

NAG

SOUTH AFRICA'S LEADING COMPUTER GAMING & TECHNOLOGY MAGAZINE

GAMES & MOVIES

past, present and future

- THE GODFATHER - A PREVIEW YOU CAN'T REFUSE <<
- [c0c0nut RUN] 22 GAMING HEADPHONES TESTED <<
- SPLINTER CELL: CHAOS THEORY REVIEW <<
- TOMB RAIDER: LEGEND EXPOSED <<
- SLI FOR THE MENTALLY UNDERSUPPLIED <<
- SWAT 4 REVIEW <<
- DOOM 3 EXPANSION REVIEWED <<
- 2 WATER COOLING KITS DRUNK <<
- WE TOUCH DUNGEON SIEGE II... IT FEELS GOOD! <<

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- DEMOS** Act of War MP | Brothers in Arms | Chariots of War | Cossacks II | Imperial Glory | Pariah MP | Project - Snowblind | Restricted Area | Rising Kingdoms | SWAT 4 | House of the Dead 3
- DRIVERS** NVIDIA ForceWare 71.89
- FLASH** Wendidali | Brink of Time | Foamy Ssongs | las Aventuras De Mr Coos | Non-livingstons | Robenstein | Sea Survival | The Match
- ANIME** LO Magazine June | Boogiepop | Comicparty | Shingu
- MOVIES** Pitfall | Batman - New Times | Black & White 2 | Bloodrayne Movie | Dungeon Siege II | Earth 2160 | Half-Life 2 - Lost Coast | Star Wars - Episode 3 | Star Wars Revelations | Tomb Raider Legend | Trackmania Sunrise
- PATCHES** Act of War v1.04 | Stronghold 2 v1.1 | LOTR BFME v1.02
- UTILITIES** DivX 505 | Quick Time 6 |



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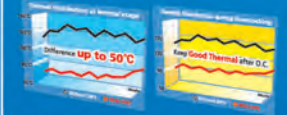
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ED'S NOTE



ZOMBIES IN CAMBODIA...

A WHILE AGO A FAKE story appeared on the Internet about Zombies in Cambodia. The humour of this [even though people were dying] didn't escape us as you'll discover liberally peppered around the magazine. The immediate response to this news in the office was to pack a few bags and book tickets to Cambodia to help out where we could. The Cambodian government's response was to send in the army, but all this ever does, as gamers around the world know, is create more zombies. Instead, the Cambodian government should have told the army to stay away and flown in gamers from around the world – we know how to deal with zombies. Standard issue soldiers will hesitate when confronted with the living dead, but gamers just see an opportunity to practice their swing. We know where to hit them, how to hide from them – we have valuable insight into the inner workings of the zombie mind. Assault rifles and coordinated team strategies simply don't work when dealing with these evil creatures. The wild swinging of a chainsaw, shotgun blasts from between boarded up windows, a little panic, a screaming blonde and snappy one-liners are the essential tools for zombie killing. They might laugh at us now, but the day will come when they need us. Will we ignore the call to arms... hell no! There are gamers out there who fall asleep counting body bags. Watch this space...

E3 update...

This is the only time in the year when I feel like a celebrity. The requests for meetings, invitations to parties and functions flood my inbox on an hourly basis – these PR people are a tricky bunch, each trying to eat up as much of my time as possible so I spend less time with other PR people. They even plan their functions on opposite ends of the planet to try and prevent journalists from attending

everything on offer. If only they knew every invitation I accept is based solely on the food and wine on offer – it's amusing to watch newbie journalists staying at the same party for three days straight and then going back to their respective bosses trying to explain why they only saw three games from one publisher the whole time they were at E3. On the guest list for some of these parties are genuine Hollywood celebrities – we'll tell you [and show you] in the next issue... so make sure you get it. We're also taking some serious video footage of the whole show so you can see exactly what it's like. This will also include as many booth babes as our bribe money will allow. Hope there's no earthquake this year!

Cool competition

So you've always wanted to work for a gaming magazine, even if your job involved mops and plastic tongs? Well, make sure you grab the July issue of NAG – the one with the massive E3 supplement, poster, the usual innovative and exciting content, the DVD [oh stop]. In the next issue we'll be giving you the opportunity to impress us with your skills and who knows where it'll all end. In the next issue we're also resurrecting a few NAG staples from years gone by – things that our fans have been begging us for.

But enough of this, there's a whole magazine to be read...

Michael James [Editor]



FEELIN' LUCKY, PUNK?

I NITALLY WE PLANNED ON doing a Star Wars cover to entice new readers to buy NAG. This cover image would front a story on games and movies. The link to Star Wars was a little tenuous, so we decided to do a piece on where games and movies first collided [Star Wars arcade] and build from there. Decent idea, except that the artwork was corrupt - after downloading the 200MB image, twice. We then decided to just drop the Star Wars thing altogether and go with the straight games and movies cover. Odd all this, because the cover was originally destined to be Area 51 with a cool alien image, but the early review code didn't work on our debug PS2 unit.

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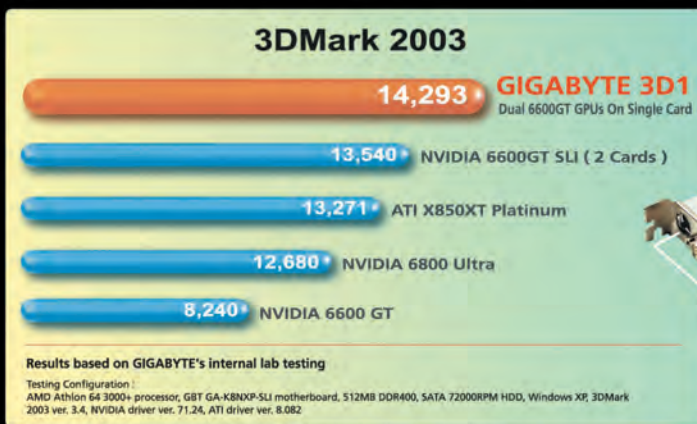
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BYTES

XBOX 360 RPG

Final Fantasy creator's next project

Hironobu Sakaguchi, the creator of the Final Fantasy series has revealed his next project, an RPG game exclusive to the Xbox 360 console. The development of Blue Dragon will see Akira Toriyama, the designer for the Dragon Quest and Dragon Ball Z series, working closely with Sakaguchi, having last worked together on Chrono Trigger. The game is in development at Sakaguchi-san's Mistwalker development studio, which he founded with other ex-Squenix veterans. He signed up to create Xbox 360-exclusive games alongside Rez creator Tetsuya Mizuguchi and ex-Capcom limelight Yoshiaki Okamoto.

GAMING INDUSTRY KEEPS GROWING

In the US, the videogame industry displayed a 23% growth in the past year. This trend has been spearheaded by handheld consoles, which reflected a growth of 162% (though it must be noted that, given the fact that this technology is new, a great initial growth is hardly surprising, given the virtual non-existence of such products not so long ago). Both Sony and Nintendo contributed greatly to these figures.

COMPETITION WINNERS

Nintendo DS [April issue]

Albert van Niekerk

GeCube Radeon X600XT [April issue]

Adrian Stevens

Michael Cloete



GATES LIKES XBOX 360'S CHANCES

Microsoft the new next-gen king?

BILL GATES, WHILE SPEAKING to reporters and editors at the Society of Business Editors and Writers, said he felt confident that Microsoft can take over the crown of the next generation king when the Xbox 360 (or Xenon) is released. "Our goal in the last generation was to be in the game," Gates said. "We came out of this round a strong number two."

It's a tall order, but Microsoft will already be unveiling the Xbox 360 in May and are aiming for a December US release. Rumoured to have wireless controllers and a removable hard drive, it will definitely make an interesting addition to the console wars, though analysts feel things will only heat up once Sony releases the PlayStation 3 in 2006.

"We believe that market perception will cause entertainment software stocks to fluctuate within a narrow range until there is

better visibility into software demand," says Michael Pachter, analyst at Wedbush Morgan Securities. "We think that many investors have misinterpreted the launch of the Xbox 360 as the beginning of the next generation, and expect rapid sales growth in 2006. In contrast, we expect the launch of Sony's PS3 (expected in late 2006) to mark the beginning of the next cycle, and think that rapid sales growth will not materialise until 2007."

Gates wouldn't agree much with this statement, though. "What we've got in this (next round), at some significant financial cost, was the right to play again with great credibility," Gates said. "So now people are looking at the two companies (Microsoft and Sony) at a pretty much equal basis."

The company recently signed a deal with Samsung to be the supplier of HDTVs for the Xbox 360.

BAD DAY L.A.

American McGee is at work on a third person action game set in the City of Angels. The plot revolves around a jaded, cynical character who must overcome a crazy combination of natural disasters, paranormal events, criminal activities and general urban unpleasantness in order to save the city he has grown to loathe – and get the hell out of it! Enlight Software will be publishing the game on PC and Xbox early next year. If McGee's previous work is anything to go by, this one should be bizarrely entertaining!



DUNGEONS & DRAGONS ONLINE

Turbine Entertainment, creator of Asheron's Call, is at work on the first Dungeons & Dragons-based massively multiplayer online role-playing game (MMORPG). The company has announced that alpha testing has begun and the game is expected to be complete some time in the second half of the year.



SERIOUS SAM II

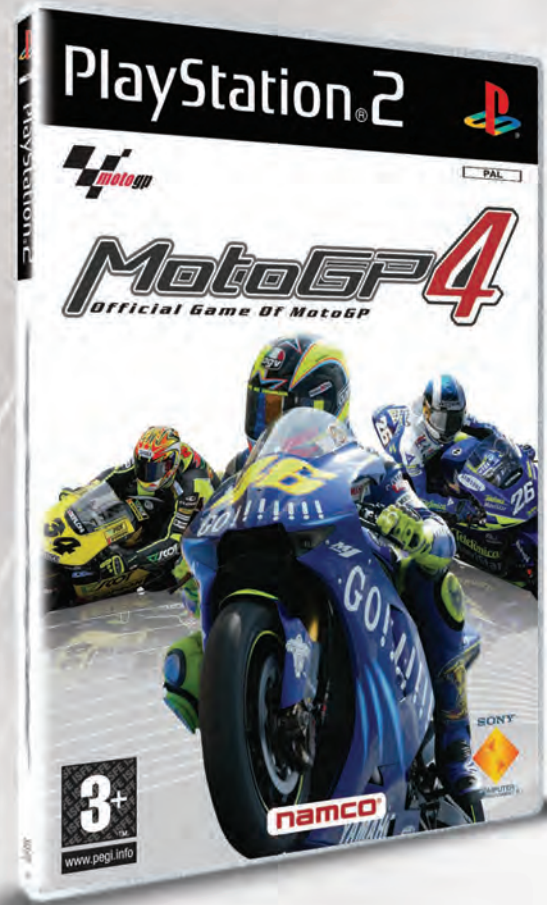
Croteam is at work on a sequel to Serious Sam. The company claims that its new engine can render 100 times the detail that its predecessor could handle and will serve up even more simultaneous antagonists than the original did. Serious Sam II is being designed for PC and Xbox, to be released later this year.



UBISOFT TAKES OVER MIGHT AND MAGIC

The brand, which has been around for twenty years now, is being revived by Ubisoft in the form of Heroes of Might and Magic V, set to be released early next year on PC. A range of enhancements are planned, including the implementation of a modern 3D graphics engine.

MotoGP4
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UPDATE: DOOM MOVIES

Will it Rock?

You are probably surprised by the plural, but in fact there are two Doom-inspired movies being produced (although the lesser-known one is actually a biography of the brand's creators, John Carmack and John Romero). This production, intended for the small screen on American cable TV, is based on David Kushner's book *Masters of Doom*. As for the movie based on the game, from Universal Pictures – the project has been delayed (again) and is now expected to debut in October. However, fans of the game had best be warned – the theme of the movie does not follow the game's plot faithfully, being set in more contemporary times and dealing with the outbreak of a virus, rather than a demonic invasion. Forgoing the Martian setting from the game, a group of marines is sent to a distant planet to secure a science lab under attack from creatures of unknown origin. In addition to *The Rock* as Sarge, the film also stars Karl Urban as John "Reaper" Grimm, the formerly nameless space marine who acts as the film's central character. One of the scientist characters has been named after id Software lead programmer John Carmack.



HARRY POTTER AND THE GOBLET OF FIRE

BASED ON THE FOURTH book in the Harry Potter series, this game will be released in November to coincide with the launch of the film. All three protagonists will be playable and players will be able to combine spells in cooperative play modes, producing more powerful effects. A magic feedback system will vibrate players' controllers according to what arcane tricks they get up to. The game is being developed for PC, PlayStation 2, PSP, Xbox, GameCube, Nintendo DS and Game Boy Advance by EA's UK studio.



PHANTASY STAR UNIVERSE

This upcoming incarnation of the Phantasy Star role-playing series will offer two play modes: solo and online. The single player adventure will last for over 40 hours (which, compared to the likes of *Diablo II*, is actually quite measly) and will be story-driven. The online component will be in the form of a MMORPG set in a persistent universe. At present, no release schedule has been announced. The game is being developed for PC.

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MORE HALF-LIFE 2

Valve's blockbuster is finally on its way to the Xbox and it has been stated that it will feature content identical to that of the original. However, owners of the console will be delighted to hear that more sophisticated lighting effects are being implemented in this version. Multiplayer support will not be available by default, but speculation abounds that this may be a downloadable option at a later date. The release date has been tentatively estimated at around the middle of the year, or just after. PC owners can look forward to an expansion for Half-Life 2, titled Aftermath - to be released at roughly the same time. Valve has revealed nothing of substance regarding this add-on, except for stating that the story-line is a direct continuation.



GTA TO HIT THE PC IN JUNE

Fans of the GTA franchise will be chomping at the bit to get their hands on the PC version after catching a glimpse of the recently released screens. Touted as the definitive San Andreas experience, gamers can look forward to a Beverly Hills makeover in the PC game with higher resolution textures, longer draw distances, smoother motion and a more accurate FPS-style control system.

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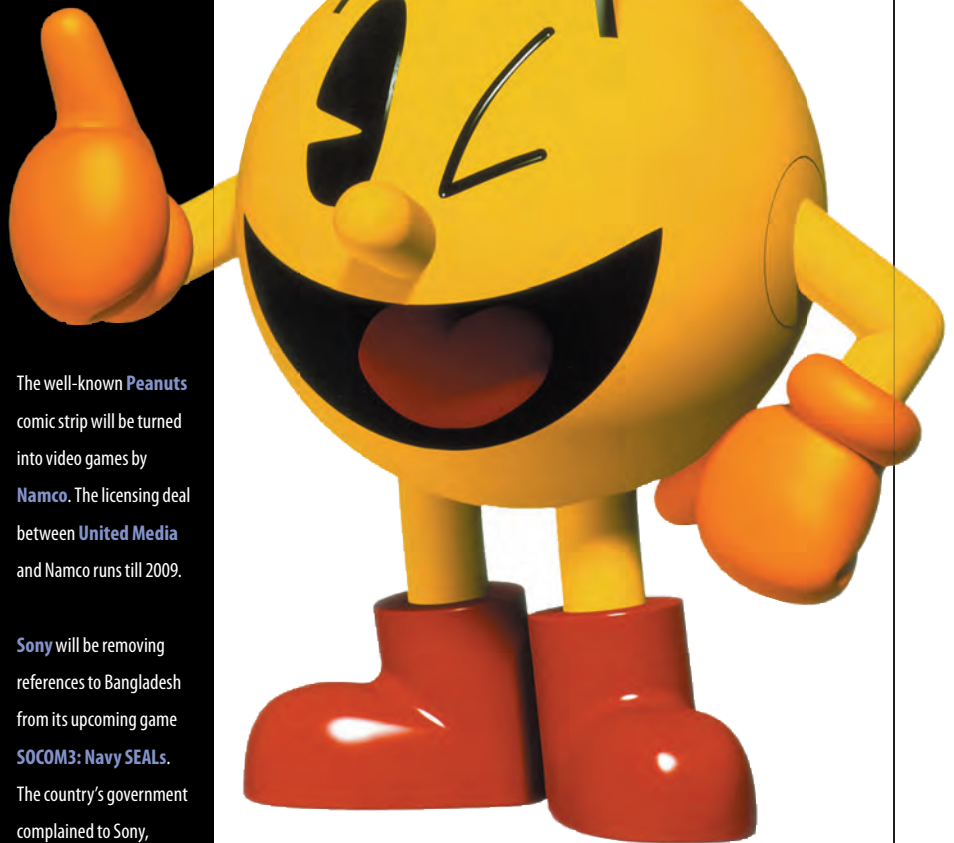
GAMING ACCESORIES
 COMPETITIONS

EVIL DEAD REGENERATION

THQ has embarked upon a film-to-game project with a difference. Instead of rehashing a movie's plot, Evil Dead Regeneration will explore a possible continuation of events in Evil Dead 2.

"It's our goal to create the spiritual successor of Evil Dead 2, one of the seminal action films ever, in pop-culture," said David Bollesen, general manager, Cranky Pants Games. "Having Bruce Campbell on board, providing creative direction and embracing new ideas we've injected into their universe is critical, and their enthusiasm continues to drive us to deliver the ultimate Evil Dead experience."

It is being developed by Cranky Pants Games and is expected in the next few months on PC, PlayStation 2 and Xbox.



The well-known **Peanuts** comic strip will be turned into video games by **Namco**. The licensing deal between **United Media** and Namco runs till 2009.

Sony will be removing references to Bangladesh from its upcoming game **SOCOM3: Navy SEALs**. The country's government complained to Sony, accusing it of suggesting that Bangladesh is a terrorist state. Sony has acceded to the demand.

Namco has merged with **Bandai**, the latter paying just shy of \$2 billion for the rights. Surviving the competitive market was the reason given for the merger. The new company will be known as **Namco Bandai Holdings**.

Surprisingly, the best selling **PSP** title in the US in its first month of launch wasn't **Ridge Racer** or **Wipeout Pure**, but **Twisted Metal: Head On**.

PAC'N ROLL

NINTENDO DS OWNERS WILL, in a couple of months, be able to enjoy Namco's upcoming new Pac-Man game. This new title boasts 3D graphics, a more intricate play dynamic (featuring environmental hazards and new power-ups) and an innovative new control method that makes use of the handheld's touch screen. The game will include the original Pac-Man game as a bonus.

PIRATES OF THE CARIBBEAN

Buena Vista Entertainment has revealed that the Pirates of the Caribbean franchise will be growing in more than one direction. Two sequels are planned: the first being Pirates of the Caribbean: Dead Man's Chest, which is already being filmed; and another that hasn't been detailed so far, except for an expected launch in 2007. The first of these will be accompanied by a simultaneous launch of game titles for Nintendo DS and Sony PSP, to be developed by Griptonite Games. Meanwhile, next-generation console versions will be developed by Eurocom Entertainment Software.





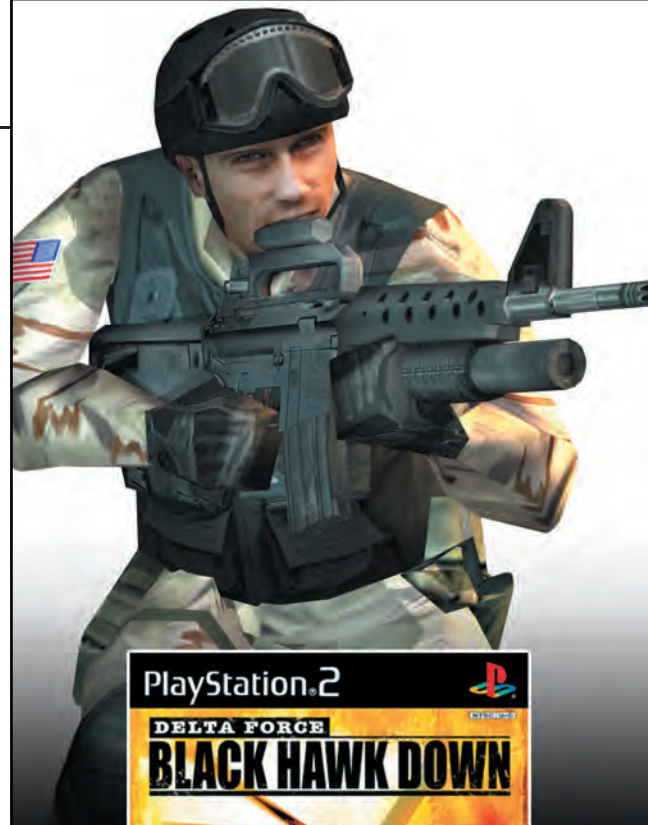
BURNOUT REVENGE

Electronic Arts recently announced that Criterion Games will be developing a game revolving around the theme of road rage. In addition to more conventional racing game modes, the title will also offer the Revenge mode, which will allow players to let it all out in rush-hour traffic. Burnout Revenge for PlayStation 2 and Xbox has been scheduled for release in September.



NEED FOR SPEED MOST WANTED

Yet another illicit street-racing-themed game is on its way from the team behind Need for Speed Underground. This upcoming title will add the concept of building up a list of offences as an 'achievement'. In addition to racing against other drivers, players will need to evade the police. The game will feature the to-be-expected bewildering array of upgrades for their cars, and will offer a dynamic open world to play in. EA Canada is responsible for the game's development. It is planned for PC, PlayStation 2, Xbox, GameCube, Nintendo DS, Game Boy Advance, Sony PSP and next-generation consoles – quite the list of platforms!



Delta Force: Black Hawk Down

Totally redesigned for the PS2 utilizing the groundbreaking Azura engine, Delta Force – Black Hawk Down recreates the intense atmosphere of a war-torn country. From tours of duty in the vast Somali countryside, where snipers could lurk on top of any hill - to the maze like streets of Mogadishu, where militia and civilians blend seamlessly. To ensure accuracy, NovaLogic spent months researching the history of the conflict, and worked extensively with three former Special Forces Operatives, including two who served in Somalia in 1993.

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WEB SCORES

Splinter Cell Chaos Theory [PC]

NAG [100]	78	
GAMESPY.COM [5]	4.5	
GAMESPOT.COM [10]	8.6	
IGN.COM [10]	9.6	

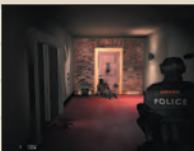
Act of War [PC]

NAG [100]	75	
GAMESPY.COM [5]	3.5	
GAMESPOT.COM [10]	8.5	
IGN.COM [10]	8.5	


The Punisher [PC]

NAG [100]	71	
GAMESPY.COM [5]	3.5	
GAMESPOT.COM [10]	6.6	
IGN.COM [10]	8.0	


SWAT 4 [PC]

NAG [100]	86	
GAMESPY.COM [5]	4.5	
GAMESPOT.COM [10]	8.5	
IGN.COM [10]	9.0	

Fight Night Round 2 [PS2]

NAG [100]	92	
GAMESPY.COM [5]	NA	
GAMESPOT.COM [10]	8.9	
IGN.COM [10]	NA	

FIFA Street [PS2]

NAG [100]	59	
GAMESPY.COM [5]	2.0	
GAMESPOT.COM [10]	6.7	
IGN.COM [10]	5.5	

Constantine [PS2]

NAG [100]	63	
GAMESPY.COM [5]	3.5	
GAMESPOT.COM [10]	6.4	
IGN.COM [10]	6.5	

Death by Degrees [PS2]

NAG [100]	40	
GAMESPY.COM [5]	3.0	
GAMESPOT.COM [10]	5.6	
IGN.COM [10]	5.0	

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

Fox, Paramount and Universal Studios are all considering releasing movies onto the PSP UMD format. Fox has already committed several movies, including 'i, Robot' and 'Predator'.

VU Games announced that it will withdraw retail support for Half-Life 2 starting from August, resulting from the court case between it and developer Valve regarding the Steam distribution system.

Creative Assembly has announced Rome: Total War – Barbarian Invasion, an expansion which will focus on the decline of the Roman Empire and the rise of the rampaging hordes.

According to rumour, Sonic the Hedgehog will soon be making his debut on the Sony PSP console. Sega has yet to confirm this.

PSP RELEASE ANNOUNCED FOR EUROPE

Start saving...

SONY'S PSP FINALLY GOT a release date for Europe – 1 September. You will, however, have to be willing to part with around £179 (€249) for a PSP, compared to the US price of around \$260. It also sadly translates into a hefty R2600 locally and local supplier Ster Kinekor has predicted the PSP's local price to be between that and R2800.

The upside is that the deal will be the value pack released in the US, which contains a PSP, a 32MB memory stick, battery pack and headphones. European buyers can also pre-register and order their PSPs, which will get them a free copy of Spider-Man 2 on UMD - the PSP's proprietary disc format.

Sony hasn't explained why the unit is being released at such a hefty price, but it will seem the likelihood of a PSP price cut in the US won't be this year, else it will likely interfere with the European launches. Then again, as it stands, it's cheaper to simply import the unit directly from North America.





BLOODRAYNE MOVIE COMING

A film chronicling the origins of BloodRayne is in production (though no release details are currently available). The rather impressive cast includes Kristanna Loken, who played the 'Terminatrix' in Terminator 3, Ben Kingsley ('Gandhi'), Michelle Rodriguez and Michael Madsen. If you want the story-line spoiled for you, visit www.bloodrayne-themovie.com.



SPYTOY

The team behind EyeToy will be releasing SpyToy this September. The package makes use of the EyeToy to provide 'espionage-themed' gaming options. Some of its features include face recognition and the ability to make video recordings that can be edited and played back. New technology improves the camera's resolution to 640 X 480. A set of games consistent with the theme will be bundled with the product.

WAR FRONT

CDV and Digital Reality have teamed up to develop and publish War Front, an action-strategy title that explores a speculative alternate World War II wherein Hitler was assassinated. The story will be semi-historical in nature, blending real events and fictional 'what-if' premises.



Close Combat: First to Fight

Lead a four-man fire team of US Marines in close-quarters authentic urban combat in the streets and buildings of Beirut and other Middle-Eastern combat theatres. It was created with the help of more than 40 active-duty U.S. Marines fresh from fire fights in the Middle East and will be used by the United States Marine Corps as a training simulation. Close Combat: First to Fight is as close as you can get on a computer to being a Marine fire team leader in modern urban combat!

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ON THE HORIZON

US RELEASE DATES



PC RELEASE DATES

Date	Title	Genre
June	Battlefield 2	Action
June	Battle of Europe	Flight Sim
June	Brian Lara International Cricket	Sport
June	Codename Panzers: Phase Two	Strategy
June	Cold War	Adventure
June	Commandos Strike Force	FPS
June	Day of Defeat: Source	FPS
June	Deep Sea Tycoon 2	Simulation
June	Dragonshard	Strategy
June	ECHO: Secrets of the Lost Cavern	Adventure
June	Fantastic Four	Action
June	F.E.A.R.	FPS
June	FlatOut	Racing
June	Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas	Action
June	RollerCoaster Tycoon 3: Soaked!	Simulation
June	Squad Assault: Second Wave	Strategy
June	Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon 2	FPS
June	TrackMania Sunrise	Racing
June	Worms 4: Mayhem	Strategy



XBOX RELEASE DATES

Date	Title	Genre
June	50 Cent: Bulletproof	Action
June	Batman Begins	Action
June	Capcom Fighting Jam	Fighting
June	Conker: Live and Reloaded	Action
June	Destroy All Humans!	Action
June	Fantastic Four	Action
June	FlatOut	Racing
June	Grand Theft Auto: San Andreas	Action
June	Halo 2 Multiplayer Map Pack	FPS
June	Juiced	Racing
June	Medal of Honor: European Assault	FPS
June	Worms 4: Mayhem	Strategy



PSP RELEASE DATES

Date	Title	Genre
June	Armored Core Formula Front	Action
June	Coded Arms	Shooter
June	Dead to Rights: Reckoning	Action
June	Frogger: Helmet Havoc	Puzzle
June	Midnight Club 3: DUB Edition	Racing
June	Ys VI: The Ark of Napishtim	RPG



PS2 RELEASE DATES

Date	Title	Genre
June	Arc the Lad: End of Darkness	Action
June	Batman Begins	Action
June	Combat Elite: WWII Paratroopers	Action
June	Delta Force: Black Hawk Down	Action
June	Destroy All Humans!	Action
June	Fantastic Four	Action
June	FlatOut	Racing
June	Juiced	Racing
June	Killer 7	Action
June	Medal of Honor: European Assault	FPS
June	Psychonauts	Adventure
June	Samurai Western	Action
June	Worms 4: Mayhem	Strategy



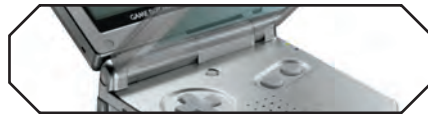
DS RELEASE DATES

Date	Title	Genre
June	Boktai	RPG
June	Dragon Ball GT: Transformation	Fighting
June	Fantastic Four	Action
June	GoldenEye: Rogue Agent	FPS
June	Kirby: Canvas Curse	Action
June	Sigma Star Saga	FPS



GAMECUBE RELEASE DATES

Date	Title	Genre
June	Batman Begins	Action
June	Fantastic Four	Action
June	Geist	FPS
June	Killer 7	Action
June	Medal of Honor: European Assault	FPS



GBA RELEASE DATES

Date	Title	Genre
June	Dragon Ball GT: Transformation	Fighting
June	Fantastic Four	Action
June	GoldenEye: Rogue Agent	FPS
June	Kirby: Canvas Curse	Action
June	Sigma Star Saga	FPS

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CHARTS

PC Games

#	Title
1	Sims 2 University Expansion Pack
2	Splinter Cell Chaos Theory
3	Sims 2
4	Rugby 2005
5	Need For Speed Underground 2
6	Star Wars KOTOR Classics
7	CSI Exclusive
8	Playboy The Mansion
9	Star Wars KOTOR 2 Sith Lords
10	Sims Ultimate Collection
11	Championship Manager 5
12	Doom 3 Resurrection of Evil Expansion
13	Lord Of The Rings Battle For Middle Earth
14	101 Dalmations
15	SWAT 4
16	Command & Conquer Generals Classics
17	Need For Speed Underground Classics
18	Battlefield Vietnam Classics
19	Act Of War Direct Action
20	Cricket 2004 Classics

PlayStation 2

#	Title
1	Gran Turismo 4
2	Rugby 2005
3	Metal Gear Solid 3 Snake Eater
4	Need For Speed Underground 2
5	Grand Theft Auto San Andreas
6	Playboy The Mansion
7	Splinter Cell Chaos Theory
8	Brother In Arms
9	WWE Smackdown VS Raw
10	WWE Smackdown Here Comes The Pain Platinum
11	Mortal Kombat Deception
12	FIFA Street
13	Devil May Cry 3
14	Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2005
15	Singstar 2 & Microphone
16	Final Fantasy X-2
17	ESPN NFL Football 2005
18	Eye Toy Play 2 & Camera
19	Singstar [no microphone]
20	Getaway 2 Black Monday

JUNE AT A GLANCE



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24
Movie
Batman Begins

30
Gaming
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ALL-STAR CAST FOR SCARFACE GAME ADAPTATION

Vivendi Universal and Radical Games have shown great insight by not basing their Scarface game on the movie, but rather letting it start where the film classic left off. Al Pacino's likeness will grace the game, and voice acting is being provided by James Woods, Miguel Sandoval, Robert Davi, Michael Rappaport, Michael York, Steven Bauer, Robert Loggia, Jay Mohr and Cheech Martin. The game will be available for PC and Xbox next year.

Game music scoring hits in Los Angeles

Music from computer games has become very popular in some places and Los Angeles has become the host of multiple concerts of this genre. In May, Nobuo Uematsu presented his concert comprised of music from the Final Fantasy series. Another, similar, event is planned for the Hollywood Bowl on the 6th of July. The concert will feature music from various computer games, including WarCraft, Tomb Raider, Halo, Metal Gear Solid and Sonic the Hedgehog. The music will be performed by the Los Angeles Philharmonic Orchestra backed by a full choir.

DIGITAL ILLUSIONS PLANS NEW FPS

Battlefield developer spreads its repertoire

Digital Illusions, or DICE, has announced two new projects. The first is a PSP version of Battlefield: Modern Combat, the console-based version of the popular Battlefield franchise. While the PS2 and Xbox versions are expected later this year, Modern Combat PSP will ship in early 2006, around the same time as the Future Gen Xbox version. Battlefield 2 for PC is still slated for a June/July release.

DICE also announced that it has started working on a new FPS, currently unnamed. The shooter will be released in late 2005, while another untitled game will be released on console in 2006 – possibly the same title. Finally, if you need more DICE goodness, another untitled game will be released somewhere in 2007. DICE has been very quiet about these projects, only stating that the one is definitely an all-new intellectual title.

HUGE PS2, PSP SALES EXPECTED

Sony has announced that it expects to have shipped 12 million units of the PlayStation 2 and a similar number of the PlayStation Portable by the end of next March. If these projections are accurate, total sales of these products will reach about 15 million for the handheld and almost 100 million for the console.

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ATARI

MULTIPLAYER

EVOLVE AND SHASE QUALIFY FOR ESWC 2005

THE MOST-ASKED QUESTION IN and around the WarCraft III tournament area at the ESWC 2005 Qualifier, was: "Who the hell is Shase?" The answer, of course, was: "The winner". Shase, also known as Travis Weedon, became the first South African ever to win a national tournament as a wildcard entry, beating Ross 'nf-gamp' McIlroy in the final. Also making a convincing return to form, longstanding Counter-Strike greats Evolve scored a final victory over iDentity Gaming, securing their seats on the plane to France in July. Meanwhile, Nico-Louis 'Mielie' Joubert defended his WCG 2004 title as the top local Unreal Tournament player. The_Basilisk was on the scene to compile this report.

Keeping with a long tradition of gaming events, the Carousel Casino again played host to the South African Qualifier for this year's Electronic Sports World Cup. Organised by Arena 77 and sponsored by Rectron, the tournament took place over a full weekend, from the 29th of April to the 1st of May, and was packed with more competitive matches per square inch than any event preceding it. Thirty-six Counter-Strike teams, thirty-two Unreal Tournament players and roughly as many WarCraft III players took their seats in one of the most intense, and strangest, gaming competitions in SA history.

In the technical department, the event was virtually impossible to fault. Building on their experience from last year's event, the Vaalhooligan Crew (VC) delivered a stable and lag-free network to the competition areas, which were also disconnected from each other and the open LAN during tournament play. This minimised the risk of outside net sending, unnecessary network traffic due to copying, and the spreading of viruses. VC also distributed free anti-virus software to help curb the effect of viruses. Computers brought in were first tested for electrical faults, according to the practise established in 2004, and as a result there were no power drops during the entire weekend. New gamers may find it difficult to imagine an event without adequate electricity, but not so long ago power failures were the expected norm. The technical competence shown



by the Arena 77 / VC team is a sign of thorough preparation which will hopefully continue into the future. Many other events would do well to learn from this example.

The organisation of the Counter-Strike tournament, however, left much to be desired. Without the presence of head admin Mandus 'Recon' Momberg, the staff seemed wholly disoriented and unsure of themselves. Server problems (which essentially resulted from the poor allocation of available hardware) caused an incredible five



Top: Counter-Strike team Evolve, add yet another title to their gaming 'career'

hour delay before the first matches could get underway. The problem was eventually corrected, but this forced the tournament to run later than it needed to on the Saturday, and to start earlier again on the Sunday morning, meaning the players were no doubt tired for important games. Another complaint was that the draw for the double elimination stage of the tournament was done via the bonus point system, which has proven in the past to produce random results and encourage humiliation of the weaker teams. Questionable seeding also led to several unbalanced groups.

Another major criticism I had of the event was prize distribution. Compared to other recent tournaments, the purse was noticeably small, and what made the situation worse for many gamers was that the spot prizes far exceeded what was given away to the competitors. For those who have put in the time and effort to compete, this is certainly a huge disappointment. An anonymous WarCraft III player summed up the problem: "Clifford, the new pro-gamer who has been practising his guessing game hard all year, guessed a number at the prize-giving and won a PC. It seems the future of competitive gaming is in the open LAN."

Nevertheless, the Counter-Strike winner's bracket (WB) saw Evolve and Ace meet in the first semi-final, and iDentity and Rival in the second. Evolve, who had trained hard for this competition due to recent losses to iDentity, found no resistance at all from Ace, and steamrolled through to the WB final. It was not to be so easy for iDentity who were pushed to the final rounds of the match before emerging as the shaky victors against Rival. Evolve then won the WB final on de_cbble. iDentity had problems adapting to Riaan 'Style' van Niekerk's on-the-fly leadership, and were dominated in every respect on what was slated as a crucial map. Meanwhile, the Bad Habit Boyz were tearing through the loser's bracket (LB), taking out Rival and running head-on into the LB semi-final against Ace. I have never seen BHB play this solidly, and what should have been an easy win for Ace became a worrisome situation at times. However, excellent play from the young Detrony ensured that Ace would progress to the LB final. In another game that was closer than expected, Ace never let iDentity run away with the lead, and might have been able to challenge realistically for the win if they had had more experience as a team. The super-final, then, saw the second match-up between Evolve and iDentity. Being forced to eliminate de_cbble, which their opponents were clearly strong on;

iDentity had to be content playing de_nuke, which had traditionally been Evolve's stronghold. And, narrowly but certainly, they pulled it off, forcing the final into a second map. Unfortunately, though, the deciding game, played on de_dust2, was utterly one-sided, with Evolve walking away with a 16-1 win and first place in the tournament.

The biggest upset of the WarCraft III tournament was the elimination of the favourite, Chris 'Swoop' Barter in the very first round. Swoop lost to Shase and Valprax in a group tie-breaker, becoming the first of the Nightfall casualties. WCG 2004 winner Anthony 'Juvenile' Fellowes was the second to go, losing to Shase and team-mate Gamp in the double elimination stage. Shase also had a hand in disposing of Chris 'Zick' MacDonald, the fourth Nightfall player in the tournament. The eighteen-year-old university student started playing WarCraft III competitively about a year ago. "My main practice was on LAN," said Shase. "I played a lot against my brother, who gained his skills while in Europe." Almost unaware of the scale of his achievement, he said he did not have high expectations coming into the competition. "I thought Swoop was going to win it," he explained. "But the game after I beat Zick, a team-mate said something like, 'What's going through your head right now? You must be feeling you could win the whole thing?' And that was the point I realised it." When asked if he gets nervous, he simply replied, "Hardly."

Unreal Tournament was not an official discipline at this year's ESWC qualifier, and so the participants were competing instead for the honour, as well as R2000 in cash. The UT results were significantly less unexpected, with all of the top seeds advancing to the double elimination stage. In a similar fashion to the Counter-Strike format, frag difference was used to draw the brackets, which lead to the favourite, Mielie, playing his most difficult game (against team-mate Karl 'Mburr' Buys) in the winner's bracket semi-final. He lost this match 2-0, and was forced to make his comeback in the loser's. Also in the winner's bracket, the eternal runner-up, Jonathan 'Zero-1' Attwell, beat Rikus 'Gandulf' Jordaan 2-1. Zero-1's tournament was looking good, as he also managed to drop Mburr to the loser's bracket with a 2-1 map score. Mielie, then, having recovered from a fever that had been plaguing him the previous day, won over both Gandulf and Mburr (2-0 in both matches) for the opportunity to play Zero-1 in the grand final. Needing to win twice in two best-of-three contests, Mielie beat his opponent 2-1, 2-1 in the closest South African UT final in the last two years. **NAG**



RESULTS

Counter-Strike 1.6

1. evolve
2. iDentity Gaming
3. Ace
4. NakedIT BHB
5. ethereal
6. Rival
7. elemeNt
8. ViGouR

WarCraft III

1. Travis 'q6' Shase' Weedon
2. Ross 'nf-gamp' McIlroy
3. Barry 'q6' TreNd' West
4. Chris 'nf-Zick' MacDonald
5. Paul 'Assassin[Own3d]' Fairbank
6. Gerhard '[d]Abuse. H4t3' Ungerer
7. Eric 'BB-Sage' Brand
8. Dean 'Zero' Loots

Unreal

Tournament 2004

1. Nico-Louis '42::Mielie' Joubert
2. Jonathan 'q6' zero-1' Attwell
3. Karl '42::Mburr' Buys
4. Rikus '42::Gandulf' Jordaan
5. Kyle '(TA).Knayda(), 'Khoury
6. Anton '42::Suntory' Lines
7. Nick '42::Nick' Bester
8. Richard 'n00mz' Shuttleworth

INTERVIEW



IT TAKES GUTS TO leave a reputable company and start over with your own ideas. Jeff Strain, co-founder of ArenaNet, did just that. And now he wants to change the way we play online. . .

JEFF STRAIN

ARENANET

IMAGINE THE SCENE: YOU'RE hard at work developing some of the most talked-about titles in the massively multiplayer online role-playing category, when you decide that the genre could be taken down a different path. A path that would allow everyone to enjoy it, not just those who have massive great holes in their not-so-busy schedules.

Okay, it might not have gone exactly like that, but after working on reputable titles such as StarCraft and World Of Warcraft, this is exactly what Jeff Strain did in the spring of 2000 when he and fellow Blizzard employees, Mike O'Brian and Patrick Wyatt, founded ArenaNet with a view to provide an innovative online gaming experience.

"The whole reason we wanted to start ArenaNet was to try some different things with online games," says Strain. "We felt that the massively multiplayer online genre, in particular, was stuck in a rut, and that everyone was just revolving around a few core ideas that were laid down five years ago by games like EverQuest. We really felt like the technology could give us a way to bring the cool social dynamics of online games to a much broader audience."

It may be easy to say, but reshaping an entire genre to make it appeal to those not easily lured into an online world is no simple task and ArenaNet will have to have a fair few aces up its sleeve if it wants to succeed. Strain is clearly aware of this, yet his smile suggests that he's confident in his company's ability to deliver.

"We think that being able to take some chances with design is our greatest advantage. Being a new company with no past successes to build upon has put us in a position to be more creative," he says. "One of the interesting things about our development team is that everyone is very into console games – we love the immediacy. Our plan has always been to make a game that had the depth of a really intense MMORPG or RTS, but could be picked up and played for ten minutes before dinner and still feel like something had been achieved. It's our belief that rather than having to spend your time preparing to have fun, you should actually be having fun."

This way of thinking has obviously greatly affected the way ArenaNet's first title, Guild Wars, has turned out, and

Strain is quick to point out that the game shouldn't be labelled as an MMORPG. You can easily see why people would make this assumption – at a glance the title seems very similar to many massively multiplayer online RPGs and it certainly uses much of the same technology.

However, the MMORPG tag suggests a certain type of game design and it's this design that ArenaNet has attempted to steer away from. Rather than your abilities and strengths being largely determined by the number of hours you've put in, Guild Wars has been heavily based on Magic: The Gathering – a card game where the more cards you have, the more strategic options become available to you. The twist is this doesn't necessarily make you a better

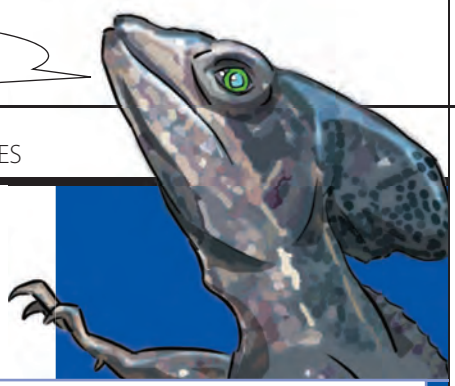
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player.

"We made sure that Guild Wars was designed from day one as a game that rewards skill and not just the amount of time you have to put into the game," Strain explains. "If you've been playing for ten hours and I've been playing for a 100 then, if you're the better thinker, it's very possible that you'll beat me. We also feel this improves the co-op elements; it becomes very difficult if one member of a team has more time to spend on the game than another. When this happens, you get members who reach higher levels quicker and get to do things that others may never do. This is a huge downside to MMO games and means the game loses appeal very quickly. Our system allows us to avoid this element as well."

So what's next for Strain and ArenaNet once Guild Wars has hit the shelves? A well-deserved holiday perhaps? "Guild Wars Chapter 1, Guild Wars Chapter 2 and then probably Guild Wars Chapter 3," he says with a smile. "There'll be no rest for us. We always want our players to believe that there's a future in what they're spending time on – that's very important to us." **NAG**

Faster than a speeding bullet! More powerful than a moving train! Able to leap from the ledge above the red armour to the railgun in a single bound!



DOMAIN OF THE BASILISK

BY ANTON LINES

Axed

HERE IS A WELL known story about the first American president, George Washington, who, as a boy, cut down his father's cherry tree with an axe. This historical instrument is apparently on display at a museum in the United States. However, both its head and its handle have been replaced several times. Is it the same axe?

The question is a common example of Theseus' paradox. It is a problem relating to the replacement of parts of a whole – and to what extent the whole is still its original self after the replacement. The same concept can be readily applied to the gaming industry. In simple terms: is a game developer the same company if it contains none of its initial members?

I suppose I'd better explain why this should interest us at all. As long as we get the action we're looking for, does it really matter who's behind the wheel? Clearly, I believe it does. We are assaulted by advertising for hundreds of new releases every year, and among all the factors that influence our final decisions on what to buy, developer history is one of the most important. We see the name Blizzard Entertainment and think, "Hey, Diablo was cool." We see Microsoft, shake our heads, and mutter about the bugs in Windows. The point is: developer history plays a significant part in how a new game is received, both by consumers and by the media. It determines hype, distribution model, and even, to an extent, review scores. And why shouldn't it? People and products are judged on their reputation all the time. It generally gives us a good idea of what to expect unless, of course, it's a completely different bunch of people masquerading under the same name.

I'll turn to three examples from popular development houses. Squaresoft, the Japanese giant, famous for a range of RPG titles, was originally founded in 1983 but failed to make any impression on the market until Hironobu Sakaguchi created Final Fantasy in 1987. Today, fans of the series eagerly await the release of Final Fantasy 12, most of them

unaware that Sakaguchi himself is no longer with the company. In fact, aside from Nobuo Uematsu (who wrote the music for all the games in the series except X-2); none of the original team remain. After FF12, Uematsu is also leaving. The console producer and games publisher Atari is still around today, but in nothing like its original form. Atari is now owned by Infogrames, but has really become nothing more than a brand name. The original company no longer exists, and Infogrames simply owns the rights to Atari's intellectual property. Blizzard Entertainment recently lost virtually the entire Diablo development team, including Bill Roper (who also played an important role in the StarCraft and WarCraft series), David Brevik, Erich Schaefer and Max Schaefer. Nevertheless, Blizzard is currently planning Diablo III.

In many cases, we associate games with the names of companies, not individuals. And in an industry where prices are still pretty steep (especially in South Africa), we ought to be better informed as to whose reputation, exactly, we're basing our decisions on. Paying more attention to what goes on behind the doors of the industry, and recognising that a new development team, even under an old name, is a different entity, will help us all avoid the disappointment of incorrectly hyping up new titles. Diablo III, in my books, still has a lot to prove. **NAG**

“ It is a problem relating to the replacement of parts of a whole – and to what extent the whole is still its original self after the replacement. The same concept can be readily applied to the gaming industry. In simple terms: is a game developer the same company if it contains none of its initial members? ”



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The Secret to Success

ON THE ODD OCCASION, I'd be walking down the street perusing any kind of gaming-related store that I might happen upon when suddenly, I'm stopped by someone who is an avid reader of NAG, the gaming magazine of choice. He, or she as it may, will exclaim: "You have the 'bestest' job ever! I envy you!" I'd smile and nod, replying with a sotto, "Why yes, I do have the most awesome job in the world," then sign whatever scrap of paper is shoved at me and continue along my merry way. Sometimes, confetti will fall from the sky to mark my passage.

No, really. Why would I lie about something like this?

It is mostly thought that working at NAG, a gaming magazine, is nothing short of a gamer's dream. If you were thinking that, you'd be entirely correct. Being at the epicentre of gaming in all its various forms is a wonderful and enlightening experience, especially for an avid enthusiast. But let me write an epitaph here for you, the wide-eyed gaming partisan trying to break into this delectable industry.

There is a well-kept secret that we all share, here in the industry you're trying to break into. We don't tell people this secret, or our jobs would be in jeopardy. This secret is the key ingredient for getting in, and getting your game on. But, since I'm such an incredibly benevolent person, I'm going to let you in on this little secret, right here, right now.

Drop all your assumptions about what you think working at a gaming magazine is all about, get some education and stop thinking that your avid enthusiasm for gaming is all you need.

There, the cat is out of the proverbial bag. The secret is out, may the gaming gods forgive me for what I have done. Pretty soon, every gamer in this country is going to finish high school, get some basic education in writing or perhaps design and then come gunning for our jobs. No longer will aspiring game reviewers think that fragging one of the NAG staff in a game of Quake 3 makes them eligible for their position, and defeating the Editor in a game of Unreal Tournament 2004, will no longer be considered the prerequisite requirement for becoming the editor of NAG.

Have I made the world a better place? Only time will reveal the outcome of my actions.

Now, to be fair, I'll admit that having enthusiasm counts for a lot. Personally, I find that my enthusiasm often works well as a substitute for education or intelligence. But like a bridge built from taffy, it works for a while but eventually collapses in a sweet, sugary mess, polluting the local ecosystem and causing the death of several species of wild duck. A more solid foundation of education and experience makes for a much better construction, especially when trucks need to cross the river.

Visually appropriate analogies aside, my little tirade this month may seem fuelled by a specific event, but is actually nothing more than the eventual result of a long-running set of events that seem to surface en masse every time graduation from high school draws near. The e-mails start flocking in - a mixture of requests and begging to 'play games for a living'. It sounds sardonic, but is eerily true. Despite having reasonable guidelines such as 'send in a review of a recent game', appropriate to gauge writing ability, some 'gamers' persist in claiming that they've been 'playing games all their life', and thus are perfectly suited for the job.

When you're 14, your life hasn't been that long. **NAG**

“ It is mostly thought that working at NAG, a gaming magazine, is nothing short of a gamer's dream. If you were thinking that, you'd be entirely correct. ”



* No ducks, wild or otherwise were injured during the writing of this piece.

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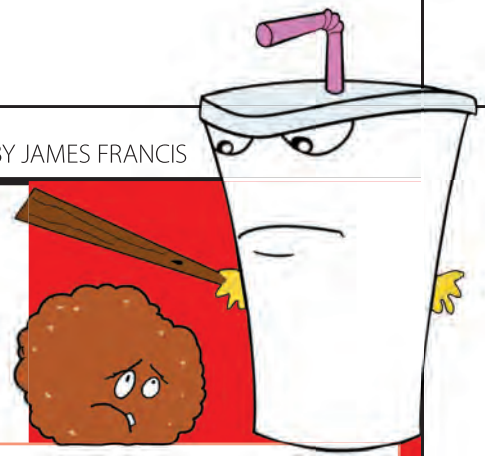
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Death to the Underground



THERE SEEMS TO BE a lot of noise being made about independent development. For any entertainment industry to work well, it's fair to assume you need a strong upcoming and underground scene, because that's where the mainstream gets its ideas from. There's nothing inherently corrupt about the idea. When you work on big projects involving big money, you are bound to be more restricted in what you can do. Britney Spears wouldn't be selling as many albums if she decided to go into concept mixing or try her hand at bluegrass.

But the market keeps evolving and that's thanks to an undercurrent of artists who range from simply injecting their own style into an existing genre, to the outright crazy punter whose music resembles something akin to a wet cat in a bag.

Gaming lacks this culture, which is weird because we're supposed to have it. Unlike movies and music, it's not that hard to make a game. But garage development is long retired, mostly thanks to pockets of coders who believe that before you can make a great game, you need a great engine. There are the die-hards, people who put out free games and remakes – all of which push us along a bit more, but we've squandered the biggest commodity of all: mod development.

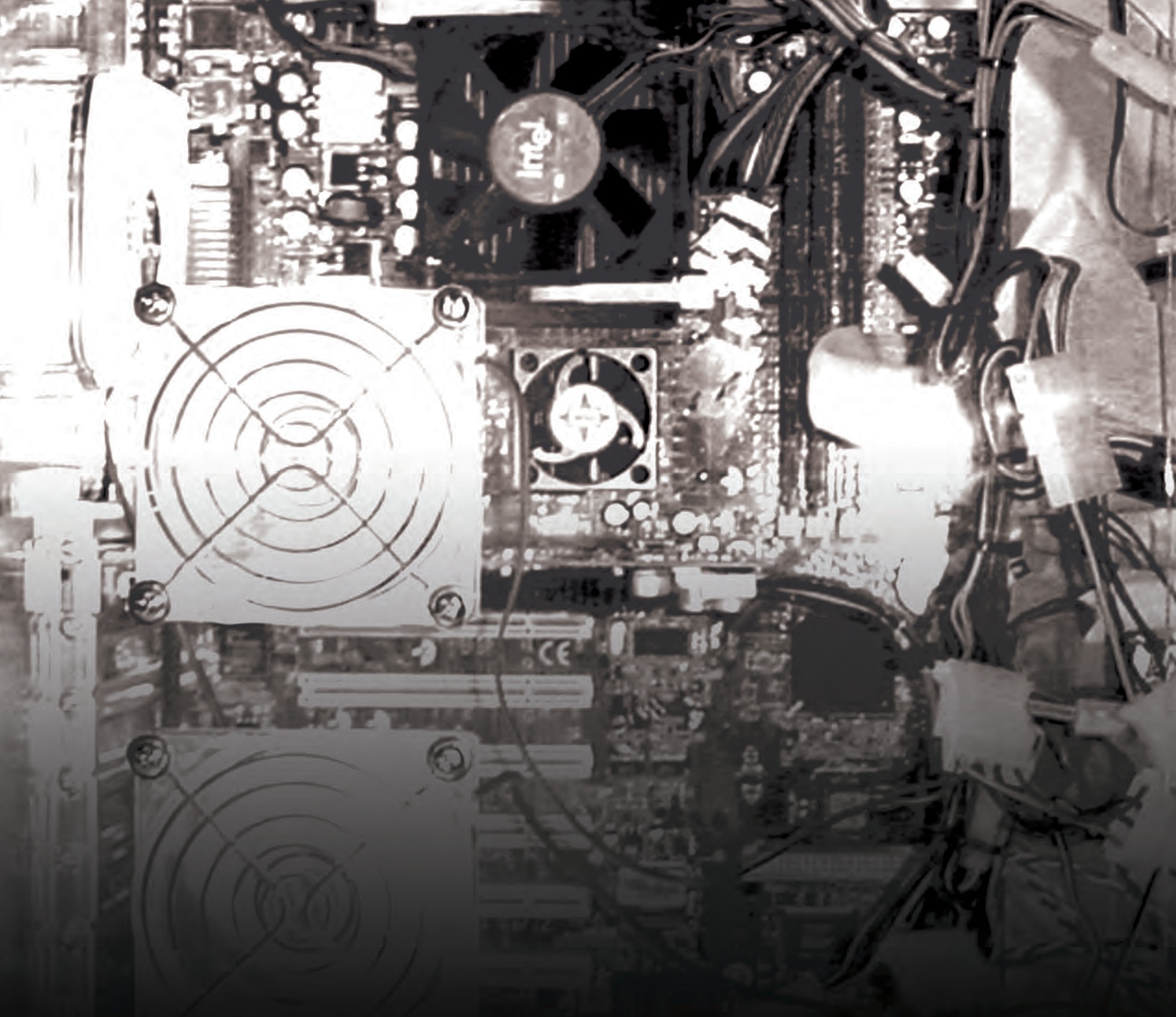
Mods became big, really big, with Quake, thanks to Quake C. This simplified coding language gave users a lot of access to the Quake engine's power, allowing them to do some interesting things. Combined with simple models and easy level development, it took no time before we had stuff like Quake Rally, Future Fantasy and the famous Grappling Hook. But then Quake 2 arrived and slapped us with serious coding: Visual C, DLLs, stuff! This managed to sideline most of those people who enjoyed making mods. Granted, the extra power brought a lot to the table for developers, but it also managed to cull the bedroom enthusiasts. Think about it, there are more shooters now than ever before, but far less mods per game than I can recall in recent memory. True, there is a bulk issue. There definitely are lots of maps and such for

most titles, but none of them resonate the glory days of mods where creativity was more important than simply slapping together a stage with a few new textures.

So why can't we have this element back? Some would argue that engines have become more complicated – too complicated – but I think this would benefit us. Surely with a very powerful engine you should be able to achieve more than ever before using a scripting language, one that allows you to alter the properties of the world as Quake C once did. In the beginning, when God made light and Carmack made Quake, things weren't as easy as they are now. Tools were grittier, computers were weaker and we all had to slap together textures on far less accomplished software. Now graphical packages are very powerful and very easy to use. The Internet is a huge library for modders, giving them everything they need to know to do something. But it's all been given to the inately hardcore – those who actually know how to write hard code. Well, that doesn't make you a gamer and you shouldn't have to leap through machine code hoops to make your own mod. There are far more people out there that would like to make mods than there are actual modders – all thanks to the complicated technology keeping them out.

This is the fault of the developer. Be it time, apathy or just general stupidity, no developer seems keen to simplify the fan creation process at all. Sure, level building isn't that tough, but modding is and that's where the crux resides.


“ In the beginning, when God made light and Carmack made Quake, things weren't as easy as they are now. Tools were grittier, computers were weaker and we all had to slap together textures on far less accomplished software. Now graphical packages are very powerful and very easy to use. The Internet is a huge library for modders, giving them everything they need to know to do something. But it's all been given to the inately hardcore – those who actually know how to write hard code. ”



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INBOX

LETTER OF THE MOMENT

FROM Enforcer

SUBJECT Violence

Games over the years have changed from saving damsels in distress, to using a chainsaw to beat back evil hordes of zombies. So why this sudden change? Why do gaming developers see the need to create more violent games? Modern day society dictates, through the social norm of peace and goodwill, that violence is seen as a punishable offence and is generally found to be unacceptable in modern day life – with good reason of course. Yet here we gamers, male and female alike, sit down in front of whatever gaming tool we use and use violence to solve our means. My only reason for us gamers enjoying violence in games so much, is that we find it entertaining. We want to use violent means to destroy monsters and aliens. We want to gather torches and pitchforks, march over to Telkom, knock down the walls of oppression, lay siege to their office and . . . Sorry about that; old habit. Back to my main point. If we humans did not find violence entertaining, we would never have included it in the programmes we watch. Tell me how many times you find it amusing when your most hated character on TV gets clobbered? It applies to us all. If it weren't so entertaining, game developers would see that the market for violent games was falling apart, and stop developing violent games. And pigs would fly. Violence is such a part of our daily lives that a world without it would be called heaven. Although violence through games may instil some influence over our younger audience, it doesn't take an absolute idiot to realise that choice is what separates the crazy from the sane. We choose to go out and play violent games because we find it entertaining, not to learn the best way to survive an attack from the legions of zombies. *Funny you should mention that. Just the other day someone in the office said CNN or some other news source had reported zombies in Cambodia. People in the office were more interested in flying over to help clean up the problem than doing any work. So I guess you must be right about the whole violence thing. You're getting two free games because you're a good person; and good always wins over evil.* **NAG Ed.**

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



FROM KroaX

SUBJECT The Frustration

I would just like to know what you guys do to mailers who swear at you and call your mothers names etc. (Do you guys follow up with lawsuits?) I just want to know for the times when I really get frustrated about something said at NAG, and want to give a piece of my mind to the people at NAG!

Lawsuits take far too long, I find that sending my boys [little Tony and Frankie knuckles] around for a chat works the creases out of any frown in no time at all. **NAG Ed.**

FROM Byte

SUBJECT Fun or not

After playing many hours of games, good and bad, old and new, I have come to one painfully obvious conclusion about what is or is not a good game. My argument stems from the continuous comparisons and judgement of games based on their graphics, originality, sound and AI. All these factors are just the icing on the top of a much more important and deeper factor of what makes a good or bad game. That factor is fun. Most games now are always trying to impress with brilliant graphics, but I still have more fun playing Worms than I do when playing Doom 3. The comparison is fair and totally relevant. What does the one game have in a greater amount than the other? It's fun. This comparison can relate to many other games which are fun or not.

Fun is the one single criterion that most games are really rated on. Various flaws [technical and otherwise] can always be overlooked if the game is fun at the core [this also relates to play dynamic] – this is why you can never truly compare games on any other set of criteria, because a game can be technically flawless, but still get a poor score [can't think of a good example other than Scrapland]. On the flipside, look at WarioWare for the GBA - poor graphics, average sound, mindless repetition [I can go on], but what a stunning game. **NAG Ed.**

FROM Darryn "Matrix"

SUBJECT USA WW2

Good Day To All The NAG Readers I Would Like To Vent My Anger At The Game Developers Who Make World War 2 Games, How Is It That They <snip>.

The rest of the world finds it annoying when you use capital letters to start every word. Take this as a clue if you're wondering why nobody ever replies to any mail you send. I'm doing this as a public service. Same goes for those plods who WRITE EVERYTHING LIKE THIS. **NAG Ed.**

FROM Duke

SUBJECT Just curious

What do you have to write about to be in the letters thing? Hardware, software, games or some really 'hard' computer topic? I've been writing a few letters. Just want know if there's anything specific? NAG does rock though and thanks for the DVD.

You nailed it – thanks for your contribution. **NAG Ed.**

FROM Aquila & Gamers in Nelspruit

SUBJECT Gaming competitions

The serious lack of gaming competitions in Nelspruit makes it hard for gamers to show their stuff. It's been my lifelong dream to compete in a competition such as those mostly hosted in any "Major City" - except for the capital of Mpumalanga, Nelspruit. My clan and I have been waiting a long time for a competition to be hosted in Nelspruit and guess what... we're still waiting! If we want to go to a gaming competition, we have to go all the way to Johannesburg. So Somebody! Anybody! Please do something about this. Please publish this letter and make the public aware that there are serious gamers in Nelspruit who have the need to show what they've got. Oh, and by the way the Cover DVD rocks!

Dear gamers in Nelspruit. We'd love to arrange competitions all over the country, but in most cases, like yours, we don't even know where Nelspruit is and when we eventually do find out, its by bending over a giant map of South Africa with a magnifying glass [the kind of map where 100km = 1cm]. It's not that we're not willing to embrace gamers in every corner of our country, it's just that you live just South of the middle of nowhere and the petrol price just went up. Why not speak to a local Internet café [if you have one] and arrange a formal competition there. Organise for the winner to be sponsored a trip up to JHB to compete in a big competition. Please just make sure that you cover up your PC for the trip - chicken feathers and CPU fans don't mix well. **NAG Ed.**

FROM Moral Minus

SUBJECT Repressing Oppression?

I know that your publication and staff feel compelled to ingratiate themselves to certain global corporations in order to continue receiving merchandise to review. But I think you should be out there helping the struggle against these greedy behemoths – I'm incensed that innocent consumers feel they have no choice but to fork out R600 for a certain OS whenever they get a new PC. It's time your publication starts supporting the freedom fighters. By this I refer to open source and the



Linux-based OS, Ubuntu (headed by Mark Shuttleworth), which is totally free and encourages people to do the unthinkable – share it. (This may seem Communistic, but since when was that illegal?) NAG could continue sleeping with the impersonal corporations, but wouldn't it be better for the SA community as a whole, if you dedicated at least one page to investigating some aspect of open source each month? In this way you will help to force the industry to be more competitive and also give your 'valued' readers choice... do you really give two hoots about us, or is your new BMW too comfortable?

To be completely honest, I think open source is a waste of time. I find it ironic that Mark Shuttleworth made his money on selling software, and yes, I really love my BMW [new 3-series is on order as I type this]. If I were open source orientated, my BMW would be a 1989 Mazda 323 and I'd never be at work because it wouldn't start in the mornings and I don't live on a downhill. If all software in the world were free, it would eliminate competition. And without competition [real competition], we'd all still be struggling with basic compilers. But that's just me. What exactly does this have to do with gaming BTW? NAG Ed.

FROM Not given
SUBJECT Age and Games

Hey NAG. Great DVD edition. I'm also pleased at the new effort you've put into your magazine this edition - for a minute I thought you all were slacking. I've sent this mail because I am extremely angry right now. I recently played Counter-Strike Source (don't say anything, Ed), and I decided to use my new microphone to test if it works online. I was playing with my friend, <edited>, and we were having a conversation about some guns etc. via microphone, when someone said, "do I hear two girls playing CS?" I told him exactly what I thought about his hearing problems, his inability to tell girls from guys, and his IQ status, and then I mentioned my age. The whole server went up in flames and everyone was commenting on how I shouldn't be playing at my age and I should go play with my toy train and whatever else those overgrown amoebas could pull out of their single-digit IQ's. Is this the same for other game communities, or is it just us CS playing South Africans? What confuses me is that I am 15. What would their reaction have been if I were 12? What's wrong with being 15 and playing CS? Its only one year from the



average age of a CS player! Is our community so short-sighted that only 16 year olds are allowed to play CS? And we wonder why CS is getting less and less popular. Think about this, how long has CS been out? Let's say someone started at 16 when it came out. Add about 10 years, 26 would be his age now, and he would probably not be able to play the game anymore. If we held the attitude I found on that server throughout those 10 years, the amount of people playing CS would probably drop to a singular digit! The only reason we have been able to continue this community, is because all the 'underage' CS players have been hiding their ages from everyone and lying since the beginning. I would know, because I started CS at the age of 12, and have been fighting for a place since then. I don't believe everyone has this attitude of insulting someone because of their age, but there are those out there who make life terrible for us. We shouldn't need to hide our ages or lie just to be part of this scene. Give us some space!

If this attitude stays as it is, our CS community will cease to exist entirely. Don't discourage younger players, encourage them!

The problem isn't really your age - it's the fact that you're playing CS. NAG Ed.

FROM The Not So Mighty Bob
SUBJECT Miktar's Ramblings

Why in God's name have you enlarged Miktar's soapbox? His ramblings make Ramjet sound like Shakespeare? You should rather have given the extra page to Basilisk, whose columns are always entertaining and worthy of a page in NAG. Miktar states that idiots look down on consoles as inferior hardware. The fact is, consoles are inferior hardware.

We're not sure why Miktar has been so off lately - he used to be so agreeable and pleasant. I personally believe the fame has gone to his head. Not to worry however, we've seen this kind of thing before. He'll either revert back to normal, or decide gaming is beneath him and retire somewhere near Nelspruit [where gaming doesn't exist].

NAG Ed.

SHORTS

FROM Nick

SUBJECT RE: Quick blame something!

I have a question and it would help if you could answer. If you take a photo in GT4's photo mode, who owns the copyright on that - Sony, Polyphony or does the 'photographer' own it?

FROM BadgerB

SUBJECT In connection with the worlds shortest short.

Now?

FROM Tony

SUBJECT General Question

I have a strange question to ask and I am sorry if I am wasting your time. Do you have any tips for me on how to start a magazine?

FROM Blazerfrost

SUBJECT Heresy abound once more

Can you please supply me with the e-mail address of the idiot who cuts up his NAG front pages? I've got a little business to settle with him involving pitchforks and torches. NAG readers, we cannot allow such heresy to continue against our sacred magazine!

Dear NAG people

Congratulations on your cover DVD. It owns. For that you get a complimentary (invisible) coupon, which gives you free access to the Krusty Krabb chain of restaurants. Yours Sincerely, Mr. Krabbs

FROM Brendon

SUBJECT NAG volume 8 issue 1 April 2005

I would just like to know if the article where you compare a PS3 with the Cray X1 Supercomputer was an April fool's joke or something, because you can't be serious that a PS3 is going to beat a Cray.

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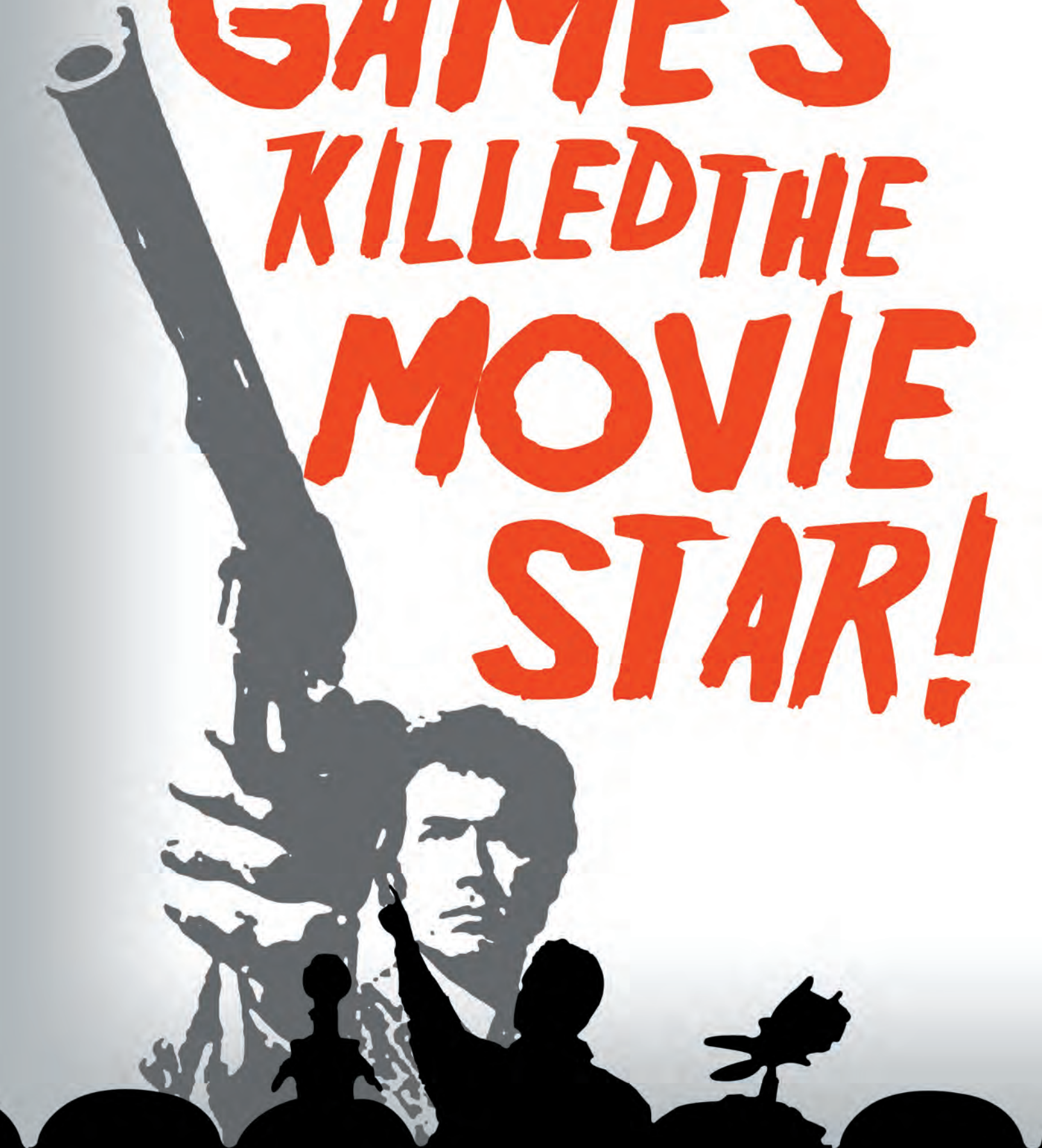
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GAMES KILLED THE MOVIE STAR!



Game fans loathe movie games. Not without warrant either; games based on movie licenses have more or less always been inferior, if not downright rubbish. While slapping a popular brand onto a game concept has its advantages, licensed games have managed to create a rift between them and their intended audiences almost from their conception. The first game to be based on a movie license, Star Wars on arcade in 1982, might have heralded a new era, but it didn't take long before this fell apart. In that same year, Atari took the plunge and made a game based on the biggest movie of the year. E.T. might have been box-office gold, but a rushed development time resulted in one of the worst games in the industry's history, forcing Atari to post a \$536 million loss. Was it a sign of things to come? The game-savvy observer might nod "Yes!", but the history between the two media run a lot deeper and licensed games reflect a legacy that gaming has shared with movies for the past two decades. >>>

The days before movies

INTERACTIVE GAMING STARTED A long time ago - in 1958 to be precise. An engineer at Brookhaven National Laboratory, named William Higinbotham, developed a title that involved bouncing a single object between two players. Aptly named Tennis for Two, it became the precursor to Pong, the first coin-operated arcade title (released in 1962 by Atari). Even back then, Higinbotham defined the basic gameplay mechanics: a system where a player is constantly challenged by increasingly fierce opponents until he dominates them all. The enthusiasm around this new medium was huge, spawning the first commercial game, Space Wars.

But the surge in interest waned not long after, and by the mid seventies gaming had been shunted back to being a small pass-time.

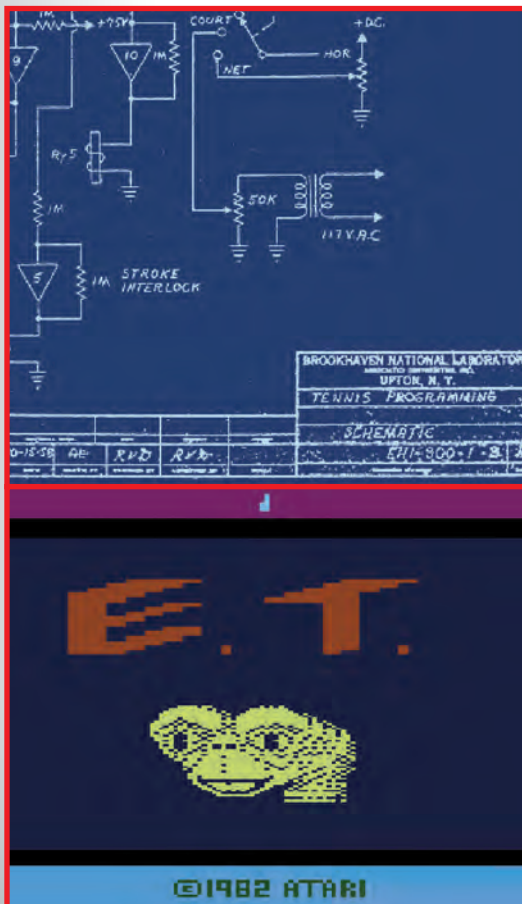
Gaming's time had obviously not come yet.

This changed with George Lucas. After having created Star Wars, Lucas placed his focus on gaming, wanting to break the medium out of its stoic approach and bringing it into a more mainstream reality. This excerpt from a 1983 Lucasfilm annual report perhaps put it best: "The immediate goal is to find the best way to bring the 'Lucasfilm touch' to video games and help advance the state of the video game art." Lucasfilm's gaming studio started in a nondescript office, though the movie influence was already evident, if only in the environment. The office, situated between Industrial Light & Magic and a company that would later become Pixar, started to produce a range of titles, though we'd best recall them for the Star Wars and Indiana Jones offerings. Even back in the early eighties, gaming's

explosion as a new medium was founded on the foundations of movies.

This isn't really an alien notion. One school of thought is that media is born out of older media. This is called Remediation - the process where an emerging medium carries the hallmarks of other media. The concept goes up a step. When a medium has the hallmarks of several types of media, it's called Hypermedia. Gaming falls solidly into this category. If you break down the digital pastime, it has elements that could be found in movies, music and even Renaissance art (Renaissance art was the first to truly investigate perspective, something that gaming started to adopt with titles such as Wolfenstein).

Basically, gaming was stuck in a rut. Until the eighties, games mostly involved large pixels blowing up other pixels. These certainly didn't



Top Left: The original circuit blueprints for Tennis For Two, the first game; Left: Atari's E.T., which resulted in over half a billion Dollars in losses; Top: Star Wars Arcade, the first game based on a movie franchise.

inspire the level of immersion which modern games do. When Lucas and other visionaries of the time approached gaming, they saw the real potential of what it could be. Sadly it also spawned the licensed game. Even before Electronic Arts made history fifteen years ago by signing John Madden's profile to their series of American football games, companies have dabbled in games that relied on the popularity of other franchises. The favour went the other way as well - the first movie based on a game was Atari's Cloak and Dagger in 1984.

Movies: gaming's big brother

IN 2000, THE ENTERTAINMENT world started paying serious attention to games when the industry's revenues exceeded those of the US box-office by a billion Dollars. But in the nineties, several movie companies disastrously tried to enter the gaming market with their own offerings for gamers out there. The relationship was already there, although more that of a distant cousin than someone who'd bring you coffee in the morning. That's because gaming's serious evolution happened during the eighties, so by the nineties it was evolved, but still relatively small on the radar. Apart from gaming's limited vision in terms of design, it had another stumbling block: arcades. When you design an arcade game, the point is to have quick immersion and immediate satisfaction. This had appeal, but it didn't draw the type of audiences needed. The turning point started emerging with consoles. The first console, the Odyssey, was released in 1972 and had a fair amount of success. But the true heirs of gaming's console revolution belong to the Atari 2600, Nintendo's Entertainment System and Sony's PlayStation. Through the baker's dozen decade, these helped fortify a new type of player: one that could sit in the comfort of his home and pay attention to a game that didn't swallow quarters every time he wanted to play. This

allowed game developers to develop longer and more complicated games. By eliminating the need to catch someone's attention immediately, gaming had a much wider canvas to work on. But where would one go when you had this much space to work with? Gaming inevitably turned to movies.

The evidence is very apparent. Resident Evil relied heavily on camera angles and emotional effects used in classics such as Dawn of the Dead. Most games adapted the multi-level formula from movies as well: Bruce Lee's Game of Death involved a fighter moving up the levels of a restaurant, fighting tougher opponents on each. Even classics like Half-Life adapted movie-style dialogue to introduce a new level of character immersion and appreciation. Sound also had a role, as games started to adapt their soundtracks to be more epic and cinematic - a technique inherited directly from movies.

The reason for this is really simple. The trick with any form of entertainment is immersion. If you don't have a captive audience, you have a flop. Just as it is important that people watching a movie or a concert have to be drawn into the movie or concert, games require the same effect. We might take it for granted now, but games have used cinema techniques to trigger our internal familiarity. When Resident Evil adopted zombie movies' camera angles, it was to make players feel familiar with what they were facing. It scared the living daylight out of you when you watched the movie, so when you play the game, your brain naturally associates the atmosphere and angle with that same response. When playing a Star Wars game,



Top to Bottom: the Odyssey, released in 1972, was the first console; a scene from the Bruce Lee film Game of Death, which inspired developers to design levels with boss characters at the end; Resident Evil used camera angles and sound ideas from George Romero's zombie classic Dawn of the Dead.



Total Recall, released in 1990, remains one of the worst games of all time, optimising the movie game culture of shoddy development, poor game design and lacklustre use of the source material.

the soundtrack is integral to this: hearing the booming chorus of the Empire's theme tune (even if Darth Vader isn't stalking down the corridor towards you), immediately takes you to the same emotional level you experienced when watching an Imperial fleet ship flying towards a doomed planet. Since modern gaming found its birth in the art of cinema, it was inevitable that developers would try and adopt the same techniques to get the same responses out of their audiences.

Licenses: gaming gone bad

PERHAPS BECAUSE OF THIS estranged father-child relationship, Hollywood didn't pay much heed to gaming. To the movie industry, a game based on a box-office release is about as important as action figures: it just means more revenue. And as anyone who has bought movie-based merchandise knows, it's not good at all. But it does sell and that's all the movie executives care about. While original games were allowed to paddle around and create their own direction, movie games have always been about making money and cashing in on a surge in popularity. Believe it or not, but licensed games have been around as long as modern gaming – and even back then they didn't get it right.

The situation didn't improve much over the years either. *Total Recall*, based on the 1990 Arnold Schwarzenegger hit, produced one of the worst games in history. There were some exceptions – *Robocop's* side-scrolling platform game wasn't a bad title at all. But in general, things were often half-baked or just downright unpalatable. This culture is due to several aspects, most of all thanks to

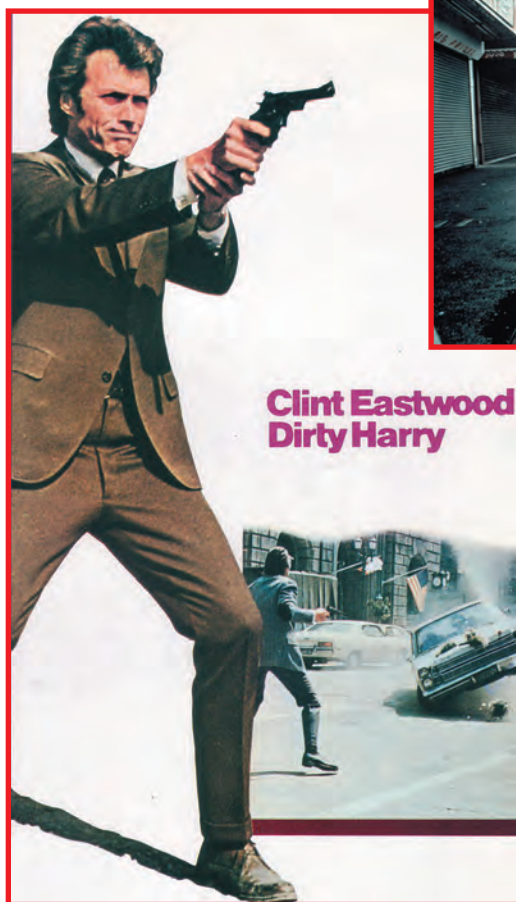
GAMES AND MOVIES: THE OTHER SIDE



GAMES BASED ON MOVIE licenses might have a terrible legacy, but it hardly compares to the movie industry's disastrous attempts at turning games into movies (a process that begun back in 1984, using Atari's *Cloak & Dagger*). It's so bad, in fact, that it is hard to isolate any specific contender for the "Worst Of" distinction, but many feel that the finalists are definitely *House of the Dead*, *Super Mario Bros* and *Wing Commander*. The latter had some hope for it, since the *Wing Commander* series had been using real actors and FMV sequences ever since it was able to. *Mario Bros* probably stands as the biggest disaster, mainly because it appeared to have nothing to do with the game at all, only taking inspiration from it and then concocting a story of its own.

The reason behind this, some argue, is that games aren't as reliant on character development and dialogue as movies are. This rings true when you consider the success stories of game-to-movie conversions. *Tomb Raider* might not have met critical acclaim and did so-so at the box office, but enough to produce a good sequel. *Mortal Kombat's* movie brought two tiffy sequels and an animated show, while *Resident Evil* had a sequel with talks of a third movie. All these films, though, made liberal use of the games' content, changing characters, events and stories as needed.

2005/2006 has several game-related movies on the way, mostly thanks to director Uwe Boll (behind the infamous *House of the Dead* and the dull *Alone in the Dark*), but Hollywood's fascination with games and the money they make will bring more prominent titles. Apart from Boll's own *Dungeon Siege* and *Bloodrayne*, *Doom* is already in production while the *Halo* movie is being negotiated for. There are even rumblings of a *Metal Gear Solid* film.



In 2005/2006 gaming heads into movie legacies, taking on projects like Dirty Harry (Warner Bros), The Warriors (Take 2), Scarface (VU Games) and The Godfather (EA Games). All feature appearances and voices from original cast members.

movie involvement. Games have inherited the movie model that requires something to be a hit. Since you spend millions in developing a movie or game, it's very important that the content is marketable and has as wide an appeal as possible. While more hardcore gamers will be happy to have their patience tested by a game like Doom, movie audiences are used to entertainment handed to them. Movie games aren't any different. Since they have to appeal to the movie in question's audience, they can't be overly complicated. This was especially true back in the early days of gaming's growth. Since consoles hadn't really cemented a mainstream audience yet, license games had to be easy to consume. In

other words, it had to have those elements that made people watch the movie in the first place. Who cared if it was a good game? Players were more likely to be disappointed when they didn't get the same feeling they did from watching the movie. Of course, technology hadn't progressed nearly far enough to allow for this, while at the same time, licensed games were rushed out to meet the immediate public interest. It was almost inevitable that movie games would suck.

There is another aspect to the problem. While games grew up with movies as a source of ideas, the medium is also inherently very different. Games don't carry the same level of narrative and character development that movies do (one of the reasons why movie to game translations are often terrible). Because it is a medium that lends from several other media, it also creates a different level of immersion for players. When you translate a two-dimensional movie into an interactive

game, you leave behind the carefully crafted ebbs and flows of the movie presentation and need to create a different level for players to appreciate what they are involved in. A movie only requires you to watch – stop watching and the movie still goes on. Games need their audiences to progress. It is quite fair to regard games, not as the poorer cousin of movies, but rather as an evolution beyond - though a pretty slanted one.

Today: the dawn of modern movie games

MOVIE GAMES HAVE INHERITED a stigma, partly thanks to their cash-in nature and partly because of the movie industry's severe misunderstanding of what gaming involves. Through the years this has created a rift between audiences and the games, especially since the largest part of the market consisted of discerning, tech-savvy gamers who weren't about to be wooed by a title just because it had Star Wars slapped on the box. But this has

obviously changed.

Two important aspects, mentioned before, have started to come into fruition. Consoles have exploded onto the mainstream stage (both the Xbox and Dreamcast were heavily promoted on MTV events). Technology has also come a lot further, giving developers a lot more ability to do what they want to do. This includes the more precise and careful use of all those cinema techniques gaming has grown up with. When Dragon's Lair was released, it was more of an interactive movie and existed almost purely because the, then-new, Laserdisc technology allowed for large movie files. Now even the stalwart CGI movie is being replaced by in-game cinematics. This means that game developers can get even closer to the movie experience while still maintaining the unique aspects that make games, well, games. Suddenly games weren't action figures anymore – the medium was actively poaching audiences and their cash away from the Hollywood machine.

This has spawned a slow, but surging demand that movie games meet the standards the movies have set. When Jason Hall stated that Warner Bros intended to reprimand game studios producing inferior license games, he was pointing to a problem that has emerged. The gaming audience is more mainstream and more game-savvy, so they aren't as forgiving anymore when they spend their cash on a movie game that turns out to be rubbish.

Another side grew out of this realisation. Movie content is a great source for games. Dune 2, arguably the first modern Real-time Strategy game, showed the potential of harnessing a movie and book's subject into an exciting and decent game. While it's great to play something completely new, the thrill is equal when you're a storm trooper or James Bond. Rare's Goldeneye still remains one of the finest shooters ever crafted, even though it was based completely on a film. There's



Movie games have had their success stories. These include recent titles like *Chronicles of Riddick* (top left), *Goldeneye* (top right), *Robocop Arcane* (bottom left) and *Terminator 2* (bottom right).

no dispute that movie-based games can be excellent. Luckily both game developers and movie companies have started to catch on.

In the last five years there has been a surge in high-quality games based on movies. The EA Lord of the Rings games were based wholly on Peter Jackson's trilogy. *Chronicles of Riddick* showed that games could be used to flesh out a movie fan's experience of a story – something that the Star Wars games have demonstrated for well over a decade. Activision showed the importance of this relationship when it sued Paramount for not promoting the Star Trek license enough with film and TV audiences (something that would obviously impact Activision's own range of Star Trek games). The market has grown to realise that the movie-game relationship can't be ignored. In fact, it might be vital to both

industries' survival amidst the spiralling costs of creating and marketing.

So what does the future hold? Well, most movie games are still likely to be terrible. It's inevitable, especially since a decent game takes time to develop. But the tide is turning. In the past two years, several popular TV shows – *Alias*, *ER* and *CSI* for example – have turned into game franchises (with varying critical and market successes) and you can hardly throw a rock and not hit a popular movie that doesn't have some sort of game in the works. This is mostly due to the growing and maturing gaming audience demanding better games. Movie studios can't afford to miss out on this opportunity, nor can Game studios – evident in the recent announcements of movie classics such as *The Godfather*, *The Warriors* and *Dirty Harry* being turned into games. **NAG**

HATE THEM, BUT WE STILL WANT THESE...

Movie-based games might bring the bile out of your factory model hardcore gamer, but they are a rich source of fantasy and action. Obviously there are definitely a few movies we think could make great games...



Mad Max: The Road Warrior

Reinforced cars, Mohawk-sporting chain gangs, chases involving a big sixteen-wheel rig, a flying gyrocopter, a make-shift fortress with flamethrowers and a decapitating boomerang. How exactly won't this be the best game yet made?



Dark City

You wake up with no memory and you are framed as a serial killer. Or are you a serial killer? You have to find out in a weird world controlled by mind-bending aliens...



Cannonball Run

Why? Because it has a car with a monkey in it! Dozens of different types of cars, a whole United States to race them through and the chance to play Jackie Chan in his Mitsubishi, kicking ass at the road stops.



The Good, The Bad and The Ugly

There is a serious lack of Western games as it is. Capture Eastwood's likeness and become the man with no name, walking around and having gunfights with Lee Van Cleef and hundreds of confederate soldiers and Mexicans. Don't forget the immortal theme tune...



Apocalypse Now

Take a ride along as Lt. Kilgore blows the crap out of Charlie's Point. Dodge bullets in the trenches at the Da'ning bridge. Sneak through Kurtz' compound of cannibals and strange pygmy people. And share a cigarette with Harrison Ford.



The Toxic Avenger

Become Toxic and take out the bad guys in your town using the most violent ways available! Get bonus points for using a mop! Play mini-games like help the old lady across the street, seduce the good-looking blind girl and stuff random muggers and thugs painfully into trash cans.



Kill Bill

This could be really, really terrible, but a game based on the Bride taking her revenge out on her former squad members could really be something, especially if it's done in that Tarantino-esque random scene fashion. The Crazy 88 scene alone would make it worth it.



12 Monkeys

Apart from having two characters (Bruce Willis and Brad Pitt), the dizzying array of time travelling, end-of-world conspiracies, and a mixture of post-apocalypse and modern society, this can't lose. That and we might finally figure out what really happens in the movie... [You didn't get it? Ed.]



Kung Fu Hustle

Stephen Chow already stole our hearts with Shaolin Soccer, but a game adaptation of his over-the-top kung fu movie would be perfect. Create a character that specialises in a style and has the ability to do the superhuman: like a scream so loud it rips the floorboards out. Yes, you have to see this movie.

PREVIEWS

WANTED



Age of Conan – Hyborian Adventures

PLATFORMS: PC **RELEASE DATE:** TBA

Conan the MMOG? Soon players will be able to go online and join in one of the most violent and aggressive fantasy settings in modern time. One thing you can be certain of: This isn't Lord of the Rings or World of Warcraft.



Worms 4: Mayhem

PLATFORMS: PC, PS2, Xbox **RELEASE DATE:** Q2 2005

Look, you either liked Worms 3D or you didn't. But you'll never stop liking Worms. Even if the 3D was quirky, we loved it, so another game, hopefully sporting a bit more polish for the three dimensions, is always good news.



Star Wars: Empire At War

PLATFORMS: PC **RELEASE DATE:** Q3 2005

The Star Wars game universe still lacks a decent RTS title. When you consider the subject matter, it's amazing they haven't gotten there yet. But with former Westwood employees behind the development process, there isn't any reason not to look forward to Empire At War.

WHILE SEQUELS CONTINUE TO dominate the announcements every month, there are times when new titles break into the scene and give things a new spin. Both Timeshift and Without Warning look promising for their genres, while The Godfather is trying hard to bridge the movie-game divide. But, if it isn't broken, don't fix it, and when it is, make sure you do a proper job. This seems to be the case with the new Tomb Raider, while Dungeon Siege II shows that you don't need to completely overhaul a sequel just to make it better.



7 SINS



DEVELOPER Monte Cristo **PUBLISHER** Digital Jesters **PLATFORMS** PC, PS2 **RELEASE DATE** TBA

Singles and the new Larry game made us wary of this type of title, but any game that features a voyeur mode and is so blatantly honest about what it's about - sex, wealth and power - deserves a mention. Called a 'life sim', your character has to rise through the ranks in a city that will make Sodom and Gomorrah look like suburbs of Salt Lake City. This involves around 20 mini-games, ample amounts of nudity and suggestiveness. The key question here is just how far will 7 Sins push the envelope?

HARRY POTTER & THE GOBLET OF FIRE

DEVELOPER EA **PUBLISHER** EA **PLATFORMS** PC, PS2, Xbox, GameCube, DS, PSP **RELEASE DATE** 2005

Harry Potter has certainly made those Muggles over at EA roll in the cash. Just as the movies have gotten better with each addition, so have the games and the days of the awful first title are well behind us. Now onto the fourth book, and things are looking a lot more polished. Yup, it will still follow the movie plot to a tee, but so far that hasn't been a bad thing.



JAGGED ALLIANCE 3D

DEVELOPER Mist Land **PUBLISHER** Strategy First **PLATFORMS** PC **RELEASE DATE** TBA



Jagged Alliance finally takes the leap into 3D, as our favourite mercenary game heads for West Africa. A former government hires your team of six mercenaries to stop the situation and prevent a neighbouring country from developing nuclear arms. The game still uses the series' mixture of real-time tactics, turn-based combat and extensive role-playing and upgrade elements.

ASK YODA

DEVELOPER THQ Wireless **PUBLISHER** THQ **PLATFORMS** Mobile **RELEASE DATE** TBA



This will probably not surface on our shores any time soon, but it's a quirky concept. Yoda lives on your phone screen, going about his daily business (which involves looking confused, saving space ships and moving Wookiee lunches when they aren't looking, we suppose) and he's open to any question you ask him. Waste a lot of time this will.

FAR CRY INSTINCTS

DEVELOPER Crytek **PUBLISHER** Ubisoft **PLATFORMS** Xbox **RELEASE DATE** Q3 2005



The oft-delayed port of this classic PC game might actually be released this year. The time it took has a bit to do with Crytek building the game more or less from the ground up, instead of just porting it. Apart from the Far Cry engine now being multi-platform, it also makes the game worth getting even if you have played the PC version, because it has a lot of the new touches and graphical effects.

QUAKE IV

DEVELOPER Raven Software **PUBLISHER** Activision **PLATFORMS** PC **RELEASE DATE** TBA



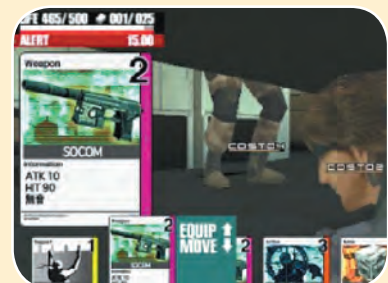
There you have it: The first Web-approved Quake IV screenshot and the first, in our opinion, to really show that the Doom 3 engine is at work here. Some more minor story details have emerged, but it's still you versus the Strogg in a game that continues right after Quake II. With Raven at the helm of such a legendary series and a game that's starting to look this good, it's hard to wait for Quake IV to be released.

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



Knights of the Old Republic

On a recent trip to the US, our art director picked up a copy for \$5 (love you long time) and has since spent most of his working hours beating up Sith and strange people on distant planets.



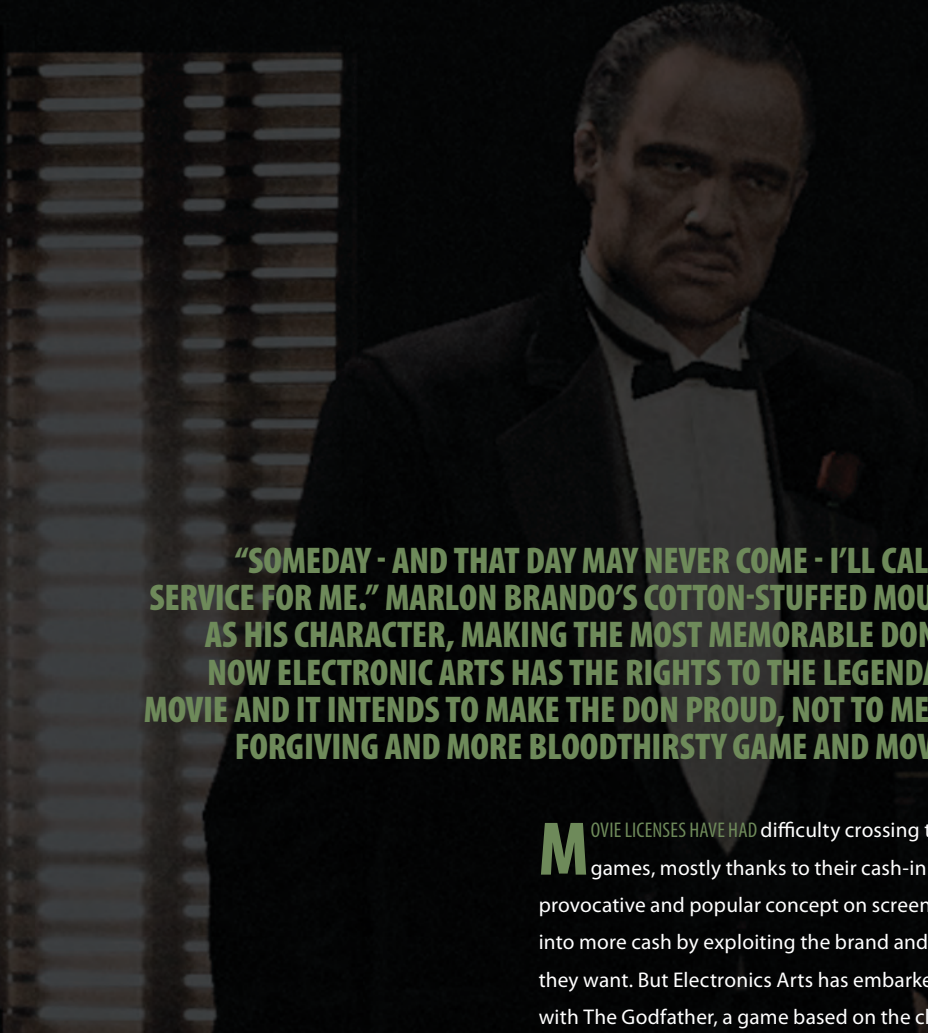
Metal Gear Acid

A card-based Metal Gear game? We might not have liked the third MGS game, but that doesn't mean we don't like the series. And Metal Gear Acid on the PSP definitely has a lot going for it, even if that's just collecting cards.



A Bard's Tale

It's not the best RPG made – at all. But it is really funny if you know your RPGs. As the game's hero explains, raiding other people's chests and closets for stuff is a public service. It reduces clutter.

A large, dark, semi-transparent image of Marlon Brando in a tuxedo, looking slightly to the right. The background is a dark, textured wall with vertical lines.

"SOMEDAY - AND THAT DAY MAY NEVER COME - I'LL CALL UPON YOU TO DO A SERVICE FOR ME." MARLON BRANDO'S COTTON-STUFFED MOUTH WAS AS SMOOTH AS HIS CHARACTER, MAKING THE MOST MEMORABLE DON IN MOVIE HISTORY. NOW ELECTRONIC ARTS HAS THE RIGHTS TO THE LEGENDARY THE GODFATHER MOVIE AND IT INTENDS TO MAKE THE DON PROUD, NOT TO MENTION THE FAR LESS FORGIVING AND MORE BLOODTHIRSTY GAME AND MOVIE FANS OUT THERE.

MOVIE LICENSES HAVE HAD difficulty crossing the digital divide into games, mostly thanks to their cash-in stature. When you have a provocative and popular concept on screen, it's not hard to turn that into more cash by exploiting the brand and giving fans more of what they want. But Electronics Arts has embarked down a very different road with *The Godfather*, a game based on the classic 1972 movie.

The dynamic is fairly obvious. Unlike most recent movie games, *The Godfather* is over 30 years old, which means that the initial hype is long gone and the actors aren't under contract to participate anymore. Then there is the matter of a movie with a huge legacy behind it. Mario Puzo's books already have a huge following, as does Francis Ford Coppola's Academy Award winning trilogy. Thus, while EA has been given a great opportunity here to show how games can add to a movie's legacy, the stakes are high because this time the fans will be hard to please - much more so than a Don and his hot-headed sons.

SO FAR THE PUBLISHER has been fairly secretive about the project, specifically on how the game actually plays. But a lot has been revealed as well. The game, *The Godfather*, has been compared to the most so far, is *Grand Theft Auto*, because they share the same genre. You'll play as a hood rising through the ranks of the Corleone family, headed by the infamous Don Vito Corleone. While the game ties in closely with the first movie (the producer has brought in Mike





**Family
Loyalty
Fear**

The Godfather Returns

Winegardner, writer of *The Godfather Returns*, to consult on back stories and fictional details in the game), the main character will have to go about his own way to make a claim in the mob. Reputation will be the key here: the world will be persistent and non-player characters will remember interactions they have had with you. It breaks down to keeping a balance between violence and kindness. If you are weak and show too much favour, people won't fear you, ultimately making the money rackets with shop owners a bit hard to execute (not to mention that your own men won't think much of you). Lean too much towards violence, and you'll beckon more violence towards yourself. So while keeping these two in order, you go around old New York, extorting money from some, doing favours for others, and ultimately build up your reputation to eventually become Don of the Corleone family.

EXACTLY HOW THIS will work is still a mystery, but an open-ended world with freedom of choice will be the playing field. Unlike GTA, though, your actions will also affect the main story branches. There are three ways through the game, each offering its own ending. These have been tailored to suit the movie's ethos and serious fans of *The Godfather* might not be as surprised as other players at the conclusions. This

makes sure that, even though your gangster is carving (and occasionally shooting, punching and pistol-whipping) his own way through the world, it stays in touch with the original plot. This also translates into players doing jobs that reflect the events in the movie. For instance: the horse's head didn't magically appear in Jack Woltz' bed; chances are you might be the guy who had put it there. Another example is the gun smuggled into the restroom so that Michael Corleone doesn't, in the words of Sonny Corleone, "stand there with his dick in his hand". Neither of these has been made concrete by EA, but they have certainly been alluded to. Fans of the movie can remain content, though. Classic scenes and important plot points, such as Sonny's gunfire execution and the Don dying in his tomato patch, are not going to disappear and can't be affected by player actions. Instead, what you do in the game affects your future in the family.

AS WITH THE MOVIE, the game will run from 1945 to 1955. Thanks to the involvement of developers who worked on the latest Tiger Woods game, players will be able to create a unique-looking character to suit their tastes (Tiger Woods features an impressive character creator), though one will have to stick to the American Italian mould.

"You are there when Brasi is murdered, you are there when the Don is shot"

Hunter Smith, Senior Producer



Another contribution from the Tiger Woods developers will be the control scheme. They have been tasked to create something useful and unique, since EA felt that if one thing hadn't come of age in the open-ended action genre, it's how you interact with everything. Your character will visibly age through the ten years, as will the game world. Essentially it's more about letting players play a role in the legendary movie, as well as an opportunity to flesh out background information (of which there is a wealth of). Authenticity remains key, and apart from EA Redwood Shores (the development crew) having the movie on constant loop at their offices, a lot of consulting work has been done with Robert Duvall, James Kaan and the late Marlon Brando. Brando even supplied voice segments for the game before his unexpected death, while Kaan, Duvall and more than 20 other actors from the movie are lending their voices, facial expressions and expertise to *The Godfather*. Fans can even expect the original score by Nino Rota, fleshed out by Academy Winner Bill Conti. Francis Ford Coppola was initially said to be involved – one game document even suggested that he'd be directing short sequences in the game – but the acclaimed director has since revealed that *The Godfather* game doesn't carry his blessing. Other prominent actors such as Al Pacino also don't appear



to be returning to their famed roles. Still, the show must go on.

AT THIS POINT IN the plot not enough has been revealed about The Godfather and the producers say that it will take around a year before the title will be released, which means there still remains a lot to be done. Visually the game is definitely pushing the boundaries in terms of style and approach. EA has been keen to demonstrate and explain that the original movie legacy isn't at stake here and that the game will reflect the epic accurately. It's also keen to break into the lucrative open-ended genre market, dominated by GTA and complimented by the likes of Mercenaries and True Crime. But perhaps the most crucial point is that The Godfather represents an opportunity to demonstrate how games can enhance their celluloid cousins. The Godfather game has already experienced an unprecedented amount of mainstream media coverage and this is sure to build even more as the release date looms. In fact, EA has mentioned, here and there, that a full game trilogy based on the movies is definitely feasible (though how the over-long third movie will translate into a game remains to be seen). The pedigree and money certainly is here, so chances are good that The Godfather will give gamers and fans an offer they can't refuse. **NAG**

VITAL INFO

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



DUNGEON SIEGE II

Exotic locations, interesting creatures, powerful weapons. Deja-vu...

WITH ONLY A RUSTY dagger and whatever farm implement you had in your hands at the time, you saved the world. Saving the world, of course, involved running through multiple climate zones, sending several hundred monsters into oblivion and then taking everything that wasn't nailed down and putting it on a mule.

The Dungeon Siege experience, while easily distilled

into what seemed to be a tedious concept, was enjoyable despite its lack of depth. With a sense of trepidation, the question of 'will Dungeon Siege II have the same tentative sense of enjoyment, but bring enough improvements to the table to merit a sequel?' quickly comes to the fore. The answer, based on the press preview build, seems a resounding yes and no at the same time.





One of the more noticeable changes is the lack of humble farmland beginnings. This time around, the player enters the game as a fully equipped Mercenary, complete with best friend, shady past and other plot-inducing devices. By choosing your race, you can change your starting statistics to better suit your style of play (archer, mage, warrior and so forth). All four classes make a comeback, namely Melee, Archery, Combat Magic and Nature Magic. As expected, using a specific type gives you experience in that class, making marginal improvements to its efficiency and what weapons/spells you may use.

The new Hero Powers add some spice to the system. Each class has access to unique powers that seem pretty capable of turning the tide of battle when used wisely. Utilising a skill-tree (one per class), players earn points while levelling into various skills that both improve various aspects of their class, as well as unlocking Hero Powers when certain criteria are met. This certainly adds much required depth to the character system, though still manages to seem a few steps behind the ageing Diablo II.

Kill a monster and out pops the expected obscene amounts of merchandise. Previously an obtuse pack mule or giant lizard served as the best way to cart around all the extra loot. Dungeon Siege II sees fit to expand on this idea just a touch by adding a larger variety of subservient creatures which can also be fed extra items so as to improve their statistics and attacks. Pack-creatures are much better suited for the long haul this time around, though they still have the annoying tendency to run into battle as if to sniff the crotch of the most powerful creature around and invite their own demise.

Smaller touches certainly improve the overall experience. There are more side-quests with which to entertain yourself, your party has a member limit until you

hand over enough cash to your local inn to raise that limit, and crafting of items exists among other things (the latter was unavailable in the preview build we received).

A lot has been promised with Dungeon Siege II - reactive environments that can be used in battle, a dynamic storyline that can change depending on the actions of the player and intensive artificial intelligence as the creatures learn your patterns and react accordingly.

Unfortunately for Dungeon Siege II, the marginal improvements to the graphics and slight additions to the various systems seem to lean more towards a glorified expansion pack rather than a full-blown sequel extravaganza. It is still too early to tell if this will be a predominant trait throughout Dungeon Siege II, or if these concerns will be ironed out in its remaining development cycle. The need for a lengthy dungeon crawl, hacking and slashing all the way, makes Dungeon Siege II interesting enough in light of the odd lack of titles in this genre. **NAG**



VITAL INFO

■ Platforms

PC

■ Developer

Saber Interactive

■ Publisher

Atari

■ Supplier

WWE [011] 462 0150

■ Genre

FPS

■ Release Date

Q3 2005



In Timeshift you'll be able to manipulate time like never before

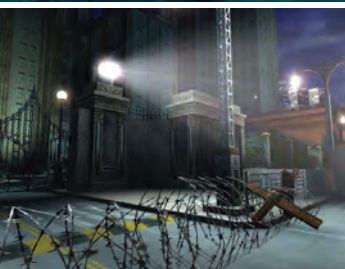
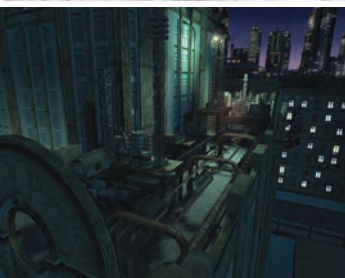
TIMESHIFT

SABER INTERACTIVE BROKE INTO the gaming scene not too long ago with their palatable, if slightly unoriginal Will Rock. But thanks to that low budget project, the team has garnered the reputation to make a big-budget title (backed by publisher Atari). The result is Timeshift, a first person shooter that will allow you to manipulate time. *[With a dagger? Ed.]*

Game gimmicks such as slowing down time are nothing new. Both Painkiller and the new Doom expansion make ample use of extra abilities that tilt the battle in favour of the player. Timeshift, though, takes this a step further. Although you won't have unlimited access to time manipulation, the idea goes well beyond the scope than even the likes of Prince of Persia. One example the developer mentions, is being caught in a room with an enemy. His gunfire shatters a mirror, which reveals another room. The player can leap through the mirror and then reverse time, which not only reverses the mirror back to its pre-shattered appearance, but the pursuing enemy also steps back. Returning to normal time, he enters the room, only to see a mirror that's intact. In other words, you'll be able to manipulate the game world using time shifts (ranging from speeding up to slowing down and even freezing time completely).

Puzzles are even affected by this. In one scenario you can stop the electrons in a pool of electrified water, allowing you to wade through safely.

Graphically the proprietary Saber3D engine certainly looks stunning. It already boasts all of the bells and whistles we've come to expect from today's FPS titles, including a cutting-edge physics engine. But perhaps the real reason to keep an eye on Timeshift, is that it mixes Eastern European design sensibilities with American money and polish. The last game to emerge with this kind of pedigree behind it was Far Cry, so that alone is reason enough to take Timeshift seriously. **NAG**



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VITAL INFO

- **Platforms**
- **PS2 XBOX**
- **Developer**
Circle Studios
- **Publisher**
Capcom
- **Supplier**
Ster Kinekor [011] 445 7900
- **Genre**
3rd Person Action
- **Release Date**
Q3 2005



WITHOUT WARNING

With six characters, players will experience events from several angles

WHILE COVERING TOMB RAIDER elsewhere in this section, we didn't really lament the passing of Core Studios - an outfit that, apart from Lara, didn't offer much more to gaming. Still, the original crowd behind this group, sans Toby Gard, have gone on to form Circle Studios. They've also signed a deal with Capcom to release Without Warning, in which you'll play no

less than six characters. In a twist that players of the survival horror Siren will find familiar, the game takes place over a specific period of time - twelve hours - and each of the six characters are essentially played at the same time. In other words; after playing one of the Delta Force characters you would switch to, say, the security guard and play him during the same time



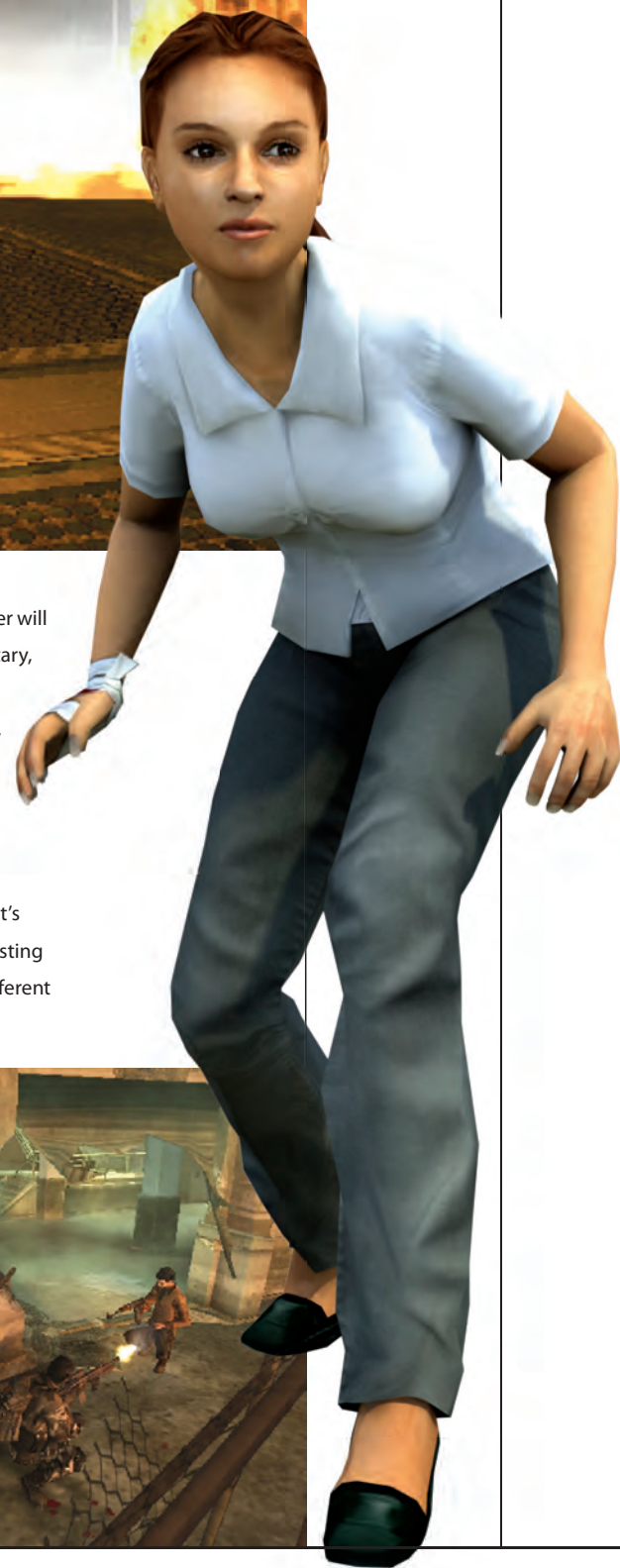


period as you did the Delta Force guy.

The story takes place in a chemical plant after terrorists take over and start threatening people. A crack squad of Deltas has been sent in to stop them (since mass military action is out of the question in such a volatile place), but are ambushed, leaving only three surviving. Thus starts the quest to beat the bad guys and save the day. Apart from the three remaining Delta Force members, players will also be able to play as a secretary, a security guard and a news camera man who crashed his helicopter

on the roof during the siege. Each character will feature a different playing style (the secretary, for instance, is pretty stealthy, while the security guard has access to unique areas), though everything takes place via third person action.

The idea is that as you play; the story and the roles of the various characters will build up, giving you a fuller picture of what's happening. The concept certainly is interesting and if executed well, should make for a different experience. **NAG**



VITAL INFO

■ Platforms

PC

■ Developer

Altar Interactive

■ Publisher

Cenega

■ Supplier

Bowline [021] 550 9700

■ Genre

Turn-based tactical

■ Release Date

Q3 2005



UFO: AFTERSHOCK

HUMANITY HAS DONE IT. Not only was the Earth rendered unusable, but the subsequent safe haven, a floating island called Laputa, was destroyed thanks to faction fighting. In no time you find yourself back on Earth, fighting a vastly more intelligent alien threat and trying to reclaim the planet your species was born on.

The prequel to Aftershock, *Aftermath*, was met with mixed feelings. While the title was innovative and interesting, it wasn't what a lot of long-time X-Com fans were expecting, plus it had a few setbacks of its own. With *Aftershock*, developer Altar Interactive hopes to change this perception, as well as improve on the game.

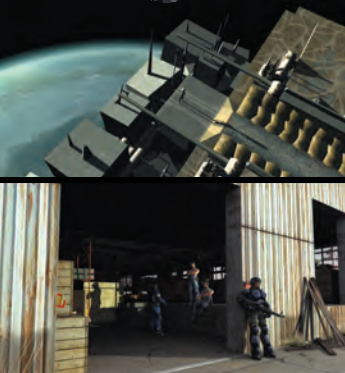
For this reason, no new engine was introduced. Instead, as the team labels it, things have gone evolutionary, relying heavily on fan feedback based on the former game. While *Aftershock's* engine will feature a lot more in terms of visual eye candy, the real tweaks come in the game itself. Elements such as interior combat and destructible environments have been added, making your squad-based combat far more fluid and strategic. In fact, a lot of the changes seem to reflect the general evolution isometric squad titles have seen in the past few years.

The base management area has been revamped and expanded. Resource management will play a far bigger role in *Aftershock*, as will capturing territories and linking various bases to your central HQ. This, in turn, will determine the technologies researched and the resources available to your teams before you send them into combat.

Aftershock keeps to the X-Com ethos of combining base management with turn-based squad combat. But it moves well beyond that scope as well, giving strategy players more to do. Altar insists that a lot of the changes come from fan feedback, so essentially *Aftershock* might be one for the fans. Whether that means that new players will enjoy the next chapter in the X-Com legacy remains to be seen. **NAG**



Aftershock relies heavily on fan feedback from *Aftermath*



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.

VITAL INFO

- Platforms
DS
- Developer
Nintendo
- Publisher
Nintendo
- Supplier
Nintendo [011] 256 7760
- Genre
Pet simulator
- Release Date
2005



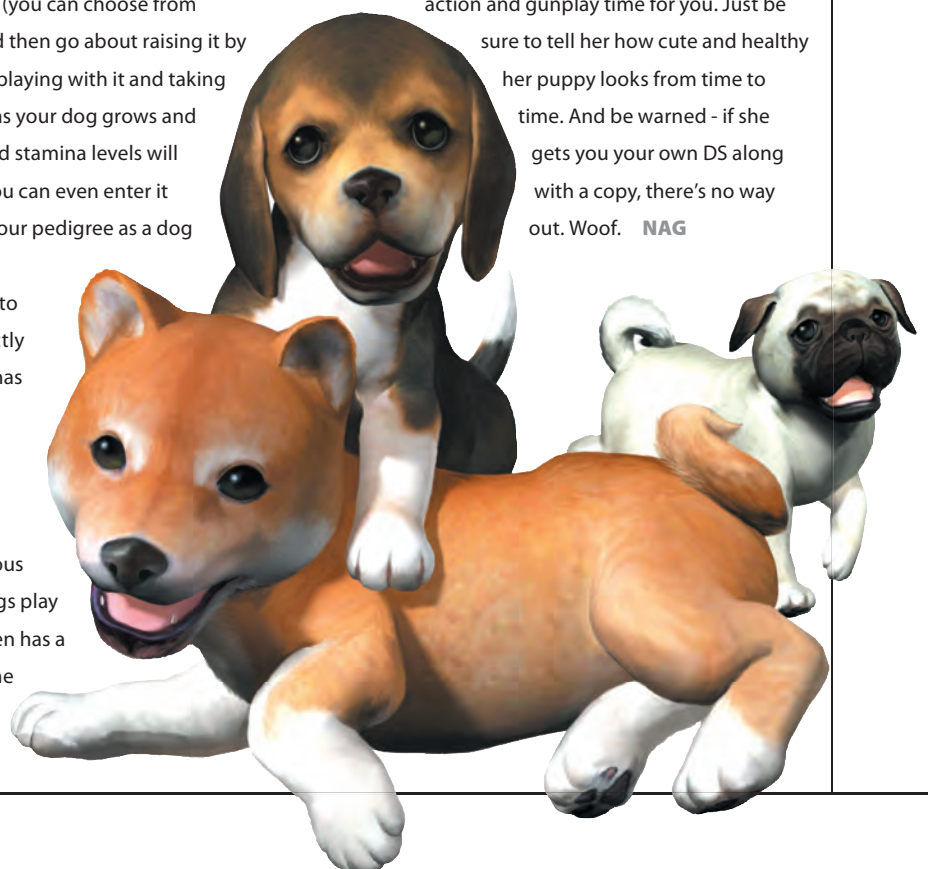
Cute, cuddly and addictive. Meet the DS' latest killer app-pup

NINTENDOGS

NEED SOMETHING TO KEEP you or the woman in your life occupied? The DS is already an attractive accessory for the cuter side of gaming, but Nintendogs just screams 'killer app' when it comes to the handheld. Why? Because it's Nintendogs in 3D, that's why. Okay, not quite - the same creators aren't involved, but it follows the same dynamic. You choose a puppy (you can choose from several breeds of puppies) and then go about raising it by feeding it, giving it attention, playing with it and taking it for walks. In true RPG form, as your dog grows and gets more exercise, its look and stamina levels will change. Do a good job, and you can even enter it into dog shows, showing off your pedigree as a dog owner.

Either way, this translates into a massive waste of time – exactly what we all love. Nintendogs has all the makings of a game that will make Tamagotchis seem timid and steal hours away as you spend time with your pet. Via the wireless function, various owners can also have their dogs play with each other. The game even has a quirky feature that will have the console bark at you if another pet owner is in the vicinity.

Even if this doesn't interest you in the least, game widows can take heart because it'll be an easy, cute, straightforward and highly addictive game. Thanks to the DS' touch screen, you'll be able to pet your little puppy in style. So, even if you don't like the idea, your girlfriend might and that translates into more hours of nonsensical action and gunplay time for you. Just be sure to tell her how cute and healthy her puppy looks from time to time. And be warned - if she gets you your own DS along with a copy, there's no way out. Woof. **NAG**





DO NOT TRY THIS AT HOME.

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



PlayStation®2



www.PlayStation.co.za



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for updated rating
information.

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PREVIEW

VITAL INFO

Platforms

PC PS2 Xbox

Developer

Crystal Dynamics

Publisher

Eidos Interactive

Supplier

Megarom (011) 234 2680

Genre

3rd Person Adventure

Release Date

2005



*A Lara for a new generation?
Eidos and Crystal Dynamics hopes so*



TOMB RAIDER: LEGEND





Boasting new animation and textures, Tomb Raider is certainly looking good

// SHE LOOKS LESS LIKE a nineties comic book cover and more like an adventurer." This was the comment from online site, GameGirlAdvance. Frankly, we couldn't agree more. Lara Croft has always been an office favourite - and not only because of her deadly assets. The games after the first two fell very short, showing a steady decline in the series that finally climaxed with the horrible Angel of Darkness. So horrible, in fact, that the title was taken away from Core, given to Gex and Legacy of Kain developer, Crystal Dynamics, and series creator Toby Gard was brought back to help sort things out (after finally completing the not-so-epic Galleon).

So far, at least visually, the results are impressive and we are aching to get back to some Tomb Raiding again. The

most important change, overall, is Lara getting a major graphical overhaul. The screenshots might not seem that different, but a whole slew of new movements and animations have been added to her repertoire. She also boasts an extensive array of facial expressions, plus she and the game world have gotten a nice dose of realistic textures and touch-ups. Lara will be far more aware of her environment and Crystal Dynamics promises much more fluid animation. After Prince of Persia, though, this shouldn't be a promise - it should be expected!

Not only is Eidos desperate for a new hit in its catalogue, but Ms. Croft has long deserved another decent shot at gaming immortality. Keep an eye on this one. The first lady of gaming might be back. *[Woohoo, Ed.] NAG*





LFS S2 REVS UP FOR RELEASE

IF YOU'RE A FAN of simulated racing, not arcade driving games like Need for Speed Underground and its ilk, but a simulation of true to life car racing, you need to read this...

Live For Speed was released almost two years ago and rapidly gained a core following of hardcore simulation addicts who couldn't get enough of the title's raw realism and heart-pounding online racing action.

For the three-man development team, as with all great simulator developers, it was not enough. The community had a long list of suggestions for the planned second version, called LFS S2, and the team had its own ideas on how to take the title even further.

With the release of S2 imminent, NAG spoke to Victor von Vlaardingen who, together with Scawen Roberts and Eric Bailey, built this simulation phenomenon.

NAG: Did you anticipate the cult following LFS would generate?

VV: We did not really know what to expect in the beginning. So you can imagine that we were pretty excited seeing people discover the first demo and getting excited themselves. We've always been quite communicative with the community ever since and I think that's part of the appreciation as well. And remaining independent is worth something, especially in the sim racing community, where people want a good

product. We aim at exactly that and it's a big reason why we remain independent - allowing us to really finish something without deadlines glooming around the corner.

NAG: What would you say the development team's main areas of focus are in developing S2? Graphical improvements, physics enhancements, or merely extending S1 with the addition of new cars and tracks?

VV: A combination of all those things. There's always room for improvement. Tyre physics (the hardest part), graphical improvements, more content, more useful features - the focus is on everything.

NAG: How has the development team gone about improving the look of S2? The translucent windows for instance, and the more detailed driver model - were these improvements which the community had specifically requested or was it a decision taken by the team?

VV: It's something that, like many other things, grew on us really. From day one people have said, "The menus can look nicer" and "the driver animation could be nicer" - things like that. Being a small team, we need to make decisions on what to do first. So when the time is right, the improvement is made. Doing the graphical update before S2 seemed like a good time. It gives a better impression and S2 deserves getting a good impression.

NAG: In terms of the physics engine and driving model, how much effort has gone into enhancing these and what are the final results of this tinkering?

VV: Scawen has spent quite some time on physics improvements. The result is having a much better sim-experience now, even though he's not done with physics yet. Especially the tyre and suspension-model improvements have made a



big difference. I quite can't go into detail about this and any final judgements, as Scawen isn't done with it yet, but the S2 driving model definitely makes you feel more like you're driving a real car than S1 did.

NAG: Audio. A lot has been said about the real-time audio synthesis model used in LFS. What's the story?

VV: We chose this because it can be much nicer than using fixed samples for the engine sound. The big advantage is that the sound is much more lively and direct than using samples. We're not limited by the sound of certain samples. Real-time adjustments to the sound, according to your racing condition, are done better with synthesis rather than using samples.

NAG: You have added additional niceties and features such as fuel consumption and tyre wear for instance, and out of the blue you also surprised the community by adding a damage model. How much of a challenge has it been to implement these modifications, and how will they affect the game dynamic?

VV: Tyre wear and fuel consumption were done while improving the tyre physics all-in-all. Tyre wear is directly related to how the tyre will behave over time, so it's logical that this was implemented while improving the tyre model.

The current damage model is the result of the improved suspension. Suspension damage is simply required in a proper suspension model.

All this will give a better player experience and the player will become aware that the virtual car he's driving is not invulnerable, but must be looked after in a realistic fashion.

More immersion is what it boils down to.

NAG: In S2, the focus is on increasing the speed. All the GT cars and even open-wheel racers make the vehicles in S2, on average, faster and more powerful than S1. Is this the way in which the LFS series was planned from the beginning?

VV: Sort of yes. We wanted to start with every day cars that most people have actually driven or drive every day. This way more people could compare the virtual cars to the real thing. From their feedback we could get a good impression about the S1 physics model and see where its flaws were.

ON THE DAY OF writing this review, the LFS S2 Alpha demo appeared on www.liveforspeed.net, and from the single track and three cars included in this release, it's obvious that S2 will establish the LFS firmly as the sim racer to beat in the future. On the first day of this release being made available, 156 S2 servers appeared online and were for the most part all



filled with the Alpha limit of 11 racers, although S2 final will feature support for up to 20 and even work well on dial-up.

Damage is beautifully implemented and any significant shunt will most likely result in the end of the race for the careless driver and perhaps his hapless victim. Since pit stops will now play a major part in the racing experience, pit rules and a full penalty system have been incorporated to try and keep cars entering and leaving this service area safe from over-eager pit-lane abusers.

The graphics are now exquisitely detailed, while tracks include dangerous curbs to catch the imprecise driver out and even drainage grates, which will not only affect the balance of the vehicle as tyres run across them, but in a long race could lead to damaged suspension and steering components if hit too hard too often.

Finally, the driving physics model. There's little I can say about this, apart from pointing out that it is not the aesthetic improvements listed above which will establish a sim racer so firmly in my mind as king of the hill. Put simply, the physics model is at present without a doubt the most realistic and natural feeling representation of driving a fast car around a race track available on any gaming platform.

Grab the 29MB demo from www.liveforspeed.net today and judge for yourself. **NAG**

LEEEET'S GET READY TO RUUUMMMMMBBBLLLLLLEEEEE!!!

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AWARDS CRITERIA

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Editor's Choice

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



Platform

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



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MWEB
HOME

An amazing game in its own right, but less of an experience

VITAL INFO

- **Platforms**
- **Suggested Retail Price**
R 299
- **Developer**
Ubi Soft
- **Publisher**
Ubi Soft
- **Supplier**
Megarom [011] 234 2680
- **Genre**
Stealth Action
- **Age Restriction**
16+
- **Minimum Specs**
Pentium 3 1.4GHz
256MB RAM
DVD ROM
64MB Video Card
4.0GB HDD



Games reviewed on
Rectron machines



*I hope nobody
is sneaking up
on meee...*



SPLINTER CELL: CHAOS THEORY

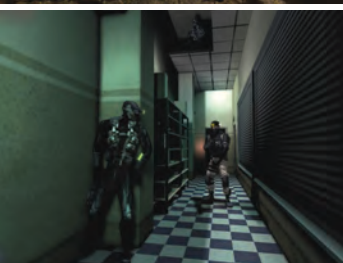
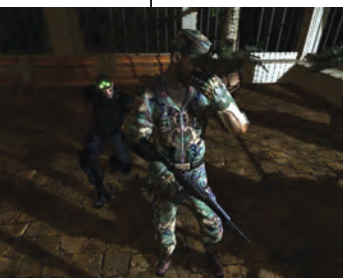
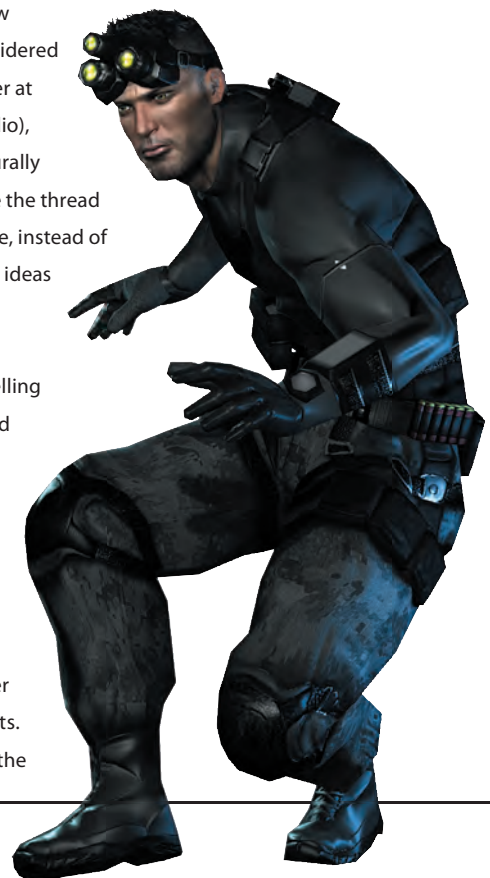
IN CHAOS THEORY, SAM Fisher asks over his communications system, "How do I open this casing, I don't have a crowbar handy?" and is met with the response, "Crowbars are for geeky video game characters, you can open it from the console downstairs".

There simply isn't a better quote (albeit a candid slap in the face for Half-Life 2) from the game itself to describe what has happened to the Splinter Cell franchise. Simply, in an attempt to take itself too seriously it has lost the authenticity it once had. Ubi Soft has added to the winning formula that has made Splinter Cell so popular, but somehow simply overlooked addressing some of the real issues that have plagued the series from the beginning. To mention a quick example: while the method for controlling super-sleuth Sam Fisher was never terrible, it has simply not improved much over the last three titles, only increasing to the inaccessible. Yet, Ubi Soft has taken other steps to bring Splinter Cell into a more mainstream market - but more on that later.

Chaos Theory is overflowing with new features and ideas that manage to either add a lot, very little, or actually dumb-down that special something that made the series so compelling in the first place. Being more of a 'true'

sequel to the original 2002 start of the series (since it's Ubi Soft Montreal's second Splinter Cell game, with last year's Pandora Tomorrow being largely considered a filler put together at the Shanghai Studio), Chaos theory naturally seems to continue the thread from the first game, instead of building upon the ideas from the second.

Speaking more fondly, the storytelling has been improved dramatically and provides a better-rounded, inclusive gaming experience that doesn't attempt to kill off the player every chance it gets. However, despite the



more polished presentation, lazy text descriptions before and after missions still cause easily-lost threads and plot points, surprising in a game of this calibre.

Alongside grand visual opulence and new gadgets from government-secret-organisation-cliché Third Echelon, ageing Sam Fisher is given the chance to exhibit a new (alarmingly kinky) rubber suit and some moves learned at self-defence class. The new close-combat manoeuvres (usually involving some or other lethal combination of foot, head and/or palm, perhaps knife) are easy and lethal - perhaps too easy. Combined with a quick-save available anytime, anywhere, and suddenly Chaos Theory seems to have no discernable difficulty. Kill, save, kill, save. Though it will be contested, a checkpoint system would certainly have favoured this type of game better (as the previous two have proven). This new altruistically forgiving nature is part of the main complaint against Chaos Theory, to be examined later (still).

Breaking the necks of enemies while hanging upside down, yanking enemies to their doom over railings and such are simply impressive, yet volumes could be said about how painfully rare chances are to exploit all the new interactions. On the same thread, the utterly lethal close-quarter combat moves make guns more of a hindrance than a help. Even the improved diverging paths are horribly underutilised, alongside the rare chances to use the impressive moves such as the split-jump, pipe hanging and rappelling. Expect to spend obscene amounts of time inside air ducts that just shouldn't be there - the ultimate movie and game cliché.

Chaos Theory's visuals are easily summarised; embarrassingly impressive, detailed to a fault, yet almost too dark to appreciate all the graphical splendour. When visible, Sam Fisher stands out as one of those rare characters in a video game that actually looks like he's physically interacting with the environment, rather than simply existing in it.

It is exciting to mention the brand-new cooperative mode, allowing you to team up with a friend to tackle four specially designed missions. It is less exciting to mention the unfortunate bugs that plague this mode, making network play difficult and online play almost impossible. When the mode is feeling cooperative however, there is great entertainment in dual rappelling, using your teammates as a human ladder or helping them long-jump over security lasers. None are as impressive as the Hang-Over; one player controlling the rope (elevation and position) that the other player is dangling from upside down, either tapping at a computer or silently breaking the neck of an



unsuspecting guard. The lack of a map however, makes coordination difficult and betrays the tacked-on nature of the collective mode.

Making a welcome return from Pandora Tomorrow, the 'Mercs vs. Spies' mode has been slightly polished and remains either brilliantly spectacular, or completely irrelevant depending on your understanding of it. A different development team worked on the multiplayer, annoyingly apparent by the visual deviation from the single player (graphically substandard) and separate set of key mappings.

Splinter Cell's claim to fame was its engrossing single player, and this remains its strongest area. To make the series more appealing to the masses (and finally getting to the point mentioned earlier), Ubi Soft has neutered the experience to pacify those lacking the attention span to play it the way it was originally intended. With its quick-kills and quick-save, it is a dumbed-down experience lacking the compelling nature that made it such a diamond in the rough. Unsurprisingly, it is this exact change to Splinter Cell that will make it a much better game on a global scale, more accessible and appealing to the general public. **NAG**



Unashamedly methodical and violent: exactly how we like it

89

VITAL INFO

- Platforms
- Suggested Retail Price R 270
- Developer Volition
- Publisher THQ
- Supplier WWE [011] 462 0150
- Genre Third-person action
- Age Restriction 18
- Minimum Specs
- Pentium 3 1.0GHz
- 128MB RAM
- 16 x CD ROM
- 64MB Video Card
- 2GB HDD
- AOpen**
- Games reviewed on Rectron machines



THE PUNISHER

HERE'S A GAME DICHOTOMY. On the one side it is a very repetitive affair, involving the same thing over and over again throughout all of Punisher's 12+ stages. On the other hand, repetition is fun. In a world where games are expected to change their play dynamic every second stage or so, giving players a break from how they perform the task at hand, The Punisher is blatantly direct: kill everything, punctuated with moments of interrogation and violent diversion. Apart from the odd boss fight, the formula stands: you have guns, they have guns - it's the last man standing.

Frank Castle has certainly had a rough life, but the character has managed to remain a popular addition to the Marvel Comic line-up. In the wake of the (then) upcoming movie, THQ got the rights for the game. But, apart from Thomas Jane's voice and a few scenes

from the flick, The Punisher took all of its inspiration from the comic books themselves. In the game, Castle is pitted against the Mob, Russian mercenaries and a few other bad people as he makes his way to the end of the mystery: who is trying to kill him? This translates into a dozen or so levels spanning chop shops, skyscrapers, the harbour, bars, a mob mansion and even a mercenary base on a remote island. To help the man do the job of being a vigilante, players are handed a very impressive arsenal of heavy weaponry and handguns. Even though you can only take a set of each into a mission, the weapons of fallen foes are also at your disposal.

What sets The Punisher apart? Simply put - violence. This is hands-down one of the most violent games you are ever likely to play. Information can be extracted from opponents



in a variety of ways, including bashing their heads into the ground or taking advantage of special interrogation points (such as dangling them over a pool of piranhas or feeding them into a wood chipper). Some help you out, others unlock special content, while the rest really just tempt you to torture them to death. The Punisher is also shamelessly biased towards body count and execution. Using melee weapons, such as cleavers and baseball bats, will give you extra points and taking out opponents, using the extremely entertaining quick kills, is very easy and impressive on the points tally.

In the end, the Punisher boils down to how entertained you'd be taking on dozens upon

dozens of foes and killing them in entertaining and bloody ways. Features such as building a score multiplier by not getting hit, also affect how you play and points scored can be used to buy upgrades for your character. The AI isn't top-notch and variations in opponents usually rely on their choice of weapons and armour. In fact, The Punisher might have failed if it weren't for the vast array of locations and bad guys. But, throughout the entire game the formula stays the same - kill them all.

If you enjoy violent titles and long for a more brain-dead and methodical experience that sticks to a basic formula, get The Punisher, because it comes highly recommended for just those reasons. **NAG**

THE PUNISHER ON THE PS2

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Based on the comic book series that tells the tale of the hardcore, vengeance seeking vigilante Frank Castle, better known as The Punisher, the game of the same name is a solid and entertaining action title, despite the lurking suspicion that it often relies more on completely over-the-top violence than innovation to hold one's attention. There are, nonetheless, a few aspects that set the play dynamic apart from that seen in similar titles. The most noticeable of these being the interrogation feature. Those familiar with the franchise will know that the Punisher is quite an intimidating entity, mostly on account of his carrying enough firepower to frighten the Libyan defence force - the result being that at your discretion, rather than killing a foe, you can intimidate him into divulging valuable information. Nevertheless, the emphasis of the game is set squarely on dismembering the opposition, and to that end, The Punisher is quite an addictive endeavour, though anyone with a weak stomach might do best to avoid it. Excellent character detail adds tremendously to the visual effect of the myriad methods of eliminating enemies the game puts at your disposal, and the voice acting is both convincing and, at times, humorous. Ultimately, The Punisher brings little innovation to the genre, though it is a very well-finished product. If wanton and gratuitous violence is in line with your video-gaming preferences, it shouldn't disappoint.

Crush, kill, destroy. All in a days' work for self-styled vigilantes



Thought-provoking, intense and most entertaining - just be wary of the frustratingly long load times

86

VITAL INFO

■ Platforms

PC

■ Suggested Retail Price

R 299

■ Developer

Irrational Games

■ Publisher

Vivendi Games

■ Supplier

Nu Metro [011] 340 9345

■ Genre

FPS

■ Age Restriction

16+

■ Minimum Specs

Pentium 1.0GHz

256MB RAM

8 x CD ROM

64MB Video Card

2GB HDD

Games reviewed on
Rectron machines

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It's a little-known fact that SWAT's creation was the result of farm worker uprisings in the 1960s in the city of Letts. Los Angeles police were so impressed by the specialised crowd-control training given to the local officers tasked with ending the riots that they commissioned their own counter-force division, and SWAT, as we know it today, was born.



// DROP THE WEAPON! GET down on the ground! Comply! Comply!"

Interesting words, full of authority, as words spoken from behind a rather large gun often are. Typically, when heard by those who are involved in illegal, illicit or otherwise suspect activities, they inevitably herald the start of a journey through the American criminal system, or the alternative, which is a one way, guaranteed trip to the afterlife courtesy of a three-round burst to the head.

It's all in a day's work for SWAT, the paramilitary wing of the US police that's called in when things go seriously pear-shaped. And it's the premise of the long-running SWAT series, which sees a new lease of life with a deft touch from the masters at Irrational Games.

Those familiar with the SWAT series of games will be familiar with the concept. As commander of a squad of elite gun-toting, door-breaching officers, it's your job to bring order to the chaos. Where SWAT differs from games like Rainbow Six is the emphasis on the use of non-lethal force. It's not considered sporting for a Kevlar-clad SWAT operative to use his assault rifle on a kid who is holding up a gas station convenience store with a stolen handgun.

Using a system of penalties and bonuses, SWAT4 encourages the player to make life-saving decisions in the heat of the moment, neutralising threats when absolutely necessary,

but encouraging the use of non-deadly force whenever possible. Your job is to bring them back in handcuffs, not body bags. Even on the moderate difficulty setting, this is easier said than done, as suspects are notorious for their itchy trigger fingers and their propensity to hide behind hostages.

Fortunately, the men (women are noticeably absent in the game) of SWAT are prepared for any eventuality. Pepper spray has suspects and uncooperative civilians coughing and gagging, while a beanbag shell fired by a non-lethal shotgun can deter even the most resolute criminal. For everyone else, there's the favourite of law enforcement officers everywhere, the Tazer. If it moves and seems even the tiniest bit recalcitrant, 50,000 volts of muscle-debilitating electricity normally seems to do the trick.

For the more complicated situations, where a bullet to the head seems to be the only reasonable way of resolving the problem, SWAT4 offers the usual cornucopia of kick ass to the discerning counter-terrorist, with the silenced MP5SD proving to be this reviewer's favourite. Even so, SWAT4 is all about saving lives, and the emphasis on bringing order to the chaos with minimum casualties is a theme that is faithfully adhered to from start to end. It may not be the most fast-paced shooter around, but SWAT4's high-pressure situations will have you making judgment calls in the heat of the moment. **NAG**

Okay, you come up with a good caption for this shot...



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A very well put together game that revisits the style of Command & Conquer

75

VITAL INFO

- **Platforms**
- **PC**
- **Suggested Retail Price**
R 265
- **Developer**
Eugen Systems
- **Publisher**
Atari
- **Supplier**
MegaRom [011] 234 2680
- **Genre**
RTS
- **Age Restriction**
16+
- **Minimum Specs**
Pentium 4 1.5GHz
256MB RAM
2X DVD-ROM
64MB DX9 Video Card
6GB HDD

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ACT OF WAR: DIRECT ACTION

THIS REAL-TIME STRATEGY GAME is set against the backdrop of an international oil crisis and focuses on the exploits of Task Force Talon, a fictitious 'direct action' (opposite to 'covert operations') elite force. The packaging claims "military authenticity" but, although this is roughly true for the lower-tech level structures and units, most of the more advanced assets are somewhat fanciful at best. Nevertheless, the game has a fairly 'realistic' feel, which is enhanced by the live acting. The installation consumes well over 5GB of hard drive space. Most of this is accounted for by the extensive video cut-scenes, which convey the story. The campaign is very enjoyable and fairly long, though make no mistake, it won't keep you busy for weeks. Sadly, one of the game's three factions is not represented in single player campaign mode, except as the enemy – players cannot play The Consortium in campaign mode (then again, was this the case, the game would no doubt have taken up 10GB of hard disk space!). There is much in-game chatter that conveys further story elements, as well as providing some character development and humour.

Enough about the cinematography – let's take a look at the game itself. The basic model is consistent with the majority of real-time strategy titles out there. The resource model is mostly fairly conventional: players collect oil from oil deposits and turn it into cash at refineries. Some buildings can be captured to generate steady, but finite income while they are held. A novelty is the concept of prisoners of war. Seriously wounded soldiers and crew from destroyed vehicles can be captured and

held in a prison facility. These POWs generate slow but infinite income while incarcerated, or can be sacrificed ('interrogated') for map information. While in specific terms these POW aspects are rather artificial, the premise behind them is sound and quite elegant.

Overall, the game plays like old-school Command & Conquer, a fact that delighted us no end. Infantry units are important but vulnerable to being run over by vehicles. The 'realism' aspect is largely provided by the fact that weapons, designed to kill a specific type of target, tend to do so very efficiently. For example: you will very seldom see an aircraft survive more than two anti-aircraft missiles, and sometimes a single missile will do the trick. One downside to the game's overall dynamic is the fact that, in skirmish or multiplayer mode, it tends to degenerate into an arms race, which means an economy race. The super-weapons are unbelievably powerful – so it's a good thing that 'super-defences' (against super-weapons) exist. **NAG**

THE FACTIONS

US Army:

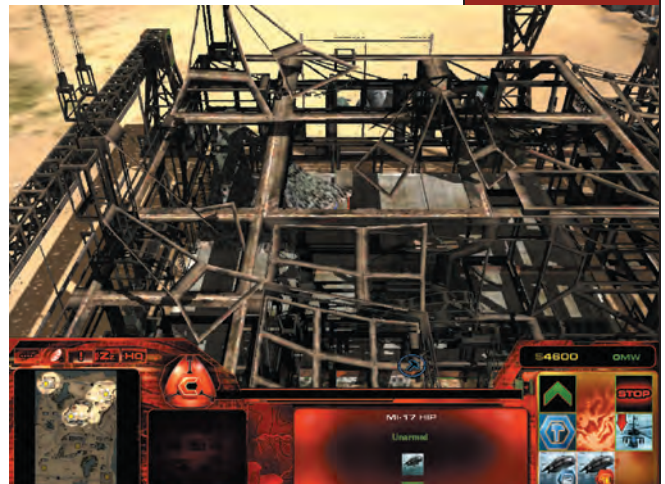
Requires power for its structures. Units are highly specialised, so a variety must always be fielded.

Task Force Talon:

Structures are self-powered. Units are highly versatile, but very valuable, so losses are costly.

The Consortium:

Power required for high-tech structures. Units are generally cheap and expendable.



Top: Falling Star: before...
Middle: ...during
Bottom: ...and after!

resurrection
of evil



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VITAL INFO

■ Platforms



■ Suggested Retail Price

R299

■ Developer

Crystal Dynamics

■ Publisher

Eidos

■ Supplier

MegaRom [011] 234 2680

■ Genre

FPS

■ Age Restriction

16+

■ Minimum Specs

Pentium 4 1.5GHz

256MB RAM

4 x DVD ROM

64MB Video Card

3GB HDD

Games reviewed on
Rectron machines

It may not look much like a shotgun but it still works like one... Old ideas in new clothing

PROJECT: SNOWBLIND

DO YOU WANT TO know why games like Half-Life 2, DOOM 3 and Far Cry are so good? It's because they were made for PC. At a time where growing numbers of first person shooters are being ported from console to PC, this simple but fundamental difference is what makes all the difference. Project: Snowblind suffers from 'consol legacy' in a number of ways which we'll discuss throughout. Aside from this (and if you overlook the simplistic story, play dynamic, bugs and crashes), the game manages to be overall entertaining and is exactly the kind of experience non-hardcore gamers will find enjoyable.

In terms of vanilla shooters, Snowblind has a number of unique selling points which spice up the action. First up is the fact that you are an augmented soldier capable of various superhuman feats, such as boosting your reflexes (by slowing time) and cloaking yourself. You also have enhanced vision and so on. Secondly, the weapons and toys are plentiful and fun to use. You can hack into systems and take control of security cameras and turrets. Apart from the usual shotgun and assault rifle variants, there are the trusted kinetic kicker (Half-Life 2 gravity gun), grenades (EMP, gas, flak etc.), personal defence systems (deployable riot walls) and other fun goodies. The third unique selling point is the ability to drive different vehicles. From simple armoured cars all the way to combat robots, each of these unique elements is well implemented and useful, so it never feels like the developer kept adding cool toys and gadgets just for the sake of it.

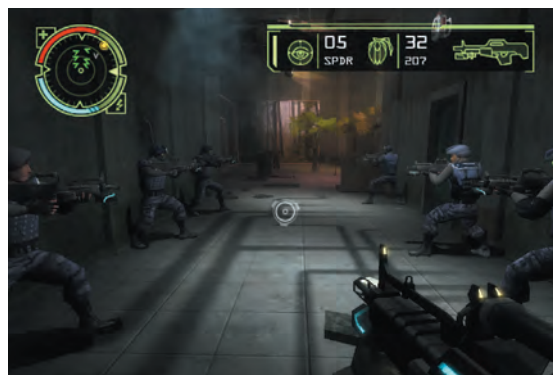
Level design is dull and simplistic. If you've ever entered

a building, walked up the stairs and into the various offices inside, you're halfway qualified to create levels for this game. Snowblind is content to deliver a standard environment with little incentive for you to explore or even examine your surroundings (this game is run-and-gun with a few sniping opportunities). Graphically it doesn't compare well to anything we've seen recently – it's competent, but lacks that special feel, and the level design doesn't provide anything graphically memorable either. This aside, the game dynamic is engaging, fun, well paced and not too difficult to play through.

The game features 'save rooms' here and there, so you can't save where you want. These seem out of place and absurd in the setting of the game. The graphics and overall game design are also not comparable to other shooters and at the end of the day, the whole experience is a little short and simple. Project: Snowblind will not impress immediately, but requires a fair amount of playing to show its limited charm. **NAG**



Manning turrets is always satisfying



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VITAL INFO

■ Platforms



■ Suggested Retail Price

R 199

■ Developer

Stormfront Studios

■ Publisher

Atari

■ Supplier

Megarom [011] 234 2680

■ Genre

Action Adventure/Fighting

■ Age Restriction

12+

■ Minimum Specs

Pentium III 1.0GHz

256MB RAM

4x DVD ROM

64MB Video Card

2.8GB HDD

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Zhai uses
her hide-in-
shadows ability

DEMON STONE

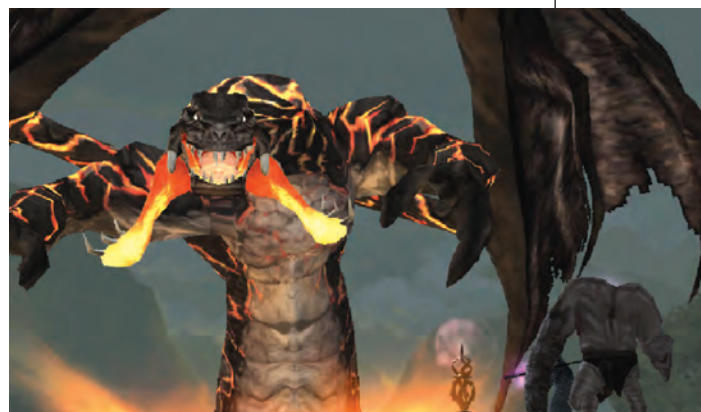
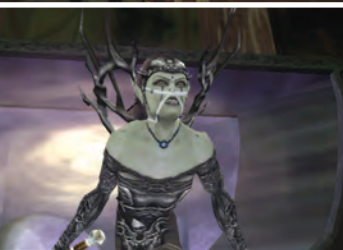
THE FORGOTTEN REALMS IS likely the most developed of all Dungeons & Dragons settings, having spawned countless adventure modules, artwork, novels and short stories and, in the past decade or so, computer games. Demon Stone is the latest in this tradition and it has been developed with the help of Robert A. Salvatore, the celebrated author of the Drizzt Do'Urden books, The Cleric Quintet, as well as many short stories. The Drow ranger makes a 'guest appearance' in this game and fans of the books will be delighted to find that the character's animation does justice to its literary description – we were blown away by the fact that he fights just like we pictured him doing in the books.

The game is, at its heart, a combat-based adventure game, with slight elements of character development thrown in. Players cannot choose their starting characters, which limit options, but this means that the story could be developed in greater depth. The combat system is combo-based and the game lends itself readily to being played with a game-pad. We found the control interface tricky and anomalous at first, but once we played for a while and figured out what was required, it gradually became more intuitive (players familiar with beat-'em-up games will understand what we mean). The key is to develop a rhythm of keystrokes; to play instinctively rather than consciously.

Graphically, the game is breathtaking and pulls this off with impressively modest system requirements. We witnessed one misplaced shadow, but otherwise all the effects are appropriate and well-executed and some are

artistically creative, such as the party's arrival in the jungle of Chult via a magical portal, which we shan't even try to describe – it has to be seen! The game has a very cinematic feel to it, and tampering with any elements would only disrupt this effect. A note on the soundtrack: the music in this game fits the game, arguably better than any other we have ever heard. One criticism: the seamless camera angle changes do, in a couple of places, cause some difficulty, particularly in the heat of battle.

If this game has a failing, it is its re-playability value – this is almost zero. The game has three difficulty levels, and as most players will start at the default medium difficulty, this means it can be played twice, then put away for a year or so. The game is linear and exclusively single player. It is also disappointingly short, although some parts are quite hard and require numerous reloads. In an ideal world, it would be possible, like a video, to rent the game rather than buying it. **NAG**



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Thanks, but we'd much rather play Scrabble! You too, probably. . .

VITAL INFO

- **Platforms**
- **PC**
- **Suggested Retail Price**
R 299
- **Developer**
Wargaming.net
- **Publisher**
DreamCatcher Interactive
- **Supplier**
WWE [011] 462 0150
- **Genre**
Turn-based strategy
- **Age Restriction**
12+
- **Minimum Specs**
Pentium III 750MHz
256MB RAM
4x CD ROM
32MB Video Card
1.5GB HDD

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A beach landing operation

DOMINATION: MASSIVE ASSAULT

IT WAS WITH GREAT pleasure that we embarked upon this review. You may be thinking, "Ah, must be a good game," but in fact, quite the opposite is true - to such an extent that we refuse to even play coy, and draw out the moment of revelation. Quite simply: why do people still make games like this? Perhaps it's so that critics like us can enjoy a good, scathing rant from time to time. And how the hell do they manage to sell such rubbish to publishers?

The background 'story' is a clichéd and confused wishy-washiness about two factions, one noble and righteous, the other noticeably less so, and an inter-planetary war they have been waging for some time now. The in-game 'story' is a series of text-and-speech based briefings. Guys, we've said this before and we'll say it again: a progression of military goals, no matter how tediously long does not make a story! Now, it baffles us that a game containing no video cut-scenes and endowed with mediocre (at best!) graphics, manages to consume well over a gigabyte of hard drive space and run with all the responsiveness of a beached whale on a contemporary computer system (and all this despite ostensibly low listed system requirements, too). Even the excessively anthem-like (in fact, downright cheesy) soundtrack doesn't play properly. But here's the cherry on top: the voice acting makes us think of non-English speakers reading from a script that was translated into 'Engrish' by another non-English speaker wielding a bilingual dictionary.

So far we haven't justified our opening question -

something we're about to rectify. This title is a turn-based strategy game. Now, don't get us wrong - we suppose somewhere there is a niche for this kind of entertainment. Say, on a table-top in the form of a board game, perhaps? This brings us back to our gripe about performance. How did the developers manage to make something, with no real-time elements, being run on a modern computer, resembling a slide-show? (We exaggerate... slightly). Some really advanced de-optimising techniques must have been applied! As for the game's graphics, well, Domination 'boasts' 3D graphics, but that's about all that can be said in its favour in this regard. The buildings and units are childishly rendered, bringing to mind 'plastic'. OK, so the water is quite nice (deliberate choice of word there), and if the free-roaming camera is swung about some (its control is rather tricky, being sluggish on one axis and over-sensitive on another), one can behold adequate clouds scudding across the sky. Hardly worth the expense and bother of buying this game - particularly if you live on the coast!

It seems that the developers have tried to compensate for the game's shortcomings by providing an overabundance of play modes. Fair enough, perhaps the word overabundance can't really have meaning in this context - the more the merrier, we always say. Nevertheless, the numerous play modes and decent challenge levels, offered by this game, fail to rescue this disaster from the realms of ignominy. **NAG**



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This geopolitical simulator will appeal to those who want a drawn-out cerebral challenge

VITAL INFO

- **Platforms**
- PC
- **Suggested Retail Price**
- R 250
- **Developer**
- GolemLabs
- **Publisher**
- DreamCatcher Interactive
- **Supplier**
- WWE [011] 462 0150
- **Genre**
- Geopolitical strategy
- **Age Restriction**
- 3+
- **Minimum Specs**
- Pentium 3 1.5GHz
- 256MB RAM
- 4x CD ROM
- 64MB Video Card
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SUPERPOWER 2

Iraq invasion: the paths of forces in transit are shown



ABOVE:
The economic interface provides a wealth of information and management tools
BELOW:
The battle view is highly abstract



THIS IS ONE AMBITIOUS project. GolemLabs and DreamCatcher Interactive's Superpower 2 is a very valiant attempt at simulating the administration of a modern, present-day nation, which is no mean feat. Although the overall task has been broken down into three main spheres, namely Economic, Political and Military, this by no means results in a simple game.

At the beginning of a game, the player is faced with a global view of the world, which can be rotated and zoomed into and out of. The degree that the view can be zoomed into is very impressive, allowing the player to view not only cities, but also major roads in any part of the world. An astounding amount of research has gone into this title, with not only topography and geography being highly detailed, but also demographics and economic data for individual countries. However, there are discrepancies and we cannot tell whether these are deliberate for game purposes, errors in research, or whether the data is based on old data (games start in the year 2000, so it's possible that the game's data is accurate for that year's geopolitical climate). One of the most

striking aspects of the game is the fact that, barring the scenarios which are really for tutorial purposes, games are free-form and players choose their own countries and set their own goals.

The process of governing a nation is accomplished by manipulating the three spheres mentioned above. The political sphere offers the fewest 'buttons' or 'controls', but that is

because virtually everything in this field is accomplished by means of 'treaties', which are treated more broadly than the usual definition of the word. Everything from setting up joint humanitarian efforts, to economic coalitions and declarations of war, is handled by proposing a 'treaty'. The other controls in this sphere involve religious freedom, allowing the player to set the legal status of various locally relevant belief systems. The economic sphere, on the other hand, serves up a number of controls as well as displaying vital economic information, much of which cannot be directly adjusted, as it is the result of the interaction of numerous factors. The military aspect offers the most opportunities for direct influence, as is to be expected in a game that must strive not to be boring. The military sphere is where players will find technological research spending options, as well as the means to build, deploy or transfer military assets, and the ability to launch attacks. Battles can be left to be resolved on their own accord, or players can take a battle's reins into their own hands.

On the downside, the game is slightly buggy and players can expect to see the desktop halfway through a game, from time to time. Furthermore, the soundtrack was broken in the preview version of the game and this has made it into the finished product! (After half an hour of play or thereabouts, the soundtrack gets stuck and repeats the same couple of seconds of music ad nauseam.) These factors lend the game a rather unfinished feel. Also, bear in mind that this game isn't action packed – it's long-winded and slow. Despite these criticisms, we're minded to be fairly forgiving, and can call Superpower 2 a good, if different, game. **NAG**



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A bit short, but an entertaining expansion

75

VITAL INFO

■ Platforms

PC

■ Suggested Retail Price

R 204

■ Developer

Nerve Interactive

■ Publisher

Activision

■ Supplier

Megarom [011] 234 2680

■ Genre

FPS

■ Age Restriction

18+

■ Minimum Specs

1.5GHz CPU

8x CD ROM

2.2GB HDD

16 Bit Sound Card

DirectX 9.3D Card

Games reviewed on
Rectron machines

Big, ugly and dangerous it's Hell all over again

DOOM 3: RESURRECTION OF EVIL

ONCE YOU COME TO the end of Doom 3's not-so-groundbreaking story, a few questions are left unanswered - specifically about what happened to Dr. Betruger, the man who initiated Hell's invasion of the Delta Labs. Thankfully, humans have a god-like ability for tenacity and short-term memory, because it isn't long before the UAC heads back to Mars, partly to find out what happened in Delta and partly to explore the ruins of the ancient alien race that was discovered.

Where Doom 3 took its time initiating players into the environment, Resurrection of Evil knew this is moot a second time around and after a brief in-game movie, demonstrating how a pack of marines find an alien artefact and end up opening the gate that led to the downfall of those very aliens, you are thrown into the thick of it. From the first gunshot, a new monster is introduced - a flying skull with horns. It also doesn't take long before RoE's only original weapon (apart from the artefact itself) is handed over. It's essentially a version of Half-Life 2's gravity gun, only this model is pretty adept at throwing back plasma projectiles and small flying monsters (apart from also being able to lift and move most objects in a room). This alone gives it a memorable part in the game, since now you can throw back the nasty packets of hurt that imps love to lob towards you (it also

kills them with one blow). To combat this evolution a bit, a new type of imp is introduced - one that is far more aggressive and nimble at attacks, not to mention able to leap considerable distances.

Disappointingly, RoE didn't seek to take players to new places. The Martian base as well as Hell is pretty similar to what you experienced in Doom 3. In fact, your tour through Delta Lab will feel somewhat nostalgic, since a lot of areas have been used again. The expansion at least sought to expand on the monsters (introducing three new ones, but none of the missing original Doom brethren), the multiplayer aspect (more maps plus the new CTF mode) and the weapons. The gravity gun and artefact (which captures the three respective powers of the trio of bosses in the game, allowing you to use them in combat) have been mentioned, but the double barrel shotgun's return is well worth it, since it is insanely powerful for its pedigree (perhaps that's why it was aptly called the super shotgun in Doom II). It is a shell-hungry utensil, though.

RoE isn't very long and apart from a bit more overall polish, it really is just more Doom 3, not seeking to break the mould or even kicking a few indentations in it. Still, if it's Doom 3 you want, you've got it: scary and action-filled. The only real drawback, then, is that you can finish it in one sitting. [You L33t gamer you, Ed.] **NAG**



Too daunting for newcomers, too rushed and unpolished for enthusiasts

VITAL INFO

- Platforms
- PC
- Suggested Retail Price R 299
- Developer Beautiful Game Studios
- Publisher Eidos
- Supplier MegaRom [011] 234 2680
- Genre Sport/Management
- Age Restriction 3+
- Minimum Specs
Pentium III 700MHz
256MB RAM
4 x CD ROM
4MB Video Card
400MB HDD

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CHAMPIONSHIP MANAGER 5

MUCH CRITICISM WAS LEVELLED at prior Championship Manager titles for being too daunting for newcomers, as well as being too slow-paced, and the latest title aims to rectify this, with mixed effect. The pace is definitely faster and you're now able to continue managing your team while the game goes about its number crunching in the background.

As far as depth is concerned, however, the game certainly requires much patience and will likely still frustrate newcomers. The interface feels too cumbersome for comfort and it takes quite a while to get to grips with all the options available to you, which include scouting for prospective players, hunting for new jobs, as well as setting up tactics for your team.

On the pitch, things aren't much better. You can 'watch' the match on a 2D representation of the field and make tactical changes on the fly, though the effects of these are too inconsistent to be of use. It often seems as though the results of any changes you make are

entirely random, with luck a more important factor in the outcome than strategy.

Football enthusiasts will nevertheless get a kick out of being able to live out their management fantasies, until the title's lack of polish becomes apparent. Casual gamers will likely be far too intimidated to get any enjoyment out of it at all. **NAG**



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Underdeveloped story is the biggest drawback of this otherwise average action title

VITAL INFO

Platforms



Suggested Retail Price

R 270

Developer

Bits Studios

Publisher

SCI

Supplier

WWE [011] 462 0150

Genre

Action

Age Restriction

16+

Minimum Specs

Players: 1

Memory: 90KB

Analogue: Sticks only;

Vibration compatible

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John Constantine battles the agents of darkness with zero humour and cigarette smoke

CONSTANTINE

LOSELY BASED ON THE similarly named film, Constantine is a third-person action title that follows the story of demon-hunter John Constantine, on a quest to rid the world of all sorts of evil (as one would expect of any self-respecting demon-hunter). It should be noted, however, that although the game is definitely based on the movie, it revolves far more around shooting demons than story-telling. Thus, anyone unfamiliar with either the movie, or the comic on which it was based, might feel somewhat disoriented by the relative lack of depth of the back-story that the game presents. The game dynamic is quite standard fare for the genre, with one or two minor innovations – the most noticeable is the lead character’s ability to transport between Earth and Hell whenever he comes across a portal (conveniently disguised as a puddle of water). The idea behind this is that in certain instances, Constantine needs to solve a puzzle in Hell, the outcome of which will affect Earth, allowing you to proceed further through the level. It’s not a new concept, but it does make for some variety, particularly since Hell is well-detailed and visually quite convincing (though the puzzles are simple and straightforward, so the concept soon loses its allure and starts feeling quite tiresome and ordinary). Constantine also has a ‘True Sight’ ability which, in first person view, allows him to detect demons disguised as humans. In addition to the myriad of divinely-inspired

weapons in his possession, Constantine also has the ability to cast spells to help him defeat his enemies, though they often seem overly complex, underpowered, and unnecessary (they do look quite cool the first few times you use them). Despite all this, however, the play dynamic remains largely typical of any game in this genre – it’s fast and frantic, though it feels too stereotyped, and there just isn’t enough to set it apart from other titles of a similar nature. The only factor that truly sets Constantine apart from its competitors is the interesting lead character. The unintentionally amusing voice acting provided by a Keanu Reeves sound-alike, and the lack of attention paid to telling Constantine’s story through the game, sadly hampers this aspect of the game’s appeal. It’s certainly not bad, and it might appeal to devout fans of the franchise, but for anyone just looking for a good action title, you can probably do substantially better. **NAG**



Excellent boxing title in every respect – not to be missed!

VITAL INFO

- **Platforms**
- PS2
- **Suggested Retail Price**
- R 360
- **Developer**
- EA Sports
- **Publisher**
- Electronic Arts
- **Supplier**
- EA Africa [011] 516 8300
- **Genre**
- Sport
- **Age Restriction**
- 16+
- **Specifications**
- Players: 1-2
- Memory: 96KB
- Analogue: Sticks only;
- Vibration compatible

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Realistic looking action

FIGHT NIGHT ROUND 2

BOXING TITLES HAVE ALWAYS been a hit-or-miss affair [Sigh, Ed.], on account of the difficulty of accurately recreating the pace of the sport without having the entire ordeal feel too cumbersome or heavy-handed. [Hey, Ed.] The result being that realism is often traded off against entertainment value and the finished product usually manages to disappoint both casual gamers and purists alike. EA Sports found the right balance with Fight Night 2004 and Fight Night Round 2 improves on that foundation in almost every aspect. In addition to deep and very well rounded career and character creation modes, Fight Night Round 2 has almost revolutionised the boxing play dynamic. In a departure from tradition, punches are now thrown solely

through the use of the right analogue stick and EA Sports has done an excellent job in recreating actual punching motions with the analogue stick. The end result, though, requires patience to truly master and is highly intuitive – flicking the stick makes for a quick jab, arcing it produces a hook, and pulling back on the stick to wind-up before a punch, produces a wild haymaker. Defensive moves are just as intuitive and enthusiasts will be glad to know that clinching has been included this time around, further adding depth to the already solid play dynamic. Excellent sound and truly breathtaking graphics add further polish to the title, making it a must-play for any fan of the sport. **NAG**

Promising concept, but far too unfulfilling in the long run

VITAL INFO

- **Platforms**
- PS2
- **Suggested Retail Price**
- R 360
- **Developer**
- EA Sports
- **Publisher**
- Electronic Arts
- **Supplier**
- EA Africa [011] 516 8300
- **Genre**
- Sport
- **Age Restriction**
- 3+
- **Specifications**
- Players: 1-4
- Memory: 249KB
- Analogue: Sticks only;
- Vibration compatible

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Pulling another successful combination

FIFA STREET

INSPIRED BY THE SUCCESS of recent titles such as NBA Street V3, which aim to put a heavy arcade-style spin on traditional sports, Electronic Arts have applied the same formula to the world's most popular sport (though the finished product feels unfortunately nowhere near as polished as its basketball counterpart). The concept is certainly familiar. FIFA Street is basically four-on-four football, sans most of the rules, with the emphasis placed on performing tricks rather than on the strategy of the game. Successfully stringing together tricks not only increases the likelihood of scoring a goal off a shot taken at the end of the combo, but also serves to fill up a 'Gamebreaker meter' that allows you to pull off an

incredibly powerful shot - though unlike NBA Street, it doesn't guarantee a goal and even if you do score, it detracts no goals from your opponent's total. The concept is certainly sound, but unfortunately it just doesn't fit in as smoothly with football as it does with basketball. The tricks quickly become repetitive, the artificial intelligence of your opponents and team-mates often seems entirely absent and the ball-physics are just a little too unrealistic to be comfortable. At first, it's entertaining, but the play dynamic soon becomes tired and sadly leaves one feeling quite unfulfilled. With copious amounts of refinement, a sequel might be excellent. But as for FIFA Street, it's short-lived and at best mediocre. **NAG**



A beautifully vibrant, loud and memorable experience

VITAL INFO

- **Platforms**
- **PS2**
- **Suggested Retail Price**
R299
- **Developer**
Behemoth
- **Publisher**
Zoo Digital Group
- **Supplier**
Ster Kinekor [011] 445 7900
- **Genre**
Shooter
- **Age Restriction**
16+
- **Specifications**
Players: 1 - 4
Memory: 100KB

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Traffic was congested on the i150, due to an influx of flammable cars, yellow aliens and a giant mechanical bee



ALIEN HOMINID

STARTING ITS LIFE AS a charming little Flash-based game on the popular Website Newgrounds, Alien Hominid became enough of a cult hit to merit a conversion into a full game with all the trimmings. Behemoth has done a stunning job, taking what made Alien Hominid fun in the first place and expanding on it enough to provide a fresh new experience with the same mettle.

Alien Hominid is a traditional 'shooter', along the same lines as games such as Metal Slug. You, the spunky little yellow Alien, stranded on earth, kill the FBI agents who shot down your ship. The game dynamics are traditional to the genre with a few additions. You run and gun, picking up better weapons as you go along. Close quarter combat is a simple button-tap that usually cuts an enemy in half, while grenades do wholesale damage as expected. More interestingly, the Alien can jump on top of an FBI agent's head who then proceeds to run around screaming. Pressing attack will bite the agent's head off, which, if done in full view of other agents, will send them into a screaming panic. It's cute, but also very effective. You can also dive into the ground and pull agents under (with a satisfying little blood spurt to indicate the death of the hapless agent).

The real charm of the game is found in its unique art style. Colours are bright and vibrant with the entire experience animated and visually active. Progression

through each level brings about more interesting scenarios, backdrops and enemies - a true visual feast despite being 2D in an age overwhelmed by 'realistic' 3D graphics.

In terms of difficulty, Alien Hominid is definitely 'tough as nails'. One bullet means death (except if you have a shield which allows a one bullet reprieve), and death happens often. Bosses are ruthless and, until you figure out the pattern of their attacks, expect to die and die again. The whole experience could be considered both frustrating and eerily satisfying, depending on your level of masochism.

Cooperative play is fully supported and wholeheartedly appreciated. Two players can romp through the main game (the extra firepower is a blessing), while up to four players can play the various arbitrary mini-games which are unlocked.

It would be difficult to try and explain the sheer charisma Alien Hominid has. Possibly, it's the traditional (and underutilised) genre, or perhaps it's the chutzpah of the art direction. Regardless, it has both in spades. **NAG**



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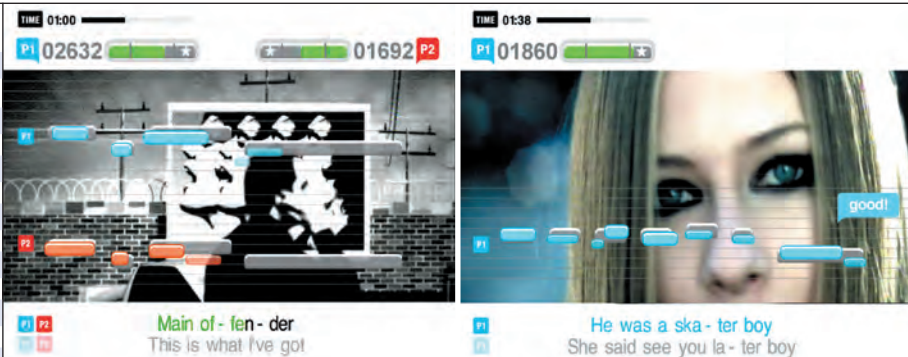
It's more SingStar. Contemporary songs by the bucket load.

60

VITAL INFO

- Platforms
PS2
- Suggested Retail Price
R 219
- Developer
SCEE
- Publisher
SCEE
- Supplier
Ster Kinekor [011] 445 7900
- Genre
Karaoke
- Age Restriction
3+
- Specifications
Players: 1 - 2
Memory: 200KB
Controller Support:
USB Microphone

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SINGSTAR POP

HOT ON THE HEELS of the previous two SingStar titles, SingStar Pop is an obvious expansion to the series featuring an unsurprisingly broad contemporary song selection. All the expected music superstars are here - Avril Lavigne, Jamelia, Keane, Robbie Williams and the Black Eyed Peas. Pretty much everyone who has had some chart-topping song during the last three years. Once again, the classic game modes return, along with the popular 'Pass the Mic' and 'Duet' modes. Aside from some new voice filters during Playback Mode (that distorts or enhances the players' voices), there really isn't anything new.

People desperate for more songs to sing along to (or parents who are tired of hearing their kids singing the same songs over and over), will leap at this opportunity to expand the song selection. Those looking for a slightly more expanded experience, perhaps something more updated, will be disappointed to find that SingStar Pop contains almost zero interface changes from the previous titles and the same amount of new ideas. It's a song expansion disc, and while there is nothing wrong with that, it simply doesn't offer enough to merit its price unless you are really desperate. **NAG**

Sing your heart out, your friends won't laugh

Bomberman + Sports = Entertaining, at the least

68

VITAL INFO

- Platforms
PS2
- Suggested Retail Price
R299
- Developer
Hudson
- Publisher
Ubi Soft
- Supplier
MegaRom [011] 234 2680
- Genre
Action
- Age Restriction
3+
- Specifications
Players: 1 - 4
Memory: 200KB

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BOMBERMAN HARBALL

BOMBERMAN HAS ALWAYS BEEN a popular brand, almost as old as contemporary gaming itself. For some inexplicable reason, Hudson has decided to take the franchise and release an arbitrary sports title with a few extras added on.

At the centre of the entire Hardball experience, is a type of 'life' mode tied to the PS2 system clock. You create a character and it trundles along doing day-to-day activities. Side challenges allow you to unlock customisations to his or her appearance, though it all seems pretty otiose.

Putting the life mode aside, the traditional Bomberman experience thankfully exists in this version. Five different

battle modes allow for up to four player mayhem. Place bombs, blast away blocks and eventually other players. It's simple, but entertaining.

The new twists however, are the included baseball, golf and tennis modes. Each is unfortunately stoically traditional, though the inclusion of multiplayer for each mode redeems them slightly.

On the whole, there isn't anything particularly special about Bomberman Hardball, for despite being a multitude of games, each done reasonable well, it doesn't excel at any one of them. As far as tennis, baseball or golf games go; there are individual titles that achieve much better results. **NAG**

Mr. Bomb is not your friend

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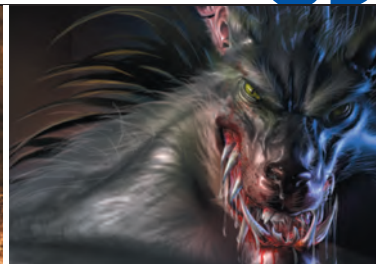


A time warp with a twist. Reasonably entertaining despite signs of age

69

VITAL INFO

- Platforms
PS2
- Suggested Retail Price
R 360
- Developer
WOW Entertainment
- Publisher
SEGA Europe
- Supplier
WWE [011] 462 0150
- Genre
Action
- Age Restriction
16+
- Specifications
Players: 1
Memory: 120KB



ALTERED BEAST

1 988 WAS A MAGICAL year for many reasons. The Sega MegaDrive was released in Japan, Bruce Willis finally found something worthwhile to do in Die Hard and Altered Beast was released around the world to much critical acclaim.

Seventeen years have passed since the original and suddenly a 'remake' appears, attempting to bring back the legacy. While this new Altered Beast is by no means horrible, it doesn't manage to make any lasting impression either. Taking on the role of a 'special' military operative, players explore a small West Coast town and beat up copious amounts of horrible monsters along the way.

While a generic brawler isn't anything special, Altered Beast manages to pull it off quite well. Morphing into one

of the various creatures (once unlocked) is entertaining, each transformation accompanied by a grotesque cinematic scene depicting the painful looking transition. Each creature has its own unique abilities, used to solve certain puzzles or tackle specific monsters. As you progress, you also upgrade the DNA of a creature to assign more powerful attacks and attributes - possibly the most interesting part of the game.

On the whole, Altered Beast doesn't set any standards or really fail to meet any, aside from perhaps a vicious difficulty curve designed to send even the most avid gamer into a rage. The tale of twisted genetic manipulation unfolds at a reasonable pace and is fairly engrossing. **NAG**

Amazingly, utterly horrible in every conceivable way

40

VITAL INFO

- Platforms
PS2
- Suggested Retail Price
R 426
- Developer
Team Ninja
- Publisher
Namco
- Supplier
Ster Kinekor [011] 445 7900
- Genre
Action
- Age Restriction
10+
- Specifications
Players: 1
Memory: 100KB



She was quite sharp

DEATH BY DEGREES

IT IS EASY TO imagine how Death by Degrees came to be. Somewhere high-up in the Namco managerial chain, some bright spark had this idea: "let's take Nina Williams from Tekken, with her voluminous 'assets' and have her debut in her own series where you fight bad guys in 360 degrees using her signature moves!"

Now while that doesn't sound too horrible, somewhere between that wide-eyed bright spark and the end result, someone must have had the idea to add in just the right amount of faecal matter to make the game utterly terrible.

Everything from the 'cutting-edge' right-analogue

stick combat system (stolen from Rise to Honor), to the substandard voice acting and atrocious load-times, adds up to possibly one of the worst games of the year, bar Fight Club. The core concept to the game seems to be the idea of 'sluggish'. Everything from the climbing to the pauses between the transitions from first to third person occurs at a snail pace, so sedate it's almost relaxing. With pause menus (required to check objectives and the map) taking between five to ten seconds to load, its simply pathetic how inexcusably poor this game is. **NAG**



Fresh, irreverent and humorous.
A hit or miss RPG for most.

69

VITAL INFO

- Platforms
XBOX
- Suggested Retail Price
TBA
- Developer
inXile entertainment
- Publisher
Ubisoft
- Supplier
Megarom [011] 234 2680
- Genre
RPG
- Age Restriction
12+
- Specifications
Players: 1



BARD'S TALE

FEW THINGS GO RIGHT for The Bard, the womanising, sardonic protagonist of inXile's provisional RPG. It's amazing how his tactless wit, brazen attitude and painful disregard for the feelings of others bring him so much grief.

At heart, Bard's Tale is a moderately solid action RPG that, while failing to live up to its peers in this generation, makes up for it's shortcomings with a wonderful critique and parody of it's own existence and genre. It would be easy to disregard the game based only on its mechanics. The combat system is obtuse, the enemies unnecessarily abusive and

overall, the game comes across as shallow. There is little to no micromanagement of your character and the entire experience is mundane and flat.

As mentioned, that's only the case if you regard it solely on its game mechanics, disregarding the other aspects that make Bard's Tale such a likeable dungeon crawling experience regardless.

There isn't an easy way to summarise what makes Bard's Tale such an oddity - being likeable despite constituting such a substandard game on its own. Part of its amicable quality comes from its hit-or-miss, tongue-in-cheek humour (the way it parodies such a hidebound genre). Very little is spared. Even the classic tale of 'The Chosen One' (out to save the princess, of course) is queerly mocked (by monsters, no less), complete with sing-along singsongs where a little ball bounces on each word if you wish to join in. The Bard's own meandering adventure is given gravely sarcastic overtones by an often confused baritone narrator who simply can't seem to grasp certain concepts (such as an entire treasure chest popping out of a slain wolf), but takes every available chance to berate The Bard for being such a failure.

Laughter seems to be the best medicine for the ailment of a substandard game. **NAG**

Happy with just coin and cleavage



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EA/01

Its specific charm rubs off on you, but wears off all too soon

VITAL INFO

- Platforms
DS
- Suggested Retail Price
R 360
- Developer
Sonic Team
- Publisher
SEGA
- Supplier
Nintendo [011] 256 7760
- Genre
Puzzle
- Age Restriction
12+
- Specifications
Players: 1



PROJECT RUB

YOU SIMPLY HAVE TO love wacky attempts at being different, even when they don't make particularly amazing games. Project Rub is a bizarre collection of mini-games that have you flicking, poking, stroking and rubbing your way along, trying to win the affections of a girl. It's not as kinky as it sounds, however. The overall theme and premise is curiously compelling, with a level of wonder and satisfaction often eclipsing the infuriation and irritation certain ambiguous concepts in the mini-games can bring.

Memorably, Project Rub attempts to take full advantage of every function the Nintendo DS has to offer. Aside from rubbing aside spiky balls in the path of characters in shopping carts, other mini-games involve blowing on the microphone to snuff out candles that are about to burn people, or even giving CPR in the form of timed taps on the heart and blowing into the microphone.

While there is a lot to adore about Project Rub, there



is a lot to disdain, especially the lack of longevity. Once completed (after a scant few hours), there is no reason to ever play it again aside from perhaps collecting pointless bits of clothing for the arbitrary 'love interest' dress-up mode. Regardless, the utterly weird world of poking balls to vomiting goldfish brings a welcome introduction to the Nintendo DS' ideas and is its own unique and rewarding experience. **NAG**

Vexing and entertaining, but entirely too shallow to last

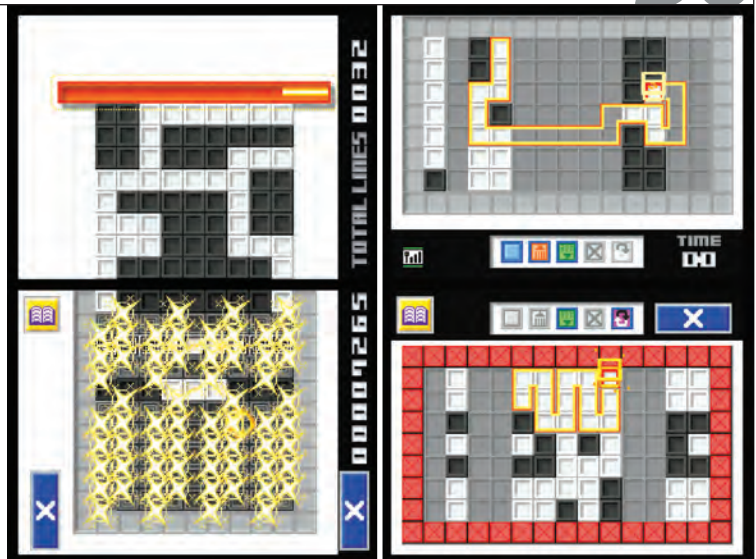
VITAL INFO

- Platforms
DS
- Suggested Retail Price
R 270
- Developer
Nintendo
- Publisher
Nintendo
- Supplier
Nintendo [011] 256 7760
- Genre
Puzzle
- Age Restriction
3+
- Specifications
Players: 1 - 2

POLARIUM

IT STARTS OFF WITH a simple enough premise. Using the stylus on the bottom screen of the DS, you draw lines which flip tiles below it from black to white, or white to black. Once a horizontal line is entirely one colour, it will disappear.

The end result of such a simple system is a cold and uninvolved game, too subtle and plain to be a truly engaging puzzler. Polarium is both basic in visuals and in content. The lofty Puzzle mode contains around a hundred puzzles that are solved by drawing one line, each puzzle seemingly impossible, until you figure it out and move on to the next impossible one. Interestingly, you can design your own puzzles for this mode and send them to a friend wirelessly, but it holds very little appeal. The more traditional Challenge mode sees you drawing lines quickly to reverse the 'polarity' of patterns that fall from the top of



the screen - the further you get, the faster patterns fall.

Wireless multiplayer features, but remains untested.

Even with its shortcomings, Polarium is a useful distraction when there simply isn't anything else to do. This doesn't make it a good game, however. As a meagre showcase for the capabilities of the DS, Polarium could easily have been addictive, but simply isn't. **NAG**



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TECH NEWS

Xbox 360

This coming Christmas season will see the arrival of two models of Microsoft's upcoming Xbox 360. It is expected that about 80% of the manufactured units will be premium versions, which will ship with hard drives and, it is rumoured, Microsoft's WebTV system. This is Microsoft's foray into multimedia in the living room. The lower end version will essentially be sold as a games-only system, while the premium version will handle media tasks, such as TV and streaming video, as well as Internet access and e-mail applications. Sony's PlayStation 3 is expected to be released in a variety of models, too, including a basic console version and a home media server version. Both of these are expected next year.



ALIENWARE STAR WARS PCS

Where will merchandising end? Alienware has released a system based on AMD's Athlon 64 FX-55 CPU that ships, swathed in Star Wars themes. Two variants are available – Light Side and Dark Side (of course). The artwork on the cases reflects the respective version and wallpapers and desktop skins ship with the machines to match the theme.

"Star Wars indisputably ranks as one of the most

popular movie franchises of all time, yet had never been featured on a PC, so Alienware worked with Star Wars to fill that void," said Robert Lusk, vice president of sales and marketing for Alienware. "The result of this collaboration, the Aurora: Star Wars Edition offers an irresistible mix of both visual appeal and power that is sure to make an unforgettable impression."

[www.alienware.co.uk]





SILVER PS2 SLIMLINE

Sony has announced the availability of a Satin Silver model of their slimline PS2 console. A range of Satin Silver accessories will also be on offer ranging from a vertical stand, Dualshock 2 controllers, memory card and DVD remote to a silver EyeToy camera.

David Reeves, President of SCEE said, "When we introduced the new slimline PlayStation 2 in November last year we delighted consumers with its compact size and elegant style, and hundreds of thousands of existing PlayStation 2 owners upgraded to the slimline model. The new silver model takes the elegance and beauty of PlayStation 2 to new heights. With over 30 million PlayStation 2 consoles in households across Europe, the new Satin Silver model will secure the position of PlayStation 2 as the games console of choice for the keen, and now fashionable gamer."

Windows XP X64 Edition Released

After a long wait, Microsoft finally released its 64-bit operating system. At a small press conference held recently Microsoft launched both the 64-bit version of Windows as well as Windows Server 2003 x64. One of the key features of this new operating system is that it is now able to address up to 128 gigabytes (GB) of RAM and 16 terabytes of virtual memory.

Microsoft also announced its Technology Advancement Program which will allow users who bought a copy of Windows XP Professional for their 64-bit computers to upgrade it to Windows XP X64 for free.

Technological Furniture



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Asus W3V Notebook Series

This new range of laptops from Asus is aimed at the mobile gaming market.

Features include a 14-inch screen, Radeon Mobility X600 (128MB) graphics, up to 80GB of hard drive space, up to 2GB of DDR II 400/533 memory, and a variety of connectivity options including

Bluetooth, Ethernet (up to gigabit) and 802.11a/b/g. A special drive bay can accommodate an additional drive (magnetic or optical) or an additional battery - this bay is hot-swappable. The W3V is also able to play music without having to boot into the operating system.

Finally, the Power4 Gear+ power-saving technology has eight presets for different applications and routes power accordingly to various devices (sending none to devices that don't need it, thus reducing wastage).



VIEWSONIC 19"

ViewSonic has released an LCD monitor optimised for peak gaming performance. The 19" VX924 delivers a 4ms video response time ensuring that gaming, videos and graphic intensive applications are viewed at their optimum. Other features include a native resolution of 1280x1024, wide viewing angles and analogue/digital inputs.

NEW AOPEN FASHION CASES

The new EZ Solution range of cases features two lifestyle-oriented models. The Impression design is available in silver and black, and carries an additional silent fan in the front for enhanced cooling, as well as a variety of front-accessible ports. The higher-end Nouveau adds a stylish art-deco look, and is made from aluminium in order to keep weight low. It also totally overkills the drive space issue - four 5¼-inch bays and seven 3½-inch bays. These cases are available locally from Rectron.





NEW POWER SUPPLY FROM COREX

Corex has introduced the Thermaltake PurePower range of PSUs which emphasises a modular design, meaning that superfluous cables don't clutter the PC's interior and impede airflow. A graphical meter displays total system consumption. The PSUs come with the full range of modern cables and adapters. [www.corex.co.za]

Nintendo to use Broadcom Wi-Fi

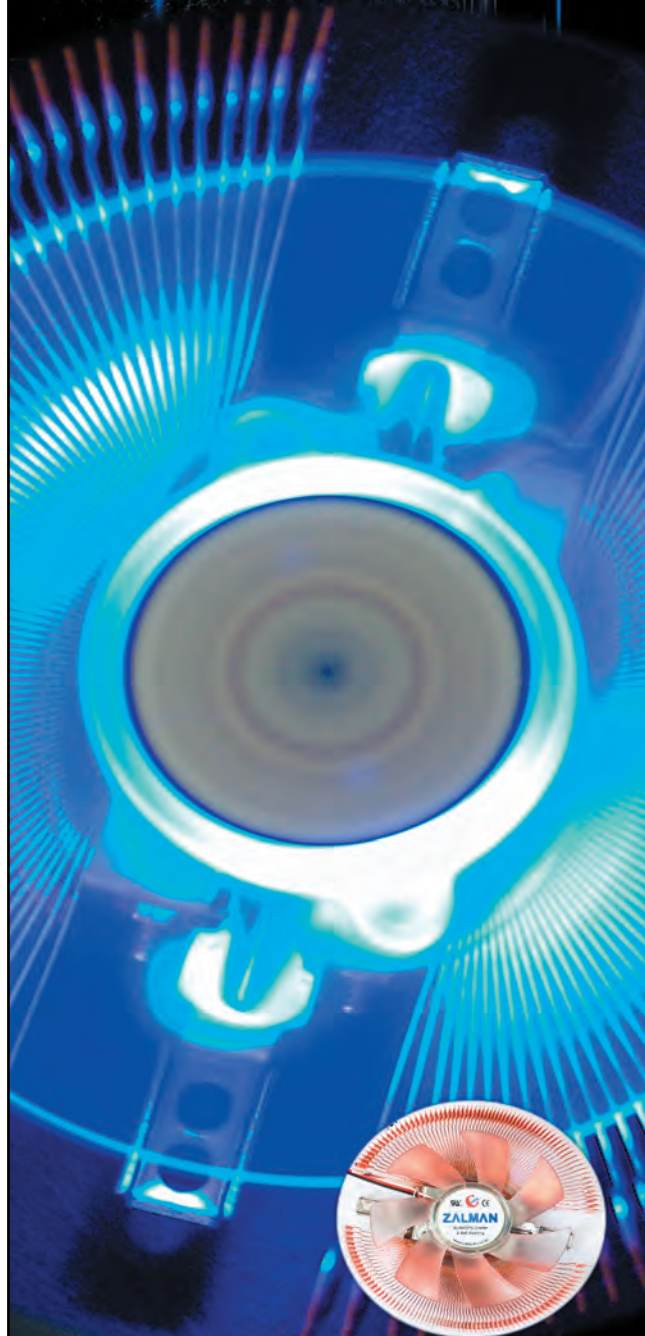
A sketchy announcement by Nintendo and Broadcom indicates that the latter's wireless technology will be used in Nintendo's next-generation console, Revolution. The emphasis appears to be on ease of use and good transmission ranges. Rumours also hint that the implementation of Bluetooth may mean that the console's peripherals may also make use of wireless connectivity.



BLUEANT'S BLUETOOTH MP3 PLAYER HEADPHONES

These innovative, but expensive, headphones contain a standalone MP3/WMA player with 128MB of storage. Although storage capacity is rather small, the headphones can also be used as a hands-free headset with a Bluetooth-enabled cellphone. Data transfer takes place via Bluetooth, so the device can be used as a small portable drive for carrying files around. [www.blueant.com.au]

ZALMAN



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ZALMANN TNN 500AF

WE MAY HAVE BEEN very vocal in the past about our dislike of silent cooling systems, particularly those aimed at the gaming market, due to the fact that the vast majority of these solutions simply don't work when running high-end hardware under the demands of modern gaming titles.

But the Zalman TNN 500AF is something else altogether. It is without a doubt the most advanced PC case we have ever tested, not to mention one of the heaviest weighing in at a portly 26kg. Which by the way, is 1kg more than its predecessor, the TNN 500A.

That TNN acronym stands for 'Totally No Noise', and this solution is designed to be able to run the most high-end gaming hardware available today with zero noise and no heat problems. The astonishing weight is mostly as a result of the sides of the case being essentially huge finned heat sinks. A good deal more of the weight is evident when you swing the unit open for the first time, and notice no less than three large heat blocks, complete with heat pipes, attached to the underside tray of the 500AF and one smaller block affixed to the inside rear as well. We'll get back to these blocks later.

Once you've figured out how to open the beast, installation is actually relatively straightforward, but requires some surgery to your existing hardware to give its best. This is because those blocks, mentioned in the previous paragraph, all need connecting to various components of your system via custom solutions, included in the box, which need to be fitted first. Most notably, there's a VGA card heat pipe system supporting all the popular modern gaming boards which, quite frankly, had us very concerned thanks to some well-documented history with this sort of device and a cherished 9800 Pro.

Once the components are fully

prepped, fitting them all together in the case, complete with their associated heat pipes, is tricky but ultimately not that difficult. There are two separate CPU heat blocks, a massive VGA heat block, which can move to suit your system, and the small rear-mounted block which attaches to the top of your Northbridge cooler.

The TNN 500AF comes with its own fanless 400W PSU, a fully-featured front panel with additional USB ports, a FireWire port, audio connectors, and even an IR receiver unit and a very useful in-case lamp, all of which are neatly cabled and labelled and therefore a breeze to plug onto your board. An HDD heat pipe based cooling system rounds off the package nicely.

The 3GHz LGA 775 Pentium 4 system, complete with a X800-based PCI Express graphics card and a couple of SATA hard disks, ran eerily silently



VITAL INFO

■ Pros

Totally silent, totally cool and totally stable

■ Cons

Hernia risk - not for LAN parties

■ Supplier

Frontosa [011] 466 0038

■ Internet

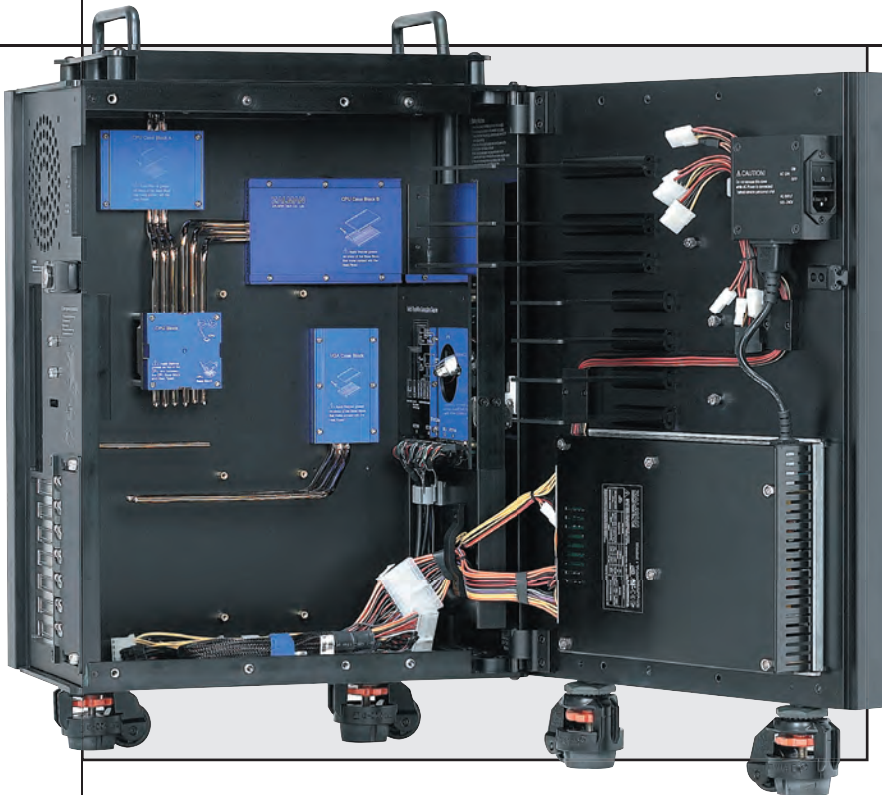
www.frontosa.co.za

■ RRP

R7399

■ Reviewer

Russell Bennett



especially in a back to back comparison with the same system in a standard case using Intel's OEM Smart Cooling solution. Although the TNN includes large round venting holes which look like they should house 120mm case fans, there are absolutely no more fans to generate noise or vibrations, and yet it manages to run cooler than it normally does.

Those heat blocks and copper heat pipes criss-crossing this Zalman offering work wonders, with an average ten degree temperature improvement under load and an even bigger 14 degree variance when idle. What's more, the 400W PSU supplies very stable and clean power throughout - the lack of electric fan motors makes the TNN more power-efficient than a system relying on such units for heat dissipation.

The 500AF even includes its own remote control; hence the IR receiver unit in the front panel construction, which can be used to control the system from a distance for multimedia operations.

OK, so it isn't very mobile at 26kg, despite running on smooth castors. What it is, is absolutely silent (the soft clicking and whirring of the two SATA drives started to sound like the Niagara Falls after running this system for a while), very cool and very stable. It definitely is one of the best constructed cases we have ever seen from any manufacturer - even those specialising in custom PC case building.

Want a silent PC without sacrificing any power or getting worried about overheating in our sweaty SA summers? Forget those piecemeal solutions that just don't work. The TNN 500AF is the only way to go. **NAG**

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ATLANTIC WAVE CF200-NEB

STRIVING TOWARD A SIMPLE external liquid cooling solution, Atlantic Wave almost gets it right with the CF200-NEB. At first glance the CF200 looks promising, but does fall short of expectations.

The impressive looking external aluminium cooling unit weighs just over 1.3kg and features an integrated blue LCD screen on the front panel just above a translucent blue water gauge. For the control of all the various functions, the CF200 has an aluminium control knob located here as well. The blue LCD screen is only really clearly visible from within a fairly small viewing angle, but provides both the thermal sensor reading as well as the unit's fan rpm. The unit uses an integrated thermal sensor wire (located at the rear) which is attached as close to the CPU die as possible, in order to determine the CPU temperature. This is then used to calculate the desired CPU temperature as well as activate the alarm. The large control knob is easy to use and allows one to control the internal fan rpm (fan rpm can be adjusted from a fairly quiet 1550rpm to a noisy 3210rpm). Located on the upper surface of the unit is an integrated 80mm fan shielded by a silver fan grill.

Two pipes (one blue and another red, denoting water temperature and direction of travel) protrude from the rear of the unit and end 90cm from their source as open tubes. These are then just simply pushed through a bracket inserted at the rear of the computer and onto the water block's plastic nipples and secured with plastic 'mounting nuts'. This process is effortless and quick, but tends to leave one wondering about the potential disaster which may occur with the use of plastic connectors.

The CPU water block is made from copper and has a transparent plastic (blue tinted) circular dome atop its upper surface. This dome houses the two nipples and consists of the channel for the water to flow over the top of the water block. Being transparent, one can see the water flowing along the channel as well as the dimpled upper surface of the water block. This dimpling allows for more surface area as well as agitating the water to encourage heat transfer.

The package is Spartan compared to rival manufacturers', with Atlantic Wave merely shipping

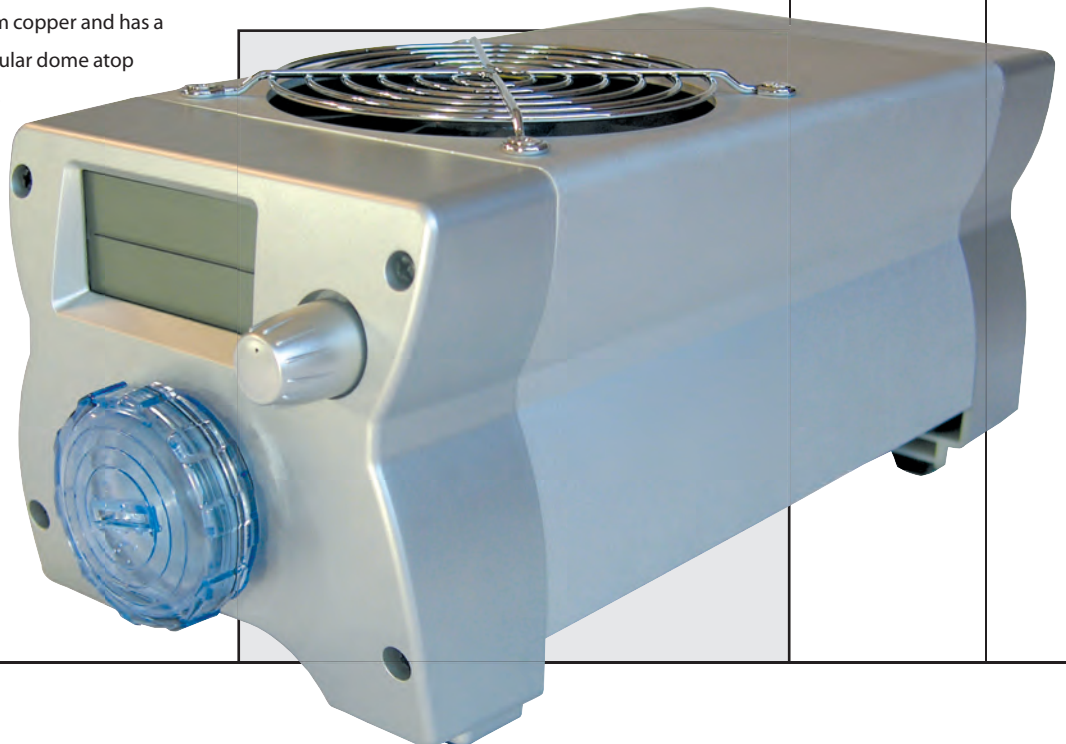
the External Heat exchanger and CPU water block with associated piping, thermal paste and mounting clips.

While the assembly of the system is incredibly easy, the bleeding of the trapped air is more than cumbersome, if not impossible. This is a major flaw of the CF200, as one of the main criteria of a liquid cooling system is that its thermally conductive liquid be as 'dense' as possible. The denser the fluid, the more heat it's able to absorb. Air trapped within the cooling liquid acts as a buffer, thus inhibiting its ability to absorb heat and therefore lowering the system's cooling ability. These fine air bubbles, churned up by the CF200's pump, were later accumulated within the water block, almost directly over the CPU core, and were responsible for the poor results achieved.

This was evident in testing, as the CF200 was unable to lower temperatures by more than 8°C over that of stock air cooling. This level of water cooling is not justified as air cooling can match these thermal figures with more than likely the same amount of noise as generated by the CF200's internal fan set to its maximum.

Another disappointment was the lack of a comprehensive manual. The CF200 ships with a three page document that is somewhat cryptic.

Although Atlantic Wave has a great looking external cooler with much potential, they have to find a way of making the unit less difficult to purge of air. In addition, most liquid cooling kits these days make provision for GPUs to be cooled together with the CPU. This lack of additional cooling (coupled with the system's flaws) is bound to hurt the CF200's success. **NAG**



VITAL INFO

■ Pros

Looks the part
Control button easy to operate
Ease and speed of assembly

■ Cons

Cooling ability
Difficult to purge of air
Does get noisy
Requires its own power supply

■ Supplier

Eurobyte [011] 234 0142

■ Internet

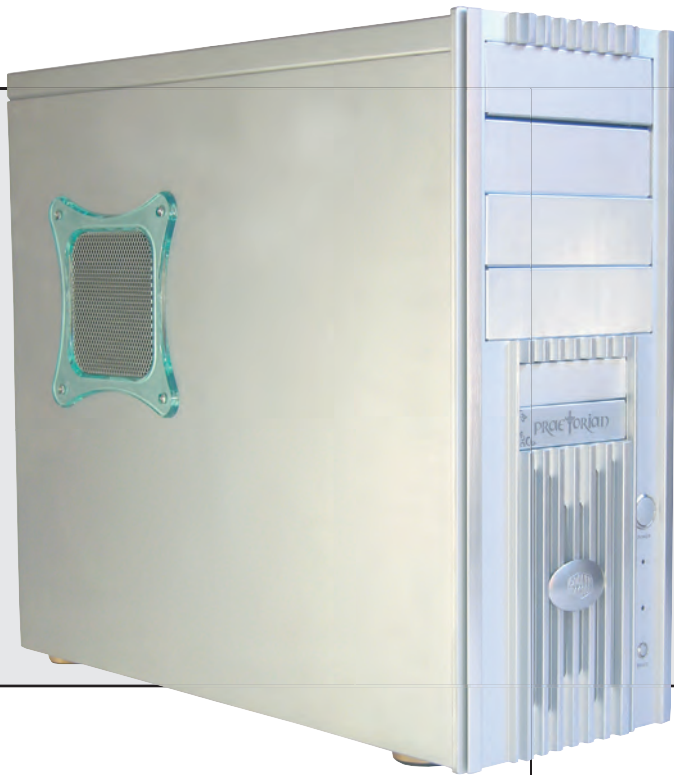
www.eurobyte.co.za

■ RRP

TBA

■ Reviewer

Victor Moore



COOLERMMASTER PRAETORIAN 731

A MEGA-STYLISH CASE LIKE THE CoolerMaster Praetorian 731 would seem to be the ideal housing for all those tasty gaming goodies you've packed into your pride and joy. It also has practical benefits, as its all aluminium structure and brace of case fans are intended to ensure that none of your high-powered gaming hardware causes embarrassing overheating issues.

Aesthetically, the CoolerMaster is more than up to the job in our opinion. The lovely brushed aluminium finish, vertical aluminium ribbing up the front and Praetorian label on one of the two 3½-inch drive covers look the business right from the start. The little flap protecting the front-panel connectors, situated on the top of the unit, is a good idea too, although you will find yourself cursing it when you've brushed it and it pops open for the umpteenth time while you fiddle inside your machine.

The aluminium construction, combined with no less than four case fans built into the box (plus one included for keeping your PSU cool), combine to keep system temperatures

down quite impressively. The Socket 939 Athlon 64 system we built into it was steady at 48°C under load in a conventional case, while the Praetorian kept the temperature down at 35°C. And that with only two of the four case fans powered up, as not many motherboards have the headers to plug in all four separate power plugs.

The downside? Well, we feel a bit like motoring journalists nit-picking at a low-volume sport car's imperfect paint finish here, but aluminium is a rather soft metal. As a result, the construction feels and looks a bit off, with large panel gaps at the front and holes at the base, for motherboard supports, that just don't take being screwed into very positively. **NAG**

VITAL INFO

Pros	Excellent system cooling properties
Cons	Aluminium panels feel soft and bendable
Supplier	Rectron [011] 203 1000
Internet	www.rectron.net
RRP	R1100
Reviewer	Russell Bennett



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EVERCOOL WC-202 ULTRA WATER COOLER KIT

EVERCOOL BREAKS FORTH FROM the mould to give us their new WC-202 Ultra Water Cooler Kit.

The kit comes in an extremely well packaged box consisting of the CPU and GPU water block, antifreeze liquid, an enhanced radiator unit, the main heat dissipating unit (pump and controls), silica gel tubes, thermal paste, a temperature sensor wire and all the necessary bits and pieces to mount the two water blocks to either AMD K7, K8 or Intel P4 Socket T, Socket 478 or Intel P3 processors and to most video cards. (An optional HDD cooling block can be purchased for use with the kit).

Assembly of the unit is a little tricky and requires some preparation prior to the final installation within the case. Once the system has been purged of air and is full of water and red antifreeze, it is relatively easy to install and operate.

The main unit and internals are aesthetically very pleasing and they boost confidence in the water kit's ability. This coupled with solid water blocks, thick piping and near leak proof connections, makes the kit a visually compelling purchase.

The main heat dissipation unit is installed in an available 5¼-inch drive bay, and boasts an LCD readout of either the current temperature reading or fan rpm. In addition, the display indicates the 'status' of the pump and fan operation, or lack thereof, which is linked to an audible alarm. A rotary button is located on the face of the unit and is used to increase its internal cooling fan speed, thus increasing the unit's cooling efficiency. (The main unit's internal fan speed did not seem to make much difference in the reported temperatures under load though.)

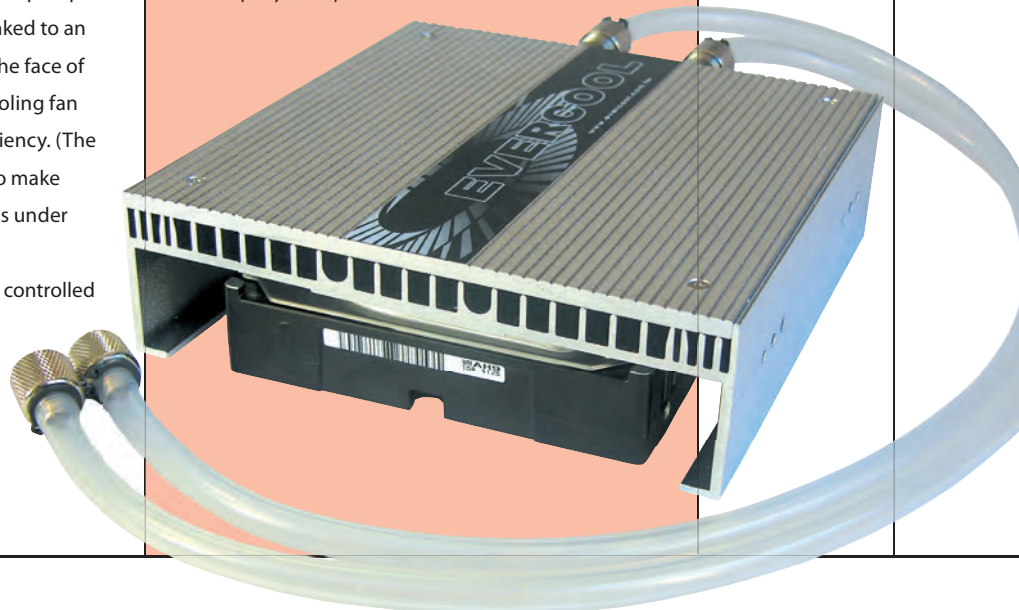
The radiator unit's large fan is automatically controlled by the main unit, and is dependant on the chosen maximum threshold temperature.

In terms of efficiency, the WC-202 is very effective, with an average drop in temperature of between 10-15°C (even at full tilt). **NAG**



Evercool Water Cooler Component Kit

THE EVERCOOL HARD DRIVE water cooler is an accessory for the Evercool water cooling kit. In the box you will find a large hard aluminium chassis which fits over a hard drive as well as noise dampening screws and brackets to fasten the hard drive to this chassis. Also included are two water pipes that you can attach to your Evercool water cooler kit. Inside the hard drive water cooler is an array of fins as well as a small water block which helps to draw the heat away from the hard drive. The only thing you 'need' to install this cooler, is an open 5¼-inch drive bay inside your case. The hard drive water cooler works very well and is highly recommended for drives that tend to run hot - such as speedy 10000rpm drives.



VITAL INFO

■ **Pros**

Integrates easily into the system
Supports many platforms

■ **Cons**

Possible water spillage on setup-needs to be assembled outside the case

■ **Supplier**

Naked IT [011] 678 1288

■ **Internet**

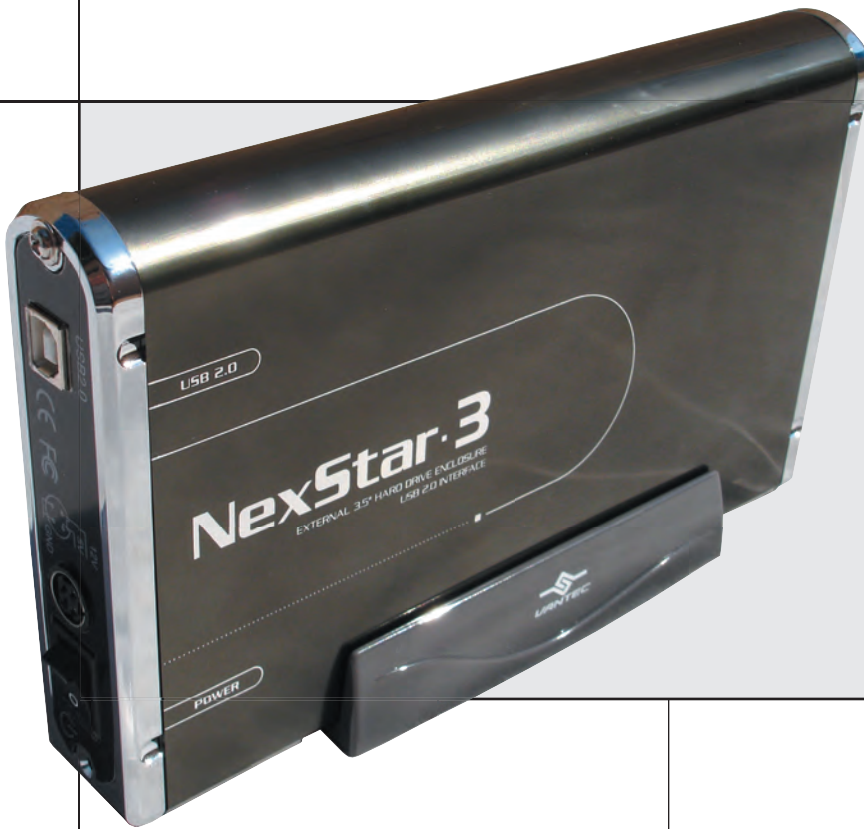
www.nakedit.co.za

■ **RRP**

R999-Water Cooler Kit

■ **Reviewer**

Victor Moore



VANTEC NEXSTAR 3

DURING THE COURSE OF last year we had a look at both the original NexStar and subsequent NexStar 2 units, and at the time judged them useful if a bit flimsy. Vantec has now released the NexStar 3, which goes a long way towards dispelling these concerns. The NexStar 3 presses all the right buttons in terms of aesthetics and before even plugging a drive into the unit it gets our thumbs up.

The glossy, black casing with shiny chrome detailing is a winning combination, there's no doubt. Even the blue backlit Vantec logo which flashes with hard disk activity adds to the appeal. What's more, the highly attractive looks are supported by superb construction elements. The NexStar 3 is made mostly from aluminium to enhance cooling properties, and unlike so many aluminium products which sacrifice thermal advantages for outright strength, this chassis remains commendably stiff and almost entirely vibration free thanks to its quality build.

Inserting the drive is easy and the case is so stiff it feels as though your

drive would be completely safe even if you didn't have screws to secure it properly. The drive enclosure itself slides snugly into the external cover, with

just a bit of cable-repositioning needed for it to close up.

The USB 2.0 to IDE interface is fast too, managing a credible 15000Kbps transfer speed using an older, 40GB 7200 RPM ATA 100 disk. The same drive on an internal IDE bus manages around 15500, so there's almost no penalty in the move to mobile.

As a package, the NexStar 3 is in our opinion an unrivalled external hard disk enclosure. The only criticism we can level at it now, is that it doesn't include any other connectivity options like FireWire for instance; it is exclusively a USB unit. **NAG**

VITAL INFO

Pros	Downright gorgeous looks Solid build Comes in four colours
Cons	USB only
Supplier	Frontosa [011] 466 0038
Internet	www.frontosa.co.za
RRP	R550
Reviewer	Russell Bennett

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HARDCOR3

HEADPHONES

THE HEADSET IS ONE of the gamer's most important pieces of gear. Not only does it allow you to listen to your game audio while at a LAN, but it also allows you to play games late at night without disturbing the household. As you can imagine, there is a wide variety of headphones currently on the market, and even though most of them are not targeted at the gaming sector, most of them do a pretty great job when it comes to gaming. About the only feature we feel is crucial to a headphone used for gaming, is an in-line volume control. This feature allows you to adjust your audio levels while busy with a game without having to Alt+Tab to your desktop to adjust it from your task bar.

HOW WE TESTED

While reviewing the headphones for this month's roundup, we played some games and listened to some of our favourite songs, really loud. The game most suited to testing the headphones was Doom III, purely because it features such great audio effects, while the music we listened to was a mix between Rock and some good old fashioned 'doof-doof'. We also looked at the comfort factor of each headphone as we feel that it is one of the most important aspects of any headphone, because it is most likely to be used for long periods of time.

Disclaimer:
Please note
that no
coconuts were
harmed during
the writing of
this article!

PLANTRONICS GAMECOM PRO1

The GameCom Pro1 is definitely one of the best headphones we have tested to date.

It is almost identical to the Gamecom 1 except for the fact that the GameCom

Pro1 features a USB DSP (Digital Signal Processing) box - so there is no need for a sound card if you use this headset.

The sound it produces is very loud and crisp thanks to the DSP box. The GameCom Pro1 also has an in-line volume controller and the volume control is digital instead of analogue. As with the Gamecom 1, this unit is also well designed and shouldn't be uncomfortable when used for long periods of time.

WIRED



VITAL INFO

- **Plus**
Loud, crisp sound
- **Minus**
Price
- **Supplier**
Plantronics 0800 22 0202
- **Internet**
www.plantronics.co.za
- **RRP**
R940

VALUE SOUND COMFORT
90 95 90

OVERALL

91



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MANHATTAN 5.1 SURROUND SOUND HEADSET

Manhattan took a slightly different approach with its 5.1 surround sound headset. For one thing, it doesn't plug directly into a sound card. Instead, it uses a USB audio box. This audio box amplifies and converts sound to Dolby Digital and DTS surround. The benefit to this setup is that you do not need a 5.1 sound card. But on the flipside, you will not be able to use it with your existing 5.1 sound card. The headset itself is very comfortable and even though it sports 5.1 sound, it isn't much bigger than a regular set of headphones. The in-line volume controller also allows you to adjust the channels to your liking.



VITAL INFO

Plus	Great sound quality Removable mic included	
Minus	Can't plug into sound card	
Supplier	Esquire [012] 657-1111	
Internet	www.esquire.co.za	
RRP	R799	
VALUE	SOUND	COMFORT
80	85	75
OVERALL		
76		



ZALMAN ZM-RS6F

Zalman was the first company to introduce a 5.1 surround headset, which in essence is a great idea. The ZM-RS6F requires a 5.1 soundcard in order to reproduce surround sound which is great for late night gaming. We were, however, a little disappointed with the treble sounds which dominated the bass sound. The headset is foldable for easy transport. Unfortunately, this makes the headset feel flimsy and it doesn't fit very firmly. We also missed the in-line volume controller that, we feel, is a necessity for gaming headsets these days.

VITAL INFO

Plus	5.1 surround sound	
Minus	Flimsy design No in-line volume controller	
Supplier	Frontosa [011] 466-0038	
Internet	www.frontosa.co.za	
RRP	R465	
VALUE	SOUND	COMFORT
75	75	70
OVERALL		
80		

SONY MDR-IF540RK

If you want a great cordless headset for watching DVDs, listening to music, or to use with your PC, then this offering from Sony is definitely the one to get. This kit consists of a transceiver that connects to your audio port (or DVD player) and it doubles as a cradle charger for your headset. The headset is very comfortable and we love the fact that the headset switches off when you remove it from your head and automatically switches on again when you place it on your head. The sound quality is superb and we were very pleased with the results while playing games and listening to music.



WIRELESS

VITAL INFO

Plus	Sound quality Cordless	
Minus	Needs line of sight	
Supplier	Sony [011] 690-3555	
Internet	www.sony.co.za	
RRP	R999	
VALUE	SOUND	COMFORT
85	95	90
OVERALL		
90		



COREX

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Front Blue LED (Flashing when in use)



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PREMIUM KH-18MV

We were fairly impressed with this headset and the sound quality it produced was not too bad, although deep tones and bass sounds were not reproduced as effectively as we would have liked. The Premium KH-18MV also sounded slightly softer than some of the other units in this roundup. Both the headband and the earpieces are heavily padded, although the adjustable headband felt a little too flimsy. An adjustable microphone branches from the left earpiece, but the boom on which the microphone is placed is not very sturdy.



VITAL INFO

Plus
 Price | Heavy padding
Minus
 Sound quality lacks bass
Supplier
 Timeline Computer
 [011] 791-7799
Internet
 www.suntech.co.za
RRP
 R75
 VALUE SOUND COMFORT
80 70 80
 OVERALL **76**

PREMIUM KH-21 MIV

The KH-21 MIV is not just an ordinary set of headphones; it features enhanced bass vibration which can be fun if used for short periods of time, but becomes quite annoying if used for too long. The bass vibration is powered by two AAA batteries which are placed in the in-line volume controller. There are two levels for bass vibration: normal and maximum (we found normal to be great for most games). Switching this feature off dropped the sound quality drastically and made the KH-21 MIV perform on par with the Premium KH-18MV. The microphone that stems from the left earpiece was also a bit too flimsy for our liking.



VITAL INFO

Plus
 Bass vibration is fun
Minus
 Gets annoying after a while
Supplier
 Timeline Computer
 [011] 791-7799
Internet
 www.suntech.co.za
RRP
 R125
 VALUE SOUND COMFORT
80 75 80
 OVERALL **78**

SENNHEISER PC155

The Sennheiser pc155 is pretty standard. It features conformable padding on its earpieces while the headband also has soft padding. Protruding from the left earpiece you will find a microphone which can flip down when needed. In the middle of the microphone's boom is a bendable section which will allow you to place it closer or further away from your mouth. The sound quality was impressive and we were pleased with its performance during our gaming sessions.



VITAL INFO

Plus
 Great sound quality
Minus
 Very expensive
Supplier
 Sennheiser [011] 482-2501
Internet
 www.sennheiser.co.za
RRP
 R1290
 VALUE SOUND COMFORT
65 85 85
 OVERALL **78**

ALTEC LANSING AHP-512

The Altec Lansing AHP-512 headphones are very comfortable, featuring padding on both the headband and the earpieces. This particular model is not directly aimed at the gaming market (which is why you will not find a microphone attached to it). The sound quality it produced was more than acceptable for both gaming and listening to music. About the only aspect we could find fault with on this headset was that when you use it at low volumes, the sound is well balanced and produces sufficient bass for an enjoyable experience, but when you turn the in-line volume controller to full, the bass seems to fade while the treble dominates the sound.



VITAL INFO

Plus
 Comfortable
Minus
 Lacks bass at high volumes
Supplier
 Esquire [012] 657-1111
Internet
 www.esquire.co.za
RRP
 R199
 VALUE SOUND COMFORT
80 70 85
 OVERALL **78**



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ALTEC LANSING AHP-212

This headset from Altec Lansing looks flimsy, but we were pleasantly surprised when we used it. This unit fits around the back of your neck, as opposed to over your head, which makes it very comfortable. A thin plastic strap ensures that it fits tightly against your neck. The sound quality was not the best we have heard and sadly, the AHP-212 suffers from the same symptoms as the AHP-512 when the volume on the in-line volume controller is turned up. The only other problem is that its cord is awfully short, and unless you have front audio connectors, you will not be able to use these with your case standing on the floor next to your desk.



VITAL INFO

- **Plus**
Loud volume | Comfortable
- **Minus**
Lacks bass at loud volumes
- **Supplier**
Esquire [012] 657-1111
- **Internet**
www.esquire.co.za
- **RRP**
R159

VALUE	SOUND	COMFORT
80	75	80
OVERALL		
78		

PLANTRONICS GAMECOM 1

The Plantronics Gamecom 1 looks very plain in comparison to some of the other headsets in this roundup, but it is far from it. This unit features very soft earpieces that are comfortable to use for long periods of time. The earpieces are also mounted on a swivel base making them comfortable for most ear types. On the left earpiece is a fold down microphone with adjustable boom which can be muted with the in-line volume controller. The sound quality of this headset was great, although it lacked some bass in certain games, while its music playback capabilities were crisp.



VITAL INFO

- **Plus**
Sound quality | Comfortable
- **Minus**
Lacked bass in certain games
- **Supplier**
Plantronics 0800 22 0202
- **Internet**
www.plantronics.co.za
- **RRP**
R329

VALUE	SOUND	COMFORT
90	85	90
OVERALL		
88		

LOGITECH EXTREME PC GAMING

Logitech is known for its great product range, but sadly the Extreme PC Gaming headset fell short in various aspects. The headset wraps around the back of your head and the earpieces fit snug against your ears. On the left earpiece there is a microphone which has a bendable boom that allows you to position the microphone to your liking. Disappointingly, the wraparound headset was a tad uncomfortable as there was little space between the earpieces and the part that wraps over the ear. The sound also lacked, and when turning the volume up, you will find that the bass drops while the treble seems to overpower it.



VITAL INFO

- **Plus**
In-line volume controller
- **Minus**
Not very comfortable
- **Supplier**
DCS [011] 466 5099
- **Internet**
www.logitech.com
- **RRP**
R319

VALUE	SOUND	COMFORT
75	75	70
OVERALL		
73		

LOGITECH PRECISION GAMING HEADSET

This behind-the-head headphone is by far one of Logitech's most comfortable headsets. The large foam earpieces fit snugly over the ear, while the actual speaker is placed at an angle which makes it fit comfortably against your ear. These headphones also fit fairly tight, so they will not slide off your head. On the right side you will find a fold down microphone. The in-line volume and microphone mute controller is handy, although the volume control knob is sluggish and difficult to use with your thumb or index finger. Sadly, this headset also lacked bass sound in the sound it produced.



VITAL INFO

- **Plus**
Comfortable
- **Minus**
Sound lacks bass | Sluggish in-line volume controller
- **Supplier**
DCS [011] 466 5099
- **Internet**
www.logitech.com
- **RRP**
R429

VALUE	SOUND	COMFORT
80	75	90
OVERALL		
81		

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www.viewsonic.com

MM GEAR EXTREME DUAL STEREO HEADPHONE

MM Gear is a fairly new brand in South Africa. The Extreme Dual Stereo Headphone is small and foldable. This, sadly, is also the cause of its flimsy construction. Wearing it also felt a little uncomfortable as it didn't feel solid and its earpieces didn't fit as snug as we would have liked. The sound quality produced by this headset was not particularly impressive and it lacked bass. For portable audio devices this is a great headset, but it is not recommended for gaming.



VITAL INFO

- Plus**
Compact | Foldable
- Minus**
Sound quality
- Supplier**
Frontosa [011] 466-0038
- Internet**
www.frontosa.co.za
- RRP**
R259

VALUE	SOUND	COMFORT
80	70	70
OVERALL		
73		

PHILIPS HP 800

Most of the Philips headphones we were sent are actually aimed at the DJ market, but as with the HP 800, these make great PC/music/gaming headphones. The only drawback of these, as is the case with the HP 800, is that these headphones don't feature in-line volume controls. From a comfort perspective, the HP 800 is exceptionally comfortable and will also do a great job of keeping your ears warm in those large chilly LAN halls as your ears fit inside the cushioning. The sound these headphones produce is not bad, and the only criticism we have is that they could have produced slightly louder sound.



VITAL INFO

- Plus**
Comfortable | Price
- Minus**
Could have produced louder sound
- Supplier**
Philips [011] 471-5000
- Internet**
www.philips.co.za
- RRP**
R191

VALUE	SOUND	COMFORT
85	75	95
OVERALL		
85		

PHILIPS HP890

The HP890 features the biggest earpieces we have seen on a set of headphones to date, but this is not a bad thing. The large earpieces make the HP890 very comfortable and the sound it produces is superb. We really appreciated the tangle-free cord that is bundled with this product. This cord is grooved which makes it less likely to tangle. The cord is also removable. Because the HP890 was developed for hi-fi use, there is no in-line volume controller, and connecting it to an amplifier is preferable. If you have a decent speaker set for your computer, it shouldn't be a problem.



VITAL INFO

- Plus**
Sound quality | Comfortable
- Minus**
Needs an amplifier to achieve best results
- Supplier**
Philips [011] 471-5000
- Internet**
www.philips.co.za
- RRP**
TBA

VALUE	SOUND	COMFORT
NA	90	95
OVERALL		
NA		

PHILIPS HS910

The HS910 is a portable, foldable headset which is actually better suited for a portable audio device, but the sound is very loud and crisp and it will do a great job of providing the audio for your gaming and other PC requirements. Shipped with this headset is a hard case pouch which you can use to transport the HS910 in. We were disappointed that there was no in-line volume controller with this headset, and the cord was also shorter than we would have liked. The HS910 fits around the back of your head and fits snug against your ears.



VITAL INFO

- Plus**
Can be used for jogging
Sound
- Minus**
Short cord
- Supplier**
Philips [011] 471-5000
- Internet**
www.philips.co.za
- RRP**
TBA

VALUE	SOUND	COMFORT
NA	90	90
OVERALL		
NA		

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PHILIPS HP830

If there were a prize for the sexiest headset, the HP830 would have won it hands down. This headset doesn't just feature good looks but also features amazing sound quality. The HP830 is actually geared towards the DJ and hi-fi market segments, but its great sound quality will make it a great set of headphones for PC and gaming use. Sadly, you will have to make due without an in-line volume controller. As seems to be the case with all of the Philips headsets, the HP830 is incredibly comfortable and features large padded earpieces.



VITAL INFO

- **Plus**
Sound quality
- **Minus**
No in-line volume controller
- **Supplier**
Philips [011] 471-5000
- **Internet**
www.philips.co.za
- **RRP**
TBA

VALUE	SOUND	COMFORT
NA	90	90
OVERALL		
NA		



PHILIPS HC200

You would not usually think of getting a cordless headset for your PC/gaming requirements, but if you think about it, it makes perfect sense. The HC200 is a very comfortable headset featuring large earpieces and a head strap that fits securely on your head. The headset itself features a volume control and houses two AAA rechargeable batteries (which come included). The sound quality of the HC200 is superb and we were very impressed with it. The only downside to this kit is that the transceiver, which connects to your audio port, requires line of sight to work properly. Mounting this transceiver on your monitor should solve that problem.



VITAL INFO

- **Plus**
Sound quality | Cordless
- **Minus**
Needs line of sight
- **Supplier**
Philips [011] 471-5000
- **Internet**
www.philips.co.za
- **RRP**
TBA

VALUE	SOUND	COMFORT
NA	90	90
OVERALL		
NA		

XBOX LIVE HEADSETS

Plantronics produces a small range of Xbox headsets. These include the GameCom X10, GameCom X20, and the GameCom Halo2 Edition. These headsets are not designed for listening to music or in-game audio. They are designed to be used with Xbox Live to strategise plans of attack with your fellow gamers. The GameCom X10 features an over-the-head design with a single earpiece and adjustable microphone. The GameCom X20 looks very similar to Plantronics' mobile headsets, but with a boomed microphone protruding from the earpiece - this headset can be worn on either the left or right ear. The hi-tech looking GameCom Halo 2 Edition is a funky design and sports an in-ear earpiece with an adjustable microphone. This headset can be worn on either ear and features an over-the-ear design, making it comfortable and preventing it from slipping off.



VITAL INFO

- **Supplier**
Plantronics 0800 22 0202
- **Internet**
www.plantronics.co.za
- **RRP**
GameCom X10: R141
GameCom X20: R175
GameCom Halo2 Edition: R679

GameCom X10

GameCom X20

GameCom Halo2 Edition

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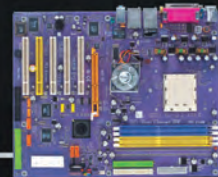
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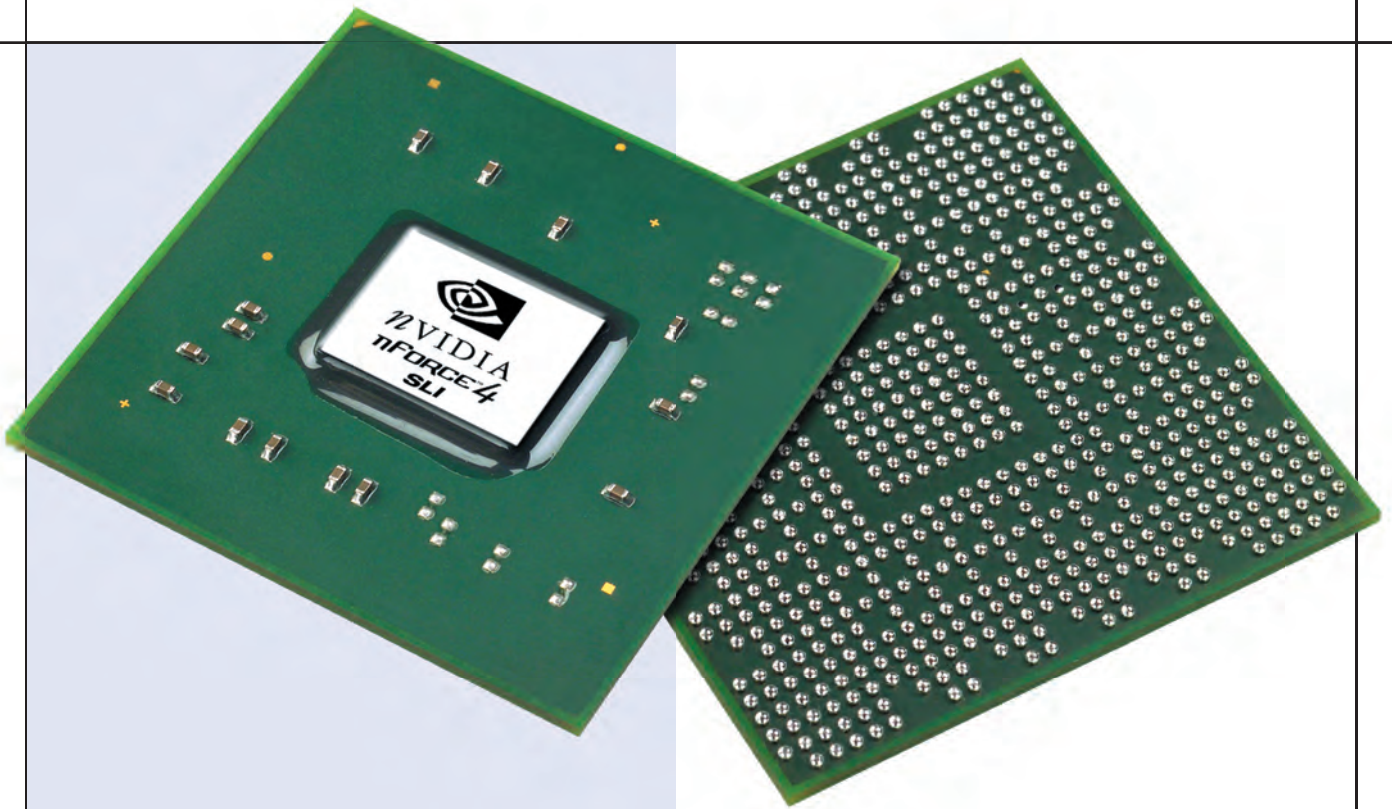
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NVIDIA SLI: IS IT TWICE THE FUN?

In theory, SLI technology is nothing new to the computer industry and if you think back to the days of the 3dfx Voodoo2 you should know what we mean. This time round, NVIDIA breathes new life into the dual-VGA card concept. Whether your pockets are deep enough to afford the high-end solution though, is another issue altogether.

FOR THE TECHNICALLY UNEDUCATED, here is a crash course in SLI (Scalable Link Interface) technology. This technology allows you to install two identical PCI-Express graphic cards on one motherboard. The benefit of such a setup is that the two graphic cards are able to share the work load, which in turn allows your graphic card to handle graphics intensive applications and games much more effectively because it is able to split the work load between the two GPUs.

SLI technology was designed to allow a given system to scale the geometry and fill-rate performance of an application or game between two GPUs (Graphic Processing Units). With the NVIDIA SLI solution this technology is not reliant on the software to make it work, but rather the device drivers which are designed to split the work load given to the GPUs.

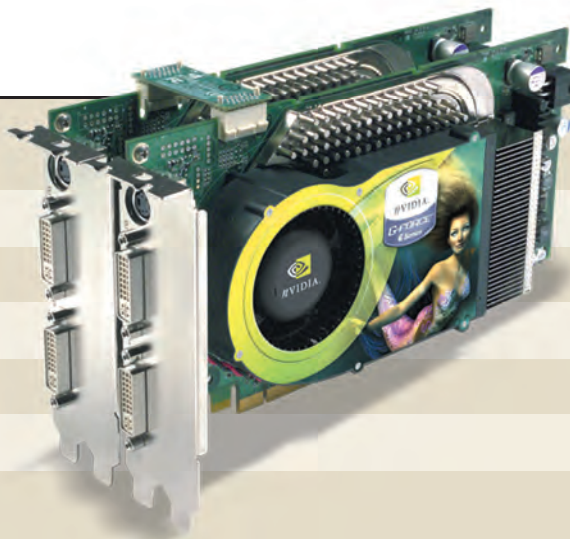
So how does it work and what do you need to enable SLI?

To create an SLI configuration you need two SLI certified graphic cards. These need to be of the same GPU type and the same BIOS revision, but you can use two SLI VGA cards that run at different clock speeds. This is obviously not recommended as the drivers will simply run both cards at the slowest card's clock speed. Even though you will have two graphic cards in your computer, you would only need to connect your monitor to one, as the second card relays all of its information back to the primary card which in turn will display the graphics on your screen. AMD systems will automatically select the master GPU when the system boots up. AMD systems do this by checking which graphic card is connected to the monitor. Intel based systems will always select the graphic card closest to the CPU as master.

SLI certified graphic cards feature a Multi-function I/O (MIO) port,

THE COST OF SLI (OUR TEST BED)

Asus A8N-SLI Deluxe	R 1595
2X Asus 6600GT	R 4390
2X Asus 6800GT	R 9390
2X Asus 6800Ultra	R 11990
Kingston Hyper X - 2x 512MB 533MHz	R 2695
AMD Athlon64 Processor 3800+	R 3995



which is used to connect the two cards. The connection between the two cards is made by a SLI Scalability Connector (or Bridge as it is also known). The reason why NVIDIA opted for this method rather than sending the data between the cards via the PCI-Express bus, is because the data transfer rate of the SLI Scalability Connector, according to NVIDIA, is 10GB per second. This is much faster than PCI-Express and will allow the two cards to communicate, digitally, without having to pass through any part of the motherboard.

SLI PCI-Express graphic cards will only run on SLI-certified motherboards. These motherboards host a second X16 PCI-Express slot for use with dual VGA cards. An important fact to note here is that even though a SLI-certified motherboard features two X16 PCI-Express slots, each of these will only run in X8 mode when SLI is enabled. The reason for this is because the NForce4 platform only has 20 dedicated PCI-Express lanes for graphics, and in order to run dual VGA cards you will need to split this bandwidth.

In order to make the physical switch between SLI and non-SLI mode, you will see that there is a small PCI card that is situated between the two PCI-Express slots. This card can be turned around, depending on whether you want it to run in single VGA, or SLI mode.

On the ASUS A8N-SLI Deluxe, the motherboard in the test machine we reviewed this month, this card is clearly marked in which way it should be facing for either mode and is not that difficult to turn around. For those individuals who wouldn't want to open their cases to switch between SLI and single VGA mode, there is hope. As seen at CeBit this year, motherboard manufacturers have already begun designing other ways to switch between SLI and single VGA mode using a digital switch, but the manufacturers were hesitant to provide more information on this subject. (Asus has announced a SLI board that can change modes in software or the BIOS – the Asus A8N-SLI Premium.)

The NVIDIA drivers are the key element in making SLI work and include dynamic load balancing technology that allows it to split the workload between the two GPUs. NVIDIA's SLI technology currently uses two rendering methods: AFR (Alternate Frame Rendering) and SFR (Split Frame Rendering).

Alternate Frame Rendering, is the most basic and causes each GPU to render alternate frames. As you can imagine, this is not

SLI POWER REQUIREMENTS

AS YOU MIGHT HAVE thought, an SLI system is quite a bit more power hungry than single VGA card systems, especially when looking at a high-end SLI system. NVIDIA recommends a minimum of a 350W power supply for a basic SLI setup, but 500W for a high-end system. One problem you might face when installing an SLI configuration is that you might run out of power connectors. The NVIDIA 6800 graphic card requires two 6-pin power connectors. If your power supply doesn't have one by default you can use the adapter supplied with the graphic card, but this adapter requires two regular 4-pin power connectors. In an SLI system you would then need eight, free, 4-pin power connectors - something which is not likely in high-end computers.

Here is a basic guideline from NVIDIA:

Entry-level SLI configuration

Recommended PSU: 350W to 420W
 Dual GeForce 6600 GT graphic cards
 Athlon 64 939-pin CPU
 Single HDD
 One optical drive

Midrange SLI configuration

Recommended PSU: 420W to 480W
 Dual GeForce 6800 or GeForce 6800 GT graphic cards
 Athlon 64 939-pin CPU
 Two optical drives
 PCI sound card

High-end/enthusiast SLI configuration

Recommended PSU: 550W or greater
 Dual GeForce 6800 Ultra graphic cards
 Athlon 64 FX 939-pin CPU or Intel Xeon
 Two or more HDDs, including RAID 0, 1, 0+1 or five configurations
 Two optical drives
 PCI sound card



IMAGE SFR

ANICE TOUCH TO THE new SLI compatible drivers is that you can actually view the SFR ratio by enabling this feature in the driver settings. Once enabled, the ForceWare drivers will display a green bar indicating which part of the screen is being rendered by which GPU and how hard each GPU is actually working. The scene depicted here from Half-Life 2 is fairly symmetric, thus the line is around the centre of the screen and both GPUs are rendering about the same amount.

SLI APPLICATION PROFILES

IN ORDER TO SELECT which rendering mode to use, NVIDIA has created various Application Profiles for both games and application. Over 100 games and applications are currently supported. A full list can be viewed here:

www.nzone.com/object/nzone_sli_certifiedapps.html.

From the ForceWare 71.84 drivers, however, you are able to create your own profiles and choose which rendering method should automatically be used for your applications and games.

For a tutorial on how to do this, point your browser to:

www.nzone.com/object/nzone_sli_appprofile.html.

ATI AND NVIDIA ON ONE MOTHERBOARD

FRANCY RUNNING BOTH AN ATI and NVIDIA graphics card on one motherboard? Well it is not impossible although it can be tricky. A question which also comes to mind is why you would want to, but the simple answer "because you can" will suffice. The guys at Tomshardware decided to install both an ATI X800 and an NVIDIA 6800 on one motherboard. You can read about the experiment and how to do it yourself here:

graphics.tomshardware.com/graphic/20041123/sli-performance-32.html.

the most intelligent way to make use of two GPUs and this is why Split Frame Rendering is the preferred method of utilising an SLI setup. SFR allows each GPU to render a portion of a scene instead of alternate frames. If the scene in a particular game or application is symmetric, meaning both the top and bottom halves are equally complex, then the work load between both GPUs will be the same. But the benefit of SFR comes into play when one part of the scene is more complex. The SLI drivers will automatically change the workload ratio between the two GPUs. One GPU will be instructed to render the smaller, more complex scene, while the other GPU will render the larger, less complex scene. Because the images are

digitally composed, you will not come across problems often faced with analogue composing such as tearing.

After reading up on all the technical information about SLI, we were eager to run some tests to see whether SLI is all that it claims to be. The test machine we used was supplied by Asus and Axiz and consisted of an AMD Athlon64 Processor 3800+, an Asus A8N-SLI Deluxe motherboard and two sticks of Kingston HyperX 512MB DDR533 memory. In order to thoroughly test the NVIDIA SLI, we used three sets of graphics cards which spanned from entry-level SLI to high-end SLI. We used the Asus 6600GT, Asus 6800GT, and Asus 6800 Ultra to run the benchmarks. We also used the latest ForceWare drivers, version 71.84, which were available at the time of writing this article.

Looking at the benchmark results produced across the nine different benchmarks we ran, we were very surprised by the results. As you will see by comparing the scores, having an SLI setup will not always produce favourable results. After studying these scores we can safely say that SLI is not much use for older games or applications running at low resolutions. When turning up the resolution and enabling features such as anti-aliasing, you will start to notice the power of SLI.

For most people, one of the key factors about SLI is the price. At just under R6000 for one Asus 6800Ultra graphic card it is out of reach for most people, let alone buying two for an SLI configuration. The Asus 6600GT is slightly more affordable, but you will be paying close to R4500 for two cards. We would rather invest in one high-end card for that price. SLI is a great technology and it most definitely has a place in the market for extreme enthusiasts and people with stacks of money. Sadly, the performance versus price ratio is not yet justifiable for your average gamer, but it might be a good idea to keep a close eye on this technology, especially now that ATI has also announced their plans for a dual-VGA. **NAG**

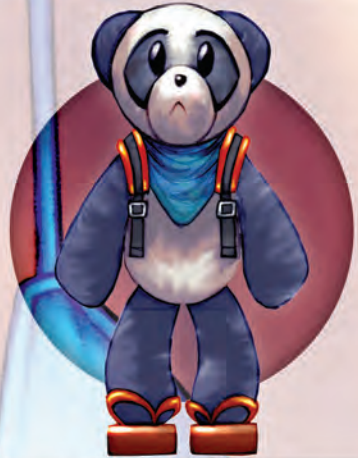
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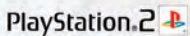
EXCLUSIVE TO ANIMEWORX THIS JUNE ARE KESSEN III AND MONSTER HUNTER ON PS2. OTHER NEW TITLES INCLUDE AREA-51, JUICED, MEDAL OF HONOUR: EUROPEAN ASSAULT AND GRAND THEFT AUTO: SAN ANDREAS FOR XBOX.

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LAZY GAMER'S GUIDE

ATARI FLASHBACK CLASSIC GAME CONSOLE

ONE OF THE ADVANTAGES of console technology evolving faster than a steroid-fed mouse on a high-speed treadmill is that the older consoles can be packaged into smaller and cheaper units. The Atari Flashback bundles top games from the 7800 and 2600 consoles into one neat little package, allowing old gamers to get nostalgic over the days when pixels were literally everything.

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The Flashback Console

This little unit doesn't measure more than fourteen by ten centimetres, but it contains twenty games from a bygone era. All that's required is to plug it into your television and power supply. And voila! Old-school gaming the editor always gets teary-eyed about.

The controllers

Slick but retro, these controllers might not crack it in today's market of analogue and rumble-feature demanding games, but back in those days they were cutting edge, so you don't need anything more to play the games. And Atari had the common sense to package the unit with two of these – something a lot of similar packages, for some reason, don't.

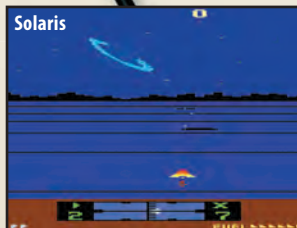


RCA support

If your television still demands input via your AV connector, this won't work. Then again, so won't most new consoles. And there are only two connectors, but these games never made use of stereo sound. They just 'beeped' and 'blipped' at you.

Games!

It would be pointless, though, if the Flashback didn't feature some serious games. Solaris, Millipede, Asteroids, Battlezone, Adventure, Breakout – these and fourteen other games are oddly quant today, but they are still a lot of fun (and very challenging) to play. See what the world was like before 8-bit graphics changed everything.





SAVIORS

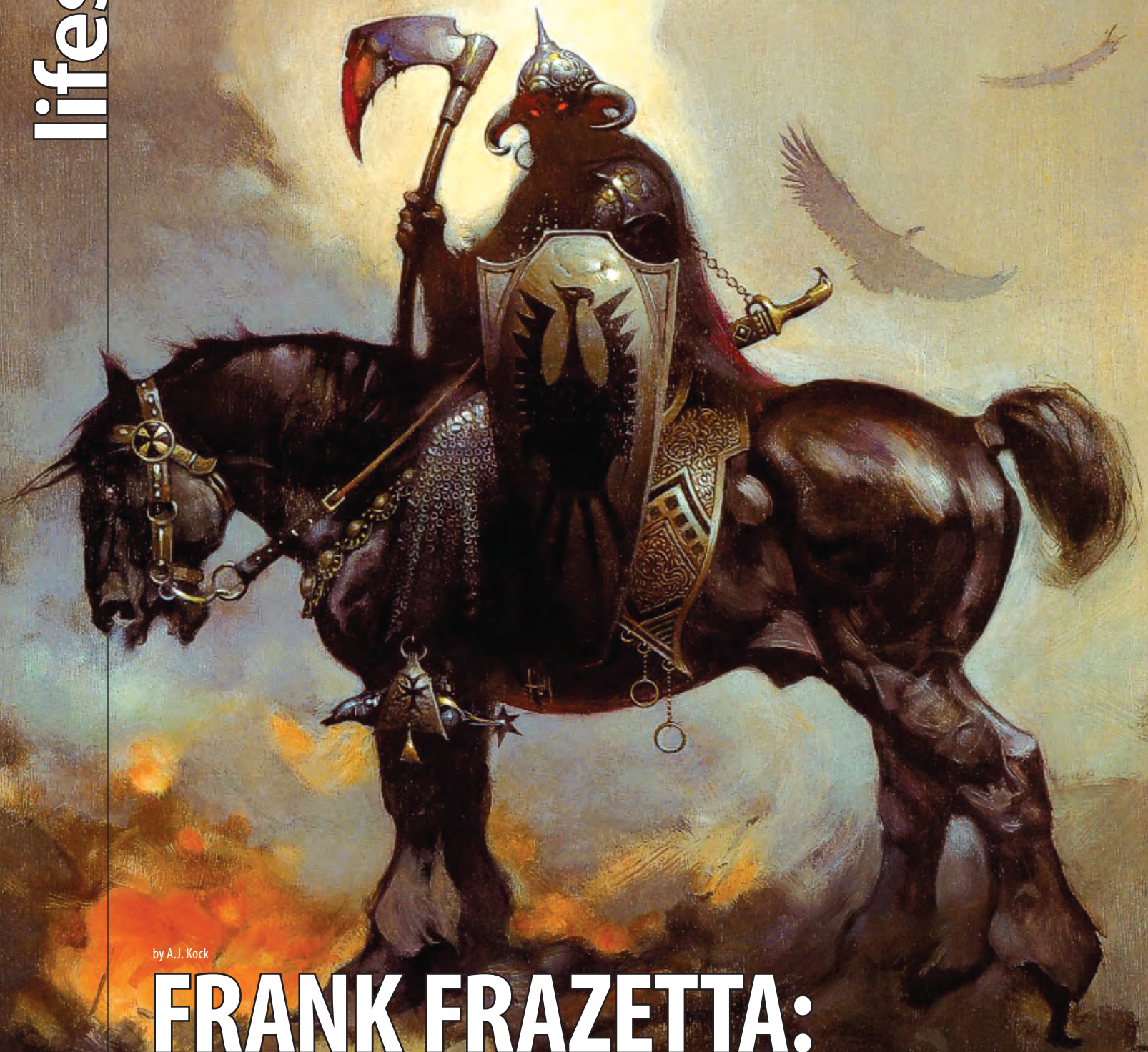
of kamigawa™

Release Date
3RD June 2005



MAGIC
The Gathering

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

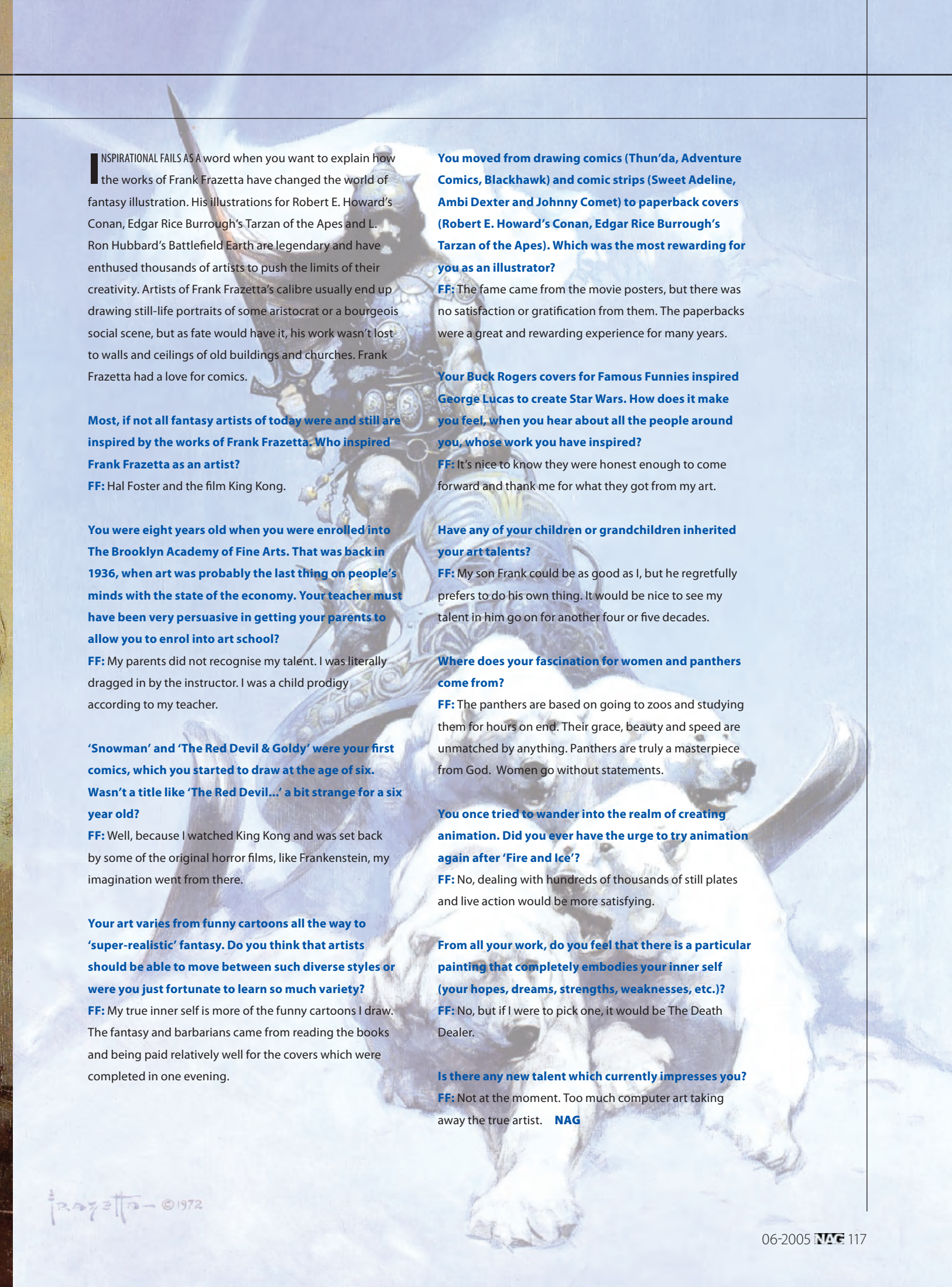


by A.J. Kock

FRANK FRAZETTA: BEYOND INSPIRATIONAL

© 1973

Frazetta



INSPIRATIONAL FAILS AS A word when you want to explain how the works of Frank Frazetta have changed the world of fantasy illustration. His illustrations for Robert E. Howard's Conan, Edgar Rice Burrough's Tarzan of the Apes and L. Ron Hubbard's Battlefield Earth are legendary and have enthused thousands of artists to push the limits of their creativity. Artists of Frank Frazetta's calibre usually end up drawing still-life portraits of some aristocrat or a bourgeois social scene, but as fate would have it, his work wasn't lost to walls and ceilings of old buildings and churches. Frank Frazetta had a love for comics.

Most, if not all fantasy artists of today were and still are inspired by the works of Frank Frazetta. Who inspired Frank Frazetta as an artist?

FF: Hal Foster and the film King Kong.

You were eight years old when you were enrolled into The Brooklyn Academy of Fine Arts. That was back in 1936, when art was probably the last thing on people's minds with the state of the economy. Your teacher must have been very persuasive in getting your parents to allow you to enrol into art school?

FF: My parents did not recognise my talent. I was literally dragged in by the instructor. I was a child prodigy according to my teacher.

'Snowman' and 'The Red Devil & Goldy' were your first comics, which you started to draw at the age of six.

Wasn't a title like 'The Red Devil...' a bit strange for a six year old?

FF: Well, because I watched King Kong and was set back by some of the original horror films, like Frankenstein, my imagination went from there.

Your art varies from funny cartoons all the way to 'super-realistic' fantasy. Do you think that artists should be able to move between such diverse styles or were you just fortunate to learn so much variety?

FF: My true inner self is more of the funny cartoons I draw. The fantasy and barbarians came from reading the books and being paid relatively well for the covers which were completed in one evening.

You moved from drawing comics (Thun'da, Adventure Comics, Blackhawk) and comic strips (Sweet Adeline, Ambi Dexter and Johnny Comet) to paperback covers (Robert E. Howard's Conan, Edgar Rice Burrough's Tarzan of the Apes). Which was the most rewarding for you as an illustrator?

FF: The fame came from the movie posters, but there was no satisfaction or gratification from them. The paperbacks were a great and rewarding experience for many years.

Your Buck Rogers covers for Famous Funnies inspired George Lucas to create Star Wars. How does it make you feel, when you hear about all the people around you, whose work you have inspired?

FF: It's nice to know they were honest enough to come forward and thank me for what they got from my art.

Have any of your children or grandchildren inherited your art talents?

FF: My son Frank could be as good as I, but he regretfully prefers to do his own thing. It would be nice to see my talent in him go on for another four or five decades.

Where does your fascination for women and panthers come from?

FF: The panthers are based on going to zoos and studying them for hours on end. Their grace, beauty and speed are unmatched by anything. Panthers are truly a masterpiece from God. Women go without statements.

You once tried to wander into the realm of creating animation. Did you ever have the urge to try animation again after 'Fire and Ice'?

FF: No, dealing with hundreds of thousands of still plates and live action would be more satisfying.

From all your work, do you feel that there is a particular painting that completely embodies your inner self (your hopes, dreams, strengths, weaknesses, etc.)?

FF: No, but if I were to pick one, it would be The Death Dealer.

Is there any new talent which currently impresses you?

FF: Not at the moment. Too much computer art taking away the true artist. **NAG**

manga

Dark Angel

CPM Manga

R81.95

This is fantasy manga. Rather than the giant robots usually seen in manga stories, here we have fairies and magic. The four lands surrounding the Oukoku are each protected by a, so-called, phantom saint. Each one is a powerful warrior gifted with special magical

powers. Because of the saints'

power, the leaders in Oukoku have created a treaty, forbidding any of the saints from entering each other's territory. If they never meet and fight, the lands will be

safer. Unfortunately, 'Dark' has just become Saint of the Red Phoenix. In order to prove he is the new saint, he has to travel to Oukoku. Though he has a fairy companion, 'Dark' has no sense of direction, resulting in him wandering into the lands of the 'Blue Dragon', thus running the risk of putting all the lands at war.



internet

The Atarians

www.atari.com/atarians/

Back to the Future! Atari is busy milking its retro licenses, as many publishers do. So, as part of the campaign, the publisher has opened The Atarians - a side-scrolling on-line game where you have to navigate a cave full of monsters. Not the most fun we've had with Flash, but it's a good time killer if you need one. *[Frustrating too, Ed.]*



comics

Seven Soldiers of Victory

DC Comics

R21.95

Seven unknown men are looking for seven soldiers to save the world from the return of ancient evil. Not any soldiers though. They have selected seven second-rate super heroes - the ones who haven't managed to become part of a team and who aren't on the popularity A-list. Nevertheless, these seven try to save the world as their masters have asked. But in the end they fail. What? How can the heroes fail? Ah, it's all part of the greater plan. See, if seven fail there must be a backup plan. When you're called the seven unknown men, you would have a plan B, wouldn't you? Read the seven soldiers series and find out. All this and alliteration too?

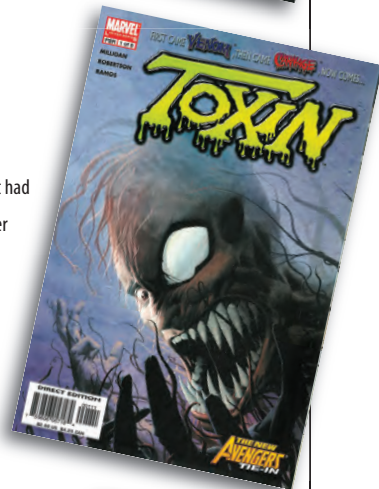


Toxin

Marvel Comics

R21.95

Once Pat was a police man. He patrolled New York, keeping the streets safe. Once Pat had a wife and child, and he was happy. That's all changed now. Once there was a monster called venom - a symbiote that needed a human host. Venom spawned a child, a creature called Toxin. Toxin too needed a human host. Toxin found Pat. Now they share a life. Unlike Venom's host though, Pat insists on being in charge, on doing the right thing. It cost him his job and his family, but now he has the power to make a real difference. If only he can remain in control.



Batman Jekyll and Hyde

DC Comics

R21.95

Inside every man there is a conflict between two people. Brave and scared, strong and weak, good and evil. In the Batman universe there is one prime example of this, Harvey Dent, or Two Face. He's a physical manifestation of what Robert Louis Stevenson wrote about in Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde. For the first time DC Comics does an in-depth investigation into the mind of Two Face, providing new insight into what made him do the things he did, and what it is like to live inside his head. With dark gloomy artwork to add to the atmosphere, this is not a happy series. But it is something a little more than you usually get out of a comic book. Something to make you think and even worse, something to make you wonder, "What if...?"

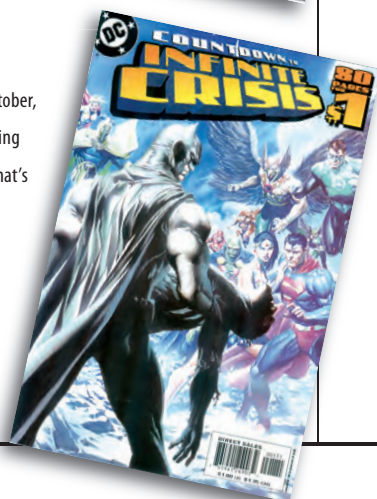


Countdown to Infinite Crisis

DC Comics

R12.50

The DC Universe has been building up to a large change that will happen around October, making use of pretty much every DC book in existence. But if you haven't been reading any DC comic with enthusiasm, this would be more confusing than anything else. That's why the comic company released this book - a 'one-shot' starring the Blue Beetle that will place new fans exactly where they should be in terms of the evolving DC Universe. Even if you're not that interested, for eighty pages at such a cheap price, it's worth getting anyway.



books

The Art of Machinima

By: Paul Marino

Price: R336.95 (Excl. delivery)

COMPUTER GAMING IS BLAMED for many things. From promoting violence and sex, to being racist and homophobic, many believe

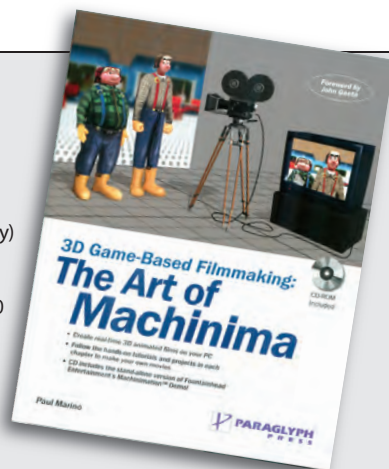
that games are responsible for the decline of society. *[They are, Ed.]*

Those who know the industry can give a positive example for every negative one. For one, games have seen the establishment of Machinima; simply defined as animated filmmaking within a real-time virtual 3D environment. Basically, this means making a movie from elements commonly found in first person shooter games like Quake, Unreal and Half-Life.

The era of Machinima began on 26 October 1996, when the first Quake movie, *Diary of a Camper*, was released. Not even ten years later, there are Machinima music videos, a film festival and even feature articles in prominent publications about this entertainment technology.

The Art of Machinima, while providing an insightful read on how the concept came about, focuses on hands-on tutorials on how to create these movies. The book ships with a CD containing trial versions of software the aspirant Machinima director will need to create his/her masterpiece.

This is definitely a book that will appeal to gamers who enjoy modding first person shooters and want to take their expertise a step further. Even aspirant movie directors will find useful information in this book.



Broadband Entertainment

By: Scott Kipp

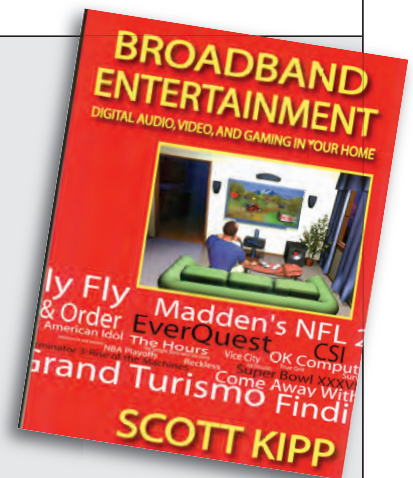
Price: TBA

AT FIRST GLANCE, BROADBAND Entertainment looks like a cheap compendium of information on digital entertainment. The artwork is amateurish and, at times, makes one feel as if author Scott Kipp is being condescending.

However the book managed to draw us in with useful information on the convergence of entertainment. The book shows just how far behind South Africa is in terms of digital entertainment. Granted, we live in a Third World country with more pressing issues, but communications technology is vital to address many of them.

One of the very first tables shows the time it takes to download an MPEG-4 video using different Internet connection speeds. On an average dial-up connection (56Kbps) it will take 48 minutes to download a 20MB file. The same file takes ten minutes to download on DSL (256Kbps), 2.7 minutes on standard cable modems (1Mbps) and only 40 seconds on premium cable modems (4Mbps). The figures only get worse. A two hour movie can be downloaded in an average of 32 hours on dial-up, while it will take only 40 minutes on premium cable.

Broadband Entertainment is a fascinating read on where entertainment is heading in terms of technology. While South Africa is light years away from many of the examples in the book, it gives a glimpse of what is already available in many other countries.



graphic novel

Barnum

By: DC Comics | **Price:** R 135.95

A COMBINATION OF ALMOST HISTORY and almost the circus. This fictional story uses real people from history in a highly entertaining story. P T Barnum, world renowned circus owner, saves the life of President Carver of the USA. As a result, he is asked by the president to use his 'Circus of Anomalies' to save America from the threat of a devious Russian scientist named Nicola Tesla. Similar in vein to the League of Extraordinary Gentlemen, this novel has high adventure, romance, and loads of biting humour. Read it and see how many side characters and events you recognise from the real world.





Collateral

Thanks to impressive cinematography by Dion Beebe (Equilibrium) and Paul Cameron (Man on Fire), the City of Angels assumes as much importance here as the movie's story and characters. Filmed almost completely with a modified high-definition digital video camera, the gritty side of LA comes through with stark realism.

Sporting silver grey hair and a suit to match, Cruise projects a taut combination of cynicism and stoicism as he toys with Max during their wild ride together. Foxx, shedding his 'In Living Colour' comic persona, endows Max with a growing sense of doom that finally explodes into action. It's a treat to see Foxx nail the changes in Max's character and to watch Cruise play a villain with such pizzazz. So much for typecasting. Never mind that Collateral's plot doesn't always make sense (for example, how does one detective know so much toward the end of the film?), cinematic artistry and memorable performances make up for any minor weaknesses here. Because of his splendid work helping this riveting motion picture, Michael Mann earns a place on our list of favourite directors. He's clearly a master at creating almost perfect film pace and exquisite movie suspense.



Alexander

Greatness is the burden of the very few. There are very few great men. Alexander of Macedon was one. Director Oliver Stone wants to be. Stone's Alexander is a dreamer whose aspirations outstrip the understanding of his times, a seeker forever pushing past the horizon, a man following destiny without fear of failure. He is mostly misunderstood until his time has past. Colin Farrell provides an admirable and emotional Alexander, as much as any man could bring to life a myth. Hopkins' aging Ptolemy drips with regret and wisdom, his venerating voice trembling at just the perfect moments and then no more. But the movie truly belongs to Angelina Jolie's Olympias, more Medusa than mother, and more devourer than nurturer.



Ocean's Twelve

Oh the curse of the sequel has struck again. Why is it that some sequels are excellent films in their own right and others are better off avoided, or should in the worst case scenario never have been made?

The film is replete with Soderbergh hallmarks - steadycam shots, rapid cuts, snappy dialogues and a bunch of cameos. Yes, it's slick, great to look at, and has some fantastic, but bad acting, actors. With this many actors and one too many sub-plots, the screenplay and direction needed to be a little less indulgent and a little clearer. This sequel is, sadly, not up to standard compared to Ocean's Eleven.



The PSP Garden

www.pspgarden.com

Need to know just absolutely everything worth knowing about Sony's PSP? This useful, independent site features all of the know-worthy news related to the PSP and is updated daily. To make things even easier, the site has an RSS-feed so you don't have to keep checking in on it. If we could only get this service for all the hardware we like...



Good Charlotte The Chronicles Of Life And Death

The Chronicles Of Life And Death holds some of Good Charlotte's best work in addition to their worst. The epic feel the band was trying for, is lost in the transition into the title track, a typical but perfected pop rocker. This song, along with the next two 'Walk Away (Maybe)' and 'S.O.S.' complete the album's triple attack of powerful pop rock.

'Chronicles...' is a step in the right direction career wise, but it shows a conflicted band trying to do too much at once. There is more good than bad on The Chronicles Of Life And Death, as this band begins to explore the world outside of pop punk. This album shows potential for this band to mature and become more consistent. They have the heart, they just need time.

Moby Hotel

Moby is many things: a true pop-music eclectic, a sonic wizard, a distinctive songwriter, a politically engaged activist, a bridge between the worlds of rock and electronic music.

But he's not much of a singer, and by making his detached, deadpan delivery the dominant voice on his new album, he leaves most of the songs as surface decorations, unexcavated by the kind of emotional soul singing (sampled or not) that he applied to much of his earlier music. The four tracks fronted by R&B-rooted Laura Dawn illustrate the difference.

Returning to the mainstream after last year's back-to-techno diversion Baby Monkey, the New Yorker has ploughed all his resources into a collection of relentlessly catchy, hook-festooned rock songs. For all the sensual stimulation it provides, Hotel is too insistent on being liked, and it's sacrificed its heart to make that happen.

card game

Bang!

Price: R150 | www.boardgames.co.za

DID YOU WATCH SPAGHETTI Westerns as a child, looking forward to the ultimate shootout scene where the outlaws got what they deserved? Did you want to be the sheriff, or the outlaw? If yes, you need to take a look at Bang!, a non-collectable card game that simulates the shootout between a sheriff, his deputies and the outlaws. The cards are of good quality, with cartoon-like drawings that evoke a grimy, old-west atmosphere. The rules of the game are easy to understand.

Bang! can be played by four to seven players with a game lasting about thirty minutes. Players are randomly assigned roles which are hidden from the other players, except the sheriff. Based on the role, a player will have different goals – the outlaws want to kill the sheriff and the deputies, the sheriff and the deputies want to kill the outlaws and the renegade wants to be the next sheriff.

Each player also gets assigned a character such as 'Lucky Duke' or 'Rose Doolan' that will give each player some kind of unique skill - be it an additional card to draw or increased range. Play itself is quick, with



bullets flying and beer being guzzled (beer acts as a health potion). Players hide behind barrels, get different weapons allowing them to shoot further and dynamite is tossed from one player to another until it explodes – normally with catastrophic effect. Range is handled simply – and brilliantly – based on the seating arrangement being used.

Bang! is a light-hearted, fun game and a brilliant way to spend time with friends and family.

board game

Twilight Imperium III

Price: R730 | www.boardgames.co.za

TWILIGHT IMPERIUM III IS the third edition – and a major rewrite – of an epic space opera game which was first published in 1997. What is inside will not disappoint the three to six players whom the game is aimed at – good looking plastic miniatures of various space ships, space stations, point defence systems and infantry bases fill the box. Markers, the hexagons making up the playing field, and the cards are of a high quality as well. The cards identify all the planets, types of technology, secret and public objectives as well as political policies.

Ten unique races are defined and each has special abilities - from the wily Xxcha Kingdom who can make diplomatic agreements ensuring peace between itself and another race, to the Humans from Sol who breed like rabbits (one can create extra ground units). Each race also has a home system and starts the game with a small number of units.

The board itself is built up by the players, using large hexagons, around a central planet, Mecatol Rex (the centre of the universe so to speak). Thus, the actual board is different every time that the game is played. A hexagon may contain one or two planets that provide resources and political influence points which are used within the imperial senate to vote on resolutions. Hexagons can also contain worm holes, asteroid fields or a nebula – all with different effects.

Twilight Imperium III is much more than a space combat simulator. It's a game that portrays an epic struggle between star-faring races on different fronts. Twilight Imperium III is not a quick game. A typical game can last anywhere between three and eight hours depending on the number of players involved and the level of experience of the players. If you enjoy games like Master of Orion III and Galactic Civilization and can get together enough opponents, this is the board game for you.



GAME OVER

TWISTED LOGIC



BY SHIVONNE LOND T

Hard boiled little “eggs”

YOU’VE GOT TO ASK yourself why the word gamer rhymes with lamer. It shouldn’t. Why do so many gamers give the impression of being ratty troglodytes (and please don’t complain that this is not a real word) still living in the basement? It was recently reported that computer monitors could cause pimples (the radiation or something like that), so at least some people have an excuse now. Popular culture is quite content to portray all gamers as fat, ugly 20 year olds who haven’t seen the sun (or a bar of soap) since 1980 and think a week old burger is haute cuisine - and it often seems that this is an accurate portrayal.

Now, on the other hand, it’s not easy being the total opposite, like me. Not only do I have breasts (these occurred naturally - not as a result of too many pizzas – like some gamers I could mention) and a rather attractive demeanour (or so I’ve been told), but I also really enjoy gaming. This puts me, and a few lucky others, in a rare category. Perhaps I need to include a picture of my left breast to prove that I am, indeed, female. I have also, so far, resisted the urge to dye my hair blue like the young lady I once saw on a documentary about gamers. It’s easy to get discouraged when all your friends think you are strange and unsociable for spending the weekend playing Half-Life 2.

No need to get cantankerous, because I cannot only play the games, but understand the complexities behind them as well, since I’m a ‘real’ software developer (and not just a script kiddie or a copy-paste Google programmer either). Many gamers, both men and some women, find this rather intimidating. I seldom bite, unless provoked, so it’s rather strange that people who have long since been disregarded by amoebas as inferior life forms are endeavouring to tell

me about life, the universe and gaming. Oh, how I long for the good old days of the feudal system to return so I could chop off the heads of some of my inferiors without too many repercussions.

Arrogance is fine, and I have sometimes found the need to employ it myself. But it just doesn’t cut it when you don’t have the ‘experience’ to back it up. Life skills can’t be gained just by shooting at pixels on a colour screen, and yet there are gamers out there who consider themselves as learned as old Socrates himself, but have yet to ask one of my kind on a date (and I am not just referring to the men here...).

What the gaming community needs to do if it ever wants to achieve a level of maturity greater than preschool, is grow up. Most of us aren’t eleven anymore. Come out from under your rock, take a shower, drop the excess testosterone and shave off that paltry moustache (ladies, this applies to you too).

Autographs will be signed, as needed, with a flower. And if anyone needs me to explain the big words, sorry, once you hit puberty, it will all make sense. **NAG**

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BBC NEWS WORLD EDITION

News Front Page

Last Updated: Friday, 1 April, 2005, 17:00 GMT 18:00 UK

E-mail this to a friend | Printable version

Cambodian Troops Quarantine Quan...

There has been a small outbreak of “zombism” in a small town near the border of Laos in North-Eastern Cambodia.

The culprit was discovered to be mosquitoes native to that region carrying a new strain of Malaria which thus far has a 100 percent mortality rate and kills victims in fewer than 2 days.

Military Forces quarantine Quan'sul

KEY STORIES

- Lebanon head of security resigns
- Syria-Lebanon pullout 'nears end'
- Victim of Hariri bombing buried
- PM forms new government
- Hariri's son takes father's role

FEATURES AND ANALYSIS

Modernising trends

Syria is facing a series of new economic challenges, says the BBC's Dan Isaacs

ATTENTION NAG OFFICE, THIS IS REDTIDE. I'VE DECIDED ON THE LOCATION FOR OUR STAFF HOLIDAY THIS YEAR. PACK SWIMSUIT AND SHOTGUN.

NAG

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69 For MG53 is pure madness...

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Avant-grade slanting air vents like a sports car



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