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- STAR WARS: REPUBLIC COMMANDO REVIEW <<
- SOCKET 939 AMD MOTHERBOARD ROUND-UP <<
- GOD OF WAR REVIEW <<
- ALIEN HOMINID PREVIEW <<
- WE SIT ON THE ITAL-RACER RACING SEAT <<
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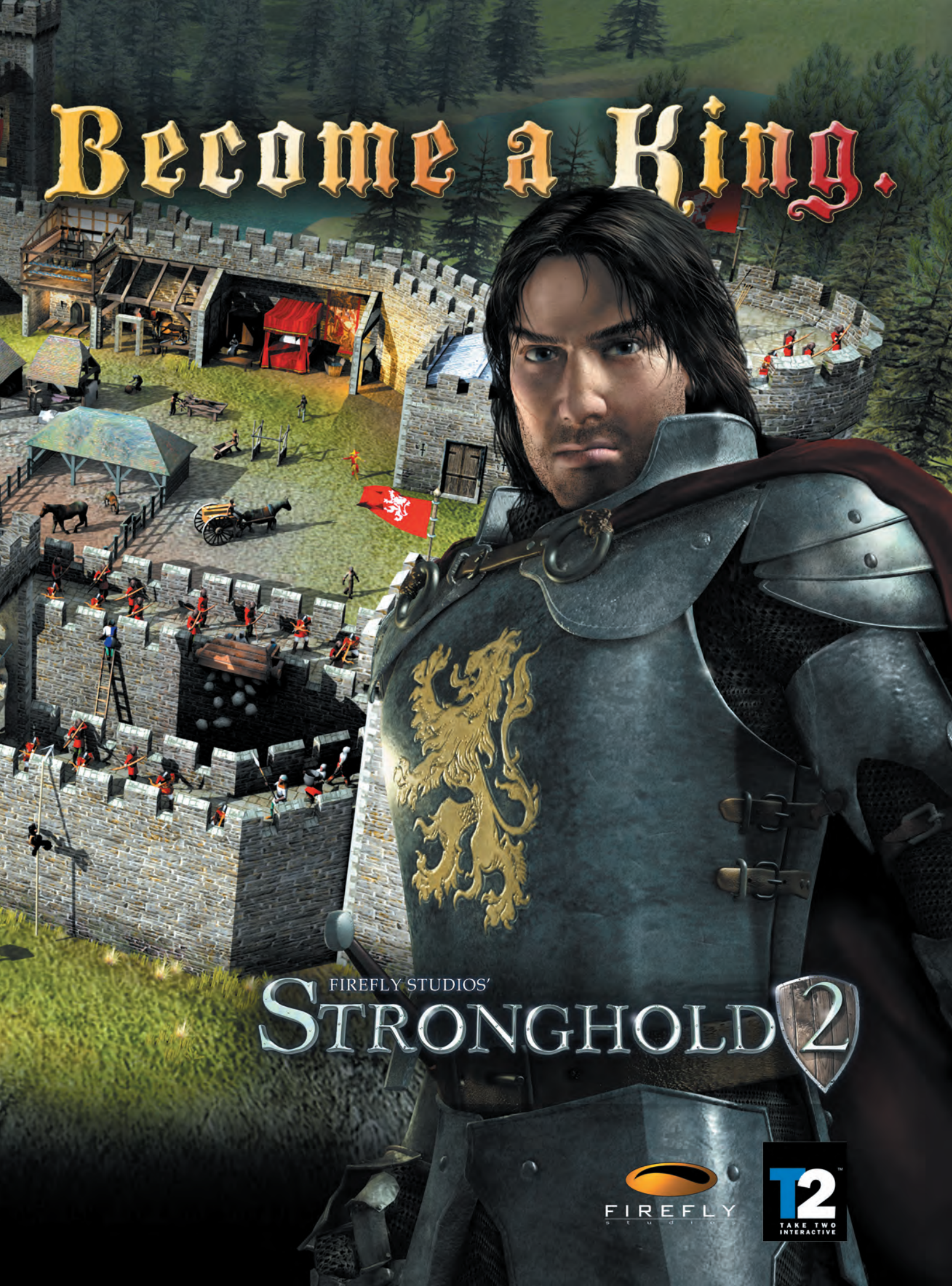
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- FLASH MOVIES** Heinz the Owl | Play | Prince of Persia | Sloppy Fight
- FULL GAMES** Alien Hominid | X-Com Ufo Defense Gold Edition | rRootage | Seiklus | Cirque de Zale
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- ADDONS** DOOM 3 Map Pack | Pirates! Theme
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ED'S NOTE

SHE'S BACK

I'M WEARING MY GRIN again. If you haven't heard by now, Eidos has announced a new adventure for Lara Croft entitled Tomb Raider: Legend. This makes it number seven by the way. The new character image is on display in the news section [from behind – get it, she is back...].

On one hand it's hard to get excited about this news after the last game – I was so disappointed after playing Angel of Darkness that I deleted my secret Lara Croft artwork folder and started wearing my Tomb Raider T-shirts to bed. I suppose this is a case where the developers became too consumed with the icon and forgot all about the game.

On the other hand it's hard not to be optimistic about this news because there's the chance that they've learnt all their lessons from their past failures. My concern at this stage is that although they've released images of Lara, nothing has been said about where she's going to go adventuring. Please let it be back to those amazing locations from the first two games and forget all the garbage with Paris and 'real world' locations. Who wants to climb a fire escape in the middle of town when you can be easing a jewel from the eye of an 80 foot statue in the lost city of Atlantis, having just come from a lion pit infested jungle tomb in Peru? Thankfully, Crystal Dynamics is developing the title with some of the original creators onboard.

But more importantly, I'm going to keep this text as short as possible so I can increase the size of the picture of the new Lara on this page. Yes, I know I'm pathetic, but remember to thank me before you leave.

Quick things

If you're one of the unlucky few experiencing problems with the DVD, most issues can be worked around or solved by checking the NAG website for suggestions and fixes. Please remember that, unless physically damaged, the DVD has been

properly tested and does work perfectly well. On that note, if you need to upgrade to DVD visit the NAG Website and click on the nasty yellow banner at the top of the page for a decent DVD drive at a very decent price.

E3

In other 'major' news – remember to start planning your acquisition strategy for the July issue of NAG. We're off to E3* again and this time we're taking a video camera and Miktar so you can see what all the fuss is about. The July issue will feature, besides a DVD stuffed full of movies from the show, our world famous E3 Supplement. Tada! This E3 supplement covers the show from all angles and has become such a critically important piece of literature in knowing everything there is to know about gaming, that NAG is sending three of their best journalists over to cover this spectacular event. Remember, they're unveiling three next generation consoles this year, making this E3 the hottest ticket ever. Except that is, for the mighty Microsoft who has decided to outdo the competition and buck the system by launching its new console on MTV a few days before E3. Too bad they'll be annoying all those gaming journalists [who've travelled across the planet] with their desperate marketing antics.

Michael James [Editor]

*E3 stands for Electronic Entertainment Expo. It is the industry's most lavish annual event [held in May at the Los Angeles Convention Centre] with Hollywood stars and thousands of journalists from around the world attending. E3 is where everything begins and ends in the gaming industry. Unfortunately, this is strictly an industry only event, so don't ask us to take you with...



POP GOES THE WEASEL

GATHER MY LOVELIES. IT is time for another interesting story about the cover artwork. You do realise that this whole information block started as a joke? Now it seems every cover has a story to tell – at least you get a little insight into the mechanics involved in publishing this rag and all I can do is hope that someone out there finds this stuff interesting. This month's cover was supposed to feature S.T.A.L.K.E.R. Shadow of Chernobyl, but we didn't get the required artwork - so no oversized worms and giant pumpkins for you lot. Lucky for us, there was a fallback which we initially had to decline because of the original plan for the cover, but ended up accepting after all. Phew.



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BYTES

SPORE COULD BE HUGE

Biological life simulation the next big thing

Will Wright, creator of games such as SimCity and The Sims, has undertaken another grandiose simulation project. This time it deals with the evolution of life itself. The game, if it is implemented as planned, will begin with players developing and evolving a single-celled creature into a self-aware being, and then progress to a strategic level, and finally to a stage wherein players direct civilisations of these beings.

The idea has been compared to a combination of Black & White, The Sims, SimCity and Civilization. To bring this concept to fruition will require "outside-the-box" thinking for the developers and numerous innovations are expected.

The highly motivated Wright said that developers with grand ideas should not give up on them if they seem unfeasible – technology will eventually always catch up with the concepts, facilitating their realisation.



LARA'S BACK

A New Look Miss Croft, courtesy of Crystal Dynamics

EIDOS AND CRYSTAL DYNAMICS finally unveiled what fans can expect from the next Lara Croft game, at least in terms of Miss Croft herself. Our favourite tomb raider returns in Tomb Raider: Legend. Eidos PR is full of words on how they went back to explore Lara's origins, looking at what drives her and such. The reality is that the franchise needs a major overhaul in terms of game mechanics and ideas. Lara might have been the first gaming superstar, but she's fallen behind her 3D platform peers in recent years, culminating in the horrible Angel of Darkness.

The team at Crystal Dynamics followed the same route, but they stuck to consumer reports, gamer feedback and playing all of the former titles - probably to see what went wrong. But can they save the franchise?

One boon for the new game is that Lara's original creator, Toby Gard, is back on the project after the so-so success of Galleon, a game with its own epic development saga. "Even before the first title launched, Lara Croft had to fight her way into the Tomb Raider franchise, since at the time most game characters were muscle-bound blokes," said Gard. "The Lara Croft character is resilient and totally unstoppable. In Tomb Raider: Legend, we explore these core personality traits and reveal the Lara Croft gamers have been waiting to see."

While Lara's breasts might arguably be her two best assets, at least in terms of what made her popular, the new Croft is a bit more streamlined. While cleavage does still play a role, the character itself has had a slight change in focus, giving her a more athletic look. This will be complimented with a skeletal structure to allow fluid motion, attentive face emotions and eye movements. We really hope that Prince of Persia also made it into Crystal Dynamics' research pile.

The game will head to the PC, PlayStation 2 and Xbox later this year. With Eidos being eyed for a takeover by SCI, a blockbuster title won't do their fortunes much harm, so a 2005 release is very likely. Expect more news after E3.



CONSOLE GAMES TO BECOME MORE EXPENSIVE

It seems publishers are planning to use the pretext of new emerging hardware to hike video game prices. Several publishers revealed plans to raise the average price point for games to be released on next generation consoles, even though development costs don't justify the increase.

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MARVEL NEMESIS: RISE OF THE IMPERFECTS

Electronic Arts and Marvel Comics are collaborating on a fighting game featuring classic Marvel characters, as well as new characters designed specifically for the game. The game is being developed for PlayStation 2, Xbox, GameCube and PSP by Nihilistic Software. May will also see the launch of Marvel's Nemesis: Rise of the Imperfects comic book miniseries, which will consist of six issues. The game is expected to be completed by year's end.



X³: REUNION

Enlight has announced that X2: The Return, the planned expansion pack for X2: The Threat, has been scrapped, and is being replaced by an entire sequel featuring a new game engine. The game's design has, to a considerable degree, been steered by input and feedback from the gaming community - fans of X2 who had constructive criticism to provide. X3: Reunion is expected some time after mid-year.



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PSP SELLS, BUT DOESN'T SELL OUT

Handheld sales don't blow away US

Sony, despite being at the top with console sales, has been having a tough month. Immersion won its court case against the electronics giant, based on a technological patent that allows peripherals to vibrate when something happens. Sony has been fined nearly \$100 million and ordered to stop selling the PlayStation 2 in the US until the problem has been fixed. But the firm has decided to appeal and refuses to stop retailing its console for the time being. In the US, Sony was supposed to debut the PlayStation 3 in late March, but this was cancelled at the eleventh hour and finally confirmed to Reuters. The reason, apparently, is that the company didn't want to add extra pressure on developers and it is not a sign of being behind in development.

March also saw Sony launch the PSP in the US. According to official sales statistics, more than 500 000 consoles have been sold in the first three days after the console went on sale. Reports from the floor have been mixed however. While specialist retailers sold out, the mainstream outlets didn't, with some consumers claiming they were expected to buy games along with the unit, sending the price up significantly.



SIMS GO DANCING

Yes, yet another expansion is on its way for The Sims 2

NIGHTLIFE WILL ADD A pleasure-seeking life goal, as well as dating mechanics and an attraction system. Sims will also now be able to leave their homes for a night of partying, with the expansion adding 125 party-themed objects to the game.



RESIDENT EVIL 5 IN THE WORKS

Can they top number 4 though?

Little information has been disclosed, but it has been officially announced that a new Resident Evil game is in development. No release dates or platforms have been announced, but Capcom has hinted at major developments in the story plot. Speculation would suggest that this one will be available on next generation consoles.

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NEXT UNREAL TOURNAMENT

Anyone for Unreal 3?

EPIC HAS STATED THAT a new Unreal Tournament is in the works, although to date not even an official name has been suggested. Furthermore, the company has categorically stated that it will not be ready this year. Most previous game modes will reappear in this version, as well as a new game type called "Conquest", which is expected to sport huge battlefields and which will feature tactical objectives and some degree of resource management. The next Unreal Tournament is expected to be available for PC and Xbox 2.



DESPERADOS 2: COOPER'S REVENGE

The sequel to Desperados: Wanted Dead or Alive offers a play dynamic consistent with its predecessor, but with some new possibilities thrown in. For instance, there are now two 3D view modes that can be switched between, depending on the situation. In development at Spellbound, this strategy title will be released for PC by Atari late this year.

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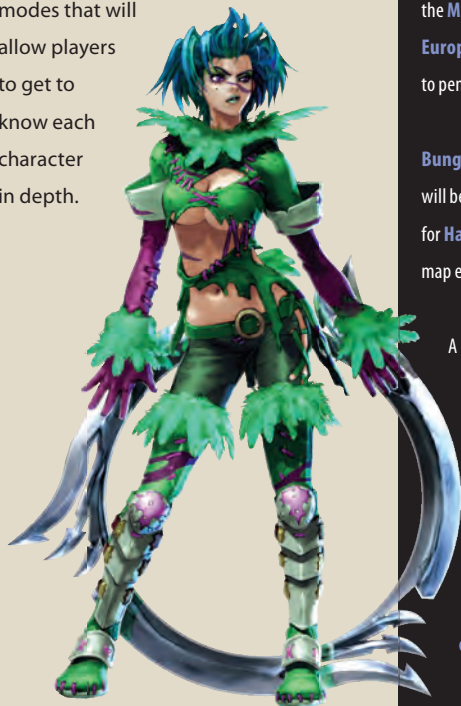
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GAMING, RACE COMPETITION'S



SOULCALIBUR III

Work on the next SoulCalibur title is about a third complete, and the developers expect to be releasing it on PlayStation 2 later this year. The new chapter will offer three new characters, as well as a character customisation mode that will allow players to modify their alter egos' appearance and weaponry. A number of play modes will be available to satisfy differing demands, including story modes that will allow players to get to know each character in depth.



Sony's ambitions for movies on the PSP received a boost with Amazon.com retailing the discs at 30% discount, making them cheaper than DVDs.

Apocalypse Now screenplay writer, John Milius, has joined the Medal of Honor: European Assault team to pen the game's story.

Bungie and Microsoft will be releasing new maps for Halo 2 in a multiplayer map expansion pack.

A gamer in China stabbed another man to death after the latter sold his Cyber Sword, a rare and hard-won item, in MMOG Legend of Mir 3.

TOUCHING IS GOOD

New Nintendo contest features severed hands

NINTENDO HAS DONE IT again. When it comes to contests, the company has rarely been rivalled, except perhaps by the late Acclaim. Nintendo even holds the record for the world's biggest bowl of spaghetti and meatballs. Now it wants to promote its Nintendo DS 'Touching is Good' campaign by sending severed mannequin hands to people. The point is to use those hands in pictures or home movies - the best of which will win \$1,000, a DS and four DS games.

The company also recently officially confirmed its upcoming online service, the only surprise being that the service, which launches later this year, will be free. The system is based on the same code that powers the handheld's local network playability, so users will find it familiar and consistent. The first Wi-Fi enabled games are expected to debut by the end of the year. Support for the online service, furthermore, will be a standard feature of the next Nintendo console, the Revolution. Revolution will be backwards compatible with the GameCube. Development of the next generation system is said to be on schedule.



WORLD OF WARCRAFT SETS RECORDS

Demand still high for WOW

Blizzard's massively popular multiplayer online game has topped 1.5 million subscribers, and has boasted over half a million simultaneous players. When the game's beta testing phase opened, 100 000 applications were received in the first hour. Given that the game is soon to be released in China, we can expect World of Warcraft to keep beating its own records.

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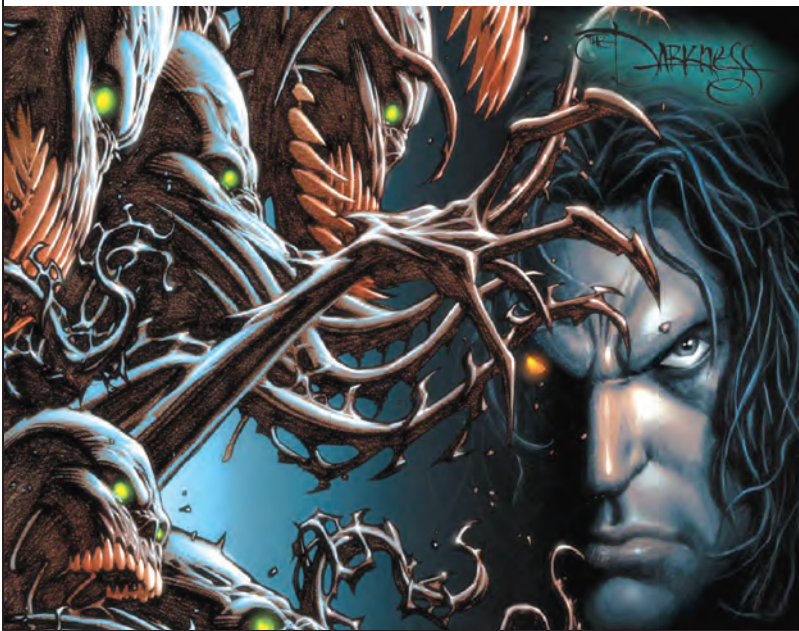
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PAC-MAN WORLD 3

This upcoming title from Namco is in commemoration and celebration of the quintessential Pac-Man's 25th birthday, and is to be released late this year on PC, PlayStation 2, GameCube, Xbox and PSP. A few new play options are being added, although the overall play dynamic will remain true to the original. Unbelievably, the developers have cooked up something of a "story-line" – come on, guys, get real!



THE DARKNESS


Riddick developers onto next project

Majesco is planning a title, for next generation consoles, based on the Top Cow comic, The Darkness. The story revolves around a mafia hit-man who becomes possessed by the powers of The Darkness. The game's format will be non-linear, first and third person action and will also encompass an online multiplayer match mode. It is being developed by Starbreeze, and is expected to be ready next year.



WEB SCORES


Silent Hunter III [PC]

NAG [100]	91	
GAMESPY.COM [5]	NR	
GAMESPOT.COM [10]	8.9	
IGN.COM [10]	8.8	

Brothers in Arms: Road To Hill 30 [PC]

NAG [100]	85	
GAMESPY.COM [5]	4.5	
GAMESPOT.COM [10]	9.0	
IGN.COM [10]	9.1	

Star Wars Republic Commando [PC]

NAG [100]	91	
GAMESPY.COM [5]	4.0	
GAMESPOT.COM [10]	8.7	
IGN.COM [10]	8.2	

The Sims 2 University [PC]

NAG [100]	82	
GAMESPY.COM [5]	4.5	
GAMESPOT.COM [10]	7.9	
IGN.COM [10]	8.5	

God of War [PS2]

NAG [100]	94	
GAMESPY.COM [5]	5.0	
GAMESPOT.COM [10]	9.3	
IGN.COM [10]	9.8	

Mercenaries [PS2]

NAG [100]	78	
GAMESPY.COM [5]	4.5	
GAMESPOT.COM [10]	8.8	
IGN.COM [10]	9.1	

NBA Street V3 [PS2]

NAG [100]	90	
GAMESPY.COM [5]	5.0	
GAMESPOT.COM [10]	9.1	
IGN.COM [10]	9.4	

Resident Evil 4 [GC]

NAG [100]	94	
GAMESPY.COM [5]	5.0	
GAMESPOT.COM [10]	9.6	
IGN.COM [10]	9.8	

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

The **Resident Evil** series hit a milestone when Resident Evil 4 pushed the series over the 26 million mark.

Handheld underdog **Gizmodo** has bolstered its chances by announcing that 89 games will be released for the game unit.

Nintendo has invaded New York with a new two-storey store in the Rockefeller Centre, called the **Nintendo World Store**.

Sean Connery will return as **James Bond** by lending his likeness, expressions and movements to EA for their next Bond title, **From Russia With Love**.

Codemasters sold 40% of itself to venture capital fund **Benchmark Capital Europe**.

GRAN TURISMO 4 SALES PERFORMANCE

GRAN TURISMO 4 FOR the PlayStation 2, from Polyphony Digital, has sold over a quarter of a million units in its opening week, placing it as the fourth fastest selling game ever, after GTA San Andreas, GTA Vice City and Halo 2. This figure almost equals the combined opening week sales for the first three games in the series. As a result, Metal Gear Solid 3 has slid down to the second position. On a side note: twelve titles from Nintendo DS' launch line-up made it into the UK Top 40 chart, which is fairly impressive for a brand new platform.



NEW RPG FROM SQUARE ENIX

A new role-playing title is on its way from Square Enix, titled Code Age Commanders. The game is set in a sci-fi setting where mankind must avoid a natural catastrophe that occurs every 10 000 years or so. The game is about half-complete and is expected to debut for PlayStation 2 in Japan some time this year.

TRIBES SUPPORT SEVERED

Gamers not happy

Vivendi Universal recently announced that the planned patch for Tribes: Vengeance has been cancelled, and all further support for the game is being discontinued. No reasons for this decision were given, but it can be accepted that poor sales (compared to other VU properties) are at the root of it.

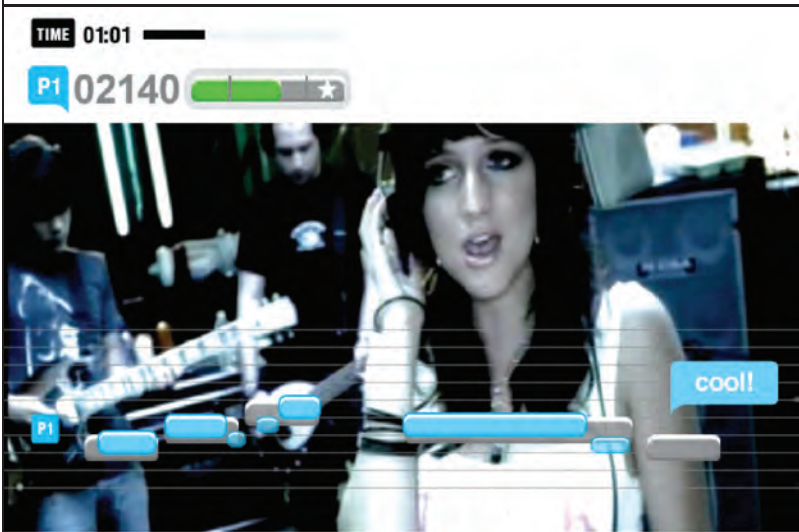




MADAGASCAR

Another movie to game license

This humorous action title for PlayStation 2, Xbox and GameCube is based on the upcoming animated feature film of the same title from DreamWorks. Players assume the roles of the four animal characters (a lion, zebra, giraffe and hippo) and harness and develop each of their unique skills in order to best enemies and overcome obstacles. The action takes place in the city of New York and the island of Madagascar.



P1 Pie - ces of me
P1 I am moo - dy

SINGSTAR POPWORLD

This is another karaoke-style sing-along game for the PlayStation 2. The package includes two microphones which connect via a USB adapter and, obnoxiously enough, the game is compatible with the EyeToy, should would-be pop stars desire to see themselves on TV. The track list comprises chart hits from the past three years.

16+
www.pegi.info

ZOO CLIMEX PC DVD-ROM blishing

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ON THE HORIZON

US RELEASE DATES



PC RELEASE DATES

Date	Title	Genre
May	Advent Rising	Action
May	Asheron's Call: Throne of Destiny	MMORPG
May	Asheron's Call 2: Legions	MMORPG
May	Cold Fear	Action
May	Cossacks II: Napoleonic Wars	Strategy
May	GTR FIA Racing	Racing
May	Gun Metal	Shooter
May	Knights of Honor	Strategy
May	Madagascar	Action
May	Pariah	FPS
May	Risk Your Life: Path of the Emperor	RPG
May	Star Wars Galaxies: Rage of the Wookiees	RPG
May	Supreme Ruler 2010	Strategy
May	The Roots	Action
May	Universal Combat: A World Apart	Action
June	Battlefield 2	Action
June	Call of Cthulhu: Dark Corners of the Earth	Adventure
June	Dragonshard	Strategy
June	Fantastic Four	Action
June	Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas	Action
June	Rainbow Six: Lockdown	Tactical
June	TrackMania Sunrise	Racing
July	Charlie and the Chocolate Factory	Puzzle
July	The Bard's Tale	RPG



XBOX RELEASE DATES

Date	Title	Genre
May	Advent Rising	Action
May	Alien Hominid	Shooter
May	Animaniacs: The Great Edgar Hunt	Action
May	Capcom Fighting Jam	Fighting
May	Darkwatch	Shooter
May	Destroy All Humans!	Action
May	Digimon World 4	Action
May	Forza Motorsport	Racing
May	Juiced	Racing
May	Madagascar	Action
May	MotoGP 3	Racing
May	Pariah	FPS
May	Resonance	Action
May	Sid Meier's Pirates!	Strategy
May	Star Wars: Episode III Revenge of the Sith	Action
June	Charlie and the Chocolate Factory	Puzzle
June	Conker: Live and Reloaded	Action
June	Fantastic Four	Action
June	Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas	Action
June	Rainbow Six: Lockdown	Tactical



GAMECUBE RELEASE DATES

Date	Title	Genre
May	Donkey Konga 2: Hit Song Parade	Puzzle
May	Animaniacs: The Great Edgar Hunt	Adventure
May	Geist	FPS
May	Madagascar	Action
May	Digimon World 4	Action
June	Rainbow Six: Lockdown	Tactical



GBA RELEASE DATES

Date	Title	Genre
May	Egg Monster Hero	Action
May	Mr. Driller 2	Action
May	Pac'n Roll	Action
May	Yu-Gi-Oh: Nightmare Troubadour	Card
May	Star Wars: Revenge of the Sith	Action
May	Fire Emblem: The Sacred Stones	Strategy
May	Madagascar	Action
May	Wario Ware Twisted!	Action
May	Londonian Gothics: Meikyuu no Lolita	Adventure
May	Ultimate Brain Games	Board
May	Ultimate Card Games	Card



PS2 RELEASE DATES

Date	Title	Genre
May	Animaniacs: The Great Edgar Hunt	Adventure
May	Arc the Lad: End of Darkness	RPG
May	Championship Manager 5	Sports
May	Cold Winter	FPS
May	Colin McRae Rally 2005	Racing
May	Digimon World 4	Action
May	Enthusia Professional Racing	Racing
May	Getting Up: Contents Under Pressure	Action
May	King of Fighters: Maximum Impact	Fighting
May	Madagascar	Action
May	Metal Slug 3D	Shooter
May	Midnight Club 3: DUB Edition	Racing
May	Pro Race Driver 2	Racing
May	SingStar Popworld	Music
May	Star Wars: Episode III Revenge of the Sith	Action
May	Vampire: Darkstalkers Collection	Fighting
June	Charlie and the Chocolate Factory	Puzzle
June	Fantastic Four	Action
June	Killer 7	Action
June	Rainbow Six: Lockdown	Tactical
June	Samurai Western	Action

Look & Listen
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CHARTS

PC Games

#	Title
1	Sims 2 University
2	Sims 2
3	Star Wars KOTOR 2 Sith Lords
4	Rugby 2005
5	Playboy: The Mansion
6	Cricket 2004
7	CSI 2 DM Excl
8	Star Wars Republic Commando
9	Need For Speed UG2
10	Star Wars KOTOR 1 Classics
11	Sims Deluxe
12	Sims Vacation

PlayStation 2

#	Title
1	Gran Turismo 4
2	Rugby 2005
3	Need For Speed UG2
4	Grand Theft Auto San Andreas
5	Playboy: The Mansion
6	Singstar 2 & mic
7	Singstar 1 no mic
8	Burnout 3 Takedown
9	Mortal Kombat Deception
10	Getaway 2 Black Monday
11	Jak 3
12	Tekken 4 Platinum
13	WWE Smackdown vs Raw
14	Socom 2 Platinum & headset
15	Brothers In Arms

DID YOU KNOW

The largest LAN party in the world was held over the Easter weekend in Norway. 3200 gamers attended The Gathering 2005, which took place in an Olympic ice skating arena.



MAY AT A GLANCE



18 May
Exhibition
**Into the Pixel Art
Exhibition**
www.intothepixel.com

19 May
Movie
**Star Wars Episode
III Revenge of the
Sith**
www.starwars.com

18-20 May
Event
**E3 Expo, Los
Angeles, USA**
www.e3expo.com

PSX NOT QUITE DEAD AFTER ALL

SONY HAS ANNOUNCED TWO PSP-compatible models of its PSX PlayStation 2-based media centre, which was recently reported to be pulled off the market. The new models differ only in that they are able to record video onto Memory Sticks in a format that the PSP can interpret, meaning that TV footage can be captured on the PSX for later enjoyment on the go.



CODED ARMS

Konami expects to release Coded Arms on PSP some time after mid-year. The game is a first-person shooter with a rather unusual back-story: a virtual reality world that was to be used as a training ground, gains self-awareness and becomes hostile. In order not to waste the resource, the player's character, essentially a hacker, is called in to clear out the cyber-infestation. The atmosphere of the game is said to be quite eerie, and players can expect a wide array of available weaponry, with each class of arm being effective against some opponents and not against others. Up to four players will be able to take advantage of the PSP's wireless networking capabilities by playing cooperatively or competitively.

MORE ODDWORLD ON THE WAY

Oddworld Inhabitants have already begun development of the next in their series of games. The next title, which is expected to be out late this year for Xbox or, possibly, Xbox 2, will feature somewhat more mature content, themes and humour.

JOHN WOO AND GAMING

John Woo's game development studio, Tiger Hill Games, is at work on ShadowClan, scheduled for release next year, which suggests that the platform may be next generation consoles. The game will blend ninja action with gang warfare and is set in New York. Four other games are in production at the aforementioned studio and these are but a few of the projects currently underway by renowned film directors, who have wholeheartedly embraced the video game as a medium to exercise their expertise.



MULTIPLAYER



NAKED IT PRE-ESWC TOURNAMENT

IT'S ALWAYS ENCOURAGING TO see local companies getting behind South African competitive gaming. National events such as rAge and the Carousel ESWC qualifier would not be anything close to what they are without the help of sponsorship. In addition to the big names, a JHB based PC component and games store called Naked IT has taken an interest in sponsoring local players. They are doing this in the form of holding their own tournaments and awarding sponsorships to the winners. In January, they held a competition for Counter-Strike: Source (won by Bad Habit Boyz) and WarCraft III (won by Terr4pin). Two months later, they decided to run a pre-qualifier for the Arena 77 ESWC event. The winning Counter-Strike team and WarCraft III player would both receive fully-paid entrance fees, accommodation and travel for the ESWC qualifier. The _Basilisk was on hand to chronicle the proceedings.

The venue for the tournament was Naked IT's store in Hillcrest Centre. To begin with, I have nothing but good things to say about the set-up. The 24 tournament machines (20 for Counter-Strike and four for WarCraft III) were arranged in a manner conducive to easy viewing for spectators, while also allowing the players enough room to be comfortable. The table surfaces were just the right height, shape and texture - something often overlooked at other tournaments. An added bonus was that the entire venue looked professional. I heard no complaints about the performance of the tournament machines and, during the time I was there, there was not a single server or machine crash. One of the WarCraft III PC's didn't take too well to a certain

CPL WORLD TOUR

AFTER BAD WEATHER SUSPENDED play at the CPL World Tour's first stop in Turkey (yes, bad weather thwarted a gaming event...), the official tournament finally got underway, with top Painkiller players from all over the world fighting it out for a total of \$50,000 in prize money.

Final standings:

- | | |
|-----------------------------|-------------------------------|
| 1. fnatic/Vo0 - \$15,000 | 4. Fatal1ty - \$5,000 |
| 2. SK zyz - \$10,000 | 5. fnatic/gellehsak - \$3,500 |
| 3. Play.it.Stermy - \$7,000 | |

The second stop of the World Tour will be held in Barcelona, Spain from 29 April to 1 May 2005. [www.cplworldtour.com]



WORLD E-SPORTS GAMES

NORWEGIANS OF AMERICA (NOA) have won the World E-Sports Games (WEG) final in Beijing, China. This ambitious Counter-Strike tournament spanned over two months and two countries, leaving NoA and British team Four Kings as the finalists in front of a stadium of fans. Relying on television broadcasting in a similar vein to the way StarCraft and WarCraft III are handled in Korea, the WEG aims to raise the level of popular interest in First Person Shooter games in the east. In the consolation finals, played on the same day, Mousesports of Germany won 2-0 over The Gamer Company from the USA (13-8 on de_train and 13-11 on de_inferno).

Final standings:

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| 1. Norwegians of America - \$50,000 | 3. Mousesports - \$10,000 |
| 2. Four Kings - \$20,000 | 4. The Gamer Company - \$7,000 |

[eng.worldesportsgames.com]





player's keyboard, but I can hardly fault the organisers for that. The Counter-Strike results were all displayed on a large plasma screen and there were chairs (particularly comfortable ones) available for use by the spectators. The staff impressed me as well. Although they were all relatively inexperienced, they were enthusiastic and attentive to the needs of the players. On an organisational level, they managed to get through a very large number of teams and players (considering the size of the venue) efficiently and timeously. And even before they knew who I was [*do you know who I am? Ed*], I was treated in a friendly and helpful manner.

In the absence of the Bad Habit Boyz (who were already sponsored by Naked IT) and Evolve and Identity Gaming (who have both signed contracts with other sponsors) it was to be the day of the lesser-known teams in the Counter-Strike competition. Ace, the only recognised top team participating, had recently parted ways with arguably its two best players - Dr4k and Prem. This gave other teams such as Voltz, Sinister and Finality a fighting chance. One criticism I had, was that the tournament was run on single elimination. I understand that time and space were limited, but such a tournament structure has the potential to produce random results and, considering Naked IT are putting their company brand behind the winners, they should try to keep things consistent. Having said that, however, the entrance fee was low and all the players received good value for their money.

WORLD CYBER GAMES EUROPEAN CHAMPIONSHIP

THE WORLD CYBER GAMES European Championship was held in March, featuring several competitive titles, including Unreal Tournament 2004, WarCraft III and Counter-Strike 1.6. Surprisingly Counter-Strike was won by an underdog team from Poland, Pentagram, who beat the favourites, Schroet Kommando Denmark, in the final. WarCraft III was unsurprisingly won by former champion 4K|Grubby from the Netherlands, and UT2004 by Italian newcomer, DevilMC. DevilMC had

Finality were probably the biggest challengers to Ace's chance of a victory and it would have been great to see them play the final against each other. This was not to be (another casualty of single elimination), as the two teams met in the semi-finals, with Ace coming out on top in two maps (13-6 on de_inferno and 13-6 on de_dust2). Meanwhile, on the other side of the bracket, Sinister and Voltz faced off in a nail biter. Voltz took the first map, de_dust2, quite comfortably (13-4), but Sinister fought back in the second, de_inferno, to win it in overtime (13-16). The decider was played on de_train, with Voltz pulling through with a 13-7 win. The final turned out to be rudimentary for Ace, who won it in straight maps - de_dust2 (13-6) and de_train (13-5) respectively.

The favourite in the WarCraft III competition was undoubtedly Chris "sWoop" Barter. But he was not the only big name in attendance. Cavalier and Zick, Swoop's Nightfall team mates, were also present, as well as 1000manLAN winner Assassin (who drove up from Durban), and the brothers Hate and Forced, who finished first and second at the WCG Johannesburg qualifier last year. Right from the early stages, Hate looked to be playing exceptionally well, disposing quickly of both Cavalier and Assassin. Swoop was also looking good, knocking out all of his opponents including Forced. As it seemed fate had intended, Hate and Swoop met in the final, and it was a match that made the tournament worth attending all on its own.

Hate (Night Elf) was all over Swoop (Human) in the first map. After staying ahead on hero experience and unit count, Hate finally drove the nail into the coffin by ambushing his opponent's army and killing his mountain king close enough to his base to launch an immediate attack. Swoop called "GG" (good game), signalling the end of the game. In the second map, Swoop timed an offensive on Hate's main base perfectly, destroying a building before Hate could return to defend himself. This unsettled the Night Elf player and Swoop took control from there, winning the game. In the final map, Swoop again attacked early, and with some brilliant micro-management, succeeded in killing all of Hate's wisps (basic worker units). However, outnumbered and staring in the face of almost certain death, Hate took back control in a stunning battle and forced Swoop onto the defensive. Swoop could not recover and was finally beaten.

If this is as a taste of what we can expect at the Carousel at the end of April, it might be one of the most exciting competitions yet.

to progress through both the first and third place WCG 2004 finishers (fnatic.Lauke and Chip_Mask[GSC] respectively) in order to take this championship, which makes his win even more impressive. All eyes will be on him at the next major international tournament, the Electronic Sports World Cup. **NAG**

[\[www.wcg-europe.org\]](http://www.wcg-europe.org)

INTERVIEW



A second chance is something most developers can only dream of, but it's a different story for this man. Richard Badger of Juice Games reveals what it's like to get another bite of the cherry. . .

RICHARD BADGER

JUICE GAMES

WE'VE ALL HAD A bit of bad luck every now and then; some more than others, admittedly, but we all stumble at some of life's hurdles. Unfortunately, Juice Games seems to have found every hurdle a little too high over the last few years. Several of its titles have suffered publishing problems and only now, with THQ agreeing to do the honours on Juiced, are things starting to turn around. But, as lead designer Richard Badger recounts Juice Games' run of disappointments, it becomes evident that the challenges of the last five years have helped make the company stronger.

"I started work on eRacer which, while admittedly not very successful, was technically a great game, that set the foundations. We then moved towards Xbox and we did Lamborghini, which unfortunately never made it out due to Rage going under and EA buying all the assets. That was a terrible time for us; we were devastated. Lamborghini was a great game. It looked as if it was going to receive good scores from the press and it would have been one of the first Live racing titles. Even when EA bought it, and we knew full well that we would never see any money, that's something that you can swallow. When you find out that it's never going to be released, full stop; well, that's a real kick in the teeth. We threw our hearts and souls into the game for 18 months. I suppose ultimately the whole experience has strengthened our resolve."

This has obviously been the case as Juice Games has simply refused to give up on Juiced. When publisher Acclaim went under last year it looked like the game, which was ready to go into shops, would never get released. Thanks to the intervention of THQ, the game will now hit the shelves, though the arrival of a new publisher has meant a few changes for Badger and his colleagues.

"The challenges are to build up a good relationship," he says. "When you go to a new publisher you have to deal with a whole new set of guys. There are a lot of differences. They have to get in with your working practices, and we have to make sure that we can meet their demands and understand what it is they want from us. These things are sorted out very quickly, though, and at the end of the

day we all want to make a good game. Working with THQ is really a godsend for us - it couldn't have worked out better."

'Godsend' is almost definitely the right word. Thanks to the move to THQ, Juice Games has received a rare second chance for its game. Juiced has already been released for review once and many publications have already commented on the game's strengths and weaknesses. It's rare that a developer gets an extra four months to amend its game after receiving feedback from the gaming press.

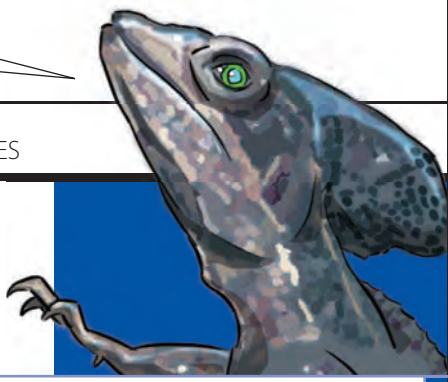
"It was an incredible opportunity," Badger admits. "But initially it was very tough to go back to the game. We thought our work on it was finished and then THQ picked

"We've actually been doing nothing but driving games for the past five years. It's a good job, I like them."

it up and told us to start working on it again. This was a huge mindset change for us, as we were already working on another title." The Juiced team also had to deal with the negative comments certain aspects of the game attracted in reviews and previews. Though, as with almost everything else to do with this title, it's all come good in the end.

"We have to admit that when we first received the reviews, spread them all out in front of us, and saw the negative feedback in some magazines, our initial reaction was that it was all a load of rubbish and they were wrong," says Badger. "After we'd been away for a while and came back to it, it was obvious that there were fundamental mistakes. There were AI problems and some of the cars were just impossible to drive; the handling was awful and our way around this problem was just to not drive these cars at all (a bit stupid when we look back on it now). It was all down to the pressure we were under by Acclaim to deliver on deadline. Thankfully, we've addressed all of these problems now and the whole thing flows much better. We're very pleased with it now. It'll be interesting to see what the press makes of it this time..." **NAG**

Know it? I ****ing wrote it!



DOMAIN OF THE_BASILISK

BY ANTON LINES

Not Quite Over the Hill

HAVE A FRIEND. LET'S call him Mr. J. He plays Unreal Tournament 2004 for the top competitive team in the country. What's unusual about Mr. J. is not that he practices more golf than UT2004 and still manages to stay among the best - it's the fact that he's 28. In ordinary life, he wouldn't be considered particularly old, but for a gamer he's virtually a senior citizen. Another acquaintance of mine, we'll call him Mr. S., was 34 when he represented South Africa in Counter-Strike. In the world of competitive gaming, a thirty-four year old might as well be considered dead or dying. Apart from exceptions, such as Mr. J. and Mr. S., we just don't see top competitive gamers in their late twenties or older. I'd like to know why.

Mr. J. has his own theory. He is a believer that being older carries no advantages. The older you get, the more your reactions are diminished, he says. But I often wonder about his claims. You see, if our dear Mr. J. has truly declined since his earlier gaming days, he must once have been fast enough to make Superman look like a snail. Is he justified in claiming that age is a serious setback? Having watched him play since the early Quake 3 days, it seems as if his aim has only improved in the last three or four years. He makes it look easy. His crosshair seems to wait in just the right place for the opponent to step into it. And the opponent always does.

I believe he's partially right. His reflexes have probably gotten slower, but, being as experienced as he is, he relies less on reflex shots. Instead, his weapon of choice is prediction. He is seldom surprised by his opponent. As long as his handling of the mouse is smooth and consistent, he will always hit his target. But why is he the exception and not the rule? Why aren't there many older players smacking the youth around? In the international scene, there are virtually no "older" players. The oldest I can think of is Johnathan Wendel (better known as Fatal1ty) who is 24. The oldest player in the Counter-Strike team, NoA, is their captain, Jorgen "Xeqtr" Johannesson, and he is 22. The majority of players, across all game types, are currently around 19 or 20 years of age.

I think the reason for this is historical. Gaming as a profession only started to take off this side of the millennium, and

that means anyone older than 22 would have had to think about getting a "real job" before being given the opportunity to play games for a living. Once someone becomes part of the working world, it is very difficult to find time to play at all, let alone challenging for positions on the podium. And I don't think many are likely to take the risk of quitting their jobs to become pro-gamers. The ones who will make a living from this are the school leavers. Anyone older will be a serious exception.

Having said this, of course, it follows that when the sport is more established, players will be able to make a living from it well into their thirties. As with other sports, the peak age will probably even out to mid-twenties, and players will start to think about retirement at 35. We might very well see Sander "Vo0" Kaasjaager (who just won his fifth straight international Painkiller tournament), still stunning opponents and audiences ten years from now. **NAG**

“The older you get, the more your reactions are diminished, Mr. J. says. But I often wonder about his claims. You see, if our dear Mr. J. has truly declined since his earlier gaming days, he must once have been fast enough to make Superman look like a snail.”



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Stupid VS Stupid

EACH NEWFANGLED ITERATION OF hardware, specifically gaming hardware, be it console or computer related, seems to create a reoccurring situation that I find most vexing. When two products (or more) exist in the same quasi market space, it doesn't take long before devout followers (zealots) of one product start assaulting those who follow the other product.

To make it simpler, let's take the PlayStation Portable (PSP), the Nintendo DS (DS) and their purblind followers. Both factions obstreperously demand that the product they support is simply better and that to even consider the other product is nothing short of heresy.

Let me be advertent about this and show you how controvert the whole 'Something Versus Something' debacle is. It's rather simple, really, despite what people attempt to make it. There is a simple little idea that I'll share here. You may want to sit down.

Here it is. For something to be good and for you to enjoy something, something else doesn't have to be bad. Wow. I mean, that's so cosmic and all. You don't need to be maven to understand this exacting system we call life and the rather amazing principle tentatively labelled 'preference'. So, let us take stock of what we've established so far. But this time I'll try to be layman about it.

To use the PSP and the DS in their example roles, people often believe that, since they understand the PSP as the superior system, the DS must be inferior (and vice versa, of course). Both are handheld gaming consoles and it is only natural to cull the unworthy, since they occupy the same market and both vie for your hard earned money. Similar situations arise with the PlayStation 2, GameCube, and Xbox.

But let us step back a minute here and just imagine for a little while, that perhaps each system (I'm talking about the PSP and DS here, stay with me) was developed with a different idea in mind. I can already hear some people's noodles being overcooked, trying to wrap their fragile little sensibilities around this vivid concept. Regardless, I will brave onwards

and even go so far as to state that perhaps, just perhaps, the PSP was made for certain people, and the DS for certain other people - and sometimes you even get a type of person (such as myself) who falls under both criteria!

So, you over there. Yes, you. You say you prefer the PSP over the DS because the PSP appeals to you with its super sexy super-sized screen and talented line-up of big-name developers? Congratulations, you amazing person you. Oh, I see someone raising their hand in the back there. Yes? You say you prefer the DS because you're interested in innovative game dynamics made possible with the dual-screens and touch-sensitive display, not to mention the equally impressive yet slightly different focused line-up of developers? Well done, you astonishing gaming simulacrum. Now, why can't you two with your different opinions based on personal preferences get along? Do I have to call your parents?

Getting off my digression, it is rather plain to see that often these 'X versus Y' debates which appropriate across forums, chat channels and anywhere else where gamers nest are rather inane and entirely unnecessary. Sharing information on a product so that someone may make more informed choices in their future purchases is amicable, but telling someone he is a sexually challenged imbecile because he doesn't agree with your obviously superior viewpoints, is nothing short of anserine behaviour.

So, let us all differentiate (that means "evolve so as to lead to a new species or develop in a way most suited to the environment") and put a stop to pointlessly penile comparisons that serve only to confuse. **NAG**

“ For something to be good and for you to enjoy something, something else doesn't have to be bad. Wow. I mean, that's so cosmic and all. You don't need to be maven to understand this exacting system we call life and the rather amazing principle tentatively labelled 'preference'.”



Switch Between One and Two Graphics Engines with Just Few Clicks on the Mouse

ASUS Motherboard, with AI Selector Utility and High-Speed Switch IC, Provides Convenient Selection of One or Two GPU Operation

The introduction of SLI (Scalable Link Interface) dual-PCI Express graphics card technology in 2004 brought significant improvement in graphics processing but also posed a big challenge for motherboard makers.

What is the most convenient way for users to switch between single and dual graphics card configurations?

While most motherboards still require users to physically select the two modes by unplugging and plugging selector cards, the ASUS A8N-SLI Premium motherboard incorporated AI (ASUS Intelligence) Selector, which adopted Pericom Semiconductor's PCI Express Switch IC (integrated circuit) instead of a selector card to provide convenient switching between SLI and non-SLI operation with just a few clicks on the mouse.

With the exclusive AI Selector, users of the A8N-SLI Premium, the enhanced version of the popular A8N-SLI Deluxe, no longer need to open the PC case and unplug and plug the selector card on the motherboard to change graphics card modes. The A8N-SLI Premium is the only motherboard

on the market equipped with programmable switch IC to eliminate the hassle of opening the PC case.

AI Selector allows users to select different graphics modes:

1. Single video card mode
2. Dual video card (SLI) mode
 - Two identical SLI-ready graphics cards running on SLI mode
 - Two graphics cards operating independently providing multiple display output

With AI Selector technology, users can easily switch between two PCI Express x8 SLI mode and one PCI Express x16 mode to optimize performance for specific applications and 3D games.

"The A8N-SLI Premium with AI Selector represents motherboard engineering at its best. It provides the most convenient platform for either one or two graphics engines," said Joe Hsieh, Chief Editor of TechTrend Magazine. "We are pleased to announce the availability of this innovative solution for those who demand the very best in video performance."

Besides convenient SLI activation and deactivation, the A8N-SLI Premium comes with another exclusive feature, EZ Plug. When the system is in SLI mode, the supply of power for the graphics adaptors is crucial. The A8N-SLI Premium incorporated the patented EZ Plug, which provides dedicated support for the high power demands of graphics cards.

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 maintain voltage integrity during transmission, guaranteeing dependable supply of power, quiet operations and graphics card compatibility.



Easily switch between single- and dual-GPU modes

"VoodooPC is known for using only the fastest and most reliable equipment on the market with our PCs. The ASUS A8N-SLI Premium is exactly what we look for in our systems, and it echoes very well with our image. It's stable, but most importantly it blows the doors off the competition in performance and features," said Rahul Sood, President and CTO of VoodooPC.

In Gaming Opinion is Gospel



O, REACTIONARIES, HOW I love thee. It appears our Metal Gear Solid 3 review caused a storm in a teacup last month because the reviewer deemed to give it a less than worthy score. For some reason, in all of his gaming wisdom and profound button-mashing experience, he has failed to see the brilliant, nay, godly creation that is Metal Gear Solid 3. And he gave it 69? How dare he? This is clearly a time to head to your keyboard and rebut! Forums need to be posted to! E-mails need to be sent! Hell, while you're at it phone the office and demand an explanation!

Same old, same old. I've always found this side of gaming a bit curious, because people are fine if you score an unknown game poorly and they hang on your every word, taking your (opinionated) reviews as some form of gospel. But tread over that precious line – call a pot a pot because, well, it looks like a pot to you, though that pot also happens to be the hottest thing in gaming since the last hottest thing – and the fans want blood.

Is this stupid or what? Firstly, there is the blatantly obvious: it's an opinion. As with any opinion, you can either act like the drunk at a bar and be loud about it arguing your point, or you can have your say and leave it at that. Or (and this is a bit of a leap for some) you just say nothing, because some opinions just aren't that important. Trust me; what someone wrote about your game in a magazine usually doesn't warrant an outcry. You're not any poorer for it, which leads to my second point.

If you didn't like the review, it's fair to assume you've played the game. Amazingly a lot of instigators never even saw the game, building their assumptions from screenshots, movies and what the press wrote. Any gamer worth his salt knows by now that until you actually play a game, don't ever regard a game on the same level as the marketing and preview PR tend to elevate it to. Now, if you have played the game (I'll be generous here), what's it to you what some guy wrote? Did he make the game tougher? Did he take the shine away? Or is he simply unable to see the brilliance you experienced? Hell, join the

club. I'll never understand why a racing title is good or bad, but enthusiasts light up or scowl in disgust when they play certain games. A relative and racing enthusiast called Burnout boring, repetitive and nonsense. I don't agree, but that's opinions for you.

And lastly, the unavoidable outcry. Now if you have come to the stage where you really disagree with the reviewer and you just need to get things off your chest, remember that there is a procedure here. Calling the reviewer names isn't going to help. If you ran after me in the street and called me names, I'd sooner punch you than listen to your opinion.

It's also good to remember that old nugget: it's an opinion. And as far as opinions go, everyone has one. So when you launch yours, just as you don't see the reviewer's side, don't expect him to see yours. That just won't happen. Engage in a civil manner - saying what you don't agree with and leaving it at that is the best way. In a year or less, no-one will care anyway.

I don't care right now, but it's a good way to fill 600 words. **NAG**

“Calling the reviewer names isn't going to help. If you ran after me in the street and called me names, I'd sooner punch you than listen to your opinion.”



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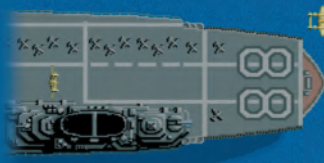


PlayStation®2

PSP™



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LETTER OF THE MOMENT

FROM Cassius Thyldinar

SUBJECT Evolution and electronics

I assure you that I have been taking my medication regularly once again, and that no more letters like the one I sent in May 2004 will be forthcoming. This time, I have something of gravity to bring to the table. My father often jokingly comments that my children will be born "with no legs and four hands", a reference to the time I spend on my PC. I have wondered for a long time if this jest should be taken seriously. It took millions of years for the first tree-dwelling apes to adapt to life on the ground, and hundreds of thousands more for our racial predecessors to develop the mental and physical traits necessary to use tools. The advent of fire saw the most significant epoch – the mastery of a natural fear, the forging of metal, and the cooking of meat, all of which had a dramatic effect on our evolution. Our species is always evolving, very slowly so, but it does all the same. Most people overlook this fact, and the general frame of mind is that Homo sapiens will always remain as it is, in an evolutionary status quo [I don't agree with this broad statement, we evolve a little every generation, Ed]. However, everything we do, every new experience and invention, has some impact, big or small, on our slow advance through time. Modern science has ushered countless wonders (and terrors) into the world. The most ambiguous (and subtle) of these, in my view, must be electronics, especially that of the microprocessor. In my opinion, the invention of the microprocessor might well have a great effect on our species as a whole, much more so than even the splitting of the atom. More and more people are using computers in their

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



IMPORTANT STUFF! PAY ATTENTION!

Land Mail: P.O. Box 237, Olivedale, 2158

Cyber mail: letters@nag.co.za

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

There is a new rule for those of you sending in any artwork for publication. Your submission must include the NAG logo on one of our magazine covers [download @ www.nag.co.za] built into the image somewhere – and by 'built in' we mean not pasted or stuck on somewhere – built in. You real artists will know what we're talking about – no logo / cover – no fame. NAG logo on CD.



occupations, in their recreation and even in the administration of their very lives. In comparison, nuclear science has a place only in the most educated of minds, such as that of Albert Einstein and Stephen Hawking. As a result, the notch carved, so to speak, into the genetic tablet by electronics is far deeper than that of particle physics. Could the one or more species that grow from our own genetic branch grow into this heritage we leave, for good or ill? Might we, indeed, evolve into a species with stunted legs and overdeveloped arms? Might the descendants of the underprivileged, who do not have access to computers, develop greater physical attributes than the descendants of the wealthy and, in a way, come out on top after all? I see a huge brain surrounded by fat with stuff plugged into it in the future. But that's just me. Have two free games to develop those arms of yours. **NAG Ed.**

FROM Michael

SUBJECT rAge beginners LAN

I was wondering if at rAge there could be a beginners LAN for people like me (someone who can't LAN to save his life). It would be good to get new people into the gaming industry. It doesn't have to be the whole weekend - just Saturday to Sunday.

Just book your spot, pay the money, pack your PC and show up at the event - this is how everyone starts. There's no big secret to this social activity. **NAG Ed.**

FROM Withheld

SUBJECT LAN games in my school

Upon reading one of your old magazines, I saw an interesting article about LAN gaming in schools. I asked my computer teacher if we could start a LAN club at school. He refused but said he would talk to the headmistress. However she is so stubborn she said I need a list of schools doing LAN clubs. Could you possibly send me a letter to say that starting a LAN club will not rot our brains as my headmistress fears and if

possible a list of schools in the Germiston or Johannesburg area.

Dear stubborn headmistress

Allay your fears and know that starting a LAN club will not rot any brains. The rotting happens a few months after starting the club and before you know it, everyone will be in the LAN club because playing computer games as an extramural activity is so much easier than pretty much anything else on offer. Soon after starting the club, also expect angry parents to start writing letters and making phone calls [expect a few to even show up in person] about their child's academic decline, and even though they're too busy with their own lives to notice little Timmy's unhealthy ten hour couch-based gaming marathons, they'll be sure to blame you when Timmy is rushed to hospital because he's too fat to breathe on his own. Good luck with the club and all and remember that NAG offers a special subscription rate to schools.

Regards,

Michael James

Editor

NAG Magazine

FROM Vertigo

SUBJECT Gaming essence

I'll get right to the point - I love games. It's as simple as that. But lately I've been noticing I haven't been really addicted to a game for more than a couple of days at most. Don't get me wrong, I was literally blown away by Half-life 2 and Far Cry, but I can't help thinking maybe games aren't as "fun" as they used to be. But before I have a 100, eye-squinting pale computer slugs at my door - swinging their mouse cords with sweaty palms in a threatening manner, and brandishing the blunt edges of their keyboards - let me explain. It was that feeling you couldn't really put down on paper - you know the one that makes you set your alarm clock early just so you can get those few extra hours into that game you were playing the previous night. The only possible explanation is maybe we are so swept up in the "need for speed" (as I like to call it) that we really don't appreciate those little things that made you count the minutes until the end of school. Or maybe we've just seen anything and everything there is to see and cynicism starts to fester. Believe me - I'm too young to be jaded and too old to be naive. Yet core speeds, over clocking and tweaking that very last setting for optimal performance may pale into insignificance as for the first time a vacant, goofy smile crosses your face when you know that game's got its hooks



1942 (1985)

into you - and there's no such thing as "maths tests..."

You're not helping the LAN club drive much with this letter.

NAG Ed.

FROM Michael

SUBJECT Job

I just wanted to know what it would take to become a reviewer at NAG. I'm currently being moaned at by my parents to get a job and the only thing that interests me is gaming. At this time all I've been doing is gaming since I left school (been gaming for 12 years). I was also wondering if there is some way I can become an apprentice at NAG if a full time job is out of the question, like make you guys coffee etc., learn the ropes and maybe get a few unwanted reviews to do. I'm not interested in studying journalism - I'm only interested in gaming. I'm pretty experienced with reviewing games during my chats with my friends (all we talk about is the latest gaming news and games we've played) and with today's spell check and thesaurus options it's not like I need to be a master journalist. As a NAG reader myself I'm not interested in Shakespeare style reviews, but more on why the game was bad or good. I also want to send you a review of a latest game for you to check if I have what it takes. So let me know if it's worth sending you one.

*I barely know where to start. Just a few tips. Firstly. If you're going to ask for a job try not to begin by telling me you're such a layabout that your parents are constantly complaining. Secondly. Telling me you're only interested in gaming tells me you're not interested in anything else - I'd worry that making coffee might be too much of a stretch for your abilities. Thirdly and most importantly. Don't insult the journalists who actually work for the magazine by saying all you'd need is Microsoft Word and some patchy game playing experience to work here. Tell me something; did your school have a LAN club? **NAG Ed.***

FROM fLisk2005

SUBJECT Late Reviews

I'm simply curious as to why the reviews are always later than their release dates in South Africa.

When reading NAG Magazine, I quite occasionally find a review of a game that was released two or maybe three months earlier. Reviews should be as early as possible to aid gamers on what to buy at the appropriate times. There are, of course, the exceptions like Half-Life or Doom which were reviewed before their release. Previews shed light on what the game is about and what we should expect. So therefore I would like to

know what takes you guys so long.

This is easy to explain. We usually only get sent review copies at the same time the game hits the retail channel. Other times we're sent gold review samples of the final game. Other times we're flown to exotic locations [okay Slough, London] to review the games in a hotel conference room while Activision people swarm around us with coffee, cookies and cash bribes. Other times the games get delivered to the office and sit on the wrong desk for a month until someone in management stumbles across them. We only review finished code, so this will have an impact on when we do the reviews. You should know better than to buy a game before reading our review of it. If we don't review a game be suspicious - this usually means the distributor or publishers know its rubbish and 'forget' to send us a review sample.

NAG Ed.

FROM David

SUBJECT Pentium and AMD?

I am writing to NAG for the first time and I am writing to you in response to the March 2005 issue of NAG. Somebody wrote about how Pentium is greatly superior to AMD and I believe that this is a stupid idea. The reason why people believe this is because hidden messages are implemented (sic) into their brains, therefore Pentium have achieved their goal. Sadly this subliminal propaganda has worked on you too Editor.

*There's nothing subliminal about it, Intel [Pentium] pays bigger bribes than AMD - end of story. Now implement this, 'buy Intel'. **NAG Ed.***

FROM yUDI

SUBJECT Speakers

I've been playing some Resident Evil 4 on my GameCube with 5.1 sound. The sound system consists of 2 front speakers each with a subwoofer and tweeters, a centre speaker and 2 satellite speakers. The sound quality is superb but I have one problem, the satellite speakers do not produce bass. This is obvious because they are so small, but wouldn't it be awesome if rear speakers had their own subwoofers? Usually the rear speakers do not need bass but imagine how it must sound and feel to hear a giant thundering behind you and not just hear treble. I don't know much about speakers and amplifiers but surely it's not that difficult to have subwoofers with the rear speakers? It would cost a bit more and need more power but that's about all. Or is there already something like this?

*You can always try sitting on the subwoofer when you play - this way you'll get as much vibration as is legal. **NAG Ed.***

SHORTS

Why don't you put that panda thing in your magazines anymore? He was the first thing I looked for whenever I read NAG.

Ok, I just want to know why all these WWII FPS games are based on the USA. I know most of the developers are American, but hell, they only joined the war for money and they only joined in after two years. So I think it will probably bring a breath of fresh air into the genre if they made a game about the English or the Germans. What do you think?

I was curious as to know why on your Cover CDs for the last two months you have provided Forceware 56.05 drivers. Or was this a mistake on your printers behalf and it was meant to be 66.05?

Actually I was wondering if you guys have any old magazines lying around. I'm looking for all the NAGs with the Developers Blueprint in it. You see I'm a developer, a rookie developer, and would like to know how to design major games and acquire the tools for it (sic). I'm willing to pay for these magazines (and CDs). I will come and collect them if you tell me where they (sic) live.

How do you fit in your reviews if too many games arrive/are sent? Who gets to decide? Do we, your readers, ever miss seeing a review because there was no space to include it?

How do I become cool? My name is Brett and I am scared of girls. This is a serious issue. I played LSL to learn tips but girls just scare me. I need help. Please include a pimp section in the magazine for me and the other nerds.

Hi guys this is Byron. I wrote a letter to you in the February 2005 edition. This is the best magazine in SA. I am interested in a career that would include designing, programming and testing computer games. Could you guys please tell what I will need to study and how to go about starting this career? Please could you send me addresses of any SA companies that produce computer games so that I could approach them for future employment?

PREVIEWS

WANTED



Burnout Revenge

PLATFORMS: PS2, Xbox

RELEASE DATE: 2005

More Burnout? Hell yeah! Burnout 3 was in a league of its own, because anyone could play it and it was a lot of fun. Now that Criterion has shown us what it is really capable of, there's no reason not to look forward to this sequel.



God of War

PLATFORMS: PS2

RELEASE DATE: Q2 2005

We've already played and finished the NTSC version, so it's official: God of War rocks. Now we're waiting for the local PAL release, so we can get our own copies and play it again. Don't say we didn't tell you about it.



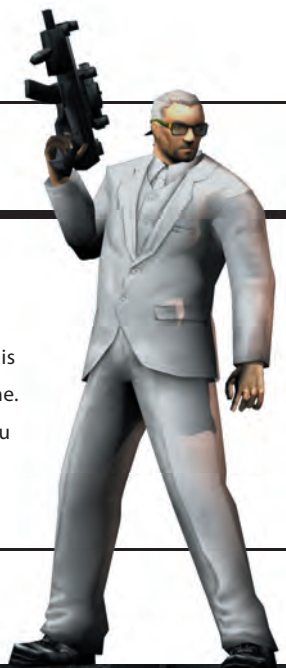
Spore

PLATFORMS: TBA

RELEASE DATE: TBA

Will Wright, since making EA buckets of money, is considered a game design god. We're not quite as sold yet, but his new game, Spore, does sound very interesting...

IT'S A HOT AND heavy month for previews! GDC had just come and gone and E3 is just around the corner, so you can expect some serious game announcements in the next few months. This month is a catalogue of sequels and ports, but the original games look insane. In Alien Hominid you are a gun-toting alien, Ride or Die expects you to race with rocket launchers and Total Overdose could be called El Mariachi the Game. Look it up.



DEAD TO RIGHTS 2



DEVELOPER Namco **PUBLISHER** EA **PLATFORMS** PC, PS2, Xbox **RELEASE DATE** Q3 2005

Namco's third-person shooter about a man and his dog is back for more – and even better this time. This time Jack Slate's K9 partner Shadow will be far more useful as the dog can be ordered to attack and disarm enemies. As a nice touch, Shadow is invulnerable, but his actions are tied directly to your stamina bar - the less you have the less he can do.

CIV MOBILE

DEVELOPER Com2Us **PUBLISHER** Atari **PLATFORMS** Mobile **RELEASE DATE** 2005

Civilisation, the globe-stretching, history spanning turn-based game, is an ideal candidate for the mobile platforms of today. Com2Us knows this, which is why it signed a three year deal with Atari. Take on the world as you start your empire from scratch, building cities, mines, roads and going to war or allying with your neighbours as you work towards the ultimate Civilisation. This is guaranteed to siphon away your free hours.



LUMINES

DEVELOPER Bandai **PUBLISHER** Ubisoft **PLATFORMS** PSP **RELEASE DATE** Q2 2005



Already available on the PSP in the US, Lumines is the latest creation from Tetsuya Miziguchi, who already has Rez and Space Channel 5 on his creation resume. Lumines might seem to follow the basic idea behind Tetris, but as you can expect from Miziguchi, it's a whole new game play experience transcending anything a puzzle title has done before. Ubisoft plans to launch the game along with the PSP in Europe.

EARTH 2160

DEVELOPER Reality Pump **PUBLISHER** Deep Silver **PLATFORMS** PC **RELEASE DATE** Q3 2005



The sequel of the exciting Earth 2150 will soon be upon us! While this rather unique RTS didn't manage to build up as many fans as other popular RTS' tend to do, it still maintained a loyal-enough following to warrant two expansions and a sequel. The new game will come with a picture-in-a-picture mode - this helps players monitor two parts of the map at the same time.

GEIST

DEVELOPER n-Space **PUBLISHER** Nintendo **PLATFORMS** GCN **RELEASE DATE** Q3 2005



Will we ever see n-Space's interesting shooter? Having been delayed several times, it appears that Geist, a shooter involving you as a spirit taking over your victims and using them, might finally be released. It looked interesting when it was first mentioned and it still looks good. With Geist, n-Space planned a more cerebral shooter, not just hinged on gunplay and a quick finger trigger. Expect it by the middle of this year.

24 THE GAME

DEVELOPER SCEA **PUBLISHER** SCEI **PLATFORMS** PS2 **RELEASE DATE** Q4 2005



In a strange move Sony is now developing the official game to the hit series 24. Boasting a lot of missions, the game will take place between Season 2 and 3, and as a usual piece of bait will reveal details about the show and answer some questions. While it's doubtful the game will force you to finish it in 24 game play hours, it is being kept true to the real thing with the original script writers and cast involved.

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



Scrabble 2005

To prove his credentials and sharpen his skills, our copy editor keeps playing Scrabble. The rest of us would too, but unlike the real game the PC version doesn't allow you to make words up. Honestly, what's the point then?



Ape Escape: On The Loose

The PSP is all the rage at the office right now and spanking someone's monkey over a wireless connection is the flavour of the day. Between ping pong, racing, boxing and a few others, the Editor still needs to win one. Maybe he's distracted by the hi-def screen...



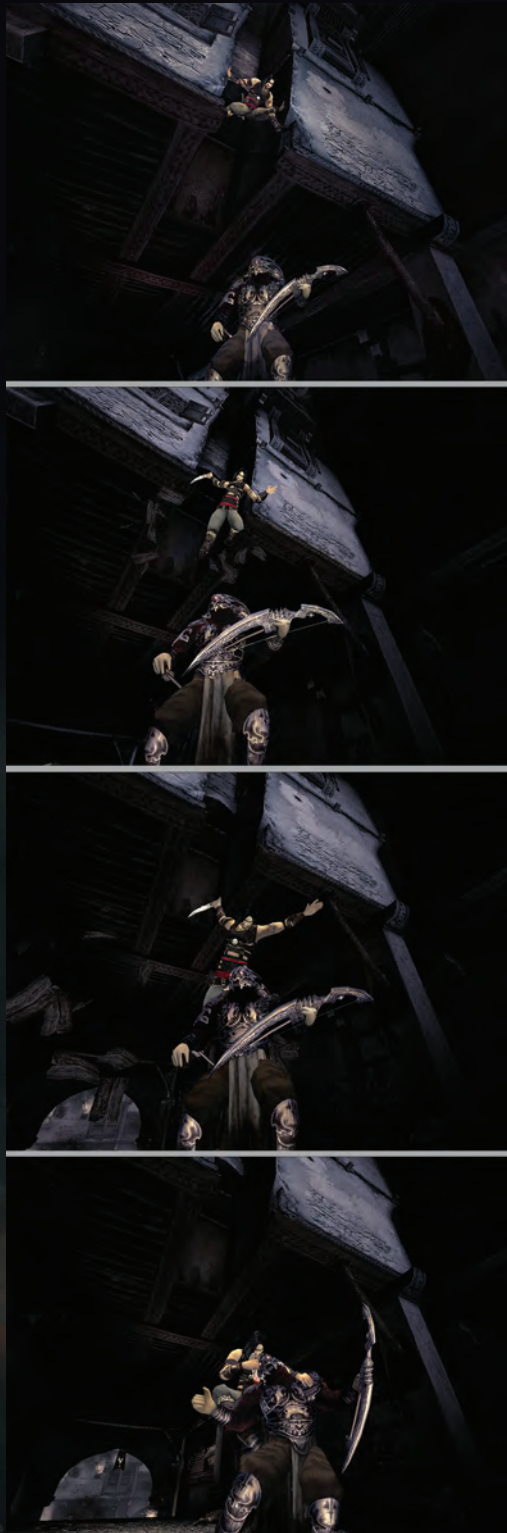
Act of War

The next C&C killer? Judging by this RTS' growing popularity, the demo did it no justice at all. It feels retro, like the first generation of Red Alert, combined with great graphics and REALLY BIG NUKE EXPLOSIONS. And an AI that will eat you for a snack.

THE MOST FAMOUS PRINCE IN GAMING RETURNS A THIRD TIME IN HIS NEW INCARNATION: THAT OF A WALL-BOUNDING, SWORD WIELDING FIEND WHO BROKE ALMOST ALL THE RULES OF MODERN PLATFORM GAMES. AND HE HAS BROUGHT ALONG A FRIEND, OR AT LEAST A DOPPELGANGER, TO SHARE IN THE FUN.

BURNING DOWN BABEL

PRINCE OF PERSIA 3



The prince's moves have been expanded to allow for new attacks, a more robust fighting system and a new range of skills and quick kill moves

IN THE 1926 OPERA *Turandot*, the Prince of Persia is sent to the executioner's block after failing to solve a series of puzzles. Whether Jordan Mechner, *Prince of Persia's* creator, got his inspiration from this tale can be left up to historians and fans to ponder, but it is the only historical context for the character. It's moot, though, because *Prince of Persia's* claim to fame lies in a very different area. The series has managed to bring several innovations to the gaming world. With the first title it was rotoscoping, a film-animation technique used in movies such as *Snow White and the Seven Dwarves*, the old *Superman* cartoons and even as recently as *Lilo & Stitch*. It involves using recording of live-action movement and turning that into animation. Mechner achieved this feat in *Prince of Persia* by studying hours of footage featuring his brother doing a variety of moves while dressed in white. This showed, because *Prince of Persia* boasted a level of animation smoothness only rivalled in its day by *Flashback*, another game to use Rotoscope technology.

Platform titles have always been comfortable with run-and-gun motivations, but POP changed this with a more acrobatic and intelligent approach. At face value, the original POP might have seemed bland and repetitive, but it was this very repeating of actions while obstacles, puzzles and opponents got tougher, that made it unique. The sequel, *The Shadow and The Flame*, went further on this route, but added to the combat and gave the game a graphical overhaul. But for some reason after that, Mechner took a break from the series, releasing another game, *The Last Express*, in 1997. *Prince of Persia* only returned again in 1999 with the dismal *Prince of Persia 3D*, a move to cash in on the growing popularity of 3D platform games. The charge was being lead by *Tomb Raider*, an obvious protégé of *Prince of Persia*, but just as with *Alone in the Dark* compared to *Resident Evil* age wasn't necessarily a virtue and the series floundered trying to bridge the 3D gap. It was, in fact, so bad that *Prince of Persia* itself seemed doomed towards becoming gaming history as a series.

A New Beginning

A NEW PRINCE OF PERSIA might have been inevitable, but it needed a serious change in direction if it wanted to compete against an ever-growing 3D platform market. "In 2001 Ubisoft approached me with the idea of bringing back *Prince of Persia* and doing a new game for consoles," Mechner recalled. "I went up to Montreal to meet Yannick Mallat who was the producer of the project and the small team that he'd assembled." What it really took was animation. In a strange sense of legacy the new breed of *Prince of Persia* games would find their grounding in the same principle that the original cemented: groundbreaking animation. "We invited him to the Montreal studio to see the initial animation tests the team had made and to hear their ideas," said Patrice Désilets, *Sands of Time's* Creative Director. "When Jordan saw what we had done, he was blown away. That was the moment I really knew we had something incredible on our hands." Reportedly it looked like a stripped *Tony Hawk* game without the skateboard - a character that could traverse walls, make death-defying leaps and

achieve acrobatics never seen before in a 3D title. This tipped the scale and started the work on a game that would revive the series and change 3D platformer games as we knew them. Prince of Persia: Sands of Time met with a lot of critical acclaim when it was released, since it simply shattered the limits of the genre. Even Mechner quipped that he had not seen anything like it done before, which is one of the reasons why he got involved in the project. Prince of Persia 3D was Tomb Raider with baggy pants and a turban. Sands of Time was a new way of thinking by marrying the original game's concept of creative platform navigation with 3D, introducing a whole new style of game play.

Things get darker

SANDS OF TIME'S FOLLY, though, was that it simply wasn't tough enough. Not in terms of a game – it was definitely challenging – but in its mood and feel. While your character changed throughout the levels, there wasn't a lot of grit or real attitude, which turned traditional gamers off the title. Sands of Time wasn't a sales disaster, but it doesn't quite count as a success story either. Warrior Within, the second in the new legacy, sought to remedy this with a far more aggressive approach.

Firstly, the prince himself sported longer hair and a far tougher demeanour. The experience with the Dagger and unleashing time onto a huge palace hasn't been kind to him, since a lot of monsters and other opponents are after him for changing the course of history. This was complimented with darker levels, more elaborate design and a revamped acrobatic and fighting system. Apart from dual-wielding weapons, the prince could now connect combat moves and acrobatics, often resulting in spectacular entrances and quick kills. "When defining the vision of Prince of Persia: Warrior Within, we initially started with a set of strong emotions we wanted to provide. Essentially, we wanted this game to feel like a thriller - to generate a sense of fear and oppression. In this game, the Prince has to fight for his life", said Bertrand Helias, Warrior Within's lead producer.

The gamble worked and the second game became a big hit, though as with the original Prince of Persia 2, this sequel was more an extension of the first game than a new bag of innovations. Ubisoft Montreal established what was wrong with the first game and polished out the kinks, added new moves to the acrobatics and combat and went for a mature and violent atmosphere.

Three times a Prince

LOOKING BACK, A THIRD Prince of Persia game was inevitable. Warrior Within was a welcome announcement, since Sands of Time's poor retail performance left the future of what was an obviously excellent game in doubt. A second title meant that the series was being taken seriously and brought a sigh of relief from fans. Warrior Within's financial success brought an even bigger sigh and a third game was bound to happen, unless the developer had run out of ideas. Thankfully that hasn't happened, though details about the next title are still very sketchy.

Taking off from where Warrior Within ended, Prince of Persia 3 kicks off as the prince and his romantic interest Kaileena enter the city of

PRINCE OF PERSIA
3 TAKES PLACE
IN THE LIVING,
BREATHING CITY
OF BABYLON, A
CHANGE FROM
THE CATACOMBS
AND PALACE
THEMES OF THE
PREVIOUS GAMES

Babylon, expecting a warm reception. But the ancient metropolis is caught in war and the people don't even remember their old prince. This is because when he unleashed the sands of time, he changed history and the way things are forever. The third game sees the return of his father, the King. This character seeks to control Babylon and isn't worried about being cruel and unkind. In turn the king is out to kill the Dark Prince and regain his ruling power. He ends up going after the original prince as well, confusing him with the evil incarnation. A time-created paradox is a bit hard to explain, after all.

This heralds in a few new ideas for the game series. Firstly there is the matter of Babylon. The previous games all restricted their environment to large palaces and catacombs, but in Prince of Persia 3 players will be able to experience a city. This created a new design challenge for the developers. "Designing a city is a new exercise for us. Previous games mostly took places in huge rooms in palaces. For Prince of Persia 3 we wanted to give the player the feeling that he is running through a real living ancient city, with a lot of contrast between rich, enlightened places and dark, gruesome poor streets." It hasn't been made clear if the game will be subject to the same lapses in time periods that we saw in Warrior Within, but the dagger remains a pivotal element in the story; so does the pervasive theme of an ever-changing prince. In Prince of Persia 3, skills and abilities will be added and evolve as the prince progresses through the levels. Formerly movement and actions were open to you from the start and the levels changed to allow you to do more elaborate things. Now some skills will have to be unlocked. No details have been given on the new skills either, but a new combat system will be introduced, expanding from the current series' free-form fighting. Now you can dispatch enemy monsters with different combinations,

including effective (and time saving) critical kills that take out almost all opponents in one blow.

Perhaps the most interesting aspect is that Prince of Persia 3 expands its playable character quota. Apart from the Prince himself, the Dark Prince will also be a playable character, apparently boasting a whole different way of playing. As screenshots indicate, "dark" doesn't only indicate this new prince's mood and motives, but might include some unique powers as well. The original protagonist always had his handy dagger to control time. Since the Dark Prince might not have access to this, his approach on the world will be different, but should be as engrossing as playing with the Prince of Persia.

A lot remains unsaid and Ubisoft Montreal will have to release a lot more information before the difference between 2 and 3 can really be celebrated. The game engine will obviously feature more graphical flair. Ubisoft Montreal boasts that we'll see effects not yet done on consoles. New enemies will also appear, one of them will be called the 'pack'. Says Bertrand Helias, "These type of enemies will attack you in groups and will be able to chase you wherever you run. Designing their AI is very challenging, but eventually, I think they will be some of the most memorable enemies that fans of action games will ever have met." And yes, those huge boss fights will return as well.

The prospect of a new Prince of Persia based in a new location, along with a new playable character, sounds exciting enough. To date we have a lot of faith in the series and the new wave of games from Ubisoft hasn't left us disappointed. So it's only fair to extend the courtesy to the latest announcement. In the end, the prince is returning and he's bringing a few new tricks, areas and characters to the party. A far cry from the poor sod beheaded for failing a few puzzles. **NAG**



The Dark Prince (inlay) will feature some of his own powers. As these screens show, cloaking will be one of them, not to mention chains for weapons, plus the original prince's acrobatic abilities.

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Alien Hominid raced out of the humble beginnings of a Flash game to the big time of a console hit in the US on the PlayStation 2, Xbox and GameCube. Now it's cracking its knuckles and heading towards PAL territories, including South Africa. We chat with John Baez, the game's producer, about AH, games in Flash and the future. . .

The game has already been released in the States to a fanfare of media acclaim. What would you essentially put this down to? Also can you give the readers a brief into the background of the game – for it started life as a Flash/basic Web game?

In an era of publisher funded hyper-realistic 3D games, we self funded our own 2D console game. In addition, we are launching a new franchise. It's not a sequel or a licensed property and we don't have half naked women in our game. All of this adds up to tremendous risk, but we really feel that gamers are dying for diversity and we are hopefully providing it for them.

Yet, with all this risk we knew that ultimately we would be successful because of our grass roots fan base. The prototype was originally launched on Newgrounds.com where it developed quite a following. That is where I first saw it, and I thought, "What a brilliant game! This must be made into a console game." As fate would have it, Dan Paladin the artist, came to work at the development studio where I was working. A few months later our boss shut down the company and Dan, Tom, Brandon and myself started The Behemoth to bring Alien Hominid to the consoles.

Since then, the prototype has been played over nine million times on Newgrounds, console sales are going well and we have become the first company to successfully launch a completely new Web franchise on all three consoles. And we have launched a very cool range of urban vinyl

figurines and clothes.

The first impression, when you see the game visually, is that it is very different – with hand drawn graphics. With gamers calling for state of the art graphics, why do you think players have taken to the style of the presentation?

Well, gamers cannot live by hyper realistic 3D games alone. If you go to an art museum you can experience a tremendous range of rendering styles and unique emotions which each artist is trying to convey to the viewer. Compare that to the current state of video games and you can see how narrow our industry is. At The Behemoth, we are building a new company that focuses on connecting the artist with the player. Most other games are about connecting technology with the player. Bigger, better, faster, more realistic graphics. But to what end? If all games start looking the same it is going to get pretty boring pretty quick.

Please tell us about the story behind the game and the kind of progression the game offers in both variety and tasks?

In Alien Hominid, you play an alien that gets shot down by the FBI and your spaceship is stolen. Your job is to get your spaceship back and get off earth before your enemies take you hostage. In the game there is lots of run and gun, some puzzle games and some platformer elements. There are also segments of top down space shooters.



GO!GO!

ALIEN HOMINID

Do you believe the simple things are sometimes the best and do you also believe that high value production and huge development teams sometimes overlook what a vast majority of gamers want – pure and simple addictive games?

We're not sure that games have to be simple to be addictive, but for our studio what we have created was certainly an effort to peel back the visual presentation of the game so that we could get to the core of game play. The problem with huge development teams and the incessant march towards hyper realism is that often the development of the game becomes an exercise in design by committee or even worse, design by attrition. We view game design as something more akin to making a sculpture. If the project is big enough, the artist will have a crew to help him, but ultimately it is the sculptor who is responsible for communicating his emotions to the viewer through his chosen medium.





What are some of the rewards on offer and what gives the game the appeal to make you want to keep playing? Perhaps also a small nugget of info on the power-ups?

For most players the reward is the visuals. Big, beautiful explosions seem to just get bigger as you progress through the game. Each level has its own unique bosses and the need to see what is next really drives players forward. I mean come on, every player who picks up the controller really wants to know what can top the Butterscotch Pudding Boss...and we deliver! As for power-ups, each one has a different ability (i.e. acid, ice, laser, etc.) and each one gives the player a one hit point shield, which comes in mighty handy sometimes.

Sixteen levels complete with bosses. How visually different are the levels? Tell us about your favourite level?

Well, the game is such a meaty, visual feast that it is hard to narrow it down to just one level. But I have to say the Russian levels are my favourite because of their bold graphic style. Back in the days the Russians always made these tremendous artistic statements in everything from their graphic design to their architecture and Dan has done a remarkable job capturing this flavour and creating something totally new.

What about 2005 for Behemoth?

Hopefully we will be able to reach out to our fans in novel ways as we begin to capitalise on our modest success. There is nothing more inspirational for an indie studio than to get handwritten fan mail, so we are really trying hard to make sure our fans will be proud of our next game. **NAG**

Check out the Alien Hominid flash game on our Cover DVD





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VITAL INFO

■ Platforms

PC

■ Developer

Funcom

■ Publisher

Funcom

■ Supplier

TBA

■ Genre

Adventure

■ Release Date

Q4 2005

April Ryan returns in the sequel, along with two new playable characters



THE LONGEST JOURNEY

Released in 1999, *The Longest Journey* was met with a lot of acclaim from both fans and critics alike. Taking place in 2209, you were April Ryan, a struggling student living in Newport and plagued by nightmares. The problem was that the things in her dreams were also appearing in the real world and soon she found out that she was caught between two worlds. With fifteen chapters spanning four CDs, *The Longest Journey* was huge for its time and still large by today's standards.

DREAMFALL: THE LONGEST JOURNEY

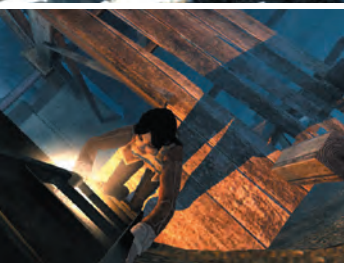
FUNCOM RETURNS TO THE adventure realm after the incredible success of *The Longest Journey* a few years ago. Despite having become a niche and a generally rare genre, adventure games seem to be picking up in pace again and the next *Longest Journey* game, *Dreamfall*, plans to capitalise on this.

As one can deduce, the new title will extend the *Longest Journey* universe, though this time around Funcom has opted for a more action-based approach. But the developer is also quick to point out that action isn't the operative word here and that gamers shouldn't expect things such as timed jumps or gunplay galore. Instead we're expecting something akin to *Broken Sword 3*, where certain areas required quick thinking or pressing the right keys, all while still keeping it authentically adventure.

The story is still being held under wraps, but you'll be able to play as one of three characters set in three different versions of the same world: a fantasy one, a futuristic one and a secret one, not yet discussed. The

first character is Zoe Castillo, a 20-year old woman from Casablanca who gets pulled into a worldwide conspiracy after her friend disappears. The other two characters are Kian and *Longest Journey* heroin April Ryan.

Dreamfall promises that it will bring a lot of new ideas and locations to the genre, with innovation apparently being a key word. Considering how impressive *The Longest Journey* was, the sequel is already eagerly awaited. Apart from the three directions the story will take, choices will also have consequences which means you'll have to consider your actions carefully. Whether this new direction, along with the greater emphasis on action, will appeal to fans of the series and genre remains to be seen. **NAG**



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VITAL INFO

■ Platforms

PC PS2 XBOX

■ Developer

Codemasters

■ Publisher

Codemasters

■ Supplier

Megarom [011] 234 2680

■ Genre

Racing

■ Release Date

Q4 2005



TOCA RACE DRIVER 3

YOU CAN'T REALLY COMPLAIN much about Codemasters' past racing titles. While not all of them have managed to become legendary, this development and publishing outfit has been doing justice to the TOCA name, featuring high-speed cars on recognised circuits. But with TOCA 3, things are lifted a notch since it's now all about racing and not just touring cars.

TOCA 3 breaks down its action in disciplines, 35 of them. Players will be able to race cars and tracks from British GT, Muscle Cars, V8 Super cars, Monster Trucks, Formula 3 and even a stint as a Williams BMW F1 driver. All this can be started at the root, though, since kart racing will also be available. Each discipline will have a career mode and a player can sequentially progress from one to the other via the Full Pro Mode - aimed at the enthusiast player. Alternatively you can play each on its own or experience everything available to you by heading to the World Tour mode. This section will feature cinematic clips to drive the story, but ultimately aims to be a fast fix for racing. In a nutshell, TOCA 3 hopes to appeal to all walks of racing fan lives, featuring modes for the less technical and racing stoic, to the speed freaks and those who are picky about accuracy and handling.

Of course it wouldn't be fair to simply put a few new cars and tracks in and call it a day. Codemasters have improved the existing damage model with the new generation of

their own Terminal Damage Engine. More attention to detail has also been placed on the physics engine and realistic tyre wear is now a feature of the game.

One concern might be whether Codemasters has bitten off more than it can chew. Covering various types of racing is already a daunting development task, but 35 of them raise the ante significantly. It also remains to be seen if spreading focus this broadly will in the end keep racing fans happy - a reputedly tough group to please.

If TOCA 3 manages to do what it sets out to, though, it will be an impressive title and sure to carry on the TOCA game legacy. **NAG**



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VITAL INFO

- **Platforms**
TBA
- **Developer**
SCI
- **Publisher**
SCI
- **Supplier**
TBA
- **Genre**
Action
- **Release Date**
2005



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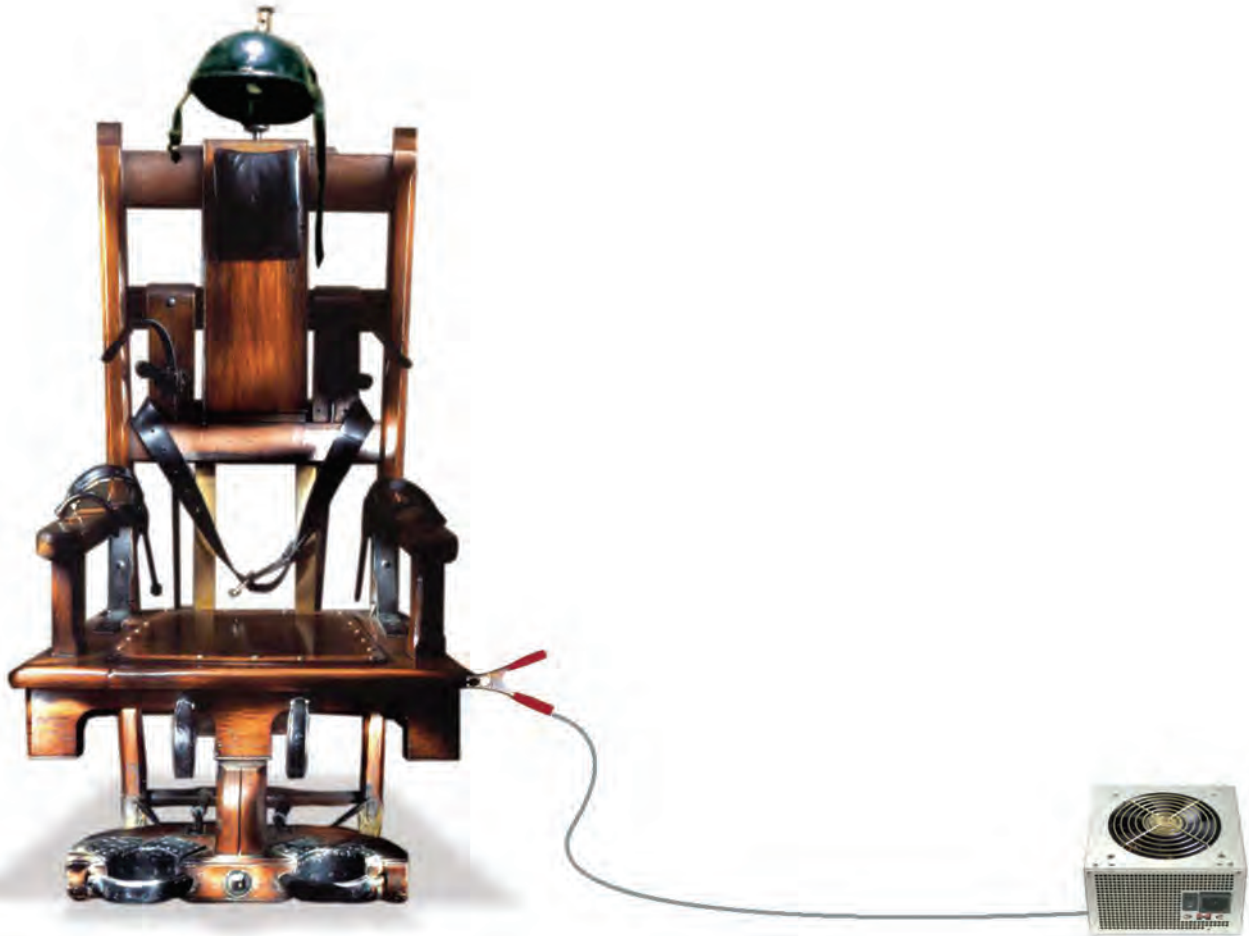
DESPERADO THE GAME? WHILE Robert Rodriguez's name doesn't seem to be tied to Total Overdose, the similarities are significant. Set in South America and featuring over-the-top gunplay, including lethal, gun-mounted guitar cases, there's no denying that fans of El Mariachi, Desperado and Once Upon A Time in Mexico will find something familiar with SCI's latest title.

Ramiro Cruz, released from jail, is recruited by the DEA to take the place of his deceased twin brother who has been working undercover in South America to root out a drug syndicate. The plot thickens as Ramiro's dad was killed there during a DEA mission in 1989. So apart from stopping the syndicate, he also has a personal agenda to avenge his brother and father.

The reason why Total Overdose has us excited, is because it contains words like "non-stop gunplay" and "free style action". Apart from access to a huge arsenal, Ramiro will be able to drive vehicles scattered all over levels and do impressive acrobatics (such as run up against walls, drink tequila and flirt with local girls). The style looks decidedly non-serious, though you can be sure Total Overdose is reaching for more mature audiences.

Likely to be one of SCI's big titles closer to its release, you can expect to hear a lot more about Total Overdose in the near future. In the mean time, start practicing for it by polishing your boots and taking swigs from a bottle of Mexican Tequila. *Disclaimer: NAG does not condone drinking, smoking or having fun in any way.* **NAG**





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VITAL INFO

- Platforms
- Developer
- Publisher
- Supplier
- Genre
- Release Date



Can European Assault save Medal of Honor? We certainly hope so

MEDAL OF HONOR: EUROPEAN ASSAULT

ISN'T IT IRONIC THAT even with a sub heading like European Assault, Medal of Honor still insists on using the American spelling? Nevertheless, it's best not to be too caught up in the differences between nations, especially when you are about to embark on a unifying cause: to topple Hitler. To date the vast series of Medal of Honor games have mostly been worthy additions to the War Shooter genre, punctuated with occasional lackluster or obvious cash-in titles, finally culminating in the disappointing Pacific Assault last year.

European Assault, formerly known as Dogs of War, will be the series' third venture into console territory. As the name suggests, you'll be backing Europe, this time playing as US Army Lieutenant William Holt, recently assigned to the Office of Strategic Services. Assigned classified cases, Holt's job will include such things as gathering intelligence on the new Tiger Tank and stopping the Nazi plan to harness and use Atomic weapons.

Set in 1942, MOH plans to put you in the thick of it. However, unlike past games in the series, European Assault takes a decidedly non-linear approach. Players will have one of several routes through a level and be presented with various sub-missions that they can complete when they choose to. Each of these will give a player bonus equipment when completed with a large bonus if all of them are accomplished. Players will also, Brothers in Arms style, be able to give other fighters orders by pointing at something with the target reticule and giving an order.

Rallying is a new addition to the game play. The concept involves when, during times of extreme duress and

stress, soldiers have been found to shoot faster and more accurately, as well as dodge bullets. In the game, a player will have a Rally meter, which fills up as headshots and such are achieved. Activate a full Rally meter and a player will be granted a short period of time where everything moves slower and he has unlimited ammo - only for a few seconds, but enough to turn the tide of the battle. **[Bullet time finally arrives in WWII!? Ed.]**

A major boon to the project, though by this time a staple EA reaction, was the hiring of a professional screenwriter for the story. John Mulius, who has written the scripts for Dirty Harry and Apocalypse Now as well as directed movies such as Conan the Barbarian, boasts a vast military knowledge and should bring a new twist to a series that is frankly running out of steam. Series stalwart advisor Capt. Dale Dye has remained onboard to assist with the tactical and historical accuracy of the game.

Will European Assault be enough to redeem the MoH series? As with Pacific Assault, European Assault holds a lot of promise, but it will have to be decidedly impressive to take Medal of Honor back to the top. **NAG**



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MAY 2005



PlayStation 2



VITAL INFO

■ Platforms

PC

■ Developer

Lionhead

■ Publisher

Microsoft Games

■ Supplier

TBA

■ Genre

Action

■ Release Date

2005

Firstlook



FABLE: THE LOST CHAPTERS

The PC port will feature content left out of the Xbox version



TO CALL FABLE A disappointing endeavor would be an understatement. The game managed to avoid a lot of the RPG elements it was hoping to achieve. Whether this was a matter of being ahead of its time or not is still a matter of debate, but Lionhead's latest venture did achieve enough success to warrant a PC version, named the Lost Chapters.

The original game featured a young boy as you guided him through his training and eventually into the world where he had to avenge his parents and complete a quest he'd been training his entire life for. Fable's main appeal was that your choices determined your alignment and a decidedly evil character would find that the world reacted very differently to him than to a good natured hero. As the boy's fame (or infamy) grew, villagers would recognise his name, children would mimic his hairstyle and tall tales of his deeds would circle the land, much to his (and your amusement) when heard.

While Fable was a decidedly lackluster RPG and one that left a lot of players feeling short-changed, Lionhead is making up for

this with a lot of extra content not seen in the Xbox version. Thanks to Fable's extremely turbulent development cycle (which ended up seeing the game a 15th of its original size), a lot of content and concepts have been left out – some of which Lionhead plans to place into the PC version and redeem it somewhat.

At any rate, another title from Peter Molyneux will definitely be good news for PC gamers and long-time supporters of both Bullfrog and Lionhead. Whether The Lost Chapters, though, takes Fable a bit closer to what it was supposed to be, remains to be seen. **NAG**



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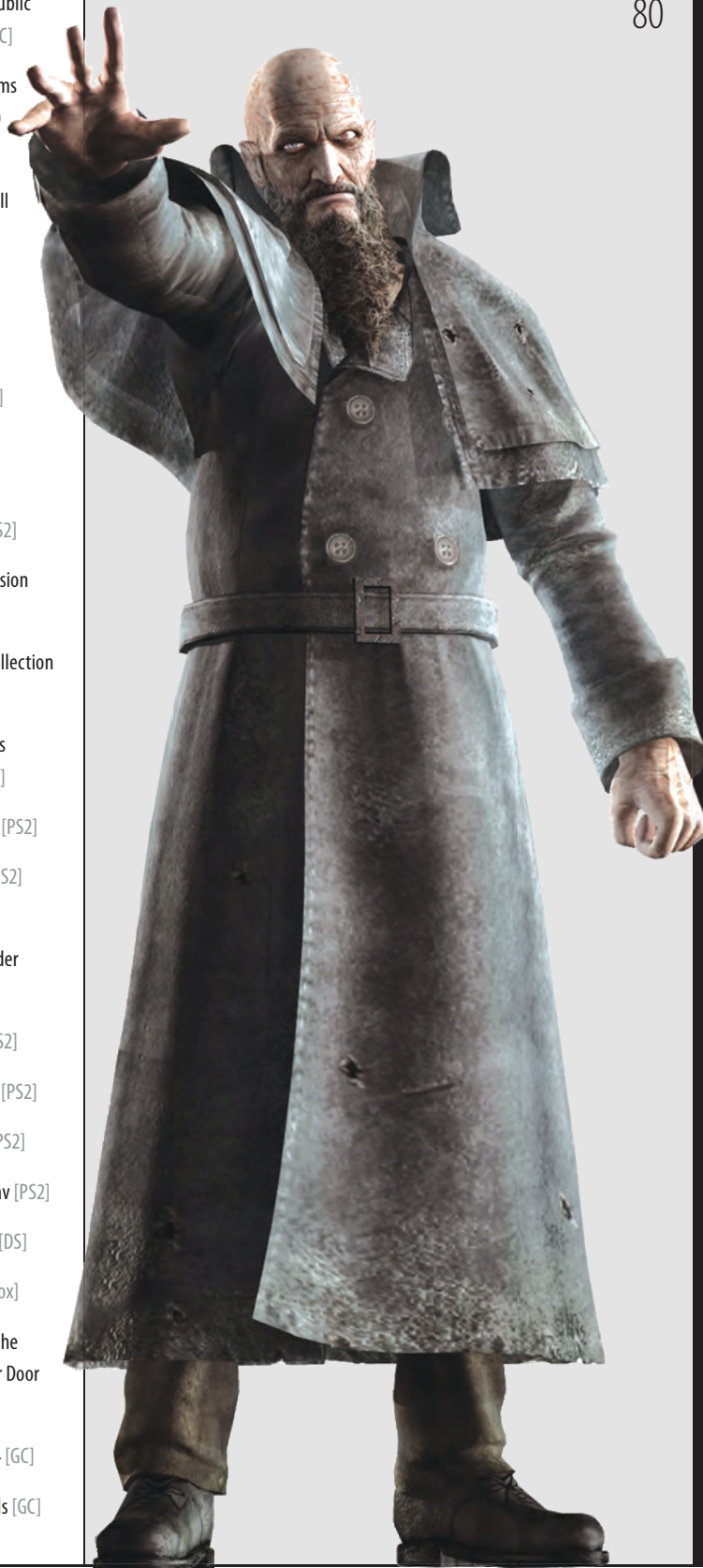
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Editor's Choice

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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

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MAY 2005



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Innovative and polished, this is a shining star of a war

VITAL INFO

- **Platforms**
- **PC**
- **Suggested Retail Price**
R 270
- **Developer**
Pandemic
- **Publisher**
LucasArts
- **Supplier**
EA [011] 516 8300
- **Genre**
FPS
- **Age Restriction**
12+
- **Minimum Specs**
Pentium 1000MHz
256MB RAM
8 x CD ROM
64MB Video Card
2000MB HDD



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STAR WARS REPUBLIC COMMANDO

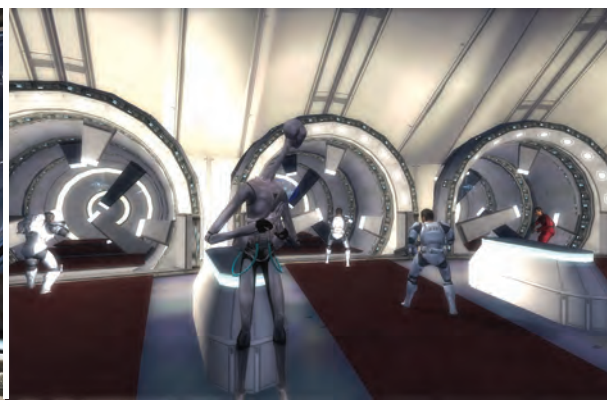
PANDEMIC'S REPUBLIC COMMANDO SEEMS to come from a bizarre twilight zone universe where squad based combat is fast, easy, and intuitive. Computer AIs don't get in your way, get themselves killed, or do what you don't want them to. Voice acting is funny, gives characters depth, and isn't repetitive. And Star Wars games don't suck!

Set between Star Wars Episodes 2 and 3, the player takes command of one of the many clones from the Clone Wars - designated Delta 38. Unlike the average storm trooper, commandos are enhanced with better weapons, shields, and supposedly superior mental and physical attributes.

Commanding the squad is an amazingly simple task. Instead of having to navigate through menus for squad orders, all you have to do is simply move your target reticule

over an icon that automatically highlights in your tactical display, and hit the action button. This activates specialised manoeuvres ranging from sniping or manning turrets, to blowing up doors and hacking a computer console. As long as someone in the squad is still alive, they can revive another player and each other to about half health. When you run out of health, you fall down incapacitated. You have the option to let your squad continue with their present tasks, in which case they'll revive you once they're not busy, or call them to revive you immediately. The squad will automatically decide who performs a manoeuvre based on who is not busy, who is closest, and who is best suited for the task. Surprisingly, it never makes the wrong guess. Not only does the game always seem to magically pick the right

I told you we'd get a ticket for idling in the no parking zone.





person for any job you're assigned to, but they also move into position while firing at enemies, crouching behind cover, and defending each other. If you reassign someone to another task, they don't just run into enemy fire to the new position, they sneak around enemies if possible or advance from one point of cover to another while firing.

Some of the realism comes from real world military experience. Pandemic hired a US Special Forces instructor as a consultant, and their four man animation team spent time going through real training covering the tasks the commandos perform in the game. It really shows when you do things like order the squad to breach a door, for example. While one of them is setting the explosives the other two immediately move into position to cover him from enemies coming up from behind. As soon as the door breaches, the man to the left of the door always tosses in a grenade without exposing himself, usually right into enemies waiting on the other side. The quality of detail in the animations lends that extra something to the atmosphere and feel of the game.

Even if the animation isn't enough to make the squad mates seem alive and not just cannon fodder for the convenience of the player, the voice acting is superb. The player's character is voiced by Jango Fett himself, Temuera Morrison. The rest of the commandos all have unique personalities and constantly talk back and forth and even drop one-liners that are funny instead of just cheesy. The voice samples rarely repeat, so the characters don't suffer from the usual problem of sounding like a broken record saying the same thing after every fight.

Graphically, Republic Commando can hold its own against the latest FPS titles. It has all the shader bells and whistles, and still scales well enough to be playable on most of the graphic cards out there. Those with pre-DirectX 9 cards will

lose some effects, but the game still runs nicely. The graphics are full of extra little touches like raindrops which land on your visor, and which your visor automatically wipes away for you. The night vision mode also looks very cool.

The music is a movie quality soundtrack of note. It's the standard Star Wars full orchestra, but it's not a bunch of short loops. The soundtrack dynamically adjusts to the in-game action and never feels forced or out of place. The sound effects aren't the typical canned samples either. Pandemic had professional Foley artists create all the sounds for the game in a studio. Everything from bare lizard feet running behind you to the click of the remote detonator was custom recorded for this game. It's just another touch among many that sends the quality bar over the moon.

Those expecting just another half baked movie license FPS with a licensed engine are in for a shock. Yes, Republic Commando is a movie license title. Yes, it does make use of the Unreal 2 engine. But everything about it just shines with polish and that smooth as butter feel that just makes a game come together into something more - an experience. The only flaw (if it could be called such) is that the game is a bit on the short side. **NAG**

No, it was YOUR week to bring the donuts! We go in number order, how hard is it to remember this kind of thing? It's a simple system: Jenkins on 1, McCarthy on 2, Harrison on 3 and you on 4. What are we going to do for breakfast now?



VITAL INFO

■ Platforms

PC

■ Suggested Retail Price

R265

■ Developer

Gearbox Software

■ Publisher

Ubisoft

■ Supplier

Megarom [011] 234 2680

■ Genre

War Squad FPS

■ Age Restriction

16+

■ Minimum Specs

Pentium 3 1.0GHz

512MB RAM

DVD Drive

32MB Video Card

3GB HDD



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BROTHERS IN ARMS

AT THIS STAGE IN the race, war shooters are seemingly less of a fad and more of a sub-genre. While the topic remains pretty much the same, wars, locations and even various nations have been used to expand on the genre. Even though we look forward to a new generation of war shooters, there is still a lot that hasn't been explored.

Gearbox, mostly known for its expansion and port work, took it upon itself to look at some of these aspects. Brothers in Arms is a World War 2 based shooter that takes place during D-Day and the eight days thereafter. The team had gone to great lengths to duplicate locations

found in Europe, because the missions are based on actual campaigns and operations from the war. In fact, your lead character is a real one.

This gives more clarity to the war era. Once you complete a mission, material gets unlocked that shows details, original reports and notes from the mission. It's not quite as emotive as other shooters have managed, but it is a nice touch. It also makes the maps seem a bit Spartan compared to Brothers In Arms' peers, but this is quickly overlooked by the game's other unique contribution.

One element with almost every war shooter is squad

Your squad is your life here.

There is no place for rogue tactics





members. Games tend to give solitary missions from time to time, but generally in a war a few guns are better than one. Brothers In Arms takes this aspect more seriously by handing you control of squad members. Not everyone on the battlefield is under your beck and call, but you are put in charge of squads – groups of two or three. Squads tend to vary from fire teams for suppression, assault for its namesake and anti-tank for stickier jobs. The commands are broken down to three: movement, cover fire and assault. Your squad is smart enough to find cover and shoot at the enemy without your help, but you can direct their fire and movements. For instance, using two squads you can flank someone with one team while the other provides cover fire.

Every opponent or cluster of opponents on the battlefield can be spotted, in line of sight, because they sport a red circle above them. Firing at them reduces the red, which indicates their morale. The point is to keep a spot under constant fire while you can sneak someone closer, since the hiding Nazis have too low a morale to return fire. This easy way to spot the enemy shows that the point is less about run-and-gun tactics and more about moving your men and yourself around, outfoxing the German positions. In terms of that, it's a good twist, but for a shooter it leaves a few things behind.

Essentially, because you are using your AI guys against their AI guys, Brothers In Arms' bad guys aren't quite that advanced. If you were armed with a weapon as in, say, Call of Duty, you could have easily picked them off yourself. But the realism curve is driven high on the weapons and hitting a target is quite tough, especially when they aren't bad shots themselves. Ammo is a rarity, but gracefully your squad never runs out. You do, though, and that's another

incentive to go the squad root.

Squad play is made even more enticing when you are given two or more of them, or even a tank. Tanks manage themselves pretty well in a fire fight, but they have a vulnerability to artillery. Tank on tank battles aren't too tough, especially since Gearbox finally allows what everyone's wanted since vehicles appeared in games. In the game you can disable a tank by climbing up the back and dropping a grenade down the hatch. But other than the odd anti-tank weapon, they provide great squad shelter and are invaluable to keep the morale of a particularly pesky bunch of Nazis low.

Sadly the squad side of things also seems to be lacking. The game provides an overhead-style map that gives a slightly better perspective on your surroundings, but it isn't always useful. This leaves you doing a lot of work on the ground, scouting out positions and moving your squads. The movement command generalises a location, sometimes leading soldiers to stand in the line of fire instead of ducking for nearby cover. But overall they hold their own. It would have been better, though, if you could give multiple commands at a time or tell soldiers to man gun nests. Your guys are very efficient at killing the enemy – the trick is to make sure they don't get shot to pieces when doing so, because they generally don't run for cover if it's not right under their noses.

Brothers In Arms is a diamond in the rough and has a lot of good ideas. The game isn't technically flawed and the animation and realism bars were set high. But it lacks as a squad-based shooter and doesn't work as a run-and-gun title. This is a nice change. You'd just wish they had done more with the squad side of things. Well, maybe in the sequel. **NAG**



VITAL INFO

- **Platforms**
- PC
- **Suggested Retail Price**
- R 265
- **Developer**
- Ubisoft
- **Publisher**
- Ubisoft
- **Supplier**
- Megarom [011] 234 2680
- **Genre**
- Submarine simulator
- **Age Restriction**
- 7+
- **Minimum Specs**
- 1.4GHz CPU
- 512MB RAM
- 4 X DVD-ROM
- 64MB DX9 Video Card
- 2GB free HDD



SILENT HUNTER III

I'VE RATHER ENJOYED SUBMARINE simulators since the days of The Hunt for Red October. Particularly, and you'll have to excuse this pun, the sense of immersion in historical events that a well-executed sub simulation can create. [Deep, Ed.]

Silent Hunter III is the latest offering in the Silent Hunter series to take a shot at creating this effect for players. Although a deadly serious simulator, Silent Hunter III includes the adjustment of enough realism settings

to make even the inexperienced sub captain enjoy his aquatic experience. It's never going to be a run-and-gun experience, but it is possible to sink a few battleships in an enemy fleet without first studying submarine procedures in too much detail.

Turn the realism right up however, and I suspect even genuine sub captains would be satisfied. Silent Hunter III is a comprehensive simulation, without a doubt, which helps

Captain, I don't know if I can take much more of this!





it achieve that total immersion factor referred to earlier in this review. It features the most fabulous visuals the genre has ever seen. For the first time ever, the crew you interact with at every post are true 3D models which turn to you, articulating each response to their captain's commands visually as well as audibly.

The models of your sub itself and its potential victims are top flight and their destruction beautifully depicted. Pepper the hull of a merchant vessel with shells from your deck cannon, and explosions will rip masts down until the big bang scatters flotsam and jetsam across the ocean surface. A good torpedo firing solution on a destroyer could crack the target in half if struck amidships, or cause it to accurately list to the flooding side before keeling over. If anything, the audio effects are of even higher quality. You are able to identify a contact purely by the sound of its propellers in the water, and torpedoes racing towards their target sound chillingly purposeful and realistic. When running silent, crew members whisper responses to every order, and the groaning and creaking of your sub's superstructure as it approaches crush depth is incredibly ominous. Even the simple electric hum of your periscope motor raising or lowering the scope adds to your involvement in the game, while the noise of depth charges battering your hull chills the blood even before the visual impact of valves bursting on the command deck suggests you and your crew may be doomed. These cosmetic victories are underpinned by a truly dynamic campaign engine. The seas in which your career plays out are constantly variable, from weather patterns to fleet positions, although heavily-used shipping lanes are based

on historical data and often a straggling merchantman can be picked off in these regions.

Weather, by the way, looks great and impacts on your sub's operations. In bad storms, your surfaced sub will send huge plumes of spray skywards as wave after enormous wave buffet it, which makes it impossible to man deck-mounted weapons. Speaking of which, always remember to pull crew off your deck gun before ordering a dive, or you're likely going to lose a key officer as well as a couple of vital sailors.

Any missions you undertake in your submariner career (including training exercises) amass points in Silent Hunter III. These can be used to convince your fleet's technicians to fit enhanced equipment to your boat first, or recruit more skilled crew members. These skills play a crucial role in your sub's actions - a highly talented weapons officer will calculate an accurate torpedo firing solution more often, for instance, while a novice sonar operator will periodically lose the contact. Finally, the comprehensive multiplayer features extend the playability of Silent Hunter III further than ever by allowing up to eight individually captained subs to wreak havoc on an unsuspecting merchant fleet. Let me tell you, just four of these silent predators can quickly turn any flotilla into a nightmare of burning oil and sinking metal.

After a seemingly interminable period of mediocre titles supplying the virtual submariner with his kicks, Ubisoft has delivered what can only be described as an unparalleled simulator in Silent Hunter III, while managing to inject enough fun and excitement to entice players new to the genre into the deep seas as well. A sterling job and a simulation triumph. **NAG**

As you can see by the range finding depth gauge attached to the thermometer thing on the right, we can see that the ship in the sites is still floating

It's a definite average game that could have been a great management title... but isn't

VITAL INFO

- **Platforms**
- **PC**
- **Suggested Retail Price**
R 299
- **Developer**
Arush Entertainment
- **Publisher**
Ubisoft
- **Supplier**
Megarom [011] 234 2680
- **Genre**
Management
- **Age Restriction**
16+
- **Minimum Specs**
Pentium 3 800MHz
128MB RAM
8 x CD ROM
64MB Video Card
800MB HDD

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PLAYBOY: THE MANSION

SEX SELLS. AND AS far as current sales figures are concerned, everyone seems to be buying. Playboy: The Mansion is a perfect example of people identifying with name brands and that a game doesn't have to be great to be a success. Hell, it doesn't even have to be good.

It's very tempting to give Playboy: The Mansion a massive tongue lashing purely on principle. The last time sex was used to sell a game we had to live with the new Leisure Suit Larry title, after all. But in all fairness, one can't be too hard on Playboy: The Mansion. Sure, it's not going to win any awards, but it certainly doesn't deserve to be binned either. It really tries at being something more than it is, at very least, and ends up in the halls of mediocrity rather than the halls of utter rubbish.

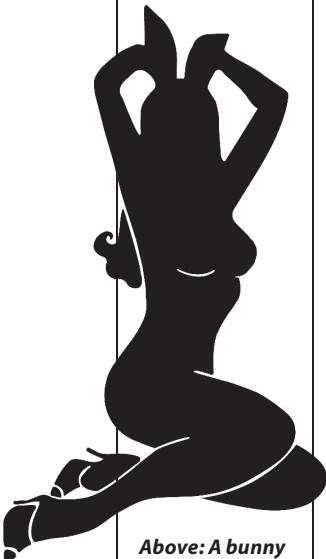
What is the idea behind the game? You play the part of Hugh M. Hefner, the founder of the Playboy Magazine Empire. It is up to the player to churn out a monthly T&A [ask your dad...] magazine and, in doing this, turn the virtual Mr. Hefner into the legend the real one is.

It all sounds fine and well. The game is a management title with a few good ideas to it and is at least moderately

original in terms of subject matter. But then they threw the whole sex thing in and attempted to turn what could have been a brilliant management simulation into a quasi-social interaction game. And this is where the problem comes in.

The game takes on a feel almost like The Sims, with the player getting Mr. Hefner to talk to people to make deals, get interviews, and con chicks into posing nude for his magazines (the photos are taken by the player, of course, in a special "camera" mode.) This is all fine and well, but the actual scope of the interactions is very limited.. Mr. Hefner generally becomes best buddies with every guy he meets and has sex with every girl in a variety of locations. It gets monotonous, despite the fact that the sexual encounters are, initially at least, fairly funny. So the game gets bogged down in a cycle of throw a party, produce a magazine, throw a party, and produce a magazine. Mr. Hefner's life actually seems quite boring.

All this is supported by average graphics and sound quality. Sadly, this is a game whose core idea could have broken the stigma attached to sexually themed games and it falls into the same trap as all the others. **NAG**



Above: A bunny girl... what a surprise!
Bottom left: Heff is the only man in the world who can have sex while wearing his underwear.
Bottom right: Semi-naked people in your garden... now that's living!



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GAMING ACCESSORIES, COMPONENTS, COMPETITIONS, GAMING ACCESSORIES, COMPETITIONS, GAMING ACCESSORIES, COMPONENTS, COMPETITIONS

A solid addition to the game, although fairly challenging in terms of time management

82

VITAL INFO

- **Platforms**
- PC
- **Suggested Retail Price**
- R 180
- **Developer**
- Maxis
- **Publisher**
- Electronic Arts
- **Supplier**
- EA Africa [011] 516 8300
- **Genre**
- Simulation
- **Age Restriction**
- Teen
- **Minimum Specs**
- Pentium 3 800MHz
- 256MB RAM
- 8 x CD ROM
- 32MB Video Card
- 1GB HDD

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Left: Time to get down to some serious business. Right: Dorm life... God help us!

THE SIMS 2: UNIVERSITY

IT SEEMS ALMOST IMPOSSIBLE for Will Wright to do anything wrong these days - especially when it comes to The Sims 2. In the University expansion, the people simulator takes on a whole new twist with the addition of a new "age phase" - the young adult sim.

While the expansion has the usual extras one might expect, like items and new careers, there is also the whole question of sending your young adult Sims to university. Of course this isn't mandatory, but getting a degree in one of the many courses available at one of the three universities, does help your sim through his or her career later in life. If you have the stamina to deal with varsity, that is.

There is no rest for the player in this game. Four years of university are divided into eight semesters, each around four sim days long. In that time, the player needs to complete term papers, do assignments, make improvements to their sim and attend classes, all while trying to keep their sim happy. It is not an easy task. But it is a fun one.

Space is far too limited here to go into any great detail about the changes that University makes to The Sims 2. Let's just say that they are good changes, making the game a little more enjoyable once University is completed. Anyone who enjoys The Sims 2 should get hold of this title. **NAG**

Plenty of potential ruined by technical issues and zero personality

50

VITAL INFO

- **Platforms**
- PC
- **Suggested Retail Price**
- R 299
- **Developer**
- .Free Radical
- **Publisher**
- Codemasters
- **Supplier**
- MegaRom [011] 234 2680
- **Genre**
- Action Adventure
- **Age Restriction**
- 16+
- **Minimum Specs**
- Pentium 4 2.0GHz
- 512MB RAM
- 32 x CD ROM
- 16MB Video Card
- 1GB HDD

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Left: The more advanced version of the Darth Vader choke hold Right: Release mental patients to keep the guards occupied

THERE SHOULD BE A laundry list of items that all developers must compare their product against before putting it on a shelf. Somewhere on this list there must be the option to save anywhere you like and be able to click past any video sequence at any time. In the case of third person games, an intuitive camera is ideal and further to that, in the case of an action title, the ability to point your weapon wherever and whenever you like without any begging, coaxing and effort. If this list existed, then Second Sight would have spent a few more weeks in development. Being a console port you can expect some console legacy to invade the title here and there, but in the case of Second Sight these "quirks" ruin what is a fairly decent action game.

The story ends up close enough to interesting to be entertaining, and your character features a number of psychic abilities as well as a few conventional weapons to take apart the enemy forces. What makes the game unique is that, besides pressing buttons and disabling cameras, you can also use these abilities to terminate enemy characters - too bad they're so dumb that the simple act of hiding in a cupboard can foil their attempts to catch you. The locations and environments are inventive to a degree, but the overall game is ruined by a poor camera, a laboured control system, dumb artificial intelligence and not enough imagination. Not to mention having to watch the same video sequences over and over as you replay the level for the third time. **NAG**

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VITAL INFO

- Platforms
- PS2
- Suggested Retail Price
- TBA
- Developer
- SCEI
- Publisher
- SCEE
- Supplier
- Ster Kinekor [011] 445 7900
- Genre
- Action
- Age Restriction
- 16+
- Specifications
- Players: 1
- Memory: 100KB

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Is that building still following me?



GOD OF WAR



Not what I had in mind for "stay sharp"!

GOD OF WAR CARRIES a mature rating, one it deserves wholeheartedly. Cutting right to the meat of it; the game contains buckets of blood, oodles of guts, blatant nudity and a level of action/adventure that simply defies the norm.

While Greek mythology (Zeus, Athena and all that godly jazz) might be hit or miss with some, it's in the fun-factor where God of War truly shines. To get the plot out of the way, lead protagonist and overall angry person Kratos had his life saved by Ares (the Greek god of war) and in return had to kill scores of people whenever Ares felt the need. As a result, Kratos suffers from insomnia and an overall attitude problem. While not a complete antithesis to the heroes in today's titles, Kratos masterfully fills the role in which he has been cast. He needs to be an angry, downtrodden yet entirely overly violent person. After all, he wants to get back at a God. Promised by Athena to be forgiven for his sins by the gods, Kratos' quest takes him (and the player) on a lavish, fantastical journey not soon to be forgotten.

Since action is the main course for God of War, preceded by a delicious entrée of adventure and the occasional

snacking on puzzles, every facet of the combat has been refined and polished to a ludicrously smooth, sharp point. In short, the developers have hit the nail on the proverbial head, giving gamers an extremely easy to use but difficult to master system for combat, both stylish and technical. The two basic flavours of attack, light and heavy, can be chained together for lengthy combination attacks and then some. Blocking stops the overwhelming amounts of enemies from damaging you, but more importantly, if a block is timed just right, the game will slow down into an impressively smooth state (bullet time, if you will), just for effect. It works incredibly well and makes you feel a lot more hardcore than you should. The default weapon Kratos uses are two swords on the ends of chains, attached to his arms. These flail about with a mesmerising pattern depending on your attacks, flying out and hitting enemies at range.

Achieving interesting and/or devastating moves/combo attacks will also slow down the game in kind, while dodging attacks via a quick flick of the right analogue stick will provide a slightly more functional way of staying alive. The controls are ultra responsive and need to be - enemies are ruthless and

give no quarter, attacking you from all angles and all the time. Upgrading your weapons (after collecting sufficient amounts of red orbs) provides additional attacks and moves and progression through the game - rewarding Kratos with even more weapons/spells, each also upgradeable.

Mobile and entirely capable, the more adventurous sections of the game have Kratos scaling walls, tightrope walking across narrow beams or even dodging massive flaming boulders while trying to find the right door. Simple tasks such as opening doors actually require mashing a specific button, giving the game an odd sense of urgency. This concept continues throughout the game, though certain sections are a little more in-depth. Battling a massive creature will often involve beating it senseless first, then quickly tapping a specific button and then tapping the correct sequence of buttons as they appear on screen, sending Kratos into an impressive and animated foray of flips, jumps, attacks and completely unbelievable finishing moves. Certain boss fights are so incredible that they define mere textual explanation.

As the journey progresses, each new location tops the previous in terms of sheer scale and chutzpah. The cramped confines of a sea-bound boat quickly transitions to the grand city of Athens, from there on to an endless desert as well as riding in a castle resting on the shoulders of a crawling titan. Each location brings more puzzles, more combat and even more deadly enemies who eventually start matching Kratos for sheer antagonism. Worth a mention and the highest regard, is the music that accompanies the entire scope of the game. Professional, emotive and beautiful, certain pieces of music will linger in the air long after the level has been completed.

Ultimately, the entire experience behind God of War is satisfying, bringing the best the genre has to offer into a new light. As a bonus, completing the game unlocks a sheer treasure trove of interesting content such as interviews, the making-of, extra missions and challenges; all well worth the effort. **NAG**



A decent enough title if there is nothing better to play

VITAL INFO

- Platforms
- PS2
- Suggested Retail Price
R 219
- Developer
Vicious Cycle
- Publisher
Take 2
- Supplier
Ster Kinekor [011] 445 7900
- Genre
FPS
- Age Restriction
12+
- Specifications
Players: 1
Memory: 100KB



ROBOTECH: INVASION

ROBOTECH FANS WOULD REMEMBER the “New Generation” era of Robotech. Dispute may reign over whether the series was better or worse than the initial Robotech series, but that is rather irrelevant. Set during the “New Generation” story arc, Invasion manages to pull off a solid enough FPS experience amid the styling and scenarios from the cartoon.

Part of the series was the Cyclone vehicles - motorbikes incorporated into the armour of the characters. You can switch between running and the Cyclone at almost any time, though controlling the Cyclone is finicky and unresponsive, only really useful for covering large distances quickly.

The 3D environments range from colourful to bland - a

duality predominant throughout the game in most of its aspects. Sometimes the voice-acting seems unprofessional and tacked-on, other times it sets the mood perfectly with Hollywood flair.

Overall however, Invasion doesn't raise any bars or bring any surprises to the table. For once (and quite rare in games), the plot of Invasion becomes its saving grace. Epic hive raids, gang confrontations and other situations give the story momentum alongside the sense of urgency placed on the player. This driving force is both compelling and interesting, augmented by a dual-character view of the plot once progression has been made. On the whole, Invasion is nothing special but doesn't fall by the mediocre wayside either. **NAG**

Motorbikes and missiles, this truly is the future...

Retro recollection for halcyon Sonic days. A must for fans

VITAL INFO

- Platforms
- PS2
- Suggested Retail Price
R 450
- Developer
Sonic Team
- Publisher
Sega
- Supplier
WWE [011] 462 0150
- Genre
Platformer
- Age Restriction
12+
- Specifications
Players: 1
Memory: 200KB



SONIC MEGA COLLECTION PLUS

YES, THIS IS A blatant cash-in on the Sonic franchise. Yes, Sonic Mega Collection Plus is simply a repackaged collection of Sonic paraphernalia and games from the retro days of the Sega Genesis and Sega Game Gear consoles. Yes, we love it. *[Fanboy <cough> Ed.]*

There has always been something appealing about having “everything in one place” and this is what the Mega Collection focuses on. Every classic Sonic game is there, and then some. Aside from the seven main Sonic games from the Genesis, each of the six Game Gear Sonic titles is also included (but require unlocking by playing the main games). Other games that can be found are Genesis favourites such as The Ooze, Comix

Zone, Ristar and others - a truly nice touch to an already impressive package. The (back in the day) technological breakthrough of the Lock-On Sonic 3 & Sonic and Knuckles cartridges is also perfectly emulated.

The Mega Collection, quite simply, was made for fans of the speedy blue Hedgehog. The un-lockable artwork, comic covers, movies and other media assets are a testament to that. Those who missed the entire Sonic craze back in the day and want to know more will probably want to pick this title up once it goes budget.

In the meantime, having over 20 full (retro Sonic & Co.) games on one PlayStation disc is something most gamers/fans would see the value in. **NAG**

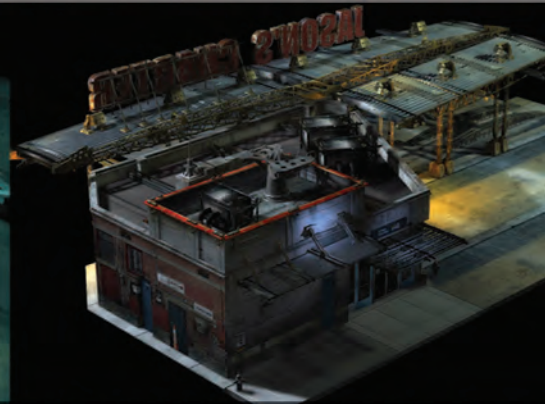
The blue Erinaceus Europaeus is truly rare...



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VITAL INFO

- **Platforms**
- PS2
- **Suggested Retail Price**
- R 420
- **Developer**
- Sacnoth
- **Publisher**
- Midway
- **Supplier**
- Ster Kinekor [011] 445 7900
- **Genre**
- RPG
- **Age Restriction**
- 16+
- **Specifications**
- Players: 1
- Memory: 58KB
- Analogue: Sticks only;
- Vibration compatible

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I attack you with my special attack numbers!

SHADOW HEARTS: COVENANT

THE SEQUEL TO THE largely unnoticed Shadow Hearts sees you once again taking on the role of Yuri, a shape-shifter of note, as well as various accomplices, against the backdrop of the early 20th century. The game begins with Yuri defending a village against German invaders, soon after which his morphing powers are stripped by a mysterious priest. Yuri then begins his quest to regain them, whilst trying to save the world from a very clandestine and nefarious organisation. Fortunately, the story is far less pompous than that of the typical “save the world” RPG, and is characterised not only by its darkness, but also by the frequent incidents of exceptionally off-beat humour that perpetuate the whole affair. The

combat system is turn-based, but with an interesting twist. After selecting an action for a particular character, you are presented with the “Judgment Ring”, which functions in a similar fashion to the swing meter found in most golf-games. Correct timing of button presses allows you to string together combos, or maximise damage on your attacks. It’s an innovative idea that makes the whole combat dynamic far more interactive. Add to the mix an excellent soundtrack, reasonable voice acting, and fantastic graphics, and you’re left with an RPG that dares to be different, and will undoubtedly succeed. It’s an utterly enjoyable and worthwhile endeavour that any RPG enthusiast should play. **NAG**



VITAL INFO

- **Platforms**
- PS2
- **Suggested Retail Price**
- R 426
- **Developer**
- Yuke's
- **Publisher**
- Konami
- **Supplier**
- Ster Kinekor [011] 445 7900
- **Genre**
- Sport
- **Age Restriction**
- 12+
- **Specifications**
- Players: 1-2
- Memory: 90KB
- Analogue: Sticks only;
- Vibration compatible

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RUMBLE ROSES

A WRESTLING GAME MIXED WITH a Dead or Alive beach volleyball title, is probably the best way to sum up the concept behind Rumble Roses. Despite being created in partnership with Yuke’s, the team behind the WWE Smackdown! series of games, Rumble Roses is definitely more about showing off the usually scantily-clad female character models than it is about wrestling. And to that extent it succeeds in what it set out to do.

Featuring a cast of ten characters, each with an unchangeable alternate “identity”, and a storyline that ultimately involves defeating a crazed scientist dressed like a nurse, and her psychotic wrestling cyborg, Rumble Roses never takes itself too seriously - and it’s advisable

that anyone who plays it should adopt the same attitude.

The game dynamic, however, is remarkably sound, despite offering a highly limited variety of moves for each combatant, as well as a lack of novelty matches. The scripting and voice-acting are so downright ridiculous that they often leave you in stitches, and on the whole the experience manages to be a short-lived one.

The game’s degree of continuity is directly proportional to the period of time for which staring at the pixelated beauties manages to keep you interested, but if you’re looking for some light-hearted, and probably politically incorrect fun, this might be just your thing. **NAG**

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PlayStation 2

Engrossing storyline, but sadly hampered by a lack of inspiration and tedious play dynamic

69

VITAL INFO

Platforms

PS2

Suggested Retail Price

R 426

Developer

Konami

Publisher

Konami

Supplier

Ster Kinekor [011] 445 7900

Genre

RPG

Age Restriction

7+

Specifications

Players: 1

Memory: 98KB

Analogue: Sticks only;

Vibration compatible

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*Huh? What?
Where? Kittens?*

SUIKODEN IV

SUIKODEN IV TELLS THE tale of a young soon-to-be knight in a somewhat mystical world who, in a bizarre and unfortunate twist of events, ends up not only with a nasty curse over his head, but also the task of searching for 107 other very special individuals known as the Stars of Destiny, to help him overcome forces of unspeakable evil in order to save the world – pretty typical Japanese RPG fare.

In a more unique fashion, the game is set on a number of islands separated by generous amounts of ocean, and sailing between these locations comprises a large portion of the play dynamic. The addition of sea battles and several other mini-games serves to spice up the typical

turn-based battle mechanism, though the gratuitous amount of seafaring does tend to become tedious. The storyline is quite complex and well told, however, as has become typical of the series - though slightly bland graphics and an unremarkable soundtrack do little to complement it. In fact, aside from the storyline, Suikoden IV, though certainly not a bad title appears little more than mediocre and brings little innovation to the genre as a whole. Ultimately fans of the series will likely enjoy it, as will anyone who has enough patience to become thoroughly engrossed with the storyline. As for everyone else, Suikoden IV is likely to be regarded as merely average. **NAG**

Flight simulator that manages to be enjoyable and rewarding, without being intimidating

80

VITAL INFO

Platforms

PS2

Suggested Retail Price

R 426

Developer

Namco

Publisher

Namco

Supplier

Ster Kinekor [011] 445 7900

Genre

Flight Simulator

Age Restriction

3+

Specifications

Players: 1

Memory: 63KB

Analogue: All buttons;

Vibration compatible

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*This, is an,
aeroplane*

ACE COMBAT: SQUADRON LEADER

ACE COMBAT 4, THE series' first PS2 incarnation, set a new standard for the franchise, and was rightly regarded as one of the best console flight combat titles around. The latest title, though not as revolutionary as its predecessor, manages to successfully build on that foundation, and is certainly a very worthwhile and enjoyable game. Once again, the game accomplishes to fit in somewhere between a hardcore flight simulator and an arcade-style flying shoot-'em-up - and it does it remarkably well. It's not too complicated and won't chase away novices, but at the same time it feels like a proper simulation. The game offers a variety of real-world fighter jets from both past and present, and also manages to

find place for a well-crafted storyline in amongst the often very fast-paced action. Visually the graphics are superb. The environments and the different aircraft are all exquisitely detailed and the visual effects, ranging from various environmental and weather effects to the plentiful explosions, are all exceedingly convincing. The voice-acting, despite a few low points, is also generally impressive, and the sweeping soundtrack is difficult to fault. All in all, despite any remarkable improvements over its predecessor, Ace Combat: Squadron Leader is a very well-polished, accessible and entertaining flight combat simulator, likely to please both fans of the series as well as newcomers. **NAG**

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90

VITAL INFO

- Platforms
PS2
- Suggested Retail Price
R 360
- Developer
EA Games
- Publisher
Electronic Arts
- Supplier
EA Africa [011] 516 8300
- Genre
Sport
- Age Restriction
3+
- Specifications
Players: 1-6
Memory: 306KB
Analogue: Sticks only;
Vibration compatible

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First you lick it, then you dunk it...

NBA STREET V3

THE THIRD TITLE IN Electronic Arts' celebrated arcade basketball series has arrived. And in a break from tradition, rather than being a simple facelift of its predecessor, NBA Street V3 could be better described as a major overhaul.

The game dynamic is still about three on three basketball, though you have a number of "tricks" at your disposal, which are pulled off by using the right analogue stick in conjunction with any number of the shoulder buttons, with each different combination used to perform a different trick. It sounds rather complex and is in fact quite daunting at first, but one soon becomes accustomed to it. Naturally, the more complicated the

trick, the higher the possibility you'll mess it up, but the more trick points you'll score. Trick points serve not only to fill up your Gamebreaker meter, which allows you to perform a special dunk that can dramatically swing the score-line in your favour, but also contributes to points earned at the end of each game that can ultimately be used to buy new stat points, tricks, attire or even players for your team, as you work your way up through the street leagues, and ultimately find yourself playing alongside real NBA stars. Graphics and sound are absolutely top-drawer and the game dynamic is slick, polished, and highly addictive, making Street V3 a top-quality, not-to-be-missed arcade basketball title. **NAG**

Frantic, visceral and utterly enjoyable for fans of the series

70

VITAL INFO

- Platforms
PS2
- Suggested Retail Price
R 426
- Developer
Konami
- Publisher
Konami
- Supplier
Ster Kinekor [011] 445 7900
- Genre
Action
- Age Restriction
12+
- Specifications
Players: 1-2
Memory: 100KB

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Here to chew bubblegum and kick butt

NEO CONTRA

THE CONTRA SERIES IS very old, as ludologists (those who study gaming) would tell you. Eighteen years old, in fact. What better way to celebrate the "coming of age" for the series, than with a faithful and frustrating release featuring our two favourite action superstars? Contra has always been about overdosing on the cheesy action principle.

Neo Contra doesn't fail to disappoint in that aspect. To make a poignant example; one level has you running on the propeller of a helicopter, fighting off incoming airplanes. You simply don't get more over-the-top than that.

Fans will enjoy the ultimately tough-as-nails difficulty

curve present in the "one hit you die" system that has always permeated the series, though it might seem a little too unforgiving for most to stomach. With a slightly angled viewpoint from the top, sometimes characters and enemies alike can be obscured by scenery, leading to agonising moments usually followed by a quick death.

Despite this frustration, it's amazing how such a time-honoured and old genre can still survive in this day and age (after a little facelift and some visual eye-candy).

While definitely an enjoyable game in its own right, the shortness of the experience leans more towards waiting for a budget re-release of the game instead of buying it now at full price. **NAG**



In this category, next to Grand Theft Auto, just as good if not better

78

REVIEW

VITAL INFO

Platforms

PS2

Suggested Retail Price

R 360

Developer

Pandemic Studios

Publisher

Lucasarts

Supplier

EA [011] 516 8300

Genre

Action

Age Restriction

16+

Specifications

Players: 1

Memory: 200KB

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MERCENARIES

*Do you mind
if I take this?
What? You do?
Tough...*

PETER HIRSCHMANN IS WELL-KNOWN for being quite knowledgeable, and after creating honoured titles such as Secret Weapons Over Normandy and Medal of Honor, it is wonderful to find him in the producer seat of Mercenaries. Backed up by the red-hot development team Pandemic (Full Spectrum Warrior, Star Wars Battlefront), Mercenaries certainly has enough talent supporting it.

To use a trite way of summarising Mercenaries, you are essentially handed the keys to a plethora of military vehicles (cars, tanks and helicopters, oh my), given a massive North Korean landscape on which to pursue your vehicular ideology and five warring factions which you get to play off one another for monetary mirth.

There are three characters from which to choose, with very little difference between them. Controlling your Mercenary is simple enough as the controls conform to the standard found in most third person action titles. Initially most of the massive environment is open to you, though running through the military zones without proper planning can quickly lead to a new ventilation hole being installed in your head.

Mercenaries is a lengthy, deep game that promises wide scale destruction and, surprisingly, delivers. While you might not find yourself too interested in the plot, pursuing hours of minor missions and getting lost for the heck of it is superb, while hijacking enemy vehicles remains consistently entertaining. **NAG**



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VITAL INFO

- **Platforms**
- PS2
- **Suggested Retail Price**
R 320
- **Developer**
Harmonix
- **Publisher**
SCEE
- **Supplier**
Ster Kinekor [011] 445 7900
- **Genre**
Sport
- **Age Restriction**
3+
- **Specifications**
Players: 1

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Jiggle your arms, for style...

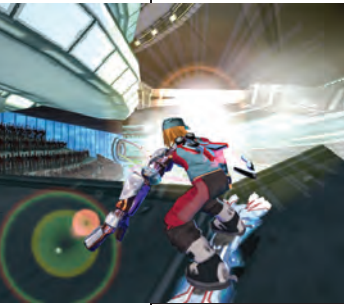
EYETOY: ANTIGRAV

NO SLAPPING, WAVING, CLEANING or jigging in front of the Sony EyeToy here. Wonderfully (and thankfully) different from the usual EyeToy fare, Antigrav involves moving your body and arms to control a hover board racer - and you don't even have to look at your own visage onscreen.

The game tracks your face, body and arms (the arms via coloured armbands) and translates your movements into the character onscreen, albeit in a distilled fashion. Leaning left and right (but keeping your face forward) steers the racer, while crouching or jumping does the same with your character. Waving your arms about executes tricks while in the air, or slaps targets while

grinding on a rail. The tracks are diverse and interesting - multiple paths through each keep things fresh. The lack of a proper multiplayer mode however seems quite disheartening. Instead, you can only race against the 'ghost' image of a friend - one of their previous attempts at a track. Progression through the game seems uneventful, the only milestones being that of more tracks, racers and equipment (which have little effect on the game) to unlock.

While essentially quite standard in terms of substance, the interesting control mechanism is fresh and funky, hopefully a sign of more creative things to come in terms of the underappreciated EyeToy. **NAG**



VITAL INFO

- **Platforms**
- DS
- **Suggested Retail Price**
R 420
- **Developer**
Vicarious Visions
- **Publisher**
Activision
- **Supplier**
Nintendo [011] 256 7760
- **Genre**
Action
- **Age Restriction**
None
- **Specifications**
Players: 1

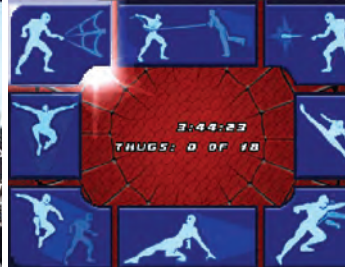
*Up in the sky!
It's the amazing
generic movie
licence!*

SPIDER-MAN 2

ONCE AGAIN WITH GREAT profits on a blockbuster movie come great amounts of horribly slap-dash games that fail to capture the spirit of Spider-Man.

In this DS incarnation, Spider-Man flips, flops and flounders through various uninspired levels roughly based on events from the film. The game swaps between three modes. The first being your traditional 'side view' platforming experience where you punch baddies and crawl up and down walls. The second, a quasi-3D New York to prowl around, unlocking new attacks (that have to be activated via a horrible interface found on the bottom screen). And lastly the dual-screen mode (usually during boss fights) where the top screen shows the action from the side while the bottom shows you Spider-Man's point of view.

Levels contain multiple objectives, usually the utterly frustrating fare of "find the person/gold/cookie/kitten" in a maze of corridors and/or vents. Almost every activity the game involves you in, is tedious and, for the lack of a better word, boring. Not even the slightly interesting use of the dual screen during boss fights is enough to make this game worth any effort. **NAG**



Pretty to look at, pretty to hold, tons of substance, yet just not fun *[Doesn't rhyme Ed.]*

67

VITAL INFO

- Platforms
XBOX
- Suggested Retail Price
TBA
- Developer
Mercury Steam
- Publisher
Deep Silver
- Supplier
Not available in SA
- Genre
Action
- Age Restriction
12+
- Specifications
Players: 1-2



SCRAPLAND

Low-ridin' through cities of the future

AERICAN MCGEE IS INVOLVED in Scrapland, somehow. His name is on the box, though there seems to be no tell-tale signs of exactly what it was he did. So, let's ignore the big name on the box, shall we?

In the recent trend of having lead protagonists being morally reprehensible and slightly unethical, it's pleasant to see a lead character (in this case, a literally self-made robot called D-Tritus, looking for work in a new space-city) who is just generally nice. He is a very nice guy... robot. It's charming at first, but soon the overly trusting nature becomes slightly unnatural.

Grand Theft Robot would not only be a good way to describe the open-ended game dynamics of Scrapland, it would also be an eerily highly accurate way to describe what makes Scrapland a little different. D-Tritus has the ability to "copy" the programming of the various characters he meets, turning himself into them and using their specific abilities to his own ends. Certain scenarios require certain characters' traits in a puzzle-like way, adding to the already daunting list of tasks one has to do. Building your own spaceships and flying through the sci-fi city and racing and combating your way through the witty storyline are initially comfortable, but seem to somehow quickly lose momentum.

Despite the impressive visuals and emergent game play, Scrapland just lacks a certain something to make it all worth it. **NAG**



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VITAL INFO

- Platforms
- **NAG**
- Suggested Retail Price
R 450
- Developer
Nintendo
- Publisher
Nintendo
- Supplier
Nintendo [011] 256 7760
- Genre
RPG
- Age Restriction
None
- Specifications
Players: 1
Memory: 10 blocks



PAPER MARIO: THE THOUSAND-YEAR DOOR

QUASI-SEQUEL TO THE MUCH-LOVED Nintendo 64 game in the same vein originally released in 2000, Paper Mario: The Thousand-Year Door is a written testament to how style really can work for a game. The paper theme may seem superficial at first, but quickly becomes something so integral to the universe one cannot imagine the game being pulled off any other way.

Dimensionally challenged in a vibrant world, Mario sets off on what seems to be the usual "save the Princess" fare, but that's as far as the cliché goes. After reaching midway, one might even start thinking that Paper Mario seems to be the anti-cliché for the Mario series of games, and that's something wholeheartedly appreciated. To use a tiny example, for once bad-guy Bowser is five or more steps behind Mario and making a comical attempt at everything he does.

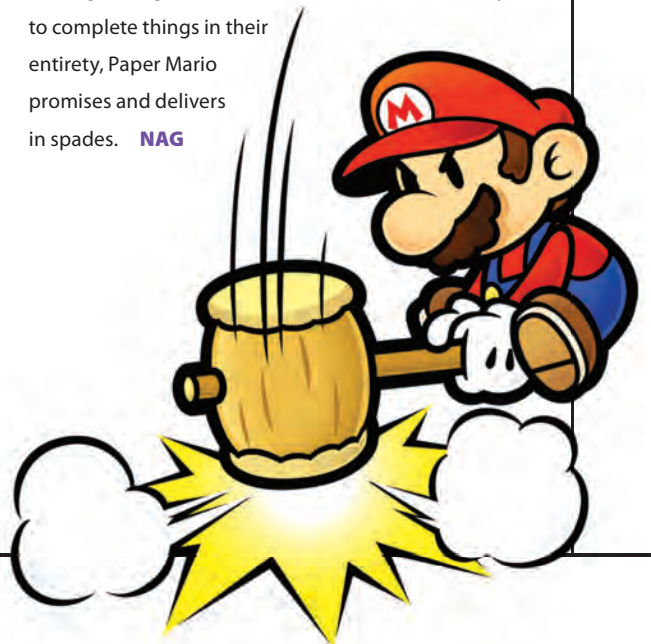
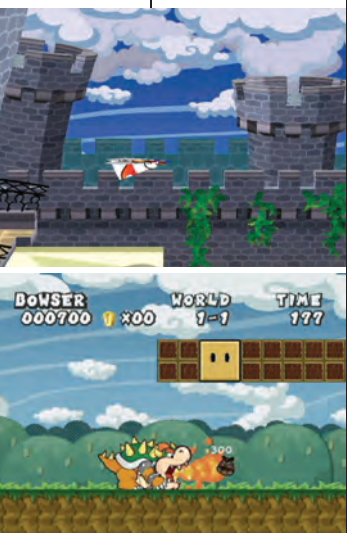
The entire game is themed around comedy, adventure and most of all, paper. The whole paper aspect permeates through the game, not only stylistically in how buildings will unfold when you enter them, but also in the combat and adventure sections. Being of the RPG genre, combat typically only happens once Mario touches an enemy. The starting conditions of the fight can be changed, for example, by jumping on enemies beforehand; Mario gets to attack first when combat happens. If an enemy bails into Mario first, he and his team-mates are at the mercy of the enemies' first strike.

Each companion found along the journey has their own story, history and typically interesting traits, as

well as functional moves - both in battle and out. One character can summon up a gust of wind, useful for finding hidden stairs or otherwise masked by a draped sheet of paper disguised as the background. Often the sheer ingenuity of the paper-based world astounds, as bridges get built in a flip-book animation sequence or backdrops unfold, tear apart or get cut into relevant shapes.

With the turn-based combat being interesting and deep (timing on actions become very important), the world vivacious and the characters truly fascinating in their own right, Paper Mario comes across as a heartfelt quality title, masked behind a deceptive childlike appearance. With over 20 hours of game time for those rushing through or over 50 for those who obsessively like to complete things in their entirety, Paper Mario promises and delivers in spades. **NAG**

If it rains, we're screwed...



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- 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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Vigorously fresh and fantastic, this is a welcome return for the series

VITAL INFO

- Platforms
- NAG
- Suggested Retail Price
- R 450
- Developer
- Capcom
- Publisher
- Capcom
- Supplier
- Nintendo [011] 256 7760
- Genre
- FPS
- Age Restriction
- 18+
- Specifications
- Players: 1
- Memory: 8 blocks



RESIDENT EVIL 4



Everybody was kung-fu fighting. Those zombies were fast as... zombies



EVERY CONSOLE AT SOME point in its lifespan gets blessed with a game so sterling, it forcefully sets the quality expected from future titles. Unfortunately for every developer out there, Resident Evil 4 is that game and it has come home early.

It's no big secret that the Resident Evil series had of late become staunch and entirely dated. Even the graphically unsurpassed Resident Evil Zero simply didn't offer anything new to keep fans interested or to draw in new players. It seems almost entirely too incredible that somehow, the rigid and stoic Resident Evil has suddenly been reborn into a sleek, powerful beast that simply hungers to impress.

Everything about this latest incarnation of Resident Evil is new, different and jaw-dropping. It is not a flawless game, but all trespasses are quickly forgiven in the sheer experience. Protagonist Leon (after returning from the Raccoon City incident) is both detailed in appearance and happily maudlin in attitude. The controls are tight and responsive while the "over the shoulder" camera gives you an

intense focus on what you are aiming at while simultaneously making you peripherally blind, increasing the tension.

Contextual actions, achieved when close to certain elements, lend an entirely new type of freedom to Resident Evil. Ladders can be knocked over, fences jumped and even during the cinematic cut scenes you aren't safe. Miss a timed button press and you'll quickly find yourself on the wrong end of an axe.

The enhanced control you have is entirely necessary, for these are not zombies you fight. They are villagers, religious men and even the military, lethal, dedicated and above all, intelligent. They will attempt everything possible to make sure Leon dies, and their capabilities are almost as many as Leon's when it comes to leaping fences, raising ladders and clambering through windows. Thankfully, weapon purchases and upgrades feature heavily in dealing with the threats, while defending Ashley (the president's daughter Leon was sent to save) is less of a chore than usually possible. **NAG**



An excellent RPG experience faithfully true to the franchise

80

VITAL INFO

- **Platforms**
- **Suggested Retail Price**
R 450
- **Developer**
Raven Software
- **Publisher**
Activision
- **Supplier**
Nintendo (011) 256 7760
- **Genre**
RPG
- **Age Restriction**
11+
- **Specifications**
Players: 1-4
memory: 8 Blocks



X-MEN: LEGENDS

THIS WOULD BE THE perfect time to say something special to developer Raven Software (known for their high-quality titles). That something is "Thank you". Thank you Raven, for

finally giving gamers and X-Men aficionados the game we've wanted all this time. High praise, yes, but deserving despite the game's subtle shortcomings.

There is nothing special about the way X-Men: Legends looks. The game's attempt at cell-shading (to make it look more like the comic) actually detracts from the overall graphical quality, making the characters seem bland. This is where the shortcomings thankfully stop and the rest of the game shines.

Being an action role-playing experience with extreme amounts of detailed faithfulness to the X-Men franchise, Legends pits you (and three team-mates either AI controlled or happily steered by friends via the extra controllers) against the expected evil mutants (and some surprises). Combat is fast, fun and ultimately rewarding as the reactive environment responds cunningly to your ministrations. Enemies can be

thrown clear through walls while devastating combo attacks between team-mates (with proper timing) bring wholesale carnage to the screen.

On cue, each character can be upgraded, kitted out and swapped with other popular X-Men characters while the interludes between missions at the Xavier Institute for Higher Learning bring about interesting Danger Room submissions and welcoming extra content. Definitely one for the fans. **NAG**

*Gambit
can kiss my
Adamantium
butt...*



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WWE

megarom interactive

The Cactus Connection

TECH NEWS

Intel and AMD on same motherboard

Elitegroup Computer Systems, previously noted for the Dual Graphic Engine innovation which can, to a limited extent, combine AGP and PCI Express on the same motherboard, has introduced the PF88, which is a plug-in card that allows an AMD K8 processor to be used on an Intel-based motherboard. The company will soon be introducing motherboards supporting this plug-in card, which itself will cost about a third of the price of a suitable motherboard.



LOGITECH'S NEW PSP ACCESSORIES

At the recent CeBIT exhibition, Logitech unveiled a range of accessories for Sony's PSP handheld. The PlayGear Pocket Case is a shell that protects the unit, but does not hinder or obstruct any functions, so the PSP can be used without removing it from the case. Furthermore, the flip-top can rotate far enough back to act as a stand when watching movies. The PlayGear Stealth earphones feature different sized

rubber fittings, ensuring a comfortable fit for any size ear. The PlayGear Amp portable speakers feature a bracket to hold the handheld, allowing it to be used for hands-free watching of movies. PlayGear Share is a simple splitter that doubles the audio out port, allowing two sets of headphones to be connected to the PSP at one time. The product range will be available in SA in June.





GENIUS MAXFIRE WIRELESS G-12PS

This is a new and relatively inexpensive (R210) wireless controller for use with PC or PlayStation. The 2.4GHz transmission has an effective range of 10m. The controller boasts an impressive array of buttons and sticks, as well as vibration effects. PlayStation and PlayStation 2 are supported natively, while PC compatibility is ensured by a driver disk included in the package. [www.axiz.com]

THERMALTAKE LIQUID COOLING SYSTEM-ROCKET

This is a new water-based cooling system from ThermalTake. Making use of no fans means that the Liquid Cooling System-Rocket results in a very quiet PC.



Sapphire introduces new bundling strategy

Sapphire Technology, manufacturer of graphics cards, has hit on a new way to bundle software with its products. The new initiative is referred to as Sapphire Select. The new initiative will offer DVDs containing a wide range of locked applications. Customers will choose an applicable number of these, for which they will be issued activation codes. Additional activation codes will be available for purchase at discounted rates.

Cool Manipulator

ZALMAN



ZM-MCF1

6 Channel Fan controller



Frontosa IT

ACECAD

Thermalright

VANTEC

ZALMAN

DACAL

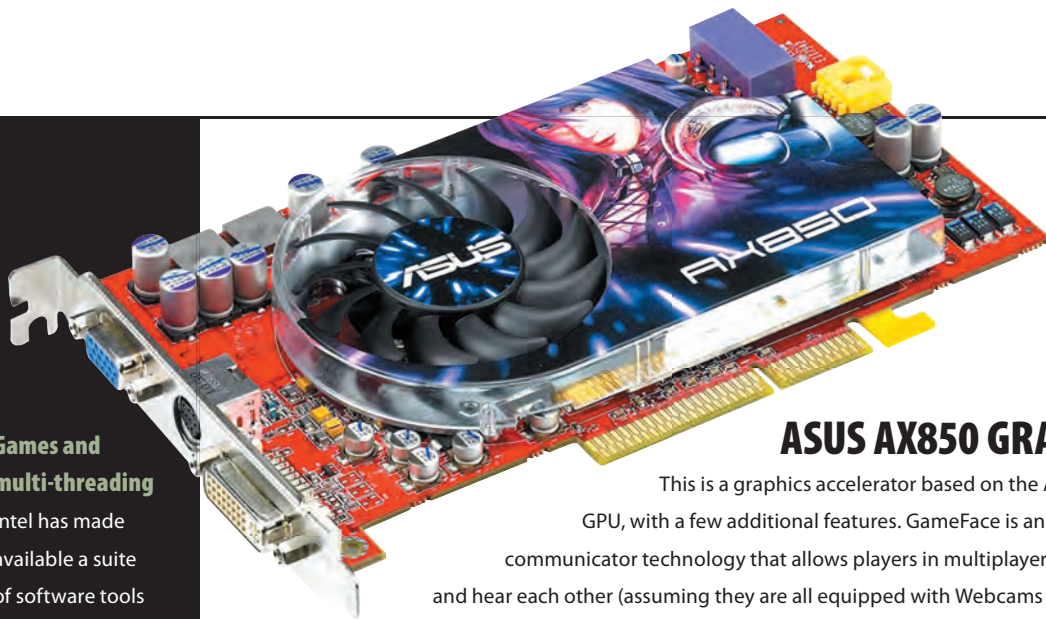
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13:7

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Games and multi-threading

Intel has made available a suite of software tools designed to help game developers take advantage of dual-core processors' multi-threading capabilities. Physics, world simulation, character animation and artificial intelligence are all expected to benefit greatly from the ability to deploy these various elements onto separate processing threads.



ASUS AX850 GRAPHIC CARD

This is a graphics accelerator based on the ATI Radeon X850 GPU, with a few additional features. GameFace is an audio-visual communicator technology that allows players in multiplayer sessions to see and hear each other (assuming they are all equipped with Webcams or equivalent). The AX850 boasts on-screen adjustment of various settings, without having to quit the current application. The card also provides native support for security surveillance, empowering a user to train a Webcam on a location and then making use of motion detection to record unauthorised events.

PHYSX

Opening up new possibilities in gameplay

AGEIA HAS ANNOUNCED THE production of the first hardware physics accelerator, or PPU called PhysX. The 125 million transistor chip is designed to go on cards for PCI Express slots with up to 128MB of GDD3 RAM. It consumes approximately 25 watts of power and AGEIA says that prototype boards are available now and it expects OEMs to be able to have hardware ready by the end of 2005. They also claim that there will be "at least 15 significant titles" supporting the chip by the end of the year.

Since the CPU can only process a few hundred discrete physics objects, such as bones in a model, particles, or points of a fluid surface, a new solution will be needed to take advantage of the increase in power and flexibility of next generation graphics hardware. While there has been some speculation that modern GPUs can be adapted to process physics, doing so would mean having to balance resources between the physics simulation and the graphical quality.

LOGITECH MM22 PORTABLE SPEAKERS

Designed to be used with an iPod or other portable music player, these speakers fold up to about the size of a hardcover book when not in use. Any analogue audio source that features a 3.5mm jack is supported. The mm22 speakers allow owners of portable media players to enjoy music without having to wear headphones. The system can be powered by batteries or an included AC adapter. [www.logitech.com]



LOGITECH MX518

Logitech's new MX518 is the company's successor to the gaming-oriented MX510, and features a similar contoured design. Buttons above and below the scroll-wheel allow the user to change between resolutions of 400, 800 and 1600dpi on the fly.



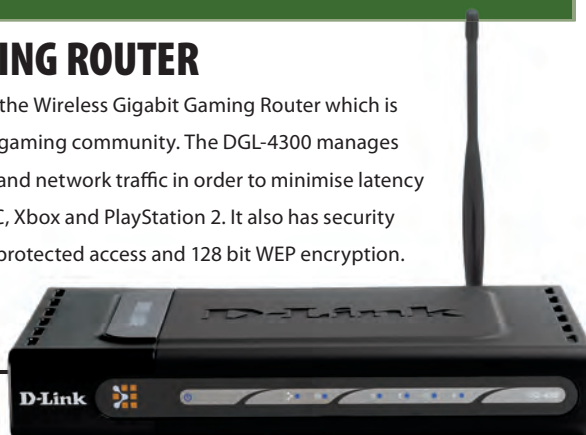
SAITEK GAMER'S KEYBOARD

The two main features which make this keyboard a consideration for gamers is the adjustable funky blue backlighting behind the keys, which can be set to either bright, dim or off and the command pad. Using the Saitek programming software you are able to bind multiple keys to one single button on the command pad. [www.saitek.com]

D-LINK GAMING ROUTER

D-link has announced the Wireless Gigabit Gaming Router which is targeted at the online gaming community. The DGL-4300 manages and prioritises broadband network traffic in order to minimise latency and will work with a PC, Xbox and PlayStation 2. It also has security features such as Wi-Fi protected access and 128 bit WEP encryption.

[www.d-link.com]



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EUROTEK D900T

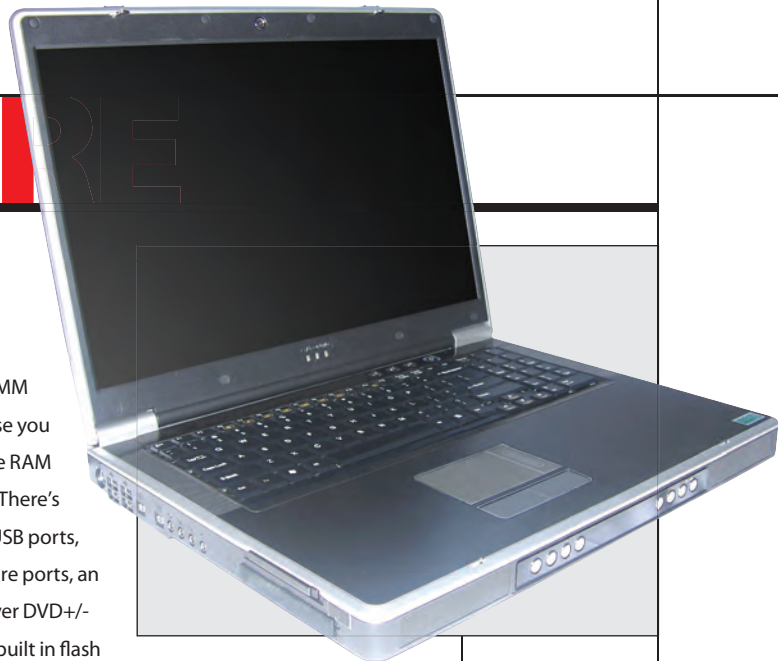
THE EUROTEK D900T IS a desktop replacement class laptop. Packing a Pentium 4 Extreme Edition 3.4GHz, 1GB of RAM and a Geforce 6800 Go PCI Express GPU, it's less of a machine to do work on the go on than a convenient one piece gaming powerhouse that just happens to have a battery that lasts about long enough to plug it back in when someone trips over the cord. The 17" (43cm) screen supports resolutions of up to 1680 X 1050 in a 16:10 aspect ratio, so you'll have a great screen for DVD watching and high resolution gaming. In case that's a little small, there's a DVI port on the back and a bundled DVI to VGA adapter. Jacks for headphones, microphone, line in, and SPDIF digital out should cover your audio needs.

The Eurotek D900T also features 802.11b/g wireless and a gigabit Ethernet port. Bluetooth is onboard in case you need to exchange data with your cellphone or PDA.

Storage space is not much of a concern. There's room for a second 2.5" hard drive for when you fill the 60GB 7200rpm drive the Eurotek D900T comes with. It also has

four SODIMM slots in case you need more RAM someday. There's also four USB ports, two Firewire ports, an 8x dual layer DVD+/-RW and a built in flash card reader.

During testing the Eurotek D900T, gaming performance rocked. Running the latest games in 1600 X 1024 with 4x antialiasing and 8x anisotropic was a breeze. However, heat can be an issue. The laptop overheated several times during testing due to being placed on a bed which interfered with the four cooling fans on the bottom. This sometimes caused reboots, lockups, and data corruption on the hard drive. Heads will turn when you show up with this, assuming you can lift it. Just keep it in a cool well ventilated place, such as Antarctica. **NAG**



VITAL INFO

- **Pros**
Powerful
- **Cons**
Heat issues
Heavy
- **Supplier**
Eurobyte [011] 234 0142
- **Internet**
www.eurobyte.co.za
- **RRP**
R29 600
- **Reviewer**
Toby Hudon

CHAINTECH ZENITH VNF4 ULTRA VALUE EDITION

THE EXCEPTIONAL CAPABILITIES OF the nForce 4 Ultra chipset are well documented. It is currently the undisputed gaming performance champion in conjunction with the 64-bit AMD chips it supports, and includes all the new technology of Intel 9xx architecture. However, motherboards with nForce 4 Ultra on board are still in the high price categories making these advantages available only to those on a healthy budget.

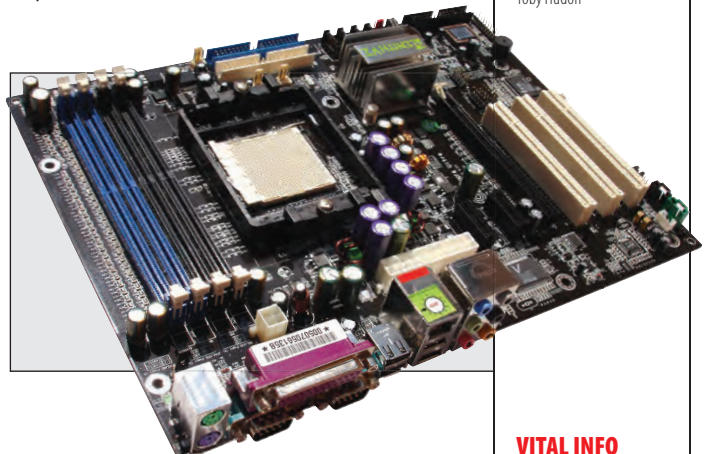
Chaintech has created the Zenith Value brand specifically for consumers with smaller budgets, and has just released the VNF4 Ultra Zenith Value Edition to deliver high-end capabilities at an attractive price point.

From a performance perspective, this Chaintech offering doesn't really show its budget roots, featuring PCI Express, four SATA 2 channels, as well as an array of soft nForce 4 benefits to boot. The BIOS and passively-cooled Northbridge heats up quickly, making over clocking not the Zeniths strongest suite.

Its cost-conscious nature is also clearly obvious in

its design. The Chaintech is a small board overall and features peculiarities like the extremely cramped DIMM slots with unusual pairings (slot 0 + 1 form one dual channel, 1 + 2 the other) and IDE connectors without plastic sides at all. The tall passive chipset cooler mentioned earlier also sits very close to the rear of the PCI-E x16 graphics slot, making installing any kind of cooled card just about impossible.

Nonetheless, with a socket 939 Athlon 64 3500+ installed, it offered excellent computing power at an affordable price. It was stable during operation and with a decent graphic card chosen to fit, would make the basis for a gaming system with leading performance. **NAG**



VITAL INFO

- **Pros**
nForce 4 at a more palatable price point
- **Cons**
Quirky irregularities
Space constraints all over and limited BIOS over clocking functions
- **Supplier**
Sonic Informed [011] 880 2684
- **Internet**
www.sonicinformed.co.za
- **RRP**
R1000
- **Reviewer**
Russell Bennett

ABIT FATAL1TY AA8XE

ABIT HAS BECOME A popular motherboard choice amongst hardcore PC gamers of late, steadily taking over the over clocking scene with uGuru and associated tools, and is now aiming at sewing up this segment of the PC scene by joining forces with 23-year old celebrity gamer Johnathan Wendel. Wendel's nickname "Fatal1ty" has now started appearing on gaming-dedicated hardware such as the AA8XE Intel 925-based motherboard.

Based on the performance targeted 925XE chipset, the AA8XE incorporates an almost vanilla feature set for the most part. There's Azalia high definition audio (on a custom riser card interestingly), four SATA connectors, one IDE connector, PCI Express x16 for graphics, two more x1 PCI add-in slots and two 32-bit PCI interfaces. Two PS/2 connectors, two RJ 45 LAN ports, four USB slots and two fans, channelling air out the back of this system, are situated on the back panel.

The two fans extract air from the Dual OTES arrangement covering the voltage regulation capacitors surrounding the CPU socket. The MOSFETs are already covered by their own heat sinks, and dual OTES ensures a constant flow of cool air to keep temperatures right down. There's an additional fan on

the Northbridge heat sink arrangement, and a further two are included in the box

for RAM cooling, although I have yet to come across DDR2 with heat issues.

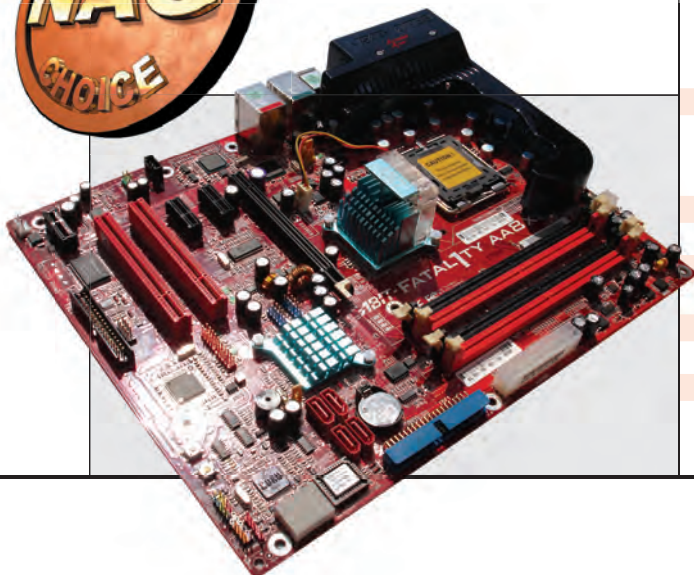
Dual OTES makes installing the OEM Intel cooler relatively tricky and anything with larger dimensions will simply not fit. But this is all in place to ensure that the system remains safe even when over clocking dramatically, which this package truly excels at. An extensive range of BIOS options means that the Fatal1ty exceeds the expectations of even the most dedicated over clocker, allowing you to pull huge performance from cheaper CPUs easily. The 3GHz FSB 800 Prescott CPU I used for testing could run in the region of 3.8GHz quite comfortably on this board.

Even with this comparatively humble processor, this Abit offering performed consistently in the highest echelon of Intel-based platforms available today, although even with high-end 3.46GHz P4EE chips at 1066MHz FSB it is overshadowed by the latest Nforce 4 chipsets from rival AMD according to all reports.

There's no doubt about whom this offering is targeted at, and I for one like the idea of such obsessive focus. The Abit Fatal1ty AA8XE may well be the best Intel gaming platform currently available. What's more, it looks great installed and is tangibly a product purely for us, the gaming market. **NAG**

VITAL INFO

- **Pros**
Pure gamer focus
Great performance
Very stable
Easy to over clock
- **Cons**
Feature set perhaps a little sparse in top flight motherboard market
- **Supplier**
Frontosa [011] 466 0038
- **Internet**
www.frontosa.co.za
- **RRP**
R3200
- **Reviewer**
Russell Bennett



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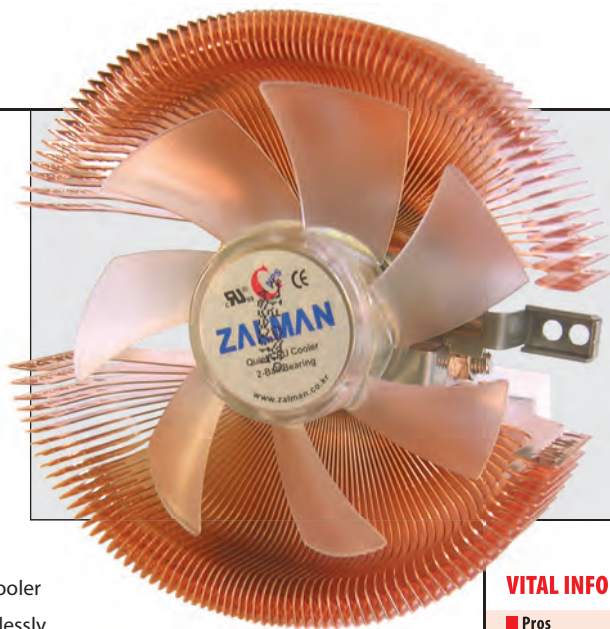
ZALMAN CNPS7000B VGA COOLER

ZALMAN HAS RELEASED A "B/Beta" version of their award winning CNPS7000Cu Cooler, dubbed the CNPS7000B.

The "Big-Blue", distinguishable from its predecessor only by its transparent cooling fan illuminated by an integrated blue diode, weighs in at 2g heavier (755g), but has a smaller dissipation area (3,15cm² - down by 16cm²). The smaller dissipation area has not affected the cooler's ability in the least however. In fact, its cooling power still equals that of its predecessor. The size of the CNPS7000B remains unchanged at 109mm in length, 109mm in width and 62mm in height.

The CNPS7000B's claim to fame is sure to be its diversity. It is compatible with all CPUs currently available. This impressive list includes: Intel Pentium 4 socket 478, 775 (for socket 775 separate mounting hardware must be purchased), AMD Duron/Athlon/Athlon XP/Sempron socket 462, and AMD Sempron/AMD64 Athlon 64/Opteron socket 754/939/940.

Mounting plates are easily installed on the motherboard and following the application of thermal paste, the



radial cooler is effortlessly mounted on the CPU.

The only downfall of the CNPS7000B is that the cooler requires motherboards with mounting holes and no components higher than 39mm in the heat sink zone (55mm radius from CPU centre). This limits the motherboard choices available for use with "Big-Blue".

The CNPS7000B, once powered, illuminates the clear fan in a blue light, intensified with a speed increase control courtesy of Zalman's Fan Mate 2.

Zalman stays with tradition and keeps it quiet yet powerfully cool. **NAG**

VITAL INFO

- Pros**
Compatible with "all" CPUs
Exceptional cooling power
Silent operation
- Cons**
Requires mounting holes
No fan grill
- Supplier**
Frontosa [011] 466 0038
- Internet**
www.frontosa.co.za
- RRP**
R375
- Reviewer**
Victor Moore

ZALMAN VF700-CU QUIET VGA COOLER

IMPLEMENTING A REAR METAL brace and nipple structure, Zalman attaches a 270g all copper pressed fin cooler to your video card's GPU (Graphics Processing Unit). Welcome to the new Zalman VF700-Cu Quiet VGA Cooler.

The package consists of the cooler, mounting hardware, thermal paste, a multi-connector and, in addition, Zalman offers eight RAM heat sinks with integrated adhesive thermal tape.

Installation of the cooler is effortless. The brace is easily installed at the rear of the graphic card and serves as a mounting point for the massive cooler. It also prevents the GPU/PCB (Printed Circuit Board) from being damaged. A conventional screw down clip is used on the front of the graphic card to attach it to the brace. This clip has mounting holes at two points, allowing for different graphic card designs. The installation of the RAM heat sinks is even more effortless as they are simply "glued" to the RAM chips.

The design of the large radial cooler allows not only for the cooling of the GPU, but also all of the surrounding circuitry and components. The RAM heat sinks, with their

low profile, fit below the cooler's fins, receiving their fair share of air from the slow spinning fan.

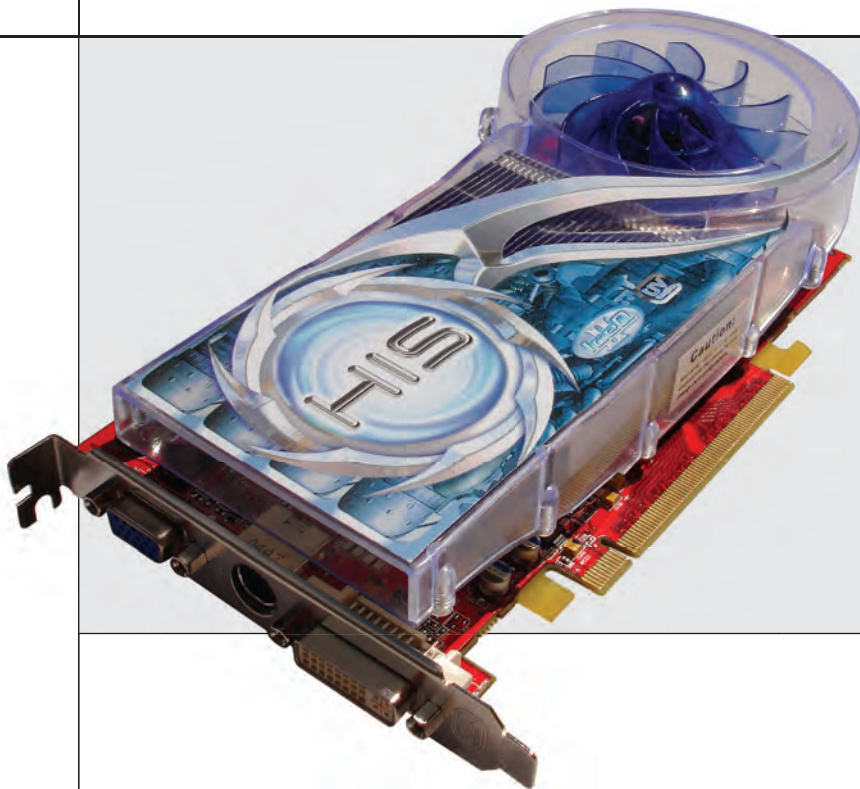
As usual, Zalman makes use of their CNP (Computer Noise Prevention) technology to ensure noise levels are almost non-existent in "silent" mode and more than acceptable under the "normal" mode selection.

Performance is excellent with the VF700-Cu allowing unbelievable headroom in terms of over clocking ability, thanks to its powerful cooling ability. **NAG**



VITAL INFO

- Pros**
Easy installation
Powerful cooling ability
Silent operation
- Cons**
Doesn't fit NVIDIA PCX series
Loose adjacent PCI slot
Exposed cooling fan
- Supplier**
Frontosa [011] 466 0038
- Internet**
www.frontosa.co.za
- RRP**
R270
- Reviewer**
Victor Moore



HIS ICEQ 2 X800 XL

ATI HAS RELEASED THE X800 XL chipset rather quietly. Destined to plug the price gap between high and low-end models from the same line, the X800 XL is destined to become the budget-oriented gamer's best friend, usurping the spot from the popular 6800 GT.

This particular HIS variant incorporates a very attractive, if huge, VGA cooler called IceQ 2, which draws air from the heat sinks covering both VPU and video RAM chips and expels it out the back of the case. This ought to prove useful when it comes to pushing

the 400MHz core and 490MHz RAM frequencies up in the search for more power. Strangely, the include iTurbo software can only push these figures to 430 and 500 respectively, but over clocking with conventional tools unlocks far greater

rewards.

The X800 XL's really big trick is that it is a full 16-pipeline VPU as opposed to the 12 in the X800 Pro. These additional pipes mean that even the reduction in clock frequencies can't keep the newer offering from smashing the performance benchmarks of the Pro version to pieces.

In fact, it ran very close to the range-topping X850 XT in the most demanding synthetic benchmark currently available - 3DMark 05. On the same test system running a Prescott P4 3GHz CPU with 512MB DDR 400 RAM and with Catalyst 5.2 drivers installed, the XL managed an astonishing 4748 points. At 1280 X 1024 with 4X FSAA and 8X anisotropy enabled, it still scored among the best available with 3235.

This HIS X800 XL should become the de facto standard for those wanting a cutting edge graphics card without the massive expense of either the 6800 Ultra or the X850 XT. The XL can really compete with both of these offerings thanks to its 16 enabled pipelines, but at a far more reasonable price. **NAG**

VITAL INFO

■ Pros

Massive performance
Affordable price

■ Cons

iTurbo over clocking software too conservative

■ Supplier

Sonic Informed
[011] 880 2684

■ Internet

www.sonicinformed.co.za

■ RRP

R4200

■ Reviewer

Russell Bennett

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 4. Different Color available
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 Recommended Retail Price: R250

MP201-128MB
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 2. Support SD/MMC card expansion.
 3. Voice Recording
 4. FM Radio (20FM Preset channels)
 5. Direct record FM radio into MP3/WMA format
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 7. Delicated LCD display with metal housing.
 Recommended Retail Price = R995



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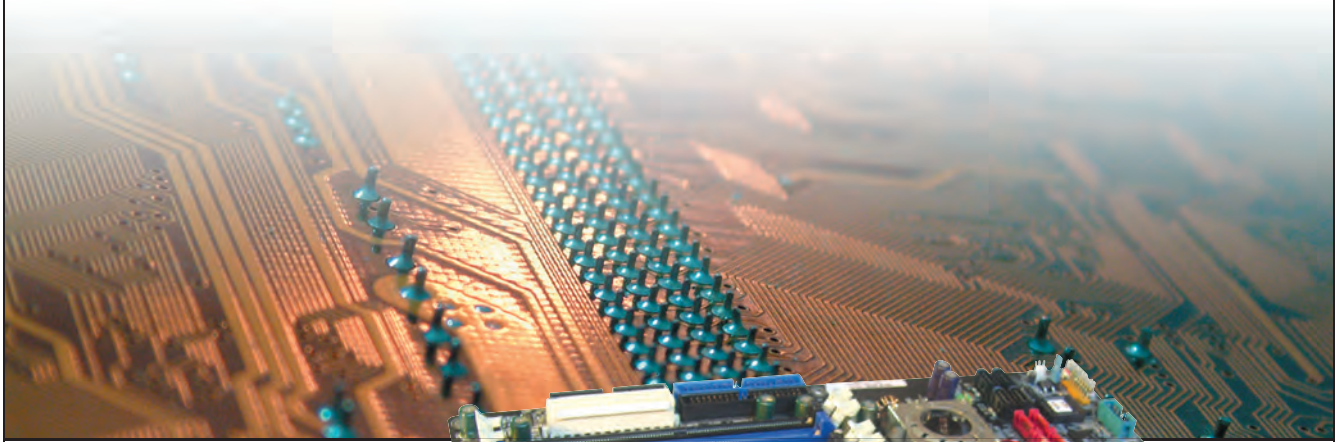
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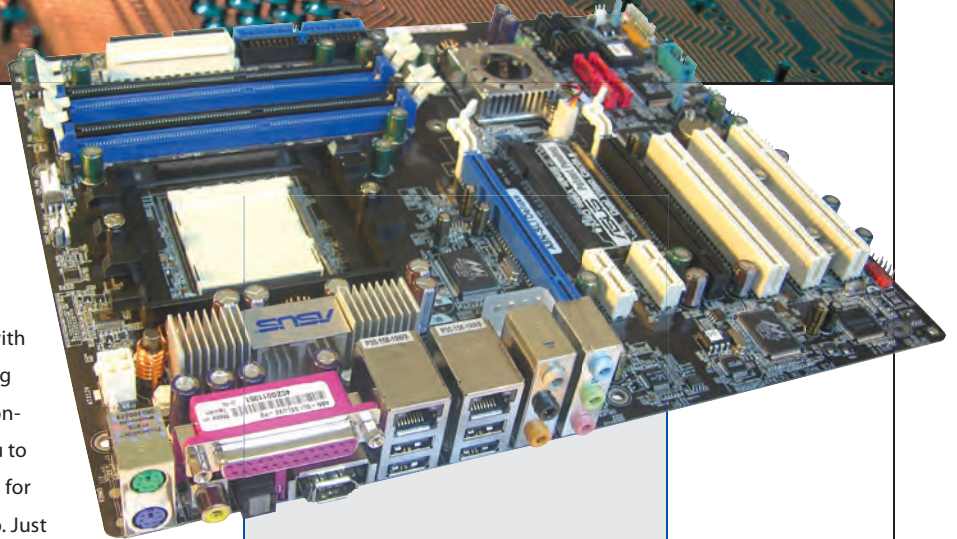
SOCKET 939 AMD MOTHERBOARDS

WITH THE ONGOING BATTLE between AMD and Intel it is only natural to follow up the Intel motherboard roundup in the February issue with one on AMD-based motherboards. We would like to extend our thanks to both Asus and Naked IT. Asus stepped in at the last minute to supply the NVIDIA 6800GT PCI Express graphic card, while Naked IT was kind enough to supply the heat sink paste we used to test these motherboards.

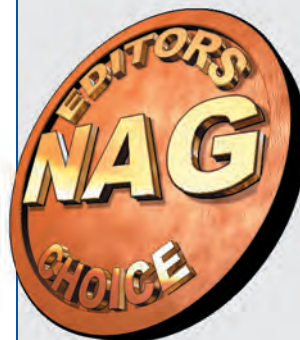


ASUS A8N-SLI DELUXE

THE ASUS A8N-SLI DELUXE is definitely one of Asus' best motherboards to date. The most noticeable feature of this motherboard is its dual PCI Express X16 slots. In between these two slots are two PCI Express X1 slots with the space between the two VGA slots allowing better air flow. Switching between SLI and non-SLI mode is very easy and simply requires you to flip the selector PC board so that it is inserted for either a single card setup or a dual card setup. Just above the top PCI Express X16 slot is a 4-pin power connector. This allows for more power to be available to an SLI setup, should it need it. The only negative was the position of the nForce4 SLI chipset. Large VGA cards will fit tightly and removing a card is difficult as the clip that keeps it in place is not always easily accessible. Asus recently released the A8N SLI Premium version which contains the AI Selector features allowing you to switch between single VGA and dual VGA mode in the software. At the back panel, this motherboard features all the connectors you would ever need, including dual Gigabit LAN, an optical output, and a Coaxial S/PDIF output. The audio on this motherboard is supplied by a Realtek ALC850 codec and supports up to eight channels. The Asus A8N-SLI Deluxe performed very well during the benchmark test.



BEST ON TEST



VITAL INFO

■ Plus

Performance
Back panel connectors

■ Minus

Position of the nForce4
SLI chipset

■ Supplier

Asus [011] 783-5450

■ Internet

www.asus.com

■ RRP

£1599

VALUE

89

PERFORMANCE

92

OVERALL

90



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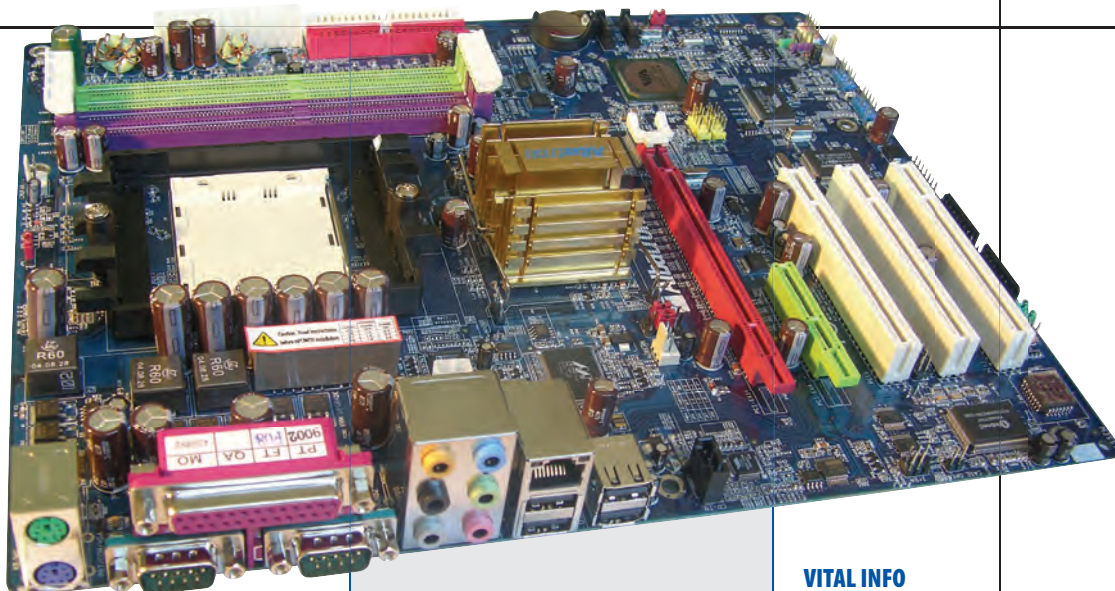
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ALBATRON K8X890 PROII

THIS MOTHERBOARD DOESN'T SPORT all of the flashy features of some of its competitors and we were a little disappointed with its overall performance compared to that of its competitors. This motherboard features the VIA K8T890 which means it has one PCI Express X16 slot. An interesting fact to note is that Albatron opted for one PCI Express X4 instead of four PCI Express X1 slots.

Situated next to the CPU socket you will find what looks like a very short PCI slot. This slot is used for the mPower module. The mPower module was designed to provide an additional four phase power supply to the CPU. This helps to stabilise the current. Looking at the back panel you will find only one Marvell Gigabit LAN port. There are also four USB 2.0 ports while the IEEE-1394 ports are available on the bundled PCI bracket. The onboard audio on this motherboard is provided by the VIA VT1720 Envy codec and is capable of supporting up to eight channels.



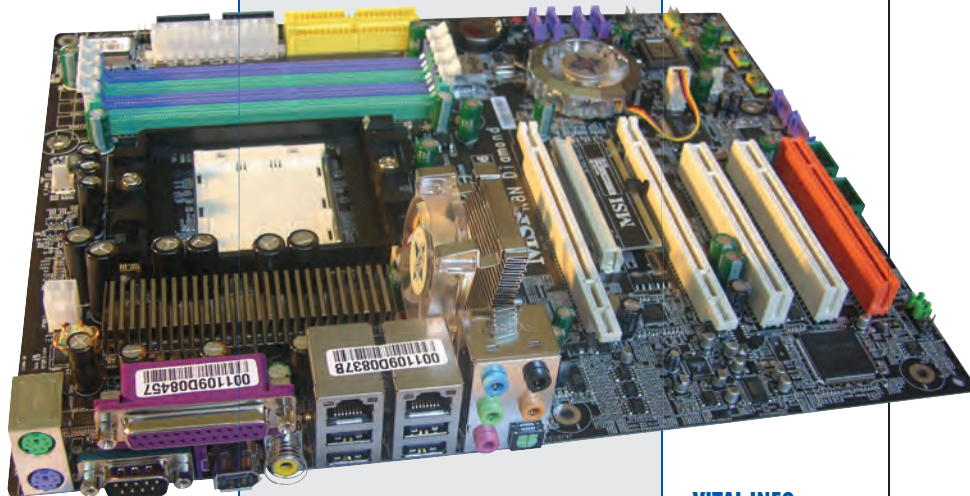
VITAL INFO

- **Plus**
mPower module
- **Minus**
Only one Gigabit LAN port
- **Supplier**
Wentek International
[021] 551-8866
- **Internet**
www.wentek.co.za
- **RRP**
R1200

VALUE **88** OVERALL **84**
PERFORMANCE **80**

MSI K8N DIAMOND EDITION

MSI HAVE GROWN FROM strength to strength in recent years and one of the things its products are known for is innovation. The MSI K8N Diamond Edition is no exception. To start with, this is an SLI enabled motherboard which means it sports two PCI Express X16 slots. The chipset on this motherboard is the NVIDIA nForce4 SLI and we were pleasantly surprised to see the inclusion of an onboard Creative Sound Blaster Live!, 24-bit/96KHz audio codec. This Creative codec features EAX Advanced HD and Dolby Digital EX technology and supports up to eight channels. The SLI selector PC board is very small on the MSI K8N Diamond Edition and fits tightly between the two PCI Express slots. Sadly the retention clip that keeps it in place is flimsy and it is tricky to mount this clip back in place after the SLI selector card has been changed. On the plus side MSI has included a PCI-Card which adds 802.11g and Bluetooth capabilities to your system. An external antennae which is used by both technologies, is also included. On the back plate you will find dual Gigabit Ethernet connectors as well as an optical, and a Coaxial S/PDIF output.



VITAL INFO

- **Plus**
802.11g and Bluetooth
PCI-Card bundle
- **Minus**
SLI selector retention clip
- **Supplier**
Light Edge Technology
[021] 510-8270
- **Internet**
www.lightedge.co.za
- **RRP**
R2200

VALUE **90** OVERALL **86**
PERFORMANCE **83**



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GA-8ANXP-D

8 Sigma Series

GA-8GPNXP Duo

8 Sigma Series



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



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



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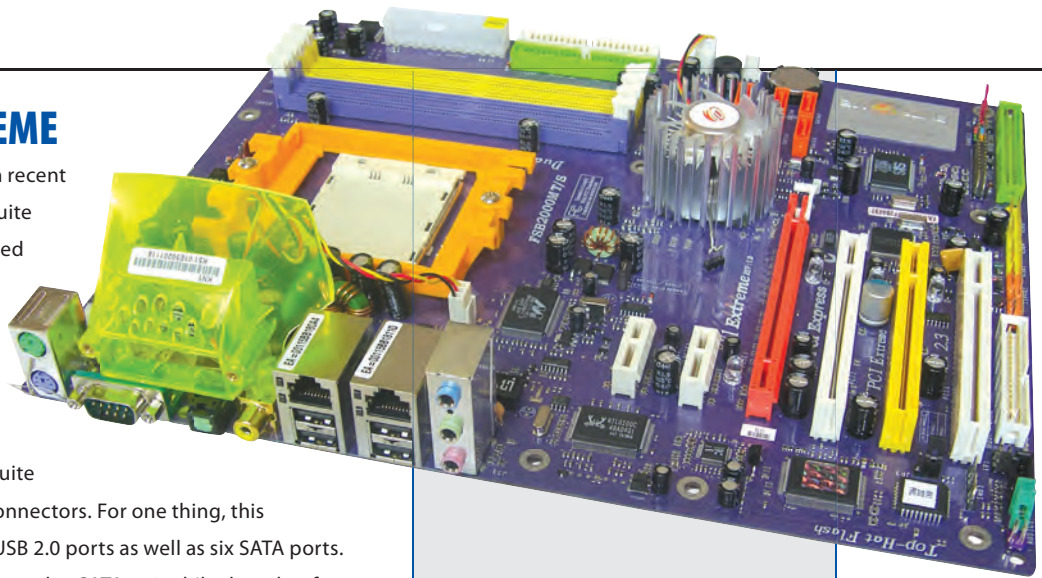
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ECS KN1 EXTREME

ECS HAS BEEN FAIRLY quiet in recent months, so we were quite excited when they delivered their latest Socket 939 for inclusion in the roundup. The ECS KN1 Extreme is based on the NVIDIA nForce4 Ultra chipset, and offers quite a large number of extra connectors. For one thing, this motherboard boasts ten USB 2.0 ports as well as six SATA ports. Two of the SATA ports are rated at SATA-150 while the other four are SATA-300 compatible. All six are RAID 0, 1, and 0+1 compatible. An innovative feature, which is not easily missed, is the bright yellow duct which guides air via a fan over the capacitors that are situated next to the CPU socket. If you have a windowed case you would enjoy the LEDs that ECS had added to this motherboard. These are situated in-between each PCI socket and flash randomly. Looking at the bundle we noted that ECS had included a 3¼-inch USB and IEEE-1394 panel which fits into a floppy drive bay and is used to bring the ports at the back of your PC to the front. Another bundled feature we thought was handy was the 2 meter Ethernet cable found in the box.



VITAL INFO

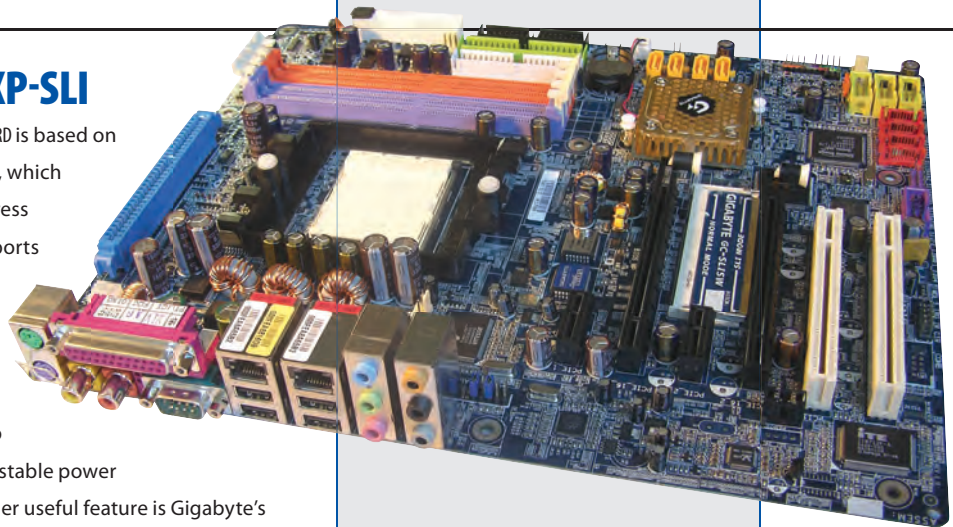
- Plus**
- Ten USB 2.0 ports
- Front bay connectivity panel
- Minus**
- No Dual Gigabit Ethernet ports
- Supplier**
- Esquire Technologies
- [012] 657-1111
- Internet**
- www.esquire.co.za

RRP
R1367

VALUE **78** OVERALL **79**
PERFORMANCE **80**

GIGABYTE GA-K8NXP-SLI

THE GIGABYTE GA-K8NXP-SLI MOTHERBOARD is based on the NVIDIA nForce4 SLI chipset, which means that it features two PCI Express X16 slots. This motherboard also sports Gigabyte's popular DPS (Dual Power System). This add-on card slots onto the motherboard just above the CPU bracket and adds additional six-phase power to the motherboard ensuring a more stable power supply to your components. Another useful feature is Gigabyte's Dual BIOS. This allows you to use the backup BIOS should the main BIOS fail - handy if you are an overclocker. Looking at the back plate of the Gigabyte GA-K8NXP-SLI you will find Dual Gigabit LAN ports as well as a Coaxial S/PDIF input and output port. The eight channel audio is produced by the onboard Realtek ALC850 Audio AC'97 codec. The motherboard also includes a Gigabyte 802.11g wireless PCI. In addition this motherboard is available as part of a bundle which includes a Gigabyte GeForce 6600GT. This is not just any graphics card though, and actually features two GeForce 6600GT GPUs. The VGA is optimised to work with this motherboard, which is a bit limiting, but if you buy the bundle the performance should be impressive. The bundled package retails for approximately R4999.



VITAL INFO

- Plus**
- DPS add-on card
- Bundled 802.11g PCI card
- Minus**
- Large chipset heat sink
- Supplier**
- Rectron [011] 203 1000
- Internet**
- www.rectron.net

RRP
R2400

VALUE **80** OVERALL **82**
PERFORMANCE **85**



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 Multimedia 5 Bottom Mouse
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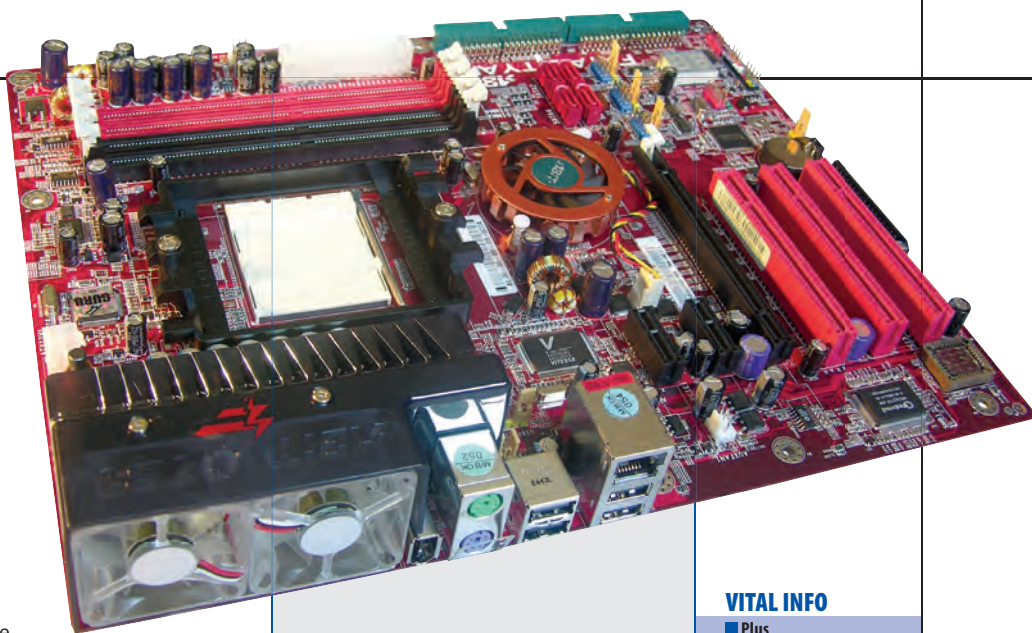
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ABIT FATAL1TY AN8

THE FATALITY RANGE OF motherboards is the result of the collaboration between one of the world's top gamers, Jonathan Wendel, and DFI. What we like about this motherboard is that it doesn't feature anything that you as a gamer won't need, such as a parallel or printer port. It also sports a couple of unique features such as the red LEDs on the back of the motherboard. These lights shine off the back plate and look stunning if you have a windowed case. Something which you should also notice is the OTES (Outside Thermal Exhaust System) cooling system. This system draws cool air from the back of your case and blows it over voltage regulator circuits. The Fatal1ty AN8 is based on the NVIDIA nF4 Ultra chipset. It has one PCI Express X16 slot and two PCI Express X1 slots. In the box you will also find an OTES RAMFlow adapter. This nifty device fits over your memory modules and features two fans that cool your memory modules. It works surprisingly well. Another feature reminiscent of ABIT motherboards, is the two digit LCD on the motherboard. This indicates various codes which are useful when you are trying to find a cause to a PC problem.



VITAL INFO

- **Plus**
Sound Card is removable
LEDs on the back of the board
- **Minus**
Position of the floppy connector
- **Supplier**
Frontosa IT [011] 466-0038
- **Internet**
www.frontosa.co.za
- **RRP**
R2100

VALUE **80** OVERALL **81**
PERFORMANCE **82**

DFI LANPARTY NF4 SLI-DR

DFI HAS CONVERTED MANY gamers to case modders with their LanParty series of motherboards. The LanParty nF4 SLI-DR is the latest in the range and offers NVIDIA's SLI support and is based on the NVIDIA nForce4 SLI chipset. It features two PCI Express X16 slots, one PCI Express slot, and one PCI Express X4 slot. Something which is unique to the LanParty series of motherboards is its UV connectors. On this motherboard the colour scheme is yellow and under UV light it looks quite remarkable. About the only thing we disliked on this motherboard were the SLI selector jumpers which had to be manually changed to switch between normal and SLI mode (this as apposed to a PC Board found on most other SLI motherboards). The onboard audio is provided by the Realtek ALC850 codec and this sound module is removable should you have a PCI soundcard. The bundle with this motherboard is also mentionable and includes the PC Transpo, a carry harness for your case, and FrontX, a 5¼-inch drive bay device that brings some ports usually found at the back of your PC to the front of your case. Lastly there is also a set of UV reactive round IDE cables.



VITAL INFO

- **Plus**
UV reactive connectors
Performance
- **Minus**
SLI selector jumpers
- **Supplier**
Axiz [011] 237-7000
- **Internet**
www.axiz.co.za
- **RRP**
R1995

VALUE **88** OVERALL **86**
PERFORMANCE **85**

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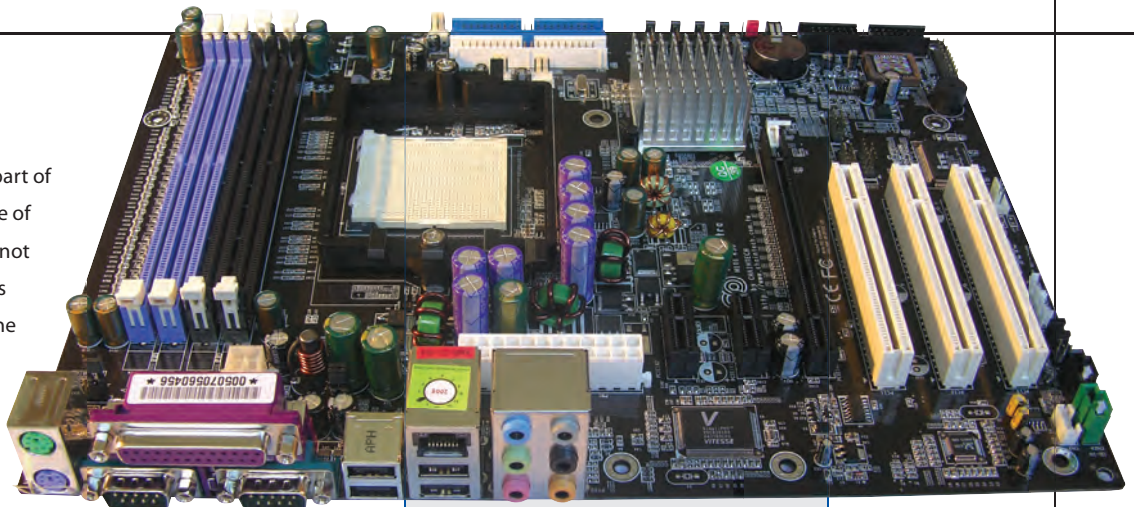
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CHAITECH VNF4 ULTRA

THE CHAITECH VNF4 ULTRA is part of Chaintech's Value Range of motherboards, so we were not expecting many extras. This motherboard is based on the nForce4 Ultra chipset and features two PCI Express X1 slots as well as one PCI Express 16X slot. Because this is a value

branded motherboard, it was not a surprise to only find one Gigabit Ethernet port and only four USB 2.0 ports. There is also not much of a bundle and you will only find two SATA cables, a SATA power connector and a set of IDE cables. The onboard audio is powered by a Realtek ALC850 codec and is capable of producing up to eight channels of sound. Looking at the motherboard layout, we weren't too impressed with the size of the heat sink on the nForce4 Ultra chipset. If you install a large VGA card you will find that it is a fairly tight fit. We were also a little disappointed with the positioning of the four pin CPU power connector. On the plus side though, this motherboard performed pretty well for an entry level board and its price is not bad either.



VITAL INFO

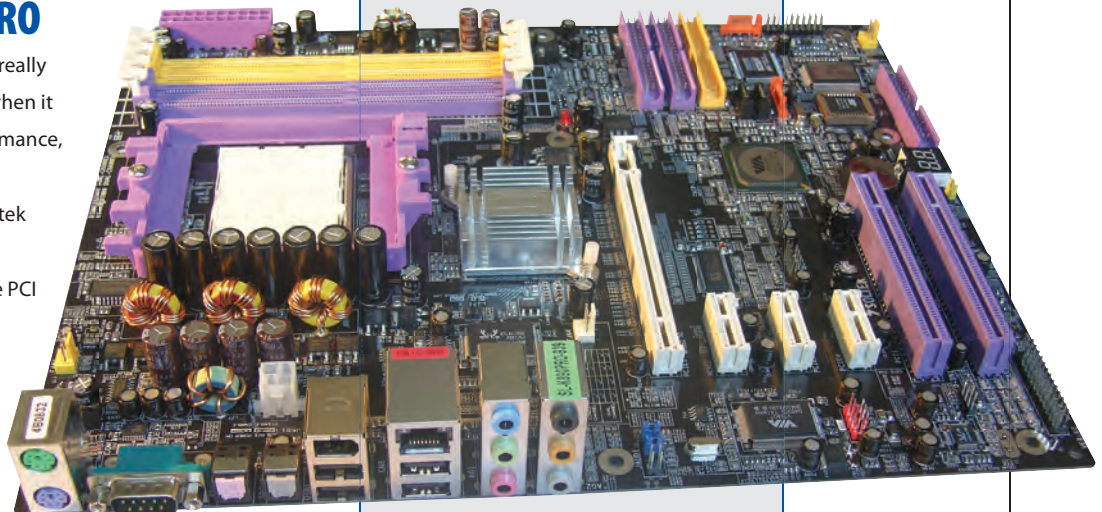
- **Plus**
Price
- **Minus**
nForce4 Ultra chipset heat sink
- **Supplier**
Sonic Informed
[011] 805 3800
- **Internet**
www.sonicinformed.co.za
- **RRP**
R999

VALUE **87** OVERALL **83**
PERFORMANCE **80**

SOLTEK SL-K890PRO

SOLTEK IS A BRAND that has never really been at the top of the logs when it comes to desirability and performance, but this brand has grown a lot stronger in recent years. The Soltek SL-K890PRO is based on the VIA K8T890 chipset and features one PCI Express X16 slot as well as three PCI Express X1 slots. Looking at the motherboard, it is not easy to miss the purple and yellow coloured connectors.

This colour theme is carried throughout the package and even the bundled IDE cables feature this colour. On the bottom end of this board you will find a two digit LCD that is used to display error codes, should something go wrong. For the most part, this motherboard is pretty standard but we were a little disappointed with the placement of the first IDE connector. If you have a large graphics card installed you will most likely have an IDE cable that squeezes against it. Some high-end users will be annoyed at the inclusion of only a single Gigabit Ethernet port, while others will appreciate the S/PDIF input and output ports on the back panel.



VITAL INFO

- **Plus**
Performance
- **Minus**
Single Gigabit LAN port
- **Supplier**
Eurobyte [011] 234-0142
- **Internet**
www.eurobyte.co.za
- **RRP**
R1395

VALUE **78** OVERALL **80**
PERFORMANCE **82**

BENCHMARKING

EVERY YEAR WE DREAD the Motherboard roundups, the reason being the difficult benchmarking process. But being the suckers (for punishment) that we are, we return every year and do the job. This month we used an array of popular applications to test the performance of each motherboard. We ran all the benchmarks on Windows XP SP2 with all the latest software updates installed. The first benchmark was the ever popular 3DMark05 build 1.2.0. For this benchmark we used both the CPU score and the overall 3DMark score. Then we ran PCMark04 build 1.3.0. Another popular graphics benchmark we used was Aquamark 3. For this we had to install the "Direcpl.dll" patch available from the Aquamark Website in order to make it run with the new NVIDIA graphics card. The last set of benchmarks we ran was the SiSoft Sandra 2005 suite. This produced a set of results that indicate the performance of the motherboards' memory bandwidth as well as indicating the CPU Arithmetic and Multimedia performance.

Motherboard	3DMARK05		SISOFT SANDRA 2005					
			CPU ARITHMETIC		CPU MULTIMEDIA		MEMORY BANDWIDTH	
	CPU	Total	Dhrystone	Whetstone	Integer	Floating Point	Int ALU	Float FPU
Albatron K8X890 Proll	3250	4811	10973	3771/4846	22785	24507	2037	2038
Asus A8N-SLI Deluxe	5104	5201	11532	3957/5095	23907	25753	5993	5952
MSI K8N Diamond Edition	3802	4860	11082	3807/4893	22982	24746	2163	2154
ECS KN1 Extreme	3692	4870	11069	3804/4891	22985	24685	2164	2158
Gigabyte GA-K8NXP-SLI	3752	4825	11050	3990/5101	22882	24720	2099	2105
ABIT Fatal1ty AN8	3424	4830	10039	3449/4463	20845	22420	2096	2095
DFI LanParty nF4 SLI-DR	4920	4872	10917	3757/4829	22697	24417	5917	5866
Chaintech VNF4 Ultra	3607	4871	10930	3757/4861	22691	24410	2129	2130
Soltek SL-K890PRO	3925	4858	10985	3774/4854	22809	24536	2687	2688

Motherboard	PCMARK04					AQUAMARK		
	CPU	Memory	Graphics	HDD	Total	CPU	GFX	Total
Albatron K8X890 Proll	4285	2942	7065	4695	4366	8075	8964	57655
Asus A8N-SLI Deluxe	4652	3150	7302	4922	5042	10920	9768	67486
MSI K8N Diamond Edition	4343	3075	6739	4883	4448	8372	9093	58940
ECS KN1 Extreme	4318	3086	6749	4925	4430	8363	9096	58930
Gigabyte GA-K8NXP-SLI	4310	3010	7086	4880	4410	8297	8934	57990
ABIT Fatal1ty AN8	3979	2928	6687	4944	4137	7906	8787	56492
DFI LanParty nF4 SLI-DR	4421	5361	6909	4906	4809	10324	9189	63596
Chaintech VNF4 Ultra	4296	3052	6735	4943	4361	8235	9030	58321
Soltek SL-K890PRO	4383	3542	7141	4717	4577	9132	9241	61112

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Available at Look & Listen
www.lookandlisten.co.za



Speakers

The racing seat has two Logitech Z3 speakers mounted around your headrest, while behind the seat sits the subwoofer for those moments where you just pointlessly rev your engine into the red and beyond. The speakers cost an additional R849.99.

Steering Wheel

The seat has two steering wheel options, both from Logitech. The first is the more common Driving Force wheel (R2599.99 incl. seat), but shell out R3799.99 (incl. seat) and you can get the Pro Steering Wheel (shown here). Unfortunately the racing chair only supports these Logitech models.



Pedals

Part of the deal, and probably the real reason why you'd want this setup, are the pedals. The distance between your feet and the pedals can be adjusted and the cable hides away neatly inside the metal tubing.





Exclusive to AnimeWorX this month:

Timesplitters 3: Future Perfect (PS2 & Xbox), Ys, Arc of Napishtim (PS2) and Jade Empire (Xbox). Other new titles include Appleaseed (Anime DVD), Burst Angel (Anime DVD) and the Ninja Scroll T.V. Series - Collector's Edition (Anime DVD).



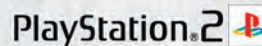
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WWW.ANIMEWORX.CO.ZA





Blue – Taking the First Step from Gaming to Animation

by A.J. Cock

HOW REAL IS SOMETHING when its existence can be wiped out because of one failure? Creating a gaming company is just as easy as destroying it. Larger, stagnant companies stick to proven formulas and create sequels. Smaller, fresh companies try new things and run the risk of failing miserably. Is that the risk we take for creative freedom? One thing is for sure. Christopher Mullins (CM) knows what is at the core of staying real – and that is the art of storytelling.

What was the reason behind creating Blue: A Short Film?

CM: I wanted to switch from the gaming industry to the animated film industry, but I did not want to start all over again by getting a low-end job and slowly working my way up. I thought that, maybe if I created a short film worthy of a little attention, I could bypass some of the entry level positions.

How long did it take to make a short film like Blue?

CM: It depends on the size and experience of the team of course, but it took us two and a half years.

Why did you move over from the gaming industry to the moviemaking industry, and how big is the difference between the two industries?

CM: I really love the art of storytelling and it's something that I hope to get better at throughout my life. I don't think I'll ever lose my passion for films. I play the occasional game or two a year, but for the most part I don't have the same interest in them that I used to.

The difference is between the art forms as a whole. But as far as the artwork and animation is concerned, the differences are blurring. Someday we will be able to play games that have as much detail as movies.

Do you think that in the near future we won't have the need for animators, as "virtual characters" become similar to real actors, and directors will hire them and direct them in their films, without the need to actually create them from scratch every time they create a movie?

CM: This is an excellent question. I am fairly positive that this will happen to some degree. People all over the world are fascinated by other people they see in magazines, movies, TV, etc. It doesn't seem to matter if they never



actually meet these widely-publicised people, they still think of them as real people, living a life of stardom and showing up every once in a while as a character solely for the purposes of entertaining us. Speaking purely philosophically, who's to say that these people are even real people? Most of us have no real proof.

That may be getting a little too deep but I think, at the very least, it goes to show that we are perfectly capable of getting attached to a computer generated character.

This, of course, is interesting to discuss and theorise about, but it's a scary possibility for the animator. Particularly for an animator or modeller who is mainly focused on creating realistic material. For the more stylised animators and artists, I think and hope that there will always be work.

It's very interesting to watch humans push the limits of technology further and further and then try to put the brakes on things once they realise that they are becoming more and more insignificant.

Why did you decide on creating the virtual office Xenobi?

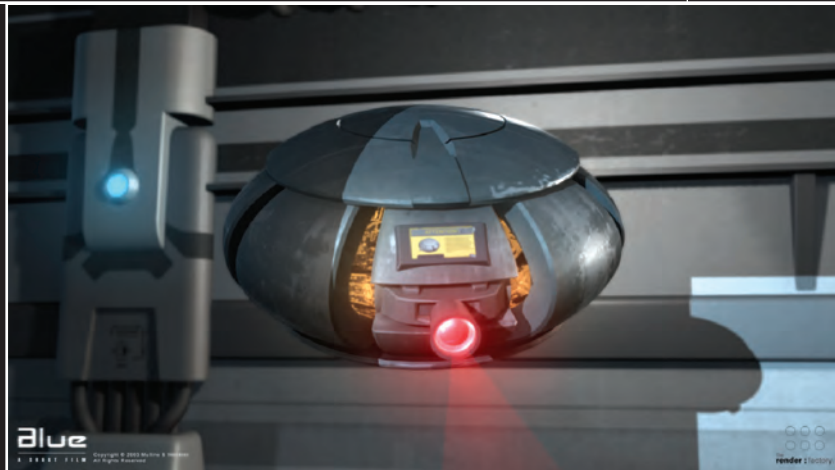
CM: I wanted to create an entity that I could attach to all of my films. Hopefully, if the films are good enough, Xenobi will be known for creating consistently entertaining material. But it's probably going to take a while to get to that point. Also, I want to work with different artists on every film. I love collaboration and there's no better way to get new and exciting results than to switch the team for each project.

Do you, James Anderson and Aaron Webster do anything else while working on Xenobi's next project?

CM: Yes, we all have full-time jobs in the industry. James works on the sound engine for a game development company in Sydney, Australia. Aaron works as a modeller, texture artist, shader, and writer for a CG-Animation and FX company in Toronto, Canada. And I have a position as Animation Technical Director for Fathom Studios in Atlanta, GA (US).

Why do you think only comedy animation sells well in the West? Put in a different way - why can't the West take animation seriously?

CM: Well, obviously the US is a capitalist machine, so no matter what industry you're talking about, in the end it's all about making money. The companies and studios which make up the film industry in the U.S. are in heavy competition all the time. If one local company spends a couple of years making an animated film and doesn't make a good-sized profit, it is in serious danger of falling out



of the race completely. As a result, all of these companies have teams of market analysts who spend all of their time studying who buys tickets, or who rents animated films. The results always seem to show that comedy brings both kids and adults to the theatres and serious animated films bring only a small "cult" audience. While this type of audience truly appreciates the art of the film, it's never enough to keep the studio in business.

That doesn't explain everything however. For instance, why are the more serious animated films successful in Japan? There seems to be a true difference in culture between western audiences and eastern ones (specifically Japan). It's rather scary to think that the people behind the industry also dictate what we like and don't like.

What are you currently working on?

CM: I'm working on two new projects. I'm busy producing a 5-6 minute short animation which I'm very serious about and therefore taking my time. I'm also working on a smaller, less serious 1-2 minute animation called Pillowman.

Do you have any suggestions for someone starting out in CG film-making?

CM: If you want to make a film, don't make it too long. I'm very proud of Blue, but it could have been edited down to half the length and would probably have been a better film. I could go back and re-edit it, but I would rather move on and apply what I've learned to new projects. Both employers and film festivals prefer shorter animations. **NAG**



role playing

Gemini

IN A WORLD

THAT is becoming increasingly "dominated" by Wizards of the Coast's D20

system, it is rather refreshing to take a look at something other than what is becoming the norm – even if the product is becoming difficult to find due to its age.

Gemini is not the newest game, not by a long shot. In fact, it was produced seven years ago. This does not make it dated... pencil and paper role-playing games (particularly ones set in something of a fantasy setting) don't really suffer from the time related woes that seem to afflict computer games. In truth, they become classics, wonderfully nostalgic journeys into other realms.

So, as said before, Gemini is not the newest game around. But it has a rather unique setting that makes it rather fresh in terms of fantasy role playing.

Set in a world where the Church is strong, despite the fact that evil stands poised to take over everything, Gemini allows the player to experience some standard fantasy fare mixed with darker elements that seem to have a place in a more "real world" setting.

One would be excused for calling Gemini a simplified version of Dungeons & Dragons, but, in truth, where some of the mechanical elements were lost, other story driven elements were gained.

Although there is a lot of scope within Gemini, one cannot help but develop the impression that the game suffers from something of a time limit. The world is bound by a prophecy that will eventually bring the whole lot to a close, leaving the Game Master scabbling for purchase as his source material disappears. Of course there is always the possibility that he could postpone the prophecy reaching fulfilment, but you can only delay the inevitable for so long. This wonderfully dark game is, sadly, limited.

The game system is simple enough, although one argument against games that do not use the D20 system is that players and Game Masters need to learn new rules when they want to experience new games. This argument is dwindling, however, as the D20 system takes over more and more of the role-playing world.



comics

Lex Luthor: Man of Steel

DC Comics | R20.95

An interesting first issue. We see Lex Luthor, Superman's long time rival, from his own perspective. As Lex says, "What is truth? Truth is in the teller. No man sees himself as evil." This book is an examination of why Lex Luthor is the way he is, and how he justifies his actions to himself. In the Superman stories, he is nothing more than evil, yet here we see him arranging a special bursary for the son of one of his cleaning staff. Does that make him evil? At the same time he sends a rescue team to save a scientist from being kidnapped. All so he can convince the man that he would be better off working for Lexcorp than retiring to a farm. Does this make Lex a hero? Like the man said, "... it's all in the teller." Give it a try - you might find something you recognise in yourself.

Fuzzy Knights

Kenzerco | R94.95

For the role players out there, as well as people who like cute fuzzy toys. Imagine a group of toys who, when there aren't any kids around, role play. Instead of the usual artwork, these stories are told using photographs with commentary added. You will be amazed at how already funny comments can be made so much funnier when they come out of the mouth of a bullied stuffed bunny. The stories in this series are primarily aimed at role players, though anyone who has ever had any contact with this group will find something they can chuckle at.

Seaguy

DC | R69.95

This seemed like a good graphic novel to do a review of, and it is, but how to describe it is another matter all together. It's the story of a Superhero in a world that no longer needs heroes. It's the story of a man in love with a bearded lady. It's the story of a man whose best friend is a talking, smoking tuna fish with a bad taste in hats. It is all of these things, and other levels of silliness that we can't even begin to explain. But if you are really in need of a good laugh, especially if your life is going down the drain, then read Seaguy. It won't seem so bad after all.

Shoggoth's Old Peculiar

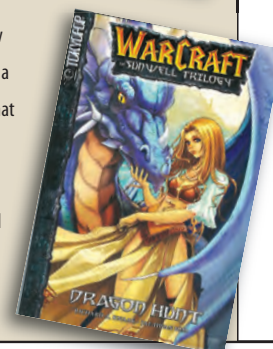
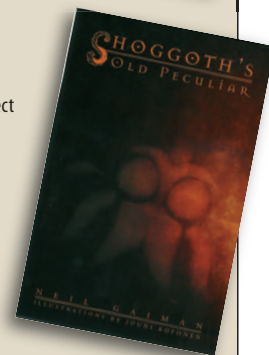
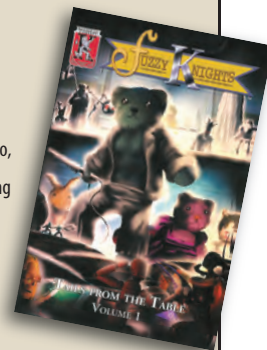
Dreamhaven | R110

If you have read any of Niel Gaiman's books or comics and if you are a fan of the H.P Lovecraft Cthulhu monsters, then pay attention. Old Peculiar is a very strange piece. It has the horror aspect of a typical Lovecraft piece, but along with this comes a very British sense of humour. The story revolves around an American tourist doing a walking holiday of the UK. When he finds a little town off the map and tastes the local brewed beverage, strange things begin to happen. Not unlike trying out British beer...

Warcraft: The Sunwell Trilogy

Tokyopop | R76.95

It's the World of Warcraft. It's been a war game, a computer game and a role playing game. Now Tokyopop has created a series of Manga novels. This first series follows the adventures of Kalek, a young blue dragon sent by his master to find the lost Sunwell. Though no one knows exactly what form the Sunwell may take, it is a source of great power and the only thing that can break the balance of power between the armies of the humans, elves and ogres and the mighty force of the evil Lich lord. On his Journey Kalek is trapped in human form, aided by a secretive young girl - and then his betrothed arrives as well. As each new arrival aids the group, they add confusion and tension as well. Never mind the Great War pending out there.



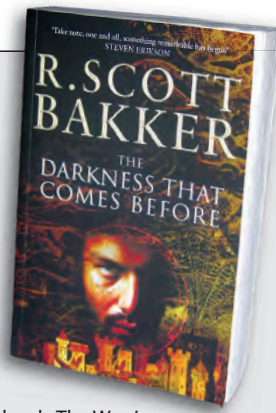
The Darkness That Comes Before

AUTHOR: Steven Erikson
PRICE: R188.95 (Excl. delivery)
BUY IT: www.kalahari.net

THE DARKNESS THAT COMES Before is the first book in the Prince of Nothing series written by Canadian author, R. Scott Bakker. With the second book, The Warrior Prophet, following hot on its heels, readers are advised to start reading now while it is still easy to catch up.

Bakker, who holds a B.A. in English language and literature, an M.A. in theory and criticism, and is currently completing his Ph.D. in Philosophy, has created something that could best be described as epic. Set in the fantasy world of Eärwa, the book is as close to a modern-day Lord of the Rings as is possible. Drawing from his academic knowledge, Bakker has created a world with all its idiosyncrasies. He looks at everything from languages, cities, religions, and mysteries to the taboos of the different cultures populating the world. But, while Tolkien's Lord of the Rings was at least in some part accessible to the general reader, The Darkness That Comes Before is a more daunting affair.

One feels that Bakker is walking a tightrope in getting the balance right between providing too much information and keeping the reader engaged in the story line. Many fantasy readers will get this book hoping for a typical swords and sorcery spectacle. For these, the series will disappoint.



Basic Computer Skills

AUTHOR: Easy Click / Alida Vermaak
PRICE: R199
BUY IT: www.bowline.co.za

AIMED AT PRIMARY SCHOOL kids (Grade 3 - 7), the Basic Computer Skills book attempts to teach the extreme basics of Word-processing, Spreadsheets and Typing. As expected, when dealing with children of a certain age, the book is written very plainly and the exercises themselves are simplistic but educational. Each page is adorned with relevant pictures and clipart, so expect to see lots of cats when the book deals with typing the word 'cat'. Overall the book does what it sets out to do, although too often the language used to describe certain actions/objects clearly seems wrong. For example, after learning about a quick way to do something in a spreadsheet, the book memorably says "It's like working with speed!" Writing aside, each lesson is rounded off with decent enough exercises to check if what was learned managed to stay learned. The book would ideally suit a teacher who is teaching basic computing to children, since a child on his own would quickly find the book daunting and the lessons a little too vague on things like 'The Desktop' and 'Power on the computer, wait until it stops running'.



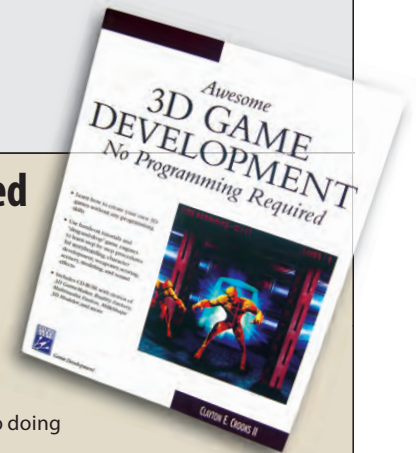
Awesome 3D Game Development: No Programming Required

PRICE: R384.95 (Excl. delivery)
AUTHOR: Clayton E. Crooks II
BUY IT: www.kalahari.net

WHICH GAMER HAS NEVER dreamt of creating the perfect title? Chances are, not many. It seems to be natural for players to imagine how they would create a game that combines successful elements of AAA-titles with some of their own unique concepts. That is how the theory goes. Once it comes down to doing coding, many aspiring designers get intimidated. Enter Awesome 3D Game Development.

This book is aimed at teaching game developers how to create titles without programming skills and seeks to provide an understanding of how the game design process works. It consists of 28 chapters, all focusing on different elements of game design. Bundled with the book comes a CD filled with shareware versions of the software used in the examples. This includes 3D Gameworker, Multimedia Fusion, MilkShape 3D and Paint Shop Pro. While many hardcore gamers would have come across many of these tools, the book provides interesting tutorials and drag-and-drop game engines that showcase the different steps in game development.

While a more in-depth look at the development side of things would have been great, Awesome 3D Game Development succeeds in bringing across the scope of how a game gets put together. If anything, it shows the reader just how difficult (or easy) it can be to create a hit. While not an absolute must-read, it still contains useful information to get novice developers up and running. More importantly, it plants the seeds of development in a new generation of gamer.





The Punisher

Fans of Marvel Comic's "The Punisher" can finally throw out their copies of the 1989 direct-to-video version starring Dolph Lundgren, a film that failed to give any cinematic justice to the beloved comic-book hero. The update is smart and fresh, compensating for years of painfully watching Lundgren stalk around in yet another unidentifiable B-movie.

The Punisher is the darkest Marvel adaptation yet, with more violence and action in a single scene alone than most of the other films. Castle is idealistically more like a Batman-figure, with realistic weapons and an emotional past that the audience can relate to better than the red-devilled antics of Hellboy. The final product is nearly perfect, a result of coupling Castle's alcohol-soaked emotion with some of the most creative action sequences ever filmed. The Punisher appeals to a much larger audience than one would expect. It could make you cry, laugh or just shout out for more bloody violence, but regardless of your reaction, you're going to love it.



National Treasure

Absurdism taken to a new extreme, this Disney Michael Bay co-production is loaded to the gills with that producer's innate love of car chases and errant gunpowder, while maintaining a very Disneyfied (and virtually nonexistent) body count and a gravely silly respect for off-kilter Americana. In the end, it's the odd casting and unimaginative, workmanlike direction that make the painfully overlong National Treasure the exercise in mediocrity it is. Toss in a slice of a conspiracy-minded bestseller The Da Vinci Code and one of the most bombastic scores of the year (courtesy of the usually reliable Trevor Rabin) and you've got a recipe for cinematic malaise that leaves your head aching from all the improbabilities, explicit and otherwise, that clutter the exposition-heavy storyline at every hairpin turn.

National Treasure, for all its emphatic national history, is an underdone pastiche of Raiders of the Lost Ark and a really tedious high school history class.



After The Sunset

After the Sunset tries to be two different films. On one hand, it's the heist film about a retired jewel thief making one last big score. On the other hand, it's a quirky light comedy about an FBI agent's love-hate relationship with his nemesis. It would have been greatly improved if it would have just stuck with one of these goals.

To their credit, the cast is the only thing holding this film together, and its shaky storytelling has proved that Hollywood golden boy Brett Ratner isn't all that and a bag of chips. Now, I've liked a lot of Ratner's work, but he was due for a stumble, and he made it here. Hopefully this will keep his paws off of the Superman franchise as we roll into the future.

Gamics!

www.gamics.com

Most gamers read comics. It's almost a natural union of things. Online comics have long been the domain of gaming. And there have been more than enough game-related comic spin-offs, we all know that. So what about a comic created using game characters? Not sprite comics, but full 3D such as The Matrix Online and Final Fantasy XI? Head over to Gamics and check it out.

Awake: The Best of Live

Alternative rockers Live are one of those bands you either like or don't. We've liked them since the first time we heard "Lightening Crashes". Live hit their peak in popularity in 1996 after "Lightening Crashes" and their audience slowly dwindled away. They became like a lot of bands of that period - they got lost in the endless shuffle of other artists. Even so, they've put out some consistently good singles and they are now showcased on "Awake: The Best of Live" - 17 of their best songs, plus two new ones, "We Deal In Dreams" and a cover of Johnny Cash's "I Walk The Line". The CD spans the group's entire catalogue from "Mental Jewelry" to last year's "Birds of Pray". The best material on the CD is from their first three albums, "Mental Jewelry" (1991), "Throwing Copper" (1995) and "Secret Samadi" (1997). Songs like "Selling the Drama", "I Alone", "Lakini's Juice", "All Over You" and "Lightening Crashes" have the band at their most accessible - with great rock songs and sing-along choruses. That's not to say their latter singles aren't as good - songs like "Dolphin's Cry" and "Run To The Water" are catchy, but their material has become mellower and lacks the raw energy that made the band successful in their younger days. If you miss the post-grunge rock of the nineties, we'd definitely recommend The Best of Live; if you don't, we'd stay away from this one.



The Best Club Anthems 2005

Club Anthems was EMI's most successful dance series released in 2004. 2005 sees the return of the brand, with an album as strong as ever. Encompassing the entire "commercial club scene" (and not just "dance" music) this album features 40 massive hits across various genres from R&B and Pop, to House and Commercial Dance Music. Standout tracks on the album include: "Man In The Mirror" from SA's very own Redd-Angel, Michael Gray "The Weekend", Geri Halliwell "Ride it", Kentishman "Easy Lover", Uniting Nations "Out of Touch", Beenie Man "King of the Dancehall", and Inaya Day "Nasty Girl". The album also features the brand new Shapeshifters single "Back to Basics", the monstrous "Shine" by The Lovefreakz and the massive "We Close Our Eyes" from the Groove Cutters. This is without a doubt the biggest commercial dance / club album that you'll get this time of year, so don't waste your time on any substitutes.





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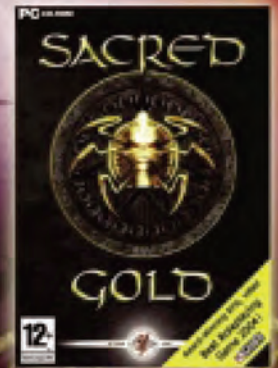
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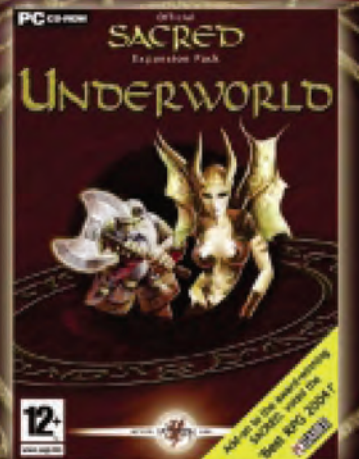
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GAME OVER

TWISTED LOGIC



BY SHIVONNE LONDT

Why Barbie never came with the chainsaw accessory

EVERY LITTLE GIRL HAS this dream of kissing an ugly frog and having it turn into a handsome prince, although I think the objective of said exercise was not to steal the prince's toys. I never understood why guys always got to have the coolest toys. Don't get me wrong, there is a time and a place for Barbie, but once I'd finished getting her married and dressed in whatever outfit was fashionable at the time, there was no Barbie's Overlord accessory and that really irritated me.

Girls were never expected to really like computer games or all manner of things fantasy in general. I remember speaking to a girl in school when Duke Nukem came out (giving my age away here!) and having her give me a blank look that told me not only was I speaking a foreign language, but that the sounds coming out of my mouth were probably of extra-terrestrial origin as well. While guys were playing with robots and planes, I was supposed to have been groomed for a life of sitting on the side and squeaking; "Oooh what's that" at computer games!

People often tend to think little girls should stick to pink bows and flowers. When I'd go and stare longingly at the toy cars and Micro Machines, little old ladies would come running out from their hiding places, crying, "But my dear that isn't ladylike!" and steer me towards some crying baby doll. I didn't want a crying baby doll - I wanted a tank! Strict parents, unfortunately, prevented me from having the screaming tantrum I felt I so richly deserved.

A similar attitude seems to prevail today. When my significant other goes gaming - although I am made to feel welcome - there is a definite attitude of "It isn't ladylike!"

prevailing. They don't swear as much in front of me and tend to blush when I start swearing. It just goes downhill the first time I frag one of them. And even guys in the computer shops tend to get very nervous when I go up to them and start using big words like RAM.

It's like there is some secret guy gaming society that dresses up with their underwear on their heads to conspire to keep women away from the gaming scene. Case in point - the first gaming event I attended had no visible ladies' toilets and, although it would have been immensely satisfying to strut into the men's loo and scare the pants right off anyone unfortunate enough to be there, I resisted and went to a nearby garage instead.

The ladies among us know. We don't need pink keyboards or "Barbie Goes Shopping" to make us happy these days. We can hold our own with the best of you. However, I am not throwing my pink T-shirts away. Underneath that desire for world domination I'm still a girl, albeit one who enjoys blowing things into gibbering blobs and I'm definitely not going to change. I, however, adamantly refuse to wear any underwear on my head. **NAG**

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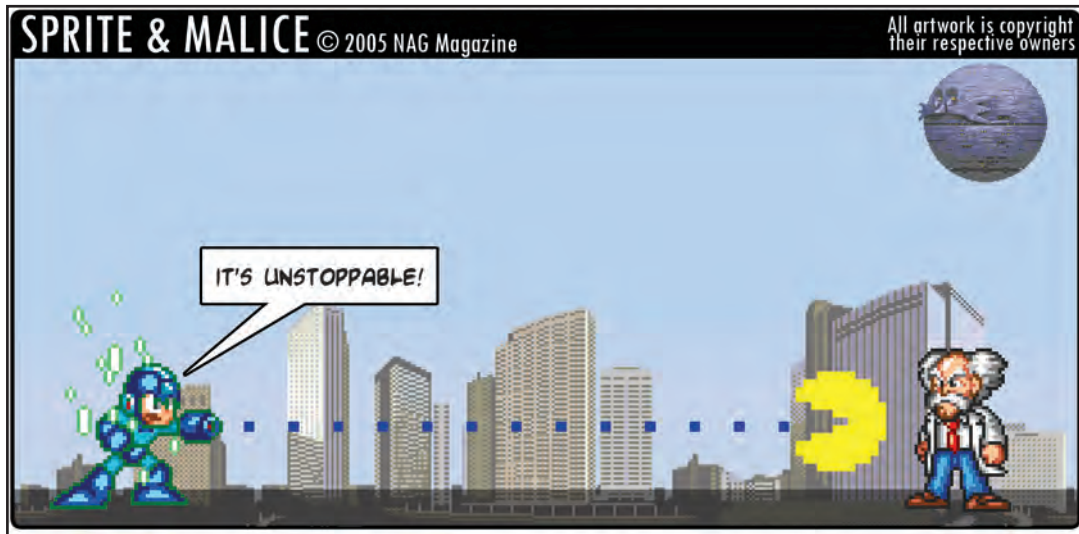
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69 for MG53 is pure madness...



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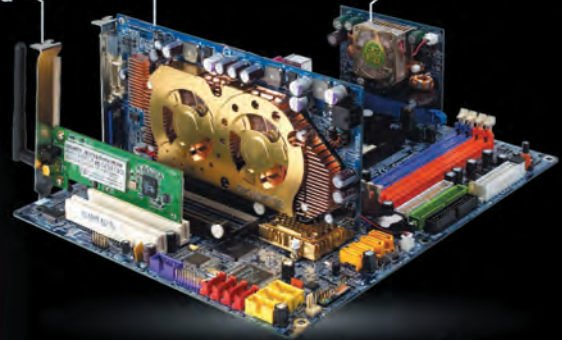
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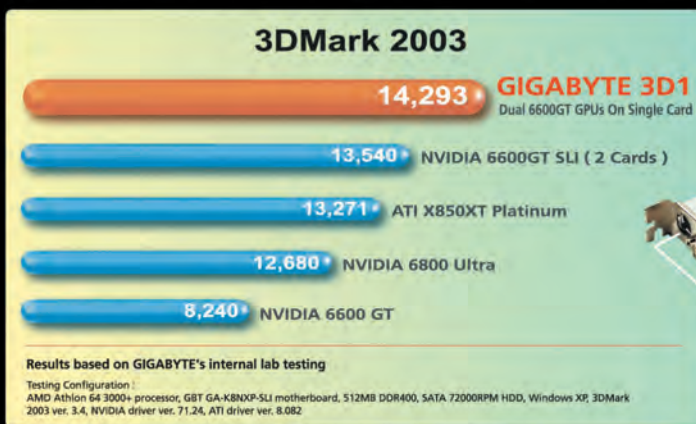
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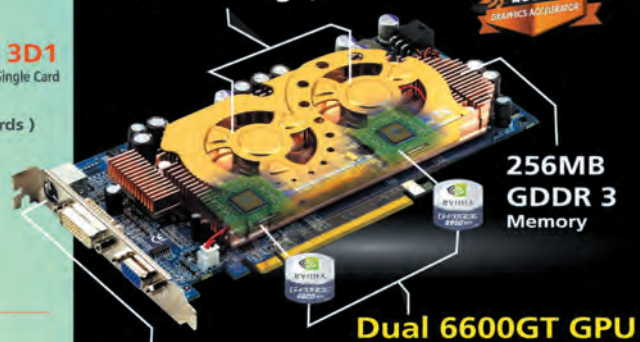
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