

NAG

SOUTH AFRICA'S LEADING COMPUTER GAMING & TECHNOLOGY MAGAZINE

METAL GEAR SOLID 3 SNAKE EATER REVIEW ◀◀

CASE MODDING GEAR ROUND-UP ◀◀

JUICED HANDS ON PREVIEW ◀◀

PLAYSTATION 3's CELL PROCESSOR EXAMINED ◀◀

AGE OF EMPIRES III PREVIEW ◀◀

ELSA GLADIAC **6600 GT** CARD REVIEW ◀◀

METROID PRIME 2 ECHOES REVIEW ◀◀

STAR WARS KOTOR II THE SITH LORDS REVIEW ◀◀

WIN! 2 GECUBE GRAPHIC CARDS & 1 NINTENDO DS ◀◀

CALL^{OF}DUTY 2

PREVIEW

PC XBOX GAMECUBE GBA DS MOBILE PSP PLAYSTATION 2

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04

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Tim Clark - PlayStation 2
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 TOM CLANCY'S

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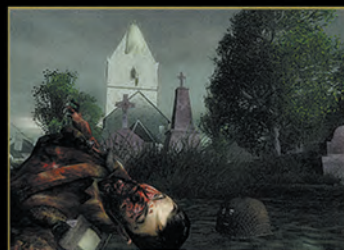
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the men I led out were brothers"

Sgt Matt Baker - 101st Airborne



BROTHERS ★ IN ARMS ★ ROAD TO HILL 30

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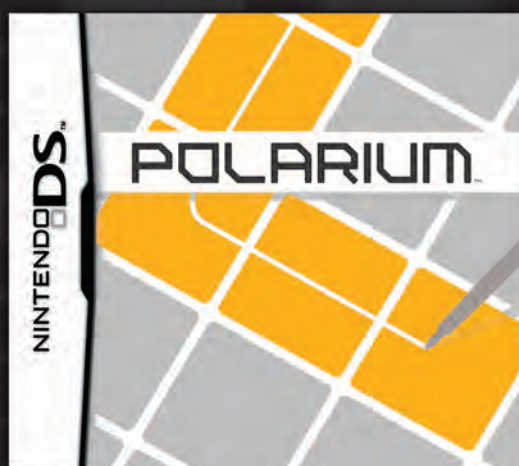
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CONTENTS

FEATURES

- 28** Interview: Brenda Braithwaite
- 90** PS3: Cell on Earth
- 110** Lazy Gamer's Guide - Microtek Portable DVD Player

HARDWARE

- 92** Elsa Gladiac 6600 GT graphic card
- 93** Gigabyte GV Rx70128D graphic card
- 94** Gigabyte Radion X800 PCI-E graphic card
- 95** MMGEAR 2WAY Headphone
- 96** SilverStone Nitrogon NT01 V2.0 CPU cooler
- 98** Hardcor3 - Case Modding round-up

REGULARS

- 12** Ed's Note
- 14** Bytes
- 24** Multiplayer
- 26** Win: A Nintendo DS
- 30** Opinion - The Domain of The_Basilisk
- 32** Opinion - Miktar's Soapbox
- 34** Opinion - On The Wire
- 36** Inbox
- 86** Tech News
- 112** Lifestyle: Anime
- 114** Lifestyle: Roleplaying | Comics
- 115** Lifestyle: Books
- 116** Lifestyle: Music & DVDs
- 118** Win: 2 GeCube Radeon X600XT graphic cards
- 120** Subscription Form
- 122** Game Over

PREVIEWS

- 38** Previews
- 40** Call of Duty 2
- 46** GTR
- 50** Age of Empires III
- 52** Juiced
- 54** Close Combat - First To Fight
- 56** Project Snowblind
- 58** Tom Clancy's Rainbow 6 Lockdown
- 60** Resident Evil: Outbreak File #2

REVIEWS

- 62** Reviews
- 64** Star Wars KOTOR II: The Sith Lords PC
- 66** Darwinia PC
- 68** Sentinel: Descendants in Time PC
- 70** Nexus The Jupiter Incident PC
- 72** Immortal Cities: Children of the Nile PC
- 74** Painkiller: Black Edition PC
- 76** Metal Gear Solid 3: Snake Eater PS2
- 77** Spongebob Squarepants The Movie PS2
- 77** Eyetoy: Monkey Mania PS2
- 78** King of Fighters PS2
- 78** King Arthur PS2
- 79** Metal Slug 3 PS2
- 80** Metroid Prime 2 Echoes GC
- 80** Tales of Symphonia GC
- 81** Oddworld Stranger's Wrath XBOX
- 82** Mario vs Donkey Kong GBA
- 82** Grand Theft Auto Advance GBA
- 84** Super Mario 64 DS
- 84** Asphalt Urban GT DS



ON THE DVD

- DEMOS:** Republic Commando | Splinter Cell 3 | Swat 4 | Airstrike 2 | Astro Avenger | Cellblock Squadrons | Domination | Empire Earth 2 | Global Defense Network | GTR | Heavy Weapons | Prince of Persia: Warrior Within | Psychotoxic | Still Life | Wik and the Fable Of Souls | Will of Steel
- MOVIES:** Darwinia vid.review | Ape Academy | Batman Begins | Bloodrayne | Boom | Brothers in Arms | Cold Fear | Colin McRae 2005 | Constantine | Corpse Bride | Devil May Cry 3 | DOOM 3 Expansion | F.E.A.R MP | Fighting Jam | Full Spectrum Warrior | Gran Turismo 4 | Kessen 3 | Lego Star Wars | Project Snowblind | Don't Panic! | The Matrix Online | The Sims 2 University | Vivisector | Worms 4 | Resident Evil 4 | DS Launch UK Ad
- DRIVERS** ATI Catalyst 5.2 XP | Nvidia ForceWare 66.93 XP
- FLASH MOVIES** War | Shadow Brian | Orbox | Ddautta | Cat Song
- FULL GAMES** Head over Heels | Highway Pursuit | MU Online | Rise of the Triad Shareware | Rise of the Triad XP addon
- ANIME** Lo Magazine | Robota | Appleseed | Robota Hunted
- PATCHES** Chaos League v1.07 | NWN v1.65 | Red Mercury v1 | Superpower 2 v1.3 | FlatOut v1.1 | Topspin v1
- ADDONS** ROTT Goodies
- UTILITIES** WinXP Service Pack 2 | 3DMark 2005 | Adobe Acrobat 7 | DirectX 9c | DVD Decrypter | FireFox | Gmail Notifier | LimeWire | Maxthon | Media Player 10 | Microsoft AntiSpyware | Quicktime 6 | Shareaza | The Core Media Player | ThunderBird | WordWeb





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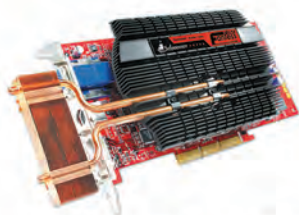
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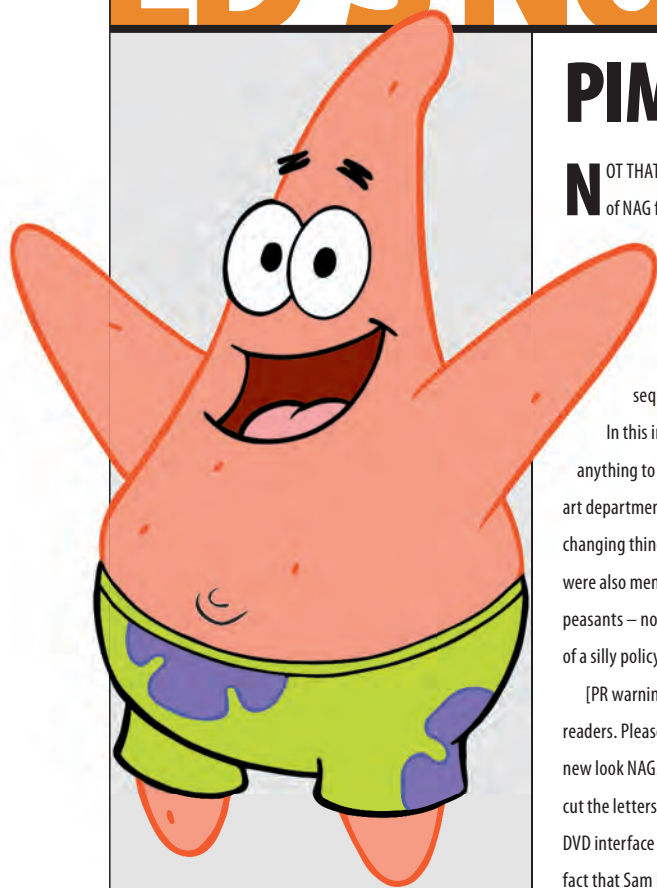


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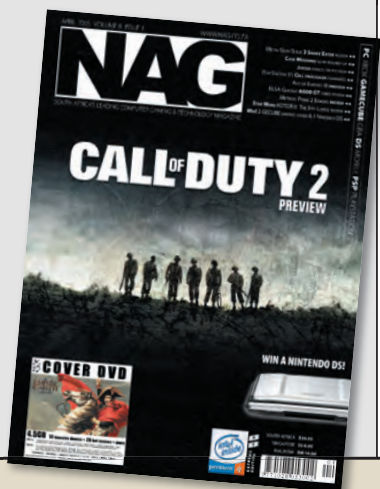
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ED'S NOTE



All echinoderms have one thing in common: radial symmetry



PIMP MY READING MATERIAL

NOT THAT YOU'D NOTICE from the cover, but this issue of NAG features some new textures, a few additional levels and we've increased the overall polygon count by a factor of 10. Think of it as NAG 8: The Empire Expands – now you see why I'm not responsible for naming Star Wars sequels. The story behind the facelift looks like this.

In this industry I believe that a year is way too long for anything to stay the same – even 6 months is a push, but our art department issued a few stern threats and warnings about changing things too often. Pitchforks and burning torches were also mentioned, so I'm going to let this one go to the peasants – no use in letting the whole kingdom slide because of a silly policy, right?

[PR warning] Anyway to the people who really matter – our readers. Please tell us what you do and don't like about the new look NAG. Things I'm not happy about include having to cut the letters section down by 2 letters, the fact that the cover DVD interface is the same as the old cover CD interface and the fact that Sam Fisher is spelt 'Fischer' on the actual DVD. The blame for this can be laid squarely at the feet of James, who insisted that this spelling was right and secondly me, because I should have double checked it. Oh well, one day it'll all end with someone on the floor kicking and struggling as my hands tighten around their throat. Oops, did I just say that out loud?

Cover DVD

Based on our survey it wasn't a difficult choice to make the move to DVD. So thank you to all those readers who took the time to vote either way. We're also sorry to lose those few readers who aren't prepared to make the change to DVD – whatever their reasons are, they have to be respected, and we bid you farewell until you do get a DVD-ROM.

Interestingly, some of you thought our vote for DVD was just an

elaborate advertising gimmick intended to shift as many Gigabyte DVD-ROMs as possible. Well, I guess you were wrong. We were serious about the DVD and this issue marks an important stage in the growth of this magazine and gaming culture in South Africa. The NAG studio hasn't been this hyped-up in a long time and you can understand the excitement – 4.5GB of stuff is nothing to laugh at, it's a cap and a half we're saving you each month. Where else can you buy a 124 page top quality gaming magazine, with a double sided poster and a cover DVD for just R39.00?

Our subscribers must be laughing at this news – especially those who subscribed during the last 3 months. Depending on how you look at it, you're all getting a free DVD until your subscription ends. Naturally, if you do have a subscription and don't have a DVD-ROM, just send us mail and we'll be more than happy to refund you for the remaining magazines on your subscription. [In case you're not 100% clear on this, NAG will have a DVD on the cover of each magazine from this issue onwards – there will be no more CD version.]

Wrap up

Go to the back page and say hello to Shivonne Londt, Ramjet's replacement. We're giving her a few months to try and impress everyone. Again, let us know what you think...

To end off on a very positive note, the January edition of NAG sold the most copies ever in the history of the magazine – something that seems to be happening almost every other month these days. I'm not trying to impress anyone here, but I'm rather just highlighting that the gaming industry is growing fast [both globally and locally] and we're doing everything possible to keep NAG on the forefront. Finally, a huge thanks to the team who put this issue together.

Right, I think I've wasted enough space already – enjoy the issue and keep sending the mail.

Michael James [Editor]

COVER STORY

YOU CAN BLAME ACTIVISION for ruining the most astonishing ever cover in the history of NAG. The plan, before we signed an NDA for Call of Duty 2, was to put a giant image of SpongeBob SquarePants on the cover of NAG to see how many people we could scare away from buying this issue – even though it's the launch of our Cover DVD. But considering the size of the scoop involved here and the fact that we're trying to get Activision to send us preview code of Quake IV, we buckled under the weight of the bribe. The next best thing would be to put SpongeBob on this page, but considering his superstar status he refused to make an appearance this far into the magazine. So we had to settle for Patrick instead [a remarkable performer in his own right]. Next month may be sizzling, because we're trying for an exclusive on one of the big shooters for 2005. So stay glued to your magazine for more spongy goodness.

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[JetFlash DSC]



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BYTES

MUSIC DOWNLOAD SERVICE FOR PSP

Watch out Apple, here comes Sony

Sony Computer Entertainment is in the process of establishing a music download service for the PSP, which will go live just after mid-year. Because it will make use of Wi-Fi connectivity, at the moment this has little local relevance. This is surely bound to change as local wireless infrastructures mature. The service will, it is rumoured, also allow download of game content and, possibly, movies. The latter makes sense, given the PSP's video playback capabilities. Additionally, the company is planning to extend the handheld's capabilities to include Web browsing and mobile phone functionality, and possibly even word processing and spreadsheet handling.

PSP GAME SHARING

Sony to rival Nintendo's "DS Download Play"

The Game Sharing facility on Sony's PSP handheld allows multiple players to enjoy small games, allowing multiplayer gaming to be an option. However, given that the system downloads the relevant content to the client handhelds' RAM, means that the types of games that can use it are currently rather limited. On the other hand, the fact that the download takes place to RAM rather than to the Memory Stick hinders piracy. Game Sharing, which is currently little understood even by game developers, is expected to evolve in time.



TOTAL WAR SERIES COMING TO CONSOLES

THE MAKERS OF THE Total War series of strategy games, The Creative Assembly, are collaborating on a project with Sega to bring epic action-combat to console gamers in the form of Spartan: Total Warrior. While Total War allowed players to command armies, Total Warrior will allow players to assume control of a single warrior

within an army, using an array of melee and ranged weapons while engaging in battle with the enemy. Battlefields in the game will include arid wastelands, large cities, dungeons, rugged mountains, and the Imperial Coliseum in Rome. Spartan: Total Warrior is scheduled for release in September on PS2, Xbox and GameCube.

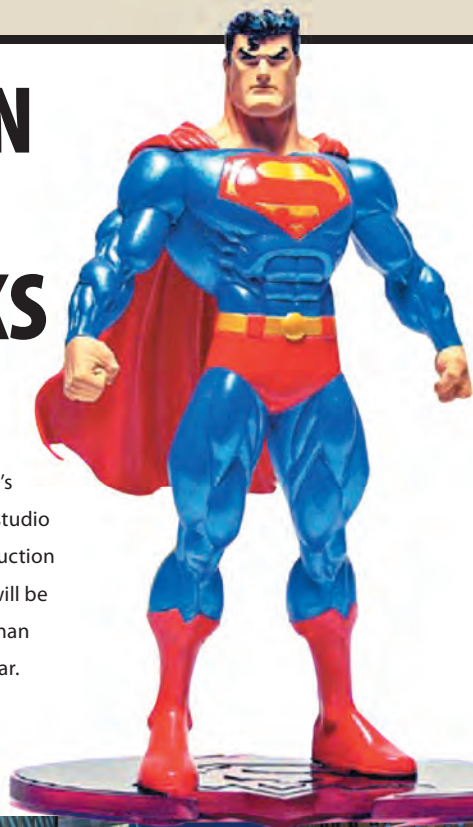


INTEL TRADEMARKS VIIV

Intel has filed for two new trademarks, namely Intel VIIV and Intel Inside VIIV. No official information has been divulged yet, but speculation is rife that this may be the branding that the company will apply to its dual-core 64-bit processors.

SUPERMAN GAME IN THE WORKS

THE TIBURON BRANCH OF Electronic Arts is handling development of an upcoming Superman title, the studio's first non-sports oriented game. The studio is currently recruiting talent, so production is well underway. Fans of the comic will be pleased to know that the film Superman Returns is due to be released next year.



TYCOON CITY: NEW YORK

Deep Red Games, developers of Beach Life and Monopoly Tycoon, are at work on a "Big Apple" themed city and financial empire builder, due out from Atari late this year. Players will be involved with founding renowned landmarks and various businesses, with over 100 types of the latter to choose from.



DO NOT TRY THIS AT HOME.

To those parties attempting to recreate the stunts contained in the new MX vs. ATV Unleashed, we offer this message: DON'T. While that seems fairly obvious to most, you'd be surprised how many people will contemplate emulating its dangerous intensity, vis-a-vis the realistic head-to-head racing experience. Ergo, THQ and Rainbow Studios put forth the following caveats to all parties: Do not attempt to make a golf cart do 70 mph, nor launch a sand rail over a moving plane. Moreover, do not undertake the recreation of any and all stunts from MX vs. ATV Unleashed in order to replicate its realistic rag-doll physics. The insane stunts and fierce racing is intended for the sole intent and purpose of an intense gaming experience, not for the discovery of clever ways to inflict bodily harm. Case in point, THQ and Rainbow Studios offer this photo as reference of the projected outcome of ignoring this warning. Honestly, what was this guy thinking? Said driver wasn't anywhere close to successfully completing the jump, nor is the other side of the canyon he was attempting to reach even in the aforementioned photo. In summation, MX vs. ATV Unleashed is not real, don't attempt to make it real.



 rainbow
STUDIOS PRESENTS

**MX vs. ATV
UNLEASHED**



PlayStation 2



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SNIPPETS

Namco has signed a licensing agreement with **Games Workshop** which allows them to create interactive PC and console games based on the popular fantasy universe of **Warhammer**.

Despite defending the design, **Sony** is now offering free repairs for anyone who is experiencing a specific button to stick on the **PSP**.

LucasArts has mentioned that it wants to reinvigorate the **Indiana Jones** franchise. Sounds good to us.

The **PSP Power Brick** is an auxiliary power supply for the **Sony PSP** - an external battery that can be used when no mains point is available - to provide longer usage than allowed by the PSP's own, rather feeble, battery.

Havok debuted its new **Physics** middleware at GDC. The new tools will work on both current and next-gen platforms.

Rumour has it that **Microsoft** has signed a million-dollar deal with **Alex Garland**, who wrote **The Beach** and **28 Days Later**, and that a **Halo** movie is on the cards. However, Microsoft has declined to comment, neither ruling out the possibility, nor confirming it.

DICE have posted a slump in profits, but also mentioned that we'll definitely see **Battlefield 2** in June.

Relic Entertainment will be adding the **Imperial Guard** as a fully playable faction in its upcoming expansion pack for **Warhammer 40000: Dawn of War. Dawn of War - Winter Assault** is expected out around July.

Funcom has signed a deal that will bring in-game advertising to the free version of MMORPG **Anarchy Online**.

GTA creator **David Jones** has signed a deal with **Webzen** to release a MMOG based on the law versus criminals...

SONIC TO MAKE WAY FOR SHADOW

Long live the Hedgehog

SONIC THE HEDGEHOG'S NEMESIS from Sonic Adventure 2 looks set to be the new platform franchise under development at Sega. Shadow the Hedgehog will take players on an adventure through the darker side of Sonic's universe while rail sliding, jumping and whipping through the diverse environments in each level. At this point it seems likely that the game will be released on PlayStation 2 and GameCube later this year.



MEDAL OF HONOR: EUROPEAN ASSAULT

European Assault (for Xbox) is the next episode of EA's Medal of Honor series and is set, obviously, in the European theatre. Once again, the emphasis is on delivering a "historically accurate and authentic" experience, and the story hinges on the exploits of the Operational Strategic Service. The developers have opted for an environment that reflects the actions and decisions of the player, and future mission intelligence is influenced by what the player manages to ferret out during play. Naturally, the game will offer several multiplayer options.

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AREA 51

The first-person shooter Area 51, from Midway, has been scheduled for release on the 25th. The story-line behind the game appears to be an extended cliché involving government conspiracies and a deadly virus.



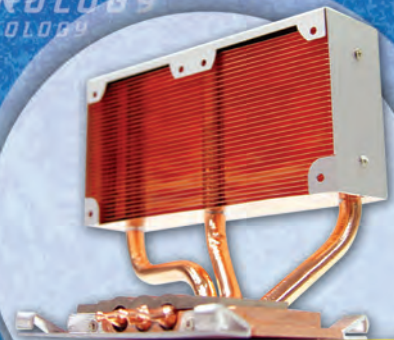
50 CENT: BULLETPROOF

Rappers 50 Cent and Dr Dre will star in an upcoming third-person action game from Vivendi Universal. The two will no doubt contribute music to the title, but aside from that, nothing is known about this game, including platforms or release dates.

THE INCREDIBLES

THQ will be releasing another game based on The Incredibles. The console versions (PS2, Xbox, and GameCube) are being handled by Heavy Iron Studios. Helixe is responsible for the Game Boy Advance and DS versions, while Pacific Coast Power & Light is developing the PSP version. PC and Mac versions will also be released.

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MORE SNIPPETS

Although Nintendo is not saying what its plans are, rumours are that a new version of the **Game Boy** will be introduced this year to compete with the **Sony PSP**. It is also said that the company intends to emphasise the **DS** ability to act as a PDA and may even run on **PalmOS**.

The team behind the buried **Sam & Max** sequel have announced a point-and-click adventure starring the comic character **Bone**.

Top Cow Productions, **NCsoft**, and **Cryptic Studios** will be introducing a comic based on the online game **City of Heroes**. The first issue will appear in May and subscribers to the game will receive a free copy.

Analysts are predicting that **Nintendo** will release an update of the **GBA SP** this year. The reasoning behind this stems from more GBA game piracy and Nintendo's habit of updating hardware every two years.

Rumour is that **Halo 3** is in development, aimed to be released the same day as the **PlayStation 3**. The point would be to torpedo **Sony's** launch ambitions.

An ad inside **The Sims University** expansion suggests that the next expansion will feature taking your sim out for a Nightlife.

Nintendo will be making use of **RSA's BSAFE** encryption technology to safeguard content on the **Nintendo DS**, particularly when being played or shared over the handheld's Wi-Fi connection. The company hopes to curb piracy with this new policy.



S.T.A.L.K.E.R. DELAYED

THIS TITLE WAS ORIGINALLY scheduled for release during last year's holiday season, and was then postponed until May. Now it has been delayed again, this time with no expected date being given. This first-person shooter will feature some small elements of role-play, and is interesting in that it is set in a to-scale recreation of the infamous Chernobyl nuclear power plant.

BLIZZARD ACQUIRES RTS VETERAN

Dustin Browder, who directed game design for Battle for Middle-earth, has left Electronic Arts and joined Blizzard. He has been with the team since the Westwood Studios days and has been involved in many of the company's previous projects, including Red Alert 2 and Command & Conquer – Generals. His new posting will

have him answering to Blizzard's Rob Pardo, who has been involved mainly in the WarCraft franchise. On a related topic: word has it that there is some turbulence with regards to the old Westwood team. We can only hope that this doesn't negatively impact the recently announced upcoming Red Alert title.



BATMAN BEGINS – FILM AND GAME

Batman Begins, a film chronicling Batman's origins, will open at theatres abroad on 17 June. A similarly titled game, from Electronic Arts, for the PlayStation 2, GameCube, and Xbox will launch the same day. Game Boy Advance, PSP, and Nintendo DS versions are expected to be released soon thereafter. The game will feature the voice talents and likenesses of virtually the entire cast of the movie – this will include names such as Michael Caine, Liam Neeson, Katie Holmes, Morgan Freeman, and Christian Bale.



PC, VIDEO GAME SALES TOP \$7 BILLION IN US

Game industry closing in on film totals

MARKET RESEARCH FILMS IN the US have estimated last year's computer and videogame sales to have totalled \$7.3 billion in that territory. This was comprised of \$5.2 billion in console game sales (over 160 million units!), \$1.1 billion in computer game sales (45 million units) and \$1 billion in portable games (some 42 million units). The genre breakdown, in order of decreasing popularity, looks like this: action, sports, shooters, children's/family titles, racing, role-playing and fighting games. It is interesting to note that strategy games don't really feature in the American context. Bear in mind that our local demographics are different and therefore the above statistics very likely won't apply here. The gaming industry is still drawing ever closer to the film industry, with the latter having totalled (again, in the American context) \$9.4 billion.



FABLE THE LOST CHAPTERS

Microsoft has announced the development of Fable: The Lost Chapters for PC by Lionhead Studios. The game will be based on the original Xbox title but will have expanded content, greater customisation, new quests and enhanced graphics. The game is scheduled for release later this year.

NEW ESRB RATING CATEGORY

A new, intermediate, category has been introduced by the Entertainment Software Ratings Board. The new rating is E10+ and it fits between E and T, recommending an over ten audience. The new category applies to games that contain "moderate amounts of cartoon, fantasy or mild violence, mild language and/or minimal suggestive themes."

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TERRORISTS NO DEALS NO MERCY



Tom Clancy's Rainbow Six: Lockdown

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www.rainbowsixgame.com

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WEB SCORES

Star Wars KOTOR II: The Sith Lords [PC]

NAG [100]	73
GAMESPY.COM [5]	4
GAMESPOT.COM [10]	8.5
IGN.COM [10]	8.7



Nexus The Jupiter Incident [PC]

NAG [100]	74
GAMESPY.COM [5]	3
GAMESPOT.COM [10]	N/R
IGN.COM [10]	N/R



Darwinia [PC]

NAG [100]	97
GAMESPY.COM [5]	N/R
GAMESPOT.COM [10]	N/R
IGN.COM [10]	N/R



Immortal Cities: Children of the Nile [PC]

NAG [100]	62
GAMESPY.COM [5]	3
GAMESPOT.COM [10]	7.6
IGN.COM [10]	7.9



Metal Gear Solid 3: Snake Eater [PS2]

NAG [100]	69
GAMESPY.COM [5]	4.5
GAMESPOT.COM [10]	8.7
IGN.COM [10]	9.6



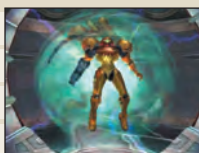
Oddworld Stranger's Wrath [XBOX]

NAG [100]	70
GAMESPY.COM [5]	4.5
GAMESPOT.COM [10]	8.5
IGN.COM [10]	8.8



Metroid Prime 2 Echoes [GC]

NAG [100]	85
GAMESPY.COM [5]	5
GAMESPOT.COM [10]	9.1
IGN.COM [10]	9.5



Tales of Symphonia [GC]

NAG [100]	79
GAMESPY.COM [5]	4
GAMESPOT.COM [10]	8.8
IGN.COM [10]	8.5



The ratings in this section, apart from the NAG ratings, are not the opinion of NAG Magazine. Duh.

DIRTY HARRY GOES DIGITAL

Another old movie goes gaming

IT APPEARS THAT THE latest trend in the license realm is to convert old movie franchises into new games, the latest addition to this group is Dirty Harry from Warner Bros. The internal project will feature the voice of Clint Eastwood, though beyond that it's anyone's guess. A major plus, though, is that Chronicles of Riddick producer Peter Wanat will be working on this project. Jason Hall, WB Games Division head, seems quite amped, "To our elation, Clint was very knowledgeable about how this could be interesting as a storytelling medium and very supportive."

But don't start getting excited just yet; it's being developed for next generation platforms, with some sources touting a 2007 release date.



PSP DOWNLOADS TOO BIG FOR MEMORY STICK

Wipeout Pure the first victim

IT APPEARS THAT THE standard issue 32MB Memory Stick accessory for the PSP is not sufficient to store all the potential downloadable content which Sony has on offer. For instance Sony confirmed that new courses and soundtrack songs would be made available for Wipeout Pure players to download on a monthly basis. If this were the case and one were to assume the rumours of

one download being around a minimum of 4MB were accurate then it would be a mere 7 months before your memory stick was full and not able to take any additional data. This is of course also assuming that nothing else was stored on your memory stick either, which by logical reasoning would mean either having to go out and purchase additional memory sticks or having to delete data to make space.



FANTASTIC FOUR

A game based on the upcoming film Fantastic Four is on its way, though no expected release date has been published. The game will allow players to manage the group of four superheroes, using their special abilities singly or, at times, in combination, to overcome obstacles and best enemies. Multiplayer modes include a two-player cooperative mode, as well as head-to-head arena battles.

FF CREATOR WORKS ON XBOX 2 GAME

Original RPG planned

Microsoft seems to have learned from its mistakes with the Xbox, in particular the lack of RPG titles, an aspect it was harshly criticised for. The company has announced that Final Fantasy creator Hironobu Sakaguchi has joined forces with Microsoft Games to develop a new RPG for the Xbox 2. Sakaguchi recently stopped working at Square Enix as Executive Vice President and currently heads Mistwalker games studio. No further details were given on what kind of game we can expect, but it's bound to be stunning.

THE MATRIX: PATH OF NEO

Green pill anyone?

It's hardly an inspired title for the next Matrix-themed game from Atari and Shiny Entertainment. The game, scheduled for release for PC, PlayStation 2, and Xbox by year's end, will attempt to recreate the story of the entire Matrix trilogy, casting the player as the central character, Neo. It will contain footage from all three films, as well as from The Animatrix.



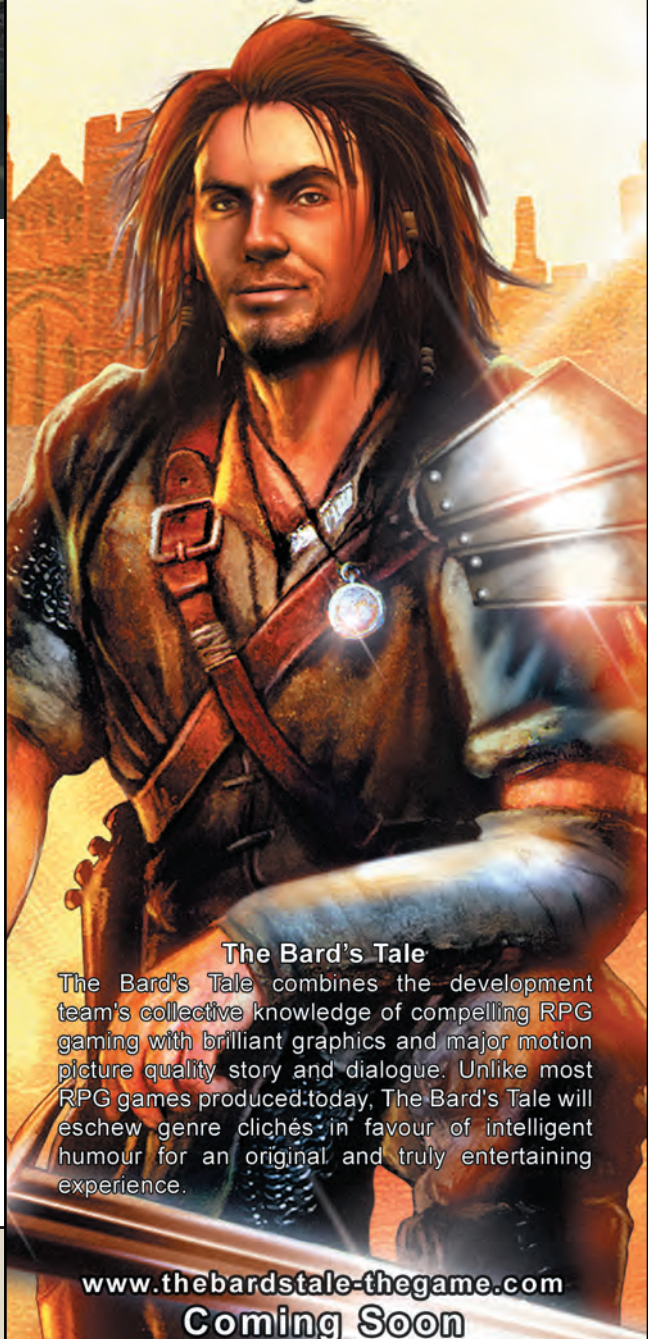
MOVIES ON PSP

Although being marketed primarily as a gaming device, the PSP's advanced media handling features are not being overlooked by Sony, and movies are gradually being released on the UMD format that the handheld uses. On 19 April, XXX, Hellboy, Resident Evil 2: Apocalypse, Once Upon a Time in Mexico and The House of Flying Daggers will join the repertoire. Final Fantasy VII: Advent Children will also appear on UMD, quite possibly on this format first. Further releases will be made on a monthly basis. You can expect to pay about the same for a movie on UMD as you would pay for a DVD, which makes sense, as it's the intellectual property rather than the cost of the media that dictates pricing.

The BARD'S TALE

4.5 out of 5

Official U.S.
Playstation
Magazine



The Bard's Tale

The Bard's Tale combines the development team's collective knowledge of compelling RPG gaming with brilliant graphics and major motion picture quality story and dialogue. Unlike most RPG games produced today, The Bard's Tale will eschew genre clichés in favour of intelligent humour for an original and truly entertaining experience.

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ON THE HORIZON

US RELEASE DATES



PC RELEASE DATES

Date	Title	Genre
April	Area 51	FPS
April	Asheron's Call 2: Legions	MMORPG
April	Call of Cthulhu: Dark Corners of the Earth	Adventure
April	Close Combat: First to Fight	FPS
April	DOOM 3: Resurrection of Evil	FPS
April	Dungeon Lords	RPG
April	ER	Strategy
April	Guild Wars	MMORPG
April	Madagascar	Action
April	Pariah	FPS
April	Restricted Area	RPG
April	Still Life	Adventure
April	SWAT: Urban Justice	Action
May	Cold Fear	Action
May	GTR FIA Racing	Racing
May	The Bard's Tale	Action
May	Tom Clancy's Rainbow Six: Lockdown	FPS



XBOX RELEASE DATES

Date	Title	Genre
April	Advent Rising	Action
April	Animaniacs: The Great Edgar Hunt	Action
April	Capcom Fighting Jam	Fighting
April	Close Combat: First to Fight	FPS
April	Dead to Rights II: Hell to Pay	Action
April	Digimon World 4	Action
April	DOOM 3	FPS
April	Forza Motorsport	Racing
April	Jade Empire	RPG
April	Madagascar	Action
April	Operation Flashpoint: Cold War Crisis	Tactical
April	Pariah	FPS
April	Predator: Concrete Jungle	Action
April	Spy vs Spy	Action
April	Star Wars: Episode III Revenge of the Sith	Action
April	Still Life	Adventure
April	Unreal Championship 2: The Liandri Conflict	FPS



PS2 RELEASE DATES

Date	Title	Genre
April	Animaniacs: The Great Edgar Hunt	Adventure
April	Arc the Lad: End of Darkness	RPG
April	Area 51	FPS
April	Cold Winter	FPS
April	Dead to Rights II: Hell to Pay	Action
April	Digimon World 4	Action
April	Enthusia Professional Racing	Racing
April	Fahrenheit	Adventure
April	Getting Up: Contents Under Pressure	Action
April	Madagascar	Action
April	Metal Slug 4 & 5	Adventure
April	Rise of the Kasai	Action
April	Star Wars: Episode III Revenge of the Sith	Action
April	Stella Deus: The Gate of Eternity	RPG



PSP RELEASE DATES

Date	Title	Genre
April	Colin McRae Rally 2005	Racing
April	Harukanaru Toki no Naka De: Irore Tebako	Strategy
April	Midnight Club 3: DUB Edition	Racing
April	Pro Race Driver 2	Racing



GBA RELEASE DATES

Date	Title	Genre
April	Lego Star Wars	Action
April	Pac-Man Pinball Advance	Pinball
April	Pokemon Emerald	RPG
April	Puyo Pop Fever	Puzzle



GAMECUBE RELEASE DATES

Date	Title	Genre
April	Advance Wars: Under Fire	Action
April	Animaniacs: The Great Edgar Hunt	Adventure
April	Donkey Konga 2: Hit Song Parade	Puzzle
April	Geist	FPS
April	Madagascar	Action
April	Nintendo Pennant Chase Baseball	Sport



DS RELEASE DATES

Date	Title	Genre
April	ElectroPlankton	Music
April	Need for Speed Underground 2	Racing
April	Polarium DS	Puzzle
April	World Championship Poker: Deluxe Series	Card

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CHARTS

PC Games

#	Title
1	The Sims 2
2	Star Wars KOTOR II Sith Lords
3	Star Wars KOTOR Classics
4	Cricket 2004 Classics
5	Lord of the Rings Return of the King
6	Lord of the Rings Battle For Middle Earth
7	Need For Speed Underground 1 Classics
8	Sims Deluxe Edition
9	Harry Potter Prisoner Of Azkaban
10	Need For Speed Underground 2
11	Command & Conquer Generals Classics
12	CSI Double Pack
13	Battlefield Vietnam
14	Singles Flirt Up Your Life
15	CSI Dark Motives
16	Need For Speed Underground
17	Worms Fort Under Siege
18	Half-Life 2
19	Sims Making Magic
20	CSI Exclusive

PlayStation 2

#	Title
1	Need For Speed Underground 2
2	Grand Theft Auto San Andreas
3	Dragonball Z Budokai 3
4	WWE Smackdown vs Raw
5	Burnout 3 Takedown
6	Sims Platinum
7	Mortal Kombat Deception
8	Singstar 2 Party & Microphone
9	Gran Turismo 3 Platinum
10	Fifa 2005
11	Cricket 2004
12	Tiger Woods 2005
13	WWE Smackdown Here Comes The Pain
14	Splinter Cell Pandora Tomorrow Platinum
15	Eye Toy Play 2 with Camera
16	Jak 3
17	Killzone
18	Singstar 1 No Microphone
19	Getaway 2 Black Monday
20	Tekken 4 Platinum

APRIL AT A GLANCE



8 April
Movie
Be Cool
www.becoolmovie.com

23 April
LAN
Mayhem
www.mayhem.co.za

29 April - 1 May
Event
Rectron Electronic Sports World Cup South Africa 2005
www.arena77.com

SONY STOPS WORK ON CONVERGENCE DEVICE

Short life for PSX

SONY HAS SUSPENDED PRODUCTION of the PSX, and there is no word at this point as to whether this is a temporary measure, or whether the concept of an integrated entertainment device (digital video recorder/console hybrid) is up for redesign. It is also possible that the concept is being abandoned entirely. Sony has not commented on the matter.



WIRELESS XBOX 2?

Less clutter for your box

Developers working on Xbox 2 games have, unofficially, confirmed that the console uses wireless controllers, affirming rumours that circulated the net earlier. Reportedly the design is very similar to the Xbox's Controller-S, though little more detail has been given, apart from that this will be the first console to be released with a wireless standard.

A few questions still remain unanswered, in particular on how batteries will work (will the controllers be rechargeable?) and if force feedback will be supported – often omitted from wireless designs because of their high power consumption.

STRATEGIC RPG ON DS

Japanese company Mist Walker, founded by Hironobu Sakaguchi, the creator of the Final Fantasy series, is at work on a strategic role-playing title for the Nintendo DS. The company believes that the basic mechanic of such games is ideally suited to control via a touch-screen, and intends to make the interface entirely stylus-based. The project, the company's first, is in very early development stages, and no dates of any sort have been indicated.

WITHOUT WARNING

UK's CIRCLE Studio (comprised of former Core Design – noted for Tomb Raider) staff, are developing this third-person action title for PlayStation 2 and Xbox. The game will present its story through the eyes of six characters who are embroiled in a hostage situation that develops when a terrorist group takes control of a chemical factory. The game is scheduled for release late this year.

NINTENDO ADDS MORE COLOUR

Pikachu GBA & multi-coloured DS

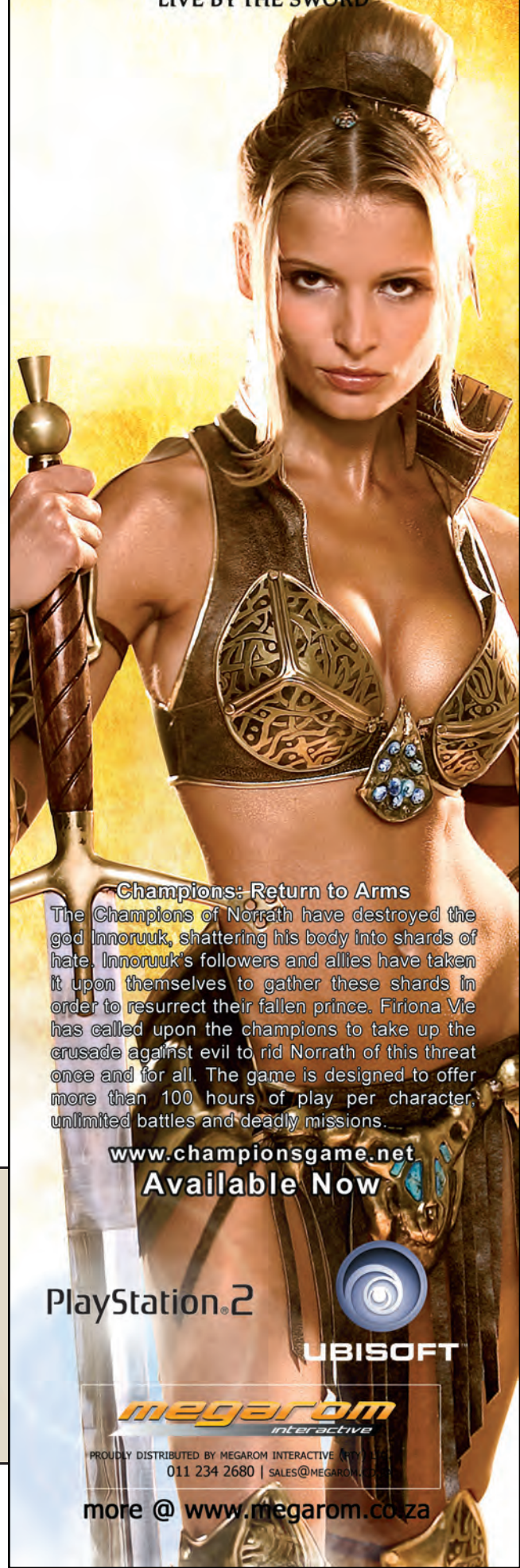
Nintendo has launched a Game Boy Advance SP version with Pokemon's Pikachu as the theme. It is already available in Japan.

In addition, the company has released four new colour schemes for the dual-screened handheld: Graphite Black, Pure White, Turquoise Blue, and Candy Pink.



CHAMPIONS RETURN TO ARMS

LIVE BY THE SWORD



Champions: Return to Arms

The Champions of Norrath have destroyed the god Innoruuk, shattering his body into shards of hate. Innoruuk's followers and allies have taken it upon themselves to gather these shards in order to resurrect their fallen prince. Firiona Vie has called upon the champions to take up the crusade against evil to rid Norrath of this threat once and for all. The game is designed to offer more than 100 hours of play per character, unlimited battles and deadly missions.

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MULTIPLAYER

WARCRAFT 3 LEAGUE ENTERS NEW SEASON

THE SECOND SEASON OF the highly successful local WarCraft 3 league has begun. Headed by the admins Zilk, StanDarsh, AvatarX, and Relax, it is a vehicle by which the standard of South African WarCraft 3 is perpetually raised, and where newer players experience the heat of competition for the first time. At the heart of the league is its Website, **w3l.za.net**, which incorporates an impressive system for receiving game replays and automatically adding the results to the database. As such, the manpower required to run the league is drastically reduced, and the Website functions as an efficient control mechanism. The site is informative and professional, setting a good example for the conduct of its players.

Conspicuous by their absence from the player roster are clan Nightfall. Nightfall contains several of South Africa's most experienced and decorated players, including the likes of Chris "sWoop" Barter and Anthony "Juvenile" Fellowes (both having represented South Africa at international competitions). However, WCG SA runner-up, Eric "Sage" Brand, as well as the West brothers, Trend and Black, are on the bill, and look to keep the standards of competition high.

At the end of each season, the bottom two players will lose their places and two new players will be added. Unknown players interested in signing up for the league are advised that participants are selected on an invitation-only basis. First a player must become known in the local WarCraft 3 online community and express his/her interest in joining the league. For information and advice, consult the W3L Website, or join #warcraft3 on the Shadowfire IRC network.

UNDERDOG'S DAY AT SHADOWSCOMP

BECAUSE THE LOCAL SCENE is relatively small and close-knit, true upsets in Counter-Strike tournaments are exceptionally rare. The skill difference between established and new teams is just too high. Of course, there have been surprises in the past (Damage Control's victory over Evolve at last year's WCG qualifier for example), but before Shadowscamp there had never been a true moment of shock.

Shadowscamp was a community-run tournament held at Mayhem's venue in Boksburg – the first LAN competition of 2005. All of the recognised teams were in attendance: favourites Evolve, the new-look Identity Gaming (formerly Damage Control), Team Ace (featuring ex-players of Evolve, Zero Effect, and Destrukt) and the Bad Habit Boyz. Before this competition, very few had even heard of the team calling themselves Prodigy.

The initial rounds progressed without incident; the top seeds comfortably advancing to the semi-finals of the winner's bracket. Identity faced off against Ace, taking the match convincingly and securing them a place

in the winner's bracket final. On the other side of the bracket, Evolve were up against the unknown team Prodigy. The rAge 2004 champions were looking strong before the match and were also fortunate to have the legendary Shaun "Deathsbane" Marx (on holiday from Australia) standing in for Kevin "Silencer" Murphy, who was unable to travel up from Port Elizabeth. During the first half of de_dust2 Prodigy showed some flair, but was unable to make any real dent in the Evolve armour. The half ended 8 rounds to 4. The situation then swung a full 180 degrees in the pistol round (first round) of the second half. Evolve killed all of Prodigy's players except for Shadow_Phynx. To the amazement of both players and spectators, Shadow_Phynx proceeded to play the best round of his life, killing all five Evolve players and winning the round. From then on Evolve were shaken and unable to recover and Prodigy scraped through with a 13-9 victory. This meant Prodigy were through to the winner's bracket final with Identity, but the game itself turned

WORLD E-SPORTS GAMES

MENTION PROFESSIONAL GAMING AND anyone who knows anything about it will immediately think of South Korea. Seoul, the capital, and also the birthplace of the World Cyber Games, is the location for a new and exciting project in

the world of electronic gaming competitions. World E-Sports Games (WEG) has partnered with broadcaster Ongamenet to produce a gaming league of the quality

of South Korea's StarCraft and WarCraft 3 scene, but with a focus that includes the mainstream international market. This, of course, means that Counter-Strike is the supported title. Currently, the league is in a trial season involving eight invited teams from around the world. The renowned Norwegians of America (NoA), UK powerhouse 4Kings, German professional gaming team Mousesports and third place WCG finishers Maven (from South Korea), are among the participants.

The players are currently living in South Korea for the two-month duration of the



out to be a bit of an anti-climax. Identity steamrolled the newcomers 13-1. Meanwhile, in the loser's bracket, Evolve and Ace were forced to meet early due to the Prodigy upset. Ace had looked rather out of shape the entire tournament and couldn't make any real impact on the game, resulting in the end of their tournament at 5th/6th place. After knocking out BHB (who, as a result, finished 4th), Evolve then progressed to face Prodigy once more. This encounter was to be remarkably different from the first and Evolve won the match on de_nuke without breaking a sweat.

The grand final, featuring Identity and Evolve, was forced into a two-game match as Evolve won the first game on de_nuke 13-8. Identity then dominated the second on de_inferno (their strongest map) with a huge score of 13-1, claiming overall victory. With the ESWC qualifier just around the corner, Identity Gaming is currently looking like the favourites, coming off this win. Evolve's second place is nothing to be laughed at either and they will, no doubt, be strong contenders. Ace, though, only managing a meagre performance here, are a much better team on paper and perhaps all that is needed is a little teething time. Whether Prodigy's astounding third place will translate into a good finish at the ESWC qualifier, we will have to wait and see.

league. Their expenses are all covered and chores such as housekeeping, laundry and cooking are handled by the WEG staff. "The living quarters, our dirty clothes, bathrooms, and computer space are all cleaned and maintained . . . which really leaves the gamers' only focus on winning matches," said Michael "Hare" O'Toole, a player for Mousesports. Each match is broadcast live on South Korean national television, and as such the league is receiving unprecedented exposure. WEG's Website, www.worldesportsgames.com, features league information, player profiles, results and Video on Demand (although you have to pay for it).



SNOW SUSPENDS PLAY: CPL WORLD TOUR NEWS

BAD WEATHER WAS TO be the ultimate victor at the first stop of the CPL World Tour in Turkey in February. Heavy snowfalls reportedly blocked the proposed venue for the tournament, resulting in its unfortunate postponement. However, since many of the players had already arrived in the country by the time these circumstances were known, the CPL organising committee decided to hold a smaller qualifying event at a different venue. The high finishers would receive paid travel and accommodation for the rescheduled \$50,000 tournament.

The Painkiller competition got off to a riveting start, with top seeded players only narrowly advancing to the later rounds. American number 2 seed Johnathan "Fatal1ty" Wendel became the first

casualty, losing to the Italian Allesandro "Stermy" Avalone in a repeat of the ESWC 2004 upset. However, this time round, Fatal1ty would have a second chance in the loser's bracket. Sander "Vo0" Kaasjager (Netherlands), the defending champion of CPL Winter, pulled off a close-call against his Fnatic team-mate Andrew "Gellehsak" Ryder and progressed to face Stermy in the WB final. Vo0 continued his run of top form, knocking the Italian down to the loser's bracket where he had to face Fatal1ty once more. The American came out on top in this second clash, but was unable to keep the momentum going for the grand final against Vo0. This was the Dutch star's fourth consecutive international tournament win.

While the WEG has been criticised (in a much-quoted article on Gotfrag.com) for excluding the non-Asian spectator market by not allowing HLTV, the players themselves have had nothing but good things to say. Gary "Seige" Sanchez, NoA's manager, released a statement on the issue: "As far as the coverage is concerned, the WEG has accomplished their goals. They are a company just like any other . . . and have a business model which, unlike other existing models, depends on live TV broadcasting." Jonas "Goodfella" Virtanen, the leader of 4Kings, summed up the players' response to the league: "The WEG is without a doubt one of the most professional and high

classed tournaments I've ever attended. Even though it's their first international event and it's broadcasted on television they've managed to pull it off without any big issues."

Having already completed the two group stages of the league as well as the semi-finals, all eyes are on the final to be played in Beijing, China, at the end of March. Currently the players are taking a break, some returning to their home countries to rest and visit family, friends and girlfriends. Over a month of intense competition has left the favourites NoA to take on a surprisingly strong 4Kings. Mousesports and Team Gamer Co (USA) will battle for third / fourth. **NAG**

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2005 Electronic Sports World Cup

South Africa

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GAMES: COUNTER STRIKE & WARCRAFT III

VENUE: Carosel Casino



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INTERVIEW

BRENDA BRAITHWAITE

CYBERLORE STUDIOS

OF ALL THE ROOMS we've conducted interviews in, this was the most interesting. Scattered all around was a range of Playboy memorabilia - cups, T-shirts, bunny ears, and an impressive stack of magazines spanning 50 years of Playboy history. Although this heap of gentlemen's literature would usually be found hiding beneath the beds of teenage lads, at Cyberlore Studios this particular stack of adult magazines is considered valuable research material. And the person leading this research? Playboy: The Mansion's lead designer, Brenda Braithwaite. So how exactly do you work your way up to wrestling with that famous rabbit logo?

"Back in 1982, Linda Currie - who's now a designer at

“People have explored violence right up to its edge, but sexuality? Nothing.”

Blue Fang working on the Zoo Tycoon series - asked me if I was interested in taking over a job she would soon be vacating, working at Sir-Tech Software answering people's questions about the Wizardry series," Braithwaite explains.

"I was only 15 at the time and the thought that someone was willing to pay me to play games was hysterical, really. I mean, what kid wouldn't love that? Little did I know that would be the beginning of a very long career in the industry." After listing the many games she has had a hand in creating, it's obvious that the "very long career" that Braithwaite speaks of has been a busy one. Titles are mentioned that we hadn't thought about for years (Freakin' Funky Fuzzballs), and there are more recent names like Dungeons & Dragons: Heroes. But after working on so many games where do you look for inspiration?

"It's actually really easy to come up with ideas. If I weren't talking to you right now, I'd be back working on one of the three game ideas that I'm currently investigating," Braithwaite replies. "You just make yourself receptive and you'll get one, corny as that sounds. What is difficult, however, is to get those ideas sold. We're in a catch-22 market. The public wants original, innovative game play

and ideas. However, publishers can rarely afford to fund them, so you see sequels, derivative products and licensed titles or some combination of the three." Some might argue that Playboy: The Mansion falls into a couple of those categories - it's clearly licensed, and the game play is reminiscent of life-management games like The Sims. However, this game does have the obvious (and huge) advantage in that it puts you in the slippers of Hugh Hefner and allows you to get as close as you ever will to living the Playboy dream.

"With the Playboy: The Mansion title, the inspiration for everything came from the life of Hugh Hefner and the Playboy empire itself. Our project lead and lead artist, Seth Spaulding, visited the Playboy Mansion in LA to photograph it so that our artists could accurately reproduce it in the game. Many things, from the texture of the walls on the grotto to the rich wood interiors, came from that trip. The missions in the game were influenced by the real steps Hef took as he built the empire. The clothing lines in the game feature real clothing from Playboy's catalogue. We were very fortunate with this project - Playboy virtually opened the doors for us."

The thought that immediately springs to mind, when discussing a game of this type, is that of quality. Attempting to keep the game play prominent and preventing the licence from turning the title into a parade of naughty bits must be a challenge.

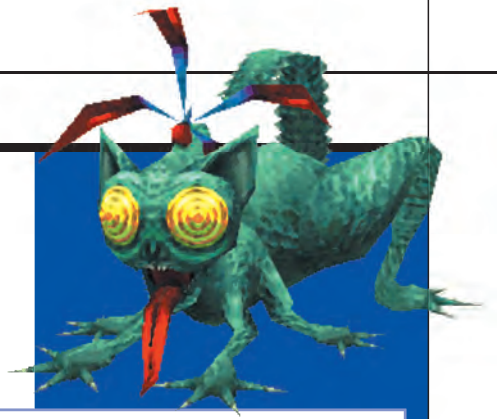
"It was a lot easier than you might think," Braithwaite assures us. "Playboy is an exceptionally classy brand. The biggest challenge was the completely uncharted territory we were exploring - no-one has ever tried to do what we did on consoles. We worked very closely with Sony and Microsoft throughout the whole process, and I think we're all pleased with the outcome. The second biggest challenge, of course, is combating the stereotype. People may not be expecting it to be a great game, and most certainly they're not expecting it to be a game women will really enjoy. Neither of those is true, of course. There's a fine line where things go from 'okay' to 'graphic' - and I definitely want to stay on the 'okay' side of that line..." **NAG**



Brenda Braithwaite wants to let us live it up like Hugh Hefner. And with 15 years in the gaming industry behind her, she knows just how to make that happen.

Ramjet, I'm pregnant!

Never Mind The Bollocks!



FOUR YEARS. FEELS LIKE a long time, doesn't it? It is. This column first appeared all the way back in March 2001, and much has changed since then. I've seen the local competitive community improve from a bunch of hopeless amateurs to a professionally minded and dedicated body of players, producing the occasional world-class star. I've seen the standards of games rise from Black and White to Half-Life 2. I've seen the release of the Xbox, the GameCube, and countless innovations in PC technology. But, four years on - four long, painstaking years on - I'm still waiting for the Second National Operator (SNO).

The first article I ever wrote for this magazine was about the supposed end of the telecom monopoly in South Africa. Whatever happened to that? Why are we still suffering under the regime of The-Company-That-Shall-Not-Be-Named? According to a report by NUS Consulting, South Africa's land-line telecom service is the most expensive in the world. Local call costs have risen steadily over the past five years - by 10.5% in 2000, 16% in 2001, 24% in 2002 and 12.5% in 2003 (and again in 2004, although I don't have the exact numbers), now costing over R20 per hour. National calls cost R60 per hour and international calls, on average, a whopping R430 per hour, which is more than double that of the next most expensive country. The-Company-That-Shall-Not-Be-Named earned R4.6 billion in 2004 (profit after tax), up from R1.7 billion in 2003. The salary of the company's CEO last year was R11 million. This is clearly a highly profitable industry, yet the cost of using the service continues to increase and its quality continues to decrease. I spend approximately R380 per month for the use of an unstable 56Kbps line, whereas uncapped, unshaped ADSL in the UK will cost you a total of £15 (R170).

The figures are only half the issue - the context points to something even more sinister. Why does The-Company-That-Shall-Not-Be-Named hold such a totalitarian monopoly? Our country supposedly has the world's most liberal constitution and is billed as a free market economy. The SNO

was first announced in 2001, but its arrival has subsequently been postponed again and again. We were supposed to see it in February, but it comes as absolutely no surprise that the date has been moved to June. Come June, I expect it'll be relegated to September. Come September... well, you get the idea. NUS Consulting estimates that the end of 2005 is the earliest we could possibly expect the SNO's arrival. Why? Because the government is a 40% shareholder in The-Company-That-Shall-Not-Be-Named and is making a killing as long as the public continues to be exploited. Starting to make sense?

And what will it change once the SNO graces our shores? They'll be competing with a company that has had decades to entrench itself in the South African economy, under the protection of the state. Will prices really drop? The arrival of the third cellphone operator hasn't done much to the rates of the other two. In fact, I wouldn't be surprised if the SNO and The-Company-That-Shall-Not-Be-Named agree on a mutually beneficial pricing schema (as the first two cellphone operators are rumoured to have done).

The conclusion of this article will perhaps strike some as unduly pessimistic, but I believe we, the consumers, have a right to be both angry and disillusioned. I certainly am. Bottom line: we are not living in a free market economy. We are faced with the reality of having to pay ridiculous charges for sub-standard service, and things do not look as though they're going to get any better. **NAG**

NUS Consulting estimates that the end of 2005 is the earliest we could possibly expect the Second National Operator's arrival. Why? Because the government is a 40% shareholder in The-Company-That-Shall-Not-Be-Named and is making a killing as long as the public continues to be exploited. Starting to make sense?



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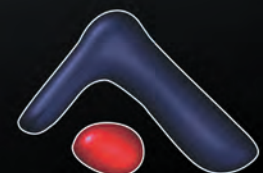


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ARENA 77



South African gamers are lazy

HAVING MORE SPACE WITH which to ponder pernicious trends is certainly a most edifying endeavour. Now, I don't want to spew some hifalutin* reasons why something is better or worse than something else with this new spacious page I've been allotted. So instead I'll digress into more interesting subject matter.

South African gamers are incredibly lazy. I say this with no sarcasm or malice, just pure concern based on actual experiences. Time and time again the average South African gamer has proven, beyond any reasonable doubt that they are lazy, incompetent, and utterly unwilling to bother learning anything other than the bare minimum required to go through their gaming lives.

Now, I already hear some voices of dissent rising up from the people who have somehow managed to read the gargantuan 130 words before this statement (congratulations to you), but hear me out. I'm smart, I know things.

If you peruse any of the local gaming related forums, you'll neatly fall into one of two groups. In the left corner, we have the gamers. These are the guys and gals who enjoy playing games, discussing games and even, sometimes, making them. They are a minority, an almost dwindling species that is being replaced by everyone else in the right corner.

Everyone else likes to only play Counter-Strike or talk rubbish on the forums - even going so far as to be completely incapable of using www.google.com for the answers to their questions. They choose instead to bother the gamers with inane posts asking "hwo U w4llh4ck CS:Sauce!?!? LOL", give or take a few "?!?! s" and perhaps a "rofl!" here and there. The right corner contains people who look down on consoles as "inferior hardware". After all, polygon count is everything when it comes to fun. The right corner obviously contains idiots. That much is painfully clear.

Now, the idiots don't need to be idiots, really. The only thing that separates a smart person from a stupid person, bar genetics and

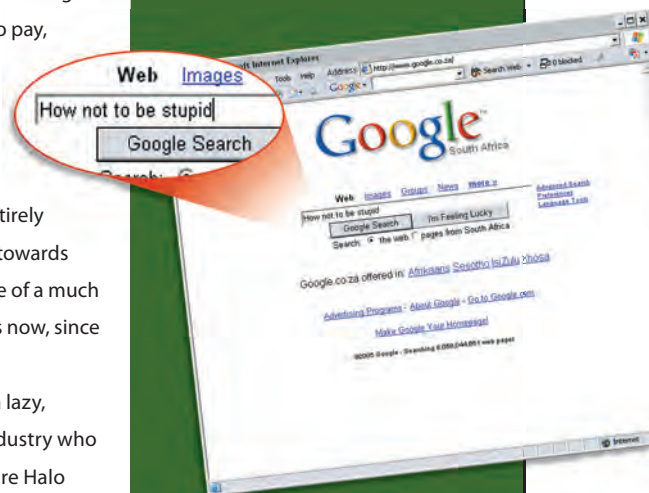
mind-altering substances like a plank of wood, is effort. It takes remarkably little effort to learn, providing you're learning about something you are actually interested in. School has managed to produce record-breaking amounts of stupid people with award-winning methods of teaching such as: "repeat everything I just said" or "go read the most boring textbook in the world, there will be a test later".

We're in the age of wondrous technology now with the Internet (a magical network of books that talk to each other), so learning no more has to be something usually associated with blackboards, chalk, and misanthropic WW2 veterans.

Google is the new pink, soya, and teacher, capable of telling you the answer to almost any question you may have. In just a few seconds, you could actually learn something! All it takes, the only price you have to pay, is the tiniest bit of effort. Getting to the search engine Google, using it and then finding the answer to your question is not difficult. Yet, most South African gamers seem entirely unwilling to just take that little step towards enlightenment - and this is indicative of a much larger problem (that I cannot discuss now, since I've run out of space).

We gamers are getting stuck with lazy, stupid patrons of the videogame industry who believe that you can actually compare Halo 2 to Half-Life 2, or who insist that the fun of a game is directly proportional to how powerful your PC is. So, do the gaming world a favour. Use Google, and make yourself a smarter, more functional part of gaming society and society in general. **NAG**

The only thing that separates a smart person from a stupid person, bar genetics and mind-altering substances like a plank of wood, is effort.



* A real word according to Winnie the Pooh and probably SpongeBob

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Blood on the Game Floor

HAVE YOU PLAYED THE Punisher yet? Even if you haven't heard of Volition's movie-cum-comic game, you soon will. Apart from being a good game it is also unbelievably violent. Not the kind of Samurai Pop "blood squirting from every orifice" violence, but in terms of sheer violent acts it really can't be beaten.

I'm not complaining. Call me a pop violence aficionado. I may not want to watch snuff movies or anything that actually ties into real life, but I own the unrated version of Takashi Miike's über-violent Ichi the Killer and I love it. I also loved Rise of the Triad, Carmageddon, Mortal Kombat, the infamous Lone Wolf & Cub movies, to name but a few. Lobo has long been a part of my comic staple, so has anything bearing Simon Bisley's name.

All the talk about game violence can be distressing, but when you look at it closely it's all about the children. Violent games have been proven to increase the aggression in children. According to a report on Psychologymatter.com, a study on violent media, including TV and games, has shown that children exposed to these display more antisocial and aggressive behaviour. That makes sense. While your nubile brain is still sorting out the sensory overload that our adult brains have dulled to over the years, like a rock in a river, violent imagery is bound to leave an impression and impede your personal compass on what's civil and what's not.

The thing is that these rules don't quite apply to us rock-dulled grown-ups who like a bit of violent fun at the expense of none. A lot of studies have been done on the origins of violence, which is considered a form of aggression. You get two kinds: Instrumental Aggression (the act of hitting someone over the head to get to their wallet) and Hostile Aggression. Within the latter resides the family of violence. Violence is essentially when you do harm in order to do harm. But this is a bit cut and dry. What about a soldier in a war - is he being violent for the sake of violence or

survival? If it's the latter, does that mean he's still violent?

I think so. As with all human emotions, violence is a far more complex thing than to simply be contextually summed up. A man beating his wife and you ripping the head off your sister's dolls aren't related, but they are both violent acts. This also suggest to me that violence isn't necessarily a disease but another example of a human emotion that is ingrained in our psyches - one that displays itself in a variety of ways. Still, in the search of violent media, research seems to look at the effect it has on children and usually approach the subject from a negative point of view.

What's wrong with that? Well, I like violent movies and I enjoy violent games. I have the capacity to establish that neither are real (I abhor real violence), but I have a need to play a violent game more than I enjoy some sanitised, family-friendly title. Still, this isn't taken into consideration. No, violence is bad. It is strange how many studies have been done to back this idea, but very little goes into why we are violent or why we might enjoy violence, even just at a synthetic stimulus basis. If we want to solve the problem of a violent society, we have to stop treating violence as a negative and consider that it's an emotion with a lot of degrees and has a need to be quenched, even if only on a computer screen for a stressed-out adult. **NAG**

“While your nubile brain is still sorting out the sensory overload that our adult brains have dulled to over the years, like a rock in a river, violent imagery is bound to leave an impression and impede your personal compass on what's civil and what's not.”





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INBOX

LETTER OF THE MOMENT

FROM Brendan

SUBJECT Mail (where is the love?)

First, thanks for a great magazine. Keep up the good work! Let's get to the point. Recently I checked a war documentary (I'm a Discovery fan), where all the dudes were going on and on about that bond they had with complete strangers – the whole Band of Brothers thing. Funny thing is that game developers are always trying to get a war game so realistic (and are doing a great job), but where is the love? I for one can't remember a game where I actually like my team. Your team does help to spot something, but is always in the way, getting stuck, or getting you killed. Games like Half-Life 2, Men of Valor, Vietcong even Rugby 2004 are particularly bad at this. Sure they kill stuff [Rugby? Ed] and say funny things, but you don't actually care about them (only when they are mission critical, but that's actually worse). So come on game developers, give us some cool team-mates.

Those of you who have played Half-Life 2 will know that one of the greatest shortcomings in the game was not being able to shoot your team-mates, and by 'shoot' I mean 'repeatedly in the head'. Bad [or Command & Conquer harvester] artificial intelligence makes a game feel fake and unrealistic. So no matter how close you get to photo-realistic graphics etc., the effect will always be ruined by dumb AI. But then again you aren't dodging real bullets in games and there's no real chance of dying while playing a game. So until they make gaming that real, you'll never buy into what they're selling. NAG Ed

The 'Letter of the Moment' prize is sponsored by EA Africa. The winner receives 2 games for coming up with the most eclectic chicken scratch



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Important: Include your details when mailing us or how will you ever get your prize if you win...

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FROM Jason

SUBJECT Dear Ed

As a new subscriber to your magazine, I must congratulate you on the wonderful temperament and humorous approach you take to some of the daftest letters, addressed to an Editor of a magazine, I have ever read. Is this the usual standard of letter the poor Ed actually attracts? Examples: "How to start my own gaming company and the costs thereof" and my personal favourite, "using NAG to pick up woman" LOL! I understand the importance of these clowns receiving your attention by way of replies, but this section for me, was by far the most entertaining of the whole magazine! Thanks for a great first edition (for me) and although the attached disc is a little dry with respect to demo's etc., I understand the industry does go through quiet times and so look forward to some more great editions in the near future.

I think our new Cover DVD will solve plenty problems when it comes to 'dry' content. As for the few and the brave moronic readers we have... see box on the right. NAG Ed

FROM Nick

SUBJECT What's in a Game?

Over the past decade or so the computer has evolved into a multitasking piece of equipment essential to the lives of men and women everywhere. Whether it is work or play, we cannot disregard the impact this invention has had on civilization as we know it. Of course the very most important use this



machine could have manifested into would be in the entertainment department – gaming – and this is where I crawl out of the philosophy [that was deep, Ed] and dive into my topic.

What's in a game? Well besides graphics, physics, game play and sound what else could there be, right? WRONG, how could you forget originality!? Yes we, in our ever-saturated market, are always searching for something new and exciting that

THE LIFE AND TIMES

[For your amusement please find a sample of some of the stuff I have to deal with on a daily basis. No editing was performed on the following five letters, Ed]

I'm 12 years old and a liker of games. some people (including my family) think that games are in-mature (and i dont play games like wennie the pooh or tetris which i agree is a bit childish). I mean even adults play games that I play don't they (DOOM, NEED FOR SPEED, SPLINTER CELL). Just beacuse its a game doesnt mean only small children play it does it...

Hi, I trust you are well.

I would like to pass on some info! I did phone the Nag Offices and told someone this info, but i do not think they believe me! I have attached a document to this mail. It is the Official Sims2 Expansion Release Letter.

I enjoy reading your guy's magazine and would like to help all of you out in any way that i can regarding The Sims2, i do keep in contact with Ea on a regular basis and can get info that you guy's would like if you need help.

Your's Sincerely

I can get Need for Speed Underground 2 demo running on my computer, a HP T468D.

I can see only the following 3 files:

liveupd.grg, liveupdt.tri, liveupdt.sig

Do you think the disc is corrupt or is it my computer?

hi i found a new use for the nag it has probably been done before but i want u guys to know the nag mag has many uses. I can tear the front pages out (the big pics about the games) and put them on my school books.

Please can someone help? In Prince of Persia, Warrior Within, at the fortress gate present, after fighting the second crow man, how do I get to the third? Also, when can I use the sands? I live in Graaff-Reinet and think I am the only person here who has the game. PLEASE!!!!

hasn't been done before. Well tough luck folks, the "demons from Hell on Mars" sketch is all booked out! But wait. Let's take a step back and ask ourselves something. How original was the story behind Doom 3? Not quite I can assure you. Demons have been pouring out of portals since the 90s. So what then made Doom 3 so popular and 'original?' Some might say the use of a winning formula; others might say the menacing atmosphere coupled with the most GPU straining 786432 pixels to have formed on a screen. I say both, and a whole lot more. "It's the small things that count." We've heard that saying before; well they count here! Details Gentlemen! We've always said a good game comprises of a balance in all of its aspects. Well a great game takes it a step further. To illustrate this we look again to Doom 3. The idea of running around through corridors in one great science facility on the dullest planet in our solar system doesn't sound too exiting. Add a few demons and we've all heard it before. But by focusing on the details, id and Nerve software have simply turned the stereotype around to make the idea infinitely more plausible and bringing the Mars facility to absolute life (or death:). "Give us examples," you say. You've all played the game and if you haven't you should. If I had to list examples, well... there are too many.

Don't get me wrong, Half-Life 2 is a fine accomplishment for Valve, but Doom serves its purpose in showing the world that your concept doesn't necessarily have to be original in order to spawn a great game.

If you watch Shrek 2 you'll notice hundreds of small details.

*For example: On their journey to visit the king and queen the horses and carriage are shown travelling across a number of different terrains and weather conditions, including a short downhill section where the animators have actually gone to the trouble of animating the two horses struggling with the steep incline and heavy carriage – now that's just classy and forms part of why that movie is one of the biggest earners ever. **NAG Ed***

FROM Someone

SUBJECT NFSU2 Mystery

While playing Underground 2 at medium detail (in the middle of low and high), I noticed that when I press the 'look behind' button to see what's going on behind me the frame rate is much faster than when looking forward and after tweaking my system a bit I still have the same problem. I'd rather have the bad frame rate when looking back. Even if I install the latest driver for my graphics card, the game is even slower. I have a [lists specs, Ed]. Do you think I should have this problem? Or did I install my graphics card backwards. Doom 3 works on my ma-

chine at a reasonable frame rate why should I have a problem with this? PS: great magazine keep up the good work.

Would it be lame to tell this guy to race in reverse?

NAG Ed

FROM x x

SUBJECT How to calculate the dawning of photo-realism

Simple, you just invent a standard, let's call it "PhotoMark", and produce a photo-realistic simulation working with Hollywood people or however game developers think photo-realism might be generated in games. It doesn't matter if no computer will be able to run it when it's released. So, for example, in 2008 it may run at 5 frames per second, then in 2010 in 10. Then we just calculate when we can play photo-realistic games after looking at the graph and its incline. At 30fps, BANG! Photo-realistic games - Instead of looking forwards, let's task the goal to work backwards. Tell me what you guys think...

That's like trying to make cheese by shaking a cow.

NAG Ed

FROM Lourens [Signed as Beverly? Ed]

SUBJECT Why is there no warning?

NAG you guys think you are so cool making a gaming magazine and then selling it for 35 bucks. My son Steven started buying your magazine about 2 years ago. He is now obsessed with gaming and his grades are dropping. He wasted R2000 on the Internet browsing your site. He also wasted R340 subscribing and he is buying every game you say is good. This evil magazine is ruining his life. I feel guilty because I let him buy the magazine in the first place. Please put a warning label on the magazine so that other mothers won't make the same mistake. I will be watching you closely from now on. Every mistake you make you will regret.

*Something about this letter tells me you're not someone's mom but rather an oddball reader who is impersonating a mom... do I have it right? Regardless of the nature and depth of your mental illness, please stop sending us mail and just buy the magazine every month like the good reader you are. **NAG Ed***

FROM Damned

SUBJECT Microsoft Ripped me off

I opened the nice shiny red box. It looked so cool. It was full of nice little buttons, for everything you could imagine. This is what the Microsoft Wireless Comfort Edition keyboard and mouse set looked like. I installed the software and played around with it for while, I had come to the conclusion that this

SHORTS

FROM Bruce

SUBJECT Badger?

Hey can you tell me what happened to the badger because it's been gone since the October issue? What happened to him? Are you still going to have badger hunt competitions?

*You mean you haven't spotted him since October? I thought he was easy to find. **NAG Ed***

FROM Walter

SUBJECT New edition

Morning Michael. When will your new edition hit the shelf and could you give me a local release date for the game "Boiling Point – Road to Hell" - this for my son of course.

*Of course it is. **NAG Ed***

FROM Neil Robinson

SUBJECT Vietnamese Ghetto

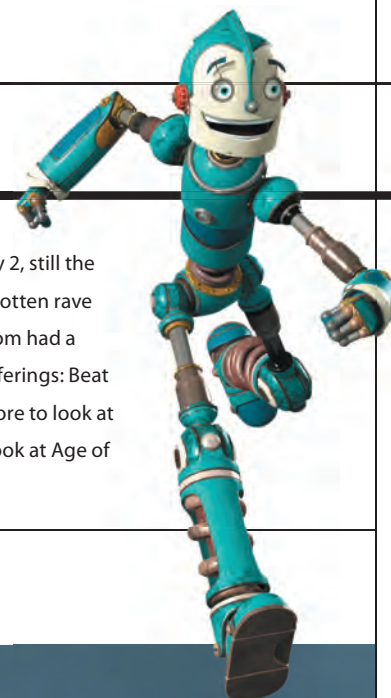
After leaving Vietnam, Carl Johnston (considered a "M[a]n of Valor" by his peers) moves to San Andreas and totally against character, lives out the rest of his Grand Theft Auto life in the 'hood'. Do these games tie in somehow? Or are there just a lot of African-American Carl Johnston's out there? Or are the respective developers hoping to join forces and produce GTA: Saigon?

*Now that's funny. **NAG Ed***

was the best keyboard & mouse set I had ever seen. A couple of days later I installed Need For Speed Underground 2, and strangely whenever I held down the up arrow and pushed the side arrow the up arrow stops functioning. I immediately looked for a patch of some sort and to my disbelief, Microsoft simply just posted a cause and reason why the keyboard did this, no patch or fix whatsoever. Now I am stuck with a cr**py keyboard (the mouse rocks) which in this little town I live in (Potchefstroom) no one would want to buy. I would just advise anyone who is thinking of buying a Microsoft keyboard to seriously reconsider.

*Funny you should mention this - I had a similar problem when Tomb Raider came out - but back then I ditched my old keyboard and bought a Microsoft keyboard and the problem disappeared. Weird or what? **NAG Ed***

PREVIEWS



APRIL PACKS A PUNCH with the announcement of Call of Duty 2, still the best wartime shooter on the market. GTR, which has gotten rave reviews in Europe, also enters our world. Meanwhile Capcom had a recent press event, so we look at two of their upcoming offerings: Beat Down and Resident Evil Outbreak's sequel. There's a lot more to look at with hands-on previews of Juiced and Snowblind, plus a look at Age of Empires III and the new Close Combat game.



F.E.A.R.

PLATFORMS: PC

RELEASE DATE: 2005

The game play footage released for this action shooter, showcasing the multiplayer aspect, has a lot of reason to get excited about. Grenades have simply never looked this beautiful.



Vivisector

PLATFORMS: PC

RELEASE DATE: Q1 2005

It might be one of those somewhat dodgy shooters from Eastern Europe, but in Vivisector you can literally shoot chunks of meat off your target. Gory, bound to cause a stir, guaranteed to be a lot of fun.



The Godfather

PLATFORMS: PC | PS2 | Xbox | PSP

RELEASE DATE: Q3 2005

EA puts its big budget ways to good use and plans a revival par none. With voices from James Caan and even the late Marlon Brando, plus some astounding visuals, The Godfather might be that remake we all wanted.

DARKWATCH



DEVELOPER Sammy **PUBLISHER** Sega **PLATFORMS** Xbox **RELEASE DATE** 2005

Sammy goes dark and dangerous in this console-based shooter featuring a lone gunman on a quest for vengeance. He lives an ironic life: our hero is a vampire that works for a Wild West paranormal agency out to stop the things that go bump in the night. Furious gunplay, dark locales, spooky monsters, a lusty female Vampire, and Havok physics complete the package. Dark and moody, it might manage to find a niche market tired of sci-fi shooters on the consoles.

BOMBERMAN DS

DEVELOPER Hudson **PUBLISHER** Ubisoft **PLATFORMS** Nintendo DS **RELEASE DATE** Q2 2005

Bomberman doubles its real estate by heading onto the dual-screened DS. This obviously means the game is twice as big, plus the touch screen gives a few new options, though it doesn't seem to allow for direct character control. The addition of wireless support will allow up to eight players in a LAN session, but the most interesting new feature is the ability to play by voice via the DS' microphone.



GODS OF THE VIRTUAL BOARDS

DEVELOPER Dev Game Technology **PUBLISHER** TBA **PLATFORMS** PC **RELEASE DATE** 2005



Nostradamus predicted the end of the world - now you have to defend it. This interesting game from Brazil will pit you against seven Gods and their virtual boards in an epic battle to save, well, everything. Each God has been training at his or her own special kind of game and though it doesn't strike a Mario Party chord, it does look interesting enough to try out.

DOMINATION

DEVELOPER Wargaming.net **PUBLISHER** Dreamcatcher **PLATFORMS** PC **RELEASE DATE** April 2005



Massive Assault returns in this sequel where the Free Nations Union and the Phantom League are at it again in a number of exotic, sci-fi locations. This turn-based strategy game takes the series to a whole new visual level. Twenty scenarios and two campaigns entertain the single player while multiplayer comes in the form of Hotseat, LAN and Internet play.

AMERICA'S ARMY: RISE OF A SOLDIER

DEVELOPER Secret Level **PUBLISHER** Ubisoft **PLATFORMS** PS2 | Xbox **RELEASE DATE** Q2 2005



America's Army, the insanely popular online war shooter from the US Army, is heading the console way. The aim is to transfer the realism of the online game to console players and it's bound to be a hit on online networks. Features include a fully customizable soldier and a non-linear campaign mode to follow. Sadly, it's not likely to be free like the PC version, but you can't have everything on a silver platter.

ROBOTS

DEVELOPER Vivendi **PUBLISHER** Vivendi **PLATFORMS** PC | PS2 | Xbox | GCN | GBA | DS **RELEASE DATE** 2005



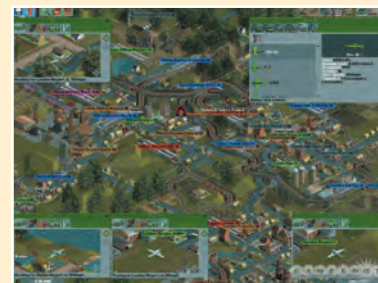
The Dreamworks picture with the same name is around the corner, so we might be in for another licensed game disaster. The difference here, though, is that the developers had a lot of access to the movie models, scenery, and concepts well ahead of time. They were also given a lot of space to develop new characters, opponents, and areas to Robots' vast city. Hopefully this is another chance for an excellent license game to surface.

What we're playing at the NAG office ...



Quake III Arena

A classic returns as more office additions mean more fodder in this stalwart. We can't resist the allure of a few more death and CTF matches, not to mention a host of new maps available online.



Locomotion

Chris Sawyer's Locomotion might have had zero cosmetic upgrades since Transport Tycoon, but it is even more addictive with new game mechanics tweaks and subtle changes.



Paper Mario 2

A game that gives you a reason to own a GameCube. With hours upon hours of enjoyable and often zany quests, interesting characters and an involved combat system that relies on reflex as much as intelligence. Paper Mario: The Thousand Year Door is engrossing, addictive, stylish, and fun.

JOIN THE ARMY

SEE THE WORLD



Call of Duty set the standard for war shooters. Call of Duty 2 plans to take the genre where it's never been before with new levels of graphics, authenticity, and action. The guys at Infinity Ward spoke to us about their upcoming game.



Tell us about Call of Duty 2. When and where does it take place? Are we still giving it to the Nazis?

Zied: Call of Duty 2 is a natural progression for our team and a huge step forward in intensity, authenticity, and action. We are taking the hallmarks of the original Call of Duty and expanding them to create the most intense, amazing battlefield experience ever. Call of Duty 2 covers a vast number of locations, from North Africa to Russia to Germany. We have worked meticulously to create battles and develop rich stories from the trenches across the length of much of the war itself. More specifically: in Call of Duty 2, we're taking you to North Africa where you'll get a chance to match wits against General Rommel, the "Desert Fox", and his Afrikakorps, both as a British infantry soldier and a Scottish

tank commander and experience the harsh dusty realities of desert warfare.

In addition, the player will return to the locations of some popular battles of the first Call of Duty, in new and exciting missions. For example: players will experience new missions in and around the battle of Stalingrad - the gruelling six month blood bath that cost the German Army over six hundred thousand soldiers. They will also be thrown into other battles on the Eastern and Western fronts that you'll find out about in the next few months.

What new game play features can we look forward to in Call of Duty 2?

Zied: Call of Duty 2 is about increased player freedom. There are many new game play features, but two of the most important

Interviewees

Grant Collier, **President**

Jason West, **Chief Technology Officer**

Zied Rieke, **Lead Designer**

Michael Boon, **Lead Artist**

Steve Fukuda, **Designer**

Bryan Pearson, **Software Engineer**

ones are the non-linear missions and the open-ended game play structure, or "Vignette System," as we call it. Both of these features are about increased player choice.

Call of Duty 2's new, big and open environments enable the player to take multiple paths to complete the mission objectives. This gives players the chance to use actual military tactics like outflanking and fire and manoeuvre to eliminate the enemy. In addition to multiple routes, the player will also often have several active objectives and can make strategic decisions about how and when he completes them.

In addition, Call of Duty 2 is divided into many different missions or "vignettes." These vignettes, when taken together, allow the player to experience the story of four



freedom to play how they want and therefore can choose to become much more involved in each character's story if they like, or play through the war across the characters' stories year-by-year. It's their choice.

We understand Call of Duty 2 uses a new game engine. Can you tell us about the new engine and what it does?

Jason: We designed the new technology around the game we wanted to build. We feature immense open environments, epic chaotic battles and an amazing number of AI, both friendly and enemy. To allow us to bring the battlefield experience and immersion to the next level, we designed the new technology to use real-time dynamic lighting and shadows, specular maps, projected texture lighting and normal maps.

The AI system uses more realistic tactics on both the friendly and enemy sides. Each team will use fire, manoeuvre, and flanking tactics against threats - which is especially important with the new non-linear game play that we have added to Call of Duty 2.

Effects and weather are now more realistic than ever with the new technology, allowing for some amazing situations. Rain and snow will not only look realistic, but also cause the AI to react in more realistic ways. We also use smoke for portable concealment on the battlefield - from deployed smoke



different ordinary soldiers experiencing the extraordinary story of World War II. Rather than force the player through each mission one at a time, in Call of Duty 2 when the player finishes a particular vignette, we allow him to choose which of the four character's stories he would like to continue with next. This means that players can choose what mission they want to play. They can follow a particular character's story through to its completion or, alternatively if they prefer, they can also decide to play chronologically across all the conflicts, fighting one year at a time from 1941 to 1945.

So, we've given players the complete



grenades as well as explosions in the area. The AI understands the smoke and uses its new abilities in its interactions.

Boon: The new Call of Duty 2 engine allows us to add an order of magnitude and more detail to characters, vehicles, and the world. We have the standard normal maps and specular maps, we have fantastic real-time lighting and shadows, and we also have many more subtle touches that add to realism - such as the ability to make more organic buildings, control over the sharpness of the specular reflection, light bloom, and exposure adjustment.

In Call of Duty 2, smoke and dust play a large role in both the look of the game and the game play, so we've added volumetric smoke, which makes a huge difference to the credibility of the atmospheric effects.

What is the advantage of creating a new engine specifically for Call of Duty 2?

Boon: The big advantage of using a next-generation engine, like Call of Duty 2, is that we can tailor the new technology to the kind of game we're making. With Call of Duty 2, we have decided to make our graphics as impressive as the game play was in the first game, without compromising the game play or the cinematic experience. To do so, we need an engine that can support large, open areas, lots of characters, a cinematic ambient world, and high frame rate all at the same time - you know a typical Call of Duty battle.

How about weaponry? Are there any new weapons? Are any weapons from the original Call of Duty returning?

Steve: For starters, we've introduced more semi-automatic rifles. The Germans get the Gewehr 43 and the Soviets get the SVT-40.



Call of Duty compared to Call of Duty 2; War has never looked this good

To reflect the change between portraying parachute infantry in Call of Duty and rangers in Call of Duty 2, the folding stock M1A1 Carbine has been replaced with the M1 Carbine. All nationalities will have their own pistols - the British will have a Webley Mark 6 revolver and the Soviets will have the Tokarev TT-30. Smoke grenades for "portable concealment" that the player can deploy at any time are instrumental new weapons in Call of Duty 2. Overall, in addition to the returning arsenal from Call of Duty, there are over 15 new weapons in Call of Duty 2.

Can you describe what battles in Call of Duty 2 will be like?

Steve: Actually, one of our driving goals for Call of Duty 2 is to go beyond the intensity and epic action that we delivered in the original. We have been working on increasing

the intensity level and sense of immersion throughout Call of Duty 2 in several ways. Let's take the example of a battle in the remote town of Toujane, in Western Tunisia, which was a part of the British campaign in North Africa in 1943. In this mission, the player is tasked with escorting Crusader tanks from the 7th Armoured Division through a difficult, cramped built-up area.

You are constantly surrounded by soldiers struggling to communicate through the sheer density of combat noise. The effect of thick billowing dust and obscuring smoke in the streets creates a greater sense of chaos and confusion and provides players with tactical opportunities. Faint shapes of Afrikakorps infantrymen, moving around the flank, are seen faintly through smokescreens. Grenades are being thrown back and forth; tanks sweep lanes with their co-axial machine guns and fire

MEET NEW PEOPLE



communicate to the unfolding events. This will not only give the player useful information as to the condition of his squad and the disposition of the enemy, but also adds to the chaos and colour of the battlefield experience. Overall, we're committed to making the most captivating, intense and epic title possible.

For the sequel, what sort of research did the team do in development?

Boon: In many respects Call of Duty was extremely authentic, but there were many areas in which we knew we could do even better. One key area was in the feel of the environments. For Call of Duty 2 we sent artists to France and North Africa, in particular, to get a feel for what makes those areas different from the places we grew up. We took close to 10,000 photos plus videos and sketches. You really have to visit a place to understand what makes one place feel different to another. The buildings in France, for example, are so old and organic and many of them have been patched and repaired many times over hundreds of years. When we came back from France we had to throw away our early test French levels and textures and start over. The difference it made is amazing.

North Africa is a new location for Call of Duty 2 and we are committed to getting it just right. The history and culture of North Africa is very different than anything most of us have exposure to, so it was really important that we got first-hand experience of that environment. Once again, it made a huge difference to the look of Call of Duty 2. **NAG**

at each other in the confined space. It's total chaos.

What plans do you have on the sound for Call of Duty 2?

Bryan: With Call of Duty 2 we are advancing the audio benchmark introduced in Call of Duty. In addition to all-new sound effects, voice, and music we're introducing a number of new sound engine components that will greatly enhance the audio presentation. These enhancements will allow our authentic field recorded weapons to not only volume scale correctly over distances, but will also realistically change in timbre (tone) as that distance increases. Other details will be enhanced, such as bullet impacts. These will now not only sound appropriate for the surface they impact with, but are calculated for their probability to cause ricochets. One feature that we're especially excited about is our new Battle Chatter System. This system gives each and every soldier (allies and axis) on the battlefield a unique voice and vocabulary of around 500 to 750 lines of dialog. This chatter is not randomly triggered phrases, but intelligent unscripted squad reactions as they

AND KILL THEM

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Out of nowhere comes GTR, an FIA-license bearing game that has stunned audiences and critics alike across Europe, giving it some of the highest scores seen for a technical racer. As the title heads towards our shores, we spoke to GTR's producer, Stephen Viljoen, who also happens to be a South African residing happily in Hermanus...



How long has SimBin been working on GTR?

We started with pre-production and prototyping around September 2003. We started with full production in December 2003 after securing the FIA license.

The game carries the FIA's stamp of approval. How did that come to being?

We knew from the outset that the only way we'd be able to bring a game, based on the FIA GT series, to market would be to obtain the official license for the series from the FIA. Henrik Roos, the CEO of SimBin, had his own racing team which participated in the FIA GT series. He approached the FIA with the proposal that SimBin would create a simulation based on the FIA GT series. They were very hard to convince, but once they saw the extreme amount of accuracy that we put into the prototype work, they finally agreed to an exclusive multi-year license to the FIA GT series.

From the outset, what was the final vision for GTR?

Right from the start, our goal was to create the most accurate, realistic, and convincing driving simulation ever done for the PC market. At the same time, being gamers at heart, we wanted to make sure that it was, above all, fun.

The FIA license gave us the unique advantage to represent some of the world's most incredible sports cars in a game. These include beasts such as the Ferrari 550s, 575s, and 360s, the Lamborghini Murcielago, the

Chrysler Viper, and the Saleen. Our goal was to accurately recreate the experience of driving these incredible cars.

The game features Arcade, Semi-Pro and pro modes.

How do you make sure that you don't compromise one mode's game play for another in terms of the game's overall design?

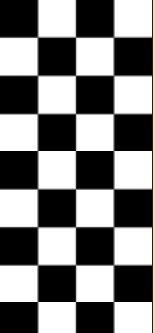
The important thing during the design is to view all modes as important parts of the whole game and not to try and tack on a mode near the end of the game development to try and accommodate a bigger gaming demographic. What we did was to look at each specific group of gamers, be it arcade-style racers or full-out simulation jockeys, and we designed the modes best suited to the specific game play styles. We set up groups of beta testers who would focus on the specific modes (Arcade, Semi-Pro, Simulation), and used their feedback to properly develop each mode into, what we believe, will satisfy all the racing gamer types out there.

For the serious racing enthusiast, just how detailed is GTR?

Phew, where do I start? Having the official seal of approval from the FIA meant that we were able to work closely with the controlling bodies of each of the tracks, as well as each of the official teams who race in the series.

Let's look at the tracks first. We obtained the blueprints for each of the ten official tracks included in GTR. We sent surveillance crews out to each track, who took hundreds





of photographs, hours of video footage, and recorded detailed GPS information for each track. All this reference material was then used to create a virtual replica of the real world track. The road surface, rumble strips, run-off areas, sandpits, tyre barriers, advertisement boards, track side buildings, trees, and so forth, are all accurately modelled and placed.

We used telemetry data provided by the real race teams to model each bump and dip on the track surface to be in the same spot and the same geometry as the bumps and dips on the real track. The weather was modelled to accurately reflect the conditions during the actual events. Even the sun is in the same position as it was at the time of the real race, with accurate shadows cast on the track.

GTR features a new technology called Live-Track. During the course of a real race, little pieces of rubber, called marbles, break off the tyres and settle on the road surface just off the main racing line. As the race progresses, this part of the track loses more and more grip and driving off the main racing line can make it very difficult to keep the car on the road.

With Live-Track, we simulated this effect in the game - both visually as well as on a physics level. The player will even experience the tactile feedback of this marble build-up via a force feedback device.

We were given access to the actual cars by the individual teams. Our sound team spent a lot of time recording the actual sounds of

each car. Sounds were recorded inside and outside the car - idling, revving, and so forth. The recordings were then used to create, what we believe, to be the most accurate car sounds ever used in a game.

We took hundreds of photos of each car, capturing the tiniest details and then recreated each car down to the finest detail. Even the glass on the mirrors is correctly shaded. Each wheel style is accurately modelled to reflect the full range of variations used on the real cars. Each driver's clothing and helmet were also accurately recreated.

The real-world teams, when they saw what we were creating, were extremely excited to see their own cars and drivers so accurately reproduced in a game. We were given access to the cars' technical specifications, telemetry data, setup configurations, and so forth. These were used to create the most accurate physics to date in a game, with each car's physics individually created to simulate the real car. Each tyre type's physics were modelled to accurately represent the dynamics of the real tyres.

Now, for the casual gamer, how does Arcade mode make sure he doesn't get bogged down with the details of the Professional mode?

For arcade mode, we created a separate physics and tyre model for the cars. This was developed and fine tuned with the help of a dedicated arcade player beta testing team. These guys are hard-core arcade players and



with their feedback, we were able to create an arcade mode that is very easy to get into. The car setups in arcade mode are also greatly simplified, with a few simple sliders to configure the most critical aspects of the car's behaviour. The Arcade mode comes with four pre-set difficulty levels, ranging from "Sunday Driver" to "Alien on Wheels." The difficulty levels take the player through a progressively more difficult learning curve, with the AI drivers becoming more challenging as well. All of this helps the casual player to get in a race quickly and just have fun, without having to fiddle with car setups and the like.

How do you view the digital racing market? Is it in good standings or can more be done?

The racing market has experienced resurgence in recent years, I think. The Racing genre is proving to be very popular again and the availability of high quality force-feedback wheels, at very reasonable prices, is certainly very welcome. Still, there is a lot more room for growth. The advance in technology is making it possible for us to create racing simulations that we could only have dreamt of before. I am very excited about the possibilities that this opens up - and we are already moving to the next level in our next titles currently in development.

In GTR, how many tracks, teams, and cars will be at your disposal?

There are a total of ten unique tracks and 17

unique car models used by 58 teams, giving a total of 77 individual cars that the player can select from.

The game has garnered a lot of critical success in Europe. Did you expect such a reaction?

We knew that we had something very special going, but underestimated how popular the racing genre had become in recent years.

When we initially released GTR in Germany in late 2004, we were all waiting on the edge of our seats to see what reaction the game would create. The first reviews started coming in and we received the highest rating ever given to a sports game in Germany. This was by a mainstream gaming publication which is generally regarded as the top gaming publication in Germany. Our publisher in Europe sent out review copies to publications in the other European countries and again the results were the same. Needless to say, with this being our first commercial game, we are all walking around with a permanent grin on our faces.

You are based in South Africa. Is the Simbin team spread over the world, or are you the only isolated member of the team? How do you create a game over such vast distances?

The team is spread pretty much all over the world. We have team members in the USA, Australia, the UK, Italy, Sweden, the Netherlands, and so forth. There are two of us

in South Africa; me and Sean Vollmer, who is one of our track modellers.

The vital ingredient in being able to work together as a team to create a world-class product over such distances, is the dedication that comes from absolutely loving what we're doing. Everyone automatically does more than what is asked of them, so there's no need to police the members to make sure they're working.

We have a centralised development forum through which we communicate and where everyone posts their pieces of the development puzzle. Most of the day-to-day communication is done via MSN and good old e-mail. It certainly has its challenges, but overall we've been able to work very well together.

Are there any plans for a console version?

GTR is a PC-only release. All our future products will be multi-platform though.

What's next on SimBin's list after completing GTR?

We have a very exciting product approaching its beta phase very soon. It will be released later in 2005. Additionally, we are already well underway on the design and development of at least two other titles. One of these is pretty obvious (hint, we have a multi-year license for the FIA-GT series). The other will push the racing genre into a new paradigm shift altogether. More about this later though... when I can say more. **NAG**



VITAL INFO

■ Platforms

PC

■ Developer

Ensemble Studios

■ Publisher

Microsoft Games

■ Supplier

Comtek [0860] 600 557

■ Genre

RTS

■ Age Restriction

TBA

■ Release Date

Q2 2005

Ensemble has built a new engine from scratch taking advantage of the advancements in graphical and physics technology, including shaders and Havok support



AGE OF EMPIRES III

AFTER TWO GAMES AND a brief detour into the world of Age of Mythology, along with literally millions of units sold, it's hardly surprising that another Age of Empires game is in production. Fairly unique in its execution, the series is about you creating a civilisation, mining various materials to build societies and creating armies

to dominate your neighbours. It's Civilization in a more intimate RTS format and it has spawned a lot of fans.

Age of Empires III, then, should not want to disappoint. The team behind it knows this and the game itself has been in development ever since they finished Age of Mythology.





In this sequel you head for the new world as Europe decides to conquer America. In the fray are eight European nations and a dozen American Indian tribes to avatar your conquest. The traditional Age of Empires game mechanics apply, but with a few extra twists.

The most notable addition will be the Home City: a pervasive construction that will stick to you for dozens upon dozens of games. A Home City represents your power base, but it also allows for upgrades to units. To balance this influence on the game, a city will need to grow and achieve stature. Since there are multiple ways to focus on a city, say for instance you prefer a powerful Navy, home cities can grow to appear very unique, especially when you consider how many nations are available.

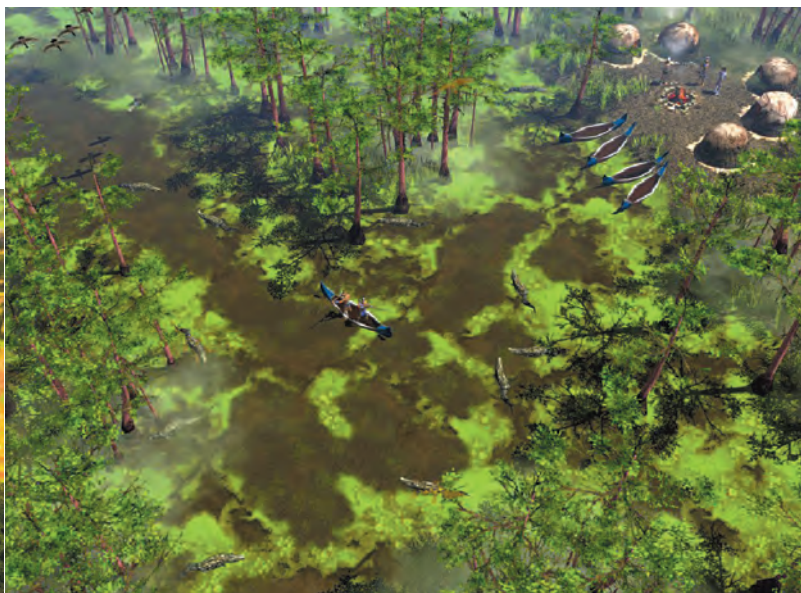
Allying with your enemy is also a new way to expand the depth of the game. Each nation has shared and unique units, but allying will give a player access to new

technology and new units.

The most striking change, though, is the way it looks. Age of Empires III takes a step into the next generation with a new 3D engine provided your graphics card is at least a bit up to date. Ensemble, though, assures us that it will still run well on low-spec machines. Shaders, real-time shadows and bump and specular mapping are used to great effect - as is the Havok physics engine, allowing trees to tumble down hills and battles to be as grotesquely realistic as possible. The Ensemble penchant for detail shines through as the world will be much more vibrant with animations such as turtles lounging on river-side logs.

Of course, no matter how you look at it, the return of Age of Empires is a nice thing. The new graphical and game play tweaks, including a much-enhanced combat system, is bound to breathe more life into a strong franchise. **NAG**

With both European and American Indian tribes, AoE III hopes to give a lot of replay value, including unique units and a Home City, your unique upgrade hub



VITAL INFO

Platforms

PS2 PC

Developer

Juiced Games

Publisher

THQ

Supplier

WWE [011] 462 0150

Genre

Driving

Age Restriction

TBA

Release Date

May 2005



In Juiced avid racers can gain reputation by showing off their cars and moves at competitions.



JUICED

ORIGINALLY SET TO CONTENT for the throne of the "underground" racing/modding genre (currently held by the oft-considered lacklustre Need for Speed: Underground 2), Juiced was fatally wounded by the sudden closure of its publisher Acclaim. After weeks of speculation, the license was finally rescued by publisher THQ who then had the title delayed for some months to polish up the game for an early April release. Initial impressions of the first Acclaim-based version were highly favourable and had the industry very excited. But these new delays by THQ were worrisome.

A more recent hands-on of the THQ version have put all those worries to rest - Juiced is looking better than ever and then some.

It seems that the entire game has been given a stylistic overhaul. The interface and other visual elements have been redone to look more in theme with the concepts of underground racing and car modification. It looks good, to say the least, if not a lot more mature. In terms of the graphical quality, it seems that the cars, as well as the tracks and various effects have been given a bit more attention.



Scratches, scrapes and dents on the cars seem more realistic while the actual physics involved in getting these feel more refined. The actual driving controls are still very technical, thankfully leaning away from the arcade-style racing of NFSU into more realistic areas. As you race around the track, the spectators on the sides of the road are now more audible and either cheer you on as you lead, or shout insults if you trail behind.

A new interesting facet in Juiced is the more fluid Respect system during the actual race. Previously, you gained and lost respect with the other "crews" by driving well, or crashing into their cars respectively. Now, depending on your driving your Respect will change real time. If you lead the pack your Respect steadily grows. Being in last place damages your standings quickly. A quick takeoff at the starting line gives you a good initial boost of Respect, helpful if you're going to go ramming into cars and crowds.

When the race is over and done, you head back to the garage to repair any damage you've done to your car (after all, hitting a wall at over 200km/h certainly doesn't bode well for your fancy neon lights and paintjob), as well as purchase new cars or upgrades for your car.

Possibly the most exciting new aspect added in this regard is the "Auto Tune" ability. Juiced works off the 'Class' system for your cars - the higher your brake horsepower (bhp), the higher your class of car and the



more difficult races you can participate in. Previously one had to fiddle and futz with upgrades trying to get your car just the right bhp to either raise or lower it in class. Now, you can simply select which class you wish your car to be and the game will automatically buy the most pertinent upgrades for your car. It's the exact functionality that those of us, who simply don't want to spend hours crooning over our cars, have wanted.

Juiced certainly isn't the exact same type of game as Need for Speed: Underground 2, but it does share similar aspects with the genre. Underground racing, pink slip bets, upgrading and modifying your 'ride' to make it the best of the best and so fourth. However, NFSU is more of an arcade-style racer with appropriate physics and racing mechanics whereas Juiced is much more realistic and often unforgiving. Regardless, Juiced looked good the first time round and is now looking even better. **NAG**

How you race is as important as how aggressively you race; reputation is everything in Juiced



The developers boast literally trillions of cosmetic, tyre and engine upgrade combinations in Juiced

VITAL INFO

■ Platforms

PC PS2 XBOX

■ Developer

Take 2 Interactive

■ Publisher

Take 2 Interactive

■ Supplier

MegaRom [011] 234 2680

■ Genre

Tactical FPS

■ Age Restriction

TBA

■ Release Date

April 2005

Close Combat hopes to up the bar on realistic urban combat games

CLOSE COMBAT FIRST TO FIGHT

FIRST TO FIGHT IS another addition to the growing military simulator genre, taking players one step further in terms of realism when it comes to combat. As games have found a place in modern combat in terms of training soldiers, these advances have found their way into the titles we play, as seen in games like Full Spectrum Warrior. Close Combat goes the same route, destined to

become a military simulator in some form and developed with the assistance of over 40 active-duty Marines.

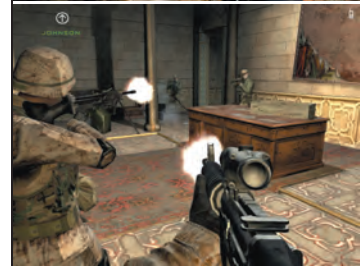
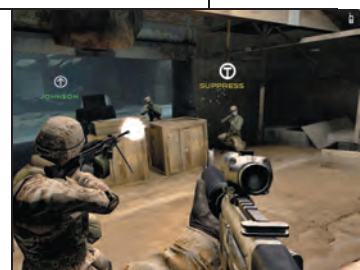
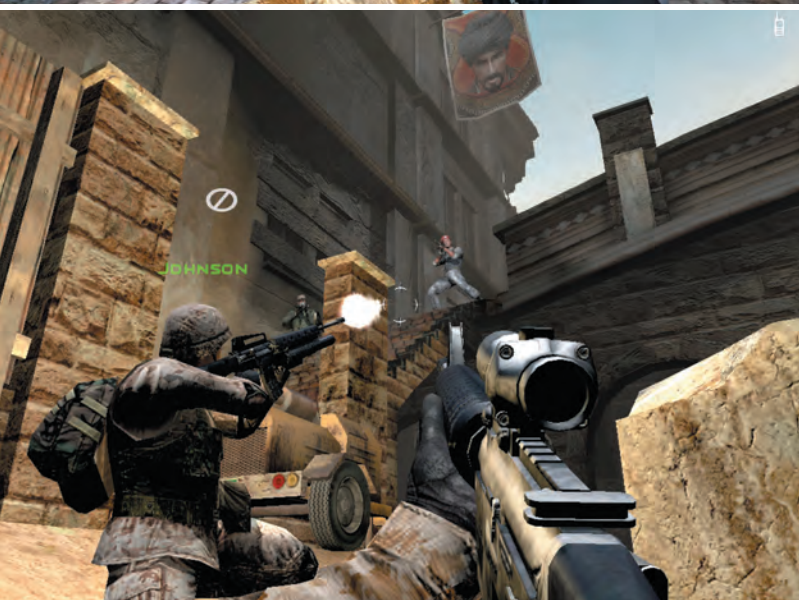
Based in Beirut in 2006, your squad is part of a NATO force sent to get rid of insurgents after the Prime Minister is taken ill. The action is heavily focussed on urban combat and the developers opted to avoid tedious missions such as hostage situations or bomb diffusions. Instead, the main focus will fall on the implementation of Ready-Team-Fire-Assist, or RTFA, a system used effectively by Marines to ensure a highly effective combat force in terms of formations, movements and tactics.

Featuring both single and multiplayer modes, Close Combat allows a huge amount of control over your three teammates. It also promises advanced AI to ensure that they react like Marines would in a combat situation. As with Full Spectrum Warrior, authentic Marine formations and moves can be executed. Extra support can be called in, ranging from other fire teams and Cobra helicopters to Abrams Tanks and other assault vehicles. This option will be restricted otherwise players might call in help for any little problem.

The engine is proprietary and boasts all the bells and whistles associated with a PC shooter three days: volumetric shadows, normal maps, high-res textures, rag doll physics and so forth.

It is hard to come to any sort of objective conclusion on this kind of game. While its features sound promising, combat simulators walk a fine line in terms of quality where leaning too much to one side can make a game too difficult or too arcade-like, while the worst move would be unresponsive or stupid AI. First to Fight still has to prove itself but it looks promising and should give combat Sim fans something to look forward to. **NAG**

Squad-control is a major factor in CC, so a lot of the game's success will hinge on AI



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VITAL INFO

Platforms

Xbox PS2 PC

Developer

Crystal Dynamics

Publisher

Eidos Interactive

Supplier

Ster Kinekor [011] 445 7900

Genre

FPS

Age Restriction

TBA

Release Date

March 2005



Locked and

Loaded

- Snowblind

is the action-

hungry cousin

of Deus Ex



PROJECT SNOWBLIND

BETTER KNOWN FOR THEIR historic Legacy of Kain series, Crystal Dynamics try their hand at the First Person Shooter (FPS) genre with Project Snowblind.

Going for the dramatic intensity of the frontlines of war through the eyes of a new breed of nano-enhanced super soldier, players effectively live the fantasy of being rather elite. With access to the most high-tech weaponry, gadgets and vehicles, Project Snowblind manages to capture a wonderful science fiction vibe wrapped up in emotional intensity and valour. The mainstream gaming press has deemed it prudent to call Project Snowblind a "Halo Killer". While it certainly does get a favourable impression, it simply doesn't have that charismatic spark of Master Chief or that certain *je ne sais quoi* that made Halo such a runaway success.

Regardless, with rather unique weapons and interesting vehicles, Project Snowblind is a blast to play and rather impressive to look at.

Standard "run, shoot, hide and shoot more" FPS fare aside, emphasis seems to have been placed on making your Biomod implants rather pivotal to success. The Biomods are upgradeable

superhuman aspects of your character with abilities such as slowing down time, going invisible and protecting yourself with a force field. Each of these abilities is quite functional in battle, especially the one that slows down time but leaves you unaffected. Each ability is accompanied by satisfying visual effects and audio - rather impressive on the PlayStation 2 and it's slowly dating hardware.

The few levels available in the demo were astoundingly detailed for an FPS on the PlayStation 2, making full use of physics for destroyable objects yet neglecting the same physics for the death animations of enemies. Instead, each enemy would die in a predictably scripted manner, detracting slightly from the overall polish. Progression through the levels was a standard "A to B" affair with the occasional deviation in the form of saving a fellow soldier in peril or trying to intercept enemies. Interesting scenarios involving vehicular mayhem cropped up now and then to spice things up, but most of the demo played out with emphasis on intelligent use of your weapons and Biomods.

Project Snowblind is looking impressive indeed, though the Biomod upgrading was not available in the demo to comment on. Neither was the "Wall of Shame" which will supposedly contain the names of soldiers you let down in battle by failing to answer their pleas for help. **NAG**



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VITAL INFO

Platforms

PS2 PC Xbox

Developer

Ubisoft

Publisher

Ubisoft

Supplier

MegaRom [011] 234 2680

Genre

FPS

Age Restriction

16+

Release Date

Q2 2005



TOM CLANCY'S RAINBOW SIX LOCKDOWN

THE RAINBOW SIX SERIES has always been the flagship of the Tom Clancy line-up. While the likes of Splinter Cell and Ghost Recon have made impressive gains on gamers' perceptions, Rainbow Six was the series that started it, not to mention squad based combat in general.

Now heading for its third sequel, the developers had thought long and hard on what they could do next, apart from the expected graphical and AI overhauls. In this case Ubisoft took a leaf from the Ghost Recon series and decided to include Sniper missions, effectively doubling the amount of characters you can play as. While the normal missions still exist, allowing you to guide a squad against terrorists, the new sniper missions aim to lend a new perspective and tempo to the action - even Ghost Recon's trademark "holding of breath" feature made its way over to this series.

The plot is a fairly familiar one: you versus terrorists. In this case the bad guys have gotten their hands on a

nanotech biological weapon, which prompted a lot of research by the developers in Jane's and the Centre of Disease Control's manuals. The developers credit Clancy's role in the project as "working with the Clancy people" which means he personally didn't have much to do with the project. But to ensure that the game is what the fans want, a lot of time has been spent on forums, with fans and previous iterations of the game. After all, with three titles under your belt you walk a fine line between creativity and keeping the fans happy. Other new touches to the game are new weapons, new areas, plus a much-improved motion sensor.

Graphically the game boasts a new rendering engine while the famous AI code has also undergone an overhaul. Rag doll physics arrive in the form of Havok 2 support. The developers promise that some missions will have multiple ways of finishing them, depending on how you use your force's individual skills. **NAG**

Hands up! Drop your weapons of mass destruction!



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TECHNOLOGY

VITAL INFO

■ Platforms

PS2

■ Developer

Capcom

■ Publisher

Capcom

■ Supplier

Ster Kinekor [011] 445 7900

■ Genre

Survival Horror

■ Age Restriction

Mature

■ Release Date

Q2 2005

**Outbreak**

#2 should finally bring multiplayer to the PAL regions - core to the series concept



It's called Survival Horror and we can't think of a more horrible thing to try and survive than an attack by giant mutant zombie alligators

RESIDENT EVIL: OUTBREAK FILE #2

WHEN YOU HAVE AN award-winning franchise that has moved over 24 million copies worldwide and it seems that you have reached the end of your tether, what do you do? In the case of the popular Resident Evil series, the single player experience has moved onwards to axe-wielding, crazed hillbillies while the Outbreak series started a new multiplayer side to the proceedings. After the success of Outbreak, despite dubiously leaving multiplayer out of the PAL versions, File #2 has been announced. The sequel plans to harbour little in terms of surprises, taking players further into the experiences of ordinary citizens when the T-Virus is unleashed upon Raccoon City.

The first Outbreak allowed players to team up and take on the zombie hordes with up to four players. File #2 follows this route, but extends its character options to eight - the game is still restricted to four in multiplayer mode while single players can have up to two AI team mates. The plot is simple and familiar: after the Umbrella Corporation unwittingly changed the population of your town into Zombies and a menagerie of nasty creatures, you team up with other uninfected citizens to find a way out before the government decides to make a clean slate of the town. In the process you'll discover more about what happened, as well as uncover individual player stories.

The title will be driven further with the collection of

special items and points, which in turn will allow players to unlock even more characters, weapons and other objects. New scenarios, monsters and locales are obviously included, as well as a new control scheme - this allows players to opt between Resident Evil's familiar D-pad control and the more loose analogue controller (Capcom refers to the latter as Devil May Cry movement). Levels will have multiple routes through them and enemy placement will be random (to make sure that, even if you try out all eight characters, your game won't ever be identical twice).

File #2 is really just an extension of the first game with more polish and some nice tweaks. Foremost, though, it's finally a chance for a multiplayer Resident Evil to hit the PAL territories as well as for Capcom to sort out the atrocious AI and loading issues of the first title. **NAG**





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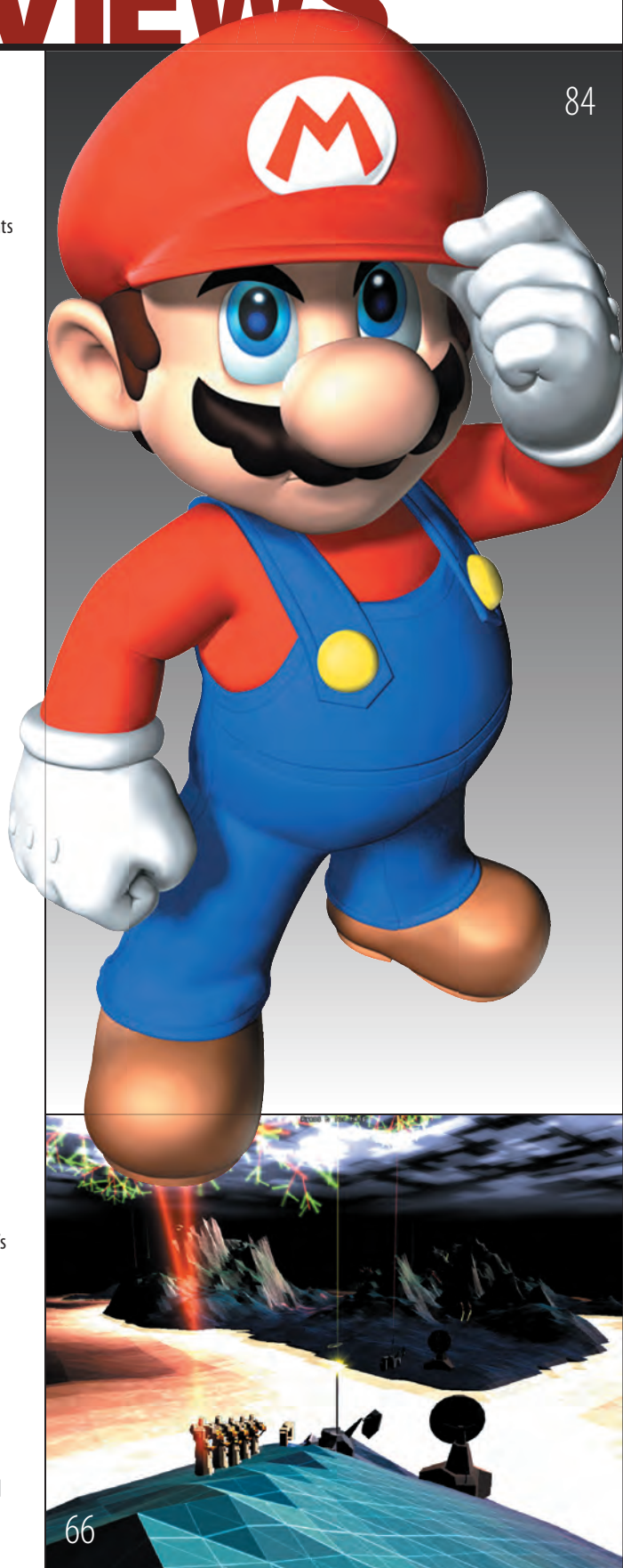
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REVIEWS

- 64 Star Wars KOTOR II:
The Sith Lords [PC]
- 66 Darwinia [PC]
- 68 Sentinel Descendants
in Time [PC]
- 70 Nexus: The Jupiter
Incident [PC]
- 72 Immortal Cities:
Children of the Nile
[PC]
- 74 Painkiller: Black
Edition [PC]
- 76 Metal Gear Solid 3:
Snake Eater
[PS2]
- 77 Spongebob
Squarepants The
Movie [PS2]
- 77 Eyetoy: Monkey
Mania [PS2]
- 78 King of Fighters
[PS2]
- 78 King Arthur [PS2]
- 79 Metal Slug 3 [PS2]
- 80 Metroid Prime 2
Echoes [GC]
- 80 Tales of Symphonia
[GC]
- 81 Oddworld Stranger's
Wrath [XBOX]
- 82 Mario vs. Donkey
Kong [GBA]
- 82 Grand Theft Auto
Advance [GBA]
- 84 Super Mario 64 [DS]
- 84 Asphalt Urban [DS]



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Editor's Choice

Once in a while, a game comes along that displays certain qualities which our editor likes. Pretty colours and loud noises help...



Platform

Platforms are described using icons rather than just plain old words. For those of you who don't know (shame on you) they are, left to right, top to bottom: PC, PS2, GameCube, Xbox, PSP, Game Boy Advance, and DS.



Scoring

Our scores range from one to one hundred, with a score of fifty being considered average - because we can. Live with it.



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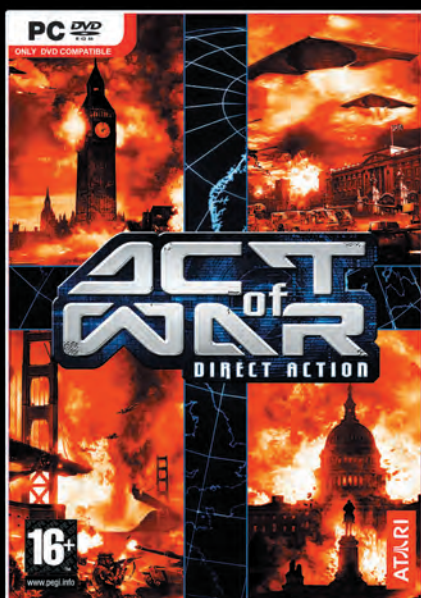
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PC
DVD

A great story and enjoyable game, despite lacking technological advances

73

VITAL INFO

■ Platforms

PC

■ Suggested Retail Price

R 285.00

■ Developer

Obsidian Entertainment

■ Publisher

LucasArts

■ Supplier

EA Africa [011] 516 8300

■ Genre

CRPG

■ Age Restriction

12+

■ Minimum Specs

Pentium 3 1GHz

256MB RAM

4 x CD ROM

32MB Video Card

3.5GB HDD

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Games reviewed on
Reclon machines

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STAR WARS KNIGHTS OF THE OLD REPUBLIC II: THE SITH LORDS



*Even Jedi have
acne problems*

IT WAS SHORTLY AFTER the release of the original Knights of the Old Republic – around the time that people were finishing the game, in fact – that the call for “more” started going out. And publisher EA heeded to the call, going all out to please the devoted fans the world over. But instead of role playing master, Bioware, taking on the new project, relative newcomer Obsidian took charge of the development and, in effect, produced a game that is both very different and very similar to the original Knights of the Old Republic title.

The game features a story that is more than a little unusual in the Star Wars milieu. While most Star Wars games (and movies and books, for that matter) tend to glorify and exemplify the

Jedi Council, Knights of the Republic II: The Sith Lords takes a very different view of this normally lofty institution. See, the entire premise of the story is that the character the player controls is a fallen Jedi, cast out by the council for spurious reasons. The council may (or may not, depending on your perspective) have made a mistake. The fact is, though, that the game calls the Jedi Council’s integrity into question.

At a time when Jedis have been hunted to near extinction, you begin the game playing your unfortunate character. The game again plays on a memory loss angle at this point – which is a little too much like the first – and, despite the fact that you are a trained Jedi, it takes quite some time before you get your



hands on a lightsaber. The story develops in an interesting (if sometimes tedious) manner from that point on, featuring a high standard of voice acting and characters infinitely more interesting than the first game. The tale involves plots and a general aura of mystery (especially concerning certain companion characters) that keep the player guessing until the inevitable twist comes along.

The game play is virtually identical to the previous title. There's lots of running around in this third person role playing adventure, with tons of back and forward to accomplish the myriad of quests that your player picks up along the way. There's a lot to do in the game and the inclusion of new force powers makes doing it all the more fun. Repetitive enemies can get a little much, but starting with already established, fairly powerful characters mean that combats are generally short. Sadly the developers seem to be particularly "anti-droid" meaning that there is a lot of droid bashing early in the game. The assassin droids, though, are incredibly funny, with their unique brand of polite menacing and threats.

Having completed the first game generally helps the player of Knights of the Old Republic II understand what is going on (with several references to Revan and Malek), but it certainly isn't necessary to enjoy this title. In fact, in certain respects not having played the previous game is a good thing – the player won't notice how dated Knights of the Old Republic II actually is.

See, Obsidian obviously wasn't taking any chances – which, essentially, may be the biggest mistake it made with this title. The graphics engine has only been marginally spruced up, and the game play has not changed at all. Characters who run into walls still keep running, which is pretty poor, and the overall interface looks almost exactly the same. A few new inclusions (like two weapon slots, allowing melee and ranged weapons, for example) make for a nice change, but the more picky gamers out there are going to be generally disappointed with the lack of technological advances in the game. New "prestige character classes" also add a bit of spice, allowing players to further specialise and focus their characters

at higher levels. Another nice new feature lies in the fact that players can now collect components to create their own chemical compounds and upgrade components, amongst other things – provided they have high enough skills in the right places.

While Knights of the Old Republic II is essentially a computer role playing title, there are certain elements that Obsidian has added to exemplify the cinematic qualities of the game. For example: there are several occasions when the player is pretty much forced to play with certain characters – not the main character. This forms a great sub-plot feel, and heightens the "movie style" of the game as stated before, but some players may not like the removal of choice when it comes to picking characters to play. This doesn't happen too often though, so it shouldn't prove too much of a problem.

In essence, Knights of the Old Republic II is exactly what gamers asked for – more KOTOR. There may not be many changes to the look and feel of the game, and it may feel a little old, but the brilliant story and interesting characters go a very long way to mitigate the game. Initially it may feel a little plodding (especially if you are impatient to get hold of your lightsaber), but the intrigue unfolds at a reasonably fast pace, meaning that once the first few missions are done, the game gets pretty interesting quite quickly. The patient, forgiving player will certainly be rewarded by this game. **NAG**



Though highly polished, KOTOR II is more of an extension of the original game than a true sequel



Unique and inspirational. An unforgettably rare experience

97

VITAL INFO

Platforms

PC

Suggested Retail Price

N/A

Developer

Introversion

Publisher

TBA

Supplier

Not available in SA

Genre

Action

Age Restriction

7+

Minimum Specs

Pentium 2.600MHz

128MB RAM

4 x CD ROM

32MB Video Card

24MB HDD



Games reviewed on
Reclon machines



*Worshipping
the ion cannon
wasn't smart...*



*Find a video
review of
Darwinia on
the Cover
DVD for more
information
and an in-depth
look at the
game.*

INTROVERSION SAID: LET THERE be the light fantastic. And there was Darwinia. The industry wallows in mediocrity - contented overfed pigs rolling in their own stagnant creations. Meanwhile, small self-publishing indie developer Introversion quietly raises a bar the malignant industry didn't know it had. While the mainstream developers continue to think that innovation means complicating the game with realistic details until playing their game is about as much fun as doing your math homework, Introversion reminds the gamers why they started playing games in the first place and loved it.

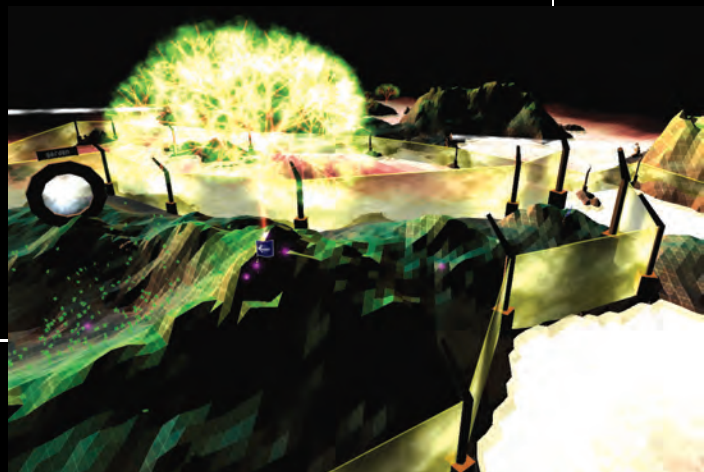
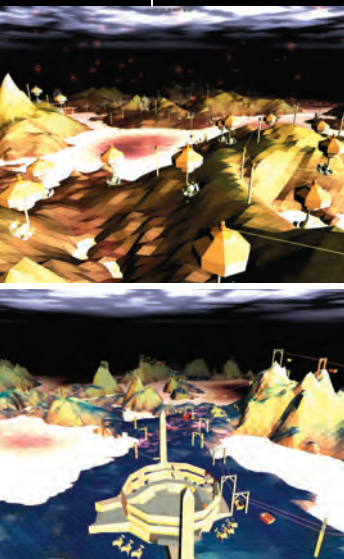
Taking distilled inspiration from a variety of genres, the main focus of Darwinia is essentially strategy. Controlling an initially small squad of anti-virus soldiers, players need to clear out viruses which have infected the "virtual theme park" Darwinia - its inhabitants in mortal danger. Controlling the squad is direct; the action often intense and visceral as the viruses become more varied and lethal. Progression gives rewards in the form of upgrading your various "programs," such as the anti-virus squad, the docile Darwinians themselves and the various other programs such as weaponry. Completing objectives allows movement to a new location, each location stylistically varied and beautiful.

The Darwinians are critical to success but cannot be controlled directly. Indirectly however, one can set up "go to" officers who tell the Darwinians to go from one point to another in a reminiscently Lemmings way. The somewhat autonomous Darwinians are needed to activate important machinery that your Builder units cannot, while also great for attacking swarms of viruses

(once upgraded with weaponry). There is a simple elegance to each mission, yet the objectives are hardly easy. As the missions vary from escort to defend or pure destruction, one's methodology for playing drastically alters. Players can focus on upgrading the weapons or aspects they prefer the most themselves, though this will change depending on who is playing, making the experience intimate and unique.

There is an underlying symmetrical beauty to Darwinia, proportional to the game dynamics themselves and the enjoyment found therein. The quasi science fiction storyline (which would make William Gibson proud) weaves comfortably throughout the missions, engaging and often surprising in its simplistic yet emotional appeal. While the visual style may seem overly simplistic, the retro-theme cunningly hides intelligent graphical trickery and allows for epically-proportioned battles. Hundreds upon hundreds of Darwinians can be called to battle - a stunning sight to behold.

Darwinia is an epic and immersive concept, polished to perfection and a proud homage to where it all began - with fun. **NAG**



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PlayStation®2

A puzzle game that is, at times, exceptionally difficult. Not for the mentally lazy!

65

VITAL INFO

■ Platforms

PC

■ Suggested Retail Price

R199

■ Developer

Detalign

■ Publisher

The Adventure Company

■ Supplier

WWE [011] 462 0150

■ Genre

Puzzle Adventure

■ Age Restriction

None

■ Minimum Specs

Pentium 3 800MHz

256MB RAM

4 x CD ROM

32MB Video Card

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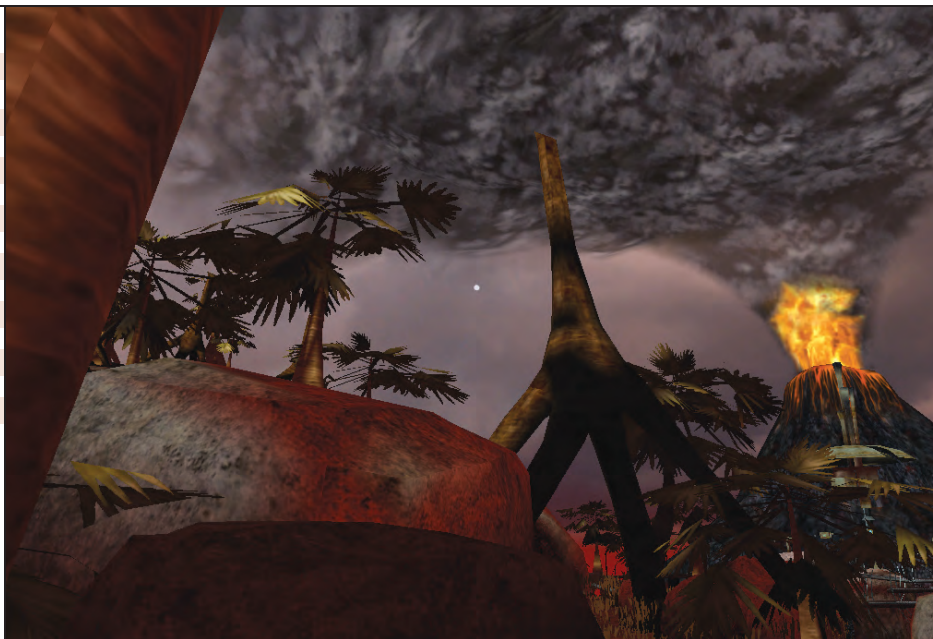
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TOP: Too many
options...

BOTTOM: Preparing
to enter a maze



*It should be hot and
hard to breathe
here, but the
character doesn't
even notice!*

SENTINEL DESCENDANTS IN TIME

I HAD NO IDEA WHAT to expect when presented with this title. So upon first playing it, I found myself wandering around a beautifully rendered 3D tomb, in first person, but with no weapons and no enemies to shoot at (or run away from!). Somewhat puzzled, I started taking closer looks at elements of the environment, and began noticing subtle clues. Some features, when I moved my mouse over them, changed my cursor, and I then realised that I was faced with a first-person puzzle adventure game.

The player assumes the role of an amateur "tomb raider" in search of loot and, more importantly, renown. However, the character's motivation for being in this particular tomb is somewhat more altruistic, though I shan't divulge story elements. The plot is not particularly intricate, but has been stretched out over the course of the game and does present a few twists and questions and is quite satisfying in the languid fashion in which it gradually unfolds. It does this by means of sporadic dialogue with a mysterious denizen

of the lands that you, as the player, will visit. A journal of previous dialogue allows the player to review what has been discussed before. All of these environments are visually astounding, and the audio ambience matches the mood of the game perfectly. Although the environments are sprawling, they are not as large and mazy as to get the player lost - this latter "service" is provided in other ways.

Sentinel's central theme is that of puzzles and many of these are fiendishly difficult! Annoyingly, some of these require repeated walking to and fro between locations (this apparently still being in vogue in puzzle games). The puzzles range from the purely abstract to the audio-visual. So if you are tone-deaf, you may get stuck at some points. If you lack the patience to sit and scratch your head while immersed in moody music, then this one isn't for you. On the other hand, if you are looking at whiling away many hours while meeting a considerable cerebral challenge, then by all means try it out. **NAG**



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Very deep, challenging, and rich in story. Adventurous sci-fi fans will love this one

74

VITAL INFO

■ Platforms

■ PC

■ Suggested Retail Price

R 270

■ Developer

Mithis

■ Publisher

Vivendi Universal

■ Supplier

Nu Metro [011] 340 9345

■ Genre

Space combat simulation

■ Age Restriction

12+

■ Minimum Specs

Pentium 3 1.0GHz

128MB RAM

4 x CD ROM

GeForce2 or better video card

1.4GB HDD

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Reclon machines

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supply ships

SOUNDS like a
piece of cake!

NEXUS THE JUPITER INCIDENT

THIS TITLE VISITS A genre that I have not seen around for a couple of years - star ship combat simulation. Nexus - The Jupiter Incident grants players control of an increasing number of ships, topping out at ten. Furthermore, while some of the ships carry important characters, these are more pivotal to the advancement of the story than to the actual action. Each character possesses three skills that can be advanced and which subtly influence certain in-game factors, but seldom is the player even called upon (or even allowed) to allocate the placement of these characters.

The view is always external and the game essentially blends elements of the star ship simulator with real-time tactics. Spatial awareness in a totally 3D environment, which this game actually boasts, is quite difficult. For this reason, during the course of the first few missions it is almost irrelevant where everything is in relation to everything else, but this gradually changes. All of a sudden you find yourself in intensely tactical situations where the relative placement of assets is of paramount importance, and the learning curve steepens exponentially. On the other hand, the fact that the game starts getting very difficult is actually a plus, as too many games these days are far too easy. If you plunge into this one, expect to spend a significant amount of time replaying missions.

From an audio-visual point of view, this game is most appealing indeed. The graphics, curiously, appear somewhat dated in their handling of textures, but exhibit a phenomenal degree of sophistication in terms of special effects. The engine's handling of light is fantastic and functional at the same time. Your job, as the ship or fleet commanding officer, is to decide on the best course of action to be taken in different scenarios. So the game requires players to make snap decisions, many of which lead to reloading the scenario. The music is uncommonly good. The score is beyond moody. It is downright spooky most of the time. Although the game has a varied set of multiplayer modes, I believe that it truly shines in the single player campaign mode. **NAG**

TACTICAL DEPTH

As commanding officer of a ship or small fleet, it is your task to accomplish various assigned objectives. Some actions will contradict these goals and will lead to defeat. In combat, players are required to manage the ship's systems, behavioural pattern (aggressive, defensive, etc.), manoeuvring options (approach, attack shields, attack individual systems, evade, investigate, etc.), and to make tactical decisions regarding the best approach to a situation. Do you shell a ship from a distance with artillery ordnance; do you approach and first pummel its shields, then its hull; do you target individual components in order to disable specific functions; do you deploy fighters; or do you attempt a boarding operation? These are but a few of the choices one must make, making this one of the most tactically involved games I've seen in a while.



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one's ships

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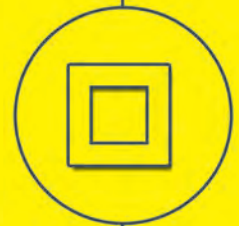
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E&OE

An excellent game that takes the city building genre on a slightly different path

62

VITAL INFO

Platforms

PC

Suggested Retail Price

R 310

Developer

Myelin

Publisher

Tilted Mill / Sega

Supplier

WWE [011] 462 0150

Genre

City building simulation

Age Restriction

3+

Minimum Specs

Pentium 3 800MHz

128MB RAM

CD ROM

32MB Video Card

1.1GB HDD



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IMMORTAL CITIES CHILDREN OF THE NILE

**Missions can
be sent into
the world to
explore and
establish
relations**

IF YOU ARE A fan of city building simulations, you'll likely be familiar with Impressions Games' renowned series (Caesar III, Pharaoh, Zeus, Emperor: Rise of the Middle Kingdom and their respective expansion sets). Children of the Nile evolves the genre to make it current with prevailing technology. More specifically, it makes full use of 3D graphics technology. Recently, I covered a game called Medieval Lords, another city builder with 3D graphics, and I was impressed by it. The title lacked certain subtleties that made the Impressions titles excellent. Some of these (such as the world map) have been ported, as it were, to Children of the Nile. The game dynamic has been streamlined somewhat, which may or may not dismay fans of Pharaoh. Gone is the idea of

"walkers" that have specific ranges and serve varying purposes. The model is now far less formulaic, and less prone to analysis and optimisation. Children of the Nile is played in a more intuitive fashion.

One of this game's most striking features is its virtually unlimited camera control. Players can zoom out to a great height for a birds-eye view, or they can zoom down to street level. The camera's angle can be changed, so one can look around and up. The models and terrain are fairly detailed. Watching the shadows and the ambient lighting change as the day progresses is a delight and is absolutely beautiful (everything has a warm, reddish cast to it at dawn, then the light strengthens, becoming whiter, and eventually, at sunset, the colours change again, with the shadows on the other side now). Ambient sounds also become louder the closer you are to the ground. Overall, the game boasts a decent level of immersion. The musical score is rather tame and slow, and gets quite repetitive after a while.

Although superficially similar to other city builders, this game's dynamics are markedly different and I found myself having to learn entirely new ways to do things. In fact, the game's campaign starts off quite difficult, offering a decent challenge. And it gets harder - much harder!

Emperor: Rise of the Middle Kingdom broke a mould by introducing multiplayer to this sub-genre. Sadly, Children of the Nile doesn't follow suit in this regard. Granted, given the specifics of this game's dynamics, I can't even imagine how multiplayer might be implemented. **NAG**

CASTE BASED SOCIETY

Unlike other city building titles, in Children of the Nile you won't see citizens of specific classes simply materialising out of nowhere. Instead, whenever a vacancy opens in a new occupation, a citizen from another profession will move up into this new slot. This doesn't necessarily happen automatically - some occupations require a high educational level, and so only some candidates will qualify. Furthermore, whereas in other titles a sign of success is when the entire population is of a high social class, Children of the Nile is more realistic in this regard - your peasants will remain peasants, and will never own lavish homes. Success in Children of the Nile, therefore, is measured differently - a society with the right balance of social classes is required, which more closely mimics real-life situations.





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If you're looking for old-school FPS action, Painkiller is definitely worth a look

76

VITAL INFO

Platforms

PC

Suggested Retail Price

R 249.99

Developer

People Can Fly

Publisher

Dreamcatcher

Supplier

WWE [011] 462 0150

Genre

FPS

Age Restriction

16+

Minimum Specs

1.5GHz processor

384MB

DVD-ROM

NVIDIA GeForce2 GTS or better

2.6GB available HDD



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PAINKILLER: BLACK EDITION

FRAG IN STYLE

Painkiller only features five weapons and seven expansions, but the use of alternate fire modes, combined fire modes and the ability to combine weapons open up a whole new way of killing monsters that you wouldn't expect to see in such a seemingly straightforward FPS. The PainKiller, the fallback gun from which the game takes its name, can slice, dice, burn and dismember hell's demons in four different ways.

WITH PAINKILLER'S SOMEWHAT SURPRISING multiplayer success, namely becoming the feature game of the Cyberathlete Professional League's World Tour, it's little surprise that the developers have released Painkiller: Black Edition, the special collector's edition, hoping to milk the golden cow for just a few more drops of lucre.

Harking back to the FPS frag fests of old, the original Painkiller saw players dispatching whole herds of evil monsters, demons and the undead with gay abandon. The flimsy plot is just there to tie the bits where you're killing everything in sight together, although we're not complaining – it's action in spades and we loved it. It reminded us of the glory days of Quake and DOOM, where the only thing standing, holding back the hordes of evil was a lone marine with a shotgun.

The recently released expansion, Battle out of Hell, leaves off where the original began, and is in many respects an equally fine game. The flock of monsters is back, the rather small (but versatile) arsenal has been bolstered with the addition of two extra guns and the boss creatures, which were already impressively large, have grown to epic proportions.

So while Painkiller and Battle out of Hell are winners, the Black Edition is somewhat less inspiring. As a desirable collector's edition, it's a failure – no doubt about it. While

attractively presented, there's just not enough additional content to warrant existing owners of the titles to splurge out and get the Black Edition.

So, what's new with Black Edition? Not much. In addition to Painkiller and the expansion (which now sports updated CPL multiplayer tweaks), the Black Edition features a "making of" feature, an Xbox preview and a music video of some obscure European band set to Painkiller imagery. Yes, second-rate Euro rockers and CG demons getting blown to bits. Painful!

As for the "making of" feature, well, that deserves some discussion. The premise is that a real life Daniel Garner (the protagonist from the game) interrogates the development team, asking them for answers as to why he was created. To be perfectly frank, it's pretty lame, and the fact that it's in Polish with English subtitles certainly doesn't make it more appealing. Each interrogation ends with Daniel Garner killing the interviewee. It's a painful thing to watch development nerds pretending to be assaulted by a two-bit actor in a cheap leather coat.

That said, the Black Edition is certainly worth buying if you've been eager to give Painkiller a try. It typically retails for around the same price as a regular PC title, so it is perhaps not entirely fair to compare it to the lavish collector's editions we're used to seeing. **NAG**

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VITAL INFO

■ Platforms

PS2

■ Suggested Retail Price
R 499.00

■ Developer

Konami

■ Publisher

Konami

■ Supplier

Ster Kinekor [011] 445 7900

■ Genre

Tactical Espionage

■ Age Restriction

16+

■ Specifications

Players: 1

Memory: 200KB

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*Sure, standing
out in the open
is great for not
getting shot...*

METAL GEAR SOLID 3: SNAKE EATER

IT CAN GO UNCONTESTED that Metal Gear Solid has changed the face of gaming. Its focus on cinematic storytelling and tactical espionage, instead of direct 'guns blazing' assault made poignant statements that rippled across the spectrum of game development. It was destined to be a trick Hideo Kojima could only pull off once, and once was enough. Its sequel was a terrific movie, wrapped up in a game all too technical for most. Kojima's Midas touch could not save Metal Gear Solid 2: Sons of Liberty from becoming a 'hate/love' game. The third and final instalment (if Kojima keeps his word), Metal Gear Solid 3: Snake Eater is a game that nobody else would dare to make - and that works for and against it.

Recent games have handled storytelling much better than Snake Eater, but there remains a certain charm and magic about this third instalment that can't be found in titles without Kojima's penchant for being pedantic. A new era apart from its predecessors' plots, the 1960s unfold into a world-power struggle for global supremacy. As almost always, you are Mr. Elite Tactical Soldier sent on a dangerous mission to infiltrate, against all odds, a heavily guarded enemy territory to uncover highly coveted secrets behind a newly created weapon of mass destruction. Incredibly camp, yet loveable, exasperating, pretentious, and funny all at the same time. The plot rarely takes itself too seriously, making it the most wonderful part of the game.

That aside, Snake Eater's awkward camera, and

ludicrously long cut scenes only serve to accentuate the already tedious camouflage system and other shortcomings. The need to eat does give slightly more depth while the inclusive healing system (you have to bandage your wounds and splint your broken bones before you can regain health lost), will either amaze or frustrate. Essentially, the new features fail to add anything substantial, actually breaking up the experience rather than bringing it together into a cohesive experience.

There simply isn't much to say about the visual fidelity of Snake Eater, aside from perhaps a few choice expletives followed by the word 'gorgeous'. Every blade of grass, every tree, and every high-octane cut scene serves (as only Kojima could) to show the latent power in the PlayStation 2. This makes you wonder why other titles refuse to produce the same results. If you're an eye candy junkie, Snake Eater is the fix you need. If you're the type who wants a game that is fun to play without having to suffer because of it, look elsewhere. **NAG**

*I'm taking this
chair. It's a nice
chair...*

VITAL INFO

Platforms

PS2

Suggested Retail Price

R 361

Developer

Heavy Iron

Publisher

THQ

Supplier

WWE [011] 462 0150

Genre

Platformer

Age Restriction

3+

Specifications

Players: 1

Memory: 100KB



SpongeBob and Patrick's debut Formula One car

SPONGEBOB SQUAREPANTS: THE MOVIE

AS ODD AS IT may sound, Heavy Iron Studio's genius was showing when they were brought in to once again turn a movie into a game. Unlike their attempt with The Incredibles, their work on the irrelevant SpongeBob Squarepants: The Movie actually manages to hold together as a decent enough game. Ironically, it's not a very good "game of the movie", relying only on basic slides from the movie to set the scene for the various levels. This is not a problem however, as the game can stand on its own two feet without tying itself to its license counterpart. After a few quick stills from the movie to set

the scene, you embark as SpongeBob (or Starfish friend Patrick, depending on the level) on a rather off-kilter platformer, collecting various things to unlock more levels. The game plays out sequentially for the most part following the plot of the movie, but has the distinction of allowing you to unlock levels out of order and attempt them at your own leisure. The objectives vary and are often thankfully wacky (what did we expect?), allowing for the occasional chuckle. A great game for fans of absorbent Mr. Squarepants and his escapades, yet oddly detached from its namesake. **NAG**

VITAL INFO

Platforms

PS2

Suggested Retail Price

R TBA

Developer

SCEJ

Publisher

SCEE

Supplier

Ster Kinekor [011] 445 7900

Genre

Puzzle

Age Restriction

3+

Specifications

Players: 1-4

Memory: 200KB

Controller Support: Sony EyeToy



The NAG groupies can get pretty violent...

EYE TOY: MONKEY MANIA

THERE IS A DISTINCT lack of fun multiplayer party games in the industry. Monkey Mania attempts to add a little variety to our choice of party games, while simultaneously supporting the much under-appreciated EyeToy. Perhaps trying a little too hard, Monkey Mania is essentially a board game where between one and four plays can play, using the EyeToy, in an attempt to earn points. The board itself is composed of multiple levels. Reaching the next level requires a certain amount of points. Points are gained by either landing on certain spots, or by winning in the battle mini-games. Battle mini-games are unfortunately only triggered when a player lands on

the right spot, instead of at the end of each round like in Mario Party. This slows things down, and while the mini-games themselves range from frustrating to fun, they simply don't happen frequently enough to keep the game interesting. Once a mini-game has been played once, it becomes unlocked and playable at any time you wish - though each mini-game is rarely interesting enough to be played on its own.

Monkey Mania may appeal to the very young (who will in turn be annoyed at some of the overly complex requirements), but essentially comes across as bland and uninspired. **NAG**



Thoroughly unremarkable movie translation – well presented, but soon becomes tedious

64

VITAL INFO

Platforms

PS2

Suggested Retail Price

R 452

Developer

Krome Studios

Publisher

Konami

Supplier

Ster Kinekor [011] 445 7900

Genre

Action

Age Restriction

12+

Minimum Specs

Players: 1-2

Memory: 56KB

Analogue compatible

Vibration compatible

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KING ARTHUR

BASED ON THE SIMILARLY named film, Konami's adventure title King Arthur ties in very closely with its cinema namesake, at least in terms of presentation. Spread over roughly 20 levels, each of the game's missions correlates closely with events from the film, which is certain to please fans of the movie. Unfortunately, however, a flawed and uninspiring play dynamic prevents what was a very promising concept from realising its full potential – the majority of the game is melee hack-and-slash style combat, as is typical of this genre, interspersed with bouts of ranged bow-and-arrow combat, as well as the odd battle on horseback. Cumbersome controls and the often awkward flow of the game (particularly apparent

in the horseback sections) tend to make the experience a chore. Repetitive, uninspiring levels and the ability to only save the game at the end of a level add to the frustration. Visually, the game is less disappointing, with well detailed characters and environments, though they are far from being state of the art.

One redeeming quality of King Arthur, however, is the sound – a masterful, epic score, and very well executed voice-acting make the game far more bearable. Nonetheless, King Arthur is likely to only please devotees of the movie. As far as anyone looking for an action or adventure title is concerned, there are currently far more interesting titles available. **NAG**

Very limited mainstream appeal, but well suited to 2D enthusiasts and nostalgia-seekers

74

VITAL INFO

Platforms

PS2

Suggested Retail Price

R 286

Developer

Playmore

Publisher

Playmore

Supplier

WWE [011] 462 0150

Genre

Fighting

Age Restriction

12+

Minimum Specs

Players: 1-2

Memory: 100KB

Vibration compatible

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KING OF FIGHTERS 2000/2001

KING OF FIGHTERS 2000/2001, as the title indicates, is an almost direct port of the two Neo-Geo arcade titles, released four and five years ago. With beat 'em up enthusiasts being used to visually superb 3D titles, it's unlikely that these two highly pixellated 2D fighting games, much in the vein of Street Fighter (for those who haven't heard of the King of Fighters franchise), will find much favour in the mainstream. In fact, it's almost senseless trying to make any comparisons between these titles and the fighting titles of today. King of Fighters 2000/2001 isn't trying to steal any fans away from Tekken; it's aimed at an entirely different market. Boasting a mind-

boggling array of about 75 pugilists to choose from, each with a large range of (often insanely complex) moves, and very fast paced fights, King of Fighters is the sort of title that will appeal most to fans of the series, or anyone looking for some uncomplicated nostalgic fun. It certainly doesn't possess the graphic prowess of Mortal Kombat or the technical depth of Virtua Fighter, but it manages to be entertaining in its own quirky way. It's hard to recommend this game outright, since it is definitely largely a niche title. But if fast, frenetic and straightforward two-dimensional combat piques your interest, King of Fighters 2000/2001 is undoubtedly worth a look. **NAG**



Great for fans of the series and the genre. Excessive killing at it's finest

VITAL INFO

Platforms

PS2

Suggested Retail Price

R 286

Developer

SNK

Publisher

Ignition

Supplier

Ster Kinekor [011] 445 7900

Genre

Shooter

Age Restriction

12+

Specifications

Players: 1 - 2

Memory: 200Kb

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The primal battle
of boat vs truck

METAL SLUG 3

IF YOU HAVE A penchant for dying four-billion times in the space of a few hours, then the Metal Slug series is for you. To call Metal Slug 3 difficult would be as gross an understatement as to call movie-licensed games terrible. It is a difficult game, saved entirely by the fact that you can continue as many times as you wish. The 4th instalment in the series, Metal Slug 3 takes the genre to new heights (right where enthusiasts want it). Every stage brings intense action and a rather unique array of enemy characters. At certain points in the game you reach a "crossroad" where you can take alternate routes, letting you discover more

stages. Vehicles spice things up nicely, each increasing the firepower and defence at your disposal as you battle through zombies, fish and aliens. The entire arcade experience has been faithfully translated to the PS2 with a few new elements thrown in for fun, such as a two-player "weight gain mode" where you square off against a friend to see who can become fat first. As with each of the Metal Slugs, most of the enjoyment comes from teaming up with a friend to take on the endless bad guys and picking up better weapons as you go along. In all regards, Metal Slug 3 represents the best the genre has to offer. **NAG**



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The series continues with expected polish and flare

85

VITAL INFO

Platforms

NGC

Suggested Retail Price

R 499

Developer

Nintendo

Publisher

Nintendo

Supplier

Nintendo [011] 256 7760

Genre

FPS

Age Restriction

12+

Specifications

Players: 1

Memory: 8 blocks



Great view, dodgy location...

METROID PRIME 2 ECHOES

THE RETURN OF STRONG, silent bounty hunter Samus is certainly a reason for neglected GameCube owners to rejoice.

Once again players embark on a first-person adventure, becoming the hunter behind the visor and travelling to a planet torn into light and darkness. As you are hunted by a mysterious entity and a race called the Ing, you explore the parallel light and dark worlds of the planet to augment your suit's weapons and abilities. Each new weapon and ability found, lets you access previously closed-off areas and progress through the silently-narrated story. The new massive, dangerous environments are beautiful and stylish, requiring careful scrutiny with

your Scan Visor to find clues. New Visor modes present interesting new aspects and make Metroid Prime 2 more than just 'more of the same'.

For the first time in the Metroid franchise, a death match mode features where up to four players can duke it out using the weapons and abilities from the game. Good fun, but unfortunately not a lasting component. The main focus of the game lies solidly in its single player exploration and engrossing theme. You are alone, on an alien world with nobody to help you and everything out to kill you. Being a bounty hunter is just as much fun the second time around. **NAG**

Lengthily traditional RPG with depth, style and polish

79

VITAL INFO

Platforms

NGC

Suggested Retail Price

R 499

Developer

Namco

Publisher

Nintendo

Supplier

Nintendo [011] 256 7760

Genre

RPG

Age Restriction

12+

Specifications

Players: 1 - 4

Memory: 8 blocks



It's always "for the girl"...

TALES OF SYMPHONIA

TALES OF SYMPHONIA IMMEDIATELY engrosses the player in a beautiful world where legends define actions and the question of how much to sacrifice to save the world is on the minds of every inhabitant. A notable mention is that of renowned artist Kosuke Fujishima, who produced the high-quality Anime cut-scenes dotted throughout the entire game. The game spans two GameCube discs - an impressive feat considering the capacity of the discs.

At the core of the game, and usually activated by running into creatures on the world map, the rather intense real-time 3D battle system makes for a frantic and interesting deviation from the usual RPG norm. Interestingly, each character (up to four in your party)

can be controlled via a different controller on the GameCube, if you feel like switching over from the AI to a friend.

Tales of Symphonia is a lengthy title with over 80 hours of epic storyline for you to explore. The story itself is a major plus point for the game, expertly written and entertaining all the way. Each character's strengths and weaknesses grow depending on your own choices, fitting your fighting style instead of forcing you to work with what you were given.

Hundreds of side-quests and mini-games expand an already impressive title that is simply a must have for fans of the genre and this style of RPG. **NAG**

An interesting divergence from the norm.
Healthily massaged by the Oddworld style

70

VITAL INFO

■ Platforms

XBOX

■ Suggested Retail Price

TBA

■ Developer

Oddworld's Inhabitants

■ Publisher

EA

■ Supplier

Not available in SA

■ Genre

Action Adventure

■ Age Restriction

12+

■ Specifications

Players: 1



ODDWorld: STRANGER'S WRATH

ODDWORLD INHABITANTS HAVE A rather unique penchant for doing rather odd things. Their previous endeavours have predominantly leaned towards simple action-puzzle titles. Each has been somewhat non-traditional, filled with beautiful backgrounds and grotesque, yet adorable characters heaving on the language and attitude. Stranger's Wrath almost seems to be a giant leap away from what Oddworld Inhabitants are comfortable doing, yet somehow retains the spirit of Oddworld perfectly.

Fully furred with the attitude of a Clint Eastwood-inspired cat, you play lead protagonist The Stranger as he attempts to raise some "moolah" for a rather important operation (plot point and driving force behind his actions). The game pans out across multiple bounties. You get to pick which bounty you want to attempt in a rather freeform manner (Grand West Auto, if you will). Each bounty mission usually involves travelling from the large hub-town towards point B, dispatching baddies along the way (either in first or third person, each mode with pros and cons) until you finally meet the bounty you're after in the form of an often difficult boss fight.

Central to the game and part of its charm, is how you deal with situations involving enemies. Your crossbow can take two types of ammo simultaneously and there are over eight types of ammo. Loading chattering squirrel-like creatures and little voracious fur balls with teeth into your bow, allows you to lure enemies into a toothy trap by shooting the squirrel first - which attracts enemies with its yammering. After that you fire your piranha-like fur balls at the enemy. It's all rather tactical at times - some good pre-planning can often make a difficult situation a breeze.

Stranger's Wrath is both beautiful and melancholy. The western theme is used to convey an almost destitute barren land yearning for hope. The Stranger himself is maudlin, yet stoic - an interesting character to experience alongside an already interesting game. **NAG**

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WWE

megarom interactive

The Cactus Connection

Beyond any reasonable doubt, a brilliant gem of a puzzle game

80

VITAL INFO

Platforms

GBA

Suggested Retail Price

R 360

Developer

Nintendo

Publisher

Nintendo

Supplier

Nintendo [011] 256 7760

Genre

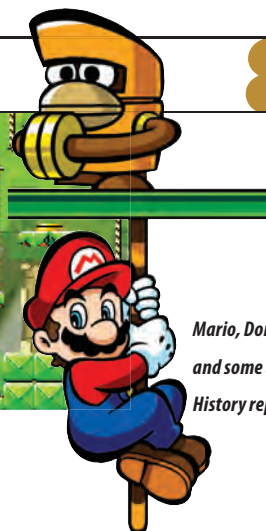
Action Puzzle

Age Restriction

3+

Minimum Specs

Players: 1



Mario, Donkey Kong and some barrels. History repeats

MARIO VS. DONKEY KONG

THE DAY HAS COME where we can finally settle the time-honoured rivalry of Man vs. Monkey in the highly enjoyable form of an action puzzler. The diminutive Mario vs. Donkey Kong may seem simplistic at first, but actually hides a cunning lateral puzzle game that requires reflexes as much as it does grey matter. The acrobatic Mario has a full range of moves including handsprings, back flips and somersaults - each geared towards overcoming various obstacles. Familiar enemies such as Piranha Plants, Shy Guys and Thwomps attempt to hinder Mario's progress towards finding the key for the exit. There are six areas, with over 100 levels in total. In the penultimate level of

each area, Mario must lead a group of six "saved" Mini Marios to the end of the level. The Mini Marios follow the real Mario closely and mimic his moves, making for interesting situations and puzzles. The more Mini Marios you save, the more damage you are able to sustain in the Boss level of that area - a fight against Donkey Kong himself who's been stealing the Mini Mario's.

Frustration may occur at difficult points, but those will almost always be human error. Mario vs. Donkey Kong may be an arbitrary game especially with its puzzle nature, but its flawless execution is rare in this age of half-hearted attempts. **NAG**

A fun and authentic GTA title but a better job could have been done

75

VITAL INFO

Platforms

GBA

Suggested Retail Price

R 360

Developer

Rockstar

Publisher

Rockstar

Supplier

Nintendo [011] 256 7760

Genre

FPS

Age Restriction

16+

Minimum Specs

Players: 1



GRAND THEFT AUTO ADVANCE

GRAND THEFT AUTO COMING to a handheld console is a dream come true. The series has appeared on both the Gameboy and Gameboy Color, but this is the first time that a title was developed with an entirely new storyline. This alone should be reason enough to interest fans of the series. Sadly it also ends up letting the very same fans down.

While players new to the GTA world will enjoy this game, especially with its finely animated sprites and fun missions, the overall structure is far too constrictive, and

after several missions you start to wonder if the game will branch off at all. Little to no initiative is handed to the player who explores and the title quickly turns into a run-of-the-mill action title. It also feels much sanitised and is by far the most family-friendly release in the GTA series yet. GTA GBA isn't a bad game as such, but it lacks the charm of the series and will definitely not appeal to seasoned fans. The controls feel a bit clumsy at times, but the real question is whether you'll remain interested long enough to really get to grips with them. **NAG**



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A decent enough racing game making its mark on the fresh Nintendo DS

70

VITAL INFO

Platforms

DS

Suggested Retail Price

R386

Developer

GameLoft

Publisher

Ubisoft

Supplier

Nintendo [011] 256 7760

Genre

FPS

Age Restriction

3+

Minimum Specs

Players: 1 - 4



ASPHALT URBAN GT

ASPHALT URBAN GT MAY appear diminutive on a console but certainly does its best to act big. As a racing game, it manages to hold its own and contend with the big boys on the larger consoles. Proceeding through the Championship mode nets you cash with each win, with which to either purchase better cars or to upgrade your existing ones. Most races unlock cars or tracks, though the tracks seem very limited compared to the sheer amount of vehicles to unlock.

While the racing in Asphalt certainly is fun and visually quite appealing, racing along the same six or so tracks over and over gets repetitive. Regardless, fans of racing

games and Nintendo's new console will certainly find that the numerous cars and their respective modifications lend themselves towards a full-bodied game with quite a decent shelf-life. Wireless multiplayer via the Nintendo DS' wireless ability is supported, though untested for this review. It's odd to note that Asphalt opted not to include an analogue control method via the Nintendo DS' touch screen - a concept that was proven to work with Metroid Prime Hunters: First Hunt and Mario 64 DS. None the less, the D-pad control scheme does its work amiably and doesn't get in the way of an enjoyable racing experience. **NAG**

All the innovation of the original, repackaged into a new appealing package

70

VITAL INFO

Platforms

DS

Suggested Retail Price

R360

Developer

Nintendo

Publisher

Nintendo

Supplier

Nintendo [011] 256 7760

Genre

Action

Age Restriction

3+

Minimum Specs

Players: 1 - 4



SUPER MARIO 64 DS

NO DOUBT ALREADY AN expert on bathymetry simply due to the sheer depth of the original Mario 64 title (originally on the now archaic Nintendo 64 console), Mario makes a return on the tentative Nintendo DS with a reworked and moderately upgraded version.

For all intensive purposes, Mario 64 DS is a faithful port of the original, running smoothly on the new DS hardware. A straight port might not have been very interesting, but Nintendo saw fit to throw in enough new bells and whistles to keep long-time fans happy on their return trip to the Mushroom Kingdom. Newcomers to Bowser's nefarious plots are also catered for and will have an interesting journey. Running around the castle (using either the D-pad or the improvised analogue



control via your thumb and the lower touch-sensitive screen) and jumping into portraits representing levels is still as engrossing as ever. Each level contains multiple (and often confounding) objectives as you collect stars to progress further into the castle. Newly added objectives, areas, goals and characters spice things up nicely while the all-new unlock-able mini-games, that use the touch screen, are addictive and well worth the effort. Wireless multiplayer modes look appealing, though untested for this review.

To come to a conclusion: despite possibly being a shameless port, Mario 64 DS retains all the shimmer of it's originator as well as adding enough to make it stand out. **NAG**

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PlayStation®2



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TECH NEWS

Intel's dual-core processors

Although Intel recently criticised the design of the multi-core Cell processor, the company has nevertheless completed development of its own dual-core 64-bit processors, which will start appearing on the market over the next few weeks, if not sooner. Intel's dual-core approach involves a symmetrical architecture, which is in contrast to Cell's dissimilar internal component "brains." To accompany the Pentium Processor Extreme Edition, the company is also releasing a new chipset, the 955X Express. The 945G Express and 945P Express chipsets will support Intel's other processors.

SONY ERICSSON J300

The J300 provides a 3D gaming engine and easy downloads of video clips, games and ringtones at an entry-level price. Available in pink, black or white, the J300 has fast processing, a high quality screen, crisp clear sound and 12MB onboard memory.

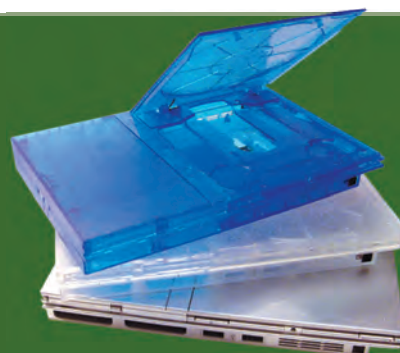
"If you are looking for a fresh new phone at an affordable price, don't think this means you have to be restricted to basic, boring games," says Philippe Kubbinga, Sales Director of Sony Ericsson Southern Africa. "The J300 offers a fantastic gaming experience in both 2D and 3D, including the famous Rayman 3. It features fast-moving action, rich graphics and bright colours, but it's also a great phone for voice and text communications."



XCM CRYSTAL SERIES CASE

Tired of looking at your PS2 already? The XCM has been designed to give your slim line console a facelift in under 5 minutes. Easy to install, the replacement shell is available in a variety of vibrant colours.

[www.farmerentertainment.com]



ROCK XTREME TI GAMING NOTEBOOK

This beast's classification is a bit misleading – for a "notebook," it is very big. However, the Rock Xtreme Ti is designed as a mobile gaming workstation rather than a regular laptop – the idea being that it is easy to transport to LAN parties and the like. The machine is powered by a 3.6GHz Pentium 4 CPU, and carries 1GB of DDR2 memory. Graphics are supplied by a 256MB ATI Mobility Radeon X800, and storage is taken care of by two 60GB drives (7200 rpm) arranged in RAID0. Given the specifications, it is plain to see why the battery can't be expected to last a long time, particularly when playing games. This "notebook" will spend most of its operating time plugged into mains!

[www.rockdirect.com]



TOSHIBA SATELLITE P35 GAMING LAPTOP

This new offering from Toshiba is powered by a Pentium 4 3.3GHz CPU and ATI Mobility Radeon 9000 GPU, which can be upgraded to a 9700. The unit features a 17" screen and is quite nice to look at all round. However, expect this toy to be rather pricey.

TABLET-BASED GAMING PLATFORM

A small company by the name of SL Interphase has designed, predominantly in conceptual terms, a mobile gaming platform based on the Tablet idea. Unlike other handheld units, this device features an 8.4" display, which is about four or five times the size of those offered on Sony's and Nintendo's handhelds. The machine will feature a high degree of upgradeability, and will be PC-compatible. It will also be usable as a mobile computer, something of a cross between a laptop and a PDA. Pricing is expected to be on a par with middle-range laptops. Currently, the designers are looking for investors before they can begin production.

[www.sl-interphase.com]



New DVD copy protection system

Macrovision has released RipGuard DVD, a technology designed to foil piracy of content on DVDs. The design approach has been reverse-engineering of sorts: copying utilities were analysed, their methods deduced, and the new encryption system designed to work off their weaknesses. The system is not infallible, and can still be circumvented by some software – and no doubt a few hours after introduction some hacker figured out how to get around it. Several major companies (including the likes of IBM, Microsoft, Sony, Warner Bros and Walt Disney) have banded together to develop a new content protection standard, being referred to as Advanced Access Content System, which faces the challenge of protecting copyright while still allowing it to be legitimately disseminated within a home entertainment network environment.

ICEBOX

The ICEBOX is a Web-enabled entertainment system that combines e-mail, Internet access, TV, CD and DVD playback and video surveillance ("monitoring"). It is designed primarily for use in the kitchen, thus it features a flip-up screen design that allows it to be kept out of the way when not in use, as well as a washable (wireless) keyboard and remote, presumably due to the likelihood of spillages and the like.

BenQ FP767-12 LCD monitor

BenQ has hopped on the 12ms response time bandwagon, and has released an LCD monitor that achieves that level of responsiveness, allowing it to properly support 75Hz refresh rates of graphics cards without flicker or tearing.

Sony NW-E505

A new flash memory based MP3 player is on its way from Sony. It will boast a capacity of 512MB and a battery life of 50 hours. It will have an FM radio and will weigh in at a mere 37g.

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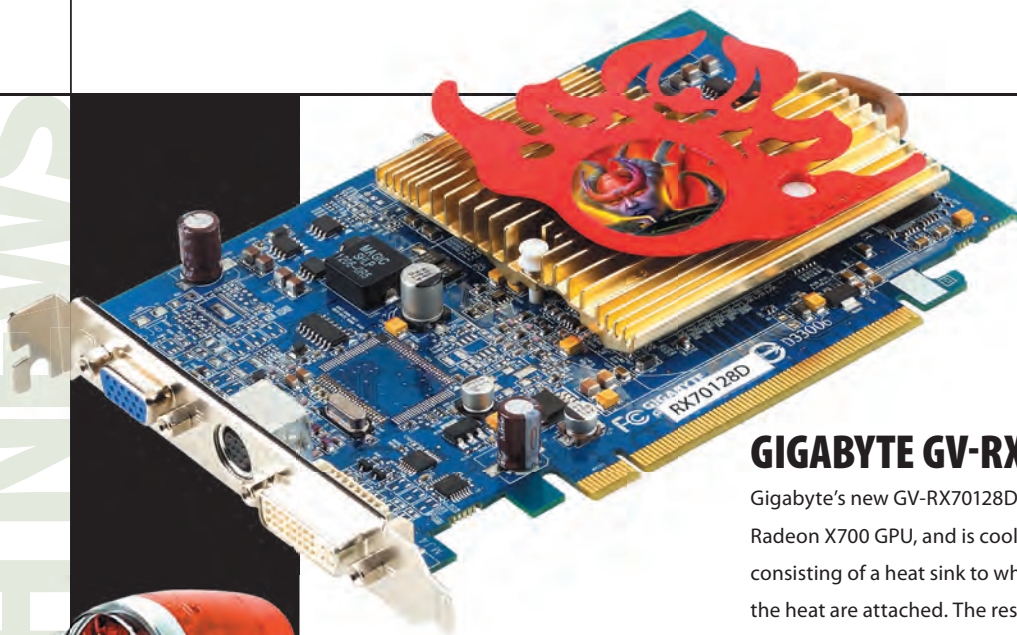
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GIGABYTE GV-RX70 WITH SILENTPIPE

Gigabyte's new GV-RX70128D graphics card is powered by an ATI Radeon X700 GPU, and is cooled not by a fan, but by a system consisting of a heat sink to which metal cooling pipes that dissipate the heat are attached. The result is a dead-quiet graphics card, reducing the overall noise levels of a PC that uses it.

[www.rectron.co.za]



Thermaltake Beetle CL-P0086

This impressive-looking CPU cooling system consists of a heat-sink made up of copper pipes and aluminium fins, enclosed within a case that directs airflow from an adjustable fan optimally. Furthermore, it allows the addition of an extra fan, which greatly enhances its effectiveness, and is versatile enough to fit most Intel and AMD processors. The unit is said to operate very quietly.

GIGABYTE NEON COOLERS

Gigabyte has released two CPU fan sinks targeted at gamers who simply must have that extra bling inside their case, in addition to the obvious thermal cooling solution. Both coolers are built on Gigabyte's Neon Cooler 7 architecture, while the Neon Cooler 8 offers support for AMD-based Socket 939 systems and the Neon Cooler 7 incorporates the Intel-based LGA 775. This cooling solution is said to be ideal for overclocked rigs and will be available locally through Rectron.

[www.rectron.co.za]



EDIMENSIONAL AUDIOFX FORCE FEEDBACK GAMING HEADSET

eDimensional has launched a set of headphones with the emphasis on immersion in games or movies. The gadget uses HRTF to simulate surround sound, and also has a vibration function that makes subsonic frequencies tangible. This function can be toggled on or off, and its intensity can be adjusted according to personal preference. The headset also features a noise-cancelling microphone, making it ideal for gamers.

[www.edimensional.com]





MAD CATZ PSP ACCESSORIES

Mad Catz will be releasing a range of eleven accessory bundles for Sony's PSP handheld console. Each bundle will offer a different combination of gadgets and gizmos. The line is being launched to coincide with the American launch of the handheld.
[www.madcatz.com]



SATURN GAME PAD FOR PS2

In Japan, PlayStation 2 owners will have the option to purchase a version of the Saturn game pad which is being introduced by Sega. The units are black, to match the colouring of the original PS2 console.

PUT YOUR BEST FOOT FORWARD...

Adidas has developed a gimmicky running shoe that features a small processor that interprets signals from sensors to adjust various properties of the shoe on the fly (or should that be "on the run"?). The shoes are powered by lithium batteries that provide power for about 100 hours, and the system shuts down after 10 minutes of walking or rest to save power. This new lifestyle item took three years and many dollars to develop.



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PS3: CELL ON EARTH

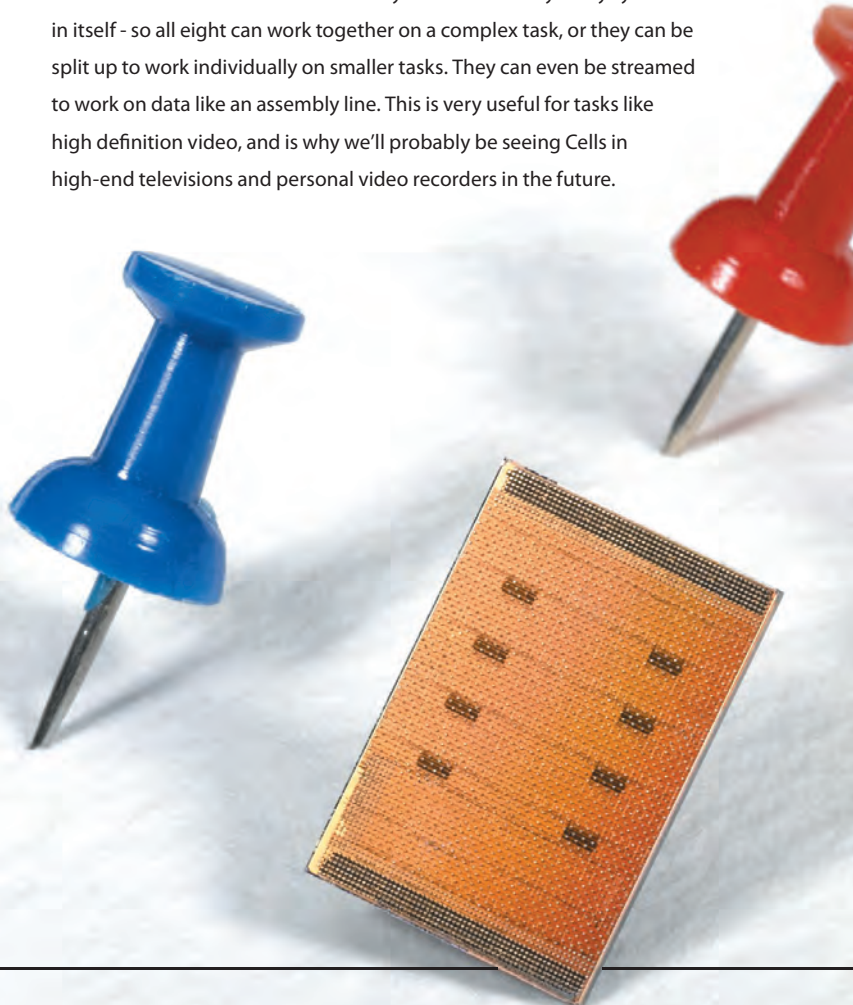


This is a concept image, not an actual PS3 ... deal

The PlayStation 3 is due to arrive later this year. It will without a doubt be the platform to beat in the next round of console wars. Sony (in cooperation with IBM and Toshiba) has announced a radically new CPU called Cell that has the industry buzzing with speculation. So, let's take a look at Cell and what it means for tomorrow's games.

by Toby Hudson

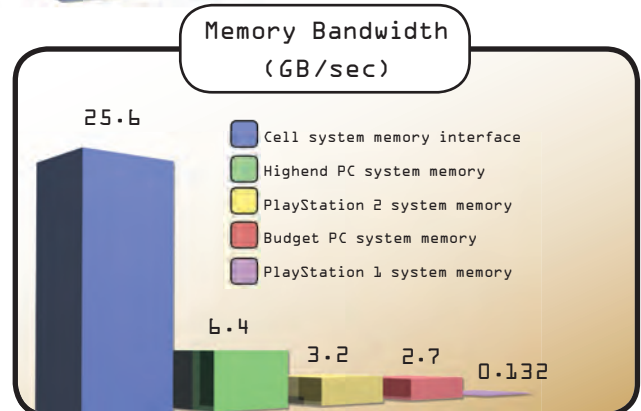
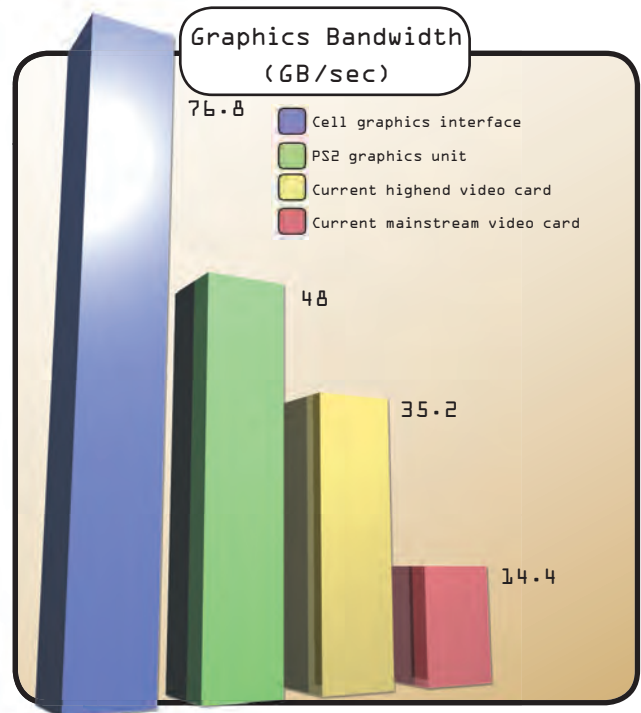
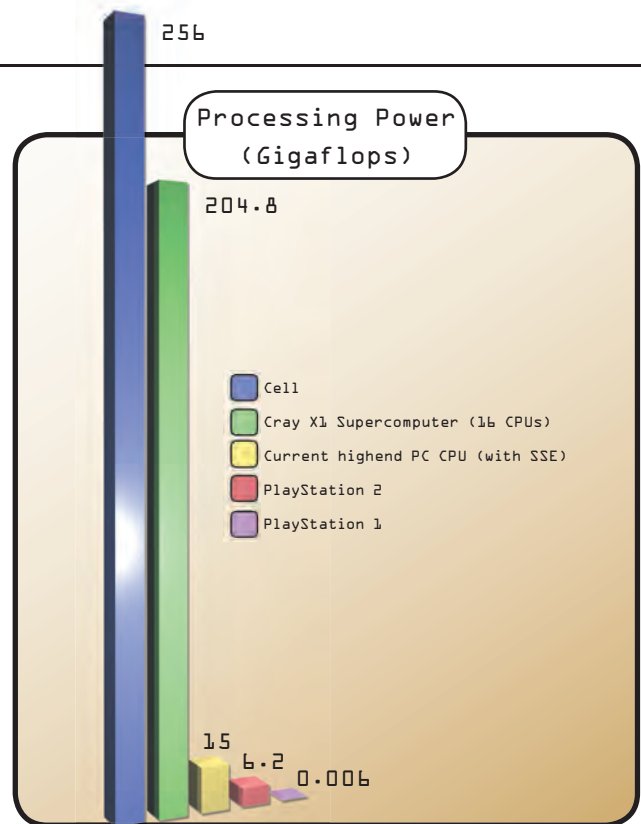
CELL IS AN INNOVATIVE design in CPUs. Instead of just one processor, Sony, IBM, and Toshiba have teamed up to create a group of nine processors that work together. One of these is based on the IBM Power chip, similar to that used in Apple's G5. This CPU provides the basic control and services for the other eight, which are simplified but extremely high speed CPUs similar to the pipelines on a modern video card. These processors are called Attached Processor Units, or APUs. But unlike the pipelines of a video card, APUs are more general purpose. They can do more things than just draw graphics, much like a normal CPU. Each APU has its own 256KB of memory and is essentially a tiny system in itself - so all eight can work together on a complex task, or they can be split up to work individually on smaller tasks. They can even be streamed to work on data like an assembly line. This is very useful for tasks like high definition video, and is why we'll probably be seeing Cells in high-end televisions and personal video recorders in the future.



The Cell in the PlayStation 3 is expected to run faster than 4GHz, which will make it faster (in clock speed) than any current PC processor. This means that even demanding PC games can be ported to and run on the PS3, at least as well if not better than their original versions. We can potentially look forward to see demanding PC titles such as Half-Life 2, with its complicated physics, running on PS3 whereas a PS2 version would likely have had to sacrifice much of the graphics and physics details. Cell has been designed to provide extremely high amounts of memory bandwidth, similar to many supercomputers. Rambus has once again been given the job of designing the memory for the new PlayStation and has developed a new bus specifically designed to feed Cell's insatiable appetite for memory.

From the design of Cell, it looks like Sony is intending to push gaming further along the course it is already headed. Now that good graphics are getting fairly easy to achieve in a game, newer games are turning to physics simulation to add innovations to game play. By performing real time simulation of physics, games can have dynamic worlds that respond to the player, leading to new types of game play. Gamers will be more able to use their creativity to solve game puzzles or dispatch enemies by using the reactive environment to their advantage. In the past, simulating physics has been the job of supercomputers, and so Cell was designed with that in mind.

Cell is also able to share processing jobs. Multiple Cells can be assembled into a system and work together in parallel. Sony has hinted that Cells may even be able to do this over a network and wireless connections. This means the Cell in a PlayStation 3 could, in theory, team up with the Cell in a HDTV, or other device, to provide additional power for improved graphics or features. Whether or not this finds any practical use remains to be seen, but the possibility is very interesting. **NAG**



ELSA GLADIAC 6600 GT

ELSA'S GLADIAC 6600 GT-BASED offering landed in my review pile at the same time as Gigabyte's vanilla X700 (albeit named an X700 LE), so I could get a back-to-back comparison of these two mainstream targeted offerings from the constantly warring VGA manufacturers.

Featuring a miniature version of the attractive cooler featured on the large 6800 series, the Gladiac is nevertheless an unassuming card upon first acquaintance. This perception is attributable in part to the higher than normal PCB itself - perhaps to accommodate the SLI interface placed on the top of the card, making it feel more like a previous-generation design.

Clock frequencies on the GT suggested that it would be a more than adequate performer, with both memory and GPU core clocked at an identical 500MHz. In the Futuremark synthetic benchmark 3DMark 05, the results supported this pre-testing conclusion to a certain extent. The 6600 GT at standard resolution and standard settings achieved 2699 points, marginally above the 2502 recorded by the vanilla X700. Enabling post-processing effects, namely 4-sample FSAA and 8-pass anisotropic filtering techniques, saw the Elsa 6600 extend its lead in this price segment somewhat. Where the X700 dropped to just on 1700, the Gladiac remained just over the 2000 mark with 2050. As for image quality, the Elsa was almost indistinguishable from its competition. Push the resolution up, an act which you expect to play to the NVIDIA GPU's frequency advantage, and the Gladiac 6600 lets the side down.

At 1280 x 1024, with FSAA and anisotropy still enabled the NVidia board generated Direct3D "Out of memory" errors and refused to even begin the benchmark run. That's using the Pixel Shader Model 3.0, which NVIDIA boards support but ATI does not as yet. Selecting PS 2.0 allowed the benchmark run to continue, but the performance was visibly hampered. Although the final result was still very slightly ahead of the X700, the struggling GPU was visibly evident in the choppiness of the output and shocking image quality degradation occurred. The score of 1374, now a mere 110 points ahead



of the X700, didn't completely reflect the real result of this comparison - while frame rates may have been down, the ATI offering still generated a quality image without massive screen tearing or large moments of visible lag.

Perhaps installing, uninstalling, and reinstalling different versions of the NVIDIA driver package could alleviate or resolve these issues, but this result remains a poor indication of the overall stability of this solution, limiting its appeal to the hardcore gaming segment. Combining two of these cards in an SLI solution is sure to provide immense performance at 1024 x 768, but I would be concerned about the stability of such an implementation.

So after being initially quite taken by the Elsa Gladiac 6600 GT and wanting it to deliver consistently better scores than its competition, this review has ended in disappointment and just a little bit more degradation of the NVIDIA brand in my opinion. **NAG**

VITAL INFO

■ Pros

Excellent standard resolution performance and fast pixel shading

■ Cons

Starts to fall apart somewhat as you increase resolution in conjunction with shaders

■ Supplier

Proton [011] 486 0748

■ Internet

www.prototech.co.za

■ RRP

R1950

■ Reviewer

Russell Bennett



GIGABYTE GV-RX70128D

THIS GIGABYTE X700 LE is actually a rather confusing piece of hardware. ATI intends releasing an even more affordable LE version of its next generation of Radeon boards, clocking in at the same 400MHz core clock frequency but with RAM clocked down to a meagre 250MHz, as opposed to the 400/350MHz of the current X700. The Gigabyte in this review is clocked at the standard frequencies because, in actual fact, it is a standard X700 and not an X700 LE as suggested by the product code on the box. Nonetheless, this PCI-Express (PCI-E) offering does provide us with the opportunity to get some scores on this, the baseline mainstream 3D accelerator in the existing ATI product range.

Aesthetically there is little differentiating this Gigabyte from every other X700-based board available today.

VITAL INFO

Pros

Great performance for the price
Class-leading image quality

Cons

It's not the LE indicated by the packaging

Supplier

Rectron [011] 203 1000

Internet

www.rectron.co.za

RRP

R1699

Reviewer

Russell Bennett

of DDR RAM, 8 pipelines and additional features similar to those implemented on the higher-end X800 series. And for its budget price tag, the standard X700 offers decent performance, although I'd probably still go for the Pro version with its faster 425/430MHz clock frequency combination.

In 3DMark 05, the Gigabyte X700 posted solid figures and I was impressed with image quality identical to that of its bigger brothers. Using Catalyst 5.2 drivers, 3DMark 05 Professional delivered a score of 2502 at 1024 x 768 without image-enhancing shaders enabled. The test system was running a 3GHz, 800 MHz FSB Intel CPU with 512MB of DDR 400 RAM running in dual-channel mode. Introducing FSAA (Full Scene Anti-aliasing) of 4X and anisotropic filtering of 8X caused the expected performance hit, with the overall result falling to 1752. Applying these techniques and pushing resolution up to 1280 x 1024 really caused some wilting with a final result of 1264.

For a baseline, no-frills model, it's still a pretty impressive performance. The older 3DMark 03, a far more technically demanding piece of software, showed up the outright grunt of the card with a total score at standard resolution and settings of 6499 - pegging the card squarely a few notches above the last-generation performance leader, the 9800 XT. **NAG**

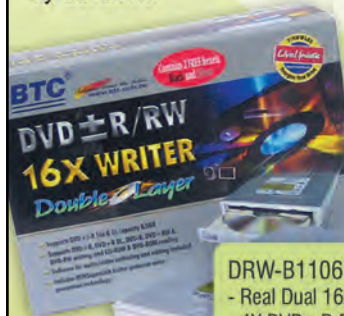
The only noticeable difference is the larger than normal heat sink covering both the back and front of the card. This is a heat pipe based solution rather than the conventional, tiny fan generally attached to X700s.

This product features 128MB



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GIGABYTE RADEON X800 PCI-E

THIS GIGABYTE PCI-EXPRESS (PCI-E) version of the excellent X800 doesn't offer very much in the way of innovation, but does offer the interesting benefit of being able to directly compare the performance of the PCI-E bus, in this its first generation, to the more mature AGP connectivity mechanism.

The clock frequencies are slightly different. The AGP contestant being a Pro version of this GPU and therefore featuring a 70MHz core clock advantage at 470MHz while the memory is actually clocked lower, at 450MHz against the PCI-E's 500MHz RAM. This in conjunction with the minor performance advantage of the PCI-E benchmark platform (800MHz FSB P4 3GHz with 512MB dual-channel DDR 400 versus 533MHz FSB P4 3.06GHz with 1GB vanilla DDR 333) should even the results out somewhat and give a decent representation of any bus speed discrepancies.

One thing I immediately disliked about the newer card was the use of a Gigabyte SilentPipe passive cooler as opposed to the entirely reasonable fan/heat sink combo on the Sapphire AGP board. This more conventional solution generates very little noise and keeps my X800 Pro within tolerable temperature levels - even if I tweak frequencies quite expansively. The chunkier and less attractive Gigabyte heat sink, sans fan, allows the card to reach high operating temperatures even when not under load.

The synthetic benchmark 3DMark 05 delivered the overall results I anticipated, matching my expectations almost exactly across the board. At 1024 x 768 without FSAA or anisotropy, the PCI-E X800 managed only 4162 to the 4468 of the older board. And this gap remained static no matter what combination of FSAA, anisotropic filtering settings, or resolution I tried. At 1280 x 1024 with post-processing fully enabled, the Gigabyte managed 2684 to the Sapphires 2886. In fact, disabling pixel shaders but continuing to increase the resolution saw the AGP card open up a decisive gap, managing 2920 at 1600 x 1200 while the PCI-E offering only managed 2508.

The delta continued to remain remarkably steady even when moving to the older 3DMark 03 benchmark suite. AGP got 10540 in this application compared to the PCI-E board's 9620. While Doom 3 frame rates for the standard time demo remained an identical figure apart at both high and ultra detail levels, the AGP offering scored exactly 1.6 fps more in each situation. This new-generation real-world



benchmark would have been the first place I would have expected the newer bus to perhaps take advantage of its higher available bandwidth and close the gap between the offerings, but instead the time demo mirrored the results of the synthetic runs.

Now, if you have moved on to a PCI-E platform and are looking for a high-end card which won't break the bank, this X800 will satisfy your requirements and then some. I'm not certain that this Gigabyte variant would be my first choice, but certainly try to get a model with a conventional cooling arrangement rather than a SilentPipe affair.

What this test most definitely does not do, is establish a solid argument for any kind of performance benefit of PCI-E over AGP at this stage in the technology's life. If you already have a high-end AGP-based system, there's really no reason to migrate to PCI-E right now unless you absolutely must have the latest technology at all times. **NAG**

VITAL INFO

Pros

Great, solid performance complete with excellent image quality

Cons

SilentPipe bulkier and less effective than standard cooler
No performance benefit from bus

Supplier

Rectron [011] 203 1000

Internet

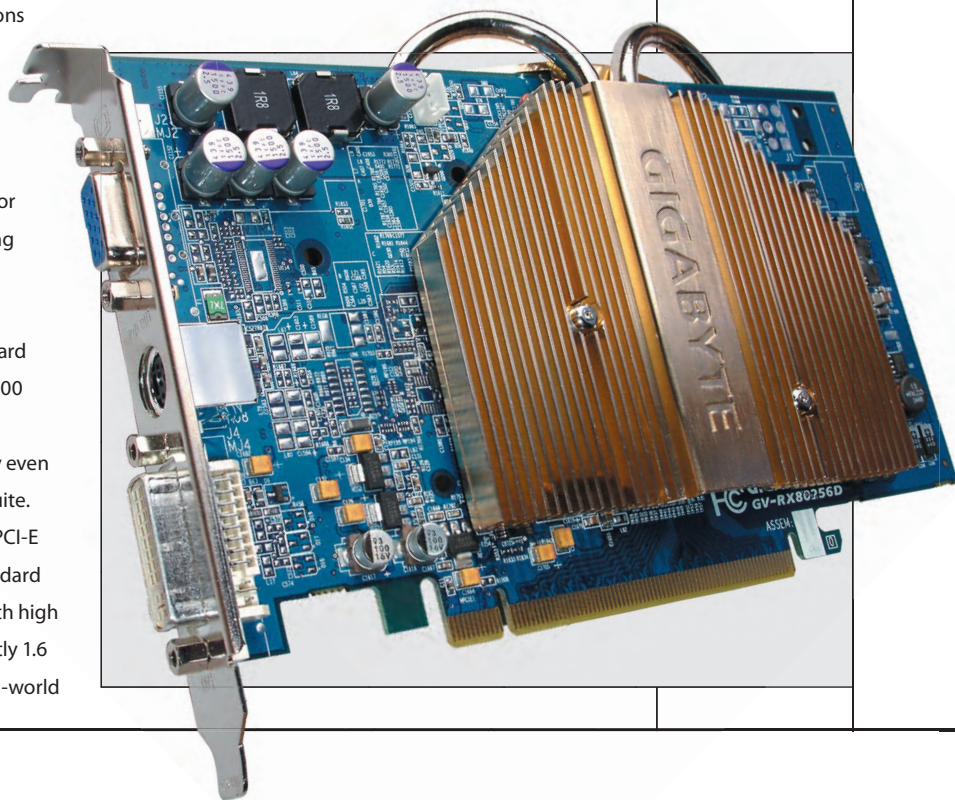
www.rectron.co.za

RRP

R2699

Reviewer

Russell Bennett





MMGEAR 2WAY HEADPHONE

HEADPHONES HAVE ALWAYS BEEN very subjective items, centered on your own personal needs and what you want out of a set of headphones. With so many brands, types and sets, with various degrees of quality, it's a daunting task to find the set of headphones to suit you. The 2WAY Headphone by MMGEAR may not be

exceptional headphone in its own right. Comprising of 4 speaker units in total - two per side, naturally - the 2WAY can sound over all frequencies from high to low with remarkably stable response. Essentially, each side contains a tweeter for crisp highs and a woofer for the low bass, avoiding any annoying signal noise or unnecessary vibration.

the ultimate solution in terms of Sound Pressure Levels, Frequency Responses and other concepts only professional DJs would understand, but it certainly is an

The unit itself folds into a very comfortable shape, perfect for storing inside your bag. Unfortunately, the headphone cable itself is only a paltry 150cm, very short in comparison to other equally priced headphones. Ignoring that oversight you have a high quality, reasonably priced set of headphones certain to appeal to the casual and slightly more professional user. **NAG**

VITAL INFO

■ Pros

Good sound quality

■ Cons

Cable too short

■ Supplier

Frontosa [011] 466 0038

■ Internet

www.frontosa.co.za

■ RRP

R299

■ Reviewer

Miktar Dracon



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 7. Delicately LCD display with metal housing.
 Recommended Retail Price = R995

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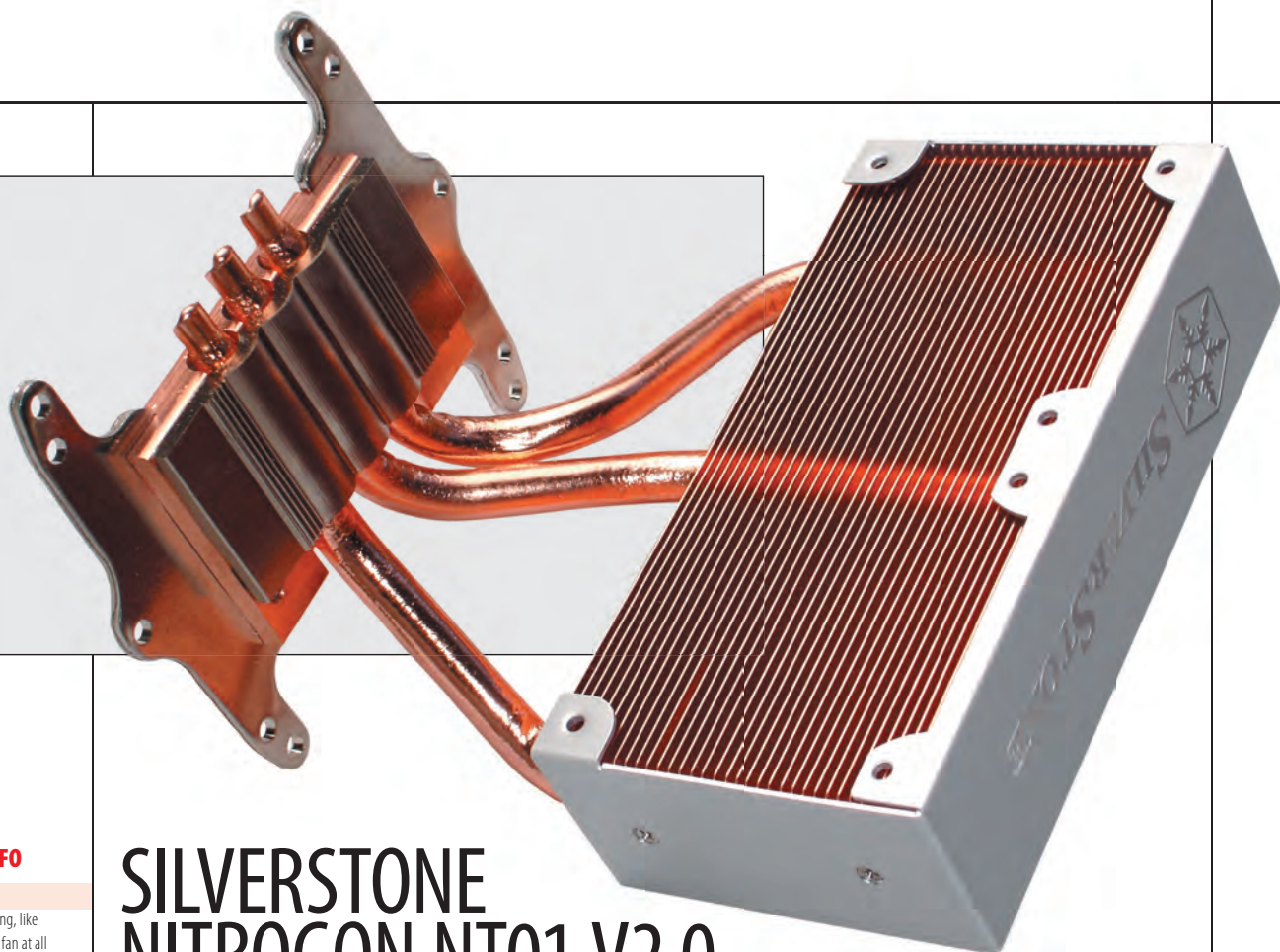
Distributor of



TEL: 011 707 5000

WEB: WWW.COREX.CO.ZA

FAX: 011 707 5050



VITAL INFO

■ Pros

Noiseless cooling, like having no CPU fan at all

■ Cons

Entirely inadequate cooling, like having no CPU cooler at all

■ Supplier

Naked IT [011] 678 1288

■ Internet

www.nakedit.co.za

■ RRP

R399

■ Reviewer

Russell Bennett

SILVERSTONE NITROGON NT01 V2.0

THERE ARE SOME AFTERMARKET add-ons, upgrades, and enhancements which I, for the most part, just don't "get"... Passive cooling systems are one of these categories.

Now for my money, as a gamer, most system upgrades are planned and executed in an effort to improve the technical capabilities of my machine and ultimately, to allow me to play the latest games at the highest levels of detail without frustrating lag. Although additional CPU cooling might not seem like a means towards this goal, it really is, as a CPU which is running too hot will cause major stability and performance issues on any

system - regardless of the quality or cost of the remaining hardware components.

Passive cooling systems, however, like the SilverStone Nitrogon NT01 V2.0 on review here, offer the aesthetic pleasure of a silent workstation, free from the constant hum of CPU cooling fans polluting the environment. However, the trade-off to this silence is restricted cooling potential and I must confess: I have only tested a couple of passive coolers where this give and take translates into a good buying decision.

I tested the Nitrogon on an Intel LGA 775 platform. Now the new Intel Smart Fan technology introduced with this form factor CPU is a fun thing to watch, as it ups the rotational speed of your CPU fan by a few RPMs at a time as the measured temperature rises. This racket becomes a pervasive part of your computing environment, but the CPU is kept down to a comfortable 36 degrees. With the Nitrogon installed, without the support of similarly noise-generating case fans, the system is almost completely inaudible, but also shuts itself down every five minutes once CPU temperature hits about 90 degrees. What a useless exercise. Two large case fans blowing onto the peculiarly-positioned heat sink bring the idle temperature down to a more agreeable 46 degrees, but make just about as much noise as the OEM Intel solution. **NAG**



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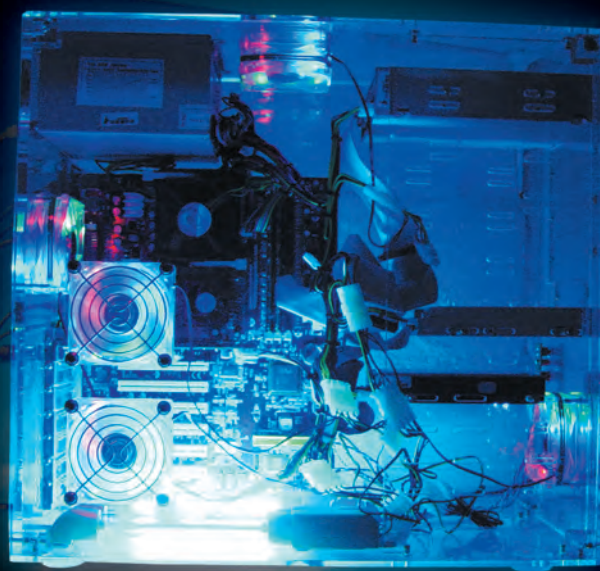
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HARDCOR3

CASE MODDING

WELL FOLKS, IT IS that time of the year again. Case modding has really caught on and almost everybody is doing it these days, purely because it is so much fun and it does not have to be an expensive hobby. In the following pages you will find some of the coolest case modding goodies around.



THERMALTAKE KANDALF

There is simply too much to like about this case. First up it features 11 drive bays and features a removable front panel. The Kandalf was designed to accommodate watercooling setups and by installing the optional upgrade kit, the Kandalf can be fully BTX compliant. This case features screwless connectors and there is also a bundled accessory box that fits into a 5¼-inch bay. On the top of the case you will find two USB 2.0 ports, one IEEE-1394 port, as well as two audio connectors.



VITAL INFO

■ **Plus**
Too many to mention
■ **Minus**
Pricey
■ **Supplier**
Corex [011] 707 5000
■ **Internet**
www.corex.co.za
■ **RRP**
R3412

VALUE 85
COOLNESS 95
OVERALL 90

CASE



CHENBRO GAMING BOMB II

The Gaming Bomb II is a huge improvement over its predecessor and has some great features. First up it sports two stylish handles, similar to that of the Apple G5, and is remarkably lightweight. It sports a side panel window and four 5¼-inch drive bays. In the front and back of the case you will find a 120mm fan and there is space for a fan to be placed at the top of the case.

VITAL INFO

■ **Plus**
Handles | Lightweight
■ **Minus**
Pricey
■ **Supplier**
Rectron [011] 203 1000
■ **Internet**
www.rectron.co.za
■ **RRP**
R1999

VALUE 85
COOLNESS 90
OVERALL 82

CASE

VITAL INFO

- **Plus**
- Wind tunnel
- **Minus**
- Pricy
- **Supplier**
- NakedIT [011] 678 1288
- **Internet**
- www.nakedit.co.za
- **RRP**
- R1299

VALUE 90
COOLNESS 90
OVERALL 90



SILVERSTONE TEMJIN TJ06

This case was designed with an innovative new cooling technique built in. The TJ06 has a large wind tunnel built into the bottom of the case that channels air over the CPU and memory via a set of 120mm fans. Interestingly enough, your motherboard is mounted upside down and your hard drives are placed directly under the power supply unit. If you want to turn heads this is the case to get.

VITAL INFO

- **Plus**
- Small
- **Minus**
- Limited space for case modding
- **Supplier**
- Frontosa [011] 466 0038
- **Internet**
- www.frontosa.co.za
- **RRP**
- R810

VALUE 80
COOLNESS 85
OVERALL 82



ANTEC MINUET

If you want a less traditional case then the Minuet is the one to go for. It measures 9.7 cm x 32.4 cm x 42.7 cm, features a glossy black finish and has space for one 80mm fan on its side panel. On the downside it only features one 5 1/4 inch drive and one stiffy drive bay. On the front panel it sports two USB 2.0 ports as well as one IEEE-1394 port, there are also two audio connectors situated here.

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Quiet & Cool



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XLIGHT MULTI-FUNCTION CCFL CONTROLLER

This CCFL controller fits into a 3¼-inch bay and is capable of connecting to two inverters.

This allows for a total of 4 CCFLs that can be controlled. This device allows you to set the sound sensitivity for sound-to-light as well as a toggle to flash normally.



VITAL INFO

- **Plus**
Fits into a 3¼-inch bay
- **Minus**
Kit only includes one inverter
- **Supplier**
NakedIT [011] 678 1288
- **Internet**
www.nakedit.co.za
- **RRP**
R199

VALUE
79
COOLNESS
70

OVERALL
74

FRONT PANEL CONTROLLER

SILVERSTONE EUDEMON SST-FP52

The Eudemon is a sexy looking system monitoring and fan controlling device. It includes three sets of thermal sensors that you can use to monitor the temperature of your hard drive, CPU, and system with. You can also connect three fans to it that will automatically adjust the temperature. The blue LCD also displays the time and date and the unit is equipped with a high temperature alarm.



VITAL INFO

- **Plus**
Three temperature probes
- **Minus**
Only three fan controllers
- **Supplier**
NakedIT [011] 678 1288
- **Internet**
www.nakedit.co.za
- **RRP**
R399

VALUE
80
COOLNESS
90

OVERALL
85

FRONT PANEL CONTROLLER

XPANEL MULTI-FUNCTION CONTROL PANEL DT5000

The Multi-Function Control Panel DT5000, slots into a 5¼-inch bay and apart from featuring three thermal sensors and three fan controllers, this model also has two front USB connectors, one IEEE-1394 connector, as well as a microphone and headphone socket. This unit also doubles as a hard drive cooler and an 80mm fan, situated on the bottom panel, will ensure a cool running drive.



VITAL INFO

- **Plus**
Doubles as a hard drive cooler
- **Minus**
Controller knob feels flimsy
- **Supplier**
NakedIT [011] 678 1288
- **Internet**
www.nakedit.co.za
- **RRP**
R399

VALUE
85
COOLNESS
90

OVERALL
87

FRONT PANEL CONTROLLER

COOLER MASTER COOLDRIVE 6

The CoolDrive 6 is a very futuristic looking device that can monitor your system temperature and control your case fans. It fits into a 5¼-inch bay and it doubles as a hard drive cooler. One of the best features of this device is that it is bundled with software that will allow the CoolDrive 6 to display useful information, such as available space and transfer speed from your hard drive.



VITAL INFO

- **Plus**
Software allows for added features
- **Minus**
Pricy
- **Supplier**
Rectron [011] 203-1000
- **Internet**
www.rectron.co.za
- **RRP**
R699

VALUE
80
COOLNESS
90

OVERALL
85

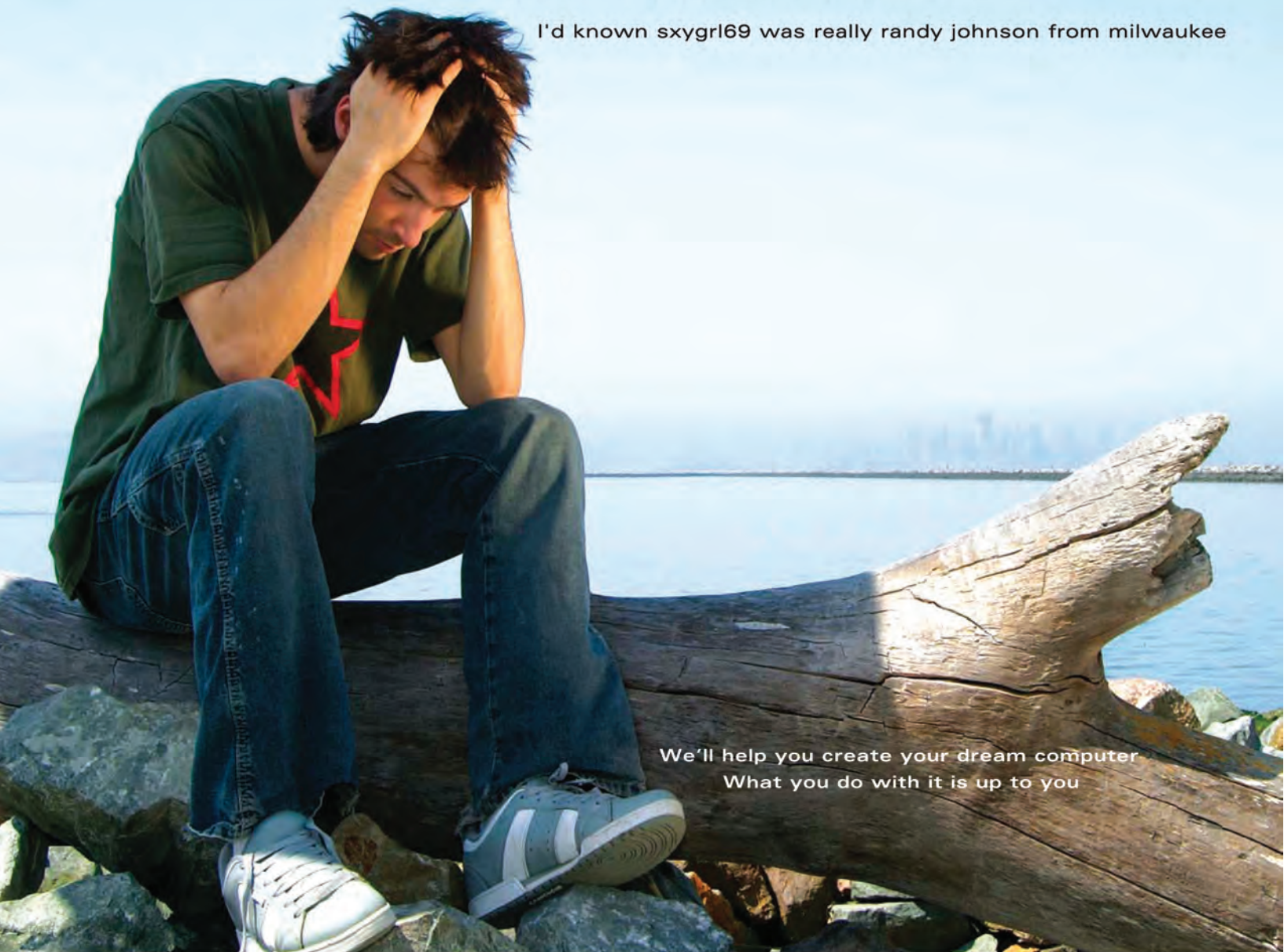
FRONT PANEL CONTROLLER

I wish

I hadn't accidentally emailed my boss that porn link

I hadn't tried to hack into the Pentagon

I'd known sxygrl69 was really randy johnson from milwaukee



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COOLERMASTER COOLDRIVE 4

Even though this device has been around for a while, it is still one of our favourites. The CoolDrive 4 features a large blue LCD and is able to monitor your fan speeds as well as your system temperature. It also doubles as a hard drive cooler and for those who like colours, the control knob on this device can display seven different colours.



VITAL INFO

- **Plus**
Built in hard drive cooler
- **Minus**
LCD does not change colour
- **Supplier**
Rectron [011] 203-1000
- **Internet**
www.rectron.co.za
- **RRP**
R399

VALUE 85
COOLNESS 85

OVERALL 85

FRONT PANEL CONTROLLER

COOLERMASTER MUSKETEER

The Musketeer is a retro looking device that fits into a 5¼-inch bay. It is able to display your fan voltage, sound pressure, and the temperature of a probe that you are able to place anywhere. The three round dials emit a funky blue glow and you can set the sensitivity of the indicators by toggling the switch next to them.



VITAL INFO

- **Plus**
Measures sound pressure, voltage
- **Minus**
Only one temperature probe
- **Supplier**
Rectron [011] 203-1000
- **Internet**
www.rectron.co.za
- **RRP**
R599

VALUE 80
COOLNESS 90

OVERALL 85

FRONT PANEL CONTROLLER

COOLERMASTER MUSKETEER 2

The Musketeer 2 features much the same look as the original device, with the exception that this one's dials can flip between seven different colours. Rather than replace the first one, the Musketeer 2 does not measure the same components. It is able to display your hard drive speed as well as your sound pressure for both your left and right channels. It also features volume controls for both channels on either side of the dials.



VITAL INFO

- **Plus**
Displays hard drive speed
- **Minus**
Both sound channels have their own volume control
- **Supplier**
Rectron [011] 203-1000
- **Internet**
www.rectron.co.za
- **RRP**
R699

VALUE 75
COOLNESS 85

OVERALL 80

FRONT PANEL CONTROLLER

ZALMAN RESERATOR

The Reserator is an external fanless water-cooling system. The reservoir is built into a cylinder shaped tower that is designed to dissipate the heat generated by the components. A handy feature, built into this system, is a flow indicator that lets you know when the coolant is flowing correctly. If you want to cool your VGA card with the Reserator you would need to purchase the optional water block. Unlike other water-cooling systems that use fans to cool the radiator, this one is completely silent. The only downside is that it is not easy to move around.



VITAL INFO

- **Plus**
No fans so it's ultra quiet
- **Minus**
Not ideal for the LAN gamer
- **Supplier**
Frontosa [011] 466 0038
- **Internet**
www.frontosa.co.za
- **RRP**
R2872

VALUE 80
COOLNESS 90

OVERALL 85

WATER COOLER

10,118 Points!!

ASUS SLI Motherboard

Shatters 3DMark05 Record

Whether it's listening to music, watching DVD and TV or playing games, more and more people are using PCs for entertainment. Especially in gaming applications, the improvement in graphics technology has given PCs more power to deliver realistic images.



NVIDIA® SLI™ Technology (Scalable Link Interface) is the latest motherboard platform that enables simultaneous operation of two PCI Express graphics card to deliver extreme video performance. The ASUS A8N-SLI Deluxe motherboard set a new 3Dmark05 record with a stunning 10,118 points during the recent NVIDIA nForce4™ launch conference. As the worldwide leader of motherboards, ASUS created the world's first motherboard with the capability to support SLI technology and surpassed the 10,000-point threshold. 3Dmark is one of the most popular and respected 3D benchmark programs among editors and enthusiasts worldwide. 3Dmark 2005, newly released on September 29, 2004, represents the most rigorous 3D testing program yet. It usually takes as long as a year to break the 10,000-point barrier. The A8N-SLI Deluxe was able to surprise the industry by breaking the 10,000 mark within 10 days!

The A8N-SLI incorporated two unique features for dependable power supply to two PCI Express graphics cards and easy activation of SLI (Scalable Link Interface) mode.

EZ Plug - Direct and Reliable Power Supply

When the system is in SLI mode (dual PCI Express graphics operation), the supply of power for the graphics adaptors is crucial. The A8N-SLI Deluxe incorporated the patented EZ Plug, which provides dedicated support for the high power demands of graphics cards, maintains overall system stability, and improves graphics card compatibility.

When the power source is positioned

far away from the PCI Express slots, the long routing causes power degradation. This also creates unnecessary noise and interferes with the performance of other components along the way. The EZ Plug is located adjacent to the PCI Express slots to prevent power loss and maintain voltage integrity during transmission, guaranteeing dependable power supply and reliable operation.

By minimizing power loss and maintaining consistent voltage throughout power transmission, the EZ Plug significantly improves motherboard compatibility with power voltage-sensitive graphics cards. No more picky graphics cards threatening to shut down the system due to incorrect voltage levels. Furthermore, it also enables optimum power distribution to other components since the main power supply no longer have to support the graphics cards.

Unlike the SLI solutions by other manufacturers, the EZ Plug supports both 20-pin and 24-pin standards, which is still currently the mainstream. Users who want to upgrade to the latest SLI platform, can save the extra cost on a 24-pin power plug. In addition, a LED light issues friendly reminders when the EZ Plug is needed to ensure the graphics cards can run at full power without compromising system reliability.

EZ Selector - Easy Insertion Prevent Selector Card Damage

A SLI motherboard requires an onboard SLI Selector Card to switch the system between SLI mode (dual graphics cards) and normal non-SLI mode (single graphics). Due to the confined space between the two PCI Express x16 slots, inserting and removing the selector card is difficult

and could cause damage to neighboring components, socket, and the selector card itself.

The A8N-SLI Deluxe is the world's only motherboard to include the patented EZ Selector. This innovative feature utilizes a special socket design to accommodate the SLI selector card, enabling easy insertion and removal. Activating SLI mode on the A8N-SLI Deluxe is a simple three-step process that users cannot experience in any competing motherboards. When repeated insertion and removal is not a concern, the life expectancy of the SLI selector card increases greatly.

Besides supporting two PCI Express graphics cards, ASUS A8N-SLI also takes on a special thermal design which gives more room for graphics cards and significantly improves the thermal issue of conventional SLI design. A8N-SLI also features the popular ASUS AI Proactive features such as AI NOS and AI Net2. Let's not forget a list of top specifications such as Serial ATA 2.0, 8 Serial ATA ports, 1394 interface, 10 USB connections and 8-channel audio.

If top-of-the-line graphics and processing capability are what you need, then the ASUS A8N-SLI Deluxe is your board.

3DMark Test (1024 x 768)

	SLI	Single
3DMark03	20102	12447
3DMark05	8954	5016

3DMark Test (1600 x 1200)

	SLI	Single
3DMark03	13446	8011
3DMark05	6351	3462

■ With A8V-SLI, 3D graphics performance can reach up to **186%**!

COOLERMASTER AQUAGATE ALC-U01

What makes the Aquagate stand out from the rest is the fact that it can be placed outside your case as well as be mounted in two 5¼-inch bays in your case. The front panel features an LCD that displays the water and CPU temperature. It will also warn you when the coolant is running low. The Aquagate is also bundled with virtually everything you would need to get it up and running - this includes coolant, the tubing, and the CPU water block.



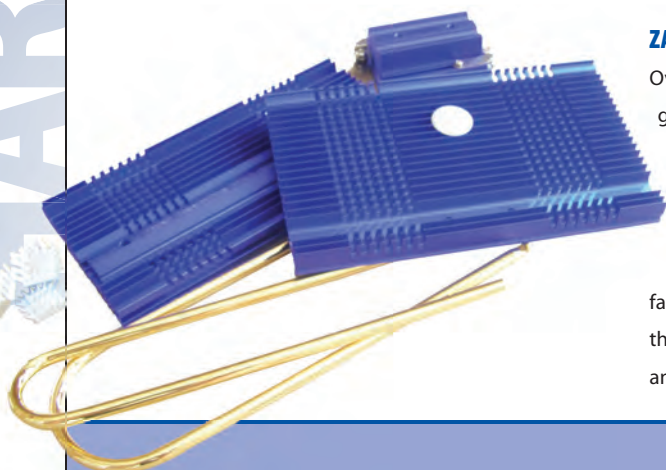
VITAL INFO

- **Plus**
Internal or external mounting
- **Minus**
Only CPU water block included
- **Supplier**
Rectron [011] 203-1000
- **Internet**
www.rectron.co.za
- **RRP**
R2599

VALUE 85
COOLNESS 90
OVERALL 87

ZALMAN ZM80D-HP NOISELESS VGA COOLER

Over clocking a graphics card causes serious heat to be generated. Short of converting to water cooling, the Zalman ZM80D-HP is a great solution to dissipate heat. It features two large heat sinks that are connected by two heat pipes that help to disperse the heat build-up. There is also an optional 80mm fan which can be purchased separately and clips onto the ZM80D-HP. The installation of this device is tricky and not recommended for the faint of heart.



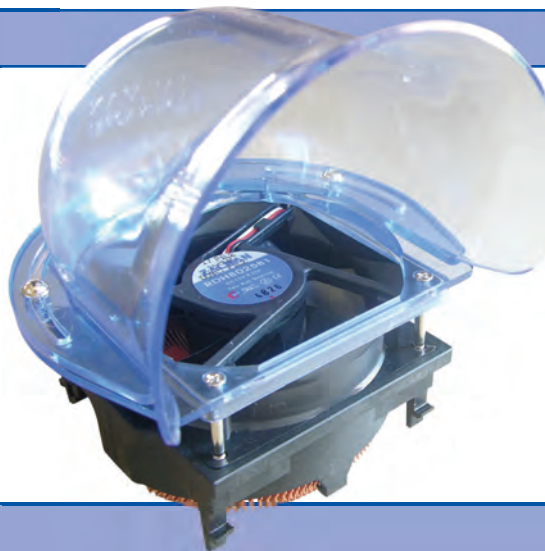
VITAL INFO

- **Plus**
Works well to disperse heat
- **Minus**
Tricky to install
- **Supplier**
Frontosa [011] 466 0038
- **Internet**
www.frontosa.co.za
- **RRP**
R350

VALUE 80
COOLNESS 75
OVERALL 77

ZALMAN CNP55700D-CU QUIET CPU COOLER

The CNP55700D-Cu Quiet CPU cooler is quite a weird looking CPU cooler. This is mainly due to the duct built onto it. The cooler doesn't blow air onto the CPU, but rather sucks air from the CPU. The duct was designed to blow air directly onto the exhaust fan at the back of the case and is adjustable if the exhaust fan is not positioned directly next to the CPU. The kit also includes a speed control for the fan on the cooler, but it is awkward to use and an external controller would have been much better.



VITAL INFO

- **Plus**
Air Duct
- **Minus**
Fan speed controller
- **Supplier**
Frontosa [011] 466 0038
- **Internet**
www.frontosa.co.za
- **RRP**
R526

VALUE 60
COOLNESS 75
OVERALL 67

ZALMAN ZM-2HC2 HEATPIPE HDD COOLER

Cooling a hard drive is always tricky, but Zalman has developed a heat pipe bracket that fits over your hard drive. The heat is transferred to the heat pipes, which in turn allow for heat dissipation. The kit also includes vibration dampers that fit between the ZM-2HC2 Heatpipe HDD Cooler and the case.



VITAL INFO

- **Plus**
Heat pipe cooling works well
- **Minus**
Takes up a lot of space
- **Supplier**
Frontosa [011] 466 0038
- **Internet**
www.frontosa.co.za
- **RRP**
R314

VALUE 80
COOLNESS 78
OVERALL 79

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IN TUNE AND HAS
ITS GROOVE BACK



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WIN: GECUBE GRAPHIC CARD | I-MATE JAM | LOGITECH HARMONY REMOTE

SOFTWARE: ADOBE ACROBAT 7 | LINSPIRE | MACROMEDIA CAPTIVATE | QUICKBOOKS

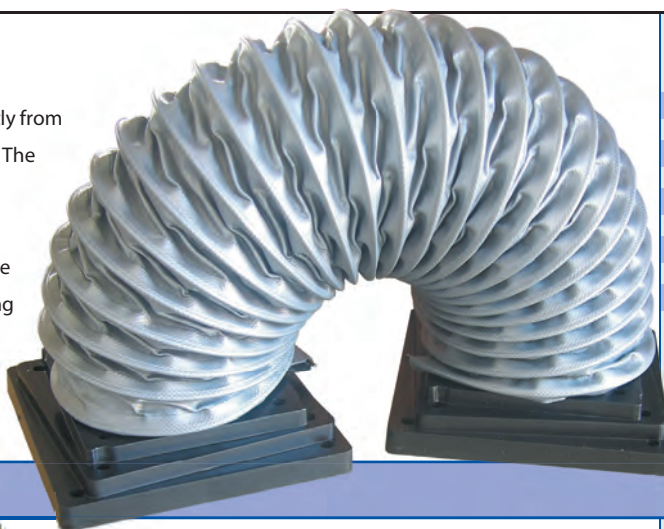
HARDWARE: 3COM WIRELESS ROUTER | IOMEGA NAS SERVER | PHILIPS 20" LCD | MAC MINI



ON SALE APRIL 6

AIR DUCT KIT

This Air Duct kit works by creating a duct directly from your CPU fan situated somewhere in your case. The kit includes all the mounting brackets as well as the duct, which is similar to that used in air conditioners. I actually used a kit like this on one of my first case modding projects, and by having air sucked in from the outside through this duct, onto my CPU fan I managed to drop the CPU temperature by 10 degrees.



VITAL INFO

- Plus**
Can drop CPU temp by 15°
- Minus**
Takes up a lot of space
- Supplier**
NakedIT [011] 678 1288
- Internet**
www.nakedit.co.za
- RRP**
R159

VALUE 90
COOLNESS 90

OVERALL 90

COOLER ACCESSORY



THERMALTAKE TYPHOON CPU FAN

The Thermaltake Big Typhoon is one of the most powerful CPU heat sink and fan products available today. It features a 12cm fan with 6 heat pipes that conduct the heat through the finned heat sinks. One of the best features about the Typhoon, is that it is compatible with both Intel and AMD CPUs and it comes bundled with the required brackets for both platforms. This cooler is surprisingly quiet and the fan and heat sink are very light - so this heat sink fan will not place any unnecessary pressure on your CPU.

VITAL INFO

- Plus**
Large fan = decent cooling
- Minus**
It's very large
- Supplier**
Corex [011] 707-5000
- Internet**
www.corex.co.za
- RRP**
R676

VALUE 80
COOLNESS 85

OVERALL 82

CPU HEAT SINK FAN

ROUND IDE AND FLOPPY CABLES

One of the first things any case modder does when modifying a PC, is to install round IDE cables. These not only look great, but also allow for better airflow inside the case. The ones I had for review this month were wrapped in UV reactive plastic. This means that when you have a UV light inside your case these cables will light up. The last IDE cable I received was also wrapped in an EL cable that also lights up when connected to a power source.



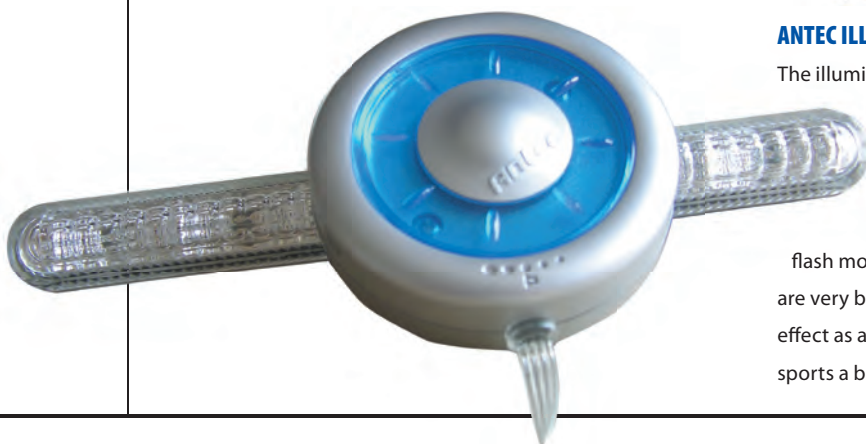
VITAL INFO

- Plus**
Looks good, improves airflow
- Minus**
Needs UV CCFL
- Supplier**
NakedIT [011] 678 1288
- Internet**
www.nakedit.co.za
- RRP**
R49 (floppy) R79 (IDE)

VALUE 90
COOLNESS 90

OVERALL 90

CABLES



ANTEC ILLUMINATE BLUE

The illuminate Blue is not your average case light and features an external case control that allows you to set the sound sensitivity, as well as to toggle it between its normal and flash mode. The tube contains six LEDs that are very bright but do not provide the same effect as a CCFL. The external controller also sports a blue LED.

VITAL INFO

- Plus**
External controller
- Minus**
Lacks effects of CCFL
- Supplier**
Frontosa [011] 466 0038
- Internet**
www.frontosa.co.za
- RRP**
R260

VALUE 80
COOLNESS 78

OVERALL 79

LIGHTS

87 Passion

GIGABYTE 8 SIGMA Series Motherboard



54Mbps Wireless
LAN Card included



U-Plus D.P.S Super Cooling
offers extra power

GA-8ANXP-D

8 Sigma Series



Intel 925x Chipset
U-Plus D.P.S
Wireless LAN
DDR2 533
PCI-Express
Dual Gigabit LAN
IEEE 1394b
Serial ATA
Intel High Definition Audio

GA-8GPNXP Duo

8 Sigma Series



Intel 915P Chipset
U-Plus D.P.S
Wireless LAN
Duo DDR Design
PCI-Express
Dual Gigabit LAN
IEEE 1394b
Serial ATA
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GIGABYTE™
TECHNOLOGY

Upgrade Your Life™ www.gigabyte.com.tw

EL WIRE KIT

EL wire can make your case look funky if used correctly. It is available in a range of colours and cable lengths and the blue colour, in particular, looks awesome. You can also cut them to size and daisy chain them if you wish. Just do not use too much of it, it can make a great case mod look tacky.



VITAL INFO

- Plus**
Can be shaped
- Minus**
Looks tacky if overused
- Supplier**
NakedIT [011] 678 1288
- Internet**
www.rectron.co.za
- RRP**
R89 (150cm) R119 (250cm)

VALUE 79
COOLNESS 70
OVERALL 74



CASEART EL DRAGON

This is quite an interesting case mod item. It can be placed on the inside of your case window or anywhere else where it will be visible, for that matter. The dragon image on the front of this mat flashes in sequence and can add an extreme coolness factor to the right case mod setup. Just please do not use more than one on a case.

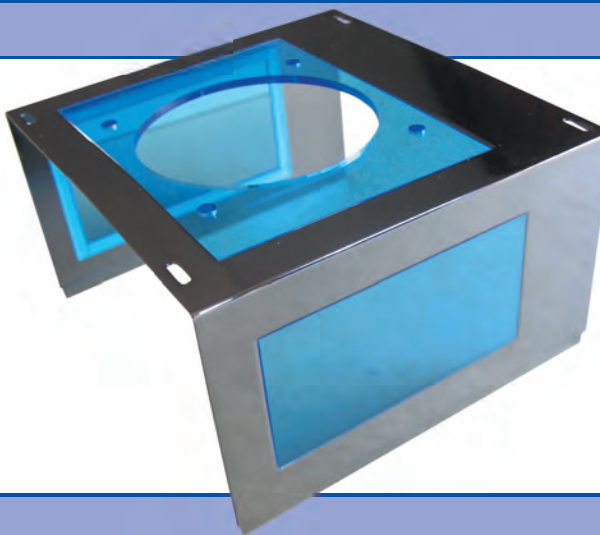
VITAL INFO

- Plus**
Flashing dragon
- Minus**
Limited usability
- Supplier**
NakedIT [011] 678 1288
- Internet**
www.nakedit.co.za
- RRP**
R159

VALUE 79
COOLNESS 80
OVERALL 79

AEROCOOL ACRYSHIELD

If you are bored of your plain metal PSU cover, then take note of this case mod accessory. The Acryshield features a titanium-coated surface with three translucent windows, one on either side and one on top for the fan mount. Please note that the Acryshield does not fit on all PSUs.



VITAL INFO

- Plus**
Mod your PSU
- Minus**
Does not fit all PSUs
- Supplier**
NakedIT [011] 678 1288
- Internet**
www.nakedit.co.za
- RRP**
R79

VALUE 90
COOLNESS 90
OVERALL 90



PSU CONNECTOR KIT

Finally, boring old beige and black power connectors are a thing of the past. These case mod accessories allow you to change the power connectors to any one of a range of UV reactive colours. Just note: you would need a set of tools to change the connectors and these can be purchased separately.

VITAL INFO

- Plus**
Looks awesome under UV light
- Minus**
Can be tricky to install
- Supplier**
NakedIT [011] 678 1288
- Internet**
www.nakedit.co.za
- RRP**
R49 (excluding tools)

VALUE 85
COOLNESS 85
OVERALL 85

3D THUMB SCREWS

Thumb screws allow you to easily remove your side panels without using a screw driver. Nowadays these are available in all shapes and sizes and there are even 3D thumbscrews available for fan mountings.



VITAL INFO

- Plus**
Looks great
- Minus**
Does not suit all case mods
- Supplier**
NakedIT [011] 678 1288
- Internet**
www.nakedit.co.za
- RRP**
R69

VALUE 73
COOLNESS 79
OVERALL 76

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Fueled by SAPPHIRE

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with the SAPPHIRE family of ATI based solutions...



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LAZY GAMER'S GUIDE

MICROTEK PORTABLE DVD PLAYER

DVD ON THE GO? As media becomes more and more digital it makes little sense that in order to watch your favourite movies, you must be restricted to your lounge. The portable DVD industry therefore is, unsurprisingly, a booming industry and Microtek's Portable DVD Player is entering a crowded market.

SUPPLIER: DDS
WWW: directservices.co.za
RRP: R1549



The Player

The player is roughly two-thirds the height of a DVD case and as thick as two cases. It is reportedly region-locked, but you can also play music and MP3 CDs on it. The screen in the front measures 72 x 54mm.

Be Entertained

Being portable, it makes sense that instead of on-board speakers you can plug headphones or another sound output into it. As a nice additional touch, the unit comes with cables that will send audio and video out to standard RCA jacks on your TV. Since the player features a rechargeable battery, it's truly portable and the headphones come in handy for those car trips.



Keep a Distance

A nice touch is the included remote control, doubtlessly exactly what would be needed should you decide to wire the player to a real TV and recline on a comfortable couch. That's recommended as well – despite the nice screen, the portable option doesn't exactly compare to lounging in front of a 74cm TV.

Keep it going

The other side of the unit features the power socket, Hold button and power switch. The Hold button makes sure that when paused or doing something around the player, you don't accidentally press the wrong button, thus losing your place or missing an important plot point. For instance, we'd never have known who Keyser Söze was...



Be in Charge

What's a DVD player without actual DVD controls? The silver circle is for navigating while the other buttons are really pretty self-explanatory. The dark round thing at the top is the IR eye for the remote control.



ABIT

Advanced Durability

FATAL1TY AN8



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ABIT Engineers innovate yet again with the world's first memory thermal solution on a desktop motherboard. This special cooler adjusts according to system loading for automatic fan speed adjustment.



Exclusive ABIT Engineered motherboard technology allows you to easily tweak your system for optimum performance and frame rates.



With a special layout and heatsinks, this exclusive PWM design keeps all MOSFETs <50°C, and promotes rapid heat dissipation around the CPU.



Exhaust heat from your PC like never before with Dual OTES cooling technology. Works with uGuru to automatically adjust fan speeds for the optimal balance of thermal and acoustic performance.

A godsend for case modders, ultra-bright LEDs surround the motherboard for a stunning futuristic look.



Striking red and black color scheme.

SATA 3Gb/s

Doubles bus bandwidth which provides blazingly high disk performance.

Gigabit Ethernet

The industry's fastest Gigabit Ethernet performance eliminates network bottlenecks and improves overall system efficiency and performance.



NVIDIA Firewall protects your PC from intruders by filtering unauthorized traffic. Integrated into NVIDIA nForce MCPs, it provides professional-grade traffic inspection capabilities, instant on protection, advanced management features. NVIDIA Firewall will also utilize the NVIDIA ActiveArmor secure networking engine.



Reduces noise interface from high frequency signals with an independent card for outstanding 5.1-channel audio quality (SNR>95db).



AN8

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- 1 PCI-E X16 slot, 2 PCI-Express X1 slots, 3 PCI slots, 1 x AudioMAX slot
- 4 x SATA150 (RAID 0, 1, 10, 5, JBOD), 2 x ATA133
- 10 x USB 2.0, 1 x IEEE1394, 1 x NVIDIA GbE
- 5.1 Channels Audio and Optical S/P DIF In/Out
- ABIT uGuru™ Technology
- ABIT OTES™ Technology



FATAL1TY AN8

- NVIDIA NF4 Ultra supports AMD K8 Socket 939 with 2GHz Hyper Transport™ Technology
- 4 DIMMs Dual DDR400 up to 4GB
- 1 PCI-E X16 slot, 2 PCI-Express X1 slots, 3 PCI slots, 1 x AudioMAX slot
- 4 x SATAII (RAID 0, 1, 10, 5), 2 x ATA133
- 10 x USB 2.0, 1 x IEEE1394, 1 x NVIDIA GbE
- 5.1 Channels Audio and Optical S/P DIF In/Out
- ABIT uGuru™ Technology
- ABIT OTES™ Technology



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Illustrating the games

IF YOU EVER THOUGHT that working for a gaming company might be fun, you may be right. Daryl Mandryk (DM) worked for Electronic Arts for 3½ years before moving on to another “secret” studio. It seems the competitiveness between gaming studios makes them all very secretive about their current and future projects, but there are various means of making an illustrator talk...

You have been working at Electronic Arts for the past 3½ years. What did you do at EA and which titles did you work on?

DM: I was hired by EA as a character modeller and texture artist. As it happened, I was on a game where I had a chance to do some concept art as well. I eventually decided that concept art was the path I would rather be on than modelling. The two main titles I worked on were Def Jam Vendetta, where I modelled, textured, and did concept art,

and Def Jam Fight for New York, on which I was the lead concept artist. After that I moved into the concept art pool, where I worked on several different titles including FIFA Street, NFS Underground 2, as well as several projects that haven't been announced yet.

How did you end up getting a job at EA?

DM: I actually never pursued a job at EA. I always sort of had a negative attitude towards working for such a large mega-studio. However, one of the producers there tracked me down and offered me a position on a new game which sounded like a lot of fun, so I decided I would give it a shot. The game eventually got canned, but I moved on to other projects there and discovered it was actually quite a fun and educational environment to work in.

You have recently departed from EA. Are you now working freelance or have you taken on another permanent job offer?

DM: I've taken a permanent offer at another studio. Unfortunately, at this time, I can't say which studio - it's all top secret! However, I'm still available for freelance work, but I'm finding it hard to fit time for it into my schedule. They keep me very busy painting all kinds of interesting things. There needs to be more hours in the day.

Is science fiction and fantasy your preferred genres of expression?

DM: I love them both, but I think fantasy is a little more my style. Although I enjoy painting gadgets and laser guns, there is something a little more raw and primal about painting fantasy scenes. I do tend to blur the lines between them a lot though.

What do you think lies beyond Bisley, Frazetta, and Moebius for the Western sci-fi fantasy artist?

DM: It's an interesting time for fantasy art. Artists are now

The Last of the Invaders





exposed to art from all over the world via the Internet. The blending of all these different influences will create something unique.

Have you ever thought of creating a comic or animation from your work?

DM: Yes, but finding the time to actually sit down and do it is the hardest part. I have lots of ideas floating around in my head. I just need to organise them. It will happen one day.

If you could choose any game (for console or PC) you would like to illustrate for, which one would it be?

DM: Diablo. It's one of my favourite games ever, and is totally my style. I feel I could design some really cool stuff for that game.

You mentioned on your Website that Half-Life 2 interrupted your workflow. Do you think it was worth the long wait?

DM: Yes, I think in the end it was. It was probably the best single player FPS I've ever played and I'm a big Counter-Strike addict as well. I think they did a terrific job.

You obviously love what you do. Does it ever feel like a job (not being fun)?

DM: Ha-ha... yes, sometimes when you have a looming deadline and a grumpy art director it can feel like work. But most days I feel like I am just goofing-off painting pictures, so I guess that's a good sign. It's a lot of fun to see a painting develop all the way from nothing. That's what keeps me motivated. The act of creating is very rewarding.

In your gallery you have an image of The Thing from Fantastic Four. Are you a fan or was it commissioned work?

DM: I'm a fan. It was actually done for a friend of mine as a request... but lets face it The Thing is cool.

Thank you for taking the time to answer our questions.

DM: Thank you! **NAG**



Die Robot



The Thing



Club Zero-G

Mad Yak

R125

In this story, a future organization changes reality to the way they want it to be by controlling the consensus. Meanwhile, four kids create a club in the dreams of kids in the current time, which slowly allows them to realise that there is a meeting point between their dream world and the reality of the changed future. The question is, will they accept the world they think they want, or will they fight the control and allow a world of choice?

Breach

DC Comics

R19.50

In Breach we have scientists messing with things they shouldn't. "Hey, we're going to open a doorway to other dimensions. What could possibly go wrong? Besides, the army is financing it - they'll protect us, right?" Surprisingly, although some of the scenes are brief they manage to give you a fairly successful attachment to the characters. And the fact that the story begins with the end really makes you want to know how bad it's going to get.

Arana

Marvel Comics

R21.50

Anya Corazon is a young Spanish girl from Brooklyn and she is also the latest to wield the power of the spider. So like Buffy she goes hunting after the monsters of the dark, except these monsters aren't just vampires that can be dealt with using a simple stake to the heart. These are men in power, corrupt politicians, judges and secret organisations. To top it all, Anya has a cold. A symbiotic shape-changing suit of armour linked to your body doesn't react well to sneezes when you are trying to get the bad guys. Then it's time to go home and study the fourth layer of Dante's inferno: Algebra. Light reading, but more fun than most of the super hero genre.

Ravenloft: Masque of the Red Death

THERE CERTAINLY IS A lot of harping on about the D20 system, and with good reason. It seems that this (relatively) new approach to gaming – especially with the release of the Dungeons & Dragons version 3.5 rules – is breathing new life into a lot of products that were either flagging or almost forgotten. Take, for example, the Ravenloft setting. While this was originally a fairly popular Advanced Dungeons & Dragons setting, making use of the old rule system, it sort of fell by the wayside when TSR started running into all their hassles. Wizards of the Coast didn't seem keen to resurrect the setting with their acquisition of TSR, but Swords and Sorcery, the White Wolf

D20 driven subsidiary was more than keen on getting their hands on this gothic horror material. A few books later, we have this... yet another volume in the ever growing list of Swords and Sorcery Ravenloft titles.

Masque of the Red Death is, quite simply, an extended campaign setting detailing the 19th century Gothic Earth. It features almost everything you need to play a campaign in this world with, but very much unlike other D20 products which tend to be quite compact, to get the most out of this game you need to get hold of the Ravenloft Player's Handbook, Ravenloft Dungeon Master's Guide and Ravenloft Denizens of Dread books - all in addition to the standard version 3.5 Players and Dungeon Master's books.

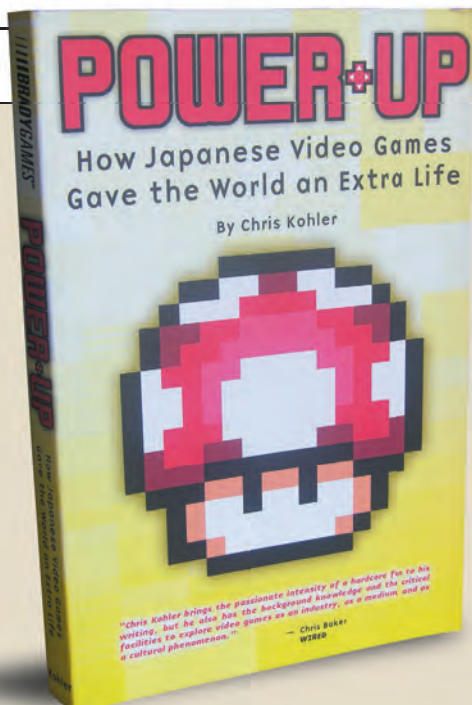
This heavy reliance on other books is probably not all that necessary in the greater scheme of things. Sure, the setting

is highly detailed, but so is the Call of Cthulhu setting, all of which is encapsulated in one tome. So does this equate to a money making scheme? Possibly. The fact is, though, that players of the old Ravenloft setting will certainly be drawn to these books and, once they get a taste of the much improved, highly detailed new Ravenloft; they will probably lap up all the other books like a bulldog going at a bowl of porridge. One can never fault a highly detailed campaign setting and Masque of the Red Death is nothing if not detailed.

It may be a good idea to research this one before buying it, though – the expenditure to be able to give it the run it deserves is quite high. Thankfully the prices of these books do seem to be improving with the more favourable exchange rates of late.

PRICE: R265.00





Power-Up

AUTHOR: Chris Kohler

PRICE: R190.95 (Excl. delivery)

BUY IT: www.kalahari.net

POWER-UP EXAMINES HOW JAPAN and its culture have affected the video game industry. Chris Kohler, through anecdotes and personal interviews with several of the top Japanese game designers, has put together an excellent study that will hold as much appeal to ludologists as those with only a passing interest in gaming.

It has become the accepted standard for books dealing with ludology (defined simply as the study of gaming) to begin with a look at the origins of gaming. Not one to stay with convention, Kohler dedicates a part of the history to video games as a multi-cultural gateway. This succeeds in showcasing the positive influences of gaming throughout its history.

Once the reader moves past the history, the book comes into its own. With chapters focusing on the Japanese role-playing game, game music and the Japanese game marketplace, there are more than enough points of interest to stimulate debate between gamers. My favourite chapter was the one aptly titled "Lost in transration: This game are sick" (sic). Featuring snippets discussing everything from the infamous "All your base are belong to us" (sic), to how the ghosts in Pac-Man got their names, this is definitely one for aficionados.

While Power-Up could've done with better layout, it's still an insightful read into what makes the Japanese game industry tick. From a historical perspective, it provides valuable analysis on just how pervasive Japanese (video game) cultural references are in our games today. Give it a read, you will not be disappointed.



More Than A Game

AUTHOR: Barry Atkins

PRICE: R251.95 (Excl. delivery)

BUY IT: www.kalahari.net

AUTHOR BARRY ATKINS, AN English lecturer at the Manchester Metropolitan University, claims that More Than A Game is the first academic work dedicated to the study of computer games in terms of the stories they tell and the manner of their telling. He focuses on four titles: Tomb Raider, Half-Life, Close Combat, and Sim City, rating each as unique in their respective genres. Atkins believes that this book is ideal for both the student of contemporary culture and gamers who are interested in how computer games tell their stories. Judging by this, More Than A Game should be a fascinating read for all concerned.

Unfortunately, the reality is somewhat different. Atkins comes across as just another intellectual who sits in his ivory tower removed from reality. The different readings on the four games, while academically sound, are dry and lack the required critical analysis that readers of the book will require. Not only does he point out the obvious weaknesses of the respective games, he shows how badly out of depth an academic can be if he/she doesn't have an intimate understanding of the subject matter. It is difficult to determine whether many of his comments are criticising or praising the game under discussion.

While not a complete waste of time, this book doesn't merit serious consideration. Instead, readers who want a good gaming analysis title should look elsewhere. More Than A Game is destined to be enjoyed by academia while scorned by just about everyone else.



The Incredibles

Character-driven animation with angst and adventure

If, like me, you are tired of animation involving fish, bugs, and animals, this will be the film for you. It will also revolutionise the target audience for animation. It is so densely emotional and driven with complex characters that perhaps children will finally see their own family dramas on screen in a cartoon featuring superheroes.

The Incredibles is a very mature leap for Pixar Animation Studios. Bob and Helen yell at each other and the kids are angry. As characters they have dimensions that bugs and fish just cannot express. Besides this, the action-adventure part of the story is also well done with nods to James Bond and superhero comics. And, of course, the animation is outstanding and resets the bar. All the characters have enough facial characteristics to now allow further emotional depth to creep into the field of animation. A worthy endeavour!

The Village

An enjoyable horror with some good acting

In the back end of the Pennsylvania boondocks a small village lives sealed off from the outside world, the inhabitants having moved there years before inspired by utopian dreams. Their simple way of life hangs in an uneasy balance with the mysterious inhabitants of the nearby woods, whose presence looms like a shadow over everything the villagers have built. This balance is unsettled when the curiosity of one villager brings to an end a tense period of truce. "Those we do not speak of" begin making tentative forays back into the village, leaving some particularly chilling warnings that stir up the populace and force them to act.

Lock & Load: Various Artists

Whenever a compilation album is compiled, the trick usually is to include at least two popular songs, a maximum of four songs everybody would like, and make sure the popular songs included have been featured on at least fifteen other CDs – or so it seems. Lock & Load, thankfully, is different. The songs included are a virtual who's who of the mainstream rock charts in South Africa during the past year. The Darkness appears with 'I Believe in a Thing Called Love', while Jet keeps things pumping with 'Are you Gonna Be My Girl'. Other artists featured are: Ash, P.O.D., Tweak, Radiohead, Nickelback and Matchbox Twenty, to mention but a few. Lock & Load is an excellent compilation, doesn't feature a bad track, and would be perfect to play at your next LAN.

Van Halen: The Best Of Both Worlds

This album has all of their best songs from the David Lee Roth to the Sammy Hagar years. This truly is the way to top off many of their platinum albums' big songs and put them all on a two disk collection. There is another disk focusing on their hits, but this collection has it all. I would definitely recommend buying this disk set if you like Van Halen. If you don't, don't bother.



internet



Radio Free Zion

www.radiofreezion.com

How often does it happen that a community radio station surfaces around an online game? To modern memory, never, but it has with the online version of the Matrix game. Radio Free Zion is run entirely by volunteers and it also took upon itself to organise events, spread news, and give helpful hints to gamers. Even if you don't play the online Matrix game, the selection of music is pretty awesome. Not bad for a title still in beta...



The Federal Vampire & Zombie Agency

www.fvza.org/index.html

So if vampires or zombies attack us, what do you do? Luckily Uncle Sam is ahead of you and created the FVZA – all about dealing with those creatures of evil bound to drink your blood or eat your brains. The FVZA is full of helpful information, such as interactive adventures for training, case studies on zombie and vampire attacks, not to mention a load of other information you just need. Having being endorsed by the likes of Fark.com and BoredAtWork, we highly recommend this site. It might just save your life.



Nintendo Records

www.nintendorecords.com

Clocking Nintendo games has always been a passion for fans but a whole sub-culture, on "who can beat a game the best," exists out there. Nintendo Records is dedicated to that cause – and not only Nintendo games, but most titles that ran on a Nintendo platform. With cash bounties up for grabs, a lot of impressive records have surfaced, such as finishing Super Mario Bros in 5 minutes. It took us two weeks...



Betrayers

of kamigawa



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The Gathering



E-Mail: magic@icon.co.za
Website: www.geon.co.za

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Exciting Xbox titles coming to *AnimeWorX* this April: *Doom 3* Collector's Edition, *Far Cry Instincts*, *The Bard's Tale*, *Midnight Club 3: DUB Edition* and *Oddworld: Stranger's Wrath*.



Stockists of all leading console brands (PlayStation 2, Xbox, GameCube) and their accessories, *AnimeWorX* has a wide selection of new and classic titles. We also have an extensive collection of Anime, Manga, Soundtracks, Posters, Wallscrolls and Anime Pins. E's Otherwise, *Gantz* Volume 2 and *Full Metal Alchemist* Volume 2 will be arriving in April.



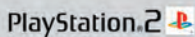
AnimeWorX, specialist retailers of collectables such as McFarlane and Anime related figurines. Expected arrivals in April: *The Art of Spawn: Series 27* and McFarlane's *Dragons*, along with the *Ikki Tosen* range.



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011 789-8215

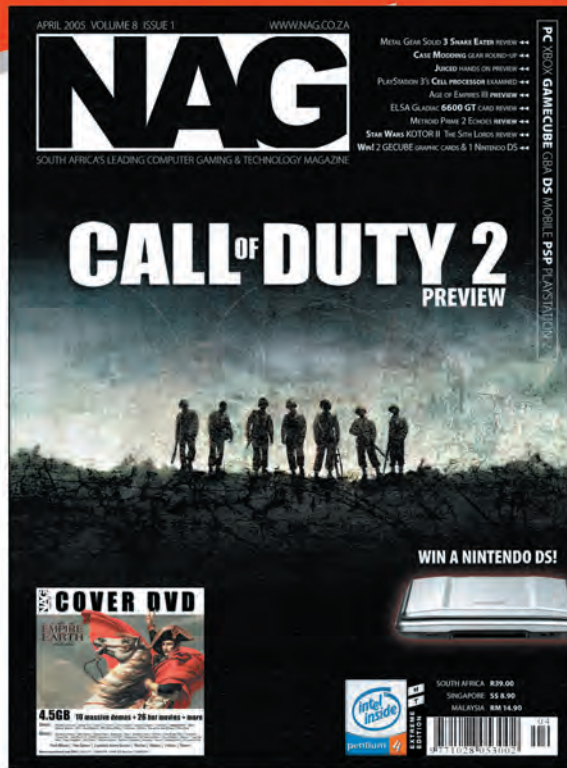
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BY
SHIVONNE LONDT

Chicks in Chain Mail Bikinis

I CAN UNDERSTAND THE ATTRACTION that guys have to them. But as a chick (although not one currently wearing a chain mail bikini) the attraction is somewhat lacking. They chafe when you walk, pinch when you sit down, and won't really stop a determined sword thrust – although I suppose the point is to distract said swordsman to the extent that he doesn't know where he is supposed to be jabbing that thing anyway. So I ask myself then: Why are so many female characters in games wearing chain mail bikinis, or the equivalent?

Please don't get me wrong here. I am not a militant feminist who says only ugly woman in frocks should be depicted on game covers. If I decide to play a female character in a game, I would at least like her to look good. I can't relate to a pixellated mess. On the flip side of the coin, I have so far resisted the urge to wallpaper my room in posters of muscular barbarians, a la Diablo. It must be a guy thing. Most of the men in games, aside from said barbarian, are pretty decently covered. The women, however, tend towards the skimpy. Maybe they just have higher body temperatures and sit around, after a hard session adventuring, waving their hands at their faces and complaining that the men haven't gotten around to fixing the air-conditioning yet.

It is, however, nice to have a strong female character to relate to in gaming. And there has

been a definite move away from having women as the default princess in need of rescuing from whatever rampaging evil was in fashion. Quake 3 had several babes (albeit in bikinis or cat suits) who were quite capable of towing the fragging line. One thing I cannot stand in a game is a useless female whose only function is to flap around, break her ankle, and scream for help.

I must admit, however, that there is a perverse satisfaction to see my bosomed heroine destroy her better clothed male counterparts. I suppose it appeals to something perverse in me to think that not only does my character look hot, but also takes on monsters with the best of the men.

So don't remove the babes in bikinis just yet. We all need that sense of wonder sometimes in this day and age. And be sure not to complain when my scantily-clad barbarian babe kicks your ass. **NAG**

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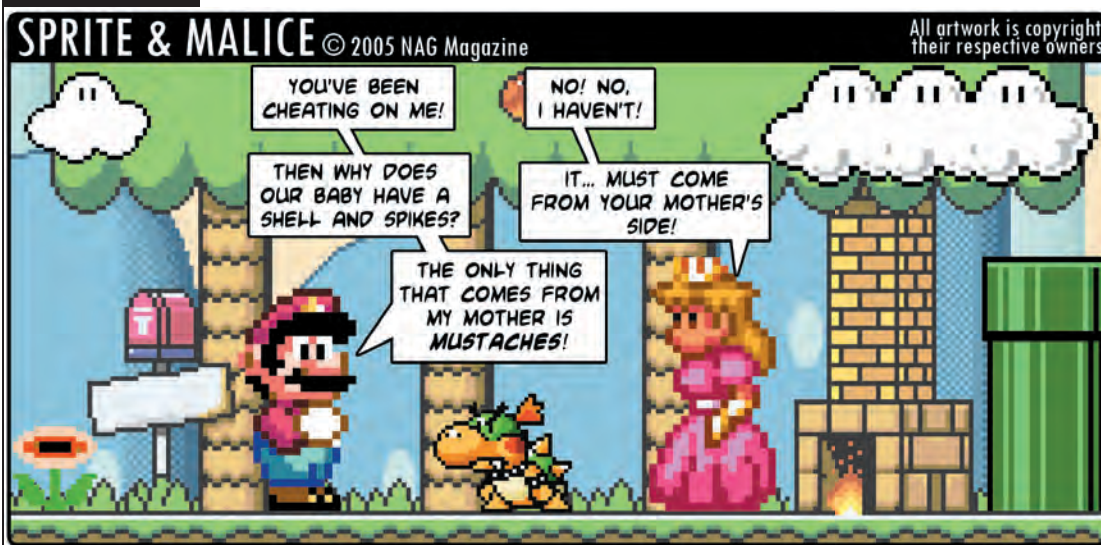
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Stand back... I don't know how big this thing is going to get.



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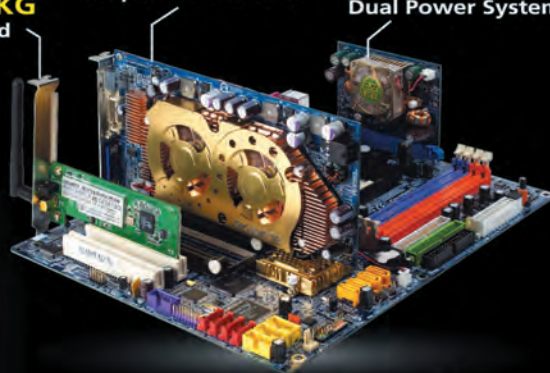
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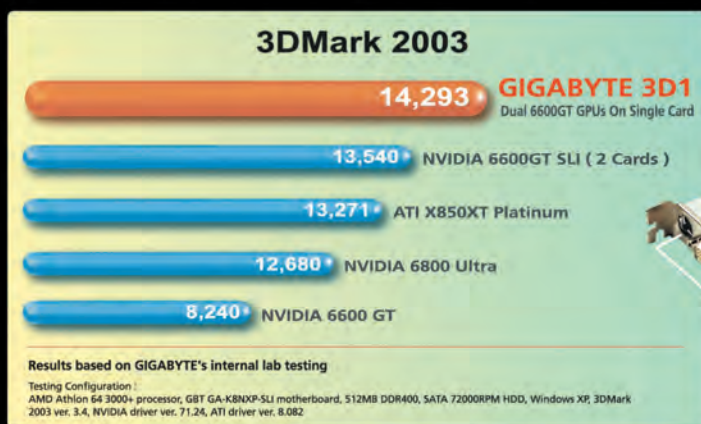
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