

HYPHER 137 MARCH 2005

HYPHER

PS2 / XBOX / GCN / PC

FANTASTIC FOUR

Oz exclusive first look at one of the hottest games of 2005

RALPH BAER

Exclusive interview with the father of home videogames

SPLINTER CELL: CHAOS THEORY

We head to Montreal for a final playtest!

REVIEWED
ZELDA: MINISH CAP ON GBA

METAL GEAR ACID

Snake's back on PSP!

MASSIVE 8-PAGE FEATURE

COMICS AND VIDEOGAMES

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MARIO TENNIS

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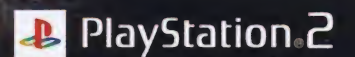
Have they lost the plot?



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'.
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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 Raif 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.

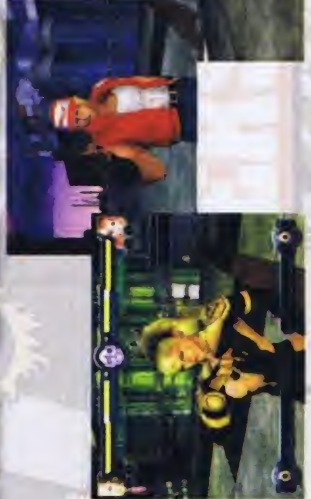
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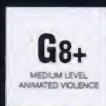
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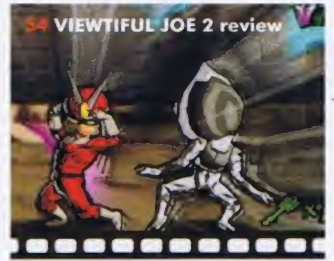
THE SITH LORDS™

36 SPLINTER CELL: CHAOS THEORY

"Montreal and back again",
a Bennett's tale...



Contents



26 SONY PSP hands-on report

08 Editorial

10 News

This section just keeps getting smaller. But that's because there's just so much to fit into the rest of the mag!

12 Subscriptions

Your last chance to become rich. Rich with material possessions that is, which is the best kind.

14 Fantastic Four interview

Licensed gaming is making a comeback. Check it out on pg14.

18 Comics and Videogames feature

Christian Read goes undercover as a nerd to find out why comics and videogames are such a good fit. Hang on a sec... that's not makeup!

26 PSP Hands-on feature

We test drive Sony's PlayStation Portable.

32 V8 Supercars 2 interview

It's coming to PSP - we talk to the development team!

34 Previews

Wipeout Pure on PSP, Rainbow Six 4, Splinter Cell: Chaos Theory, Brothers in Arms and Cold Winter, all put under the Hyper gameplay microscope.

44 Net Trawlin'

A look at Pro Evolution Soccer 4's online multiplayer...



48 Hardware

The latest and greatest digital decks from Technics.

52 Reviews

76 GBA Reviews

78 Arcade Mode

80 Classics

We talk to the father of the videogame industry, Ralph Baer. This is a historic issue, folks.

84 Win Win Win

An Alien Vs. Predator snowboard up for grabs.

86 DVD Reviews

89 Anime

90 Mail

96 Charts

98 Next Issue

Review Index

54 Viewtiful Joe 2

56 Mario Power Tennis

58 Shadow Hearts: Covenant

60 Phantom Brave

62 Katamari Damacy

64 Metal Slug 3

65 Children of the Nile

66 Nexus: The Jupiter Incident

68 Shadow of Rome

70 Capcom Fighting Jam

72 The King of Fighters 2000-2001

73 ESPN NFL 2K5

74 ESPN NBA 2K5

74 Joint Operations: Escalations

74 The Chronicles of Riddick: Escape from Butcher Bay

76 The Legend of Zelda: The Minish Cap

EDITORIAL

» Last month I spoke about subjectivity being part and parcel of the reviewing process, and an element of that is the environment in which you play a game. Playing a multiplayer shooter on a LAN, for instance, is pretty different to playing online. Similarly, there are some games that are a natural fit for playing here in the office and some that are better suited for the home.

Work is perfect for pick up and play games and multiplayer, and it's cool having a whole bunch of people who are as passionate about gaming as we are here. We'll put something on and it's never long before other people will come to check it out (the Hyper area naturally being the hub of the Next Media office universe) and offer their thoughts. Games like Burnout 3 and Mashed, for instance, were instant hits, with other worker bees hanging out playing them with us for days on end. That's the way games like that are meant to be played, and why the extended Hyper crew are such an important part of the magazine. On the other hand, I wouldn't even attempt to play and review an in-depth narrative-heavy title here at work - there are some games that are meant to be played at home with your own setup.

Thus, it's not purely content that makes a game enjoyable. The set and setting (to use an old Tim Leary term) are definitely factors to take into consideration. Of course, it's only something that will influence your enjoyment. Great games will always be great games. I could be playing Half-Life 2 amongst the fire and brimstone of old testament hell and still love it. Similarly, although it was undeniably more fun playing Driv3r with Wilks and the crew, laughing at just how bad it was, you could put me on the planet of the nymphomaniacs and it would still suck balls. No, not literally. Okay maybe.

Once again, what I'm saying is - game reviewing is not a black and white process. It's about having fun and getting something worthwhile out of it. Whether that's having a laugh with your mates or being told a really great story, fun is in the eye of the beholder. We're just your guides along the way.

And speaking of nymphomaniacs, this issue couldn't get much sexier if we swabbed the mag with pheromones and dressed it in a g-string. We finally go hands on with the PSP, take an in-depth look at the synergy between comics and videogames, interview the father of the home videogame industry Ralph Baer and much much more. Gold Jerry.

Cam Shea » Editor



[above] Signing the mag for a fan. Pretty ugly kid...

HYPER»

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WRITE TO HYPER!

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HYPER CREW MONTHLY TOP 5 GAMES

Cam Shea - Editing Unit 27

1. Phantom Brave - PS2
"Deeper than Deepy McDeep and his adventures at the bottom of the ocean"
2. Resident Evil 4 - GCN
3. Super Mario RPG - SNES
4. Viewtiful Joe 2 - GCN
5. Katamari Damacy - PS2

Daniel Wilks - Writing Unit 54

1. World of Warcraft - PC
"Sleep is for the weak"
2. Paper Mario 2 - GCN
3. Katamari Damacy - PS2
4. Shadow Hearts: Covenant - PS2
5. La Pucelle Tactics - PS2

Malcolm Campbell - Art Unit 01

1. Half-Life 2 - PC
"Highlight so far: the rocket fight with the flying whale helicopter thingy"
2. Metroid Prime: Echoes - GCN
3. GTA: San Andreas - PS2
4. Street Fighter 3: 3rd Strike - Xbox
5. Resident Evil 4 - GCN

Andrew Bulmer - Butters Unit 14

1. Half-Life 2 - PC
"Oh wait my PC is STILL busted! Damn you technology, damn you all to hell!"
2. ESPN NFL 2K5 - Xbox
3. Metroid Prime: Echoes - GCN
4. Project Rub - Nintendo DS
5. Mario Power Tennis - GCN

You've played the games, now meet the stars!*

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pop culture expo

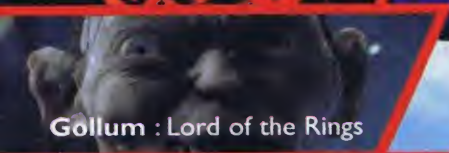
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Gollum : Lord of the Rings



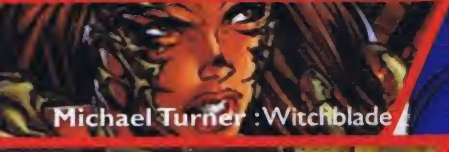
Marik : Yu-Gi-Oh!



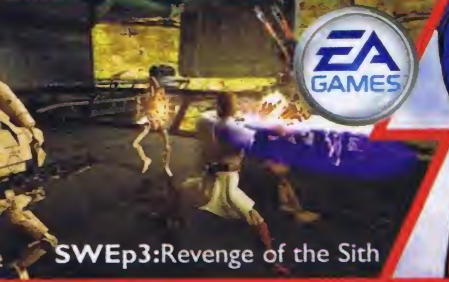
Goku : DBZ & DBG



Seamus Finnegan : Harry Potter



Michael Turner : Witchblade



SWEp3: Revenge of the Sith

Also exhibiting:



*All guests confirmed commitments pending
Supergirl © copyright DC Comics 2004



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News

IN THE NEWS: Bryce ha ha steps from Kyoto to Tokyo for charity / PCPP staff admit "Hyper's better" / Sony sell UMD launcher

NINTY

DS DOWNUNDER

Nintendo Australia confirm launch date and price

It's official! The Nintendo DS will be hitting retailers around the country on February 24th at a recommended retail price of \$199.95. The price point is definitely a coup for Nintendo, after much speculation that it could be as high as \$249.95. As it stands, the DS is only \$50 more expensive than the GBA SP, and if the marketing campaign is strong enough, Nintendo have a great opportunity to quickly build a big install base.

The actual launch pack is much

the same as it was overseas, with a demo of Metroid Prime Hunters included. The first party launch titles will be Super Mario 64 DS and WarioWare: Touched! with Pokemon Dash to follow shortly after. Of course you can also expect to see titles from some of the other big publishers like EA, Activision and THQ make an appearance at launch. We'll have full reviews of all the launch titles next issue. Stay tuned.



[below l to r]
Metroid Prime Hunters,
Mario 64 DS,
WarioWare: Touched!
and Pokemon Dash



FIRST LOOK SCREENS! BLAU!

Age of Empires III PC Developer: Ensemble Studios



MP3

NINTENDON'T

Low res video here we come!

▶▶ In an interesting move that is sure to cause a bit of a stir when it is released, Nintendo have announced that they will be releasing a DS adapter that will allow the handheld console to play MP3 music and MP4 video. Whilst this sounds like an okay idea in print it could potentially harm the reigning king of handheld gaming by putting them in direct competition with the PSP instead of happily sitting in its own niche as a game dedicated platform. The adapter should retail for around ¥5000 (approx. \$63 AUD) bringing it into the same price point as the PSP, a machine built with the capability to play music and video at a far higher resolution than the Nintendo system. It remains to be seen whether the adapter will be a success or not but it wouldn't be too much of a surprise if it disappeared from the radar only a few months after release - does anyone else remember the GBA card reader?

T&A

BOOBIES = MONEY

More litigation, what a surprise

▶▶ Boobies may equal dollars in the bank but not always in a good way. Take-2, a company not unfamiliar with controversy with such games as the GTA franchise and Manhunt under their belt are being targeted by an as yet unnamed claimant for her unlawful appearance in the T&A themed quiz title, The Guy Game. Jane Doe, the girl suing the company claims that she was only 17 at the time the footage of her was recorded, making it impossible for her to give her legal permission to use the footage as well as the fact that she was underage when said footage was shot. Of course one has to wonder why she posed topless for the game in the first place if she was underage. Nevertheless, Ms. Doe is filing suit against Take-2, Top Heavy Games (the developers) and both Sony and Microsoft for the simple reason that the game appears on their respective platforms.



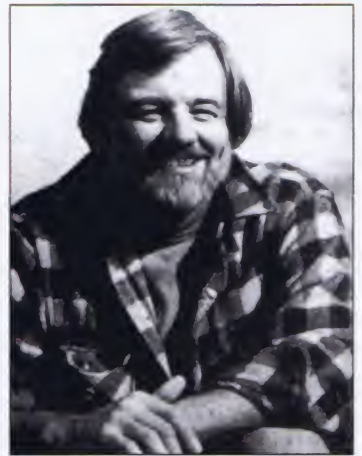
[above] Not pictured: Jane Doe.

BRAINS

ROMERO (THE GOOD ONE)

More survival horror on the way

▶▶ Legendary horror director George A. Romero has recently inked a deal with Living Dead Productions Limited and Hip Games (creators of Beyond Divinity, Dead to Rights and Kill. Switch) to launch a new series of games under the George A. Romero Presents label. No games to be developed by this interesting collaboration have yet been announced but we do know for sure that there will be no titles based on any of Romero's films. Instead the veteran director responsible for such genre greats as Night of the



Living Dead, Dawn of the Dead (the good one, not the remake), Day of the Dead, Martin and the upcoming final instalment of the dead series, Land of the Dead will be acting as a creative consultant endeavouring to make sure the horror games made under the brand will meet his criteria.

WINNERS

HYPER 135

BUFFY AND ANGEL DVDS
- Jonathan Snow, Waterfall, NSW
- Jessica Slinger, Mt Evelyn, VIC

HAL-LIFE 2 AND WORLD OF WARCRAFT
- Angela Turner, Melbourne, VIC
- Daniel Spicer, Green Point, NSW
- Matthew Rowland, Park Orchards, VIC

XBOX, RIDDICK AND FSW
- William Allington, Hornsby, NSW



UO

HEART OF VIRTUAL GOLD

Gamers dig deep

▶▶ It takes all kinds to save the world but a new move by an enterprising Ultima Online player takes the cake as far as geeky ingenuity goes and also gives you one of those pleasantly warm and fuzzy feelings on the inside. A server admin and forum junkie who goes by the name of Crazy Joe and describes himself as "proudly going bald" has taken it upon himself to find a new way of helping the victims of the recent tsunamis. To this end Joe has set up 16 (at the time of writing) virtual donation centres on different Ultima Online servers so that players can donate their virtual gold to the relief fund. This virtual gold is then collected and auctioned on Ebay with all proceeds going to the Red Cross. It's amazing how something can be so incredibly geeky whilst simultaneously being really pretty damn cool.

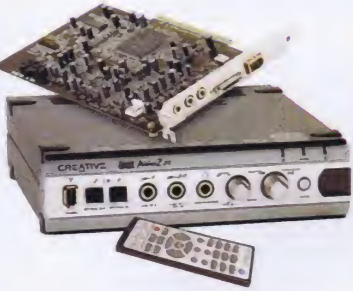
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* Motherboard and Video Card may be subject to change due to availability. Computer specs will remain in similar parameters and price point will not change

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- Logitech Z-5500 5.1 speakers
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THE GAMES: Half Life 2 Collector's Edition, World of Warcraft Collector's Edition, Vampire the Masquerade, EverQuest 2, Prince of Persia Warrior Within, Sid Meier's Pirates, Brothers in Arms, Splinter Cell Chaos Theory, Medal of Honor Pacific Assault, Star Wars: Battlefront, Championship Manager, Project Snowblind, RollerCoaster Tycoon 3, Vietcong: Purple Haze, Axis and Allies, Demon Stone, Sacred Plus, FlatOut, Shade: Wrath of Angels, Shellshock, Age of Mythology Gold, Rise of Nations Gold, Halo PC, Zoo Tycoon 2, Imperial Glory, Silent Hunter III, Kohan 2, Wings of War PC.

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FANTASTIC 4

Available on PS2, XBOX, GCN, PC ■ Category: Action ■ Players: 1-2 ■ Developer: Seven Studios ■ Available: Mid 2005



▶▶ One look at the upcoming big releases in Hollywood and you're sure to notice the predominance of comic book titles making it to the big screen, thanks to the massive success of such blockbusters as the Spider-Man and X-Men movies. Another comic book film on the horizon, and one definitely destined to make an impact on the comic book/film scene is Fantastic Four, one of the most ambitious superhero films yet attempted. Hyper were lucky enough to be able to interview Julia Humphreys and Jeff Gardiner, the producer and lead designer of Seven Studios about their upcoming game based on the film/comic license.

Hyper: Will the game be strictly based on the movie license or will you be drawing on the comic history as well?

Seven: The Fantastic Four game draws from both the movie license and the Fantastic Four comic book universe. The game follows the general story arc of the movie, but also contains additional side plots that allow the player to explore the rich comic history. Rest assured that you will be seeing familiar locales and villains from the FF comic universe!

Although the Fantastic Four is usually only made up of Ben Grimm (The Thing), Reed Richards (Mr Fantastic), Invisible Woman (Sue Storm) and Human Torch II (Johnny Storm) there have been many other characters who have been official members of the team in the past including Crystal, Luke Cage, She-Hulk and Ms. Marvel II. Will any of the extra FF members be appearing in the game?

We have chosen to focus on the four main members of the Fantastic Four.

Fantastic Four (the comic) deals with the family unit as much as it does with teamwork and saving the world - will this dynamic feature in the game?

Absolutely! The unique family dynamic of the Fantastic Four is one of its hallmarks, and we are showcasing both the family bonds and squabbles. Sue's over-protectiveness of her little brother Johnny, Reed's romantic history with Sue, and Ben and Johnny's famous friction are all integral parts of the story.

And following on from that, who is adapting the storyline for the game? What kind



(above) After being scared witless during Chamber of Secrets, The Thing finds Aragog for some payback

of changes are being made to flesh it out to work as a videogame, and how much emphasis is being placed on both story telling and dialogue?

Zak Penn, the writer of the X-Men 2: X-Men United movie, has been responsible for adapting the game storyline. Story and dialogue have had a major role in our game's development. We wanted to ensure authentic characterizations of each Fantastic Four member, not only in their powers and moves, but also in their dialogue and relationships. Players should feel that they are playing Ben Grimm as The Thing and not just another super-strong super hero.

We have made several additions to the story to make it work as a video game. Because the movie is an origin story with an emphasis on character introduction and development (much like the first Spider-Man and X-Men movies), we have pumped up the level of action to sustain the hours of combat and exploration necessary for a video game. We have done this by adding side plots that branch off from the main story and allow the Fantastic Four to travel to additional locations and interact with other characters and enemies from the Fantastic Four universe.

Is the game/movie based around specific story arcs in the comics or is it a new story created to encompass the original transformation of the team and their meeting with villains such as Dr Doom?

It is a new story that follows the same story arc as the movie. We don't want to give too much away, but it's safe to say that yes, Dr. Doom will be making a major appearance.

How closely are you working with the movie team?

We have had a close collaboration with Fox, including early access to the movie script, conceptual art, set design, costumes and locations. Our lead artists and designers have visited the film set multiple times, bringing back excellent photo references of the environments

The FF spend their time defeating intergalactic beings, not street thugs robbing old ladies' purses

and props. We have seen animatics and effects work from an early stage that has helped us match the look and flow of the major action moments as closely as possible.

Fans of the comic are obviously very passionate about the characters and the world - is it daunting trying to live up to their expectations? And what steps are you taking to ensure that this game is as authentic as possible?

Thankfully we have designers, artists and programmers on staff who are also passionate fans of comics in general and the Fantastic Four in particular. We have several resident experts who can cite issue and page number, and we turn to them whenever there's a question about a character or story element. We also work closely with Marvel to ensure that we are representing the characters and the franchise as authentically as possible.

One thing that is both a blessing and a curse about working within this world is that the Fantastic Four have been evolving for over forty years. We have tried to bring in as many classic elements from the comics as possible, but there was no way to cram forty years of content into one game.

What interests you most about working with such a venerable and well loved comic license?

It's been an honor and a long



time dream to work on such an iconic franchise. There are several reasons to love the FF. A primary one is that they are 'save the world' superheroes. Unlike other popular franchises, the Fantastic Four spend their time defeating intergalactic beings, not street thugs robbing old ladies' purses.

We also love that the F4 are a blend of high technology and supernatural elements. This enriches their world in several salient ways - they're able to fight on different planes of existence, against aliens and demons, mutants and overlords. They have no limits.

Perhaps most of all, the Fantastic Four broke the mold for comics: many of their issues are actually character based, not just strictly plot oriented. The four are family, steeped in history, with conflict and compromises. This is heavily reflected in both the movie and the game.

What are the advantages and limitations placed on you in terms of game design when working with a license?

One of the main advantages - which could also be perceived as a limitation - is developing powers and abilities within the strict guidelines of the established Marvel universe. For instance, everyone knows and understands what The Human Torch can do, which is great because we don't have to go into too much explanation as to why this guy is flying and on fire! However, it also means we have a lot to live up to. One way a superhero game can fall short is to fail to make good on a primary covenant to the player. A player buys and plays a superhero game to feel superior, to warp and change the world using other-worldly powers. The primary focus of the design team is to make you feel like a superhero, not only through smashing away at enemies,



[top] That's one hell of a wind-up. He should join the office softball team...

but by interactions within the environment as well.

What enemies can we expect to encounter?

The Fantastic Four movie game features over 60 enemy types, each with unique powers, moves and abilities, which require the player to execute certain attacks and utilize specific tactics to overcome. These enemies include Doombots (of course!), Moloids, and other stock baddies from the F4 realm. There are also plenty of meatier enemies, such as Diablo and Doom himself...

Will any of the vehicles common to the FF such as the Fantasticar, Fantasticopter or the Pocket Rocket appear in the game?

The F4 will use some traditional vehicles as they travel to more remote destinations throughout the game.

Would you say this game is first and foremost an action title with puzzle elements, or is the weighting more even?

After all, you have four very unique characters to work with, so there's great potential for utilising all those abilities constructively in gameplay.

While we hesitate to pin our game down in such generic terms, this is first and foremost an action game. We have spent a lot of time ensuring that combat is deep, intuitive, responsive, and most of all, just fun. Having said that, there are also a lot of puzzles in our game. We tried to stay away from the generic "find the key" or jump puzzles and have instead focused on using specific hero powers to interact with the environment. Sue makes full use of her telekinetic powers. Reed not only

uses his elasticity to great effect, but his brains as well, hacking computers and turning enemies against themselves. Each hero has several unique ways to interact with the environment, and each is called to use them, separately and together. Each hero has over 40 unique moves, so the F4 game is brimming with emergent gameplay. We also have a full suite of mini-games, unique to each hero, to break up the action and offer the player unique challenges.

What percentage of the game will be played with the full FF squad? How difficult is it designing levels around four sets of abilities? Is it liberating in terms of designing interesting puzzles?

A large percentage of our game will feature 2, 3 and often all 4 of our heroes. This game has offered many unique design challenges, one of them being that when all four heroes are together, there really isn't much they can't do. Between the four of them they can fly, burn, smash, sneak by and outsmart just about everything you can throw at them. In contrast, the ways they can combine their powers is also endless, which really opens up a lot of exciting and refreshing design pathways.

What percentage of the game will you be controlling a single character? And will those levels be designed specifically for one character or will you be able to choose?

The majority of the game will require you play with two or more characters. The Fantastic Four are a team, and we're really emphasizing that with our game design. You can also switch to any hero who is on screen at any time.



Each hero has over 40 unique moves, so the F4 game is brimming with emergent gameplay

One of our hardest design decisions was whether or not to allow the player to choose their hero, or heroes, or to tailor the levels for specific sets of them. We chose the latter (after trying the former, I might add). This allowed the designer to really customize the levels for a particular hero (or heroes). Our game is extremely detailed and handcrafted. Enemies are indigenous to their environments - they are part of the ecology. The levels are extremely interactive, more so than any other game of this type I have ever played. You can lift, throw, smash, swing, and burn nearly everything you see (depending on your hero, of course!) This opens up the world, allowing players to explore and experiment in our levels, trying different tactics and experiencing the game in different ways. This also allows us to make the whole game playable co-operatively. That's right, all of our missions are playable with a friend.

Tell us a little about taking established characters with established abilities and designing gameplay around them.

This hero team lends itself to gameplay. The possibilities are limited only by the imagination. For example, Ben can smash certain objects (such as trees and light poles) and then use them like baseball bats. Reed can reach into tight, twisting corridors to recover hidden or lost items. Johnny can weld through steel to gain access to a hidden vault. Sue can encapsulate enemies in their tracks, holding them down. She can also lift distant objects with here telekinetic powers, and fly on a board made from psychic energy...

Tell us a little about the general combat mechanics, and the use of powers in combat.

We've spent a lot of time working on, tweaking and refining our combat. Each hero feels unique with

his or her respective powers, range, and super abilities. We have a soft lock targeting system that allows for context sensitive animations, such as ground and rear attacks. We also have a simple, intuitive hard lock targeting system which opens up dodge maneuvers, and a unique, very personal camera angle. Heroes have their strengths: Ben is the bruiser, while Johnny excels at ranged combat. Sue has many stealth mechanics and rear, one-shot assassination type attacks, while Reed is very good at medium range with his rubbery arms.

Each hero has a suite of light and heavy attacks, block breakers and aerial maneuvers. They also have many unique combos, as well as attacks based on their cosmic powers, such as Johnny's supernova or Sue's wall of force. Every combo and cosmic attack can be upgraded as you accumulate points during gameplay. Combos are unlocked throughout the whole game, allowing the player to continually learn and uncover new mechanics.

Outside of combat how will powers affect gameplay?

The hero will be able to interact with the environment in unique ways

throughout the entire course of the game, not only to progress, but to achieve sub-objectives, find hidden areas, unlock costumes, etc.

Will there be multiplayer modes as well as co-op? And if so, could you tell us a little about how they'll work and what we can expect.

The entire game will be playable in co-op mode! We're very excited about this - it has been greatly received and really shows off this game's full potential. There is also a full Arena Fight mode, where the player will be able to choose different sets of enemies and different modes of combat such as "Moloid Bowl," where players will be able to compete in a football style game - replacing the ball with a squirming, sneaky Moloid!

What will this game do that no other has?

Ben Grimm in all his 800 pounds of orange-rock glory. <<<

COMICS AND VIDEO GAMES



*FROM PAGE TO
PLAYSTATION AND
BACK AGAIN*

STORY: CHRISTIAN READ

I'M A VERY LUCKY MAN, YOU KNOW. I'M A **PROFESSIONAL GEEK**. I MAKE MY LIVING REVIEWING COMPUTER GAMES, SOMETIMES DVDS, AND WRITING COMICS.

MY NAME IS **CHRISTIAN READ** AND I'VE WRITTEN QUITE A FEW COMICS NOW. PROBABLY THE MOST WIDELY KNOWN HAVE BEEN SOME STORIES FOR **STAR WARS TALES**, BUT I'VE ALSO WRITTEN AROUND FIFTEEN ISSUES OF **THE WATCH**, THE MINI-SERIES **DUNWICH: TALE OF THE CTHULHU MYTHOS**, **WITCH KING** AND THE **ELDRITCH KID**, PLUS A BUNCH OF SMALL PRESS STUFF. AND I LOVE COMPUTER GAMES. I DO. I'VE BEEN WORKING FOR THIS MAGAZINE, AND PC POWERPLAY, ON AND OFF FOR YEARS.

SO WHEN **CAM**, THE PITILESS EDITOR-THING AWOKE ONE DAY, WITH TERRIBLE FESTERING PLANS IN HIS EVIL MIND TO EXAMINE THE LINKS THESE TWO ART FORMS SHARE, HE COMMANDED **DANIEL** TO CONTACT ME. SO IT WAS THAT I WAS THUMBING THROUGH MY WELL-WORN COPIES OF PLANETARY WHEN MY PHONE RANG. "READ!" COMMANDED THE TERRIBLE IGOR-LIKE DEP. EDITOR. "COMICS AND GAMES! THEY CROSS-OVER WITH EACH OTHER, SOMETIMES FANTASTICALLY! SOMETIMES POORLY! WHY?" HE SNEERED DOWN THE PHONE SO I REPLIED AND HERE'S WHAT I SAID WORD FOR WORD, MAN.



ART ON THE CUTTING EDGE

Computer games and comics; two art forms born and bred pretty much wholly in the twentieth century. They exist on the cutting edge of pop culture, both of them walking the fine line between commercial success and artistic endeavour. Both of them existing in the fringes of what's considered 'acceptable' entertainment.

But, more importantly than that, they have weirdass characters beating the living hell out of people, aliens, monsters, the blind, anything that moves really. Now that's entertainment.

Well, that's a little simplistic but the mainstream of both comics and games have a lot of similarities in style and substance. Characters with special powers, a certain visual distinctiveness, often in battles to save the earth, galaxy, princess, whatever. There is an aesthetic in the two media that embraces the bombastic, the ludicrous, the

STYLISTED ICONS

Superman, Lara Croft, Batman, Mario, Spiderman, Sonic, Wonder Woman, Space Invaders. What these characters have in common is their distinct recognisability as being characters tied to their medium. Something unique to pop culture is something that characters, places, things take on the role of icons. Show nearly anyone around the world a picture of Superman and he'll be recognised. Sonic, perhaps less so, but remember, Space Invaders was a phenomenon in its day. It spawned songs, countless magazine and TV news time; it was the cool thing for those poor disco bastards to do. It became recognisable as more than just a game.

This iconic role has to do with the fact that comic superheroes and video game characters are stylised. If you've ever had the misfortune to see a man dressed up as a superhero in real life, you'll

THEY EXIST ON THE CUTTING EDGE OF POP CULTURE, WALKING A LINE BETWEEN COMMERCIAL SUCCESS AND ARTISTIC ENDEAVOUR

surreal. And comics and games are both bastard media. Computer games often use the tools of cinema to create their effectiveness. Camera angles, music, lighting and, obviously, CGI. Comics utilise elements of prose, movie scripting, classical art, radio play, still photography and even music.

What they share is that when all these techniques are fed into the grinder, a new thing is born. Games and comic both transcend their influential media to become something unique.

know it's ridiculous. I've been to many, many comic conventions in three continents. I've seen terrible things. Batman represented in comics, though, looks like a total badass. The same with Lara Croft or Mario. The design of the characters means you can recognise them with one glance. Easy to remember addictive little memes, oh yes.





BUILDING BLOCKS OF THE CRAFT

It's the fact that videogames and comics have drawing as their most basic building block that makes them iconic. Traditionally, they're not real things and they're not meant to be. Sure, FMV is getting to the point where we have near realism, but gameplay often chooses to be stylised, rather than representational. Even games that go for realistic effects keep things simple.

Of course, times are changing. Technology has affected both media in this respect. I was having a gander at Doom 3 the other day. Not a bad wee game, but what struck me was that it seemed a very realistic environment. Sure it's in the future but it's quite easy to recognise. Then, while having a look at the latest X-men book, you'll note that colouring effects, and the right artist, will give a stronger sense of immersion. Things are looking realer. Is this a good thing? It's a matter of taste, really. Perhaps things are changing in that respect, perhaps not. Interestingly, as games made graphic breakthroughs, so did comics. A new kind of realism, spear headed by Alex Ross but also including artists such as Glenn Fabry and Liam Sharpe took the stage.

ACTIVE VERSUS PASSIVE

OK So, comics and games share similar sensibilities. They basically look the same. But when it's all said and done, a comic is a passive experience. You read it, you look at the art. You're told a story. Games, of course, are an active experience. You create the experience. A game might be structured; Diablo is always going to make you stick that soul-crystal in your skull, but character-creation, actual gameplay,

so forth, to capture that ensemble dynamic."

Superheroes have always had unique elements to them that just haven't translated very well to other medium. A superhero novel tends to be rather flat, especially during the action sequences. Superhero films are getting better, but let's face it, Daredevil and the Hulk weren't as cool as they could have been. So how does a game

COMICS TAUGHT GAMES HOW TO DEPICT ACTION ON THIS FANTASTIC, IMPOSSIBLE LEVEL

branching dialogue options and all that jazz means that a game is never going to be experienced the same way by two people.

I went and talked to my old pal, Morgan Jaffit, who was one of the big wheels in designing the critical hit, Freedom Force, a game based on 60s superheroes. "Freedom Force was very much influenced by the Silver Age of comics, so I went back to the classics for inspiration in terms of dialogue and overall style. I especially focused on the earlier team comics, things like the Avengers, Justice League and

adapt to that feel. According to Morgan, we blow stuff up.

"On the game play side, [of Freedom Force] we were concerned with translating the 'feel' of the exploits that comics depict. As a result, we really wanted to focus on over the top, impressive combat. That ended up informing a lot of our decisions, from relatively minor things (such as being able to knock people back great distances) to really core mechanics, like the destructible environments.

"In fact, that's a good example of a choice that wouldn't have been





THE BEST

WHAT ARE SOME OF THE BEST GAMES TO SUCCEED? WELL, THERE HAVE BEEN A LOT OF ADAPTATIONS OF COURSE, AND SEVERAL COMIC WRITERS HAVE SCRIPTED GAMES, NOTABLY **WARREN ELLIS** ON HOSTILE WATERS, **GRANT MORRISON** ON BATTLESTAR GALACTICA AND **BRIAN MICHAEL BENDIS** ON THE LATEST SPIDEY GAME. HERE ARE SOME OF THE BETTER CROSSOVERS, USING MAINSTREAM COMPANY BOOKS.

made were it not for the comic book influence that ended up forming part of the game's nucleus. Knocking down buildings and throwing cars at people are a big part of the early comics feel, so we decided to emulate that. Once you've decided to let the player destroy everything in their environment, you end up with a whole selection of design issues that flow from there, and which to me help make Freedom Force stand out from the crowd."

GOOD VERSUS EVIL

When a game wants to either create its own superhero experience, or recreate a comic experience, it's always a risk. I'd say that comics are capable of taking artistic and creative risks games simply can't. But what games give you is a real chance to interact with these characters in ways you can't elsewhere. Unless, of course, you want to go to a comic convention and cuddle up to a fatty dressed as Spiderman.

"Comics taught games how to depict action on this fantastic, impossible level that is really important to the videogame hero," continues Morgan. "In fact, the concept of the 'Superhero' has really been key to the development of the videogame hero. Both the visual and narrative elements are very similar, for better or worse.

"That said, I think comic book writing has gone a lot of places games haven't yet. Games pretty much fit into the 'Action/Horror/Fantasy' genre with very little deviation. Comics show that we have a much wider palette to work with, if only we try."



X-MEN: MUTANT APOCALYPSE (SNES - 1995)
X-MEN: LEGENDS (XBOX, PS2, GCN - 2004)

Both these games make really good use of X-men lore. Forty year of rich superhero stories give a lot of characters to play and to fight, and lots of locations and groovy powers to use. That's the key to a good superhero game, after all. There's already a barrage of great characters and unique visuals. These X-men games really embraced their source material and let the X-men be, act, sound, feel and play like, well, the X-men.



PUNISHER (ARCADE - 1993)

The arcade game of the Punisher was a real step up for comics games. The Punisher himself, star of a recent dire movie, is a pretty simple character. He's an enormous gun-nut who kills criminals. It writes itself! When Capcom bought out a side-scroller featuring him, it was magic. While the gameplay seems a little primitive, the essential fun of taking a deeply violent comic character and letting him loose on hordes of thugs with a variety of makeshift weapons captured the comic's feeling perfectly. Here's hoping the recently announced new adaptation keeps up the high standard of violence.



SPIDER-MAN (PLAYSTATION, N64, DREAMCAST - 2000/2001)

These are probably the best comic adaptations around for gamers. Spider-man, the hard luck hero, is one of the most beloved of all superheroes. He's had many, many cartoon shows, several movies before Sam Raimi stepped up, a live-action telly show, books, and more than a few games. Some ordinary, some tops. The Maximum Carnage game for Sega Megadrive comes to mind as a forgotten, flawed gem.

But when Activision when ahead and gave N64, Playstation and Dreamcast owners a Spidey game, they spared no expense. By giving Spider-man his native NYC to play in, classic villains, a wide array of powers and, perhaps most importantly, letting the character have the kind of wise-cracking, funny adventures he has in his books, a genuinely great game was made. The sequel, possibly the most eminently damn fun comic game ever, really raised the bar in terms of visuals. Check these games out, you won't go wrong.



THE DISASTERS

OF COURSE, SOME GAMES JUST DON'T WORK OUT. MAINLY THROUGH *IGNORING SOURCE MATERIAL*, SOMETIMES THROUGH *SIMPLY BEING BAD GAMES* THAT WERE UNDER-DEVELOPED.



THE HULK: PANTHEON SAGA (PLAYSTATION - 1996)

■ This mess was based on a long running storyline in Hulk comics. It was a pretty good read, having a Hulk (who had Banner's mind, at the time) who joined an organisation of super-humanitarians. Of course, when you played the Hulk in the game, you were just a green blodge on a screen in a mangled storyline that made no sense to anyone but long time readers. When you've got an enormous, violent, unstoppable monster to base a game around, let him do violence that's unstopably monstrous.

HELLBOY: ASYLUM SEEKER (PC - 2000)

■ Hellboy is pretty much the greatest comic to ever live. Funny, scary, making such good use of comic-story telling techniques, with a great main character, Hellboy seemed primed to be a computer game. Hellboy, (for those who missed the excellent film) is a paranormal investigator for the US government. He fights creatures out of folklore and legend. He's got a big-ass gun, a monumental stone fist that grips apocalypse and he's generally superhuman.

So why did Hellboy: Asylum Seeker suck so much ass? Well, because it was done on the cheap. Poor voice acting, lame physics, more clipping than a leper colony and textures with the consistency of granny's undies. The greatest let down yet. I have only played the demo and it made me want to kill myself. And by myself, I mean the person who signed off on releasing this.



AQUAMAN: BATTLE FOR ATLANTIS (XBOX - 2003)

■ The worst adaptation of all time has to be Aquaman: Battle for Atlantis. Now, Aquaman is a bit of joke character for most non-geeks. After all, when you're fighting Darkseid on Counter-Earth while the Daxamite Brood are preparing to sleep with your girlfriend, Lois Lane... well, do you want a guy who can punch hard enough to create sonic booms, or a chap who can communicate with fish?

"Oh no! The mega-laser is pointed at the sun!"

"And the Bass are panicking!"

No.

Fortunately, Aquaman usually fares much better than that in comics. His connections to royalty, his innate arrogance and majesty have been played up, and someone fed his hand to piranhas a few years ago for that extra gritty feel.

Instead of going for a groovy role-playing game under the sea, or even a submarine action game, Battle for Atlantis is a tepid 3D game that occasionally takes on elements of a fighting game. Banally designed characters, deathly dull fighting and camera controls so complex that they make you grind your teeth all leave the game as a messy, painful failure. Oh, and Aquaman's grand super-power of talking to fish is nothing more than a special attack. Some grey thing that might be a shark bites someone, or a whale bitch slaps someone else. This is one very poor excuse for a game indeed.

SPAWN: THE ETERNAL (PLAYSTATION - 1997)

■ Spawn: The Eternal didn't really fare much better than Hellboy. Once the best selling property in comic-land, like Hellboy, it's rife for a game. Spawn is a soldier who sells his soul to the devil. He comes back as a super-powered demon, fighting both his former superiors, and the demon-king he supposedly serves. Super-artist Todd McFarlane made Spawn one of the best looking books out there for a while so it's doubly aggravating that Spawn: The Eternal is a washed out, dull, poorly put together game. One can only hope that comic creators in the future are better treated by games companies.



THE FUTURE

COMICS TO GAMES

Comics are still hot property in Hollywood and are likely to remain that way for at least a few years to come. Hopefully, that kind of high profile will also keep them feeding the games industry. There are a few comics out there that could translate extremely well to games. Sadly, Morgan wouldn't commit to an answer on this one saying only "Honestly, any comic could make a good game, done right. You can make good games out of the crappiest of licenses, and people have in the past (N64 Goldeneye, anyone?). Some comics lend themselves more naturally to the conversion, of course. Given that most games are in the action/horror/fantasy genre, those sorts of comics make for very easy conversion.

"Of course, easy isn't necessarily the best or most fulfilling option. I'd rather see games try and go out to some of the more interesting directions comics have taken. Everything from the historical and personal introspection of Maus to the sprawling futurism of Transmetropolitan seem to me to be rich veins of inspiration for the coming age of videogames."

Here are my personal recommendations for comics that should make the leap.

PLANETARY

■ Archaeologists of the Strange, Planetary are a three member team of super-humans who investigate the weird side of superhero universes. So far, we've seen a version of the Fantastic Four as a sinister, world-dominating secret society, a deeply sad Hulk, and a Captain Marvel that's truly magnificent, and analogies of Wonder Woman, Superman and Green Lantern dying under various horrible circumstances. Part mystery stories, part gritty and realistic super-hero dissections, Planetary is perfect for a Deus-Ex style action RPG.

THE ULTIMATES

■ The Ultimate Universe is an updated version of the Marvel Universe, closer in intent, look and feel to the movies than comics we've previously seen. A huge, smash-em up action game waiting to happen, every issue of The Ultimates plays out like a clever, sexy two hundred million dollar film. And how can you go past the line "HULK HORNY!"?

Then there's the Authority, the precursor in terms of style and substance to The Ultimates, starring super-powered fascists who fight for good, which would also lend itself well.

HELLBLAZER

■ Forget the treacherous-looking upcoming film, John Constantine, star of Hellblazer, is a street-smart, bitter, chain smoking occultist who works the dark streets of London where crime and horror meet. Stick him into a Silent Hill style survival horror setting, set him up with a few magic tricks, give it a Mature Label and some solid quality voice acting from proper British actors, and you've got a classic.

QUEEN AND COUNTRY

■ Far and away the smartest spy comic ever, Q&C focuses on Tara Chance, a burnt out intelligence agent for MI6. Make this one a first person shooter, focussing on her assassinations, or a Ghost-Recon/Socom style military shooter, set in real-world environments with politically relevant story lines and you could easily outdo the macho posturing of Tom Clancy.

STRAY BULLETS

■ A story of grifters and thugs, of lent rent dives and ambitious criminals, Stray Bullets is one of the finest crime comics this side of Sin City. Give it a GTA style engine and the adventures of Amy Racecar would be a perfect, edgier crime game.

GAMES TO COMICS

'Quid Pro Quo, Clarice'. Increasingly, games are fertile grounds for comics. The longest running of these is the Tomb Raider series, from Top Cow. There, Lara Croft has had a range of adventures, and even some cross-overs with the Darkness and Witchblade. Top Cow is also responsible for several comics set around the storied Soul Reaver series. Of course, Aliens Versus Predator was a comic some decade ago. Here are some pics for games that should make the crossover to comics.

FINAL FANTASY

■ At any point in the series, you've got grounds for a great comic. Brilliant character designs, great universe, towering characters, this one is a natural. Of course, chief designer, Yoshitako Amano has been involved with comics on and off for a while. Battlechasers, a book clearly influenced by this series, was the best selling comic in the world for a while.

DOOM

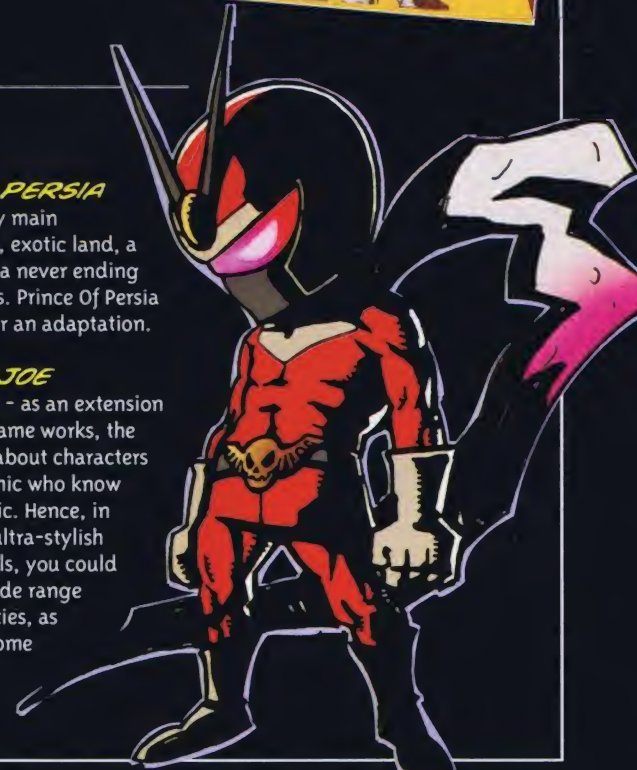
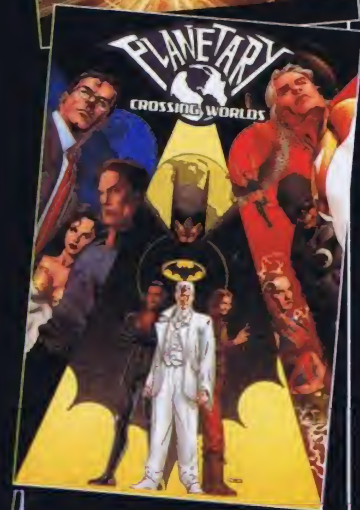
■ Demons! Big frigging guns! A hard as nail marine! This one is dead simple and really only requires a bit of work to become an easy adaptation. In fact, you might want to google the Doom comic the designers did for Doom 2 as a bit of a lark.

PRINCE OF PERSIA

■ A sexy, deadly main character. A rich, exotic land, a great quest and a never ending parade of visuals. Prince Of Persia is just waiting for an adaptation.

VIEWTIFUL JOE

■ Think about it - as an extension of the way the game works, the comic could be about characters trapped in a comic who know they're in a comic. Hence, in addition to the ultra-stylish look of the visuals, you could also parody a wide range of comic properties, as well as having some damn cool fight sequences.



THE WORK

Thankfully, not all games come from superhero comics. Christian Gossett is the creator, pencil-artist and co-writer of *The Red Star*, a rather brilliant comic that recasts the fall of Soviet Russia as a sprawling techno-fantasy. It uses CG designs heavily throughout the book. The giant Skyfurnace ships, the tanks, even the spells, all are computer designed and rendered. Someone thought that it was an obvious property to cross to games and they were right.

Comic creation and game creation seem to have lots in common, just as experiencing them does. "I'm kind of interested in how skills cross-pollinate between games and comics. The skillsets are very similar," says Gossett, "Comics writers are now, more and more, writing in-game stories. Comics colorists and artists are designing characters and environments for games. A videogame is just a comic book where you get to 'be' the hero instead of watch them go through their adventure."

Which is handy, but games do have their own style and aesthetic separate from comics. Luckily, Chris is an old school gaming geek. "Well, I'm a videogame OG from back in the day. Space Invaders, Pong, when I was a tiny kid, it was the birth of electronic entertainment. I remember seeing the older kids taking girls on dates to videogame arcades, that's how crazy and new and cool it all was... My favorite games have ranged from the classic Star Castle to the first games ever written on a laserdisc *Dragon's Lair* and *Space Ace*. The list goes on: *Final Fantasy VII* (still my favorite. I just really loved that visual style), *Neverwinter Nights* (can't wait to play *Jade Empire*), *Red Dead Revolver* (for its heaps and heaps of style), *Dead Or Alive Ultimate*. I'm all about the fighters, man."

DIE HARDEST

Not only is he a long time fan, he's also a long time professional. Those comic design skills have seen him work as a character designer on *Pitfall 3-D*. "After that, Activision moved me over to their flagship title of that time, *Apocalypse* featuring the voice and motion captured moves of Bruce Willis himself. I did a lot on that game. Designed Bruce's character, the

major bosses, wrote the in-game script and even did some motion capture acting myself. *Apocalypse* ended up being finished by Neversoft, the bad boys who rocked the world with the *Tony Hawk* series. I worked with them (again, writing and storyboarding the in-game movies) on what was, at the time, the best, most successful comic book adaptation yet on the first Playstation, *Spider-man*. This was the OG *Spider-man* that set the tone for all of the others that followed."

Just to finish off, Chris also did voices for *Heavy Gear III*, storyboarded *Kill Switch* and of course, did nearly everything for *Red Star*. So the man knows his games. But, adapting your own work, from comic to game, how does that work?

"Primarily it's a translation job - and I don't mean language. Translating still images to moving images. The power of a comic's page is in how much rhythm and movement can be suggested, even though comic art will never do anything but sit there staring back at the reader. The *Red Star*, thanks to our production process, and the genius of *Snakebite* (digital painter) and Paul Schrier (3D models and renders) is already a very motion-induced experience as

THE POWER OF A COMIC'S PAGE IS IN HOW MUCH RHYTHM AND MOVEMENT CAN BE SUGGESTED

far as comics go. This is what has separated us from the field. I have very specific ideas about how these things should move, what kind of rhythm and speed and weight it would all have if we were to see it in motion, and this was what I wanted to see translated properly."

Now, of course, Acclaim went belly up half way through the creation of the *Red Star* game, which was pretty frigging bad timing. But a lot of work was done. Nonetheless, Chris "... wrote the in-game story and storyboarded the in-game movies. Unfortunately, Acclaim was on its deathbed and failed to pay for the production of any movies, so that was a waste of everyone's time."

However, having an existing comic, a whole developed and

designed world made the process much easier. "I myself worked very closely with the developers. Don't forget, I have a library of over 1500 3D models from the creation of *The Red Star* graphic novels, so this helped a great deal in communicating what the world should specifically look like. Having this kind of data helped Acclaim push out a game on time, which was rare for them in their last few years of existence."

Now, of course, Acclaim did go out of business, ("just another Plan A that fell apart, necessitating a Plan B.") meaning that we won't see this project, at least, not any time soon, although I for one say my prayers to the Gaming Gods each night. Developers, take note. Buy up this property!

BRING ON SIN CITY

The process wasn't wasted though. "I've learned a lot about how some people you can be honest with, and share your truest creative self with, and some people need to be slapped into submission. It's just the way it was with certain members of that team." But Gossett

has been involved in game design since we fought saber-toothed tigers and played PSone. His run ain't up and there's always next time. So what's next for Christian Gossett and games?

"I'd like to realize and creatively direct a *Sin City* game. Frank Miller will always be a hero of mine, and with the Xbox 2 and PS3 coming out in the next couple years, the technology is there to make an incredible adaptation. They probably already have a deal somewhere, and if so, I wish that project the best."

Of course, there is always *The Red Star* comics, the *Elektra* comic, and other fine works by Team *Red Star*. Go to www.theredstar.com and check out more.





PlayStation Portable

Hands on from Japan

➤ Bryce McDonough

Waiting in line has never been much of a hobby for me. However, on the 12th of December last year, after spending 2 hours jittering from excitement and a small overdose of caffeine, I realised that some things in life are worth the wait.

The irony of the situation is, of course, that if I had a PSP to keep me busy I would have gladly waited twice as long... or at least until my battery died. After trying to explain this to the shop clerks several times, I eventually resigned myself to standing impatiently along with the rest of the plebs who simply needed Sony's hottest new toy the day it hit the stores. The couple in front of me were entirely too engaged in each other to be interested in chatting with a gaijin, and the slightly creepy guy in a flasher-style overcoat behind me seemed incapable of conversation. A friend who was going to come with me and maybe pick up one of his own, reneged for alcohol-related reasons and has been regretting it with unconcealed envy ever since. This left me alone with my thoughts; not an entirely comfortable place.

Once the shop was open, the line snaked through aisles and aisles of model robots, GameCube accessories and PS2 games which on any other day could have kept me interested for hours. But not today. I spent the time emailing friends from my phone (seriously, Australian mobiles have some catching up to do), going over the checklist of games in my mind to make sure I didn't forget anything, and dreading an announcement that they had sold out at any moment.

The Package

After all the drama, I was soon holding the PSP Value Pack plus four games (out of six launch titles) in my hot little hands. The standard PSP Pack comes with (of course) the PSP unit itself, the PSP internal lithium-ion battery and the charger. For an extra 5000 yen (about \$65 or so) I picked up the Value Pack, which comes with a few extra goodies, at a slightly better price than purchasing them separately.



THE PSP

The PSP, my friends, is no toy. It's very much a pocket-sized console. Words, no matter how skilled the writer, cannot begin to describe the feeling of seeing a PSP. Pictures in magazines (and lower quality ones online) give you an idea of what shape and size to expect, and even get you excited at the prospect of having something so sexy. But, it is so, so, so sexy. It's Cam in a mini-skirt and whipped-cream bikini doing a solo Lambada. No, it's even

sexy things out there somewhere, but they've instantly lost all importance. Second to catch my eye was the screen, and just how much of the PSP is nothing but screen. The screen simply could not be any bigger without the PSP itself getting bigger. It is that dominating - so much so that people with fat thumbs are gonna miss some action if they can't slim down in time for the Aussie release.

Along the bottom are system buttons - these all sit flush in the PSP

The PSP has a shiny black finish - so shiny she's (and 'it' has become a 'she') virtually luminescent

better than that (thank god - Ed). And this is before you turn it on.

The first thing I noticed as I peeled the foam wrapping away was the polished finish. The PSP has a shiny black finish - so shiny she's (and 'it' has become a 'she') virtually luminescent, with the only non-smooth imperfections being so deliberate as to add to the effect. It's kinda like seeing a freshly detailed Porsche drive down the street - you know there are other

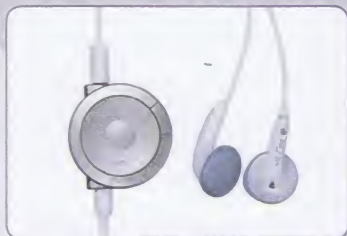
and so it's difficult to tell whether they are responding sometimes, but not being command buttons this is no big deal. The command buttons will look very familiar to all gamers, and feel right at home. The D-pad is split four ways in classic PSX style. Similarly the four face buttons bear the now infamous square, triangle, O and X symbols. The layout of both the buttons and the D-pad is a little tighter than your standard PS2 controller, in a very ergonomic way.





They all feel a little harder than their home console counterparts too, being made of a clear but very solid perspex (they look black from straight on because the PSP is black, but check them out from a side profile and you'll see what we mean). I've read reports from people saying the L and R buttons lack sturdiness, but as far as we're concerned, they're going to have to be pretty heavily abused before they give out. They're also made of the same clear perspex as the other buttons, which means your forefingers are visible through them. An utterly useless trait yes, but it adds to the overall style that oozes from this pocket console.

The system menu gives you access to the many functionalities of the PSP - from system settings to music, picture and movie viewing, and of course games. Your save games can be checked and deleted here too. The screenshots everywhere show a rich blue backdrop to the menu, however the colour actually changes from month to month - with December being orange. Its simplicity makes navigation no real



problem, and with the system's language being selectable (Japanese or English) it makes things even easier. For us anyway.

SPECIAL HEADPHONES

The PSP headphones are a split set, with a remote control that you then plug the buds and short cord into. The remote itself is utterly useless when playing games, and the earphones don't quite do the sound capabilities of the PSP justice. Still, for listening to MP3s the remote does work, although it doesn't have an LCD display on it.

SOFT CASE AND HAND-STRAP

The strap is pretty damn lame, its white-ness is too much of a contrast from the sleek black lines of the PSP and looks more suited to a man's handbag or something else suitably European. Unfortunately, it comes with the soft-case, which in my opinion is probably the best peripheral available so far. I've heard some people complain about it not having a lid which is fair enough, and others that no games fit in it with your PSP. Initially this



fazed me as well, however now that it's been bouncing around in my bag for a good couple of weeks, it's fairly obvious that games are going to need a hardcase ala MDs... you can try slipping a game in there if you want to, but don't come complaining to Hyper when it breaks and you have to fork over another \$70.

MEMORY STICK DUO (32MB)

Clocking in at four times the size of a PS2 memory card, the PSP saves games on a run-of-the-mill Sony memory stick. Not entirely trusting Sony to let me use just any old memory stick, I stuck with the PSP-branded one which comes with the pack, however we've checked it out since and it's compatible with any standard Sony memory stick Duo (that's the mini-size one, folks). This means that for me I can dump a bunch of MP3s onto a whopping 512MB card, and then save my games on the bytes left over, and I now have a spare card so my friends don't delete my save games every time they pick 'new game' from the menu.



THE LOCAL HYPE

Japan has been being prepped for the new generation of handhelds for several months now, with Nintendo and their rather funky new DS getting the jump on TV commercials. In fact, Sony has adopted a rather 'soft' launch for their PSP, unsure of what sort of userbase they can build with their first outing in the pocket market. With only 200,000 units shipped for re-release nationwide, they naturally sold out within hours. Pre-orders were not taken at ANY shop I checked out, and the lines, especially at major shops in the big cities of Tokyo and Osaka, were significantly longer than those for the DS. Of course, Nintendo did have pre-orders, and also a larger shipment for release, plus a promise of many more by the end of January 2005.

The Games

Here's our rundown on the pic of the Japanese launch titles, as well as Metal Gear Acid, which we picked up four days after launch.



[below] *drools*



Ridge Racers

■ This is the game that convinced me I needed a PSP. Ridge Racers on the PSP is the sixth game in the Ridge Racer series, and easily the best.

The meat of the game is the World Tour mode, offering a huge amount of preset tours to take part in, each one with a prize for completion. The prizes include new cars, new tracks, new tours, and even a bunch of nostalgic Ridge Racer trailers.

Both cars and tracks are plentiful in this game, though there aren't as many cars as you think - a mod-kit does not make a new car in our opinion. Tracks however number 24 (that's 12, forwards and backwards) which is more than any other RR game and should keep you busy. Though there aren't any prizes up for grabs, the 'omakase Tour' ('Leave-it-to-us tour') mode is another great inclusion. It lets you choose a class of car and a time limit of 5 to 60 minutes, and it will create a tour to match your schedule. Great for when you've got half an hour and want to knock over a whole tour.

The driving physics of RR have always been a lot more about style than any particular level of realism, so if you like the arcadey

powerslide mechanics then you will LOVE this game. The cars have a genuine weight to them, they don't just float across the road like some games have a tendency to, and the sense of speed is quite satisfying. You'll spend a lot of your time above 200km/h in this game, so it's very important that it feels like you're travelling that fast. To make things even faster, Namco have given us nitro this time around. Fun and very cool. Nitro is amassed by powersliding at high speeds (with a max of 3 boosts), so learning how to take your corners will give you a lot more boosts and help your best times tremendously. Our hats go off to the person who came up with this system.

The icing on top of this already delicious cake is of course going to be the multiplayer mode. Wireless play means it's as simple as sitting somewhere within 20-30 metres of each other and having the same game in your PSP. For up to eight people - yes eight - without a single cord anywhere. With the gameplay, graphics and longevity to challenge your average home console game, RR is just what Sony wanted at release. And us gamers too.

[Mondo Grosso] The soundtrack is sexier than Bryce in a Japanese schoolgirl outfit

Lumines

■ Trippy Tetris inspired music-puzzle game from the also very trippy Mizuguchi Tetsuya (Rez, etc). The game mechanics actually work very well, and this is a game I have found stealing hours at a time. Less taxing on the battery too, so good for long trips. The tie between music and action is a little deeper than Rez, but it's still essentially just a game with great sound effects and a better soundtrack. Good stuff, just what Cam ordered.

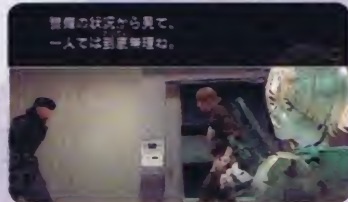


Metal Gear Acid

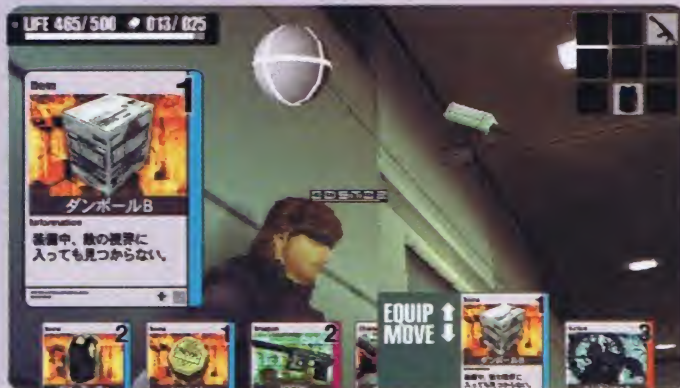
■ The Metal Gear franchise is a huge thing to try and bring to a handheld, and although the PSP could easily handle the original PSone game, and then some, Konami have decided to go in a thoroughly different direction.

MGA puts you in the Metal Gear world, but it isn't a Metal Gear game. You will feel the Metal Gear atmosphere and it's a very Metal Gear story, but the entire game has been turned into a strategic card game. Yes, you read that correctly.

How does it work? Simple, really. Snake must carry out his mission just like old times, however you don't control him directly in the same way - you must use cards in a turn-based strategy environment, where Snake has his turn, and then each other character on screen takes their turn. The screen is divided up into a grid like in any other strategy game, and your possible actions are taken from the cards in your hand - involving things like attack cards and item cards (which can be



equipped). At the end of each move you choose which way Snake faces (thus affecting his line of sight) and whether to stand or crouch - stealth is as important as ever. The game is very slick, with an interesting story presented in high quality 2D anime-style slides. There is no voice-acting though, which also means that there are a lot of (Japanese) subtitles to read. Since we are just getting into the meat of the game, it's impossible to give a final verdict on the game system just yet, suffice to say that if you like your games fun and varied, then you'll definitely want to give this one a look. It's great to see a big company like Konami trying something so very different with a very popular series - if they wanted to make the big bucks they could have simply ported over the PSone game with a new level or two and there would be few complaints. As it is we get to experience our Metal Gear in a whole new way, and new is a good thing, right?™



[above] Of course the battery will be dead before you get through the first cutscene...



Minna no Golf (Everybody's Golf)

■ A port of the very popular PS2 game, this one actually pipped Ridge Racers as top seller at launch, but not by much. This golf game mixes highly accessible game physics with cute characters, unlockable stuff, a bunch of courses, and an excellent multiplayer mode.



[below] She hasn't quite got the mannerism but the "whistle" is quite correct



[above] Hey, how many of that chick are you seeing?

Vampire Chronicle: The Chaos Tower

■ Capcom and the Darkstalkers series have hit the handheld in a big way, and with VC:TCT being the only fighting game available so far, it's a good thing it's a killer. The animation simply does not miss a beat, and looks as good as you could imagine. The biggest downside is that, well, we all know that a port of one of their best SF games would be both a lot more fun, and much more successful. Probably on the way.



The Verdict so far



What We Like

Sleep mode - have to dash for the train? Never fear, pause your game, switch off your PSP and get running. Turn it back on when you're on the train and you are in EXACTLY the same position. No boot time, no save screen, no nothing. Better yet, it appears to not tax your battery at all, so saving your game is only for when you want to change games. Opens up a whole world of possibilities for portable games, wouldn't you agree?

Graphics - nothing you have ever held in your hand can begin to compare. Comparisons are very difficult, but at the moment the graphical detail is sitting somewhere between PSone and PS2 - detailed but a little jaggy. As always, however, once developers start getting a handle on the machine, games will only look better. Bring on the next gen of titles!

Huge screen - yeah, we just had to say it once more. I was excited about the GBA screen way back when, but it simply doesn't compare. This 16:9 puppy is 4.3 inches wide, displays at 480x272 pixels and 16.77 million colours, and is large enough to impress even your most cynical friends.

Great games - whilst we haven't seen a full roster of killer games yet, there are a few titles on their way that should interest you, namely Gran Turismo Mobile, Final Fantasy series, Devil May Cry, etc. But more than this, once the machine proves itself capable, expect true second generation titles to flow in like they did in PSone's hey-day.

Solid & plentiful buttons - with a total of six buttons simply for gaming, many of the previous handheld design shackles are out the window. Also, they feel like PlayStation buttons, not some portable ripoff.

Multimedia capabilities - slot a Sony memory stick in and you are ready to go. All the MP3s (or even mpeg movies, jpeg files) you can fit on it, wherever you go. MP3s get good battery life too, so you don't need to worry about that aspect.

Good storage medium - the UMD is definitely a winner in our books. With 1.8GB of storage on a single disc, few could complain. Just think, all 3 discs of FF7 could fit on a single disc not much larger than a 50 cent piece.



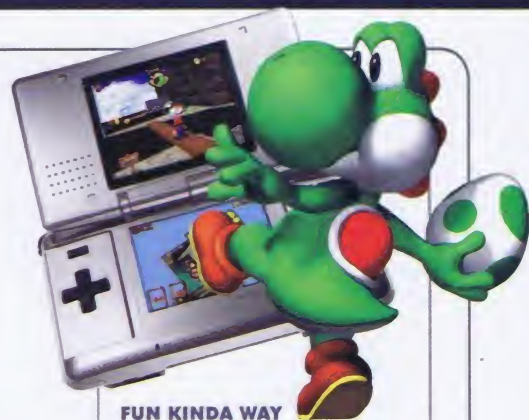
What We Don't Like

With all this praise you may be forgiven for thinking that the PSP is flawless - it ain't. Being their first foray in the market, Sony have a few things they can tighten if they truly intend to topple the battle-hardened Nintendo. Here are a few of the most glaring.

Battery - seriously, a processor that strong and a screen that big were always going to be a drain. But 4 hours?! And to be honest, at its worst that is all you are going to get. Ridge Racers taxes the battery more so than any title, and it hasn't given me more than 5 hours on a single charge yet. If you are going to use it a lot between charges, a spare battery is definitely in order.

Regions - since I'll be shopping for games in Australia again one day, this aspect has kept me very interested. Despite Sony's assurance that the machine will be world-ready (with only movies and music receiving region-coding), every game I have bought so far has had the region code 2 branded clearly on the back of the package. That is the same as Japan's DVD region code, so this needs to be cleared up. Even so, it will mean that movies on UMD will only be for PSPs bought in that country, which won't ruin your life, but may prove inconvenient.

Initial flaws - there are reports all over the place of faulty PSPs, things stuck under the screen, mixing pixels, UMDs not reading, and plenty more. Don't believe them all - but yes, the



FUN KINDA WAY

Local impressions of the DS and PSP are very much different ends of the gaming spectrum. The DS, with its stylus and touch-screen, is seen as aimed at the younger market, in an unadulterated fun kind of way. The PSP though, will be seen as an accessory of serious image-raising potential for anyone aged 16-36, and playing at the bus stop or on the train will be where it's at. In Japan, touch-screen antics just aren't going to be as socially acceptable for people above primary school age I'm afraid.



SONY



GRAN TURISMO 4
THE REAL DRIVING SIMULATOR

SELECT START

first batch of PSPs have had some issues. I myself am missing 2 pixels in the top-right of my screen, but since I can't see them at all except when the screen is on but completely black (and I know where to look too) then I would hardly call it an issue. I also had an identical problem with my first GBA, and they stood out during all games. Sony has included a repair request form in the PSP pack, and with future shipments not being as rushed, these sorts of problems should become less common.

Fragile battery case - the PSP is not a toy, and leaving it in the hands of your irresponsible cousin is just being irresponsible yourself. Don't. One of the first things to break is going to be the case holding your battery in. Something about the lid to the battery compartments simply doesn't sit right and leaves you feeling damn uneasy.

Fragile UMD slot - the second most likely thing to break is the UMD slot. Again, the PSP is not a toy and has not been prepared to be as durable as a Gameboy. So when it comes to changing games, make sure you trust the person who is doing it.

Fragile UMDs - try not to step on your games. They break.

Multimedia - playing MP3s and DVDs is a nice feature (although paying \$30 for a DVD I can ONLY watch via my PSP? I don't think so), but for now it's important for Sony to make sure everyone sees this as a solid games machine to challenge the mighty Gameboy, not some hybrid portable machine that isn't sure where it wants to go.

THE WIND UP SIGNAL

Sony are well on the way to making the PSP a serious handheld contender. The DS though is no slouch, and Nintendo have brought plenty to the table themselves... in fact the name Nintendo is far more synonymous with handheld gaming in Japan than anything else (GCN marketshare is even lower than in Australia). However, the two are such completely different types of machines, with such disparate strengths that all we can say is - if you're a serious gamer, you're going to need both.



V8 SUPERCARS 2

Available on **PSP** ■ Category: **Racing Sim** ■ Players: **1-Multi** ■ Developer: **Sumo Digital** ■ Available: **Early 2005**

➤➤ V8 Supercars 2 really resonated with Australian gamers, as it gave us the chance to get behind a grunty hunk of metal and fly around Bathurst, lapping up the attention to detail. Car nuts loved it, and thanks to its wide array of competitions, tracks and cars there was something for everyone. But here's the best bit - pretty soon we're even going to be able to take it out on the road with us. Yes, it's coming to PSP. To find out how the conversion is going, we spoke to Steve Lycett, Development Producer at Sumo Digital.

Hyper: How will V8 2 on PSP differ from its last outing on PS2? Is this a port or a true sequel?

Sumo: V8 2 on PSP is a conversion of the PS2, but with extra features. Whilst the core of the game



☞ The official definition of "fanging"

remains the same, bear in mind that this is the first time you'll see a full and proper racing simulation game on a handheld console. Before now you've very much been tied to your TV or monitor, now you have the freedom to drive anywhere, on the bus, in the pub, etc.

How will the game be structured? What changes have been made from the console version?

The core of the game, with your racing through an evolving championship and storyline remains. For veterans you've got a new way to play, and for newcomers you'll get to step into the shoes of a driver battling his way to fame. For PSP we're adding wifi multiplayer and one or two surprises I don't want to spoil just yet.

How much have you had to adapt the PS2 engine for the PSP?

Surprisingly little. We're finding that the PSP is quite powerful. All the models and levels have the same polycount as the PS2. We've adjusted some of the textures to take into account the screen on the PSP, but in essence, we've not had to

sacrifice any detail in the conversion of the game. We also expect the same level of audio and visual presentation, the movies certainly look very nice on the handheld!

What technical hurdles need to be/have been overcome? How difficult, for instance, is it to get 21 cars displayed at once on screen?

Well you draw one car, then the next, then the next... :) As I've mentioned the PSP isn't any slouch performance wise, to get all those cars on screen is pushing the system but we have a nice supply of tricks to get it all happening.

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

Wifi play is the obvious one. You can play anywhere with anyone without any wires or needing to setup modems and routers. Technically, there is very little that the PS2 does that isn't achievable on the PSP. In terms of gameplay, we've not wanted to alter it from the PS2 as we genuinely believe that this style



☞ Yep, they're cars alright

of play is going to be very fresh for the handheld players.

And how about vice versa?

Well, the one thing we've had to consider is that the PSP has limited Analog control. There is only the one stick and the buttons themselves aren't analog. As a result we've been tweaking the controls to make the game feel right. Also the PSP has stereo audio, so we've had to consider how to capture the 3D sound of the original.

So much of V8's appeal lies in the handling - how effectively will the PSP's analogue nub be able to translate the subtleties of the handling?

You'll have to take my word for this, but it's translating really, really nicely. You can still feel the



▶▶ ALL MODELS & LEVELS HAVE THE SAME POLY COUNT AS PS2

different weights of each style of vehicle and although the Analog stick is quite small, it's surprising reactive and accurate. We are also intending to give the player a number of ways to control the game so we hope that there will be a solution to everyone's tastes.

Given that this is a simulation, and thus requires concentration for long periods, are you introducing any new modes that people can just pick up and play when they want to play their PSP out on the road?

Actually, the way the game works actually really suits burst play. It has always saved between races, and races themselves are focused bursts of a small number of laps. Of course, if you feel you want a longer challenge, you can set this via the Free Ride options.

How many cars will be in the game, and how many motorsports, championships and circuits?

A hell of a lot! Off the top of my head we've got about 60 different types of vehicle in there, over

30 different championships and that takes in 15 different types of motorsport. Whether you're burning round the circuit or thrashing off-road we're sure everyone will enjoy the variety.

Will there be any localised content in the game? Cars/tracks etc that will appeal specifically to the Australian market?

V8 2 is specifically designed for Australia. There are specific cars and tracks that don't appear in the other versions of the game. See, we're so nice to you and you didn't even buy us a beer!

The last game Sumo developed was Outrun 2 for Xbox. Is it a radically different challenge developing an arcade racer for console to developing a simulation for PSP, given that for both games you've got a full game foundation to build on?

If having all the foundations there would mean the conversions were easy :).

Both of these games have had a similar challenge of converting the original version to a less powerful



machine. In Outrun's case we had to consider that the Chihiro board had more RAM than the Xbox, in V8 2's case, we've got less RAM and less processor power. In other words, you've got to squeeze a pint into a half pint pot. This isn't an easy task in places.

On V8 2 PSP we've also had to learn a new console with quite different architecture to the code the game was originally written for. So although we can re-use parts of the original code (for example the handling and physics) a lot of it has to be re-done from the ground

up. Luckily, as a team, we've had experience of breaking a lot of new consoles in, but even then, it's still posed some interesting challenges.

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

Right now, it is difficult to say. We're still optimising the game and part of that process is going to involve making sure we can extend the life of the battery, without compromising the quality of the game in anyway. I do think that we shouldn't be any worse than any other title though. Ask me again in a month or so :).



0:36:4
 LAST 1:15:2
 BEST 1:03:44

WIPEOUT PURE

Available on **PSP** ■ Category: **AG Racing** ■ Players: **1-8** ■ Developer: **SCEE Studio Liverpool** ■ Available: **2005**

Is this the dawning of a second golden age for the original breed of high velocity 3D racers? We'd like to think so. After all, both Ridge Racer and Wipeout stormed the POne when it was first released, giving the console a jacked-in, turned-on, cutting-edge, buy-this-now vibe. And it looks like history is set to repeat itself on PSP. Ridge Racer is back and a complete badass once again, and a new Wipeout game is just around the corner too. About time!

SLIP SLOP SLAP

But the best part is that this isn't some slap-happy, sloppy seconds port. This is an all new game baby. The development team's "mission

statement" (if you'll forgive my use of corporate parlance) is to focus on the core elements that make the Wipeout series so great - to create a "pure" Wipeout experience. Hence the name. This means that you can expect to see elements from all the previous games, so it's not so much a continuation of Wipeout Fusion as it is a celebration of Wipeout as a whole.

Interestingly, only a handful of members on the team have worked on the previous games, so although dedicated to creating a game that Wipeout fans will love, there are also lots of new ideas that have been brought to the table.

One of these is the new energy system. Forget having to pit, in

Wipeout Pure whenever you pick up a weapon you have the option to either absorb that weapon's energy to help recharge your shield, or use the weapon as per normal. This should introduce a new layer of strategy, forcing you to choose between firepower and safety. Let's hope the weapon balance is good enough that it actually is a choice, and not simply a case of always shooting your lock-on missile and always absorbing your landmines. As far as the weapons and pick-ups go, nothing has been confirmed at this stage, although you can expect



Don't shut yourself off man

to see many of the classics return, as well as a couple of surprises.

At this stage we're not sure what the overall structure of the game will be. We do know that six of the teams return from previous Wipeouts, while two new teams have been



SIDE BY SIDE How does Wipeout Pure compare graphically to Wipeout Fusion? Have a look for yourselves!





WHAT WE'D LIKE TO HEAR:
 A slamming new soundtrack! Personally I'd like something in the spirit of the very first Wipeout...



❖ THERE WILL BE 12 NEW TRACKS AND 4 CLASSICS

added. We also know that there will be 12 brand new tracks, with 4 classics (one from each previous Wipeout) also included, and rebuilt from the ground up.

What we don't know is whether the credit system from Wipeout Fusion will return. In Fusion, racing earned you credit which could be spent on upgrading your craft in six areas (top speed, thrust, brake force, lateral stability, weapon power and shield power). Thus, there were no speed classes to

speak of, only a gradual and steady increase in speed and ability. It was a system we really liked and we'd love to see it return.

One thing we do know is that, like the old games, the AG craft in Wipeout Pure are no longer tied to the track. Thus, you'll bounce around and get air off hill crests, making the game feel more dynamic, and a little more faithful to the earlier vision of the series. Whether any of the exploits that were possible in Wipeout 2097 (such as half-course shortcuts) due to the massive air that could be gained will also return is anyone's guess. The team have said, however, that in addition to the return of airbrakes, they've also implemented a new aerial move, so it will be very interesting to see what shape that takes.



[above] Sweet, sweet lens flare



JUST TRON Pure also seems to have a new mode that we've dubbed "Tron vision". There's only one screenshot available showing off this look, but it has us licking our lips in anticipation.

GET IN THE ZONE

In terms of the peripheral modes, all we know at this stage is that Wipeout Fusion's Zone mode is back. Zone mode simply charged you with surviving for as long as your shield held out. There were no competitors and no weapons, but your accelerator pedal was locked down, and the longer you survived the faster the ship would go. It really was a raw test of skill and racing lines, and showed just how fast the game could get. Wipeout Pure will ship with courses designed specifically for Zone mode, further enhancing the breakneck speed. We can't wait.

Wipeout Pure will also have Wifi multiplayer. Up to eight people will be able to connect and race wirelessly (in either a single race, league or time trial), which should be absolutely brilliant fun. You'll also be able to swap ghost data with friends, as well as synchronise records with friends to create global records tables.

Better still, Studio Liverpool are also planning on offering up a host of downloadable content after the game has shipped, including new tracks, new ships, new skins for the game and new music tracks. <<



SPLINTER CELL CHAOS THEORY

Available on **PC, Xbox, PS2** ■ Category: **Action/Stealth** ■ Players: **1-4** ■ Developer: **Ubisoft Montreal** ■ Available: **March 2005**

Admit it - who doesn't find the thought of strapping on a skin-tight black latex suit and sneaking up behind well-built mercenaries in attractive uniforms appealing? Ok, maybe that's not quite the right way to describe the action within Splinter Cell Chaos Theory. It's actually all about prancing about like an acrobat, and merging yourself with a finely chiseled fellow operative to attain heights that would otherwise be impossible. Hmm, that doesn't sound much better. Perhaps it's best just to say that in Chaos Theory you're a highly trained killing machine on a mission to save the free world. There, that's much more like it!

The basic gameplay within the third in the Splinter Cell series is much the same as the previous two blockbusters. You're a lone operative tasked with infiltrating various highly secure premises. To aid you in your quest you'll be armed to the teeth with the latest gadgets that the US Army's white coats could devise ways to blow vast amounts of the defence budget on. So it sounds much the same as prior versions, right? Well, after witnessing a few highly choreographed demos, as well as getting some hands on time with the game, a multitude of significant changes looks set to make this title the strongest we've yet seen from this very successful Clancy series.

SAM FISHER, HE'S SO HOT RIGHT NOW

Splinter Cell games have always been renowned for how much they excite the old optic nerves, but Chaos Theory shattered our expectations by being even more stunning than anticipated. On the PS2 a new technique known as geotexturing turns simple two dimensional surfaces into what appear to be three dimensional models, accurately reflecting light and casting shadows. This has lent the PS2 version a much higher overall level of detail in its levels than competing titles on the platform.

Several other cool new graphical effects can now be seen across all ports of the game. Soft shadowing makes shadows look eerily real, and watching a character's shadow through the paper walls of a Japanese home is simply stunning. Refraction effects make transparent surfaces bend and distort light accurately, a particularly memorable implementation being a beautifully etched dragon carved into a glass wall. Unfortunately our screenshots can't really show how great these techniques look, but rest



assured they're both breathtaking effects. Each version of the game now has the Havok 2 physics engine integrated into it, allowing for cool rag doll effects on corpses, as well as swinging lights and objects that behave just like the real thing.

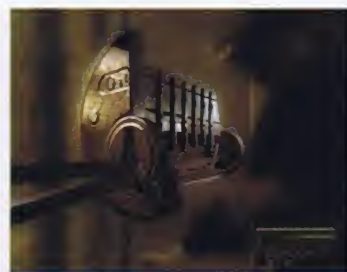
Obviously the PC version is the most spectacular of the bunch, as to be expected considering the amount of time and money owners pump into its hardware. But the Xbox version is a very close second, and even the PS2 version does its platform proud. Regardless of which version you'll end up playing, it's likely it will redefine what you thought each platform was capable of.

A SOLO AGENT

The first demo we saw had two players progressing through the same level on separate Xboxes, with



Sam cleans up the Redfern streets



If it bleeds, you've picked it too much

WHAT WE'D LIKE TO SEE:

Considering how cool cooperative play looks, the release of additional coop maps is an absolute must.



MOST LEVELS NOW HAVE MULTIPLE POSSIBLE ROUTES



the action being beamed onto two large screens located next to each other. While one player took the sneaky-sneaky approach, making sure to stick to the shadows and create the minimum of fuss, the other took an entirely different route through the level. This other player obviously had tinea on his trigger finger, taking out patrolling troops left, right and center. And

even though they both had the same objective, to get security codes necessary to open a ship's vault, they were able to attain them in different ways. The stealthy player grabbed the ship's captain, persuading him to cough up the goods with the gentle placement of a knife to the jugular, while the other player simply cracked into the ship's computer.

the level red (with your opponent's blood)? You might like to take the heavily armed loadout then. But if you'd rather act like a ghost in the shadows, a gadget-heavy loadout will probably suit your clandestine needs better.

to jimmy the lock open. It only took the blink of an eye to open, allowing Sam clear the area much more quickly, but there was a price to pay for the brute force approach. As soon as a guard neared the lock, he noticed it was busted and ran for the nearest alarm bell. This placed the entire area on alert, making progress much tougher.

A simple definition of Chaos Theory is the complex and unpredictable dynamics of systems that are sensitive to their initial conditions, and the next demonstration ably showed how this applies to the gameplay within the single player game. Approaching a locked door, Sam whipped out his trusty lock pick to open it. While it was a time consuming approach, when a guard later passed by the door he didn't notice anything amiss. Rewind to the approach again, and this time Sam used one of his new weapons, a combat knife,

FRIENDS THAT KILL TOGETHER STAY TOGETHER

Splinter Cell 2 had one of the most innovative, not to mention pants-fillingly tense, online modes that gamers have ever seen. We've used this description a million times before, but it fits perfectly - the adversarial mode was simply four player hide and seek with high powered weaponry and gadgets. Unfortunately it was also harder



[tip] Sam hopes no one drops the soap



than passing the astronaut training program at NASA. It wasn't so bad at first, but unless players logged serious time into learning the intricate labyrinths that passed as levels, the difference between experienced and novice players was soon an intimidating chasm.

The developers of Chaos Theory realised this, and have now introduced a special training system to allow players to figure out the best routes through levels. This is achieved by setting up glowing waypoints



It's the ghost of Samvid WildFish!

and trails through the levels, showing the player exactly how to progress without ending up as worm bait.

Many of the new moves from the single player have also been introduced into the adversarial mode, and the mercenaries now have a cool sweeping kick to get around the old smoke grenade trick that spies relied heavily upon in the first version. To counter this powerful new ability, the spies have borrowed technology captured from a crashed Predator mothership. That's right - cloaking! Don't stress that this will create invisible super warriors though, as it's quite limited in its scope. It's got a time limit, isn't totally invisible, wears off in rain, and cloaked players can neither run nor fire weaponry. Still, it should prove to be the perfect solution to evading clumsy mercenaries, and is sure to boost the tension to cardiac arrest inducing levels.



Sometimes gamers like to play alongside a pal against the common evil of the computer, and the brand new cooperative mode fills this need perfectly. Four specially designed cooperative levels are included, with the promise of more on the way post release. During the demo of this impressive section of the game, we witnessed two spies using each other's bodies as a springboard and a ladder, helping them to reach out of the way areas. There are also puzzles that need the coordination of both players to achieve, such as deactivating two bombs

simultaneously less the laser tripwire between them is suddenly no more.

Based on the demos we witnessed, both online modes are guaranteed to be incredibly popular, and the inclusion of voice support should only solidify this claim.

Due out in March, Splinter Cell Chaos Theory should be a very big game for Ubisoft. It improves on everything that was great about the first two games, fixes all of the bits that annoyed spy wannabes, and provides three distinctly different gameplay styles. What more could you ask for? <<<



WHAT WE'D LIKE TO SEE:
It'd be a perfect world if the Xbox Live online career mode somehow made it to the PS2 and PC versions of the game



RAINBOW SIX 4: Lockdown

Available on **PC, Xbox, PS2** ■ Category: **Action** ■ Players: **1-16** ■ Developer: **Ubisoft Montreal** ■ Available: **March 2005**

▶▶ The latest version of Rainbow Six reinforces the direction Ubisoft has taken with Ding's band of ultra-warriors. Instead of focusing heavily on the tactical planning stage found in earlier R6 games, which was a favourite feature of nerdy grognards with a penchant for pocket protectors (hey, I was one of them, so I'm allowed to say that!), Lockdown's laser pointer is aimed right on the forehead of high-speed, action-oriented gameplay. That's not to say that it has totally discarded the squad-based tactics of its predecessors, as you'll still have a team of good guys watching your back. But there are no planning screens at all, and the weapon selection screens seem a little more simplified. It's all about getting you into the warzone as quickly as possible, appealing to a wider audience than the slide-rule lovers of the original R6 titles.

WREAKING HAVOK AGAIN

The major changes to the single player game seem to be cosmetic differences. The graphics engine has been given a spit and polish, with full integration of the Havok 2 physics system to

give everything a realistic sense of weight. A nice touch are the mirrors located at corners, allowing you to see oncoming troubles through the reflection, as well as fix the damned beret hair that spec-ops soldiers often suffer from. Special sniper levels are also included for those of you with clock tower urges, where you'll need to cover other team members as they do their bloody thing.

The multiplayer game has been tweaked, with both the PS2 and Xbox versions supporting 16 players in head to head mode, and up to four players in cooperative mode. A total of ten unique multiplayer maps are included for you to romp around in, although these do appear to be based off single player maps. Six different game modes should keep you happy for an unhealthy amount of time. But the most significant change in the online game is the extremely cool new Xbox Live career mode...

Like a MMORPG, when playing Lockdown over Xbox live you'll now have persistent monetary, skill and equipment levels. You'll need to choose a specialisation from the range of medic, commando, spec-ops, engineer and bunny

hopping team killer. As you win more games, you'll be rewarded with both experience points and cold, hard cash. Use the XP to level up certain skills, such as accuracy or running speed, while the moolah is good to spend up at the Quartermaster. There's no need to ever purchase ammunition, but to get the best boom sticks will require some patient saving. Over time your body armour becomes damaged, and will require a patching up job if it's going to stop anything heavier than a BB gun pellet. Unfortunately it's only possible to have a single character per Gamertag, a limitation caused by the amount of storage space that Microsoft has made available. We're pretty sure the community won't be too pleased with this, so wouldn't be surprised if a fix to allow multiple characters per tag is introduced.

While the single player version of R6 Lockdown looks solid enough, it's the MMORPG-esque element of the Xbox Live mode that has us really excited. Those of you lucky enough to own an Xbox and have access to a zippy broadband line can find out in April whether or not this excitement was justified. <<<



[Dett] Nothing says bad-ass like a puncy set of Ray Bans





BROTHERS IN ARMS: The Road to Hill 30

Available on **PC, Xbox, PS2** ■ Category: **FPS** ■ Players: **1-4** ■ Developer: **Gearbox** ■ Available: **March 2005**

▶▶ Randy Pitchford is the guy behind Gearbox Software, which is the company developing this WWII themed shooter. Now, it'd be easy to dismiss this as yet another generic WWII title except for one thing. Randy was born to make this game. He's almost as passionate about WWII history as he is about gaming. When listening to him speak (or is gush a better word?) about his beloved baby, it was impossible not to become infected with his enthusiasm for this game. So what makes this stand out from the already crowded beaches of Normandy?

A VIRTUAL NORMANDY

One of the most striking things that we took away from Randy's presentation was the amount of research that went into this game. According to Randy, if he'd have known how much time and money would be pumped into scraping up every last detail on its setting, he'd have never of started making it.

The game is based on the true story of a single squad of paras who jumped behind the Normandy beaches, to cut off reinforcements from the front and to attack the

heavy beach defences from the rear. Gearbox used a wealth of historical reference material to ensure that everything is modelled as closely to the real conflict as possible. These various sources included after action reports, aerial reconnaissance photographs, hand drawn diagrams and even accounts from dozens of witnesses. Simply collating all of this information turned out to be a mammoth task in itself, before any game design even began.

But the result is truly memorable. An incredibly accurate representation of the battlefield has been recreated, right down to the placement of picket fences, hedges and disabled vehicles. Even the position of enemy squads is

mapped out according to where allied soldiers reported them being. Randy claims that after playing the game you'll be able to visit the real location and know exactly where you are. Every mission in the game is based upon real missions that Allied troops fought tooth and nail to accomplish during their eight days in hell.

It's obvious that as far as accurately recreating the setting goes, Gearbox totally nailed it thanks to the extensive investment in researching the conflict. But how about the sensation of combat? Randy didn't want this to be yet another twitchy, reflex-based shooter that rewarded quick nerves but didn't accurately depict combat.



Enter the formidable talents of one US Army Colonel John Antal ret.

As a renowned author and WWII historian, the good Colonel reinforced the pool of information that the game was based on. But it was his work in the field of squad-based tactics, about which he published several West Point manuals, that led to one of the game's most defining features. It



[above] Gunners rule!



[right] Grass is greener on the allied side



[right] Is that Horatio Hufnagel behind him?

WHAT WE'D LIKE TO SEE

Would it one day be possible to play a WWII shooter from the perspective of a German soldier?



[above] They say war is hell... but it's usually raining down from the heavens

LIKE AN ACTION PACKED INTERACTIVE HISTORY LESSON

can be summarised in two words. Fire. Move.

For the first few minutes of the game, as you drop alone into the woods far behind Omaha beach, separated from your squad mates due to the horrific drop conditions, BIA plays just like every other WWII shooter. Albeit a very pretty, very authentic shooter.

It's only when you start to collect fellow comrades that the tactics of Fire and Move come to the fore.

Running directly into the rapid fire of an MG42 nest is a great way to end up as a lifeless corpse. The only way to get around a formidable placement is to utilise suppressing

fire, forcing the enemy to keep their butts in the dirt, and to then move into a flanking position to spread out the concentration of their gunfire. It's quite a simple tactic in theory, but figuring out when to fire, not to mention where to move to, isn't quite as simple when bullets are flying within inches of your head. Thankfully an intuitive context sensitive cursor makes sending orders to your squad mates a very simple experience.

After spending a few hours playing the game, our doubts about whether or not we'd be bored with yet another WWII vanished amidst the gunfire and smoke of incoming artillery shells. It's got the trusty shooty shooty bang

bang action offered by other WWII shooters, but the inclusion of the fire and move tactics makes this game so much more. The fact that it looks and sounds so good, as well as feeling more like an action packed interactive history lesson than a cheesy shooter, surely can't hurt it either.

CHESS AND GRID IRON

Once you get through the single player game, an innovative multiplayer component awaits. Best described as mixture of a standard first person shooter, chess and grid iron, it promises to be a refreshing experience. Not only will you have to worry about getting shot, you'll also have control of AI squad mates. Whether to use these as bait for an ambush, stick close to you and thus hopefully provide crucial backup when necessary, or to even send

them out on a flanking manoeuvre, is all up to you.

Regardless of how impressed we sound about our time with Brothers In Arms Road to Hill 30, there are doubtless many naysayers reading this who will simply dismiss it as yet another shooter chock full of Nazis. They'd be fools to do so, however, as it could be Gearbox's defining moment. <<<



[top] An early model whippersniper



COLD WINTER

Available on PS2 ■ Category: FPS ■ Players: 1-Multi ■ Developer: Swordfish ■ Available: Mid 2005

When we first got code of this new and interesting looking Cold-War themed console FPS we were wondering how we could fit it into what is ostensibly a comics themed issue. What could have been a little bit of a problem with flow was quickly solved when it was discovered, much to our delight that the story, which sees a disavowed secret agent breaking out of a Chinese military prison and wreaking havoc on evildoers worldwide was written by none other than Warren Ellis, the comics legend responsible for such greats as Transmetropolitan, The Authority, Planetary, Global Frequency, as well as scores of other notable books. Daniel's abiding love for Ellis' work

aside, how does the rest of Cold Winter stack up in an already quite glutted console FPS market?

WHAT A STERLING PUN!

Quite well, or so initial code would indicate. In Cold Winter, players take the role of Andrew Sterling, an embittered and forgotten agent, seemingly left to his own devices. The opening cinematic quite ably sets the tone for the rest of the game and is firmly in keeping with Ellis' history as a writer and the Cold War setting as a whole - our first introduction to Sterling comes with him being brutally tortured by his Chinese captors, beaten around the head with a rifle butt and having his fingers broken one by one. After

being rescued by an enigmatic female agent by the name of Kim, Sterling sets about first escaping from the prison (and destroying any records of him ever being there) before taking his fight to the global stage and putting the serious hurt on anyone who wants a piece of the free world. So far so good but with just the plot Cold Winter doesn't sound markedly different from any of the other similar games on the market. Once you start to look beneath the surface, however the game comes into its own.

The first thing that really took our fancy after the brutal opening cutscene was the introduction of healing in the game. Unlike the common model of having health packs littered around the levels, med packs that can be hoarded for later use or even leaning against walls in the name of realism, Cold Winter gives Andrew an infinitely reusable healing device, the only catch being that using it takes time and leaves the player very vulnerable during its use. From the code we played this ability to heal at any juncture (so long as you take all the necessary precautions to cover



your back) really adds to the flow of the game, allowing the player to continually make progress rather than always have to hang back, take things easy and backtrack for health pickups.

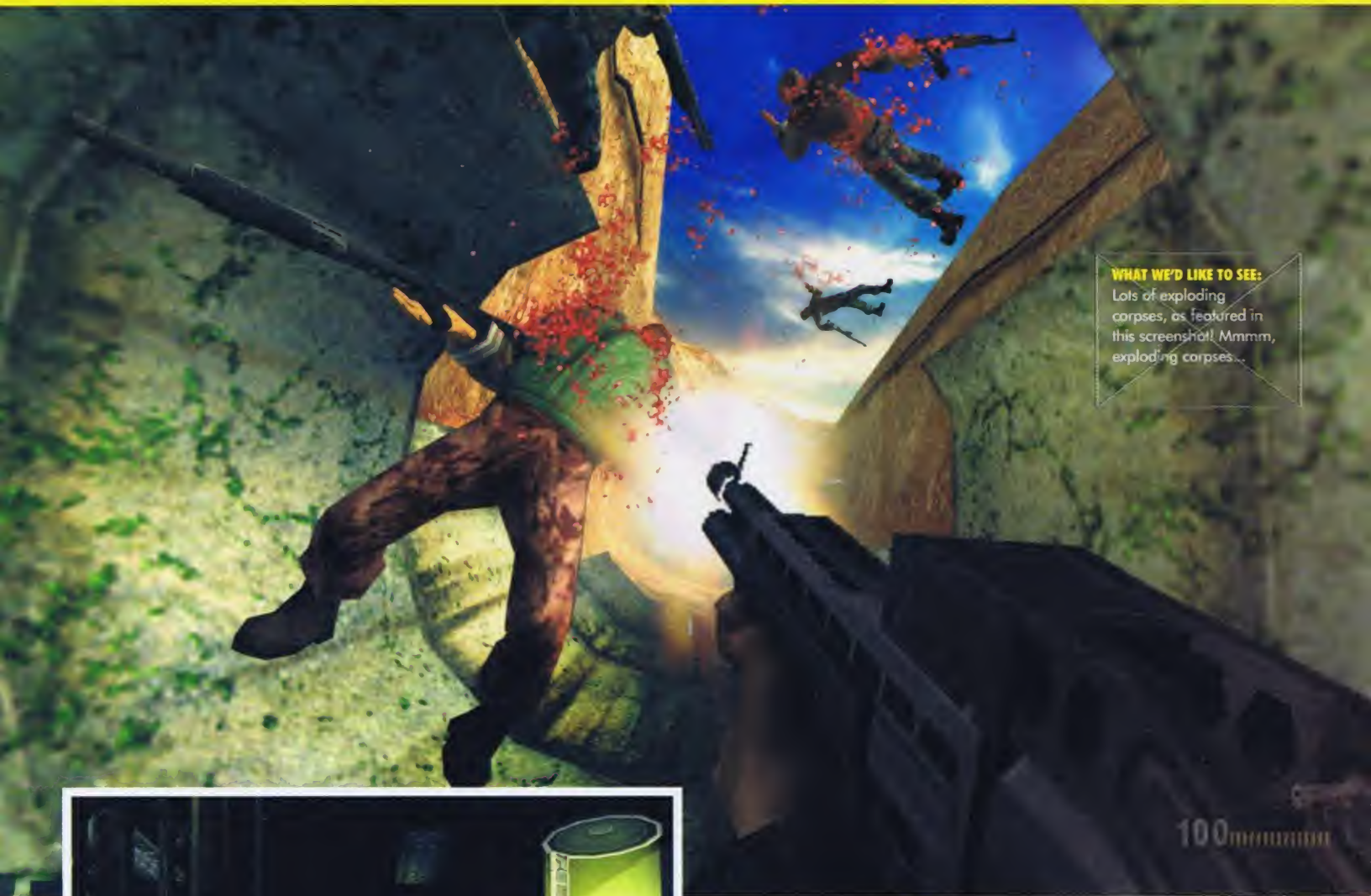
Another interesting and potentially great touch comes through the implementation of the Karma physics engine in nearly every aspect of the game, from ragdolling on enemy models through to manipulation of the environment. The first real instance of seeing the physics engine in action is the realistic ragdolling (combined with numerous hit locations) that lead to some rather spectacular, if somewhat gory deaths. Players can also pick up and throw nearly any object in the game and can manipulate larger



[shows] I'll die before I surrender, Tim



[shows] It's no Mohito



WHAT WE'D LIKE TO SEE:
Lots of exploding corpses, as featured in this screenshot! Mmmm, exploding corpses...



[shows] For once, just once, I'd like to see a genetic testing lab going smoothly. Sure, it wouldn't be very exciting, apart from the "thrill of science"

objects in different ways as well - players can push around tables to make makeshift platforms to reach higher areas or even knock them over to make barricades and impromptu cover. This manipulation of the environment goes deeper than just the physics engine. Players will have the ability to make makeshift weapons by combining different objects found throughout the levels; the first example being

Molotov cocktails fashioned from empty bottles, rags and a can of gasoline. Other weapons the player can expect to get their hands on include the trusty 9mm, AK47 and frag grenades (which literally send enemies flying).

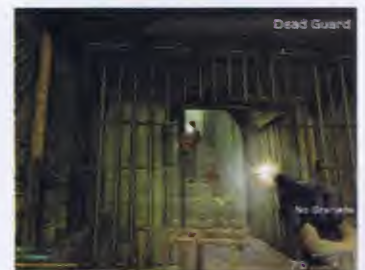
ON OUR TOES

Cold Winter also appears to shine in the field of enemy AI. Although the code we saw was definitely early

PLAYERS WILL BE ABLE TO CREATE MAKESHIFT WEAPONS



and full of the glitches you expect to see the enemy AI was definitely strong enough to keep us on our toes. Enemies we encountered didn't simply stand and shoot but instead effectively used cover (including tipping over tables to create barricades), called for backup, fled to sound alarms and even turned off the lights so we couldn't see where they were. By the time the code is finished the AI should definitely be impressive indeed. Although built using the Renderware engine, Swordfish have managed to push the processing power of the PS2 with some very nice looking character models, a number of subtle lighting effects and as already mentioned, the seamless integration of physics into gameplay. <<<



Staying in the cell was his first mistake

FRANCHISE? Initial reports on Cold Winter seem to indicate that Swordfish and Vivendi are looking to establish a franchise around the main character a-la Metal Gear or Splinter Cell. Whilst it's too early to judge whether the game will indeed branch out into a franchise at the current stage, Cold Winter has all of the hallmarks people look for in their franchise games; interesting world, great writing, good looks and compelling gameplay.



!!! PES Fan - Pro Evolution Soccer Fansite
 http://www.pesfan.com
 An essential Pro Evo fan's website

Pro Evolution Soccer 4 on Xbox Live

>> March Stepnik

Konami's Pro Evolution Soccer 4 is a beautiful game of soccer. So much so that after eight versions in Japan and four in the West, the folks at EA are still playing catch up with the FIFA series in terms of offering fluid, excellent gameplay. But in the realm of online play - in which the Xbox version is the first in the console series to go up the broadband pipe - the reverse is true: PES4 on Live is lacking and Konami could certainly do with paying attention to what EA has down with FIFA 2005.

Let's get one thing out of the way first before we go any further: the actual game of football that PES4 offers online is near faultless. It's exactly the one you see in the single player game, with only a few minor modifications to ensure games aren't spoiled by rude players. There's a time limit on the setup screen to ensure things get a bit of a move on, and there are only 3 pauses available to a player per

game, and these last 60 seconds and will only come into effect when the ball next goes out of play. Otherwise it's the PES we all know and love (and it's an excellent port of the PS2 version, although veterans will find the controller layout a little tricky to get used to) and even in its current state it's still second only to playing the game against your friends around the same TV.

ROONEY AT EVERTON?

Unfortunately it's also lacking a whole host of peripheral features. All the basics are there; you can check your standings, see which of your friends are online, create a game or join either a quick or opti-match game. But all of it is a bit trite really, especially when put next to the nicely polished FIFA 2005 and its support for extended play. EA has even funded a virtual World Cup for players to take part in, giving its patrons a helluva good reason to come back for more.



[above left] The dance of the sugarplum fairies has never been so moving



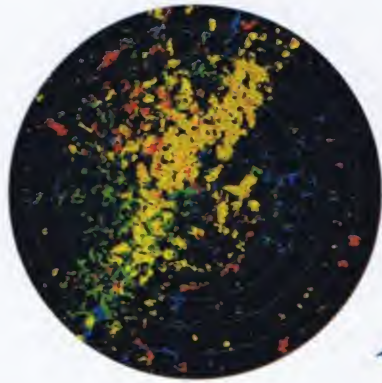
Another gripe is the ranking system, which rewards quantity over quality. Points are rewarded for simply taking part in a match. For example, a player with five wins, five draws and no losses will be rated lower than a player who has won five, drawn five and lost a hundred. What's worse is that there's currently no penalty for cheating players - those who pike-out when faced with defeat. Reports abound on the forums of players fearing to go more than one goal up in a game in case of losing a legitimate win.

And then there's the lag. Lag on Live is entirely erratic: games range from completely lag-free to stuttering, unplayable affairs irrespective of which time of day they're played. Thankfully it's not often bad, but when it is, it's simply not worth playing.

It all points to a Konami rush-job in getting the game on Xbox Live. The good news is that there's a patch imminent (initially due before Christmas, it'll be out by the time you read this) which promises to fix the lag and introduce an instant 0-3 loss to any player that prematurely leaves a game. Konami has also promised more in the patch, but no further details have been released. Given that the 'quit penalty' would be pointless unless the ranking system is overhauled points that there might be overdue changes made there too. The fans are certainly hungry for it.

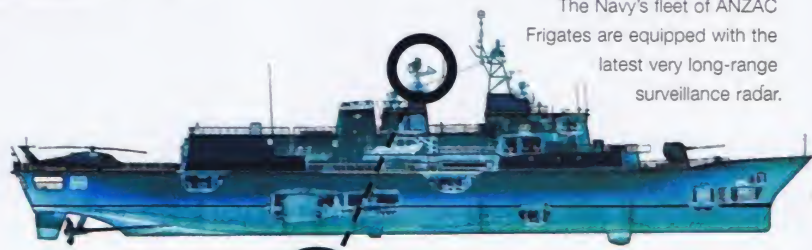
PES4 on Live is still a beautiful game but it's hard not to be disappointed with the basic online support. Konami would do well to address this for next year's release if it plans to compete with FIFA's online presence. <<

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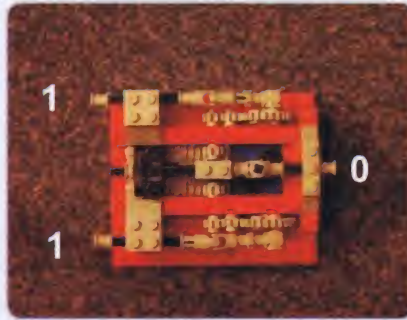
»» Kosta Andreadis



The Half-Life Saga & Cookies

<http://fragfiles.org/~hlstory/index.htm>
<http://www.student.itn.liu.se/~troja881/cookie/>

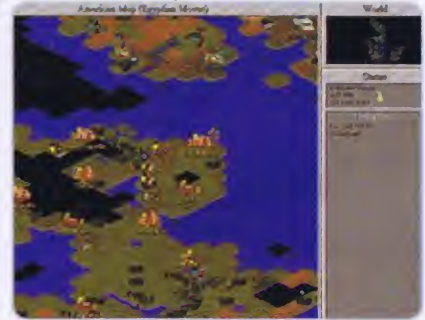
»» A nerd might say that the Half-Life series is a great example of minimalist storytelling. To everyone else they make very little sense. Who exactly are the Combine, and why is Gordon Freeman being controlled by a mysterious figure known as the 'G Man'. Here's a site that attempts to explain the Half-Life saga, its myths, meanings and what not in simple English that most should be able to understand. And boy was I way off; I thought the G Man was called the G Man for his knack for getting the ladies where they want to go - every time.



Lego Logic Gates

<http://goldfish.ikaruga.co.uk/logic.html>

»» Ah Logic Gates, the building blocks of all AI. And it's at that point where 99% of you have stopped reading. To the remaining 1% you're better off stopping too because I can't converse in nerd-talk, but I'll be damned if I won't give it a try. Here goes, the Lego Millennium Falcon featured on this site is laughable, the upper hull and quad laser depiction is clearly off scale. It's as if the guy hasn't heard of Star Wars: Starship Schematics, which is sad because you'd really need a copy of this book before making any Falcon model from scratch. If it was going to be easy to replicate, Han wouldn't have spent years illegally modifying his standard Corellian YT-1300 Freighter!



Abandonware

<http://www.abandonia.com/index2.php>
http://dosbox.sourceforge.net/news.php?show_news=1

»» For a game to become abandonware two things must be true, it has to be older than five years and it's no longer being published. Once these two things are in check the game becomes free for distribution. Naturally this means that most games from the 'cd games' 'dir/w' days can be freely distributed. But to run a game that was developed for DOS on a machine running Microsoft's latest abortion of an operating system, Windows XP, can be quite taxing. This is where Dos Box, a free x86 emulator for Windows, comes in.



Screenshot Archive

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

»» To most, screenshots are like the movie trailers for the videogame world - teasing, promising and exciting. To corporate skills like Cameron McShea and Can Dan Wilks, screenshots are to be arranged on a page to line their pockets and appease their publishing gods. To the rest of us screenshots represent purity, and this website features many collections of screenshots from years gone by from the Atari 2600, Coleco Vision, Sega Master System, NES and many other classic gaming systems.



Top Ten Urinals

<http://www.urinal.net/topfive.html#>

»» Although they serve their purpose, I've never really been a fan of the urinal. I'm a stall man through and through, there's something about standing in a line urinating with total strangers that seems, well, a little off. And who are these people that try and make conversation while you're urinating? Maybe it's just me, or maybe it's one of the government's many subliminal mind control thingies, having us urinating in unison like cattle - assuming cattle urinate in unison.



Projecting on the Cheap

<http://www20.tomshardware.com/howto/20041113/index.html>

»» There are certain things you need to survive: food, water, shelter and a projector. It comes with the territory, man wasn't meant to be entertained by small radiation-emitting cathode ray tubes (that's TV to the layman). To project is to live, and you wouldn't want to deprive yourself of life, that would be stupid - Townsville stupid. "But they cost so much money", "I can't afford that on my meagre non-pimping salary." How about you stop your whining, because you don't need a degree to make your own projector, just visit this site and follow the easy step-by-step instructions. And yes, I know I was right in assuming you don't have a degree.



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TECHNICS SL-DZ1200 DIRECT-DRIVE DIGITAL TURNTABLE

Some old DJs are kinda like old dogs - no matter what you put in their water, they're still slow as all hell at learning new tricks. They've been in love with their Technics SL-1200s (or similar direct drive decks) for decades and simply haven't been ready to end the relationship.

Now this is despite the insane cost of import records; the limits to the format, including its vulnerability to warping and scratching (of the permanent-damage accidental kind, as well as cue-burn, and heavy-handed wikka wikka carry-on); huge innovations made in CD decks over the last decade or more; and the desktop/laptop DJ software revolution of the last 8 years! Crazy. So why haven't they properly gone digital?

TIME TO GO DIGITAL ALREADY

Because until recently, nothing beat a direct drive vinyl turntable for wild style mixing and scratching. Final Scratch lead the way with its time-coded vinyl that can played on regular decks to manipulate digital audio on a laptop via a special converter. Pioneer's CDJ1000, Numark's CDX and Denon's DNS-1000 CD decks have all delivered various versions of the scratch platter... but it took Technics a little longer to come to the party. And damn it, Technics has finally delivered a worthy successor to its SL1200 Direct-Drive Turntable that combines a feels-like-vinyl setup with CD deck functionality for tricky digital audio manipulation.

The SL-DZ1200 turntable features the 1200's solid vibration-resistant build, an almost full sized (10-inch) platter, and the filter, sample, loop and cue point controls CDJs have been messing with for a decade. Music can be loaded from CD, CD-R/RW or Secure Digital memory card in WAV (CD-standard), MP3 and AAC formats.

Get some hands-on time with the free-wheeling platter and you'll find you can do just about anything that the old analog decks did including spin, scratch, slip, slide and wind down (using the adjustable brake control). You could use it like a CD jog wheel... but it's so much more fun in turntable mode.

You can't drop a needle up,

down and across a groove to do nasty stabs, but that kind of hardware/vinyl abuse wears thin with listeners fairly quickly anyway. Besides, all kinds of much more interesting cuts and drops are easier to pull off when you have four sample pads and four cue point pads to jab at.

Spend some time familiarising yourself with the sample editing function so that you get clean In and Out points and you'll be able to happily loop four samples (to a combined total of 40 seconds) in and out of the mix over the top of whichever track is playing. While these samples will be erased at the end of each session, your cue points won't be. The deck itself can

INFO

RRP: \$2,099

Distributor: Panasonic - www.panasonic.com.au

Media: CD, CD-RW, CD-MP3, SD/MMC

Audio formats: WAV, MP3, AAC

Tempo control: +/-

8%/16%/33%/50% (+ Pitch lock)

- Direct-Drive mechanism
- Scratch table (+270mm platter)
- 4 x cue point pads (+ one touch cue point load)
- 4 x sample pads - 40 seconds total sample time (+sample In/Out point editing)
- Loop pads
- Adjustable brake control
- Forward/Reverse switch (+ Instant Change button)
- 8 x dynamic effects
- Digital out / line out / headphone out
- Rotatable display





store up to 50 sets of 10 cue points, which are memorised and reloaded along with their loop, effects and auto cue

settings each time you insert the original source CD - and you can save even more on an SD card.

The main loop function performs as expected for those 'hang on, while I think of something' moments, and used sparingly, the built-in effects provide some interesting plot-loss moments (our

synapses are yet to recover from one staffer's excessive use of the Auto Pan and Air Hammer FX).

WHAT'S NEXT?

Now, for the next stage - the SL-DZ1200 MKII (or whatever it's going to be called). We'd love to see increased onboard memory, some kind of waveform display (to show breaks and dynamics), a bigger and better display interface (for navigating through CDs filled with a hundred or more mp3 tracks) and maybe a few more in-built effects.

Overall, it's a beautiful evolution for the SL1200 that should lovingly persuade plenty of old vinyl DJs to make the switch to digital.

Stuart Ridley

TECHNICS SH-MZ1200SL DIGITAL MIXER

RRP: \$1299

■ The MZ1200SL mixer is the perfect accompaniment to Technics' new digital decks, and is designed specifically to enable DJs to hook up two 1200 MkIIs and two DZ1200 digital decks. The design is very much in keeping with the DZ1200s with a sleek silver finish and "come hither" look. Or maybe that's just us.

As you'd expect the cross and channel faders are optical and highly accurate. The feel of the unit is rock solid too, with just enough weight to the sliders and knobs. Plus, the MZ1200SL has two digital inputs and a digital out to ensure zero signal degradation. A sweet bit of kit.



MOTOROLA E398

RRP: \$599

The E398 is a new phone from Motorola designed specifically to target the hip-happening-techno-funky-go-getter-yes-yes-y'all youth market. Why they gave it to us to review I have no idea - Wilks and myself are essentially crotchety old men, after all. Oh well, using the E398 did help us cast a fleeting glance at our vanishing youth, for which we shall forever be grateful. It's a pretty cool phone too, sporting all the features modern phone users need (Tri-band, GPRS, Bluetooth, big screen, digital camera, proper headphone jack, Transflash support for extra memory etc) in addition to really running with the whole multimedia angle. One example of which is the twin 16mm 22Khz stereo speakers that sit on

either side of the unit. Combined with a nice deep vibration system you'll get better sound quality out of this than you will out of the average mobile phone. Mp3 support in addition to MIDI also doesn't hurt - as long as the bitrate is reasonable. And then there are the "rhythm lights" which are strips in the same spot as the speakers that flash different colours in response to calls, music and some games. It's a nice touch, although only really useful for finding your phone when it's ringing in the dark. Which happens more often than you'd think.

The screen is big and sharp, weighing in at 176x220 pixels, and with MPEG4 support you get reasonable video playback too. The interface is pretty good and

there are some nice touches like slick little sending and received message animations. Of course the E398 also comes with a camera with a max resolution of 640x480 and flash. Always handy for capturing mashed up luvvedup clubbing antics (see, China's still cool!).

The best part though, is that Motorola haven't sacrificed functionality in their quest to create a hip phone. The E398 actually bears a great resemblance to the Sony Ericsson T610 model, but we much prefer this one. The screen is sharper, there's an extra function button above the five-way stick (which is also less fiddly), the number buttons are bigger and feel better to press, and above all, the OS is easier to use.

Cam Shea



WESTERN DIGITAL RAPTOR 74GB 10,000 RPM SATA HDD

RRP: \$349

Normally we wouldn't touch a HDD tech piece with a ten foot pole. We're not a hard core mag and HDDs are pretty hard core and never really thought of as being that interesting. Our reasons for looking at the Raptor are twofold, firstly it's in our big-arse subscriptions PC so we thought we should let you know what the thing did and secondly, even though this is a hard drive it's just so damn cool. Why is it cool I hear you ask with a dubious lilt to your voice and eyebrow raised to show your suspicion? Simply put, the Raptor is the fastest desktop HDD around that doesn't require you to purchase a prohibitively expensive SCSI card. In short it's perfect for gaming due to a massive decrease in install and load times.

We're not going to pretend that we've put the drive through exhaustive benchmarks and have graphs, pie charts and squiggly

lines to prove it - we tested the most gamer friendly way possible - playing games. Did the drive make a difference? You bet it did. Half-Life 2 took nine minutes to install on our standard 7200 RPM gaming drive and only five on the 10,000 RPM Raptor. Does the difference of four minutes really mean anything in real life? Of course it does - we got to play HL2 four minutes earlier on the WD drive than on our old Seagate. Unfortunately the drive couldn't do anything about the painfully long activation times for the game over Steam. On a more important note the average load time between levels was halved. This, more than anything else makes the Raptor the greatest gaming drive around - there's nothing more frustrating than getting into a game and then being rudely dragged back out of the world by unconscionably long load times.

Daniel Wilks

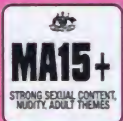


PLAYBOY

THE MANSION™



www.playboythemansion.com



PC CD-ROM



PlayStation 2



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54 Viewtiful Joe 2

Is life still viewtiful?



Review Index

- 54 Viewtiful Joe 2
- 56 Mario Power Tennis
- 58 Shadow Hearts: Covenant
- 60 Phantom Brave
- 62 Katamari Damacy
- 64 Metal Slug 3
- 65 Children of the Nile
- 66 Nexus: The Jupiter Incident
- 68 Shadow of Rome
- 70 Capcom Fighting Jam
- 72 The King of Fighters 2000-2001
- 73 ESPN NFL 2K5
- 74 ESPN NBA 2K5
- 74 Joint Operations: Escalations
- 74 The Chronicles of Riddick: Escape from Butcher Bay
- 76 The Legend of Zelda: The Minish Cap

Reviews



Game Theory

DANIEL STAINES



I've been sitting for a while now trying to think of an appropriate opening for this month's column. It's something of a special occasion, you see, and I wanted to open with something appropriately poignant and meaningful. But to hell with it, it's much easier to just state the facts and get it all out of the way. So here we go: this, ladies and gents, is the

final instalment of Game Theory. From the next issue onwards, this space will be devoted to another column written by somebody who will probably not use words like "mechanics" or "emergence" quite as frequently as I do. Or maybe they will - who knows? At any rate, whatever you read here next month won't be written by me. So there you go.

Oh, and in case you're wondering, the decision to stop Game Theory was entirely my own and completely voluntary. Basically, I've become progressively busier over the past few months and now find that scraping together enough time to think about and write a regular column is not as easy as it once was. So, the only sensible course of action I can see is to give it up before I stop enjoying it and concentrate on my other concerns. And that's about the sum of it. No reader backlash, no falling out with Cam, no drunken fistfight with Wilks... nothing scandalous or juicy at all. It's just time to move on.

However, before I do that, I'd like to be a bit of a wanker and thank everyone who emailed me or joined in on the Game Theory discussion threads on Hyperactive. You guys are the main reason I kept writing the column every month and I have enjoyed the many exchanges we've shared over the past two or so years. In particular, forum regulars such as aubergine, kami and areal deserve big props for their intelligent feedback and ability to consistently discuss game theory in an insightful and entertaining manner. Also, big ups to Eliot and Cam for letting me use a page of their magazine as a soapbox every month. And Amos too - I have to thank Amos. It just wouldn't be Hyper if I didn't.

So, anyway, I think that's just about enough self-indulgent tripe for this month. It's time to pick up my thesaurus (which, ironically, I just misspelled) and go use my big words somewhere else for a while.

See ya round, guys.
daniels@next.com.au

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

0-49

Have you learnt nothing? Stay away from these games dammit!

50-59

A slightly bigger number means a little better. See? Maths is useful!

60-69

Into the realms of mediocrity. These games are just sigh-worthy

70-79

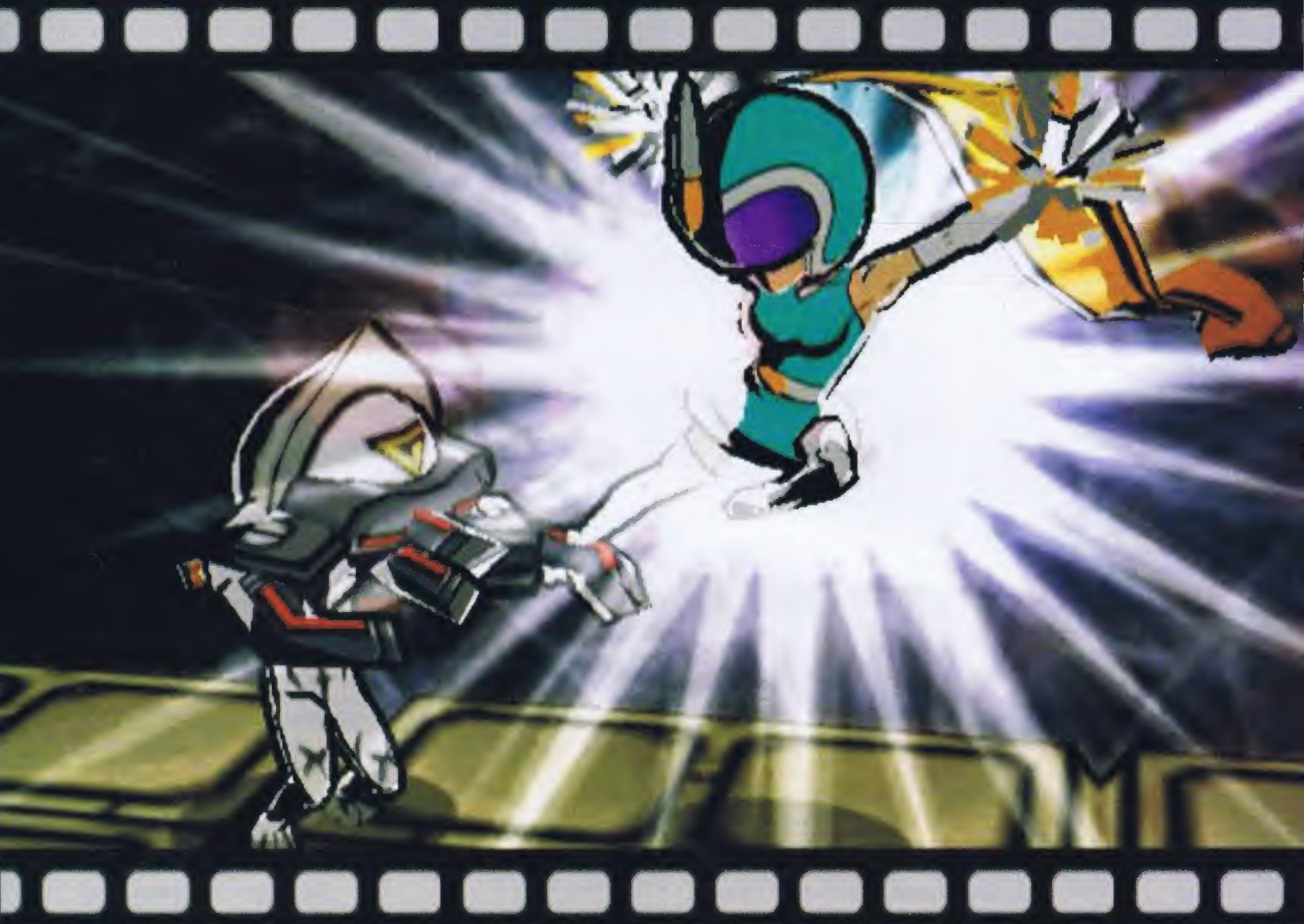
These games have nuggets of gameplay gold, but ya gotta look

80-89

The 1980s were pretty sad, but these 80s are pretty damn good

90+

Knock down anyone who gets in between you and these games



VIEWTIFUL JOE 2

DANIEL WILKS is Viewtiful on the inside

When Viewtiful Joe made its first appearance on the Cube last year it reminded us how cool side scrolling beat 'em ups could be. Joe, an obsessive movie geek (a man after my own heart) was dragged into the world of movies and transformed into a spandex clad superhero in order to rescue his kidnapped girlfriend Sylvia. Combining clever gimmicks, frantic action, great design and devious puzzles, Viewtiful Joe's success saw the game being ported (again with great success) to the PS2. This time

around the game has appeared almost simultaneously on both platforms and delivers more of the same action we've come to expect along with the welcome addition of a second playable character, Joe's now rescued (and rather kick arse) girlfriend, Sylvia. Sucked back into Movie Land again it's up to Joe and Sylvia to find all of the missing Rainbow Oscars and save the day.

RAINBOW PARTY?

The real meat of the first Joe game was the inclusion of the titular hero's spectacular Viewtiful powers which allowed him to slow time, speed up or zoom in to access more spectacular and damaging moves. Aside from combat these powers were also vital to solving the puzzles dotted throughout the 10 or so hour playing time. Fans of the series expecting some new powers for the main character may be a little disappointed to discover that Joe gains no extra abilities but

should be happy with Sylvia and her new ability. A name like "Replay" strongly hints as to what the power does - when activated it replays Sylvia's last attack from three different angles, dishing out some serious damage. Be warned though - any damage accidentally taken during the Replay move will be tripled. After successfully pulling off a Replay move, Sylvia is wreathed in electricity, similar to the way Joe is wreathed in fire after executing a Mach move, allowing her to do more damage to enemies or solve certain environmental puzzles.

Whilst not playable

cooperatively, Viewtiful Joe 2 offers players what they call the "Viewtiful Touch" (now that's a rather suspect name if ever we've heard one), an ability to switch from Joe to Sylvia at any given time. Each of the characters plays very differently making for a nice and varied ride. Unlike Joe who is a strict hand to hand fighter, Sylvia comes armed with a gun



[Simpsons] That "lava" is just Orange-aid



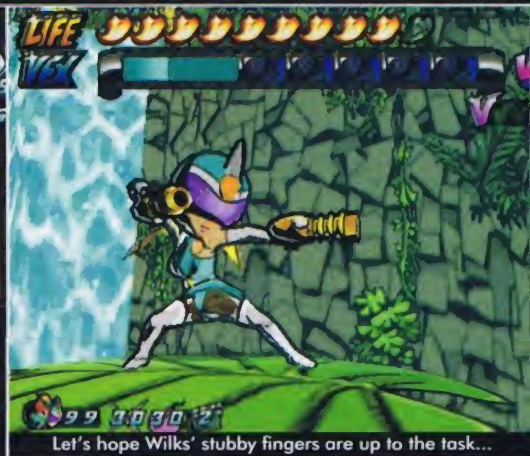
[Ridge Racer Rev] Sparks are flying!



Only fools fall in lava...



Death by pom pom... how embarrassing



Let's hope Wilks' stubby fingers are up to the task...

(hidden in a cheerleading pom-pom) giving her the ability to do ranged attacks, albeit at a slower rate than Joe can throw punches and kicks. Upgrades and new moves can be bought for both characters between levels and include a second gun for Sylvia, effectively doubling her rate of fire and damage potential.

First and foremost a fighting game, Viewtiful Joe 2 also contains a number of rather devious puzzles, some of which will have you enthralled looking for the answer whilst others remain a little obtuse and will be more likely to have you pulling your hair out at the root. The inclusion of the second playable character means that the puzzles this time around can be that little bit more complex - later in the game you will discover puzzles that require not only the

»» Hearing Joe tell Sylvia to "Go get 'em sexy!" never fails to elicit a smile

split second timing of Viewtiful powers but also precision switching between character. This is great in theory but there are few things as frustrating as knowing what you have to do but being unable to do it due to your lack of manual dexterity (stupid stubby fingers).

AN ILLICIT SMILE

Voice acting and soundtrack also remain very similar to the first game but as the old saying goes, "If it ain't broke, don't fix it". The sound effects are wonderfully over the top and Hollywood, and the voice acting is suitably melodramatic and cheesy. If you're anything like us you'll probably find yourself

switching between Joe and Sylvia at random just to hear the little sound grabs when they meet for that brief moment. Hearing Joe tell Sylvia to "Go get 'em sexy!" never fails to elicit a smile. Even better are the sound bites when players pause the game. The first time we heard an exasperated voice moan, "oh, what does she want now?" or "just tell them you're playing a great game" was rather special.

Viewtiful Joe 2 utilises the same unique design and rendering of the original game - cel shaded 3D characters in the foreground against 2D backdrops in a faux-3D corridor. If you haven't played Viewtiful Joe this may sound a little odd but it works brilliantly. This time around the levels are more complex and interesting but disappointingly many of the villains you defeated make a comeback. It's all well and good to tip the hat to fans of the original game but requiring players to fight the same bosses again smacks of laziness in the design department. <<

ISN'T THAT A JAMES BROWN TRACK? As well as a second playable character, Viewtiful Joe 2 features levels in which you drive/pilot/command (whatever) Joe's super powered vehicle the Six Machine. During these levels VJ2 becomes something of a shooter. Depending on who is in command, the vehicle transforms and has access to different powers. With Joe behind the wheel the Six Machine transforms into the Six Dolphin, a sleek little sub with torpedoes and while Sylvia is driving it becomes the Six Drill, capable of boring through stone and shooting explosive barrels. Penis envy? You be the judge.

AVAILABLE ON:
PS2 / XBOX / PC / GCN

DETAILS:

CATEGORY: Action

PLAYERS: 1

DEVELOPER: Capcom

PUBLISHER: THQ

PRICE: STBA

RATING: TBA

AVAILABLE: April 1 2005

HYPER VERDICT:

PLUS: Looks brilliant, second playable character, devious puzzles.

MINUS: Samey.

GRAPHICS SOUND GAMEPLAY
86 84 86

OVERALL
85

A brilliant game but a little too samey.



MARIO POWER TENNIS

STEPHEN FARRELLY thought it was going to be Mario Foxy Boxing

Nintendo's products have a penchant for setting standards, and no standard was set higher for virtual tennis than the N64 classic, *Mario Tennis* (although *Virtua Tennis* on Dreamcast came in pretty darn close). Stylish visuals, fast-paced multiplayer action and second-to-none gameplay made *Mario Tennis* a must-have title for the N64, and in typical Nintendo fashion, the game set a benchmark for all to follow.

Since *Mario Tennis*, the gaming world has seen many a tennis game

come and go, and while excellent games have stood out from the usual tripe (Top Spin anyone?), nothing has managed to pip *Mario Tennis*.

This is the immediate problem with *Mario Power Tennis*; Camelot has tried to change too much of what they got right the first time and in doing so, have turned *Mario Power Tennis* into a sometimes tortuous romp of frustration and cheating. It's still damn fun, very pretty and will fill a void, but in our minds it's a missed opportunity.

A PLUMBER'S LIFE

The first notable thing about *Mario Power Tennis* is the visual upgrade, an aspect that was definitely worth waiting for. A stylish FMV intro plays out the game's very loose plot (yes, tennis needs a story to work in Nintendo's world), and this also sets up the 'fun factor' the game offers, which is one of MPT's most redeeming features. On the court everything looks great with

excellent animation, bright colours and plenty of Nintendo-centric effects keeping things as Mushroom Kingdomy as you'd expect.

Mind you, it's not all sunshine and lollipops; depending on which side of the "deaf/can hear" chasm you stand upon, the soundtrack is sure to grate pretty badly. Voice acting is fairly amusing and fits the fun nature of the game, with Hyper's old buddy Charles Martinet putting in a top effort all round in the game's grunts and moans, but it's difficult to find a balance; without the sickly upbeat selection of tracks playing the sound effects sound really lonely, but with it all on you may go a little mad.

Thankfully the plethora of modes and mini games available goes a long way to redeeming MPT's shortcomings. Indeed, the biggest draw for *Mario Power Tennis* is the amount of options available to you - the game has been moved from a tennis sim to a veritable tennis party game. Aside from standard



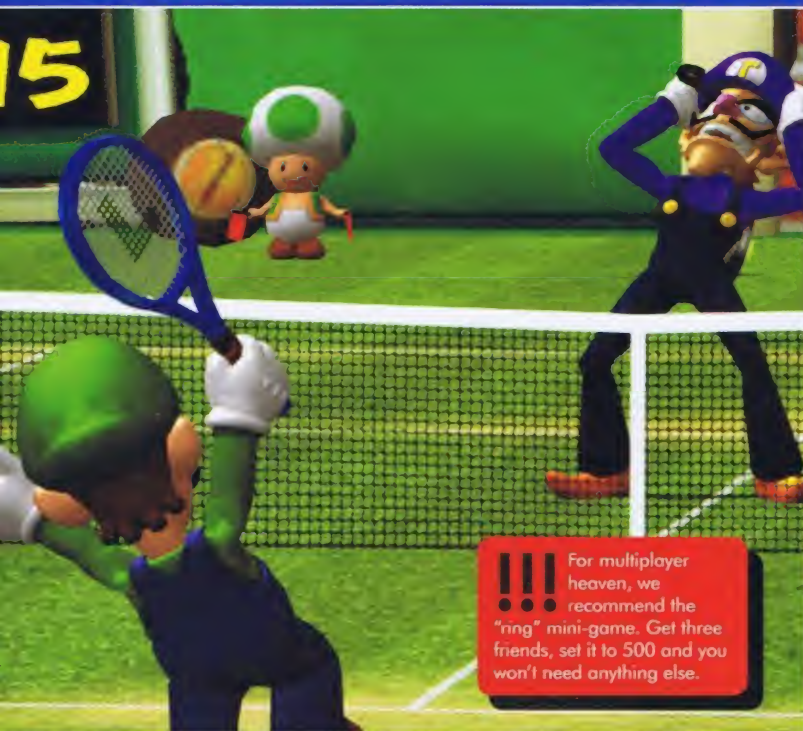
[up] Crouching Mario, Hidden Racquet



[up] TATS Cru are big Mario fans apparently



[up] I wouldn't mind seeing Peach's domes



!!! For multiplayer heaven, we recommend the "ring" mini-game. Get three friends, set it to 500 and you won't need anything else.



(welcome to "obvious caption corner") Mario has crabs



(and again) Wario loves fisting



Somewhere, over the rainbow, Waluigi is high

play modes like Exhibition and Tournament, you can now play a number of Special Games that range from Artist on the Court, where players are hitting paint balls at a character's image on a wall to colour it in, to Tic Tac Glow, where you're hitting balls of water at squares on the court covered with the paint from Super Mario Sunshine. In all there are seven Special Games to initially choose from with one more to unlock, while there's a lot more to unlock in other modes of play. Tournament, for example has you choose from a standard tournament to Gimmick Courts, where you play opponents on courts with a twist. So, the DK court will have crocodiles crawling across the net, and hitting the croc will make it drop into your opponent's side and if the reptile manages to snag the player, they're slowed down considerably. Finishing any of these games unlocks more modes and so forth, which opens up the replay factor ten-fold and definitely puts MPT on the list of must have drinki... err, party ; games (this is Nintendo after all).

Beyond the mini games, Tournament Mode has you going through a ladder of winners until

»» The game has been moved from a tennis sim to a veritable tennis party

you reach and finish the final, and like Mario Kart, you move up to a more difficult level; start at Mushroom Cup, then reach Flower Cup and finally Star Cup. Naturally finishing Star Cup unlocks even more for you to challenge, and so on.

MARIO PARTY WITH TENNIS

Despite its many engaging features, MPT loses out a little bit thanks to some largely pointless inclusions. Chief among these is the new Power Shot that can be performed at varying intervals of duelling, and said power move can really get you out of a pickle (allowing you to get to a ball almost anywhere on the court), which is always nice for you, until your opponent manages to return an otherwise winning shot which makes for some very frustrating gameplay.

It's arguable the addition of this feature adds a new level of strategy to the game, but in the end, it's nothing more than a superfluous input in gameplay where you fire off your power shot, and your opponent immediately

does theirs. All it really serves to do is interrupt the flow of play thanks to ridiculously lengthy animations every time the move is performed.

It's interesting that one small addition can have us so up in arms, but it really is just a pointless addition that we've long since turned off. Nintendo are generally good at playtesting all their mechanics, so it's surprising that they've let through such a gimmicky inclusion. Same goes for many of the mini-games. Some are great, but some are just there to make up the numbers and you'll be unlikely to ever play them more than once.

With all that being said, there is still a lot to love about this update, but for all the party elements, you're going to have the most fun with the mechanics set to "vanilla". We really think that Nintendo would have been better served keeping the game mechanics simple and combining the awesome multiplayer mechanics with a thorough single player RPG approach, a la Mario Tennis on Game Boy. <<

AVAILABLE ON:

PS2 / XBOX / PC / GCN

DETAILS:

CATEGORY: Party Game

PLAYERS: 1-4

DEVELOPER: Nintendo

PUBLISHER: Camelot

PRICE: \$99.95

RATING: G8+

AVAILABLE: TBA

HYPER VERDICT:

PLUS: Tons of mini games, great visuals, excellent physics.

MINUS: Annoying soundtrack, Power Shot.





SHADOW HEARTS: Covenant

DANIEL WILKS is Mr. Journalist

When I say that Shadow Hearts: Covenant is one of the gayest games ever to be released you should not attempt to take offence. I'm not using gay in the colloquial sense (meaning bad); I mean gay as in homosexual. If you're homophobic then put the magazine down and get a life, otherwise continue reading. You shouldn't be disappointed because Shadow Hearts: Covenant is one of the best Japanese RPGs to be released in the last few years, albeit a rather camp one. Unlike the majority of Japanese RPG sequels, Covenant takes place a few months after the events of the first game and continues the rather epic story. Don't worry if you haven't played the first game, the plot is dense enough that even veterans of the series will get lost and all of the vital prequel information is played out in some great cutscenes.

RATHER CAMP YOU SAY?

Set in the early stages of WWI, Shadow Hearts: Covenant tells

the story of eight strange (and rather fruity) characters banding together to defeat an ancient order of religious zealots bent on doing something (presumably quite bad), lead by the likes of Grigori Rasputin and a sexy, disheveled (and rather camp) young priest. The setting may ostensibly be WWI but aside from the opening cutscene you'll barely realise as the game veers towards Final Fantasy-ish steampunk populated with all manner of strange beasts (most of which are taken from real world mythology), evil (and very camp) villains and massive world ending plots invariably involving things man was not meant to know(tm).

The story might not be any more compelling than any of the Final Fantasy series but where Shadow Hearts: Covenant really shines is in the characters, monster design and genius combat/skill system. Although players can only control up to four characters at a time

there are actually eight characters that will join your party and add their unique (and often quite camp) skills to the mix. The mix, though quite stereotypical on the surface is really quite eclectic.

The initial character is Karen Koenig, the daughter of a fallen German Aristocrat clad in anachronistically slutty skin tight micro-dresses who learns special sword skills from loose pages of a German opera. Yuri, also known as Godslayer (insert metal guitar riff here) is a sullen Japanese/Russian lad with the ability to transform into the form of demons he has killed and trapped in his soul. He also has a penchant for telling everyone, friend and foe alike to "bite me". Joachim (an office favourite), is a professional wrestler/superhero/vampire/camp muscleboy who wields a large heavy object (ranging from a frozen tuna to a miniaturized Nautilus exercise machine), can change into



[above] Welcome to the stage of history



[above] There's still the roach problem

an invisible form, bat form and butterfly masked, gay superhero form at random and speaks in stentorian tones reminiscent of golden age comics. Gepetto, the puppeteer is a crotchety old wizard with an alarmingly young looking girl puppet he uses as a weapon and dresses up in different alarmingly



!!! If you have a specific save game from the Japanese special edition of Shadow Hearts you can unlock Gepetto's puppet's special outfit based on "The Emperor's New Clothes". A naked pre-teen combat puppet - creepy.



Bullenfogel

Malkie - why oh why couldn't I caption that pic on the left?



It's heaps more interesting, not to mention fruity, than these...



Aqua Edge

I stand corrected. This pic is practically an orchard

slutty outfits to gain special attacks, earning him the office nickname of the "action pedophile". Blanca, a wolf gets pissed off when people call him by the wrong name, sharpens his teeth with sandpaper, fights other wolves to prove he is the strongest, speaks like a Corey (Feldman or Haim, take your pick) when in conversation with other animals and is searching for his long lost daddy. Lucia, a part time exotic dancer and full time bimbo wields the devastating powers of aromatherapy and tarot and doesn't understand sexual entendre. Anastasia Romanov, the daughter of Russian nobility is a uppity little brat armed with a camera, combat Faberge egg and enjoys beating up Joachim. Finally there's Kurando Inugami, a polite and softly spoken Samurai who, in amongst the other characters is a true fish out of water.

»» The characters are the true narrative strength of Shadow Hearts

SPEEDO CLAD

It may seem like a lot of page space to dedicate to the characters but they are the true narrative strength of Shadow Hearts: Covenant. Listening to them react to situations is compelling, if not hilarious. The jokes fly thick and fast, as does the innuendo. If you think the main characters are quirky you should see the villains which include a bondage mistress, giant speedo clad Indian professional wrestler with protruding gut, giant pink pussy cat and more.

The other main strength of the game is the incredible, yet simple real-time combat and skill mechanic. Although the interface is

turn-based and highly reminiscent of Final Fantasy, Covenant uses an "action ring" to activate all skills and attacks. Each of the character has a unique ring with a number of strike zones on it depending on the skill or attack as well as how the ring has been modified with items. A pointer spins around the ring and the player has to hit all of the strike zones to affect the attack/skill. Hitting special strike areas will give critical effects. It takes a while to get used to but soon you'll wonder how you'll ever play a standard turn based game again. The other great feature of combat is the ability to combo - players can move next to each other triggering combo moves that increase the amount of damage done with each successive hit. If four character successfully execute a combo the final character can pull off a massive combo magic effect for huge damage, just the thing for beating the frequent (and huge) bosses. <<

MUSCLEBOYS Much of the humour in Covenant is sexual in nature but also quite subtle. Not so in the case of two shopkeepers that follow the characters all around the world. The two blatantly limp-wristed brothers are caricatures of caricatures, fawning over pretty dresses, chatting up the male members of the party, wiggling their French arses into the camera and swapping dresses with the old man Gepetto for trading cards featuring naked bodybuilders with names like Mr. Samurai and Mr. Detective.

AVAILABLE ON:
PS2 / XBOX / PC / GCN

DETAILS:

CATEGORY: RPG

PLAYERS: 1

DEVELOPER: Aruze

PUBLISHER: Midway

PRICE: STBA

RATING: TBA

AVAILABLE: TBA

HYPER VERDICT:

PLUS: Great characters, funny, brilliant combat.

MINUS: Labyrinthine story.

GRAPHICS SOUND GAMEPLAY
86 89 92

OVERALL
88

The most strangely Japanese RPG ever!



PHANTOM BRAVE

CAM SHEA is a Harried Editor

It's official: Nippon Ichi are one of the most underrated development studios out there. After the superb *Disgaea* and *La Pucelle Tactics*, *Phantom Brave* has arrived to blow the cobwebs out of the turn-based strategy genre. It's a breath of fresh air, and yet another game that's destined to eat up vast tracts of your free time.

HERE COME THE OWL NINJAS

The star of *Phantom Brave* is 13 year old Marona, an orphan who lost her parents in a deadly battle 8 years earlier. Like her parents, Marona is a Chroma, which means she can see, create and command phantoms. As a result, she's feared by the local townspeople and lives a largely solitary life on Phantom Isle. Despite this, Marona is kind hearted and optimistic, and spends most of her time with her mentor and protector Ash, a phantom trapped between life and death who was killed in the same battle as her parents and

has sworn to take care of her.

As a freelance monster killer for hire, much of the early going in *Phantom Brave* sees Marona traveling from island to island doing jobs for people. The difficulty ramps up gradually, which is definitely a good thing because there's an awful lot to learn. This thing is deep baby.

Your home base in the game is Phantom Isle. It's where you gather your resources and prepare for battle. You're allowed 50 items on Phantom Isle, whether they be phantoms, weapons or objects (which are also weapons, but we'll get to that). Go over that number and you'll need to put characters and items into storage.

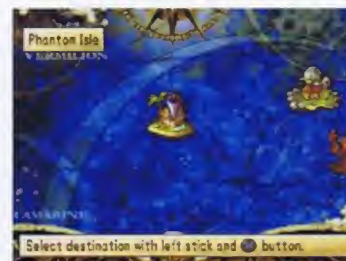
It's on Phantom Isle that you can put together your party. Marona is able to create as many phantoms as you can afford/store, although you'll only have a few basic classes to choose from at first, such as Merchant, Healer, Fighter etc. As you progress and beat new enemies

you'll unlock new classes to create, which range from Fusionists and Grannies to Archers and Owl Ninjas.

In order for phantoms to fight, Marona must summon them into battle by confining them into an object. Thus, all sorts of ordinary objects on the battlefield become vehicles for corporealising your party. As soon as you get to the battle screen you'll be sweeping the cursor over everything to see how that object's stats will effect/suit various phantoms. Rocks and stone pillars for instance, will boost attack and defense but lower speed, so they're ideal for fighters. A flower or shrub on the other hand will boost intelligence and resistance to magic, so would be ideal for a spellcasting character. Not only can each object can be used for confining phantoms, they can also be picked up and used as weapons, although you character's stats will be effected differently if you Equip as opposed to Confine. Equipping



[above] Old people always waffle on



[below] That's one word for it...





!!! We'll have a full review of La Pucelle soon. In fact, Wilks is playing it with a big grin on his face right now...

A little slippery
A little bouncy



He's an Ichiban Boshi fighter! Yum!

Marona Marona, why ya buggin'?

She's a little young to have jugs isn't she?

an object will also bring with it a set of relevant moves. Best of all, in addition to being able to buy and equip weapons on Phantom Isle to bring into battle, it will often work in the other direction, bringing an object you've equipped during the battle back to Phantom Isle. So once that flower's back at Phantom Isle, you can assign it to someone and start leveling it up!

Once confined, each phantom only has five turns in battle before losing its solidity and returning to the ether. You can confine as many times as you like per battle, but each phantom can only be used once, and a maximum of 16 characters are allowed per battle - and this includes Marona and equipped items.

UBER FLOWER POWER

As you'd expect, gaining experience points in battle will level up your phantoms, but that's only the tip of the iceberg.

There are seven types of skills (physical attacks, vital attacks, elemental magic, physical magic, space and time attacks, stat enhancers and healing moves) which all use different types of Skill Points, and each phantom has different

➤➤ **Once confined, each phantom only has five turns before losing its solidity**

rankings in each category. Thus, it's imperative for you to equip characters with weapons/objects that have moves that cater to the phantom's strengths. You get experience for using skills, so the more you use a skill the higher its level becomes. Also, the higher your ranking for a skill the faster you'll gain exp, so if you have level F in a skill there's not much point equipping a weapon with moves in that skill.

The more you use weapons in battle the more mana you harvest from them. Talk to the blacksmith back on Phantom Isle and you'll be able to use that mana to strengthen your weapons, either by leveling them up or buying new moves. You can also use a Fusionist to combine weapons allowing you to use their cumulative mana to upgrade equipment ability, equipment efficiency or once again purchase new moves. Thus, you can incorporate moves from entirely different skills onto a weapon. Say you have a character with grade A physical attacks and grade B in

physical magic. A sword will cater to utilising your physical attacks, but you may want to fuse it with a weed or some other type of plant in order to purchase a physical magic move for the weapon. The Fusionist can also combine phantoms, using much the same system.

The currency of Phantom Brave is Bor. You can use this to heal characters outside of battle (via a Healer), purchase weapons and items (via a Merchant), create new phantoms (via Marona) and even create random dungeons (via a Monk). The importance of a Monk in your party can't be overstated - creating and fighting through random dungeons is the fastest way to gain experience for characters and weapons. It also introduces you to new creatures, battle settings (such as slippery ground and bouncy ground) and parameters.

Phew! 1000 words and all of them about the mechanics. Suffice to say, Phantom Brave is a game that will consume you. Pure gameplay gold. <<<

AVAILABLE ON:
PS2 / XBOX / PC / GCN

DETAILS:
CATEGORY: RPG
PLAYERS: 1
DEVELOPER: Nippon Ichi
PUBLISHER: THQ
PRICE: STBA
RATING: TBA
AVAILABLE: February 26

HYPER VERDICT:
PLUS: Incredibly deep and interesting mechanics.
MINUS: Slow cutscenes, non-existent animations.

GRAPHICS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY
60	69	90
OVERALL		
89		
It may look old school, but PB is inventive and rewarding.		



KATAMARI DAMACY (IMPORT REVIEW)

Na Na Na Na Na Na Na Na Na Katamari **DANIELCY!**

“What the hell is wrong with Japanese people” is a term thrown around with gay abandon in the Hyper offices, usually for good reason such as the predominance of tentacle on orifice action in their animation or the fact that they still willingly allow Bryce to reside in their country. Katamari Damacy is not a game that makes us wonder that eternal question. Quite the opposite in fact - it is a game so good, so original and so brutally charming that it makes us feel bad about all of the bad things we’ve said about the land of the rising sun in the past (with the exception of the aforementioned Bryce living arrangements).

THEY EVEN SOLD HIM A PSP!

Things are not all smooth sailing for the Prince, a miniscule green alien with rather blank features and a head like a cigar butt placed horizontally on his neck. It transpires that the King of All

Cosmos, a gigantic fop with a ruffled collar, protruding nose and strangely cylindrical head got a little tipsy one night and managed to smash all of the stars in the sky. Being the abusive and emotionally distant parental unit that he is, the King of All Cosmos denies any responsibility and charges his diminutive son with replacing all of the stars by sending him to Earth to roll stuff up in a ball. Yeah, we know, on paper it sounds a little stupid but the plot doesn’t matter a jot - it’s the action that counts.

Everything in Katamari Damacy revolves (pun not intended) around rolling over stuff with the Katamari (which roughly translates to mean “bunch of souls” according to the official site) - if the ball is big enough it will pick up the object and add it to the mass of the ball, steadily increasing its size and allowing it to pick up larger objects. So far so good. It may sound a little simple but when you

add a size goal and a time limit you have a maddeningly addictive puzzle game in which the player has to work out what to pick up first to increase size to pick up the larger objects to reach the size limit before time runs out. Starting on a tabletop with a tiny Katamari the Prince must pick up thumbtacks, mahjong tiles and other small objects to become large enough to roll off the table and start picking up the crap that litters the floor.

The sense of scale in Katamari Damacy is something that must be looked upon with a reverential sense of awe, preferably with your mouth open in a semi-comedic “O” of surprise. It’s that good. Starting off on the tabletop the Prince and his proto-star comprised of things rolled up into a ball look miniscule. Everything in the surrounding area dwarfs you - the table itself is a continent, the family are like the titans of Greek mythology striding majestically (or goofy



[above] Rollin’ rollin’ rollin’...



[above] Though the streams are swollen





as the case may be) across the landscape, too large to pay any attention to something so small and inconsequential. After you reach a certain size threshold, however the screen will blur a little, the camera will pull out and you can see the table is just a table and you can start exploring the rest of the house, chased by gigantic mice and a enormous house cat. Another threshold and camera change and you'll be the one chasing down the mice to add to your ever growing ball of star matter. And so on and so forth until your ball is big enough to leave the house and start rampaging across the city picking up people who get too close and then picking up cars and trees and buildings, eventually getting big

BALL OF LOVE Katamari Damacy has one of the greatest game soundtracks in recent years, if not the best ever. The greatness of the soundtrack is hard to describe but it comprises around 10 tracks of different musical genres ranging from swing through to electronica, with each song somehow dealing with the central conceit of Katamari Damacy - rolling stuff into a ball. It's a work of semi demented genius that ties in perfectly with the charming visual style and simple sound effects. There's just something special about hearing a swing song about rolling someone up into a ball of love whilst chasing a horde of screaming schoolgirls with a ball the size of a small truck. Trust me.

» A benchmark achievement as far as design and gameplay are concerned

enough towards the end of the game to pick up the island the house you started in was situated upon. It's an incredible achievement and destined to go down in videogame history as one of those benchmark achievements as far as design and gameplay are concerned.

HUGGY BEAR

Aside from the straightforward size based levels, Damacy also features levels in which the player must pick up a certain thing to create a constellation. Cancer, for example requires the player to pick up as many crabs

as they can in the time limit, whereas creating Ursa Major requires the player to pick up the largest bear they can, a remarkably difficult task (even without a time limit) when you consider the fact that the level is filled with all manner of bears ranging from tiny teddy-bears that you can accidentally pick up without seeing them through to a giant grizzly the size of a building. Unfortunately for all the greatness in the gameplay any gamer worth their salt will be able to complete the single player game in six or less hours and the multiplayer is too

simple and repetitive to really keep your interest. That said, there is so much replay value in Katamari Damacy that you'll be going back to it time and time again just to chase around some helpless people and have a giggle - if you have an NTSC PS2 and import a copy that is. <<



AVAILABLE ON:
PS2 / XBOX / PC / GCM

DETAILS:

CATEGORY: WTHIWWJP

PLAYERS: 1-2

DEVELOPER: Namco

PUBLISHER: Namco

PRICE: N/A

RATING: N/A

AVAILABLE: Never

HYPER VERDICT:

PLUS: Best. Soundtrack. Ever. Maddeningly addictive,

MINUS: Too short, never coming out here.

GRAPHICS SOUND GAMEPLAY

91 96 91

OVERALL

93

We've fallen in love...





METAL SLUG 3

JOHN DEWHURST believes in the righteousness of 2D

While realistic war shooters are getting closer and closer to some of the cruel realities of modern combat, the natural parody lives in games like Metal Slug. Starring cigar chomping bad lieutenants with names like Chip and Dirk, Metal Slug is the cartoon styled, side-scrolling war piss-take featuring an ever more absurd array of foes.

NAZI-ZOMBIE-TERRORIST ALIENS ATTACK!!

Ignore for a moment the quite un-P.C. (that's politically incorrect) racial stereotypes: camel-riding arabs in the desert, chubby Nazi storm troopers and the fearless but under-resourced Pacific War Japanese soldiers. How about poisonous sea creatures, the undead, yetis and the undead? The novelty value of the pick-ups (fruit, food, love letters), special weapons (a chimp with a baretta, a storm cloud, a satellite weapons system) and the cheeky humour set this game apart.

This is a faithful transplanting of the arcade favourite to the PS2 and Xbox, with a smattering of extras. This means you've got one bloody hard game on your hands. Not quite at the level of Super Ghouls n Ghosts (surely the hardest game ever) but still, if you don't know the game backwards, you'll lose a shitload of lives in ever more frustrating succession. The game has excellent pacing and while hard, is never actually impossible. This is a worthy test of twitch expertise.

But for all that, it's over pretty quick. After you've continued 50-odd times, the big alien will be dead and order restored. There are multiple paths through Metal Slug 3, as well as many different vehicles to commandeer, but I can't imagine playing it through more than a dozen times - not a great shelf life. The options allow you to select a mission to begin from, so obviously the immediacy of returning to a favourite part is being catered for. Nostalgia

is a fickle niche, however, so a whole new mission would have been nice...

A little discouraging are the extras, comprising a new multiplayer mode. Fat Island is where you can duke it out two player style. It's a single screen where you race around trying to eat as much as possible while shooting your opponent. It's not bad, but also not very good and certainly not equal to the two player arcade mode. Just on an aesthetic note, the menus aren't integrated very well - they're downright clunky. It's sad that this game is so clearly a port. It should have been nestled into its new home with a bit more care.

Even so, Metal Slug 3 is still a strong arcade game that maintains its appeal on PS2. Without the monetary restrictions of paying for extra credits, the cruel difficulty is a little less rewarding and the game quite honestly feels a little short. But for the arcade aficionado, this is one to get for the stylish artwork and almost peerless action alone. <<

AVAILABLE ON:
PS2 / XBOX / PC / GCN

DETAILS:

CATEGORY: Arcade Shooter
PLAYERS: 1-2
DEVELOPER: SNK Playmore
PUBLISHER: THQ
PRICE: \$49.95
RATING: MA15+
AVAILABLE: Now

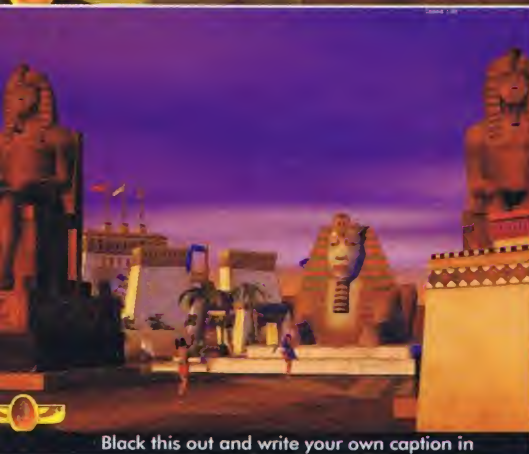
HYPER VERDICT:

PLUS: Great weapons, great enemies - it's rad.
MINUS: Light on extras, fairly short in this format.

GRAPHICS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY
80	75	75
OVERALL		
76		
Excellent arcade action with a moderate lifespan.		



■■■■ COTN has a very robust camera system that allows you to follow citizens (up close) as they go about their daily activities.



Black this out and write your own caption in



The first Stairmaster wasn't exactly portable



There's nothing like a grand erection to impress people

CHILDREN OF THE NILE

KOSTA ANDREADIS is a child of two nerds

There's a theory going around that aliens (those from outer space not Mexico) built the Great Pyramids of Ancient Egypt. It's clear that this theory is ludicrous, and *Children of the Nile* (COTN) can demonstrate this quite convincingly as a few solid hours with this title can turn anyone into a scholar of Egyptian culture (or something close to, like an undergraduate). This interesting simulation/strategy hybrid from the makers of *Pharaoh* lets you create and plan your very own Egyptian city where you're at the whim of your citizens and their approval for both your leadership and their living conditions.

A PHARAOH TO REMEMBER

On the surface *Children of the Nile* looks a lot like the countless other strategy sim titles on the market, from *Settlers* to *Empire Earth* (COTN uses its engine) to the classic *Civilization*. But COTN takes quite a different approach to the genre in

that you do not have direct control over your citizens and city - you merely act as the leader, planner and ruler. In the end it's your citizens that act as the primary resource as they do all the work for you, from farmers to priests, soldiers and noble men, each citizen in your city goes about their life. The objective is to keep order and balance in the hope that you may one day be remembered as a great ruler, and to do that that you'll need a tomb, a big one. There's definitely ambition in the game's design and the individual AI of each inhabitant within your city is quite something to behold, as they go about their daily lives - shopping, collecting taxes, tending to crops, gathering resources. And so in order to keep inhabitants happy and let your city flourish you'll need to ensure all their needs are met, which in turn will gain you prestige points allowing for more lavish expansions like the monumental task of constructing a Pyramid.

There are quite a lot of aspects involved in creating a grand civilisation, from planning to diplomacy, and it almost becomes a necessity to play through the various tutorials. The tutorials provide all the information and guidance needed to create a well balanced city so once they've been completed the main campaigns feel more like design experiments, as more often than not it's the same number of structures and services needed to succeed. And so the end result doesn't quite match up to the ambition presented in the game's design and initial promise; there's definitely a lot of fun to be had but nowhere near enough room for experimentation. The AI is also little buggy, certain citizens seem to hold grudges no matter how hard you try to please them. Gripes aside, this is still a title that sim and strategy fans should check out, if simply to give kudos to developer Tilted Mill's ambitious step in a new direction for the genre. <<

AVAILABLE ON:
PS2 / XBOX / PC / GCN

DETAILS:
CATEGORY: Simulation
PLAYERS: 1
DEVELOPER: Tilted Mill Entertainment
PUBLISHER: THQ
PRICE: \$79.95
RATING: G
AVAILABLE: Now

HYPER VERDICT:
PLUS: Great engine, interesting take on genre.
MINUS: A little too predetermined.

GRAPHICS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY
88	75	80
OVERALL		
78		
So close to greatness, but not enough freedom.		



NEXUS: The Jupiter Incident

KOSTA ANDREADIS thinks Melbourne is the nexus of the Universe

There's not a lot of science fiction that takes place on planet Earth - been there, done that my man. Space is where it's at. You may have heard of it; uncharted star systems, nebula, planets, and asteroid fields - the place is happenin' and has been for quite a while now. It's a great place to travel to (if you can cough up the scratch that is) and there's plenty to do, from shopping to site seeing. And if you get bored you can always become a Starfleet commander and battle multiple Alien races with unknown technology in an epic struggle to save the human race, as seen in Nexus: The Jupiter Incident. This is one title that should be at the top of any science fiction nerd's wish list for many reasons. Apart from being an exceptionally detailed strategy title and the necessary inclusion of huge hulking star ships with firepower that would make the US government invest even more money into the

military, Nexus: The Jupiter Incident also features the most impressive recreation of space and space travel that the genre has ever seen.

SPACE, IT GOES ON FOREVER

In the 23rd century of human civilisation, space travel and colonisation is a corporate controlled environment where disputes are resolved in much the same way as back when we were cave dwellers. Instead of the traditional rock to head, however, it's the more civilised approach of high powered hull penetrating beam weaponry. In the game players take the role of Marcus Cromwell, a seasoned but relatively young commander and his ship the Stiletto. Under the guidance of one of the mega corporations you embark on a mission that will take you the far edge of the known solar system where a new and exciting technological discovery has been made. Needless to say it's not of

human origin, and before long you'll be commanding entire fleets through worm holes, battling alien races and highly sophisticated AI in an epic story that is quite complex in nature, thanks in part to the great cinematic and briefing sequences. So it's a space-based real-time strategy game then? Well, yes and no. The similarities to titles like Homeworld are purely cosmetic, as Nexus features a heavy focus on micromanaging your fleet and its actions. Missions themselves are primarily battle focussed and so equipping your fleet with the right weaponry and knowing when and how to use them is the key.

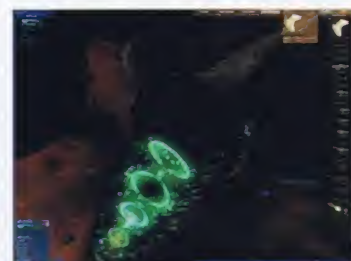
Apart from the fact that this is a very slow burning strategy game, the first thing you'll notice is the exceptional presentation and graphics engine. We're talking an accurate recreation of our solar system where planetary movement is based on real physics and where you can zoom in on planets, their



[up] Hyper HQ is the nexus of the universe



[above] Off to wage war on space nazis





!!! Nexus. The Jupiter Incident was once known as Imperium Galactica 3. Umm, yeah.



The ship's called "Phallicus Maximus"



(it would be remiss of us to exclude it) Is that Uranus?



On the good ship lollipop, it's a sweet trip to the candy shop

moons and asteroid fields. Playing the game is no different, you can select friendly and enemy craft and view them from any angle and distance as they travel and engage in conflict via a user interface that is both natural and intuitive. It truly is impressive and when you couple this with the remarkable particle and lighting system the whole package becomes extremely believable, so much so that the in-game visuals rival those that can be seen in CGI sequences from TV shows like Star Trek and Babylon 5. And you'd be hard pressed to find explosions as big and impressive as the ones on offer here.

URANUS!

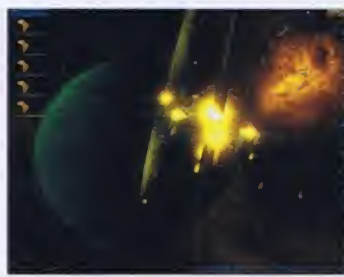
The brief description of the graphics engine may lead you to believe that this is an action packed game - it isn't. Nexus is a strategy game through and through, from pressing the space bar to pause proceedings and select commands to staring at the screen for minutes at a time as you travel to nearby space stations. Thankfully, it eases you in quite nicely with the opening missions acting much like training scenarios, but ones that help forward the plot.

»» You'll be faced with micromanaging almost every aspect of your fleet

However, much like the plot as your situation gets more complicated so does the gameplay, almost overwhelmingly so, as you'll be faced with micromanaging almost every aspect of your fleet with numerous choices at your disposal, from targeting specific weapon and defence systems to boarding enemy craft with a team of commandoes. The rest of your time will be spent watching the consequences of your choices in the slow, drawn out battles. In their quest for perfection, you may get the feeling developers Mithis may have gone one step too far when you're left watching one of your star ships trying to manoeuvre around an enemy for almost a minute trying to find the best firing angle and distance. And so at times the strong narrative and impeccable presentation can be somewhat hampered by slow nature of the gameplay, something the genre itself is well known for.

Ultimately, if you're a science fiction fan this is worth picking up for the presentation alone, even if it

does feature a slight overuse of the now too common light bloom effect. Everything from the menus, star maps, story, audio and visuals are of the highest order and the gameplay, although frustrating at times, is one of the better examples the genre has seen in recent years. So overall, the good far outweighs the bad with Nexus, and the epic single player campaign paves the way for the solid multiplayer component which, although surprisingly engaging, is strictly for those that have invested quite a few hours into the single player component - beginners will be wise to keep well clear. <<



[up] "That's no moon... oh wait, yes it is"

AVAILABLE ON:
PS2 / XBOX / PC / GCN

DETAILS:

CATEGORY: RTS
PLAYERS: 1-Multi
DEVELOPER: Mithis
PUBLISHER: Vivendi Universal
PRICE: \$89.95
RATING: G8+
AVAILABLE: Now

HYPER VERDICT:

PLUS: Amazing presentation and graphics engine, intuitive interface.
MINUS: Overly slow at times, a lot of time spent watching and not playing.

GRAPHICS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY
94	88	82
OVERALL		
84		
She may be slow, but she's got it where it counts.		



SHADOW OF ROME

DANIEL WILKS is a General who became a gladiator who became overweight

Shadow of Rome is an odd game for Capcom to make. The company, best known for survival horror games, stylistic action games such as the Onimusha, Viewtiful Joe and the Devil May Cry series, as well as the Street Fighter franchise have gone out on a limb and created an action/stealth game set during the height of the Roman Empire. Has this change of pace been worth the effort? Well, kind of. Shadow of Rome is one of those frustrating games that shows moments of greatness before sliding back to mediocrity. Like the little girl who

had a little curl, when Shadow of Rome is good, it's very very good but when it's bad it's horrid.

DEATH SENTENCES

Good points first. Rather bizarrely for a Capcom action game, Shadow of Rome sports a rather cool story central to the action and based around real world events. It's 44 B.C. and the glorious reign of Caesar has come to an untimely and bloody end under the knives of assassins. The Senate quickly accuses and convicts an innocent and good man, Uesnius, of the crime and sentences him to death. Unfortunately for the corrupt men in power there are two people who have other ideas. Agrippa, the son of Uesnius, obviously doesn't want to see his father dead but his rescue plan is a difficult one - becoming the most revered gladiator in all of Rome, the man given the honour of executing the supposed assassin of Caesar. Octavius, Agrippa's

friend, takes his own route to the truth, infiltrating the senate through stealth and disguise to find those responsible for the murder and consequent frameup.

Gladiator missions with Agrippa are pure action. Utilising a simple two button and block combat system the gladiator must hew his way through numerous foes in the arena, simultaneously trying to stay alive and impress the audience. Although the combat system may be simple in theory it offers a good deal of depth, allowing the player to fight with a number of weapons (including severed limbs, much to the delight of the crowd), steal weapons from opponents, dismember combatants, throw weapons, dodge, roll, shoulder charge and the like. Although it is possible to win fights through simple attack-attack-block routines, doing so does not impress the punters watching



[above] The very first Heimlich maneuver



[up] It's got nothing on Foxy Boxing

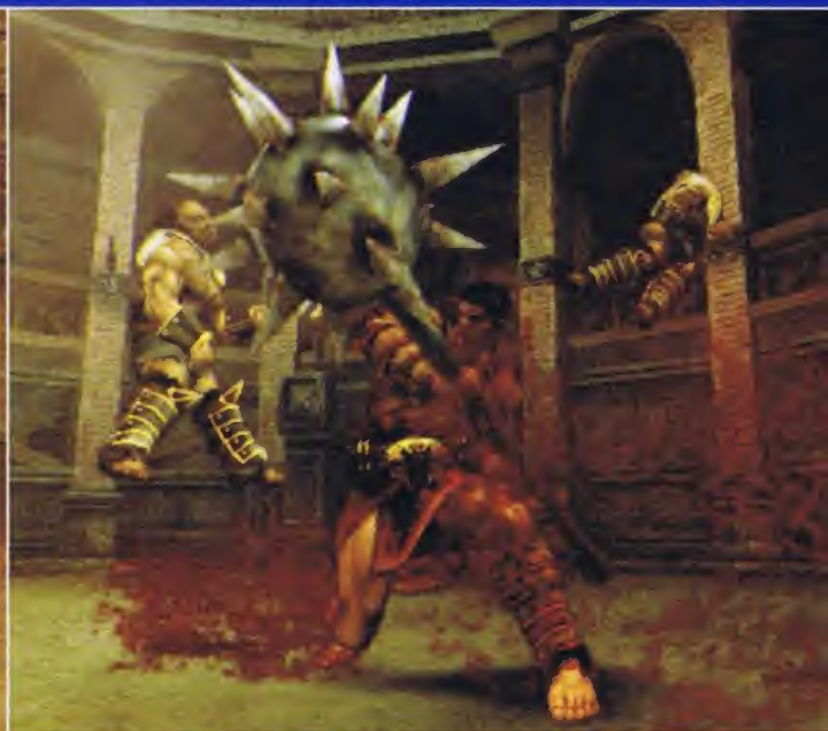


[up] So, do you like Gladiator movies?





!!! Gladiator games are all well and good but what we want is a Capcom produced 3D fighter a-la Soul Calibur based around gladiatorial combat.



Beefcake. BEEFCAKE!



Quit scratching your axehole and get back in there!



A funny thing happened on the way to the Forum...

from the stands and impress them you must if you want to win.

The Romans may have invented the aqueduct but it seems as though they had substandard blacksmiths as all of the weapons in the game seem to have a lifespan of about 20 seconds, quickly breaking under the constant grind of hack and slash. It is possible for Agrippa to steal weapons from opponents or pick them up from off the ground but the supply can quickly run short. To ensure a steady supply of weapons, meat (for healing) and other expendable items Agrippa must play to the crowd - decapitate an enemy and they may cheer for more, make another run in fear and piss his pants and you could have them by the short and curlies. Once the crowd is firmly on your side (as shown by a handy crowd reaction-ometer) it's a simple matter of hitting the requisite button to

»» The stealth action serves as a great counterpoint to the brutal combat

pose for the assembled bloodthirsty crowd and send them over the edge.

SOLIDUS SNAKE

Whereas Agrippa is a hulking powerhouse, Octavius is a different creature altogether, a slight pretty-boy more accustomed to using his head than his fists. Instead of killing the hell out of anything that gets in your way, Octavius uses stealth and guile to save the day. Octavius is armed with quick wits rather than muscles and weapons and utilises them to steal outfits from downed foes allowing him to sneak around unnoticed, to hide in shadows, use single hit stealth knockouts and kills as well as solve puzzles. Shadow of Rome really shines when it gets to

the meat of Octavius' missions. The stealth action is well implemented and serves as a great counterpoint to the brutal and bloody Agrippa missions. Unfortunately one of the major frustrations of the game appears during those self same missions - save points, or more precisely, the infrequent appearance thereof. Due to the wussy nature of Octavius he dies at the drop of a hat (or other sharp object) so you'll often find yourself having to do the same task multiple times before you can move on. This is very frustrating during stealth missions as sometimes it's impossible to know what to do without approaching with trial and error. It's not so bad if you've only got to backtrack a few minutes but after playing through a mission for 20 minutes and painstakingly sneaking by numerous Roman soldiers only to be spotted by someone who doesn't appear to be able to see you in the first place but does due to some dodgy clipping and AI will have you pulling your hair out in frustration. <<

BLOODY BEAUTIFUL Shadow of Rome is another one of those games that makes you do a double take simply because you can't believe the visuals come from the PS2. Without a doubt the game looks very impressive with some excellent character models and animations. Combat is where the engine really shines with all manner of bloody deaths. The character deformation is simple but works a treat, especially with the added bonus of being able to beat up opponents with the severed limbs of fallen gladiators.

AVAILABLE ON:
PS2 / XBOX / PC / GCN

DETAILS:

CATEGORY: Action

PLAYERS: 1

DEVELOPER: Capcom

PUBLISHER: THQ

PRICE: \$TBA

RATING: TBA

AVAILABLE: 18 Feb 2005

HYPER VERDICT:

PLUS: Fun combat, looks great, nice stealth.

MINUS: Frustrating saves, some AI issues, a little simple.

GRAPHICS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY
89	83	79
OVERALL		
77		
A strange move for Capcom that almost triumphs.		



CAPCOM FIGHTING JAM

Mix **MALCOLM CAMPBELL** up and you get LL Capcom Bell Mam

It pains me to put that Overall score down there, it really does. Usually when games are reviewed, the score we put in the Gameplay column will to a large extent determine the overall mark, and rightly so - if a game is fun enough, everything else should be secondary. But occasionally a game comes along where a solid, even fun, playing experience can't override the fact that the game is not the complete package. Capcom Fighting Jam is such a game and as a fan of fighting games and in particular, all things Capcomesque, it's hard not to feel just a little bit exploited by the whole venture.

GEEXPLOITATION

Capcom realise there is a relatively small but highly dedicated fan-base for their 2D fighting games and have been making recent titles with these fans firmly in mind. Cross-over games like Capcom Vs. SNK have kept the

ball rolling, the bucks flowing and the fans relatively happy, but it has become increasingly apparent that the amount of effort Capcom wish to put into new titles is as minimal as possible. For all the hoopla that surrounded the 15th anniversary of Street Fighter, the game that was released to commemorate the occasion, Street Fighter Hyper Fighting, was distinctly undercooked.

Hopes that Capcom might make good and release a new Street Fighter game or an 'ultimate compilation' were resurrected with the announcement of Capcom Fighting Jam. The basic premise of CFJ is a good one. Acknowledging its rich fighting game history, Capcom has gathered characters from five different games for an almighty slugfest. From Street Fighter II, we have Ryu, Guile, Zangief and Bison. From the Alpha series there's Guy, Sakura, Rose and Karin. Representing SF3 are Chun Li, Alex, Urien and

Yun. Things get interesting with the inclusion of Darkstalkers favourites Dimitri, Felicia, Jedah and Anakaris, and just plain weird with four characters from Red Earth - Hauzer, Leo, Hydron and Kenji. Players choose any two of these for their team, one primary and one backup, with the option given to switch to the backup in the second round. No tag-team soup for you. The real trick is that each of the games represented has various special techniques to utilise. For example, the SF3 characters can parry; Alpha has its counters and custom combos, Darkstalkers their chain combos, and so on. To their credit, Capcom has managed to retain a semblance of balance amid the potential chaos, and CFJ is most interesting when the strengths and weaknesses of the various games are exploited. There is nothing revolutionary about it, but from a pure gameplay perspective, CFJ is good solid fun.

So what's the beef?



[up] Daigo would have parried that...



[up] Honda as cheersquad? You're kidding





MORE FOOD METAPHORS

The main problem with CJF is there is very little meat on the bone. As an arcade port, there are only two game modes - arcade and versus. A basic survival or story mode would have been nice for the home console versions, but not to worry, most people play these games against friends anyway. It's hard to be forgiving when it comes to the character roster, however. For a game purporting to be a compilation of Capcom's fighting history, four characters from five games just isn't enough. The notable absentee list is lengthy - Ken, Sagat, Blanka, Adon, Cammy, Ibuki, Makoto, Dudley, Morrigan, Talbain, Lei-Lei, Donovan amongst many others. Oh sorry, they're not strictly absent. They're just playing cameos in the backgrounds. Useful, that. To make matters worse, the

Sprites have been recycled yet again creating a cut-and-paste effect

four Red Earth characters can be largely written off as novelty/joke inclusions, particularly the screen-filling dinosaur, Hauzer. The one truly new character, Ingrid, hardly excites either. Supposedly a 900-year-old deity, she looks like a Japanese schoolgirl and bears more than passing resemblance to Athena from the King of Fighters series. Two bosses and a bunch of original theme tunes are unlockable (woobloody-hoo), but seriously, if there was one game that needed an image gallery, this was it. But no, not even a single Bengus sketch to unlock.

The most obvious problem with CJF is the graphics. Sprites have been recycled yet again creating a cut-and-paste effect that looks

amateurish, or worse, lazy. But judging by the staff listing when the credits roll, where sound effects, score and ending artwork staff vastly outnumber those listed for graphics and programming, it would seem Capcom no longer has the means to fix this problem. So instead of blaming the three poor artists that worked on CFJ, maybe it's just better to grumble about their boss's reluctance to support a game that doesn't have ten billion polygons.

It's possible that CFJ will be the last new 2D fighting game to come out of the venerable Japanese giant. Most of the staff that have worked on the Street Fighter and Darkstalker games have left the company and Capcom are understandably focused on other titles now. If it is their last, Capcom Fighting Jam is a disappointing end to a great tradition. It's still very playable (and fans like me will undoubtedly play it out of pure dedication) but pales in comparison to the games it pays tribute to. Heartbreaking, really. <<

2D ART LOVE The endings for each character have been drawn by the very talented people at Udon Comics. They're huge fans of the Capcom fighting games and it shows - the fight scenes are full of lovingly rendered signature moves, poses and taunts and the way they've managed to weave a cohesive story out of the snippets of information presented in the games is commendable. The Street Fighter series is currently thirteen issues strong and the Darstalkers series just starting, with a Rival Schools series coming soon.

AVAILABLE ON:
PS2 / XBOX / PC / GCN

DETAILS:

CATEGORY: 2D fighting game
PLAYERS: 1-2
DEVELOPER: Capcom
PUBLISHER: Capcom
PRICE: STBA
RATING: TBA
AVAILABLE: 18 Feb 2005

HYPER VERDICT:

PLUS: Solid, balanced gameplay.
MINUS: Recycled graphics, too few characters, and game modes. Obvious lack of effort.

GRAPHICS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY
70	70	85
OVERALL		
68		
Even die-hard Capcom fans will find this underwhelming.		



!!! For the nostalgic amongst you the intro sequences from every KOF game, from '94 to '99 can be unlocked by accomplishing various feats of skill during the game. Thankfully none of these unlockables require you to play "party" mode...



Like Mighty Ducks, Kof is big on the Flying V



She must totally work out



The ghost of David Wildgoose gets paanched!

KING OF FIGHTERS: 2000-2001

MAURICE BRANSCOMBE gets excited and dusts off his (arcade) stick

Australia is invariably the last on a long list of release dates for any game you care to mention, but this sad state of affairs gets a whole lot sadder if you happen to be a 2D fighting enthusiast. Quite unforgivably this particular game, King of Fighters 2000-2001, had been available in the US for almost an entire year, and in Japan even longer, before anyone saw fit to give it a local release, and even a year ago these games weren't exactly debutants. Now, after years of waiting Aussie gamers finally have a KOF to call their own, not only that but there's two of them...

THE KING OF WRITERS 2005

The Kof series is one of the very few remaining 2D fighting franchises, and this compilation of the 2000 and 2001 editions certainly demonstrate why the series has been so enduring. The fighters are charismatic, and the gameplay mechanics are easy enough to pick up and play but

take much practice to master - an elusive but essential quality for any great fighting game. The graphics certainly aren't cutting edge but for what they are, low-resolution and two-dimensional, they are amongst the finest examples of their genre. For this PS2/Xbox version 2001 has also received a number of graphical improvements, including higher resolution backgrounds that are more colourful and animated than the originals'. The improvements are minor but add extra value to the package, and for the purists the original arcade backgrounds are secreted away inside the game waiting to be unlocked.

The differences between these two games are limited to subtle tweaks from the previous year. The backgrounds are all new, but far too many of the sprites are reused from year to year, and the only outwardly noticeable gameplay changes are the use of "strikers", while mandatory

in 2000, are optional in 2001.

Other features include the typical three-on-three arcade mode complete with the usual convoluted KOF storylines, and of course the indispensable multiplayer modes. One other curiosity is the "party mode". Unfortunately, this mode is anything but a party. Instead it's a 200-plus battle survival mode where your opponents don't even move or attempt to hit you until you're about 100 battles into the "party", making the real test of skill not survival but enduring the sheer boredom of beating one lifeless opponent after another. Regrettably the majority of the game's secret strikers and backgrounds have to be unlocked in the party mode, somewhat blighting the game's otherwise superb design.

Blights aside, this compilation offers amazing value with two classic fighting games for one very low price. Anyone who enjoys the odd bout of back alley pixel-on-pixel action should pick it up. <<

AVAILABLE ON:
PS2 / XBOX / PC / GCN

DETAILS:

CATEGORY: 2D Fighting
PLAYERS: 1-2
DEVELOPER: SNK Playmore
PUBLISHER: Ignition Entertainment
PRICE: \$49.95
RATING: M15+
AVAILABLE: Now

HYPER VERDICT:

PLUS: Two fantastic 2D fighters in one, bountiful unlockables...

MINUS: ...that are mostly tedious to unlock. Still those same old sprites.

GRAPHICS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY
79	72	87
OVERALL		
84		
Superb value for 2D fighting fans.		



!!! ESPN is a more accurate simulation of the NFL than Madden. Making cheap long passes won't get you far...



JOESHMOE'S SCRIB

WAYNE

Joe Shmoe's certainly popular...

Helmet cam - an innovation from the porn industry

Butters' beloved Buccaneers get walloped again...

ESPN NFL 2K5

ANDREW BULMER helps keep the 80s alive with NFL shoulder pads

In essence, you can consider ESPN NFL to be a combination of two licensees, the NFL and its Players Association, and ESPN - well for now at least. A recently inked 5-year exclusivity deal with EA means that this will be the last ESPN NFL game for some time. Beyond lamentations of an EA monopoly, this is a downright shame as the ESPN/NFL partnership has given Sega the ability to blend gameplay elements with an expansive news network of styled broadcasts.

VIP POSSE LET'S KICK IT

While Madden features local and national newspapers to keep you up-to-date with the latest NFL news (sans all the DUI charges that pop up during a real NFL season of course), ESPN NFL has Chris Berman wrapping up and predicting all the action. On the field we have a game with all the bells and whistles of franchise, practice and tournament modes as well as extensive player

management options for when you tackle season modes. The innovation is the VIP system, an AI controlled option that profiles the way you play, which you can hand to a friend to practice against "you" in preparation for the ultimate showdown.

Other options include The Crib, where you can view trophies and awards won and view unlocked movies. Also, being the 25th anniversary of ESPN there is a mode to replay some of the greatest moments in NFL history including the Ice Bowl and Heidi Bowl (which is ironic for two reasons if you think about it).

ESPN NFL takes an "if it ain't broke don't fix it" approach with no major changes in gameplay, simply a balancing of difficulty, eliminating how easy it was to run the ball in 2k4. You also have right thumbstick options for the QB whilst in the pocket that allows you to duck and weave away from would be tacklers, and the player presentation

retains its high standard with great motion capture for tackles, catches and general movement.

Rounding out the ESPN package is great and extremely accurate commentary that shows incredible detail in verbally recreating plays, although admittedly the voices are more grating than the smoothness of Al Michaels and under no circumstances can Suzy Kolber be an entertaining commentator (unless there's a drunk Joe Nameth telling her how beautiful she is). ESPN matches Madden in every facet of gameplay with some great fantasy options that let you do a quick, arcade style, fantasy draft for a single game, and the ESPN angle and presentation will push it across the line for some NFL fans, while Madden players may balk at the unfamiliar interface and differing, and initially confusing playbooks.

AVAILABLE ON:
PS2 / XBOX / PC / GCN

DETAILS:

- CATEGORY:** Sports
- PLAYERS:** 1-4
- DEVELOPER:** Visual Concepts
- PUBLISHER:** Take 2 Interactive
- PRICE:** \$49.95
- RATING:** G8+
- AVAILABLE:** Now

HYPER VERDICT:

PLUS: Great gameplay, smooth animations, bonus features.

MINUS: My personal vendetta against the annoyance of Suzy Kolber

GRAPHICS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY
92	86	94
OVERALL		
91		
You can see why EA wanted to eliminate the competition.		





JOINT OPERATIONS: Escalation

There is no doubt that Joint Ops, yet another realistic war themed multiplayer FPS, is a beautiful beast featuring some great character models, huge and detailed maps and epic combat, but it made nary a blip on the radar. Why is this? Unfortunately for Novalogic the game featured massive server problems at release - not the best thing when your game is all about the online experience. Thankfully many of the server issues have been rectified in time for the release of the first expansion pack.

The choice of content for the expansion is a little strange but manages to add to the overall structure of the game instead of nerfing it. Aside from a slew of new maps, Escalation adds two new heavy vehicles, the Heavy Tank and Assault Helicopter but wisely stops them from becoming side destroying super weapons by putting the emphasis on teamwork. Both vehicles require a separate driver/pilot and gunner making soloing a thing of the past. Unfortunately the expansion also adds motorcycles to the mix with less successful results. The two wheeled vehicles spawn regularly around the map and are the fastest vehicle in game. These vehicles essentially do away with the teamwork necessitated by the other vehicles, as it is far easier and faster to simply jump on a bike and zip across the map solo. Oh well, Joint Ops is still one of the most underrated online shooters out there, and well worth a go.

Frank Dry

AVAILABLE ON:
PS2 / XBOX / PC / GCN

DETAILS:
CATEGORY: FPS / **PLAYERS:** 1-150 /
DEVELOPER: Novalogic / **PUBLISHER:** Vivendi /
PRICE: \$49.95 / **RATING:** M15+ / **AVAILABLE:** Now

GRAPHICS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY	OVERALL
83	81	80	80



[above] We're the Hells Satans out of Bakerfield

THE CHRONICLES OF RIDDICK: Escape From Butcher Bay

You know Escape from Butcher Bay, right? It's that really good Xbox game that didn't sell as well as it should've because everybody had already spent their money pre-ordering Halo 2. Anyway, it's out on PC now and - provided you've got the necessary hardware - I think you should go out and buy it. Yes, even if you've played the Xbox version already. Yes, even if you hate Vin Diesel. Yes, even if your friend told you the movie sucks.

You see, Escape from Butcher Bay is one of the best action games ever made. It's intensely atmospheric, expertly paced, beautifully presented and - best of all - it makes you feel like a total goddamn badass the whole time you're playing it. Riddick's the kind of protagonist that you emulate while controlling: he's a callous and impossibly self-confident monster, and that's what you become while "being" him in the game. After a few hours spent in Riddick's company, you'll be shiving screws like a true sociopath - and enjoying every single minute of it.

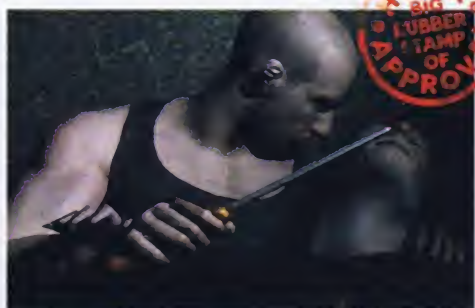
The PC version comes with two features the Xbox original didn't have: an extra level and a developer's commentary mode. The extra level slots seamlessly into the middle of the game and is good - if forgettable - fun. The developer's commentary mode is a great idea and should prove entertaining for anyone with even the slightest interest in game development. The only problem is that the Starbreeze guys are perhaps a little too eager to point out their game's shortcomings. But hey, I guess someone had to, right?

Daniel Staines

AVAILABLE ON:
PS2 / XBOX / PC / GCN

DETAILS:
CATEGORY: Action / **PLAYERS:** 1
DEVELOPER: Starbreeze Studios / **PUBLISHER:** Vivendi
PRICE: \$69.95 / **RATING:** MA15+ / **AVAILABLE:** Now

GRAPHICS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY	OVERALL
85	90	89	90



[above] That's not a shiv, THIS is a shiv

ESPN NBA 2K5

EA's Live series of games are all well and good, but NBA 2K5 is what we call value for money. For a \$50 outlay you can get your hands on a game that can go head to head with just about any other basketball title out there. Once again Visual Concepts have done a great job bringing both the razzle dazzle and the gritty workhorse mentality needed for success into videogame form.

Players familiar with previous installments will definitely get off on the added depth to post play, which means you'll always have a host of options to choose from, whether it be backing into a defender, spinning into the lane or simply stepping back to make room for a jump shot. Adding to this depth are the playbooks for each team. Assign the plays you want to the D pad and changing things up on the fly is now a reality. Unfortunately, the balance between offensive moves and defensive is once again pretty uneven - this is a game for people who want to go to the hoop, not play tight D.

Throw in Franchise mode (now called "The Association"), an improved and online 24/7 mode (where you create a baller, train him up then go up against NBA players in mini-games), a host of "Street" variants of the game to enjoy, and some great visuals and you've got a winner for \$50 in our books.

Frank Dry

AVAILABLE ON:
PS2 / XBOX / PC / GCN

DETAILS:
CATEGORY: B-ball / **PLAYERS:** 1-4
DEVELOPER: Visual Concepts / **PUBLISHER:** Take-2
PRICE: \$49.95 / **RATING:** TBC / **AVAILABLE:** Now

GRAPHICS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY	OVERALL
88	80	83	82



[in a game store] 2K5 is notable for its freaky cover

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THE LEGEND OF ZELDA: THE MINISH CAP

▶▶ Nintendo passed the reins of the handheld Zelda games to Capcom some time ago. First there was the *The Oracles of Ages* and *The Oracle of Seasons* for Game Boy Color, then came *A Link to the Past*: *The Four Swords*. The *Minish Cap* is Capcom's fourth Link title. The venerable Shigeru Miyamoto has said that each new Zelda game presents a new interpretation of Hyrule. So it's with a little surprise (and some relief) that *The Minish Cap* makes so many changes to the Zelda we know.

Some things will never change though, here is farm boy Link, who must rescue the fair Princess Zelda from the clutches of Ganon... wait no! Our villain this time is the mysterious sorcerer Vatti. Link must reach the Light Force (NOT the Tri Force) before his enemy, in order to save Hyrule from a terrible fate. Of course, Link's not alone. His sidekick is Ezlo, who rides on Link's head. In fact, Ezlo IS the Minish Cap. It is Ezlo that transforms Link from human size to miniature size as he frolics around the kingdom of Hyrule.

THE LITTLE PEOPLE

Somehow the people of Hyrule are completely oblivious to the presence of tiny fairies living among them. Talk about blind, they're everywhere! One of the joys of *The Minish Cap* is spying tiny doorways and towns, and discovering how to

get there. Link can't become big or small at will, he must find certain magical stumps (or pots or mounds) that allow him to change. This becomes part of the problem solving as you wonder: "How can I get THERE?" Capcom has integrated the tiny world so well that transforming between them is even part of some boss battles. Really though, it's in the dungeons and town puzzles that the miniature aspects function best.

Normal sized Hyrule has whole towns to meet and interact with, so also the Picori have tiny communities filled with characters. It's good luck to talk to people (don't you know?), and one of the ways Capcom has made socialising essential is with the Kinstones. These are lucky charms, split into two halves. Many figures in the game are willing to join Kinstones. If you have one that matches then something lucky happens! It might be a chest appearing somewhere in the world or a hazard is cleared for Link. There are many different colours of Kinstone and different patterns - the trick is finding one to match your friend's Kinstone. By using Kinstones, weapons are upgraded, rupees become abundant and progress through the game continues.

One smart move by Capcom was in augmenting the weaponry of Link. Trusty sword, bombs, arrows and boomerang remain, and their mechanics are pretty much identical



[above] Some things never change



[above] "Where's my sword, Stupid?"

to past games. What's nice is the inclusion of new weapons - Badger Claws allow Link to dig through soft ground, the Gust Jar allows him to suck enemies to him and spit them out as projectiles. There's even an Ocarina of Wind! The function of the weapons is so central to solving puzzles, particularly in the segmented dungeons, that having some unfamiliar tools is a breath of fresh air. This minor change reinvigorates Link's adventures, giving seasoned Zelda fans something new to play with and discover.

This is the basic Zelda formula with some new mythology, new big/small flavour and new weaponry. It's definitely closer to the *Wind Waker* cutesy style than the darkness of *The Ocarina of Time*, with enough new elements to satisfy. Bravo Nintendo and Capcom.

John Dewhurst

AVAILABLE ON:

GBA / DS / PSP / N-GAGE

DETAILS:

CATEGORY: RPG

PLAYERS: 1

DEVELOPER: Capcom

PUBLISHER: Nintendo

PRICE: STBA

RATING: G

AVAILABLE: TBA (aside from import)

GRAPHICS SOUND GAMEPLAY

85 84 92

OVERALL

90



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[Below] Tim bought his Nissan shirt in Photoshop land. You can get anything there...



The Fast and the Furious

— RAW THRILLS

When your surname is a petrochemical, it is inevitable or even natural that you will be cast in the lead role in a movie about petrol heads. Weirder still, the surname of the actor playing opposite Vin Diesel in 2001's *The Fast and the Furious*, is 'Walker', which as we know, is actually the direct opposite to the word driver. Things like this are subtle reminders that although this film seems labotomously shallow on the surface, beneath the fluoro green hood lays the actual meaning of life itself. That's right - boil it down, and life is all about hot chix and gear stix (a.k.a ecstacy and adrenaline).

THE MAXIMUM TUNE

Being based on an already successful movie does have its advantages. The two most popular racing games (Wangan *Midnight Maximum Tune* and *Initial D*) are both based on successful manga/anime. So following this logic, if you bring out a street racing game that already has a fan base because of a movie, the game is bound to be a success as well... riight? Unfortunately, *FF* and *Initial D* are worlds apart when it comes to sheer high frame rate

200kph+ driving intensity. *FF*'s racing physics, although acceptable, never make you feel like you're ever going really too fast for the track and it's rare that you ever have to brake. Accidents (e.g. the excellent *Burnout 3: Takedown*) are virtually non-existent and careering into a wall will just slow you down briefly.

However, where this game does succeed is that it is very arcadey and although all 12 race tracks (ranging in difficulty) are located in the U.S, the real location may as well be fantasy land. For example, on the San Francisco track, we accidentally missed a turn off on a raised freeway and found ourselves doing jumps across rooftops and through buildings until we came across the race track again. Often the parameters of the track are not well defined, though this is where you should take racing lines at every given opportunity.

Taking a leaf from Wangan and *Initial D* is the option to upgrade any one of the 17 vehicles. A different system is employed via typing in a pin number instead of having to purchase a propriety 'memory' card. This enables you to keep records

of the numerous customisations (ground FX, spoiler, decals, engine, tire and Nitrous) as well as the money you have earned (via doing stunts and winning races) that enables you to unlock hidden cars. It's best to get the Nitrous (N2O) first as you will often find yourself neck and neck at the finish line and that extra boost should be enough to give you an all important win.

The cool thing about this game is that it does have 'continue' or that you win a free game for coming first - a feature which is sadly lacking in Wangan. This enables you to start at an easy track and work your way through all of the other tracks fairly easily, which in other words, is good value for money.

The game studio Raw Thrills may not have been around for very long, though the head game designer Eugene Jarvis has. He originally created the legendary *Defender* back in 1980, and though this game probably won't reach the popularity of either *Defender* or Wangan, the game definitely does deserve a test drive.

7.5/10

[Below] Screenshots actually used to be taken like this. Nowadays we just draw them in Photoshop



Actual in game interrogation




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A VIDEOGAME ODYSSEY

MAURICE BRANSCOMBE.



Creator of the world's first console, and the true father of the videogame industry, Ralph H. Baer, sat down with Hyper to discuss his brilliant career, the Magnavox Odyssey and three decades of video gaming history in the making...

Today it seems glaringly obvious; videogames were positively destined to exist. The interaction between console and television is so symbiotic these days that few of us can imagine a world without them, and even if we could, we wouldn't want to. Once upon a time however it wasn't so obvious, in fact the very idea of playing interactive games on a television set must have seemed preposterous to most sane-minded people. But not to Ralph Baer. Born in Southwestern Germany in 1922, Ralph immigrated to the United States at the age of sixteen, and later served in the US military during World War II. After the war his career took a turn that would lead him to be the first man in recorded history to conceptualise playing games on a standard consumer television set, and when this idea eventually became a reality he was the one who saw the machine to the market as well. To put it simply, if you've ever played any videogame console (and if you're

reading this magazine, it's safe to assume that you have) then you owe a debt of gratitude to one man for making it all happen, and his name is Ralph H. Baer - the true father of videogames.

THE SECRET BROWN BOX

A bus stop may seem an extraordinary place for the invention of a multi-billion dollar industry to begin, but that's exactly where it all started. On the 31st of August 1966, Ralph H. Baer was on a business trip to New York City as the Chief Engineer and Manager of the Equipment Design Division at a military contracted electronics company named Sanders Associates. While Ralph was waiting at a bus stop for a fellow employee, he was struck with an idea. There were approximately 40 million television sets in America in 1966, and it seemed such a waste that they should only be used to watch standard TV broadcasts. With his extensive knowledge of television

receivers Ralph knew that it was possible to display and control light on a television screen, and that with a little effort an interactive TV game could be possible. From this thought he started to write down what his device would be able to do, and the ways that it would do it.

"I remembered my previous day's train of thought when I sat down in my office the next day, 1st September 1966, and wrote a 4-page Disclosure Document," recalls Ralph. "It lays it all out and, incidentally, now serves as the legal starting point of the industry."

Taking his ideas into his workshop, Ralph recruited a few of his staff to man a secret project, one so secret that even Ralph's employer, Sanders Associates, had no idea that it was taking place under their own noses.

"I ran a large division at Sanders Associates with some 500 engineers, techs and support people," recalls Ralph. "Even back then, my direct labor payroll was about ten million dollars a year, [which would be] about 25 million nowadays. I could easily do some preliminary R&D investigations involving one or two guys on my own hook and subsequently either bury these skunk works projects or get them legitimately funded."

Within a few months of secretive labour Ralph's team had finally

made his vision come true, they had a prototype unit that played games on a television screen. The game was simple, a "fox and hound" game where one player would control their square of light to chase and catch the other player's square. Later, Ralph had a toy rifle hollowed out, turning it into the world's first videogame light gun, which could be used to shoot squares of light on the television screen.

"I did not show anything to management until we had both light gun games and the chase games working and they were reasonably interesting to play," continues Ralph. "Of course, I took a lot of flak for doing this at Sanders, a large defense industry company then, later a Lockheed and now a BAE company... The derision and the snide comments did not come to a resounding stop until a few years later when the patent and know-how licenses started to bring in tens of millions of dollars."

Ralph took the flak, but it didn't diminish his enthusiasm for his creation. Within two years he and his team, which included at various times Bill Harrison and Bill Rusch, had turned their technical research into the world's first ever complete TV games console. The prototype console was a rectangular box and was covered entirely in brown wood-patterned laminate,



which quickly earned it the rather appropriate nickname: "the Brown Box". The Brown Box had many of the features we associate with the consoles of today; it included two control units for competitive play and of course a light gun. The selection of games had grown to now include volleyball, football, "fox and hound" and a few variations of rifle shooting games, but the true defining moment of the Brown Box was a staggeringly simple, yet undeniably elegant and endlessly amusing game that would, in one form or another, be more instrumental in the success of the videogame business than any other. Ping-pong.

1972: THE ODYSSEY IS BORN

It would take Ralph until July of 1970 to find a buyer for his groundbreaking product, four years after having first conceptualised it. Sanders Associates, being a military company, certainly weren't going to produce a home game system, so Ralph shopped the idea of videogames to the most logical companies to be interested in television gaming, American TV manufacturers. RCA, Zenith, Sylvania, Magnavox and Warwick were all approached, however at first only RCA showed any interest, and after months of negotiations even that deal fell through.

Fatefully, one of the RCA executives was so impressed with the Brown Box that when he was given a job at rival company Magnavox he immediately suggested acquiring Ralph's console.

Two years later in March of 1972, the final design of Ralph Baer's TV games console was unveiled, and now had its official name: the Magnavox Odyssey. The final design of the Odyssey console had only a few of the aesthetic features of the Brown Box prototype, but it certainly established many features that would become standards for every home console to come after it. It had a little wood paneling (was there anything from the 1970s that didn't have wood paneling?), but for the most part the Odyssey was sleek and futuristic, set in brilliantly contrasted black and white plastic, the final result of which looked like it would be more comfortable as a prop in Stanley Kubrick's 2001: A Space Odyssey than sitting in front of your television, and given that the two share a certain

commonality of title, it probably wasn't much of a coincidence either. The machine had interchangeable cartridges for each game, which included the likes of board games, gambling games, volleyball, baseball, and of course, ping-pong.

Instead of colour graphics, the Odyssey came with a number of translucent plastic overlays that stuck to your TV screen, and as it was not quite powerful enough to keep track of player scores, it also came with other accessories such as score tables, playing cards and gambling chips. Despite almost inconceivable marketing blunders on the behalf of Magnavox, whereby they sold the console at the prohibitively expensive \$99 price tag (for 1972, this would have been an incredible amount to pay), the console was only made available through Magnavox dealerships, and in many advertisements the

impression was given that the console would only work with Magnavox TV sets, the Odyssey was still a considerable success.

"A brand new product totally unknown to one and all cannot become as big as one developed after the industry has gone through 4 years of maturation and microprocessors became available." says Ralph, comparing the success of post-Odyssey consoles, such as Atari's VCS 2600, "For what it was, a 1960s design, the Odyssey did extremely well commercially, selling 350,000 systems by 1974 versus zero from anybody else."

"Magnavox also continued as a successful competitor with updated game units until 1976, when they dropped the ball and took another two years to develop Odyssey 2. It never caught up with the Atari 2600 although it did well in South America and Europe."

[The Brown Box]
Back then, every household appliance had wood paneling





[above] The early 70s were a funky time to be a console

Despite the console's relative success however, the greatest returns by far would come later, somewhat reluctantly, from Atari, Coleco, Midway, Mattel, Activision, Nintendo, Data East, Taito and many, many others.

TICKET TO INDEPENDENCE

For more than a decade after the Magnavox Odyssey had left store shelves and faded from consumer's minds, Ralph's Odyssey project was still making Magnavox, and Sanders Associates more money than ever. The securing of a patent on his invention of television gaming meant that anyone else wanting a piece of the videogame pie had to go through Ralph Baer first.

"When Nolan Bushnell [co-founder and then-president of Atari] came along and copied the Odyssey's ping-pong concept and used it to build the Pong arcade game, we settled with him almost on the courthouse steps in Chicago, he became our first licensee."

"It was Magnavox that sued Atari," states Ralph, "Nolan opted out of the suit before we went to court. He signed the first license agreement with Magnavox, paid up 100 thousand dollars, and much more later when international sales entered the picture. Magnavox was our [Sanders Associates] exclusive licensee with rights and duties to sublicense the world and that they did effectively. The returns were shared by Magnavox and Sanders, after the lawyers were paid."

Nolan Bushnell wouldn't be the last, with almost every company in the videogames field paying royalties for the privilege of marketing their own consoles and games. The total sum of which amounted to more than 100 million dollars over a little more than fifteen years. Although Ralph saw little of the actual returns from his work, the success of videogames did give him a new career.

"The money that changed hands in the seventies was my ticket to independence and professional freedom," says Ralph. "It was Sanders' Director of Patents and

myself who serviced the licensees. I also came up with additional technology to support Magnavox, Coleco and others. Therefore, all that money coming into Sanders was directly dependent upon the two of us and we could do no wrong as long as the spigot was open and money kept pouring out of it in substantial quantities, which it did for a long time. That gave me the freedom to shed my division manager's responsibilities at Sanders and become a freelancing research and development manager with a small group whose direction and output was determined by me and me alone. In that capacity, I put the company into several new businesses based on my small group's R&D work. Some of these involved video game technology, such as the weapons simulation and training business which we initiated at Sanders."

The current generations of consoles however no longer have to pay Ralph his dues, with the patents

has always refuted the claims that anyone other than himself is responsible for the creation of the videogames business, and in 1985 he was given the chance to prove it.

"Nintendo was negotiating with Magnavox for a license." Ralph recalls, "Eventually, these long term negotiations broke down. Their high-priced outside New York lawyers persuaded Nintendo management that they could successfully lay a so-called 'inequitable conduct' case on us."

In an effort to persuade the court that Ralph was not in fact the inventor of videogames, and therefore not liable to receive royalties for his patents Nintendo had Willy Higginbotham and Steve Russell carted in to testify. It was clear that both had indeed created interactive computer games before Ralph's 1966 invention, Higginbotham's little-known Tennis for Two in 1958, and Steve Russell's Space War in 1961.



A SECOND ODYSSEY

By 1974 the original Odyssey's steam all but run out, as technically superior competitors including the phenomenally successful Atari Pong units entered the market. Magnavox put up admirable competition with an updated version of their Odyssey in 1975, called the Odyssey 100, and had an even greater console in the works, a programmable console capable of advanced graphics on par with the Atari VCS 2600, titled Odyssey 2. The machine played games, but also had a full keyboard built into it, for typing and educational games.

"I consulted in the beginning of the development when the choice of an Intel chip set was being contemplated." Remembers Ralph, "I also salvaged the O2 program after Magnavox management had cancelled it by intervening and getting it started up again."

The Odyssey 2 was released in 1978, but unfortunately Magnavox's indecision meant that the O2 arrived a year too late, the Atari VCS 2600 had launched in 1977, and was already streets ahead of any of the competition. Regardless Magnavox supported their hardware until the early eighties.

Much of the pioneering work that Ralph Baer accomplished has been obscured by misreporting

ceasing to be legally enforceable in the mid-eighties.

"All patents have long since expired," says Ralph, "US patents lasted up to 17 years, until that was recently changed to 20. All of the relevant patents date back to the early seventies, and the only royalties I am currently still collecting is for a line of 'Talkin' Tools' by toy-maker Hasbro."

PING-PONG, OR PONG?

In the time since the formative years of the videogame industry much of the pioneering work that Ralph Baer accomplished has been obscured by misreporting, and media coverage that Ralph has referred to as little more than "drivel unrelated to reality". As surprising as it may seem, Ralph's contributions to the videogame industry are often attributed to others. Many have reported that Nolan Bushnell started the videogame revolution with his Pong arcade game, some cite Steve Russell's Space War as the originator of the videogames industry, and others still have reported that Willy Higginbotham, a nuclear physicist, started the industry in 1958. Ralph

Higginbotham's game was hardly even a game; it was more of a physics demonstration intended to distract visitors attending open days at his laboratory, and Steve Russell's game was a student project, only playable on a handful of university mainframes throughout the states. Neither were ever meant to be a saleable product, and crucially neither of them were intended for home use. So while Higginbotham and Russell may still be contenders for the crown of 'father of computer games', no one in the court was significantly convinced that either of them had done enough to qualify them as 'the father of home videogames' as well.

"I sat in the back of the court room when they [Higginbotham and Russell] testified and never talked to either of them. They had been paraded into the courtroom by Nintendo in their attempt to discredit our patents... They lost."

"[Afterwards] negotiations between Magnavox and Nintendo resumed and a settlement involving a one-time payment by Nintendo to Magnavox and Sanders was reached a few months later."

Nolan Bushnell's claim to the videogame industry's parentage however was more difficult to discredit.

"[At the time] I did not think of my video game inventions as being in any way more or less important than dozens of other inventions I have come up with and converted into actual, deliverable hardware." says Ralph, "So, when Nolan Bushnell came along and copied the Odyssey's ping-pong concept and used it to build the Pong arcade game... I had no great desire to argue with him when he represented himself as this great inventor, [after all] he has one or two issued patents, I have 150 plus."

Bushnell of course wasn't the inventor of the videogame, although many sources still claim it as such. The truth was that he attended a Magnavox trade show on the 29th of May 1972, and was one of the many visitors who witnessed, and even played the newly unveiled Magnavox Odyssey console. He even signed his name on Magnavox's guest list for the event. Months later he would release his own Pong arcade game, a game that would propel Atari to the unfathomable success it achieved in the late 70s and early 1980s.

"He did begin to tick me off after he started to misrepresent facts during depositions and in court." recalls Ralph. "Atari became a big success in the arcades courtesy of Pong, the Odyssey ping-pong game knock-off, and later via the 2600. Bushnell was clearly successful in perpetuating the myth that it all started with Pong... Atari was a great company, produced terrific games for their time and developed an extremely large following of devotees. They sold and internalized the myth of Nolan's representations of himself as the great inventor."

"To this day, his version of history still circulates through many websites, books and encyclopedias." regrets Ralph. "Lately, both he and Alan Alcorn [the programmer behind Pong] have toned down their rhetoric considerably, especially when holding forth in video game history programs... Nevertheless, a lot of historical garbage still circulates, and I have been around long enough to know that once certain perceptions take root in the public's mind, they become incontrovertible 'facts' no matter how spurious they may be."



THE ODYSSEY CONTINUES

At the age of 82 Ralph Baer shows no signs of slowing down, he still works every day, writing a book, consulting with other inventors and managing his patents, and inventing as always.

"I am the rare guy still working hands-on in my lab for a good part of my time, much as I did 30 years ago," he says, "This time round I'm building functional replicas of the Brown Box as well as of early and more complex TV game systems which my tech, Bill Harrison, and I developed at Sanders Associates in the sixties. The Brown Box replicas are destined for display at major museums throughout the world. The complete line of our 1960s developmental, and functional units which I am building and which is almost done, constitutes a display for traveling road shows and special hands-on exhibits at science museums."

Today however, Ralph Baer admits to having little more than a passing interest in the current videogame industry, and these days the only games he has time to play regularly are the ones he builds himself.

"At 82 years of age, other things obviously take priority" confesses Baer, "the only games I play are the ping-pong, hand ball, volley ball and gun games which I must play in order to check out replicas

of the Brown Box after I build them for the next major venue like the Smithsonian, the Japanese National Science Museum, and the German Heinz Nixdorf Museum."

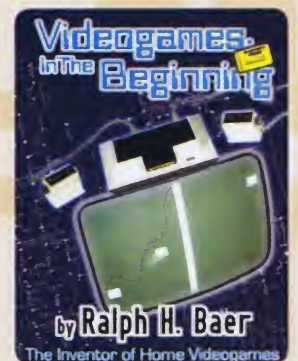
The growing interest in the history of the videogame industry, as well as the still persisting misreports of the earliest days have prompted Ralph to play a more active role in getting his story out there.

"Videogames had really not changed the last 25 years of my life except for the past few years... It was only the relatively recent but stupendous rise of the videogame business from the ashes of the early eighties that focused people's attention on the history of the industry and thrust me into the limelight. That made me conscious of the fact that I had a legacy to live up to. I got more involved with classic games activities including writing my book 'Videogames: In the Beginning' which will be in print in a couple of months."

"It's been a long trek," says Ralph of his career in videogames, "and now that my book has been put to bed, that trek has come to an end."

Without the extraordinary efforts of Ralph H. Baer, more than three decades worth of spectacular video gaming memories would have undoubtedly been significantly less spectacular. For that Ralph, Hyper thanks you. <<

[left] Without this man, we'd be out of a job



VIDEOGAMES: IN THE BEGINNING

One project that has been taking a considerable amount of Ralph Baer's time over the past couple of years is the writing of his book; Videogames: In the Beginning. Part biography, and part history of the videogames industry. Ralph hopes that the publishing of his book will finally clear up any misconceptions about the origins of videogames.

"My main objective with the book is to create a comprehensive account of how the idea for playing games on a home TV set originated and how it turned into a product that started the industry." Says Ralph. "The book even contains enough technical detail in the appendices to allow replication of the hardware!"

Any videogame enthusiasts interested in the true origins of videogames, or anyone wanting to try their hand at building a replica of the first ever console will be able to pick the book up very soon through Rolenta Press.


winwinwin

Win an Alien Vs. Predator Snowboard valued at \$1000!

>> It may be the tail end of summer where you are, but here at Mount Hyper, the snow season is just kicking off. No, we haven't relocated to Canada, we're just hyped about this competition. To help promote the imminent release of Alien Vs. Predator on DVD, our good friends at Fox Home Entertainment have given us a sweet (and very limited edition) AVP snowboard to give away to one lucky reader. But that's not all! We also have ten copies of the DVD for ten runners up. Cool huh?

Not only is the prize momentous, but so too is the occasion. After all, how often do the classic versus questions get answered? We may never know whether Superman is stronger than Wonder Woman, or whether Aquaman is more redundant than the Chlorophyll Kid, but thanks to this film, we can now finally answer the age old question: "Who would win in a fight - Aliens, Predators or a bunch of scientists with guns?"

There simply isn't anything cooler than a film with both these iconic properties, and you'd be crazy not to check it out. Better still, the DVD release features a never before seen alternate opening, two audio commentaries, a making of featurette, deleted scenes and a still gallery of Darkhorse AvP artwork. Nice. To be in the running for this awesome prize, just answer the following question in 50 words or less:

 What two other comic/film franchises should team up and why?

Put your answer, as well as your name and address on the back of an envelope and send it to: I Love Canadia, Hyper, 78 Renwick St, Redfern, NSW, 2016. Winners will be judged based on the perspicacity of their argument and/or quality of humour.



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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 January 25 and entries close at 6pm March 9. 4) In determining eligibility the judge's decision is final and no correspondence will be entered into. 5) The winner will be drawn at 9am March 10 at Next Publishing Pty Ltd, 78 Renwick St, Redfern NSW 2016. 6) Prizes must be taken as offered and are not redeemable for cash. 7) The promoter is not responsible for misdirected or lost mail. 8) The winners will be notified by mail and results published in the May issue of Hyper on sale April 6. 9) 1 winner will receive an Alien Vs. Predator snowboard (valued at \$1000) and Alien Vs. Predator on DVD (RRP \$35), and 10 runners up will each receive Alien Vs. Predator on DVD (RRP \$35). Total value of the competition is \$1385.00. 10) The promoter is Next Publishing Pty Ltd ABN 88 002 647 645 of 78 Renwick St, Redfern NSW 2016.

Win Astro Boy: Omega Factor on GBA!

>> Astro Boy: Omega Factor is quite simply one of the best shooters available on the GBA. We loved it so much we imported it from the States and gave it a huge 93% back in issue 133. As John said at the time: "While we see many ports of very complex games, the GBA does a simpler style of game much better. While Astro Boy is seemingly simple, it is one of the tightest, most exciting games around. Astro Boy joins the cast of essential titles for GBA".

Thankfully it's about to be released locally, so everyone can get in on the hot side-on machine-gun-butt action. Better yet, thanks to our funky friends at THQ, we have six copies of this stellar title to swing out to six lucky winners. To be in the running for one of the packs, just tell us:

What is the name of Astro's sister in the 80s series?

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

**6
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Win a three month Homescreeen subscription!

>> Video stores are the past my friends, and services like HomeScreen are the future. Forget late fees and searching racks for that illusive title, now renting DVDs can all be done online. Just log on to www.homescreeen.com.au and you can sign up for a free one month trial. Once you've signed up and logged in, it's a simple matter of browsing through the thousands of titles on offer and choosing a "Must See" list. Once that's done HomeScreen will send you three titles. You can hold onto them for as long as you want, and after you're done with each one, just seal the reply paid envelope it came in, send it back and HomeScreen will send you another title. The biggest advantage of this system is that you can go at your own pace - the number of DVDs you get a month for the flat fee is entirely up to you.

Thanks to HomeScreen we have five sets of three month subscriptions to give away. To be in the running, just answer the following:

Name five films based on videogames?

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

**5
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That's some kind of constipation



No gold plated shark tank bar for you my friend

Metallica: Some Kind of Monster

PARAMOUNT, M 15+

Love them or hate then you can't deny that Metallica are a massively important and influential band but aside from the names of the band members and the fact that they really (really, really) hate file sharing, most people don't know a lot about them. Enter *Some Kind of Monster*, a project that sounds as though it began as vanity and wound up as so much more. Charting the course of the epic (time wise) making of their most recent album *St. Anger*, *Some Kind of Monster* gives such an intimate insight into the functioning of the band that you can't help but be caught up in the beast that is the world's most famous metal band. Instead of seeing what one would expect from such a band - hard drinking, partying and the like, *Monster* leads the viewer through weekly therapy sessions, a year in rehab for lead singer James Hetfield, the near death of the long term friendship between Hetfield and



[up] "It's this thing, called the interweb, and it steals music. And kills babies"

drummer Lars Ulrich, recriminations from past band members, more therapy, hissy fits, the hiring of a new bassist and eventual triumph.

The title, *Some Kind of Monster* is a line from one of their songs but at heart it describes the band to a T - larger than life and twice as ugly, more a force of nature than a band and presided over by massive ego and eccentricity. You may not like Metallica, but without a doubt *Some Kind of Monster* is one of the greatest music documentaries captured on film.

Daniel Wilks

MOVIE: 9 / EXTRAS: 8



Preparing to leap into the picture above to steal music from Ulrich. She's an interweb thief!



Arahan

EASTERN EYE, M 15+

Action comedies are hard to do. Too often the focus is put towards the action at the expense of the comedy leaving the viewer with an anemic script, a few lame jokes and a total lack of charisma. *Arahan*, much like the brilliant Korean action comedy *My Wife is a Gangster* (if Eastern Eye is reading this - release that film!) sways the balance towards the comedic, only occasionally peppering the film with action but not skimping on the choreography and effects when said action does finally occur.

The plot to *Arahan* is rather twee at best - a loser cop stumbles across an enclave of martial arts masters in suburbia who see in him a chance of furthering the Tao of the universe. The cop, for his part just wants to learn how to fight and a chance to get to know the chief master's gorgeous, arse-kicking daughter. Naturally there's an ancient evil, some light romantic comedy and all the fun that can be had with a bunch of crotchety old martial arts masters living in the middle of a big city. When the action does eventually come it is truly spectacular. If you're



[middle] You could have just asked me to arahand you the pole, but no

not a fan of wirework in your fight scenes you may want to give *Arahan* a miss but otherwise you're in for a treat. *Arahan* isn't genius by any stretch of the term and is nothing if not lightweight but it does succeed in being a truly enjoyable romp.

Daniel Wilks

MOVIE: 7 / EXTRAS: 5

Dodgeball:

A TRUE UNDERDOG STORY

FOX HOME ENTERTAINMENT, M 15+

▶▶ *Dodgeball* was a surprise box office hit last year, a fact that we think speaks more of the cult of Stiller than the film itself. It's not that it's bad, more so that this is a film that's essentially been made about 150 times already. Think *Major League 1&2*, *Mighty Ducks*, *Slapshots*, *Bad News Bears*, *Longest Yard*, *Wildcats* etc and you'd be on the right track. Actually, no, you'd be on the identical track.

Let's see. Struggling gym Average Joe's, run by all round nice guy Peter LaFleur (Vince Vaughn) is on its last legs, mostly because of just how damn nice he is. He needs to come up with \$50,000 to save the gym or it will be bought out by all-round nazi gym owner White Goodman (Ben Stiller). All hope looks lost, but then a dodgeball tournament is discovered with an unlikely first prize of \$50,000.

Struggling gym's rag-tag bunch of loser members form a team and find a quirky coach, and must give it their all against a number of other equally unlikely and stereotypical teams and make it to the finals against their arch nemesis. Do the underdogs win the day and get the girl? Take a wild guess.

It's a low brow parody of countless feel good movies certainly, and definitely has its moments, but it's just hard to shake the feeling that pretty much every joke and character has been handed down through a hundred films already. Every character that is, aside from Alan Tudyk's. Firefly fans beware - seeing Alan (aka Wash) slumming it as "loser guy on team who thinks he's a pirate" is distressing to say the least.

Cam Shea

MOVIE: 6 / EXTRAS: 6



[above] One of the lesser gurns Stiller unleashes in the film



Great effects for 2002. Erm... yeaaaaah

Godzilla Vs. Mechagodzilla (2002)

EASTERN EYE, PG

▶▶ The 2002 *Godzilla Vs. Mechagodzilla* marks the third time the two iconic monsters have met in battle and represents the fourth time in the series that the creators have decided to go back to step one and ignore all the films between it and the original 1954 *Gijira*. This approach is both a blessing and a curse to G-fans as the movie once again casts the giant atomic reptile as a destructive force of nature (and not the protector of Japan) but spends so much of the running time describing how Godzilla can come back from being destroyed by the Oxygen Destroyer bomb in the original film as well as detailing the building and design of Kiryu (Mechagodzilla) that the monster

on monster action is relegated to the background. The special effects and miniature work are of a generally high quality but one can't help but think that the writer and director really wanted to make a film about a plucky research crew building a giant robot and convincing the government to give them a second chance when it inevitably runs amuck than a kaiju film, leaving the big G as something of an afterthought. If you're a fan of large men in rubber suits check it out, otherwise save your money until Eastern Eye releases some of the excellent Heisei series (1984-1995) such as *Godzilla Vs. Biollante*, *Godzilla Vs. Space Godzilla* or the brilliant *Godzilla Vs. Destroyer*.

Daniel Wilks

MOVIE: 6 / EXTRAS: 2



"So basically you're dressed as a huge nerd"

The Best of Triumph The Insult Comic Dog

NOT RATED, IMPORT

▶▶ If you haven't experienced the genius comedy of Late Night with Conan O'Brien's Triumph The Insult Comic Dog, you haven't really laughed properly. Forget Larry David, forget Jerry Seinfeld, hell, forget Dave Chappelle, Triumph is where comedy is at.

This collection of his greatest exploits covers his 'in-depth' reporting of the Westminster Dog Show, his stint on Hollywood Squares, his reality check of the American Idol auditions in Hawaii and most famous of all, his verbal bashing of the nerds awaiting the first screening of Star Wars Episode I. Each and every insult escapade is as funny as the last

and Conan O'Brien fans will enjoy watching the mutation of his freakish hair over the years.

Special mentions go out for Triumph's many, many notches on his belt - if you've seen a bitch (a female dog, you sickos), chances are he's schtoooped her - and his constant referral of Lassie and Benji being gay. And not forgetting his infatuation with J-Lo's butt and what its aroma must be like - pure comic genius.

There's very little in the way of extras, but at any rate, *The Best of Triumph The Insult Comic Dog* is awesome... for me to poop on!

Stephen Farrelly

MOVIE: 9 / EXTRAS: 2

Labyrinth: COLLECTOR'S EDITION

COLUMBIA, PG

Sure, *Labyrinth* has dated due to the nature of the musical numbers, and some of the special effects (even after remastering) are pretty shoddy but the film still stands the test of time as one of the great family films but not one without some damaging flaws. For those unfamiliar with what is widely considered to be Jim Henson's opus, *Labyrinth* tells the story of Sara, an adolescent girl (a very young Jennifer Connelly) who is whisked into the fantasy world of the Labyrinth when she half-jokingly calls upon the Goblin King Jareth (a very glam David Bowie) to take away her baby brother whom she is babysitting. Realising her mistake Sara plunges head first into the Labyrinth determined to find her brother and return to the real world. Along the way she is both helped and hindered by various characters and beasts. It is

here that the real magic of the film shines through as all of the beasts and characters are some form of puppet, animatronic or richly detailed costume meticulously created by Henson (famous for the Muppets) and his Creature Shop.

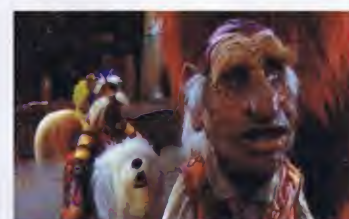
Unfortunately as good as the creature designs are and as enjoyable as it is to listen to Bowie, *Labyrinth* meanders too much to be a full success, spending more of the hefty running time showing the audience an array of beautifully designed creatures and events rather than a fully coherent and eventful storyline. The Collector's Edition contains an excellent making of doco as well as cast and crew photos, concept art and a small collector's booklet.

Daniel Wilks

MOVIE: 8 / EXTRAS: 8



[above] This film has dated you say Wilks? What makes you think that...?



He's been hanging around Jim Beam too much

Man on Fire

FOX HOME ENTERTAINMENT, MA15+

Bourne Supremacy move over... there's a new contender for the award of "worst camera work ever in a feature film!" *Man on Fire* is the story of John Creasy (Denzel Washington), a man with severe emotional baggage and a best friend named "Mr Jim Bean". Creasy has seen death and destruction after many years as a former government operative. These years have savaged his will and left him lost. A chance job as the bodyguard of nine year old Lupita Ramos (Dakota Fanning) in Mexico city softens his self loathing, although the violence dished up for revenge is certainly not served cold when it comes to Creasy's modus operandi after the kidnapping of Lupita.

Washington is composed and smooth in his performance as a vengeful killer, but is let down by the camera work and the editing which is truly grating. Perhaps Scott had seen *Team America* and decided what he needed was a montage or ten! The stylistic camera work in particular valiantly attempts to be slick and exciting but in the end is just annoying. That said, with the ever increasing violence in the film, one perhaps should be glad that the camera work does not reveal every detail.

The extras include the standard behind the scenes featurette and additional commentary - unfortunately Washington is missing from the line up.

Rebecca Izard

MOVIE: 5 / EXTRAS: 6

88 **HYPER**

THE *Greatest* MOVIES YOU'VE NEVER SEEN



It's "about" time someone made some good telemovies

Ginger Snaps Trilogy

MAGNA PACIFIC, MA 15+

The *Ginger Snaps* films are, on the surface, teen horror films. More specifically they are teen werewolf films but thankfully Michael J. Fox is nowhere in sight. Once you look past the surface, however, their true genius comes to the fore. *Ginger Snaps* utilises lycanthrope as a parable of the menstruation myth. Ginger, the eldest of two strange and morbid sisters promises her sister that she'll never leave her and that they'll be dead by 16 because there's nothing better to do. One night, Ginger begins her first period and the scent of blood attracts a werewolf. Soon Ginger is showing an appetite for sex and blood, growing hair where there was none before and alienating herself from her sister.

Ginger Snaps 2 takes the story even further into the allegorical, this time juxtaposing the onset of lycanthrope with mental illness and drug abuse. The final film, *Ginger Snaps Back* is a massive change of pace once again, taking place in the Canadian Rockies sometime in the mid 19th Century and playing like some bizarre Canadian Gothic replete with historical accuracy, painfully flat Amerindian stereotypes and anachronistic language. Of the three films, *Ginger Snaps Back* plays the Lycanthrope the straightest but in doing so serves to set up the first two films thematically. With dead on dialogue and two fantastic leads, this is a must-see trilogy.

Daniel Wilks

MOVIE: 9 / EXTRAS: 3

Gundam Seed

VOLUME 1: GRIM REALITY

CATEGORY: SCI FI
 PRODUCTION: SUNRISE

To be perfectly honest I haven't seen much Mobile Suit Gundam in the past, but if it's anything like *Gundam Seed* I think I'll be tracking some down. *Gundam Seed*, you see, is a very smooth combination of many elements: it's character driven yet full of action; it has serious military strategy talk and adult characters, yet somehow manages to put a kid behind the controls of a giant robot without resorting to cliché; and it's got some great futuristic design whilst still remaining grounded in a believable conflict.

The setting is Cosmic Era in the year 71, a world where humankind has reached out beyond Earth to other planets and space stations. It opens on Heliopolis, a neutral space colony whose inhabitants are trying to live their lives in the shadow of the ongoing war between the Earth Alliance and the ZAFT.

Unfortunately, it's not long before a ZAFT mission to steal the Earth forces' secret prototype



weaponry, the 6-weapons mobile suits, interrupts their existence, turning what was once an idyllic seeming place into a war zone, and soon worse. Several students get swept up into the action, and it's not long before a revelation about the focal character Kira Yamoto is uncovered, and he is left as the only person capable of piloting the one remaining prototype Strike Gundam against the ZAFT forces to help protect his friends and the Alliance ship Archangel. To say more would be to give too much of the plot away, but suffice to say this is a series you should check out. Bring on volume 2!

Cam Shea

ANIMATION: 8 / STORY: 8
 OVERALL: 8



This guy graduated from the G-Force school of villainy

R.O.D the TV

VOLUME 1: THE PAPER SISTERS

CATEGORY: ACTION
 PRODUCTION: J.C. STAFF

Taking place four years after the three part *Read or Die* OVA, *ROD the TV* is deliberately ambiguous in title. The official stance is that it's neither *Read or Die* (which is a series of novels in Japan, in addition to the OVA) or *Read or Dream* (which is a long running manga series). Instead, it's somewhere in between.

Whatever it is, it's good. Really good. The story revolves around Nenene Sumiregawa, an author who hasn't been able to write since her friend Yomiko "The Paper" Readman (the main character from the OVA) disappeared. After being saved from a threat in the first episode (no spoilers here!) she soon finds herself playing the reluctant host to her three saviors, "The Paper Sisters".

The story is a whole lot less out there than *Read or Die* (in which "The Paper" worked as an agent for the British Library and fought genetically enhanced clones of famous figures from history), but no less compelling. As Paper Masters, the Paper Sisters have some amazing abilities at their fingertips, allowing

them to fashion and ride giant paper animals, pick locks and even slice through steel like it's butter.

That said, it's the dynamic between the characters that really draws you in. Nenene is sharp tongued and harsh, Michelle is ditsy and motherly, Maggie is quiet and rather out there, and youngest sister Anita is a bit of a brat. Like Readman in the OVA, Maggie and Michelle are both complete bibliophiles and are completely obsessed with books and reading. This, along with the paper skills, makes for a very unique tone that we can't help but love. The pacing is a lot slower than in the OVA, but this works in ROD's favour - giving it a slightly meditative feel perfectly in keeping with the fact that two of the main protagonists spend most of their waking hours reading.

To top it all off, the presentation is A grade in all departments. The look and design is really detailed, the action scenes are fantastically animated, the soundtrack is hip and the English dubs are first rate. Bring on the next six volumes!

Cam Shea

ANIMATION: 9 / STORY: 8
 OVERALL: 9



Milk's a hell of a drug



MAIL HYPER!

POSTAL:

78 Renwick St. Redfern,
NSW 2016 Australia

EMAIL:

freakscene@next.com.au

BIASED?

Dear Hyper,

This is a letter from an unhappy reader. I've been reading Hyper for about ten years now (Earthworm Jim was on the cover of my first issue), and only now feel the need to write in. Being perhaps the only magazine that covered all platforms, it was a no-brainer to choose Hyper. The fair reviews and quality writing only made it easier.

Recently, however, your magazine has become a nerdy boys club with an unhealthy attachment to the Playstation 2. I really cannot understand why you feel the need to pepper your once-great magazine with D. Mannerism, I WILL CRUSH YOU, Blau and the deification of Amos. Please, this only adds to the widely spread misrepresentation that all gamers are geeks. You're only making it worse.

At the risk of appearing a "Halo fanboy" I would like to point out the obviousness of your prejudice towards the Sony machine. What surely began as a rational marketing choice has become a deeply-set bias. I can understand why you would initially choose to consistently put the most popular system on the cover of your magazine. At that stage, I could read your reviews and easily see that you restricted the favouritism to the most blatant areas of the magazine - the cover and your larger images and headlines. Everywhere else, you remained tolerably balanced.

One of the earlier examples that evidenced a shift from rational business decision to true bias was your Soul Calibur II review. In this case, you reviewed the entire game



[above] There aren't enough synonyms for "freakin-awesome" to describe Ari Gibson

on the PS2, mentioning this system and how it handled the game. This could be justified fairly easily as an example of the gameplay over graphics campaign, reviewing the game on the graphically weakest system. Additionally, you added an "other systems" section in the review. However, I don't see how you would place yourselves in a position where you would need to justify yourselves. Why review it on a particular system in the first place? Why not simply review the game?

As for your Halo review (you knew this was coming - if you've read this far)...

I won't complain about your score of 94, I happen to agree with it. What I will complain about is your review itself. Firstly, it's interesting you delayed your review so it could be in the same issue as GTA San Andreas. I believe you felt something almost sexual when you could give a Playstation game a higher score. Second, with scarcely substantiated criticisms of the graphics, it was clear you were looking for something to bring the score down. Finally, eleven words on Xbox Live?! Come on, the Halo 2 single player experience suffers every symptom of the second in a trilogy, and it is hardly fair to

effectively ignore the area that will give the game immortality. The plot makes little sense, and doesn't have any semblance of closure even when the credits roll. The character shifts felt erratic and not much seemed to really happen. But when you've delayed the review and given yourselves over a month to discover what it means to club someone over the back of the head when they're prancing around with the sword, you could have given more than eleven words to the real meat of the game.

One final word. The increasing level of personality journalism is really hurting your credibility. Apart from the annoying injections of geek that you feel the need to jam down our throats, more and more your magazine is really letting us know who is writing the articles. Is this a place for editorialising? How can I believe a review, and believe it is fair, when the writer is blatantly revealing their personality. It will quickly get to the stage where I'm going to feel the need to "shop around" with the reviews to get something close to balance. In this situation, there will be no need for your magazine at all. It was the one-stop shop for reviews, and if it's going to continue to be the nerdy boys club that it is, I'm just

CAPTION THIS!

PART 62 WINNER

Leigh Milward is a sick man. Still, at least he didn't mention reverse umbrellas...



"Nothing distracts a player like flashing the Goatse pic on a scoreboard. Nothing."

going to stick to the Internet for my gaming news.

If you took the time to read this letter, thanks. I don't expect it to be published, considering it probably violates several length rules, but I would appreciate it if you simply read it and took it on board. It is a considered series of gripes from a genuinely long time reader who is about to abandon your magazine in frustration.

Owen.

Hi Owen, you're probably surprised to see your letter in print but we found it so special that we had to do something to honour you. We'd like to start by asking how it is that a few innocent in-jokes cater to the misinterpretation that all gamers are geeks? Not one of our jokes at the current stage is based around geek humour or knowledge but instead draws heavily on areas of pop-culture often credited as being the height of cool. Next we want to ask - how is it that we are obviously biased towards Sony? I completely dispute your accusation that we have more PS2 covers - that's bullshit dude. Take a look at our last few covers - GT4, Halo 2, Half-Life 2 and Outrun 2, shock horror, they're pretty balanced aren't they? And truth be told we're all Nintendo fanboys at heart - if you're going to accuse us of bias you should probably aim for our love of the little lunchbox that could. As for your Soul Calibur II argument - say what? Are you high? The game WAS reviewed on all three systems. At no point is one system talked about to the exclusion of the others. There are comparisons between the exclusive characters for each system, as well as for graphics, sound and loading time performance. Funny that you should have this pent up issue with our Soul Calibur II review that is entirely baseless. So what if there's a picture of a PS2 controller on page 47 - that doesn't mean shit. At that stage we thought it looked messy to have a pic of more than one controller in that space. The game was played on all three systems and reviewed on all three systems. Maybe you should read the text next time, rather than just looking at the pretty pictures?

Now on to Halo 2. How anyone could think that we would delay a review of a big game like Halo 2 so we could make it look bad against something like GTA: SA to achieve something "almost sexual" is ludicrous, insulting and just downright stupid. Why would anyone in their right mind put off reviewing one of the biggest games of the year when they could get the jump on their competitors? I'm sure

you were happy with your little sexual allusion when you wrote it but think for a second. Question yourself. Why would we do it? Now you're probably thinking that Sony paid us to (technically though it would have to be Take-2 considering the fact that GTA: SA is headed to Xbox and PC so has nothing to do with Sony at all). Now try this on for size. We didn't get to review it until that issue because that is when Microsoft gave it to us. No conspiracy. No bribes. No sexual release. That's when we got it. Next question with Xbox Live - why did we not mention it aside from briefly? Have you considered that since we were reviewing the game before it had been released anywhere in the world there might not have been any players to test it with? You might have forgotten that we send the magazine to the printers weeks before you get it. It's something called "lead time" and it means that although the magazine came out well after the game, we didn't have a month to play it online. We barely had a couple of days, and thus didn't want to focus on the Xbox Live aspect without having thoroughly played it. Hence the Xbox Live Halo 2 write-up in #136.

One final word huh? Does editorialising have a place in a magazine? Too bloody right it does. Heaven forbid that any writer actually show a bit of personality instead of simply being a faceless expositron rattling off the facts in a bland and boring manner. Reviews are by nature subjective, not objective - it is impossible for a person reviewing a game, product, movie or what have you not to flavour their writing with personal prejudice. Anyone who thinks otherwise is kidding themselves. Ultimately a human touch to a reviewer makes it all the more rewarding than a simple listing of the facts. We (and many other industry professionals) believe it is more valuable for people to know how a game plays and makes you feel than what it does and how it does it. For a longer and more analytical argument jump online and read Kieron Gillen's manifesto, "The New Games Journalism" and the brilliant "Bow Nigger" by Always Black. To summarise, if you're looking for objective articles comprising just the facts then you're going to have to look elsewhere. If you want to be informed and entertained then stick around.

HUH?

I would like to let hyper know my disgust. As a long time reader from the beginning i have picked up your magazine basically every month.

It is a good read. However, i am finding a few things unsettling.

The first is that i buy the game solely to know what is going on in the entertainment industry. I am a graphic designer by trade, and occasionally do 3D work. When i find that your articles contain strong political messages, i am somewhat alarmed. I am a customer, and regardless of your political stance i feel that your magazine is not the place to make such comments. I really don't care if the writer of the article likes or dislikes President Bush (there seem to be a lot of anti Bush messages), in fact i don't care whether you are against the eating of tofu. It's irrelevant. I'm paid my \$6.95, and i want to read about what is important.

Not only that, it's an abuse of power. I imagine Hyper magazine has a large influence on 10-20 year olds. The media is very powerful in many ways. What's worse is that your message is broadcasted in a way that ordinary folk such as myself do not have the power to do. Anti or pro Bush messages are no more or no less valid than each other because it comes down to how you interpret what information is given to you.

The second concern i have is that the mailbag has become a useless section. The questions are not usually answered, more often than not they have some ridiculous answer which is unhelpful. I really like to see you guys have fun, but give the folks that spent time and (in some cases) postage some credit. Some of those guys wouldn't have the internet to rely on for getting info like you might.

The third is your (now) over usage of "humour." You guys love Amos, that is very cool that

ATTENTION WOULD-BE WRITERS

We get a lot of letters every month asking us how they can do some freelance work for Hyper. The answer to this is simple - write something for us, make sure it is interesting and send it to Daniel or Cam. Don't, whatever you do write us a review of a game that's been out for a couple of months - it's a sure way to lose our interest fast and shows a lack of effort on your part. If you're serious write us a feature on something cool, go out and get an interview with someone interesting, write us a flashback on a great old game, write an in depth review of a crazy Japanese game or peripheral. Surprise us, make us laugh, impress us and you may get in the mag and even get some filthy lucre as part of the deal.

DEPT. OF MISC. BLAU SIGHTINGS



[above] Oh snap! Look out guys, Ashton Kutcher is coming! We've been Blaupunkt!

[right] As Police Academy aficionados, we've heard of the Blue Oyster, but the BLAU Oyster?

BLAU
OYSTER
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you all get along so well. In fact, i'd love to work in a place where everyone could share a good joke. However, there's no need to waste space mentioning him more than twice every three pages. In fact, it alienates readers such as myself- i still have no idea what it is exactly "BLAU" is or why you bring up Amos all the time. The space used could easily be utilised to tell us how pc games run on your test hardware- id' rather know how well a game will run before i buy it. Often i get a good laugh out of hyper, but i feel that repetitive punchlines are hardly as clever or inventive. I'm not asking you take the fun out, moreso that you use the space you have more constructively.

My three concerns may seem harsh, but i have genuine concern for hyper. It has always been a quality magazine, and i look forward to reading the dvd/movie section in particular every month. Mainly because i find it to be rather accurate and opening up new movies that i haven't heard of or seen before.

Thanks for your time,
Misterk

OK Misterk (or is that Mister K?) - we're a bit lost with the whole abuse of power political message thing. Sure we take the occasional jab at Bush but then again we take jabs at just about everyone else as well. Is there anything in particular you're referring to? We had a look through issue #135 and found two references, one in the Triumph the insult comic dog and the other in a response by Evil Malky in the letters section. Is this what you are referring to or is there something we have missed. We're not taking the piss here but we like to believe that we're quite fair with our scorn. Now if you were taking offence to us having a constant go at George Lucas for never letting things stand

as they are (damn you Mr. Beardy) we could understand. As far as abuse of power goes we think you may be taking things a little too far. We have no agenda. We have no ulterior motives. If we write anything about anyone more than likely it's for a laugh. We may be read by 10-20 year olds but if they are truly drawing their political knowledge from a couple of off the cuff jokes in a computer game mag then we weep bitter tears about the state of the country - it would be like everyone believing that Daniel sucks because Cam wrote it in a caption a couple of times. He does suck though.

Now to the question about why the letters are rarely answered seriously anymore. The answer is simple. The vast majority of letters we receive are not serious and don't need to be taken seriously. If a serious question comes along we answer it seriously, more often than not directly by email if it is personal or in the magazine if it has relevance to more than one person.

As for the humour issue, I guess that's pretty subjective, but we rarely waste space with it. We'd prefer to think of it as a spicy topping for an already informative magazine. Hyper will always be first and foremost a magazine about videogames, but rather than present it in a bland way, we're trying to have some fun with it. For our sanity as well as yours... And as for BLAU, all you need to do is frag someone with a rocket to the face after a mid-air twitch 180 degree spin and you'll know what we're talking about. BLAU!

LOVES THE VAI

Dear Hyper (or more precisely, Cam),
I've been reading your magazine for about a year, and pretty well pleased with the general content. Of

LETTER OF THE MONTH

SHMULTIMEDIA

By now you guys have probably already indulged in what the Nintendo DS has to offer. As have I. But I really do not understand all the hype surrounding the PSP. Sure it has a DVD player, music playback and impressive titles to back it up, but what they don't understand is that Sony relies on their multimedia to support their products. For example, a few days ago I was playing my DS in public, when a few teenagers came over and decided to bag-out my DS because of its bleak multimedia. Nintendo is my favourite console designer because of this. They don't have to rely on multimedia to sell, they rely on their games and reputation as a fantastic console designer and game developer. I know that I am in the minority for this matter but I really couldn't give a damn. I'm going to leave now and continue playing Paper Mario 2.

Yours sincerely,
Captain Blau

Testify! We couldn't have said it better ourselves so we won't.



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with some of the articles or reviews, but generally respect that they are your opinions, and could neither be right nor wrong. However, after reading your Halo 2 review in issue 135, I got pretty pissed off. This is not a crazy fanboy rant about how San-Andreas got a better score, but rather a crazy rant about your reiewing... "skills".

After reading your review the first time through, I noticed that although a lot of the focus in Halo 2 is on the multiplayer, you only wrote 1 sentence about it. What the hell? Seriously? Live is obviously a large part of the experience, and though you probably did the review before the game was released, you could have at least told us a little more about your multiplayer experiences in the office or something. Also, you may not know this, but there are such things as "spoilers". You know, little tidbits about the game that may... I don't know... SPOIL peoples experiences of the game if you tell them? Like you mentioning the second playable character, or the flood? Not everyone has played Halo and Halo 2 you know, not everyone wants to know what happens in the storyline before they play the game.

Maybe, heaven forbid, they want to find this stuff out themselves. Try to restrain yourself next time.

However, there was one thing that REALLY pissed me off about the review. In the small box in the bottom corner of page 44, you said the soundtrack to contain "Innapropriate Cock Rock" and that "with the rest of the music being so good, why introduce widdly widdly guitar wankery?" Yes Cam, we know

of Rock knowledge, you probably haven't heard of a little guitarist named Steve Vai. He did the guitar parts of the soundtrack on Halo 2. He is also one of the best guitarists alive in the world. One of his albums "Passion and Warfare" is ranked as number 4 on the Top 100 Essential Guitar Albums of all time. Once again, it is your opinion, but to call Vai's music "widdly widdly guitar wankery" and "Cock Rock" is sure to piss more than a few people off.

You may want to take some of this onboard, it could reduce the number of death-lists you are on.
Stapleface.

Dude, see letter #1 for the reason why there was no write up that issue on the Live side of Halo 2. Now as far as your questioning of Cam's reviewing skills, it's rather hard to illustrate the lack of innovation of a game without using examples of how it simply apes many of the levels of the first one (i.e. mentioning the Flood), and the whole second playable character thing is heavily hinted at in the opening cutscene and revealed in less than an hour's play. We'd hardly call them spoilers. The inappropriate cock rock example - it may be a little harsh but frankly we were cringing whenever the blazing axework made an aural appearance. We've all heard of Steve Vai here, and we can all respect he's a talented guitarist, so don't think it's just an "anti-guitar stance" based on our personal taste, as it's not. It's simply a statement that the music was, in the context of the



[above] Brady Newman's fantastic rendition of Penelo from FFXII

game, jarring, and didn't fit with the musical tone of the rest of the game. He would have criticised the soundtrack as much if it contained hip-hop or house. Daniel would have complained if the soundtrack was made up of blues or swing. Liking a genre has nothing to do with it. It's all about whether or not the soundtrack fit. We don't think those particular elements did. At any rate, Cam is not really a big hip-hop fan - he just likes the bling.

RANTY MCRANT

I'm writing to try and present a different view to quite a lot of the opinions expressed here. Namely, old games. The technological way in which games have developed in recent years is not necessarily in terms of graphics. Call me dismissive, but I personally am not one who longs for the days of the AI, interactivity, storytelling and length of Sonic, Mario and friends over Halo Life 2. Now don't get me wrong here, I have sympathy for anyone who wants to get their retrospective kicks paddling their balls, but please don't go dishing out your jaded abuse on the simply brilliant things happening in the world of gaming right now. Age of Empires 1 sends chills up my

spine, and I love looking back at the games and marvelling at what they made of the technology and seeing Hideo Kojima's genius coming through, even in those 18 bit days. I'm guessing whoever was creating games in the eighties is probably still working at Nintendo, developing whatever Gamecube games you might like to think of as shit. Anyway, come the future won't we look back on '04 and remember the Halo 2s and the Metroid 2s, as opposed to the Roadkills and the Catwomans (or is that Catwomen?). Disagree with me if you wish, but please print this.

Worthless Pogee.

Nice rant dude but what is your point? We like old games and praise new games. All that we abuse are idiots and piles of steaming donkey crap like Catwoman. I think you'll find we were quite enamoured with both Halo 2 and Metroid Prime 2. And erm, when were the "18 bit" days exactly?

MARIO = RON JEREMY

I was recently playing Super Mario RPG on Super Nintendo (great game) when I thought, is it just me or is there a... not-so-kiddy layer of humour in this game (in the end I

concluded it was just my sick mind).

Example 1: When you go into Peach's room in the Mushroom Kingdom and go over to the fire place and click A, it says 'You found Peach's ???' and then immediately some old guy runs up to you and gives you an item to not touch anything. Is this, in the words of Jim Carrey, an instrument of plee-sure? I guess we'll never know.

Example 2: When you fight these frog-creatures one of their attacks is when they come up to you, put their hands near their genitalia, shake a bit and then shoot some liquid stuff out of their crotches at you. Another example of plee-sure? Maybe.

Well, since most people have probably stopped reading by now I'll finish off.

Subadan Malosovitch (DIE INFIDELS!)

PS: WTHIWJJP?

We always knew that Mario was doing the nasty as soon as we turned off the console. As clean-cut as Nintendo might pretend to be, their games aren't all mushrooms and platonic relationships. Take Bowser's infatuation with Princess Peach, or the computer that falls in love with Peach in PM2. It's a bubbling cauldron of sex just

waiting to boil over we tells ya.

COMING UP SHORT

Is it just me, or does anyone else think that games have begun to suffer from a severe longevity problem? Take Fable, for instance. A great game, one I thoroughly enjoyed playing through both as a good and an evil character. But over way too quickly. The entire time I was playing it, there was this niggling thought in the back of my mind: "I wonder how far into this game I am? Am I halfway through? Surely not, this is supposed to be a massive RPG". But then along comes the end fight, the crappy end sequence and the credits and then that's it. I realise you can take your time in the game, but even after having completed numerous mini-quests, bedding buxom lasses and idly booting chickens for quite some time, I found the game to be simply too short.

The same must be said of Halo 2. Here was a fantastic game if ever there was one, but again that spectre kept bugging me: "I wonder how many more missions there are?" Now, maybe I'm just being greedy and expecting too much, but I did spend close to 100 bucks on each game and felt that, although the

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quality was superlative, the quantity was perhaps a little lacking. I don't expect some kind of uber-deep, massively involving game that takes weeks to complete, I just wish that the experience wasn't over quite so soon.

Saziel

We know your pain dude. Some games are just way too short. Katamari Damacy (reviewed this issue) can be completed in a paltry 6 hours and Halo 2 can be overcome in 12 or so. The problem probably stems from the advances in tech - so much effort goes into the engines and physics and the like that there aren't enough hours in the day to make games as lengthy. Also it is hard to write a compelling plot that runs for more than about 10 hours. On the other hand some games benefit from a short running time. Max Payne 2 is a perfect example - it started with a bang and the end credits were rolling before it outstayed its welcome.

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Okaaaaaay. You're a little all over the place dude. Are you sure you haven't been huffing your own medication? Just remember the mantra "don't get high on your own supply".

CULT OF AMOS

is there an Amos fan club? there should be. i would join. what i would like to say is i have been buying your magazine for i don't know how long and it is my favourite magazine. i have a few questions: 1) will you make a Hyper video game? (GameCube, PS2, PC, GBA, Xbox) if you did, you should play as Cam trying to rescue Amos from the clutches of Evil Malky while recovering the pages of the lost issue. also, play as Benton in some old-school platforming levels.

From thé trim Satan (an anagram of my name just in case anyone was wondering, which they weren't)

p.s. i have been physically and mentally preparing myself for years now and have become a



[above] We sang a song of joy upon receiving this pic from the always kick-ass Mark Withington...

black belt of Crushati (a martial art of crushing) and so Evil Malky: I, Marty, shall crush you! and there is nothing your Amos hating self can do about it.

from,

(my other pseudonym names)

X, The Lemming, Prof. Banana

Send us a \$50 and you can be the head of the fan club until someone decides to pay us more for the privilege. Crushati huh? We'd best hope that Evil Malky doesn't see this letter or he may make you eat your words and wash them down with his foot.

ANYONE NEED A HUG?

Okay, so here's halo 2, supposed to be the biggest bestest ever fecking game ever released, and yet there is one glaring omission. Where the feck are the computer bots to play against? Us severely socially-retarded losers who have yet to master the skills needed to make friends (even among that most nerdiest group of people, other computer gamers), or who are still too lazy to get a job to be able to afford an 'x-box live' internet connection, what are we supposed to do? We need those bots to make buying the game worth while. (Not that I did buy it, I finished the game in one overnight rental.) Remember Perfect Dark's extensive customisable bot opponents? That was at least 6 years ago. I find it hard to believe that the X-box is not capable of having some dedicated

bot A.I. programmed into it. The same problem was evident in Splinter Cell Pandora Tomorrow. That multiplayer game looked awesome, but due to my lack of resources in either friends or internet connections, I only got to play through the single player game (again, I rented, as it was not worth buying if finishable in a one day rental).

Here's hoping in vain that us friendless losers are not so discriminated against in the future.

(david)

We still love you. As far as bots go, we don't know why they don't seem to exist anymore. Stupid developers.

HAIR REMOVAL FOR ALL

O my Brothers,

An infamous issue within the gaming community has finally landed a spot right under my skin. I am talking about the "Super Happy Incoherent Turning" (or more commonly known as SHIT) control scheme found in most survival-horror games, such as Resident Evil. Many people bag the SHIT controls as being unintuitive and sticky. I, on the other hand, appreciate the genius behind it.

When it was first implemented into the Alone in the Dark series, I felt that it was revolutionary for it's era. Not many third person shooters back then had such a vast array of options when in combat, not to mention the 360-degree aiming. However, features like auto-aim

and first-person aiming are almost obligatory for a third person shooter these days.

But then again, the SHIT controls is being rapidly ditched for the more conventional "New Analogue Dual Stick" (also known as NADS) scheme, as apparent in games like Eternal Darkness. Now, the thing that bothers me is that people still find it appropriate to reopen wounds by bagging the now-dying SHIT scheme. It's not like people freely abuse the jittery controls of CastleVania or the tedious pace of the original Final Fantasy.

My final thoughts? Although you may not like to play with SHIT too much, some games are far better off with it. I mean, am I the only one who was frustrated with fiddling with Project Zero's NADS?

Evil Malky's fan,

AnaKissd.

You may have a fondness for the old school controls but in our minds SHIT just doesn't feel right. There's something about the placement of the thumbs in SHIT that makes us feel a little off. Playing with NADS on the other hand just comes naturally. It's a very organic thing is NADS. At first there is a little difficulty getting to grips with having to use both hands on your NADS but after a bit of experimentation most people will find themselves manipulating NADS as though they were born to it. Ultimately the choice of NADS or SHIT as the preferred style of play is up to the individual games but some

new survival horror games (the last two games in the Silent Hill franchise being prime examples) allow the games to choose which control method they like and even offered a middle ground, essentially leaving the gamer free to play with their SHIT but still keep one hand on their NADS.

AIIEEEEEEE!!!

Just want to say Hyper is "sugoi" [great].I've been living in Japan for 4yrs now [returning to oz for good this yr] and man ur mag is so spot on about Japan. Its so wacky and make me puke-cute I just luv reading about ur comments and tibbits on Japan cos u guys are so "switched on" and "right" in making them. simply HYPER is the gaming-mag kami! [god].Iluv the manga advertisements and manga reviews too.Keep up the great work! hyper reader for life damnright!

Cameron Hill

Hi Cameron. It appears that the time you have spent living in the land of the Rising Sun and Probing Tentacle has left you with a complete inability to communicate with anyone not educated in the ways of dick-girls, hostess bars,

drinking yourself up the ladder of success, dried squid snacks, really bad pizza, really good beer, painful game shows, panty vending machines, Chairman Kaga, businessmen reading hentai on trains, rampant loli fetishism, sleeping standing up, sexy schoolgirls, Puffy Ami Yumi, Hello Kitty, tamagotchi, fruity creatures you capture with eggs and bukkake.

DRAGGIN' BALLZ

I have been a long time reader of this brilliant piece of journalistic excellence. I used to read Nintendo gamer also but we all know what happened to that. I've got a high end PC, PS2, XBOX and Gamecube and the older consoles as well. I enjoy playing them all but i've got a few questions.

- 1) Are we ever going to see Perfect Dark 2?
- 2) Any chance of ever getting a 'Highlander' game? I'm a huge fan of the movies and TV series, and personally I think the idea of being an immortal and travelling around the world, throughout time staging massive sword/martial arts fights, ending in decapitation and the quickening.(Do I hear awesome RPG).

- 3) When will KOTOR 2 reach PC?
 - 4) When will the new Zelda be released for gamecube, and RE 4 for that matter?
 - 5) What do you think of the new DBZ game on PS2? personally I think that it is excellent one of the best fighting games I've played in ages and a vast improvement over the previous two.
- Any way i'm signing off. Keep up the great work.
Kind regards **Aaron Nuske**

- 1) *We wouldn't be surprised if it is deliberately delayed to be a launch title for the Xbox 2 (or whatever it's being called at the moment).*
- 2) *You liked the films and TV series? So you're the one to blame huh? You're lucky that you didn't send us your address or Wilks would have come over to your house to explain in no uncertain terms that there should only have been one and that whoever first thought that casting an American as a Scot, a Scot as an Egyptian (by way of Japan) and a Frenchman as a Scot should be beaten around the head and shoulders. As far as a game goes, god, we hope not.*
- 3) *Should be available now!*
- 4) *Zelda = when it's done - no firm*

date as yet. RE4 = May or June in Oz.
5) *It's the best DBZ game yet, no doubt.*

HIPPOGRIFTER

Dear Evil Malky,
My name is Dr Deathface and I would like to sign up for your Crushinetics at \$49.95. Please find enclosed a 'Hell Bank Note' valued at 100,000,000 yen, which works out to be \$50. Since you are so very evil, I will not expect any change.

My problem is very simple. I am a nice guy and I meet lots of people. The trouble starts whenever I introduce myself. I have such a silly name that no-one takes me seriously. This makes me very angry, but due to the constraints of my hippopotamus oath, I am unable to reveal any embarrassing secrets I may learn about them over the course of treatment. However, crushing people sounds like a far better option and I would be very grateful is you would send you system.

I await your reply.
Dr Deathface

Your name is Dr Deathface? "snigger"

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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 9th JAN 2005
RETAIL SALES

1	↗	GTA: San Andreas	Adventure
2	◆	Need Speed Underground 2	Racing
3	◆	SingStar Party Bundle	All Other
4	◆	Eyeto: Play 2 Pack	Compilation
5	▲	The Incredibles	Adventure
6	▲	WWE Smackdown vs Raw	Sports
7	▼	V8 Supercars 2	Racing
8	▲	Ratchet & Clank 3: Arsenal	Adventure
9	⊙	Eyeto: Play 2 Games Only	Compilation
10	▼	Crash Twinsanity	Adventure

TOP
10

PlayStation Games Over \$30

W/E 9th JAN 2005
RETAIL SALES

1	↗	Yu-Gi-Oh Forbid Memories	Strategy
2	◆	FIFA 2004	Sports
3	▲	Simpson's Wrestling	Sports
4	▲	No Fear Downhill Mt Biking	Sports
5	▼	MTV Snowboard	Sports
6	▲	Colin McRae Rally Ptm	Racing
7	⊙	Ms Pacman Maze Madness	Action

TOP
10

Game Cube Games Over \$50

W/E 9th JAN 2005
RETAIL SALES

1	▲	The Incredibles	Adventure
2	▼	Need Speed Underground 2	Racing
3	◆	Metroid Prime 2: Echoes	Adventure
4	▲	Paper Mario 1000 Year Door	Adventure
5	▲	Goldeneye: Rogue Agent	Action
6	▲	Pokémon Colosseum	RPG
7	⊙	Mario Kart Double Dash	Racing
8	◆	Mario Party 5	Family
9	▲	Simpson's Hit & Run	Adventure
10	⊙	Tales Of Symphonia	RPG

TOP
10

Xbox Games Over \$50

W/E 9th JAN 2005
RETAIL SALES

1	▲	Need Speed Underground 2	Racing
2	▼	Halo 2	Action
3	▲	The Incredibles	Adventure
4	◆	Fable	RPG
5	▲	V8 Supercars 2	Racing
6	▼	Crash Twinsanity	Adventure
7	▲	Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon 2	Strategy
8	⊙	Tiger Woods PGA 2005	Sports
9	▼	Spyro: A Hero's Tail	Adventure
10	⊙	Driv3r	Racing

TOP
10

PC Games Over \$20

W/E 9th JAN 2005
RETAIL SALES

1	◆	The Sims 2	Strategy
2	▲	Half Life 2	Action
3	▼	The Sims Deluxe	Strategy
4	◆	World Of Warcraft	Strategy
5	◆	The Sims Unleashed	Strategy
6	▲	The Sims Superstar	Strategy
7	◆	Lord Of Rings Middle Earth	Strategy
8	▲	The Sims Vacation	Strategy
9	▼	The Sims Makin' Magic	Strategy
10	⊙	Need Speed Underground 2	Racing

TOP
10

Game Boy Advance Games Over \$30

W/E 9th JAN 2005
RETAIL SALES

1	◆	The Incredibles	Adventure
2	▲	Pokémon Leaf Green	RPG
3	▼	Pokémon Fire Red	RPG
4	▲	Find Nemo + Monsters Inc	Adventure
5	▼	Pokémon Sapphire	RPG
6	▼	Pokémon Ruby	RPG
7	⊙	SpongeBob Double Pack	Adventure
8	⊙	Scooby Doo Double Pack	Adventure
9	⊙	SpongeBob Sq-pants Movie	Adventure
10	▼	Simpson's Road Rage	Racing

TOP
10

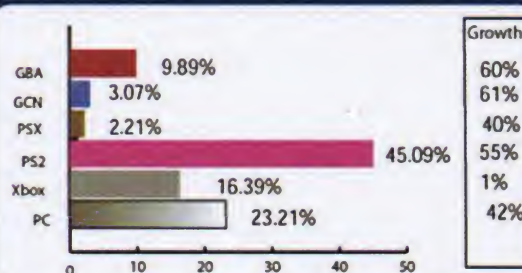
All Full Priced Games

W/E 9th JAN 2005
RETAIL SALES

1	◆	GTA: San Andreas	PlayStation 2
2	◆	Need Speed Underground 2	PlayStation 2
3	▲	SingStar Party Bundle	PlayStation 2
4	▲	Eyeto: Play 2 Pack	PlayStation 2
5	⊙	The Incredibles	PlayStation 2
6	▼	Need Speed Underground 2	Xbox
7	▼	Halo 2	Xbox
8	⊙	The Incredibles	GBA
9	▼	The Sims 2	PC/MAC
10	⊙	WWE Smackdown vs Raw	PlayStation 2

MARKET WATCH All Games by Platform

DEC/NOV RETAIL
SALES 2004



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



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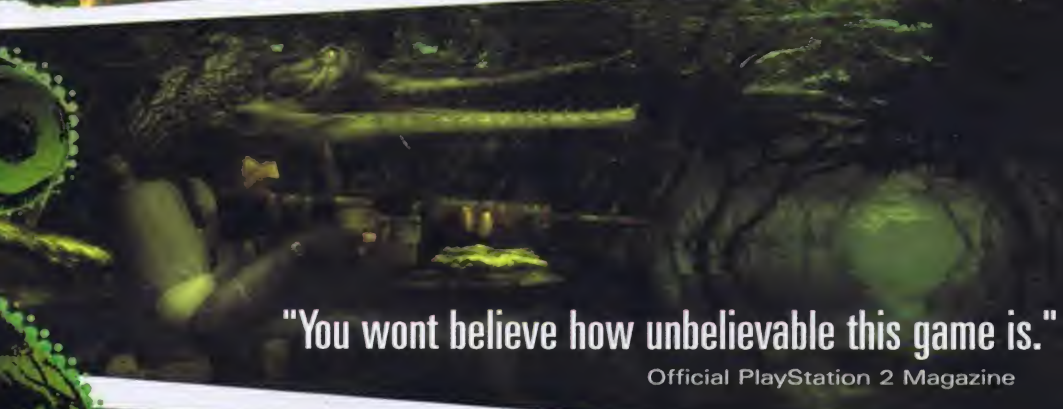
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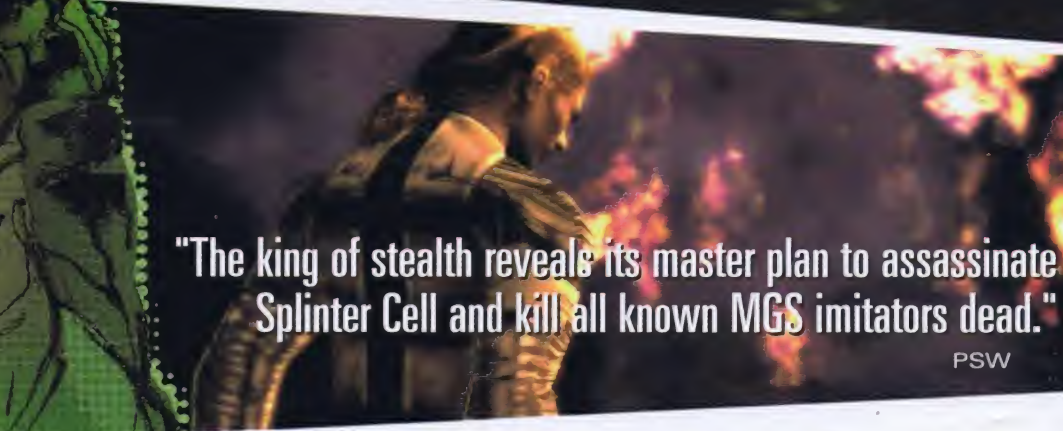
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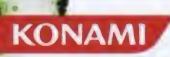
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S N A K E E A T E R



In Game Screenshots

Playstation Magazine - 100% Game Pro - 100% PSM Magazine - 100%



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