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HYPER

WORLD EXCLUSIVE!


STAR WARS

BATTLEFRONT II

World's first pics and details revealed!

EXCLUSIVE SCREENS!

CONDEMNED ON XBOX 2
Our first look at this twisted title

THE GODFATHER

Making you an offer you can't refuse on consoles and PC



Xbox 2
OFFICIAL SPECS REVEALED!
The most powerful console ever!



VEGAS BABY VEGAS

We head to the bright light city to see Midway's latest. PLUS: L.A. Rush!

FIRST AUS REVIEW!



TEKKEN 5

The fighting game King returns on PS2

A next MAGAZINE



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LEGEND OF ZELDA

Hot new screens of the next Zelda game!



GRAN TURISMO 4 REVIEWED

A consummate sim? Or the ultimate let-down?



CONTROL IS THE KEY TO CONQUEST.

10000 BC 5000 BC 3500 BC 1000 BC 400 AD 800 AD 1300 AD 1500 AD
STONE AGE COPPER AGE BRONZE AGE IRON AGE DARK AGE MIDDLE AGE RENAISSANCE IMPERIAL AGE



CONTROL
THE MASSES.

CONTROL
THE MAP.

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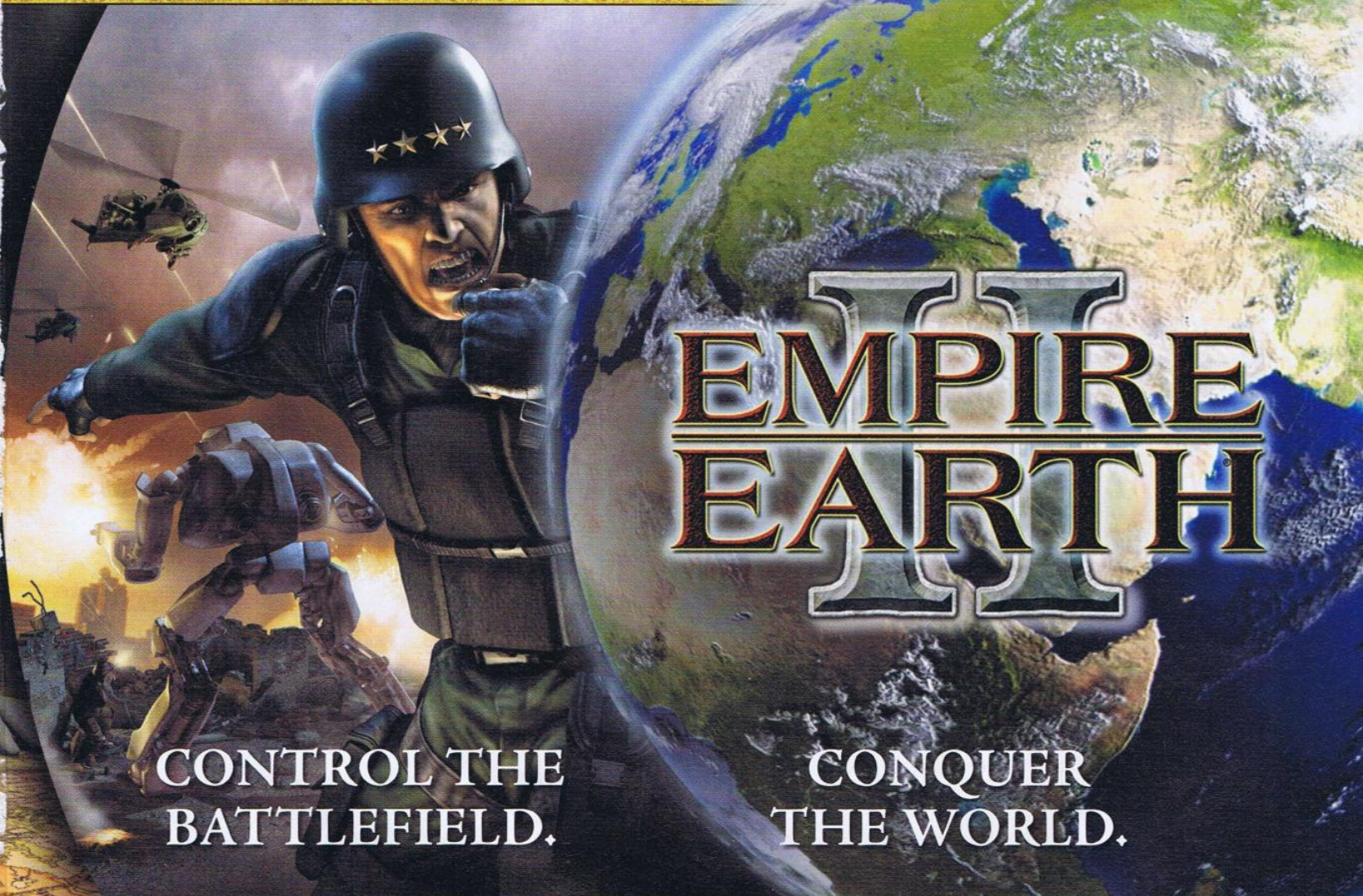


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1650 AD 1800 AD 1900 AD 1940 AD
ENLIGHTENMENT INDUSTRIAL AGE MODERN AGE ATOMIC AGE

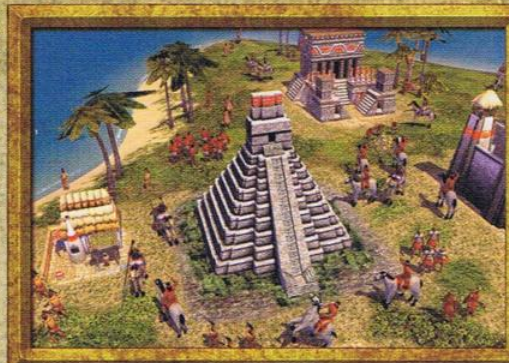


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CONQUER THE WORLD.

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ENLIGHTENMENT INDUSTRIAL AGE MODERN AGE ATOMIC AGE DIGITAL AGE GENETIC AGE SYNTHETIC AGE



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Command over 500 unique units and buildings in your 12,000-year conquest.

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Play free online in 9 challenging modes with up to 10 players.

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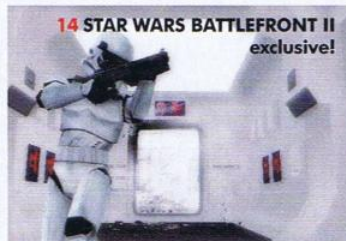


50 GRAN TURISMO 4

What's the verdict? Super sweet...



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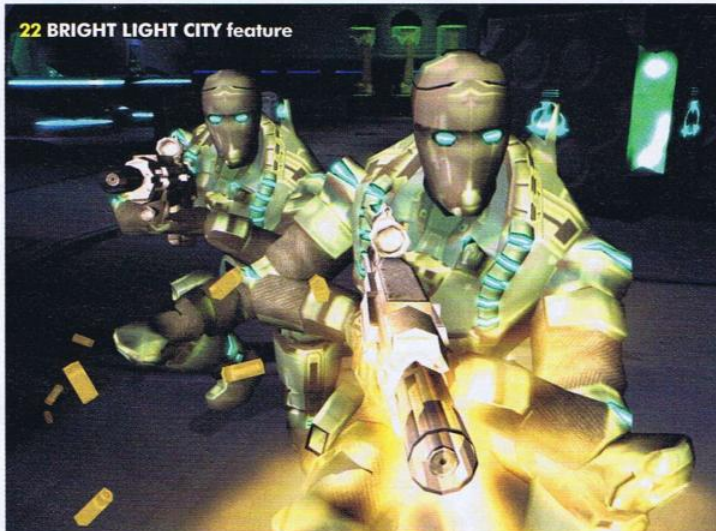
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EDITORIAL

»» Another month, another crop of bumper games. Is anyone else out there beginning to think that game developers and publishers around the world have made a pact with the devil? How are we meant to keep up? It's bad enough trying to find time to enjoy the latest PS2, Xbox, GameCube, GBA and PC games, but throw in a compelling selection of PSP and DS titles, and the threat of new consoles on the horizon and it's nothing short of overwhelming. Bring on cloning technology I say. I need at least three or four iterations of myself dedicated to different games at any one time.

Speaking of overwhelming, it's hard to know where to start with this issue. We've got the Worldwide Exclusive for the announcement, first details and first images for Star Wars Battlefront II, as well as a behind the scenes look at the making of the Episode III game. Both games promise to offer heaping gobs of Star Wars goodness.

Daniel went to Vegas to see Midway's latest batch of games, and get this - they've got a really strong lineup! Not least of which is the return of the San Francisco Rush series in the form of L.A. Rush. Good to see Midway back in form.

We've reviewed some absolutely massive games this month too. Our long awaited Gran Turismo 4 review is in the Hyper house, as is Bryce's hardcore rundown on Tekken 5. Then there's the latest Splinter Cell, SWAT 4, Cold Fear, Brothers in Arms and the kooky cool La Pucelle Tactics to name a few.

I know I'm starting to sound like a broken record, but it really is a good time to be a gamer. Enjoy!



[above] Yes, we're back on Mashed again...

Cam Shea »» Editor

HYPER CREW Monthly Top 5 Games

Cam Shea - Editor

1. Ridge Racers - PSP
"Reiko and Ridge Racer come storming back! So damn good."
2. Lumines - PSP
3. Midnight Club 3 Dub Edition - Xbox
4. Brothers In Arms - Xbox
5. Soul Calibur II - PS2

Daniel Wilks - Deputy Editor

1. Fight Night Round 2 - Xbox
"Taking Vanilla Ice to the top of featherweight is a dream come true."
2. Lumines - PSP
3. Ridge Racers - PSP
4. DOA Ultimate - Xbox
5. Otagi 2 - Xbox

Malcolm Campbell - Art Director

1. Ridge Racers - PSP
"Welcome to Driftasia"
2. Lumines - PSP
3. FIFA Street - PS2
4. Nanaca CRASH!! - Flash
5. Sonic Mega Collection Plus - PS2

Mikolai - Writer Guy

1. Captain Tsubasa 3 - Super Famicom
"Shaolin Soccer meets card battling. Weird, but it works"
2. Tee Off - Dreamcast
3. Skies of Arcadia - GameCube
4. Paper Mario: 1000 Year Door - GCN
5. Fight Night Round 2 - PS2

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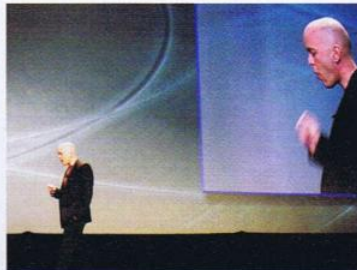
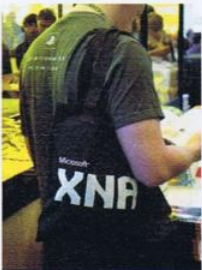
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News

IN THE NEWS: Amos retires as Hyper mascot / Flat Stanley sues Paper Mario / Bryce moves back to Oz, Kosta says "it's on"



[below]
Microsoft can even make brand new tech look boring

360?

XBOX 2 SPECS REVEALED!

No Need For a Witty Header!

After long months of speculation the semi-final specs (they are still subject to change) of the Xbox 2, Xbox Next, NeXbox, Xenon, Xbox 360, whatever the hell you want to call it have been revealed and boy-howdy is it an impressive sounding bit of kit. The guts of the machine outdo those of the original Xbox by a huge margin. This is what we know so far: The Xbox 2 will contain three 3.0GHz PowerPC cores. This may sound a little extreme at first but you need to consider that the cores are not three full separate CPUs, rather three components in the CPU. That said it still easily outdistances the CPU of the Xbox which ran at 733MHz. The GPU will be based around the next generation of ATI processors and will run with around a 500MHz clock speed. In practical terms the GPU will be more powerful than anything available on the market at the current time but we should be seeing real technology from the next generation within six months. Along with the two core elements, the Xbox 2 will have 256Mb of system RAM. If you think it sounds low then you have to consider the power of the original Xbox - it's still something of a beast and only has 64Mb. Interestingly, the Xbox 2 will do away with a conventional audio chip and will instead do all of the decompressing through hardware and processing through software, using X3DAudio.

Probably the biggest bone of contention so far has been whether or not the Xbox 2 will contain a HDD. It has been confirmed that the drive

will be optional and used primarily for storing downloadable content as well as caching games. Instead of the HDD, the Xbox 2 will instead rely on memory cards ranging in size from 64Mb to 1Gb. The exact format of these memory cards is not yet known. As was suspected, the Xbox 2 will not be utilising Blue-Ray or HD-DVD as an optical format and will instead continue to use dual layer DVD, giving them up to 7Gb of storage space per disc. Surprisingly it has also been announced that the console will come with a USB digital camera capable of taking both still photos and video for use in games and player profiles. So far it has not been announced as to whether the camera will have Eye-Toy like capabilities but it is a fairly safe assumption.

Now is where things get seriously sexy. Microsoft have openly stated that the Xbox 2 (or whatever it will be called) is going to be the pinnacle of home entertainment and they are making a few demands on the hardware and developers to make sure this becomes fact. All games for Xbox 2 are required to have a 16:9 option for aspect ratios and the baseline for resolution is high definition 720p (1280x720) as well as having mandatory 5.1 sound and antialiasing. All games will also allow players to rip and use their own custom soundtracks with ANY game. If you're rubbing your hands together in anticipation at the news then you know how we feel. With any luck we'll bring you a hands on impression in our E3 issue. Not long to wait now.

Next Generation Xbox Guide: Home

Gamer Card
The Gamer Card lets players instantly connect with people who share similar skills, interests, and lifestyles.

Gamer Title
Your visual representation online - customizable and uniquely yours.

GamerTag
Your name on Xbox Live.

Review Rating
The Review Rating will let others online know exactly how well received you are by the Xbox Live community.

Friends Online

Media Player
The media player is your instant access to your music, and will link you to the Music Player.

Content Sensitive Panel
Game publishers can use this portion of the Guide to link you to locations or features of their games. For example, imagine clicking here to launch into the Marketplace, where you can acquire episodic content, new game levels, maps, weapons, vehicles, skins, and new community-created content for \$99 each.

Location
Now you can see where each gamer is from, creating even more ways for Xbox Live users to meet and build relationships.

The Guide is an entertainment gateway that instantly connects players to some of the magic behind the next-generation Xbox experiences: your games, your friends, and your music.

Next Generation Xbox Guide: Gamer Profile

Gamer Card
The Gamer Card provides you with a quick look at the key information for an Xbox Live gamer. Gamer Cards let players instantly connect with similar skills, interests, and lifestyles. GamerTag, Gamer Title, Gamer Zone, and Gamer Score are what you find here.

Motto
Have a saying or a sentence that sums you right up? Here's your place to let your creative juices shine. The Motto can be changed to reflect your mood.

Achievements
Achievements are trophies and accomplishments that you complete online and offline in games. This will let you see how you've done as well as compare yourself to other gamers.

Player Stats
Take a quick look at the number of games and time on Xbox Live for any player on the Xbox Live service.

The Gamer Profile sums up all of a gamer's information, settings, and game play experience, and lets every player create a unique next generation Xbox identity. A player's Gamer Profile includes all their Achievements across all games, online and offline. Your Gamer Profile is presented in several ways, such as your Gamer Card in the Guide and more expansive views in game invite and matchmaking scenarios.

Next Generation Xbox Guide: Achievements

Colorful achievements can mean many things, including a snapshot of your accomplishments within games. They can also mean that you own the bragging rights for specific achievements over your fiercest competitors.

In this head-to-head view, you can see the Achievements you still have to gather compared to an opponent, motivating you to new levels of competition.

With online and offline Achievements viewable by everyone on Xbox Live, you can compare yourself to other gamers for bragging rights and inspiration.

NDS

FUNKY PACKS

Take your DS on the road

We were recently sent a couple of officially licensed Nintendo DS bags to try out. They come in two varieties - a Carrying Case and a Backpack (pictured). The Carrying Case is quite compact, with three compartments. The DS slots neatly into the lower rear space, leaving a compartment above for GBA cart and the front section for DS carts (it has nine slots for easy access as well as a mesh section for any extras). Construction is sturdy and with the included strap you can sling it over your shoulder. Nice. The Backpack is a fair bit chunkier, but still only the size of a mini-backpack all up. With three compartments it's also pretty cute.

We were also sent a DS Extras Pack from 4Gamers. This nifty little pack has a car adapter for



staying powered on the road, a device that will let you run your DS on AA batteries if it runs out of power on the lithium, a funky silver case for the DS itself, as well as a lens protector, headphones and a metal case for carts that also houses a spare stylus.



FIDDY

BULLETPROOF

Gaming goes ghetto style

It's official, Hip Hop is the new black - no racial slur intended. Everything nowadays seems to have to be ghettoed up, made more street, more urban or more bling. This isn't necessarily a bad thing. Vivendi Universal and rapper 50 Cent have recently announced that they will be teaming up to make a game titled 50 Cent: Bulletproof. Taking the real life incident in which the music mogul was shot nine times and survived as a jump off point, Bulletproof will see 50 Cent fighting to take revenge for his attempted murder, taking on the largest crime syndicate in the city and along the way uncovers an international conspiracy. We've only seen the trailer so far but it does look pretty damn cool with a buff and cranky looking 50 taking on half a dozen or so Mafia looking white guys over a mysterious briefcase. The trailer highlights both gunplay and martial arts so we should be able to expect vast quantities of both in the final product. 50 Cent: Bulletproof will be officially unveiled at E3 this year so expect some more info then.

OUCH

NINJAS ATTACK

Anti-Super Happy

The Japanese are usually quite polite to each other in business terms, never openly commenting on each other's practises or making fun of competitors. This is why the following quote from Tomonobu Itagaki, the creator of Dead or Alive came as such a surprise.

"First they put in all of these half-finished "features", then they take them right out again. Tag fights, elevation differences, walls. I don't know if it's because they're impatient, or because they lack the ability, but no matter the reason those guys are a pretty weird bunch. Any of those things would have become a bonafide feature if they took the time to do it right (laughs). Oh, and come on guys, let's quit trying to hide the prehistoric nature of the main product by tacking on some absurd "bonus game." I have been saying this for 5 years, haven't I? If you have the time to make an action-style "bonus game", why don't you create an honest-to-god action game and sell it as a standalone product? Oh, and if you're going to bother including such a "unique" form of ball play, you should do a beach volleyball game instead (laughs). Oh, that's right, I forgot something important. You guys did do a "bonafide" action game, didn't you? What was it called again? Oh yeah, NINA: Death by Degrees." Ouch.



NOKIA

Q-TER QD?

Yet another shot at it

Some people just don't know when to quit - they're willing to keep flogging the dead horse until there is nothing but bones bleaching under a harsh sun. Nokia, we're looking in your direction. Nokia have announced that they will be structuring a price cut for the N-Gage QD within the next few months to hopefully spur on the lacklustre sales. They also announced that they would be "looking at new colors, a new look and feel for the QD in the next few months". It seems that Nokia fail to understand that the games console/phone hybrid isn't failing because it doesn't look right, it's failing because the system is incapable of playing anything other than the most basic games and there are no truly great titles for the format. Of course Nokia have also announced that a complete redesign of the N-Gage is in the works - with any luck the next one will work, because the potential for a phone/handheld convergence device is huge.

WINNERS

HYPER 137

SNOWBOARD

- T. Grant, Mona Vale, NSW

AVP DVDS

- Daniel Jordan, Ryde, NSW
- John Wheeler, Frankston, VIC
- John Dean, Nth Melbourne, VIC
- Robert C. Haynes, Port Kennedy, WA
- K. Hosken, Geraldton, WA
- Brendon J. Bridle, Mudgee, NSW
- Jarrod Howard, Latrobe, TAS
- Richard Manley, Bracken Ridge, QLD
- Sam Batty, Diamond Creek, VIC
- Tom Beaumont, Brisbane, QLD

ASTRO BOY: OMEGA FACTOR

- Niklas Hammarstrom, Eden, NSW
- Lewis Powell, Bermagui, NSW
- Peter Jenkins, Pearcedale, VIC
- Jeremy Kupsch, Balwyn, VIC
- Ashley Walker, Sheldon, QLD
- Jamie Gosson, Bribie Island, QLD

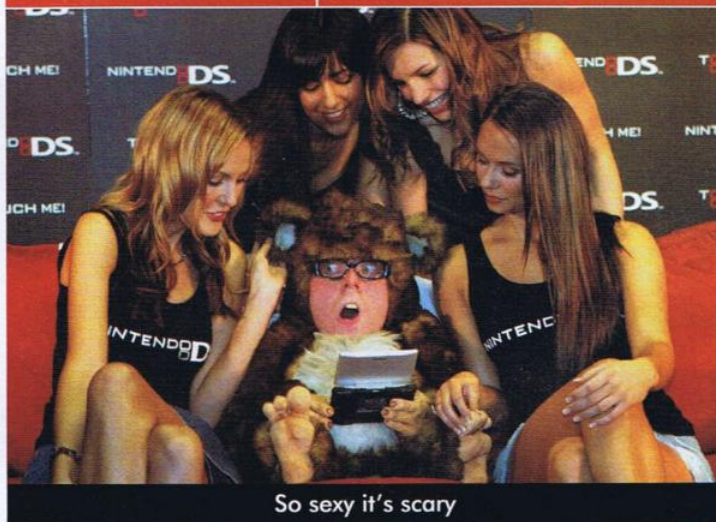
HOMESCREEN SUBSCRIPTION

- Zane McGeary, Howrah, TAS
- Th Phan, Sunnybank Hills, QLD
- Robert Polak, Parramatta, NSW
- Brendan Newham, Elanora, QLD
- Anne Humphries, Narrogin, WA

CAPTION THIS!

PART 66

Come on, make us laugh. Just send your funny screen captions to us at captionthis@next.com.au with Caption This Part 66 in the subject line.



So sexy it's scary

LINK

ZELDA SCREENS

This game just keeps looking better

In the Nintendo keynote speech given by Satoru Iwata at the Game Developer's Conference in San Fran, a number of exciting points were laid out to the thrall of press and games developers on hand.

Firstly, the next gen console being developed under the code name Revolution will feature backwards compatibility as well as built in Wi-Fi. The heart of the machine will be comprised of two chips, an IBM developed processor dubbed "Broadway" and a next gen ATI GPU going under the working title of "Hollywood", both of which are being designed to offer "game experiences not possible to date".

Announcements about the DS were also forthcoming with Iwata stating that Nintendo will soon offer a free Wi-Fi service to DS owners. Although it hasn't been openly stated it is commonly believed that the DS Wi-Fi and Revolution Wi-Fi services will be compatible allowing games heretofore unseen interaction between their handheld and console. Concurrent to the announcement, Iwata also mentioned that a new Wi-Fi Animal Crossing game is in the works.

Finally Iwata gave the crowd what they had been waiting for - new footage of the as yet untitled new Zelda game for the Cube. The game is set for release late 2005 and is expected to be one of the most sought after games of the year. It looks AMAZING. Just check out this new batch of screens.



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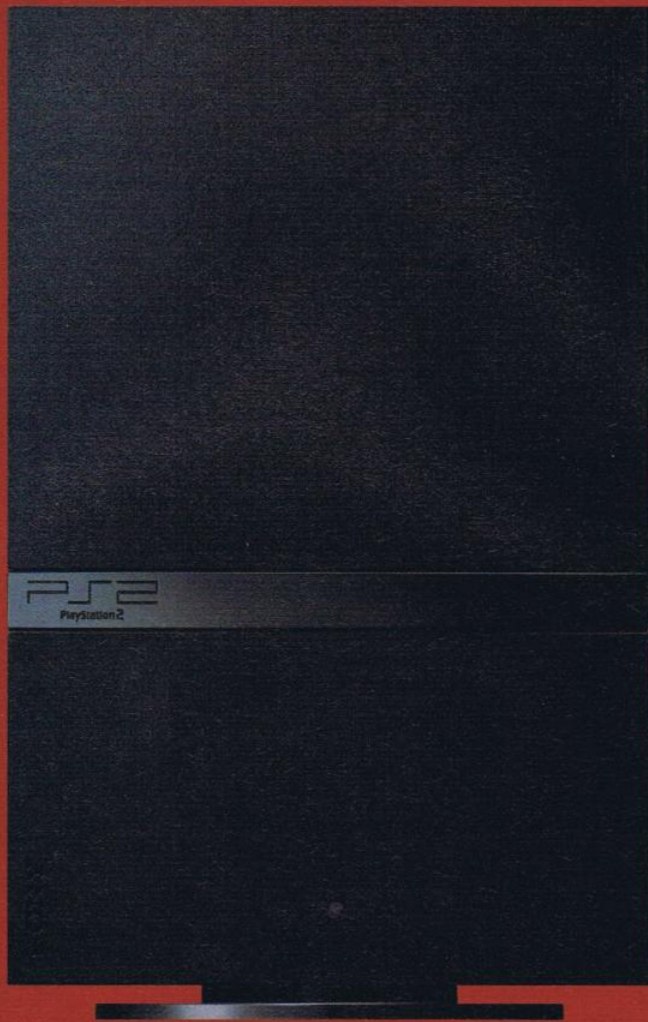


XBOX
LIVE
ONLINE ENABLED

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WIN A SLIMLINE PS2 AND EVERY PLATINUM GAME!

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One of the sexiest pieces of equipment you could have under your TV these days would have to be Sony's redesigned PS2. It's sleek and tiny, and sports network connectivity out of the box. But hey, what good would a gorgeous new slimline PS2 be without some games to play on it right? Well, thanks to our friends at Sony Australia, in addition to a slimline PS2, we have the entire platinum range to give to one lucky subscriber. That's 22 games! And with gems like Final Fantasy X, Tekken 4, GT3, Jak II, Ratchet & Clank 2, Kingdom Hearts and WRC3 it's a good looking group! Even if you already own a PS2, this is your chance to get your mitts on the latest and greatest version, as well as flesh out your game collection with a host of classics. Best of all, you'll be saving a whole heap on the cover price! Subscribe now!

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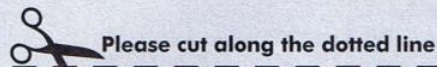
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- EyeToy Play
- Final Fantasy X
- Formula 1 2003
- Formula 1 2004
- Gran Turismo 3
- Gran Turismo Concept
- Jak & Daxter
- Jak II

- Kingdom Hearts
- Moto GP 3
- Ratchet & Clank
- Ratchet & Clank 2
- SOCOM: US Navy Seals
- SOCOM II
- Tekken 4
- The Getaway
- This is Soccer 2002
- This is Soccer 2003
- World Rally Championship
- WRC II Extreme
- WRC 3



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STAR WARS BATTLEFRONT II

Available on PS2/Xbox/PC ■ Category: Online shooter ■ Players: 1-32 ■ Developer: Pandemic ■ Available: TBA

**WORLD
EXCLUSIVE!**

The original Star Wars Battlefront certainly highlighted the boundless potential in taking the Star Wars franchise online. Since its release, epic battles have raged on Hoth, Tatooine, Endor, Yavin 4 and Naboo to name just a few, with players manning AT-ATs, AT-STs, X-Wings and speeder bikes... all in the name of victory for their faction. More online Star Wars action could never be a bad thing, and we were lucky enough to chat with **Dan Pettit**, one of the game's producers, and get the gaming world's first look at Battlefront II. On with the questions!

The Executive Producer on the first Battlefront, Greg Borrud, stated that the goal was to create "the ultimate Star Wars fan's dream". Do you feel you achieved this, and if so, what's left for the sequel?

We still have plenty of dreams to fulfill. With Star Wars Battlefront II, we're giving the player the opportunity to take the battle into space. We are also introducing the ability to play as Jedi so that you can use a lightsaber, block enemy fire and use Force powers against the enemy. The team is working hard on delivering a strong, engaging single-player experience as well. Plus, we'll be including a bunch of

new classes, vehicles and locations, many of which will be drawn from the latest movie, Star Wars: Episode III Revenge of the Sith.

Tell us about the initial planning stages of Battlefront II - the elements you wanted to change, the elements you wanted to keep, the elements you wanted to refine and the new features to be included. What factors influence these decisions?

The team spent a lot of time reading the various Battlefront forums for all three of the platforms. Listening to what the community liked and disliked had a definite influence on some of the things being

done for Star Wars Battlefront II. The community also brings up tons of additional features they'd like to see, so we've been working on addressing some of those things as well.

A simple example is adding a "sprint" ability. For Battlefront II, people will be able to sprint for a certain amount of time. Much of this decision came from community feedback. We also heard from our fans how much they wanted a more story-driven experience. So, although there will still be "Instant Action" and a MUCH enhanced "Galactic Conquest" mode, we will provide a much stronger story-driven single player experience. We will also incorporate clearer objectives for the player. And during the battle, we're making sure that it's the player who is making the true impact during the battle.

Also, the Battlefront team spent a good amount of time just playing the game online with the community. How the game is played in the real world can be much different than how you could ever plan it. This has helped define some of the gameplay adjustments we'll be making for Battlefront II to improve the balance between classes, vehicles and factions.

We are also adding a few multiplayer modes based on community interactions, as well as adding a few cool multiplayer features and a ton more options for people hosting the game. Lastly, like any other game, there winds up being ideas that are considered for the first game but never make it in. Many of those ideas are going to be incorporated into Battlefront II, but we'll talk more about those later as we solidify the details.

The original Battlefront took us to a host of classic Star Wars locations and put us behind the controls of a range of classic vehicles. What's in store for us in the sequel?

We'll be delivering even more Star Wars movie locations than before, including several new locations



[above] Spaced, the final drug tier



[above] Wow, Wicket really beefed up

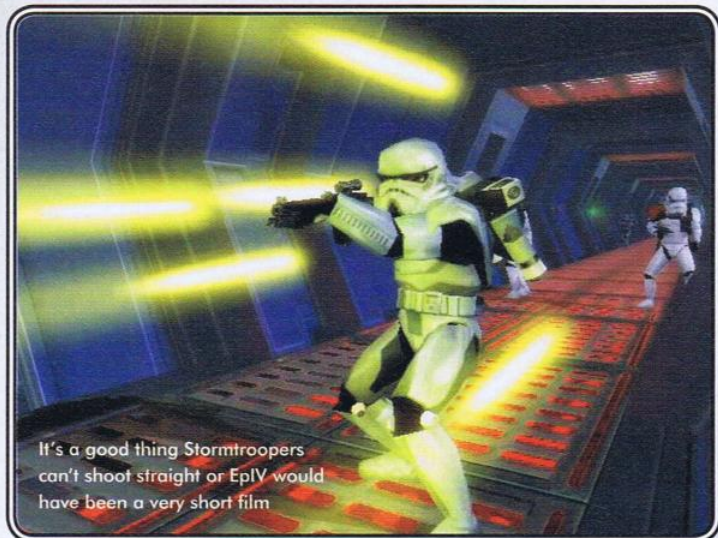
from the latest movie, Star Wars: Episode III Revenge of the Sith. We will also be visiting some locations from previous movies, such as the initial battle aboard Princess Leia's blockade runner from Star Wars: Episode IV A New Hope, the Tantive IV. And we've got quite a few others to talk about at a later date. :)

Can you tell us more about the space battles in Battlefront II?

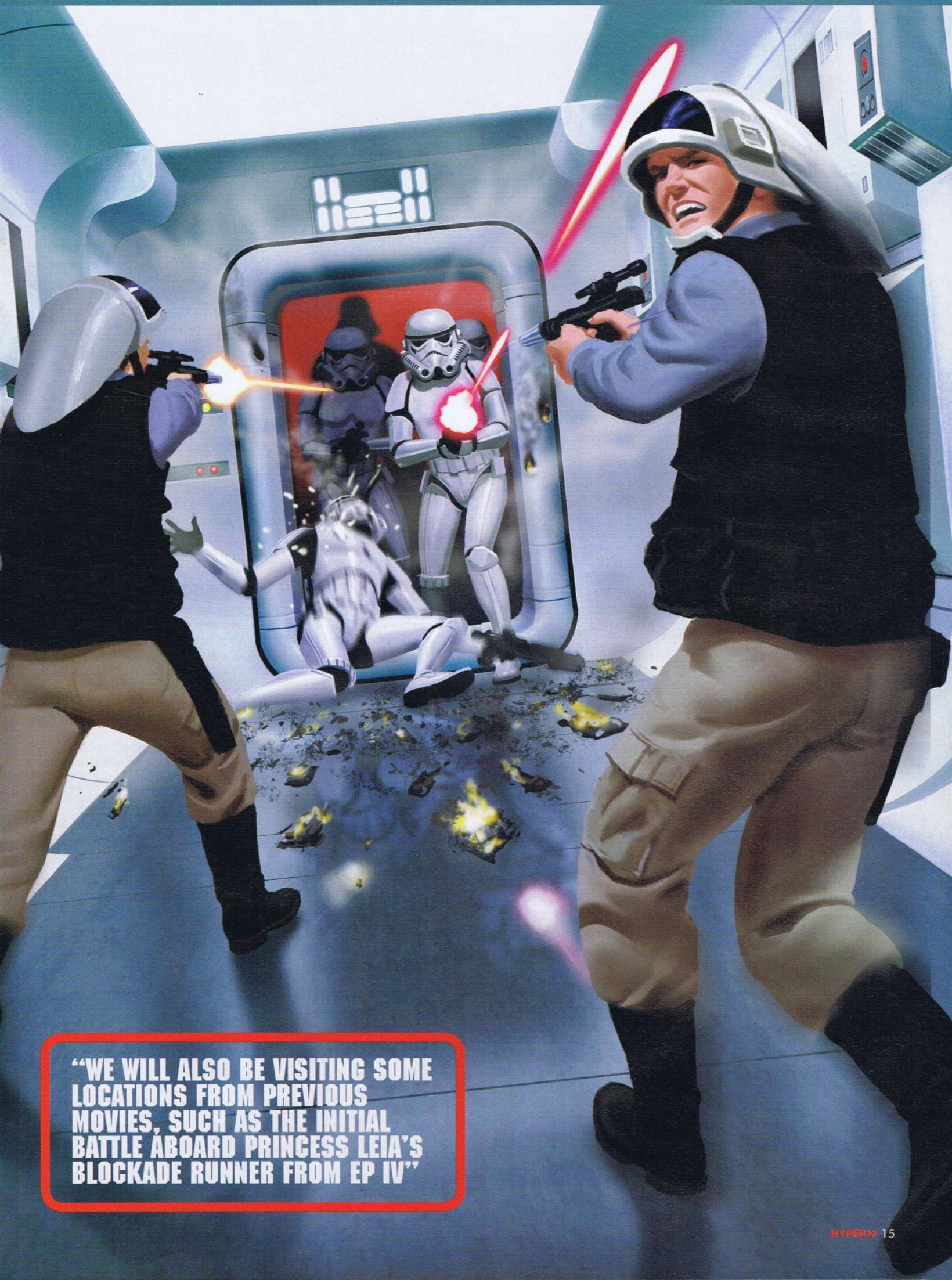
Space is a big addition to this sequel. You'll be able to fight amongst the stars and dogfight other starfighters. Or, you can stay onboard your capital ship and man one of its turrets, or even jump on a transport ship and board the enemy's capital ship and fight from within. Star Wars Battlefront II will give you the ultimate space experience where you can be fighting out in space or within the capital ship all in the same battle.

The first game was very much about the six films. Will you be drawing more on the expanded universe for the sequel?

We'll be drawing some stuff from the Expanded Universe, along with creating some new Star Wars lore. We'll also draw a lot from the latest movie, which had just a brief appearance in the original Star Wars Battlefront.



It's a good thing Stormtroopers can't shoot straight or EpiV would have been a very short film



“WE WILL ALSO BE VISITING SOME LOCATIONS FROM PREVIOUS MOVIES, SUCH AS THE INITIAL BATTLE ABOARD PRINCESS LEIA’S BLOCKADE RUNNER FROM EP IV”

The Wookiee high dive competition got off to an explosive start



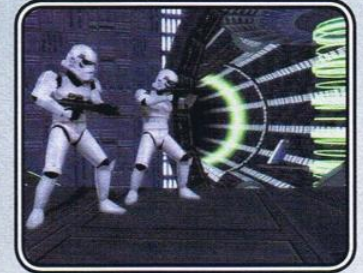
How involved are LucasArts in the development process?

Pandemic is definitely on the forefront of the game design. They are laying out every little game detail from how many letters your character name can be to playing the game online across the world.

Separatist Battle Droids, with around 20 unit types. What's changed for Battlefront II?

There will still be the four main playable factions. We are adding an additional class for each faction, as well as adding the ability to play as a Jedi. For one, as we'll see in the new

to destroy the opposition's Star Destroyer. While the Imperials have their own TIE fighters trying to fight them off, at the same time, a few Imperials stay on board to man the turret guns on the Star Destroyer to shoot down the Rebel ships if they get too close. The Rebels may then have another small group board a transport ship and actually dock onto the Star Destroyer. Players can try to destroy the turrets from the inside or weaken the ships shields from within in order to make it easier for their teammates dogfighting out in space.



have improved functionality for communicating and playing with their friends. In Battlefront II, we'll be introducing many new features that will help people quickly find their friends and play with them online. We are also working on taking that notion a step further to incorporate a system that groups of players can use to organize their Battlefront clans. We will also be enhancing and/or adding persistent stat tracking for people who play.

Design elements like needing both a pilot and a gunner in a snowspeeder on Hoth in order to take down AT-ATs was fantastic and really encouraged teamwork in the original. Do you have more elements like this planned for the sequel, and if so could you outline a couple for us?

We definitely will have new craft that support the ability for multiple people to work together that will (when executed well) create a more menacing and powerful unit. Sticking to the space idea, people could get in a transport that moves more slowly but carries a group of people. By itself, or with two people, it has little protection. But add a few others to man various guns and

"BATTLEFRONT II WILL GIVE YOU THE ULTIMATE SPACE EXPERIENCE WHERE YOU CAN BE FIGHTING OUT IN SPACE OR WITHIN THE CAPITAL SHIP ALL IN THE SAME BATTLE"

Their artists, engineers and designers are the ones building the game.

LucasArts is involved from a high level: reviewing design, mission plans, game features, story, script, etc., as well as proving sound, voice and quality assurance. LucasArts also works closely with Lucasfilm to make sure the game properly ties in with the Star Wars universe.

movie, the clone army's appearance has changed a bit. As a result, we've rebuilt the entire Republic faction to meet this new look and feel. And of course, there are Jedi. We can't talk much in detail about them yet, but there will definitely be light and dark Jedi that will have a variety of different abilities, play styles and Force powers.

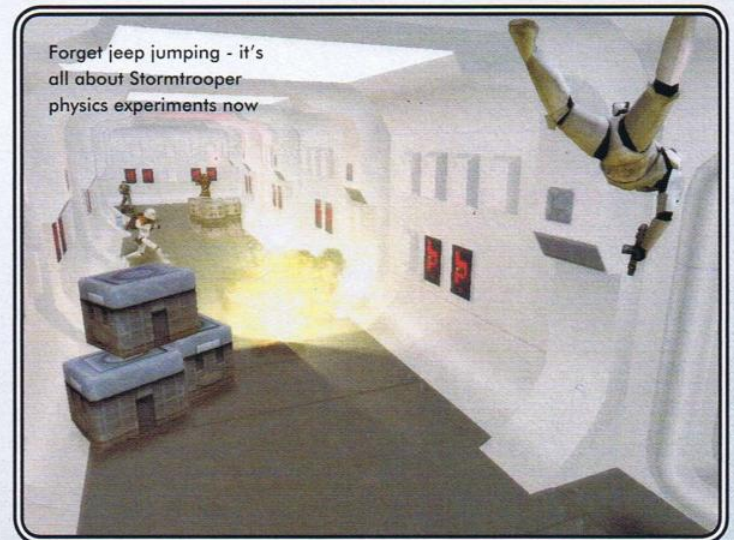
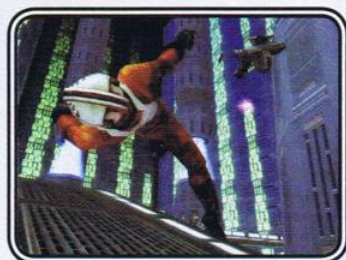
The four factions of the original were the Rebel Alliance, Galactic Empire, Republic Clone Army and

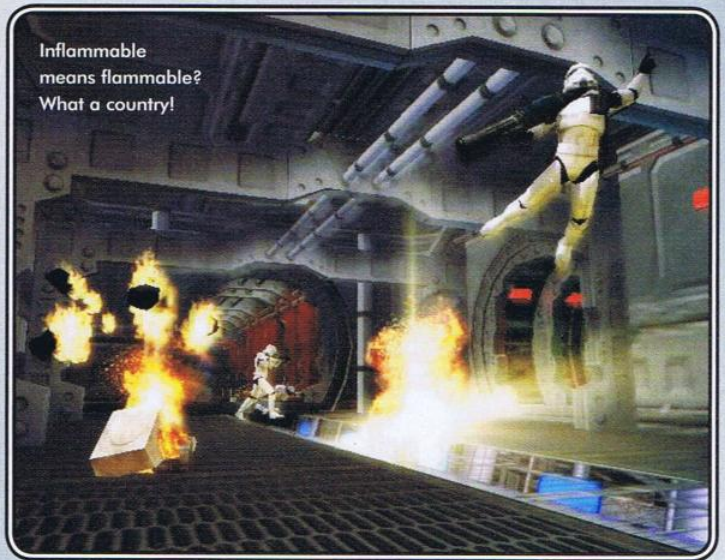
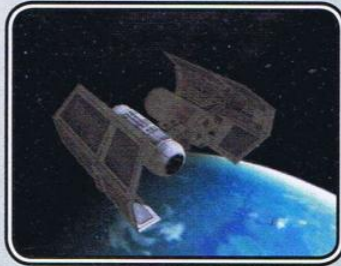
One of the strengths of the original game was the fact that in addition to 16-32 human players you could also add bots, which resulted in epic feeling battlefields. Will battles in the sequel get even bigger?

We are definitely looking to make the battles bigger, both in terms of raw numbers and gameplay. The ultimate example of this will be the epic battles in space. For instance, you'll have a group of Rebels fighting out in space trying

Something we'd really like to see in Battlefront II is an advanced clan and stat system. Is this something that's going to be included?

Another thing we got from the community is the desire to





Inflammable means flammable? What a country!

it gives it a much better chance to reach its destination. There are a few cool weapons from Episode III that lend themselves well to team play in vehicles which we'll be happy to chat about very soon!

How have the game modes and in-game objectives changed? And how will this relate to the single player game?

In multiplayer, we will be adding objective-based gameplay modes to give more variety to the type of multiplayer experiences people can have while playing Star Wars Battlefront II online or splitscreen with their friends.

Single player is definitely one of our top priorities with this game. The team has been working diligently in making sure to deliver a solid, compelling single-player

experience. Many new features have been created specifically to enhance this area of the game. One of the many things they've been doing is incorporating objectives into the gameplay. This will help give better context to what the player is doing in the mission and will help in conveying the bigger story we are trying to tell this time around. At the same time, though, we use the objectives in such a way so that, although it will be clear to the player what they need to do and why they are doing it, we'll still be giving them the freedom to play it any way they want.

Given that single player is a significant priority for the sequel, what steps will be taken to improve the AI? We felt that the AI in the original's single

player game was probably one of its weaker aspects.

A better AI system is definitely a necessity in order for us to deliver on the enhanced single-player experience that we are looking to deliver for Battlefront II. AI has been getting significant attention thus far, and we definitely saw the need to make the AI more robust and exciting for Battlefront II. Plus, the addition of a more objective-based experience during Battlefront II meant we needed to give the AI the ability to do more than just take and defend command posts. They now need to think about the strategy for the current objective(s) and react to them as well as react to what the player is doing, whether the AI is the enemy or the player's ally. Also, the objective-based system, as mentioned earlier, is an important

addition to the game. A simple example of this would be where the clone army must secure the landing platform and then fight off the CIS attack until the consulate's ship can flee to safety.

There are still significant differences between PC and console gaming, not least in terms of input devices and gaming cultures. How difficult is it to create a game with a unified design that will work on both consoles and PC? And how much time is spent tweaking the way the game plays for each system?

Pandemic has a group of people who work solely on the PC version. They work on tweaking the controls, interface, options & multiplayer as well as balancing individual units and maps to make sure we deliver a solid PC game experience.

Is Battlefront II also in development for any next generation systems?

We haven't announced plans for a Battlefront II next generation game. At this point, we're really concentrating all of our development efforts on the current machines so that we're giving fans of the first game an even better Star Wars Battlefront experience. However, we're definitely thinking about and coming up with ideas on where we can take the Battlefront franchise. So stay tuned! :)

Thanks for your time, and good luck with the game! <<<



The Stormtrooper was forced to breakdance at gunpoint. Rebel scum



STAR WARS EPISODE III REVENGE OF THE SITH

Available on PS2/Xbox ■ Category: Action ■ Players: 1-2 ■ Developer: The Collective ■ Available: Early May

With all the hype surrounding Episode III, it's no surprise that LucasArts have a game brewing for PS2 and Xbox. Two weeks before Episode III hits cinemas in May, gamers around the world will get their hands on Episode III the game, and be able to experience the fall of Anakin and his showdown with Obi-Wan in an interactive environment, linked together by footage from the film.

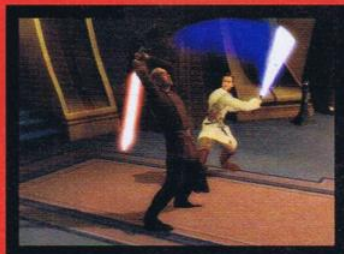
Development duties on the game have been given to The Collective, which in our minds is a very smart choice. Not only are these guys experienced in crafting solid license-based titles such as *Buffy* and *Indiana Jones*, but in *Buffy* they also demonstrated a knack for creating compelling combat situations, and putting options in the hands of the gamer (see our Q&A boxout). The Collective also know that this doesn't need to be a game that will change the world. Episode III is going to be a straight-up action game and an interactive companion for the film. In keeping their game focused on compelling action and an authentic Star Wars experience, they may just be on the way to crafting the definitive lightsaber swinging videogame.

The creation of the Episode III game has thrown up some interesting challenges for The



Collective. As opposed to creating a game based on say, one of the original trilogy, where you have the completed film, expanded universe material and so forth to work from, for Episode III the game and film were being made in tandem. This meant that although The Collective had ground-floor access to reference material from ILM, they've had to constantly cross reference to ensure everything is up to date.

Although plenty of development teams develop in tandem with a film, for Episode III the fact that so much of the film is digital - environments, characters and effects, meant that the look of the film was constantly evolving, and The Collective had to keep up. The intense collaboration with ILM, Lucasfilm and Skywalker Sound has also had its advantages, firstly in staying true to the ambition of the film, and secondly in having the most authentic assets possible to work from right from the start,



[up] Striking a pose for Jedi Monthly



FILM FOOTAGE

Since the game will be out two weeks before the film, giving fans a chance to see footage early, we asked Justin Lambros just how much footage from the film will be included: "There's over 12 minutes of Episode III footage in the game, a pretty substantial preview. These sequences are used mainly to set the stage for the environments and major character moments that we mirror from the film. In the single player story mode, 15 of the 16 missions begin with a clip of Episode III footage, and several of those have ending film sequences as well. But the majority of the moment-to-moment storytelling in the game is done with in-game cinematics to maximize the gameplay throughout the levels. We focus on a narrow slice of the total Episode III film experience - the relationship and actions of the central characters, Obi-Wan and Anakin - so in order to really deliver on that, we've created lots of in-game cinematics. Some cinematics were made to mirror sequences from the film, but most were expansions on themes and situations introduced in the film but applied to the interactive medium of games."

whether they be 3D models, characters, animations, sounds and edits of sequences. The Collective were even able to meet with George Lucas to talk about the story before he'd even finished the first draft of the script, and his involvement continued throughout.

Of course, creating an interactive retelling of the events of the film also opens up opportunities for exploring certain aspects of the film in greater depth. As Justin Lambros, the game's Associate Producer says: "Our game follows the plot of the film very closely, but it really focuses on - and in many cases expands - the central characters Obi-Wan Kenobi and Anakin Skywalker and their developing conflict. So, we really concentrated on bringing their key action moments to life in the game. Our game runs the full spectrum from re-creating action sequences blow for blow and room for room, to delivering the full impact of sequences that are just introduced, or hinted at, by the film. In fact, we've actually included levels based on scenes that were written and shot for the film, but won't make the final cut."

Beyond the storyline, however, the game will live or die based on





its gameplay, and more specifically its combat system. This is something that The Collective have pulled out all the stops on. The whole process kicked off with a lightsaber workshop with Star Wars stuntman Nick Gillard. He took the team through stances, attacks, defense and the philosophy of fighting with a lightsaber. There'll be over one hundred unique character abilities available in the game, covering saber techniques and force powers. More importantly, each character you'll be able to play as will be very distinct in style. Obi-Wan and Anakin, for instance, are obviously coming from very different places. Anakin knows he's the most powerful Jedi in existence, and fights with efficient brutality and arrogance. As he turns towards the dark side, you'll unlock powerful signature attacks known as "jury"

ANAKIN FIGHTS WITH EFFICIENT BRUTALITY AND ARROGANCE. OBI-WAN IS GRACEFUL AND CALM

moves. Obi-Wan, on the other hand, is graceful, flowing and calm, and unlocks "focus" moves which are all about speed and precision.

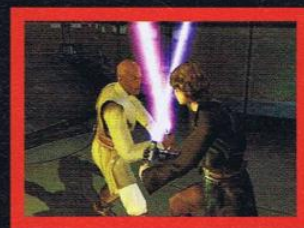
The game sees you alternating between playing as Obi-Wan and Anakin. Unfortunately, there's no co-op for the main single player mode, as Justin Lambros explains: "There is an unlockable co-op mode in the game which you gain access to as you play the single-player story mode. This mode has several different missions of cooperative play. When telling the story of

[above] Windu gets winded. Ho ho ho

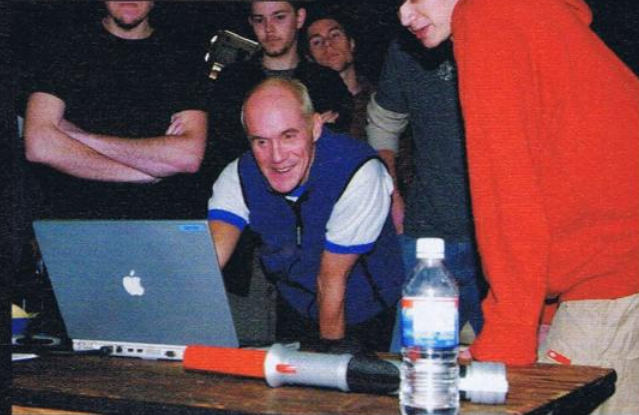
the film in the game, it was really important to us to remain as faithful as possible in both theme and spirit. It was not possible to keep those close ties to the film with a game that featured cooperative play throughout."

The greatest danger for the gameplay will be falling into simplistic button mashing patterns for lightsaber combat. The Collective are taking several steps to avoid this. The first and most obvious is simply putting a huge number of combos and acrobatic saber moves at your disposal, so you're not forced to rely on the same attack patterns over and over. The second is in facing off against varied enemies that will require a variety of strategies to take down. Taking on a battle droid, for instance, will be very

straightforward, whereas clone soldiers will have heavier firepower and fight more strategically. Obviously Sith Lords will be the most challenging, and you can bet that the final confrontation between Obi-Wan and Anakin will require every ounce of strategy you've developed over the course of the game. Speaking of the final fight, The Collective are really excited about bringing what is destined to be one of the most epic lightsaber duels ever from the big screen to the small. As Justin Lambros says "it won't just be watching it up



[left] They're making their own sound effects as they fight y'know... "pzzwwhrrr, fzzzzz, kshh"



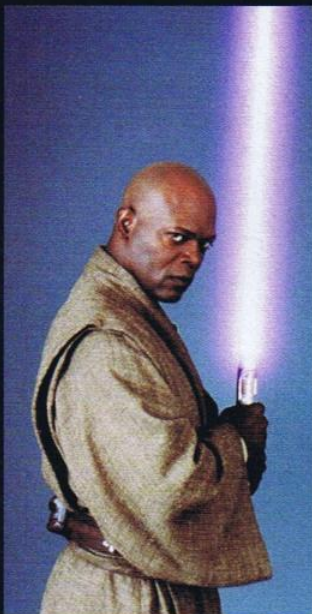
CUNNING STUNT BONUS

The stunt coordinator/fight choreographer for Episodes I-III, Nick Gillard, played an integral role in getting the combat in the Episode III game rolling, and in helping The Collective understand the rationale behind each character's fighting style, and behind Jedis in general. He spent a fair bit of time with the team, taking them through practice sessions with three of the stunt lightsabers - Anakin's, Obi-Wan's and his own, that were used on the film. Not just to give the team an authentic prop to use but also to show that each lightsaber is unique, and has its own weight, length and thickness. As Anthony Doe put it "It was a kind of modern-day Jedi training".

Hayden Christensen also came along for a day to help out. As Doe said: "Together they showed us not only some of the brilliant Episode III fight choreography, but also acted out custom content for the game! All of this will show in the final product. The influence of Nick and Hayden will be seen in every swing of the player's lightsaber. You can't help but feel it

when you play the game."

Nick was quite excited to be involved with the game, relishing the freedom of what can be achieved, and also the fact that he could help ensure that the characters had the kind of move set he'd want if he were playing the game. But Gillard wasn't just hired to consult on big flashy moves. It's just as important to get the grounding right. As Gillard said: "in the games I've played, the character movement seems to be incorrect, and I know that the people here were keen on how they could fix that. So we're working particularly on the footwork - how exactly they move. How their wrists move when they turn, that they turn the right way, that the blocks and grapples are correct. We spent a lot of time showing how Count Dooku walked, how Anakin walks now as opposed to how he walked in Episode II - which is different - and why Obi is so bouncy and jolly." Gillard plays a small role in the film as Cin Drallig (get it?) an instructor who's killed by Anakin, and he's also in the game.



MACE, DOOKU AND THE CREW

Playing as Obi-Wan and Anakin will be the core of the game, but who else will we be able to play as? We asked Justin Lambros: "We knew that people were going to want to play other characters besides just Obi-Wan and Anakin, and, in fact, many people on the team felt the same way. Again, we kept the single-player story mode firmly connected to the heart of the film, but we then used our unlockable bonus missions (single-player, co-op and versus modes) to feature some of the coolest characters from not only Episode III, but you might also find some from other Star Wars films. You will definitely get to play as all the characters from the major boss battles of the game, including Mace Windu, Count Dooku and General Grievous. In addition to that there are other characters that are playable in both the single-player and co-op bonus missions. You may even find yourself in control of the toughest, and smallest, Jedi of them all, in one of those levels.

"Going back to the versus mode, though, don't be surprised if you spend hours playing as the other characters there - these duels are incredibly fun. Just imagine mixing up the excellent swordplay that Episode III's stunt coordinator Nick Gillard helped develop with Force powers, whether you're shooting lightning at your opponent as Dooku or lifting him and throwing him through the air as Mace. There's also a lot of tension during those moments where your sabers lock - it really tests your Jedi skills."



on a screen, it'll be reacting to Obi-Wan or Anakin's fighting and feeling their attack and feeling the ebb and flow of the battle. That's what I'm really excited about. We'll hopefully not only match the intensity, but then bring it up another level through interactivity."

The final step to keep gameplay interesting will be the wealth of Force powers included in the game. As Anthony Doe, the Lead Combat Designer/Scripter on the game enthusiastically explains "The Force is your special sauce in combat - your personal can of whoop-ass. Whether you are good or evil, you'll

AS YOU PLAY THE DISTINCTION BETWEEN ANAKIN AND OBI-WAN WILL GROW GREATER

be able to use the Force in fun and destructive ways." You can get creative and fling objects at your enemies, give in to the dark side and electrocute your enemies Palpatine-style, or kick it old school and Force push droids out of your path like insignificant motes of dust. You can Force heal, saber throw and even use an old Jedi mind trick to force enemies to fight on your side. As

you play through the game you'll gain access to more and more Force powers, and the distinction between Anakin and Obi-Wan will grow greater and greater. Indeed, you'll be able to customise your Force powers as you progress, broadening the scope of combat even further.

Character development will play a huge role in this game. Anakin's descent, after all, is one of the focal points of the film and game. As Justin Lambros explains: "The evolution of Anakin as a character in the game is going to be one of the most dynamic and exciting parts of it. You'll start working side-by-side with Obi-Wan Kenobi as you have been for years in the Clone Wars, and you'll be very similar. You'll fight together as a team, you'll use your lightsaber similarly, and





WHAT WE'D LIKE TO SEE:

Playable Yoda of course! And not a Gungan in sight.

you'll kind of be the standard Jedi heroic general that fought in the Clone Wars. But as it progresses and Anakin gives into the dark side, then he's able to tap into a whole 'nother side of the Force, and he's able to use powers that are much more dynamic and powerful and sinister and deadly. And so, as he evolves in the game, he ends up being much different than Obi-Wan. Obi-Wan stays true to the light side of the Force, and Anakin then becomes the maelstrom of power that we see in that is feared throughout the galaxy."

This is a game that promises to be that rare breed of third person action game - a game where you actually care about the characters, and where you get to play as both sides of a divide that threatens to tear apart the galaxy. And of course there's the added appeal of playing through to where Episode IV starts. As Justin comments: "When Darth Vader and Obi-Wan meet on the Death Star for their famous duel in



[up] R2 downloads some robot pron

the first Star Wars film, Darth Vader's you know famous line is "the circle is now complete." Well, we're now going to be able to see, and actually live, the completing of that circle. The events that led up to this fateful duel and all of the emotion and baggage that comes with that, we're going to actually be able to not only show that onscreen but live that."

With deep combat and a wealth of Force moves at your disposal, Episode III has the potential to give the player the kind of freeform attacking options that a Jedi should have. The ultimate Jedi sim? Let's hope so. <<

Q&A



WITH THE COLLECTIVE

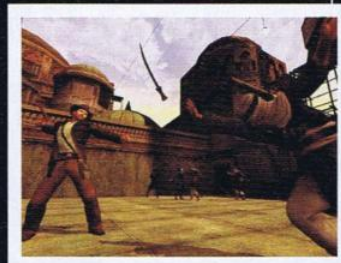
Richard Hare (VP and Creative Director) and **Gary Priest** (VP of Development) from The Collective were kind enough to answer a few additional questions about the making of the game and development in general.

HYPER: Buffy the Vampire Slayer for Xbox was a fantastic adaptation of the show. What did you learn as a studio from Buffy (and Indy as well) about working with licenses?

Richard Hare: Thank you! Our first step is always to identify the key elements of the established world that have great potential for gameplay. We then take these elements, modify or build upon them, and then weave in unique gameplay features that still seem appropriate to the fiction. This establishes our gameplay vision for the title. First and foremost, our goal is always to create a fantastic game that will be fun whether somebody is familiar with the license or not. In addition, the team spends a lot of time researching (absorbing!) all available reference materials to ensure our story elements (including new characters and locations), artistic direction and gameplay elements feel authentic to our audience - in particular, the fans. In other words, we watch a bunch of films and television!

How different is it developing Episode III around a very definite sequence of events (and someone else's vision), as opposed to something like Buffy, where although you're trying to stay true to a property, you have a large role in developing the story in the first place?

Richard Hare: There's definitely an added challenge when a game must follow an established story if it is lacking a wide variety of locations, characters or action sequences. Thankfully, in Episode III, there is no shortage of spectacular locations, awesome characters and truly impressive action sequences! Nonetheless, we still spent a significant amount of time and effort expanding upon the events of Episode III, which will allow players to experience



scenarios that are only briefly depicted or implied within the film itself. Conversely, there are many plot points and sequences that will only be revealed in the film. In this way, we feel the game and film are highly complementary - you won't have seen or experienced it all if you miss either of them.

Is Episode III running on an evolved version of the Buffy engine? If so, what changes have been made to it?

Gary Priest: Episode III is running on the Slayer Engine, so called because it was created initially for Buffy the Vampire Slayer. This engine has been effectively in development and evolving for six years and has been used to drive all of our titles since Buffy. Slayer is used in conjunction with our game construction tool SlayEd and forms the foundation of our game development suite that covers the creation of games for PlayStation 2, Xbox and the PC. We made several technology enhancements specifically for Episode III to be able to render the incredibly detailed environments, handle the sheer number of AI opponents engaging the player at once, and create a more cinematic experience with a new camera system and seamless integration of clips from the movie. Slayer is also being used as the foundation for our next-generation game engine that we're currently developing for our future titles.



as Vegas has no need, nor right to exist during the day. To see the city in the light of the sun does it a massive disservice as all you see are the towering palaces of vice and the bleak landscape surrounding. You see the poverty and the desperation. When darkness falls these flaws are hidden, not by the darkness itself but by the blinding light of neon that emanates from every stable surface. Signs advertising girly shows, penny slots, \$4.99 prime rib and lobster, people who used to be famous, people who are famous in Vegas but unknown everywhere else and people who are not famous, never were but have enough money to afford a sign. Vegas is testament to the strength of the American people, testament to their firm belief that as Americans they are capable of doing anything - like build a Mecca of rampant greed and decadence in the middle of a bloody desert. Vegas is also testament to all that is bad about the United States. There, possibly more than anywhere else in the country with millionaires numbering in the millions, can you see the vast divide between the

haves and the have nots. Within 100 metres of a hotel with rooms numbering in the thousands you can find a slum and someone living out of a cardboard box. There are more slot machines in Vegas than permanent residents.

As soon as you get off the plane in Vegas you are hit by the sights and sounds of gambling and entertainment. The airport is full of slot machines chiming away in that simultaneously annoying and alluring way of theirs. Huge screens display everything that the various casinos with enough money to afford the advertising space have to offer. Unfortunately I was in Vegas with no money in my pockets and an agenda so there was no time to sample the simple delights of losing all of my money and looking at attractive and very flexible women dance sans brassiere - all in the best possible taste of course. I was in Vegas to gamble, not with money but on the future of Midway, a veteran game company but one that has had a rather lackluster output over the last few years. Do they have what it takes

to make a comeback? That's what I was in Vegas to find out.

Off the plane and straight to the hotel, the cavernous Mandalay Bay Resort and Casino, a complex big enough to house Star City 50 times over and have some room left over for the dancing girls. Check in, get changed, go to a show. Cirque du Soleil are in constant rotation in Vegas with at least four different shows running at one time.

After two hours of people defying gravity it's time to get some eats. Harley Davidson Café. The very name conjured up manliness, large bikes and big things throbbing between your legs. You walk into a Harley themed restaurant expecting a soundtrack of classic rock but instead we were greeted with a medley of new romantic and 80s dance tracks. Odd. Never be a vegetarian in the US. You'll starve to death or else be smothered in the world's worst Caesar salad, a dish that apparently only consists of lettuce and cheese. Five pounds of slow cooked pork later it's time for a walk down the strip to admire the lights and then off to bed.





LA Rush

Developer: Midway San Diego

Platform: PS2/Xbox

Due: Late 2005

■ If you want to get Cam all nostalgic and excited about an old game all you have to do is mention San Francisco Rush. At the very mention of the game he will get all hot and bothered in a quaint but disturbingly quasi-sexual way. He'll go on at length about the sense of speed and the cool shortcuts and the ridiculous jumps. Then he usually curls up with a contented smile and falls into a half sleep. I, on the other hand didn't play SF Rush nearly as much but after seeing a bit of the spiritual successor, LA Rush I can safely say that I will be reacting the same way to the new game some time in the future. LA Rush has moved into the full 3D realm with a vengeance and will present players with around 350 miles of LA to drive around. Although the game now looks more like GTA than Rush the sense of speed is still very palpable and there are massive jumps galore. In fact the game will ship with a specific jump mode that will charge players to jump through rings scattered throughout the city to unlock new content and for the sheer thrill of jumping a car a long god-damn way. Check out our interview on the pages that follow.

Fear & Respect

Developer: TBA

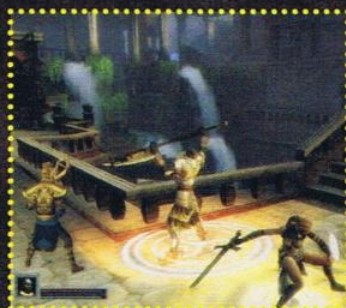
Platform: PS2/Xbox

Due: Late 2005

■ There seems to be a law in the games industry nowadays that dictates that all new IPs need to have some type of urban flavour. All we got to see of Fear & Respect was a trailer but that was enough to get the assembled throng of journalists cheering. Think of GTA: San Andreas set in the modern day, make it a little grittier and third person action oriented and you have some idea of what we saw. To ensure it hits the right notes it's being developed in collaboration with director/writer John "Boyz N The Hood" Singleton. That was not what had us cheering



though. What had us excited was the fact that the lead character is modeled on and voiced by none other than Snoop Dogg. If playing as Snoopy D, O double gizzle ain't urban we don't know what is.



Gauntlet: Seven Sorrows

Developer: Midway San Diego

Platform: PC/PS2/Xbox

Due: Late 2005

■ It's amazing that Midway is willing to tempt fate again with the Gauntlet series after the abominable Gauntlet: Dark Legacy. It's more amazing that Midway have hired everyone's favourite middle aged hair model with a Romanian internet bride, John Romero to head up the project. More amazing still is that what we've seen so far looks pretty good and not at all what we would expect from a dead franchise and Mr. "Suck it Down". Gameplay so far seems to resemble such games as Champions of Norrath or Baldur's Gate: DA but screenshots and footage point to it looking a whole lot better. Could this be the shot in the arm that Gauntlet so desperately needs? Only time and some playable code will tell.



Area 51

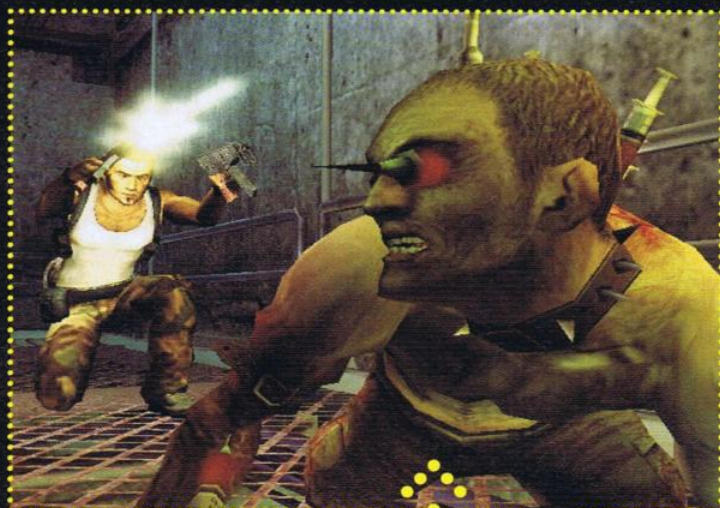
Developer: Midway Austin

Platform: PC/PS2/Xbox

Due: April 2005

■ Due out really soon now (probably by the time you're reading this), Area 51 is shaping up to be quite a decent little FPS. The game will be available on PS2, Xbox and PC with the PC version playing best so far. Weapon balance is good, levels appear well designed (at least those we have seen so far) and enemy AI should make for a decent challenge.





The Suffering: Ties That Bind

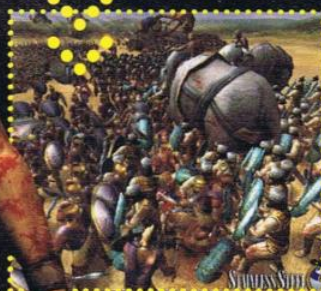
Developer: Surreal Software
Platform: PC/PS2/Xbox
Due: Mid 2005

■ The Suffering was something of a sleeper hit - a cross between action game and survival horror that actually managed to be action packed and terrifying all at once. Ties That Bind sees the improbably named anti-hero Torque away from gaol and back in his home town of Baltimore. All is not wine and roses however, as the demons of the prison have escaped into the urban landscape, mutating into new forms that echo urban blight rather than execution methods (as seen in the original game). The action has been ramped up a bit in the sequel and rather than detract from the mood of the game it serves to draw players further into the world of demons and a man with a dark past. New game elements include the addition of Torque's dead wife serving as something of a spiritual advisor (with emphasis placed firmly on spiritual), multiple beginnings (to reflect the multiple endings of the first game) and two rage forms, one to reflect an essentially "good" Torque and one who has embraced his dark side. From what we've seen so far, The Suffering: Ties That Bind will, if anything be a superior game to its predecessor. We can't wait.

Rise & Fall

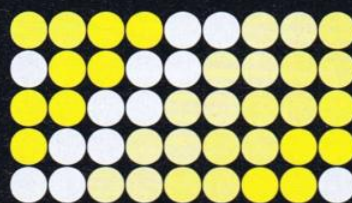
Developer: Stainless Steel Studios
Platform: PC
Due: Late 2005

■ It's going to be hard to top Rome: Total War as far as historical RTS/Strategy goes but Rise & Fall: Civilisations at War could be that game. Rise & Fall will allow players to choose from one of four major races and present them with some epic scale battles. More interestingly, Rise & Fall will allow players to jump into a hero character from each race (such as Alexander the Great) and play them in first person to turn the tide of the battle, delving deep into the fray or using missile weapons to take out archers and the like. Whether or not the formula will work is still up in the air but early footage and screenshots show us some truly spectacular looking battles.



WAKE UP CALL

There is no better way to wake yourself up for a day of work than to jump on a roller-coaster or some other form of adrenalin-pumping ride. One wake up call was made with the New York, New York casino coaster - a track measuring around 1km that you hurtle around with neck jarring speed in about 40 seconds. That was pretty intense first thing in the morning but nothing compared to the Big Shot, the morning ride for the day of the press conference. The Big Shot rests on top of Stratosphere, a casino/hotel shaped like Centrepoint Tower. To get to the ride you have to take an elevator up 109 floors and get out onto the roof. You are then strapped into a seat and cranked down on a hydraulic piston. After a few seconds you are flung another four or five stories up, the free fall a few stories down. At the top or the ride you can no longer see the roof so you feel like you're falling 115 odd floors above Vegas. If that can't wake you up then you're already dead.



Midway Arcade Treasures 3

Developer: Midway
Platform: GCN/PS2/Xbox
Due: Mid 2005

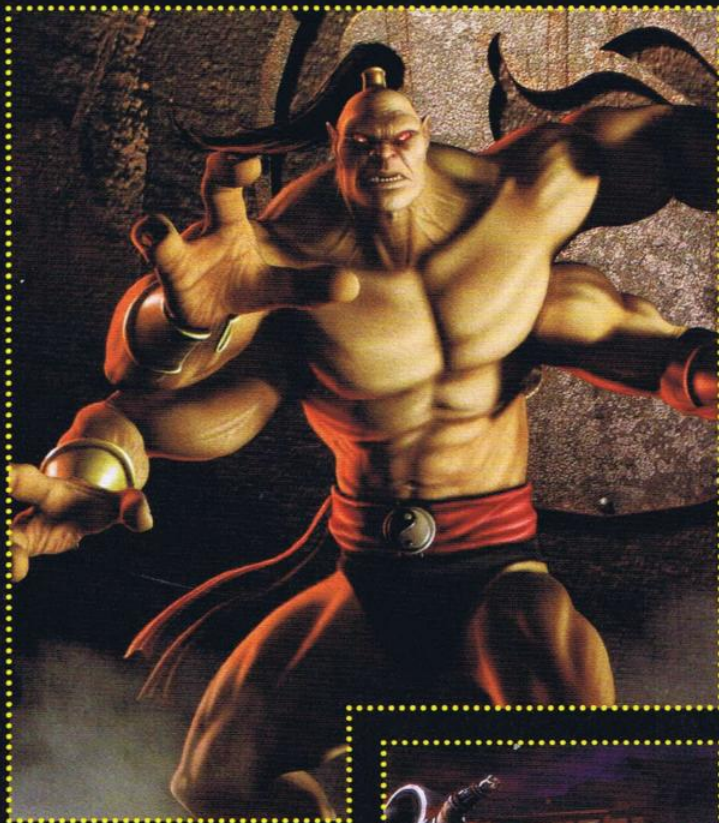
■ OK, so a new arcade compilation isn't something to write home about so I won't waste too much page space on it aside from to say that Arcade Treasures 3 is shaping up to be the best of the lot. All of the games contained in the third compilation are racing titles and include such classics as San Francisco Rush, Rush the Rock and Hydro Thunder.



THE LAND DOWNUNDER

If you ever get to the US be sure and eat at one of the many Australian themed restaurants. Just make sure that you're not too easily offended. Apparently Australians eat Kookaburras, think everything is Bonza and smother our French fires with Monterey Jack cheese and Bacon. Reckon!





Mortal Kombat: Shaolin Monks

Developer: Paradox
Platform: PS2/Xbox
Due: September 2005

■ A new Mortal Kombat action game has its work cut out for it considering the terrible games that have come before it, most notably Sub Zero and Special Forces. Shaolin Monks is looking like the game that could actually, well, work. No playable code was available at the event but what we are given to understand is that Shaolin Monks will utilise a multi-directional combat system along the lines of Rise to Honor or Death by Degrees, as well as integrate the well known moves of the two main characters, Liu Kang and Kung Lao. Also in keeping with the Mortal Kombat franchise, the two characters will have access to at least 10 fatalities each as well as Multitalities



and Brutalities, the latter two being room clearing attacks and just plain nasty respectively. As an action game, Shaolin Monks will include a lot of environmental interactivity ranging from simple wall running for movement through to area specific attacks and fatalities. Players will also be able to customise their character through experience gained during combat. As could be expected, Shaolin Monks will feature both single player and cooperative game modes. We've been saying for a while that we want to see a good action game come along that utilises both thumbsticks. All signs so far point to Shaolin Monks being that game.

Mortal Kombat: Deception

Developer: Midway
Platform: GCN
Due: Never

■ We've finally had a look at the GameCube code of Deception and it looks exceptional - probably the best of the bunch with some sumptuous graphics and two bonus characters - Shao Khan and Goro, available to play. Unfortunately we also discovered that it will not be



released locally so any of you Cube fanciers will have to import a copy from the UK if you want your share of MK goodness.

Narc

Developer: Point of View
Platform: PS2/Xbox
Due: Probably never

■ Otherwise known as the game that will never, ever get released in Australia. Narc is a remake of the old Midway arcade game that features a hyper-violent Narc shooting people, getting bitten on the arse by crack dogs, collecting drugs for points and sometimes blowing shit up with a rocket launcher. The new version has gone full 3D and presents a game similar to True Crime but with one significant difference. Players in Narc can use drugs to gain special abilities for a short time. Sure, the



game has an "Addiction Meter" to show how bad the player is hooked on drugs and they can be kicked off the force for their habit but we have a funny feeling that the censorship board may have some problems with a game that encourages experimentation with drugs.

WELCOME HOME AND BY THE WAY, F**K YOU

The best part of traveling for me is coming home. The knowledge that tonight you will be sleeping under familiar skies in your own bed is the most wonderful welcome home. I'm sitting on the plane, recently fallen into what I like to call an "ennui coma" - the state you fall into when you are so bored you can't be bothered keeping your eyes open - when the PA comes on and the pilot informs us that due to "extreme weather conditions" in Sydney the Airport is closed and we will have to divert to Brisbane. It's hard to describe the feeling you get when you discover you can't go home. It's kind of like betrayal. It hurts and puts a dampener on the mood. Eventually we get into the Brisbane airport - the Casino décor a pale imitation of our point of origin. I wait at the carousel for my bags, listening all the while to a bored sounding woman on the PA telling us not to leave the baggage collection area until they inform us where we will be staying for the night. I wait for my bag a little more. The carousel stops. No more bags come. I ask at the baggage claim desk about my luggage. They tell me that they have no idea where it is but if I ask at Sydney they might know. I ask if they can give me a toothbrush and some toothpaste so I can at least brush my teeth. Apparently that is beyond the purview of the people who lost my bags. Another hour and a half later (around 11:30pm) we are shuffled out to the buses to take us to our hotels for the night. An hour later we arrive due to the fact that the bus driver decided to go to the wrong hotel first, showing us parts of the outskirts of Brisbane that only exist during the witching hour.

Hotel - too late to get food, no point in having a shower to get back into clothes you've been steadily marinating in for the last 20 hours but I do so anyway. Sleep. For at least 20 minutes anyway until I get a call from reception telling me that the bus to take me back to the airport in the morning will be leaving at 6am. I order a 5:30 wake up call. Ten to six I get my call. No time for a morning shower. Back into stinky clothes and onto the bus. It only takes us 20 minutes to get back to the airport where we discover that our plane doesn't leave for another three hours. Red Rooster for breakfast is not good, no matter how you look at it.

Finally Sydney and I line up with all the other shmoes who had bags go missing. There's about three dozen of us. I get a polite "we have no idea where your bags are but if you wait for a few days we can probably find them"; the baggage guy also informs us that LAX keeps them in business - without them bags would not get lost. Stupid LAX. Home, shower, brush teeth. Coma. Two days later I get my luggage delivered at work. I love Sydney, I really do but I think I may have done something to piss her off. Time for some groveling.

*Red Ant is exempt from any blame given for the disastrous flight back home. The blame lies firmly on the shoulders of the weather, the airlines and Brisbane. Just because I hate Brisbane.



LA RUSH

Available on PS2/Xbox ■ Category: Arcade racing ■ Players: 1-Multi ■ Developer: Midway San Diego ■ Available: Late 2005

an Francisco Rush was one of the original band of brash arcade racers. While hightailing it through San Fran, excessive speed was your friend, shortcuts were plentiful and the massive changes in elevation meant that you spent almost as much time in the air as you did on the ground. It was a truly great arcade racer, and several sequels were released. But then Midway let the Rush series lie for a while, lurking in the shadows of a generation of gamers' minds, waiting for a chance to be reborn. It's been a long wait, but now Rush is back, in LA no less. To find out more about bringing the series screaming back to life, we spoke to **Pall Palsson**, a developer from Midway.

since we made the last Rush game. The consoles are so powerful now that they have handed all genres a whole new set of tools to create the best gaming experience possible. For racing games in particular this has made it possible for us to create realistic and vast open cities, create a deep cinematic storyline, accurately model licensed vehicles and portray visual and performance upgrades to those very same cars. Along with all the classic Rush style game play (big jumps, cool shortcuts, track exploration and crazy stunts) we think these new additions are very much in keeping with the spirit of the classic Rush games.

"Rush". It features Rush style arcade game play that blends competitive arcade racing with a moment or two that will make your heart stop. All this mixes into adrenaline packed fun that we think will carve its way into the hearts of fans of the classic Rush games as well as the fans of arcade racers in general.

The Rush series already has its own distinct style, but with the inclusion of customisation and "bling" you seem to be bringing it more into line with the other popular racers at the moment. What's the reasoning behind the change? Are you prepared to risk alienating Rush fans?

We don't want to alienate the Rush fans, as a hardcore Rush fan myself I can tell you we are keeping and enhancing the things that made the classic Rush games so great at the same time as adding new things that we were simply not able to do in the past but are in essence very Rush game mechanics. The customisation in the game is very easy to do but at the same time visually impressive and has a positive impact on the performance of your car. The "bling" is something that ties very well into the story and all the Rush elements we have in the game.

What will make LA Rush a quintessentially "Rush" game?

LA Rush captures the spirit and feeling of the classic Rush games in style. We have the cool shortcuts and the huge jumps, the over the top cars, the forgiving physics and the race course exploration that made the Rush games so popular in the arcades and on previous consoles. The sensation of speed in Rush is greater than you find in any open city racing game that I've seen to date so we are definitely not lacking in the speed department. These things combined with the open city and the new "rush moments" that happen during races are going to make LA Rush first and foremost a worthy resurrection of the Rush franchise and a fun arcade racing game.

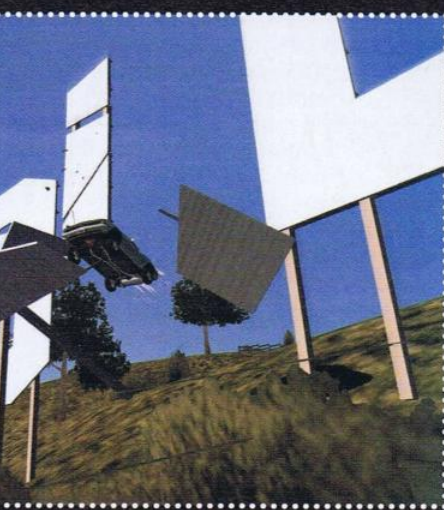
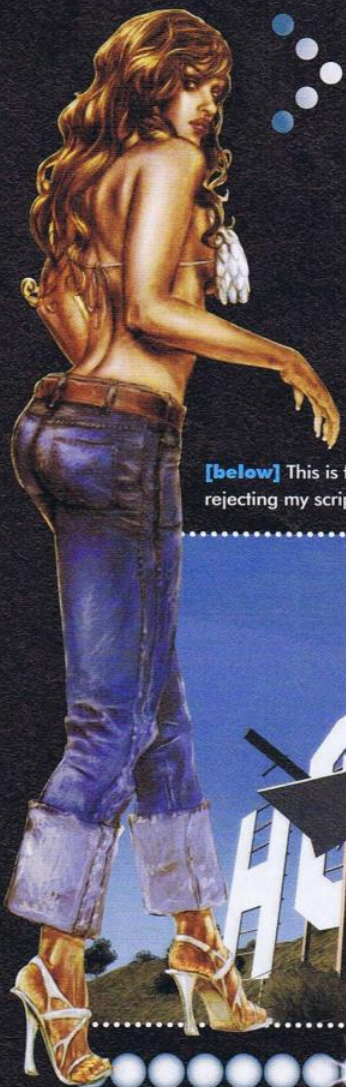
How much of a role will customisation play in the game?

Every car in the game can be taken to WCC and the guys there will upgrade the car for you. This is not something that the player needs to do to complete the game but does make it easier. We did not want LA Rush to be another car tuning game and in all honesty I can't think of anyone who I would rather have upgrade my rides than the guys at WCC... it is after all what they do for a living! Having your car customized gives it a visual and performance upgrade that will come in handy when you need that extra burst of speed to do the huge jump that's going launch you out of 2nd place, over the line and ultimately to immortality as the best street racer LA has ever seen.

HYPER: The Rush games are renowned for their speed, wild shortcuts and big air, all wrapped up in a straightforward arcade framework. With LA Rush it sounds like you're taking the series in a slightly different direction with the inclusion of a story mode and open course design. Tell us about what's changed for LA Rush, and the reasoning behind the changes.

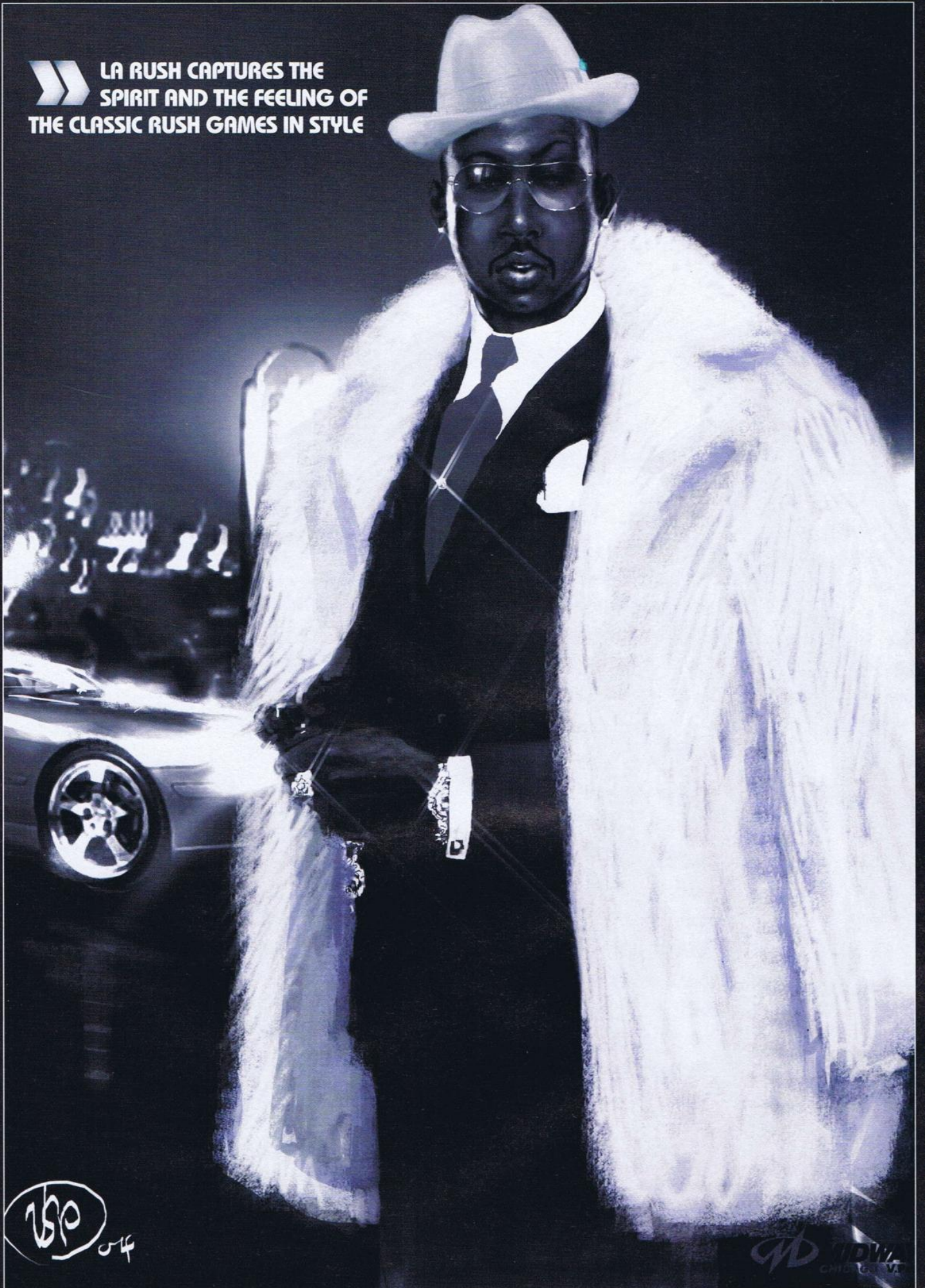
Pall Palsson: We believe that LA Rush is following the very same direction as the classic Rush games, the design has simply been updated to include some of the cool "Rush" things we can do on modern consoles. Racing games have matured a lot

[below] This is for rejecting my script



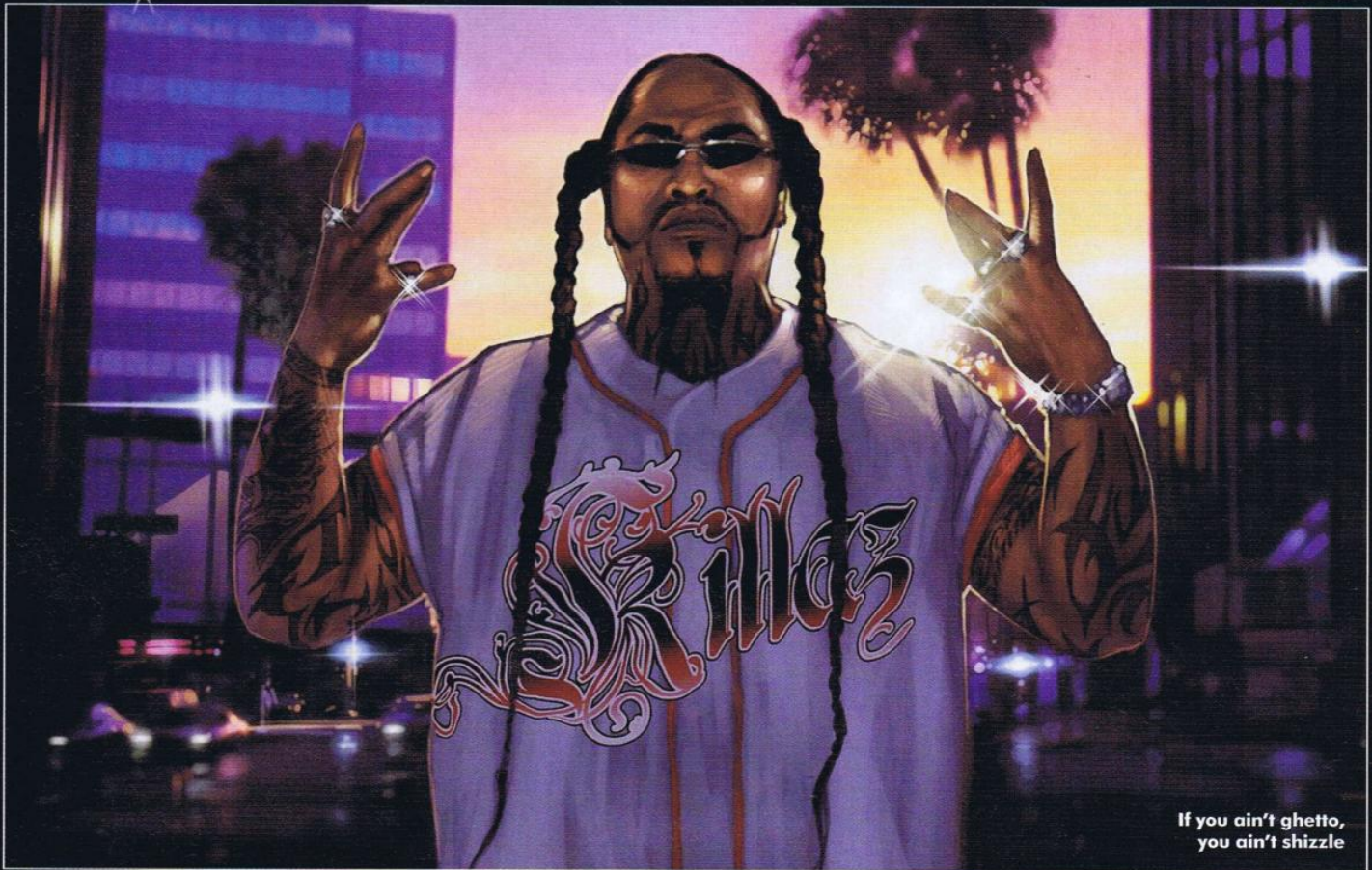


LA RUSH CAPTURES THE
SPIRIT AND THE FEELING OF
THE CLASSIC RUSH GAMES IN STYLE



160
04

SD SDWA
CMC CMT



If you ain't ghetto, you ain't shizzle

to either re-buy or repair the vehicle?

Every car in LA Rush has a realistically detailed damage model and throughout a race your car will pickup damage. LA Rush is above all else arcade style game play so we did not want to frustrate the player by forcing him to repair his vehicle after every race... there is a lot of cool stuff to crash into and through in the game and we didn't want there to be any financial drawbacks to enjoying that so the car is automatically fixed and reset if the player takes too much damage. During a race, this obviously incurs a time penalty.



Los Angeles is a pretty flat place - does this make capturing the adrenaline the series is known for more difficult than when you had San Francisco as a setting?

We wanted this re-birth of the Rush franchise to have its own unique feel

» THE "BLING" IS SOMETHING THAT TIES VERY WELL INTO THE STORY

Variously we've seen LA Rush described as being a free roaming living city with 350 odd miles of road and being comprised of 50+ unique tracks, how does the game contain both?

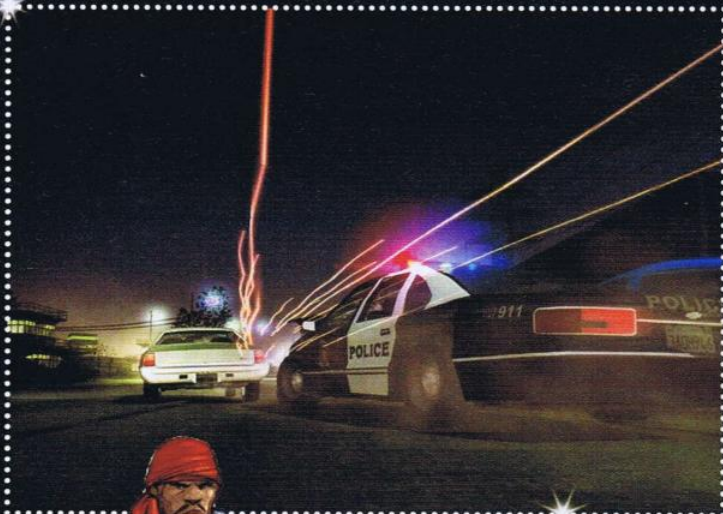
All the races are set in the city and creating so many races and missions out of 350 odd miles of road is extremely challenging. The challenge was also making sure they were all adrenaline packed and very, very, Rush but I think we have accomplished that goal and I can't wait for people to get their hands on the game.

while still keeping all the elements that made the classic Rush games so great. In keeping with that we didn't want to set the new Rush game in a city that has already been featured in the Classic Rush games. Los Angeles is a great city to set a racing game in for various reasons and it's also a city that many people are familiar with. San Francisco is a great setting for a Rush style game and perhaps the franchise will return to its roots at some point in the future but at the present time we are very excited to be featuring Los Angeles. LA is, like you said, a pretty flat place and we have gone to great lengths to keep the real-life feel of Los Angeles while

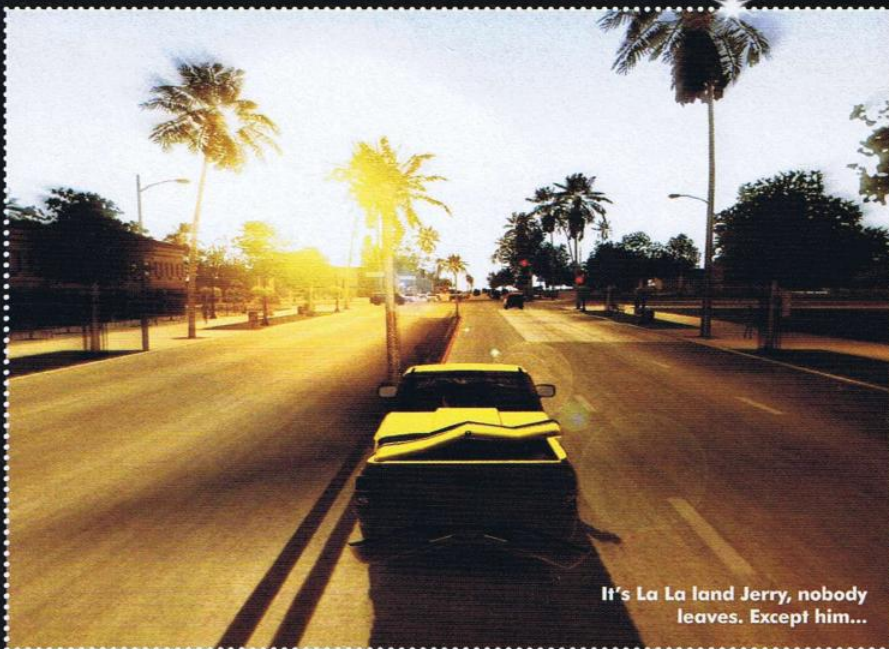
Can you tell us which car licenses will be included in the game? And how about aftermarket parts manufacturers?

At this time I can not give you a definitive list of the car licenses and aftermarket parts that will be featured in the game. Rest assured that there will be a lot of licensed cars and the West Coast Customs guys can't work unless they have access to the very best of aftermarket parts. In the weeks to come we will release more news of the car licenses, celebrity talent and aftermarket parts featured in LA Rush

Will there be damage modelling? And if a car is damaged in a race or jump will players be forced



Last of the V8 Interceptors



It's La La land Jerry, nobody leaves. Except him...

Xzibit A: My Pimped Ride



at the same time making sure that the races we set are packed full of excitement. Luckily we have very gifted level artists who have by clever modelling of buildings and other geometry carved LA into a place where the adrenaline packed Rush moments are never far away.

The story mode sounds interesting - could you tell us about how it will be structured and what kinds of missions we can expect?

The basics of the story are that you are a top street racer in LA and your nemesis, a semi-legit businessman, has stolen all your cars to make sure you don't win all the cash he has put up for a series of high stakes street races. As you progress through the story you will have access to races that are free or have a low entry fee and those races will help you build up your cash for the high stake Cross-town races that drive the story progression. Mixed in with the races are Acquire missions where you regain your stolen cars and retribution missions where you

can take your revenge out on your nemesis for the grief he caused you. The story is non linear so once you have raced a few races in the first area you can either finish that area (to make sure you have the best possible car to tackle the next area) or move on to any of the four other areas that are featured in the game.

How much of the game will the story mode comprise, and what other modes will be available?

We want Story Mode to be the heart and soul of LA Rush. It's where you regain your stolen vehicles, your dignity and ultimately your dominance over the LA street scene. The game will also feature a Quick Race option for those that just want to sit down and get a quick fix of Rush as well as some additional fun packed game modes that we'll announce in the coming weeks.

The ring mode will see players travelling across the city looking for unique jumps. Can you tell us how this will work and what type of rewards players can

expect from making all of the jumps?

When the player is driving around the city he will spot markers that indicate the start of an adventure (ring) sequence. The player then has to figure out how to reach that marker, it may be floating in mid air indicating that the player has to find a jump to reach it. When the player manages to hit the marker the game will pause and proceed to show the player the location of the next marker in the adventure sequence. When the player hits the last marker in the sequence he will be shown the location of a hidden reward... and that reward could be one of the awesome concept cars featured exclusively in LA Rush.

Will all of the game components (story mode, ring mode and free roaming) be integrated into the single player game or will they be different game types?

These will all be part of the single player game but if you have finished a race or acquired a car in the Story Mode that car and those races will then become available through the Quick Race option. We are looking

[above] "Pull the car over. Your ride isn't bling enough for our town"

at implementing more game modes at the moment but I can't give any details on them at this time.

Will LA Rush feature an online component? If so, could you give us some details on the modes and how many players will be able to race concurrently?

The online component of LA Rush is still being looked at so I can't at this time comment on the extent we will implement online play. We will feature multiplayer split screen.

What graphics engine is LA Rush running on, and what features will make the visuals distinct?

LA Rush is running on a proprietary graphics engine created specifically for LA Rush. It has a lot of interesting features that allow us to reproduce the city with lots of detail, an incredible draw distance and lots of special effects that all help bring the city to life and give players the best possible game play experience.

Thanks for your time! <<<





**EXCLUSIVE
XBOX 2
SCREENS!**

CONDEMNED

Available on **Xbox 2, PC** ■ Category: **First Person Horror** ■ Players: **1** ■ Developer: **Monolith Productions** ■ Available: **TBA**

▶▶ The Sega brand has become pretty battered over the years. Once the epitome of cool, Sega now faces an uphill battle for the hearts and wallets of the modern gamer. These are the guys that have been unfortunate enough to play Crazy Taxi 3 and other dross that they've brought out since becoming a third party publisher. But hey, the good news is that Sega know all this, and are setting out to broaden their portfolio and essentially reinvent themselves in the eyes of the Western gamer.

Case in point, Condemned. In development for next gen systems and PC at Monolith Productions, this is definitely one to look out for. Monolith, after all, are the studio behind the excellent No One Lives Forever franchise, one of

our "greatest games you've never played" - Tron 2.0, and they're also currently working on one of our most anticipated games of 2005 - F.E.A.R.

We don't know a great deal about Condemned as yet, other than it's a "first person psychological thriller". You play as FBI agent Ethan Thomas, a member of the Serial Crimes Unit. In Condemned you'll be on the trail of a brutal serial killer, a pursuit that will take you through a variety of decaying urban environments - the kinds of places that even the most brave and foolhardy fear to tread. And then there's the population. From the Silent Hill-style macabre and twisted freaks with deformed limbs and bodies that have wasted away, through to more traditional teen slasher flick enemies, Condemned has got all bases covered. This is

a game that's designed to screw with your head, in a constantly unsettling world with enemies that behave intelligently. In addition to the combat that we all expect from the horror genre, players will also have forensic tools at their disposal, which will hopefully make the game's puzzles a little more believable and appropriate. After all, how many FBI agents need to find the jade dragon's eyes in order to open a door?

As our exclusive Xbox 2/Xenon screenshots attest, the look of the game is nothing short of stunning. The look is realistic and gritty, with some heavily Sin City-inspired elements, such as the inspired use of negative space with arcing splashes of red. It looks disturbing, it looks bloody and it looks amazing. We'll have more on Condemned after E3. <<<

WHAT WE'D LIKE TO SEE:

The forensic elements in the game used for creative and interesting puzzles.



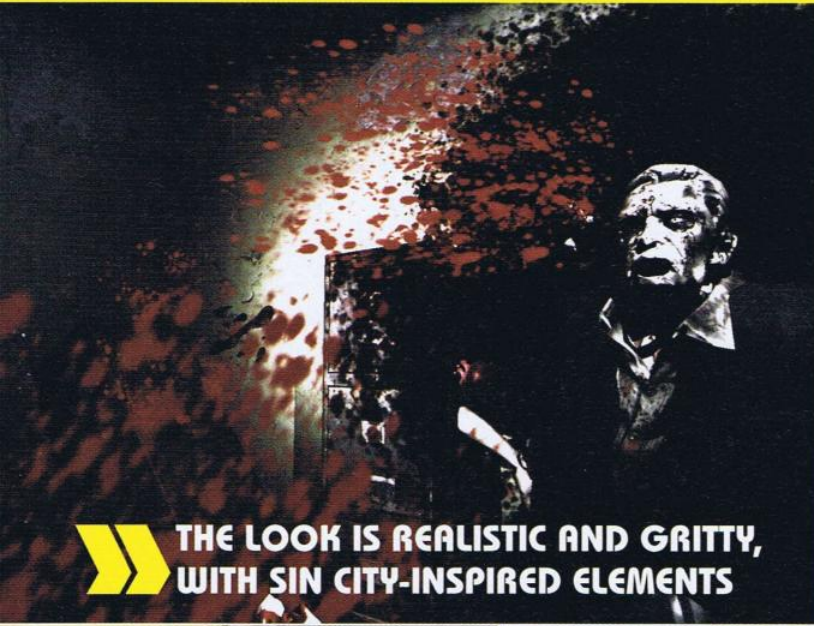
[up] You really need to get some sun



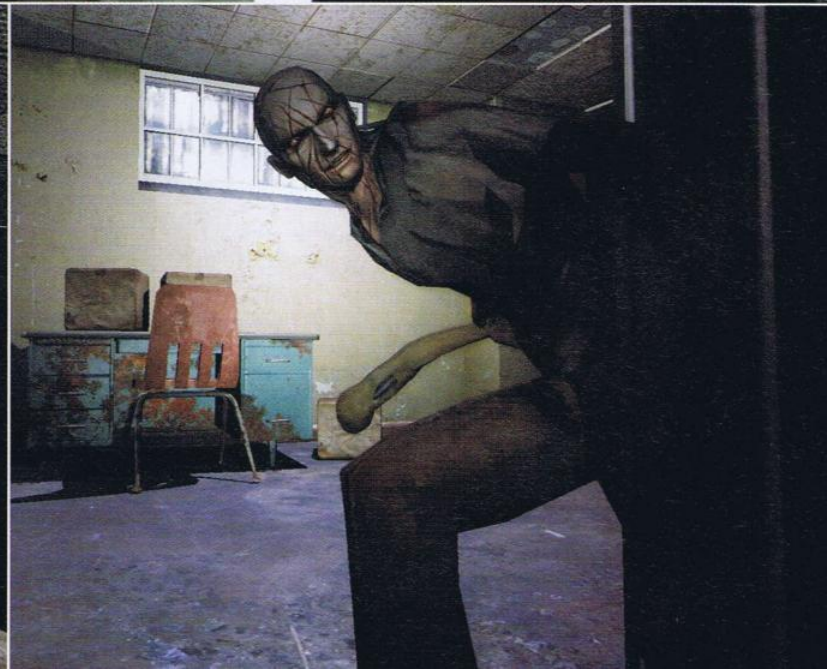
[up] I'd wager that he's a bad guy...



[up] Thankfully Bunnings sell spiked bats



**THE LOOK IS REALISTIC AND GRITTY,
WITH SIN CITY-INSPIRED ELEMENTS**





WHAT WE'D LIKE TO SEE:

The idea is to create a gameworld with a memory. Let's hope they do... cos we'll remember it if they don't.

THE GODFATHER

Available on PC/PS2/PSP/Xbox ■ Category: Action adventure ■ Players: 1 ■ Developer: EA Redwood Shores ■ Available: Late 2005

Based on the book by Mario Puzo and directed by Francis Ford Coppola, 1972's *The Godfather* is a classic, there's no two ways about it. References to sleeping with the fishes, waking up with a horse head in your bed and making people offers they can't refuse have permeated pop culture to the point

where everyone knows about it, even if they haven't seen it. Mind you, if you haven't seen *The Godfather*, then it's about time you did. It's a great flick, but what's interesting about the idea of a videogame translation is that it's not exactly action packed. It's very much a film about characters

and family, about manipulation and negotiation, about respect and loyalty, and about the ethics of mob business, rather than about shocking violence or fast paced action. Thus, there's really no way a straight-up action game or GTA clone would cut it with *The Godfather* license. To stay true to the property, EA are going to have to tread very carefully.

Rather than simply following the events of the film, the game will weave itself in and around them, fleshing out side stories and the wider machinations of the Corleone family. Thus, you won't be playing as any of the main characters from the film - although your path will most certainly intersect with theirs on numerous occasions and in pivotal moments from the film. Instead, you'll create your own character who's just a small-time crook at the beginning of the game, before being accepted into the Corleone crime family and working your way up through the family by succeeding in missions and earning respect and greater influence.

Set in 1945-1955 in New York, *The Godfather* is going to have a very



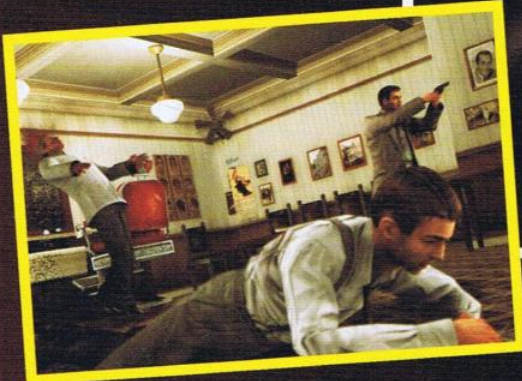
[above] The first one to blink gets shot



[above] Let me help you with that tie



distinctive gameworld, but perhaps what's most interesting about it is the goal that EA Redwood Shores have set themselves - that the player's actions will be remembered, and matter. This doesn't just go for the big confrontations either. If you punch someone randomly on the street, the idea is that they'll remember and either fear you, respect you, try and get you back or all of the above. It's a lofty ambition and should certainly be taken with a big grain of salt, but this is after all,



DIplomacy can be just as powerful a weapon as violence



[above] Get me a poison canoli!



[above] More tie problems to solve

a game about figures that would be known and feared throughout the community - you should be noticed and your actions remembered.

The dev team are also being very careful to offer the same kinds of choices and framework that was so important in the film - that is, diplomacy can be just as powerful a weapon as ruthless violence. In fact, resorting to violence Sonny style can often be the most destructive option. In the game, there will

always be options in how you respond to certain situations, and there will always be several potential outcomes. Do you intimidate, negotiate or just resort to violence? Or do you go for a mix of the three?

The aim for this game is to put your fate in your hands. You'll have to make smart choices, and consider the potential ramifications. You can't just go around killing everyone. Business is the bottomline in the Godfather world, and if you're



running around doing things that are bad for business or bad for the family, your rivals and your crew will turn on you.

You can probably already guess what kinds of missions will be on offer - drive bys, hits, extortion, bank heists and so on, but you can also imagine the shift that will occur as you move your way up through the Corleone ranks. The Godfather doesn't get his hands dirty - he looks at the big picture, he coordinates, he pulls the strings. If it's done right, there'll be a palpable feeling of power and respect as you advance in this game, until you reach the position of Godfather, with territory, money, officials in

your pocket and the respect of the city. But that's not the final goal - the ultimate in this game will be becoming the Godfather of Godfathers and controlling not just the Corleone operation, but all the five families. <<<

DEEP POCKETS Other exciting news for Godfather fans is that James Caan and Robert Duvall are lending their likenesses and voices to the game. As Sonny Corleone and Tom Hagen respectively, they were two of the most important characters in the film, so that's a big plus. Marlon Brando was also set to be involved, recording some dialogue and granting EA use of his likeness before his death. It wouldn't be *The Godfather* without Don Vito. Whether the likes of Al Pacino and Diane Keaton will be involved hasn't been revealed yet.

Another element that will help make this game feel like an authentic journey in the universe of the Godfather is the iconic Nino Rota score. Imagine taking a stroll through Little Italy once you've reached the level of Godfather with the film's score playing in the background.



[above] Extreme dentistry



WHAT WE'D LIKE TO SEE:

Actually, they've already implemented it. Lego Star Wars has some of the best "spin physics" we've ever seen. Just try jumping and spinning in this game - spin physics on two axis. It's a revolution!



[above] "Want to build a fort?"

LEGO STAR WARS

Available on **PC, PS2, Xbox** ■ Category: **Plastic Action** ■ Players: **1-2** ■ Developer: **Traveller's Tales** ■ Available: **Very soon**

▶▶ Lego has had a long association with Star Wars nerds over the years. And these nerds have proven time and time again that pretty much anything that they can dream of can be built with Lego. Apparently they don't dream of women, and instead have fashioned life size models of R2-D2 and the like from everyone's favourite plastic building block. Now Lego are set to give something back to all the Star Wars fans that supported them, in the form of Lego Star Wars: a game where absolutely everything contained within is built from virtual Lego.

DISGUSTINGLY CUTE

Not only does this approach make Lego Star Wars look nice and unique, but it also has an intentionally comical side effect. It's absolutely hilarious seeing a Republic Cruiser modeled out of Lego soaring through space at the beginning of the first Episode I level, and the characters are disgustingly cute in Lego form, with their stubby little bodies and "painted" facial animations. Pretty much everyone's in there too - there's a massive roster of unlockable

characters, with just about anyone who played a role in the three new films being featured... as well as multiple iterations of many of the most popular characters. Some of the standouts for us would be Darth Maul, who looks like a kid dressed up for Halloween in his Lego incarnation, and Yoda, who has a surprisingly unblocky head but still looks cool.

The game takes you through a simplified retelling of Episodes I-III, and the entire game is played with two characters - whether AI controlled or a friend, meaning that a second player can enter and leave the game at any time. There are some puzzle-lite elements introduced here. Armidala for instance, has a grappling hook that can be used in certain points to access areas the other player can't. You're also able to take over control of some other characters, with R2 units and protocol droids available to be jacked and used to get through locked doors and the like. And then there's the comedy value to be had from slicing and dicing up a C3PO look alike, eventually leaving it with a solitary leg to hop around on.

Another cool element in the game

is the ability to "use the force". You'll frequently see glowing objects which you can interact with through the force. Most of the time they'll just give you trinkets or move something around, but it's a nice addition - especially in combat, where you can force push enemies until they're piles of Lego scattered to the wind.

In addition to third person light saber action there are also a few on rails action sequences, such as pod racing on Mos Espa which serve to break the action up and show off a few more Lego-styled vehicles.

As you've no doubt gathered, Lego Star Wars is a game that's aimed primarily at a young demographic, but despite this, like a Bizarre-O-Jar Jar Binks - it's full of character and a lot of fun. <<<



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DEAD TO RIGHTS II

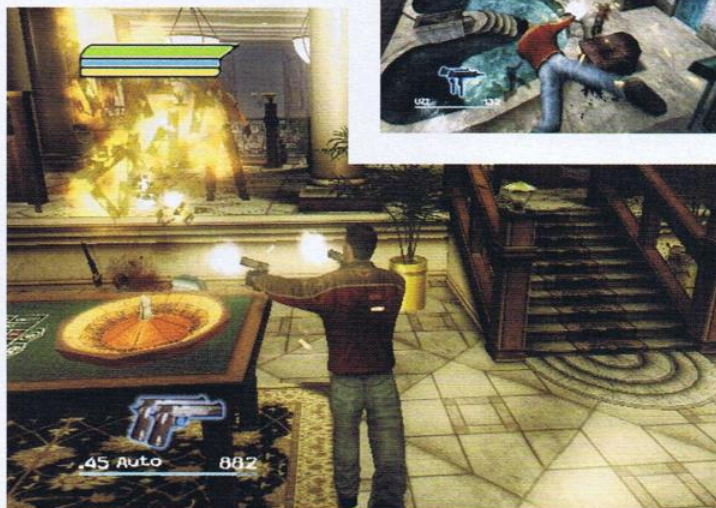
Available on **PS2/Xbox** ■ Category: **Action shooter** ■ Players: **1** ■ Developer: **Namco** ■ Available: **Soon**

On the surface the original Dead to Rights looked very much like a Max Payne clone, thanks to the third person perspective and bullet time gunplay, but digging a little deeper revealed some decent hand to hand combat (including some very cool disarm moves) and being able to call in lead character Jack Slate's dog K-9 to tear at the throats of enemies.

The sequel is all this and more. Jack Slate and K-9 are both back, and this time they're embroiled in a tale of crime, corruption and betrayal. Or so the press release would have us believe. We actually don't know a great deal about the story as yet, with all the footage we've been lucky

enough to see revolving around action and lots of it. Jack's arsenal is certainly beefier this time, with brutal weapons like land mines, flechette grenades and shotguns with incendiary shells. He'll also get to use heavier artillery like shoulder-mounted RPGs and mini-guns.

What we're most looking forward to checking out are all the disarm moves. There are now 25, and they range from basic grapples to elaborately cool - such as Jack gracefully spinning around an opponent, snatching his weapon, taking him to the ground and breaking his arm all in a couple of swift motions. K-9 will also play a greater role in combat and you can use him to retrieve items.



SMART BOMB

Available on **PSP** ■ Category: **Puzzle** ■ Players: **1-4** ■ Developer: **Core Design** ■ Available: **At Oz launch**



Puzzle games don't often tell much of a story. A game of Tetris once told me a tale but that was after a seriously long sequence of play and I think I was probably hallucinating. Smart Bomb, on the other hand, has what could be described as a serious attempt at a story, but then, it's a game with a cool enough premise that it may work.

The world, you see, is in grave danger from a network of sophisticated AI bombs. As a member of the Bomb Disposal Unit it's up to you to use a prototype virtual reality system to get inside the bombs and defuse them. The basic idea seems to be that your

PSP represents that prototype, and Smart Bomb is the software that lets you get inside the network of bombs to try and disable them all. Not a bad idea.

There will be over one hundred puzzles to solve, and Core Design are really working hard to make the player feel as if they're under pressure, with the weight of the world on their shoulders. We'll find out shortly whether they succeed or not, but Smart Bomb certainly looks like an interesting take on the puzzle genre.

SPARTAN: TOTAL WARRIOR

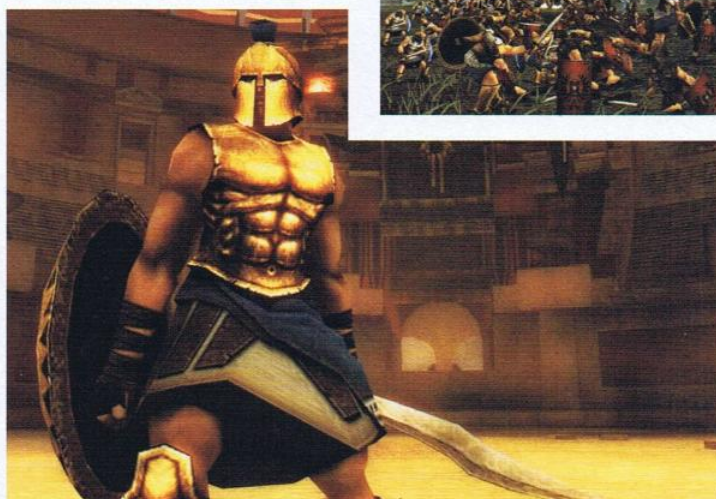
Available on **GCN/PS2/Xbox** ■ Category: **Action** ■ Players: **1** ■ Developer: **Creative Assembly** ■ Available: **September**

Sega recently acquired the fantastic development house Creative Assembly, makers of the Total War series. The first fruits of this partnership will be Spartan: Total Warrior, which will be on shelves in September for GameCube, PlayStation 2 and Xbox. Rather than making a console adaptation of one of the Total War games, Spartan will take the massive battles the company is famous for and put players in the middle of the action.

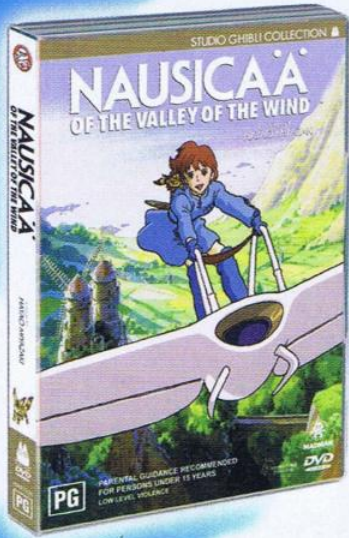
Set in the ancient world, Spartan will draw from both real world history and mythology as the player fights against the Roman Empire, culminating in a showdown in the Coliseum in Rome. Battles will be

epic to the point of ludicrous, with legions upon legions of warriors fighting tooth and nail across huge maps. Like the Total War games, fighting will feel dynamic with realistic looking clashes between fighters, resulting in a battlefield that's organic and constantly changing.

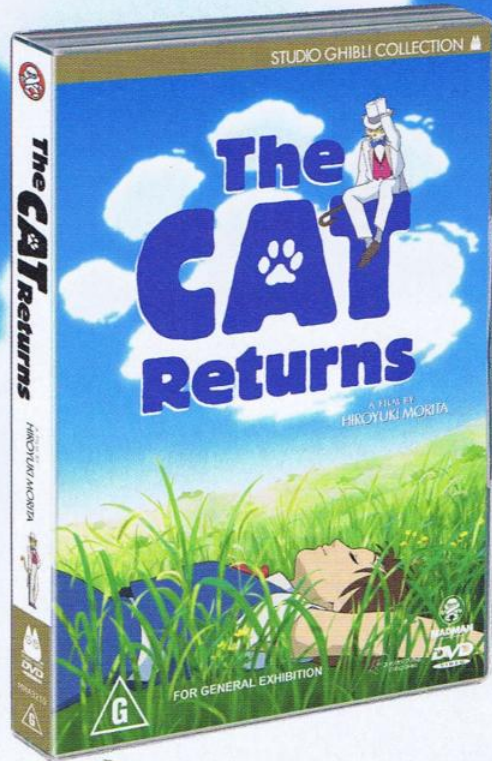
In terms of combat you'll have a wide range of moves at your fingertips, including melee and ranged attacks, a host of weapons, combos and special moves, as well as blocks and dodges. We'll have more on this one after E3.



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BLACKLISTING RISK: FALLOUT

Blackly funny, hugely playable and the subject of intense obsession amongst fans, the Fallout series is finally on its way back... and it's about time.

>> ALEXANDER JAMES BURKE



FALLOUT 1

It's been a long time coming - after so many stops and starts, Fallout has well and truly returned. Bethesda Softworks, developers of the outrageously successful *The Elder Scrolls III: Morrowind*, have announced that they will be taking the wheel from Black Isle Studios and Interplay to drive one of the CRPG (computer role-playing game) market's funniest, most original and popular series back into pole position.

1997's *Fallout* created a world that was unique to the RPG format. Inspired by films such as *Mad Max* and *Dr. Strangelove*, nuclear paranoia, 1950s disinformation, and *Area 51*, *Fallout* was primarily influenced by *Wasteland*, a game developed in 1986 by Brian Fargo for the Commodore 64 and the Apple II.

Much like *Fallout*, *Wasteland* was a post-apocalyptic RPG. Despite the simplicity of the 8-bit colour, it was an engaging and

NEVER BEFORE HAD A COURAGEOUS RPG HERO FOUND HIMSELF SODOMISED

complex game. When Black Isle released their take on post-nuclear role-playing eleven years later, *Wasteland* fans dubbed it an unofficial sequel (although some complained that it dumbed down the gameplay). Either way, *Wasteland*'s "unofficial sequel" brought the post-nuclear setting into spectacular 16-bit colour, the likes of which *Wasteland* could never have managed.

SCORCHED EARTH

The instant your feet hit *Fallout*'s charred ground, you knew that this wasn't an RPG of the swords 'n' sorcery variety. The game began outside Vault 13, where the most blessed of Earth's population sought refuge during and after nuclear attack. The traditional quest, experience, and item-grabbing of classic RPGs was intact, but *Fallout*'s world was immeasurably different. No longer lush and green in the fashion of fantasy RPGs, this isometrically-viewed land was as arid as Monty

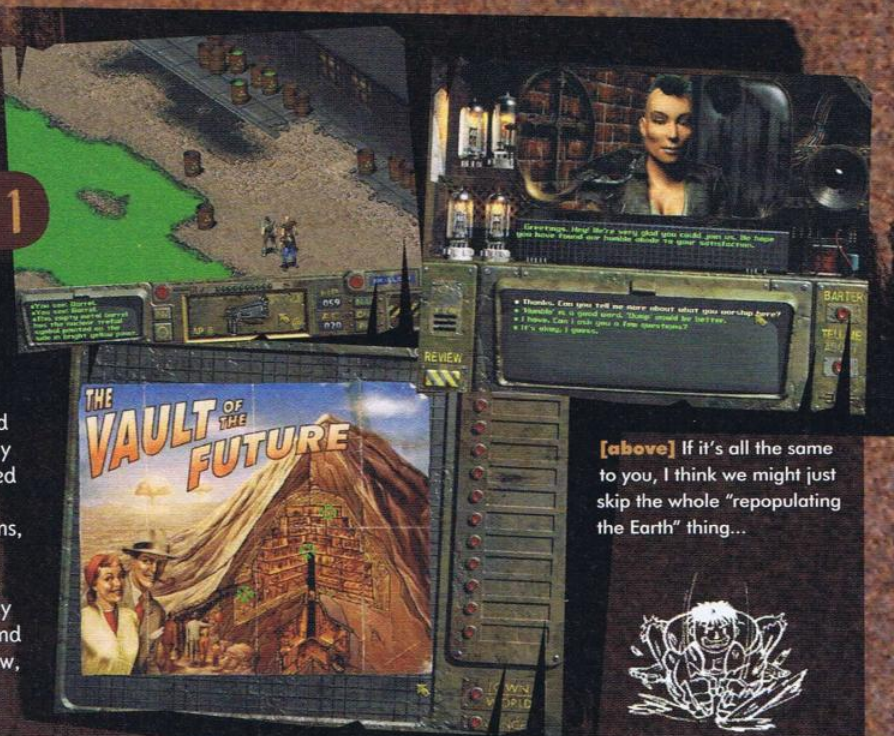
Burns' heart.

The people weren't much cheerier, either. As soon as you plodded off to the town of Shady Sands, you were greeted by extravagantly ugly faces, bitter dispositions, religious zealots, and jumbo scorpions (that is, if you hadn't already been attacked by a band of mutated freaks). Now, whilst this may sound a lot like a *One Nation* Convention, *Fallout* added an extra ingredient to the mix: laughs.

Fallout's distinctively black humour was its most shocking element: never before had a courageous RPG hero found himself sodomised - by Francis the super-mutant, no less - or sharing a war story and a few bottle-caps with a guy who looked like something out of *Night of the Living Dead*. All the darkness of the *Fallout*

universe was anthropomorphised in Pip-Boy, the game's perky little mascot. If you ever felt oppressed by the weight of the post-nuclear world, you could simply turn to pictures of Pip in the process of evisceration or barfing after severe poisoning, and remember that, well - life wasn't so bad after all.

The game's comedic kick masked darker truths, reflected in the sobering and cinematic opening sequence (war never changes, innocence is always war's first casualty). This is perhaps why the series resonated with so many gamers: while most RPGs are based on fantasy, *Fallout* was based on reality. The *Fallout* universe was strewn with the ashes of propaganda posters, decaying military bases, and cities obviously modelled on post-war Hiroshima. Sean K. Reynolds, a former Black Isle employee, believes the series stood out because of "smart writing, humor, a good storyline, fun gameplay, and character options that affect how the game



[above] If it's all the same to you, I think we might just skip the whole "repopulating the Earth" thing...



plays and ends".

An integral part of this universe's creation was Steve Jackson Games' GURPS rules engine - *Fallout* was the first computer game to implement it. In using the GURPS engine, Black Isle had created a title that was not only unique in content but also in gameplay. Even when AD&D (Advanced Dungeons & Dragons) was the best-known game, Steve Jackson Games continued to produce GURPS supplements - in particular, genre-based GURPS sourcebooks - and was thus able to stay in business. Reynolds explains the engine's importance: "It showed that mechanics-based games - as opposed to games with simpler/looser mechanics, like the Storyteller system games from *White Wolf* - didn't have to be AD&D and didn't have to be fantasy, either."

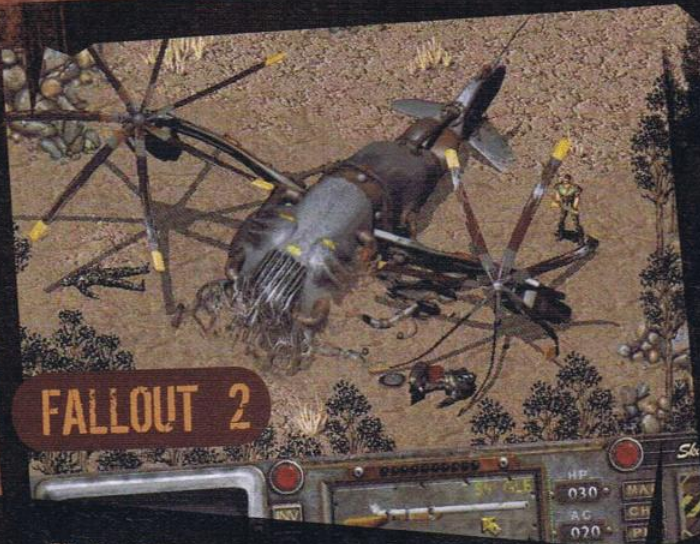
Black Isle's post-nuclear gem gained cult status. Nearly every videogame

publication has at some point acknowledged *Fallout*'s brilliance: the game won Black Isle OGR's "Game of the Year" and "RPG of the Year" from PC Gamer, Computer Gaming World, GameSpot, Adrenaline Vault, Games Domain, and GamesMania. Truly passionate players consider themselves "Fallout Scholars", and dedicate themselves to the series, exploring miniscule side quests and quirks, and immersing themselves in the game's buttload of post-modern esoterica.

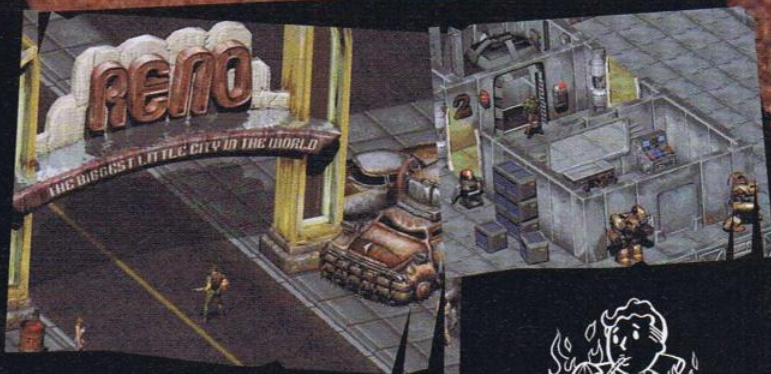
GARDEN OF EDEN

With *Fallout 2*'s release in 1998 - along with the much-lauded *Baldur's Gate* series - Black Isle cemented itself as one of the most acclaimed RPG developers. In the series' second round, the player was cast as the Vault Dweller's grandchild - yep, you were now officially your own grandpa (or grandma... or both).





FALLOUT 2



[above] Reno always did feel a little post-apocalyptic



The story was vastly different to that of its forerunner. Rather than beginning in ye olde vault, the player was chucked smack bang into a tribal village called Arroyo, and the journey began when it became necessary to trace a Garden of Eden Creation Kit.

The player found locations both familiar and altogether new. Fallout's original capital city, the Hub, was replaced by Vault City and its clean-limbed, upstanding, true-heart residents. There were, of course, conspiracies here and there, but the city itself was a lot more open and inviting than any of Fallout's locales. Overall, Fallout 2's landscape created the impression that the human species was beginning to re-establish civilization.

How? Well, that's where the plot came in.

Size was the biggest surprise. Fallout 2 was significantly larger than the original, and stuffed with sparkly characters and brilliant side quests. It also added a sorely-needed element that its predecessor attempted to implement but eventually abandoned: sidekicks. Sure, it was possible to waddle around with flabby, lifeless NPCs in the original, but you had to micromanage them and couldn't share anything - all had to be bought or stolen from them. They also weren't much up to conversation. In the sequel, this was remedied by introducing myriad buddies with whom the player could maraud. This gave the player a stronger sense of immersion in the narrative than

Fallout managed; the characters seemed real, rather than digital.

After Fallout 2, Interplay released Fallout: Tactics. As a squad-based-strategy-shooter, Tactics was most assuredly not your daddy's Fallout. Interplay promisingly described their latest title as "a quest to reawaken long-dormant technology in order to defeat a powerful enemy in the one-of-a-kind Fallout Universe", but it did not sell well. Tactics lacked the immersive quality of its RPG brethren, and as a result, was not placed on the same pedestal as its ancestors. It seemed the age of Fallout was at an end; Tactics' release spoke of a stronger focus on throwaway action rather than character development.

A HELL OF A VAULT

Excitement rippled when news of Black Isle's new project (codenamed Van Buren) circulated. Now, this would have

Buren being abandoned. With some anguish, Reynolds reveals the extent to which the game had reached completion: "Every area had a detailed area description with character and quest info and a general map. Several areas - somewhere between three and five, about a third or fourth of the areas in the game - were almost completely finished and were just waiting on certain engine elements to be built and scripts for the creatures. If I recall correctly, we were hoping to get the game on the store shelves by Christmas 2004."

Reynolds had publicly stated that Interplay's survival would be extended by working on titles that didn't need large teams. Fallout Tactics: Brotherhood of Steel was thus released to a console audience. Reynolds explains that this is primarily due to the fact that "designing for consoles in some ways is easier as you don't have to worry about a hundred

FANS SHOULD EXPECT FALLOUT 3 TO REMAIN TRUE TO ITS PARENT'S VERSATILITY

been a big bag of Ruffles had it not been accompanied by interesting screenshots. Unless you had issues with depth perception, they showed an unmistakably 3D engine rendering what looked a hell of a lot like a vault.

This was good news. This was a glimpse of Fallout 3.

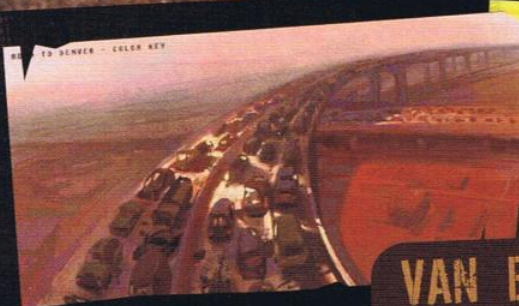
The bad news? After an excruciating wait for Van Buren, Interplay declared bankruptcy in 2003. Knowing that salary costs would far exceed their budget, Black Isle decided to dissolve the developer. The dissolution resulted in all work on Van

different system configurations. Console games tend to be a little shorter, too. Because of the storage limitations, you can make the game in a shorter amount of time, and that means smaller development costs."

If Interplay was going to do this, it needed money. Big money. Interplay had already sold the Baldur's Gate license to Atari. Now, it needed to sell Fallout.

Troika Games and Obsidian Entertainment (both developers that employed ex-Black Isle vets) were the most obvious candidates for the Fallout license, but Bethesda Softworks won the rights





**VAN BUREN
(CONCEPT ONLY)**



(although Interplay keeps the rights to produce a Fallout online RPG). The news dismayed many, who feared their favourite series would devolve into "Morrowind with guns", and that the darkly comic undertones of Fallout and Fallout 2 would be lost.

Bethesda's executive producer for Fallout 3 and all-round über-sexy guy, Todd Howard, has promised that Fallout 3 will retain the gallows humour of its predecessors.

A true Fallout fan, Howard loved the two games because they "really let me choose to play a certain character, and the level of immersion was outstanding. I was that guy on the screen, wandering the wastelands trying to survive and helping humanity survive. And you could play it so many times and in so many different ways. The character system and the choices you could make were fantastic." Given that Morrowind (for which he was project leader) is certainly not lacking in multiple character options, fans should expect Fallout 3 to remain true to

its parent's versatility. There are also concerns that Bethesda's love of multi-platform games will lead Fallout 3 to be simplified so as to comply with the mass-market console industry. Howard replied by recommending that Morrowind should first be played on PC, and then on Xbox.

"Anyone who says a console game can't have depth hasn't played enough of them," he continued. "The platform is 100% irrelevant."

Reynolds admits that Obsidian would have done a good job. Nonetheless, he is "reasonably optimistic" about Bethesda's handling of Fallout 3 simply because he knows they're doing it out of love rather than for money. "The Fallout name wasn't strong enough to send copies of Fallout: Tactics and Brotherhood of Steel flying off the shelves," he says wryly.



Bethesda handled the Elder Scrolls license with infinite tenderness - fans loved Morrowind and Daggerfall. It seems unreasonable to expect that they shouldn't take the same care with Fallout. But have they asked Fallout's creators for any advice? Surely Black Isle has some part in the game? Well, given that Howard has announced that all work on Van Buren is to be scrapped in production of Fallout 3, it appears that they're doing it on their own. "I don't know if they've talked to anyone from the Van Buren team about Van Buren or their ideas about the series," Reynolds remarks. "I'm sure the execs at Interplay wouldn't know a thing about what made the games successful or good."

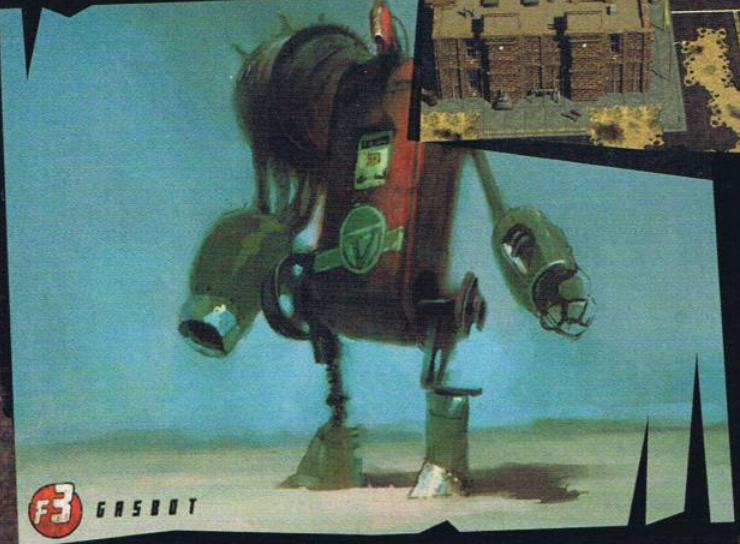
His suggestions for the Fallout 3 development team? "Follow the genre," he says. "Don't make in-jokes or Monty Python references. No supernatural elements - no ghosts, no gremlins. Stick closer to Fallout than Fallout 2 for the theme and feel of the game."

Whilst gamers may be disappointed that Bethesda has been chosen to carry on the Fallout series, the ex-Black Isle crew was absolutely crushed. Leonard Boyarsky (now of Troika Games) admitted - with a dash of hyperbole, perhaps - that losing the Fallout license to Bethesda felt like "someone had kicked me in the nuts and kidnapped my daughter". Few could argue that his misery was unwarranted given that Troika (developer of the innovative

[above] Post apocalyptic bling RPG, Arcanum, and the recent Vampire: The Masquerade - Bloodlines) was founded by ex-members of the original Fallout's development team.

Not content to let sleeping pups lie, Troika has announced that it will produce a post-apocalyptic RPG of its own. According to Boyarsky, the as-yet-untitled game is to be played from an isometric perspective utilising a swank new 3D engine. Boyarsky feels that this RPG has not yet been picked up by a publisher because they're "looking for successful titles in terms of sales and not just positive reviews, and fantasy genres are favored over non-fantasy. Most, if not all, of the successful CRPGs have been in a fairly narrow category. Being original is risky". Unfortunately, since speaking to Boyarsky, Troika Games has closed its doors. Let's hope the team can realise their post-apocalyptic dream elsewhere.

Much has changed since 1997, when originality won Fallout so many accolades. This world of wars is conservative. Similarly, the gaming market seems to be closing the door to innovation - games are shorter, and most publishers are investing money into already prosperous franchises. The prognosis for unconventional titles ain't too chirpy. But, much like your encounter with Francis the supermutant, all you can do is hope and pray that it'll all be over soon. Hopefully, with Bethesda's take on Black Isle's revered franchise, we may once again see true love for games triumph over profit. <<<



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With a format list that includes but is not limited to MP3, JPG, XVID, DIVX, MPEG 2 and QuickTime as well as running on the latest wireless technology, you'd think the DSM-320 would be the perfect device for download junkies everywhere. With the advent of broadband, unlimited downloads and large storage devices who wouldn't want to stream all that "backed-up" audio, video and images straight into their living room. But looks and product spec sheets as they say can be deceiving - almost ridiculously so with D-Link's first foray into the media player market with the DSM-320 Wireless Media Player. If ever there was a product rushed to the market place then this is it, but thankfully after some downloading, the firmware upgrades and new media server software actually make this unit a very promising if flawed device.

Yes, the unit is practically useless straight out of the box, a firmware update (released almost three months after its US release) is required. Here are some of the additions from the latest firmware

version: ability to change aspect ratio of image (say what?), ability to select audio and video output (oh so that's what those component plugs are for?), fixed video out-of-sync issue (you know, so you can watch video files) and improved MP3 playback (so you can listen to more than three songs before it crashes). It's a pretty extensive list and it's no wonder the unit was only just released here in Australia, because if you can't control the aspect ratio and video/audio output signal out of the box you've got problems.

But enough bitching, there are actually some great things to say about the DSM-320. Let me think, oh yes, it looks quite sleek and it, well it has a nice colourful menu - maybe that's why the unit won so many consumer electronic awards. Ok, so maybe that's being too harsh because the device does work extremely well with certain video and audio codecs like MPEG 1, 2, 3 and DivX. The unit only seems to grind to a halt with certain MPEG 4 and XVID files. The DSM-320 seems to be quite picky in what it

wants to play, and even then, play without a constant stuttering image. But this may partly be due to the fact that the XVID codec is open source, meaning there are countless versions out there, and being the codec of choice for downloaded media it's not like the blame can be placed on D-Link for its mediocre support. But once you know which codecs work well and which don't (QuickTime support still hasn't been implemented) a simple re-encoding of your problem media files and you're all set to go.

Regardless, these problems are common with most 'Media Center' devices on the market, but with a few more firmware updates the DSM-320 could be the product of choice or at the very least actually do everything it says it can on the box. Finally, in regards to the wireless portion of the device a word of warning to those without a wireless infrastructure - stick to wired mode. Save yourself the anguish, because without the latest wireless router or access point you won't get a decent or steady signal.

Kosta Andreadis



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46 Tekken 5

The King of Iron Fist returns



Reviews

Game Theory

SEAMUS BYRNE

The Noughties are the new Thirties?



Games, movies... movies, games. The content has flowed to and fro since the early years of gaming, but the games industry itself has never looked more like the film industry than it does right now. Sadly, what it's looking like is the heavy-handed,

protectionist regime of the 1930s Hollywood studio system.

At that time, Hollywood was hitting its stride. The Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences had been formed to promote the US filmmaking industry and the business of cinema was emerging from the silent era to become a major force in public entertainment. While the industry grew in confidence, the major studios moved to protect their interests, looking to secure their dominance through contractual agreements - agreements with the talent, from directors to actors to crew. Sounding much like the modern game industry?

Clearly, the major game publishers are the studios of this industry. Their control of the talent of this industry - the developers and their creative works - allow them to choose what the public gets to play and they set the tone for what is available on stores shelves. Ultimately, this sets the tone for a risk averse industry rather than one that delivers originality and pushes the boundaries of what gaming can offer its audience. Sequels and licenses are becoming the staple diet.

No doubt publishers would like to argue that sequels and licenses allow them to support more innovative work that may not meet with as much financial success. Critics argue the publishers have little incentive to be creative. Few challenges are genuinely taken on as they only detract from the bottom line.

If we look to the movie industry, it is unquestionable that the studio system was a help rather than a hindrance for the

sake of a professional and well organised industry. But once that system moved to one of protection over advancement, it required something separate from the studios to shake things up and get things moving forward again. In their case, the talent finally challenged their contracts as unfair and moved the system to one where studios bargained with them on a film-by-film basis. This combined with the rise of independents helped make for a vibrant industry.

The big fear for the future of independent games is the cost of developing a hit title. The majors pour tens of millions into a big release, so how can the small developers compete? Well how did independent filmmakers compete with the major studios? By focusing on what they do best - staying focused on originality and creativity with the budget available.

Independent gaming, just like indie film, is not about the 'event' release like the majors are. Indie releases are out there for the long haul and it has never been easier to find the audience you're looking for - the audience will even help spread the word when they like what they see! Good games rise above the noise and independent developers can be rewarded for their efforts without the need for a major publisher. Irrational Games, maker of Freedom Force, is just one good independent developer being rewarded for their highly original work.

Industrial maturity is at a similar stage to 1930s Hollywood, about thirty years after the arrival of the medium itself. It took another thirty years for the studio system to break down in the film industry and a powerful independent cinema to arrive. Interesting times may be ahead, but there is no need to believe the game world will collapse due to big bad publishers. Be optimistic that the independents already at work will help keep original ideas arriving on our consoles and desktops in the years to come - and support that work when you can.

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

0-49

What went wrong here? Pretty much everything. Avoid like the plague

50-59

Avoid like a medium level plague. Still quite dangerous

60-69

These games have more in common with the flu. Won't kill you

70-79

Playing these will make you feel content, but a little woozy

80-89

Like drinking from the bountiful fountain of gaming vitality

90+

Playing these is like striking oil in your backyard... only better





TEKKEN 5 (IMPORT REVIEW)

BRYCE MCDONOUGH haha stepped back to Australia to do this review

When it comes to the PlayStation generation, few games are as iconic as Tekken. Being the definitive fighting game on the PSone and an arcade smash throughout the mid to late nineties, the series has taken somewhat of a backseat to Virtua Fighter in recent years. Now that the latest instalment is ready for our grubby little hands, Namco themselves must know that this one has to be a killer if they intend to reclaim their crown atop the 3D fighter heap. And in this, Tekken's 10th anniversary

year, it is only fitting that Tekken 5 hit homes with a serious punch.

ANYTHING'S BETTER THAN TEKKEN 4

The key to Tekken's success has always been killer graphics, a large roster of cool characters, a remarkably intuitive control system and, above all, accessible gameplay. The previous game on PS2 had an incredibly slick presentation, however for each innovative change to the game or its engine, an equally glaring issue detracting from the game could be found. Memo to Namco: position change = good, only one standard throw = bad. Walls and terrained arenas = evolution, infinite combos = broken. However perhaps the most unforgivable oversight would be Jin and his 'One move to rule them all'. A single character who is simply unbeatable is always, always a bad idea. The good news is that Namco read their memos.

Tekken 5 is very much a return to the classic gameplay of Tekken 3 or Tekken Tag - so much so that this game feels a lot more like what Tekken 4 'should' have been. Where Tk4 forced us to slug it out in a jab fest, Tk5 has given us back the movement of older Tekkens, with up returning as jump and down as crouch (Tk4's sidewalk is still available with double taps ala Soul Calibur). The position change is gone too, which means that more attention must be paid to your environment in order to avoid being cornered. The walls and obstacles of Tekken 4 have been simplified too, with walls on most arenas (no more obstacles) but varied sizes and shapes, none of which allow for infinites anymore. Also, the inclusion of a few infinite arenas has been another popular feature among old-school fans. What new features does the game offer us? Well, the two most important are the new 'crush' system, and the long-range



[above] Kangaroo Jack hits back at critics



[above] It's like anime, only stationary



[above] Shit man, you just killed god





[top screenshot] Anna gets "stuck in". Ouch

Asuka understands the power of phat pants...

...Whilst Christie knows the distractive power of breasts

throw. The long-range throw is exactly as it sounds - input forward plus your standard throw command, and the reach is truly monstrous. This is a much better solution to the runaway tactics that dominated TTT, allowing the game to flow quickly and freely but also making sure you have options even when your opponent is a turtling biznatch.

Perhaps the best new feature in Tekken 5 is the fantastic 'crush' system. It is not a revolutionary new idea - it's not even new to Tekken, however this time around it has been incredibly fleshed out and sharpened, and made an integral part of the game, and your game too if you ever intend to win (see boxout).

JACK'S BACK

The roster this time around is definitely worthy of special mention. After 20+ characters in Tekken 2 and 3, then over 30 in Tekken Tag, Tekken 4's return to just 20 characters was somewhat of a letdown. On top of this, many old favourites were nowhere to be seen, resulting in even more disgruntled fans. Not this time though, with a complete crew of 30 characters available. Mere quantity alone would never have made us happy, but the amount of work that has been put into even the most novel of characters is great - every character in the game has the ability to win against any other (though some do have to work harder than others). Returning faves include

CRUSHINETICS? The new crush system is quite simple really - crouching moves have a crouch-status and jumping moves have a jump-status. Predicting your opponent's high move (or a throw for that matter), you can perform a high-crush move such as Marshall Law's sweep-kick, which will completely dodge the high move every time. Alternatively, your cheap friend dog who does nothing but low kicks? Let him try as you hop-kick over it and send him flying. This system is excellent for people who want to outsmart, not just out-mash, their opponent. Finding out what moves your character has to evade high and low, and then using them effectively in a match is such a rewarding feeling you are unlikely to ever get sick of it.

Every character in the game has the ability to win against any other

a genetically modified kangaroo from Tk2, an oversized robot who was inexplicably absent from Tk4, Bruce, the king of Thai Kickboxing, and even a Jun clone in the guise of a new character. Apart from Asuka (cute young Japanese girl - but aren't they all? - who plays like Jun) the two genuinely new characters Raven and Feng are simply fantastic. Raven is the spitting image of Wesley Snipes in the Blade movies but for an X-shaped scar which dominates his face. His Ninjitsu fighting style brings an entire new flavour to Tekken, which is most welcome. Feng Wei, the second new addition, is a Chinese Kempo fighter who killed his own master and has been travelling around China challenging other dojos. His fighting style is great to watch and he is actually one of the strongest characters in the game.

The arcade version of Tekken 5 has been floating around arcades attracting all sorts of attention for several months now, and one of the reasons is the customisation

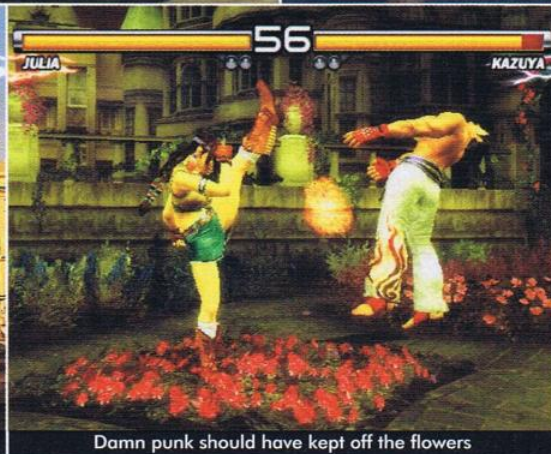
options we've been given. In the arcade version, purchasing a small credit card sized piece of plastic lets you save your customised character costume and colours, plus it keeps track of your win-loss ratio as well. You also improved in rank from measly 'Beginner' right up to 'Tekken Lord' which told everyone else around just how shit-hot (or just shit) you really are. A very nifty feature, and one we can enjoy at home without the pesky cards. As long as your memory card is tucked in nicely in slot 1, you can use all the gold you amass in Story and Arcade mode to deck out your characters



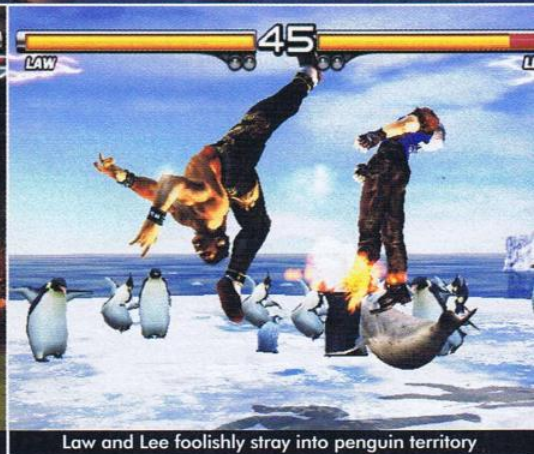
[up] Making Blood & Bone for the garden



Jack cleverly dodges Hwoarang's face-kick by not having a face



Damn punk should have kept off the flowers



Law and Lee foolishly stray into penguin territory



[above] Is that PCPP's Yellow Boots?



[above] Flipping out and killing someone

as you please. Think Kaz would look better in a yellow suit than his standard purple? Spend the dosh and it's yours. And colours are only one aspect - the list of accessories for each character stretches from pink sunglasses and a lasso for Julia to a huge Chinese broadsword across Law's back, a Shaolin shaved head for Feng, or even a nurse's cap and giant syringe for Nina.

The possibilities are as twisted as your imagination lets them be, although to be honest a whole new set of console-only accessories would have been a nice inclusion. Also, for some reason, the ranking system has stayed, but the win-percentages are gone, and both of these are completely unaffected by challenging your friends. Since this was simply the best way to enjoy the

arcade game (Ranking Matches are always the most exciting and tense), this seems like a pretty strange oversight to have been made.

THE USUAL ARRAY

So on our Mode Select screen, joining 'Customise', we have your usual array of play modes, including Story Mode, Arcade Mode, Vs, Team Battle, Survival and Practice. There is still no online mode, though we debate whether the PS2 network could actually handle Tekken Vs-play online. Non-inclusion is better than an unplayable version, but with DOA Ultimate on the market showing it can be done, it seems they may need to slot it in for Tekken 6.

Story Mode replaces the standard Arcade mode, giving us each character's background for joining

the tournament. Like *Tk4*, the story is narrated by a scary man with a strange American accent and a penchant for overly loud background music while anime slides... erm... slide across your screen. Some of the stories are good, some are woefully bad. In general it is nice to see this approach being taken with the series as we can now learn more about our characters as we go instead of searching the net and finding nothing but weird fan-fics.

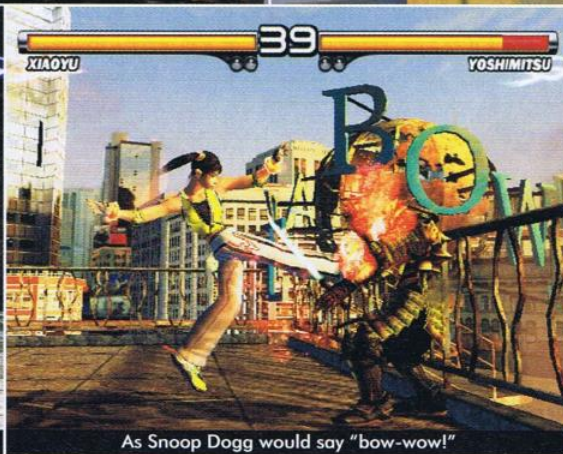
Arcade Mode is NOT a chance for you to play through the game as you would on your own, but is instead a simulation of sitting down at the arcade and having a succession of people challenging you. This is the only mode where you can improve your character's rank (and an endless supply of gold for your accessories) so you'll probably find yourself spending hours trying to work your way through the ranks with each of your favourite characters - I know I did. The AI in this mode is acceptable, easily the best that Tekken has offered us so far. Also, all the 'people' you play have real names, and it even says what country they are from if outside Japan, leading to a slightly



THE SCENE Tekken is burning its way through coins in arcades all over the world at the moment, not only in Japan, but I was also impressed to see how solid the local Aussie scene is. So once you put some hours in with the home version, go get yourself an IC card and meet some real players. It'll only cost you about \$4-5 at most arcades, and the thrill of playing real people is well worth the price of admission. Can't find people? Then check out the local sites - Arcadepimp.com for Tekken and Ozhadou.net for all fighting games - and introduce yourself.



!!! Bryce has clocked literally thousands of arcade bouts on his Tekken 5 cards, so if you see him, challenge him... we'll be very impressed if you win.



Seriously: penguins. They're the Antarctic mafia

As Snoop Dogg would say "bow-wow!"

Such a mighty wallop



[above] Tekken an ass kicking



[below] He's so high right now



Tekken History contains arcade perfect emulations of Tekken 1-3

more authentic feeling. It still could have been done a lot better though, and this particular area of the game is where we had our biggest gripes.

AND IT'S FREE RIGHT?

An awesome addition though is 'Tekken History', which contains arcade perfect emulations of Tekkens 1, 2 and 3, all packed in and as fun as they ever were. Considering each of these games sold over 1 million units each on the PSone console, the inclusion of them here free is a bonus for hardcore fans and newbies alike. Plus for us PAL territories, playing Tekken 3 at 60fps will finally be a reality.

In terms of graphics, Tekken 5 is as pretty as you could possibly expect from a PS2 game. Namco has always had an amazing CG team, and this game showcases their talents with a great intro movie and excellent ending movies for each character. Some parts of the cutscenes in the Story mode are done in-engine, and up close you can see just how much polish

there is in the game. The sprites are larger than in Tekken Tag though not quite as large as Tekken 4, and are slightly less cartoony than Tk4 as well. The arenas are all simply fantastic to look at, though the final stage can make things a little hard to see sometimes. The breaking of the ground and walls as you crash into them is a little on the exaggerated side, but then so is everything else about Tekken. The sound effects rock, thoroughly convincing crunching sounds come with every big hit, and the soundtrack is much better than the muzak we were abused by last time and much more in keeping with the Tekken atmosphere.

Tekken was the undisputed King of fighting games until Sega went multiplatform and Virtua Fighter ended up battling it out on Sony's system. Is Tekken 5 good enough to reclaim its former glory? The judgement here is a resounding 'Hell yeah!'. <<

AVAILABLE ON:
PS2 / XBOX / PC / GCN

DETAILS:

CATEGORY: 3D fighter

PLAYERS: 1-2

DEVELOPER: Namco

PUBLISHER: Sony

PRICE: STBA

RATING: TBA

AVAILABLE: TBA

HYPHER VERDICT:

PLUS: Tekken at its best ever. Awesome fighting game engine.

MINUS: Incomplete Vs mode and arcade modes.

GRAPHICS SOUND GAMEPLAY
92 90 94

OVERALL
93

Best. Tekken. Ever.





GRAN TURISMO 4

MARCH STEPNIK raises his hands and sings hallelujah in the church of GT

One particular standout Gran Turismo 4 moment early in the piece is the second last International A License Test; a one-lap high-speed test drive of the German Nurburgring Nordschleife course, also affectionately known as One Of The Most Challenging And Difficult Tracks In The World. At 20.8 kilometres long, to earn a bronze medal (the minimum pass mark in GT4 - don't even think about a gold medal just yet) the requirement is simple: complete the track in 10 minutes. Snaking

through three villages and vast stretches of gorgeous German Schwarzwald scenery, the trick is that a single lap of Nurburgring consists of 176 turns (of which a good proportion are completely blind), seemingly innocuous climbs, teasing drops and a whole lot of uneven, less than pristine road.

The rule of thumb in this test is to remember to brake at the turns (easy in, fast out, as they say) and to absolutely floor it on the straights - of which there are also many - and ensure you don't drift off the road. If you do kiss the dirt, it's instant disqualification.

As you hit speeds close to 200kph on the straights, with the crisp and lush scenery absolutely screaming by, you realise that what little control you do have of the circumstances is at the mercy of the track itself; pocks and uneven slabs of tarmac threaten to launch your car only centimetres into the air, snatch you back down again

and send you into a skid or a spin. Your white knuckles clutching the controller (or if you're lucky, the beautiful Logitech GT Driving Force Pro steering wheel), you'd do well to remind yourself to simply relax.

It's a race; not against other cars but against the clock - it's absolutely exhilarating, and absolutely beautiful.

THE REAL DRIVING SIMULATOR. WORD.

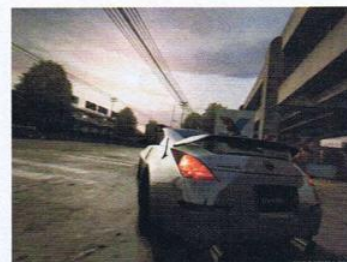
If there's one crowning achievement of Gran Turismo 4, it's that in many respects it's the most exhilarating game in the series. Forget that there are over 700 cars (ranging from museum pieces to prototype concept cars) and 50 tracks to play with and on, or that this is the first game to use the second layer of a console DVD (which isn't a modest call either; things had to be cut out of GT4 for it to make it under the 8.5GB of data mark). To steal a popular marketing sound byte



[above] Hooray for more car captions!

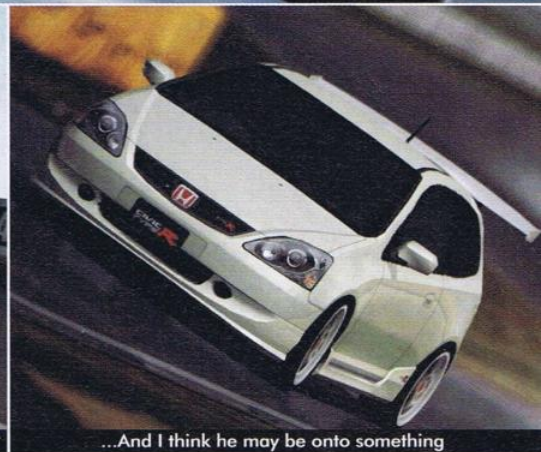
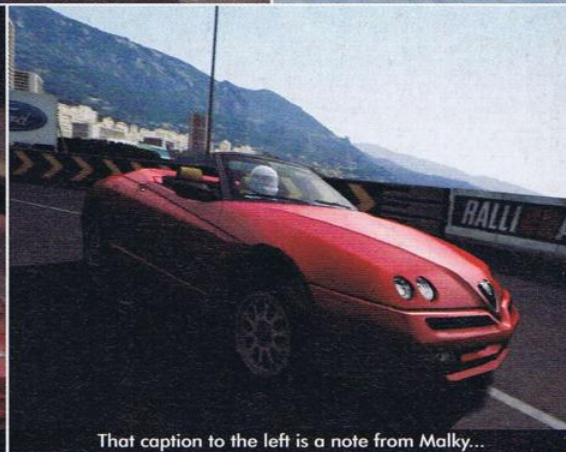
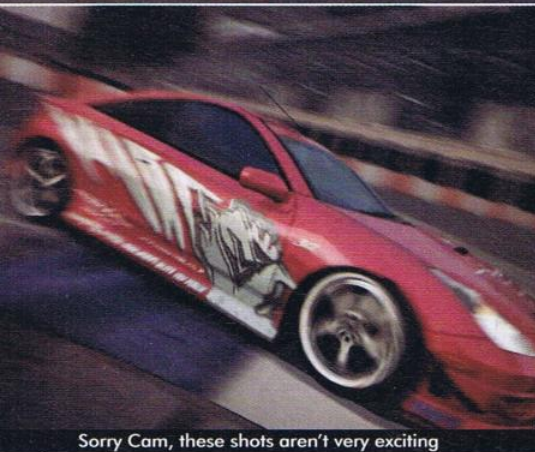
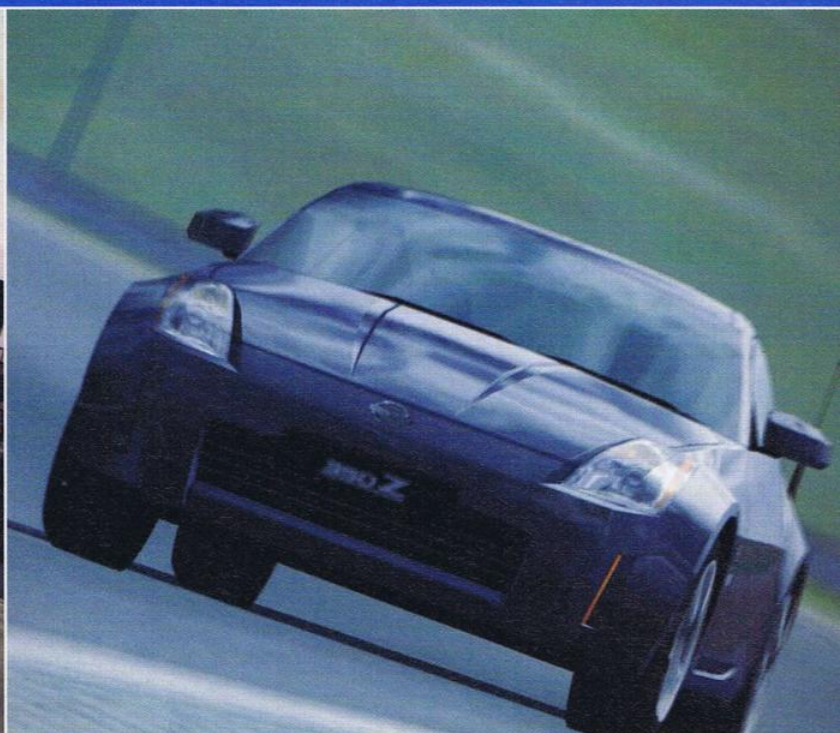
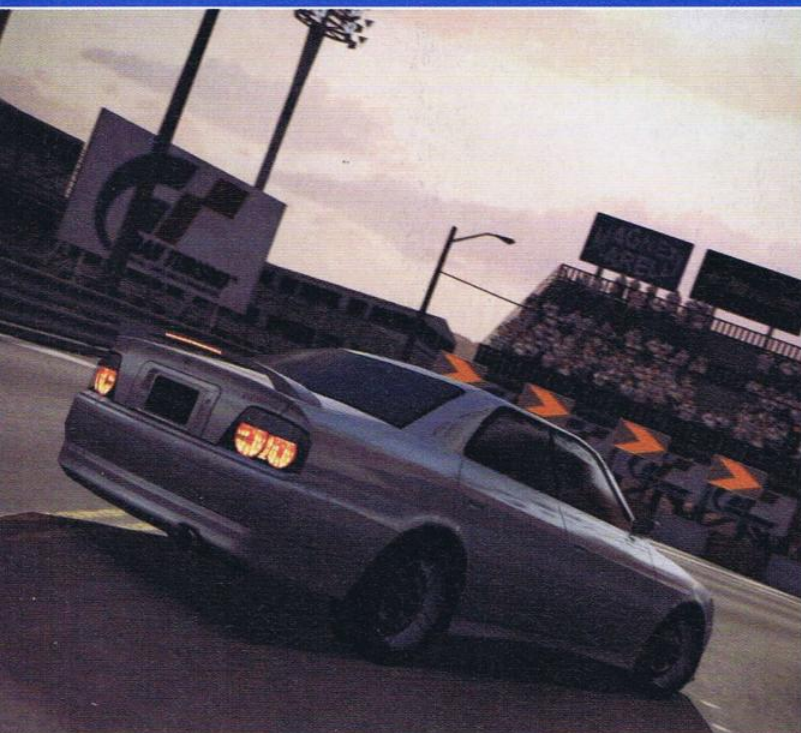


[above] Kicking it Sega Rally style



[above] Wilks loves a big rear end





Sorry Cam, these shots aren't very exciting

That caption to the left is a note from Malky...

...And I think he may be onto something

from the hyping of GT4, if you were to take each car in the game for a spin on every course in the game, you'd have to play the game over 120 days, 24 hours a day. To put it another way, that's 2,880 hours of straight driving - and that's not even touching the other modes on offer in the game.

Nope, Gran Turismo 4 represents a more subtle yet significant evolution of the series. Even with the new modes to play with GT4 is in most respects the same game as GT3; apart from the plethora of cars available and a handful of new secondary modes the real change has been to the driving itself. For the first time since 97's Gran Turismo the driving model has been given

a major overhaul, and it shows.

Its subtitle of "The Real Driving Simulator" is an important disclaimer to GT4. Although its clear Yamauchi and his team at Polyphony Digital haven't set out to deliberately trick their loyal fanbase, it's hard not to feel just a little cheated by what Gran Turismo 4 isn't. It simply isn't a very good racing game. Where other driving games since the original GT have come and shown just how valuable damage modelling is in imparting a sense of vulnerability of a vehicle over the course of a race (thank you V8 Supercars) and the competitive spirit given by AI that doesn't behave like cattle (thank you V8, again, and Project Gotham Racing

B-SPEC MODE B-Spec mode is driving a car in Gran Turismo without actually driving it yourself. Instead, you view the race from either the driving or broadcast views and issue commands to the driver AI to win a race. It's selected at the beginning of every race, where normally you'd proceed to A-Spec racing mode.

As a diversion or a preview for a more difficult race, B-Spec mode offers some basic value. Apart from placing more relevance on car setup than in A-Spec mode races, B-Spec lacks the depth needed to make it a serious alternative to the main mode.

We find its real value to be as a cheating aid; for some easy cash, choose an easy race, set the AI and leave the room, returning only to restart the race. You'll amass the riches needed for the serious toys in GT4 in no time.

Hong Kong's neon graffiti lined streets make for a fantastic backdrop

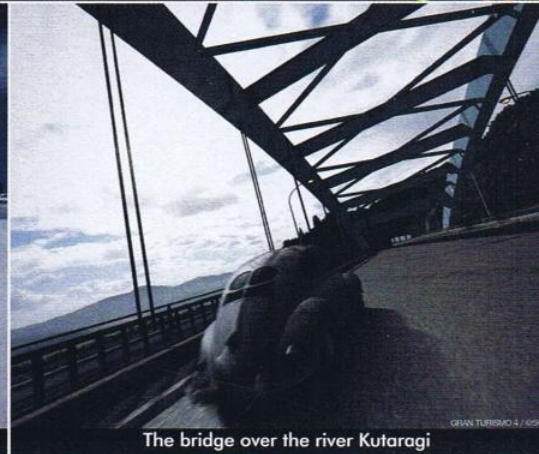
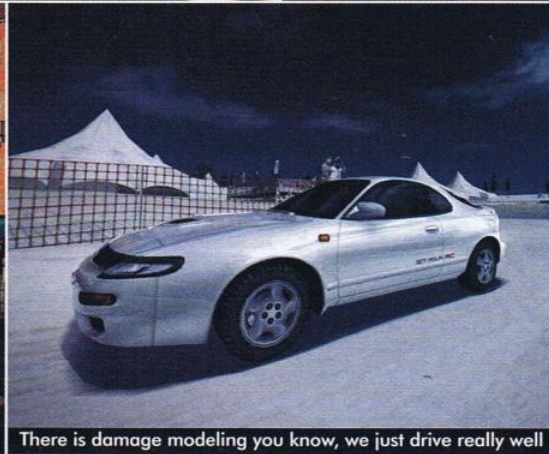
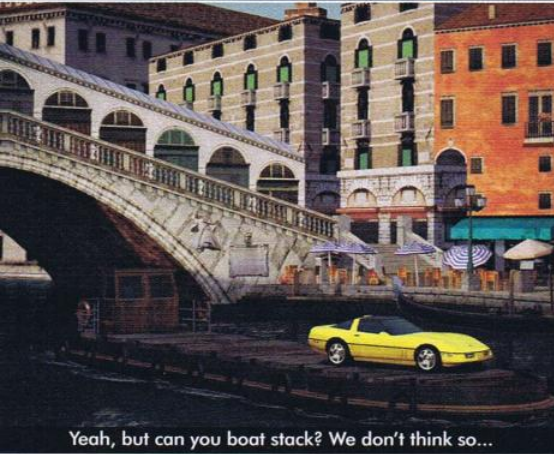
too), Gran Turismo stubbornly clings to its primitive roots. For whatever the reason, competitor AI still virtually ignores you; you can still bump off competitors going into a turn, gaining speed and position in the process; and you still finish the race even after the aforementioned silliness with a car in pristine condition. You can quite happily take short-cuts across the dirt of the track without penalty too, and the only real result for crashing heavily into a barrier is the shake of the screen and the loss of a few seconds on the lap time.

Instead, it seems that Polyphony Digital has pretty much ignored the racing side and focused almost exclusively on the driving model, pouring an incredible amount of detail and polish into it. Nothing matches GT4 for its driving engine; creating the sensation that you are indeed hurtling down a gorgeous track at break-neck speeds in a machine you'd have to mortgage your own house to own. Cars seem to react realistically to the

smallest change in road surface and elevation - more so than ever before, making for some truly immersive driving. This is the real magic behind Gran Turismo 4; something no other driving game has really come close to.

POSEUR

There have been other changes, of course. The most obvious is the front end of Gran Turismo mode. Known as Motor Resort City, it's basically an expanded version of the GT3's Gran Turismo main screen. Rather than a cascading menu system coming from the handful of play option icons in GT3, Motor Resort City breaks things up in a more logical and real world manner. With a stack of options from the main screen - around 40 icons to explore - the not-so-subtle hint with Motor Resort City is that there's a helluva lot to do. As for navigation, it's not the nightmare it could potentially be; after only basic exploration of the screen you'll be instinctively and quickly navigating



Yeah, but can you boat stack? We don't think so...

There is damage modeling you know, we just drive really well

The bridge over the river Kutragi

to the area of your choice.

From here, it's Gran Turismo as we know it and love it. First it's the license tests, which features one of the handiest innovations yet; gone is the school mistress narration of GT4 Prologue and instead we have regular pace-car lap tests. The idea is simple - keep up with the pace car; follow its line and brake when it brakes - and is the most valuable and holistic method of teaching high-speed driving on difficult courses the game has to offer.

Completing license tests earns you access to new courses and cars, which you can then take and use in regular races where a placing will earn you money. Money is then spent on upgrading

your car as well purchasing brand new ones, and so on.

New to the series is the questionable B-Spec mode (see the boxout for more), and Mission Races (which also earn you money on successful completion), which play more like racing-specific license tests. The idea behind Mission Races is simple: to cut to the chase and put players in tight racing scenarios without having to create them yourself in the main racing modes. Photo mode is pure indulgence, however is surprisingly addictive. After all, these gorgeous machines are designed to be drooled over.

The new collection of courses are also stars in their own right. The previously mentioned Nurburgring

represents one of the most challenging and subsequently rewarding courses in the game, while the city based courses offer some gorgeous eye candy. Hong Kong's neon graffiti lined streets make for a fantastic backdrop to some tight races, as do the New York and Paris based events. Other favourites include the European villages - Citta di Aria and Cote d'Azur offer some exceptionally thrilling races - where fantastic scenery and architecture lining the narrow streets impart an incredible sense of speed and danger.

There's also the new snow and ice tracks - which apart from offering a fantastic visual change from the norm, takes the sliding



[above] Last minute gaffa tape repairs

and drifting nature of rally driving and cranks it up a notch or three.

Of course, there's a reprise of a handful of tracks from earlier GT games, albeit with graphical and presentational face-lifts. Speaking of graphics, GT4 is a clear cut above GT3 and a testament not only to the power of the PS2 but the technical savvy of Polyphony Digital in squeezing out such impressive visuals. Nothing out there on any system comes close to it.

THE BAD...

There is one inherent flaw in Gran Turismo 4 which makes the lack of damage modelling seem trivial. It's race balancing. In a game where it's imperative to buy and upgrade your car to win races,

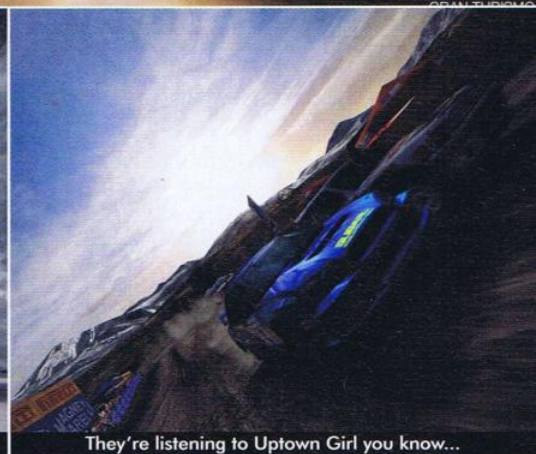
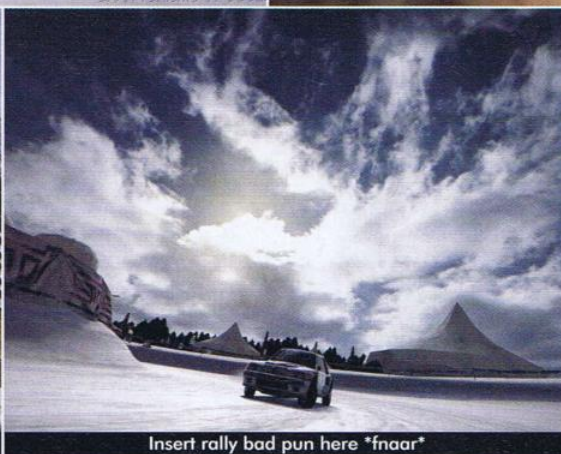
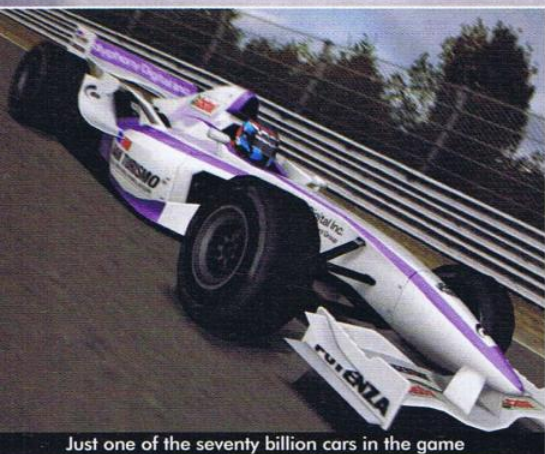
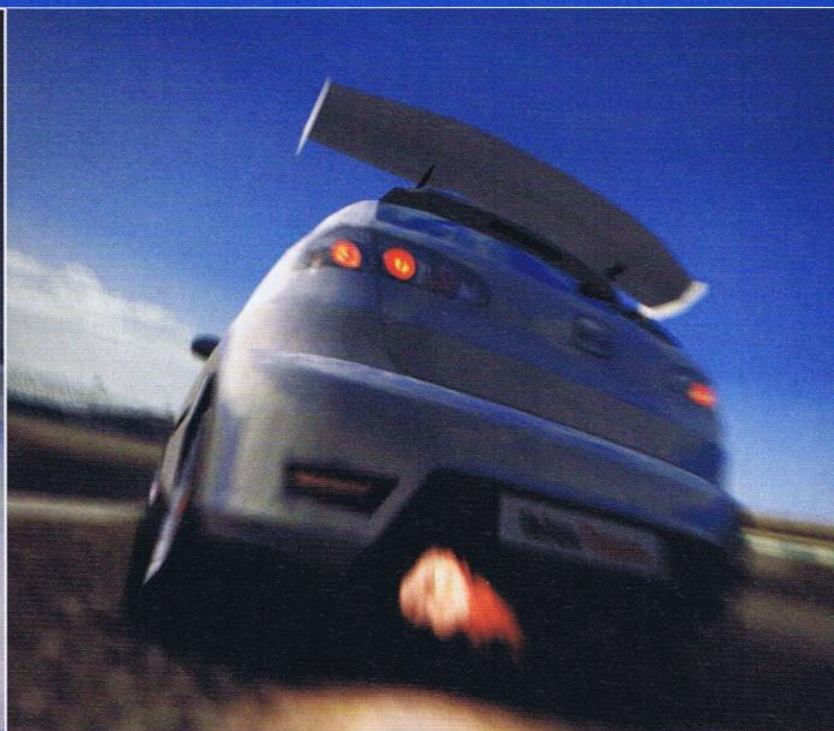
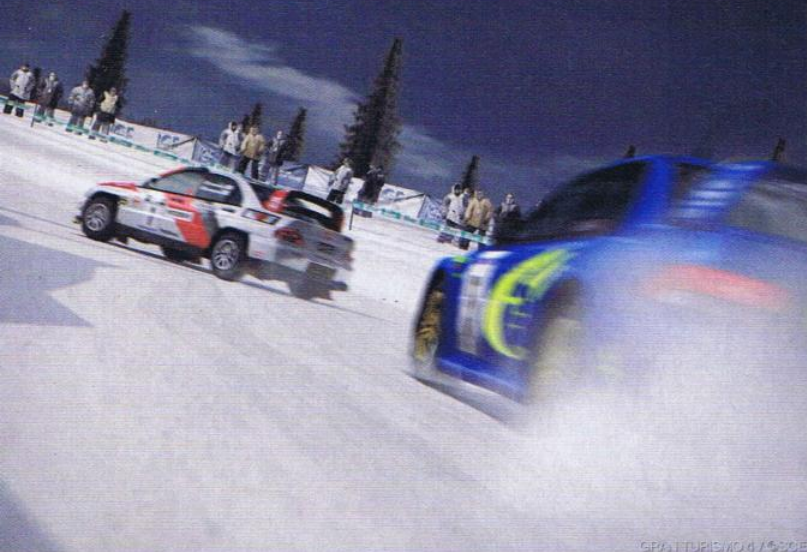
PHOTO MODE From either replay saves or one of several photo-mode specific locales from around the world, happy snaps of your pride and joy can be taken and saved for all to see. Except they're not just happy snaps - from viewing angles to all manner of manual camera modes there's a surprisingly deep amount of control in the composition of a photo.

Post-production support is also impressive - photos can be saved onto USB thumbdrives as JPEGs and ported to a PC with ease, allowing you to further enhance the images, grace your desktop with customised scenes from the game, and print them out at will. You can even hook up a USB photo printer - like the Epson Picture Mate we tested - directly to the PS2 for immediate high-res prints of your favourite photos.

Apart from taking the car-worship that underpins the GT series to another level, it's a surprisingly addictive diversion.



!!! Xbox owners don't have long to wait for their slice of the simulation pie. Full Forza review coming soon!



Just one of the seventy billion cars in the game

Insert rally bad pun here *fnaar*

They're listening to Uptown Girl you know...

Polyphony has yet to come up with a solid solution to the problem of car power in races. In Gran Turismo 4 you're either going to win the race by the first three turns or be relegated to race trailer in the same distance. It's rare to find a truly competitive race; in most cases in GT4 it's a race against yourself.

Gran Turismo 4 does lessen restrictions on types of cars allowed in a race, introducing a points system based on the level of competition faced. The trouble is that this system is a tad arcane; it's never clear just which car upgrade will propel you into a new class altogether, taking you from leader of the pack back down to dunce in the matter of moments.

Indeed, the inclusion of the aforementioned Mission Races and the more thrilling License Tests (apart from introducing beginners to the more thrilling side of the game earlier) seem to be an admission on Polyphony's part of the problem in balancing. Thrilling license tests and mission races are all good and well as standalone events, but they're not a substitute for the real thing.

No other driving game features such a perfect learning curve

SWEET, SWEET CAR LOVIN'

Ever since producer Kazunori Yamauchi pitched Gran Turismo to Sony by saying he wanted to be able to drive the TV, Yamauchi has succeeded in building a series that celebrates the driving of luxury and everyday cars in a way no other series has. Gran Turismo 4 is the next evolutionary step in the series and an unreservedly beautiful game.

Still, it's far from a complete experience. The problems of race balance and lack of a robust racing model mar an otherwise exceptional title. These are compounded by the fact that the online mode was dropped from GT4 for reasons unknown. Its inclusion would have been an ample antidote to the racing blues, around the online clock. As it stands its split-screen, same room racing, or Ethernet LAN play serve as the ways to satiate the real competitive urge.

These issues can ultimately be forgiven due to what GT4 instead so near-perfectly does: no other driving game features such a perfect

learning curve that'll have you thinking and talking like a pro in no time (although you'll have to work for your successes in GT4, this game is absolutely beginner-friendly), nor offers such fantastic breadth. The ability to discern the difference between a 700kg, medium horse-power leopard of a car and a two-tonne tank on the race track is deeply rewarding. Being able to complete a course in an 80kph top-speed consumer car first then a 380kph super car second, where the road side screams past you so fast as to almost cause nausea, is simply thrilling.

Still, we look forward to where Polyphonic Digital will take us with the next in the series. Gran Turismo 5: The Real Driving and Racing Simulator? Now that would indeed be something really special. As it stands, Gran Turismo 4 is an essential experience for car enthusiasts until then. <<

AVAILABLE ON:
PS2 / XBOX / PC / GCN

DETAILS:

CATEGORY: Driving
PLAYERS: 1-6 (LAN)
DEVELOPER: Polyphony Digital
PUBLISHER: Sony Computer Entertainment
PRICE: \$99.95
RATING: G

HYPER VERDICT:

PLUS: Stylish and massive, fantastic driving model, so many cars & tracks.

MINUS: Racing elements are incomplete and lacking, no online.

GRAPHICS SOUND GAMEPLAY
93 85 92

OVERALL

90

It's Gran Turismo taken up another level. Enough said.





SPLINTER CELL: Chaos Theory

ED DAWSON is a member of the Mandelbrot Set

As our latest Tom Clancy title begins, Japan's leadership is defying the looming gaze of hostile neighbours by creating a new branch of its military, the Information Self-Defence-Force (I-SDF). This triggers the ire of nearby governments who claim the move contravenes Japan's post-WWII pacifist constitution, which prevents the creation of a military force capable of striking beyond its borders.

KOREAN FOOD

This diplomatic protest suddenly escalates. A Chinese cruiser and a North Korean destroyer aggressively



blockade the Korea Strait, boarding a Japanese cargo ship and taking the crew hostage. This act is rationalised as a legitimate response to the potential or perceived remilitarisation of Japan. Tensions are rising, electronic warfare in the region is reaching fever pitch and the USA decides to lend some surreptitious assistance to their Japanese friends - the USS Walsh, a ship decked out with communications spying equipment and the cauliflower-eared but deadly Sam Fisher on board.

The first thing you'll likely notice about this new Splinter Cell game is the obvious graphical overhaul. Sam himself has never looked so good, while his environment just drips with finely rendered details that all add to the already heavy atmosphere of the game. Bump mapping and per-pixel shading, among other enhancements, bring new polish and shine to the Splinter Cell world, which was otherwise

beginning to look a little tired.

The name Chaos Theory refers to the mathematical method of finding order in seemingly random systems, that is often summarised in the possibility of a butterfly's flapping wings creating a typhoon on the other side of the world, through an escalation of wind energy - created by a freakish combination of random interactions in the atmosphere.

In this case, the flapping butterfly is a genius computer engineer called Bruce Morgenholt, who finds trouble in Peru, captured by a separatist group called "The People's Voice". As the information Morgenholt has inside his head could compromise UN military systems, our butterfly has the potential of sparking a nuclear conflict - so the best of the best - that is, Sam Fisher, is sent in to save him.

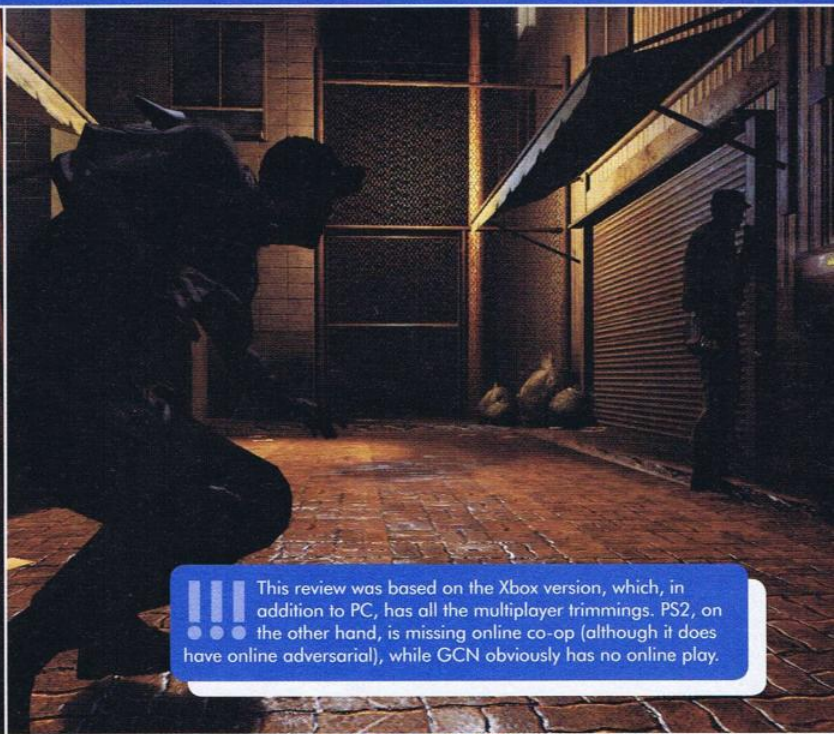
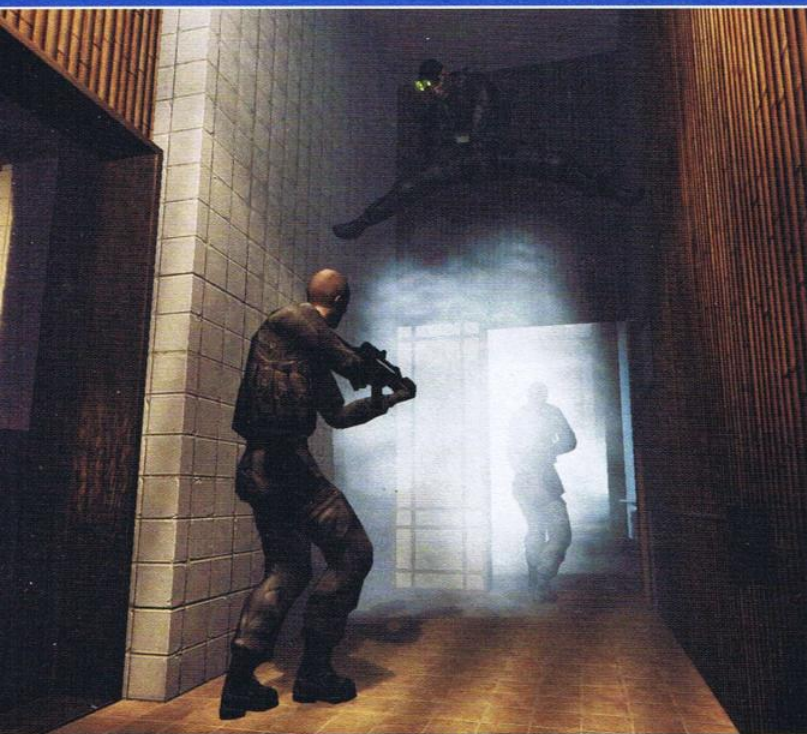
Good 'ol Sam is back in black again, putting on the freaky three-dot night vision goggles



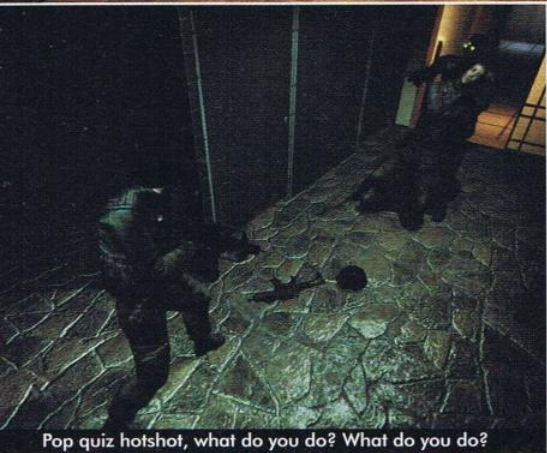
[above] Sam wanted to be Oshi...

and doing his usual tricks of silent insertion, scaling walls, snapping necks, climbing on the plumbing and playing tricky games with gee-whiz spy-tech gadgets. Your now requisite Splinter Cell tools are at hand, such as heat-vision, night-vision, EMF vision and sticky cameras. Sam can split-jump in corridors, that old trick where you climb a narrow area by maintaining pressure on opposing walls with your feet.

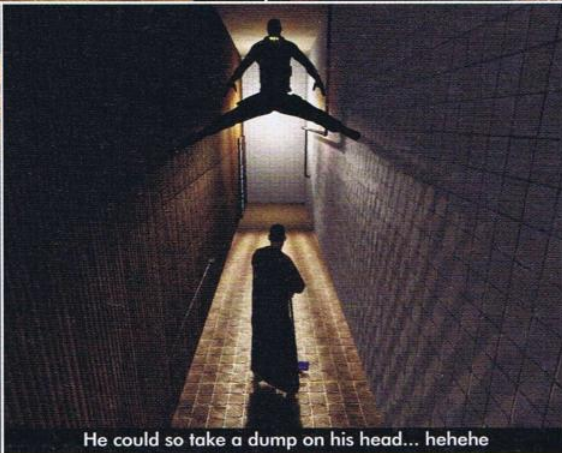
There is some good interface streamlining going on, such as the "interact" button which launches a context-sensitive menu - allowing you to crawl into spaces, grab enemies, lock, bash or spy through doors, sometimes carrying out one-time or mission-unique actions



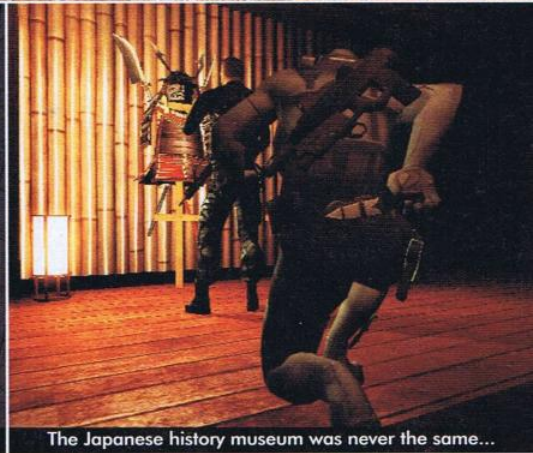
|||| This review was based on the Xbox version, which, in addition to PC, has all the multiplayer trimmings. PS2, on the other hand, is missing online co-op (although it does have online adversarial), while GCN obviously has no online play.



Pop quiz hotshot, what do you do? What do you do?



He could so take a dump on his head... hehehe



The Japanese history museum was never the same...

that help break up the monotony. Grabbing an enemy, you can now interrogate them - often resulting in a short and darkly humorous conversation between Sam and the panicking enemy. You'll often get key information this way.

Stealth in Chaos Theory is the usual spectacular Splinter Cell affair, shooting out lights and throwing empty bottles to create diversions, with lively brightness and stealth indicators - showing you exactly how sneaky you're being and whether you're likely to evade your foes. You can even use your own voice with the Xbox communicator to make a sound to attract a guard - as long as it isn't too loud, which would allow him to zero right onto you. This is a very cool feature and a tricky little exercise in controlling the volume of your own voice,

You end up feverishly whispering and hissing orders and warnings

that is surprisingly entertaining. It's especially fun if you make whimsical insults a part of your distraction process, leading to a guard's snapped spine.

JUICY CARAMEL FOOD

There are many good improvements, but the really juicy caramel icing on the Chaos Theory cake is the outstanding new co-op mode, which adds to the already engaging and asymmetrical multiplayer modes introduced in Pandora Tomorrow. You can play through the single-player campaign as a two-man team using brilliant new "theatre sports" kind of features such as acrobatically throwing your teammate, dangling from his hands,

using him as a human ladder or playing the decoy to set up a stealth kill, which are all excellent additions to the game. Countering your new abilities, these environments will challenge you with certain simultaneous actions you need to perform, such as needing to both access retinal scanners at the same time. These team-based objectives really spice things up.

Naturally, you'll want to constantly communicate with your teammate to keep things tight, but your raised voices project into the environment - and will attract the guards! So of course, you end up feverishly whispering and hissing orders and warnings to each other. This dynamic is unique to this game and it all adds to the atmosphere and tension. There's even a simplified on-screen communication system, allowing the communicator-challenged to achieve the complex simultaneous co-op goals, which can be tough. Luckily, the Quicksave option is never far away. <<

MULTIPLAYER EVOLUTION The gamble Ubisoft Montreal took with the complex multiplayer mode included in Splinter Cell: Pandora Tomorrow has paid off in spades. Thanks to that quirky mode which pitched two very different teams against each other; blunt Argus Mercenaries and Sam Fisher's Shadownet Spies, multiplayer is now established as a key feature of the future Splinter Cell landscape. In this title, the multiplayer modes are fleshed out to the max, supporting co-op and versus via Split Screen, System Link and online.

AVAILABLE ON:
PS2 / XBOX / PC / GCN

DETAILS:

CATEGORY: Stealth Action
PLAYERS: 1-4
DEVELOPER: Ubisoft Montreal
PUBLISHER: Ubisoft
PRICE: \$99.95
RATING: M15+
AVAILABLE: TBA

HYPER VERDICT:

PLUS: Visually striking, great co-op mode, smart evolution of the series.

MINUS: No quantum leaps in core game design.

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY
91	87	84
OVERALL		
89		
Classic S.C. with some cool incremental improvements.		



STAR WARS: REPUBLIC COMMANDO

DANIEL WILKS wants to give Republic Commando Suvvuty Sux

When you think Star Wars, people invariably think of the same few things, Darth Vader, Lightsabers, Yoda, Wookiees, X-Wings and how much Jar-Jar Binks sucks. Probably the last thing that springs to mind is New Zealand. That's set to change with the release of *Star Wars: Republic Commando*. There is a simple reason for this. As we all know from Episode 2: *Attack of the Really Bad Film Titles*, Republic clone troopers are copies of the famous and deadly bounty hunter Jango Fett, played by the great Maori actor Temuera Morrison. As the commander of a squad of elite Republic Commandos, you the player not only get to play Temuera Morrison, complete with NZ accent but also lead three other Temuera Morrisons drawn from an entire army of Temuera Morrisons.

GET 'EM DED

Strangely enough even though all of the units of your elite squad are

clones of Jango Fett they each have their own distinct personality and way of speaking. Unfortunately, for the most part this inappropriate character is all that shines through in what is otherwise a rather formulaic first person shooter. Before going any further I will state for the record that *SW: RC* isn't a bad game. It's quite fun, it's just nothing new in any way, shape or form. As the squad of Commandos, players are sent on three rather short campaigns and battle enemies including never ending waves of droids as well as the insect like Geonosians. Although the player is given a limited amount of control over the Commandos in your squad the name of the game is action, not tactics. Every level is similar in design with players having to make their way through long linear corridors shooting hordes of respawning and stupid enemies to get to a specific location to either hack a computer or blow something up.



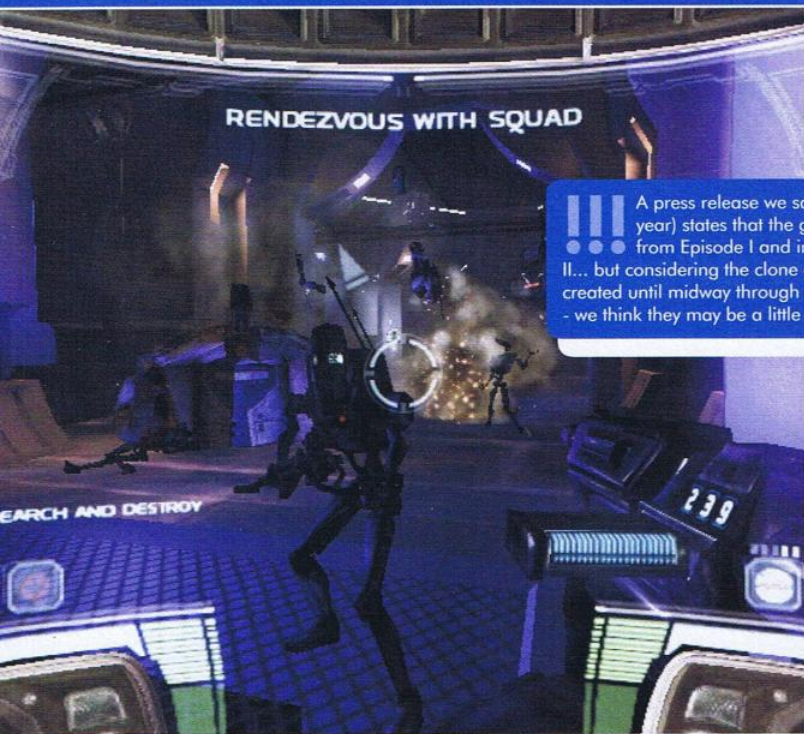
[old territory] They're no Metal Mickey



[groan] He's having a HUD time seeing

To try and distance itself from its contemporaries, *Republic Commando* introduces a slight tactical spin on the formula by giving the player limited, context sensitive control of your squadmates. Each of your three comrades in arms has a single area of expertise - blowing stuff up, hacking and sniping. Depending on where the crosshairs are positioned the player can give simple commands to one of the three. Place the crosshairs over a Bacta Tank (health station) and

give the order and the most injured member of the party will heal themselves, place the crosshairs over something that needs to be blown up real good and the explosives expert will get to work. For the most part the squad AI is decent with them shooting the things that need to be shot, but occasionally they will lapse into a pit of stupidity doing such brilliant things as standing in the middle of a room whilst a battle rages around them, walking into your line of fire and a personal



||| A press release we saw (from last year) states that the game is set from Episode I and into Episode II... but considering the clone army wasn't created until midway through Episode II - we think they may be a little confused.



In New Zealand this space would have a kepton



A scene from Republic Commando 2: Electric Boogaloo



Searchinnnn, Seek and Destroy

favourite, trying to take out heavy combat droids hand-to-hand.

The biggest disappointment in Republic Commando is the lackluster and unbalanced weapons. Players will have the opportunity to find the usual assortment of shotguns, blasters, sniper rifles and the like but aside from the standard blaster not too many of them will be getting a workout. They lack punch.

Interestingly the developers have decided to make death nigh on impossible in Republic Commando. If one of your squadmates falls in battle one of the other members of the team will revive them after the battle. Likewise the main character doesn't die when they run out of health, they instead fall unconscious until

The developers have decided to make death nigh on impossible

they are revived by the team. The only time players actually die is when all four members of the elite squad are taken down. This doesn't happen too often. Whilst it is nice not to have to rely on quicksave and quickload to make your way through the game the lack of any real threat takes away the true challenge.

EDUTAINMENT BE DAMNED Republic Commando is a decent looking game but quickly becomes rather monotonous after you've trekked through your first few levels of corridor/tunnel - there's only so

many times you can see the same piece of machinery, texture or pile of rubble before becoming a little blasé. It is also one of the least Starwarsy looking Star Wars games to have come along (aside from the edutainment titles that just tack Star Wars onto a spelling or maths quiz).

Aside from the jarring NZ accents, Republic Commando is a great sounding game - the soundtrack switches from gritty and militaristic to more familiar refrains with ease and always serves to suck the player into the world. As I said in the header, I would really like to give Star Wars: Republic Commando 76 for a score, mostly because it's funny when you say it with a NZ accent but also because at heart, Republic Commando isn't a bad game. It's fun and distracting and not too hard on the eye. Unfortunately it's also lazy and short and contains an obviously tacked on multiplayer element. Ultimately a score of 70 may not sound as funny but it's a fair assessment of the game. <<

PLAYING WITH FRIENDS As is common with basically every PC shooter nowadays, Republic Commando comes bundled with a multiplayer component, which is, to put it bluntly, terrible. Multiplayer contains four game modes - Deathmatch, Team Deathmatch (arguably the same thing), Capture the Flag and Assault but all of them come across as being nothing more than a last minute inclusion to keep up with the Jones'. All of the game modes play as you would expect with the dull and unbalanced weaponry, aside from Assault. Don't get too excited and think that the mode is like Assault from UT with progressive objectives and vehicles - it's simply another version of CTF where you need to bring your flag to the enemy base instead of their flag to yours.

AVAILABLE ON: PS2 / XBOX / PC / GCN

DETAILS:

CATEGORY: FPS

PLAYERS: 1-16

DEVELOPER: LucasArts

PUBLISHER: LucasArts

PRICE: \$89.95

RATING: M15+

AVAILABLE: Now

HYPER VERDICT:

PLUS: Star Wars, Temuera Morrison, simple tactics.

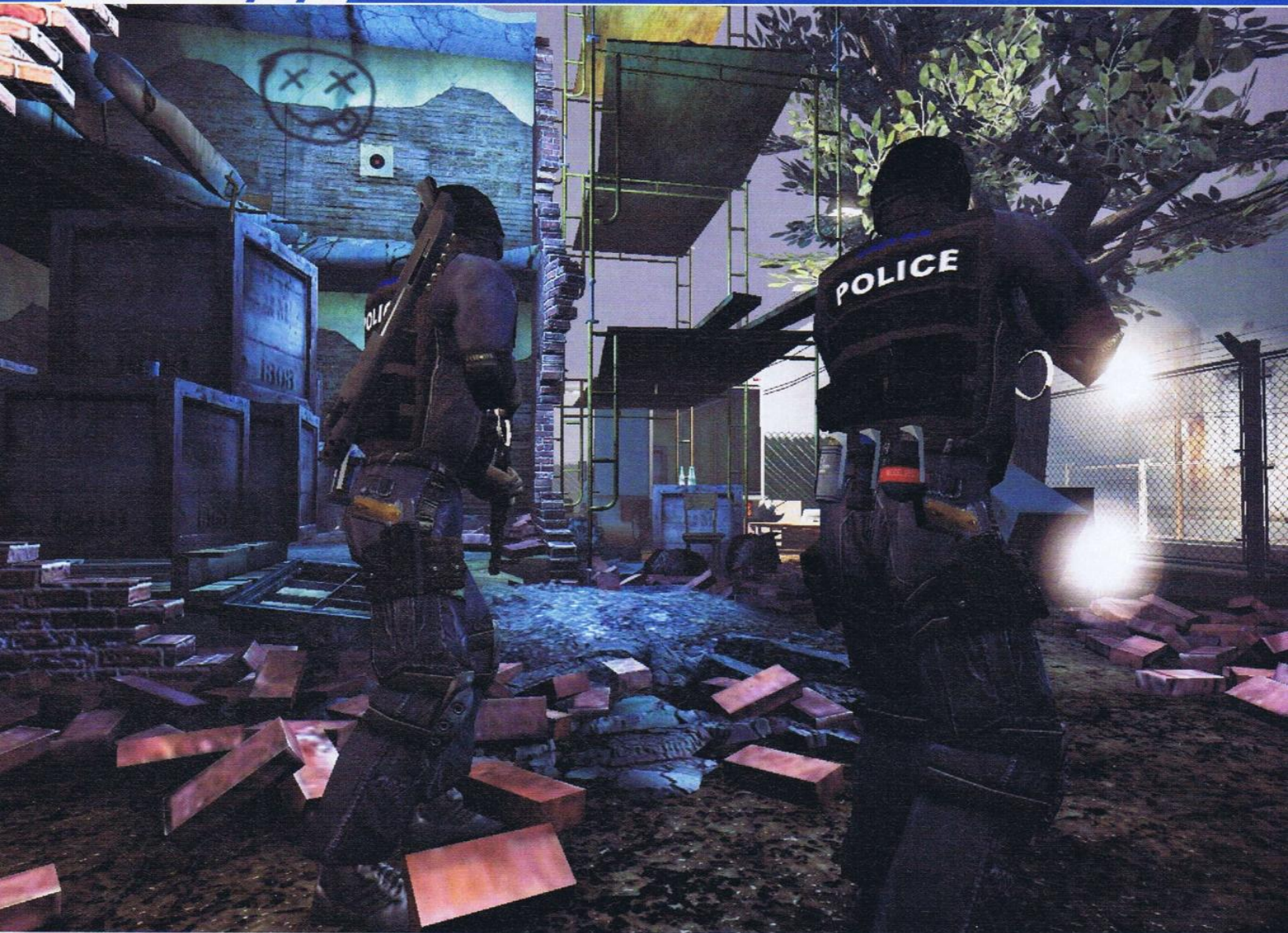
MINUS: Dull weapons, dull multiplayer, short.

VISUALS 81 SOUND 89 GAMEPLAY 72

OVERALL

70

Easily the least Starwarsy Star Wars game.



SWAT 4

KOSTA ANDREADIS shouts "hands in the air, douche bag"

Sometimes one wonders what the cut-off point is for situations where regular police just won't cut it and you need to call in a SWAT team. The situation would have to be pretty serious and well above a domestic noise pollution call. "Hello SWAT? Yes, my neighbour's playing his stereo way too loud. And being late on a Sunday night coupled with the fact that I've got work tomorrow, well, you can see how that would cause a slight kaffuffle in my planned evening of sleep." "Hostage situation? No, nothing like that, do you think you can maybe just go over there and place an explosive charge on his stereo and maybe use some C2 gas on his loud mouth wife?" "Hello, SWAT? You there!?"

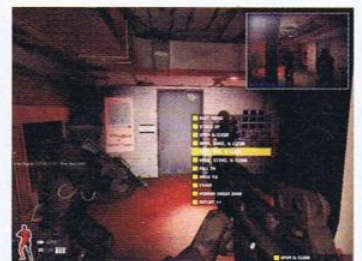
SWAT: MIAMI

SWAT, an acronym for Special Weapons and Tactics, are special units of the policing force (in the United States) called in to defuse delicate crisis and turmoil situations

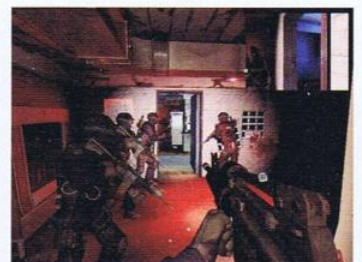
- because sometimes, even the cops have to call 911. Please note that delicious 911 line is from the poster to the 2003 Hollywood blockbuster film SWAT starring LL Cool J and the lesser known Samuel L. Jackson. Someone seriously needs to tell Wilks to be a little more discriminatory in the posters he decides to adorn his walls and thankfully, this game has nothing to do with that film. Instead it's the latest instalment in a long running and very successful franchise from Sierra, which began as a spin-off to their popular Police Quest series. With the same heavy focus on realistic law enforcement and engagement the Quest series was known for, this time the focus was on engagement, and SWAT 4 remains true to its original roots. This is a game with a firm grounding in reality as it provides numerous scenarios whereby the player controls an elite SWAT unit in an attempt to defuse each situation using real tactics and

codes of conduct. So the objective is to restore the peace, and when the most trigger happy of you out there would like to hear "by any means necessary" the reality is shooting the bad guy in this game is a last resort - as missions themselves can be tackled with non-lethal 'bean-bag' weaponry.

At a glance the game looks somewhat similar to the numerous Tom Clancy inspired tactical shooters on the market; that is your Rainbow Sixes and Ghost Recon's - the very same shooters that Tom Clancy himself has never actually played. However, what separates this title from the rest is a clear focus on keeping things simple without the need to dumb down the tactical aspect. So the learning curve here is very slight, controlling your four man unit (divided into red and blue groups) is never a chore. Issuing commands is context sensitive, so if you see a door up ahead simply select your command from a pop up

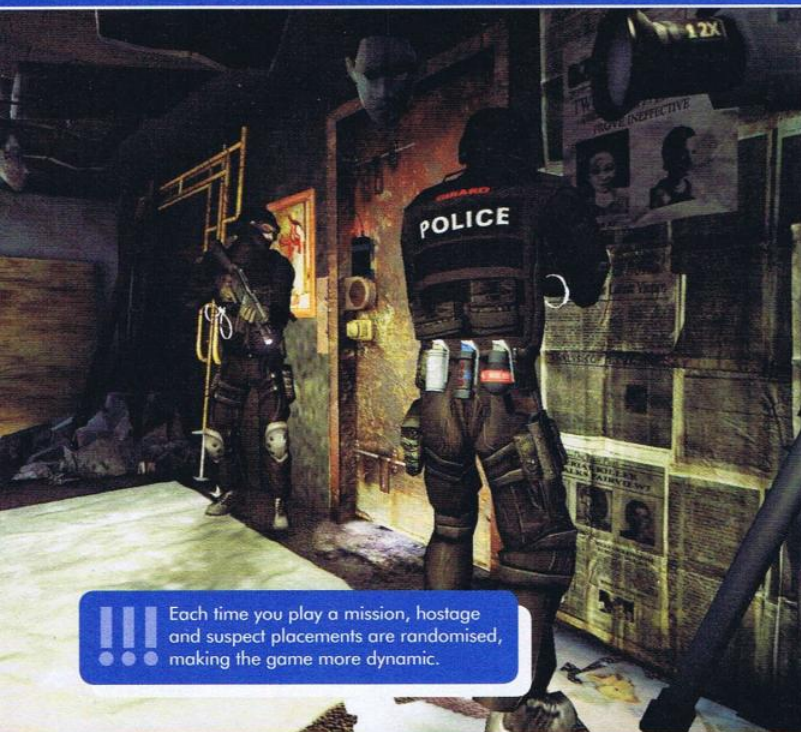


[above] Outside the hippy pot party



[below] Dave's not here man

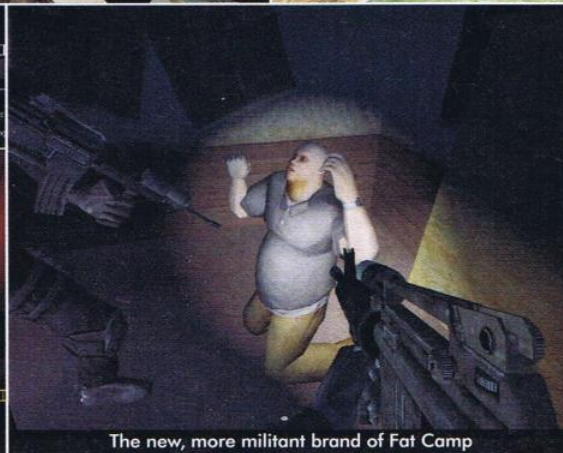




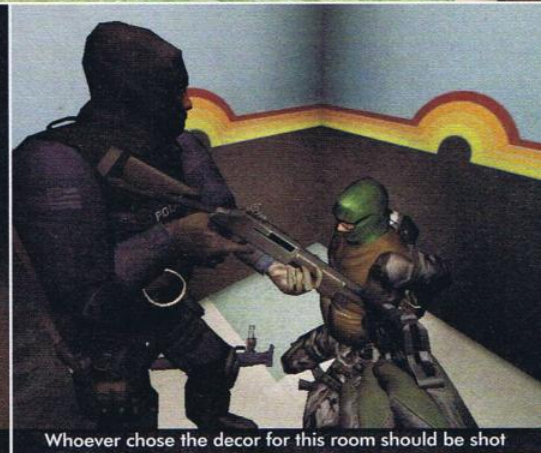
Each time you play a mission, hostage and suspect placements are randomised, making the game more dynamic.



Is there any other weapon?



The new, more militant brand of Fat Camp



Whoever chose the decor for this room should be shot

menu. You can issue commands to your entire team or the individual groups and if they get split up you're only a keystroke away from bringing up a picture-in-picture display of each member's viewpoint. It's all very simple to control and in no time at all you'll be mirroring under doors, gassing rooms, clearing stairwells and restraining both civilians and perps. A nice touch which also incorporates the PIP interface is the inclusion of sniper support which you can control at regular intervals to neutralise mission objectives (i.e. kill fellow human beings).

BREACH & CLEAR DOUCHE BAG
Set in New York, SWAT's career mode follows a scenario based approach where each mission represents a potential situation where a SWAT team may be called. From an arms deal at an Asian restaurant, to a hostage situation from a bank robbery gone badly, to neutralising a serial killer at his place of residence - the variety and detail that has gone into each scenario is commendable. And using the latest Unreal engine the visuals of SWAT 4 are certainly nothing to sneeze at in the detail department. In particular the serial

The variety and detail that has gone into each scenario is commendable

killer scenario is exceptionally well thought out and executed, and instantly conjures up imagery from films like *Silence of the Lambs* and *Seven*, except this time the SWAT unit doesn't get blown up in a tragic case of the serial killer being one step ahead of the law. In this scenario players must also restrain the killer's deranged mother. You'll find that she refuses to comply with your orders leaving you no option but to either pull out the pepper spray or better yet, the taser. Players will find that each criminal and civilian will act uniquely and both will need to be restrained in order

for the mission to be a success. With the exceptional detail in the variety of locations on offer it's unfortunate that this had a detrimental cost on environmental interaction. Apart from blowing open doors and using corners and doorways as cover there is very little differentiation in the overall set of tactics employed, and no emphasis on using the physical environment to your advantage. In the end the outcome will rely more on your entry strategy, caution taken and intelligent squad command than making use of your unique surroundings. <<

WE NEED TO CO-OPERATE Apart from the standard multiplayer fare that plays out like a confined *Counter Strike*, players also have the option of playing each of the career scenarios with a real squad of players. The co-op mode changes the gameplay dramatically as players will need to work as a squad, clear rooms correctly, and work together in the very strictest sense of the phrase. In order for that to work there can only be one leader, which means the other players will have to follow their every order. Yeah right! Best suited to a LAN setting, this aspect of the game works extremely well at creating verbal abuse amongst players, and coupled with the custom mission editor adds quite considerably to the play experience.

AVAILABLE ON:
PS2 / XBOX / PC / GCN

DETAILS:
CATEGORY: Tactical FPS
PLAYERS: 1-Multi
DEVELOPER: Irrational Games
PUBLISHER: Sierra/Vivendi Universal
PRICE: \$89.95
RATING: MA15+
AVAILABLE: Now

HYPER VERDICT:
PLUS: Intuitive command interface, varied tactical scenarios, wedges.

MINUS: Static Environments, not enough use of the words "douche bag".

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY
88	80	88
OVERALL		
86		
A fine entry in this long running series.		



PLAYBOY: The Mansion

CAM SHEA finally gets to go to the mansion...

Okay, so I missed out on going to the Playboy Mansion during last year's E3. I haven't missed much sleep over it, although it certainly would have been interesting to have a mental picture of it all to compare to this game. Or maybe it wouldn't. After all, in *Playboy: The Mansion*, you're not a visitor to the mansion, you play Hef. And although you're following the rise of the Playboy empire, you're making all the decisions yourself: who to hire and fire, who to put on the cover, what articles to commission

and run, who you're going to interview, what decorations you want in the grotto, and so on.

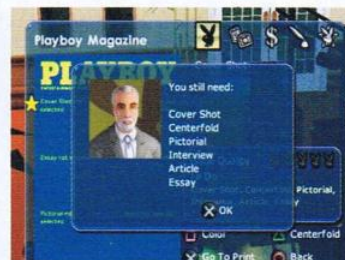
MELONS! MELONS FOR SALE!

As a concept, it sounds like a decent idea. Take *The Sims*, simplify the gameplay and inject a whole lot of partying, sex and stars. Unfortunately though, the end result is a game that's definitely on the dull side. Without the complexity of interactions and time management focus of *The Sims*, the life of the ultimate Playboy just isn't as interesting as you may have hoped.

The game kicks off with Hef in his mansion and Playboy magazine just a sparkle in his eye. You'll need to set up an office, hire a journalist and photographer, and sweet talk some pretty young thing into posing for the first cover. Each issue requires certain things - a cover shot, a centerfold, a pictorial, an essay, an interview and an article. The greater the star power of the people involved



[up] Hef obviously has a lot on his plate



[below] Hef hails the disco bus



[above] A little dull, you say?

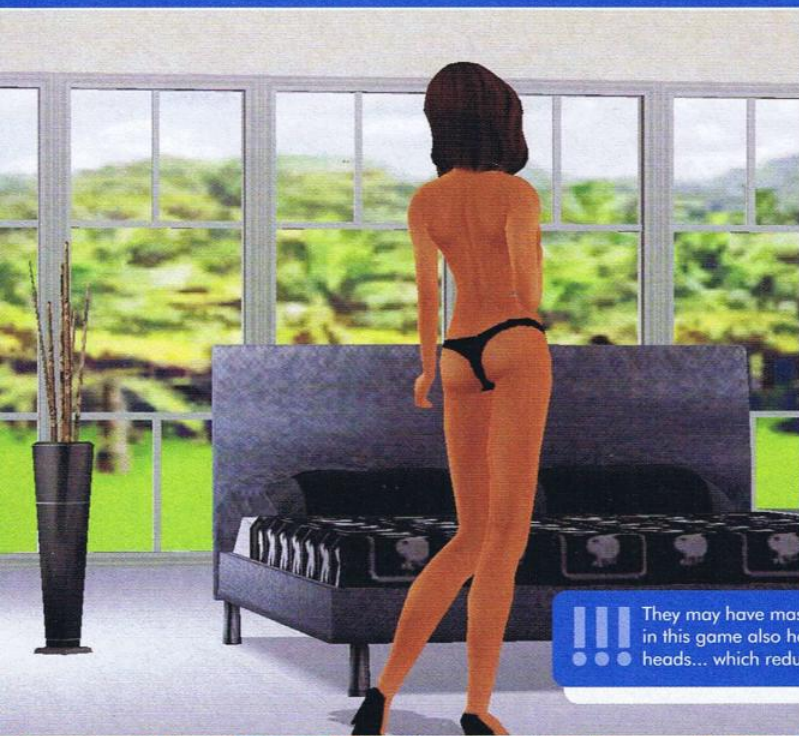


[below] From air hockey to tongue hockey

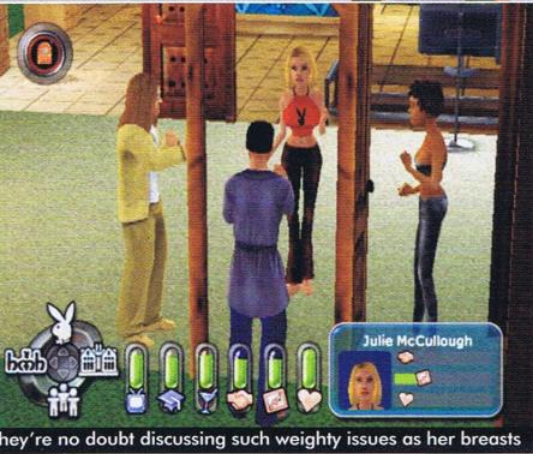
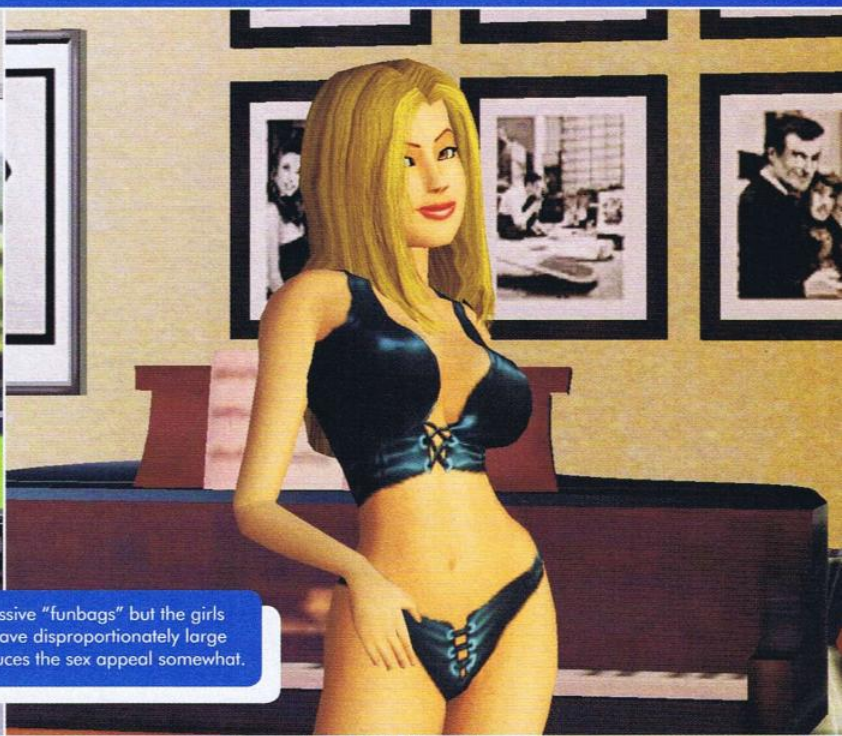
in the content, the more draw the issue will have, but you'll also need to consider the demographic that you're aiming for. The areas to consider are TV/movies, sports, arts/lit, humour, fashion, music, politics, sexuality and tech/toys. If one of these areas is of particular interest to your audience you can focus on it, but you'll have to find the right person to deliver the most compelling content.

A huge range of people are at your fingertips, either to hire as staff or to invite to parties (although you won't be able to invite the big stars until you're more established). Each individual you meet has icons indicating their likes and dislikes, meters indicating physique (very important for Bunnies), intellect and charm, and of course, stats

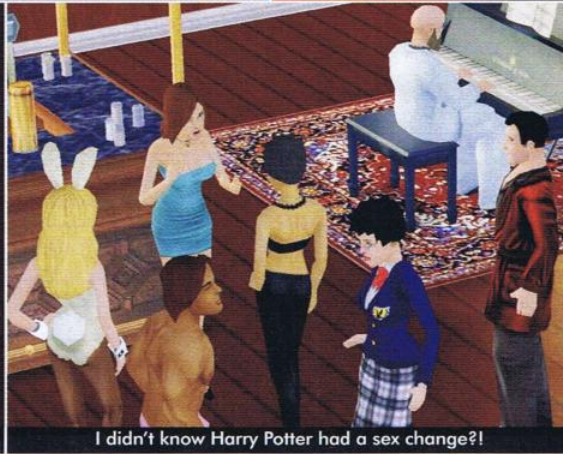




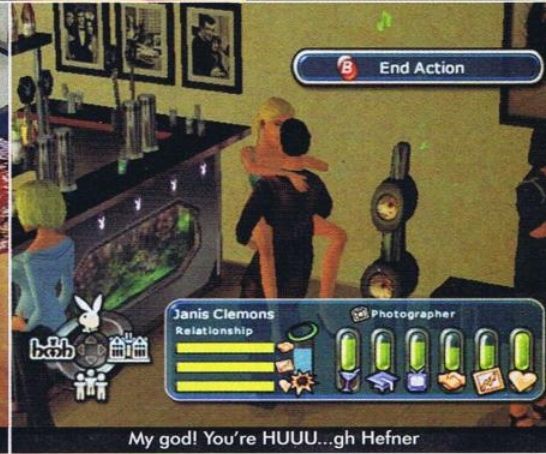
!!! They may have massive "funbags" but the girls in this game also have disproportionately large heads... which reduces the sex appeal somewhat.



They're no doubt discussing such weighty issues as her breasts



I didn't know Harry Potter had a sex change?!



My god! You're HUUUU...gh Hefner



^ Blast through the burn and ride the zone

relative to you and relative to their mood/goals. This is a game that's all about mixing business with pleasure and increasing your profile, so social networking (ie clicking through conversations with guests) certainly comprises most of the gameplay, with the vast majority of magazine decisions being very simple choices.

TALKING SHIZZLE Conversations are broken up into three broad categories when talking to women - casual, business and romantic, each with a bar indicating how you're faring in that category, while for men only the first two categories are available. Of course as you talk, extra conversation options open up, from smoking cigars through to doing the nasty on the nearest piece of furniture.

Whilst this is certainly a game about networking and having vast numbers of people as friends and lovers, it does mean that you can go from not knowing someone to having sex on the couch within a matter of minutes. Similarly, becoming best friends with a rock star is just a matter of having enough patience to click conversation icons a few times.

This is a game that's all about mixing business with pleasure

HEF HATES DEADLINES

If it's all sounding like there's a lot to consider, well, there is and there isn't. Simultaneously a strength and weakness is the fact that you can pay as much or as little attention to stats and the like as you want. In fact, it's very easy to cruise through on auto pilot, holding parties and schmoozing the people you need to in order to generate content. There's rarely much pressure on you either - just get the magazine done when you're good and ready, and hold parties that go on until you've achieved your objectives. The only elements that indicate that time is

ticking by is the day/night cycle and regular bills/wages to pay.

That said, if you take the time to read the manual and engineer your social gatherings and content a little more, as well as spending more time altering the mansion and its decor, you'll get more out of the game... although you'll have to fight with the interface to do so - finding information you need just isn't as intuitive as in *The Sims*.

Despite the shortcomings of the game, there's still perverse pleasure to be had in the way it rapidly escalates. Once you've got a few issues out the door, you will have quite a few staff members, a whole host of friends in your Inner Circle, several girlfriends and the ability to call on huge numbers of celebrities and guests when you want to hold a party. If mindless conversation path mining doesn't bother you too much, there's enough to like about *Playboy* to make it worth checking out. Just don't expect it to be titillating - the photo shoots are highly anti-climactic. <<

AVAILABLE ON:
PS2 / XBOX / PC / GCN

DETAILS:

CATEGORY: Sim
PLAYERS: 1
DEVELOPER: Cyberlore Studios
PUBLISHER: Ubisoft
PRICE: \$79.95 (console), \$69.95 (PC)
RATING: MA15+
AVAILABLE: Now

HYPER VERDICT:

PLUS: Amusing sex animations, easy to pick up.

MINUS: Simplistic and can be a little dull to play.

VISUALS 75 SOUND 80 GAMEPLAY 73

OVERALL
74

A mixed journey to the land either side of the silicon valley.



COLD FEAR

STEPHEN FARRELLY doesn't get sea sick

Having taken control of the espionage market through their Tom Clancy titles, Ubisoft has opted to move into a re-energised genre in Survival Horror. Hot off the heels of one of this year's most important games, Resident Evil 4, Cold Fear pays much homage to the genre and its standout achievements and successfully takes more than a leaf from the action triumphs of the recent RE4.

From the outset, Cold Fear's setting is desperate; an incident aboard a Russian whaling rig in the Bering Sea brings the attention of the US Coast Guard, however, the first team sent aboard is wiped out almost instantly with no findings or explanation present. The only thing to do is dispatch a single Coastal Guard (obviously) to do what an entire team was incapable of, thus our protagonist, one Tom Hansen, is dropped on deck and the game begins.

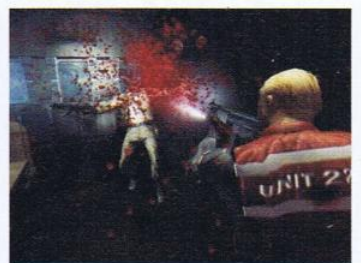
IT BELONGS IN A MUSEUM

The first thing to pay attention to in Cold Fear is the ferocious environment. Not only are you out at sea with a storm crashing around you, but the rig you're on is anything but a stationary hub; instead, what you're treated to - without warning - is an environment constantly tipping left and right and up and down, all while dangerously coated in water, fallen electrical cables, debris and spot fires - threat is instantly portentous, and we haven't even come across any enemies yet.

The grandeur of this chaos is in its visual presentation: Cold Fear is damn pretty, and violently active thanks to the mixed marriage of the game's environments. On the one hand, the disruptive sea and storm erupting around you represents a live, organic presence, while on the other, the cold, unforgiving nature of the steel barge you're alone and outnumbered on represents



[fog joke] Running into an N64 game...



[above] Thankfully he's not part of G-Unit

a deadly embrace of solitude and trepidation. The dual nature of life and death is constantly around you, and you won't soon forget the desperation of your deadly situation thanks to this.

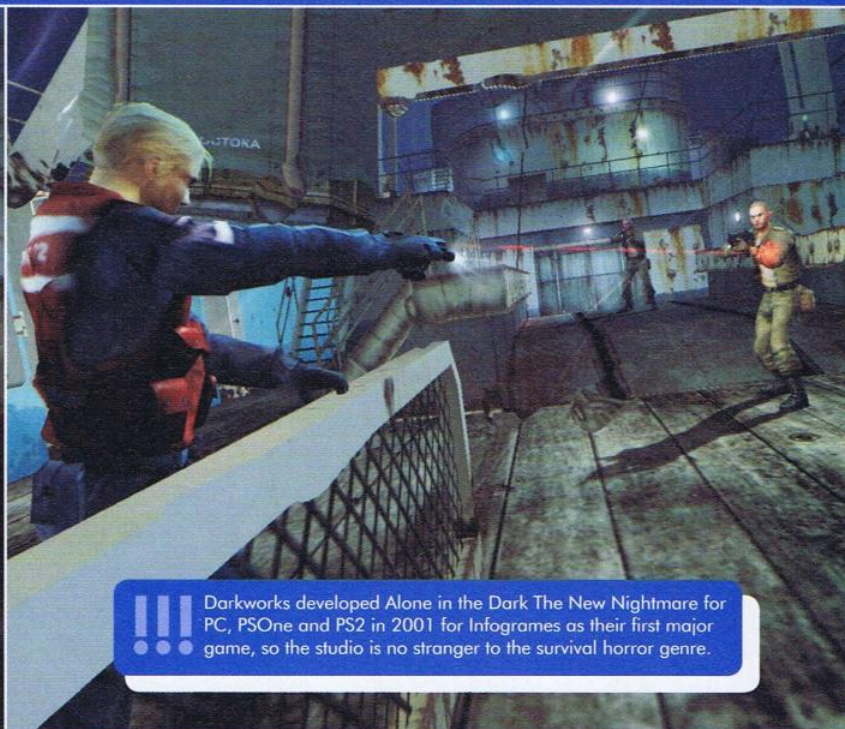
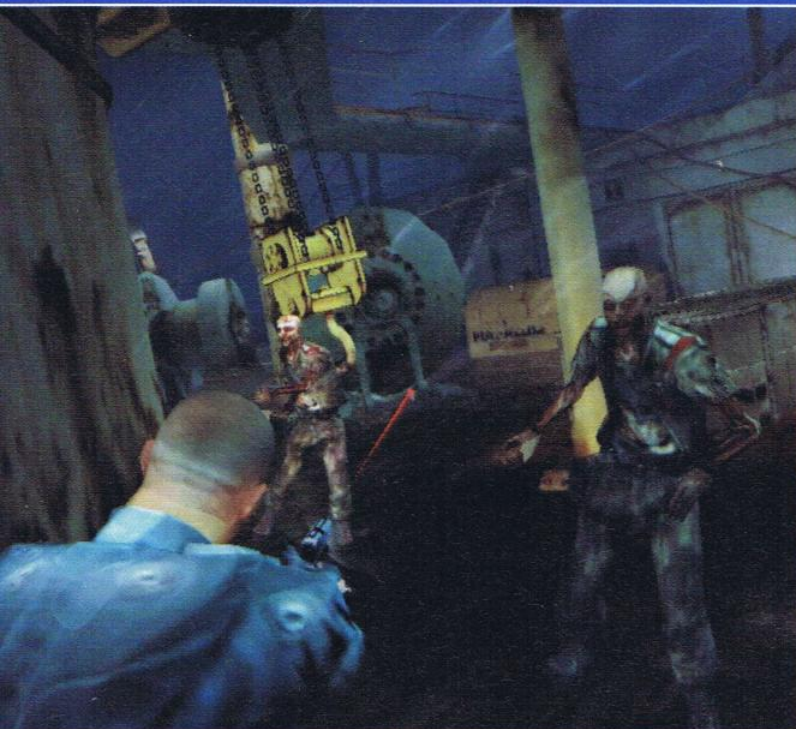
Moving Mr. Hansen around reveals a hybrid camera system that employs the old Resident Evil trickery of cheeky camera positioning and the action stylings of Resident Evil 4, however, unlike RE4, Cold Fear allows you to move and strafe while aiming, an aspect of the game that flows through to a greater emphasis on action over atmosphere and anxiety. Though this idea is invigorating, it is detrimental to the horror aspect of the game in that much of the desperation is lacking as



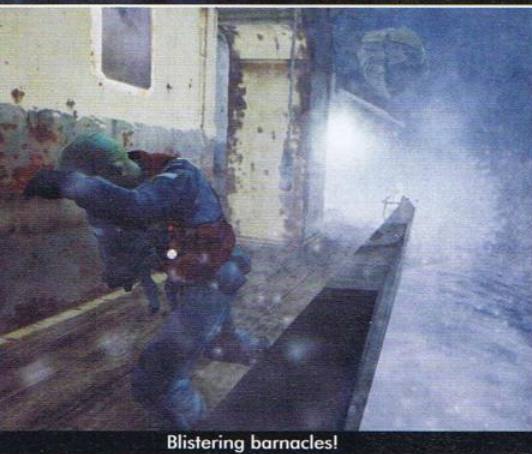
[above] Electrocution, Texas style!

you can always be prepared for anything. In fact, it's entirely possible to move through the whole game in the 'action' camera rather than the 'horror' camera - an initiative that may or not be welcomed by punters, depending on what you want out of the title.

The story, like most survival



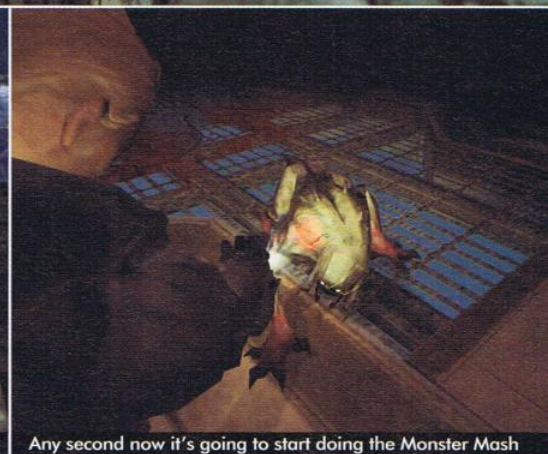
!!! Darkworks developed Alone in the Dark: The New Nightmare for PC, PSOne and PS2 in 2001 for Infogrames as their first major game, so the studio is no stranger to the survival horror genre.



Blistering barnacles!



When times get rough... like a boat over troubled waters



Any second now it's going to start doing the Monster Mash

horror games, revolves around illegal experimentation, shady pasts, underhanded partnerships and screwed-up, grotesque monsters. Though it's all come before, there is a fair amount of intrigue to be enjoyed throughout Cold Fear as the information you're handed is at a slow and steady pace, and major events definitely drive the game forward, though they're hardly groundbreaking in the grand scheme of brilliant story-telling.

The basic idea is that a parasite known as "Exocel" has been allowed to host with humans, which has resulted in a zombie-like state for said hosts, and naturally the order of the day is to behead these symbiotic life forms and deal with the uber-zombies that are invariably waiting for you further along in the game.

It's entirely possible to lure your unsuspecting foes into danger

METROID ADVANCEMENT

While uncovering the story at hand is enjoyable, it's very easy to get lost on the ship, which can be frustrating - especially given that Darkworks has employed a Metroid idea of advancement in that many doors and walkways will not be readily available to you from the get-go (which makes sense given that most of the game takes place on one vessel). Remembering which key is for what door and so on can get annoying, and it's just enough to derail the game's pace and flow.

Moreover, though the environments are beautifully crafted, the enemies and their animations, in-

game cutscenes, and certain sound effects just aren't up to scratch. Firing your vast array of weapons just doesn't sound convincing, while the aiming system is a little off and the hit points for enemies is too low, which is all a huge let down given the time and care taken with setting up the immediate atmosphere.

The big plus for Cold Fear though, is the implementation of environmental traps. It's entirely possible to lure your unsuspecting foes into danger, be it a pool of water you can electrify, gas pipes you can vent or oil barrels you can explode. You can even lure them off the side of the ship when it violently dips one way or another.

Cold Fear is an enjoyable third-person action experience and the horror element keeps things engaging, however, too much emphasis on the former keeps the latter from being what it could have been - there's potential in the franchise and Cold Fear is a good beginning, but if you had to choose, it's Resident Evil 4, hands down. <<

WHERE IS BENNETT? Former Next Media employee Bennett Ring has been missing for some weeks, however, we soon discovered his position at Next was just another one of his 'cover jobs'. It turns out he works for the CIA and has recently been seen trying to uncover the mysteries found within the Bering Sea on a particular Russian whaling vessel. At the time of going to print, Bennett "Benton" Ring (or should we say "Jason Bennett"?) wasn't available for comment - he is in fact, presumed dead.



AVAILABLE ON:
PS2 / XBOX / PC / GCN

DETAILS:

CATEGORY: Survival Horror

PLAYERS: 1

DEVELOPER: Darkworks

PUBLISHER: Ubisoft

PRICE: \$99.95

RATING: MA15+

AVAILABLE: Now

HYPER VERDICT:

PLUS: Wonderful environments, interesting plot, traps.

MINUS: Too much emphasis on action, weapon sounds too weak.

VISUALS 87 SOUND 84 GAMEPLAY 80

OVERALL
81

A good leftfield entrant in the Survival Horror genre.



Just so you know, the story picks up after the Champions have shattered the god Innoruuk's body into the Shards of Hate. The god's followers are gathering the shards in the hopes they can resurrect him. It's up to you to stop (or help) them. Sounds like an excuse for combat to me...



"Oh please don't hit me with your magic wand!" *snigger*



The Comic Convention went horribly wrong



Where can I upgrade my pelvic thrust of doom power?

CHAMPIONS: Return to Arms

DANIEL WILKS loves a bit of hack 'n' slash

Return to Arms is a definite case of "if it ain't broke, don't fix it". The original Champions of Norrath was probably the most successful of the action RPGs to be released on console as it did away with the pretence of being much of a roleplaying game and instead focused all of its energies on making the game experience both beautiful and action packed. Instead of a story, Norrath had an excuse for the action. Return to Arms follows that trend with an infectious charm, with each of the levels essentially having one major conceit to drive the action and little in the way of



plot otherwise. The Champions saga owes a lot more to Gauntlet than it does to the game to which it is most frequently compared, Baldur's Gate: Dark Alliance.

SLIGHTLY TWEAKED

Set soon after the events of the first game, Return to Arms sees the player hewing their way across a number of different planes of existence to stop (or aid) the big bad. Gameplay has only been slightly tweaked from the first game with online play being fixed and the inclusion of two new playable character classes, the feline Vah Shir Berserker and the lizard-like Iskar Shaman. If anything these two new characters look better than the characters returning from the original game but they play much like the Warrior and Cleric respectively. One other minor change that will be a welcome respite for Champions veterans is that enemies seem to drop fewer items but more gold so you don't have to spend all your time

heading back to town to sell your ill-gotten loot. Players can also choose their allegiances early in the game, siding either with good or evil but this choice is by and large cosmetic, not affecting the game aside from a few rare unique alignment based missions. Otherwise you'll find yourself fighting through the same level with the same objectives, albeit in a good or evil way.

Champions still looks great with excellent character models and animations, highly detailed equipment, brilliant surface textures and the strangely thick water that flows like custard. Unfortunately anyone who played the first game will not find anything new to look at as the levels, though planar in design follow the formula of the original - there's still a water level, a lava level, a big old sky dungeon, a musty castle and the like. The overall effect gives the player the impression that Return to Arms is just an expansion pack rather than a fully-fledged sequel. <<

AVAILABLE ON:
PS2 / XBOX / PC / GCN

DETAILS:

CATEGORY: Action/RPG
PLAYERS: 1-4
DEVELOPER: Snowblind Studios
PUBLISHER: Sony
PRICE: \$99.95
RATING: M15+
AVAILABLE: Now

HYPER VERDICT:

PLUS: Addictive button mashing, looks good, less filling.
MINUS: Samey.

VISUALS 86 SOUND 78 GAMEPLAY 78

OVERALL
76

It ain't broke but it ain't enough either.

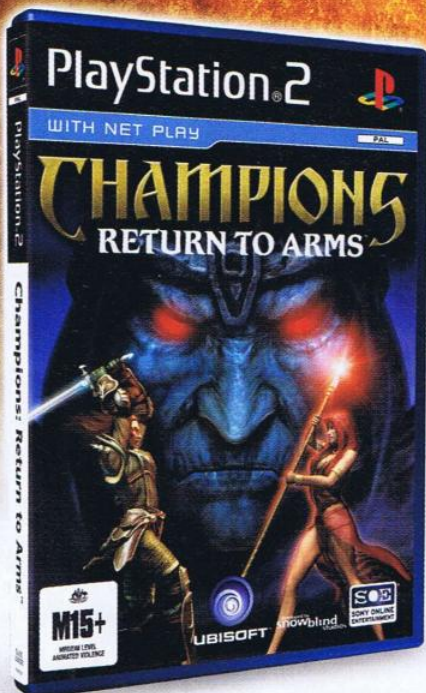
LIVE BY THE SWORD



7 races & 7 classes to choose from, including Vah Shir Berserker and Iksar Shaman. Thousands of arms, items and artifacts to acquire.



Cooperative or competitive play for up to 4 players online or offline with Multitap. Over 50 areas to explore and conquer.



www.championsgame.net



PlayStation 2

PLAYABLE ON LINE

developed by snowblind studios



UBISOFT™



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It's snow picnic out there that's for sure



!!! The original Empire Earth received 83% back in issue 99.



These guys have obviously got big brass (cannon)balls



When the dust cleared, Bob realised his wallet was gone

EMPIRE EARTH II

KOSTA ANDREADIS is an imperial warhorse

Saying that all strategy games are primarily about conquest may sound like a broad generalisation, but it's hard to argue otherwise. Empire Earth II is no different; this is a strategy game steeped in conquest, both imperial and economic, and apart from being the sequel to a rather impressive Age of Empires inspired RTS game it also comes packing an impressive checklist of streamlined features and implementations. That said, the claim of 'innovative new features' that has been bandied around in the leadup to release is a little misleading. You're still in charge of a civilisation, building up their military forces and/or economy in order to defeat a rival played out from a top-down isometric perspective.

ISOMETRISTIC!

Almost every strategy game employs the same top-down perspective, giving most gamers the impression that the genre is static when in

fact it's constantly evolving. To put it bluntly the additions in EE II do not take the genre in bold new directions - this is evolution, where gameplay concepts are streamlined and established ideas are expanded upon. For example, take the game's Citizen Manager which allows you to distribute your citizens to the various resource gathering tasks and construction from one simple interface. Then there's the War Planner, which allows you to use a full screen map to plan attack strategies and paths and share them with your allies. Oh, and the real-time weather system that has a direct effect on both your civilisation and your war efforts. That's not to forget the game's 15 civilisations ranging from Aztecs to Americans, with hundreds of distinct units and structures. All these new implementations and expansions are fantastic and add up to an experience that is well worth the time invested.

Much like its predecessor Empire Earth II spans thousands of years of

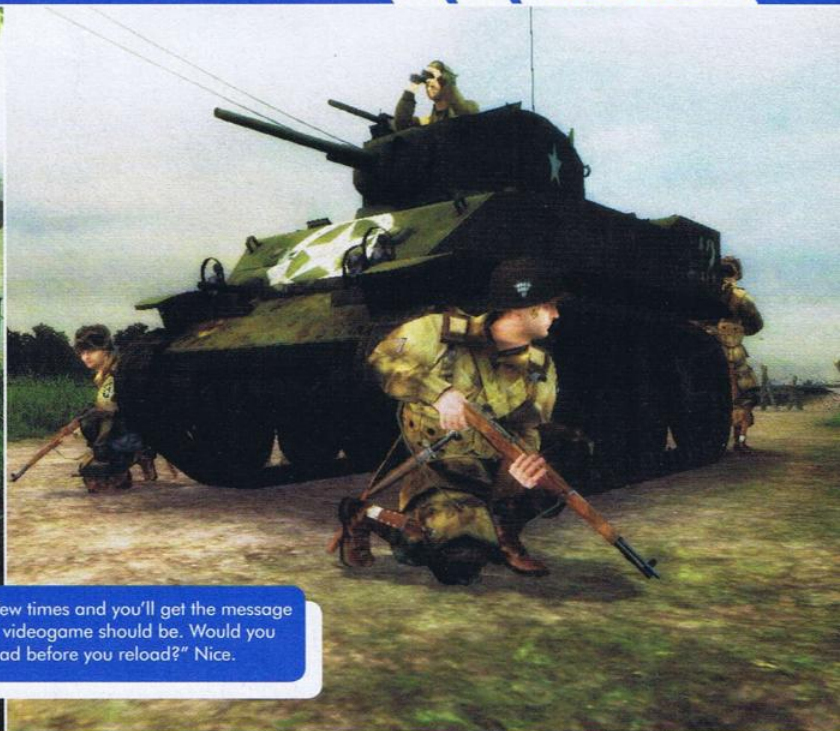
history divided into epochs, where each epoch covers a specific time period ranging from the Stone Age to the mid 21st century. So over the course of the game players can expect to have both spear throwers and advanced military robots at their disposal - which is a nice touch. The single player campaign is divided into 15 scenarios covering each epoch and covers a human history not unlike the one seen in the classic TV series Sliders - whereby the Aztecs weren't conquered by the Spanish but instead flourished well into the 20th century. An impressive level of detail has gone into each of the different epochs and the differentiation between the various civilisations (which all help add to the numerous multiplayer modes on offer). Empire Earth II doesn't break the mould, it simply reshapes it and the end result is a rewarding strategy gaming experience with plenty of depth - and there really isn't much more you could ask for. <<

AVAILABLE ON:
PS2 / XBOX / PC / GCN

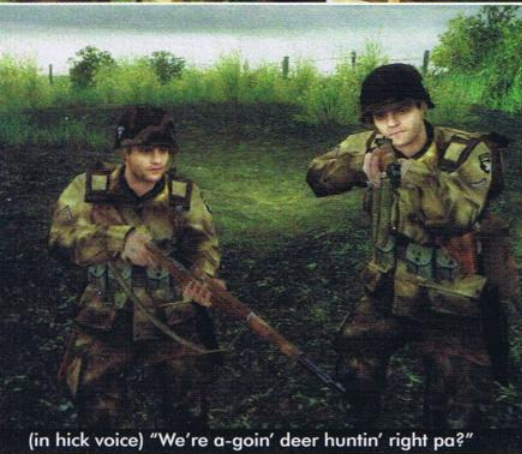
DETAILS:
CATEGORY: RTS
PLAYERS: 1-Multi
DEVELOPER: Mad Doc
PUBLISHER: Vivendi Universal
PRICE: \$89.95
RATING: M15+
AVAILABLE: April 28

HYPER VERDICT:
PLUS: Diplomacy & economic control without taking the focus off combat.
MINUS: Epoch system is very restrictive in the single player campaign.

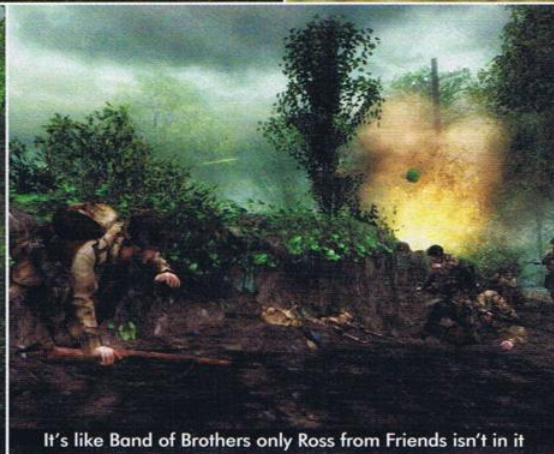
VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY
82	78	86
OVERALL		
85		
Rewarding strategy game that builds on a winning formula.		



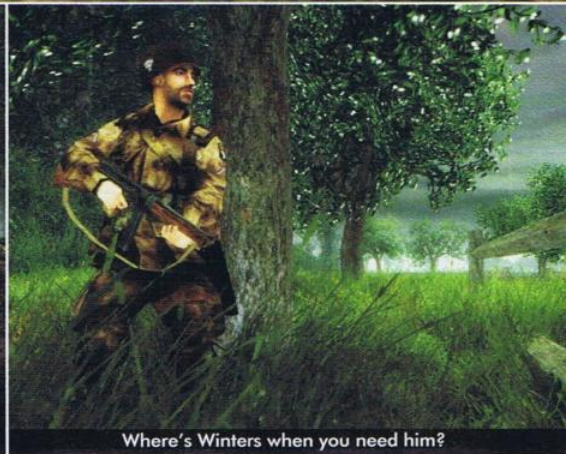
!!! Fail a checkpoint a few times and you'll get the message "War isn't fair, but a videogame should be. Would you like to heal your squad before you reload?" Nice.



(in hick voice) "We're a-goin' deer huntin' right pa?"



It's like Band of Brothers only Ross from Friends isn't in it



Where's Winters when you need him?

BROTHERS IN ARMS: Road to Hill 30

CAM SHEA wonders if Mark Knopfler is unlockable

Up until now WWII-based first person shooters have largely been about the spectacle of the experience, with the explosions all around and the intensity of wartime obfuscating the fact that the gameplay itself is still largely run and gun. Even though you often play as part of a squad, the linear and scripted nature of the games has taken most of the strategy out of our hands. That's not necessarily a bad thing, but we're glad that a game like *Brothers in Arms* has come along to offer a little more strategic depth to the WWII experience.

BAND OF BROTHERS IN ARMS
You play as Sergeant Matt Baker, a squad leader in the 101st Airborne Paratrooper division. The first mission in the game sees you and your squad dropping into Normandy on D Day, and over the course of the eight day invasion, you'll go to hell and back - or more specifically 17 missions, through St. Come-du-

Mont, into Carentan and eventually Hill 30. The missions are actually based on real battlefields, with maps that have been put together based on aerial reconnaissance images, photos and eye witness accounts. *Brothers in Arms* is very focused on telling a story about a relatively small group of men, and making you care whether they live or die. To that end, mission headers are minimal with introspective dialogue from Baker and there's plenty of chatter between squad mates going into missions. Starting out with a couple of men to manage, it's not long before you're in charge of a full fire team and assault team. You'll quickly learn how to move your men into position and lay down suppressing fire, enabling you to flank for a low risk kill. Another important inclusion is the ability to switch to an aerial view of the map, allowing you to check out the enemy positions and look for lines from which to flank them. As you gain more men, maps get

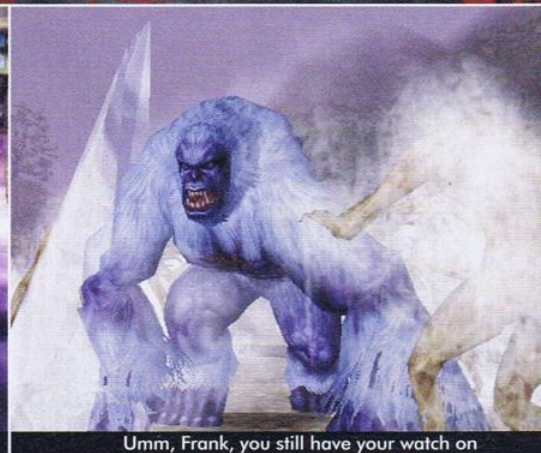
a little more open and complex, and on the whole the gameplay has more in common with *FSW* than any other WWII game, only you're actually doing the shooting. It all adds up to a completely different feel compared to any other WWII FPS. You're constantly advancing from cover to cover, using suppressing fire and out maneuvering the opposition. A consequence of this is that battles feel less overwhelming as there are less men on the map, but you'll be so immersed in gaining position and taking out the enemy positions that you won't care. The only real issues we've found are that enemy soldiers sometimes have a mystical ability to detect that you're creeping up on them, and invisible walls occasionally prevent you from trying more radical strategies. They're hardly game breaking elements though - just minor annoyances that fade in comparison to all the things there are to like about *Brothers in Arms*. <<

AVAILABLE ON:
PS2 / XBOX / PC / GCN

DETAILS:
CATEGORY: 1st person tactical shooter
PLAYERS: 1-Multi
DEVELOPER: Gearbox Software
PUBLISHER: Ubisoft
PRICE: \$99.95 PS2/Xbox, \$89.95 PC
RATING: MA15+
AVAILABLE: Now

HYPER VERDICT:
PLUS: More strategy than any other WWII FPS.
MINUS: Can feel a little samey after a while.

GRAPHICS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY
86	86	87
OVERALL		
87		
A great new addition to the WWII FPS genre.		



The demon that's summoned every time a bad game is made

Wolfman takes a slash

Umm, Frank, you still have your watch on

ALTERED BEAST

FRANK DRY rips off his rose coloured glasses in disgust

Back in the days when we did the things and the Megadrive was King (or Queen if you were a Nintendo fan) there was a fun little game called Altered Beast that allowed the player to live out their wildest fantasies of side-scrolling across various levels, changing into a monstrous form and dishing out a healthy dose of 16-bit carnage. Altered Beast was not a great game but it did keep your attention and distract you from the fact that you didn't buy the far superior simultaneous release that had something to do with a speedy hedgehog. This is not that game.

GETTING YOUR \$\$\$ WORTH

The new Altered Beast is a cliché wrapped in stereotype, wrapped in a formula. Players take the role of a formerly dead special ops guy brought back to life by a shady operation using an even shadier pseudo-science in the form of the Genome Chip, a little bit of circuitry

that allows you to implant different forms you can later shapechange into. Naturally your memory is a little hazy allowing for frequent expositrons which inorganically feed you the next bit of the story. Finally the helicopter you were being transported in has crashed in evil mutant land of doom, scattering your Genome Chips necessitating you kill everything you encounter to find them to get your forms back so you can complete the puzzles so you can escape from the evil mutant land of doom so you can take the disc out of your PS2, put it in the microwave, watch the ensuing pretty light show and feel you may have almost gotten your money's worth.

Altered Beast is all about two things - killing monsters and changing forms. At least the latter is competent. Combat follows a simple two button mashing system familiar to those who have played Devil May Cry, Otogi, Blood Will Tell and countless others but they all have

something in common that makes their combat work - the combat looks spectacular and you can lock on to an enemy. Not so in Altered Beast. Combat is samey and lacks any sense of excitement and your inability to lock means that most of the combat will be spent simply mashing buttons in the hope that some of the enemies will be stupid enough to get in your way. They are. The shapechanging on the other hand at least looks fairly cool, if gratuitously gory. Throughout the game the player can find and utilise multiple forms including the Werewolf, Yeti, Raptor, Fishman (not Eliot) and others. Each of these forms have unique skills that can be upgraded RPG style and need to be utilised to complete the various levels and puzzles. Unfortunately the combat remains as simple as it is in human form, just easier for the most part. It seems as though most of the effort in the game went into the pointlessly gory FMV that plays every time you change shape. <<

AVAILABLE ON:
PS2 / XBOX / PC / GCN

DETAILS:

CATEGORY: Action
PLAYERS: 1
DEVELOPER: Sega
PUBLISHER: Sega
PRICE: \$79.95
RATING: MA15+
AVAILABLE: Now

HYPER VERDICT:

PLUS: It's not a remake of a worse game, looks OK.

MINUS: The game.

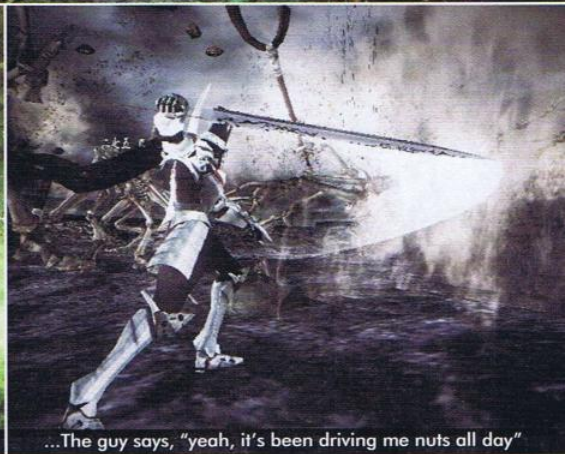
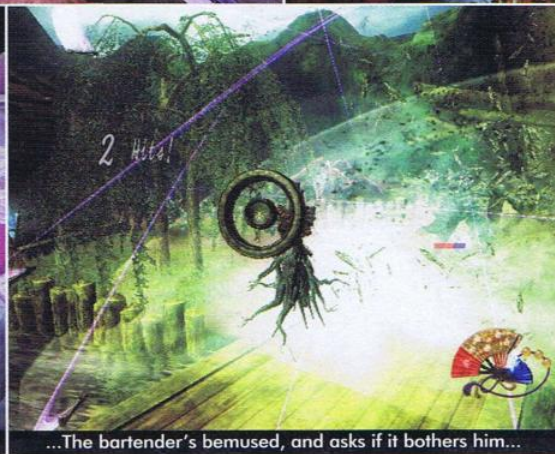
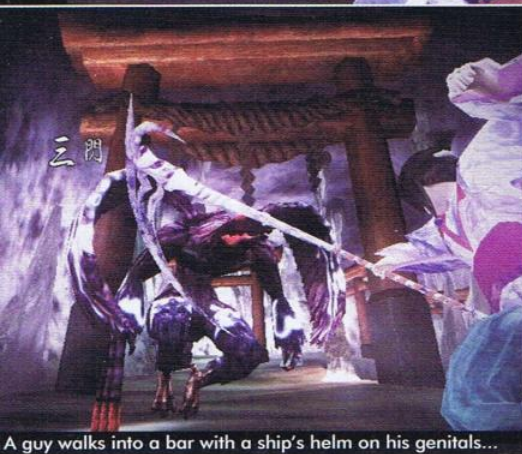
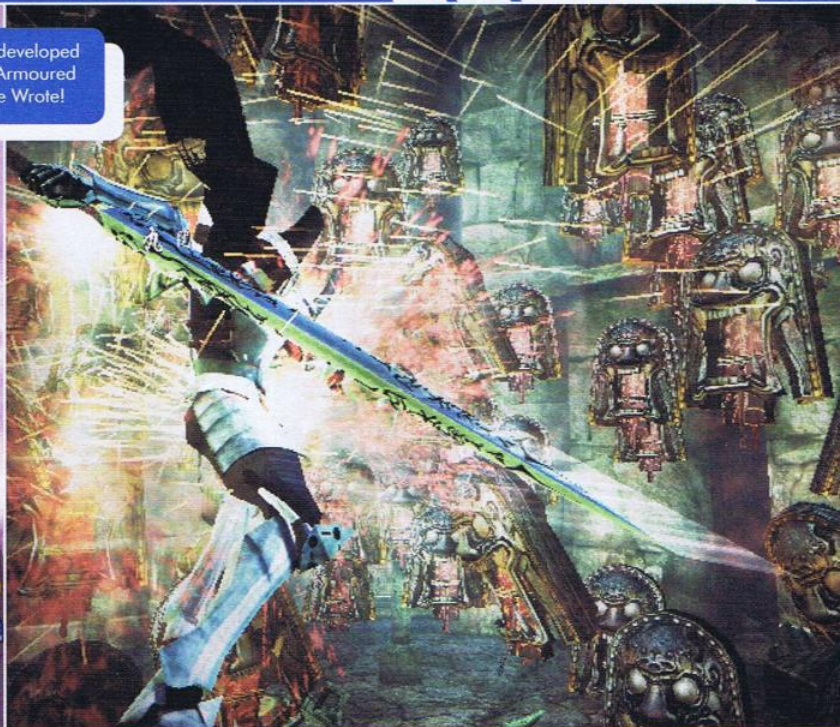
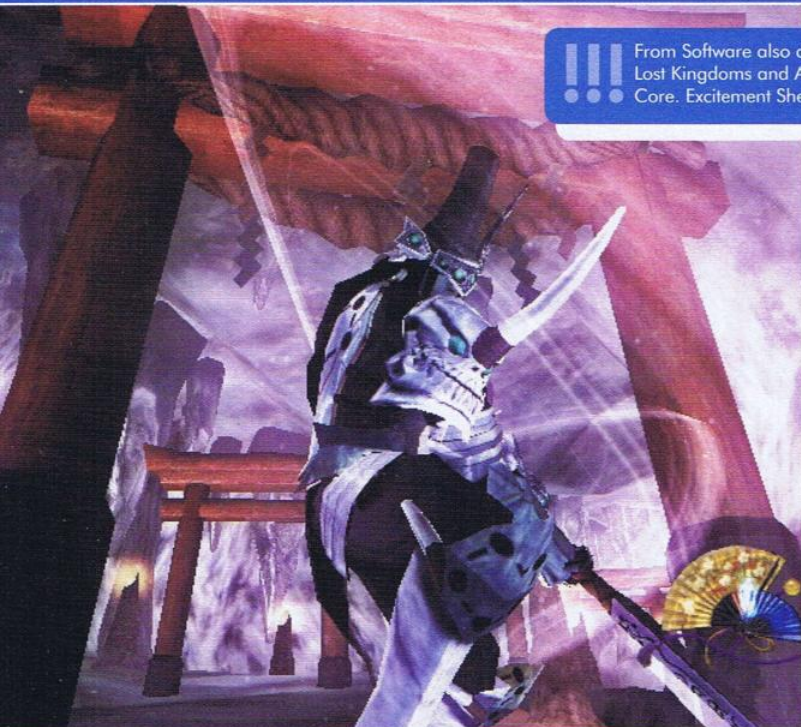
VISUALS SOUND GAMEPLAY

79 71 56

OVERALL
48

All-Turd Beast would be a more appropriate title.

From Software also developed Lost Kingdoms and Armoured Core. Excitement She Wrote!



A guy walks into a bar with a ship's helm on his genitals...

...The bartender's bemused, and asks if it bothers him...

...The guy says, "yeah, it's been driving me nuts all day"

OTOGI 2

A game that's almost as pretty as **DANIEL WILKS**...

There may be many games in the third person action canon but there are few as good looking as those in the Otagi series. The second installment begins just after the events of the first game with the immortal samurai Raikoh once again asleep in his sword waiting for the world to need him again. Need him it does, but this time around the threat is so great that five other immortal warriors are needed to help. Otagi 2 features fewer stages than the original game but the complexity of them means that veteran Otagi players should still be able to get a solid 15-20 hours of fun from the title. Instead of simply launching into a mission, players are forced to choose which immortal hero they will try to tackle the level with, a choice that plays an important tactical role in Otagi 2, as the same character cannot be chosen immediately after being played, and some characters are better suited to certain levels than others.

COME INTO PLAY
 Combat remains essentially the same as it was in the first game with a light and heavy attack and simple combos combining the two as well as a magical attack capable of doing massive damage or other effects depending on the character. Although the combat mechanic remains similar across all of the characters, each have their individual strengths that will often come into play. Raikoh is a balanced character but the objective may be more easily achieved with a character who can glide, throw monsters or can string together devastating combos. It's your choice.
 The visuals once again retain the same strangely dreamlike quality of the original with slightly hazy outlines and diffuse lighting. All of the levels also contain huge amounts of deformable objects that can be broken using the heavy attack. The debris from terrain combined with

the clouds of sparks thrown up by defeated enemies can sometimes be a little disorienting but only serve to further the dreamlike, surreal quality of the game.
 Character models for the main characters are outstanding. Raikoh looks much like we remember him but some of the other generals are triumphs of design meeting mythology - Suetake, for example, appears to be a living, animate tree stump with the ability to glide and wields a weapon that resembles the wheel of a ship. Unfortunately the graphical splendour comes at a cost. Otagi 2 throws around the particle effects with gay abandon, which leads to fairly frequent bouts of slowdown. None of the slowdown we encountered was game killing but it was definitely frustrating. Soundtrack, effects and voice acting are nearly on par with the graphics. Now if only the gameplay were as good we would have a truly spectacular game. <<

AVAILABLE ON:
 PS2 / XBOX / PC / GCN

DETAILS:
 CATEGORY: Action
 PLAYERS: 1
 DEVELOPER: From Software
 PUBLISHER: THQ
 PRICE: \$79.95
 RATING: TBA
 AVAILABLE: Now

HYPER VERDICT:
PLUS: Looks amazing, sounds great, cool playable characters.
MINUS: Slowdown, a little repetitive.

GRAPHICS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY
89	90	81
OVERALL		
82		
Lightweight but gorgeous.		



Culotte	
HP	1601
SP	1975

LA PUCELLE: TACTICS

DANIEL WILKS used to fight for the other side

▶▶ Nippon Ichi is a strange little development house but thank god they exist. Without them the turn-based strategy genre may as well curl up its toes and die. Sure there are great turn-based games such as Advance Wars, Fire Emblem and Final Fantasy Tactics but these are more of an oddity than a solid output. Nippon Ichi, on the other hand have blessed the gaming world with Disgaea: Hour of Darkness, Phantom Brave and now La Pucelle: Tactics, all within the space of 12 or so months. What is even more amazing than their steady output of turn-based strategy is that all of them have been remarkably different experiences with the only common threads being the turn-based nature and the fact that they are an absolute hoot.

SNES IS THE NEW PS2

You could be forgiven for mistaking La Pucelle for a SNES game when you first see it. The graphics are

entirely 2D and low resolution, and animations are kept to a minimum. This approach, while a little alienating at first actually adds to the charm of the game - it looks retro enough to be cute but not to the point where it becomes distracting. Players follow the story of Prier and Culotte, a brother and sister team who work for a militant arm of the Church of La Pucelle and their teacher/mentor/guide/probation officer Alouette whose job it is to scour the land and protect it from evil. After the first few hours of play you may think that La Pucelle is a fairly lightweight kids game as far as plot is concerned but stick with it - for such a cartoony and sweet natured looking game, La Pucelle has a remarkably dark and adult story to tell about corruption in the church, the fallibility of the human will, lust, betrayal and murder. Unfortunately the cutscenes in which this story is told are often about five times

longer than they need to be, contain ridiculous amounts of slow moving ellipsis speech bubbles and pauses and cannot be skipped.

Battle is the major focus of La Pucelle, with players opposing the forces of evil over a huge number of missions on isometric maps. Each of the three main characters has a specific set of skills learned through leveling up but also have access to the Purify skill. This skill forms the crux of the game. Purification has two purposes. The first and most overt is to clear maps of spawn points for creatures and create damaging lines of force. Each map is dotted with a number of portals with lines of energy emanating from them. Each of the portals will spawn a new enemy after a set number of rounds and their corresponding lines of energy have a different effect when the portal is purified. Through careful positioning of units it's possibly to aim these lines of



[above] The only Petit Viking EVER



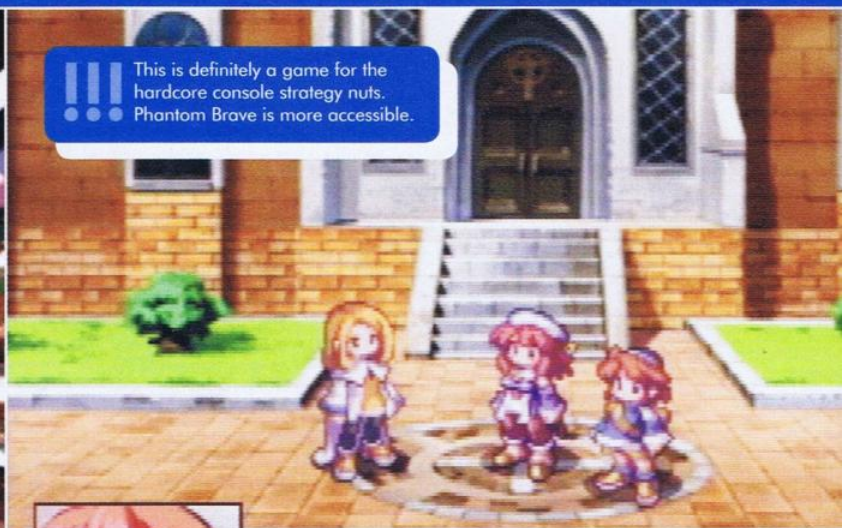
[below] "But she's a crip!"





Ragnarok

!!! This is definitely a game for the hardcore console strategy nuts. Phantom Brave is more accessible.



Oh, Holy Goddess Poitreene... Sorry 'bout that! There, I'm done.



Exhibit A: yet more shroom love from Japanese developers



Not pictured: all the other drugs Nippon Ichi are on



This is the place. They said they saw the zombies here.

Let me guess, it's an ancient Indian burial ground right?

force at enemy units to do damage from a range. If the player can position troops in such a way that they can form an unbroken line of force around enemy troops it can cause massive amounts of damage to anything within the border.

The other use for Purify is far more vital to winning La Pucelle. Most enemies in the game can be converted to join your side by first purifying them until you're told they will join your side and then defeating them in battle. Players can have a maximum of eight troops at one time but can summon reinforcements if one troop falls so it's useful to have as large a retinue as possible. All units gain XP from battle in skills determined by what equipment they have. Purified units also need to be trained between

Most enemies can be converted to your side by purifying them

fighters to shape the way in which they will gain XP. The names and locations in La Pucelle sound French for the most part but the training is pure Japanese weirdness - some of our training options include Foot Massage (for loyalty) and Stab (to improve their toughness). To power up items you can also send higher level Purified creatures into the Nether Realms. The back of the box claims that La Pucelle contains 100+ hours of gaming to finish. This does not seem to be an idle boast.

LAUGH IT UP HAIRBALL

The design of La Pucelle can best be described as quaint. The characters

are obviously anime inspired. The monsters on the other hand are pure strangeness, including such greats as a cardboard box with a gremlin in it or balls of hair (created through an evil hair growth serum) that have the ability to turn you into a hairball for a set number of rounds. Some of the boss monsters are actually strangely affecting on an emotional level, such as a giant crying land whale thingy. Unfortunately whilst the voice acting is quite decent the rest of the sound stays true to the retro roots of La Pucelle and can get quite annoying after a short while. <<

MURDER FOR FUN AND PROFIT To gain the most XP, treasure and the best items, players will have to make frequent ventures into the bowels of hell to fight the toughest monsters. The easiest way to do this is to murder your own units. You read that right - the best way into hell is to murder your own units. Once you've done this a few times on a map the threshold of dark energies should be reached and a portal to hell should be opened. Be warned, the nether realms are tough as buggery and the only way you can get out is to make it all the way through so you may want to wait until you're a decent level before making your first attempt.



AVAILABLE ON:
PS2 / XBOX / PC / GCN

DETAILS:

CATEGORY: Strategy

PLAYERS: 1

DEVELOPER: Nippon Ichi

PUBLISHER: Mastiff

PRICE: STBA

RATING: TBA

AVAILABLE: TBA

HYPER VERDICT:

PLUS: Great strategy, nice voice acting, addictive.

MINUS: Interminably long and boring cutscenes, huge difficulty curve.

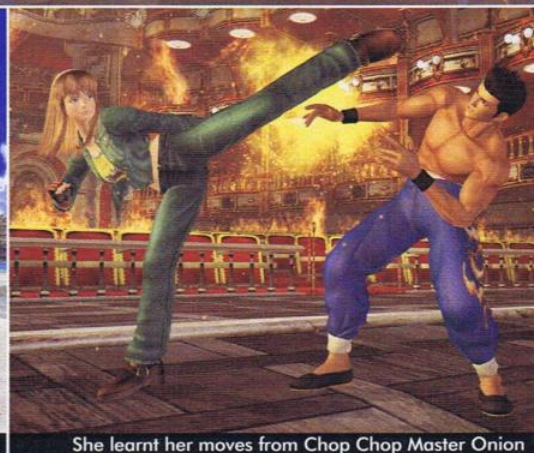
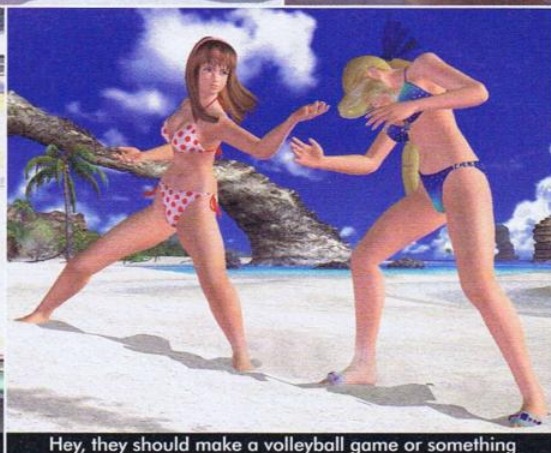
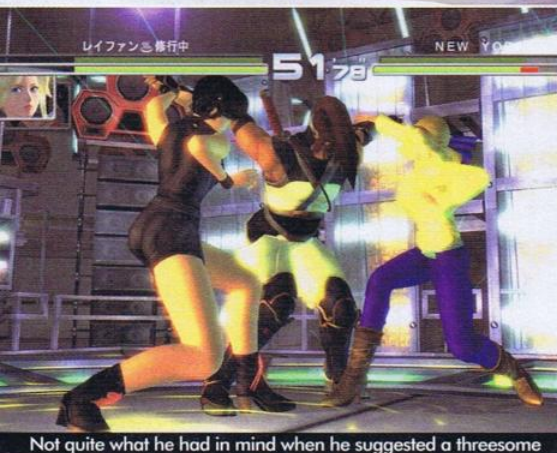
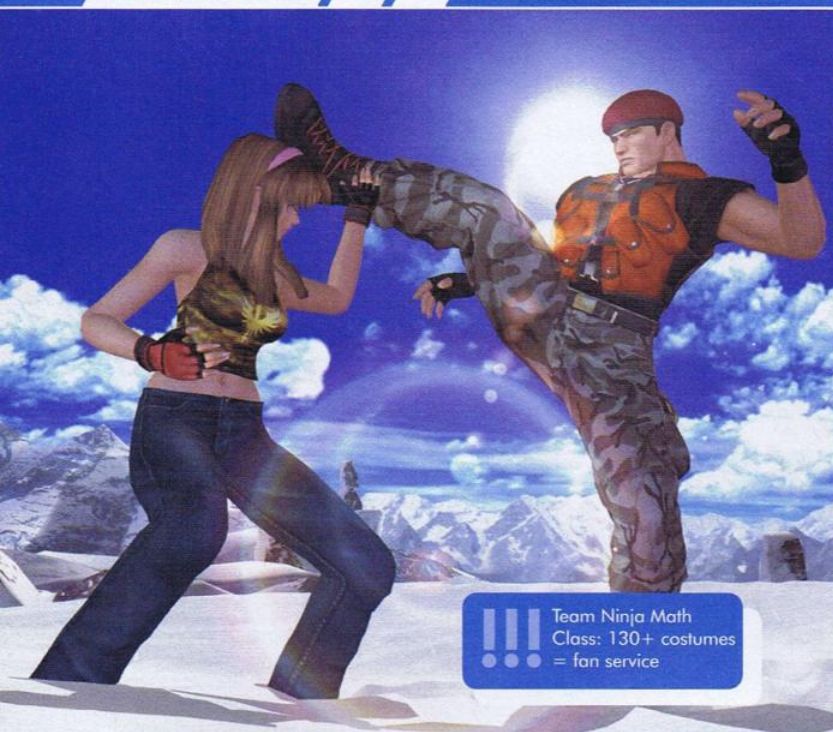
VISUALS SOUND GAMEPLAY

61 71 89

OVERALL

84

Great strategy with a steep difficulty curve.



DEAD OR ALIVE: Ultimate

DANIEL WILKS gets his stick out

▶▶ The DOA series has a long history dating back nearly ten years but during that time it has always been overshadowed by its contemporaries such as Virtua Fighter and Tekken. It's a pity that the only real attention that DOA has received had been more about the incredible graphics than the solid fighting engine because the series is one of the most user friendly technical fighters around, offering new players an easy in to the genre and seasoned fighters a great technical engine.

SKIMPY SCHOOLGIRLS

Dead or Alive: Ultimate is not a new game. What it is in fact is a combination of the original Saturn DOA and DOA 2, significantly reworked. The original DOA is a pleasant diversion but not something you'll be spending too much time on. DOA 2: Ultimate, on the other hand is a marvel, both in looks and playability. Each character has access to around

70 moves including counters and throws as well as a wealth of unlockable costumes. Fan service is obviously one of the priorities in Ultimate as evidenced by the sheer number of outfits available for the female characters with some having up to 20 to discover and include such fan favourites as schoolgirl uniforms and skimpy bikinis.

The most significant inclusion in DOA: Ultimate is the fact that it is online enabled and it works great. There is surprisingly little lag in the online play making it a pleasant surprise, and there is a great deal of satisfaction to be had challenging people online so don't be surprised if Ultimate becomes a runaway success. The other significant change to the game is that the levels are even more multi-tiered than before. Where it was possible to knock people from the occasional ledge in the previous DOA games, DOA: Ultimate offers multiple points of interaction in each stage including



knockoff points, special throw locations and breakable objects.

It's impossible to review a DOA game without drooling over the amazing graphics and Ultimate is no exception. The graphics, to put it bluntly, are some of the best to be seen on the Xbox. Fighter models are brilliantly detailed and animations are superb. As mentioned earlier, all levels now have multiple areas of interaction and are, like the fighters, wonderfully detailed. Keep your eye out for the final boss as he has one of the most spectacular moves ever displayed in a fighting game, in which he stamps his foot and creates a shockwave that changes the season of the level. It's a breathtaking effect to top off a breathtaking game. <<

AVAILABLE ON:
PS2 / XBOX / PC / GCN

DETAILS:

CATEGORY: Fighting
PLAYERS: 1-2
DEVELOPER: Team Ninja
PUBLISHER: Tecmo
PRICE: \$99.95
RATING: M15+
AVAILABLE: Now

HYPER VERDICT:

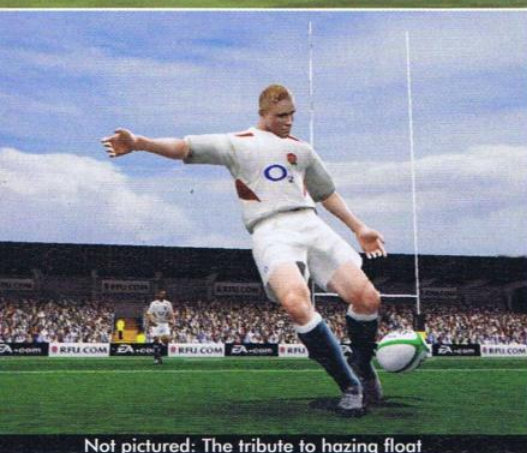
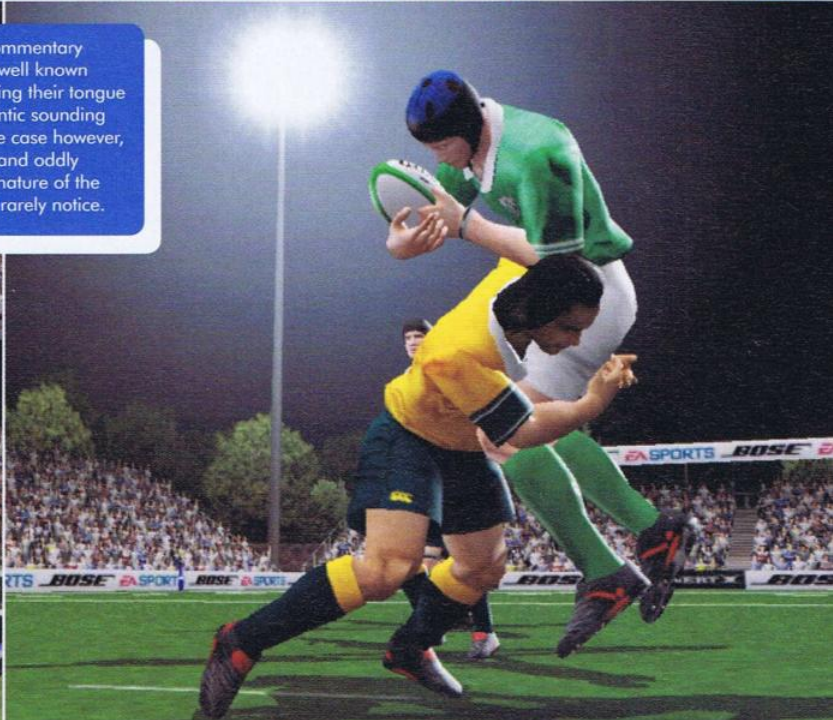
PLUS: Looks amazing, tons of unlockable content, online fighting.

MINUS: Cheating game.

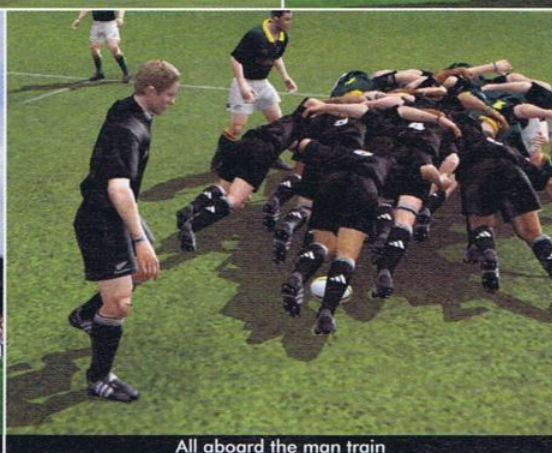
VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY
94	87	88
OVERALL		
88		
The best DOA yet.		



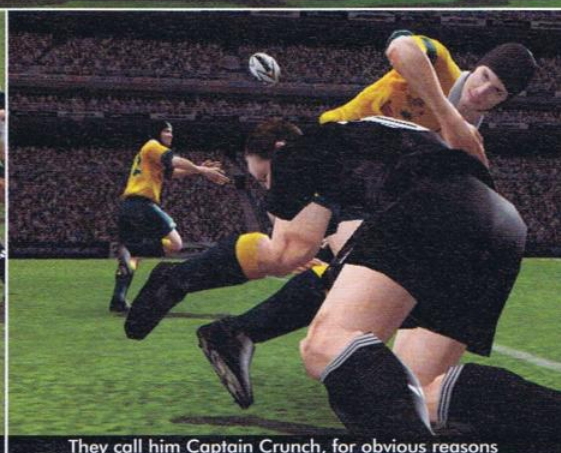
!!! The sound and commentary is top notch, with well known personalities lending their tongue to give this game an authentic sounding experience. As is always the case however, these can become grating and oddly placed but the engrossing nature of the gameplay ensures you will rarely notice.



Not pictured: The tribute to hazing float



All aboard the man train



They call him Captain Crunch, for obvious reasons

RUGBY 2005

Does **ROLAND FLANAGAN** give EA a mauling?

Welcome to Rugby almost done right. For this year's instalment EA have really stepped up a notch. For starters, Rugby 2005 is far more visually appealing than its predecessors, thanks partially to the same technology that drives EA's FIFA and NHL franchises being utilised, so the blocky mish-mash of past games can be forgotten.

COCO THE MONKEY?

Replacing the stock standard Play-Doh models of yesteryear are nicely rendered players from around the globe, from George Smith to Roc-a-Coco. No longer do scrums form with players' heads inserted halfway up their mate's arse. Tackling is thankfully rectified to no longer be a slow, two man wrestling match, whilst a quick passing game is rewarded with open space and room to run.

Whilst FIFA rewarded the player for using the basic controls, Rugby 2005 requires the special moves such

as dummy pass, step and palm to be used on a regular basis in order to move the ball down the field at a noticeable rate. Speed is one of the biggest criticisms that can be thrown at this game. Fans of the sport know that Rugby can be a very fast paced game, but Rugby 2005 insists on a slow progression where the benefits of numerous phases of control often result in you losing ground instead of gaining.

Whilst FIFA and NHL protected the player from making silly passes by always passing to a player when the basic pass button is pressed, Rugby 2005 seems to find more pleasure from you passing into an empty hole and a race ensuing between yourself and the computer. The controls for Rugby leave a lot to be desired, struggling to switch from offensive to defensive modes. Too often do you find yourself stuck trying to tackle when instead you want to add more men to the ruck or maul.

And this is where having a

friend handy helps. Kick into some two player and the playing field suddenly becomes level - my glitches become our glitches, your control difficulties become our control difficulties. This is where Rugby 2005 comes to its peak - this is a great game to hang out and play with a mate. Co-op is also good fun as with some basic understanding of each others playing style, cross field and grubber kicks can be used with lethal efficiency to out manoeuvre the computer.

Sadly, the fact remains that Rugby Union is a game that has never transitioned to the console in a form that will satisfy purists. With fiddly controls and problems that plague the FIFA and NHL franchises glaringly prominent, Rugby 2005 falls short of the heights that other EA titles have given their fans. But this is a huge step in the right direction, and a tribute to EA's commitment to its sporting stranglehold. <<

AVAILABLE ON:
PS2 / XBOX / PC / GCN

DETAILS:

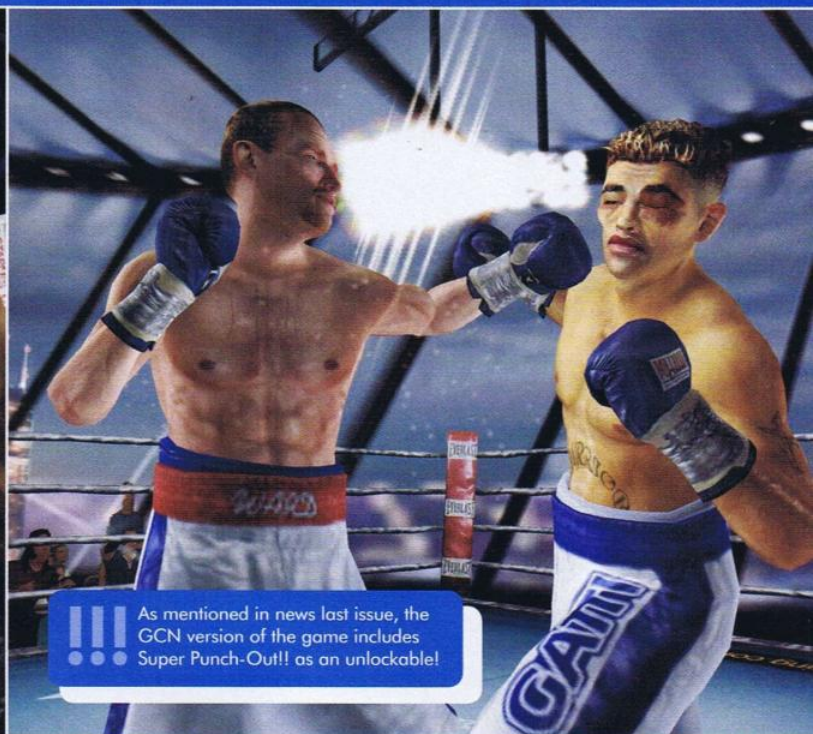
CATEGORY: Sports
PLAYERS: 1-Multi
DEVELOPER: EA Canada
PUBLISHER: EA
PRICE: \$89.95 (console), \$69.95 (PC)
RATING: G
AVAILABLE: Now

HYPER VERDICT:

PLUS: Looks amazing, sounds great, great playable characters.

MINUS: Slowdown, a little repetitive.

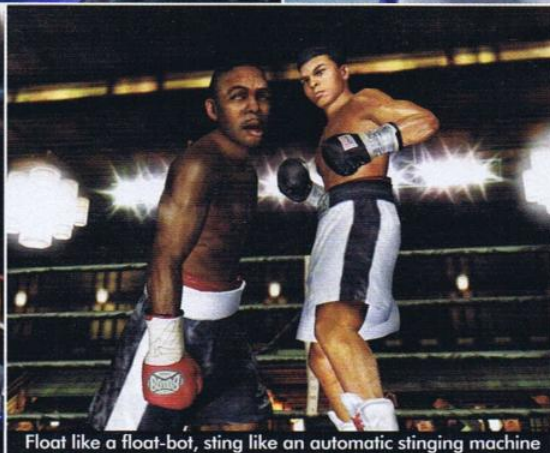
GRAPHICS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY
83	90	78
OVERALL		
80		
Best. Rugby game. Ever.		



!!! As mentioned in news last issue, the GCN version of the game includes Super Punch-Out!! as an unlockable!



Extreme makeovers, ghetto style



Float like a float-bot, sting like an automatic stinging machine



Beefcake, BEEEEFCAAAKE

FIGHT NIGHT ROUND 2

DANIEL WILKS takes Clubber Hong to the top, again

When Fight Night first appeared in our office around 12 months ago we were blown away with the fact that we liked, nay, loved a boxing game. Until that time there was no other boxing game for us other than Super Punch-Out!! on SNES. Now comes Fight Night Round 2, a significant reworking of the earlier title that improves on the boxing action and adds a host of new features, such as haymakers, cutmen, gear that improves stats and online play that make it the best boxing game ever.

RING HOOCHIES

Round 2 utilises the same control methodology as the original game with all attacks keyed to the right analogue stick but the subtlety and responsiveness of the control has been significantly improved. Now instead of simply having jabs, hooks and uppercuts available, players can execute devastating haymakers by taking a normal

attack and winding up before execution. When these attacks connect the results are, for want of a better word, devastating. The right stick is sensitive enough now that it can be used to feint by lightly tapping in a direction and the enemy AI is responsive enough to move to counter, enabling quick and tactical players to create openings for a damaging combo.

Unlike the original game, unlockable content such as new gear and ring attendees now actually have an effect on gameplay instead of being simple cosmetic. New shoes can add to your fighter's speed, foul guards to your body and the like. Ring girls psyche your fighter up and allow them to recover stamina faster and ring effects allow you to get up after a knockdown more easily. Players can also employ cutmen and other injury professionals to help with healing between rounds. If players are serious about stemming

blood or taking down swelling they can also play a mini game in which they need to keel a white bar inside a moving target area.

Graphically Fight Night Round 2 leaves the original game in the dust. Character models are extremely detailed, sometimes to grotesque effect. Every punch leaves a mark in Round 2 so you'll be treated to sights of swollen eyes, split lips, weeping cuts and noses being broken. The create-a-fighter function gives unprecedented control over fighter appearance and ranks second only to Tiger Woods for customisation. Sound is effective, if somewhat flat aside from the knockout replays where everything is slowed down and punches sound like Howitzers. If EA continues to bring out a new Fight Night every year we can't wait to see what's coming next. <<

AVAILABLE ON:
PS2 / XBOX / PC / GCN

DETAILS:

CATEGORY: Boxing
PLAYERS: 1-2
DEVELOPER: EA
PUBLISHER: EA
PRICE: \$89.95
RATING: M15+
AVAILABLE: Now

HYPER VERDICT:

PLUS: Tight controls, awesomely customisable, brutal.

MINUS: Cheating game, brutal.

VISUALS SOUND GAMEPLAY

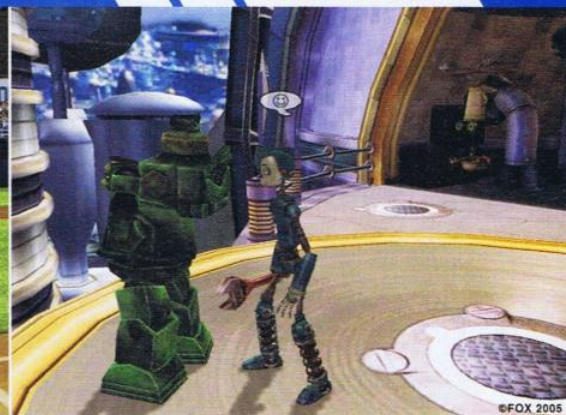
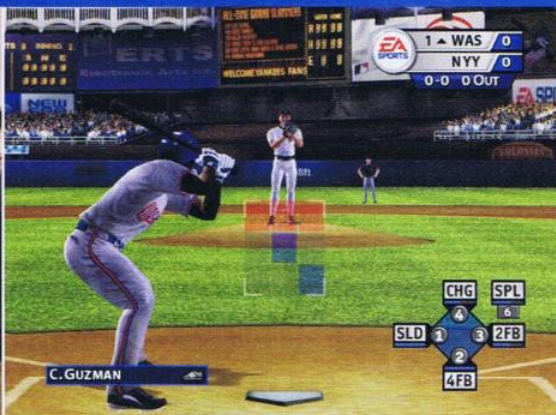
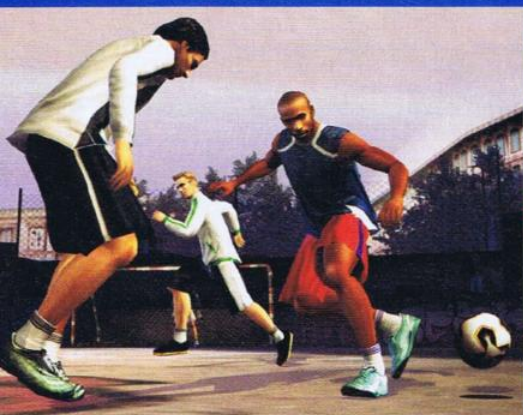
91 84 91

OVERALL

90

The best boxing game around.





FIFA STREET

Following on from Urban Freestyle Soccer and Sega Soccer Slam before that, FIFA Street is EA Big's attempt at turning the beautiful game into an arcade experience. Based loosely on the type of five-a-side street football played in parks and on courts across the world, the focus here is on footballing tricks. The roulettes, can-cans and flip-flops that feature so heavily in Nike ads take centre stage and performing them is as easy as flicking the right analogue stick (or 'trick stick' as EA would have it) in any direction. Linking tricks and keeping the ball airbourne builds the combo meter, making shots on goal harder to stop. The result is Hollywood football - the ball bounces wildly from player to player with little thought to tactics and enough showboating to make Cristiano Ronaldo blush, before crashing anti-climactically into the back of the net. It's crass, simplistic and flashy, but at the same time quite fun.

Being an EA game, FIFA Street has a ridiculously high level of sheen on its production - a legion of real-life players, decent graphics with a great replay system to show off the mo-capped tricks, a fitting soundtrack and an annoying guest MC providing colour commentary (with a pretty good 'Blau!' in his repertoire to boot). It's a pity the gameplay is so terribly shallow, but watching Thierry Henry trick his way past two defenders then back-heel a scorcher into the top corner tends to make you forget that. Which is what EA is counting on, I'm guessing. To fill in the blanks for FIFA Street 2, maybe the developers might introduce a keepy-uppy minigame like the hackey-sack event in California Games?

Malcolm Campbell

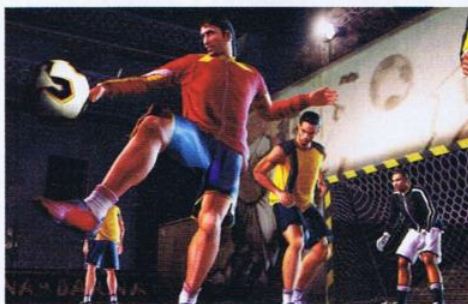
AVAILABLE ON:

PS2 / XBOX / PC / GCN

DETAILS:

CATEGORY: Fantasy Sport / **PLAYERS:** 1-2 / **DEVELOPER:** EA Sports Big / **PUBLISHER:** EA / **PRICE:** \$79.95 / **RATING:** G / **AVAILABLE:** Now

GRAPHICS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY	OVERALL
85	79	60	75



[above] No disco bus for these guys, just the show boat

MVP BASEBALL 2005

To coincide with the start of the U.S. baseball season comes the latest release of the MVP Baseball series. This year's title, like in previous years, features loads of new additions and improvements. If, like Homer Simpson, your dream is to own your own sports team, welcome to the Owner Mode. While it's no Football Manager in terms of depth, this mode lets you control nearly all aspects of managing a ball team. Players start off by building a ballpark and then with the money in the budget, you buy upgrades and concession stands for the stadium. To begin with it'll be hard to make any serious money, as everything you make will have to be put back into upgrades.

Another new addition is the pitching and batting mini-games. The pitching game involves throwing the correct pitch at the appropriate coloured block, more points are gained by knocking off groups of coloured blocks. The batting game is pretty much hitting the ball where the computer tells you to, hitting objects on the field picks up extra points. The points gained from these games can be used to unlock old school uniforms, legends of the game and ballparks of the past.

The improved player animation creates a more realistic interpretation of the game, which in turn makes it more enjoyable to play. While not a complete overhaul from last year's version, MVP Baseball 2005 adds several tweaks such as batter movement and an improved pitching meter, that now makes throwing the perfect pitch that much harder, and satisfying, making it a worthwhile purchase for fans of the game.

Amos "retired" Hong

AVAILABLE ON:

PS2 / XBOX / PC / GCN

DETAILS:

CATEGORY: Sports / **PLAYERS:** 1-2 / **DEVELOPER:** EA Canada / **PUBLISHER:** EA / **PRICE:** \$89.95 / **RATING:** G / **AVAILABLE:** Now

GRAPHICS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY	OVERALL
76	75	82	80



[above] Hey, someone wrote "Amos don't go" in the sky!

ROBOTS

Robots is the latest platformer to be based on an animated film license, and is quite obviously aimed at a younger demographic than we usually cater for here at Hyper. That said, this doesn't make it a bad game, and we've had enough fun during our time with it to make a review worthwhile. In fact, for the littlies there is quite a bit to recommend. Whilst not nearly as flash as the film, Robots is a pleasant looking game with well designed and animated characters and some nice, if somewhat drab robot city environments.

Gameplay revolves around Rodney Copperbottom, our robotic boy hero progressing from level to level completing various NPC given tasks to unlock the next area. Most of the tasks take the form of collecting a number of set objects in a time limit and returning them to the NPC who gave the quest in the first place. It's fun, in a simple way with elementary combat and puzzle solving, kind of like a Fischer Price My First Ratchet & Clank. Unfortunately, even though the game is based on the film license the actual film content in the game is quite low - after completing a level the player is rewarded by a short clip but for some odd reason (presumably due to license restrictions) none of the original dialogue is played, instead a narrator will give a brief overview of what has just happened and what is to come. There's nothing overtly bad about Robots, but unless you are a littl'un or an obsessive fan of the film there is little to recommend it.

Captain Cool

AVAILABLE ON:

PS2 / XBOX / PC / GCN

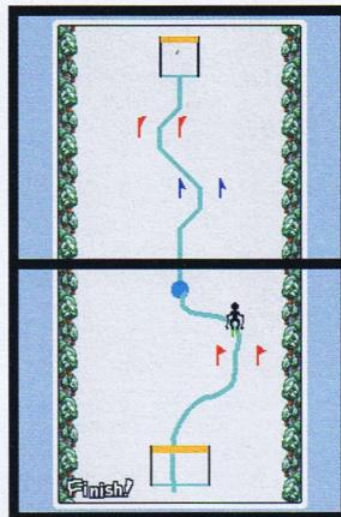
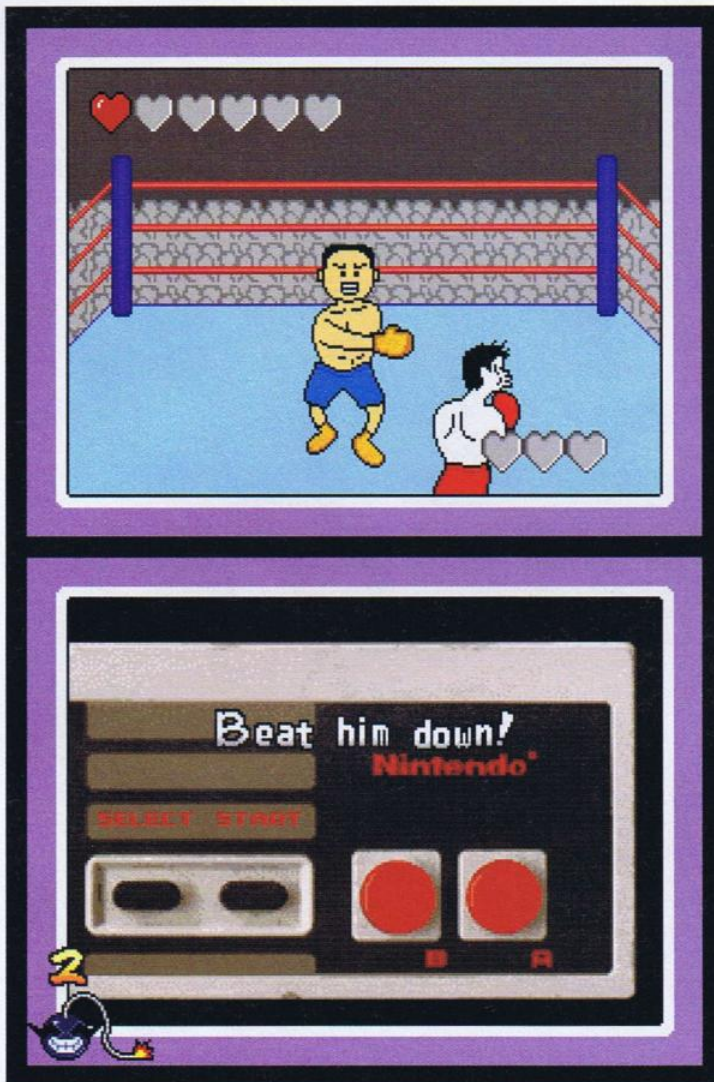
DETAILS:

CATEGORY: Platformer / **PLAYERS:** 1 / **DEVELOPER:** Eurocom / **PUBLISHER:** Vivendi Universal / **PRICE:** \$49.95 (PC), 69.95 (console) / **RATING:** G8+ / **AVAILABLE:** Now

GRAPHICS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY	OVERALL
81	68	71	70



[above] I think he's selling crank. Bad robots, bad



[below] Big, heavy, wood etc



[above] Mr T in Aladdin 3: Pity the Fool



WARIO WARE TOUCHED!

Wario Ware Touched! for Nintendo DS attempts to utilise the handheld's touch screen, stylus and microphone in ways you thought never possible - in both the strictest and strangest sense of the term. The Wario Ware series takes the simplistic nature of mini-games to an absurdist level. As players frantically try to keep up with the onslaught of reflex and button pressing challenges that change every few seconds they struggle to comprehend exactly what it is that they are doing. We're talking slicing melons, blowing in somebody's ear, cleaning windows, performing equations, lighting matches, milking cows - and all in under a minute. Yep, Wario Ware is still as crazy as it ever was, and it's no wonder the original became an instant success - it's an experience perfectly suited to the handheld format.

A TOUCHY FEELY GAME

Touched! is very similar to its predecessor, in that the game follows a level based system where every few seconds a new game will begin and another will end - all wrapped neatly between animated

sequences featuring Wario and a cast of characters both old and new. To say that the game makes ample use of the touch screen and stylus would be an understatement, in fact the Nintendo DS's d-pad and face buttons aren't used at all. So if you can think of a creative way in which to use both the stylus, touch screen or microphone, you can be sure to find it here and with the mini-games lasting mere seconds, you'll be doing everything from drawing, rubbing, blowing, connecting and controlling numerous objects through the many bizarre scenarios the game can throw at you. Bizarre is definitely the key word, as one minute you'll be fending metroids off Samus and the next you'll be chiselling a toilet out of a piece of stone. There are only certain things you can do with a touch screen and over the course of the game's 200 microgames you may find yourself doing the same thing over and over (especially with the microphone based games), but the bizarre variety of it all helps keep things fresh. Any game that can provide fun from unravelling

an entire roll of toilet paper has got to be doing something right, and thankfully the retro gaming moments of the original return with everything from Zelda to Metroid to Mario making an appearance.

But much like the nature of mini-games themselves, Wario Ware Touched! loses its steam after a few hours. The lack of any real multiplayer games is surprising, and the unlockable features are disappointing, ranging from things like fully functioning oven timers, metronomes, calculators, wind chimes and yo-yo's. So in the end you could easily plough through most of what the game offers in a single afternoon, but then again Wario Ware's strength doesn't lie in longevity but in the complete opposite. This isn't a game that offers a lengthy experience - instead this is a game that opts to condense that experience into key moments, cut it up and offer each piece at random. You may get bored sooner than you think but before that happens, you'll be having a great time.

Kosta Andreadis

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

DETAILS:

CATEGORY: Mini-games

PLAYERS: 1-2

DEVELOPER: Nintendo

PUBLISHER: Nintendo

PRICE: \$69.95

RATING: G

AVAILABLE: Now

VISUALS SOUND GAMEPLAY

70 80 73

OVERALL

79



DK: King of Swing

Forget DK titles that you've played in the past, King of Swing operates on a simple, yet charming premise - climbing and swinging. Everything in this game is about moving hand over hand, and leaping from point to point, just like, yep, an ape. To do so, the game almost exclusively uses the shoulder buttons, representing the left and right hands respectively. You leap up and grab onto pegs or pads in the air, and either move

across the array by alternating from hand to hand (DK will spin around the peg clockwise if holding with his right hand and anti-clockwise for left), or use centrifugal force to swing off one peg, through the air, then latch onto another. It's a nifty little concept, allowing you to be as safe or as speculative in your movements as you like. Once you've got movement down, you'll be quickly scaling great heights, leaping from peg to peg or pad to pad. Add in the ability to charge up to jump and attack enemies and you have a refreshing new take on the platform genre.

In typical Nintendo fashion, the learning curve is spot-on, with new gameplay elements introduced steadily throughout the game. You'll come across rocks and bombs that can be grabbed and thrown with one hand while holding onto

a peg with the other, and it's not long before courses are littered with disintegrating pegs, moving pegs, switches, jacks, tyres and conveyor belts. The life system in this game is also well handled. Collecting bananas actually has a point - you can use ten to gain a heart back, or use twenty for invincibility for a short while.

The biggest question mark for King of Swing, however, is longevity. Playing through the single player game will unlock some average multiplayer games (which require all players to have the cart, which given how basic they are, is insane), but there's not much replay value for the single player game, nor is it particularly hard. At least it's fun while it lasts eh?

Cam Shea

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

DETAILS:

CATEGORY: Platformer

PLAYERS: 1-4

DEVELOPER: Poon

PUBLISHER: Nintendo

PRICE: \$69.95

RATING: G

AVAILABLE: Now

VISUALS SOUND GAMEPLAY

70 70 80

OVERALL

80



[above] We've got DK pegged

SPRUNG

Subtitled "A Game Where Everyone Scores", Sprung is the first DS dating simulator we've come across, and god willing it will also be the last. You play as either Brett or Becky, a couple of friends both looking for love while on holidays at a ski resort. Brett secretly has a half husky for Becky, while Becky just broke up with her boyfriend, and the story weaves around both of them (and their other friends) through a number of set pieces. Will they fall in love? Will Brett get his "tip wet" with a host of snow bunnies? Honestly, you probably won't play it for long enough to find out.

Sprung's greatest flaw, you see, isn't its writing, which has enough personality to carry the game. Nor is it its visual style, as we like the way the dual screens are used to display both of the characters in conversation, allowing you to gauge facial reactions, and the animations are quite cute. No, Sprung fails because rote learning is key - beating each scene is a matter of eventually stumbling through the right sequence of responses, rather than through puzzle solving or use of critical acumen. And it can



[above] Vanilla Ice is playing? Sweet



[above] The dev team have a meeting



[up] You got Spruung. It's on, girlfriend!

get very frustrating too, because there's often no way to determine how someone is going to respond. Often minor things will land you in gaol and force you to restart the scene. At other times you can actually take a girl back to your place, but fail because the mission is something else entirely. Sprung: A Game Where Everyone Scores When We Tell You To Or You Fail.

Cam Shea

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

DETAILS:

CATEGORY: Dating sim

PLAYERS: 1

DEVELOPER: Ubisoft

PUBLISHER: Ubisoft

PRICE: \$49.95

RATING: M15+

AVAILABLE: Now

VISUALS SOUND GAMEPLAY

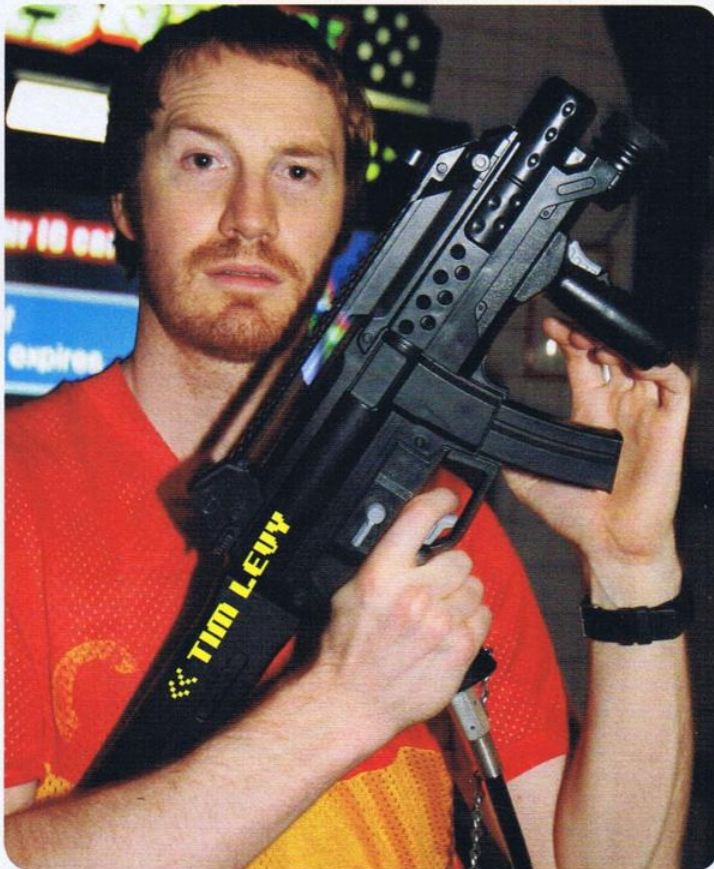
74 70 40

OVERALL

41



[left] Levy in heat vision isn't quite as funny



Ghost Squad

- SEGA



[below] Oh shit, it's upside down and set to 51 seconds!



Man. What a fool. Always at war with himself. We all know the 'adult' way to deal with problems such as limited resources and religious differences is to battle it out on the bargaining table. But if the pen was truly mightier than the sword, and bargaining took place with words instead of bullets, we'd never have hair-trigger reflex visceral action video games like Ghost Squad (no disrespect to Infocom's 1980 text adventure game Zork)

DRUGS AND MARATHONS

The last gen of arcade light gun shooters (Time Crisis, Virtua Cop, World Combat), although excellent in their own right, weren't exactly stayers. After a few full games, they begin to get as tired as an 87 year old man in shackles on Rohypnol running a marathon. Fortunately, Sega has combated this genre's inherent predictable on-rail-edness by introducing a propriety 'I.C.' card. Purchasing this card for 5 bucks enables you to save your character's name, rank and accumulate different unlockables.

Being a member of G*H*O*S*T (Global Humanitarian Operation & Special Tactics) means that you

are kept tethered and champing at the bit to be released on (3) special occasions such as the President being kidnapped on his 747 Airforce One or when hostages need to be saved from a swampy jungle hideout or a luxurious mountain resort.

Initially, you are armed with a very kool sub machine gun, with simulated recoil, based on the real life HK MP5 which has a fire selector switch allowing single, 3 shot burst or rapid fire modes. But don't think you can just leave it on rapid fire all the time. You only have 100 full auto bullets in this mode per level and the thing is, there are a lot of situations in this game where blazing away will only kill hostages, which is bad for your health. In fact, you will need to use the gun's front button to do things such as engage in hand-to-hand combat, defuse bombs (a memory game) and handcuff suspects/ hostages. At first this seems trivial, but when you are cuffing crazed hostages and then are interrupted to carefully (the gun is very accurate and can be calibrated at the beginning of each game) blast bad guys who are hiding behind hostages, the game's intensity is magnified exponentially.

As you play, you are awarded experience points, which increase not only by regular action, but also by doing 'head shots' or 'quick shots'. These 'G.S points' can be spent at the end of each game to unlock: 25 different types of weapons (submachine guns, pistols, sniper rifles, a shotgun, heavy machine guns and even a crossbow); 14 different outfits including a panda suit; and new routes. Being able to play the game using different guns really does make a big difference and using the shotgun or full auto sub machine gun are such great options that it makes you want to play just to unlock them. Other unlockables include night and thermal vision goggles and a flashlight.

This game has deservedly done great things overseas, and in Britain, it has been reported that individual machines are collecting over AU\$4,000+ per day. So if you are a big fan of the light gun shooter genre, and you are scared that you are going to totally blow your weekly gaming budget, you can always just BUY the 2 player arcade console for the measly sum of \$17,000... maybe not.

9.5/10

*SPECIAL THANKS TO PLAYTIME AND LEVON.

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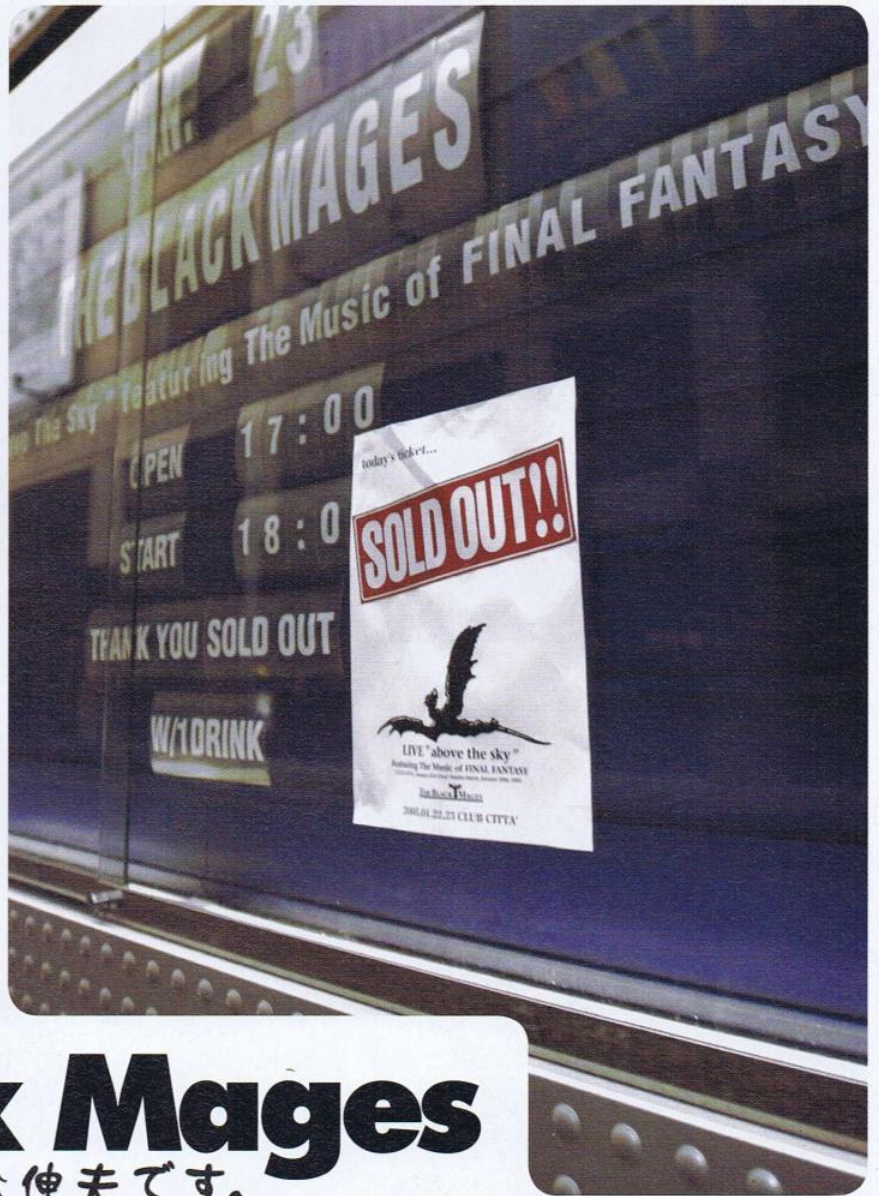
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**Unreal
CHAMPIONSHIP 2**
THE LANDRAI CONFLICT

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[bottom] Chik-a-wow
chika-wow-wow



The Black Mages

- LIVE IN KAWASAKI! 植松伸夫です。



LIVE "above the sky"
Featuring The Music of FINAL FANTASY
CLUB CITTA, January 22 & 23rd / Namba Hatch, January 26th, 2005
THE BLACK MAGES

When most people think of the music of Final Fantasy they think of the stirring choral pieces or beautiful piano melodies of the multitalented composer Nobuo Uematsu. And indeed such people would probably consider being a world renowned composer of original soundtracks enough for one man. But Uematsu is not just one man. Deep inside that passive Japanese exterior lies a raging rock beast.

Well maybe not a rock beast. But certainly a rock demigod.

The Black Mages is Uematsu's rock outlet. They've just released their second album "The Skies Above" and Hyper was lucky enough to be in attendance during their January 23 performance at CLUB CITTA in chilly Kawasaki, Japan (the lengths we go to for you people).

MR GOO?

The Black Mages consist of Nobuo Uematsu and Kenichiro Fukui on keyboards, Michio Okamiya and Tsuyoshi Sekito on guitars, Keiji Kawamori on bass and Arata Hanyuda on drums. Performing

rock arrangements of famous Final Fantasy pieces they had the rapt attention of the sold out Kawasaki crowd. They were joined on stage by the enigmatically named Kazco and Mr Goo who provided vocals.

Beginning with "The Rocking Grounds" (from Final Fantasy III) they immediately brought the audience to their feet and their glow sticks to the ready and things stayed pretty much that way the whole night. The tracks were drawn mostly from "The Skies Above" although the band whipped the crowd into a frenzy with "Those Who Fight Further" and "Clash on the Big Bridge", two popular hits from their first album.

Although Uematsu is the most famous face, all of the band members were given their moment in the spotlight. Guitarists Michio Okamiya and Tsuyoshi Sekito traded solos throughout the night and even drummer Arata Hanyuda managed to get one in that put Garth's performance in Wayne's World to shame.

Dressed in costumes specially designed for each of them, the

band members joked around with the audience and spoke a little of the possibility of a third studio album. Nobuo Uematsu in particular seemed to be enjoying himself. When the band returned for an encore of three songs, after the crowd enthusiastically called for their return, Uematsu looked positively ecstatic, saying that the event was like a promise the band had been dreaming for.

The Black Mages were well supported by the composer Kenji Itoh, the mystery musical unit "muZik" and the MC "Udatsu Tanaka". Kenji Itoh kicked the night off with compositions from the upcoming "Romancing Saga" series as well as the mystery group "muZik" who performed Final Fantasy pieces arranged to a techno beat. The crowd response to muZik prompted Uematsu to comment that they should release a CD so we'll keep our eyes peeled for any developments on that front.

Hyper would like to thank Mr Nobuo Uematsu, Ms Masako Miyoshi and Square-Enix for making the whole event possible. <<

[below] Have you seen this man? He's wanted for saying he thinks FF is over-rated



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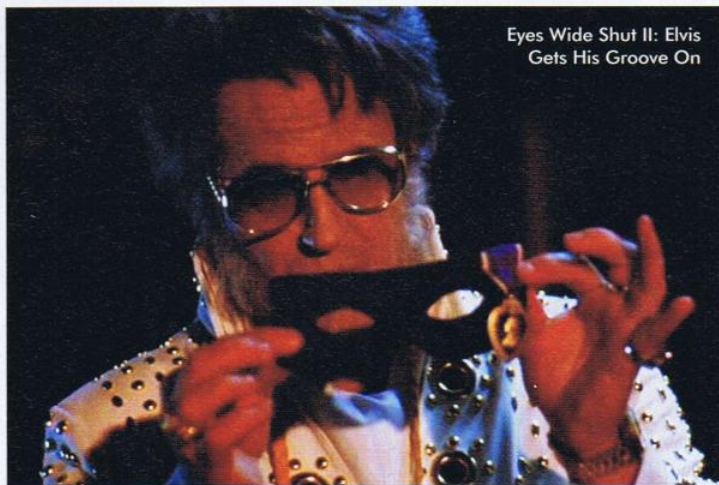
NINTENDO DS

GAME BOY ADVANCE

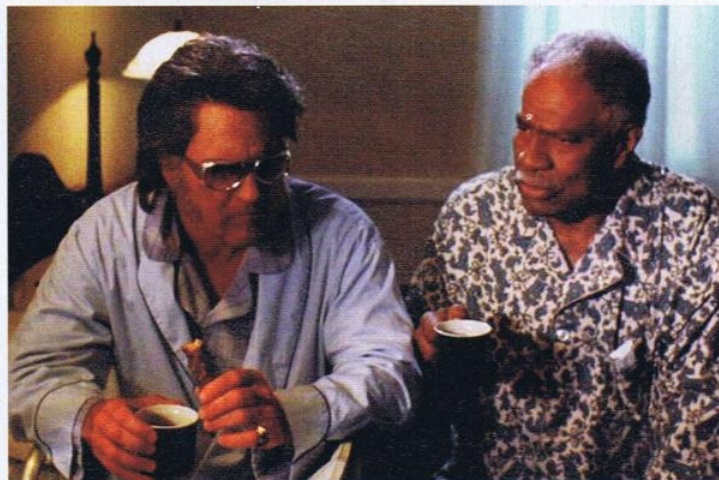
SIERRA



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Eyes Wide Shut II: Elvis Gets His Groove On



Bubba Ho Tep

MAGNA PACIFIC, M 15+

Normally when faced with a film which posits a story based around an aging Elvis in an old age home making friends with a black man who claims to be JFK and then having the unlikely pair fight a soul sucking Egyptian mummy most people would snigger and look for something a little less goofy sounding. To do so would be to skip over one of the most strangely touching films in recent years as well as deny you seeing one of the greatest pieces of comedic acting in recent memory. Bruce Campbell, best known for playing the goofy, chainsaw wielding hero of the *Evil Dead* films, Ash, does not so much play the aging and crotchety king of rock and roll, Elvis Presley as become him. Every grumpy old man reminiscence about better times or lost moments is exactly how you could picture an elderly Elvis behaving, every stiff-hipped, zimmer frame swagger is priceless. Ossie Davis is similarly good as JFK.

Whilst the outlandish plot does give license to some moments of broad comedy, *Bubba Ho Tep* is much more thoughtful than it appears on the surface. Rather than

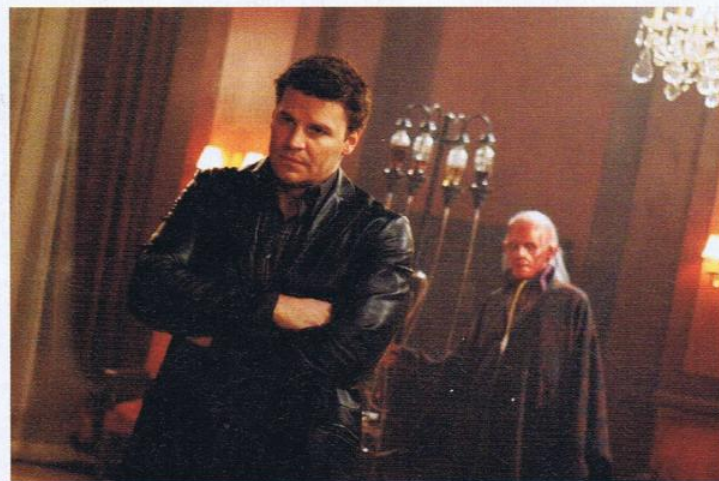


[top] Elvis contemplates a lump on his pecker. No, seriously, he does

use the two main characters as fodder for cheap laughs, director Don Coscarelli (best known as the writer/director of the *Phantasm* films) has opted instead to tell the story of two wonderful old men, sick of their pitiful existences, determined to go out in style and recapture some of the greatness of their earlier days.

Daniel Wilks

MOVIE: 8 / EXTRAS: TBA



Angel Season 5

FOX HOME ENTERTAINMENT, M 15+

The final season of *Angel* kicks off with Angel Inc. taking over the LA branch of their arch nemesis, law firm Wolfram & Hart. Not only is this just about the biggest shakeup in the history of the show, but it's a device used to further underline the fact that the line between good and evil is murky at best. Can Angel and the crew fight to make the world a better place from the belly of the beast? Or will they be too distracted to do so in this corporate environment where money must be made and all their enemies are now their clients? It's an intriguing scenario, only heightened by the inclusion of Spike in the ensemble cast - if you thought LA wasn't big enough for two vampires with a soul you'd be dead right.

As the season progresses the action ramps up to fever pitch, with the last few episodes in particular making moves only a show that knows it's ending are able to do. Great stuff. This season also has perhaps the greatest standalone *Angel* episode to date - Smile Time. Even if you're not a fan of the show you really should check this episode out. *Angel* crossed



[above] Angel faces the fury of the forgotten Baldwin

with *The Muppets*? Sweet.

On the downside, Cordelia is out of the cast the entire season (aside from one brilliant episode) which is a damn shame considering how much Joss and co have invested in her as a character. Even so, this season is a fitting finale to a great show.

Cam Shea

MOVIE: 8 / EXTRAS: 5



Strongbad refines the look of the Trogdor

The Grudge

ROADSHOW, M 15+

The Grudge looks more like an experiment in remaking than an actual remake of a decent, if somewhat overshadowed Japanese horror film. What makes *The Grudge* so interesting is that the American remake is directed by Takashi Shimizu, the director of the original, stars a number of actors from the original and reuses numerous locations from the original. Does it work? Nope - not in the slightest. There has been a lot of love thrown the way of *The Grudge* but most of it is unfounded - the story, a rather typical haunted house affair plods along with no real pacing save for that Shimizu seems content to try to fit one real scare or spring loaded cat (something that jumps out of the dark to shock the audience but has no impact on the plot) in every scene so there is no build-up or climax, save the requisite Hollywood knee-jerk twist ending. Characters are resolutely stupid



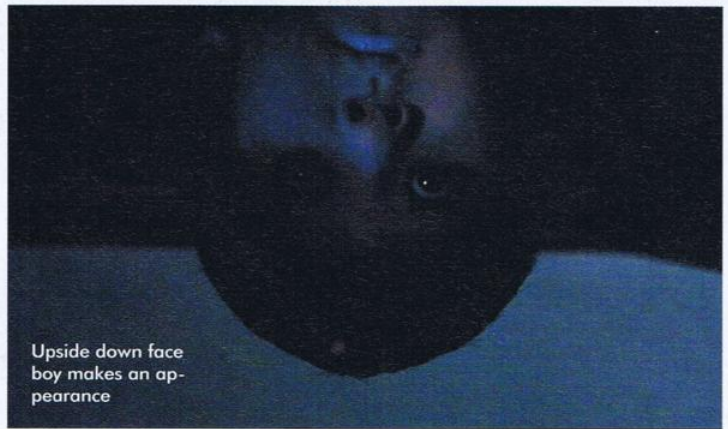
[above] Throwing a tantie isn't really horror... it's just annoying

and follow the well trodden path of placing extremities into dark recesses to investigate spooky noises or enter the haunted house even though they know that to do so will mean their doom.

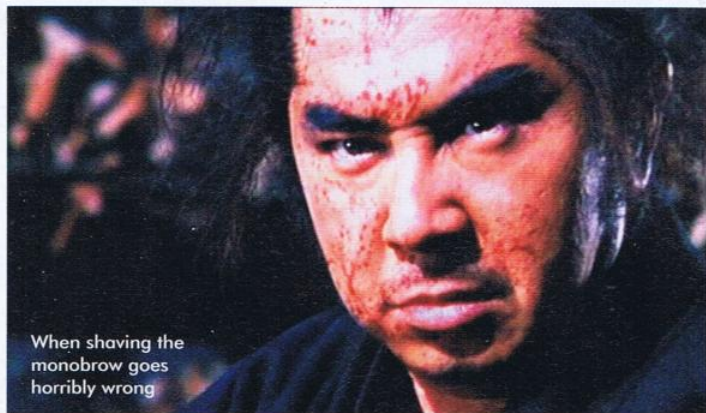
In amongst the self congratulation in the special features there are a few bits of interesting information including this little gem: the whole purpose of remaking *Ju-On* for an American market was so people could enjoy it without subtitles. Haven't they heard of dubbing?

Daniel Wilks

MOVIE: 6 / EXTRAS: 5



Upside down face boy makes an appearance



When shaving the monobrow goes horribly wrong

Lone Wolf and Cub: BABY CART ON THE RIVER STYX / SWORD OF VENGEANCE

EASTERN EYE, R 18+

There's a strange beauty to the *Lone Wolf and Cub* films in amongst the over the top gore and gallons of disturbingly bright red blood that seems to be contained under high pressure in the bodies of all assailants. Since the release of the first *Lone Wolf* film, *Sword of Vengeance* in 1972, the series has gone on to be something of a cultural icon - although few people know the series many are familiar with images of a samurai pushing his infant son around in a weapon ridden baby cart on his search for vengeance.

The story of the films revolves around a disgraced swordsman named Ogami Itto and his son

Daigo - the only two survivors of a massacre that killed the rest of his family - trekking across feudal Japan selling his services to the highest bidder whilst searching for the hit squad that caused all of the grief in the first place. *Lone Wolf and Cub* deals with the big issues like honour, family and sacrifice in broad but strangely touching brushstrokes but on the whole veils its soft heart in extreme violence. Although excessive in the blood and dismemberment the action scenes are brilliant, thanks, in the most part to the fact that actor Wakayama Tomisaburo (Ogami Itto) is a real life master of *laido* and *Kendo*.

Daniel Wilks

MOVIE: 7 / EXTRAS: 4



There's a joke about Tom Baker here somewhere

Carnivale Season 1 (6 DISC BOX SET)

WARNER BROS, MA 15+

Repeat after me, "god bless the HBO". For those of you unfamiliar with the term, HBO stands for Home Box Office, a cable network in the US responsible for some of the best television programs ever screened such as *Band of Brothers*, *The Sopranos*, *Sex and the City*, *Oz* and the heartbreakingly brilliant western, *Deadwood*. Now you can add *Carnivale* to that list.

Set in early 30s heartland America, *Carnivale* leads the viewer through a morally ambiguous fight between the forces of light and dark. On the one side we have Ben Hawkins, an enigmatic and rather standoffish young man who takes up a position as a travelling carnival dogsbody. He can also cure the sick and injured but at a great cost. On the other side

there is the evangelical Brother Justin Crowe, a man of the cloth with more than his fair share of demons. What makes *Carnivale* so appealing is the lack of judgement forced upon the viewer - most characters in the series are selfish, egotistical or just plain nasty meaning that there is rarely a clear delineation between hero and villain. They need to be that way to survive. Hopefully season 2 will reach our screens soon.

Daniel Wilks

MOVIE: 9 / EXTRAS: 6



The Simpsons Season 5

FOX HOME ENTERTAINMENT, PG

Season 5 (1993-94) was a transition year for *The Simpsons*. Behind the scenes, most of the writing staff from the first four seasons had left, including show runners Al Jean and Mike Reiss (who went off to make *The Critic*) and Conan O'Brien, who was offered his *Late Night* gig midway through the season.

For many programs this would have been a death knell, but Season 5 is a testament to the quality of the staff that came in to fill the void. Simply put, this is a golden season - there's barely a dud episode in the bunch. Rather, this season gave birth to some of the most enduring classics such as *Homer Goes to College*, *Rosebud* and *Deep Space Homer*. Another thing to note about this season is that show runner David Mirkin and the rest of the team were keen to really explore the backgrounds and motivations for some of the other denizens of Springfield. Thus, we have episodes like *Homer Loves*

Flanders, Homer and Apu, and Burns' Heir, all of which cleverly avoid being padding and are hilarious in their own right. The season as a whole is a great blend between clever writing and zany antics, all with an emotional core.

Once again the commentaries are fantastic. It's a bit weird not having Al Jean leading the chatter, but they're as insightful and entertaining as always. In fact, listening to the commentaries, it's not hard to see what's so wrong about *The Simpsons* these days (from season 14 onwards really). The blood, sweat and tears that went into every frame of animation and every line of dialogue during the early years is palpable, and I can't help but think the show just doesn't get the late night sessions and right up to deadline rewrites it used to.

Oh well. For fans this really is a compulsory purchase. Classic mirth making.

Cam Shea

MOVIE: 10 / EXTRAS: 7



Sonic X

MRA, G

This series sees Sonic and friends (and one enemy of course - no prizes for guessing who) sent through a time/space warp to future Earth after an incident with Chaos Emeralds goes horribly wrong.

Although they are regarded as freaks when they suddenly appear in the big smoke, it's not long before they find friends and acceptance, and plenty of big robots to battle courtesy of Dr Eggman.

As is standard for so much anime, there has to be a character that the young audience that this is primarily targeted at can identify with, and that role is taken by young rich boy Christopher. He's one of those wide eyed excitable characters that's annoying but tolerable. Fortunately for Sonic and crew he's also got

a genius grandfather, a kickass bodyguard and a mansion for a house. Not a bad crib to crash in.

Sonic X isn't exactly brimming with compelling story, but the animation is very good, and there are some really nicely framed shots. We were won over in the first episode, for example, by a scene where Sonic is racing the S-Team. Sonic breaks the sound barrier, flies off a ramp and over a wind farm, sending the blades whirring and resulting in the panorama of the night city that he's above brightening from the extra power. It's creative little touches like this that make you realise some love and attention has been lavished on the series. Even so, this is really only for the hardcore Sonic fans.

Frank Dry

MOVIE: 6 / EXTRAS: 1



Bullshit Season 2 IMPORT REVIEW

SHOWTIME ENTERTAINMENT, MA 15+

Penn and Teller are a brilliant duo of entertainers combining Vaudeville style theatricality and histrionics with clever social commentary and cutting edge prestidigitation. *Bullshit* Season 2 sees the illusionist team up to their old tricks debunking fads, theories and institutions they see as being bullshit. This time around they take on Recycling, PETA, the climate of terror, relationship counselors, the war on drugs, 12-step programs and most controversially, the Bible, amongst others.

The second season doesn't quite have the impact of the first but still serves up a refreshingly irreverent look at the world and some of the more closely held cultural mores. Unfortunately this time around the

team seem to have done a little less research about the subjects they choose to debunk leaving some of the arguments a little dry but who can fail to laugh when hearing hard rocking survivalist nut Ted Nugent having a go at PETA or not feel offended when a prissy anti-profanity campaigner decides that whilst taking the lord's name in vain is horrible and should be banned it's perfectly alright to use the name of another religion's deity because, you know, they're not real? It's also a little disappointing to note that the anti-profanity campaigners that Penn and Teller have a go at in the show have still managed to leave their mark on the series - it's now known as B.S. on the slipcase.

Daniel Wilks

MOVIE: 8 / EXTRAS: 3

Paranoia Agent

VOLUME 1: ENTER LIL' SLUGGER

PRODUCTION COMPANY: GENEON
 GENRE: THRILLER?

It's very difficult to write a review of *Paranoia Agent* without resorting to using a lot of words we're not really allowed to print in this magazine. Now because the series is bad - far from it - it's so bloody good that it's hard not to get overly enthusiastic and resort to some choice four letter words for emphasis. Satoshi Kon, the director of the brilliant films *Perfect Blue*, *Millennium Actress* and *Tokyo Godfathers* is destined to become a major player in the world of anime if his output so far is anything to go by.

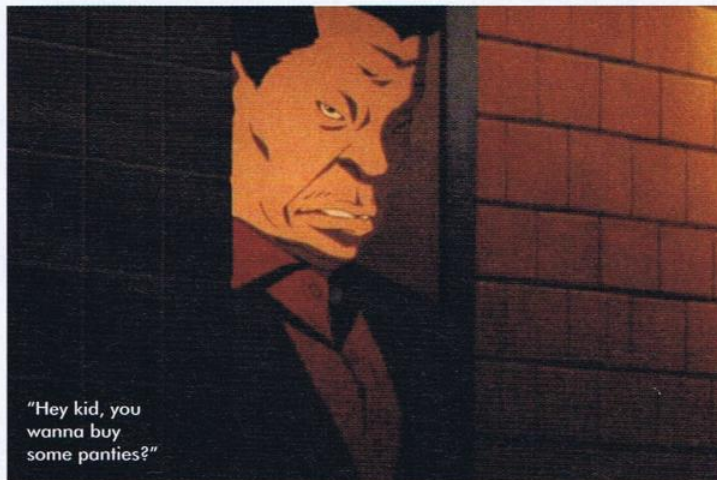
Paranoia Agent, his first series is an odd duck, hard to pin down into a particular genre or style and focusing on one character per episode rather than following the exploits of a single person. People are being attacked in a sleepy Tokyo suburb. What makes these attacks so interesting is the fact that they are seemingly random and that the victims describe the assailant as being a male of middle school age wearing golden inline skates, a baseball cap and wielding a bent

golden baseball bat, leading the attacker to be known by authorities and the media as Lil' Slugger. Stranger still is the effect that the attacks have on the victims - each of them seems calmer afterwards, more at peace, finally allowed to take a break from the rat race. These are just broad brush strokes - the series deals with myriad characters, each of them a product of the paranoia born of 20th century living.

Character design is sublime and the animation is of the same quality we have come to expect from the director. The English dub is superb if you're not into reading subtitles and the soundtrack, as eclectic as the show itself is great. The opening track alone is brilliant enough to warrant a purchase, a chaotic and frantic 80s pop-like remix played over a montage of characters from the series laughing hysterically at inappropriate times in inappropriate places. It's creepy yet uplifting - a perfect intro to one of the most intriguing anime series released on our shores.

Daniel Wilks

ANIMATION: 9 / STORY: 10
OVERALL: 10



Porco Rosso

GENRE: DRAMA
 PROD: STUDIO GHIBLI

Porco Rosso is yet another fantastic anime from Hayao Miyazaki and Studio Ghibli. Set in a romanticised Italy and the Adriatic sea in the wake of WWI, *Porco Rosso* stars the titular Porco. Formerly a top pilot in the Italian air force during WWI, he becomes a mercenary after the tragic deaths of his comrades. Patrolling the skies and fighting off any sky pirates that threaten the various ships in the Adriatic (for a fee of course), Porco's an instantly appealing character - a man of few words who smokes too much and takes his curse in his stride. Porco, you see, is actually called Marco, but since the war a curse has turned his features to that of a pig. Hence Porco.

The crux of the story sees Porco taken down by the brash American pilot Curtis, who's hired by local pirates. Porco takes the remains of his plane to Italy under the nose of the military, to be helped by Grandpa Piccolo and his talented young designer Fio. When Fio returns with Porco to face off against Curtis he's forced to come to terms with not only his experiences during the war, but also the feelings



[above] Where's Sandy and Monkey?

that the beautiful Gina (who runs the local bar) has for him.

Porco Rosso is essentially a swashbuckling story of adventure and romance, and is both light hearted and thought provoking. The animation is as gorgeous today as it was in 1992 on release, with the Adriatic setting creating magnificent backdrops for the dogfighting, whilst the character designs are pure Miyazaki - these are characters you'll fall in love with. And as is always the case in Miyazaki films, no characters are simply black or white - their motivations are their own and in some ways are just as valid as the motivations of the central protagonist. The final showdown with Curtis is the perfect example of this - it's such a Miyazaki ending, and yet another reason why he's one of the greats.

Joey Tekken

ANIMATION: 8 / STORY: 8
OVERALL: 8



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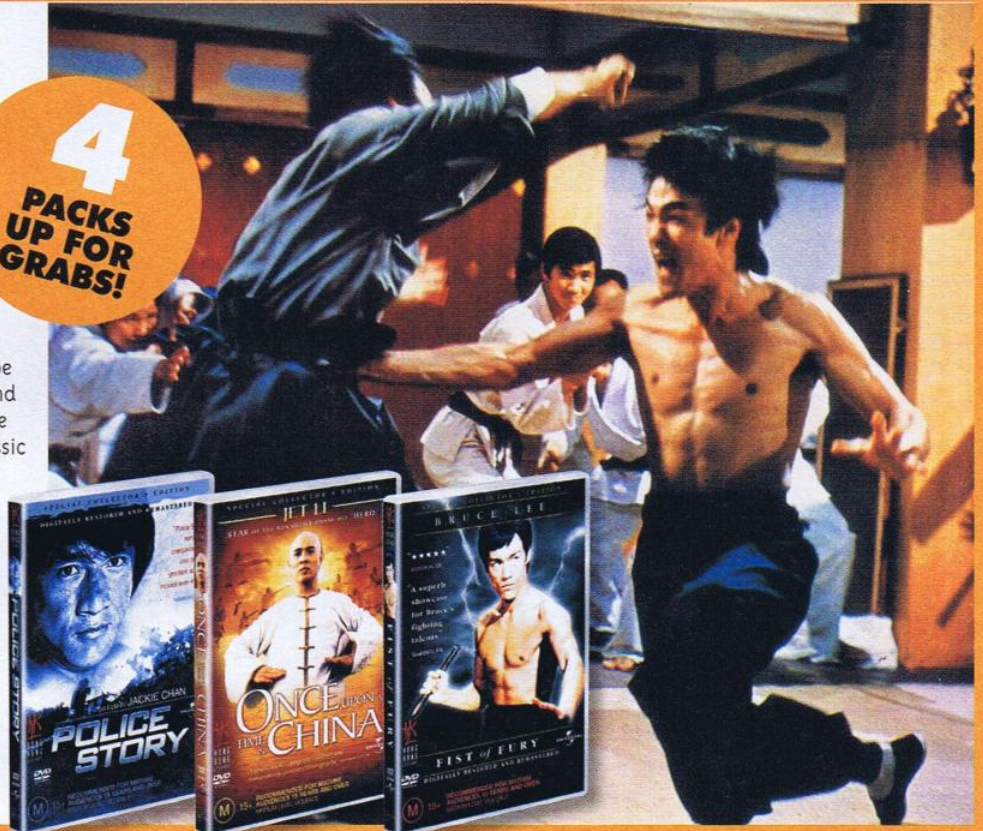
»» Fact: kung fu rocks. Fact: Jet Li, Jackie Chan and Bruce Lee are three of the all-time martial arts greats. Fact: Many of the greatest Hong Kong martial arts films are finally getting a local release in Australia!

Thanks to the new Hong Kong Legends label, steaming bowls of kung fu goodness will be regularly served up to Australian DVD players, and to celebrate we've got four packs of the first wave of releases to give away. That's five bonafide classic films: Once Upon a Time in China, Iron Monkey, Armour of God, Police Story and Fist of Fury. To be in the running, just answer the following:

»» At what age did Jet Li win his first national Wu Shu Championship?

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

4
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WIN METAL GEAR SOLID 3 ON PS2!

»» Games that score in the high 90s are very few and far between here at Hyper, and when they do come along, they're games to be treasured. Games that will be remembered for years to come. Metal Gear Solid 3 is one of those games. Last issue we gave it a rocking 96%, and that's for a great number of reasons - fantastic characters and great dialogue, an interesting and comprehensible plot, gameplay that builds on previous iterations of the series whilst also striving in new directions and rewarding experimentation, and so much more. This is a game that is just plain cool.

Thanks to our friends at Atari, we're lucky enough to have five Metal Gear Solid 3 packs to give away. Each one contains a copy of the game for PS2, a sweet MGS3 T-shirt and notepad. Note to self: enter this competition.

To be in the running for one of our MGS3 packs, answer the following:

»» Name three of the bosses from previous Metal Gear games.

Put your answer and your name and address on the back of an envelope and send it to: **I Love the Snake, Hyper, 78 Renwick St,**

5
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GRABS!



ATARI

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 March 29 and entries close at 6pm May 11. 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 May 12 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 July issue of Hyper on sale June 8. 9) 5 winners will each receive Metal Gear Solid 3 on PS2 (RRP \$99.95), a MGS3 t-shirt, pen and notepad. 4 winners will each receive Once Upon a Time in China, Armour of God, Police Story and Fist of Fury on DVD (RRP \$29.95 each) and Iron Monkey SE (RRP \$34.95). Total value of competitions is \$1118.75. 10) The promoter is Next Publishing Pty Ltd ABN 88 002 647 645 of 78 Renwick St, Redfern NSW 2016.

WinWinWin

WIN A NIGHT IN FANTASIA CDS!

»» Back in October, Hyper staffers were lucky enough to be invited to A Night in Fantasia at the Sydney Conservatorium of Music. The Joe Hisaishi pieces that were played on the night have been released as a CD, and thanks to our friends within the Eminence Orchestra, we have fifteen CDs to give away. This is a must-enter comp for Studio Ghibli fans, as the music performed includes scores from Laputa, Totoro, Mononoke, Spirited Away and Howl's Moving Castle. However, if you want to win, you'll have to do something for us! The Eminence Orchestra are interested in doing a concert entirely composed of videogame scores, and they want to know what you'd like to hear. Whether Japanese or Western in origin, write in and tell us what piece(s) of videogame music you'd most like to hear performed by a full orchestra. Oh, and answer the following question too:

»» Name Nobuo Uematsu's rock band.

Put the answer, plus your "most wanted" pieces of videogame music, and your name and address, on the back of an envelope and send it to: **The Savage Beast, Hyper, 78 Renwick St, Redfern, NSW, 2016.**

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UP FOR
GRABS!

A NIGHT IN FANTASIA 2004
Studio Ghibli Performance



WIN PLAYBOY: THE MANSION PACKS!

»» If wearing a smoking jacket and shuffling around in slippers while a bevy of beautiful ladies caters to your every whim is your idea of paradise, then we've got news for you - Wilks is already living it. But that's the Hyper magazine empire for you. There's another though... I think it's called Playboy, and it's run by this guy Hugh Hefner. No, we hadn't heard of it either, but they've gone and made a game about it anyway. Playboy: The Mansion is all about mixing business and pleasure. You'll be wining and dining celebs, commissioning writers, getting busy with buxom babes and overseeing centerfold spreads. It has everything that Tetris didn't, and thanks to our friends at Ubisoft, we have six copies of the game on PC up for grabs, as well as a Playboy poster and keyring/bottle opener for each winner.

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

»» What year was the first Playboy published?

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

6
PACKS
UP FOR
GRABS!



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The Mortal Kombat Legacy

» ANTHONY CORBETT

During the early nineties it seemed every moral activist and politician without a campaign platform was blaming all of society's ills on violent movies, rap music or the brand new heretic du jour, video games. Whilst Doom and its ilk would certainly provide fuel for their fire, Mortal Kombat was a 350 megaton powder keg doused in nitroglycerin strapped to a Bus That Couldn't Slow Down.

HEINZ BIG RED

Aside from letting players belt each other with various styles of "martial arts", Mortal Kombat also realistically depicted gore - well, if you consider five pints of claret stemming from a kick to the ankle realistic. Furthermore, the victor of two-out-of-three bouts could graphically maim their opponent, ripping off their head or entire torso being big crowd favourites. Mortal Kombat's other claim to fame was that it used digitised actors as opposed to sprites, though this was as much a gimmick as the murderous aspects of the title, the characters' stilted, crab-like shufflings were as staccato as the brand of fisticuffs they brought to life, and the downfall of Mortal Kombat would not be militant do-gooders, but rather every fighting game's biggest foe: mastery. If there's no depth to the mechanics, there's no longevity. And MK had no depth. It was a slugfest, with powerful special attacks simply traded over and over due to the relative lack of combos because moves rarely flowed into one

another. Further conducive to frustration was the attack priority of roundhouse kicks and uppercuts - they were so freaking powerful! Did we mention how unintuitive it felt to use a block button in a 2D fighting game?

Arguably what brought MK the most notoriety occurred as it was being translated to the 16bit consoles of the time, with Nintendo seeking to appease censors and "family groups" by removing the blood from the SNES version altogether. The rest of the port may have been handled admirably, with even the earth-shuddering sound effects making it across relatively unscathed, though it never felt quite right when Kano tore a lifeless grey lump owned by a three week old cadaver out of his opponent's chest...

But it felt oh-so-good when Midway unleashed their sequel, for Mortal Kombat 2, simply put, offered more. More characters with more moves meant a more strategic approach to defeating your foe. Only kidding. Though the gameplay was undoubtedly better balanced, the exponential increase in finishing moves resulted in fights degenerating into cheap tactics repetition even quicker than before, with both combatants desperate to hear the trademark "Finish Him(/Her)!" catch-cry and celebrate their ignoble win by eviscerating their foe. Though given the necessity for both pixel perfect distancing and the learning of complex commands this rarely happened, which resulted in more unintentional shin-kick deaths, ergo more

cabinet-thumping or controller-throwing, ergo more being laughed at by friends and on-lookers. More, see. Still, perversely satisfying combos were obtainable by taking advantage of the inglorious physics and repeatedly juggling foes with special attacks - this was barely evident in the first installment and definitely perfected here. Factor in a stupid amount of death moves and the game's kitsch brand of humour and you have the perfect Mortal Kombat.

THE SUCKIEST BUNCH OF SUCKS THAT EVER SUCKED

Mortal Kombat 3, on the other hand, was a menacing title which removed all the cornball humour that made MK2 so bearable - er, playable. The roster now housed the most detestable bunch of tools in gaming and the much touted Animalities - wherein your character morphed into a beast and gored their foe - bore some of the most atrocious animation to see the light of day.

MK3 also premiered a hideous new brand of AI that had the ability to lock down all avenues of creative gameplay, exploring you to uncover the most repetitive attack commands as they were the only kind it couldn't block; something which has sadly become a bit of a hallmark in titles since. Compounding the awkward mechanics, meanwhile, was a run button. No, really. This was the final straw to convince everyone that Midway's one trick pony had finally been castrated and rendered undeserving the ridiculous hype,

monthly progress report columns and six page previews virtually every mag on the planet had devoted to the game.

Yet still this title would be blessed with two offspring - its pseudo-sequel, Ultimate MK3, adding to the mix delightful inventions labeled Auto Combos. Each character basically had an assortment of random button presses that mystifyingly formed a string attack and threw Newtonian principles right out the window. Just to top it off, this new method was also more powerful than the 'old' combos. Great.

Continuing on from UMK3 was of course Mortal Kombat Trilogy, which purported to be an amalgamation of the three (four?) titles yet was pretty much MK3 With A Really Big Roster. By this time it was all so broken and tacky you couldn't have paid us to care.

After these spectacular travesties it couldn't seem to get any worse for the franchise, yet Midway blighted the Earth with a scrolling beat-'em-up titled Mortal Kombat Mythologies. Its highlights included your dependence on pressing a button to make Sub-Zero (the lone character) face the correct way whenever a foe attacked from the opposite direction, and the ability to be squashed underneath a giant pillar simply because you were attempting to advance the screen's scrolling. Vomit-worthy is perhaps the only description to do justice to the title, which owns the #3 spot on our Worst 50 Games Ever list. Yes, it really was that bad.

QUAN CHI COULD TEAR OFF HIS FOE'S LEG AND BEAT THEM TO DEATH WITH IT!

HALF-DECENT SEQUELALITY

Not so *Mortal Kombat 4*, which can be summarised perfectly by one of the moves contained within - Quan Chi could tear off his foe's leg and beat them to death with it! The over the top gore and cheese that exemplified the second edition was back in a big way, accompanying some pleasing (though far from ground-breaking) 3D models knocking nine gallons of tomato sauce out of each other. They could now also conjure weapons like broadswords out of the ether - hilarity and, of course, dismemberment ensued. Despite ushering the unenviable transition from 2D to 3D quite respectably, it's probably the most overlooked title in the series and whilst it was never likely to contest *Soul Calibur*, as a quick bash at the arcades or a weekend rental few games could make you grin with sadistic pleasure this much - their own leg!

Whilst it was nowhere near as cheesy, *MK: Deadly Alliance* built solidly on *MK4*'s mechanics, and the ability to switch between various fighting stances per character on the fly was far more enthralling than any disemboweling the series has ever dished out. Even more encouraging, the recently released *MK: Deception* follows the *MK2* ethos of paving a likeable game atop a mountain of crazy unlockable shit - *MK chess*, anyone?

Midway may have avoided taking literacy classes, but they have learned that exaggerated violence and gore can no longer be relied upon as a title's sole selling point. Is that the sun peeking through the clouds? <<



WON'T SOMEBODY PLEASE THINK OF THE CHILDREN?

Unsurprisingly, *MK*'s gratuitous gore put it at the vanguard of gaming censorship debates for years, particularly here in Australia where the original's infamy accelerated the legislation that saw games rated just like other media; whereas *MK4* shares the dubious honour - along with Sega's *House of the Dead 2* - of being one of the first arcade titles to wear a magical curtain that protects the moral fiber of unsuspecting passers-by.



MAIL HYPER!

POSTAL:

78 Renwick St. Redfern,
NSW 2016 Australia

EMAIL:

freakscene@next.com.au

FREEGAMES AHOY

Dear Mr. Shea,

Firstly, I would like to commend you on the excellent magazine you run. I have subscribed for almost two years - and bought in shops for much longer - and have found Hyper to be the best gaming magazine available. However, I will get straight to the point of this letter.

With the forums section of your magazine discontinued, there are now two or three extra pages to be filled each month. Although I am sure this problem is already being addressed with an "Amos sealed section", a "Crushinetics liftout" or the like, I have my own idea, which you may find interesting.

Hyper's reputation is built on the fact that it is multi-platformed. However, I feel that there is a platform - maybe only a sub-platform - that is overlooked. This platform is the PC freeware/shareware. Sure, there's "Net Trawlin" with Kosta, and this is a fine section of the magazine. Unfortunately though, it rarely features any of the great freeware games being released on the net. Yes, I know you cover the PC already, but commercial and free PC games are very different beasts.

Freegames are made primarily for the purpose of providing short, simple but ultimately satisfying bursts of entertainment. You could easily liken their place and popularity to the GBA in the console market. Also similar to the GBA, there is a truly enormous freeware library that includes many games of quality comparable to some of the best commercial games. There is also a large demand for freegames in the

casual PC and console gamer demographic; people who are uncompromising in their tastes for high quality games, but who have spent all their money on their consoles, or whose computers do not have the specs to run today's hardware intensive games. Lastly, since there is no pressure on the developers to "shift units", freegames provide fertile grounds for game developers to produce some of the most innovative and refreshing game experiences available today. For these reasons I feel that the freegame deserves its own section in Hyper as much as the consoles, handhelds or PC.

So please don't fill the old forum section with ads, because there is a much better use for the space. Sure, ads might pay for your trips to E3, but think of the freegame gems like G-Type, Cerberus, Little Fighter 2, and Notrium that have provided us all with hours of free entertainment. Surely they deserve to get their own coverage in your great magazine. So please, think of the freegames.

Sincerely,

Superblau (aka "danos")

Superblau - it's like you read our minds! We were already planning a big feature on freeware games next issue, and fingers crossed we'll even be hitting newsstands with a cover disc featuring the best of the best free games! Sweeeet. I like your idea about doing coverage in Net Trawlin though - we'll try and do a free game update every few months once we've done the feature.

Oh, and in place of the forum section we've pretty much just made mail bigger.

GAMES, FOOD & BEVERAGE AND YOU.

When Driving home the other night after picking up take away for dinner I had a thought about how food and gaming go so well together or at least how some do.

So I thought I would write about one of my new fave gaming beverages only now available in my area (about Time!) and why it goes well with gaming.

Of course there's times when food doesn't seem necessary anymore like when a new game or console has entered the family...

The Frozen Drink AKA: Slushy, frozen Coke ect. (Yes that's right frozen drinks are new to my area, Macca's just got one installed the other week!)

- Good with Gaming Because:
Liquid/solid: It's like eating and



[above] Luke Woodhead mesmerised our inbox with this tasty pic

drinking at the same time!

Cold: Great for the hot headed gamer or for sweaty hand syndrome. - Preferable Attributes:

Texture: Nice smooth texture, no large chunks of ice and defiantly not watery.

Flavour: Great taste, must not have that flat taste that you some times get from freezing drinks.

-Cons:

Melts fast, occasional brain freeze, big sticky mess if spilt, condensation on cup is some times worse than sweaty hand syndrome...

I've been buying your mag since I was 12. I'm now 22 so I can say I've done a bit of growing up with you guys (only a little bit, mind). After reading the first two letters in issue 137 I was compelled to write in for the first time...

What the firetruck are these people moaning about? Hopefully there are many readers out there are as confused as me by this negative feedback. I buy your mag BECAUSE of the humor and funny references to pop culture, not to mention the unbiased, no bullshit reviews. Now maybe because I'm a huge Simpsons fan and a firm believer that Greedo never should have fired first that I "get" you guys better than some readers, but you only have to look around the newsagents and on the internet to realise Hyper is where it's at.

For me you have always been on the money and not ones to shy away from taking apart a media hyped game, unlike some single platform posers.

Keep up the good work, keep evolving, and keep watching the skis.....I mean skies.

Robyn Grellet.

As far as gaming beverages go, we don't think you can go past beer

CAPTION THIS!

PART 64 WINNER

Jackie Francis had his pickaxe in hand, mining the most comedy gold this month.



"After being told about the possibility of a Nintendo spy, the storekeepers started to think they were being watched."

but only if you're over the age of 18. Now if we could make a beer slushie that would be gold. Gold I tells ya.

LOVES THE DS

To the gaming aficionados at Hyper,

The Nintendo DS, what a beautiful machine!

Yes, I was one of the many gamers country wide to put a pre-order on this ambitious, new hand-held and wait those agonising months until it finally got a release on the 24th of Feb.

How amazing is this machine!? Nintendo seemed to have finally grown up and it shows! The DS is a very attractive little project, everything from the beautiful feel and position of the buttons to the stylized and responsive touch of the touch screen are all amazing achievements for such a compact and portable machine.

Even though I am yet to get my hands on Metroid Prime: Hunters (which by the look of the demo, will be the handhelds major drawcard), I am amazed the way Mario 64 has been polished, expanded and ported. It just makes a classic even better.

Nintendo have also got smart and started marketing with a series of not-too-shabby ad's which will hopefully boost its sales early and get it a lead on Sony.

I am just so pleased of the progress Nintendo have made as a company in the past couple of years, it's fantastic to see them evolving. Here's to a new era!

Remember, It's good to touch,
Alex Fynes-Clinton (silent91)
P.S- Please print this letter because, like you, I use good grammar!

We love the DS too but since getting our own PSP our love is divided evenly between the two. The DS so far is unfulfilled potential whereas the PSP is beautiful to look at and plays like a dream. Both systems have their faults but both are, without a doubt brilliant additions to the gaming arena.

BENTON MUSIC?

That sucks, but I'd say it's well deserved. I'm guilty of starting my day off by checking your blog and enjoy keeping up with the latest and greatest news and reviews. Take care and



[above] Daniel MacGregor's big red ball makes dreams come true

hurry back. (and while you're on hiatus, CHANGE THE MUSIC IN YOUR CD PLAYER!) James, Norah, and Kenny need a break! Ryan, I guess I'm the other person that reads this!

Johnie Woods

Ok Johnie, Benton's gone so there should be no more problems with bad music. Actually, who the hell is this - there is no Johnie at Next and as far as I know there has never been one. Did you forget to take your meds today?

OLD SCHOOL GAMER!

Dear Editor,

I am a 61 year old console game enthusiast (never really been into PC games) and have finally gotten around to dropping you people a line. My particular interests are driving simulator games and some first person shooters and action adventure games. I was very disappointed in "Thief", even though your magazine gave it a pretty positive review. Apart from the lack of save points and the totally useless maps I was very surprised to realise that they spoke with an American accent back in the Middle Ages! Gee, the things you find out when you start playing a new game! The graphics were great as was some of the gameplay, the potential is there for a really good game. But I found it frustrating and irritating.

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PlayStation 2



Could be that I'm getting old and grumpy? Probably. Driver 3 was also disappointing to say the least. I was really looking forward to it. Maybe they'll try harder next time. Can't wait for GTA San Andreas on Xbox.

Question: Do you think the graphics for GTA SA will be better on Xbox than what is currently on PS2?

Enough of this waffle, what I would really like to know is this: Do you or most of your readers consider the Xbox controller superior to the PS2 one, especially when it comes to driving simulator games? Personally I do. Do you think that Sony will introduce an upgraded controller to match the Xbox one? Are most steering wheel systems for Xbox and PS2 crap? The ones I've tried are. I just couldn't calibrate them successfully. Does it depend on the driving game being played? I suspect it does. Could your magazine do an assessment of the various steering wheel systems currently available, taking into consideration value for money, controllability and accuracy as well as their ruggedness. I think most of them are too cumbersome and awkward to set up. What are your thoughts?

Cheats. How do they come about? I believe that the programmers and developers of the various games insert them for a bit of fun or because they've been sampling some strange chemical substances. But what is the route from there out to the public? Do some computer, techno nerds spend hours running through various controller button combinations till they come up with something or are the cheats unofficially/officially leaked to the public by the developers in some way or another?

Any whisper of a Project Gotham 3 in the pipeline? Hope so, can't wait if there is.

Thanks for your time and keep up the good work.

Yours sincerely

Renfrey G. Ansell

Hey Renfrey

An excellent point about American

accents in the Middle Ages - that kind of thing annoys us too. Damn Yank-centric view of the world. In answer to your questions:

- *GTA will most definitely look superior on Xbox. The frame rate should be more consistent (which is the most important thing for our money), pop up should be lessened and character models will probably be more detailed.*

- *The Xbox controller (Type S that is) is marginally better for racing simulations than the PS2 controller, but that's only really because it has analogue triggers. Overall though, the PS2 controller is more utilitarian than the Xbox controller in our minds, and those four shoulder buttons really come in handy. We doubt that Sony will change it much for the PS3 (nor do we think they should - it's the best, most functional controller design since the SNES pad), but we wouldn't be surprised if they supplement it with another style of input. Eyetoy 2 anyone?*

- *Many racing wheels are crap, it's true. The best one we've used in the last couple of years is the Williams F1 Team Racing Wheel, which is really affordable and available on PS2 and Xbox. We've never had much trouble with calibration, just make sure when you turn the console on the wheel is resting in the centre. Good wheels will have multiple sensitivity settings and good games will have options too. That said, we'll try and do a rundown soon.*

- *Cheats are generally released to the public by either the developers or the publishers. It's a good way to keep a game in the public eye a few months after release. There are some games (like PC FPSs) though where you could conceivably work out the console commands yourself - "give health" is a whole lot easier to discover than X, X, O, L, R, Start. And then there are games like World of Warcraft, where gamers discovered all the emotes by trying commands out.*

- *Project Gotham 3? Come E3 we should know all about it. We're thinking it will be an Xbox 2 launch title.*

SO MANY SWEARS

Dear Hyper,

I don't want to sound like a prude, but there is something that deeply concerns me about, y'know, stuff that ain't for kids in games. You see, I was playing San Andreas the other day, and my

LETTER OF THE MONTH

HIS ROCKINGNESS

To the editor,

I am a mother of two teenage boys and every month they spend their pocket money buying your magazine. While I don't read it personally, they talk to me about it a lot as a persuasion tool to get me to purchase games for them.

I understand that your magazine is a lot of fun with all the pictures and colours, but I'm worried my boys are becoming hyperactive due to all the flashy pictures.

Is it necessary to make your magazine so exciting-looking? Can't you tone it down, craft the colours to look more mature, or even just make the entire colour scheme monotone like a newspaper?

I want my boys to keep reading, I assure you, but your magazine has a lot of distractions. You only have to flick through issue 137 to see it's too much fun to stop a child's attention wandering.

I admit, it's not as bad as those other magazines with nude women which only exist to help dirty male minds clean their pipes, but I am fearful your magazine is becoming too bright and fun to be educational.

My boys claim Evil Malky, the art director (Eh? I thought I was - normal Malky), is the problem - I don't know who that is, but please talk some sense into him.

Thank you,

Frannie Myres

Dear Frannie,

Whilst we appreciate your suggestion that we change the layout and colour scheme of the magazine to become dull and monotone we regret to inform you that this will be impossible for us to achieve due to Malky's inhumanly high quotient of rockingness. His massively rocking genetic structure means that he is physically unable to do anything dull and/or monotone. We do, however, have a suggestion for you.

Maybe you should have your children read the magazine wearing dark sunglasses. The effect of this should be twofold - firstly the dark tinting of the glasses should mute all of the colours to such an extent that they should no longer cause your boys to become hyperactive and rock out like Malky. The second result of the dark glasses should be that your boys become the coolest kids in school and therefore become a hit with the ladies. I hope this helps.



You've won a Microsoft® IntelliMouse® Explorer for PC!

Best. Mouse. Ever. The IntelliMouse® Explorer is an ergonomic optical mouse with five re-programmable buttons and an excellent feel for serious gaming!

Dad walked in during a swear laden cutscene. He didn't have a problem with me playing it, he just asked if there was a way to cut the swearing if a young, impressionable mind was exposed to it. Well, I searched and searched for a Parental Control option, but to no avail. Which brings me to my point: why don't more developers include Parental Control in their games? Don't get me wrong, I'm all for free speech and freedom of artistic expression, but it'd just be nice if the magic of more...erm... mature games could be experienced by all without any mind scarring experiences.

From Robinson

(P.S. Any word on the release date/price of the PSP? If it doesn't come out by July I'll just have to get a DS)

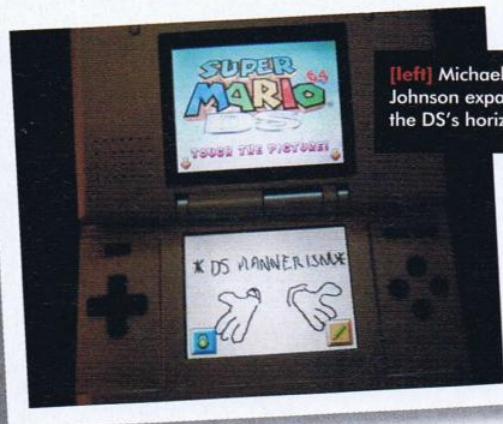
There is a thing on the game to make sure that young and impressionable minds don't come in contact with

the content of San Andreas already. It's called an MA rating. If somebody playing the game is not prepared for the content then maybe they shouldn't be playing it in the first place (and let's face it - swearing is far from the only thing that gives San Andreas a mature rating). If mature games could be experienced by all they wouldn't really be mature games then would they?

MORE BIG UPS

Dear Hyper,

I'd like to start by saying to Owen and Misterk, what the hell is wrong with you!! Your complaining about the humour in the mag, why? Its one of the many reasons I buy it, a lot of other mags lack the humour and therefore are just plain and boring, and a lot of the time give crappy games good scores like that Spawn game on ps2. I cant remember what hyper gave it but another mag gave



[left] Michael Johnson expands the DS's horizons

it 8 out of 10! I know Hyper gave it less then 50%, I know people have different opinions but its not just that game, it seems that official magazines just cant give out a bad review, so if u want honesty and fun buy Hyper, but if you want bullshit and boring buy OPS2M.

But now onto something else that I've wanted to say for a while now, to all PlayStation and Microsoft loyalists:

This was on the E3 DVD for 2004 (I've only ever seen it in EB so to those that's never seen it look there after E3 this year, its pretty cool) the man on the Nintendo DVD said and showed a chart showing that from 2001-2004 Nintendo had sold more games then Microsoft and were closing in on Sony. Now, if that's not enough proof that Nintendo really know what they're doing how about this: another chart was shown for the games industries growth and guess what, Sony had dropped 24% Microsoft hadn't moved at all and Nintendo was the only company who caused the gaming industry any growth at all-it had moved up by 41%. So without Nintendo the Video Gaming Industry would be getting worse. Just have a little think about that before you all rush out to buy a



PSP in March.

Now I'm not saying that it's a bad System I'm sure its great, but Sony concentrates more on the gamers who think 'WOW look at those graphics and the console looks so advanced'. But the reality is its all a disguise. Do Nintendo need DVD's to sell systems? Nope, they rely on creative games like Pikmin and Paper Mario, so if you're a Sony fanatic just play a Paper Mario game and see how different it is from most RPG. Just so you know I do own a

PS2 and I love it, but they don't have games like Nintendo do games that are so interactive you could swear its reality. And for all those that still think Nintendo is 'kiddie' then open your damn eyes. Resident Evil is the opposite to that. Looks at other games like Eternal Darkness and Viewtiful Joe, which is now on PS2. Sure Nintendo adds a lot of colours into there games and have fire breathing dragon/turtle thing with spikes on its shell and little

[above] Great stuff from Max Gibson. No relation to Ari but they both rock

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Amos Hong
March 7, 2005

RE: No more mascot
I write this letter as my resignation from being cool. The time I have spent as the mascot for Australia's most cutting-edge games magazine has been an experience I will never forget and it has helped me grow, both personally and professionally.

Growing up I was always a big fan of Hyper and to be immortalised in its pages is something I will always cherish. The time has come, however, for me to move on as Hyper mascot and move towards more creative endeavours - perhaps with the Seattle Seahawks.

I thank Hyper for the attention they have given me, but the constant groping was one of the many indications that my tenure as mascot was moving towards less and less professional terms; if my chiseled body and amazingly handsome Korean features aren't enough to dazzle people, and physical contact is required, it is a prime indication that I'm not the mascot I once was.

There is no bitterness in my resignation, and I know that although I might be gone, through Hyper, my spirit will live on. Always.
Sincerely yours

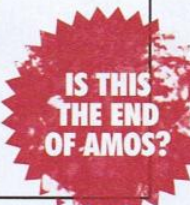
Amos "Boo-Yay, Korean Love God, Wong Fei"
Hong

You read that right. We regret to inform you that the world's favourite Korean everyman will be gone from the warm glowing warming glow of Hyper by the time you read this. This, of course, will leave Hyper with a serious Official Mascot Deficit. As such we need to call upon you, our loyal readers to help us out. We need you to vote for our new Official Mascot. We have looked long and hard for replacement mascots and cut down a long list to the following:

1. Evil Malky
"Let the crushing begin"
2. Moe "Moemar" Branscombe
"There's no limit"
3. John "Playdate" Dewhurst
"Tweaks nipples"
4. Andy "Butters" Bulmer
"I can't believe it's not Butters"
5. Tim Levy
"Levy Love for everyone"
6. Giant Hamburger Guy
"Does this burger make me look fat?"
7. Little Miss Crazy Dance
"You know, like, stuff"
8. Crate
"..."
9. The Ghost of David Wildgoose
"The ghost of mascots past"



Votes or suggestions for other mascots can be sent to:
freakscene@next.com.au
We will let you know the results of the vote soon.



flower things you pull out of the ground to help rebuild a space ship... but it's all just for fun so before you bag it try it, go into a shop or a friends house and play one for a while, just try it.

2 more things quickly before I go in issue 137 you said the Touch Screen was more for a younger audience, how can you say that? This opens up a truckload of opportunities for the developers and fun for us gamers. I've also noticed tons of games never even mentioned in Hyper, Zoids Legacy and every Yu-Gi-Oh! on any console as well as DBZ 2 and 3 on PS2, Beyblade on GBA and GCN. It seems your avoiding all the kiddie reviews, you surely cant say you never got all of those games, now if it happened only once I could over look it but this man times? I cant blame you for not wanting to review Beyblade or something else you might think your too old for but its your job and obviously you got DBZ because you even said it's a good game as a response to Aaron Nuske in #137.

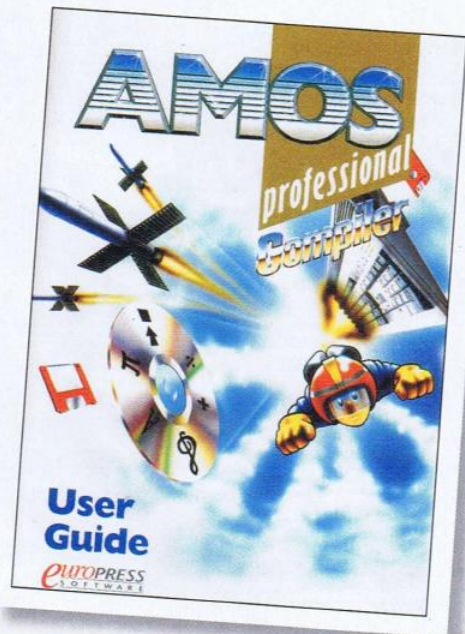
Not too end on a low note I really do love this mag and look forward to every issue but I really felt I needed to say all of that.

Constructive criticism is never a low note champ. Believe it or not, we rarely get sent kids games aside from the big ones like Robots (this issue) and the like. Total Gamer, our sister publication handles the kids game duties leaving us to review the games for an older audience. It's good that you've done your research but you should always take marketing numbers with a grain of salt as statistics are the easiest way to lie.

A FINE MAHOCK TO ALL

We are living in a golden age my friends. In my short life we've gone from the radness of Galaga to Metal Gear Solid. I can't remember how long I've been playing videogames but I'm sure its been a decade if its a day. I came in somewhere around the tail end of the 8-Bit revolution, when it was Nintendo vs Sega all the way. I threw my lot in with the Master System. When I could afford it, I got myself a Super NES. Sega vs Nintendo went out the window and it was ALL about the games. Soon we heard rumours (for me, often through Hyper) of the Ultra 64 and the Katana. Along with a little thing called Playstation... Gentlemen? Start your drooling.

So when did the folks who make these wonderful contraptions lose their imagination? Why does it seem inevitable that we will soon see



[above] James Frith wanted a sample of Amos goodness

Sony's PS3 and Microsoft's X-Box 2? Where did all the fun in naming your console go? Am I the only one who wants these two guys to go out on a limb? Respect a gaming tradition?

Now, I am only partially a fool. I understand that Sony and Microsoft have spent untold billions of dollars burning their brand words into our cerebral cortexes. These companies are not Sega or Nintendo, hence they also have other non-gaming products available. This means their console gaming wares need to be immediately identifiable to us plebs with the 12 second attention spans everywhere. But I shudder at the thought of where it ends.

At what point do the Sony marketing guys say "Hmm... Playstation Seven? Maybe its time for a re-think..." And I think it's a sure bet that our old buddies at Nintendo won't be bringing the Gamecube successor to the table without a title befitting its no doubt zanyness. Despite my previous subtle claim to being an industry veteran, I realise this is small potatoes but its important to me. Bring the love you big clumsy corporations.

Julbot.

Hey dude - The new Nintendo console does have a great name to go along with the Nintendo wacky naming heritage. It's been dubbed the "Revolution". Whether or not this is simply a project code name or a final name remains to be seen but we're keeping our fingers crossed. It's not too goofy so we doubt it will be changed like the Dolphin was renamed the GameCube. Of course people may think that it only plays the crappy Aerosmith light gun arcade game from 10 years ago which could cause a slight problem.

We play seriously...

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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 6TH MARCH
2005 RETAIL SALES

1	★	Sonic Mega Collection Plus	Adventure
2	◆	Playboy: The Mansion	Strategy
3	▼	GTA: San Andreas	Adventure
4	▼	NFS: Underground 2	Racing
5	▲	Ace Combat 5: Sqdrn Ledr	Simulator
6	▼	The Incredibles	Adventure
7	◆	WWE Smackdown vs Raw	Sports
8	▼	Eyeto: Play 2 Pack	Compilation
9	▲	Crash Twinsanity	Adventure
10	▼	SingStar Party Bundle	All Other

TOP
10

Nintendo DS Games Over \$40

W/E 6TH MARCH
2005 RETAIL SALES

1	◆	Super Mario 64	Adventure
2	◆	WarioWare: Touched!	Action
3	◆	Asphalt: Urban GT	Racing
4	◆	Spider-Man 2	Adventure
5	▲	Sprung	Adventure
6	▼	Tiger Woods PGA 2005	Sports
7	◆	Zoo Keeper	Action
8	◆	Ping Pals	Action
9	★	The URBZ: Sims In The City	Strategy

TOP
10

Game Cube Games Over \$50

W/E 6TH MARCH
2005 RETAIL SALES

1	◆	Mario Power Tennis	Sports
2	▲	Metroid Prime 2: Echoes	Adventure
3	▲	Paper Mario 1000 Year Door	Adventure
4	▼	Mario Kart Double Dash	Racing
5	▲	Pokémon Colosseum	RPG
6	★	Mario Party 5	Family
7	▼	The Incredibles	Adventure
8	▲	Pikmin 2	Action
9	★	Donkey Konga w Drums	All Other
10	★	Yu-Gi-Oh Fisbound Kingdm	Strategy

TOP
10

Xbox Games Over \$50

W/E 6TH MARCH
2005 RETAIL SALES

1	★	Sonic Mega Collection Plus	Adventure
2	★	Playboy: The Mansion	Strategy
3	▼	Halo 2	Action
4	▼	Star Wars Old Republic 2	RPG
5	▼	NFS: Underground 2	Racing
6	▼	Fable	RPG
7	▼	The Incredibles	Adventure
8	★	Crash Twinsanity	Adventure
9	▼	MechAssault 2: Lone Wolf	Action
10	★	V8 Supercars 2	Racing

TOP
10

PC Games Over \$20

W/E 6TH MARCH
2005 RETAIL SALES

1	★	The Sims 2: University	Strategy
2	◆	The Sims 2	Strategy
3	▼	World Of WarCraft	Strategy
4	▲	Half Life 2	Action
5	▼	The Sims Deluxe	Strategy
6	▼	Star Wars Old Republic 2	RPG
7	★	Playboy: The Mansion	Strategy
8	▼	The Sims Unleashed	Strategy
9	★	Civilization 3 GNH	Strategy
10	★	V8 Supercars GNH	Racing

TOP
10

Game Boy Advance Games Over \$30

W/E 6TH MARCH
2005 RETAIL SALES

1	▲	Finding Nemo + Monstrs Inc	Adventure
2	▲	SpongeBob Double Pack	Adventure
3	▼	Pokémon Fire Red	RPG
4	▼	Pokémon Leaf Green	RPG
5	▼	The Incredibles	Adventure
6	★	Scooby Doo Double Pack	Adventure
7	★	Yu-Gi-Oh Day Of The Duelist	Strategy
8	★	Lizzie Mcguire+Dis Princess	Adventure
9	▼	Pokémon Sapphire	RPG
10	▼	Pokémon Ruby	RPG

TOP
10

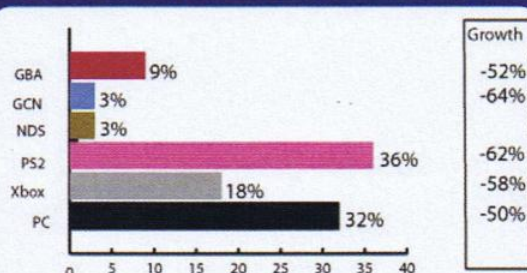
All Full Priced Games

W/E 6TH MARCH
2005 RETAIL SALES

1	◆	Super Mario 64	Nintendo DS
2	★	Sonic Mega Collection Plus	PlayStation 2
3	★	Playboy: The Mansion	PlayStation 2
4	★	The Sims 2: University	PC/MAC
5	▼	GTA: San Andreas	PlayStation 2
6	★	Sonic Mega Collection Plus	Xbox
7	★	Playboy: The Mansion	Xbox
8	▼	NFS: Underground 2	PlayStation 2
9	★	Ace Combat 5: Sqdrn Leader	PlayStation 2
10	▼	WarioWare: Touched!	Nintendo DS

MARKET WATCH All Games by Platform

FEB 05 VS JAN 05
RETAIL SALES 2004



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



GfK's comprehensive database of online market intelligence, updated weekly

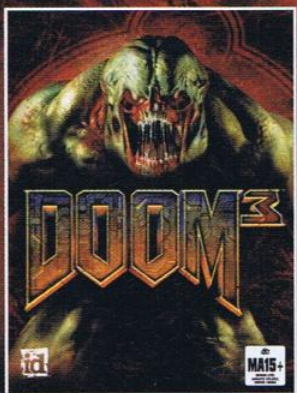


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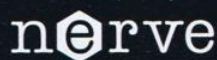
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