrive and received a lot of praise from the British gaming press. The twist here is that the game casts you as some sort of avenging angel with a nice line in firepower. Well I suppose it beats saving the universe with a peashooter. Anyway the graphics were suitably gothic and certainly added a great deal to the game's appeal. It may be just another horizontal shooter but the satisfying gameplay and graphics still make this a fan favourite.



Atomic Robo-Kid Tresco. 1990

»» One of the strangest shmups, *Atomic Robo-Kid* had you traversing maze-like levels as a super deformed robot. No forced scrolling here. In fact if you wanted to you could just sit in the one location and do whatever it is super deformed robots do. If you actually wanted to finish the game you could also move through a multi-directional scrolling environment handing out robot death. Lose your weapons however and you may as well restart the level as some sections were simply impossible to navigate without the right power-ups. This one is still oddly appealing.



Fire Shark Toaplan. 1990

»» For the most part Megadrive Shmups tended to scroll horizontally rather than vertically. There doesn't seem to be a particular reason for this, that's just the way it was. Anyway, *Fire Shark* is one of the Megadrive's better Vertical scrollers and a conversion of the Toaplan arcade original. Nothing much more you need to know about this one really. It's a competent translation of the arcade original and one of many WW2 themed shooters on the Megadrive.

the Megadrive is still considered by many to be a golden era in videogame history.

The initial rise of the shmup on home consoles can be attributed to the arrival of new 16bit technology. Companies like Toaplan / Taito had been successfully releasing shmups in the arcades since the early 80s but this was the first time home consoles could produce accurate ports of the games taking up space in the arcades.

The Megadrive could not only handle ports of games like Truxton and Raiden but these

were also relatively cheap and easy to produce. It was far easier to translate a Japanese shooter for the western market then it was an RPG or platformer and this meant the PAL market soon found itself flooded with shmups of varying quality - much to the bemusement of magazines at the time like Mean Machines and C+VG.

The increased processing power of the 16bit consoles also meant that shmups became far more complex than those seen on early 8bit systems. Before the days of Radiant Silvergun and Ikaruga companies

like Toaplan and Tecnosoft were exploring new weapons systems techniques and level design. Bearing in mind that most shooters at the time had relatively simple upgrade systems, early releases like Hellfire and Gaiares really pushed the envelope and are still considered Megadrive classics to this day for their unique weapons systems.

However, the emergence of 32bit-based systems signalled the end of the shmup era. As Sony rose to prominence in the videogame industry during the mid 90s with its PlayStation so too did 3D graphics.

Early titles like the original Tomb Raider showed the public the potential of 3D game environments and the industry never looked back. All of a sudden 2D shooters, formally a mainstay on the console market looked hopelessly outdated and simple. And while the Sega Saturn may have been host to the pinnacle of 2D games development, its failure signalled the end of 2D games and in turn shmups.

With this in mind, join Hyper for a look back at some of the most memorable examples of the genre on the Megadrive.



Gaiares Telenet / Renovation. 1990

» Ah yes, Gaiares. You're not allowed to talk about Megadrive shmups and not mention this game. While it may have been an early release, it featured one of the most unique power-up systems to be implemented during the 16bit era. Basically you had pod, (R-Type Style), which you could fire at enemies to capture their weapons. Maxing out your weapon was then a matter of draining weapons from the same type of enemies. Simple but brutally effective this is one of the first shmups to introduce the idea of chaining together attacks and is regarded as a classic.



Hellfire Seismic. 1990

» Hellfire was one of the toughest shmups released for the Megadrive and as such tends to divide opinion. The hardcore love this game while those of use who barely made it past the first level are less enthusiastic. The graphics in Hellfire were always basic but it's the weapons system that saw this release rise above the crowd. Unless you knew what you were doing and exactly which weapon configuration to use at a given point in a level you were dead. Simple as that really.



Truxton/Tatsujin Toaplan. 1990

» One of the first shmups released on the Megadrive and one of the many arcade conversions from Toaplan to find a home on Sega's system. While this did well upon its release it's also notorious for the cheap shots the game would throw at you. Enemies would attack you from the bottom of the screen before you even had a chance to see them and progress largely relied on being able to memorise the level layout and not throw your control pad out the window.



Musha Aleste Toaplan. 1990

» This is the game that Internet fanboys inevitably mention. Set in Feudal Japan, this vertical scrolling shmup from Toaplan is a precursor to much of today's 'curtain shooters'. Featuring excellent graphics and frantic gameplay Musha Aleste is bullet hell from the word go. Luckily the power up system means it's not all over with one stray bullet. Never released in PAL markets Musha Aleste tends to command a good price on Ebay and is somewhat of a must if you consider yourself a shmup collector. At least according to the fanboys.



[above] The Japanese releases had some awesome box art. From left; Robo-Kid, Gaiques, Tatsujin, MUSHU Aleste, Aero Blasters, Zero Wing & HellFire



**Air Buster/
Aero Blasters**
Kaneko. 1991

» Certain magazines loved this game upon its release and it's worth mentioning for that fact alone. Mega even called it the best shooter on the Megadrive. Maybe it was the 2-player option? I don't know. Anyway Air Buster is a fairly generic vertical scroller. It's good, featuring some nice music and graphics but nothing outstanding. Um, yeah.



**Cross Fire/
Super Airwolf**
Kyugo. 1991

» To begin with Cross Fire seems hopelessly generic. Fly up in the screen in your helicopter and shoot shit. Haven't we been here before? But wait, reach the end of the level and you suddenly find yourself on foot in a Commando style clone running around a military base trying to free hostages. If things get a little too hectic you can even call your helicopter in for backup. Complete the on foot sections and it's back to the vertical shmup. Never given a PAL release, Cross Fire is actually a bit of a lost classic and well worth tracking down.



Twin Cobra.
Toaplan. 1991

» Another game not to get a PAL release, Twin Cobra is a port of an arcade favourite. While the graphics on the Megadrive version are simple it's the non-stop action and the classic gameplay that makes this one stand out. Blowing shit up will never get old and Twin Cobra allowed you to do it with a second player in tow - cue frantic attempts to steal a friend's power-ups. The Corner Store near my house used to have this and I was sad when it disappeared one day.



Zero Wing
Toaplan. 1991

» Zero Wing will always be known for the unfortunate translation issues it encountered. "All your base are belong to us" Remember that? Yeah well this is where that short lived Internet craze originated. Aside from that Zero Wing is a fairly standard horizontal shooter with a cryptic storyline and nice handle on english.



(main pic)

Eliminate Down
Soft Vision. 1993
 >> Alongside Greylancer, Eliminate Down is one of last generation shmups released for the Megadrive. Also like Greylancer it was never released outside of Japan. Which is a shame because it's one of the best examples of the genre on the Megadrive. Nothing particularly original here but the fact that it was released in 1993 at the tail end of the shmup era means it's managed to distil most of the best elements from the previous three years in one neat package. Some of the best graphics on the Megadrive, a variety of weapons systems to choose from before you start and some very satisfying gameplay makes this an import must.



Raiden Trad
Absolute Entertainment / Micronet. 1992
 >> Raiden was massive upon its release in 1992 and soon found its way into virtually every arcade ever. It spawned several sequels and even 12 years on you can still find a copy of the machine hiding in most arcades. While the Megadrive conversion only received average reviews upon its release the game has stood the test of time well and is still one of the best vertical shmups on the Megadrive - or the arcade for that matter. Nothing fancy, just an excellent example of clean, twitch gameplay.



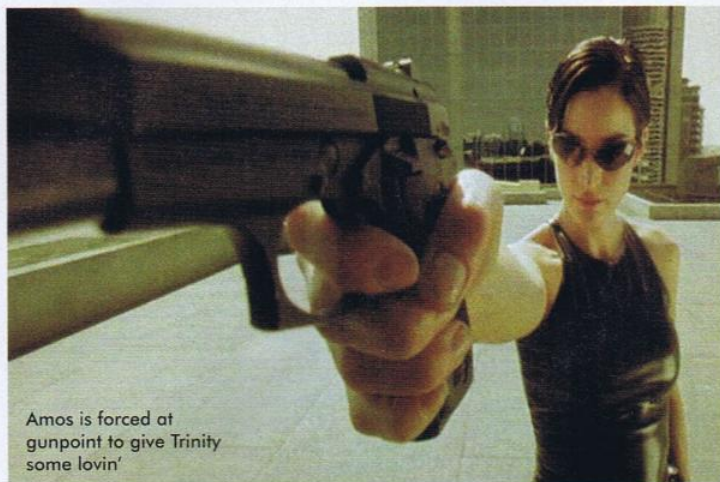
Super Fantasy Zone
Sun Soft. 1992
 >> A follow-up to the Fantasy Zone games on the Master System, this Megadrive release is surprisingly tough considering the sickly sweet graphics. Similar to Defender, your ship stays centred in the middle of the screen and you can scroll in either direction horizontally. You can buy upgrades from the shop mid level and once you take down a certain number of enemy spawning generators it's time to fight a boss. Except you'll inevitably die. And then die again, and again and again. Still this one is fun in a cute way. Oh and it was only ever released in Japan.



Thunderforce IV
Tecnosoft. 1992
 >> The Thunderforce series is widely considered to be the barometer by which other Megadrive shooters are gauged and number IV is arguably the best shooter on the system. Crazy people will swear that number 3 in the series is better but they're delusional. Anyway Thunderforce IV featured incredible graphics, a strangely appealing cock rock soundtrack and some of the most satisfying shooter action on the Megadrive. Huge in every sense of the word this is an essential for all shmup fans.



Twinkle Tale
Toyo Records. 1992
 >> While shmups tend to be the domain of socially awkward young men with a penchant for giant robots, Twinkle Tale turned this cliché on its head by casting the player as an anime inspired witch with a fetching purple cape. A multidirectional scrolling shmup, Twinkle Tale allowed you to traverse its cutesy landscape handing out death with your witch powers. Another import only title it's considered one of the best shmups on the Megadrive. Not that you're likely to find a copy cheap.



Amos is forced at gunpoint to give Trinity some lovin'



The Matrix (ULTIMATE COLLECTION)

ROADSHOW, M 15+

Reviewing the *Ultimate Matrix Collection* is something of a difficult task not just because of its sheer size but also because once you get over the initial shock of a 10 disc box set you realise that there's not actually that much new on offer. The boxed set contains all three movies from the trilogy, the *Animatrix*, the three revisited documentary discs as well as *The Roots of the Matrix*, those being the philosophies and science behind the stories, *The Burly Man Chronicles* featuring behind the scenes footage and interviews with members of the cast and crew of the films, and finally *The Zion Archives*, a collection of stills, production drawings, design sketches, trailers, TV spots and a behind the scenes teaser for *The Matrix Online*.

Each of the three films contains two new audio commentaries, one by critics and the other by scholars but ultimately they come across as a little dull. Hearing critics simultaneously praise and condemn each of the films becomes quite tiring. There is definitely the occasional high point, such as



[above] Cocaine's a hell of a drug

when one critic compares the fight between Neo and the Merovingian's henchmen in his chateau to an inappropriate and badly made sex-scene - you're not turned on or impressed, rather just waiting for the film to start again.

The true highlights of the set are discs eight and nine, the *Roots* and *Burly Man Chronicles*. Each of them shows an interesting and entertaining insight into the world and making of the films. As a box set, *The Ultimate Matrix* is definitely an impressive achievement in terms of size but in terms of scope it falls a little flat. It's still definitely worth your 100 bucks though.

Daniel Wilks

MOVIE: 8 / EXTRAS: 9



THX 1138: THE GEORGE LUCAS DIRECTOR'S CUT

WARNER BROS, PG

Well it comes as no surprise that George Lucas (a.k.a. Mr Beardy a.k.a. Mr Revisionist) has seen fit to digitally remaster his first feature film featuring new and cleaned up special effects. *THX 1138* never felt like the creation of the man who went on to make *Star Wars*. In this low-budget and visually striking science fiction film we find a future where all citizens are medicated (by either the government or corporations, it's never made clear) to eradicate emotion and individuality, not for some sinister plan but merely to increase production and revenue.

THX 1138 was never a brilliant film, probably due to the shoe-string budget it was made on, and this new director's cut actually makes the experience of watching the film that much more accessible and consequently superior to its original incarnation. This film proves that Lucas was primarily a visual director and film editor from the get-go, as both the dialogue and acting in *THX 1138* play second fiddle to the pacing, cinematography and



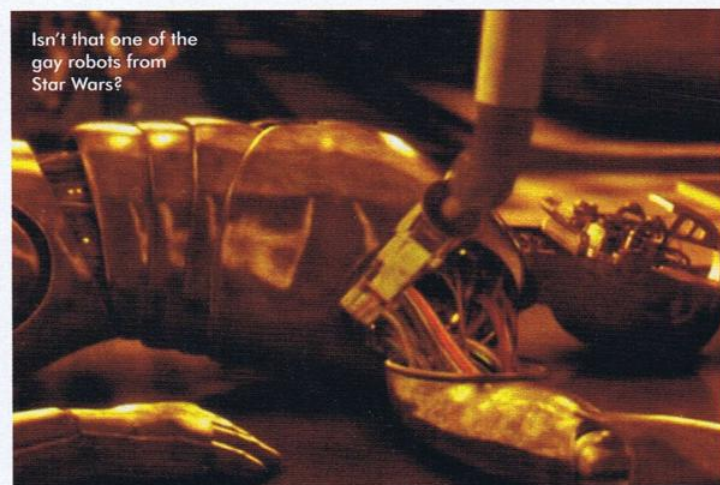
[above] In the original version they all had hair... oh Mr Beardy

framing of each shot/sequence. Consequently *THX 1138* is more art than film, a metaphor for a society focussed on consumption and corporate control, themes which are probably far more resonant today than they ever were when the film was originally released in 1970.

This two-disc special edition comes with George Lucas' original student film *THX 1138 4EB* and two great documentaries on the film and Francis Ford Coppola's production company 'American Zoetrope'. Funnily enough *THX 1138* was their first feature film and almost single-handedly ruined the company.

Kosta Andreadis

MOVIE: 8 / EXTRAS: 9



Isn't that one of the gay robots from *Star Wars*?

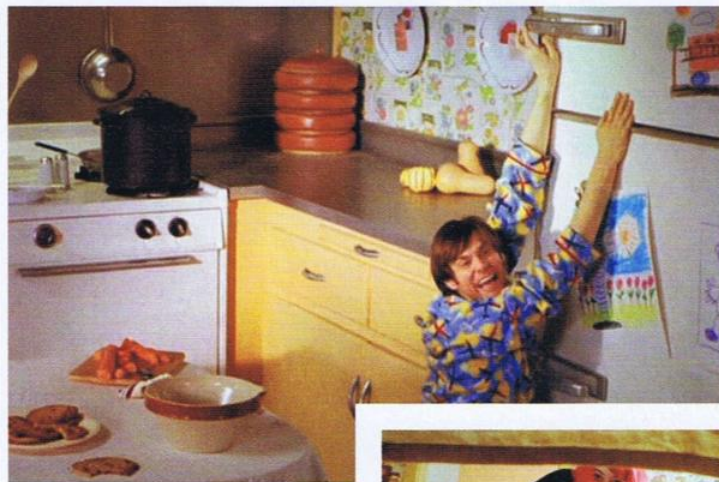
Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind

ROADSHOW, M 15+

Highbrow is one of the terms frequently associated with writer Charlie Kaufman by overzealous film critics. Such a term is usually meant at the detriment of the material, simultaneously praising it for its narrative ingenuity whilst backhanding it for being "above" the layman in terms of plot and style. *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* is one such highbrow film but the genius of the piece is that it works so well on so many levels that it's hard not to fall in love with it. Jim Carrey, usually seen portraying a lovable but otherwise bumbling slapstick fool gives the most restrained and genuine performance of his career as Joel, a thirty-something no-hoper who falls madly in love with the vivacious and more than a little confounding Clementine (Kate Winslet). Told in a kind of reverse chronology, *Eternal*

Sunshine tells the story of Joel, who, upon finding that Clementine has had her memory of him erased by Lacuna, a hole in the wall medical practise specialising in memory wiping, decides to have his memories of her erased as well. Once the memories start to go Joel begins to remember why he loved her in the first place and struggles through a number of surreal memories to keep his memories of her alive, even though they are being erased at his request.

Both Carrey and Winslet are perfect in their roles as Joel and Clementine, carrying with them an easy chemistry usually only seen in people very much in love. There are a few hiccups in the script when it comes to narrative flow but the sheer genius of the concept and the tender way director Michel Gondry treats the material more than makes up for the flaws. The feature is backed up by a great commentary by Michel Gondry and

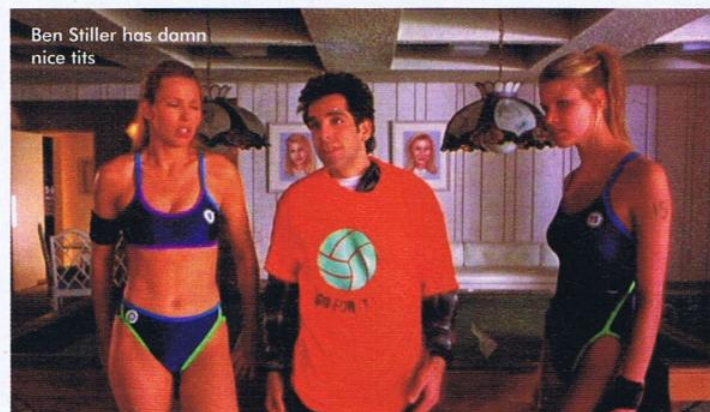


[above] Frosty Fruit withdrawals. I know what that's like man - stay strong

Charlie Kaufman, the director and writer respectively, some deleted scenes, a behind the scenes look, an amusing conversation with Carrey and Gondry, a commercial for Lacuna and a slightly creepy film clip of the song "Light & Day" by the Polyphonic Spree.

Daniel Wilks

MOVIE: 9 / EXTRAS: 8



Ben Stiller has damn nice tits

Flirting With Disaster

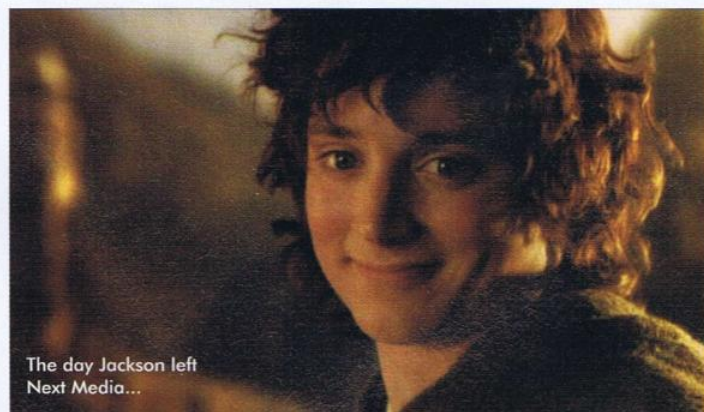
MIRAMAX, M15+

In the world of uncomfortable comedy, Ben Stiller is at the top of his game, and this comedy from the mid 90s from director David O'Russell (*Three Kings*), is definite proof of that. In *Flirting With Disaster*, Ben Stiller plays Mel Coplin, an adopted soon-to-be father who seeks the help of an attractive adoption counsellor to track down his biological parents. Essentially a road movie, *Flirting With Disaster* features some hilarious scenes and characters as Mel travels across the country in search of true parents. The film is very typical of a lot of independent films made in the US in the mid-to-late 90s, quirky, off-beat and very funny - the polar opposite of the Jerry Bruckheimer blockbusters

plaguering most cinema screens. Even after crashing a truck into a post-office whilst trying to get a lesson from a potential trucker father and destroying a potential mother's collection of crystal animals his real parents turn out to be acid making hippies (played by Alan Alda and Lily Tomlin). Throughout all the madness, Ben Stiller keeps everything very centred as he struggles to control each situation - and so the film becomes the first starring role for the comedian/actor that solidified his comedic talents. This is a very funny film that no Ben Stiller fan should miss out on, a minor classic that features an ensemble cast of very funny characters.

Kosta Andreadis

MOVIE: 8 / EXTRAS: 4



The day Jackson left Next Media...

The Return of the King

(EXTENDED EDITION)

ROADSHOW, M 15+

Like the extended editions of the first two films of the trilogy, the RotK four disc set features a wealth of new material (around 50 minutes) including extended cuts of old scenes, scenes cut from the original theatrical cut of the film and even some new effects shots.

The additional footage in *The Return of the King* fits really naturally and much of the time you will be hard pressed to see where it's been added. This is not to say that there are no standout moments as some pivotal scenes have been added back into the film including the death of Saruman and the Mouth of Sauron at the Black Gate. Other added scenes include an amusing

drinking competition between Gimli and Legolas as well as a touching conversation between Faramir and Pippin about the nature of strength and the love of a father. Clocking in at just over four hours, *The Return of the King* is a truly gargantuan epic. The film features four audio commentaries by the director and writers, the production team, the design team and the cast, the latter of which includes more than 30 actors including both Gollum and Smeagol. Discs three and four feature hours of documentary footage, behind the scenes looks and remarkably candid interviews with cast and crew about the shoot and post production of the third film.

Daniel Wilks

MOVIE: 10 / EXTRAS: 10

Spider-Man 2

(2 DISC COLLECTOR'S EDITION)

COLUMBIA TRISTAR, M 15+

▶▶ I'll come right to the point - *Spider-Man 2* is the best superhero film since the release of *Superman 2* way back in 1980, and the reason for this is simple. Instead of focussing on the special effects and forgetting the characters, or treating the audience as though they were stupid (*Catwoman*, I'm looking in your direction), *Spider-Man 2*, like *Superman 2* before it concentrates on the human emotions behind the larger than life heroes. Whilst watching Spidey swing through downtown Manhattan is undoubtedly thrilling, the emotional core of the film; the continuing mute love Peter Parker feels for MJ, the fact that Aunt May may lose her house, Dr. Otto Octavius being torn between serving humanity and serving his monstrous mechanical arms, and Harry Osbourne's ongoing hatred of Spider-Man who he blames for his father's death, serve as the real drawcard. Watching Peter

Parker struggling with the burden of responsibility while trying to maintain a semi-normal life adds a very human element to the film and serves to draw the viewer in far more than any action scene ever could.

That said, the action of *Spider-Man 2* is absolutely spectacular. Raimi has mastered the integration of live action and CGI in the second film - no longer is it blindingly obvious when Tobey Maguire (or his stunt double) become a computer generated stand-in. In fact only once do the effects look anything but special and then it's for such a short time and in such a pivotal scene that it doesn't really matter at all.

Another great strength of *Spider-Man 2* is the wonderfully layered performance of Alfred Molina as the sometimes villainous Doc Ock. Molina infuses the Ock with a sense of gravitas that elevates what is otherwise a rather goofy looking and even more goofily named



[bottom right] The new "Thorpedo Fully Sick Sellout" swimming goggles

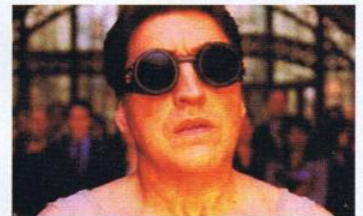


character to being fully three dimensional and very sympathetic.

Special features on this 2 disc set include two commentaries, numerous behind the scenes, making of and comic book documentaries, a few rather dull bloopers and a number of nice little hidden features.

Daniel Wilks

MOVIE: 10 / EXTRAS: 9



Harry strokes Hagrid's bird

Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban

WARNER BROS, PG

▶▶ For my money *The Prisoner of Azkaban* is the best of the five Harry Potter books: it was dark, with more complex, interesting and sometimes terrifying characters (Lupin, Sirius Black and the Dementors to name a few) and has a slow boiling plot that really kicks and twists wonderfully at the end.

Fortunately, *Azkaban* is also the best of the Potter films to date, sporting much more mature direction and cinematography. This is largely because Chris Columbus, the director of the first two films, has stepped aside and handed over the reigns to Alfonso Cuarón (*Y Tu Mamá También*). Paired with cinematographer Michael Seresin,

they have a great eye for creating an organic, yet fantastical world.

It also doesn't hurt that many of the actors are drawn from a stable of top shelf British talent. David Thewlis is spot on as Lupin and Gary Oldman gives a spirited performance as Sirius Black. Michael Gambon also ably steps into Dumbledore's shoes for the late Richard Harris.

As has been the case in each of the HP films, many of the details of the book get lost by the wayside (such as the reasoning behind Potter, Pettigrew and Black's animagus skills), but despite this *The Prisoner of Azkaban* is the best big screen rendition of J.K. Rowling's world yet.

Guy Incognito

MOVIE: 7 / EXTRAS: 6



Holy shit this film sucks

Catwoman

ROADSHOW, M 15+

▶▶ *Catwoman* would have to be the worst superhero movie ever made, if not one of the worst films made in the last decade. Although supposedly based on the DC character of the same name, *Catwoman* dismisses all that went before it and tells the tale of Patience Philips, a mousy woman who is killed, resurrected by a cat and turns into a fetish gear clad supernatural special effects disaster fighting against one of the worst criminal conspiracies ever to disgrace the silver screen. Everything about the movie is terrible - Halle Berry is woeful as the mousy Patience, the slutty Patience and the eventual transformed Catwoman, Benjamin Bratt is lifeless as the love interest Tom (Catwoman's love interest is

named Tom - sheer genius), the CGI effects are so transparently bad that it looks like the game at times and the direction by the one named French former special effects director, Pitof seems to equate the number of stupid angles and times the camera can rotate around the action with real talent. The only saving grace of the film is the brilliant credits sequence that shows a number of different Catwomen through the ages but everything after those first few minutes is nothing but a dismal cat-astrophe.

A decent doco featuring Adam West, Ertha Kitt, Lee Meriwether and Julie Newmar is initially pretty cool but ultimately only makes the feature look worse.

Daniel Wilks

MOVIE: 1 / EXTRAS: 6

ATARI

Win King Arthur Goodies!

» Australia's own Krome Studios have been hard at work on a King Arthur game for PS2 and Xbox. No, it's not a game about Arthur Adams from Hey Dad becoming a king (mostly because King Nudge is in development). Rather, it's a game based on the Jerry Bruckheimer film of the same name, starring Evil Malky's former squeeze Keira Knightley as Guinevere. The game lets you take control of Arthur, Lancelot, Guinevere, Tristan and Bors, and is as action packed as it is epic.

King Arthur for PS2 and Xbox will be coming out at the same time as the film's DVD release, so to celebrate, our friends at Atari and Buena Vista have put together the mother of all King Arthur prize packs to give away to five lucky readers. Each pack contains a copy of the game on PS2, a copy of the King Arthur Director's Cut on DVD, as well as a King Arthur Polo shirt, Organiser, Watch, Bag and Cap. Sweet!

To be in the running for one of the packs, just answer the following question:

Who was Jerry Bruckheimer's partner back in the Top Gun days?

Put your answer, as well as your name and address on the back of an envelope and send it to: **Crush (on) Keira, Hyper, 78 Renwick St, Redfern, NSW, 2016.**



FIVE WINNERS WILL RECEIVE:

- 1 x King Arthur Game (PS2)
- 1 x King Arthur Director's Cut DVD
- 1 x King Arthur Polo Shirt
- 1 x King Arthur Organiser
- 1 x King Arthur Watch
- 1 x King Arthur Bag
- 1 x King Arthur Cap

**5
PACKS
UP FOR
GRABS!**

Win Guilty Gear X2 Reload!

» Anyone who's been reading Hyper for a while would know all about our feelings for Guilty Gear. Simply put, anyone who says 2D fighting games are dead needs to play this series. Guilty Gear has the most compelling characters of any fighting game EVER, backed up stellar gameplay mechanics and gorgeously detailed backgrounds and animations. It's inventive, it's crazy and it's very Japanese. Is it any wonder we love it?

The best news though is that HES Interactive are bringing out Guilty Gear X2 Reload for both PS2 and Xbox in Australia, and thanks to some gentle pleading we've secured six copies to give away. To be in the running, just tell us what system you'd like the game on, and answer this question:

What is Giant Doctor Baghead's name in the game?

Put your answer, as well as your name and address on the back of an envelope and send it to: **"Baghead Reloaded, Hyper, 78 Renwick St, Redfern, NSW, 2016."**

**6
COPIES
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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 December 28 and entries close at 6pm February 2. 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 February 3 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 April issue of Hyper on sale March 9. 9) 5 winners will each receive King Arthur on PS2 (RRP \$99.95), King Arthur Director's Cut on DVD (RRP \$32.95), a King Arthur Polo shirt (RRP \$49.95), a King Arthur Organiser (RRP \$69.95), a King Arthur watch (\$119.95), a King Arthur bag (\$39.95) and a King Arthur cap (\$29.95). Six winners will each receive Guilty Gear X2 Reload on the platform of their choice (PS2 or Xbox) (RRP \$89.95). Total value of competitions is \$2752.95. 10) The promoter is Next Publishing Pty Ltd ABN 88 002 647 645 of 78 Renwick St, Redfern NSW 2016.



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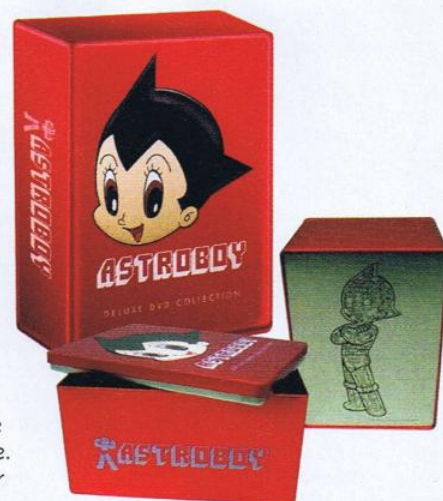
Astro Boy DELUXE DVD COLLECTION

CATEGORY: SCI-FI ACTION
PRODUCTION:
TEZUKA PRODUCTIONS

▶▶ I'm sitting at my PC right now, staring at a giant metal box that's sitting on the desk beside me. Emblazoned on its shiny red surface is the smiling face of one of the most recognisable anime figures of all time - Astro Boy. The sight of his face alone sends waves of nostalgia echoing through my mind. And indeed, if you grew up at roughly the same time I did, chances are you're the same. *Astro Boy*, even more so than *Star Blazers* or *Battle of the Planets*, was one of the most significant programs of my youth. And you know what? Watching through it all again - I'm glad that it was.

The reason for this isn't because Astro Boy is still an iconic design, or that Daddy Walrus is still the coolest character ever. It's not even because *Astro Boy* had an exciting vision of the future (well, present according to Tezuka's original chronology) and prescient themes that still ring true today. No, it's because this show has soul.

Astro Boy's creator, Osamu Tezuka, was (and still is) one of the most influential manga artists/animators in Japan, driving the boom and popularisation of manga in post-war Japan. He was as much a philosopher and pacifist as he was an artist and storyteller, and this comes across very strongly in *Astro Boy*. *Astro Boy* is a show with a clear moral compass that somehow avoids being too preachy. Instead, you simply see that Astro Boy believes that everyone - man and robot alike, has good within them, and always seeks a non-violent solution. It's refreshing to see



a kids show where characters aren't simply black and white, but can grow or make mistakes, and where there isn't always a happy ending.

The animation is still remarkably good too. Rather than the simply drawn scenes of much kids TV animation, *Astro Boy* is quite complex, with detailed crowd backgrounds and swooping, graceful flight sequences. Not all the storylines are as engaging as you may remember, and some of the voice acting is a little painful, but this series is still really tight.

Fans would already know that this series of *Astro Boy* is actually the second series, and it's pretty cool to see one episode of the original 1963 series included in this 10 disc box set's bonus DVD. Indeed, it's quite amazing that since his creation in 1951 in manga form, Astro Boy remains as relevant today as he did all those years ago. An essential purchase.

Cam Shea

**ANIMATION: 8 / STORY: 8
OVERALL: 9**



"Adam Sandler on a desert island, falls in love with a coconut"

Astro Boy 2003

Even though we reviewed the new series of *Astro Boy* back in issue 124, it's finally out locally, so it's worth having a second look.

The new series once again tweaks the story of Astro's origins slightly, and although many of the classic characters return, they've changed either in name or in design. Atlas, for instance, is no longer the puncy mega-tanned-faux-Egyptian-pony-riding-space-crystal-living guy (pictured top left) he was in the 80s series. He's been completely redesigned and is much cooler as a result. We're less happy, though, about the new look Astro Boy and Dr Elefun. Take Astro, for instance - his arms and legs are really chunky and look way out of proportion to the rest of his body. You get used to it, but it's little things like this that show that the guiding hand and astute eye of the late Osamu Tezuka are missed in the new series. We're also not a fan of the name changes - why change Dr Elefun to Dr O'Shay? Why change Uran to Zoran? There's just no need.

Fortunately the English dubs are pretty reasonable, and the content is as entertaining as ever. It's definitely still skewed well towards the younger viewers, which is a bit disappointing given all of Astro's original fans have grown up, but understandable. Thematically it's bang on the Tezuka money, and newcomers will love the melding of high grade cel animation with slick CGI animation. If you consider yourself a fan of *Astro Boy*, the 2003 series is well worth picking up. Next stop? The release of the 1963 series on DVD!

Gungrave VOLUME 1: BEYOND THE GRAVE

CATEGORY: ACTION
PRODUCTION: STUDIO MADHOUSE

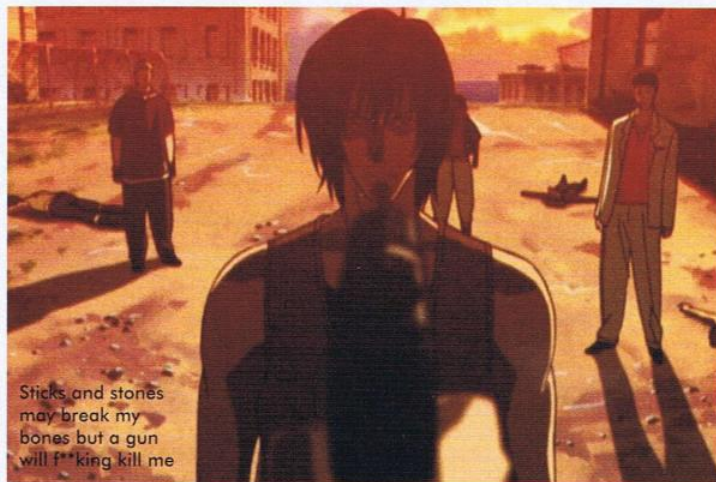
There's one trait common to most anime derived from long running manga or videogames - the creators assume that the audience will have some prior knowledge of the story and can thus streamline the narrative of the story and jump right into the action. Unfortunately this approach can leave a lot of viewers who are unfamiliar floundering for the first few episodes, making series' hard to get into due to impenetrable character histories, the background of rivalries and the like. *Gungrave* tackles the subject from the opposite direction, wiping the slate clean and starting all viewers off on an even footing. This approach does cause some major jolts in the flow of the series but rather than suffer because of it, the radical tone shifts serve to strengthen the material.

The first episode introduces the audience to the major players in the series: an evil Mafia organisation lead by the enigmatic "Bloody Harry" that employs grotesque undead enforcers, a young girl hiding out with a slightly nutty

scientist and a gun wielding killing machine called *Beyond the Grave*. After the action packed start the series switches gears and delves back into history, taking viewers to the origins of Harry and *Beyond the Grave*, better known as Brandon while he was alive. Harry and Brandon are best friends in a violent city, living life through petty crime and street brawls. The two are polar opposites - Harry is talkative and charming and Brandon is nearly mute and lets his fists take care of the conversation. Through a spirally progression of revenge, Harry and Brandon fall deeper into their life of crime. The fact that the audience knows that the friends will eventually have a falling out and become bitter enemies serves as the crux of the early episodes and the thoughtful progression of the story makes it incredibly compelling, so much so that the switch back to undead killing machines and two-gun mojo may come as something of a disappointment.

Colonel Wilkeson Senior

ANIMATION: 9 / STORY: 8
OVERALL: 8



Sticks and stones may break my bones but a gun will f**king kill me



Gad Guard VOLUME 1: LIGHTNING

CATEGORY: ACTION
PRODUCTION: GONZO

Gad Guard comes across as something of a kid's series dressed up in the trappings of an adult oriented anime - the production designs are gorgeous, the design has a pleasant retro feel harkening back to some of the robots seen in *Astro Boy* and *Voltron* and the animation is very good but at the core the morality of the film, the delineation between good and evil is so black and white that there is no real depth to the story. Every time a bad guy appears you know he's going to be in for a beat-down at the hands of Hajiki and his Techode, Lightning. Hajiki is a typical anime loser; he's good natured and generally nice but has little or nothing going for him until he stumbles across a magic widget called a Gad, a cubic doodad that turns into a giant robot (called a Techode) when it makes a strong emotional bond with a person. Being the good natured and lovable loser that he is Hajiki decides to use Lightning to fight evil wherever he finds it.

Although the plotting is somewhat

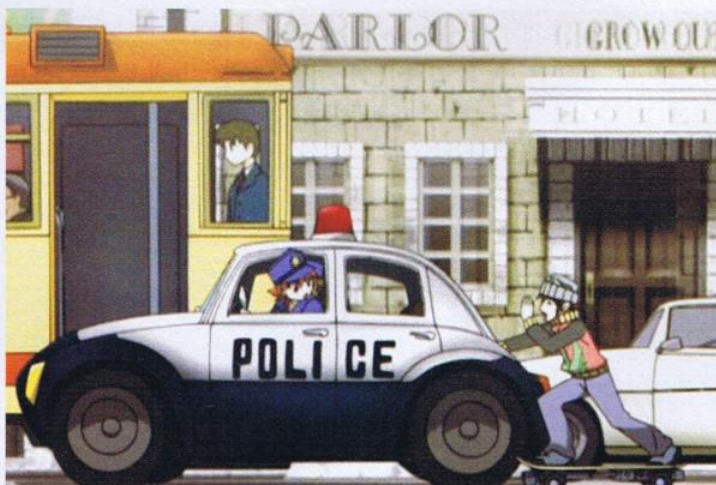
formulaic the animation and action scenes mostly make up for it. The giant robot battles are very much of the hand-to-hand variety, giving each of the action scenes a nice personal feel. Although the plotting and core of the series is quite young there is one moment of outrageously misplaced fan-service in the first episode. A well endowed young woman (one of the villains) sits back in their nightclub-esque hideout and is fed a carrot by her man. You've never seen someone enjoy eating a carrot so much in their life. The moans and groans alone make you think that she is some distant quasi-European looking Japanese descendant of Linda Lovelace. Inappropriate sexual hijinks aside, *Gad Guard* also features one of the best theme songs since *Cowboy Bebop*.

Daniel Wilks

ANIMATION: 8 / STORY: 6
OVERALL: 7

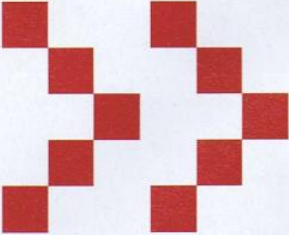


Hey Wilks!
Where are the carrot eating screens?



Q. What game are you most looking forward to in 2005 and why?

We've had a veritable tidal wave of great games in the last few months here in Australia, but hey, sometime in February we'll have finished them all and be thirsting for more gaming morsels to sink our teeth into. So what's on the horizon in 2005? Aside from obvious chart toppers like FFXII and MGS3, there's a lot of titles in development that haven't been made public yet - those announcements will be rolled out between now and E3, and you can be sure there will be some biggies. Right now, however, being the sagacious chaps we are, it's the promise of games that really utilise the new systems that we're most looking forward to. The game that completely utilises the Nintendo DS's dual screens, stylus and mic. The game that works the PSP to the bone. And of course, the possibility of getting our mitts on Xbox 2 titles. There's a lot to look forward to this year...



HYPER FORUM

Well, it's been a good run, but that's it for the Forum section in Hyper. From now on, it's over to the forums at www.hyperactive.com.au and www.doesmannerism.com. Super happy sayonara Hyper Forum!

SOLID!

Since the Australian release date for Metal Gear Solid 3 is in 2005 I guess I would have to say that. The Metal Gear series have always had incredibly compelling and deep plot line that not only entertains but also makes the player think, the first MGS was about Genes and how they can direct your life, but also how you can break away from them, the second was about memes, which is a highly complicated theory which can be roughly explained as the basic building blocks of our minds and culture, in the same way that genes are the basic building blocks of biological life. The third installment of the series is about eras, I have no idea how this is going to be told in the story but it really intrigues me. Another reason that MGS3 is my most anticipated game is because of the game play, no more are there stuffy corridors in big plants or factories, now Snake is in the Jungle with no radar and must remain hidden using camouflage, on top of this is the requirement of catching and eating animals to survive and even treating wounds that you receive in battle, such as removing bullets when shot or burning off leeches with a cigar (Snakes favorite brand of course). And those are just some of the reason of why I think that Metal Gear Solid 3 is the game I am most looking forward too, now if only it can get an earlier release in Australia.

Simon O'Conner



[above] Metal Gear Solid 3: Snake Eater. You actually play as the locusts you know

LINK TO THE FUTURE

I have been waiting for this topic of discussion to come up for a while now and I couldn't be more happy with the timing. The game im most looking forward to in 2005 has only just started being showcased since this years E3 and very little information of the storyline and other details such as release date has being provided. What is the name of this game you may ask, its the mouth watering, finger licking, adrenaline pumping, next Zelda title for the one and only Nintendo Gamecube.

After watching the E3 trailer and reading your great interview with Eiji Aonuma in issue 131, along with just about every other GCN owner I

know, I have developed a craving for this game. The visuals are looking outstanding and some aspects of the game shown in the trailer and screens, such as riding on horseback while attacking have really caught my eye (not really sure if this was a cut-scene but it looked cool). In my own opinion the luscious graphics combined with what is inevitable to be outstanding gameplay will once again be combined to produce yet another awesome Zelda title which will be ranked up there with the best games of all time.

Harry.S

DUPED FOR DUKE

The game I am most looking forward to... well, to be honest for the last god knows how many years it has been Duke Nukem Forever, but I now realise the error of my ways and have given up on it ever coming out. So, in lieu of that game I guess I'd have to say Wanda and Colossus. ICO is easily one of the best PS2 games of all time, and with Wanda it looks like videogaming as an artform is going to be reinvigorated once again. Climbing monsters? Solving living, breathing, walking puzzles? It sounds almost too good to be true. Bring it on!

Dynamite Duke

LUB TEH CAPCOM

The highlights of 2005 include two quirky and PS2/GCN exclusive titles, which along with Resident Evil 4



[above] I hope it has voice com. Then we can make "a Fish called Wanda" jokes



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 hell, we'll read it but given that there's no more Forum section, you'll have to make up your own topic...

may well be the Best. Quarter. Of. Releases. Ever. for a developer.

Viewtiful Joe 2 looks like another classic Capcom beat-em-up. More of the brilliant Viewtiful Joe gameplay is very good, but the extra features will really raise it to another level. The replay VFX power is a great idea, especially if it can be combined with moves like Ukemi and Viewtiful Forever, leading to even more frenetic button combinations and powerful moves. It's an unlikely game to have a co-op mode and will make the gameplay very different. Unlike the movies it parodied, VJ2 will be a more than worthy sequel.

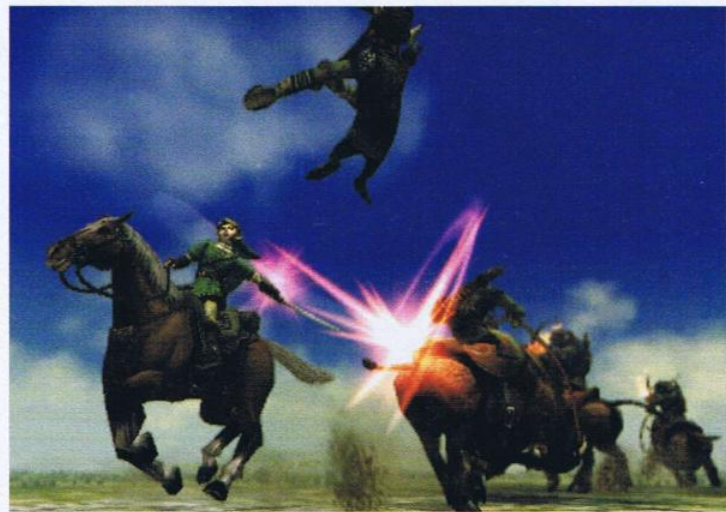
Killer 7 is intriguing, as almost nothing is known about this cel-shaded shooter. I would doubt its potential in the hands of most other developers but for Capcom, who seem to specialise in violent and/or quirky titles. Hopefully the makers of some of the Worst. Controls. Ever. (PNo3, Onimusha, Resident Evil) will come up with a workable scheme.

Alastair Christie

NINTENDO LOVE

Wow.. that is the hardest. question. ever. Serious.. There are so many cool games coming out next year

i'm gonna have to do a million graveyard shifts to buy them all! Anyway, if i think about it.. there are a few games that kind of.. Jump to mind, but then others seem to float through my thoughts and smack the others into the abyss of the 'Blau'.. First game that comes to mind (and most probably, others minds) is, of course, the Next Legend of Zelda game.. That is going to be (as the caption said under the screenshot in issue 131) the BEST. GAME. EVER. i doubt i need to explain why i'm looking forward to this.. Next game that comes to mind (probably only to my mind) is Phantasy Star Universe. Being the "Phantasy Man" you called me in my last mail, i think this is going to be awesome aswell.. The current PSO ep 1&2 is slowly dieing.. The release of Episode 3 wasn't enough to keep PSO going for very long.. Although it might have just extended PSO's life expectancy just enough to release PSU, which (as my PSO fans agree) is looking awesome.. Just the thing we PSO'ers need to get our game back up and breathing again. Next game is probably Metroid Prime 2:Echoes.. The first one was excellent, even the people at EB were raving about it! (and thats



[above] An artist's impression of Shiggy corraling the dev team on the new Zelda

saying something..) Hopefully the sequel will give us a deeper look into Samus' past and hopefully we can find more about the Chozo.. Multiplayer is actually looking pretty cool, but Metroid is and has always been a 1 player game.. The thought of clones of Samus is looking kinda.. Crap. But, if they can pull it off properly.. i won't complain. And last, but probably not least.. is Star Fox Adventures 2. I'm not a great fan of Fox and Co. But the first was relatively good, so .. I suppose it

wouldn't be a bad idea to grab the sequel and see what that's all about.

Ziggy

ZELDASAURUS

I'm looking forward to the new Zelda for GameCube where Link is only an adult and go around killing dinosaurs and other shit like that. If it does not come out n 2005 I have wasted part of my life typing this....

Con the Fruiterer (Yes my name is actually Con)

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MAIL HYPER!

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78 Renwick St. Redfern,
NSW 2016 Australia

EMAIL:

freakscene@next.com.au

GRRRL GAMER

Dearest Hyperarians,

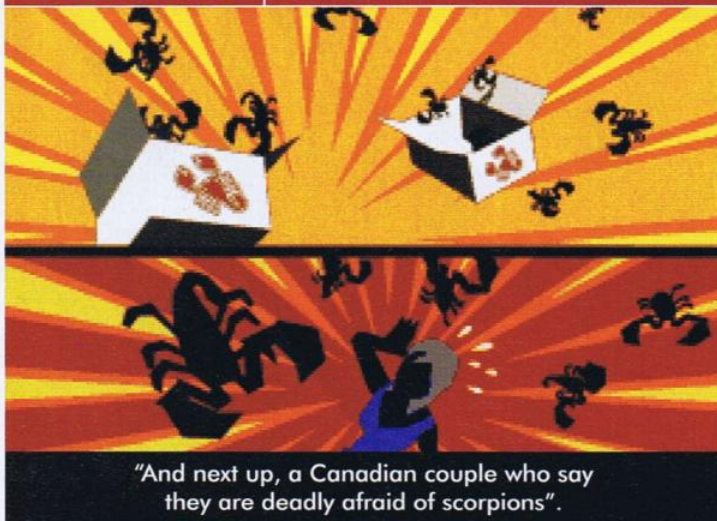
Greetings. I have self-appointed myself representative of all... (cue fanfare) female gamers. That's right, we exist, sadly unbeknownst to many male gamers. We're a struggling race boys, but we're still here. What always amazes me is the rate of acceptance and knowledge of gaming between the genders. For instance, when I was on the phone with a girlfriend, she began describing a classic school geek, and I thought - hoo boy, not another one. But then she reached through the phone and rattled my very soul - "what's Halo?". I was stunned and speechless for about 4 seconds. I went on to explain briefly the nature of the game, forcing myself not to go into a poetic trance and intricately describe the Xbox/PC masterpiece. Another time a few months ago, I was dumping my school bag (yeah yeah I'm still in high school - shut up!) when I overheard a bunch of guys discussing Counter Strike and the like, so I said for the sake of conversation - "Dammit! Hey, did you guys hear how Halo 2 has been pushed back again?" They turned to me slowly and one of them stepped up - "You know about... Ha... lo? But but, you're a girl!" I raised my head proudly and announced "Yes. Yes I am".

So heed my cry, guy gamers - spread the word, start a revolution... do something to make society acknowledge our presence! I am doing all I can, but this is not enough. Publish this (and if you have I sound like a real blonde) and notice us chick gamers, and we

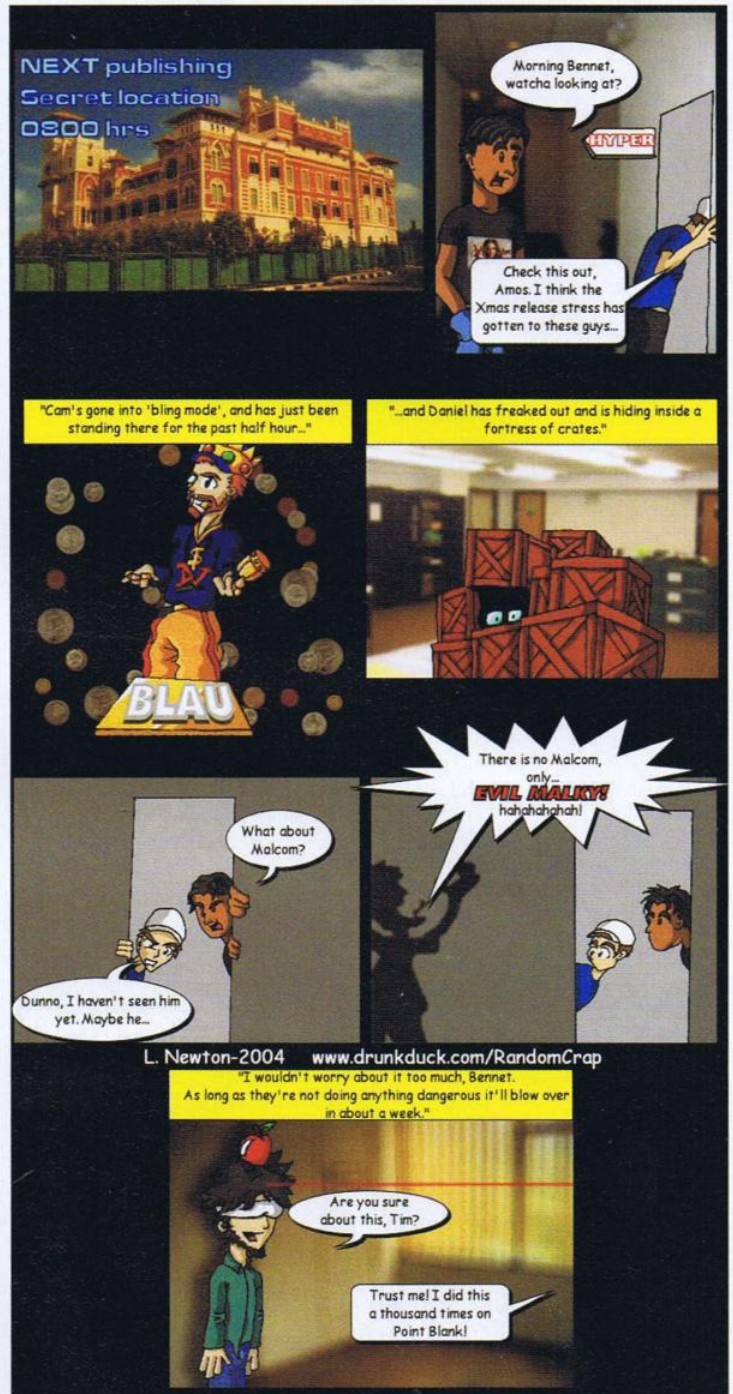
CAPTION THIS!

PART 60 WINNER

In a sea of funny entries, Mr. Tea Towell a.k.a. **Lewis Powell**, tickled our Simpsons funnybones the most...



"And next up, a Canadian couple who say they are deadly afraid of scorpions".



[above] Liam Newton is our new favourite person ever.

might do something to remove the stereotype of male gamers. I am a woman gamer, hear me roar!

Yuna's "other" cousin

PS How was "A Night in Fantasia"?

Hey Y.O.C.

I hear you on the stereotype issue. People are always amazed that I'm a gamer. They have this expectation that we'll all be pasty and smelly (which, let's face it - isn't too far from the truth for Wilks), and then they meet a stunningly attractive Adonis like myself, and all their preconceptions go out the window. But back to your letter, it's always good to hear from female readers - we know you're out there, and this magazine is as much for you as it is for the guys. Hell, why do you think

we adopted Amos as our mascot - to sex up the mag for the girls (and some of the guys).

As far as breaking down the myth that all gamers are guys - that's definitely changing, but it's a slow process, especially since the mainstream press still seems to identify gamers with guys drooling over Lara crawling through a tight passage. So get up on your crate (soap boxes are 5000 lbs) and be a proud female gamer!

METAL GEAR STUPID

Man I'm stupid! You see I'm a really big Metal Gear Fan, you know one of those guys who have the soundtrack and all sorts of geeky things like that.

Now After Metal Gear Solid 3 was

released in the states earlier this month, I though (stupidly) that I would soon be getting my hands on the game at the most in a month or two. Now here is the funny thing, the Pal version being released, not two months from the NTSC release, not three, four or five, but six bloody months. According to the Australian Atari website, MGS3 is being released April 30th. I mean, why would it be six months until a pal release?

What are they remaking the entire games physics engine from scratch? I seriously don't understand why it would take three months, I can understand they have to get the pal version box art and produce the actual Pal game discs, but why couldn't they start doing that a few months before do get an earlier release date. I'm sure this isn't the only time the Pal region has had to wait an extra six months for a game, but it's the first that has effected me, I just can't understand why it would take that long. Anyway that's all I got to say, thanks for reading.

From Stupid, uhh I mean Simon O'Connor.

Hey Stupid, usually the PAL delays are related to the time it takes to do translation for the region.

An American release need only be translated into English but in our region we need English, French, Italian, Magyar, German, Russian and a few others I can't remember off the top of my head. The good news is that the game is coming out in March, not April and that there will be some (some would say token) extras for the PAL version, such as Duel Mode (just the boss battles) and Demo Theatre (watch all the cutscenes in a row). We're hanging out for it too, but to be honest it makes some sense for it to come out early next year than at Christmas. There are so many strong titles out right now that MGS3 deserves to get its time in the limelight and not be "just another A grade xmas title".

FUNNY BUSINESS

Dear Cam,

Hello my name is Timothy and I like Hyper. I am good and get it each month. You are funny. I have a PS2 and Sly. You need more coverage of hot games like Star Wars Episode 3. Thankyou for being funny. Keep up the good work. Peace out.

From Timothy Daniels and my friends.

DEPT. OF MISC. BLAU SIGHTINGS

Production/Creature Coordinator	PATY BLAU
Latex Foam Lab Supervisor	JOHN COPPINGER
Animatronics Engineer	RON BECK
Wardrobe Supervisor	MARY ELIZABETH STILL
Costume Supervisor	JANET TEBROOKE
Wardrobe Mistress	JENNY GREEN
Shop Manager	RICHARD MILLER
Jeweler	BARBARA KASSAL, EDWINA PELLIKKA, ANNE POLLAND, ELVIRA ANGELINETTA
Creature Costumers	
Assistant Property Master	CHARLES TORBETT
Property Supervisors	DAN COANGELO, BRIAN LOFHOUSE
Property	HOLLY WALKER, IVAN VAN PERRE
Propmakers	BILL HARGREAVES, RICHARD PETERS
Master Carpenter	BERT LONG
Master Plasterer	KENNY CLARKE

[above] Tim Maddocks spotted some Blau in the credits for Return of the Jedi.

Wassup!

Glad you dig the mag, thanks for reading! Your "doesmannerism" pic was pure gold, and it's good to see the wisdom of the mannerism transcends age. Speaking of Episode III, just between you and me, we're going to have something big on it very soon, so keep your eyes open...

MOONTAN

Do you guys have a tanning bed in your office? I heard it's important

for your skin to be exposed to U.V rays (i.e. the sun) to keep you alive - skin needs oxidising or something. Therefore, seeing as you guys stay indoors playing cool games all day, yet you remain alive, it's obvious you must have a tanning bed. Go on, admit it.

From Daniel Spicer

Our secret is out but you have a little of your science wrong. People don't oxidise. If we did we'd probably rust.

We play seriously...

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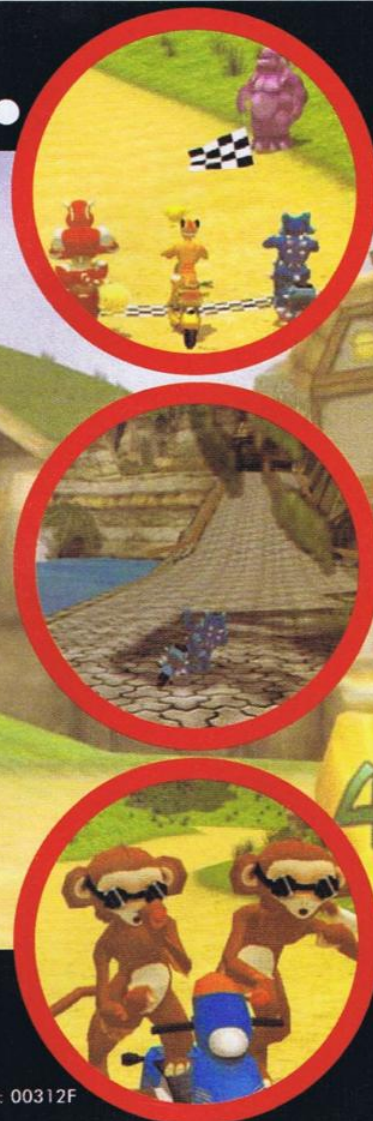
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After the 23 age, your trunk slowly quits carries out a important hormone known as Someone Increment Internal Secretion. The decrease of it, that governs grades of other internal secretions in the trunk is straight responsible for all of the most frequent designations of growing old, as furrows, gray hair, abated energy, and diminished intimate function.

Read more intelligence

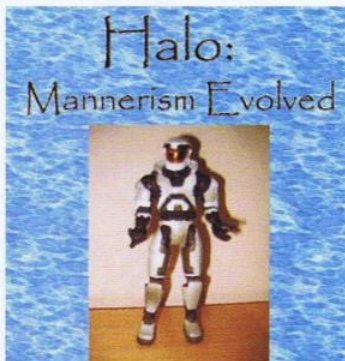
Whilst we appreciate your offer to read more intelligence (something we could all afford to do I dare say) your somewhat tenuous medical knowledge calls into question your actual clinical knowledge. We may be wrong but Someone Increment Internal Secretion sounds like a crazy Japanese porn film, not a vital part of the human body. Of course, I have never been to dubious medical school to learn dubious medical knowledge so I may be wrong.

BUFF YOUR MONOCLE

Hey Hyper homeys! You know, I was reading the letters in issue 134 a few days ago and quite frankly I was completely pissed off with the nameless coward taking pot shots at the Cam, the mag and the crew. I mean, what a cockhead, he criticises the mag and then doesn't even have the balls to leave an alias, yet alone a real name. Listen up, go and buff your monocle you pompous wanker and then maybe you'll be able to look past a few simple spelling mistakes and see how awesome this mag is and always has been. And just so you don't think I'm a hypocrite, I'll leave you my name, an alias AND a pic. Anyway guys keep up the great work and don't let idiots like that get you down, I've been reading this mag since issue 23 and I don't plan on stopping anytime soon, keep the good times rollin'.

Jason "Afrodisiac" von Kanel.

PS - Some Levy love never goes astray!



[up] Adam Noussa reinvents the genre

Wow, all we can say to that is, Best. White Man. Afro. Ever! BLAU! Oh, and we hope you enjoy this issue's Levy Love Adventures Extravaganza!

SCHMALO 2

Halo, loved by millions the moment they laid eyes and hands on it and the demand for a sequel quickly arose. Halo 2 has finally arrived and while no doubt it is fun, is this really the sequel we have been waiting 2 1/2 years for?

If you ask me the hype that has been generated for this game over the past few years was such that you came to think that this game was going to be the second coming of the messiah. But is it really that good? The single player I have to admit is just magic to witness but the multiplayer and other aspects of the game really fall short of its reputation. The most prominent of those is that there's NO HEALTH METER only shield, I mean c'mon, and every time I got to melee someone while I'm dual wielding I drop my second weapon and have to pick it up again, the same goes for getting on turrets and in vehicles and its pisses me off to the max. The multiplayer in Halo 2 doesn't quite feel like Halo multiplayer should, the weapons feel imbalanced and it practically comes down to who has the bigger guns and less skill related, like on Halo 1 they could have a shotgun, sniper rifle or even rocket launcher but if you were good enough you could take em down with a pistol. It doesn't seem like that in Halo 2, like the rocket launcher can fire so fast it doesn't matter if you miss the first time and the needlers are so hard to avoid and do so much damage that someone with 2 of them is practically invincible and the bloody gauss cannon on the warthog will kill you in 1 shot on foot and like 2 shots in a vehicle, also the shotgun has been weakened which is good, but it was weakened so far that you need to be right next to em to hurt em and even then it takes like 2-3 shots. I no that that's kind of realistic and some people like that, but when it gets to the point where there really are only a few weapons worth getting then it gets kind of dull. Some things in single player can get on ya nerves like not being able to see your passenger's health in vehicle and that you can have the campaign it done in about a week or less.

But like I said its not all bad, heck its heaps of fun (as Hyper will inform you of) it's just that these sorts of things can really stand out when you expect it to be absolutely brilliant, it just doesn't fell like the

LETTER OF THE MONTH

FAPTASTIC!

while browsing over your review of the one handed controller in December's Hyper, I was agitated, bemused and not-quite-offended by your inference that it is solely useful for 'fappers'. My one handed controller has guided me through many Square Enix related pleasures lately and I have found that self gratification is but one of many purposes that a free hand can be put to. I have discovered others like:

- feeding the face with chips/ Kit Kats/ coffee
- scratching all manner of itchy body parts
- giving the wife a one handed hug when she gets home without pausing
- answering the phone (but obviously not listening to the caller)

And my favourite, giving the big finger to Maester Seymour (or your choice of most hated bad guy) as you simultaneously whip him/her good on screen. If only I had known of such a controller when I gave Sephiroth the Omnislashing he so richly deserved back in '98.

Admittedly, it is more difficult to use the one hander with more action orientated games, but I am currently training in secret with Pro Evo Soccer.

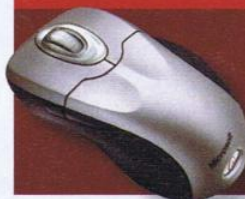
My eventual plan is to be able to crush my friends with the mighty Dutch Oranges while bitch slapping them or 'C'MON!'ing Lleyton Hewitt style mid-goal. Try saving a penalty when someone gives you a wet willy right at the vital moment.

No-one alienates PC mouse users for having a free hand in non-keyboard games. Us one handers demand respect. Now if only the geniuses behind this fine product could make a wireless version, the possibilities would be endless.....

Michael

One Handed Advocate and Non-Fapper (mostly)

Well, because we've managed to offend you by making the allegation that you are in fact a dirty fapper then we thought we should make it up to you by making yours the letter of the month. As such we will send you a mouse so that even you can now make fun of you for being a fapper. You win. We win. Everybody wins. It's like there's a party in your pants and everyone's invited! As far as a wireless one handed controller goes there is only one possibility that exists - fapping in any room of the house and the ability to go and clean up afterwards without having to stop playing the game. Brilliant!



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that's my fault for expecting so much but how can you not with how much they pushed it, I do admire the effort they put into the game, I can't deny that.

I'm interested to hear what others think about this too.

JV(yth

PS: the 'JV(' = a trippy M, just so you know.

Halo 2 is a great game, sure, but we think Bungie were in a bit of a pickle when it came to creating it. If they strayed too far away from the format of the original game then they would risk alienating the core fanbase and if they stuck too close to the original formula then people thinking that the second game would be the best thing ever would be sorely disappointed because they have essentially played the game before, albeit with slightly different mechanics.

SATISFIED CUSTOMER

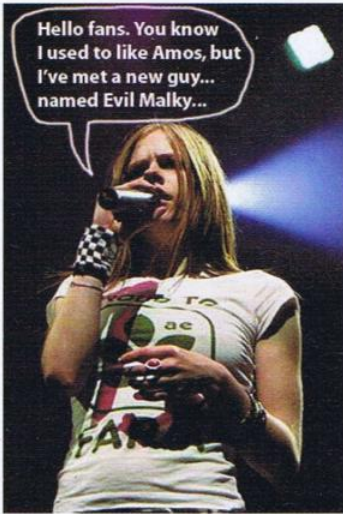
Dear Puny Hyper Crew,

I recently read the newest issue of your magazine, and noticed that you were advertising an answer to back pains, tension and high gaming prices with a new exercise regime called "Crushinetics!"

I myself am a casual gamer who enjoys what this new technology of 3D offers the world of gaming. I own a small variety of consoles, both new and old, and when affordable, will buy games for them. I am a frequent reader of your magazine and enjoy the humour the staff at your office contribute in the magazine. Personally, I believe it is easily better than the sissy PC Powerplay magazine. I still wonder why they bother to even exist in this world. Realising I required something to kill the long hours at work and noticing the new issue was out, I took a trip to my newsagents to get



[Evil Malky versus Vamp Willow] We received this entry for our Buffy comp via intra-office mail, from someone named 'Samo Gohn'. He will be crushed, whoever he is.



[above] Evil Malky even gets the girl

the new issue. I was reading through the "Mail Hyper" section of your magazine when I came across the "Crushinetics" advertisement.

I for one also suffer from those same symptoms in which this exercise program is aimed at repairing. I have tried my own mutilation program to rid of the pain, but I have failed miserably and I am now wanted in 3 different states and awaiting 4 different trials for murder and reckless endangerment as a result of my attempts. I now have chosen to turn to your new method in a bid to cleanse myself of my pain.

I truly believe that with the skilled knowledge your staff holds in their minds, that this program will not fail me. I have enclosed a cheque for the required amount of \$49.95. I hope that your program will be successful in curing my pains and I wish your crew the best of luck with your exercise program in the future.

Luke Carroll aka madmangohan

P.S: Once my cheque has been cashed, please send an email to the following address so I can email my home address to your company for shipment. luke_trainer@hotmail.com



[up] Luke Carroll definitely followed the rabbit down the hole and into Crate Land

P.P.S: A/S/L = 16/M/QLD

P.P.P.S: Also enclosed is a photo of me wearing a crate. With this crate on, I become my alter ego Crate Man, protector of crates and crate objects alike.

P.P.P.P.S: Please feel free to email me at the above address if you wish to view anymore of Crate Man's adventures. Currently an outfit is in the design stages.

Mr Carol
We're very excited that you've

decided to come on board and learn the mysterious ways of Crushinetics! (well, Daniel and I are... Evil Malky merely growled that he "might" hold off on crushing you). Be warned though, it is not for the faint of heart or singular of testicle - you must be prepared to wholly devote yourself to the cause and to crush all that stand in your way. You may even have to endure a montage of yourself in training, set to cheesy 80s rock or "Eye of the Tiger". Shudder.

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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 5th DEC 2004
RETAIL SALES

1	▲	GTA: San Andreas	Adventure
2	▼	NFS: Underground 2	Racing
3	▲	SingStar Party Bundle	All Other
4	◆	Eyeto: Play 2 Pack	Compilation
5	▼	WWE Smackdown vs Raw	Sports
6	◆	Ratchet & Clank 3: Arsenal	Adventure
7	◆	Eyeto: Play 2 Games Only	Compilation
8	▲	Crash Twinsanity	Adventure
9	▼	V8 Supercars 2	Racing
10	⊕	Spyro: A Hero's Tail	Adventure

TOP
10

PlayStation Games Over \$30

W/E 5th DEC 2004
RETAIL SALES

1	◆	Yu-Gi-Oh Forbidden Mem	Strategy
2	▲	HPotter Chamber Of Secrets	Adventure
3	◆	Disney Triple Pack	Adventure
4	▲	RC Stunt Copter	Racing
5	▼	Bratz Dolls	All Other
6	▼	Grand Theft Auto Coll Ed	Adventure
7	▲	FIFA 2004	Sports
8	▲	Colin McRae Rally Ptm	Racing
9	◆	Simpson's Wrestling	Sports
10	▼	MTV Snowboard	Sports

TOP
10

Game Cube Games Over \$50

W/E 5th DEC 2004
RETAIL SALES

1	◆	NFS: Underground 2	Racing
2	◆	Paper Mario 1000 Year Door	Adventure
3	⊕	Metroid Prime 2: Echoes	Adventure
4	▲	Simpson's Hit & Run	Adventure
5	▲	Spyro: A Hero's Tail	Adventure
6	▼	Tales Of Symphonia	RPG
7	▼	Pikmin 2	Action
8	▼	Mario Party 5	Family
9	▼	Pokemon Colosseum	RPG
10	⊕	Goldeneye: Rogue Agent	Action

TOP
10

Xbox Games Over \$50

W/E 5th DEC 2004
RETAIL SALES

1	◆	Halo 2	Action
2	◆	NFS: Underground 2	Racing
3	◆	NFS: Underground Clsc	Racing
4	▲	Crash Twinsanity	Adventure
5	▲	Fable	RPG
6	▲	Spyro: A Hero's Tail	Adventure
7	▲	Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon 2	Strategy
8	⊕	V8 Supercars 2	Racing
9	▼	Mortal Kombat: Deception	Action
10	⊕	Prince Of Persia 2: Warrior	Adventure

TOP
10

PC Games Over \$20

W/E 5th DEC 2004
RETAIL SALES

1	▲	The Sims 2	Strategy
2	▼	Half Life 2	Action
3	▲	The Sims Deluxe	Strategy
4	◆	NFS: Underground 2	Racing
5	▲	The Sims Unleashed	Strategy
6	▲	The Sims Superstar	Strategy
7	▲	MOH Pacific Assault	Action
8	▼	World Of Warcraft	Strategy
9	◆	The Sims Vacation	Strategy
10	◆	Rollercoaster Tycoon 3	Strategy

TOP
10

Game Boy Advance Games Over \$30

W/E 5th DEC 2004
RETAIL SALES

1	◆	Pokémon Fire Red	RPG
2	◆	Pokémon Leaf Green	RPG
3	⊕	Nemo: Cont Adventures	Adventure
4	▼	Finding Nemo + Monstrs Inc	Adventure
5	▲	The Incredibles	Adventure
6	▼	Hot Wheels Vel X + Wrld Rce	Racing
7	⊕	Shrek 2	Adventure
8	▼	Shrek 2: Beg For Mercy	Adventure
9	▼	Pokémon Ruby	RPG
10	▼	Simpson's Road Rage	Racing

TOP
10

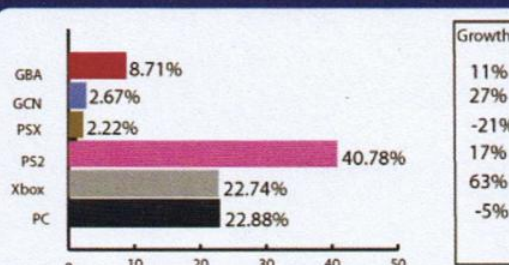
All Full Priced Games

W/E 5th DEC 2004
RETAIL SALES

1	▲	GTA: San Andreas	PlayStation 2
2	▼	NFS: Underground 2	PlayStation 2
3	◆	Halo 2	Xbox
4	▲	SingStar Party Bundle	PlayStation 2
5	▲	Eyeto: Play 2 Pack	PlayStation 2
6	▼	NFS: Underground 2	Xbox
7	▼	WWE Smackdown vs Raw	PlayStation 2
8	▲	Ratchet & Clank 3: Arsenal	PlayStation 2
9	▲	Eyeto: Play 2 Games Only	PlayStation 2
10	⊕	The Sims 2	PC/MAC

MARKET WATCH All Games by Platform

NOV vs OCT RETAIL
SALES 2004



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



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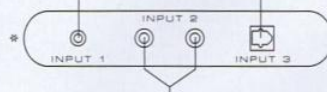


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