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HYPER

GBA
POKÉMON EMERALD REVIEWED!
But is it the same game yet again?

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Plus: Amazing New Screenshots!

PLUS: PS3!
First console pics & features – turn to page 8!

Exclusive First Look!
ULTIMATE SPIDER-MAN
You've never seen Spidey like this before!

Classics
RIDGE RACER
A look back at the King of Drift

HALO 2'S NEW MAPS
Q&A with Bungie, plus all new pics!

First Look!
SERIOUS SAM 2
Serious sequel coming to PC!

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A next MAGAZINE

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JUST IMAGINE THE SCHOOL REUNION.

14 ULTIMATE SPIDER-MAN

Fresh new look, same compelling gameplay.

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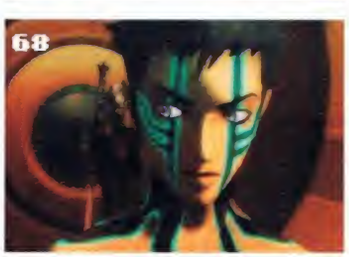

EDITORIAL

>> By the time you read this E3 will long be over, but as I write I'm gearing up to hop on the very next plane to the land of smog and bindlestiffs. I'm an excited ball of nervous energy right now, chomping at the bit to get over there and stuck into all the press events, interviews, behind closed doors demos and parties (you can't forget about the parties). Simply put, this is going to be the biggest E3 EVER; not only will the hardware announcements shape the future of the industry for years to come, but there are going to be some stunning games on display too. But enough of that for now, as we'll have our Hyper-global-meganet E3 feature next issue, when all shall be revealed.

For now, I'll leave you in the more than capable hands of Hyper 141, an agreeable little issue in which we spill the beans on Xbox 360 and PS3, take a first look at Ultimate Spider-man, talk to 50 Cent, find out that The Hulk actually CAN translate into an awesome game, kick back and enjoy the visions of David Perry, indulge in some schadenfreude in our analysis of The Matrix Online, review a swathe of great, good and pretty crap games, take a look back at Namco's Ridge Racer series, and on top of it all, clue you into the secrets of a successful (gaming) relationship. Enjoy!

Cam Shea >> Editor

HYPER CREW Monthly Top 5 Games

Cam Shea - Editor
1. Wipeout Pure - PSP
   "Fasty McFastlane"
2. Yoshi Touch & Go - DS
3. Midnight Club 3: DUB Edition - PS2
4. Resident Evil 4 - GCN
5. The Incredible Hulk - Xbox

Malcolm Campbell - Art
1. Lego Star Wars – PS2
   "Charming, fun and even better on replay. Original trilogy version please!"
2. Wipeout Pure - PSP
3. Midnight Club 3: DUB Edition - Xbox
4. Resident Evil 4 - GCN
5. Street Fighter III: 3rd Strike - Xbox

Daniel Wilks - Deputy Editor
1. God of War - PS2
   "I like it Greek"
2. The Incredible Hulk - Xbox
3. World of Warcraft - PC
4. Guild Wars - PC
5. Freedom Force vs The Third Reich - PC

Kosta Andreadis - E3 travelling companion
1. Wipeout Pure - PSP
   "Silky, sexy, fast, and smooth - kinda like me."
2. Lego Star Wars - PC
3. Doom 3: Resurrection of Evil - PC
4. Polarium - DS
5. Donkey Kong Jungle Beat - GCN

HYPER>>

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News

IN THE NEWS: Bryce clocks Lumines, score resets / Xbox 360 MTV special – worst TV EVER

IPOD?

XBOX 360 UNVEILED

Cool Box, Bad TV

The Xbox 360 MTV event would have to be one of the worst half hours of TV we've ever had to sit through, made up as it was of horrible jump cuts, annoying drunk guys at spring break mentality and a lack of any information about the console aside from the face that Lil John likes it. The pre-E3 press conference took a different track and went positively Orwellian on us, telling the collected gaming journos that Microsoft would "revolutionise the way people think about having fun". On paper the Xbox 360 is a pretty powerful machine, boasting around 10 times the processing power of the black box but compared to the PS3 it looks something like a dinosaur - in the console's defense it will be the most powerful console in the world for six or so months. As we all know by now, all games on the 360 will support high definition and the console will play DVDs out of the box. With the constant claims that everything is going to be HD, we are seriously hoping that the Xbox 360 will feature DVD upscaling so you can output movies in HD. The fact that Samsung, the pioneers of the technology are one of Microsoft's partners in the console hint towards this but as of yet we have no confirmation. On to other news, the 360 will feature backwards compatibility but due to the new hardware in the console games will have to be emulated. What this means in practice is that not all games will be backwards compatible - Microsoft will be focusing on their best selling titles first. The most exciting thing about the Xbox 360, much like the original Xbox is the Live service. This time around there is two levels of Live service available, Gold and Silver. Silver service will be a feature right out of the box as long as you have broadband and will allow players to chat with friends, download content and demos but will not feature online gaming. Gold service (which has a monthly fee) will give gamers access to all of the above as well as online multiplayer gaming. Bizarrely one of the big announcements at the press conference was that the Square Enix MMO Final Fantasy Xi would be available on 360. Announcing that Squeenix is supporting your console is all well and good but doing so by saying that you are offering a 3 year old MMO already available on two other formats is a little dumb to say the least. Oh yeah, a final bit of bad news, although the 360 will be appearing worldwide around November we have an unofficial report that says we won't be getting the console until some time mid next year. We'll keep you posted.

SHINY

PLAYSTATION 3 UNVEILED

Compatible with everything

The cat is finally out of the bag - Sony has officially unveiled the PS3 and so far it looks to be one hell of a machine. On paper the PS3 looks to have a good deal more processing power that the Xbox 360 or Revolution but on paper Cam can say he's a demon in the sack so you can probably take that bit of hype with a grain of salt. On the other hand the PS3 does have some rather incredible features, not the least of which is the fact that the console will be backwards compatible across the entire Playstation range (aside from PSP). The machine's Blu-Ray drive (BR-ROM) supports pretty much every format known to man from CD through to Blu-Ray. Like the 360, PS3 will feature a removable HDD (no indications of capacity have been given as yet) but will go one step further by supporting USB 2.0 memory, Memory Stick, SD and Compact Flash. It is unknown at this point whether these types of memory will be able to be used for save games or whether they are strictly for media playback. The console will feature built in Ethernet, WiFi and Bluetooth, the latter which will be used for controllers. The official press release states that the Bluetooth can handle up to seven controllers but it seems more likely that games will remain four player and the other Bluetooth slots can be taken up with other devices such as a keyboard, wheel or other peripheral. Again like the 360, PS3 will feature HD support up to 1080i and 5.1 surround sound. PS3 will also feature support for two monitors/TVs. Hopefully this will mean that if you have two screens you can do away with shoddy splitscreen action in multiplayer. Bizarrely, the controller in the image (which was not demoed at the press conference) looks like a shoddy third party peripheral. With any luck the thing will be redesigned by the time the console is released in 2006. On the games front, Sony made a mch stronger impression than did Microsoft, thanks to some very impressive looking demos of games such as Tekken 6, an incredible looking Killzone sequel (shocking, we know), KillingDay and Gundam World. Also at the conference was shown a remake of the beginning of Final Fantasy VII that showed off the rendering power of the console. Whilst it does not mean that Final Fantasy VII is being remade for a next gen console (thank god) it did show off some incredible real time rendered animation. More when it comes.

FLAT

VIVA LA REVOLUTION

Download frenzy

There aren't any real concrete details available yet as to what is inside the Revolution but Nintendo have decided after all to unveil their new console at E3. In a move that comes as a bit of a surprise after the wow factor of PS3, Nintendo have openly stated that their console will only be 2-3 times more powerful than the Gamecube but in typical Ninty fashion amended the statement by saying that it was what you did with your power that counts. What we do know so far is that the console is tiny, about the size of three standard DVD cases stacked and that it will support both DVD discs and the proprietary Gamecube discs via a slot loading drive. All controllers will be wireless and a very special "unique" will be announced some time in the future. Nintendo also promises that the Revolution will be the easiest of the consoles to program for. The most exciting bit of news about the console so far is that Nintendo have said that ALL of the company's back catalogue will be available to download - everything from NES titles through to Cube titles. There has been no talk of price for this service as yet.

TINY

GBM

More Gameboys

As well as announcing their new console, Nintendo also announced the immanent arrival of a new iteration of the GBA, titles the Gameboy Mini. The handheld is absolutely tiny, clocking in at around the same size as the iPod Mini and will boast the brightest screen for a GBA to date.

JOY!

PSP DATE DOWN UNDER

Sony's PSP due September 1

The PSP finally has a release date in sight for Australia and New Zealand. The date is September 1 and the price is $429.95 for the Value Pack, which contains a pouch, a 32MB memory stick duo, a battery pack, headphones, wrist strap and UMD sample disc with non-interactive game demos. Check out www.yourpsp.com.au for more details.

MUSIC

THE WORLD OF JOHN WILLIAMS

Episode III tunes get the nod!

The Eminence Orchestra are organising another great evening of music for July 8 at the Sydney Town Hall. This time, it's the world of John Williams, an entire night of John Williams scores performed by the Eminence Orchestra and the Eminence Symphonic Choir. From Harry Potter and Star Wars classics through to Saving Private Ryan, this is going to be a great night. There are two pieces that we're particularly excited about though. First up is the performance of the climactic "Battle of the Heroes" from Episode III, which will be the first official world premier. Cooler still, we've been tipped off by our friends in the Eminence Orchestra that they'll be doing a surprise performance of the Legend of Zelda theme! Sweet! Tickets are available through Ticketek, and you can check out www.worldofjohnwilliams.com for more information!

WINNERS HYPER 139

I LOVE THE SNAKE
- Glenn McCleary, Stanmore NSW
- Donna Trickey, Kyneton VIC
- Benita Green, Warwick QLD
- Ben Rodda, Wentworth NSW
- Christian Baker, Parramatta NSW

KUNG FU CRAZY
- Robert C. Haynes, Port Kennedy WA
- Sasha Markiewicz, Exeter SA
- Ben Cove, Grafton NSW
- Patrick Deshpande, Hornsby NSW

THE MANSION FAMILY
- Baden Shipp, Campbelltown NSW
- Victor Puc, Algester QLD
- Sue Harrison, Everton Park QLD
- Michele Wallis, Te Atatu Peninsula, Auckland
- Jason Lauria, Greenvale VIC
- Frank Tovo, Port Noarlunga, SA

CAPTION THIS!

PART 68

Come on, make us laugh. Just send your funny screen captions to us at captionthis@next.com.au with Caption This Part 68 in the subject line.

The winner of this month's Caption This will receive Conker: Live and Reloaded as well as two new release Xbox *Live*-enabled games.

Conker: Live and Reloaded is the newest Xbox game from Rare. Due out in July, the game promises a deep, action-packed Xbox *Live* shooting experience. Also included in the package is the entire N64 Conker game, updated with generation-leading visuals and life-altering toilet humour.

Something about nutz...

TETSUYA MIZUGUCHI Q&A

HYPER: The transition from a racing game like Sega Rally to a rhythm game then to a revolutionary synaesthesia shooter covers a lot of territory. Tell us a little about the games you've been involved in and how your game design approach has changed over that time.

Mizuguchi: My interests are extensive: from observing physiological feelings such as "feel good" to music and scenarios. Therefore, I don't want to limit myself to a single genre. I want to continue to create masterpieces with new ideas no matter what genre they are.

Music is a central theme to all of your games. What is your philosophy on game design and why is music so central to it?

Music is not necessarily to be the center of everything. Since originally my specialty was storytelling, encompassing that, I'd like to consider a wide variety of things from now on.

My philosophy in game design is to do "reverse" design of human instincts, desires, and dreams. All of those are based on human experiences.

Where did the idea for Lumines come from?

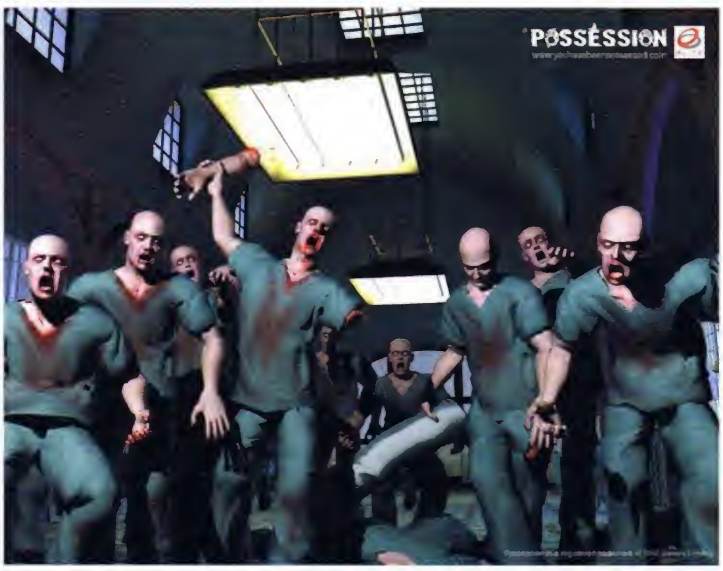
The inspiration I had when I came up with Rez idea had been still in my head, and Lumines is the result of chemical reaction between that

FIRST LOOK XBOX 360 SCREENS! BLAU!

Call of Duty 2 PC/XBOX 360 **Developer:** Infinity Ward • **The Hype:** High def WWII console gaming

FIRST LOOK XBOX 360 SCREENS! BLAU!

Possession PS3/XBOX 360 **Developer:** Blitz • **The Hype:** You control the zombies and send them on a rampage

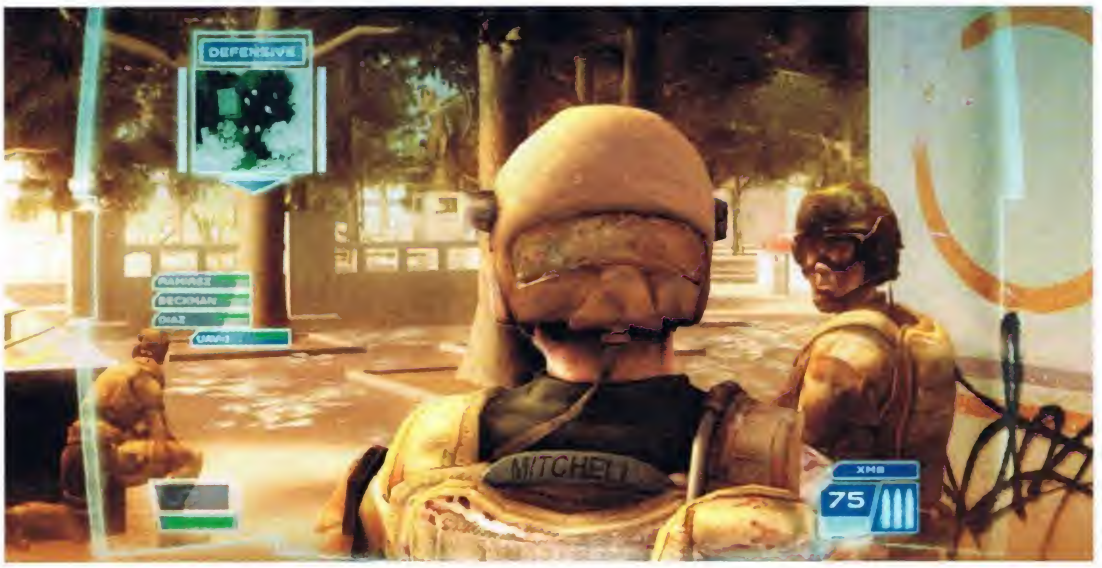


FIRST LOOK XBOX 360 SCREENS! BLAU!

Quake IV PC/XBOX 360 **Developer:** Raven Software • **The Hype:** The Strogg versus the Raven

FIRST LOOK XBOX 360 SCREENS! BLAU!

Ghost Recon 3 PC/GCN/PS2/XBOX/XBOX 360 **Developer:** Red Storm • **The Hype:** The soldiers of the future on the



FIRST LOOK XBOX 360 SCREENS! BLAU!

Saint's Row XBOX 360 **Developer:** Ignition • **The Hype:** Beat rival gangs and corrupt officials to conquer the city!

FIRST LOOK SCREENS! BLAU!

We Love Katamari! PS2 **Developer:** Namco • **The Hype:** The King of all Cosmos is taking requests!

inspiration and PSP's new style

Mondo Grosso is one of our favourite electronic acts from Japan. What was it like working with him? Was it a collaborative effort or was the music written separately from the game?

It was a very fun experience because I'm also a big fan of his music. Originally we just asked him to allow us to use my favorite song of his, "Shinin'". But in the end, he let us use 4 of his songs. The music was written separately from the game.

What other Japanese (or international) artists would you like to work with in the future? And which musicians/DJs/producers have influenced you most?

I don't have any particular favourite. But I think "Chemical Brothers" are great artists because they deeply consider the relationship between images and music. Also I like "Brit Pop" such as "Travis" and "Oasis".

Can you tell us a little bit about your next game Meteos? Will it follow the synaesthesia tone of your last two games or will it be different again?

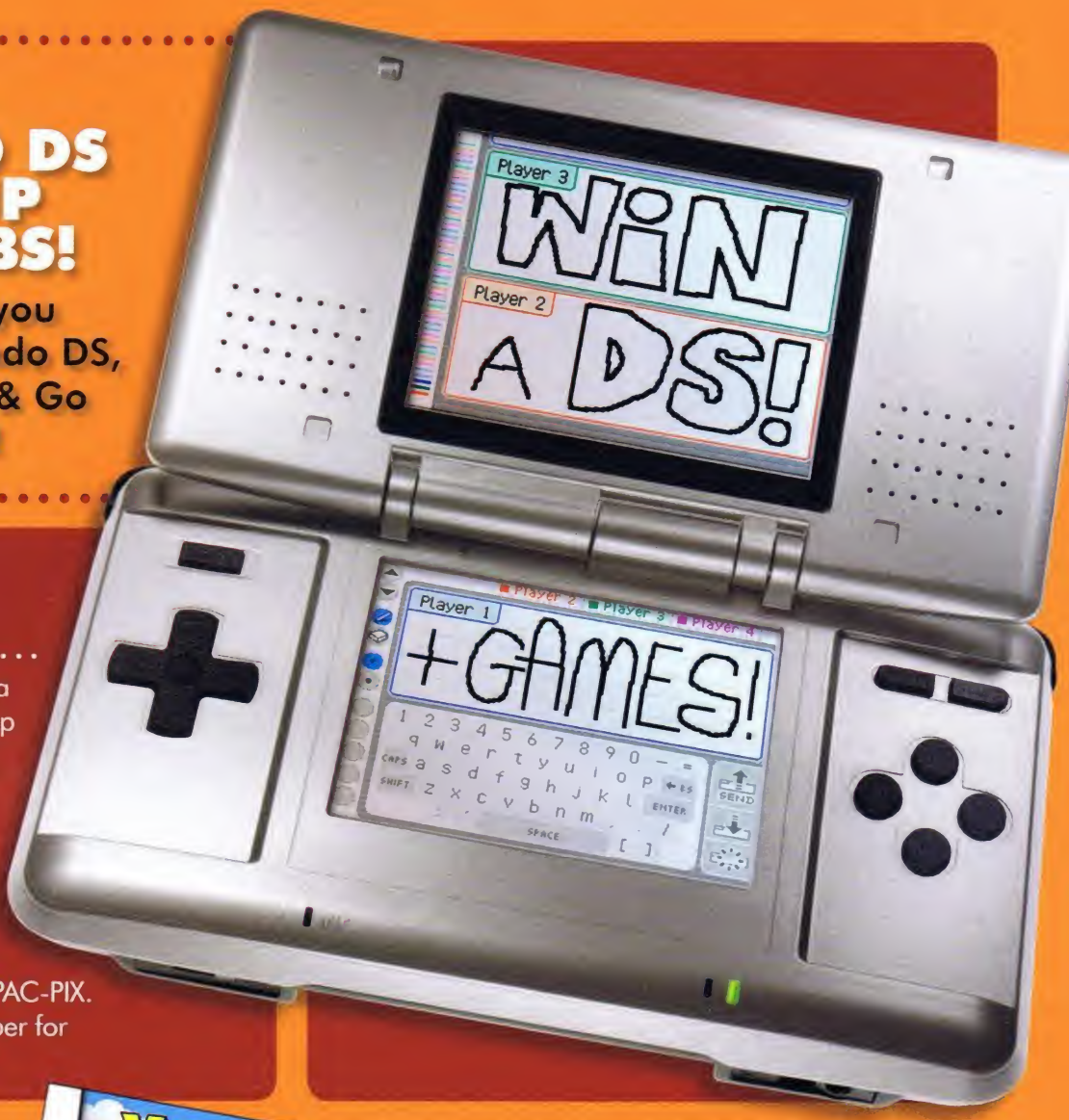
I don't think so. Meteos is more like action oriented. Mr. Sakurai who created "Smash Brothers" was in charge of Meteos game design, and Meteos got enough of his good tastes and qualities.

Will we be seeing Ulala again soon?

Sure if you want. I always have an idea for it in my head. <<

FIVE NINTENDO DS PACKS UP FOR GRABS!

Subscribe and you could win a Nintendo DS, plus Yoshi Touch & Go and PAC-PIX!



WIN A NINTENDO DS!

Our last DS giveaway was such a success we've decided to team up with Nintendo Australia again and do another one. Subscribe this month and you could be one of five lucky gamers to get their very own brand new Nintendo DS, plus two of the greatest games available for the system - Yoshi Touch & Go and PAC-PIX. And of course you're getting Hyper for cheap. How can you go wrong?

WIN YOSHI TOUCH & GO!

Help Yoshi get baby Mario to safety! In this DS-only game, the dual screens and stylus come into their own as you draw in cloud paths for Yoshi to follow, shoot eggs at enemies and even capture them in your own cloud circles! It's a fresh new take on the platform genre, and the perfect example of why the Nintendo DS is so unique.

WIN PAC-PIX!

PAC-PIX revisits the arcade classic Pac-Man in a way that can only be done on DS! In PAC-PIX you're trying to capture all the ghosts, but this time you actually get to draw a self-animating Pac-Man in yourself! You can draw up to three Pac-Men at once, and the smaller you draw them, the faster they move. With engaging graphics and puzzles, PAC-PIX is another must-have DS title.

Subscribing to Hyper is cheaper than buying the magazine at the shops and you get it delivered straight to your door. Get your 12 issues of Hyper for less and maybe even win this awesome prize!

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ULTIMATE SPIDER-MAN

Spider-Man: The Movie 2 was the best selling game based on a movie in 2004 and no wonder - it was a fabulous game (one of the few licensed titles actually worth a damn) that game the player a wonderful freedom of movement, a tight fighting engine and some nice mission structure. Instead of sitting on their laurels just waiting to churn out another Spider-Man: The Movie game when the next film comes out, Treyarch have decided to take the Spider-Man franchise in a new direction with Ultimate Spider-Man, based on the hugely popular comic book series of the same name. From what we've seen so far, Ultimate Spider-Man will stick closely to the look and feel of the comic with an interesting use of cel shading and comic panel effects. Based after the events of issue #39 of the series, the culmination of the Venom story arc in which Eddie Brock becomes the nemesis of the wall crawler and subsequently "dies", Ultimate Spider-Man will allow players to take the roles of both Spider-Man and Venom (guess he didn't die in issue #39 then, huh?). With a script penned by Brian Michael Bendis, who has written all the Ultimate Spider-Man comics since its debut in 1999, and characters designed and illustrated by Ultimate Spider-Man artist Mark Bagley, Ultimate Spider-Man is looking hot. Hyper spoke to the Senior Developer at Treyarch, Chris Busse to find out more.

Systems: **GameCube, PC, PS2, Xbox** ■ Category: **Web slinging action** ■ Players: **1** ■ Developer: **Treyarch** ■ Available: **September 2005**

Hyper: Ultimate Spider-Man allows players to take the roles of both Spider-Man and Venom - will any of the game be playable as either Peter Parker or Eddie Brock?

Chris Busse: Short answer: Yes. Longer answer: See question 3.

How will the experience of playing Spidey and Venom differ?

Both their locomotion and combat are completely different, but more importantly the player experience is totally different with the two characters. Our goal is that the player will come away feeling like a super-hero when they play as Spider-Man and a Super Villain when they play as Venom.

The story of Ultimate Spider-Man picks up from the end of the Venom story arc detailing how Eddie Brock becomes Venom. How much of the back story will be detailed in the game?

Our game story deals with the birth of Venom in the Ultimate universe. The bulk of the story depicts events following issue #39, but in the retelling of events of the Venom story arc, as seen in the comic book series, we recreate the battle between Venom and Peter Parker as the prelude to the entire game.

What was/is it like working with a comic book author for the script of Ultimate Spider-Man? Likewise what was it like working with Mark Bagley for character design? Was there any difficulty translating one medium to another?

Working with Brian Michael Bendis, Mark Bagley and all of Marvel team was incredible. It was a truly collaborative effort between all creative entities. Using comic panels in our game really helps to bring across the amazing story Bendis wrote; and the 3D comic inking technology we've created really breathes life into the characters that Bagley concepted for us.

You say that Ultimate Spider-Man will contain the largest number of characters from the Spider-Man universe ever assembled in a video game - can you give us a few examples of the characters we may be meeting and fighting?

I can't reveal too much at this point, but we do have the largest line-up of interactive Marvel characters in any Spider-Man game to-date. Some of the characters you will see are Spider-Man and Venom, of course; Electro, Rhino and Nick Fury make appearances as well; we're even debuting two Ultimate characters in our game before they appear in the comic book series.

We understand that a whole new combat system has been developer for Ultimate Spider-Man. How does it differ from previous Spider-Man games?

It was built from the ground up with the Ultimate Spider-Man comic series as our guide. We wanted to recreate the feel of Spider-Man's combat from the comic books. He's not about brawling, so we wanted to shy away from standing toe-to-toe with guys. It's all about bouncing around and building up damage. The more the player bounces around from guy-to-guy and guy-to-wall-to-lamppost-to-guy, the more damage he does with each hit. It pays for the player to mix up their attacks and targets from strike to strike.

Ultimate Spider-Man will feature a free-roaming, living city - how does the free roaming nature integrate with the story of the game?

The free roaming city fits in very naturally with Spider-Man. We've added a section of Queens on to Manhattan because it plays such a large role in Peter's life (and yes you can swing directly from Manhattan to Queens and back using the streaming engine).

Ultimate Spider-Man will allow Venom to destroy environmental objects. Will Spider-Man have a similar ability?

Spider-Man's character is not about creating large amounts of destruction and so we didn't feel it was appropriate to include that as part of his gameplay. Venom, however, is all about mayhem, destruction, and civil disorder. That's one of the great benefits of having two playable characters; you get to explore differing styles of gameplay.

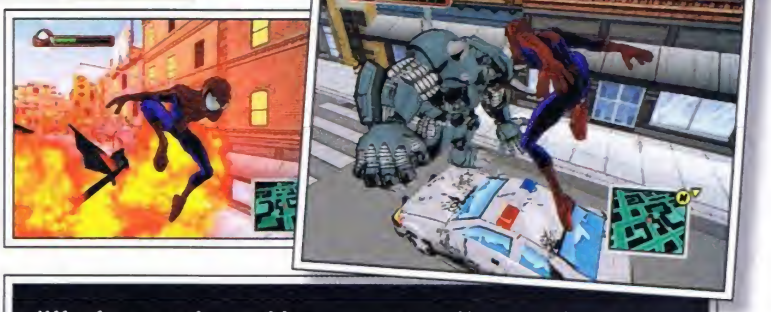
A threat assessment system will force players to prioritise their heroic actions during gameplay by having situations deteriorate at different rates. How does this feature work?

This is something that Spider-Man will have to deal with during various missions in his part of the storyline. Spider-Man will come across situations where a civilian is in harm's way and there is timer that is decaying before that situation will become critical for that civilian. There can be as many as 3-4 of these occurring simultaneously and the player will need to decide which situation to deal with first as it is most grave.

For example: At one point Rhino hurls a car into this restaurant causing an explosion and massive damage. There is one civilian huddled in the corner trying to stay away from the soon to expand flames, while the other is dangling from the edge of the building. While Spider-Man will need to get both hapless folk out of danger, it's critical that he get to the person slipping from the roof before he falls and then go back to get the guy not yet burned by flames.

Web-swinging has advanced leaps and bounds (no pun

Spidey bends over and prepares to get himself a Rhino sized high colonic



The game will feature comic style panels appearing on screen to drive the story

intended) across the Spider-Man (movie) series of games. Will Ultimate Spider-Man once again improve on the formula? If so, how?

While we have made small physics adjustments here and there, we didn't change this significantly from the last Spider-Man title. The physical swinging and free-roaming environment fit so well with Spider-Man that we just had to keep it.

We have introduced some controller changes that we felt help to make the controls more accessible for anyone who hasn't played a Spider-Man game in a while, but if you played the last movie game then you will be very comfortable with what we have in this game.

The graphics engine for Ultimate Spider-Man does a remarkably good job at rendering comic-like figures. Tell us a little about the engine. Has it been difficult maintaining the look of the comic in the game?

Capturing the feel of the comic book in 3D was our first and one of our biggest challenges. We wanted something that mimics today's comic books and not so much the 2D look you get from standard cel-shaded games. We put some of our best engineers on the task and came up with the 3D comic inking technology you see in the final product.

Each character carries several sources of light with him that help to create the line thickness around the edge, the highlights and rim-lights as well as the interior inking that brings home the look of a 3D comic book. It's not like anything anyone has seen before, and most importantly, it often looks like you're peering onto your own comic book as you play.

We understand that comic book panels will keep players appraised of plot elements as well as other events taking place in the city - how will this feature work?

When we first sat down to decide how we wanted to best portray the license of Ultimate Spider-Man, the look and the comic book panels were the two things that jumped out at us. The panels really give us a chance to not only pay homage to the comic book from which we got our inspiration, but it also gives us a chance to tell story in a whole new way.

Super Happy Super Deformed Supaidaa Maan will not be a playable character

Normally, during the course of a game, you need to either be in interactive mode or narrative mode. During narrative mode, the player has no control over the action, while bits of story are imparted. Conversely, while in interactive mode, the player has control but no real story or character can be conveyed. With the panels, we get a second camera, a second window into the world if you will. This allows us to dedicate a camera to the interactive mode, keeping the player swinging and fighting, while the second camera can be used to punch up details of narrative or flavor. It's a tool that has allowed us to blur the line a bit between action and cut-scene just a little bit more.

What gameplay elements will Ultimate Spider-Man offer that none of the other games in the series have to date?

Playable Venom, 'nuff said.

Thanks for your time!

Thank you!

The new fighting engine rewards players experimenting and leaping around

ULTIMATE SIDEBAR

FOR THOSE OF YOU WHO AREN'T INTO COMICS, THE ULTIMATE BOOKS ARE A MODERN RETELLING OF MANY OF THE MARVEL CHARACTERS TO BRING THEM INTO A MODERN SETTING WITHOUT CARRYING OVER BAGGAGE AND AN EXPLANATION OF HOW, FOR EXAMPLE, PETER PARKER CAN REMAIN A TEENAGER IN THE YEAR 2005 WHEN HE WAS A TEENAGER IN 1963. ULTIMATE SPIDER-MAN WAS THE FIRST MARVEL ULTIMATE TITLE AND PROVED SO POPULAR THAT THE COMPANY TURNED IT INTO AN ENTIRE FRANCHISE WITH ADDITIONS SUCH AS ULTIMATE X-MEN, ULTIMATE FANTASTIC FOUR AND OF COURSE, THE ULTIMATES. ULTIMATE SPIDER-MAN IS ONE OF THE TOP 10 BEST SELLING COMICS IN THE WORLD SELLING OVER ONE MILLION COPIES IN THE US IN 1994.

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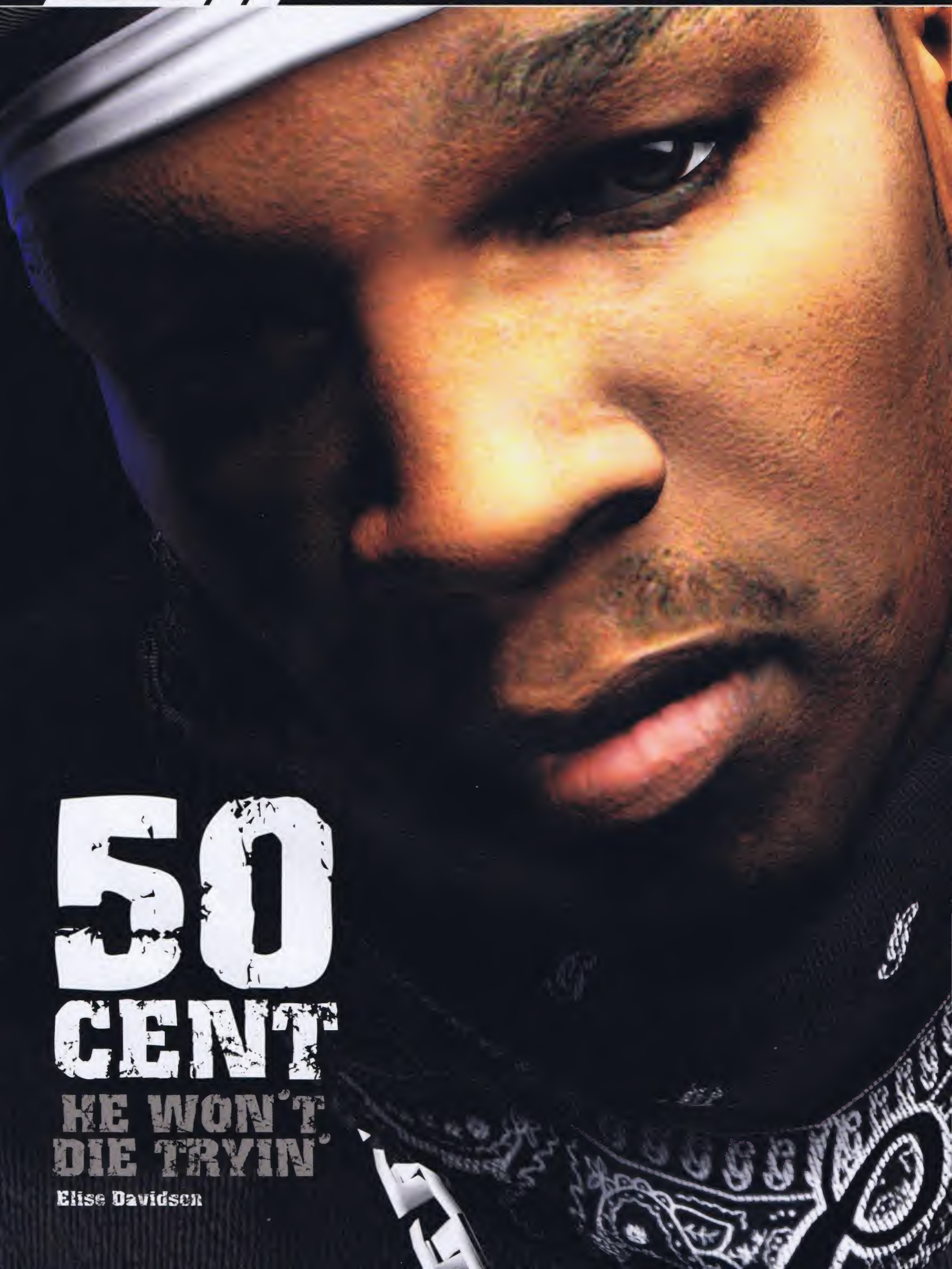


50 CENT

HE WON'T DIE TRYIN'

Elise Davidson

50 Cent, mega successful rap artist, G Unit member, part owner of G-Unit Records and G-Unit Clothing is more than just a household name; the man's a walking brand name. There's the shoes (G-Unit Reeboks), the drink (Formula 50 Vitamin Water), and his book deal. There's even a movie on the way in which he stars, based loosely on 50 Cent's life to date, in a similar vein to Eminem's 8 Mile.

Eminem is one of his tightest friends, as is the Godfather of beats, Dr Dre, and Fiddy is fiercely loyal to both, as well as his G-Unit homies. Never one to take it lying down, Fiddy has beef with those who dare to cross him - to date including rappers Ja Rule, Fat Joe, Jadakiss, Nas and more recently, G-Unit's newest recruit, The Game. In short, the man's worth a hell of a lot more than small change, to a lot of people.

Little wonder then, with the trend for featuring hip-hop stars in games these days, that Fiddy has been sought out by Vivendi Universal to collaborate with them on their latest creation, 50 Cent: Bulletproof. The game's story was written by Terry Winter, executive producer and writer for the hit TV series, The Sopranos. But that's not to say that Bulletproof will be the real life tale of 50 growing up. Instead Winter has created a modern day gangsta tale of drugs and violence with New York as the backdrop. Fiddy's character is, in essence, a badass hustler who himself gets double-crossed and dragged into an international conspiracy. The character has to use his guns and his street smarts to rip through the crime families in New York. If you've seen the trailer you'll also be aware of the mysterious white briefcase that plays a part in the action, somehow.

Most people by now are familiar with the real life drama of 50's upbringing in the Bronx, New York, a lifetime before his debut album in 2002 Get Rich or Die Tryin' catapulted him into the public eye.

Born Curtis Jackson in 1976, little Fiddy was just eight years old when his mother, a drug dealer, was shot and killed. He then moved in with his grandparents, and himself started selling crack cocaine when he was 12 years old. At the height of his dealing, 50 was pulling in five grand a day, and probably only survived because he never used any of the drugs he was selling.

He started rapping as a way out of that dangerous lifestyle, but lost his first record deal with Columbia after they freaked at him getting shot - nine times to be precise - sitting in his car outside his grandmother's house. Fiddy has in fact never lost his paranoia about the possibility of getting shot again - even after all the security two majorly successful albums can buy - he still wears a bulletproof vest everywhere he goes. His SUV and Lamborghini are not only bulletproof, but bombproof as well. Just in case.

So whilst many other rappers claim to be real life gangstas, there's few like Fiddy who are the real deal. When it came to making Bulletproof, 50 wanted to have a lot of input into the overall game. With everyone involved happy with the choice of Terry Winter for writing the game's story, the game's producers decided to create a game that was really tightly focused and story-driven, rather than open ended. We know that it's a third person POV, but there are FPS-style controls. Let's face it, if you've seen the trailer you'll know it's violent.

The music plays a massive part in a game like this, and we can reveal that Bulletproof will also include all of 50's music from Get Rich or Die Tryin', select cuts from second album The Massacre as well as the soundtrack for his upcoming film. You'll also be able to play all of Fiddy's music videos, in fact you'll be able to hang out in your crib and listening to 50 music and/or watch videos, including some new tracks he has laid down especially for the game. You'll be essentially stepping into 50's world, and all it entails, from interacting with pawnbrokers, weapon dealers, informants, shady doctors and music bootleggers to shooting the crap out of the bad guys. Then of course there's his homies: including a character with the voice and likeness of Eminem as "McVicar" and Dr. Dre as "Grizz", as well as G-Unit members Tony Yayo, Lloyd Banks, and Young Buck. Fiddy himself has also recorded hours of dialogue and had a million photographs taken in order to recreate his (very) lifelike image.

In many ways Bulletproof is going to be a landmark title. It's a product that crosses media boundaries; a seamless integration of music and gaming with top notch production values. But importantly, it's also one of the arms of the 50 Cent juggernaut, an integral element of a dedicated poly-media push, crossing music, film and gaming. Let's just hope it's fun.

In an exclusive Hyper interview with Fiddy on the set of his new film in Toronto, we get the low-down on Bulletproof from the man himself.

Hyper: What's it been like for you working with Terry [Winter]?

50 Cent: It's great, I mean like actually Terry travelled with me during the Roc Tha Mike tour for like two months... He got the chance to be around me for a while and I gave him like, information about my life story.

I understand Terry has written the screenplay for your upcoming film, how did it come about that he was also responsible for writing Bulletproof's story?

Well what happened was I spent so much time with him, he had a lot of information already. Outside of the two and a half months he spent with me getting that information, he had to go through the information he had compiled during that time to compile the actual screenplay. So he was up-to-date on, you know, me personally, so I said, 'Why don't we get Terry to do it?' when they said they were going to have someone come in and help write the actual theme for the videogame.

I said, 'Ain't nobody gonna know it better than him, so you can sit there and write and keep sending me things and I'll deny it and deny it and deny it until I think it's perfect, or we can have Terry - who's gonna know what to write - you know, do his thing. And he did a really good job on it.

It's a shoot-em-up kinda game, yeah?

Well you know it's like GTA: San Andreas. You know what I mean, the way some games send you on a specific mission. What is not like other games is that in this game there's different possibilities for you to be... People who appear to be with you in some areas, they switch up, they're no longer on your side, they do different things (laughs), you know what I'm saying and these are things that actually happen in life.

How much of the game is actually based on real events in your life?

Well the videogame is fictional. You know at some points there's real scenarios that Terry added that makes it exciting to me, and there's other points, there's fictional points that make it a videogame. You don't want to make things so accurate that people actually start trying to do the things that they're doing in the videogame. You know what I'm saying!

Yeah, I can understand that, being in the public eye and a role model to some kids you are bound to attract attention over the violence in the game. Do you think that's going to be something that's going to have your critics firing up again?

Oh you know, they love me, they love me!

They love to talk about you.

If I wasn't around what would they talk about? What happens is the more successful you are, the more people become critical. They can no longer judge the material that you create fairly, so you have to be able to run on your own energy. See I spent the largest proportion of my time ahead of any success believing that I could do the things that I'm accomplishing now. So I don't have a problem with critics because they just fit into that category of people who didn't believe to begin with.

Getting back to the game... I'm interested in how the process worked of getting your likeness, and your movement, and how real it actually is.

Well what they did is I had to take a looooot of photographs man, they had me sitting like in front of the camera you know, like motion pictures.

What about your character, does it use your actual voice?

Yeah, I had to do that. As far as the voiceovers was concerned I maintained it to the script for it, for the videogame, so it would be things that I would say. So like I wanted to make it personal, so I said those things like I would say it in that situation.

What did you say, what sort of things... can you give me an example?

I said so many different things, man they had me in there for 14 hours doing that!

Wow, did you do it all in the one day?

Nah, I had to break that up. I could not sit there for 14 hours, it was like 'I'll come back another day and we finish it'.

What's your favourite catchcry from the game, do you have one?

Nah I don't have nothing specific like the Arnold Schwarzenegger 'I'll be back' going on (laughs), you know like the funniest things to me is like the action, the sounds, like when you're jumping off something or when you, you know...

Yep, yep, like a oooffff sort of noise...

Yeah, yeah, that was fun.

So what sort of cars feature in the game? I know you love your yellow Lamborghini...

Yeah, that gotta be in there.

What else have you got?

Older vehicles like the 55 Impala.

Mmm, the classics...

Yeah the classics will be in there. You know... there's so many different things, I don't actually have 'em in the game, but they are physically in it.

I know I asked you this before but how much of the actual game - how much of it is focused on the drug dealing gangsta Fiddy and how much of it is the Fiddy, international musician, superstar?

You know what I think what you consider gangsta I think people would interpret Grand Theft Auto as gangsta, you know what I mean, especially the latest one because they made it a little more urban. I think if you looked at it it's a mixture. Having Terry be a writer and he wrote on the Sopranos it's a mixture between what you would see on the Sopranos, and street life. So it kinda combines, it's almost like he [the game's hero] gets caught into a world he's not really familiar with and he's just trying to just roll with the punches.

A lot of thinking quickly on your feet, which is something that I guess you have had to do most of your life.

Yeah, yep.

With the beefs that you have with people in real life - Ja Rule and Jadakiss, Fat Joe, etc - will they appear in the game as people that you have beefs with?

Oh yeah like 'cause it's kinda like it's missions, so at points there's gonna be people that you absolutely know you have a problem with, and there's gonna be people who you think you're cool with who change on you, you know at certain points.

I think the first few times that you

go there that, like because the whole environment is so reactive with certain things that you do, so like if you go onto a level and you respond one way it changes who turns their back on you. So it's like, you create a pattern to know what's going to happen when you go through there because they've [the game designers] explored every option and opportunity and ways that you can do things. What happens is if you go in a certain direction in the game, it changes what happens on the next level.

Just one final thing 50, I've spoken with Ja Rule before and his says his beef stuff with you isn't true, and I quote, 'That shit is just all about selling records'. Can you comment on that?

He said what?

He said he's never met you and it's all just about selling records.

Oh, he's a liar. You know what? Ja Rule...You know what it is? Artist-wise, he's not strong enough to go against me. You see what I'm saying? And I know he's not intelligent enough to know that, but the people around him, never, ah... I would think the entire company around him - even the staff at Def Jam - at some point should have told him that he needs to stop. So what he does now is because he's already went too far, so he tries to say, 'Nah, we ain't got no problem, that was just all sellin' records' you know what I'm saying? Cause he's already gone past that point where he can compete. Now, anything he does, like - to the general public - anything he does, has to be compared to what I do because he's made himself be seen as a direct opponent of mine.

Right, so he's talked it up but he can't back it up, is that what you're saying?

Right so they're gonna compare it to that. So now, if he releases a record and it's mediocre - and everything he's put out has been pretty weak - and when he does that now while I have the momentum that I have now with my record, and I'm on point with everything that I've been putting out so far, it makes him look worse and worse and worse. Every time he mentions my name, you know what I mean? So he'll always try and downplay it now, but I really genuinely don't like Ja Rule. I'll never like him.

How did it start?

A friend of mine robbed him. A guy from my neighbourhood, I knew him, I grew up with the kid... Everyone's not blessed with the same opportunities. I'm able to write music for a living and move away from that lifestyle and do all these different things with my life right now. There's people I grew up with who are in the exact same situation that I was in before my music took off. ...And you know, and because I knew him, like, it's like, say I grew up around you. If I know you, I don't care what you did to somebody else - when you say hi, Ima gonna say hi.

I understand what you're saying, so if it's a friend of yours, you're going to back your friend up.

Yeah. We went to school together - we didn't actually hang out with each other all the time me and the kid, but, we went to school together and I know him. So when he says 'what's up'... and that's really ALL it took, for me to say 'what's up' to him. When Ja saw that he felt like, if I'm cool with him, then I can't be cool with him.

Is that the way it works?

It is, you know to some extent it is, but you know what like where I'm from generally we stay away from people who have problems with each other. So we not involved. Like we might know both parties, but we'll stay neutral, where I'll talk to him, and I'll talk to the other party. But I'll tell 'em when I'm talking to 'em, like, 'you listen to me don't tell me nothin.... Like, I know you have problems or whatever, but I don't want to know nothing about that', you see what I'm saying?

Right. Yeah, that's pretty much the same thing you'd do here, you don't want to get involved with that sort of shit.

Right. That's like with Jadakiss and Fat Joe and them going to make records with Ja, they're making a decision at that point, cause they come from environments similar to where I come from, so they're gonna know that when you stand next to a person that close to try and support their project at that point... for me, that indicated to me that they would be allies in that situation.

So they've chosen their friends and you've chosen yours...

Right.

"WELL, YOU KNOW IT'S LIKE GTA: SAN ANDREAS. YOU KNOW WHAT I MEAN"

Andre Emerson, Producer of 50 Cent: Bulletproof

Hyper: One of the most interesting aspects of the game is the music mixing element. Tell us what role it plays in the game and how it works.

Andre Emerson: 50 has a home studio in his apartment in the game. There you can mix exclusive new freestyles with new beats from the hottest producers in hip hop.

How would you describe the gameplay in Bulletproof? Is it free roaming like Grand Theft Auto or more linear like something like Streets of Rage?

We've crafted a very strong narrative to drive the player through the experience. As a result, the freedom and creativity comes in the form of how you will approach each situation rather than where you can wander.

Can you give us a rundown on how the game is structured?

It takes places over several nights in NYC. It is chapter-based and driven by an amazing crime-epic that features over an hour of cinematics.

How much of the gameplay is hand to hand and how much is using weapons?

Bulletproof is a third-person action game, with FPS-style aiming. There are various physical moves/attacks as well that involve Counter-kills, Human Shield, Silent attacks and the use of mobile cover objects. 50 can grab virtually anything with wheels and use it for cover and/or shove and crush enemies with it. It's quite special.

Will there be any squad-based gameplay? With members of G-Unit for example?

50 will work with G-Unit during certain points in the story. You don't have to control/command anyone, but you will have to work together.

Tell us about working with Terry Winter. Is there any cross-over in the settings/stories for the game and the film?

Terry is an Emmy-Award winning writer for the now classic, HBO's The Sopranos and he also wrote the screenplay for 50's forthcoming film. 50 introduced us to Terry earlier last year and working with him has been nothing short of incredible. He's crafted one of the best crime-epics in recent memory with Bulletproof. The game and film storylines are completely different, yet complimentary coming from the same writer.

AND THERE'S A MOVIE IN THE PIPELINE TOO...

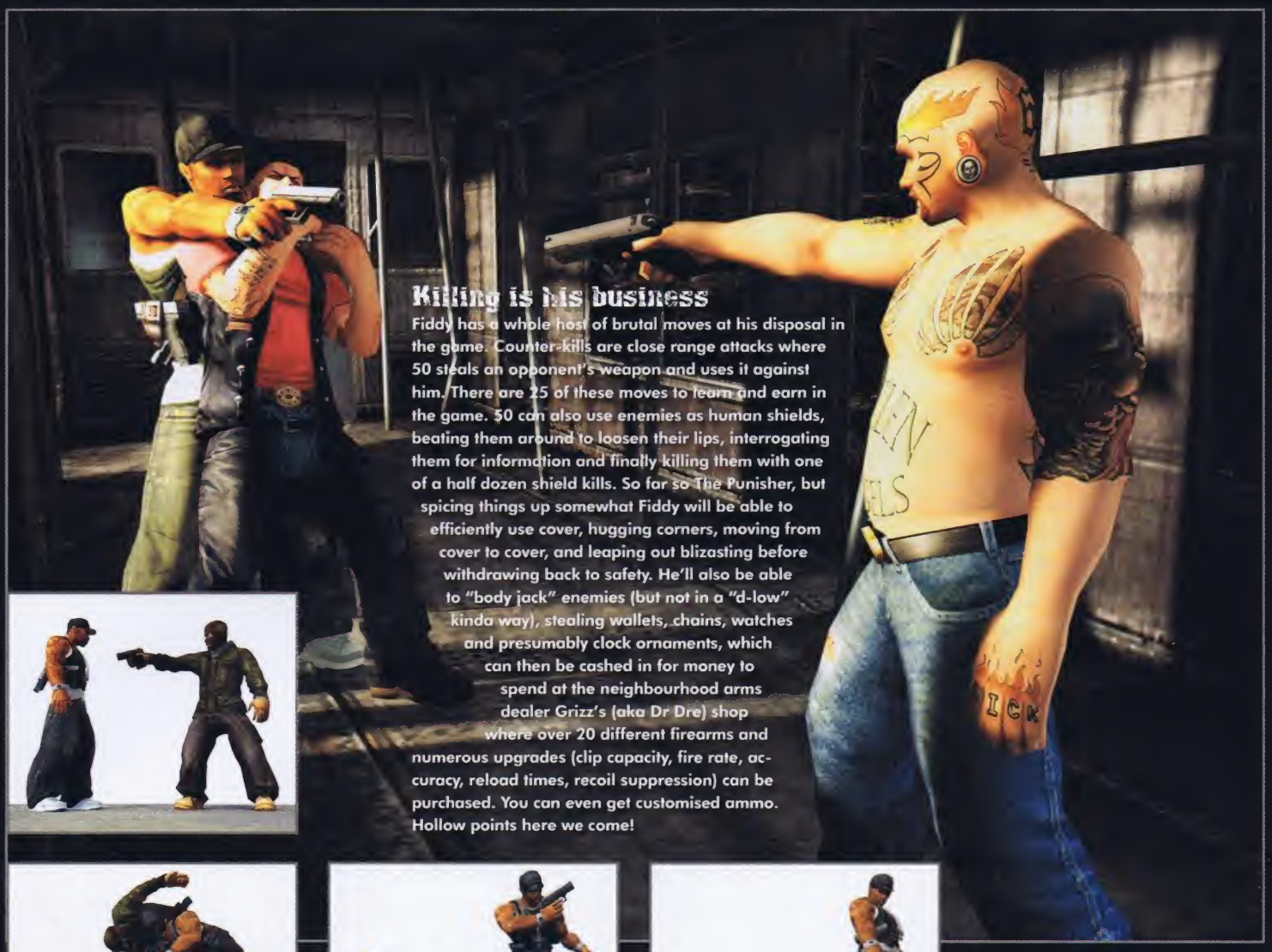
At the time of our interview, 50 Cent is on location in Toronto for a new movie he is filming, which is based loosely on actual events in his life, think Eminem in 8 Mile. Like Bulletproof, The Soprano's writer Terry Winter has penned the script. Here's what 50 has to say about the acting experience.

ON THE SET: "It's kinda weird watching actors. Cause you know actors gotta find themselves, and find the characters and they'll make references to things and I think they forget that it's loosely based on my life at some point. Cause they'll speak about as if it's... You see, they're so familiar with doing projects that were just made up, that they'll speak about it freely or fluently and they forget that the person that they're actually talking about is me."

ACTING AS THERAPY? "I think it might be helping me in this role. The fact that I can actually identify with the experience. I mean if you had to research what it would feel like to experience anything like that, you have to just imagine what that was like, whereas I have a reference to it, in my head."

ON OTHER ACTORS "I think a lot of them are crazy. Those actors I think they're schizophrenic, you know I think they're schizo ... If you can be more than one person. You know they say it takes 30 days to make a habit, like if you tryin' to be on a diet or something, like it takes 30 days, now it's a habit.

So if you're researching a character, you spend a large portion of time - eight hours, 16 hours a day sometimes - in character. Like you mean to tell me that at some point you just don't take on a little bit of that character? Later in your life being just be doing a little bit like that character? Probably out of nowhere for no reason."



Killing is his business

Fiddy has a whole host of brutal moves at his disposal in the game. Counter-kills are close range attacks where 50 steals an opponent's weapon and uses it against him. There are 25 of these moves to learn and earn in the game. 50 can also use enemies as human shields, beating them around to loosen their lips, interrogating them for information and finally killing them with one of a half dozen shield kills. So far so The Punisher, but spicing things up somewhat Fiddy will be able to efficiently use cover, hugging corners, moving from cover to cover, and leaping out blizasting before withdrawing back to safety. He'll also be able to "body jack" enemies (but not in a "d-low" kinda way), stealing wallets, chains, watches and presumably clock ornaments, which can then be cashed in for money to spend at the neighbourhood arms dealer Grizz's (aka Dr Dre) shop where over 20 different firearms and numerous upgrades (clip capacity, fire rate, accuracy, reload times, recoil suppression) can be purchased. You can even get customised ammo. Hollow points here we come!

Is there a danger that you're simply glamorising the thug life?

This is an action game for a mature audience. I wouldn't say we're glamorizing anything.

Bulletproof is, in some ways, forging new ground as far as cross media pollination is concerned. Do you see Bulletproof as an important title for the game industry moving forward?

Bulletproof is the ultimate fusion of gaming and music. It will set a standard for future games. We feature over 3 hours of past, present and exclusive 50 Cent / G-Unit music, a catalog of his music videos, participation from G-Unit, Eminem and Dr. Dre - rooted by a deep third-person action shooter, and all framed by Terry's modern-classic crime epic. It's the definitive 50 Cent experience.

How much of a role has 50 had in the creation of the game?

He's been involved from day one and continues to be. 50's engaged in the content, look, story and game mechanics. He's provided us with hours of voice over work and exclusive music content. He's amazing to work with.

Did 50 do any of the motion capture for the game?

He offered, but we choose to hand animate the entire game for a stylized art direction.

How much involvement (if any) have Dre and Eminem had with the game?

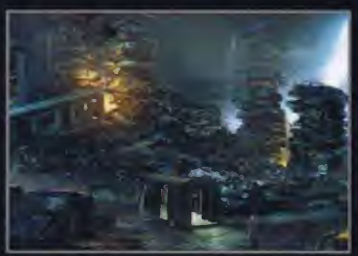
Em and Dre play starring roles in the screenplay.

We've heard that your chief AI coder came from Crytek. What has he been able to bring to the team?

We've got amazing AI logic/pathfinding up and running. It's changed the way we're thinking of future development. Our system is simple, elegant and easy to use. With very simple behavior modification, we can have enemies perform deep actions that previously would have been hard coded to create the desired effect. The best part is that all of it is decision-based. You'll be able to play a chapter numerous times and get very different results.

What will Bulletproof have to offer gamers who aren't fans of 50 Cent?

A deep third-person shooter, with rich AI, diverse play mechanics, incredible visuals and an amazing crime story to drive progress. While there are numerous 'extras' for 50 fans, this game will be exciting for any action game/movie fan. <<



"BULLETPROOF IS THE ULTIMATE FUSION OF GAMING AND MUSIC. IT WILL SET A STANDARD"

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DRAGONSHARD

Systems: **PC** ■ Category: **Strategy-RPG** ■ Players: **1-Multi** ■ Developer: **Liquid Entertainment** ■ Available: **Late 2005**

There seems to be a growing sentiment recently that the real-time strategy genre is stagnating, with each new game seemingly offering the same resource collecting, fortress building, war-waging action as the last. Something that Liquid Entertainment's Ed Kaminski knows too well. "We knew that there were a lot of people out there that thought the RTS genre is dried up." says Kaminski, "People think that there is only one way to do an RTS game, but me and the people I work with don't think that is necessarily true. We can take the rules of RTS and bend them, or even just break them." Kaminski and Liquid's latest game, Dragonshard, certainly looks like a rule breaker.

DUNGEONS AND DRAGONS: UNDERGROUND

The first tip-off that Dragonshard isn't quite your run of the mill RTS is its two distinct levels of gameplay. Above ground the game plays more or less like a traditional real-time strategy game, but should you choose to travel underground a role player quest with all the style of a pen and paper D&D adventure awaits. Although the strategy side of Dragonshard still has plenty of resource collection and point-and-click carnage it also looks to be trying out plenty of underused ideas. Your champion characters for example, are upgradeable and remain in your army from mission to mission, so instead of starting on every map with a new batch of soldiers fresh off the conveyor belt you'll have characters that you've invested hours of effort into, and who you definitely care if they live or die. The fortress building in Dragonshard is also an admirable attempt to differentiate itself from the crowd, with no tech-tree to stop you from building whatever structures you desire. Building is limited to within the walls of your castle though, so careful planning is required so you don't run out of room.

To pay for all these buildings you'll of course need cash. Above and below ground you can collect either gold or magical crystals called dragonshards that act as the game's main currency, and anything collected on either level, including treasure, weapons, armour or magical artefacts immediately goes into a shared inventory, so everyone in your army can benefit from it, and not just the adventurer that stumbled across it.

[above] Something about bestiality?

[above] You spin me right round baby

[up] Beauty's in the eye of the beholder

Another interesting inclusion in the game is the addition of areas called places of power. "In the simplest terms a place of power is an area on the map that is special," says Kaminski, "and if your forces control the area your army is granted a special blessing." Some of these blessings that your army can acquire include a reduction in the cost of casting spells, increased health, stronger attacks, better defence and more speed, making guarding the places of power a highly beneficial tactic.

According to Ed Kaminski the places of power will also play a significant role in Dragonshard's multiplayer matches. "Usually when you play a multiplayer RTS game, it's just the person that destroys all the other players who wins. We are looking to include more options for players when playing Dragonshard in multiplayer" says Kaminski. "The places of power is one way we

WHAT WE'D LIKE TO SEE: The promise of both an expansive real-time strategy and an involving role playing experience in a single game to be fulfilled.

[above] Many shards but no dragon

[above] Johnny Cash reference?

can do this, as players can set up a match where the winner has to hold the all places of power for a set time."

Along with this "hold the hill" type game there are other multiplayer scenarios planned including a "kill the keep" match, where each army has one special building, the keep, and the winner is the first one to topple the structure.

IT'S DAMP AND SMELLS BAD DOWN THERE

The beneath ground role-playing sections are just as you'd expect from a Dungeons and Dragons game, with your party of adventurers wandering the depths of a dank cavern in the search for riches, weapons stashes, and magical artefacts. Along the way there will also be numerous side quests for you to entangle yourself in. One such sub-quest we were shown involved a wizard who had wandered into a trap in one of the game's many catacombs. After talking to the imprisoned wizard you discover that there is a lever nearby which may or may not release him, and you have the option of either finding it and pulling it or leaving him to his fate. Pulling the lever of course doesn't open his cage, it's a trap and it instead opens a large secret door revealing the Merilith, a massive female monster that takes up a good quarter of the screen and has six arms, each holding a sword that is at least the size of a small aircraft.

"What's cool about an enemy like the Merilith is that usually when units fight in an RTS game it's only a one-on-one fight" says Ed Kaminski, "but that's not so in Dragonshard. All of the Merilith's six arms can target and attack a different enemy... this is something we wanted to do to really bring the creatures from the Dungeons and Dragons monster manuals to life "

Other classic Dungeons and Dragons monsters also make appearances in Dragonshard including the ever-lovable Gelatinous Cube, which will swallow and dissolve your soldiers in its transparent body at its leisure, and the Beholder whose multiple eyes will rain showers of hot laser death upon your adventuring party. The most intimidating creature of all the ones we were shown however was the screen-filling Horned Devil, a gigantic bipedal dragon that carries a nasty looking chain whip, and you don't need too much imagination to guess who he wants to flog with it.

Dragonshard is graphically similar in style to Liquid Entertainment's previous release, War of the Ring, if not significantly superior. "We've tried to be extremely detailed in our maps," says Kaminski, "and since you are able to zoom in and rotate the camera we've had to made the world as immersive as possible and include all the little details."

If Dragonshard makes good on its potential, it may well end being one of the most innovative new RTS's we've seen in quite some time. <<

GUARDING THE PLACES OF POWER WILL BE A HIGHLY BENEFICIAL TACTIC

[Up] Dear diary. I suck, signed Cam

WHAT WE'D LIKE TO SEE: What we'd like to see: Intelligent use of physics and destructible environments!

SERIOUS SAM 2

Available on **PC** ■ Category: **FPS** ■ Players: **1-Multi** ■ Developer: **Croteam** ■ Available: **TBA**

» A couple of years ago a little game called Serious Sam came out and took our offices by storm, mostly because the name is something of a misnomer. Serious Sam was not serious at all - it was a blast from the past, a balls to the wall action fest that called to mind the hallowed name of Doom by hurling hundreds of enemies at the player in never ending waves of FPS aggression. Then came Serious Sam: Second Encounter, a game that many felt was a sequel to the original but was in fact a stand alone expansion. Now, years later the promised sequel is on its way and from what we've seen it's going to be a doozy.

Hyper managed to get its hot little hands on some demo footage of Serious Sam 2: We Don't Have a Subtitle Yet but Probably Will by Time of Release and things are looking sweet. As the Eastern European man pretending to be Mr Movie Phone doing the voiceover stated in the demo, Serious Sam 2 will run using the new Serious engine which has been developed by Croteam and is newer than the last engine. Bad English aside the new engine looks pretty damn sweet and is supposedly 100 times more powerful than the original Serious engine. Along with the new power comes real-time dynamic lighting, environmental mapping, bump mapping and a fully integrated physics engine. A few quick demos showed the physics engine in action with corpses ragdolling convincingly as they were thrown off things and dropped down pachinko style slaloms. There has been no indication as to whether physics will play a role in actual gameplay as yet but with the success of Half-Life 2 and the integration of physics into core gameplay we wouldn't be at all surprised to see something similar in SS2 - the fact that we have been told that there are undisclosed new weapons leads us to believe some type of physics gun may be involved. Fingers crossed.

On the features side, Serious Sam 2 promises to contain quite a bit of gameplay, with 24 huge levels (and we do mean HUGE - the flyovers were really impressive) spread over seven environments including jungle, swamps, frozen tundra, futuristic cities and a volcanic planet. Players will be able to pick up and use 14 weapons including old favourites like the mini-gun and cannon as well as "humourous" new additions such as the Klodovik Bird. We have no idea what that is either aside from the fact that it is apparently quite funny. Dual Wielding is the new black so players will be able to do that too, though at this time we have no idea as to which weapons will be dual wieldable. All the guns in the world would be for naught if there was nothing to shoot at so SS2 comes packed with 40+ enemies ranging from old favourites (like the screaming bombers who have been transformed from decapitated suicide bombers into bobble heads for this outing) to some new additions including what appear to be wind up rhinos, creepy-arse spider things and broomstick riding witches. Five huge bosses will also make life tough for the player. Enemy AI does not seem to have developed past the "run screaming at the player and try to kill them" stage but considering that was one of the elements that made the original such a fun game we wouldn't have it any other way.

[sp] Big Trouble in Big China

[sp] Frodo takes Mt Doom by force

THE NEW ENGINE IS SUPPOSEDLY 100 TIMES MORE POWERFUL THAN THE ORIGINAL

WHAT WE'D LIKE TO SEE: Less scripted sequences and more emergent turmoil.

THE OUTFIT

Systems: **Xbox 360** ■ Category: **Third person action** ■ Players: **1-Multi** ■ Developer: **Relic Entertainment** ■ Available: **November 2005**

The flood of games set during the second world war continues unabated. The Outfit from Relic Entertainment is the latest, and from what we've been told it sounds like it's attempting to unify the squad-based strategy of titles like Brothers in Arms or Full Spectrum Warrior with the cinematic intensity of Call of Duty. Not a bad idea, and the fact that it's being developed for Xbox 360 and looks stunning doesn't hurt either.

VIVA LA RESISTANCE

The Outfit takes place after D-Day. French resistance operatives alert Allied forces of General von Beck, a rogue Nazi SS officer who has allegedly been brutally killing civilians in the region. Two squads are sent in behind enemy lines to put a stop to him, but the plot thickens when it's revealed that von Beck wants to defect and that it's Beck's chief aid General Meyer that's behind the deaths. It's now up to you to not only survive increasingly demanding battles and situations, but to actually help von Beck escape.

What this boils down to is a third person tactical shooter. You'll be in control of two squads of five men with direct control over the squad leader in each, and the ability to switch between squad leaders on the fly. There isn't much information on how commands will be given to your squad mates at this stage, just that they'll be more than capable on their own, instinctively finding cover, returning fire and providing covering fire. Hopefully Relic will incorporate an intuitive command system like Brothers in Arms. We also know that each squad leader will have their own specific skills, and presumably you'll be able to choose the makeup of each squad - do you need scouts, engineers or riflemen? Then there'll be your tactical use of each squad - when to send one squad to flank the enemy, when to split them up to achieve different objectives, and when to combine your firepower.

Mission objectives will include search and destroy, capturing key locations, reconnaissance and rescue missions. In an interesting touch, completing objectives will net you experience points, which can apparently be spent as you go, so we can look forward to upgrading weapons, acquiring fixed position weapons and vehicles like tanks, and even getting the ability to call in air strikes.

As you can see from the screenshots The Outfit is no slouch in the visual department. Everything from the long grass at your feet to the hills in the distance look organic and richly detailed. Better still, Relic are saying that the environments will be interactive and destructible, using real physics and damage modeling, a claim which we've heard plenty of times before, but which we always have our fingers crossed will be delivered. The current generation of WWII games rely heavily on scripted sequences, creating the illusion of real-time destruction, but why wait around for the game to tell you when a building gets blown up? Get your bazooka in hand and do it yourself! Well, that's the theory, and in addition to making games more immersive and fun, would also open up new strategic depth. It's due out in November, so we should have more on The Outfit soon.

LIFE AND DEATH. IT'S NOTHING BUT A GAME...

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WHAT WE'D LIKE TO SEE:
More games based on non-Judge Dredd related 2000AD series. A Strontium Dog game could be interesting...

[below] Soldier being attacked by comic

ROGUE TROOPER

Systems: **PS2, Xbox** ■ Category: **Stealth-action** ■ Players: **1** ■ Developer: **Rebellion** ■ Available: **Late 2005**

As dedicated as 2000AD fans are, even the most ardent would have to confess that the Judge Dredd license needs a bit of a lie down. After all, 2000AD has more than two decades worth of other comics that deserve a shot at being turned into videogames, yet all we seem to receive is mediocre games like 2003's Dredd Vs Death. Thankfully Rebellion, the game developer that now owns the entire 2000AD back catalogue, is finally giving us something less dreddful in the form of stealth-action game Rogue Trooper.

THAT'S RIGHT, I SAID "DREDDFUL"

Long time 2000AD readers will immediately recognise that blue skinned soldier as Rogue Trooper himself, who first appeared in the comic series of the same name in 1981, and who has featured sporadically in the pages of 2000AD ever since. Newcomers to the series shouldn't be discouraged though, you won't have to track down any twenty-year-old back issues of the magazine to understand the game's plot as it takes up from the very first Rogue Trooper story. Set on the war-ravaged planet of Nu Earth, a world so desolate from centuries of conflict that no human can breath its toxic air, Rogue Trooper is the last remnant of a battalion of genetically engineered infantrymen specifically designed to fight on the planet's barren surface. Rogue is now on the revenge trail, determined to give the turncoat that set up the demise of his squad his comeuppance. To aid him in his task he has the memory chips of three of his fallen comrades implanted in each of his pieces of equipment; his gun, helmet and backpack. These chips are the digitised minds of ex-Squad members Gunnar, Helm and Bagman, and each can be used to unique effect during the missions, so while Rogue Trooper may be the only controllable character you essentially have a squad of soldiers to command. This fact looks to be the game's main differentiating feature, as each of your squad mates has their own special abilities and personality. Bagman for example can collect raw materials found in the environment and can use them to manufacture new weapons, and Rogue's helmet, the imaginatively named Helm, can hack into computer systems.

We were also promised that the game would be far less linear than most third-person action games, with at least five different ways to complete any one section. A few examples of the different techniques that would be possible include taking the direct approach with a frontal assault as well as sneaking, but also numerous techniques that are only possible with the help of your computerised companions. You can for example set up a trap with your rifle, Gunnar, and lure your enemies into your ambush, or use him as a diversion while you infiltrate deeper into enemy territory.

Although still quite early, the game is graphically quite impressive, and more importantly it looks to be painstakingly authentic to the original comic series, something that should hold it in good stead with 2000AD fans upon its release later in the year.

WHAT WE'D LIKE TO SEE: Some Herb Alpert and the Tijuana Brass (of "Spanish Flea" fame) on the game's soundtrack!

TOTAL OVERDOSE

Systems: **PC, PS2, Xbox** ■ Category: **Third Person Shooter** ■ Players: **1** ■ Developer: **Deadline Games** ■ Available: **August 2005**

» We don't mind telling you that prior to seeing Total Overdose in action we were sceptical. The outline we'd been given was barebones at best, simply stating that you played a DEA agent eradicating Mexican drug cartels with extreme prejudice. This combined with the game's generic drug-themed title caused images of a game akin to Midway's dire drug-dealer-murder-sim NARC to form in the collective Hyper Crew imagination... and that's not a good thing. Thankfully Total Overdose avoids a similar fate, and instead looks to be a tequila-fuelled combination of humour and action that's hotter than a tamale!

BURRITO FLAVOURED SAN ANDREAS?

"The game's style and atmosphere has been directly taken from the cinema" says Fabien Rossini, product manager for SCi, the game's publisher, "We hope that Total Overdose will be to the gaming industry what Robert Rodriguez or Quentin Tarantino are to film".

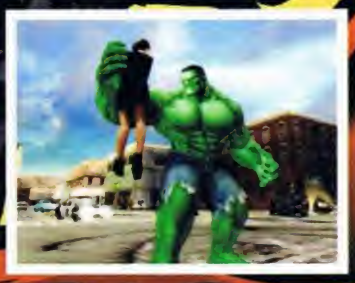
The Rodriguez influence is hardly subtle, with references to his El Mariachi trilogy of films surfacing at almost every turn. The game's protagonist for example is a Banderas-esque outlaw named Ramiro Cruz who returns to Mexico to settle a score; revenge for his murdered father. Of course, the local drugsters won't go down without a fight (do they ever?), so Ramiro is resigned to killing every single one of them, each time in more stylish and thrilling ways.

The ensuing run and gun action could be best compared to that of Max Payne. Amusingly enough Ramiro can even manipulate time, slowing it down for some bullet-time gunplay or reversing it too. Don't ask us how he can do it though, as the game doesn't even attempt a logical explanation. He just can - because it's fun.

These are the kind of inclusions that indicate that Total Overdose doesn't quite take itself seriously. The game's dedication to silliness is again typified by the completely unnecessary "hat-catching" game, where hats can be knocked from enemy's heads and caught on your own - for bonus style points. If you're particularly good at it you can end up wearing multiple hats at the same time, for that fashionable tower-of-hats look that's so hot right now.

The humour has even infiltrated the game's more violent pursuits with a selection of unlockable attacks, fittingly called "loco" moves. Among the most humorous is the piñata bomb, which once tossed makes nearby bad guys run to the paper-maché donkey, squealing girlishly with glee, only to have it explode taking everyone within its radius to a fiery grave. Other notable loco attacks include a masked Mexican wrester who fights by your side when called, an exploding sombrero that can be thrown like a Frisbee, and the old faithful machine gun inside a guitar case, something that will again be spookily familiar to Robert Rodriguez fans.

Overdose also takes substantial inspiration from the seemingly inescapable Grand Theft Auto series, with cars, bikes and trucks to steal, and a "freestyle" game design. We'll find out soon enough whether Total Overdose is more than just a burrito flavour San Andreas when it launches in August. «



WHAT WE'D LIKE TO SEE:
For the love of all that's holy will someone make a good Daredevil game to shut Wilks up?

THE INCREDIBLE HULK: Ultimate Destruction

Systems: **Xbox/PS2/GCN** ■ Category: **Smash!** ■ Players: **1** ■ Developer: **Radical** ■ Available: **Late 2005**

You probably all know by now that I'm (Wilks) something of a comic book nerd. I love larger than life super adventures. On the other hand the only time I've ever really had love for The Hulk is in the Ultimates as he is credited with one of the greatest lines ever put in a speech bubble, "Hulk Horny!", the greatness of which was exacerbated by the fact that he later stated that The Hulk was going to tear Freddie Prinze Jr. a new one. Aside from that brief and shining moment of comedic genius I've never had much time for the cranky green giant. I mean, what can he do? He's big. He's green. He's hella strong. He's pretty much impervious to anything smaller than a tank. He can jump really, really far. He can smash stuff. To me that's just not enough to make a compelling comic book character.

[above] Hulk like Mechwarrior!

GENUINELY GOOD, NO REALLY

On the other hand, it's the perfect combination to make what is shaping up to be one of the few genuinely really good superhero games. The problem with most superhero games is that the player never really feels all that superheroic. Either they feel as though they are playing some other type of game (3D brawler, shooter, button masher or highly realistic torture simulator in the case of Catwoman) or the obstacles they face are too small - no superhero should ever be killed by a faceless goon. How gypped would you feel if you were a 12 foot tall machine of mass destruction and some guy on the street can take you out with a blow to the head. This does not happen in The Incredible Hulk: Ultimate Destruction - in it Hulk is a nigh on unstoppable force of destruction, no simple cranial trauma is going to put him down for the count.

As you may have guessed, players take the role of the Hulk. That's it. No crappy Bruce Banner stealth levels. No puncing around in human form to look for scientific equipment. None of that drek. Ultimate Destruction, as the title suggests, is all about ripping shit up, and the green dynamo does it in style. From the outset, even before purchasing any of the 150 odd moves available in the game, Hulk feels like a super-being. He can pound across the ground shrugging off gunfire, he can charge about shoulder barging anything smaller than a building out of his way without slowing. He can pick up and throw just about anything and if he can't find anything to throw he can smash the crap out of anything in his way and make a projectile. And he can jump. Boy can he jump - hold down the jump button and charge it and he can spring multiple stories into the air or cover hundreds of metres in a single bound. What's more, when he hits the ground he creates a shockwave, knocking down and smashing anything in a radius. Even better is the fact that when Hulk is charging nothing in the terrain can stop him - he'll just run straight up the side of a building if you come across one. Combine this with a charged jump and you have some seriously fun - and freeform - movement.

[above] Hulk like Windsor Pilates!

[above] Hulk wear you as hat!

[above] Hulk like classic movie tributes

[above] Hulk can't think up caption!

[Hulk] Large. Green. Stupid.

[Text] Talking like moron hurt brain

WHAT WE'VE SEEN OF THE GAMEPLAY IS RAMPAGE MEETS GTA

The Hulk wouldn't be the cranky moss coloured lunkhead comic book fans have known and loved for decades if he wasn't good at kicking arse and taking names (well, he would take names if he was smart enough to remember them). From what we've seen of the code, Ultimate Destruction has a pretty damn impressive fighting engine with moves ranging from simple punch/kick combos through to sonic claps, earth-shaking ground pounds and air dashes. Pretty much all of the attacks can be powered up by holding down the attack button/buttons to unleash a more devastating or effective version of the attack. Although we have not been able to try it as yet, Vivendi assures us that with a little practise players should be able to juggle enemies and bosses, destroy vast tracts of land and otherwise have a jolly good time. Other attacks include the ability to "weaponise" parts of the terrain - turn a compact car into a pair of metal gloves, turn a missile pod from a helicopter into a convenient ammo holder or turn a ball and chain from a wrecking ball into a whip!

HULK VS ANGRY DAD

The best way to describe what we've seen of the gameplay is Rampage meets GTA - players are given a massive living city to roam around and break but can (and will) opt to start story based missions which further the tale of Banner trying to cure himself of the Hulk, smash some evil villains (including a very cool looking Abomination) and come to terms with his inner demons. The story missions we've tried all had a similar style of play - tear arse around the city, break some stuff and get away back to the church, Banner's hideout. Although some of the missions did feel a little repetitive in style, the joy of running around the city and actually feeling like a super being more than made up for it. If this is the type of quality we can expect from Marvel producing games based on their own characters we can't wait to see both a finished product and what they have in store for us next. Fingers crossed for Daredevil. Or Iron Man. Or Doctor Strange. Or The Ultimates. Or Silver Surfer. Or maybe one of the countless other great characters in their stable. Aside from Razorback - a mutant truck driver who wears a pigs head for a hat - he just plain sucks.

>> MINI MANIA Like the GTA series, The Incredible Hulk: Ultimate Destruction features a number of unlockable missions and mini games. The ones we've seen have been a great deal of fun. Mini games we've played so far include: a race, a simple event transformed into something great by the ability to run up sheer surfaces; Urban Golf, in which the Hulk must bash an enormous golf ball through the city to the hole in as few hits as possible; and one very difficult and extremely addictive one in which we had to throw vehicles onto the roof of a building.

WHAT WE'D LIKE TO SEE:
To be truly historically accurate the Japanese side should have mechs added to their selection of vehicles.

BATTLESTATIONS MIDWAY

Systems: **PC, PS2, Xbox** ■ Category: **Action** ■ Players: **1-Multi** ■ Developer: **Mithis Entertainment** ■ Available: **Mid 2005**

Although games journalists are prone to bellyaching about the sheer volume of World War II themed games seemingly arriving every minute, there's no denying that there is a certain appeal about the era. It can just be a little dismaying to see product after product that has obviously been made with little initiative or effort to combine this intriguing setting with the kind of original gameplay befitting of it. No such thing could be said about Hungarian developers Mithis Entertainment though, as their latest game, Battlestations Midway, looks to be one of the more resourceful uses of the WWII theme we've seen in some time.

AFFLECK SPOOGE

The game begins at Pearl Harbour, December 7th 1941. If you even remotely know your history, or if you've seen the terrible Ben Affleck film, you'll know it as the day of infamy that brought the U.S. of A. into World War II; the Japanese bombing of Pearl Harbour. You take the role of an American PT-boat Commander Harry Walker, and from the opening level where he survives the devastating surprise attack Walker is catapulted into the Pacific conflict. Through eleven levels, each based on historic encounters, you must fly, float and submarine your way to the decisive battle of the Pacific conflict, the battle of Midway.

"New concepts are what I'm interested in, I like to create games that are different." says Zsolt "Nyúl" Nyulászi, the creative director of Battlestations Midway. "Midway is an action game that is a lot of fun, but meanwhile Midway also has a lot of depth to the gameplay. It gives the player a huge amount of freedom... and from the first mission to the last there's always something new to see and do. Which is a rare quality in a game today."

Battlestations does indeed seem to be a rare breed of game, combining arcade style flying and shooting gameplay, with subtle elements of strategy, all put to the test with three different kinds of vehicles; planes, boats and submarines. You have a maximum of about 30 ships and planes amongst your forces at any one time, although you can only personally control one vehicle at a time, switching between any other craft on the battlefield on the fly. Its only real equivalent would be something along the lines of Battlefield 1942, although Midway is far more concerned with what goes on at sea and in the air rather than on the infantry frontlines. These three quite dissimilar styles of vehicular gameplay look to be the game's defining feature, with each craft having its own unique advantages and disadvantages. Planes for example, are fast and agile but relatively flimsy, destroyers and battleships on the other hand are slow but devastatingly powerful.

Each of the game's vessels also have their own sophisticated

[above] Not Pictured: The other half

The only way is [Up] Baby!

[above] GTN: Grand Theft Naval

[above] Coles red spot special

THE DETAILS OF ALL THE MODELS... ARE HISTORICALLY ACCURATE

[above] He's got some size issues

[above] Better than barrel duty

damage models. Holes can be blown out of the hull, the engine can break down, cannon turrets can collapse, and fires can even break out on the deck. Thankfully each ship has a team of engineers working around the clock to repair the damage, with each of their priorities able to be set via the game's convenient "repair screen". These realistic damage models should be important to the player from both an offensive and defensive perspective, as the same kinds of damage that can be inflicted upon your ships, can also be exploited for use on the enemy.

If you don't feel like beating up on the Japanese with your newfound knowledge of their vessels weaknesses however, the game will also be giving you the opportunity to control the Japanese military in opposition to the American and Allied forces, and we all know how fun it can be to play the bad guy.

FULLY ARTICULATED RUDDERS

For a game that spends most of its time above, in, or under the Pacific Ocean you'd expect some high quality water physics in Battlestations Midway, and that's exactly what this game delivers, with varying weather effects ranging from clear and calm to rain, fog and lashing stormy seas. The condition of the ocean can even affect the performance of your seafaring vehicles, with conditions like rough seas being particularly detrimental to weapon accuracy, as the undulating waves will move your aiming reticule around far more than on a calm day. The amount of detail Mithis has managed to put into each of the ships and planes is also quite an impressive feat. Everything from the planes' fully articulated rudders right through to the animated pilots and their gunners sitting in their cockpits clearly visible through the transparent glass has a high level of visual polish that makes the game a pleasure to look at, and according to Nyúl, the vehicles in the game look just as the real ones did in 1941.

"The details of the models, how the ships and planes look, are absolutely historically accurate" assures Nyulászi. "We specifically chose our lead game designer, Rephix (Botond "Rephix" Szalacsi), because his previous profession was an aircraft technician, so he knows a lot about the aircraft, flying and in general how things work on a plane."

Of the 40 different warships, 27 combat planes and 5 submarines available in the game you'll have the likes of destroyers, battleships, aircraft carriers, torpedo planes, bombers, dog fighters, recognisance aircraft and many more at your disposal. All of these craft do control surprisingly authentically, although not so authentically as to ruin the game's fast and furious arcade action.

"We did a lot of research to make it accurate... but the ships in the game are not going to be exactly as they were historically because a battleship could fire up to twenty miles away, and that wouldn't be very fun in a game, to shoot a target that is even beyond the horizon, which a real battleship could do. So that had to be changed" says Nyulászi, "but the balance of the game reflects the real World War II environment."

The game's imminent release means we won't have to wait too long to find out just how well balanced Battlestations Midway will be. <<

WHAT WE'D LIKE TO SEE: Many people didn't like the darker, more "mature" Prince from Warrior Within... yet now we have him AND a "Dark Prince". Sounds like a whole lot of angst. Let's hope they get it right.

[below] Ubisoft's headquarters

PRINCE OF PERSIA 3

Systems: **GCN, PC, PS2, Xbox** ■ Category: **Action platformer** ■ Players: **1** ■ Developer: **Ubisoft Montreal** ■ Available: **November 2005**

Will the Prince ever learn? The back story to the Prince of Persia series might as well be released as a textbook called "Time Travel 101: Why Not to Mess With the Flow of Time". Let's recap shall we? In the first game, the Prince releases the sands of time and spends the entire game trying to close the hourglass in order to stop the raid on the Maharajah's palace. In the second game, a beastie known as the Dahaka pursues the Prince to punish him for screwing with the flow of time in the events of the first game. The Prince, ever the brainy chap, refuses to take his medicine and instead decides to stop the sands of time from being created in the first place. Of course, in trying to prevent this he unwittingly does the opposite, releasing the sands. The Prince finds another workaround to prevent this, ultimately preventing the events of the first game from ever happening, but at what cost? In Prince 3 we find out.

[above] Whip it good...

On his return to Babylon with Kaileena, the Prince finds the city in ruin - ravaged by war and in a timeline where the beautiful past of Babylon he remembers never existed. History has been changed... and the Prince is no longer alone. In the same world is the Dark Prince, a power hungry version of the Prince who wants to rule all of Babylon and whose spirit will gradually possess the Prince. The Prince's father seeks to kill the Dark Prince to regain power, but who should wander into the palace looking like the Dark Prince? Yep, Vanilla Prince, who soon becomes a fugitive on the streets of Babylon. In yet another tragic twist, Kaileena sacrifices herself to once again unleash the sands of time, giving the Prince a slim chance of survival, and the possibility of bringing order back to this chaotic world.

THE FRESH PRINCE OF BABYLON

One of the most interesting gameplay ramifications of the third game's story is that you'll actually get to play as both the Prince and the Dark Prince, and they'll have very different fighting styles and attitudes. Alongside this, Ubi Montreal have expanded the freeform fighting mechanics, rebuilt all the enemy AI, introduced new sands powers (although they haven't revealed what they'll be yet), incorporated a new stealth art for one-shot sneak kills and by the sound of things have given the Prince some kind of chain whip or something similar as you can now "strangle enemies from afar with the deadly Daggertail".

Much of the action will take place on and above the streets of Babylon. You can expect thrilling rooftop chases and battles, and moving stealthily through dark, atmosphere drenched backstreets. What we're hoping for above all, however, is a game that has the fighting depth of Warrior Within paired with the emphasis on out and out acrobatics that won us over in the original. Not to mention a Prince we can more readily empathise with, which, given the split personality good/bad motif, is certainly something Ubisoft Montreal will be exploring. More on Prince 3 soon.

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profile: david perry

shiny entertainment

David Perry is one of the most well known members of the videogame development community. Over the course of more than two decades in the industry, Perry has been one of its most outspoken voices, not just evangelising videogames as a medium, but also looking to steer the future direction of games and game development. He's uniquely qualified to answer the "Last Frontiers" questions we posed last month, but when we received his responses, they were so in-depth that we've decided to present them to you in full. Gamers and Gamerettes, we present to you, the thoughts and ideas of Mr. David Perry...

HYPER: 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?

David Perry: To be honest with you, the next generation of video game machines feature just a bunch more pixels on screen, and faster processors. I can promise you that just about every team out there will bring each machine to its knees day one, then spend the next 5 years working out how to use its power more efficiently. So what excites me is what NEW challenges Programmers will be willing to accept, and what also excites me is finally Game Directors or Lead Designers will feel it's time to start busting out the ideas they've been saving in their closets "for someday when a game console can do this stuff!".

Personally, I've been thinking about the future and have been making a list of the things that I expect to see evolving over the next generation (and probably the generation or two after that.) I plan to keep my list updated, so please feel free to check back with me to see what has been achieved, what I've added and what we're still waiting for!

1) **PHYSICS** - Where 'everything' begins to function. So you jump into a ceiling fan and it chops your head off, however if you stick a steel bar into the ceiling fan, the blades in the fan shatter. Not because the designer planned for those two, but because the properties of the fan are correct. So if you threw paint up there to test it, the paint would splatter on the walls correctly. So the rules of the world are more real, allowing gamers to "play" more with the environment and its contents. We will be emulating everything you can see, touch & interact with, from grass, to fluids, to clothing, to hair, to raindrops, to air flow, even light beams and dust particles... They will all be mastered and simulated in real-time. Why should you care? Because a very valuable element of playing games is the feeling of "immersion". (You know, when time seems to stand still.) To sweep the gamer from the reality they are in (their boring-ass living room) and take them off into the fantasy world that the game's supplying. Anything that feels very fake or incorrect literally taps you on the shoulder and reminds you that you're just playing a game. (Loading screens are a GREAT example of something that destroys immersion.) So can things like a car passing right through a person, or a door that has been told to remain shut NO MATTER WHAT you do to it. (Even if you found a way to hit it with a truck.) So game designers will be looking hard at Physics to help resolve the rules that make us comfortable that the world around us is based on rules. Rules we can experiment and have fun with.

2) **LOCOMOTION** - This has nothing to do with trains, it's all about how people and creatures move in your game world. Ideally it's where characters can be made to "automatically" do things that complex mathematical equations solve instead of motion capture technology or endless animation by hand. To explain it simply, say you reach your hand into the fridge and remove a drink, the animator must have an animation to do that. Then what if there's a can on top of the fridge, will that need another animation? Does that mean an extra animation to handle every shelf at every depth the tin can could sit? In games today, it's mostly solved by a crude "grab" animation that doesn't care where the can is, the can basically teleports into the sweeping hand. Yet much research is and has already been done on driving the characters by math through reverse engineered motion analysis, beyond simple inverse kinematics or blending. This requires a study of anatomy or massive crunching of mixed data-sets to learn, create and then correctly drive the rules of locomotion, for any body/limb structure combination. Why should you care? Well it means (back to the immersion thing) that characters, enemies, creatures will all be able to get across the world by themselves, especially if my point (1) is achieved, where you could tear the landscape apart. Even stepping over a dead body properly would look cool! The fact that the characters could handle any terrain properly and (at the same time) could show their state of mind through their individual movements, will get away from the "everyone's a clone" feeling we currently get in a games.

3) **PARTICLES** - Anytime you see explosions in games, they are generally built up from thousands of smaller parts. The guys that make this stuff, the 'visual effects' guys call them particles. So if you see fire spreading, it's usually little bits of animating fire following along the path they want the fire to go. The good stuff that occurs with particles is the ability to make effects three-dimensional, so explosions can blast out in all directions and be viewed from any angle. That said, by blending the creation of particles with other systems, like knowing

where the surface of our character's body and the surface of the other characters in the game, we start to see more interesting responses. So for example, if a person runs through a cloud of smoke, you would see the smoke wafting around and behind his body. Those environmental disturbances are a sign that the programmers are starting to think about how we affect our surroundings, so if a car drives past a pile of cardboard boxes at 120mph, the boxes swirl into the street behind it. The holy grail will be when buildings are made literally brick by brick and can be destroyed in infinite combinations. There have been many people trying different ways to simulate this, but in the future it will be commonplace. Meaning if you drive a truck through a wall, depending on where you hit will have dramatically different effects on the building. Then there's also lots of work going on with flocking of creatures or objects, so if you have 10,000 leaves being blown in the wind, they become complex particle systems and need physics, collision detection, wind effectors, and self-shadowing to look really correct, again it could look amazing, but programmers just leave that alone for now. Other stuff that we see today are things like snow falling onto people's shoulders etc. In the future, the snow will melt, the clothing will darken when wet, the cloth will hang differently, become heavier and finally drip when it's wet enough. Then when you walk through fire, the clothing will know it's too wet to burst into flames, it will also make you cold. It's not just about looking much cooler than games today, but it's detail that designers will be able to add to their toolboxes for future designs.

4) LIGHTING - Earlier I talked about immersion, a key element of that is the atmosphere. One thing that can really ground a person in a certain location is the way their body is lit, and also the way the local shadows fall onto and across their bodies. A big improvement recently has been self-shadowing, where if a person folds their arms, you can see the shadows from their own arms falling across their own body. Then there's real self-shadowing, where even the small details on a person will create shadows, like their ear will drop a shadow across their face, so as the body turns relative to the light, the shadow will stretch and move. In Hollywood a trick they commonly use in movies is to put a slight smoke into the air, this has an interesting effect of making the image a little more 3-Dimensional. It also adds some atmosphere. The truth is that the air we live in is not completely invisible, there's always stuff floating around. (You will see the dust if you look at the air you are breathing now when it passes through a very bright ray of light). Games commonly assume there's nothing there, and that gives the world a very sterile look. The better artists think about how light beams will reflect off this stuff and how the light scatters. The more you look into the volumetric properties of light, the more complex it becomes. So now programmers are even looking into real simulation of clouds (yep, they can now generate them and the light passing through them will look correct, they also do the same for sky and sunsets). In the past, it was all just faked, but now people are really attempting to do it properly. Why would you care? Well the atmosphere of a situation can really affect how you feel. In the future, you will feel "gloomy", or you will feel the weird darkness on a night when the moon and stars can't be seen. That mixed with real simulated weather should give designers the ability to place you in incredibly realistic or impossible (if they choose) atmospheric situations.

5) TACTICAL AI - You've heard about Artificial Intelligence for game characters for years. Yet the truth is, it's still incredibly basic even today. Heck it's artificial stupidity, where the characters are commonly so dumb it's more fun to shoot them than it is to hang out with them. Going forward, studies are working on interesting things, like making them play properly against you (yes many games actually cheat, they know where you are at all times), however in a real world, every enemy will have their own opinion & memory (that you can exploit.) Some will adapt quickly and learn how you play... Meaning if they see you doing some fancy trick, like shooting out the lights and then killing everyone with your night vision goggles, they will use a flash-bang to temporarily blind you. The BIG change is that instead of being forced to do this by the designer, they will do it themselves. They will look for weaknesses in you (and your tools) and exploit them. So if you shoot at a guy 10 times and miss him, his respect level for you will drop dramatically. He might decide to take you out with his knife, because you're not worth a bullet!

WE WILL BE EMULATING EVERYTHING YOU CAN SEE, TOUCH AND INTERACT WITH

6) SPEECH RECOGNITION - Now, we all know about games that use microphones to hear what you say, but this is beyond just a small subset of "chosen" words that the game would understand. Currently we have speech recognition all over the place, even in cellphones

[MDK ART]
Not just a pretty face...

[SPECTRUM GAME BOOKS]
The pot of ZX Spectrum at the end of the rainbow

[EARTHWORM JIM CONCEPT ART]
Earthworm Jim 101: Fridge + cowlaunching = fun

[MESSIAH ART]
Thankfully Bob doesn't dance...

[STUNTCOPTER ART]
A prop from an Andy Sedaris film

[WILD 9 CHARACTER ART]
Enter Nighfist... he will hit you WITH HIS FIST!

and cars, but it's always looking for a freebie. In the game world this would mean making a Harry Potter game where it can easily spot the difference between you saying "Expecto Patronum" or "Stupefy" or "Wingardium Leviosa" or "Expelliamus". Because they sound SOO different, that's easy to program, but where it gets complex is "Natural Language Recognition". We take for granted if someone says "It feels good", where a computer actually struggles to decide exactly what we meant by "it". If the recording quality was kinda poor, it will even have problems deciding between "recognize speech" or "wreck a nice beach!" There have been major advances, but only in limited focus sets. Like recognition of commands or sentences in one area, like sports or weather. There is still a TON of work to get us to understanding anything you say or type correctly. Getting it wrong could spell disaster... For example, "GO BACK!" could sound like "ATTACK!". So to get it "right", we need to teach the program common sense also. Common sense is so complex, it's amazing that it's "common" sense. Computers are still years from having a working set structure for real-time games, and so we continue to watch the people that compete in the "Turing Test" to see how close we really are to solving the problem. The best date I have heard for real Natural Language Speech Cognition is 14 years. (That's based on us accelerating to the solution exponentially every year.) Well, we shall see. In the meantime, expect this form of interface to improve and improve. About 15 years ago, I used to tell people, "Imagine you are flying a space fighter and able to talk in real-time to your co-pilot and gunner"... Well we are still not there yet, but I do believe that when the day comes, you will become even more immersed in the experience of being the pilot of that craft. To pull this off, we are also gonna need to get people better microphones, and find a way to stop your dog barking, or the phone ringing when you are saying something important. Understanding speech with completely random ambient noise is another hurdle in itself, so improved microphone technology with very advanced noise-canceling is one of the ways we can stand a better chance.

7) SPEECH GENERATION - Well this one is completely different to SPEECH RECOGNITION. In this one, the character in the game has to be able to form his/her own sentences. Well that's not too hard, as long as you give it plenty of sentences to say. Like lots of buzz words, then let the character insert a bit of key info. You see this today in things like weather forecast systems, where a robotic voice says, "The outlook for Wednesday is Heavy Rain", where it just drops the day into the slot for the day, and drops one of 20 different weather situations into the slot for the weather. So that would be SPEECH GENERATION, however what we as designers really want is Natural Language Speech Generation. Now that's a LOT tougher, like asking a character "How do you feel?" and then them being able to actually tell you, then you shoot them in the leg and ask again, this time they have a completely different opinion of you, so they hate you and their response is different, then they realize that you shot them with an antidote that just saved their life, and now the spoken response changes again. It's incredibly complex stuff to get it to sound right, and from character to character (with their own speaking patterns/style), it should yield an almost infinite amount of possible speech. Problem is it requires intonation, flow, timing, intention, meaning... It's got to all flow smoothly to work and sound right. If not, the person ends up sounding like a computer talking. There has been plenty of research done, but no sign of this working really well in games for many years. That said, I've seen some good demos of text (where it prints what they would say) and I've heard some good demos of the intonation and flow. However, currently most developers stick to text or pre-recorded voice-acted lines and I hate to say, you can expect that for some time coming.

8) EMOTION - I'm tired of hearing people talking about getting us to cry in video games. Meaning you will care so much about the game you are playing that it will cause you to cry when someone dies. I look at the problem as a designer writing skill problem, as so many games today are truly devoid of quality emotional interaction. An example I give is just how awkward two 3D characters look in today's games when they try to embrace and kiss. It's so fake, it's almost a joke. Many designers and programmers don't even bother trying. That's why it's easier just to keep them at distance and shoot them! In movies, when you fall in love with a character (so you really do cry when they die), the writer has done an amazing job of making the character incredibly appealing. If you take movie writing classes, you will get an incredible appreciation for the art of how these people manipulate your feelings. It's like when you hear a comedian, you think he's just reeling off jokes, you forget how he slaved

MANY GAMES FORCE US DOWN VERY CONTROLLED SCRIPTED PATHS...

over every line to re-phrase and adjust timing to get the jokes to actually work. Writing is the same and so we can't just drop a girl in a game, have her die in level 3 and expect you to cry. It's going to take learning from experts how to do this better. Interestingly, what they say, how they react to situations, how they react to others are key examples of how to get us to start liking them. So the issue of Speech Generation pops its head up again. If we could make the characters TRULY fun to hang out with, that could actually get you laughing as they comment on something funny you just did together, that's when you should expect gamers to bond more with the other characters in the game. Today I think the trick designers use to make you care is to make you invest time into or rely on the attained strength of other characters, so when they die, you lose the investment in time, and their strength/support. That should make you feel loss as it really is a loss, but it won't make you feel the same kind of emotional loss that will drive tears.

9) SELF-FUNCTIONING WORLDS - What we are expecting here is that you can be a 'fly on the wall' visitor in a working city or place. Meaning that it will function without you and it will correctly respond to your reactions. I think Grand Theft Auto is a fantastic example of how cool this is going to be. The problem is that in current games, the people walking around are drones, they are clones of drones. The traffic drives aimlessly, the city is in fact just a Hollywood façade, like one of those buildings that only has a front. Many games force us down very controlled scripted paths to keep us from exploring, yet exploring and experimenting can add so much fun. As games get more expensive to make, as teams get larger, there will be pressure on designers not to lay out long paths that pass through places for only short periods of time. So for example imagine you need to go to the Cathedral to collect the Book of Names, however as you won't be allowed to explore, you just go in, get the book and leave. That's a TON of work for only 30 seconds of gameplay, so to entertain you for 10 hours, the amount of work will be almost crazy at the detail level that next generation machines can handle. So what's the solution? It's to make the places we build more functional and to let you explore more. So you can spend 30 minutes or 3 hours in there, it's up to you. The trick will be to give you things and choices of things to do that will tease you into entertaining yourself in there.

10) I was asked about 10 years ago what I thought the future would give us. I picked one thing I always wanted, however it's STILL not here!!! But I think it's gonna happen at some point. That is "Live Video from a Machine I can't Afford". Meaning that if a gamer wanted to play on a $12,000 PC or a $5,000,000 Flight Simulator, the video can be fed live into your home console. I think this could be a lot of fun for designers, basically to design a game that's absolutely impossible for a console to run, but that we can pay a small fee and 'rent' time on a supercomputer built for playing games. To get this we need High-Definition TV live through the internet. So it's a while away, but I expect some version of this within the next two generations of consoles.

What do you see as being the greatest game design limitations placed on developers at the moment? How would you like to see gaming mature in the future?

I think something we can learn from Hollywood is to "dream and do". It's very common in teams today for a designer so say "I want to see XXXX" and the reply from the programmers will be, "The engine can't do that" or "We don't have someone that can do that", or "Our tools can't handle that" or some good reason why the idea should be avoided. That mentality is why we have so many games that are based on previous engines, basically working from what we know works, reducing risk and re-using old technology. Hollywood dares to dream more, they will take a concept like "air is jelly" and then create whatever new (never been done before) technologies or techniques necessary to achieve the Director's vision. That means you are more likely to experience dramatic innovation. I'm not being mean to our business, but most of us take the safe route and then give a standing ovation to Will Wright when he shows us his next design (no matter how impossibly complicated it would seem to the average team), his team gets it on screen. I ask myself how many teams would have followed or fought this direction if they had it presented to them by their internal designer and not by Will Wright. I would guess too many would fight it, and that's a partial explanation why the radical innovation curve we were on from the "good old days" has faded. In those days, the designer was the programmer, so whatever he designed is what got programmed.

But note, it's faded, but not stopped. That means that Miyamoto, or Molyneux, or Wright will hopefully keep surprising us... You can't even guess where their teams and ideas are going to go next. That's true innovation and I really don't believe it's about the limitations of the hardware, it's the limitations of how a majority of video game developers approach their day to day work.

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

SO MANY GAMES TODAY ARE TRULY DEVOID OF QUALITY EMOTIONAL INTERACTION

I think God of War by SCEA shows how massive opponents, in epic battles with you, matched with an incredible musical score can really deliver more "game" than you believed is available from the hardware you're playing on.

I think Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas by Rockstar is a great example of creating a feature rich world for you to explore and enjoy. You really get moments of feeling free in their world. The Sims is also a good example of this concept; you are truly free to experiment.

I think the Call of Duty games from Activision have showed how incredibly immersive game

[SACRIFICE SCREENSHOT]
Another of our "greatest games you've never played" entries

[MORE ART]
Niobe gets her crank on

[MOVIE PREMIERE PHOTO]
That Keanu Reeves standee is almost lifelike!

experiences can become, where you (at certain times) honestly feel like you are in the middle of a chaotic war.

I think the Battlefield 1942 games from EA & Counter-Strike games from Valve have shown how people can very happily entertain themselves (for a CRAZY amount of hours) given the right online-capable games with the right balance and features.

I think Half-Life 2 by Valve showed how incredibly compelling a scripted world can still be when the bar is raised many notches.

So to cut a long answer short, I think the future will yield many really great hybrid games that borrow key components of what made these titles above so good.

How does Shiny intend to take advantage of the added possibilities that the forthcoming consoles will provide?

We are going to focus on immersion, atmosphere, leaving the strategy to the gamer and also making sure to offer a key online component.

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

Sadly no, I think the innovation of peripherals has been decidedly unexciting. Adding the EyeToy camera for the PS2, was treated with more respect than it deserved. It's a horrible camera with nasty lighting issues that has yielded more toys than games, but I do respect Sony for trying and just ask for MORE, MORE, MORE. There is a company called Immersion that is going around suing all the game companies for making Joypads with vibration in them. Immersion are going to suck blood from everywhere possible to sustain their company that should have died naturally years ago. However as they are winning their lawsuits, I expect to see (like a kick in the pants) the Hardware companies will hopefully try making some new innovations themselves.

What would I like to see?

I asked Kutaragi for a thumb keypad on the back of the PS2 controller about 5-6 years ago. I still want it!

Off the top of my head...

I would like to see twist sensitive strain gauge plastic in the controller, so it's very sensitive to twisting.

[ENTER THE MATRIX GAME ART]
The word BLAU comes to mind

THE INNOVATION OF PERIPHERALS HAS BEEN DECIDEDLY UNEXCITING

I would like to see internal motion sensors that can give an analog read on the angle the controller is at and also can give us the velocity and direction it's being shaken.

I would like to be able to give a small shock to the gamer. (Not dangerous, just a shock.)

I would like to know if their hands are ON the controller. (Sensing the presence of hands.)

I would like a Silent Scope arcade style rifle (with the small secondary screen mounted in the sight eyepiece.)

If I can't have that, I would like a small color screen in the joypad.

I would like a sliding physical switch on the controller. (Like the one on a flashlight.)

I would like a small sliding bar, that I know where the slider is. (Think of it like a volume control slider.)

I would like to know the pulse of the gamer.

I would like a wireless analog pedal.

I would like to know how tightly the gamer is squeezing the controller.

I would like a mouse nipple, like they have on laptops, so I can mouse around the screen.

I would like a Bluetooth headset that lets the game know what the gamer is hearing, that can also play extra (secret) messages into his ear. (So two people playing side by side can be getting different information from the game spoken into their ear.)

I would like everything wireless as standard.

Designers love tools, many of these would add an extra tool to their toolbox and I think they would lead to some quite innovative uses.

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

They are all getting into the same ballpark. Sony however has (as always) gone their own way with their architecture. So initially the other consoles will be easier to program and see the horsepower. That said, as people do get to grips with the Sony architecture (like they did on the PS2), I expect to see a steady improvement.

Regarding marketing I think Nintendo needs to break out their checkbook! Microsoft already has their checkbook open and they want to really compete this time from the start. (I just hope they don't do another crazy Rare-type deal.) Nintendo are in major trouble if they think they will just win because they are Nintendo and have Zelda and Mario. The DS compared to the PSP is an example that they bet on innovation, where Sony bets on better hardware.

If I were in this fight, I would be signing up talent and actually investing in all key games that developers are working on for my format. Last time around Microsoft paid $375M to Nintendo and Rare. I would have given $10M to 37 of my key developers to spend EXCLUSIVELY on their Xbox titles.

Will anybody be brave enough to do that this time around?

We shall see... <<

Shiny on you crazy diamond

David Perry first started making games well over 20 years ago. He was in high school at the time, and it was back in the era when a single person could make an entire game, serving as programmer, designer, artist, sound designer and tester all in one. Games were his passion and it wasn't long before Perry got his formal start in the industry at the tender age of 15, writing games to be published in books. He hasn't looked back, with a total of 35 games (24 of which he was lead programmer on) under his belt.

Before starting Shiny Entertainment Perry was involved in the creation of one of the best 2D platformers on Genesis - Disney's Aladdin. He was also involved in the erm, slightly less resume enhancing titles Cool Spot, The Terminator for Orion Pictures and McDonald's Global Gladiators. However, all that experience in programming and game design served him well, and in 1993 Perry started a small dev house called Shiny.

Success wasn't far away, thanks to a bizarre 2D platforming creation known as Earthworm Jim. Its off the wall Kricfalusi-esque humour, lush animations and creative levels really clicked with the gamers of the day. A sequel, comic book series, toy line and cartoon series later, and Shiny were well and truly on the map.

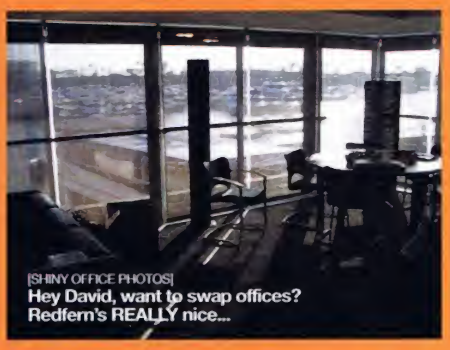
1996's MDK for PC proved that Shiny could take things in interesting new directions, moving to wide open surreal landscapes and third person shooting action - including one of the first serious implementations of sniping in a videogame. It also continued Shiny's zany naming tradition, with weapons like The World's Most Interesting Bomb.

From there the team went back to console, with 1998's PSone third person shoot 'em up Wild 9 and 1999's R/C Stunt Copter, a model helicopter sim that was one of the first games (alongside Ape Escape) to really utilise the dual shock controller.

After two relatively low key titles it was time for Shiny to jump back into the spotlight, and it's fair to say that the lead-up to 2000's Messiah was something of a hype feeding frenzy. The game was based around Bob, a cherub who could inhabit the bodies of other characters/creatures in the world, an ability that opened up countless problem and puzzle solving options. The hype was huge and fortunately the game largely lived up to expectations. 2000 also saw the release of Sacrifice, a critically acclaimed RTS that flipped the usual RTS perspective on its head by putting you in the midst of the action as a wizard chosen by the gods to help conquer the universe.

Then there was 2003's Enter the Matrix. Another highly hyped title, it sounded brilliant on paper; Enter the Matrix was designed to flesh out the events in The Matrix Reloaded, taking the player down an integral side story. Cutscene footage was shot alongside film footage, the game was written and directed by the Wachowski brothers and the action kung fu gameplay was fast and flashy. Unfortunately it was also repetitive and very glitchy. With another year or so in development Enter the Matrix could have been a serious action game contender, but ultimately it wasn't. Despite this, Enter the Matrix sold phenomenally well, and now Shiny are taking a second shot at the Matrix license, with "Path of Neo". This time you actually get to play as Neo and from what we understand, you'll be battling through many of the signature fight scenes from the three films. With any luck this will become the definitive Matrix videogame.

[GENESIS GAME BOXES]
Aladdin and MC Hammer get their clothes from the same store y'know



[SHINY OFFICE PHOTOS]
Hey David, want to swap offices? Redfern's REALLY nice...

[PATH OF NEO SCRENNSHOTS]
Woah, I know jazz ballet

BACKWASH
A murky, mist-veiled, hugely atmospheric map, Backwash is sure to become a classic. Set amongst swampy ground and humming Forerunner technology, this one is great for Slayer game type variants.

CONTAINMENT
Set on Delta Halo, Containment is an icy 16 player map complete with all vehicles. With a base at either end of a winding trench it's perfect for game types like CTF and Assault.

Halo 2 Multiplayer Map Pack

>> Cam Shea

Since its release in November last year, Halo 2 has gone on to sell over 6.7 million copies worldwide, making it not just a gaming phenomenon, but the driving force behind the adoption of Xbox Live by the masses. To keep the Halo 2 multiplayer love going, Bungie are now set to deliver nine new maps. Hooray!

By the time you read this, four of the new maps will be available - Containment and Warlock as free downloads for Xbox Live subscribers, and Sanctuary and Turf as $7.99 premium downloads. Then, come June 28, Live subscribers will be able to download the remaining maps for $19.99.

If you're not on Live and want the extra maps for splitscreen and system link play, you'll be able to pick up the pack in stores across the country for $29.99. You'll also get a couple of bonuses, as the retail pack will also include two new videos - an animated side-story set in Old Mombasa that reveals unseen events that take place during the single player story, and a featurette that takes players through the new maps, offers combat strategies and includes interviews with the map designers. The retail package also contains the updates to the game that were previously only available online. Good stuff. Let's take a look at the new maps on offer.

SANCTUARY
Set amongst temple ruins on Delta Halo, Sanctuary has a base at either end with a relatively open area in the middle. Naturally this one is great for Assault and CTF.

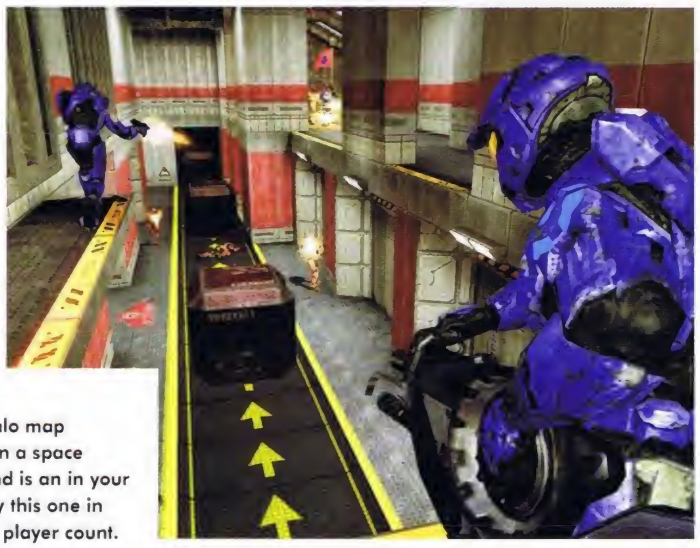
RELIC
Set on a battle-scarred island, Relic has numerous routes to the battlements at one end, and plenty of wreckage and rocks to duck behind. Perfect for one flag CTF and Assault, Relic is a medium sized map.

GEMINI
A retreat for senior Prophet prelates set high above High Charity, the basic layout of Gemini is based on the "Duality" map from Bungie's Marathon series. It's a small map, designed for a few people playing something like Slayer.

WARLOCK
Set in ancient Forerunner ruins, this small indoor affair was inspired by the Halo 1 map "Wizard" and is most suited to mid-sized firefights and game types like Slayer, Team Slayer and Oddball.

TERMINAL
A large map set in New Mombasa, Terminal is notable for the tracks running through it (although we won't tell you more just yet) and the intense firefights in Assault, one flag CTF and Team Slayer that inevitably arise.

TURF
Set on the gritty streets of Old Mombasa, Turf is a large, asymmetrical map with countless alleyways and streets to battle through. Bungie put this one together with the Territories game type in mind, but it will play well in countless other modes too.



ELONGATION
A reinterpretation of the Halo map Longest, Elongation is set on a space station high above Earth and is an in your face close quarters gem. Try this one in CTF or Assault with a small player count.

Q&A

We spoke with Brian Jarrard, the Community Manager at Bungie, about putting together the new Halo 2 content.

HYPER: How did you go about determining what kinds of maps people would want for the Map Pack? Do they address things you think were missing from Halo 2's initial batch of maps or do they build on themes/game types that have proved popular?
Brian Jarrad: Well first off, we look at what kind of things we want in the map pack. Of course we pay close attention to things players ask for - but they often want conflicting things, and some things that seem obvious don't actually work by the time you get to testing them. We've definitely tried to build on cool things from Halo 1 and 2, and we spent a lot of effort building maps that worked well with multiple game types. The new maps work better, we think, for Territories than the batch included in the November release of the game.

Were only nine maps designed from the start or did you start out with a large pool then narrow the selection down? If so, how many maps were considered for this release and how were they narrowed down?
We start with more, although with Halo 2, we didn't actually lose that many. And a lot of the work we did on maps that didn't make it, helped improve the ones that did. The process of narrowing down is pretty straightforward - if it's fun it stays, if not, it goes. That does mean however, that none of the maps in the map pack existed before November 2004. They were all built from scratch - although obviously Warlock and Elongation have roots in Halo one maps.

As you say, two of the maps in the pack are inspired by, or reworked versions of Halo 1 maps. Are these back by popular demand? Do they play better in the Halo 2 framework?
Yep. Demand, suitability for game types and weapons, and hours of testing. And yep, we know folks wanted Hang 'Em High, but with the new weapons, physics and features, it didn't feel anything like the first game. Blood Gulch/Coagulation actually demonstrate that theory pretty well. They look similar, but feel dramatically different.

How much thought do you give to the places these maps are set and the possible backstory? Is that an integral part of planning a map?
Sometimes the back story is important - in the case of Backwash for example, but we always build a map first to support a game type, a rough number of players - and start refining from there. In Turf, we concentrated on making a fun Territories map. That kind of thinking is applied to all the maps. Since that required closed off, urban surroundings, it was obvious it should be set in a city on Earth. Ultimately we do strive to ground our maps in the fiction of our universe and provide locales that the players will recognize and relate to.

Which are the most popular of the new maps within Bungie and why?
Sanctuary, Terminal and Relic. Because they all work well with the team sizes we have available for grudge matches. Art versus Design is a particularly bloody match-up. I won't say who wins, but it ain't pretty.

Do you have anything more planned for Halo 2 after this? Or is it on to the next generation?
Everyone is very much intent on making the next big thing.

Thanks for your time!

The Matrix Online

>> Daniel Wilks

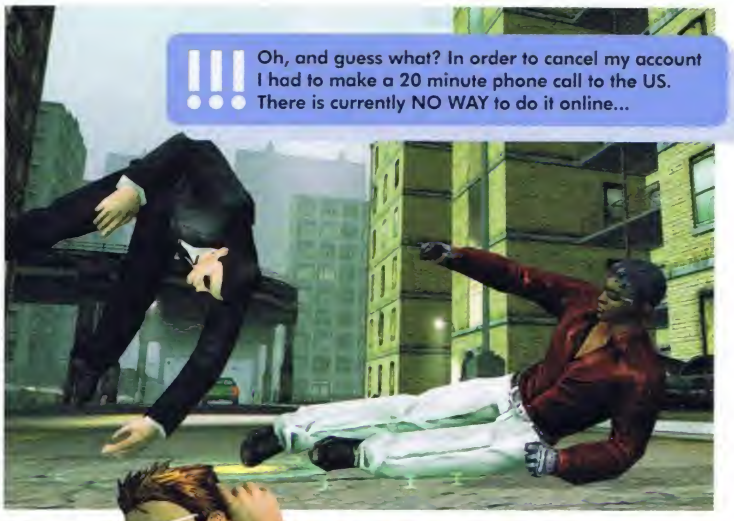
The Matrix Online, to me, is like the Village People movie, "Can't Stop the Music". Not because of the fruity looking outfits (and there are plenty of them) or the wildly unenjoyable music but for the fact that The Matrix Online, like the ill fated movie, came way too late. Can't Stop the Music was released five years after the band were at their peak - they hadn't been popular for nearly two years when the movie came out. The Matrix Online, on the other hand, is two years too late to cash in on the sequels and six to cash in on the success of the original. Does anyone really care about The Matrix anymore? Unfortunately the answer to this question seems to be yes.

Patches and bug fixes have almost become accepted in the games industry. Nobody likes to have to patch a game to get it to work when they first buy it but 10-15mb is acceptable. Even people of dialup persuasion can suck that down in a short while. Then there are the unacceptable, incredibly broken games that don't so much require a patch as a complete rewrite. The Matrix Online is one of those games. I installed the game roughly two weeks after the US launch. This means there were probably two weekly maintenance patches I had to catch up on. That should be maybe 50mb, 100 at most. Not 1.2Gb. I had to patch the damn game (and this is a boxed copy mind you, not early code like we sometimes review from) for three hours to get it to run.

I was still willing to give the game a chance at this point and it managed to impress me. Character creation is great. There's very little in the way of customisation at the beginning aside from what you look like due to the fact that the skill system is one of the most, if not the most malleable in any MMO. Like in the movies, players can upload different skill sets into their head - the only limiting factor being level and memory capacity. Whilst this all sounds great in practise, and for the most part it is, there are some major problems with the system. Skills and powers are still strongly statistic based so once you've built up a character to any degree your choice of skills for re-spec is limited due to the fact that some things will be beyond your reach. If you build up an Operative character (the basic warrior) you'll put your level stat points into combat related statistics. Later you may want to re-spec to being a Patcher (the cleric/healer style character) for a mission. You can do this with skills but there's a trade-off - you'll be rubbish at it due to your lack of relevant statistics. The other problem is that it takes forever to get to a stage where you can get any good skills. Come on now - who playing The Matrix Online doesn't want to be able to say, "I know Kung Fu" and mean it? Well, you can but only after the 20+ hours of grinding it can take to reach level 10.

There are two types of mission in The Matrix Online; story missions and collector missions. The former are gathered through your phone so you don't have to trek around to talk to people to gather them. The latter are simple kill X amount of people and give me their stuff type quests, usually rewarded with some article

[above right] She does look like Toni Collette right? Or am I just obsessed?



!!! Oh, and guess what? In order to cancel my account I had to make a 20 minute phone call to the US. There is currently NO WAY to do it online...

[above] Red pill or blue pill? I'll pass actually... you got a cyanide pill?

of clothing or maybe a new gun. All quests have one thing in common. Combat. Everything revolves in one way or another around fighting, which wouldn't be such a bad thing if the system wasn't so horribly broken. There are two types of combat in MO, ranged and melee. Ranged combat is made up of virus attacks (spells) and gun shots - basic attacks taking the click button, wait until it refreshes and click it again route. Melee is vastly different. It uses a real time turn based system where each combatant chooses an attack (or special move) or defence for the round and then watches it played out as they choose their next move. Although the system does allow for some nicely choreographed fight scenes and gratuitous bullet time moments, after the umpteenth time you've seen the animation it gets a little dull. Unfortunately the two styles of combat don't mix - if you're in melee you can shoot, if you're shooting you can't melee. This doesn't stop people outside of melee shooting you however. Due to the different speeds of the combat, it's possible to be shot a bunch of times before you can pull off a melee attack. Worse still is the fact that leaving melee either requires the death of the enemy or the choice of flee melee as a move in combat, leaving you with even more time to get shot as the flee move can be easily countered. Add to this some hastily respawning mobs that can make a simple fight take forever, as the mob you just killed pops up behind you and attacks, and the fact that all enemies look essentially the same and you have a dull grind.

I could mention how the game crashes every time I try to jack out of the Matrix, the multiple lag issues, the clipping issues, the terrible mob AI, the lack of any real differentiation between character models (yay, I just got a black trench coat and cowboy hat like every single other player on the server), the fact that the city is huge, empty and repetitive, the long, hard and frustrating slog to get anywhere remotely interesting, the dance animations that are the single most embarrassing thing to appear in a game in a long time, the serious framerate issues on high end machines, the fact that even at low lag (378ms) it can take up to a second for your character to jump after you hit space, that you can take falling damage from running down stairs and its insufferably obtuse interface but you probably get the point. It's time to exit the Matrix people - it's as dead as the Village People. ≪

Links

>> Sir Kosta Andreadis

Are You Pissed?

www.rupissed.com/

>> Assuming you have access to the internet whilst you're out drinking, here's a site that can calculate your blood alcohol content via a not so simple questionnaire/form. In theory this may seem like a helpful resource but in actuality I think it's the exact opposite. Too many specific questions asking things like when you started drinking, how much you weigh, what type of beverage etc. If you're trying to figure out if you're too drunk to operate heavy machinery put it this way - if you can fill out this form without any trouble then you're OK to step behind the controls of a crane. If not, then you're pissed.

The Dark Lord of the Blog

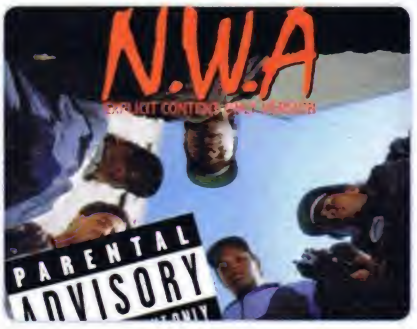
darthside.blogspot.com/

>> The internet is flooded with blogs, and it seems everyone has an opinion on this or that and you know what, who cares? Do I need to know what Mike in Chicago thinks about the latest Garbage album? No. Who cares what Sue the single parent from Wisconsin has to say about the Middle East peace process, or why John from Brisbane thinks Joss Whedon's Firefly is pure genius. Garbage sucks, we won't see peace in the region in our lifetime and Firefly is average at best (you're fired - Cam), so stop flooding the net with non-porn related distractions!

OMG Romoe & Juliet!!!11

www.kroh.net/mirrors/l337_shakespeare.swf

>> When it comes to a good story they don't get much better that the ones from Willy Shakes - the dude was the master storyteller man, a true artist. But unfortunately Shakes was writing his stuff back in the 17th century, long before people started speaking proper English, instead they used words like 'thou', 'yonder' and often spoke in soliloquy. So in order to make his stuff relevant today it needs to be jazzed up, words shifted around, and what not. But in order to do so you'll need the talent of a visionary director able to grasp the original power that Shakes brought to the table and translate that for modern audiences - like the animation depicted here.



This CD Contains Explicit Content

www.ni9e.com/

>> Gangster rap has always gotten its fair share of flak, most notably due to the lyrics about killing, drug dealing, pimping women for large sums of money, and having intercourse with non-garden variety hoes. It may sound pretty bad here on paper but lyrics like "I've got hoes in different area codes" is still a far cry better than "Baby, put your loving arms around me". So in the end your stance on gangster rap will most likely boil down to whether or not you'd rather a) fall in love and give your heart to someone in exchange for the exact same thing (great choice, not) or b) violently kill your enemies, sell drugs to poor people, objectify and sell women for sex and keep 80% of the profit to spend on extravagant jewellery and vehicles.

LAN Party Saturday from 8:30 - whenever!

www.tomshardware.com/game/20050402/index.html
insert25.com/gamer_culture/how_to_host_a_successful_lan_party.php

>> Attention nerds of the world a LAN party isn't a real party OK. If it doesn't end up with either a) Wilks judging a wet T-shirt competition, b) Farrelly passing out drunk in the middle of the floor, c) An equally drunk Wildgoose trying yet again to get into the Guinness Book of Records for "World's largest Doritos sandwich", or d) Cam streaking into the neighbour's yard yelling "Goblin king, goblin king, take this baby away from me!" then what you have is a whole bunch of people with the PCs in one place playing games.

The Secret Life of Mana

soma.mods.de/eng/index2.htm

>> If someone were to say "Secret of Mana was a piece of crap game" would you get all upset? If you answered yes then this currently in development and very impressive Half-Life 2 mod is definitely for you. Now I could have easily have said "Secret of Mana was an amazing game" but I'd much rather ruffle some feathers than make friends. When you go to the gym and develop 24-inch pythons like me you don't need to make friends via cheap reminiscing. Ooh, does anyone remember the endurance tests from Kid Icarus? Who gives a crap, I've got muscles now and I'll break you in half.

Ikki Tousen

LEGENDARY FIGHTER VOLUME 1

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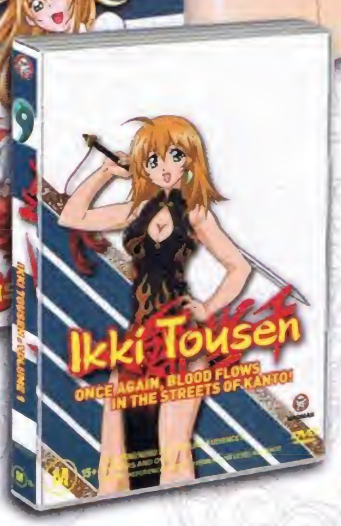
"Wherever the director could have inserted a panty shot, ...it's there." T.H.E.M. ANIME REVIEWS



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www.madman.com.au/ikkitousen

The Gamer's Guide to Brownie Points

by Justin Law

[above] Preparing a breakfast in bed will net you major BPs

Your other half (assuming you have one) won't back off of your tit because she reckons you're spending too much time with your hands on a controller and not enough on her. If that's the case, you may need to adhere to the age-old method of achieving a balance - the Brownie Points System. Of course you could ignore her implorings and carry on regardless, but that, brothers, is the imperilled road to destruction which usually results in long months of yearning and cheap porn sites.

Brownie Points (BPs) are rewards for efforts in pleasing your other half, which you can then spend on Gaming Hours (GHs). If you play your cards right, you could have a whole long weekend in front of the telly/monitor with your mates while she's serving the drinks.

THE STRATEGY

There is a strategy in the BP system which will help you maximise your BP:GH ratio - remember that women are generally smarter than us so we have to be on our toes. The trick is to not let on about the system, and to make all your BP-earning actions seem spontaneous, so every time you hear, "Oh, how wonderfully unexpected" (or words to that effect) that's the Kerching! of BPs in the bank.

You must also be careful in your expenditure of accumulated points - don't be belligerent! She needs to feel in control and that she's bestowing upon you a great reward. A true BP master will have his other half frequently encouraging him to spend his GH and feeling borderline guilty that she isn't doing enough for him.

Given that there is a range of actions you can perform, there is a range of BP values to match from basic 1-pointers through to more elaborate 4-pointers. There are also major bonuses for special one-offs.

Great care is needed in how you accumulate these points so that suspicion isn't aroused - she must NEVER think that you're only doing these things to get her off your back. If you're like most blokes (lazy, inconsiderate, major health risk) and you rattle off a bunch of four-pointers straight away, she's going to smell a rat. The art is to dilute them with a sprinkling of lesser actions so that she feels it's all part of a natural progression. Eventually you'll be able to nail the big earners without having to muck around too much with the loose change.

Chop chop dig dig
chop chop dig dig

BROWNIE POINTS

Valuing BPs can be nebulous because each person responds to your efforts (and the sincerity in which you do them) differently, so to simplify things we'll use the example of a 20-year-old male who has a 19-year-old live-in lover. Also for the sake of simplicity, we'll value each point at 10 minutes.

We'll also start with the basics then move up to the big earners...

1-POINTERS:

- Throw stubbie lids in the bin rather than leaving them on the bench
- Lift your feet up when she's vacuuming
- Put the peanut-butter smeared knife you've just used in the sink
- Put down the toilet seat after you've used it
- Put a fresh roll of toilet paper on the holder when you've used the last sheet
- Open the door for her
- When making yourself a cup of tea, make her one too

- When she comes home, offer her a cheery greeting straight away
- Wait a minimum 10 minutes before turning on the telly after sex

2-POINTERS

- Sit through a whole episode of The Gilmore Girls with her (or him if your partner happens to be David "GG Lover" Wildgoose)
- Say how great her bum looks in those jeans
- Put on her favourite CD so she has something to listen to while vacuuming
- Put away the peanut butter, margarine and bread after you've made yourself a sandwich (bonus point if you offer her a bite)
- Use the toilet brush when required (on the skid marks, you oaf!)
- Phone her to let her know you'll be home a little late from the pub
- Put your dirty undies in the clothes basket
- Kiss her passionately before you have sex

3-POINTERS

- If you've scored 100 in cricket, a goal in soccer or pantsed a dude on the pool table, phone her to share your celebration
- Lift up the couch so she can vacuum under it
- Remember her birthday ahead of time (prove it by mailing a birthday card a few days beforehand)
- Make her a peanut butter sandwich as well and cut off the crusts
- Mop up the results of poor aiming around the toilet bowl
- Pick a flower from the neighbour's garden on the way home from the pub to offer as an apology for being late
- Offer to take care of dinner by making the phone call for the pizza
- Make encouraging remarks during sex such as, "Wow, your hair looks great from up here."

4-POINTERS

- Actually arrive home from the pub when you said you would
- When she's nearly finished the vacuuming, come in and say, "Oh, you should have let me do that!"
- Spend more than $30 on her birthday present (jewellery is a winner here and nothing says it better than diamantes)
- Invite her to the pub for a counter meal during the half-price lunch offer and pay for it
- Make a show of cleaning the bathroom (throw a bucket of water around - it all goes down the floor drain anyway)
- Ask if she'd like something from the bottle shop when you go to buy a slab for yourself
- Buy her flowers for no apparent reason (there usually is an important reason lurking nearby so this is good insurance)
- Make sure she's actually aroused before commencing sexual intercourse

MAJOR BONUSES

The amount of BPs you earn for these actions will vary greatly, but you can be pretty much guaranteed of many GH in return. IMPORTANT: These should only be done rarely or they will become expected and your BP rewards will be greatly diminished.

- Vacuum the whole house - by yourself
- Take her to a fancy restaurant (Sizzlers, etc) and pay for dinner
- Buy her an item of jewellery that costs more than a new Xbox game
- Drop the "L" word (oh, FFS - it's "Love"!)
- Ensure she experiences an orgasm during sex (if she fakes it, that's her problem)

COMBOS

Like most of us you're probably not very organised so you may need to carefully construct a string of earners to rack up some GH for when your mates suddenly announce they'll be around tomorrow for a full day of Burnout 3. Here's an example of what you can do to get up the points pronto.

She comes home from work and you give her a cheery greeting (1BP) then offer her a bite of your peanut butter sandwich (1BP). After putting away the stuff you used to make it (2BP) you remember you had curry last night and check the toilet. Sure enough the toilet brush is required (2BP) and while you're there, you replace the empty toilet roll (1BP). In fact, you haven't been careful at all, so a quick bucket of water and the bathroom's come up a treat (4BP). She's looking a little tired so offer to grab her a few Breezers from the bottlo (4BP) even though you know it'll be a struggle to carry them AND the slab of beer for yourself. When you return, order a pizza (3BP) and sit through the Gilmore Girls (2BP - bonus 1BP for laughing at the right times). A couple of Breezers and she's getting in the mood so you kiss her passionately (2BP) and tell her her bum looks great in those jeans (2BP). Seizing the moment, you suggest oral sex and then tell her you can't see any dark roots in her hair at all from your vantage point (3BP). Remembering there are more points to be gained here, you fumble around in her nether regions until she starts making the right noises (4BP). You make sure she has the first laugh (10BP), even though you keep having to think of your grandma's wrinkly arse to stop ending the moment too soon, and then scream out "I love you!" (15BP) as you 'arrive'. You then collapse on the couch making a mental note of the time. Exactly 10 minutes later you switch on the TV (1BP) and in the commercial break, toss your dirty undies in the washing basket (2BP). Total BP = 60. GH = 10.

See? Simple. <<

LOGITECH MX518

RRP: $99.95

There have been many mice in the past touted as being a gaming mouse for various different reasons - aesthetics, internal fans to stop you from getting sweaty palms, extra weight to give it a more grounded feel, less weight so you can adjust faster - you get the picture. We can safely say that the Logitech MX 518 truly is a gaming mouse, built for gaming and all but pointless for anything else. Why? The big thing about the MX518 is the fact that it not only has a stupidly high DPI (1600 - the highest currently available), and players can change the mouse resolution on the fly using small buttons above and below the scroll wheel. What this means in real terms is that you can change the sensitivity of your mouse in real time rather than having to jump into an options menu to do so. This is only really handy in FPS games but once you've played with the various levels of sensitivity (you can set five custom levels through the drivers or simply use the defaults) you'll never turn back. Imagine using max resolution to turn and fire quickly in an outdoor setting then switching to lower resolution for more pinpoint accuracy and no juddering due to your hand not being truly steady for sniping. Similarly the different resolutions are excellent in RTS games - high res to rapidly scroll across the map in a flick of the wrist and a lower res for fine manipulation. The MX518 isn't cheap but it's worth every cent.

NOKIA N91

RRP: TBA

Although this baby isn't due to hit the streets until later this year, we're already getting excited. It's clear, you see, with the announcement of their N series of phones, that Nokia are back on their game. The N91 particularly caught our attention. Not just another Series 60 based smartphone, this puppy comes packing a 4GB hard drive and a 3.5mm stereo jack. Yes, the iPod has finally met the mobile phone.

Copying music to the device is as easy as plugging the phone into a USB 2.0 port on your computer and dragging and dropping. With support for MP3, AAC, WMA and M4A, as well as the ability to record from the included FM tuner everything looks great on paper. The real test will be ease of navigation through your music (something we won't be able to test until we get a review unit), but the basic controls are housed on a slide down panel over the keypad which is a nice touch. The N91 will even pause the music when you answer a call then resume when you hang up.

Other functionality is set to be just as impressive. The N91 has GSM/GPRS/900/1800/1900 + WCDMA, and EDGE, Bluetooth and Wi-Fi 802.11b/g/1, not to mention a 2 megapixel camera. With a slick stainless steel veneer, the N91 also looks the part.

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56 God of War

One of the most intense action games in recent years...

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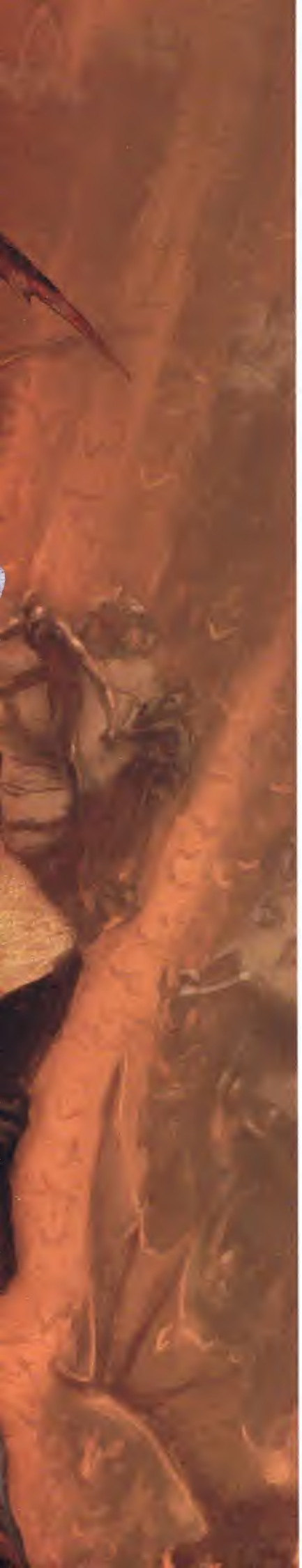


Reviews

Game Theory

SEAMUS BYRNE

The realities of virtual economies

I recently noticed a flood of cheap leather at my Ironforge Auction House. Two people had dumped it there, resulting in lower prices across the whole leather market. I had some cash to spare, so I bought the cheap stuff. Every last piece. I put it back on the market at a more typical price and doubled my money within hours.

Later I discussed this feat of genius with my wife, who quickly called me a virtual Oppenheimer. Apparently I'd enacted exactly the kind of activity that made the De Beers corporation what it is today. It bought control of as many diamonds as possible, particularly when mines were selling cheap, in order to keep prices high and maximise profit. Like me, he used the personal justification that he was just helping to keep prices stable.

So here we are in a day where our games are offering clear 'working models' for many of our world's economic systems. From concerns of inflation to distribution of wealth, virtual worlds are doing their best to recreate, and intentionally diverge from, real world conditions as part of a drive to deliver in game economies that offer stability years down the track.

There are two angles of interest here. What the real world can learn from virtual economies and what the game makers can learn from the real world.

On the first front, there are already many lessons being learnt from game worlds. Academic economists have been looking inside virtual worlds since Ultima Online, examining the ways in which these economies work and how they fail. In many ways, the failures offer the best lessons and some reflections on our own world. Remember the deforestation concerns in Ultima Online?

One fascinating aspect of having many servers replicating the same world for different audiences is the capacity for each server's economy to diverge from the norm. World of Warcraft Auction Houses often run at stable average prices in each world, but between worlds these averages can diverge by quite large amounts even with similar populations. Examining the trade movements and major players involved with these instances could offer insight into how dominant 'tycoons' and 'cartels' can influence a world's economy. The reflections on our own world could be quite revealing.

On the other side, with serious cash being dropped on virtual goods and currency, game developers need to continue refinement of in-game economics. World of Warcraft, has an estimated 'secondary market' of $2m a month, according to GameSpot analysis, even though they classify such activity as in breach of the user agreement. SOE believe their own secondary markets run at $200m a year, which is why they're introducing official channels for such real sales of virtual goods.

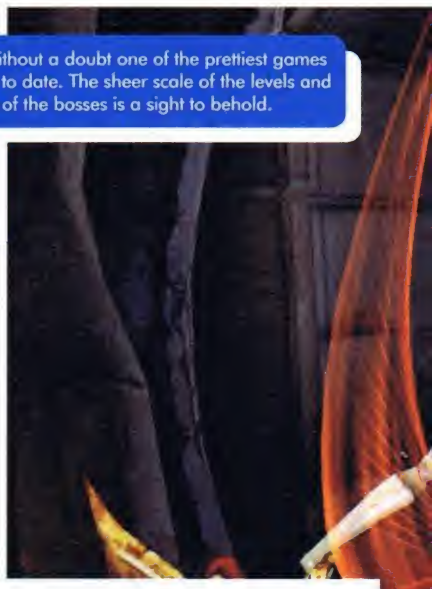
One fallacy of the secondary markets is the idea they will be the demise of game economies. Real spending on virtual goods is like stock market activity. It is a reflection of in-game activity and value, but the fact it redistributes in-game wealth doesn't inherently mean it is going to inflate the economy. For someone to sell currency, it has to exist in the first place. Hyper-inflation is caused by a tap of money entering the game in an area that doesn't have a place for it to exit in similar quantities; not by people getting access to more money sooner. That is a symptom, not the root cause.

Don't expect the virtual billionaires to sit on their piles of cash. Unlike the real world, they can't buy diamond mines with their cash. At some point they're going to see a fiscal opportunity and take advantage of it.

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

0-49	50-59	60-69	70-79	80-89	90+
Like watching a Uwe Boll film on endless loop	Like watching the bits of House of the Dead with nudity	As fun as poking Uwe Boll in the eye with a blunt stick	As good as stopping Boll from making another film	As satisfying as repeatedly kicking Uwe Boll in the nuts	Like going back in time and making sure Boll was never born

God of War is without a doubt one of the prettiest games released on PS2 to date. The sheer scale of the levels and intimidating size of the bosses is a sight to behold.



[above] Just your common Minotaur

[above] Freaky + Boobies = Sirens

GOD OF WAR

It's all Greek to **DANIEL WILKS**

Let me tell you a story - it's not about ancient Greece or killing monsters but it's still relevant. Last year at E3 I found myself wandering around the Sony pavilion looking for a game to play. Every booth had a line in front of it (mostly because they all seemed to be playing Rumble Roses, much to the delight of the sweaty throng). Every booth that is, aside from a few secreted in a corner, out of the gaze of most of the assembled journalists. After being told that the game featured in the booth I was approaching was "boring" and "crap" by a foreign journalist who shall remain nameless so he doesn't look like a hypocrite, I started to play. That game was, of course, God of War. I had to wait another year to play it again, an event I eagerly anticipated. Is God of War as good as I remembered? Yes.

[Big] The thing that Kratos is mounting

SWEET RELEASE

Unlike many other games in the 3D action genre, God of War actually has a well written and compelling story, starting strongly with our anti-hero, a Spartan named Kratos leaping from the highest mountain in Greece to embrace the sweet release of death. The game, we soon learn, is made up of the events that lead to that fateful point. Without giving too much away, Kratos is a badass. He's a mean and skilled SOB who sold his soul to Ares, the god of war for power and a second chance at life. After slaughtering his way across the Mediterranean for his deity, a tragedy leads Kratos to reexamine his life and serve the other, far more cuddly (they are only responsible for hundreds of deaths a day rather than thousands) Greek gods as a form of penance and to gain a chance at redemption. Ares, slightly pissed about this, goes on a little rampage and declares war on Athens. It's up to the player, as the permanently constipated, cranky and downright deadly Kratos to save the day. By killing a lot of people/monster/divine half breeds.

[above] Getting a bit oh head

[above] Not Pictured: Short Round

Without a doubt the best part of God of War is the combat system, as well it should be considering the fact that combat makes up 90% of the gameplay. The system is straightforward in design but allows for a huge amount of depth. Basic attacks are controlled via three buttons - light attack, heavy attack and block, combinations of the three making combos. Players also have access to special magical attacks they learn off Greek gods throughout the course of the game. Instead of having to worry about buying new weapons or which item to equip, God of War instead limits the player to a choice of two weapons - knives on chains and a big old sword that you pick up early in the game. Both of these weapons can be upgraded by picking up red orbs from downed enemies, each new level unlocking new abilities and combos. All magical attacks, such as Zeus' lightning (a ranged attack), Medusa's gaze (a petrifying attack) or the damned souls of Hades (summoned minions

[above] Carnage is swirly

to attack and harass the enemy) can be upgraded in a similar manner.

So far the combat system may sound similar to any other 3D action adventure game available and on the surface it is. The combat system really heats up when it comes to what can only be described as mini-games. When certain enemies are taken down to a set health threshold a button will appear above their heads. If the player hits the button in time it will open a small mini-game to kill the beast. All of these games are essentially rhythm games revolving around hitting the right button or moving the thumbstick in the right way within the time limit. Successful completion of the challenge results in an instant kill as well as a specific type of orb drop depending on the enemy killed - Minotaurs drop guaranteed green orbs for health, Gorgons drop blue orbs for magic and all other mobs drop red orbs for skill.

Without a doubt the best part of God of War is the combat system

I'VE GOT THE KEY-E

One of the most pleasant surprises in God of War is the fact that the puzzles in game aren't always of the "find the key" variety (though many of them do trudge along that tried, true and terribly dull path). Some of the puzzles are downright inspired in fact, a standout being a 3D puzzle in which Kratos must rotate and fit blocks together to create an unbroken wall. As with all third person games, camera sometimes becomes an issue in God of War. The player has no control over camera angles - for the most part the AI does a good job at angling the camera to the most cinematic and useful angle but occasionally, especially when navigating thin beams or tight walkways the camera can make the going a little tough, to say the least. Good puzzles, great combat, beautiful levels (one on the back of a Titan is a true standout) and great sound come together to make a great game but there's one catch - it's over in about 8-10 hours. There are multiple difficulty settings and a fair few unlockable features including an interesting hint at the plot of the inevitable sequel but after completing the game once you'll find yourself hard pressed to play through again. <<

AVAILABLE ON:
PS2 / XBOX / PC / GCN

DETAILS:

CATEGORY: Action
PLAYERS: 1
DEVELOPER: Sony
PUBLISHER: Sony
PRICE: $99.95
RATING: MA 15+
AVAILABLE: June 23

HYPER VERDICT:

PLUS: Fantastic combat, huge bosses, beautiful.

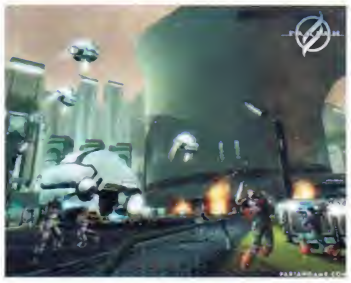
MINUS: Short, find the key.

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY
91	90	92

OVERALL
91

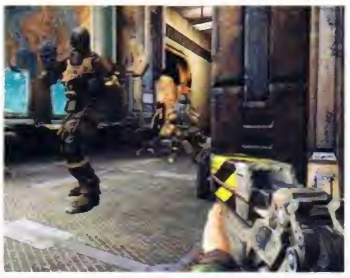
Beautiful, brilliant and bloody but also bloody short

>> THE BIG BOSS Another area in which God of War excels are the boss battles. Saying they are huge is an understatement. The first boss, the Hydra is just a taste of what is in store. It's enormous, deadly and you have to fight it three times in different ways, the final battle involving having to pin two heads to the deck of a ship so you can climb the main mast to fight the main head. The ending to this battle is brilliant and bloody as hell to say the least. This battle pales in comparison to the one later on down the track in which you fight The Minotaur (not just any old minotaur, hence the capital letters).



Friendly fire is always a threat in multipleyer. It's also fun. Try and restrain yourself from killing your team mates too often.

[above] Dare we say it? Why not. BLAU!



PARIAH

DANIEL WILKS is more of a martyr...

A game doesn't have to be original to be good. It just has to be fun. Pariah hardly has an original bone in its 10 hour long body but that doesn't stop it from being a solid and seriously fun slice of first person shooting action. To set the scene, it's 500 odd years in the future and Jack Mason (you) are a fallen military doctor, recently court-martialed and sent from the front lines back to a ravaged and used up Earth, now used as a prison, to do simple first aid and escort duties. After a little snafu with paperwork, Jack is left without a military escort for his otherwise routine escort of a cryogenically frozen prisoner who also happens to be the host of a strange and potentially interesting virus. As luck (or lack thereof/plot) would have it, Jack is shot down, his prisoner is released and in a feat of Darwinian stupidity he ends up covered in the prisoner's blood, infecting him with the virus. All Jack has to do is protect his prisoner, get the hell out of Dodge and find a cure for the virus. Simple, right?

[Up] Assault Rifle vs Gunship

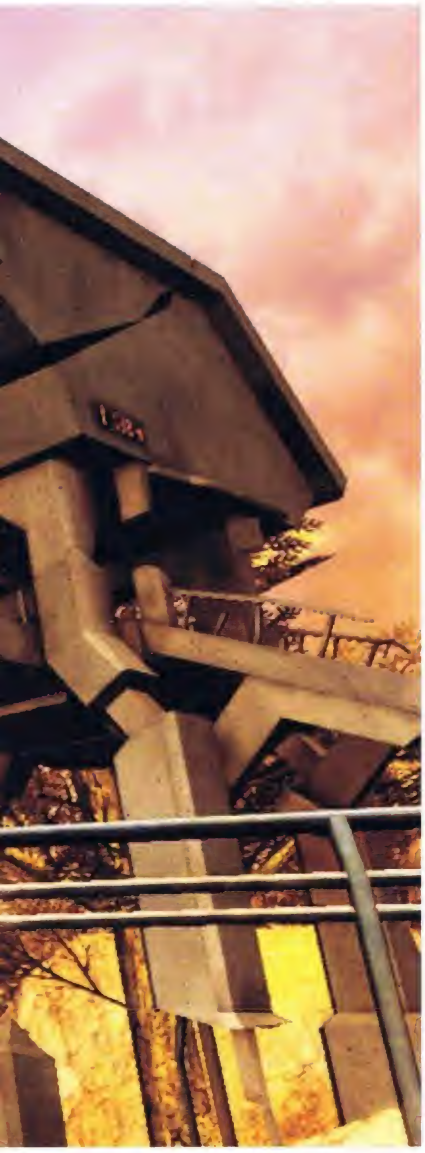
JACK IN THE XBOX

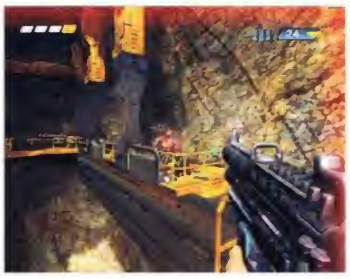
The action of Pariah is competent and solid if never particularly inspired, mostly due to the enemy AI. Combat normally takes place at either extreme or medium range with the player either sniping enemies from out of range of participating in long range gun battles. This is not necessarily a problem but the erratic enemy AI could certainly use a serious tweaking. Normal attack patterns for the AI seem to consist of either running to medium range, firing a few shots and then taking cover or running into range, firing a few shots and then frantically running out of range only to do it again in a few seconds. It's not bad as far as tactics go, just very samey - it would be nice to see a little more variation with the fights. Controls for on foot missions are tight and responsive but vehicular controls are on the weak side with some definite steering and camera issues. Thankfully there are relatively few of these missions and they are quite easy to complete. The game also features a few brief on rails shooter sections to break up the action that, whilst unremarkable are a fun distraction. That said, Pariah still does offer up some very solid action for its running time.

[above] Looks cool but steers like a cow

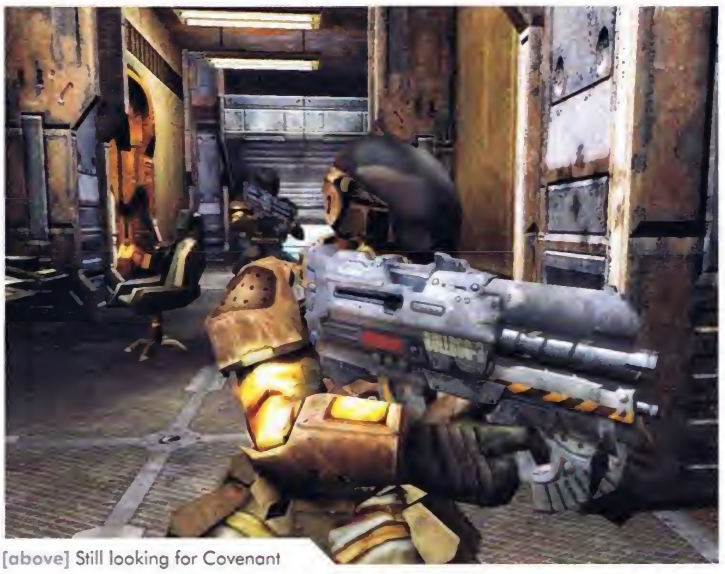
[above] Bonesaw for the win!

Probably the only speck of originality in Pariah is the weapon system which allows players to tailor weapons and loadouts to suit their particular play style. The basic weapons have been seen a thousand times before in different games - an assault rifle, sniper rifle, grenade launcher, shotgun, rocket launcher and all the usual suspects (aside from any pistol weapons), but exploring levels will earn players hidden weapon cores, little upgrade devices that can be added to any of the weapons as well as the healing tool. Each of the weapons has three levels





[above] Where are the Covenant?



[above] Still looking for Covenant

of upgrades. The Bulldog (the basic assault rifle) for example, has a faster rate of fire for the first upgrade, a recoil stabiliser for the second and becomes armour piercing with the third. The Grenade Launcher on the other hand, draws particles into the grenade making for a bigger explosion (as well as some pretty natty visual effects), are given a manual trigger at the second upgrade and become sticky with the third. Other weapons have defensive shields, heat seeking properties, faster reload rates, infra-red scopes and the like. By using the weapon cores, players can beef up the weapons they use on a regular basis, giving the game a more personal slant than other FPS games. The weapon cores and upgrades also feature in multiplayer. Weapon cores are rewarded for kills or can be found hidden through levels. Upgrading the right weapon at the right time can be key to winning a round - there's no point in upgrading your rocket launcher to being heat seeking if you're dukeing it out in the confines of a ship's corridors. Likewise upping the stopping power of your frag rifle (shotgun) in a big outdoor map may not be the most advisable move unless you plan on charging your opponent.

Each of the weapons has three different levels of upgrades

LUSH AND LOVELY

Powered by the Unreal engine, Pariah is a lovely looking game. If it's anything to go by, the quasi-apocalyptic future in which Earth is a used up planet doesn't look so bad. Don't go into it expecting the usual blasted desert wastelands and ruined cities, the Earth of 500 or so years in the future is lush with vegetation and criss-crossed with babbling brooks that would look at home in a Merchant Ivory film. The look of the game falters a bit with the indoor environments as they are quite dull and repetitive, of course they are meant to be military bunkers so bright colours and a commitment to interior decorating wouldn't be all that authentic either. Character models are nicely realised but there is a notable lack of variation in enemies with only a handful of different models. After a while you get the feeling that you're killing an army of clones. As with the rest of the game, the visual design is unoriginal but solid and enjoyable. <<

>> GOT FRIENDS? Although the word Pariah means a solitary outcast or untouchable, the game Pariah features a robust multiplayer game with 13 maps and all the familiar game modes as well as one "unique" to the game called Front Line Assault. Both the Xbox and PC versions of the game feature full bot support so you can still indulge in a little deathmatch action even if you really are a pariah. The game also features a powerful level editor that is enjoyable enough to be a mini-game in its own right. Making a full playable map can be something of a chore if you want to keep things balanced but the ease of the controls and fact that both Xbox and PC can upload the maps should ensure that there will be a wealth of player made multiplayer maps available shortly after release.

AVAILABLE ON:

PS2 / **XBOX / PC** / GCN

DETAILS:

CATEGORY: FPS
PLAYERS: 1-16
DEVELOPER: Digital Extremes
PUBLISHER: Groove Games
PRICE: $99.95
RATING: MA 15+
AVAILABLE: Now

HYPER VERDICT:

PLUS: Solid, dependable, nice weapon upgrade system.

MINUS: Unoriginal, iffy AI.

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY
86	81	84

OVERALL

83

Unoriginal but solidly playable and enjoyable.

[groan] Racing: one of the "FINA" things in life

FORZA MOTORSPORT

Has **MARCH STEPNIK** left his GT4 days behind?

Let's not beat around the bush: Forza is Microsoft's take on Gran Turismo and its format is virtually identical. You race cars from a huge range of licensed consumer and sports vehicles on real and fictional tracks, take the winnings to upgrade existing cars and buy new ones and then race these on ever-increasingly challenging tracks. The most impressive thing about Forza though is that it quite comfortably steps up to the plate and gives Gran Turismo a serious run for its money. Like any debut it's not the perfect package, but it does so many things new and right that you just won't care. Xbox owners: your time has most definitely come.

CAREENING THROUGH CAREER MODE

The basics are all there. You've an Arcade mode for instant gratification, plus Free Run, Time Trials and a Multiplayer mode (splitscreen, LAN and Live) for that real-world competitive fix. But as you'd expect, the core of Forza is the beautifully deep Career mode.

After your first few races, what's most striking is the amount of love that has gone into not only the menus but the overall flow of the game. Forza is absolute joy to play, with most elements of the game being clearly explained at every step of the way. Unlike the arcane systems of other racing titles, you'll always know where you are, where you're going, and why. The only wild territory is car tuning, and that's for obvious reasons.

One of the more interesting innovations is Forza's RPG-like levelling system. Apart from controlling the flow of the game's content (some race cups and cars are unlocked by hitting certain levels), the level system is a smart way to allow racers to instantly position themselves with desirable opponents. It's also used as an effective reward system. Especially for beginner drivers/races in the early stages of the game, there's a nice sense of rapid progress - bonuses like discounts on upgrades and even whole cars themselves greet you every couple of races or so.

The user friendliness also carries over to the racing itself. While Forza lacks a comprehensive tutorial (like Gran Turismo's beautiful License Tests), it does introduce an ingenious dynamic race line indicator. Depending on your speed and position on the track, the racing line will indicate when you should brake, release or absolutely floor it. Of course, to stop this little piece of brilliance from being too powerful the indicator is a guide only; for the best times you'll still have to apply brains and old fashioned skill.

As for the driving itself, Forza presents a solid simulation with all the important fundamentals. The cars have discernable weight and you'll have to know exactly when to brake and accelerate in turns to ensure your tyres don't give way. As you progress up the power chain your tactics will also have to change for success. The only complaint here is that the cars feel just a little arcadey in the way they move and stick on the track. But that's a real nitpick - only Polyphony Digital with over a decade of experience has done any better with GT4 in this department.

Where Forza misfires just a tad with the driving engine, it more than makes up for it in the racing model. The AI is impressively active, and will fight for position in most races. Sometimes they're docile, other times they'll show no hesitation in ramming you for the top spot. This works particularly well with the damage modelling - there's just enough

[up] AND THE CROWD GOES... home

Forza also features Drivatar mode - which is an AI that you train to race just like you for races you'd like to set and forget. While interesting, this little buddy requires a fair bit of work, and his fees are deducted from your race winnings.

[up] Like that Squarepusher track

[up] You can be my wingman anytime

destruction to encourage proper driving but not too much to be a pain in the arse; kissing a barricade or the rear of a car will often cause a loss in power or affect your steering column (and cost you some race earnings), but you won't see any fireballs or spectacular pile-ups.

But really, it's the combination of these three elements that makes Forza so good; this is a pure racing game. Fangin' down a road all the while drafting across the track to stop a pass, you'll be praying that they don't ram you and send you into a spin costing your position and a number of credits in repairs. And if there is a bit of prang, scraping over the finish line in first place with a beat up car is absolutely thrilling.

Scraping over the line in first with a beat up car is absolutely thrilling

LIVE FROM YOUR LOUNGE ROOM

But it gets better. You really do need Live now. At least, to get the most out of Forza, you do. Designed very much with Live in mind, Forza beautifully integrates its online capabilities seamlessly into the game. Online races can be chosen from the main menu for a quick race, while delving deeper into the game shows support for online car clubs and car trading (something we've yet had a chance to play with). But it's the use of Live in the single player Career mode that really excites. You can race others online, and the winnings will affect your standings (money earned and levels gained) in Career mode. It's a simple idea that works incredibly well. Also, bringing up a race in Career mode will show a leaderboard (and if you've raced it before, your position on it) for that track for quick comparison. But that's not all - if you're skilled enough to rank well, a ghost of your race will be saved for others to download and observe your l33t driving skillz. Forza is simply a much better game thanks to Live.

All in all, Forza works because it's the most complete racing game on any console system. It's good for beginners, rewarding to the experts. It allows you to tweak your car until it's really your own and the Live support is truly outstanding. The driving engine could do with some fine tuning but we'll leave that for the next version of Forza; as it stands Forza Motorsport is a beautiful racing experience. Get it. <<

>> **CUSTOMISATION** Under the hood, Forza is an impressive beast. With a stack of upgrades and the ability to tune them, hardcore enthusiasts will be rewarded for covering themselves with virtual grease.

But like any real racer will know, what's on the outside is equally important. Forza really shines here: not quite as comprehensive as something like NFS: Underground, Forza nevertheless offers a good range of aftermarket body parts to give your racing machine that stylish edge. It's the livery-editor that does the real damage though, with six car areas and 100 layers of decals per area. This is some seriously powerful stuff and the dedicated are rewarded here with a machine that is most definitely your own. And it makes for some good perving; checking other rides out on the starting grid in online multiplayer is where it all pays off.

AVAILABLE ON:

PS2 / **XBOX** / PC / GCN

DETAILS:

CATEGORY: Racing sim
PLAYERS: 1-8
DEVELOPER: Microsoft Game Studios
PUBLISHER: Microsoft
PRICE: $99.95
RATING: G
AVAILABLE: Now

HYPER VERDICT:

PLUS: A complete package. Innovation and polish in virtually all aspects.

MINUS: Crap soundtrack, an immature driving engine.

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY
89	85	94

OVERALL

93

HYPER BIG RUBBER STAMP OF APPROVAL

You won't look back - Forza is it.

!!! Hearing Tom Baker (or a remarkably good impersonation of him) has made us even more excited about seeing the new series of Dr Who!

[above] Look at the ragdolls fly

COLD WINTER

DANIEL WILKS refuses to make a gratuitous "head" joke

Take one SAS operative working for MI6, place in a Chinese military prison, torture liberally, sprinkle with a little profanity and you have the recipe for Cold Winter, a nasty yet fun FPS potboiler about a political prisoner turned mercenary trekking across the world fighting terrorism, or, more precisely, shooting a hell of a lot of people. Usually in the head, making them fly off in a comedic (and grotesque) way. Whilst swearing a lot.

STERLING SHOW OLD BOY

Players take the role of Andrew Sterling, the aforementioned swearing, tortured, cranky, head shooting former MI6 seconded SAS operative. After being captured and tortured by those dastardly commies, MI6 promptly erases all files pertaining to Sterling and leaves him to the tender mercies of a prissy man in a white suit with a penchant for breaking fingers. After escaping (killing a lot of people in the process), Sterling, understandably miffed at being left out in the cold joins a "private security concern", does some freelance spying (which means killing a lot of people) and, as the plot would have it, becomes involved in a conspiracy far larger than him that could significantly reduce the population of the world.

The script is far and away the strongest element of Cold Winter and no wonder. Warren Ellis, one of the modern visionaries of comic books wrote the script and it's full of his trademarks, darkly witty cynicism, ultra violence, grandiose speechifying, detestable villains, a little accidental misogyny and a massive conspiracy. The voice acting is universally excellent, and shows a pleasant lack of American accents - in fact there doesn't appear to be one American in the entire game. Instead we get all manner of European and Middle Eastern accents and a voice over that sounds disarmingly like Tom Baker (unfortunately I skipped the credits after finishing the game so cannot confirm this).

[Jihad] Generic Middle Eastern terrorists

There is a reason why I mention the script and voice acting before gameplay - these two elements are what will prompt you to continue playing more than the actual gameplay. It's not that Cold Winter does anything wrong - it doesn't - it's more the fact that the game treads a path many have traveled before. Basic gameplay revolves around FPS action, with Sterling shooting the crap out of anything that moves. Real time

[above] Gratuitous phallic symbolism

[above] Another lead based decapitation

[above] Seems like a fair fight

[above] How to fail Sniper School

physics, ragdolling and a model deformation/gore system have been implemented in the game making for some spectacular firefights as enemies are blown apart, cars explode and ever-present explosive barrels do their thing. The engine is definitely up to the task of rendering the mayhem, and stays at a nice and stable frame rate.

The controls are tight and for the most part the camera is very good but there is a certain sloppiness to the shooting. It's way too easy, on all but the most difficult level, to score an instant kill head shot - start a three round burst at an enemy's chest and the third shot will take off their head 90% of the time. Combine the ease of killing with the abundance of available armour (dead enemies can be searched for ammo, items and armour) and you end up with relatively little challenge. A game being hard is not necessary for a player to enjoy it but when you can get through a game in only a little over six hours you know there's something missing.

The script is far and away the strongest element in Cold Winter

ASSHOLE PHYSICS

One of the more interesting aspects of Cold Winter is Sterling's ability to interact with the environment, at least on the surface at any rate. On a basic level, the player can push, pull and knock over most things to block doors, create cover or otherwise just be a jackass. The other way in which Sterling can interact with the environment is by combining objects he picks up into new and usually deadly configurations. Get your hands on a couple of empty bottles, some strips of cloth and a gas tank and you can make Molotov Cocktails to throw at mooks (because, you know, it's always fun to see someone running around screaming and on fire). With an alarm clock and some C4 (much of the Middle East seems to be constructed from C4 the stuff is so easy to find) and you can make timed explosives. Although making items is fun, some of the recipes you get throughout the game are nigh on useless - it's possible to make a mine detector but only one small portion of one level out of 18 has mines in it and they can be easily circumnavigated. Ultimately none of the objects you can make (with the exception of lockpicks, which are usually needed to get bigger and better guns) have any effect on gameplay and come off as window dressing rather than a feature. <<

>> **COLD COUCH** Cold Winter comes with a number of multiplayer modes that can be played splitscreen or online but overall the experience feels a little undercooked. Multiplayer contains all of the familiar game modes such as Deathmatch and Capture the Flag as well as a novel take on the basic capture and hold game in which players must fight over possession of a severed head, holding on to it to rack up points for their side. Unfortunately splitscreen play only supports four players and the maps are too big and cluttered to make them particularly viable, as you spend most of your game time running around looking for someone to shoot. We haven't been able to test the game online but support for up to eight players should alleviate this problem somewhat.

AVAILABLE ON:
PS2 / XBOX / PC / GCN

DETAILS:
CATEGORY: FPS
PLAYERS: 1-4/1-8 (online)
DEVELOPER: Swordfish Studios
PUBLISHER: Sierra
PRICE: $99.95
RATING: MA 15+
AVAILABLE: Now

HYPER VERDICT:
PLUS: Fantastic story, excellent voice acting, Tom Baker?

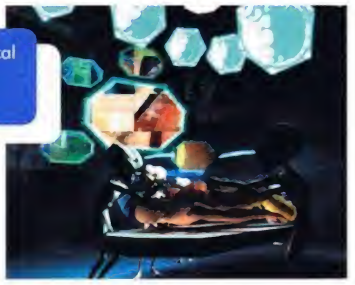
MINUS: Lacks challenge, short.

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY
86	95	79

OVERALL
81

A fantastic story brilliantly acted but lacking challenge

You may remember Area 51 from your local arcade game. Yes, it was a very average light gun shooter once upon a time.



[up] "I once caught a human THIS big"

[up] "Which direction is Timesplitters?"

AREA 51

CAM SHEA cleans up the U.S. government's mess... again

Poor old David Duchovny. His stint on the X-Files has forever doomed him to being the guest of honour at Nerd Conventions and doing narration for shows like The Mysteries of Unexplained Mysteries, Alien Autopsies: Swimsuit Edition and of course, any game that features government conspiracies concerning aliens. Thus, it comes as no surprise that Midway's latest - Area 51 - should feature Duchovny's inimitable brand of "I'm super bored" voice acting. In fact, he voices the lead character Ethan Cole, also played by you. It's like a Vulcan mind meld between the player and Duchovny, which is just as exciting as it sounds. Or maybe not.

MUTANT OFFSPRING

The game sees Ethan Cole and his HAZMAT team called in to Area 51 to help contain a mysterious outbreak. A virus is rampaging through, killing people and inhabiting their bodies. The result is part The Thing and part Doom 3. Enemies aren't what we'd call smart, but the game does a great job of keeping you on your toes as they move quickly, can leap over barricades, through windows and drop down from ledges. There's little here that we haven't seen before, however, and to a large extent Area 51 is just a fun, unoriginal game that consolidates features from previous FPS titles.

The weapon lineup is as expected, and dual wielding comes standard. Thankfully the shottie can be dual wielded - for when one shotgun just isn't enough - which is a nice touch. Physics and ragdolling have, of course, been incorporated, so firefights feel relatively dynamic, and enemy bodies get flung through the air and slump awkwardly to the ground. Ethan has a flashlight for the requisite dark, moody sections, which are contrasted nicely with the big warehousey environments that must often be defended from wave upon wave of mutated freaks. And it's in these situations where you'll be thankful that your squad is a little more proactive in this title than in others. They'll actively take out enemies when under siege, and lead the way when you have to move on.

Perhaps the most noteworthy aspect of Area 51 is the fact that a short way into the game Ethan is infected by the virus, giving him the ability to mutate at will, with a stronger melee attack and viral ranged attacks. It's also accompanied by a nice shift in the visuals, but by and large the alternate state isn't as useful as it could be.

All things told there's not all that much wrong with Area 51, but it's hard to get too enthused about it either. It's very much a checkpoint to checkpoint game, with plenty of keys to find and doors that mysteriously unlock themselves after cutscenes. It's not a game that's going to rock the genre in other words, but you could certainly do a lot worse. <<

AVAILABLE ON:
PS2 / XBOX / PC / GCN

DETAILS:

CATEGORY: FPS
PLAYERS: 1-16
DEVELOPER: Midway Studios Austin
PUBLISHER: Midway
PRICE: $79.95 ($69.95 on PC)
RATING: MA15+
AVAILABLE: Now

HYPER VERDICT:

PLUS: Nice visuals, solid gameplay, your squad actually does stuff.

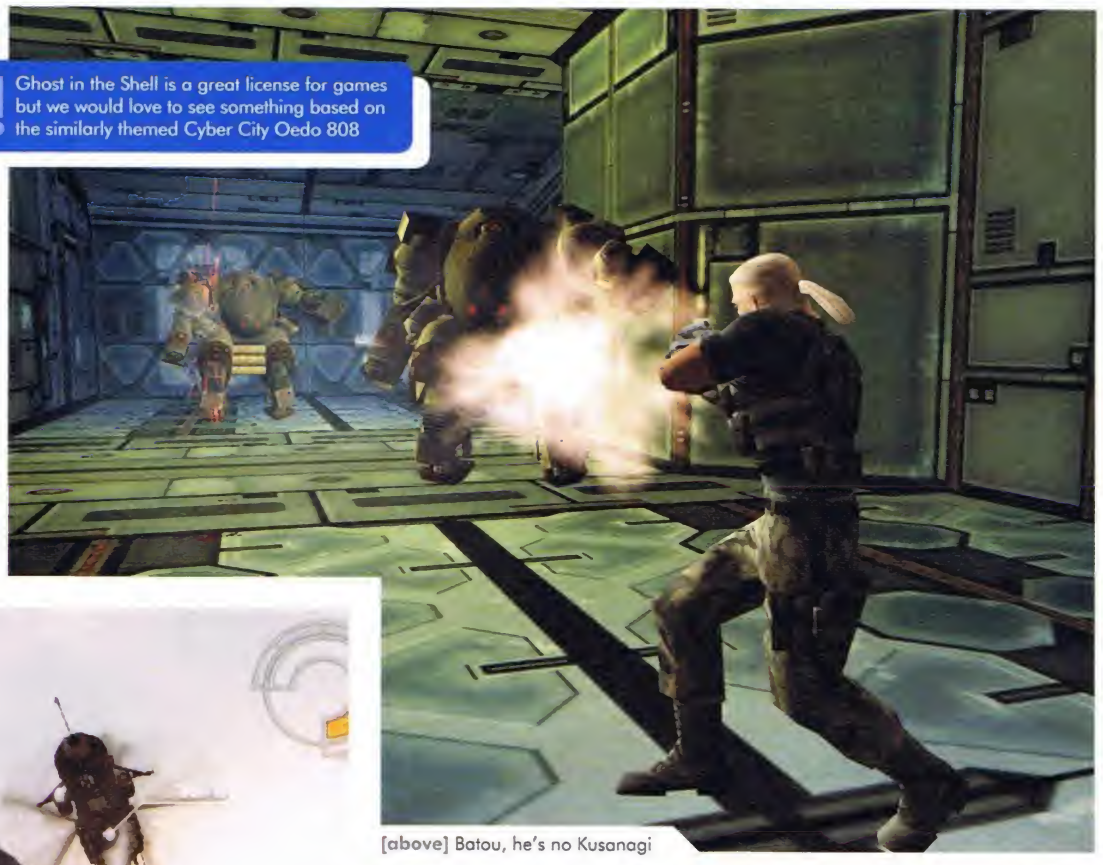
MINUS: You've seen it all before, Duchovny, crazy plot.

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY
80	81	75

OVERALL
78

A by the numbers FPS that is nonetheless engaging.

Ghost in the Shell is a great license for games but we would love to see something based on the similarly themed Cyber City Oedo 808



[above] Batou, he's no Kusanagi

[up] This is beginning to look like hentai

GHOST IN THE SHELL: Stand Alone Complex

ELIOT FISH stands alone and gets a complex about it.

For some games, the only thing to lift them out of the mire is a popular license full of memorable characters and storylines. But instead of a license being used to gild the lily, it's often leant upon until it crumbles to reveal the mediocre game that lies beneath. Ghost in the Shell: Stand Alone Complex is a game that teeters dangerously close to this all-too-common videogame fate. There's no one big flaw that spoils this experience, but rather, lots of niggling little problems that generally drag this Anime-styled action game down to a level of the "merely average".

Ghost in the Shell is a beloved piece of fiction, and it's perfect videogame fodder. Whilst this game is based on Stand Alone Complex, the animated Ghost in the Shell TV series, it's still as cool as it ever was. Cavia and Bandai have definitely ensured that the game is up to a certain standard, and that it capitalises on what's great about the Anime; but at times it feels as though Stand Alone Complex is simply aping other games such as Metal Gear Solid, instead of establishing its own take on the stealth/action experience.

The sexy-cool Motoko Kusanagi looks great and animates nicely. Her melee attacks are suitably dynamic (even cutting to a special slow-motion camera view for each finishing move) and there are plenty of guns and the odd bit of hacking to help break up the relentless action. But your experience as Kusanagi is spoiled by some sometimes stiff character movement - especially when lining up one of the game's countless precarious jumps. The problem is that when you press the jump button, the animation for the move kicks in with a split-second delay. It's enough to regularly have you mistiming crucial jumps. If the game didn't rely so heavily on jumping puzzles (many of the levels are like an obstacle course of wall jumps) the bee wouldn't be buzzing so loudly in our bonnet. Stand Alone Complex tends to drop to the level of frustrating platform play all too often, which can leave you wandering about some areas figuring out exactly how you're expected to jump around in order to get out.

If you keep your cool and systematically work your way through the game - and hey, there are some top action moments to be had - this is challenging enough to provide some decent entertainment. However, when you find that you've finished the game in less than 10 hours, the steam might start building up between the ears once more. Ghost in the Shell fans will find a lot to like about Stand Alone Complex, but in the end it's just not as original, deep or satisfying as it should be. <<

AVAILABLE ON:
PS2 / XBOX / PC / GCN

DETAILS:

CATEGORY: Action
PLAYERS: 1-4
DEVELOPER: Cavia Inc.
PUBLISHER: Bandai
PRICE: $99.95
RATING: M15+
AVAILABLE: Now

HYPER VERDICT:

PLUS: Fans will appreciate the detail, missions are challenging.

MINUS: Stiff character movement/ control, lots of precarious jumping.

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY
83	69	75

OVERALL
73

Far from standing alone, this is average action fare.

[up] Part 1 of an annoying boss battle

!!! Episode III also gets a special Hyper award for "worst looking hair in a game". Ray Martin's hair is more convincing than this.

EPISODE III: Revenge of the Sith

CAM SHEA and **DANIEL WILKS** are both on Episode III barrel duty

Cam: There's a little something we're always going on about here at work, and that's "Hyper Solidarity". What am I talking about? Well, let's take reviewing Episode III as an example. Rather than one of us slogging our way through this oh so average game, we decided to tag team it, firstly to share the pain, and secondly to have someone else to bitch to about it. Hyper Solidarity baby. So Wilks, this was pretty disappointing eh?

WILKS TRIES TO BE FUNNY

Wilks: About as disappointing as your bedroom performance I would say (fnar fnar). Here's a game where you finally get to see whiny little bitch Anakin turn into James Earl Jonesing badass Vader. That in and of itself should rock for anyone with the least bit of geek cred. It's obvious from the outset that this has been rushed to get it out the door. Can you say Glitchy McGlitch? How many times through this did we see enemies disappearing for no apparent reason, lightsabers passing straight through enemies doing no damage or see our character (Obi-Wan or Anakin) simply glitch out and do a spastic dance for a while?

Cam: Hells yeah, this is a pretty glitchy game. And it's not like there's a good excuse either. This isn't meant to be a revolutionary-real-world-physics-trillion-poly-go-anywhere hump-anyone-Shiggy-Molyneux-massively-online-single-player-celsoft-rendered-direct-x-11-pixtex-shaded-teh-roxor-leviathon. It's a simple bloody action game. And you're meant to be an all powerful Jedi/Sith, not some schmuck hemmed in by invisible walls and unable to leap across gaps unless there's a glowy pad on the ground. That said, there's certainly some perverse satisfaction to be had in mashing away in combat. You can pull off some pretty stylish attacks and evades, and the animation is (on the whole) very good.

Wilks: You can pull off some flashy moves I agree, but half of the time the camera either obscures the enemy so you have a hard time attacking them or for some reason your combo just reverses direction leaving you attacking thin air. While this is really frustrating, what I find even worse is the fact the manual doesn't feature any real information about the combat system, and most of the hints are shown at inappropriate times, like the middle of boss battles when you don't particularly want to take your eyes off the super-cheap enemy to read how the game works.

Cam: And then there's the whole targeting system. It's mystifying when you're directly facing an enemy, yet your force lightning targets some random place in the air behind you. This comes down to shifting your target with the right analogue stick, but surely the basic mechanics should be intuitive - i.e. you target the guy in front of you? But that's enough about combat for now. What did you think of the experience points system and the fact that you alternate between Anakin and Obi-Wan?

Wilks: It was OK but many of the powers turned out to be nigh on useless for the most part. What is the point of building up your force grab powers when most of the enemies

[above] Hadouken, yadda, yadda

[above] Someone wants to be onboard

[above] Now, you'd think that would hurt

[glitchy] Target sentry gun - hit droid

in the second half of the game seem to be immune to it? Conversely, what is the point in building up your finishing moves if 50% of the time they choose to randomly target mid air or one of the omnipresent exploding barrels? The system for getting XP seems to be as random as the combat as well - XP is gained through killing enemies (obviously) and is ranked in levels of skill ranging from fair to masterful. We could repeat the same formula over and over again with attacks and for some kills get fair and for others get masterful. Who knows, we may have been told how it works by one of the instruction boxes that flash up occasionally for five seconds but we were too busy trying not to die or get bored to notice.

Cam: Or too busy cringing. Episode III has some of the worst voice acting to ever grace a game. Talk about phoning your performance in - the guys doing Anakin and Obi-Wan bring about as much charisma to the voice work in this project as a wet piece of cardboard. They're actually pretty decent sound-alikes, but come across as disinterested throughout, which may have more to do with the characters themselves

Random tough guy one liners aren't part of the Jedi credo

(thanks Mr Beardy) and the fact that the lines are mostly out of character and used in inappropriate places, than on actual effort. Then there's the awful sound mixing (in both - we checked out the PS2 version as well) where you need to basically double the volume of your speakers to hear anything in the cutscenes.

PULP FRICTION?

Wilks: Speaking of out of place lines, what the hell were the developers on when they thought having one of Mace Windu's lines being something along the lines of "I will strike you down with furious anger". I'm as much a pop-culture fan as the next guy but in-jokes in Star Wars? Random tough guy one liners aren't a part of the Jedi credo last time I looked - aren't they meant to be all detached and spiritual and shit? Hearing Obi-Wan say "I enjoyed that" 300 times after cutting the arm off a Clone Trooper (this happens more than you would believe possible) grates somewhat.

Cam: We should probably also mention that this ain't a long game. We took it in turns playing over the course of a day at work and finished it. Doing so unlocks a few new "missions" (essentially a sequence of rooms) as peripheral characters (yes, including Yoda), and there are a bunch of co-op missions and quite a few characters to face off with in the two player duel mode, but really, there isn't much sustaining this one. The plus points for me? I thought some of the settings were appropriately epic and cool. I thought it was pretty funny watching Malky wander past with his hands over his ears trying to avoid spoilers (we were playing it before the film came out). And erm, that's about it. I think younger gamers will probably dig this one, but it pales in comparison to the Buffy game (which The Collective also made). A rental title at best.

Wilks: I was quite taken with the lava factory but aside from that, Episode III is a bit of a stinker. In the game's defence though, it's still a damn sight better than Star Wars: Obi-Wan. <<

AVAILABLE ON:
PS2 / XBOX / PC / GCN

DETAILS:

CATEGORY: Mashtastic action
PLAYERS: 1-2
DEVELOPER: The Collective
PUBLISHER: LucasArts
PRICE: $89.95
RATING: M 15+
AVAILABLE: Now

HYPER VERDICT:

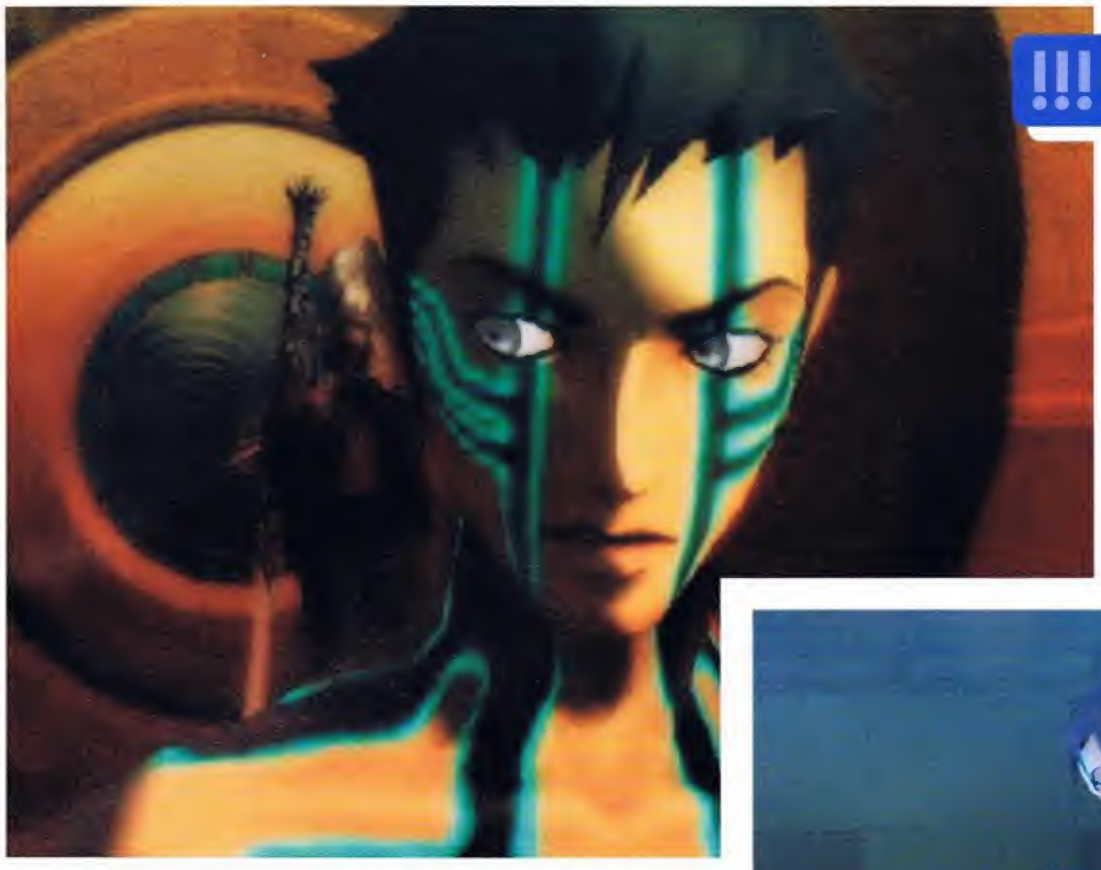
PLUS: Nice animations, plenty of moves, some good settings.

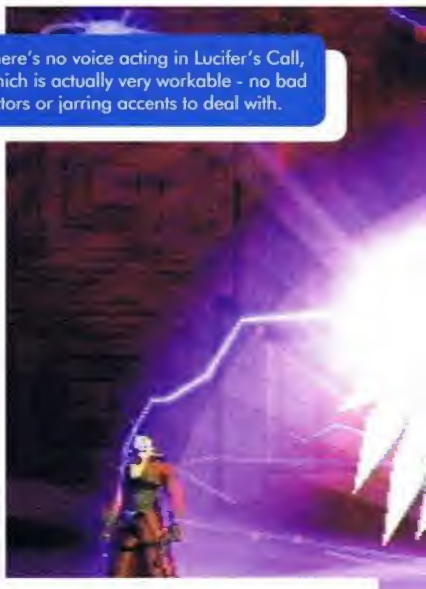
MINUS: Glitchy, terrible voice acting, annoying combat mechanics.

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY
77	50	68

OVERALL
68

As the acronym tells you, Episode III: ROTS.





There's no voice acting in Lucifer's Call, which is actually very workable - no bad actors or jarring accents to deal with.

[below] Bizarre untranslated title

SHIN MEGAMI TENSEI: Lucifer's Call

Only **SALLY WOELLNER** was hardcore enough for this one...

As a gamer, I think I've been on enough quests to save the world. I've saved it from every conceivable type of madman, psychopathic fruity villain, and testosterone poisoned tyrant; and quite frankly, I'm sick of it. Which is why it was quite a pleasant surprise when, about thirty minutes in to Lucifer's Call (also known as Nocturne), the world was annihilated.

WORLD'S BLANKIEST BLANK

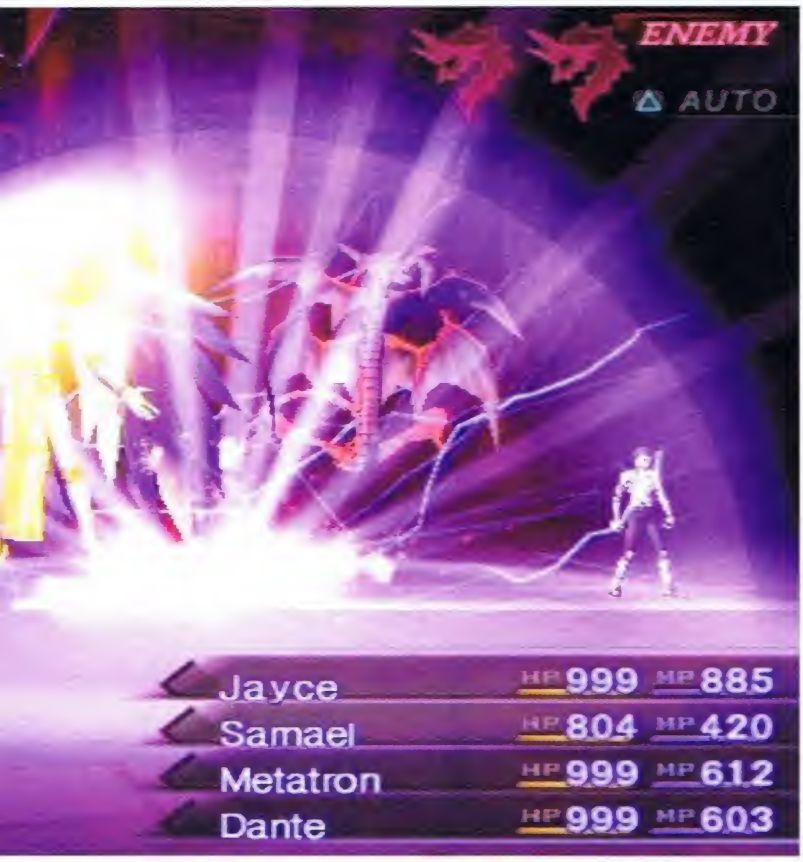
Of course if it ended there, it'd be the world's shortest RPG, and we could all go home. But thanks to the aid of an especially creepy small blond child, a regular Japanese high-school student survives. Instead of taking a plucky band of do-gooders on a quest, he ends up traveling the post-apocalyptic 'Vortex World', mainly in an attempt to find out exactly what the hell just happened. As the plot progresses, however, he finds himself at the center of the struggle to determine the fate of the new world that the vortex will give birth to. The Vortex World itself is a stylishly rendered inverted earth, now populated with the souls of the dead, plus an amazingly wide variety of talkative demons.

The story, while compelling, honestly doesn't feature too highly in the gameplay though. This game is basically centered around exploring locations and dungeons, and we really wouldn't recommend it to anyone with a mortal fear of corridors. What saves it from being a tedious series of random encounters (why yes, I am looking at you, FF) are the strategic elements that feature heavily in the gameplay.

For starters, the variety of enemies in Lucifer's Call is impressive, with over 100 distinct demons. Happily, this game doesn't suffer from the typical "let's slap another colour on it and call it a different monster!" RPG approach. Instead, the characters are drawn from a wide variety of cultures and mythologies, so you'll find yourself facing off against beautifully rendered horsemen of the apocalypse, angels in bondage, Japanese demons, figures from Chinese mythology, and things that look like they should be the next Mr Whippy mascot. And this is especially relevant, given that your party is comprised solely of demons that you have recruited yourself. Pretty much any enemy you face can be recruited or created as the game progresses, including all the bosses.

During battle you can initiate conversations with your enemies, to talk them over to your side, or wheedle items and money from them. Negotiating with the demons can be interesting - they can also demand money or items, or request that you answer a knotty philosophical question. Some of them might plead for their life when they're being slaughtered, or attempt to join you of their own accord, presumably because they're just that impressed by your character's spiffy glowing tattoos.

You can control your protagonst's strengths and weaknesses by ingesting different insectile creatures called Magatama, which also impart different skills and powers, and each of the demons you recruit has specific strengths and weaknesses. It's very important to create a balanced party, as the strengths and weaknesses of the protagonist and his allies are absolutely critical to the game. The battle system is turn-based, and rather than just dealing or taking extra damage, attacking a demon's weakness will give you extra turns. Likewise, if an enemy attacks your weakness, you will lose turns. You can't coast through on strength alone - if you're not paying attention, you can lose against enemies that are far weaker than you merely because you don't have any opportunities to attack. Putting together the right party,



[above] Luckily he's a combat dentist

and developing strategies to deal with the enemies and bosses of the world accounts for most of the depth of the game and is surprisingly compelling. I normally reserve a special hatred for endless random battles, yet I found myself enjoying the fights and happily exploring locations for hours on end.

The visuals don't hurt either, despite the locations occasionally being somewhat of a mixed bag. The cel-shaded look is used to great effect, creating a very slick and stylish aesthetic for the game - it's perfect for bringing the gorgeous character artwork of Kazuma Kaneko to life. Most of the visual energy seems to have been spent on the demons, so although there are some absolutely gorgeous environments, some of them are in contrast depressingly bland.

During batle you can initiate conversations with your enemies

END GAME

And while the story often does take a back seat, when it pokes its head up, it serves to intrinsically influence the direction and ultimate ending of the game, rather than just acting as filler. As you learn more about the ideas and philosophies of the different factions striving to create the new world, through conversation you can align yourself with any or none of the philosophies on offer. Your choices will shape this new world, and decide which of the multiple endings you, well... end up with.

As unique, visually appealing and fascinating as Lucifer's Call may be, in the end it might be a difficult game to tackle for RPG newbies. It's scarily long - up to 90 or so hours, depending on whether you really want to tackle the obligatory optional dungeon or not. There are plenty of random encounters, and tactical, sometimes difficult, boss battles. There's a large degree of character and ally variation and customisation, and you really could spend hours figuring out all the ins and outs of this game. Add to that the dark, philosophical storyline, and an easy brainless game this is not. These elements will have some of you salivating, and some running for the hills. If you're one of the former, Lucifer's Call comes highly recommended. <<

>> **DANTE HO!** The English release of Nocturne/Lucifer's Call is a 'Special Director's Cut', featuring an enormous extra set of dungeons well as an extra ending. It also includes Capcom's Dante, from the Devil May Cry series. He was loaned for Nocturne (oh Dante, you ho) in exchange for Kazuma Kaneko creating the originally controversial devil trigger designs for DMC3. You won't encounter him often, unless you choose the explore the optional dungeon, but he fits surprisingly nicely into the SMT world. There's even a recreation of a scene from DMC2, which is now arguably the best thing to ever come out of that game.

AVAILABLE ON:
PS2 / XBOX / PC / GCN

DETAILS:

CATEGORY: RPG
PLAYERS: 1
DEVELOPER: Atlus
PUBLISHER: Ubisoft
PRICE: $79.95
RATING: M15+
AVAILABLE: June 30

HYPER VERDICT:

PLUS: Involving, awesome strategic RPG.

MINUS: Endless battles, can be difficult.

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY
84	87	89

OVERALL
86

A great game for those prepared to give it the time.

Serenity - the Firefly movie is going to be out really soon now and we can't wait to see it!

[above] Tooth-picking in Ancient times

[above] An early test of Deep heat

STRONGHOLD 2

KOSTA ANDREADIS is man of pure medieval...

If you've ever used the Zergling rush strategy in Starcraft then its safe to say that you're genetically predisposed to 'rushing'. There's really nothing you can do about it and if this is the case then Stronghold 2 may not be the game for you, as the focus here is on the defensive, castle defence to be exact. Set in the middle-ages, or whenever the hell they had castles, lords, and kings vying for land and crown, Stronghold 2 lets players indulge in classic siege warfare as well as simulate the finer aspects of castle life, apart from the excessive boozing and womanising. But with the promise of epic castle offensive and defensive battles it is unfortunate that players have to plough through some fairly average and generic RTS set-ups to get there.

JOUSTING IS OVERRATED

As with many strategy titles there's a lot of gameplay to be found in Stronghold 2 and it offers two single player campaign modes, one focused on castle life (simulation) and the other on a quest for the crown (warfare). Simulation is all fine and dandy when done right but Stronghold 2 really tests your patience in the castle life mode when you almost always need to build two or three types of buildings to perform one task, and then sit there for minutes waiting for it to be carried out. And with little or no customisation available the whole affair seems a decade out of date. But when it comes to the castle defence aspect, that being getting your keep, walls, towers and defensive positions up to scratch the game does come into its own and become a lot of fun if a little flawed. Waging a massive assault on an enemy stronghold or defending your own castle helps elevate the single player aspect of the title to be on par with the multiplayer, which is better executed if only for its lack of tedium. Defensive strategies can be quite devious, for example you can leave an empty wall for someone to bring their ladder bearers and troops only to bombard them with boiling oil and burning logs when they try to scale your walls.

When you're on the offensive the experience can get quite frustrating, with the source almost always being either the poor AI amongst your troops or the limited micromanagement system. You know you've got problems when you can only use one mouse button to issue commands and formations with virtually no hotkey support. The flipside to that of course is the simulation aspect of the game where, through a generic set of staple RTS conceits, it becomes clear that developer Firefly should have focused on the siege warfare and forgot all about apple and sheep farms, jousting tournaments and other nonsense. That's not to say that a castle life simulator wouldn't be cool, it's just that the one on offer here is boring.

AVAILABLE ON:
PS2 / XBOX / **PC** / GCN

DETAILS:

CATEGORY: RTS
PLAYERS: 1-Multi
DEVELOPER: Firefly Studios
PUBLISHER: Global Star Software
PRICE: $69.95
RATING: M15+
AVAILABLE: Now

HYPER VERDICT:

PLUS: Siege warfare featuring everything you've always wanted.

MINUS: Uninspired castle simulation

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY
70	65	64

OVERALL
65

Part siege warfare part castle sim and the first part is good.

JUICED

You have to feel somewhat sorry for Juice Games, the developer behind Juiced. On the eve of the game's release last year, everything went pear-shaped with Acclaim, and a new publisher and release date had to be sought. Luckily, THQ stepped in and the game is finally seeing the light of day. But with Midnight Club 3 recently tearing up the streets, the timing for the release probably couldn't be worse. Direct comparisons are impossible to avoid, and Juiced comes out second best in a direct head-to-head between these two street racing games that revolve around car mod culture.

The delay of Juiced did however give Juice Games the opportunity to continue to tweak the parts of the game they were probably unhappiest with. What we have here then is an improved game over the version that was ready for release almost a year ago. Yes, this feels like a more polished product. However, we can't shake the feeling that most of the changes are only aesthetic. Grinding our gears through the career mode doesn't reveal any amazing new revelations in gameplay, and if anything it makes us hunger for the more adrenaline pumping action of Midnight Club 3's busy city streets, instead of these Gran Turismo 4 style orderly circuits.

It's good, solid and offers hours of tweaking, but the game lacks the pizzazz and excitement of Rockstar's effort. Unfortunately, our opinion of Juiced has been watered down.

Eliot Fish

AVAILABLE ON:
PS2 / XBOX / PC / GCN

DETAILS:
CATEGORY: Racing / **PLAYERS:** 1-6 / **DEVELOPER:** Juice Games / **PUBLISHER:** THQ / **PRICE:** $99.95 (PS2 and Xbox), $79.95 (PC) / **RATING:** G / **AVAILABLE:** June

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY	OVERALL
84	84	79	79

[above] Give us traffic and drift any day

KESSEN III

It's a bit odd, but it's a combination that works. Kessen III breaks further away from its more dry strategic roots by adding mystical abilities and special effects to the fray - something that's been lifted directly from Kessen's sister series, Dynasty Warriors. It also adds a detailed narrative to the mix, which is told via two hours worth of gorgeously produced cutscenes. While this is primarily a war strategy game, the narrative detailing the exploits of the younger Oda Nobunaga in feudal Japan is peppered with enough character, drama and humour that Kessen III at times feels like a gloriously cheesy Japanese soap opera.

The other big change is the game's environments, which for the first time aren't completely flat. Combined with destructible objects (like defensive walls, buildings and the like), Kessen III feels decidedly more 3D. There's also an effect on strategy - elevation can be used to your advantage in combat.

It's clear that Kessen III was designed to be everything to everybody - an epic tale of warring samurai with action strategy that a beginner can pick up and play but with enough depth to satisfy the strategy nuts. The end result, not surprisingly, is that it falls a little short of its lofty aims. Battle controls are simple enough and you can quite comfortably play through the game without having to delve into a the planning and non-story critical areas the game has to offer. If you do, however, Kessen III becomes a much deeper game, but it never strays far from its action roots.

March Stepnik

AVAILABLE ON:
PS2 / XBOX / PC / GCN

DETAILS:
CATEGORY: Action Strategy / **PLAYERS:** 1
DEVELOPER: KOEI / **PUBLISHER:** THQ
PRICE: $99.95 / **RATING:** M15+ / **AVAILABLE:** Now

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY	OVERALL
83	85	80	80

[above] Looks like Dynasty Warriors, only slower

STREET RACING SYNDICATE

Street racing is so hot right now, and if this racing sub-genre were to somehow take physical form in the guise of a sexy female and you were to let's say touch her cans, you'd definitely get burnt - not only by a hefty lawsuit but by the physical temperature too. SRS joins a growing list of racing games aimed at those with a keen interest in 20-inch chrome rims and full sports body kits, and with free-roaming cities to explore, numerous licensed cars to buy (around 40 or so), races to race, ladies to impress and countless modifications to make SRS does have a lot to offer, but sadly the execution is average at best. Let's go down the list shall we? The cars don't handle realistically at all, catch-up logic is obvious from the very first race and the most enticing aspects of the game such as roaming the city looking for competition and girlfriends are boring. Even the simplest aspect of the genre, music, is bungled big time here - with a pitiful selection of hip hop, rock and other so-called 'urban music'. And then there's the girlfriend aspect, where you can complete challenges and races to unlock real-life models to be your girl! Bah, these 'models' the developers speak of are nothing of the sort and even if they were going to get skanks at least have the decency to get hoochie mamas - this is street racing after all. But, as there is a lot to do in SRS the end result does have somewhat of a 'soap opera' effect, where after being subjected to middle of the road content for such a long period of time, slowly growing accustomed to the banality, you end up enjoying the experience.

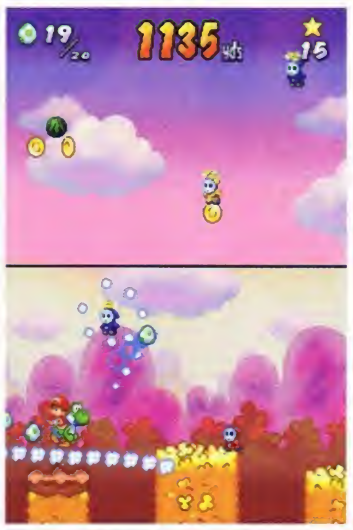
Kosta Andreadis

AVAILABLE ON:
PS2 / XBOX / PC / GCN

DETAILS:
CATEGORY: Racing / **PLAYERS:** 1-2 /
DEVELOPER: Eutechnyx / **PUBLISHER:** Namco /
PRICE: $TBC / **RATING:** M15+ / **AVAILABLE:** Now

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY	OVERALL
65	50	60	60

[above] Does "Lost It" refer to the driver or developers?



[diabetes] these screens are so sweet

[above] Yoshi just got fruitier

!!! Occasionally you'll die because of the odd double up on control, such as trying to draw at Yoshi's feet but coaxing him into jumping instead, but these annoyances are few and far between.

YOSHI'S TOUCH & GO

As much as the crew is addicted to the PSP at the moment, the reality is that we're not really having new gaming experiences on it. Sure, Ridge Racer and Wipeout Pure may be stunning games, but in terms of how we play them, they're not offering anything particularly novel - just a glossy, handheld version of what has come before. Yoshi's Touch & Go, on the other hand, is a prime example of what Nintendo are trying to do with the DS - bring new forms of gameplay to the table. It's a completely stylus driven game, and a charming extension to the platform genre.

IT'S A BIRD, IT'S A PLANE, NO IT'S BABY MARIO

There are two basic styles of play in Touch & Go. In the first, baby Mario is falling from the sky. Slowing his descent are three balloons attached to his back. As Mario falls on the top screen, you must use the stylus to draw in clouds to alter his path on the touchscreen, steering him away from enemies and towards coins and powerups. Adding to the strategy, you can draw around non-spiky enemies to trap them in a bubble (converting them to coins), which can then be flung up at baby Mario or moved into a position where he'll fall into it. It's not hard for your cloud path to go awry, but fortunately you can take a couple of hits - as long as you have a balloon left the game continues.

How you do in this initial falling section determines which colour Yoshi will catch you at the bottom for the next ground-based side-scrolling section. The different yoshis vary in egg carrying capacity and speed, and you'll change yoshis every 1000 meters.

Whilst guiding baby Mario's descent is novel, it's on land that Touch & Go really gets interesting, introducing a little more gameplay complexity. In these levels your yoshi moves inexorably from left to right (or right to left if you want to set the game that way), and it's up to you to keep the little dinosaur that could and his cargo safe. This means drawing a cloud path for him to follow, circling enemies with clouds, jumping and flutter jumping by tapping Yoshi once or twice, and best of all, tapping the screen to fire eggs. You'll also need to eat any fruit you come across to keep Yoshi stocked in eggs. One hit by an enemy and you're finished, and as the game screen gets more cluttered, you're frenetically drawing in a path for Yoshi, circling enemies, shooting enemies and trying to hit stuff on the top screen. It's a compelling mix, but as opposed to having many levels and worlds like a traditional platform game, Touch & Go is very much a 'beat the high score' game, limiting its replay value somewhat and making the instant death mechanic quite frustrating.

There are four main single player modes (two of which must be unlocked). Score Attack mode is self explanatory - get as high a points score as you can across a drop and run. Marathon Mode charges you with going as far as you can. In Time Attack mode you must rescue baby Luigi from the Toadies as quickly as possible. Finally, Challenge mode, like Marathon mode, is unlimited, charging you with getting as far as you can within the time limit.

By its very nature the gameplay is more limited than a traditional Nintendo platformer. That said, the tactile nature of the game is really engrossing and DS owners would do well to check it out.

Cam Shea

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

DETAILS:

CATEGORY: Platformer
PLAYERS: 1-2
DEVELOPER: Nintendo
PUBLISHER: Nintendo
PRICE: $69.95
RATING: G8+
AVAILABLE: TBA

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY
83	80	86

OVERALL
85

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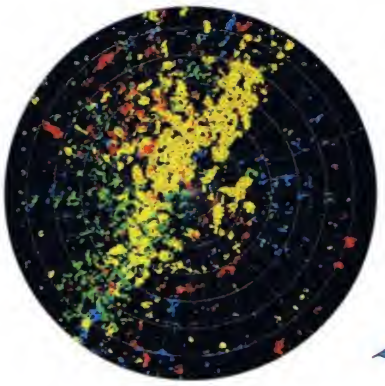

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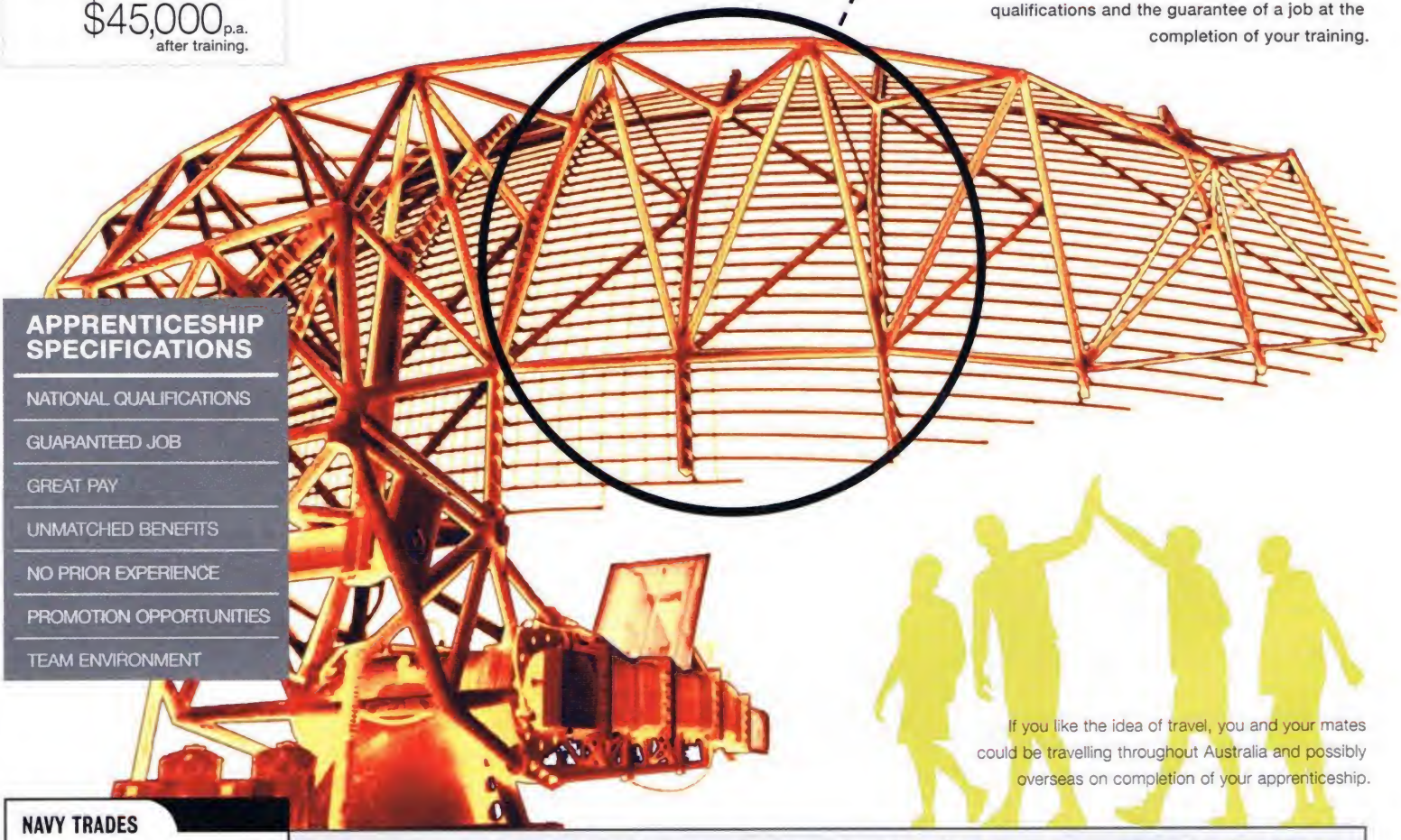

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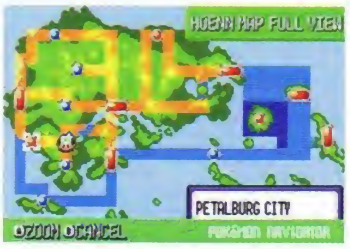
[renovate] If your house looks like this

[abo] Have at you, Land Whale!



POKÉMON: Emerald Version

As the sun slowly sets on the GameCube, we ever so fearfully wonder what's to become of Nintendo. The GBA is being succeeded by the DS - however much Nintendo wish to deny it - and we are left with a clean slather, as their home console withers and their new handheld takes its time in delivering some star attractions. So what does the GBA, Nintendo's warhorse, have to offer in the meantime? Surely something fresh and diverting to keep the fans salivating? A hot new hero? Or would you rather a reheated Pokemon game? Nintendo thinks leftovers is what you want...

In Emerald, you take the role of a young Pokemon trainer living in the land of Hoenn, who's just moved to a new town. He/she befriends the amiable Prof. Birch and sets off to become the world's greatest trainer. On the way, the dastardly Team Aqua and Team Magma must be vanquished in their efforts to awaken the legendary Pokemon, Kygore and Groudon. Sound familiar? It should. Pokemon Emerald Version is a "continuation" of the world of Ruby and Sapphire. In fact, it's basically a combination of the previous two games.

I'VE PLAYED THIS BEFORE...

The gradual course of travel around the world, seeking out gym leaders and battling other trainers, catching wild Pokemon, breeding, gaining new techs; the potent Pokemon mix is here in all its glory. Nintendo are still strong in presenting a complete package: a simple and compelling battle system; a great variety of play options - from trainer battles to Pokemon hunting and countless minigames; and a cast of a thousand creatures to collect.

I hate to admit it but once you get back into it, Pokemon is one of the more rewarding games you can play on the handheld. Nintendo seems to be styling Emerald as a kind of greatest hits. The game is compatible with Fire Red and Leaf Green as well as Ruby and Sapphire, allowing you to import your past Pokemon. So there's a truly ridiculous number of Pokemon that can be assembled here via Link Cable or the Wireless Adaptor. The chance to face your Leaf Green Snorlax against the stronger Pokemon of the newer games is indeed tantalising.

So is Emerald for the fans? If so, why is so much of the game a retread? It's fun - don't get me wrong - this is classic "gotta catch 'em all" action but you've played this before in Ruby and Sapphire. What differences will you notice? Some of the character artwork has been cleaned up and Pokemon in battle now have a fancy opening taunt animation. There are a number of new battle options, most notably the Battle Frontier where combat is conducted under specific conditions. The combat challenge must be negotiated to allow trading with other trainers.

It's disappointing that Nintendo has done very little with a two year old game, aside of repackage it and add a price tag. Some new animations here, a new battle mode there - it still looks like a pretty SNES game to me regardless. And what's with the boarish adherence to one save slot? It just ensures mum and dad are cornered into buying multiple copies for the kids. There's so much to love in the game and there's so much to hate in this antiquated model. While Pokemon will always be a classic, Pokemaniacs deserve a lot more. Times must be tough at Nintendo if they can't look after Pikachu and his mates...

If you've never played Pokemon or are returning after an extended hiatus, this is a top priority for GBA role-playing. Regular fans need to think carefully whether they care to afford a game that offers so little in new content.

John Dewhurst

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

DETAILS:

CATEGORY: Role-Playing Meglomania
PLAYERS: 1 to multi
DEVELOPER: Game Freak
PUBLISHER: Nintendo
PRICE: $69.95
RATING: G
AVAILABLE: Now

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY
55	80	85

OVERALL
70

WARIOWARE Twisted!

Is the world ready for another WarioWare game after the very recent releases of WarioWare on GCN and WarioWare Touched! on DS? If it's as much fun as WarioWare Twisted! the answer is yes. Like the rest of the games in the series, WarioWare Twisted! is a game built around a gimmick, the gimmick this time being a gravity/motion sensor built into the game cartridge meaning that players can control the game by tilting the handheld in different directions. Aside from giving the game a new twist to the action to liven things up, the motion control also makes this the first handheld Wario game you wouldn't want to play on a crowded bus if you've got a thing about getting funny looks.

The formula for the game is the same as all of the others - play through a bunch of themed microgames featuring liberal amounts of toilet humour, mucous, Nintendo Love and strangeness to get to the boss level - an extended microgame that may last up to 30 or so seconds - to unlock the next group of challenges. The vast majority of the games are nothing you haven't seen before but the microgames that truly show off the motion sensing technology are outstanding. One game sees the player trying to keep a surface flat underneath a small walking figure by turning the handheld every which way (including upside down) while another is rhythm style dancing game in which the player has to time their movements (left right and jump) to mirror those of the characters on screen. Although we do have a strong fondness for WarioWare games here at Hyper we hope that this will be the last one we see for a while - four games released within two years is overkill, no matter what new gimmicks you add - the series needs to take a hiatus for a while before it outstays its welcome.

Daniel Wilks

[up] Translation: I cry for the love of my fist
[left] Something Cam and Wilks need to do more

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

DETAILS:
CATEGORY: Puzzle
PLAYERS: 1
DEVELOPER: Nintendo
PUBLISHER: Nintendo
PRICE: $69.95
RATING: G
AVAILABLE: Now

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY
60	81	84

OVERALL
82

RETRO ATARI CLASSICS

Now this is an idea we like. Take a bunch of classic and arguably-maybe-probably-not classic games, and instead of just adapting them for DS and pushing it out the door, get world renowned graffiti artists to help give each game a visual makeover. And then push it out the door.

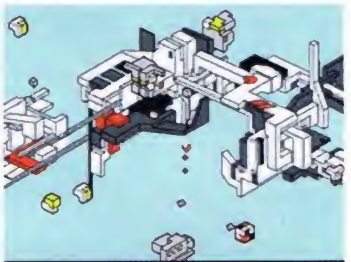
It's a great idea, and the 10 games featured: Asteroids, Breakout, Centipede, Gravitar, Lunar Lander, Missile Command, Pong, Sprint, Tempest and Warlords, cover a good cross section of Atari retro gaming. As opposed to many retro packages, at least this time the graf angle combined with re-imagining these games for the DS has brought a somewhat fresh spin to proceedings.

A few of the games take place across both screens now, so you're shooting and moving on the bottom screen while the Centipede starts at the top, Pong is aligned vertically rather than horizontally, and your paddle is on the bottom screen but the blocks on the top in Breakout. This is a mixed blessing - you have a little longer to plan now in Missile Command, for instance, but the missiles move a little faster. The other games however, take place on the top screen with control advice on the bottom screen. Nothing much has radically changed in other words.

It is interesting testing out the touch screen aspect, however. For some of the games it works really well. Tempest utilises it well and Missile Command is as much fun as ever. For other games though, we found ourselves wandering back to the D-pad and buttons. Asteroids is definitely better this way, as is Sprint.

Then there are the makeovers. Each game can be played in original "retro" stylee or in the new look "remix". The graf artists are Obey, Reas and Delta, but rather than coming across as hip and urban, the remixes mostly just feel tacky. There just isn't enough scope for doing detailed and cool art - the game screens must be kept simple and easy to understand so as not to lose playability, but in doing so what can be done with the art is also very limited. Only a couple of the remixes really impressed us. Delta's Asteroids remix with chunky line drawn 3D backgrounds, ships and debris looks great, and Delta's Tempest remix also impressed, with some cool pixel flourishes here and there and a sweet touch screen display. Although most are a little disappointing, if you view it as just having an alternate skin for the game to choose from, it's still a good inclusion.

Drake McLeroy



[above] Guess which retro game this is

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

DETAILS:
CATEGORY: Old-school games
PLAYERS: 1-4
DEVELOPER: Taniko
PUBLISHER: Atari
PRICE: $69.95
RATING: G
AVAILABLE: Now daddy-o

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY
70	70	70

OVERALL
70

Lethal Enforcers 3 – KONAMI

Anyone remember the digitized photo phenomenon in the early 90s with games such as Mortal Kombat and Lethal Enforcers 1 (set in 1990s Chicago) and LE2 (set in the 1890s wild west)? Well I don't. I've (selectively) killed off those brain cells on purpose, because some things are almost best left in the past where they belong. Apparently (reading from notes from my 1993 pre-web blog thing called a 'diary') it's not that they were entirely bad games, sure, I complained about the guns not being 'really' accurate and they did feel a little light and plasticky, but overall the game was fairly basic with its pop up generic bad guys being reminiscent of early mechanical light gun arcade games that were practically a torch wedged into a toy gun which you shone onto stuff that physically popped up like cans from an oak barrel or a target inside the mouth of a wall mounted moose head trophy (I do remember that... *reminiscent sigh*).

[UP] Can we be Funk Tiger Bazooka?

So yes, it is strange that LE has returned after a 13 year hiatus as if we were all just longing for the original games' triquel. Fortunately, Konami, that innovative programming powerhouse of the dance and music games, does not tip its police cap and pay homage to this game's predecessors, but just starts afresh and has created a pretty decent shooter with a couple of new 'innovations'.

After plonking in your money and choosing from 40 different character nick-names including 'Ace' (the one I choose), 'Love' or even 'Fork' (the ones I didn't choose), you realise that Lethal Enforcers 3 has been divided into 6 'separate' shooting games, each with its own title, font, graphics style and even soundtrack. You also realise to play the title game 'Lethal Enforcers 3' you have to unlock it by playing through the other 5 Japanese locations, such as: Akihabara - thwart gnarly street gangsters in Tokyo's electronics shopping district; Harbour - stop cracked out drug smugglers on the docks and container ship; Underground - gun battles in subway stations are always fun; Airport - Is that lady pregnant or has she got 14kgs of plastic explosives in her jersey?; Nuclear Power Plant - Stop the terrorists from reaching those 72 virgins in the sky.

One of the new innovations to the game is the unique vibration shock pad in the floor of the game which activates when you get shot or your shield (activated when you point the gun off screen) gets hit. Also, you always compete against either a computer controlled policeman or another human in a running race to see who can reach the end of each sub stage first. So if you take longer to shoot the bad guys because you are rightfully aware of the innocent civilians being accidentally hit in the cross fire, or that you are constantly cowering like a baby behind your 'reload' shield, you could come second place and miss out on chance of promotion (or demotion if you hit civilians) and a better police retirement package.

As usual, I prefer to use the two guns ala John Woo movies, but most of the time, it is just a waste of money as I am yet to be able to de-couple my eyes to focus properly on both screens at once. Hogging both guns also means that you won't lose face when playing in two player mode if your 'opponent' is (in the unlikely event) much better than you. After all, there's nothing worse than someone smirking next to you in an arcade when they see your 3% hit ratio.

Despite the decent competition in the light gun game department these days (Sega's Ghost Squad still being the crème), LE3 is still a fun romp and a must play for any fan of shooters.

8/10

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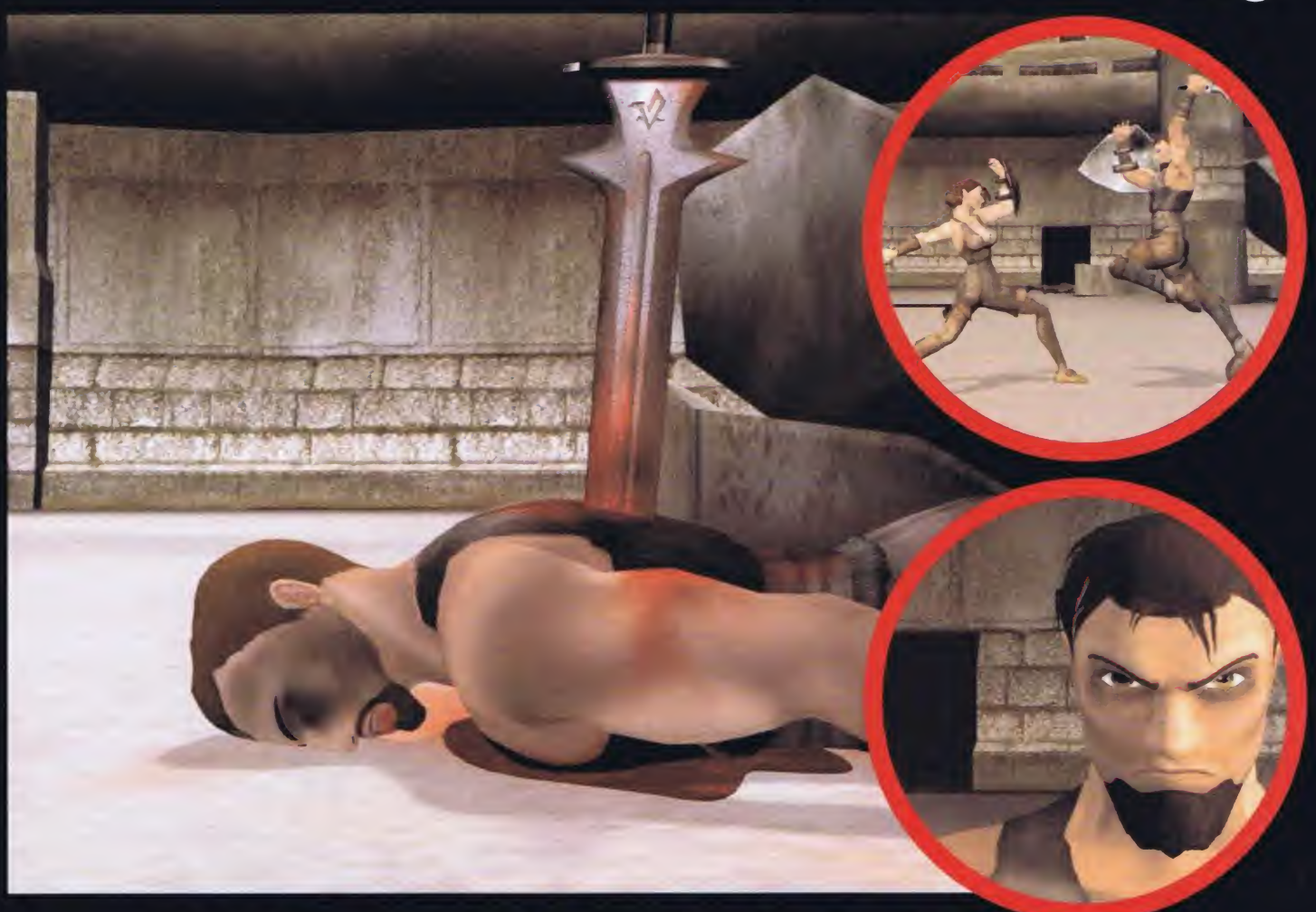

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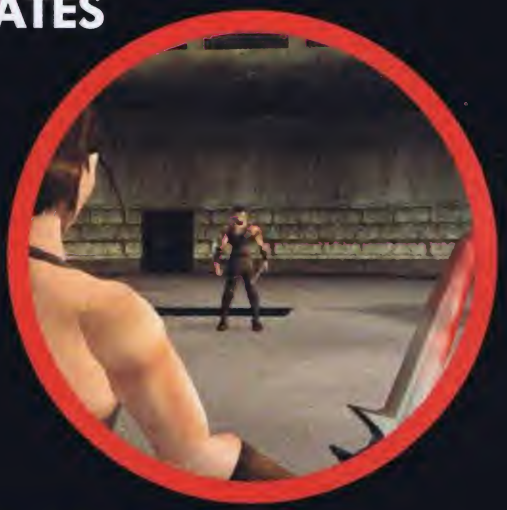

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WinWinWin

WIN PARIAH AND AN XBOX SIGNED BY DIGITAL EXTREMES!

PLUS 5 COPIES OF PARIAH UP FOR GRABS!

>> We were recently lucky enough to have the founder and creative director of Digital Extremes, James Schmalz, drop by Hyper HQ. It was quite an occasion. After all, Digital Extremes are the fiends behind UT 2003 and UT 2004, two of the greatest multiplayer PC games of all time, and James himself was one of the creators of the original Unreal. There's real gaming heritage right there folks.

During his visit, James grooved on some of the earliest issues of Hyper, patiently listened to us raving at him about how much we liked Pariah and all the crazy ideas we had for maps, and most importantly, took the time to sign a brand new Xbox for us. Or should we say, for you! Yes, THQ and Hyper are offering you the chance to win an Xbox signed by the Digital Extremes front man, as well as a copy of the game and a swanky Pariah T-Shirt. Five runners up will get a copy of Pariah and a T-Shirt.

You really owe it to yourself to enter this competition. Pariah is a truly rocking game and if you haven't read our review yet then go read it now and return once your head is bulging with newly acquired info about the upgradeable weapons, stylish visuals and design, sticky grenades, strong AI, extensive multiplayer options and map creation functionality. Pretty cool huh?

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

What's the name of the lead character in Pariah?

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

Terms & Conditions: 1) Entry is open to residents of Australia and New Zealand except employees and immediate families of Next Publishing Pty Ltd and its agencies associated with the promotion. 2) Only entries completed with these terms and conditions will be eligible. 3) Competition begins 9am May 31 and entries close at 6pm July 13. 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 July 14 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 September issue of Hyper on sale August 3. 9) 1 winner will receive a new Xbox console signed by James Schmalz (RRP $249.00), 1 copy of Pariah on Xbox (RRP $99.95) and 1 Pariah T-Shirt (RRP $20). Five runners up will receive a copy of Pariah on Xbox (RRP $99.95) and 1 Pariah T-Shirt (RRP $20. Total value of competitions is $948.70. 10) The promoter is Next Publishing Pty Ltd ABN 88 002 647 645 of 78 Renwick St, Redfern NSW 2016.

Win Win Win

WIN STEAMBOY ON DVD!

10 COPIES UP FOR GRABS!

>> If there's one title that has shaped the anime landscape it's Katsuhiro Otomo's Akira. The tale of a post-apocalyptic Neo-Tokyo on the brink of destruction (again), it set the tone for much anime to follow with its adult subject matter and incredible production values. After ten years in production, Katsuhiro Otomo is back with another opus - Steamboy. The most expensive animated production of all time, Steamboy is set in a steampunk-esque Victorian England, and while it's more of a rollicking adventure film than it is a treatise on technology, fans of Akira will relish Otomo's eye for action and attention to detail throughout.

To be released as a two disc set, the film is encoded using SUPERBIT technology, and the second disc contains a five part making of doco. Thanks to our friends at Sony Pictures Home Entertainment, we have 10 copies of this landmark DVD to give away. To be in the running just answer the following:

>> Name two of the voice actors for the English dub of Steamboy.

Send your answer, as well as your name and address to: **The Amazing Steamboy, Hyper, 78 Renwick St, Redfern, NSW, 2016.**

WIN ARCHIE'S WEIRD MYSTERIES VOLUMES 1-3

10 PACKS UP FOR GRABS!

>> Archie is as relevant to Australians pretending to be 50s Americans today as he was to Australians pretending to be 50s Americans back when he was first created. Even so, there comes a time when a series needs to be reinvented, and that's exactly what has happened for Archie's Weird Mysteries. Think Scooby Doo set in Riverdale and you'd be on the right track.

Archie, you see, writes a column for the school paper called "Archie's Weird Mysteries" documenting all the bizarre stuff that seems to be happening in Riverdale. Things like everyone in town turning into Veronica (suh-weet!), Archie's car coming to life and wreaking havoc, and Archie and Reggie becoming invisible. Archie, Jughead, Betty, Veronica, Reggie and Dilton must put a stop to it all, one case at a time. Thanks to MRA Entertainment we have 10 packs of the first three DVDs in the series to give away. To be in the running, just answer the following:

>> Name one of Archie's friends.

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

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Baadasssss

MAGNA PACIFIC, MA 15+

24 years ago a vain and angry but undoubtedly talented man took a step outside the Hollywood system and revolutionised the way studios looked at audiences. Melvin Van Peebles, something of a token black studio director who had recently finished directing a comedy called Watermelon Man in which a bigoted white man wakes up one morning to find himself black, decided to make a black film, not for a white audience, but for a black audience, something that had never been done before. To do it he had to buck the system, lie, cheat, abuse and almost bankrupt himself. The resulting film, Sweet Sweetback's Baadasssss Song went on to be the top grossing independent film of 1971, garnered critical praise and kick-started the so called Blacksploitation genre.

Baadasssss is the story of the making of Sweetback with the original director's son (who incidentally played a young Sweetback in the original film), Mario Van Peebles taking writing, directing and starring honours. The end result it a ferociously funny and often very confronting biopic that does not shy away from showing the inherent racism in the Hollywood system at the time as well as the fact that Melvin Van Peebles does not appear to be a very nice person. After making so many atrocious films in the past, Van Peebles the younger has finally proven that he has some definite talent. He may not set the world on fire like his father did but with Baadasssss he has shown he can definitely entertain.

Daniel Wilks

[above] Totally sweet round hair

[above] Yo Ahab, kaibo my doobage?

MOVIE: 8 / EXTRAS: TBA

Lady Snowblood

EASTERN EYE, R 18+

Don't believe the hype on the back of the box, Lady Snowblood is not THE film that inspired Quentin Tarantino's overrated Kill Bill films, it is just one of them. In actuality, Lady Snowblood is something of a companion series from Lone Wolf and Cub, containing all of the things that made the samurai series so popular - namely copious amounts of fighting and gore (not to mention a few boobies thrown in for good measure). The year is Meiji 6 and the Japanese empire is reeling after the dissolution of the Tokogawa shogunate. A national draft is instituted to stabilise the country but a few individuals spread rumours (to get people out of the draft) that government agents wear white, leading to a mob brutally murdering a teacher and raping his wife. The wife takes revenge on one of her rapists but is jailed before she can complete her revenge. The woman's hatred is so great that while in prison she seduces a guard and conceives a daughter to continue her quest for vengeance. Yuki, the girl is adopted by a priest, endures a childhood of training and sets out to right the wrongs perpetrated on her family with a sword hidden in an umbrella. Strangely enough it all ends in tears. Lady Snowblood is a striking film, not just because Meiko Kaji (Yuki) is a stunning woman with perfect skin and huge expressive eyes but also due to the beautiful cinematography and art direction. Every scene is saturated in contrasting colours (blood on the snow being a typical example) but unfortunately the transfer is a little grainy so much of the impact is lost.

Daniel Wilks

[above] Gotta practise my stabbing

MOVIE: 8 / EXTRAS: 5

Sonatine/Boiling Point

EASTERN EYE, MA 15+/M 15+

After seeing later works of writers and directors it is sometimes hard to go back to their earlier works and see them fleshing out their style or ironing out the kinks in their delivery. No so with Takeshi "Beat" Kitano, as his early works simply reflect what an incredible filmmaker he would go on to be with classics like Hana Bi and Kikojiru. Boiling point, made in 1990 is, like many of the auteur's films seemingly languorous and formless, telling the story of two normal salarymen who play for a small town baseball team and end up getting in trouble with the Yakuza. After the team's couch is badly hurt by the Yakuza, the men decide to travel to Okinawa to buy a gun to defend themselves. There they meet a strange Yakuza with his own scores to settle played with wonderful stoicism by Kitano. Although punctuated with moments of violence and sex, Boiling Point is a strangely gentle comedy of manners.

Sonatine on the other hand is a story of bad men doing bad things but being remarkably human through it all. Kitano plays a Yakuza (again) sent with a few of his men to Okinawa (again) to mediate between to warring Yakuza factions. Upon arriving on the island his headquarters are bombed and the men not with him are massacred prompting Kitano and his men to realise something is wrong and go into hiding on a remote beach. Once the protagonists reach the beach the pace of the film slows to a snail's pace, content to show the day to day lives, actions and touching stoicism of a group of men aware that their days may be numbered. Both films are superb examples of why Takeshi Kitano is considered one of the modern masters of cinema. His characters are at once very broad yet very personal. You care about what happens.

Daniel Wilks

MOVIE: 9 / EXTRAS: 4

The most bored looking badass in the world

"I was in Darkman goddamnit!"

Kinsey

FOX HOME ENTERTAINMENT, MA 15+

In 1947 Kinsey published his first in a series of books detailing human (male) sexuality in dry clinical detail and his findings changed everything. Kinsey showed, through rigorous use of statistical data that what one once thought to be true or deviant was not only real but usually quite common. Due to his book homosexuality was decriminalised throughout most of the US and people came to understand that masturbation wouldn't make you go blind . Kinsey the film is a fascinating biopic not only of a deeply flawed but interesting man but also of the climate of repression and fear that necessitated such a radical paradigm shift.

Liam Neeson portrays Kinsey as a man fascinated by the human animal but who has no real idea how to be one. The film details how Kinsey first got into sex and statistics - a combination of collecting one million gall wasps for scientific study and being a virgin (along with his new wife) on his wedding night having to work out themselves what they were meant to be doing, through to the furor caused by his work. At one point he is even accused of being pro-communist for corrupting the morals of American youth with his work.. An excellent audio commentary, some interesting deleted scenes and a couple of hilarious outtakes complete the package.

Daniel Wilks

MOVIE: 9 / EXTRAS: 8

Insert mildly finny joke about being drilled

Six Feet Under SEASON 3

WARNER BROS, MA 15+

Word is that Rachael Griffiths only signed on to do Six Feet Under because of Alan Ball (American Beauty writer). It was a smart Move. Six Feet Under is like a fine bottle of red wine that just gets better with age. The third season opens with the health concerns of Nathanial coming to its climactic head. This thus begins a season that has matured in its writing and personified the depth of the characters. The shift away from the reconstruction each week of the latest corpse and the appearance of dead people, has meant that the writers have opened up an intimate window into the lives of the Fisher clan. There is so much that goes on in the evolution of all of the Fisher's lives that I don't want to ruin any surprises by saying too much! However, the series is not short of romantic liaisons for Ruth, emotional turmoil for Clare, and loads of kissing for David (for those of you who like a big gorgeous black man kissing an effeminate white boy! Grrr wink wink). The series also sees the return of Brenda (Rachael Griffiths) after the implosion of her relationship with Nate. This of course is bound to stir up some tension with Nate's new family unit... you will have to simply watch it, love it and appreciate it for the amazing series it is. Extra features on the DVD include a featurette, commentaries and some deleted scenes for fans.

Rebecca Izard

MOVIE: 9 / EXTRAS: 6

Blade Trinity

ROADSHOW, MA 15+

"If we run fast enough we can get away from this train wreck of a movie"

Thanks to the magic of DVD not only can we watch Blade Trinity at home, we can also watch the longer, equally bad extended version as well. To put it bluntly, Blade Trinity is a terrible film. Not one individual part of the film is any good. The fighting is dull and mostly looks like a couple of bored people drunkenly playing grabarse with a failed attempt to spice them up by cutting to a different angle every millisecond, the effects are amateurish, the acting is atrocious and the story is painfully dull. It's a pity because the first two Blade films were a hoot, evenly balancing violence and gore with incisive humour. The (hopefully) final film in the trilogy tries to spice things up with the addition of two new characters, Abigail Whistler, a walking advertisement for iPod and Hannibal King, a stereotypical wiseass but instead dilutes the type of character the film has. Apparently Wesley Snipes is currently trying to sue New Line for the fact that he was not the centre of attention in the film - strange considering that he is one of the film's producers and could have had a little influence on the direction the film took.

Drake McLeroy

MOVIE: 4 / EXTRAS: 7

[above] Red skivvy = tough?

[above] Give me my money. now

A face commonly pulled by tourists after first trying vegemite

Bondi Tsunami

MADMAN, M 15+

If you only see one Australian psychedelic pretentious painfully cool borderline obnoxious Australia/Japanese road movie this year, make sure it's Bondi Tsunami - just don't expect much to happen or for there to really be any traditional form of film narrative contained within. Bondi Tsunami vaguely tells the story of four ultra cool Japanese surfers cruising the East Coast of Australia in their vintage 1961 EK Holden looking at stuff, drinking beer, taking photos, surfing and goofing off. That's about it. Nothing happens, it goes nowhere but for all of that Bondi Tsunami is a thoroughly enjoyable experience highly reminiscent of a bizarre interbreeding of music videos, Sogo Ishii experimental punk films like Electric Dragon 80,000v or Burst City and a rambling Burroughs-esque story about something that's probably pretty deep when you're stoned. The cinematography is excellent as is the art direction, frequently using devices uncommon to mainstream film such as the heavy use of split-screen. The cast is perfect for what they do - stand around and look pretty or do goofy shit for no readily apparent reason. Although it would be easy to deride Bondi Tsunami as being shallow, to do so would be a disservice and an understatement. The film is all about surface. It's pretty, it's glossy and it's hollow. But it's fun. And Miki Sasaki who plays the bubbly Kimiko is painfully cute.

Daniel Wilks

MOVIE: 6 / EXTRAS: 6

Chucky grabbing at boobies needs no caption to make it funny

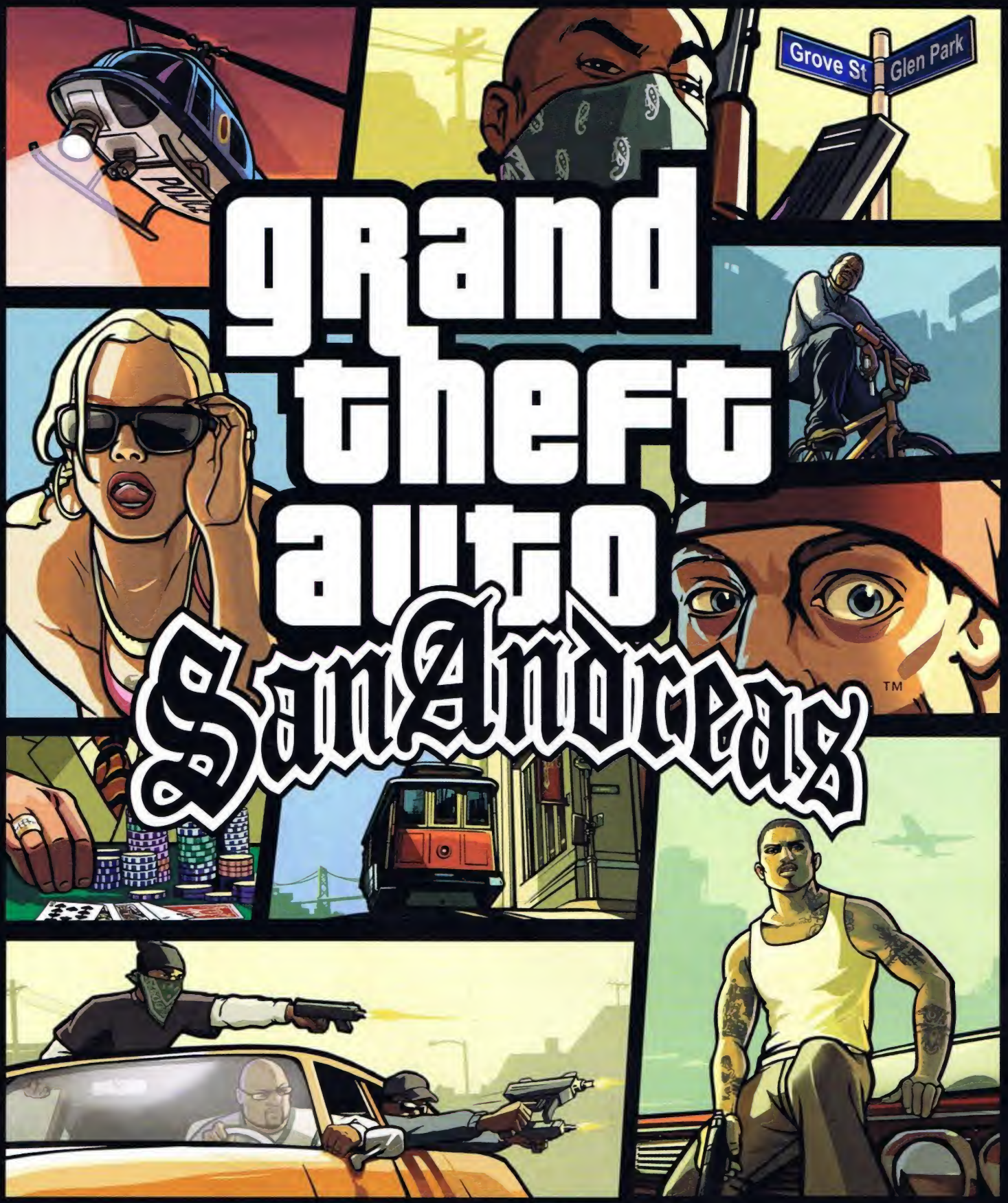
Seed of Chucky

UNIVERSAL, MA 15+

Some franchises keep alive by doing the same thing over and over again. Others do the same thing by reinventing themselves with each new outing. The Child's Play series falls firmly into the latter camp, the producers realising after the first film that the killer doll schtick was a bit of a one trick pony so added more and more comedy to each outing. Seed of Chucky, the fifth film in the series has foregone scares altogether and instead aims at pure gross-out comedy and for the most part succeeds. The film opens with the introduction of a new doll, the son/daughter of Chucky and Tiffany born at the end of the last film (Bride of Chucky). After seeing Chucky and Tiffany on TV, the boy/girl travels to America to find his folks and is promptly named Glen by Chucky and Glenda by Tiffany - nobody is quite sure of the sex of the child because all it has between its legs are the seams where the legs join and a little plastic mound. Simultaneously Jennifer Tilly (the voice of Tiffany) plays Jennifer Tilly, a washed up actress having to appear in shitty killer doll films. Tiffany becomes obsessed with Jennifer Tilly and wants to transfer her spirit into her body so she can be a star. Chucky wants to be Redman because he's black and well hung. Glen/Glenda thinks it's Japanese due to the Made in Japan stamp on its wrist. It's insane and slapdash but when it's funny, it's really damn funny.

Daniel Wilks

MOVIE: 7 / EXTRAS: 5



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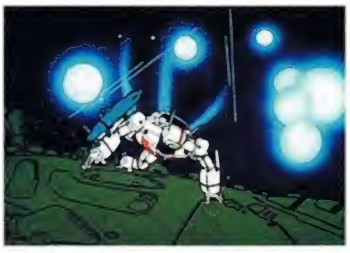
Minmei tries not to look like a bimbo while sitting on a phallic object



Simple animation and character design hamper some good stories

Robotech 20TH ANNIVERSARY EDITION

PRODUCTION: TATSUNOKO
GENRE: SPACE OPERA

Sometimes a series becomes far more than the sum of its parts. Most of the time the above statement is meant only metaphorically but in the case of the series we know as Robotech, this is quite literal. Made from recut episodes of three different anime series, Super Dimensional Fortress: Macross, Super Dimensional Cavalry: Southern Cross and Genesis Climber Mospaeda, licensed for American distribution. The New story of Robotech told the history of the war between Earth and the Zentradi, a huge genetically engineered warlike race bent on recovering the technology (a crashed spaceship that lead to world peace, the development of human robotech and was rebuilt as the SDFI becoming mankind's greatest hope to win the war) of the Robotech Masters, an ancient race of highly advanced engineers who discovered the power of Protoculture, developed Robotech and seriously pissed of the Invids, a formerly peaceful but now rather aggressive alien species driven to their warlike tendencies by the Zentradi who were originally created by the Robotech Masters for the purpose of keeping hold of the power of Protoculture. Oh yeah, there's also a bunch of kids who are forced to grow up too fast by the intergalactic war, a few bizarre love triangles and one of the most annoying characters ever to grace animation, Lynn Minmei, a bimbo singer whose voice can cause giant blue warriors to ponder the meaning of the universe and why their parents never loved them. Or something like that.

Even though Robotech has previously been released in this country, the series is being released again in a remastered format for its 20th anniversary. What this means is a little vague as no amount of remastering can make the animation not look like it comes from 1982 (and was made on a budget) or improve the quality of the voice acting. Many of us have fond memories of Robotech as kids but the series has aged and not really in a good way. After being spoiled by animation in the last decade, Robotech looks positively stone age with flat characters, repetitive action and backgrounds and a washed out look that gives the impression that the whole thing was coloured with texta. The voice acting also comes from a period when cartoons were automatically for kids so not a great deal of effort seemed to be put into it. The quality of the voice acting is also a mirror of the writing which is often so simplistic it becomes insulting.

Paradoxically, the stories of Robotech are excellent and frequently very adult oriented, typical examples being one early story in which Rick Hunter, a brash young pilot, and the aforementioned annoying bimbo Minmei are trapped in a disused section of SDFI and contemplate the possibility of starving to death. The strange schism between adult and complex stories and simple animation/writing lend the series a certain charm but unless you're prepared to have some of the memories of childhood entertainment broken you might want to give it a miss, ditto if you own one of the other editions of the series that have been released locally.

Daniel Wilks

ANIMATION: 5 / STORY: 9
EXTRAS: 1 /OVERALL: 7

EPIC IS AN UNDERSTATEMENT The saga of Robotech doesn't end with the 85 episodes shown on TV, it has spun out into a rather massive franchise. Aside from the three sagas (Macross, Southern Cross and The Next Generation) as told in the TV series, the Robotech universe also encompasses Do You Remember Love, a full length movie, Macross Flashback 2012, a 20 minute long Minmei music video compilation, an unfinished series called Robotech II: The Sentinels, Robotech: The Untold Story, an as yet unreleased movie, Macross II: The Lovers, a four part series and movie, Macross Plus, a rather awesome four part series and the Macross 7 saga comprising 49 episodes, one movie and something called Dynamite. This, of course doesn't include the games, RPGs, books, comics and merchandise - there isn't enough room to list them all.

Ghost In The Shell: SPECIAL EDITION

PRODUCTION: KODANSHA
GENRE: CYBERPUNK

This year marks the ten year anniversary of the release of Ghost in the Shell, and after watching it (yet) again, it's clear that it's every bit as impressive and every bit as relevant today as it was when first released.

For those who haven't seen it, Ghost in the Shell is set in the year 2029, at a time when information and the net is omnipresent, and when humans can be augmented so heavily that it's only their "ghost" or soul that defines them as human. Events are centered around the covert government agency Section 9. They're on the trail of a mysterious and all powerful hacker called The Puppet Master, an individual capable of getting into any system - including dignitaries' brains. Also involved is Section 6 - the ministry of foreign affairs, although what role they play in relation to The Puppet Master isn't initially clear. As major hottie Major Kusanagi and her team find out more, she begins to question how much she actually knows about her own identity.

At the crux of the film is the question - what is it to be human and truly sentient? Major Kusanagi is almost completely cyborg; aside from her brain and a small piece of her spine, she's entirely artificial, but it's her "ghost", her consciousness/soul that defines her as a human. What happens when a ghost arises in a completely digital form?

Ghost has quite an introspective plot, and director Oshii isn't afraid to give scenes room to breath, letting the gorgeous imagery and contemplative plot time to be absorbed. The counterpoint to these scenes are a smattering of truly intense and stylish action sequences, giving the film an enjoyable pacing and balance. This is a true classic.

The film has been digitally remastered, and includes 6.1 DTS and 5.1 Dolby Digital surround mixes. Extras include some basic info pages, plus two featurettes covering the making of the film and the tech and effects. If you already own Ghost in the Shell on DVD, it's really not worth shelling out the cash, but if you don't, consider this an essential purchase.

Frank Dry

ANIMATION: 10 / STORY: 9
EXTRAS: 3 /OVERALL: 10

D.N.Angel VOLUME 1: THE DAWN OF DARK

CATEGORY: TEEN ACTION MELODRAMA
PRODUCTION: TV TOKYO/XEBEC

Daisuke is a somewhat goofy middle school student who decides, on his fourteenth birthday, to declare his love for Risa, a cute girl he goes to school with. Unfortunately for him, not only is his love unrequited but the very fact that he's in love activates a longstanding family trait that has been passed down through generations. You see, every male in the Niwa family has an alternate side - a legendary Thief called Phantom Dark. Every time Daisuke yearns for Risa, Dark is brought forth. The only way to be rid of Dark is to win her heart, an effort made all the more difficult by the fact that Risa soon falls in love with Dark. To complicate things further, Dark kisses Risa's twin sister who may or may not have a crush on Daisuke, making for a love quadrangle (or some fraction I can't possibly imagine). And then there's a boy at Daisuke's school who's actually a secret agent employed to capture Dark, and may also play host to his own alter ego - Dark's nemesis. Phew!

DNAngel starts out well, with two strong episodes setting up the mythology of the world and the characters. It's certainly not without its share of charm, intrigue and humour, showing off some slick scenes with Dark, and reveling in the hilarious juxtaposition of Daisuke's family's dark mysterious secret with normal family life, leading to moments when Daisuke's mother goes from arcane chanting in ancient ceremonial robes to being the bubbly motherly figure he's known all his life. Unfortunately, D.N.Angel doesn't maintain the momentum across all four episodes, losing its impact with a weak story about a magical Unicorn painting, and an unsatisfying encounter between Daisuke and his schoolyard nemesis. Overall though, this series has plenty of potential, and we're looking forward to volume 2.

Frank Dry

ANIMATION: 7 / STORY: 6
EXTRAS: 5 /OVERALL: 6

RIDGE RACER:

THE ARCADE RACING LEGEND

CAM SHEA AND ANTHONY CORBETT

FROM the darling of the PlayStation launch, the benediction early adopters sought to wave in the faces of their 16bit console owning mates, to a series left idling, forgotten until the launch of the PSP, when Prince Namco gave it the kiss to bring it out of its slumber, there's no doubting that Ridge Racer is an important series in the evolution of videogames. Come with us now as we witness Namco tear along the straight of adrenaline-soaked racing, drift around the hairpin of incremental annual upgrades and very nearly wrap one of their most revered series' around a telegraph pole, before pulling a stunning move to careen over the line in first place.

RIDGEY

Released in the arcades back in 1993, Ridge Racer was a revelation. At that time, the most advanced polygonal racing title was Sega's 1992 effort Virtua Racing, a game that still looked very much like driving a Lego car through Blockoland. Ridge Racer sped out of the gates with a vivacity that was nothing short of intoxicating. Virtua Racing may have been an impressive demonstration of polygonal graphics on debut, but Ridge Racer made it look like a dinosaur.

Ridge Racer had a shiny modern veneer about

it - not just because of the 3D graphics, but also because of the urban course design. Gamers found themselves barreling through fluorescent lit tunnels, along city freeways and attacking hairpins down by the water. It was fast, it was brash and it was immensely playable. Sega hit back with Daytona USA a year later, but Ridge Racer was the first racer to really herald the power of 3D.

1994 saw the release of Ridge Racer 2 in the arcades (which included more tracks and the ability to network the game into an eight player setup), but it wasn't until 1995 that Ridge Racer came home as a launch title for Sony's PlayStation console. Simply put, alongside Wipeout, Ridge Racer helped give the PlayStation the cutting edge image that quickly established it as the height of cool. Ridge Racer on PlayStation was very much an arcade port - one basic course with an extension that could be raced forwards and backwards, but it was very close in looks to the arcade game, and had such rewarding drift mechanics that it's still immensely playable today.

Legend has it that Namco had six months to put together Ridge Racer for PlayStation. They did a damn fine job, and it was for this game that many gamers bought a system link cable in order to enjoy two TV, two PlayStation multiplayer racing at home.

1995 turned out to be a huge year for the series, with the arcade-only Rave Racer also released. This one added a great new city track, sending the gamer gliding on freeway overpasses, through tunnels and between towering high rises, as well as a treacherous mountain course. A sign of things to come?

SPARKS ARE FLYING

Not just yet. 1996 saw the release of Ridge Racer Revolution for PlayStation. Essentially more of the same, it was short on longevity, but high on fun factor. Handling had been tweaked, losing some of the original's black and white powerslide mechanic, and slightly diluting the feel of the handling in the process. Revolution retained the city/resort styling of the original, taking players down by palm trees and huts on the beach, through multiple hairpins, long curves, arcing runs and back once again to the intensely urban freeway setting. The design style was very much the same, as was the quality of the visuals. Still, those who had become hopelessly addicted to the first game still savoured the new course, "lapping" it up.

RAGE AGAINST THE DRIFT MACHINE

"Racers, start your engines and let's get it on". These were the words that accompanied the start of each race in Namco's 1997 PlayStation sequel Rage Racer. This was a game that took the home series in a radical new direction in terms of course design. Aside from a few undulations, Ridge Racer and Ridge Racer Revolution were mostly quite flat. Rage Racer changed all that, pitting you against massive hill climbs and sharp slopes.

This was also the first Ridge Racer game to really try and be more than just arcade fun. To that end you worked your way through GPs, and bought and tuned cars, gradually working your way up to faster and faster vehicles. At the start of the Career mode you'd lose a lot of speed on the steep hills, but by the end you'd blaze up them, a feat which was nothing compared to the speed going back down. The change in design focus helped to reinforce the fact that you were actually meant to be driving a car - a piece of machinery that had to struggle

THE RIDGE RACER TIMELINE

- **Ridge Racer** (1993, System 22 arcade hardware)
- **Ridge Racer 2** (1994, System 22 arcade hardware)
- **Ridge Racer** (1995, Sony PlayStation)
- **Rave Racer** (1995, System 22 arcade hardware)
- **Ridge Racer Revolution** (1996, Sony PlayStation)
- **Rage Racer** (1997, Sony PlayStation)
- **R4: Ridge Racer Type 4** (1998, Sony PlayStation)
- **Ridge Racer 64** (2000, Nintendo 64)
- **Ridge Racer V** (2000, Sony PlayStation 2)
- **Ridge Racer V - Arcade Battle** (2001, System 246 arcade hardware)
- **Ridge Racer DS** (2004, Nintendo DS)
- **Ridge Racer** (2004, Sony PSP)

LEGEND HAS IT THAT NAMCO HAD SIX MONTHS TO PUT TOGETHER RIDGE RACER FOR PLAYSTATION

in certain places. Rage Racer (and R4) also incorporated a few smaller touches to make the experience more realistic, such as having your viewpoint rear back as you rev up then drop as you change gears.

Although a lot grittier and grey in its colour palette than previous games, Rage Racer really upped the visual ante. Remember the first time you saw the waterfall cascading down by the roadside? Or swept through a Mediterranean village then through the ancient Greek ruins? It was breathtaking, and you never really knew what to expect around the next corner. Hell, the Arc De Triumph was at the end of the first straight!

Rage Racer shook up more than just course design and game structure. The driving mechanics themselves changed quite considerably. And not necessarily for the better. It often felt like you were being penalised for drifting as the AI miraculously cruised around the inside of corners without losing speed while you watched your speedo drop trying to drift. Rage Racer was also notable because until you earned enough money to tune your first car the handling was horribly un-Ridge Racer. Your car refused to powerslide most of the time, making the first half an hour or so an exercise in frustration. With a little persistence though, it wasn't long until that familiar Ridgey Rush came flooding back.

As opposed to the billion beats per minute rave fare of the previous two games, Rage Racer's soundtrack was a little more chilled out, with a couple of laid back drum 'n' bass tunes helping give it a distinct mood. We should mention, however, that not all was good in aural land. The screeching tires sound effects were perhaps the most objectionable noise ever conceived in the gaming universe. Scraping your nails on a blackboard provided welcome relief. All in all, however, the series was moving in a positive direction. All it needed was an extra layer of depth and polish...

REAL RACING ROOTS

Ridge Racer Type 4 was penciled in as the last iteration of the series fans would see on the faithful grey box and it was set to go out with a bang. The tracks on offer were some of the silkiest in living memory - a loving amalgamation of Rave Racer's "Everest on crack" sections and the original's city curves, as close to perfection as one might have imagined. The courses and vehicles looked fantastic too, providing a stunning showcase of what the PlayStation was capable of in its twilight years.

R4 also offered the most user-friendly experience to date, with the familiar drift technique being distilled to manageable portions for the uncoordinated among us, though veterans could unlock fearsome beasts that handled like the distressed shopping trolleys of old. Unfortunately, collecting all 320 completely unique (read: ever so slightly hotted-up) vehicles was an exercise in pure tedium as your Grand Prix win/loss ratio determined which car the game would hand over - no matter how velvety the combination of car handling and tracks, this artificial extension of longevity was bearable for all but the shortest while. On the plus side, R4 built on the Career mode concept of Rage Racer, giving you a manager who would give you advice and information. At least, he did for some of us. Cam imported the Japanese version, and thus didn't get much out of his Japanese manager's thick stream of Japanese text. R4 also had the best soundtrack of the series so far, with an eclectic selection of electronic music.

As a bonus for the fans, the game was packed with Ridge Racer High Spec (a.k.a Ridge Racer Turbo), a playable demo of the original that ran at a luxurious 60fps. This helped round out what was already an impressive package, and arguably the best Ridge Racer game yet.

THE SCREECHING TIRES SOUND EFFECTS WERE PERHAPS THE MOST OBJECTIONABLE NOISE EVER CONCIEVED

RIDGEY COMES TO NINTENDO

For Ridge Racer's debut on a Nintendo system in 2000, Namco left the game in the capable hands on Nintendo's new American development studio - Nintendo Software Technology Corporation. The result was Ridge Racer 64, a highly competent game that was nonetheless caught somewhere between Ridge Racer past, and the more dour visual stylings of Rage and R4.

There were three courses on offer, with two variations each - the original Ridge Racer course, the Revolution course, and an all new desert based course. Ridge 64 even offered players a choice between three handling modes, including our personal favourite, the "RR64" set, which was very reminiscent of the rock solid powersliding of the original.

In terms of playability, Ridge Racer 64 felt great - the handling was good, the tracks were as compelling as ever, and the frame rate and sense of speed were excellent. On the negative side, however, the tropical/urban scenery of the original courses was replaced with dull countryside surrounds, which left the game looking a little dull. The courses were also lacking any of the mountain runs that were the hallmarks of the later PlayStation titles. Overall though, considering the state of arcade racing on the N64, Ridge Racer 64 was a breath of fresh air.

A NEW BEGINNING?

After Soul Calibur arrived on the Dreamcast completely tricked out, many were expecting just as masterful a transition for Ridge Racer V on PS2. Sadly, the limited development time before rushing the game out for the PS2's launch deemed such a feat impossible,

ATHLETE'S THUMB

There are a lot of odd peripherals designed with fairly limited applications, and the Namco JogCon, produced solely to enhance the driving pleasure of R4 consumers, ranks up there with the fruitiest of them. A standard PS controller with a nasty dual-thumb-operated wheel situated where the analogue sticks are intended to sit, it's certainly an unwieldy collector's item even if a few "hardcore" Ridge fans swear by it. Most, however, just swear at it... give us Namco's earlier analogue steering peripheral, the Negcon, any day.

OFF THE SCALE

A triumph of both absurd marketing stunts and sheer indulgence, Ridge Racer Full Scale allowed the handful of folks that encountered it to drive a Mazda Miata (Eunos Roadster) around the game's track - whilst sat in the actual car itself. The steering, acceleration and brakes were all connected to the in-game car, which was remodeled to resemble its real life variant, and the vehicle and its accompanying widescreen were situated in an impressively over-sized marquee - for when a bona fide car sitting on an arcade/expo floor just isn't imposing enough.

resulting in a highly playable, but very down the line entry in the series.

The one city that connected all the courses (including a shiny new version of the original course) was probably the least jagged first-gen PS2 entity, and the physics that hurled the cars over said tracks were arguably the greatest seen in the series and perfectly suited to the Zen powersliding mentality. Unfortunately, in throwing the game back to its (real racing) roots, Namco had apparently forgotten the features which had ensured the series stayed alive between the first and fifth titles - the most notable absence was the sublime valleys of R4 and the monstrous mountains of Rave, as the courses represented here were disappointingly flat. They'd also forgotten to inject any semblance of next-generation wizardry with the AI behaving just as idiotically/menacingly as it did in the original edition. Indeed, if Namco were seeking to replicate everything the original Ridge Racer epitomised for the PSone five years previously then they succeeded, as that's the impression many got from the game - they'd seen it five years ago. Despite selling more than a few PS2s at launch on brand recognition alone, and featuring a decent GP-based career mode, RRV just didn't have the longevity many would have hoped for in a racing title released in 2000. And the less said about Namco's disastrous foray into "realistic" driving simulations with R: Racing, the better.

Fortunately, with the glorious PSP edition of Ridge Racer out now, and Ridge Racer DS revisiting the N64 release, Namco can once again hold their heads high and we can plaster those 6x4 glossies of Reiko back on our walls... <<

CRAZY NAMCO

The opening crawl when playing through Career mode in Rage Racer is one of the funniest things we've read in a game. For those who haven't experienced its zany glory, here it is:

Rage Racer...
The deep primitive roaring exhaust notes titillate the base instincts of those who become known as Rage Racers. No-one knows how the race started or how the contestants became known as Rage Racers.
Contestants, dangerously living on the edge. Those who live for the moment and love the heady perfume of nitro, smoked rubber and hot asphalt.
Meeting together for one purpose to be...
The best there is...
The Ultimate...
The #1 Rage Racer

RIDGE RACER PSP

GHOST IN THE SHELL

[PSONE, 1998]

MAMORU Oshii's filmic adaptation of Ghost in the Shell is certainly deserved of its classic status, though the ill-fated redesign of leading lady Motoko Kusanagi and the limited showing of the arachnid mechs which pervaded Shirow Masmune's manga was something of a disappointment. Thankfully developer Exact set out to rectify this when they directed their PSone title towards the source material by not only returning Kusanagi to her traditional, svelte form, but also by ensuring that Section 9's Fuchikoma tanks could easily put the Prince of Persia's gymnastics to shame.

BATOU... HE'S NO KUSANAGI

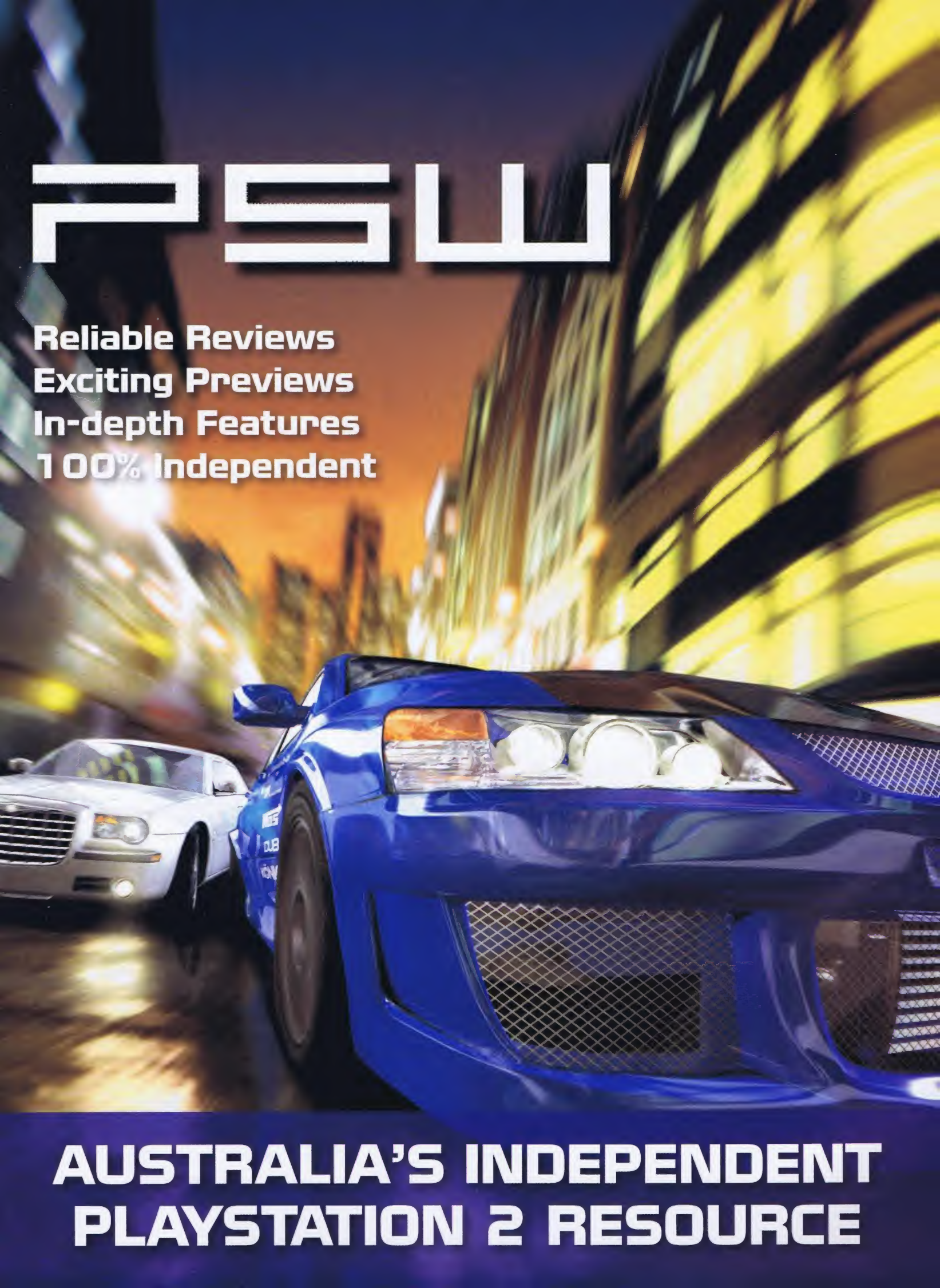
There were a lot of things that GitS did tremendously well and top of the list was that it made a very good first impression: a slammin' techno track accompanied a gorgeous anime introduction wherein Motoko and her Fuchikoma busted some truly amazing moves before splitting apart their foe. Not only was it one of the most radiant cutscenes the console world had seen, easily matching Namco's much-touted cinematics, it also set the pace for the rest of the game. Heck, even the mission briefings oozed style; they may not have been technicolour extravaganzas, but they were far more than dull static screens: a scrolling wire-frame map showed Japan's top counter-terrorist team travelling to their next hot-spot, with Kusanagi and her associates providing an audio commentary over the top of yet another penetrating musical number. In fact the entire soundtrack of GitS was exceptionally well-suited and just plain exceptional, interweaving with and enhancing the urgency that coursed through the missions - given that it included artists like Derrick May, Dave Angel and The Advent, it really wasn't all that surprising.

DOES WHATEVER A SPIDER CAN

The majority of your time in the Fuchikoma's pilot seat was spent either eliminating enemies or diffusing bombs, both of which were a treat and never grew boring - no matter how many times the theme was replicated - simply because of your vehicle's phenomenal manoeuvrability, the level design which fully took advantage of said manoeuvrability and some extremely fluid controls. Leaping, spraying automatic fire in three hundred and sixty degree arcs, performing lock-ons, shuffle strafing, playing hide and seek on the walls of skyscrapers, lobbing grenades - all could be endlessly threaded in to combos until the li'l red tank embodied liquid death. Sadly this exhilarating ride was not a long one as there were far too few missions on offer, even including the obligatory guardian battles and of course the unique Spy Hunter-style levels in which your Fuchikoma screamed along the highways and oceans, blasting everything that got in its way to smithereens without much effort; the latter may have only been a novelty, reminiscent of shmup sections that 16bit platform games periodically inserted without provocation or reason, but they made a welcome break from the main levels where the Fuchikoma's flexibility and a constantly rotating camera provided quite a bit of disorientation.

Also disheartening was the lack of truly formidable enemies: the Fuchikomas felt stupidly overpowered and the fact that you never got to roam the environments with similarly alacritous terrorist units stalking you simply seemed like a missed opportunity - as did the lack of a multiplayer contingent. Replay value therefore fell back on the Training mode entirely, a vicious series of time-limit-oriented challenges that tested your tank handling skills far more than anything found in the main missions.

Its few shortcomings and wasted potential aside, GitS ultimately provided a concise, scintillating game world augmented by a cool minimalist techno soundtrack and a heap of Masamune's trademark style - a forgotten PSone gem. <<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ACTS OF LEVY

Today I happened to be around at a mates' place watching a cheesy B-Grade movie about a giant Boa Constrictor and a giant Python (which I might add was bloody hilarious). At one stage I had to nip around the corner to my place to grab another movie or something. When I came back, one of my friends lept out the front door before I even knocked and said, "You know that guy who does the arcade reviews for Hyper? Levy or something?"

"Yeah?"

"Come and look at this."

We jumped back inside the house and he pointed my eyes to the television, on which was a guy who looked slightly like Tim Levy himself playing a mad game of ping pong with another guy. It was on the Comedy Channel on Foxtel. I didn't actually believe that it was Levy at the time, but when the credits rolled, lo and behold, "Produced by Tim Levy and..." and also credits for him acting. So, Levy made it onto the comedy channel? How did this happen? Also, what the hell was happening in that short movie, I mean, I only caught the end of it but it sure did look wierd :P Oh well, congratulations to him :P

Wierder still, I came home and decided to write in about it, so I picked out a random Hyper from my collection to flick to the mail section to get the email. It turned out to be issue 130, and right there in the mail section was a picture of good old Levy wearing the orange bandana and with a ping pong bat in his hand, looking fiercly at his competitor. What's going on here, now you're advertising in the magazine? Now I'm curious :P

Thanks for taking the time to read up, keep going with the mag it's a great read despite your recent onslaught of critism!

Fishonthecarpet

Tim Levy is indeed a man of many talents. Not to mention a man for whom zaniness is a way of life and shenanigans the wallpaper of his world. Levy is a comedy guru, a master of the finer nuances of physical comedy, and if you didn't know that already, then you obviously haven't been paying enough attention to his appearances in Hyper.

The child of Hearty Hilarioustein (the "Funniest Man in the World" for sixteen years running from 1956-1971) and Ping Fei Pong (the Undisputed World Heavyweight Ping Pong Champion), it's no wonder comedy flows through him like wine through a Hungarian fountain. And combining his comedic sensibilities with ping pong is a given. You obviously never saw his one man show - "A Man and his Balls". It was genius. When he juggled his own balls in his mouth the entire crowd was in raptures.

Levy's influence even extends back in time. You know that character Kramer from Seinfeld? Based on Levy. You know those Three Stooge guys? Based on Levy. Any time a child laughs, any time a prostitute guffaws, any time a ray of comedy light slips through the otherwise dreary Comedy Channel schedule, you can bet Tim Levy is behind it.

A CALL TO ARMS

This letter is dedicated to the lovely social liberties that are feedback and correspondence, for issue #139. First, I want to extend a huge thumbs-up to Renfrey G. Ansell (you don't happen to deal in latex, do you?: p), I love the sort of letters that are full of insightful ponderings and intelligent questions that get informative answers. Spot on, let's have more letters like that.

Next up, in the letter "More Big Ups" it was stated that "Sony and Microsoft loyalists" who "think Nintendo is 'kiddie' should open your damn eyes". It then went on to mention such landmark titles as the new RE games, Eternal Darkness, etc.

As far as I knew, there were no Sony and Microsoft loyalists. The term "fanboy" is universally preceded by "Nintendo" in every local and foreign gaming publication ever read.

Also, as a PS2 owner myself, I feel I must mount a defence on behalf of my supposedly graphics-obsessed, easily-influenced-by-corporate-propaganda brethren. It's all well and good for Nintendo fans to tell us what awful people we are for contributing to the possible fall of their beloved platform, but point-in-fact: we'd all own Nintendo's systems if they were REALLY listening to the mass market and responding accordingly.

Personally, I didn't buy a GCN because, although it has some real spunk in its mature line-up, it's soooooo daaaaamn looooooooooong between such games that I feel I wouldn't have really clocked up enough regular playtime to get my money's worth.

To conclude, Julbot brought up a good point with his complaints relating to the repetitive, unimaginative naming of our media. It really pissed me off to hear about Tekken 5 being named so, for instance. I mean, come on Namco, brand familiarity might be a good thing for sales, but surely you could have slapped together some reason for the tournament's name to change, would it have cost you that much?

I believe that my pleas, like Julbot's, like many other gamers will no doubt fall on deaf ears, so if you guys at Hyper don't mind, I'd like to use the mailbag to conduct a little experiment.

I'm calling on behalf of Australian gamers for any and all developers/publishers etc. to write in next issue and acknowledge that you are actually reading our opinions, if not taking them on board when beginning your next cash-cow project. This ought to be interesting.

Keep up the good work guys.

Hate to break it to you champ but we're in Australia, the arse end of the world as far as the majority of publishers and developers are concerned. Our opinion (as a country) counts for very little as we only have a small market that brings in a tiny percentage of the money that other territories do (Asia, Europe and America). As far as branding is concerned, do we think it would have hurt Namco to name Tekken 5 something other than Tekken 5? Definitely. Branding is immensely important in the eyes of the consumer. Changing the name of a franchise could damage the sales to no end. Think of it this way - when you get something from McDonalds you have certain expectations as the brand is in the public's awareness to such an extent that it is part of the furniture. People will buy what they know. Change the name to Happy McFuntime's Burger Emporium

CAPTION THIS!

PART 66 WINNER

Mr M just keeps on winning. We're going to have to ban him soon...

"Alf chose the perfect time to come out of retirement"

and it just becomes another shop. In the case of Tekken, take away the Tekken name (and hence all it stands for in the minds of consumers) and you would simply have another 3D fighter that, no matter how good it is will not sell anywhere near as well as part of an established franchise. It's the goal of the vast number of developers and publisher to create I.P. that can become a franchise, as they know the commercial value of creating brands. Conservative certainly, but that's just the way it is. And let's face it, if they did change the name it would probably be chosen by committee, and the vast majority of fans would probably hate it. Think about it. What would you prefer - Tekken 5, or "Legend of Iron Fist: The New Fisting Generation"?

EVIL MALKY FOR PRES

With regard to the mascot deficiency: although your crate-based humour has been excellent, and something that as a long time games enthusiast I can identify with, I think that because crates don't have the ability to speak for themselves they should be ruled as a future mascot. Tim Levy has got style an charisma in spades I'm sure, but I think we need something fresh (no offence to Mr Levy intended). Evil Malky would be a departure from the wholesome image of Amos and bring a lot of much needed crushing antics, and therefore in my opinion the best choice.

Regards,

Jess

Evil Malky will crush you last.

WIKKY WIKKY WILD WILD GOOSE

Evil Malky. Without question, his most evil of evil hearts will rule the pages of hyper. All shall kneel, wither and die as a reign of terrible hate and pain will wash over us all. Once in control, i am sure that Evil Malky will find a way to kill the ghost of David Wildgoose, even though he is already dead. I would have voted for crate, but i just cant see how a crate is going to become a mascot. But yes, vote 1 Evil Malky.

P.S.

How exactly did David Wildgoose die anyway? I can see him being hit by a runaway semi driven by the incredible hulk, but that's a bit too far-fetched, even for something off Futurama...

And also, kudos to the old Nintendo gamer crue, that has to be one of the coolest mags ever printed. Its peak was a day in the life of N64 gamer, when Kosta only played with his action figures all day.

David Wildgoose died from a rare and tragic disease call Feldman's Syndrome, the symptoms of which include a gradual and painful transformation into a forgotten 80s teen heartthrob who went on to have a successful drug habit and very little else. Although the disease was caught early and a Feldectomy was performed on the late Wildgoose, the operation was not a success and he succumbed to the Feldman's Syndrome, forever killing the David Wildgoose we loved and relacing him with the abomination that is Corey Wildgoose.

BURGLAR PROOF

Back in January, in the dead of night, we were robbed. Along with a few mobile phones and a video camera, the sneaky thief also pilfered my collection of 14 PS2 games. Even Jak & Daxter in an ex-rental case I couldn't even sell on eBay.

The thief even had the audacity to take the copy of Prince of Persia: Sands of Time out of my PS2. Fortunately, my consoles and memory cards were not taken. My collection of GameCube games also remained untouched, and they were sitting right next to the PS2 games.

Does this say anything about the way people look at Nintendo? People wouldn't even be caught dead stealing their games?

I thought this might make an amusing story for you,

Jerec

P.S. Insurance paid up, and I was able to get most of the games back: Even Disgaea, which is really difficult to find.

Sorry that your games got stolen but that had us laughing loud enough to have the rest of the office telling us to shut up.

HEY HYPERINIS ;-)

Lovin' the mag. Lovin' the in-jokes. Lovin' life, really. That last point may seem to be a little over the top, until I reveal why...

Having played with a PSP quite extensively over the weekend, thanks to a generous (and trusting) friend of mine, I have fallen in love!!

This thing is sweet. Nah, screw that. Super Sweet is the only way to describe it. Playing Ridge Racer for the first time was the best introduction I think I could have asked for. It shows off the PSP so well. The graphical detail in this game, and you would have to assume those to follow, is nothing short of amazing. You can tell that everything has a high poly-count and colour and brightness is simply stunning. Really, unit as a whole is stunning. It feels solid and all the buttons are very responsive, and there's not one thing gimmicky about it "cough", "cough", DS, "cough".

After a thoroughly social-life ending weekend with my new-found love, I could only find a small number of things that bugged me. The biggest thing that I noticed was pixel blur. It seems that it has quite a large pixel response time (I couldn't find anywhere online where the actual stat is specified). Creeping up on opponents in this racer made this problem very evident. The cars ahead will ghost across the screen as you move left to right. If it's meant to be an FX thing, then it's way overdone. At first I did think that perhaps it was a part of the game, but having played the old-school racer that intros the title, it was made only more obvious - the background ghosts in horizontal and vertical planes severely. It does lend itself to a game of speed, but how is it going to affect FPS titles? I get the feeling that panning is going to be a real problem.

Overall though, I'm sold on this thing. It's what I've wanted out of a portable gaming machine for years.

Keep up the good work guys.

The Anti-Cam

PS What's the Deal with Amos? You need to give him a pat on the arse (how can one slap a deity?) and remind him what it means to be mascot.

Hey Anti-Cam

Are you so called because you're against Cam, or because you're his complete opposite in every way? Kind of like a Bizarre-O-Cam, who actually likes the Rage Against the Machine song "Renegade of Funk" (which Cam hates because he thinks that it's false advertising as it doesn't contain even a dash of funk), and who thinks Parappa the Rapper is the worst game ever. Hell, you probably don't even want to get on the disco bus either do you?

In any case, yes we've noticed the pixel response times too. It's a major bummer considering LCD monitors are now getting so fast, but there's always a trade-off. Perhaps the newer LCD technology was too expensive to implement, or perhaps having a lower refresh time would have chewed through the batteries even faster? Besides, in a perfect world the PSP would have an OLED screen. Fingers crossed for PSP 2 eh? And fingers crossed we don't see the current response rate impacting on gameplay.

[above] Corey Wildgoose discovers the fate that awaits him.

REVIEW II: ELECTRIC BOOGALOO

Consider this a Reader's Addendum to your Resident Evil 4 review.

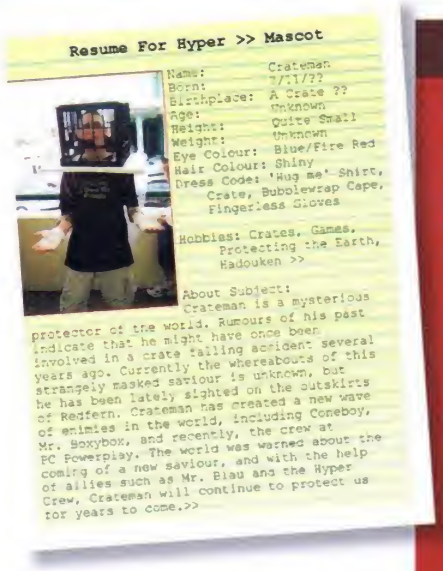
By now you should have bought the higher-priced Collector's Edition of RE4. (How the only edition available can be called a "Collector's Edition" is beyond me, other than to squeeze an extra ten bucks out of every copy). You should have either played a long way through it or completed the game and possibly gone onto a second round (like I did to see what the guns maxed out are like- not much different).

RE4 is a good game executed brilliantly, but does this make it a great game? Even though it's touted as a radical new improvement for the RE series the art still outshone the game design in leaps and bounds. Don't be fooled by the gorgeous attention to detail and the stunning animation and environments, they are all there to distract you from the glaring inconsistencies of the game. I loved playing it. It was fun, but in the end, it was as pointless as its story.

Collecting the Red, Blue and Green gems to complete a "puzzle" or to angle the mirrors so that the light hits the switch to open the door is so very very old now, (four games old to be precise) and for a game as realistically gritty and "Mature" as RE4 this clunky Red Blue Green game design is not just a bad fit, it's a kludge. (Look it up).

Somewhere along the way you will ask yourself, how is it that axe-throwing zombie-esque villagers carry around boxes of ammunition? Why do the robed clergy of RE4's creepy creepy cult carry incendiary grenades, yet fail to use them while they lumber up to the barrel of my shotgun? Why do security doors open up when I take a precious item from its secured place? (Last time I checked that's when security doors close).

Or most of all, how can the Merchant that you buy all your new weapons and upgrades from even exist? With all these murderous



[above] Crate man offers his cratetastic skills as a new potential mascot.

villagers and cult members everywhere, how does he survive? And moreso, how does he get from where you just left- to where you've just fought tooth and nail to get to- before you did??? The gaps of logic are as horrific as the games content and destroy so much of the atmosphere and suspension of disbelief the art team went overboard trying to create.

To regain the tension and drama promised of the term "Survival Horror" I would have opted instead to lose the Merchant entirely, and with it all the gold in the game (since there'd be no merchant to buy from anymore). Definitely lose the way these simple peasant villagers drop unimaginable amounts of convenient items for you. There are far better ways to drop ammo in a game than this. Please. Also, I would have had more Creepy Cult and less Hi-Tech Laboratories.

Did any of the reviews even point out how mindless zombie peasants could have the presence of mind to use electronic key cards and high tech genetics equipment, but then be stupid enough not take cover when you're shooting a machine gun at them? If you want to scare me, Capcom, I mean reeeally scare me, then have the story and game design make some sense at least. For example: It would have been great if you had a 2 gun restriction (like Halo) and Ashley (the girl you are rescuing) was used to carry any extra guns or equipment- then she would have replaced that horribly intrusive inventory screen. The effects of this to the gameplay would have been a much better fit- The more you load on the poor girl the slower she would walk. Asking her to follow you gives you access to more weapons, but also puts her in more danger. So what do I do? Survive on little and play it safer, or risk Ashley's life and get through it easier?

These are almost ethical questions! And this is precisely the level of mature game design that needs to be asked of the new generation of games these days. Not the tired standard of being able to pause an enemy mid-attack to go look in an imaginary briefcase of weapons for a more appropriate one. Or at the very worst, asking the player to collect a red gem, green gem, and blue gem, and insert them into holes conveniently gem-shaped. What condescendingly pointless shite. Christ almighty, Capcom, don't be afraid to grow up a little bit, will you?

Now don't get me wrong, if I want fun RedGreenBlue game design then give me Zelda: Wind Waker any day. I'd argue that even it had more sophisticated game design than RE4 does. But if we're talking a new generation of survival horror for the growing main-stream market then for all the great innovations RE4 did have (like context-sensitive areas, etc) overall it still falls embarrassingly short of the mark. Perhaps we will only see a true reinvention of the series when a good game executed brilliantly isn't reviewed as a great game.

M

Hey M, you raise some good points, but we can't help but think that Resident Evil is the wrong series to start demanding more mature game design and logical consistency in. For us it just doesn't matter that the villages are full of weaponry, ammo and life curing herbs, nor that the Merchant couldn't realistically get to his shop locations. They're just devices to keep the game flowing smoothly and work wonderfully in that context. By your logic healing yourself with herbs isn't realistic so Leon should only have one life bar for the whole game. And stepping in a bear trap should cripple Leon and not allow him to go any further. That just wouldn't be fun.

We do like your idea about having Ashley carry your excess weaponry, however, and certainly the obtuse puzzles could definitely be improved, but RE4 is first and foremost a game about atmosphere and intensity and we think it does this particularly well. You're meant to switch your brain off and enjoy it!

Moving away from RE4 though, there's certainly a case for more believability in games, but it must always be balanced against ensuring the title is fun. Games have linear storylines for a reason, they have locked doors for a reason (as infuriating as that may be), and they let you get shot a bunch of time without dying for a reason. There is hope, however, for change and maturation, and many developers are aware of the need to break free of some of these artificial devices. David Perry outlines some of the things he'd like to see on page 38 for instance, and a game like Half-Life 2 (although constrained to many of the conventions of the genre) built in physics related puzzles as an intuitive part of the game world, as opposed to the inanity of "find the

LETTER OF THE MONTH

TOILET HUMOUR

I've been a loyal reader since issue no. 2, the flaming basketball on the cover being all the incentive a recent recipient of a brand new Megadrive, and basketball nut, needed to first get my hands on this great gaming publication. At the time I was on holiday in South W.A., and after the purchase my Dad and I were headed to a landmark that I was quite excited about visiting; an extremely steep street. After about 30 minutes of driving, I lifted my head out of the mag and asked my Dad how long it was until we'd be there. "We were just there" he replied. Believe it. Although Hyper has given so much good over the years, bad things can, and do also come with it. I'll never see that street again. But there is a far more detrimental effect that Hyper has had on my life, to which I would like to bring to your attention.

For me, Hyper is to be read on the Throne and never anywhere else. This is far from a disrespectful thing, as I do my best reading there, and Hyper has graced my Throne week in week out since 1994. Just like Corey Feldman, I cherish these moments.....except that he was talking about teasing a fat kid while smoking in a tree-house. The problem however, lies in the fact that while business is promptly finished, I would always want to do more reading, and so I would stay until I finished what I wanted to read. The real problem lies in the fact that for all the great deal of extra time I spend in there reading, I have a habit of continuing to wipe.

Because of this I easily use 2-3 times as much toilet paper as a normal person, and have received much flak from my parents. "Toilet paper doesn't grow on tree's" they'd say. In the last few years however, concern has switched from the small additional cost to the shopping list each week, but to the point that they believe I might have some sort of problem with my arse. And when your Dad feels the need to ask you "Is everything right 'down there'?", things just ain't cool. On numerous occasions I've also been threatened with a trip to the doctors to have things checked out. Definitely not cool.

"Just stop wiping", I hear you say. Try being home alone with the internet and not looking at porn - it's like that. Maybe there are others who suffer so, maybe not. I just felt that it was about time you needed to hear this....

So in closing, thankyou Hyper for providing me with over a decade of thoroughly enjoyable reading. Thankyou, and Damn you.

Adam

Damn dude, just...damn. We'd like to say that we know your pain but that would be a bald faced lie and as we all know, lies make baby Jebus cry and whilst making a baby cry has some fun features, by and large it just means you can't get to sleep or your flight is going to seem even longer than it is. We have a wacky idea that just may work for your situation - take your current copy of Hyper, remove it from the confines of the bathroom and read it somewhere else.

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

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

[right] Agostino Damiano is so cool we had to print his letter at a totally different angle to the rest of the mag

HYPER >>

AGOSTINO DAMIANO thinks the hype is warranted.

The letters section of issue 137 of Hyper - Australia's longest running multi-platform gaming magazine - truly is a reflection of the times. Having had slim pickings in the way of choice in the past, competition now seems a serious threat to magazine publishers in the same way it's a threat to game publishers. Are the criticisms valid or are they merely the same old complaints received month after month, only in that month they were printed?

This reviewer's experience of Hyper is somewhat limited, having read the magazine uninterrupted since it's 5th anniversary special some years ago I'm no veteran. What made the magazine attractive then however, still does. But now the magazine has to contend with the internet and a raft of localised foreign publications, Edge being the most recent and surely the most prominent (open discussion on the Hyperactive forums along the lines of "Who bought Edge over Hyper this this month?" is testament to this).

What made the magazine popular and what is likely to see it retain it's popularity is it's absolute uniqueness. First and foremost it is the only dedicated Australian multi-format gaming magazine, something to be proud of in itself, but there's much more than that. The magazine has always achieved a sense of community with it's readers, as opposed to anonymity, this coupled with a genuinely informal approach to gaming gives it a nature which can't be matched by it's competitors. "By gamers for gamers" would be an accurate marketing line. Further, literally no gaming magazine comes close in terms of Hyper's unique visual presentation. At first glance you may wonder how you could take the magazine seriously, with it's extravagant use of colours and blocky fonts, presented in a way that resembles a pre-schooler's experiment with coloured paper and glue. Look around though at everything else on the rack; every second computing/technology mag has minimalist styling with white backgrounds and Wip3out inspired fonts. Far from original. Further exploration may leave you equally unimpressed, why are there photos of the reviews throughout and what are these captions for example? Personality is why. The magazine has retained throughout the years, an informal relationship between the writers and the readers and this, coupled with the off-beat sense of humour simply enhances the sense of community.

[above] I'm a freaking genius!

I BUY IT FOR THE ARTICLES, I SWEAR!

Perhaps though, this review has placed too much emphasis on the presentation of the magazine, and characteristics which are obvious to anyone flipping through, rather than focusing on the meat of the bones. It's doubtful I'm the only one who began reading the magazine in the hope that I'd avoid buying a $100 dud, having wised up the fact that an official console mag is sparring in it's objectivity to say the least. Hyper's reviews are unrivalled by any other magazine, both in the their size and in their quality. That said, they're not perfect. A typical criticism is one of bias, usually towards favouring one system over another. These criticisms fall flat when you consider current release schedules. If the PS2 sees upwards of a dozen games released monthly and the GCN two or thre it's only natural that the PS2 would have more rubber-stamp worth games. However, what wouldn't go astray is a weakening of the magazine's "It's good to play together" stance are a return to comparative reviewing across consoles. If the X-Box is the place to be for PC-style first person shooters and the PS2 is sport game heaven let it be said. This also involves making a clear-cut distinction regrading ports, gamers want to know which system has the best version of every game or the best of a genre, this way, investing in a console becomes an easier decision (those owning multiple consoles, well...you're just top stuff aren't you?). In addition, the opening paragraph of most reviews may baffle the casual reader. Where once they were consistently used to good effect to discuss the history of a developer, the popularity of a particular series or the state of the genre the game belongs to, they are now wasted referencing a story bearing no resemblance to the actual game. On a side note, numerous reviews have been noticeably smaller than their corresponding previews, despite scoring high reviews. DJ Decks & FX and Burnout 3 come to mind.

>> Hyper's reviews are unrivalled by any by any other magazine

YOU'VE GOT ME CONFUSED WITH SOMEONE ELSE

Other areas the magazine seems to be slipping on is the lack of a consistent gaming hardware section, in particular gaming peripherals. DJ-ing equipment and top of the line mobile phones are certainly interesting, if somewhat out of most people's price range. Most gamers would find more utility in reviews and unearthing of some good 3rd party controllers and add ons. Another area is the considerably large film previews. Sometimes you'll think you're reading a cinema magazine, having sworn your hand-eye co-ordination saw you pick up a gaming magazine. Page after page of Lord of the Rings and Star Wars. None the less, these are drops in the ocean compared to the quality of the magazine as a whole.

Overall, the mag maintains a superb ability to stay with the times, not only in terms of referencing pop culture and linking in various indirect influences to the gaming industry but also in being able to spin off sections of the magazine no longer relevant. Cheats and playguides, once considered essential are now so prolific on the internet that to print them would be entirely non-essential. Rather, such past staples have made way for DVD reviews and updates of online gaming. Lastly, the continuous referral to gaming's origins and history through retrospective articles help keep things in perspective, providing some history to those new to the world's greatest past time (cheese rolling, you just don't do it for me anymore) or assisting to remind jaded gamers of another time. The quintessential gaming magazine.

AVAILABLE ON:
PRINT

DETAILS:
CATEGORY: High brow
PLAYERS: 1
DEVELOPER: Amos?
PUBLISHER: Next Publishing
PRICE: $6.955
RATING: Blau-tastic
AVAILABLE: Monthly

HYPER VERDICT:
PLUS: Humour, visually original. Great price.
MINUS: Anime section still only one page. No Amos segment.

REVIEWS	STYLE	VALUE
94	92	92

OVERALL
94
THE Australian multi-format gaming magazine.

The Official Australian Games Chart

Compiled by GfK in association with the IEAA

TOP 10 PlayStation 2 Games Over $50

W/E 8th May 2005 RETAIL SALES

1	◆	Gran Turismo 4	Racing
2	✪	Star Wars Ep 3 Revenge Sith	RPG
3	◆	GTA: San Andreas	Adventure
4	◆	Lego Star Wars	Adventure
5	▼	Midnight Club 3 DUB Ed	Racing
6	▼	Sonic Mega Collection Plus	Adventure
7	◆	SingStar Party Bundle	All Other
8	◆	NFS: Underground 2	Racing
9	▼	Playboy: The Mansion	Strategy
10	◆	Rugby 2005	Sports

TOP 10 Nintendo DS Games Over $40

W/E 8th May 2005 RETAIL SALES

1	◆	Super Mario 64	Adventure
2	▲	Rayman	Adventure
3	▼	WarioWare: Touched!	Action
4	▼	Pokémon Dash	Racing
5	▲	Asphalt: Urban GT	Racing
6	▲	The URBZ: Sims In The City	Strategy
7	◆	Robots	Adventure
8	▼	Spider-Man 2	Adventure
9	✪	Project Rub	Strategy
10	✪	Tiger Woods PGA 2005	Sports

TOP 10 Game Cube Games Over $50

W/E 8th May 2005 RETAIL SALES

1	◆	Resident Evil 4 CE	Adventure
2	◆	Legend Of Zelda: 4 Swords	RPG
3	▲	Pokémon Colosseum	RPG
4	✪	Tales Of Symphonia	RPG
6	✪	SRS Street Racing Syndicate	Racing
5	▲	Mario Power Tennis	Sports
7	◆	Mario Kart Double Dash	Racing
8	▲	Donkey Konga w Drums	All Other
9	◆	Paper Mario 1000 Year Door	Adventure
10	✪	Pokémon Channel	RPG

TOP 10 Xbox Games Over $50

W/E 8th May 2005 RETAIL SALES

1	✪	Forza Motorsport	Racing
2	✪	Star Wars Ep 3 Revenge Sith	RPG
3	▼	Doom 3 Limited Edition	Action
4	▼	Lego Star Wars	Adventure
5	▼	Midnight Club 3 DUB Ed	Racing
6	▼	Halo 2	Action
7	▲	Sonic Mega Collection Plus	Adventure
8	✪	NFS: Underground Clsc	Racing
9	▼	Star Wars Repblic Cmmando	Action
10	▼	Playboy: The Mansion	Strategy

TOP 10 PC Games Over $20

W/E 8th May 2005 RETAIL SALES

1	▲	Empire Earth 2	Strategy
2	▼	The Sims 2: University	Strategy
3	◆	The Sims 2	Strategy
4	▲	World Of WarCraft	Strategy
5	▼	The Sims Deluxe	Strategy
6	◆	The Sims Full House	Strategy
7	▲	MOH Pacific Assault	Action
8	◆	Half Life 2	Action
9	▼	Star Wars Old Republic 2	RPG
10	◆	The Sims Unleashed	Strategy

TOP 10 Game Boy Advance Games Over $30

W/E 8th May 2005 RETAIL SALES

1	▲	Pokémon Fire Red	RPG
2	▲	Pokémon Leaf Green	RPG
3	▲	Legend Of Zelda Minish Cap	RPG
4	▼	Nemo + Monsters Inc	Adventure
5	▼	SpongeBob Double Pack	Adventure
6	✪	Crash Bandicoot Fusion	Adventure
7	▲	Pokémon Ruby	RPG
8	▲	The Incredibles	Adventure
9	▼	Lizzie Mguire+Disny Prncess	Adventure
10	▼	Scooby Doo Double Pack	Adventure

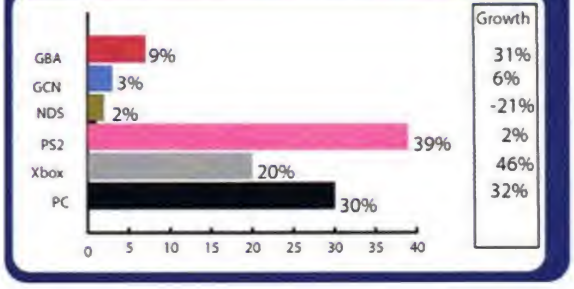
TOP 10 All Full Priced Games

W/E 8th May 2005 RETAIL SALES

1	◆	Gran Turismo 4	PlayStation 2
2	✪	Star Wars Ep 3 Revenge Sith	PlayStation 2
3	✪	Forza Motorsport	Xbox
4	✪	Star Wars Ep 3 Revenge Sith	Xbox
5	▼	GTA: San Andreas	PlayStation 2
6	▲	Empire Earth 2	PC/MAC
7	▼	Lego Star Wars	PlayStation 2
8	▼	The Sims 2: University	PC/MAC
9	▼	Midnight Club 3 DUB Ed	PlayStation 2
10	▼	Doom 3 Limited Edition	Xbox

MARKET WATCH All Games by Platform

APR 05 Vs MAR 05 RETAIL SALES 2004



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

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HYPER 142 >> On sale July 6

mobile games

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Lord of the Rings - 22729 | Bejeweled - 22731 | Monopoly - 22747

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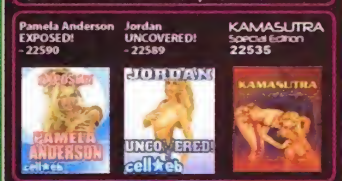
22757 BlackJack >> NATACHA | 22758 StripTris >> Elita



Pamela Anderson EXPOSED! - 22590 | Jordan UNCOVERED! - 22589 | KAMASUTRA Special Edition 22535

22471 CarSex Kamasutra | 22301 Katharina Strip | 22353 Sexy Poker

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22722 Top Gun Air Combat 2 | 22791 Zoo Tycoon 2 | 22456 WWE™ Cage | 23481 Out Road | 22125 Moorhen Kart 04

22781 Xyanide | 22782 Kanzo Masters | 22280 2004 Cricket World Champs | 22270 Ancient Empires | 22741 METAL UNIT

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22612 Absolute Rally Challenge | 22588 Evel Knievel | 22575 Moto GP 2

22703 The Drinks | 22737 Fight Club | 22197 Slots

22465 Pokies - Fruit Machine 2 | 22404 Racing Fever 2 | 22573 MX Unleashed

22671 Prince Of Persia Warrior Within | 22533 Tom Clancy's Rainbow Six - 3 | 22259 Prince of Persia Harem Adventures | 22262 Siberian Strike

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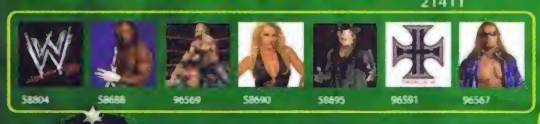

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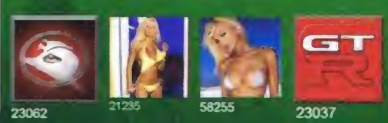

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