EXCLUSIVE! SNOW RACER 98 - 6 PAGE REVIEW

extreme PlayStation • Issue 3 • March 1998

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Issue 3 March 98



Resident Evil 2

RETURN OF THE LIVING DEAD

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SNOW RACER 98

GRAN TURISMO
THE REAL DRIVING SIMULATOR

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NAGANO WINTER OLYMPICS 98 • DEAD BALL ZONE • THEME HOSPITAL • POWERBOAT RACING • SKULLMONKEYS & MORE

PlayStation

NEW

AV

"JERSEY DEVIL WILL BE DANCING ON THE GRAVE OF THE COMPETITION THIS CHRISTMAS."

93% extreme PlayStation

"SO, THE BEST OF THE 3D BUNCH? CERTAINLY!"

PlayStation Magazine STARPLAYER — The Official PlayStation Magazine

"JERSEY DEVIL IS A CLASSY PLATFORMER"

90% PlayStation plus









JERSEY DEVIL™



THE

ENGER.

TEMPTED?

ocean malofilm interactive

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Editorial

Extremists, issue three is upon thee! As always, we bring you the most in-depth reports on what's hot in the swirling PlayStation cosmos. With extensive coverage of over 45 titles, you can't go wrong. Sony have announced that they've sold two million of the funky grey boxes, ensuring the already high quality of game development will expand even further. And with the PAL versions of Gran Turismo and Resident Evil 2 - both featured in this issue - nearly complete, '98 looks like being the best year yet for gamers.

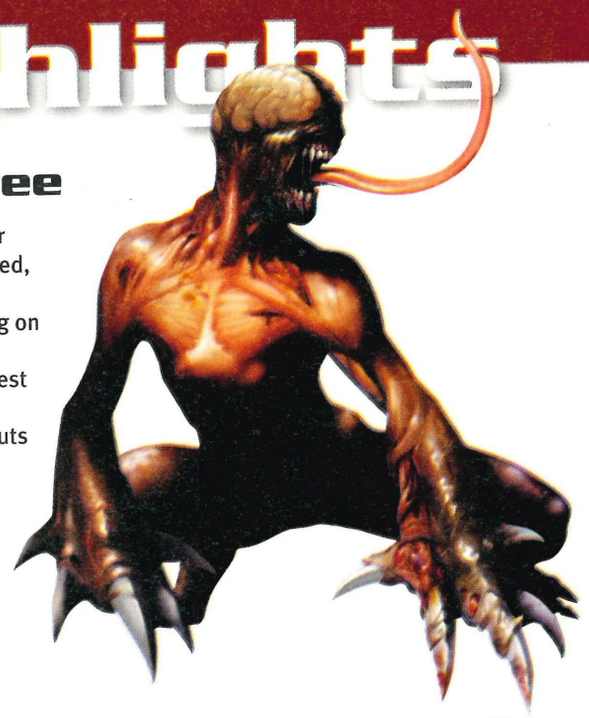
We've also travelled to Paris this month in search of treasure; returning with the exclusive on Snow Racer 98. It's a dirty job, but someone's gotta do it! So plug in, tune in and turn on to the world of extreme PlayStation.

It's a habit that can't be kicked!

Sweet,

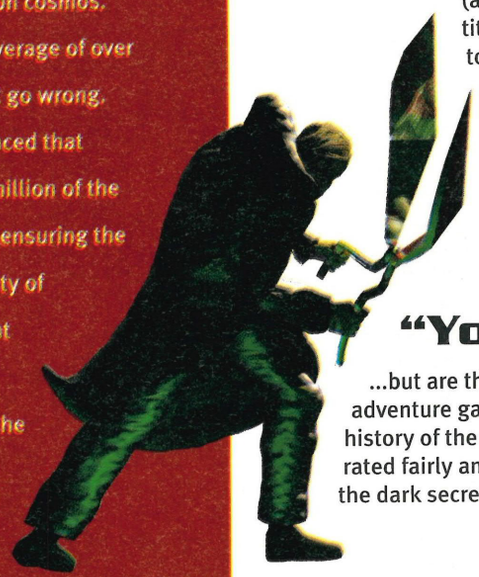
Darren

Highlights



Zombie Jamboree

Resident Evil 2 - The putrefaction factor returns! More of the skew camera-angled, conundrum-solving, viscera-shredding favourite. Our in-depth preview starting on Page 26 gives the low-down on the loathsome follow up to one of the coolest (and scariest) PSX titles ever. It takes guts to read this. Both yours and some undead sucka's.



"You Find Fifty Gold Pieces..."

...but are they worth spending on a time-guzzling, head-scratching, goblin-slashing adventure game epic? Well, now you can get the whole picture with our olde worlde history of the computerised quest, plus a round-up of titles available for the PlayStation rated fairly and courageously by our very own ogre-smiter, Ian the Just. Page 52 holds the dark secret of the ages in its bosom.



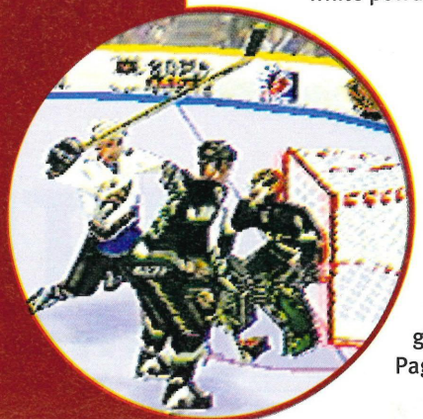
Gran Turismo

Two hundred and fifty true-to-life cars? Real time gorgeous lighting effects? More tracks than a junkie's forearms? The best graphics ever? Now you can decide for yourself with our plush preview of this eagerly-awaited racing leviathan. Burn two smoking streaks onto the tarmac towards Page 18 for a full throttle rundown.



Get Completely Piste

After last month's excellent Coolboarders 2, can Snow Racer 98, Power & Magic's two-pronged stab at high-speed snowy sliding, grab some air over its rivals' heads? Or will it wipe out and break its knees? Butter the nose over to Page 58 to get a dose of fresh white powder.



It's Great When You're Skate, Yeah!

With not one, not two, not three but FOUR flipping ice hockey games reviewed this issue, it's inevitable they're going to go head-to-head-to-head-to-head. Our consecutive-page bonanza referees the inevitable gloves-off brawling that broke out, and picks the smashed teeth off the ice. Pages 70-73 fanfare a bloody-nosed victor (with funny cheesy organs).

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You're bound to want it, aren't you?

Review Guide

Overall Score - 91-100%
Dog's bollox, cat's knackers, etc. Buy, beg, borrow or steal this game. Worth pawning your granny's heirlooms for.

Overall Score - 81-90%
The dog's bollox, but not quite the cat's knackers. Still worth spending your hard-earned dosh on, and definitely worth stealing.

Overall Score - 71-80%
Make sure you play this little critter before you buy or steal it. Many will think it's great, some will think it's crap.

Overall - 51-70%
We're getting on the verge of this-ain't-even-worth-stealing territory. It might interest punters who are big fans of the genre.

Overall - 25-50%
Okay if you've received it as a present, but parting with cash for this title might be regarded as madness.

Overall - 0-25%
If you see this game lying on the pavement, cross over to the other side. If you see it on fire, don't piss on it - let it burn.

signals

IF IT'S HAPPENING, IT'S HERE!
EPM BRINGS YOU THE LATEST NEWS

UPDATE: PLAYSTATION TOPS 2 MILLION

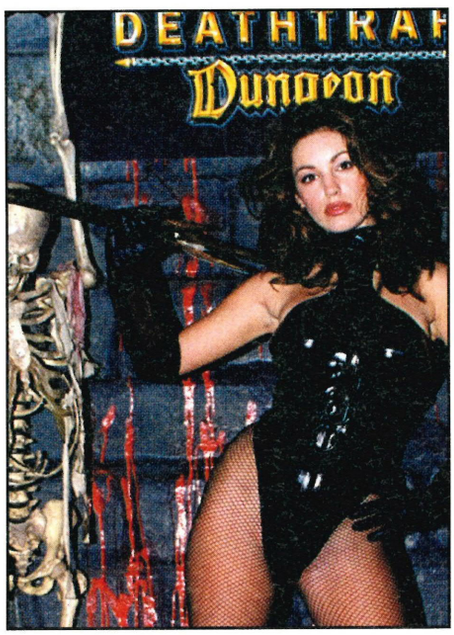
Friday, 30th January saw the official announcement from Sony that the PlayStation has now sold over two million units in the UK. It was inevitable that after last month's news story claiming 1.9 million UK units, that the two million figure would be hit within a few months, although the announcement came much sooner than expected.
To celebrate this Sony are launching a £1 million charity initiative called 'Help'. This involves the launch of a three-game package for just £39.99. The games on the compilation are Broken Sword, Myst and Road Rash - not the best games available, but for this price it's definitely a VFM compilation. The good thing is all profits from the Help compilation will be donated to charities, including The Prince's Trust and Great Ormond Street Hospital.

YAROZE!



To celebrate the launch of their new web site (check it out at www.playstation-europe.com, it's pretty cool), Sony are going to be giving a £200 discount to new Net Yaroze members. The first 500 members to join up after 31st January will receive this discount, as well as access to the private members site. This means that if you've a general knowledge of programming in 'C' and a spare £350 as opposed to the normal £550, you can get yourself up and running as a PlayStation programmer (if you can get in there as one of the first 500). Starting off with the Net Yaroze can lead to bigger things - several talented Net Yaroze developers have already been snapped up by top European software houses.

TORTURE CHAMBERS



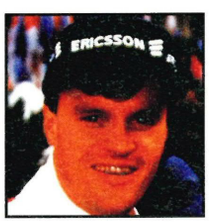
Dominatrix Kelly Brooks donned a kinky leather bondage suit and entered London Dungeons to promote Eidos' new game, Deathtrap Dungeon. Traffic literally came to a halt outside the Dungeons as Kelly strode in from the street to do her S&M photo shoot. As you can see from these photos, with Kelly dressed as Red Lotus from the game, she's no girl-next-door. In fact, looking like that she'd send most men packing, except for us at extreme PlayStation, of course.

TINY TROOPS

DREAMWORKS INTERACTIVE

Dreamworks Interactive are to licence the new Universal and Dreamworks pictures film, Small Soldiers. The film follows the story of a war between two sets of the most futuristic toy action figures ever - The Commando Elite and the monster-style Gorgonites. The movie mixes live action with computer-generated footage (a la Toy Story), and the stars include Gregory Smith and Kirsten Dunst. Tommy Lee Jones will supply the voice of Major Chip Hazard, commander of the Commando Elite. There has been no release date announced as yet, so I wouldn't hold your breath for the film or the game.

RALLY CHAMP HITS PLAYSTATION





Tommi Makinen, twice international rally champion, is to endorse and work on a new rally game from Europress Software and Strange Productions. Tommi will offer his expert opinion (rally, not programming) throughout the production of this potential V-Rally beater.
The game, Tommi Makinen World Rally Champion, looks set to be a graphical treat; the high-resolution pixel graphics are unique on a rally game. The game features 60 tracks, but that's nothing compared to the fact that it comes complete with its own 3D track editor. This offers the player the chance to design their own tracks from scratch using scenery and environments from the tracks already in the game! Hopefully this part of the game will be easy to use, because track editors in the past have often been a bitch. Also featured are nine cars, all modelled on real-life rally cars, making the game as realistic as possible.
Tommi Makinen World rally Champion is set for release in May so you can expect a preview and review very soon.



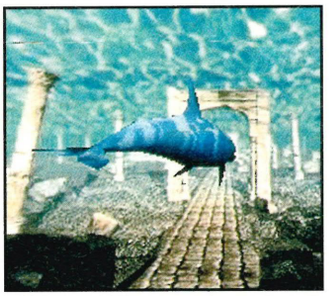
RESIDENT EVIL 2 IS RATHER POPULAR

Virgin and Capcom's Resident Evil 2 totally white-washed American sales on the weekend of its release. It took in over $19 million in revenue, beating every film at the box office bar one (probably Titanic). In fact the game has beaten American figures for FFVII, Tomb Raider 2 and Super Mario 64. It's no surprise either, Resident Evil 2 is excellent - check out this month's preview in Exposed to find out more.



DEPTH BECOMES FLUID

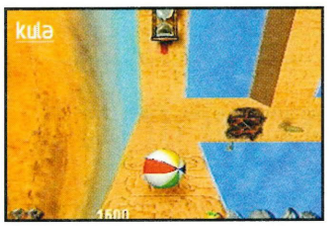
The headline says it all, really. Sony's intriguing game-come-music sequencer is to be officially called Fluid on its UK release in June this year. We should definitely have some proper news for you next month. Hopefully.



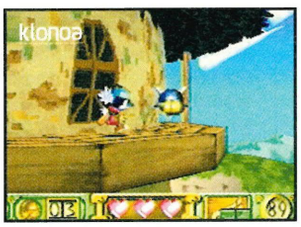
MISSIONS FOR YOUR MONEY

Westwood Studios are to release a double disk add-on for Command & Conquer: Red Alert this summer. The package will be called Command & Conquer, Red Alert: Retaliation. The two discs - Counter Strike and Aftermath - will offer 34 new missions and 12 new units. The multiplay option has been taken into account and seven of these new units can only be used in a link up game. We'll have a review just as soon as we get a copy - as long as we can pull ourselves away from it, that is.

KULA & KLONOA



Here's a few shots of two Sony games that were just a little too late to get into Exposed or Gamespotting. Kula World is a full 3D puzzle game that casts you as a ball rolling around on fully rotatable platforms. The idea is to collect all of the items and reach the exit before the time runs out. We've had a quick blast on it and we can tell you one thing - it's bloody hard.



Klonoa is a platform game in a similar vein to Pandemonium. The graphics are more cutesy than Pandemonium's, but they also seem more solid. We'll have a full preview on both games next month.

CORE GOES ORIENTAL





Core design are working on a new game called Ninja, to be published by Eidos and hopefully hit the shelves in June.
The game casts you as a wandering ninja who returns to find his Japanese homeland devastated by a war between two warlords - one with the devil's help on his side. The monsters the devil used didn't simply take out the enemy though - they destroyed everything, and now the land's filled with terror. As an honourable ninja, it's your job to save your people and return Japan back to its former self.
It won't be easy, though. There are 13 massive 3D levels and a mass of enemies for you to take on. The arcade action is viewed through fixed camera angles so it sounds like it may be more Resident Evil than Tomb Raider. Your character can fight hand to hand, use a sword and other weapons or even use magic. Details are sketchy at the moment, but we should have more info for you next month.

WHAT'S UP DOC?

Infogrames have been given the licence to publish games starring the famous Looney Tunes characters. Infogrames have already started production on some of the titles, although no names or details have yet been released. However, the deal means that we could see games starring Bugs Bunny, Daffy Duck and the cool Elmer Fudd, among others. Let's just hope the games are better than Space Jam, the movie or the game.



BLANKA RETURNS

One of the all-time favourite Street Fighter characters is to make a welcome return in Street Fighter EX2 for the arcades. The Brazilian beast was one of the best fighters from the original Street Fighter 2, so much so that he was banned from most multi-player tournaments at our house. Basically he's rock and his return to the fray is welcome in our books.
Improvements to Street Fighter EX include full CG intros and full character endings on completion of the game. The game will appear in the arcades this summer, and you can expect a PlayStation version to follow. When are they ever going to get around to making a full 3D version of Street Fighter, though?



THOUGHT OF THE MONTH...

We reckon that Eddie The Eagle should have stormed the Olympic ski jump ramp at Nagano and pulled a mooner in the air. So there!

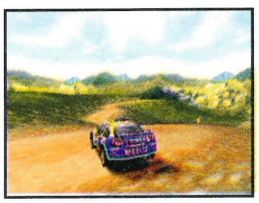
LARA LOOK-A-LIKES





Following the sacking of Rhona Mitra, Eidos have appointed a new Lara Croft in the form of model Vanessa Demouy. That's about it really... here's a piccy. Every month extreme PlayStation will be nominating a babe who we think should be cast as Lara Croft. Send in your ideas (funny, serious or sad), and you might just get a mystery prize.
This month's winner is... Caprice (Phhwwwooooaaaar).

CODEMASTERS JOIN RALLY RACE



Codemasters have announced two new games to hit the shelves this summer. Colin McRae's Rally and Brian Lara Cricket '98 are both pencilled in for a 2nd quarter '98 release and both are looking excellent. On the strength of TOCA (Codemasters world-class racer), Colin McRae's Rally could become one of the top racing games - it may even beat the benchmark rally game V-Rally. As for Brian Lara '98... well it's a cricket game, innit? Seriously though, if you're into cricket then Brian Lara '98 promises to be the best (or is that only?) simulation of the game you'll get on the PlayStation.



NEW SOCCER GAME SHOCKER

Rage have announced their new addition to the PlayStation soccer market. Striker has appeared on countless formats since its release on the Amiga, but this is the first time it's hit the PlayStation. Details are very thin on the ground at the moment, but if Striker on the PlayStation is as ground-breaking as the Amiga version, it could be something special.

COCK-UP CORNER - TOMB RAIDER 2 CHEATS

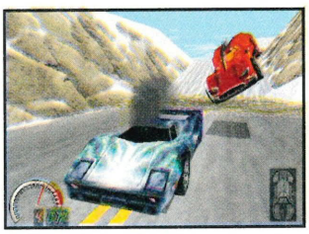
A thousand apologies for printing a couple of the TR2 codes incorrectly.
Here's the correct versions, with the all-important step backwards and forwards section. Sorry!

LEVEL SKIP
During gameplay, make Lara perform the following actions in sequence: hold Walk and side-step Left, Right and Left again; continuing to hold Walk, step backwards once and then forwards once. Then release Walk and turn three complete circles (either direction will do, as long as all the turns are in the same direction), now jump forward and perform a Roll in mid-air by pressing the Circle button. The screen freezes while Lara is executing the roll in mid-air, and after a few seconds you're transported to the end of the level.

ALL WEAPONS
Hold Walk and side-step Left, Right and then Left again; continuing to hold Walk, step backwards once and then forwards once. Then release Walk and turn three complete circles (either direction will do, as long as all the turns are in the same direction), now jump backward and perform a Roll in mid-air by pressing the Circle button. Press the Select buttons to access the Inventory to find all weapons with full ammunition.

PSX CARMAGEDDON

The controversial but fun-to-play Carmageddon is on its way to the PlayStation. Interplay's top racing/murder game has proved a massive hit on the PC, and if the reaction to BMG's also-controversial Grand Theft Auto is anything to go by, Carmegeddon should prove a smash on the PlayStation too.



YOU BOUNDER, YOU

This one came in a little late. We've just heard that well-known cad and bounder Leslie Philips will be doing the voice-over for Gex. So instead of hearing a load of gags on American culture, Gex will now comprise of over five hundred distinctly British one-liners. Leslie's voice should fit the bill perfectly - we'll let you know what it sounds like in next month's review.



THIS MONTH WE 'AVE MOSTLY BEEN PLAYING

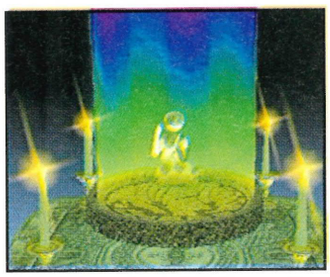
DARREN	IAN
Gran Turismo	Soviet Strike
Circuit Breakers	Tactics Ogre
Snow Racer 98	DigiMon

SAUL	GRAHAM
Dead Ball Zone	Wipeout 2097
Gran Turismo	Coolboarders 2
Resident Evil 2	Gran Turismo

CHRISTIAN
Grand Theft Auto
Micro Machines V3
Wipeout 2097

Overseas

This new feature aims to bring you details of what's hot on the eastern and western PlayStation gaming fronts. We all know those little chaps over in Japan tend to get all the good stuff first, followed by the Americans and then good old blighty Britain (if they can be bothered) last, so it's up to us to bring you the best in overseas gaming.





First off is a game called Monster Rancher, which plays somewhat similarly to the Tamagotchi and the new DigiMon that has swept the nation. It's a big hit in Jap land, and has just hit the shelves in the USA.

The idea is to breed and raise a monster, which then challenges other monsters; these can be your mates' creations or computer-generated ones. The game's real gem is that you can create a monster by allowing the program to read data off of an audio CD. By swapping disks, it reads off some details and from these, generates a monster. You can then inter-breed them and train them into lean, mean fighting machines. The added bonus is that there are over two hundred monsters to try and create. This brings back memories of the old Barcode Battlers, where everyone was cutting up anything that had a barcode on it. This time, though, you have to go rummaging for your dad's old CD classics, like Showaddywaddy or Shakin Stevens (there's someone here who owns one, but we won't mention any names, Darren). We haven't spent too much time on this one (mainly, because we kept taking the piss out of Darren's taste in music), but judging by what we've played, it's great fun and there seems to be plenty to keep you coming back for more and more. Let's hope this one sees the light of day over here.



The next game on our list is called Einhänder. You'd be forgiven for thinking this is becoming a Squaresoft page, but they do keep banging out brilliant games.

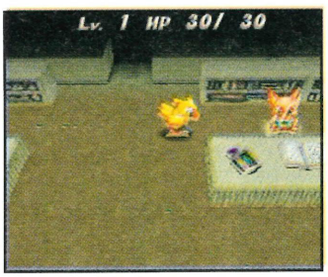
This one's a pure shoot-'em-up that makes the old classics like R-Type sit up and take notice. The further you get into the game, the more and more hectic it gets, with enemy craft throwing all they've got at you. Not only can you pick up and use several weapons at the same time, but you can also switch them over to tackle different opponents in different positions. As you go along it's a case of shoot everything in what starts as a 2D scroller, but changes to a 2 $^1/_2$ D scroller, with some brilliant backdrops that really help to capture the mood. This one's been another big hit.

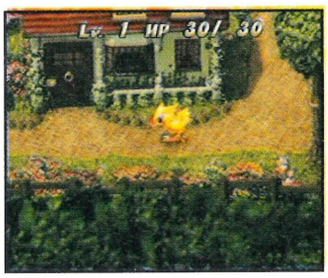


The next game that's causing a stir is a Squaresoft title. It's another adventure game and it's called Chocobo: Mysterious Dungeon. If you've played Final Fantasy VII all of the way through, you already know what a Chocobo is. If you haven't, a Chocobo is a small yellow bird and has appeared in several Squaresoft games.

This time you're placed in an ever-changing dungeon, picking up weapons and power-ups that make you stronger and stronger in your quest to defeat the increasingly-powerful foes. The game's typical of the cutsey Japanese anime style that we've all come to expect, and it's proving another big hit for the Squaresoft team. The chances of seeing it over here are slim, so keep your eyes open for Final Fantasy Tactics instead.







Lastly, if you were into Time Crisis, then you'll love Elemental Gearbolt. Without doubt, this is the best game we've played on import for some time. Before each level, you're treated to some brilliant Manga-style animation which tells the story of what you're fighting for.

When the levels open up you follow a set course, but the graphics are so smooth it's a pleasure just to watch, let alone play. If you think you've seen some meaty end-of-level baddies before, think again. As you come face to face with them, their energy bars quite literally go off the screen. You really need to be trigger happy to beat them. To accompany this, you're treated to some of the best and most haunting music to ever grace a game, setting the atmosphere to what is truly an epic adventure.







Other news from the Land of the Rising Sun this month is that Sony, of all companies, has been ordered to cease its control of software pricing. It's been accused by the Japanese Fair Trade Commission (JFTC), that it is in violation of Japan's anti-monopoly laws regarding certain business practices concerning the PlayStation, and its software distribution. These practices include demanding retailers sell software at fixed prices, and restricting sales of second-hand games. They demand wholesalers sell to retailers only. The JTFC also alleges Sony stopped and terminated contracts with those who didn't comply. A spokesperson for the company has argued they have done nothing wrong and do not accept the allegations. If anything arises from this, we'll keep you notified.

Well that's almost it for this issue, but if you want us to find out about any particular game or you want more details about something that might not be released over here, let us know and we'll investigate it. Next month we hope to bring you information on Xenogears, X-Men Vs Street Fighter, Bomberman World (here goes more violent, late-night, multi-player sessions) and Parasite Eve; plus more...

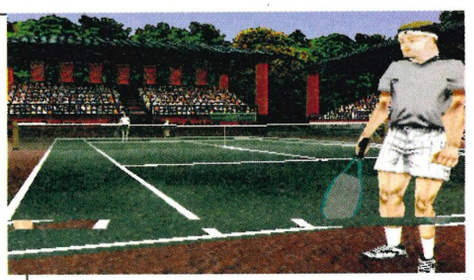
Gamespotting

This section is dedicated to titles still in development. All the information here has been kindly sent to us by the various publishers involved in releasing the titles. Included are near-complete games like Interplay's Powerboat Racing and Gremlin's Men In Black.

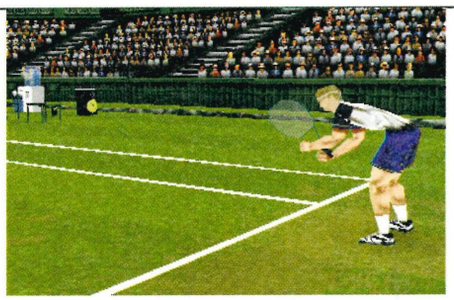
Actua Tennis

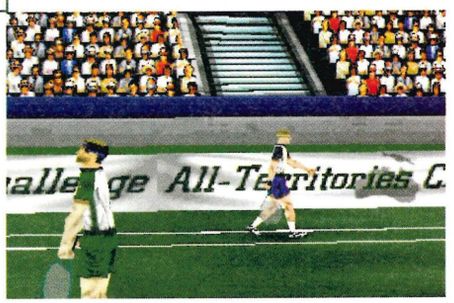
Publisher - Gremlin
Developer - In House
Released - 2nd Quarter '98

Another day, another Actua Sports series. Actua games are almost always worth a look, and as there's no major tennis tourney to get in the way of development (if you don't know what we're talking about, check out our Actua Hockey review), this one should be pretty good.
Commentary is one area where Actua games excel, using professional commentators from TV shows. Actua Tennis is no exception, featuring Sue Barker and Barry Davies. You can play tournaments across the globe on any court surface you like. Both male and female tennis players have been motion captured, adding realism to the animation. The court is presented in 3D, enabling you to view the action from any angle. Shot replays are catered for too.
We always look forward to an Actua game, and this one's no exception. Tennis games tend to play more like Pong than a sophisticated simulation, but if anyone can break the mould, it's Gremlin.



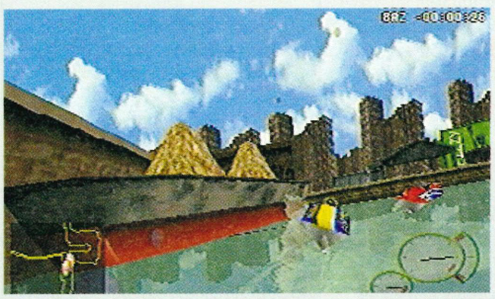






Powerboat Racing

Publisher - Interplay
Developer - Prometheus
Released - March '98



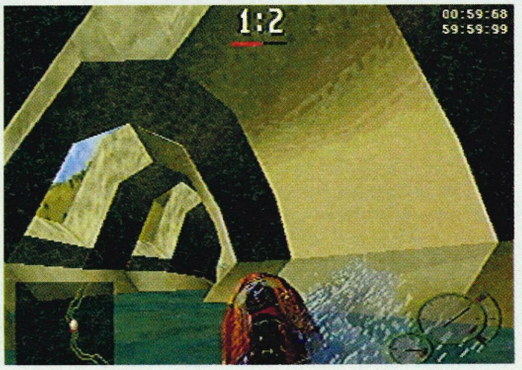
With the racing genre already overcrowded and top titles like Newman Haas and Grand Turismo soon to be released, Interplay wisely opted for a very different sort of racer. Taking to the waters on nine 'tracks' spread all over the world, Powerboat Racing offers an aquatic arcade experience.
Our preview disk had a few problems, but it also gave reasons to be optimistic. The arcade-style racing is pretty neat. The boats have no brakes (for obvious reasons), but by raising and lowering the outboard motor you can emphasise speed or handling. This takes some getting used to, but puts a whole new perspective on the racing genre. On the negative side, the camera swings wildly as you turn, making it difficult to see where you're going, and there's too little difference between the boats you choose. It's also too easy to lose your way and take wrong turnings too.
Interplay promise a complete overhaul before the game's released. With its wrinkles ironed out and the presentation beefed up, it could be a winner.





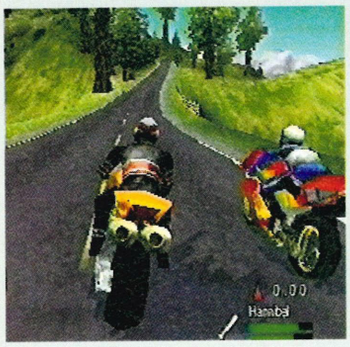






Road Rash 3D

Publisher - Electronic Arts
Developer - Team Road Rash
Released - 1st Quarter '98







Is there anyone out there who hasn't played a Road Rash game? This is motorcycle racing with a difference, and the difference is you get to punch and kick your opponents off their bikes, or even cut them down with a chain or a metal bar. The series' first outing on the PSX was criticised for being a 16-bit game with FMV, but now EA seem set to silence their critics with Road Rash 3D.

RR3D is a full 3D offering, with motion-captured bikes and riders. The movement is exceptionally smooth, especially when you draw up next to a foe and try to flatten him. As well as the usual race modes, there's to be a Big Game Mode which sees rival biker gangs battling it out. Which do you join? The one that offers the biggest bribe, of course. You race, wrestle and ride your way through over 200 miles of road, stretching from the city to the coast.

We haven't seen much of Road Rash 3D, but what we have seen looks good. Expect a more exhaustive preview soon.

Vigilante 8

Publisher - Activision
Developer - Activision
Released - May '98

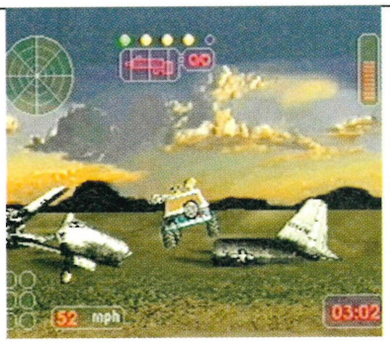






Are you ready to rumble? This is a driving game with a difference, and that difference is combat; on second thoughts, make that war. Unlike, say, Destruction Derby, which is basically a sports driving game with a lot of bumping, Vigilante 8 puts the emphasis squarely on the battle aspect of driving. Competitors not only bump into each other, but also attack with a veritable arsenal of deadly, high-tech weapons. We've no details on what they are or how they work, but take one look at the screenshots and you'll see what we mean.

Vigilante 8 offers 12 3D battle arenas, a brand-new graphics engine offering lens flare, real-time reflection mapping, car and terrain deformation and intense 3D explosions. There are also 12 vehicles and multiple perspective options.

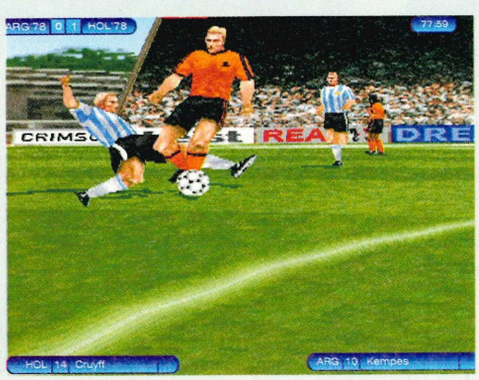


Steve Jackson Games once produced a board game called Car Wars, in which you had to design your own car, kit it out with weapons and fight with it. One of the standard cars it offered was called the Vigilante. Could this be the inspiration behind the game? We'll probably never know, but if the PSX Vigilante 8 plays as well as the counters-and-dice Car Wars, it should be a real corker.

Viva Football

Publisher - Virgin Interactive
Developer - Crimson Team
Released - 3rd Quarter '98

Ho hum, another football game riding on the back of this year's World Cup competition. This one offers (according to Virgin) 'a new type of soccer simulation that flawlessly recreates all the passion, excitement and unpredictability of the real thing'. Does that mean you mess with half a dozen Chelsea-supporting skinheads as you leave the ground? Or you hear the match has been postponed while you're driving to the stadium? Or a thug runs out of the stand and twats the linesman? Probably not, but the game will boast a 'unique' control system that offers the player pinpoint accuracy when passing and shooting, feints and dummies in the box and a great interface which should appeal to beginners and experienced players alike.



The game uses polished 3D, using a whole team for the motion captures, and all international teams from 1962 to 1998 are represented. Squads are recreated with accuracy in mind, so you can have real fun playing 'fantasy' matches - who's the best , the 1966 England squad or Brazil's winning side of 1994?

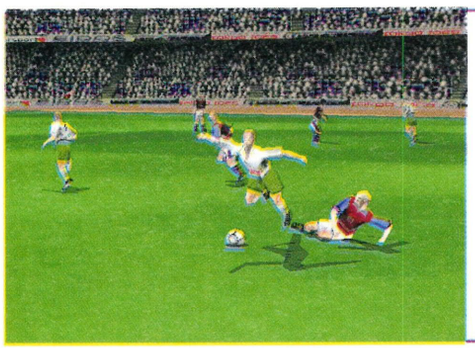
As always, more news as it's made.

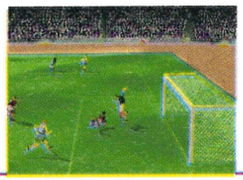


World League Soccer

*UPDATE

Publisher - Eidos
Developer - Silicon Dreams
Released - September '98





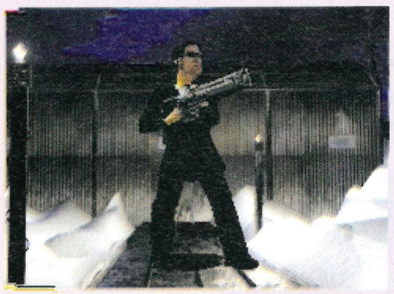
Two things are certain during a World Cup year. The press go wild with optimism when England beat a top-class side like Fiji then call for the manager's head when we go out to Tunisia, and home video games consoles are awash with football titles. 1998 is proving no exception, with several footie games on the horizon, including this offering from Eidos.

We've little to add to our Gamespotting feature last month, but here are some cool new screenshots to drool over. Isn't that Aston Villa fouling the opposition?



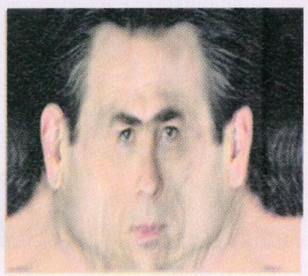
Men In Black

Publisher - Gremlin
Developer - In House
Released - 1st Quarter '98









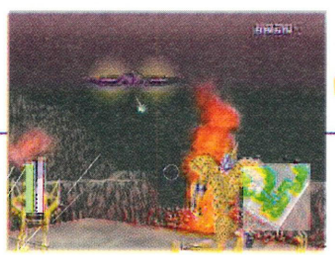
Men in Black... a highly funded yet unofficial Government agency. Their agents regulate all things alien on the planet Earth. They dress in black and work in secret. Though few know they exist, they're our only line of defence against the extra-terrestrial hoards.

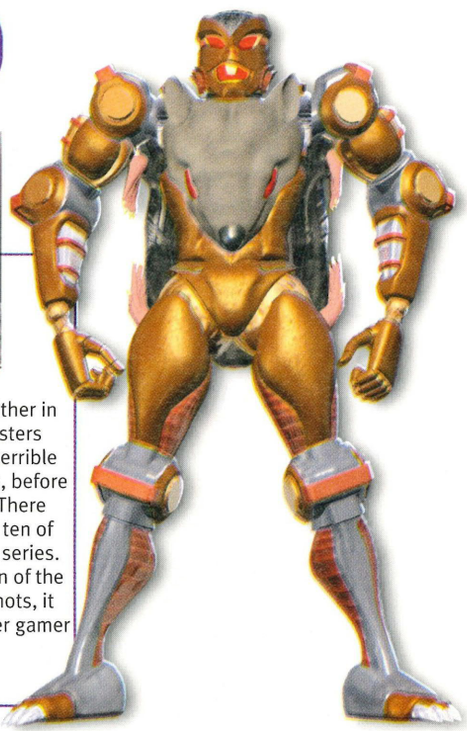
There's a new threat - you must protect the planet against the scum of the universe. Only by using your skills to the fullest can you hope to survive this 3D action adventure. Carrying out your secret missions requires brains as well as brawn. Check out the cool puzzles like the bomb diffusion. If it comes to fists you must be ready, but it's better to use one of the seven weapons available.

Your missions take you over a mix of volatile terrains, with one of our three best agents - it's up to you to decide which you take. A weapons training area, assault course and combat practice zone are at your disposal too. Remember - nothing's as it seems.

Beast Wars Transformers

Publisher - Hasbro
Developer - Hasbro
Released - Spring '98

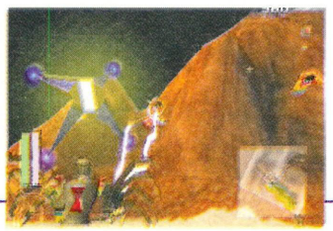




Transformers - robots in disguise. Since their launch in 1984, you've read the books, you've seen the film, you've bought the toys, you've worn the T-shirt... actually, unless you're still in short trousers you probably haven't, but Beast Wars might just appeal to gamers of all ages.

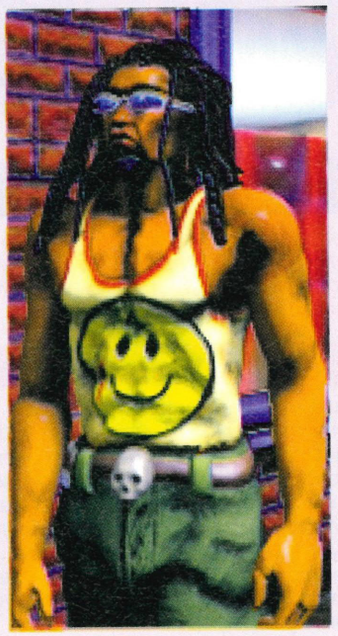
Based on the popular toys/books/films/any other cash-in, the game is a 3D action outing featuring characters that transform from beasts to robots at the touch of a button. Two factions battle it out, the heroic Maximals and the evil Predacons. You can control either in their battle for world domination, effectively offering two games in one. Both sides must beware of the alien monsters called the Skriix, who arrive through inter-dimensional portals (of course) and lay waste to all they find. The two terrible beast armies must join forces against the common enemy when they arrive, before once more turning on each other. There are 24 different levels and around ten of the most popular figures from the series. We've yet to see a playable version of the game, but judging by the screenshots, it doesn't look like it has the younger gamer in mind. More news as it's made.





Wreckin' Crew

Publisher - Telstar
Developer - Electronic Studios
Released - September '98



Wreckin' Crew is a driving game with the emphasis on arcade-style combat. Steering clear of the simulation path, Quickdraw have gone all out for fun.
The game offers a whole host of stylised and customised vehicles, from a 1957 Chevvy to a beat-up Ford pick-up. Each machine has its own strengths and weaknesses. There are practice modes, cup competitions and head-to-head deathmatches, not to mention two-player stunt arenas. A split-screen mode lets two players compete on the same PSX. In-game power-ups include weapons, nitros, shields, repair kits and teleports. There are also over 1000 road-side objects you can run into. The player can choose from a range of eight characters, with two secret racers to be found. There are also to be secret short cuts on every track.







Xenocracy

Publisher - Grolier
Developer - Simis
Released - TBA



Xenocracy has you commanding an independent peace-keeping force, out to prevent interplanetary war in our solar system. In the world of this 3D space combat game, four planets are inhabited by humans: Earth (obviously), Mars, Venus and (incredibly) Mercury. True to human nature, the four planets are constantly squabbling. Your task is to make sure they don't annihilate each other by ensuring one planet doesn't get the whip hand over the other three. This isn't easy. There are no good guys and bad guys here, and the planet's governments are as corrupt as each other. You're in one combat situation after another, but rarely on the same side twice in succession.
There are several crafts available, including fighters, bombers and scout ships, and combat can take place in space, on an asteroid or a terra-formed moon. There are 150 missions in all, but you only need to complete 30 to complete the game. There have been several space combat and combat/trader games, but never a combat/political management sim. Xenocracy looks interesting, to say the least.

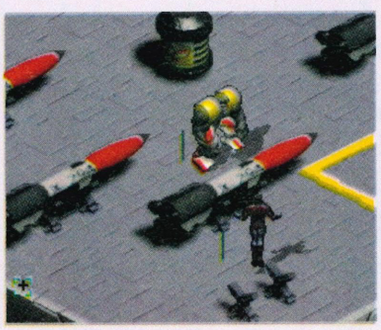


Youngblood

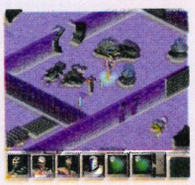
Publisher - GT Interactive
Developer - Extreme Studios
Released - 2nd Quarter '98



Now here's a weird one. Youngblood is an RPG/strategy game based on a comic that will have closed down before the game hits the shelves. For those who've read it (we've never heard of it), the game includes its comic characters such as Overtkill and Chapel.
The game features a top-down perspective and real-time combat. Levels include deserts, jungles and even hell. You control teams of four characters, all armed to the teeth with weapons which can be upgraded as you go. Your characters can gain powers through experience too.
The aim of the game? To prevent a bloody apocalypse by stopping a mutant jihad's onslaught across the globe. There are 11 real-time missions and seven unique heroes. You can command a troop of four or one of said heroes, and there's even an R&D section where you develop new weapons.
RPG buffs and those that like their games cerebral should look out for Youngblood. We certainly will - stay tuned for a full preview next issue.











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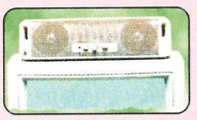
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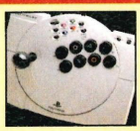
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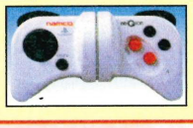


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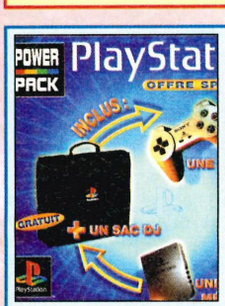
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To assist in choosing the right game for you, we have included review scores from both Play and Playstation Plus, two of the country's leading PSX magazines. We have also tried to categorise the games for you (although some are difficult to categorise!) If you would like advice or more information on a game prior to purchasing, please do not hesitate to ring our sales team who will give a fair and unbiased opinion of the game. Remember, if you don't like it you don't have to keep it so they will always tell you the truth!

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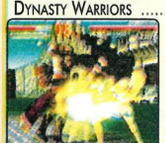
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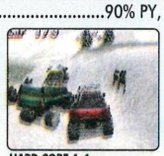

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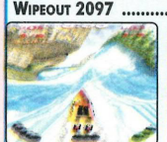
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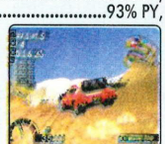

RAY TRACERS


MOTO RACER


GRAND THEFT AUTO

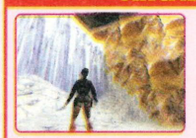
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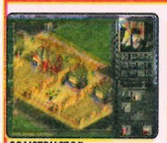

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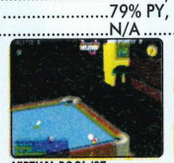

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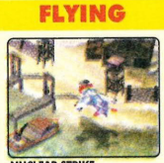

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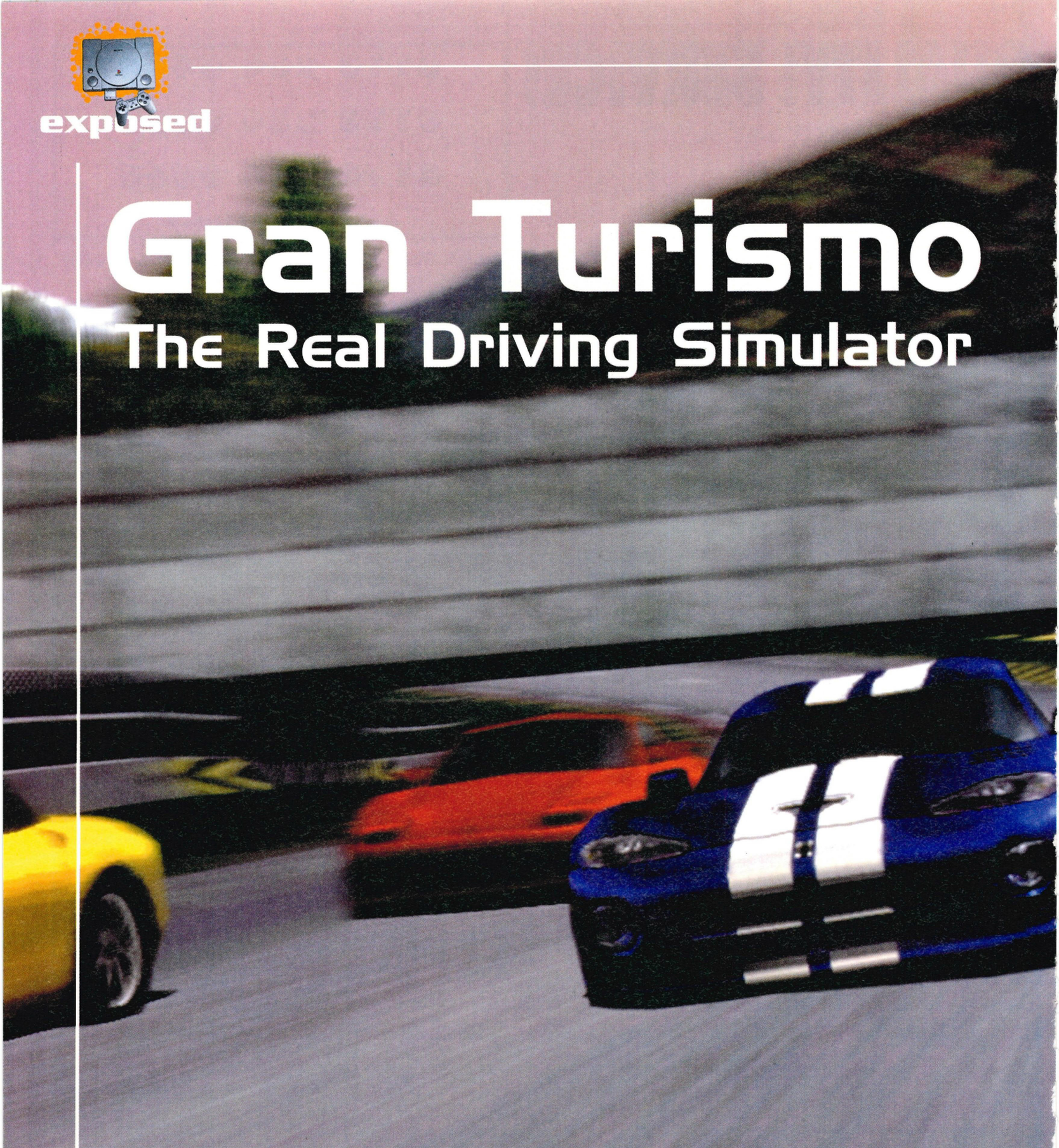
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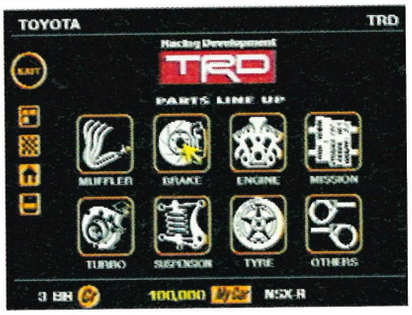
Gran Turismo

The Real Driving Simulator



"The ultimate racing game, one that does not just incorporate racing but also a game that captures and embodies the whole racing and automobile culture"

Publisher - SCEE Developer - SCEI Release Date - June '98 Genre - Racing

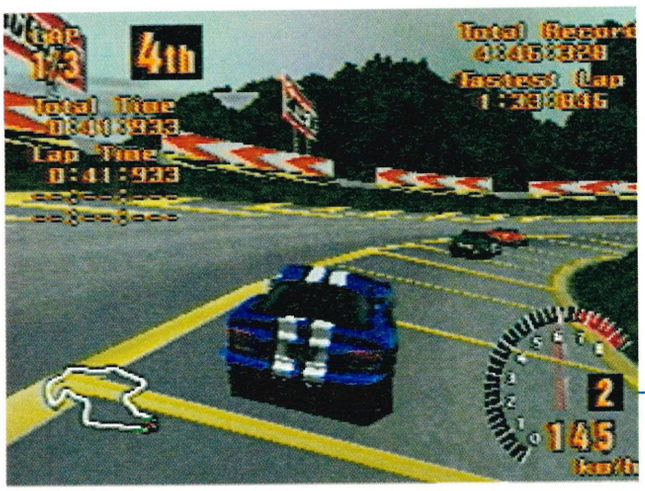


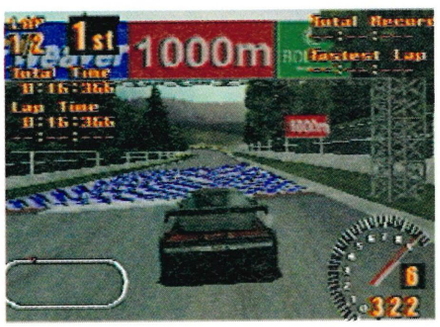
Stand up, Mr Yamauchi

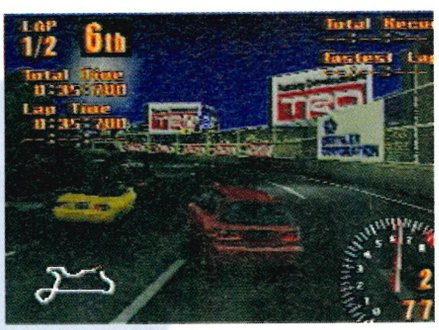
Gran Turismo's chief developer Kazunori Yamauchi has been developing driving games for more than four years, but he first had the notion of Gran Turismo well over five years ago. Gran Turismo is only his third game, but it's a massive departure from his last venture, Motor Toon Grand Prix. Mr Yamauchi has always been into motor racing and cars, and his aim with Gran Turismo was to create the most comprehensive and realistic driving game ever. It looks like he may have achieved this modest goal.

Not only did he want to create 'the ultimate racing game', he also strived to make a game that covers the whole of the world automobile culture, something which is evident in the quantity and diversity of the cars which are available to drive. It's possible to go from driving a standard Nissan family car to a factory team-produced top-of-the-range sports car. It doesn't stop here, though, as all of the cars can be upgraded. It seems Mr Yamuchi has indeed managed to cover every aspect of automobile culture.

Kazunori has a dream for the future: 'To have each and every sports car in the game and to reproduce all of the race categories available'. Looking at Gran Turismo, this dream may not be too far off.









If this issue of extreme PlayStation is a little late, there's one game and one game only that can be blamed - Gran Turismo, the most comprehensive, sophisticated and exhilarating driving game to hit the home market. We were lucky enough to have a very brief fling with Gran Turismo before Christmas, but nothing could have prepared us for what we witnessed from this preview disc.

The first thing that astounded us on GT was the sheer choice of vehicles available. Being a preview disc, we were lucky enough to start the game with a huge wad of cash in the bank, so in effect we had access to nearly all the cars. Although we didn't count them, the press release tells us there are over 250 cars to race - each one with its own unique handling characteristics. At the beginning of the game you won't have access to most of the cars, though you still get a good choice of the lower-end vehicles.

There are two modes of play to choose from, a Quick Arcade Mode or the full Gran Turismo Mode. Most people will plunge straight into the arcade mode, but this is only a very small portion of the game. The real Gran Turismo experience comes from the GT mode. Here you start off as a lowly wannabe racing driver who doesn't even own a car. You have a little money in the bank with which to buy yourself a new motor - at the moment you've got a million yen but this will be changed to sterling for the full UK release. This sort of cash doesn't entitle you to much in the way of luxury, so it's best to visit the second hand car sections at each of the ten different garages. Once you've found a motor to suit you, there are a number of different routes you can take. You can enter a Spot Race to earn a little extra cash, do some Time Trials to practice but earn no money, or take your first Licence Test.

You have to pass your Licence Test before you can enter the GT league or any of the other special events available. There are three licences to attain, with the 'B' licence being by far the easiest. To gain a licence you must perform eight tests of your driving skills. This usually involves completing part of a circuit within a designated time, although the final International Test forces you to complete whole laps within ridiculously tight time limits.

Once you have a 'B' licence you can enter the GT Sunday League, where you can get into the racing proper. Winning races in the Sunday League gives you cash to upgrade or buy a new car at the end of the league. If you win the whole league you're given a brand-new car to do what you like with. It's best to sell the car you get by winning the Sunday League, though, because it's usually pants. Once you feel confident enough with your driving skills you can go on to take further tests so that you can enter some of the more professional competitions.

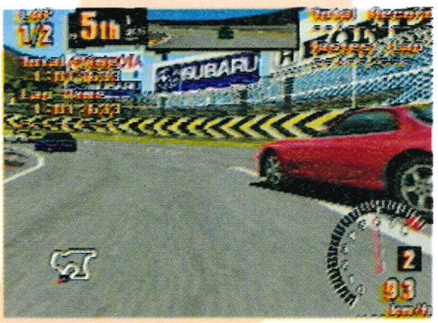
The way the game progresses eases you into the whole immersive experience that you get from Gran Turismo. It's not just about racing, it's about automobile culture as a whole. Finally buying that Dodge you've wanted from the start is such a good feeling, but it doesn't end there. Each manufacturer has its own upgrades garage where you can change nearly every aspect of your car, from the paint job to the pistons. Experimenting in this section is one of our favourite parts of the game. Visit the garage, buy

some parts then go to the car set-up screen before your next race. Set your car up how you want it, then go for it out on the track. Unlike most other driving games where upgrades are hardly noticeable, the upgrades in GT really do make a difference. For instance, buying better suspension makes your ride much smoother, or a new drive train changes your revs and helps you to avoid wheel-spinning at starts. The anticipation of what happens with your new upgrades really makes you feel like a little kid at Christmas. Or something.

Something which disappointed on the preview version is the music. In fact it's more than disappointing - it's just plain crap. This shouldn't make a difference for the final UK version, though, as Sony are going to change the music drastically by using famous UK Indie bands to provide the soundtrack. Sony are also going to speed up the game before it hits the shelves and address any slowdown problems that are ever-so-slightly evident on the preview and Jap copies of the game. So in effect, we're actually getting a real PAL copy of the game and not some sub-standard Jap import dressed up as a PAL game.

Any amount of cars, upgrades and tracks (did I mention that there are eleven tracks, and they can all be reversed?) wouldn't make GT the game it is if it wasn't for the fantastic racing engine. The preview version shows off some of the best, most realistic and exciting racing we've seen on any PlayStation racer so far. When the full version arrives, we're going to be looking at the potential number one game of the year. In fact lets go the whole hog - Gran Turismo could quite possibly be the best console game ever!







GT-TV

One of the truly outstanding aspects of Gran Turismo are the amazing replays available at the end of each and every race. Not everyone likes replays - most would rather just get on with the game, but you just can't ignore the TV-style replays on Gran Turismo.

Each replay represents exactly what happened in the race using some of the best visuals we've ever seen on any game. The style is pure television, with dozens of different cameras placed around the track to give you the best view of the action throughout the whole replay. A mass of camera angles have been utilised to make the replays as exciting as possible. As well as the basic side-on sweeping views, cameras have been positioned at low angles on the corners and straights to give you a feel for the speed at which the game runs. When your car hares past one of these cameras, it really is a sight to be seen. The graphics stay as solid as possible, and even if there's a little glitch, you won't really notice it.





The Car's the Star

There are over 250 cars in Gran Turismo, but what are they like? There are cars from ten different manufacturers including Mitsubishi, Nissan, TVR, Aston Martin and Dodge. The range is massive and diverse, but it takes an age to earn enough cash to buy yourself one of the hallowed special models. These cars aren't available to the public, and are extremely powerful, but very hard to control - simply buying one won't turn you into an instant champ. The ultimate goal is to get hold of one of these cars and race it in the higher leagues, but the racing is still fast paced and action packed in the lower leagues with less powerful cars. Here's an example of the range of cars that you can get from the manufacturers included in the game:

HONDA

Low End
CRX



Special Models
NSX



MITSUBISHI

Low End
MIRAGE



Special Models
GTO





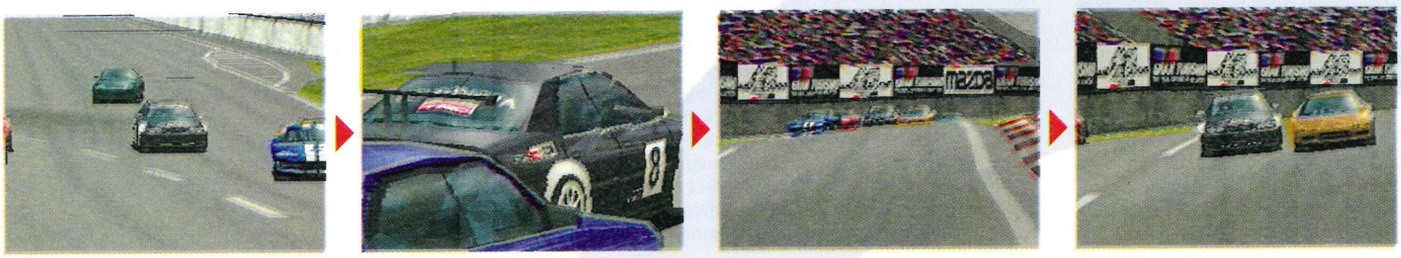






When in a race you may not realise exactly how close some of your overtaking and cornering may have been - watch it on the replay, though, and you soon see how hairy the racing in Gran Turismo really is. Watching the start and the first few corners of a race is about as action-packed as things get on the PlayStation. It's really great to watch exactly how you took that first corner in a pack of six cars, or how you managed to hold off that TVR as he tried to take you on the corner, or how you clipped that NSX and sent it careering into the gravel pit. The replays are essential viewing on Gran Turismo, unlike other games where they're seldom used.

Here's a sequence of a start on the Grand Valley track. Our car started off at the back, but with superior skill (and a far faster car) it finally got to the front...

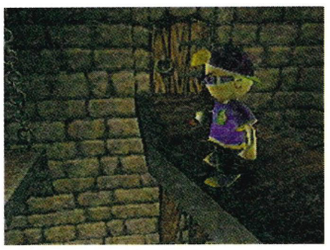


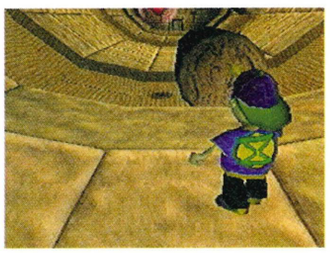


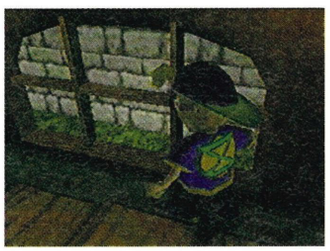
Publisher - Psygnosis Developer - Travellers Tales Release Date - 27th March '98 Genre - 3D Platform

Rascal

Could this be Mario 64 for the PSX?















You may have seen last month's Gamespotting feature about Rascal and its developers Traveller's Tales. If you did, you know Traveller's Tales have a strong reputation and a history of producing great games. Well, this pedigree has been put to good use with Rascal because what we're looking at here is one of the most technically advanced 3D platformers we're likely to see for a long time.

It's not only the developers and the publisher who have strong pedigree, though. The main character was designed by Jim Henson's Creature Workshop, of The Muppets fame. So what do we get then? Well, Rascal's a young lad who's still at school. He's got a cool pair of shades, blonde hair and a baseball cap that, combined with his natty clothes, makes him a bit of a dude. Okay, he may not be quite as appealing as Lara Croft or countless beat-'em-up characters, but he fits the style of game perfectly and will probably prove a huge hit with the kids.

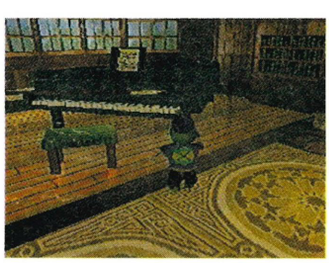
Technically, Rascal comes extremely close to Nintendo's Mario 64. The sprites are huge and the scenery solid. The levels are also huge, and extremely diverse too. All this means nothing, though, if the game fails to produce the goods on the gameplay front.

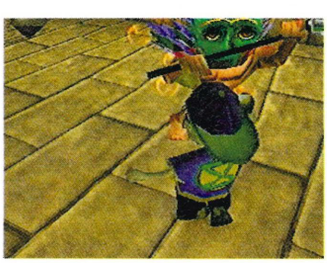
When our preview copy of Rascal first arrived all we were expecting was a sub-standard Mario 64 clone. We didn't believe the PlayStation could handle a game like this as well as the N64. How wrong we were. Our preview disc proves the PlayStation has got a lot left to offer because Rascal really is looking special.

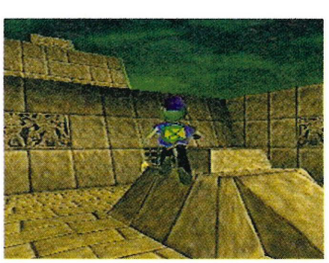
You probably know the story by now, but we'll go over it once again for those who missed it first time around. Chronon, the despicably evil Overlord, has kidnapped Professor Casper Clockwise who happens to be the scientific advisor to NATO. His ETTAS (Exploration Through Time and Space) machine gives the Overlord the power he desires, but the professor's son, nicknamed Rascal, has plans to rescue the old man. However, your main goal is to rebuild pieces of the time clock which have been lost through time and space. These pieces are heavily guarded by Chronon and his henchmen, so it's not just a case of finding them - you have to fight for them too.

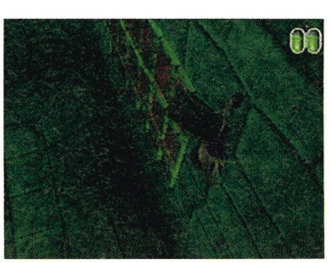
So starts a journey through six unique time zones as Rascal battles his way through Chronon's Henchman, which include gunslingers, pirates, guard dogs, knights, dragons and ancient Aztecs. Each time zone has a unique storyline which explains why some of the baddies in the game are after you. For instance, on the first level, Castle Hackalott, the once-good Sir Axel Hackalott and his once-friendly dragon have been possessed by the evil Chronos. Chronos hasn't only possessed Sir Hackalott though; he's also controlling the castle staff, so you also come across Stokes the Blacksmith and Mrs Stokes the Kitchen Hand, both out to get you.

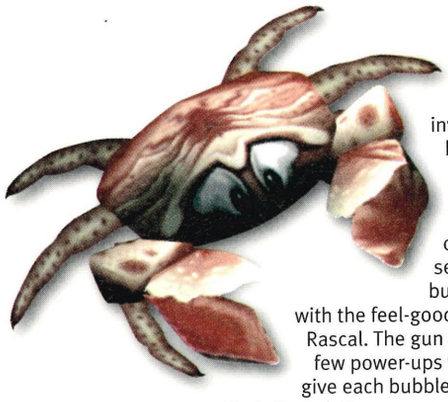
Rascal has only one weapon to help him through. This











is the professor's latest invention, the bubble gun. This weapon isn't the most exciting piece of hardware seen in a game, but it fits well with the feel-good niceness of Rascal. The gun also offers a few power-ups to collect which give each bubble a different effect. If you loiter on screen for too long, a bubble appears and releases a small meanie such as a rat, a spider or a bat. These can be taken out with your gun, but it's best to save your ammunition and simply stomp on them.

You start the game in your house, where you can visit a few rooms, one of which contains your save screen. At first you need to leave your bedroom and head downstairs to the dining room where you find the time machine. This consists of some machinery that contains a fantastic looking wibbly-wobbly, shiny ball. The graphical effect on this ball is fantastic as it reflects the whole room as it moves; in fact, the reflections throughout the game are a sight to be seen. To get out of the house and into the game proper, you have to jump into the ball. Once you've completed a level you're transported back to the house where another door opens, allowing you to get further into the game.

Rascal is one of the best looking 3D games we've seen on the PlayStation. Even on the preview version, glitching and clipping is kept to a minimum and when it does happen it doesn't get in the way of play. The whole thing looks extremely solid and the variety of scenery is vast. Each area has its own unique set of traps and hazards to overcome so you're always learning new things as the game continues. On the Aztec level you must avoid falling sarcophaguses and Indiana Jones-style wall traps. On the medieval Castle level you come up against all manner of medieval characters, including knights in shining armour and a massive dragon. All the levels are pretty sizeable, so Rascal won't become a one-minute wonder.

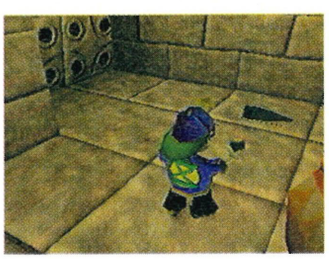
You're not just confined to basic platform action either. For a start, you can take to the water in some great swimming sections and one of my favourite parts (so far) has you speeding down a banked slope in a wooden bowl as you attempt to avoid rocks and collect power-ups. If Traveller's Tales implement extra challenges throughout the whole game, then Rascal could become one of the all-time classic platformers and not just a technical masterpiece.

Analogue control has been implemented on Rascal, but on the version we played it seemed a little hard to use so we stuck to the digital pad. Hopefully, though, this will be looked at before the game hits the shelves. On the whole the control feels good, although not quite up to Mario 64 standards, yet.

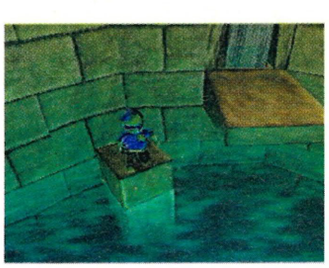
At the moment Rascal has a way to go, but it's still looking like one of the hot games of '98. We haven't witnessed visuals of this kind since we played Mario 64, and if the finished version lives up to the preview then I for one will shell out my cash for what looks like the platformer to beat all platformers.











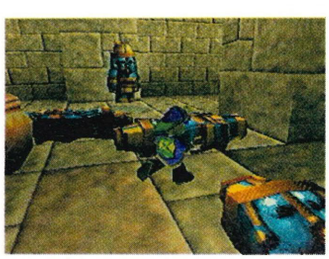
The Rascal Files

We nabbed Rascal in between star appearances to ask him a few questions about himself.

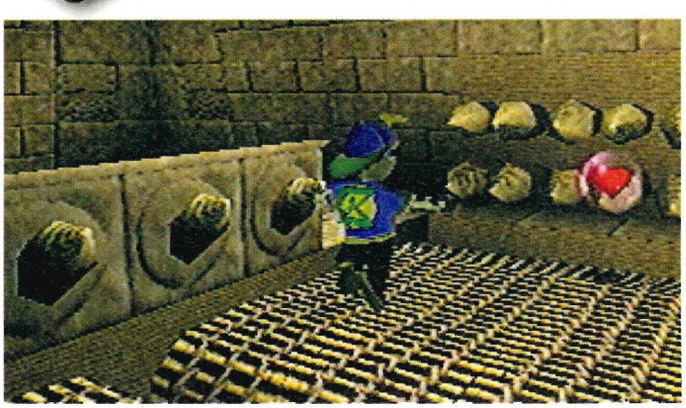
NAME	Callum Clockwise (alias Rascal)
FAVE FILM	Men In Black
FAVE TV	X-Files
FAVE FOOD	Noodles
FAVE DRINK	Isotonic Nutri-Vibe
FAVE PLACE	Italy
FAVE SPORT	Football
FAVE SPICE	Scary
BEST MATE	Nicky Dent from over the road
GIRLFRIENDS?	Too many to mention
DISLIKES	Ticking clocks, jelly babies and Camilla, my older sister, hogging the telephone
BEST MUSIC	Anything
FAVE HOBBY	Time Travel
TOP SAYING	Cool It!
FAVE FILM STAR	Alicia Silverstone
HEROES?	My dad because he has created so many great inventions and gadgets and he is very clever

So as you can see, Rascal is an interesting chap. Really...







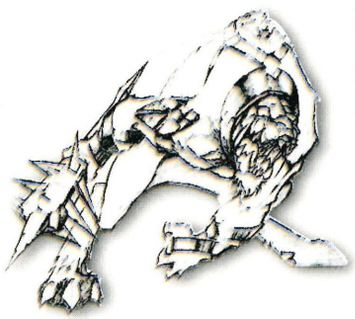


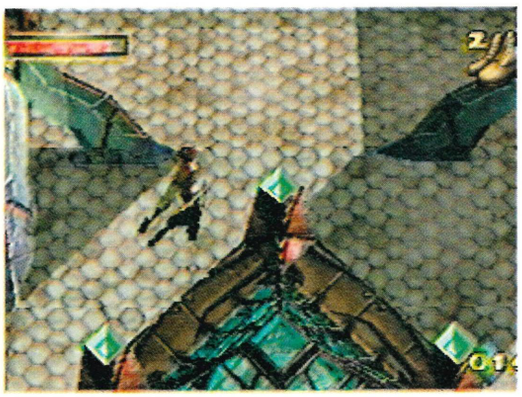
Publisher - Activision | Developer - In House | Release Date - March | Genre - Platform

Pitfall: Beyond the Jungle

Pitfall goes PlayStation













If you played games back in the early eighties, you may well remember Pitfall on the Atari 2600. As obscure as this old machine now is, it had its fair share of classics and Pitfall is most definitely one of them.

While doing his thing in the jungles of South America Indiana Jones-style, Pitfall Harry finds a mystical crystal that allows him to enter another dimension. Here the evil temptress has complete control over the ancient Moku Civilisation, and Earth is next on her list. This sets the scene for Harry's adventures as he makes his way through 20 of the toughest levels while battling the Temptress' minions in order to save the day - and the bird.

Pitfall takes the adventures of Pitfall Harry (voiced by Bruce Campbell of The Evil Dead fame) into the nineties by turning the original format on its head. The first game was a sideways-scrolling platformer which used about eight colours to give an effect of being in the jungle. Okay, it looked pitiful, but it had the one all-important aspect - gameplay.

On the face of it, Pitfall looks nothing more than a distant cousin to the original Atari game. Pitfall Harry has now been thrown into a vast, fully explorable 3D world where he can go anywhere and do whatever he likes. There's no set route to follow, so exploring the intricacies of the massive levels should prove a liberating experience.

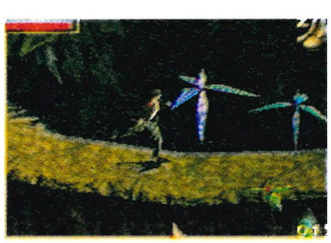


So far the game's looking good, and its running at a very healthy speed. In fact Pitfall 3D is one of the fastest games of this ilk that we've seen. Comparisons to Tomb Raider are bound to be made, but Pitfall doesn't attempt to rival Lara Croft's epic. Whereas Lara's adventures are usually slow-moving and puzzle orientated, Pitfall Harry likes to get right into the action and fight it out face to face. That's not to say that there aren't any puzzles in Pitfall. Finding your way through some of the levels is puzzling in itself, as they're extremely large and deviously designed. You often have to find certain objects to open doors or special rooms. On our preview disc, each level had a hint to tell you what you need to collect on the next level. We thought this made the game a little too easy, but the hints may not stay for the final version. Finding clues would have been a better way to give hints on what to do next.

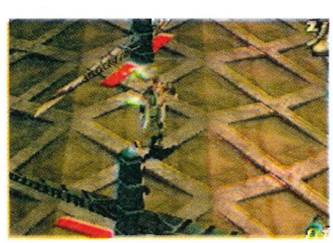
There are four unique regions to play through, and each has about four levels. You start in the jungle, head into the temples and even explore the centre of a volcano. After this you find yourself in a prison camp and fighting your way through the middle of a war! There's well over 20 different enemies for you to take on, so the variety should be enough to keep you coming back for more.

Pitfall looks set to be a technological triumph, especially on the visuals front. From our time playing the game it also looks ready to set the world alight in the gameplay stakes - we'll reserve judgement until next month's review, though.









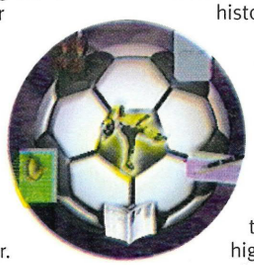
Publisher- Gremlin **Developer**- Gremlin **Release Date**- 1st Quarter '98 **Genre**- Football Management

Premier Manager '98

Do you get a bung during transfer deals?

Who would believe it, eh? From the early days of stat-riddled-but-fun home computer football manager games (usually written by Kevin Thoms), the genre has grown to the point where you get action-packed graphic representations of the game instead of just seeing the scores and up to four people can play at a time. Football management sims have acquired an anorak reputation over the years, and some of the worst games deserved it, but can the genre still be fun?

Premier Manager '98 comes with a great pedigree. In the early nineties, PC and Amiga titles Premier Manager 1, 2 and 3 achieved what was previously thought impossible and made management games accessible to the mainstream, offering an in-depth, easy-to-use gaming experience which grabbed you by the bootlaces and refused to let go. At last, you really felt you were in control of your team. Premier Manager '98 looks set to utilise the superior speed and graphics of the PlayStation and take the series a stage further.



Gremlin claim Premier Manager '98 is 'the definitive football management game'. An incredible range of options are offered, enabling the player to do 'everything from setting admission prices to training players and even building a new stand'. Thankfully, the player can turn off many of these options and just play out the role of the manager and concentrate on selecting teams, training players and dabbling in the transfer market instead of taking on the role of the club chairman and commercial director as well as those of our tracksuited friend in the dug-out. When appointed you can opt for full control, team manager, trainer or just accountant.

"The latest version is a great leap forward in technology and gameplay", said a Gremlin spokesperson. "The capabilities of the PlayStation means you don't have to wait for ages while the screen updates". All four English divisions are included, as well as the major European players. Accurate club histories and honours are offered too.

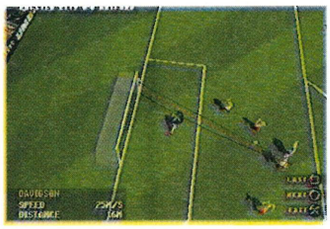
Although primarily a one-player game, earlier versions of Premier Manager worked surprisingly well with a few mates. After taking it in turns to control your team, match days take on a whole new perspective when you're watching your mates' teams as well as your own, laughing as they lose to a team you beat the previous week and cursing if they're higher in the league than you. As for grudge matches, where two human players' sides meet in the cup semi's... Hopefully Premier Manager '98 will also offer multiplayer fun.

It's too early to say whether PM '98 will appeal to non-strategy fans, but if its pedigree is anything to go by, we've every reason to be optimistic. Stay tuned for a full review, but don't hold your breath - we were promised a review copy before Christmas, and the game's still not finished in February. Perhaps Gremlin's reluctance to put out an part-finished game is another reason to be optimistic.

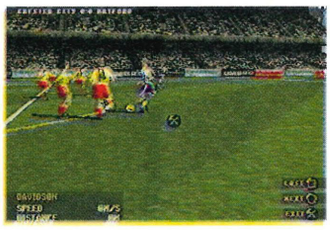














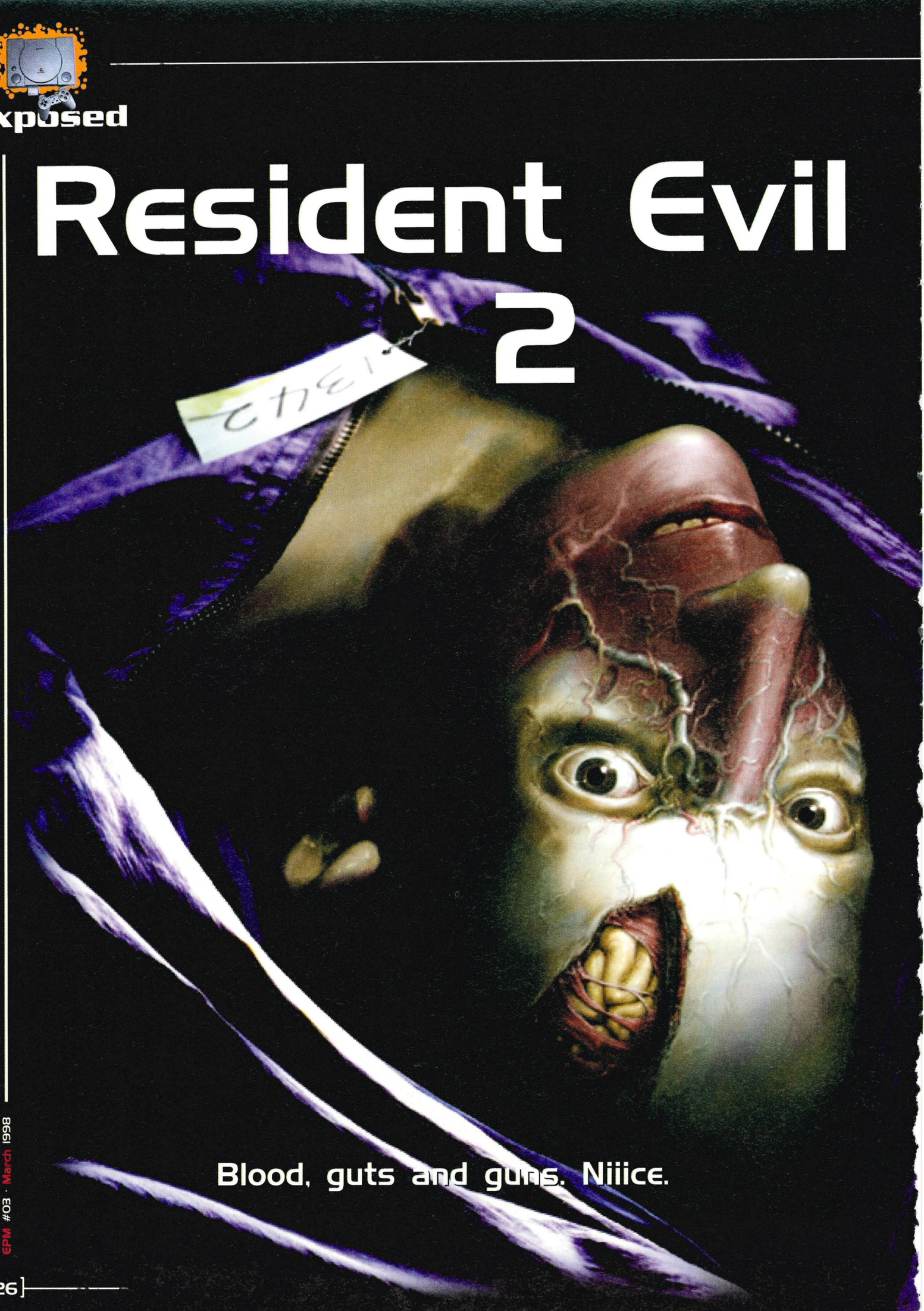
When Saturday Comes...

When it comes to representing the match, Gremlin have gone for the stats approach with graphics taken from Actua Soccer available for replays after the game. The clock ticks away as statistics such as corners, shots on target and, of course, goals are recorded. The system works surprisingly well, offering more suspense than expected and a quick way through what you've no control over anyway. We hope they overhaul the disciplinary aspect of the game, though. Even Millwall wouldn't earn two red cards and four yellows in a pre-season friendly.



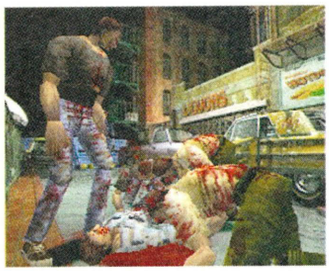
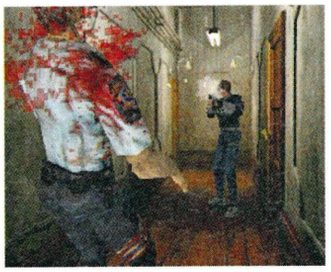


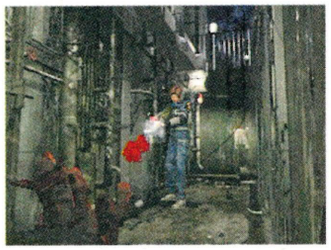
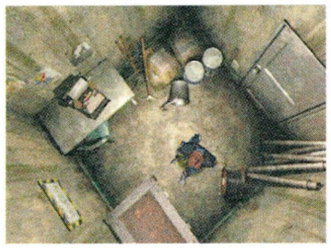
Resident Evil 2

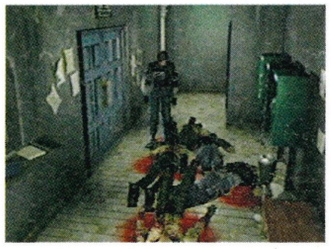


Blood, guts and guns. Niiice.

Publisher - Virgin Developer - Capcom Release Date - 8th May 1998 Genre - 3D Action/Adventure



The moment we've all been waiting for has finally arrived - our preview copy of Resident Evil 2 is here. Yes, we've been playing a nearly finished version of 1998's potential Number One and the word is - wait for it - Resident Evil 2 is bigger than the proverbial elephant's gonads. No hold on a minute; that doesn't quite get over what we're trying to say. What we're saying is Resident Evil 2 outweighs Godzilla's family jewels. To recap this ridiculous intro, then, Resident Evil 2 is the nuts. Got it?

Many of you already have an idea of the immensity of this game from the excellent, if a little short, demo that came with Resident Evil: The Director's Cut. As cool as the demo was, though, it's got nothing on the preview copy we've been privileged enough to play.

Your first inkling of Resident Evil 2's stature is the fact that it comes on two discs, one for each character. Both Claire and Leon have a different introduction leading to their meeting. From then on in it's an action-filled roller-coaster ride through the dim streets of Racoon city, with an oil tanker bearing down on you for good measure. There's no time to catch your breath once the intro finishes as you're immediately mauled by a throng of flesh-eating zombies. You can choose to stand and fight but the best approach in my book is to peg it. Luckily you have a new move in Resident Evil 2 - the push allows you to wade through the groaning zombies with a minimum of damage. Getting to the police station is your main goal, but running through the city streets is challenging and exciting enough - after just a few minutes play you realise Resident Evil 2 holds a far higher zombie and kill count than its predecessor.

One thing that dogged Resident Evil was once you'd killed the couple of zombies in a certain area, there would be no more action for ages. This hasn't changed completely for the sequel, but the simple fact is that there are loads more flesh-eaters for you to take on, so you never find yourself getting bored.

Resident Evil 2 is influenced a great deal by the king of the zombie movies, George Romero. The Living Dead films are here in abundance, from the lethargic, almost pissed movement of the zombies to the use of creepy camera angles and a ridiculous amounts of pig's blood.

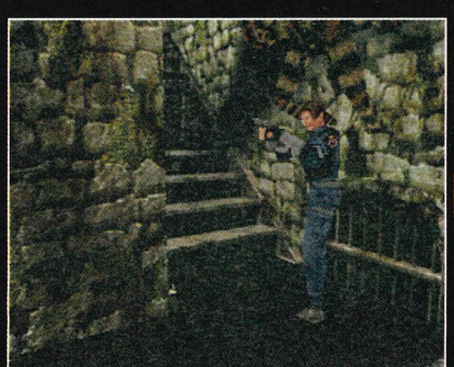
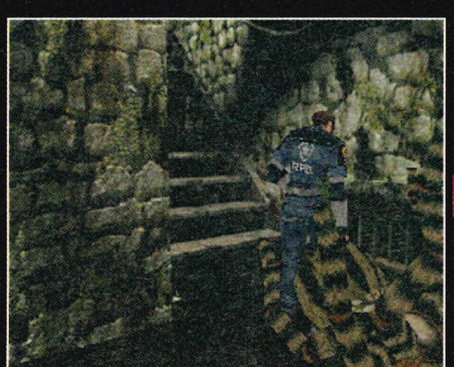
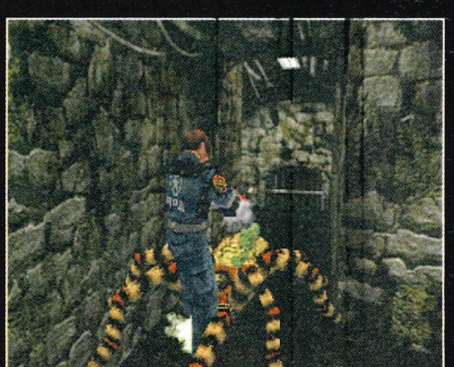
Resident Evil 2 is bound to get a lot of attention, simply because of the over-the-top blood 'n' guts to be witnessed. Check out the screens to see what I mean. You get zombies feasting on dead bodies, heads and extremities blown off and mutant ravens pecking bodies to pieces, but 'la piece de resistance' has to be when your character bites the bullet. You get an excellent, blood-soaked overview of your death, which differs depending on which creature has finished you off.

When Resident Evil first arrived people said how scary and creepy it was. To me, this was utter bollox; you can't be scared by a video game (or so I thought), they're just not realistic enough. In my opinion, Resident Evil couldn't scare the pants off a schizophrenic with a mortality complex, but the sequel certainly shat me up a little. I wasn't a gibbering wreck after playing the preview disc, but I did jump a few times - and that's while playing in a brightly lit office, with loads of people milling around. Imagine playing it at home in a dimmed room with the sound right up! The atmosphere created by the camera angles and sound help create this 'on the edge of your seat' experience while playing Resident Evil 2; you know that even in the quiet moments, there'll always be something mean out for your blood just around the corner.

Resident Evil 2 isn't just about beating off hordes of zombies though. The puzzle and story elements figure just as much as the action. Some of the puzzles promise to be of Mensa quality, and even the supposedly easy ones on the early stages of the preview caused us a little grief. Things like setting light to a fire in order to burn the painting above aren't immediately obvious, but they're pretty logical. If you walk past something of interest (puzzle or pick-up) your character turns its head to glance at it. This helps in finding puzzles you didn't know existed. Before noticing this, we just ignored the painting mentioned earlier.

The stunning visuals and completely immersive atmosphere are going to make Resident Evil 2 one of the best PlayStation titles this year. Fact. If the finished version can match the preview version, Resident Evil 2 will receive scores in the high nineties in every magazine, and deservedly so. It's hard to get over how good Resident Evil 2 is in a preview, but as I said at the start, it really is the nuts.

Incy Wincy Spider...

The Protagonists

The STARS team were all but wiped out in Resident Evil, so it goes without saying Capcom have had to come up with some brand-new characters for the sequel. You find RE2 contains more character interaction than the original game, so here's a run-down on the two main characters and a few extras who feature in the plot...



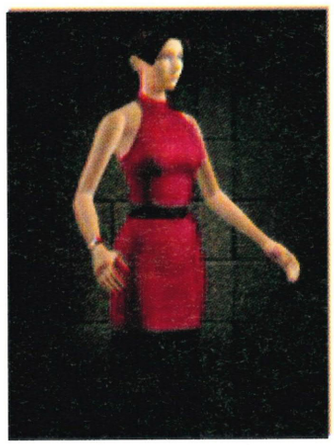
LEON

Leon has just arrived to start his first duties in Racoon City as a rookie cop. Nothing could have prepared him for what he got, although his reckless and brash attitude should help him deal with the situation. Playing as Leon seems to be a little easier than playing as Claire.



CLAIRE

Claire Redfield is the sister of Chris, the STARS member from the original game. She's in town to unravel the mystery of her brother's disappearance but she's got a lot more than she bargained for! Claire is intelligent and extremely aware of her surroundings, so she should be able to cope with the horror of RE2.



ADA

You meet Ada in the police parking lot. She's a fearless, highly-skilled professional who seems to have a superiority complex - her good looks should make up for this, though. Her part in the proceedings is quite important, but we're not going to spoil it for you - you'll just have to wait.



SHERRY

Sherry is the daughter of William Birkin, a brilliant Umbrella Corporation employee, and like her father, she is very intelligent - at least for her 12 years of age. How she figures in the game isn't clear at the moment, but you probably have to rescue her at some point.









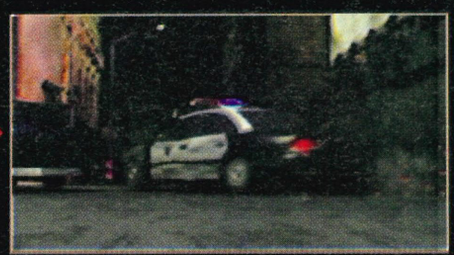
EVIL INTRO













Lost the Plot?

Resident Evil 2 follows on from the plot of the original game, though this time around the Umbrella Corporation has come up with a new strain of the zombifying T-Virus, the G-Virus.

It's just a few months since the incident at the mansion on the outskirts of Racoon city. Things haven't been quite right ever since, though. The townsfolk started to complain of skin rashes, and before you could say 'Night Of The Living Dead', nearly everyone had become a zombie. The Umbrella Corporation has struck again.

This is where you come in, either as Claire Redfield (sister of Chris from the first game) or Leon Kennedy (cocky rookie cop). Each character has a slightly different plot and reason for being in Racoon City as you discover as the game progresses - or if you read the box elsewhere in this preview.

The action takes place inside the Racoon City Police Department buildings where nearly everyone has either been munched by zombies or turned into one. This means you have to kill loads of zombie rozzers! Not very PC, if you ask us. You don't start the game at the cop shop though. After the crash in the intro, you and Claire are split up by a burning oil tanker. Depending on which character you're playing, you have to take a different route. Both characters do meet up at different points in the game and your actions throughout alter what happens when you finish the game and start on the other disc. There's a plethora of different outcomes throughout both character discs, so you want to play over and over again to uncover more twists and turns in the expansive plot.

The Hardware

No fight against evil is complete without a glut of big guns, and Resident Evil 2 is no exception...



1. KNIFE
Good for chopping up lettuce or spreading butter, but useless on zombies.

2. HANDGUN
Leon's one-shot handgun - useful if you aim carefully, but it's very easy to waste rounds.

3. CUSTOM HANDGUN
Leon can upgrade his handgun if he finds the handgun parts. It turns the basic weapon into a three-shot automatic.

4. BROWNING HANDGUN
Claire's weapon is not as good as Leon's as it holds less ammunition.

5. SHOTGUN
Claire can't find the shotgun, but in Leon's hands it's absolutely devastating as it can take out multiple enemies.

6. CUSTOM SHOTGUN
This makes Leon's shotgun twice as devastating, but you need to find the shotgun parts before you can use it.

7. CROSSBOW
Claire's alternative to the shotgun. It fires three darts at a time, so it's useful against packs of zombies.

8. GRENADE LAUNCHER
The grenade launcher is only available to Claire, and like the bazooka in the first game, it fires explosive, flame or acid rounds.

9. MAGNUM
Leon's long-range handgun.

10. CUSTOM MAGNUM
Find the Magnum parts to upgrade the Magnum.

11. MACHINE GUN
Pull the trigger and watch those zombies drop like flies.

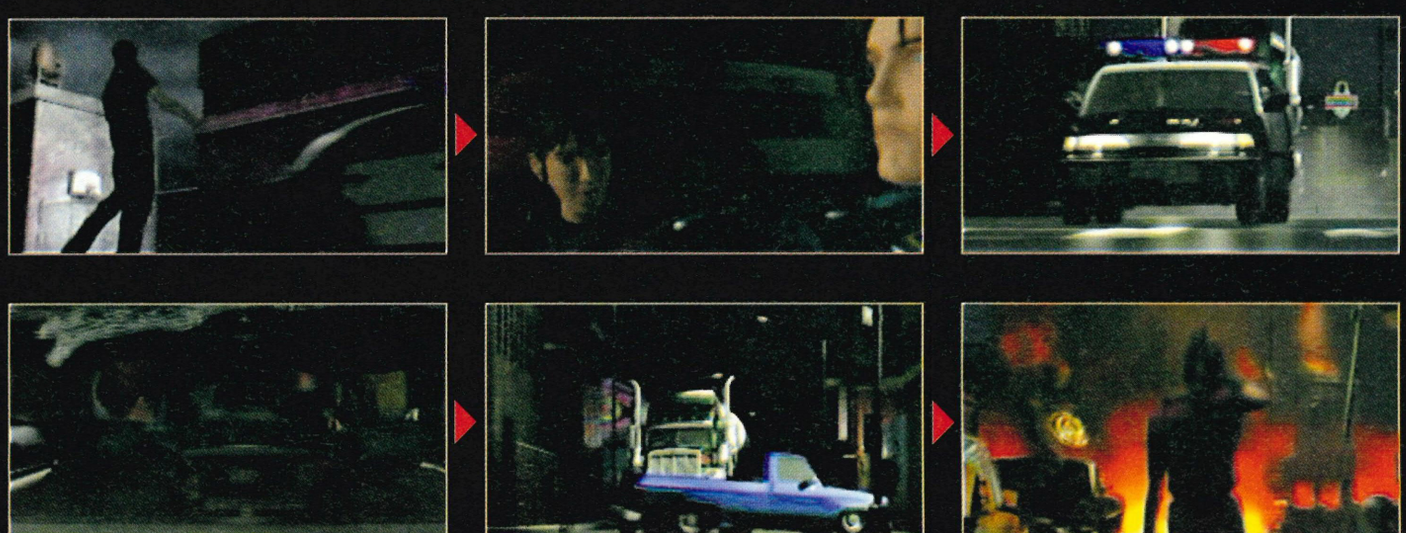
12. TASER
Claire gets the taser and it fires bolts of electricity up to ten feet. Nasty, if you ask us.

13. COLT
William H Bonney's favourite. Claire gets this powerful hand-held weapon only when she finds the special key.

14. GATTLING GUN
Ouch. This thing fires rounds faster than a vindallo exits on the morning after. Very, very destructive but you can't get it until you complete the second disc in under 2 $^{1}/_{2}$ hours.

15. ROCKET LAUNCHER
Obviously the most powerful weapon available, and you can get it with unlimited ammo if you beat the first scenario in under 2 1/2 hours.

Here are some stills of the superb introduction to Resident Evil 2. These scenes are after Claire and Leon meet. As they're fleeing the zombies in a police car, they're attacked by a zombie that's been waiting in the rear seat. They lose control and end up stoving into a lamp post. Just when they think they're safe they spy an oil tanker bearing in on them at high speed...

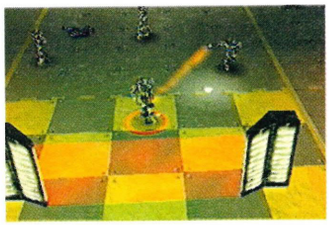


•Publisher- GT Interactive •Developer- Rage Software •Release Date- May '98 •Genre- Future Sports



Dead Ball

Speedball 2 for the next generation!





Thank god someone's finally done it - a decent future sports game that belongs on the PlayStation and not the Amiga. Although loath to admit it, Rage software's forthcoming Dead Ball Zone owes a great deal to that Bitmap Brothers classic, Speedball 2. Don't think it's just another Speedball clone, though. Okay, the game's set in the future, the idea's to get a ball into your opponent's goal by fair means or foul, and the onus is on management as well as match skills. It all sounds very Speedbally, but once you start playing Dead Ball Zone, you realise Speedball 2 is here in spirit but not body.

It's the future (again) and things aren't looking too rosy (again). Throughout the world, governments have built massive research facilities called Geo-Cities in a united attempt to find a solution to the world's poverty, pollution and social problems. These cities are totally self sufficient, and the people inside rarely have contact with the outside world. This is no bad thing, as the outside world's in a right old mess. Crime lords run the show, and it's not a safe place to live. These crime lords organise a game called Dead Ball Zone. This violent version of the sports games of old proves very popular (and deadly). In fact, it's so popular the Geo-Cities want to get in on the act. This is where you come in. You start off as a team of petty hoodlums with one simple goal to get your team to the Geo-Cities, where you can live a life of luxury.

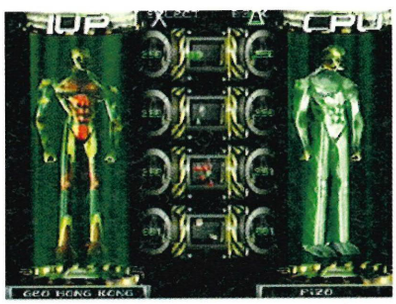
The game isn't yet finished, but playing the preview disc soon drew a crowd around the screen. There were a number of things that caused people to stop what they were doing and ask 'what's this, then?'. Firstly, there's the graphics, and especially the animation. Everything is done in high-resolution mode, so the game looks absolutely sumptuous. If you think speed must be sacrificed for this visual stimuli, you're totally wrong. This game is fast - in fact, at times it gets a little too fast. Don't worry, though, as the learning curve is set perfectly to ease you into the different aspects and speed of the game. The animation has been painstakingly drawn by hand and it shows - it really looks the dog's family jewels.

Violence is Golden...

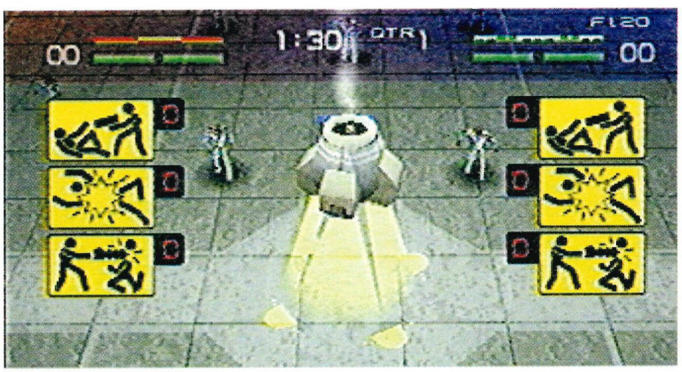
The second thing that grabbed people's attention is the violence in the game. You can forget American football, rugby or Australian rules football; Dead Ball Zone isn't just violent, it's downright nasty. We've never witnessed such a display of wanton head-smashing, and even though it's not exactly politically correct to say so, it's a great laugh.

The basic moves ease you into the violence. A rugby tackle smashes your opponent to the hard concrete or metal floor, whereas a punch stuns them, freeing the ball for you to steal it. For a while you're content to play

COACHES CLINIC



Creating a top team and training your players up can be a time-consuming process, but the result is definitely worthwhile. When you're happy with your team you can even save it to memory card, take it around to a friend's house and give him a good kicking.



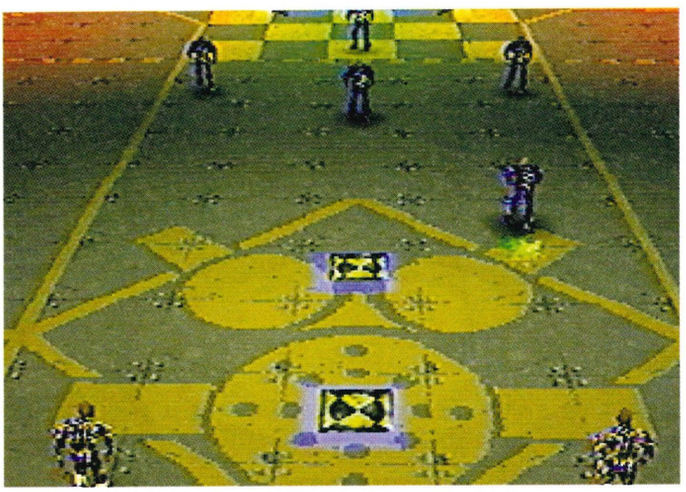
UNDERHAND TACTICS



Zone











around with these few moves, but if you want some real carnage you must learn the array of special moves at your disposal. These are activated by different button combinations, and although they're hard to get going at first, after a while they become second nature. Some of the moves are particularly nasty, like the kick in the knackers which makes the player on the receiving end puke up. Other moves include a crunching head butt you can almost feel yourself, and a few wrestling-type moves that look great but are only practical against Giant Haystacks or Big Daddy.

On top of the special moves (as if anything else was needed) you've the option to choose weapons for the game. At the beginning of each match you're offered the choice of guns, bombs and chainsaws; yes, you did read that correctly. This adds a whole new dimension to the already mega-violent proceedings. Thankfully the weapons are limited so you don't just go out onto the pitch and chainsaw the opposing team to death.

You can't just rely on violence to win at Dead Ball Zone, though. You need to produce pixel-perfect passes, blinding shots and some full-on running and dodging tactics. The running and dodging is helped by a turbo, which only lasts for a couple of seconds but is essential for getting yourself out of tight spots. The turbo button also makes your shots much more powerful, so use it wisely.

Although all of your players are pretty damn granite-like, that's to say rock, they suffer injuries and in extreme cases die in the middle of the match. If one of your players does kark it, you see them lying in a pool of blood on the deck. When it comes to blood, Dead Ball Zone has its own fair share. In fact, most of the moves produce a copious amount of bright red blood - let's just hope the powers-that-be don't order it to be cut, or even worse, turned green.

The management aspect of the game is pretty deep. If you don't look after your team in the tournament mode, you won't make it past the first half of the competition. Each player has a set of stats which can be selected for training. If you don't train your players, they end up being out-run, out-played and out-fought by their opponents. However, if a player becomes injured you need to concentrate on nursing them back to health instead of training them. You have to tread a fine line between training and rectifying injuries, something that makes tournament mode very tough. You also need to look at your players' status during a game. If a player becomes too damaged, substitute him for another. This aspect of the game is very important - if you leave a severely injured player on the pitch he ends up in a wooden box before the end of the match.

What we've got then is an extremely violent future sports game that follows in the footsteps of Speedball 2. The PlayStation is definitely in need of a title like Dead Ball Zone as Psygnosis' Riot completely failed to deliver. Hopefully the review copy will live up to the promise of the preview version. We'll find out very soon.

RAGE AGAINST THE MACHINE

Rage Software

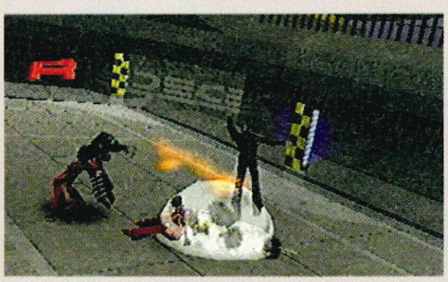
Rage Software are no newcomers to this videogame lark. It was they who gave the world Striker, the game that changed the face of football simulations. At the moment they've got about eight games in development, including a new Striker game for the PlayStation. Here's a list of their previous efforts...

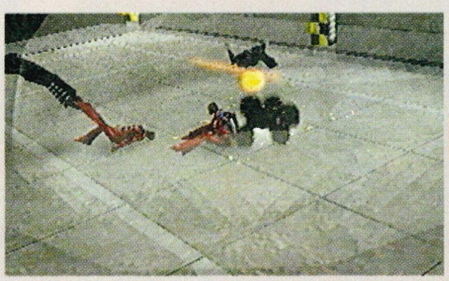
- Striker
- Power Drive
- The Darklight Conflict
- Jonah Lomu Rugby
- Trash It





Here's an example of the special moves and the weapons in action - check out the Death from Above move whilst the opposition trigger a bomb.

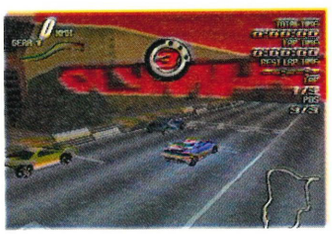


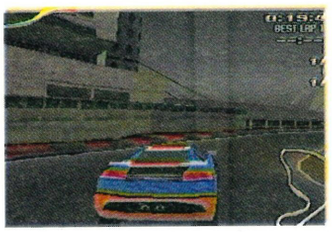




Publisher - Gremlin Developer - Gremlin Release Date - 1st Quarter '98 Genre - Driving

Motorhead





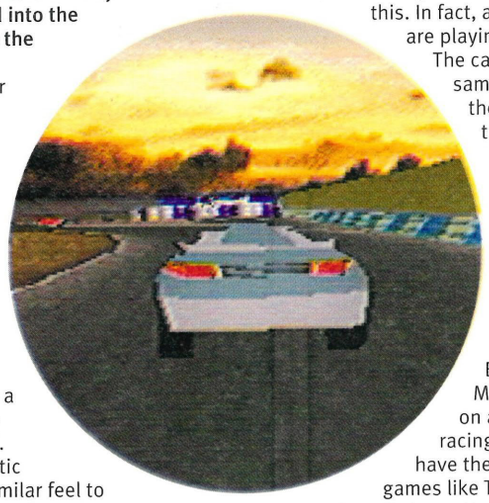


Motorhead, from Gremlin, attempts to jettison the gameplay physics of Ridge Racer in favour of a futuristic, WipEout style. The game takes place in a future where the city streets have been transformed into the high velocity race-ways where the action takes place.

There are eight tracks on our preview disc, though some of them refused to load. The tracks we did get working are brilliantly laid out with enough varying futuristic scenery to give every track a completely different feel. The tracks range from tight right angle-infested monsters to smooth oval speedways with just a few chicanes for you to worry about. Although the draw-in is a little dodgy at the present, the tracks look just about finished.

The eight cars are all futuristic sports machines with a very similar feel to the cars from Ridge Racer, but without the decals and attention to detail. The preview we have is only very early, so hopefully Gremlin will see fit to add a little more detail to the cars. It's not that they look bad though - they're just a little bland.

The cars may be a little bland, but they're also bloody fast. The game is running at an excellent pace, and the Ridge Racer-style handling complements this. In fact, at the moment it feels like you are playing a futuristic Ridge Racer. The cars handle almost exactly the same - the back ends kick out on the corners and they deftly take to the air when you hit small hills. This type of handling makes for some hairy racing if you're willing to put the pedal to the metal.



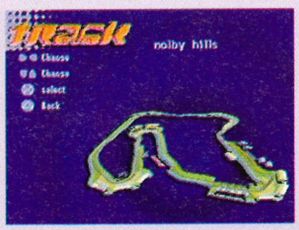
For a software house who aren't really famed for their racing games, Gremlin are certainly going for it this year. Along with Buggy (EPM-Exposed, Issue Two), Motorhead looks set for a full on assault of the PlayStation racing games market. Gremlin will have their work cut out, though, with games like TOCA, F1 and the forthcoming Gran Turismo. Hopefully, their different approach to driving games should find them a niche in the market. Find out for sure next month when we'll have full reviews on both games.

The Tracks

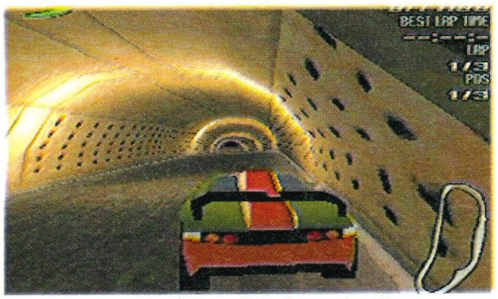


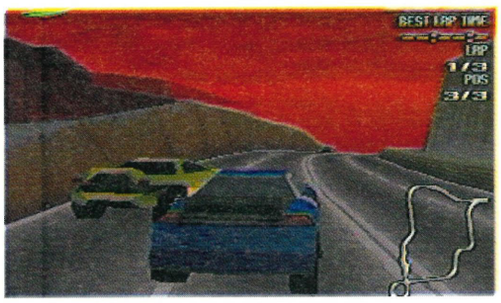
Motorhead offers eight futuristic tracks for you to take on, and each one has its own pictorial representation at the track selection screen. Each track has its own unique setting so you may find yourself in the middle of a city or on a coastal road. One thing the tracks all have in common is the devious design Gremlin have implemented. One minute you're thinking you've got the track sorted, then all of a sudden you come across a ridiculously-sharp corner or a jump in the middle of a chicane. The variety of tracks is definitely a plus point on Motorhead - it's certainly better than the one or two tracks you get on Ridge Racer and its contemporaries.













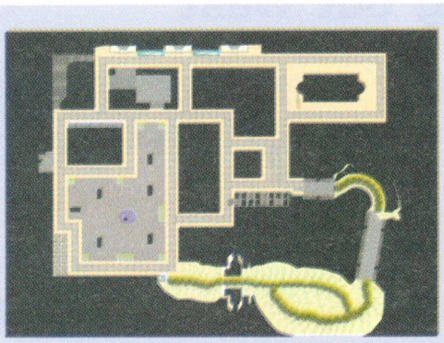




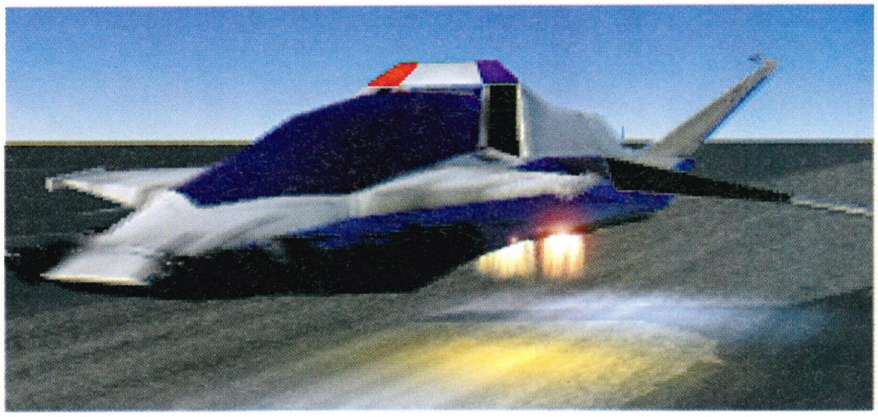


Publisher - Interplay Developer - Pixelogic Release Date - 2nd Quarter '98 Genre - Combat Racer

Crime Killer



THIS A PLAN OF ONE OF THE CITIES YOU PATROL.



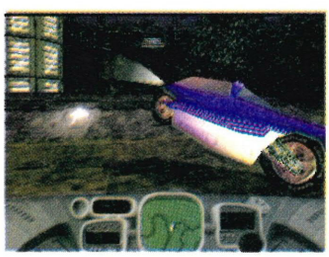
In the near-future, a company that develops petrochemicals manufacture a designer virus. This has been constructed to break down waste fuels, but after constant use it starts to mutate into a fearful new strain. Named Gen.State 108, it gorges on natural fuel products around the world. Nations dependant on the fuel begin to fall, resulting in investors bombarding the nations with the latest electrical goods and vehicles. Industrial, corporate and street crime rises - all are armed with cutting-edge technology. In one city, the URIEL Consortium became the sole provider for the city police force. The consortium provides the officers with the latest defensive weaponry. To add to the trouble, a radical movement group called the Burning Epoch, led by The Preacher, launches a crusade to rid the world of the petrol-consuming bacteria. Their intentions seem genuine, but the URIEL thinks differently.

You take on the role of a cop of the future, patrolling the land savaged by bacteria. Tracking down The Preacher is high on your agenda, but you must also deal with everyday criminal elements . You're armed with the latest weapon systems, land and air. Each level is mission-based, and these vary from stopping biker gangs freeway racing to rescuing kidnapped pop stars.

The preview copy we've been playing is only about 60% complete, but it's already super-fast, with an excellent hand-brake turn feature. This allows you to turn completely around by simply pressing the Triangle button, making for great chases along the tight streets of the cities. The weapons available to both you and your enemies are spectacular. You can be chasing a small insignificant vehicle which suddenly opens up to reveal rocket launchers aimed at your ass. As well as the cities being infested by crims, innocent civilian vehicles roam around the streets doing their daily business. These obviously get caught up in the action, many dying accidentally. If you waste too many, you're up on a charge and your badge is removed.

Combat racers are getting quite popular at the moment, with the recent release of Auto Destruct and classics like Twisted Metal 1 & 2, but with Crime Killers looking, and playing, very well at only 60% complete, it looks like this could steal the combat racer crown.

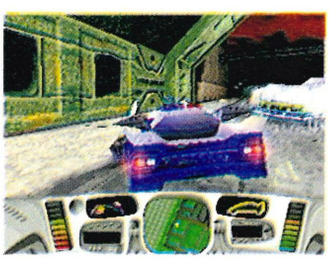














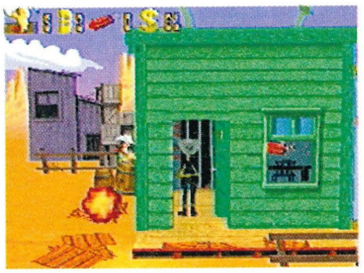
THE STREETS HAVE MANY CIVILIAN VEHICLES ON THEM, SOME GOOD AND SOME BAD. HERE'S A FUTURISTIC VW HIPPIE VAN, PROBABLY FILLED WITH JUNKIE GRATEFUL DEAD FANS.

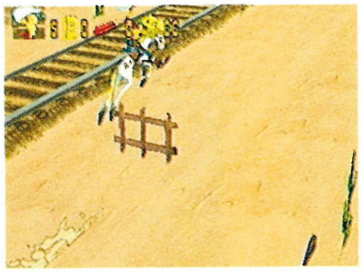
Publisher - Infogrames UK Developer - Infogrames Multimedia Release Date - April '98 Genre - Platform

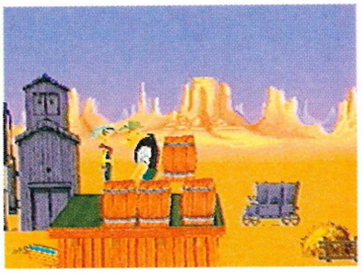
Lucky Luke

Infogrames goes way out west









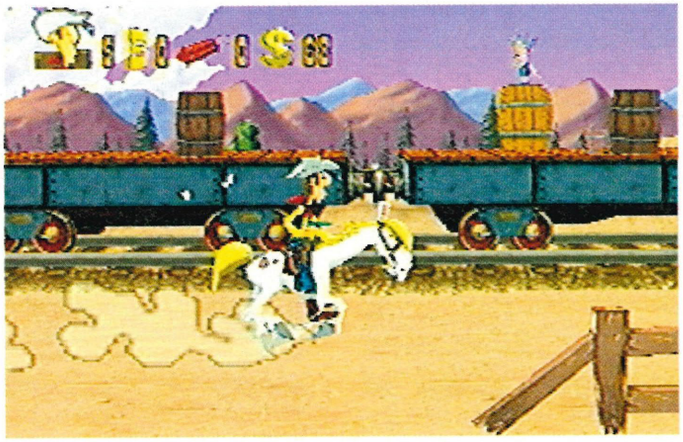
Lucky Luke follows the adventures of one of France's most famous kids' comic book characters, called (naturally) Lucky Luke. Set in the old wild west, it's your job to take control of Luke in your bid, as the Sheriff, to clean up the town.

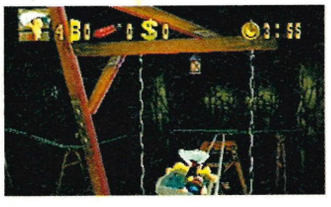
Enforcing the law isn't a task to be taken lightly as there are plenty of varmits and outlaws in town and they're all gunning for your hide. The action takes place in 2D, although the scenery, foreground and background are so deep you'd be forgiven for thinking it's a 3D game. It works a bit like Pandemonium, only not quite as radical. There is a set path, but sometimes it will take you behind, through, around or over buildings and obstacles which gives the game a much needed feeling of depth.

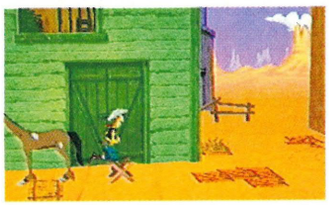
The cartoon graphics suit the platforming gameplay perfectly, especially as the game is based on a comic book. The animation is also top notch, especially on the main character who's made up of around five hundred polygons, something which is hidden by the cartoon style. The graphics are also helped by a moving camera that really enhances the action. Again the camera movement is nowhere near as radical as Pandemonium's, but some people may see this as a good thing. To keep the player interested, the development team have tried to make Lucky Luke's seventeen levels as varied as possible. This shows on the preview disc - the first level has you going from left to right through the town whereas the second level sees you on horseback in a bid to stop a highjacked train. There are also three different bonus levels for you to find which promise to be 'Sheer Fun'.

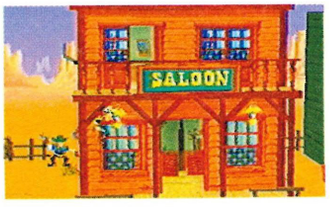
Ultimately, Lucky Luke is aimed at the younger end of the PlayStation market, although we must admit to being stumped by a few of the puzzles on the first level! Only for a little while, mind you. The shooting and jumping action promises to be pretty frantic, but it looks as though Lucky Luke will rely on its puzzles for the challenge factor.

The original soundtrack has been written to compliment the Western feel of Lucky Luke, and the sound effects add even more to this. The gunshots and explosions all sound realistic, and the voice samples also add a great deal to the game. In fact the preview disc really succeeded in creating both a wild west and comic book atmosphere. We were all pretty impressed with the preview of Lucky Luke, especially with the variety of the levels. The game plays smoothly and the puzzles are tough enough to keep you interested, but not so tough that they become frustrating. The cartoony graphics are going to make Lucky Luke a hit with the kids and probably the parents who are going to be shelling out for it. As for the rest of us, we'll have to wait for the review to find out.









The Hoe-Down Low-Down

extreme PlayStation talked to the development team behind Lucky Luke at Infogrames Multimedia...



How long has the game been in development and how many artists and programmers have been working on it?

The project started in May 1996, and let me tell you we were all very busy during all these months. There are about 20 people actually working on the game including Infogrames' Development Support Group, external graphic and music studios.

What are the strong points of the game?

Lucky Luke PSX offers, above all, extraordinarily varied challenges. You can fight enemies with your hands, but you can also shoot them, directly or through a target which appears on the screen. You have to collect objects. You need good reflexes (for example, when riding your horse, you must avoid stones, cacti and fences whilst shooting the bad guys on the train. You have to be logical (find the right mechanisms, switches, etc)... In fact, all kind of actions that are generally spread across several games have been mixed together in Lucky Luke.
Great efforts were made on the graphics, with about 500 polygons for Lucky Luke. We noticed all our testers were very keen on the details and what we could call the secondary animations. For example, if we look at the level where Lucky Luke is fighting with a cowboy in the saloon, you're completely in the mood; girls are dancing on a stage, the pianist goes on playing his music, the barman is cleaning his glasses and the fight is reflected in a mirror behind the bar.
We have 19 high quality original tracks, all of them being completely western orientated. You're right in the mood as soon as you start the game. Besides, we have used a lot of different sound effects to give a humorous touch, which is crucial for a cartoon character like Lucky Luke.

Could you give us some technical characteristics of the game?

We're not obsessed by figures. Our main goal is to produce a game as beautiful as possible, faithful to the comic books, as playable as possible. Our key sentence is, 'to have fun'. For us, technical performance is less important than giving pleasure to players. However, we can tell you Lucky Luke himself is about 500 polygons, with a little bit less for bandits and other enemies in the game. Lucky has more animations than the main characters of recent platform games. Lucky Luke can walk, jump, shoot in lots of directions, push objects, use dynamite, climb ladders, etc. The animations of Lucky are much more fluid and smooth than other platform games on the market too. Finally, as you will see, there are lots of different enemies in this game. Lots of enemies imply lots of life and lots of different interactions.

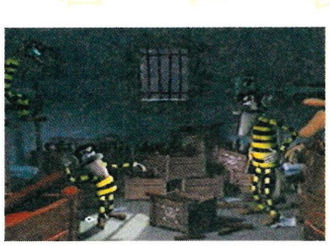
What are the major problems you met?

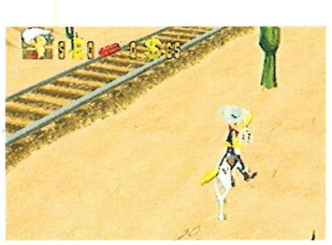
The success of 32-bit consoles has turned some concepts upside down. We think we had a real know-how on 16-bit consoles. We really knew how to create universes and characters on paper and produce a game easily and quite rapidly. Sure, this know-how has been useful to start creating in 3D because from the beginning of the design, you have to think of all the technical constraints you have to face; number of polygons for main characters, for others and for the background, the number of polygons to be displayed simultaneously on the screen, etc.

Did the PlayStation let you unleash your creativity?

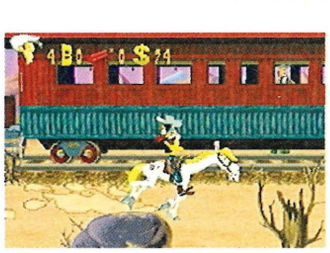
In spite of the never-ending increase of game consoles' power, I think we will never totally express all our 'madness' because we are players above all. And as players, we always want to put more and more things in our games!

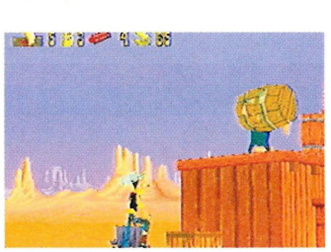


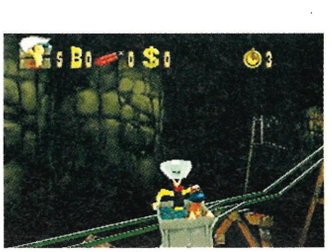








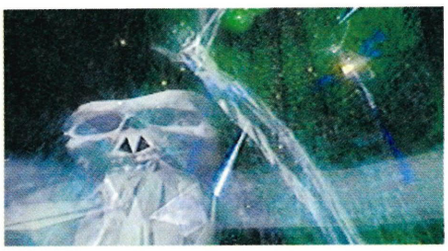




Publisher - GT Interactive Developer - N-Space Release Date - 2nd Quarter '98 Genre - Racing/Arcade

Bug Riders

Debugging has never been so much fun!















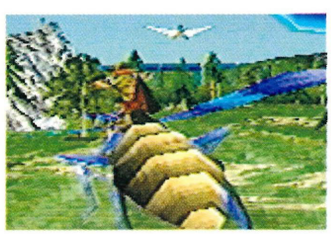
How would you like to climb on board a revved-up roach or hi-octane horsefly? What about lapping a ladybird? Drag racing a dragonfly? Well believe it or not this isn't just a crazed insect powder-induced hallucination. Thanks to GT Interactive and N-Space's stab at a racing/pest control-style game, it's a reality.

Set in the age-old medieval land of Entymion, the game pits various riders of enormous invertebrate steeds to race and fight against one another, with the ultimate prize being the right to replace the dying ruler Leptus and become Emperor (or Empress, of course) of the whole creepy-crawly kingdom. The protagonists (introduced in the lushly epic opening movie) are a varied bunch, including commoners, exiled noblemen, a priestess, an undead jester and a mutated half-man half-grasshopper. Each has a corresponding multi-winged mount of their own, including a very techno clockwork wind-up fly. To gee them around the various courses, each rider charmingly crops their bug more often than Lester Piggott on an audit day, twatting it to ever greater speeds, until the tolerance bar at the side of the screen hits the top, resulting in a nasty insect squeal of agony and a disgruntled slow-moving bug. Not one for the League Against Cruel Sports, then. Alternately, the buzzing beast can be reined in to kill speed (not needed often) and slide niftily to the left and right around obstacles. These include seafront castles replete with towering cliffs, pleasantly sun-dappled forest glades, mountainous ravines and gloomy caverns, with each of the five tracks having three variations on its main path and its own set of ruthless opponents.

The format of Bug Riders is basically an aggressive arcade racer with mystical weapons and power-ups scattered about the tracks to pick up and use willy-nilly on your rival pretenders to the throne, with the goals being their destruction and a quick time. The bugs react with pleasing agility and speed, with passing manoeuvres possible both above and below opponents as well as to the sides, and each insectoid looks significantly different from the next, complimenting the style of their rider. Some of these (due to empathic powers, or perhaps even being first cousins in the hive) have an affinity with insects and as a result their mounts recover more quickly from over-eager use of the crop, and presumably snuggle up to them at night as well. Each insect is also varied in its top speed, so a balance between wing power and pain-ignoring stamina must be struck, depending on your own predilection for invertebrate sadism.



The usual Time Trial and Campaign (basically a league/knockout) settings are available, and there is also a split-screen two-player mode, where schoolyard games of 'whose insect can kill the other' can be re-enacted on a grand beweaponed scale. For those who just like the smell of cochineal, the Exterminate race option is a winner, as only stone-cold kills count for progression onto other tracks. The sound is notable at this stage for the hum of your own bug and especially the zippy 'whirrrr' of the others as they buzz past at speed, while the accompanying music is a rousing collection of Conan-style orchestral fanfares and epic rumblings that fit in nicely with the filmic airs the game adopts. Visually the game is also impressive on first view, the landscape wheeling smoothly around the insects nicely-animated transparent wings and independent body segments. The way things are shaping up it looks as if Bug Riders is going to create a new niche of racing game, which although unlikely to spark off another wave of frantic cloning by the software gods will provide a breath of fresh air in the pretty much stagnant racing game scene, and bring some joy to those of you who prefer a thorax to a throttle.









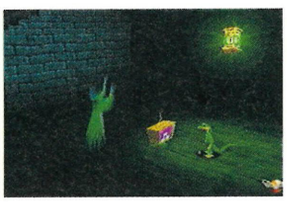
Publisher - BMG Developer - Crystal Dynamics Release Date - April '98 Genre - 3D Platformer



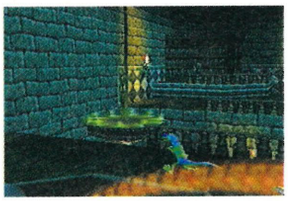
Gex- Enter the Gecko











That TV addict Gex is back with a vengeance in this, his first 3D outing. Gex: Enter The Gecko hails from Crystal Dynamics, the people behind Pandemonium. Unlike Pandemonium, though, Gex is a full 3D go-anywhere affair.

Gex has been recruited (somewhat reluctantly, we might add) by a government agency. His task is to stop his arch rival, Rez, from taking over the country's television airwaves. Gex must enter the media dimension and do battle with Rez's cronies in a bid to oust him from television once and for all.

As the game is set in the media dimension, all of the levels have some kind of media theme about them. Each level is designed to mimic famous films and TV programmes. Also, to get over this TV atmosphere, sad clichés from telly programs are shouted around as you travel through the levels (there are over 500 celebrity impressions and jokes taking the piss out of popular culture).

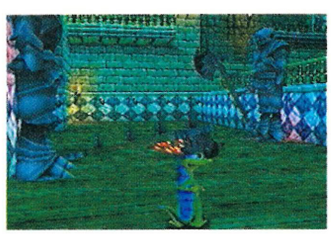
At the moment the scenery on the levels is looking sumptuous, especially the Scream level, which takes place in an eerie haunted house. You come across some incredible morphing walls - faces actually come out of the wall to get you. You also battle translucent ghosts and flame-throwing skulls. On the preview copy there aren't a great deal of creatures for you to take on, but hopefully more will be added for the finished copy.

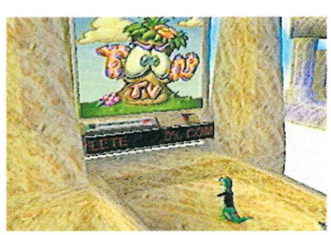
Gex is also looking pretty cool. The animation looks motion captured, but we're sure it isn't; it would be pretty hard to get a gecko to perform the type of tricks Gex can do. As it happens, there are over 3,400 frames of character animation that go right down to lip synch.

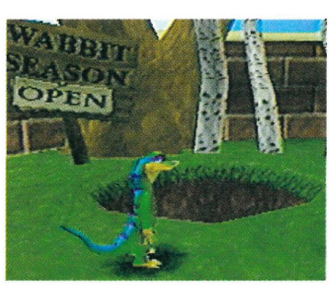
The preview copy we played promises a great deal, as even at this point in time, Gex: Enter the Gecko is extremely playable. The game proves to be fun, and quite taxing even though there is a distinct lack of enemies for you to take on. There are plenty of traps and tricks for you to get past, like falling axes or weight-adjusted bridges. The levels also keep you interested. Toon TV takes off cartoon shows, and in one part you jump down a rabbit hole, only to come out looking like a rabbit. All of Gex's moves stay the same, but you have to avoid an Elmer Fudd lookalike who's out to get you. This looks extremely close to copyright territory, but I hope it stays for the final version.

Throughout the game Gex dons different disguises, which include a kung fu suit and a space suit. What abilities these disguises offer to Gex we don't know, but it sounds interesting. Even when Gex isn't wearing a special disguise or a suit he has a number of moves at his disposal. The best way of dealing with enemies is to whip them with your tail, but you can also do a single or double jump with a tail-whip. Gex also has a tongue lash which can help him out on his travels.

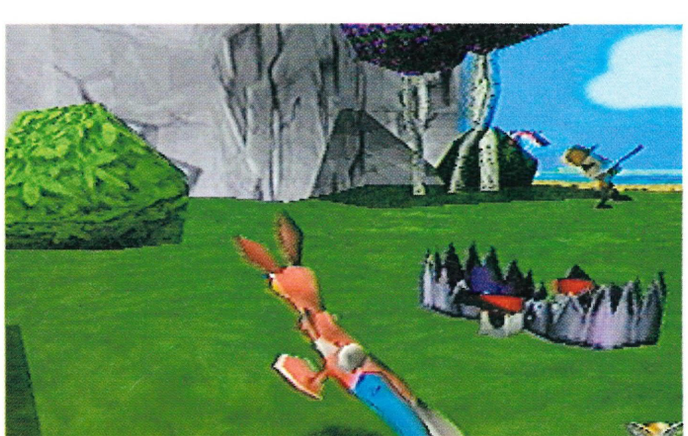
It must be said we're well into our preview copy of Gex. With Psygnosis' Rascal looking so promising as well, it looks like PlayStation platformers are on their way up.











Publisher - SCEE Developer - Exact Release Date - May '98 Genre - 3D Shooter



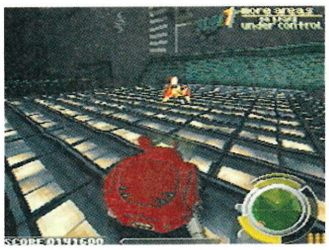
Ghost in











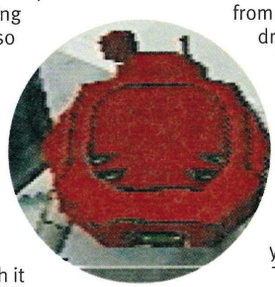




Ghost In the Shell follows in the footsteps of the Japanese Anime film of the same name, so you know you're in for some serious blasting action. The preview disc we received is at a very advanced state, so even at this stage we can tell it's going to be a fantastic game.

What makes Ghost in the Shell different from other shoot-'em-ups? For a start, your tank is probably the most versatile vehicle ever seen in a video game. It looks like a big red bug, albeit with big machine guns for hands, and the bug shape gives a clue to what your machine is capable of. I didn't bother reading the notes that came with the preview disc so I was unaware of what happens when you walk straight into a wall. Rather than coming to a sudden, abrupt halt, the screen tilts 90 degrees and you climb vertically! Within no time we realised this machine really is a go-anywhere vehicle. Walking up walls, marching over buildings, clinging to ceilings and patrolling the underside of bridges are all possible in Ghost In the Shell, and although it gets a little disorientating at times, it adds a whole new angle to the tired genre of 3D shoot-'em-ups.

What else does Ghost In the Shell offer, though? The graphics are excellent, but once the blasting action kicks off you're too busy to notice the huge cityscapes, dingy sewer systems, darkened warehouses and huge tower blocks. There's no draw-in on the scenery either; everything looks really solid and this part of the game is just about finished. One problem I do have with the graphics is that at times the enemy robots, tanks, gun emplacements and helicopters seem to pop up into the screen. Hopefully Sony will address this before the game hits the shelves.



Developers Exact (the people behind Jumping Flash, fact fiends) have made a conscious effort to steer Ghost In the Shell away from the run-of-the-mill shooting action already available on the PlayStation. So as well as the revolutionary go-anywhere (literally) gameplay, there are also plenty of levels offering a diversion from the normal stages. One mission has you dropping from the sky onto a boat which can be steered using the shoulder buttons. This leaves you with the job of defending yourself as you speed through the water in hot pursuit of the villains. Another level has you caning it down a highway, getting attacked from all sides. These 'chase' missions are especially frantic as there is no way of slowing yourself down - you've simply got to roll with it.

The game is mission-based, and between each mission you get a cool-looking Anime clip which gives more of the storyline as the game goes on. After each clip you get a breakdown of your next mission in a futuristic computer graphic style. The dialogue here is superb and very movie-like. It really feels as though you're part of some kind of special ops unit. The introduction is also Anime and it's really something special. I've seen some action-packed intros on games before, but this is pure Anime action, and with the techno soundtrack pumping away in the background, it really sets you up for the game proper.

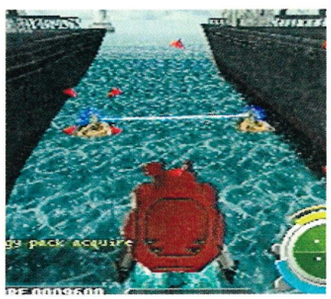
Ghost in the Shell has proved very popular in Japan, but it would as they're mad on Anime out there. Hopefully, though, the great gameplay, graphics and music evident on this preview disc should be enough to persuade gamers to give this a try. I'm gonna break with preview tradition at this point and tell you that I think Ghost In The Shell is excellent, and unless something goes drastically wrong, we'll be shouting loudly about it as soon as we get our hands on that hallowed review copy.



the Shell







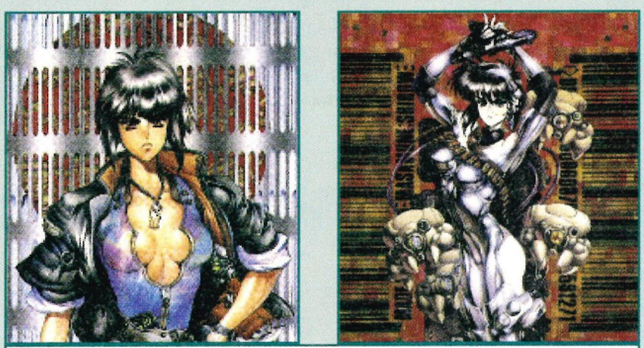


Anime Action



AKIRA

It's been said that Ghost In The Shell is the best Manga flick since the all time classic, Akira. The movie is set in the year 2029, when the world has become one huge, borderless global village. The net has grown to a massive size and the whole population is looked after by special agents who can download themselves onto the net and manipulate their machinery via computers. This is where you come in; as a member of a crack anti-terrorist unit, it's your job to totally eradicate the threat of terrorism. The plot of the film is rather contrived, so rather than read about it I suggest you go out and get yourself a copy on video.

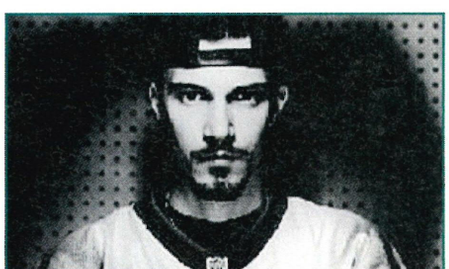


GHOST IN THE SHELL

DJ's Delight

The thumping soundtrack, provided by some of the world's top techno DJs and producers, perfectly compliments the frantic action in Ghost In the Shell. In fact, the soundtrack isn't universally thumping; at times you're treated to some superb electro and minimal electronics. The people behind the soundtrack include one of the godfathers of techno, Derrick May. This man was responsible for the immense classic Strings Of Life, and to find some of his tunes on a PlayStation game is a real delight. Other players who wrote pieces for the soundtrack include Joey Beltram, respected American DJ and producer who's been around since the rave years, and CJ Bolland who's responsible for rave classic, Horsepower, creator of the superb Electronic Highway and Analogue Theatre albums, and more recently, famous for his Sugar Is Sweeter tune (remember Sugar Daddy) that hit the top forty last year.

Last month's N2O preview showed exactly where game music should be heading and Ghost In The Shell has taken it one step further. The futuristic setting of the game is complimented by the most advanced music of today. We've been waiting for a soundtrack like this for a long time, and it's finally here. If you're in any way into electronic music, you're going to love this soundtrack. If you're not into this type of music, let it be an education. This is what the future of music is about. Thankfully then, for all techno lovers, Sony Music will be releasing a compilation of Ghost In The Shell music which should be out at the same time as the game.



JOEY BELTRAM



CJ BOLLAND



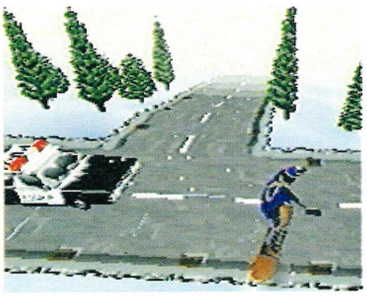
DERRICK MAY

Publisher - Eidos Developer - Silicon Dreams Release Date - March '98 Genre - Winter Sports



Chill

Eidos hits the slopes!



If a snowboarding game is to beat the excellent Coolboarders 2, a different approach is needed, and Eidos think they've found the right angle. Instead of giving you a number of tracks to complete in certain times or positions, you get slopes on which you can roam around freely. This, they claim, is more in line with what snowboarding is really about - freedom.

There will be five slopes on the finished version, but our preview only had three. These were the Forest, Village and Winter Sports slopes. All three slopes are huge, and although the Coolboarders 2 tracks are very long, they are nowhere near as wide as the slopes on Chill. The slopes give you plenty of space to explore and perform stunts. All the slopes have varying routes, so it will take you ages to fully explore every area in the game. On average, it took me about five minutes to get to the bottom of each slope and the variety on the way down was amazing. One of the slopes even has a half-pipe running through it so that you can earn extra points on freestyle stunts and another throws you off a cliff at the end - a parachute opens and you have to guide yourself down!



The graphics are very well drawn, although a few people did comment that the riders are a little small. This may be because of the size of the tracks the boarders are speeding down. The scenery is all well drawn and the digitised mountain backgrounds are excellent.

It's a shame, then, that the draw-in evident on the actual slope ruins any effect that the excellent backdrops give. Hopefully Eidos will remedy this before you actually get to play the game.

The stunts play an important part in Chill, but they are extremely hard to pull off. Only mastery of the stunts will see you become the winner so you have to put a few hours of practice in before becoming the champ. On top of the stunts, there are also a couple of extra moves you can perform. The first is a rail slide - find any long, thin object, like a pile of logs or a pipe, jump onto it and slide. The second move is the bonk - jump onto any solid object and bounce off it. Simple.

Coolboarders 2 is a hard act for Chill to follow, but its different approach may just earn it a few fans.





The Boarders

You've a choice of four boarders in Chill. Each boarder has two different outfits and very different lifestyles...

BONE

Bone doesn't believe in all this mystical nonsense as he is simply a speed freak and a thrill junkie. Bone is a bit of a loud mouth, and can often be heard boasting about how he is the gnarliest snowboarder in the valley and how his shaved hair-do reduces drag when he's out on the slopes. Bone is often found at the local bar arguing with Trix. If he's not there, though, he'll be tinkering with his board to get that extra bit of speed or stability out of it.

GOAT

Goat has spent his life out in the sticks, so he's used to taking on the steepest and hardest slopes around. He's a bit of a mystic at heart as he believes in 'Zen Boarding' - being at one with the mountain and sensing the slopes. He believes the only way to snowboarding perfection is to become one with board and the mountain in perfect harmony. Cool.

TRIX

Trix has earned herself a reputation as one of the most daring and talented boarders around, even though her privileged background usually means she'd be better off playing tennis at the country club. Trix was previously an Olympic bi-athlete and her skiing experience is put to good use on a snowboard. Trix says, "it's the only thing I've ever fallen in love with". She has now abandoned skiing to become a full time snowboarder.

YO-YO

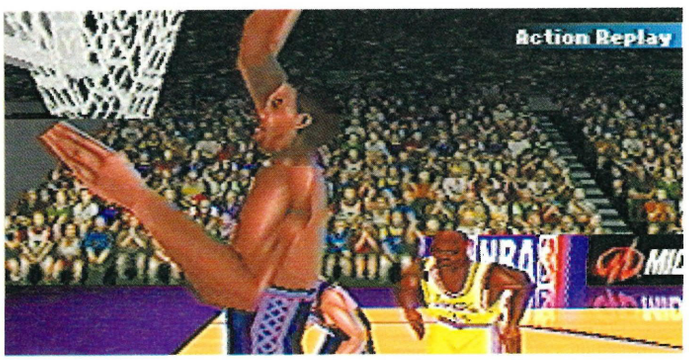
Yo-Yo is the daughter of a state diplomat, but she spends winter in the valley to get away from the boring state functions and bodyguards. Yo-Yo is renowned for her wicked sense of humour and she spends ages planning elaborate practical jokes. Yo-Yo is a black belt in Jujitsu, so if she's ever on the receiving end of a practical joke the instigator will not go unscathed.

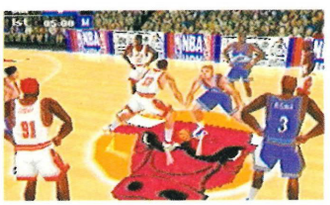


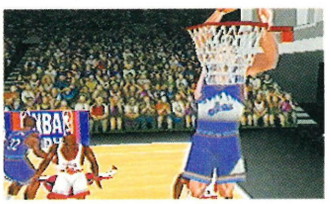
Publisher - GT Interactive Developer - Midway Release Date - 1st Quarter '98 Genre - Sports Sim

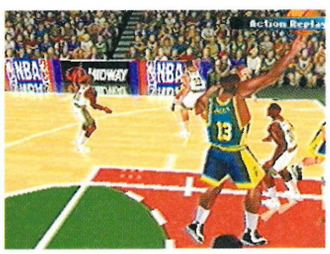
NBA Fastbreak '98

Sprite Men can jump!

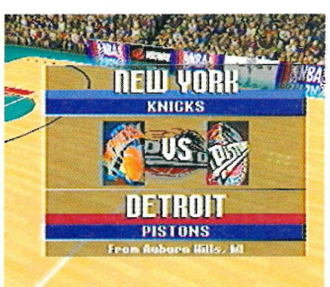


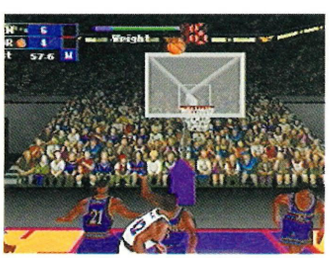






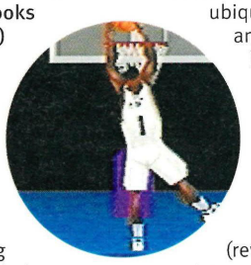






In an already overcrowded section of the sports sim arena, the prospects of success for yet another basketball game rely almost entirely on whether it can set itself apart from the plethora of similar examples currently flooding the market. At the last count, at least a dozen titles (generally of high quality) already compete for the fairly small numbers of players who enjoy the sound of squeaking trainers and bouncing balls, so any new title must at least equal what has come before, and be innovative enough to warrant shelling out forty pounds or so. Midway's new effort, NBA Fastbreak '98, looks set to do just this in a brave (or foolhardy?) attempt at sewing up the market.

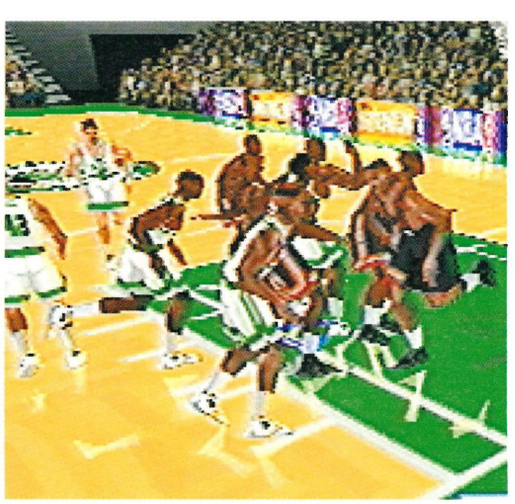
Their approach is angled squarely at the dedicated basketball fan who is au fait with much of the sport's intricacies, making it more of a simulation than a straightforward arcade knockabout. Bizarrely-monikered plays are available, such as 'Ally oops', 'picks' and 'boxouts', which no doubt have your players performing complex and balletic attacks on a dumbfounded opponent. If you're less able, tactics revolve around the 'run at the basket and try to slam-dunk it' axis. As is the norm these days, such moves are numerous, athletic and increasingly tricky to perform. They can be viewed over and over again for the benefit of your mates with the fully interactive replay mode, leaving virtually no angle unviewed.



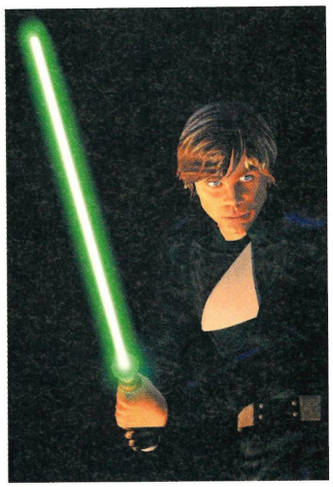
To assist you in mastering the ego-ballooning manoeuvres there's an excellent practice mode available in which two players knock about an empty court, free to fling the basketball to and fro with stylish behind-the-back passes and deceptive 'through the legs' antics. It also gives criticism (unavailable during matches) on your throwing technique, which is based around the tried-and-tested 'press and release-time' system, which soon becomes instinctive and fairly satisfying to implement. However, used in anger against an opponent things become comprehensively trickier as enormous men paw at what you've got in your hands, so to speak, blocking and anticipating passes and shots at basket intelligently. These players are all the genuine real-life article, including the dye-haired dress wearer Dennis Rodman and towering man-mountain (and sometime mediocre rapper) Shaquille O'Neill. Along with a digitised portrait each player is accurately represented to scale on screen, a feature which is surprisingly effective and intimidating, especially with the aforementioned Shaq who is visibly taller and wider than those scurrying around him, allowing him and others of similar stature to barge convincingly. More often than not, this ends with the unfortunate target sprawling pleasingly and a foul and possible free throw being awarded, utilising a somewhat ropey-looking 'moving crosshairs' affair to determine accuracy. In addition there is some nice attention to detail such as players gaining a limp when injured and slumping convincingly when fatigued.

Sonically the effects are a comprehensive set of realistic basketball-court-type sounds, plus the now ubiquitous commentator, in this case of course an over-excited American who I feel was a little over critical of some of my more daring court-length attempts to score ("What kind of a shot was THAT?"). Crowd noise is reasonably unobtrusive, although the crowd themselves seem to have been bussed in from Stepford, with their metronomic waving and vacant stares.

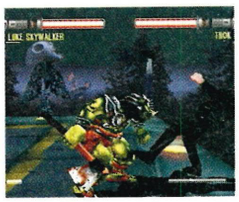
As the weak World League Basketball (reviewed last issue) shows, competition is so intense in this particular genre that only a virtually flawless game will survive amongst such a merciless horde. However NBA Fastbreak looks promising enough at this pre-release stage to stay afloat in a highly-saturated corner of the gaming pond, through a comprehensive attitude combined with fairly easy-to-grasp game dynamics.



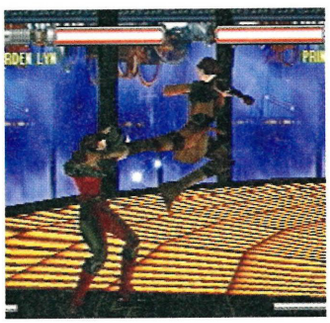
Publisher - Virgin Developer - Lucas Arts Release Date - 1st Quarter '98 Genre - Beat-'em-up



Star Wars:
Masters of Teräs Käsi









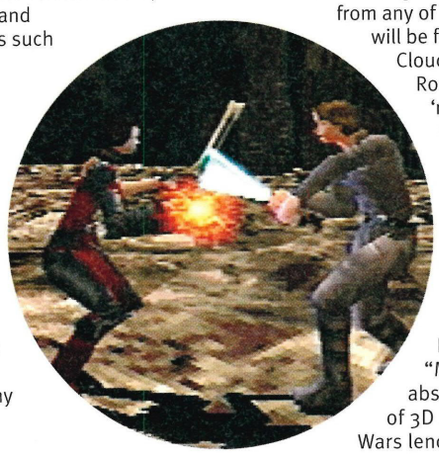


What's this? Masters of the Terraced Khazi? Isn't an ordinary crapper good enough for the stars of Star Wars? However you spell it, Star Wars: Masters of Teräs Käsi is the latest game to ride on the back of the renewed interest in the Star Wars saga, growing from the souped-up re-releases of the films.

The game is a 3D beat-'em-up in the Tekken mould, pitting Luke Skywalker, Han Solo and Princess Leia against the bad guys such as Boba Fett, Tusken Raiders and Gamorreans. The plot centres on the mysterious Arden Lyn, a master of the ancient martial art (aren't they all?) of teräs käsi. Like a Jedi Knight, a teräs käsi master harnesses the power of the Force, but they follow a very different philosophy, Arden Lyn is a follower of Darth Vader hell-bent on destroying the Rebel Alliance, and recruits the most feared champions in the Galactic Empire to fight the rebel leaders in one-to-one combat. Why do people agree to these silly tournaments?

There are nine characters in the game, drawn from both Rebel Alliance and Galactic Empire forces. There are also several secret characters to be uncovered as the game progresses. Each character has a unique power attribute or special ability, eg. Arden Lyn has a cybernetic arm loaded with various battle tools. Standard Star Wars weapons such as light sabres and blasters are available too.

Offering more than a passing nod to the Street Fighter games, characters build up 'force power' as they fight. When they've enough power they can execute their individual power moves. The game will also boast 'hundreds of possible moves, fully rendered 3D characters and environments and extremely lifelike movement'. This has been achieved by drawing the graphics over films of real actors executing fight-style moves. Although the plot for the game isn't taken from any of the three films, the battle arenas will be familiar to all Star Wars fans; Cloud City, Hoth, the Emperor's Throne Room and Tatooine. Look out for the 'never-before seen' (in other words, 'made up for the game') penal colony on the planet Mytus VII. Play modes include Practice, Arcade, Versus, and Team, where players choose four characters and compete in a no-holds-barred single elimination tournament.



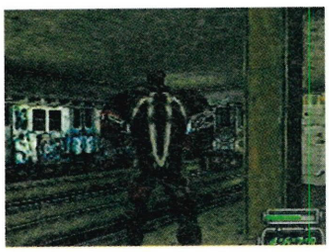
According to LucasArts' Tom Bryon, Project Manager, "Masters of Teräs Käsi is an absolute dream come true for fans of 3D fighting games because Star Wars lends itself so well to this genre. The raw action, life-like movement and slick game control are the types of features that take these games over the top, and Masters will be no exception".

Star Wars: Masters of Teräs Käsi hits the shelves around Easter. It needs to be really good to make a splash in the already-overcrowded beat-'em-up genre, but if you can beat the crap out of an ewok, the insufferably cute and atmosphere-destroying irritation which ruined Return of the Jedi, it can't be all bad.





Publisher - SCEE Developer - Sony Interactive Studios America Release Date - April '98 Genre - Action Adventure



Spawn- The Eternal



Hailing from the comic books and movie of the same name, Sony's Spawn is yet another 3D action/adventure game. Spawn, however, puts the onus on the beat-'em-up side of things rather than puzzle-solving elements.

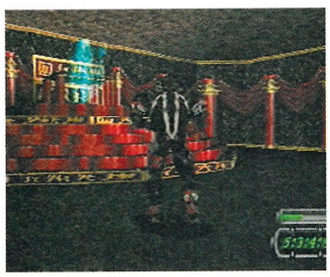
The graphics look pretty solid, although the preview disc did have a few nasty glitches which should be sorted out before the game hits the shelves. The main character's also looking good - he's the biggest 3D character we've seen in a game so far, and the animation, although a little minimal, is well up to standard.



There are two parts to Spawn - exploration and fighting. When in exploration mode you must find switches to open doors and find your way through the level in a pretty standard way. When you come across an enemy character, the camera changes and the view goes into one-on-one combat-style. Here you have various kicks, punches and special moves to dispose of your opponent. At this point in time the battle mode is looking a little plain, but the game still has work left to do so we're hoping Sony can spice things up a little.

There are four levels on the preview disc, all of which can be entered from one room at the beginning of the game. Once you've completed a level and killed the end-of-level boss you're taken back to the start room so that you can tackle the next levels. We're expecting more levels for the full release though - if there isn't then Spawn will rank as one of the world's shortest games.

It's a well known fact that movie licence games are usually pretty standard affairs, even if the movie was excellent. The problem we have here is that Spawn was a complete flop at the cinema. This doesn't really give Spawn a good start on the PlayStation, so it's going to have to be something special and do better than the film. The preview disc offers a lot of promise, but there needs to be more action and excitement. The puzzle elements are all in place, and although the fight sequences seem to take priority, there really isn't enough there to make the game exciting. If more battle action is implemented in Spawn, we could be looking at a potentially big game.











The Man Behind the Mask

Spawn is an established and popular comic book (author: Todd McFarlane, Trainspotters) as well as a film and a soon-to-be-released game. The story behind Spawn is very deep and complex but here it is in a nutshell.



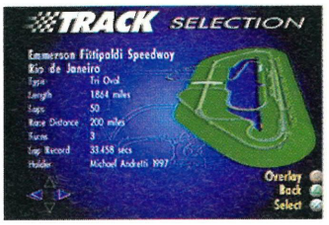
Al Simmons was born in a sleepy suburb of Pittsburgh. One thing set him apart throughout his life - his driving ability to win at everything. This made him very successful, so much so that he was picked up to work for the CIA while at college. He quickly worked his way through the military ranks of the CIA until one day he saved the President from certain death during an assassination attempt. Because of this he was offered a job in a very secretive organisation. Here he would go on terrible missions that were supposedly for the good of America. When Al started to question the reasons behind the missions, his boss ordered him to be executed and on the next job he was fried by the other agents.

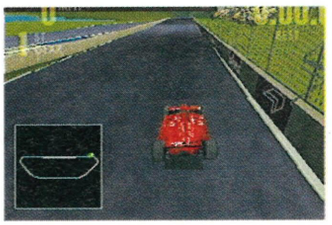
Just before he died, though, Al made a pact with Hell to come back to earth to see his wife. Al had become Spawn, one of Maleboglia's (the Devil's) Hell Warriors. He now has to work out a way of using his powers for the right reasons, such as how to save his wife from Maleboglia's sidekick The Clown, and most importantly, how to get out of the pact, something that no being has ever done before.

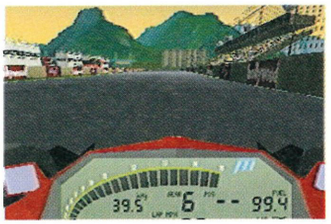


Publisher - Psygnosis | Developer - Studio 33 | Release Date - March '98 | Genre - Driving Game









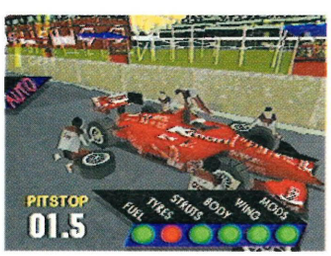
Newman Haas

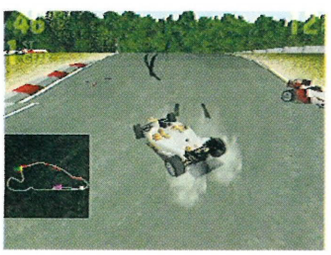
Psygnosis bring Indy Cars to the PlayStation

The Newman Haas Team

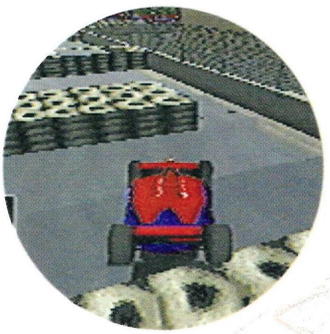
Formed in 1983, Newman Haas Racing was formed by the actor Paul Newman and Carl Haas, a veteran driver. To date they've won the championship three times, the first in 1984, only their second year racing, with Mario Andretti. His son Michael took the championship for Newman Haas in 1991, and two years later Britain's F1 champion Nigel Mansell won the 1993 season in his first year as an Indy Car driver.











If you've read the first two issues of extreme PlayStation (and if not, why not?), you'll already know something about Newman Haas Racing. After Psygnosis' well-received but bug-riddled Formula 1 game (the original, not the '97 version) hit the shelves, the company looked for ways of improving it. While they worked on an update, which, of course, became Formula 1 '97, Studio 33 took the code and adapted it to Indy Car racing. The tracks were replaced by those raced by Indy drivers, the handling characteristics of the cars changed to those of the heavier, faster Indy Cars and the game was given the same spit-and-polish treatment Psygnosis themselves gave to F1 '97. The result? A fast and exciting game, far more than just a tweaked version of F1 with Indy circuits.

Contrary to popular belief, there's more to Indy racing than simple oval circuits. Newman Haas Racing contains five permanent tracks, four street circuits and only two ovals. There are also four bonus fantasy tracks to be won during the game. You can race any of the 16 drivers currently active in Indy Car racing, and commentary is provided by Danny Sullivan and Bobby Varsha. The engine noises are sampled from genuine Indy Cars, again adding to the realism.

There are five perspectives on offer in the one-player game, but only three with two players. The split screen mode works well, with no loss of speed, but the lack of a distant chase view makes it difficult to anticipate corners. To get the most from the game, you'll have to learn the tracks. The circuits are varied enough to suit all tastes, though. Beginners can race on the ovals, with experts taking on the murderous Houston, Texas track.

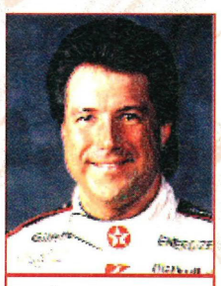
The Stars and their Cars

This year's Newman Haas drivers are Christian Fittipaldi, nephew of '70s legend Emerson Fittipaldi, and Michael Andretti, son of 1978 Formula 1 champion Mario.

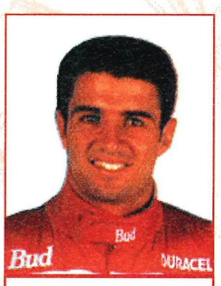
Fittipaldi has raced two seasons with Newman Haas, earning a second and two third-place finishes in 1996. The 26-year-old Brazilian finished fifth in the PPG Indy Car World Series, and won the Indy 500 Rookie of the Year in '95. He drives the red #11 Kmart/Budweiser Swift-Ford/Cosworth (blimey, what a mouthful).

Michael Andretti, born in the USA in 1962, won the PPG Indy Car Championship in 1991 and finished second in 1996. The 1997 season was his seventh for Newman Haas. Unlike Formula 1 cars, Indy vehicles from the same team don't necessarily share the same liveries. Andretti's car is black.

The Newman Haas Indy Car accelerates from 0-100 mph in 4.2 seconds, with a top speed of 240 mph. It has a fuel capacity of 40 gallons, running on methanol.

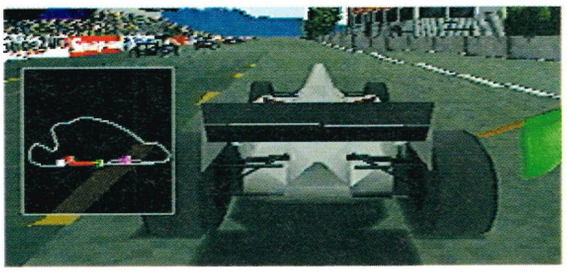


ANDRETTI



FITTIPALDI





Racing



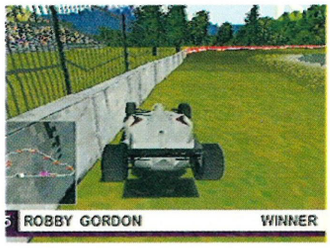


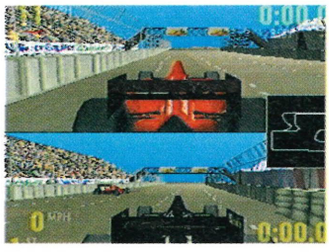
Our almost-finished preview copy featured fast, slick graphics though they became distinctly jerky when using the in-car perspective. Hopefully this will be addressed in the final version. The viewpoint changes to a more distant perspective during crashes, giving a clear view of what went wrong and how to get back onto the track. This is a real boon; in some games, battling your way back into the race after a smash is awkward when using close or in-car cameras.

Just like F1, it's possible to set up your car to your own requirements or just pick it up and play. You can opt for arcade and simulation modes, and switch off the car damage if you're in the habit of bouncing your vehicle off the walls.

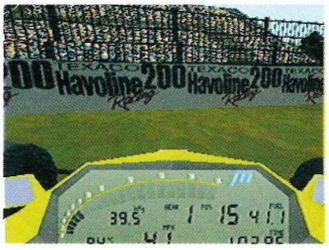
There are a few minor niggles on our preview version. It seems difficult to keep your car in the centre of the track. You're always drifting to one side or the other, and therefore find yourself constantly tapping the D-Pad on the long straights. Also, the cars seem to lack grip on the tracks, but don't slide enough on the grass.

To find a niche in the already-overcrowded driving genre, Newman Haas must be a top title. Psygnosis' F1 games already have much of the market sewn up, and the only other Indy Car game (the grossly underrated Andretti Racing) can be bought for around fifteen quid, and offers touring car races as well as the Indy event. With such stiff competition, can Newman Haas Racing force its way through the pack and put in a pole position performance? Only time will tell, but it's looking good. Stay tuned for a full review next month, unless something disastrous happens at Psygnosis towers.









So What's the Difference

Indy Cars may look similar to Formula 1 vehicles, but there are substantial differences between the two sports. Indy cars are heavier, which greatly affects their handling characteristics. Although faster than F1 cars, Indy racers aren't as technologically advanced. Their increased speed comes from raw power, made possible by the less stringent rules and regulations governing the sport. Unlike F1, there's no standing start. Instead of revving their engines and moving off when the lights turn green, Indy Car drivers enjoy a rolling start. They move along in the order in which they qualified, a bit like a Formula 1 formation lap. They're not allowed to overtake or push for position until the race starts for real. Also, Indy Cars don't race in the wet - if it rains, the race is suspended.

Indy pit stops are slower than their F1 counterpart, as the rules limit the crew to only one engineer per wheel. Stops of around 30 seconds are the norm in Indy racing. There are far more accidents too - the fast cars and tracks bordered by concrete walls are very unforgiving.

Several drivers have achieved success in both Indy and Formula 1, most recently the current F1 champion Jacques Villeneuve. And, of course, our own Nigel Mansell left the Williams-Renault F1 team as champion, then drove Indy Cars for Newman Haas Racing, winning the championship in his rookie year.

Publisher - Mindscape | Developer - Supersonic | Release Date - May '98 | Genre - Top-Down Racer

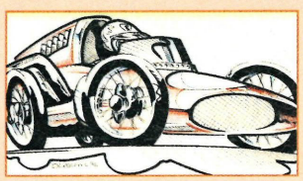
Circuit Breakers

The Micro Machines Beater?

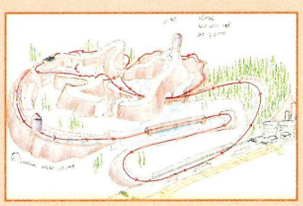




And on the First Day



Computer graphics have to start from somewhere. Here's two sketches used by Supersonic to design the Wild West course and Corvette car.



I can hear you screaming, "it's another Micro Machines clone" from here. We'd have to agree, but as its developers, Supersonic, produced Micro Machines 2, Micro Machines '96 and Micro Machines Military, you can guarantee this will be as good as or even better than the aforementioned classics. We've been bashing away at the preview copy in single and multi-player modes for the last week, and even though a preview should be an unbiased overview of a game, we can safely say this is going to be a big hit.

The main difference between this and the MM series is Supersonic have been perfecting a new 3D engine which allows the racers to experience a roller-coaster ride feeling. Many of the courses boast huge inclines and descents, speeding up and slowing down the action. They've even gone as far as placing treadmills upon the hills on certain tracks to screw you up even more. On nearing a steep slope, you think you're going to slowly trundle up it, only to be whisked at jaw-breaking speeds up the gradient, over the brow and into the air. This roller-coaster feel is achieved by the camera angle being slightly behind the cars instead of being totally overhead, and the use of colour-transparent fogging.

There are four different cars to choose from: Corvette, Lamborghini, Ferrari and Mini. As with the MM series, these cars change into different vehicles depending on what track you tackle. When entering the underwater world, your car changes into a submarine; in the swamp world, you're given a boat version of your chosen car.

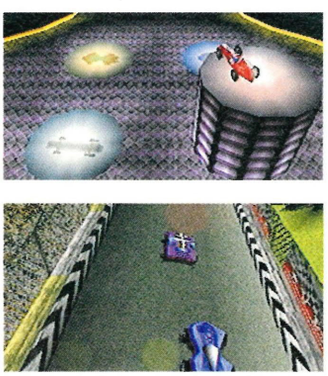
There are eight distinct worlds, including Jungle, Snow, Persia, Venice, Wild West and Motorway. Altogether there are 16 selectable tracks from the start, but we can definitely tell you there are plenty of secret ones, taking the total much higher. With different secret play options as well, including reverse, night, turbo and upside down courses, Supersonic boast there are well over 200 course play options.

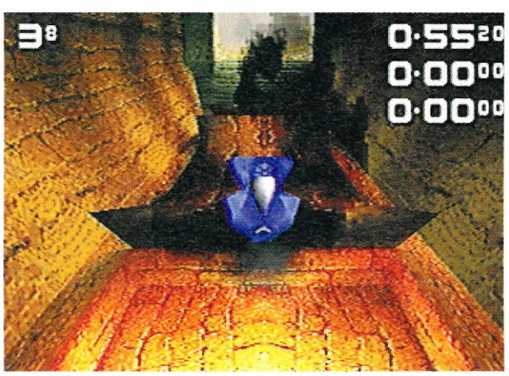
Included within every course, a player can find short-cuts to improve his or her position, but also found within the tracks are power-ups. These are scattered around the course and include turbos, smoke screens, oil silks, missiles, enlargers, and shrinkers. Once a car has driven over the power-up, it's activated by pressing the R1 button. A car can collect more than one power-up; the L1 button is used to scroll through them, depicted in the top left-hand corner of the screen, so you can pick out the desired one. Which power-up you use is determined by where you are in the race - for example, if you're trailing in last place, you'd be mad to use the oil silk that gushes from the back of the car. Go for a turbo instead.

Another big feature is the multi-play. As with the MM series, Circuit Breakers allows 'four-player action' with the use of a Multi tap. This, again, is excellent fun.

If you're a MM fan, your first reaction to Circuit Breakers is that it isn't as fast, but after smashing around a couple of the courses you realise that speed isn't the issue. What makes Circuit Breakers exceptional is the undulating courses. Brilliant!







Publisher - Infogrames UK Developer - Capcom Release Date - 1st Quarter '98 Genre - RPG

Breath Of Fire III



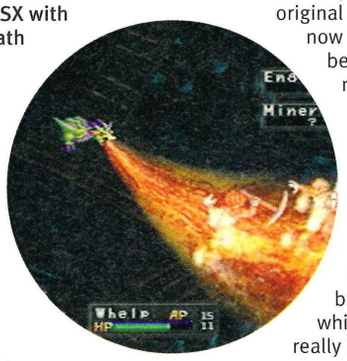






After suffering a derth of good Japanese-style RPGs, the PlayStation is undergoing a role-playing renaissance over the last few months. The spectacular Final Fantasy VII swallowed the Christmas market whole, Psygnosis' forthcoming Alundra seems set to offer a thrilling Zelda-like experience and now Capcom hits the PSX with the latest game in their acclaimed Breath of Fire series.

The game starts when a group of miners come across a baby dragon (or whelp) trapped inside a crystal egg. Blasting it open, they find the dragon is alive. You take control of the lizard and escape from the mines, burning anyone who gets in your way - even baby dragons are strong. After being captured and escaping from a train you meet a boy called Rei who finds a child in the woods, which becomes your main character. Your destinies are tied together as you explore the game.



Although sprite-based, the characters in the game animate very well, giving the game a real Japanese cartoon atmosphere. Fans of former fighters like Suikoden and Vandal Hearts will feel right at home with Breath of Fire III. There's a veritable menagerie of monsters to tackle as you trundle through the tantalising territories, and some cute and colourful characters to be found along the way.

Several improvements have been made to the original SNES game engine. The world can now be rotated, enabling you to look behind obstacles, and the battles are now fought on the main exploration screens. In other words, you fight the monsters where you meet them as opposed to the game loading up a special battle screen. This is far more realistic and atmospheric.

The Breath of Fire series is famous for its strong storylines and exciting game worlds, creating a believable game environment about which the player genuinely cares. You really feel part of the tale, as opposed to some games the fighting and character building seem to exist for their own sake, with the plot just a convenient excuse on which to hang them. From what we've seen so far, BOFIII looks set to continue this tradition. Look out for a full review - soon.

Forces in Combat...

When forced to fight a frenzied fracas with a fearsome foe, you first choose the Attack Icon. Notice how your armour and hit ratings are offered before you start.



You then select your target for each of your party members...



...and attack. You can select magic attacks too, if you wish.

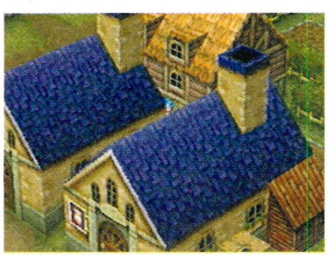


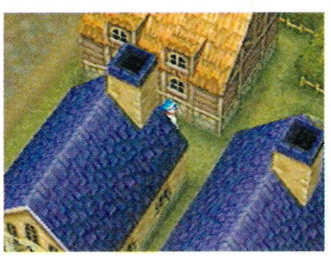
After the battle, you get your experience.



The World Keeps on Turning

By holding R1 and moving the D-Pad, you can rotate your game world to get a better look behind buildings and other obstacles. This is essential for finding hidden items and secret doors. This is only for viewing, though - the scenery reverts back to the normal perspective when you release R1 and move.









•Publisher- Namco •Developer- Namco •Release Date- June '98 •Genre- Light Gun Shoot-'em-up

Point Blank

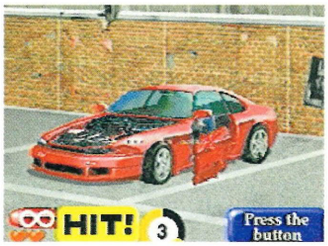
Gun Bullet hits the PSX

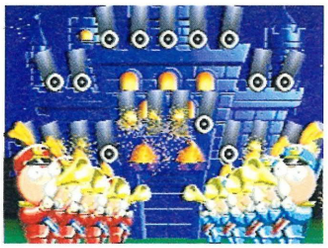
















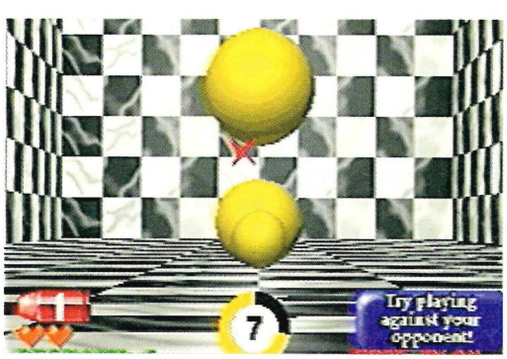


Based on the charmingly-titled Gun Bullet coin-op, Point Blank takes the usually John Woo-like light gun genre and puts it in a strictly Sesame Street context. The game is based loosely around the antic of Doctors Don and Dan, a kind of tooled-up Bert and Ernie, whose adventures on Point Blank Island (natch) give you an excuse to blow stuff away. Aimed squarely at the younger or less 'serious' gamer, as the SNES-like screenshots obviously suggest. Point Blank is to Micro Machines what Time Crisis is to Formula 1.

Surreal and fairground-style shooting galleries are the order of the day, with both targets and tasks being wildly varied over the two dozen-plus standard and bonus levels. Never before has the discerning player been able to waste such a wide variety of objects, from mundane paper gangster cut-outs through to bouncing balls, falling leaves, pelicans, lava, UFOs, bloated pink sparrows and even characters from Dig Dug. The level design follows this trend, being situated in orbit, underwater or in lurid fantasy realms, whilst the tasks set include straightforward accuracy tests, high speed rapid-fire blowouts and, most interestingly, Crystal Maze-style puzzles that require a steady brain as well as hand. Some missions even include protecting the hapless doctors from falling dangers, an unusual (but admittedly brief) humane turn of events for a gun game. Two-player and tournament modes are supported, so a whole party can participate, although this requires the extravagance of two Guncoms for full effect. A notable addition to the basic arcade conversion comes unexpectedly in the shape of a rudimentary RPG in which one steers Don and Dan around the Zelda-like island, interacting simplistically with its wacky residents in a quest to find the Gun Bullet, a fabled firearm that's 'reputedly able to damage dragons' (no guesses what the final boss is, then). You can accumulate money and experience, and so on to gain extras such as a rapid fire gun, energy-replenishing food and (cryptically) a new shirt 'for when yours gets dirty'. Hmmm, those Japanese, eh? As expected, the light gun works brilliantly, dispatching all and sundry with pinpoint precision, whilst also being employed to steer characters around the map, enter initials (with a challengingly-short time limit to do so) and pick the numerous different options.



On sight of the game, the opinion voiced around the office was "Oh dear, why bother?", but if you can see past the decidedly 16-bit nature of the graphics there's actually a playable little gem of a game here. The usual rhythm for a game of this type of 'shoot the man, shoot the man, shoot the boss' is refreshingly absent, avoiding the somewhat repetitive experience afforded by the otherwise excellent Time Crisis. However, despite the augmentations and add-ons to the formula, it still has the air of an economic and convenient arcade rehash on the part of Namco, so hopefully the price will reflect this.



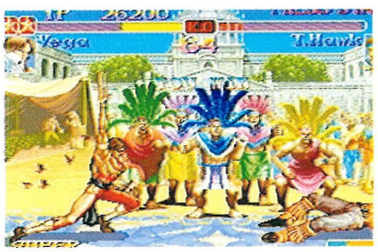


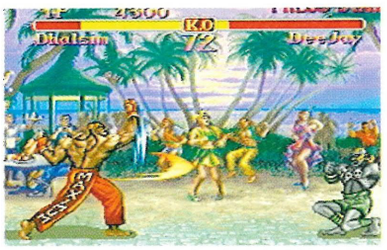
•Publisher - Virgin •Developer - Capcom •Release Date - April '98 •Genre - Beat-'em-up

Street Fighter Collection



Come on then, I'll take all three of you!







There's a real danger of the venerable Street Fighter series becoming the Police Academy of video games, as sequel upon sequel pile up on the shelves, slaking the thirst for Ryu, Ken, Chun Li and the rest which many players have with a vengeance. This compilation could be seen as Capcom cynically squeezing the last possible profitability from an ageing series in its last throes of life, as the somewhat cobbled-together feel of the version we previewed suggests. However, as a retrospective trilogy of well-loved past classics (apart from Ex+ Alpha of course), it makes financial and completist sense.

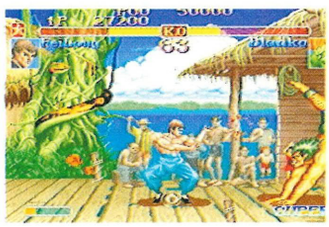
If, like me, the most enjoyment you've had from Street Fighter was the excellent Manga interpretation, criticisms such as the resolutely 2D shadow-puppet nature of the game, the flicker-frame moves and twee pastel backgrounds ring true. It's fair to say SF is definitely from an era that's passed, and it shows its age, especially when translated to the multi-dimensional PSX where polygons are order of the day. Compared to Soul Blade or Bushido Blade, its 16-bit heritage becomes a little too apparent, and while we're generally all for retro gaming and/or daring graphics styles (see Grand Theft Auto, for example), it does seem a pity that the visuals weren't modernised at all.

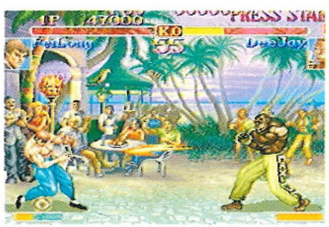
Popular opinion goes against this, though, and as a result here they are again in a convenient package which includes Street Fighters II, II Turbo and Alpha 2 Gold. In the first two games the usual crew of characters are present, including the mincing sadist Vega and funky Jamaican DJ - er, Deejay, who fight in a variety of different locations all over the world, the best of which is a cool Aurora Borealis setting. All the familiar moves are present, albeit at an increased speed. Fireballs, Voodoo powers and electrical skin shocks spice things up, though finding these moves is a case of trial and error without the aid of a practice mode to tell you what buttons you bashed to make the attack.

The much-admired fighting consists of flurries of various punches, kicks, leaping strikes and sudden surprise grabs, plus of course the magical ranged attacks. Flimsy sound FX don't help the bone-crunching potential of the game and become fairly repetitive quite quickly. With all the sample memory available, it seems a missed opportunity that the original arcade audio wasn't beefed up, but then it would not have been a genuine translation, one supposes. However, the gameplay is of course rock-solid and contains enough depth to keep 'em coming back for more (as history recounts), especially in the fraught and violent head-to-head mode.

The third instalment, Alpha 2 Gold, takes the winning formula and (although remaining defiantly 2D) expands heavily on the basic sets of moves from the original games, allowing for greater attacking intricacy and head-splitting possibilities. The graphical style is much larger, clearer and smoother than its predecessors, while the backdrops are, refreshingly, much more varied than before, especially the smart 'landing Harrier' level. This instalment appears to rectify some of the shortfalls (brought about through old age) mentioned above, and, coupled with a healthy dose of nostalgia, will probably be the main reason for purchasing the collection. Expect a review soon (and an Ex Plus Alpha I & II compendium, no doubt).











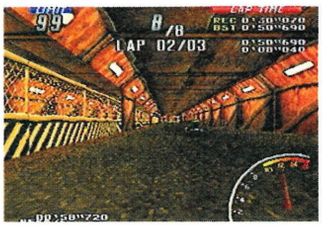


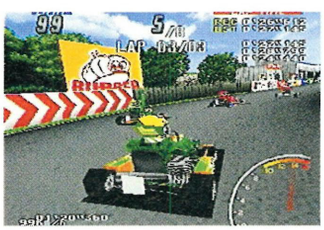


Publisher - Ocean Developer - Gaps Release Date - 2nd Quarter '98 Genre - Racing

Ayrton Senna's Kart Duel 2




After playing Formula Karts Special Edition (X-Rated, Issue One), we realised a karting game could be as much fun to play as other racers, so when Kart Duel 2 arrived for preview we were soon arguing over who got the job.

Kart Duel 2 has no special sections or anything to really make it stand out from the crowd, but what it does do, it does extremely well. So far we've played on nine tracks on the preview disc, and all are well designed and cleverly thought out. The tracks aren't as short as the aforementioned Formula Karts so the feeling of urgency isn't there, but the racing is still pretty solid. You start with the choice of three tracks in the Stock C class. These are all relatively easy to complete - hopefully the competition will be a bit tougher for the final version. As you make your way up through the different classes, the tracks become much tighter and difficult to negotiate.

The preview disc had some bad draw-in - as long as this is remedied, though, the graphics will be of a very high standard. The track environments also vary a great deal. One minute you're racing on a basic track and the next you're driving through underground circuits or tracks in the mountains. At this time the karts and drivers all look the part, although some of the karts did have front wheels missing! There are two different views to use: Outside and behind or the driver's view. For once, I found the driver's view the best to use as the programmers have got the perspective and angle just right. The outside view is still useable, but the best feeling of speed comes from the other perspective.



At the moment there are only four Karts to choose from, but the finished version will have more. The only real difference between the karts is the colour. You can change your kart's handling by altering the position of your seat, the size of the tyres and the drive cogs. This does make a difference to the racing, so it's best to try out different combinations of settings.

At the moment the racing's a little easy, but you can see glimpses of some pretty devious AI programming going on. For instance, the green team have a nasty habit of cutting you up when you try to overtake, whereas the orange karts always seem to ram you from behind - something that really annoys as they always seem to get past you on corners. The collision detection is also a little harsh at the moment, but we're sure the Q&A testers will pick up on this before the game is finished.

Ayrton Senna's Kart Duel 2 could become an underground hit, but it will probably never make the limelight. Okay, so it doesn't have the draw of some of the other racing games around, but it does promise some extremely solid and action-packed gameplay.





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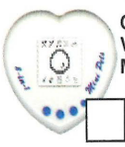
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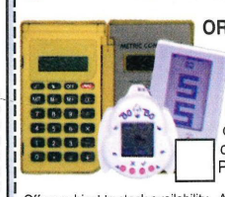
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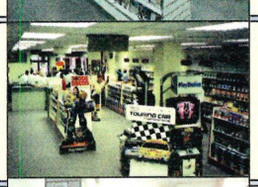


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Spirit of Adventure



From the text-based offerings of yesteryear to the graphics games of today, we take the adventure world by the throat and shake it until the puzzles squeak...

Adventures represent the intellectual end of gaming. They don't demand lightning reflexes and fast fire-button fingers, but instead expect the gamer to solve problems using sheer brain power. How do I get over the hole? Maybe this plank lets me cross; no, it's too weak. How can I strengthen it? Aha - I've found a beam and a piece of rope. I'll tie it to the plank...

In the early days, problems were solved by typing commands: TAKE PLANK, TAKE ROPE, TIE PLANK TO BEAM, PUT PLANK ON HOLE, etc. Today, you'd have to move the plank icon onto the beam icon, then move the rope icon onto the combined plank/beam. Same idea, different implementation. So how did we get from there to here? Read on...

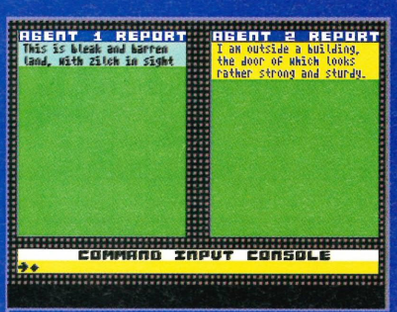
Most people know the first adventure games were text-based, with little or no graphics. However, few realise the very first adventure (and one of the first ever computer games) was written as early as the mid-1970's. Two fantasy role-playing fans called Willie Crowther and Don Woods decided to write a similar game for the office mainframe. The game, simply called Adventures, was written in the Fortran language and used over 300k of memory. They put the game into the public domain, and soon it was being played wherever there was a mainframe able to run it.

The game was, by today's standards, a simple affair. There were no graphics; instead each location was described with a few sentences of text, and you manipulated your environment by typing simple verb/noun commands. The first location, for example, offered, 'You are standing beside a small brick building at the end of a road. A river is flowing nearby, going south, with open country to the north and dense forest all around'. Typing NORTH took you to the open country, or you could GO IN to enter the building. One thing you couldn't do, though, was save your game. Every time you returned to it, you had to start afresh.

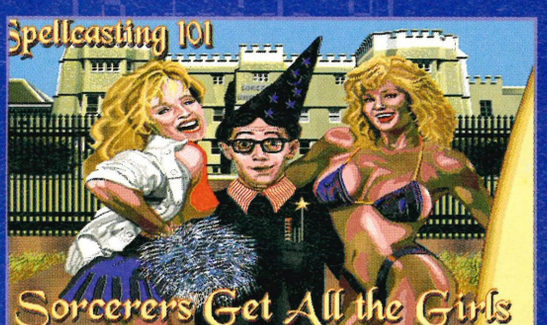
With the birth of home computers, the original Crowther/Woods Adventures was converted to machines such as the Spectrum and Commodore 64. Re-coded in assembly language, and making more efficient use of the processor, the game easily fitted into the Speccy's 48k of memory. Several companies produced versions of Adventures under titles such as Classic Adventure and Colossal Cave Adventure.

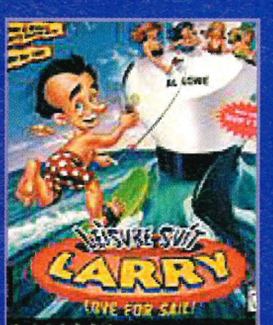
Even before the Crowther/Woods game hit the micros, American programmer Scott Adams was releasing adventures for early home computers such as the Tandy TRS-80. His first game, Adventureland, was almost strangled at birth when his wife, resentful of the time he spent on the game, put the finished disk in the oven. Luckily it wasn't switched on. Melbourne House's 1983 hit The Hobbit broke new ground in text adventures. Not only did it offer a static picture to illustrate most locations, it also boasted one of the most advanced text-based interfaces to date. Previous games allowed only two-word inputs, but The Hobbit could deal with short sentences like CLIMB INTO BARREL, SMASH WEB WITH SWORD and even simple instructions offered to other characters, eg. SAY TO ELROND 'READ MAP'. It also offered non-player characters with artificial intelligence, with whom you could interact during the mission. On the 'down' side it was riddled with bugs and if the non-player characters' IQs were any lower they'd have to be watered daily, but this didn't stop the game selling in hundreds of thousands and inspiring umpteen home-grown send-ups.

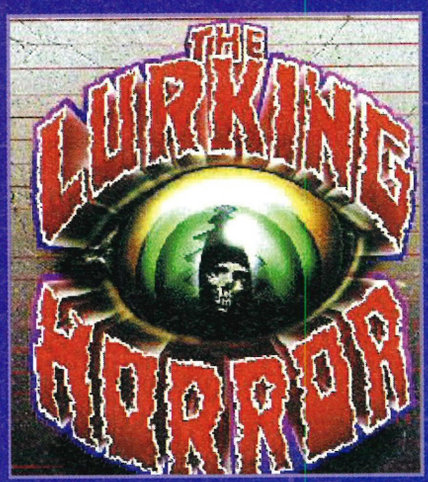
The undisputed kings of text adventures are Infocom, who, from 1979 to 1989, produced some of the best text-based offerings ever for most home computers of the day. Although presentation was never high on Infocom's agenda, their exciting plots, keen prose and extreme attention to detail won them a huge cult following and titles such as Zork, Lurking Horror, Leather Goddess of Phobos and Hitchhiker's



Double Agent

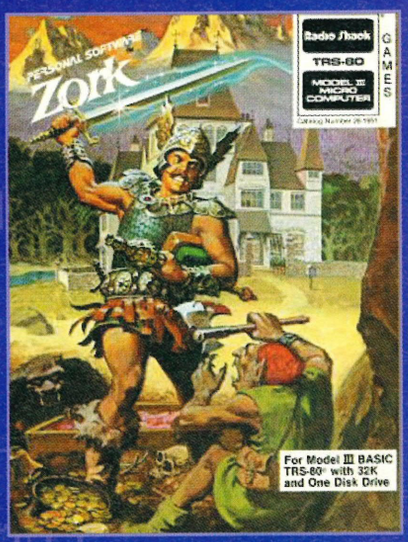








Loom



Guide to the Galaxy still sell today.

The next leap forward in adventure gaming came with Valhalla. A text-based illustrated adventure in the Hobbit mould, Valhalla's claim to fame is that the graphics were animated. Your character appeared on the screen, and if you typed GET AXE, he walked over to the also-illustrated object and picked it up. This opened the door to the next generation of adventures, those which could only fit on 16-bit machines. These, of course, are the graphic adventures familiar to all PSX adventure fans.

As stated earlier, graphic adventures work on the same principle as text adventures. The player (who may or may not be seen on-screen) works his way through the game solving puzzles, using objects and generally learning more about his surroundings. Instead of using a keyboard, though, the player uses a mouse or hand controller. Items are depicted on the screen using icons, which can be dragged in and out of your inventory window and combined with things in the playing area or other object icons to solve puzzles. This sort of game is often described as one with a WIMP environment - Windows, Icons, Mouse and Pointer.

Early pioneers of the graphic adventure include Sierra On-Line, who's Leisure Suit Larry games, with their balding, stay-at-home hero and innuendo-riddled storylines proved extremely popular on the PC. Unfortunately, they were less popular when played using floppies on machines such as the Amiga and Atari ST - the amount of disk swapping required made them almost unplayable. Not so LucasArts' illustrious offerings. Loom was a delightful, if easy, adventure where the main character cast spells by listening to and reproducing musical notes. The graphics were, by today's standards, poor but the storyline was phenomenal - you couldn't put it down. Better was to come with The Secret of Monkey Island and its sequels. By now both graphics and compression techniques had improved greatly, so although the game was far bigger than Loom, it was still playable from floppies.

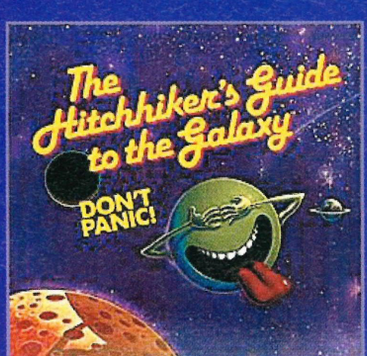
The graphic adventures gained strength, but the illustrated text adventure was far from dead. Spellcasting 101, by ex-Infocom programmer Steve Meretzky, was a humorous offering with optional graphics. Five on a Treasure Island and Wonderland were both based on the books of the same title, and again featured text interfaces and illustrated locations. The pure text adventure, that is with no graphics at all, had by now disappeared from the shops but thanks to programming utilities like The Quill, Professional Adventure Writing System and Text Adventure Development System, home computer owners could program their own games and sell them via mail order. Many did, and indeed still do. The quality of home-grown games such as Retarded Creatures & Caverns (Zenobi), Double Agent (Tartan Software) and Axe of Kolt (FSF Adventures) rival anything sold through retail in the text adventure's heyday.

The next phase in the development of adventures was offered by new technology rather than software. The PC's CD-ROM drive and the coming of CD-based consoles opened new doors for the graphic adventure. With graphics processors improving all the time and the public demanding bigger and better games, floppies were no longer an adventuring option - disk swapping would kill a game. Cartridges were of little use as their storage capacity was too low, and although the PC's hard drive could deal with them, not all gamers could afford the kit. CDs, on the other hand, could store an incredible amount of data, allowing stupendous graphics without compromising game size. The enhanced sound capacity offered by CDs allows for speech in games too. The PlayStation's CD drive makes it the ideal machine for adventurers; to see why, check out our round-up of ace PSX adventures starting just over the page...





Secret of Monkey Island



Adept Adventuring



What makes a really good adventure? What is it that separates the great from the merely good, and the good from the dire? Here's extreme PlayStation's answer to these oft-asked questions...

A good adventure must have a consistent atmosphere. You wouldn't expect an alien to pop up in a John Wayne western, and out-of-place features look just as stupid in adventures. For example, a sci-fi game shouldn't include a fairy-tale puzzle such as planting the magic bean and watering it, the beanstalk growing instantly and providing access to a high window. Instead, what's wrong with a Gro-Ray, an experimental device using radio-active beams to energise seeds and accelerate growth? Same result, but achieved without destroying the game's atmosphere.

In a similar vein, objects should be placed logically within the game, not just scattered around like Autumn leaves. You might expect to find a pen or a pair of scissors in a writing desk, but not a pair of garden shears. Likewise, no one keeps their best suit in the garage. Objects placed without rhyme or reason destroy a game's atmosphere and lead the player to question its logic.

An adventure map should be logical. Leaving a location the same way you entered it should take you back to where you came from, not to somewhere else entirely. Some early games deliberately broke this rule to make the game harder, considering mapping a puzzle in itself. All it did, though, was frustrate and get in the way of the puzzle solving. Likewise, there should be few (if any) empty locations. Every area should serve a purpose, whether it holds a puzzle, offers an item or simply advances the plot. There's no point a game boasting about its number of locations when a significant number of them just waste space - no one's fooled.

Some map areas should not be accessible to the player until he's solved puzzles. For example, he might need to fix a cable car before he can get up the mountain, find the train ticket before reaching the next town or simply use a plank to bridge a gap. This keeps the game fresh and exciting by focusing the player's attention where it's needed and then opening new, unseen areas. Wandering through 120 locations looking for a puzzle to solve is plain boring.

A good game should offer lots to do. After building the bare bones of a game, ie. the route from the start to the end and all puzzles and interaction in between, the programmers should use remaining time and space to anticipate incorrect actions. For example, crossing a canal might require stilts. What else might a player try? Swimming, using a table as a raft or even pole-vaulting with a washing line prop. There's nothing duller than being told 'I can't do that' every time. Instead, the raft could sink (if not needed), or the character could protest he gets seasick. Likewise, he could refuse to get his clothes wet by swimming, and the pole vaulting attempt could leave him stuck atop the prop before sliding back to where he started. Thus the player is rewarded for thinking, even if the puzzle isn't solved.

Red herrings shouldn't drown the useful objects. Also, they should be well chosen, not picked at random. For example, some of the above incorrect solutions to the canal problem require objects - if they're not there for some other purpose, they make ideal read herrings; they imply a solution without actually offering one.

Another bane of early adventures, and still a curse in bad ones, is the sudden death. A player might find himself locked in a room with three boxes. One contains the key, the other two poisonous snakes which kill instantly if their boxes are opened. This isn't puzzle-solving, it's trial and error and bloody frustrating to boot. Deaths should be rare, and even then the player should have a chance to escape.

Even worse than the sudden death is the action which makes the game insoluble. A beer bottle essential for a later puzzle might be destroyed if offered to a thug, or a sword needed to kill the dragon guarding the princess might break if used on the rock troll. The player could waste hours of time playing further, without realising the game cannot be completed. Likewise, points of no return should be used carefully. By all means destroy a bridge after the player has crossed to prevent him going back, thus moving the game on, but don't let him leave behind an object he can't do without and had no way of knowing he needed. This should be achieved without interrupting the game's atmosphere, though. If there are good reasons why the programmer doesn't want the player to leave a room until he's found the secret code in the desk drawer, don't just say, 'Isn't there something you should do first?' every time he tries to leave without it. Instead, why not lock the bloody door and put the key in the drawer, with the code on the fob?

Mazes, a series of identical-looking locations with confusing exits, are a legitimate puzzle. They've been done to death over the years though - if you must include one, keep it short.

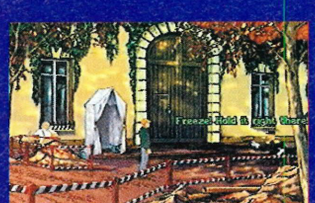
Finally, let's have no atmosphere-destroying adverts. If a software company wants to tell you about their other games, they should use a page in the instruction manual. There's nothing more irritating than wandering around a medieval castle and finding a peasant who wants to tell you about the latest shoot-'em-up.

Amazing Adventures

So much for the history of adventures. What are the best games the PlayStation has to offer? Here's a round-up of what's hot, what's not and what's complete grot...

Broken Sword: Shadow of the Templars

SONY



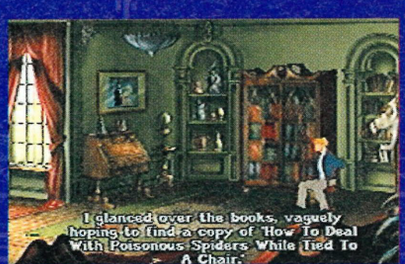
Developers Revolution come to the PSX with an excellent pedigree from the home computers, with games like Lure of the Temptress and Beneath a Steel Sky selling by the bucketload. You play Californian George Stobbart and, while on holiday in France, witness a fatal bombing and become involved in a murder mystery. Revolution are masters of the strong start, throwing you in at the deep end, and this one's no exception. It's also got a smooth learning curve, with early puzzles being a simple matter of talking to other characters and gaining clues. Later puzzles have you scratching your head until you're ankle-deep in dandruff. This is not an easy game.

The game's main fault is the huge loading times taken for speech samples. This is a real pain when you're trying to hold a conversation. Still, the overall quality of the game is good.

80%

Broken Sword 2: The Smoking Mirror

SONY



Interesting. There's some great stuff here, with excellent cartoony graphics offered with a cool sense of humour. Unfortunately some of the puzzles are ridiculously convoluted, suffering from that old bugbear reverse logic, where you do things because you can and not because you want to, your purpose only becoming clear after you've solved the puzzle. Taking the reflective marker from the museum flagpole is a particularly awkward and illogical task (for some reason, you're not allowed to use a nearby ladder), and it's ages before you realise why you needed it anyway. On the 'plus' side, it has one of the strongest opening sections I've seen in ages.

81%

Blazing Dragons

BMG



This comedy adventure is brought to life by voice-overs from Monty Python star Terry Jones. You play Flicker, a dragon with a talent for inventing things. Use these to solve a variety of perplexing but fair puzzles. They're not too tricky, which is just as well as the game's aimed at the younger player.

Genuinely funny characters and a learning curve which allows you to make progress and rewards lateral thinking make this game an ideal adventure for beginners. Look out for it if you found Broken Sword 2 about as easy as nailing jelly to the ceiling.

80%

Alone in the Dark: Jack is Back

INFOGRAMMES



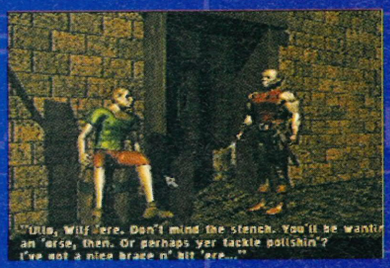
This is the game which redefined the adventure on the PC. Taking place in a genuine 3D environment, you play detective of the supernatural Ed Carnby and must investigate a kidnapping in a spooky mansion. Although full of adventure-style puzzles, you must also be quick on the draw with your trusty pistol and fast with your fists to win through. The emphasis is on brains, but there's an element of brawn in there too.

For all its strengths, Alone in the Dark looks decidedly dated now. When you know what you're doing, it's also very short. Alone in the Dark must be respected as a groundbreaking pioneer, and is indeed a fun game in its own right, but it doesn't wow as it once did. A welcome, if no longer amazing blast from the past.

70%

Chronicles of the Sword

PSYGNOSIS



Another PC conversion, here you play Knight of the Round Table Sir Gawain, and you must team with Merlin the wizard to rid Camelot of the evil witch Morgana. That's the plot - so far, so good but it all goes wrong when you put the disk in the machine and boot up. The background graphics are brilliantly drawn but ridiculously sparse, and the characters look and animate like badly-painted tin men. They take ages to walk from one side of the screen to the other too. If you keep playing long enough to find the puzzles, you see they're in the 'use an object to get another' mould; nothing out of the ordinary, and certainly not enough to save such a poorly-presented game.

60%

City of the Lost Children

PSYGNOSIS



Now here's a weird one. You play a streetwise 12-year-old girl sent to steal by her orphanage headmistress, who's really a pair of Siamese twins. You later get caught in a plot involving a scientist who's ageing prematurely as he can't dream, so he sucks the dream out of children.

The graphics are as depressing as the plot, with dark, moody backdrops offering an impressively oppressive atmosphere. You can almost smell the stale piss. The interface works well too, albeit frustratingly slowly. You have direct control over your character as opposed to the usual point-and-click affair. Pick-uppable objects are offered as soon as you near them, so there's no tedious pointer-dragging. It's not perfect by any means - an in-game map would help, as would the ability to interrupt speech samples, but its mean-and-moody feel make it a worthy alternative to feel-good cartoon adventures.

81%

Cyberia

INTERPLAY



Explore the frozen deserts, take on the international terrorists, steal back the Cyberia device and get back in time for tea and scones with your gran. All in a day's work for your average adventurer.

Cyberia features several different genres, with adventure-style puzzles mixed with action sequences. Trouble is, the game as a whole just doesn't work as well as it should. There's virtually nothing for you to do other than follow the game's predefined path - you don't play it so much as help it along. Deviate even briefly from this path and you either die or get bored stiff as you find there's nothing to do. The game styles fit together poorly too. It's more like playing a series of sub-games than a complete blockbuster. Ho hum.

54%

D

ACCLAIM



What the smeg's going on here? D gives you a time limit of two hours. Fair enough, until you find you have to play it from start to finish in two hours flat, real time. It's not that this is a difficult job in itself, but the game has no save facility, or even a pause function! Make sure you've plenty of time on your hands before you start, and empty your bladder before booting up. This is a deliberate design rather than accidental omission forcing you to play as if the game were for real, but this doesn't stop it being bloody irritating. At two hours game time, it's hardly the largest adventure on the PSX either.

D isn't without its pluses. The graphics are excellent and the vampire-inspired storyline strong, but these come nowhere near saving it. If the developers try making another adventure, I hope they let the player play it how he wants instead of forcing him to play it how they think he should.

62%

Discworld

PSYGNOSIS



Great cartoon-style graphics, an intuitive interface and Eric Idle's witty voice-over make this game a pleasure to play - for an hour or so. After that, you're pulling your hair out trying to work out what to do next. The game's insufferably difficult, in a frustrating rather than challenging way. Its logic is just too wacky and way-out to be followed by anyone who isn't an avid fan of the Terry Prachett novels. Some of the puzzles are terrifyingly obscure, and overall the difficulty level was set too bloody high. By all means give it a go - it's a fun game. Just make sure you've got a solution handy.

80%

Discworld 2: Missing, Presumed...!?

PSYGNOSIS

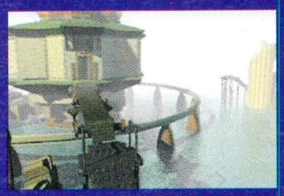


Wacky humour and great cartoon graphics make this a memorable experience. Fans of Terry Pratchett's Discworld novels will find the characters familiar, as well as recognise the Pythonesque humour. The game's warped logic takes some getting used to, but listen for clues when you get something wrong - if you use the wrong object on the compost heap, for example, you're told you 'can' plant that there'. Hmm... shall I look for something to plant? Sometimes the game's logic can be a bit too bizarre, but over all, the game's great sense of fun wins through - especially the dig at the original Crowther-Woods adventure.

86%

Myst

BRODERBUND



Although atmospheric in its own right, Myst's game environment just isn't plausible. The devices, such as the railway and electricity generator, seemed to serve no purpose other than to provide the player with puzzles to overcome. The railway certainly doesn't link destinations, and the generator lacks anything that needs electricity. Apart from the usual plotlines, there is no storyline to unfold. It's just five separate game areas where you run around solving puzzles until you've done enough to go on to the next. Myst features the sort of puzzles found in mid-eighties text adventures, and doesn't seem to have benefited from almost a decade of development in the genre.

Thus, although popular with non-games players, it was less well received on the PlayStation, earning average marks. Hopefully the sequel will prove better.

55%

Little Big Adventure

ELECTRONIC ARTS



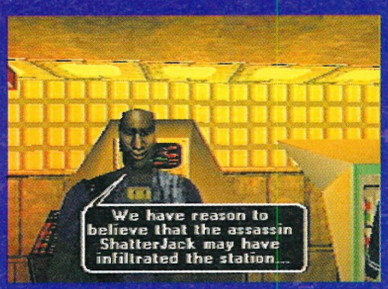
This tongue-in-cheek outing is set on the planet Twinsun which, because it has two suns, is hottest at the poles and coldest on the equator. Four species of intelligent life have evolved, but all live in the grip of the evil Dr FunFrock. The physics of this planet are laughably impossible, but what the flick - its only a game.

Your character, Twinsen (obviously named in honour of the planet) has four distinct moods on offer, and you have to select the correct one to get you through each section of the game. Need to go about your business unnoticed? Choose 'discreet' mood. Speed along in 'athletic' mood, use 'aggressive' for fighting and 'normal' for everything else. Together with the interesting isometric perspective and challenging puzzles, this makes Little Big Adventure an interesting experience.

76%

Sentient

PSYGNOSIS



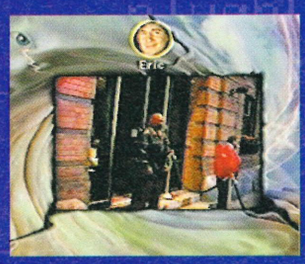
This first-person perspective game is full of atmosphere and suspense. Set in a doomed mining station in a decaying orbit, you half land, half crash into a scene of suspicion and drama. Can you isolate and stop the mystery virus, and will you live long enough to find out?

The game's flaws are plain to see. It's easy to become lost as you wander around the station (come on guys, how about an on-screen map?), and it's easy to miss important things along the way, rendering the game confusing and unsolvable. These flaws aside, Sentient is an absorbing and challenging game.

78%

Psychic Detective

ELECTRONIC ARTS



This little number comes on three disks. Eric, the main man and eponymous psychic detective, has the uncanny ability to see into other peoples' minds. Viewed in the first person perspective, every so often an icon representing another character appears on the screen - you can now switch to that character and see what he sees, gaining clues along the way.

Although a brave attempt at doing something new, it doesn't really work as a game. The FMV is excellent, but takes place in a tiny window in the middle of the screen. You're often offered several alternative perspectives at a time, making the whole thing confusing, and switching to other views is about all you can do - user participation is minimal. Even the sex, violence and profanity couldn't save it.

50%

Clock Tower

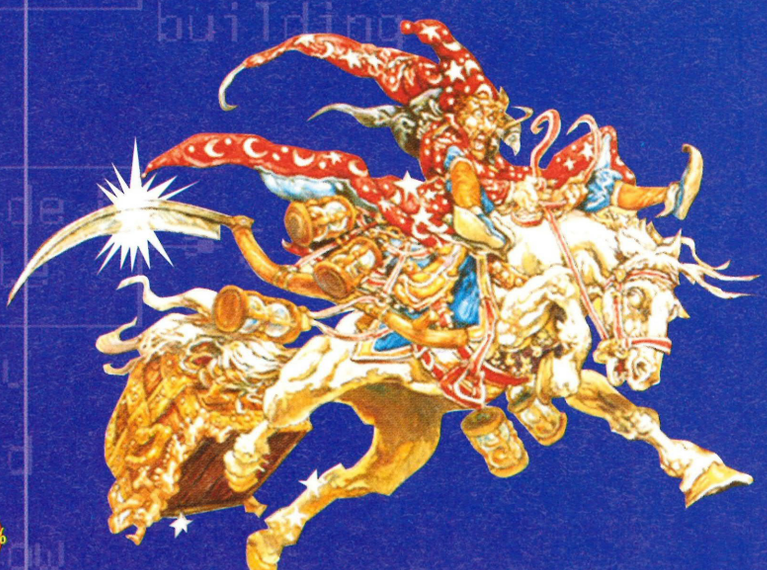
ASCII ENTERTAINMENT



Hmm... this is a game of two halves. The traditional adventure section is slow, badly presented and boring - you just walk around talking to people, waiting for something to happen. When it does, you're plunged into a game of cat and mouse with the sinister Scissorman, the game's big baddie. You must complete certain tasks while avoiding the attentions of the scissor-wielding killer, hiding when he's near or laying a trap to slow him down. This part offers genuine tension.

Hopefully the forthcoming Clock Tower 2 will offer a more consistent adventuring experience.

77%

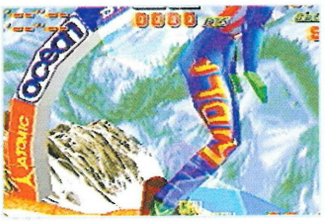


Snow Racer '98

Is there room for yet another winter sports game?

'98 has already seen an avalanche (I can't help it!) of games dedicated to snow-based sports. The winter Olympics haven't helped much either. This issue sees a staggering four ice hockey games, two snowboarding titles and the official Nagano Winter Olympics 98. We've already had Coolboarders 2 (Issue Two) and NHL '98 this year, making nine in total. A few of these titles suffer from being rushed out to coincide with the Winter Olympics. This is definitely a great shame as it gives the PlayStation a bad name; quality should be assured. Gracing the front cover of this magazine is one of those nine titles mentioned, and I can safely say Snow Racer 98 hasn't been a victim of 'NBQS', or to give its full title, 'Nagano Quick Buck Syndrome'. Power And Magic, the French developers, haven't succumbed to this temptation, ensuring every graphical detail and every element of the gameplay is perfect. Read on to see why we think SR98 is THE winter sports game of 1998.



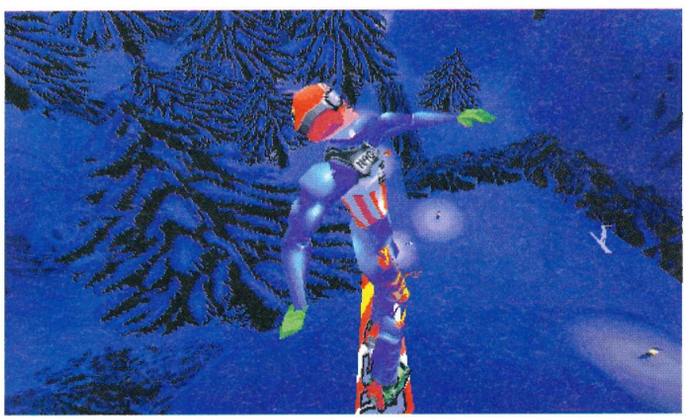







Basically Snow Racer 98 is two games in one. Instead of concentrating their efforts on one simulation, Power And Magic have taken on the task of simulating both alpine skiing and snowboarding. Now, you might be thinking that both sports are very similar, and it's just a simple case of replacing the skis with a snowboard. Well, you'd be right if PAM (Power And Magic) had opted for the easy route, and chosen only Alpine/Hard Boot snowboarding, as this is very close to alpine skiing. But instead they have included both Alpine/Hard Boot and the stunt based Freeride/Soft Boot, a sport very different to alpine skiing (a point Konami managed to overlook in Nagano Winter Olympics 98).

Let's talk snow! The first thing you notice about SR is the awesome environments you're thrusted into. This has to be the first winter sports game where the snow really looks and feels (handling of skis and boards) like snow. The trees look like they have snow upon them, the mountains look like snowy mountains, if you catch my drift (shit, I've done it again!). Sorry Konami, but I'm going to compare SR98 to your Nagano game again. The snow on Nagano winter Olympics has those dodgy black lines flicking across it, making the alpine section look pretty crap. Now, Coolboarders 2 is a good game, I'm not going to start slagging that down, but again, the mountains and snow had those cack edging lines flickering - Snow Racer 98 is as solid as Pamela Anderson's titties. The slopes are packed with detail, from snow-covered huts to cable cars carrying contestants up the piste. On your way down the slopes, you pass under hot air balloons and zoom past spectators cheering you on; the whole feel of the game captures the essence of both sports.

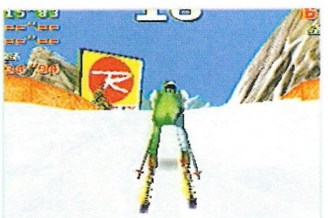


▲ Night-time courses feature brilliant lighting and sound.

Speed Too!

The second major factor that kicks you in the knackers is the speed of the game. It's BLOODY fast! If I were allowed to use stronger language to describe the fastness of the game, I would. Well, put it this way: Snow Racer 98 is as fast as 'Following Unlawful Carnal Knowledge'. The alpine skiing sections send you hurtling down the face of the mountain, with you edging frantically around each turn, holding on for dear life. This is also true of the snowboarding events; the blue ice found on many parts of the courses get you up to speeds in excess of 100mph.

As I've said already, the game is split into two events. The first is Ski, the alpine skiing section. After selecting your character, you can choose between Downhill, Giant Slalom and Combined. Downhill has no gates; simply fly straight down in the quickest time. SR98 uses a timer and checkpoints to give it that arcade feel; each checkpoint rejuvenates the timer with extra precious seconds. When you finally manage to make it down the course (the Ski event is addictively difficult), you're awarded points on your position relative to the other five skiers; whoops, I forgot to mention you're battling it out with other skiers on the way down, Tricky! Giant Slalom is again against the clock and five other skiers, but you also have to pass successfully through every gate on the course. Miss one and you get a time penalty; miss five and you're disqualified. Combined, as you've already guessed, is both Downhill



"...Snow Racer 98 is as fast as 'Following Unlawful Carnal Knowledge'..."

FUNKI GUYS AND FIT CHICS

NAME: BRUCE WESSON	NAME: ROBERTO ALONZI	NAME: INGE MAYER	NAME: ERIC LAPLACE	NAME: KENI MINOSOKI
NATIONALITY: AMERICAN	NATIONALITY: ITALIAN	NATIONALITY: GERMAN	NATIONALITY: FRENCH	NATIONALITY: JAPANESE
AGE: 26	AGE: 26	AGE: 29	AGE: 34	AGE: 16
HEIGHT: 1.80M	HEIGHT: 1.80M	HEIGHT: 1.87M	HEIGHT: 2.17M	HEIGHT: 1.76M
WEIGHT: 82KG	WEIGHT: 82KG	WEIGHT: 57KG	WEIGHT: 127KG	WEIGHT: 68KG













and Giant Slalom. You do both courses, with your points from each being added together to determine the winner. On all the Ski courses you get nine points for a win, six for second, three for third, one for fourth and bugger all for fifth and last places.

Pot of Gold!

Next on the agenda is snowboarding; this is split into two separate versions. The first is Freeride snowboarding, which is also split into Downhill, Giant Slalom, and Combined. Downhill consists of getting down the slope within five minutes, plus you have to undertake at least 1500 points-worth of stunts along the way, so it's a case of finding a good time/points ratio to win. Giant Slalom is a huge ramp where you must perform a stunt worth over 1500 hundred points. These ramps get larger the further you progress. Combined, as with Ski, is both events with the points being amalgamated.

Last but not least is Alpine snowboarding. Again, this is split in the same sections as the other two. Downhill gives you the task of reaching the bottom of the slope within the checkpoint times; fail to reach a check within the time and you are disqualified. You also have to perform a minimum of 500 points-worth of stunts along the way. This is a lot fewer than Freeride due the time limit, and the fact that Hardboot boards are longer and aren't really designed to pull off classy-looking stunts. Giant Slalom is very similar to the Ski section, except you don't go between gates but around them. And by now, you don't need an explanation of the Combined section.

Every event also has a time attack, allowing you to pick a course and try your hand at smashing records. This option also has a ghost mode to let you know how you're fairing against previous attempts. There's a two-player mode that allows you to battle it out against a pal, but the speed of the game is drastically reduced. This has to be expected though, and is really the norm with most fast games once translated into multi-play.

"...Power And Magic have taken on the task of simulating both alpine skiing and snowboarding..."

Board Stoopid!

All of the boards and skis are brand names. In the Skiing section you can chose different skis, width and length, from Dynastar, Atomic, Dynamic, Rossignol, Salomon, K2.



▲ CPU opponents beef up the ski sections.

In keeping with the rest of the game, PAM have included a large selection of characters to chose from. These are cartoony/anime in look, giving a kind of cool edge to the proceedings. All have been accumulated from different countries, with varying ages, height and weight.

NAME:	TERJI HAAS	NAME:	CHRIS HOBNER	NAME:	JOHN SMITH	NAME:	GINA BALTO	NAME:	HERMAN SPIID
NATIONALITY:	FINNISH	NATIONALITY:	AUSTRIAN	NATIONALITY:	AMERICAN	NATIONALITY:	ITALIAN	NATIONALITY:	GERMAN
AGE:	24	AGE:	38	AGE:	34	AGE:	16	AGE:	24
HEIGHT:	1.85M	HEIGHT:	1.74M	HEIGHT:	2.17M	HEIGHT:	1.76M	HEIGHT:	1.85M
WEIGHT:	75KG	WEIGHT:	77KG	WEIGHT:	127KG	WEIGHT:	68KG	WEIGHT:	75KG















The stunts available are top notch! The camera sometimes pans to the side to give you an even better view. The time in the air is awesome, a real feeling of being free!

"...The 3D engine is super-fast, bringing trees and other obstacles to you in a blink of an eye..."

The snowboarding selection boasts makes by A, K2, Nidecker, Original Sin, Oxygen, Rossignol, Salomon, Burton and Morrow. All of the equipment is on display, showing off all of the funky designs and shapes.

Realism makes SR98 shine. When you're snowboarding, the smoothness of turn is extraordinary, making this, in my eyes, the best snowboarding simulation available. The handling of the skier is also quality - edging around turns at 110mph in an Alpine Racer stylee. The 3D engine, as I've already mentioned, is super-fast, bringing trees and other obstacles to you in a blink of an eye. The SFX in the game are exemplary, flaunting both reverb and Doppler. Doppler is used on the cowbells hit by the spectators as you pass them. If you don't know or understand doppler, higher frequencies travel further than low ones - for example, when you hear a siren of an ambulance it's difficult to tell where it's coming from, as you can't hear the low frequencies until it's a lot closer. Anyway, where was I? Oh yeah, there's doppler on SFX.

With 15 different courses and three different styles of event on each, you're guaranteed getting ya money's worth. SR98 is also very difficult, but in an 'I'm gonna beat this' kind of way. If you're looking for a winter sports simulation, SR98 is up with the likes of Coolboarders 2. And with the added alpine skiing sections, you won't be classed as a madman for buying both.



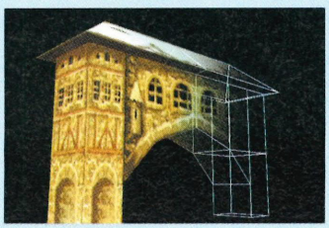
PAM have perfected graphical details like lens flare.

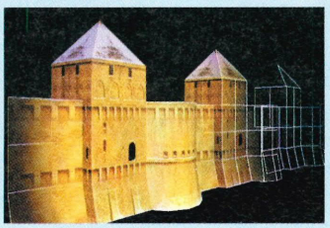




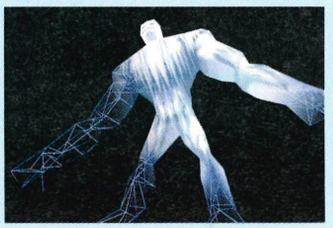
LOOKIN' GOOD

Detail is everything! A winter sports game wouldn't be authentic without the usual tit-bits. Here's a closer look at the buildings featured in the game, and if you're lucky while playing, you might even find an abominable snowman wandering around looking for a mate.



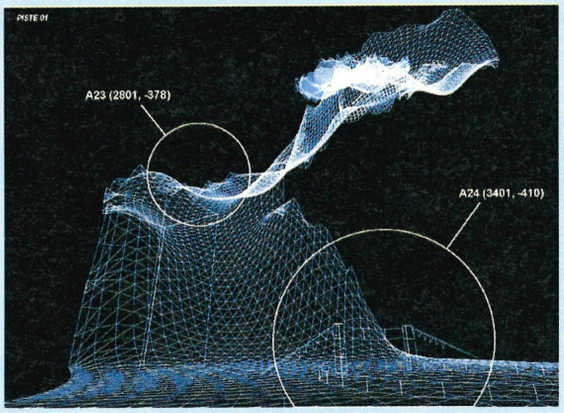






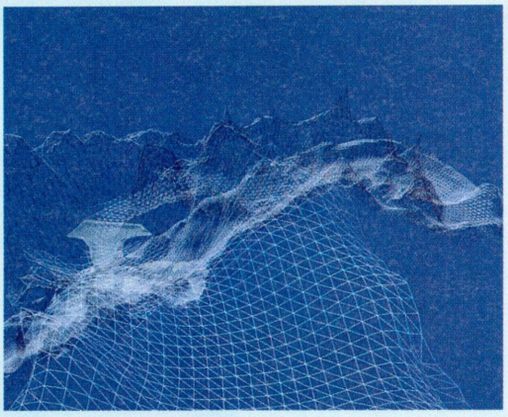
PISTE UP

All of the snowboarding courses have multiple routes, giving the player that 'freedom' feeling. This leads to a player being able to explore, giving the courses a kind of 3D level slant. PAM have definitely pushed the boat out with the course designs. Here are a few development shots to show just how much work really goes into creating an environment.









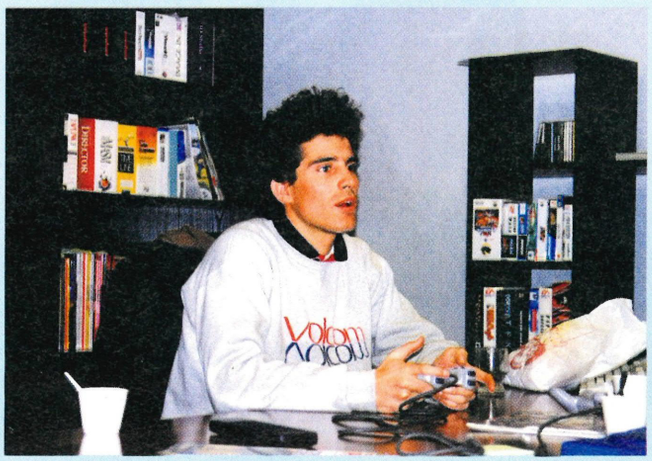


BABS

Simulations these days have to be as realistic as possible; this is where motion capture and an overseer are essential. Power And Magic took on the talents of Babs, rated eighth in the world at snowboarding, and the French number one. He was used for all the snowboarding tricks, and worked closely with the animators to make sure that the smallest snowboarding details were achieved.

In France, Babs is regarded as a lifestyle guru; gracing snowboarding magazines every month, plus endorsing products from snowboards to trainers. When we met him in Paris, he was just finishing the final touches to Snow Racer 98 before flying off to Nagano to compete in the Half Pipe at the Olympics.

There's also a hidden rendered image of Babs tucked away in a cave somewhere on one of the courses. Can you find him?









Second Opinion

It's hard to split SR 98 and Coolboarders 2, I'm still undecided which is ultimately better. SR 98 does have the extra alpine skiing courses, edging it past CB 2 in the longevity stakes. But CB 2 does get my juices flowing quicker. A strange paradox!

Saul

The Score

Publisher	OCEAN SOFTWARE
Developer	POWER & MAGIC
Released	APRIL
Version	UK
Price	£39.99
Genre	SPORTS SIM
Players	1-2

GAMEPLAY
9

ORIGINALITY
8

LIFESPAN
8

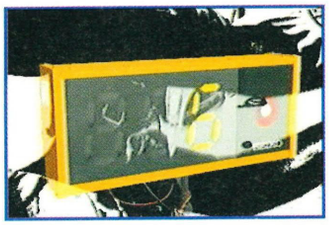
SOUND
8

GRAPHICS
9

OVERALL
90%

in summary

A gold medal, drug-free, winning performance, man!









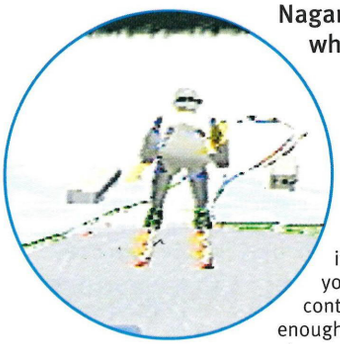
Nagano Winter Olympics 98

With a wealth of sports sims under their belt, including the unforgettable Track and Field and the awesome ISS Pro, surely Konami can't balls up on the wintry slopes of Japan?





Nagano Winter Olympics is a multi-event sports simulation. There are 13 in all; here's a run-down of what's cool and what's not.



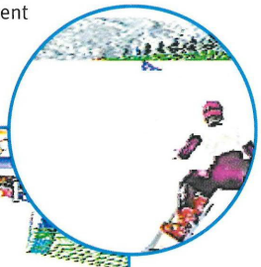
Alpine Skiing - Downhill

You kick off your Olympics with the Downhill. It's a race against time, but you must also pass through all the gates successfully. You're disqualified if you miss a single gate, and also if you're out of the qualifying time. The control method for your skier is simple enough, although the jerky actions make smooth turns impossible. The snow looks like a patchwork quilt made by an old Siberian blind woman with frostbite. It's pretty tough to get within the time, but it looks and plays crap so you're not compelled to persevere. Not a good start, and twelve more to go - things must get better!



Snowboarding - Giant Slalom

Of all the snowboarding competitions, Konami had to pick the worst. This is basically the same as Alpine skiing except on a snowboard. Big Air or Half Pipe would have been much more fun and added variety to the game. The snowboarder is sluggish, with his movements being very unrealistic. The event lacks speed; completing the downhill 930m course within the time limit is very easy. A real disappointment!



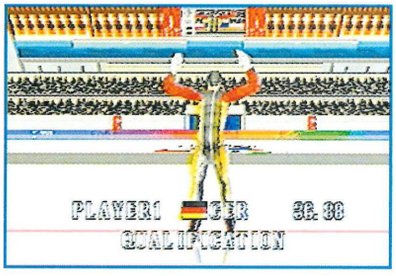


Alpine Skiing - Super-G

This is a 2,420m course which is supposed to test 'speed and technique'. Again, you're put off straight away by the black edging lines constantly flickering across the snow. The actual event is boring; it's tough, but not fun. There's no sense of speed, no adrenaline rush to keep you occupied. Videogame Alpine skiing needs that little extra programmed into it. Okay, the scenery's nice to look at, there's touches like powder oozing from the back of your skis, but so much more could have been added! Thumbs down on event two.







Speed Skating - 500m

This is a race around one lap of the track, plus 100m. It's supposed to be all in the cornering, but I found you could win and receive gold while taking the corners as wide as you like. Your speed is increased by repeatedly tapping the square and circle buttons, but you still skate if you stop tapping! I never felt in control of my skater; no real skill is involved in winning this event. On the 'plus' side, the skaters, stadium and track look great, but let's be honest - you don't look at the mantelpiece while you're poking the fire.

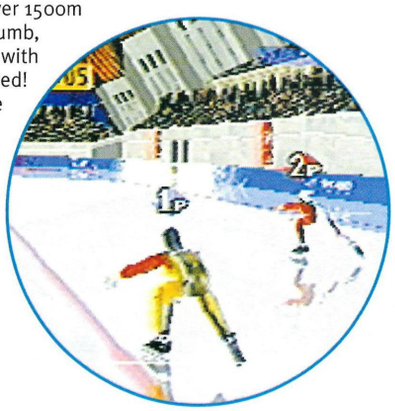
Alpine Skiing - Giant Slalom

This event saves the Alpine skiing section. P-R-A-I-S-E the Lord! This is a complex course, so the lack of speed is lost as you're always trying to get through the gates. Either I'm getting used to it, or for some reason the glitching of the snow seems to have decreased. As with the other two Alpine events, getting a good time is pretty tough, but you're now driven to do so. More turning and less crouching is cool!



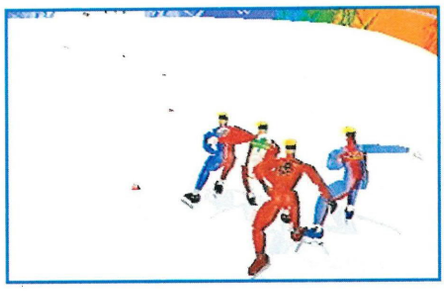
Speed Skating - 1500m

This is the same as the previous event, except it's three laps plus 300m. Tapping the buttons for three laps might seem a long time, but for anyone whose played Track and Field, Hyper Sports or Athlete Kings, this is fairly simple. The longer track does add enjoyment over the shorter circuit, but again, you really don't feel you're contributing enough to the victory. Over 1500m your fingers should be numb, with your hands burning with cramp - this is not achieved! As I have said before, the fact that your skater continues to peg it down the ice even when you've stopped battering the pad is a real cock-up! Overall, the speed skating section isn't gonna give you a hard-on.



Short Track - 500m

This is more like it! The race length is 4.5 laps of the track. You must sprint to get the inside track, and then battle to keep hold of it. Tapping the square and circle buttons increases your speed, with the direction pad moving you from the inside to the outside of the lane. There's also an energy bar which brings a strategic element to the race. You lose energy very quickly, so it's a case of getting in front and then replenishing your energy at the right moments. If behind, you must battle off the opponents to keep position, plus plan an attack on the leader. This is what Winter and Summer Olympic videogames are all about - easy to pick up, difficult to win, but frantic enough to keep you interested.



Short Track - 1000m

Same as the previous event, but longer - yippee! The race length is nine laps around the track, so stamina and strategy play a huge part. The energy bar hasn't been increased to match the longer race; holding onto the lead for the full nine laps is virtually impossible. This leads to excellent tussles for positions throughout the race. Top notch!

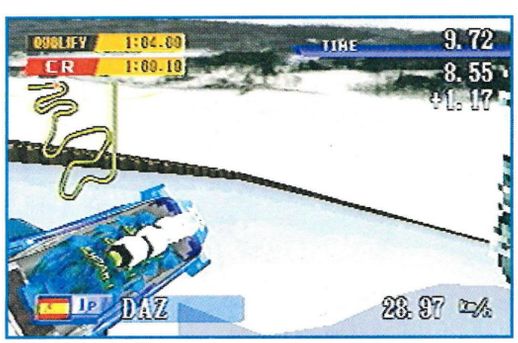


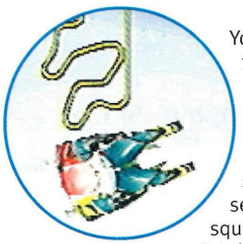


Bobsleigh

This is the four-man version. You start sprinting down the ice by tapping the square and circle buttons. Once you've reached a certain speed, you can then press either the triangle or X button to instruct your men to board the bobsleigh - pilot, second man, third man and breaker. If you don't get everyone on board you're disqualified.

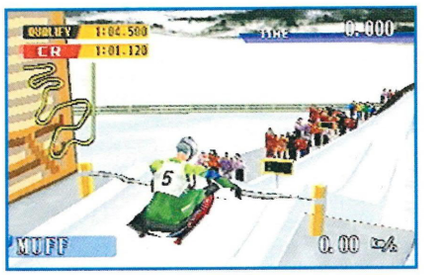
The actual boarding sequence is very good, but once you're on the run things start going 'Pete Tong'. It's only a simple right and left control system, but as in keeping with many of the events, you don't feel in control. You can't really gain speed off the high turns, with major clipping occurring when you hit the sides. Should have titled this event 'Bollox' instead of 'Bobsleigh'.

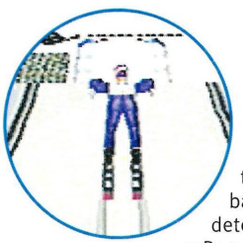




Luge

Your start is determined by a power gauge that increases and decreases in a cycle. The higher the better, and with usually only a few hundredths of a second splitting the first three, a good start is essential. Here we go again! The idea for starting the luge is pretty cool; after selecting the power you have to tap the square and circle to gain speed, but from then on it is literally all downhill. The luge is definitely the most likely to grab the 'Sh*tist Event' crown from the Bobsleigh. The control method is the same as the Bobsleigh, so to save the use of foul language - I'll leave it at that.



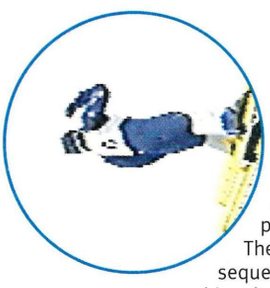


Ski Jumping - Large Hill

The idea here is to jump for distance, but also maintaining a good posture in the air to receive points from the judges. At the base of the jump, a gauge appears to determine the angle of your jump; pressing L1 or R1 selects the angle you desire. Once in the air you must press either left or right to straighten your posture if the wind direction puts you off course. To land you must press either L1 or R1. Your distance and scores are added together, and the total scores of the two jumps you perform are added to calculate your grand total.

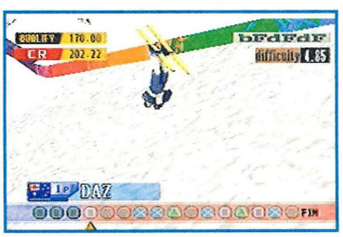
The control system works well; the gauge is very easy to follow. The wind vane for determining the wind direction is also very useful. The event's main downfall is that it isn't really fun. The Ski Jump section should be one of the most exciting events in the game, but lack of thought keeps it very average indeed. Changing the camera angle to first-person view while in the air would have added a little kick to the proceedings. It's not bad, but definitely not brilliant.





Freestyle - Aerials

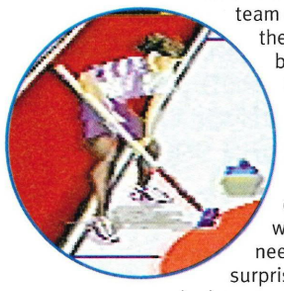
Cupid Stunts! This could have been somethin' else, but you've guessed it - it isn't. You have to perform stunts off a ramp. You pick the stunt first, then perform it by pressing the button sequence at the bottom of the screen. The whole problem with this is the fact that the button sequences are around 20 presses long. You're constantly watching the bottom of the screen to see if you're pressing the right buttons, instead of watching the very spectacular stunts. Okay, you can watch the replay, but surely a better control system could have been used so you can view the whole thing. The stunts could have included direction presses, similar to Coolboarders 2. You have to perform two stunts with points being awarded for difficulty; these are added together for a final score. This event could have been the 'star' event that shined out, showing innovation and style, instead, it reeks of cack.





Curling

Sounds boring, but this is actually one of the better events in the game. You first choose the angle in which the stone is to be directed, and then how much force is used to propel it down the ice. One of the women from your team curls the stone, with the other two frantically brushing in front of it to increase and decrease its speed. At the end of the ice alley is a large target; the stone which stops nearest the centre wins. Four teams compete, so you play two rounds to determine the winner. Slow but fun, and with quite a lot of skill needed to place the stone well, this is definitely the surprise package of the game. Graphically, this event looks very good. You can press the triangle button while curling to change the camera angle when nearing the target, which is very useful. The whole control system and simulation has been well thought out.







▲ The shoulder buttons can be used to change the view on the courses and stadiums on the event select screen.



▲ The control system for every event is easily accessed.

Second Opinion

The sheer number of events seems to have diluted the effort gone into perfecting the gameplay for each one - they are essentially little changed from a game on a similiar theme from a decade ago. Shockingly Curling (turgid in reality) is the most enjoyable to play. What a topsy-turvy world, eh?

Christian

The Closing Ceremony

As you've probably guessed from the breakdown of the events, I feel Nagano Winter Olympics 98 is, well, crap. Okay, some of the events are playable, some are quite enjoyable, but overall you'd expected more from a game that boasts thirteen different events. The fun element is non-existent. The only aspect that saves this title from the 'Extreme Pit of Sh*t' is the four-player option. If you've got a Sony Multi-Tap, three friends and two crates of Stella, you'll probably have a good time. But a game really needs to stand alone, and not depend on the multi-player feature. A good multi-player option should be a bonus.

As I see it, Konami have simply rushed this title out in time for the Olympics. There are too many flaws to even consider giving this a good score. This is a real shame as, like many other people, I was really looking forward to bashing my way around the snow-driven mountains of Japan.

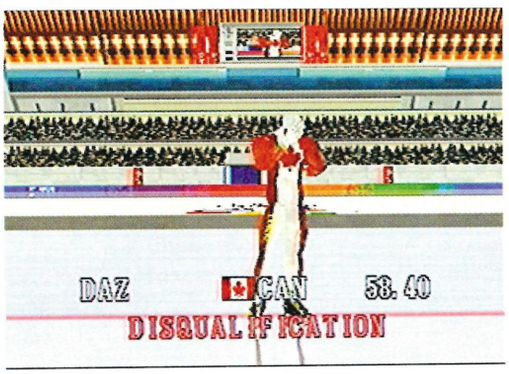
The control system for nearly every event, except for only two or three, is complete bollox, which isn't like Konami. They've published many great sports sims over the years, including the awesome, ground-breaking, genre-creating Track and Field.

If you're looking for some inspiration boys, go back to ya roots, man!



DARREN





The Score

Publisher	KONAMI
Developer	IN HOUSE
Released	OUT NOW
Version	UK
Price	£39.99
Genre	WINTER SPORTS
Players	1-4
Memory Card	✔
Multi-Tap	✔
Analog Pad	✔

GAMEPLAY
4

ORIGINALITY
7

LIFESPAN
4

SOUND
6

GRAPHICS
7

OVERALL
50%

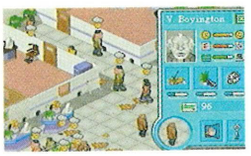
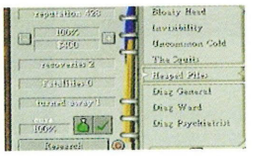
in summary

A real disappointment.

Theme Hospital

'Casualty' was never like this...

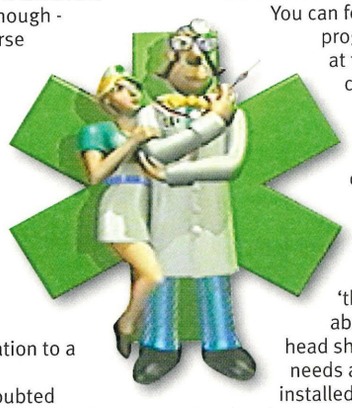




And we thought Thatcher was out to wreck the NHS? Bullfrog's Theme Hospital does in an afternoon what 18 years of Tory misrule positively failed to do, ie. turn healthcare into a business. As a hospital administrator you must attract patients like a shopping mall attracts customers and pander to their every need, sending them home safe and well.

You start the game by building essential rooms and facilities such as a reception area, a GP's office and a pharmacy. When ready, you open your hospital to the hoards of sickly patients who turn up to use your facilities. If you've organised your hospital well the sick and needy will find their own way around. If someone wanders too far, though, you can point them in the right direction. You control every aspect of the hospital's management, including finances, staff hiring and firing, facility building and research into new diseases and cures. Keep your staff happy or they leave, make sure there are enough benches for waiting patients and check the hospital is warm enough - there's nothing worse than being cold when you're ill. To complete the game's ten levels you must fulfil a specific objective, which could be earning pots of dosh, curing a certain number of sick patients or raising your reputation to a given level.



Despite its undoubted depth as a strategy outing, Theme Hospital has been put together with a serious sense of fun. There's a great tutorial at the start, where you're basically told what to do and why you're doing it. This is a great way to ease you into the game. The interface has been put together with the user in mind too - although complex at first, after a few plays it's invisible.

You can follow your progress by looking at the various characters trundling around your hospital. If there's a queue outside the GP's office, build another one to take the strain. If the 'thought bubble' above a patient's head shows a bog roll, he needs a crap - have you installed enough toilets? It's thus best to start with a small hospital, fleshing it out when you can see what you need.

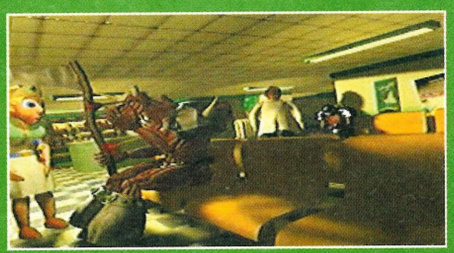
Even the most cursory glance at the screenshots tells you the game has a keen sense of humour. It just refuses to take itself too seriously. Check out the diseases: inflation (swollen heads), baldness, invisibility (all you see are a pair of boots, a brolly and a bowler hat), bloaty head and flat tongue. This is a serious sim with its tongue firmly in its cheek.

"...Theme Hospital has been put together with a serious sense of fun..."

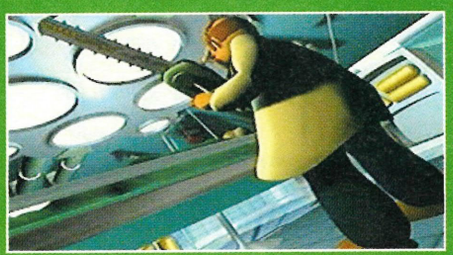
On the whole, Theme Hospital is a good game. It hangs together well, offering seriously deep and involved gameplay, but without becoming anal-retentively awkward to play. There are one or two problems, though. Staff members doing similar jobs all look alike, making things very confusing. For

ONLY WHEN I LAUGH

Even the intro sequence is filled with marvellous tongue-in-cheek humour. Check out these examples and la ugh until you split your sides (then run until you get a stitch in them)... The grim reaper sits awaiting treatment, while wonder doc puts down his PlayStation and grabs the trolley and wheels the patient into the operating theatre. Just as he's about to operate (with a chainsaw!), he gets a message saying the patient's medical credit has run out. Disaster! The operation is cancelled and the patient ejected.

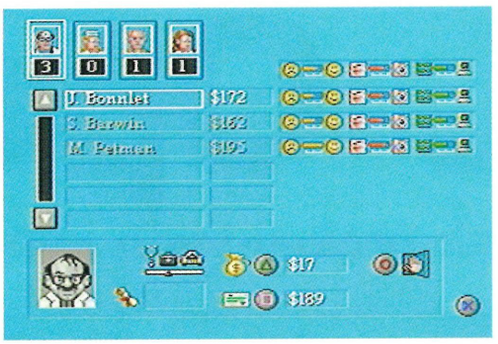


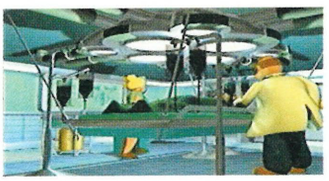












example, all handymen share the same sprite, as do all doctors, nurses and receptionists. You have to click on the character to find out which person it is. Also, although the game's ten levels are huge and plenty enough to keep you going, why not include a free-play option where you could build and maintain a hospital purely for its own sake? After all, king of the God games Sim City gave us the chance to build and maintain a settlement purely for the hell of it, with no victory conditions and no terms of failure, unless you performed so badly you went bankrupt. Even this could be avoided if you knew the money cheat. A similar option in Theme Hospital would be a boon.

Perhaps the biggest criticism of Theme Hospital is very much a matter of opinion rather than a clear flaw in the game, namely, how exciting can hospital administration be? The patients are pretty anonymous - you won't get a buzz out of healing them on an individual level, and en masse they're little more than statistics. Bullfrog's previous game Theme Park suffered from similarly anonymous characters, but when they rushed around in groups they were enjoying themselves - seeing them so happy was rewarding. Can Theme Hospital, where the idea is to get rid of the characters rather than keep them with you, say the same? Needless to say this is for the individual to decide - personally, I found maintaining an efficient healthcare facility very rewarding, albeit not as much fun as building a theme park.

Arcade-orientated button-bashers won't be won over by Theme Hospital, but those who like their games a little more cerebral should find it to their liking. A worthy game, but not for everyone.

IAN



DEVELOPING YOUR HOSPITAL

As you build funds, you can invest in bigger and better facilities. Here's an example of a hospital from the first level. Later in the game, as you face tougher, more complex diseases and epidemics, more treatment and diagnostic rooms become available, especially specialist clinics.

1: Reception: Your first task is to hire a receptionist and place a reception desk near the main doors. Without a receptionist, no one will come to your hospital. Place some benches in the reception area for patients to sit on (no one likes to stand when they're sick), and a drinks machine in case they get thirsty. Hire a handyman to pick up their litter.
2: Staff Room: This is where your staff take a break. If your staff room is too small or is poorly stocked, your staff get tired and miserable. Make sure there's a TV and a comfy sofa, and if you're feeling extra generous, put a pool table in there too.
3: GP's Office: The GP's office has a desk, a chair and a filing cabinet, though you can add radiators, plants and the like if you wish. You need to hire a doctor to work in the GP's office.
4: General Diagnosis: This room starts with a screen and a crash trolley. This room aids the diagnosis procedure and makes sure the patient's condition is fully identified. A patient arrives with his condition 0% diagnosed. He visits the GP's office and this figure is increased according to the doctor's skill. If it's still less than 100%, the patient can visit the more specialist diagnosis rooms such as this one.
5: Pharmacy: This is where patients go to collect prescriptions, and is an important part of the hospital. All it contains is a pharmacy cabinet (though you can add fire extinguishers, radiators and the usual fripperies), but you need a nurse to work there.
6: Toilets: I'm sure these need no further explanation. If you don't put in enough toilets, the patients piss on the floor. They contain a sink and a khazi.
7: Psychiatric Room: The psychiatric room serves as both a treatment and diagnostic centre. Containing a couch (of course), a screen and a comfortable chair, you need to hire a doctor with psychiatric skills to work in the psychiatric room.
8: Wards: Wards are less important than you would expect in a Theme Hospital facility; this hospital has far too many of them. They're used for diagnosis and for resting patients waiting for an operation. A nurse must be hired to work here. Later in the game, when you have a ward you can build an operating theatre in which to carry out operations.
9: Inflation Clinic: Clinics are set up to deal with specific diseases. This one's for inflation, a curious comedy disease which causes people's heads to swell. It contains an inflator, a specialist piece of medical equipment.



Second Opinion

Theme Hospital takes Theme Park that little bit futher. If you enjoyed the first, you'll love this. Every detail of hospital life has been covered, even down to people using the crapper. Bullfrog strikes again, can't wait for Theme Whorehouse.

Darren

The Score

Publisher	ELECTRONIC ARTS
Developer	BULLFROG
Released	27TH MARCH
Version	UK
Price	£39.99
Genre	STRATEGY
Players	1
Memory Card	✔

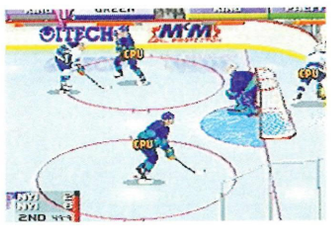
GAMEPLAY
7
ORIGINALITY
9
LIFESPAN
8
SOUND
8
GRAPHICS
9
OVERALL
82%

in summary

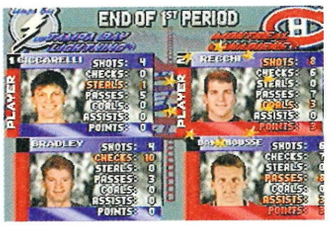
More balls than a double hernia...

NHL Open Ice

Tongue-in-cheek broken-teeth sub-zero action, anyone?







Unlike the three (count 'em) other ice hockey games reviewed this issue, NHL Open Ice takes its cue from the ever-popular NBA Jam in its approach to accurately representing the intricacies and technicalities of a complex sport. In other words, it removes all the boring bits that slow things down and gives the players 'It's a Knockout'-style massive heads. The action here is strictly two-on-two (plus a CPU goalie), with the player given full control of one skater and the shots and passing of his computer-steered team-mate, allowing professional-looking cross-rink manoeuvres to be pulled off simply and stylishly. Controls are simple, including straightforward pass, shoot or turbo actions, with buttons doubling as body check and steal when you're off the puck.

Even though the play area is flattened and truncated compared to a full team version, there's still plenty of space to slide about and run away cowering from the hulking opposition, plus enough room to get a nice long run-up to launch a crunching mid-air body check from their blindside. The feel and movement of the players is excellent, despite the resolutely arcade nature of the game, sweeping up and down the ice nicely and skidding to spray-stops with ease. For such a simplified game the physics are also excellent, with just enough momentum to feel genuine, while players can also skate backwards (allowing for some sharp and nasty stick-work) and barge opponents mercilessly into the walls with just a twitch of the controls. Shooting accuracy depends on the timing and speed of the attacking player rather than the direction they're pointing, with the angles between puck, net and goalie crucial to success. The balance seems to work out just right though, allowing hi-speed passing shots through to goal-line scrambles to be represented satisfyingly, with plenty of scoring action rather then robotic repeated saves by the computer. However, things can become a little scrum-like when all four players are in close proximity to each other, and the puck often gets lost in the confusion, which is true to reality as well, I suppose. Besides, it does add to the frenetic qualities of the game. The 'Player 1' marker is clear enough most of the time to distinguish you from your team-mate, although occasionally it's a little easy to mistake one for the other (especially when they collide) and try to skate off controlling the CPU character, possibly with disastrous results.

Pucking hell...

What really sets Open Ice apart from others of a similar ilk is the addition of various special moves that are activated by shooting while moving under turbo assistance, and include spectacular somersault and high-speed slap shots. As well as this there's the NBA Jam-inspired 'He's on fire!' feature, gained by scoring repeated goals, stealing the puck and pulling off body checks. When the corresponding energy bar at the top of the screen is full, the puck starts to flame and the player in question becomes bigger, quicker and tougher than before; at least until the opposition score a goal. If the blessed player scores, though, the entire net catches fire. Get three in a row and it explodes entirely. Monster! As well as this, the players sometimes swell in size when shooting if the shot is hard, and leave a vapour trail in their wake if travelling at a high enough speed. And, of course, the swollen heads bring a welcome touch of gigantism to any sports arena, so set that option to 'Large', baby.

Surprisingly all the American and Canadian teams are present, with each player possessing Skate, Shoot, Pass and Check attributes, all of which make quite a large impact during the game. A good touch is that unlike many other sports games there is no one team that can easily trounce all the others, neatly avoiding the 'I want to be Germany' syndrome. Other features include a handy Coach's Clinic, where a grizzled veteran gives you his tips on technique, and a Hall of Fame bracketed by cheesy digitised cheerleaders juggling (!). Commentary is genuine and all-American, although it has a few phrasing glitches ("The DEVils playing the DUcks"), while the in-game sound captures the incessantly cheerful nature of an ice hockey match, including players calling for passes, the ubiquitous 'bum-bum-bum-bum' Wurlitzers, the clack of sticks and the soothing crunch of body on barrier.

As a simulation for the dedicated ice hockey fan, NHL Open Ice is of course unsuitable. However, for knockabout arcade japes and fun-packed action it's a definite winner, especially so in two-player and multi tap mode, as the game's particularly easy to pick up and play without any previous experience. Where are the Zambonies, though?



CHRISTIAN



Second Opinion

Excellent multi-player action ice Hockey. definitely the most fun of all four games here.

Saul

"...there's enough room to get a nice long run-up to launch a crunching mid-air body check from their blindside..."

The Score

Publisher	MIDWAY
Developer	AVALANCHE
Released	APRIL
Version	UK
Price	£39.99
Genre	SPORTS SIM
Players	1-4
Memory Card	✔
Multi Tap	✔

GAMEPLAY **9**

ORIGINALITY **7**

LIFESPAN **6**

SOUND **6**

GRAPHICS **6**

OVERALL **80%**

in summary

Pucking good fun.

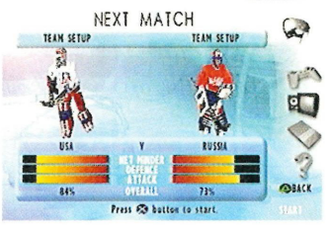


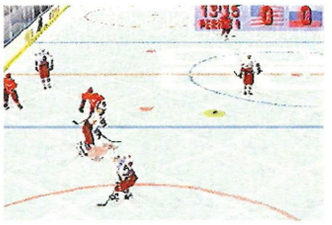
Actua Ice Hockey

At last, England make the Olympic Ice Hockey tournament.









Gremlin have managed to procure the official Olympic licence for their first outing on the ice hockey rink. However, they've bent the rules a little and included the British team, who won't actually be in Nagano when the tournament kicks off.

Actua Ice Hockey closely follows the Actua series, delivering a fast-paced simulation with enough arcade elements to keep everybody happy. The excellent motion-captured animation helps give the game its smooth and fast pace, but I'm afraid to say Actua Ice Hockey is the least playable game in the Actua series. It's also the least polished of the series, as there are a number of annoying bugs in place. For instance, it sometimes takes an absolute age for the computer team to turn up for a penalty or face off. Also, at the end of a period, the camera seems to go a bit mad. Perhaps if the game wasn't tied in with the Olympics, Gremlin would have had time to fix this.

Actua games are renowned for their intuitive and well thought out control systems, but Actua Ice Hockey doesn't really deliver in this department. Passing and shooting are fine, but once you're off the puck the control system seems to lose it slightly. Changing players is a real nightmare because the game runs at such a fast pace. No sooner have you selected a player close to the puck that it shoots off down the rink and you have to select another player. Another problem is the momentum of your players, something which NHL Face Off '98 got just right. Trying to stop your selected team member in Actua Ice Hockey is like trying to stop an arctic truck on black ice. This causes all sorts of problems as you whiz past the puck or the player you're trying to bodycheck.

A problem I found with Face Off '98 was that there is no kind of ice hockey atmosphere at all in the game. Actua Ice Hockey is totally the opposite to this - a goal results in an array of flashing disco lights, organ crescendos and screams from the crowd. The whole thing oozes atmosphere, apart from the commentary which is extremely poor. I was looking forward to some really interesting commentary on Actua Ice Hockey as the last Actua game, Actua Soccer 2 had some of the best dialogue I've ever heard.

> **"...Graphically, Actua Ice Hockey is up there with the best of them. The whole game oozes visual quality..."**

It's a shame, then, that the commentary on Actua Ice Hockey is always repeating itself and making stupid mistakes throughout the whole of the game. I can't understand how Gremlin could have cocked this up after the excellence of Actua Soccer 2 - could it be that Actua Ice Hockey was a little rushed?

On the simulation front, Actua Ice Hockey cannot be beaten. I'd rather play a worldwide tournament than an NHL tournament as I can relate more easily to the teams involved. Your team set-up can be changed and each nation comes with a host of stats. Canada and the USA seem to be the best teams to choose, whereas most of the European teams pale in comparison. I'm not a big ice hockey follower but surely some of the European teams can give the North American's a run for their money in real life.

Graphically, Actua Ice Hockey is up there with the best of them. The whole game oozes visual quality although I think the players are a little too small. There are all the usual camera angles for you to choose, but the long distance ones are a bit useless due to the size of the players on the rink.

Despite the control system lacking in certain departments, Actua Ice Hockey is still playable - with a little perseverance. If it didn't have to be out in time for the Olympics the flaws would probably have been ironed out. I'm afraid Actua Ice Hockey is the classic example of a rushed game; it could have been great, but instead it's just all right.



SAUL



Second Opinion

The Winter Olympics has cursed this game with being hurried, I reckon. Too many silly gaps and glitches to be competitive with the rest of the pack.

Christian

The Score

Publisher	GREMLIN
Developer	IN HOUSE
Released	OUT NOW
Version	UK
Price	£39.99
Genre	SPORTS SIM
Players	1-4
Memory Card	✔
Multi Tap	✔

GAMEPLAY **7**

ORIGINALITY **6**

LIFESPAN **7**

SOUND **7**

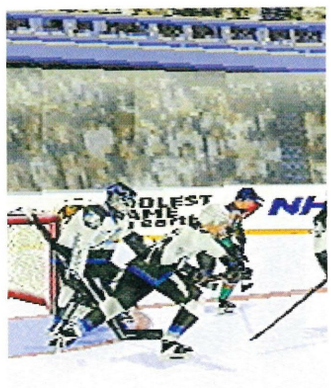
GRAPHICS **8**

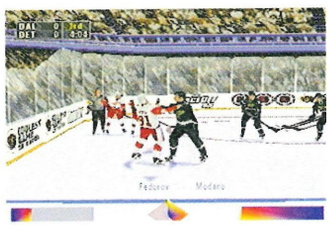
OVERALL **74%**

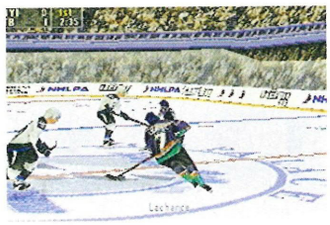
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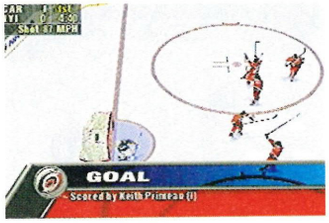
It's good, but not that good.

NHL Face Off '98









Sony's own foray into the crowded Ice Hockey market is, in fact, a very good effort. NHL Face Off sits nicely between the simulation attitude of Actua Ice Hockey and the full-on arcade action of NHL Open Ice.

The outstanding feature of NHL Face Off '98 has got to be the incredibly smooth gameplay. It really does feel as though you're on the ice, as Sony have managed to get the player's momentum just right. If you let go of the joypad you come to a gradual stop and not a grinding halt or a huge slide into the barrier. This instantly gives the play a realistic feel, complimented by the passing and shooting, which is nice and fluid. However, the control set-up could have been a little more intuitive. Some sports games seem to have a control system with which you can instantly get to grips, while still presenting you with a challenge. NHL Face Off '98 simply presents a challenge, and is not easy to get to grips with.

Having said that, if a little perseverance prevails you get a decent game of hockey. Something which makes things a little easier is the icon passing technique you can opt to use. Simply hold the L2 button and a separate icon appears on four of your nearest players. Once you've decided which player to pass to (which should be done pretty quickly), simply hit the button that corresponds to that icon. I prefer to use the normal passing method, but rookies will find this way of getting the puck around the rink much easier.

Graphically, NHL Face Off '98 cannot be faulted. The smooth animation complements the gameplay and the players are all well drawn. The action runs at a variable pace and can be played ridiculously fast or tediously slowly. Setting the game at a medium pace is about the best it gets, though, so when it comes down to it, the variable speed seems a bit pointless. Something which isn't pointless is the variable camera. NHL Face Off '98 doesn't boast a wealth of camera angles, but the ones on offer are all playable. Although the visuals are smooth and pretty realistic, there doesn't seem to be any of that real ice hockey atmosphere on NHL Face Off '98. A little more razz would have been appreciated throughout the game as things seem to be a little too bland.

> "...The multiplayer game really hots things up, especially with the large playing area..."

In real life, ice hockey is a very loud event. The crowds go wild with air-horns, whistles and frantic shouting, the commentator usually sounds like he's taken half the country's amphetamine supply and the organ player tinkles the ivories like his mum's life depends on it. It's a little disappointing, then, when all we get from the crowd is a few half-hearted shouts and jeers, the commentator sounds like he's taken half the countries Tamezepan supplies and the organ player sounds like he's playing at his mum's funeral. Put bluntly, the sound in NHL Face Off '98 is pants, and most definitely the worst of the four ice hockey games this month.

Complementing the smooth gameplay NHL Face Off '98 offers is an idea that should have been implemented in ice hockey games many moons ago. Size - to be exact, the size of the rink. The playing area in NHL Face Off '98 is nothing short of massive. This gives you room to execute those pixel-perfect passes or to simply dribble the puck around until your heart's content. The feeling of freedom on the rink is far greater than any of the other hockey games on the PlayStation, and although it doesn't make NHL Face Off '98 the most playable game, it certainly makes it stand out from the crowd.

The multiplayer game really hots things up, especially with the large playing area. This gives all of the players (of which there can be eight) space to move around. There's not quite as much rough-and-tumble as you'd expect from a multiplayer ice hockey game, but you have the chance to pull off some cool body checks or get into the odd fracas.

Apart from the atrocious sound, NHL Face Off '98 is one of the better ice hockey games I've played. Ice Hockey fans will appreciate the inclusion of all the teams and players in the NHL although they may not appreciate the lack of strategy options in the game. The size of the playing area and the smooth gameplay and animation are the game's most redeeming qualities. If the control system was a little more intuitive I think we'd be looking at a contender for the champ here. As it stands NHL face Off '98 is a challenging and fun, but alas, flawed ice hockey game.



SAUL

Second Opinion

To control this is a touch slicker than PowerPlay but does lack the uniquely ra-ra American atmosphere of a hockey match.

Christian

The Score

Publisher	SCEE
Developer	SCEA
Released	OUT NOW
Version	UK
Price	£39.99
Genre	SPORTS SIM
Players	1-8
Memory Card	✔
Multi Tap	✔

GAMEPLAY **8**

ORIGINALITY **8**

LIFESPAN **7**

SOUND **3**

GRAPHICS **8**

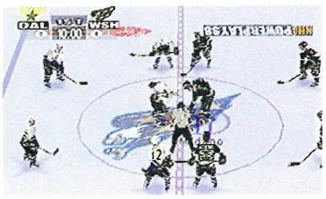
OVERALL **80%**

in summary

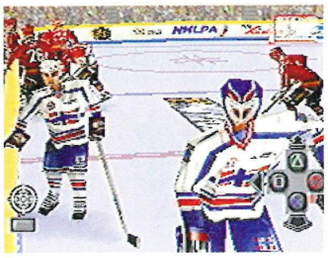
Plays a great, but not outstanding game of hockey.

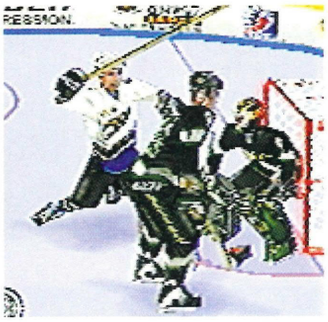
NHL Powerplay '98

Sticks. Ice. Shoulder Pads. A puck. Get the picture?









The flexibility afforded by using polygon-driven graphics was bound to trickle down into the usually-luddite realm of the sports game, and last year's NHL Powerplay was the first ice hockey game on the PSX to take up the challenge of moving away from the flat-faced limitations of two dimensional sprites. Now in 1998 the follow-up is here, with refinements all round to boot. But how does it better the other high-stick 'n' bodycheck games that grace the previous three pages; if at all?

If sheer numbers of options is a guide, then this game must truly be the Daddy. Unlike NHL Open Ice, each button on the controller has up to four functions depending on whether you're in possession of the puck, chasing other players, controlling the goalie or even having an ill-tempered scrap! Initially it's all a bit much for the fingers to take, leading to painful knotting as you try to hit the Fast Skate, Select Player and Block buttons simultaneously, but a methodical learning process soon pays off. It's difficult to not try and steer the characters like football or basketball players when starting out, but an understanding of the different, swinging rhythm of ice hockey soon comes, and the need for space-making passes and tactical manoeuvres becomes apparent. To simplify things at first it's possible to turn off the more exotic rules and regulations such as icing and offside, which helps to pick up the pace of the game overall as well - there are far fewer stoppages.

A clearly visible 'in control' marker helps to spot the player currently being steered, a vital feature as necessity requires rapid cycling through the team to pick out whoever is nearest the puck. To get possession, one can 'hook' with the stick, bodycheck of course or poke check, which can take an opponent's feet away from under him. Shooting at goal and passing can be executed in a number of increasingly more aggressive ways, peaking with the golf-like slap shot which can launch the puck the length of the pitch in mid-air. However, more often than not the goalkeeper coolly reaches out and plucks it down (see screenshot for the sad evidence). Indeed, its difficult to get past them at all without a thought-out attack, and these armoured net guardians don't cave in to physical hassle lightly. To assist with getting past them, there's a detailed Coach Team menu in which attacking and defensive postures can be adopted and refined, plus a Powerplay formation for when the opposition's a man down and a Penalty Kill setting for post-foul situations. Any fly manoeuvres or cracking scores pulled off can be replayed through the comprehensive replay mode, allowing a full 360-degree view, up-close zoom and video controls. This becomes especially useful after a particularly blood-curdling professional foul, as they're beautifully animated and extremely satisfying to pull off scot-free. Unfortunately, I haven't managed to start a fight with the opposition yet, but if this happens there are not one but two buttons for brawling available, and presumably the replay mode works in full for this section of the game as well.

> "...the sound effects have a perfect huge-amphitheatre ambience..."

As well as the single exhibition matches, there are full seasons, playoffs and international tournaments to wade through, and for the truly committed a Create Player option where an individual (and in turn a team) can be created from virtually the skeleton up; you can define their birthplace, for God's sake! The players' new and improved names show up on their shirts, so there's much potential hilarity.

Presentation-wise it's impeccable, with a pleasing front-end and incidental graphics, while the sound effects have a perfect huge-amphitheatre ambience, as the clatter of stick on ice (or head) reverbs with a sweet and hollow ring. The booming voice of the announcer, the cheers and boos of the crowd and the ubiquitous fairground organ also echo around the stadium in a near-perfect facsimile of their real-life counterparts, adding that all-important atmosphere of Real American Cheese which all Yank sports exude.

In a nutshell, NHL Powerplay presents a deep and long-term challenge for the truly dedicated ice hockeyist, with a plethora of detailed options and a tricky but rewarding control system to master. One for Wayne Gretzky obsessives, without a doubt.



CHRISTIAN

Second Opinion

Definitely one of the better hockey games reviewed this issue. And with plenty of options to tinker with, this will keep ya occupied for quite a while.

Darren

The Score

Publisher	VIRGIN
Developer	RADICAL ENT.
Released	OUT NOW
Version	UK
Price	£39.99
Genre	SPORTS SIM
Players	1-8
Memory Card	✔
Multi Tap	✔

GAMEPLAY **7**

ORIGINALITY **4**

LIFESPAN **8**

SOUND **7**

GRAPHICS **7**

OVERALL **82%**

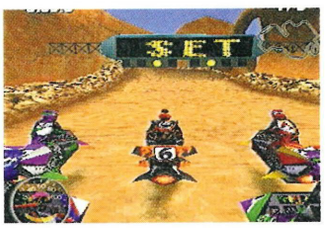
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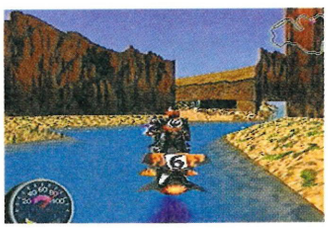
Like a deep-freeze Command & Conquer.

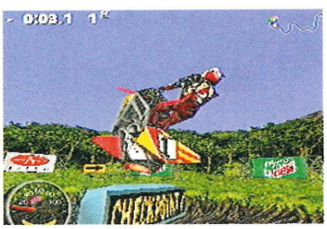
Jet Rider 2

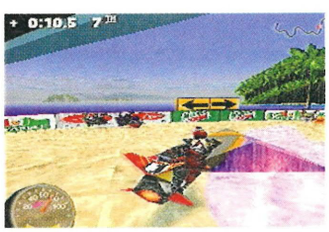
Sit astride a throbbing monster (again)











Is it a bike? Is it a plane? Is it a Jetski? Yes, it's all three! In Jet Riders 2, the star vehicle seems to be a cunning conglomeration of all of the above, skimming over land, bobbing over water and flying into the low stratosphere in a marvel of near-future techno-marvellousness. Time again for some into-the-screen speed jousting as you, the player, race a gaggle of brightly-jumpsuited crotch rocketeers around a set of circuits which get gradually more complex and feature outrageous backgrounds. But what makes this better or worse than the rest of the pack of PSX racers? Well, pedal to the metal, get the hammer down, step on it, burn rubber and other assorted petrol clichés; let's have a look at Sony's newest attempt to use its own machine in a thrilling and no doubt cutting-edge manner.

The front end of the game is slickly put together and comprehensive (despite having no intro movie, which is incredible nowadays), and complimented nicely by classy Marvel-style comic book art depicting the various protagonists. Each of the ten riders has differing pros and cons affecting acceleration, top speed and handling, plus a dimly-illuminating bio that tries to inject some personality into the opposition, but alas to little avail. Set-up options allow for various controller configs, including a useable double-analogue affair (similar to TOCA) with the right stick controlling acceleration and brakes. The three default tracks (volcanic, ravine and post-earthquake LA) have all been seen before, more or less (In Rapid Racer and WipEout 2097 for example), but this is balanced by the hidden courses earned by success in the league. These include a subterranean cave-fest, a rollercoaster-style effort, and most interestingly a looping, pink cloud-sheathed track set in Heaven! Unfortunately God is not your co-pilot, and getting to this stage requires considerable effort, as the TruePhysics™ that dictate the bike's movement and momentum are temperamental to say the least. Funnily enough Sony's blurb says this feature '...gives gamers the unique experience of actually feeling the sensation of riding a real jet bike'. Puzzling words, as I thought they were meant to be fictional fantasy machines. Oh well. Presumably as a result of this system, ruts in the 'road' send the bike off course unpredictably, proving difficult to read and allow for, while the controls seem to lag behind the inputs, giving the bike a mushy response that feels very similar to a number of other Jetski simulators on the market. Although being ostensibly realistic, this doesn't help the game - unlike real Jetskis, you can't move your body to compensate for the vehicle's bouncing. Serious crashes result in your rider being thrown in various painful fashions (a la 'Hang On'), while scrapes and knocks merely scrub off speed, although sometimes a tad too severely for my liking. This can become frustrating as the courses are littered with stationary obstacles stuck in the middle of the track such as bridge posts, trees and airliner parts. These lie on the racing line and thus need to be skimmed past as closely as possible, but more often than not you clip your bike and bring it to a dead stop. In itself this wouldn't be a major flaw, but coupled with the game's poor frame rate and blocky definition, cracks start to show in the gameplay as a whole. Even though it's nicely drawn, Jet Rider 2 jerks along in such a staccato manner that obstacles run from the horizon to the player in what seems like a couple of steps, making the tiny adjustments that the game's control system demands a point-and-hope affair at best. Most of the time is spent over-correcting the bike as it yaws left and right, rattling pea-like down straightaways and missing corners altogether. Of course, long periods of practice would mean one would become used to such handling idiosyncrasies, but the question remains in my mind whether the racing would be satisfying enough to warrant the effort.

> **"...Is it a bike? Is it a plane? Is it a Jetski? Yes, it's all three!..."**

Think ahead...

The bike doesn't steer mid-jump (odd for a hovering vehicle), and while airborne it's impossible to see the course markers which are all at ground level and tend to become lost in the landscape. This

WACKY RACERS?



Crazed Inventor Gadget gets a real kick from racing in his long-johns.



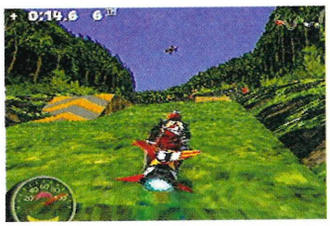
Babe-o-matic master mechanic Bomber has an alarming tendency to fall asleep on the job.

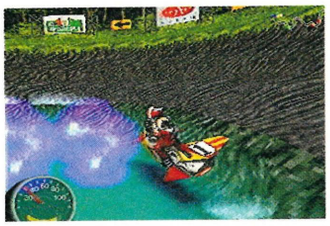


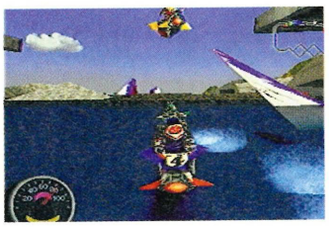
Scary Goth wannabe Vampeera sits in her room dressed like a spider and burning incense when not on the track.

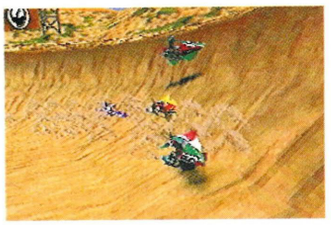


Risk-taking temptress Wild Ride likes to coat herself in grey paint and let her fuzzy pits dry in the slipstream.









is another of the game's immediate playing faults as it can very rapidly become difficult to see where the track's heading, especially as the directional arrows are small and indistinct. Again, practice and learning would cure this, but even after repeated goes it's all-too-simple to end up pointing mystified in the wrong direction, in particular after a jump or crash at a tricky point. The tracks themselves are more technically challenging than adrenaline-inducing, being twisty and fiddly rather than fast and sweeping. The loops and corkscrews on later levels are a blast, but mainly for their novelty value.

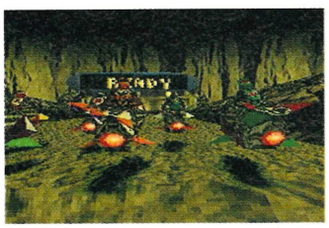
"...The tracks themselves are more technically challenging than adrenaline-inducing, being twisty and fiddly rather than fast and sweeping..."

To assist with things, the bike is equipped with an electromagnetic 'grapple' that, on certain corners, can act as a pivot to spin the bike around the curve (just like in Batman - The Movie). However it has the feel of a tacked-on feature (possibly included to spice up what would be slow-speed corners?) and doesn't really add much to the playing experience. Head-to-head is more fun (as is usually the case), but only due to the more interesting driving style of a human, and again there is no serial mode, only split-screen. Why, why, why? Nice touches do exist though, such as the need to avoid hitting overhead objects (such as the checkpoint gantries) and the fine detail on the bikes themselves, which, ironically, are probably partially responsible for the game's smoothness problem.

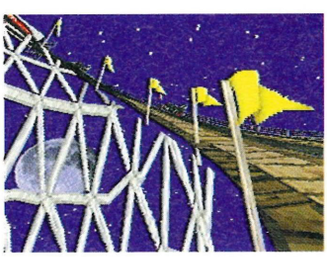
In the sonic stakes, Jet Rider 2 doesn't cover itself in glory. The background music is hideous 80's throwback computer rock, and while the sound effects are on the whole competent the main engine noise is a kind of 'phut phut phut' granddad's lawnmower effort, and certainly doesn't compliment the image of a gleaming hi-tech speed machine. Strangely enough, the checkpoint chime is the sound of a cash till ringing. Sony's corporate personality showing through subconsciously, perhaps? Proof of this is there on the screen as product placement rears its profitable head; riders are sponsored by the sickly-green soft drink Mountain Dew and Butterfinger (whatever the hell that is). This gives the otherwise-stylish presentation an unwelcome tacky element, despite being only a fairly minimal intrusion, and serves as a warning of the shape of things to come as the demographic of computer game owners becomes wider, and thus a better target for advertisers.

Jet Rider 2 beggars the question, 'why bother?'. The PSX is awash with racing games, logically implying that new games must be just that, new and improved. However a cosmetically different vehicle and some wobbly handling don't plug the gaps in gameplay and graphics that are so apparent here. Let's hope Jet Rider 3 gets its priorities straight...

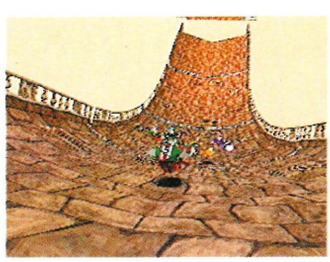
CHRISTIAN

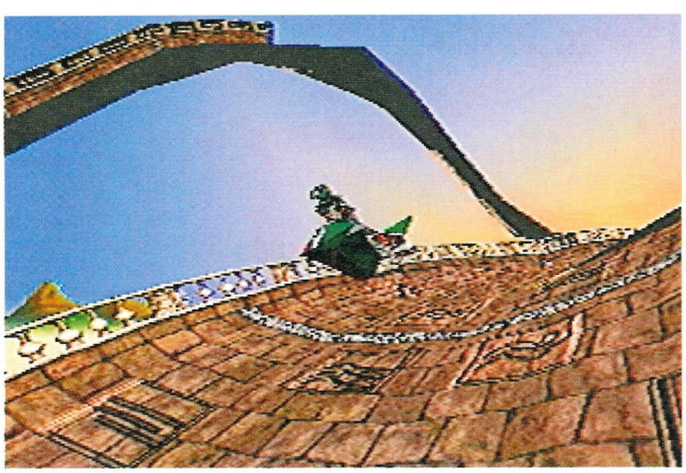












▲ Racing in heaven? Look out for Ayrton Senna then...

Second Opinion

Jet Rider 2 only holds a fraction of the potential that the idea carries. The tracks are there and the bikes are there but the gameplay is sorely missing. Maybe Jet Rider 3 will hit the mark.

Saul

The Score

Publisher	SCEE
Developer	SINGLE TRAC
Released	APRIL
Version	UK
Price	£39.99
Genre	RACING
Players	1-2
Memory Card	✔
Analog	✔

GAMEPLAY
4

ORIGINALITY
5

LIFESPAN
5

SOUND
6

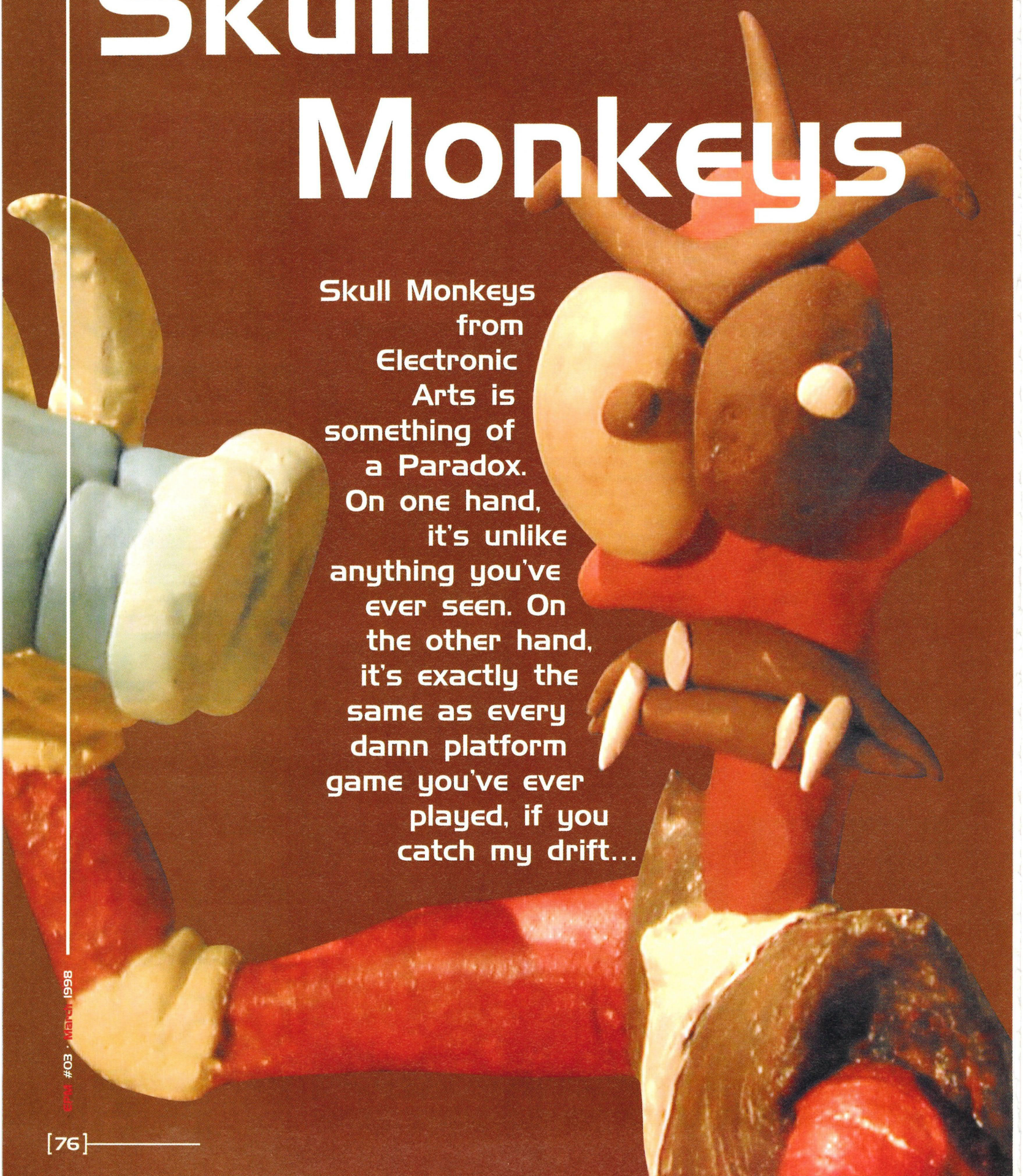
GRAPHICS
6

OVERALL
61%

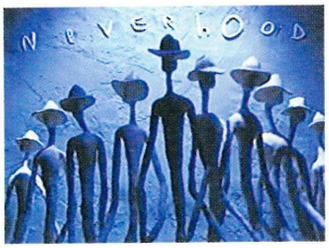
in summary

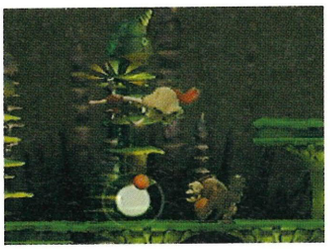
Takes the weary formula of PSX racing games and leaves it exactly as it found it.

Skull Monkeys

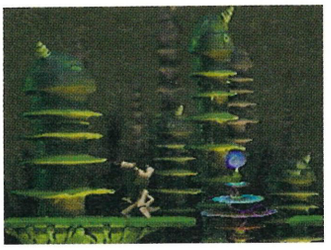


Skull Monkeys from Electronic Arts is something of a Paradox. On one hand, it's unlike anything you've ever seen. On the other hand, it's exactly the same as every damn platform game you've ever played, if you catch my drift...





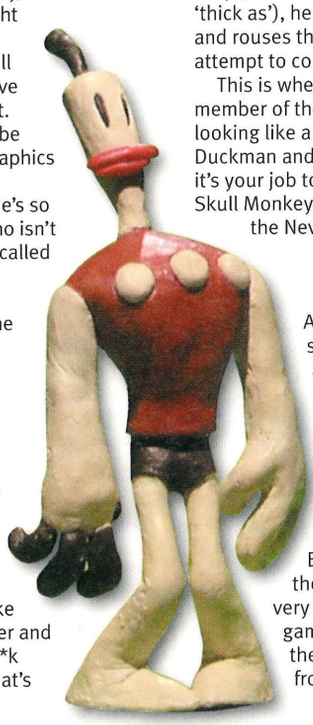




Skull Monkeys has been crafted by Dreamworks Interactive, an offshoot of Steven Spielberg's film studios Dreamworks. This goes some way to explaining the paradox I've just mentioned. Skull Monkeys' cosmetic feel is unique, yet after playing the game, you soon realise you've seen it all before. It's just like most Hollywood movies, where age-old stories are dressed up in new, more aesthetically-pleasing surroundings.

This isn't to say the style of Skull Monkeys isn't top-quality, but that the gameplay doesn't match up to it. It's a shame really, because with a little more thought on the gameplay side of things, Skull Monkeys could have been a sure-fire hit.

You can't fail to be won over by the graphics and aura of Skull Monkeys. The game's so surreal, anyone who isn't grey in colour and called Norm is instantly captified by its weirdness. From the start of the intro, you're thinking, "what the f**k is this?". The whole thing is just so damned weird. It reminds me of one of those dreams you have minutes after going to sleep. You know, you wake up ten minutes later and think, "what the f**k was that?". Well that's Skull Monkeys for you.



All the characters in Skull Monkeys have been created and animated using clay. Claymation, if you like. This goes towards its unique feel as it's the first platform game on the PlayStation that uses this technique. The intro is completely produced in Claymation, and it makes for some excellent viewing.

According to the storyline, an evil man called Clog fell to the planet of the Skull Monkeys. Here, being a tad more brainy than the average Skull Monkey (who, incidentally, have IQs of negative numbers and can be described using words such as 'pig-shit', 'two short planks' and 'thick as'), he becomes their leader and rouses the Skull Monkeys in an attempt to conquer the Neverhood.

This is where you come in. As a member of the Neverhood (and looking like a cross between Duckman and that Pepperami guy), it's your job to defeat Clog and the Skull Monkeys before they destroy the Neverhood.

Strange things...

As the platform fare starts you're still in awe of the fantastic intro and fazed by the weirdness of it all, but I'm afraid this doesn't last very long. You soon realise Skull Monkeys is an Earthworm Jim clone of the highest order, with a very polished coat. The game itself plays well, but there's no getting away from the fact that in the originality department, this sucks.

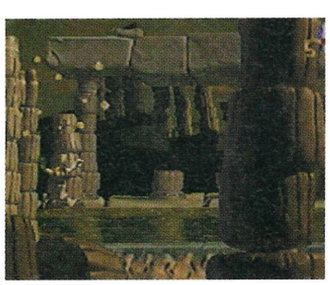
"...The game's so surreal, anyone who isn't grey in colour and called Norm is instantly captified by its weirdness..."

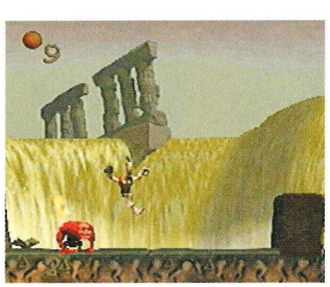
There's really nothing more to the game than jumping from platform to platform while taking out Skull Monkeys of differing shapes and sizes. Okay, you've got moving platforms and some of the levels involve you going upwards as well as the usual left to right, but this is no more than what's offered by any game that came before it. Killing the Skull Monkeys is far too easy as well. A simple jump on the head (seen that somewhere before, methinks) sees off most of your adversaries. You can collect shots to take out the Skull Monkeys, but they don't last long and this also makes things even easier. There are a number of other moves you can pull off, though you need to collect icons to win them. The Fart Head, Phoenix Hand, Universe Enema and Super Willies are all fun to watch, but, alas, they don't add anything extra to the gameplay.

The difficulty level is definitely a problem with Skull Monkeys. There's no learning curve at all. This is because you know exactly what to do when you start anyway. Get to the end of the level by jumping from platform to platform, avoiding various tricks and traps and killing



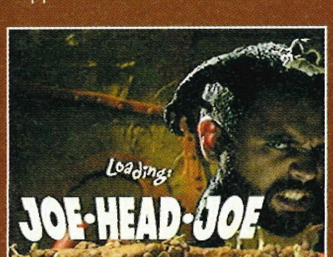


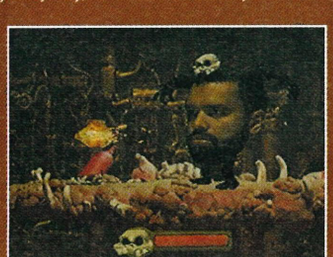


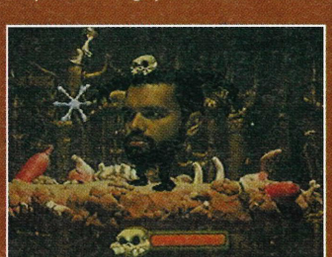


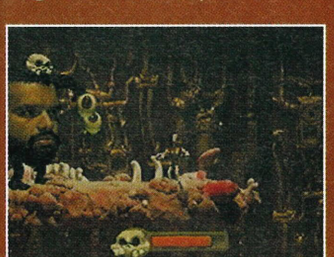
JOE·HEAD·JOE

Some of the end-of-level bosses are a little on the weird side, but this one really does take the biscuit. Joe-Head-Joe is literally a digitised head stuck to a tiny pair of legs. Adorning the top of the head is a little skull, which I suppose makes the head a Skull Monkey. Anyway, to beat this boss you must first dodge his fireballs but then, most bizarrely, his eyeballs pop out of their sockets and bounce towards you, causing you to take evasive action. When you first come across this boss you wonder whether the person who thought it up - and the guy who lent his head to be digitised - are actually sane.

















the various Skull Monkeys. It's as simple as that. To make things even easier, the first few levels have little signs all over the place telling you what to do and how to do it. Like we really needed telling! Things do get a little tougher on the later levels, but anyone who has even the slightest gaming ability won't find the game at all taxing.

Monkey business

I think I've established there's nothing new on the gameplay side of Skull Monkeys. It does have some saving graces, though. For a start, the visuals are of an impeccably high standard, which is to be expected from a company like Dreamworks Interactive. Plenty of effort has gone into the animation, making it smooth, faultless and at times very funny. The animation has plenty of quirky touches, such as the way that your character runs or the explosions that occur when you bounce on a Skull Monkey's head. Killing the Skull Monkeys results in this explosion, but they also split into lumps of clay that fly off the screen. This looks great, but it doesn't make up for the extremely tired 'jump-on-the-head' way of disposing of your enemies.

> **"...the visuals are of an impeccably high standard, which is to be expected from a company like Dreamworks Interactive..."**

The backgrounds are also pretty stunning. The multi-layered parallax scrolling is a sight to be witnessed. The backgrounds and foregrounds really add depth to Skull Monkeys, giving it the sort of 3D feel you'd get when watching Jaws 3D, only without having to use those stupid cardboard glasses. In fact, quite often your character is obscured by a foreground object; this doesn't actually annoy, though, as it adds a certain 'je ne sais quoi' to the feel of the game.

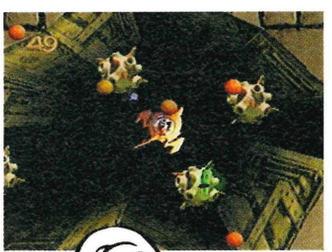
Some of the graphical touches found throughout the levels are also pretty astounding. For example, huge jets of flame threaten to fry your butt on the Hard Boiler level, and you find disgusting frothy brown water on the Hot Dog stages. The graphics cannot be criticised at all; I just wish as much effort had gone into making the gameplay that little bit different.

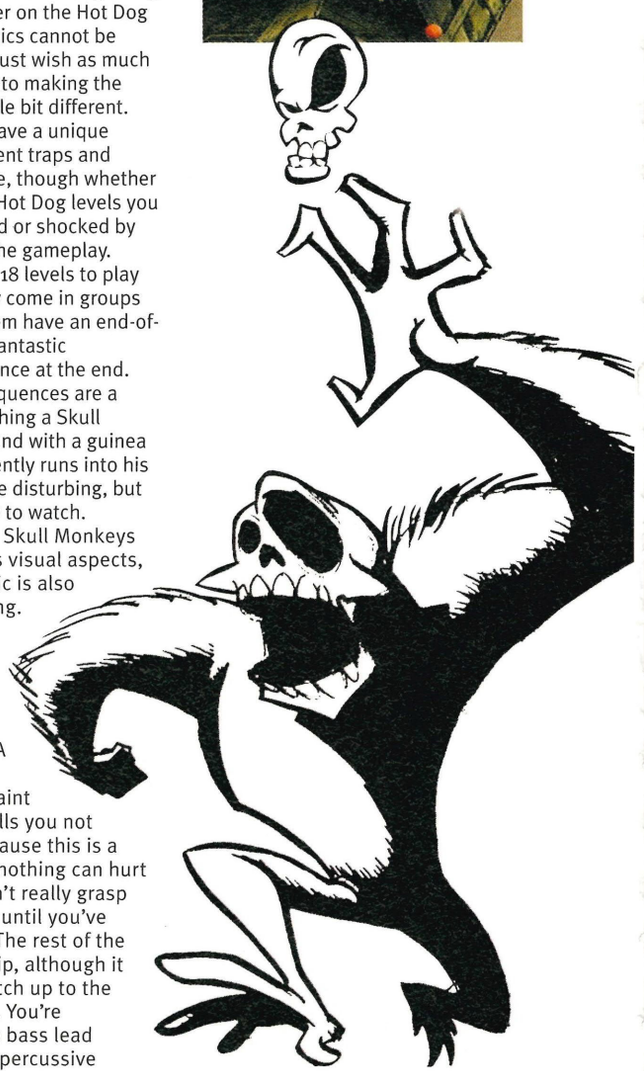
The levels all have a unique setting and different traps and tricks to overcome, though whether in the Sno or the Hot Dog levels you won't be surprised or shocked by anything new in the gameplay. There are around 18 levels to play through, and they come in groups of three. All of them have an end-of-level boss and a fantastic claymation sequence at the end. Some of these sequences are a great laugh. Watching a Skull Monkey play around with a guinea pig that consequently runs into his eye socket is quite disturbing, but also bloody funny to watch.

The humour in Skull Monkeys isn't limited to its visual aspects, though. The music is also highly entertaining. Take, for instance, the little ditty that plays in the background of the bonus level. A voice whispers quietly over a quaint little tune as it tells you not to be scared, because this is a bonus room and nothing can hurt you here. You can't really grasp how weird this is until you've heard it for real. The rest of the music is on this tip, although it doesn't quite match up to the bonus room skat. You're treated to double bass lead jazz grooves and percussive

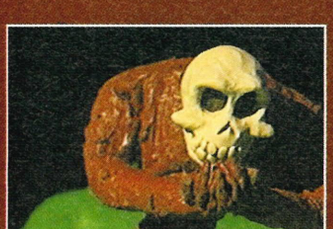


▲ A typical British beach scene.



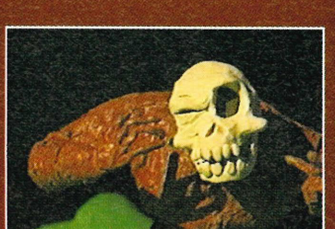


SILLY, ISN'T HE?





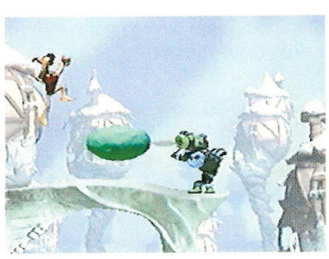
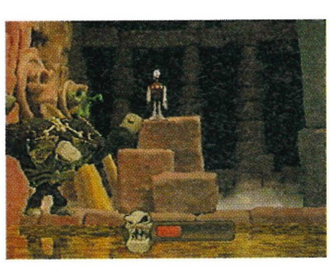










groovy skits that really complement the zany atmosphere which Skull Monkeys offers.

It's funny how stereotypical Skull Monkeys is. The fact that it stereotypes nearly every platform game before it isn't what I'm talking about, though. What I am talking about is that Skull Monkeys is stereotypical of any Hollywood film you may have seen, and coming from a Hollywood-associated developer makes me feel very cynical about the whole thing. In some ways, Skull Monkeys is similar to any big Hollywood blockbuster. Take, for instance, Jurassic Park or The Fifth Element. Both looked fantastic, but when it came to content they both offered the bare minimum. This really shouldn't happen with a video game. It makes you think, doesn't it? Dreamworks enters the video game scene and gives us exactly what every other Hollywood company puts on the silver screen - great-looking turkeys.

Okay, so it's not quite a complete turkey, but there isn't much in the way of content here. Skull Monkeys is a hard game to review because on the face of it I'd love to say go out and buy it. I mean, how can something be this original in some ways when its totally unoriginal in others? As it stands, if you're the type who loves a basic platform romp and who can sit through a game that offers nothing new on the gameplay side, then you'll love Skull Monkeys. If, however, you require gameplay as well as great visuals, weirdness and polish, then you won't enjoy Skull Monkeys. I would definitely recommend you hire it out just to witness it, but if you want to buy it, make sure you think long and hard before parting with your cash.



SAUL

"...Dreamworks enters the video game scene and gives us exactly what every other Hollywood company puts on the silver screen - great-looking turkeys..."



Freddie Starr eat yer heart out!

Here are some shots of the sequence where one of the Skull Monkeys plays with a hamster, which promptly runs into his eye socket. All sorts of commotions follow, and they're actually quite amusing.





Second Opinion

I agree with Saul's multi-cultural analysis - Skull Monkeys has bags of visual appeal but a minimal amount of gameplay meat on its bones. One to hire and admire.

Christian

The Score

Publisher	ELECTRONIC ARTS
Developer	DREAMWORKS
Released	OUT NOW
Version	UK
Price	£39.99
Genre	PLATFORM
Players	1

GAMEPLAY **5**

ORIGINALITY **5**

LIFESPAN **6**

SOUND **9**

GRAPHICS **9**

OVERALL

65%

in summary

Perfect on top, but a bit whiffy as you dig deeper.

Soviet Strike

A classic game reborn...









What a game! After the dire Mega Drive monstrosity Urban Strike, Electronic Arts were right back on form with Soviet Strike, their first Strike game on the PlayStation. It sold by the bucketload as a full pricer, and now it's only twenty quid it's an unmissable barg.

Almost everything about Soviet Strike is correct. The plot, involving a renegade Russian general with a beef about the collapse of Communism, is exciting and believable. The difficulty level is challenging and progressive (unlike the shamefully-easy Urban Strike) and the FMV sequences, where you receive orders before a mission and transmissions during the game, add atmosphere without detracting from the action.

So what makes the game so great? All the elements that made the Strike series so popular are there. Yourself and a co-pilot fly into enemy-held territory, completing a series of missions on each level. You need all your wits about you if you're to beat the hoards of enemy tanks, guns, SAM sites, planes, troops and chrysanthemums. Okay, I lied about the chrysanthemums, but you need more than flower power to get through this little arsenal. It's not all 'blast and shoot', either. The Strike games have always contained a keen strategic element, and Soviet Strike is no exception. Although the missions can be taken in any order, in practice it's best to tackle them roughly as advised. Taking out radars is usually an early priority, as unless they're toppled the enemy know where you are and home in on you. Attack the compound without tackling the power station and the ground defences are too strong, and when rescuing your agent from the POW camp, take out the watchtowers and enemy vehicles before hitting the huts and helping the hostages. During battles you must first hit the thing that's best able to hit back, and match your weapons to the enemy in question - don't waste Hellfires (powerful, but you only carry eight) on a tank you can take out with a single Hydra (less powerful, but you carry 38). The chaingun's more than enough for infantry. Before reloading by picking up an ammo crate found by blasting buildings and cargo trucks, you might want to make a little excursion into enemy territory outside your immediate brief to waste your last few missiles. Crates return ammo to maximum, so anything remaining when you reload is wasted. Thus you must think about how you use your armaments.

> **"...The Strike games have always contained a keen strategic element, and Soviet Strike is no exception..."**

Soviet Strike takes the 'thinking man's shoot-'em-up' approach further still, demanding you think even harder about what you're doing. For example, on one stage you must get help from the local Arabs. Unfortunately, they're in the middle of a long-standing family feud and are reluctant to bury the hatchet, or at least use it on the bad guys instead of each other. When positioning your allies (you ferry them into the battlezone), make sure you don't give them an opportunity to attack each other. There's more to stopping advancing enemy columns that just blasting them into scrap metal too. Look for opportunities to cause rockslides to block their path, allowing you to tackle a separate set of foes. Charge in with all guns blazing and you're finished.

The helicopter handles like a dream. Using the 'turn and move' control, whereby pressing Right or Left rotates the chopper and Up and Down moves it forward and backward, the chopper moves exactly how you would expect and feels just right. Pausing the game brings up a map screen which tells you where all enemies and collectibles are located, as well as outlining your missions and indicating your next priority target. Stranded locals are often shown, which is a great asset. Pick them up using your helicopter's winch and take them to a landing site and you're given extra armour. Do you take them back immediately, costing fuel (which you must also collect when needed), or press on with your mission and drop them off later when you're nearer a landing site? Another strategic element is introduced.

Thankfully, the Strike team (as the developers are generally known) included a lot of variety in the game. There are only five levels (less than half as many as Urban Strike), but they're huge, brilliantly thought out and tricky enough to keep you playing for weeks. You're not forced to fight in legions of vehicles other than the helicopter either. Extras were offered as a selling point in Jungle Strike and Urban Shite, but they all proved unsatisfactory - the program was written with a helicopter in mind, and felt devilishly unconvincing when you controlled hovercrafts, Stealth planes, motorcycles and people.

On the negative side, the game could do with a zoom function to move the camera in and out. On some stages, you feel a little too close to the chopper. The ability to broaden the perspective so you could see more of the game area would be a boon.

Soviet Strike is arguably the best blaster on the PSX. Brilliant design keeps the game fresh, attention to detail offers atmosphere and a decent learning curve means you won't complete it in an afternoon. If you haven't got it already, now's your chance.

IAN

The Score

Publisher	ELECTRONIC ARTS
Developer	IN HOUSE
Released	OUT NOW
Version	UK
Price	£19.99
Genre	SHOOT-'EM-UP
Players	1
Memory Card	✓

GAMEPLAY 9

ORIGINALITY 7

LIFESPAN 9

SOUND 8

GRAPHICS 8

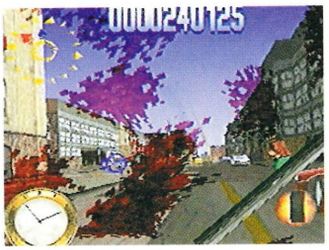
OVERALL 91%

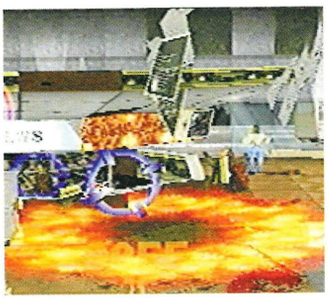
in summary

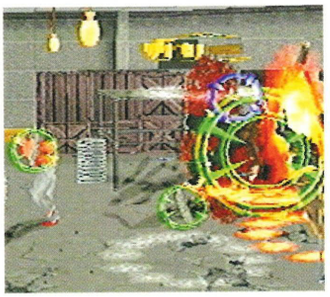
A great game from a classic series.

Die Hard Trilogy

Die Hard with a price cut!







The odds were certainly stacked against Fox Interactive's Die Hard movie licence when it first appeared in late 1996. Firstly, most people are wary of this type of multiple-games-per-disc package, and although the quality of the three games on Die Hard Trilogy is almost unsurpassable, at the time not everybody was aware of this. The second problem was that Die Hard Trilogy was a movie licence, and most sensible people know that most movie licence games should be avoided - at all costs.

Well, to Fox Interactive's credit, Die Hard Trilogy overcame both of these barriers and is still classed as one of the all-time top PlayStation games. And rightly so. All three games are superbly playable and with some cool graphics to boot. The three games are entirely self-contained - you don't have to beat the first to get to the second, and so on.

The first game, Die Hard, sets you on a straightforward search, blast and rescue mission through the Nakatomi Plaza building, and although the idea is straightforward, you find the going pretty tough as Die Hard definitely offers far more of a challenge than the other two games on the disc. The game itself is a 3D isometric floating camera-style shooting fest, with plenty of big weapons and explosions; just like the film. It's amazing how much effort must have gone into the game engine on Die Hard as things move so smoothly, something that the other two games in the trilogy also manage to achieve.

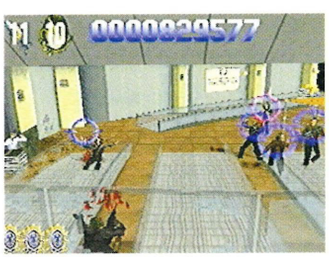
The second game is best played with a light gun, but the cursor/target shooting action is still excellent with a joypad. Die Hard 2 is set in Washington/Dulles airport and it's your duty as Jon McLeane, super cop, to kill as many terrorists (and inevitably civilians) as possible. The graphics on this game are by far the best of the three on offer here. There are plenty of weapons, rockets and grenades to be found, making the destruction quota rocket off the scale. Everything can be shot up in the airport, so as well as gunning down the terrorists you also blow up vending machines, shoot destination monitors and cause some serious ceiling collapse. Until Time Crisis came along, Die Hard 2 was the best light gun shooting action to be found on the PlayStation, and it's only a third of the trilogy!

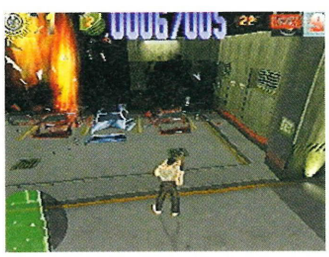
> **"...Each and every one of these sub-games could be released as a Platinum game on its own..."**

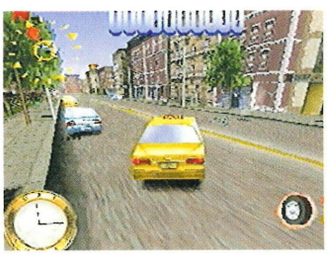
The third game on the disc is Die Hard With A Vengeance and is my personal favourite. Although the graphics aren't exactly amazing, the gameplay certainly is. Dozens of time bombs have been scattered throughout New York and it's Jon McLeane's job to save the day once again. This time, though, you get to drive around in a selection of different vehicles in search of the bombs - the problem is you're up against a very, very strict time limit. There are a number of pick-ups for you to collect around the city, including turbos and time bonuses, which makes things a tad easier. Driving around the city at full speed is a pretty hairy experience, and it has to be said that mowing down pedestrians as you cut across park picnic areas or pavement cafes is a great laugh - especially using the in-car mode, where the blood splats across the windscreen. Some of the bombs have been planted on moving vehicles, so at times you get into chase sections which add a welcome diversion from the rest of the game.

Each and every one of these sub-games could be released as a Platinum game on its own, and with a few tweaks, Die Hard With A Vengeance could have made it at full price. As it stands, you're being offered three extremely playable and exciting games for half the price of most other games on the market. The games don't exactly follow each film's plot to a tee, but the fast-paced, frantic and extremely destructive elements from the Die Hard films are firmly in place. If you're a new PlayStation owner, or if for some inexplicable reason you managed to miss Die Hard Trilogy the first time around, now is the time to get it - you're getting one of the best PlayStation titles to have appeared since the little grey box was launched for only twenty quid. Seriously, how can you say no?

SAUL







The Score

Publisher	FOX INT.
Developer	FOX INT.
Released	OUT NOW
Version	UK
Price	£19.99
Genre	MULTI
Players	1
Memory Card	✔

GAMEPLAY **9**

ORIGINALITY **9**

LIFESPAN **9**

SOUND **9**

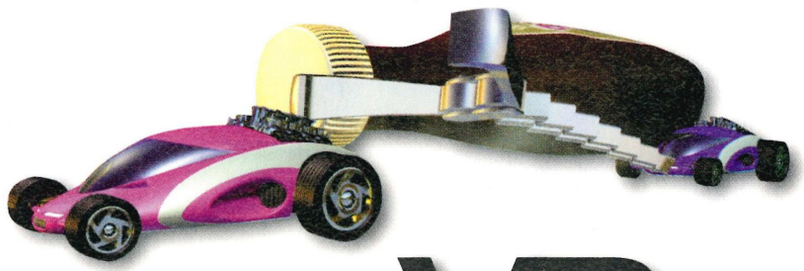
GRAPHICS **8**

OVERALL **94%**

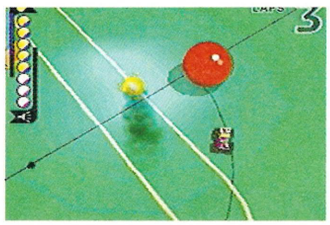
in summary

Surely some mistake - all this for twenty smackeroonies. Just buy it.

Micro Machines V3



Itsy-bitsy, teeny-weeny, little turbo nutter b****rds



Back in the misty era of the Spectrum, C64 and even Amstrad, CodeMasters (then a fledgling budget title-only outfit) released the single-screen Grand Prix Simulator. It was not notable for its graphical flair; the cars were straightforward oblongs with a white dot at one end to denote the front, and the scenery basic green grass and grey tarmac. What made the game both remarkable and intensely enjoyable was the manner in which the cars would powerslide pleasingly at a flick of the controls, which although strictly-speaking unrealistic was nonetheless highly satisfying and above all FUN. Micro Machines V3 can trace its genealogy directly to this game, preserving the simple elements that worked so well while updating it with 90s depth and visual tomfoolery. A prime seller as a full price game, its appearance on Platinum spells trouble for the clutch of clones that have appeared, as in all departments Micro Machines V3 is a tour-de-force of design, inspiration, stupid jokes and raw gameplay.

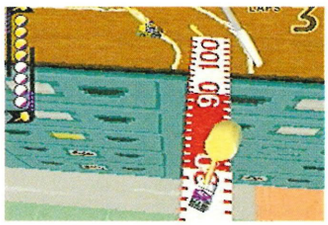
The game's trump card is, ironically, its licensing source, normally the weak link in a game. Being tiny toys means a whole new set of environments can be raced in, places where no racer has gone before. Snooker tables, classrooms, the back garden and a chemistry lab are now high speed tortuous raceways, complete with all the hazards one would expect to find. A metre rule becomes a skinny bridge over the yawning chasms between desks, lily pads transport you across open pond water and an ironing board is a colossal ramp onto the (messy) kitchen table. Design-wise the game is not only ingenious from the practical playing angle but is also the source of a great deal of wry humour, which often lies in details on the landscape such as the preserved brain nestling on the laboratory floor and the brazenly-discarded bikini on a beach course. The powerups available are also intended for maximum laugh impact, including repelling force fields, bouncing torpedoes and (best of all) the enormous Tom and Jerry-style mallet with which you can smash your opponent flatter than Jodie Kidd's chest.

This viciously competitive element is another of MMV3's strengths, especially in the two- or more-player modes where frantic

> **"...its appearance on Platinum spells trouble for the clutch of clones that have appeared..."**

short-cuts and sneaky Schumacher-like nudging becomes the order of the day, leading to inevitable threats of violent retribution and some freakish exclamations from all involved ("f***ing snail/pencil/milk puddle!"). Where the game really shines, though, is in the clever Pad Share mode in which up to four players divide a pair of controllers between them, forming impromptu opposing teams. More often then not chaos ensues as cars (or boats, or monster trucks, etc) scurry wildly and innaccurately around the terrain like weeny crack-fuelled joyriders, showing a wilful disregard for





sportsmanship, teamwork and braking as they blow on the comedy car horns thoughtfully provided on the triangle button.

The characters available to play as are a far cry from the usual sleek racing pros one comes to expect in a game - they're a motley bunch of misfits, including a surfer, a rasta, a Tank Girl clone and a belching nerd, each with their own set of gung-ho one liners. Custom characters can be saved and raced as they accumulate the bonus vehicles available on winning in single-player races, which are even more outrageous than the default ones, including a Hippy VW camper, a hovercraft, and so on. Unlike the soon-to-be-released Circuit Breakers, each vehicle handles significantly differently from the next, demanding vastly differing styles of driving. A tail-out powerskid in the zippy beach buggy is simple, but in the dump truck it spells disaster - a long plummet probably follows. However, it's still fun to drive the less exotic examples, and some have handy accessories such as a permanent and pleasantly-destructive gun on the tank. To help the coordinationally-challenged there's a driving school, whose principal is the delightfully-jugged Cherry, a pixel babe who coaxes you to do better with a seductive coo, or more likely admonishes with some ego-withering sarcasm.

Essentially MMV3 takes the simple-but-solid formula of top-down racing and covers it in a yummy coating of wit, depth and loveable presentation. As a full price release it was excellent, as a twenty-pound Platinum it should be a mandatory purchase.



CHRISTIAN



The Score

Publisher	CODEMASTERS
Developer	IN HOUSE
Released	OUT NOW
Version	UK
Price	£19.99
Genre	TOP-DOWN RACER
Players	1-4
Memory Card	✓
Multi Tap	✓

GAMEPLAY
10

ORIGINALITY
7

LIFESPAN
8

SOUND
7

GRAPHICS
8

OVERALL
93%

in summary

Fun, fun, fun till your daddy takes the D-Pad away.

WipEout 2097





Faster, Pussycat! Thrill! Thrill!

The racing game, arguably the PSX's most common genre, dominates the other categories of software to the point where the need for speed has become a compulsion with which most software houses seem unhealthily preoccupied, and as a result, cars, boats, skis, karts and now even armadillos can be hurtled around at a high clip through multitudes of tracks and environments. The thrill created by such games comes from the relentless impression of break-neck velocity and hair's breadth margins between the swift and the sluggish, qualities that the PlayStation is built for, but which are only rarely used to its full potential, as the yawn-inducing majority of racers tepidly demonstrates.

WipeEout 2097's numberless prequel was an enjoyable but flawed piece that nonetheless helped to showcase the grey box's vector-shifting abilities and demonstrate the potential for radical sensations of speed and vertigo available to spin out a player's perception, and test his or her concentration to the point of 'max-out'. 2097 takes this further than any previous game, and most, if not all, released since. The major reason for this is obvious when looking at the game in action; it hurtles past with a speed and smoothness that puts its main rivals (especially the grainy F1 '97) to shame, with only a barely noticeable hint of nasty polygon clipping at the edges. I've been playing solidly for over a year now, and can count on one hand the number of times the game has slowed up, even with 16 other ships on screen or during link-up play (which is as close to videogame nirvana as humanly possible). An ironic side effect of this is that you rarely see the care taken over the backgrounds; they're finely-detailed works of art in themselves, including real-time smoke effects, panoramic sky or cityscapes that look like oil paintings and sly adverts for techno-barons Future Sound of London.





The niftily-designed anti-gravity crafts the player controls each have differing strengths and weaknesses, favouring speed, handling, defence and suchlike, peaking with the weaponless but meteoric Piranha-class ship which is so quick and agile it truly beggars belief. Even the beginners' craft is a handful at first, though, and the clank of hull on wall is frequent, loud and frustrating. Unlike other racing games the brakes are used only sporadically, and behave more like pulling a handbrake turn, spinning the car sideways as well as killing airspeed. This allows outrageous lines and overtaking manoeuvres to be pulled off with posy aplomb. Optional weapons include the expected missiles, rockets and mines, but best of all is the Quake Bomb which somewhat bafflingly causes the entire track to ripple like a wave ahead of the ship, causing those in front to be tossed about like toys. Incidentally, the game's only weakness lies with these opponents, as the CPU ships tend to fly a little woodenly, but this is only a minor gripe.

> **"...the crackling raw velocity becoming addictive in an extremely short period of time..."**

The visual excellence is matched by the award-winning sound effects which avoid the normal grating wail of engines by going for a classy whistle/whine that provides aural information without irritation. The sound of a scrape of ship against wall is beautifully executed, providing a real guide to how near the edge you are, while the soundtrack is a roll-call by the cream of British electronic music such as Photek, The Chemical Brothers, FSOL and The Prodigy and was good enough to warrant an album in its own right. This cross-cultural aspect of the game is also unique, as it was arguably the first piece of entertainment software to be as cool as music, and indeed got its look from The Designers' Republic, who were responsible for Pop Will Eat Itself and the Warp record label's striking post-modernist imagery. This served to make the game desirable as an object of cultural credibility in itself, definitely a first amongst the historically insular computer games scene. Despite all this, though, it is the experience of playing that makes it what it is rather than clever marketing and association; the crackling raw velocity becoming addictive in an extremely short period of time, making other games seem just too slow and sedate in comparison.



CHRISTIAN





The Score

Publisher	PSYGNOSIS
Developer	IN HOUSE
Released	OUT NOW
Version	UK
Price	£19.99
Genre	RACING
Players	1-2
Memory Card	✓
Link Cable	✓

GAMEPLAY	9
ORIGINALITY	8
LIFESPAN	9
SOUND	10
GRAPHICS	10
OVERALL	95%

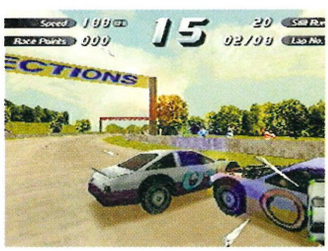
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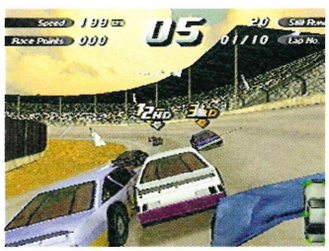
Takes the learning curve at over 400mph.

Destruction Derby 2



Jeremy Clarkson's Extreme Machines has nothing on this!









There were two reasons why I paid two hundred and seventy quid for my PlayStation a few years back. The first was Wipeout, and the second was Destruction Derby. I've had hours of fun out of both games, and with Wipeout being so unfeasibly hard, Destruction Derby ended up as my favourite of the two. It wasn't without its faults, though, so I was relieved to find that Destruction Derby 2 has addressed most of them.

Firstly the tracks on DD2 are much, much wider than the tight, twisty courses from the original. This makes the racing much more exciting as you won't find the track getting blocked up all the time. Also, the onus is more on the destruction part of the game in DD2. The crashes and smashes are more realistic, and as they're in real-time you never see the same crash twice. There are no set pieces to get bored with, so the game doesn't become repetitive.

DD2 isn't much of an improvement graphically over its predecessor, but there was never a problem in this department anyway. The whole game oozes quality on the visuals front, from the massive cars to perfectly-designed and intricate track layout. A detail I particularly like is the way that your car loses pieces as it becomes less and less road worthy - one minute you have a shining undamaged vehicle, and the next the bonnet and wheels are bouncing all over the track! The clipping is kept to a minimum, which is something that always impresses me on any driving or 3D game.

There are seven tracks on which to do your thang, plus four Destruction Derby bowls. At the start, though, there are only four tracks and one bowl for you to race on. To get access to the rest of the tracks you have to enter the Wrecking Racing league and work your way up through the ranks. This is easier said than done, because there are 19 other drivers all out to send you and your car to the scrap merchants. Races aren't won by simply crossing the finish line first - you also have to earn as many destruction points as possible by taking out the other racers. Watch out, though, because if your car suffers too much damage your race is over. However, you earn more points for spectacular crashes so there's no room for holding back. The points system, although good in theory, doesn't seem to work so well in practice. It's a bit hit and miss as to whether you get your points after a crash, and it gets frustrating if you don't get them when you think you should have.

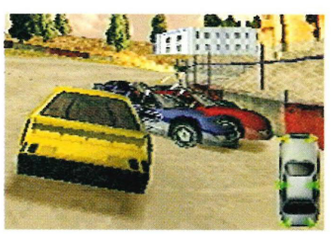
> **"...it simply can't be beaten for its arcade-style wanton destruction..."**

The four Destruction Derby Bowls make for some superb carmaggedon as you cane it around with the goal of saving your own hide whilst taking out everybody else's. Facing 20 cars across an arena is a daunting sight - facing 20 cars across the Death Bowl arena doesn't bear thinking about! This bowl has a huge drop at one side which has to be avoided to stay in the race. Playing this arena in Total Destruction mode - where every single car comes after you - is pure suicide, but a right hoot.

Although it's a good idea on any racing game, the link-up mode doesn't seem to offer as much excitement as it should on DD2. The first game suffered from the same, 'I'm gonna kick your ass - when I can find you', syndrome. What could have been a worthy addition to the game turns out to be a very boring game of cat and mouse as you end up spending most of your time looking for the other player.

DD2 isn't a thinking man's game, but it simply can't be beaten for its arcade-style wanton destruction. Watching it can be almost as much fun as playing - check out the cars flying off jumps or the spectacular pile-ups that occur at the start of each and every Destruction Derby bowl race. DD2 really does improve on its predecessor, and even at the original £45 it was a well-worthy purchase. At twenty quid, though, it's a 'must buy'.

SAUL



The Score

Publisher	PSYGNOSIS
Developer	REFLECTIONS
Released	OUT NOW
Version	UK
Price	£19.99
Genre	RACING
Players	1
Memory Card	✔
Link Cable	✔

GAMEPLAY
9

ORIGINALITY
9

LIFESPAN
7

SOUND
8

GRAPHICS
9

OVERALL
90%

in summary

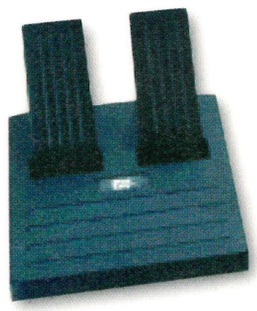
At this price, any self-respecting PlayStation owner should own this.

PSYGNOSIS PLATINUM COMPETITION

BUZZ, BUZZ, BUZZ IN THE DRUM OF THE EAR

The extremely generous guys and gals at Psygnosis have donated a bucketful of prizes to coincide with the release of Destruction Derby 2 and WipEout 2097 on Platinum. As you can see from both games' reviews, they scored in the nineties, proving both titles have stood the test of time.
The winner of the competition will get a Dolby Pro Logic speaker system and MadCatz steering wheel, pictured here, plus a copy of the WipEout 2097 soundtrack and a Destruction Derby 2 T-shirt. There are also four runners-up prizes of a MadCatz steering wheel, a copy of the WipEout 2097 soundtrack and a Destruction Derby 2 T-shirt. Niiice!







To enter, just answer this tricky brain teaser:

IN WHICH SEASIDE SPORT CAN A PARTICIPANT 'WIPE OUT'?

A. DONKEY RACING
B. SURFING
C. LOLLY LICKING
D. BOOB SPOTTING



Entries on a postcard (preferably featuring half-naked women) to:

The Answer's B Competition
Extreme PlayStation Magazine
Quay Magazine Publishing
Quay House
The Quay
Poole
Dorset
BH15 1HA

* Competition closes on 27th March 1998



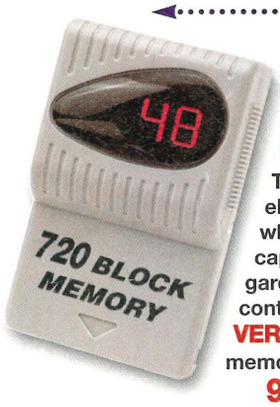
STUFF

IT'S A BLOODY JUNGLE OUT THERE!

HERE IT IS AGAIN, THE VITAL STATISTICS OF THE SEXIEST PLUG-INS AND ADD-ONS TO MAKE YOUR BASIC BOX AS BIG AS A BULLDOZER. BANZAI!

DATEL GAME PRODUCTS

720 SLOT MEMORY CARD



RRP - £39.99

This card can hold an elephantine 720 separate saves, which is over 48 times the capacity of your common-or-garden variety, and ingeniously controlled via the joypad to boot.

VERDICT - The Titanic of the memory card fleet.

9/10

ARCADE STICK

ASCIIWARE

RRP - £15.99

A steel shaft and base form the Terminator-like endoskeleton of this enormous bit of kit, while microswitches give a featherlite response.

VERDICT - Emulates the 'big cabinet' feel of the arcades, ideal for the heavy-handed among you.

8.5/10



GAMESTER LMP

PROTECTOR GUN

SPECTRA VIDEO

RRP - £15.99

This baby boasts a built-in ammunition reload switch with three speed settings and a Special Weapons launch button.

VERDICT - Not great for Dirty Harry impressions due to its canary-yellow colour. However, it's very precise and cracking value for money.

9/10



EURO AV 02

RRP - £15.99

Raises picture quality and audio clarity by using the SCART socket in your telly.

VERDICT - Unmissable if you've got a hi-tech scart TV. Still a bit of a wrench for a tenner, though.

7/10



ASCII PAD

RRP - £15.99

This is a 360-degree D-Pad for improved directional accuracy, with hardcore ABS plastic structure and a palm-friendly shape.

VERDICT - After the official pads, this is the next toughest homie in the hood.

9/10

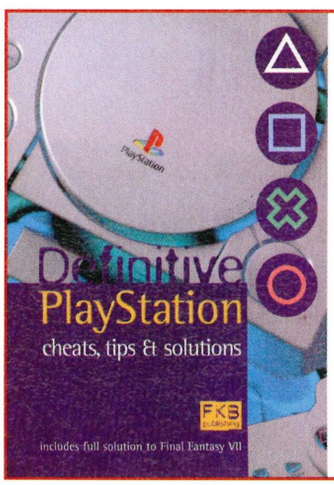


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Ex-Communication

THE BBFC CAN KISS MY ARSE

Dear EPM,
Who the hell are the BBFC? I'll tell you - they're a bunch of old farts who still think it's 1940. I'm 21 years old and have grown up playing with computers and playing games such as Pac-Man and Defender. I also grew up with the horror films of the eighties such as Texas Chainsaw Massacre and The Evil Dead, watching them with my old man. Firstly, am I a murderer? No. Will I ever be? No. Have I changed because of so-called corrupt games and films? No. There are plenty of nutters out there, but that's not because of games like Grand Theft Auto and Resident Evil. As far as I'm concerned the BBFC can kiss my arse. I play what I want when I want and they should keep their noses out of our business.
Carl Fletcher, Cradley Heath

EPM says...
Couldn't agree with you more. It could be worse, though. In Germany, virtually every game involving sex or violence gets banned. Their censorship laws are so ridiculous that in a game like Mortal Kombat, the blood must be painted green or blue or the game gets banned. Anything remotely connected with World War II is instantly taken off the shelves, too. Publishers who expect their game to fall victim to this censorship get it out with no pre-publicity whatsoever. It just suddenly appears in the shops without warning, with no previews in the magazines and no advertising. This buys the game about a week of selling time, after which it comes to the attention of the authorities and is banned. Those who missed the boat lose out. Can you imagine how annoying this is? Worse still, as you have no previews or reviews to go by, you can only guess whether the game is worth buying. By the time the word gets out about its quality, it's gone.
Yes, the BBFC suck, but we've got it a lot better than the Germans. Congratulations on a neat letter though - you've won the prize.

I'VE DRAWN A PICTURE

Dear EPM,
Hi, my name's Dave and I'm one of your biggest fans. Anyway, it's my birthday on 9th February, so could you do something for me? I've drawn a picture of Grand Theft Auto, so can you stick it in one of your issues, please?
David Osborn, Warrington
PS I'm going to be nine.

EPM says...
Your wish is our command - we've put your picture between pages 58 and 59 in the dog-eared copy of Issue One that's propping up the wonky leg on Dazza's desk. Happy birthday, and bad luck on having the same last name as our sub-editor.

CAN YOU HELP ME

Dear EPM,
Last month I bought the adventure Broken Sword II. I got through most of the puzzles but now I'm bolloxed. I've walked onto the film set-up and talked to everybody, but I can't see any way of getting past it. Can you help or give me a cheat for the game?
Mike Bennet, Kingswinford.
PS I forgot - the game's for the PlayStation.

EPM says...
We guessed you were playing the PlayStation version - why else would you write to us? Check out our full solution starting on page 92, but there seems to be a bug at this point in the game. If you still can't get through while following the solution, go back to your last save and try again.

THE CHEATS DON'T WORK

Dear EPM,
I bought your magazine last month for the Tomb Raider 2 cheats. I was disgusted to find they didn't work...
R. Supward, Tonbridge

EPM says...
All but two of the cheats work as printed, but unfortunately due to a production problem the cheats for Level Select and All Weapons were incorrect. Check out our nicely natty news section starting on page six for the correct codes.

MUSHY PLEASE

Dear EPM,
Would you please, please send me a copy of Super Mario Brothers on the PSX please, please send it 'cos I've wanted it for ages and can't find it in the shops. Would you please please send me a copy please as you're my only hope please. I said 'please'.
David Thatcher, Ludlow

EPM says...
David, will you please, please realise that Mario is a Nintendo game and however often you say please, it will never be released on the PSX. Please, please understand that we're a magazine, not a software shop. Thank you and good night.

TO BE OR NOT TO BE?

Dear EPM,
I am writing to tell you the dramatic story about how I got my hands on Tomb Raider 2.
• Saturday, 10.00am: I woke up and heard my mum clattering away as usual making my breakfast. My mum and I went to the Pet Rescue round the corner to buy a guard dog to make sure no one steals my PlayStation. I thought buying a dog would be great. We then went to the newsagents and bought a free ads paper. Obviously I was looking in the games section. I decided it was time to buy a new game but had to think how I would get the money. The question was, 'to be or not to be?' The answer was, 'to be'.
• Saturday, 12.00pm: I started to search for a seller and rang loads, but I found they'd all sold their Tomb Raider 2s. Then, all of a sudden, I thought, 'trade some of your games'. What a great idea. Then I started to look for a trader. I called Ross Records which was too far and too expensive. Gary's Games were not going to offer me a good deal for my games but then I rang Warpzone and they said they would give me the game for Resident Evil and Parrapa the Rappa, which I thought was great.
• Saturday, 3.00pm: The game was then mine. CH-CHING! I also had five quid to spare to buy your mag with.
Bradley Cottier, Tangmere

EPM says...
ZZZZZZZzzzzzzzzzz...

CURIOUS QUESTIONS

Dear EPM,
1st: Congratulations on a great mag.
EPM: Don't mention it.

2nd: When will WipEout 2097 be released on Platinum? I've read in other mags it is out now, but I can't find it.
EPM: It should be out now. Check out our review on page 83 too...

3rd: Should I buy Street Fighter Ex+A or wait for Tekken 3?
EPM: Depends whether you prefer 2D or 3D beat-'em-ups.

4th: Are you planning on having a demo CD with your mag in the future?
EPM: Who knows what the future will bring?

5th: I think it's great you have so many reviews in your mag. Some other mags give only half a page to a review.
EPM: ...and some mags review dodgy NTSC import versions of games and don't tell the readers, leading to disappointment if the title hasn't been converted properly. Bear this in mind when mags boast 'first ever review' while other titles are still PREviewing that particular game.

6th: How many games work with G-CON 45 and are all games going to work with it in the future?
EPM: Judge Dredd, Time Crisis... does anyone know of any more?

7th: Is it true that Core have signed a deal with

BLAZE

Wanna win a selection of brill Blaze International goodies? Every month the sender of the best letter picks up a surprise bag of accessories. It's a real 'trick or treat' offer - you could win anything from a top joypad to the cardboard tube from the inside of their used bog roll. Unless you write in and win, though, you won't find out which it is...

Nintendo and if so will the sad people who own the shitty N64 be able to play Tomb Raider 2? Please say it's not so.

EPM: It's not so; Eidos signed an exclusive deal with Sony. We hardly think the N64 is 'shitty', though; the PlayStation's far superior catalogue of games makes it by far the better choice, but the N64 isn't a bad machine in its own right. Let's enjoy our consoles without having a dig at other people's.

USES FOR A PLAYSTATION

Dear EPM,
What can I use my PlayStation for apart from playing games?
NV Bright, Liverpool

EPM says...
A doorstop, a paper weight, a fly swat... Seriously, the PlayStation is a dedicated games machine, and not really suitable for anything else (does 'NV' stand for 'Not Very'?). You can play Audio CDs on it, though.

DEPRESSION AND STRESS

Dear EPM,
If my doctor had prescribed a PlayStation, around five good games and six issues of your magazine I would have been on the road to recovery by now. I have been suffering from depression and stress since some time last year until now. It has been a real pain, though I have a solution to the problem.
My first remedy? I purchased a PlayStation in November '97. Second, I got myself five good games and hay presto, my depression and stress were significantly reduced. But there was still something missing. I needed a damned good magazine, and there it was; Issue One of extreme PlayStation. A cool cover, reviews, previews and news, and all the PlayStation info anyone needs to know. It's the only magazine I ever took an interest in reading from cover to cover.
It seemed like I had to wait a lifetime for Issue Two, but it was worth it. Keep them coming and thanks.
Derek Crawford, Co. Tyrone
PS You don't need a pill for every ill. Buy extreme PlayStation!

EPM says...
Arselicker! Don't be too hard on your doctor - it would be hard for him to prescribe six issues of our magazine when this is only Issue Three, but thanx for your kind words.

CLOCK THIS...

Dear EPM,
I was extremely pleased with your Clock Tower review, which was extremely honest and thorough, unlike other reviews in lesser mags. This brings me to the true subject of this letter; did you realise this game is in fact Clock Tower 2? The original Clock Tower was on the Super NES, but was never released in the USA or UK, so the '2' was wisely dropped. The Clock Tower you reviewed has been out in Japan for around two years, which is probably why it looks slightly dated. Clock Tower 3 has just been released in Japan by Human Games, and boasts improved sound, graphics, etc. I have already ordered my copy.
I own 80 games for my PlayStation, most of which I've completed. I love Clock Tower, but I'm having a few problems. Could you please help? I have endings A to E with Jennifer and C, D and E with Helen. I can't for the life of me get endings A and B with Helen; could you please tell me how to do this? Also, out of the ten hints, I'm missing only 3 and 8. Where do you find them? I need to get all the endings and all the hints because if you do, the '???' option on the title screen becomes available, revealing the true secret of Clock Tower.
Spencer Ohm, Dudley

EPM says...
Hmm... interesting thoughts about Clock Tower. We've no idea how to get the hints and endings you require (you've already got the ones we found). Is there anyone out there who can help? If so, drop us a line.

WALK THIS WAY

Dear EPM,
First I want to say your magazine is great and easily the best. I never used to buy PlayStation magazines until yours was released. I must admit though, I only bought it for the Crash 2 review but I loved it so I bought last month's as well. I was wondering if you were going to include any walk-through guides in the magazine such as Jersey Devil? I personally don't think you should, as they take up room where reviews could be instead. I did, however, think the Final Fantasy VII guide you gave away with Issue One was good because it didn't take up valuable review pages.

EPM says...
The only time that we'll print a guide in the magazine will be due to demand. Ever since its release we've been getting hundreds of calls asking for help on Broken Sword 2, which is why you'll find a guide in this month's mag. We'd rather condense a guide into fewer pages than stretch it out just to fill space. So you'll still find plenty of news, previews and reviews, even if we do print a guide.

I would now just like to ask you a few questions:
1. Is there any news on a third Crash game?
EPM: There will be a third Crash game, but nothing solid has come about yet.

2. Is it worth getting Coolboarders 2 if you have the original?
EPM: Yes. Coolboarders 2 is an excellent game in its own right. If you do have the first one, do a trade in.

3. Are there any cheats for either of the Broken Sword games?
EPM: No cheats, check out the guide to BSII on Page 92 if you're stuck.
Matthew Sadler, Retford

Got a whine? Drop us a line! Send your merry missives on all things PlayStation to:

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SWINDLERS INC.

THESE CHEATS ARE DEDICATED TO PAM AND TOMMY - THANKS FOR A 'TOP NOTCH' PERFORMANCE. BUT NEXT TIME, TOMMY, PLEASE, PLEASE, PLEASE KEEP THAT BLOODY CAMERA STILL. ANYWAY, HERE'S A BATCH OF THE HOTTEST CODES SWEEPING THE NATION.

COMMAND AND CONQUER: RED ALERT

Input the following codes by pressing the cancel button on the team select buttons (×, □, △, ○) in the tool bar.

INSTANT VICTORY

Press cancel when the pointer is over each of the following: ×, □, □, ○, △ and ○.

NUCLEAR ATTACK

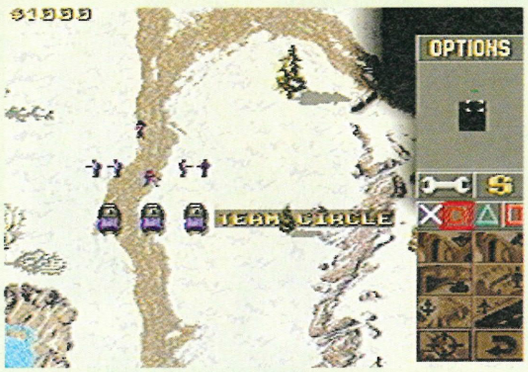
Press cancel when the pointer is over each of the following: ○, ×, ○, △, □ and △.

MONEY

Press cancel when the pointer is over each of the following: □, □, ○, ×, △ and ○.

FULL MAP

Press cancel when the pointer is over each of the following: □, △, ○, ×, △ and □.



SOVIET PASSWORDS

LEVEL 2: 17DUXFJ6C
LEVEL 3: VMBWOQ284
LEVEL 4: XN37MCCSO
LEVEL 5: LHo6FZZQL
LEVEL 6: BUVV2oLFF
LEVEL 7: AVYQ1oYA8
LEVEL 8: LZRJTMQAN
LEVEL 9: YQX4C9GFH
LEVEL 10: 1QESO8LEo
LEVEL 11: RKPoUOXJA
LEVEL 12: CDLKYL7Q4
LEVEL 13: 8T5GGDK25
LEVEL 14: X5CDEoKN8

ALLIED PASSWORDS

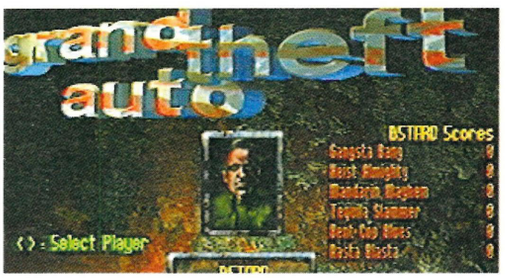
LEVEL 2: LZ9SWDNVK
LEVEL 3: 3AH5VCCYG
LEVEL 4: X63VC9XJI
LEVEL 5: DV795VoEE
LEVEL 6: 17DCPX2Z8
LEVEL 7: 9oBAZDHP3
LEVEL 8: 9oOoDSR5H
LEVEL 9: SRS8OSSQT
LEVEL 10: 5SOSL9GZ8
LEVEL 11: HFZNFE4HS
LEVEL 12: 5RNZ2KIA4
LEVEL 13: 3ASoQJC8o
LEVEL 14: 59EW5K6G1

GRAND THEFT AUTO

CHEAT MODES

Enter the following players' names to activate the relevant cheat.

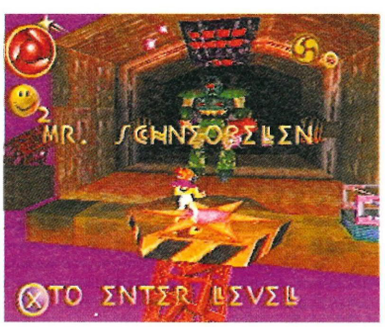
BSTARD: as a player name to gain all weapons, unlimited ammunition, level selection, ninety nine lives, armour, get out of jail, co-ordinate display and maximum wanted level.
THESHIT: as a player name to gain all weapons, unlimited ammunition, level selection, ninety nine lives, armour and get out of jail.
MADEMAN: as a player name to gain all weapons, unlimited ammunition, level selection, armour and get out of jail.
GROOVY: as a player name to gain all weapons, unlimited ammunition, armour and get out of jail.
EATTHIS: to set your wanted level to four.
CHUFF: to play with no police.
TURF: to have access to all the cities.
BLOWME: to have the relevant co-ordinates displayed.



PANDEMONIUM 2

LEVEL SELECT PASSWORDS

ICE PRISON: EMIAGCAI
ZORRSCHA'S LAB: OMACCBAI
HOT PANT'S: FAIAGCBI
STAN'S THE MAN: FEKAGCCA
OYSTER DESTROYER: LGBFIICE
PUZZLE WOOD: LMBBIIEE
TEMPLE OF NORI: IEBBIIGF
EGG! EGG!: KNBBIIAI
HUEVOS LIBERTAD: LGBJIICI
PIPE HOUSE: LOBJIIEI
HATE TANK: IGBJIIGJ
FANTABULOUS: FFCAGCCC
MR. SCHNEOBELEN: FHCAGCCK
COLLIDE O SCOPE: FJKEGCDC
THE ZOUL TRAIN: FLKEGCDK
LICK THE TOAD: ADIKBIIB
THE BITTER END: ADMIBIID
RUB THE BUDDHA: MAECCBEJ



NHL POWERPLAY '98

HIDDEN TEAMS

Choose 'Start Game' and then select 'Exhibition Mode', then immediately hold down ×+△+□+○. Release the buttons once you get to the team selection screen. You now have The Rad Army and the Virgin Blasters as teams to pick.



Auto Destruct

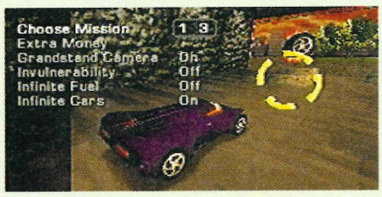
Pause the game whilst in play and press ↑, ↓, ←, →, ↓, →, L1, R1, R1 to open up the cheats menu. From that the following features are available.

Car Select:
Pause the game and press ←, R1, →, R1, ←, R1, →, R1

Immortal:
Pause the game and press ←, R1, ↑, L1, ↑, →, R1, ↓, L1

Blood Mode:
Pause the game and press L1, ↓, R1, ←, L1, →, R1

New York Time Trial:
Pause the game and press L1, →, ↓, ←, ↑, R1



Tokyo Time Trial:
Pause the game and press L1, ←, →, R1, ←, →, L1

Subway Time Trial:
Pause the game and press L1, ←, L1, R1, →, R1

Choose Mission:
Pause the game and press ↑, ↓, ○, L1, R1, L1, ○, ↓, ↑

Next Mission:
Pause the game and press □, ○, R1, L1, ○, ↓, L1, ↑

All Money:
Pause the game and press L1, R1, ↑, ○, ↓, □, →, R1, L1

Add One Minute To The Time:
Pause the game and press ↓, L1, L1, ○, ○, R1, ↑, □, L1

Invulnerable:
Pause the game and press L1, L1, L1, L1, ←, ○, ○, □, L1

Infinite Fuel:
Pause the game and press L1, ○, ←, L1, ○, R1, L1, ↑, R1, ↓

Actua Soccer 2

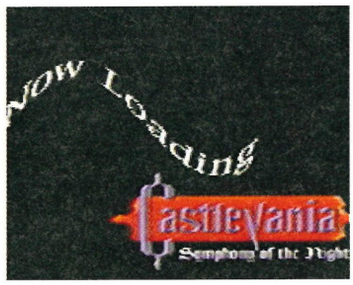
Input any of these combinations at the title screen to activate the relevant feature. A message will appear to confirm the correct code entry.

Gremlin 11 Team: Press ←, →, □, ○, ↑, ↓, □, ○
Play with Beach Ball: Press ←, →, ←, ↑, ←, →, □, □
No Flood Lights: Press ←, ←, ←, ○, →, →, →, □
Large Players: Press ↑, ↓, ↓, →, □, □, ○, ○
Invisible Players: Press □, ○, ↓, ○, ↑, →, □, ←
Small Players: Press ○, ↓, ↓, □, ↑, ↑, ←, →
Ghostball Mode: Press □, □, ←, ←, →, →, ○, ○
Monochrome Mode: Press ↑, ↓, ↑, □, ○, ↑, ↓, ↑
SFA Mode: Press ←, ←, □, →, →, ○, ↑, ↓



Castlevania- Symphony of the Night

Now Loading
When the words 'Now Loading' appear, you can manipulate the logo on the screen using your D-Pad.

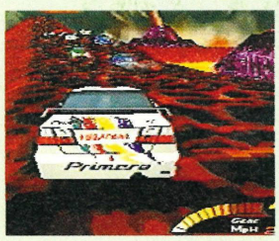


Axe Lord Armour
After beating the game once, start a new challenge, but this time enter your name as 'AXEARMOR'. Now there will be a new suit of armour in your inventory.

Enhanced Luck
Again, after bearing the game once, start a new game and this time enter your name as 'X-X!V"Q'. Now you start the game with 99 luck and the Lapis Lazuli item, but your strength and hit points will be reduced.

TOCA: Touring Car Championship

Access Tracks
To gain access to all of the tracks enter your name as 'JHAMMO'.



NHL Face Off 98

Bonus Players
Enter one of the following names in the player creation screen, but don't alter or edit any of the attributes:

RAJA ALTENHOO
STEVE BRASKI
TOM BRASKI
CRAIG BROADBOOKS
DAVE BRICKNELL
JOSJ HASSIN
TAWN KRAMER
JOHN REHLING
ALAN SCALES
KEELY RYAN
JODY KELSEY
PETER DILLE
CRAIG OSTRANDER



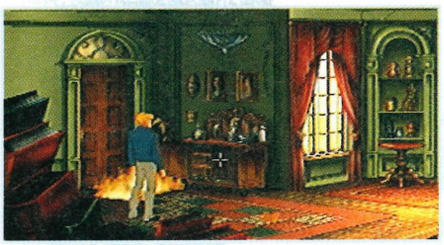
Player's Guide

BROKEN SWORD 2

the smoking mirror

ESCAPE

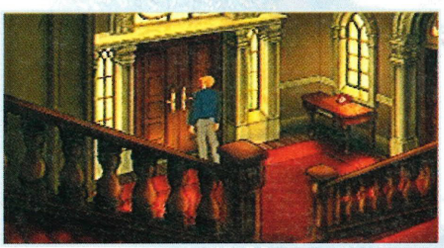
1: Examine the bookshelf to find one corner is held up by a loose wooden block. Move the cursor to the bookshelf corner nearest yourself and kick it out of the way. The bookshelf falls and squashes the spider.
2: Rub your ropes against the bracket revealed when the book case fell. You're free!
3: Pick up the poisoned dart from near the corner of the mat.
4: In a drawer in the writing desk is a pot. Inside this is a key. Get it.
5: Near the curtain is the handbag. Open it.
6: Open the cupboard near the fire with the dart. Inside is a cylinder too hot to pick up with your bare hands. Use the knickers from the handbag.



7: On the cupboard is a soda siphon. Use the cylinder on it. Use the siphon to douse the fire.
8: Kick the door down to get out of the room.

IN THE HOUSE

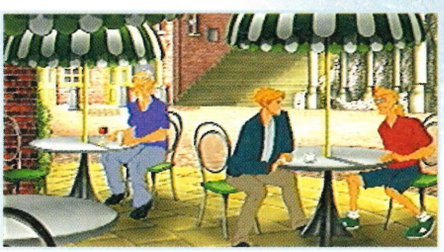
1: Read the note from the handbag. Use the phone to ring Lobineau.
2: Pick up the newspaper next to the phone. A clue!



3: Unlock the left-hand set of doors and leave.

THE CAFE

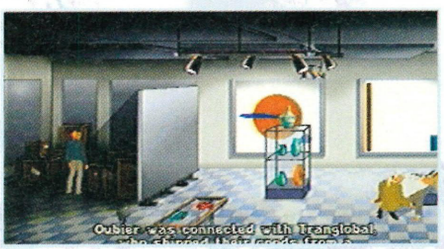
1: Talk to the guy at the table with you. When he asks what brings you to Paris, pick the Nico icon.
2: Next, select the gendarme icon to ask him why he left the police. Talk to him as much as you wish.



3: Talk to the waiter until he gives you a coffee. Lobineau arrives, and more of the plot is revealed.
4: Show Lobineau the pot by selecting the pot icon. He advises you to go to see his friend at the Glease Gallery.
5: Use the exit icon to leave. After a cameo of Nico and her captors, you should talk to the Gendarme again. Use the gendarme icon. Talk to him again and he tells you to leave him alone - steal the flask off the table.
6: Talk to the Gendarme again; use the gendarme icon. When he's finished and you're told you have another lead and can go to the house or the gallery, go to the gallery.

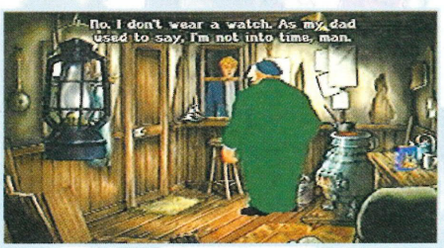
THE GLEASE GALLERY

1: Talk to the fat man. Use the flask you stole from the gendarme on his glass.
2: Use the flask on his drink again. He falls and smashes a cabinet.
3: Talk to the blond guy who helps him. This is Mr Glease.
4: Go to the back of the gallery and take the label from the packing case. It's a clue! You then move on to Marseilles.

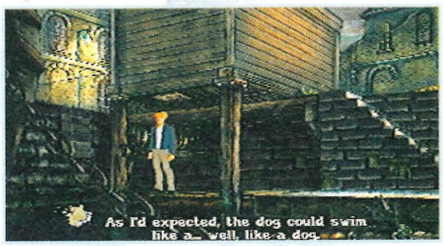


MARSEILLES

1: Walk to the hut. As you try to climb the fence, the guard dog goes barmy.
2: Look through the hut window to see the night watchman drop a bottle through the trapdoor. He tells you you're too early.



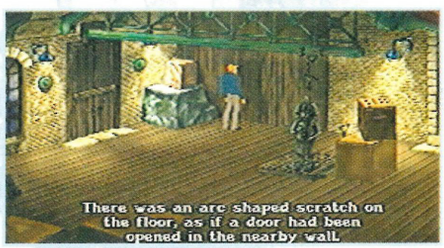
3: Go down the steps. Take the boat hook from the water and use it to get the bottle under the trapdoor.
4: Go back up the steps and look at the chimney - it's hot. Use the bottle on the chimney, then examine it again to remove the cone. Put the empty bottle into the chimney.
5: When the man leaves the smoke-filled hut, go down the steps and into the hut through the trapdoor. Take the packet of dog biscuits.
6: Standing under the hut, feed the biscuits to the dog. There's a platform on the wall under where it's standing - use the boat hook on it to make the mutt fall into the water. Don't worry, he can swim.



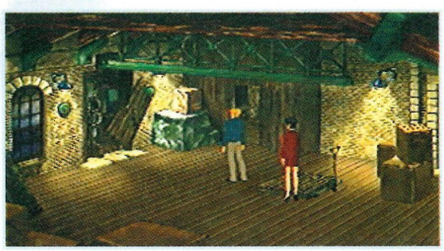
7: You know what to do next - climb over the fence and up the ladder at the far side of the dock. Look through the window and use the boat hook on the fan. Go back down the ladder and knock on the door. When offered the icons, choose the gendarme.
8: As soon as you can, move back up the ladder and push the pulley. As the bully-boy walks in front of it, swing it again to knock him into the water. Go into the warehouse.

DOCKSIDE WAREHOUSE

1: Search the desk drawers to find the small key.
2: Move right until you see Titipoco. Use the brass key on him to free him. Use the lift.
3: Move a crate into the lift doorway to stop the doors closing. On the left-hand side of the lift is a light switch. Press it.



4: Examine the arc-shaped scratch near the wooden wall. This shows a door was opened here. Find the secret door and go through.
5: Inside the room you find Nicko. Try to talk to her - you remove her gag. Untie her. Pick up the flint carving and follow her. Use the rope on the statue under the pulley. Use the tape on the electric eye at the foot of the left side of the lift to prevent it being called. Move the crate from the lift, move the upper crate onto it and then move the third crate out of the way. Use the lever on the



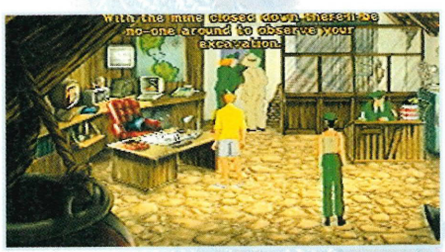
handcart under the statue. Tie the statue to the pulley and lower the cart again. Ask Nico to help send the statue flying through the doors.
6: Go through the smashed doorway and use the manacles on the cable. You slide down and land in the water. After a short sequence where you talk to Lobineau and Mr Glease, you go to Quaramonte, in Central America.

QUARAMONTE

1: Talk to the band. Their pipe player, Miguel, is in jail. Ask about him by picking the Miguel icon, then pick the music icon. When they've finished, ask about the mine accident (icon next to 'exit'), then leave.



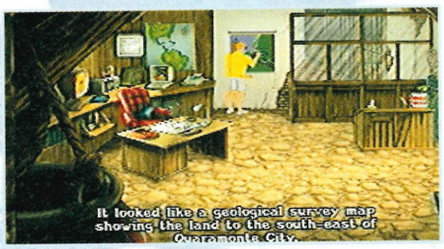
2: Talk to the fat woman to the right. This is Mrs Henderson. Ask her about Duane (icon next to 'exit'). Do so until his icon is no longer offered, then leave.
Move right to find Duane in the truck. Speak to him. Ask about the truck twice to find it's full of explosives. Now talk music, then ask about Miguel.
3: Walk into the building near Pearl Henderson. This is Tourist Information. You hear some dodgy-looking geezers talking about the mine 'accident'. Ask about Oubier (between pyramids and biscuits) twice, then use the exit icon to end the conversation.



4: Talk to the guy on the right about pyramids twice. Look at the pull-down chart on the white wall. You're not allowed to do so. Leave the building.
5: Talk to Nico about the chart (next to 'exit') and then talk to Duane about the General twice. Now go to the mine office, a big white two-storey building near the market. Ask the woman about Professor Oubier (icon to the left of the biscuits). Show her the knickers for an amusing response. Now go back to Duane and ask about Miguel; if Oubier's with him, do something else until he's gone. Duane asks for a detonator. Talk to him about detonators. Now go back to the mine office and ask the woman about detonators, then ask about the chart. Leave the building.



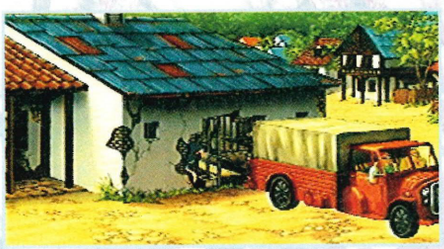
6: Now talk to Nico, outside the office. Ask her about the chart. Talk to the general and select the Nico icon. When she leaves with the General, talk to Renaldo (the guy on the right) and talk about pyramids. Leave, talk to Pearl, and select the pyramid icon. You're taken back inside, and Pearl leaves with Renaldo. Look at the chart.



7: Go back to the mine office and talk to Concha. Select the chart icon. Take the detonator from the cupboard and go back to Duane.
8: Give Duane the detonator. He tells you to go and warn Miguel the rescue attempt is in progress. Go back to the Police Station, where you looked at the chart. Go down the passage at the back of the room, behind the glass partition.
9: Talk to Miguel. You're captured. You're given control of Nico.

GEORGE AND NICO

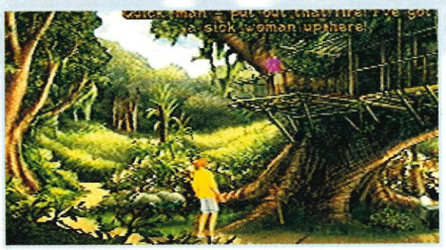
1: You (Nico) are in the General's living room, avoiding his attentions. Click on the lava lamp, television and tiger skin rug. Talk to the General and ask about them. Eventually, the General's mother arrives.
2: Control now switches to George. After a short cameo involving Duane and his 'explosives', talk to Miguel. Ask about the noose twice. He gives it to you. Tie it to the window bars. Move away from the window, pick up the rope and move the cursor over the window until you get the 'speech' icon. The game switches to Nico. The General's mother is trying to get him to propose, but her efforts are thwarted by a big bang from in the town - I wonder what that is? George and Miguel are freed.



After a short sequence where your boat is blown up, you wind up on the river bank.

THE RIVERBANK

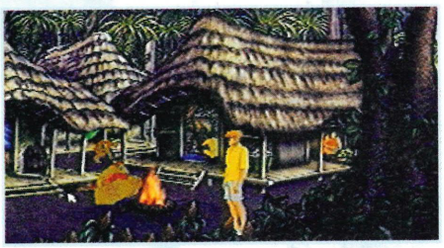
1: Grab the vine rope from the wooden wheel nearby. Move left to the two stones. Use the vine on them to make a drive belt. Put the bank statement on the pile of damp leaves near the water wheel. Use the fetish on the water wheel to start a fire.



2: So that's where Nico is. Talk to Hubert and select the Nico icon. She's been bitten by a snake. Hubert talks about a root which will cure her. Select the root icon twice, then end the conversation.
3: Put the collar between the stones to press it. Use the nearby cross to turn the stones and then pick up the collar again. Return it to the priest.
4: Select the root icon, and he eventually agrees to take you to the village.

THE VILLAGE

1: Select the Nico icon to tell the native what happened. Next select Hubert, then the shaman. End the conversation and give the biscuits to the native.
2: Put the Mayan stone in the empty biscuit packet and use it on the native. You get to see the shaman at last - go left.



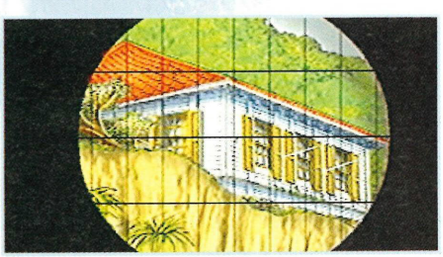
3: You sit and talk with the shaman. Select the priest icon to find why Hubert is so reluctant to go to the village. Select the Nico icon twice, then the root icon twice. After learning more about the legend of Tezcatlipoca, use the Hubert icon twice to find out about his kids.



4: Time to enquire about the stones. Use the stone icon, then the Jaguar Stone (next to the eclipse) twice. Ask now about the Eagle Stone twice, then the original stone icon. Now, at last, you get to talk about the root again. Do so. Back at the tree house, put the cone under the stones you used to press the collar. Put the root on the stones and turn them with the cross again. Pick up the cone. Climb the ladder and go into the house to cure Nico.

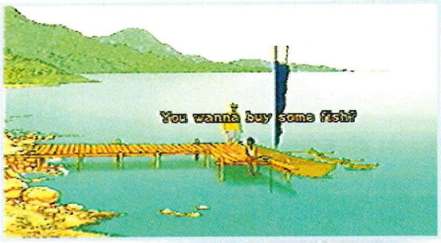
KETCH'S LANDING

1: Look at the plans on the table, then through the eyepiece of the theodolite, the tripod-mounted tool to the right of the table. You see an old house.

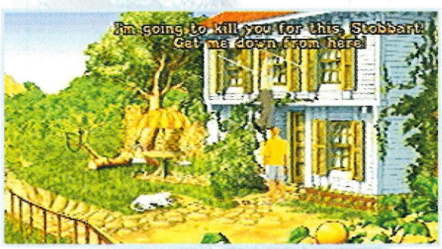


2: Talk to the guy nearby. This is Bronson. Talk about the theodolite twice, then end the conversation. Climb the steps.

3: Play with the cat. It's not too friendly. Extend the ladder and try the door to start a conversation with the old ladies.

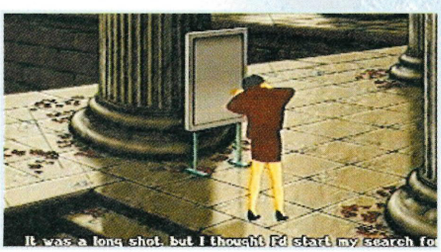


4: Go back down the steps and talk to the fisher boy on the jetty. Talk about pirate treasure, Ketch, the sisters, the plans and Bronson - in that order.
5: Talk to Bronson about the sisters. When he asks about the fisher boy, go for the thumbs up icon. Talk with him about the plans, then go back up the steps.
6: Talk to the old ladies about the cat, and say you like cats. Talk about Rio three times, then about Emily twice. Talk about the cat, then Emily once more.
7: Go back to the jetty and talk to Rio. Select Emily, the fish, then the lipstick. Walk away and come back. Ask about fish twice, then end the conversation and get the inner tube from the wheel.
8: Talk to Rio - you get your fish. Talk to him again, about the inner tube. Now go back up the steps and climb the ladder. Put the inner tube on the flagpole, go down the ladder and put the fish on the inner tube. Now the cat's distracted, get the ball. Climb the ladder again and retrieve the inner tube. The cat gets its fish. Use the inner tube on the tree to the left to make a catapult. Use the ball on the catapult to knock the theodolite target clean off the flagpole - why you couldn't just move the ladder is beyond us, but we didn't write the game.

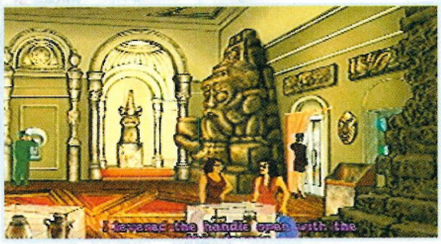


9: While Bronson's messing about on the flagpole, remove the ladder. Pick up the marker he drops, then go down the steps and pick up the theodolite. Go back up the steps, talk to Bronson, then go back down and get the plans. So Bronson was planning a hotel!
10: Go back up the steps and talk to the old ladies. Give them the plans. After a short sequence, you're in the museum.

THE BRITISH MUSEUM

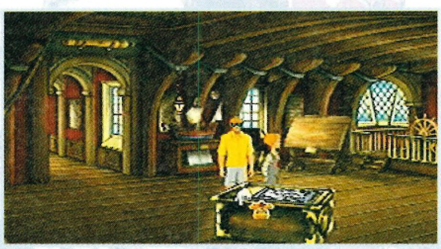


1: Control now switches to Nico, who obviously got the short straw (and an even shorter skirt). Look at the cabinet next to the curtain on the right-hand wall.
2: Go all the way to the left and talk to the attendant. Go for the stone icon, the last of four. He introduces you to... Professor Oubier! When offered the speech icons again, just end the conversation. Oubier is called away. Ask the attendant about the stone again. It's been stolen.
3: Grab the key from the cabinet, then steal the obsidian dagger from the cabinet on the other side of the room, next to the phone. Retrieve the key and talk to the attendant about it. When he goes to the phone, use the dagger on the doors behind the curtain.



THE KETCH MUSEUM

1: Back to George. Pick up the quill from the table in front of you. Go and look at the portrait of Captain Ketch on the far wall, behind the wheel.
2: Go and look at the sea chest. Inside you find Emily. Talk about the cross twice and go.
3: Leave the museum and tickle the cat with the quill. He tears it to pieces - pick them up. Go and see Rio. Ask him about Emily, then about his sister. Give him the tattered feathers and he gives you the conch.
4: Go and talk to Emily. Go for the conch, then end the conversation. Pick up the chart and put it on the table. Put the cross in the pen holder to the right of the chart. It's difficult to find the exact spot, but you need the 'hand' icon.



5: Put the lantern in the ink well on the table. You need the 'cogs' icon. A shadow is cast over a skull-shaped island...
6: Go talk to Rio. Ask about treasures, then zombies. He takes you to Zombie Island.

ZOMBIE ISLAND

1: Look at the outcrop to your left. It's too high. Look at the boat and ask if you can borrow one of Rio's nets. Use it on the outcrop and you climb up.

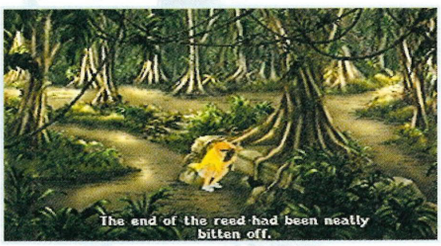
LONDON UNDERGROUND

1: Control now switches to Nico. Look in your handbag to find the hair grip, then use it on the blue slot machine's reject slot. An old fashioned penny falls into the receptacle for reject coins.
2: Weigh yourself using the penny on the weighing machine. You get a card. Use the dagger on the cupboard under the yellowing poster, then use the card to release the lock.
3: Press the button in the cupboard to change the signal, and board the train.

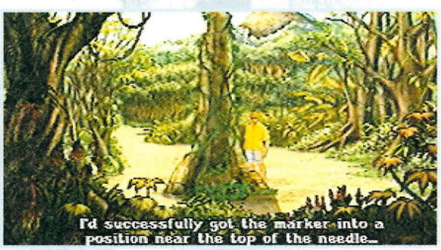


EXPLORING ZOMBIE ISLAND

1: Back to George. Walk through the exit to the north-east and you're in the forest near a swamp. Pick up the reed at the swamp's edge. Leave by the right exit, and look at the den under the tree. Poke your reed into it - the end is bitten off.



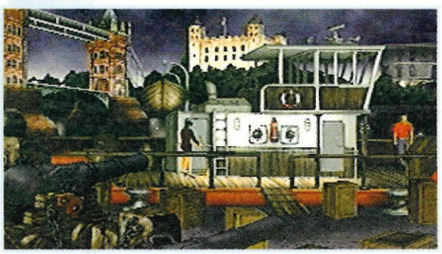
2: Go back the way you came, all the way to the cliff top. Use the south-east exit and walk up to the boar. Use the reed on the dart to make a blowpipe, then use this on the boar. If you jump to the overhanging branch as you shoot, the boar opens an alternative exit to Camel's Hump Hill. Go right.
3: Keep going right until you reach a fork, where you can continue right or go north into the screen. Go north to find a clearing with a huge needle-shaped stone in the middle.
4: Pull the creeper, then try to pick it up - it won't hold your weight. Use the net on the marker you took from the flagpole. Use the net and marker on the vines at the foot of the 'needle'. Throw the creeper/net/marker over the top of the needle-like rock.



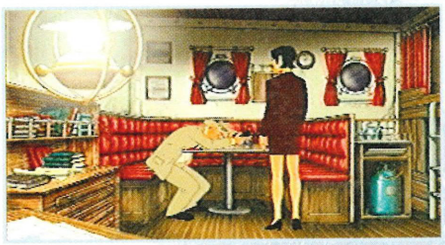
5: Go through the exit created by the runaway boar. Set up the theodolite on the hill. Look through it - keep looking right, then look at the needle-like pillar. You see the marker glisten at the foot of the sight. Click on both it and the tall rock behind it.
6: Leave the hill by the right-hand path, and control switches to Nico.

THE DOCKS

1: Move behind the crate, but only when the watchman has passed. From there, as he talks to Pablo, open the cupboard next to the ladder then



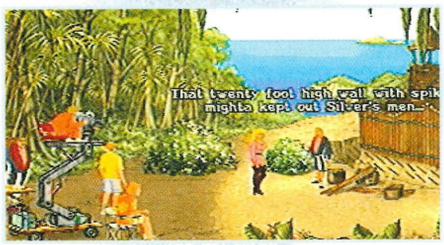
climb up the ladder and onto the roof. When the guard investigates the cupboard, shut it on him and secure it with the mop propped next to the cupboard. You haven't much time - this may take several attempts.
2: Look through the porthole. You see Karzac kill Oubier. He then leaves, and you walk into the cabin.



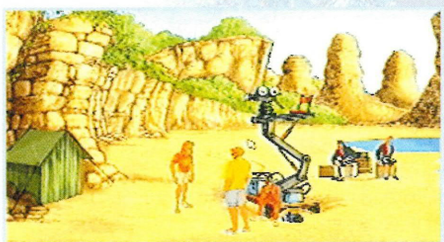
3: Try to take the stone - you can't until you've checked he's dead. Examine Oubier. There are no signs of life. Get the stone.
4: Karzac tries to strangle you - stab him with the sacrificial dagger you've been carrying around since the British Museum.

FILM SET

1: George, meanwhile, has stumbled on a movie set. Talk to the director (Hawkes) until your options are exhausted, then talk to Haiku (the actor on the right) about everything until Hawkes tells you to get out of shot and shooting starts.



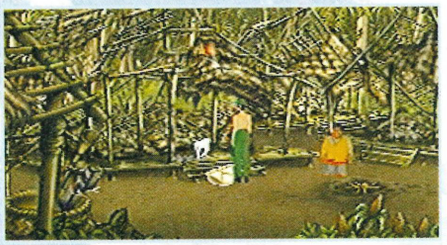
2: Examine the bush twice, and look at the camera. Pick up the pancake, maple syrup and a bun from the table. Smear the maple syrup on the pancake.
3: When Bert is near the bush, give him the syrupy pancake. He makes a mess of himself. Talk to the director, who asks Bert to do a dangerous stunt. Throw a bun into the bush, then get another and do the same. Bert is chased by hornets and injures himself.
4: The next scene is filmed on the beach. You see the pillar of stone you identified as the hiding place for Keach's treasure, and spot a cave at the top.



5: Talk to Bert and use the pillar icon. He's not keen to climb to the cave.
6: Talk to Hawks about his movie until the icon is no longer offered, then talk to Bert about the movie and then about Hawks.
7: Look at the camera, then at the portable camera on the floor near the cameraman's foot. Talk to the cameraman about Hawks, then about the pillar of rock.
8: Talk to Hawks about the pillar of rock, and then about the cameraman. You explain about the portable camera. Success - you're dressed as Jimbo Hawkins and hired.

THE BURNED VILLAGE

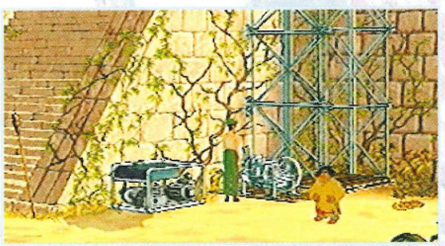
1: Move to the right and pick up the underpants on the floor.
2: Look on the step next to the barrel to find a hot stone. Use the underpants to pick it up. Damn - it worked on the cylinder at the start, but not here.



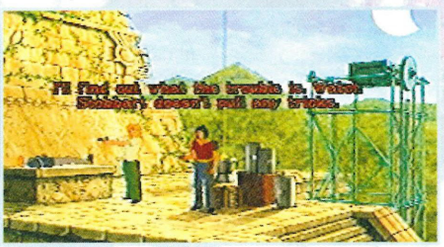
3: Examine the barrel. Talk to Titipoco and ask him to help you with the barrel. You tip it over, washing the stone onto the floor. It's in the pile of ash clearly visible at the edge of the puddle - run the cursor over it until you get the pick-up icon.
4: Titipoco is pointing at something. Follow his finger to the left.

OUTSIDE THE PYRAMID

1: You arrive at the pyramid, and see George being led up the steps. Remove the fuel cylinder from the electricity generator. It's on the fuel tank, on the left side of the machine.
2: Use the dagger on the fuel line (further to the left - look for the cogs icon), then use the fuel cylinder on the leaking fuel. Put the fuel into the lift engine (the machine on the right) by clicking on the fuel cap on the top. Now press the button on the side of the engine (again, this is tricky to find). The engine starts.



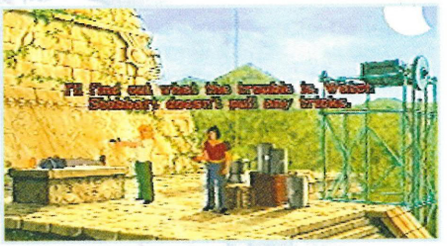
3: Flick the lever on the left of the engine to find it's not connected to the lift. Flick the switch again so turn it off.



4: Pick up the rope, hand it to Titipoco and select the rope icon. He climbs the scaffolding.
5: Fasten the rope to the wheel. The lift now works. Talk to Titipoco about the lever, stand on the lift and talk to him again.

HUMAN SACRIFICE

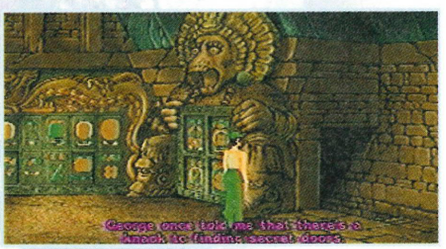
1: You get to the top of the pyramid and find George, captured at the burned village, in a spot of bother.
2: Pick up the ammo from on top of the brown crate then use the lift again. Move left and get spotted by the guards. Talk about Karzac, though it will do you no good. Instead, pick up the torch.
3: Get Titipoco to light it for you, then you (automatically) throw it onto the fuel. Throw the ammo onto the fire. This gets rid of the guards and distracts Pablo.



4: Talk to the General, who's pointing a gun at George. Titipoco covers him while you free George - use the dagger. You go inside the pyramid.

INSIDE THE PYRAMID

1: Nico gives George the stones - he now has them all. Pull the levers on the back wall, then talk to George about levers. You pull them together and open a trap door.
2: After a short sequence, you end up in a room with weird dials. This puzzle is harder to explain than it is to solve, so pay attention. The idea is to press each of the four tiles on the extreme right. Here's how to do it...
3: The symbol on each of the four tiles labelled A-D is made up of two of the symbols on the tiles marked 1-10. The symbols on the tiles marked 1-10 are made up of two of the symbols on the wheels. Click on the right side of a wheel to turn it clockwise, and the left side to turn it anti-clockwise.
4: To depress a lettered tile, you must press the two corresponding numbered tiles. To depress a numbered tile, you must align the wheels until the symbols making up the numbered tile meet in the centre. Depressed numbered tiles stay depressed until a third is pressed, so after pressing the two respective number tiles, press the letter tile straight away.
5: The numbered-tile combinations for the lettered tiles are as follows: 2+5=A, 3+10=B, 1+8=C, 6+9=D.
6: As the last lettered tile is depressed, a secret door opens. Go through it - control switches to George.



7: Pick up the torch and get Titipoco to light it. Pull the lever on the wall. It's on the blueish wall to the left of the screen. You fall (again).
8: Pick up the torch and light the wall-mounted torch on the right wall. Pull the lever in the centre of the rear wall, and go through the left door.
9: There's a doorway on the left here, with a lever either side of it. First pull the right one, then the left. Go through.
10: Pull the lever next to the open doorway and then go through. Go down the stairs to the right, and pull the lever at the bottom.
11: Go down the stairs again and you're in the heart of the pyramid. Watch the end sequence - you've won.

EXTRAS

ALTHOUGH SOME MAY NOT BELIEVE IT, THERE IS A LIFE OUTSIDE OF VIDEOGAMES. THIS IS WHERE EXTRAS FITS IN. EVERY MONTH WE BRING YOU THE BEST OF THE BEST ON ANYTHING THAT ISN'T A PLAYSTATION GAME. IT COULD BE MUSIC OR MOVIES, CLOTHES OR CARS, BOOKS OR BOOZE; IN FACT YOU NAME IT AND YOU'LL SEE IT HERE AT SOME POINT. THIS MONTH WE'VE BEEN PUTTING THE DIGIMON AND DIGIBOY THROUGH THEIR PACES, GURNING AND WEARING WHITE GLOVES TO THE HARDCORE HEAVEN ALBUM AND REMINISCING ABOUT THE RUBIK'S CUBE. SO, TURN OFF YOUR PLAYSTATION AND DO SOMETHING THAT YOU'VE PROBABLY ONLY EVER DREAMT ABOUT; ENTER THE REAL WORLD...

DIGIMON

DigiMon takes the cyberpet concept a stage further; as well as raising your cyber-creature, you now fight with it. From the day it's hatched, you must take good care of your DigiMon. You can check on his status, feed him food and vitamins, train him for battle, wipe up his shit (honest) and when he's old enough, fight. If he gets injured, heal him.

when you check his status, his age and weight are shown, as are his hunger and strength ratings, shown as four hearts. Don't over-feed him, or your lean, mean fighting machine turns into a fat-cat insufferable prat. You can boost his strength with vitamins, but do this too often and he gets sluggish or even sick.

Neglect your DigiMon and he beeps to gain your attention. Thankfully, the creatures sleep from around 7pm to about 9am at first, needing less and less rest as they grow. This means you too can get a good night's sleep without worrying about your cyberpet.

Like the Tamagotchi, a DigiMon eventually 'dies', or rather 'returns to the mainframe'. The better you look after them, the longer they last. A good age to aim for is 12-15 years, a DigiMon's year lasting a day in real time. When he's gone, you can hatch a new pet - you don't have to buy a new unit.



Dock 'N' Rock

The key difference between DigiMons and previous cyberpets is that you can link two machines and fight - Dock 'n' Rock. To do well you must first train by shadow-boxing. Choose the training option and your DigiMon faces another, identical animal across the screen. To strike, you must aim high or low. The DigiMon opposite blocks high or low. If he blocks your blow, he gains a point. If you avoid his shield and hit him, it's a point to you. All DigiMons can shadow box in this way, even those at the baby stage.

When he reaches the rookie stage, he can fight for real. To do this you need an opponent also at rookie stage or above. Both pugilists must choose the battle option, then link the two machines as shown. One transfer of data later and you're locked in combat. The winner gets stronger while the loser weakens, and both lose energy.

It's a pity the fights always follow the same formula. Perhaps closer battles could last longer, and walkovers be finished almost immediately. Also, the percentage of fights won is offered on the condition menus, but not the number of battles fought. Any fool can win his first battle then keep his DigiMon idle to maintain a 100% record. Even so, DigiMon battles are exciting and fun, offering a new perspective on the cyberpet. Losing several fights in a row is a great incentive to take better care of your monster.

DigiMons cost £10.99, and are in the shops now.

Colourful Characters

As your DigiMon gets older, he changes form depending on how well you look after him.

▸ Baby Stage

The DigiMon hatches in around five minutes, and changes into the KoroMon in around 20 minutes to half an hour. Baby DigiMons cannot fight, but they're able to train.



BOTAMON: Slimy DigiMon
Weapon: Bubbles
This newly-hatched DigiMon is slimy and covered with black baby hair.



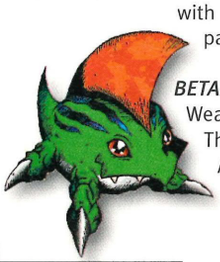
KOROMON: Little DigiMon
Weapon: Bubbles
Still unable to fight, this is the DigiMon in infanthood.

▸ Rookie Stage

A KoroMon grows into one of the rookie characters in around two days. Which character you get depends on how you treat him.



AGUMON: Lizard DigiMon
Weapon: Flames
This small, fierce creature has little power, but fights with passion.



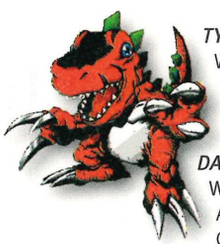
BETAMON: Frog DigiMon
Weapon: Electricity
The amphibian is quieter than the AguMon.

▸ Champion Stage

The DigiMon reaches champion stage in around 4-5 days, but can take up to a week.



GREYMON: Great DigiMon
Weapon: Flame Bombs
This is the strongest of the champions, the result of good training.



TYRANOMON: Dino DigiMon
Weapon: Giant Tail
This dinosaur-like DigiMon is intelligent and gentle.

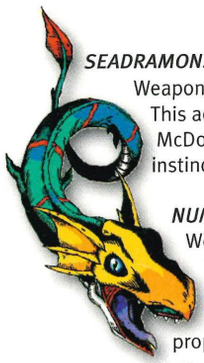


DARKMON: Dark DigiMon
Weapon: Claws
An evil, wicked and ferocious DigiMon. Cross it at your peril.

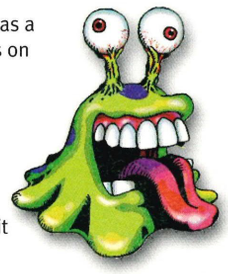
MERAMON: ? DigiMon
Weapon: Unknown
This is the mysterious flame character. Little is known about him.



AIRDRAMON: Dragon DigiMon
Weapon: Giant Tornado
This flying DigiMon is very rare. Can you find it?



***SEADRAMON:* SERPENT DIGIMON**
Weapon: Squeeze
This aquatic monster is as thick as a McDonald's manager, but fights on instinct.



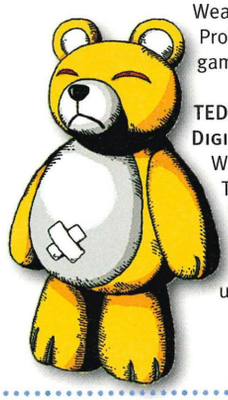
***NUMEMON:* SLUG DIGIMON**
Weapon: Secret
You get this DigiMon, which looks like a violent sneeze, if you don't raise it properly.



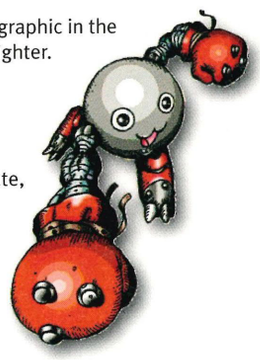
▸ ULTIMATE STAGE
Work hard and you might get one of the three ultimate characters.

METAL GREYMON: CYBORG DIGIMON
Weapon: Missiles
This mechanised fighter extends his life with bionic body parts.

MAMEMON: MUTANT DIGIMON
Weapon: Big Fists
Probably the worst graphic in the game, but a tough fighter.



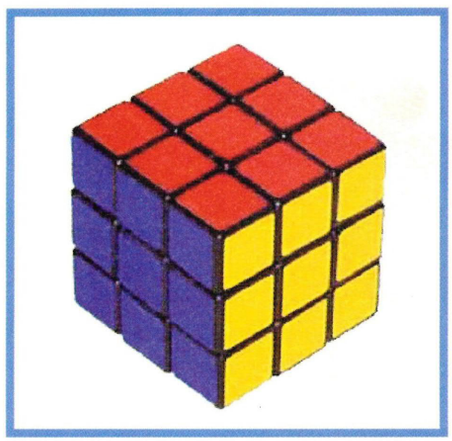
TEDDYMON: TEDDY DIGIMON
Weapon: Love
This one looks cute, but conceals a deadly secret. Can you uncover it?



BLAST FROM THE PAST

RUBIK'S CUBE

Who remembers the Rubik's Cube? Who could ever forget it? Professor Rubik's perplexing creation was THE big craze of the early eighties. We wonder how many people solved the Cube without looking at a solution? No one here did. Indeed, if you had no instructions there were two main ways of completing it; the first was to peel off the stickers and move them, but they soon tore and lifted, making it obvious what you'd done. The other method was to pull the cube apart and reassemble it, leaving no traces of your cheating.



As the Cube craze fizzled out manufacturers tried all sorts of gimmicks to squeeze the last few drops of dosh out of the product. There were Royal wedding cubes, hexagonal and spherical 'cubes', the even-trickier billion barrel, a cube with 25 squares on each side and even a snake-like creation that was more of a toy than a puzzle. For all its popularity at the time, though, it's now a distant memory. I wonder if mine's still in the attic?

MUSIC

First up this month is Hardcore Heaven Volume 3. This 36-track double CD is mixed by hardcore luminaries Sy, Slipmatt, Dougal and Brisk, and includes a selection of top light-stick waving, pogo-jumping, hand-shaking tunes from the hardcore scene's best producers. If you're into the likes of Force & Styles, Brisk & Ham and DJ Seduction, Hardcore Heaven should be right up your alley... Pulp Fusion 2 on Harmless Records takes a completely different route from the hands-in-the-air anthems of Hardcore Heaven Volume 3. In fact, it couldn't be any further away. With classic tracks from Herbie Hancock (sampled by King B on Back By Dope Demand) and the Salsoul Orchestra, Pulp Fusion 2 showcases a host of seventies superfly, ice cool, stakeout music. Don your flares and get down... Goldie, drum & bass' very own pop star, has released his new album, Saturnz Returnz to a mixed reaction. There's no Inner City Life or Timeless, but his 60-minute long Mother track should raise a few eyebrows... Goldie's own label, Metalheadz, has a compilation out - Platinum Breakz 2 is a prime selection of some of the hardest, darkest, metallic beats you're likely to hear this side of the Millennium. Adam F, Grooverider and Lemon D all contribute tracks scary enough to put Freddy Kruger in an institution... Finally on the albums front, we've got Underground Garage on MCI records which gives us a selection of the hottest UK Garage around; if this is your sound, then Underground Garage is your compilation... Singles worth checking out: Madonna - Frozen, with dance mixes including William Orbit... Fire Island's Style Council Cover - Shout To The Top... Damon Wild & Tim Taylor - Bang The Acid (remixes).



DIGIBOY

Fifty-five games on a keyring, eh? Bollox - the Digiboy, from the Japanese Keychain Company, has four games; the other 51 are difficulty levels and minor variations.



The Turbo game is a weak driving effort. Your blocky vehicle dodges obstacles that look exactly like the car, and you don't steer so much as flip from the right lane to the left one and back again. Galaxians is equally dire, featuring blocks for aliens and invisible bullets.
It's not all doom and gloom, though. The snake game, where you grow longer by swallowing food, taking care not to hit the sides of the screen or your tail, is playable and fun. The inevitable Tetris clone, in which you fit falling shapes to make complete lines at the bottom of the screen, is superb - our designer played it for days.
The Digiboy is really only recommended if you want a cheap game of Tetris, but that's no damning indictment - it offers a good version of an all-time classic. They cost £7.99 + £1.00 P&P, but thanks to extreme PlayStation you get it for £5.99 + a quid P&P. Send cheques and postal orders, payable to The Japanese Keychain Company, to: Unit 16, Gunhills Lane Ind. Est, Armthorpe, Doncaster DN3 3EB or call them on 01302 830515. To get the discount, you must mention extreme PlayStation.

the JAPANESE keychain company

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Issue 4

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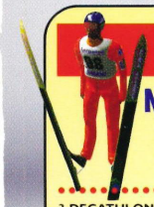
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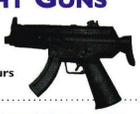


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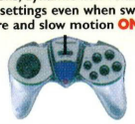


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