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AUSTRALIAN LAUNCH DETAILS

XBOX 360 EXPOSED!

Hands on with the hottest Xbox 360 games

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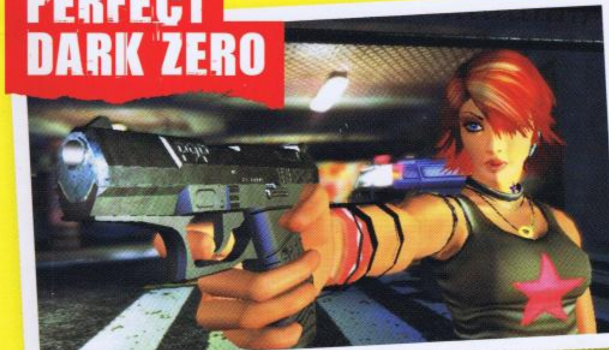

KAMEO

RIDGE RACER 6

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PGR 3 • DOA 4
T.H.A.W

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NINTENDO DS ★ VERSUS ★ SONY PSP

>>>>>> SPECIAL FEATURE <<<<<<

The Showdown for Handheld Supremacy

>>>>>> SPECIAL FEATURE <<<<<<

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SPLINTER CELL 4 UNVEILED!

The stunning sequel that's set to be the definitive Sam Fisher game

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Mario Kart DS • Sonic Rush
Ouendan • Meteos
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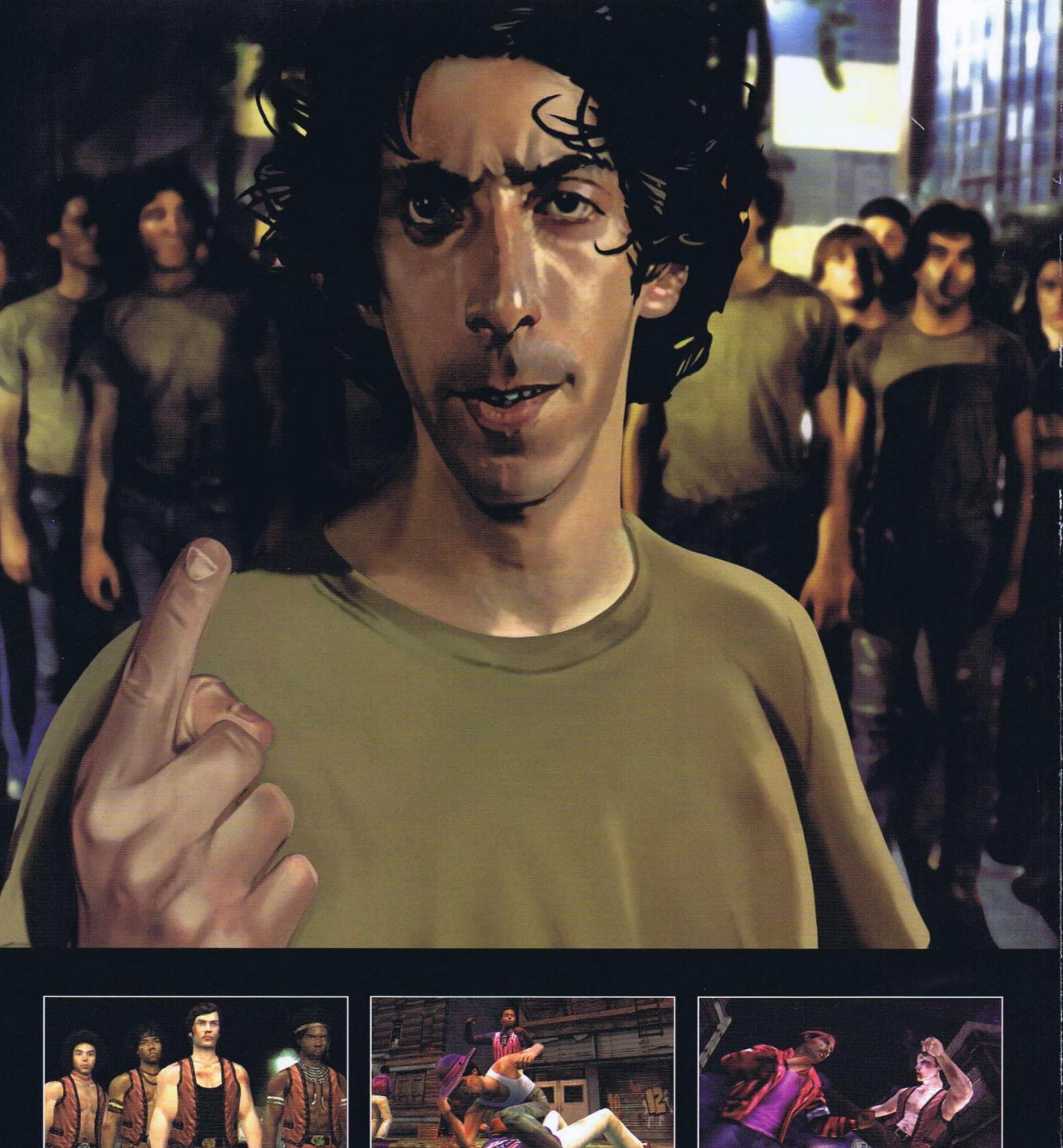

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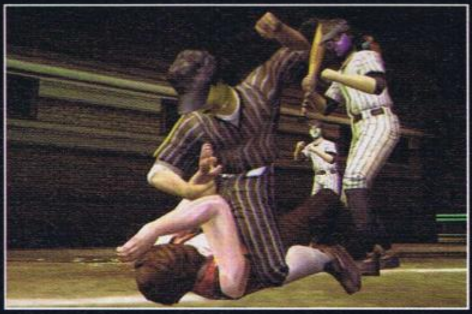

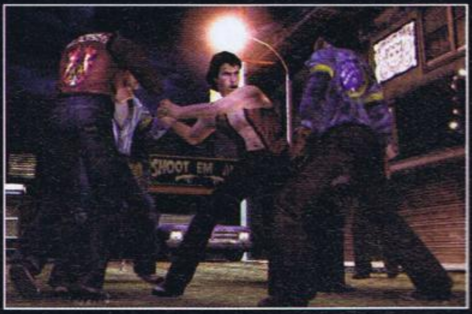

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PS/2 Keyboard/Mouse Combo
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PS/2 Keyboard/Mouse Combo, FDD
120w 2 Channel Speaker System
ATX Case with 300w PSU / Front USB

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SOHO AMD SYSTEM

AMD Athlon64 3200+
Gigabyte/MSI (NForce3 Chipset)
1024Mb PC3200, 5.1 Audio, GB LAN
200GB SATA 7200rpm, 8Mb Cache
256Mb NVIDIA FX5500 Videocard
16x Dual Layer DVDRW, 2 Speakers
19" LCD Monitor, 12ms Response
PS/2 Keyboard/Mouse Combo
15-in-1 Memory Card Reader
ATX Case with 300w PSU / Front USB

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INCLUDE;	ADD;
WinXP Home/Pro	+ $130/$199
250GB SATA HDD	+ $50
Wireless Combo	+ $65

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SOHO INTEL SYSTEM

INTEL P4 630 64-Bit (3.0Ghz)
Gigabyte/MSI (Intel 865PE Chipset)
1024Mb PC3200, 5.1 Audio, GB LAN
200GB SATA 7200rpm, 8Mb Cache
256Mb NVIDIA FX5500 Videocard
16x Dual Layer DVDRW, 2 Speakers
19" LCD Monitor, 12ms Response
PS/2 Keyboard/Mouse Combo
15-in-1 Memory Card Reader
ATX Case with 300w PSU / Front USB

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Upgrade Options:

INCLUDE;	ADD;
WinXP Home/Pro	+ $130/$199
250GB SATA HDD	+ $50
Wireless Combo	+ $65

Includes 25 free DVDR's
Windows XP

GAMING AMD SYSTEM

AMD Athlon64 3500+
Gbyte/Asus/MSI (VIA K8T890 Chipset)
1024Mb PC3200, 5.1 Audio, GB LAN
160GB SATA 7200rpm, 8Mb Cache
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Upgrade Options:

INCLUDE;	ADD;
WinXP Home/Pro	+ $130/$199
Logitech Z-5500	+ $365
MSI 7800GTX	+ $455

Includes 25 free DVDR's
Windows XP

MULTIMEDIA AMD SYSTEM

AMD Athlon64 3500+
Gbyte/Asus/MSI (VIA K8T890 Chipset)
1024Mb PC3200, 5.1 Audio, GB LAN
200GB SATA 7200rpm, 8Mb Cache
256Mb GeForce 6600, 16x DVDRW DL
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19" LCD Monitor, 12ms Response
Logitech X-530 5.1 Speakers
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Antec SLK1650B Case with 350w PSU

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Upgrade Options:

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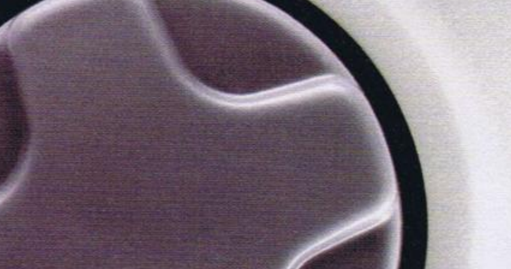
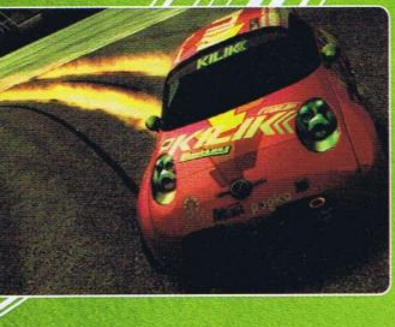
14 XBOX 360

Hands on with the launch titles and an in-depth interview with one of Microsoft's Xbox 360 bigwigs.





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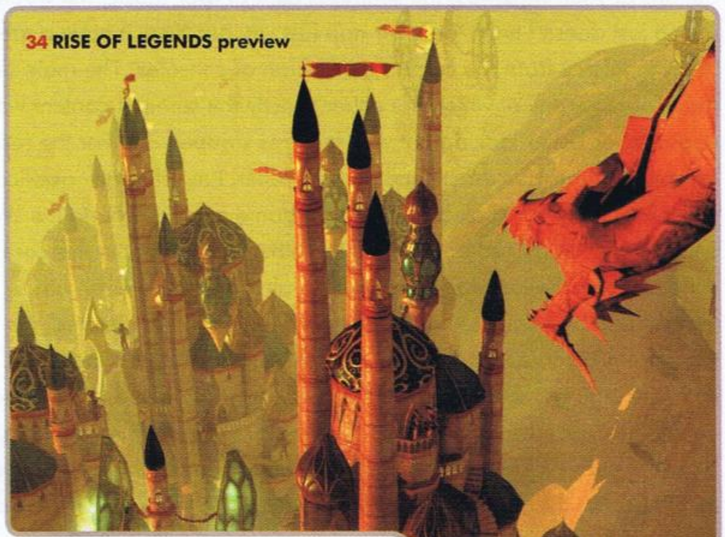

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EDITORIAL

>>Impressed? Yes. Blown away? No. That's our reaction after (finally) getting our own 360 in-house. It's a great machine – the integration of online, the streamlined GUI and range of options at your fingertips, the seamless control over music, the wireless controllers, and all the rest. It just doesn't have the killer app just yet, nor does it have a great deal in terms of games to distinguish it from the current generation of consoles. The main problem is that there are so many ports, many of which are either exactly the same in content with a reasonable graphical upgrade, or better looking but with features stripped out. For the former, just take a look at Most Wanted or American Wasteland. For the latter, I'm referring specifically to many of EA's sports titles. Sure, FIFA on Xbox 360 may be a game geared around the World Cup, and traditionally EA's World Cup games do strip out the other modes, but in this case it's going to be viewed by consumers as the lesser FIFA title, which ain't a good look on a new system. In terms of original games (and by original I mean "not available on other systems", as the majority are still sequels) the line-up is certainly good, it's just not inspired. Perfect Dark Zero, Kameo, Ridge Racer 6, Project Gotham 3 and DOA 4 are all very playable games, and certainly enough to keep us entertained until the next wave of big titles. Ultimately though, we're not the ones who need to be convinced. We've followed the 360 from the beginning and know how much potential the machine has. It's the mainstream consumer – the consumer that Microsoft are so desperate to get their hands on – that will determine whether the Xbox 360 can claim the top spot in the next generation. Can they do it? They're certainly confident, and this topic, as well as plenty of others have been covered in detail in our interview and hands on starting on page 14. We think you'll find it an interesting read.

Cam Shea >>Editor

HYPER CREW Monthly Top 5 Games

Cam Shea - Editor
1. Mario Kart DS – Nintendo DS
   "Sweet fancy Moses! The greatest multiplayer game since Mashed!"
2. Ridge Racer 6 – Xbox 360
3. Mario & Luigi 2: Partners in Time - DS
4. Project Gotham Racing 3 – Xbox 360
5. Mario Tennis: Power Tour - GBA

Malcolm Campbell - Art
1. One Piece Grand Battle – PS2
   "Lots of fun and lots of laughs."
2. Getting Up – PS2
3. Sonic Rush – Nintendo DS
4. Mario Kart DS – Nintendo DS
5. Pro Evo 5 – PS2

Daniel Wilks - Deputy Editor
1. Meteos - Nintendo DS
   "Compelling gameplay and incomprehensible storyline = WIN!"
2. Mario Kart DS – Nintendo DS
3. Soulcalibur III – PS2
4. Kameo: Elements of Power – Xbox 360
5. WoW 1.9 test server - PC

Amos Hong - Former Mascot
1. Exciting Professional Wrestling 6 – PS2
   "It's exciting... Super Sweet!"
2. Biohazard 4 – PS2
3. Fatal Frame 3 – PS2
4. Winning Eleven 9 – PS2
5. Street Fighter Zero 3 – Arcade

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ISSUE 148
FEBRUARY 2006

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Distribution by: **Gordon & Gotch**
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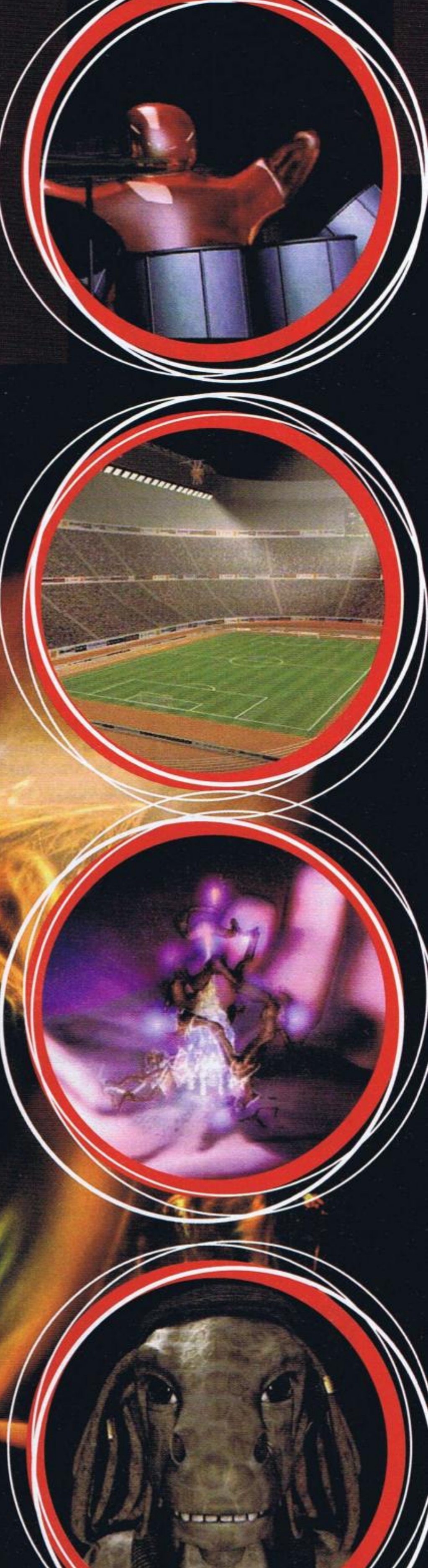
ACN 002 647 645
ISSN 1320-7458



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News>>

IN THE NEWS: Korea to get Xbox 360 before Australia - thanks Microsoft / Crate disappointed by Hyper mascot poll results

NEXT GEN OZ

XBOX 360 AUSTRALIAN LAUNCH

Microsoft finally get around to us...

The date is finally in and we still have a bunch of sleeps to wait. It's official, Xbox 360 will be making it to our hallowed shores as of 12:01am on **March 2**, 2006 for the price of **$499.95** for the core system (console, composite AV cable and wired controller) and **$649.95** for the full package (console, 20GB hard drive, media remote, wireless controller, component high-definition cable and Ethernet cable). Sure, our release date is months after the rest of the world, something that people are rightfully a little miffed about, but there are some positives to a delayed release. When the console reaches our shores we will have a much stronger launch lineup with around 30 titles on offer including such anticipated games as Elder Scrolls: Oblivion and Gears of War. More importantly, the flaws that are plaguing a reported 14% of the consoles sold so far should be ironed out by our production run, making for a smoother, less buggy launch. Fingers crossed that Microsoft decide not to emulate their American launch when the console arrives in Australia, having a bunch of "celebrity gamers" show up and stand around looking pretty (or pretty vapid in the case of Paris Hilton) holding their free 360 while there weren't enough left to supply the actual paying public.

Aside from the two console packages (and unspecified value packages that may be available at launch), the following first party accessories will be available come March 2.

- Wireless (RRP $79.95) and Wired (RRP $59.95) controllers
- Play charge kit (RRP $34.95)
- Rechargeable battery pack and cradle (RRP $49.95)
- Battery pack (RRP $19.95)
- 20Gb hard drive (RRP $169.95)
- 64MB Memory unit (RRP $49.95)
- Wireless networking adaptor (RRP $169.95)
- VGA cable (RRP $49.95)
- Advanced AV pack (RRP $39.95)
- High Definition AV pack (RRP $49.95)
- Headset (RRP $49.95)
- Faceplate (RRP $29.95)
- Universal Media Remote (RRP $49.95)

Gears of War: available at launch

HDD
XBOX 360

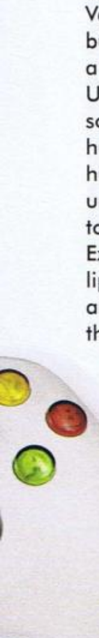
A LITIGIOUS AMERICAN? NO WAY! Every console launch has its hiccups, the Xbox 360 being no exception. A reported 14% of machines sold at launch were said to have lockup, crash and overheating problems that caused the machines to fail. The voracity of this statement is unknown but it has caused one unhappy punter, a Robert Byers of Chicago to file suit against Microsoft for releasing the Xbox 360 with a "design flaw that causes it to overheat and freeze up". Byers is filing for Microsoft to pay unspecified damages as well as recall and replace defective machines and speculates that the console was released with design flaws in order to beat the PlayStation 3 and Revolution to the market. As yet Microsoft have not commented on the lawsuit and are not expected to until it is finished but precedence does not stand on their side. Many lawsuits against product design flaws have been successful in the past, the most recent and high profile being the iPod nano. Users were disappointed at how easy it was to scratch the screen, prompting a class action lawsuit against Apple. Apple circumnavigated the litigation by offering free replacement screens to all of the unsatisfied customers.

Bad Cop No Doughnut

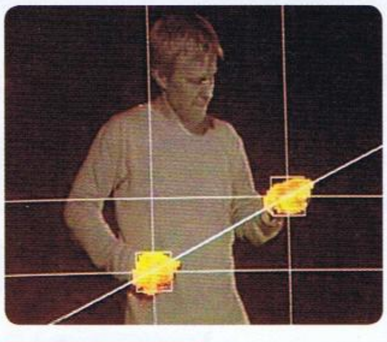
DANIEL WILKS - THE WORLD'S MOST DANGEROUS DEPUTY EDITOR

The next generation is upon us and it's bound to disappoint. I'm not saying this because I'm all cranky and jaded or wanted to start off with a punchy little statement, rather the fact that the more advanced consoles get the easier it will be for people to be disappointed in games. Two sets of systems ago we had a generational jump that heralded the dawn of 3D. That was huge. What do we have this time? Better graphics, better online integration, HD, wireless controllers and in the case of Nintendo, a nebulous concept console with an innovative but most probably underutilised first party controller. Before any Ninty fans come and attempt to tear me a new one (my old one is fine thanks), I have high hopes for the console but I can't see too many developers intentionally crippling their sales by making games for a proprietary game controller making their games not portable to other platforms, hence underutilised. It's not a massive generational swing. It's a facelift for the most part. For all the hyperbole, the Xbox 360, PS3 and probably the Revolution will be more akin to upgrades of current hardware rather than a true next gen.

The better graphics become the easier they are to pick holes in. The effect is known as "Uncanny Valley", a rather poetical phrase but a fitting one. To paraphrase a very long theory on perception, Uncanny Valley means that as something becomes closer to human without actually being human it has a disquieting or uncanny effect, making it easier to pick out as being non-human. Expect to see a lot more criticism of lip-synching, character animations and eyes in games journalism in the coming year.



I think what it comes down to in the end is that if there is any real generational change it's going to be one of scale. Greater processing power means more models, longer draw distances, bigger worlds. But is size really a generational leap or, as we've all been taught throughout our lives, does bigger not necessarily equal better.

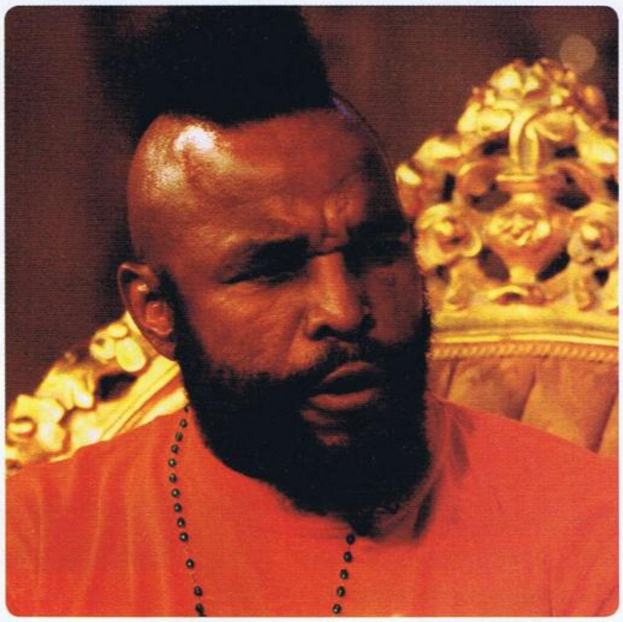


PICK SQUEAL

VIRTUAL STARDOM

For all the Bill and Teds out there...

You don't have to be able to play the guitar to become a fully fledged rock pig thanks to a group of Finnish computer science students who have developed a virtual air guitar. Let that sink in for a second. A bunch of students have created a virtual version of an imaginary instrument. How post-modern can you get? Cultural theory aside, the Virtual Air Guitar Project as it is known adds real electric guitar sounds to passionately strummed air guitar. To rock out, all the player need do is stand in front of a camera wearing a pair of bright orange gloves, the program interpreting the movement of the two gloves and translating it into sound, the actions of both hands and their distance apart correlating to the kind of sounds produced. Although there are no plans for a commercial version of the software at this stage it is nearly impossible to think that some games company won't pick up the license for the software, turning bedrooms all around the world into minor rockstar fantasies. All we need now is virtual cocaine overdoses, virtual sex scandals and virtual swimming pools in which to throw virtual TV sets and the fantasy will be complete.



T

RETURN OF THE KING

First name, Mr. Middle name, period. Last name, T.

OK, this has absolutely nothing to do with gaming but it's something the world needs to know anyway. 10 years after being diagnosed with cancer, everyone's favourite gruff be-mohawked gold chain wearer, Mr T is back. He's starring as Clubber Lang in the upcoming Rocky VI and more importantly he will star in his own reality TV show called, wait for it, I Pity the Fool. We're not going to say any more on the subject, instead letting the great man's words speak for him.

"We are going to start filming Rocky VI soon, with me as Clubber Lang again, and we're also starting work right now on my new show - which is called I Pity the Fool. Unlike all the other reality programmes, it is going to be about helping people. We're not going to be eating worms or swapping wives. For example a lady might write to me saying she's having trouble at a car dealership, because she's the only female employee and the men are harassing her. So I'll go in and straighten things out. I learn about the situation, observe for a couple of days and then call the guys into a meeting and give them the Mr T rap - I tell you fools, you don't disrespect no lady. My mum is a lady."

Finally a reality show everyone can enjoy and we won't hear no jibber jabber saying otherwise.

WINNERS HYPER 146

F.E.A.R.

WINNER

- Barnaby Daley, Perth, WA

RUNNERS UP

- Nik Donkin, Raymond Terrace, NSW
- Robbie Martin, Northam, WA
- Michael De Abreu, Palmyra, WA
- Peter Allen, Millicent, SA

AMERICAN PIE BOX SET AND SKECHERS

- Chris Yoo, Waverton, NSW
- Jamie Campbell, Camp Hill, QLD
- Mandaly Fry, Geraldton, WA
- Lauren Walker, Valley View, SA
- Brendon Dorff, Bonnet Bay, NSW
- Phillip Lucis, Newtown, NSW

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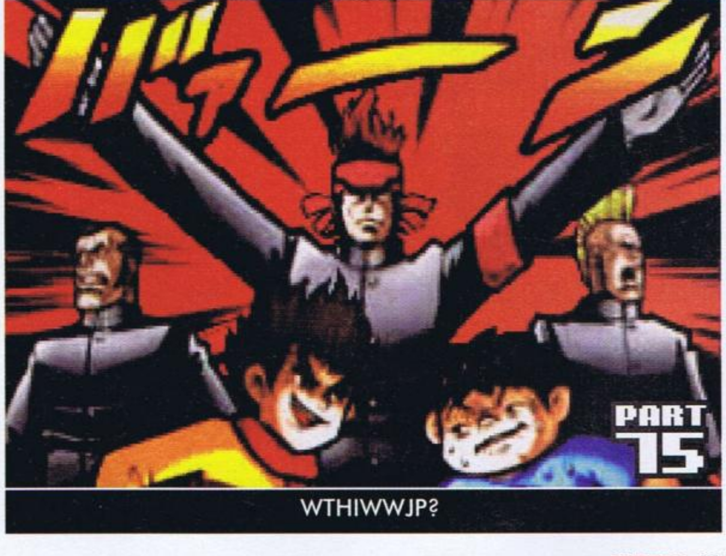

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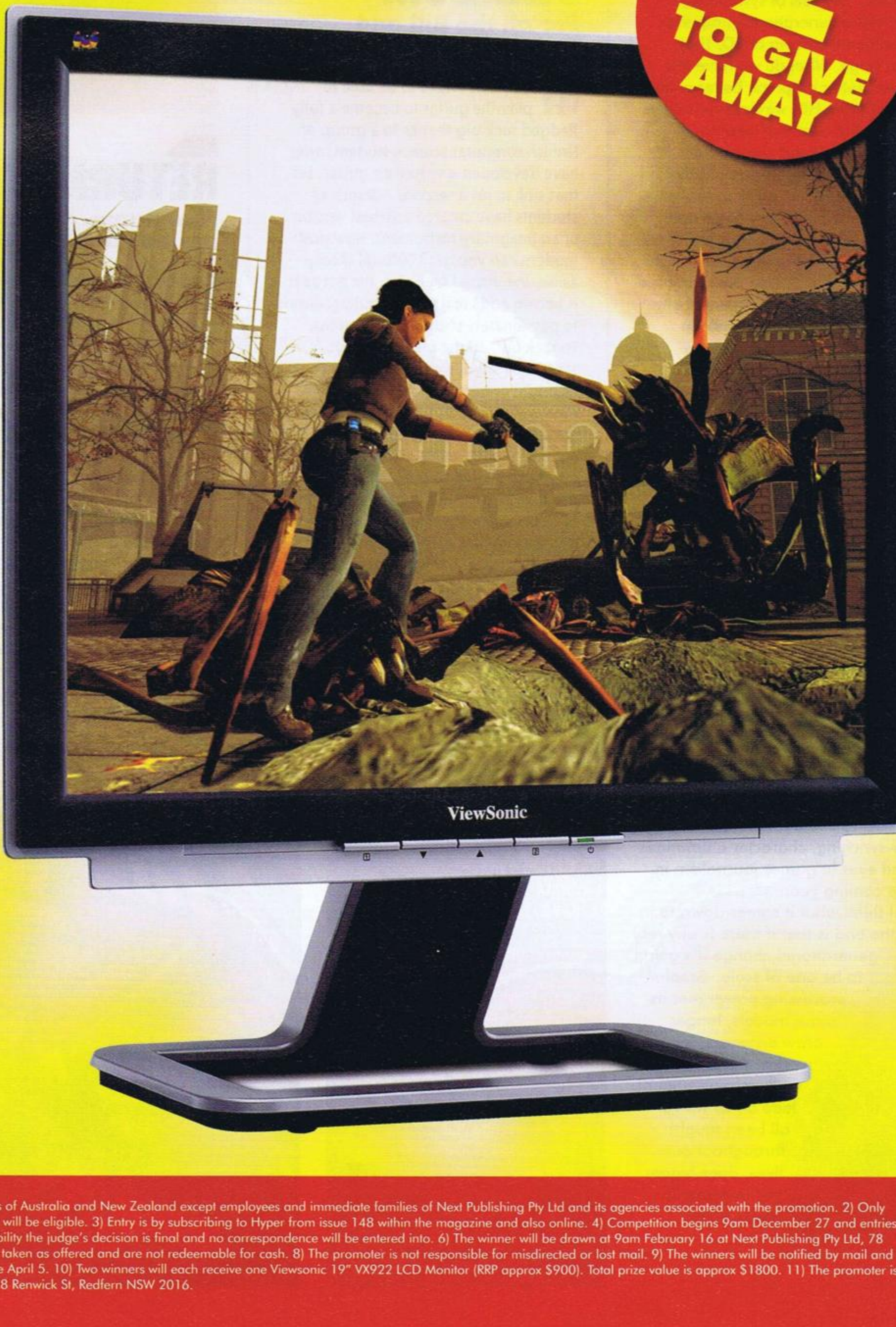

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XBOX 360

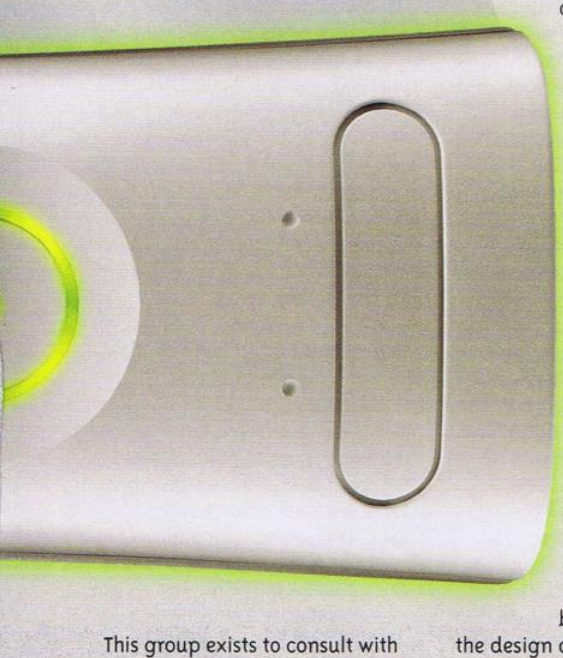
PAST, PRESENT AND FUTURE

XBOX 360
Memory Unit A
Memory Unit B

Now that the Xbox 360 is well and truly a reality, it's time to not only give you our impressions of the launch titles, but also to take a look at Microsoft's game plan for Xbox 360 and how they plan to dominate this generation. To do that, Hyper sent intrepid reporter **March Stepnik** to speak to **Jeff Pobst**, the Lead Technical Game Manager of Microsoft's Xbox Division. While the fast-talking and highly excited Jeff has produced a transcript of War and Peace proportions (which we've already cut down), it's an interesting read with plenty of insight into how Microsoft have approached bringing the 360 to market. Enjoy.

Hyper: Tell us a little about who you are and your role within the Xbox 360 juggernaut.

Jeff Pobst: So I am Jeff Pobst, I am with the Redmond Office. I work with what we call the Advanced Technology Group. It is a group set aside as part of the Xbox division to work with game developers. There's about 45 of us, which includes developer support - folks who write some of the samples and the white papers for the developers. Also my group is called the Technical Game Manager Group, and I manage the technical game managers. TGMs (as we call them) are the relationship holders with all the developers. So we have a personal relationship with every game developer in some ways (some obviously much better than others) who are the folks making games for Xbox. Some of them are first party, some of them are third-party - they're all customers to us.



This group exists to consult with game developers to try and help them make the best game as possible on the Xbox or the Xbox 360. The idea simply being that if they have extra assistance the games will be better on the platform, if the games are better on the platform that's the one the consumer wants, that's why they buy the platform. Because it's the games. You don't buy a shiny white box for this price for the sake of a shiny white box – you buy it because of what you can play on it. And hopefully, as people buy it for the games, they'll also see some of the new and exciting functionality.

What's exciting about entering the 360 era?

So, one of the things obviously about the Xbox 360 versus the Xbox, is it has a significant increase in computing power, and memory and graphical capability. And, one would expect, especially with high definition being a standard output, that there's going to be a level of fidelity increase over the original product. But one of the things we wanted to point out is that it's not just a graphical detail increase, but it's also a significant ability to do so much more computing that it can actually change the game experience.

One of the things that is really neat is when you compare it to the Xbox – it's got 64 megs of memory, it's a 733 Celeron processor. If you think about it like a PC it seems awfully weak, but because it's a dedicated game machine with no other processes running and you know as a game developer that every person has the same spec, you can really optimise your code for that and get out far more than you would ever think of a 733 with a GeForce 2 on a PC.

So you can make games like you make them for a console, with hardware that came from the PC world. That was beneficial to us in many ways for getting into the console market early but it had some negative drawbacks by not being involved in the design of the parts themselves. We designed the architecture and we made it work as optimally as possible, but a lot of the parts were off the shelf parts from the PC world. Almost all the parts in the Xbox 360 are co-designed between Microsoft and our partners. So the processor is an IBM processor but has several unique elements that are exclusive to the Xbox 360 that Microsoft helped co-design. Additionally, the graphics processor was co-designed between Microsoft and ATI.

The thing that's exciting about that... Microsoft is a software company, and our competitors

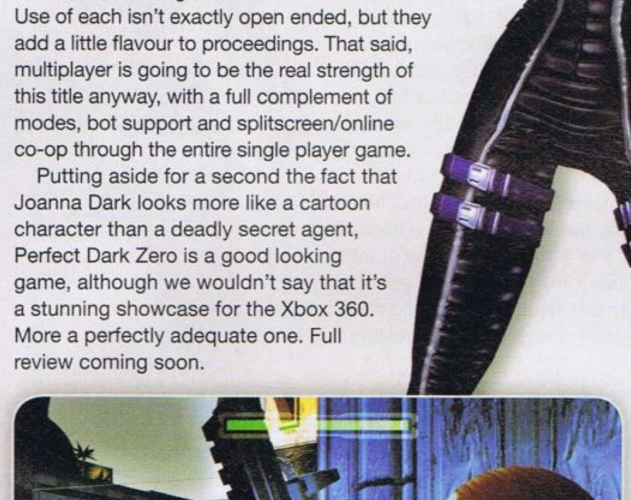
ALMOST ALL THE PARTS ARE CO-DESIGNED BETWEEN MICROSOFT AND OUR PARTNERS

PERFECT DARK ZERO

>> Rare have been working on this game for a long time now, and we're pleased to report that we've enjoyed most of our time with it so far. This isn't a game that's going to change the world, nor a game that will score 101% (N64 Gamer – we're looking at you). It is, however, a solid title that takes a decidedly old school approach to game design.

Much like GoldenEye and Perfect Dark before it, difficulty level counts in Perfect Dark Zero. Big time. Play the 14 single player levels on Agent and you'll experience a straightforward, largely run and gun shooter that doesn't offer much of a challenge. Bump it up to Secret Agent (and then Perfect Agent beyond that) and you enter a realm where you must perfect your path through the game, attempting levels many times over to work out the best way through. It can be frustrating, but Joanna's well equipped. Although you can only carry two heavy weapons at a time, there is some dual wielding on offer with lighter weapons (and grenades), and as you beat levels on the various difficulty levels you'll unlock more weapons you can take in with you. The gadgets that we've seen form a basic roster, but a handy one nonetheless. There's the Locktopus, which can get you through locked doors, the Demolition kit for blowing up specific environmental objects/structures, the Data Thief for hacking, the Audioscope for stealth-centric missions, and the CamSpy which is a remote controlled hovering unit with an EMP attack. Use of each isn't exactly open ended, but they add a little flavour to proceedings. That said, multiplayer is going to be the real strength of this title anyway, with a full complement of modes, bot support and splitscreen/online co-op through the entire single player game.

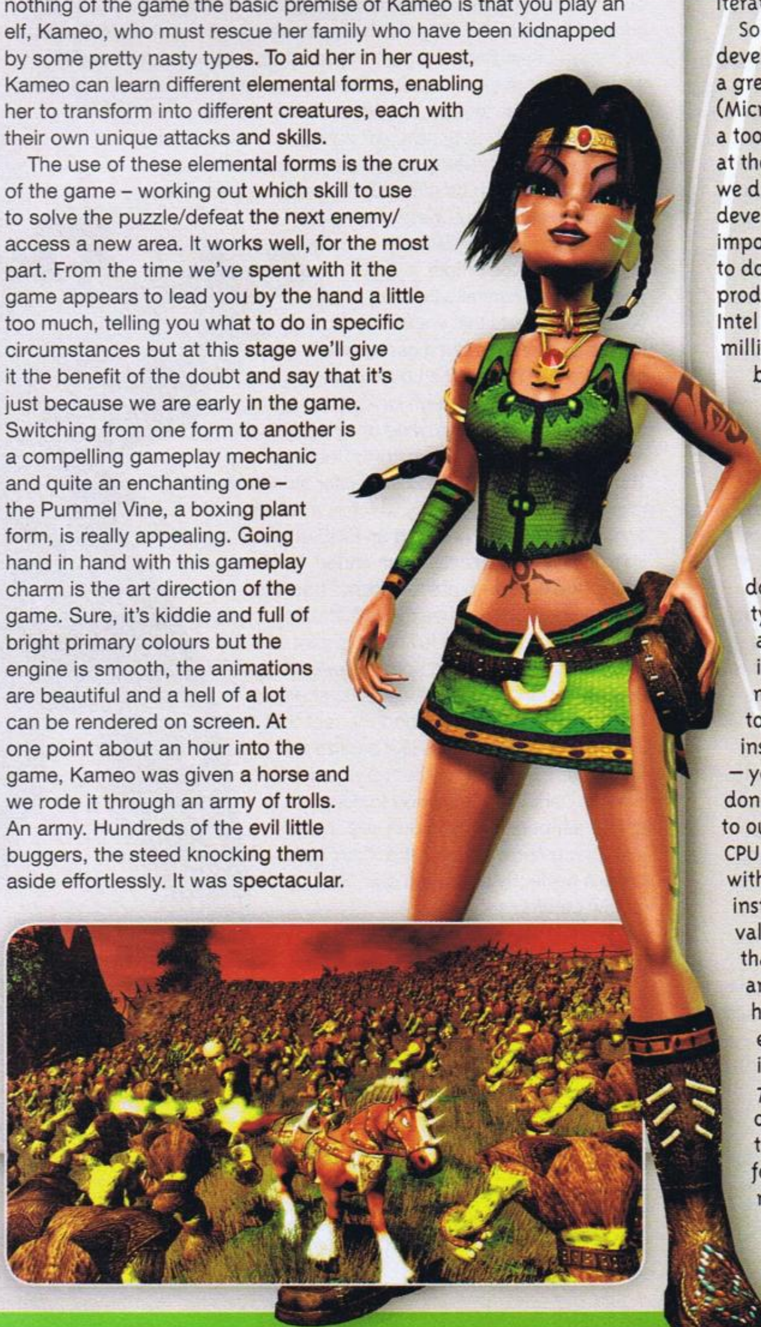
Putting aside for a second the fact that Joanna Dark looks more like a cartoon character than a deadly secret agent, Perfect Dark Zero is a good looking game, although we wouldn't say that it's a stunning showcase for the Xbox 360. More a perfectly adequate one. Full review coming soon.



KAMEO: ELEMENTS OF POWER

>> Rare are a strange developer. They can make very adult games (in terms of complex gameplay rather than plot) but they nearly always end up looking very kiddie. Kameo is definitely one of these games. A good number of punters may be put off by the look of the game. It's cute and childish, though Kameo herself is rather hip swingingly sexed up. The gameplay on the other hand nicely echoes some of the greats of action/adventure gaming. For those of you who have heard nothing of the game the basic premise of Kameo is that you play an elf, Kameo, who must rescue her family who have been kidnapped by some pretty nasty types. To aid her in her quest, Kameo can learn different elemental forms, enabling her to transform into different creatures, each with their own unique attacks and skills.

The use of these elemental forms is the crux of the game – working out which skill to use to solve the puzzle/defeat the next enemy/access a new area. It works well, for the most part. From the time we've spent with it the game appears to lead you by the hand a little too much, telling you what to do in specific circumstances but at this stage we'll give it the benefit of the doubt and say that it's just because we are early in the game. Switching from one form to another is a compelling gameplay mechanic and quite an enchanting one – the Pummel Vine, a boxing plant form, is really appealing. Going hand in hand with this gameplay charm is the art direction of the game. Sure, it's kiddie and full of bright primary colours but the engine is smooth, the animations are beautiful and a hell of a lot can be rendered on screen. At one point about an hour into the game, Kameo was given a horse and we rode it through an army of trolls. An army. Hundreds of the evil little buggers, the steed knocking them aside effortlessly. It was spectacular.



in many cases are hardware companies, by really looking at the hardware from a software perspective, we allow the hardware to be more easily used for game developing. It's one thing to have power, it's another thing to have harness-able power. Someone on the team once compared it to the idea of "I'm going to give you a Ferrari. You have your choice: do you want it fully assembled or in parts?". The fully assembled one tends to be more fun. So, the idea being here that by having the software folks who build this library of software - that's unheard of on the consoles, we give developers so many APIs and libraries for them to really focus on the game development and not on the hardware parts - that makes their lives a lot easier. They can prototype much faster, they can iterate on ideas much faster.

So we feel like it's a great development environment and also a great gameplay environment (Microsoft is a software company, a tools company). So as we look at the chips, some of the things we did is really say well, in game development these are really important things that you need to do. Like one idea was the dot product. On an Xbox using an Intel processor it probably does millions of dot products a second, because the dot product is a mathematical calculation you use for trying to figure out angles off of polygons. So you're trying to determine which way it is, how do you light it, did I hit something, did I not? You're doing millions of dot products typically. Well, a dot product is a very advanced calculation, it takes a lot of steps even in machine code, and we were able to make dot product a single instruction as part of the CPU – you know, the CPU had never done that before. So in many ways, to our knowledge, this is the first CPU actually designed for gaming, with the idea that there's actual instructions in there that are more valuable to a game developer than a typical software developer, and that's why they're in the hardware. And so that's really exciting because not only can it do it if it's 3.2GHz versus 733Mhz, not only can it do a dot product – even if it did in the exact same way, you know four and half times faster, but now that it's a single instruction instead of 14 instructions, now it's not just four and a half it's four and a half times fourteen and now you can really crank through and do much more calculations on what you need to do for your game.

The multiple cores and multi-threading must help a huge amount too...

The processor has 3 cores, and each core has 2 threads. That spec is unique to Xbox, but the idea of multi-processor computing is everywhere. Obviously we're seeing it on competitors' products, we're seeing it in PCs. As chip manufactures are starting to hit heat and power limits in how fast they actually want to drive their chips, people are looking at having more and more multiprocessor parallel processing capabilities as something available to the programs that are running so they can be more efficient and increase power without just cranking up clock speed.

By giving the game developer three identical cores – and they all work the same way – the game developer now has the opportunity to take what they can do in a frame (often a game developer thinks in terms of, "okay I've got 30fps/60fps so the amount of calculations I can do can only last one frame, and then I need to be done and working on the next frame".). So they have what they call a CPU budget for one frame. If we look at a developer's CPU budget, they often only have – okay, graphics actually takes up 15-20% - but AI, physics, collision, simulating where everybody is, saving and loading – all those things end up taking a lot of the time of an individual frame. By working with game developers so that they can have a main game thread, a physics thread, a collision thread, an audio thread, we've allowed them to split out all those things that would slow down the frame, and now let each one become significantly more complex because they're all happening simultaneously during that time of the frame. It's a lot more work for a developer to do that, and so we've definitely seen an increase in programming staff (typically 15-30% at most). Where we've seen huge increases in game development for the next generation has really been in the content staff – the artist and the designers, the level designers and such.

Some people say "Oh my goodness, next generation is bringing on all these really expensive games", but the truth of the matter is, it's not the consoles that are doing it, it is the publishers and the developers that are doing it. It is such a competitive market to have that hit title – we're a hit driven business. The top 15% of titles are really only the profitable ones, so 85% of titles in general don't look like they're making any money. But if a publisher has a hit in that top group they make so much money that it covers their losses and allows them to stay in business and stay profitable. So it's very important for a publisher to always have hit product, so they're always trying to differentiate themselves, and even over the life cycle of Xbox, we've seen team size go anywhere from 15 in the early days at the small end to 100-125 in recent Xbox titles – and that's just on the original Xbox. So we've seen this very continual growth of throwing more and more people at a project so you can do more – create more art assets, create more detailed environments (like you have in Big Red One) – with a very large team, even though it's the current generation of console. So the costs have been going up pretty steadily, even staying in the same generation.

As we move to the next generation, we've now pulled away a lot of the boundaries. Currently, game developers would be sitting in their meeting and the designer would say "well, we want to do this, this and this", and the programmer says "no, no, no, you're not going to be able to do all that. Pick two of those three things – you've only got these resources, figure out what you can do with those constraints." By moving to the Xbox 360, we've pulled a lot of constraints, and now the developers go "okay, we wanna do this this this and *this*", and they realise they need more people. And people is what drives the costs of games.

So we're seeing really large teams being involved in game development, we're seeing very high budgets. I think it's been very continual: it is competitive forces – developers want to have *that* [hit] title. People who go to the stores to buy games buy 3-5 a year – the majority – and there's a smaller group of people who buy 20-30. But if you want to make enough money to cover your costs you've got to get to that mass market, and you want to be the developers of one of those 3-5 games that everybody buys, developers put more and more into the games and that's where I say the escalating costs really are coming from. We opened the floodgates a little bit by giving developers more capability – they didn't have to rush in and use it, but they have.

Staying on the subject of rising development costs, what solutions to rising costs will be most viable? Obviously middleware and developer support will be important, but do you think we'll also see shorter games or episodic content, or a higher price for games at retail?

This is one of the things Microsoft is spending a lot of time on. There are two main approaches that we took. One approach is XNA, a series of tools that we're building that help the developer... We're working on solving problems like asset management, like build pipeline – things that the developers have to spend a lot of time on that's not fun, that doesn't end up in the fun part of the game, but they have to spend resources on – we're trying to automate a lot of that and help that and get those tools out there.

AS WE MOVE TO THE NEXT GENERATION, WE'VE PULLED AWAY A LOT OF THE BOUNDARIES

Additionally, with the Xbox 360, we created this idea of a guide – an operating system that is always there and always available that has a lot of the functionality that people used to have to put into every single game. We look across all the games, we talk about the experiences we want consumers to have and we said look, instead of every game developer putting additional junior people on giving me a friends list for Live, doing save/load, and all the things that are work that you have to do by default, let's do all that in the console itself – make it available as libraries that everybody can call and make it easy for the user to just pull it up, use it, and save the game developer time. And we're going to continue along that path, trying to take things and put it in the console, so that every game developer doesn't have to do it, saving all of them a certain amount of time so they can spend that time on the entertainment side of things.

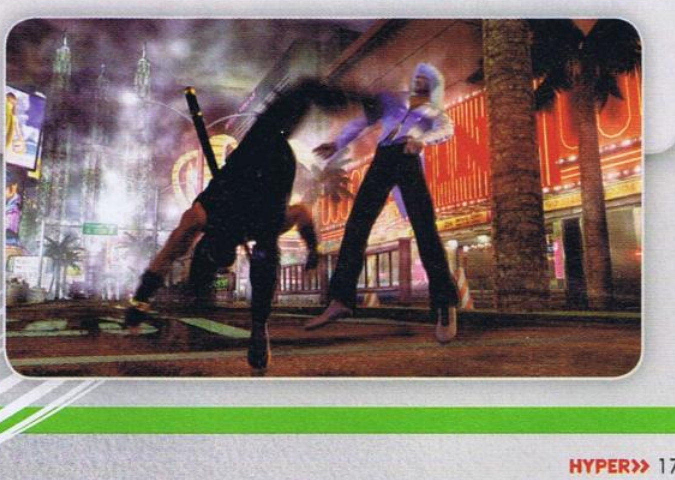
From a competitive point of view, if you believe my assertion that it's the competition that's driving up costs more than anything else, we're going to save time so the entertainment experience is better and hopefully differentiate our console from other consoles where they don't have those tools and APIs, where the developer still has to do all that work. But the competition is

JEFF POBST ON HARNESSING THE POWER OF THE 360

'I've been asked before "what percentage of the console is being used with the launch titles?". It's actually a misnomer, it's one of those things you see on the Web – it's not correct. They're all using all of it – the question is are they using it all efficiently? Almost all of the titles are multi-threaded, almost all of them are cranking and pushing the console as hard as they can. But I think as they develop over time, they're going to be more and more efficient about the tasks they want to have happen in their games (for example, any algorithms they come up with to do it less computationally to achieve the same result), so as they develop their second and third game, they're able to do more. CoD Big Red One is a good example of that: you're seeing a lot more than you've seen in previous Xbox games because it's their second or third game and they take the optimisations from the previous games and look at the areas that weren't optimised and focus on those and that opens up that budget to do more things.'

DEAD OR ALIVE 4

>> DoA. We loves us some DoA. We love the fact that it's an instantly accessible fighting game that can also be very technical. We love the look of the game, the multi-tiered stages and the unlockable characters and costumes. Hopefully we're going to love DoA4. We say hopefully because the code we got our hands on, whilst being very nice to look at (though not as pretty as people probably expect), was rather imbalanced, with the faster characters having a definite advantage over the slower or more technical characters. That said, the two new characters we got to play, the female luchidore and the Virtua Fighter Lion like character were a heap of fun, the former combining wrestling with faster attacks than any of the established grappler characters and the latter having lightning fast attacks and combos. With the speed as it currently stands, the online mode looks as though it will simply be a matter of gambling on the person with the highest ping but we have faith that these niggles will be ironed out in time for final release early in the new year.



going to get fiercer on our console because people now have more resources and more time to do more entertainment, and so we expect the games to get better and better and better.

So I don't know that we're actually going to save anyone money... I don't believe that saving money is what the people who are spending the money are after. they're after winning. They're after creating the game that people want to buy. So if we save them effort on things that don't differentiate the product. And hopefully that will then differentiate the product as well.

The technical prowess of the Xbox 360 is impressive, but what do you think is the greatest challenge developers face in making not only quality games but gameplay that feels "next generation"?

I think the things that we're seeing for next generation is... this enhanced realism, this idea that there's enough subtle things going on now that tricks me to think I'm really there. With Project Gotham Racing 3, for example, here I am in this car, driving at night in Shinjuku (Tokyo), I've got reflections off the windshield I mean — is this a race or is this for real? I mean some of the different visual effects — the crowds, the extra things that I can have that make the world more dynamic and rich give me a different experience that seems less sterile. I can make this world feel — with the flashbulbs going off — far more dynamic, far more realistic, like I'm actually part of a living world. And I think that's one of things that makes next generation. I think with Call of Duty 2 I think we showed you that the concept of hey I have this computing power and now I can make you feel like you're part of a battle with armies as opposed to a battle with squads. And that is again a different experience of scope, but also of realism.

But I think that these next generation experiences are more immersive, more comprehensive, more complex, and what we're seeing from launch titles is a depiction of a more intense experience (in the case of CoD2), maybe more intense even for Gotham — where you feel more a part of it. What we've done is give the developer this opportunity where they had a single frame of programming that you could do and this chunk had to be for AI, this chunk had to be for physics — and we've said no, you have all these frames — 6 threads — you can do 6 different things at the same time, and right now, people are saying okay, I wanted to do more physics, I wanted to do more AI, I wanted to do more lighting, I wanted to do more crowds — and that's what they're using it for.

But as you start getting more game developers who are able to make games for Xbox 360, more people get development kits - we have over 6000 kits out there right now with over 200 games in development. But that's just the tip of the iceberg, I mean we're going to have hundreds and hundreds of games, we're going to reach over 10000 game developers out there, we're going to have so many seats focused on Xbox 360 that you're going to get all these intriguing new things, like the developer who says "I always wanted to do a game that has 3 threads worth of physics, because I'm going to do this gameplay mechanism that no one has ever seen before." I can't sit here and tell you that I know what that is — but I know that the opportunities that we're giving to game designers are such that... the meetings are like "Okay, we can do that, and we can do more.", and the designer's eyes just light up.

One of the reasons that we think we're seeing a real good partnership with Japan right now, is because the Xbox 360 not only has the power to do some crazy things that people couldn't do before, but because of all the software that we've combined with it — the tools that we provide and the APIs that are available — the ability to iterate quickly is something we're hearing about over and over from Japanese developers right now. And American, European and Australian developers who are already familiar with the support on Xbox right now — they were already using it to iterate things quickly. I think the thing that's exiting about game design is when you have this idea and there's some period of

WE THINK WE CAN REALLY BE THE NUMBER ONE CONSOLE IN THE WORLD

PROJECT GOTHAM RACING 3

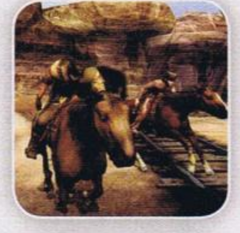
>> There's not a great deal we need to add to last month's PGR3 piece other than to say we've spent more time with the game and the more we play the more enamoured we become. Like previous games in the series, there are just so many styles of challenge on offer, from racing online to kudos challenges and precision driving, it's all here and packing smooth handling and a great sense of speed.

The visual fidelity of this game is breathtaking. It's not photorealistic, but it's as close as any game has yet come, and most importantly, makes the experience that much more immersive. The incredibly detailed cockpit viewpoint, the spectators by the side of the road, the fact that you can look down side streets as you zoom past and see the city blocks extending off into the distance, the bright lights of Vegas and Tokyo at night, the dense urban sprawl of New York, it's a majestic experience. Bizarre Creations have also incorporated plenty of effects to complete the illusion of actual racing, the most noticeable of which is the use of high dynamic range lighting, so as you come out of a tunnel into the sunshine the glare almost blinds you in a perfect imitation of the way human eyes adjust to rapid changes in brightness. This is definitely one of the highlights of the launch line-up.

THE PORTS

Call of Duty 2

>> One of the standout ports at the US launch, this game looks incredible on 360, packing everything that we loved about the PC version and well adapted controls to boot. It may be a straight up port, but this title is still a great showcase for Xbox 360.



Gun

>> Gun looked impressive on current gen and isn't a great leap to 360, especially not when there are low res textures all over the place betraying its heritage.

Tony Hawk's American Wasteland

>> American Wasteland looks much sharper on 360 and runs smoothly. If you don't own a copy this will be the one to get.

Need for Speed: Most Wanted

>> Yet another game that really isn't leaps and bounds ahead of the Xbox version. Yes, the cars look fantastic, yes the lighting is heaps better and yes the anti-aliasing helps, but really none of this changes the gameplay and in terms of content, Most Wanted is exactly the same.

time until you see it on the screen, and it's "oh, it's not quite what I was thinking, but you know if we tweak this then maybe," and then you go back and wait. On some of our competitors consoles, because they don't give you the tools, they just say here's the hardware, go figure it out, especially the Japanese developers were very used to having an idea and waiting several months to see that idea in play. And now that they're playing with the Xbox 360 (and we're working with every major Japanese developer and publisher now – they all have kits) they're discovering it's a much quicker process – they can see their ideas in days instead of months. They're having so much fun iterating, and I really believe that it's that iterative process for game designers, where they discover and find and tune these new experience so much faster, that has them so excited.

So beyond the first party Japanese developers (Mistwalker, for example), Japan's really taking to the Xbox 360?

We're definitely seeing that. Sony's very powerful. At the end of the day there's one feature, and only one feature that matters, truthfully, to the game developers, and that is install base. So if there are only five of these [Xbox 360] consoles out there, it doesn't matter how much I love it, it doesn't matter how good the tools are – I can't make money in business selling games to a small number of people. So in the first generation we had a cultural disconnect a bit, we didn't have the relationships – being an old friend and working together is very important – and they [the Japanese games industry] did perceive that in the Japanese market we didn't sell enough units. Several things have changed. One, we've had the whole life of the Xbox where we kept working trying to build relationships and we have built relationships. A lot of the Japanese developers and publishers made a couple of small games for Xbox so they tried it out and they discovered some new things, and go "okay, you guys aren't so bad to work with".

Another thing, the Japanese market for games has actually shrunk, and a lot of Japanese developers are saying they can't make enough money with my Japanese audience only, so my team actually get requests "Can you tell us whether this game will appeal to western audiences" all the time. So their eye is focused in other parts of the world – now they have to think more globally to make money.

They know Xbox 360 will be successful in North America, they think they're going to be more successful in Japan, you have these tools for me to iterate that I've never had before, you're spending lots of money helping us, you're making strong commitments in the marketplace, building relationships (we've been talking 5-6 years now instead of 1 or 2 years with the Xbox). So all those things are brewing into the perfect storm, so to speak, where all of a sudden there's this great support.

Now, everyone's hedging their bets right now because Sony has a strong brand, and people expect Sony to sell a number of consoles. But as we have such a great launch line up in Japan, people are saying "wow, you're going to sell a lot of consoles before Sony comes out – you might even sell many many millions of consoles before Sony comes out. I might make more money on your console." And that's not just on products like games, we also the have the Xbox Live marketplace, and the ability for people to download episodic content, and download and purchase new levels, and things to dress up the console as well as a host of other new content – and we've opened up a new revenue stream for publishers in addition to regular retail sells and on top of that we have Xbox Live Arcade, which is the ability for small games (we think of games less than 50 megs in size) to be distributed online, the sort of games that retail typically wouldn't take. So we have these new revenue streams, we have the install base, we have a tool set, we have the partnerships. It's getting exciting. We really think that these things are going to combine together – no one of them is enough, but all together – we think we can really be the number one console in the world.

The Xbox in comparison to other consoles seems to occupy a more male domain, as a more male-centric games machine. For the 360 one of Microsoft's goals is to expand the player-base. How do you attract female gamers and mainstream gamers without alienating the hardcore? Will Xbox Live Arcade really be enough? Sony proved that they could capture the mainstream market with peripherals like the EyeToy, Singstar and Buzz. Will the Xbox 360 have similar products?

So we've announced there will be a camera, and the camera – not just

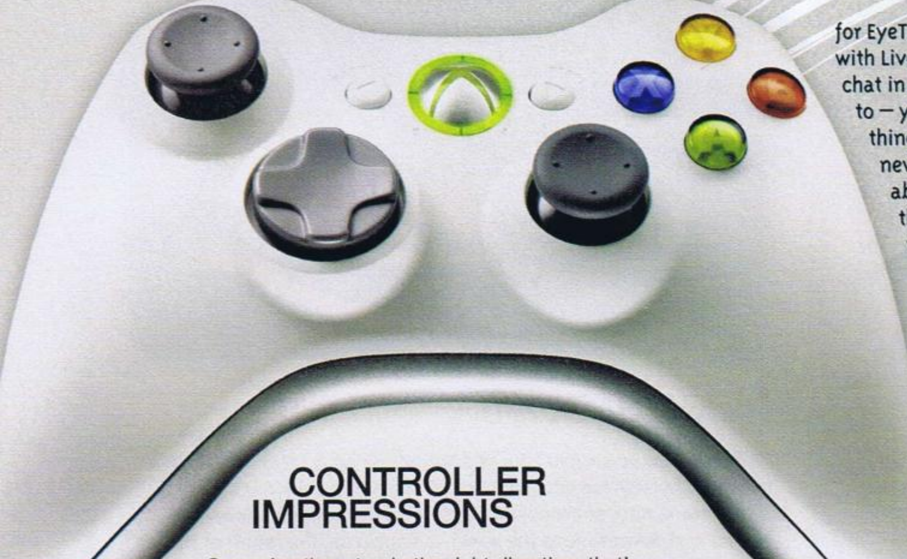
RIDGE RACER 6

>> Picking up where the PSP title left off, Ridge Racer 6 is a great return to console form for Namco. We're talking sublime drifting, a sweet frame rate, stacks of courses full of the hairpins, sweeping curves and downhill runs the series is known for, the return of the nitrous mechanic and of course, crisp high definition visuals. The single player game is based around the World Xplorer, a game mode with a huge number of races and branching paths, allowing you to pick your own path through the game. It's a little like the PSP title, in that even though there are countless events, you'll be racing each course multiple times - forwards and backwards and in different car classes. It really doesn't matter though - there are enough courses to keep you entertained and with 130 vehicles to unlock, including some ridiculously over the top Namco concoctions, there's always an incentive to keep playing. The nitrous system has changed a little too, as you can now unleash double and triple boosts if your tank is full enough.

In terms of online, you can upload and download ghost cars in the Global Time Attack mode which is a great way to see how the fastest players in the world tackle each course, and of course, there's online racing and a global leaderboard.

While Ridge Racer 6 is a long way from PGR3's level of visual sophistication, it has that inimitable Ridge Racer aesthetic stamped all over it, which combined with a great sense of speed is what the fans are looking for anyway.

POSITION
5/14
LAP TIME
294



CONTROLLER IMPRESSIONS

Cam: Another step in the right direction, that's how I'd describe the 360 controller. The move from the "Duke" to the Type S reduced the overall size and spaced the face buttons more logically. For the 360, the formerly awkward black and white buttons have disappeared, and there are now four shoulder buttons – well, two buttons and two triggers. They're still not as comfortable as on PS2, but it makes a big difference. The controller as a whole is comfortable and responsive and the wireless functionality and assigning of each controller (when activating each controller it gets assigned a quadrant on the controller and machine so everyone knows which controller is theirs) works flawlessly.

Daniel: I gotta say I was a little disappointed with the controller. The shape itself sits comfortably in my hands and the four basic face buttons are well placed and comfortable but I feel the controller has gone a little backwards with the triggers, shoulder buttons and thumbsticks. The thumbsticks are a little too floaty for my liking, lacking the nice stiffness of the Type S sticks and the left and right triggers don't seem to have that much in the way of play to them. The shoulder buttons feel like hard plastic micro-switches, not nearly as comfortable as I would have liked. Finally the centre console button that brings up the in-game blade interface and can be used to power the console on and off (a nice feature to be sure) is a little too soft in touch. In Kameo where the start button is used to open one of the game interfaces I've found myself accidentally brushing the button on numerous occasions and opening the blade interface.

for EyeToy things, but connected with Live – actually supports video chat in the home. So you'll be able to – you know those expensive things in conference rooms that never really work? You'll be able to connect a camera to the Xbox 360 and just have it work – "Oh, grandma hi!".

We also think that the idea of arcade games – Xbox Live Arcade – obviously we have retro games, we have some new games – like Zooma is very popular. That reaches a different kind of audience, a casual audience. But this distribution mechanism also allows publishers and developers to try new ideas. One of the arguments – there's many – of why people feel the industry and not just Xbox is male-dominated is because a lot of the big titles require a certain budget and need to target a certain audience that you know is there.

But here, with Arcade, I can deliver new ideas to people over the internet and see if I can grab new audiences and tap into new demographics. So we've opened new channels for people to reach new audiences as well. And we think from a family system, we think that the idea of Live, achievements for games – the idea that I can check my gamer tag and see what games I've played and what achievements I've reached for each game. These are serviced by Live so I can also look somebody else up and I can not only see what achievements you've got but I can compare these side by side. It's not just a competitive thing – you might have done something that I've been trying to do and now I know that I can ask you for help – "hey, how did you do that?". It opens up the mentoring effect, the water-cooler effect. It helps build community, it helps get people interested in games.

We're working very hard to have community features, and what I would call ancillary features. Gaming is what this box is about – without question – but there's so much multimedia and broad appeal features that we think it's going to be less scary to a lot of people (hey, it's a lot more friendly than the original). And as it's less scary, more people who aren't used to picking up the console controller are going to feel more comfortable. The Pro skew comes with a remote control, for playing movies and such, and you can navigate the Xbox 360 entirely with the remote and that might be the interface that's more comfortable in the houses that aren't used to it. And then they say "Wait a minute - arcade games, maybe I'm interested" or demos – I can download console demos straight to the console.

So we think we've done a lot to broaden the appeal. Obviously, the game titles that come from the publishers will be extremely instrumental in that. From a peripherals point of view we have the camera coming, from a feature point of view we're trying to address other members of the household as well – though we don't expect them to buy if for those reasons, we expect it be bought for games. But once it's there, they'll find a bunch of different uses for it.

THERE'S A LOT OF FLEXIBILITY IN THIS BOX FOR GAME DESIGNERS TO USE HOWEVER THEY WANT

The catchcry for Xbox 360 is "everything in high definition". Given that only a small percentage of consumers actually have high def displays, do you think this will resonate with people?

It has in all of our studies so far. What we saw in the US is that people are buying an Xbox 360 in one hand and a high-def TV in the other. A lot of the TV manufactures have said that they sometimes need a killer app. In almost every country you study, with Japan actually being the one that has the highest high-def penetration, US being second and Europe and Australia kinda falling behind – they're all in the exact same curve, there just in a different place on the curve. To date, sporting events have been the killer app for high-def television. Australia's going to be in the World Cup, the World Cup's going to be broadcast in high definition... And I think as World Cup comes, and maybe the Commonwealth games, you're

JEFF POBST ON THE NINTENDO REVOLUTION AND ITS CONTROLLER

'I don't know what it will to do for games. I think it's a very bold move for Nintendo. They've decided that they're going to change things up. Now it makes a lot of sense for Nintendo, from a business point of view. My personal opinion – not Microsoft's – is that if you look at Xbox and you look at the PlayStation world, they both have strong first-parties but have tons of partnerships and relationships with third-parties, and my job is all about really strong relationships with my first party and third party developers. Nintendo doesn't emphasise third parties to the same extent – they have some third party games on the console, but it's not the same. Nintendo's console is about Nintendo's content, in most of the cases. So they have a situation where they change the whole way they make content, the whole way they make the console, and come up with brand new methods of interactivity.

How much it will deliver the experiences that people want, I think we'll all have to wait and see. I think the fact that they're bold enough to take the step is exciting, and if they discover something and share something that's new, I expect the whole community to follow suit in some way.'

POWER
A
SELECT
HOME
START
b
a
Nintendo

going to have a lot of impetus for high-def.

High def is going to be important to Sony through the PS3 because they're going to want to sell Sony TVs – they're a hardware company right? Their goal is to sell hardware.

We're a software company, so our goal is to make sure that our games have the best experience possible. We're not trying to sell hardware, we're trying to sell a software experience – that's our focus.

Hardware for us is working really closely with our partners and helping the hardware partners focus on what's needed for the software developers. There's that different philosophy between the two companies.

That said, TV companies see game consoles as the second killer-app for people to adopt high-definition.

In a recent report on Christmas sales in America by Wedbush Morgan Securities, the company noted, "consumers appear to be indifferent to the proliferation of sequels, including a slow start to holiday sales and risk of continuing weakness". What are your thoughts on the glut of unimaginative sequels in the market? What's Microsoft's stance on this and what measures have been taken to support/combat this?

That's an interesting statement. I'm not sure I actually agree with them. I think what they're doing is taking a perception, which is "Oh yeah, companies are just making the same old, same old". I think on the Xbox side of things, we had consumers who were intending to buy an Xbox 360 slow down their Xbox purchases. I think PS2 hasn't had the releases this holiday that they were really looking for.

I would just say it's about the games. It's about the quality of the games – it doesn't matter if the game's a sequel or not, it doesn't matter if the game is something brand new, or something that brings back an old memory - I think consumers flock to good games.

I think we're going to have a smaller number these holidays of the games that everybody buys and I think those games are going to do really well and by the end of the quarter I expect that we'll be back where people expected us to be. Coming up with a console launch messes up the timing of when the sales take place.

I'm no analyst, I'm no expert – they are the experts - but from what I've seen I'd say that I tend to disagree

When it comes to selling the Xbox 360 and its abilities to game developers (and in particular designers), what from your perspective is the strongest and most exciting thing about the machine?

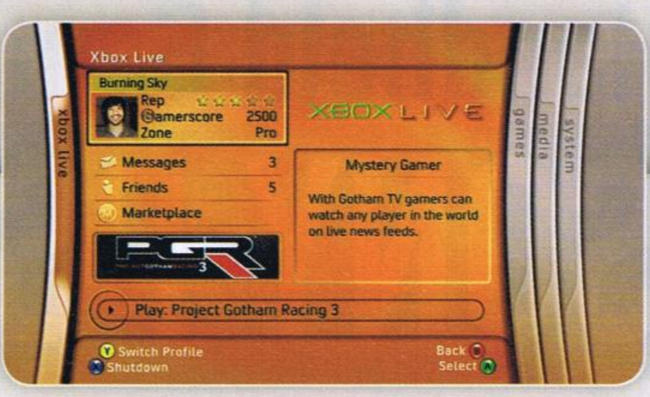
It's a sum of things. The thing that's most exciting to me is that conference room that I described earlier, where the designers are having their meeting and they go "Yeah we can do that, and that, and that", because this console allows for that.

So we have the CPU with all the cores. I didn't talk about the GPU (graphics processor unit) – the graphics processor on this is more powerful than you can get on a PC right now. And it's *flexible* – there's a lot of flexibility in this box for game developers to use however they want. If you get the latest generation nVidia or ATI card, they have a fixed number of either 16 or 24 pixel shaders and 6 or 8 vertex shaders and what that means is that I can only do so many pixel or vertex polygon effects per second as I chug through my scene, trying to get my frame done.

With the Xbox 360, we have a chip that has 48 shaders that can be either pixel shaders or vertex shaders, so if you want to use all 48 for vertex you can send those calls and they'll go through, and you can send all as 48 pixel shaders, or you can automatically split them as you send the commands so it's extremely flexible, and, more than anywhere from double to eight times as powerful as the latest brand new US$300 PC video card, and the Xbox 360 is US $400.

The ability for us to get that silicon on there, have embedded DRAM, have a very fast bus to memory that's unified memory – this thing is built for gaming unlike the PC. No – this thing is *optimised* for gaming. PC gaming is great, there are some experiences on PC that I love, Microsoft is committed to PC gaming. But we were able to take a lot of things that you'd wish you had on a PC and make it so on the Xbox 360.

Thanks for your time Jeff.



Burning Sky
Rep ☆☆☆☆☆
Gamerscore 2500
Zone Pro
Messages 3
Friends 5

Mystery Gamer

With Gotham TV gamers can watch any player in the world on live news feeds.

Play: Project Gotham Racing 3

THE BLADE INTERFACE

>> The menu system on 360 is known as the Blade; different bands of interface options that can be scrolled through to change different settings or access Xbox Live and the like. It's very stylish and quite intuitive and user friendly. We haven't really had a lot of time yet to sit down and play with it (hey, we got games to play!) but one thing really stood out. You can set a default control schematic in the basic interface (button mapping, inverse camera and the like) which will carry on through all of the games loaded on the machine, getting rid of the need to change settings in every game you play. It's a small thing but we love it.

HDD
XBOX 360
XBOX 360

!!! The achievement system really is a masterstroke. It's like your Gaming C.V. and you'll find yourself obsessively completing achievements not just for yourself but for your online portfolio!

Handheld Gaming Head to Head:

SONY PSP VS. NIN

By now you're all more than familiar with what each of the new handhelds has to offer. You know that the PSP is the graphics powerhouse with a serving of multimedia on the side, while DS is all about innovation with its dual screens, mic and touch functionality. They may be diametrically opposed approaches, but as we all know, the true merit of a system lies in its games. So if you're in the market for a new handheld, we're going to steer you through the pros and cons of the games available for each system.

SONY
POWER
HOLD
SELECT
START

GAMES ON PSP

STRENGTHS

The PSP's greatest strength is probably in its racing lineup. With the likes of Ridge Racer and Wipeout Pure, and to a lesser extent Midnight Club 3: DUB Edition, Burnout Legends and V8 Supercars, there's plenty to keep racing fans – especially arcade racing fans – happy. Sports games are also strong on PSP, thanks to titles such as Pro Evo 5, Everybody's Golf and Virtua Tennis, and the ad hoc wireless multiplayer means that if you have enough friends with the games you can experience them at their best – against human competition. Oh, and if you're prepared to mess with your firmware and turn to the rom downloading dark side, there's a whole treasure trove of retro gaming possibilities for this system too.

WEAKNESSES

There are very few good RPGs for PSP, and the complete absence of first person shooters and 3D fighting games (aside from the recently released "The Con", which is by all accounts crap) is quite mystifying. We mentioned that the sports lineup is strong, but let's face it, you can play PES5, Everybody's Golf and Virtua Tennis on your PS2, so there's a lot less for PS2 owners to get excited about than there are for people who own a PC or the other consoles. Perhaps the most damning weakness is that we're not really seeing much that hasn't come before; there's a serious glut of games that are either average or just uninspired – bring on some innovative games!

CONTENTIOUS POINTS

Since the initial wave of great titles, we've been snowed in by ports, and the vast majority – although competent – are either scaled down versions of their console brethren or just aren't as much fun on PSP. Aside from the occasional quality game like Liberty City Stories, there hasn't been much meat to the PSP bone of late.

THE FUTURE

There are a number of genres that need to be accounted for, and the PSP desperately needs original and clever titles. Fortunately, there's definitely hope thanks to games like Loco Roco. We also have our fingers crossed that Gran Turismo 4 Mobile will see the light of day soon, hopefully with online play... although I wouldn't hold your breath. In any case, the key to success will be a steady stream of strong releases – something that Sony and third party developers have struggled to deliver so far.

TENDO DS

GAMES ON NINTENDO DS

STRENGTHS
While the launch lineup was relatively weak for DS, the machine has gradually been building steam, and right now there are a host of titles that really utilise the system and give gamers something fresh to sink their teeth into. We're talking about Nintendogs, Trauma Center, Kirby Canvas Curse, ElectroPlankton, Yoshi's Touch & Go, Pheonix Wright: Ace Attorney, Ouendan and Pac'n Roll. That's a huge list of innovative titles, and they're backed up by a large selection of more predictable games that nonetheless still rock the proverbial house. Titles like Mario Kart DS, Sonic Rush, Castlevania: Dawn of Sorrow and Advance Wars: Dual Strike have all hit retail in the last few months.

Considering it also plays the entire GBA catalogue - a system that has itself undergone something of a renaissance this year - it's a really good time to own a DS.

WEAKNESSES
The DS is not a 3D powerhouse. You're simply never going to see a gorgeous, screamingly fast arcade racer on this system. Nor are you going to see an overly realistic looking sports game. The DS excels in simple, clean 3D and stylish 2D, so if technical sophistication is your thing, the DS may not be of much interest.

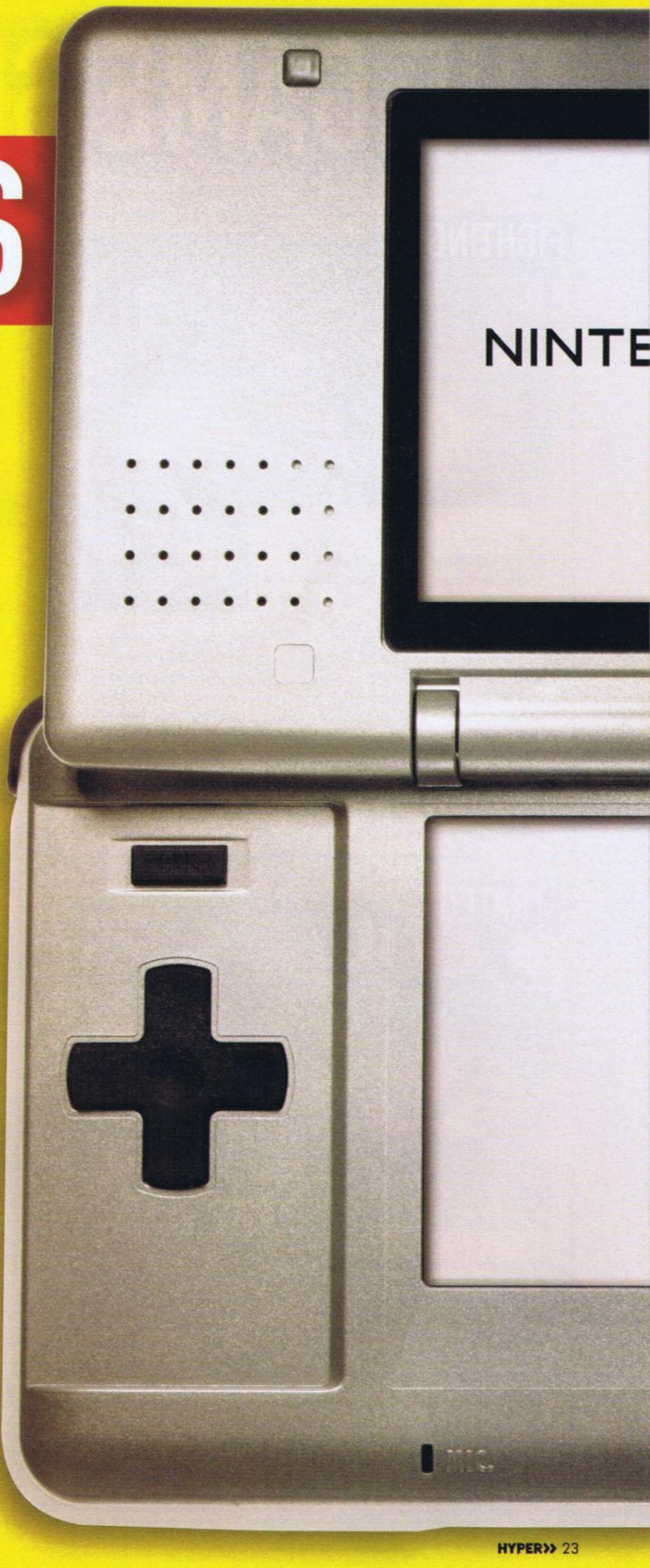
The DS is a great system when games are made specifically for it, but ports tend to be pretty poor, and often only make a token effort to utilise the strengths of the system. As always, choose your games carefully.

Like the PSP, the DS is lacking in first person shooters, but like we said — 3D really isn't what this machine is about (although we're hoping that Metroid Prime: Hunters will prove that it's still capable). There's also only one good RPG (Mario & Luigi: Partners in Time) at the moment, but fortunately there are a bunch of great GBA RPGs to fall back on.

CONTENTIOUS POINTS
Like all Nintendo systems, the DS relies heavily on Nintendo developed titles. Thus, there'll rarely be a huge flood of amazing games at once, and if you don't like Nintendo's style of development, you probably shouldn't buy one. That said, the third party developers are definitely being won over by the potential of the system. Ubisoft put together a Prince of Persia strategy title exclusively for the DS, and there are a number of games like Atlus' Trauma Center and Capcom's Phoenix Wright that take gaming to strange new places.

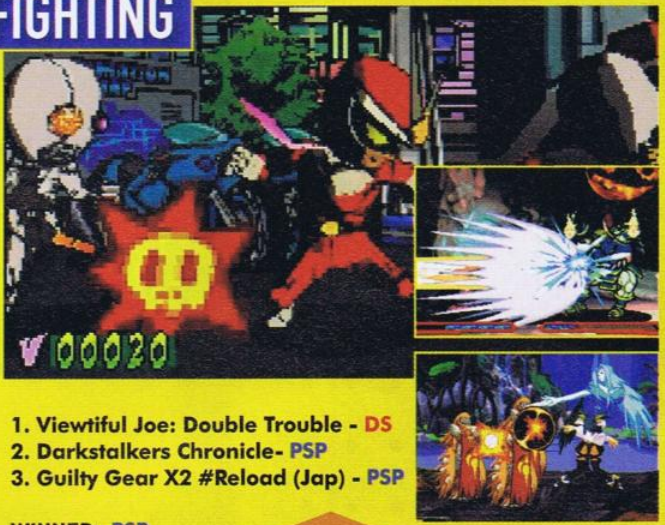
THE FUTURE
We just got our hands on Mario & Luigi 2: Partners in Time, which is just one of a number of great titles coming out in the next few months, but the key for the DS is what happens mid to late next year. They need to take the groundswell of true third party support and run with it. If they can do this, the system is going to flourish.

Also, much like the PSP, online play is somewhat untested. Sure, Mario Kart is out, but it will be interesting to see if Nintendo can embrace online play and make it compelling.



THE GAME SHOWDOWN

FIGHTING

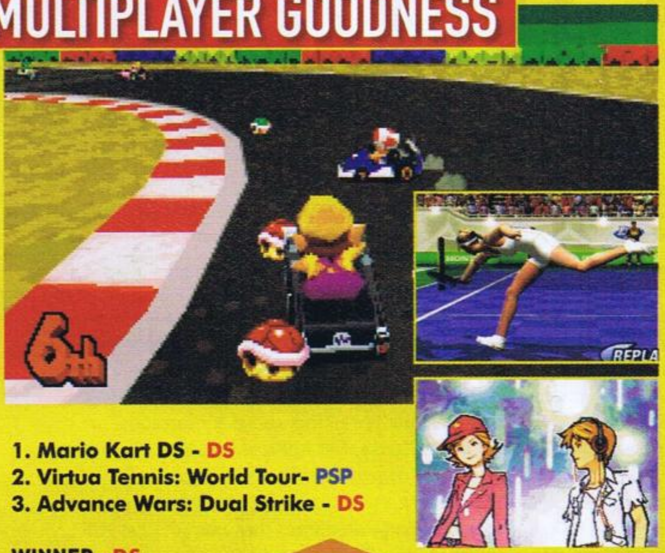


1. **Viewtiful Joe: Double Trouble - DS**
2. **Darkstalkers Chronicle- PSP**
3. **Guilty Gear X2 #Reload (Jap) - PSP**

WINNER - PSP

We're not sure where all the fighting games are lurking, but for the moment Viewtiful Joe: Double Trouble's cool take on the beat 'em up genre with its touch screen moves and dual screen gameplay gets the thumbs up from us. Darkstalkers is also pretty slick, and we're suckers for any Guilty Gear title (it should be released here early next year as Guilty Gear Judgement), especially one that features the usual bizarre one on one action AND a side scrolling beat 'em up mode! There's some good stuff on the horizon too - Street Fighter Alpha 3 Max for PSP is coming early next year, and Guilty Gear Dust Strikers for DS features fighting across both screens for up to four players. While PSP wins the category, we're surprised at the absence of 3D fighters for the system.

MULTIPLAYER GOODNESS

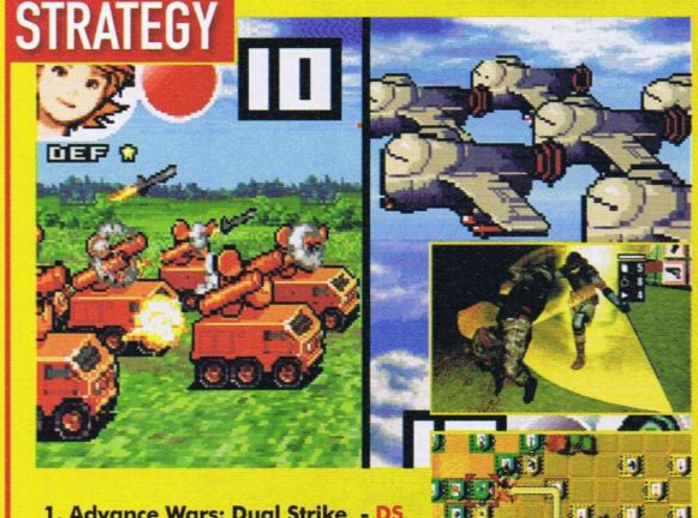


1. **Mario Kart DS - DS**
2. **Virtua Tennis: World Tour- PSP**
3. **Advance Wars: Dual Strike - DS**

WINNER - DS

For all the talk of wireless multiplayer gaming, there isn't actually a large pool of truly compelling multiplayer games for each system. On the PSP front, Virtua Tennis is great fun, while Liberty City is okay if you have enough people, as are a number of the racing games, and X-Men Legends II has compelling four player co-op. The game we keep coming back to though, is Mario Kart DS, while Kosta and John D are hopelessly addicted to Advance Wars: Dual Strike multiplayer. DS narrowly has the edge in our minds, but this is one category where it comes down to what systems your friends own. Either way, a new 2D Worms title is in development for both! Everyone wins!

STRATEGY

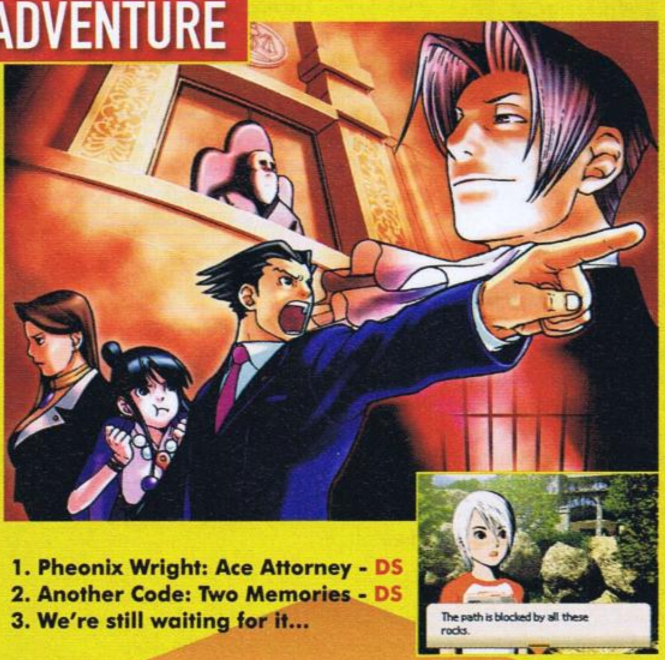


1. **Advance Wars: Dual Strike - DS**
2. **Metal Gear Acid - PSP**
3. **Battles of Prince of Persia - DS**

WINNER - DS

Dual Strike may not have set our gaming taste buds alive with new flavours, but it's still a sublime title. Acid on the other hand, was rather lukewarm, but Konami should be commended for trying something different. PSP owners also have Lemmings to look forward to, which should bump up the PSP's strategy presence. The DS wins, however, because it has the best game in the category by a long way, and also because its touchscreen will inevitably be used to great effect in this genre.

ADVENTURE


The path is blocked by all these rocks.

1. **Pheonix Wright: Ace Attorney - DS**
2. **Another Code: Two Memories - DS**
3. **We're still waiting for it...**

WINNER - DS

The DS is helping to resurrect the Adventure genre with two great games that really utilise the system. The PSP hasn't even bothered turning up for this genre yet, although Bandai has a title called Gallery Fake in the works that sees you play a detective investigating the theft of a piece of art (and its replacement in the gallery with a fake, hence the cunning title). Good to have you back Mr Adventure!

MISCELLANEOUS & COOL

1. Ouendan- DS
2. ElectroPlankton - DS
3. Talkman (Jap) - PSP

WINNER - DS
The DS is currently the king of the "strange and mysterious games" hill. Ouendan is rhythm action genius and while ElectroPlankton is really just a toolset to play around with, it's strangely compelling and soothing. Talkman, on the other hand, is more of an app with a wacky host, allowing you to translate between Japanese, English, Korean and Chinese – both through menus and through actual speech. Whether it will ever see release outside Japan though, is another matter.

SIMULATIONS

Let's begin the operation!

Interact: Johnny Smith
Boy

1. Nintendogs - DS
2. Trauma Center- DS
3. The Sims 2 - DS

WINNER - DS
This one is simple. For sim style games, the DS has the control solution to make it work. Whether you're patting a dog or cutting someone open, the touch screen gives simulations a level of control and immersion formerly lacking from the handheld domain. We still doubt a Sim City style game would work given the resolution constraints, but there's plenty that will.

PLATFORMERS

1. Sonic Rush - DS
2. Yoshi's Touch & Go - DS
3. Kirby Canvas Curse - DS

WINNER - DS
To date there have only been a few very lukewarm 3D platformers on PSP, while we've seen plenty of interesting takes on the genre on the DS. Sonic Rush is one of the best Sonic games to date, while Yoshi's Touch & Go and Kirby Canvas Curse both serve up great side scrolling touch screen gameplay. And with New Super Mario Bros and Super Princess Peach coming soon, it's only going to get better for DS fiends.

RPG

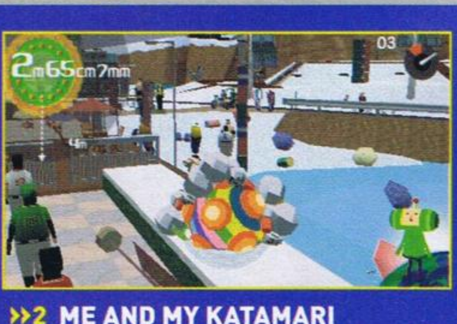
1. Mario & Luigi: Partners in Time - DS
2. Tales of Eternia- PSP
3. Any other RPGs like to step forward?

WINNER - DS
DS gets the nod in this category because of Partners in Time and the GBA RPG back catalogue, but neither system has much on offer right now. Hell, we couldn't even find a decent RPG for the coveted bronze medal position. Still, we're looking forward to Ys: The Ark of Napishtim on PSP, which should be out quite soon, and the prospect of Children of Mana for DS has us all aquiver!

MOST WANTED PSP GAMES IN 2006 >>

>>1 LOCO ROCO

Get this. You play a blob. It can roll over stuff and get bigger. It can split into little blobs to get through narrow passages. It bounces about and rolls around, all in a tripped out cartoon world. Don't get it? It's a blob thang...



>>2 ME AND MY KATAMARI

Wow, another must-have PSP game about rolling stuff. This time the King Of All Cosmos and the Prince are on vacation and must help create new islands for homeless animals. Or something. With four player wireless this is going to be awesome.

>>3 KARAKURI

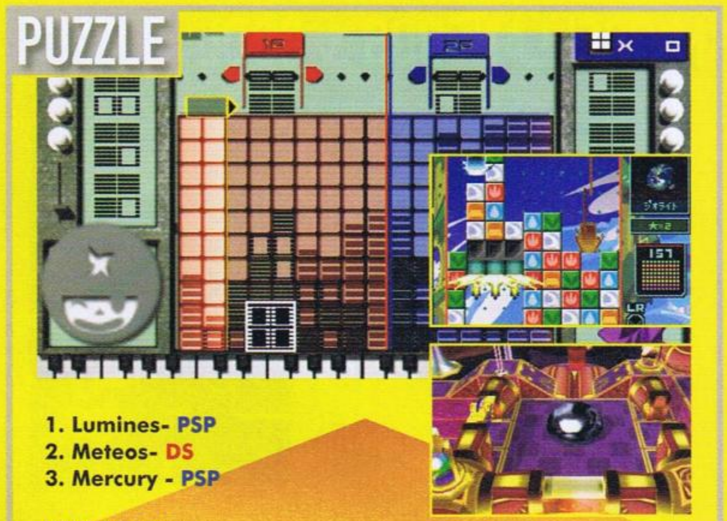
A cool take on the action platform genre where your character must use his team of robot monkeys to... ah hell, what does it matter? You have a team of robot monkeys that can team up like Voltron to make one giant robot monkey! Isn't that enough for you people?

RACING

1. **Ridge Racer - PSP**
2. **Wipeout Pure - PSP**
3. **Mario Kart DS - DS**

WINNER - PSP
PSP completely owns this category. While Ridgey and Pure are far and away the best racing titles on the system, V8 Supercars, Midnight Club 3 and Burnout Legends are also worth your time. The DS, on the other hand, really doesn't have many good racers beyond Mario Kart.

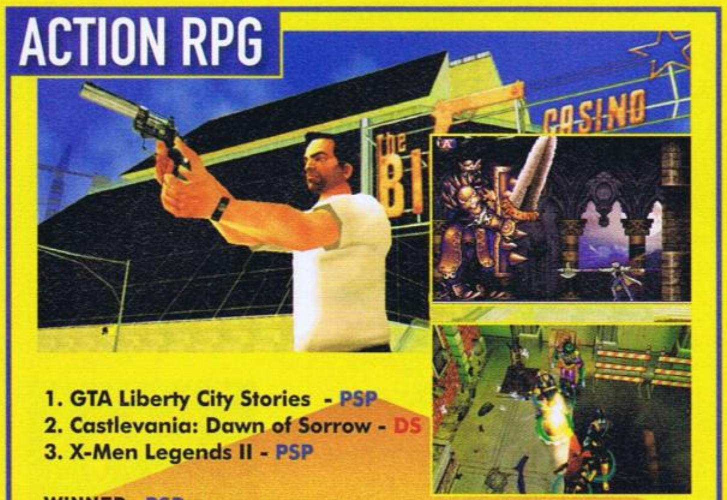
PUZZLE



1. **Lumines- PSP**
2. **Meteos- DS**
3. **Mercury - PSP**

WINNER - TIE
Zoo Keeper on DS and Puyo Pop Fever on DS only narrowly missed the cut, and all things considered both systems have something to offer puzzle fans. Lumines ansd Meteos are far and away the best handheld puzzle games available, however, so perhaps this award should actually go to Tetsuya Mizuguchi's Q Entertainment...

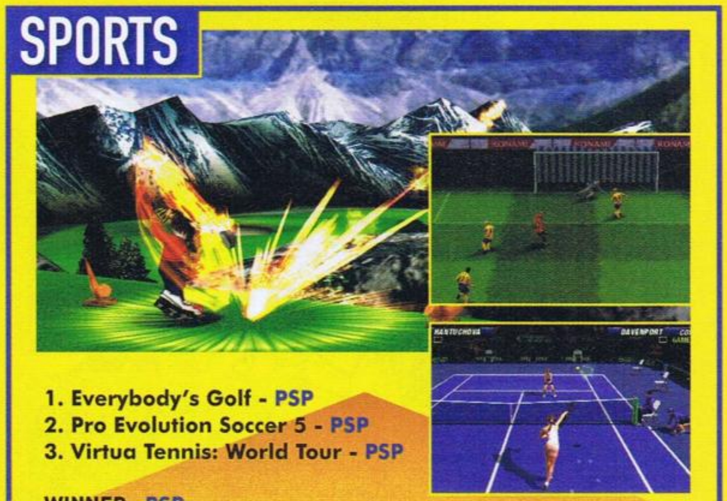
ACTION RPG



1. **GTA Liberty City Stories - PSP**
2. **Castlevania: Dawn of Sorrow - DS**
3. **X-Men Legends II - PSP**

WINNER - PSP
Bit of a weird category this one, as it spans the Action RPG/Action adventure divide, and frankly, there aren't many great games in this category for either system. The PSP edges ahead of the DS thanks largely to GTA, with a little help from the "Legendary PSP Twins": X-Men Legends II and Untold Legends.

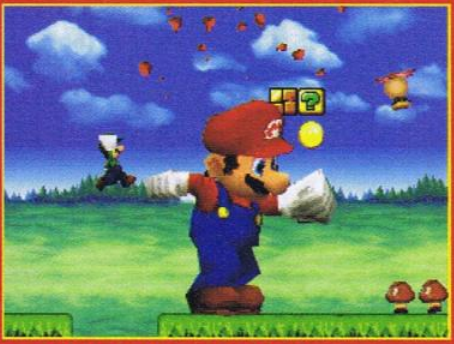
SPORTS



1. **Everybody's Golf - PSP**
2. **Pro Evolution Soccer 5 - PSP**
3. **Virtua Tennis: World Tour - PSP**

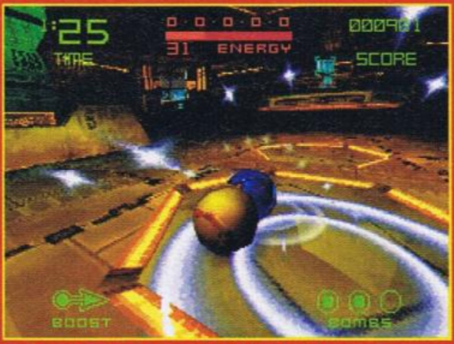
WINNER - PSP
Although DS owners have some great Nintendo GBA sports titles, there's almost nothing exclusively for DS. On the flipside, the PSP has a wealth of sports titles to choose from. Many, if not all of them, are ports, but even so there are some very solid titles in the lineup. And who doesn't love Everybody's Golf on PSP?

MOST WANTED DS GAMES IN 2006 >>



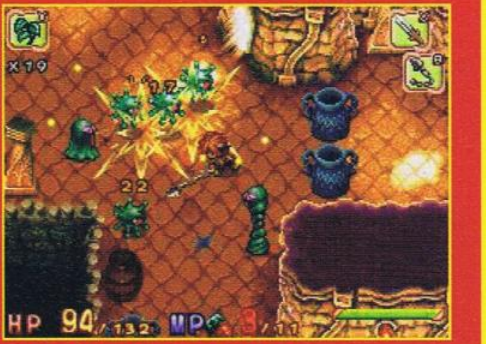
>>1 NEW SUPER MARIO BROS

The name says it all. Side scrolling platforming with a delicious mix of 2D and 3D elements and co-op wireless play. Controls are wonderfully smooth and the worlds are more vibrant than ever before. Good ol' Ninty.



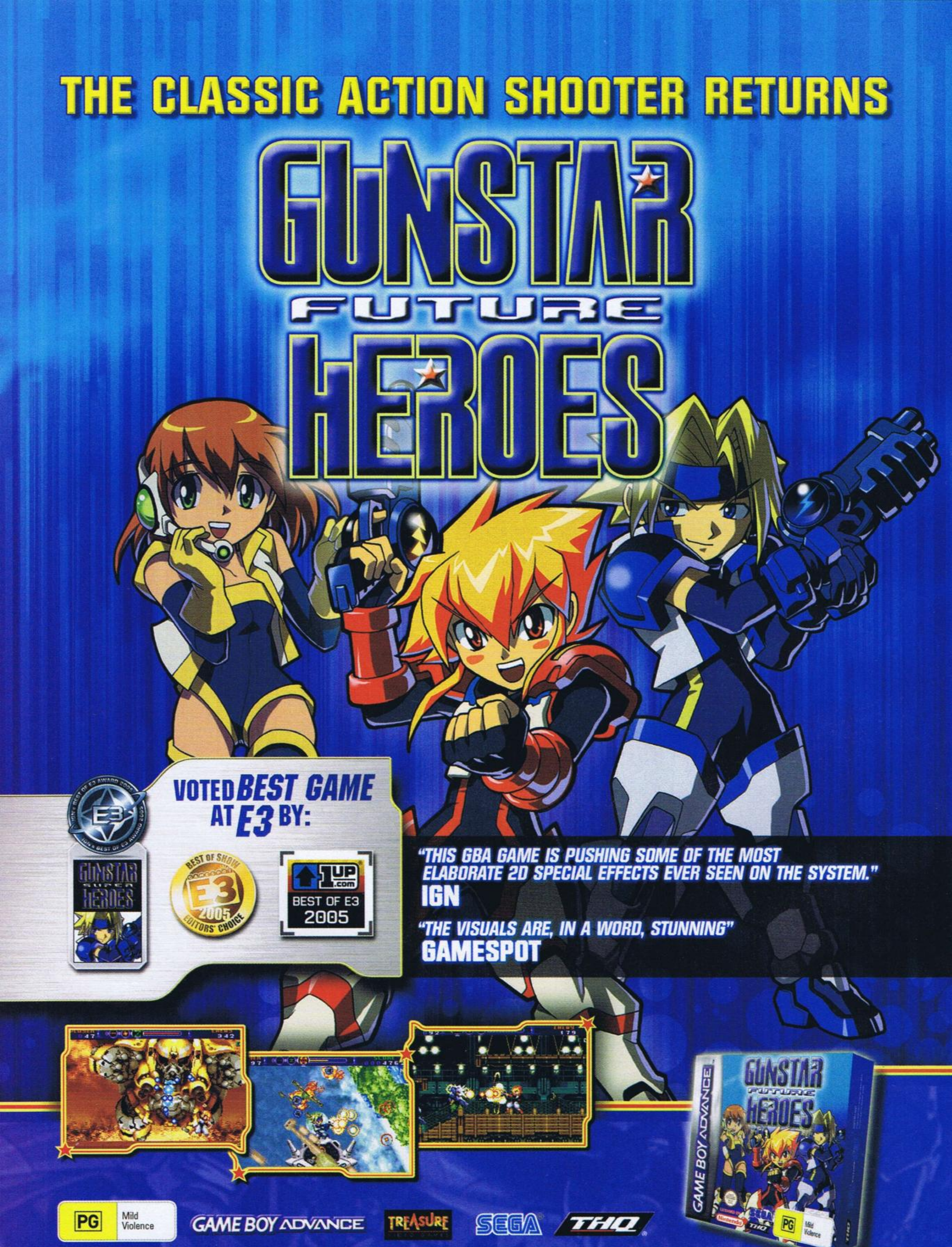
>>2 METROID PRIME: HUNTERS

Metroid Prime: Hunters has heaps in common with the GameCube titles – the mix of adventure, platform and shooting, the scanning of items and enemies in the environments and the impressive visuals. Wireless multiplayer is going to be the icing on the cake. We can't wait.



>>3 CHILDREN OF MANA

Set in Illusia, there are three main characters in this Square Enix title, the amusingly named Frick, Pop and Tumble, and gameplay is once more in the action RPG style. With detailed visuals and what's sure to be an enchanting story, we'll hopefully see this released in the West later in 2006.


THE CLASSIC ACTION SHOOTER RETURNS
GUNSTAR
FUTURE
HEROES
VOTED BEST GAME AT E3 BY:
BEST OF SHOW E3 2005 EDITORS' CHOICE
1UP.com BEST OF E3 2005
"THIS GBA GAME IS PUSHING SOME OF THE MOST ELABORATE 2D SPECIAL EFFECTS EVER SEEN ON THE SYSTEM."
IGN
"THE VISUALS ARE, IN A WORD, STUNNING"
GAMESPOT
PG Mild Violence
GAME BOY ADVANCE
TREASURE
SEGA
THQ

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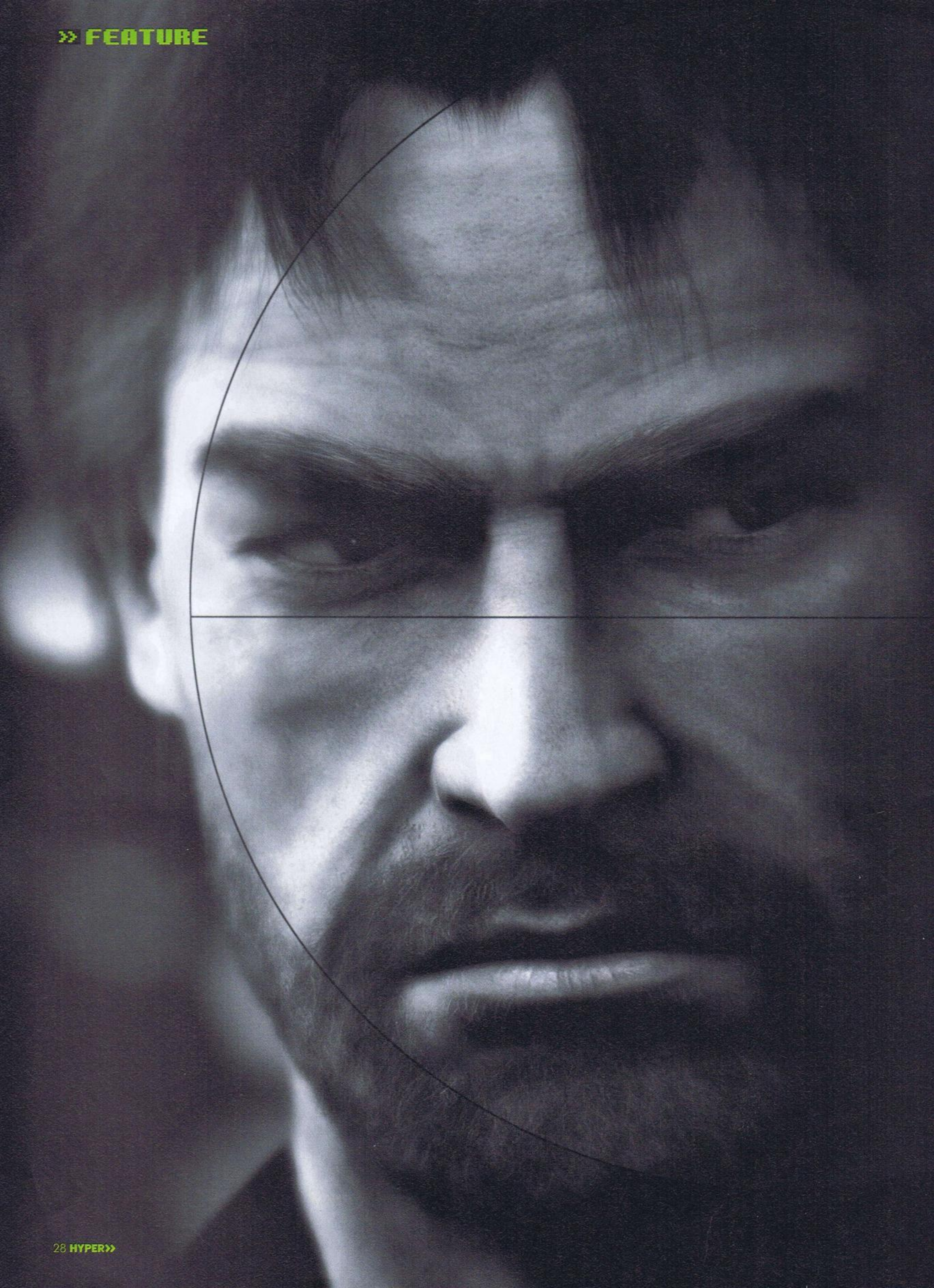


SPLINTER CELL 4: I AM SAM

No, not the "special" one, the "special ops" one. We're referring, of course, to Sam Fisher - stealth agent extraordinaire and force for good... or is he? We dispatched Seamus Byrne to Paris to find out.

Systems: **GCN, PC, PS2, Xbox, Xbox 360** ■ Category: **Stealth/Action** ■ Players: **1-Multi** ■ Developer: **Ubisoft Canada (current gen), Ubisoft Shanghai (360)** ■ Due: **Early-mid '06**

It all started with a long-haul flight to Paris in cattle class. Would I be willing to kill for a business upgrade? You can't help ask yourself the question. Sure, not seriously. Not really. Maybe after the sixteen-hour mark you're a little more serious. Who would you have to kill?

It was all the perfect set up to getting the dirt on Sam Fisher's latest expedition into the world of covert espionage. The big question rang in our ears again and again. Would you kill one to save thousands? What if it was someone you loved? According to the team behind Splinter Cell 4, big and difficult choices are to be at the heart of this version of the game, marking a major development of the concept and a big push to make Sam a much deeper character than ever before.

So are the rumours true? Has Sam really gone bad. Well, you're in for a shock. He's still a good guy! No, really! OK, it might not be that big a shock, but the story line should have any fans of the series licking their lips, and those worried about more of the same can lose the attempt at the cool jaded façade. Let's get down to details.

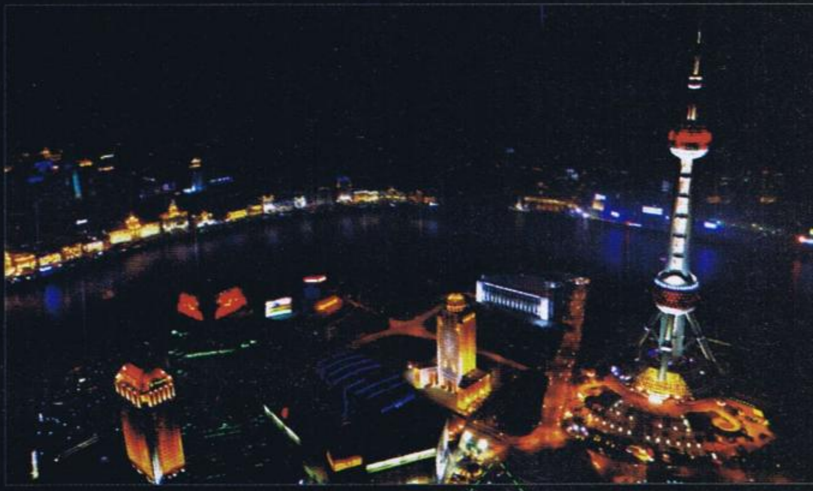
THE STORY

Here is what we know. Sam's daughter dies. Not at the hands of some evil organisation for him to become hell bent on revenge. As the Ubi crew were keen to stress, this is Tom Clancy stuff. Her death is a random event. Fisher is just shit outta luck. But it means Sam finds himself disillusioned by his line of work and in need of a big change.

Enter the whole new mission. This time out, Sam has been offered a gig at the highest level of espionage agent in the US system, a non-official cover operative — a NOC, the CIA operative status made famous by the first Mission Impossible film and more recently by the political disaster surrounding the outing of real-life NOC Valerie Plame. Sam takes up the challenge of going deep cover, and part of the deal is to go bad and become a member of a terrorist network.

Sam is arrested and goes to prison for robbery and killing civilians, and once on the inside he makes friends with the enemy and the game begins with a major breakout scene. You and a new friend/terrorist, Jamie, must escape from prison and once you have done so, you will hook up with a terrorist cell and begin your deep cover assignment.

Chris Smith, Xbox 360 Offline Game Designer, pointed out that right off the bat this makes for a very different mission structure to the previous titles. "If there was one complaint about the earlier games it was the 'do this, do that' nature of missions. Sam was given a list of objectives and you just had



XBOX 360 GRAPHICS AHOY! If you want some numbers, we're talking 12,000 polys for Sam in this one. The characters were also modelled by bona fide classically trained sculptors. They really do look pretty spesh.

We didn't see final shading and lighting effects, so it is hard to say how good it will all look. But we did see one impressive sequence on top of a Shanghai hotel with some of the best long-range background views you've ever seen. No cheating here, we were looking down on a cityscape with actual car movement and rippling water effects delivered in real-time. Not a bad background when you're ledging your way along an accurate model of one of the tallest buildings in the world.

On junket posters and press materials, SC4 has been dubbed 'Splinter Cell: Double Agent', though this was not confirmed 100% as being the final game title. One team member did mention their disappointment they would not be going with 'Splinter Cell: Deep Entry' — I guess Ubisoft are leaving the covert action porn market wide open to some other developer down the track.

MULTIPLAYER GOODNESS We only got to see Xbox multiplayer, but this was also one of our two hands-on experiences with the game. And there was some very good news in store. Guess what? The merc is gone! Pull out your MAD magazines, because it is all Spy versus Spy.

The multiplayer is built to work as a 2 vs 2 or 3 vs 3 format — or even 3 versus 2 if you feel the need to balance the odds. There was a good list of multiplayer game modes, with all the usual favourites taken care of. The mode we got to play was called 'Hack' and it was a fun capture and control variant that Xbox Multiplayer Co-Ordinator, Thomas Leroux-Hugon, felt offered the best balance of all the modes. In the demo, we played some 2 on 2 where the objective is to hack the opposite team's computer system. This is a meter-based system where each team hacks and hacks again to build the score to 100% and win the round. Map size was excellent with some great layout designs and at this size it won't take long to master paths, so you won't get destroyed for too long when you first jump in to learn a level. Unless you're crap, of course.

Another nice mode idea is 'Sam Hunt'. This is a lone wolf mode, 3 vs 1, that sounds like a great idea in a spy multi. No chance to try this one out, though, so we'll see what it's like when it lands.

We got no word at all on what form the Xbox 360 multiplayer will take. Stay tuned.

BEFORE YOU KNEELS A MAN BOUND AND GAGGED, HIS EYES PLEADING WITH YOU TO LET HIM LIVE... EXPECT THIS SPLINTER CELL TO MESS WITH YOUR HEAD

to do them. This time around, you will have competing objectives in missions — terrorist objectives as well as government ones. You will have to make choices on which missions to complete at each turn, and those decisions you make will impact on how the game plays out."

Big choices that influence gameplay does mean multiple endings are possible, though details on this subject were still well guarded. On the ongoing impacts of choice, there is a real effort in place to ensure you will get a very different game experience depending on which way you lean.

Players who decide to run with the wolves and ensure they keep their terrorist masters happy will find their access within the terror network improves over time. There is an HQ to the terrorist cell and depending on how in with the team you are, your freedom of access to the building will change over time. This can be a big help with some of your government objectives, which from time to time will require you to perform missions within the base — at obvious risk to the entire operation. With minimal access, you may have to go stealth and risk everything. With greater access, you could just walk in and take what you need no questions asked. Even at this, there are more choices. What do you do if you're busted in this situation? Hide? Run? Kill a terrorist, who is also an ally?

It isn't just about access either. You'll also receive extra gear from the terrorists in your efforts the more they trust you. You'll even find the terrorists are friendlier with you when you're just hanging around the HQ. There might even be a lady terrorist to get friendly with, if you know what I mean (but no, don't expect any invitations for some hot coffee in this house). But the price of all this is more limited support from the government side of the equation.

If you swing the other way and focus on the government missions, you'll find greater support from the good guys. Both sides will have high-tech gear on offer, but with quite different functions that make the way you have to play quite a different experience. And if you go this way, terrorists in the HQ will give you crap for your mission failures.

In other areas of the game, you'll be given side missions that appear out of nowhere. If you see a bus

Alter the incriminating audio file.
20/40

SPLINTER CELL ON PSP PSP doesn't get the latest storyline for its Splinter Cell game, but instead is set to see 'Splinter Cell: Essentials' deliver a storyline that takes you on a journey through the life of our main man Sam Fisher. Featuring a 'best of' approach to missions along with new content through to the current story timing and even beyond (was that a spoiler that Sam doesn't die in SC4?), we got some hands-on with this one and it played like one of the best action games I've had the chance to touch (albeit briefly) on the platform. With a port of the full PS2 engine, the graphics look pretty damn good for a handheld, and the controls were also decent considering the lack of a second thumbstick. Just a couple of minutes and it was comfortable to use. As comfortable as that analogue stick gets, that is. For the limited time I got to check this one out, it seems an interesting story angle to take with a nice handheld transition. Expected play length was around 13-15 hours. As long as it doesn't get too same-ish after a few levels, it could be a very important title for the PSP market.

Wife beater — Sam as bad guy

Your friendly neighbourhood Spider-Sam

crash and hear a mother scream for her child, will you jump in and save them? If you see an execution squad in a war zone, will you get involved? These kinds of extras will help your government standing out to keep you in balance, and for the perfectionists you'll need to do all of these missions if you are to go for a perfect completion rate.

IMPACT

It's clear they have really made a big play for forcing you to understand the consequence of every decision you make in the game. More than ever before, SC4 is about delivering a deep story experience that resonates with real emotional impact. And the team laid things bare as to just how far they want to push the player.

Example: Very early in the game, there is a choice of whether to kill a guy in the very unfortunate 'wrong place, wrong time' scenario. This is one of those rites of passage the terrorists place before you — shoot the guy to get some acceptance. Sure thing? No problem? It's just a game? There is the obvious division in choice we've already discussed. If you don't, you'll have a harder time getting HQ access rights. If you do, you'll lose some of your government standing. But when they demo'ed the scene you got to see they are not messing around with death at a distance. You are handed a gun and before you kneels a man bound and gagged, his eyes pleading with you to let him live. The direction of the scene is pretty powerful stuff and, according to Chris Smith, about 70 per cent of playtesters didn't pull the trigger. This is one of those scenes you realise needs to be seen to be really understood — expect this Splinter Cell to mess with your head. You will constantly be asked to choose between two evils in your quest to save the world.

JUICY TECH STUFF

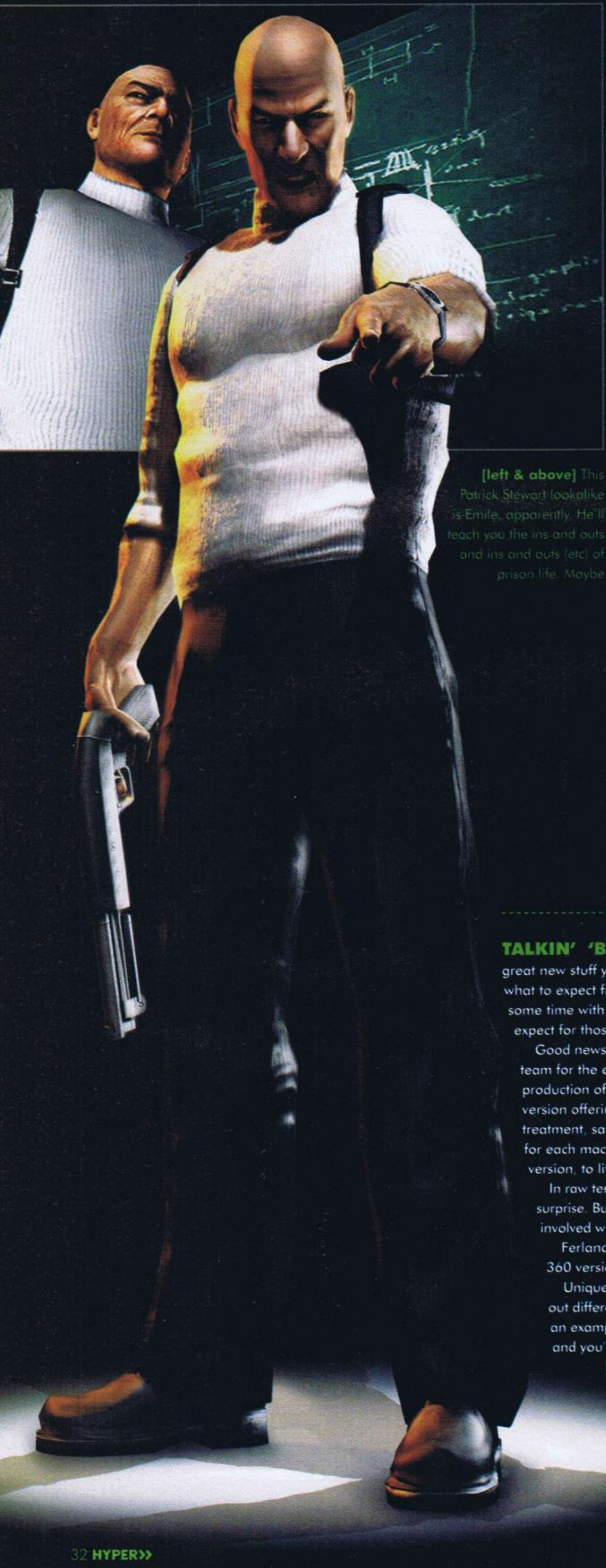
Technical development did not start until after the story writing had been given its dues. After that point, Ubisoft took the impressive step of having dedicated teams for current and next generation consoles. This means the game itself will be quite different depending on the platform you choose — each telling the story in a way that suits that console best. It's an admirable step, no doubt with some serious additional costs in development, with teams in both Shanghai and Canada effectively delivering multiple games based on the same script.

Of course, it is great to get a

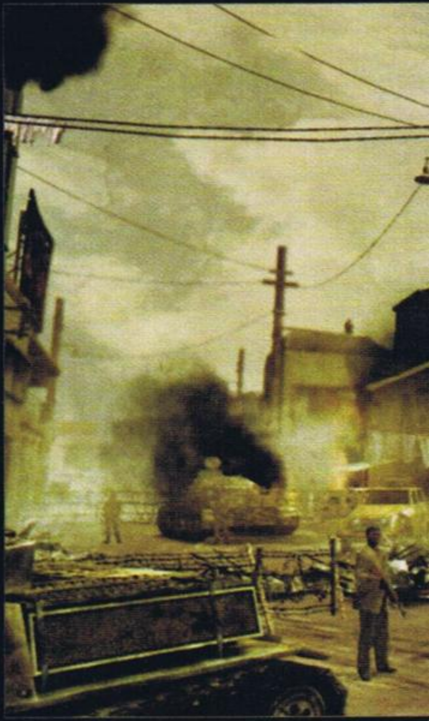
WHAT? NO GOGGLES? **Dear lord! You'll actually play a lot of this game as Sam sans goggles! The fact is, only the craziest of fans will seriously find this to be a bad thing. Chris Smith has his say:**

"With the goggles, you can see the room 100%. Without the goggles, you can still see a distant light and there will be some reflection from that light with the new lighting engine. So you can still just pick out the character. The idea is that you can still manipulate your avatar, but you are in the dark. If the area is not reflecting, you won't know what is in those corners and dark spaces, nor how deep those spaces are. So it's not that the goggles are going, it's just that we've got better gameplay to offer."

When you have them, the goggle gameplay has been enhanced with improved imaging. So when you do don them, expect them to be the best damn goggles this side of Goggletown.



[left & above] This Patrick Stewart lookalike is Emile, apparently. He'll teach you the ins and outs and ins and outs (etc) of prison life. Maybe



good idea of a big step forward for the franchise no matter what the machine, the meat we were really after was just what kind of step up we can expect from the next generation experience. And it was pretty clear this isn't going to just be some graphical bump with some nice tech demos pretending to be a new game. This will be Splinter Cell as you've never been able to play it before. The graphics speak for themselves — we're talking new modelling to fit the skins to deliver some spectacular looks, with more than 170 separate characters in the game. But graphics are what we expect from next gen updates. Here are some of the really big details you just have to drool over.

So many people: No more picking off the bad guys a few at a time due to technical constraints on how many can appear in any one room. This time around, expect up to 50 guys in a room at one time! We got to see a section of the prison breakout with what looked like a pretty big crowd causing a riot. Apparently this was a small area.

Dynamic cover: The new engine has delivered some great benefits in what kind of stealth cover can really exist. With particle physics now in their hot hands, the devs are delivering some amazing uses of smoke, fire and snow storms so you can be hidden in full view. Take out a guard right in his face without breaking stealth? You bet! Oh yeah, and did someone say full daylight missions? One war scene we got to see a run through of offered dynamic cover as vehicles exploded around you.

Good enemy AI: On both sides of the fence, we're now talking about AI that really works. In the same war scene mentioned above, you're running through an African civil war

TALKIN' 'BOUT THIS GENERATION The event was heavily focused on coverage of all the great new stuff you can expect from the Xbox 360 version of the franchise, so gleaning all the goss on what to expect from the current gen was a bit like going on one of Sam's missions. We did get to spend some time with Mathieu Ferland, Senior Producer for the Xbox version, to get a good sense of what to expect for those not going for the instant upgrade in March.

Good news for current gen fans, particularly the PS2 crew, is that not only was there a dedicated team for the entire current gen development process, there was even a separation in teams for the production of Xbox and PS2 versions. Each game can expect about 40% unique content, with each version offering an experience tailored to the strengths of that machine (GameCube doesn't get this treatment, sadly. They will get a version based on the PS2 code). Maps designs were not just tweaked for each machine, but were developed to suit each console. There was particular attention to the PS2 version, to lift the experience on what has in the past been the more neglected console.

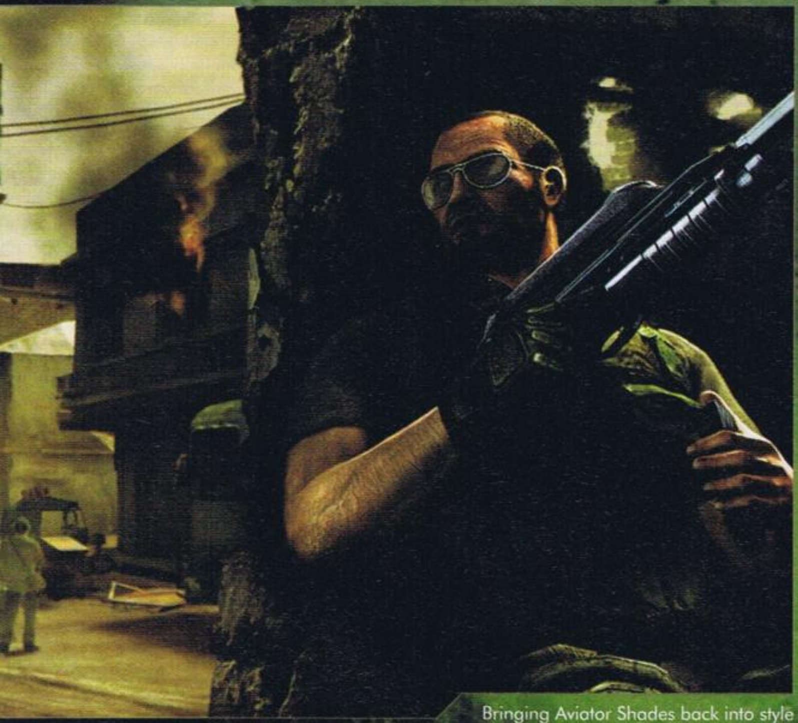
In raw terms, the sequence we got to look at looked better on Xbox than PS2 — not exactly a surprise. But it was great to see things did feel custom built for each, giving a hint to the distinct work involved with creating the best game they could at every turn.

Ferland was keen to point out that while all the attention will no doubt be heaped upon the 360 version, in many ways that spurred his team on to try and show the next gen team up.

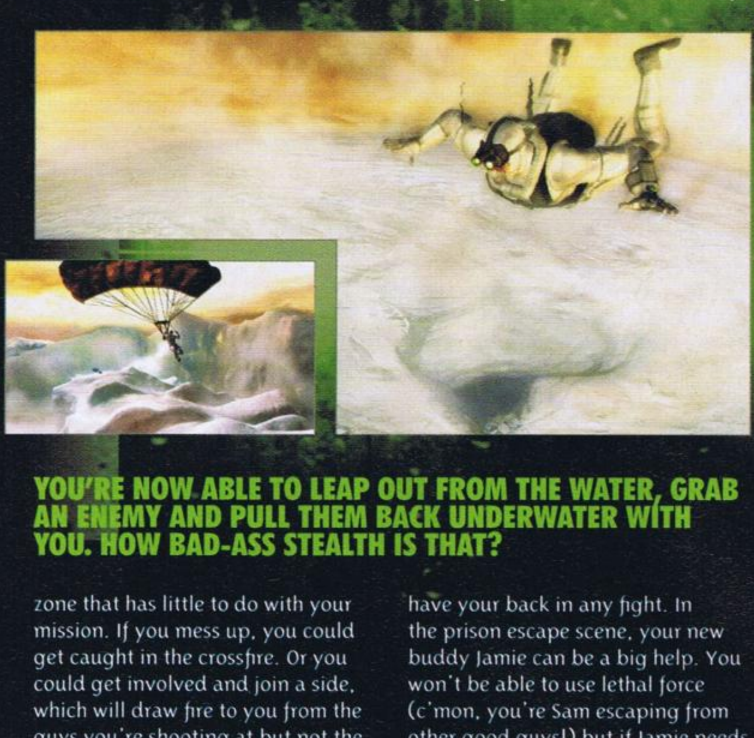
Unique to the current generation is a co-op campaign mode, which is a nice score. This will play out differently from the standard format in some ways. The riot and prison breakout sequence as an example, if you are playing solo on current gen then the riot has begun. Play the co-op version and you'll have to get the riot started yourself before you move on.

It is still difficult to pin down exactly how different the game will be on the two generations and it will make for an interesting study in game design once they're both available — it seems they could be so different they demand two reviews. Clearly, the story will be essentially identical, with the same emotional elements and the same new creative gameplay ideas appearing across all versions.

Where you can expect to see differences are in some of the grander concepts. Don't expect much daylight play on the current gen, and don't expect 50 man rooms. You'll get more of a focus on the closer range, darker stuff here. But it will still be a very new Splinter Cell experience.



Bringing Aviator Shades back into style



YOU'RE NOW ABLE TO LEAP OUT FROM THE WATER, GRAB AN ENEMY AND PULL THEM BACK UNDERWATER WITH YOU. HOW BAD-ASS STEALTH IS THAT?

zone that has little to do with your mission. If you mess up, you could get caught in the crossfire. Or you could get involved and join a side, which will draw fire to you from the guys you're shooting at but not the other side.

Good co-op AI: Chris Smith held this up as a personal bugbear — he hates games where a co-op AI gets you killed because it is so damn stupid, particularly in stealth action like Splinter Cell. This time out, if you have a friendly AI companion, they will use stealth very well — maybe even better than you. They will only break stealth or engage if you do, and they will genuinely have your back in any fight. In the prison escape scene, your new buddy Jamie can be a big help. You won't be able to use lethal force (c'mon, you're Sam escaping from other good guys!) but if Jamie needs to get involved in a fight, he will. He's a terrorist, after all.

Multiple mission paths: With the improved AI, the days of cheating with level design is over. If Sam can physically do something (jump a rail, climb a roof, through a window, whatever) then he can do it. There will be multiple paths through levels, giving you excellent value for trying out different things in missions you might be having trouble with. This also includes a lot of freedom to explore terrain in a search for an optimal line of attack.

Sweet new moves: The greater engine physics adds all kinds of new elements to the way you'll be delivering sweet death to your foes. One great new ability that came out of a chat with the two lead producers is being able to leap out from the water, grab an enemy and pull them back underwater with you. How bad-ass stealth is that? Maybe not quite as good, though, as an ice level where you will be able to swim beneath an ice surface. You'll be looking at enemies directly above you standing on the ice. Take out your knife to break through and deliver sweet death from below as you pull them under to drown them. Tell me that isn't cool! (Cool? Get it? Never mind...)

You'll also be looking at some cool new sequences that aren't exactly in the middle of all out gameplay, but will give you directorial control while a certain scene is being set up. This will help you get more enjoyment out of some of those classic game scenes where there is a lot of exposition in the story that you just need to hang around for. The coolest of these we got to see was a parachute jump where you can perform some nice aerial acrobatics on your way down. You also have control of the camera. Just don't forget to pull the rip cord!

THE ZOO

Impressed? You should be. Sam is looking mighty lean and mean here in his fourth trip to the zoo. For a number four, it is clear the team at Ubisoft is damn keen to deliver something that gives the Splinter Cell franchise a fresh dose of life.

Julian Gerighty, Co-Producer on Xbox 360, pointed out they're laying it on the line in their push toward something new. "Here we are doing a different story and we are playing around with the biggest franchise Ubisoft has got. Management may hate us when the game launches, but we've had a great time with it. It is a breath of fresh air for us as well as, we hope, for gamers."

From what we got to see, they don't have much to fear. Splinter Cell 4 is looking damn good. Now, where is that gun? I want me an upgrade for the trip home. <<

KEEPING SEQUELS INTERESTING We asked Chris Smith and Julian Gerighty, the Xbox 360 Offline Game Designer and Xbox 360 Co-Producer respectively how they kept their excitement levels high for the fourth game in the series...

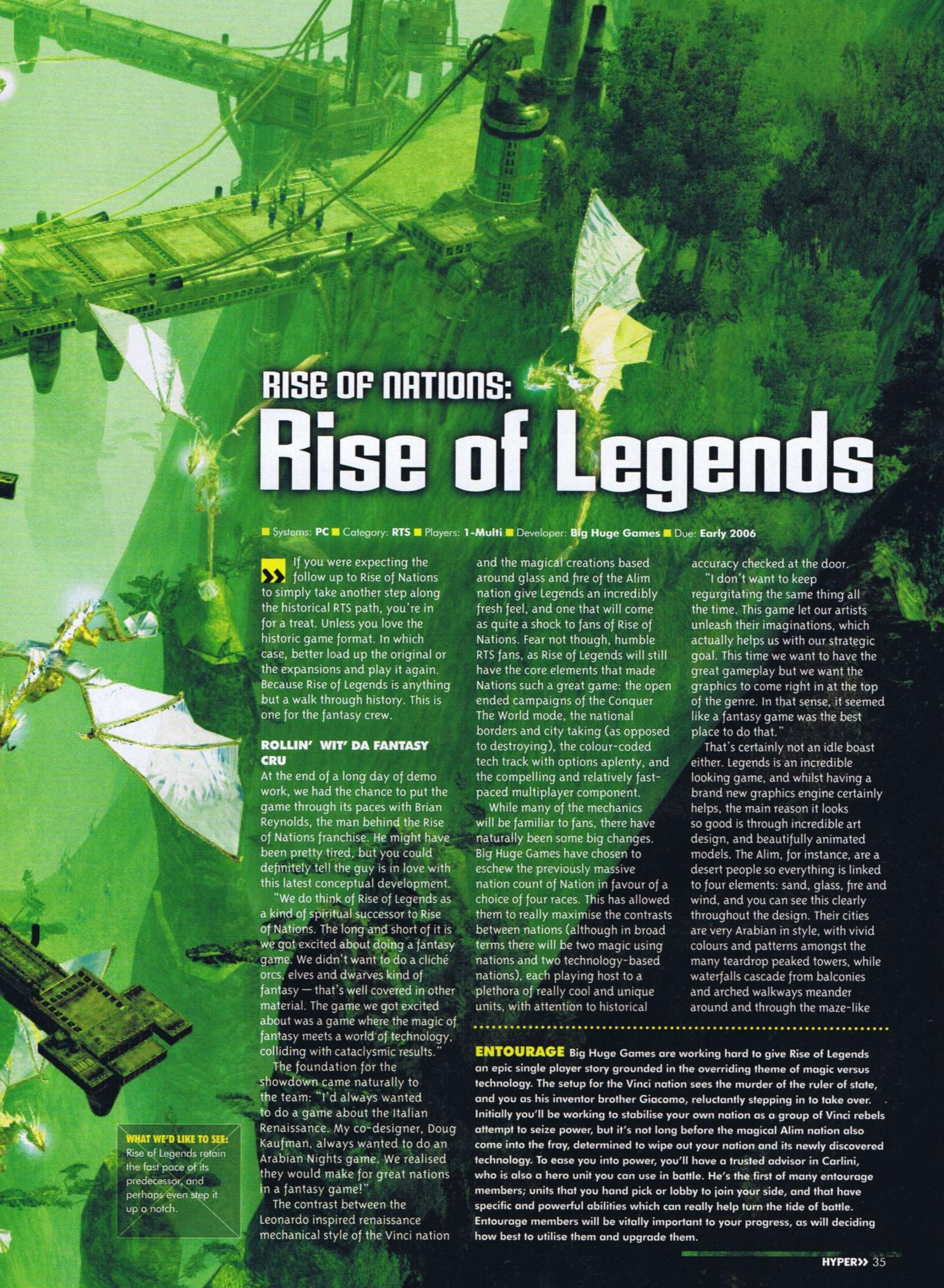
Julian: What is great on the team is that no one is jaded. When you get to the fourth episode on a franchise, Tomb Raider being a great example, people are tired of working on it and doing the same things. Something that is exciting on this team — and mainly thanks to the concept and the new technology as well — is that we can do different things!

Chris: For the industry as a whole, I think Resident Evil 4 was a flagship way of how to reinvent yourself. I love Resident Evil, but even I was getting a bit bored with them. So with Resident Evil 4 I was like, okay, this is the last time! I swear! I bought it, and I didn't sleep for a night!

Julian: That for me, and for many others on the team, is THE way to do a number four. The way to reinvent yourself. I'm a hardcore Resident Evil fan. I love the old style of gameplay. I was kind of disappointed that they were changing things, like all the hardcore fans often are. No more zombies!?! How could you do this to me Capcom!? They're zombies, okay? They're in a different context!

You find something that is really fresh, really new, and keep the spirit and emotions of what has gone before. For me, it's the model. We'd already been working on the same philosophies behind our game before theirs came out. When it came out we felt that validated the direction we were taking.

Chris: I think all the big action titles realise they can't rest on their laurels. As great as they all are, it does get boring unless you decide to stop being so precious. Sam doesn't have to have his goggles! The reaction so far has been, yeah, that is cool. But what does it mean? As designers, that's another thing. You have to ask those questions yourselves and if you've got experienced people they can take you beyond the gaming clichés. In my mind, if I've seen it in another game, I've got to do better.



RISE OF NATIONS:

Rise of Legends

■ Systems: **PC** ■ Category: **RTS** ■ Players: **1-Multi** ■ Developer: **Big Huge Games** ■ Due: **Early 2006**

If you were expecting the follow up to Rise of Nations to simply take another step along the historical RTS path, you're in for a treat. Unless you love the historic game format. In which case, better load up the original or the expansions and play it again. Because Rise of Legends is anything but a walk through history. This is one for the fantasy crew.

ROLLIN' WIT' DA FANTASY CRU

At the end of a long day of demo work, we had the chance to put the game through its paces with Brian Reynolds, the man behind the Rise of Nations franchise. He might have been pretty tired, but you could definitely tell the guy is in love with this latest conceptual development.

"We do think of Rise of Legends as a kind of spiritual successor to Rise of Nations. The long and short of it is we got excited about doing a fantasy game. We didn't want to do a cliché orcs, elves and dwarves kind of fantasy — that's well covered in other material. The game we got excited about was a game where the magic of fantasy meets a world of technology, colliding with cataclysmic results."

The foundation for the showdown came naturally to the team: "I'd always wanted to do a game about the Italian Renaissance. My co-designer, Doug Kaufman, always wanted to do an Arabian Nights game. We realised they would make for great nations in a fantasy game!"

The contrast between the Leonardo inspired renaissance mechanical style of the Vinci nation and the magical creations based around glass and fire of the Alim nation give Legends an incredibly fresh feel, and one that will come as quite a shock to fans of Rise of Nations. Fear not though, humble RTS fans, as Rise of Legends will still have the core elements that made Nations such a great game: the open ended campaigns of the Conquer The World mode, the national borders and city taking (as opposed to destroying), the colour-coded tech track with options aplenty, and the compelling and relatively fast-paced multiplayer component.

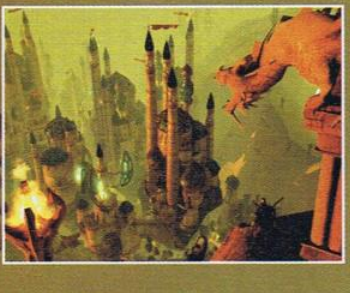
While many of the mechanics will be familiar to fans, there have naturally been some big changes. Big Huge Games have chosen to eschew the previously massive nation count of Nation in favour of a choice of four races. This has allowed them to really maximise the contrasts between nations (although in broad terms there will be two magic using nations and two technology-based nations), each playing host to a plethora of really cool and unique units, with attention to historical accuracy checked at the door.

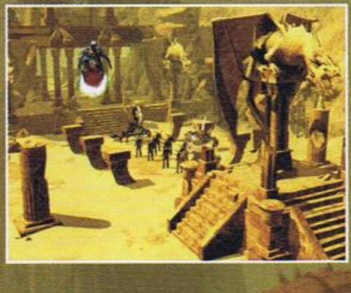
"I don't want to keep regurgitating the same thing all the time. This game let our artists unleash their imaginations, which actually helps us with our strategic goal. This time we want to have the great gameplay but we want the graphics to come right in at the top of the genre. In that sense, it seemed like a fantasy game was the best place to do that."

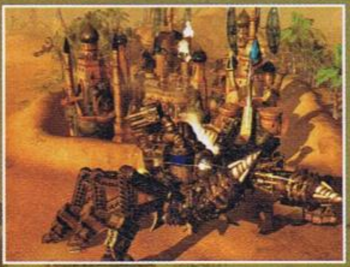
That's certainly not an idle boast either. Legends is an incredible looking game, and whilst having a brand new graphics engine certainly helps, the main reason it looks so good is through incredible art design, and beautifully animated models. The Alim, for instance, are a desert people so everything is linked to four elements: sand, glass, fire and wind, and you can see this clearly throughout the design. Their cities are very Arabian in style, with vivid colours and patterns amongst the many teardrop peaked towers, while waterfalls cascade from balconies and arched walkways meander around and through the maze-like

WHAT WE'D LIKE TO SEE: Rise of Legends retain the fast pace of its predecessor, and perhaps even step it up a notch.

ENTOURAGE Big Huge Games are working hard to give Rise of Legends an epic single player story grounded in the overriding theme of magic versus technology. The setup for the Vinci nation sees the murder of the ruler of state, and you as his inventor brother Giacomo, reluctantly stepping in to take over. Initially you'll be working to stabilise your own nation as a group of Vinci rebels attempt to seize power, but it's not long before the magical Alim nation also come into the fray, determined to wipe out your nation and its newly discovered technology. To ease you into power, you'll have a trusted advisor in Carlini, who is also a hero unit you can use in battle. He's the first of many entourage members; units that you hand pick or lobby to join your side, and that have specific and powerful abilities which can really help turn the tide of battle. Entourage members will be vitally important to your progress, as will deciding how best to utilise them and upgrade them.







[up] Totally Weird Floating Guy, as Malky calls him
[left] Wicky wild, wicky wild wild west weird spider thing

city structure. Their units are just as mythical and magic infused, ranging from men mounted on massive scorpions to glass dragons.

In gameplay terms, the fact that the Alim use magic means that they can quickly materialise units into existence and move troops from point to point instantly. This kind of tech means you can quickly summon large numbers of troops but like the Zerg they're quite weak. The Vinci, on the other hand, are a contrast to the Alim in almost all regards. Their units are a reflection of their technology - zeppelins, giant clockwork men, mechanical spiders and helicopters with rotating cloth blades, all with pipes, springs, gears and pulleys. This flows through into a higher time and cost to create units, but ultimately they're going to be stronger than Alim units.

THE PHYSICS OF GAMEPLAY

Another aspect of the game that jumped out in the demo was the whole new way of looking at the city structure for an RTS. Gone is the monkeying about with various buildings near each other. Say hello to cities where every building actually attaches to the central structure, making for a single structure that can look quite different based on how you decide to put it together. The cities, you see, are comprised of districts — areas devoted to things like military, guild, merchant and palace uses, and as you play, more districts are added. Thus, cities can vary hugely - obviously a city with several merchant districts is going to be different to one that's focused on the military, and this isn't just an aesthetic distinction; it's a reflection of how you play.

Beyond the cities, the physics engine allows for bridge construction — and destruction. Maps can get very 3D, with some serious chasms and cliffs to make for many new strategic play options. There is a real sense that the 3D engine isn't just for a pretty face. There's some real gameplay benefit — some brains behind the sexy body.

Another stand out in the looks department is a more engaging feel to the camera work. During one heated battle scene, we had the in-game camera set to a slow rotation that added a great sense of drama to the scenario.

"You can turn off the interface if you want, too. There are a few options to unclutter things, because I think people like to enjoy the cinematic nature of it."

TOTAL DOMINATION!

Another stand out development is the idea of dominance. Reynolds explains it best.

"Let's say I'm the first one to reach level two in a technology. This opens up a new power only I will have as long as I retain craft dominance. Dominances are gained in different ways. Controlling the most territory. Doing the most raiding. Having the most resources. You can gain some really useful powers."

We tested the theory with resource dominance. We queued up a batch of Vinci flying units and at first they just started being produced as normal. By activating our resource dominance power, all the units popped out straight away. Any RTS fan knows just how intimidating that can be — the kind of multiplayer move that will have enemies weeping at their keyboard.

All in all, there is a real sense of 'the epic' in the way the units engage. There is nothing small fry in the way units get their war on and as you get into the bigger units, things definitely heat up. Reynolds was clearly into the epic engagement thing too.

"You want it to be satisfying! It's funny, sometimes the artist will come up with something where there is this big giant unit and it kind of goes 'tink, tink'. We say no! I want to fill the screen with missiles and blow things sky high!"

The game has its hero units and some pretty fierce 'master units' to get serious with in the endgame. The Vinci Land Leviathan is a giant mechanical spider-like force of destruction, while the Alim Glass Dragon is just as fierce, with a sun-focusing death ray that just begged to be used again and again and again.

Rise of Legends definitely seems like a solid evolution on the already solid pedigree of Nations before it. The fantasy concepts were an exciting development and should appeal to the fantasy junkie in all of us, especially running on the game's brand spanking new graphics engine. Reynolds was coy on the subject of timing, sticking to the 'early 2006' time frame while cheekily suggesting this means either Q1 or Q2. If they take a little longer and really get this right, it should be worth the wait.

Seamus Byrne

THE VINCI CITIES ARE A MIX OF THE OPPRESSIVENESS OF VICTORIAN ENGLAND AND THE MECHANICAL DESIGNS OF DA VINCI WITH A DASH OF RENAISSANCE

ORCS AND ELVES BE GONE! Big Huge Games were determined to move beyond typical fantasy fare for Rise of Legends, and the Vinci nation is a great example of the way they approached that goal. This technology-based nation was chiefly inspired by Leonardo Da Vinci – in particular his many mechanical sketches and concepts. These covered everything from weapons of war through to flying machines and practical devices, and are perfect fodder for an RTS, giving the units a skewed steampunk style that's at once fantastical and yet grounded in reality. This also follows through to the Vinci cities – they're a mix of the oppressiveness of Victorian England circa the Industrial Revolution and the mechanical designs of Da Vinci from a pre-electricity era with a dash of the Renaissance. Thus, everything is dark and metallic (in stark contrast to the rich colours and patterns of the Alim), with great huge pipes strangling buildings like the progeny of a mechanical spider and a pipe organ.

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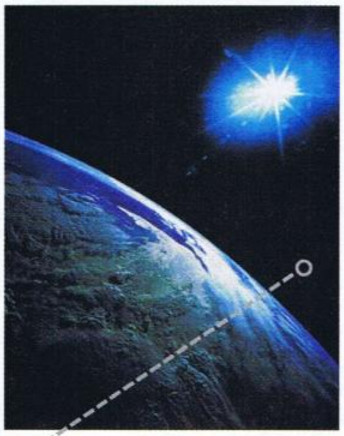

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LARA CROFT TOMB RAIDER: LEGEND

Systems: **PC, PS2, Xbox, Xbox 360** ■ Category: **Action adventure** ■ Players: **1** ■ Developer: **Crystal Dynamics** ■ Due: **Early-mid '06**

>> Before we begin, a few words on Tomb Raider: Angel of Darkness. Boring. Hard to control. Random Eurotash boyfriend. Set in cities. I feel stronger now. Lets stop there before I get too pissed off... damn, too late. You feel stronger now? You couldn't open a door before pushing a rock that somehow fed your top heavy body full of steroids giving you enough power to turn a stupid doorknob? Screw you Lara Croft, you wasted valuable hours of our lives that could have been used for cleaning the grouting in the shower or explaining to a flatmate that when the bill is due now, that doesn't mean in a few weeks.

GROSS TREPIDATION

To say we had a little trepidation when it came to seeing Tomb Raider: Legend would be something of a gross understatement. We were expecting something like Angel of Darkness and Cam was all ready to vent his spleen (and other unsavoury organs) to any who would listen. Thankfully he did not have to. Legend is, from what we've seen, a fine return to form. Even better yet, it's a fine return to the caves and jungles that should comprise the levels, not dingy Parisian streets. It's a new team and a new look and so far it's all good.

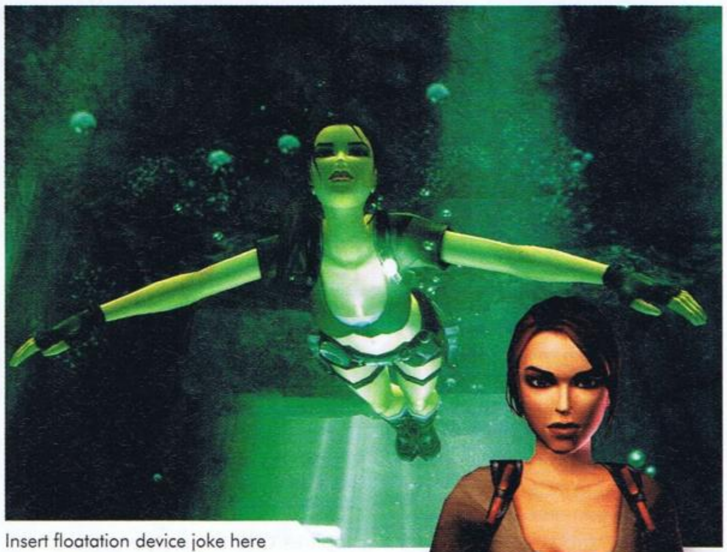
Lara Croft taught us about the innate goodness of shooting endangered species and defiling ancient civilisations. It's good to see that after a long period of posturing that they wanted to "take Lara back to her roots" that developer Crystal Dynamics is living up to their promise. The first level we were shown, a tutorial of sorts not only introduced us to the new mechanics of the game but also to the new look. Legend is gorgeous on PS2 and we can only guess how good it will look in the recently announced Xbox 360 version. Those of you used to the old school running, jumping and switch flicking of Tomb Raider will be in for a bit of a surprise — the new movement mechanics of Legend makes it more on par with Prince of Persia. Within seconds of the level loading we witnessed Lara shimmying along ledges, jumping from ledge to ledge, swinging on hanging vines, using her new magnetic grapple to swing over gaps and move heavy obstacles, using physics to solve puzzles (push a rock from a ledge to counterbalance a fallen tree balanced across a rock), fight some guards, steal some artefacts and generally navigate the landscape in a way in which we have never really seen her do before. We were sold.

The grapple, though it may only seem like a small thing is something of a revelation, allowing Lara to access areas otherwise inaccessible as well as interact with the environment in a meaningful way. The first level we saw hinted that the grapple will be instrumental in solving a number of puzzles such as attaching it to an object to

LARA CROFT TAUGHT US ABOUT THE INNATE GOODNESS OF SHOOTING ENDANGERED SPECIES AND DEFILING ANCIENT CIVILISATIONS

WHAT WE'D LIKE TO SEE:
Although we hated Lara in Paris, rumour has it she may travel to Japan in this version. That might not suck.

"Still rather impressive in the booby area" - Wilks



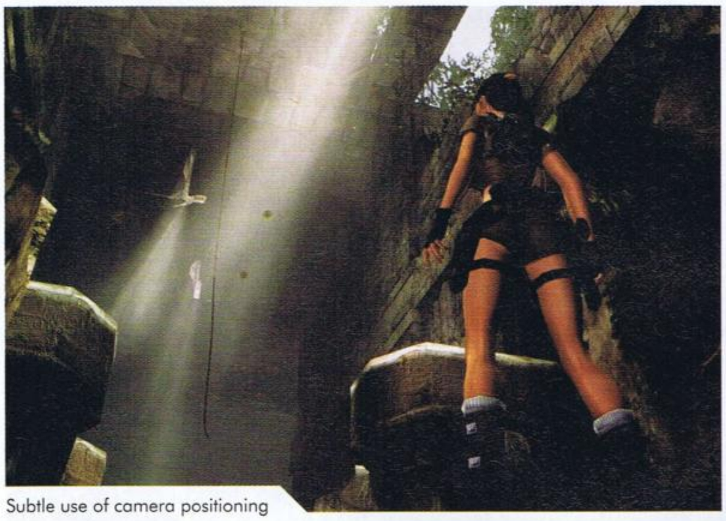
Insert floatation device joke here

give extra leverage to move it or pulling from a long range/otherwise inaccessible area. From what we've seen the grapple can also be used in combat to drag enemies closer to Lara – something that proved to be rather effective in one situation we were shown where the enemy was on the other side of a chasm. It's very satisfying not being the one to fall to your death in a Tomb Raider game. We have a feeling that the grapple will become one of the defining traits of the new game; certainly not a bad thing in our books.

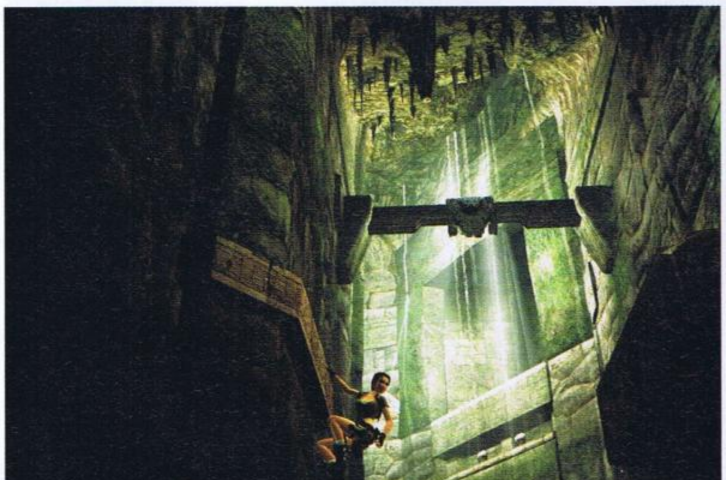
LESS SILICONE?

Lara's look has also been revamped for the new game. She's more human looking than most of the previous titles with a body veering more towards the athletic rather than the pneumatic. Never fear, she is still rather impressive in the booby area but her animations make her move much more like a person instead of a top heavy action figure. The new engine is looking impressive all round with some truly beautiful environments and backgrounds as well as an impressive "organic" feel to the levels – no matter if a level is just one big movement puzzle a-la Prince of Persia, it looks like an ancient overgrown city rather than a series of platforms to jump from to reach the gate at the other side.

In all of the goodness that we saw there was one thing that left us slightly dubious in the end. Tomb Raider: Legend seems to have a rather strong emphasis on gunplay. We have no idea whether that's just some of the work in progress levels that we've been shown or if it's indicative of the game as a whole. Whilst an emphasis on combat isn't a bad decision in and of itself (it will most likely be a big draw for a mass market crowd), too much shooting could detract from the movement puzzles and other puzzle solving mechanics of the rest of the game. As always we will reserve our final judgement until we get our hands on some finished code but our fingers are crossed that the gunplay will serve to emphasise the movement and level design instead of becoming a defining gameplay mechanic. <<



Subtle use of camera positioning



Princess of Persia

HITMAN: BLOOD MONEY

Systems: **PC, PS2, Xbox** ■ Category: **Hitman sim** ■ Players: **1** ■ Developer: **Io Interactive** ■ Due: **Early 2006**

>> Everyone's favourite barcoded baldy is making his way back to console and PC but this time it's all about the filthy lucre. You could say that any sequel to a game is about the money but in the case of the new Hitman it's 100% true. Although containing a more coherent story than the previous games, Blood Money is about the cash – how 47 makes it and what he does with it. Telling the story of Agent 47's antagonism with a rival agency that are determined to cull the competition both figuratively and literally, Hitman: Blood Money is taking a different approach than the last three games in the series, making his outings a much more mercenary affair than before.

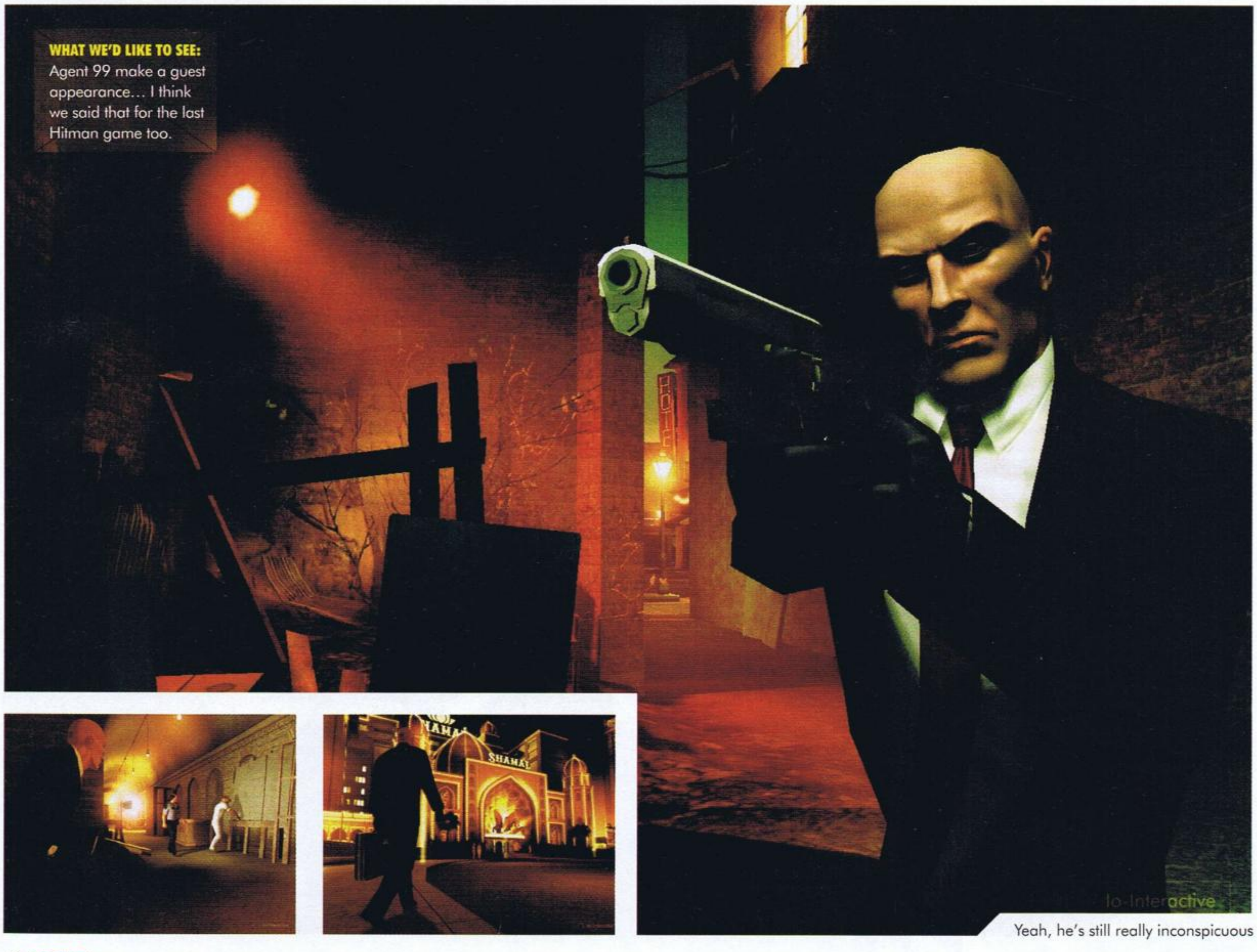
THE BENJAMINS

Money makes the world go round in Hitman – you need it to buy weapons and upgrade them, making it easier to make money by killing people. It's a never-ending cycle (at least for the 13 levels that will comprise the final game) but one that will impact on all of the gameplay. On a basic level money will be used to buy and modify weapons for your hits. Each weapon available should have ten or more modifications that can be purchased, such as a larger ammo capacity, silencers, scopes or laser sights as well as some more exotic (and expensive) modifications such as making them invisible to metal detectors. Weapon modifications will carry over between missions so you will be better able to decide on tactics due to weapons and modifications you already own. Money will also be usable in game to purchase hints from your handler.

Spending money is all well and good but you have to be able to make it first. As a hitman, Agent 47 makes his money through killing people but sometimes just getting the job done is not enough. Whilst you could simply plant an explosive in a room that the target will be in and blow up all and sundry, that type of killing leaves a mess; and a trail that can lead back to the contractor. Not only will you not make as much money as you potentially could, killing in this way can also lead to 47 developing a fearsome reputation, making subsequent missions harder due to him being recognised for being the tall and follically challenged sociopath he is, and having the AI react in a fitting manner. Never fear though – if you do screw the proverbial pooch, money can once again come to your rescue; you will be able to use your ill gotten gains to pay off some of the witnesses between missions.

WHILE YOU COULD SIMPLY BLOW UP ALL AND SUNDRY, THAT TYPE OF KILLING LEAVES A MESS; AND A TRAIL THAT CAN LEAD BACK TO THE CONTRACTOR

In a nice touch, Eidos have also announced that after launch there will be a worldwide competition for owners of the console versions of the game, including a ranking system for players, with categories such as Highest Paid, Most Wanted, Fastest, Most Accurate, Creates the Most Accidents and yes, the Best Hitman overall. You might even win yourself a sweet prize. <<



WHAT WE'D LIKE TO SEE:
Agent 99 make a guest appearance... I think we said that for the last Hitman game too.

Yeah, he's still really inconspicuous

COMMANDOS STRIKE FORCE

Systems: **PC, PS2, Xbox** Category: **FPS** Players: **1-16** Developer: **Pyros** Due: **Early 2006**

>> Say goodbye to the Commandos you once knew. Forget top down perspectives, strategy focused gameplay and often hair pulling frustration, and say hello to the STRIKE FORCE. The sniper extraordinaire Lieutenant Will "shine ya boots govna" Hawkins, the Green Beret Captain "tough as the toughest nails that were ever tough" O'Brien, and the spy Colonel "Creepy McSilent" Brown. Put them together and they form dum dum dum daa the STRIKE FORCE!

TAKE DOWN NAZIS

No, despite the caps they're not a super hero team, but three allies working to take down the Nazis alongside the French Resistance, as well as journeying to Stalingrad and Norway during World War II. Strike Force very much retains the series' gritty approach to the subject matter, but moves to a first person perspective and gives you the chance to switch between the three characters on the fly (depending on who's taking part in each mission of course). The concept is solid: each character has his own areas of expertise, so although cloaked in the garb of a relatively traditional WWII FPS, you'll theoretically always have a few options in how you approach each situation. The spy can sneak up on and garot guards and switch into their uniforms. The sniper can set himself up in a good position and take out enemies from a distance, but also has a set of knives for close range stealth kills, while the Green Beret is obviously your straight up heavy weapons expert. At this stage we've only played through the early missions in the game, which are quite introductory in approach: hold off a concerted Nazi attack as they storm your position from all sides, using the Green Beret to marshal the troops on the ground while switching to the sniper to take out paratroopers as they land; rescue hostages with the sniper by gradually knifing the Nazi patrols one by one; make your way through enemy troops by stealing uniforms as the spy so you can set charges on gun emplacements and trucks. Each mission has certain victory conditions — don't let them set off the alarm, don't lose too many men and so on. We haven't seen anything too out of the ordinary at the moment, but we're sure that the further into the game the more dynamic the situations will become, and the more you'll have to test multiple approaches to find the best way to get through each mission.

It's definitely strategy-lite, especially when compared to previous Commandos titles, but there are enough elements to distinguish it from most WWII shooters. You have a radar that shows where enemies are, which direction they're facing and how alert they are to your presence, plus you can switch to a third person perspective for a good look at your surroundings, and peek through keyholes before entering rooms. There's a bit more to uniform stealing than you may think too. The higher the rank of uniform you're wearing the more freedom you have — enemies of lower ranks won't spot that you're a spy. Enemies of the same rank will be suspicious however, while enemies of a higher rank will rumble your game immediately. <<

STRIKE FORCE VERY MUCH RETAINS THE SERIES' GRITTY APPROACH, BUT MOVES TO A FIRST PERSON PERSPECTIVE WITH CHARACTER SWITCHING ON THE FLY

WHAT WE'D LIKE TO SEE:
Levels switching between all three characters. To date we've only seen two utilised in any one mission.

Dude. Playing the trombone at them ain't gonna do much...

DARK MESSIAH OF MIGHT AND MAGIC

Systems: **PC** ■ Category: **RPG** ■ Players: **1** ■ Developer: **Arkane Studios** ■ Due: **2006**

>> Arx Fatalis is one of those brilliant games that only a handful of people played. A great story, great mechanics and great looks made it one of the best RPGs to come out in recent years. Unfortunately 2002 is a little too recent for a flashback piece but we've got something even better for you. Dark Messiah of Might and Magic, a radical first person approach to the long running Might and Magic/Heroes of Might and Magic franchise is being made by the same development team responsible for Arx Fatalis. If that's not exciting enough for you then try this on for size; it's being made with the Half-Life 2 engine.

FIRST PERSON RPG?

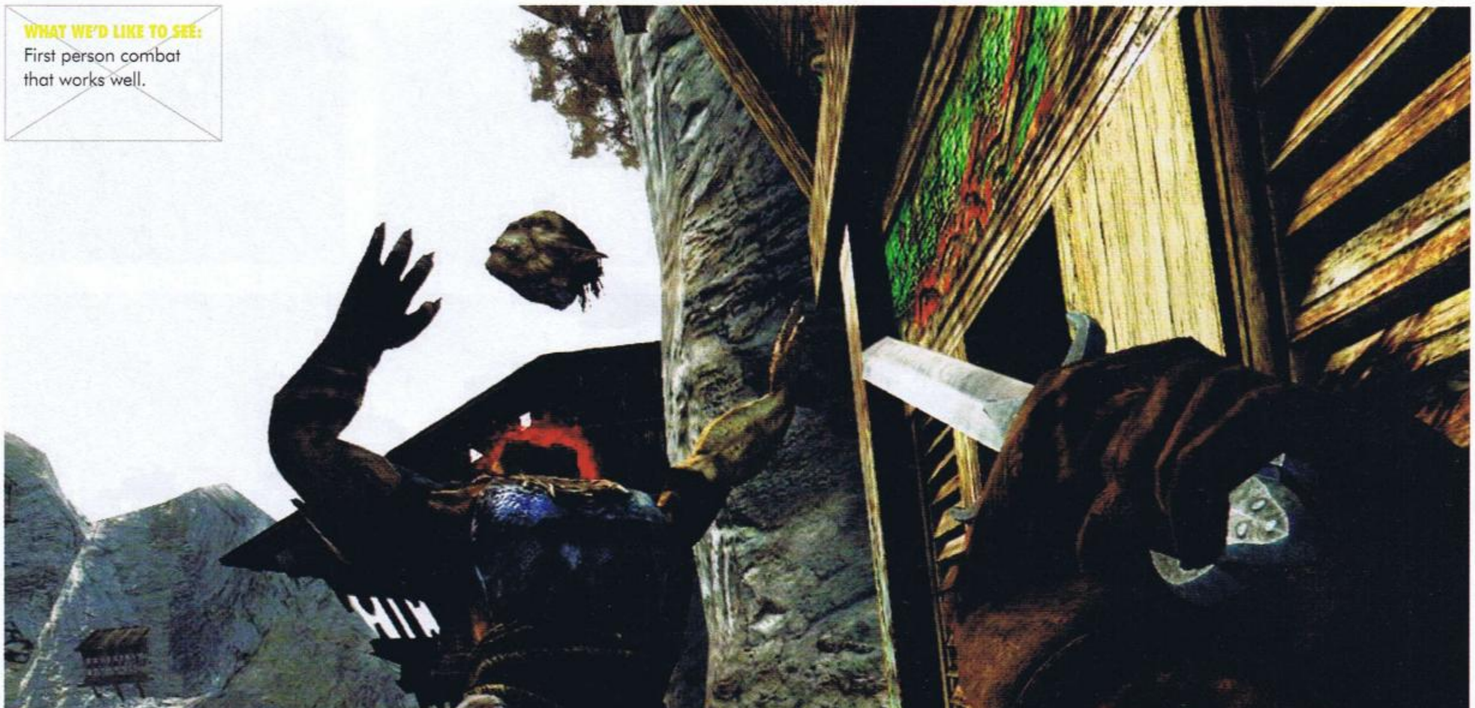
Although the series (and developer) are best known for RPGs, Dark Messiah looks as though it will have more in common with FPS games than the traditional RPG. Presented in first person, the game casts the player as a young apprentice being groomed for... something, who finds himself thrown into a volatile situation when the Dark Messiah returns to break some stuff. We don't know too much of the plot as yet but the action looks rather outstanding. Like any good fantasy setting, the world is rife with combat and magic, two fields in which the player is proficient. Stealth and thievery will also play a role in the game. The overall plan for the gameplay is to present the player with a situation and allow them to deal with it as they see fit; an orc guarding a bridge may be faced head on with a sword, killed from range with a bow and magic, snuck past or even pushed off the edge.

AN ORC GUARDING A BRIDGE MAY BE FACED HEAD ON WITH A SWORD, KILLED FROM RANGE WITH A BOW AND MAGIC, SNUCK PAST OR EVEN PUSHED OFF THE EDGE

Physics and environmental interaction will comprise a great deal of the level design in Dark Messiah. A realistic physics engine will be implemented in all aspects of the game so objects will be able to be picked up and thrown, pushed, swung and what have you. In the footage we've seen, barrels have been rolled into unsuspecting enemy camps, monsters have been shoulder charged off cliffs and massive magical explosions have launched bodies high into the sky. It looks impressive and what's more important, it looks fun.

The only obstacle that Arkane Studios need to tackle to make the game a resounding success will be the first person combat. Melee in first person is a bit of a dicey situation. For every game that has done it well there have been countless others that have implemented the feature poorly. There has to be more to the combat that simply mashing a mouse button. Fingers crossed the developers solve the riddle. <<

WHAT WE'D LIKE TO SEE:
First person combat that works well.

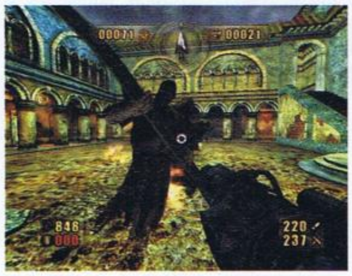


Like popping open a bottle of bubbly

PAINKILLER: HELL WARS

Systems: **Xbox** ■ Category: **FPS** ■ Players: **1-Multi** ■ Developer: **People Can Fly** ■ Due: **Early 2006**

>> 2004's Painkiller for PC was a welcome return to the fast-paced, face-off-against-legions-of-hellspawn old school shooter aesthetic first pioneered by Doom. It was gritty and it was unabashedly singular in its approach — enter room/corridor/arena, shoot the hell out of anything that moves, rinse and repeat. It was also successful enough to warrant an expansion pack, the cheekily titled Battle Out of Hell, and now the Xbox version is close to being finished. As opposed to a straight port, Hell Wars is instead a "best of" title, taking the best levels from the PC original and its expansion pack and letting console owners go nuts. Other than that, there aren't that many changes, but it must be said - this game isn't for people who have played the PC games, it's for the straight-up console market, and as such should do well.



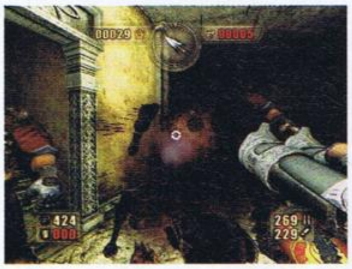
[up] Spanish Villa meets Demon Killa

PRANKING AROUND

The vibe is gritty, the enemies gruesome and the proprietary PAIN graphics engine keeps the action blazing along. One of the coolest aspects of Painkiller is the implementation of Havok 2.0 physics, specifically in the stakegun which actually allows you to pin enemies to the walls and floor. It's not so much an evolution in gameplay as a prankster's paradise, which is cool by us. Of course, aside from stake antics, Havok also brings with it rag dolling, which given the number of enemies you'll face off against, can lead to some hilarious moments as you blow groups of enemies sky high. The weapon lineup keeps the action entertaining too, with five weapons, each with a distinct alt fire. The stakegun has a grenade launcher for instance, while the trusty shottie also doubles as a freeze gun, allowing you to freeze enemies in their tracks then shatter them.

Multiplayer over Xbox Live is going to be one of the game's main selling points. In addition to the requisite Deathmatch, Team Deathmatch and Capture the Flag, it comes packing some interesting modes. There's Voosh, where each player has the same weapon (with infinite ammo) and after a period of play everyone is switched to another weapon. The team have made two maps specifically for this mode and it should be a fun test of skill, as well as a great way to develop techniques for every weapon. Another cool sounding mode is The Light Bearer. In this game type, each map has one quad damage and once you grab it, it never wears off — unless you die that is, in which case you drop it. Whoever has the quad will simultaneously have a huge advantage as well as being a marked man. Last Man Standing is a little less interesting — each player has a number of lives and once you've lost them you become a spectator. In all though, Hell Wars sounds like it will have a lot to offer the Live community when it comes to fast paced old school shooter fun. <<

THE TRUSTY SHOTTIE ALSO DOUBLES AS A FREEZE GUN, ALLOWING YOU TO FREEZE ENEMIES IN THEIR TRACKS THEN SHATTER THEM



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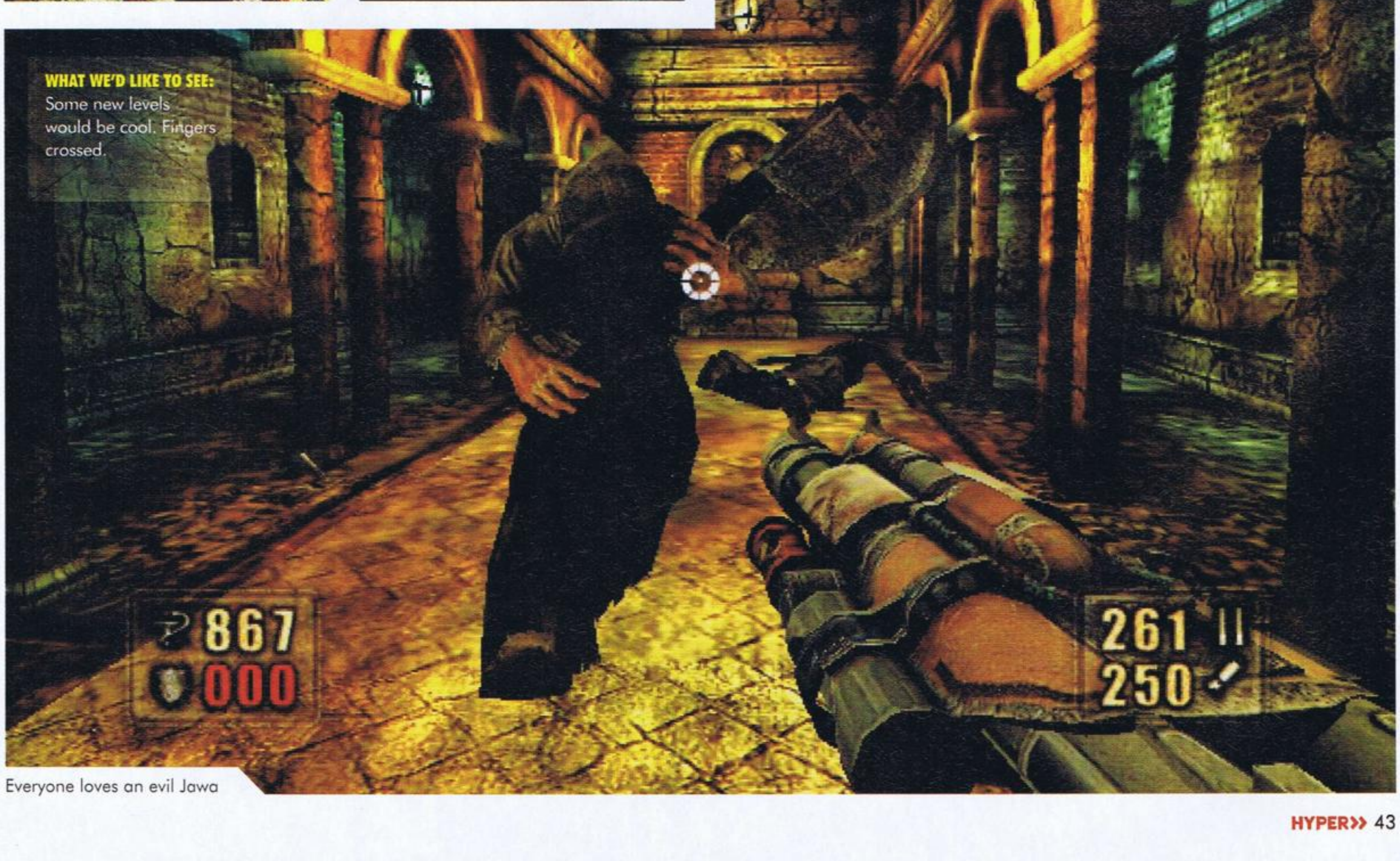


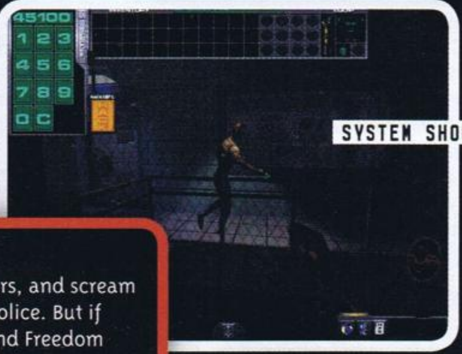
WHAT WE'D LIKE TO SEE: Some new levels would be cool. Fingers crossed.

Everyone loves an evil Jawa

OPEN-ENDED WAR

>>ALEXANDER JAMES BURKE

There's no denying it: it's hip to be square. More importantly, though, it's hip nowadays for games - whether action-based, role-players, or even racers - to be "non-linear." It's written on almost every box that hits the shelves: "Enter a dynamic, non-linear world where YOU make the choices!" That kind of tagline sounds promising at first, until you consider that almost every game lets you make choices, even Pong. So what does non-linearity actually mean? Is it multiple approaches to a single problem, or vice versa?


SYSTEM SHOCK 2

DON'T TRY THIS AT HOME

If you were to go to Ken Levine's house, bang on his doors, and scream the words through his cat-flap, he'd probably call the police. But if you asked nicely, the designer behind System Shock 2 and Freedom Force would tell you this: "My view on non-linearity is, 'when a player fights a monster, let's give him 20 different ways to fight that monster.' The player is given a broad enough set of tools that he has a choice about how to approach problems.

"Something like Deus Ex is a different take on non-linearity. I love Deus Ex, but I'm not convinced about the fact that you need an air-vent to go into, and a front door, and a roof. To me, that's really a geographic choice, and it's much more binary than a 'tool' choice. But Warren Spector chose to put the choices in the physical space. His version of non-linearity is more, 'here is one of three paths you can take', and those paths are geographically defined. I'd much rather put the choice in the player's hands; in his toolset, not his physical space, because I think you get more bang for your buck that way."

Warren Spector, Deus Ex's Project Director, agrees. "I don't know if we could've done much different back then, but Deus Ex was pretty primitive. Our approach to 'reactive environments' was more smoke and mirrors than a lot of people realized at the time. There were a lot of 'build three paths through the map' kind of choices. And we can, and should, do better than that now.

"For instance, I want more player freedom in the context of a cool story than what I'm seeing. As a player I want to craft my own experience in a way I still don't get often enough. And, man, do I want to see more stories and characters and setting that don't make me want to cringe!"

Cringe-worthy storylines are actually a huge problem with open-ended games. After all, it's kind of hard to write the next Atlas Shrugs when you have no idea which choices the player's going to make in your world. As a result, plotlines in most non-linear games tend to be, as Julian "Father of The Elder Scrolls" Lefay put it, "rich and detailed, but strictly vanilla." Rather than having a strong, omnipresent narrative to guide players through gameworlds, plots tend to be comprised mostly of "backstory" or "lore" that the player can pick up/hear/read whenever he chooses to do so. The storyline that actually follows the player's progress through the game is usually more generic than white bread.

Levine hates this. "Here's when a game loses me," he explains, "the opening cutscene starts, and there's some narrator speaking in senatorial tones about The Third Age of the Ugong Dynasty. Whenever you have a disinterested narrator with a ton of proper nouns, I just want to take a nap. That means that some guy came up with this world when he was fourteen, and has been writing about it in his journal since then, and finally has a chance to put it into action. He doesn't care about the gamer, because he thought about these things long before the game. I want to care about the gamer and his experience, not about getting across every little detail of my 12th grade study hall fantasy project."

Admittedly, though, Levine has yet to see a way that a truly open-ended story could be compelling. When you look at Deus Ex or System Shock 2, the narratives of both games are actually perfectly linear. "I can tell you as a story writer," he says, "it's so hard to write one good storyline that making branching storylines is really tough. And also, if you come back to time, you'll have two storylines and the player will only see one of them, and you'll have half as much time to work on one branch and all the things that go with it: the geography, the scripting, the this, the that ... Branches always present that problem."

SYSTEM SHOCK 2

Charles Cecil, Revolution Software's MD and the designer behind Broken Sword, couldn't agree more. "Clearly people want to feel that they're having an effect on the world," he admits, "but at its highest level - at the key plot points - we need to keep control. There's also this business about multiple endings. I think, in general, the games that have multiple endings are the ones with the weakest narratives, because it's difficult to have one great story with three or four different endings. What happens in the beginning and the end should reverberate through the middle, so, if you really care about the structure of the story, then it's not feasible to have three or four endings. But perhaps two.

"When giving the player freedom, I use what I call nodes. Narrative nodes. There are points at which you have a major narrative advance, and at that point, we need to know exactly what the state of the world is. There are subplots going on outside, but all the points pertaining to the main plot, we need to know about. So, what you do is you give people freedom within a node or between nodes, and then you pull them back - without them knowing - and funnel them into a plot point. To tell a great story, you have to know what's going on in the world and you need to keep control."

Levine thinks stories can be less restrictive than this, and also, much more efficient and rewarding than branching storylines. "To me," he says, "branching storylines are 'digital'. I use the terms 'digital' and 'analogue'. 'Digital' is you do this or that. 'Analogue' is you do this group of things or that group of things and they can overlap freely. In Shock 2, choices were much more analogous: you used different weapons and powers in any combination, whereas Deus Ex was 'go down this quarter or that quarter.' I think that's much easier to demo and explain to people, but to me, as a gamer, it's not as rewarding. I love Deus Ex, but I'm just more interested in character growth."

DEUS EX: INVISBLE WAR

The message is simple: if you compare Deus Ex to System Shock 2 ever again, Levine will find you and hurt you. And he has every right to do so, given that you've now seen the ideologically antonymous methods by which games were created. Unfortunately for Levine, though, putting these two games together is the perfect way to illustrate the two dominant schools of thought regarding non-linearity: emergence, as seen in System Shock 2, and geographical multi-linearity, which you'll know from Deus Ex.

MEDIEVAL PLAYPEN

Of course, there is another piece to this puzzle, and it's the "open-ended world" formula. Think The Elder Scrolls. Rather than making the game fit around the story, Bethesda Softworks have, since TES: Arena, focused on making the story fit around the game. The result? A gigantic, medieval playpen. Sadly, there aren't many things to play with. Whilst Levine's a TES fan, he doesn't like to spread his design too thinly: "I respect those guys a lot, but I always had a design principle called 'limited but rich'. This means that we have a smaller world, but the amount of detail per square inch is relatively high compared to something like Morrowind, where they have a huge world, but there's less detail. So that's our different approach: they want to go for scale, rather than individual moment-to-moment detail. I think they're both valid approaches, and I enjoy both types of games, but this is just the way Irrational does it."

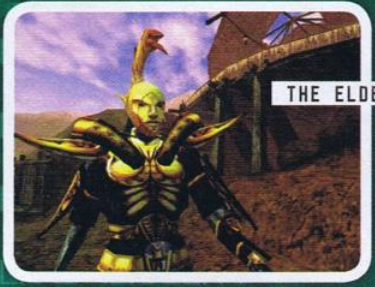
In defense, Lefay has argued that open-ended games should be "all about the world, making it open-ended, making a place where a player could spend time, disappear and never quite know what was around the corner." In a sardine can? The world should take precedence over the storyline and the player creates the story, rather than the designer. If anything, this type of game certainly helps you feel like you're part of a living world where anything is possible, but there's no engaging plotline to draw you to an inevitable end. Sort of like Limbo. Or Big Brother.

David Cage, designer behind Omikron: The Nomad Soul and Fahrenheit, looks at non-linearity in a completely different way - and doesn't hide his disdain towards certain other approaches. "Most games have a very linear structure that was initiated a long time ago by Nintendo," he notes. "You have an open world, and you go to see one character. He tells you to bring him back three sacred diamonds and he will tell you what you want to know. Once you've done your quest, he tells you where to go, so you can see another character that will give you another quest, to give you the means to find the next character, and so on.

"Most games still work like that today, except they give you ten quests at the same time. This is not non-linearity and to me, it does nothing to increase the quality of the player's experience. It is just about giving you more linear quests at the same time, and pretending you can do them in any order.

"Omikron and, in a much more sophisticated way, Fahrenheit, offer new options and another way

DEUS EX



THE ELDER SCROLLS

of managing narrative in a game. The story is not divided into quests or levels, and nor does it progress through cut scenes. Instead, I use a writing technique I call 'Bending Stories', where the player, through his actions, can stretch the story or deform it, but whatever he does, the backbone of the story is still there and guarantees quality and pacing. Thinking of the story as 'rubber bands', a rubber band is not just one choice in one scene; each action becomes a kind of rubber band by itself. And a rubber band can affect another rubber band in another scene. It really creates the feeling of being in control of the hero of a movie. Although the backbone of the story is still the same, many people who've played Fahrenheit were quite surprised by how the experience can be different when you replay the game. They saw parts of scenes that they missed the first time or just played differently to see how the story would change. It is a little bit like alternate realities: you can see variations of how your actions can affect the plot."

Cage's ideas don't stop with rubber bands and backbones. He suggests that, if you really want to give players a feeling of agency in the story, why not let them play more than one character? "In most games," Cage reveals, "you spend 99% of the time with the main character. But in movies, you can have different scenes with different characters, and this is what makes the narrative structure interesting and defines the pacing of the plot. For Fahrenheit, we found a way of recreating this filmic narrative structure: we decide that the player would have control over all the main characters of the story. We discovered that it really introduced a very unique relationship with the characters and the experience. It gave a very strong momentum to the game by putting the player in different situations."

THE SINFUL OPTION

Mind you, there are easier ways to make your game adapt to the player. Ritual's taken advantage of one of those methods with its upcoming SiN Episodes: episodic gameplay. Steve Nix, Ritual's CEO, dishes it out: "Episodic gaming allows us to provide a steady stream of content for gamers. Usually, the waiting time between games is several years, but with SiN Episodes, we will be able to deliver a new episode every three to four months. This also results in lower development costs and risk for the company. Last but not least, we will be able to incorporate community feedback into future episodes – if a certain feature is liked, we will expand it. If not, we will scale it back or phase it out completely."

SiN EPISODES

With Ritual's model, your game – whilst being essentially a linear adventure per "episode" – will end up adapting exactly to what you and other fans want. What's more, just as Nix is happy that Ritual isn't risking as much moolah as they would with a full-length title, you should be smiling: each episode should cost much less than your average game. It's an interesting way to look at non-linearity and, with the advent of Steam and other content-delivery systems, it should become more popular over time.

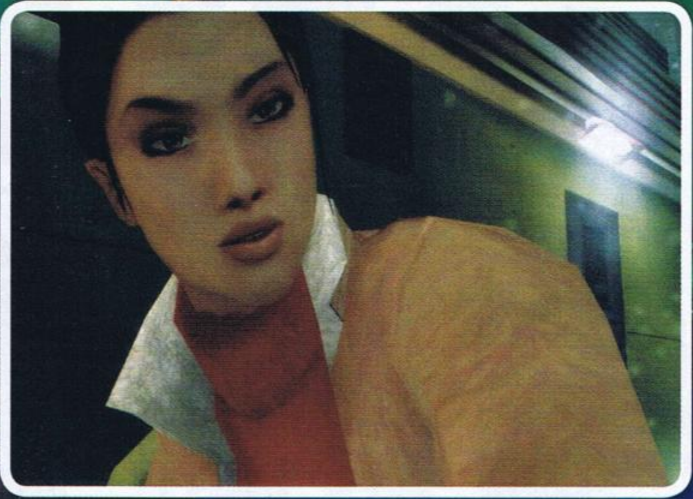
If you're Will Wright, though, you'd probably want to just cut out the middleman. Spore, the game that's rendered gamers incontinent with excitement, will feature creatures, ecosystems, cities, items, spaceships, and even worlds, that you mash together with your dirty, little meat-hooks. Remember that race of five-legged, winged, big-breasted, armour-plated, prawn-like super-aliens with gravity guns on their heads that you dreamt up in the school library? Now's your chance to give them life. Rather than being swayed by the opinions of a mass fanbase (like in SiN Episodes), Spore will adapt to you as an individual. However, it will also be affected by other players: their inventions will trickle into your universe, and whilst Rodney from Katoomba will never know that you eradicated his yellow mud-people, it's nice to know that you can. Reader, if that's not non-linearity, I don't know what is.

When you approach this territory, story pretty much goes out the window. In The Sims 2, you create a guy who meets a girl, and they have a son. That son grows up, meets another girl, and they have a daughter. The son's parents die, or you get bored of the family tree, and you start all over again. There's no story to this; it's purely your decisions, and how those decisions beget more decisions. In this way, Wright's view of game design is cyclic and somewhat Buddhist. But, as Cecil points out, our teensy human brains are programmed to process beginnings, middles, and ends. "What people think they want," he muses, "and what they really want aren't always the same. Warren Spector turned up at GDC, and he said that, actually, the quite systemic Deus Ex 2 wasn't as good a product as he'd hoped it would be. I

The problem with interfaces like the one Cage describes is that they have a tendency towards being either too simple and restrictive or open-ended to the point where the player drowns in an ocean of possibilities and actions. For a case of the latter possibility, you need look no further than Trespasser. Literally every action in Dreamworks' bug-infested dinosaur-crusher was performed in the physical space: picking up guns, typing on keypads, stacking boxes, and so on. There was no player inventory because you could only carry what you could with an arm that bent more ways than Bikram Choudhury. As an experiment in realism, Trespasser was on the way to working, but in terms of actual gameplay, well, let's just say that attempts at perpetual motion have been more successful.

FAHRENHEIT

Our teensy human brains are programmed to process beginnings, middles and ends



think the reason Deus Ex was so good was because he kept much more control over the story strands. People don't actually want systemic narratives. They want to know what's going on. They want to be told a story."

So how do you fuse systemisation and strong narrative? Where's the compromise? Cage thinks the first step is a non-restrictive interface. "The ideal interface, for me," he says, "is the one you totally forget after ten minutes of play. It has to be context-sensitive in order to offer a wide range of possibilities, but it has to remain simple and intuitive. For Fahrenheit, we tried to find new ways of interacting with the story and the world. Our objective was to have an interface that would be invisible. We also wanted it to be more than just a remote control; we wanted it to be a part of the experience; something that would really contribute physically to the player's immersion."

GETTING INSIDE THE MIND OF THE GAMER

On the flipside, context-sensitive interfaces can also hinder a player's freedom as it becomes the designer's job to figure out all the things they could do with a given object. And unless you're psychic, highly knowledgeable, or extremely perverted, that's impossible. You often find your game ending up with a serious case of "there's no reason why I should try that"-itis. Don't know what I mean? Think back to the last adventure game you played: Sure, you'd been toiling for hours, thoughtlessly popping Panadol after Panadol to soothe your throbbing head. Sure, you'd excitedly scribbled all over the message boards that you'd finally found the solution to the puzzle that'd been keeping you in a state of irritation for three months. But your ingenious idea of using the umbrella to lift the door latch just didn't cut it. And what did your coy, mocking avatar tell you? "There's no reason why I should try that." Ouch. So much for non-linearity.

OMIKRON

Truth be told, though, there's no correct way to build an open-ended game. Designers have to toil away at their title, always sitting on a precarious point between "too restrictive" and "too all over the place", and only a few games have ever gotten it right. What's the answer, then? Do we give up and go back to working within our given genres? Or do we have a go at being freeform? Well, you may think it's crazy, but I don't even care; I can tell what's going on: it's hip to make good games, and if they're non-linear, so be it. <<

LAN PARTY 101

>> KOSTA ANDREADIS

Hosting or organising a LAN party is quite unlike arranging a regular get together or party. For example in a regular party you'd have to worry about alcohol, music and making sure people aren't using your bedroom for any sort of drunken shenanigans. For a LAN these things are of little consequence, instead you need to worry about cables, power supplies, desk space, disc space, and snacks of the salted variety. In the simplest of terms a LAN party consists of a bunch of gamers in one place with their PCs connected together via the 'Local Area Network' of its namesake and playing games until their eyes stop working in any conventional sense. But as you'll see there's a lot more to it than that, preparation is the key to any successful LAN party.

HYPER'S LAN TIPS NO. 12

If the LAN isn't at your place make sure you ask early if there are any spare monitors on site, 'cause no one likes lugging large CRT monitors around town.

LOCATION SCOUTING AND SETTING UP

You're going to a need a large room (with crappy curtains apparently - Ed) that is well ventilated, as well as tables and plenty of spare power points. The foundation of any LAN is the network and you're going to need a HUB and/or Router that has the required number of ports for the number of people participating (this is usually around the 6-20 mark). Apart from that you're going to need a metric ass load of network cables (i.e. Cat 5 or 'those blue cables that plug into your network card'). Setting up usually takes a bit of time, most notably in the back and forth between the car and the location carrying all manner of PC goodies, from keyboards to monitors, and cases. To ensure you've got the right stuff each participant is going to need the following:

- **PC with Network Card:** To play stuff and let your PC socialise with other PCs.
- **Monitor:** Imagine playing Quake blindfolded... it's surprisingly hard.
- **Headphones:** To listen to the sound of bullet fire and other weaponry.
- **Input Devices:** These be your mouse and keyboard. You'll need these to make the man on the screen do unspeakable horrors.
- **Software:** Copies of games you intend to play.
- **Money:** The laws of well, err, life indicate a need for beverage and food consumption and money usually helps in this regard.

STRAIGHT PIMPIN'

Gone are the days when PC cases were big beige boxes that were as exciting as a Murder She Wrote marathon, nowadays things are different. PC cases, cooling and so forth in today's age is equivalent to rapper Xzibit finding out that you've got a piece of crap car and taking it to his boys at West Coast Customs for pimping purposes. Silver or black finishing, fan dials, neon lights, and see through side panels are some of the many features a PC case should have a few of before making its debut at a LAN. If you even think about turning up with a beige cheapo case then be ready for the timeless art of nerdicule – that is, ridicule as spouted by a nerd.

UNDER THE HOOD

'3D Mark' should be part of your vocabulary before attending a LAN for very simple reasons, the percentage of graphics whore to err, non-graphics whore at a LAN is quite drastic and if you can't vouch for your CPU and GPU output then you might as well turn up with a T-Shirt proclaiming 'I'm a Noob'. There's always someone at a LAN running games at 800x600 resolution, so make the proper precautions to make sure it ain't you.

GETTING YOUR GAME ON

Discussion of what games are to be played usually take place before a LAN and almost always consist of a few staple classics and taking some of the latest titles available out there for a spin. Here's a list of some of the best games suited for the LAN environment, and be sure that everyone has a copy before turning up.

- **Quake:** Fast paced shooting doesn't get any better than the Quake series. Perfectly suited to the LAN environment
- **Counter-Strike:** Team based shooter bliss and one of the ultimate LAN games; just remember the golden rule 'you run faster when holding a knife', and don't invite the kinds of idiots who make this a nightmare to play online.
- **WarCraft:** RTS fans may not be as prominent as say, fans of midget porn, but taking a break from adrenaline fueled shooting is always a wise option and the army building and spell casting of WarCraft is a sure fire recipe for good times.
- **World of WarCraft:** A new entry to the LAN party fold that requires an internet connection has everyone play this MMORPG online and in the same room. Even nerds say 'damn that be nerdy' to this practice.

SCHEDULED LEECH BREAKS

Ensuring you have plenty of disc space before attending a LAN party is more than good thinking it's a damn necessity for one reason only – designated leech sessions. Delicious data can be found on almost every

[up] *biege box mannerism*
[top left] A scene from Nerds Gone Wild. It didn't sell oddly enough...

PC on the network so it's best to free up space on your HDDs before rocking up. The best time to queue up these 'information exchanges' is when everyone is eating pizza and drinking their choice of either Coke or Pepsi. Of course, there's usually some excitable guy who jumps the gun when they see another PC with a large collection of entirely legal files (y'know, home movies, holiday snaps, humourous Powerpoint presentations, that kind of stuff), instigating what is commonly referred to as an 'unscheduled leech session', causing serious lag to any concurrent gaming. Such activity is looked down upon, and a no-no at any LAN party.

SLEEP IS FOR THE WEAK

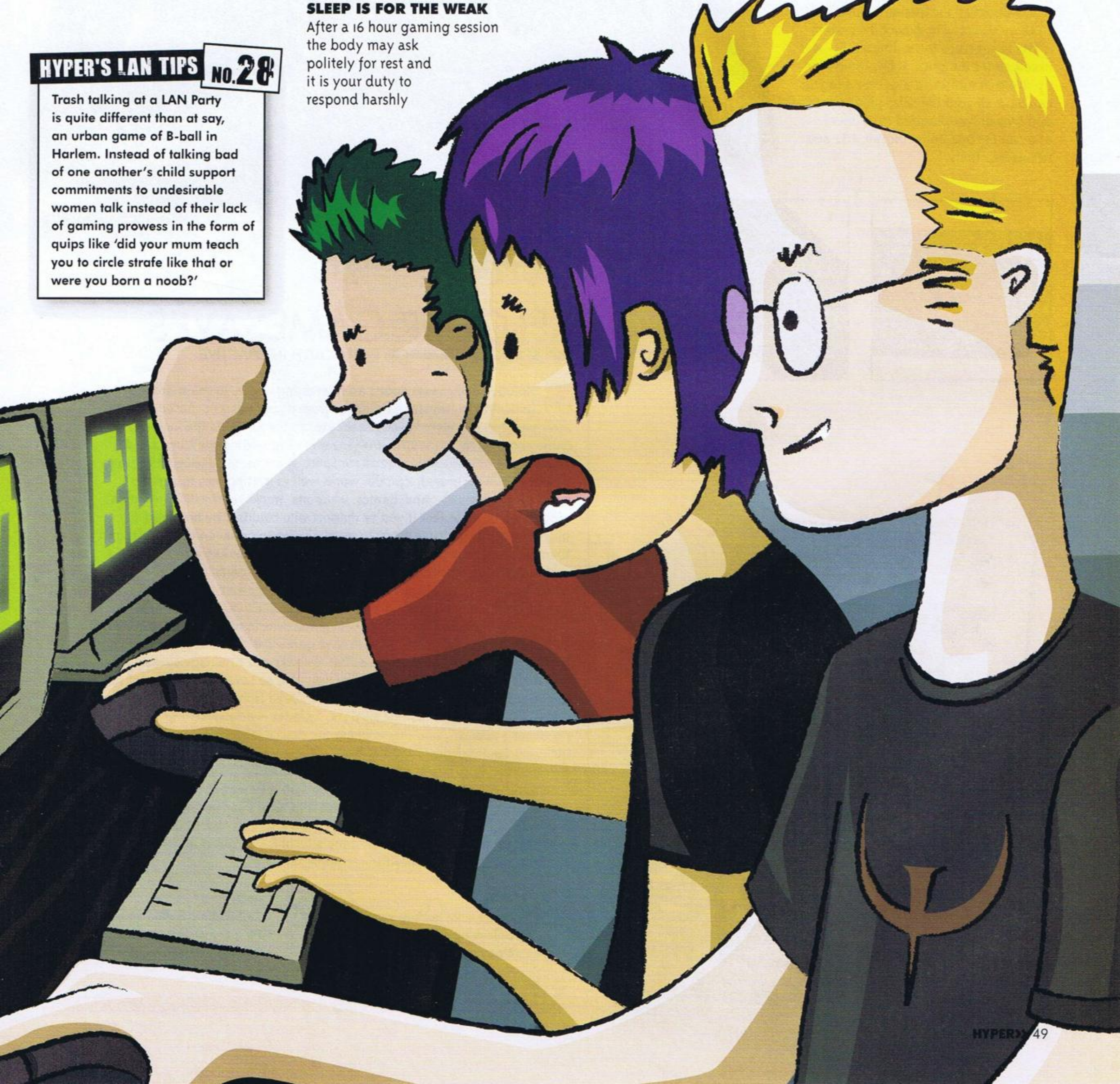
After a 16 hour gaming session the body may ask politely for rest and it is your duty to respond harshly to its request and feed it caffeine and foods high in salt and fat. But you may decide to take a break as most people do and the best way to do so is go away from the desk and hop onto a couch and watch a DVD or play a console oriented title like Streeties or Tekken. <<

HYPER'S LAN TIPS NO.56

Take a browse through people's shared folders and if you come across any digi-cam pics be sure to fire up Photoshop and make the depicted individual look like they are pleasuring or being pleasured by a barnyard animal of your choice.

HYPER'S LAN TIPS NO.28

Trash talking at a LAN Party is quite different than at say, an urban game of B-ball in Harlem. Instead of talking bad of one another's child support commitments to undesirable women talk instead of their lack of gaming prowess in the form of quips like 'did your mum teach you to circle strafe like that or were you born a noob?'



LOGITECH Z-5450 DIGITAL SPEAKERS

RRP: $799 / DISTRIBUTOR: LOGITECH

Okay, so we already dig the Z series of Logitech surround sound speakers. But let's face it, it can be a royal pain in the butt wiring up those rear speakers. You wind up with cable trailing across the floor, or unsightly cables clamped along the ceiling. Logitech know this, which is why their latest speakers come packing wireless rear satellites. Each of these rear speakers has its own built-in wireless receiver (using 2.4GHz wireless tech and adaptive frequency hopping to minimise interference) and power amplifier. You still need to power them via an outlet, but it's a good solution that keeps the sound quality high without all the fussing around.

As we've come to expect the system is THX certified so the sound quality is excellent for the price, it has inputs for up to seven multimedia devices (so you can have all your consoles plus your PC and DVD player plugged in at once) and can decode Dolby Digital, DTS and DTS 96/24. Tasty.

Logitech
THX
Input: Direct 96-24
Effect: 6 Ch Direct

Input: Direct
Effect: 6 Ch Direct
THX

optical 1
optical 2
stereo 2
stereo 3
coax
sub
center
surround
volume
mute
effect
settings
Logitech

XPLODER GAMESAVES

RRP: $79.95 / DISTRIBUTOR: BLUEMOUTH INTERACTIVE

Xploder GameSaves sports an interesting angle. Its main drawcard is its ability to transfer gamesaves from its included PC-based CD (and after registration, Web-based) databases to the Xbox via the included USB cable and 8MB memory unit. With the aim of providing 100% unlocked status for your Xbox library (and for some of the more popular titles, save points at specific areas), Xploder works well in getting you to a game's extra content (levels, mini-games, weapons, tracks, etc) with a minimum of fuss. Which is perfect if you're the sort who couldn't be bothered playing a game multiple times to manually do so or haven't gotten 'round to unlocking all tracks and cars in games like Gotham Racing.

Or better still, back up your own saves. The save game data stream works both ways, so it's possible to take your Xbox's saves and back 'em up on the PC. When viewed this way, Xploder's value is a helluva lot sweeter: the included memory card is almost worth the price of admission alone, and a handy tool to prevent save game loss in the event of hardware failure. The only limitation here is that Xploder can't manage saves above and beyond what an official memory unit can, so saves like Knights of the Old Republic and Project Zero can't be removed from the Xbox's drive.

With its reliance on save game data, Xploder is only as strong as its producer's support, and this is where the device falls seriously flat. The included CD database is aged at best, while a visit to the online database revealed the most recent save game entry marked at July 2005. The community-submitted save exchange system is flawed at best, with the ability to only upload (and share) titles that have been entered into the firm's database, meaning it too suffers from a serious lack of currency.

That, and the fact that the company's technical support is virtually non-existent, makes this one hard to recommend.

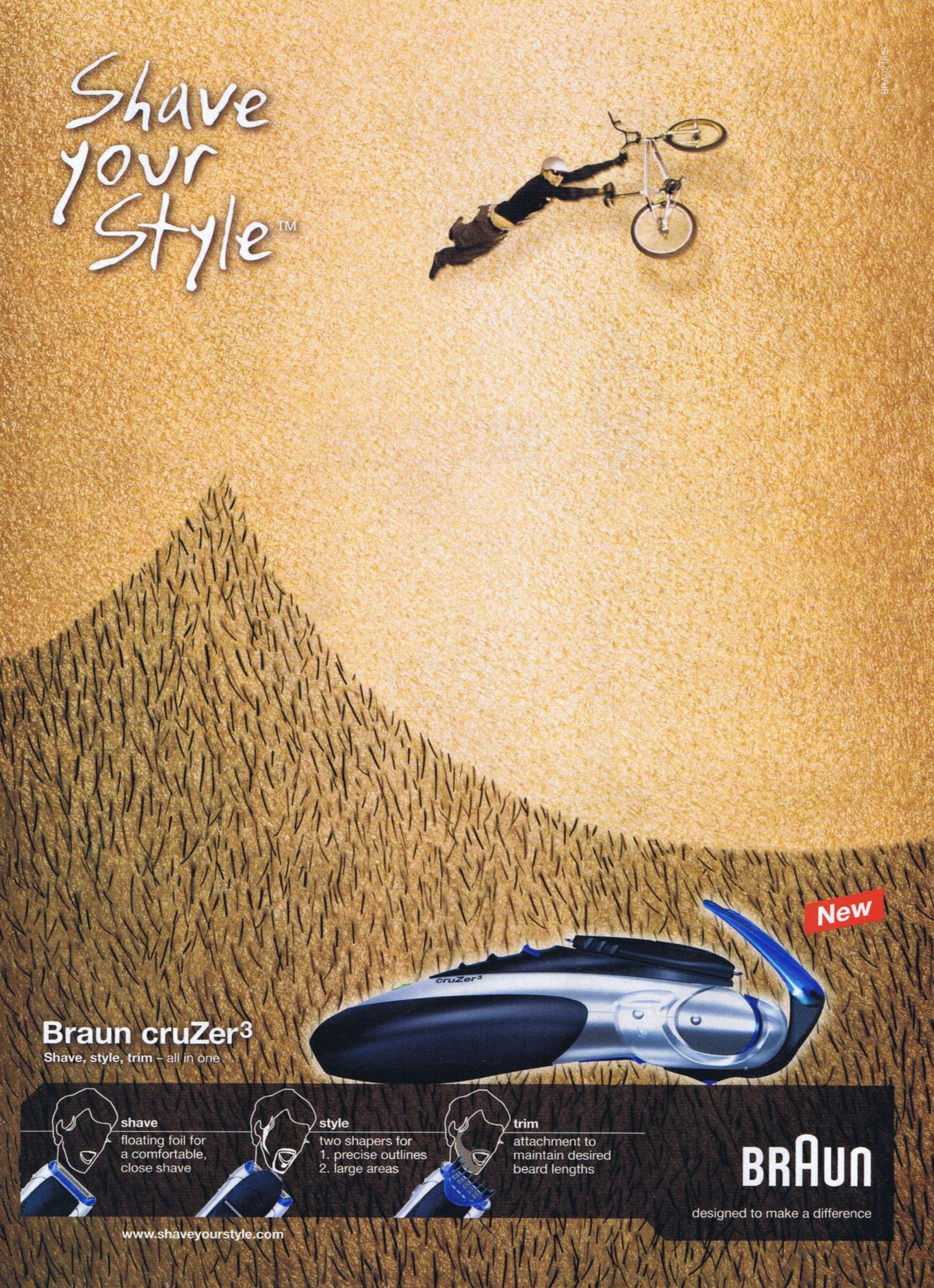
FOR XBOX
XPLODER
WANNA BEAT THE GAME?
CHEAT SAVES
USING XENO CHEAT MODIFYING TECHNOLOGY
INCLUDES 8MB MEMORY CARD
PC REQUIRED
SPECIAL WEAPONS
GAME UNLOCK
ACCESS HIDDEN MOVIES
UNLOCK TRACKS
HIDDEN VEHICLES
HIGH SPEED PC TO MEMORY UNIT USB CABLE
XPLODER XENO SAVES PC SOFTWARE
HUNDREDS OF MODIFIED CHEAT SAVES
INSTANT SAVE DOWNLOADS

PROS:

- Game save backup support
- Unlocking of game contents
- 8MB memory unit

CONS:

- Out-of-date online database
- Poor community support
- Bad technical support


Shave your Style™
BRA02 18/E
New
cruZer³

Braun cruZer³

Shave, style, trim – all in one

shave
floating foil for
a comfortable,
close shave

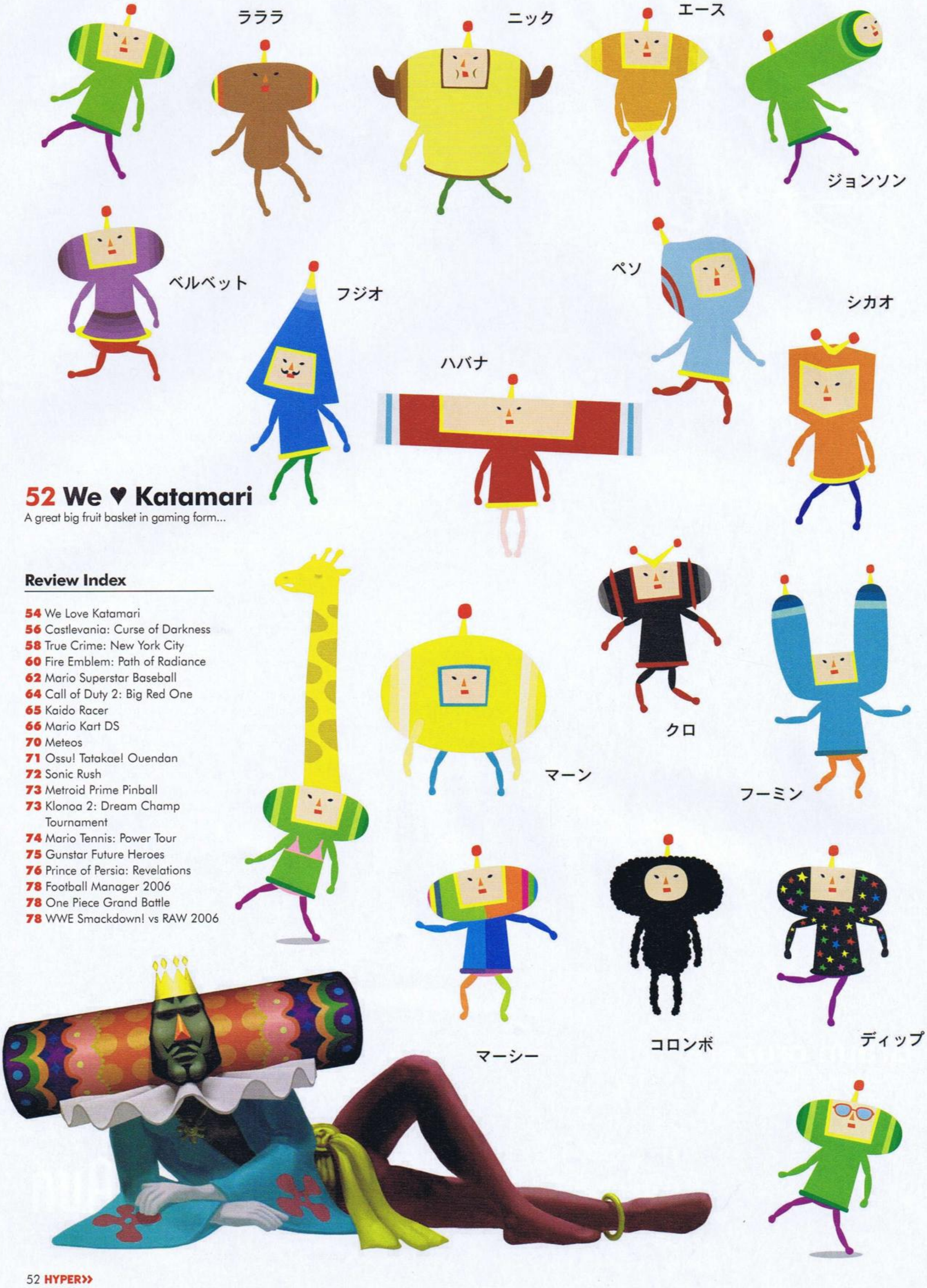
style
two shapers for
1. precise outlines
2. large areas

trim
attachment to
maintain desired
beard lengths

BRAUN

designed to make a difference

www.shaveyourstyle.com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ベルベット
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シカオ
ハバナ
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フーミン
マーシー
コロンボ
ディップ

52 We ♥ Katamari

A great big fruit basket in gaming form...

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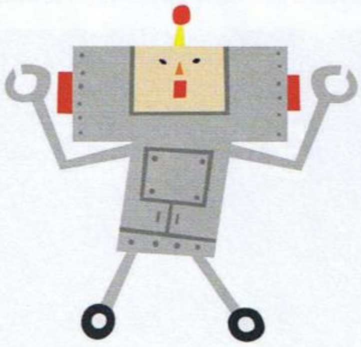
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Reviews>>

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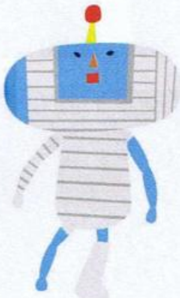
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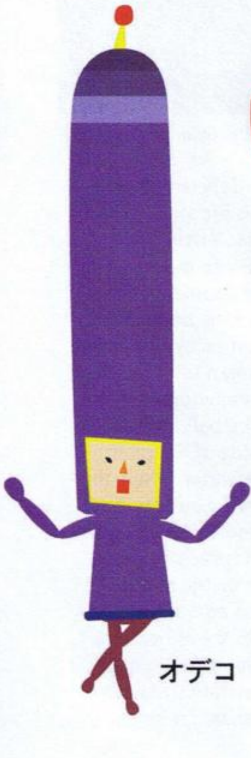
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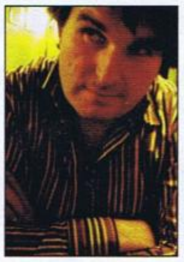
Game Theory

SEAMUS BYRNE

Players are the best big bads



Player created content has to be one of the great boom areas in recent years. Still largely a stronghold of the PC platform, things have really been heating up with the rise of MMO gaming and the player involvement in such game worlds.

Eve Online must be one of the best examples of what can happen when you give your players an expansive blank slate to work with. Its guild system goes far beyond that of most other MMOs, with player created and operated Corporations taking on central roles in the storylines that exist in the game universe. From trading to mercenary work, player organisations take on the roles that would be run by NPCs in other worlds. This has delivered one of the most startling pieces of corporate espionage ever to take place in a game. Not that corporate espionage comes up all that often...

If you haven't heard of the Guiding Hand Social Club, their name has been spreading quickly beyond the world of Eve and into general game discussion on what is acceptable in an MMO. GHSC is a kind of 'black ops' mercenary corporation whose most stunning exploit was to spend a year of real time planning and positioning to destroy another corporation in the game. They infiltrated the target corp, gained high-level trust and when they pulled the trigger on their event they assassinated the CEO, conducted a widespread simultaneous theft of the corp's possessions and liquidated everything. Estimates of the real-world value of the theft have been placed around the US$16,500 mark.

The biggest discussions from all this is to look at just what kind of 'evil' is acceptable in an MMO. This was all within the bounds of acceptable play, but was it really fair? If you ruin the fun for other players, how can that be acceptable in an MMO's terms of use?

I think for the long-term viability of MMOs the answer has to support this kind of activity. This might be a kind of organised griefing, but surely our online worlds need to have some seriously intelligent bad guys that you just know not to cross — or that you can spend years looking to seek revenge on. Some of those involved with Ubiqua Seraph, the victim corp in the above incident, may have walked away from the game never to play again. Others may have thought that was what they would do, but have perhaps found themselves drawn back in search of revenge. Maybe others still are already months into the planning of a counter operation.

There is something so much more tangible here than in other games and the reality is that this must be more gripping to be a part of than standard high-level play in other MMOs. PvP is fun, but in most worlds it is more black and white and playing a major role in the universe isn't part of the deal. Here there is a lot at stake for players, who collectively own some of the most important property in the universe and make decisions that have real effects in the Eve storylines.

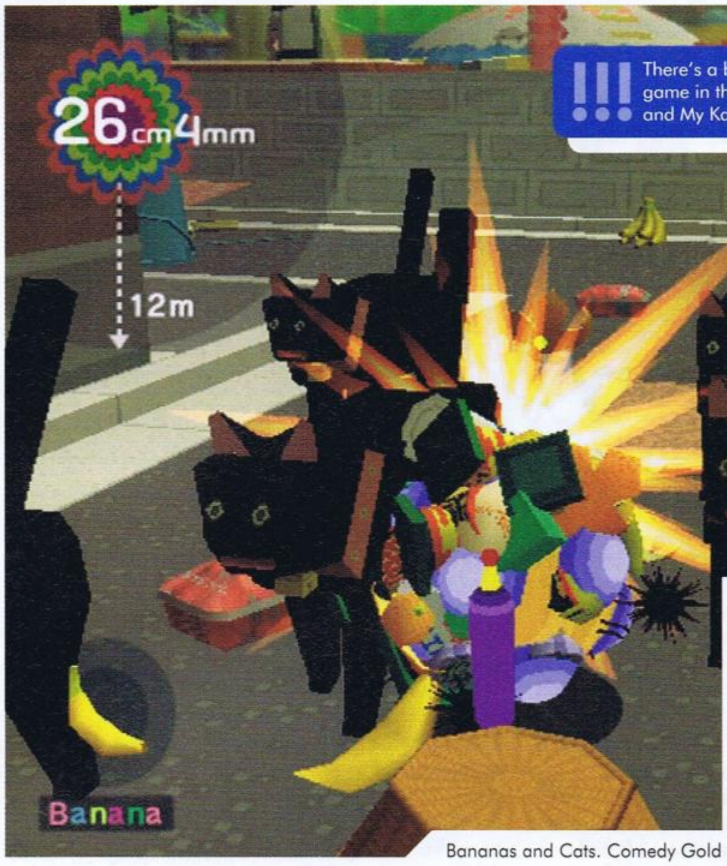
There is nothing lazy about game design that allows for rich player created content to exist in such a world. Every time control is handed over to players, the world opens a door to exploit and imbalance, so many MMOs avoid offering too much player control. Money itself is hard enough to balance.

Dedicated players can become the best possible source of in-game intrigue and storytelling. There is someone real behind the mask, which in the case of 'bad guys' would certainly make any payback all the more rewarding. You've just got to work at being good enough, or bad enough, to earn that kind of notoriety yourself.

THE HYPER SCORING SYSTEM The Overall Score – what's it all about (in a roundabout way)?

HYPER BIG RUBBER STAMP OF APPROVAL

0-49	50-59	60-69	70-79	80-89	90+
It's not rocket science. These games suck the big one...	Almost as bad as a modern contemporary dance piece	You may forfeit a little of your soul playing these... It's your call	The snakey tendril of playability lurks and curls in these games...	These games will rock your socks. And maybe your pants too	Pure uncut gaming bliss. Rack these games up asap!

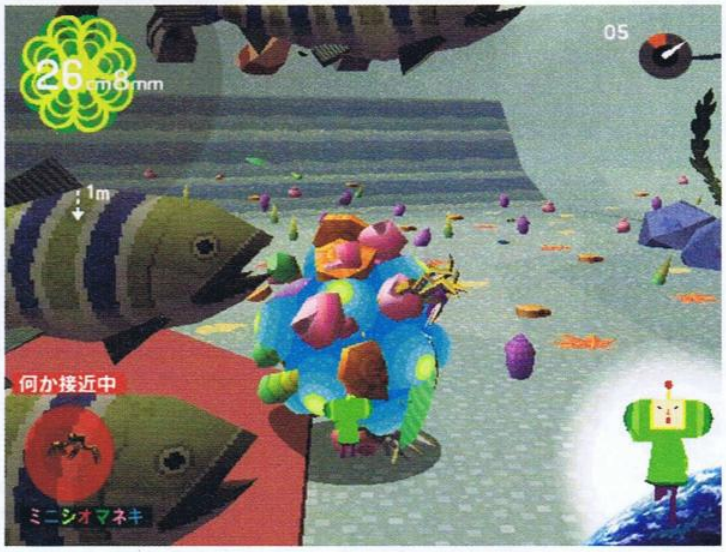


!!! There's a brand new Katamari game in the works for PSP - "Me and My Katamari". Huzzah!

Bananas and Cats. Comedy Gold

23m78cm3mm
500m

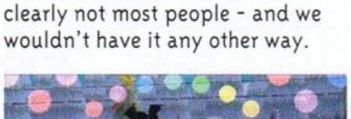
Hey...
Havana
Left Move
OK



WE ♥ KATAMARI

SALLY WOELLNER can feel the King of All Cosmos love

It's certainly an unusual concept. You have an unexpected wacky hit game, so what do you do for the sequel? Make a game based around the fact that your first game was universally adored...? It's not *exactly* the first thing most people would think of. But then again, these are the people who created Katamari Damacy, and their sequel is indeed titled 'We Love Katamari'. They are clearly not most people - and we wouldn't have it any other way.



[above] Everybody get on the disco bus

FOR THE FANS

The reason it works is because, well, we *did* love Katamari Damacy. The simple but addictive gameplay with elegant controls, coupled with the killer soundtrack and wonderfully fruity art made it almost impossible to dislike. Both games follow the progress of the tiny green cigar-headed Prince as he cleans up after his father, the King of All Cosmos, who destroyed all the stars in the sky during a night of drunken excess. To replace the stars, the Prince rolls the katamari - a colourful, knobbly, sticky ball that picks up the things it touches. Yes, it's as odd as it sounds.

As you roll the katamari, it begins to pick up small objects - paperclips, ants, thumbtacks and coins. As the katamari grows in size, larger and larger objects can become stuck to it, so that before you know it, you've knocked down and rolled up the young schoolgirl whose legs you were dodging between in the beginning of the level. Soon you're eyeing off not only the large bear juggling fish on the opposite street corner, but eventually the building behind him too, and by the end of Katamari Damacy you were on your way to swallowing the world whole. When each katamari reached its allotted size, the King would launch it into the sky, replacing a lost star.

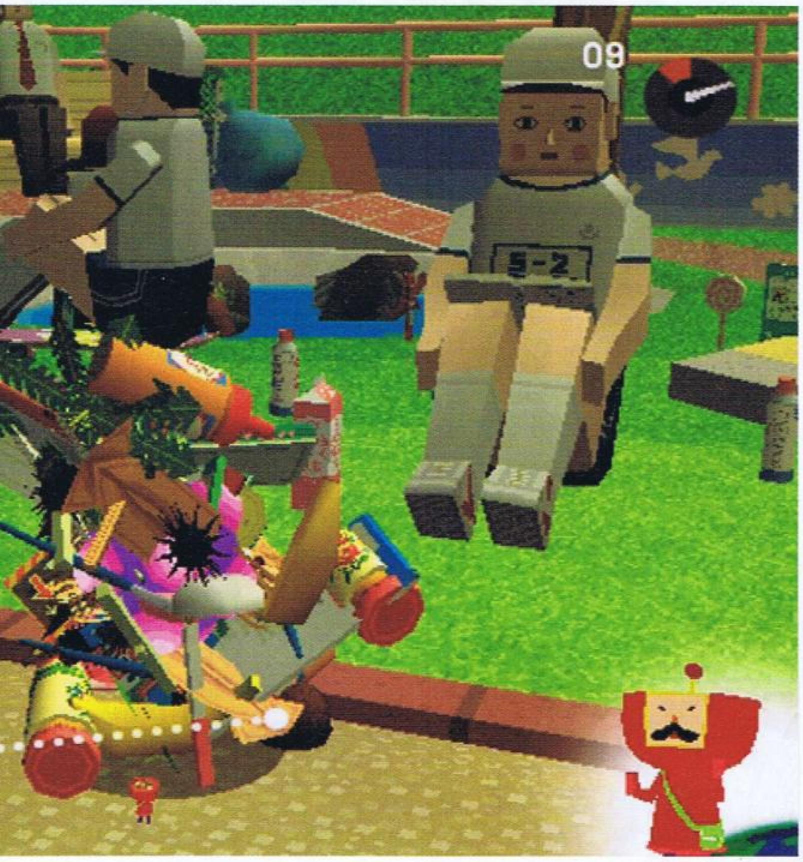
But as the King Himself notes, Katamari Damacy was lazy. The sky around Earth might be fine now, but what about the rest of the Cosmos? Pathetic. And that's what this game is for, as the Prince takes requests from fans of the original game in order to fill it up again.

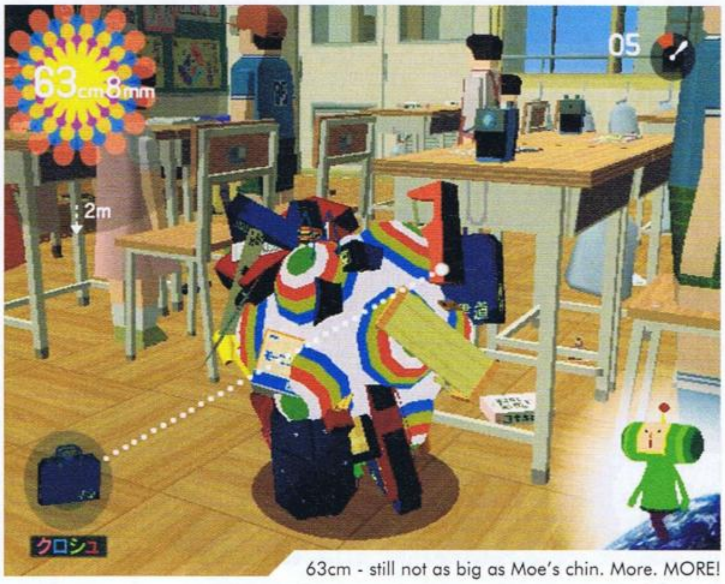
So to advance through the game and choose which level to play, the Prince wanders the Select Meadow, where fans of Katamari Damacy wait to petition the King of All Cosmos for their very own katamari. Through the game you also learn more about the enigmatic, parenting-skills-deficient King, as you witness his life story unfold through the characteristic fruity cut-scenes we love so much.

[above] The Prince's rather phallic cousin

There have been some gameplay changes made for the better, probably the most enjoyable being the way the katamari interacts more naturally with its environment. If you bump a basketball, it'll roll off to the other side of the room. You can go underwater, where the katamari floats and bounces, and gets caught on fishhooks. The racing katamari goes at triple the speed, and flies wildly into the air if you hit anything at an odd angle.

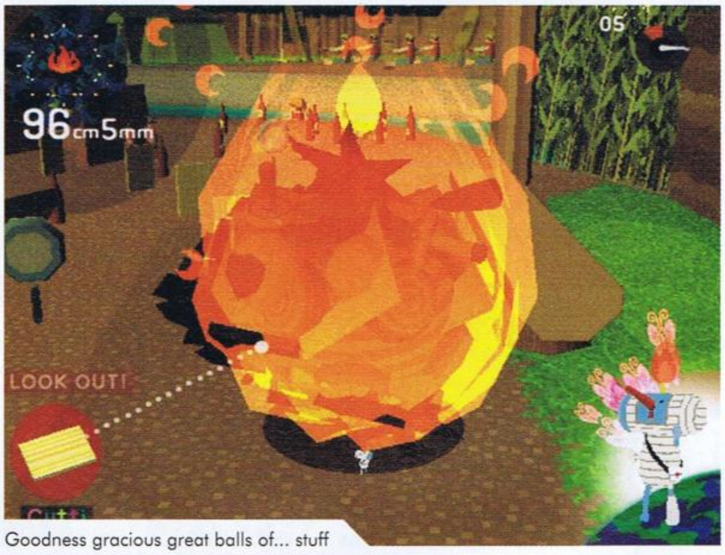
And along with the old-school levels, which require you to create a katamari of a certain size within a set time limit, there are some





63cm - still not as big as Moe's chin. More. MORE!

0
50cm0mm
LOOK OUT!



Goodness gracious great balls of... stuff

new and inspired variations. The campfire katamari requires objects as fuel at a steady rate to stop it going out. Then there's the sumo level, where you roll a tiny sumo wrestler around, absorbing food until he becomes large enough to roll up his opponent. To further expand the game, most of the levels can be re-played with different objectives, as the fans come up with new requests for a brighter, faster, or tidier katamari.

This is a much longer game than Katamari Damacy, and with the larger number of levels you do get some hits and some misses. Occasionally you'll come across a level that feels too short, or oddly small - but by and large the excellent and entertaining level design is still intact.

IT'S LIKE A DIFFERENT FLAVOUR OF FUN, A FRUITIER COMPANION TO THE FIRST FRUIT EXPLOSION...

KATAMARI ON KATAMARI ACTION

The battle mode remains largely unchanged and not all that enthralling, despite larger and more interesting arenas to fight in. The more interesting addition is the co-operative mode, where each player takes the role of one of the analog sticks, working together to control the katamari. The success of this mode will depend heavily on the person you're playing with, but it's huge amounts of fun sitting with someone and screaming at them "NO, PULL BACK, PULL BACK! We NEED that PENGUIN!"

So essentially, this game really is more of the same. There are some fun and interesting changes and additions, but the core gameplay remains unchanged. This game in some ways doesn't have the linear elegance of Katamari Damacy, and the epic sense of increasing scale that achieved - it's like a different flavour of fun, a fruitier companion to the first fruit explosion that was Katamari Damacy. Even the soundtrack for We Love Katamari is comprised mainly of excellent re-workings of the songs from Katamari Damacy.

But that's not a bad thing, by any means! The first game (which hasn't even seen the light of retail day here) was so enjoyable that it's truly a joy to have more of it. Rolling around chasing screaming schoolgirls with a giant ball of random stuff will take a very long time to get old - and to be honest? We hope it never does. <<

HYPER
BIG
RUBBER
STAMP
OF
APPROVAL

>> KATAMARI X 1,000,000 **And for the people who complained that the original game was too short, the final secret bonus stage of We Love Katamari is rumoured to take up to 10 hours of solid play to complete. Fortunately you can leave and come back to it when you'd like, as the alternative option of gamers with drips and catheters is far from attractive. You can only access this last bonus level after collecting all of the Prince's Cousins in the game, then completing the Cousins bonus stage - so it's really not for the faint of heart to begin with. But for anyone who particularly needs enough katamari to put themselves into a sweet rolly coma, this should be perfect.**

AVAILABLE ON:
PS2 / XBOX / PC / GCN

DETAILS:
CATEGORY: Unique
PLAYERS: 1-2
DEVELOPER: Namco
PUBLISHER: Namco
PRICE: $TBA
RATING: TBA
AVAILABLE: February

HYPER VERDICT:

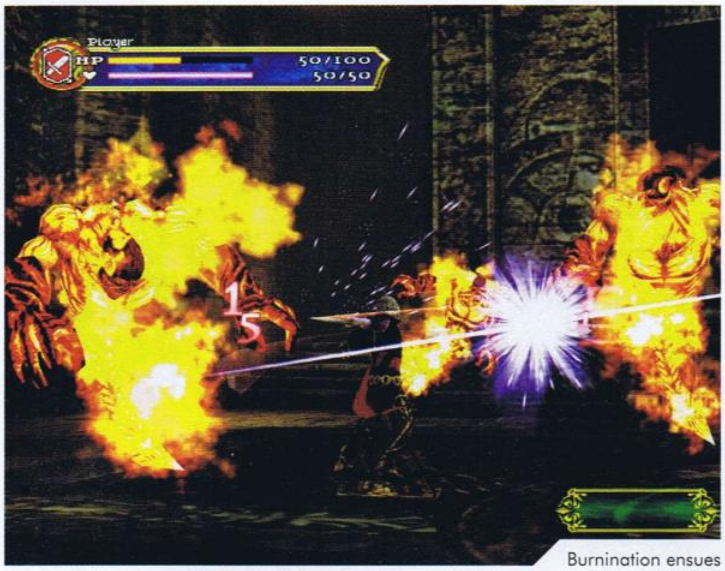
PLUS: Insane, whimsical and heaps of fun.

MINUS: Occasional level gripes.

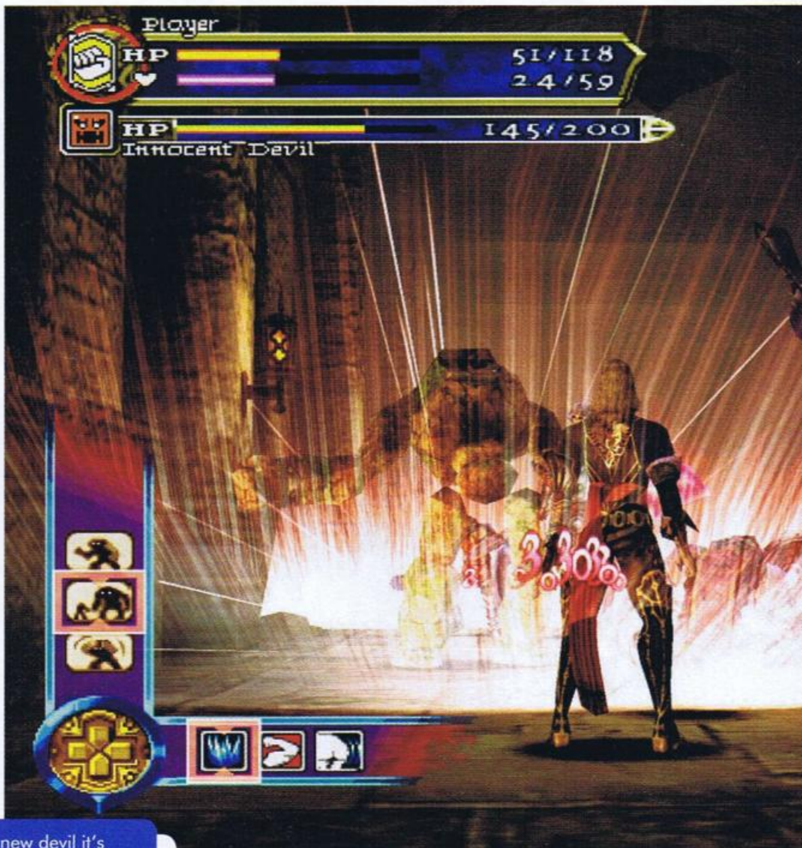
VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY
92	91	92

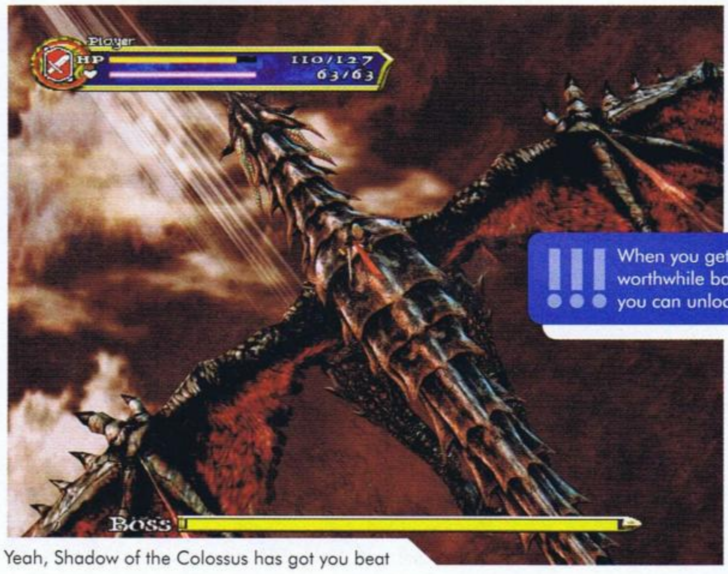
OVERALL
92

So fruity and so cool. Yep, it's Katamari!



Burnination ensues





Yeah, Shadow of the Colossus has got you beat

!!! When you get a new devil it's worthwhile backtracking to see if you can unlock any secret areas.

Dead Fencer Lv.30

[above] More burnination

CASTLEVANIA: Curse of Darkness

DANIEL WILKS is changing his name to something heroic, like Trevor

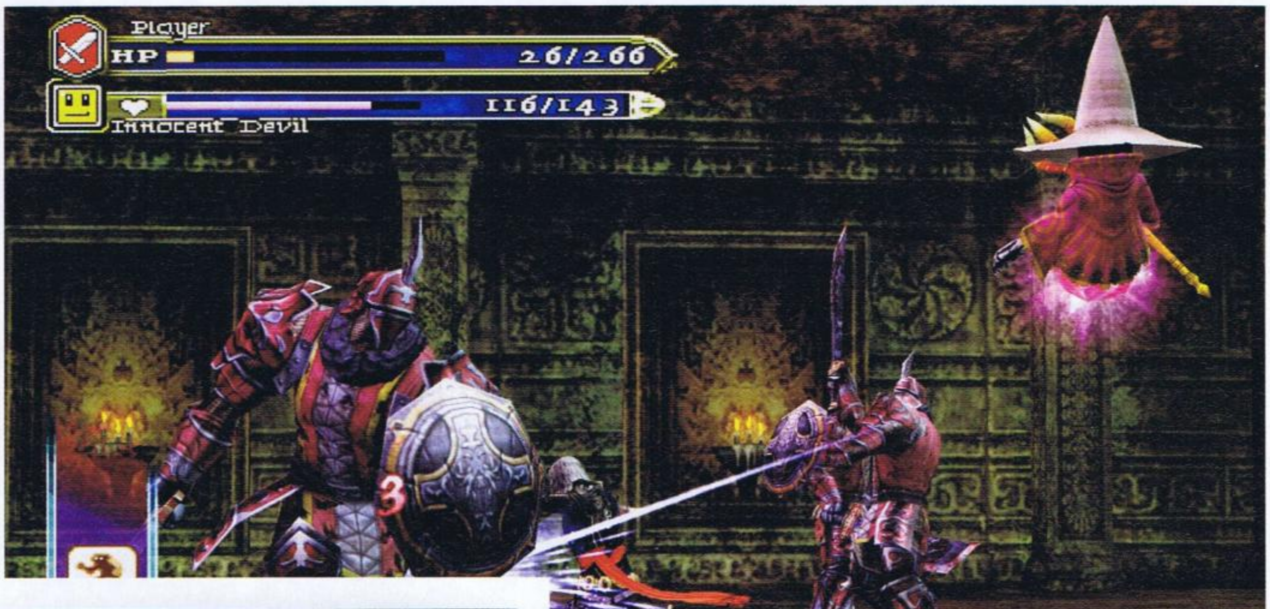
Why is it that Japanese developers always seem to have a hard time coming up with cool names for their Western looking/named characters? The racially non specific characters get cool things like Dante, Hachi the Manslayer, Cloud Strife, Squall Lionheart and the like but Western characters end up with names like Nigel, Trevor, Herbert and Terry. In the case of Castlevania: Curse of Darkness, players take the role of Hector, a rather foppish looking ex-slave of the dark prince Dracula, who has forsaken his powers and old allegiances after the death of his one true love. As fate would have it, our hero must reawaken his powers to hunt down Dracula's remaining henchman, the slightly better named Isaac. Hector and Isaac are Devil Forgemasters, a profession that is pretty much as cool as it sounds.

[above] No sexual tension here

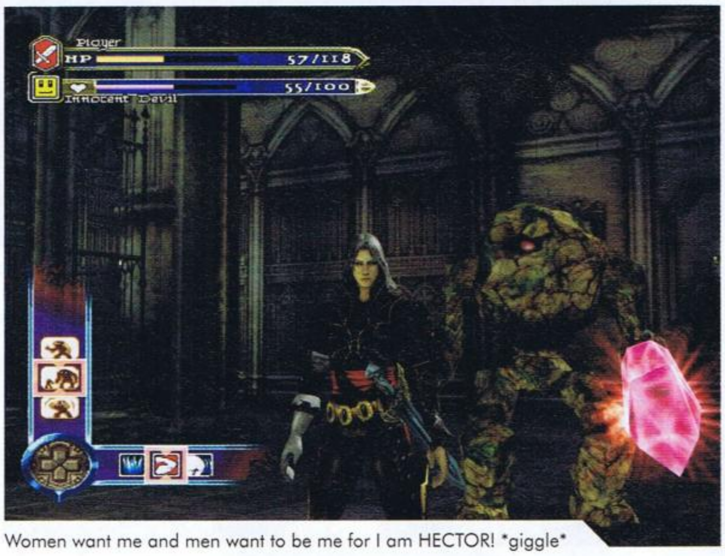
WILKS. NOT AS COOL AS HE SOUNDS

Although technically a Castlevania game, Curse of Darkness has far more in common with third person action titles like Devil May Cry and Nano Breaker than it does with the well known and much loved series, as it plays down the exploration/platforming elements of the series in favour of combat, combat and a little more combat thrown in for good measure. The developers should be commended for taking a remarkably simple fighting engine and injecting some needed life into it. Combat is a simple two button affair with a basic attack button and a combo/finisher button that pulls off a different move depending on how many basic attacks you have made in the combo; between one and five depending on the type of weapon. Each type of weapon has different characteristics making them useful at different times; spears have a long range and numerous area of effect combos, fist weapons are fast and deal good damage in a short time, one handed axes and swords do respectable damage at a good speed and two handed swords and axes deal massive damage at the expense of speed. The different types of weapons also denote the colour or evo crystal dropped, materials necessary for the growth of the defining trait of the game, Innocent Devils.

Hector is a Devil Forgemaster and, as the name suggests, he can forge devils; small pets that loyally follow Hector using their abilities to aide him in his battle with Isaac. Innocent Devil types include fairy devils that can learn to heal and have the intrinsic ability to open chests, large golem creatures that help in combat and can lift heavy doors, Orko looking floating wizards who specialise in magic attacks, birds who can allow you to glide for short distances and little demons who can transform you into a puddle to slide under locked doors and other obstacles. All Innocent Devils level up with experience but also go through development trees tied to the colour of evo crystals collected by the weapon wielded by the player. Depending on the evolutionary path the Innocent Devil will change to new forms and



Save me Orko, Save me!



Women want me and men want to be me for I am HECTOR! *giggle*

learn new skills on their way to the ultimate forms at the end of their evolutionary trees. Don't worry though if you're not happy with the way your original devils progress – occasionally one of the devils will drop a "devil shard" of the creature type they are, allowing you to create a new level one Innocent Devil and evolve it differently.

HECTOR AND ISAAC ARE DEVIL FORGEMASTERS, A PROFESSION THAT IS BASICALLY AS COOL AS IT SOUNDS

CRAFTY DEVILS

Aside from the Innocent Devils, the other main strength of Curse of Darkness is the crafting system. Each beastie killed has a chance to drop a material component such as Steel, a Knight's Vein or some slightly more outlandish item which can be combined with other materials to create new weapons and armour. The further the player progresses into the game the more interesting and powerful the items that can be created. Every time a new reagent drops you'll find yourself jumping into your menu to see if there's a new item you can make and then agonising on the decision as to whether you want a new sword, axe, helmet or armour when you realise you can make only one. It's addictive as hell and immensely satisfying creating your own gear but there is a downside – for all of the great gear you can make there are also some inexplicable bad items thrown into the mix (presumably they form part of the material makeup for some phenomenally powerful items if you find all of the rare ingredients) – it's mightily infuriating to spend your one rare ingredient that just dropped creating a broom that does 41 less damage than the weapon you're currently wielding or making what you assume will be a great suit of rare armour that turns out to be some ragged leather tunic when you're already wearing plate. Other reagents can be stolen from monsters if the correct criteria are met. Stolen materials are usually rarer than those dropped.

Fans of Castlevania may be somewhat disappointed by the lackluster level design of Curse of Darkness and the reliance of combat over the platforming/exploration focus of the 2D games but the clever combat and Pokemon style pet handling show the 3D series moving in the right direction. It's still far from being a great game but it is addictive and satisfying for the most part. <<

>> TALKING DIRTY **Although the majority of the character models in the lush pre-rendered cutscenes look like rejects from a Malice Mizer film clip, the voice acting is of a universally (and surprisingly) high order. The script, preposterous as anything about heroes who used to be Dracula's minions searching for their old powers to combat a goth leatherboy with bad hair whilst dealing with added distractions like a creepy monk dude and Saint Germaine (yes, that Saint Germaine) can be, is delivered with conviction and only the slightest hint of ham. You'll actually find yourself enjoying the conversations instead of skipping them.**

AVAILABLE ON:

PS2 / XBOX / PC / GCN

DETAILS:

CATEGORY: Action
PLAYERS: 1
DEVELOPER: Konami
PUBLISHER: Konami
PRICE: $89.95
RATING: M 15+
AVAILABLE: February

HYPER VERDICT:

PLUS: Combat system, crafting, Innocent Devils.

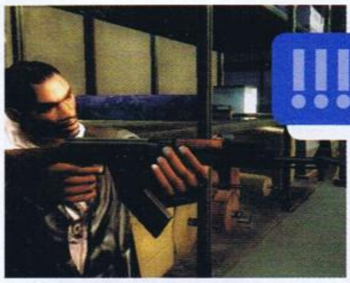
MINUS: Dull level design, repetitive.

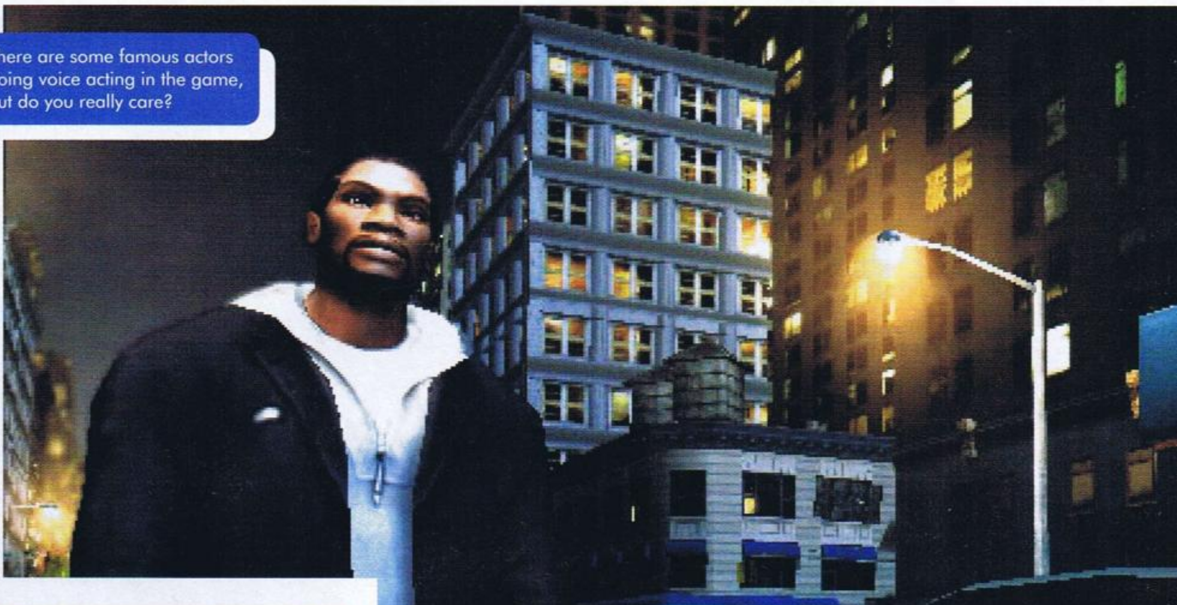
VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY
85	89	82

OVERALL

80

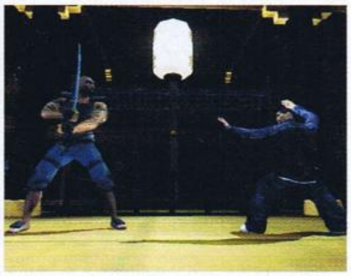
Not great but definitely satisfying.





There are some famous actors doing voice acting in the game, but do you really care?

The power of corn rows sucka



TRUE CRIME: New York City

ELIOT FISH wishes Donald Trump was here to sort this mess out...

True Crime, huh? Let me tell you what a true crime is - that a game like this could get released in the half-baked, buggy, design-crippled state that it's in. But before we get the disc shredder out, let's take a look at the few half-decent ideas that are struggling to rise to the surface in the swirling sea of arse that is True Crime: New York City.

CRAZY OVERDOSE

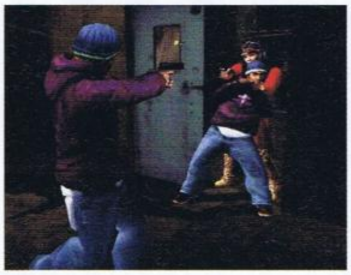
No prizes for anyone quick enough to point out that the True Crime series has so far been an attempt to re-design Grand Theft Auto. Now, you could say this is a boo-boo in itself, however the crazy Total Overdose has proved that it can be done successfully. True Crime, however, fails to really take the concept beyond the point of weak imitation, even though there are some basic ideas here that would have looked great on paper.

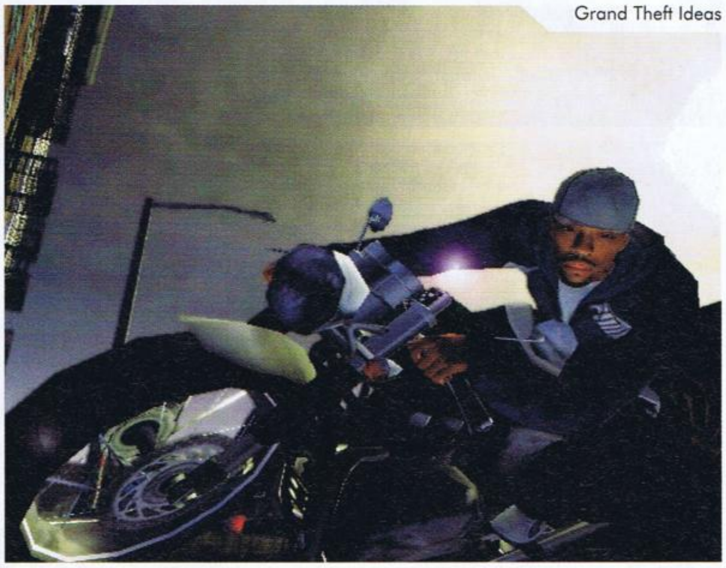
For starters, the city of New York City appears to be replicated in full. This is a truly massive, sprawling city, but in an effort to really make it feel like New York, the streets have been packed with as many pedestrians and as much traffic as the game can handle — which actually isn't really that much. Even so, it all grinds the engine to a stuttering limp whenever you jump in a car and start cruising — the engine simply can't keep up with you. Something should have been decided here — take some stuff out, add some loading points, or simply make the city a bit smaller — because as it is, the game is almost unplayable at times. But hey, it's kind of admirable that they tried to recreate New York City so faithfully. Well, maybe interesting if you actually live there and can be bothered to spot your favourite street corner. For the rest of us, it may as well be some generic videogame city.

As the game puts you in the shoes of a policeman, the other remotely cool design decision was to make the "free roaming" aspect of the game revolve around busting crime and working your way up the career ladder. You get to do what cops do — rock up on the scene and flash your badge, maybe fire a warning shot if there's a bit of ruckus. Then you can frisk people for illegal items and rough them up a bit before slapping the handcuffs on. If you're happy to go down the path of the bad cop, you can plant evidence on people simply

[above] Yeah dat's how da PO PO do it

[above] *Random Hip-Hop Lyric*





Grand Theft Ideas

How not to use a barricade

YOU CAN ALMOST MAKE YOUR WAY THROUGH ANY COMBAT SEQUENCE WITH YOUR EYES CLOSED

to make it look like you're doing good work on the street. You can even "forget" to hand in evidence if you're not interested in walking the straight and narrow. But ultimately, the good/bad cop dynamic leads nowhere – it's pretty much just for fun. Working your way up rankings in the force is also largely pointless. It's not really required in order to finish the story missions, but rather it's there for you to pass the time with – that's if you actually find any of the free roaming in this game even the tiniest bit entertaining.

THE OLD GOOD COP BAD COP ROUTINE

But for all the half-decent ideas in the "cop sim" concept, there is an endless list of bugs, glitches, dumb designs flaws and control issues that stop it from ever being fun. To name but a few: when random crimes are taking place, there's always some arbitrary time limit imposed – you can drive there only for it to pop out of existence when you arrive; when busting a crime inside a building, some thugs make a run for it – if you chase them outside, the mission instantly ceases to exist, and you've lost the chance to resolve the crime; driving cars around shows off how glitchy the engine is, as trying to drive over small hilly areas in a park can make you spin in mid-air as the collision detection freaks out; the same button used for frisking people also crash tackles them to the ground if you're moving any faster than a very slow walk, which is just bloody annoying; other cops will happily shoot at people that you're attempting to frisk or arrest, making your job somewhat dangerous... and the list really goes on. It's just a dog's breakfast of problems.

Shooting people has also been made so easy, that you can almost make your way through any combat sequence in the game with your eyes closed. Simply hold the L1 button and you'll auto-target the enemies, with only a few shots needed to kill them. You can virtually stand on the spot and just cycle through the enemies, gunning them all down in the blink of an eye. The hand-to-hand combat isn't even worth mentioning, which is a backwards step after True Crime: Streets of LA. In fact, it's surprising how much of Streets of LA has been discarded, to be replaced with game mechanics that feel far less polished or developed. But hey, you can change your outfit, just like GTA: San Andreas! Groan.

We can't help but feel that a massive opportunity was wasted here. Instead of ironing out the bugs and problems with the last game, they've only been enhanced and made worse by throwing it all in a new city with more complex and problematic gameplay mechanics. Just steer clear. <<

AVAILABLE ON:

PS2 / XBOX / PC / GCN

DETAILS:

CATEGORY: Action
PLAYERS: 1
DEVELOPER: Luxoflux
PUBLISHER: Activision
PRICE: $89.95
RATING: MA 15+
AVAILABLE: Now

HYPER VERDICT:

PLUS: One or two decent songs on the soundtrack.

MINUS: The game isn't finished and never will be.

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY
72	82	56

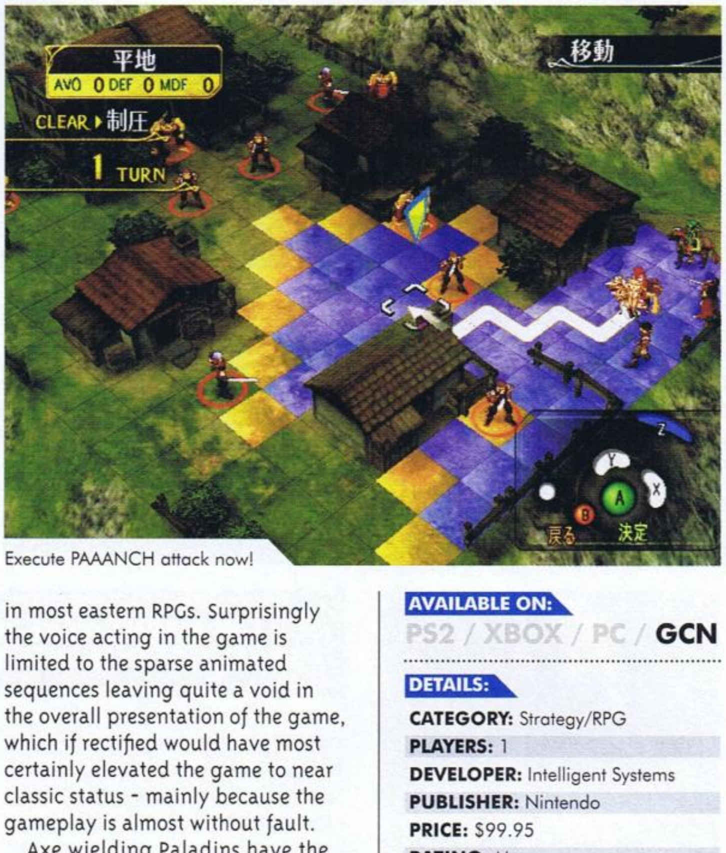
OVERALL

55

A waste of time and money if you're silly enough...

!!! You can unlock exclusive character art and challenge maps by connecting your GBA with a copy of Fire Emblem or Sacred Stones to your Cube!

Bet you the next words she says are "tee hee"

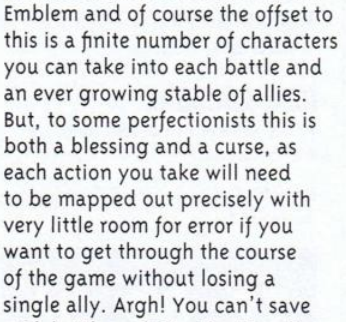


Execute PAAANCH attack now!

FIRE EMBLEM:
Path of Radiance

KOSTA ANDREADIS walks the path of zaniness

One of the hallmarks of Nintendo's long running strategy/RPG hybrid series Fire Emblem is when one of your party members falls (i.e. carks it) during the course of a battle they would be down for the count for the rest of the game. There's simply no way to revive a fallen character in Fire Emblem and of course the offset to this is a finite number of characters you can take into each battle and an ever growing stable of allies. But, to some perfectionists this is both a blessing and a curse, as each action you take will need to be mapped out precisely with very little room for error if you want to get through the course of the game without losing a single ally. Argh! You can't save mid-battle and I just lost Boyd! Ahem, let's continue shall we?



LIKE GBA VERSION? BUY THIS

To those that have played Fire Emblem on the GBA, describing this GameCube incarnation becomes a whole lot easier - simply imagine the same game with a different and expanded story, better visuals and more unit variation and strategy. To others it's not so easy, so for those of you out there who have never played Fire Emblem before find someone who has a GBA version and get them to describe it. Or if you're such a lazy bum that you can't even manage that, imagine a traditional turn based RPG crossed with chess and an RTS with units moving along a grid-like battlefield engaging in err, battle. Ok!

Path of Radiance sees players take control of Ike and a band of mercenaries for hire (don't worry they're the good kind with morals and so forth) who get engulfed, naturally, in a war that divides two races and various countries along the continent of Tellius. With a wonderfully animated introduction sequence the game, much like its handheld counterpart, presents the story using hand drawn anime-style visuals and the typical 'epic, if a little familiar' story progression seen in most eastern RPGs. Surprisingly the voice acting in the game is limited to the sparse animated sequences leaving quite a void in the overall presentation of the game, which if rectified would have most certainly elevated the game to near classic status - mainly because the gameplay is almost without fault.

Axe wielding Paladins have the advantage over spear wielding soldiers, and Mages using the Fire spell have the advantage over Mages that use the 'spell that's worse than fire'. Damn the booklet and its lack of having the weapon/spell circle information thingy! Kind of like Pokemon or Rock Paper Scissors it's a pretty simple setup ("this beats that but is crap against this") but so is chess, so you'd better nip that attitude in the butt, at least I think that's how that analogy goes. Never mind that for now, the only real disadvantage one may find with this setup is an over reliance on characters with a higher defence rating and enemy units clearly preying on the weak, every time, without fail. Other than that, this is pure strategy, RPG, chessy, stats heavy heaven. <<

AVAILABLE ON:

PS2 / XBOX / PC / **GCN**

DETAILS:

CATEGORY: Strategy/RPG
PLAYERS: 1
DEVELOPER: Intelligent Systems
PUBLISHER: Nintendo
PRICE: $99.95
RATING: M
AVAILABLE: Now

HYPER VERDICT:

PLUS: Great strategy gameplay that requires constant thought and tactics.

MINUS: Engaging story sorely needs more cutscenes and voice acting.

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY
70	75	85

OVERALL
85

Great GBA game becomes great GCN game. Great!

PLAY AS MAN. PLAY AS KONG.
PETER JACKSON'S
KING KONG
THE OFFICIAL GAME OF THE MOVIE

Break jaws, slam enemies, and throw massive objects in Kong's third-person battles.

Use weapons, traps, and your team wisely to survive in first-person as Jack.

November 2005 **www.kingkonggame.com**

M Moderate violence

PlayStation 2 PSP XBOX XBOX 360 GAMECUBE PC CD-ROM NINTENDO DS UBISOFT

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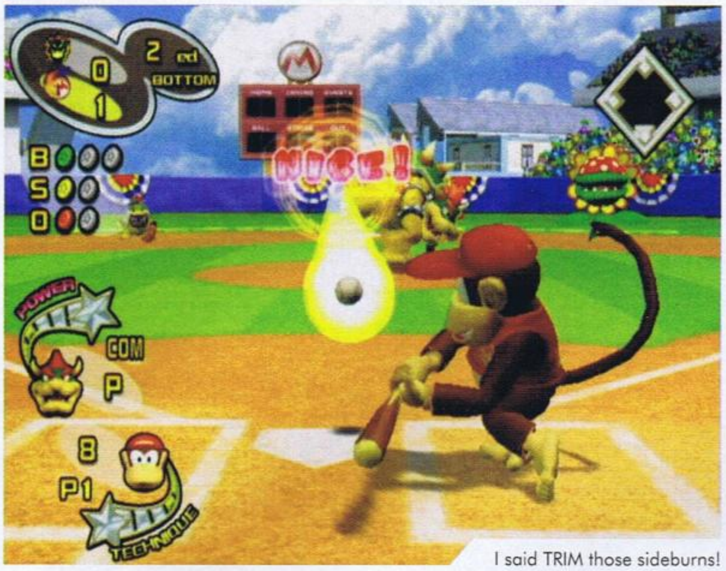
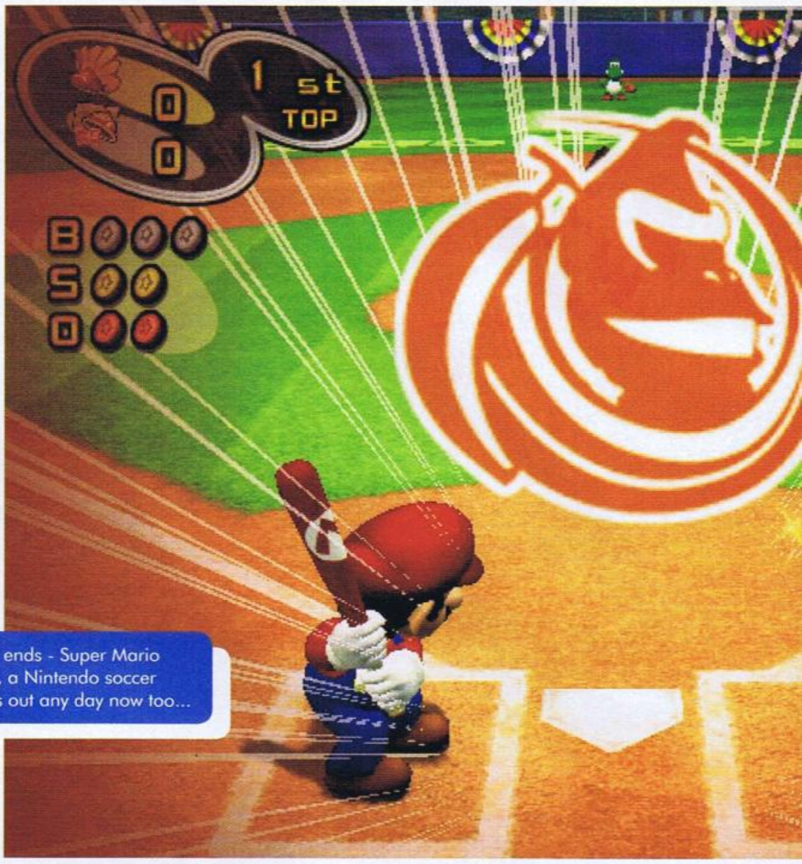


I said TRIM those sideburns!



It never ends - Super Mario Strikers, a Nintendo soccer game is out any day now too...

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We haev funny game observations

MARIO SUPERSTAR BASEBALL

CAM SHEA and **DANIEL WILKS** both wanted to write about their balls

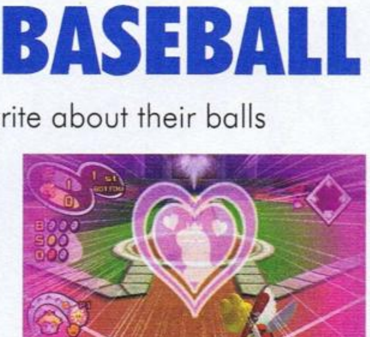
Daniel: Is it just me or is Mario a little bit of a whore? He's appearing in everything these days. Hell, we've even got that bloody Dance Dance Mario thing sitting dejectedly in the corner. Well, he plays baseball too.

STUFF IT IN YOUR CAKEHOLE

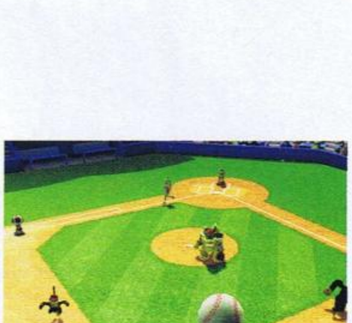
Cam: Yeah it's a shame to see Mario pimping himself out, but let's look at it from his point of view. He's spent countless years now going on epic quests at the expense of his job (does he even *have* his plumbing license any more?), all to rescue the girl — a Princess, no less — who pays him in cake. CAKE I tells ya! It's no wonder the poor little guy has ended up turning tricks on the streets and loaning out his likeness and name to every game that wants him. Mario Baseball is the latest, and after playing hours and hours of it, we can sum it up with a resounding "meh".

[above] Mario's burning balls

Daniel: Well there is one overriding redeeming feature. The Goomba hits the ball with his mighty brown man truncheon. No kidding — when he winds up to take a shot it looks like he's hitting the ball with his todger. Hint to Nintendo, when you design a character it's probably best not to have the bat the same colour as their body as it sticks out from between their legs. Aside from the hitting a home run with my penis, there wasn't that much to make Mario Baseball stand out. The single player game is a little dull (not to mention a cheat) and the multiplayer game makes it too easy to steal bases.



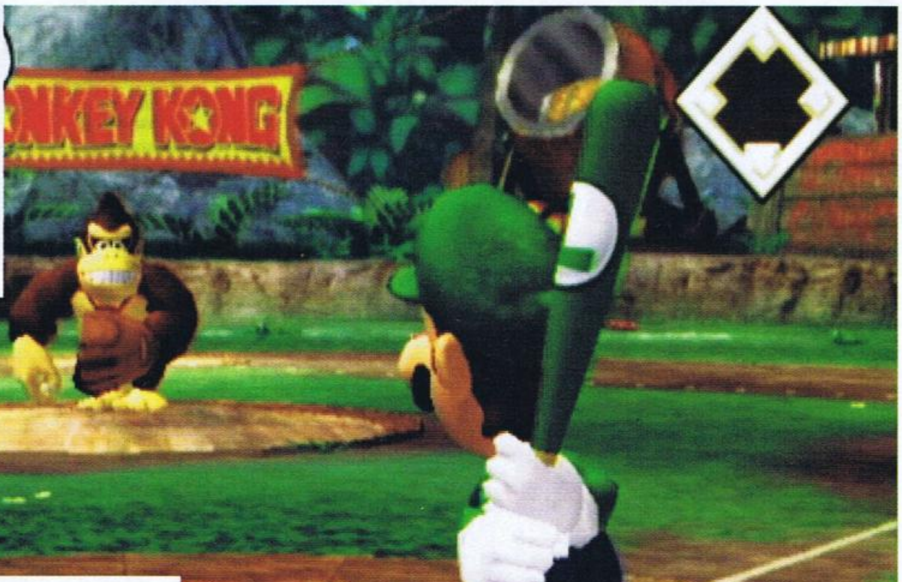
[above] We Heart Baseball

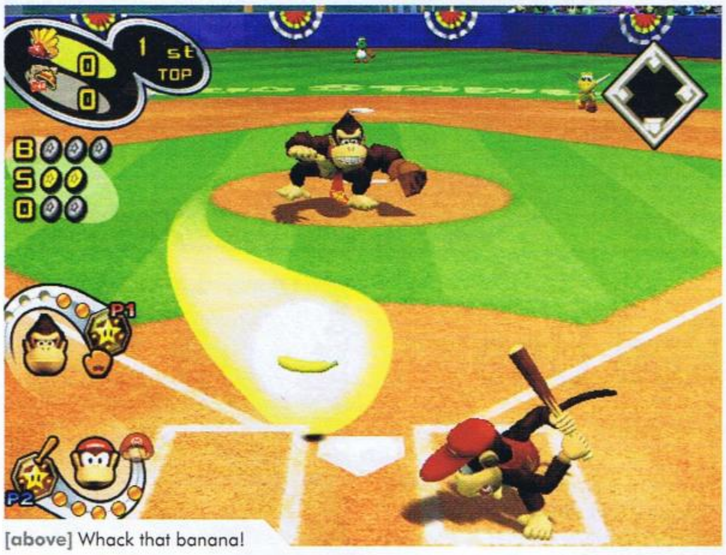


[above] Yet another foul ball

Cam: It's a weird mix isn't it? The game just isn't weighted well. Most of the time Mario Baseball is heavily in favour of the fielding team — with most hits going straight down the throat of a fielder, but then stealing bases is really easy (and once the pitcher is winding up he's locked in to pitch and can't throw the player on base out) and the whole system for throwing the ball back from the outfield (or anywhere really) is a disaster. You're meant to press in a direction on the analogue stick as you throw to indicate the base you want to throw to, but it only works some of the time. It's just so infuriating missing an easy out because a fielder throws to home for no apparent reason. The whole thing is a bit patronising too, like we can't get our heads around pressing anything other than the A button. With a bit more sophistication this could have been good fun.

Daniel: Yeah — the lack of any real sophistication really hurts the playability. As does the cheapness of the AI. It can throw to whatever base it wants to a hell of a lot faster





[above] Whack that banana!

WHEN GOOBA WINDS UP TO TAKE A SHOT IT LOOKS LIKE HE'S HITTING THE BALL WITH HIS TODGER

than a player and if I have a ball I'm ready to catch somehow hit my fielder in the head and knock them out allowing the opposing team to run home four players and win the game by one run (it's happened three times so far) the little purple lunchbox that could is going to add the ability to fly to its repertoire of skills. Honestly, does Ninty really think that the fact that everything in the game is essentially controlled by one button is a good idea? I don't know about you but holding down the A button and releasing it does not equal especially clever gameplay to me. Back on the balance side, did you notice that it's actually easier to get a homerun with the smaller characters with a lower batting skill than it is to with the big characters like DK or Bowser who are meant to be the best batters in the game?

Cam: I did. There doesn't seem to be much rhyme or reason to stats versus actual performance when it comes to batting. I mean, Toadsworth is one of your most consistent homerun hitters! And that guy's like 90! And where's Toadovsky? Every other bloody Nintendo character is in the game. Speaking of which, that's one thing I did like – the fact that you start out in the single player with a ragtag bunch of players and can recruit named players during matches against them. But it all seems to be over a bit quickly...

HITTING A HOMER

Daniel: Damn straight – a couple of matches later and all of the characters join you. It's strange. Each match in the single player has missions to recruit characters like pitch a perfect game or get a hit, but sometimes even if these criteria weren't met the players would choose to join anyway. Each character also has a number of stars you can get that supposedly upgrade the character. You get these stars by becoming MVP, hitting a homer and the like but they seemed to have absolutely no impact on the game. At least some of the mini-games were decent for a few minutes.

Cam: Like the "who wants to see me sock a few dingers" mini-game where your homers become fireworks. Yeah, that was fun for about four minutes. I guess we just expected that in the grand tradition of Mario Tennis and Mario Golf we'd get something a little bit more from Nintendo out of this; either totally compelling gameplay or an RPG-style single player mode. Instead we get nothing particularly special at all. I don't hate this game, it's just hard to feel anything much about it at all.

Daniel: That about sums it up perfectly. It's charming, kind of like a brain damaged puppy. You can play with it but it's kind of a one sided affair. <<

AVAILABLE ON:

PS2 / XBOX / PC / **GCN**

DETAILS:

CATEGORY: Sports
PLAYERS: 1-4
DEVELOPER: Nintendo
PUBLISHER: Nintendo
PRICE: $99.95
RATING: G
AVAILABLE: Now

HYPER VERDICT:

PLUS: Hot Goomba coque and ball action.

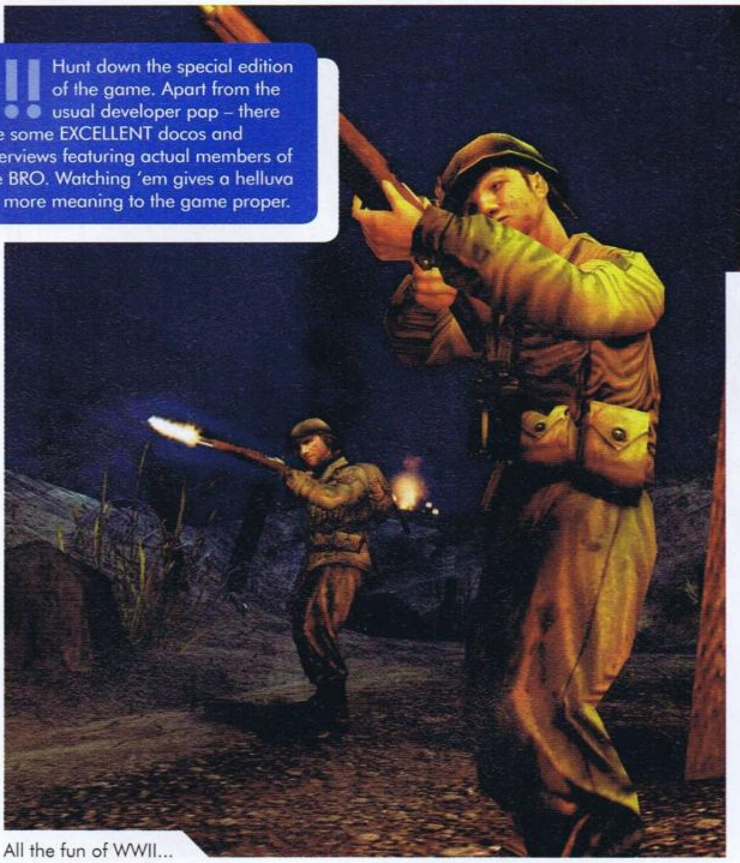
MINUS: Simplistic and lacking Nintendo's usual polish and balance.

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY
78	76	65

OVERALL
66

Hit homeruns with your tackle. Yipee!

!!! Hunt down the special edition of the game. Apart from the usual developer pap – there are some EXCELLENT docos and interviews featuring actual members of the BRO. Watching 'em gives a helluva lot more meaning to the game proper.



All the fun of WWII...

...With added reloading!

CALL OF DUTY 2: Big Red One

MARCH STEPNIK reckons this one's a lot like Queen's Bohemian Rhapsody...

Let's get to the most important, wtf-based question first. Call of Duty 2: Big Red One (BRO) – which appears only on current-generation consoles – is not the same game as the more succinctly named Call of Duty 2 on PC (and Xbox 360). Nope, CoD2 is the continuation of the original PC epic war-shooter, and thus has you playing World War 2 from a bunch of different national perspectives.

Big Red One, on the other hand, is a totally separate adventure (but set during WW2, yeah?) and not really a sequel to anything. It details the exploits of the US's 1st Infantry Division – aka Big Red One - through a variety of campaigns starting in North Africa and ending up in the heart of Hitler's domain. And this is precisely what makes this CoD stand out from its PC and Xbox 360-based cousins: while you gun down Nazis in terrifically realised battle zones over a number of historically-accurate locations, you're stuck with the same group of soldiers throughout. There's no regular change to play through another side's eyes. It's just you (and only you) and the glory of the Big Red One.

THE GLORY OF MY BIG RED ONE

Which is a bit of a double-edged sword. On the one hand, there's a distinct sense of focus as you traverse through Africa and Europe as part of the same troupe, and the peripheral dialogue between your squad in between all the fire fights, delivered in a gritty and convincing manner is a particularly nice touch. On the flipside, your squadmates' individual characters aren't developed enough throughout the campaign so when they do go down, the deaths never reach their strong potential impact. Just who exactly was that one again? The ground gained by focusing on one group in BRO is ultimately lost by the difficulty in really engaging with your team. Easy come, easy go then.

It's something that shouldn't really bother you in the slightest though, because BRO is just such a gas to play regardless, even if it doesn't do anything really new. Narrative/structure issues aside, this is one tight FPS that pushes all the right WW2-based shooter buttons. The special effects are amazing and the level of intensity on the battlefield is as unrelenting as ever – picking off enemies while bullets whiz by, mortar explodes to one side and bombers drop their payload overhead is all in a day's work in BRO. The locations are lovingly crafted in one of the best-looking (in a gritty, WW2 sorta way) 3D games on current-gen consoles.

And in opposition to more specialist combat games, BRO has you doing virtually *everything* you could do in a war. Think it of an extended remix of the best WW2 shooters have to offer. It has you launching surprise attacks by foot, manning large anti-air guns, blasting enemies from the safety of a tank (or in a not-so-surprising twist, taking down enemy tanks with shoulder-mounted bazookas). There's trench warfare, sniper runs – fancy being an aerial gunner too?

Which leads to the BRO's only real sticking point – its totally linear structure. Everything about this game is designed to push you down one very strict path, with little opportunity to deviate. It's no less realistic than a game like MoH European Assault (with its open-map, multiple-approach design), but it's an important caveat. While BRO doesn't let your roam free, it does instead take you on one hell of a thrilling – if not rather familiar - rollercoaster ride. <<

AVAILABLE ON:

PS2 / XBOX / PC / GCN

DETAILS:

CATEGORY: FPS
PLAYERS: 1-16
DEVELOPER: Treyarch
PUBLISHER: Activision
PRICE: $49.95 GCN, $89.95 PS2/ Xbox
RATING: MA 15+
AVAILABLE: Now

HYPER VERDICT:

PLUS: Blazing special effects, great visuals, solid action.

MINUS: Story's a bit naff, nothing new.

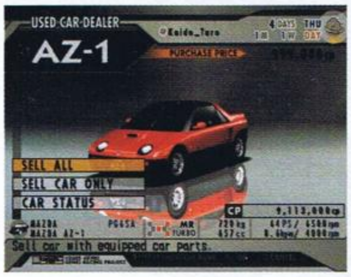
VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY
88	84	82

OVERALL

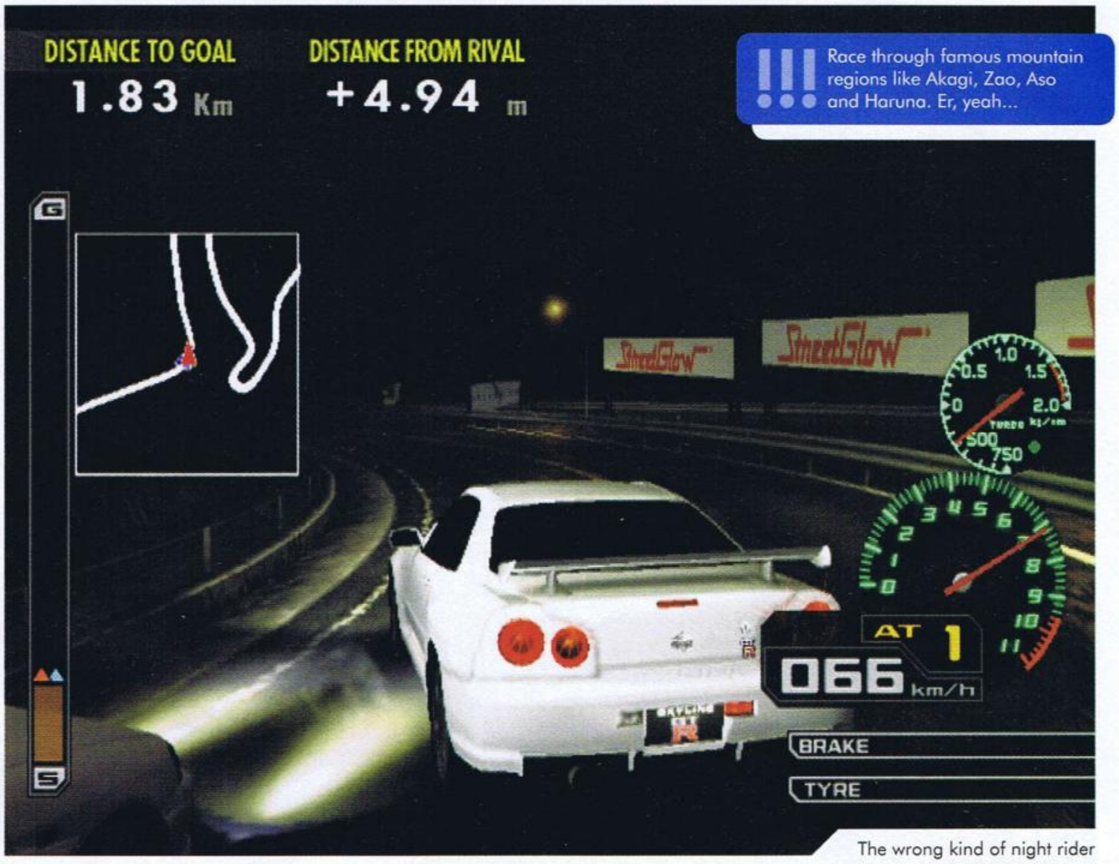
84

A tasty morsel in a genre that's being flogged to death.

SP
00'03"900
059



ENTRY
HAKONE
AREA A
AREA B
AREA C
AREA D
AREA E
Area A
Select section to move.



Race through famous mountain regions like Akagi, Zao, Aso and Haruna. Er, yeah...

The wrong kind of night rider

SP
00'03"900
059

[above] Ooh look, it's another car *sigh*

SP
00'26"831
070

KAIDO RACER

ANDY HUNT is a bit of a drifter

Looking at the racing genre in today's marketplace is akin to perusing a line up of guys wearing suits. Sure they all look nice, are well groomed, and are quite sharp, but ultimately they're pretty much the same thing... well, maybe one guy has a pinstripe suit, or something.

However, sometimes it's nice to see the disheveled labourer type, complete with blue tank top and bricker's cleavage hanging out the back of his pants getting a bit of a look in. Actually, this turns out to be quite an apt way to describe Kaido Racer (or Kaido Battle 2 – Chain Reaction as it's known in other parts of the world) - a racing game that concentrates on driving a car with its arse hanging out.

HUGE IN JAPAN

Drift racing, and its counterpart Touge (pronounced "Too-Gay" – as in "Overly Happy") has been huge in Japan, and is becoming quite prominent here in Australia. The idea behind Kaido Racer is to scream through mountain passes, participating in a variety of different modes, trying to best your opponent in the "wow" stakes. The modes include CA (drift), TA (Time Attack) and LF-TF battles. That last mode entails you either trying to overtake your opponent when you start from behind, or trying to increase your lead when starting from in front of them.

In the CA mode, sections of the mountain pass will be marked with specific zones for you to drift your thang within. Points are awarded in these zones according to the speed and angle of your drift, taking note that if you so much as even breathe on the walls, you will lose all points for that section.

As the game seems to focus on the driver versus the track philosophy and effectively maintains the spirit of Touge, the courses are devoid of any traffic other than yourself, or your opponent (depending on the mode). However, as the courses are extremely narrow in sections, some may find the absence of other cars a godsend.

The handling of the cars themselves is relatively loose, focusing instead on making the drift aspect as exhilarating as possible, as opposed to being anally realistic. For all intents and purposes it works well, and to link several corners with one drift is extremely satisfying.

The adjustable weather conditions, times and direction of the course provide some variety, as drifting downhill requires a very different style than drifting uphill – not approaching a downhill corner properly transforms your Nissan 180SX into the world's most powerful shopping trolley.

There are 149 licensed cars available and they all are a fair representation of their real-life counterparts, including the different handling aspects of a powerful rear wheel drive versus an all-wheeler. Modifying each car is reminiscent of Gran Turismo, and avid drifters will get much enjoyment out of adjusting toe, ride height and camber.

The in-game graphics are somewhat dated when you compare them to the latest from Polyphony, but they run smoothly and without an injection of Dr Choppy, which is kinda to be expected considering the distinct lack of any other action on the track.

It is difficult to recommend Kaido Battle 2 straight off the bat, due to the desolate courses, no car damage and so-so graphics, however if bricker's cleavage is your thing, and you want to see something a little different among your suits, it just might cover a fashion style lacking in your slick racing game collection. <<

AVAILABLE ON:

PS2 / XBOX / PC / GCN

DETAILS:

CATEGORY: Arcade racing
PLAYERS: 1-2
DEVELOPER: Genki
PUBLISHER: Konami
PRICE: $69.95
RATING: G
AVAILABLE: Now

HYPER VERDICT:

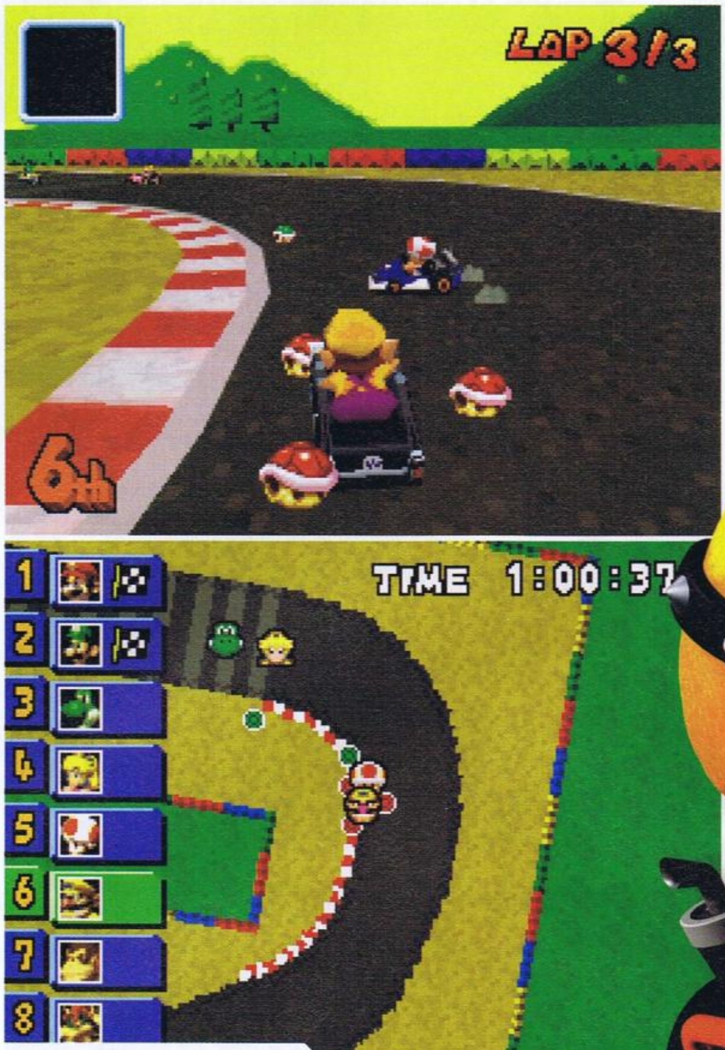
PLUS: Finally a game that provides a semi-realistic representation of drifting.

MINUS: Static tracks, dated graphics, exploitable mechanics.

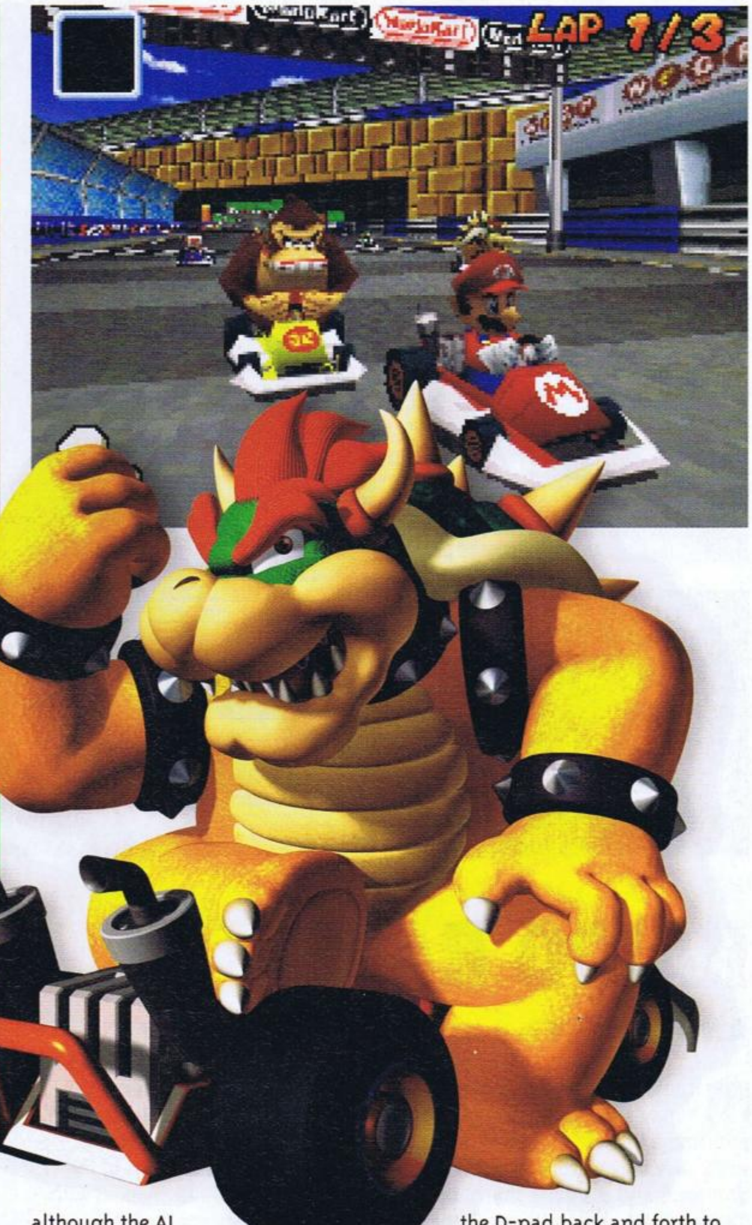
VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY
80	75	80

OVERALL
79

Purist drift racing that ain't half bad...



And Mario-head streaks to victory!



MARIO KART DS

>>> Must. Stop. Playing. For long enough. To write. This. Review. Aah bugger it. "Guys? Who's up for another round?"

ZERO PRODUCTIVITY ENSUES

An hour later... Damn this be an addictive game! There are some serious advantages to this job and having six people who own DSs within shouting distance is one of them. Getting Nintendo to send us four copies of the game is another (and Amos was smart enough to go out and buy his own copy... we're currently working on Malky) and being able to claim we're "working" for our two hour Mario Kart multiplayer session every day is definitely the icing on the cake. But here's the best bit: just about everyone out there who wants to will be able to get in on the multiplayer action. For a start, you can play with up to eight people wirelessly, even if only one person has the cart. You're really restricted in terms of courses, but once your friends have had a taste they'll probably go out and buy the game anyway. Then there's online play. Yes, this is the first DS game to support online play for up to four people, and even if you don't have wireless internet at home, you can get a USB Wi-Fi adaptor to connect to your PC's broadband connection (although the Nintendo one is $50 - ouch) or just hit one of the wireless hotspots Nintendo have set up around the country. So yeah, a piece of the Mario Kart multiplayer pie for all.

And here's the truly stellar news - Mario Kart DS is the best game in the series so far. The ease with which you can hop into multiplayer (and the fact that you don't have to share the screen) takes it beyond both MK 64 and Double Dash!!, and it absolutely wallops Super Circuit in terms of handheld playability. This is kart racing gold Jerry, gold.

MODE 7 OUT THE WINDOW

Mario Kart DS is the first true 3D Mario Kart game for a handheld and it runs like a dream. Although not super detailed, it's smooth and fast, and the textures are clean and functional. Unlike DD with its 'larger than life' cartoony presentation with oversize shells and bananas, MK DS feels much more focused on racing than on zany antics, and although the AI still cheats like crazy, they're nowhere near as bad as they were in DD.

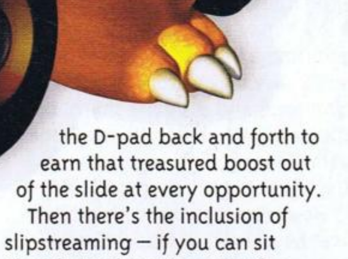
More importantly, it takes the familiar handling mechanics to new heights, feeling a lot like a super deluxe version of MK 64's handling. For instance, unlike Double Dash!! we're once again hopping into powerslides, which definitely feels more intuitive, and opens up those classic old banana jumping/gap jumping strategies once more. The powersliding mechanics have never been better, either. There's just so much room to move in a powerslide – reel it right in for a tight line around a corner, slide way out to avoid an obstacle or to take the outside line, and of course, toggle the D-pad back and forth to earn that treasured boost out of the slide at every opportunity.

Then there's the inclusion of slipstreaming – if you can sit close behind another racer for long enough you'll get a burst of speed for a few seconds and the ability to barge other racers out of your way. It's a great addition (although somewhat hard to pull off consistently) that really spices things up on those long straights; if you're in front you can either hold your line and speed and risk someone slipstreaming past you, or you can swerve back and forth across the track and try not to give them an opportunity.

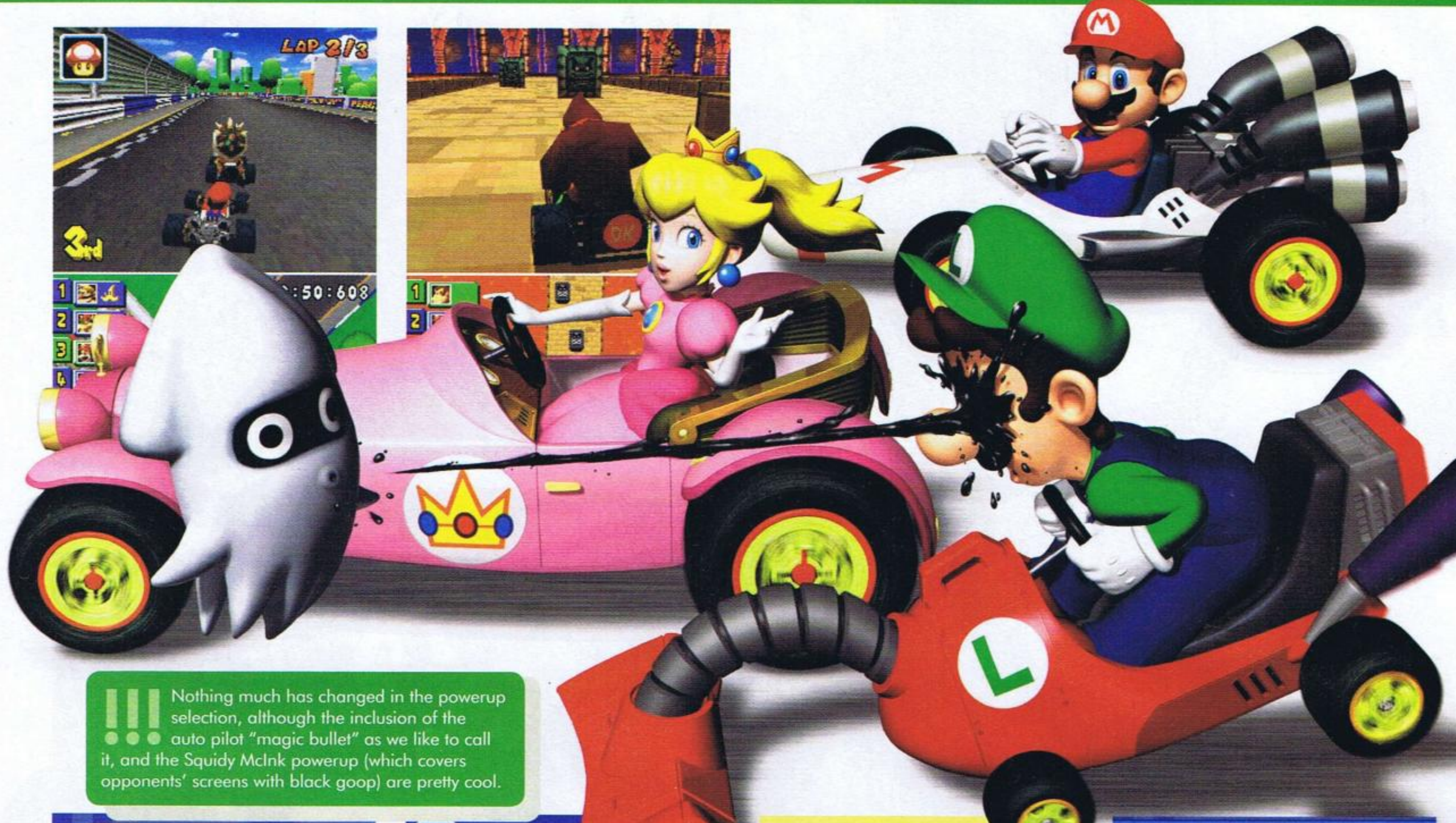
While Mario Kart DS doesn't really utilise the touch functionality much,

SELECT CHARACTER
DONKEY KONG

[up] DK's car contains an aphrodisiac



[up] Thrilling map action!



!!! Nothing much has changed in the powerup selection, although the inclusion of the auto pilot "magic bullet" as we like to call it, and the Squidy McInk powerup (which covers opponents' screens with black goop) are pretty cool.

STANDARD MR
SPEED
ACCELERATION
WEIGHT
HANDLING
DRIFT
ITEMS
OK

HERE'S THE TRULY STELLAR NEWS - MARIO KART DS IS EASILY THE BEST GAME IN THE SERIES SO FAR

the dual screens are used to great effect. The bottom screen displays a top down map of the course immediately surrounding your kart, allowing you to see obstacles on the road ahead, as well as any shells bouncing around the course and racers coming up behind you. You can even see who holds what powerup. You'll only be able to sneak a peek from time to time during races though, making use of the lower screen nice and strategic.

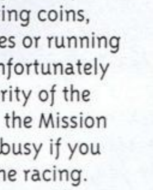
The track design too is a delight. Half the courses have been taken from the previous games — Super Mario Kart, Super Circuit, Mario Kart 64 and Double Dash!! giving this a definite "best of" vibe. Many of the courses have never looked or played better. They're a pretty good selection too, running the gamut from some of the classic circuits — Mario Circuit 1 (SNES), Peach Circuit (GBA), Luigi Circuit (GCN) and Yoshi Circuit (GCN) through to fan favourites like Banshee Boardwalk (N64), Baby Park (GCN) and Donut Plains 1 (SNES). There are even some of the most accursed courses thrown in to keep you on your toes, such as Koopa Beach 2 (SNES) and Choco Island 2 (SNES). Better still, each course comes packing its own classic theme tune, which makes them all the more enchanting.

The new courses are great too. Highlights include Waluigi Pinball; a ride around a giant pinball table that starts with everyone being shot to the top of the table then following the swooping and sloping paths down, taking care to avoid giant pinballs, bumpers and flippers. With some sweet retro sound effects Waluigi Pinball is an instant classic. There are a couple of winding, hairpin filled courses through mountainous areas, such as Shroom Ridge and DK Pass which are a good challenge, plus there's a new motocross-style course in Wario Stadium, a new Bowser Castle, a new Mario Circuit and a disappointing new Rainbow Road. There are 32 courses in total, and while they're not all classics, there's enough variety to fuel multiplayer sessions for a very long time.

ON YOUR LONESOME

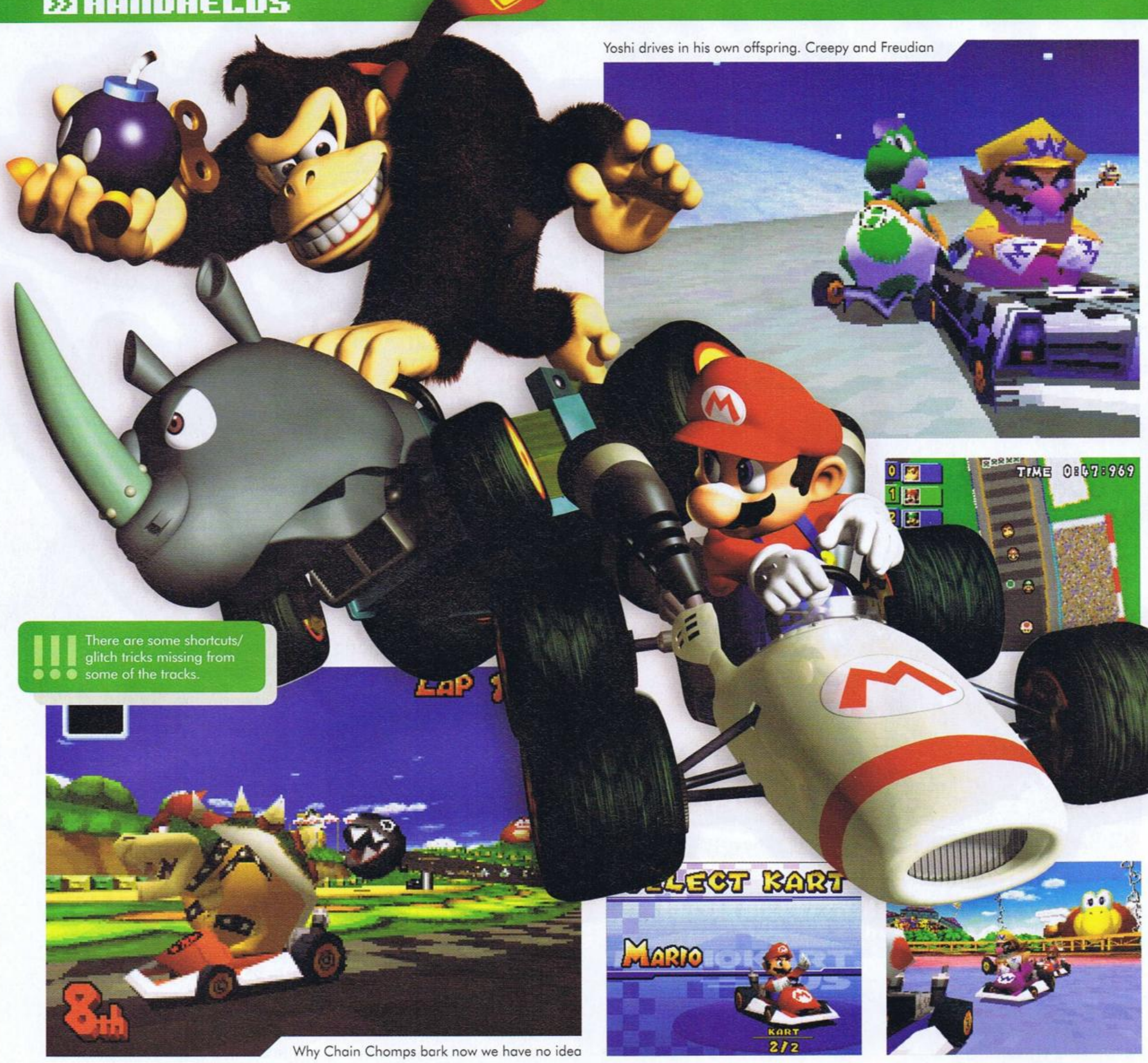
While single player isn't what this game is about, it's certainly a lot easier to get through each GP than many of the previous versions, thanks in part to how glorious it feels to play, and to a more sensible points system — no restarts allowed, but you can still win if you come second or third occasionally. There's heaps to unlock in the single player game too — all 32 courses in normal and mirror mode, and stacks of extra karts and characters (even R.O.B. has made it in there!). There's even a whole new Mission mode. This is comprised of six sets of quite straightforward challenges and boss battles, and really comes alive when you're tasked with doing things like hitting a certain number of turbo boost powerslides in a lap, but is less interesting when you're charged with collecting coins, driving through gates or running into crates, which unfortunately constitutes the majority of the challenges. Even so, the Mission mode will keep you busy if you want a break from the racing.

As expected, however, it's multiplayer gaming over local wireless that's easily the highlight. There's



>> SHINE RUNNING OVER THE BORDER Battle mode is now comprised of Balloon Battle and the new Shine Runners mode. Balloon Battle you're probably all familiar with, only this time you start with only one balloon blown up and must blow into the DS's microphone to get your quota of three. In theory it's a good idea, forcing players to find quiet corners to blow up their balloons mid-game, but in practice it's just kind of lame. Shiner Runners sees everyone trying to collect a limited number of shines with players gradually being eliminated. Hitting a player carrying a shine will free it for you to collect (you can follow where it goes on the map screen), which is all well and good but the gameplay feels pretty random, and making tight turns to collect shines can be a nightmare.

Both modes use the same six courses, including the most sickly sweet piece of Nintendo design ever – Tart Top (and no, that's not as sexy as it sounds), and really aren't anything to get excited about. It is, however, quite nice to have the radar on the bottom screen.



Yoshi drives in his own offspring. Creepy and Freudian

There are some shortcuts/ glitch tricks missing from some of the tracks.

Why Chain Chomps bark now we have no idea

IT'S MULTIPLAYER GAMING OVER A LOCAL WIRELESS CONNECTION THAT'S EASILY THE HIGHLIGHT

just nothing like being able to scream at someone sitting right next to you, or doing a victory dance in Wilks' face after a really close race where you narrowly made it over the line just as the sound of a blue shell rang through the air from several DSs. The best part of multiplayer sessions is how freeform it can be. Forget selecting tracks before each race or competing in a GP. Just choose your speed class, any AI you want and your character/kart and set the course selection to random! Much like the GPs, everyone gets awarded points at the end of each race which are then added to their total. You can play for hours this way, seeing the lead swap back and forth as the points mount. Or you can just choose to do a certain number or races or set the first to X victories.

While there's occasional slowdown in multiplayer wireless sessions, and the handling is a little sluggish compared to single player, this is the mode Mario Kart DS was made for, and the mode that's going to tide you and your friends over for a long long time. Like I said, gold.

Cam Shea

AVAILABLE ON:

GBA / **DS** / PSP / N-GAGE

DETAILS:

CATEGORY: Kart racing
PLAYERS: 1-8
DEVELOPER: Nintendo
PUBLISHER: Nintendo
PRICE: $69.95
RATING: G
AVAILABLE: Now

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY
89	80	92

OVERALL

93

HYPER BIG RUBBER STAMP OF APPROVAL

nintendo Wi-Fi connection

>> ONLINE PLAY While Mario Kart is perfectly functional online, there are some limitations that prevent it from reaching the heights we were hoping for. For a start, races are limited to four players and you can only choose from 20 of the 32 courses in the game. There's no option to play Battle mode online, nor to trade ghost laps (which is a great function over local wireless). In races your opponents may jump around a bit and you can't do essential tricks like trailing shells behind your kart. It's simplistic in approach too – there's no ranking system and little customisation, with no lobby outside races and the only real options being to set up races with friends or by other criteria such as skill level or location. The whole thing feels very vanilla, but if you can't get together with friends to play, it's a good option to have. Check out www.nintendowifi.com and choose Australia for more info on hotspots.

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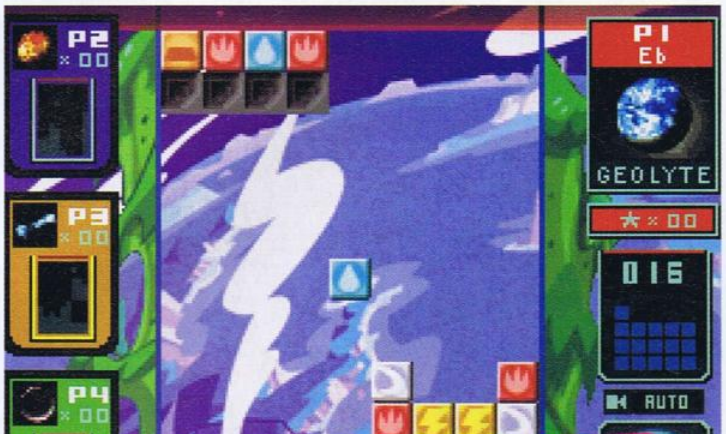
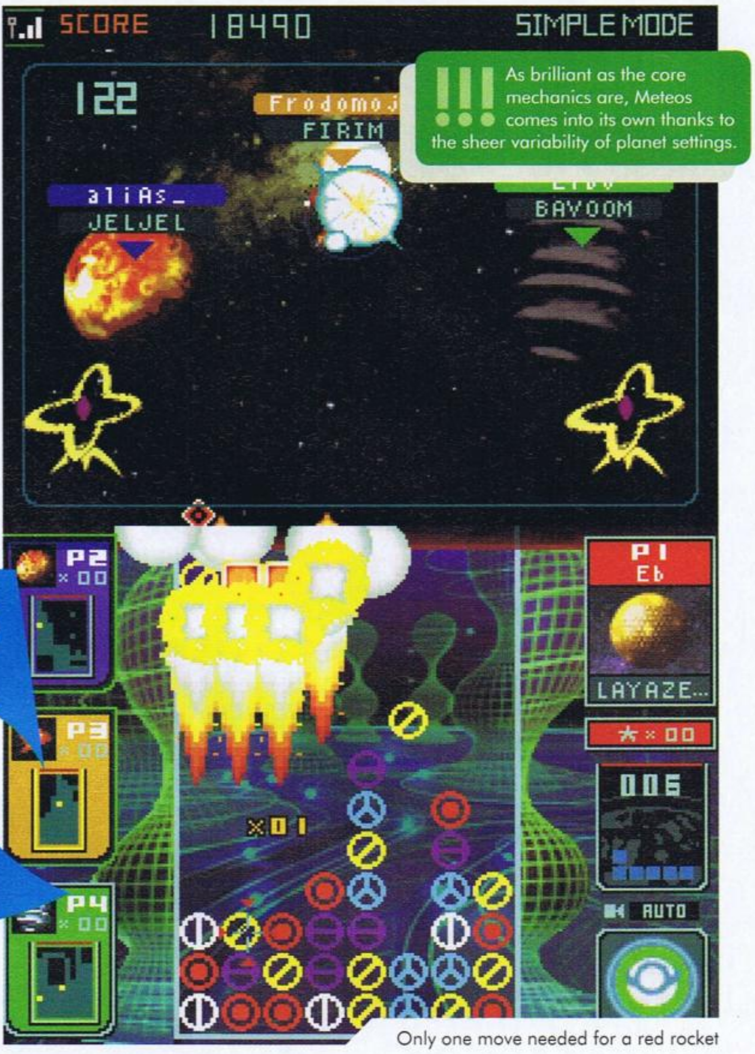
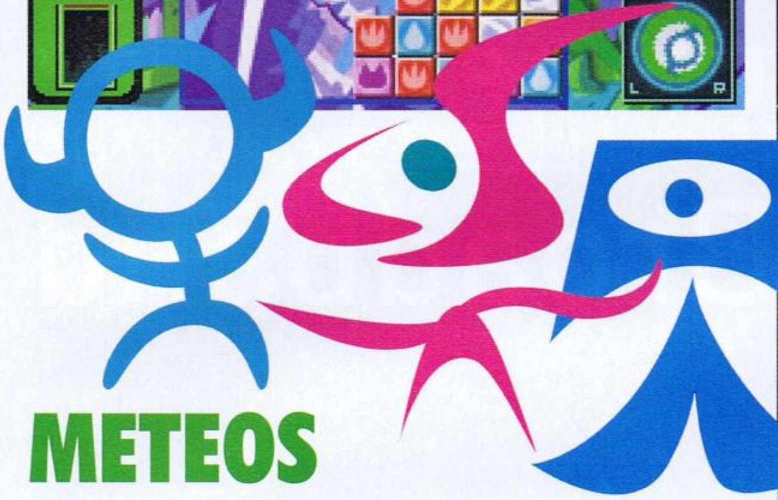

P2
P3
P4
P1
Eb
GEOLYTE
016
AUTO


SCORE 18490
SIMPLE MODE
122
Frodomoj
FIRIM
aliAs_
JELJEL
BAVOOM
P2
P3
P4
P1
Eb
LAYAZE...
006
AUTO

As brilliant as the core mechanics are, Meteos comes into its own thanks to the sheer variability of planet settings.

Only one move needed for a red rocket



METEOS

It's strange when a simple puzzle game can have your hands shaking from adrenalin after a few minutes play but that is exactly the effect that Meteos has. Created by the same genius team responsible for Lumines, Meteos has all the hallmarks of a Mizuguchi game; simple yet incredibly deep and compelling gameplay, open-endedness and a kick-arse soundtrack. If you own a DS, this is one of the games you need to own.

THERE'S A PREMISE?

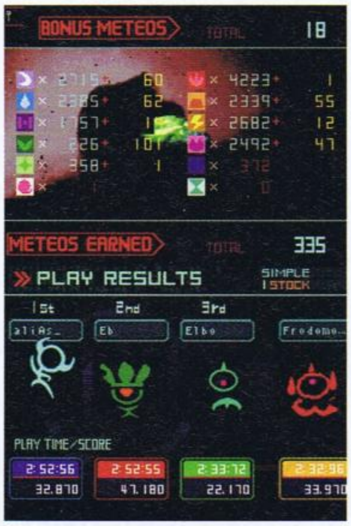
The basic premise of Meteos is that an evil planet named Meteos (kind of like a larger and slightly nonsensical Sauron's Eye) is launching meteors at every planet and it's up to the heroic Metamo Ark to send the meteors back where they came from. The ark does this by lining three or more of the same colour meteors either horizontally or vertically, converting them into rockets that will blast all of the meteors stacked on top of them into orbit. Gravity changes depending on the planet you're playing on so some areas will need only a basic three part booster whilst others will require the player to quickly form extra boosters whilst the meteors are in the air to give it extra lift. Using the stylus, players can move individual meteors up and down. It's as simple as that.

Why then is the game so great? Like Tetris, the concept of Meteos uses the one simple gameplay mechanic that is essentially endlessly replayable and scales in difficulty depending on the speed at which the pieces drop. No matter how good you get the game can always ramp up that little bit more making it a consistent challenge. Unlike Tetris, Meteos features a number of gameplay modes. Simple games are instant one off games in which the player can choose the planet and the rules of the engagement. Time Attack mode challenges the player to remain alive for a set amount of time or through a set number of meteors falling and Deluge mode simply times how long it takes for you to die under a constant deluge of meteors.

The core single player mode, Star Trip offers three different paths to take through the cosmos (each with their own branching structure) to a final confrontation with Meteos, adding challenges to each level such as "Win in under 2 minutes" or "Launch 200 meteos". Multiplayer is also available with up to four players on one cartridge using the DS Download feature. The game keeps track of the number of different kinds of meteors launched in play which can later be used in the Fusion mode to create new planets, items or unlock new sound-scapes for levels.

Meteos is, without hyperbole, the best puzzle game on the DS. It's fast, furious, amazingly addictive and hugely fun, though not without a flaw. The game requires you to get good and do it fast. The difficulty of most modes, especially Star Trip ramp up at a pace that may leave some casual players wallowing in the dust, but it's clear that Tetris finally has competition.

Daniel Wilks


BONUS METEOS
TOTAL 18
METEOS EARNED
TOTAL 335
PLAY RESULTS
SIMPLE 1 STOCK
1st
2nd
3rd
aliAs_
Eb
Elbo
Frodomo...
PLAY TIME/SCORE
2:52:56 32,870
2:52:55 47,180
2:33:12 22,170
2:32:96 33,970

[up] Battle against three abstract shapes

SCORE 10014
SIMPLE MODE
44
TIME 0:47:28
Frodomoj
JELJEL
aliAs_
GEOLYTE
Elbo
MEGADOM

P2
P3
P4
P1
Eb
BOGGOB
013
AUTO

AVAILABLE ON:

GBA / **DS** / PSP / N-GAGE

DETAILS:

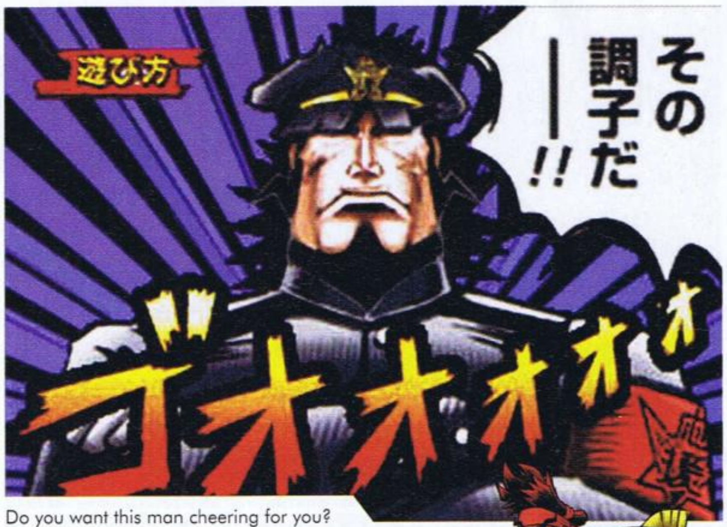
CATEGORY: Puzzle
PLAYERS: 1-4
DEVELOPER: Q Entertainment
PUBLISHER: Nintendo
PRICE: $69.95
RATING: G
AVAILABLE: Now

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY
85	91	94

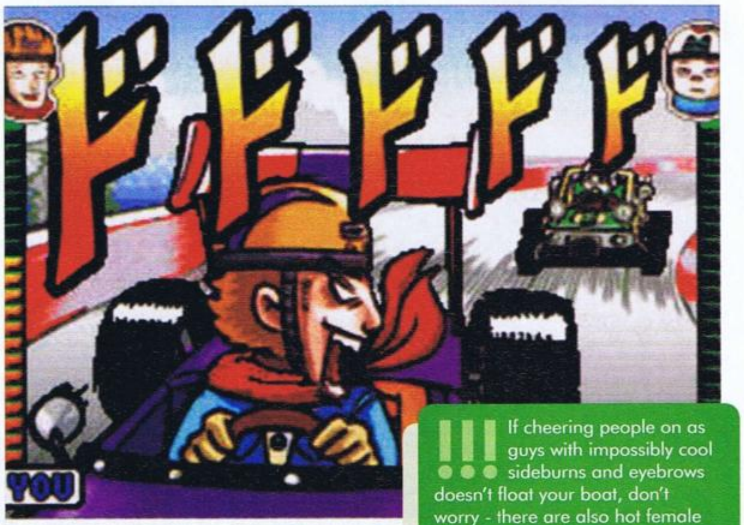
OVERALL

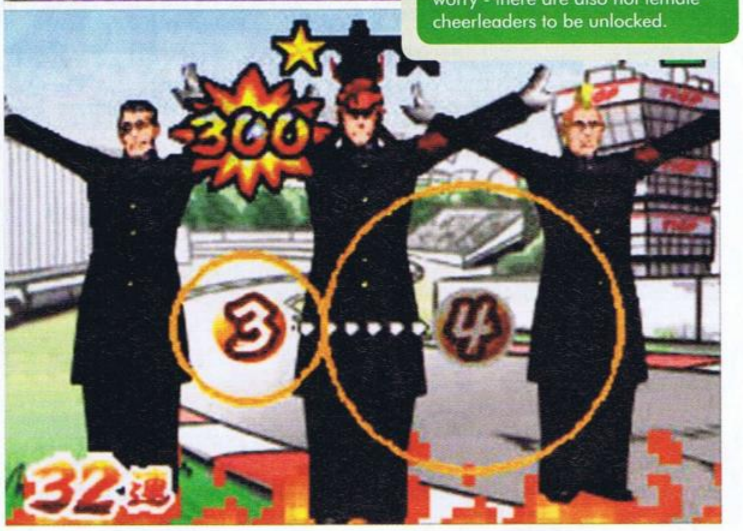
92

HYPER BIG RUBBER STAMP OF APPROVAL


遊び方
その調子だ——!!
ゴオオオオオ

Do you want this man cheering for you?





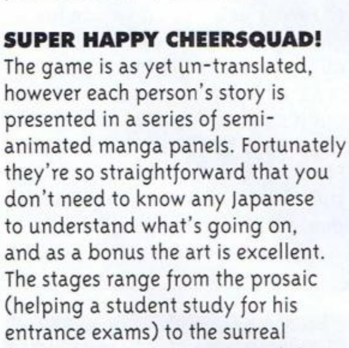
!!! If cheering people on as guys with impossibly cool sideburns and eyebrows doesn't float your boat, don't worry - there are also hot female cheerleaders to be unlocked.

OSSU! TATAKAE! OUENDAN (IMPORT REVIEW)

>> Ossu! Tatakae! Ouendan is a rhythm game built around a ridiculously endearing premise: when various people are experiencing the worst of life's difficulties, they scream at the top of their lungs: "OUENDAN!" Immediately a group of burly men in military uniforms appear on the scene, ready to cheer them on to victory with a catchy J-Rock soundtrack. These men are the Ouendan - the cheer squad. And by tapping the DS a lot, you too can help cheer all these poor citizens to a better life.

SUPER HAPPY CHEERSQUAD!

The game is as yet un-translated, however each person's story is presented in a series of semi-animated manga panels. Fortunately they're so straightforward that you don't need to know any Japanese to understand what's going on, and as a bonus the art is excellent. The stages range from the prosaic (helping a student study for his entrance exams) to the surreal (cheering for an election candidate, whose opponent's winning strategy is to gift everyone with magical purple afros. Say what, Japan?). Your cheering skill will affect the course and outcome of each tale, with added story breaks in the stage to let you know how you're going.



The game mechanics are pretty simple, but very addictive. Each stage is set to a different song, and Ouendan makes great use of the DS touch-screen, requiring you to tap 'hit markers', draw lines and spin discs in time with the music. The better your timing, the higher you score, and you can chain successful hits for a combo. As the game difficulty progresses, the rhythms become more intricate, incorporating off-beats and maddening timing, triple-taps and longer combo chains. If you play through the hardest difficulties, you'll find yourself with a bizarre love-hate relationship with the songs in question, and a nasty hand-cramp from the time you nearly plaited your fingers together on the last stage.

The difficulty progression is at times a little steep, as often after clearing a stage you find yourself facing four new songs of equal and seemingly insane difficulty. However as you get used to the game, the jump from one song to the next becomes smoother, and there's an extra easy option available if you really need it.

100
2
3
48連
おっすはなこ

The songs for each stage are catchy and well chosen, and there's a good range of styles and genres in there (though obviously if you're violently opposed to J-rock, this isn't the game for you). The songs are apparently wildly popular in Japan, and although they're sung by sound-alikes in Ouendan, the sound quality and singing is still great.

The game even has decent replay value, with a total of five levels of difficulty (although attempting the hardest may require cybernetically augmented reflexes) and the co-operative and battle multiplayer modes are more fun than they have any right to be. It's unknown if the game will see an English-language release, but it's so addictively surreal that's it well worth the import - though it probably will leave you with the urge to scream "OUENDAAAAAAAAN!" the next time you're in trouble.

Sally Woellner

AVAILABLE ON:

GBA / **DS** / PSP / N-GAGE

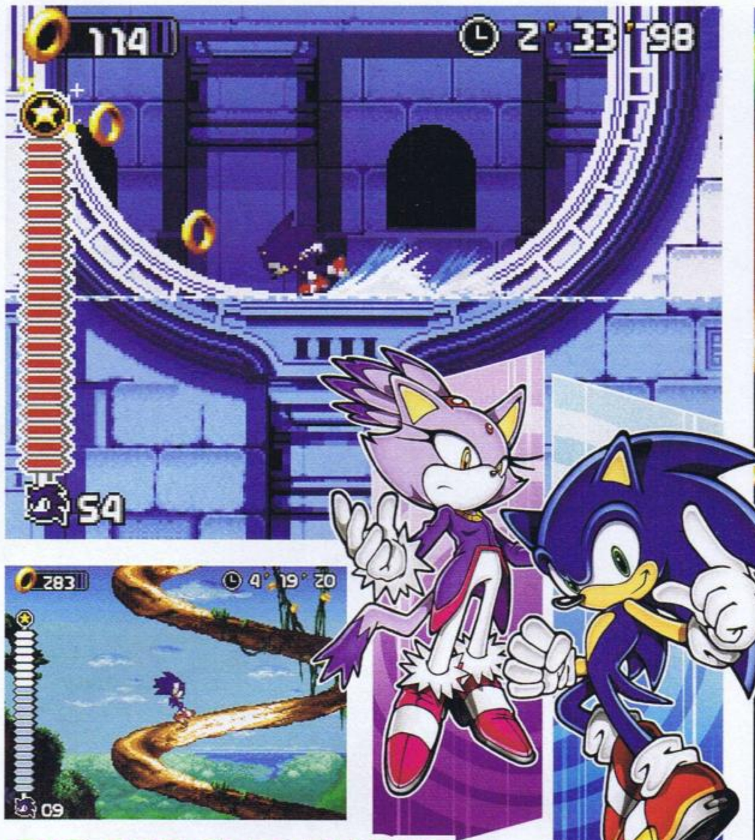
DETAILS:

CATEGORY: Rhythm
PLAYERS: 1-4
DEVELOPER: Inis
PUBLISHER: Nintendo
PRICE: $TBA
RATING: TBA
AVAILABLE: Now (Jap Import)

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY
90	91	91

OVERALL
91

HYPER BIG RUBBER STAMP OF APPROVAL



!!! What is it about finding bloody crystals/emeralds/gems that so appeals to platform game designers? Get over it!

SONIC RUSH

>> Sonic Rush for Nintendo DS is a return to the frenetic, two dimensional but multi-directional high speed jetting of a little blue hedgehog. Sonic runs, jumps, flies, swings and flips through the seven themed main stages including Leaf Storm, a traditional nature filled Sonic world; Night Carnival, a Vegas style bright lights zone and Huge Crisis, which takes place on an aircraft carrier.

As is tradition in Sonic, there is one other playable character: Blaze the Cat. This purple cat is from another dimension – but who'd know it since she has all the same moves as Sonic, only her animations are different. This is a pity since the series was built on the variety of Sonic and sidekick: Sonic and Tails; Sonic and Knuckles. Though you play through the different worlds in a different order, the experience of using either Sonic or Blaze is effectively the same.

The whole crew is along for the ride, in purely speaking roles: Eggman (nee Robotnik), Knuckles, Tails, Amy and her pet Chao with the same cutesy squeals that viewers of the cartoon series will know and err... love. Once again, Sonic and Blaze are racing after Eggman to reclaim the stolen Sol Emeralds (or Chaos Crystals), as rivals but ultimately as friends, comrades and passionate lovers (way to read the subtext! – Ed).

THANKS FOR THE DUAL SCREEN

Being on the DS, Sonic Rush takes place over two screens. A great idea, mostly for exploration and replay value since in all Sonic games, there are multiple routes through each course. As you dash vertically, you can see different paths above and below that you might be able to get to. The bigger rollercoaster sections are really exciting on dual screens, as you hurl Sonic headlong from top to bottom and back again. Transitions at slower speeds from the top screen to bottom and vice versa are trickier, as you're never quite sure when your character will reappear. One particularly annoying section has you manoeuvring a momentarily invisible Sonic out of the way of an invisible enemy... Jedi mind tricks needed for that one.

Boss Battles appear every third level in Sonic Rush and are all in pseudo-3D. That is, in a 3D perspective while Sonic or Blaze runs from side to side. The battle scenes are gorgeous, whether above the skies as a giant Robotnik falcon soars in to attack or inside a pyramid, against a large and fearsome dung beetle. These battles call on pattern recognition to avoid damage and deliver carefully timed attacks to Eggman. The low number of rings provided for health makes for some tense platform play.

There are some changes to the basic formula of high speeds and boss battles throughout Sonic Rush. Sonic might have to battle a certain number of enemies before progressing from a room, there's also some tilted perspective sections, much like

Double Dragon. These sections do provide a little variation but it's pretty bland stuff, really.

Sega has taken a step back in time to two dimensions where Sonic was still fun. Yeah! And they've really tried to focus on speed and speed alone, which is an important step forward (and simultaneously back). But they're still haven't nailed the complete package. There's great speed and fun boss battles but a pale second character and some bitsy interludes; some great features but some ordinary inclusions. When Sonic broke in the early '90s, Sega showed a new and brave face for gaming. Ever since we've seen duller and more generic Sonics. Sonic Rush is far better than Shadow but it's safe rather than cutting edge. Sega has a way to go before Sonic is top of the pile again. But still, this is a stronger Sonic game than we've seen in a long time.

John Dewhurst

AVAILABLE ON:

GBA / **DS** / PSP / N-GAGE

DETAILS:

CATEGORY: Action
PLAYERS: 1
DEVELOPER: Sonic Team
PUBLISHER: Sega
PRICE: $69.95
RATING: G
AVAILABLE: Now

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY
80	70	81

OVERALL

81

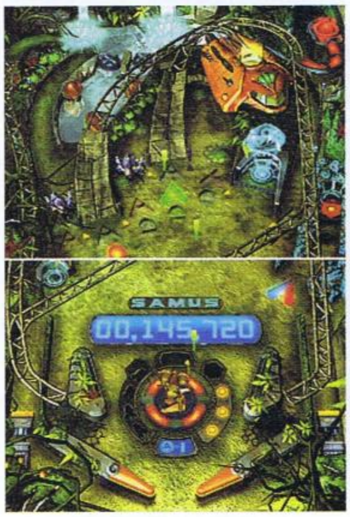
METROID PRIME PINBALL

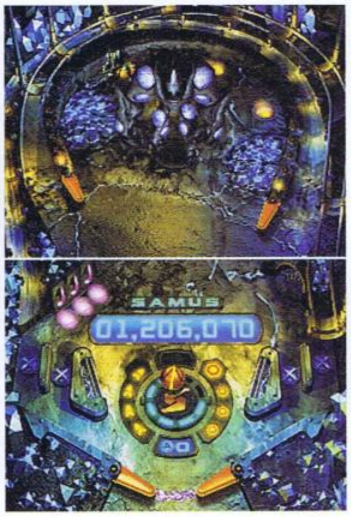
The first Metroid title to be released on the DS isn't the first person shooting action of Metroid Prime Hunters it's, surprisingly, a pinball game. Prepare to meet Samus in morph ball mode bouncing between those bouncy belly things and going up ramps on Metroid-themed pinball tables. And as far as pinball games go (handheld ones in particular) Metroid Pinball is definitely up there, the tables are well designed and animated but you have to ask yourself how great can a videogame of pinball really be? The answer to that would probably come down to personal preference and hey, every now and then who doesn't load up the space-themed pinball title that comes preloaded with all versions of Windows? Anybody?

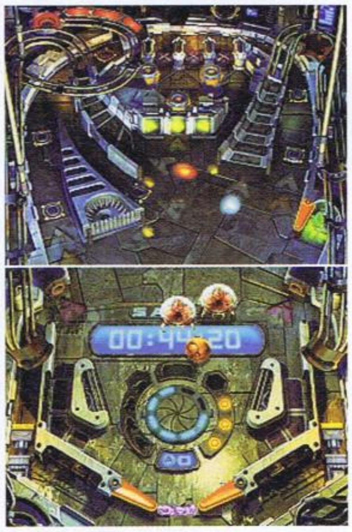
Oh well, either way Metroid Prime Pinball is exactly what it says it is and thanks to increased hardware power and the dual screen set-up of the DS this is definitely a fun diversion. All the familiar pinball gameplay is in tow, from multi-balls, missions, bonus points and so forth. The added shooting elements that let players take part in a little Samus meets Space Invaders action against foes that'll be familiar to fans of the series is particularly well executed. As an interactive element players can also use the touch screen to 'tilt' the table in either direction for more precise control.

The dual screens work a treat for giving you a complete view of each table and all the moving elements are nicely animated. It's not Hunters, but it's pretty cool nonetheless.

Kosta Andreadis







[up] The Who's new Rock Opera - Samus

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

DETAILS:
CATEGORY: Pinball
PLAYERS: 1-8
DEVELOPER: Nintendo
PUBLISHER: Nintendo
PRICE: $69.95
RATING: G
AVAILABLE: Now

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY
81	78	80

OVERALL
79

KLONOA 2 Dream Champ Tournament (IMPORT REVIEW)

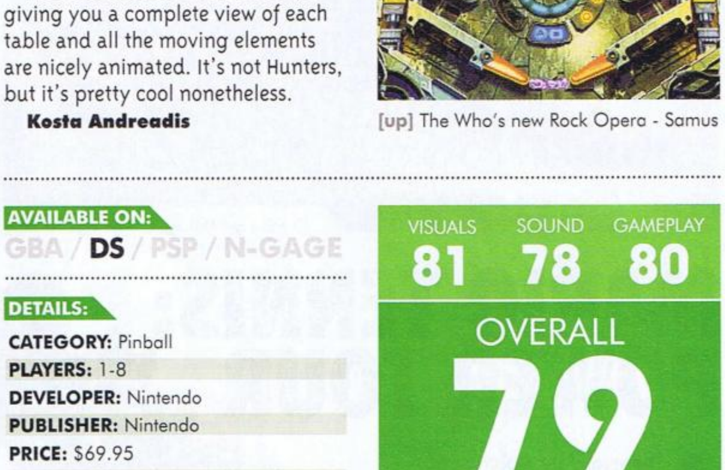
There's still no sign of this game getting a local release, but being huge fans of the Klonoa series we figured it's high time we reviewed it anyway. For those of you who aren't familiar with the Klonoa games, it all started with a charming title on PlayStation that was essentially a 2D platformer presented with 3D elements (you could throw things into and out of the screen and the paths wound around in 3D space). The mechanics were simple — your floppy eared avatar could grab enemies and use them. Vanilla enemies were used for double jumps and as projectiles, while other enemies brought special abilities to the table. Thus, although enemies could hurt you, they were also your most valuable tool.

As simple as it sounds, in concert with traditional platform elements it led to some great puzzle-based gameplay where you had to work out how to use all the enemies in the area to traverse platforms, bounce pads and the like. Fortunately, enemies respawned after you used them, giving you plenty of freedom to experiment or practice. Along with some seriously catchy music it all added up to an enchanting game and a refreshing take on the platform genre. Dream Champ Tournament very much picks up where the previous games left off.

The 3D graphics are gone, but the gameplay is just as addictive, with a couple of new elements thrown in on top of the familiar mechanics to keep the puzzles interesting. And this game is all about the puzzles - each area brings with it a new twist that wonderfully exploits the simple but compelling mechanics, and the further in you get the more the puzzles ramp up. It may look simple, but Klonoa has gameplay in abundance, along with plenty of collectables for the completists out there. Wahoo!

Cam Shea

Not even a little bit fruity



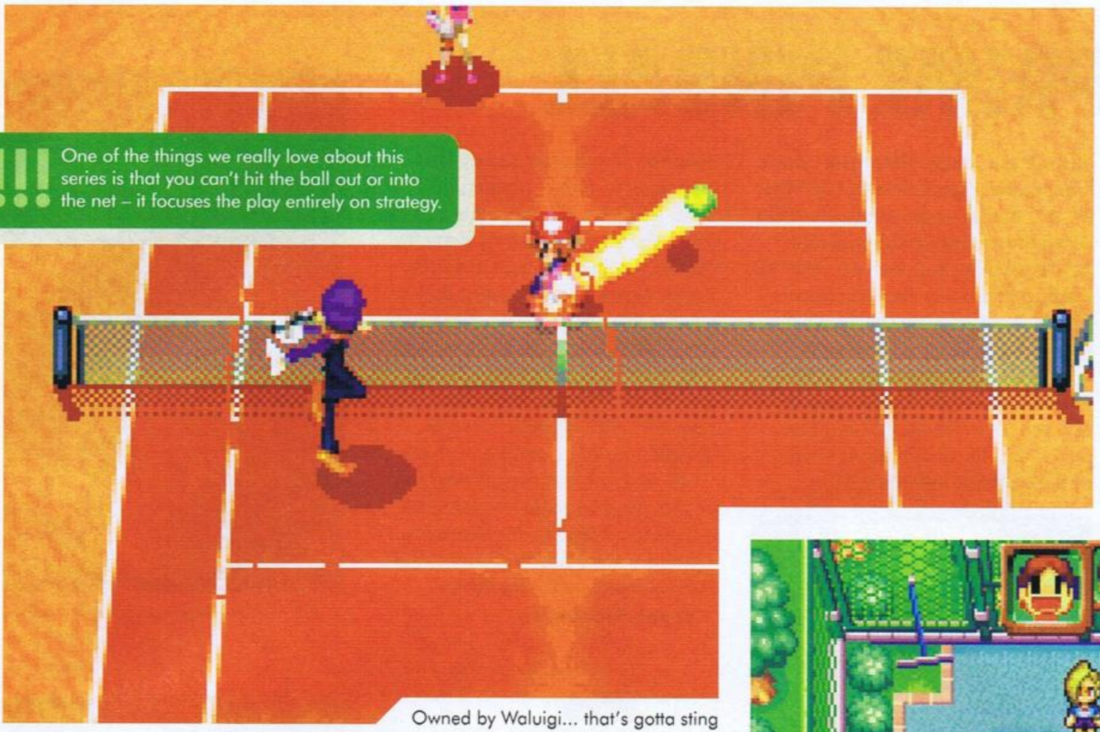
[up] Small pictures are hard to caption

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

DETAILS:
CATEGORY: Platformer/puzzle
PLAYERS: 1
DEVELOPER: Namco
PUBLISHER: Namco
PRICE: $TBA
RATING: G
AVAILABLE: Import - now

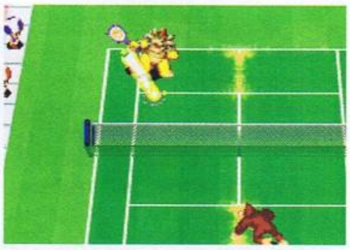
VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY
70	75	81

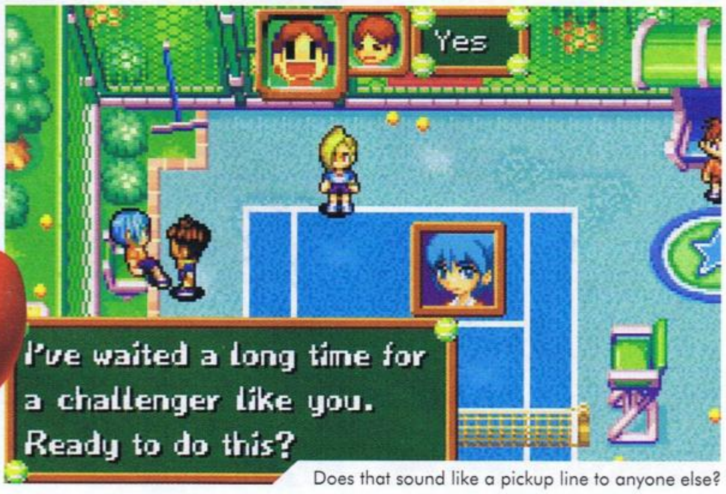
OVERALL
80



One of the things we really love about this series is that you can't hit the ball out or into the net – it focuses the play entirely on strategy.

Owned by Waluigi... that's gotta sting

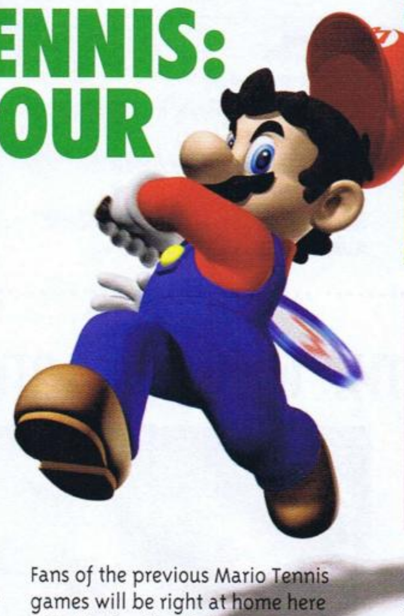




I've waited a long time for a challenger like you. Ready to do this?

Does that sound like a pickup line to anyone else?

MARIO TENNIS: POWER TOUR



There may be a picture of Mario on the box, but he's not the star of this game. Instead, Power Tour harks back to the classic Mario Tennis Game Boy title, where you play as an unknown character (in this case either Clay or Ace) and work your way through the Tennis Academy rankings before shuffling off to play in the Island Open.

ACE CLAYINGTON

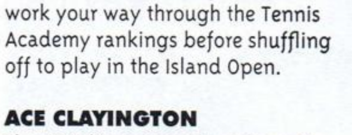
This RPG-lite approach works really well for a couple of reasons. First of all it brings some longevity to a title that, let's face it, you're going to play on your own most of the time. It gives you more than just matches to play – it gives you tennis communities to explore, NPCs to talk to and training exercises to take part in. Secondly, there's a very definite feeling of progression. As you play matches, gain experience points and level up a number of times you can see the improvement in your game. Your opponents also get steadily harder as you rise from Junior through to Varsity and beyond, giving the game a steady learning curve.

Anchoring this approach to game design is a rock solid tennis engine. Fans of the previous Mario Tennis games will be right at home here with the familiar flat shot, top spin, slice, drop shot and lob available through a mix of A and B. This time, however, as you go through the training exercises, you'll be taught some solid tennis theory too, such as how to use the side-spin of slice shots and top spin to your advantage. There are also Power Shots to master, and unlike the GCN title, these aren't too gimmicky, adding a little extra power to your arsenal and unpredictability to rallies.

It's great fun and even against the AI can result in some long and heated rallies (although the lob is still essentially the "get out of gaol" shot for most of the early going). The experience points system is compelling too, and there are a number of ways in which it can be gained – playing matches, completing exercises on the Teaching Court and beating mini-games at the various levels. There are four main areas to allocate points when you level up: power, control, side spin and speed, as well as five secondary skill categories: serve, stroke, volley, top spin and slice, so you can craft your player according to your strengths. The experience system doesn't stop there though, with a whole host of Power Shot training machines. These amount to zany mini-games such as the Jump Gym which is a homage to Mario's ability to smash blocks with his head, and Duck Walk, which has you progressing along a step course in a time limit. They're good fun, unlock new Power Shots for you to assign, and will have you coming back to try and beat your high score.

It all adds up to a great game of tennis that evolves as you play. There may be too much pointless dialogue (complete with never ending smiley/frowny faces and long-winded nodding sessions – you'll see what I mean when you play it), but if you want a handheld sports game with a bit more purpose, this is it.

Cam Shea



AVAILABLE ON:

GBA / DS / PSP / N-GAGE

DETAILS:

CATEGORY: Tennis
PLAYERS: 1-4
DEVELOPER: Camelot
PUBLISHER: Nintendo
PRICE: $49.95
RATING: G
AVAILABLE: Now

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY
79	75	88

OVERALL

87

PLAYER
081
SCORE
0015950

This game was released as Gunstar Super Heroes in the US. Why the name change? We have no idea...

They're heroes - with guns - in the future!

PLAYER
104
SCORE
0020600

cue pantomime voice Behind You!

GUNSTAR FUTURE HEROES

Gunstar Future Heroes is a sequel that Treasure swore they'd never make. Gunstar Heroes, for those who remember it, was a hard, rockin' Megadrive-era action shooter, from a time when people could refuse to make a sequel. The GBA is the home of all things 2D past and present so it's fitting that the makers of the awesome Astroboy are now bringing to the GBA one of the hardest shooters around.

Gunstar Future Heroes has all the mania of a coin-op shooter, from the constant firing of infinite weapons to the endless string of marauding enemies, to the boss battles with giant robots boasting repetitious attack patterns and big flashing weak spots. It's just like Astroboy in that regard but it's loads harder, mostly due to the scarcity of health pickups. There's the same multitasking requirements of shooting one thing while avoiding fire from three others; and the whole game is run at a breakneck frenzy thanks to rapidly decreasing health.

COLOUR COORDINATION

You have a choice of character, Red and Blue. Unfortunately, their differences are slight. Each has three weapons, Red has a red primary plasma beam, Blue has a blue electricity stream. Then they share an explosive flamethrower and laser chaser darts. Each weapon has a charge meter that fills up as you take down enemies, but there's little time to watch, as a barrage of Imperial minions flood over you. Gunstar Heroes banked on continually evolving weaponry to maintain variety. Weapon pick-ups transformed the weapon your guy already had in hand. Sadly there are no weapon pickups at all in Gunstar Future Heroes, just the same three guns the whole way through.

To beef up variety, Gunstar Future Heroes boasts constantly changing mission styles. In one level, you'll be running left and right shooting assailants, the next you'll be spinning and careening on a spaceship towards the "camera" as the landscape streams away from you and gundam give chase; the next you're chasing a train on a chicken (of sorts); the next you're flying a helicopter dealie over a city shooting down tanks and robot ships. They're mostly one-off levels but they instil a kind of playful variation that handheld gaming thrives on, and many action titles fail to provide.

The controls are fairly convoluted. Picking items is an effort (down and B), while the direction of fire can be locked by holding the R trigger, whether it's left, right, or diagonally in any direction. This way, you can maintain the direction of fire but your character can be moved separately. It's hardly necessary in the earlier levels but the tricky final stages require some sophisticated control. It all comes to make sense in a kooky way.

There's a great amount of care and detail in Gunstar Future Heroes but for that, it's fairly short. As you attempt a later level, continually die and reload, you begin to memorise the rhythms of the levels. It is only through great trials and retrials that you'll get to the top of that damn casino, but once you know how, it is fairly easy to repeat. Gunstar Future Heroes really should have been longer by half, it's not as though Treasure can't do extended play — Astroboy was perfect in that regard. As a fairly pure action game, it's hard to fault otherwise. Gunstar Future Heroes is a brief dizzying, joyous 2D ride.

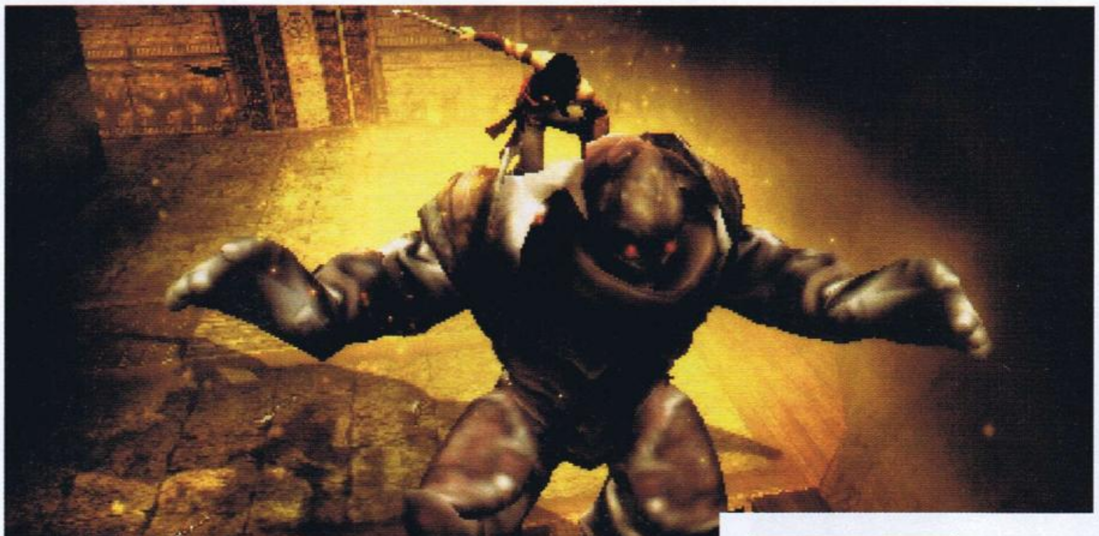
John Dewhurst

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

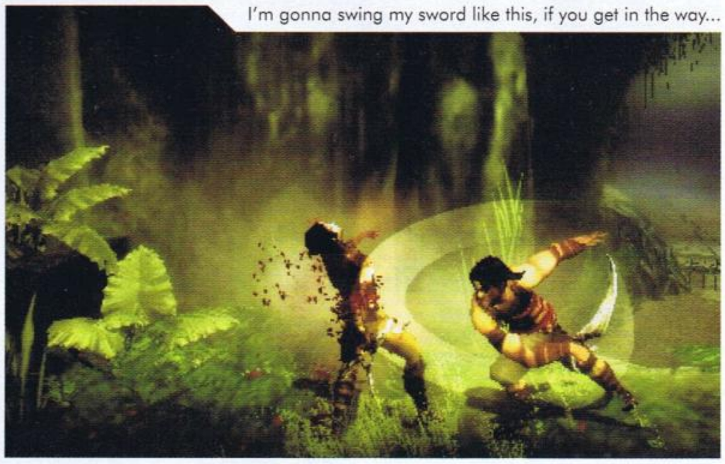
DETAILS:
CATEGORY: Action
PLAYERS: 1
DEVELOPER: Treasure
PUBLISHER: THQ
PRICE: $59.95
RATING: PG
AVAILABLE: Now

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY
85	74	80

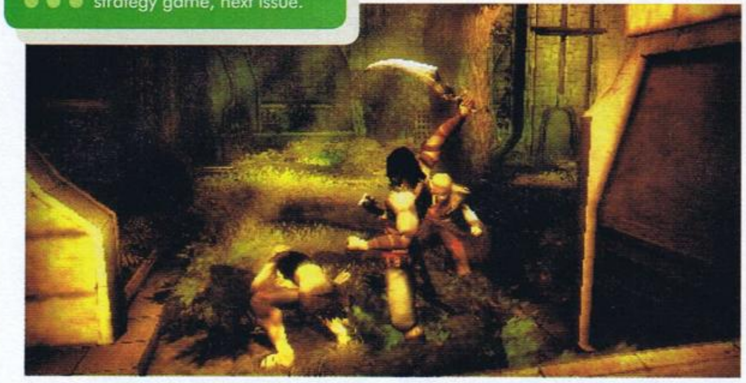
OVERALL
79



I'm gonna swing my sword like this, if you get in the way...

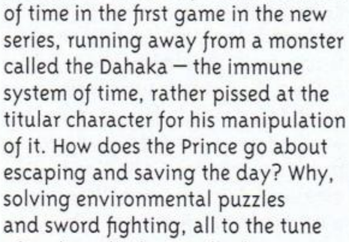


!!! We'll have a review of "Battles of Prince of Persia", the DS strategy game, next issue.



PRINCE OF PERSIA: REVELATIONS

>> The Prince is back, this time in handheld form, in a semi-remake of Prince of Persia: Warrior Within, a game that sees the Prince, fresh from restoring the time stream after his little mix-up with the sands of time in the first game in the new series, running away from a monster called the Dahaka – the immune system of time, rather pissed at the titular character for his manipulation of it. How does the Prince go about escaping and saving the day? Why, solving environmental puzzles and sword fighting, all to the tune of cock-rock of course! Taking the basic framework and levels of Warrior Within, Revelations extends the game with new levels, new puzzles and a more in depth fighting system that contains numerous single and dual wield combos. If you've played Prince of Persia before and liked it, you're probably already sold on the idea of the game going handheld but before you rush out and buy it, the game does have a few significant flaws.



[up] Insert lame poledancing joke

FALLING DOWN

It's quite timely that the review of Prince of Persia for PSP comes in the same issue as a feature that mentions some of the ways that games ported from console to handheld fall down. Before anyone gets up in arms, yes, we know that Prince of Persia: Revelations is not a direct port of Warrior Within, the second new Prince of Persia game, as it has new levels and combos, but the basic gameplay of environmental puzzle solving is a direct port. The PS2, Xbox and PC versions of Prince of Persia are built with independent camera control, that is, you can control the camera whilst moving. Due to the single thumbstick on the PSP this is not possible. Instead, the developers have instituted a control scheme that requires players to hold in the left shoulder button to control the camera. While this sounds fine in theory, in practice the camera control comes off as rather clunky, making it difficult to look around you at any given time and making it especially easy to fall off ledges if you're trying to look around for your next port of call whilst balancing somewhere. First person view uses a similar control scheme – hitting right on the d-pad moves you into first person but you still need to hold in the shoulder button to move around – without it you just start moving again, leading to no end of frustration.

It's a pity the camera doesn't work well because the rest of the game is genuinely very good. The environmental puzzles, both new and old are excellent, the combat system works better than it did in Warrior Within and the graphic quality is nearly identical. Hopefully the next Prince game for PSP will be developed with an all new camera system tailor made for handheld gameplay.

Daniel Wilks

AVAILABLE ON:

GBA / DS / **PSP** / N-GAGE

DETAILS:

CATEGORY: Action
PLAYERS: 1
DEVELOPER: Ubisoft Montreal
PUBLISHER: Ubisoft
PRICE: $79.95
RATING: M
AVAILABLE: Now

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY
88	76	86

OVERALL

78

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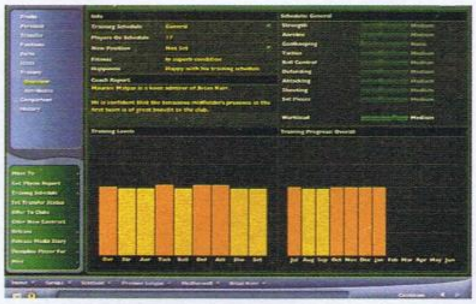


FOOTBALL MANAGER 2006

Here we are again - another year, another Football Manager game. If you're not waiting patiently for the PSP version (we're not kidding, it's in the works), then there's good reason to snap up this 05/06 season.

You wouldn't think after over a decade of yearly updates that there would be anything left to add, but Sports Interactive just love to suck us back in with new features. The most obvious change this year is the inclusion of half-time and full-time talks — slate your players or pat them on the back to help maintain their motivation or improve morale. Using this feature really comes down to common sense — players with a performance rating below 5 need a boot kicked at their head, whilst those around 6 or 7 get encouragement, with any player getting 8 or above deserving golden praise and a happy finish to their post-game massage. It adds another layer of interaction with your individual players to go along with other details in the game that have been improved this year. Players now have a more varied and detailed list of likes and dislikes with the club. You can see what positions and on-field moves they prefer in their profiles, and it's easier to track their training progress. Ah yes, training — it's all been re-designed, making it piss-easy to set-up.

Other improvements include the way injuries can now be dealt with differently — you can give players injections to ensure they make the next game if it's important enough to you. Better media interaction also means more mind games with opposing managers. The game is also generally all a bit speedier. There are simply lots of fun new delights to discover, so jump back in and get your fix.

Eliot Fish

HYPER BIG RUBBER STAMP OF APPROVAL

AVAILABLE ON:

PS2 / XBOX / **PC / MAC** / GCN

DETAILS:

CATEGORY: Sim / **PLAYERS:** 1-Lots / **DEVELOPER:** Sports Interactive / **PUBLISHER:** Sega / **PRICE:** $79.95 / **RATING:** G / **AVAILABLE:** Now

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY	OVERALL
50	25	90	90

Alan Gilmore

ONE PIECE: Grand Battle

Long time Hyper readers will probably remember a fun little Dreamcast game called Powerstone, an arena-based fighting game from Capcom known for its chaotic four-player battles. It had a simple premise — players are thrown into small, enclosed stages and given a simple fighting system and a bunch of items to use/throw/power-up. They fight, gang up on each other, stage epic see-sawing battles, have fun, then move on. The concept was adapted in Smash Bros. Melee to great success, and now Bandai followed the formula for fun with One Piece Grand Battle.

The main drawback with OPGB is that it lacks the four-player option of the previously mentioned titles, although it makes up for this with the introduction of support characters that can be summoned to wreak havoc. The combo driven fighting engine is decent enough, with plenty of special moves and some cool secret attacks. It's no Virtua Fighter, but the emphasis here is on fun and playability. There's some mini-games if you need a diversion from the fighting and heaps of stuff to unlock, so even if you've never heard of Monkey D. Luffy, OPGB should provide plenty of amusement.

Really, though, it's all about the fan service (no, not the boobies and panties kind). Grand Battle is packed full of little details from Eiichiro Oda's epic pirate series and should be a requisite buy to anyone that follows the exploits of the Straw-Hat Pirates. A word of warning to the fans, however: the Western release of Grand Battle has been "modified" to bring it into line with the US dubbed and edited anime. That means all characters have their American voices and names, and some have been removed completely because they haven't yet appeared on the shows aired in the States!

Malcolm Campbell

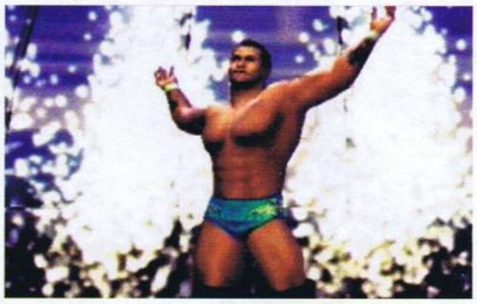
AVAILABLE ON:

PS2 / XBOX / PC / GCN

DETAILS:

CATEGORY: Arena fighting / **PLAYERS:** 1-2 / **DEVELOPER:** Ganbarion / **PUBLISHER:** Bandai / **PRICE:** $89.95 / **RATING:** PG / **AVAILABLE:** Now

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY	OVERALL
89	75	80	84



WWE SMACKDOWN! VS RAW 2006

Hot on the heels of the WWE Smackdown! vs RAW 2006 on the PlayStation 2, the latest and arguably the best in the series, comes the PSP version. The PSP holds up well against the PS2, aside from the PSP's lack of commentary there is minimal difference between the two.

One of the most sensible changes to gameplay, that brings with it a little more realism and the need for tactics, is the inclusion of the stamina bar and momentum meter. These make for a more intense match as using power moves repeatedly will drain your stamina, slowing down the wrestler, while using cheap tactics will lead to lack of fan support, so you won't be able to use a big finisher to inflict maximum damage.

There are several match types, the new additions being the Backstage Brawls, Buried Alive match and the replacement for the Bra and Panties match, the Fulfil Your Fantasy match. The GM mode, where players take the role of a General Manager of a show, is an alternative for the story driven and still excellent Season mode. The PSP version also features several mini-games like Texas Hold 'em poker, a balancing game featuring Eugene called Eugene's Airplane race and a trivia question game. While fun, these essentially are just time fillers.

The drawcard for owning both versions of the game is the compatibility. Saves files in the Season mode and created wrestlers can be transferred between the PSP and PS2. An excellent option, that allows the gamer to take their game everywhere they go. Another incentive is that the game includes a legend that can only be unlocked using the PSP, Jake "The Snake" Roberts.

An excellent game, that looks and plays well, and also a great complement to the PS2 version.

Amos Hong

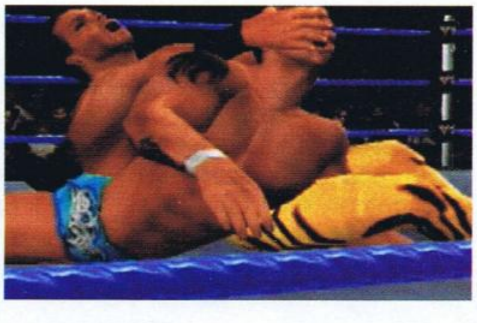
AVAILABLE ON:

GBA / DS / **PSP** / N-GAGE

DETAILS:

CATEGORY: Wrestling / **PLAYERS:** 1-4 / **DEVELOPER:** Yuke's Media Creations / **PUBLISHER:** THQ / **PRICE:** $79.95 / **RATING:** MA 15+ / **AVAILABLE:** Now

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY	OVERALL
83	78	84	83



KONAMI

"Pro Evo 5 is the best soccer game on the market." PC PowerPlay **9/10**

OFFICIAL AUSTRALIAN XBOX MAGAZINE ELITE

"An absolute must buy... The world's hands-down best football game."
OAXM **9.6/10**

PlayStation.2 GOLD AWARD 10/10

"If you love soccer then you need this game; it's as simple as that!"
OPS2 **10/10**

HYPER BIG RUBBER STAMP OF APPROVAL

"...like swirling a fine Grange Hermitage around in your mouth...it's bloody beautiful."
Hyper **95%**

EDITOR'S AUSTRALIAN GAMEPRO CHOICE

"Simply the best. Gameplay so wonderfully involved, stupendously deep and deftly controlled that the experience has no end. A must-own for sports fans."
Game Pro **10/10**

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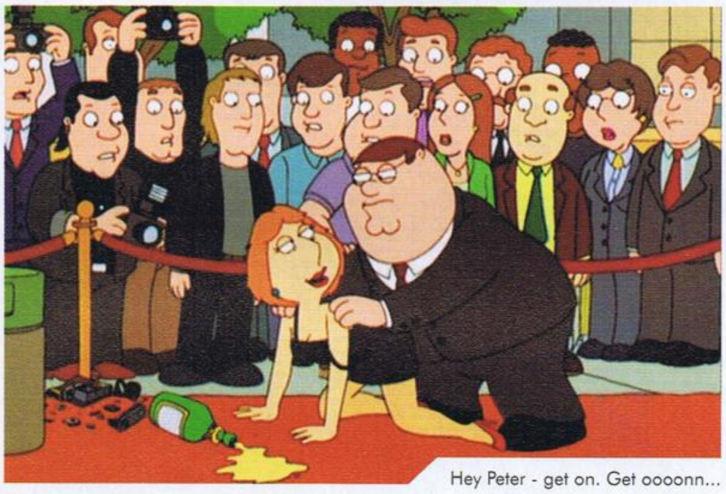
Family Guy – Stewie Griffin: the Untold Story



Hey Peter - get on. Get oooonn...

FOX HOME ENTERTAINMENT, M 15+

Those of you expecting a real *Family Guy* movie may be a little disappointed as what you really get is three episodes strung together with bookends and an intermission. Don't get me wrong, it's still funny as hell but the pacing and writing is patchy due to the episodic nature of the movie. After a near death experience at a pool when learning to swim, Stewie has a quick glimpse of hell and decides to mend his evil ways. Needless to say, this fails. Along the way he sees a man on TV who looks like an adult version of him and, convinced that the football headed stranger must be his father rather than the doughy Peter, he heads to San Francisco with Brian the dog to track him down. Hilarity ensues.

The movie runs much like an 80 odd minute episode, following Stewie's adventures whilst not neglecting the other characters. Some of the funniest moments in the film come from Peter's new job as a TV personality who hosts a segment in which he rants about the mundane stuff that "grinds his gears", becoming an everyman hero in the process. As promised in the tagline of the film, the soundtrack is uncensored, giving you an opportunity to hear some of the characters swear. Wisely Seth McFarlane has not overdone it so when you hear one of the characters cut loose it's a truly funny moment.

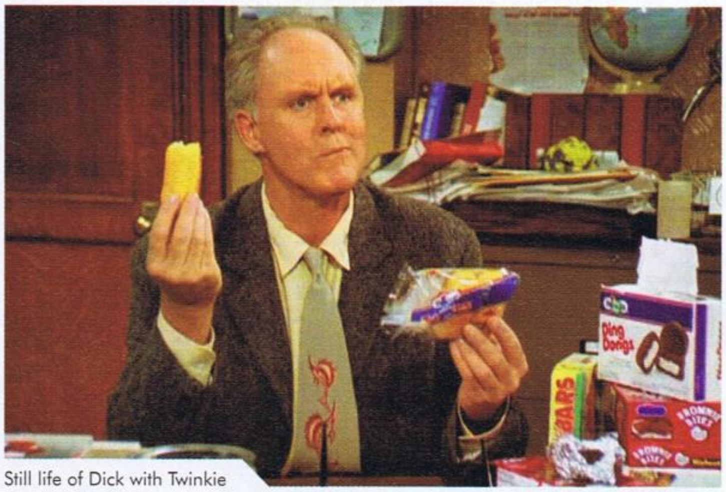
Daniel Wilks

[up] Drunk babies - always comedy gold

MOVIE: 8 / EXTRAS: TBA

3rd Rock From the Sun

– SEASONS 1 AND 2



Still life of Dick with Twinkie

MAGNA PACIFIC, PG

In my mind *3rd Rock* is one of the best sitcoms of the 90s. For those that don't know the premise, a team of aliens arrive on Earth and assume human form (somewhat randomly – the oldest member of the crew becomes the adolescent boy and the very masculine weapons expert becomes the woman) as part of a mission to observe human behaviour. What was meant to be a short stay becomes a long one as each member of the crew becomes attached to life on Earth. The premise is used to great effect, allowing the writers to explore not only the quirks of Western culture and human nature, but also to make the family's over the top antics more believable. This is a sitcom that has its cake and eats it too – it revels in rapid fire gags and physical comedy but is anchored in what is ultimately meaningful subject matter. Over the course of the first two seasons, as we see the Solomons frantically trying to blend in and be "normal", the message of the show is very much that there's no such thing.

Complementing the great writing is a fantastic ensemble cast. John Lithgow in particular is a genius, playing the role of the self absorbed and often infantile High Commander with amazing timing and presence. The core group is ably assisted by well cast recurring characters and a parade of excellent cameos.

The first two seasons are now available as very reasonably priced box sets and come highly recommended.

Cam Shea

SERIES: 8 / EXTRAS: 4

Tae Guk Gi: Brotherhood of War

EASTERN EYE, MA 15+

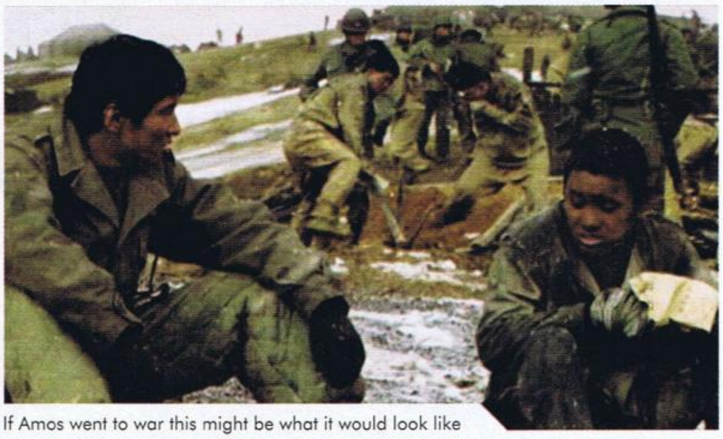
» Some may write this South Korean epic off as another *Saving Private Ryan* or (shudder) *Pearl Harbour*, but underneath the unashamedly emotional approach is a truly brilliant film about the horrors of war. Two brothers, the quiet and academic Lee Jin-Seok and older, overprotective and macho Lee Jin-Tae are shanghaied into the Korean war, their relationships and view of the world change. Determined to protect his brother, Lee Jin-Tae vows to become the best soldier he can, garnering enough medals and respect to have his little brother sent home, only to start becoming caught up in the war and bloodlust, turning to killing as a way of life rather than a means to an end. Lee Jin-Seok follows an equally depressing path, first losing the reverence he feels for his brother and succumbing to the bloodlust himself.

It's a powerful film, definitely overly sentimental at times but perhaps more powerful because of it. Unlike similar movies, *Brotherhood of War* is not content to simply say that war is hell; every frame practically oozes the director's disdain for combat. If you have a weak stomach you'd be advised to stay away as the film is brutally violent throughout, with beautifully handled close in camerawork simultaneously deglamourising the carnage and portraying the deadly, confusing chaos of it all.

The two disc set contains over two hours of special features including an excellent making of and special effect doco. It's the type of treatment befitting of the most successful South Korean film of all time.

Daniel Wilks

MOVIE: 9 / EXTRAS: 8



If Amos went to war this might be what it would look like

What the hell is wrong with Japanese people?

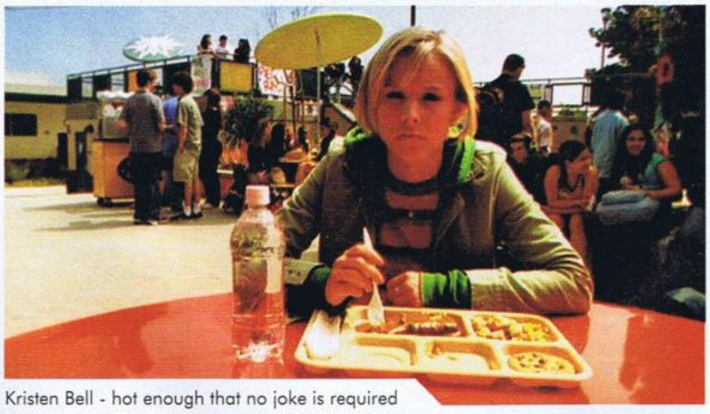
A Weatherwoman / A Weatherwoman Returns

EASTERN EYE, MA 15+

» Based on a popular manga of the same name (Otenki-O in Japanese) *A Weatherwoman* is a deliciously funny and chaotic farce about a strange woman with an almost supernatural lust for success and weather aiming to become the most popular weatherwoman on television. Keiko (the sexy as hell Kei Mizutani) is a strange woman. She talks like a gangster, masturbates enough to send puritans into bouts of cleansing flagellation and can (for no readily explicable reason) fly. When the regular weatherwoman Michiko calls in sick, Keiko gets her big break, reading the weather and capping off the presentation by flashing her panties to the unsuspecting audience. Overnight she becomes the toast of Tokyo. Michiko, demoted to interviewing sexual deviants for the late night talk show, Hello Mr. Pervert becomes jealous of Keiko, her luxurious office and escort of semi-naked men and plots revenge. Whereas *A Weatherwoman* is a wonderfully funny satire of idol culture in Japan, *A Weatherwoman Returns* is more of a collection of bad masturbation jokes and a rehash of the storyline of the original. Although mildly funny in parts, the sequel fails to deliver on laughs and even fails to live up to the original in terms of nudity and sex.

Daniel Wilks

MOVIES: 8/6 / EXTRAS: TBA



Kristen Bell - hot enough that no joke is required

Veronica Mars SEASON 1 (IMPORT REVIEW)

WARNER BROS, NR

» Ah, finally a teenage drama without all the teenage drama! *Veronica Mars* is a breath of fresh amateur teenage detective air. Set in and around Neptune High, a school with a massive class divide thanks to the distinction between the normal kids and the "09ers", so named because their postcode distinguishes them as the children of the elite ultra rich, the series opens after Veronica's fall from grace.

Once a member of the elite clique, Veronica's life changed forever when her best friend Lilly wound up murdered and her sheriff father would not let go of his conviction that Lilly's father was the perpetrator. Her father's investigation results in Veronica becoming a social outcast amongst her former friends. It's a tale of girl has best friend, girl dates best friend's brother, girl gets raped at party and girl's best friend ends up dead. Who killed Lilly Kane and who raped Veronica? With so much to uncover, Mars as student by day, private eye at night is not caught up in your usual teenage angst. Mars is driven, inventful and very persuasive. Helping her father build his P.I. business, nothing will come between Veronica and the truth. This is an edgy drama created by Rob Thomas (Dawson's Creek – but don't hold that against him) which is both slick and compelling and is one of the best new dramas to be released recently. The US DVD release contains little in extras, but our love of Mars means this is forgivable.

Rebecca Izard

SERIES: 10 / EXTRAS: 2

WIN KUNG FU HUSTLE!

10 PACKS UP FOR GRABS!

>> Stephen Chow is a funny man and *Kung Fu Hustle* is perhaps his funniest film. Often compared to a live action Loony Tunes cartoon, *Kung Fu Hustle* tells the story of a down on his luck wannabe petty criminal who falls into a whole heap of trouble when he disguises himself as an Axe Gang member to extort a poor suburb that is, unbeknownst to him, populated with a collection of Kung Fu masters. There's pratfalls galore, brilliant fight scenes, numerous pop-culture references, more jokes packed into five minutes than you would find in an entire Hollywood comedy and even a pretty good story thrown in to boot. Not only do we have a serious half husky for the film, but the DVD release comes packing an audio commentary by Stephen Chow, deleted scenes, a making of featurette, an interview with Stephen Chow and outtakes, to name a few. Thanks to Sony Pictures Home Entertainment we have ten huge *Kung Fu Hustle* packs to give away. Each lucky winner will get the film on DVD as well as *Kung Fu Hustle* trading cards, watch, inflatable axe, fan and tattoo. To be in the running, just answer the following question:

>> Name another film starring Stephen Chow.

Send your answer, plus your name and address on the back of an envelope to: **Chow Mine, Hyper, 78 Renwick St, Redfern, NSW, 2016,** or email us at **hypercomps@next.com.au** with the comp name in the subject line.

STEPHEN CHOW
KUNG FU HUSTLE
KUNG FU HUSTLE

Each prize pack contains:

- Kung Fu Hustle on DVD
- Trading Cards
- Watch
- Inflatable Axe
- Fan
- Tattoo

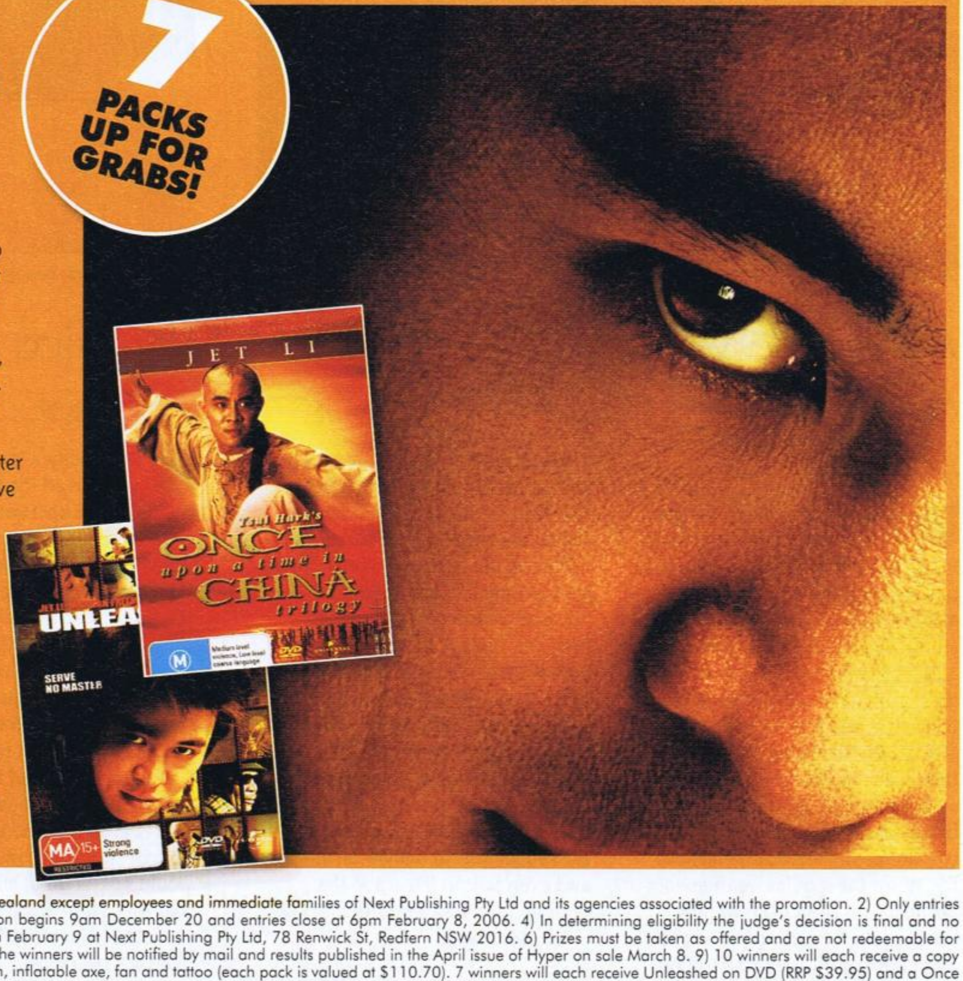
WIN UNLEASHED AND THE ONCE UPON A TIME IN CHINA BOX SET!

7 PACKS UP FOR GRABS!

>> To celebrate the release of *Unleashed* on DVD, we've teamed up with our friends at Universal to bring the best of Jet Li present and past together into the one prize pack. First up is *Unleashed*, in which Jet plays Danny, a man raised like an animal to become an unthinking killing machine. It's a film that's at once brutal and a poignant exploration of humanity, and is probably Jet's best Western made film to date. And then there's the *Once Upon a Time in China* box set which contains the first three films in the series. Chronicling the life of the legendary martial arts master Wong Fei Hung, these films spearheaded the new wave of Hong Kong cinema with their historic backdrop, lush cinematography and amazing fight scenes. We have seven packs, each containing *Unleashed* and the *Once Upon a Time in China* box set, to give away. To be in the running, just answer this simple question:

>> What is Unleashed also known as?

Send your answer, plus your name and address on the back of an envelope to: **Danny the Dawg, Hyper, 78 Renwick St, Redfern, NSW, 2016,** or email us at **hypercomps@next.com.au**



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winwinwin

WIN PRO EVOLUTION SOCCER 5 ON PSP!

>> Pro Evo isn't just a soccer game, it's a religion and now you can take your religion on the road with you, without the need for generators. Convenient. What do we really need to say about this one? The boffins at Konami have managed to pack the most in-depth and amazingly playable soccer mechanics out there onto a handheld and have thrown in ad-hoc wireless play to sweeten the deal. It's not a game that's going to replace your PS2 copy at home, but it's a great complement to the console version, letting you take your game on the road and even allowing you to save replays to show your friends. Thanks to our buddies Captain Atari and Ken Konami we have six copies to give away. To be in the running, just answer this simple question:

What is the Pro Evo series called in Japan?

Send your answer and your name and address to: **Super Happy Soccer All Star Strikers, Hyper, 78 Renwick St, Redfern, NSW, 2016,** or email us at **hypercomps@next.com.au** with the comp name in the subject line.

6 COPIES UP FOR GRABS!
ATARI
PRO EVOLUTION SOCCER 5
KONAMI

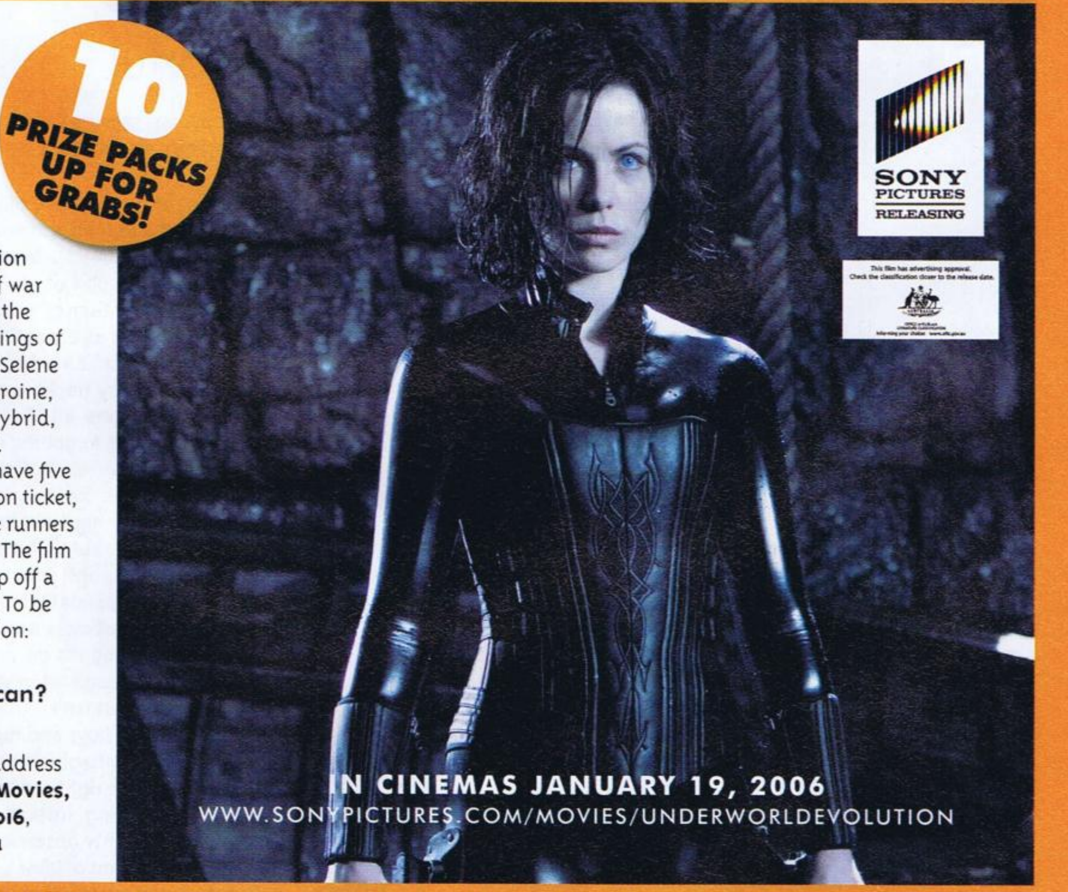
WIN TICKETS TO SEE UNDERWORLD EVOLUTION!

>> Two words. Kate Beckinsale. Sold yet? If not, try this on for size. *Underworld: Evolution* is the sequel to the hit gothic action flick *Underworld* and continues the saga of war between the aristocratic Death Dealers and the barbaric Lycans. The film traces the beginnings of the ancient feud between the two tribes as Selene (Kate Beckinsale), the beautiful vampire heroine, and Michael (Scott Speedman), the lycan hybrid, try to unlock the secrets of their bloodlines.

Thanks to our friends at Sony Pictures we have five first prize packs containing a double in-season ticket, the comic book adaptation and a tattoo. Five runners up will also receive a double in-season pass. The film is out on January 19 so we're closing the comp off a little early (January 18), so get entering now! To be in the running, just answer this simple question:

What type of creature is a Lycan?

Send your answer, plus your name and address on the back of an envelope to: **Full Moon Movies, Hyper, 78 Renwick St, Redfern, NSW, 2016,** or email us at **hypercomps@next.com.au**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This film has advertising approval. Check the classification closer to the release date.
IN CINEMAS JANUARY 19, 2006
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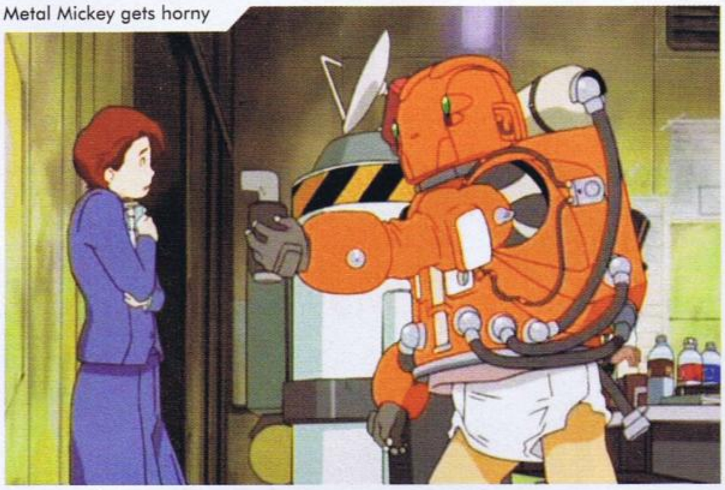
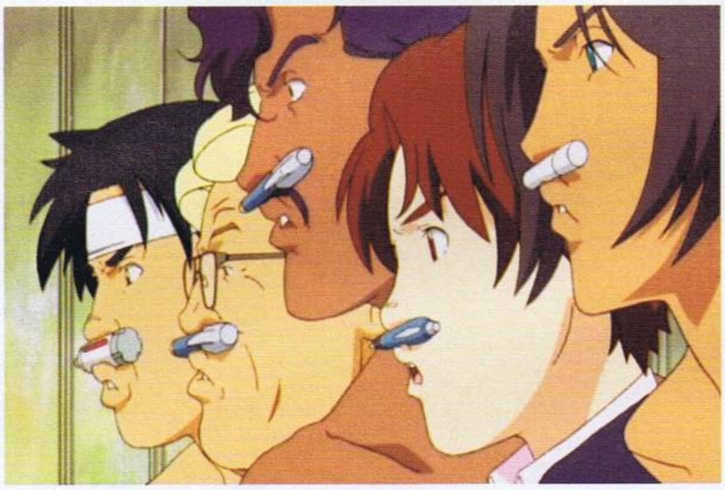
Terms & Conditions: 1) Entry is open to residents of Australia and New Zealand except employees and immediate families of Next Publishing Pty Ltd and its agencies associated with the promotion. 2) Only entries completed with these terms and conditions will be eligible. 3) Competition begins 9am December 20 and entries close at 6pm February 8, 2006 for the Pro Evo comp and 6pm January 18, 2006 for the Underworld: Evolution comp. 4) In determining eligibility the judge's decision is final and no correspondence will be entered into. 5) The winner will be drawn at 9am February 9 at Next Publishing Pty Ltd, 78 Renwick St, Redfern NSW 2016. 6) Prizes must be taken as offered and are not redeemable for cash. 7) The promoter is not responsible for misdirected or lost mail. 8) The winners will be notified by mail and results published in the April issue of Hyper on sale March 8. 9) 6 winners will each receive a copy of Pro Evo 5 on PSP (RRP $79.95). 5 winners will each receive a double in-season ticket to Underworld: Evolution (RRP $30), a 48 page comic book adaptation and a tattoo. 5 runners up will each receive a double in-season ticket to Underworld: Evolution (RRP $30). Total value of competitions is approx $880. 10) The promoter is Next Publishing Pty Ltd ABN 88 002 647 645 of 78 Renwick St, Redfern NSW 2016.

Metal Mickey gets horny





Planetes

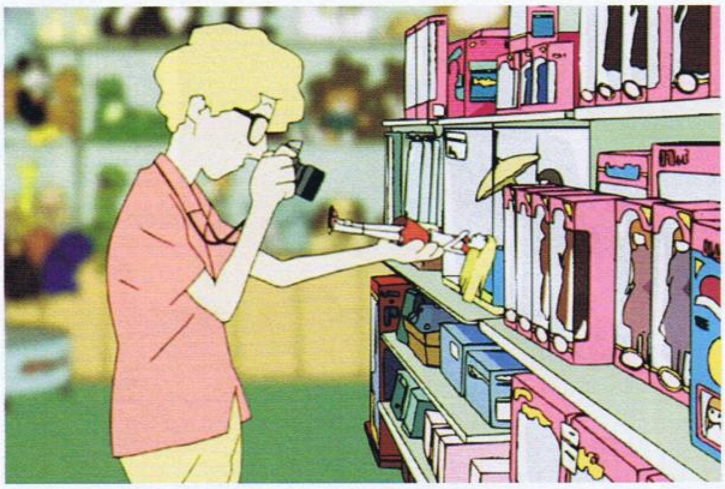
CATEGORY: SCI-FI DRAMA
PRODUCTION: BANDAI VISUAL

The year is 2075 and the thick cloud of orbital debris – junked satellites, rocket boosters, satellite detritus and the like – is making interplanetary and orbital travel difficult. As shown in the introduction of the show, a single bolt travelling at speeds of around 8km/s can cause catastrophic damage to whatever it hits, so to combat this threat the business empires of earth establish the Debris Sections; essentially space janitorial services and massive money losers. You read that right. *Planetes* is the story of the men and women who pick up junk. In space. It's a lot better than the premise sounds.

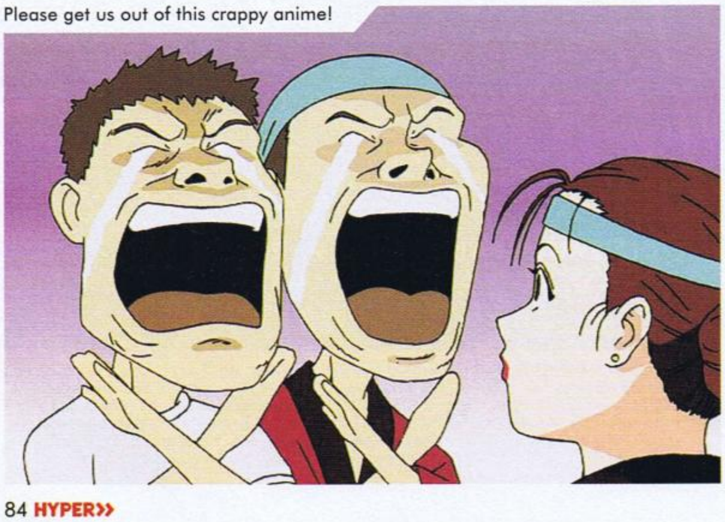
Viewers are introduced to the Debris Section through a young recruit called Tanabe, willing to do anything (collecting junk in space is considered a low station job) to get into space. Tanabe is an everywoman style character. She is teamed up with a more seasoned astronaut Hishiro Hachirota, an everyman character. Each episode revolves around one or both of these characters, dealing with the trials and tribulations of working in space, collecting space junk and more mundane things such as what to put in your last will and testament, how long you should hold onto a dream even though you know it's impossible to achieve or simply having pride in your work. It's safe to say that nothing really happens in *Planetes* and that on the whole, aside from a few thrilling moments of debris collecting/disposal, but the series is more concerned with philosophical/political musings and character development. It's a strange concoction, but after watching five episodes I want to see the other 21. I can't sum it up better than that. The original Bandai print contains a wealth of special features in a 2-disc set including interviews with real life NASA Debris Section personnel. We've only seen a preview disc but fingers crossed we'll be getting the second disc here as well.

Daniel Wilks

ANIMATION: 8 / STORY: 7
EXTRAS: TBA / OVERALL: 8



Please get us out of this crappy anime!



Colorful

CATEGORY: FAN SERVICE
PRODUCTION: STUDIO WOMBAT

Colorful is comprised of 16 short and schizophrenic episodes based entirely around fan service. Not as part of the show in an overt way like series' such as *Ikki Tousen*, but as the actual focal point. *Colorful* is kind of like a faux documentary tracking a number of characters, all of whom go to great lengths to get the best sneaky (or not so sneaky) glimpse of panties and bras that they can. It takes a very high octane approach, cutting rapidly between non sequiturs and constantly changing art and animation styles with plenty of close ups of both the panties and the gurning lustful reaction. Sound interesting? Unfortunately it just isn't.

Horny Japanese boys and men obsessing over panty glimpses can be palatable in the right context, but this is just boring. Instead of presenting this panty obsession from a cultural point of view *Colorful* gives it exactly the same treatment as most anime, only there's even less context. As the episodes progress it's basically the same thing over and over - horny college guys willing the wind to blow up a girl's skirt, the coach ogling his star athlete, the Western exchange student filming panties every way he can, blah blah blah. We're sure it's meant to be funny in a zany kind of way but it just comes across as rampant loli-ism with little point. Oh look – his nose is bleeding again! What a surprise! Oh look, he was staring at her crotch so hard he fell off his bike! Hardy ha ha.

There are a couple of legitimately funny ideas given the context of the show. The skyscraper size schoolgirl that wanders through Tokyo in episode 12 we liked, and the lamp post that guys keep dashing their brains out on is also a good running joke. Ultimately though, if you take out all the other stuff that makes anime great and just reduce it to the fan service and horny boys, you're not left with much, as *Colorful* so adequately demonstrates.

Cam Shea

ANIMATION: 7 / STORY: 1
EXTRAS: 3 / OVERALL: 3

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- AT THE MOVIES, ABC TV

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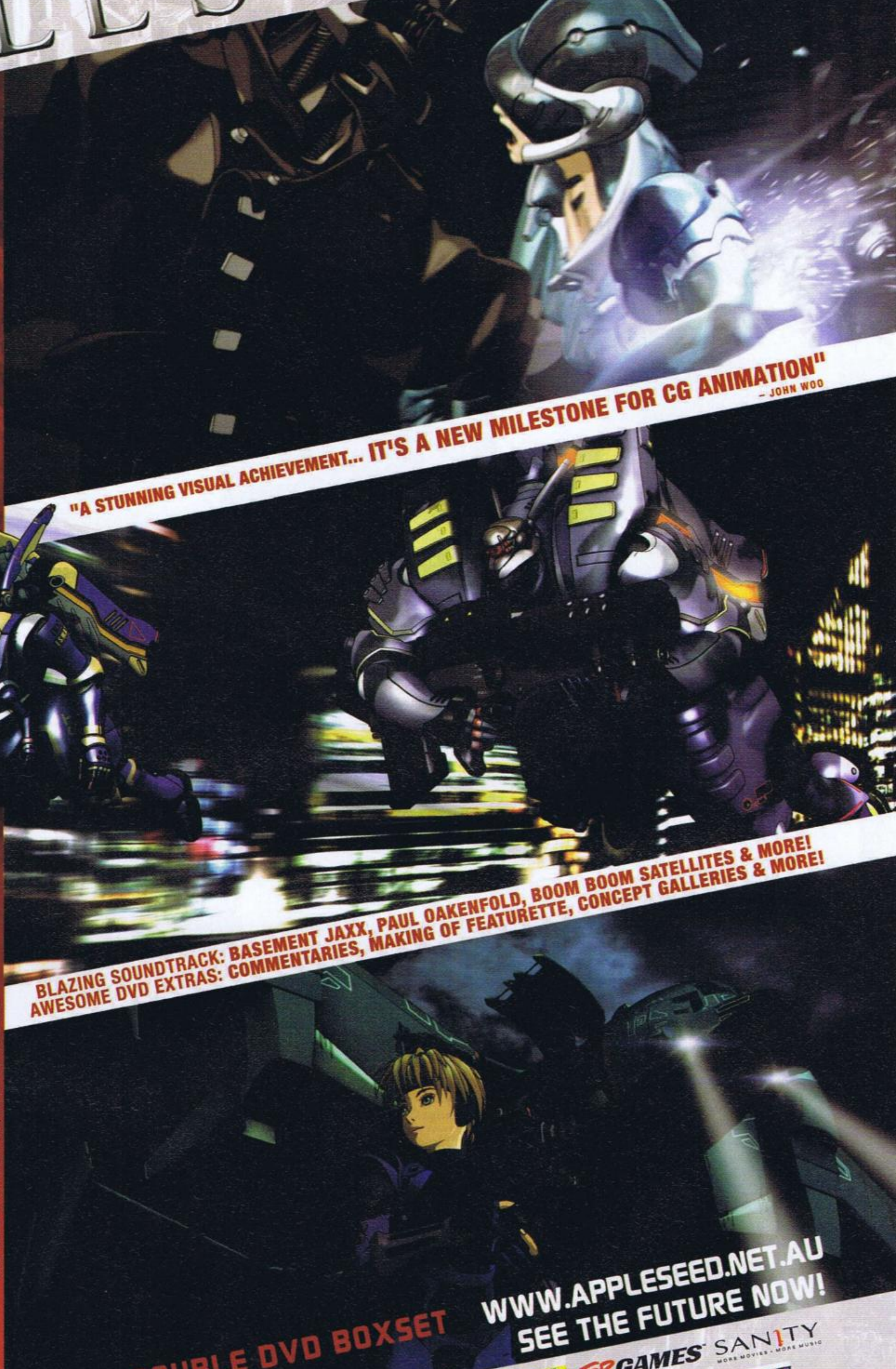

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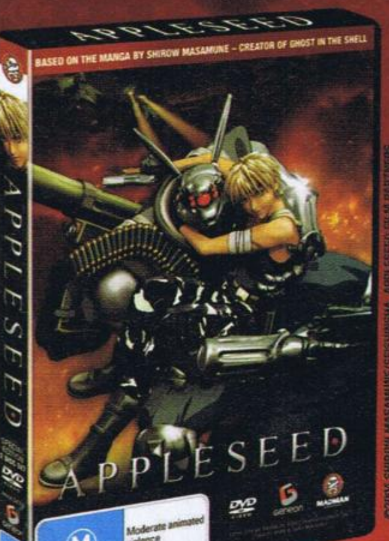

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M Moderate animated violence
DVD
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M Moderate animated violence

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DIZZY

» Ben "Yahtzee" Croshaw

If you were in any way into the European game scene of the late 80s and early 90s - admittedly that's quite a big 'if' - then you've probably heard of the Dizzy series. Designed and developed by the Oliver Twins and distributed by Codemasters for the ZX Spectrum, Commodore 64, Amstrad CPC, Amiga and PC, the Dizzy titles were a series of adventure games following the exploits of a sentient egg who wore boxing gloves. It remains the world's most popular game series involving breakfast food wearing sports equipment, effortlessly beating Tim The Figure-Skating Pancake.

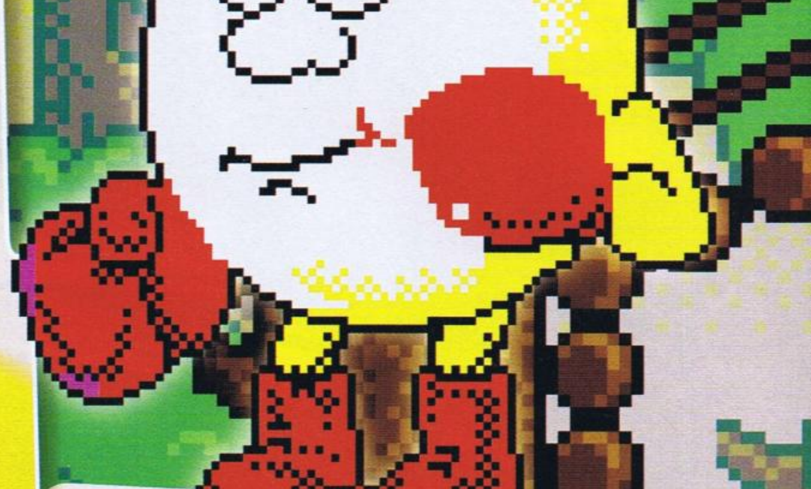
THOSE EGG COUNCIL CREEPS GOT TO YOU TOO?

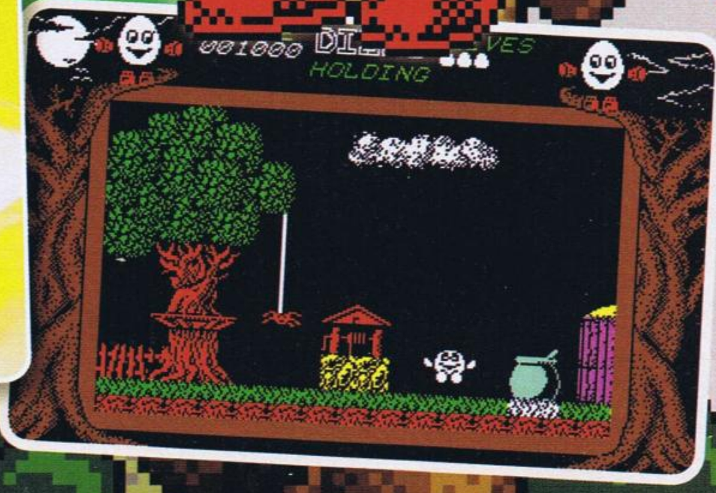
In their time, the Dizzy games enjoyed immense popularity, at least in the few places where the games could actually be found; most of the titles were only released in Europe, with the exception of certain attempts to break the console market I'll be discussing later. The appeal of the games lay partly in an enjoyable blend of arcade-style platform jumping and adventure-style inventory puzzles, partly in sharp and often humorous writing, and partly in the adorable way Dizzy would constantly flap his arms up and down like he was trying to shake off something nasty.

According to interviews, the Oliver Twins didn't originally intend their character to be literally an egg. Sprites had to be kept simple because of the limitations of their graphics software, so in designing the protagonist for their new game, the Twins started with just a smiley face. Then of course it needed to move around, so stubby hands and feet were added. After they realised how egg-like the character seemed, they took that concept and ran with it. Presumably, then, Dizzy came out of a chicken at one point, although such matters should probably not be too closely examined, if only for decency's sake.

Dizzy's most memorable feature - aside from the whole egg thing, obviously - was his characteristic manner of jumping. By tipping the joystick up and to the side, Dizzy would launch into a somersault. It wasn't possible to stop or change direction mid-leap, and a jump would either end with Dizzy flying directly into something deadly or landing back on terra firma, whereupon he would usually continue rolling directly into something deadly. But Dizzy never let his brittle nature get to him; even during his death animation, his fixed grin remained. There were, and still are, few game characters who could face death as confidently as Dizzy.

Leaving aside for the moment the occasional foray into purely arcade





DIZZY
PRINCE of the YOLKFOLK
AMIGA

titles, there was little variation in each Dizzy game's central concept. Dizzy would be plunged into a strange land, often starting the game locked in a prison cell for no adequately explained reason, and must solve a number of puzzles by collecting and using tools and items, all the while using his somersault power to circumnavigate deadly threats such as fire, spike pits, hungry rats, sharks, and on one occasion, a light shower of rain. The ultimate goal was usually to either defeat an evil wizard or rescue one or all of Dizzy's mates.

YOU'D BETTER RUN EGG!

The very first game in the series, the grandly titled Dizzy: The Ultimate Cartoon Adventure, was released in 1986 and saw Dizzy with little going for him but three lives and a single solitary inventory slot. Interestingly, the game was in part based upon the poem 'The Green Eye Of The Little Yellow God' by J. Milton Hayes, being littered with references and quoted lines from the poem. It goes to show that games were more intelligent in the olden days. You wouldn't see this sort of thing today; you'd never see a Tomb Raider sequel based around an allegory for mankind's rejection of the sacred feminine.

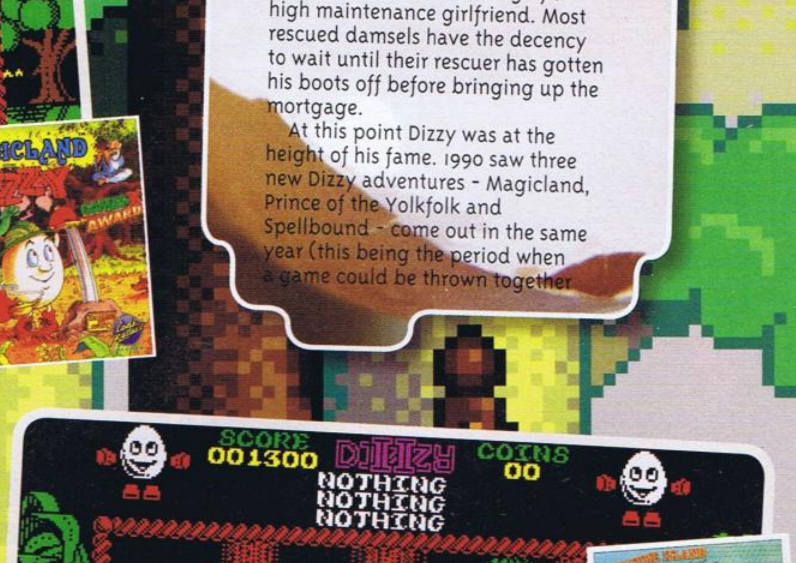
The sequel, Treasure Island Dizzy (1987), caught us all off guard by granting three inventory slots but only one life, an absolutely insane decision in the days before save game functions. Many a gamer found themselves hurling their tape decks through plate-glass windows when Treasure Island Dizzy somersaulted a little too far and ruined two hours of progress. Perhaps Dizzy was trying to tell us something about the frailty of existence, and the folly of wasting our precious lifetimes, or maybe the Oliver Twins had both recently acquired severe cranial injuries. Whatever the reason, I can't have been the only one who complained, because the multiple lives were back for Dizzy 3.

Dizzy 3, or Fantasy World Dizzy (1988), was where the Dizzy format really started getting refined. Now Dizzy had three lives and three inventory slots. Now he had an entire entourage of eggy friends, including the standard girlfriend archetype, Daisy, to get kidnapped all the time and be the Princess Toadstool to his Mario. It also continued the tradition began in the last game by having a sidequest, where Dizzy had to collect 30 gold coins, as Daisy was quick to remind him as soon as she was rescued. Daisy, then, was something of a high maintenance girlfriend. Most rescued damsels have the decency to wait until their rescuer has gotten his boots off before bringing up the mortgage.

At this point Dizzy was at the height of his fame. 1990 saw three new Dizzy adventures - Magicland, Prince of the Yolkfolk and Spellbound - come out in the same year (this being the period when a game could be thrown together

SPELLBOUND
DIZZY
AMIGA
STRANGE WORLD

BUSHY GROVE
MAGICLAND
DIZZY
84%
AMIGA



by two guys in an afternoon). Crystal Kingdom Dizzy came out in 1991, adding the ability to change direction mid-leap and robbing Dizzy of all his deliriously suicidal charm. It had certainly been proved that there was a market for ovum-themed platform adventures, and the obvious next step would be to conquer America, and the console market.

EGGY BEHEMOTH

To this end, Fantastic Dizzy (aka Fantastic Adventures of Dizzy internationally) was created, for NES, Sega Megadrive, Master System and Game Gear, published by Camerica. This game was something of a magnum opus for the Oliver twins, since it combined locations, characters and puzzles from all of the previous Dizzy adventures into one gigantic behemoth of a game, laced with enough subgames and sidequests to keep even the most attention deficit child occupied.

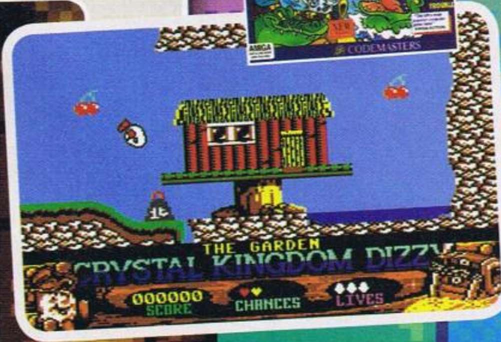
Sadly, things didn't quite work out. Originally put down for a Christmas 1990 release, publication was delayed until April 1991, missing the crucial gift season. Despite critical acclaim, barely a quarter of expected sales were met. Perhaps the subject matter confused audiences outside of Europe; after all, they hadn't had time to let the concept of roleplaying as a living breakfast grow on them to the point where it wasn't completely ridiculous. Perhaps Americans would rather eat food than control it.

1993. Camerica was forced to close down after the failure of their Aladdin Deck Enhancer, and Codemasters found themselves in financial trouble. The Oliver Twins' company, Interactive Studios, suffered many layoffs. Revenue was needed fast, so it was decided to organise a compilation of three Dizzy titles for the Sega Master System and Game Gear, the rather fate-temptingly-titled Excellent Dizzy Collection.

That didn't quite work out either. Codemasters and the Oliver Twins split up, the rights to Dizzy remained co-owned by both, and as such Dizzy was finally laid to rest on a layer of delicious crispy bacon as part of somebody's Egg McMuffin. But don't be sad for little Dizzy, cherished reader; he had a fulfilling life and brought joy to everyone who appreciated wearing boxing gloves and jumping around like an idiot, a lifestyle I'm sure we've all dreamed of at some point.

Although the series is long over, and a modern-day update seems increasingly unlikely, there will always be people on the internet who refuse to let go, and you can find more information on Dizzy at http://www.yolkfolk.com. «

CRYSTAL KINGDOM
DIZZY
AMIGA
CODEMASTERS



The Fantastic Adventures of
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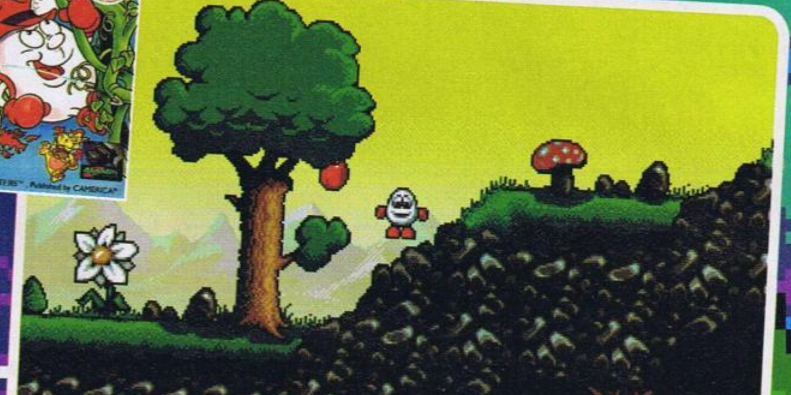

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Street Fighter vs. Mortal Kombat

newgrounds.com/portal/view/276650

>> The Mortal Kombat craze probably reached its peak when the feature film was released to critical acclaim along the lines of "Awesome!" (Daniel Wilks, 1995)* and "If memory serves me correctly, that movie was awesome!" (Daniel Wilks, 2005)**. And it most certainly was, with impeccable acting writing and direction* making it a cinematic treasure*** that amazingly is one of the highest grossing films of all time!**** And talk about a soundtrack! With its incredible sampling of the popular videogame and intricate 4/4 techno beat, making it one the highest selling soundtracks of all time!***** And to think when it's pitted up against the loser-fest that is Street Fighter, Mortal Kombat loses!

* lie, ** bald face lie, *** total fabrication, **** the polar opposite of the truth, ***** you get the idea

PlayStation 2
ZONE OF THE ENDERS

Voice Acting or The Art of Using Ones Voice to Act

http://www.audioatrocities.com/

>> Famous Hollywood B-actors who lend their voices to a videogame often instill the game with a sense of credibility which is, to say the least, a little ironic. If a B-movie star and has-been can add authenticity to the voice acting in videogames then truly bad examples of videogame voice acting would have to be just that, soul sappingly bad. But that doesn't necessarily mean that the game itself would be bad, as titles like Resident Evil and Shenmue slowly reach classic status nothing can change the fact that each title featured horrendous voice acting.

Retro Synths and 8-Bit Music

http://www.somethingawful.com/articles.php?a=3356

>> News flash! Computerised music is set to take over the world! Grab you coats ladies and germs and leave those guitars behind, as little microchips and circuits 'synthesise' your favourite instruments and take them into the next dimension of sound! With man ready to land on the moon, he's finally ready to jam with all the cool space cats he meets there! Are silver jumpsuits next on the shopping list? We think so! Computers are the future and some scientists predict that in 30 years music will evolve to a stage where instruments will all be stored in small multi-coloured cubic devices that emit powerful vibes directly into your brain!

– Cameron Shea Snr, June 16 1967

ビール
Liquor House
Mini

Vending Machines in Japan

www.photomann.com/japan/machines/

>> You're in the midst of a morning jog listening to your iPod. The white device streams music to your ears from a recent 'pump you up' play list created specifically for when you're exercising. In the list are a few choice tracks from the Rocky soundtrack, and when these tracks emerge you imagine that you're Sylvester Stallone, with a low IQ, speech impediment and a predilection to drool like a caged ape. In the distance you see large parliamentary style steps but struggle to muster the protein it would need to race up them. The music swells and just then, like a lightbulb illuminating, you see a vending machine that sells eggs, which are high in protein and if you're not mistaken, the very fuel Rocky Balboa needed to do the stair climb thing in EVERY SINGLE Rocky film.

the of and to a in that is
1 2 3 4 5 6
FIND WORD:
BY RANK
REQUESTED WORD: THE
RANK: 1

Language – Use it

www.wordcount.org/main.php

>> The most common word used in the English language is of course 'the', and lo and behold this very sentence started with the word 'the'. Kinda makes me feel like a common street whore when all along I've considered myself to be one of those upper class 'escort' types that only service the rich and famous for diamonds and dime bags. So from now on I'm only going to use rare words, the kind that most of you and our esteemed editor barely know the meaning of. Words like 'exploitable' (definition: Kosta - Ed), 'synonymy' and 'obsequies', and perhaps some words that will literally blow your mind like 'hydroflavouristicallousness' - a word so obscure that I had to make it up.

Bassline Baseline, 2005
single channel DVD with sound
dimensions variable
total run time 21 minutes

Bassline Baseline is a video essay that investigates the invention, failure and subsequent resurrection of the mythic Roland TB-303 Bass Line music machine in the last two decades of the 20th century. The narrative seeks to invite thoughts on technological mediation within product innovation and creative expression. The dead-panned 'documentary' video attempts to explore how and why creative tools fail and how increasingly more options, parameters or intermediaries devised during a tool's research and development phase don't necessarily lead to increased expressivity or virtuosity during the tool's lifetime of actual use, unless the super-structure of its cultural context is dramatically reconsidered.

Everybody Needs A 303

www.nkhstudio.com/pages/popup_bassline.html

>> When Roland released the TB-303 in the 80s it was meant to be used to replicate and generate realistic sounding bass lines. But as the decade progressed the unit became notorious for being one of the focal points of the rise of electronic music. In this relatively short (well, it clocks in at just over 20 minutes) web documentary, the rise of the device and its place in music history is well presented by filmmaker Nate Harrison. Harrison, who also narrates is believed by some to be some sort of robot from the future as made clear with his human voice replication technology.

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Wild it - unlimited	$94.95	Unlimited	Nil	www.wildit.com.au
Aztec	$69.95	35Gb	Shaped to 64/64	www.aztec.aunz.com
Tel.Pacific - smart choice 1500	$79.95	Unlimited	Shaped	www.telpacific.com.au
Aapt - broadband + home phone bundle	$59.00	15Gb	Nil	www.aapt.com.au
Cyberone	$24.95	200Mb	14C mb	www.cyberone.com.au
Cyberone	$89.95	Unlimited	N/a	www.cyberone.com.au
Bendigos.Net	$149.00	Unlimited	Nil	www.bendigos.net
Ozemail - without ozephone	$39.95	250Mb	$0.06/Mb	www.ozemail.com.au
Ozemail	$49.95	10Gb + 10gb	Shaped	www.ozemail.com.au
Ozemail - with ozephone	$69.95	20Gb + 20gb	Shaped	www.ozemail.com.au
Ozemail	$99.95	20Gb + 20gb	Shaped	www.ozemail.com.au
Teegee internet – light	$64.95	8Gb	$3.00 Per gb	www.teegee.com.au
Teegee internet – heavy	$79.95	25Gb	$3.00 Per gb	www.teegee.com.au
Tpg premium	$69.95	25Gb	Shaped	www.tpg.com.au
Tpg premium + voip	$69.99	25Gb	Shaped	www.tpg.com.au
Askaussie.Com	$65.95	35Gb	Shaped	www.askaussie.com
Supernerd	$99.95	30Gb	Shaped	www.supernerd.com.au
Supernerd	$139.95	60Gb	Shaped	www.supernerd.com.au
Internode - starter	$59.95	5Gb	Shaped	www.internode.com.au
Internode - value	$69.95	15Gb	Shaped	www.internode.com.au
Westnet	$69.95	10Gb + 10gb	Shaped	www.westnet.com.au
Westnet	$89.95	20Gb + 20gb	Shaped	www.westnet.com.au
Internode - pro	$89.95	30Gb	Shaped	www.internode.com.au
Internode - elite	$129.95	60Gb	Shaped	www.internode.com.au
Aspark pty ltd s05 - bundled phone/internet	$57.00	35Gb	$2.00 Per mb capped $72	www.aspark.com.au
High Speed ADSL				
Ozemail	$99.95	20Gb + 20gb	Shaped	
Ozemail - with ozephone	$89.95	40Gb + 40gb	Shaped	www.ozemail.com.au
Internode - extreme - value	$59.95	15Gb	Shaped	www.internode.com.au
Internode - extreme - pro	$79.95	30Gb	Shaped	www.internode.com.au
Internode - extreme - elite	$119.95	60Gb	Shaped	www.internode.com.au

All prices and details listed were correct at time of going to print, we recommend you check out each ISP's website for further details before signing up to any plan. Prices quoted may be for combined phone & broadband services. All sites listed are done for the benefit of our readers as an information source to some of the available ISP services available in Australia and our listing should not be seen as an editorial recommendation by Hyper unless specified. No ISP services have been tested by Hyper, so read all the facts and check out the relevant forums before you sign up.

ISP PROFILE

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MAIL HYPER!

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TWO DOLLAR WORDSMITH

Recently I read an article on portable species-identifiers - objects that can differentiate between species, and act like a portable taxonomist. Although still being developed, their uses will be far more wide-ranging than might seem initially apparent, from simply increasing knowledge of the Earth's biodiversity, through to jobs like customs (and yes, even bird-watching).

Most current prototypes compare photographs, and one of the problems quoted in the article was the need to draw an outline around the object being analysed. At which point the gamer's brain in me cried out "What about the DS?". What about it? Hook a camera up to the DS, slot the software in: problem solved. Although I doubt the DS would be capable of either the data analysis required, or even holding the vast amount of photographs necessary (20-100 per species, depending on how distinct it is) to identify all catalogued eukaryotes, it makes you think.

Before we continue, let me point out: I am not a Nintendo zealot, nor do I hate any of the Big Three. I have nothing but contempt for the disastrous business decisions responsible for the GCN's failure, and also Nintendo's current talk of nailing the "old granny" demographic. I love great games. On any system. I also understand that behind their failures and successes, marketing and games and shiny plastic, every console is produced by people who want only one thing: your cash.

Compare screenshots of PSP and DS games, and not even a Ninty diehard could pass the DS off as superior. If someone asked me to sell them the DS concept, however, I would say "Use your imagination." It is the attitude behind the DS that is brilliant: expand the horizons, do something new. The possibility for peripheral interaction similar to what I mentioned is huge: digital photo manipulation on the fly? Organising playlists on your ipod? Recording voice samples? Why the hell not? Unfortunately its technical limitations will hamstring much of this free-thinking. Assuming Nintendo is still around in five years, I am looking forward to the DS's successor, which will hopefully have hardware that can keep pace with voice recognition and data analysis, and a larger-capacity disk. Until then creative developers will have to limit their ambition, but the ambition that the DS inspires is its greatest credit.

And what about the PSP? What innovations lie within? Only ones that bring portable systems into line with the recent "innovations" of home consoles. Music, movies, storage, internet. Nothing that impinges on the basics of playing games, only additions that turn it into a multimedia machine for yuppies to lap up. And as Seamus Byrne pointed out so well, it is the elegant touches of dedicated machines that place them far above convergence devices. With my 20GB ipod fulfilling its pure function beautifully, there's no way I'll blow $800 to get a bulky machine with 1GB of space.

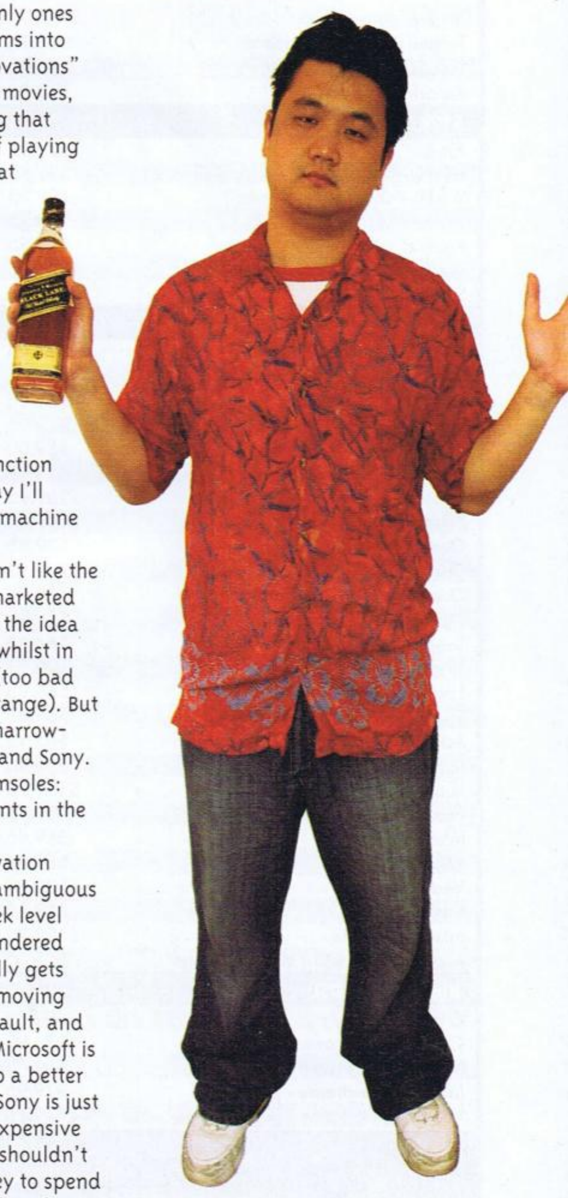
But I'm not saying I don't like the PSP: it's beautiful, well-marketed and well-supported, and the idea of playing Wipeout Pure whilst in transit makes me quiver (too bad it's far beyond my price range). But it's just so typical of the narrow-mindedness of Microsoft and Sony. Look at their next-gen consoles: where are the improvements in the actual game experience?

Where has all the innovation gone? So far we've seen ambiguous tech specs that take a geek level of 122 to decipher, pre-rendered screenshots (that one really gets me), controllers that are moving towards a depressing default, and removable hard-drives. Microsoft is pouring all its money into a better online experience, while Sony is just making their box damn expensive (and ugly too). And why shouldn't they? With so much money to spend on marketing, whatever they do, it'll sell.

Nintendo and their new controller have deeply impressed me. It's not just progressive, it truly is a revolution. The possibilities are enormous, and beyond that, it looks hella fun. Despite this, I doubt that Nintendo will ever regain the "top spot". The amount of money they can throw at advertising is nowhere near that of the other companies, and we all know that the real rewards are in the blessed mainstream, who pick their games from TV. I don't expect Nintendo to last forever, and when they do die, the other companies will pick the new controller off Nintendo's corpse and continue on their merry way. People who buy a PS3 or 360 can have fun playing more Halos, more Dynasty warriors, more Socoms. Do you want to know what you'll be doing if you buy a Revolution? Just use your imagination.

Yours with the utmost verisimmilitude,

Michael Jensen.

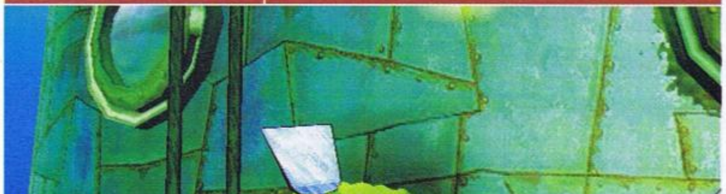


[up] Amos' character model from the Xbox 360 version of Scarface...

CAPTION THIS!

PART 73 WINNER

The best of a bad bunch by a bloated sack of protoplasm going by the (we assume) pseudonym **John K...**



Spongebob defends himself on Spongebath the Old Folk Day

(Oh by the way, I think that the XBOX 360 might not be such an innocuous name. That "3" is no accident. Microsoft would hate to be seen lagging behind the PS3 with an XBOX2, if you get me. What about Nintendo? What are they up to, NES-5?)

Right back at the beginning we said that we looked at the DS and all we could see was potential. It's taken some time, but we're finally starting to see games that are really taking advantage of that potential. They may not all be brilliant, but at least we have a new way to interact with games, and that's something that can only be healthy for gaming. The PSP on the other hand is big and beautiful and has the benefit of familiarity. Nintendo always seem to give great scope for imagination – hopefully they can pull through with the Revolution. And no, the 3 in 360 is no accident. They tested out a bunch of names in market testing and that was the one that was most future sounding. Xbox 2 just didn't cut it; the only thing that would make that a sure fire hit would be to add a subtitle. Who wouldn't want to buy an Xbox 2: Electric Boogaloo?

CAN OPEN, WORMS EVERYWHERE

Quick question guys (and gals aka Wilks). Why is it that with multiplatform titles that appear on consoles as well as DS/GBA/PSP you never list the fact that they're available on the handhelds in the information box?

Well, in the old days it was because the GBA version would be completely different so the console review wouldn't apply in any way to the handheld game. But now, with the advent of the PSP, handheld titles are closer than ever to their console cousins. That said, we still feel that even if a game is basically the same, it's a qualitatively different experience playing it on a handheld than on other systems. In most cases the score and review would differ, so we leave them off...

And now, as we see games being ported to Xbox 360, another can of worms has been opened. On the one hand, our Tony Hawk's American Wasteland review and score wouldn't really change for the 360 version, whereas something like FIFA is a completely different game. We'll be looking at current gen versus next gen scoring/reviewing on a case by case basis.

THE HERD

So I was walking through my local EB the other day when I stumbled across the XBOX GTA triple-pack. This raised a question in my mind about the concept of big-name games going multi-platform.

Firstly, I understand *why* this happening can be a good thing. It means that the developers/producers get a better financial result, and hence can produce a bigger budget for their next game. It also means that everyone gets to enjoy these great games, regardless of their console choice (I know I sure as hell would love it if Fable came out for PS2).

What about the negatives, though? I've always been a firm believer in the idea that a console is made by its games and not its hardware. If so many of these titles become available everywhere, though, will consoles begin to lose their identity and simply degrade the competition into a hardware war?

This seems to be especially prevalent with the PS2. Both Metal Gear Solid and GTA end up going over to XBOX and PC a while after their release. Sure, PS2 gets them first, but before they spread, they were two of the biggest PS2-only games out there, and were essentially flagship titles for the system.

I also heard a rumour that Squaresoft were considering switching the Final Fantasy series over to Nintendo (which, while I don't really believe it now, but I was hoping you could lend some credible denial to it).

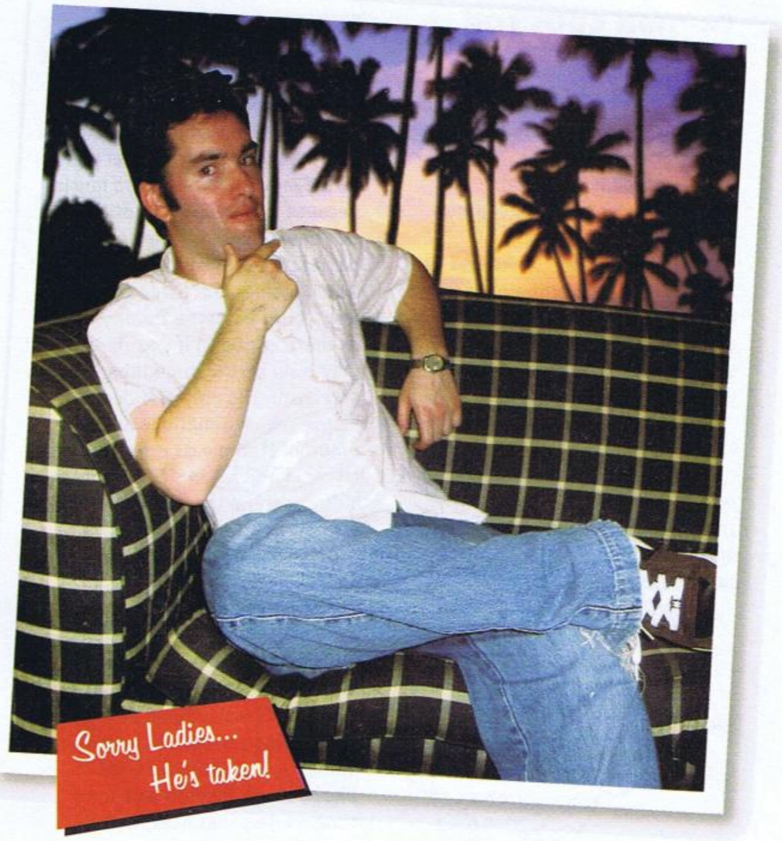
While Sony loses these exclusivity deals, Microsoft still manage to broaden theirs and are developing a nice little set of 'XBOX only's', and Nintendo have their own franchises to choose from.

Actually, maybe this is what Nintendo are trying to do with the DS and Revolution. While Sony and Microsoft battle it out with what appear to be becoming very similar products, Nintendo has broken of and is trying to establish itself as an individual. You will never have the same experience on any other console as you will with it and its unique controller system. I have heard this system mocked countless times but maybe it's exactly what we need, to help consoles gain their identity back and become unique in their own way.

Anyway, thanks for your time. I realise that I rambled on a bit, and there are probably some stupid points in there, but hey, who cares?

(P.S. Is the PS3's new controller just a prototype? Please tell me it is, it already looks uncomfortable)

Liam



Sorry Ladies... He's taken!

What you say about the Revolution is true in part – it will give you an experience that you cannot have on the other consoles but we have a horrible suspicion that the approach may hurt the success of the console in the long run. By having the proprietary controller (even if there is an expansion to make it more like a "normal" controller), Nintendo are essentially saying that developers can only develop a game for them and them alone, cutting down on their profit margin from platform cross-pollination. Combine this with the already high Nintendo licensing fees and a number of developers may very well cut their losses and leave the Nintendo realm altogether. Also worrying is the fact that a number of developers (Ninty included) are sure to make gimmicky games that do nothing but cash in on the unique features of the controller. Fingers crossed that they succeed though – we are Ninty lovers at heart and it's good to see some real innovation instead of just a shiny new coat. As far as the PS3 controller goes, we have no idea. Ken Kutaragi probably thinks it is the best thing in the world and if you find it uncomfortable you should have your foolish hands replaced.

As for Squaresoft, there is absolutely no chance that they will switch the Final Fantasy series back to Nintendo's systems exclusively. We suspect that PlayStation 2 and PlayStation 3 will get the premier FF titles, Revolution will probably get a second tier exclusive title or two, while Xbox 360 will get the scraps (Final Fantasy XI? Does anyone care anymore?)

MOE FOR MASCOT!

Unlike Moe's gargantuan chin I'm going to keep this letter short and sweet. I vote for Moe as new Hyper mascot! Who seconds the motion?

Senior Cardgage

We do. Motion carried. We have a new mascot.

I HEART NINTENDZORZ!!! ELEVEN!11

I can't wait for the day when the Revolution comes out and grabs top spot in the market and you guys jump back on the Nintendo bandwagon . I can already here you stating "Hey man, we always thought it was cool". You Hyperalians are in for a shock I think.

runnin_blue

P.S. You might as well change the name of your magasine from Hyper to Graphics Whore. You have been told.

Another person who doesn't actually seem to read the "magasine" and instead jumps to random conclusions. Not much to say to this aside from – we have always been Ninty supporters. Good luck to them regaining the top spot, but we doubt it will happen. If they do, Cam will eat his fat pants.

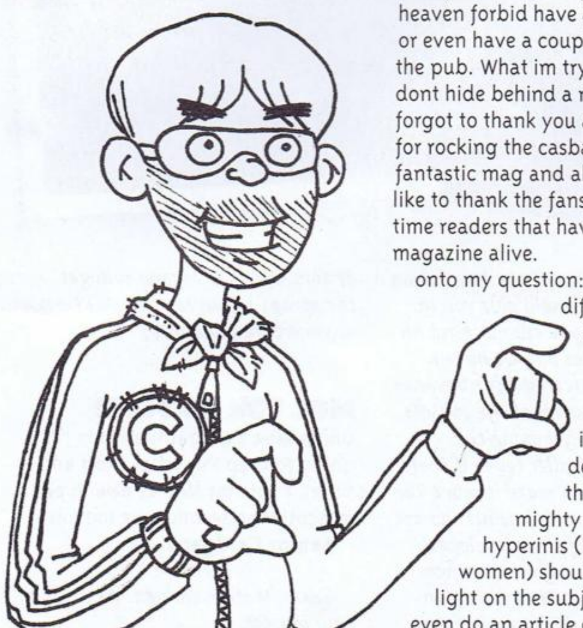
CAPTAIN COOL FOR MASCOT!

Hey Hyperinis

After observing the PC Powerplay reader in its natural habitat (the LAN party) I came up with a mascot for them. He's called "Captain Cool" and he's faster than a speeding bullet at accusing people of cheating in Counter-Strike and has the power to leap entire generations of consoles in a single bound. I've enclosed a pic, showing off his signature "CC" gang sign. What do you guys think?

Brett Favererer

The PCPP crew have a motto "girls just wanna have fun" and in the spirit of that sentiment we'll pass along your Captain Cool pic for consideration...



[up] PC Powerplay's new mascot "Captain Cool" *snigger*

NO PROBLEMS

i've solved the problem of what to buy out of psp and ds .

It's obvious, it should be the choice of games you're into not for the fact that the psp can let you watch movies and listen to music, because if you haven't noticed you can buy a memory card reader for gameboy advance that lets you watch movies and listen to music and would be better quality on the ds than on gba so if you think about they both do the same thing. games and cost is the only real deciding factor, me im a mario lover and proud of it so the ds is for me. Onto my next point, i'm sick of people hiding behind the name of geek and using it as an excuse to be a loser.

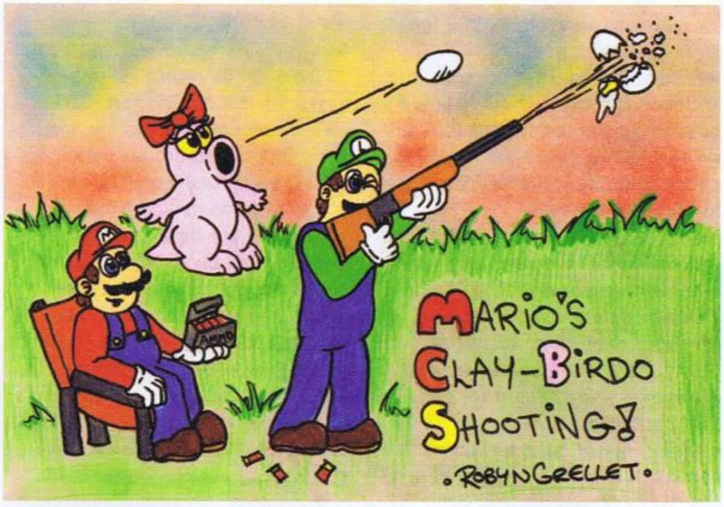
Calling yourself a geek doesnt mean you cant have friends or heaven forbid have a girlfriend or even have a couple of beers at the pub. What im trying to say is dont hide behind a name. oh yeah forgot to thank you all at Hyper for rocking the casbah with your fantastic mag and also would like to thank the fans and long time readers that have kept this magazine alive.

onto my question: whats the difference between retro and old school games? my friends and i have been debating and think you all mighty hyperinos and hyperinis (if there are any women) should shed a little light on the subject and maybe even do an article on it with some of your favorite retro and old school games. thanks!

until next time bite my shiny metal ass from the crushinator ps. amos is legend and should have an issue devoted to him, there is no chance of amos not being relected for mascot, long live amos !!!

Matthew Edwards

There isn't a worldwide shortage of capital letters so you should use up your daily quota. Onto your points, the main reason for choosing a handheld gaming machine should be the games (although don't kid yourself – the PSP is FAR more capable when it comes to media playback than the DS will ever be, as it has been designed around media functionality while the DS has not). We at Hyper love the DS and PSP equally. They're different platforms offering different experiences. We've even got a feature this issue looking solely at the games available for each system – kind of a snapshot of which system is excelling in which areas. As for your question, Cam thinks that Old School isn't as old as Retro but has a cool cache. Daniel thinks that it's all the same thing and it just depends on what type of elitist wanker you are as to what you call it. But as we know, Wilks sucks.



[up] Fortunately none of the characters were naked in this effort by Robyn Grellet

DAMNABLE DELAYS

I heard on the news that the Xbox 360 will be available all over the world before christmas except Australia where it will not be available until March! This is a disgraceful insult to Australian gamers especially considering how quickly we have embraced Xbox Live. I thought Australia was considered part of the PAL,Europe,UK territory. Why are we getting it 3 months after them?

Daniel Forrest

Basically we are a small market and it's hard for Microsoft to justify cutting back sales in a more lucrative market like America, Europe or Japan to sell a few thousand here. Think of it this way – we'll have a much stronger launch lineup when we get the Xbox 360.

STOP PIMPING MARIO!

Dear Hyper,

When is Mario going to be in a game other than a Sporting title? As we know the Olympics are coming up which would once again open the doors for a whole slew of Mario sporting games or one big game presumably titled Mario's Olympic Games. Actually that might not be so bad though as you can see by my drawings, some of the Olympic events would be quite suitable for amusing Mario antics, but that's not my point, my point is I want more Mario games like Paper Mario: The Thousand Year Door, which I really enjoyed.

Even the old NES and SNES Mario games have better game play than a lot of these sports games, except any Mario Kart game those are fine by me yes make more Go-Kart games by all means.

Well hope you like the pics.

Cheers,

Robyn Grellet

Hey Robyn,

We're totally with you on the issue of Nintendo pimping out Mario to every genre they can think of. It makes baby Jesus cry, and you can bet it's not going to stop here. On the plus side, if you liked the awesome Paper Mario 2, it's not long until Mario & Luigi 2: Partners in Time comes out for DS, and Mario Kart DS should tide you over until then...

SNAIL COMPETITIONS

Hi, as a longtime Hyper magazine reader for many years, I'd be extremely grateful if a suggestion mentioned below can be considered. The regular contests in Hyper mag are cool and all, but I'd be grateful if offering the additional option for Hyper's readers to be able to also submit their entries by E mail can start being offered.

Since E mail saves readers postage, of course it'd be cooler if entry by E mail was made the only way of entering a Hyper mag contest, on the basic, sensible condition that only one E mail per person and per snail mail address was accepted.

Sincerely,

David

As the genie in that awesome Family Guy episode where Peter gets three wishes says - Done!

The Passion of the Gamer

MIGHT AS WELL FACE IT – YOURE ADDICTED TO GAMES.

Part 1.

By Dylan Burns

Many of us have heard the arguments proposed by many people regarding the negative effects of video games – violent crimes committed by game-inspired individuals, missed workdays, pasty complexions, ineffectual social interactions, and non-existent sex lives. Well, with the exception of the latter situation, most of these arguments have little evidence, and gamers become a little upset when portrayed as unintelligent, vacuous portals upon whom evil game developers go to work with their nefarious world conquering plans.

We are after all supposed to be generation Y: tech-savvy, with relatively high disposable incomes and a propensity for staying at home far beyond socially acceptable limits. We should be able to tell the difference between reality and any subconscious messages that may reach us whilst playing a violent game. I'm certainly not going to go out in real life and hit some guy with a baseball bat, nor mow down an army of cybernetic robots with unfeasibly large weaponry, simply because I have been doing so for the last few hours in a game. However, it is unfortunately true that some 'negative' aspects of games can become quite noticeable and the biggest of them is the fact that games are damn addictive!

FIG 1. *An early woodblock illustration capturing a state of hopeless addiction in those afflicted by "the devil's pursuit"*

Read any magazine or online forum and elements of game length will arise. How long does it take to complete? Is it worth my money? Additionally, many reviewers will list length as either a positive or negative aspect, especially for games of particular genres that traditionally embrace epic game lengths, such as RPGs. Apart from concerns over whether a game is worth your money, game length is an important aspect of how desirable a game is - the drive to beat the epic and insurmountable seems to be an inherent part of gaming pleasure. While the general trend is towards shorter games, there are plenty of developers still making titles with huge play lengths, not to mention the many persistent online worlds, which essentially have no imaginable end.

String together (at least) four or five purchases a year, and you have a sizeable chunk of time needed if you are going to enjoy everything that each game has to offer. This is by no means bad, but such devotion lends itself to certain lifestyle choices. How many times have you said to yourself, 'Just an hour of play,' only to find yourself glued the screen all day? How often have you eschewed a Friday night out, just because you're up to a cool bit you want to pass? How many kilos has such devotion accumulated upon your previously god-like physique? How many salacious advances from the horde of perky girls who constantly frequent your house have you had to regretfully turn down? Ok, perhaps that last one is just wishful thinking, but the point is that if your answer to two or more of those questions is lots, then you might as well face it – you're addicted to games.

Such addiction is easily recognisable by the inability of the afflicted to maintain basic personal hygiene, and the uncanny ability to morph your body into the shape of your lounge-resting position, even after you get up! Girlfriends, boyfriends, they come and go, but games demand your instant attention. Shower? Bah! Toilet break? Hmm, that empty cup looks appealingly voluminous... You get the idea, and if you're nodding your head or smiling in recognition then you are addicted.

Denial is always the first reaction. I have often used the argument that my many days of gaming pleasure are necessary for market research – to keep up with the industry lest I find myself overrun by the constant flow of quality titles. But that will only get you so far, and eventually this particular line of reasoning will be stymied. A second, though highly risky, tactic is to nonchalantly lie about your day: "Yes, of course I studied/worked/saved-the-world all day," whilst having slyly spent the day gaming and managing to enact an evil giggle at your deception. Your subjective moral outlook may leave you guilt free, but at some point you may be caught out.

So, the pertinent question to then ask is whether such addiction is actually a bad thing. The normal resounding answer would be no, but then something strange has happened lately that has changed my outlook. Hour-long sessions or more are well and good, and great fun, but unfortunately there have been several instances where life has rudely interrupted an exhaustive gaming routine. Overcoming the mounting rage at such intrusions, I have dutifully carried out the tasks assigned me and then blissfully returned to my beautiful fictitious worlds.

However, and this is where it gets weird, it seems that the time away from games actually had the effect of deepening my appreciation for them. Whilst writing dissertations about funny people long dead who liked to write stupid things down so that people like me would have to read and actually understand them (don't study philosophy kiddies), I realised that a small part of my mind (well, a small part of my small mind) was focused on the games I would play when I reached the summit of assigned chores. Something called 'anticipation' built up over time, so that I found myself mind-salivating at the thought of getting back to my passion. When I did return, no longer was I playing by rote or heuristically solving challenges; it was if the time away from games had made them fresh again. Even that stupid end boss who should exist in the Stupid End Boss Hall Of Fame could not raise my ire as I took him on for the millionth time. It was beautiful.

Sure, the time away from games was analogous to the separation anxiety felt by long-distance relationships, or twins separated at birth, but in some way that actually helped to strengthen the bond between games and myself. Perhaps this is just another form of game addiction, but it is a step in the right direction, it has to be.

This anecdotal story can serve to show that game addiction need not become a problem. Don't lose that love for games, hells no! But at the same time, you don't really want to go down a path that sees you surrounded by cups filled with your own urine, do you?

If not, then stay tuned for part two of this investigation – Detox!

© Sir Dylan Gameboffin Burns III, 2005

The Official Australian Games Chart

Compiled by GfK in association with the IEAA

TOP 10 PlayStation 2 Games Over $50

W/E 27th Nov 2005 RETAIL SALES

1	✪	NFS: Most Wanted	Racing
2	▼	Buzz: The Music Quiz Bundle	Family
3	▼	Eyetoy: Play 3 Pack	Compilation
4	✪	WWE Smackdown vs Raw 06	Sports
5	▼	SingStar 80s Bundle	All Other
6	▼	Eyetoy: Play 3 Games Only	Compilation
7	▼	Harry Potter Goblet Of Fire	Adventure
8	✪	Ratchet Gladiator	Adventure
9	▼	Star Wars Battlefront II	Action
10	▼	Crash Tag Team Racing	Racing

TOP 10 Nintendo DS Games Over $40

W/E 27th Nov 2005 RETAIL SALES

1	◆	Mario Kart	Racing
2	◆	Nintendogs Lab & Friends	Simulator
3	◆	Nintendogs Dachschund	Simulator
4	◆	Nintendogs Chihuahua	Simulator
5	◆	Harry Potter Goblet Of Fire	Adventure
6	◆	The Sims 2	Strategy
7	◆	Shrek Superslam	Action
8	◆	Spyro Shadow Legacy	RPG
9	◆	Super Mario 64	Adventure
10	◆	Madagascar	Adventure

TOP 10 Game Cube Games Over $50

W/E 27th Nov 2005 RETAIL SALES

1	◆	Pokémon XD: Gale Darkness	RPG
2	▲	Harry Potter Goblet Of Fire	Adventure
3	▼	Mario Party 6	Family
4	◆	Crash Tag Team Racing	Racing
5	✪	NFS: Most Wanted	Racing
6	✪	Dancing Stage Mario Mix	All Other
7	✪	Metroid Prime 2: Echoes	Adventure
8	✪	Baten Kaitos	RPG
9	▼	Mario Super Star Baseball	Sports
10	▼	Resident Evil 4 CE	Adventure

TOP 10 Xbox Games Over $50

W/E 27th Nov 2005 RETAIL SALES

1	✪	NFS: Most Wanted	Racing
2	▼	Star Wars Battlefront II	Action
3	✪	Matrix: Path Of Neo	Adventure
4	▼	Harry Potter Goblet Of Fire	Adventure
5	▲	Ricky Ponting Int Cricket 05	Sports
6	✪	Call Of Duty 2: Big Red One	Action
7	▲	Battlefield 2 Modern Combat	Action
8	▼	Crash Tag Team Racing	Racing
9	▼	GTA: San Andreas	Adventure
10	◆	Halo 2	Action

TOP 10 PC Games Over $20

W/E 27th Nov 2005 RETAIL SALES

1	◆	Age Of Empires III	Strategy
2	✪	The Sims 2: Holiday Party Pk	Strategy
3	▼	Call Of Duty 2	Action
4	✪	NFS: Most Wanted	Racing
5	▼	The Sims 2: Nightlife	Strategy
6	▼	Civilization IV	Strategy
7	▼	The Movies	Strategy
8	▼	World Of WarCraft	Strategy
9	▼	Harry Potter Goblet Of Fire	Adventure
10	▼	The Sims 2	Strategy

TOP 10 Game Boy Advance Games Over $30

W/E 27th Nov 2005 RETAIL SALES

1	▲	Pokémon Emerald	RPG
2	▲	Bratz Rock Angelz	Adventure
3	▲	Madagascar: Op Penguins	Adventure
4	▲	Harry Potter Goblet Of Fire	Adventure
5	▼	Finding Nemo + Incredibles	Adventure
6	▼	Donkey Kong Country 3	Adventure
7	▲	Shrek Superslam	Action
8	▼	Shark Tale + Shrek 2 Pack	Adventure
9	✪	Scooby Doo 2 Monsters	Adventure
10	✪	Star Wars Trilogy	Adventure

TOP 10 All Format Games Over $50

W/E 27th Nov 2005 RETAIL SALES

1	✪	NFS: Most Wanted	PlayStation 2
2	▼	Buzz: The Music Quiz Bundle	PlayStation 2
3	▼	Eyetoy: Play 3 Pack	PlayStation 2
4	✪	WWE Smackdown vs Raw 06	PlayStation 2
5	▼	SingStar 80s Bundle	PlayStation 2
6	▼	Eyetoy: Play 3 Games Only	PlayStation 2
7	✪	NFS: Most Wanted	Xbox
8	▼	Harry Potter Goblet Of Fire	PlayStation 2
9	✪	Ratchet Gladiator	PlayStation 2
10	▼	Star Wars Battlefront II	PlayStation 2

TOP 10 PlayStation Portable Games Over $40

W/E 27th Nov 2005 RETAIL SALES

1	✪	NFS: Most Wanted	Racing
2	▼	Star Wars Battlefront II	Action
3	▲	Burnout Legends	Racing
4	▼	FIFA 2006	Sports
5	✪	Harry Potter Goblet Of Fire	Adventure
6	✪	Pursuit Force	Adventure
7	◆	V8 Supercars 2	Racing
8	▼	NFS Underground Rivals	Racing
9	▼	Untold Legends	RPG
10	✪	X-Men Legends 2 Rise Apoc	Adventure

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

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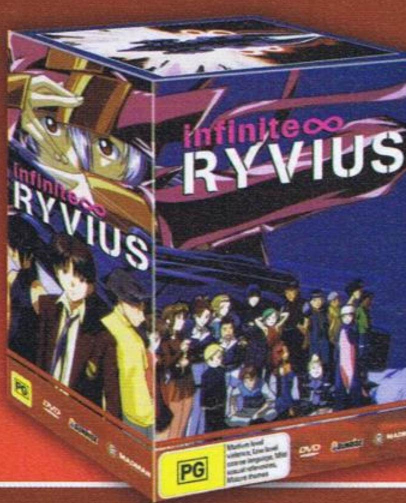

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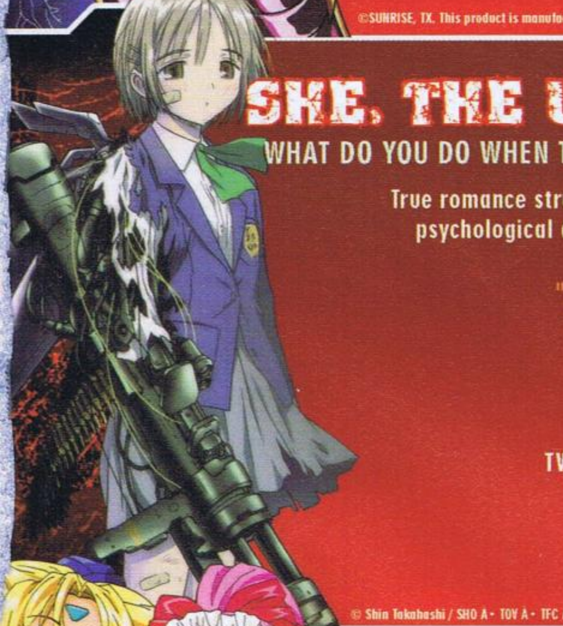

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