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HOOPER

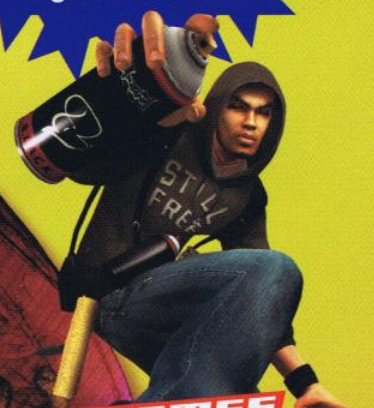
UNVEILED

Soul Calibur III

The greatest fighting game series of all time returns!

SPECIAL NEXT WAVE CONSOLES

Developers speak out about the next generation!



HOT GAMES AROUND THE WORLD IN ATARI DAYS

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1ST PSP REVIEWS

RIDGE RACER PSP

PLUS: Lumines & Vampire Chronicle

MIDNIGHT CLUB 3 DUB edition



REVIEWED PS2/XBOX

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A brave New World for strategy games in 2005?

A next MAGAZINE



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Welcome back to the stage of history...



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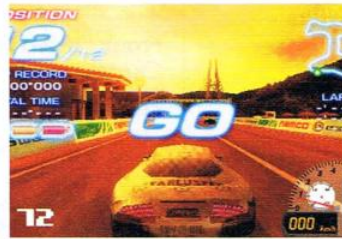
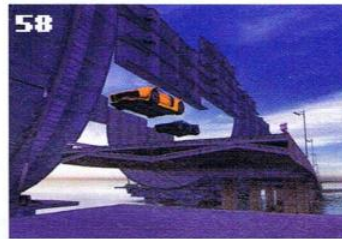
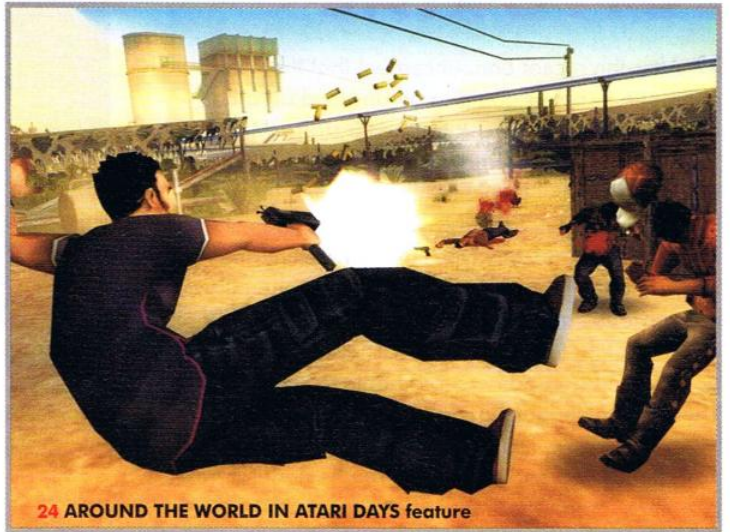
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EDITORIAL

After the recent announcement that the next generation Xbox is going to be unveiled on a half hour MTV special a week before E3 starts (May 12 in the U.S.), it's looking more and more like Microsoft are serious about launching the machine (in some territories at least) later this year. Rather than showing the console to industry types first and letting the information filter out from there, as has been the case for previous hardware announcements, Microsoft are going straight to the consumer. They want everyday gamers and non-gamers to be able to see it in action. They want a serious buzz about this machine and they want it now. From the time this issue hits the newsstands you can expect a veritable flood of next gen Xbox information, and we'll be there every step of the way.

Of course, just because Microsoft are looking to jump the gun on the next hardware cycle doesn't mean that Sony and Nintendo are going to stand idly by. No sir, Sony will be unveiling their new system and a treasure trove of great PS2 games, and Nintendo will have the new Zelda and details of the Revolution. There's little doubt that this is going to be the biggest E3 of all time, and both the K-Man and myself will be there.

What will the next generation of consoles hold? This issue we've asked a panel of developers what they think the next generation will be like and what they'd like to see. Check it out on page 18. We've also sent Moe halfway around the world to see some games and German TV, we've scoured the net for the best freeware games (thanks for putting together the disc Amos!) and we've reviewed two of the greatest arcade racers of all time. I can dig it.

Cam Shea >> Editor



[above] Cam and Frank Dry out for a night on the town at their local all-night juice bar.

HYPER >>

ISSUE 140

JUNE 2005

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ACN 002 647 645
ISSN 1320-7458

HYPER CREW Monthly Top 5 Games

Cam "White Chocolate" Shea - Editor

1. Midnight Club 3: DUB Edition - PS2
"Dubbed out and fancy free"
2. Resident Evil 4 - GCN
3. Ridge Racer - PSP
4. Minish Cap - GBA
5. Killer 7 - GCN

Daniel "Super Punch Out" Wilks - Deputy Editor

1. Lumines - PSP
"Mizuguchi you handsome devil, you've done it again"
2. Jade Empire - Xbox
3. DUOtris - freeware
4. Crazy Cross - freeware
5. Trackmania Sunrise - PC

Malcolm "Malky Magic" Campbell - Art

1. Tekken 5 - PS2
"Some of the best fighting arenas ever made. The space station is amazing."
2. SoulCalibur II - PS2
3. GTA: San Andreas - PS2
4. Midnight Club 3: DUB Edition - PS2
5. Capcom vs. SNK 2 - PS2

Frank "Insert Something Funny" Dry - Carrot Lover

1. Poke Dash - Nintendo DS
"Nah, just kidding"
2. Wipeout Pure - PSP
3. Timesplitters Future Perfect - PS2
4. Doom 3 - Xbox
5. Zelda: Four Swords - GameCube

VENTURE JOE™

APRIL 2005



PlayStation 2



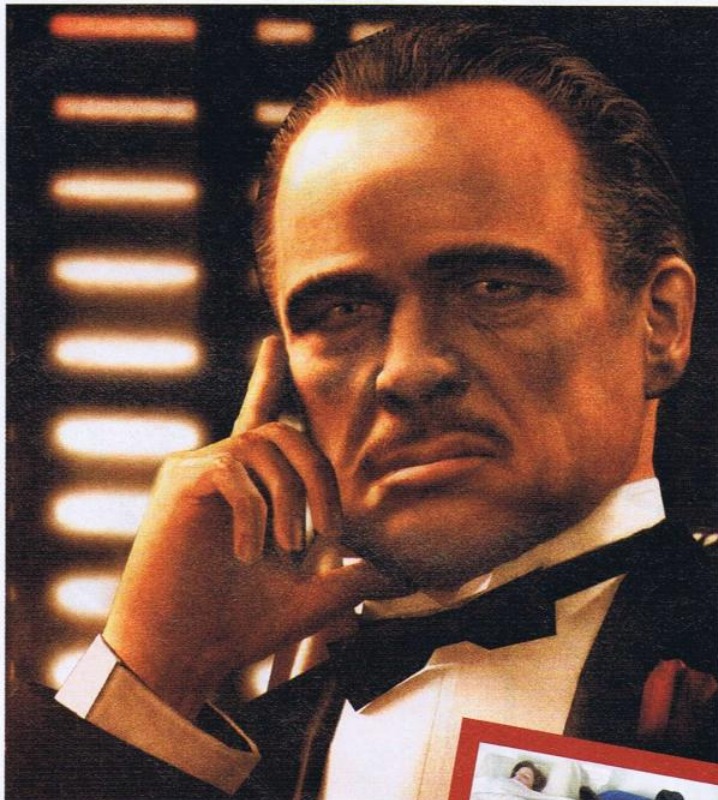
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News

IN THE NEWS: Molyneux declares next title will bring about world peace / Xbox 360 declared "worst. name. ever." by Hyper



OUCH

WORDS WERE SAID

A horse's head for EA's bed?

Something screwy is going on. Francis Ford Coppola, famed director of the Godfather trilogy has recently come out swinging saying that he disapproves of EA's treatment of the Godfather license in their upcoming game and, what's more, that he was never actually asked for his permission to make the game in the first place. He is quoted on AMC's "Sunday Morning Shootout" as saying, "I knew nothing about it. They never asked me if I thought it was a good idea. I went and I took a look at what it was... What they do is they use the characters everyone knows and they hire those actors to be there and only to introduce very minor characters. And then for the next hour they shoot and kill each other. I had absolutely nothing to do with the game and I disapprove. I think it's a misuse of film."

Fair enough — we wish more directors would get up in arms about crappy conversions of their movies and vice versa, we wish developers would take out a hit on Uwe Boll for making crappy films based on their games, but something rings a little odd. Prior to Coppola's remarks, the game's producer, David De Martini, had said that members of the dev team spent a week at Coppola's winery going through his notes on the making of the film so they could remain true to the spirit of the film even though they are breaking away from the story. Unless EA Redwood somehow managed to break into Coppola's ranch while he was on holiday, somebody isn't telling the truth. Either EA went to the ranch, which would require permission or they didn't. Interesting.



INFECTED

XBOX 2 UNVEILED MAY 12

Microsoft turn to MTV

Microsoft's latest viral marketing campaign Our Colony (www.ourcolony.net) is well under way and, if the success of the I Love Bees campaign is anything to go by it will be a global phenomenon. Of course there are no official links between Microsoft and the 4orty2wo Entertainment run ARG (alternate reality game) but a few things have come to light that make the link undeniable. Whereas I Love Bees was a narrative driven viral campaign, Our Colony seems to be about competition — form a colony, get people to join and perform tasks to earn points and rewards. The most interesting rewards so far are small images of what appear to be parts of

the redesigned Xbox controller for the next gen machine, the Xbox 360, NextBox, Xbox 2 or whatever you want to call it. The images show a stark white controller with noticeably Xbox-like layout, although the white and black buttons do seem to be missing. The other prominent feature on the site is a countdown clock set to end on May 12, the same day that Xbox 2 is going to be unveiled via a half hour MTV special. The program will be hosted by Elijah Wood and feature a performance by The Killers. The fact that Microsoft are so anxious to get the machine in front of consumers adds further weight to speculation of a late 2005 launch date.

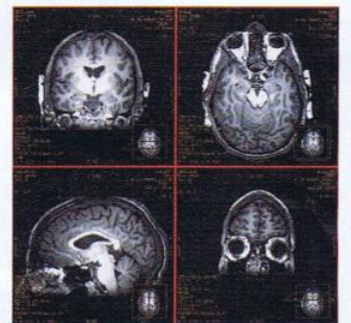


SCARY

THIS IS YOUR BRAIN ON SONY

Straight to your dome

Not content to rule the console world, Sony have gone a step further and filed a patent that can give them access to your brain. The US patent, granted to a Sony researcher by the name of Thomas Dawson details a way in which ultrasonic pulses can beam sensory information directly into the brain. "The pulsed ultrasonic signal alters the neural timing in the cortex," the patent states. "No invasive surgery is needed to assist a person, such as a blind person, to view live and/or recorded images or hear sounds." This news is simultaneously very cool and quite chilling. On the one hand it can totally revolutionise



[up] He was served here, here and here. Worst I've ever seen

entertainment as well as allowing the blind to see and the deaf to hear but on the other hand it could mean that our brains are no longer sacrosanct and we could no longer trust our sense as the be all and end all of experience. You can bet that we'll be bringing you more on this technology when information comes to light — though we seriously doubt there will be anything to report on until our 20th birthday at least.



HALO 2 OZ TOURNEY RESULTS

Who is the biggest fish in the BigPond?

The BigPond Halo 2 tournament is officially over, with Dean Loaney from Sydney coming out as single player Champion and Perfect Play taking out the clan challenge after nine long hours of gaming. Congrats to everyone who took part — it's events like these that will not only strengthen the Australian gaming scene, but raise gaming into the realms of more traditional sports.

CASHOLA

HITTING SONY WHERE IT HURTS

No rumble in the Sony jungle

Recently Japan Today reported that Immersion Corp. the company holding the patent for force feedback/rumblepad technology have successfully sued Sony for a hefty 90.7 million US dollars. Whilst \$90.7 million may be a drop in the bucket for a giant such as Sony it strikes us as odd that the entertainment giant didn't go the same way as Microsoft and settle out of court with Immersion Corp. for a far smaller sum of money. The pain does not end

there for Sony however — there is an injunction against Sony selling or importing any of the following into the United States:

PlayStation consoles, Dualshock controllers, and a number of games the jury thought infringed upon the copyright — A Bug's Life; Amplitude; Ape Escape; Atlantis: The Lost Empire; Bloody Roar 2; Cool Boarders 3; Cool Boarders 4; Cool Boarders 2001; Crash Bash; Crash Team Racing; Drakan: The Ancients' Gate; Emperor's New Groove; Extermination; FantaVision; Final Fantasy X; Formula One 2001; The Getaway; Gran Turismo; Gran Turismo 2; Gran Turismo 3; Grand Theft Auto: Vice City; Grand Theft Auto 3; Grind Session; ICO; Jak & Daxter; Kinetica; Kingdom Hearts; Legend of the Dragon; The Mark of Kri; Medal of Honor Frontline; Medieval 2; Metal Gear Solid 2; Monsters Inc.; Sly Cooper and the Thievius Raccoonus; SOCOM Navy



[up] Not pictured: a relevant image

Seals; Speed Punks; Spyro: Ripto's Rage; Spyro: Year of the Dragon; Stuart Little 2; Syphon Filter 2; Syphon Filter 3; Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 3; Twisted Metal: Black; Twisted Metal 4; Twisted Metal: Small Brawl; Treasure Planet; and War of the Monsters.

At the time of writing the injunction has been suspended pending Sony's appeal. If they lose, the massive corporation could be in a world of hurt. Of course it does seem doubtful that anything could put a halt to a juggernaut like Sony.

WINNERS HYPER 138

THE PUNISHER

- Samantha McPherson,
- Belmont North, NSW
- Pete Atkinson, Nanango, QLD
- Baden Shipp,
- Campbelltown, NSW
- Andrew Brewer,
- Aberfoyle Park, SA
- Cary Pichler, Innisfail, QLD
- Daniel Gabrysiak,
- Wallsend, NSW

PHANTOM BRAVE

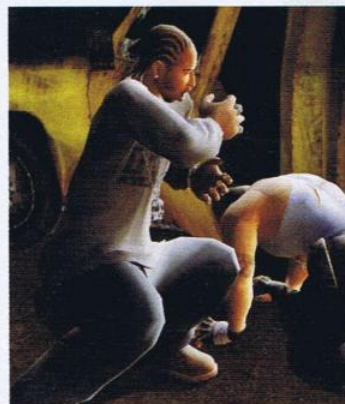
- Matt Van Zyderveld,
- Murarrie, QLD
- Sasha Liu, Glossodia, NSW
- Angie Ng, Heatherton, VIC
- Luke Green, Warwick, QLD
- John Lombard, West End, QLD
- Michael Kroon, West Footscray, VIC

SCARIER

DEF JAM DICKHEADS

Some people really are sick

A 47 year old Florida woman and a 14 year old male relative have been arrested for child neglect and aggravated child abuse respectively after the little dickhead thought it would be a good idea to test out some of the moves he'd seen in Def Jam: Fight for NY on a two year old boy he was minding. Apparently the 14 year old repeatedly threw the toddler to the floor, punched him in the face and beat him with a wooden stake taken from a political campaign sign in a neighbourhood yard. The woman, 47 was charged with child neglect as she did nothing for the toddler's injuries aside from treat them with ice and witch hazel for two days until the mother returned finding



[above] It's a game people!

her two year old son, bloody, covered in cuts and scratches and suffering from a bruised spleen and rushed him to hospital. Doubtlessly the game will take the brunt of the blame for the attack but as we've always said in Hyper — that kid was already cracked if he thought beating up a two year old kid was any kind of good idea, game or no.

CAPTION THIS!

PART 67

Come on, make us laugh. Just send your funny screen captions to us at captionthis@next.com.au with Caption This Part 67 in the subject line.



Even Kenny has a PSP... yet still no sign of an Oz launch

Bad Cop No Doughnut

DANIEL WILKS - THE WORLD'S MOST DANGEROUS DEPUTY EDITOR



Something has really hit me in the last month and it left me feeling a bit blue. Due to our feature

about freeware games I spent a good deal of time playing games downloaded free from the internet. This in itself isn't what made me blue. It's the fact that I had more fun playing games that cost nothing other than bandwidth than I did playing many of the games reviewed in the last few issues. In a month of playing free games I encountered more innovation, more clever gameplay hooks, more expansions on familiar themes and more downright fun than I did in the same amount of time playing so called A-list titles. The realisation of why I found the games so refreshing and fun hit me like a ton of something hard and made me feel not a little bit dirty. Forgive me for sounding like a communist* or hippy** when I say this but ultimately it looks as though money is to blame.

The freeware developers are, as their very name suggests, free to experiment with ideas, unafraid of the bottom line. To them the bottom line is nothing more than finding enough time (and maybe a few more people gullible enough to donate their time and skills to the project) to finish their game. There's no concern for going over budget by getting too creative, there's no fear of alienating a market by innovating rather than slapping a number after the title of a game. Not all freeware games are original and innovative of course - the vast majority are remakes of older games but even here freeware seems to trump commercial product. Instead of focusing on blinging up the game and adding some type of street element they just focus on the game. How it plays. If it's fun. It's all about fun.

*I own too much stuff to be a communist and if I ever met Che or Mao I'd punch them in the mouth.

**Bathe too often, never hugged a tree, think I have canine teeth for a reason. All in all I just don't like hippies.

FIRST LOOK SCREENS! BLAU!

Shadow the Hedgehog GCN/PS2/XBOX Developer: Sega Studio USA • The Hype: Mysterious, elusive and fast



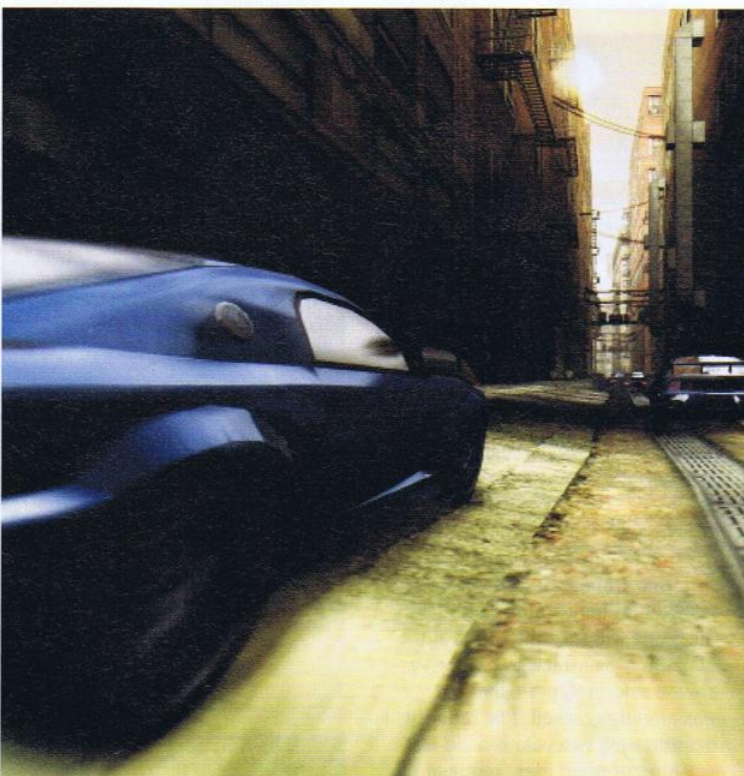
FIRST LOOK SCREENS! BLAU!

Prince of Persia 3 GCN/PC/PS2/XBOX Developer: Ubisoft Montreal • The Hype: Strange prince in a strange land



FIRST LOOK SCREENS! BLAU!

Burnout Revenge PS2/XBOX Developer: Criterion • The Hype: Unleash your frustrations on rush hour traffic!



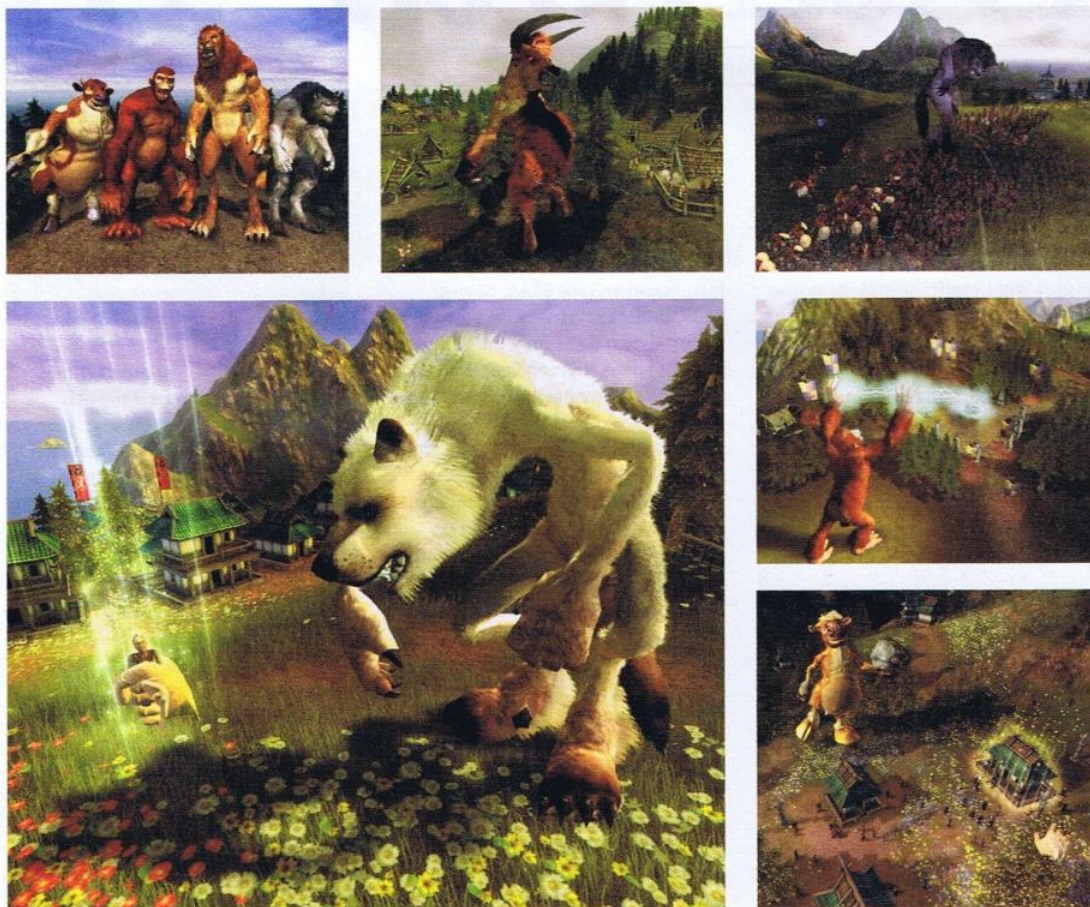
FIRST LOOK SCREENS! BLAU!

Tomb Raider: Legend PC/PS2/XBOX Developer: Crystal Dynamics • The Hype: Lara redesigned and back into the tombs



NEW SCREENS!

Black & White 2 PC Developer: Lionhead Studios • The Hype: "The greatest strategy game of all time"



OVERFLOW

Sega recently announced another partnership designed to strengthen their Western-developed game portfolio. This time it's Silicon Knights, the Canada-based team behind great games like *Eternal Darkness* and *Metal Gear Solid: Twin Snakes*. The worldwide exclusive deal sees Sega collaborating with Silicon Knights in the creation of a new franchise for next gen consoles. Could be huge.

Following on from the big 50 Cent: Bulletproof news, rap crew D12 are teaming up with Konami, lending their voices, likenesses and tracks (including one exclusive) to "Crime Life: Gang Wars".

Want a hit list of publishers who have pledged support for Xbox 2? Here it is: 2K Games, Activision, Atari, Bandai, Bethesda Softworks, Buena Vista, Capcom, Codemasters, Eidos, Electronic Arts, FromSoftware, InterServ, KOEI, Konami, LucasArts, Majesco, Midway, Namco, Phantagram, Rockstar, SCI, SEGA, Tecmo, THQ, TWP, Ubisoft, Vivendi and Webzen. And then there's Hironobu Sakaguchi (of *Final Fantasy* fame), Tetsuya Mizuguchi (*Lumines*) and Yoshiki Okamoto (*Streeties*) who are also committed. And let's not forget Microsoft Game Studios and their plethora of studios.

Ghost Recon 2 for PC has officially been terminated. Fear not though, for Ghost Recon 3 for PC is still being developed and should hit shelves later this year. So yes, the franchise on PC is going to skip a sequel...

In news that surprised no one, Midway's NARC has been refused classification by the OFLC. While NARC certainly wasn't looking like a great game, it's definitely time to get the push for an 18 certificate happening again.

Good old Sega. Presumably after seeing our "Best games you've never played" feature, and the love that Gunstar Heroes continues to received, they registered the title "Gunstar Super Heroes" with the US Patent Office. Huzzah!



WHAT WE'D LOVE TO SEE:
Hands-on play at E3!
Oh, and for the game to go back to being "Soul (SPACE) Calibur", not the silly "SoulCalibur" that we're forced to call it.

SoulCalibur III

Systems: **PS2** ■ Category: **Fighting game** ■ Players: **1-2** ■ Developer: **Namco** ■ Available: **Late 2005**

There's little doubt that for hardware manufacturers, having a Soul Blade or SoulCalibur game is a jewel in your system's crown. Every single title in the series to date has been successful critically and commercially, and has raised the benchmark in both graphics and gameplay for future titles to follow.

BRINGING THE LOVE
Unlike Soul Edge on PSone and Soul Calibur on Dreamcast, both of which were very much system showcases and technically ahead of anything else on the market, for SoulCalibur II Namco went multi-format, bringing the love to PS2, Xbox and GameCube. The game was exceptional on all three systems, further expanding

the rigorously playable and open-ended approach to gameplay that is the hallmark of the series, while introducing a unique special guest for each system.

The multi-format love couldn't last, however. Like GTA3, having SoulCalibur exclusively on your system (even if it's only for six months) pays dividends and it seems that Sony have done enough to woo Namco back to PS2. This is just speculation but we suspect that Sony are rallying some top games for release later this year (although don't hold your breath for an Oz 2005 release) just in case Microsoft really do launch Xbox 2 late 2005. Damn shame Microsoft didn't get in first for an Xbox 2 launch title, but with Sony's install base it makes economic sense for Namco to go with PS2. Besides which, developers are getting fantastic results from the PS2 hardware these days, and SoulCalibur III could be the ultimate fighting game showcase for the system.

That said, Namco know that the visual gains on PS2 for III when compared to the last title will be



[above] Insert off-colour ring joke

relatively minimal so are going all out to wow us with new moves, features and modes.

At the top of our "hells jeah" list is the Character Creation mode. As Namco Producer Hiroaki Yotoryiyama says: "I think we reached a certain pinnacle with the guest characters in SoulCalibur II. So we asked ourselves what we could do to improve the series further. The answer is to create your own character, the character only you've dreamed of". Damn straight. You'll be able to customise your character's looks, weapon and style of combat. How deep the customisation will be is not known at this stage. The only examples we've seen are swapping clothing and choosing between which brand of jaunty hat your character will



>> **STAGES OF HISTORY** Set towards the end of the 16th century, one of the stars of SoulCalibur III will once again be the environments. One stage is an ancient temple nestled amongst the clouds and precipitous peaks of a truly dark and menacing mountain. Another takes its cue from the classic Virtua Fighter 2 raft stage, with a platform floating down a river, moving past medieval castles perched amongst pockets of land. And then there's a stage set high up in a clock tower with giant cogs and light pouring through the clock face's stained glass windows. We can't wait to see what else Namco have up their sleeve.



AT THE TOP OF OUR "HELLS JEARH" LIST IS THE CHARACTER CREATION MODE

wear. We suspect that there'll be a number of body types and faces to choose from (as opposed to full body and face morphing) and you can go nuts from there. So yes, hopefully Daniel will be able to make his fighting pimp, and Cam will be able to make Vanilla Ice (complete with "Chicken Tonight" fighting style) just so the AI can kick the crap out of him.

There will also be three new Namco designed characters making an appearance. First up is Zaslamel, a mysterious hooded figure, dressed in somewhat medieval garb. He wields a Scythe, and wants nothing less than to raise the evil Soul Edge sword for himself. Then there's the spunky Tira, who's meant to be an angel of death but looks more like an over sexed court jester to us. Tira will be fast and graceful but it's her ring that's of most





interest to us. Erm, and by that we mean the metal Ring Blade that she wields - the possibilities for inventive and interesting attacks and defensive moves is huge. The outfit may be ridiculous but damn we love that render (pg 4). Thanks for the "assets" Namco.

Our favourite new character, however (who we like so much we just had to put her on the cover) is the gorgeous Setsuka. She may look innocent, but behind her colourful flowing clothes and umbrella lies a fierce fighter battling to avenge her master. With sword drawn from the base of her umbrella she'll have a potential weapon in both hands and once again the potential for combat with an umbrella and katana is droolworthy.

REAL-TIME SIMULATION?

There are some very cool modes to take these characters through too. The most interesting are probably



Lost Chronicle mode and World Competition mode. Lost Chronicle is a "hybrid combination of combat strategy simulation and fighting game elements" in which you battle as your "custom fighter in a real-time simulation". What that means we're not sure. It sounds, if not like a full-blown strategy game, at least like it will open up the traditional SoulCalibur gameplay a fair bit. World Competition mode is sadly not an online mode, but seems to bear much in common with Virtua

Fighter 4's system that emulates the arcade experience by pitting you against virtual contestants - all with different skill levels and different styles. Other modes of note include a deeper Story mode (now called "Tales of Souls"), Soul Arena, which, like previous games in the series, shakes things up by introducing special conditions and circumstances, and Museum mode which lets you check collectables and view the history of the series.

With jaw dropping graphics, more than 25 playable characters and a raft of game modes, SoulCalibur III has rocketed to the top of our most-wanted list for 2005. <<



PREDATOR

CONCRETE JUNGLE™

Claim your prize. Leave the rest for the coroner.

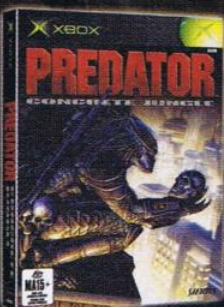
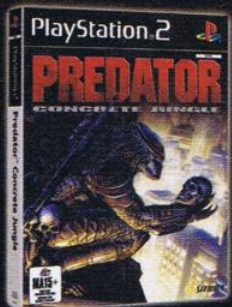


Use a full arsenal of superior Predator weaponry to annihilate your enemies



Roam city environments in search of your next prey

AVAILABLE 12TH MAY



PlayStation 2



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SUBSCRIBE AND PICK A DVD!

WHICH HONG KONG LEGENDS TITLE DO YOU WANT?

This month we're doing things a little differently here at Hyper. We're so stoked that a whole host of Hong Kong cinema classics are getting DVD releases in Australia that we've arranged for fifty lucky subscribers to get the Hong Kong Legends DVD of their choice! Just choose a title and write down your selection when you subscribe! Bear in mind R18+ rated titles will require proof of age.



THE BIG BOSS

SPECIAL COLLECTOR'S EDITION

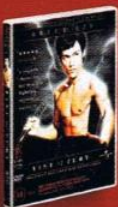
■ The Big Boss was instrumental in creating the timeless legend that is Bruce Lee. Starring as Cheng, a migrant worker who travels to Thailand in search of work, Lee breaks open a drug-trafficking ring with his fists of steel. In his quest for justice and revenge, he is an unstoppable force of nature, breaking down wave after wave of opponents with powerful hand combinations and lightning fast precision kicking.



EASTERN CONDORS

SPECIAL COLLECTOR'S EDITION

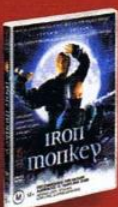
■ This powerful tribute to 'The Dirty Dozen' is one of the crowning achievements of the great Sammo Hung's career. Set in Vietnam, jungle meets kung fu in a series of brutal fight scenes as Sammo and a group of Asian Americans are sent to destroy a munitions cache the Americans left behind, a year after withdrawal. Featuring excellent cinematography, this is a must-own DVD for Hong Kong cinema fans. **Rated R18+**



FIST OF FURY

SPECIAL COLLECTOR'S EDITION

■ Now available totally uncut for the first time since 1986, *Fist Of Fury*: Special Collector's re-instates the incredible nunchaku battle sequences, so synonymous with the image of Bruce Lee. In what many enthusiasts consider to be 'the ultimate martial arts movie', Lee is a true force of nature as he battles against Japanese Imperialist forces determined to subjugate his people.



IRON MONKEY

2-DISC PLATINUM EDITION

■ This breathtaking epic combines incredible dynamic, high-flying fight-action and stunning cinematography with a classic story of courage, honour and sacrifice. Action superstars Donnie Yen and Yu Rong Kwong give immaculate performances as two legendary warriors who must put their lives on the line to defeat the barbaric excesses of a corrupt political regime and protect the lives of the people whose cause they champion.



MR VAMPIRE

SPECIAL COLLECTOR'S EDITION

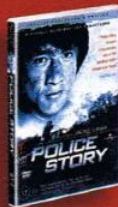
■ Inspired by Pu Songling's legendary collection of horror stories in *Liaozhai Zhiyi*, *Mr Vampire* is a multi-levelled action adventure combining the supernatural, elements of black comedy and award-winning action in one of the most successful Hong Kong pictures ever made. Starring Chin Siu-ho, Lam Ching-ying, Moon Lee & Pauline Wong, *Mr Vampire* continues to be one of the classics of the genre.



ONCE UPON A TIME IN CHINA

SPECIAL COLLECTOR'S EDITION

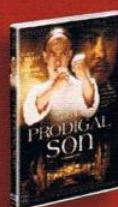
■ Directed by legendary veteran Tsui Hark and featuring the devastating physical talents of Jet Li, this cinematic jewel won every award imaginable and played at New York cinemas for 18 months continuously! *Once Upon A Time In China* recounts the adventures of legendary martial arts master Wong Fei Hung, as he battles ruthless imperialist forces determined to subjugate his country with a terrifying new weapon - the gun.



POLICE STORY

SPECIAL COLLECTOR'S EDITION

■ *Police Story* is regarded by fans and critics alike as the apex of Jackie Chan's celebrated career. Breaking new ground with its breathtaking fights and stunt sequences, and featuring a top-notch cast, which includes actresses Brigitte Lin and Maggie Cheung, director Chan combines a compelling storyline of an honest cop on the run from a false murder charge with dynamic visuals and full-blooded fight scenes. A true classic of Hong Kong cinema!



THE PRODIGAL SON

SPECIAL COLLECTOR'S EDITION

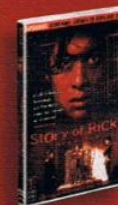
■ Groundbreaking choreography, super-slick editing, dazzling camerawork, and four of the world's most talented martial arts performers, Sammo Hung, Yuen Biao, Lam Ching-ying & Frankie Chan epitomise *The Prodigal Son*. This movie single-handedly invented the style and direction for the 'new-wave' classics that brought Asian Cinema to the attention of international audiences. **Rated R18+**



PROJECT A

2-DISC PLATINUM EDITION

■ Thwarted at every turn by the incompetent local police force, and betrayed by one of the men under his command, Jackie Chan dominates the screen as a turn-of-the-century marine, hot on the trail of a ruthless band of cutthroat pirates. The show-stopping clock-tower fall by Chan is just one of the incredible stunts *Project A* serves up. One of the action-genre's best-loved and most accomplished action-adventures.



STORY OF RICKY

A.K.A. RIKI-OH (COLLECTOR'S ED)

■ One of the most amazingly violent and gory movies ever to emerge from Hong Kong, *Story of Ricky* is based on the hyper-violent Japanese manga *Rikki-O* and is regarded as the most faithful live-action adaptation of manga source material to date. Featuring some of the most outrageously graphic and convincing 'splatter' effects in the history of cinema, *Story of Ricky* is 88 minutes of pure, unadulterated, blood-soaked fun. Consider yourself warned. **Rated R18+**



WAY OF THE DRAGON

2-DISC PLATINUM EDITION

■ *Way of the Dragon* is the only full-length feature film ever directed by Bruce Lee and a bonafide classic in its own right. Set in Rome, Lee plays the stranger in a strange land role to perfection, and the final showdown against Chuck Norris in particular is outstanding. Employing optimum bit-rate audio and video tracks to deliver the most awesome sound and vision possible, the classic *Way of the Dragon* has never looked or sounded better.



YOUNG MASTER

SPECIAL COLLECTOR'S EDITION

■ A fully uncut, first-time DVD release of Jackie Chan's amazing directorial debut. Filled with intricate, masterfully choreographed action sequences, clever sight-gags and fluid camerawork, this timeless classic which has been made in the mold of the classic "Drunken Master", is even today one of the top-grossing Jackie Chan films of all time!

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HYPER»»

HY0140

the last frontiers of console gaming

Developers and the Next Generation

» Erin Marcon



A duality exists within gamers. We bemoan the short life spans of modern consoles. We tell anyone who will listen that there is no need to upgrade so soon. Then we attend the midnight launch to ensure we're among the first to experience the next generation of tech.

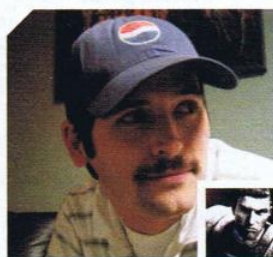
We don't have bottomless wallets. What convinces us to shell out \$500 or more for an unproven system? The reason is simple. We are seduced by the promise of a quantum leap in gaming. In the past, each generation has brought with it a major advance which has profoundly enhanced the interactive experience.

What innovations will the next generation have to offer? Graphics already border on the photorealistic. Environments are presented in 3D. Objects are manipulated by advanced physics programs. Online gaming is already upon us. What is left to improve? What are the last frontiers of console gaming and how can they be conquered?

In order to answer these and other questions, Hyper contacted some of the leading local and international development figures. Meet our panel of experts, a virtual roundtable if you will.



Kevin Burfitt is a technical producer with Atari Melbourne House. Over the past decade, Kevin has contributed to ten titles, including Deathkraz (PC) and Space Race (PS2 and Dreamcast). The studio achieved international success with the 2004 release of Transformers (PS2). A sequel is rumored.



John Chowanec is the producer of Project Snowblind (PS2, Xbox and PC), the popular FPS from Crystal Dynamics. He claims to have grown the moustache as part of a team-building exercise, but it seems more likely that it was a requirement of his multi-million dollar endorsement with Pepsi Co.



Janos Flösser is the managing director of Denmark's Io Interactive, a studio best known for producing the popular Hitman titles. In addition to the highly anticipated Hitman: Blood Money (PS2, Xbox and PC), Flösser hinted that Io had already commenced work on a top-secret action game.



Nick Hagger is the creative director of Melbourne's own Bluetongue. Nick has a wealth of experience in licensed gaming, having produced titles such as Jurassic Park: Operation Genesis (PS2, Xbox and PC) and Starship Troopers: Terran Ascendancy (PC). Blue Tongue has two secret projects in the works for late 2005.



After contributing to the success of N64 classics Goldeneye and Perfect Dark, **Karl Hilton** became a founding member of respected UK development studio Free Radical Design. He recently oversaw the art design of Future Perfect (PS2, Xbox and GCN), the latest critically acclaimed chapter in the TimeSplitters series.

The next generation of consoles all promise superior graphics. Will graphical improvement alone be enough to excite gamers? And if not, what do you think will be the key to creating compelling next generation content?



CHRIS SATCHELL

- Next-generation games will indeed see a leap in graphics fidelity, but more importantly they will usher in the high-definition era in video games, fuelled by consumer demand for experiences that are always connected, always personalized and always in high-definition.

High-definition era games represent a massive and ambitious leap from current generation console gaming. To deliver these experiences developers need the power of hardware, software and services. While graphics will be the first and most immediate thing to catch the gamers' eye, graphics alone won't be enough. Consumers are looking for more immersive, integrated experiences that tie killer graphics to new types of gameplay.



NICK HAGGER

- The leap forward in graphic power of the next-generation consoles will open up new potential for more immersive and detailed worlds [and] more visually arresting game experiences.



JANOS FLÖSSER

- People do not buy technologies, they buy entertainment. We need to renew genres, maybe even introduce some new ones.



BRAD WELCH - I hope graphics isn't all that's left to excite gamers! The

next gen puts a lot of horsepower in developer's hands that can be used for better AI, more complex and dense worlds, more and better use of physics simulations and more detailed and expressive characters.



KARL HILTON

- The jump in quality of graphics is largely going to be taken for granted. However, the jump in processing power, if used properly, will have a major impact on gameplay. I think an area that would particularly benefit from this is A.I. I would like to see the characters you interact with in games being much more convincing on an emotional level. Seeing a group of people react as a both an individual and as part of a group to the situations they find themselves in.



STEVE STAMATIADIS

- Gamers will only get wowed by improved graphics for about 10 minutes if they aren't backed up with a fun game. So obviously the trick will be to use that upgraded graphics power to compliment the gameplay... At the end of the day, regardless of which generation we're in, build it fun and they will come!



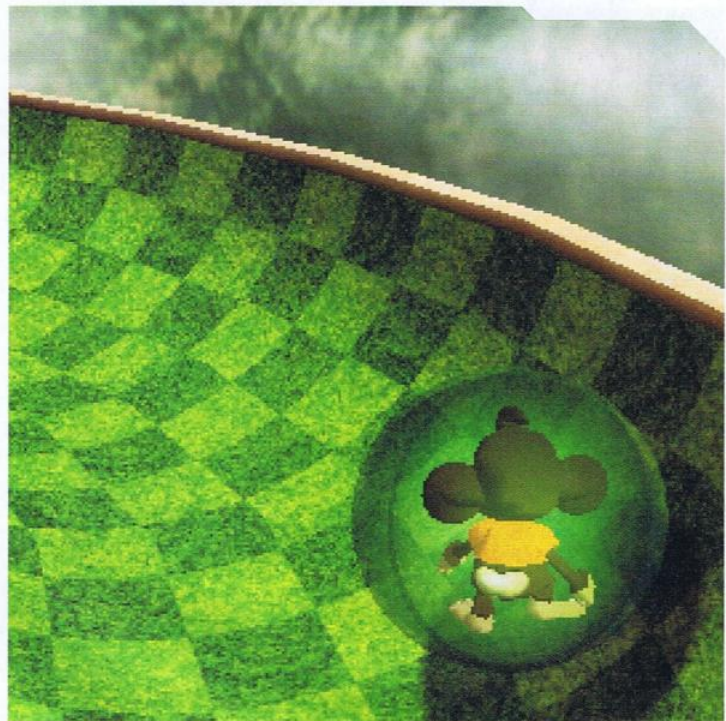
JEREMY STRAUZER

- I think initially graphical enhancements will get people's attention but to keep that attention and have people want to buy the game, it still needs to have compelling gameplay and design. I don't think this will ever change in game development.



CHRIS SATCHELL

- One next generation feature we think gamers will be especially excited about is the Xbox Guide. Consistent across all our next-generation titles, the guide is an entertainment gateway that



[SUPER MONKEY BALL SCREENSHOT]
More monkeys in balls can only be a good thing for the future of gaming...

instantly connects players to their friends, games, music and movies. Through the guide, gamers will be able to customize playlists and soundtracks for their games, share and compare game stats and gamer information with the community through the Gamer Profile and, access downloadable content from the Xbox Live Marketplace to purchase things like new weapons, levels and characters using a micro transaction system.

HIGH-DEFINITION ERA GAMES REPRESENT A MASSIVE AND AMBITIOUS LEAP...



Chris Satchell, a self-confessed geek and former bartender, has been writing games since the age of nine. As director of engineering for Microsoft Game Studios, he contributed to titles such as Fable, Project Gotham Racing 2 and Forza Motorsport. He was recently appointed general manager of Microsoft's XNA Studio.



Steve Stamatiadis is the creative director and co-founder of Brisbane's Krome Studios. He is best known as the creator of TY the Tasmanian Tiger. Steve recently turned his attention to the development of a third TY adventure and also revealed the existence of an as yet unannounced title for next-gen consoles.



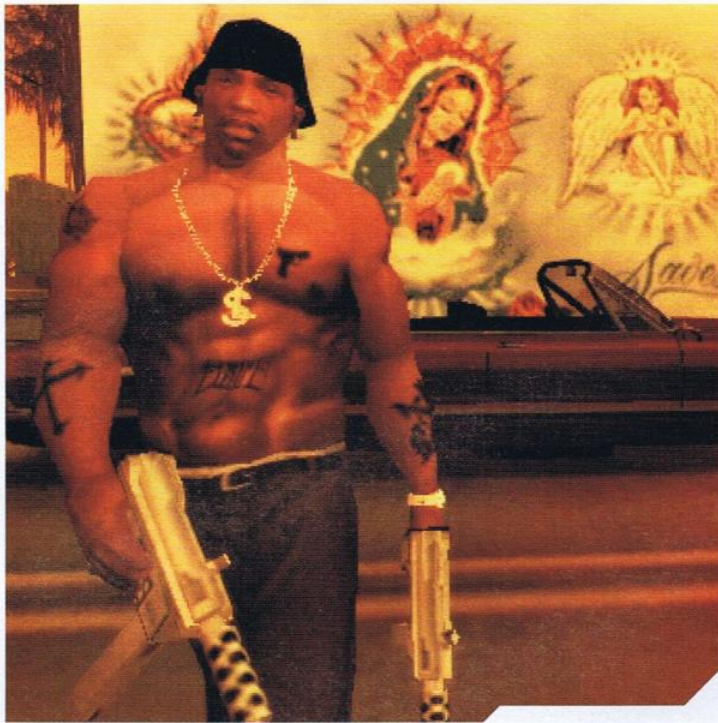
Sports game specialist **Jeremy Strauser** is a senior producer with EA, the world's largest games publisher. His games have appeared on numerous platforms, including PS2, Xbox, GCN, PSone, Saturn, SNES and Megadrive. He is currently working on the latest iteration of the blockbuster Madden NFL series.



Alex Ward is the creative director of Criterion Games, an EA subsidiary. The runaway success of Burnout (PS2, Xbox and GCN) and its sequels has catapulted Alex to the forefront of the industry. He is using his newfound clout to push the development of 'Black,' Criterion's forthcoming FPS.



Brad Welch is the director of Destroy All Humans (PS2 and Xbox), a high profile release from Pandemic Studios in Brisbane. Brad provided us with several photographs of himself for use in this article. The others were deemed to be 'unsuitable' for print in a family publication.



[GTA SAN ANDREAS SCREENSHOT] San Andreas let wiggers all over the world live out their gang banging fantasies...



[SINGSTAR ART] Get Singstar and you too could be cel shaded... and preppy



Considering the technical advances of the past 10-15 years (the move to true 3D, online gaming etc), what challenges remain for the next generation of systems?

JANOS FLÖSSER - More complex AI, flocking, bio-mechanics, camera systems, fuzzy logics, genetic code, stronger narrative; my list will go on forever...

NICK HAGGER - The challenge is to keep pushing the graphical fidelity of our games so that we can move beyond the limitations of 'uncanny valley'. As rendering technology gets better, game experiences will become even more compelling, allowing gamers to enter the photo-real realities from the comfort of their living rooms.

KARL HILTON - The depiction of the real world in games is still a very very simplified model. The level of complexity which could be modelled can be increased enormously to create more realistic and involving environments in which to set games. Consistency in a game world is still a big challenge.

KEVIN BURFITT - Physics is starting to be used more and more in games, but it is still in its infancy. AI is still a long way from where we dream it could get to, and that's something that may take several more generations of consoles before it really starts to shine.

STEVE STAMATIADIS - The biggest challenge will be finding ways to better

integrate the player into the gaming experience. Once that is figured out the biggest problem will be making people stop playing.

ALEX WARD - To me, accessibility is a major challenge for the industry to address. Being honest, many games are just far too hard and this prevents them from being enjoyed by a wide audience.

CHRIS SATCHELL - The real challenge of the next generation is dealing with the complexity and scale of building these incredible games. This means that development teams are facing soaring development costs, a larger and more specialized staff, exploding content requirements and more outsourcing. The next generation of gaming systems will deliver all the technical weapons developers need, the challenge is how to use their arsenal effectively. Managing the game production process and team collaboration becomes critical to success. To help address this challenge, we are introducing XNA Studio, an integrated team-based development environment tailored for game production. Thought of as the visual studio for game development, XNA Studio will streamline the production process to give developers more time to focus on the new features customers crave.

JOHN CHOWANEC - Authoring tools have already proven to be incredibly important on this

What titles from the current generation of consoles do you believe most exemplify the direction that gaming will take in the future?

NICK HAGGER - The GTA series is a landmark because the gameplay is so freeform, the world design is so internally consistent. Simple concepts often provide the best experiences, games like Katamari Damacy and Super Monkey Ball are both addictive and innovative in their design.

BRAD WELCH - There's been open games before, but GTA3 was really the first one to pull off a large 3D environment filled with a wide variety of fun things to do and a lot to discover.

KEVIN BURFITT - I'm not sure yet whether GTA type games are the 'next big thing,' or if they've already been and gone. First person shooters are still popular and will continue to be so, and sports games will always have their corner of the market.

JEREMY STRAUER - Personally, I think sports games will always be the genre to innovate and push the

THE DEPICTION OF THE REAL WORLD IN GAMES IS STILL A VERY SIMPLIFIED MODEL

generation of systems. I see no reason for that trend not to continue. Here at Crystal Dynamics we strongly believe that great games are built with great tools. We have definitely spent a great deal of time supporting our tools so that the designers and artists have as much interaction time as possible. Moving forward, we're focusing a great deal of energy on our tools for the next generation of systems.

KARL HILTON - Online gaming is still in its infancy. There [will] continue to be new developments as people discover new things to do with on-line functionality aside from 'just' death-matching.

envelope on the delivery of a real physical world.

NICK HAGGER - Peripherals are a big influence as well. Cameras, headsets and voice chat make games much more up-close and personal.

STEVE STAMATIADIS - Games like EyeToy Play and Sing Star show a glimpse of what is possible outside the realm of standard gaming. Expect to see a lot more of the fringe stuff pop up as well. Stuff like the Dance Dance Revolution games, Taiko: Drum Master, Katamari Damacy and The Sims, even MMPORGS (when the hardware can handle them better).

What do you see as being the greatest game design limitations placed on developers at the moment?



JANOS FLÖSSER - Time and money I guess. Our industry is a highly intelligent and talented one. We can work around all the problems and ideas, but we have to make money at some point.



KEVIN BURFITT - Spiralling development costs are probably the biggest limitation - in the near future most game design ideas will be technically feasible but not all of them will be economically viable.



KARL HILTON - The conservatism of a lot of the game buyers out there. It is getting very hard to launch new ideas and new franchises. Nearly all of the big selling games now are licensed products from films, comics or sports. Why should a publisher invest money in a potentially risky new product when they can make easy money producing average quality film and sport tie-ins which they know will sell in sufficient numbers? For the future I would like to see games developers, buyers and publishers looking for new, original, thought provoking content.



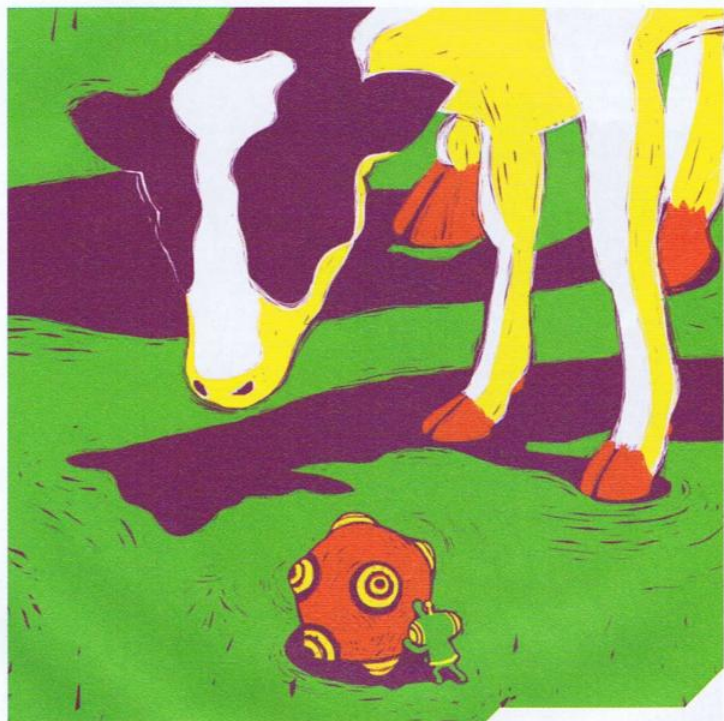
ALEX WARD - I think the greatest limitation is often having to acknowledge what has come before. This is particularly true in online games, particularly the FPS genre. There are too many unwritten rules and informal conventions that have stayed in place too long and not been challenged. The sooner the industry begins to tread a new path and forget about what has come before the better.



JOHN CHOWANEC - The biggest limitation (in my mind anyway) on console developers at the moment is system memory... Each console has a limited amount of memory that we can fill with our visuals, gameplay, etc. It's always a challenge, albeit a fun one, to maximize each console as much as possible, and generally that has us pushing the limits in terms of system memory, processor usage, etc.



CHRIS SATCHELL - Developers today are looking to create worlds that are bigger and more realistic than ever before, which means the amount of content that needs to be created is going up dramatically. In order for developers to realize their vision for more immersive experiences, they will need software



[KATAMARI DAMACY ART] Now if there was a monkey in that ball, Katamari would have been even better

that will bring consistency to the content creation process.

The difference with the next generation is that technology is not limiting the design any more, the practicalities of creating a huge piece of entertainment is. ...By delivering reliable, controllable and reusable methods for managing and building content in synchronization with the game code, XNA Studio will free time developers used to spend fighting with their build processes to be spent adding new content to their games.

NICK HAGGER - Development time is one of the greatest constraints on game developers. Game designs are necessarily limited in scope by the development schedule. Longer development cycles coupled with mature technology will lead to better products.

THE SOONER THE INDUSTRY BEGINS TO TREAD A NEW PATH... THE BETTER

How would you like to see gaming mature in the future?



JOHN CHOWANEC - I think the development community owes it to itself to take its commitment to entertainment seriously. We have a responsibility to ourselves to ensure that we're doing as much as we can to build a viable art form.



BRAD WELCH - I think some sort of outlet for indie developers would be great

[EYETOY PIC] Sony have been monitoring you ever since this baby came out





[SHADOW OF THE COLOSSUS SCREENSHOT] What's it all about? We're still wanda-ing... (sorry, long day)

for the industry. The success of games in the US like Katamari Damacy show that original ideas can flourish.



JANOS FLÖSSER

- Personally I would like to focus on strong, compelling social worlds, more complex characters and relations between them, stronger and more varied narrative drive, lighting and staging, music and sound design, but first of all going more emotional. As a human being, my main focus will always be other human beings. Reflect intelligent, emotional human behaviour, regardless of the genre.



JOHN CHOWANEC

- I firmly believe that videogames are one of the greatest emerging forms of entertainment, and like movies, radio, and television before us, we can take what we do as a form of fun and turn it into an art.

Do you see any of the new consoles bringing with them a significant shift in the way we play videogames?



ALEX WARD - I'd love to say yes, but I've been playing the same way since 1982. It's the same shared, fun experience to me. Sorry if I disappoint anyone there! The real shift will be in who plays, and the number of people that enter the gaming world as the interactive entertainment experience continues to speak to a broader audience.



KEVIN BURFITT - I don't think so, at least not for the hardcore gamers who already have online connections on their console. The big difference will probably be with the average family beginning to play console games within a larger community online.



KARL HILTON - I think with the growth of the online component of games, gaming is becoming a more social and group thing and I hope that will continue to expand. Personally, I have always enjoyed the social element of a really good multi-player game from death-matching in TimeSplitters to Bomberman on the old SNES. I think there is a lot more that can be done in game design to expand those types of experiences.



BRAD WELCH - I don't think more horsepower will change things that much. New takes on controllers and input devices (things like EyeToy) could certainly make a big difference. With the increasing broadband take-up in Australia, online will probably expand further and perhaps console developers will find some new directions to take that in.



NICK HAGGER - It may be that the new home consoles will offer more non-gaming applications to make the platforms fit more comfortably into a family living room, make them part of a 'digital lifestyle.' Chat and karaoke, as well as more PC style applications extend the functionality of gaming platforms. Sony and Microsoft have already mooted these features. However, it seems unlikely that Nintendo will shift from their long held position that non-game functions 'dilute the gaming experience.'



What do you see as the strengths and weaknesses of the next generation of systems from Nintendo, Sony and Microsoft?



NICK HAGGER - It's really too early to say, but one thing is for sure, the battle to own your living room will be fought on much more even footing. I think a lot of it will come down to who's got the games - and that means who's got access to the best developers. The market leader will be the one who gets the best development teams to create trail-blazing content for their consoles.



BRAD WELCH - Platform comparison really comes down to the quality of the games on each one. All three current platforms have great games. I'm sure that will continue.



WE CAN TAKE WHAT WE DO AS A FORM OF FUN AND TURN IT INTO ART



We would like to thank everyone for participating in this discussion.

Over the past twenty years, every generation of consoles has provided us with an irresistible impetus to upgrade. The SNES gave us 256 colours onscreen. The PSone gave us our first substantial taste of 3D graphics and the Xbox became the first console to lure gamers online in significant numbers.

What will be the impetus this time? Certainly we can anticipate improved graphics at a superior resolution. At present, high-definition is only available on a handful of titles, and only in certain territories. Microsoft is the first of the big three to announce high definition as standard for their next generation console.

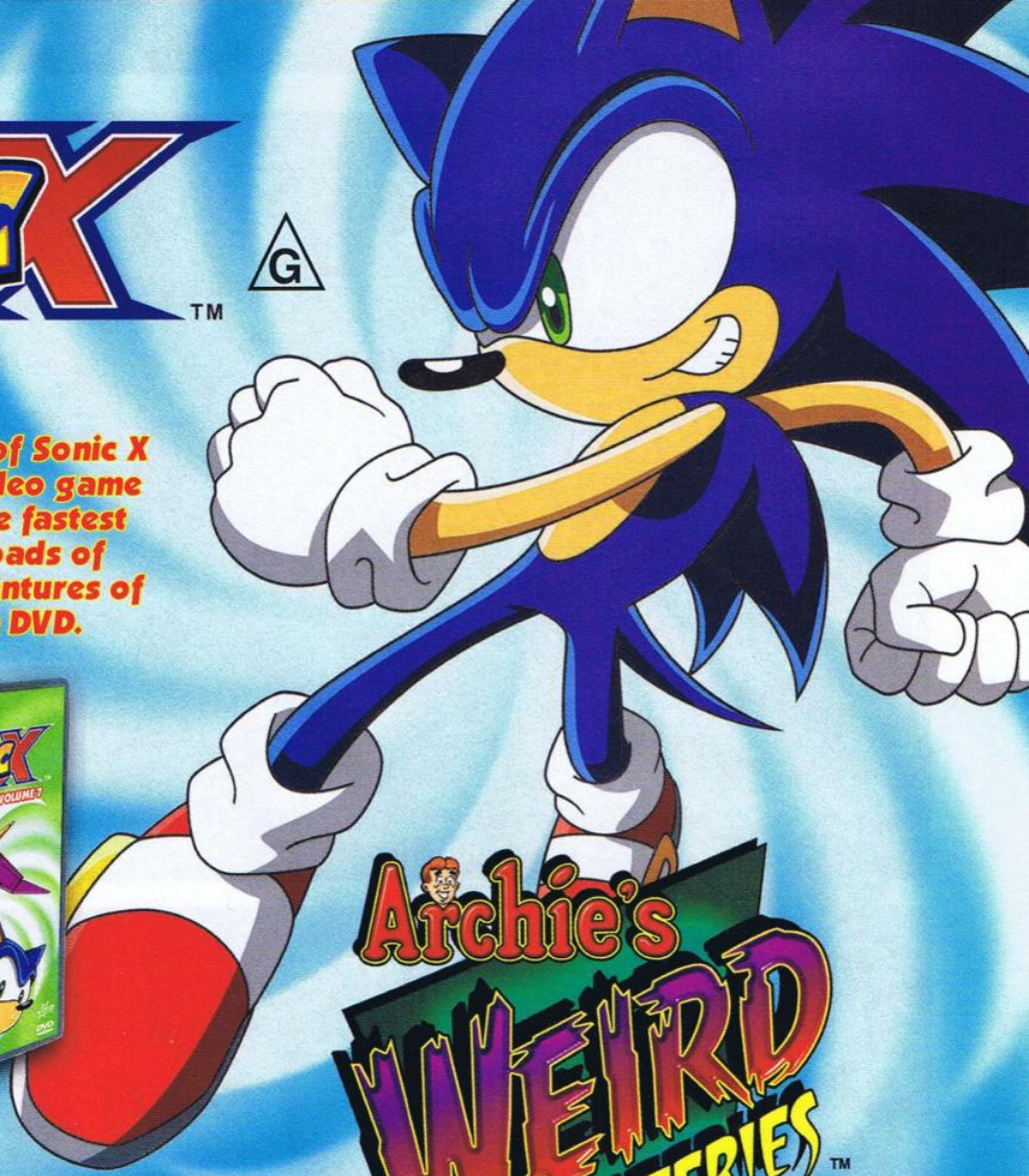
Unusual input devices, such as motion sensors and touch-sensitive pads, will become more prevalent. Online gaming will be more flexible and accessible. A.I. routines will become more diverse and unpredictable. Gamers will interact with truly immersive physical and social structures.

Without question, the next generation will represent a logical refinement of existing innovations. Will it be more than that? Will it lure us from our warm beds to attend a chilly midnight launch? Time will tell. <<

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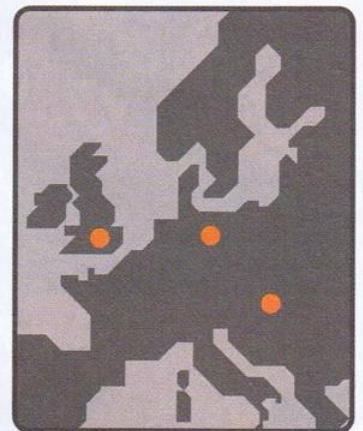


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hyper's European Vacation



HYPER REPORTER, **MAURICE BRANSCOMBE**, SPENDS TWO WEEKS IN EUROPE BEING KIDNAPPED IN LONDON, WATCHING GERMAN "MOVIES" IN BERLIN AND CRAWLING THROUGH HUNGARIAN DUNGEONS IN BUDAPEST. OH, AND HE SAW A COUPLE OF GAMES TOO...

WESTERN SCUM IN LONDON
Europe is a long way away. It may seem obvious to you, but for a guy who firstly hasn't travelled overseas for the better part of a decade, and secondly thinks that the hour or so train trip it takes me to get into Redfern every so often is the absolute limit of my travelling endurance, this was something I had to learn the hard way. So it was that after more than twenty-two hours of cramped economy class travel, and innumerable back and neck spasms later, we finally arrived at our destination; London, England. A small group of fellow Australian games journalists had agreed to take the two week tour of England, Germany and Hungary, including myself, Eliot Fish, with whom I'm sure you're all familiar, and Frank Riccard, whom I'll have you know chose that pseudonym himself.

Our first responsibility upon arriving on English soil was to check out Pivotal Games' latest tactical shooter, Conflict Global Terror, at an event bustling with European press. Everything seemed to be

going well, that was until lunchtime, when groups of suspicious-looking waiters started filling the showroom. We had picked them out as soon as they showed up. For starters their uniforms were different from the waiters that had been serving us mere minutes before, and secondly they didn't so much look like they waited tables for a living as much as they looked like hardened baby killers. Sure enough all hell broke loose, with the faux-waiters smashing our dinners onto the floor, pushing us off our chairs, laying us face-down on the ground, taking off our shoes, and stealing a few wallets, all while shouting obscenities at us ("western scum" was a favourite, among other

unprintables), and shooting their pistols into the air.

After a few minutes of this our kidnapers took us on a ride to an abandoned building, blindfolded us and forced us into an underground cellar where we were eventually rescued by some Special Forces types, who were only slightly less offensive than the kidnapers themselves. It was all a set up of course, a fun little exercise organised by Pivotal Games in order to give us a taste of what it's like to be a hostage in a terrorist situation. It had worked. So much so that at least one of the European press had refused to go back into the cellar. The rest of us may not have wanted to go back in either if





London's hottest boy band, "The Sex Romps"

it had not been for the promise of getting to squeeze off a few rounds of ammunition from a selection of the terrorist's rifles and pistols. After a few cheesy photo ops with the weaponry, both terrorists and victims retired for Moroccan food and to drink away the memories of the day's events.

PAAANCH THE CAAABBIE

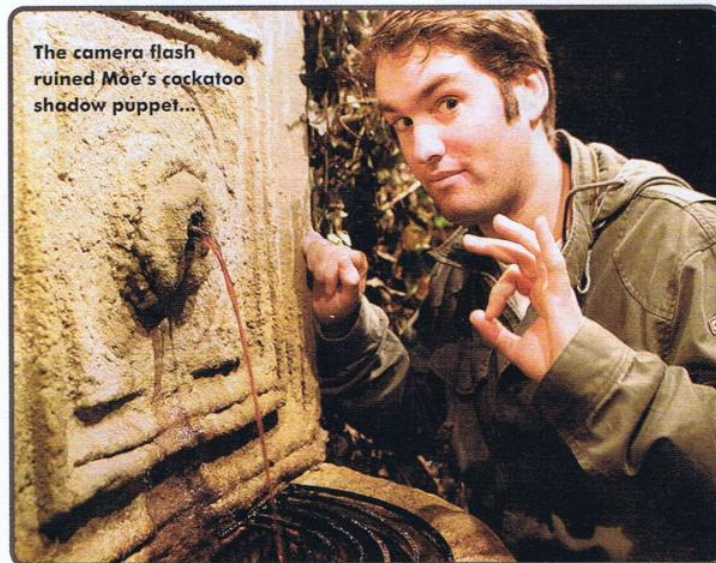
Despite the fact that we had been told repeatedly never to get into anything other than an official London black cab, for fear of being swindled, abducted or otherwise defiled, we were drunk, so what the hell. On the way home from the Moroccan restaurant we got into the seediest looking grey sedan we could find and asked slurishly to be taken to our hotel in Kensington. Needless to say the cab driver smelled the lucrative stench of booze-addled foreign journos on a bender and decided to take us the scenic route, Kensington via Heathrow, to the tune of twenty-five pounds for what should have been a five-pound trip. By the end of the ride swear words had been said and Eliot was positively polishing his knuckles in preparation to deliver a devastating dragon punch to the face of the so-called cabbie when

»» The cab driver smelled the lucrative stench of booze-addled foreign journos on a bender...

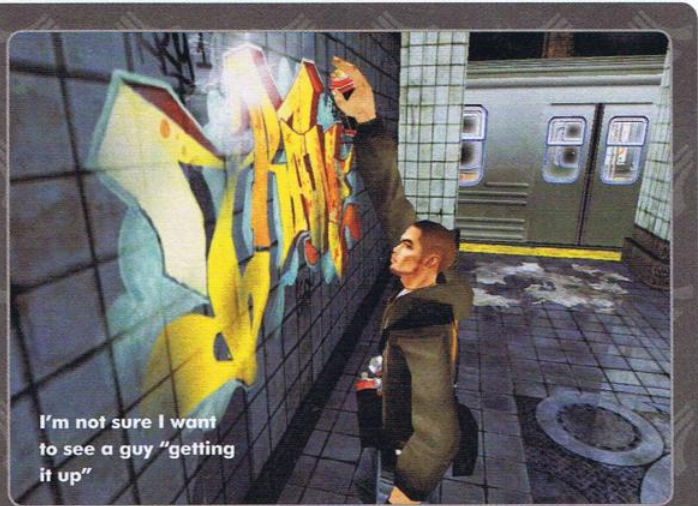
the driver finally relented and took a ten-pound pay cut. Wanker.

The day after our hostage situation was supposed to be one of the most important events of the trip, a one-on-one interview with Metal Gear Solid creator Hideo Kojima over a MGS3 themed lunch menu consisting of snake, crocodile and other exotic wildlife. In a moment of unfathomable irrationality however, Konami decided that they really didn't want Australian coverage of the event, no matter how far we had travelled to be there, and promptly revoked our invitations mere hours before we were due to attend.

Disappointed, we consoled ourselves by spending the next couple of days seeing the sights of



The camera flash ruined Moe's cockatoo shadow puppet...



I'm not sure I want to see a guy "getting it up"

GETTING UP: CONTENTS UNDER PRESSURE

The brainchild of clothing tycoon Marc Ecko, Getting Up looks to have all the graffiti spraying action of the Jet Set Radio games, but with the controls and acrobatics of a recent Prince of Persia game. The emphasis of the gameplay will be on the graffiti artist's motto of getting in, getting up, and getting out, which of course means plenty of breaking and entering, vandalising, and then

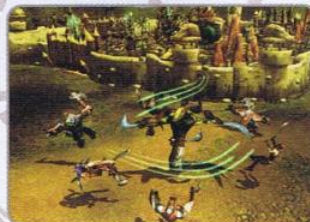


avoiding arrest - all the ingredients of a good night out. As a bonus we were also given a sweet Marc Ecko designed shirt that was exclusive to attendees of the Go Play event. It's just a pity that they only had the shirts in sizes to fit American games journalists: XXXXXL.

Platform: PC, PS2, Xbox Category: Action Adv. Developer: The Collective

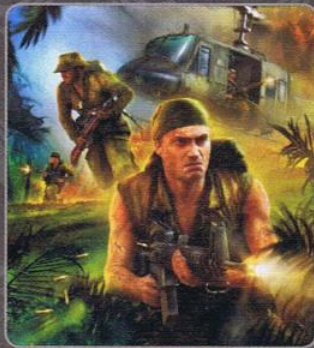
DRAGONSHARD

One of the strongest titles at Atari's Go Play event was Dragonshard, the first attempt at bringing the Dungeons and Dragons universe to the real-time strategy genre. Dragonshard combines both strategy and role-playing elements into what looks to be a unique gaming



experience. Above ground you'll command an army and construct your battlements, but venturing underground turns the game into a dungeon-crawling RPG. Any of the gold and magical items you recover whilst underground can be used to strengthen your above ground forces, and what's more both planes of gameplay occur simultaneously and can be switched on the fly at any time during play.

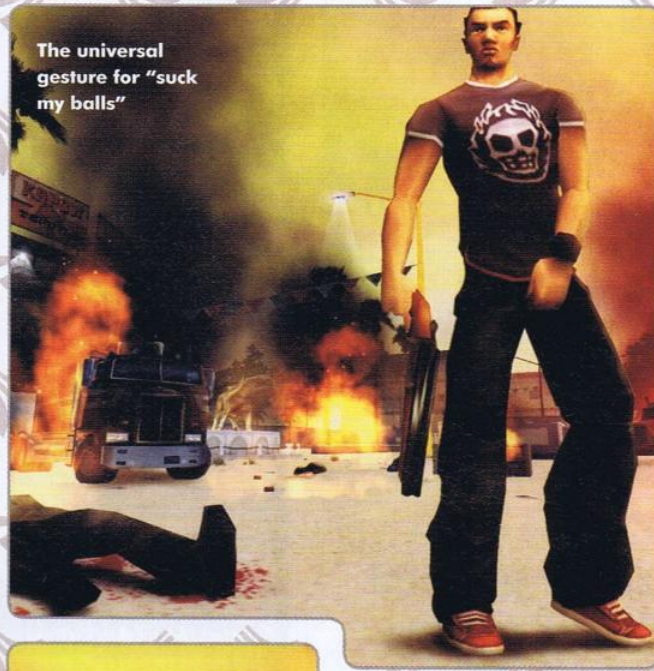
Platform: PC / Category: RTS / Developer: Liquid Entertainment



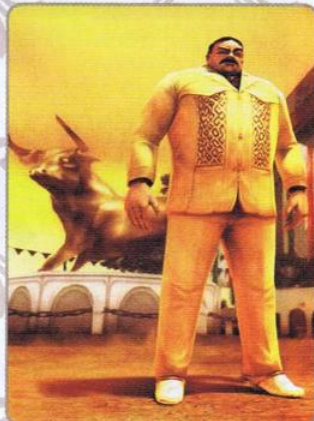
CONFLICT GLOBAL TERROR

■ Unlike other games in the conflict series this time the war is not set in a historic period but instead has a contemporary setting, where fictional Neo Nazi Terrorists threaten our peaceful way of life. Seeing the return of the original characters from Conflict Desert Storm I and II, the latest in the series looks to deliver a nicely updated take on the formula the first three conflict games established. Graphically the game is easily superior to the previous games, but Pivotal were particularly impressed with the amount of detail they managed to shoehorn into the PS2 version of the game, especially the high-resolution textures.

Platform: PC, PS2, Xbox
 Category: Tactical Shooter
 Developer: Pivotal Games

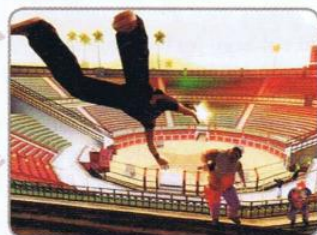
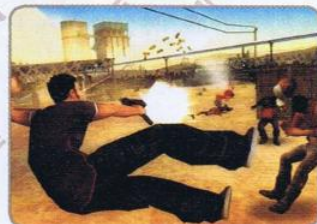


The universal gesture for "suck my balls"



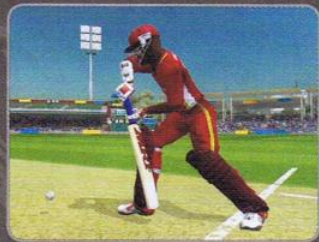
TOTAL OVERDOSE

■ Total Overdose was one of the surprises of the trip, as we didn't quite know what to expect. With such a generic action game title we thought we were in for a cookie-cutter third-person shooter, but pleasingly enough it turned out to be anything but. The game is heavily inspired by Robert Rodriguez's El Mariachi series of films, although the



humour has been turned up to ten. Some of the special moves alone are laugh out loud funny, like the Mexican pro wrestler that comes to your rescue at the touch of a button, body slamming your foes into the dirt. As well as laughs, the game looks to have some solid shooting action with time manipulation thrown in just for the hell of it.

Platform: PC, PS2, Xbox / Category: Shooter / Developer: Deadline Games



RICKY PONTING INTERNATIONAL CRICKET

■ Even in its pre-beta stage Ricky Ponting International Cricket is already infinitely more playable and better looking than any of its competition (not hard - Ed). Codemasters have promised us the most balanced cricketing experience available, and have assured us that every part of the game will be fun, including the bowling and fielding, and not just the batting. They even referred to their game as being to cricket what the Pro Evolution series is to soccer, and from what we've seen so far we've no reason to doubt them.



Platform: PC, PS2, Xbox / Category: Sports / Developer: Codemasters

London. Of course, London weather is likely some of the worst I have ever experienced, and the city is also so expensive (and our exchange rate so bad) that you may very well have to mortgage your possessions to be able to afford anything that costs over a pound. Regardless, seeing London quickly became the highlight of our trip. We of course visited the typical tourist attractions such as the Tower of London and Madame Tussauds among other places of interest.

Just as we were beginning to memorise the tube routes however, it was time for us to leave. We had a date with Codemasters at their headquarters in the charming town of Leamington Spa, about three hours train from London. For a company that makes a living in the technology business, their centre of operations was surprisingly lush, surrounded by green English countryside instead of grey concrete high-rises. It seemed like the country life was doing them some good too, since we were thoroughly impressed with each of the games they had to show us, including the likes of V8 Supercars 3 and Ricky Ponting International Cricket. Nice blokes too.

GO PLAY IN GERMANY

To say the flight from London to Germany was uncomfortable would be needlessly diplomatic. The truth of the matter was that I had been seated next to a man who could have only ever ordered his plane tickets over the phone, for if he had attempted to order them in person, if indeed his gargantuan bulk could fit through the travel agent's doorway, he would surely have been forced to book the entire economy class section as well as half of business class just to accommodate his incomparable girth. Seeing as he had succeeded in paying for just one seat however, I was now sandwiched between the human-sized Frank Riccard to my left, with this half-man, half-manatee combination to my right. It may not have been quite as uncomfortable if



[above] Making games in the Codies Spa



[up] Dave Perry refused to mannerism

each of my strained breaths didn't fill my nostrils with the odour of the aforementioned colossus's armpit, which nuzzled the side of my face, and which he had attempted to camouflage with an entirely ineffective, if not equally offensive deodorant.

Once we eventually reached Berlin however, the ordeal all seemed worth it. Germany, you see, has the greatest television known to man. It is the kind of country where even a mild mannered sports channel, which during the day broadcasts soccer coverage and bizarre "spot the difference" gameshows, can in the evening turn into a nightlong all-girl, see-everything nude spectacular. Like I said, Best. Television. Ever. We didn't have too much time to indulge in Germany's other sights however, as we would spend the entire two-day visit inside Atari's "Go Play" event where they showed us some of their most promising new games for this year and beyond. Interestingly enough almost all but a few of them were completely new properties, as opposed to being sequels, and apart from the show's inordinately long lunch breaks where we were subjected to some of the most abhorrent meals of the trip, if not our lives, we were for the most part pleasantly surprised with the results. The moment of the show accompanied by the most fanfare undoubtedly occurred on the second day of the show, when Dave Perry unveiled his latest Matrix tie-in, The Path of Neo. We were led into an old-fashioned movie house where Perry stood beneath a cinema screen running with the falling green digits that are synonymous with the Matrix films, and were promptly shown an early version of the game's trailer and gameplay footage that we were told was originally only planned to be shown at this year's E3. When the final presentation of the show was over and we had absorbed our last German television we packed

»» Even a mild mannered sports channel can turn into a nude spectacular



WORMS 4: MAYHEM

Getting some hands on time with Worms 4's single and multiplayer modes was somewhat of a relief. We had all feared that after the likes of Worms 3D and Worms Forts that one of our favourite strategy series mightn't ever be quite the same. New features this time around include customisable worms and weapons, but the most promising aspect of Worms 4 is that many of the complaints from previous games have been addressed, something that will hopefully make this latest game the closest yet to that original 2D Worms formula.

Platform: PC, PS2, Xbox
Category: Strategy
Developer: Team 17



Crashing and burning... just like my car captions



V8 SUPERCARS 3

Although the code of V8 Supercars 3 that we got to play was extremely early and much of the graphics and textures had not yet been put into place, the underlying game was very playable indeed. The handling has been significantly tweaked to near perfection, and is realistic enough to satisfy simulation nuts, but fast enough for the rest of us to enjoy it too. We were also

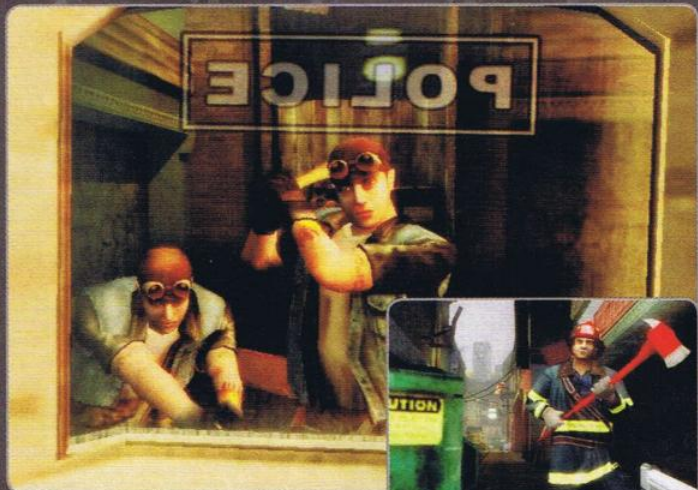
promised 30 different types of racing (as opposed to 15 in the previous game) but Codemasters were extremely tight-lipped as to what new vehicle classes and tracks would be included. They did however let one slip, Go-Karts will be a new class in V8 Supercars 3!

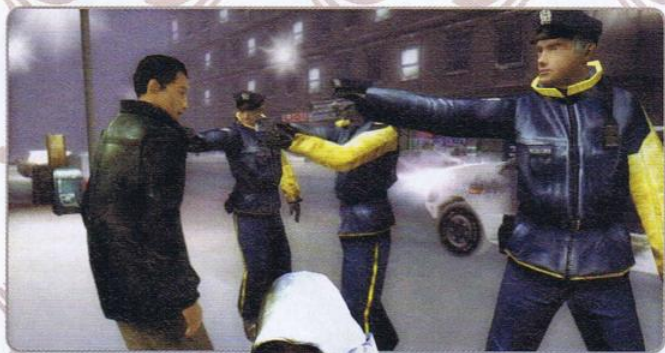
Platform: PC, PS2, Xbox / Category: Racing / Developer: Codemasters

ROLL CALL (Working title)

Roll Call is the story of a year in the life of a Special Forces officer at the head of a zero tolerance operation. The game includes a number of interesting ideas, primarily that your character has control over the city's emergency services including police, fire department and paramedics, and can utilise them to accomplish tasks to which they are best suited, i.e. law keeping, fire control and healing. Presently the game is console only, but it was hinted at that there might be a PC version in the works also.

Platform: PS2, Xbox / Category: FPS / Developer: Rocksteady Studios





FAHRENHEIT

■ Fahrenheit is a cinematic adventure game where supernatural occurrences and bizarre murders abound, all set against the backdrop of the coldest New York City winter of all time. You play the role of several different characters throughout the adventure, on both sides of the law; a murderer, and the police detectives trying to track him down. The game's main calling

card though is its twisting, multi-path storyline that changes with every decision that you make. There are several different ways to approach any given obstacle, and the storyline naturally adapts to each of your decisions, leading you to a unique conclusion. As long as the game gets the balance between cinema and adventure correct, Fahrenheit will be one to watch.



Platform: PC, PS2, Xbox / Category: Adventure / Developer: Quantic Dream



ENEMY IN SIGHT (Working title)

■ The tentatively titled Enemy in Sight is the latest project from the team behind Vietcong, and the Hidden and Dangerous series. This war simulator promises both an engaging single player campaign and squad-based multiplayer, with numerous types



of weaponry and more than 25 controllable vehicles. The game's environments, which have been modelled using parts of Germany and England as references, will be completely deformable with every building in the game able to be destroyed, every tree uprooted, and the landscape distorted by bomb blasts and bullet hits, among other forces.

Platform: PC / Category: FPS / Developer: Illusion Softworks



Cor, that's a red hot chopper

BOILING POINT: ROAD TO HELL

■ Another promising title. Boiling Point is a free-roaming game that could most easily be described as a first person shooter Grand Theft Auto set amongst 625 square kilometres of South American jungle. Strangely enough the



game stars Arnold Vosloo as the main character, complete with his face scanned onto the player model. You may remember him for his role as "the mummy" in the films of the same name.

Platform: PC / Category: FPS / Developer: Deep Shadows

our bags, stopping only briefly to visit Snack Point Charlie and the Brandenburg Gate Starbucks before once again heading into the skies.

GOULASH AND GOOSELIVER

The last leg of our journey found us touching down in Budapest, Hungary to see Mithis Entertainment's latest project, Battlestations Midway. Not only did these guys have a very promising game on their hands, but they were also some of the most accommodating hosts of our entire journey, showing us around the beautiful city of Budapest, taking us out for traditional Hungarian eats, and consuming various alcohols with us into the early hours of the next morning.

After sleeping off the effects of the night before we spent the remaining day of our trip seeing what the Mithis team suggested was the best place in Budapest to spend an entire day, a castle right in the centre of the city. Just exploring the castle grounds gave us the feeling that we were actually inside one of the many medieval-themed games we had played in the past. Eliot in particular was so moved that he took to sneaking around quietly,



[HAHA] *laughing too hard to caption*

crouching down in corners every now and then and holding an imaginary bow and arrow as if he were Garret from the Thief games. This behaviour only intensified when we went underneath the castle into the labyrinth, an elaborate network of caves with numerous surreal additions that made the journey through them absolutely the closest thing to being inside a real videogame we had ever experienced. The labyrinth seemed as though it had been taken straight from the dungeon of any RPG you could mention, complete with cheesy medieval music, giant forbidding statues, and weirdest of all a cavern with a four-sided fountain that spouted not water, but wine. This room was unanimously deemed to be the "power up" room, although the only powers we received after taking a few sips of the magical liquid was the power to taste very dirty wine.

As our journey drew to a close we were all a little reluctant to go home, perhaps because we already had so many fond memories of the places we'd seen, the people we had met, and the games that we had played. Then again it may have been because we knew there was another twenty-hour flight ahead of us... <<

»» It was at this point that "The Sex Romps" went their separate ways...



TIMESHIFT

■ Timeshift is one of a million games touting time control functions right now. That's not to say that the game looks bad, as it also seems to have everything it takes to be a good first person shooter; namely guns, and things to shoot with guns. The main difference is that now when you shoot something with a gun, you can reverse time and do it again, and again, and if need be, once more. If that's not a responsible use of time travel then I don't want to know what is.

Platform: PC, Xbox

Category: FPS

Developer: Saber Interactive

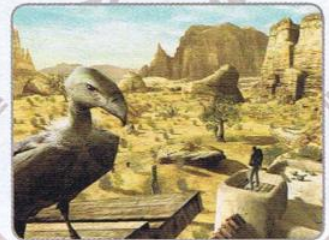
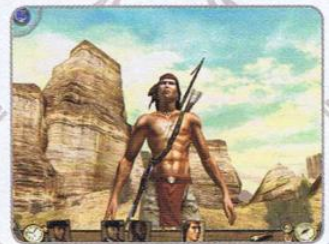


Shoot out at the Totally Awesome Corral

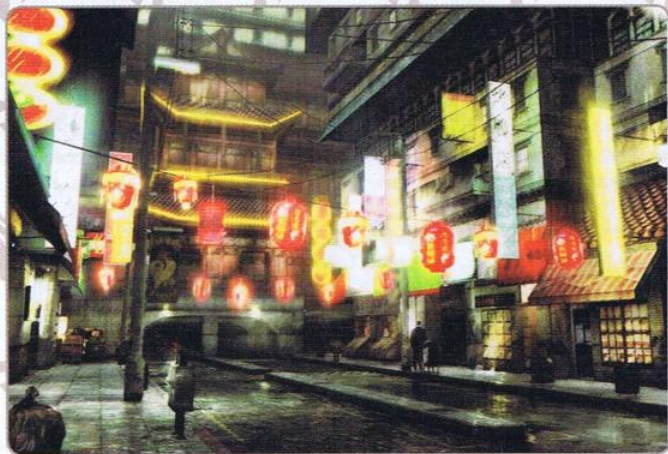
DESPERADOS 2: COOPER'S REVENGE

■ I'm quite a fan of 1960s Italian Westerns, so Desperados 2 was of particular interest to me, as the game was described to us as being a real-time strategy interpretation of Sergio Leone's Once Upon a Time in the West. This was at least half true, Desperados 2 certainly has the

Leone atmosphere, but the game isn't entirely about strategy. The player can now switch on the fly between the typical RTS isometric angle, and a new third-person viewpoint where each of the characters can be controlled individually, as if the game were an action adventure. The only question is if there will be a few references to my favourite Spaghetti Western, Django...



Platform: PC / Category: Strategy Action / Developer: Spellbound



THE MATRIX: THE PATH OF NEO

■ Without doubt the game that was given the hardest sell at Atari's Go Play event was The Path of Neo. Fortunately Shiny's second attempt at a Matrix game actually looks as though it deserves the attention. For starters this



time you'll actually get to do what most Matrix fans have wanted to do since they first saw the films - you get to be Neo. Not only that but the game will be a retelling of the events of all three films, so with any luck the game may actually improve upon the story of the last two instalments of the trilogy. It certainly couldn't make them worse.

Platform: PC, PS2, Xbox / Category: Action adventure / Developer: Shiny

BATTLESTATIONS MIDWAY

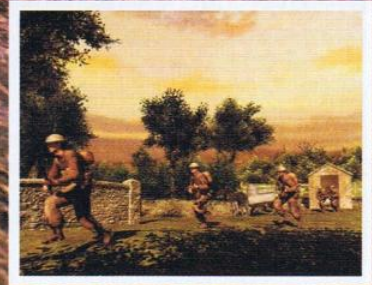
■ Battlestations Midway took the prize for the game that we were most reluctant to let go of when our time was up. It's an addictive combination of action and strategy with warfare being waged above, below and on top of the Pacific ocean during World War II. Battlestations Midway lets you change vehicles at any time during play, choosing from a pool of 40 different warships, 27 combat planes and 5 submarines, all with their own selection of weapons and unique control methods.



Platform: PC, PS2, Xbox / Category: Action Strategy / Developer: Mithis



WHAT WE'D LIKE TO SEE:
A little more tactical freedom without losing the overwhelming sense of scale and immersion of the original.



CALL OF DUTY 2

Systems: PC ■ Category: FPS ■ Players: 1-Multi ■ Developer: Infinity Ward ■ Available: 2005

There are so many WWII games out on the market these days (WWII, after all, has been the new black amongst game developers for a few years now) that it's hard not to elicit a groan when a new title is announced. Unless however, that new title is called Call of Duty 2, in which case we start anxiously awaiting its arrival.

Although the original Call of Duty used many of the elements we had seen in earlier games like Medal of Honor, such as cleverly scripted moments to draw the player into tense confrontation (instead of true AI interaction), and brilliant level design, it simply did everything that little bit better than any other

WWII game. Playing Call of Duty it was impossible not to get sucked into the European Theatre of War, fighting as the Americans, British and Russians. It was impossible not to come away from the computer, hands shaking from the adrenaline come-down after playing through the Russian Front portion of the single player campaign, and there were few people not wowed by the brilliant graphics powered by the venerable Quake III engine. And now Call of Duty is back to reclaim the WWII FPS crown.

MIXING IT UP YO
Infinity Ward, creators of Call of Duty are hard at work on the sequel of their breakout success but this time they're mixing things up a little. During the events of the first game we got to see the European Theatre (or more precisely what the developers thought the European Theatre was like) but this time around events will take the player through France and Africa. The dedication Infinity Ward has towards the realism of Call of Duty 2 is evidenced by the fact that they

have made extensive fact-finding missions to key locations in the game and have personally fired and reloaded most of the weapons that will be appearing in the sequel. The developers have also been spending a good deal of time talking to veterans and historians of the conflict to get the mood down pat.

A new and far more capable engine than Quake III will be powering the sequel and with that comes a number of changes to the look directly related to their research. Buildings in the original game were rather uniform and based around a grid pattern but structures in Africa in particular can be up to 1000 years old with a number of refinements and extensions tacked on over the years leading to far more organic/chaotic



[up] The dutch oven was out of control

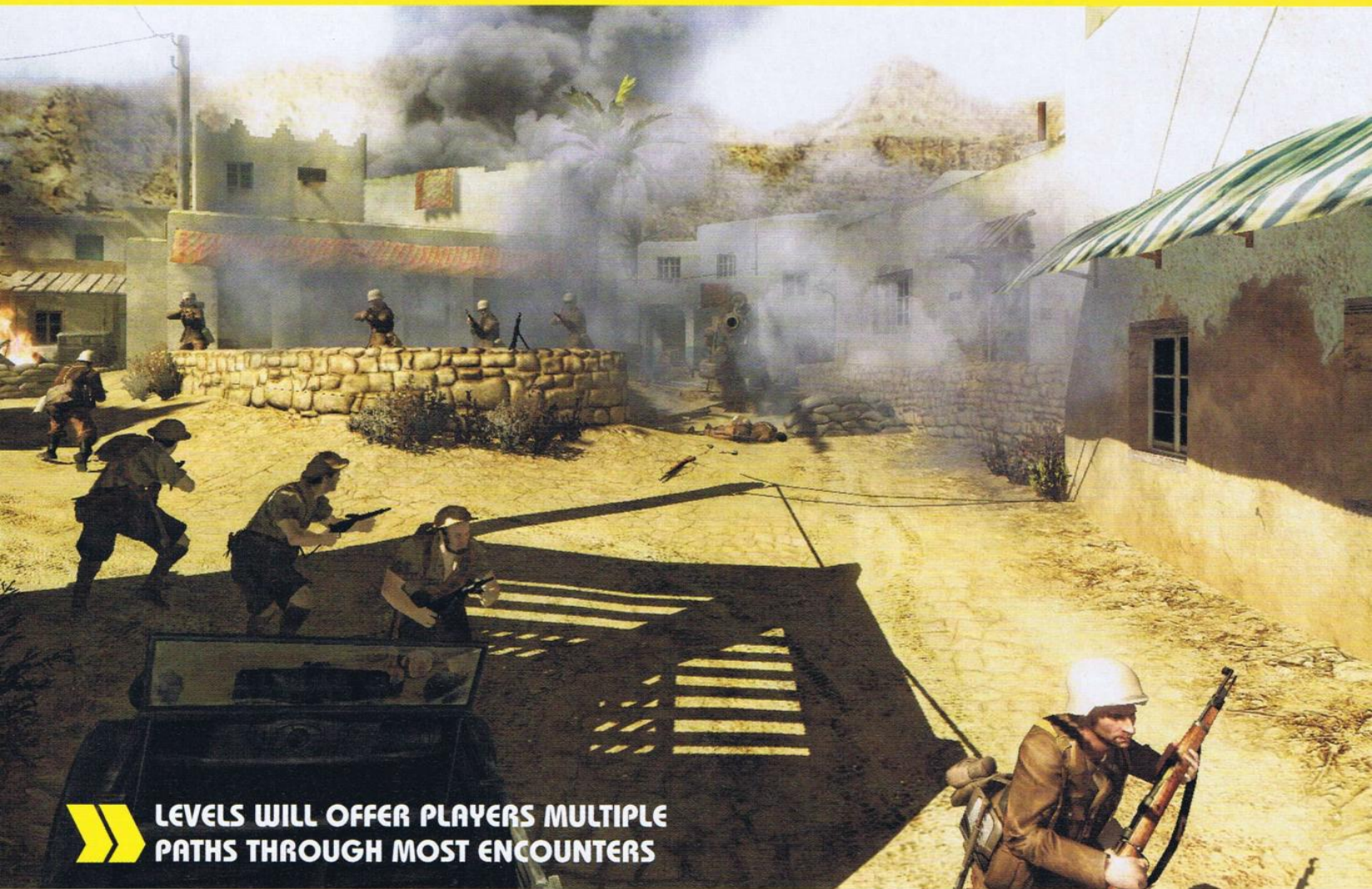
structures. Infinity Ward have also stated that level design will also be more organic with buildings grouped around important landmarks like fortresses, rivers or wells, much like in real life.

Some things never change, however. In Call of Duty 2, as you'd expect, you'll still be killing Nazis (and lets face it, who doesn't love killing Nazis), albeit far smarter and more detailed Nazis than you're ever likely to have faced before. Instead of relying solely on well scripted moments to drive the action, Infinity Ward are seriously beefing up the enemy AI so they can react to



[above] When dooty calls, find a shrub

»» **CALL OF DUTY 2 1/2** Just to make things confusing, Atari have announced that they will be releasing a new Call of Duty game as well. Developed by the same people that brought us Call of Duty: Finest Hour, Spark Studios, the new console CoD is being developed for "next gen consoles". Even more confusing still is the fact that Activision have now announced that they too will be releasing a new CoD console game to be developed by Grey Matter/Treayarch.



LEVELS WILL OFFER PLAYERS MULTIPLE PATHS THROUGH MOST ENCOUNTERS



[up] He needs a HoMeBoY Night Sight



[above] Taking potshots at tin cans

situations realistically, potentially giving encounters a great deal of replayability. Level design will now reflect this AI change by offering players multiple paths through most encounters, allowing the player to change their tactics to counter those shown by the AI.

Another advancement that comes along with the increased AI for enemies and squadmates is a communication system called BattleChatter. As the story goes, after speaking to veterans and historians, Infinity Ward was struck by the importance of yelling out information across the battlefield, telling your fellow soldiers where the enemy are, what their movements are likely to be, possible routes of attack and the like. BattleChatter should emulate this. The AI should be smart enough in the final game that it can recognise important landmarks or enemy units as well as their position relative to them

so will be able to tell the player using a number of pre-recorded lines, presumably that can be cut together to deliver the information accurately. We have no idea as yet as to whether the enemy will have access to the same technology but it can be safely assumed that the AI will feature a great deal of teamwork as well as dynamic tactical changes depending on the situation.

A STICKLER FOR A TICKLER

As a final tip of the hat to sticklers for historical accuracy (we're looking at you Wilks), Infinity Ward have gone back to the drawing board and completely redesigned uniforms and vehicle camouflage to accurately model those you would see in the battles. We currently have no more information other than the fact that the game will be out some time this year but rest assured that it's looking mighty impressive and we'll have more on it asap! <<



WHAT WE'D LIKE TO SEE:

The ability to set pigs on fire then send them shrieking at the enemy. Oh wait, Rome: Total War already did that...

AGE OF EMPIRES III

Systems: PC ■ Category: RTS ■ Players: 1-Multi ■ Developer: Ensemble Studios ■ Available: Nov 2005

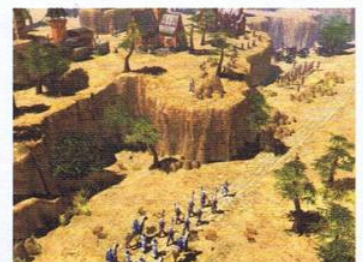
Age of Empires II is six years old now - that equates to about 73 in computer terms. It's had a long and full life but is beginning to look a bit too worn out to be trotted into the sun any more. The time of Age of Empires II may be over, its star on the wane, but only in time for a worthy successor to come along. That successor, of course, is Age of Empires III, a title that has quickly become one of the most anxiously anticipated games of 2005, and not just because of the success and huge fan following of the first two games. This third game in the series is something that the first two never were. This one is dead sexy - not in a "half husky" kind

of way, sexy in the way that you could take it home to your parents as evidence that you've made something of your life and aren't spending your Friday nights getting pissed with the boys and talking about what you're going to do in the future.

GRASS ROOTS

Although Ensemble have had a huge amount of success with their spin-off game, Age of Mythology, the beloved development team have gone back to grass roots for the latest. Age of Empires III kicks off roughly after the events of Age of Empires II: Age of Kings - 1500-1850 - but focuses on the topic of

colonising the New World rather than sticking to the conventions set in the first two games. That said, Ensemble Studios have stated that they are only just going to be getting into the Industrial Age with the game, so veteran players should be familiar with buildings and units for the most part and the game will still be focusing primarily on European cultures, albeit ones settling in the New World. As such players will have access to a number of units familiar to the series as well as some more modern (though still European) troop types such as Musketeers, Cannons and Tall Ships. Why set the new game in the Americas? Ensemble have stated that when developing Age of Empires III they saw the Americas as the next logical step. Not only did it fall in line with the rough chronology that the series has set so far, it also gave players a new setting to play in that retained much of the flavour of the original games, but added new elements and situations such as the Native American civilisations and the sheer diversity of the terrain. In



[up] It's not a posse, it's an ensemble

one continent you have everything ranging from lush tropical jungle to desert and frigid tundra.

Not too many details about the single player game have been released as yet (expect a big report post-E3) but here's what we do know; there will be a lengthy single player campaign containing 24+ scenarios that will cross many generations of a family in the Americas. The actual family has not been announced so we have no idea if players will be taking the role of any famous historical personalities, but Ensemble have hinted that players will be interacting with some very important people along the way.

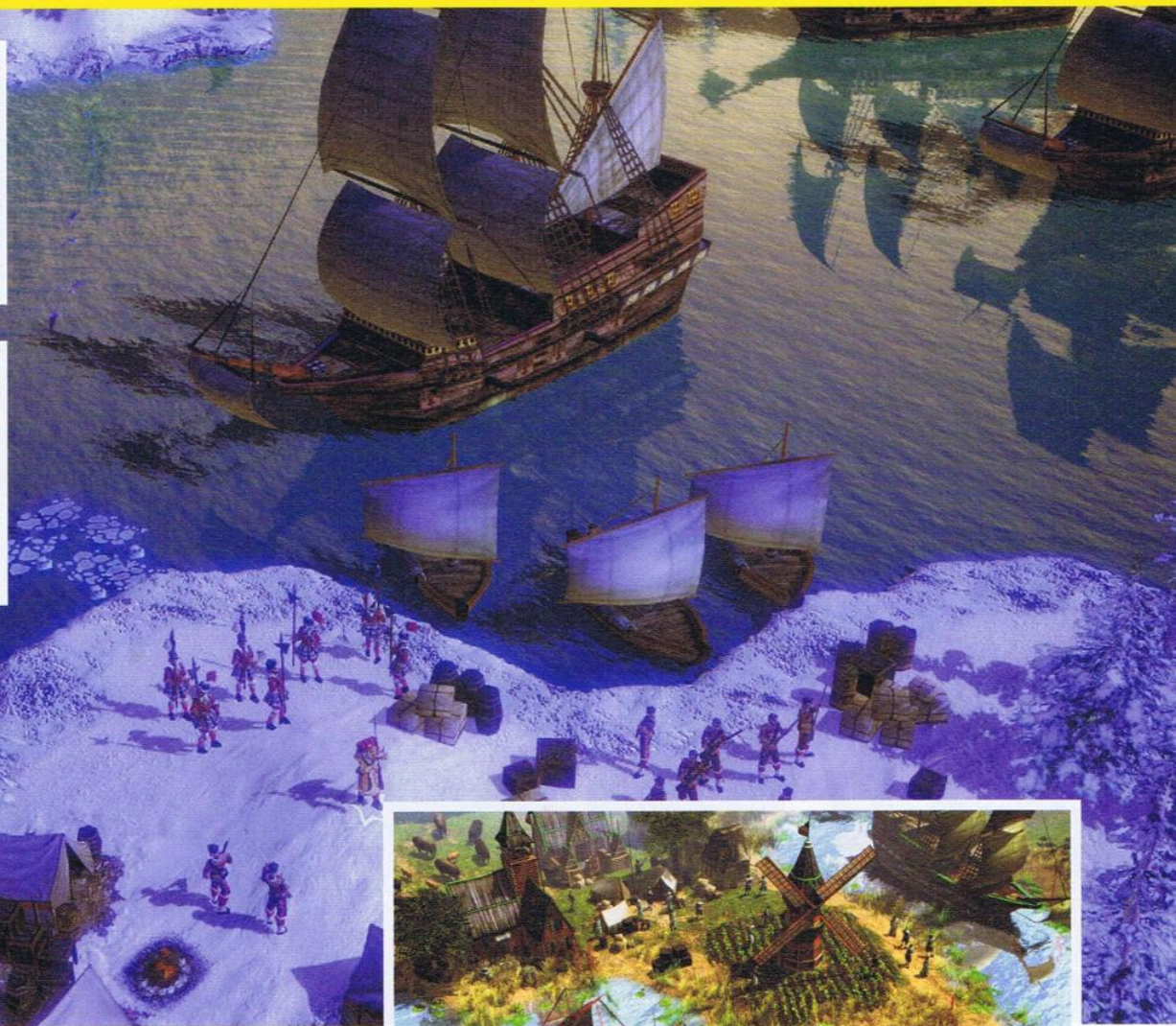
Although Ensemble Studios have some prior experience with a 3D engine from working on Age of Mythology, Age of Empires III is a whole new beast. It's no exaggeration to say that AoE III is probably the best looking strategy/



[above] Say hello Captain Jack!

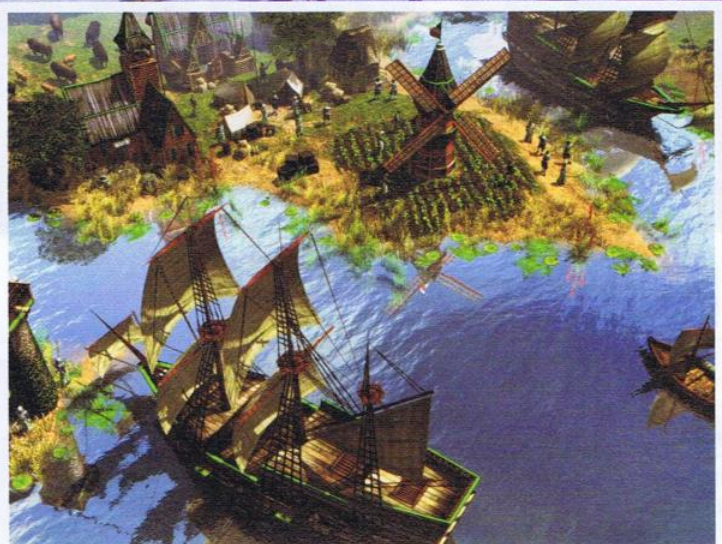


[up] Founded by prostitutes in 1849



[above] I'm gonna paint this wagon...

[above] Gonna paint it fine...



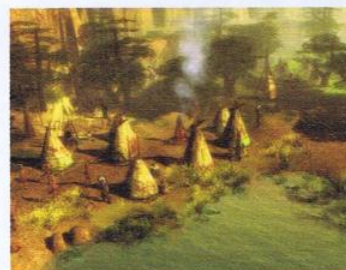
RPG we've seen to date. As the screenshots can attest (and it has been verified that these are actually engine shots and not renders), the level of detail shown in buildings, units and terrain is unsurpassed. Surprisingly, Age of Empires III is built on the Age of Mythology engine, albeit a heavily modified one - nearly everything has either been seriously upgraded or simply replaced, from the rendered backgrounds (the most obvious upgrade) to the unit pathing, animations, model system and multiplayer systems.

More impressive still is how system friendly the final engine has to be - the current generation has one of the largest hardware profiles ever seen in gaming with multiple generations of GPU still commercially available. Nevertheless, Ensemble have stated that the game will be able to run on a huge variety of systems thanks to a

number of texture, resolution, effect and graphical options. Of course the graphical majesty of Age III is not all for show - a fully functional physics engine is also being implemented allowing for ragdoll animations on units, realistically destructible buildings, falling trees and the like. How this will effect gameplay is still up in the air but it can be assumed, for example, that rubble falling off buildings into siege troops will do substantial damage. We'll have more on it soon. <<



THE LEVEL OF DETAIL SHOWN IN UNITS AND TERRAIN IS UNSURPASSED



>> **MUSKETS ON THE SIDE** One major thing that always holds a little fear for gamers when we hear about an RTS that combines both melee weapons and guns is whether or not the latter will outclass the former in every way. This should not be the case in Age of Empires III. Although the setting allows the inclusion of muskets, early rifles and cannons they will not be the be all and end all of weapons due to a number of factors, not the least of them being the fact that they weren't all powerful in real life. Although muskets were potentially hugely powerful weapons, the slow reload speed combined with their unreliability made them fraught with danger. A good crossbowman or cavalry charge was still a force to be reckoned with.

**WHAT WE'D LIKE TO SEE:**

Figurines released for each of Harman's personalities.

KILLER 7

Systems: **GCN, PS2** ■ Category: **Psychedelic Survival Horror** ■ Players: **1** ■ Developer: **Capcom Studio 4** ■ Available: **July**

Well, we've finally managed to get our hands on Killer 7, the much touted style-beast sporting slick cel-shaded graphics and a novel, if somewhat convoluted plot and we can definitely say that it's a game. The reason we say that is the initial footage seemed to be devoid of any actual gameplay and consisted simply of running through corridors and looking cool. That is actually not the case. There is a game in there and it's not what we expected - not at all.

SMILE TIME

We should start at the beginning before delving any deeper into what could be one of the strangest plots to appear in a game in a long time, if not ever. It is the future, kind of, and some catastrophes have rocked the world and ended all international air travel. This cuts down on acts of global terror but a new threat is emerging, not with a bang but with a smile and laugh. The evil Kun Lan and his army of Heaven Smiles, a viral like infection that turns people into laughing, grinning, not to mention explosive proto-zombies. Weird

enough for you yet? How about this then. Players take the role of Harman Smith, the greatest killer who was ever great, now confined to a wheelchair with what appears to be (according to one of the cutscenes we witnessed) some pretty bad delirium or maybe just a slight case of brain damage. He also has a really, really big gun.

Although you play as Harman Smith you don't actually play Harman Smith, instead players control the things that live in his head, seven bad arse killers, each with their own special skills and signature weapons. Garcian Smith is the leader of the alternate personalities but is a cleaner rather than a true killer - he comes in after the job is done to clean up the mess. He also can bring other personalities back to life if they die on the job. We can't quite get our collective heads around the idea of a split personality resurrecting another part of its own fractured psyche but watching Garcian place a little baggie (characters leave a paper bag as remains when they die) in his briefcase with weary resignation is pretty cool.

The other personalities are more combat oriented and using their special skills in the right place is necessary to beat the game. For example, Kaede Smith, the only woman in the group, can shower nearby areas with her own arterial blood, smashing barriers or revealing hidden messages. One of the other Smiths can pick locks whilst another still has superhumanly sensitive ears. In our play time though something struck us as odd - Kevin Smith (not the fat pop-culture spewing one), a small, creepy knife throwing personality did not appear to have any special skills at all. Maybe we weren't looking hard enough or maybe we just hadn't reached the right situation yet. Who knows?

Now, on to gameplay. Killer 7 turned out to be a very different game from what we expected. At first the game plays something like an on rails adventure as players control their character running down hallways and through alleys simply by holding down the A button to run and letting go to stop. Things get a little more convoluted when you come into contact with Heaven



[up] Crouch down low and go go go

Smiles however. Whenever you hear a laugh it's advisable to stop, draw a weapon (switching the game from third person to first person) and scan the surrounding area. With any luck this will cause any Heaven Smiles to appear. The AI for these basic enemies is simple - they walk straight at you and explode so you need to off them before that happens using key target areas to kill faster and gain the maximum amount of blood, a commodity needed for healing and upgrading character skills. Killer 7 also contains a great deal of puzzle solving making it something of a psychedelic survival horror. Finally, we have only faced one boss battle so far against what can best be described as a goth-loli angel. It was strange, slightly surreal and bizarrely beautiful - three terms we suspect you'll be hearing a lot when the game gets reviewed next issue. <<<

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手槍

WHAT WE'D LIKE TO SEE:
Roy and Marth from SSBM
as unlockable characters
with their own story!



FIRE EMBLEM

Systems: GCN ■ Category: Strategy/RPG ■ Players: 1 ■ Developer: Intelligent Systems ■ Available: Late 2005

It's funny that, at the end of its tether here in Australia, the GameCUBE's Strategy/RPG library truly starts to shine. Late last year we saw the likes of Tales of Symphonia and Paper Mario, two brilliant RPGs in their own unique way, while this year gamers get Baten Kaitos, Advance Wars and an all-new Fire Emblem.

The latter is going to be something of a special occasion for fans of the series, as not only has Fire Emblem only ever seen the retail light of day on Australian shores just once before (in 2004 on GBA), but it's also the first time the series has gone 3D, and on GameCUBE, no less.

For the uninitiated, Fire Emblem plays like games such as Final Fantasy Tactics, Ogre Battle and Advance Wars; players are presented with an immediate battlefield, an objective and enough tactical recourse to accomplish the set goal. Fire Emblem employs a more personal experience, however, in that the game's narrative is its driving force and every character you accumulate on your journey is an irreplaceable unit and all important to the story at hand.

With this in mind, the GameCUBE iteration of Fire Emblem pushes the

story-telling element even further with beautiful cutscenes presented in both full CG and artistically animated stills. Players assume the role of Ike, a young mercenary who rescues a Princess who employs his noble heart to ward off an invading force of half human/half beast 'Demihumans'. Along the way a grander story is presented and Ike finds that his place in his war-torn world is more important than he may realise. No surprises there.

Battles take place on 3D maps now, so Fire Emblem fans will face new tactical elements and challenges. You'll also come across some new and very cool units, including airborne humans known as Taliesins and Skinshifters who have the ability to transform into beasts. There's also the

usual ensemble of fighters, archers, thieves, knights, cavaliers and lords, and as is the way with Fire Emblem titles, if a character falls in battle, he doesn't come back.

There is also a new 'skills' element that allows characters to discover their 'true path'. In doing so, new abilities become available and can overwrite current abilities if players should so decide. This opens up the personal aspect for players as every decision you make can change the face of the development of each character.

This is definitely a title to keep your eye on. <<<





WHAT WE'D LIKE TO SEE:

Your character's name in the single player game is, get this, "Nolan Danewort". Now that may be a totally bad-ass name in French, but we're thinking they should change it for the English release. NOLAN DANEWORT! HAHHAHA.

BET ON SOLDIER

Available on PC ■ Category: **First person gambling** ■ Players: **1-32** ■ Developer: **Kylotonn** ■ Available: **June 2005**



Forget killing out of passion, out of hate, or out of duty to your country. Do it for the money. In the world of *Bet on Soldier*, a great war has been raging for 80 years and both the economy and the entertainment industry is now completely structured around it. This is no ordinary war, you see. Think *Running Man* but on a much greater scale - massive battlegrounds and armies of mercenaries fighting it out in battles devised and organised by all powerful corporations, and all for the sick enjoyment of viewers around the world.

YOU CAN SMACK TALK, BUT CAN YOU PLAY?

The best part though, is that you'll actually have to put your money where your mouth is and bet on the outcome of firefights. Not just a clever name, eh? The way it works in the single player game is that before each level you'll get info on all of the tough opponents that have been hired to fight for the other side. Each has their own odds and you must spend your cash betting on which ones you think you can take down within 60 seconds. You

can play it safe and bet on the easier guys or go for the big cash reward and give yourself a steeper challenge. When you encounter one of these foes on the battlefield, the game actually enters into a one on one duel mode where all other fighting ceases until the outcome of the battle is decided. Money earned in this way can then be spent on upgrading your weapons and armour between levels, as well as used to repair armour and stock up on extra ammo from stations scattered about the levels.

It's a neat little system and if it sounds appetising in single player you can imagine how cool it could be online. We're not sure what the reward structure (i.e. what you do with the money won) will be for winning online battles yet, but the idea of having money at stake is certainly a welcome inclusion. We do know that there will be a ranking system that you can rise through - but you'll only be rewarded for challenging and beating higher ranked players.

Although the betting system is the main point of differentiation between this and other first person



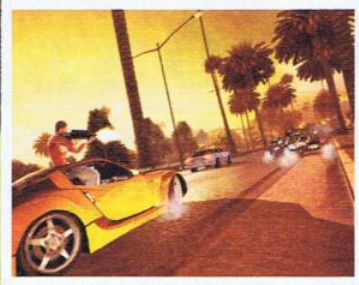
[Megadeth] Killing is his business...

shooters, *Bet on Soldier* is certainly no slouch in other areas. There will be 13 base weapons, most of which will be seriously upgradeable. The Commando Rifle for instance has a Flash Attack upgrade that can be used to temporarily blind enemies, while the Missile Launcher has a Sneak Launcher upgrade that allows you to pinpoint a specific target, with all subsequent shots going to that target. It's also cool that for the melee and one-handed weapons you'll be able to hold a shield for extra protection.

The game's developers Kylotonn have apparently spent six years working on the tech behind the game - the Kt engine, and we must admit it looks pretty sweet. The battles will take you to Europe, Alaska and Cuba, and the team have built some spectacularly large outdoor environments to host the carnage. We'll have a review soon. <<



WHAT WE'D LIKE TO SEE:
The promise of a "banging hip-hop soundtrack produced specifically for 187" fulfilled.



187 RIDE OR DIE

Available on **PC, PS2, Xbox** ■ Category: **Combat Racing** ■ Players: **1-Multi** ■ Developer: **Ubisoft Paris** ■ Available: **Mid 2005**

Street racing games are all the rage these days, and the latest to try their hand at it is Ubisoft. You may remember a title called *Notorious: Die to Drive*. After a seriously lukewarm reception at last year's E3, Ubisoft essentially decided to throw out most of what they'd done (bless them) and retool the game. The result is a much more promising title.

GAY PARISIANS

187 is being developed by Ubisoft Paris and NextGen Entertainment. NextGen is headed up by Ali Kojori whose background includes a host of animation and special effects work, as well as a stint at EA Canada, including the position of Technical Art Director on the brilliant *Fight Night 2004*, so the game is certainly in good hands.

The basic concept combines street racing, bling and gang banging. You'll play as Buck (whose likeness and voice has been provided by Larenz Tate who you may remember from *Menace II Society*), a young playa living in tha hood, home of gangs, hoes and poor grammar. For Buck it's all about the benjamins,

the fine cars and the fine rides (if you catch my drift). The game takes place in a virtual L.A. playground, where you must defend your territory from a "gang of bandit rough riders" lead by Cortez (whose likeness, voice and motion capture has been provided by Noel G who you hopefully don't know from *The Fast and the Furious*).

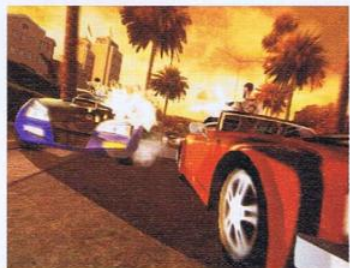
At first glance the game has a lot in common with other illegal street racing games, but the inclusion of combat really opens things up. There will be escort missions, where you'll need to protect your O.G. from rival gangs by driving behind him and taking them out. There'll be deathmatch style scenarios where you're in a relatively small arena with a host of serious firepower (everything from Uzis to shotguns and rocket launchers). And of course it wouldn't be L.A. without high speed pursuits along the many highways trying to outrun the cops.

From the screenshots you could be forgiven for thinking that much of the game takes place in amongst the skyscrapers of L.A., but fortunately you'll also be hitting the coastal roads of Malibu Beach, the industrial

areas and the single story housing of the ghettos.

Obviously shooting is paramount to 187's gameplay, and to ensure that the dual roles of driving and shooting feel natural, Ubi Paris are implementing two control options. If you select Classic, you'll have a simpler, AI assisted shooting system, whereas Direct is for the more hardcore inclined where you have 100% control over your targeting. We're expecting that you'll also be able to play co-op with a friend, which should be damn good fun... especially online.

This is a genre that Ubisoft haven't really explored in the past, but with the consistent quality of the titles that they tend to release these days, it could be a very good move. The fact that they essentially scrapped the first incarnation of the game because it wasn't good enough bodes well, as does their intention to not only shake up the street racing game genre by including glock busting action, but to aim to make the driving mechanics better than what's already on the market. Oh, and if you were wondering, 187 is the police code for homicide in the States. <<



FREE WARE GAMING

Hyper's guide to home cooked gameplay

Not all games cost money, to make or to buy. Not all games take extensive teams, thousands of man hours and class action suits from company employees to get done. Some just require a few talented people, a little dedication, a good idea and a hell of a lot of elbow grease. These independent developers slave away not for money or even, for the most part, fame. The eventual goal may be to catch the eye of the big boys in the hopes of being employed or having their game picked up by a major publisher, but first and foremost the name of the game is just that, the game.

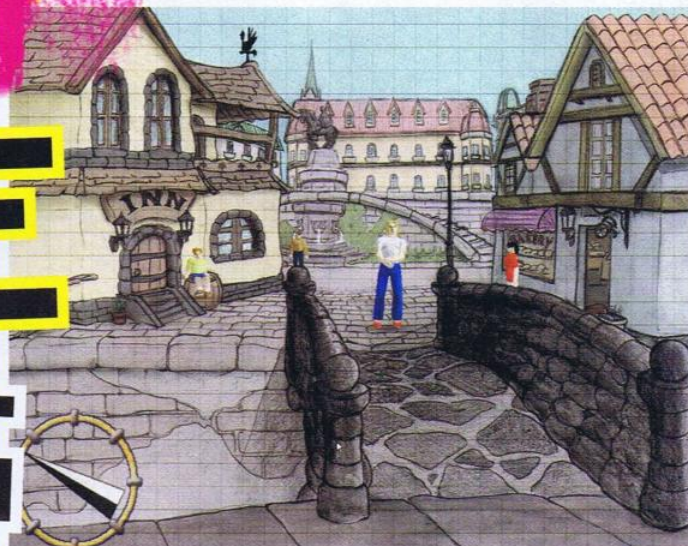
Over the last month and a bit (at the time of writing at any rate) Hyper has trawled through the smut soaked hell magnet that is the infernal interweb looking for the best of the best freeware games. Games that showed innovation, games that showed a real flair for the art of making games, hell, we were also looking for entirely derivative games that played fantastically. What we found surprised us. Initially we were expecting to jump online and search around for an hour or so to find our games but things got a little deeper than that. It took days and days of searching to put together our first short list, not because we couldn't find anything good. Quite the opposite, we found so many games that we wanted to include in the feature that we could have filled the magazine with nothing but freeware games. Every second game

we came across seemed to have that special little something that elevated it above the rest, whether it was a novel new idea, beautiful graphics, awesome old-school gameplay or a truly addictive hook. After days more we cut down the list to a manageable number.

Then it got more difficult still. Another check online revealed more new games were being released every day and some of them were so damn good that they had to supplant games already on the list. Back to the old drawing board. The list is finally finished again, after a few arguments over the various games we each tried to champion.

Here are our final choices, 25 games we thought were excellent for various different reasons ranging from sense of humour through to putting a new spin on an old gameplay mechanic. After you're done playing the games we found for you (they're all on the CD baby) we entreat you to jump online and find some more. These people need your support and there are dozens, if not hundreds of gems out there waiting to be played, like Cave Story, a cute Japanese platformer that plays just as well as Super Metroid, or Notrium, a fantastic science fiction RPG, or Ata, a funny and warm multiplayer Civil War strategy game, or Survival Project, an incredibly deep Korean action RPG, or Tsunami 2010, a brilliant shooter in the vein of Tempest 2000, or Lemmingball Z, a crazy action/strategy that combines Lemmings, Worms and Dragonball Z, or...

HYPER'S TOP 25 GAMES



CRAZY CROSS

DEVELOPER: FRAZ AKHTAR // YEAR: 2003

There's something special about Crazy Cross, a bizarre mixture of Final Fantasy (7+) adventuring with warped humour. Apparently the sequel to Crazy Lou 64 (and we've been trying to track that one down for weeks using our research department at Google, but to no avail), players take the role of Lou, a stapler wielding cross between Johnny Bravo, The Tick and somebody REALLY dumb who happens to be a master of the feared martial art, Underwater Basket Weaving Fist. After accidentally blowing up a public park while fighting giant robots that like to kick other giant robots in the balls, Lou and his sidekick, G. Zeuss go on an extended road-trip to find a mythical staple remover that can remove his past misdeeds from the fabric of reality. Along the way Lou can pick up a number of other party members including a sassy nurse and Tiny Jim, a kid on crutches.

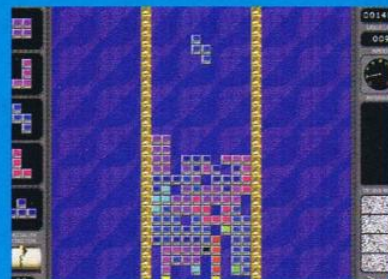
The look veers wildly from crappy PlayStation looking polys with hilarious animations (Lou's running animation is a classic) to some simply amazing hand drawn environments. Most interestingly, most of the wonderfully over the top voiced cutscenes are simply illustrated with a series of static line drawings — seemingly drawn by a dozen or so different people if the wildly veering styles are anything to go by. In short, Crazy Cross is brilliant, probably the best (and biggest) freeware RPG you will ever play. Hard to believe it was created for a university assignment.

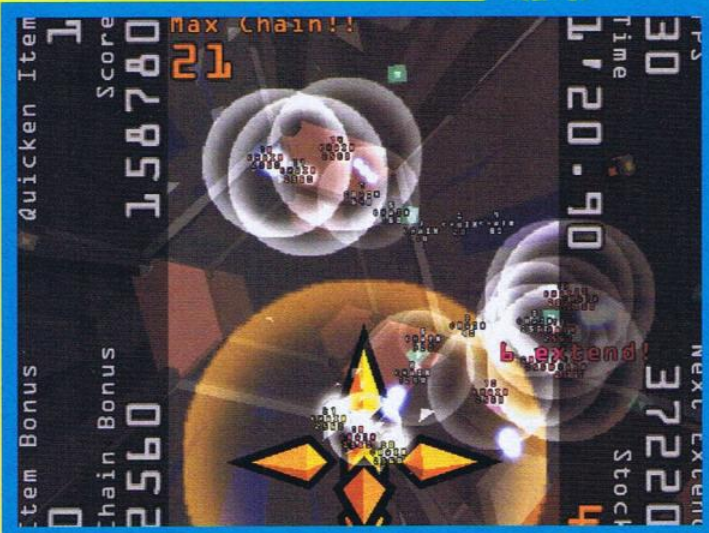
TETRIS ADVENTURE

DEVELOPER: SIMON MEGLIC // YEAR: 2001

What would a freeware list be without a Tetris clone? Although the basic gameplay remains unchanged, Tetris Adventure spices things up a bit with themed levels, powerups and the ability to edit/create levels.

Depending on the level you can expect to encounter wider play areas, oddly shaped play areas, random blocks obscuring part of the play area and even a few powerups.





EVERY EXTEND

DEVELOPER: **OMEGA** // YEAR: **2004**

Not quite a puzzle game, not quite an action game, Every Extend is a game about blowing stuff up. Players are a bomb. They have to time their detonation to achieve the biggest chain reaction. The bigger the reaction the greater the time-extend. The game is easy to beat – just get enough time to make it all the way through, but what is really hard is trying to beat the high scores. Just play it.

ANCIENT DOMAINS OF MYSTERY

DEVELOPER: **THOMAS BISKUP** // YEAR: **2004**

There are Rogue like games (ASCII character turn based random world RPGs) and then there is Ancient Domains of Mystery, a game that transcends the Rogue style genre by adding a detailed plot, a ton of missions, character class specific quests and more replayability than you can poke a stick at. For the last few years, author Thomas Biskup has been working on a shareware (that's right, you've got to pay for it) Java based version of the game. If it's any part as good as ADOM then we'll definitely be shelling out a few bucks for that one.



DINK SMALLWOOD

DEVELOPER: **RTSOFT** // YEAR: **1997**

One of the true mainstays of freeware, Dink Smallwood is an isometric Zelda-ish adventure about a young boy, Dink, coming to terms with his destiny after his mother is mysteriously killed in a fire (or killed in a mysterious fire if you want to get all grammatically correct). Controls are simple via keyboard but a gamepad is highly recommended. Once you've finished the main campaign there are dozens of player made mods available for download.



AKUJI

DEVELOPER: **BUSTER** // YEAR: **2002**

A Japanese platformer, Akuji can easily be called "Castlevania for kids" but to do so would do the game a great disservice. A side scrolling adventure/platformer, Akuji casts the player as a young demon who needs to recover his powers. Although playable with keyboard commands, Akuji really shines with a gamepad as it feels like a great old-school Nintendo platformer. Be sure to install the English patch before you play unless you can read Japanese.

G-TYPE

DEVELOPER: **CNC DARKSIDE** // YEAR: **2002**

Take R-Type and Gradius, then jam them together and you'll have a good idea what to expect from G-Type. And why it's called G-Type. With a range of powerups to collect, the ability to charge your attacks and nice sprite-based graphics, old school shooter fans will find plenty to like here. Incidentally, if you do a web search for "G-Type", make sure you add the word "game" in as well... or you'll find out once again why we're always saying "what the hell is wrong with Japanese people". You have been warned.



TRUCK DISMOUNT

DEVELOPER: **JETRO LAUHA** // YEAR: **2004**

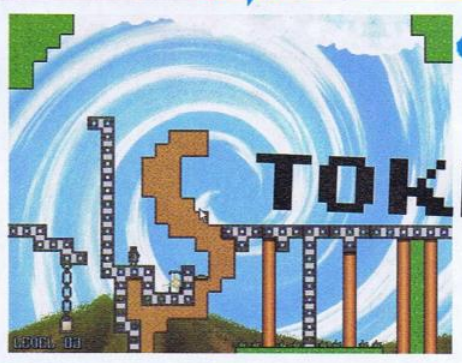
More a physics experiment than an actual game, Truck Dismount sees players placing a figure in a truck, placing the truck on a runway, placing ramps (if you so desire) and then ramming said truck into a wall to see how much damage can be inflicted on the driver/passenger. It's strange how damn addictive smashing an anonymous 3D stick figure is — once you've hammered the little bugger into a wall once you'll definitely do it again.



TUMIKI FIGHTERS

DEVELOPER: **KENTA CHO** // YEAR: **2004**

A side scrolling shooter with a difference, Tumiki Fighters seems to be made up entirely of pastel coloured children's building blocks. When the player blows up an enemy ship they can grab a falling piece and add it to their own, upping the firepower of the craft and adding ablative armour at the expense of manoeuvrability. It's one hell of a fresh concept.



TOKKOBOT DX

DEVELOPER: **JETRO SUNI** // YEAR: **2002**

Imagine two game franchises meeting and giving birth to mutant but somehow brilliant offspring. Tokkobot DX is that game, combining elements of Lemmings and Tetris. A robot has to cross the stage, traversing holes

which need to be patched with falling Tetris tiles. For each level the player only has a set number of tiles, each of which is foreshadowed in the top right corner of the screen. The robot starts walking shortly into the level so you can't think too long before placing tiles. It's so much harder than it sounds.

rROOTAGE

DEVELOPER: **ABA GAMES** // YEAR: **2003**

Essentially a never ending boss battle, rRootage is one of the great Japanese freeware shooters. Thanks to its stylised graphics and clever system whereby only the core of enemies can harm you, the action gets very hectic, but also gives you ample opportunity to pull out insane evasive manoeuvres. With a bunch of game modes (including one with a brilliant Ikaruga-style colour system) and a bubbly acid soundtrack, this is a must-play game.



IVAN (ITER VEHEMENS AD NECEM)

DEVELOPER: **UNKNOWN** // YEAR: **2004**

Another Rogue style game but this time with a far reaching plot, definite missions, clever levels and a graphical interface (for those of you who can't dig the ASCII). After making your adventurer, players are sent on a mission to deliver a letter that winds up getting them in way over their heads. Don't expect anything too flashy in terms of visuals but IVAN does have an easy interface making it a good launching point for people looking to get into Rogue style games.



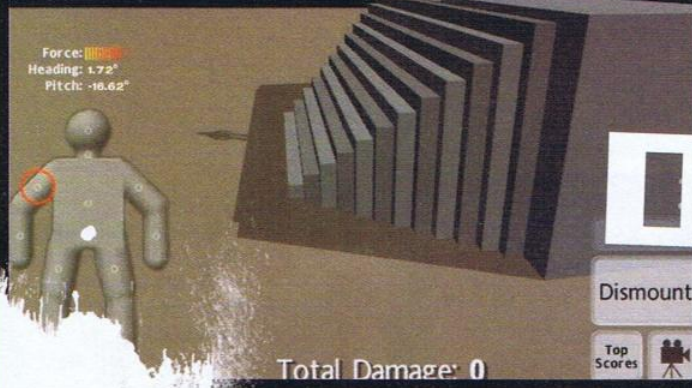
STAIR DISMOUNT

DEVELOPER: **JETRO LAUHA** // YEAR: **2004**

Similar to Truck Dismount in many ways, Stair Dismount has players pushing a humanoid figure down stairs to rack up points. Choose where on the body to push them, choose how hard to push them and then watch and wince as the little guy goes tumbling down the stairs, screaming and breaking all the way.

Porrasturvot
Stair Dismount

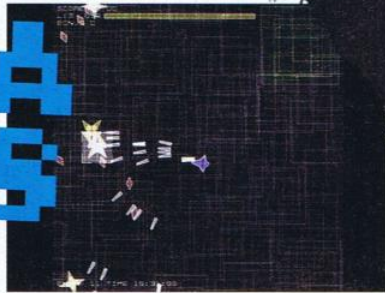
TAAT



AREA 2048

DEVELOPER: **HELLO WORLD PROJECT** // YEAR: **2004**

Yet another stylish and simple, but endlessly compelling shooter. Utilising gameplay that's a little reminiscent of Asteroids, but with a much bigger playing field and facing off against actual enemy ships rather than hunks of rock, the basic polygonal models are contrasted by a variety of minimalist black and white backgrounds. A menacing and somewhat chaotic techno soundtrack rounds it all off.



DIE

POWER SHOOTER

DEVELOPER: **SUZUKI YUSUKE** // YEAR: **2002**

Another vertically scrolling shooter. Power Shooter is heavily influenced by the shooters of old, with a rather traditional (but quite attractive) low res style to the graphics. The game moves at a great pace, with plenty happening on the screen at any one time and two modes of fire to switch between.



DUOTRIS

DEVELOPER: **BINARYZOO** // YEAR: **2004**

One of the best puzzle games you will ever play, DUOTris is at heart a block staker but in reality is so much more. The screen is split along the middle and a single block moves to the mid point from top and bottom. Players need to make groups of three to clear blocks, not an easy feat when the blocks move simultaneously on both sides. DUOTris has two game modes, Arcade and Classic, both of which are brilliant. Arcade is the fastest paced game mode and contains a number of randomly dropping powerups, some of which are beneficial (such as getting rid of a full column) and some of which are very detrimental (like turning the entire screen monochrome making it impossible to differentiate between the colour of blocks). Classic mode is a slower and more tactical game but still as brain strainingly fun. Like all of Binary Zoo's games, DUOTris relies on simple geometric shapes with a few flashy special effects but still looks fantastic.

SLAVE

DEVELOPER: **KOUITI** // YEAR: **2001**

With somewhat traditional side scrolling shooter mech enemy design you could be forgiven for thinking that Die Slave (yeah, we have no idea why it's called that either - WTHIWWJP?) is another generic shooter set in space. You'd be wrong. With a choice of three ship configurations, five types of weapons that you can switch between at any time and a cool energy system that allows you to regularly intensify your attacks, Die Slave is a damn cool game. Damn hard too.

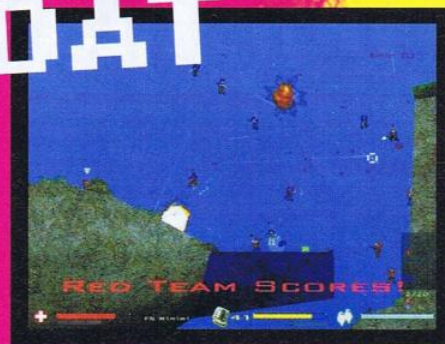


SOLDAT

■ DEVELOPER: **MICHAŁ MARCINKOWSKI** // YEAR: **2002**

■ The definitive multiplayer freeware game, Soldat has all the fun of worms, all the gore of Blood and all the multiplayer modes of Quake. Solidly

2D, Soldat presents the player with a side on view of the battlefield. Players control their character with the arrow keys and the weapons (taken from an extensive pool of real world guns) with the mouse. There's 20+ maps to play on in the basic package and literally hundreds more available for download thanks to a map editor. Sounds good to us.



MONO

■ DEVELOPER: **BINARYZOO** // YEAR: **2005**

■ The website sums it up best, saying that Mono is "Part Asteroids, part Robotron, part Paintshop Pro". Built as an experiment rather than a game, Mono is an immensely enjoyable and incredibly beautiful take on an old gameplay mechanic. The action ramps up very quickly, with a host of cool powerups and constantly morphing background colours. Like DUO, it's not long before you're feeling overwhelmed as enemies and their fire seem to be coming from all directions, while your firepower ramps up to match it – swooping and bouncing around the screen.

The graphics are also more than just an incredibly pretty backdrop. The aim of the game is actually to go from a completely black background to completely white. The difficulty ramps up organically because destroying enemies of each colour leaves behind that colour on the background and when other enemies go over coloured areas they're influenced – either homing in on you (blue), moving faster (green) or shooting more (red). It's a very clever way to increase difficulty.

You're going to have to be a serious gaming fiend to beat MONO, but fortunately BinaryZoo were kind enough to give you the controls to do so. Your ship is controlled with the mouse, and you can rotate it by holding the right button and moving the mouse. The system works beautifully and feels much more natural than other shooters.



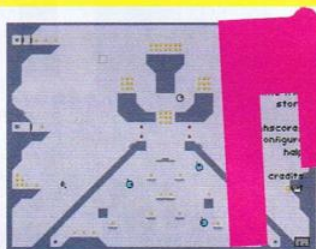
■ DEVELOPER: **BINARYZOO** // YEAR: **2005**

■ DUO features a small ship that can initially move back and forth on a horizontal line shooting (and breaking down ala asteroids) coloured circles. Then it gets strange, difficult and brilliant with players controlling the line, having to switch directions for firing, moving up and down the screen, inverting the play area and all manner of other mechanics.

Although the music is a little maddening after a while (and trust us – one taste of DUO and you'll be playing it a lot), all the other aspects of the game really can't be faulted. The simple and colourful graphics explode with vibrancy when the firepower and complexity of the scenario changes, and the gameplay never stands still. Hells yeah!

■ DEVELOPER: **METANET SOFTWARE INC** // YEAR: **2004**

■ You are a ninja. You need to get little glowy things. You can turn, jump, slide down surfaces, wall jump and move, well, like a ninja.



Basic gameplay revolves around running and jumping around a level trying to collect glowy things and unlock the door to the next level. The glowy things (I should trademark that name) extend the length of time you can spend in a level. Players must balance picking up items with hitting switches and solving basic movement puzzles to open the gate. Brilliant animations (and N is just a stick figure) elevate N above most other freeware games. What's even more impressive is the physics implemented in the game. N runs, jumps, falls and slides with fluid realism – a long fall can kill the little guy but can be broken by sliding down a wall. A mistimed jump can cause you to fall off a ledge due to having no real purchase, but running like buggery may get you that extra bit of traction to keep you on. This is a game perfect for a handheld device.

PARSEC 47

■ DEVELOPER: **KENTA CHO** // YEAR: **2004**

■ PARSEC47 is, simply put, the height of wireframe shooter coolness. But then, what else would you expect from Kenta Cho? This is twitch shooting at its very twitchiest – the speed your ship dashes about the screen is intoxicating, and fortunately the controls are sensitive enough to make it work. Plus, there's a slow button that allows you to fire the roll shot or lock-on laser. The ultimate "retromodern hispeed shmup".





GATE 88

DEVELOPER: JONATHAN MAK // YEAR: 2005

Asteroids meets RTS — sounds bizarre but damn it works well. You're a small ship that can build a base, turrets, facilities and the like. You have to protect your base and blow up enemy bases. While essentially a strategy game, Gate 88 remains an action game at heart. Players control everything in real time and will spend far more time defending their base or destroying others than building it. It takes a little while to get used to the ship controls as whilst they are very similar to those found in Asteroids the game requires a good deal more precision when it comes to aiming. The look of the game is strictly retro but incredibly the vector graphics just make the whole thing look cool rather than antiquated. Although the game features an excellent single player mode, the real meat of the beast comes in the form of the online multiplayer. Playing against the computer is one thing but playing against other players is another thing entirely — no computer will ever be as tactically diverse and just plain bloodthirsty as another human being.



TORUS TROOPER

DEVELOPER: KENTA CHO // YEAR: 2004

Like a cross between Wipeout and Tempest 2000, Torus Trooper sees players hurtling along at breakneck pace through a never ending tunnel blasting the crap out of enemies and trying to hit checkpoints before the time is up. Enemy fire can be more easily avoided (and even shot) by using the charge up/slow down button, but doing so eats up precious time. Yet another sweet Kenta Cho game. Cool tech soundtrack too.

AHRIMAN'S PROPHECY

DEVELOPER: AMANDA FAE // YEAR: 2004

Made with RPG Maker 2003, Ahriman's Prophecy is strongly reminiscent of great old RPG/Adventures like Sword of Mana with a little bit of Zelda thrown in for good measure.

With a story revolving around a young girl finding her destiny, two battling princes and a grand plot, Ahriman's Prophecy contains around 50 hours of gameplay (if you do all of the myriad subquests and explore the maps). The combat system is simple, the plot is good (although full of niggling spelling mistakes) and the gameplay is purely retro fun.



INTERVIEW

AMANDA FAE, MAKER OF AHRIMAN'S PROPHECY

HYPER: What first got you into making games? What's your background?

Amanda: I started making board games when I was eight. That was the year my dad got me a Nintendo. My Nintendo sparked my desire to make games, but programming was 'magic' to me, so I settled for designing things with cardboard and crayons.

I didn't make a computer game until the year I graduated from college. I was never exposed to computers until I went to college, and it was in my Junior year that I realized software wasn't 'magic' and that real live humans called programmers made software. Sad huh?

By that time, it was a little too late to change my major (English), so I finished up with my degree and became a Technical Writer. As soon as I got into the workforce, I got bored pretty quickly, so I learned how to make computer games in my spare time.

More or less, I'm a rogue.

Were there any freeware games/developers that really inspired you to enter the field?

No, but I have found many amazing ones since I got into the scene. The guys and girls at AGD Interactive are my idols. (<http://www.agdinteractive.com/>)

What languages do you code in, and what software do you use?

I use mostly C, C++, Ruby, or whatever the game engine I'm using requires. I also use PhotoShop and Cinema4D for my game art.

What is your eventual goal in making freeware games?

Er, well, I would like to be the evil queen on the throne of a dark gaming empire. But, if that doesn't work out, my goal is to quit my writing job, make shareware games, and get by on ramen noodles. (I don't want to work for a big game company because the games they're churning are boring to me.)

Do you have any more projects lined up for the future?

Yes. I'm working on a top-down 2D RPG called Aveyond. It's a lot like the Secret of Mana. I'm very excited because I think it's way ahead of anything else I've ever made.

What do you see as the future of freeware/shareware games?

It depends on the individual. For myself, I see a world market full of opportunity. In my opinion, the internet is still in its infancy which is a good thing for the future of independent developers.

Is there any advice you could give people interested in making games?

If you start a game, finish it! Something like 95% of people who start out never finish. If you constantly start games and never finish them, it will grow into a pattern that will be hard for you to break.

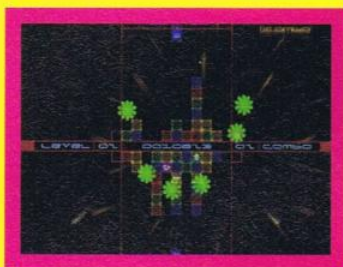
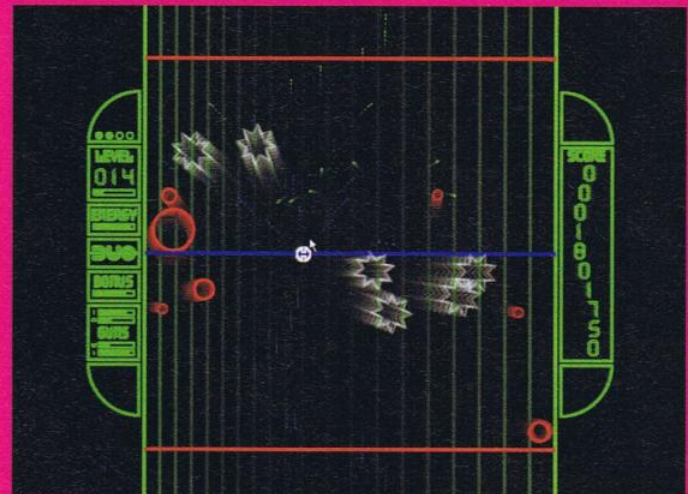
Aside from your own games are there any freeware games that you think are truly outstanding?

There are loads of awesome freeware games out there! My favourite is Kings Quest I and II VGA by AGD Interactive.

INTERVIEW

CHARIS
"FOG"

BINARYZOO CODER



[above] DUOTris a.k.a. Brain Strain

HYPHER: What first got you into making games? What's your background?

Fog: Obviously the initial attraction was the promise of riches, flash cars and women. Unfortunately I'm still waiting but it's probably just as well as I was only 12 at the time.

I originally started coding in the mid-80's on the Commodore Vic20 which seemed like a pretty natural thing to do at the time. All home computers came with a form of BASIC and most magazines had program listings that most people typed in. Invariably of course the code either wouldn't run (usually due to a magazine misprint) or was yet another "help blue square avoid the red circle" game that kept you entertained for, ooh, 30 seconds but you soon started tweaking the code and got enough confidence to try something yourself from scratch.

From there I progressed to the C64 and then onto coding on the Amiga 500 using the excellent AMOS until the early 90's when real life took over and I took a break from coding altogether.

Then a couple of years ago I got a PC through work and decided to give coding a go again and that's pretty much it. Probably a fairly typical story for a lot of coders of my age.

THERE IS ONE AREA WHERE WE
HAVE A DISTINCT ADVANTAGE
AND THAT IS INNOVATION**Were there any freeware games/developers that really inspired you to enter the field?**

There wasn't really a freeware scene as such when I started out so I can't say that was an inspiration although there are certainly many that inspire me now.

No, back in the days of the Vic and C64 many commercial games weren't developed by faceless companies but by charismatic individuals whose working methods

appear to bare a lot of similarities with many of today's freeware developers. Where one person often did all the coding, graphics and the music themselves. Coders like Stavros Fasoulas with Sanxion and Delta and Andrew Braybrook with Uridium and Paratroid. (I don't really do remakes but I'm sure one day I'll make an exception in the case of Paratroid).

And of course not forgetting the occasional long haired, slightly eccentric, llama obsessed genius. What can you say about Jeff Minters work? There's just so much to admire. Not just in the game play but the way his games are all so aurally and visually pleasing. They're almost as much an experience as they are games and that's something I'd love to be able to achieve. The cancellation of his last project Unity was a huge disappointment but I'm already looking forward to his new project... whatever that might be.

They were my original inspirations and 20 years later they still are.

What languages do you code in, and what software do you use?

My coding knowledge is pretty limited. I'd only ever coded in BASIC before so when I returned to coding after a several year break I was looking for another BASIC language to use.

I soon stumbled across DarkBasic Professional and was pretty impressed by how much things had progressed since I'd last coded. It might not be as powerful as some of the alternative languages but it suited my needs perfectly. As with all BASIC's it's really easy to learn and I can get quick results which is essential when you have a "proper" day job.

Unfortunately, as it's a BASIC language, it doesn't have the best reputation within the general coding community, but I'm more than impressed and it's fair to say DUO etc. aren't great examples of its more advanced features (support for Dx9,

pixel & vertex shaders, DLL support, BSP's etc). Apparently it can even handle something called 3D. I may have to try it out some day.

Sure it has its limitations and it's never going to out perform something like C++ but it does mean that you can actually get your games released long before that C++ game engine you'd otherwise still be working on becomes outdated.

Anyway, even as a BASIC programmer, I'm average at best but I do like to think I have an appreciation of what makes good game play which is far, far more important... or so I keep telling myself.

What is your eventual goal in making freeware games?

Apart from still hoping for the riches, flash cars and women I can't say I have any great goals or targets. As I work my coding time is often limited so all my projects and ambitions have to be suitably modest. It probably sounds pretty clichéd but as long as I'm enjoying it then I'll be happy. If others get some enjoyment from our games then that's a huge bonus.

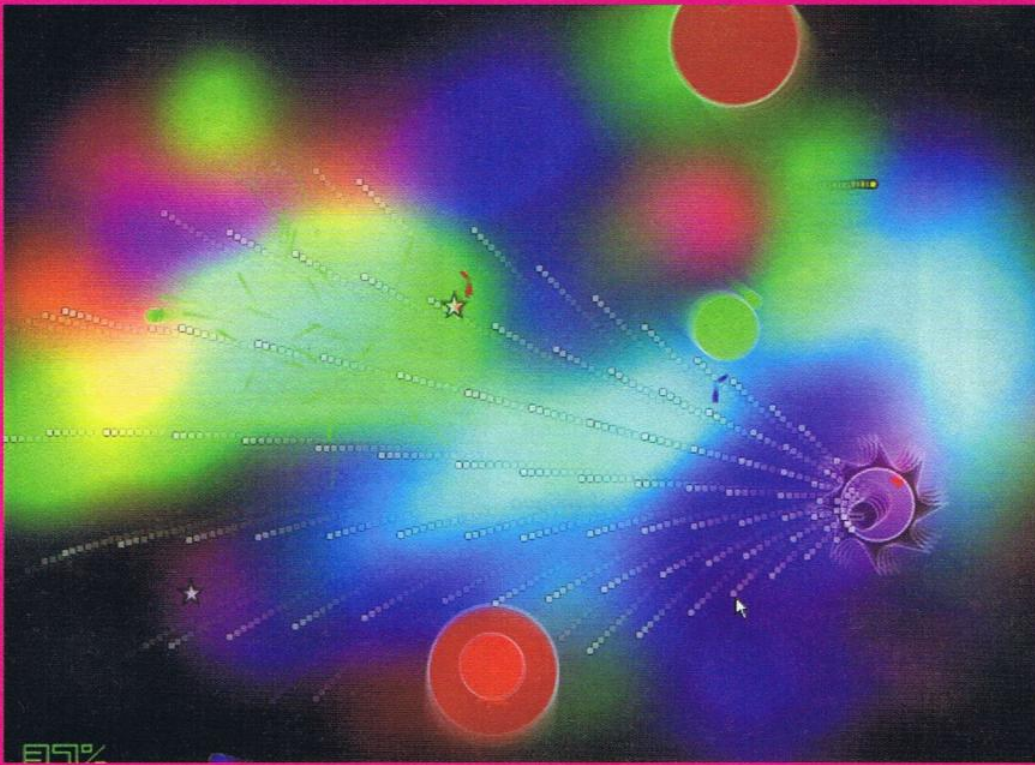
Eventually though I'd love to write something for one of the many mobile devices. I'd like to think our style of games would translate quite well.

Mono and DUO are essentially very flashy (and much more enjoyable) versions of Asteroids and Space Invaders at heart. What inspired you to take these old school games and update them for current tastes?

I've always been a shoot-em-up fan so for my first DBPro project I decided to write one but rather than clone an existing game I wanted to write one with a hint of originality so I came up with the idea of playing 2 shoot-em-ups at the same time. (Essentially what DUO is) I didn't have a clue if it would be playable but it would give me a good excuse

[below] A Blob And His Blob





[above] Just "fogging" brilliant

to throw lots of things around on the screen to see just what DBPro was capable of. I had no design document, I simply added elements as I thought them up and the code is such a mess I'm amazed it ever got finished. Luckily it did and I'm certainly more organised now.

The reaction to mono has come as huge surprise to me. As I said on our website when it was released it really was just some test code I'd done to try out some features for another project we are working on and wasn't even intended for release. Reaction has been so positive though that I'm currently working on it again to try and turn it into what I consider a proper game.

My aim in both cases was to concentrate on making them as playable as possible if necessary at the expense of fancy graphical effects and from the feedback I've received I guess I got the balance just about right.

Aside from making our brains hurt after a few minutes, DUOtris is one of the cleverest and most engrossing puzzle games we've played in quite some time. How did the idea for this game come about?

To me DUOtris was just a logical progression. I'd already proved with DUO that you could concentrate on 2 separate play areas at the same time so when I decided to do a puzzler it didn't take long to come up with the DUOtris concept. The first version "Classic" was a pretty straight puzzle game but in my opinion it was the addition of all the power-ups for the "Arcade" version that really made the game.

It's my personal favourite out of everything we've developed so far.

One of your most prominent design elements is the use of simple geometric shapes. How did this aesthetic come about?

I'd love to say that I woke up one night with an inspired stylistic vision but the truth is it was partially by chance and partially as a result of my own artistic limitations.

In DUO the original geometric shapes were just about the limits of my abilities and were only ever meant to be placeholders for the final graphics. However after showing several people an early demo they all commented on how effective the graphics were and so they stuck. I have tried on several occasions, including during the recent V2 update, to try a totally different graphical style but nothing else worked as well. The chaotic gameplay and simple graphics just seem to complement each other perfectly.

I appreciate they won't be to everyone's tastes and don't make for the best screenshots (as I'm sure any magazine editor will agree) but I like to think they have given Binaryzoo games an instantly recognisable look.

Do you have any more projects lined up for the future?

Well I always have something in the pipeline and right now there are a few things. We are currently working on the new version of mono in which I'm replacing most of the code and there will be a ton of new media. Then our next big project is an all new shmup which could be

described as DUO on steroids plus I have a couple of other ideas I'd like to prototype before maybe taking further. Oh and I'm constantly adding features to my Shoot Em Up Construction Kit which will probably never be released but was used to create mono.

I'll never be the most prolific coder around as my time is limited but now I have a small, talented team around me things should improve. After DUO, Lauri 'las6' Suoperra joined me to help out with the graphics and on all 3 games so far the guys from FK'd Reality Compositions (Aaron Frenley & Michael King) have supplied the thumping soundtracks. We seem to work well as a team and it's great to have other people to bounce ideas off.

What do you see as the future of freeware/shareware games?

One of my favourite subjects. Time for a quick rant.

I think freeware/shareware has a huge part to play in the future of the gaming industry. As technology advances I can only really see the quality gap between most freeware/shareware titles and commercial titles growing but there is one area where we have a distinct advantage and that is innovation.

The need for commercial success usually prevents most large developers from taking what could be considered a risk in releasing truly original software. Sure the odd one appears but generally we are fed a diet of new versions and clones and with the increasing cost of producing commercial titles I can only see originality decreasing.

It's understandable from the developers point of view but as we are without these financial worries we are free to develop new gameplay ideas, add original twists to existing genres or simply trying out new graphical styles.

If something truly innovative appeared on the freeware/shareware scene hopefully the idea might find its way into commercial games in the future. Or at least I'd like to believe that.

Is there any advice you could give people interested in making games?

I'm not sure I'm really the best person to be giving advice but a few things immediately spring to mind.

Firstly remember that for most people it's a hobby and therefore should be fun.

And be realistic with your choice of project. The bigger your ambitions the more likely you are to fail. If the amount and complexity of the coding required doesn't kill the project then the huge media requirements surely will.

Also get involved in the many online communities where there's an unlimited supply of advice, encouragement and constructive criticism available. I find them a great source of motivation.

Oh and have fun. Yeah I know I already said that but it's important you don't lose sight of what it's all about and if you enjoy creating a game it will show through in the quality of the final product.

Aside from your own games are there any freeware games that you think are truly outstanding?

Well I love a lot of the Japanese stuff where games are often innovative with distinctive graphics. I guess quirky would be a good description. I often find them quite inspirational even if the gameplay doesn't always work.

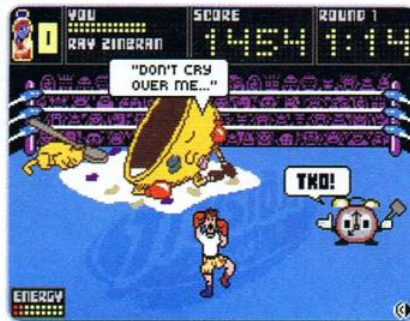
Most are games which most people will already know about like Omega's Every Extend (http://nagoya.cool.ne.jp/o_mega/product/e2.html), and Kenta Cho's games (http://www.asahi-net.or.jp/cs8k-cyu/index_e.html) but really anything out of the ordinary. <<

Links

»» Dr. Kosta Andreadis



The Handheld Boom as reported by Dr. Destruction
www.doomportables.org/completed.php
 »» Nintendo's dominance of the handheld market, much like the human race, is coming to an end. For too long Nintendo have they used their inferior Game Boy line of systems to control the market share. Much like the human race has used their inferior technology and concept of emotion to evolve their primitive civilisation. And so like a breath of fresh air players out there now have a choice of handheld that doesn't bear the Nintendo logo. Just like the human race has a choice to either give up quietly and forget their useless notion of the 'enduring human spirit' or perish at the hand of Dr. Destruction!



The Corporation
www.frusion.com/game.asp
www.pbase.com/bshocka/brookehogan
 »» Capitalism works and that's a bankable fact, that's money in the bag, that's a wise investment with prospectively positive returns. All hippy tree huggers can go back to their aimless bong fuelled lives, because the almighty dollar has won and if you want proof then here it is ladies and germs — capitalism in action. In order to quench their greed, capitalist fat cats like to take something pure, break it down and pass off a bastardised version as a marvel of innovative marketing. As much as I hate to see the NES classic Punch-Out!! being used in such a manner there is light at the end of the tunnel — Hulk Hogan has a daughter!



~ i pwn n00bs ~
www.purepwnage.com/
 »» Online gaming is not for the weak, nor for casual gamers looking to kill a few hours before their sporting event training. Noobs exist for a very simple reason, to get pwned — either by superior strats or the dreaded head shot, and if you're not willing to devote your life to the game then it's no wonder you keep getting pwned. None make that so clear as Jeremy, a pure gamer who lives to hunt and destroy noobs, as documented by his friend Kyle in Pure Pwnage, an online series that follows the trials and tribulations of pwning noobs for a living.



Operation Earth Freedom
<http://ned.ucam.org/~sdh31/misc/destroy.html>
 »» Super villains are always threatening the world, talking about wiping out entire countries and the like. Sure, they sound like big thinkers; people focussed on the big picture, but one trip to this site and you'll be convinced they're all underachievers. If you're going to take down the planet — do it thoroughly. Good old Sam has put together a guide to destroying the Earth covering all the methods that are currently available to us and somewhat feasible. Prospective super villains would do well to check this site out.



Totally Hot Babes!
www.asciibabes.com/
 »» Lusciously curvaceous babes await everyone who visits this site. A feast for the eyes as they say, assuming our eyes have digestive systems that could break down and process images of hot chicks separating the good (i.e. Keira Knightley) from the bad (i.e. Oprah Winfrey). If you don't find the prospect of looking at pictures of women posing seductively as if they're looking straight into your eyes and are about to whisper "I'm a very naughty girl and I need a stern spanking", then you my friend are, as a hip clothing company would say - "f c u k'd in the head".

```
High School/Jr.High
10 PRINT "HELLO WORLD"
20 END

First year in College
program Hello(input, output)
begin
  writeLn("Hello World");
end.

Senior year in College
(defun hello
  (print
   (cons "Hello (list 'world)"))))

New professional
#include <stdio.h>
void main(void)
{
  char *message[] = {"Hello ", "world"};
  int i;

  for(i = 0; i < 2; ++i)
    printf("%s", message[i]);
  printf("\n");
}
```

Properly Indented Hilarity
www.ariel.com.au/jokes/The_Evolution_of_a_Programmer.html
 »» Evolution is a natural part of err, stuff, because things and junk are constantly like evolving you know? Even programmers with mad skills used to have pretty much no skills at some point in their life, most likely around the birthing stage of infancy or the toddler intermission before childhood. Even when it comes to code junkies, there's evolution you know, it's not like you can be expected to write a recursive hash function to solve prime numerical maths stuff in primary school — because those sort of coding skills take time to evolve.

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The Sony Playstation® Portable (PSP) comes in a black color, with a 16:9 widescreen TFT LCD centered in a sleek ergonomic design with a high-quality finish that fits comfortably in the hands. The dimensions are 170mm x 74mm x 23mm with a weight of 260g. The PSP features a high-quality TFT LCD that displays full color (16.77 million colors) on a 480 x 272 pixel high-resolution screen. It also comes complete with the basic functions of a portable player such as built-in stereo speakers, exterior headphone connector, brightness control and sound mode selection. Keys and controls inherit the same operability of PlayStation® and PlayStation 2, familiar to fans all over the world.

The PSP also comes equipped with diverse input/output connectors such as USB 2.0, and 802.11b (Wi-Fi) wireless LAN, providing connectivity to various devices in the home and to the wireless network outside.

The world of gaming is further enhanced by enabling users to enjoy online gaming, or by connecting multiple PSPs to each other, directly via the wireless network. In addition, software and data can be downloaded through a USB or wireless network onto Memory Stick™ PRO Duo. All of these features can be enjoyed on one single system.

PSP adopts a small but high-capacity optical medium UMD™ (Universal Media Disc), enabling game software, rich with full-motion video and other forms of digital entertainment content, to be stored. The newly developed UMD, the next-generation compact storage media, is only 60mm in diameter but can store up to 1.8GB of digital data. A broad range of digital entertainment content such as music video clips, movies and sports programs can be provided on UMD. To protect this entertainment content, a robust copyright protection system has been developed which utilizes a combination of a unique disc ID, a 128 bit AES encryption keys for the media, and individual ID for each PSP hardware unit.



Smartjoy Frag for PS2
\$55

The **SmartJoy Frag for PS2** allows you to connect a standard PS/2 Keyboard and mouse to your Playstation console for your favourite First Person Shooter games. Playing online will never be the same.

Get the edge, get the Smartjoy Frag! First 50 customers will get a Free Mousepad. Those who buy 3 or more units will also get a Smartjoy Frag baseball cap!

Also available:
Smartjoy Frag for XBOX - \$55



Soul Calibur II
Universal Arcade Stick
\$58

The Soul Calibur II Universal Arcade Stick is a high quality Joystick for XBOX, PS2 and Gamecube. Includes rubber pads for extra comfortability.



Nintendo DS
Airform Pocket \$14.95

The Nintendo DS Airform pocket is designed for the protection of any scratch of the DS console and is great to store game Cart's, headphones and Stylus.



PS2 Memory Card
8MB Card \$32

In multiple colours, these memory cards bundled with a leather memory card pocket looks and feels quite prestigious.



Twin Turbo 2 Steering Wheel \$99

PS2/PS1/GC/XBOX/PC Compatible - Auto system detection - 180-degree steering angle - Programmable analog gas and brake pedals, gear shifter & hand brake.



Nintendo DS and Gameboy SP
Car Charger \$14.95

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The in-car charger for NDS and GBA is quick charging and super convenient.



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SAITEK PC GAMERS' KEYBOARD

RRP: \$99.95

Saitek make good PC peripherals and the innovatively named "PC Gamers' Keyboard" is no exception to the rule. Whilst on the surface the keyboard doesn't look too flash there is a hell of a lot going for it – most notably the programmable nine-key pad. Aside from the nine keys that can be assigned to different tasks in game, the pad also features two extra "shift" buttons giving the player a potential 27 different assignable keys. The usefulness of this keypad may be lost on FPS players but fans of RPGs and RTS (or any other game that requires a number of hotkeys) will find a hell of a lot to like.

The Keyboard itself is rather standard and bare bones in terms of layout with the only non-standard keys being for volume and to turn on and off the funky blue LED backlighting. The keyboard is a soft touch to the extreme so if you're someone who really likes a bit of resistance in their keys you should look elsewhere. The only real flaw in the overall design of the keyboard is the width of the unit. The keyboard is quite long and with the keypad attached it takes up quite a bit of desk real-estate. That said, combine this with a nice gaming mouse and you've got a great setup.

MICROSOFT OPTICAL DESKTOP WITH FINGERPRINT

RRP: \$199.95

Bill Gates may have a house that identifies him by reading his foot steps (the Gates gait as it were) as he approaches, switching on the wall sized TV, running a bubble bath, putting out his jam jams and warming up some milk on the stove, but the rest of us poor schmucks don't get to live in the world of the future. We're stuck in the stinky present. But hey, Mr Gates and co have been kind enough to incorporate one vaguely futuristic doo-dad in their latest product lineup for PC – the fingerprint reader.

Even though this won't replace the humble password completely (one of the first things you're told in the instruction booklet is that this is NOT a security feature and shouldn't be used to access

corporate networks or to protect sensitive data like financial information), if you have a login for your home PC or need to log in to more than a couple of web sites there's definitely a case to be argued to get one of these. It's undeniably cool to breeze through login screens with a simple touch of the forefinger, and the tech worked flawlessly in our tests. And then there's the cool red glow of the scanner pad.

The fingerprint reader works, no doubt about it. The rest of the package we tested is pretty standard – the keyboard has media controls, plenty of useful shortcuts and reasonable, if not spectacular, feeling keys. The mouse (Wireless Optical Mouse 2.0) does the job, and is fine for a medium price piece of hardware. It's a bit annoying that the mouse is wireless while the keyboard isn't, but what are you going to do? If you already have a mouse and keyboard that you're happy with there's a standalone fingerprint reader which retails for \$99.95.



SNK vs. CAPCOM

Not a Match. Struggle!!

Prepare for the ultimate battle as SNK takes on CAPCOM

Select characters from some of the arcades biggest franchises such as: King of Fighters, Fatal Fury, Samurai Shodown, Dark Stalkers and Street Fighter, and then slug it out to see who will win this ultimate battle of survival...



36 characters taken from SNK's and CAPCOM's most popular franchises



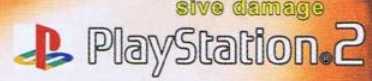
Hidden characters to unlock!



Multiple modes of play including Arcade, Versus and Practice



Go beyond the Super Special move with the exclusive Exceed Move to inflict massive damage



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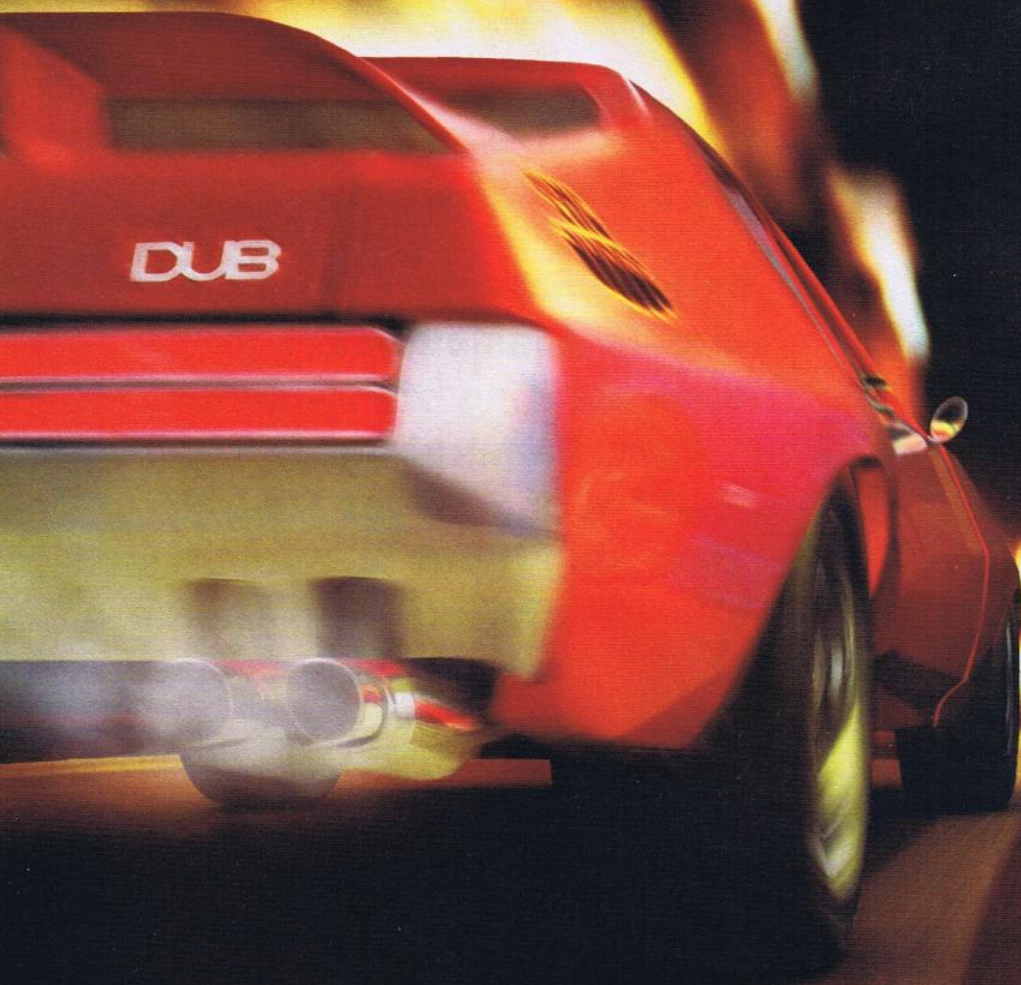
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52 Midnight Club 3: DUB Edition

Any game with Underground
Resistance can't possibly be bad right?

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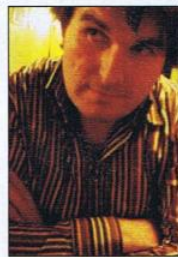


Reviews

Game Theory

SEAMUS BYRNE

DS versus PSP: the demographic shootout



It was a nice thought, wasn't it? The Nintendo DS and the Sony PSP were not going to be competitors in the marketplace. They were, in fact, aimed at very different audiences. They'd each own their own happy sector of the gaming market and everyone

would play happily together while sugar snow fell from the sky to glisten in the sun upon the meadows of happyland...

Reality check #1. There are not really any separate sectors of the gaming marketplace. In particular, there are no distinct sectors when it comes to consoles themselves. Games and peripheral devices can certainly be created and sold to certain people with certain interests. At the console level, every potential buyer will make their choices based not only on their own conclusions but those of the community.

Reality check #2. We have never witnessed a genuine handheld shootout in the kind of marketplace that exists today — a market of cool. The majority, most of which will be new or casual gamers, will decide based on look, feel and emotional response to marketing. Even more directly of influence here, all handheld and portable device markets possess a 'fashion accessory' element that must be fulfilled for the buyer to be happy.

Reality check #3. If there is any reality to the question of 'different audiences', it is that the DS will not appeal to the same breadth of audience the PSP will reach. With its media centre capabilities the DS audience is little more than a subset of the PSP's. If the PSP had phone capabilities, it would be the Platonic ideal of what the N-Gage wished it could have been.

Issues with PSP battery life and pricing are

similar to those levelled at the coolest mobile device on the planet today: the iPod. Many arguments exist for why the iPod shouldn't rule the school, but it does. Why? Because it looks and sells like a winner, so everyone believes it is a winner. And for all its issues, it offers some of the best quality available in the market.

In the quality stakes, the victor is clear from the direct comparison screenshots offered by Ridge Racer. To have a direct comparison that places daylight between the capabilities of the two devices could well be a death sentence for the DS in the minds of the fence sitters. Simply put, these shots look a generation apart.

Nintendo's stronghold — the 'kid factor' — will play little part in this shootout. A kids' playground is often more cool fickle than the rest of the world! With a game machine available that even cool adults 'need' to own, kids can have a taste of that mature cool and show it off in the playground. Perhaps the primary school gamer kids will remain Nintendo loyal (I doubt they ever were), but the fact is the non-gamer cool kids will be packing a PSP and everyone else will want in on that scene.

If cool plays its part in this comparative shootout, which I'm quite sure it will, the DS doesn't stand a chance. The slope of market decline will quickly scare off developers, sending it to an early graveyard just like the Dreamcast console — so much promise, so little to show for it.

Keep in mind the DS is a divergence, not a successor, to the Gameboy. Yet a loss in this battle will leave Nintendo with the need to wow audiences with something that goes beyond the simple concept 'handheld console' and delivers audiences a must have experience they cannot get anywhere else.

Can they do it? It's a nice thought, isn't it?

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

0-49

Does anyone actually read these little blurbs? I mean, what's

50-59

the point of trying to come up with something funny each issue if

60-69

no one actually notices? I might as well just use this space as my

70-79

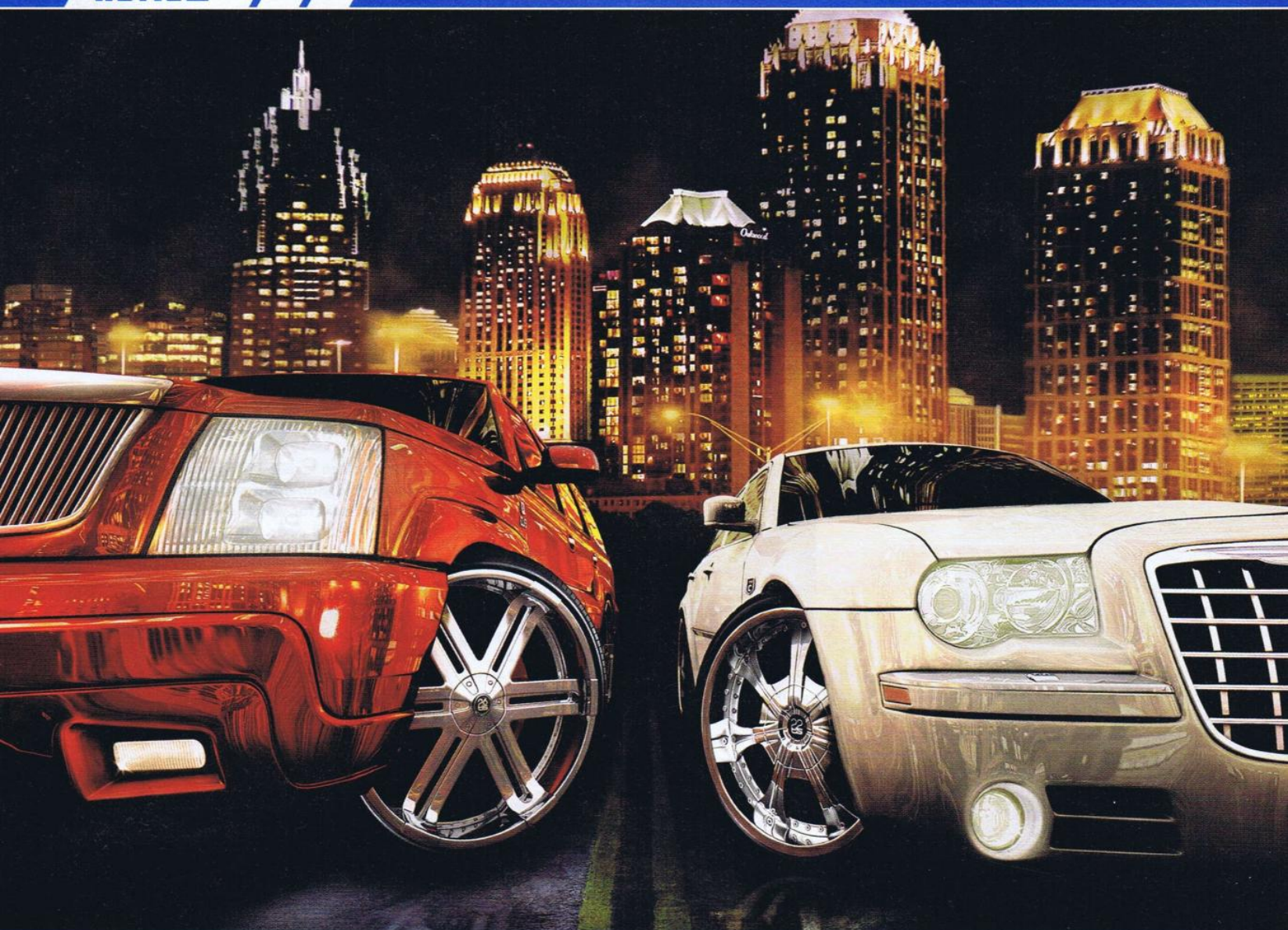
own private diary. Dear Diary, Wilks sucks, signed Cam. And hell,

80-89

why even have numbers in these blue boxes above me? Why not



something like this? Ah, that's much better. And hella cool to boot



MIDNIGHT CLUB 3: DUB Edition

CAM SHEA is in arcade racing heaven this month...

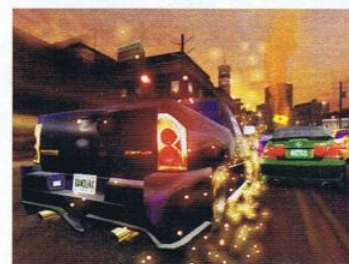
Y'know, it's easy to be sceptical. Even though we loved *Midnight Club II* here at the office, when the whole "DUB Edition" thing was announced, there were some fears that gaming's newfound love of all things bling may cloud what was a pretty cool open city checkpoint racing game. With *Need for Speed Underground* already covering similar territory, the last thing we wanted to play was a "me too" racer that wasn't sure where it stood.

RACING RENAISSANCE
Thankfully, that's not the case. Rockstar San Diego have absolutely nailed this game, building on the core *Midnight Club* gameplay and bringing in compelling new elements such as car customisation and special moves. The best part for arcade racing fans however, is that even though this game certainly has a fair bit in common with EA's *NFS Underground* series, the actual style of racing and vibe of the game couldn't be more disparate. We really are in an arcade racing renaissance right now, with *Burnout*, *Ridge Racer*, *NFSU* and *Midnight Club* all ripping it up, but doing so in their own inimitable way.

But let's not compare *Midnight Club 3 (MC3)* to the other arcade racing series'. The most appropriate comparison is to the last *Midnight Club* game. Wow. Going back and playing *Midnight Club II* after clocking 30 or so

hours (and still going I might add) on *MC3* was an eye opener. There's just so much more to this instalment. Beyond the expected stuff like greater detail in the visuals and better handling for the vehicles, Rockstar San Diego have opened up the way the game is structured and presented, giving you countless racing options at any one time, and a garage/mechanic home base in each city where you can manage and customise your vehicles.

Here's how it all works. Challenging and beating other drivers opens up their car club's races, but you'll need the right class of vehicle to compete in them. You can win vehicles by beating tournaments, or buy them. Bonus cash can be gained by doing the City Races which are scattered all over each city's landscape, and are there to take part in just for the fun (and cash) of it. Once you're done racing, head back to the garage



[above] I love a good rim job



[above] Just like *Torque*, only fun...

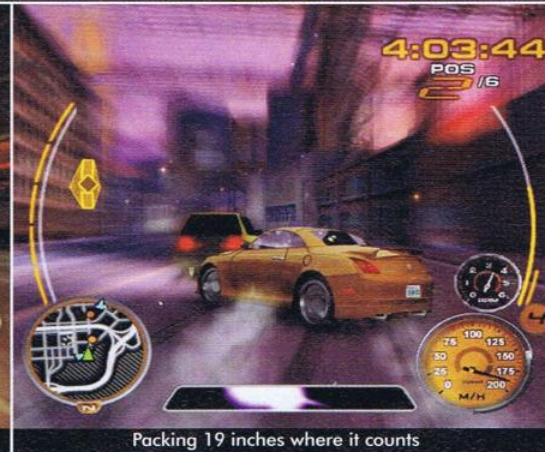
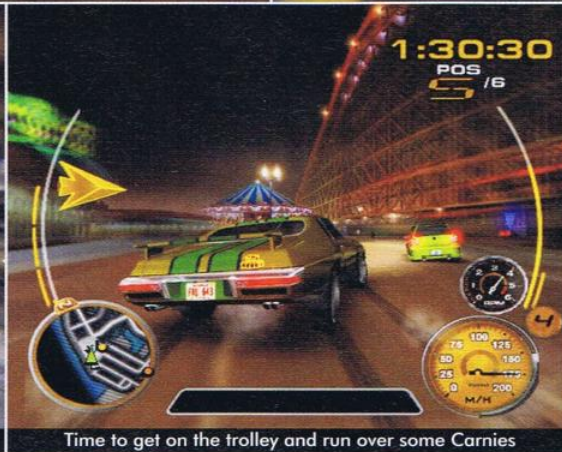
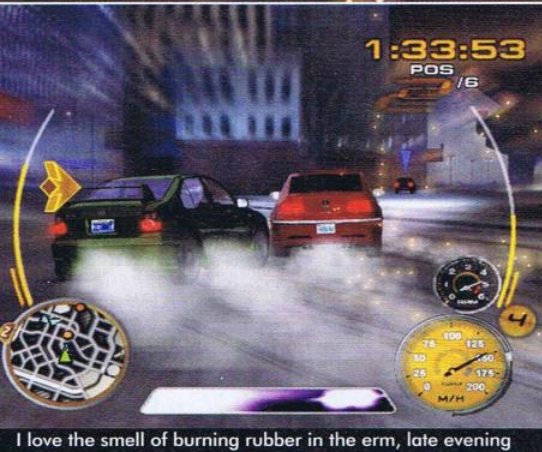
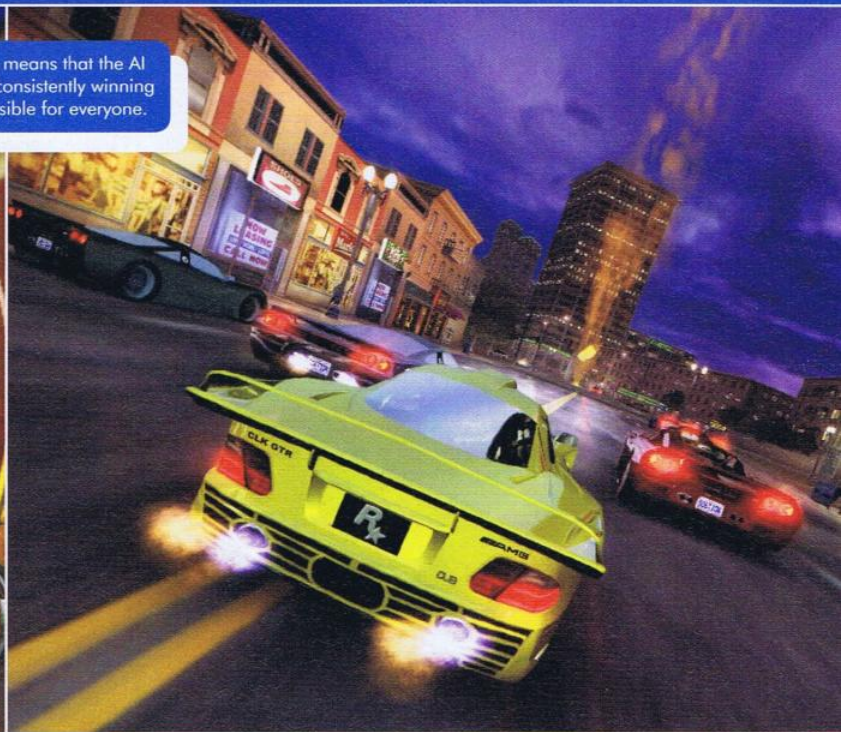
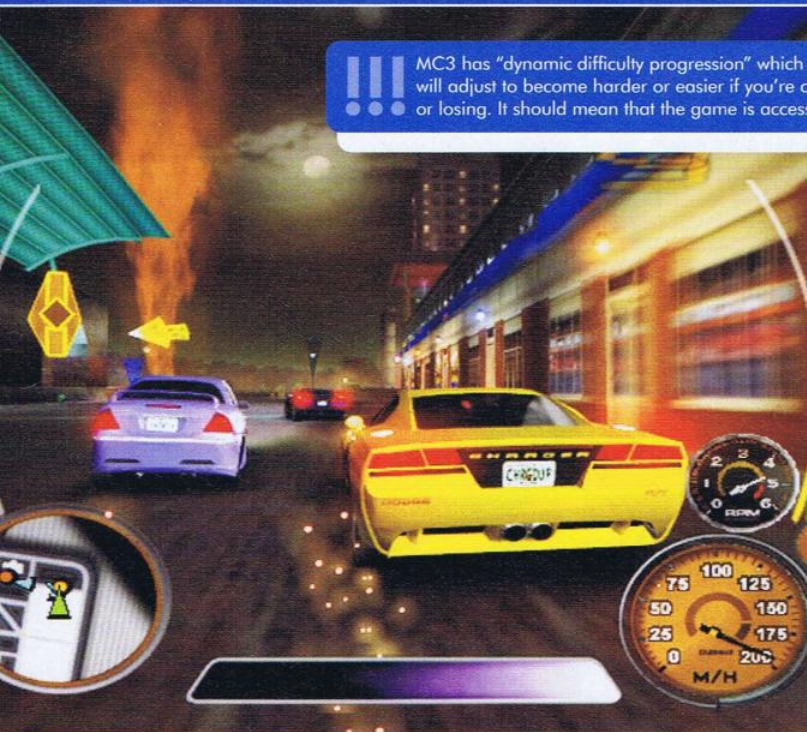


[up] Like *From Dusk Till Dawn*, only good

to modify every aspect of your car — upgrade its performance, slap on some vinyls, swap body parts, buy rims or install hydraulics.

There's a hell of a lot to this game. You have three full cities — San Diego, Atlanta and Detroit to play through and cars/bikes from manufacturers like Cadillac, Chevy, Lexus, Mercedes, Dodge, Kawasaki

!!! MC3 has "dynamic difficulty progression" which means that the AI will adjust to become harder or easier if you're consistently winning or losing. It should mean that the game is accessible for everyone.



I love the smell of burning rubber in the erm, late evening

Time to get on the trolley and run over some Carnies

Packing 19 inches where it counts

and Lamborghini to obtain, not to mention all the aftermarket parts. You have a whole host of moves to pull off while racing too. There are returning moves from *Midnight Club II*, such as nitrous, in-air control, two wheel driving and perhaps most importantly, slip stream turbo, as well as the introduction of different special moves for different classes of vehicles. SUVs, trucks and luxury sedans get "Agro". The more stuff you run into/knock over, the more the meter on the left builds. When it's full you'll get one unit of Agro which allows you to simply ram straight through traffic for a limited period. Muscle cars and choppers get "Roar". It's built up by drifting and when activated sends out a shockwave

Agro allows you to ram straight through traffic for a limited period

that swerves all cars out of your path. Our favourite though, is available to imports, exotics and sport bikes, and it's called "Zone". Drive flawlessly to build up the meter then click in the left thumbstick to go into the zone (bullet time essentially), during which you'll be able to easily weave between cars and around sharp corners. It can also be used as a get out of gaol card - if you're about to overshoot a turn you can kick it in and make the turn.

But all this talk of cars, cities and moves doesn't do justice to the reality of just how freewheeling and fun *Midnight Club 3* is to

actually play. This really is rough and ready arcade racing - tearing along at breakneck speeds, literally ploughing through the thick traffic, powersliding around corners, drafting behind another player before boosting out ahead, taking shortcuts, flipping onto two wheels to weave through traffic, boosting off a ramp to catch hundreds of feet of air, and (eventually) caning along at near *Wipeout* speeds. It doesn't matter if you're not familiar with the Dub scene, and it doesn't matter if you've never played this series before - *Midnight Club 3* is a blast to play in its own right. Get it. <<

»» **THE MUSIC'S GOOD TOO...** With around 100 tracks, the soundtrack is, for want of a better expression, pretty damn banging. Covering hip hop, drum 'n' bass, techno, rock and dance hall it's eclectic enough that there's likely something for everyone. The techno and d'n'b selections are particularly first rate. Representing techno you have artists like UR, Aztec Mystic, Fix and Knights of the Jaguar, while on the d'n'b tip there's Dom & Roland, Calyx and E-Sassin... to name a few. Given the "by any means necessary" attitude of the gameplay the drum 'n' bass is particularly perfect. There's nothing like barrelling along entirely too fast down a crowded street, jamming through traffic with the rain pouring down all around while a ferociously menacing bassline and slamming beat urges you on. Sweet. The only downside as far as the music goes is that the tunes don't continue playing when you restart, and the interstitial loops will probably drive you mad.

AVAILABLE ON:
PS2 / XBOX / PC / GCN

DETAILS:

CATEGORY: Arcade racing
PLAYERS: 1-8
DEVELOPER: Rockstar San Diego
PUBLISHER: Take2 Interactive
PRICE: \$99.95
RATING: G
AVAILABLE: Now

HYPER VERDICT:

PLUS: Fast, fun, great soundtrack, serious longevity.
MINUS: You'll need some patience, cops can be annoying.

VISUALS SOUND GAMEPLAY
89 94 92

OVERALL

92

Everything that a sequel should be.





UNREAL CHAMPIONSHIP 2: The Liandri Conflict

DANIEL WILKS is conflicted

▶▶ If you haven't heard anything about Unreal Championship 2 by this point I'll start off with a little disclaimer that should make you sleep a little better tonight. Unreal Championship 2 is a sequel to the original Xbox game in name only. Unlike the first Unreal Championship, 2 is not simply a crappy port of a good PC game that was too technically advanced to run on the console so instead was slow, dull and only served to remind you how good Unreal Tournament (insert year here) actually is. Instead, Unreal Championship 2 is a whole new game, a fast paced first person/third person shooter/action game created especially for the big black box. So the big question becomes is the new game better than the first? The short answer to that is a resounding "Hells Yeah" but the long answer involves a few recriminations and disappointments.

SILKY SMOOTH

To start with the positive, Unreal Championship 2 is fast. The framerate is silky smooth throughout gameplay (though strangely choppy during the cinematics) making for a fine ride throughout. Unlike the previous Unreal Championship, players also move fast so there aren't interminable waits to find someone to shoot as you trudge slowly through the countryside. Quite the opposite actually, players will nearly constantly be in the centre of the action in both single and multiplayer games.

Players have always had access to a melee attack in the Unreal universe but Unreal Championship 2 represents the first time where melee attacks are not simply a last ditch defence or a way to embarrass a noob but are an integral part of gameplay. Each of the characters in UC2 has a unique melee weapon and two attacks, a light fast attack and a heavy charge attack. Both of these

would be useless if the developers had not included a couple of nifty ways in which the player can bring a knife to a gunfight. On the most basic level the melee weapon can be used as a shield enabling players to close the distance in relative safety but with careful timing the shield can be used to reflect shots back at the attacker making approaching for melee action not only safe for you but dangerous for the other party. Then there is a charge move that can be used to cover a lot of ground in a short period of time, the downside of the move being that whilst charging you are vulnerable to damage. Finally, if you manage to stun another player with a charged shot from your basic pistol weapon, quickly entering melee will bring up a quick rhythm game that, if you hit all the correct buttons in the right order in the time limit, will reward you with an instant gib. Unfortunately it's usually easier and more effective

to shoot them with a bigger gun while they are stunned than risk not pulling off the melee gib.

By now you're all probably thinking that melee is all well and good but it's going to work like crap in a first person perspective. Well, you'd be right about that, first person is crap for melee action, and that's why UC2 switches to a third person perspective for melee. At any point in the action players can seamlessly transition from first person to third person with the simple press of a button.



[up] Lighting farts is just plain dangerous



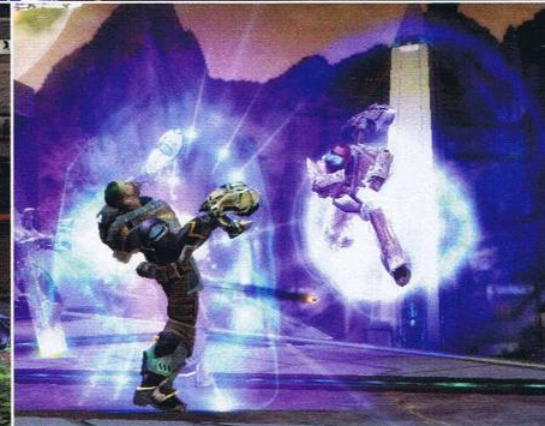
!!! Mortal Kombat's Raiden is a hidden character in Unreal Championship 2.



Hippy fire twirlers from the future



Something about a cattle prod



The portal prank went awry when Bob had a heart attack

Naturally each of the perspectives have their advantages – first person for shooting and third for melee but switching perspectives also makes a huge deal of difference in getting around the various levels. The third person perspective not only gives players a better view of the surrounding level, it also allows the player to pull off otherwise incredibly difficult maneuvers like wall jumps and adrenaline combos. Perspective switching takes a little getting used to but after a few games gibbing an opponent in first person, switching to third to wall jump up to a platform with a better weapon, switching back to first to frag another mook and finally decimating a third in melee will be as natural as breathing.

At any point players can seamlessly transition from first to third person

THERMOS VISION

In keeping with the fast paced nature of the game, each of the 14 characters also has access to a number of character specific adrenalin powers that can be used when the adrenalin meter is filled. These six powers can be used any time in combat (if the meter is filled that is) and add an extra dimension to the frantic combat. These powers include speed, anti gravity, a damage shield, area effect damage, thermal vision and more.

Although multiplayer is the

heart and soul of the game, players have to slog their way through the single player campaign to unlock maps, game modes and mutators to make it any fun. This is quite unfortunate as the single player story mode contains some, shall we say, bad decisions, the worst of which is the level in which players are introduced to a game mode called Nali Slaughter in which they have to compete with a Skaarj to kill a set number of unarmed Nali. This level goes beyond frustrating at anything other than the simplest difficulty setting, as the Skaarj are stronger at melee (the only weapons you have access to), are very hardy and have an adrenalin powerup that turns them into a whirling dervish of melee death for a short while. The odds are, to put it politely, stacked against you and not in a fun way. This is but one of the ways in which the compulsory story mode lets an otherwise great game down. We could go on but you get the picture I'm sure. <<

>> **PINK-CHEEKED AND ROBUST** The real meat of UC2 is the robust multiplayer featuring up to eight players going head to head over a network or Xbox Live. Eight players may not sound like much but with the size of the maps and the general speed of the game any more would make the game too chaotic to be playable. Players can unlock around 15 maps featuring both indoor and outdoor environments and choose from six multiplayer modes ranging from old chestnuts like Deathmatch and Capture the Flag through to Nali Slaughter (which is far more entertaining with friends than against the AI) and Overdose, a frantic radioactive sports game. The multiplayer action is fast and furious as well as being highly enjoyable – it makes the slog through the single player story mode worthwhile.

AVAILABLE ON:
PS2 / XBOX / PC / GCN

DETAILS:

CATEGORY: FPS

PLAYERS: 1-8

DEVELOPER: Epic

PUBLISHER: Midway

PRICE: \$99.95

RATING: MA 15+

AVAILABLE: Now

HYPER VERDICT:

PLUS: Excellent multiplayer, the return of the Ripjack, silky framerate.

MINUS: Dull Story mode, must unlock multiplayer content.

VISUALS 89 SOUND 87 GAMEPLAY 90

OVERALL
84

Excellent multiplayer but a rather tedious slog to get there.



JADE EMPIRE

DANIEL WILKS is changing his name to Sardonic Dep.

Set in a mythical Asia that uses elements of Chinese, Japanese and Korean architecture/culture/mythology as well as a healthy number of tributes to both Wuxia films and current Western pop-culture, Jade Empire weaves a tangled story of destinies, revenge, betrayal, redemption and, if you play your cards right and talk to the right people, love. From what we understand the team that worked on Empire was comprised of the coders from Baldur's Gate 2 and the script writers from Knights of the Old Republic, but you could be



forgiven for thinking that the game was simply an extension of the KotOR franchise as the menu system, morality system and general look of the game are all but identical. Thankfully after a bit of play the differences between the two games become obvious allowing Jade Empire to stand on its own merits.

THERE'S ALWAYS AN AMULET

For a start, Jade Empire is a good deal more simplistic in terms of statistics and inventory - only three statistics need to be assigned at level up by players and there is no inventory to speak of. If a player needs an item to complete a quest there is no need to go through a number of screens to find it and use it - it is all automatic. When a player finds a better weapon it automatically replaces the one they already have. The only thing the player needs to worry about equipping are gems in a special amulet to give bonuses to statistics.

Jade Empire is first and foremost an action RPG and quite possibly the best to appear on the Xbox in terms of the combat engine. The system may sound simple as it only uses two attack buttons (a fast attack and a charged attack that will break blocks) and a block button, but it allows for a huge amount of depth and customisation that should keep everyone happy.

When players create their character at the beginning of the game they can choose two combat styles, a support style and a damage style but throughout the course of the adventure can pick up many more through quests and paying trainers. Fighting styles fall into five categories; Support styles do not damage a target but can add debilitating status effects such as slowing or paralysing the target, Damage styles do direct damage to an enemy, Weapon styles utilise weapons for direct damage but use focus so are only available for as long

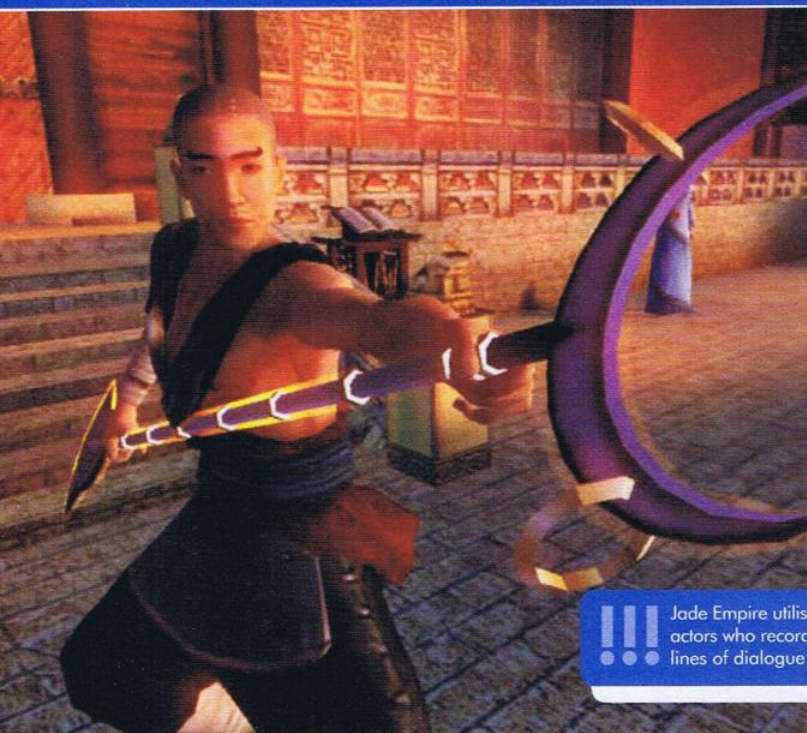


[above] Underwater Basket Weaving Fist

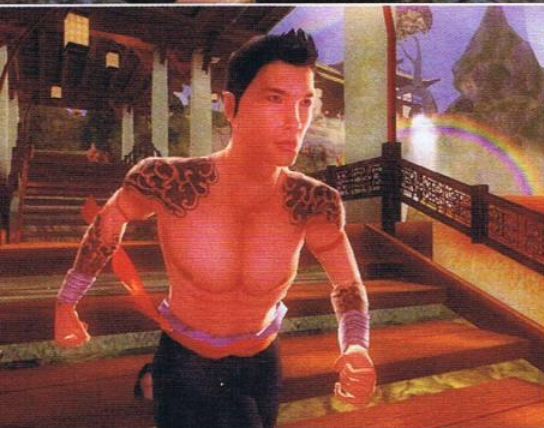


[above] Warm glowing warming glow

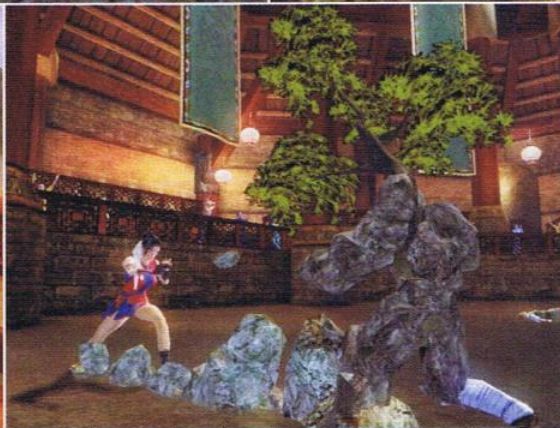
as that statistic lasts, Transformation styles use Chi and change the character into a demonic form for a short period of time enabling them to use special powers or inflict a huge amount of damage, and Magic styles are another Chi using skill that can inflict damage at range as well as a number of other effects.



!!! Jade Empire utilised around 90 actors who recorded close to 14,000 lines of dialogue for the game.



Sunshine on my shoulders makes me happy



Treebeard and the Rock Muncher apparently had a kid



A Master of the Secret Art of Pugent Foot

At any time players can have four styles mapped to the directions on the D-Pad and can change between styles in real time. This switching, aside from looking pretty damn cool, enables players to set up what are called "Harmonic Combos". By hitting an enemy, usually with a support style to begin with, a short timer begins (represented by a ring at the enemy's feet) - if the player can change styles to something that can complete a harmonic combo and hit the enemy again they will be given an instant and flashy, not to mention rather gory kill as well as a guaranteed drop to replenish Health, Focus or Chi. There is more to speak about with the combat engine such as timing, dodging and enemies being resistant to specific styles but you get the picture - it's pretty damn deep. And good.

Players can take only one of their

A tangled story of destinies, revenge, betrayal, redemption and love

followers with them at any time in Jade Empire but a new and very clever mechanic makes up for the lack of a real party. At any time followers can be set to be active or support. Active characters will attack and though they may not do too much damage they can take enemy focus from the player. Support characters on the other hand do not attack and are totally ignored by enemies but provide the player with special skills like health regeneration or more damage on weapon based attacks.

WE ARE THE KNIGHTS WHO SAY...

Bioware have long written good stories for their games and Jade

Empire is no exception. The plot is excellent and contains a couple of nice twists that will catch you off guard if you haven't been paying attention, as well as some excellent NPCs and support characters, such as the hilariously frustrating Sir Roderick Ponce von Fontlebottom, voiced by the great John Cleese, a foppish, blunderbuss wielding Westerner bent on showing the citizens of the Jade Empire that they are backwards savages.

Voice acting is excellent for the most part, aside from a few characters with wildly inappropriate voices. The soundtrack is nigh on perfect and compliments the action brilliantly. Jade Empire is also quite nice looking with some stunning environments, character animations and spell effects. Players can expect a solid 15-20 hours on their first play through and the morality system, similar to that seen in KOTOR means that players can play through at least once more, possibly twice if the rumours of a neutral ending are true. <<

» 1942 Shortly after embarking on your adventure players gain access to a flying craft powered by equal amounts of technology and magic, opening up a whole new style of gameplay. When traveling to a new area, players are given the choice to evade or fight their way there. If they opt to fight they will be thrown into a horizontally scrolling shooter level strongly reminiscent of 1942. Later in the game players can actually do specific shooter missions for money and equipment. Any shooter level completed is unlocked for a later time in the main menu.

AVAILABLE ON:
PS2 / XBOX / PC / GCN

DETAILS:

CATEGORY: Action RPG

PLAYERS: 1

DEVELOPER: Bioware

PUBLISHER: Microsoft

PRICE: \$99.95

RATING: M15+

AVAILABLE: Now

HYPER VERDICT:

PLUS: Great voice acting, excellent combat engine.

MINUS: Some railroading, not enough exploration.

VISUALS 88 SOUND 93 GAMEPLAY 87

OVERALL

87

Bioware should create their own IP more often.



TRACKMANIA SUNRISE

DANIEL WILKS used to be more of a night person

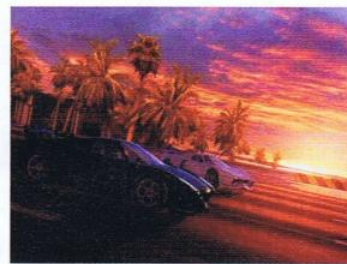
Imagine yourself rocketing along at 400 miles an hour, hitting a loop perfectly, zooming out the other side, hitting a speed boost hurling you up a ramp so you can do a quarter pipe gap transfer, feathering the brake to powerslide around a hairpin curve and zooming over the finish line only to discover that you've missed the gold medal time by three tenths of a second. Welcome to Trackmania Sunrise, a PC only racing game that is sheer joy, frustration, elation and aggravation in roughly equal measures. The sequel to Trackmania, a little known but obsessively loved PC racing game, Sunrise presents players with three very different game modes, one not so different game mode, the opportunity to make their own tracks and post them online and online multiplayer. This amount of gameplay at full price would be a bargain but at the \$49.95 price point it's a bloody god send.

AMAZINGLY FAST

The first and most basic of the game modes is Race, which obviously tasks the player with going as fast as they can to make it around the tracks provided, to make the finish line within the time needed to unlock the next track. Cars fairly fly around, reaching speeds over 400mph (nearly 645kmph), something that's all well and good to say if the sense of speed crawls along. Thankfully this is not the case. Sunrise is an amazingly fast game, fully utilising the processing power of modern PCs to seriously churn out the polygons. The races are pure arcade fun - although there are other cars on the track, Sunrise is all about going fast, not jostling for first place, as where you cross the line doesn't count for squat. It's all about time. This is the one major problem facing the racing mode - beating many of the tracks with a gold medal rating (and it is necessary to achieve at least a few gold rankings) requires almost

pixel perfect maneuvering around the track. Naturally this can take a hell of a lot of trial and error. The frustration level reached when nearly making a perfect run only to miss out by a few fractions of a second is almost too much. Handling is good, if not great with limited control over momentum in the air after one of the frequent and massive jumps and fun powersliding.

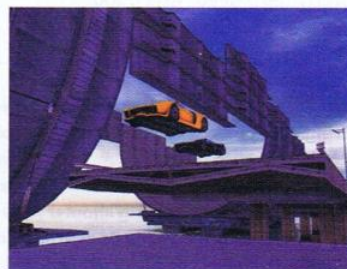
Platform mode literally combines racing with the platforming genre with somewhat mixed results. Taking advantage of the somewhat strange assortment of track pieces in Sunrise, Platform mode presents the player with a track dotted with jumps, gaps and other obstacles that need to be cleared to reach the finish line. Instead of having to beat the clock, Platform mode requires people to reach the finish in a limited number of checkpoint restarts. Although initially innovative and a lot of fun, platform mode soon becomes incredibly frustrating

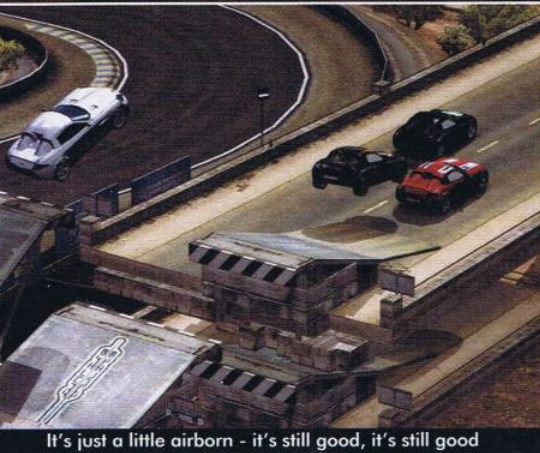
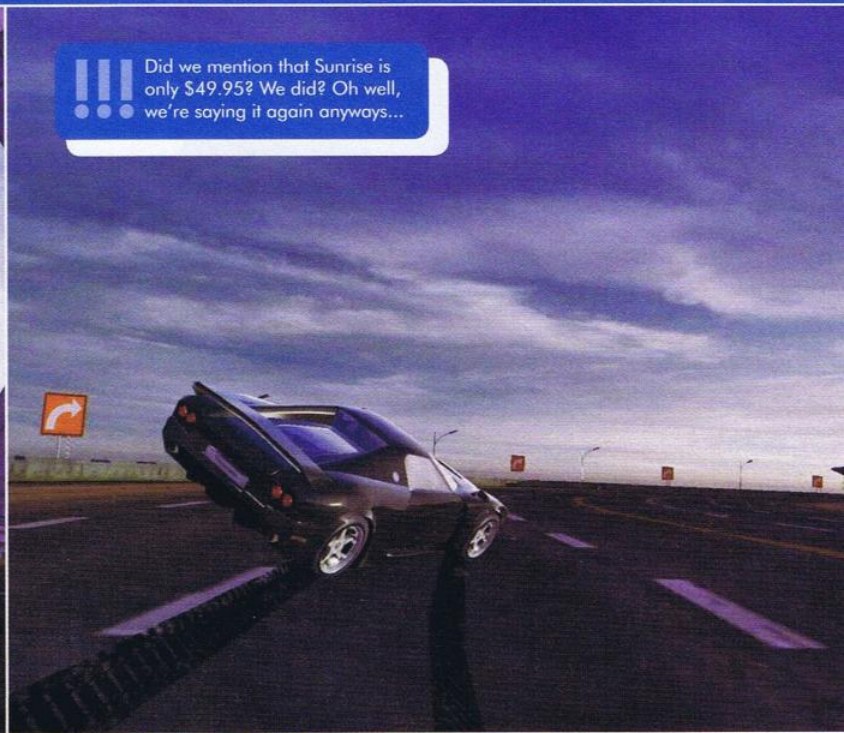


[duh] The sunrise alluded to in the title

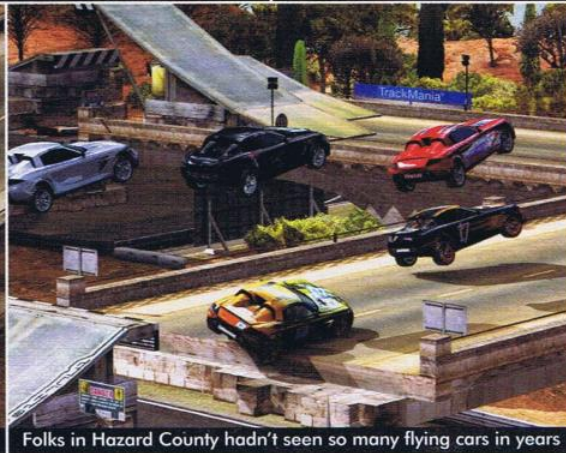


[above] But is it in the shape of a Yoshi?

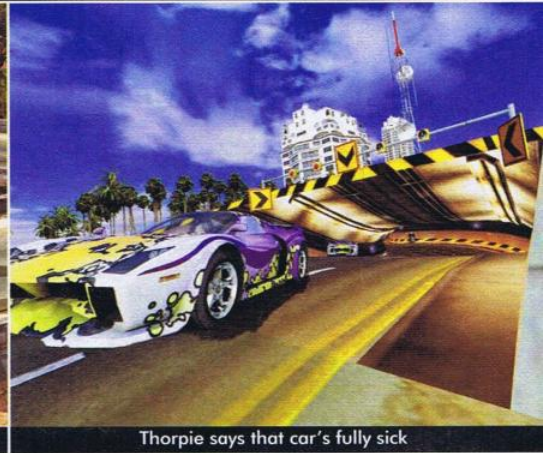




It's just a little airborne - it's still good, it's still good



Folks in Hazard County hadn't seen so many flying cars in years



Thorpie says that car's fully sick

as the tracks are designed in such a way as to be nigh on impossible without retrying the same map over and over again for hours. It's a great idea but probably the weakest of all of the game modes.

Puzzle mode makes a welcome return from the original game and it's where you'll probably be spending most of your time. Each level in Puzzle mode presents the player with a partial track complete with waypoints, start and finish line, a number of set track pieces and charges them with the dual task of placing the pieces to complete the track in the most expedient manner and then race it to once again beat the clock. If you're even a vague fan of puzzle games then playing this mode is basically a must. The concept is simultaneously inspired and incredibly simple. On the surface

Sunrise is all about going fast, not jostling for first place

many of the puzzles look rather simplistic but only a few minutes of play will show you that the most obvious isn't always the best solution to a problem. Thankfully you can set pieces of the track and jump straight in to the race allowing you to try out your design without the hassle of having to win the first time.

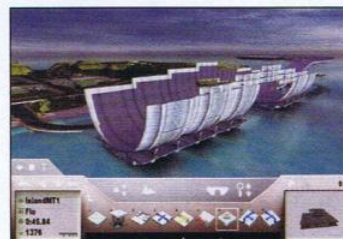
CRIZAZY

After completing the first three game modes a fourth mode is unlocked appropriately called Crazy, which combines elements of the first three game modes. Crazy is a very apt name. Players can also jump into an editor mode to create their own tracks, puzzles or even full

campaigns to post online. There are no downloads available at the time of this writing but with any luck there should be a good deal of user created content available within the next few months. Online play is available and thanks to a lack of clipping in the cars (it is purely a time race, not a place race) it runs silkily smooth.

Trackmania Sunrise is a surprisingly attractive game with some excellent car models and textures, beautiful environments reminiscent of Far Cry and a smooth frame rate over a range of cards, including the crappy 5700 we're forced to run at the moment. Tracks are a little low res but you'll hardly notice due to the incredible sense of speed. <<

➤ **STUNTED WORKFLOW** Nearly all of the tracks in Sunrise across all of the game modes contain massive and exhilarating stunts ranging from massive jumps that will carry your car hundreds of meters along the track, sometimes bypassing a number of other hazards along the way, through to loops, broken loops that require a moment of calculated freefall, flips, wall riding, quarter pipe tricks and more. It's possible to put all of these stunts in one track with the editor but we haven't been game yet - we have work to do and something that cool would seriously eat into our "productive" time at work.



AVAILABLE ON:
PS2 / XBOX / PC / GCN

DETAILS:

CATEGORY: Racing

PLAYERS: 1-4

DEVELOPER: Nadeo

PUBLISHER: Digital Jesters

PRICE: \$49.95

RATING: G

AVAILABLE: Now

HYPER VERDICT:

PLUS: Fast, Puzzle mode, big stunts, one of few great PC arcade racers.

MINUS: Frustrating. Really frustrating. Did we mention it can be frustrating?

VISUALS 88 SOUND 83 GAMEPLAY 88

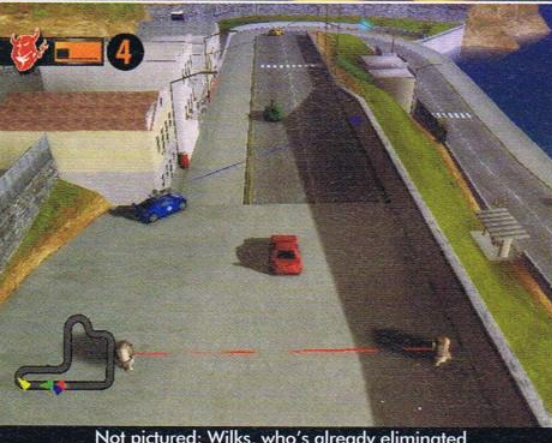
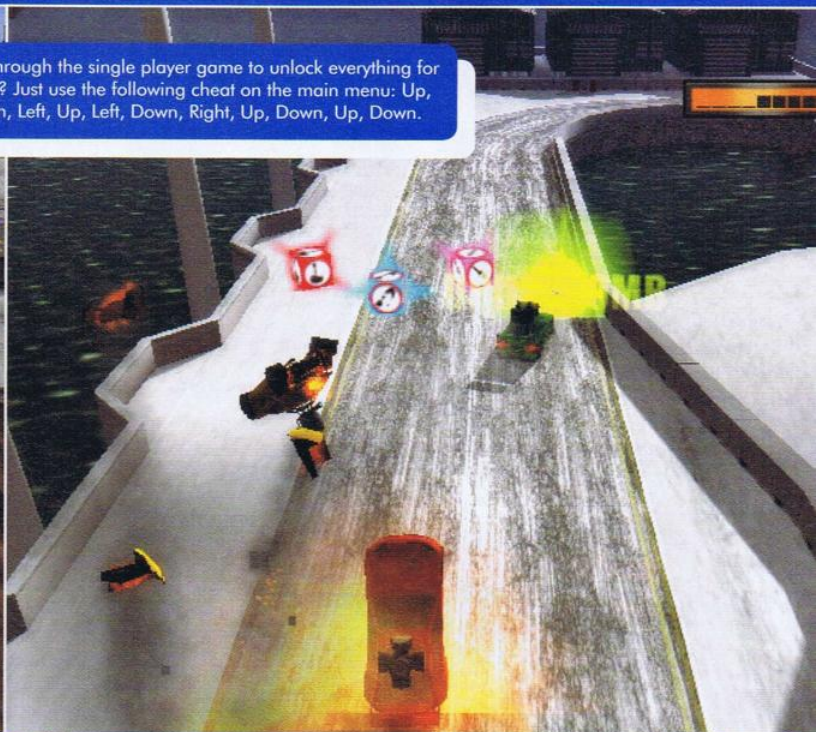
OVERALL

86

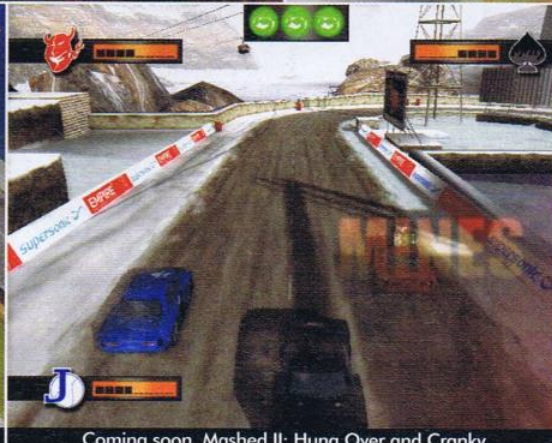
You'll love it and hate it at the same time.



Why play through the single player game to unlock everything for multiplayer? Just use the following cheat on the main menu: Up, Right, Down, Left, Up, Left, Down, Right, Up, Down, Up, Down.



Not pictured: Wilks, who's already eliminated



Coming soon, Mashed II: Hung Over and Cranky



Don't fall down the K hole!

MASHED: Fully Loaded

CAM SHEA is 'avin' it.

Most of you already know what depraved Mashed addicts we are here at Hyper, and hopefully a good number of you have racked up and devoured a few games yourselves. After all, you'd be crazy not to. Mashed is easily one of the best four player titles on PS2 and Xbox. It has an enchanting combination of great mechanics, powerups, tracks and of course, luck. It's a game that picks up where Micro Machines left off (it is, after all, developed by Supersonic — the guys behind Micro Machines 2), and is responsible for more trash talk here in the office than almost any other game.

FULLY SICK

For Mashed: Fully Loaded we have bad news, we have good news and we have great news. The bad news is that this isn't a fully fledged sequel. It's Mashed 1.5 really. The good news is, hey, it's Mashed! If you haven't done yourself a favour and

picked up the original, then there's really no reason you wouldn't get this one, which brings us neatly to the great news — at \$49.95 this is exceptional value for money.

Mashed: Fully Loaded (top work packing two drug references into a single title by the way guys) only adds two new courses, making for a total of 15, but this time there are multiple options for each — forwards, backwards and variants like racing on the course inverted, or at night time or in icy conditions.

The two new courses, Fort Gidlow and Demolition, aren't anything to get too excited about, however. Fort Gidlow is a racing circuit style affair around an island army base. It's a pretty vanilla course, but a reasonable addition. Demolition takes place atop a building that's about to be demolished. There are plenty of shortcuts and precipitous drops on either side of the track, and misleading camera angles notwithstanding,

it's well worth a race or three.

In terms of options, there are three new tournaments — Turbo, Ice and Night, 45 Challenges (three for each track at Bronze, Silver and Gold difficulties) and training missions. There are a couple of new vehicles (for a total of 15) and stats for each vehicle so you actually have an idea of what you're getting yourself into. And then there are a number of smaller tweaks — powerup names show up on screen now, there are explosive barrels positioned in annoying places on all the courses, and the camera mechanics have been adjusted slightly. The gameplay is as rock solid as ever, just don't expect to be wowed by the changes.

There isn't all that much difference between the two versions, although if you have both a PS2 and an Xbox we'd probably recommend the Xbox version. The game looks marginally better, doesn't require a multitap and most importantly, has much speedier loading times. <<

AVAILABLE ON:
PS2 / XBOX / PC / GCN

DETAILS:
CATEGORY: Racing
PLAYERS: 1-4
DEVELOPER: Supersonic
PUBLISHER: Xplosiv
PRICE: \$49.95
RATING: G8+
AVAILABLE: Now

HYPER VERDICT:
PLUS: It's Mashed. New courses and tweaks.

MINUS: Far from an essential purchase if you have the original.

| | | |
|--|-------|----------|
| VISUALS | SOUND | GAMEPLAY |
| 80 | 75 | 91 |
| OVERALL | | |
| 89 | | |
| More Mashed goodness at a great price. | | |



!!! SVC Chaos is Xbox Live enabled, but we suspect that with such an unbalanced game playing online won't be much fun.

SNK VS. CAPCOM: Chaos

DANIEL WILKS has priority over all others

It's no secret that we here at Hyper loves us some sweet old school 2D fighting game action. Every time a new fighter comes into the office it is taken as a cause for celebration, wasted time, missed deadlines and one hell of a lot of smack talk. Usually this smack talk is directed at the person currently being pwned (although it can be used to put the pwner off their game giving advantage to the pwnee) but this isn't exactly the case with SVC Chaos. If you come into the Hyper offices and see us play you'll be more likely to hear the smack talk being directed at the game itself with comments such as, "cheating game", "cheap whore" and perhaps a subtle, "that's bullshit" before a controller is dropped in disgust. There's a slight problem with SVC Chaos you see - it's fun in multiplayer for the most part but seriously broken on a fairly fundamental level.

CHEATING GAME
On paper the game sounds great: 34 characters pulled from various Capcom and SNK fighting games, all playable from the start (alternate characters can be "unlocked" by holding down R1) utilising a slightly modified version of the SNK fighting engine. Characters retain most of their special moves and combos from their respective games and franchises though some have been tweaked to lever them into the different fighting engine. It all sounds good, and it can be, especially if you're playing against an opponent of equal skill playing with one of the few balanced characters. Balance is one of the major problems in the game, or more precisely, the lack thereof. Attack priorities seem to be entirely topsy-turvy with specials and supers taking the brunt of the damage as most seem to be easily cancelled with a light attack. Other

characters, such as Shin-Gouki still has an aerial fireball, which would be fine aside from the fact that it is unbeatable due to the fact that Chaos doesn't feature air blocks. The other major problem with the game is the hit boxes that seem to randomly switch from being huge and solid, enabling hits that didn't actually connect with the character to disappearing altogether, mysteriously allowing you to punch or kick right through a person's head simply because their animation was a little out of synch with yours. It's a real pity because SVC has the potential to be a great game. SNK Playmore have not started out on a good foot with SVC Chaos - taking two well known and well loved franchises, smooching them together and coming up with something far less than the sum of its parts is not the best way to leave a good impression. <<

AVAILABLE ON: PS2 / XBOX / PC / GCN

DETAILS:
CATEGORY: Fighting
PLAYERS: 1-2
DEVELOPER: SNK
PUBLISHER: Playmore
PRICE: \$49.95
RATING: MA15+
AVAILABLE: Now

HYPER VERDICT:
PLUS: Lots of characters, "Game Over!" voice guy rocks.

MINUS: Broken priorities, broken hit boxes.

| | | |
|--|-------|----------|
| GRAPHICS | SOUND | GAMEPLAY |
| 61 | 65 | 64 |
| OVERALL | | |
| 61 | | |
| A nice idea but broken priorities and hit boxes cause more frustration than fun. | | |



TIMESPLITTERS Future Perfect

MARCH STEPNIK asks whether TimeSplitters is bi-polar or not.

As in the previous two TimeSplitters, there are two very distinct halves to TimeSplitters Future Perfect. There's the highly developed and finely tuned multiplayer side of things, and then there's singleplayer - an underwhelming and pedestrian affair on the whole, but which ultimately has enough redeeming qualities to make it worth your while. Depending, of course, on how you look at it.

CRACKING OODLES

You know the story by now. The design team responsible for the hugely successful GoldenEye 64 at Rare depart and start up Free Radical. Their debut title TimeSplitters for the PS2 is released in 2000 and the punters are pleased: Timesplitters builds on what made GoldenEye so great and gave it some serious longevity thanks to brilliant splitscreen multiplayer antics. Featuring plenty of game modes, oodles of playable characters and

dripping with a cracking sense of humour TimeSplitters became an overnight party-game hit. And the singleplayer side of TimeSplitters? Well, it offered decent training for the multiplayer now, didn't it?

TimeSplitters 2 proved Free Radical wasn't a one trick pony. Further tightening the multiplayer experience and giving more thought to the single player story, the sequel proved another hit. Future Perfect continues the trend. The multiplayer side is even more complete (more on this later), and the single player story mode is even stronger this time around. But not by much...

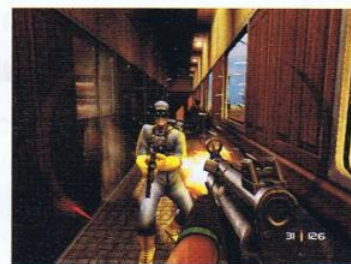
Future Perfect's story mode is Free Radical's attempt at a satisfying single player experience. The trouble is... well, there's a lot of trouble here. There're the little things, like pitifully inanimate AI, continuity issues (for example, jumping down a level-exit hole with flame-thrower in hand will see you hit the bottom with your booty taken and replaced

with a pistol at the level start), over-emphasis on the head shot (let go of it, Free Radical; that's so ten years ago), and a nasty (but thankfully not critical) sound bug that rears its ugly head from time to time thrown in for good measure.

And then there're the over-arching design concerns. The campaign is seriously short and can be completed in one sitting. Level design is incredibly linear and the bosses, when encountered, are laughably simplistic.

Taken together these issues paint a fairly lifeless picture; the mechanics of the story mode are so basic that there's rarely any sense of accomplishment as you snake your way through the adventure. You as the player are treated with such kid gloves that it feels like you're mostly being taken along for a ride...

At least there is a ride, and it's not a bad one when all's said and done. In regards to the story there's a lot more focus this time around

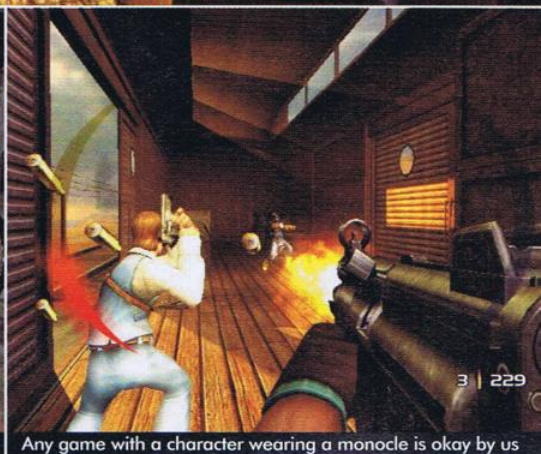
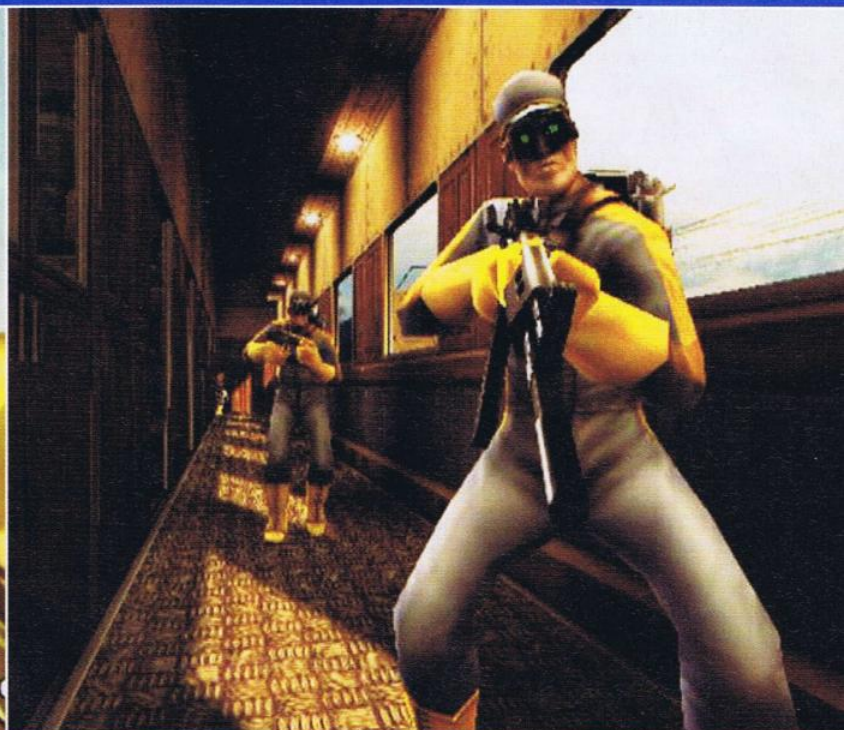


[above] When The Last Express sells out



[above] Did you turn the red eye off?

(which is a good thing considering the headache that time travel as a genre can be to get across), and this is achieved by having only one playable character - Cortez - at your disposal. The inclusion of various non-playable characters that accompany you throughout add a nice play dynamic, as does the



Nowhere near as cool as the Paper Mario 2 train showdown

The Hot Dog Deliveryman disguise didn't work for long

Any game with a character wearing a monacle is okay by us

occasional appearance from your own future or past self to get you through some of the game's tight spots. There are also (fnally) vehicles and stationary turrets to engage with, however these seem more like last minute additions to the game than well implemented tools.

But what makes the single player ultimately work is its sense of humour. Mostly character driven but with plenty of peripheral pop-culture references and piss-takes (one favourite is a parody on Doom 3's use of the audio log to drive story), Future Perfect abounds with clever dialogue which, while flirting with innuendo manages to avoid going over the top. Where Doom 3 has its atmosphere, Halo 2 its epic space and Serious Sam has its old-school strength in numbers, Future Perfect has its humour.

But what ultimately redeems Future Perfect's single player component is its challenge modes. Quite separate to the story mode, these events are bite-sized chunks of gameplay that are surprisingly addictive. Featuring all manner of wacky conceits, these diversions test and train your skills and are fun in their own right.

As a multiplayer game FP is highly polished: fast, variable and fun

HEART AND SOUL

Multiplayer is clearly where Free Radical focused its energies with Future Perfect. And focused they have - multiplayer is excellent. It's the first TimeSplitters that supports full multiplayer online, either through Live or the PS2 Network Adapter. Xbox owners get the better deal here with Live, with 16 maximum players to the PS2's 8, as well as full stat-tracking. Cube owners, naturally, miss out on online play altogether.

System link and splitscreen are naturally supported (which is really the heart of TimeSplitters given its party-game roots) and those wanting a bit of solo practice can have a whirl against a gaggle of bots.

There are over a dozen game modes to take part in with plenty of customisation options within each. Apart from your usual deathmatch, team deathmatch and capture the flag (in this case, capture the bag) variants, there are some truly enjoyable modes to be had; Virus has you aiming to be the last one

'tipped' by flaming enemies; Shrink reduces your size as your rank drops; and Vampire has you killing others to keep your own health up. For people who like the multiplayer love, there's plenty of it in Future Perfect.

All in all, as a multiplayer game Future Perfect is highly polished: fast (the silky smooth frame rate comes at the cost of less interesting geometry and textures), variable and fun.

Ultimately, TimeSplitters is let down by its own inertia. It's better in many respects than its predecessors, however things have changed in the genre. Free Radical manages to identify these developments; in the case of multiplayer it's one of the better experiences around, while in single player the evolution has been slow and painful at best.

Which is great news if it's all about the thrill of real competition to you. But if it's a rewarding single player story that you're after, then there are plenty of other games that pack more of a punch. <<

AVAILABLE ON:
PS2 / XBOX / PC / GCN

DETAILS:

CATEGORY: FPS
PLAYERS: 1-4 (GCN), 1-8 (PS2), 1-16 (XBOX)
DEVELOPER: Free Radical
PUBLISHER: EA
PRICE: \$89.95
RATING: MA15+
AVAILABLE: Now

HYPER VERDICT:

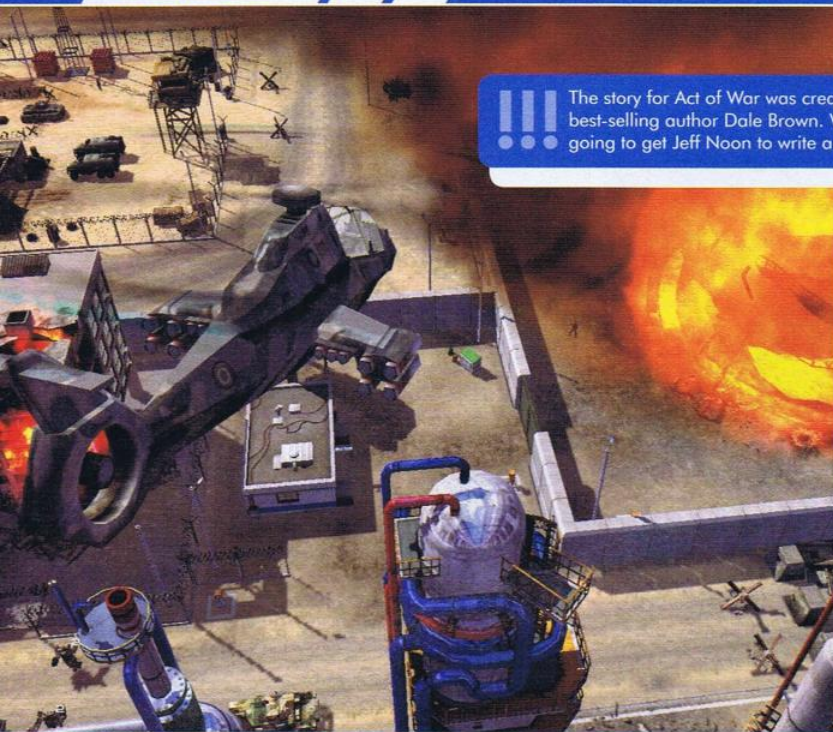
PLUS: Online, multiplayer, sense of humour.

MINUS: Underdone story mode.

VISUALS 80 SOUND 76 GAMEPLAY 84

OVERALL
80

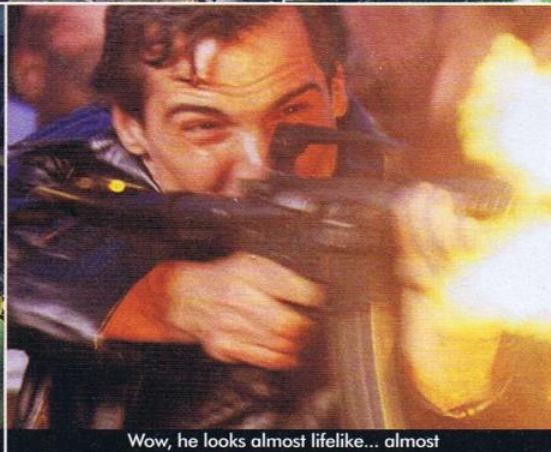
A blast in multiplayer...
less so in single.



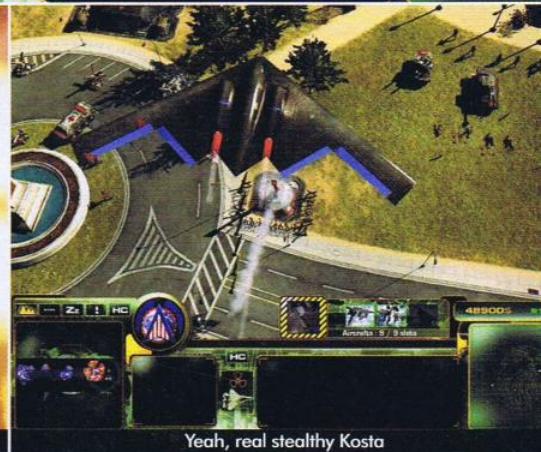
!!! The story for Act of War was created and written by best-selling author Dale Brown. When is someone going to get Jeff Noon to write a game script dammit?



The Redfern riots - you can see our offices!



Wow, he looks almost lifelike... almost



Yeah, real stealthy Kosta

ACT OF WAR: Direct Action

KOSTA ANDREADIS likes his action direct and to the point

Act of War is a realistic strategy game, set in modern times with a side order of tanks, armoured vehicles, apache helicopters and stealth bombers. In a way it's a lot like the original C&C, where strategy gameplay takes a side-step to Hollywood-lite production values. Like C&C before it, Act of War includes many hallmarks of the CD-ROM era, that being live action cut scenes, shoddy acting and questionable storytelling, all wrapped up in an epic installation directory of six and a half gigabytes. Even while the game is installing you're presented with a lengthy mock-news presentation detailing the main theme of the game - rising oil prices and the impending scarcity of this resource. Even though the story is a plausible prospect and could very well set the world stage for an epic gaming conflict between the West and global terrorist forces, in execution it's spotty at best, with the actual gameplay left to pick up the slack.

TERROR ALERT TANGERINE

In the game players take control of the standard all-American hero in an attempt to thwart the terrorist's plan to overthrow Western civilisation. Beginning in the Middle East (naturally) the game quickly crosses over to American soil, in particular San Francisco, which is turned into an impressive war zone. Keeping the majority of the setting in such a dense urban environment not only adds to the game's visual appeal but to the gameplay too, as players use buildings to ambush their enemy or set up sniper support.

While most strategy games in the past have had a clear separation of base location and a sparse battlefield, the urban setting of Act of War adds a gritty realism that fits in nicely with today's terrorist-fearing climate. The style of warfare and strategy changes according to environment and threat, meaning mass tanks or mass apache strategies won't cut it in the long run. Instead there's a

great balance between using ground troops, armoured vehicles and air forces and never a shift in balance towards any one aspect of battle.

Act of War is also quite a treat to look at, with amazing detail in the environmental damage and interaction. Yep, everything's there apart from civilian casualties or interference, which is strange and only makes the story, acting and dialogue even more laughable.

The single player campaign spans numerous missions and numerous cutscenes, hours in fact, ranging from average political intrigue to ludicrous Western gung-ho generalisations, all with some of the hammiest acting ever to grace a game. But in the end the graphics engine and the gameplay do make up for the woeful acting and intriguingly sub-par storyline, as Act of War features a robust strategy core with a wonderful variation in both strategies employed and battle scenarios. <<

AVAILABLE ON:
PS2 / XBOX / PC / GCN

DETAILS:

CATEGORY: RTS
PLAYERS: 1-Multi
DEVELOPER: Eugen Systems
PUBLISHER: Atari
PRICE: \$89.95
RATING: M15+
AVAILABLE: Now

HYPER VERDICT:

PLUS: Impressive urban military warfare.

MINUS: Hours of porn grade acting and not one breast.

VISUALS 89 SOUND 79 GAMEPLAY 82

OVERALL
80

Looking past the bad acting this is a decent strategy game.



**YOUR OFFICE MIGHT BE CRAMPED,
BUT THE VIEW'S SPECTACULAR.**

Sitting there on the runway, you shove the throttles forward and within 800 metres your Hornet springs aloft as you head skyward at over 500 kilometres per hour. There's not an office in the world that compares to that of an F/A-18 Hornet. All you need is the drive, motivation and commitment to make it yours. We'll provide you with some of the

most advanced flying training in the world to equip you with the skills and knowledge to become an Air Force Pilot. You'll need at least Year 12 English and Advanced Maths, be coordinated, highly motivated and meet Defence Force entry requirements. So call 13 19 01 or visit www.defencejobs.gov.au/aviation

Track down the Limited Collectors Edition of Doom 3 if you can. Apart from the usual PR fluff you'll find the full versions of Ultimate Doom and Doom II, complete with four-player co-op or deathmatch via splitscreen.



Sunshine, lollipops and rainbows, everything that's wonderful...



...is what I feel when we're togethAAAAARRRGH!



The Killbot Factory

DOOM 3

MARCH STEPNIK grips his flashlight with white knuckles...

Let's keep it to the forums, people: Doom 3 for the PC rocked hard. You would only have been disappointed in Doom 3 if you were hoping for the second coming. And since id Software are renowned for releasing gorgeous yet simplistic shooters with oodles of playability (especially in multiplayer) then it's your own damn fault for expecting anything else. Let's move on.

BLEEDING TORCHES

Doom 3 on Xbox is almost exactly Doom 3 on the PC (right down to the bleedin' torch and the 'anytime' quicksave system) with one major difference - the Xbox grants players the entire single player game in co-op mode, either via system link or using Live. Co-op is an excellent addition to the Doom 3 experience, and only a backward re-spawn system (at the start of each level at death, dear god) mars the absolute fun to be had. The default setting is to have friendly fire disengaged,

but for the best experience turn it on and watch every major fire fight turn into a strategic puzzle. Splash damage is a real bitch in tight corridors and small spaces.

Otherwise, the remaining changes to this Xbox conversion are inconsequential yet necessary by-products of making Doom 3 work on a substantially more limited machine. Gone are outdoor environments, the levels are noticeably tighter (the PC vanguard will notice entire sections missing), and some of the stunning lighting effects have been turned down a notch or two. Even then, Doom 3 is one of the most gorgeous looking games on the Xbox.

The Xbox also can't handle any form of Doom 3 in split screen, so it's system link or Live only for the multiplayer fix. Excepting Co-op, multiplayer is perhaps Doom 3's biggest letdown. While satisfying in a straight-edge kinda way, only a handful of basic play modes are available with minimal customisation

out of the box. Next to games like Halo 2 and Timesplitters Future Perfect, Doom 3 multiplayer on Xbox feels decidedly underdone. Bets are off on the availability of premium downloadable content in the coming months.

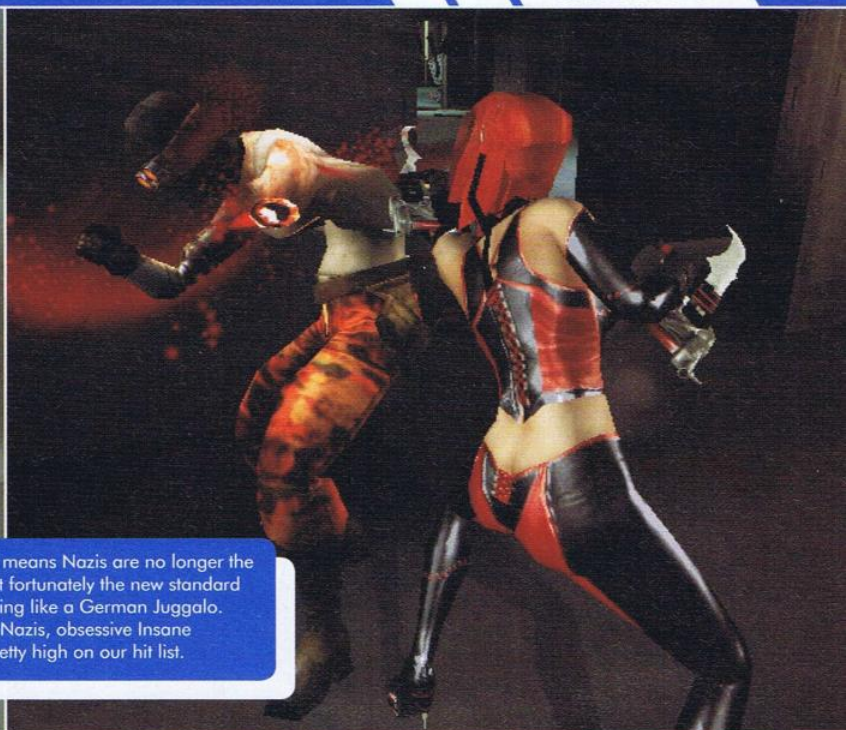
The inevitable comparisons to Halo 2 are absolutely moot - both games set out to do entirely different things. Halo 2 is more epic in narrative and execution, where Doom 3 represents a fine and very pointy stiletto with its experience. And that's to present a spine-chilling horror story in beautifully detailed and mostly claustrophobic environments - it'll have you shrieking like a school girl (and if you are one, oh boy) more often than not. Given that Doom 3 on Xbox managed to scare the bejeezus out of us a second time through (having already played through the PC version) is testament to id's brilliant design. Doom 3 on Xbox is one hella scary game. <<

AVAILABLE ON:
PS2 / XBOX / PC / GCN

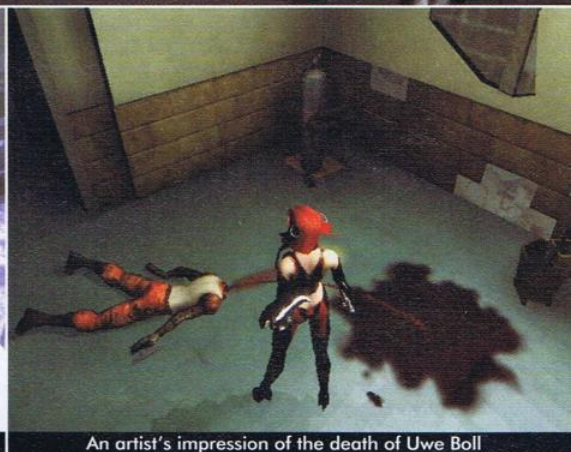
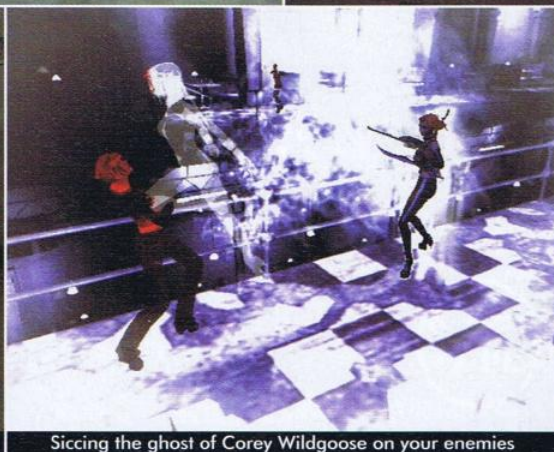
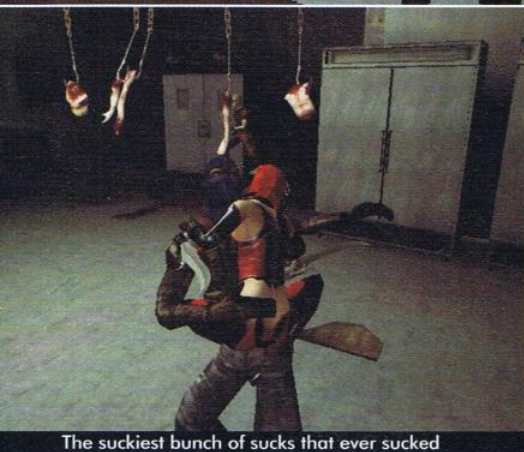
DETAILS:
CATEGORY: FPS Survival Horror
PLAYERS: 1-4
DEVELOPER: id / Vicarious Visions
PUBLISHER: Activision
PRICE: \$99.95
RATING: MA15+
AVAILABLE: Now

HYPER VERDICT:
PLUS: Beautiful game world, atmosphere, co-op.
MINUS: No split-screen, co-op respawning and slowdown.

| | | |
|---|-------|----------|
| VISUALS | SOUND | GAMEPLAY |
| 93 | 90 | 85 |
| OVERALL | | |
| 89 | | |
| A worthy console conversion of the Doom 3 rollercoaster ride. | | |



!!! The modern setting means Nazis are no longer the villain of choice, but fortunately the new standard mook looks something like a German Juggalo. Although not as insidious as Nazis, obsessive Insane Clown Posse fans do rank pretty high on our hit list.



The suckiest bunch of sucks that ever sucked

Sicking the ghost of Corey Wildgoose on your enemies

An artist's impression of the death of Uwe Boll

BLOODRAYNE 2

DANIEL WILKS never gets sick of boobies

Aside from Rayne's preposterous digital cleavage, the original BloodRayne did little to set the gaming world on fire. Sure it was fun, in a braindead Nazi killing kind of way, but we'd already played it before, half a dozen or so times in different (albeit less well endowed) forms. Despite the average reviews, BloodRayne sold well enough to warrant a sequel. Set some 70 years after the first game, Rayne is still up to her old tricks hunting down the less friendly denizens of the night and dispatching them with her arm mounted blades, guns and harpoon. There's a lot of blood to be had along the way but like the original, BloodRayne 2 feels a little tired and samey.

SIMPSONS DID IT!

Plot wise, the vamps of the world are planning to blot out the sun, Burns style or something to that effect so that... you get the idea - vampires are bad and they gotta be killed.

All for these enemies ranges from run at Rayne to try and hit her, to stand back and shoot her if they have a gun, but the sheer number of enemies and frequency of combat makes that forgivable. As combat is the major mechanic of the game, the fighting engine has been significantly beefed up from the original. The harpoon, originally used for dragging enemies towards Rayne is now a multipurpose throwing/dismanting tool that enables Rayne to pick up and throw any enemy not wielding a melee weapon and fling them about, impale them on pointy bits of the terrain or hurl them into plot devices to open up the next bit of the level. If anything the harpoon has been made too powerful and will probably become the weapon you use most.

Melee combat is as bloody as ever, if not more so with Rayne learning more moves as the game goes on. Some of the special moves picked up look quite spectacular but don't

really add anything aside from a bit of gloss to the otherwise rather monotonous battles. Finally, unlike picking up dropped weapons as in the first game, Rayne finds two blood powered magical guns early in the game that can be upgraded to different weapons including an SMG, Shotgun and Grenade Launcher. Whilst the idea of the blood gun is nice in theory, in practice it leaves a little something to be desired as once you run out of blood ammo (gained from feeding the guns instead of feeding Rayne to regenerate health) they will start feeding on Rayne, making it disarmingly easy to shoot yourself to death in the middle of a firefight. Although the game looks significantly better than the original it remains essentially the same, a fun, if somewhat average third person action game that seems happier aping other, more innovative games (Oni and Max Payne to name two) than striking out on its own. <<

AVAILABLE ON:
PS2 / XBOX / PC / GCN

DETAILS:

CATEGORY: Action
PLAYERS: 1
DEVELOPER: Terminal Reality
PUBLISHER: Majesco
PRICE: \$99.95
RATING: MA15+
AVAILABLE: 2 June 2005

HYPER VERDICT:

PLUS: Nice character models, killing Juggalos is a dream come true.

MINUS: Samey, repetitive combat, inappropriate acrobatics.

GRAPHICS SOUND GAMEPLAY

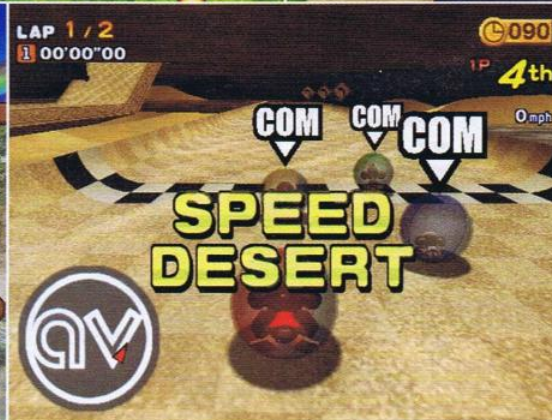
84 78 72

OVERALL
72

A guilty pleasure, but little more...



Let's just caption the damn menu screens now shall we?



Sega's secret communist agenda



Current Golf high score? Yeah we don't play that one...

SUPER MONKEY BALL DELUXE

JOHN DEWHURST is Hyper's very own Chad

The Sega versus Nintendo years are long gone but some things hold true to this day. While Sega inevitably presented some passable "Stars" (Sonic and err, Sonic) their villains were particularly underwhelming. I mean, aside from having a sweet villain name(s), Dr. Eggman/Robotnik really didn't cut it, especially next to the likes of Bowser. I hate to kick you while you're down Sega but Bad-Boon is possibly dumber than Robotnik...

IF IT CAN SO BE CALLED

Even with this so-called bad guy hanging around, Super Monkey Ball Deluxe is without doubt a robust package. It brings Super Monkey Balls 1 and 2 together for the first time, and puts them on the two (other) Big Consoles. The classic range of levels to traverse in a little ball is here, in both Challenge Mode and Story Mode. Plus, there's the now famous range of 12 mini-games, as well as extra levels especially for the Deluxe version.

Story Mode offers the gob smackingly dull saga of Ai-Ai, Mimi and the rest saving the island's banana supply from the clutches of Bad-Boon. Hear them sing in Simlish! Track the minutae! Watch them fly away! (Why do the monkeys need to ROLL anywhere if they can fly? "dm") Story Mode allows you to select your level progressively, as you move from Easy to the hardest of courses. Call me a stick in the mud but I'll take the pacier classic Challenge Mode over that any day.

Regardless, the basic game is solid. There's definitely a difference in feel between the analogue stick of the original and the PS2. But once you get used to the slight difference, the game plays just like the original. The PS2 version doesn't look quite as flash as the GCN games but that again is probably a hardware issue. Owners of the first or the second game will find it difficult to justify a purchase of Deluxe, since the experience so similar.

The meat of the monkey package is the debaucherous array of mini game options. There are 12 separate games to play with up to three friends. The Monkey Ball classics - Monkey Fight, Monkey Target, Monkey Bowling and others - have received the DX treatment, which means they offer a high level of customisation (a la SMB 2). The six other games range from good to patchy: Monkey Dogfight, Rowing and Baseball are cool enough but Soccer is plain silly. Regardless, there's a full compliment for your party needs.

It's super late arriving on the Xbox and PS2, even by traditional standards, so who knows what the Sony and MS public will make of it. At the same time, it's polished and packed with extra special goodies. Super Monkey Ball Deluxe is a welcome addition to the PS2 and Xbox catalogues, but we're saving our enthusiasm for a new Monkey Ball game on one of the new systems. <<

AVAILABLE ON:
PS2 / XBOX / PC / GCN

DETAILS:

CATEGORY: Puzzle
PLAYERS: 1-4
DEVELOPER: Sega
PUBLISHER: Sega
PRICE: \$79.95
RATING: G
AVAILABLE: May 20

HYPER VERDICT:

PLUS: SMB 1 & 2 plus new levels, mucho mini-games.

MINUS: Dated, not as polished as the 'Cube versions...

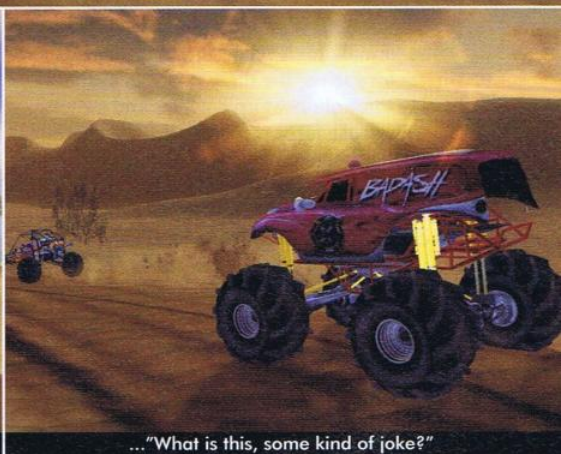
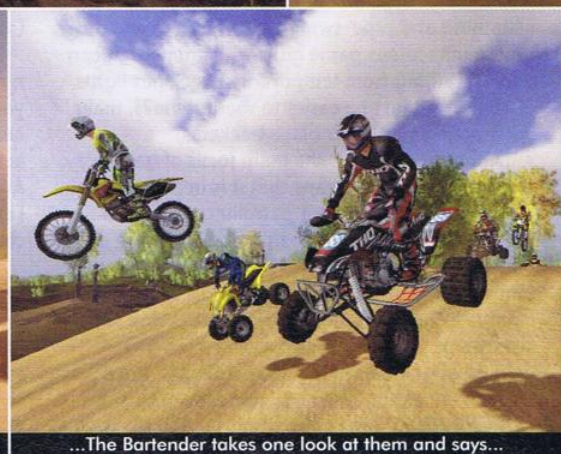
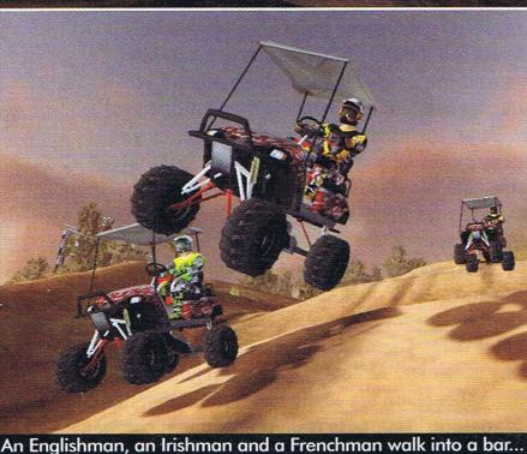
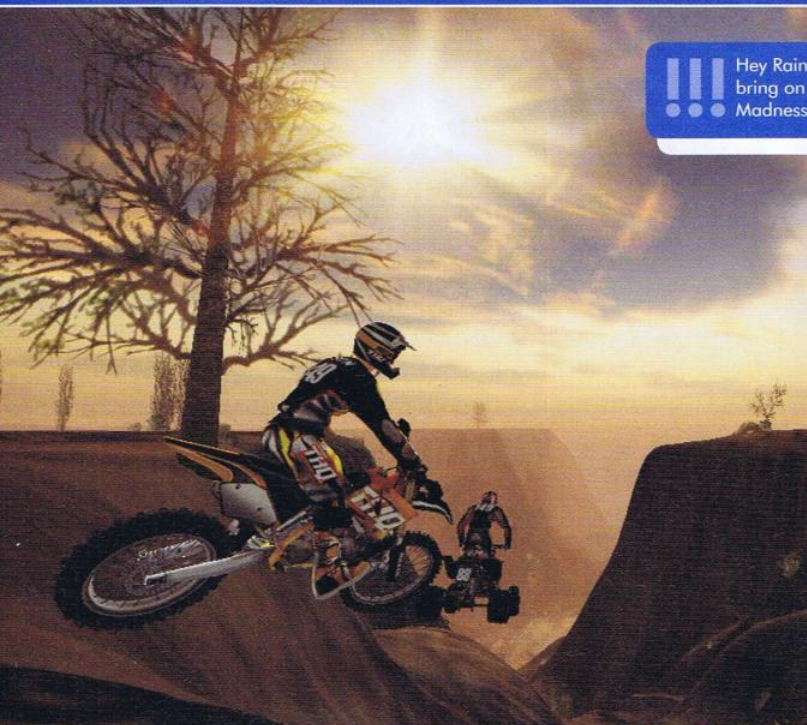
VISUALS 70 SOUND 60 GAMEPLAY 80

OVERALL

70

Monkeys for Johnny-Come-Lately

Hey Rainbow Studios - bring on a new Motocross Madness game!



An Englishman, an Irishman and a Frenchman walk into a bar...

...The Bartender takes one look at them and says...

... "What is this, some kind of joke?"

MX VS. ATV UNLEASHED

ALBERT THOMPSON ponders the meaning of "vs."

Since when did flying planes have anything to do with dirt bike racing? Since MX Vs. ATV Unleashed that's when. The latest iteration of dirt infused racing is here and, somewhat predictably, it offers up solid racing, lots of tricks and unlockable special items.

PLANES, TRAINS AND AUTOMOCARS

That's where the planes and helicopters come in, as aside from your standard vehicles you also race a range of other vehicles that include golf carts, sand buggies, utes and monster trucks. Of course at first all these vehicles are locked, so you need to bust the big airs during races to get access to them.

Certain vehicles can also be won via the Challenge mode. Challenge mode is essentially a departure from the routine of the game and pops up during championships, giving you the opportunity to earn extra goodies to play with. Once you have

been offered a challenge you can try it at any time, which is thankful as on the whole the challenges kind of stink and are somewhat infuriating given the simple pleasure of the main game, which, as we've come to expect from Rainbow Studios, is polished and slick.

The implication of the word "versus" would have many people thinking that you race against different vehicles, in a style akin to Paris Dakar, but that's not the case. Nor is it the case that this game is radically different to many other titles on the market. Thus, it may not really be "versus", or indeed, even "Unleashed", but what is on offer is very solid indeed. Rainbow Studios have put together a good looking engine, and decent physics. While we couldn't imagine anyone calling the handling realistic, the arcade style physics play perfectly into a game that is based on your skills in the air.

Taking corners does require technique, but the races are won

or lost on your ability to get big air, or not so big air. By using the left analog you can preload your jumps to varying degrees, but the game design is more innovative than having you max your preload each time. The idea is to judge your jumps intelligently, if you land in the middle of another jump you will either crash or lose your speed, so mastering the skill quickly becomes paramount to success.

Freestyle is also a large element in the game with three different competitive modes on offer that allow you to bust out varying tricks that include a backflip (and even a double backflip), and the 360. Unleashed is successful because the racing is fast and furious, and unlike the movie, that's a good thing. The AI is difficult to best but they're not flawless so you're always in with a shot. While the championships are identical for both vehicles, the extra features help add some variation and depth to the disc.

AVAILABLE ON:
PS2 / XBOX / PC / GCN

DETAILS:

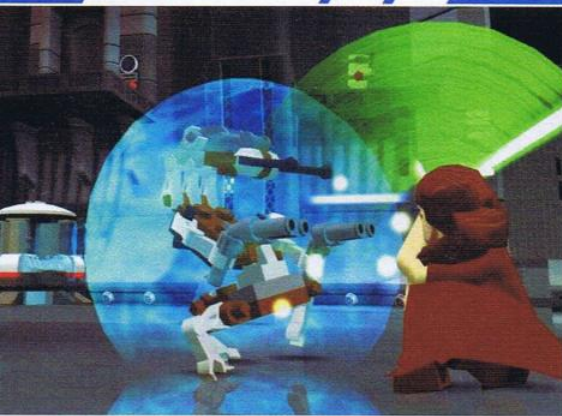
CATEGORY: Racing
PLAYERS: 1-2
DEVELOPER: Rainbow Studios
PUBLISHER: THQ
PRICE: \$79.95
RATING: G8+
AVAILABLE: May 17

HYPER VERDICT:

PLUS: Big air, fast pace, arcade handling.

MINUS: Short, stanky challenges, repetitive soundtrack.

| | | |
|----------------------------|-------|----------|
| GRAPHICS | SOUND | GAMEPLAY |
| 82 | 79 | 84 |
| OVERALL | | |
| 82 | | |
| Better than Jerry McGrath. | | |



LEGO STAR WARS

Combining Lucas' Star Wars universe with the visual design of LEGO is a master stroke for entertainment that puts the camp in Star-Wars-nerds-that-camp-out-front-of-the-movie-premieres-in-terrible-attempts-at-cosplay. While LEGO SW can be boiled down to somewhat of an action-platform button masher, it entertains other gameplay elements such as force powers and character switching that breaks the monotonous mashing mold.

The formula for level design in LEGO SW is similar for each of the three Episodes available to play through; beat up enemies and switch characters/use force powers to get past certain areas. The challenge comes if you want to unlock everything, which requires collecting coins and LEGO canisters and getting a good rating for the chapter. Collecting the 10 LEGO canisters in each chapter will give you the parts needed to assemble a Star Wars vehicle, while the coins allow you to purchase hints and extras.

LEGO SW dodges the bullet of single player boredom in that it is primarily designed as a two-player co-op game. While you can play through on your lonesome, the AI lacks aggressiveness, and the game is simply not as fun. The characters you unlock, from an R2 unit to Jango Fett, can also be used to replay completed missions and mop up otherwise unreachable LEGO canisters. Lego SW lacks the trimmings of an EA created Star Wars game with no coveted actual film footage, or even voices. What it does have is charm, and plenty of it.

Celia Hobart

AVAILABLE ON:
PS2 / XBOX / PC / GCN

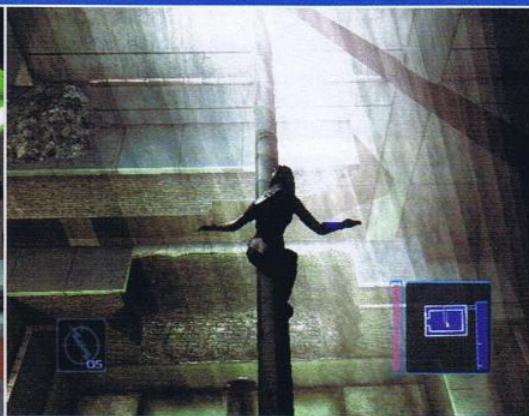
DETAILS:

CATEGORY: Action / **PLAYERS:** 1-2 /
DEVELOPER: Traveller's Tales / **PUBLISHER:** Eidos /
PRICE: \$49.95 / **RATING:** G / **AVAILABLE:** Now

| | | | |
|---------|-------|----------|---------|
| VISUALS | SOUND | GAMEPLAY | OVERALL |
| 80 | 80 | 77 | 81 |



[above] The spin physics are less impressive in screens



STOLEN

On paper it sounds like a grand idea — take the movement of Prince of Persia and merge it with the stealth of Splinter Cell, add one sexy female thief and set her to the task of nicking valuable stuff, hacking computers, picking pockets and other thieffy type stuff. In reality things are slightly less rosy. Anya, our curvaceous anti-heroine is appealing enough and she has access to a large box of tricks ranging from wall climbing and pipe-swinging through to one of those miraculous game guns with ammo that can do everything from temporarily knock out lights (wouldn't it just be easier to shoot them?), make distracting sounds or place trackers.

Although stealth is the main focus of gameplay, level design often means that it is impossible not to get into a fight with a patrolling guard, an event that only entails bashing the Y button as quickly as possible. Whilst perfectly content with the morality of stealing other people's possessions and beating up innocent bystanders, Anya is incapable of killing so the knocked out guards get up after an alarmingly short time to force you to do it all again. Of course, the enemy AI is so appalling that they may just forget about you in a few minutes and go back to walking their scripted path. The camera is unhelpful for the most part, a problem exacerbated when the player jumps from third person to first to look, take photographs or shoot as the right thumbstick no longer angles the camera but zooms instead. At least some of the character models and lighting effects are decent.

Mr X

AVAILABLE ON:
PS2 / XBOX / PC / GCN

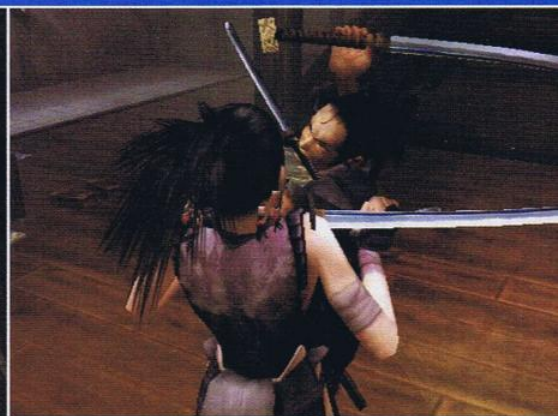
DETAILS:

CATEGORY: Stealth / **PLAYERS:** 1
DEVELOPER: Blue 52 / **PUBLISHER:** Hip Interactive
PRICE: \$99.95 / **RATING:** M15+ / **AVAILABLE:** Now

| | | | |
|---------|-------|----------|---------|
| VISUALS | SOUND | GAMEPLAY | OVERALL |
| 81 | 73 | 61 | 60 |



[above] "So I shop at Lowes, so what?"



TENCHU: Fatal Shadows

Anyone who played Wrath of Heaven remembers what Tenchu can be. Ninjas on the fly, sneaking around killing fools, whooshing and tip-toeing. Yeah, it's cool. Or it was once. Somehow the developers of Fatal Shadows ignored the outside world in producing another game in this long running (and to be perfectly honest, permanently undercooked) series, so while we were playing Ninja Gaiden they were planning this assault on the (somewhat) good name of Tenchu. For shame...

This is still the story of Ayame, now a veteran ninja who crosses paths with Rin, a vengeful youngster hellbent on avenging the destruction of her village. Their bond is like sisters - well, they're actually more like twins. Aside from the fact that Ayame uses two short blades and Rin a longer blade, I can barely tell them apart. Playing as two different characters sounds like fun... which one am I again?

The real weakness though is the fact that the action and stealth mix is so painfully simple. Run around, hide from your opponents - or better still just face them. Enemy AI is more than lacklustre, so why sneak by? Although the stealth kills are still somewhat cool, on the whole combat is rather dull and repetitive. I suppose it's a blessing that combat isn't too taxing since K2/From Software broke the first 3D Commandment: "Thou shalt not produce a crappy camera." Let me out of this mediocre game.

On the plus side, Fatal Shadows isn't actually BROKEN. You could conceivably play to the end. Although, once you've scaled a million ledges, slunk by a thousand morons and pierced many chests, you may just wonder why you bothered.

John Dewhurst

AVAILABLE ON:
PS2 / XBOX / PC / GCN

DETAILS:

CATEGORY: Stealth Action / **PLAYERS:** 1-2 /
DEVELOPER: K2/From Software / **PUBLISHER:** Sega /
PRICE: STBA / **RATING:** MA15+ / **AVAILABLE:** May 27

| | | | |
|---------|-------|----------|---------|
| VISUALS | SOUND | GAMEPLAY | OVERALL |
| 60 | 50 | 55 | 50 |



[above] Her breasts are the only things that don't fall flat



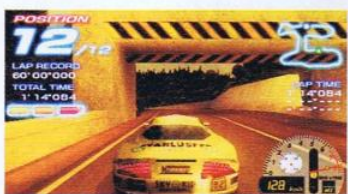
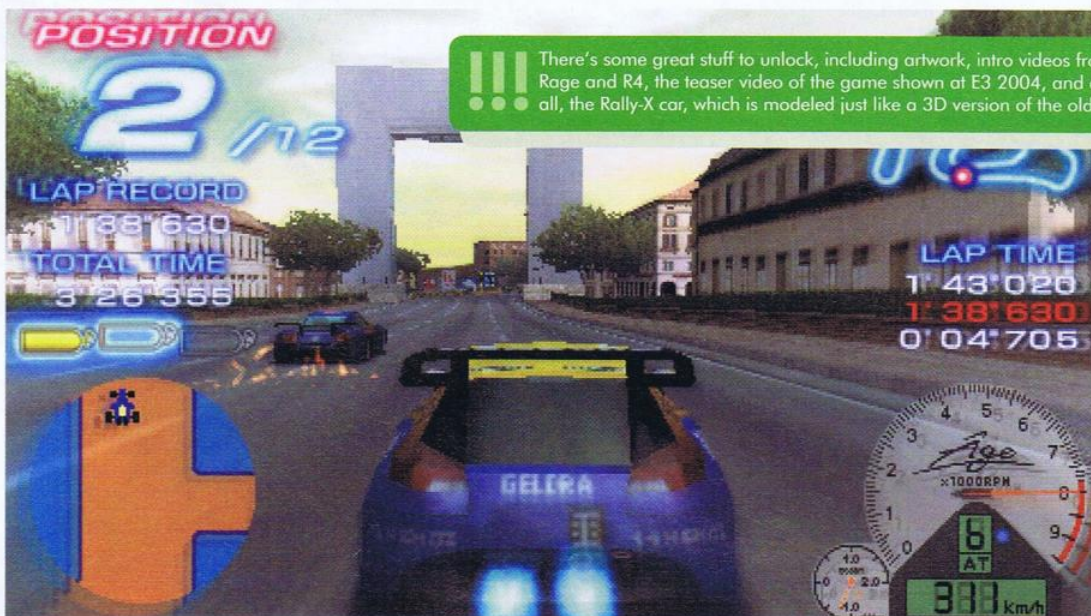
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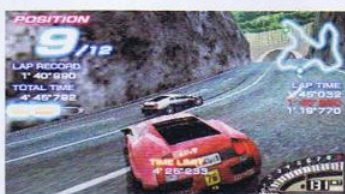
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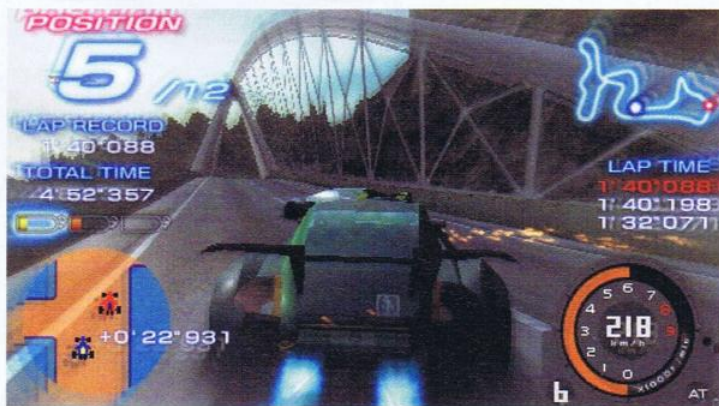
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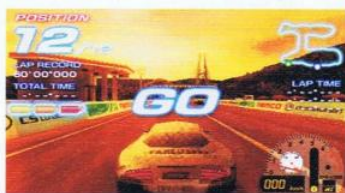
[Knuckles] Drifty Wants to Ride



[Aztec Mystic] Drifts of the Jaguar



[Parliament] Get Up for the Drift Stroke



[Carter] Cosmic Drifto

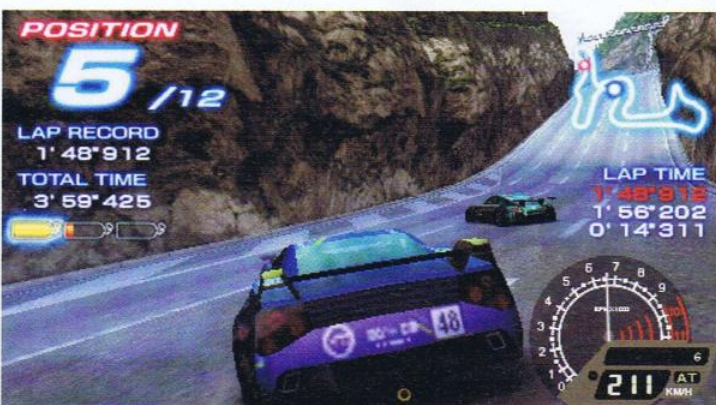


[Kraftwerk] Trans-Drifting Express

RIDGE RACER

To me, drifting (a.k.a. powersliding) is one of the single most satisfying things in videogaming. I think it's so appealing because it's both a primitive expression of raw power and an artform that requires skill and subtlety. And then there's the less analytical argument that it's just simple, balls to the wall, high speed fun. In any case, no other series has done as much to further the cause of the drift than Ridge Racer. It came screaming out of the blocks in 1993, and over the course

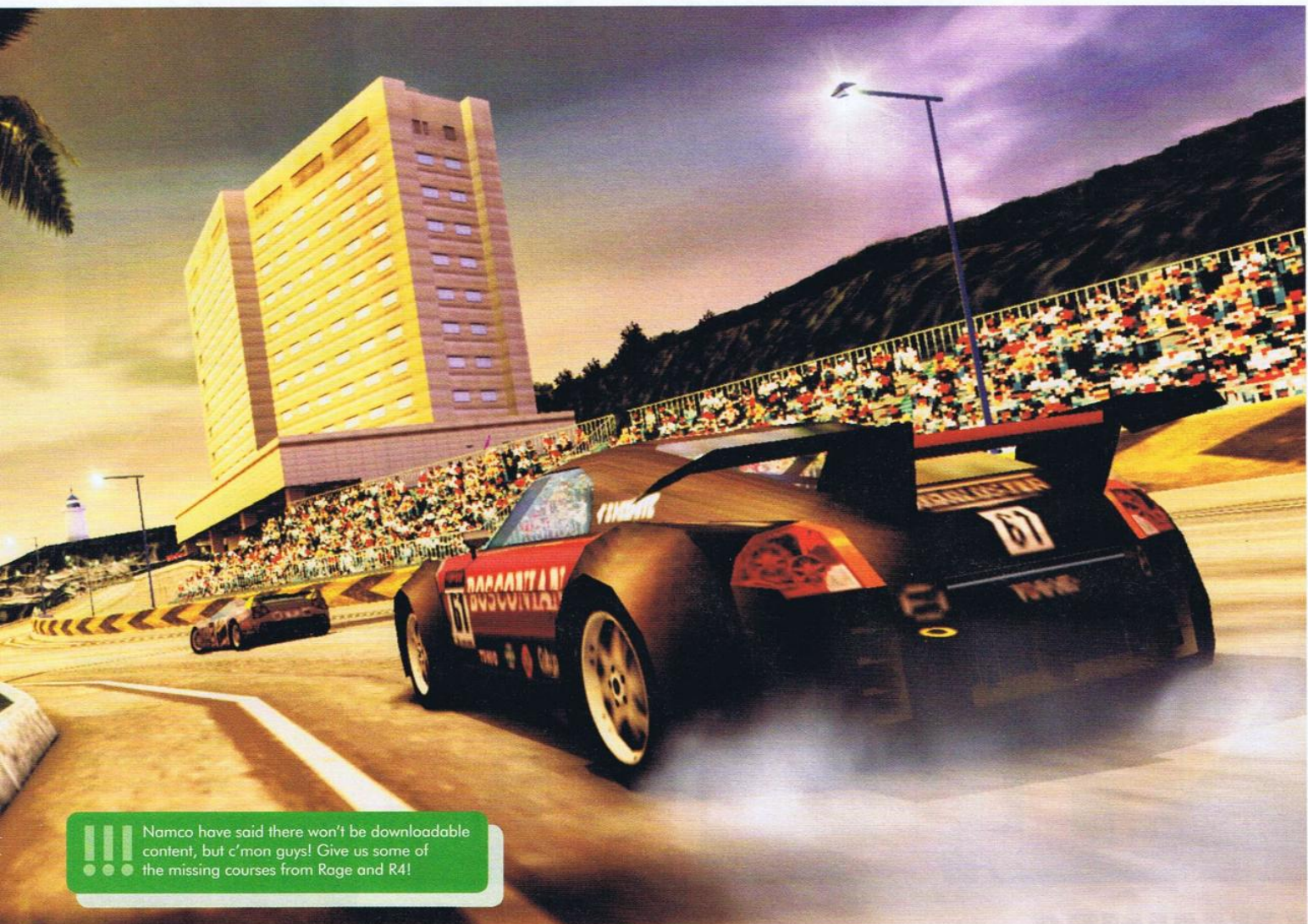
of Ridge, Rev, Rave, Rage, R4 and RV really hasn't looked back. As a product it has evolved a great deal. From its beginnings as the epitome of ultra-pretty, content-lite arcade racing, through to the grittier Rage, and the more mature R4, there are so many great Ridge Racer moments that Namco really should make a "best of". Oh wait, they have. And check this out - it's everything it should be. Ridge Racer is THE must-have launch title for PSP. It's screamingly fast, it's gratifyingly pretty and it has plenty of depth.



FAN SERVICE

So far, so ranty, but here are the facts. Ridge Racer on PSP takes 12 old courses (both variants of the original/RV course, both variants of the Ridge Racer Revolution course, the four courses from Rave Racer, two courses from Rage Racer and two courses from R4 a.k.a. "Real Racing Roots 99"), then wraps them (forwards and backwards) all up in a World Tour mode that consists of the 39 events from the Japanese version plus 7 more for the Western release. There are six classes of car, and each class has a host of different cars to unlock then race. It's a truly sizeable undertaking to beat, and a huge amount of fun every step of the way.

The amount of work Namco have put in is obvious. The old courses look resplendent in their remodeled form on PSP, and the sheer speed and beauty of the game will surprise even the most sceptical of gamers. The handling mechanics are spot on, easily usurping the feel of every other game in the series, and just to make sure they take the gameplay to a new level, there's the introduction of nitrous. You now have three tanks of nitrous that are filled by extended drifting, giving you yet another reason to drift at every possible opportunity. Utilising one of your nitrous tanks gives you a sustained burst of speed for a short time, and it opens up countless possibilities.



Namco have said there won't be downloadable content, but c'mon guys! Give us some of the missing courses from Rage and R4!

The handling mechanics are spot on, easily usurping every other RR

Do you want to be conservative and use it on the home stretch, or do you want to rip into that hairpin as fast as the game will let you?

The game mechanics are still very much like riding a rollercoaster - you're tugged around corners whilst drifting, which means you can actually drift the wrong way (or pull a 360) around a corner, but more than anything this just means that the game is easy to get into for new players. To master Ridge Racer you'll still need to know the courses and know the mechanics.

That said, fans of the series won't

have much trouble breezing through most of the game (although some of the one on one races further in get quite testing), but I'd argue that to some extent the AI competition is irrelevant. Ridge Racer isn't really about opponents - it's about mastering racing lines. It's about perfecting every drift on every course. If anything, the other drivers just get in the way. Whilst this may sound odd, to a large extent it's the way Ridge Racer has always been. It's practically built in - why else would the last couple of cars break on the first straight to let you go past? And

THROBING DRIFT CAT

Over the years the Ridge Racer games have churned out an impressively eclectic selection of tunes to race to. Ridge Racer on PSP is no exception, and probably represents the best soundtrack yet. The music is divided into "discs", each with six tunes. There's Red Disc, Blue Disc, Remix Disc, Classic Disc 1 and Classic Disc 2. Old school fans will dig the Classic and Remix discs, while the Blue and Red discs are a great set of fresh tunes. Before playing this game though, make sure you've got a good set of bin headphones - the music and sound effects will sound exponentially better.

It's also obvious that the dev team are heavily into electronic music, as is evidenced by the titles of many of the tours. Here are some examples: Come to Drifty, Fire Drifter, Block Rockin' Drifts, Strings of Drift, Jupiter Drift, Throbbing Drift Cat, Drift Del Mar, Nightmares on Drift and Exit Planet Drift. Cool huh?



[M.A.W.] Nuyorican Drift



[Mills] Purpose Drifter

hey, the real joy of competition comes with the eight player wireless anyway. To be honest we've only been able to test wireless with two machines, which worked a treat, but we're absolutely salivating at the thought of racing in an eight player pack.

But even without experiencing eight player multiplayer, after racing well over 3000km of virtual track in World Tour mode since getting our mitts on Ridge Racer for PSP, there can be no doubt that this is one of the games of 2005.

Cam Shea



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

DETAILS:

CATEGORY: Arcade racing

PLAYERS: 1-8

DEVELOPER: Namco

PUBLISHER: Sony

PRICE: STBA

RATING: TBA

AVAILABLE: TBA

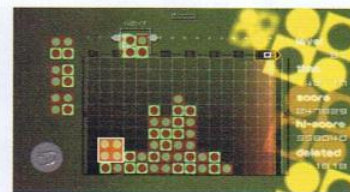
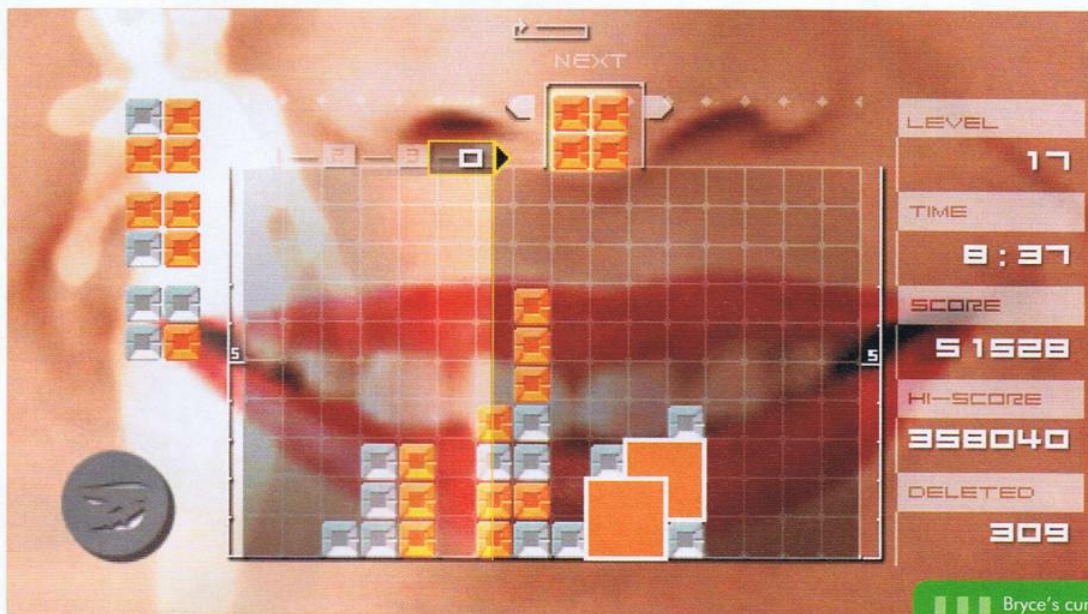
VISUALS SOUND GAMEPLAY

92 93 93

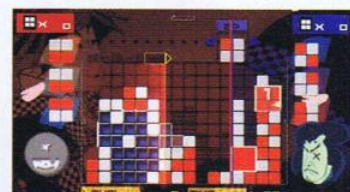
OVERALL

93



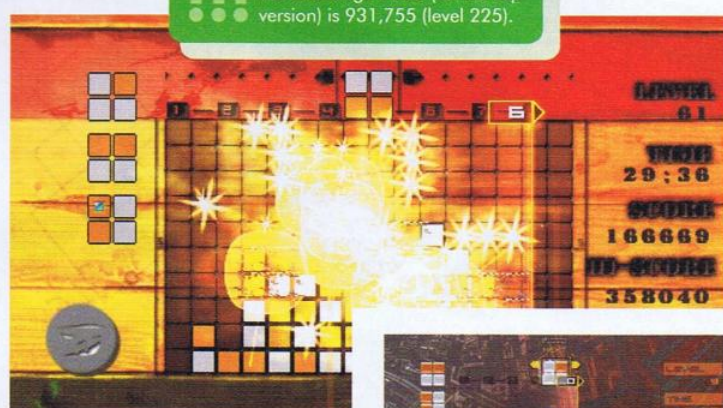


[up] Look out for Blocky, up in the trees



[RE.] Fear of a Black Planet

!!! Bryce's current high score for the Challenge mode (on the Jap version) is 931,755 (level 225).



LUMINES

In Tetris it was 'Game A'. In Lumines it is known as 'Challenge mode'. These amount to the same thing — lasting as long as possible without dying, the only opponent being the high-score table. And in a puzzle game, a balanced and well-executed endless mode is what will keep you coming back for years to come (hands up those who still have Tetris on their GameBoys).

BLOCK ROCKING BEATS

Lumines is a block-falling game where you must get four of the same-coloured tile to align in a 2x2 square in order for it to disappear. Although the game changes 'skins' (colour and background themes) constantly, there are only ever two block colours which keeps the concept and rules simple, but the gameplay develops a richness from the incredibly innovative combo system. Instead of blocks simply disappearing when they are formed, they are removed only as the music line — a windscreen wiper-like line which sweeps across the game grid to an 8-bar count of the track that is playing — passes over them. This means that you have a full bar count to build on your original block to make as many blocks

as humanly possible, with each additional block naturally increasing your score multiplier. Such a seemingly small tweak to the formula makes a huge difference in the way the game plays, and it makes coming back and competing against your own top score fun and rewarding.

Challenge mode is not the only available mode — Puzzle, Vs CPU and Time Attack are among the other options and all are quite decent. The Single Skin mode lets you choose your favourite theme, but Challenge mode is definitely where it's at.

The man behind this product is Tetsuya Mizuguchi — of Rez, Space Channel 5 etc fame — so it comes as no surprise that music plays such an important part in the game. More so than Rez, and less gimmicky than SC5, the music in Lumines is genuinely fused into the whole (you will need headphones to truly enjoy this game). Along with many original tracks, it features some tracks from Mondo Grosso (a constant feature on any playlist built by Cam) and a couple of J-pop tracks from newcomer Eri Nobuchika. These fit the groove of the game well, although more tracks and a wider selection of artists would

have added to the wonder. A Vib-Ribbon-esque feature to run mp3s from your memory stick would have been awesome too, but perhaps we are setting our sights too high.

All tracks come with a corresponding skin, and these are always designed to complement each other. Although we are essentially talking about 2-dimensional blocks on a grid, the graphical presentation is above reproach. The backgrounds are vibrant without distracting from the puzzle, the blocks are clearly distinguishable and the explosions of light that accompany big combos are satisfying. These

all help in approaching the 'zone' where the world melts away.

To criticise such a wondrous game is difficult, however there are areas which could be improved. Firstly, in Challenge mode, it would be nice to start off a little further into the game — or even have a second Challenge mode with a higher difficulty. Secondly, it would have been fantastic to have a much more comprehensive Records screen, recording high-scores, best combos, total blocks, total hours — any and every statistic you can think of. Oh well.

Funky, colourful, sexy, timeless. Lumines has arrived.

Bryce McDonough



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

DETAILS:

CATEGORY: Puzzle

PLAYERS: 1

DEVELOPER: Q Entertainment

PUBLISHER: Ubisoft

PRICE: \$TBA

RATING: G

AVAILABLE: TBA

VISUALS SOUND GAMEPLAY

91 94 91

OVERALL

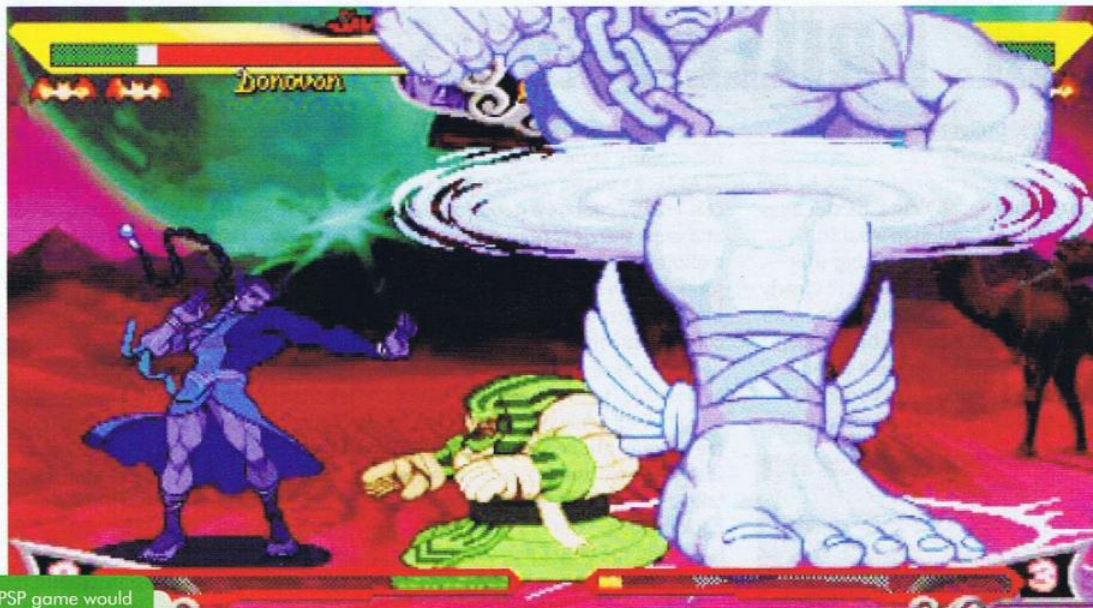
91



[Page 28] HAHA HAHA HAHA!! Hee hee



[above] Wow, a "Jazz Hands" mannerism



!!! And what PSP game would be complete without Wi-Fi multiplayer? Bring it on...



VAMPIRE CHRONICLES: The Chaos Tower

When we of the office first heard of Capcom's plans to release Vampire Chronicle (VC: TCT) on PSP, there were mixed feelings. We were excited, but it wasn't long before whisperings of "Why not Street Fighter 3 or Capcom vs SNK 2?" could be heard echoing down the cold clinical hallways of Next Media.

WHAT ABOUT FIRST FIDDLE?

It is true the Darkstalkers series has always played second fiddle to the late, great Street Fighter (SF). Not through any fault of its own though, simply because of the incredible popularity of the SF series. And had SF arrived in one of its more popular incarnations for PSP, I'm sure Capcom would have shipped millions by now. However, we would have missed out on enjoying Vampire Chronicle. And enjoying it we are.

VC:TCT is an amalgamation of the three generations of Darkstalkers, and comes with about 20 characters selected from all three titles. We get to choose which subtly different fighting engine we would like to use as well, which sets the backgrounds and BGM to that series. Some might

say this is gimmicky, others (this gamer included) might say it's fan-service. And if you check out all the other extra unlockables Capcom has packed in, you just might agree.

VC:TCT may not sport a fighting engine and system quite as evolved as, say, CvS2 or SF3, but it is on a par with Alpha 3, which is a very good thing. Guard cancels, a Super bar, chain combos — these are all present. There is no parry or high/low jump, but dash moves and defensive special moves play a much bigger role in overall strategy. Performing your special moves — especially supers — can be tricky at first until you get the hang of the controls and find a button layout that suits you. With an ideal set-up, you will find it as easy as it ever was on a SNES or PlayStation pad, and an absolute pleasure after wrestling with so many SF titles on the GBA.

Apart from the obligatory Arcade mode, this title comes with Tower mode, which is essentially a survival mode. Choosing three characters, you continue to climb the tower until your characters die, sometimes with conditions for fights such as no blocking, or trying to win with a guard-cancel. These will help



you climb the tower faster (200 storeys is a long way up) and this is where you will unlock many of the game's goodies. As is always the case, however, nothing beats playing 2D fighters against a friend. Living, breathing competition will keep this game alive forever.

The artwork in Vampire Chronicle deserves special mention, simply because Morrigan keeps popping



her head up on other games, and looks gradually worse with each outing. Perhaps it's a combination of the size and quality of the screen, but the game looks a treat. The characters have so much personality, and with the animation not missing a beat from its arcade origins, it comes right through in this version. Well worth a look.

Bryce McDonough

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

DETAILS:
CATEGORY: 2D fighter
PLAYERS: 1-2
DEVELOPER: Capcom
PUBLISHER: THQ
PRICE: \$TBA
RATING: TBA
AVAILABLE: TBA

VISUALS 86 SOUND 89 GAMEPLAY 87

OVERALL
86

MR. DRILLER: Drill Spirits

Mr. Driller hasn't changed much since his birth on Dreamcast and PSone in 2000; he still looks spacerifically cute, he still goes down where most men wouldn't dare, and he still uses his big drill — so what's to complain about? Clearly the Drill Man loves getting busy with a tool in his hands; maybe so much he doesn't realise it's time to move on. While starting afresh on the DS with the use of both screens and the



[above] Mr Alcoholic: Drink Spirits

stylus may seem like a good start, it's actually more of a plea for help.

As far as puzzle games go, you can't really change a good formula, and most puzzle formulas have been explored to death. In Mr. Driller, the formula is to drill specific coloured blocks to create an avalanche of colour-matching combos while descending as quickly to the bottom as possible (to avoid running out of oxygen), all while deftly avoiding the aforementioned cataclysms. The idea is simple and was an interesting take on the combo-block recipe back in 2000 — but it's five years later, and the only thing that has changed is the game's format.

On DS, Mr. Driller gives you a deeper view of the drilling site through both screens and you can use the stylus to control our young hero, though it's all superfluous; using the stylus isn't nearly as responsive as the D-Pad and buttons, and having to pay attention to both screens at all times adds even more impediment to the game. The transition to DS has actually been detrimental to the experience and is uncomfortably cumbersome. Drill Spirits could have just as easily been designed for the SP and maintained everything this

version had without the addition of clunky controls and an awkward field of vision. There is a multiplayer mode for wireless play, which is good, but it's very shallow and ultimately short-lived given the tediousness of the single player campaign.

It's time someone gave Mr. Driller a makeover — Namco, we're looking in your direction. Seriously though, as charming as Mr Driller may look on the surface, once you start mining for gameplay you're going to be disappointed. Best to save your money until puzzle games come along that will actually be built around the DS's functionality, as opposed to being shoehorned into it.

Stephen Farrelly

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

DETAILS:

CATEGORY: Puzzle

PLAYERS: 1-2

DEVELOPER: Namco

PUBLISHER: Namco

PRICE: \$69.95

RATING: G

AVAILABLE: Now



[up] Visit Bunnings for your drilling needs

VISUALS SOUND GAMEPLAY

74 70 70

OVERALL

72

POKÉMON DASH

The Pokemon games have had a few successful offshoots over the years. Pokemon Puzzle League springs immediately to mind, as does Pokemon Pinball. They were both solid spinoffs that sported solid game design and had just enough of the charm of the main property to work. Important that. Pokemon Dash, on the other hand, comes across as being a quick fix to push something with the Pokemon name out to DS owners without having to go to much effort.

Mind you, this "Novelty Racing Game" (as Nintendo are calling it) spinoff doesn't sound too bad on paper. You play Pikachu and must race against other Pokemon through a variety of courses, constantly sliding the stylus in the direction you want to bound. Different terrain (such as forest and desert) can slow you down, but there are pickups to rectify this. If you need to get across the water you can ride Lapras or take a hot air balloon. The first furry freak through all the checkpoints in the right order wins.

Unfortunately the game itself is as insipid as they come. Nintendo

may say that this is a game about "sliding" (the technique of sliding the pen across the screen to move Pikachu around), but really it's more of a stroke than anything else. For the most part you're just running blindly along stroking your pocket monster, waiting for the game to become fun. The best element is definitely the ability to hop in a hot air balloon and scour the landscape for your next landing point, then drop from the sky. This is something that opens the game up a little, but the puzzle potential inherent in the mechanic isn't fully explored.

The bottomline is that this could be ANY Nintendo character running along. There's nothing significant that makes this a Pokemon game. So what if Pikachu never shuts up with its "Pika pika pika licka" crap? That's just garnish.

But we'll leave you with some of the best advice you'll ever be given, and this is straight out of the instruction manual. Apparently "Long, steady, gentle strokes" are just as effective as "many short, hard strokes". True dat.

Cam Shea



[Above] Pikachu. Pure malevolent evil...



[up] Run into the water and drown. Please

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

DETAILS:

CATEGORY: Stroking sim

PLAYERS: 1-6

DEVELOPER: Ambrella

PUBLISHER: Nintendo

PRICE: \$69.95

RATING: G

AVAILABLE: Now

VISUALS SOUND GAMEPLAY

70 40 50

OVERALL

55

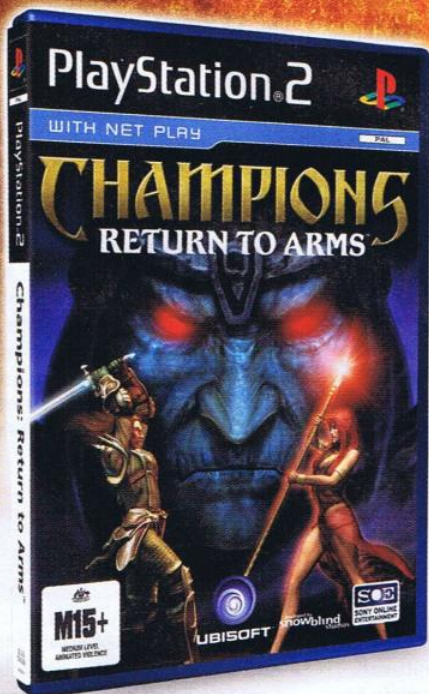
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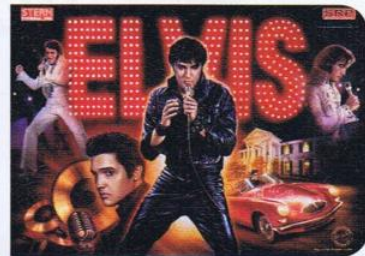
developed by snowblind studios



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[left] The King... and Elvis Presley



Elvis

— STERN

Elvis will NEVER leave the building. After starring in 31 films, releasing 81 Albums and using his likeness on lighters, playing cards, flick knives and peoples skin, they have finally released a pinball machine that is a veritable hall of fame on legs that encapsulates The King (a.k.a Elvis the Pelvis) and all that he stood (and danced and sung) for in his prime.

RUBBER IN THE RIGHT PLACES.

If there's anything you hate in the world of pinball, it's definitely a machine with large side lanes and highly sensitive tilt factor. Elvis Pinball has got to be one of the most player friendly machines we have witnessed in a while. The pace of the ball is never too intimidating, the side lane entrances are small and it is fairly easy to 'bump' the ball around the playing field and out of danger. In fact, we recommend using your pelvis - just like the King would want you to, to nudge the machine when the ball looks destined to go down the guts. Even

the factory 'replay' score is set low enough to be easily obtainable to the average player.

The overall aim of the game is to get to Elvis's nirvana - Graceland a.k.a Wizard mode. To do this you must shoot several different targets and loops as well as unlocking five different song modes, which use the classic tracks "Blue Suede Shoes," "All Shook Up," "Hound Dog," "Jailhouse Rock," and "Heartbreak Hotel". The bonafide music really adds to the charm of the machine and reminds you why he was constantly setting new world records with his music sales. Interestingly, Stern are looking to release a Marcel Marceau pinball machine and use his well known hit tracks such as " " and " ". It's quite a mission to get the machine to Graceland mode, so we feel that there should have been more fanfare once you get there - like Bally's "The Addams Family". Oh well.

The playing field is well thought out with four flippers, two ramps, pops, drop targets, an upper level

and various toys (including an Elvis doll and hound dog) to activate. There is even a video mode, which allows you to press the flipper buttons in time to the music a'la Dance Dance Revolution. We didn't witness any other vid modes, but it would have been cool to have a punch up or driving scene or even a faux pushing interface, as Elvis seems to do a lot of that in his movies. To get to the upper level, Heart Break Hotel, you have to first open a 'garage door' and then sink the ball through the opening. Completing this is quite hard, yet very satisfying. As for multiball, this machine doesn't go crazy like, say, Judge Dredd Pinball with its eight ball multi-ball. Instead of having to save balls and unlock a multitude of options, Elvis is happy to just have an easy access two ball multiball.

Fortunately, you don't have to be a bonafide brothel creeper

wearing rockabilly stuck in a 50s time-warp to enjoy this game, as it is a fine pinball machine in its own right. The skill level for this game is not ridiculously difficult - which will keep the casual pinball player happy, yet there is enough to shoot for the veteran players. We are also glad that the machine remembers Elvis in his early years and totally overlooks his last few years which



Coming soon to an arcade near you are (apart from the Marcel Marceau Machine) Stern's "The Sopranos" and "Lord of the Rings".

saw a man who men wanted to be and women wanted to be with, turn into a half man /half giant pill popping cheeseburger, who died (or did he...) at the unripe old age of 42 in his toilet.

8.5/10

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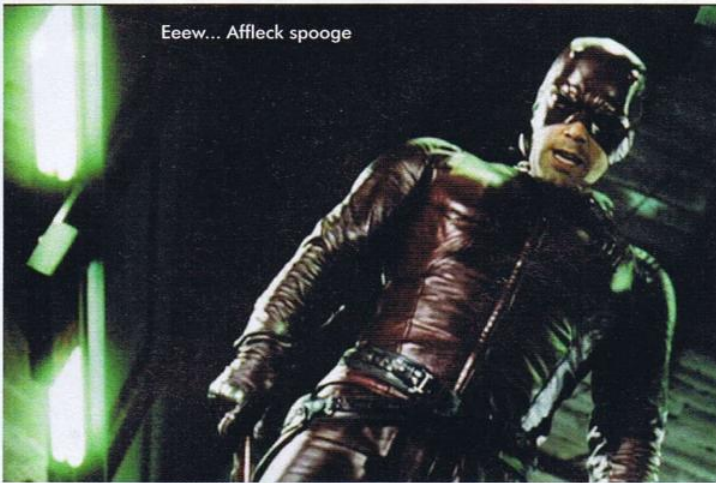


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Eeww... Affleck spooge



Daredevil DIRECTOR'S CUT (2 DISC)

FOX HOME ENTERTAINMENT, M 15+

▶▶ The *Daredevil Director's Cut* is a very different film than the one previously released. It is a darker story, less concerned with the relationship between Matt Murdock and Elektra and more detailed in the hunt for the film's main villain, Kingpin.

The major addition to the film is around 30 minutes of new footage, most of which details a subplot (entirely excised from the theatrical cut) about a murdered prostitute and Murdock defending the accused murderer, played, rather poorly by Coolio. Although Coolio's performance is only slightly above what you could expect from a school play, the subplot is actually very rewarding and fills in a number of plot holes, most notably why the police suddenly turn up on Kingpin's doorstep after the climactic battle. In the theatrical cut there is no inkling that the police have any idea who the Kingpin is until they arrest him. Joe Pantoliano as crusading reporter Ben Urich plays a much larger role in the Director's Cut, acting something like a Greek chorus as well as a convenient plot device to drive the action.



[*South Park*] Oh Ben you are so perfect, so spectacularrrrr in every way

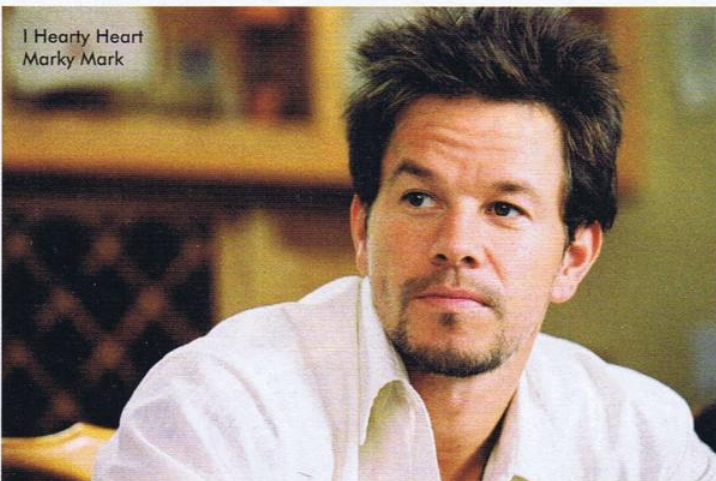
With all of the new footage it's a little disappointing to see that many of the special features on the disc are simply pulled from the 2 disc special edition of the theatrical cut, the only new addition of note being an interesting making of doco in which the director complains about the theatrical cut and the producers complain about the director's cut.

Daniel Wilks

MOVIE: 8 / EXTRAS: 9 (6 if you have the Special Edition)



I Hearty Heart
Marky Mark



I ♥ Huckabees

FOX HOME ENTERTAINMENT, M 15+

▶▶ *I Heart Huckabees* is a love it or hate it type of film. I personally love it for all its pretension and pseudo-philosophical posturing where others will hate it for the same reason. *Huckabees* begins with the story of Albert Markovski (the brilliant Jason Schwartzman), an environmentalist, bad poet, activist and president of a chapter of the Open Spaces Coalition. He is also disenfranchised with his life and believes that some of the coincidences in his life, such as meeting the same "African Guy" three times in different circumstances, must have a deeper significance. As such he employs two existential detectives, Bernard and Vivian Jaffe (Dustin Hoffman and Lily Tomlin) to monitor his life and get to the root of his problem — Brad Stand (Jude Law) the head of marketing for the Huckabees department store. Through the course of his soul searching and existential angst, Albert meets with and affects a number of different characters ranging from a nihilistic fireman (Mark Whalberg), Brad Stand's spokes model girlfriend (Naomi Watts) and meets with



[up] "But what about the driver?"

the "evil" existentialist who preaches nihilism as a form of release, Catherine Vauban (Isabelle Hupert). It's strange, brilliant and about as wanky as a film can get without being porn.

The special features on the disc are an odd bunch — PSA and infomercials for the Open Spaces Coalition and Jaffes, two great audio commentaries, some outtakes that seem to comprise solely of Whalberg pushing people and a roll of people doing miscellaneous things on set.

Daniel Wilks

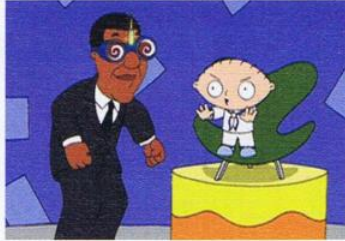
MOVIE: 8 / EXTRAS: 8

Family Guy: Season 3 (3 DISC)

FOX HOME ENTERTAINMENT, M15+

Season 3 of *Family Guy* opens and closes in spectacular form. The opening two part episode deals with Brian the dog's addiction to cocaine, his recovery and his move to California to work in the movie (a.k.a. porn) industry. The gags are thick and fast — this is *Family Guy* at its best (just check out the "pea-tear griffin" gag and the last week recap at the start of episode two for proof). The final episode takes a Tales of Interest/Simpsons Halloween episode approach showcasing three what-if stories (Peter's theme music and Meg's amazing ability to grow her nails being highlights).

The rest of the season is consistently funny as well. There are some moments where it wavers, and some moments of incredibly poor taste (such as the psychotic Margot Kidder), but on the whole this is still the most rapid-fire animated sitcom around. *Family Guy* very much picks up where the earlier



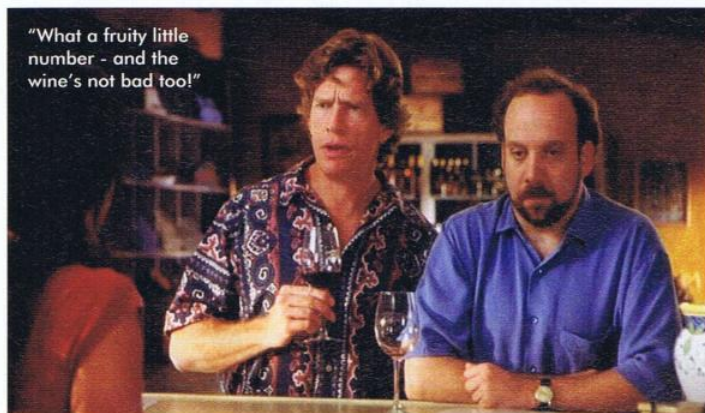
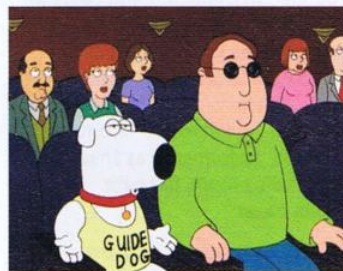
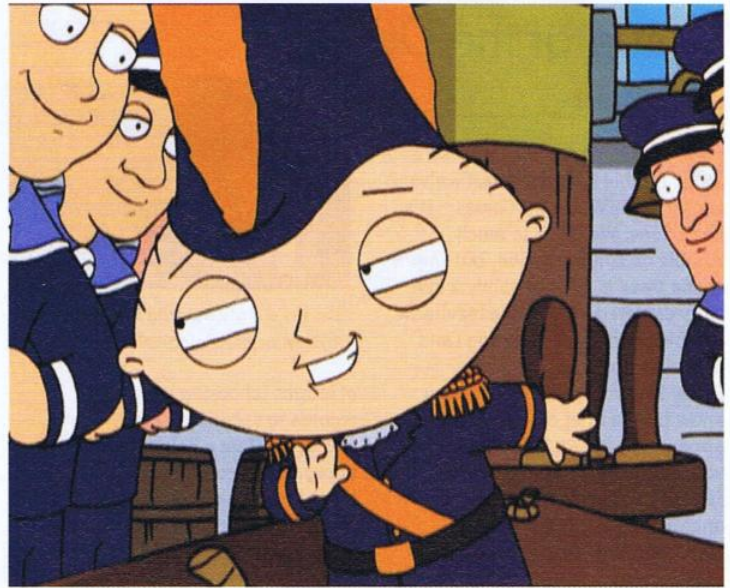
[up] Leonard Part 7

years of *The Simpsons* left off, with heavy pop culture references and stacks of zany flashbacks. That's definitely not a bad thing.

Once again, however, it's really disappointing to see absolutely no extras on this release. Fans of the show have already seen the episodes — we want commentaries and featurettes! Oh, and *Family Guy* fans should keep an eye out for *American Dad*, the new series from *Family Guy* creator Seth MacFarlane. If the pilot is anything to go by it's going to be another classic.

Cam Shea

MOVIE: 9 / EXTRAS: 0



"What a fruity little number - and the wine's not bad too!"

Sideways

FOX HOME ENTERTAINMENT, M 15+

Every now and then a film comes along that is sweet, tender, funny and just plain magic. Over the past few years we've had *Secretary* and *Igby Goes Down*, now we can add *Sideways* to the list, a delightful, real, moving and downright brilliant little comedy/drama. The wonderful Paul Giamatti plays Miles, one of the most unconventional but endearing romantic leads to grace the screen. Miles is a sad-sack and a loser, a teacher and failed novelist with a passion for wine and a yearning for the wife that left him two years previously. He is short, dumpy, balding and too smart for his own good. He's painfully human.

To celebrate his best friend Jack's upcoming nuptials, Miles takes the

groom to be on a week long tour of the Californian wine country. Jack is Miles' opposite in nearly every aspect — he's tall, charming and amoral, so as such they have different plans for the week. Miles sees the trip as some time with his friend, time to avoid his healthy diet of self loathing, time to drink some wine and play some golf. Jack on the other hand sees the trip as a week long bachelor party and as such winds up setting up a double date with two wine pourers from one of Miles' favourite haunts. Director Alexander Payne, better known for his sharp satires such as *Election* and *About Schmidt* has crafted a gentle and effecting ode to loneliness, maturity, realisation and simple pleasures. Seek it out.

Daniel Wilks

MOVIE: 10 / EXTRAS: 7



Now all we need is a tribute to heroin chic.

Bill Bailey: Part Troll

UNIVERSAL, PG

You may only know him as Manny, the hairy and odd sidekick from the brilliant *Black Books* with Dylan Moran but Bill Bailey is also a highly respected comedian and musician. *Part Troll* is a film of his show (which recently toured Australia) shot live at the Hammersmith Apollo theatre. To say Bill Bailey is funny is something of a cosmic understatement. Within five minutes of the DVD playing we literally hurt from laughing at both the brilliance of his wit and the surreal nature of his show. Bailey diverges wildly from his inability to tell jokes, inspired musical performances (including a Portishead cover of Zippedy Doo Dah and a sublime tribute to Kraftwerk), random peeks into

his mind (when everyone in an audience claps simultaneously it sounds like a giant breaking kindling), a nearly religious hatred for Chris de Burgh and sharp insight.

Part Troll is destined to rank up there as one of the great live comedy DVDs alongside Eddy Izzard's *Dress Circle*, Billy Connolly's *Billy and Albert*, Robin Williams *Live at the Met* and Eddy Murphy's *Raw*. If the show isn't enough to sate your comedy appetite the special features will, which include more Kraftwerk tributes and a bizarre and hilarious travel diary in which Bailey seems obsessed with finding the coffee and tea making facilities in every hotel room he stays. Comedy gold.

Daniel Wilks

MOVIE: 10 / EXTRAS: 7

Shaun of the Dead

UNIVERSAL, MA15+

Stubs the Zombie may be a zombie love story, but we've got news for Wideload Games — it's been done. Well, not so much zombie on zombie action, but *Shaun of the Dead* is most certainly a love story centered around the inevitable zombie apocalypse. Starring (and co-written by) the inhumanly funny Simon Pegg (who you may know from a brief but memorable appearance in *Black Books* and you should definitely know from *Spaced*), *Shaun of the Dead* is at once a touching comedy and a homage to the classic zombie flicks.

After being dumped by his girlfriend for essentially living at the pub, Shaun (Pegg) is so wrapped up in his own world that he doesn't notice London falling apart around him. When he does clue in to the fact that the city is overrun by zombies he constructs an elaborate plan to rescue his ex and his mum and take them to a sanctuary. No prizes for guessing where that is — the pub.

Along the way there are plenty



[shock] a state induced by sudden physical or psychological trauma

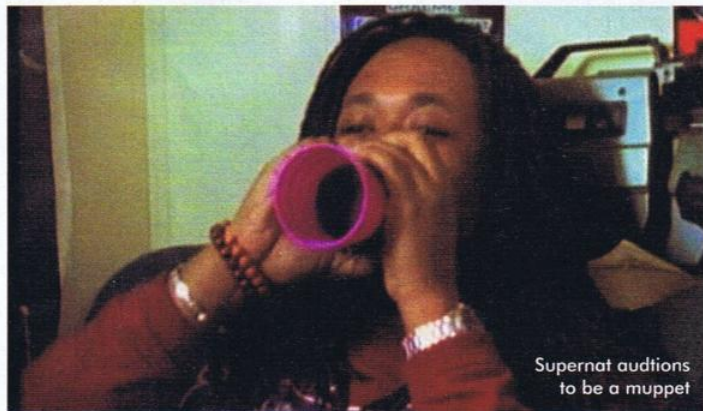
of laughs (choosing which records to sacrifice in order to try and decapitate a pair of slowly approaching zombies is a nice touch), plenty of cameos and a couple of truly heart wrenching scenes. The beauty of this film is that it's deliberately silly, but it's also grounded in characters you come to care about. The chemistry between Shaun and his best mate Ed (Nick Frost) continues over from *Spaced* unabated and is one of the film's highlights. Dylan Moran also turns in a good performance as Shaun's girlfriend's preppy flatmate.

Cam Shea

MOVIE: 8 / EXTRAS: 6



No caption needed
- this pic is perfekt.



Supernat auditions
to be a muppet

Freestyle: THE ART OF RHYME

MADMAN, M15+

It's easy to lament the state of hip hop in this day and age, with so much cookie cutter music around, but this documentary will restore your faith in the talent that exists within hip hop and its cultural importance. Made over a period of seven years, *Freestyle: The Art of Rhyme* is a celebration of the art of the truly impromptu freestyle, tracing its roots back to Jamaican immigrants in the Bronx who would "toast" over their records, to the early days of hip hop with the Last Poets and through to today's scene. This is not a documentary about commercial hip hop, this is very much about rapping as community, rapping as an artform and rapping as a vital part of everyday life.

The most fascinating parts of the documentary for us concern some of the underground superstars of the freestyle scene and the battles for bragging rights. Guys like MC Supernatural and Craig G are phenomenally talented, and electrifying in action. Also represented are the Freestyle Fellowship, Mos Def and The Roots' Black Thought and Quest Love.

Bonus features include filmmaker's commentary by the director, producer and cinematographer, exclusive freestyles and interviews, deleted and additional scenes and a late night rhyme session. Also keep an eye out for another Madman release "5 Sides of a Coin", a doco about the five aspects of hip hop.

Joey T

MOVIE: 8 / EXTRAS: 6



Her attic is infested
with college know-it-all
hippies

Ju-on: The Grudge

EASTERN EYE, M 15+

When we think of Japanese horror flicks, I am sure we all think of the same menacing music, copious amounts of water, gruesome facial expressions upon death and of course the vengeance of the dead. *Ju-on: The Grudge* is this type of old fashioned Japanese horror flick, however if you loved *Dark Water*, or the Japanese trilogy of *The Ring*, you are sure to be at least a little disappointed.

The story begins with an innocent home visit by social worker Nishira Rika (Megumi Okina). What she encounters is a strange and terrifying presence that has attached itself to the house and anyone who enters it. The premise is interesting, it's the content that doesn't deliver. Far from being a thriller that made

us bite our nails in anticipation, *Ju-on* is repetitive in its suspense and not particularly terrifying. Whilst the musical score and sound effects are bang on the horror money, the make-up on the dead is far from convincing. To be honest, playing *Resident Evil 4* made my skin crawl more. The director Takashi Shimizu adapted some of his short stories for this film, but perhaps a shorter format would have suited the story more appropriately.

The extras include a look behind the scenes, showing the process for setting up particular scenes, and interviews with both director and some of his cast. Unfortunately though, the included theatrical trailer contains all the film's best bits.

Rebecca Izard

MOVIE: 6 / EXTRAS: 5

Fullmetal Alchemist

VOLUME 01: THE CURSE

GENRE: ACTION/DRAMA
PROD: ANIPLEX/SQUARE-ENIX

In the world of *Fullmetal Alchemist*, alchemy is a science. There's nothing magical about it, although there are some people who are more talented at it than others. Rather, alchemy is driven by the process of equivalence. In other words, you can't create something out of nothing. All alchemical works are transmutations — building and changing matter using existing materials. Or, to put it more poetically, to gain something, you must lose something of equal value.

This law is at the heart of the morality system in *Fullmetal Alchemist*, and the two lead characters, brothers Edward and Alphonse, have firsthand knowledge of the how high a price must be paid when trying to transmutate something truly precious. We won't spoil it for you, but the end result is that Ed now has a metal arm and a leg, and Al has no body at all, his soul resides in a suit of armour. The beginning of the series finds the two embarking on a quest to find the Philosopher's Stone in the hopes that it can return them to normal. Although they're both



phenomenal alchemists, they're still essentially kids, so the story is both one of redemption and growing up.

The first DVD has five episodes, and we've already fallen in love with it. The relationship between Ed and Al is handled superbly (with great dub voice acting, especially from Aaron Dismuke who plays Al), the world and role of alchemy within it has stacks of potential, and we can't wait to find out more about the wider characters (such as the State Alchemists and the Seven Deadly Sins). The animation and design style are also first rate, but then, what would you expect from a series animated by BONES (*Cowboy Bebop: The Movie*) and backed by Aniplex and Square-Enix? This is definitely one to watch.

Cam Shea

ANIMATION: 9 / STORY: 8
OVERALL: 9



Never bring a puppy to a gun fight

InuYasha VOLUME 1

GENRE: ADVENTURE
PROD: YOMIURI TV/SUNRISE

Set in feudal Japan with strong ties to the present day, Rumiko Takahashi's *InuYasha* is very much a natural progression from her other seminal manga/anime series dealing with identity crises, *Ranma ½*.

But where the protagonist Ranma had to wrestle with his gender identity and the resulting social faux pas (an unfortunate curse saw his sex change readily and usually at the most inopportune of moments), the protagonist InuYasha instead struggles with his impure self; half demon, half human, InuYasha yearns to transform himself into a fully-fledged monster.

With the arrival of the series' other protagonist Kagome (a 15 year old schoolgirl from present day Tokyo), InuYasha is unwittingly released from a fifty-year bondage and immediately continues his search for the Jewel of Four Souls, a talisman so sacred and potent that it has the power to give InuYasha what he most desires. We quickly discover that Kagome is the inherited custodian of the jewel, and that she's somehow linked with Kikyo — the shrine maiden that captured InuYasha and sealed

him where Kagome found him.

The other catch is that every demon and his dog in the land is after the same trinket, so InuYasha and Kagome eventually join forces to protect their own interests; Kagome's mysterious destiny and sense of duty, and InuYasha's one shot at his own redemption.

What drives *InuYasha* is Takahashi's exceptional talent for painting rich characters and powerful narratives exploring their inter-relationships. *InuYasha* is ostensibly a tale of the coming of age of both Kagome and InuYasha, but you'd be hard pressed to tell from episode to episode what with all the epic battles against the superbly crafted figures and monsters based heavily on Japanese myth and folklore. Instead, *InuYasha* effortlessly bounds from story arc to story arc and plot twist to plot twist (of which there are many), telling its larger story in between.

At over 160 episodes, *InuYasha* certainly requires commitment, but the journey will undoubtedly be a rewarding one.

March Stepanik

ANIMATION: 7 / STORY: 8
OVERALL: 8



Another rather fruity pic

Win Win Win

WIN DEVIL MAY CRY 3 AND VIEWTIFUL JOE 2 FOR PS2!

» Devil May Cry 3 is one of the most action packed and just plain fun games we've seen in ages. It's charming, it's cheesy and it's a real return to form for the series. Viewtiful Joe 2 picks up where the original left off – unique visual style, old school gameplay jammed with new features and moves – and introduces a new playable character and player switch combos and puzzles to boot. They're both A grade games and they can both be yours, along with a Devil May Cry 3 t-shirt! Thanks to our life partners, erm, friends at THQ (it stands for "teh hella Q" by the way) we've got six packs to give away!

To be in the running, just answer the following:

What's the name of the lead character in Devil May Cry 3?

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**6
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Not only is SD Gundam Force a TV series, but it's also a series of nicely detailed action figures covering both the SD Guard and the Dark Axis, each complete with their own unique action, weapons and accessories. They're out on the streets in May, but thanks to Funtastic we have one full Deluxe Defender set of 12 12.5cm figures to give away to one lucky reader.

To be in the running send us some awesome SD artwork. Best image wins!

Send your artwork, as well as your name and address to: **Action figure art, Hyper, 78 Renwick St, Redfern, NSW, 2016.**

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SET UP FOR
GRABS!**



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 April 26 and entries close at 6pm June 15. 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 June 16 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 August issue of Hyper on sale July 6. 9) 6 winners will each receive Devil May Cry 3 on PS2 (RRP \$99.95), Viewtiful Joe 2 on PS2 (RRP \$79.95) and a Devil May Cry 3 t-shirt, 1 winner will receive a set of 12 SD Gundam figures (total RRP \$317). Total value of competitions is \$1396.40. 10) The promoter is Next Publishing Pty Ltd ABN 88 002 647 645 of 78 Renwick St, Redfern NSW 2016.

Win Win Win

WIN SONIC X DVDS!

»» What happens when Sonic and friends (and one enemy whose name rhymes with "Proctor Begman") find themselves warped to a city of humans, where they're strange talking animal anomalies? That's Sonic X in a nutshell. If you read our review of Sonic X last issue then you'd know that it's a must-see for Sonic freaks. It features some very smooth and well composed animation, a whole host of characters and stacks of action.

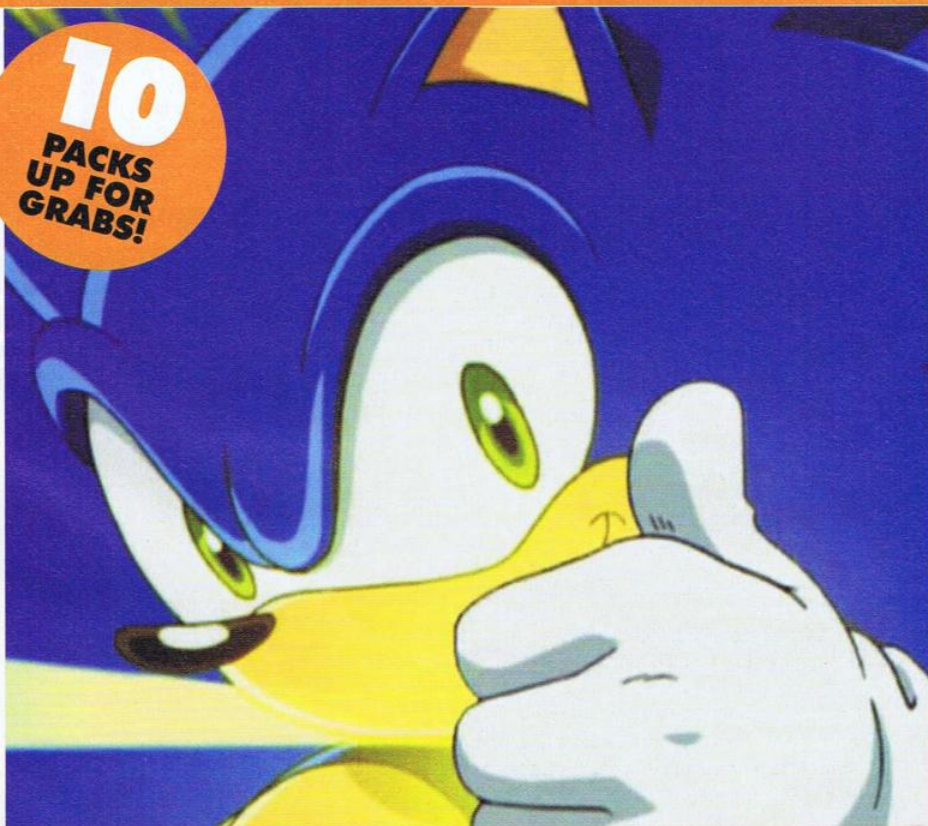
Thanks to our co-conspirators at MRA, we have ten packs of three DVDs (volumes 7, 8 and 9) to give away to lucky readers.

To be in the running, just answer the following question:

»» What are the two names that Sonic's nemesis is known by?

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

10
PACKS
UP FOR
GRABS!



WIN SAVIORS OF KAMIGAWA!

»» Card battling is a past-time as old as cards themselves. It all began when the Earl of Sandwich asked his butler to layer three cards with pictures of cool creatures on top of one another. After eating the cards, the Earl decided that he might have been better served constructing an elaborate game around the abilities of the creatures depicted, and battling against other players similarly equipped. Or so the legend goes.

The Kamigawa block is particularly cool — it introduced a Japanese inspired world where spirits (kami), samurai and mythical creatures run rampant. Saviors is the final expansion of the block and contains 165 cards. Thanks to our friends at Wizards of the Coast, we have 10 Magic the Gathering Saviors of Kamigawa packs to give away. Each pack includes one Saviors Theme Deck and two Saviors Booster packs. To be in the running, answer the following:

»» What are the spirits known as in the Kamigawa block?

Put your answer and your name and address on the back of an envelope and send it to: **It's Magic!, Hyper, 78 Renwick St, Redfern, NSW, 2016.**

10
PACKS
UP FOR
GRABS!

MAGIC
The Gathering®

SAVIORS
of kamigawa™



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 April 26 and entries close at 6pm June 15. 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 June 16 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 August issue of Hyper on sale July 6. 9) 10 winners will each receive Sonic X volumes 7, 8 and 9 on DVD (RRP \$14.95 each), 10 winners will each receive one Saviors of Kamigawa Theme Deck (RRP \$19.95) and two Saviors of Kamigawa Booster packs (RRP \$6.95). Total value of competitions is \$787. 10) The promoter is Next Publishing Pty Ltd ABN 88 002 647 645 of 78 Renwick St, Redfern NSW 2016.

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No.1

Wonderboy

» Mikolaj

4G

Videogame history is littered with forgotten characters and failed mascots. Some good, some bad and some destined for the bargain bin. However it's not all Bubsy the Bobcats and Aero the Acrobats (shudder). Amidst all the dross and ill-conceived crap out there, a number of classic videogame characters have also fallen by the wayside over the years - Wonderboy being one example. An unofficially Sega mascot for much of the late 80s, Wonderboy starred in six games before disappearing without a trace in 1994. What happened? Hyper did some research and came back with a tale of multi format licensing dramas that makes our brains hurt.

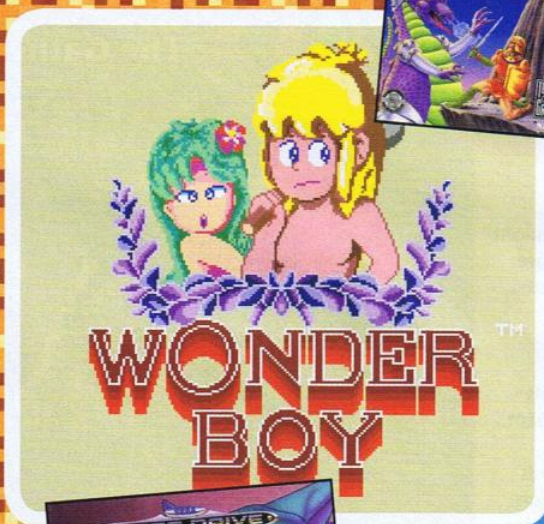
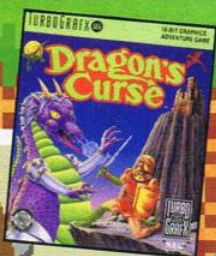
IT'S A WONDERFUL LIFE

Wonderboy began life in 1986 as a side scrolling platformer released by Sega. First launched in arcades, the game featured Wonderboy traversing a scrolling landscape dispensing death to all manner of insects and cute animals. With great graphics, simple gameplay and some catchy tunes, the game proved to be a massive success and was soon ported across to various formats including Sega's own Master System.

So far, so good, unfortunately things start to get confusing from this point onwards. You see, despite common misconceptions, the Wonderboy games were never produced by Sega themselves. Rather, the games were developed and produced by a Japanese company called Escape (which later became Westone). Sega simply licensed the games from Westone and reprogrammed them to create the Wonderboy character. Essentially it was an attempt on Sega's behalf to make a Japanese game more appealing to the Western market, i.e., much like Super Mario Bros 2 on the NES was actually a Japanese

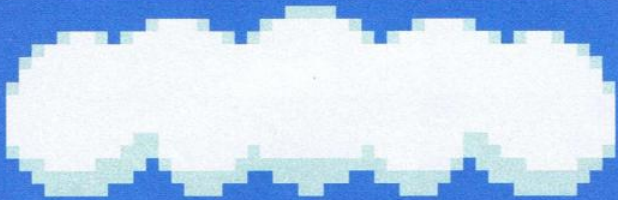
game called Doki Doki Panic re-branded for the Western market. Sega owned the Wonderboy trademark; the games themselves belonged to Westone.

While Westone were happy for Sega to tweak their games and release them under their own banner, the software developer also had no problems shopping the games to rival companies - business practises were obviously a little different back then. Anyway, Hudson Soft also picked up the license for the first game and released it as Adventure Island for the NES. The Wonderboy sprite was



[left] Who says there's no room for a semi-naked young boy to be a mascot of a corporate giant in this day and age?





tweaked and in his place we had Master Higgins, or to the Japanese, Takahashi. The game proved a hit and Master Higgins would go on star in his own spin off franchise, but that's another story.

Pleased with the response to the first game, Sega released an arcade follow up in 1987 entitled Wonderboy in Monster Land. Once again the company bought the rights from Westone and released the game under their own banner with reworked graphics. Enter Wonderboy mark 2. The flowing blond locks of the original were gone and in their place we had a short, square, Wonderboy with a sword and shield. This new game would set the template for much of what was to come in the



series as the run and jump platforming of the original were replaced with more RPG elements such as towns to explore and items to acquire.

Taking a leaf out of Westone's books, Sega whored out their version of the game to virtually every home platform going at the time. This saw Wonderboy in Monster Land converted to the Master Systems as well as popular home computers in the West such as the Amiga, Atari St, Amstrad and C64. Meanwhile, Hudson Soft had the rights to the PC Engine version and released it in Japan with its own original sprites as Bikkuriman World.

SIMPLER TIMES

All this licensing and sub licensing may seem crazy by today's standards but while these may have been simpler times, things weren't quite as random as they initially appear. Firstly, the term 'Killer App' didn't exist and it wasn't that uncommon to see games appear on rival formats. Secondly,

[right] Copyright? Pah! Rework a few sprites and voila - Brazil Boy in Monstros World (or something like that)



Wonderboy Timeline



Wonderboy (1986) (ADVENTURE ISLAND / TAKAHASHI MEIJIN NO BOUKENJIMA)

SYSTEM: Arcade / Master System / PC Engine / NES / various home computers

DEVELOPER: Escape

■ Showing its ages these days, the original Wonderboy is still a fun, if simplistic, example of the kind of sideways scrolling platformers that emerged in the mid 80s. It was huge upon its release and it's still possible to find refitted arcade cabinets with Wonderboy in trendy cafes up and down the country. The NES version was known as Adventure Island while the PC Engine version was dubbed Takahashi Meijin no Boukenjima (Master Takahashi's Adventure Island).



Wonderboy in Monster Land (1987) (BIKKURIMAN WORLD)

SYSTEM: Arcade / Master System / PC Engine / NES / various home computers

DEVELOPER: Escape

■ Wonderboy stops running long enough to visit towns and buy new equipment. This was the first game in the series to introduce the RPG elements that later games would become known for. The scrolling was also no longer forced meaning Wonderboy could check out towns, move left and right and purchase upgrades. For strange reasons known only to the Japanese developers, Wonderboy is as tall as he is wide. His Super Deformed status doesn't stop this being another huge hit around the world.



Wonderboy 3: Monsters Lair (1989)

SYSTEM: Arcade / Megadrive / PC Engine

DEVELOPER: Westone

■ The odd one out. This game ditches all the advances made in the previous Wonderboy game in favour of a weak two player horizontal shooter. There are still some platform bits thrown in but it doesn't really play like the rest of the series and the game was quickly forgotten after its release. It was converted to the Megadrive and PC Engine under the same name for some strange reason.



Wonderboy 3: The Dragons Trap a.k.a. **Monster World 2** (1989)

(ADVENTURE ISLAND / DRAGONS CURSE)

SYSTEM: Master System / PC Engine / Game Gear

DEVELOPER: Westone

■ Arguably the best game ever released for the Master System and a fan favourite. This was the first Wonderboy game developed exclusively for home consoles and picked up at the end of Wonderboy in Monster Land - in fact the game begins with you fighting the Dragon from the second game all over again. However, upon defeating the Dragon, a curse is placed on Wonderboy which turns him into a Lizard Man. Wonderboy has to regain his human form and the rest of the game is spent transforming into different creatures. The PC Engine version is confusingly titled Adventure Island while the U.S. Turbo Grafx version is known as Dragons Curse.

Sega's weakness in the Japanese home console market meant it had little to lose in allowing Hudson to release the games on its own more popular format. Sega would take on the Western market with Wonderboy while Hudson would concentrate on Japan. In fact, Sega licensed a number of their best-known games to the PC Engine at this point with Afterburner, Outrun, Space Harrier and more all appearing on N.E.C.'s home console in Japan.

Anyway, the next game to emerge from this Westone/Sega/Hudson love triangle was the instantly forgettable Wonderboy 3: Monsters Lair. A departure from the previous game's platform roots, Wonder 3 was basically a two-player side scrolling shooter. It was released in the arcades in 1989 and was then ported across to Sega's Megadrive under the Wonderboy banner while to PC Engine owners it was simply known as Monsters Lair.

At the same time as they were working on the above arcade game, Westone were also developing an all-new side scrolling/RPG hybrid for the home market. Once again the game was licensed out to both Sega and Hudson. Sega decided to dub their version Wonderboy 3: The Dragons Trap, and released it for the Master System. Yes, this is despite the fact that there was already an arcade game known as Wonderboy 3. To add to the confusion, the Japanese PC Engine version was released as Adventure Island (?) and the American PC Engine/Turbo Grafx version was Dragons Curse.

Still with us? Okay, the last game in

the series to get a Western release was the excellent Wonderboy in Monster World. Once again it was developed by Westone and licensed to Sega who tweaked it graphically in order to pass it off as a Wonderboy game in the West. It was released for the Megadrive in 1991. Meanwhile the PC Engine version was known as Dynastic Hero and was released as a Super CD.

The Wonderboy series made one final appearance in 1994. Known as Monster World IV and only ever released in Japan, it dispensed with Wonderboy altogether and instead featured his girlfriend, Asha. It was one of last games released for Sega's all but dead Megadrive system (in Japan anyway) and never received a Western Release. Sadly, this would be last anyone would hear of the Wonderboy games.

THE VERDICT

So what happened to Wonderboy? Well despite all the licensing dramas it appears he died peacefully of natural causes.

Sega were desperate for a mascot to rival Nintendo's all conquering Mario and when Sonic arrived he forced Wonderboy into early retirement.

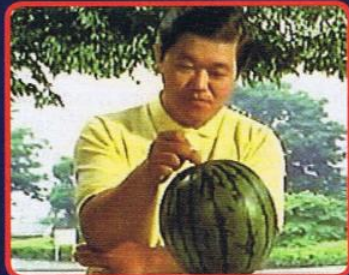


Sure, characters like Alex Kidd and Wonderboy were popular in the 8bit era, but they never really crossed over into the mainstream. Sonic on the other hand, was the cash cow Sega had been praying for.

Furthermore, by the time Sega and Sony were getting ready to battle it out with the Saturn and PlayStation, the platform games that characterised the 16bit era were all but finished. Mario 64 was yet to come along and the genre seemed hopelessly dated as the Western World lost their minds over 3D graphics.

One could also argue that by the mid 90s the marketing potential of a character named Wonderboy was limited. Games and their target audience were maturing, for better or worse the Wonderboy character was seen as throwback to another era, retirement seemed like the humane thing to do.

Whatever the case, Westone never bothered to develop another game in the series and Sega were fighting to survive in the 32bit era - a Sega developed Wonderboy game simply wasn't option. When Westone went bust a few years later it only cemented the fact that the Wonderboy series was over. <<<



ADVENTURE ISLAND

Back in the mid 80s, Hudson Soft organised the National Famicom Caravan - basically a travelling videogame competition that visited major Japanese cities. The event was hosted by a guy named Toshiyuki Takahashi who happened to be very good at videogames, so good, that he became a celebrity in his own right. Hudson dubbed him Master Takahashi and he was soon appearing in various magazines, campaigns, television programs etc.

Eager to milk this for all it was worth, Hudson Soft decided that Takahashi should star in his own videogame. Rather than design a game from scratch, the company licensed the developers of Wonderboy (Escape / Westone), to create an unofficial port for the NES. Basically this involved replacing the Wonderboy sprite with Takahashi's likeness, tweaking the graphics and changing the name. In Japan the game was released as 'Takahashi Meijin no Boukenjima' (Master Takahashi's Adventure Island). For obvious reasons this was abbreviated in the U.S. to plain old Adventure Island while Takahashi was renamed Master Higgins.

In an interesting twist on the story, the Adventure Island game for the NES proved more popular in the U.S. than the Wonderboy original and would go on to spawn six sequels. However, while the Wonderboy games gradually introduced RPG elements, the Adventure Island series never deviated much from the original game's run and jump formula. In total, four games were released for the NES and a further two for the SNES. Still, Master Higgins refuses to die; the original Adventure Island was recently re-released by Hudson as part of its GameCube Budget range in Japan. Gameplay wise it's virtually identical to the original, the graphics however have been given a major overhaul.

[left] Japanese box art was, naturally, pretty cool
[right] American box art was, naturally, total crap



Wonderboy - Monster World (1991)

(DYNASTIC HERO)

SYSTEM: Megadrive / PC Engine / Master System

DEVELOPER: Westone

■ The last Wonderboy game to get a Western release, Monster World was also one of the best. It perfected the side scrolling/RPG elements of the earlier Master System series and featured an Ocarina you had to play in order to solve puzzles. Which sounds suspiciously like a certain Nintendo game. The game was once again ported to the PC Engine and this time dubbed Dynastic Hero. A Master System version was also released in 1993.

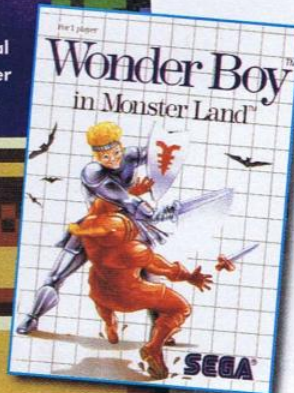


Monster World IV (1994)

SYSTEM: Megadrive

DEVELOPER: Westone

■ While technically the final game in the Wonderboy series, this doesn't actually feature Wonderboy. Instead we have his girlfriend, Asha, going through the motions in a game that is very similar to the previous title. This was released towards the end of the Megadrive's lifespan and as such it features lovely graphics. Unfortunately it was never released outside of Japan.





MAIL HYPER!

POSTAL:

78 Renwick St. Redfern,
NSW 2016 Australia

EMAIL:

freakscene@next.com.au

METAL GEAR MICKEY

Thought I should finally drop you all a line, sing your praises (and Kojima's) and ask you a few questions. Before I do that though, I would like to chuck in my two cents worth of defending Hyper's honour. To people like "Disappointed Reader" from issue 138 and all the others from issue 137, if you don't like Hyper, then why don't you just not read it. The hyper crew don't go down to the newsagency and bully you into buying their mag, you buy it through choice. Don't like what you got then go get another mag, we loyal hyper readers don't wanna listen to your whining little bitch letters anyway. Personally, with the very odd discrepancy, I have found hyper to be well informed and extremely unbiased for the ten years I've been reading it. Very rarely do I get a game where I find my opinions on it differ from yours. Also, to the people who felt like getting stuck into Wilks, because he said he goes to the pub, what the hell is that. Everyone goes to the pub, after all, we are Aussies! Lay off!

Right, now that's off my chest I'd also like to commend you on issue 138. First off, MGS3: Snake Eater. Without a doubt, the COOLEST game that I have played in years. Kojima is a legend. Things like throwing a poisonous snake at a guard for the first time and watching them panic, going in all guns blazing, or sneaking round in the shadows. If you haven't done it yet, I implore people to stun a guard, cap them in the foot, throw in a few nasty creatures and sit back and watch the hilarity when they come to. I would also like to point out, that

this is probably the first game I have played where EVERY single boss fight rocked and didn't become a ho-hum experience. Anyone who hasn't played this game is sadly missing something. Speaking of sad, the finale nearly bought a tear to my eye.

Now I've spat out that huge rambling mouthful, I'd actually like to ask you a few questions:

- 1) My friend told me about a book he had read called Konami Worlds of Power or something like that. He said it was a metal gear story, but I'm not sure?
- 2) Years back, when I played Metal Gear Solid 1, the manual hinted at some older adventures that pertained to Snake, Big Boss. . . et al. The way it was written, it made them sound like old games, possibly for SNES or something like that. Is this correct?
- 3) I recently saw two dvds in the video shop and wanted to know if you thought they were any good. One was called Musa: The Warrior and the other was called JSA. I'm gonna rent them out but I usually trust your judgements?

Thanks for listening guys

Brad

PS. I recently watched the new Takeshi Kitano version of Zatoichi and as a fan of samurai history, I loved every second of it. Now I just gotta hunt down all the older versions and watch them too.

Hey Brad, Bradster, Braderino, Bradtastic Braderonimous, Thanks for the support champ and just to let you know, Wilks is sitting in the background grinning - he's probably thinking about going to the pub right now. Either that or he's picturing someone naked. Now, onto your questions, or, more precisely your question, as the first and last are simply statements with question marks tacked on at the end to give a strangly inappropriate up inflection.

1) After an exhaustive web search taking up many minutes we've managed to find a complete online copy of Konami Worlds of Power: Castlevania 2: Simon's Quest, but could not find any mention of a Metal Gear book. The existence of the Worlds of Power book line does hint that there probably is a Metal Gear book out there somewhere though.

2) There were a couple of Metal Gear games made before the advent of Solid, the first being the MSX/NES game Metal Gear made way back in 1987/1988. Cam owns a copy of the NES version.

3) Hey! Haven't you have read our reviews? Musa is an excellent version of Seven Samurai and deserves to be seen. JSA is one of the best morally ambiguous political thrillers around.

UMMM

Having a good gander at Issue#137, I read through the review on "The Punisher," which was looking absolutely fantastic until I got to the part where it said "...The Punisher manages to retain all of its brutality without having to resort to grotesque visuals."

At this point I was quite disappointed. Now don't call me a satanic-vampire-nut for saying this, but I was quite looking forward to seeing a good curb stomping, complete with mandibles that bend the wrong way and the grinding sound of teeth on pavement.

As much as a lot of people would like to deny, there is an audience of reasonable size that is immature and bloodthirsty enough to want a bit of distasteful and offensive "line-crossing" of the significant-degreed persuasion. Fades to black and clever camera angles sure aren't going to sate our bloodlust. We need some wince-worthy, eye-watering pain on-screen.

On a different subject (one which has been done to death even more than the above OFLC Rant #Ba-Zillion), I also have been reading Hyper since the pre-Amos days (the 'Goose Era), and I like the way it has evolved. All of those Anti-Blau and Doesn't-Mannerism activists that attack our super-happy super-happy geek way of life obviously aren't worthy of much more than a kick in the pants with a rusty spike.

Regards,
Kvlt.

Thanks for the backup on the in-joke issue Kvlt, but we'll have to agree to disagree about the violence in The Punisher. Sure there are people who enjoy blood and guts for the sake of it but there is no point having it in the game aside from titillation and if that's the only reason for it then there is really no point at all. We may not agree with the Australian censorship laws but the stylistic decision made by the developers of The Punisher was, in our minds, the right move. And hey, it's still pretty brutal.

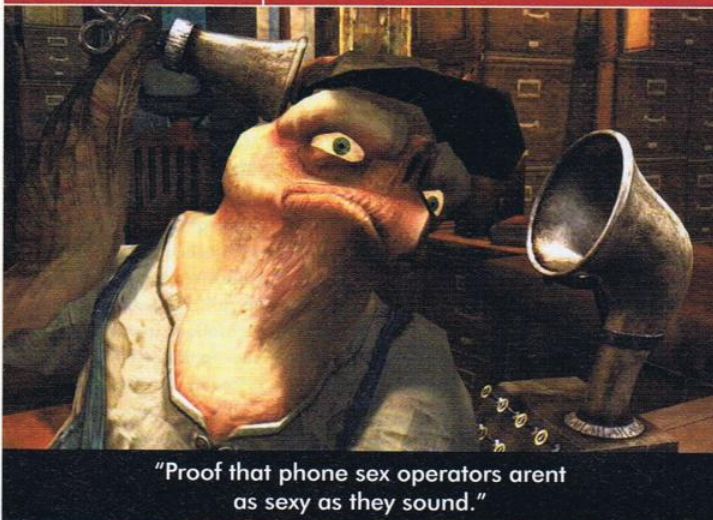
NERD IDOL

Today I flicked the channels on Foxtel to find Channel V and there was some chart show on and it was the number 1 clip that suprised me. It was Guy Sabastian (this is where most people stop reading). That's not the suprising part (thank God). The suprising part was he was wearing an Atari t-shirt. Does this make Guy Sabastian a nerd? Is this one of the reasons he is still a vergi like most nerds? I am not a fan of Guy Sabastian but you have bagged him a few times in your magazine but if you think about it

CAPTION THIS!

PART 65 WINNER

Darren Nicholls narrowly beat out a genius Simpsons reference this month to rise to the top of the captioning pile.



"Proof that phone sex operators arent as sexy as they sound."

you are now bagging one of your own. This can be solved easily by bagging another contestent who is just as bad as him like Shannon Knoll or Anthony Callea.

Trevor the Evil Flying Monkey Trainer

Dude, what makes you think that Guy Sebastian is one of our own aside from a T-Shirt you saw him in once? Wilks has a T-Shirt that says he's the world's worst pirate - that doesn't mean that he's plundering the high seas every time he leaves work. Cam has multiple Gridiron jerseys but he's nearly oblivious to the rules, and going by the same context Malky would be a giant robot and Wildgoose a monkey (that's not so far off actually). Even if he played games it doesn't mean he's one of us. Plus, these days wearing an Atari shirt isn't so much a statement about your allegiance to gaming but an attempt to be retro and hip. We'll take you up on the offer to bag Shannon Knoll though. We totally hate that guy.

FINE ESTABLISHMENT

First up, I know that you've received a swarm of letters jumping to your defence against the haters of your fine establishment, but i couldn't let this go personally un-answered.

Hyper to me is more than a magazine, it's a community. In-jokes like blau, amos, does mannerism etc. are what defines this mag above every other heap of crud on my local newstand. It's something to look forward to every month. It's good for a laugh, as well as being informative and witty. The reason this feels like a more of a community and less of a generic magazine, to me, is the fact that the reader can identify with the staff and other hyper readers, simply because they're not elitist, one platform pushing, dictators.

i remember being at tafe last year, and the new month would come rolling 'round, brining with it a new issue of hyper. Myself, and a mate would always have somthin to talk about when we got the issue, such as new games, the in jokes, and what these larikins, but genuine seeming people, known as the hyper crew, were up to.

so, the next time another casual reader with an agenda rears it's ugly head out of the sarcasm hole from whence it was conceived, just know this: videogames are about fun, shouldn't the magazines be the same?

peace out
Nathan C

Our sentiments exactly Nathan. We believe that Hyper is a community

and think you should be treated as friends and co-conspirators rather than mere readers.

DADDY DEAREST

Good day to you all. I would just like to say that the Game Theory column was spot on when it said that people who were not brought up with videogames don't like them because they don't understand them. Take my dad for example.

He's an old fart, and also a videogame nazi. I no longer have any videogames or systems in the house (not that he knows of, anyway, mwahahahaha!!) because he threatened to destroy them if I kept them. So, I had to say goodbye to my Gamecube, my PS2, my GBA, all my computer games, all my extra stuff (control pads and the like), all because I did not want them to be destroyed. They all rest at a friends house now, but, due to university, he's never home, so I can't play anymore. WHY GOD, WHY!!!!

Ahem... so anyway, the moral of this story is stay away from my beer boy!

On to other matters now. I bear the word geek with pride (as you all do), because I like videogames, I like fantasy and sci-fi, I wear glasses (which makes me a super geek), but, shock horror to those asswipes who think that all geeks do is spend time sitting on their asses playing games and what not, I work out! That's right!! Geeks have lives!! And as far as I know, all my geek friends get drunk whenever we can!! Geeks have normal lives outside of fantasy worlds you know!! We do, and anyone who doesn't think that, I'll do a moonsault off the ladder in the ring onto you while you're lying unconscious on a table!!

Super fun happy insane crazy tune time!! We go now!!

The little man known as Teapot.

PS. I have my GBA back, but rarely play because I'm scared, can you guys like rescue me or something...

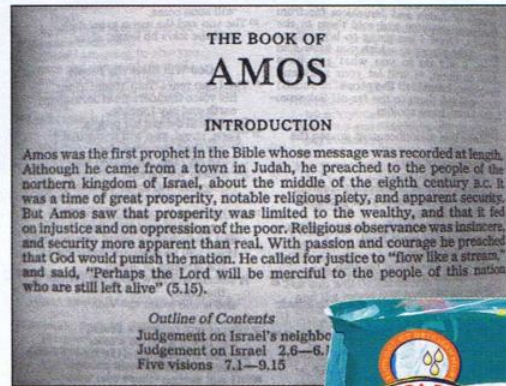
Teapot, your dad sounds like a bundle of laughs. Why exactly did he threaten to destroy all of your consoles and games? If it was just out of sheer nastiness that's not on but if the games were interfering with your studies or something then he may have a bit of a point. Not much though. On to the other matters, Geeks Unite!

I CALL YOU RIGHTY MCRIGHT

Hey i just wanted to tell Daniel hes the man. Hes so cool. I wish I were as cool as him.

No sarcasm intended.

DEPT. OF MISC. IN-JOKE SIGHTINGS



[left] Alastair Christie found the book of Amos. Apparently the butler did it...

[below] Rexoltix wept by the grave of Father Mathias Blau



[below] Matt Gardner spotted the blau on some otherwaise humourless packaging



[left] Craig Davidson found an "unexpected gem" - Beyond the Mat, directed by Barry W. Blaustein



[above] Chris Nixon sent us this heartfelt cry for Amos' reinstatement as mascot

Seriously, you rock. I love your column and general input to the mag. Love your sense of humour. No im not coming on to you. :S
A Wilks Fan
Wayne G.

Wilks here - I proclaim you the smartest person in the world for understanding my true greatness. Now bow down before me and [let's just snip this bit shall we? - Cam]. Today one Hyper reader. Tomorrow,

maybe a few more. After a slow and rather tedious time gathering power in such a fashion I can stage a coup and take over the office. Power (and chicks, never forget the chicks) will be mine! Mine I tells ya.

ALLEZ CUISINE

Hey Hyper, quite a couple of fiery issues lately, especially in the mail section.

Dont fret i still support you 97%. Why 97% you ask? I've been thinking about this for a wee bit and would like to know why San Andreas didn't deserve the 98% and become your first game to achieve that percentile? Dont get me wrong 97% is a great honour but surely San Andreas is the most worthy to sit above all games on the 98% throne.

Cheers,

Andrew Fonnice

P.S. I'm just play'n I'm with you 100% baby!

P.P.S Oh and who's your favourite Iron Chef? Sakai's unbeatable.

P.P.S What's the deal with the 24 hour endurance race in GT4? (thats *naughty word removed due to printing restrictions you bad, filthy mouthed person* up!)

Man, the San Andreas score was a really tough call. There was a huge amount of debate over whether it should be 96, 97 or 98. And as much as we love it, I think we got the score right in the end.

P.S. Is playing with us any better than playing with yourself?

Enquiring minds want to know.

P.P.S Cam is behind Michiba all the way and Wilks is a big fan of Chen.

P.P.S. Yes, it's wrong. Very, very wrong.

A CONTENDER

Greetings Gentlemen

I'm interested in becoming the new official Hyper mascot, but I have a few queries about what exactly my new position as official mascot of Hyper would entail:

1. Do I get a costume (a la Dancin' Homer and/or the Capital City Goofball)?

2. Am I employed on a commission basis, and is there a retainer to keep me financially sustained during the quieter times of the year?

3. Will you be providing me with an official statement of duties/job description?

4. Is there the possibility of advancement within your company to a mascot position with more responsibility and authority (i.e. selection and training of future mascots)?

5. How intensive will my gamer preparation and training be? (I feel that as your mascot it is my duty to



[up] Martina - a wildcard mascot entry!

become fluent in all aspects of this exclusive society from gameplay to hardware and beyond).

6. Due to the fact that I was never officially nominated for mascothood, will there be an uprising from the readers regarding my selection? (I would feel ashamed if the readers would prefer another candidate, despite my passion, commitment and enthusiasm for the task at hand).

7. Will I be required to regularly contribute to the magazine? If so, in what context?

Thanks for this opportunity for personal growth and fulfilment - and I pledge to you that I will carry out all duties to the best of my ability. I would be honoured if you would consider me for this prestigious position, and thank you, everyone, for your pity.

Martina

PS Photo enclosed.

Hey Martina

We're always glad to have wildcard entrants (so anyone else out there that thinks they've got what it takes, or wants to nominate someone - get in touch). As the old saying goes, "you've got to cast a wide net to catch a fish that's anywhere near as super sweet as Amos". In answer to your questions:

1. We were thinking a Duff Man outfit. Or Asahi Woman in reality. You'd be part super hero and part dispenser of mind buzzing licka - just the way we like it.

2. No, you'll have to come and live here in the office. You can forage for scraps of food to survive, and sleep curled up under one of our desks.

3. Yes. "Be like Amos".

4. As Hyper mascot you will have absolute authority over everyone in the building. Just like we do.

5. Well, we didn't train Amos, and that backfired big time. I mean, yes, he is meant to represent the "everyman" gamer, but we thought that this would come with a modicum of common gaming sense. And then he went out and BOUGHT Legends of Wrestling 2. NOO! As for training, I can tell from your first question that you'll be coming to us with an arsenal of Simpsons references. That show's all the training you'll ever need. Although a serviceable Cartman voice wouldn't go astray either.

LETTER OF THE MONTH

BEYOND SALES AND MARKETING

Your feature last issue about 'The Best Games You've Never Played' was really interesting to me for a few specific reasons.

Firstly, I was startled to discover that in the 'retro' section of the feature, I have played at least half and maybe more of those games, making me officially 'Old School' as a gamer. Secondly, I was even more startled to discover that I haven't played ANY of the games in the 'modern' section of the feature, which means I really AM 'Old School'.

But the interesting part is that I took some advice. I recently found a budget copy of 'Beyond Good and Evil', which, as the article pointed out, is a real gem of a game that no one bought. So I put it to the test, and I have been blown away (or should that be BLAU!N away?) by what Ubisoft have delivered here. This really is a great game, not just for the game mechanics, which are original, deep, well designed and fun; not for the story, which is compelling, well-written, with characters that can be slapstick comic relief one moment and deep, believable, flawed dramatis personae the next; not for the pretty graphics, which are fantastic, stylish, slick and full of character; not even for the main character, Jade, who not only is so much of a babe that I have to slap myself for thinking she's a babe, but is also a REALISTIC babe (as opposed to the Barbie-doll, anatomically incorrect Tomb Raider, Dead Or Alive she-nymphs)...

Beyond Good and Evil is good because it's just frickin' great. Ubisoft have clearly put a lot of time and effort into this title, and no one bought it.

Now, what I find most interesting is that games journalists are sitting on the sidelines, scratching their heads and saying, 'Why didn't anyone buy it?' Well, there's no need to be preachy here, because we all know that any answer will involve the phrases 'Grand Theft Auto' or 'Halo' in some way, but... I think that when a game this good comes along, surely the journalists have not only the platform but also the responsibility to yell out to their

readers:

'Just buy this game!' Halo and GTA and all their over-hyped and over-exposed brethren don't NEED good reviews, because they're going to sell anyway. Screw them! Halo 2 was a disappointment anyway, as many will attest, and GTA... well, I don't think there will ever be a final GTA game (brilliant though they all are).

Take a chance. Gold isn't the only valuable resource in the world, and gamers should be aware of this. There are gems everywhere, and we need to know how and why they're valuable, because frankly, gold is getting rather dull.

keepnonrockin

Tom

Another gamer that gets the greatness of Beyond Good & Evil, one of the best games of 2003. Huzzah! While we agree with everything you say about the greatness of the game (aside from the bits about Jade being a babe - you sick, sick, digitally obsessed pervert) we have to disagree about us not taking a chance on the game. If you go back to our review of BG&E in issue 124 we gave it a very respectable 88% (it only missed out on a 90 by having a few glitches and pacing problems) and entreated everyone to rush out and buy it. Both Hyper and PC Powerplay named it one of the best games of the year and still nobody listened. We don't know why exactly but no matter what we did or said the game didn't sell - even at the budget price. Maybe it has to do with the odd pacing of the game, maybe due to the visuals, maybe because it's a quirky French game with a talking pig. Who knows. We'll try again shall we? EVERYONE GO OUT AND BUY A COPY OF BG&E OR WILKS WILL GO AROUND TO YOUR HOUSE AND DO A "SEXY" (shudder) STRIPEASE!



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6. We'll have to wait and see. You're going to need to write in again with a platform for election of some kind.

7. You will be the glue that binds this magazine together. And you'll be required to go on raids into PC Powerplay territory to trash their shit. Just for fun y'know.

PASSION OF THE SHEETS

What are the washing instructions?

Hello, hello, who's your lady friend?

These babes are getting pound all over, they so jucyyyyyy

Every action we take, everything we do, is either a victory or defeat in the struggle to become what we want to be.

If poetry is like an orgasm, an academic can be likened to someone who studies the passion-stains on the bedsheets.

Julianne

Okay. Although I never want the words "passion-stains" in this magazine EVER again, it sounds as if you truly do have a stubborn stain that won't come out. Our advice is to chew it out... and never eat passionfruit in bed again.

INSERT YOSHI NOISE

I just finished reading #138 and had to say something about the letters in issue #137. I didn't see those letters but I know the type of people who would send shit like that. I regularly read hyper, but having missed some issues I have no idea when "Blau" and the eerie obsession for Amos came from but that doesn't bother me. I know in my workplace I have in jokes with the people I work with. In my opinion it's natural and helps make the work day a little easier. And I often get a laugh from your captions, sometimes their stupidness is what makes them so clever.

Also, I'm in complete agreement with Hank Moore. I know when I'm playing games there has often been a time when someone says something so funny that it makes the game magical. This phenomenon even occurs when I play games alone. And the joke is always of the "had-to-be-there" variety. Some examples that I can think of are;

- Golden eye 007 — Running in circles around someone and killing them in death match always caused screams of rage, physical assaults and thrown joy pads.
- Mario — Always saying "Its-a me Mario" (in the worst Italian accent ever) especially when doing

something cool in a Mario game, like collecting a star in Mario 64. I'm sure I drove my family crazy when I was playing that game.

- That Yoshi noise. Especially from Mario Kart 64. Basically mimicking any noise in a multiplayer game is classic. Especially when you're winning.
- Playing GTA:SA or Vice City and yelling abuse at everyone, then shooting them. Especially when they knock you off a motorcycle.
- Smackdown VS Raw when you steal their special move and win. Then make sure they know.

I'm sure if I kept thinking about it I could come up with heaps more because playing games has been a major part in my life, much like your own, and as anyone with a sense of humour knows, the funniest things can happen anytime. I couldn't stop laughing after reading about the pots from Zelda. I remember thinking the same thing.

But, not only is gaming humorous but many gamers share the same experiences which non-gamers will never understand. I'll list some of the most eventful moments in my gaming life and I'll bet y'all will nod your heads to at least some of them;

- The opening cut scene to Final

Fantasy VIII (especially after never hearing about Final Fantasy or RPGs at the time — so I was hooked)

- Finding FFVII (BEST.GAME.EVER)
- Getting all 120 stars on Mario 64 then flying up to Yoshi.
- Unlocking all the cheats on Golden eye and finishing the entire game. Without the button-entering soft arse cheats.

Sorry for the long arse letter but I had to let y'all know that I appreciate your humour and wish for it to remain. Why should your gaming experience be any less fun than mine?

Bern

Thanks for the support Bern. We like hearing about people's in jokes. As most of you are aware we here at Hyper have more than our fair share of jokes that have grown from the camaraderie of playing games. Jokes like Joey Tekken (and related bad Tekken puns), crates, you got served, Blau!, Chokey Chokenstein, Cheaty McCheat, LTC, the mannerism, Bryce, Moe's giant chin, the Korean Love God and a whole lot more. Let us know what you guys find funny, tell us jokes from your gaming experiences. It never fails to put a smile on our collective, inhumanly handsome faces (aside from Wilks who is always scowling).

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The Passion of the Gamer

A DAY IN THE LIFE OF A GAMER

By Dylan Burns

My day starts with a maladroit attempt at exercise. But I know it's pointless, my body was not made to clumsily puff its way through a Tae-Bo routine. It is a finely tuned instrument, good only for the precise manipulation of and interaction with electronic media.

You see, I'm a professional gamer. No, I don't get paid for it, but I dedicate my life to the discovery and enjoyment of games; their artistic expression, their developers and their fans. This, for me, defines a professional - someone who is an elite; who epitomises the ceaseless exploration of leisure and enjoyment for the good of mankind. In my lounge room, I am god.

By no means is it an easy life, there exist many hard decisions that need to be made in order to maintain such a high standard of professionalism. Malaise must not be allowed to enter into your emotional stream, and must be warded off with a steady supply of corn chips, soft drink and small bum-shifts on the couch.

On this day of report my other half, bless her soul, disappears quietly from my morning world. She travels to that far away kingdom of full-time employment, where eye contact and meaningful interactions with other people are required more than a few times a day. I don't know how she does it.

Thus freed from any kind of human contact or relationship burdens, the day seems spread before me like an open book. The first, and might I add most stressful, decision to be made is which format to play - PC, console or handheld? Any normal mortal can find this a decision of soul-tearing difficulty, but once made the best thing to do is to settle down with a large grin and no longer lament lost gaming opportunities on any of the eschewed formats. The day is only just beginning.

I pour myself a tasty caffeine brew, fuel for the session to follow and regrettable only because of the many toilet breaks it may later cause me to take. My nerves are on edge in anticipation. I take a brief moment to be thankful that I am alive in this century and not some other time period when I would have been forced to debase myself with actual physical work, and when I most likely would have been one of the first victims of some horrible communicable disease. That sobering thought aside, I settle down in front of my chosen format.

This is where the magic of my work begins, the outside world disappears and I become immersed within my games' worlds. My fingers move over the controller lovingly and snake-like reflexes enact to bring my protagonist(s) to victory time and time again, level after level. There's nothing quite like that feeling of having your heart in your mouth, wondering if you're going to fail a mission or level because it's just going on and on and you haven't saved for ages. Then, when you finally pass it, the relief washes over you like a gentle wave, warming you throughout and pumping out those endorphins. Speaking of warming you throughout, this may literally happen if you don't break regularly to partake of the urinal facilities. A piss break is a good time to quickly glance out the window, notice nonchalantly the goings-on, grab a snack and perhaps another beverage (vicious caffeine circle) and return happily to your private world.

A game genre or format change may then be called for. I feel this is necessary in order to be fair to all forms of gaming and to maintain my professional integrity. I find it always interesting to mix up different genres; a platform game can be followed by a survival horror game or a driving game followed by a first person shooter. Stringing together games of the same genre can result in burnout and, god forbid, a lack of interest. Therefore, in order to avoid this dangerous consequence, it's always advisable to find the game-string (I may copyright this term) that best suites you.

Meal breaks are an interesting part of the day. Some small part of me, my dark alter-ego, whispers that I should take a break from games, as cheekily written in the health warnings section of every instruction manual.

But another part of me can't tear itself away from the game I'm playing. Two minute noodles soon become the food of choice, for the dual reasons of ease of preparation and my ability to quickly fork them one-handed into my mouth during loading screens. Thusly, my nutritional needs are met.

It would be remiss of me not to mention the strange time-warping effect that my profession has upon the day. You see, for most of the great unwashed that we euphemistically call the public, the day itself passes at a rate usually agreed upon as normal. However, something remarkable happens inside my lounge room. Time seems to bend itself like a Russian contortionist and before I know it three hours have flown by, then six and then - damn it - it's nearly the end of the day and I haven't even got through half of the games I had planned to. I'm certain even Stephen Hawking could not explain just how a few square meters of my house defy conventional physics, but they do, and it is perhaps the only rueful thing about my chosen profession.

And so, like the life of the cat that meows outside my window every morning, the day which was once so full of wondrous gaming possibilities draws itself to a quick, constricted end. No fanfares, no marching parades, just a gurgling gasp as I hurriedly finish off the level I'm playing and, with a tear in my eye, turn off the power. And as that sad little red light fades, so too do my hopes and memories, my feelings of attachment to those beautiful digital creations held within. Farewell, my friends - see you in but a few hours.

The outside world intrudes and I'm brought back to reality with a disheartening snap. But although depression threatens to seep in, I feel like I have done much work, almost as if that really were me performing all those wondrous feats during my foray into fantasy lands.

And that, sadly, brings us to the end of the day. At times a sharp spear of trepidation threatens to stick in my gut as I contemplate the fact that one day I may have to leave my profession behind and pursue paid work, but it's often fleeting. Time resumes its normal course and alien tasks such as chores and sleep fill the hours between. But that's okay; my electronic army awaits me always, sitting there in standby mode.

The morning is but an eye blink away. Game tasks remain unfinished, as well as those last few levels I didn't get to conquer. Tomorrow, I have work to do.





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The Official Australian Games Chart

Compiled by GfK in association with the IEAA

TOP
10

PlayStation 2 Games Over \$50

W/E 3rd April 2005
RETAIL SALES

| | | | |
|----|---|----------------------------|-----------|
| 1 | ◆ | Gran Turismo 4 | Racing |
| 2 | ▲ | GTA: San Andreas | Adventure |
| 3 | ▼ | Metal Gear Solid 3 | Adventure |
| 4 | ◆ | Rugby 2005 | Sports |
| 5 | ▲ | NFS: Underground 2 | Racing |
| 6 | ▼ | Playboy: The Mansion | Strategy |
| 7 | ◆ | Sonic Mega Collection Plus | Adventure |
| 8 | ▼ | Robots | Adventure |
| 9 | ⊛ | Devil May Cry 3 | Adventure |
| 10 | ⊛ | Star Wars Battlefront | Action |

TOP
10

Nintendo DS Games Over \$40

W/E 3rd April 2005
RETAIL SALES

| | | | |
|----|---|----------------------------|-----------|
| 1 | ◆ | Super Mario 64 | Adventure |
| 2 | ▲ | WarioWare: Touched! | Action |
| 3 | ▼ | Rayman | Adventure |
| 4 | ▼ | The URBZ: Sims In The City | Strategy |
| 5 | ▼ | Robots | Adventure |
| 6 | ◆ | Asphalt: Urban GT | Racing |
| 7 | ◆ | Spider-Man 2 | Adventure |
| 8 | ◆ | Tiger Woods PGA 2005 | Sports |
| 9 | ⊛ | Polarium | Family |
| 10 | ◆ | Sprung | Adventure |

TOP
10

Game Cube Games Over \$50

W/E 3rd April 2005
RETAIL SALES

| | | | |
|----|---|----------------------------|-----------|
| 1 | ◆ | Resident Evil 4 CE | Adventure |
| 2 | ⊛ | Super Smash Bros: Melee | Action |
| 3 | ▲ | Mario Power Tennis | Sports |
| 4 | ▼ | Mario Kart Double Dash | Racing |
| 5 | ⊛ | Mario Golf Toadstool Tour | Sports |
| 6 | ▲ | Robots | Adventure |
| 7 | ▼ | Pokémon Colosseum | RPG |
| 8 | ▼ | Mario Party 5 | Family |
| 9 | ◆ | Donkey Kong Jungle Beat | Adventure |
| 10 | ▼ | Paper Mario 1000 Year Door | Adventure |

TOP
10

Xbox Games Over \$50

W/E 3rd April 2005
RETAIL SALES

| | | | |
|----|---|----------------------------|-----------|
| 1 | ⊛ | Splinter Cell Chaos Theory | Action |
| 2 | ▼ | Halo 2 | Action |
| 3 | ▼ | Rugby 2005 | Sports |
| 4 | ◆ | Fable | RPG |
| 5 | ▲ | Star Wars Old Republic 2 | RPG |
| 6 | ▼ | Playboy: The Mansion | Strategy |
| 7 | ▼ | Star Wars Republic Cmmndo | Action |
| 8 | ◆ | NFS: Underground 2 | Racing |
| 9 | ▼ | Sonic Mega Collection Plus | Adventure |
| 10 | ⊛ | Brothers In Arms Hill 30 | Action |

TOP
10

PC Games Over \$20

W/E 3rd April 2005
RETAIL SALES

| | | | |
|----|---|----------------------------|----------|
| 1 | ◆ | The Sims 2: University | Strategy |
| 2 | ◆ | The Sims 2 | Strategy |
| 3 | ▲ | World Of Warcraft | Strategy |
| 4 | ▲ | The Sims Deluxe | Strategy |
| 5 | ▼ | The Sims Full House | Strategy |
| 6 | ◆ | Half Life 2 | Action |
| 7 | ◆ | Star Wars Old Republic 2 | RPG |
| 8 | ▲ | The Sims Unleashed | Strategy |
| 9 | ⊛ | Splinter Cell Chaos Theory | Action |
| 10 | ▼ | Brothers In Arms Hill 30 | Action |

TOP
10

Game Boy Advance Games Over \$30

W/E 3rd April 2005
RETAIL SALES

| | | | |
|----|---|-----------------------------|-----------|
| 1 | ◆ | Pokémon Fire Red | RPG |
| 2 | ◆ | Pokémon Leaf Green | RPG |
| 3 | ▲ | Pokémon Ruby | RPG |
| 4 | ▲ | Robots | Adventure |
| 5 | ▲ | Pokémon Sapphire | RPG |
| 6 | ▼ | The Incredibles | Adventure |
| 7 | ▲ | Yu-Gi-Oh Day Of The Duelist | Strategy |
| 8 | ▲ | SpongeBob Double Pack | Adventure |
| 9 | ▼ | Lizzie McGuire+Dсны Pncss | Adventure |
| 10 | ⊛ | Simpson's Road Rage | Racing |

TOP
10

All Full Priced Games

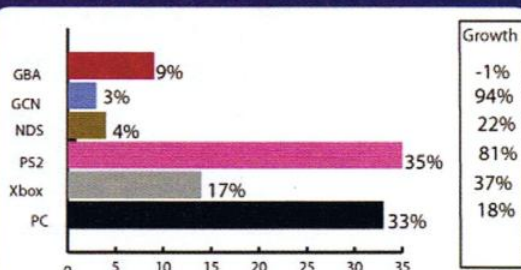
W/E 3rd April 2005
RETAIL SALES

| | | | |
|----|---|----------------------------|---------------|
| 1 | ◆ | Gran Turismo 4 | PlayStation 2 |
| 2 | ◆ | The Sims 2: University | PC/MAC |
| 3 | ▲ | GTA: San Andreas | PlayStation 2 |
| 4 | ▼ | Metal Gear Solid 3 | PlayStation 2 |
| 5 | ▼ | Super Mario 64 | Nintendo DS |
| 6 | ⊛ | Splinter Cell Chaos Theory | Xbox |
| 7 | ▲ | Rugby 2005 | PlayStation 2 |
| 8 | ⊛ | Halo 2 | Xbox |
| 9 | ▼ | The Sims 2 | PC/MAC |
| 10 | ⊛ | NFS: Underground 2 | PlayStation 2 |

MARKET WATCH

All Games by Platform

MAR 05 Vs FEB 05
RETAIL SALES 2004



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



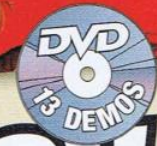
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REVIEWED!

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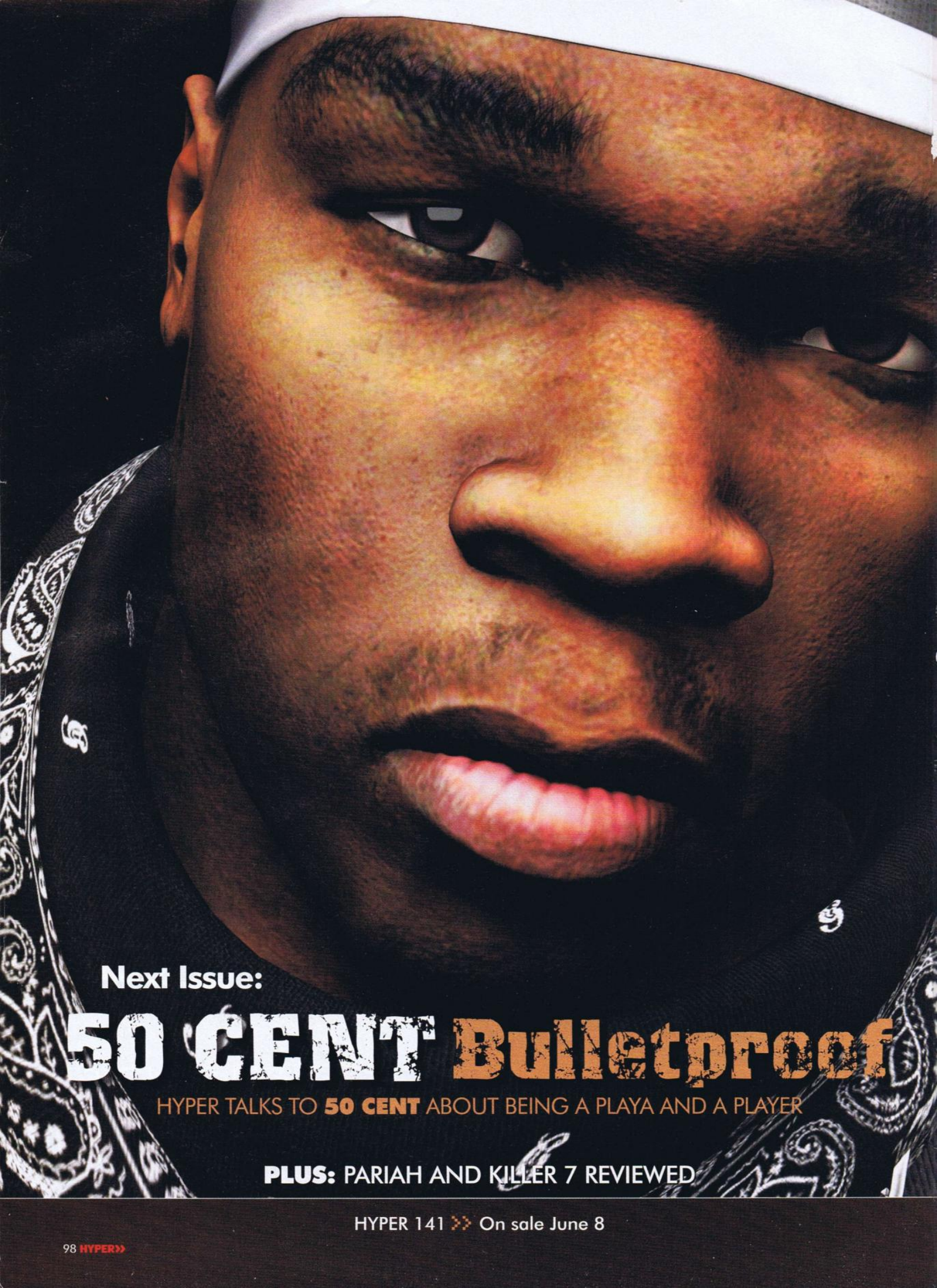


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or, sms HYPHER and the code to 191 273 [only \$4.50/sms]

NEW CHART TRACKS

| Track Name | Polyp | Standard |
|------------------------------------|--------|----------|
| Over and Over - Nelly | 99545 | 9509 |
| Nasty Girl - Nitty | 99546 | 9510 |
| Get Right - Jennifer Lopez | 99698 | 7489 |
| Let Me Love You - Manó | 99699 | 7490 |
| Since U Been Gone - Kelly Clarkson | 99686 | 7448 |
| Drop it Like It's Hot - Snoop Dogg | 99688 | 9508 |
| Soldier - Destinys Child | 99688 | 30053 |
| NumB/Encore - Linkin Park/JayZ | 15695 | 5988 |
| Underwear... - Lazyboy | 99588 | 30017 |
| La La - Ashlee Simpson | 99609 | 30033 |
| The Prayer - Anthony Callea | 27753 | 6842 |
| Like Toy Soldiers - Eminem | 99586 | 30018 |
| Wonderful - Ja Rule Feat. Ashanti | 27965 | 6920 |
| Beautiful Soul - Jesse McCartney | 99696 | 7491 |
| Blvd Of Broken Dreams - Green Day | 99656 | 30036 |
| I Just Wanna Live - Good Charlotte | 99668 | 7447 |
| Pony - Kasey Chambers | 99671 | 7449 |
| Rumours - Lindsay Lohan | 27790 | 6853 |
| Sometimes U Cant Make It... - U2 | 115501 | 7461 |
| For One Day - Evermore | 99697 | 7470 |
| Nasty Girl - Inaya Day | 99685 | 7482 |
| My Boyfriends Back - The Spazys | 99684 | 7451 |

MOST POPULAR

| | | |
|----------------------------------|-------|------|
| What U Waiting 4 - Gwen Stefani | 27788 | 6851 |
| California - Phantom Planet | 27715 | 6872 |
| Rocky - Eye of the Tiger - Theme | 15037 | 5319 |
| Black Betty - Spiderbat | 15911 | 6238 |
| Push Up - Freestyles | 27151 | 6443 |
| Thunderstruck - ACDC | 27069 | 9185 |
| Lose My Breath - Destinys Child | 99521 | 6965 |
| Ice Ice Baby - Vanilla Ice | 15102 | 6560 |
| Sex and the City - Theme | 15010 | 5507 |
| Just Lose It - Eminem | 99534 | 6964 |
| Clocks - Coldplay | 15596 | 6187 |
| The Simpsons - Theme | 15015 | 5184 |
| Push It - Salt and Peppa | 15832 | 6515 |
| Call On Me - Eric Prydz | 27963 | 6996 |
| Welcome To My Life - Simple Plan | 99642 | 6962 |
| Zebra - John Butler Trio | 15946 | 6328 |
| My Band - D12 | 15974 | 6282 |
| SwT Hm Alabama - Lynyrd Skynyrd | 15041 | 6559 |
| My My My - Armand Van Helden | 99503 | 6946 |
| Victoria Bitter - Theme | 15570 | 5943 |

OLDIES

| | | |
|-------------------------------------|-------|------|
| Hotel California - Eagles | 15029 | 6754 |
| Stairway To Heaven - Led Zepplin | 15250 | 5697 |
| Video Killed D Radio Star - Buggles | 27434 | 9175 |
| Take On Me - AHA | 15112 | 5396 |
| Satisfaction - Rolling Stones | 27707 | 5831 |

ALTERNATIVE / PUNK / ROCK

| | | |
|------------------------------------|-------|-------|
| American Idiot - Green Day | 99658 | 6828 |
| Hold On Me - Grnspoon | 99650 | 30051 |
| Back In Black - ACDC | 27064 | 6139 |
| Master Of Puppets - Metallica | 15773 | 6736 |
| Vertigo - U2 | 99540 | 9519 |
| Sweet Child of Mine - Guns N Roses | 15038 | 5224 |
| Smells Like Teen Spirit - Nirvana | 15700 | 6744 |
| Dammit - Blink 182 | 99625 | 7468 |
| Are You Gonna Be My Girl - Jet | 15715 | 6099 |
| 1985 - Bowling For Soup | 27982 | 6961 |

DANCE

| | | |
|------------------------------------|-------|------|
| Flashdance - Deep Dish | 99547 | 9520 |
| Put Em High - Stone Bridge/Theresa | 99580 | 9515 |
| The Weekend - Michael Gray | 99665 | 9173 |
| Cocaine - Yakooza | 15733 | 5500 |
| Sandstorm - Darude | 15062 | 6713 |
| Where's Ur Head At - Basement Jaxx | 99639 | 5430 |

THEMES

| | | |
|----------------------------|-------|-------|
| Beverly Hills Cop - Theme | 15026 | 5020 |
| Super Mario - Theme | 15846 | 5965 |
| Mission Impossible - Theme | 15021 | 5018 |
| Star Wars - Star Wars | 15318 | 5013 |
| The Godfather - Theme | 15319 | 5253 |
| Come On Aussie Come On | 27245 | 30043 |

These polyphonic tones are available for the following handsets: Alcatel One Touch 332, 736; LG C1100, G1600, G5300, G7000; Motorola C690, E365, E398, L720, V220, V300, V525, V600, Nokia 3100, 3108, 3120, 3200, 3220, 3330, 3530, 3650, 3660, 5100, 6100, 6110, 6230, 6600, 6610, 6610A, 6670, 6800, 6820, 7200, 7210, 7250, 7260, 7610, 7650, N-Gage; Panasonic G21M, G60, G70, X200, X300, X600, X700, X800, X900; Sanyo Ericsson E700, Sharp GX15, GX20, Siemens C60, M55, M60, S65, S65i, S65ii; SonyEricsson K500, K700, K760, K800, L200, L200i, L200ii, L200iii, L200iv, L200v, L200vi, L200vii, L200viii, L200ix, L200x, L200xi, L200xii, L200xiii, L200xiv, L200xv, L200xvi, L200xvii, L200xviii, L200xix, L200xx, L200xxi, L200xxii, L200xxiii, L200xxiv, L200xxv, L200xxvi, L200xxvii, L200xxviii, L200xxix, L200xxx; SonyEricsson K300, K700, K760, L200, L200i, L200ii, L200iii, L200iv, L200v, L200vi, L200vii, L200viii, L200ix, L200x, L200xi, L200xii, L200xiii, L200xiv, L200xv, L200xvi, L200xvii, L200xviii, L200xix, L200xx, L200xxi, L200xxii, L200xxiii, L200xxiv, L200xxv, L200xxvi, L200xxvii, L200xxviii, L200xxix, L200xxx; SonyEricsson K300, K700, K760, L200, L200i, L200ii, L200iii, L200iv, L200v, L200vi, L200vii, L200viii, L200ix, L200x, L200xi, L200xii, L200xiii, L200xiv, L200xv, L200xvi, L200xvii, L200xviii, L200xix, L200xx, L200xxi, L200xxii, L200xxiii, L200xxiv, L200xxv, L200xxvi, L200xxvii, L200xxviii, L200xxix, L200xxx; SonyEricsson K300, K700, K760, L200, L200i, L200ii, L200iii, L200iv, L200v, L200vi, L200vii, L200viii, L200ix, L200x, L200xi, L200xii, L200xiii, L200xiv, L200xv, L200xvi, L200xvii, L200xviii, L200xix, L200xx, L200xxi, L200xxii, L200xxiii, L200xxiv, L200xxv, L200xxvi, L200xxvii, L200xxviii, L200xxix, L200xxx; SonyEricsson K300, K700, K760, L200, L200i, L200ii, L200iii, L200iv, L200v, L200vi, L200vii, L200viii, L200ix, L200x, L200xi, L200xii, L200xiii, L200xiv, L200xv, L200xvi, L200xvii, L200xviii, L200xix, L200xx, L200xxi, L200xxii, L200xxiii, L200xxiv, L200xxv, L200xxvi, L200xxvii, L200xxviii, L200xxix, L200xxx; SonyEricsson K300, K700, K760, L200, L200i, L200ii, L200iii, L200iv, L200v, L200vi, L200vii, L200viii, L200ix, L200x, L200xi, L200xii, L200xiii, L200xiv, L200xv, L200xvi, L200xvii, L200xviii, L200xix, L200xx, L200xxi, L200xxii, L200xxiii, L200xxiv, L200xxv, L200xxvi, L200xxvii, L200xxviii, L200xxix, L200xxx; SonyEricsson K300, K700, K760, L200, L200i, L200ii, L200iii, L200iv, L200v, L200vi, L200vii, L200viii, L200ix, L200x, L200xi, L200xii, L200xiii, L200xiv, L200xv, L200xvi, L200xvii, L200xviii, L200xix, L200xx, L200xxi, L200xxii, L200xxiii, L200xxiv, L200xxv, L200xxvi, L200xxvii, L200xxviii, L200xxix, L200xxx; SonyEricsson K300, K700, K760, L200, L200i, L200ii, L200iii, L200iv, L200v, L200vi, L200vii, L200viii, L200ix, L200x, L200xi, L200xii, L200xiii, L200xiv, L200xv, L200xvi, L200xvii, L200xviii, L200xix, L200xx, L200xxi, L200xxii, L200xxiii, L200xxiv, L200xxv, L200xxvi, L200xxvii, L200xxviii, L200xxix, L200xxx; SonyEricsson K300, K700, K760, L200, L200i, L200ii, L200iii, L200iv, L200v, L200vi, L200vii, L200viii, L200ix, L200x, L200xi, L200xii, L200xiii, L200xiv, L200xv, L200xvi, L200xvii, L200xviii, L200xix, L200xx, L200xxi, L200xxii, L200xxiii, L200xxiv, L200xxv, L200xxvi, L200xxvii, L200xxviii, L200xxix, L200xxx; SonyEricsson K300, K700, K760, L200, L200i, L200ii, L200iii, L200iv, L200v, L200vi, L200vii, L200viii, L200ix, L200x, L200xi, L200xii, L200xiii, L200xiv, L200xv, L200xvi, L200xvii, L200xviii, L200xix, L200xx, L200xxi, L200xxii, L200xxiii, L200xxiv, L200xxv, L200xxvi, L200xxvii, L200xxviii, L200xxix, L200xxx; 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