

SOUTH AFRICA'S LEADING COMPUTER &amp; TELECOMS MAGAZINE

GET SERIOUS: AGE OF **EMPIRES III** REVIEW <<

NEED FOR SPEED: MOST **WANTED** REVIEW - REVVED <<

WHAT DO YOU NEED IN A **GAMER'S TOOLKIT?** <<

SOME **PLAYSTATION 2** HARDWARE GEAR REVIEWED <<

**BLACK** INTERVIEW - THAT'S IT - JUST **BLACK** <<

CALL OF DUTY **2** REVIEW <<

**SERIOUS SAM 2** SERIOUSLY SERIOUS REVIEW <<

Look! It's A **KING KONG** REVIEW <<

GAME **MAGAZINE** COMPETITION RESULTS <<

DO YOU REALLY USE THIS LIST TO DECIDE ON **NAG?** <<

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OF THE  
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# don't rely

\* Work in progress



**Ghost Recon: Advanced Warfighter**  
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\* Work in progress



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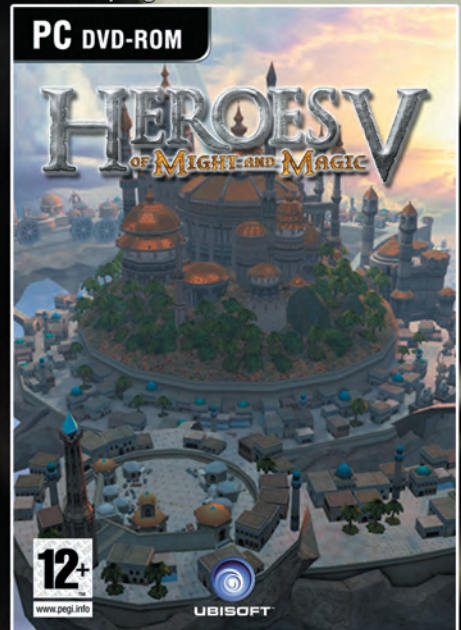


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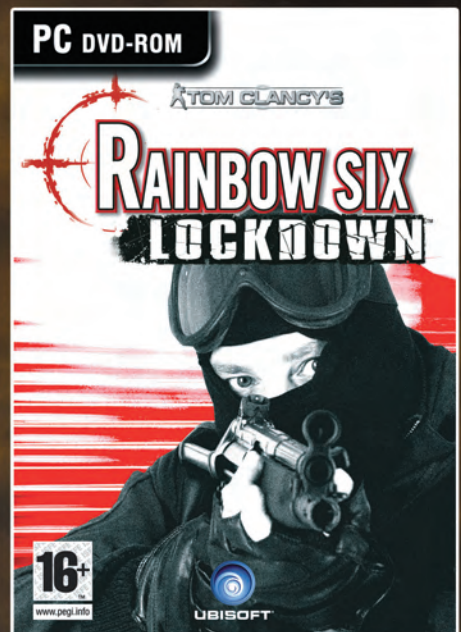
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\* Work in progress



**Heroes of Might & Magic V**  
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**Rainbow Six: Lockdown**  
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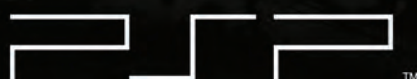




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# NEW PC RELEASES



# NEW PS2 RELEASES



PlayStation®2 





# EMPIRES RISE AND FALL



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BUT HEROES LIVE FOREVER



# RISE & FALL

## CIVILIZATIONS AT WAR



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### ADD-ONS

F.E.A.R. SDK | NAG-SIZZLER-12-2005 | World of Warcraft skin

### ANIME

Aphrodite IX | Blood | LO\_Mag\_Jan\_06 | Shadow Skill

### DEMOS

Civilization 4 | Hammer and Sickle | Harry Potter - Goblet of Fire | Live for Speed | Narnia | Need for Speed: Most Wanted | Neuro Hunter | Quake 4 | Super Taxi Driver 2006

### DESIGN

Games and Movies | Games\_FX | Gaming\_Misconduct | GAR | GHz\_Gaming\_Magazine | LAG\_Magazine | NAG (Another) | NAG Competition Page | PC Maniac | PressX | Render\_Mag | RTG | SAG | Up Side | Useful\_Mumbling

### DRIVERS

ATI Catalyst 5.11 XP | NVIDIA Forceware 81.95 XP

### FLASH

3 dudes and a puppy | All your bohemian | Cinco doom mayo | Decline 3 | Holiday super friends | Santahoe | Super retarded dog

### FULL GAMES

Enclosure | MarioWeenDX | Thugs

### GAME.DEV

Doom\_Bible | Wikidpad

### MOVIES

80 Days | CPL Finals | Game On | GR Advance Warfighter | Guild Wars - Halloween | NFSMW - Challenge | NFSMW - Montage | NFSMW - Race | NFSMW - Vs | Oblivion Chapter 1 | Oblivion Chapter 2 | Oblivion Chapter 3 | Oblivion Chapter 4 | Oblivion Chapter 5 | Oblivion Chapter 6 | P.A.N.I.C.S. Episode 1 | Person 2184 | Prey 360 Footage | Rise and Fall | Spellforce 2: Shadow Wars | Strangerhood | The Movies - Gameplay | Xbox 360 - The Wait

### PATCHES

Battlefield 2 v1.12 | Civilization 4 v1.09 | Quake 4 v1.0.4





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- Powered Firewall
- Gigabit LAN
- 8-channel audio



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- Features DVI-I / D-sub / TV-OUT
- Supports HDTV function and HDTV cable enclosed
- Unique Silent-Pipe II design





# ED'S NOTE

## COVER STORY

CONSIDERING THE RECENT HISTORY of Tomb Raider you're probably a little surprised to see us featuring this game on the cover again. The last game in the series [Angel of Darkness] made a mockery of the entire franchise, and like a ninja in the night extinguished all the life out of the Lara Croft legacy forever. A New Hope... Tomb Raider: Legacy represents a major change in process as Crystal Dynamics is handling the development of the game instead of Core Design [the clowns who screwed it up so badly] while Toby Gard is overseeing the whole process [Toby Gard is the person who is credited with the lead design on the original game].

Based on what we saw and played at the exclusive press event we attended in San Francisco, this new adventure for Lara Croft is returning to all those elements that made the original so special – adventure, mystery and a hot babe.

Hold thumbs people!

## WELCOME TO 2006 – NOTHING TO REPORT

2005 WAS A SMASHING year, simply fantastic and we couldn't have done it without you, our dear loyal readers. I sometimes get misty-eyed thinking about all the hearts we touch each month with the hard work and care we tirelessly and lovingly put into this humble publication each day of our lives. We do it all for you without a thought for ourselves...

Are you buying this? Didn't think so. I gave it a go, just to see how it felt, and for those of you who were touched in that special place, sorry that I lead you down a rosy path that ended badly.

I'm supposed to reflect on last year here and then butter you up for all the good things coming in 2006. You know, make promises I never intend to fulfil and generally trying to keep the reader base as loyal as possible. This works wonders in other mainstream publications as thousands of readers get all warm and fuzzy inside as the Editor sucks up to them. Too bad I'm not really cut out for that kind of warmth and I bet you started skimming the first paragraph the second you read the words 'simply fantastic'. So, instead of keeping up appearances, I'll just list the reasons why we will rule in 2006 and how you will benefit. The January and February issues are not going to be mind-blowing because by the time we do the January issue [just before everyone goes on leave for the year], everyone is so sick and tired of everything and anything to do with magazines, games and technology they'd prefer just getting fired – but that's too much paperwork. The February issue represents a renewed vigour [everyone is back from leave and fresh], but the industry takes a month to fire up and when we start production on the February issue, everyone else is still grinning from too much wine and food. March is really the first time everyone pulls it together, so watch out for it as it also precedes our birthday issue [April]. April NAG defies description and this year it'll be no different – we will be shaping the future of gaming publications. May and June – not sure

about these months, but they should hopefully be excellent [no refunds in case you were wondering]. July is the E3 edition and this year we're flying three journalists out to cover everything that is gaming for the rest of the year. The July issue will also feature the incredible E3 Supplement – pretty much the only one of its kind in the whole world. From August onwards I have no idea. The future is foggy from this point onwards. I never completed that business plan properly and now I understand why they said ad-libbing as you go will always get you into trouble.

Anyway, back to the top and the reflecting on 2005 part. The problem is that I have nothing to reflect on... When I look back at the past year I feel like one of the first people to arrive on the scene following a tornado – the crisp eerie silence, the incomprehensible devastation, that peculiar stench in the air and the moans and occasional scream. However, considering I've never seen what a tornado can do in person I'm going on what I've seen in the movies, and it looks pretty bad, so it'll do for this analogy. 2005 was more hectic than 2004 and every time I look up from the battlefield, another December has passed. The best way to summarise is like this: for me the biggest highlight of 2005 was Battlefield 2 and the biggest disappointment not having enough time to play all the games I wanted to. But that's what the holidays are for – right?

## Winners

WE FINALLY DECIDED ON the winner of the 'Create your own Gaming Magazine competition'. All the entries bar a few unsuitable ones are on the DVD this month. Enjoy them! I'd like to personally thank everyone who spent the time and effort to create these – truly astonishing. You're all winners because you actually got off your butts, did the work and produced something. Hopefully I'm not coming across as condescending with this, but bloody well done! **NAG**

Michael James [Editor]



Lara  
Croft,  
1997

## NAG REVIEW RIGS SUPPLIED BY:

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- Supports HDTV function and HDTV cable enclosed
- Unique Silent-Pipe II design



#### GIGABYTE Silent-PIPE II

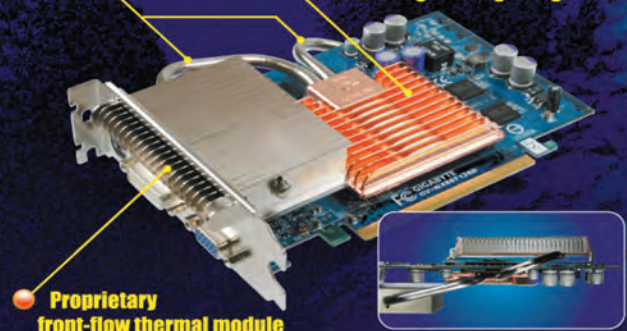
Standard Fan Solution  
Others 6600 GT Heatpipe Solution



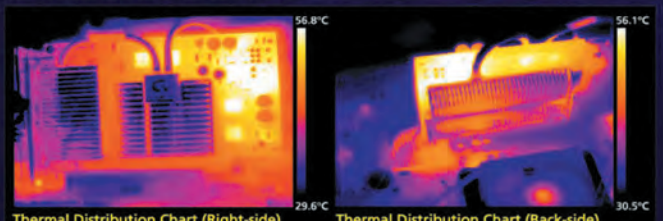
Testing platform: MB: K8NXP-SLI CPU: AMD SOCKET939 2700+ RAM: DDRII 533/256M \*1 O.S.: Windows XP Professional SP2  
Test Condition: 35°C Chamber CPU Fan Speed: 3200rpm / 12 V System Fan Speed: 1200rpm / 5 V  
Driver version: 77.72

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# BYTES

## NEW PLAYER JOINS FATAL1TY'S TEAM

The ranks of Johnathan "Fatal1ty" Wendel's Free Players Organisation have been swelled by the addition of Alessandro "Stermy" Avallone. The friendly Italian started his gaming career in 2001, and has since proven himself as one of the best and most consistent all-round gamers in the world of competitive gaming.

"Auravision and I have been carefully looking for the right opportunity to bring on a quality player with lots of potential and commitment," said Wendel. "Stermy represents the perfect player to join our group."

Auravision is the master licensor for Johnathan "Fatal1ty" Wendel, the world's leading gamer and three-time World Champion from the Cyberathlete Professional League.

"I've been an admirer of Fatal1ty and all he's done for gaming as well as the partnership he's put together with Auravision," commented Stermy. "This relationship will bring my pro game to the next level and open doors to genuine business opportunities."

Fatal1ty, Zen and Stermy competed as Free Players at all nine stops of the inaugural CPL World Tour this year, giving them opportunity to compete with the very best, at interesting locations around the world.

[[www.stermy.com](http://www.stermy.com)]



## BATTLE FOR MIDDLE-EARTH II

**E**LECTRONIC ARTS HAS REVEALED that the voice talent of Hugo Weaving (Elrond in The Lord of the Rings, Agent Smith in The Matrix) has been secured for the sequel to Lord of the Rings: Battle for Middle-Earth. The game will draw upon the books as well as the films for its story-line, so those who haven't read the books will be treated to heretofore unseen scenes. No release date schedule has been revealed.



## EA RECORDINGS

This is the name of EA's latest venture – a music distribution label in partnership with record company Nettwerk Music Group [which is Canadian, rather than German as might be expected].

"This deal is a triumphant new commitment to making classic EA music and themes available to millions worldwide," said Steve Schnur, worldwide executive of music and music marketing at EA.

EA's compositions over the past 20 years add up to some 50 hours, and much of this will now be available as MP3s or ringtones, downloadable from various music download services.

The deal follows on from EA's earlier foray into the music business with Next Level Music, a joint venture with Cherry Lane Music Publishing which is designed to help EA's efforts at signing artists and licensing its music for use outside videogames.





## EA DOWNLOADER

Electronic Arts has launched a game download system very akin to Valve's Steam, aimed at online distribution of its products. The first title to be available in such manner is Battlefield 2: Special Forces, an add-on pack that introduces elite forces such as Navy SEALs, Russian Spetsnaz and the SAS.



## CONAN THE EVER-POPULAR

THQ has signed an agreement with Paradox Entertainment, granting the software publisher the rights to develop and distribute games based on the character Conan, variously the Hyborian or the Barbarian. The deal runs for several years, and covers a wide range of platforms.

## PARENTAL CONTROLS TO BECOME STANDARD IN CONSOLES

Nintendo has announced that its upcoming console, the Revolution, will feature a built-in parental locking system. Games developed for the Revolution will include an embedded code that will notify the console of the title's rating. Parents will be able to password-lock the system to disable all games above a certain rating, depending on their offspring's age.

After entering a password, parents can adjust the console's settings and choose whether to block games with higher PEGI ratings. There are five different ratings - 3+, 7+, 12+, 16+ and 18+ - and each piece of Revolution software will include a code which indicates the game's rating.

"Even though most Nintendo games are appropriate for all ages and the game ratings are clearly displayed on the front of every game package, this added feature encourages parents to take responsibility for the games their children play," said Nintendo Europe's Jim Merrick.

The feature will be included in every Revolution worldwide. Microsoft and Sony have confirmed that both their next-generation consoles will also feature parental controls.



# PlayStation®2

## TOP TWENTY



1. WWE SD vs Raw



2. Soul Calibur 3



3. Pro-Evolution Soccer 5



4. The Warriors



5. THAW



6. Zathura



7. SingStar 80s



8. Eye Toy Play 3



9. Buzz



10. Jak X



11. Call of Duty 2: BRO



12. The Incredibles: ROTU



13. WRC Rally Evolved



14. True Crime 2: NYC



15. Shrek: SuperSlam



16. World Poker Tour



17. Codename: KND



18. Bratz



19. NBA 2K6



20. NHL 2K6



## VIRTUAL PROPERTY, REAL ESTATE

Last month we mentioned the purchase of a virtual resort in Project Entropia for an unprecedented \$100,000. Its owner has since revealed that he plans to use this property as a bridge between the real world and the virtual one, particularly by helping advertisers to reach audiences in the virtual universe. It has since been reported that the previous record virtual investment, to the tune of \$26,500, has just broken even and will henceforth be generating real profit, within less than a year of purchase. The fact that every bit of Entropia's currency can be redeemed for real money, and visitors to the virtual resort pay for various services and privileges, make the Treasure Island resort an actual goldmine.

"The virtual real estate market established by Project Entropia is on fire due to the amount of money potentially to be made, as gamers everywhere are realising that virtual worlds can compete with dirt and clay on an economic level," says virtual Space Resort winner, Neverdie.

"The Space Resort, which I plan to name Club Neverdie, is the perfect vehicle to link reality with virtual reality by enabling the entertainment industry to reach inside and target the gamer while he's in his element. This will also in turn enhance the gamer experience by raising the quality level of content through social events and interaction with live music/video. With digital downloading representing the future of the music industry, record labels are desperately searching for new ways to promote music online, and Club Neverdie will help bridge the gap." [www.project-entropia.com]

## FIRST OFFICIAL PS3 PRICING INFO

The head of Sony has announced that the company's next PlayStation will be launched around the middle of next year, and will cost between \$300 and \$400 (how this will translate into the local market is, as yet, unclear). He further confirmed analysts' speculation that the unit will initially be sold at a considerable loss, a move to drive the console's Blu-Ray disc technology into the market. However, as the manufacturing process' efficiency improves over time, the production cost is expected to fall. The system will not ship with a built-in hard drive, but will provide the option of adding one.



## XBOX 360 SELLS AT A LOSS

**A**NALYSTS HAVE POINTED OUT that the manufacturing cost of an Xbox 360 unit is about 40% higher than its retail price. This news doesn't surprise market experts, and is a fairly standard phenomenon in the current console market – Sony's PlayStation 3 will also be sold at a loss. Console hardware vendors such as Sony and Microsoft rely on

sales of the pertinent software for revenue, rather than making their profits from the hardware itself. As manufacturing processes are refined, production costs are expected to be lowered significantly. Interesting fact: IBM's processors power all three competing next-generation systems, so the company wins regardless.

## 100 MILLION PLAYSTATION 2 CONSOLES SOLD

Sony recently announced that 100 million PlayStation 2 consoles have been shipped worldwide, claiming that the PS2 is now the fastest selling computer entertainment platform in history.

First launched in Japan in March 2000, this milestone has been reached in just over five years while the original PlayStation console took nine and a half years to sell the same amount of units.

As of November 29<sup>th</sup>, more than 22.2 million units have been shipped in Asia (including Japan and South Korea), while the figure for North America stands at 40.65 million units. More than 37.1 million units have been shipped in PAL territories.



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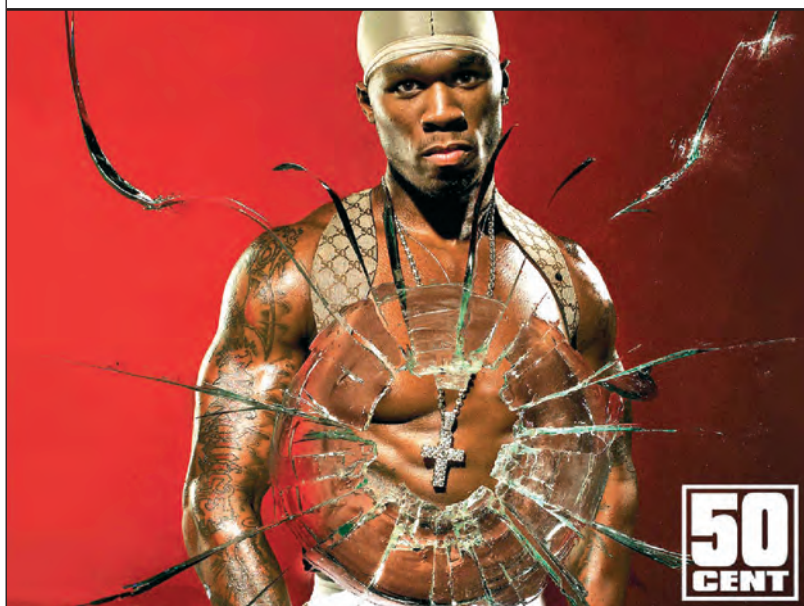




## €1-MILLION MMORPG COMPETITION

GamesRouter, publisher of MMORPG, R.O.S.E., has announced that players of this title will have the opportunity to win various prizes [including the grand prize of €1-million!] according to their prowess within the game. Various monsters will drop bronze, silver or gold 'tickets' upon being vanquished, and these will be redeemable for a range of rewards. Bronze tickets can be redeemed against game time and R.O.S.E. merchandise and silver tickets offer portable music players and a series of electronic gadgets.

The best [gold] tickets will qualify players for a play-off tournament, the winner of which will walk away with the fortune. Up to 50 gold ticket winners will be taken on an all expenses paid trip to an undisclosed location, where they can battle it out in a live tournament for the chance to pick up the ultimate prize of €1 million in cash. The competition starts in January 2006 and runs till the end of November 2006.



## 50 CENT CHALLENGES AGE RESTRICTION

Curtis Jackson, known as 50 Cent, has his own ideas about the 17+ rating on his game, Bulletproof, which is listed as containing Blood and Gore, Intense Violence, Sexual Themes, Strong Language and Use of Drugs. Jackson argues that parents should buy the game for their kids and explain to them what it is about as, he claims, it can teach them valuable life lessons! Yeah, whatever...

# otaku

the anime lifestyle magazine



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## NCsoft ENTERS THE CONSOLE MARKET

NCsoft, the company behind online games such as Lineage, City of Heroes and Guild Wars, has announced that future plans include support for next-generation consoles. However, it appears that, at least initially, the Xbox 360 will not feature in these plans, and the emphasis seems to be on the PlayStation 3. In the past, the company had limited itself to developing exclusively for PC. The company will also be opening an operation in Europe.

## DREAMWORKS AND ACTIVISION TEAM UP

The software publisher and animated film production company have signed an agreement that grants Activision rights to develop and publish games based on various DreamWorks properties. The deal covers PC, consoles and handheld devices. Upcoming titles include games based on Shrek 3 and Madagascar 2.

## PIRACY FALLING IN CENTRAL EUROPE

Recent reports indicate that software piracy in former Communist states such as Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic is dropping. Electronic Arts has been instrumental in this decline, partly by seeking tough law enforcement, but also by enticing customers with localised versions and lower prices. The console market is in an upswing in this area, which also suggests dropping piracy, as this is more difficult on console formats.

"It's a similar trend in all three countries...console software started at around 15 percent of all entertainment software two years ago. In 2005 it will probably be 35 percent and for 2007 we expect it to be around 65-70 percent," said EA's head of European sales, Jens Uwe.



## NOKIA GIVES UP ON GAMING FOR NOW

Nokia has revealed that, at present, the company has no plans to develop further versions of the N-Gage. Officials declared that the unit did not prove as popular as originally hoped, and the company will wait until technology has advanced enough to make gaming on phones more attractive. In the meantime, the company plans to focus on developing phones that are viable media handling devices.

### Viva la videogame

The French postal service has issued a series of stamps that feature classic videogame characters. These include Pac-Man, Lara Croft, Mario, Donkey Kong and several others.



## F.E.A.R. SDK AND OTHER GOODIES

Vivendi Universal has announced the first stage of post launch support for F.E.A.R. The company has released a software development kit allowing users to develop customised third-party in-game content, as well as stand-alone server software for Win32 and Linux. Further plans include the future inclusion of PunkBuster – this is software that serves to curb in-game cheating. Additional maps and game types are also planned for the near future. [www.whatisfear.com]

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## THE NEXT STEP IN IMMERSION

Philips has announced a technology which promises to provide games and, presumably, films and the like, with what the company calls "sensory surround." Named amBX, the system will allow greater sensory immersion by modifying light, colour, sound, temperature and air movement conditions within a room. So, for example, a jungle setting will fill the room with green hues and dappled lighting, while a thunderstorm will result in strobing effects.

Philips amBX chief marketing officer Jo Cooke commented: "For games creators this is a fantastic opportunity: amBX expands the immersive experience by bringing the real world environment into the gameplay."

Various peripheral manufacturers have expressed interest in the technology, which Philips hopes to launch next May.

## PARENTS BLAME WoW FOR CHILD'S DEATH

A 13-year-old Chinese boy recently fell to his death, and his parents are suing Blizzard, claiming that he was enacting a scene from World of Warcraft when the accident happened. Their claim is supported by Zhang Chunliang, a Chinese activist against computer games and Internet addiction. Neither Blizzard nor The9, Blizzard's agents in the area, have commented.

There are more than 1.5 million World of Warcraft players in China - making up more than a third of the game's worldwide subscriber base, even though the game only went on sale there in June.

### WoW parental controls

Blizzard has introduced a parental control system for World of Warcraft that allows parents to dictate permitted playing times, including the ability to enforce periodic breaks. The system applies itself to an entire account, so switching between characters doesn't allow players to circumvent this measure.



### X-Men and Spider-Man to live long

Activision has negotiated an extension of its licensing deal with Marvel Comics. The original agreement would have expired in 2009, but now the contract will last until 2017! PC, consoles and handheld devices are all covered by the terms of the agreement.



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## WEB SCORES

### Age of Empires III [PC]

NAG [100]	<b>70</b>	
GAMESPY.COM [5]	<b>5.0</b>	
GAMESPOT.COM [10]	<b>8.2</b>	
IGN.COM [10]	<b>8.8</b>	


### Need For Speed: Most Wanted [PC]

NAG [100]	<b>86</b>	
GAMESPY.COM [5]	<b>4.0</b>	
GAMESPOT.COM [10]	<b>8.4</b>	
IGN.COM [10]	<b>8.5</b>	


### King Kong [PC]

NAG [100]	<b>90</b>	
GAMESPY.COM [5]	<b>3.5</b>	
GAMESPOT.COM [10]	<b>8.1</b>	
IGN.COM [10]	<b>8.0</b>	

### Serious Sam II [PC]

NAG [100]	<b>67</b>	
GAMESPY.COM [5]	<b>3.5</b>	
GAMESPOT.COM [10]	<b>6.9</b>	
IGN.COM [10]	<b>8.2</b>	


### Call of Duty 2 [PC]

NAG [100]	<b>91</b>	
GAMESPY.COM [5]	<b>5.0</b>	
GAMESPOT.COM [10]	<b>8.8</b>	
IGN.COM [10]	<b>8.5</b>	

### SSX on Tour [PS2]

NAG [100]	<b>80</b>	
GAMESPY.COM [5]	<b>4.5</b>	
GAMESPOT.COM [10]	<b>8.7</b>	
IGN.COM [10]	<b>8.8</b>	

### Total Overdose [PSP]

NAG [100]	<b>62</b>	
GAMESPY.COM [5]	<b>3.0</b>	
GAMESPOT.COM [10]	<b>6.7</b>	
IGN.COM [10]	<b>8.0</b>	

### FIFA [PSP]

NAG [100]	<b>85</b>	
GAMESPY.COM [5]	<b>NR</b>	
GAMESPOT.COM [10]	<b>8.7</b>	
IGN.COM [10]	<b>7.4</b>	

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



## HITMAN RANKING SYSTEM

Online players of Hitman: Blood Money will be able to measure themselves against other players across the globe. The Hitman Online Ranking System will rate players in a variety of ways, including Highest Paid, Most Wanted, Fastest and Most Accurate. The system will reward players regardless of their play style, whether they prefer overt, gun-blazing mayhem or stealthy assassination.

League tables will be displayed in game and all players will be rewarded for competing online with a search to find the world's best Hitman. The competition will run for console players only and will commence once the game has launched with a grand prize, to be revealed nearer launch.

## NEW SIMS 2 ADD-ON

EA's hugely successful The Sims franchise is set to grow yet again. The third expansion pack for The Sims 2 is on its way, titled Open for Business. The add-on will allow players to set up and manage a business, whether by running a company on separate premises or working from home.



## Game Accelerator

G2 Software has announced an application called Game Accelerator that is a system monitoring and management tool that allows users to optimise their systems for game performance. Among its functions is a sophisticated memory defragmenter, an important tool for those who want to squeeze the most out of their systems. Game Accelerator will be available before March. [www.g2games.com]

## Microsoft gives kids a happy Christmas

Microsoft has donated hundreds of Xbox, PlayStation and Game Boy Advance consoles as well as gaming titles and other gaming equipment to the Get-Well Gamers Foundation, a California-based public charity dedicated to bringing electronic entertainment to children in healthcare facilities.

"The breadth of what Microsoft has given us is astounding," said Ryan Sharpe, President of Get-Well Gamers. "There's truly something here for children of every age level. My only hope is that enough healthcare facilities step forward in time for the holidays."

"Studies have shown that playing videogames is one of the best ways for patients to dull their pain receptors and shortens the length of their hospital stays," he added.

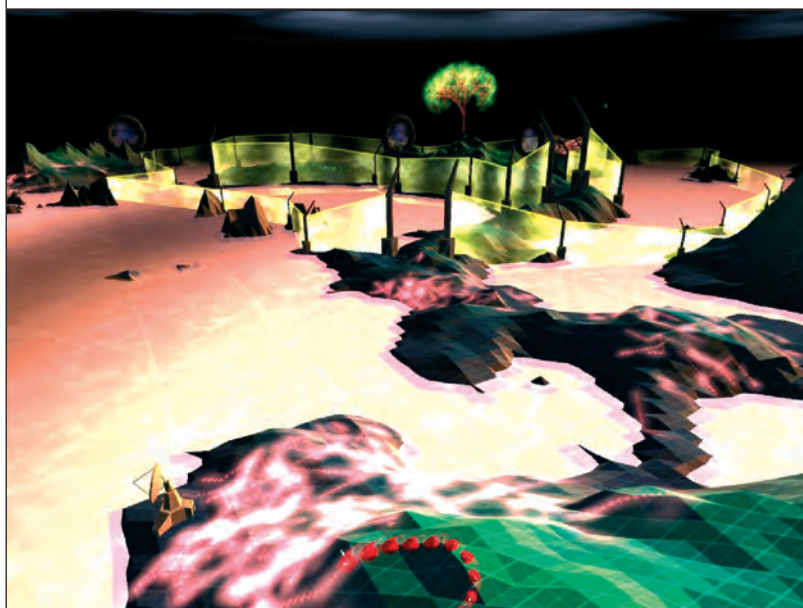
[www.get-well-gamers.org]





## FACES OF WAR

Ubisoft has announced an upcoming World War 2 themed tactical combat game that, if the company's claims are lived up to, is set to be revolutionary within the genre. Besides features such as fully destructible environments, Faces of War will include an innovative command interpretation system. Instead of carrying out the player's commands, units will 'think' about the best and safest way to do so, meaning that they will have behavioural patterns and characteristics. Ubisoft expects to launch this one in March. [[www.facesofwargame.com](http://www.facesofwargame.com)]



## DARWINIA MULTIPLAYER

Introversion has announced that the innovative game Darwinia would be getting multiplayer support as of 14 December, when it becomes available on Valve's Steam. By the time you read this you'll know one way or the other!

## FINAL FANTASY XI: TREASURES OF AHT URHGAN

Square Enix has announced an expansion pack for its MMORPG. Players can expect new maps, monsters and character classes.

## MARC ECKÖ'S getting up

CONTENTS UNDER PRESSURE



"...a hybrid between progressive street culture and traditional gaming culture."



PlayStation 2



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# ON THE HORIZON

US RELEASE DATES (SUBJECT TO CHANGE)

RELEASE DATE	GAME	PLATFORMS	GENRE
17 January	Combat Elite: WWII Paratroopers	PC	Action
18 January	25 to Life	PC	Action
23 January	American Conquest: Divided Nation	PC	Strategy
28 January	Torino 2006: XX Olympic Winter Games	PC	Sport
01 February	Tycoon City: New York	PC	Strategy
01 February	Anarchy Online: Lost Eden	PC	MMORPG
01 February	Stacked with Daniel Negreanu	PC	Cards
01 February	Payout Poker and Casino	PC	Cards
01 February	Curious George	PC	Action/Adventure
15 February	Desperados 2: Cooper's Revenge	PC	Strategy
21 February	Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon: Advanced Warfighter	PC	Tactical
21 February	UFO: Extraterrestrials	PC	Strategy
21 February	Paradise	PC	Adventure
22 February	Galactic Civilizations II: Dreadlords	PC	Strategy
22 February	TOCA Race Driver 3	PC	Racing
22 February	Marc Ecko's Getting Up: Contents Under Pressure	PC	Action
24 February	Empire Earth II: The Art of Supremacy	PC	Strategy
28 February	Keepsake	PC	Adventure

## Nintendo goes mobile

Nintendo has recently launched its new WAP portal for use with all WAP enabled handsets. VIP 24:7 members will have access to a range of classic videogame ringtones, over thirty wallpapers and additional unique mobile content. Members can select from over 20 game related realtone ringtunes, including classics such as Super Mario Bros, The Legend of Zelda: Ocarina of Time and Metroid Prime.

The realtone ringtones will be available for a cost of 350 stars per tone, while the wallpapers and selected customisation content can be obtained for 150 stars each.

## Write a script for BioWare

BioWare is looking for talented writers to help develop their award-winning roleplaying games and have thus launched a unique competition where the first prize is a job with the company. BioWare has invited writers to create a Neverwinter Nights module to tell their story using the Aurora Toolset. A list of parameters which needs to be adhered to are available on their Website as well as the who, what, where and how.

Eight winning modules will be selected with each winner receiving BioWare prizes. In addition there is the opportunity to be hired as a writer if your submission is what they are looking for.

Submissions must be in by 30 January 2006 with the winners to be announced the last week of February 2006.

[\[www.bioware.com\]](http://www.bioware.com)



## CITY OF VILLAINS BAD GUY

Lord Recluse, the leader of the villain group Arachnos, oversees all criminal activities on Rogue Isles. All other signature villains and villain groups answer to Lord Recluse and his forces. No idea what we're on about? This is the baddest of the bad in the popular online game City of Villains. Look out for our hands-on report back in next month's issue as we create some of our own baddies and set them free to do evil in the online realm.

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## CHARTS

### PC Games

#	Title
1	Age Of Empires 3
2	Sims 2 Nightlife
3	Need For Speed: Most Wanted
4	Star Wars Battlefront 2
5	Sims 2
6	F.E.A.R.
7	Harry Potter & Goblet Of Fire
8	FIFA 2006
9	Black & White 2
10	D&D Dragonshard
11	Sims Deluxe
12	Metal Gear Solid: Substance
13	Need For Speed: Underground Classics
14	Brother In Arms: Earned In Blood
15	Black & White 2 Special Edition

### PlayStation 2

#	Title
1	Need For Speed: Most Wanted
2	Lord Of The Rings 3rd Age/Batman Begins Combo
3	FIFA 2006
4	Harry Potter & Goblet Of Fire
5	Sims 2
6	Pro Evolution Soccer 5
7	Need For Speed: Underground 2/Burnout 3 Combo
8	Tiger Woods 2006
9	Hitman Contracts/Silent Assassin Double Pack
10	SSX3 Platinum
11	Dragonball Z Budokai Tenkaichi
12	Cricket 2005
13	SSX4 On Tour
14	Batman Begins
15	Mortal Kombat Shaolin Monks

### PSP

#	Title
1	Need For Speed: Most Wanted
2	Star Wars Battlefront 2
3	FIFA 2006
4	SSX4 On Tour
5	Marvel Nemesis Rise Of The Imperfects
6	Midnight Club 3
7	Tiger Woods 2006
8	Medieval Resurrection
9	Burnout Legends
10	Wipeout Pure
11	Metal Gear Acid
12	Colin McRae 2005
13	Toca Race Driver 2
14	Mercury
15	Twisted Metal Head On





## CHRIS DEERING ENTERS HoF

The President of Sony Computer Entertainment Europe (SCEE), Chris Deering, was recently inducted into the ELSPA (Entertainment and Leisure Software Publishers Association) Hall of Fame.

"Few people can claim to have achieved the commercial success of this man," said ELSPA Director General Roger Bennett. "Even fewer can claim to have done it with such humility and openness. He has led the games industry for over 10 years, making PlayStation one of the major entertainment brands for literally millions of consumers."

In his role as President, Deering has extended SCEE's reach to 104 territories worldwide, the result of which means that over one in five Western European households now owns a PlayStation. Deering joins four other Hall of Fame inductees - Toby Gard (designer of the original Lara Croft), the Darling family (Codemasters), and David Ward and Jon Woods (Ocean Software).

## New Website for PSP

Sony Online Entertainment has launched Mobile Station, a portal site for PSP users. The site is divided into three sections, Media, Games, and Links, and features a console-friendly user interface. The Media section provides various downloads, such as wallpapers, screenshots and movies. The Games section is primarily an information service on current and upcoming titles. Links will take users to other console-friendly Web services. Mobile Station requires users to upgrade their PSPs to the 2.0 firmware version. [mobile.station.sony.com]



## GOING POSTAL OVER THE NET

Running With Scissors, creators of Postal and its sequel, has teamed up with Softwrap to allow the game to be distributed online. This step has been taken primarily in order to allow players to acquire it even in territories where the game is banned – and there are a few of these!

"Governments, customs agents or other traditional barriers to going Postal will become irrelevant as the Softwrap system sidesteps distributors, retailers and other would-be gate keepers to deliver the game anywhere and everywhere," stated Running With Scissors CEO Vince Desi. "From the land Down Under to the mountains of Korea, the world can now go Postal in peace and privacy, as God intended. We're just glad that at last responsible kids and irresponsible adults the world over can now get their paws on the most blacklisted and banned game of all time!"

The Postal online store is offering the games for download, priced at \$10 for the original title or \$19.95 each for the sequel and add-on.

PC CD-ROM



THQ

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# MULTIPLAYER

## FATAL1TY WINS CPL WORLD TOUR, UPSETS VOO

SIX YEARS, SEVENTEEN COUNTRIES, five different games, over a hundred tournaments, twelve major wins and over \$500,000. This is the story of none other than Johnathan "Fatal1ty" Wendel, the world's first, America's best, and the Western world's highest earning professional electronic sportsman. Starting his career with Quake III, he has since won international tournaments in Unreal Tournament, Doom 3, Alien vs. Predator and Painkiller. However, many commentators had predicted that his career was on the decline. His relatively poor showings during 2003 and 2004, where he failed to clinch several of the most important titles, lead to accusations that he was undeservedly exploiting the media for his fame. But none can argue with the results of the Cyberathlete Professional League World Tour Finals, held at the Nokia Theatre in New York City. Fatal1ty stormed through the grand final without a moment's hesitation, finally dethroning his arch-nemesis, the fan favourite Sander "Vo0" Kaasjager.

Right up to the moment the weekend's matches began it was still unclear whether Fatal1ty and Vo0 would even be playing in the grand final. The last qualifying stop of the World Tour, held in Chile, saw neither of them finishing in the top two positions. The stop was dominated by Team Fnatic, which claimed the entire podium. Sweden's Alex "Ztrider" Ingarv at last made good on his boasting that he would win a World Tour stop, finishing the tournament without a single map loss. Second place was taken by Andy "Gellehsak" Ryder of Canada, also his best showing in the World Tour. Gellehsak's wins included tense three-mappers against both Fatal1ty and Vo0, cementing him as yet another possibility for the overall finals. Vo0 finished third, rounding off his team's exceptional performance, and leaving Fatal1ty a very unsatisfactory fifth. It looked to be absolutely anybody's game in New York, and the \$150,000 cheque was looming.

But with that much money at stake, a major tournament tends to separate the true professionals from the simply talented, and that is exactly what happened. Several upsets saw the top eight positions looking markedly different from how they had before. UK hopeful David "Zaccubus" Treacy, ranked eighth going into the finals, lost two early games to see his chances shattered. Stephan "Stelam" Lammert (Germany), winner of the Spain stop of the tour, first lost to the unknown Gareth "Garpy" Marshall (UK), then to Mark "Wombat" Larsen (USA), to end his run. A similar fate befell Andrew "Gellehsak" Ryder, who was knocked out by Vincenzo "Booms" D'Aurelio (Italy). Alex "Ztrider" Ingarv, the final high-profile victim, had to settle for sixth place after losses to Booms, Allesandro "Stermy" Avallone (Italy) and Benjamin "Zyz" Bohrmann (Germany). Stermy and Zyz, on the other hand, continued to uphold their reputations as two of the most consistent players in the tournament, finishing third and fourth respectively. Thus, Stermy turned out to be a good acquisition for the Fatal1ty brand, Free Players Organisation, which signed him the week before the tournament began. Of the lesser seeded players, Booms and Wombat adapted well to the pressure, finishing fifth and seventh respectively. Nicola "Forrest"

Geretti, the World Cyber Games 2003 Unreal Tournament Champion, took eighth place.

As we have come to expect from major sporting events, it isn't over until the referee blows the final whistle. In the upper bracket final, the two titans of Painkiller met to give audiences a taste of the action to come. It wasn't just bragging rights they were playing for. The winner of the upper bracket would have a clear advantage going into the grand final, as he would then only need to win one set to take the championship. The lower bracket contender would have to win two.

In the upper final, the first map, Sacred, was Vo0's choice. While it was close to begin with, Vo0 took control towards the second half of the game, starving Fatal1ty of health and armour, and winning 25-15. Fatal1ty's map choice, Meatless, was a different story, with the American rushing to a large early lead. Vo0 mounted an impressive comeback, but was unable to find the last kill, leaving Fatal1ty the winner with a score of 16-15. The deciding map, Psycho, was overrun yet again by Vo0, who stayed ahead of Fatal1ty the whole game to win 27-16. With that, he secured the upper bracket victory. Advantage Vo0.

Of course, playing in a quiet Internet café and playing on stage in front of a live studio audience, with a dozen cameras in your face and tens of thousands of people watching around the world, are two entirely separate things. Fatal1ty, although already down one set, had the advantage in terms of big match experience and proved that this counts most when the pressure is on. Nevertheless, his performance came as a surprise. While everybody knew he could do it, not many actually believed that he would. Vo0 had been the most consistent and had won five stops compared to Fatal1ty's two, making him the obvious favourite.

The first set began. Again the coin toss determined that Vo0's map choice, this time Psycho, would be played first. Going into the grand final, he had never been beaten on this map. Fatal1ty took an early lead but was quickly shut down by Vo0's superior aim in a crucial fire fight. The situation was looking grim for the American, but in a desperate move, he lured Vo0 into an unfavourable position and managed to kill him. After this superb piece of baiting, Fatal1ty took control and stayed just ahead of Vo0 to win 15-11. Fatal1ty's map choice, again Meatless, was utterly one-sided. He gave Vo0 no room to breathe, racking up the spawn frags (successive kills when the opponent has just re-appeared after dying) to take the map 26-6, and the first set 2-0.

An unsettled Vo0 left the arena rubbing and breathing on his hands, cold from nerves. Fatal1ty, by comparison, seemed confident and calm. In a half-time interview, Fatal1ty's team-mate Brian "Zen" Grapatin, explained that Johnathan's strength lay in how many times he had been in situations like these. He had overcome insurmountable odds on many occasions. The words seemed to





ring true. Vo0 again chose Psycho as the first map of the second set, and the timer was started. In what is already being called the most exciting finals map in e-sports history, it took a staggering seven minutes before the first kill was registered. The kill was Fatal1ty's, but immediately afterwards Vo0 snuck in to steal the gold armour, and with his opponent low from the previous fight, equalised in style. The match proceeded kill-for-kill, until the score sat at 4-4 and the timer hit zero. Overtime of two minutes was immediately initiated. Vo0 picked up quick control, 'double stacking' himself with both the gold armour and the mega health, but in the crucial encounter his nerves cracked, and a careless error of positioning saw Fatal1ty taking the kill, then three more in quick succession. Before anybody knew it, the match had ended 8-4 to the American.

At this point, the momentum was clearly with Johnathan Wendel, and he did not falter in the fourth and final map of the grand final – his choice, Meatless. This time it was Vo0 who took an early lead of 8-2, but Fatal1ty kept calm and did not engage him unnecessarily. When the moment was ripe, he moved in for the kill with impeccable precision, holding control from then on until the score was 20-8. Vo0 began yet another comeback, but it proved to be too little, too late, and the map ended 20-14.

The prize-giving ceremony was short and sweet, with a beaming Fatal1ty at a loss for words over this, his greatest tournament win. Vo0 seemed utterly dejected, but nonetheless received the tour's Most Valuable Player award and an additional \$20,000 to go with the \$100,000 for second place.  
[[www.cplworldtour.com](http://www.cplworldtour.com)]

*A two hour live compilation footage movie of the finals, courtesy of MTV Overdrive, is on the DVD*

## FINAL STANDINGS

1. Johnathan "Fatal1ty" Wendel (USA / Free Players Organisation)
2. Sander "Vo0" Kaasjager (Netherlands / Team Fnatic)
3. Allesandro "Stermy" Avallone (Italy / Free Players Organisation)
4. Benjamin "Zyz" Bohrmann (Germany / SK Gaming)
5. Vincenzo "Booms" D'Aurelio (Italy / Team Play.it)
6. Alexander "Ztrider" Ingarv (Sweden / Team Fnatic)
7. Mark "Wombat" Larsen (USA / Team 3D)
8. Nicola "Forrest" Geretti (Italy / Team Play.it)

## PRIZE MONEY STANDINGS

1. Sander "Vo0" Kaasjager - \$232,000
2. Johnathan "Fatal1ty" Wendel - \$231,000
3. Allesandro "Stermy" Avallone - \$111,000
4. Benjamin "Zyz" Bohrmann - \$102,750
5. Alexander "Ztrider" Ingarv - \$86,500
6. Vincenzo "Booms" D'Aurelio - \$37,500
7. Andrew "Gellehsak" Ryder - \$35,000
8. Stephan "Stelam" Lammert - \$28,000



# MULTIPLAYER SOUTH AFRICA TAKES (MINI) GOLD AT WCG

IT WASN'T COUNTER-STRIKE, IT WASN'T WarCraft III, and it wasn't any of the other official games – it wasn't even multiplayer. Nevertheless, the introduction of cellphone gaming at the World Cyber Games has produced the first ever win for a South African player. Tamaryn Brooke-Smith, hailing from Paarl, was one of four mobile game players sent to the WCG through an initiative by eXactmobile and the South African Wargames Union [now Mind Sports South Africa]. She represented her country in the game 'Chopper Rescue', and at fifteen was the youngest member of the SA team. With the win she collected a cheque for \$2,000 and the prestige of being one of the first mobile gaming world champions. The WCG and other related organisations have expressed their desire to grow mobile gaming, as it appeals to the mainstream market and thus helps to bring new players into e-sports.

There were no surprises in the rest of the team's performance. Our national Counter-Strike: Source team, consisting of players from Identity Gaming, Team Evolve and Bad Habit Boyz, were, as usual, unfortunate not to advance to the single-elimination rounds of the tournament. Their group contained the overall third-place finishers from Canada, Evil Geniuses, and the relatively unknown contenders from Greece, Delinquent Habits. The game against Greece went smoothly, with our team taking a 9-6 lead in the first half, and maintaining it for the rest of the match to win 19-11. Against Canada, however, a slow first half [which Canada won 11-4], put them too far behind to catch up. A valiant effort saw the game turning out closer than expected, but the Canadians stood firm to win 17-13.

Travis "Shase" Weedon, our WarCraft III representative for the second time this year, was overwhelmed by the significantly higher international standard of play. The

local WarCraft scene is arguably the smallest of the various local communities, with few real opportunities for practice. Since the effective retirement of clan Nightfall, many have been asking just how much life local WarCraft III has left. In this light, Shase's performance was still admirable. His sole victory, coming against Estonia's Aleksandr "AliaseTRazors" Goljakov saved him from a rock-bottom finish. He shared fourth place in his group with Goljakov and Han Hang from New Zealand, while Russia's Andrey "Deadman" Sobolev and Spain's Ruben "LoL\_vs\_xD" Pons Serrano qualified for the next round.

Our last remaining effort, that of Daniel Ribeiro in FIFA 2005 was also disappointing. His failure to win a game can be explained by the fact that this was South Africa's first FIFA appearance. However, the standard is likely to rise significantly in the coming years, as more and more competitions begin to support this increasingly popular title.

On the whole, WCG 2005 was a very successful tournament for the American team, which walked away with the top medal standing. Their two gold medals both came courtesy of Team 3D, whose Counter-Strike and Halo divisions proved unstoppable at the tournament. Team 3D also became the first in WCG Counter-Strike history to successfully defend their title, having won it last year as well. They join the likes of double-gold winners Yo-Hwan "Slayers\_Boxer" Lim (S. Korea) and Christian "GitzZz" Hoeck (Germany) in the WCG Legends hall of fame. No team or player has yet won three times.

"This has been the most successful Grand Final to date," said Hank Jeong, CEO of International Cyber Marketing, global organisers of the World Cyber Games. "The crowds voted with their feet, and we earned the right to say we are the biggest competition of its kind in the world. As we continue to pioneer the e-Sports category, we are seeing a great variety of nations becoming more competitive. The World Cyber Games has truly evolved to become the gaming equivalent of the Olympics."

[[www.worldcybergames.com](http://www.worldcybergames.com)]

*The four mobile gamers who officially represented South Africa at the World Cyber Games. From left to right: Ethen Reuben, 27; Wayne Kruger (Manager); Tammy Brook-Smith, 15; Werner De Lange, 36; Christo Janse van Vuuren, 23*



## WINNERS

### Counter-Strike: Source

1. Team 3D (USA)
2. K23 (Kazakhstan)
3. Evil Geniuses (Canada)

### WarCraft III: The Frozen Throne

1. Sky (China)
2. Shortroud (USA)
3. Grubby (Netherlands)

### FIFA 2005

1. Styla (Germany)
2. Alexx (Russia)
3. Eduyep (Spain)

### StarCraft: Broodwar

1. F0ru (S. Korea)
2. Androide (Russia)
3. Legionnaire (Australia)

### Dead or Alive: Ultimate

1. Katsuninken (Japan)
2. Tetra (Singapore)
3. Shinobi (S. Korea)

### Need for Speed: Underground 2

1. GearGG (Brazil)
2. Godsmack (Brazil)
3. MrKot (Russia)

### Warhammer 40K: Dawn of War

1. Select (S. Korea)
2. Quanchi (Brazil)
3. Insane (Germany)

### Halo 2

1. Team 3D (USA)
2. Evil Geniuses (Canada)
3. Halo1Style (France)





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GT  
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## SAWU BECOMES MIND SPORTS SOUTH AFRICA

**T**HE SOUTH AFRICAN WARGAMES Union [SAWU], the official national body responsible for board games, figure gaming and computer gaming, is changing its name to Mind Sports South Africa [MSSA]. "Changing times and conceptions about the meaning of words necessitated the change in name," said Colin Webster, president of MSSA. "What was acceptable ten years ago is not necessarily acceptable today, and like any organisation, we have to move with the times in order to remain relevant to society and its needs. We believe that the new name is more descriptive, as well as more marketable with sponsors and educational institutions alike."

The name change is largely due to the need to include electronic sports, which MSSA has recently begun to focus on. The organisation has been around since 1980, holding national championships and sending players overseas. As electronic gaming is a very different enterprise to the MSSA's previous undertakings, the organisation plans to initiate development at the grassroots level, first and foremost in attracting new players and improving the image of the sport.

"The principle hurdle facing gaming in South Africa is without doubt the lack of accreditation," said Colin. "Very few outsiders give due credit for the effort and skill that goes into gaming." This is where the MSSA plans to step in, as it has in the past with board and figure gaming. "A number of learners throughout the country have already received school awards based on the fact that they have received provincial and/or national colours for the games that they play. This accreditation is vital in the long-term growth of the game and is far from an award in name only."

One of the MSSA's first and already very successful initiatives was the partnership with eXactmobile to send cellphone gamers to the World Cyber Games 2005. "It is our belief that mobile gaming is the first step towards computer gaming," explained Colin. "Whereas very few people at the moment can afford the luxury of a personal computer, many millions of South Africans already do have a mobile phone."

[www.sawu.freeservers.com]



## FIFA INTERACTIVE WORLD CUP SEES A LOCAL WINNER

**S**ELF CONFESSED FOOTBALL AND gaming fan, David Letsoalo, competed against hundreds of South Africa's finest football videogamers at the Johannesburg FIFA Interactive World Cup Regional Tournament in November.

David Letsoalo said, "I've been practising hard but can't believe I'm now going to defend South Africa in the final and go to the FIFA 2006 World Cup - it just hasn't sunk in yet. The competition was really tough but I've wanted to win this tournament ever since I heard about it last year. I'll be ready and waiting and I'm going to make sure it's me holding the FIFA Interactive World Player trophy this year!"

Playing his favourite team Man United, David won two tickets to the FIFA 2006 World Cup Final, an Xbox 360 videogame and entertainment system from Microsoft plus his own copy of EA's FIFA 06: Road to FIFA World Cup.

The Johannesburg event was the fourth of eight regional tournaments held across six different continents between October and December 2005. The FIFA Interactive World Cup Grand Final which will be held in London on 18 December 2005 with winner of the tournament being named FIFA Interactive World Player 2005.



# ASUS Motherboards Deliver True SLI Graphics Performance

*Enjoy 32 PCI Express Lanes with A8N32-SLI Deluxe and P5N32-SLI Deluxe*

The ASUS A8N32-SLI and P5N32-SLI motherboards, supporting the most powerful processors from AMD and Intel, respectively, adopted several unique technologies to provide users the best video performance and cool and quiet computing operation.



2-Slot distance : Provides better airflow to ensure reliable system stability

## True Dual x16 SLI - More performance now. Even more later

Unlike previous SLI-ready motherboards that come with two x8 PCI Express slots, two full-bandwidth, 16-lane PCI Express links ensure maximum graphics performance for next-generation GPUs and games. Compared with dual x8 SLI solutions, the dual x16 platform delivers up to 10% efficiency improvement.

Current 3D games have just begun to experience the performance limitations of current dual x8 SLI systems. The next generation games will present more detailed and higher resolution textures that stress the necessity for even higher graphics bandwidth.

## Fan-less Designs - Stack Cool and Copper Heat Pipe

The fan-less designs bring effective and noiseless cooling to counter the heat

generated by components. Watch movies, listen to music and play games, and enjoy the peace and quiet. System damages from fan failure is also a thing of the past.



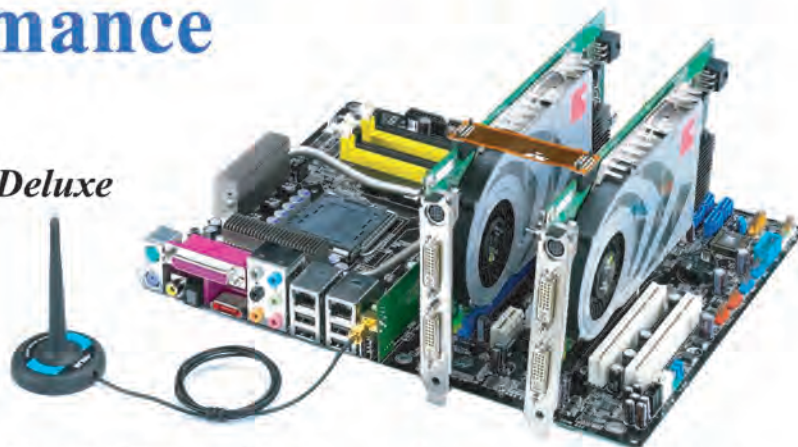
The copper heat pipe directs heat generated by the chipsets to the heatsink near the back I/O ports, where it can be carried away by existing airflow, while STACK COOL 2 effectively transfers heat generated by the critical components to the other side of the specially designed PCB (printed circuit board) for fast heat dissipation.

## 8-Phase Power design

With the 8-Phase Power design, power modules operate at 15°C lower than conventional power solutions to provide a cool computing environment. Lower temperature also results in lower fan speed for quiet operation and better stability during overclocking.



8-phase design operate at 15°C lower than conventional power solution



Effectively transfers heat to the other side of the specially designed PCB

The 8-Phase Power design reduces input ripple current and output ripple voltage, keeping the CPU and power modules from high power stress to lengthen component lifespan. Furthermore, it has the advantage of quick transient response. It acts faster than 4-phase power designs to stabilize output current and voltage. This is especially critical when the CPU requires immediate current support when under heavy workload.

## Optional fan bundle for water-cooling systems

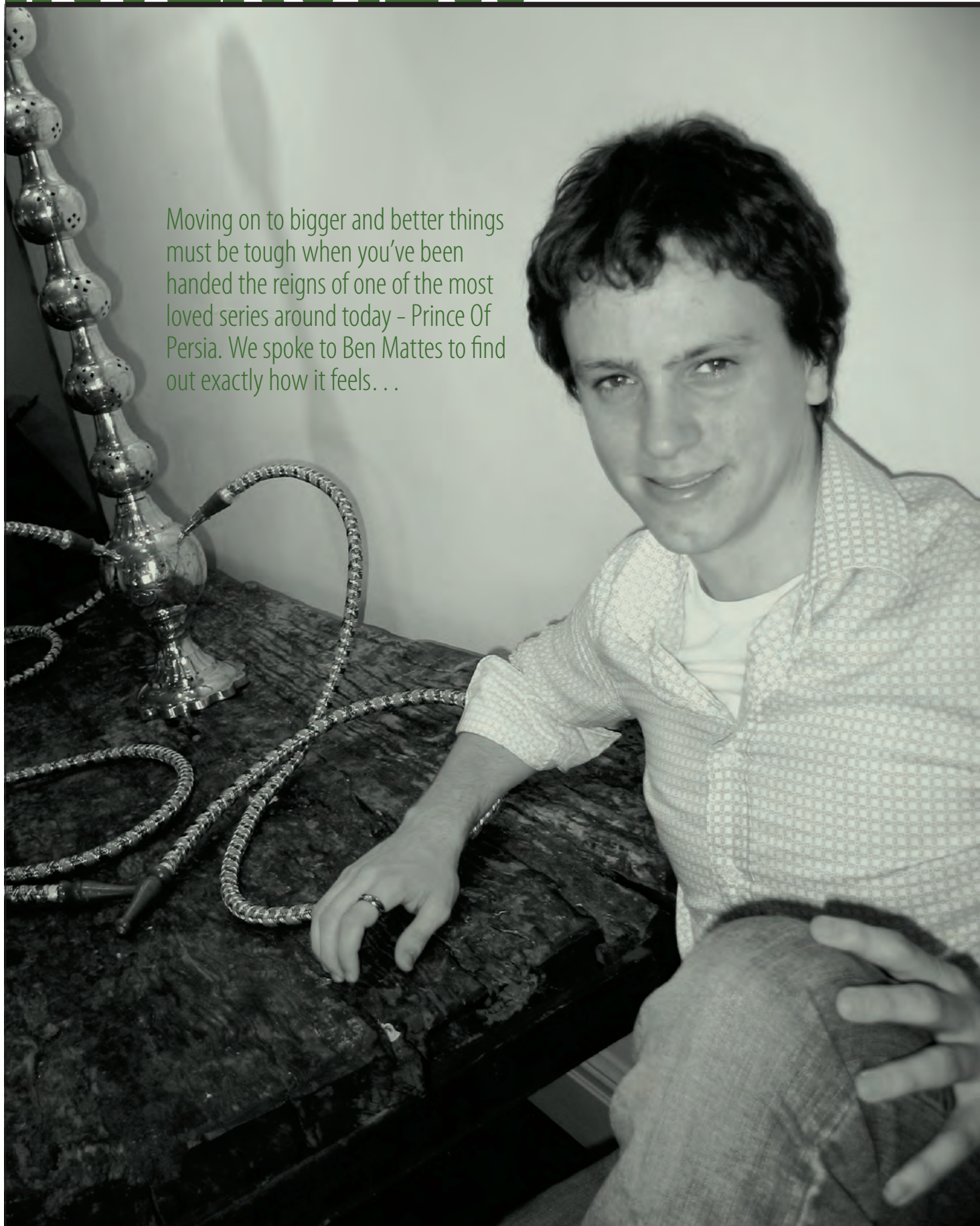


The optional fan is designed to provide sufficient airflow over the CPU power modules and chipset area when water-cooling and passive cooling solutions are utilized, ensuring effective heat dissipation for the entire system.



# INTERVIEW

Moving on to bigger and better things must be tough when you've been handed the reigns of one of the most loved series around today - Prince Of Persia. We spoke to Ben Mattes to find out exactly how it feels. . .





BEN MATTES

# UBISOFT MONTREAL

**I** PROMISE I'M OLDER THAN I look," Ben Mattes, production studio manager at Ubisoft's Montreal office guarantees us, correctly guessing that we're thinking he looks extremely youthful for someone in such a position – we assume that he probably gets it in a lot of bars.

It's a strange start to a conversation, admittedly, but he obviously wants to get it out of the way early on. "I'm 27," he continues. "I started off as a games consultant at Airborne Entertainment, which basically meant I did anything and everything games-related for a growing company that wanted to establish a presence in the mobile gaming space. At the time, that meant designing, programming and Q&A-ing WAP games. Soon the technology shifted and my meagre programming skills were no longer sufficient. You know the saying, 'those who can't do, produce,'" he explains.

We're fairly sure that this has only ever been said once – just now. But he's certainly true to his word. Not only that, but he's managed to elevate himself to the point where he's working on one of the most respected franchises in the business. Though, for someone that's just told us that he's had the dream of working in the games industry since the age of 12, mobile gaming seems an odd place to start – hardly what many would consider a dream industry job. "Having been what I would call a 'hardcore gamer' most of my life, I was very envious of what Gameloft was doing at the time," he says. "They were making 'gamers' games' for mobiles and were – and still are – the absolute top producer of mobile games in the industry. When the opportunity presented itself to work for Gameloft as a first-party producer, I jumped at the chance."

Mattes' time at Gameloft has come to an end and he can now be found holding tightly onto the reigns of Prince Of Persia, one of Ubisoft's most successful series. At the time of this interview he was putting the finishing touches on the final game in the trilogy, The Two Thrones. "The scale and scope of the project is certainly grander," he tells us, "and the nature of a triple-A console title means the work I do now is visible to a larger public." In short, the pressure is very much on for Mattes. It's difficult enough tweaking sequels delicately enough to

provide both a fresh experience as well as a level of familiarity. But when you've been handed the final instalment of a grand series, you have to be a little nervous, especially when you're far more used to working on titles for mobile phones. "There were certainly many challenges for me when I made the jump," he admits. "New brand, new technology, larger scope... Luckily, Ubisoft is a company that believes very strongly in support mechanisms, so I never felt alone in the transition."

To be honest, this was never in question. Ubisoft is certainly a company that knows what it's doing, and would certainly ensure Mattes had all he needed to complete the final chapter of the Prince Of Persia story to standard. But having a task like this entrusted to you has to be extremely daunting. "Well, on a personal level I feel like I have some big shoes to fill," he tells us. "I'm really walking in the footsteps of giants here and

"I'm convinced the phrase 'imitation is the sincerest form of flattery' was invented for the games industry"

recognise that the backlash will be severe amongst the gaming community if I fail to do the Prince justice. I take comfort, though, in the encouraging signs we're receiving for The Two Thrones. Our play tests, previews and internal reviews all point to the fact that the team here has created something truly worthy of its legacy."

This is good to hear, and although we're sad to see the supposed end to the Prince's adventures, we eagerly await the last instalment. So, is this really it? Will there be a next-gen Prince offering? C'mon Mattes, what's next? "I'd probably have to kill you if I told you," he laughs. We look on, unsurprised at this oh-so regular reluctance to give information. "I will say though, that I hope to get the chance to work on a second-generation next-gen title. The 360 launch titles look great, but we all know they're only scratching the surface of what the machine is capable of doing. What I really want is to help scratch that little bit deeper..." **NAG**





# SA Computer MAGAZINE



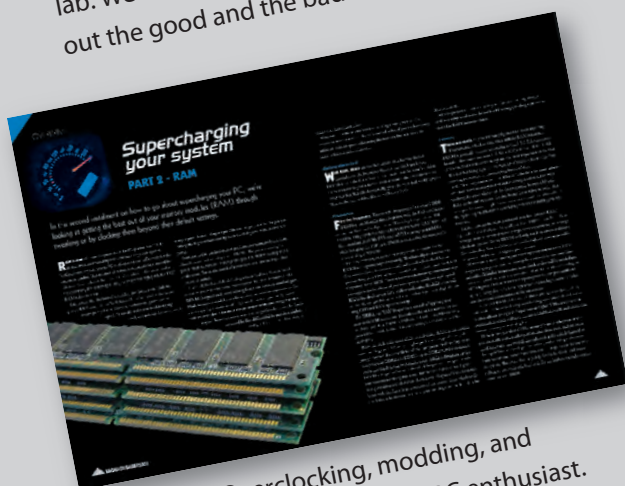
**Group Test:** Want a bit more technical and background info on the product ranges we test? This is the place to look.



**Test Lab:** A closer look at the products in our test lab. We score them, photograph them and point out the good and the bad.



**Cover Story:** Supplementing your technology lifestyle, we cover cutting edge digital trends.

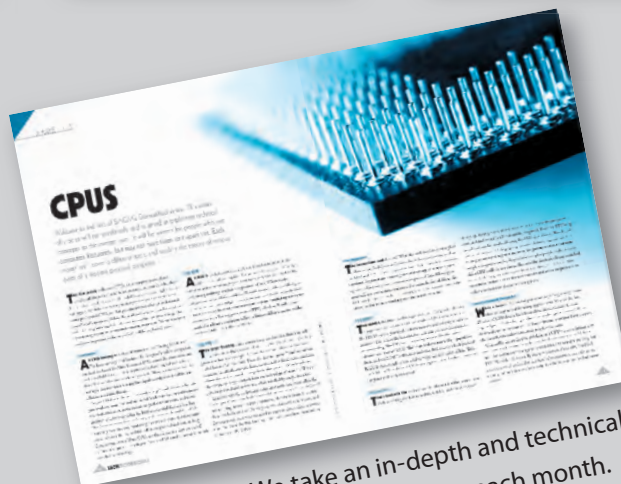


**Overdrive:** Overclocking, modding, and performance tweaking for the PC enthusiast.





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**Demystified:** We take an in-depth and technical look at one hardware component each month.



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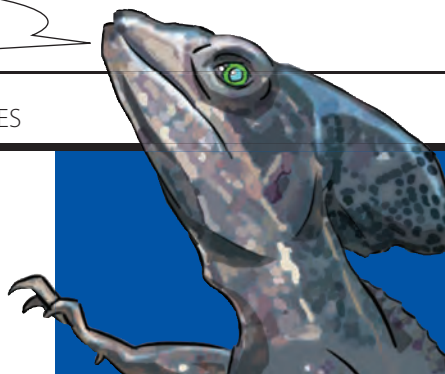


**Software Previews:** When we receive Beta code we play around with it and give you a broad overview of things to come.

**what you've been missing...**



Don't you know who I am?!?@#?



## Might Makes Slight

**P**ICTURE THIS. IT'S THE Soccer World Cup final. Brazil and Germany are battling it out for international glory. The game is tied at two goals apiece, and time is running short. Then, in the very last minute Ronaldodino streaks ahead of the German defence to intercept a long pass, confuses the goalkeeper with miraculous footwork, and scores! The crowd goes wild, but so does the offside flag. Unfortunately, Brazil goes on to lose on penalties. After the match, Ronaldmcdonaldelnino posts on an online forum that the game of soccer is boring and unbalanced with the current offside rules. There is a general nodding of heads, and the rules are promptly changed. After all, he is the best player, he must be correct.

This happens all too often in the gaming world. Top competitors frequently demand gameplay or rule changes with no supporting argument other than "I understand the game better." If they did indeed have a greater or more nuanced understanding of the title, they would be able to provide simple reasons for their proposals. "You can't understand," essentially amounts to: "I don't understand well enough to explain it to you." I'm willing to accept that a top player might have a valid point, but the point is not valid simply because he is a top player.

Of course, decision-making should not be left to people with limited knowledge of the game. The Cyberathlete Professional League (CPL) has fallen prey to this many times in the past. While their existence has aided competitive gaming a great deal in terms of mainstream exposure and prize money, they have passed many rules which were detrimental to the sport. Explicitly forbidding defensive play, forcing players to compete on LCD monitors, banning the lowering of detail settings and insisting on pre-set maps are all mistakes the CPL has made. These oversights occurred because the organisers believed they knew sport in general. But this is never the case. Even the various mainstream sports are markedly different from one another. A thorough knowledge of the particular game is needed when it comes to rule-making.

To expand on the analogy with mainstream sport, the rules should be made by the committees and associations. Most of the members of these committees were once players themselves, but their decisions are (at least in theory) made on the basis of how well a point is argued for, not on how skilled each of them were in their heydays. This seems to be something

alien to the majority of competitive gamers. "It makes the map more balanced," is only a valid claim if you explain why this is the case.

The winner of a competition may have the best reactions, the most accomplished aim, and the most mature strategy, but it doesn't follow logically that he has the greatest concept of fair and balanced play. In fact, the arguments of many top players can be broken down into: "I like it this way because it helps me win," or "I like this map because it suits my play style." These are the very sentiments we need to keep out of the rule-making process, if it is to be fair to all players. What we need is an external governing authority, composed of former players and expert observers. This panel would be able to make objective decisions, taking into account all sides of the debate: the wishes of the players, the requirements of spectators, sponsors, other commercial aspects, and most importantly, plain common sense. **NAG**

“Top competitors frequently demand gameplay or rule changes with no supporting argument other than “I understand the game better.” If they did indeed have a greater or more nuanced understanding of the title, they would be able to provide simple reasons for their proposals.

”  
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# Power of 2 GPUs on 1 Card

## ASUS EN7800GT Dual Scores 11,138 on 3DMark05

The latest VGA (video graphics acceleration) platforms such as Nvidia's SLI (Scalable Link Interface) and ATI's CrossFire have taken 3D gaming by storm, offering powerful video processing with systems that support simultaneous operation of two high-performance graphics cards.

ASUS' EN7800GT Dual took this concept one step further by incorporating two GPU (graphics processing unit) on a single graphics card. The all-new graphics card, powered by two Nvidia GeForce 7800GT GPUs, registered a score of 11,138 on 3DMark05 and 23,203 on 3DMark03 benchmarks, a clear demonstration of the card's video processing capability.



↑ 2 GPU on 1 graphics card

### External power supply enables stable overclocking

Stable power source is critical when running such a powerful graphics card, especially during overclocking.

The EN7800GT Dual comes equipped with an independent, external power supply unit to free itself from sharing the same power source with the CPU, optical drives and other power-hungry components. Moreover, you no longer have to open up the case and take apart the system to upgrade the power supply units in the future.



↑ External power supply unit

### Industrial design excellence

The ultimate gaming PC needs to be both beautiful inside and out. ASUS' award-winning industrial design team created the fan guard for functionality and aesthetics. With so many people using see-



↑ Cool fan and heat sink design



through casings these days, it's important to improve airflow and ventilation around the graphics card while making your system look that much cooler as well.

### Conclusion: More Power on 1 card

With dependable power source and innovative fan guard design, the EN7800GT Dual offers industry-leading video processing capability without affecting system stability. If you take pride in your gaming experience, whether it's high-quality graphics or a cool looking system, then look no further than the all-new ASUS EN7800GT Dual. Only 2,000 units are available worldwide. Don't waste time. It's first come first served.



↑ Serial number included for this very special graphics card





## 'Tis the season...

**C**HRISTMAS HAS COME AND gone. Did you get what you wanted for Christmas? Did your parents buy you that fancy new video card, that'll be outdated in a few months? Were you inundated with new games which won't run on your system unless you get a fancy new video card? Or did your grandparents simply give you more underwear and a bit of money so you could "go buy what you kids buy these days?"

Regardless of your supposed Christmas cheer, now comes a part of the yearly gaming lifecycle that I don't enjoy - the post-Christmas lull.

All the publishers have squeezed, squatted and pushed as hard as they could to make sure their games are on shelves come the Christmas rush. The end result, a massive gaming void come January and February, where games rarely peek out from their development cycles while the industry waits for 'the next big thing'.

And what exactly is the 'next big thing' I wonder. The Xbox 360 has been released; Quake 4 has come and gone its merry shrink-wrapped way. F.E.A.R. surprised everyone with its fresh approach to action and King Kong (The Official Game of the Movie) once again made gamers wonder why previous movie-licence titles were so bad.

But what's next? There's no Half-Life 3 on the immediate horizon... no Quake 5. As much as gamers purport to abhor sequels, we love them because they're safe. We know what we're getting. Yet, the future seems almost deprived of quality sequels, with perhaps the exception of dark-dog Might and Magic: Dark Messiah and the overly hyped (yet sure to underwhelm) Elder Scrolls: Oblivion.

Okay, sure, the PlayStation 3 is on the way, perhaps in 2007. I don't really consider anything more than a year away, 'the next big thing'. The Revolution is coming in March 2006, according to reports. That should be interesting, though I doubt it will get the exposure it needs here in South Africa.

This leads me to a thought. South Africa seems eagerly poised on the cusp of taking gaming seriously (both in an economical sense and support sense) - the new pricing of games to the more world-wide standard of R399 per title is proof of that. Yet despite this poising, certain factions still make stupid mistakes. Certain TV

stations and newspapers (along with other media) still insist that it's perfectly fine for some retard to go right ahead and present/write about gaming related things, without having a clue what they're talking/writing about.

Now this isn't rocket science people. You don't put a toddler in the United Nations (though ironically, the toddler might be better than some of the current members), you don't ask a deep-sea diver to navigate you through the desert and you sure as hell don't get some imbecile who doesn't even play games to tell me that 'Tekken 5 is the greatest game evah!'

It just doesn't work. And those of us, who actually consider gaming a little more important than most, don't appreciate seeing station executives or newspaper editors making a mockery of our trade and/or passion.

But I digress; it's now January and yet another year's ahead. What will it hold for gamers? Another rAge - that much is certain. Another 12 issues of NAG. Another 12 pay-cheques (hopefully).

And just perhaps, another 'big thing' to keep us entertained until the next 'big thing' looms on the horizon, ready to be played, analysed, criticised and judged. **NAG**

“All the publishers have squeezed, squatted and pushed as hard as they could to make sure their games are on shelves come the Christmas rush. The end result, a massive gaming void come January and February, where games rarely peek out from their development cycles while the industry waits for 'the next big thing'.”



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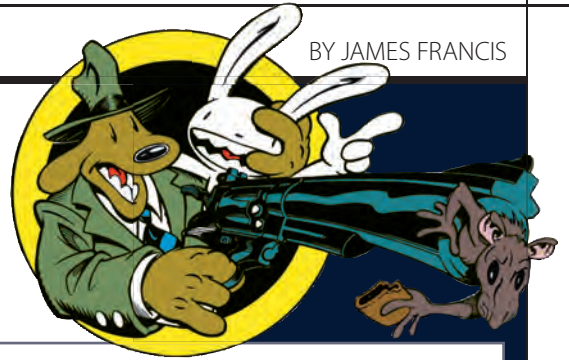


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## Originality Now!

**W**HAT'S THE POINT OF a game? A fun time? A reason to not date girls? Alone time away from the wife? Something to play before the match comes on? All of these and a few more? But if you hang around hardcore gamers long enough, you'd swear it was all about creating better games. Yes, there are bad games out there. But do all the titles released deserve the 'unoriginality' lambasting that frequents media and fan reviews? Of course not. They are being idiots.

What's with the gamer's quest for originality? I was like that too. You always quipped about how games weren't 'original'. I think if you played through the 3D revolution you could say that – the initial 3D games were pale imitations of the 2D genre. But that soon changed, and now you can't bitch about games being unoriginal. There's stuff on the market now that weren't even possible two years ago. Sure, some of it is just bigger, bolder or more polished, but take the good with the bad here – we're getting some stunning stuff out there.

This all started to ring a big bell when on the Desconocido blog someone complained about F.E.A.R. lacking originality. At the time I was playing both that and Quake 4. Q4 lacked originality, but Monolith's shooter used existing elements very profoundly. It might not seem original, but not every great painting was a Monet. Still, gamers gripe that it didn't hand them a brand new experience (which, ironically, it does). The same goes for the Call of Duty 2 online fan reviews. Most focused on the lacking multiplayer, but the rest latched on a 'same-old, same-old' mantra. One reviewer did nail it on the head: just because you saw something doesn't mean you don't want to see it again. But some gamers act as if the holy grail of their game crack addiction sits in the next great title. There is no 'next great title'. They just keep coming and after a while none will meet your superior gamer tastes. You're really just cheating yourself.

These days I glorify a game if I enjoyed it, and beat on one when it wants to be unplayable. I'm busy, so there's no time to struggle with complex interfaces or bold new changes in game design. Sometimes recycling the familiar in a new package with enough changes for spice is a good way to create a good gaming experience. There will be

revolutions, and most of you bastards won't see the forest for the trees (i.e. Darwinia). But to be fixated on a purist ideal that every game must be a new break-through to deserve being lauded is short-sighted. Sometimes games are blatantly uninventive, such as most sports iterations out there, but a lot of games don't go for the lowest common denominator and deserve more than your urgency for a push in gaming evolution.

Besides, out of rehashing comes remixing (called post-modernism). I can point to dozens of examples of good remix culture, but the most pertinent is perhaps Quinton Tarantino, the rogue director who, as homage, blatantly lifts concepts and scenes from classic movies for his own work. Games have come a long way. While you are filling a forum with your dismay at a title's lack of originality, the gaming revolution isn't actually stopping. It's rolling out there – you're just too self-important to notice. **NAG**

“There's stuff on the market now that weren't even possible two years ago. Sure, some of it is just bigger, bolder or more polished, but take the good with the bad here – we're getting some stunning stuff out there.”





# For Your PSP



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# INBOX

## [LETTER OF THE MOMENT]

**FROM** Marlon

**SUBJECT** Imprudence versus discretion

I'm going to be vague here, so my point has to be understood with an open mind. As we all know, opinions are merely the decisions made by an individual with regards to a certain topic, item, or, in this case, a videogame. Although I think there should be at least some form of discretion when it comes to airing one's thoughts on the matter, by first thinking about the game as a whole. I've read on many forums and have had heated discussions with many a headstrong gamer who have said that <insert game title here> is "terrible, a waste of money, I wouldn't recommend it to anybody." It's a fairly isolated case as really bad games are obviously excluded from my point, but to put this into perspective use Fahrenheit or Indigo Prophecy as an example. When a game comes out that is fairly original in its idea, concept or play dynamic, it's all fair and well that it will be received by the general gaming community with mixed feelings. But is it fair to then stamp it to the ground and spit in the face of the creator for his efforts just because it wasn't what you expected, or wasn't as good as another existing title which might be only slightly similar but wasn't as ambitious? Anyone is entitled to say that a game is excellent or terrible, but it's not necessary to throw toys around so that everyone is aware that you hate it and call the next person crazy because he or she thinks the opposite. It's a hypocritical situation when this happens, as it is a known fact that people complain about the abundance of bad games being released and wonder what happened to the good old days when games were made with passion as opposed to games being developed nowadays just for the quick buck. And now that a fresh idea finally arrives, it is welcomed with pitch-forks, Molotov cocktails, and an angry mob ready to burn it to the ground. We self-proclaimed gamers should be appreciative of the fact that there are people out there working very hard, dedicating 2-3 years of their lives trying to develop quality titles to satisfy our high demands. We should instead be grateful for their attempts and if the title shows some promise try to recognise their good efforts, and use constructive criticism when conveying our opinions regarding the title. If this becomes the norm over the next few years, then I have no doubt that developers will have a greater drive to deliver what is expected as we, their target market, will be steering them along the path to creating good games, and they will strive to deliver what we want because they'll know what we want. And that, ladies and gentlemen, is my opinion.

*This is exactly the kind of attitude we need to go kicking and screaming into 2006. For your part in the strengthening of the gaming industry as a whole and perhaps making people think twice before complaining, you get a free one for your trouble. **NAG Ed.***

**FROM** Jan

**SUBJECT** Cleaning a PC

Would it be safe to use compressed air to clean out the inside of my case, monitor, keyboard etc? Also, where could I buy 'professional' cleaning agents for the outside of my PC?

*Compressed air is the best method. There are no recommended 'cleaning agents' for this kind of job and it also depends on the material your case is made out of. Just stay away from water. See our Gamer's Toolkit Hardcor3 article in this issue. **NAG Ed.***

**FROM** Mark

**SUBJECT** Female gamers

There is one thing that has been bugging me and that is that 'female gamers' get their letters in NAG saying that they also play games and in great numbers. If so, why at the NAG LAN did I only see one female gamer? They probably just want to feel special but still, either shut up or come to the big events. What wisdom or greater knowledge do female gamers have that they knew there would be a major virus there [which I got hit by]? Is that why they didn't come?

*There is a virus they're all trying to avoid – the average gamer.*

**NAG Ed.**

**FROM** Jack Man

**SUBJECT** None

Please take the <censored> comic on the last page of the magazine out.

*If we did that Miktart would pop a gasket and we need him to do the cover DVD. **NAG Ed.***

**FROM** D1G1T

**SUBJECT** What?

What happens to your games when you are finished reviewing them at the NAG office?

*We keep them and no, you can't have them! **NAG Ed.***

**FROM** Eduan

**SUBJECT** Stolen PC

I wanted to sell my old PC to buy myself a new one, but let me start from the beginning. I advertised my PC in JunkMail for R8,000 and one morning I got a call from a man saying he wanted to buy my PC. He said he would make an electronic transfer. My mom and I went to check that the money was in the account, and it was. He came and picked up the PC and everything was fine. The next day the money was gone so we called him and he said that he paid with a cheque and it bounced. Well, to make a long story short, he did not pay and he called back to ask for my BIOS password. Now I was wondering if you [NAG] could give me one of your older computers. Sorry, I can't help you with an 'old' PC. At least your story will go some way to help prevent this kind of thing from happening to anyone else reading this magazine. Always wait until the money

*has cleared in your account before handing over the goods. If anyone won't accept this provision, don't deal with them. **NAG Ed.***

*[Some equality issues from the same person, NAG Ed]*

**FROM** The Fat Croft

**SUBJECT** As a matter of fat

I want to know why there are no fat people in games. Whatever happened to tolerance, what happened to accepting each other no matter what? It's all good to say that we are tolerant, but game developers are speaking a different language. We want to see a fat Lara Croft, Max Payne and Final Fantasy girls. We want to see all of them on our screens, because fat people got it going on [and on, and on...]. I'm sick of seeing these 'Paris Hilton' look-alikes gallivanting around with guns and knives. Their skinny little arms probably can't even lift that damn gun up. Heaven only knows how they manage to squeeze into those skimpy, barely there, clothes they 'wear'. I promise you some of those skirts look like bandages! A good superhero will throw on tracksuit pants, a comfy shirt, and some good trainers - and then kick some villain butt. It makes me sick!

*I don't even know where to begin. In real life, fat people just aren't equipped to deal with crocodile infested rivers, giant booby trapped boulders and flesh eating pygmies [okay, the cannibal pygmies are a bad example]. If you're doing all this cliff diving, gauntlet running and mortal combat stuff, there's no time or place to stop for pizza and beer... Therefore, real heroes are getting plenty of exercise while only surviving on bug droppings and seaweed [and these things do not a fat person make]. Thus developers are aiming to make their games as real as possible, and in reality you don't get fat ninjas. **NAG Ed.***

**FROM** The Fat Croft

**SUBJECT** An age of darkness...

I was playing Max Payne 2 the other day when [wonders never cease], I was struck by this thought. Now what was this thought, you ask? Well, I just started wondering why there are never darkies as main characters of a game. We say we are past racial inequality, but are we really? I mean, when will we see a black Max Payne or a black Lara Croft? What about an Indian James Bond? Why are all the 'heroes or heroines' of a game never people of colour? I don't mean to bring up this issue [okay, I actually do], but it is something that has bugged me for some time. I mean I'm a darkie and I am proud. But I am also a gamer, and I would like to play a game with a character that most represents me. I'm not saying I mind playing a white person, but something has to give. Also, black people have a wicked sense of humour. Can you imagine how funny Max Payne would be if Chris Rock played the role for example? Also, could you imagine how much more intense games like Splinter Cell or Half-Life would be if a guy like my man 50 Cent played the leading role? I mean, can you see my point here, or am I just raving?





So I'm clear then that you're looking for fat black people as characters in games... hmm. Something tells me this isn't going to be the next big thing. Unlike your previous letter [above], this one isn't about reality, but more about the technicalities of pixels and colour. I was going to crack a joke about shadows in games, but I think I might get into trouble here in the land of the free - <Just kidding> [disclaimer]. You do get black characters in Unreal Tournament 2004 [even girls] and I just checked now, there are 'brothers' in Quake 4 - there was a black scientist in Half-Life 2 [and he was the smartest guy in the game], the 50 Cent the game is coming soon [you'll be happy to know]. I guess these developers are coming around slowly. I just don't see a black Lara Croft somehow, and I do think Chris Rock would make an excellent Max Payne. I wonder if they'll ever make a Shaft game with Samuel L. Jackson because he's the epitome of cool. **NAG Ed.**

**FROM Ross**

**SUBJECT Blank disc**

Although you probably don't care in the least, my cover disc was blank. And yes I did check to make sure it wasn't the fault of my DVD-ROM. I'm just wondering if you could find it in your heart to give me an explanation so that I can give it [the explanation and the disc] to the nice manager of the store I bought it from. Apart from this minor problem, the October issue rocks, especially the lifestyle section.

*Sometimes the production process at the DVD plant isn't as perfect as we'd like, resulting in this kind of problem. Some clod probably printed the NAG cover DVD artwork on a dud. If it were up to me, I'd have them all tied up and beaten senseless [which is probably why it isn't up to me]. Please note that if you do have any legitimate problems with the DVD we will gladly replace it. This is the least we can do. The least you can do in return is to check the list of fixes on the [www.nag.co.za](http://www.nag.co.za) Website under the section 'On the DVD' under the topic 'NAG DVD fix v1.0'. Trying everything listed there solves most problems most of the time [even if another DVD works perfectly in your drive].* **NAG Ed.**

**FROM Jacques**

**SUBJECT Big sharks and small fish**

My kid brother recently attended a LAN where some 'lesser life form' [let's not call him an idiot] tripped the power. The result was that his almost new PC, seven days out of warranty, refused to start up. He took it to a well-known IT dealer where they tested it for R50. They tested the motherboard... broken. They tested the CPU on one of their workstations, and it was perfect. The technician placed the CPU back in the broken motherboard and brother dearest took it home, where he wanted to remove it to fit it into a new motherboard he ordered. He immediately noticed that his AMD 64 was placed the wrong way around into the plastic casing on the MOBO. Upon removing it, he also discovered to his shock that two pins were missing...he found them in the plastic, either forced or melted in... We can only speculate what this buffoon did. Needless to say, making a long story short, the technician played stupid, refusing to accept liability, not even contemplating the mere fact that just maybe he screwed up! [They train them well in that aspect, not even an eye-twitch]. We are now faced with taking further action, even small claims court if we must. Two points or rhetorical questions rather. How well trained are these shop 'technicians' really [I have heard some terrible rumours] and what defence do we as the consumer have against their inadequacy, supported by their super weapons, the 'shoulder shrug' and the 'I don't know look'? I think in that case, the industry should be better regulated and the consumer better protected.

*Very true. Well, the best form of attack is to never use them again and tell everyone you know what happened [passive resistance]. One of the office hardware 'experts' at NAG takes an internal snapshot of his notebook with a digital camera before sending*

*it in to prevent things disappearing... In your case, you probably should have checked everything carefully before accepting it back. There are a million and two technical experts out there all just waiting to screw up your hardware, and it isn't even safe to go with the name brands anymore [I can guess who you're talking about]. The best advice is to never take any hardware to anyone else and instead build and maintain your own system, because if you buy components and they're faulty, you have a leg to stand on. As for the chop who ruined your brother's CPU and was too much of a coward to admit his mistake, just remember that eventually bad karma always comes back to kick you in the crack.* **NAG Ed.**

**FROM Jay**

**SUBJECT Help Me!**

Dear great masters of gaming! I need your help. I will be getting a new PC pretty soon. I'm 13, so I won't be buying it, my parents will. My parents [how do I put this?] know nothing. Therefore, I would like to ask you for help. I was wondering if you could reply to this message with some specifications for me. Please! I need this! I'm not asking for this to be in your magazine or anything. Just for one e-mail! Please help me!

*If I actually replied to all the letters I received on a weekly basis requesting NAG to recommend a gaming machine, it would end up all I'll be doing instead of playing games all day and shouting at drunk and lazy journalists. So I'm going to steer you and hopefully everyone else thinking of sending mail like this to the following few lines. Read NAG Magazine. Here at NAG we spend all day testing hardware and fiddling with the latest toys that the manufacturer types think everyone wants. We then write about what we've discovered in the magazine and send it out to all you thousands of readers so you [stress the 'you' part] can figure out what to buy based on your own personal budget. It's an educational process which you can reference to that phrase about teaching a man to fish. We just don't have the time or inclination to reply to questions like this because how can we really help you if you can't help yourself? And if we were recommending stuff and selling it at the same time, how do you think that might make us look? If you really want a kickass machine, get one specified just like the review rig on the Ed's Note page.* **NAG Ed.**

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



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

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








PERSON2!84

# THE INACKIES

## MACHINIA FESTIVAL 2005 WINNERS



THE ART OF COMBINING MOVIES AND GAMES HAS EVOLVED. BUT THIS HAS NOTHING TO DO WITH THE SLEW OF CASH INS FROM STUDIOS OR TERRIBLE MOVIES BASED ON GAMES. SINCE THE DAYS OF RECORDED QUAKE GAME RUNS AND EVEN EARLIER, GAME ENGINES HAVE BEEN USED TO CREATE SOME FORM OF MOVIE. NOW IT'S COME TO THIS THE INACKIES.



**I**S A GAME ART? It's amazing how often you hear an argument erupt over that statement. Regardless of which side is right though, you can certainly use games to create art. For the sake of argument, let's say that art is any form of expression. Then Machinima definitely qualifies as art, at least in the film world's avant-garde areas. Using game engines, teams have been building small shows and movies, taking advantage of the in-game engine for the visuals. In fact, any cut-scene in a game that uses the engine could be considered as a form of Machinima.

The culture has grown enough to justify its first festival a few years ago. Since then, the teams creating the medium have gotten better and the talent pool has grown. The festival took place at the Museum of the Moving Image in New York and was hosted by the Academy for Machinima Arts & Science in November, kick-starting with an awards ceremony on Friday night at a local bar and grill. Actors playing as icons like Quinton Tarantino and Martin Scorsese presented the winners with their trophies.

Rooster's Teeth, the studio behind Red vs. Blue, took the majority of the trophies with three wins. Red vs. Blue won Best Independent Machinima, while Sims 2-based The Strangerhood won the prize for best editing. Controversial nominee P.A.N.I.C.S., based on the F.E.A.R. engine, took the IFC award for Excellence in Machinima Screenwriting. But the other awards are more of a testament of how much broader the field has become.

Whiplash: The Movie was a game nominee that won the Best Direction award - the project was created in Crystal Dynamics' Whiplash game by Jake Hughes. The impressive A Few Good G-Men won the Best Virtual Performance award thanks to using Half-Life 2 to re-create the court room scene in A Few Good Men between Tom Cruise and Jack Nicholson. Unreal Tournament 2004 seemed to be the winning engine, though Halo 2 kept its prominence with the live reality show This Spartan Life clinching Best Machinima Series.

But UT 2004 featured four of the twelve winners, the rest including World of Warcraft for The Return [Best Off the Shelf Machinima] and Max Payne 2 powering Only the Strong Survive [Best Sound]. Two games in the winners list used UT 2004 and both won two awards. Person2184 is a startling production, completely disguising the engine it uses with its own visual flair. The series went on to snag the Best Visual Design and Best Technical Achievement awards.

The winner of the evening, though, was Game On, a collaboration between the creators and Volvo. The movie mixes real world and game media to tell of a gamer suddenly taken into a gaming world. Good writing and great production quality got it the Machinima of the Year award as well as Best Commercial/Game Machinima.

Considering the quality of this year's winners [and quite a few deserving titles that weren't nominated], next year's nominees should be even more impressive. "I think we shouldn't underestimate the cultural power of games and how important the medium will be," said Ethan Vogt, creator of Game On. "It certainly will not go down as the best Machinima movie ever," he said. "But it was a thrill to have been there when we could all fit in the same room together." **NAG**

*Find some of the Machinima winners on the Cover DVD*





# PREVIEWS

WE WANT...



## The Matrix: Path of Neo

The Matrix game sucked, but Path of Neo is shaping up to be a 'sorry' from Shiny for the project that saw owner changes and other chaos during its development. Besides, we all wanted to play as Neo, now we'll be able to. But is Keanu Reeves a good game character? Woah.



## Space Rangers 2

Didn't hear about it? You soon will. Since the preview code arrived for this, it has grabbed the attention of the sci-fi turn-based strategy players. Create your commercial empire in space any way you want. With lots of species and even more types of jobs to do, it's bound to make an impact. Keep an eye out for a preview soon.



## Parkan II

Take to space in your ship and become the best trader/ pirate/mercenary out there. Not a new concept – Parkan 2 took a lot of ideas from Elite, Privateer and so on. But with over 300 star systems, it's not going to be a short game. Oh, did we mention that you can go on planet surfaces and inside enemy ships in first-person mode?

THE PREVIEWS ARE COMING back on track after December and the big games of the next year-and-a-bit are being announced all over the place, with more to come. This is going to be a console year and what better game to hail the next-gen of couch gaming than the first lady of gaming herself? But Lara hasn't had the best set of years lately, so will Crystal Dynamics pull it off? Read our cover feature to find out. Also check out Dark Messiah and Gothic 3, two very pretty RPGs heading out in 2006.

## FORBIDDEN SIREN 2



**DEVELOPER** Sony **PUBLISHER** Sony **PLATFORM** PS2 **RELEASE DATE** 2006

Keiichiro Toyama already scared the living daylights out of us with Silent Hill and the first Forbidden Siren, arguably the most underrated Survival Horror on the market, so it's apt that he's heading down the same road again. Forbidden Siren 2 takes place on the island of Yamigawa, which has not been inhabited since all its residents disappeared in an electric blackout 29 years ago. But, obviously, the island isn't deserted... If you played the original, you can imagine the rest.

## PT BOATS

**DEVELOPER** Akella **PUBLISHER** 1C Company **PLATFORM** PC **RELEASE DATE** 2006

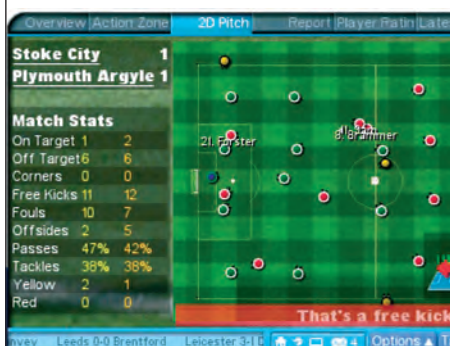
Take charge of a mosquito fleet in World War 2 from the German, Allied or Russian perspectives (yes, leaving out the Japanese is odd). A mosquito fleet is a small group of ships capable of launching quick surprise attacks on the enemy. PT Boats has our attention because it has the most realistic water physics we've seen in a game. It's so pretty you'll want to water-ski...





## CHAMPIONSHIP MANAGER PSP

DEVELOPER Gusto Games PUBLISHER Eidos PLATFORM PSP RELEASE DATE Q1 2006



Well, this is a no-brainer: a portable version of the most popular football management series around. The game will have a 2D field for matches, while players will have access to 55 leagues across the world, not to mention over 25,000 players from 100 countries. The PSP version will also have some unique modes, and players can download new seasonal data as it is released online.

## THE RUB RABBITS!

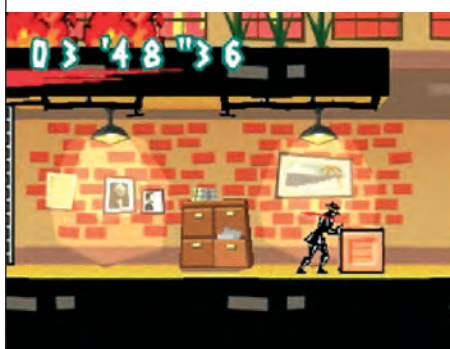
DEVELOPER Sega PUBLISHER Sega PLATFORM DS RELEASE DATE Feb 2006



Can you say 'spin-off'? It's good to see that some developers are getting decent mileage out of the DS' touch screen, but perhaps none more than Sega. With Project Rub a success and its sequel 'Where Do Babies Come From?' on its way, it's not surprising that another variant of this gameplay style is under development. The game incorporates all the Project Rub elements, but with new game modes and some other surprises.

## EXIT

DEVELOPER Taito PUBLISHER Taito PLATFORM PSP RELEASE DATE 2006



Taito is hitting the PSP with a 2D side-scrolling platform title unlike anything before it. The motion-captured stylised graphics might seem to be the big deal, but the game concept is even more interesting: rescuing people from disasters. Unlock doors, move crates and remove obstacles like fire to rescue someone and then use them in tandem to solve other problems Mr. Escape will encounter.

## FACES OF WAR

DEVELOPER Best Way PUBLISHER 1C PLATFORM PC RELEASE DATE March 2006



While we wait for The Outfit to bring wholesale WW2 squad destruction to the 360, 1C has announced Faces of War, a stunning-looking World War 2 tactical game in which players lead a squad of six fighters against the Nazis in a fully destructible battlefield. But players can also play as the Germans, as well as Allied and Russian troops.

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



## Call of Duty 2

Holy excrement on a stick. But enough of that – go read our review. Meanwhile, we are finishing it on Veteran. One of the best WW2 shooters produced. Still no German campaign, but the British desert scenes are unbelievable.



## Far Cry HDR

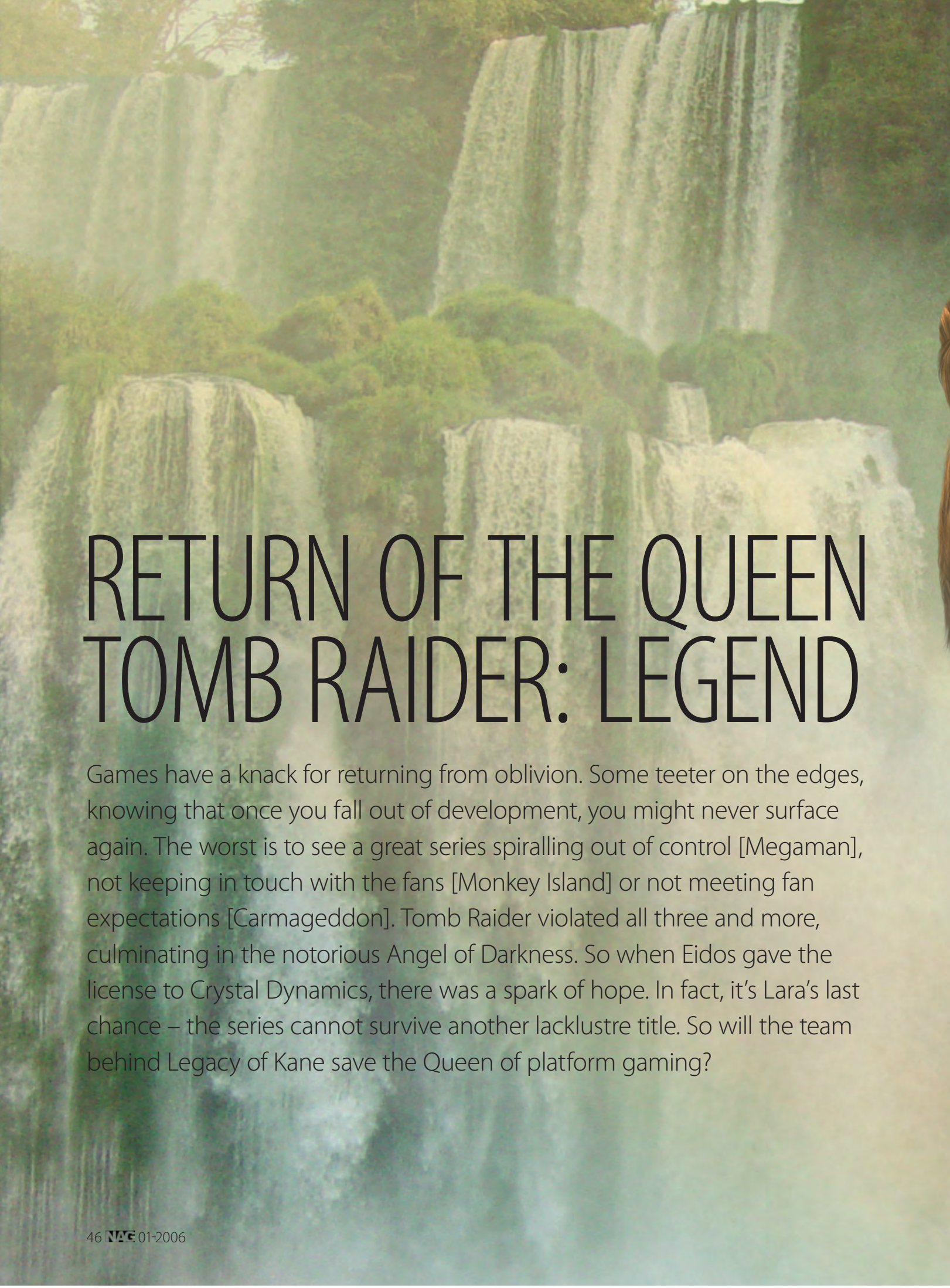
Far Cry was a stunning game, but if you have the hardware you can patch it to have 64-bit and High Dynamic Range support. So what? Well, you'll only keep to that tune until you see Far Cry's HDR. Then game graphics will simply never be the same again.



## SSX On Tour PSP

Less like On Tour and more like Tricky; which is a good thing. SSX transfers nicely to the portable device and is as slick and polished as Burnout Legends. A thumping soundtrack and a screaming Japanese girl on a snowboard also feature. So it's just like the console version.





# RETURN OF THE QUEEN TOMB RAIDER: LEGEND

Games have a knack for returning from oblivion. Some teeter on the edges, knowing that once you fall out of development, you might never surface again. The worst is to see a great series spiralling out of control [Megaman], not keeping in touch with the fans [Monkey Island] or not meeting fan expectations [Carmageddon]. Tomb Raider violated all three and more, culminating in the notorious Angel of Darkness. So when Eidos gave the license to Crystal Dynamics, there was a spark of hope. In fact, it's Lara's last chance – the series cannot survive another lacklustre title. So will the team behind Legacy of Kane save the Queen of platform gaming?





PLATFORMS: PC, PS2, Xbox, 360 • DEVELOPER: Crystal Dynamics • PUBLISHER: Eidos  
SUPPLIER: WWE [011] 462 0150 • GENRE: Action • RELEASE DATE: Q2 2006





**"E**NJOY LARA CROFT," SAID the woman next to us on the plane as everyone disembarked. This wouldn't be significant, except that she wasn't the gaming type and all we mentioned to her was that we're going to see Tomb Raider. It's a testament to one of the greatest and most prominent names in gaming. But very few people outside hobbyist circles realise just what has besieged the eager British adventurer since her appearance in 1997 and her rise to an iconic level that beats the likes of Mario and Sonic. Lara is the poster girl for the modern gaming age, but the Tomb Raider games hardly showed this, instead getting caught in a downwards spiral of increasing mediocrity which culminated in the notorious Angel of Darkness – a game so terrible that the word 'abortive' is most commonly associated with it.

Things came to a head with this title, forcing Eidos to wrest away the license from its guardians, the development house of Core, and hand it to Crystal Dynamics, the other house that helped build the British publisher. Standing in Crystal Dynamics' foyer in Palo Alto near San Francisco, their games line the wall, ranging from ports of The Horde and Star Control II for the 3DO to original IP like Gex the Gecko and Pandemonium to the series that solidified CD's presence at Eidos: Soul Reaver and the Legacy of Kane. Around the corner is a wall filled with concept art for the game that will save Lara and in a meeting room stands the grinning presence of Morgan Gray, the producer of Tomb Raider: Legends. We'd love to affirm that the return of Toby Gard, Lara's

creator, is the reason to get excited about her return, but the power and force behind this renaissance definitely lie behind Gray and his team, as the whole of the company seems to beam an exuberant energy towards the project. "It was a pipedream for many here and when we got the project, there were a few guys who were super stoked about getting the opportunity to work on a game they were fans of for a long time," said Gray. "It's a rare opportunity to be a professional developer and get to work on a game when you are a fan of the franchise."

#### Saving a legend

**B**UT SO WHAT? WE were all fans of Lara, a devotion that went well beyond curvy buttocks and breasts that defied, well, everything. But years of abuse on patient but ever-more jaded fans have left a huge toll on the series and a massive demand on Crystal to create the de-facto Lara game. It's not that fans demand a game better than the first, just a title that makes us realise why we loved the series in the first place. Legend's producer echoed the sentiment when explaining their approach. "The first step was to establish which game everyone liked – that was a resounding 'One!'. So we went through the first game systematically, isolating the key pillars of the Tomb Raider series - things like exploration, things like actual puzzles, things like better motion in exotic locales. Then we created a matrix and mapped where different things were changed







and when the series walked away from core strengths. We also trawled every Tomb Raider fan site and quizzed the gamers on what they wanted." Building on this, the team sought to find what made Lara special for them and all the other fans. Essentially it came down to two points: the series had lost track about who Lara is and what she's supposed to do. Surprisingly; if you looked at the name, the second should be obvious: raiding tombs, preferably in exotic locations. Definitely not running around the back streets of Paris trying to solve the murder of a character we barely knew. Crystal sought to provide this by taking Lara back to far away lands. In Legends, players can expect to traverse areas ranging from ruins in Bolivia and Peru to the snowy heights of the Himalayas and even more dizzying heights in an unnamed city location – seven different areas, including Lara's ancestral mansion. The story, though still un-detailed to the press, will definitely focus heavily on the exploration of ruins and discovery of rare artefacts, all building to a tale of epic proportions. "Lara Croft doesn't exist to fight people," said lead level designer Riley Cooper. "She exists to unravel

these mysteries. When we started this game, we developed the story, the systems and the levels in parallel. When one of these developed a strength that worked with the game, we'd let it challenge the other aspects. Fundamentally we wanted a game that didn't compromise in these aspects." He elaborated on level design: "For every location we did extensive research on the culture, ancient cultures, fauna and flora and so on. These don't get in the way in terms of making a great game experience, but it gives us a lot of ideas to play with and to support and invigorate the world. We take bringing some level of reality to that aspect of the game very seriously."

Still, we're not sold just yet, and neither should any gamer





be. Not after the disgrace of the series. There is some serious pain around the later titles [bar the under-appreciated, but impressive mobile games], and a lot of gamer bitterness has turned into solid apathy and jaded perceptions. Crystal will have to do a lot more than just deliver a few levels catering back to the tastes of the series. While newer gamers would snidely say "that requires seeing Lara with her kit off," the series' fans are pretty clear about it: that grid control system. This was one of the first changes to the game and the new system provides full 360 degree movement, as opposed to the tank-like shifts the old games limited players to. In fact, Legends is on a completely new code base, using nothing from the former titles. While the series had its problems with lacking innovation, the 3D action genre has made significant progress and Tomb Raider has been left behind, its motor choking and the gearshift stuck in reverse. It was disappointing when later titles didn't give much expansion to Lara's character and the general Tomb Raider ethos, but the long-delayed Angel of Darkness [at one point a PS2 launch title] wasn't just showed up by Prince Of Persia, but it begged the question of whether Eidos' Quality Control department consisted of blind monkeys. While the publisher stuck to the usual corporate creed that no competitor's game shall be mentioned, Crystal was more forthcoming about some of the games that influenced Legends' design. "We look at all games. There were obviously cool things in Prince Of Persia we thought were awesome and some things that weren't. But we don't close the blinders on us. I think any developer that says it doesn't look at other games is lying, because we all play games." Gray defined Legend's peer influences even further. "We also looked at newer things, like God of War. So anything that comes out that pushes the bar, we can play and see what we like. But it's not about doing all that. We look at what the games did differently and see if this will work for our title. It's not about doing the best of what everyone does, because our game has a specific focus of what we want to do."







### New Age Girl

**L**ARA'S MOVEMENTS ARE FAR more fluid, giving way to the acrobatics necessary to traverse the dangerous world of game archaeology. Moving her around is seamless, but the real tweaks come into the platforming sections. Legends is fairly forgiving, so being a degree off a jump won't mean you automatically plummet to your death. The game compensates for lagging motor skills, making sure that sustaining the rhythm of the game isn't frustrated by a tough control scheme. Even if you miss the ledge slightly, a God of War-inspired button flashes, giving players a split-second to grab on properly. Another innovation from recent games is the interactive cut-scenes. In one section, Lara jumps across a series of stone platforms which collapses beneath. A key movement flashes on the screen. So you tap left, and Lara leaps to the side and climbs up a collapsing stone pillar. Here a few more key combos pop up, culminating in her grabbing a ledge at the last moment. Miss a key, and the cut-scene ends in disaster. Grabbing vines and swinging from them isn't a new concept either, but it is smooth and easy, adding to Lara's mobility and feeling completely welcome to the game world. Sands of Time still holds a higher standard in terms of acrobatics, but a brief bit of hands-on time shows how Lara doesn't need to be a Circe de Soleil graduate to do her job.

This might sound worrying, as the popular perception is that originality equals quality. But rehashing and re-interpretation

of a concept in gaming often fuels a good title. Some games lay the ground rules, others seek to improve on them. Legends falls into the latter category. While the game will be a definite departure from former Tomb Raider titles, the idea isn't to compete with what was done before, rather to improve. The bevy of familiar features mentioned doesn't hold the game back, but compliment it very nicely. Still, Lara is an independent girl and wants to do things her way. This brought about several new items and actions to the series. The magnetic rope is perhaps the most obvious. With a magnet tied to its end, the rope can attach to any metal surface. So, if you were jumping across a crevice and faced a convenient metal plate high up, a tap of a button would shoot the rope out and attach it to the panel, allowing Lara to swing across the gap like a shorts-wearing Spider-Man. Just like the prince, she can leap from an outcropped branch [similar to the poles in Prince of Persia], release her grasp, extend the magnetic rope, swing towards a platform, catapult towards it, and grab the edge. Except the prince didn't have a rope.

The ubiquitous slow-mo or 'bullet time' also found its way into Legends, but not to the extent that other games use it. When Lara leaps on an opponent, the game slows down and briefly grants her more vitality and attack strength. The larger plan with this is that acrobatic movements and combat can be connected into combos. The feature wasn't fully active when Crystal demonstrated it, but what was present looked good and

TOMB RAIDER: LEGEND EXCLUSIVE PREVIEW







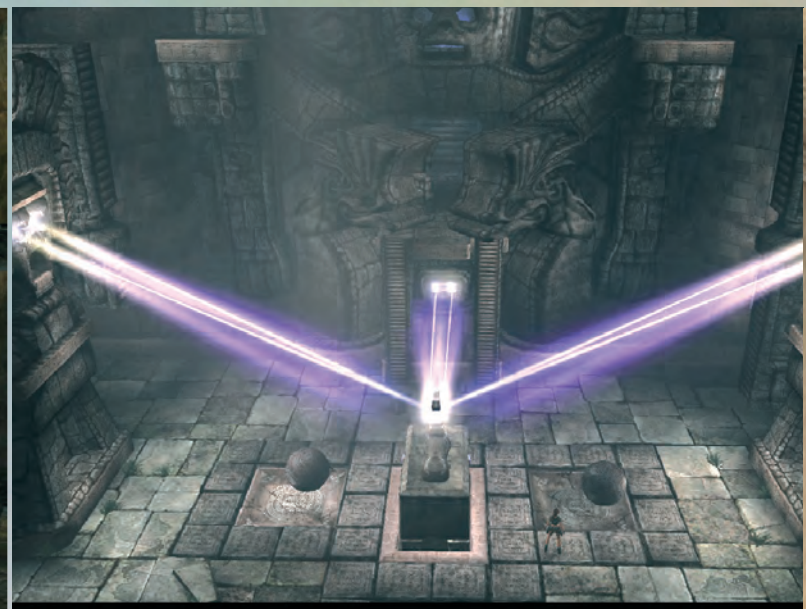
hardly like a gimmick. The fact that players can't activate it when they want to forgives it the association in the first place, and it's designed to take the weight off combat situations. In fact, the entire game seems built around keeping Lara up where she belongs. Even the story narrative is more streamlined. A level will start with an in-game cut-scene, but apart from sporadic events while playing, all the information is relayed via radio chatter between Lara and her team. They give information on why you are there and can also give hints about obstacles. This trade-off means that some information could fall by the wayside, but in terms of streamlining the experience - which seems to be a mantra of this title - it works well. Besides, all the important information is now stored in Lara's newly-acquired PDA. Finally, the save crystals have been exchanged for auto-save points in maps. So if the grapple puzzles aren't frustrating, cut-scenes don't hijack the pace, poor saving choices don't mean re-trekking across several traps for the umpteenth time, and players won't fall off ledges just because they had a cramp in their left thumb, is this Tomb Raider for dummies?

### Keeping up with the Crofts

**T**HAT BIT IS HARD to tell, though the game certainly won't be easy. Considering how not a lot of gamers got caught into the mercury-slick antics of *Sands of Time*, dumbing-down concepts and smoothing edges isn't a bad move. In fact, it worked for several popular titles in the last year. But don't mistake it for a

lack of challenge. Crystal used the opportunity and technology to expand on the world itself. Physics puzzles are very common. At one stage, Lara has to position three iron balls on saucers to open an ancient door, but finding two of these prove to be a puzzle itself. To get one involves climbing up a rock face and dropping onto a platform, boosting the ball through the air and rolling it towards the main puzzle. Another example has a waterfall blocking your way, but it's too high to jump to the top. The trick is to get the tree trunk that fell into the river to lift up - giving you a branch you can swing off. That involves moving the big rock sitting on its other end... "We're using physics not just for ambient and environmental effects, but also as part of our puzzle-solving experience," Gray said during the demonstration. "It allows us not only to make some more interesting puzzles, but also breaks away from the old formula of locating a switch and then running back across the level to a door you just opened."

Miss Croft compliments all of this, if you were wondering. While Crystal Dynamics is in charge of the game, Toby Gard makes sure Lara is who he expects her to be. Forget the legacy; while Tomb Raider's pop culture in movies, games and comics did play a role in the game, this is Gard's opportunity to refine his character some more. "The interest for me was in defining the character," he explains. "I think part of the problem of the series was that every time she's portrayed in a different way. There's no consistency to the character, so part of what I want to do is to bring that back; lay down some rules for the Tomb Raider







universe.” But what are the core attributes for such a character? “Lara Croft is on a personal mission and driven by a personal goal. She won’t let anything stand between her and what she’s going for. And she’s fiercely dangerous, but it is covered by a highly mannered facade that makes her seem very cool and in control.” This will mostly show through the story and events in the game. Visually, Lara’s also had a few nips and tucks. Using the leaps in technology since the first game, Lara is far more athletic and the hand-animated motions make her seem both life-like and fantastical in a comic book context. While her notorious bust size hasn’t decreased much, the entire character has been smoothed out with more natural curves. This alongside with detailed facial expressions gives a much better idea of Croft as a character instead of a gaming pin-up.

In terms of gameplay, Legends seems to have it right. Graphically it plans to shine. Tomb Raider might not benefit from the visceral sights other platformers deliver through tons of enemies and impressive violence, but it goes the extra mile to make the world believable. Lara will get scuffed and dusty when rolling on the ground and a sheen of water will cover her after getting out of water. Another enhancement that will be overlooked far too often is the soundtrack. Making use of Crystal’s in-house studio [and render-farm, which composer Troels Folmann proudly showed us before making a digital choir sing random words we gave him], the score will be styled to the regions of the game. But a mini ‘event’ soundtrack plans to take

things up a notch. Instead of morphing various soundtracks into each other, Legends goes further by having small arrangements for events. For instance, when a pillar falls, a certain piece of soundtrack will play, blending with the main score. It’s very hard to even notice this, but playing with sound has a great effect in games like Windwaker, so it’s one of those things you’ll miss if it wasn’t there – and with over three and a half hours of music in Legends, you definitely would.

Everything about Legends exudes quality and polish. But it specifically underscores the need to bring back a gaming franchise that stumbled far too early to reach its prime. A lot of faith has been lost over the years - to the degree that even after the press reaction to Legend at E3 in May 2005, the fans are still dubious about if we’ll ever see a good Tomb Raider game again. Granted, the stoics might hang onto the changes being bad, but the new Tomb Raider is a lady designed for a much savvier and demanding gaming crowd than the series faced in the nineties. Core’s mistake was to let legacy and laurels do all the work, but the gamble to give Crystal Dynamics a shot looks set to pay off. Fans of the genre have been slow to react to titles that broke new ground before, and new players will have to be convinced that Legends is as good as, if not better than, what the market currently has on offer. Regardless, we’re convinced – give or take a few nuisances provided by the pre-Alpha code – and we’re willing to take the remaining problems with a pinch of salt and look forward to the iconoclastic return of an icon. **NAG**

TOMB RAIDER: LEGEND EXCLUSIVE PREVIEW





**B**ULLETS ARE FLYING. YOU run through the ruins, explosions around the corners and enemy soldiers pointing their guns at you. You open fire with your AK, vicious slams of metal and gunpowder exploding as you score two headshots. This is enthusiastically announced on the screen. Two gunners hide behind the pillars of a nearby state building or embassy. Rushing forward, you fire at them. The assailants duck for cover and pieces of plaster fly all over as your bullets hit the marble. They lean back and open fire. You duck behind the wreck of a car, bullets pelting the metal. Elsewhere another fire fight is underway, but you have to take care of these two first. Strafing to the side, you throw a grenade between the pillars. Black stands up, applauds your accuracy and lets the entire front for the building explode. Shards of brick and stone fly all over the place as the dust rolls down the road and the screen shutters and the bass booms. More messages flash on the screen, congratulating you for what you just achieved. But it's far from done - more soldiers are storming down the road, opening fire. You reload.

Visceral is a word we use fairly often to sound fancy about a game's graphics. It means to obtain something through intuition rather than reason. Basically it's how a game makes you feel and a visceral game just screams at you to play it. We could mention a few other visceral games: Criterion's own Burnout 3, the astonishing God of War, the much unloved Darwinia and the super-sexy Rez. Some push the artistic boundary far more [Shadow of the Colossus], others tend to add more meat to the stew [Far Cry]. Black is going for the meat and it decided to stomp an entire cow into the pot. Hey, it could still end up being terrible, but nonetheless, we'll be interested in how far the game got in achieving its goal.

"Every Bullet has an end result," Roy Meredith told us over lunch. As Criterion's Studio Marketing Director, he was in the country to show the local

press Black. Our first viewing of it was when it launched at E3 in May 2005, and while Roy had the same code on hand, we really wanted to get under the hood of one of the more tight-lipped developers on the scene. The mind behind Criterion's titles spent his formative years in front of the Commodore 64, other platforms and arcade machines. But the game that originally started as Stunt Cop, in which a cop raced around a city to get doughnuts for his captain, went on to define one of the top studios in recent years. Criterion has a name because of its solid middleware RenderWare, but with Ward as creative director, the studio also produced the four Burnout titles with more to come. And what the studio did for arcade racers it wants to do for first-person shooters.

Movies are the driving force behind the game. "It's always useful to have strong compelling reference. It's no secret that we look at movies each and every day," Ward told Eurogamer. Meredith, involved with Criterion from EA's side, gave us some more insight. "They all understand games, they all understand entertainment and they make games that they want to play. I think they are making a game that they really want to see out there, and I think they're doing a good job of it as well." The plan is to bring the extravagance of action scenes in movies to the gaming screen. With inspirational heavyweights like The Terminator series and the Die Hard movies, Criterion wants to bring that cinematic spark to the FPS genre. Everything on the screen is explosive, pushing the PlayStation 2 into new technological realms. Ward credits it to the artists and coders working closely together, along with some pedigree from the Burnout series. In fact, a lot of people feel the footage is faked. But the running demo showed us exactly what the recorded demos did: a lot of gunfire, physics, shrapnel and exploding buildings. The question was, though, whether Criterion could create a good FPS. FPS experience isn't likely








# **unleashing the DOGS of WAR**

**Gunplay the Black way**

**As FPS veterans, NAG staff members have seen some crazy weapons. There were ROTT's drunken Missile, the immortal Super shotgun and BFG from Doom, changing people into chickens Heretic-style, Samus' powerful and improvable cannon, not to mention the heavy weaponry in Battlefield and the array of weapons in Timesplitters. But a game that pretty much is the gun?**





to be high up on the Criterion staff's resumes, Meredith admitted, but they are big fans of shooters and they carry the virtues of a strong and experienced developer. "I think that by not having experience in it you can bring a fresh approach to the game."

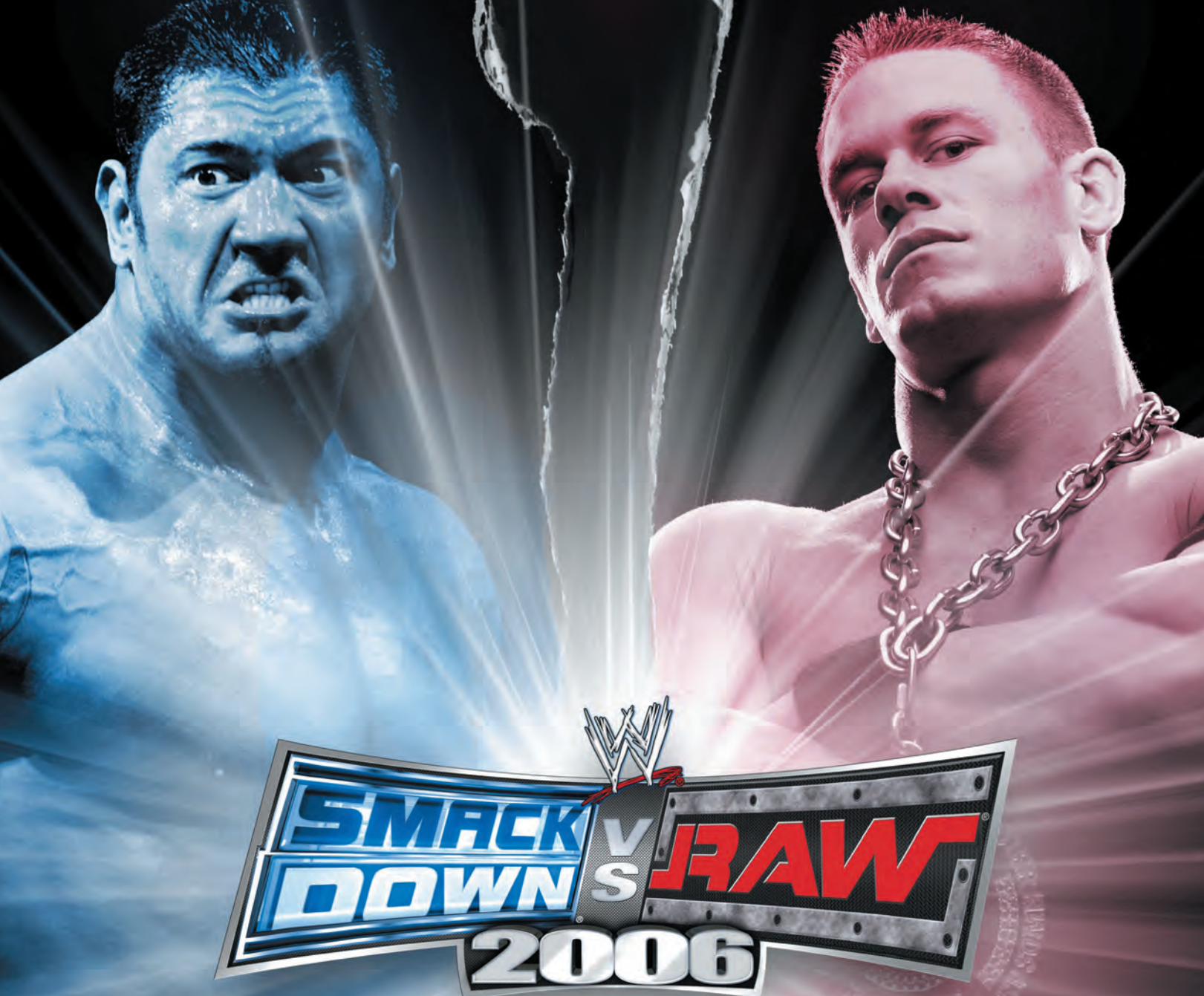
We'll have to agree: the demo code was solid and playable. At an estimated 80% completed status, we're eager to see what the final version will be like on the PS2 and Xbox. The settings are distinctly East European, with the main character being part of a black ops team. But it's overt action, not covert action - to paraphrase Ward. With maps designed with multiple paths to the various objectives and the levels offering lots of creative ways to take out enemy nests, the game throws points and awards at the player as he/she mows down the opposition in creative and destructive ways. But these arcade antics only feed off the massive energy on-screen. Criterion aimed to make the weapons the focus of the game, and they succeed brutally. Every gun is nicely modelled and sounds like a sledgehammer, so we suspect those 20% of improvements are going towards the enemy units and maps.

Spread over 11 to 12 levels, Criterion and Meredith aren't too forthcoming with the details. But they keep emphasizing that the point of the game is the gunplay - and we've seen plenty of that. You can't write three pages about shooting (even though we're trying), so we wondered why it's not going to be on the PC? "They're their own biggest critics, their own drivers if you like. Criterion wants everything to be perfect and they'll work on the console version until they think it is perfect. Then they'll look at it [a PC version]. There's more of a case for doing Black than Burnout." The crew didn't even work on the PSP game Burnout Legends, leaving the grunt work to EA developer Fusion. If another team seeks to port Black to the PC, it might happen, but don't get the same hopes for Burnout. Meredith did mention a 360 version of Revenge, though, tailored to suit the console's extra power. Still, fans of action games, especially the kinematics of F.E.A.R., will bemoan the lack of a PC version.

While the game will boast a fairly solid story, at least in the vein of an action movie plot [the levels have a lot of references to movie action scenes], it's not about the plot. "We're not making Doctor bloody Zhivago!" Ward exclaimed at E3 when someone asked about the plot for the millionth time. Because that's not the point, where Black delivers is in the experience. Who cares why you're blowing up masked gunmen in a war zone? Maybe they parked in your spot. **NAG**







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## VITAL INFO

■ Platforms

PC

■ Developer

Arkane

■ Publisher

Ubisoft

■ Supplier

MegaRom [011] 234 2680

■ Genre

RPG

■ Release Date

2006



# MIGHT & MAGIC: DARK MESSIAH

**W**E'VE YET TO SEE the new game engines truly strut their stuff. In the heyday of the Quake and Unreal engines, tons of titles used them, causing a constant evolution in the way they looked and felt. So far we've seen Quake 4 and Vampire: Bloodlines come out of the stables of Doom 3 and Source. So where's the really impressive stuff? Coincidentally it's another RPG title that takes the Source engine as its next companion. And it seems apt to push the fact that this is Source more than what you can expect as a game. A lot of gamers might overlook Dark Messiah, a title that will be the next step in this evolving sub-genre.

Might & Magic itself has had a long winding path, but Dark Messiah will make the series' most radical departure from its status quo. Firstly, combat is now a solo thing, as the game is gearing specifically towards an adventure RPG styling. The game takes place in the much darker and more menacing world of Ashan. The license was re-envisioned when Ubisoft took over and future Might & Magic games will also take place here. So what better introduction to this new fantasy land than from a

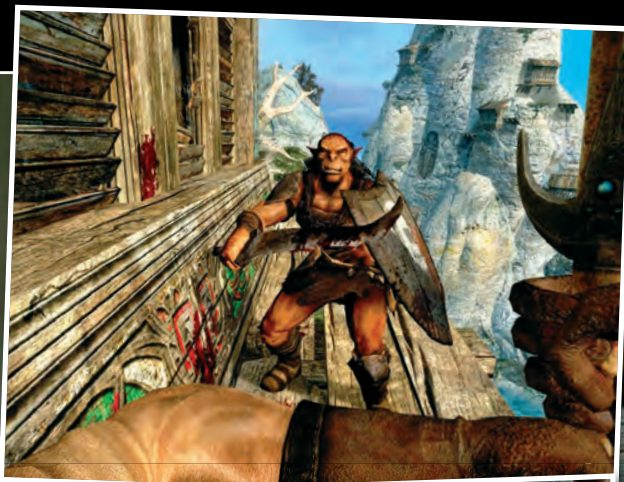
first-person perspective?

In this epic players assume the role of Sareth, the apprentice to the sorcerer Phenrig. Sareth has been trained from birth for a purpose, so his combat and magic skills are well refined. Good thing too, because a long imprisoned demon lord might find his way back into your world if you don't stop his harbinger, the dark messiah. Not a ground-breaking plot, but nothing gets hero blood pumping like certain doom.

RPG fans might notice Arkane's name in the development bracket. Not too many gamers got to play Arkane's gem, *Arx Fatalis*, and the subsequent console version hardly did it justice. Dark Messiah expands the potential for this French team and they seem to be taking the Source engine by the horns.

Let's not save the most important for last: Dark Messiah is a combat-focused game. While it will still adhere to the rules of RPGs, complete with skills, items and experience points, the world is likely to be a bit more rigid than other RPGs like *Gothic 3* and *Oblivion*. The reason is to





focus more on the immersion and strategic aspects of the game. The freedom comes in playing it how you want to.

RPG games - in fact most games - have been plagued with promises of playing a game differently using the variety of characters. But this often comes down to styles of attacks and how much damage you can deal. Even skills are generally limited to which level they are on and how much damage they do. But Dark Messiah might solve both. The class aspect has been addressed with the level design. Buildings and areas are designed to accommodate all the fighting types. So a character employing stealth can use very different tactics to the charge of a warrior. The magic class just appears to be very powerful at the moment, so the system isn't perfect yet. Skills are addressed through the fighting style developed in Arx Fatalis. When you gain a skill you are able to use it, but the player will still have to make movements that activate the skill. Basically, if you know a spell you still need to cast it using your mouse and keyboard. Perhaps combat is more illustrative of the system. When attacking an

opponent with a sword, it's not a matter of blocking and swinging. Sword movements can be controlled; players can deal localised damage with accurate blows and fend off savage cleaves, sparks flying as the two blades scrape. Physics play a big role in the combat, which can get thuggish. Characters can kick and punch as well, so a sturdy blow can send a foe flying backwards if your character has enough strength.

Combining an advanced combat and interaction system with such an RPG is a big step and it will be interesting to see how much of the role-playing model Dark Messiah will sacrifice for action. But considering the license being dealt with here, it's safe to say Arkane is aware of the serious following the game has.

Dark Messiah has a lot of promise and the use of Source could be impressive. Valve is said to be fairly involved with the project and Gabe Newell did a presentation at the game's unveiling a few months ago. All of these are good omens, so maybe we might see some serious games coming out of serious engines. **NAG**



## VITAL INFO

■ Platforms



■ Developer

Capcom

■ Publisher

Capcom

■ Supplier

Ster Kinekor Games

[011] 445 7900

■ Genre

Action

■ Release Date

Q1 2006



# ONIMUSHA: DAWN OF DREAMS







**I**F YOU SCRATCH AROUND enough, you'll find game series that have changed their genres over the iterations. Right now you can see the Ratchet & Clank and Jak & Daxter series dabble with racing. Duke Nukem made a successful transition to FPS and Starfox went from space shooter to platformer. Often these have been below expectations (C&C Renegade) or just plain disastrous (Dead to Rights), and subtle reinvention is often the better move. Survival horrors usually have this problem – once you know the plot, the iterations that follow are often not as sharp. There have been exceptions like Silent Hill 2 and Resident Evil 4, but it remains generally tricky terrain. There are of course those games that hang on to their formula, but this isn't about Castlevania.

The Onimusha series wasn't suffering. After three games a fourth title is a sign of a franchise Capcom has faith in, despite lagging sales in the later chapters. Still, a revamp was in order – the gameplay had become mechanical and stunted. The first obvious change would be a new main character. Named Soki, this blond horned fighter exudes much more character and enthusiasm than former characters in the series. But that alone isn't enough. Capcom

finally abandoned the survival horror stock use of camera angles for atmosphere. Combat is a much bigger focus in Dawn of Dreams, since the free-moving camera gets players a lot closer to the action.

Complimenting this is the new AI team-mate. There are four player characters to choose from, one of whom is Soki. While playing, gamers can switch between the team-mates at any time and the AI is given priority with the D-pad. But instead of keeping at what is really (just a growing staple in 3D action titles), Onimusha will make use of the character switching. When the two characters use similar or complimenting attacks on a target, it becomes a special attack. Players can also switch between the characters during combat to create chain combos – all of these do incredible damage and also reward handsomely with experience points.

The system is being streamlined even further with the entire game world now being in 3D and much more sprawling than the former rigid areas of previous games. This means the very idea of survival horror is not likely to be around with Dawn of Dreams, but it sounds cool nonetheless and will probably attract more players to the series. **NAG**





## VITAL INFO

## ■ Platforms

PC

## ■ Developer

Piranha Bytes

## ■ Publisher

JoWooD

## ■ Supplier

WWE [011] 462 0150

## ■ Genre

RPG

## ■ Release Date

Q1 2006



*Cutting-edge graphics hope to compliment the diverse and versatile Gothic universe. Maybe it will also help more gamers discover the series*

# GOTHIC 3

**G**OTHIC IS A NAME you hear in some gaming circles. The people who played it and had it, loved it. They had their share of complaints, but when the topic of CRPGs is going around, they'll inevitably quote something about the game that makes it significant. But don't fret if you've never heard of it. Gothic, its sequel and the following expansion were big successes in their homeland of Germany, but the UK and US markets were less receptive. The team blames poor marketing and that's perhaps the case, because the series still managed to cultivate a vibrant following through word of mouth.

The one element that sets Gothic apart from its peers is the freedom of what you can do. The world the game resided in had always been a persistent one and your actions had implications. Causing a fight with some factions could mean a lot of trouble, while doing others favours could help you out. While games like Fable were promising this kind of thing (and largely falling flat on the delivery), Gothic has already been working at perfecting this.

Gothic 3 takes this a step further. In the third game you leave the island and its city of Khorinis for the mainland. It appears that the Orcs have won against the humans and that things are not looking good. Or they may be. From the start, Gothic 3 will allow players to decide which side they play for. This is likely going to be dictated by action, so you can tamper with your alliances by moonlighting for both sides. But fraternising with the enemy is likely to make you quite disreputable, so tread lightly.

Playing both sides isn't new. Gossip is. A story about your deeds and misdeeds can spread around certain circles.

"With the Gothic series the team is developing a huge game with a believable world. So during the game the NPCs will hear

stories from you (do you work together with the Orcs, are you a friend of person XYZ...). Then they will decide if they want to work/speak with you or not..." explained Stefan Berger, Gothic 3's brand manager. "So when you kill some guys from the militia you will get problems from them during the whole game - in other RPG games they will forget the happenings. Also, they will speak with other characters about you. So when they speak in a good way about you it may help you..."

This basically shapes the game you play and the subsequent missions. The level of interaction is much more detailed than before. If you kill a sheep and a farmer sees you, he'll tell other farmers. But if you kill him and no one sees you, well... Still, you can also get the sheep by proper means, plus some deeds can be undone by doing something for the affected parties. Overall there are a few dozen types of human characters spread over 20 cities, plus around 30 different monsters and creatures. It might sound sparse, but you are likely to spend a lot of time interacting or fighting with Orcs or/and humans.

There's no point in talking about the visuals - you can see they are stunning and reminiscent of a few other FPS RPGs coming out soon. A major change to the game, though, is the removal of skills for mini-talents. This broadens the character abilities, since players can now create custom talents out of the mini-offerings. Gothic 2 wasn't perfect and the interface has been refined. Fans will be glad to hear that the inventory system is far easier to use.

Gothic 3 might be the one that juts the series into the limelight. There will be a collector's edition of the first games just before its release and providing the game doesn't get delayed, it could hit the market at the right time to make an impressive 'debut'. **NAG**





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## VITAL INFO

■ Platforms

DS

■ Developer

Nintendo

■ Publisher

Nintendo

■ Supplier

Nintendo [011] 256 7760

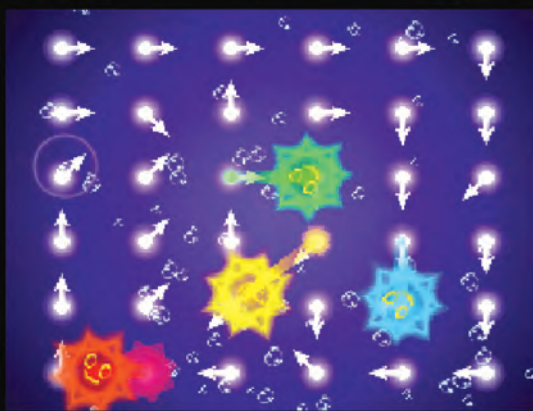
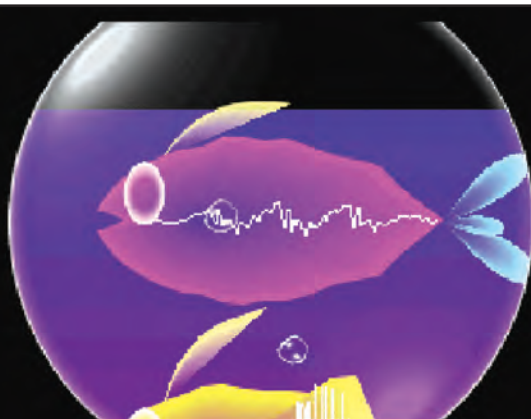
■ Genre

Music Game

■ Release Date

Q2 2006

*It's not a game,  
it's a new way to  
make visual music  
and it looks fun*



# ELECTROPLANKTON

**T**OSHIO Iwai isn't a gamer and to that extent you've probably never heard of him. The conceptual audio video artist made his name doing installations at galleries and shows and a quick Google search reveals his work in these circles. But he isn't a stranger to games, having created a few titles for the Famicom Disc System, an add-on to the NES, only released in Japan. Being a non-gamer, he shares the same hallmarks as Keita Takahashi, the creator of Katamari Damacy: a unique perspective on what a game could be if you let it.

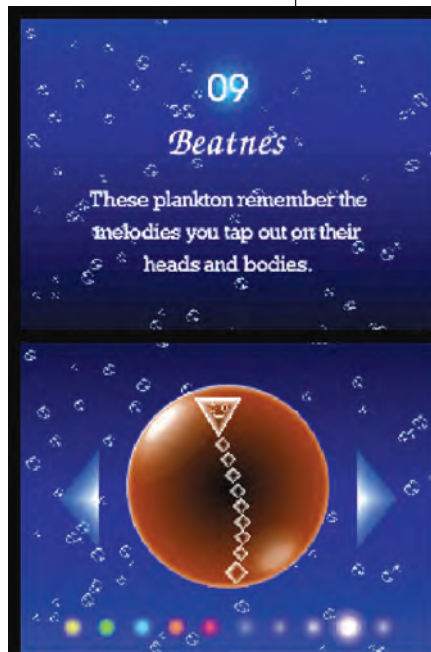
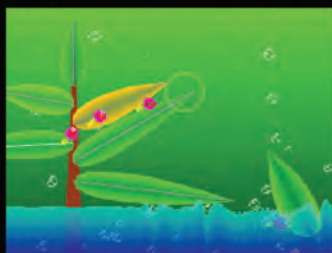
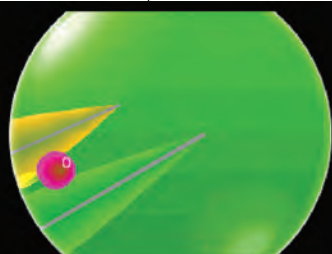
That's the ethos behind Electroplankton, a DS game already released in Japan and likely to reach the West soon. The game isn't essentially a game, but more something to do. The title was created by Iwai and is pretty simple at a glance. Using both the microphone and stylus on the DS, players can select one of twelve types of plankton and manipulate these to make music while giving a display. There's no real reward scheme here, just a means to create something.

Each type of plankton has a unique capability. Tracy is a simple kind which changes its note depending on where you place it; it also emits a string of notes when dragged. The Nanocarp, on the other hand, bounces around the screen, but reacts to waves that emit from tapping the screen. The Hamenbow bounces off aquatic life, while the Volvoice lets you record pieces of voice to play back.

The game forms around how you arrange a specific type

of plankton. Adding plankton and setting them on different paths – or in some cases touching them for different periods of time – produce different notes and visual effects. While most reviews of the Japanese title found this initially disorientating, with time and practice you can hone the plankton into some spectacular creations. The main appeal here is that, because it's not a game, you can do quick sessions on the DS.

There are no plans as yet for a European – and thus South African – release of the game, plus this is so niche that you'll likely never see it locally, except for the grey import market. So if you see it, consider grabbing it. We'll try and do the same – when that day comes expect a review. Meanwhile, consider Electroplankton to be one of those potential cult games. After all, at the time of writing it was one of the most popular game exports from Japan. **NAG**







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## VITAL INFO

■ Platforms

PC

■ Developer

Mad Doc

■ Publisher

VU Games

■ Supplier

Midigital [011] 723 1967

■ Genre

RTS

■ Release Date

Q2 2006



*With new campaigns, game modes and warriors, will this expansion keep fans happy?*



# EMPIRE EARTH II: THE ART OF SUPREMACY

**M**AD DOC SEEMS TO have a knack for expansions and sequels. The company made a solid debut with the Tales of Aranna expansion for Dungeon Siege, then went on to put more momentum in Empire Earth II. Now the team is hard at work at the staple expansion, the time-honoured way to keep an RTS rolling while the sequel is in the works. It's also a good way to make some extra cash off a series while allowing fans to get a bit more bang for their buck. Let's face it: conservatively, half of the sports games ever released could have been expansions.

But this isn't about the semantics of when an expansion is a cash-in. If it were, though, The Art of Supremacy still stands as a shining example, at least on paper. "We were thrilled with Empire Earth II, with its reception from the fans and press, with its innovations, and with its take on the series," noted Dr. Ian Davis, CEO of Mad Doc. "Yet, there's always something more you want to do, always some way to make a great game even better. We were aching to add the Fealty and Tug-of-War Modes, and I think fans are going to have a lot of fun with these. Those, and the other features we've put into play here, really make the Empire Earth II experience complete." That's the official company line, but the

new features speak for themselves.

Fealty and Tug-of-War are undoubtedly additions based on requests from fans, because these modes would affect how some people play the game. With Fealty a player can permanently ally with another player during a game, a small change in RTS gameplay that can swing the tactics. Usually players would ally until it suited them, but permanent kinship opens a whole new bag of diplomacy.

Tug-of-War will be aimed at the serious, large-scale RTS fans. A game will involve several maps, though it is unclear if you fight a map at a time or several battles at once. A game is won once someone's homeland is conquered.

There is a whole laundry list of additions, but that can wait for a review. The expansion will have three new campaigns spanning from the Pharaohs to Napoleon, as well as ten new combat units like Zulu warriors and Russian Howitzer. A new editor will also allow for building custom races.

This isn't a soft sell to play Empire Earth II, but fans of the game will definitely want to get this expansion if it lives up to its promises. But taking Mad Doc's track record to date, we'll take the gamble. **NAG**





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## VITAL INFO

### Platforms

PC

### Developer

TBA

### Publisher

Midway

### Supplier

Ster Kinekor Games  
[011] 445 7900

### Genre

RTS

### Release Date

Q1 2006

*Massive sea and  
land battles in  
Ancient land  
await RTS fans*



# RISE & FALL: CIVILISATIONS AT WAR

**A**FTER EMPIRE EARTH AND Empires: Dawn of the Modern World, Stainless Steel Studios still has a bit of history it wants to explore. Rise & Fall: Civilisations at War isn't a sequel of any kind, but it's in the same spirit, similar to how Impressions is known for its series of city-building games (though the studio has been responsible for 52 titles). This time the meme of reliving ancient battles through the Stainless Steel Studios scope is more condensed, featuring two campaigns.

First there are the antics of Alexander the Great, a portrayal that is bound to be more butch than the recent movie portrayal. Alternately there's the interesting addition of Cleopatra, the Egyptian queen who has to fight her way back to the North of the country after the Romans invade. But that's the coating. What's interesting is how Stainless plans to make it work.

"Everyone has input into the process. That philosophy was especially helpful when we sat down to begin work on Rise &

Fall. We had just shipped Empires: Dawn of the Modern World, and we knew that we wanted our next game to really push the boundaries of what was possible in an RTS game. We wanted to create a totally new and exciting experience," said Rick Goodman from Stainless Steel Studios. So similar to what happens with a lot of games reliant on their fan base, the developers listened. Hero Command was borne from this. The concept isn't wholly original, but it's still interesting.

Players can assume command of the hero figure at times in combat. Stainless wouldn't elaborate on how this might work, but the idea is to immerse the gamer more in the actual battle.

"One of our biggest goals was to actually place the player in the game, let them experience what it's like to be down on the battlefield, fighting alongside their men," Goodman explained. The idea is simple: playing as the leader, you take part in it and share in the victories and anguishes of war, instead of simply commanding from above.

Command will range into the hundreds of units, so don't think that it forgot about being an RTS. The game looks impressive and joins the latest breed of highly visual battlefields. This will definitely help with the immersion aspect, but we doubt that it will rival more on-the-ground strategic games like Kingdoms Under Fire. At its heart Rise & Fall remains an RTS, albeit with some radical ideas.

The naval aspect is also fairly ambitious. While Goodman's claims that "... for the first time in an RTS game, your navy is an important and vital part of your war efforts" aren't accurate at all (Total Annihilation?), it is definitely the most ambitious yet for a classic war setting.

Rise & Fall will have niche appeal and probably miss the mass of the game population. That is unless it is making a bid to bring more to the genre and thus widen its fan base. That is, after all, what most games want. Not being a sequel helps, as it is a new shift from an experienced team. Will it be any good? Well, at least we'll get Cleopatra running around in front of us. **NAG**





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# REVIEWS

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## AWARDS CRITERIA

*In case you didn't know yet...*

### Award of Merit

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### Award of Excellence

91 and above in the score box gets a game this coveted and world famous accolade. Only the best of the best get this rare and sought after award.



### 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, Playstation 2, GameCube, Xbox, PSP, Game Boy Advance, DS and mobile.



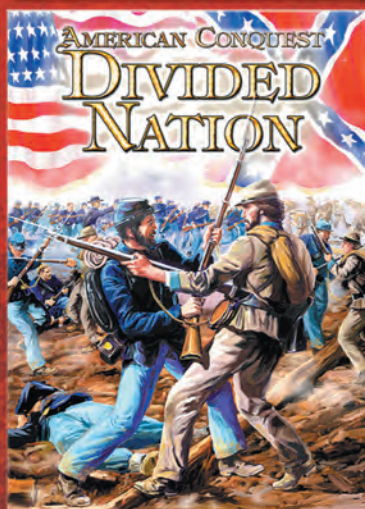
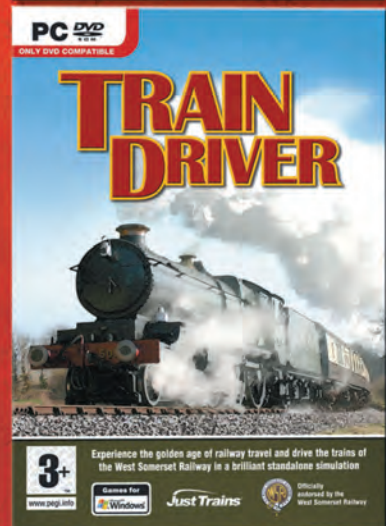
### Scoring

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



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The best arcade racer seen on the PC for around five years. Endlessly entertaining.

86

#### VITAL INFO

##### Platforms

PC

##### Suggested Retail Price

R299

##### Developer

Electronic Arts

##### Publisher

Electronic Arts

##### Supplier

EA Africa [011] 516 8300

##### Genre

Racing

##### Age Restriction

12+

##### Minimum Specs

Pentium 4 1.4GHz

256MB RAM

32MB Graphics card

2x DVD-ROM

3GB HDD

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Need for Speed



# NEED FOR SPEED MOST WANTED

**N**EEED FOR SPEED IS, bar Test Drive which died a horrible, painful, drawn-out death culminating in the most recent Test Drive title disaster, the longest-running racing series on the PC. It is an institution at this point, with a horde of fans who all wait with bated breath for the next instalment to feed their virtual speed addiction.

#### The bloodline

**W**E CONFESS WE'RE SOME of these fans, but our appreciation of fast cars and the Need for Speed franchise doesn't extend to rose-coloured glasses, allowing us to ignore the foibles of the titles. The thing is that Need for Speed has travelled a rather rocky path. The original was a beautiful arcade racer with some distinctly simulator-like qualities. Need for Speed 2 was a real weirdo with zany tracks and fantasy cars, but an attempt to retain a certain level of realism, which really didn't work at all. This is where the Need for Speed genealogy gets a little fuzzy. Need for Speed Porsche Unleashed came out in 2000, and remains the pinnacle of the series in our opinion. It was the perfect mixture of arcade racing and realistic driving, with a saliva-inducing selection of cars - basically a comprehensive history of the Stuttgart car manufacturer's entire existence. Heart-pounding multiplayer racing, proper car damage that had to be repaired after untidy races, per-part customisation for getting the best of these German über-machines, great graphics and superb sound. Porsche Unleashed was a one-off, and absolutely untouchable for many years after its release.

In fact, Need for Speed Porsche Unleashed was possibly the biggest mistake the series made. It set the bar so high that subsequent attempts at sequels to the original Need for Speed theme, some with cops involved (Hot Pursuit), then dropping the cops and going





underground into the world of illegal street racing (Need for Speed Underground), failed to recapture the magic of Porsche Unleashed. We played them all, and for the most part enjoyed them, but none immersed us in the act of driving fast cars as much as Porsche Unleashed.

Enter Need for Speed Most Wanted, the latest incarnation of this long-running series. On the surface it looks to be a simple fusion of Underground and Hot Pursuit, which makes sense as the chase modes in Hot Pursuit were the best fun to be had from that game, and we sorely missed them in Underground where 'illegal street racing circuits' utterly lost their menace when EA decided not to include police units.

But we have to tell you right away, despite these very obvious similarities to its newer siblings, Need for Speed Most Wanted in fact reminds us most of Need for Speed Porsche Unleashed.

### Cheated!

**L**ET'S GET TO THE game itself. The story mode begins following you, a nameless, faceless, new street racer in Rockport City, in your beautifully tricked-out M3 GTR. It briefly takes you through the process of working up to race Razor, mixing cinematics with (rather unexpectedly the first time) the driving mode which you'll shortly become more accustomed to. After rapidly dealing with these incredibly easy initial challenges, you find yourself taking on Razor himself - and for pinks no less.

But alas, your lovely M3 cannot be saved. It quickly transpires that not only has the underhanded and slimy Razor set you up by alerting the cops to the race, but he's had his cronies fiddle with your mechanicals while he distracted you with cheesy racing one-liners. The BM coughs to an ignoble halt, the cops arrive and whisk you off, and Razor takes ownership of his new vehicle. Buzzer!

Released from prison a short while later, you meet up with Mia once again (played by the gorgeous Josie Maran), and she informs you that the swine who swindled you has claimed top rank in the underground racing Blacklist. And what hurts even more is that he's used your ride to grab the spot! Clearly, this guy has got to go down.

### FMV is back!

**T**HE STORYLINE IS DONE in a new style for a computer game, seamlessly integrating green-screen acting with CG animation of all scenery and cars, very much like the motion picture The Immortal. It's really very well done and draws you in effectively, even if these scenes are few and far between once you're actually racing your way back up through the Blacklist. Acting is generally more than acceptable, with Josie of course being the highlight both in terms of eye-candy and artistic ability. And although the dialogue can be painfully cheesy, it fits with the underground racing street culture image so it never really jars.



*Burn up the track  
to get the girl,  
beat the thug and  
flirt with the cops*







**Modify exotic cars with proper street racing gear. No girly neons here!**

Getting back into a position where you can reclaim the top spot (and hopefully your original M3 too) is done by beating each of the Blacklist 15 in order. Before these guys will even look at you however, they set respectively higher challenges that you have to complete to win your shot at their position. These requirements are made up of a mixture of underground race wins and milestones in your evasion of the law.

Races are handled in a number of ways. There's the standard point-to-point sprint race, circuit racing which sees you and your opposition tearing around a defined street track two or three times to claim victory, toll-booth races which basically pits you against the clock on heavily trafficked and fast sections of road, and the speed trap race in which finishing first or fourth is relatively irrelevant as the winner is the one who

clocks up the biggest numbers on the various speed traps encountered throughout the course. Finally there's the drag race, frankly a most useless example of luck-based 'racing' which, for some reason, simply must be included in any street-racing title of any merit.

## Becoming the Most Wanted

**H**OWEVER, TO WORK YOUR way up the Blacklist you also need to become notorious. This is where the milestone and bounty missions come in. Milestones are things you need to achieve during the all-action chases which win you more respect with the racers, and get a higher bounty placed on your head by the cops. Milestones include things like making pursuits last for certain time periods, running a certain number of roadblocks, or causing a certain amount of damage known as Cost to State, during these high-speed manoeuvres.

Bounty is based on the same criteria as milestones, and each successive racer will demand that you achieve a successively higher bounty level before you earn the right to challenge him.

The chase scenes are great fun. The longer a chase goes on, the more heat you'll get on your tail and the more aggressive the cops will become in their tactics. When a small army of various cop cars is all over your six, the red triangles marked on your map called Pursuit Breakers are your best friends. They're also a spectacular way of drawing attention to the destructible environment. Petrol stations explode, scaffolding collapses, and giant donuts, water towers, billboards, and more can be employed to litter the road behind and block the progress of that pursuing swarm, pushing up the Cost to State value associated with the chase as well.

## VITAL INFO

### Platforms

PSP

### Suggested Retail Price

£399

### Developer

Electronic Arts

### Publisher

Electronic Arts

### Supplier

EA Africa [011] 516 8300

### Genre

Racing

### Age Restriction

12+

### Minimum Specs

Players: 1

Multiplayer / Wi-Fi: Yes

Memory: 192KB

## NEED FOR SPEED MOST WANTED 5-1-0

88

**T**AKE NEED FOR SPEED Underground, mix in a pinch of Hot Pursuit and add a drizzle of Burnout Legends on top...

The result is a pleasant flavour of racing, car modification and general mayhem on the road, with the cops on your tail. Need For Speed Most Wanted 5-1-0 is not exactly the same game as its PC or console counterparts (hence the 5-1-0 in the name), but it does a great job of carrying the same feel and theme throughout. In essence, NFSMW 5-1-0 requires you to work your way up the notorious 'Black List' to get to the top of illegal street racing. Each time you beat an opponent or win certain races you will unlock various car modification items or performance enhancing parts. There are 15 racers in total and the only disappointing thing about the PSP

version of this game is that there is no real story-line with cut scenes, as there is in the PC and console versions. In all fairness though, NFSMW 5-1-0 was designed for the PSP platform, which means that you can literally pick up, play, and put down without having to worry about a detailed plot. This is also the reason why there is no free roaming mode. What is really great about this game is the fact that you can have cops on your tail at any given moment which really spices up the race. You also



build up a heat level which is basically your wanted level, but it's essential for increasing your respect amongst the other drivers. Another interesting new addition to this game is 'Speedbreaker'. In any race you can press the 'Speedbreaker' button (the down button on the D-pad) to effectively put you in slow motion, allowing you to get out of a tricky spot. This is really handy later in the game where the cops are particularly difficult to shake off. Lastly there is 'Tuner





## Cruising the streets

**B**ETWEEN RACES YOU ARE free to roam the city (at least those parts of it you have unlocked access to) in your ride of choice, getting to know the roads and shortcuts, visiting tuning shops to juice up your wheels, or just buzzing the local cops. This free-rom mode in essence gives Need for Speed Most Wanted unlimited replay value – like loading up GTA just to see how long you can survive with a five-star wanted rating for a few laughs.

The list of cars available to you is sizzling! From Need for Speed mainstays like the Supra and the RX-7, you can now upgrade to four-wheel-drive rally rockets, the Lan Evo and Impreza STi, or climb even further up the motoring food chain with true super cars including the Lamborghini Gallardo and the Murcielago, a brace of Porsches (including the Carrera GT), the mad MacMerc SLR, the grumbling Ford GT, and even the latest offering from James Bond's own car maker, Aston Martin.

The world of Rockport is a stunning place. Probably the best thing about the graphics is what EA has called

“Overbrightness” in the graphics options menu. To those of us in the know, this option is more commonly referred to as HDR (High Dynamic Range) lighting techniques, and they transform Need for Speed Most Wanted from being a good looking game to being positively incredible to see in its glory.

## No physics? No problem!

**C**RITICISMS? WELL, THERE ARE some. For instance, there's an option to turn damage off in the configuration menu, but we have no idea why, as damage in Need for Speed Most Wanted is purely superficial and has no impact on the game whatsoever other than visually. Physics model? Well it is fairly pathetic. But the developers have pulled an amazing old-school trick and it does feel enough like driving a real car, whether using a keyboard or a steering wheel, that you quickly forget the non-existent physics as they're only really obvious at low speeds anyway.

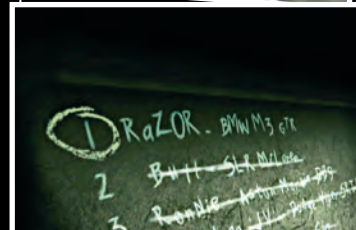
Most Wanted can also be criticised for its AI, but like the physics model it's never a major issue. The other drivers are ridiculously stupid at the beginning of the career mode, but drive perfect lines even through all the tricky shortcuts by the end. The cops frequently turn around and race off searching for you in the wrong direction. It's fun and it's kept exciting, all the way through.

Probably the most glaring negative is the multiplayer component. In short, there are no pursuit modes at all in multiplayer, only the three standard race types of circuit, sprint or drag. It also only supports four players, and with SA ADSL the Internet servers are pretty much useless.

## It's all about the thrill

**I**T'S UNUSUAL FOR US, perpetual critics, to simply look past some glaring omissions like the lack of a physics engine in a driving game, but the remainder of the Need for Speed Most Wanted package is just so smooth and slick, that in this case we are going to. The point is that this is meant to be an enjoyable, pulse-pounding arcade type of racing game. Driving the world's dream cars through beautiful to look at locations, with rich sound throbbing around you and a pure adrenaline rush filling your gut is what a racer should be all about.

And Need for Speed Most Wanted does this so well that it somehow succeeds in feeling real when you're driving through those mean streets. It's a class combination of quality elements which combine to create the best street racer available for the PC today. Play it and you'll be hooked too. **NAG**



*Most wanted is as graphically stunning as they come. The best since Burnout 3*

Takedown' which puts you in the cop seat to take down illegal street racers - this is also fun, especially if you want a break from playing the career mode. NFSMW 5-1-0 also allows you to connect to the Internet to play online with the car that you modified or over a local wireless connection with up to three other players. NFSMW 5-1-0 is definitely one of the better racing games available for the PSP, but you need to be a fan of the Need For Speed series to really appreciate it.





Fans and newcomers to the Age of Empires series should love this one

70

## VITAL INFO

### Platforms

PC

### Suggested Retail Price

R319

### Developer

Ensemble Studios

### Publisher

Microsoft Games

### Supplier

Comtek [0860] 600 557

### Genre

Real-time strategy

### Age Restriction

12+

### Minimum Specs

Pentium 3 1.4GHz

256MB RAM

4x DVD-ROM

64MB Graphics Card

2GB HDD

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# AGE OF EMPIRES III

**A**GE OF EMPIRES HAS become a household name in strategy gaming circles. People's opinions vary. Some swear by it, others complain that it's too slow, but it fully deserves the "Age" moniker. Whichever camp you're in, it must be agreed that the series has set some benchmarks for the genre, as well as serving as a template for numerous other successful titles.

As one might expect, this latest chapter takes place in more recent times than previous instalments. Except for the first few missions in the campaign, the bulk of the action takes place in the New World – the Americas, some time after the Renaissance. Unlike previous Age games, there is far less emphasis on historical accuracy. In fact, the storyline is rather fanciful, and conforms to the current fad regarding powerful secret societies and their conspiracies [Holy Grails, Fountains of Youth, and the like] that have been popularised by Dan Brown's books [Angels and Demons, The Da Vinci

Code]. We shan't, however, spoil the story for you by revealing any pertinent elements. The story is well and dramatically presented. Cut-scenes are handled by the competent game engine. In general, the game is far more story-driven than its predecessors - a fact we find most welcome.

The visual style is characteristically recognisable. It is quite peculiar that, despite



**ABOVE:** Visually, Age of Empires III differs little from previous versions

**RIGHT:** The highly detailed post-mission debriefing we have come to expect from Age of Empires





making use of a reasonably good 3D graphics engine, the game is almost indistinguishable (visually) from its predecessors. Granted, the models are fairly detailed, trees sway in the breeze, water ripples and reflects, but one knows immediately and beyond a shadow of a doubt that this is an Age of Empires game. While this is great in terms of maintaining franchise identity, it does rather give the impression that the series isn't really moving forward. At least give us a camera that can be rotated when necessary!

True to form, the units are tiny compared to structures [which provide a realistic sense of scale], which means it can be difficult to distinguish between them. Arguably, it can be said that this is merely another representation of realism – on the battlefield the commander seldom has the luxury of pinpointing every

soldier's exact location! Damage representation has advanced immensely. As buildings are damaged, their appearance deteriorates, usually on a side that is consistent with the source of the attack, and details include masonry coming loose and falling. Either the model is re-rendered in real-time, or there is a range of damage graphics, for we seldom saw two damaged buildings that looked alike. Building collapse is truly spectacular, with an abundance of particle effects.

There's not much to be said about the game's sound perspective – which is to say, it's unexceptional. Units acknowledge commands, and guns of various kinds go 'bang!' Gun reports and explosions are well recorded. The musical score is rather bland [another trademark Age of Empires characteristic] so [you guessed it] we soon enabled WinAmp.



**TOP & RIGHT: True to Age of Empires form, units are very small compared to buildings. While this sense of scale may be realistic, it makes it rather difficult to select and control them.**

**ABOVE: A huge cannon commands a powerful firing arc from this seaside cliff**



## GAME DYNAMIC OVERVIEW

**F**OR THOSE NEW TO Age of Empires, here's a brief look at the structure of the game. Players manage bases which can train a variety of military units. The object of the game is to build a stronger army than that of your enemy, and use it to defeat the opponent. Victory conditions vary, but the default and most often played format is destruction of the enemy base. Other game types include territorial or economic victories, as well as 'regicide' mode, wherein players are required to kill the opposing king [a unique unit that must be protected] – a bit like capture the flag.

Bases consist of a number of buildings, each of them fulfilling a specific role. At the heart of the settlement is the Town Centre. Here villagers are recruited, these civilian units serving as the labour force underlying the base's economy. Villagers construct buildings and gather resources, the latter required for construction and unit recruitment, as well as technological research. Previously, the resources have been food, wood, stone and gold, but in Age of Empires III stone has been dropped, which streamlines the resource model somewhat.

Bases consist of two main classes of buildings: economic structures and unit production structures. The former provide or process various resources, while the latter are used to train various units, and typically include a barracks, stables, siege weapon factory and naval dock.

The overall aim is to balance economic and military concerns. Overemphasising either is inadvisable, as neglecting the economy is a poor long-term move, resulting in the inability to keep up in the arms race in the middle game and later, while becoming too involved in economic development may leave one vulnerable to an early strike.

Age of Empires games are renowned for an intricate technology tree. There are numerous upgrades and abilities that need to be researched, some enhancing resource collection, some affecting the properties of buildings or units, and others improving combat capabilities. The number of available options borders on the bewildering, and Age of Empires III is no exception, presenting a range of new upgrade types that can be obtained. A crucial concept central to the game's whole philosophy is advancing through ages. What this means is gathering enough resources and technology to allow the player's civilisation to reach a higher level of sophistication, unlocking new technological options.



## New in Age of Empires III

FANS OF THE PREVIOUS Age games will be pleased to hear that the overall game dynamic has remained virtually unchanged. Once again, early food gathering is of paramount importance, with other resources quickly gaining importance. Stone has been dropped from the resource model, simplifying this aspect slightly.

The element of experience has been introduced into this latest chapter. Almost everything a player does, earns experience. Experience is used in two ways: to upgrade the player's home city, another new concept, and to receive shipments from the home city. Well, we use the term "new" loosely. The experience-reward system has been used in C&C Generals and Battle for Middle-Earth, and the idea that one requisitions assets from a home base has featured [in a slightly different fashion] in Warhammer 40000: Dawn of War. The home city represents the power group that is sponsoring the player's efforts. As a player earns a certain amount of experience, it will become possible to requisition a shipment - these can consist of resources, troops or new abilities. The types of shipments available depend on the city and its level of advancement. Building structures, training units, gathering resources and destroying enemy assets all earn experience for the player. So, periodically one has the opportunity to request shipments. And the more active the player is, the more often these will be available. Furthermore, experience accumulates for the home city as well, and during each level advancement players are afforded the opportunity to add a shipment type and a cosmetic customisation. The latter has no impact on the progress of the game, but allows the player to enjoy his/her own personalised cities.

Hero units feature in Age of Empires III and cannot be killed, though they may be rendered unconscious and in need of rescue. Heroes can collect treasures scattered around the map, and thus it is highly advisable to explore as extensively as possible and as early as possible.

## The Natives

THE GAME HAS BEEN structured in such a way that the Native American Indian tribes aren't actual factions vying for dominance, but are rather caught in the crossfire between the European intruders, which is historically fairly correct. Therefore, players cannot choose to play, say, the Cherokees or the Aztecs, but this doesn't mean that these do not play an important role. Players can seek to ally themselves with the local inhabitants, giving them access to native troops and knowledge. In the single-player campaign, the Native Americans play a more significant role, as players almost always have control of an Indian hero unit that accompanies a European hero.



**LEFT: A hapless Spanish ship makes a futile attempt to run a Maltese blockade**



**BELOW: A flaming fire ship prepares to ram a galleon**

The new game elements [as detailed elsewhere] have greatly enhanced playability. However, bear in mind, the new features make this one not one for the faint-hearted! The level of the game's intricacy has risen significantly, but so has the feeling of accomplishment. The single-player campaign can be played in three levels of difficulty. The easiest is recommended for novice players, but experienced strategy gamers should start on normal. The hard setting is very difficult indeed, so a great level of challenge is offered. The pace of the game has been sped up slightly compared to previous Ages, but not greatly so. Campaign missions now come in varying forms. Most are traditional 'build a base, train an army, kill your enemies' scenarios, but there are also others where certain units or resources are unavailable, requiring the player to improvise and adapt.



So what's the verdict? Well, fans of Age of Empires will likely not be disappointed by this one. While simplifying a couple of minor elements, the overall experience has been intensified in terms of complexity. Players may find the campaign disappointingly short, though. Players new to Age of Empires are welcome to give this one a try, but be warned: this game is fairly slow and very intricate. So if you're looking for intense non-stop action, rather look elsewhere. **NAG**



# SilentCool and ReverseCool

## Noiseless Cooling from ASUS Graphics Cards



**S**ystem acoustics plays a major role in providing an enjoyable computing experience, especially with more and more people using PCs for TV, movies and music. Who would want to hear the fan spinning at the end of a great movie or during a classic rock song? A good graphics card is a must-have if you want to turn a PC into a multimedia machine, but that just means another fan and more noise.

You're all in luck today, because I'm going to introduce two new high-performance yet fan-less graphics cards, the EAX800 Silencer and EAX700 Silencer. Either one of them can single-handedly rescue your PC from further noise pollution.

### EAX800 Silencer and SilentCool

SilentCool adopted two innovative designs that enabled high-performance video performance without a GPU fan. First of all, it's the large heatsink, which significantly increased the heat exchange area for absorbing heat away from the GPU and copper heat pipes.



*Optional cooling module extends to the exterior and lowers GPU temperature by another 6°C*

*Patented swivel joint enables the stacked fins to rotate 90° away from critical components.*

*Hidden heat pipe effectively transfers heat from the heat sink to the stacked fins.*

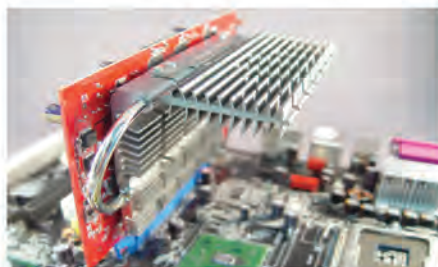


*Rotate fins away from critical components*

Secondly, fins are mounted on a swivel joint that rotates up to 90°. Depending on the locations of critical components such as the CPU, mosfets or capacitors, you can rotate the fins away from these areas for optimal heat dissipation. An additional cooling module attached to the heatsink and extends to the exterior of the PC further lowers GPU temperature by another 6°C.

### EAX700 Silencer/TD/256M and ReverseCool

ReverseCool intelligently positioned the VPU (video processing unit) and heatsink on the backside of the graphics card, placing them directly in the airflow path of the CPU fan to leverage the CPU fan's cooling capability.



*Open clamshell heatsink for enhanced ventilation.*

The heatsink, besides providing huge space for heat exchange, takes on a clamshell architecture. It opens up just like a flip phone, allowing cool air to reach every part of the heatsink for enhanced ventilation.

### No Fan, No Noise

With SilentCool and ReverseCool, noise no longer has to be a byproduct of effective cooling, and high-performance graphics cards will never again ruin your PC entertainment experience. For effective heat dissipation and powerful video performance, I wholeheartedly recommend ASUS' EAX600 Silencer and EAX700 Silencer/TD/256M graphics cards.



*EAX700 Silencer.*



It's too short and anti-climatic, but otherwise a masterpiece

# VITAL INFO

## ■ Platforms

PC

## ■ Suggested Retail Price

R399

## ■ Developer

Infinity Ward

## ■ Publisher

Activision

## ■ Supplier

MegaRom [011] 234 2680

## ■ Genre

War FPS

## ■ Age Restriction

16+

## ■ Minimum Specs

Pentium 4 1.4GHz

256MB RAM

8x DVD-ROM

64MB Graphics Card

4.0GB HDD

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*Call of Duty 2 is definitely the most engrossing and action-packed entry to the genre*

# CALL OF DUTY 2

**M**ANY THINGS HAVE BEEN said about the World War 2 genre, with “Not another one” perhaps the most common. But it has become a culture on its own. WW2 games, be it strategy, tactical or action, have a unique feel to them.

In a war game, it's about the combat at hand. Your enemies are never much more enhanced, just more or less and better or worse, or better armed. Problems come in the form of machine gun nests and units embedded in buildings. Your biggest fear isn't running into something brandishing a rail-gun on its shoulder, but a random mortar or a few well-aimed enemy grenades. Survival and moving forward are the two main objectives in a war game - never more so than in the first-person shooter.

While WW2 has found a firm footing in RTS - and until other wars like Vietnam find a more prominent space in the genre - the war truly lives in the FPS genre. There are already many variants to the standard shooter, such as Brothers in Arms and the upcoming The Outfit. But the action shooter portion is ruled by Call of Duty, a game conceived by Infinity Ward - it's no surprise that the studio largely comprises of people who worked on the Medal of Honor games. MoH stuck to a mechanical

nature, flooding stream after stream of standard enemy units after you in a notion that is wholly traditional FPS. But soldiers don't act like alien invaders or monsters from beyond. Call of Duty capitalised on this by bringing a true battlefield atmosphere to the genre. Battles were intense, switching seamlessly from clearing a machine-gun nest in a forest to room-to-room combat in a town. A lot happens in a Call of Duty game and thinking on your feet is the only way to survive.

So how can Call of Duty 2 improve on this? Hardcore FPS fans may scorn the switch - the new game opted for a regenerating health system. Halo did something similar, but still supplied health kits. Call of Duty 2 opted for the Brothers in Arms route with no health packs. Being an action game, you get wounded a lot and scouting for health packs becomes a necessary chore. In Call of Duty 2, stepping aside for a few seconds regenerates your health and the difficulty is largely how much damage bullets do and how fast your health regenerates.

Taking health packs out of the equation sounds stupid, but it actually works very well. Instead of playing on the mechanics of finding packs, you instead stay focused on the action. Now a manoeuvre you wouldn't dare because you didn't have enough









health is an option, because your health isn't an issue, the battle is.

There is a downside to this. The game is a bit easy, so serious players should stick to the two hardest difficulties.

Call of Duty 2 takes the usual route of English, American and Russian troops during the war. It's disappointing that no one has started to release proper German campaigns for the sub-genre. Granted, they were the bad guys of the war, but the entire German war machine and combat history are left to explore. It would be interesting to play some of the massive defeats in the German campaign.

Back to the battlefield - Call of Duty 2 is visceral and incredible. There are a few other words that might do it justice, but suffice to say that for once a game has outperformed the expectations of it. Anyone with a DirectX 9 capable system will see some impressive stuff. At the highest settings it might be a machine killer, but graphically it's awesome. The smoke effects are realistic and have a very real impact on the gameplay. Animations are fluid, the sound is crisp and dynamic, plus the game actually features limited material penetration – something that hasn't shown itself properly in FPSs yet.

There is something vicious about the game. The graphics and sound lend to a great atmosphere which, mixed with the regenerating health, make for a very action-packed experience. The enemy is very aggressive and fairly clever. You could complain about the AI enemies, but frankly they are tough enough. The same goes for your team-mates. Call of Duty 2 boasted that it would open up the battlefield. The game experience is still fairly linear (except that multiple objectives feature often), but the experience is made more robust with the AI squad mates. We started theorising that they just re-spawn in the back, because your allies drop like flies. But they provide decent cover fire and are more useful than you realise. The AI watches your back and with the exception of a few tight corridors don't get in your way.

Call of Duty 2 is a highly polished, very sexy game with all the right bits intact. But it leaves a bit of an after taste. Unlike the first game, its three campaigns end in an average way - not something spectacular. There is some truly amazing stuff in the game such as a building being demolished and a cliff-side invasion, but the campaigns just end in a natural conclusion. It's

also not extremely difficult and will be easier to finish than Call of Duty or its punishing expansion. The multiplayer is standard; once again a call for co-op. The Splinter Cell series expanded its multiplayer nicely, so there's no reason why Call of Duty can't follow. In such a case, team players could replace the allied AI. There's plenty of action for everyone.

Call of Duty 2 is a must-play for fans of the genre. Graphic freaks might also find it appealing. And the regenerative health actually makes it a good title for mainstream players as well. On easy this game is a walk in the park, so your uncle might get a kick out of it. But it won't last long unless you want to replay the levels and can finish on a weekend. There's not too much reason to replay the whole thing again, but we're really glad that we played it in the first place. **NAG**

***The usual three campaigns break new ground and explore new and familiar parts of the war genre***





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Around the World in 80 Days



## VITAL INFO

## ■ Platforms

PC

## ■ Suggested Retail Price

R399

## ■ Developer

Croteam

## ■ Publisher

2K Games

## ■ Supplier

Ster Kinekor Games

[011] 445-7900

## ■ Genre

FPS

## ■ Age Restriction

12+

## ■ Minimum Specs

Pentium 4 2.0GHz

256MB RAM

8x DVD-ROM

128MB Video Card

2.5GB HDD

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## SERIOUS SAM 2

**Enemies: they come in many shapes and sizes but there's always a lot of them**



SOMEONE IN THE OFFICE described Serious Sam 2 as Mario meets Far Cry [bear in mind that this was a designer, which is why we keep the reviewing team and the art team apart - Ed]. It was labelled like this because you collect coins in the game to generate score, and the first level is jungle based. However, the game can more correctly be described as painting a house with a toothbrush – tedious and not something you'll ever look forward to doing again.

Not only is it tedious, but the play dynamic, despite being broken up into occasional vehicular and turret-based action, is repetitive. The developers certainly made a decent stab at breaking things up a little by introducing a few variants on the standard formula with clever ideas. For example, in one level your tolerance to the cold is measured by a bar across the top of the screen. When this fills up, your vision frosts over and your health starts dropping until you find a suitable spot to warm up. Another good example of this is where you have a time limit to get to the next checkpoint, fighting

enemies along the way. The boss encounters are equally varied and while one will see you flying a helicopter to knock out a giant robot, another will see you collecting jumping boots to avoid the fiery breath of a dragon. The game is let down terribly by the last level, as the action degrades into a mindless maze of endless enemies, resulting in an impossibly difficult challenge that saps the fun out of the rest of the experience. It leaves you with a bitter taste in your mouth as you watch the creators of the game run out of ideas at the last minute.

The story isn't worth repeating here in detail, but involves a lone hero, Sam "Serious" Stone, on a mission to save the universe from the evil villain Mental. How the tale is told is unique in some aspects, as players will be treated to a number of video sequences that pull the game along. Go to this planet, kill this bad guy and bring back all the pieces of the medallion is the sum total of these plot fillers, and as you'd expect from a Serious Sam game, there is a fair dose of humour lacing



the whole experience. Naturally, how funny you find the game will dictate your mental age as the 'gags' are overly lame and the story telling relies on slapstick and silly characters to get its giggles. Some of the jokes are aimed directly at other games and if you've been playing enough first-person shooters in your life, you'll find some of the quips funny. There's one good scene where Sam plants a charge on a door and sets the timer. So, one quality gag, a few smart references to other games in the genre and one good scene near the end of the game represent the sum total of the real humour in the game – something has been lost in the process from original to sequel and perhaps the developers should have spent a little more time working on the script here.

But it's not all bad. One thing the Serious Sam game and expansion pack are renowned for is action and heaps of it. This isn't your traditional shooter for a number of reasons. Firstly: absolutely huge levels. Not many games can boast the sheer scale on display here, but there are problems with this. The levels are massive, look impressive and are more varied than most, but are poorly put together and besides a few impressive set pieces here and there, you soon tire of the same trees and level dynamics present throughout the game – the weakest being the final level. Overall the cost of super sizing the levels is the lack of attention to detail and the lack of complexity. In some areas you can actually see where all the polygons don't join up correctly, and if you explore every inch of the game to find all those secrets, you can look forward to getting stuck – forcing a reload. Secondly: absolutely thousands of enemies. If

you've played the original game, you'll understand what this means. You can expect between one and fifty enemies on screen at the same time and they usually all come straight at you. This would be easy to manage considering the variety and number of weapons on offer, but due to the mixture of enemies [some long ranged, others quick and a few explosive] it's hard to keep on top unless you're working hard all the time. Thirdly: fun guns. From sniper rifles to kamikaze parrots to giant cannons, Serious Sam 2 has it all. The weapons are powerful enough to almost deal with everything, and during the game there's enough ammunition around to keep up with the relentless onslaught. As a bonus, the game features five vehicles and players can look forward to everything from riding a small dinosaur to buzzing along the ground in a flying saucer. This is all good for breaking up the tedium of the rest of the game. Another plus worth mentioning is the game's music: not what you'd expect, but original and fun. The only downside is that every time an enemy is in the immediate area, the music changes: removing the element of surprise attacks. It's just too predictable sometimes. There is a multiplayer mode, but instead of knocking a few levels together where a handful of players can toss kamikaze parrots at each other and have fun, the multiplayer this time around is only cooperative, so everyone can experience all the game has to offer and not together. It's a solid sequel that just doesn't do anything interesting to keep you coming back for more. If you like endless enemies and excessively mindless action, then you might enjoy this one. But approach with caution – too much mindlessness isn't always a good thing. **NAG**



*Piloting vehicles is a welcome break from the tedium*





## VITAL INFO

## ■ Platforms

PC

## ■ Suggested Retail Price

R399

## ■ Developer

Ubisoft

## ■ Publisher

Ubisoft

## ■ Supplier

MegaRom [011] 234 2680

## ■ Genre

Action

## ■ Age Restriction

12+

## ■ Minimum Specs

Pentium 3 1.0GHz

256MB RAM

8x CD-ROM

64MB Graphics card

1.5GB HDD

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# KING KONG: THE OFFICIAL GAME OF THE MOVIE

IT STARTS OFF SIMPLY enough - a boat, an island and a big ape. Actually, the game doesn't start with the charismatic King Kong at all, but instead with lead protagonist Jack trying to stay alive.

King Kong: The Official Game of the Movie may be based on the upcoming Peter Jackson extravaganza, but it feels a lot more like a pleasant stand-alone title inspired by scenes from the film. Art assets were shared between the game and the movie, but the developers of Beyond Good & Evil took those assets and made the game their own.

It is interesting to note that the PC version of King Kong is not the Xbox 360 version, which contains much higher

resolution textures. It's unfortunate that PC owners got short-changed this way, but that doesn't mean the PC version is entirely inferior. Even without the high-resolution textures the game looks and feels stunning. The imagination and emotion apparent in the movie are flawlessly captured by the game.

Thankfully the game doesn't suffer for it. Instead of being overwhelmed by effects and attempts to 'bring the movie home', King Kong revels in its setting and game mechanics.

Skull Island, on which the movie and game take place, is very alive and very reactive. The game throws an interesting miniature ecosystem into the mix with certain creatures feeding on others - a facet that, when exploited, yields very beneficial results. Instead of wasting time and limited ammunition trying to take down a hunting dinosaur, shooting a creature out of the air will distract the carnivore while the player slips by unnoticed. A little forethought can make a seemingly difficult situation much easier. It's a very rewarding feeling to 'think' your way through instead of just heading in guns blazing.

In keeping with the reactive creatures, the environment is equally useful. Throwing a lit spear into grass will start a fire - perfect for taking down hordes of giant insects or for distracting larger dinosaurs.

The game divides its playtime unequally between Jack and Kong himself. Most of the game you play Jack, who is accompanied [most of the time] by two or three other characters from the film. These team-mates are actually quite





functional. They will defend themselves and heal each other when needed. If one of them is in peril, the game will alert you to that fact with the appropriate screaming and tense music. Just like Jack, your team-mates don't have health in the traditional sense. If they stay in peril for too long, they will die and it's load-from-save-point time. While playing Jack, you don't have a HUD at all - nothing to indicate health and ammo count. You can switch elements such as ammo count on, but it's not recommended. The lack of onscreen indicators actually pulls you deeper into the game, making you feel much more alive and vulnerable.

In contrast, playing as Kong is just an exercise in beating the living daylights out of dinosaurs. The sections where you play as King of the island, Kong, are very linear but highly entertaining. Leaping around like a misplaced overgrown hairy Prince Of Persia is enjoyable and the entire experience fluid. The combat is highly cinematic, each punch and slap rebounding with meaty sound effects. The combat itself may not be very technical, but more than makes up for its lack of depth with sheer style. The Beyond Good & Evil influences are very apparent, especially in Kong's sections.

The game progresses with a steady pace while almost every level has at least one major 'wow' section, pre-scripted or other. If anything, King Kong is a game worth playing simply for the experience of playing it. Half-Life 2 had its creepy, desolate City 17 in the same way that King Kong has its dense, claustrophobic lush jungle where everything is alive and out to eat you - except if you're King Kong, who sits happily at the top of the food chain, then you just beat stuff up.

All good things come to an end, and in the case of King Kong's longevity, all too soon. The game is incredibly short [roughly six to eight hours depending], but worth every second of it. Various bits of content can be unlocked along the way, with special content limited to players who complete the game 100% [a feat only the most adamant will achieve].

With a rather abrupt final sequence it does seem to rush to its climax. But despite its brevity, this is an unforgettable trip through the realm of Kong. **NAG**



*This is why you shouldn't eat berries from bushes*





A highly realistic combat flight simulator with a steep learning curve

79

## VITAL INFO

- Platforms
- PC
- Suggested Retail Price
- TBA
- Developer
- Lead Pursuit
- Publisher
- Graphsim Entertainment
- Supplier
- Horizon Simulations [UK]
- Genre
- Combat Flight Simulator
- Age Restriction
- TBA
- Minimum Specs
- Pentium 4 1.5GHz
- Unspecified RAM
- 4 x CD-ROM
- 64MB Video Card
- 1.5GB HDD

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**RIGHT: The F-16  
Falcon is one  
of today's most  
competent jet  
fighters**

**BELOW: Although  
there are other AI  
aircraft, you can  
only fly an F-16 in  
the game**



# FALCON 4.0: ALLIED FORCE

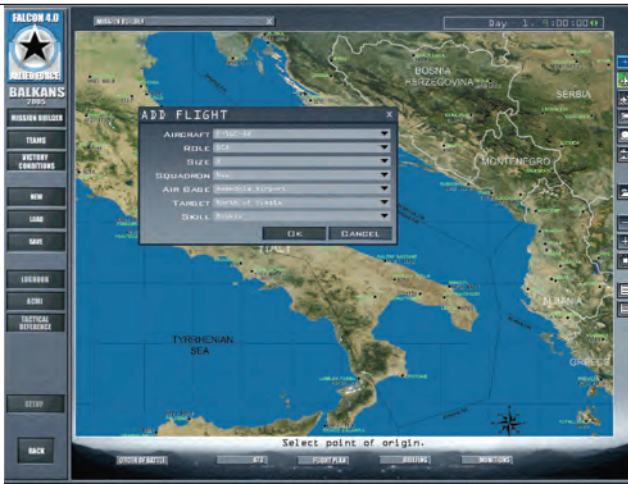
**F**ALCON 4.0: ALLIED FORCE is the latest incarnation of a classic that has been around since 1987. When the developers decided to drop the franchise in 1993, the huge fan base continued to 'develop' the game informally, resulting in what is known in the F4.0 community as "The Dance" - pulling together the various modifications into what was inherently an unstable game.

Lead Pursuit, the developers of Allied Force, took cognisance of this and incorporated some of the mods into their version, giving a new generation the ability to sample a game that can probably be described as a cult classic. What has emerged from their studios is a stable F-16 simulation that features updated graphics and comprehensive documentation added to the depth and realism that made the preceding versions so popular.

The game seems daunting at first: learning to understand what you see in the cockpit is not unlike going to F-16 ground school. The F-16's radar, the heart of your combat capability, is modelled realistically. You interact with the radar through two multi-function displays (MFDs) in the cockpit, and in realistic mode these look exactly like they do in the real aircraft. The information from the radar is shown symbolically on the MFDs, meaning that you have to spend considerable time studying the documentation to make the most of it. Fortunately there's an easy mode that removes most of the limitations of the radar (e.g. allowing it to scan behind you, which the real one can't do) and simplifies the display to make it easier to understand. The flight model is surprisingly easy, even in realistic mode. This is apparently true of real F-16s too, because they have computers that help the pilot to fly the plane within the limitations of the human body. Once again, it's possible to choose between realistic and easy modes, but it was easy enough to fly and we kept the flight model in realistic mode.







## FEATURES

Falcon 4.0: Allied Force includes a few interesting features such as wingmen and enemies that follow real-world tactics, radio chatter that corresponds with the action around you, and realistic air traffic control which includes stacking and talk-downs. Unlike in other simulations the campaign engine runs even when you are in the User Interface. This means that between the time you configure your aircraft and the time you arrive at your target, the war could have changed considerably. The two campaigns each have three different battlefields, and three variants of each. This effectively gives you six different campaigns with 12 variants!

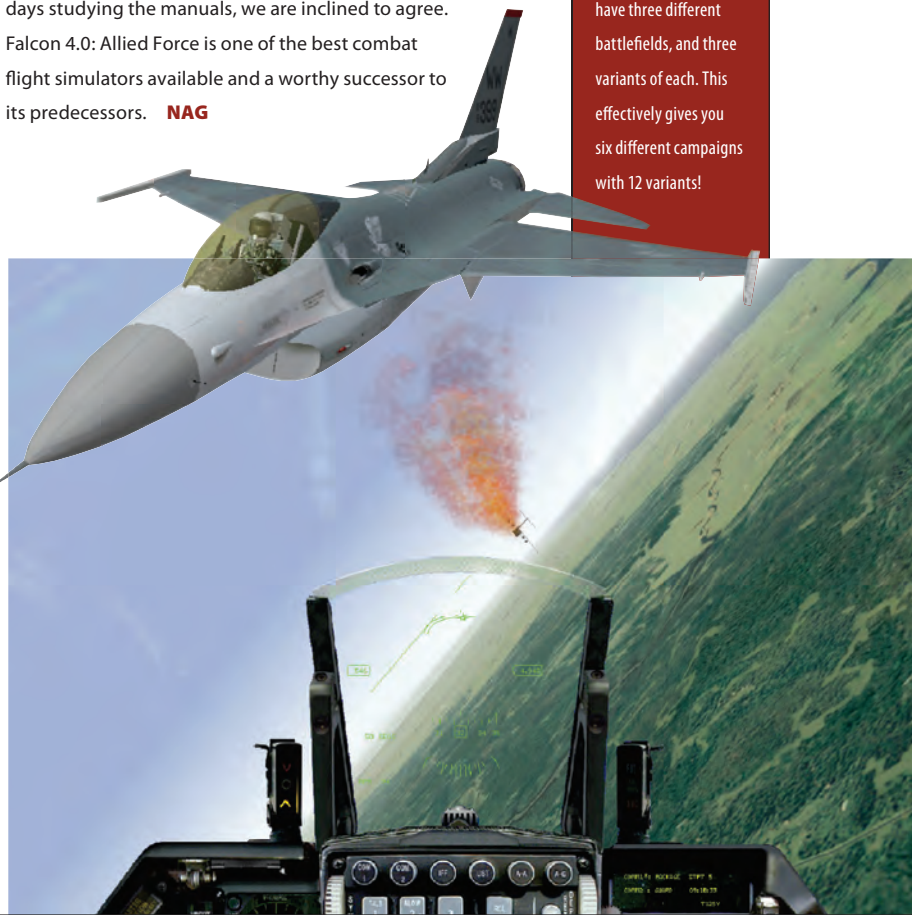
throughout the review period. The one thing that needs to be watched is the plane's angle of attack (how high the nose is in relation to the ground) when landing — an angle of attack greater than 11° causes the tailpipe to scrape on the runway.

Falcon 4.0: Allied Force is a game rather than an out-and-out simulation, and gameplay is obviously important. In this department the game doesn't disappoint. For those who want immediate action, there are instant action, dogfight and tactical engagement (single mission) modes which allow you to get into the thick of the action straight away, while career freaks can look forward to a truly immersive campaign mode. As with the previous versions, Falcon 4.0: Allied Force models a full and ongoing war in which the player's actions may or may not have an effect on the outcome. Conceivably it is possible to have a wonderful career doing everything by the book only to have your side lose the war, but that's the way things happen in real life too. The campaign mode is random and unscripted, and your missions will depend on the way the war as a whole is going. This gives Falcon 4.0 a high re-playability score, as no two campaigns will ever be the same. This is just as well because with the steep learning curve required, if you want to play it correctly it would be a sin to finish it in a month or two and never touch it again. The game includes a complete and easy-to-use mission editor, and missions built with the editor can be shared with other players - which adds to its replay value.

A game without multiplayer capability is almost guaranteed to fail these days, a fact which Falcon 4.0 takes cognisance of by offering solid multiplayer support. As expected, the game offers support for both LAN and Internet connections, but be advised that the latter requires fairly high bandwidth. You can choose between Dogfight, Tactical Engagement or Campaign games in multiplayer mode, and it is also possible to set the rules of engagement and limit the options of other players if you host a server. Interesting enough, it is also possible to play in AWACS (Airborne Warning and Control System) mode in a network game, in which case, rather than entering the 3D simulation, you play the game from an interface that simulates AWACS radar. From here it is possible to scramble players to

intercept enemy flights or warn them of imminent danger out of range of their onboard radar.

Generally this is an extremely complex game, and as such it warrants proper documentation. This comes as both a printed A5 manual of just over 50 pages, as well as a detailed 716-page PDF manual. If you want to spare yourself a lot of frustration, at least go through the printed manual. To get you up to speed, there are 30 training missions that help you learn everything from controlling your aircraft to deploying your munitions (which is the name the military types gave to what we call shooting). Fans describe Falcon 4.0 as the most complete combat simulator for a personal computer and, having spent days studying the manuals, we are inclined to agree. Falcon 4.0: Allied Force is one of the best combat flight simulators available and a worthy successor to its predecessors. **NAG**





## VITAL INFO

### Platforms

PC

### Suggested Retail Price

R299

### Developer

SimBin

### Publisher

10Tacle Studios

### Supplier

MegaRom [011] 234 2680

### Genre

Racing

### Age Restriction

3+

### Minimum Specs

Pentium 4 1.3GHz

512MB RAM

2x DVD-ROM

64MB Graphics Card

2.5GB HDD

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# GT LEGENDS

THE 60S AND 70S were two decades in our history which will always be remembered for a host of reasons, from flower-power hippies to meaningless wars, high-visibility assassinations and, if you're a car nut, probably the most seductively sculpted sheet metal ever created by the automotive industry. These were the days when men were men and proved the fact with outrageous amounts of body-hair, and racing drivers had to breathe fuel and have pure lubricant pumping through their veins.

SimBin, creator of the excellent GTR series (the more recent standalone game and the earlier F1 2xxx mod packages), has



created a game for sad old petrol-heads to get their kicks out of driving those legendary vehicles, and the demo promised that the good old F1-engine, at this stage so heavily reworked that it's practically new, would do the altogether slower, softer cars the justice they deserve.

GT Legends is the name of this title and as the name of the developer suggests, this game is intended as a realistic recreation of the era when these now-classic vehicles were new and regularly met on race weekends. This is no arcade racer, although coming from the high-grip large-turbo world of modern vehicle simulators, GT Legends feels rather arcade-like at first. The cars feel somewhat brick-like if you drive them using a conventional modern style, and just steering one around the track successfully can be a bit tricky.

Realising that these cars are rather stodgy and recalcitrant, you're soon marvelling at the realism of the whole thing. With a force feedback steering wheel attached, you quickly learn to feel the limits of the tyres' adhesion and how to work the vehicles consistently just beyond these limits, driving the





lengths of the various tracks shifting from one controlled drift to another, because this is how automotive greats like the Alfa Romeo GTA were made to be driven.

The dynamics of each vehicle are faithfully recreated, and each requires a different driving style to extract the most from. For instance, the lightweight specials, the Alfa and Lotus Cortina, can be thrown into bends on ludicrous slide angles and then sorted out at the apex before accelerating again on the way out, while the larger and heavier Mustang GT can be hustled around any track at a similar pace, but prefers to be settled before turning - the attitude of the car can be tweaked mid-corner by unleashing the big engine's torque for fantastic exit speeds.

The developers have also paid painstaking attention to small details in GT Legends, like the flexing chassis mentioned earlier for instance, the steady stream of light smoke pouring from the exhausts of the GTA at low-revs, and a delightful damage model which means that if you ram an opponent from the right rear, it's that tail light which is smashed up and which leaves metal sealing rings littering the track.

Graphics are superb, particularly the car models which bring these metallic beauties to life. The audio track is excellent with each car sounding amazing and absolutely spot-on, right down to the crackling and popping of race-tuned carburetors on the overrun, and the big American V8 featured so extensively.

There are a couple of very minor interface bugs, and a strange control issue we picked up with USB-attached steering wheels. If you can set your pedals to separate axis using the control panel software for your input device, you're okay. But if you can't, your wheel will cease to function after four or five races until you restart the system. Setting separate axis fixed the issue entirely with a Logitech Momo however, so it's not that big an issue.

Otherwise the game really immerses you in the driving of this jaw-dropping line-up of classic cars. There are Lotus Elans, De Tomaso Panteras, lightweight race-prepped Porsche 911s, Italy's finest in the form of Ferrari 275s fighting it out with the GT40s that ran over them on tracks at the time, and even the sexiest car in the world ever, the E-Type Jag.

The excellent graphics engine, top-notch physics and superb sound track make GT Legends, as the makers claim, the finest classic car racing simulator ever made. Oh yes, and the multiplayer works an absolute treat - there's even a local server.

The online capabilities of GT Legends have been really well integrated into the game as well. Although a finely-honed, track-specific setup is not essential for victory when you're racing AI, a car tuned to respond to your driving style is extremely useful when racing other humans online.

Well done SimBin, we actually think you may have surpassed the highly-acclaimed GTR with this one. If you like racing simulators or you're a fan of classic race cars, buy GT Legends. You won't be disappointed. **NAG**





## VITAL INFO

### Platforms

PC

### Suggested Retail Price

R 299

### Developer

Enlight Studios

### Publisher

Deep Silver

### Supplier

WWE [011] 462 0150

### Genre

Space simulator

### Age Restriction

12+

### Minimum Specs

Pentium 4 1.7GHz

512MB RAM

2x DVD-ROM

NVIDIA GeForce 2™ Video Card

2GB HDD

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# X3: REUNION

**S**PACE TRADING WITH SOME combat on the side anyone? Surely Elite is the only title worth mentioning in this field, like Civ is the only turn-based empire-builder, and Quake the only FPS? Well no, times do change after all...

Doing what Elite did all those years ago cannot be replicated today. The world has changed, computers have changed a lot, and we, the gamers, have not escaped this change. Fortunately that hasn't stopped Ubisoft and Enlight developing the third generation of the X Universe titles, X3: Reunion. If you're a fan of this genre, well listen up, because the good times are about to roll.

X2: The Threat, showed such promise. It had trading, a living universe and economy, combat against a mysterious alien race, and building your own financial and armed forces empires.

It was a pity then that the market was actually a static, dead thing, and the flight control made combat completely useless on anything but a joystick, while crazy lag even murdered fighting with this input device. It was still pretty good, but greatness was firmly removed from its reach.

X3 is built on a whole new engine, and takes the player back to the familiar environs of Argon Prime to continue the story of the Khaak and the pilots defending against them.

You can choose your bent at the



beginning of the game, which also dictates difficulty levels, and launch straight out into space on your first milk-run with some green pilots from fleet. But Julian Brennan, the pilot under your control, is no fighter jock. You're basically a freelancer - mercenary, transport agent, trader extraordinaire.

In X3 you can completely ignore the storyline and head off to set your own path, and this is generally the most fun. In this massive game, 'your own thing' could be hunting and destroying Khaak for the bounties on their ships, generating profits from playing the market, building and managing full-on space stations and goods factories and more. It's a big universe out there, and full of possibilities.

This time the market is alive with fluctuations and responses according to the laws of supply and demand. The reactivity of this financial system means that you actually ideally need to employ some business acumen to take control of the financial activities of the sectors you operate in. In fact, the developers claim you can seize control of entire economic systems using modern, recognised business models!







Combat is, thank goodness, almost completely fixed even on a mouse/keyboard configuration. A joystick still gives you a fraction more control, but it's no longer absolutely necessary. There is still lag, not surprising considering the astonishing beauty of the universe surrounding you, but it isn't really a problem anymore - not like it was in X2 at least.

There's an extensive list of ships and ship modifications which can further help your capabilities, and a vast range of trade goods for you to try and make some profit from. And the universe itself, as is expected of the X Universe, is enormous indeed.

The storyline itself is badly voice-acted, and the 3D characters aren't very good to look at. We'd much rather stare at the military and civilian craft constantly cruising around the busy sectors, as the lighting and shader effects in this new engine really bring them to life. Graphically, this game is a masterpiece.

And fortunately, the remainder of the game manages to even further enhance its appeal rather than wreck it. It is utterly engrossing. It's challenging and will take a long, long time before you achieve your objectives. But you'll enjoy doing it if space travel, exploration and trading appeal to you. What's more, the new interface still presents a steep learning curve, but is much more streamlined than previous iterations, making the game quick to pick up even though mastering it completely will require some time and effort from the player.

Elite? Perhaps not quite, but X3 Reunion is an awesome space title nonetheless. Its open-ended game mechanic and jaw-dropping looks will keep you coming back for months after you installed it. **NAG**



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77

## VITAL INFO

### Platforms

PC

### Suggested Retail Price

R 299

### Developer

Quantic Dream

### Publisher

Atari

### Supplier

MegaRom [011] 234 2680

### Genre

Adventure/RPG

### Age Restriction

16+

### Minimum Specs

Pentium 3 800MHz

256MB RAM

4 x CD-ROM

NVIDIA GeForce 2™ Video Card

2.5GB HDD

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LEFT: All character movements and postures have been motion-captured

BELOW: The mandatory autopsy scene



# FAHRENHEIT

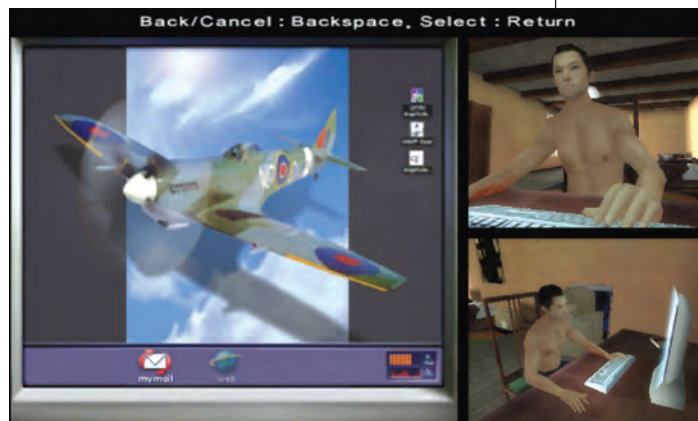
THE ENTERTAINMENT FORMS OF computer games and movies have been trying to converge for years, with many an attempt at a game that plays like an interactive film, and recently many screen adaptations of game franchises started emerging. Games that have sought to emulate films have, in general, met with very limited success so far, though one or two have done a better job of it than others. This may all be set to change in the not-too-distant future.

What intrigued us while going through the manual is the fact that the player controls all four main characters in the story: the murderer, his brother (a priest) and the two cops investigating the crime. We were curious to find out how the developers had pulled this one off, as surely we are looking at characters who are acting at cross purposes. This game is highly story driven. The point of view changes in the manner of chapters or scenes, though players may sometimes switch between characters at will. There is a strong role-playing element to this game, as is evident in the fact that each character has a defined personality, and indulging a particular character's interests is a good way to look after his or her mental state.

A clever device used in the game is one that has been appearing with increasing frequency on the silver screen – the view is often split into two or three windows, each portraying a different angle or aspect of the current situation. One of

these windows is the dominant one, and the one via which the current character is controlled. In terms of gameplay dynamics, Fahrenheit is rather unusual. Much of the game is played in a fairly traditional adventure game fashion, with the mouse and keyboard being used to direct the character within the environment. However, action sequences and tests of skill are handled differently and rather artificially – players are either required to 'button-bash' with wild abandon, or to repeat keystroke sequences displayed on the screen. These mechanisms we found to be rather trite and they detract somewhat from the game's overall brilliance – the overall impression is that the developers could come up with nothing better, nothing more convincing.

Fahrenheit boasts an eerie surreal atmosphere, often fraught with tension. The game is, in most respects, refreshingly different to anything else we've ever seen, and the story and attention to character development are superb. As far as cinematic games go, this is the best we've ever seen – play it in a darkened room, perhaps with just a couple of candles for light! **NAG**





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# VITAL INFO

## Platforms



## Suggested Retail Price

R 299

## Developer

Cyan Worlds

## Publisher

Ubisoft

## Supplier

MegaRom [011] 234 2680

## Genre

Puzzle adventure

## Age Restriction

7+

## Minimum Specs

Pentium 3 800MHz

256MB RAM

4x DVD-ROM

NVIDIA GeForce 2™ Video Card

4.5GB HDD

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in an underground  
chamber!



# MYST V — END OF AGES

**W**HO HASN'T HEARD OF Myst? This classic was a landmark in puzzle adventure games and the series has kept growing, though its successes have been inconsistent. This latest chapter promises to wrap up the saga, though this remains to be seen!

For those of you unfamiliar with this particular franchise, here's a brief look at what kind of game we're dealing with here. This style of game presents the player with a relatively placid environment to explore and get around in, and usually a fairly linear story. The world is filled with various puzzles (though their quality tends to vary according to the particular game) that need to be solved. Games like this one usually forgo intense action, rather allowing players to wander ceaselessly around, collecting clues and items, pushing buttons, pulling levers and, more often than not, scratching their heads. *Myst V – End of Ages* is no exception, and throws into the mix arcane means of transportation (also a common element in this genre). However, in addition to the traditional point-and-click interface, Cyan Worlds has included a control mode more akin to that of first-person shooters (a nod to veteran gamers), and an intermediate mode that combines elements of both. We found this a very refreshing change.

The first thing that struck us, once we were in the game properly, was the visual splendour. Lamps and other

light sources, in particular, were breathtaking. Furthermore, textures are exquisitely detailed, and reflection effects have been very well implemented. The second thing that struck us was the fact that we couldn't leave the room we were in – until we discovered an inconspicuous handle on one of the many doors contained therein. Later on we were to be impressed by the detail and animation of characters' models, particularly the human ones. The environment, as we've come to expect from Cyan Worlds, has been designed to have maximum aesthetic impact, from broad vistas with lush vegetation to engineered subterranean complexes. Players travel between various locales by 'reading' special magical books (with moving pictures, much like the newspaper in *Minority Report*, for those who've seen it) or by activating portal pedestals.

The game's atmosphere is languidly surreal, in keeping with its otherworldly theme. Characters that one encounters tend to come across as somewhat insane, or distracted at the very least. Then again, it appears that they are all ghosts in any case, so we guess they're allowed to be eccentric. The music has a background mood quality to it and is unusual in that it responds to current dialogue. For example, if a character is telling you something and comes to a violent or action-filled bit of narrative, the music will become dramatic. All-told, quite well executed.

Fans of this genre will find this title most engaging, as you can count on getting a serious scalp rash and spending many hours wandering around beautiful virtual worlds. A final note: don't be put off by the scant documentation – it is part of the puzzle! **NAG**







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## WORLD OF WARCRAFT PART 2

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IF YOU HAD TO talk to 100 World of Warcraft players, you'd get 100 different experiences regaled and opinions expressed. You'd get a wide variety of viewpoints pertaining to Blizzard's MMORPG, which isn't necessarily a bad thing. It's great that so many people can find their own type of fun in World of Warcraft, which is part of the reason it's been so popular.

For the most part however, World of Warcraft is growing simply because it's managed to reach that special type of critical mass - the type where you play it, because your friend plays it. Your friend plays it, because his friend plays it. This chain continues, and soon you're in a guild with lots of people you know, all playing just because... everyone they know is playing.

As I think I've mentioned before, World of Warcraft is a wonderful MMORPG for people who have never played a MMORPG before. It is incredibly easy to get into, it's been designed specifically to accommodate newcomers to the genre and facilitate their imminent addiction to the endless questing, levelling and best of what society has to offer - annoying kids with overpowered characters who 'smacktalk' as if it's normal to call everyone 'ghey'.

World of Warcraft represents possibly the best and worst the genre has to offer and it's this odd dichotomy that keeps it going. But for how long?

Gamers who are not new to the MMORPG genre or those who have played other MMORPGs such as Guild Wars, Everquest, Star Wars Galaxies and so forth, might not be as thrilled about World of Warcraft as the rest of humanity. The reason: while World of Warcraft does what it does well, it





doesn't attempt to innovate at all. You could consider World of Warcraft a 'paint by numbers' MMORPG.

As the month progressed, a fact that became very clear to me was that World of Warcraft would not maintain my interest for very long - simply because I've been there before and I've done all that. I've quested my little heart out, I've collected countless items, and I've searched for elusive armour and weapons to make my character that little bit more powerful. All that, before even installing World of Warcraft.

On the flip side, long-term MMORPG players may find themselves comfortable with the familiarity of World of Warcraft, bolstered by its subscriber numbers. The world is vast, soon to be augmented by the upcoming expansion pack that adds a new race on either side of Alliance and Horde. Any good MMORPG needs expansion packs to keep the content flowing, adding enough to keep people from coughing up the monthly fee.

While it may sound like it, my comments about World of Warcraft, based on my own experiences, aren't negative. The game has a lot to offer those who want what it gives, but won't bring anything to the table for those who are hungry for something new; something more.

For the South African who wants to get into this whole MMORPG thing, World of Warcraft is a good choice. It is being retailed locally soon, it works well on low-end connections (though ideally ADSL is recommended) and there are already a lot of locals playing on the US and EU servers, though mostly on the EU realms.

The game's interface can be expanded and enhanced with various downloadable modifications [[ui.worldofwar.net](http://ui.worldofwar.net)] that help you organise items, find monsters or other important NPCs, and so forth. This customisation is sure to add longevity to the game. People get a kick out of finding new ways to present data and manipulate it so as to streamline the entire experience. You get modifications that help you sell items on the in-game auction, along with modifications that make sure you never get lost.

As with all MMORPGs, it's all about the people you play with and the time you invest. World of Warcraft is no different, and having friends inside the game to play with will stave off the tedium of endless questing. The reason most people persist in World of Warcraft these days, are raids. Essentially, raids are just mass player-runs into instanced areas to kill overpowered creatures (boss characters if you will). Some raids involve two groups of players contesting an area, fighting it out en masse. Raids are a lot of fun - big brawls where chaos reigns.

A mixed bag of opinions and experiences is what I left World of Warcraft with. I personally won't be going back to it, even when the expansion is released. I'm the type who wants something new and innovative out of his games, but this in no way detracts from the tried and true formula that World of Warcraft is adhering to religiously. It just means that World of Warcraft wasn't made for me. **NAG**

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## VITAL INFO

## ■ Platforms

PC2

## ■ Suggested Retail Price

R 299

## ■ Developer

Criterion Studios

## ■ Publisher

Electronic Arts

## ■ Supplier

EA Africa [011] 516 8300

## ■ Genre

Racing

## ■ Age Restriction

3+

## ■ Minimum Specs

Players: 1-6

Analogue: Sticks only;

Vibration compatible

Memory: 35KB

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# BURNOUT: REVENGE

**B**EING CONFRONTED WITH THE new Burnout title admittedly evoked some mixed emotions. On the one hand, the Burnout series has always been arguably the most entertaining of the arcade racers. On the other hand, Burnout 3: Takedown was simply so good that it was difficult to think of the next title in the series providing any improvement over its predecessor. At the end of the day, the changes made are somewhat mixed, but they're mostly for the better. The game is still undoubtedly one of the most exciting racing titles around. The biggest change to the play dynamic is traffic checking. Collisions with any vehicle (aside from opponents' race cars) used to mean certain crashes, but now hitting same-way traffic (excluding trucks and buses), send them careening forward, as well as adding to your score. Although this means that the thrill of eluding crashes as you weave in and out of traffic is now gone, it also means that you have another weapon in your arsenal, since checked traffic is capable of causing your opponents to crash. It also adds some variety to

the Crash Junctions, since you can check traffic to cause an accident at one intersection, before wrecking your own vehicle to rack up the cash at the next intersection. It also facilitates the inclusion of a new play mode, Traffic Attack, where your sole objective is to check as much traffic as possible before time expires. Track design too has been improved, with many areas of each track designed specifically to allow you to 'Takedown' your opponents by making them

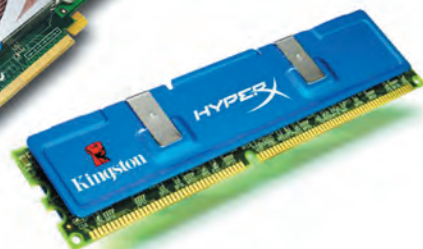
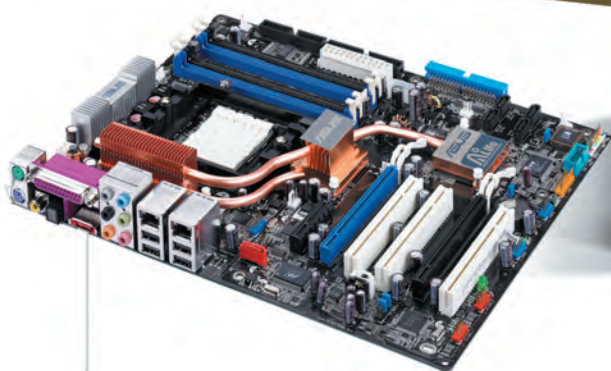
crash. In addition, alternate routes abound, meaning that each track will take several play-throughs to master. Visually, Burnout: Revenge borders on flawless – the representation of speed is quite breathtaking, and it's done without any sacrifice of visual detail. Fantastic sound effects and a thumping soundtrack complement the action superbly. Longevity is also one of the title's strong points, since the single-player mode is extensive with numerous vehicles to unlock, and each of the 169 events awards you a medal based on your placing, as well as a rating, based on your driving skill. And, of course, the multiplayer crash mode is still one of the best ways to keep yourself and a bunch of friends entertained for hours on end. Ultimately, Burnout: Revenge manages, mostly, to outdo its predecessors, and is a title not to be missed. **NAG**





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## VITAL INFO

### Platforms

PC2

### Suggested Retail Price

R 480

### Developer

Deadline Games

### Publisher

SCI

### Supplier

Ster Kinekor Games

[011] 445 7900

### Genre

Action

### Age Restriction

18+

### Minimum Specs

Players: 1

Analogue: Sticks only,

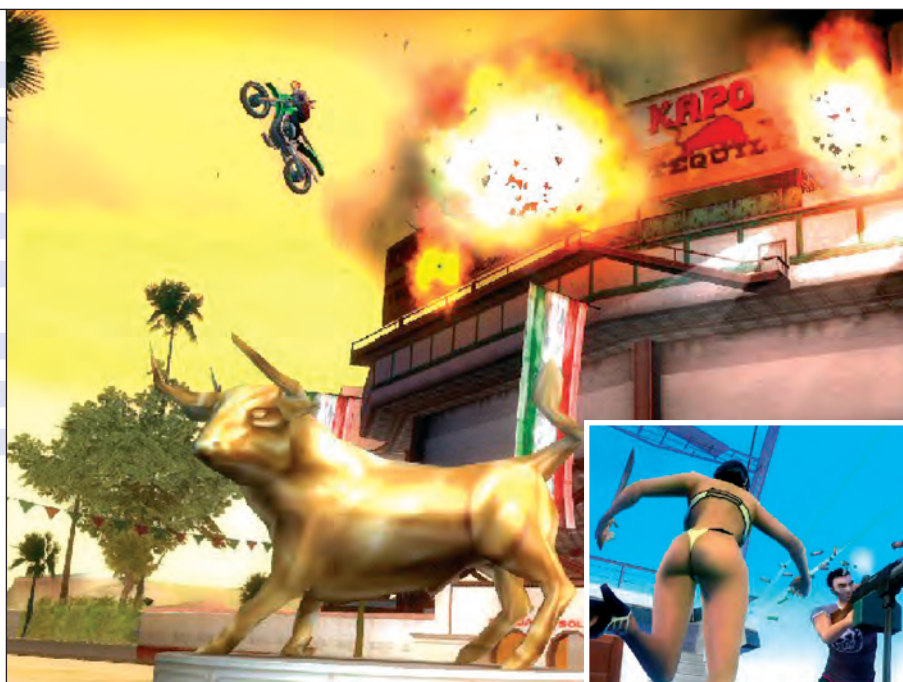
Vibration compatible

Multiplayer / Wi-Fi: No

Memory: 79KB

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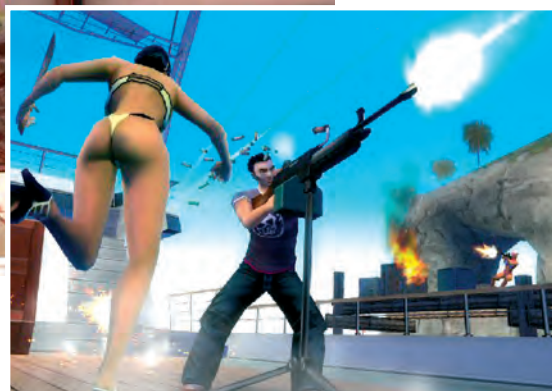
# TOTAL OVERDOSE

**T**OTAL OVERDOSE IS, IN fact, a particularly apt title for what can be best described as a tongue-firmly-in-cheek, completely over-the-top third-person shooter. The game places you in control of Ramiro Cruz, a convicted criminal whose brother works for the DEA.

After being crippled during one of his missions, the aforementioned DEA agent, reluctant to give up his quest against the evil drug syndicates, has his twin released from prison to continue his crusade against evil, as well as to find out who murdered their father.

It's far from the pinnacle of scriptwriting ingenuity, but this is rather a moot point, since the storyline is more of an 'extra' than an essential component of the game. The crux of this title lies in blasting anything and everything into very bloody and very small bits, using an array of weapons and ridiculous special moves. Since this makes up the bulk of the title, it's relatively fortunate that it's executed in quite an entertaining manner.

Unashamedly ripping off the 'bullet-time' concept from the Max Payne series, Ramiro is able to slow down time, leap off walls and perform a triple somersault with corkscrew, whilst simultaneously plugging away at his foes with an Uzi in each hand. In addition to the blatant disrespect the game dynamic has for the laws of both gravity and physics, there is also an array of absolutely absurd special moves available,



which involve, among other things, guitar cases that function as Gatling guns, and summoned Mexican wrestlers to annihilate your foes.

Though entertaining, these moves are, however, quite easily abused, since some of them are capable of disposing of even the most powerful bosses in a single use. Of course, all the mind-numbing pointless violence does manage to be satisfying, but the game is rather short and the half-baked enemy AI makes it tedious very quickly. Add to this the unpolished feel of the interspersed driving segments and the general glitch-ridden nature of the play dynamic, and Total Overdose has the potential to be, at times, as annoying as it is fun.

If you're in the market for some absolutely mindless and frantic fun, you'll likely get a weekend's worth of enjoyment out of this title. But unfortunately, it's just too short and too rough to provide any reasonable degree of long term enjoyment. Once all is said and done, it's little more than a Grand Theft Auto wannabe. **NAG**

**Ramirez loves his  
dayjob**



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90

#### VITAL INFO

■ Platforms

PS2

■ Suggested Retail Price

R399

■ Developer

Clap Hanz

■ Publisher

SCEE

■ Supplier

Ster Kinekor Games

[011] 445 7900

■ Genre

Sport

■ Age Restriction

3+

■ Minimum Specs

Players: 4

Controllers: 1

Multiplayer / Wi-Fi: Yes

Memory: 200KB

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## EVERYBODY'S GOLF

**W**HAT'S THIS? A GOLF game? Surely you jest! Who in their right mind would play a golf game, honestly? It's a sport so boring that half the time golf commentators rather comment about the ducks on the pond or the wind going over the trees, instead of watching yet another overpaid golfer taking a swing.

But hold on a second here... this isn't quite a golf game, is it? Sure, it looks like a golf game on the surface. It has the elements of a golf game - the manicured greens, tree-lined fairways, treacherous hazards... But something is a little different about this one - it's utterly enjoyable to play, even if you don't like golf.

From the start, Everybody's Golf lives up to its namesake. It is truly a golf game for everybody; its design and execution perfect for luring in the curious, yet capable enough to entertain the professionals.

Make no mistake, Everybody's Golf is a true golf game right down to the true-to-life golf physics and touch sensitive controls that demand your careful consideration to golf's many variables, such as wind, ball lie and course elevation. But it's not only that, and that's what makes it so special.

As you play, you gain Hot Shots Points that you can use to redeem advanced golf equipment,

new courses, characters and lots of arbitrary golf gadgets. Special playable guest characters even include the likes of Ratchet and Clank and Jak and Daxter, along with a few other lead protagonists from the vast Sony library.

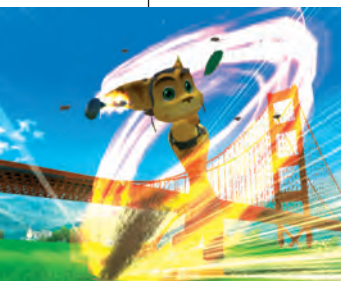
Clap Hanz has done an excellent job of making your golfing feel worth it. Not only does the character you choose to play with gain experience the more you use him/her/it, the character even forms a loyalty bond with the caddy you pick - leading to even more abilities being unlocked or special items being revealed.

With a full compliment of modes, features and game-types, you can even take Everybody's Golf online (with the PS2 broadband adapter) and compete against thousands of players. Or you can go for a few rounds with up to four people on a single unit.

It's odd to see this combination of golf, arcade-style swing systems and even RPG stat building and levelling work so well together. The end result: a wonderfully animated and enjoyable golf game that isn't boring at all. **NAG**

*Also known as 'Hot Shots Golf Fore!' in other territories*

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golf like islands,  
women and ocean**



**Nothing says  
golf like odd  
marsupials**







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80

## VITAL INFO

### Platforms

PS2 PSP

### Suggested Retail Price

PS2: R 399; PSP: R 361

### Developer

EA Games

### Publisher

Electronic Arts

### Supplier

EA Africa [011] 516 8300

### Genre

Sport

### Age Restriction

3+

### Specifications

PS2:

Players: 1-2

Analogue: Sticks only;

Vibration compatible

Memory: 164KB

PSP:

Players: 1

Controllers: 1

Multiplayer / Wi-Fi: Yes

Memory: 100KB

Age: 3+

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# SSX ON TOUR



*Ski, slide, grind  
and roll your way  
down the slopes*



**W**ITH SSX ON TOUR, the ever-popular snowboarding franchise is now in its fourth iteration, and the result is an engrossing and thoroughly polished experience. Although much of the refinement over its predecessor is quite subtle, there are a few immediately noticeable differences this time around. Firstly; instead of choosing a predefined character as you begin the Tour mode (where the bulk of the single-player

action takes place), you create your own character, and although it's not as refined as the creation modes in titles such as the Tony Hawk series, it's quite functional. Secondly; you are given the choice of using either a snowboard or skis, for the first time in the series. Although the difference between the two is largely cosmetic and has little impact on controlling your character, it does add some variety to the mix. The essence of the game revolves around building a reputation in the

snowboarding scene. This is done by participating in events that range from shred competitions (which have a specific objective that must be completed: for example, grinding 500m of rail before the timer expires), to races, trick contests and combination events. The design of the mountain is less linear this time around, and you're free to go virtually wherever you like. In addition, the trick system has been streamlined, making it far easier to execute even complicated tricks, which in turn build up your boost meter which causes your character to go faster - which is what most events will ask of you. Highly polished graphics, excellent sound effects, an appropriately metal-orientated soundtrack and an off-the-wall (but striking and functional) interface, round off the package. Ultimately, SSX On Tour is probably the best skiing or snowboarding experience you'll find this side of Tiffendale's. **NAG**



It's SSX 3 on the PSP, with Tour's styling - awesome

80

**D**ESPITE WHAT THE PACKAGING might say, SSX On Tour for the PSP is not actually 'On Tour'. It may share artistic styling with its bigger brother on the PS2 and its music soundtrack, but that's where the similarities end.

SSX On Tour for the PSP has more in common with SSX 3 for the PlayStation 2, for some odd reason. It all turns out for the best however, as On Tour for the PS2 lacked that certain magic that made SSX 3 so wonderful. On Tour for the PSP ironically retains that magic and ends up feeling more like SSX 3 redux, instead of the iconoclastic SSX On Tour for the PS2.

Everything found in the PS2 version is in the PSP version, along with the new mountain, rider customisation, skies as well as snowboards and so forth. While

you may not have the same range of freedom the PS2 version allows, the tighter more focused tracks actually work to its benefit.

The racing is much more streamlined and entertaining with the tracks beautiful in a way nobody thought the PSP could achieve. A variety of multiplayer options exist, but no Game Share, so unfortunately everyone will require a copy of the game.

It sounds odd to compliment On Tour for being more of a homage to its predecessor instead of a fresh new game, but it just works out better that way. **NAG**







# PlayStation 2

A great idea marred by bad design

69

## VITAL INFO

### Platforms



### Suggested Retail Price

R399

### Developer

Nihilistic Software

### Publisher

Electronic Arts

### Supplier

EA Africa [011] 516 8300

### Genre

Fighting

### Age Restriction

16+

### Specifications

Players: 2

Controllers: 1

Multiplayer / Wi-Fi: Yes

Memory: 120KB

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*Ironman in all his moody glory*



## MARVEL NEMESIS: RISE OF THE IMPERFECTS

**O**H COME NOW NIHILISTIC, that's just not fair. There should be a law against having an incredible idea for a game, getting it produced and then totally destroying the concept with bad design right at the end of its development lifecycle.

The good parts of Nemesis are easily noticeable because they're just that good. The art direction of the game is dark, moody and utterly polished. The styling of the game is engrossing. From the moment it loads there is no doubt that, artistically, Nemesis is stunning. It would almost have been better if there was no game in-between the art that adorns the menus of Nemesis, for it's the game that brings the biggest disappointment. You pick a superhero then duke it out in a destructible environment, using all the powers at that superhero's disposal. Nemesis is less of a fighting game and more of a brawler. There is little/no depth to the combat system with the exception of Breakfall [tapping a button allows you to recover from a stun hit that sends you flying across the screen].

The concept is great in theory - Hulk vs. Spiderman, Wolverine vs. Storm, anyone from the Marvel Universe vs. anyone else. It's a comic-book geek's wet dream, being able to finally answer all those important questions of who would beat who in a fight.

The fights look great, the environment is very reactive and cars explode happily when thrown at someone. But once the initial eye-candy gives way to actual gameplay, the lack of depth becomes apparent. Fights degrade into button-mashing in the hope of getting in a lucky hit. The laughable single-player has you playing one of three characters through a generic 'go here, beat that up' storyline that fails to impress in any way, so it's no use looking to the single-player for substance.

The character imbalance [the flying Iron Man against the ground-bound Wolverine, for example], the lack of depth to the combat system and the terrible single-player make Nemesis one of the worst 'best ideas' yet. **NAG**

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## VITAL INFO

Platforms

PS2

Suggested Retail Price

R 349

Developer

Brezzasoft

Publisher

Ignition Entertainment

Supplier

WWE [011] 462 0150

Genre

Action

Age Restriction

3+

Specifications

Players: 2

Controllers: 1

Multiplayer / Wi-Fi: No

Memory: 100KB

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It doesn't get more classic than this

## METAL SLUG 4

THE METAL SLUG SERIES is an exalted action romp through traditional side-scrolling levels populated with hordes of enemies - the entire experience animated and vibrant.

The fourth instalment [only now ported to the PS2 despite Metal Slug 5 already having been prominent in arcades and other systems for a while] contains the entire original arcade experience. Unfortunately, that's all it contains. The previous ports from arcade to PS2 each had extra content and even a few new game modes. Metal Slug 4 contains no such frivolity, suffering slightly because of it.

While the vanilla Metal Slug 4 experience is a great hop, skip and jump down retro-lane, its difficulty curve certainly won't appeal to today's casual gamer. One-shot death, insurmountable

odds and ludicrous amounts of enemy formations will frustrate the living daylights out of all but the most stalwart gamers.

On the flip side, the crisp 2D art and animation is refreshing, invigorating even. Every single sprite in Metal Slug 4 was lovingly hand-animated and it shows. You simply don't get games like this anymore.

It's not surprising however, that traditional 2D titles such as this are dying out. They simply can't compete with today's generation of 3D gameplay-ridden triple-A titles that have bigger production budgets than the entire deficit of a Third-World country.

The retro-junkies out there will appreciate Metal Slug 4. Everyone else won't get what all the fuss is about. **NAG**

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## VITAL INFO

### Platforms

PSP

### Suggested Retail Price

R 361

### Developer

EA Games

### Publisher

Electronic Games

### Supplier

EA Africa [011] 516 8300

### Genre

Sport

### Age Restriction

3+

### Minimum Specs

Multiplayer / Wi-Fi: Yes

Memory: 1,376KB

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# FIFA 06

FIFA IS UNDOUBTEDLY ONE of the most popular game franchises around and even though we are not soccer fans, we love playing the 'game'. FIFA 06 is the second PSP FIFA iteration and we were wholly impressed. The game features stunning graphics and the player models are surprisingly detailed. FIFA 06 features five gameplay modes. These include 'Play Now', which throws you directly in the action, 'Juggling', an innovative new way to play your PSP, 'Challenges', 'Season'



and 'Tournament'. 'Juggling', a timing-based mini-game, was by far the most interesting addition to the PSP version of FIFA. It requires you to turn the PSP 90 degrees and press the D-pad in sync with the player juggling the ball. The 'Challenges' mode is split into three sections: 'Comeback' requires you to come back from a deficit or tie and your aim (as always) is to win the match, 'Rout Challenges' requires you to replay a route taken in an original match to pull out the win, and you can also create a custom challenge. EA Games made sure that this game is a huge improvement on its predecessor. The controls feel a lot smoother and added features, such as having a team member sprint forward while you are running with the ball, are invaluable in a game like this. The developers also ensured that you have enough choice when it comes to player, team and stadium selection. This game features almost every team and player imaginable, including our very own Kaiser Chiefs and Orlando Pirates. If you like more control you should be happy with the Team Management capabilities built into the game and you are even able to transfer players between teams. One of the things we loved the most though, is the in-game atmosphere which is an almost perfect simulation of the real thing. Both the commentary and the crowd noise are superb, with the commentary sounding surprisingly life-like thanks to the random chatter between the commentators. **NAG**





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RELEASE DATE  
3RD FEBRUARY 2006





Action-packed and pretty

83

Interesting tactical game, but limited

75

#### VITAL INFO

##### Platforms

MOB

##### Suggested Retail Price

R 50

##### Publisher

Gameloft

##### Distributor

www.thumbtribe.co.za

##### Genre

Action

##### Download Code

SMS: tribe 20348 to 40014

NB: make sure you leave a space after the word **tribe**.

Check [www.thumbtribe.co.za](http://www.thumbtribe.co.za) for phone compatibility and downloading instructions.

## BROTHERS IN ARMS: EARNED IN BLOOD

IT'S FUNNY HOW THE Call of Duty 2 mobile game is a squad shooter, while Earned in Blood's mobile rendition is an action shooter. Using stylish graphics very reminiscent of Metal Slug Mobile, you control a soldier through a series of levels in pseudo top-down. Take on the beaches of Normandy and traverse the countryside during D-Day operations in a series of missions, some with team-mates. It's straight action and highly enjoyable, though the use of diagonal movement is tough on some phones. Brothers in Arms staples, like the famous quotes between missions, are there. Arcade platform fans should give it a try. **NAG**

## CALL OF DUTY

WHILE BROTHERS IN ARMS will take you into action, Call of Duty's mobile version prefers strategy. Create a squad of three from several types of soldiers, each with their own benefits and drawbacks. Players can choose from units like a medic, sniper, infantryman, squad leader and engineer. Once the team is set, players go into the level, based on one of the many in the Call of Duty series. Reaching the end is the goal, and switching between the three team-mates to do different things is how to get there. It's not a graphical looker, but the squad dynamic is interesting and the gameplay is fun. There's little room for replaying, as you need certain units to complete some levels, but for a tactical combat experience it's good, though not as much as Rainbow Six was. **NAG**

#### VITAL INFO

##### Platforms

MOB

##### Suggested Retail Price

R 50

##### Publisher

Activision

##### Distributor

www.thumbtribe.co.za

##### Genre

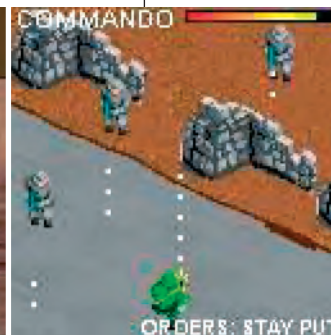
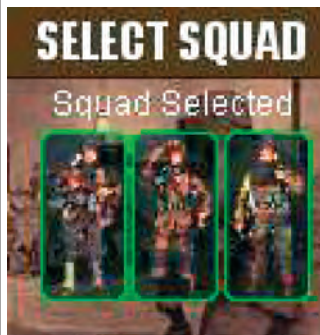
Tactical Action

##### Download Code

SMS: tribe 70352 to 40014

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An old idea in a new jacket, but it works

70

Not bad, but forgettable

60

#### VITAL INFO

##### Platforms

MOB

##### Suggested Retail Price

R 50

##### Publisher

iPlay

##### Distributor

www.thumbtribe.co.za

##### Genre

Puzzle

##### Download Code

SMS: tribe 10333 to 40014

NB: make sure you leave a space after the word **tribe**.

Check [www.thumbtribe.co.za](http://www.thumbtribe.co.za) for phone compatibility and downloading instructions.

## JEWEL QUEST

IT'S HARD TO REVIEW a puzzle title that gives the impression of a PopCap title. Easy puzzle games with a highly addictive factor will always work on a mobile platform. But until PopCap's mobile range is available locally, Jewel Quest is one of your best options. Similar to Eliminate, in Jewel Quest players need to match three or more icons to eliminate them by switching tiles on the board. But the catch here is that all the squares on the board need to be played before the timer runs out. This makes for a good way to kill some time and give your brain some pattern recognition first. While there are better titles on the market, Jewel Quest has nothing technically wrong with it. If tile elimination is your kind of pastime while standing in a queue, you'll enjoy this. **NAG**

## DESTROY ALL HUMANS

CRYPTO IS BACK, THIS time on your mobile. Spiritually this version is true to its larger cousin: you are a small alien who has to prepare Earth for impending invasion. Most of the action takes place on the ground as you run around abducting and killing humans and livestock. There is a large array of weapons, power-ups galore on the levels and several higher-level opponents to take out, such as men in black and other alien operatives. Alternately you fly in your UFO, blowing things up with your death ray. That said, Destroy All Humans is average. Graphically it's not impressive, but the gameplay keeps things going. It can get repetitive and some scenes are too demanding for a mobile keypad. It's not a poor game, but can become dull and frustrating at times. **NAG**

#### VITAL INFO

##### Platforms

MOB

##### Suggested Retail Price

R 50

##### Publisher

THQ

##### Distributor

www.thumbtribe.co.za

##### Genre

Action/Adventure

##### Download Code

SMS: tribe 30335 to 40014

NB: make sure you leave a space after the word **tribe**.

Check [www.thumbtribe.co.za](http://www.thumbtribe.co.za) for phone compatibility and downloading instructions.







# mobile games

you'll never be bored again...



[www.thumbtribe.co.za](http://www.thumbtribe.co.za)

**WARNING:** Data and Fax enabling your SIM card may take up to 24 hours to be activated, depending on your operator. You can't download a game until your SIM card has been Data and Fax enabled and you have WAP/GPRS settings saved to your phone.

Check phone compatibility and WAP/GPRS settings before trying to load games.

Choose your game and follow the SMS instructions for that game. When you request a game via SMS, a WAP Bookmark, Service or Push message will be sent to your phone. You need to connect to this via WAP/GPRS to download the game onto your phone. For Nokia handsets, if the message does not appear in your inbox, go to Services/Service inbox to retrieve the game. For Samsung and Sony Ericsson handsets ensure Push Message settings are set to 'Receive All' or 'Always'.

## R20 games

NB: Make sure you leave a space between the word tribe and the code



sms tribe 30312  
to 40014



sms tribe 70380  
to 40014



sms tribe 20324  
to 40014



sms tribe 20322  
to 40014



sms tribe 20328  
to 40014



sms tribe 20314  
to 40014



sms tribe 70385  
to 40014



sms tribe 70390  
to 40014



sms tribe 703123  
to 40014



sms tribe 703111  
to 40014

## R30 games



sms tribe 70378  
to 42008



sms tribe 70360  
to 42008



sms tribe 703128  
to 42008



sms tribe 70397  
to 42008



sms tribe 70384  
to 42008

## R40 games (R20+R20)



sms tribe 10343  
to 40014



sms tribe 10340  
to 40014



sms tribe 10342  
to 40014



sms tribe 70383  
to 40014



sms tribe 70363  
to 40014

## R50 games (R20+R30)

NB: Make sure you leave a space between the word tribe and the code



sms tribe 20353  
to 40014



sms tribe 20354  
to 40014



sms tribe 20351  
to 40014



sms tribe 20352  
to 40014



sms tribe 10341  
to 40014



sms tribe 30351  
to 40014



sms tribe 10334  
to 40014



sms tribe 10337  
to 40014



sms tribe 10329  
to 40014



sms tribe 10320  
to 40014



titles at unbelievable prices!

R20



SMS tribe 10324  
to 40014



SMS tribe 10325  
to 40014

R10



SMS tribe 10323  
to 38000



SMS tribe 10326  
to 38000



sms tribe 20349  
to 40014



sms tribe 10321  
to 40014



sms tribe 30330  
to 40014



sms tribe 20339  
to 40014



sms tribe 20350  
to 40014

## PHONE KEY

1 Samsung D500	2 Samsung E310 E800 E810 X460	3 Samsung Z130	4 Samsung Z500 D600	5 Samsung E330	6 Samsung E710	7 Samsung E700	8 Sagem MyZ5 MyX4
9 Sagem MyX5-2 MyC5-2	10 Nokia 6230i	11 Nokia 3100 3200 3300 5100 6100 6220 6230 6610 6800 6820 7210 7250 7250i	12 Nokia 6600 6260 6670 6680 7610	13 Nokia 3230 3650 7650 NGage	14 Nokia 3510i		
15 Motorola C650 V180 V220	16 Motorola V300 V500 V600	17 Motorola V547 V550 V620 V975 V980	18 Motorola V3 V80 E398 E550 E1000	19 Sony Ericsson F500i K500 K700 S700i V800	20 Sony Ericsson T610 T630 Z600		

## GPRS/WAP

MTN - FREE service  
on your phone enter  
\*123\*13#  
and then push the dial key

Cell C - FREE call  
dial 140

VODACOM - FREE call  
dial 111

Customer Care:

[help@thumbtribe.co.za](mailto:help@thumbtribe.co.za) or SMS your query to 0734276141

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# TECH NEWS

## PSP Media Manager

Sony has released this application, which allows PC users to manage media for use with a PSP. The software automatically transcodes items as necessary, to make them compatible with the PSP, and transfers data to and from the handheld by means of a USB cable. Another application is backing up game saves onto a PC. Two versions of the software are available – a downloadable version, and a boxed version that includes accessories such as a 6ft USB cable.

"With the release of the new PSP Media Manager software, we're providing Sony technology that lets users easily optimise and transfer their content from the PC to their PSP system using a familiar drag-and-drop interface," says Dave Chaimson, vice president of marketing, Sony Media Software.

[[www.sony.com/mediasoftware](http://www.sony.com/mediasoftware)]

## X-00M Movie for PSP

This application converts various video formats to be compatible with the PSP. Fit-to-stick technology resizes the converted file to fit on the memory stick being used.

[[www.edutain.co.za](http://www.edutain.co.za)]



## NEW BENQ 19-INCH LCD

The new FP93GX from BenQ is an ultra-thin 19-inch monitor that boasts a 2ms grey-to-grey response time and contrast ratio of 700:1. The response time achieved by this screen approaches the performance of a CRT monitor. The display can be connected via a standard D-Sub connector or via DVI. The product is available locally through Annex Distribution.

## MSI RD480 Neo2 motherboard

This new main board from MSI has been designed to take advantage of ATI's CrossFire graphics system, which allows two Radeon cards to be run together, even if they are not identical. The board features built-in 7.1 channel audio with a host of connectors. As is to be expected with a modern motherboard, the Neo2 carries a range of easy-to-use overclocking options, including Dynamic Overclocking Technology. Other features include 10 USB ports and three FireWire ports.

## Smaller Cells

Smaller versions of the Cell processor are being planned. These Mini Cells and Micro Cells will draw less power, and will eventually power handheld devices, including phones. It is even conceivable that multi-core architectures may emerge in such small devices.

## ALIENWARE OZMA 7 SURROUND SOUND HEADPHONES

Alienware has added these headphones to its line-up, now able to offer a private sound solution to its customers. The system's sound reproduction technology simulates the sensation that the sound is being produced much further away than is actually the case, and is shielded from electromagnetic radiation, resulting in emissions 60% below the average. The frequency response is listed as 10Hz-25KHz.

[[www.alienware.co.uk](http://www.alienware.co.uk)]







## ASUS EAX1800XT TOP GRAPHICS CARD

Apart from being powered by the Radeon X1800XT GPU, this graphics card is unusual in that the XitePad gamepad is bundled with it, along with various games. It features 512MB of DDR3 memory and a 16-lane PCI Express interface, and carries a wide array of output connectors. [www.asus.com]

## REAL POWER 550W PSU

Power supplies have to scramble to keep up with the rest of PC technology. This new unit from Cooler Master provides a maximum continuous output of 550W, maximum peak output of 650W and reports power usage by means of an output display. It has been certified by NVIDIA SLI for use with multiple PCI Express graphics cards, and conforms to the Intel ATX 12V V2.01 standard and the SSI EPS 12V V2.1 form factor.



## NEUROS MPEG-4 RECORDER 2

This device acts as a miniature digital video recorder. It connects to the outputs of an appropriate device, such as a DVD player or camcorder, and records MPEG-4 onto a memory card. The file format is non-proprietary, so it can be played back on a variety of systems, including Sony's PSP, which is the primary purpose for this device. [www.neurosaudio.com]



Flash with Style



CF Compact Flash    MMC Multi Media Card Plus    Micro-SD Micro Secure Digital  
Mini SD mini Secure Digital    RS-MMC Reduced Size MMC    MMC-plus High-Speed MMC



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## NVIDIA GeForce 7800 GTX 512

The graphics hardware giant has released a new version of the GeForce 7800 GTX. This upgraded version adds support for 512MB of fast graphics memory, and also features some engine enhancements and streamlining that have resulted in a measured performance increase of about 33% over that of its predecessor. [www.nvidia.co.uk]

## ASUS P5WDG2-WS motherboard

This new Intel 975X chipset-based motherboard joins the ranks of CrossFire-supporting boards. It can run dual PCI Express Radeon graphics cards. As well as two FireWire ports and dual Gigabit LAN, it boasts eight SATA 3Gbps ports. Asus' Stack Cool 2 technology, featured in this board, consists of a specially constructed PCB that essentially contains a heatsink on the reverse side, effectively transferring heat away from sensitive components.

## Force feedback for phones

Immersion Corporation, developers of the Force Feedback system, and I-play, developers of games and content for mobile platforms, have entered into an agreement that grants the latter rights to include the vibration-based technology in its games. 2Fast 2Furious and Metal Slug Mobile are the first titles to feature this version of Force Feedback.



## GAME AND WORK ON YOUR NOTEBOOK

This Eurotek D900T notebook has a 17" screen and a 256MB 6800 PCI express ATI Radeon graphics card. Other features include a 7-in-1 Card Reader, Web cam, Gigabit LAN / Wireless LAN and a TV Tuner. [www.eurobyte.co.za]



## SPHEREX XBOX 5.1 SURROUND SOUND SYSTEM

This is an easy to set up surround sound system that is designed primarily for use with the Xbox, but is compatible with most other audio source devices, including MP3 players. It supports Dolby Digital, Dolby Pro Logic II and DTS.

## IOMEGA SCREENPLAY MULTIMEDIA DRIVE

This is a portable 60GB hard drive that features built-in multimedia playback functionality. When connected to a PC via a USB 2.0 port, it acts as a normal hard drive [though limited to the bus' transfer speed, of course]. But when connected to a TV set, it functions as a multimedia jukebox. In this mode, it can be navigated by means of on-screen menus, and controlled either by buttons on the unit or by its remote control.



## Logitech Harmony remote control

The new device from Logitech is designed with the Xbox 360 in mind, and not only controls the console, but other audio-visual devices too. The unit can be programmed with presets that allow an entire entertainment system to be configured for a specific application, such as playing games or watching movies, with the press of one button. Logitech maintains an online database of over 100,000 AV devices, updated daily, which assists in the configuration process.

"The Harmony remote solves the living-room clutter problem of excessive remotes and makes it easy for any family member to set up the entertainment system for playing games, listening to music, or watching movies or television - all by pressing a single button," said Bryan McLeod, vice president of Logitech's remote control products.

[www.logitech.com]





## VIEWSONIC LCD MONITORS

ViewSonic joins the ranks of 2ms response time LCD manufacturers. Its VX range of monitors recently became available.

## RAZER ANNOUNCES KEYBOARD

Razer introduced the Razer Tarantula Gaming Keyboard at the World Cyber Games 2005 Grand Finals in Singapore in November. The Razer TarantulaTM packs an ultra-large high resolution [up to 256 x 64 dots] Organic LED [OLED] screen for built-in advanced interactive menu display, programmable function keys, customisable macro commands, up to 95 programmable keys which can be stored via an on-board memory of up to 5 profiles powered by Razer Synapse. [\[www.razerzone.com\]](http://www.razerzone.com)

### GIGABYTE GA-8N-SLI Quad Royal

Gigabyte has released a motherboard that boasts four PCI Express X16 slots! This top-of-the-range board, which is driven by the NVIDIA nForce4 SLI chipset, supports up to 8GB of DDR2 memory. It features four SATA 3Gbps ports, FireWire, onboard Gigabit LAN and seven fan connectors.

[\[www.rectron.co.za\]](http://www.rectron.co.za)

### GIGABYTE GA-G1975X

Here's a new motherboard that takes advantage of Intel's 975X chipset, and features a unique thermal solution. Gigabyte's Turbojet Technology delivers cooling built into a motherboard. The system drives air over and away from components that are known to generate heat, and doesn't neglect system memory.



## ALIENWARE AURORA M7700 MOBILE SYSTEM

This is Alienware's first mobile system to make use of AMD Athlon 64 FX and Athlon 64 X2 processors. This mobile system compares favourably with desktop computers, carrying the latest NVIDIA graphics.

The displays are 17-inch widescreen LCDs.

[\[www.alienware.co.uk\]](http://www.alienware.co.uk)

## Portable in Style



### External Enclosure for 2.5" Drive NST260

Dimension: 132 X 80 X 15 mm



midnight blue

### Aluminum Enclosure with Mirror Finish



onyx black



brilliant red



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## LOGITECH FORMULA FORCE EX

**L**OGITECH HAS INTRODUCED A new force feedback steering wheel to its PC product line-up, the Formula Force EX. This model comes in at a mid-range price point, essentially replacing the ageing GP model variant.

We use the top PC wheel spec from Logitech, the Momo Force, on our regular virtual driving excursions. It's good, but it has some basic technology flaws. The EX force feedback engine is essentially identical to this older model, and suffers from similar issues at the end of the day. Most annoying of these is the offish centre position, where the feedback kicks from one direction into the other as you pass through zero degrees.

Logitech maintains that this latest model employs "high-fidelity force feedback to relay every crash or bump on the road to your fingertips." As we said, in real racing simulators the effect is almost identical to the Momo Force, albeit quite a bit stronger overall.

So what's new about the EX? Well the design for starters. The buttons adorning the surprisingly small and lightweight unit have a look which tries to ape aluminium - impossible to do with plastic, but not a terrible visual effect. There's a D-pad for menu navigation which is nice, and a further 12 programmable buttons if you include the gear shift rocker switches mounted behind the wheel itself.

These shift buttons aren't very good compared to the paddles on the Momo. They're a bit tucked away and require a deliberate prod to get the gear ratios on the move, rather than a mere flick of the index finger.

The EX wheel itself uses gas-moulding techniques so that it can be made entirely from a single piece of plastic. This

makes the wheel more rigid and is meant to provide even more detailed feel through the rim. A pity then that in the EX the rim itself is extremely thin and spindly, rather like a car from the 60s. Modern cars have much meatier, thicker rims, and since you buy an FF wheel for your PC to enhance realism, we feel the EX should incorporate a thicker more realistic wheel rim.

Despite this lack of substance, the EX wheel is nice to hold. There are rubber patches for grip, positioned on each side, which look pretty good in the red colour scheme of this review unit.

The base of the steering unit follows a by-now familiar trend: it is small and light. It also features Logitech's twin G-clamp mounting system which holds the wheel to your desk quite well, but is rather flimsy in our experience and will break if over-tightened.

The two pedals are unashamedly plastic and mounted on a simple plastic base with ridges on the underside to prevent slippage on carpets. The pedals have quite a nice feel to them, with firm springing on the brake pedal in particular, giving a decent, if fake, 'feel' to this major control.

So is the EX a major improvement over the Momo or even GP? Well it does feel a lot tougher than the rattling GP versions, and feels almost like it delivers slightly more feel thanks to a marginally stronger feedback motor. Otherwise it's really the same old fare in a new box.

If you need a new wheel for your PC, offering a good balance of performance versus price, the EX will suit you perfectly. But if you already have a Momo or Formula Force GP, this is not an upgrade. **NAG**

### VITAL INFO

#### ■ Pros

Feels robust;  
Strong force feedback effects

#### ■ Cons

Logitech FF notchy, especially around the straight-ahead position;  
Spindly wheel rim

#### ■ Supplier

DCS [011] 466 5099

#### ■ Internet

[www.dcs.co.za](http://www.dcs.co.za)

#### ■ RRP

R699

#### ■ Reviewer

Russell Bennett



# THERMALTAKE MEDIALAB

**T**HERMALTAKE HAS TAKEN A slightly faster route than Microsoft's Media Center PC with its MediaLAB kit. It provides an add-in IR function controller, remote control and MultiMedian software package for any standard PC, to turn it into a media centre marvel when not already in use for gaming or work.

The IR functions reside in the aluminium casing which fits into a standard 5¼-inch drive bay and then connects either directly to a spare on-board USB connector or via a conventional, external USB port. It's powered straight from the board or via an included connector if you prefer.

Once this box is settled, all that's left to do is boot your system and install the MediaLab software or MultiMedian. It's in this application that you need to do your setup, pointing it to the locations of media you want to be easily accessible, although by default the default XP locations are supported – things like 'My Pictures' and 'My Videos', for instance, are accessible right off the bat.

In fact, you can configure the entire app, with a little patience, using just the remote. It's a fully-featured device which includes full mouse-like control of the cursor, shortcuts for launching apps, killing apps and switching apps, as well as a full range of user-recognisable home entertainment functions like play, pause, mute, etc.

The software controls your entire system and therefore you can play any format media which your system has codecs installed for – audio, video, still photos, PowerPoint presentations, etc. More basic users will have no trouble simply controlling a DVD using the remote or finding, playing and manipulating movies stored on their systems through the MultiMedian directory tree.

Coupled with a nice digital projector or LCD TV screen, this little beauty becomes just about essential. No more hopping up and down to start the next part of a movie or to search for those digital photos you wanted to show your friends in a more sociable environment than around a crowded PC screen.

If you want one of these latest consumer entertainment devices, a Multi Media PC, but can't justify the expense of essentially another computer, the MediaLab is a useful compromise. Of course, that is provided your computer is in the same room as your chosen display unit, or you can build the system into an older machine connected to your main 'server' over the home LAN if the two are more remote from each other. **NAG**

## VITAL INFO

### Pros

Easy to use software;  
Hardware feels rugged

### Cons

TV has to be in same room as PC

### Supplier

Corex [011] 707 5000

### Internet

www.corex.co.za

### RRP

R1,195

### Reviewer

Russell Bennett



# ZALMAN FATALITY

## FS-C77 ULTIMATE CPU COOLER



## FS-V7 ULTIMATE VGA COOLER



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# PLAYSTATION 2 GEAR

PERIPHERALS FOR THE PLAYSTATION 2 aren't a new thing. Gamers have been happily using peripheral steering wheels and arbitrary dance mats since the console's conception. Widely dependent on personal taste, peripherals can either enhance your gaming experience tenfold, or make you wonder what the heck peripheral manufacturers are thinking.

## MAX SHOOTER

THE MAX SHOOTER IS exactly the type of PS2 peripheral that could easily spark imaginative speculation about peripheral manufacturers. It's a device that lets you connect your keyboard and mouse to your PS2. The Max Shooter attempts to be the 'missing link' in the PS2's control scheme, letting you play first-person shooters 'the way they are meant to be played'.

Plugged into a controller port, you can attach a PS/2 keyboard and PS/2 mouse (optical or other) to it. The unit comes with a few predefined profiles for specific games, such as Time Splitters 2 and James Bond: Nightfire. These predefined profiles are set up to give you the best key configuration for that game, but you can also create your own profiles.

The Max Shooter is a hack, a clever trick that translates your mouse and keyboard into standard PlayStation 2 controller

inputs. Unlike the native keyboard and mouse support of a game such as Half-Life for the PlayStation 2, which allows USB keyboards and mice to be plugged into the PS2, the Max Shooter does its best to try and emulate proper keyboard and mouse control. It works for the most part, but certain games just weren't developed with mouse control in mind.

Time Splitters 2, for example, doesn't play well with the Max Shooter. REZ, however, works wonderfully with the Max Shooter and is a joy to play with a mouse.

For its price, the Max Shooter won't put a hole in your pocket, but it's the type of device you need to wonder if you truly need or not. A PC gamer coming over to the console side of gaming might enjoy using the Max Shooter to play an FPS on the PS2, but then he/she would be missing the point of console gaming. **NAG**



### VITAL INFO

#### ■ Pros

Lets you use PC-style controls for FPS

#### ■ Cons

Doesn't work for every title

#### ■ Supplier

Conjoy FX

#### ■ Internet

www.conjoyfx.com

#### ■ RRP

R425

#### ■ Reviewer

Miktar Dracon

## NIGHTSTRIKE ARCADE STICK

ON THE OTHER SIDE of the coin, you don't get more authentic than the NightStrike Arcade Stick. Straight out of the halcyon days of needing to stand on a beer-crate to be able to reach the Street Fighter 2 controls on the arcade machine, the NightStrike Arcade Stick is possibly the best, most rugged arcade-style joystick the PlayStation 2 (or PC or Xbox) has ever seen. The NightStrike is natively compatible with the Xbox and PlayStation 2, as well as the PC with its USB connector and compatible drivers.

The eight oversized analogue buttons adorn the arcade-sized control face, while the metal base and rubber feet do

an amicable job of keeping the stick steady during a rigorous session. The Xbox didn't want to detect the analogue nature of the buttons, but they worked fine on the PS2 and PC.

The cables fit snugly into a compartment at the bottom of the arcade stick, keeping things neat.

There is a certain authenticity to using an arcade stick for playing fighting games, though this feeling may be entirely dependent on your gaming-related upbringing. For its reasonable price, no self-professed arcade junkie should pass the NightStrike up. The more 'modern' gaming generation of today probably won't see what the fuss of an arcade-style stick

is all about, but that's their loss. The NightStrike is comfortably nostalgic but utterly dependable technologically. **NAG**

### VITAL INFO

#### ■ Pros

Authentic arcade feel and ruggedness

#### ■ Cons

Niche appeal

#### ■ Supplier

Conjoy FX

#### ■ Internet

www.conjoyfx.com

#### ■ RRP

R690

#### ■ Reviewer

Miktar Dracon





# LOGITECH PLAYGEAR STEALTH

**O**F LATE, LOGITECH HAS been very silly with its range of PlayGear products for the PSP. Half of the time, the various products can't interact with each other. You buy the faceplate protector and your PSP can't fit into the carry case. Thankfully, the Stealth headphones don't conflict with any other Logitech PSP-related products. That's because they're headphones.

For the most part, headphones are a dime a dozen and you can choose from a variety of head-squishing forms - over the head, behind the head, in the ear... The Stealth is a little different though, in the sense that it literally goes in the ear. Like earplugs, the Stealth actually gets pushed into the ear cavity, instead of just sitting on top of it. With three different size 'earplugs', the Stealth can fit any ear size and quite comfortably at that.

What is most surprising about the Stealth is its sound quality, range and clarity. The Stealth is capable of clear low, mid and high ranges as well as a surprising amount of bass. The more bass you pump through though, the more your inner ear will vibrate. You may get an uncomfortable tickling sensation inside your ear if you insist on listening to your songs with enough bass to attract elephants.

Overall, the Stealth is a great set of headphones for both the PSP and any other musically-inclined device - especially if you don't like wearing headphones that 'jut out' over or behind your head. The Stealth earns its name by being almost invisible save for the cables coming out of your ears. **NAG**



## VITAL INFO

### Pros

Quality sound;  
Comfortable

### Cons

None;  
May attract elephants

### Supplier

DCS [011] 466 5099

### Internet

www.dcs.co.za

### RRP

R179

### Reviewer

Miktar Dracon



**COMPRO**  
TECHNOLOGY



## Never Miss The Big Game with COMPRO Power-UP Feature



**What is COMPRO Power-UP?**  
Wake up your PC from Shut Down or Sleep Mode, and automatically record your favorite programs as pre-scheduled by you into hard disk.



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## THERMALTAKE TRIBE

**T**HERMALTAKE THOUGHT OUT OF the box, quite literally, with the introduction of the TRIBE external liquid cooling solution. To this end, Thermaltake has conjured up a devilishly wicked-looking black mesh cage, to house its mechanism of advanced cooling.

The package is presented in a large box and consists of the TRIBE (cage/unit), a copper water-block, two UV coolant hoses, 500ml of UV coolant, a PCI coolant hose pass-through bracket with integrated power connector, a squeeze bottle and the necessary attachment hardware for the water-block.

The cage of the TRIBE is constructed from aluminium and is anodised in black. It consists of a light frame with incorporated locking screws. These screws are used to bind the black mesh into place, forming the cage by means of silver thumb nuts. Riding atop the Cage are two similar black aluminium grab handles with the inscription 'Thermaltake TRIBE'.

Facing outward from the front of the mechanism is a 120mm cooling fan. When powered, the fan illuminates in blue. Hidden behind this is a large 12cm cooling radiator. At the far side of the cage is the silent inline pump and coolant reservoir. The pump also has a blue LED for illumination allowing the user to see the coolant level and possible air-locks.

The rear of the cage sports the coolant pipe connection nipples and a fan speed knob. In addition it also houses the power connector for the coolant pump. Fan speed can be adjusted here from 1,300rpm to 2,800rpm (16dB to 30dB).

The supplied copper water-block has a Perspex top with an integrated blue LED. It derives its power from the on-board power header normally associated with the CPU fan. This illuminates the UV coolant nicely when the mechanism is powered. A lot must be said for the design of the water-block which is in a class of its own. It is near perfection in terms of build quality, looks and performance.

The cage's upper mesh and handles need to be removed in order to fill the unit with coolant. This process is effortless and rather enjoyable thanks to forethought and intelligent design. In addition the coolant pipes attach securely and quickly.

Thermaltake has capitalised on the use of an external kit by using a really large cooling fan and radiator. Thermaltake has also made the unit visually stunning, complimenting any case in use. It must be said that Thermaltake has engineered the TRIBE for use with its SHARK case. This however doesn't make an impact on its ability to function together with another case.

It is advisable that if you wish to use the TRIBE atop your case, that its upper surface be flat and meet the following dimensional requirements: 320mm x 225mm x 165mm.

All this said and done, the Thermaltake TRIBE excels at cooling, its prime objective. Add to this awesome design styling and near quiet operation (at low fan RPM) and you have a masterpiece. The only flaw? It only offers cooling for the CPU. But then again, perhaps the labour of additional cooling would have denied it its role as a lead actor in advanced cooling. **NAG**

### VITAL INFO

#### ■ Pros

Awesome looking  
Powerful cooler  
Near silent at low RPM  
Ease of installation

#### ■ Cons

Only attaches to CPU

#### ■ Supplier

Corex [011] 707 5000

#### ■ Internet

[www.corex.co.za](http://www.corex.co.za)

#### ■ RRP

R1,750

#### ■ Reviewer

Victor Moore



# THERMALTAKE TAI-CHI

**A** NOISY SYSTEM THESE DAYS is a bit of an annoyance. The humming of all those fans needed to keep a high-end CPU, GPU and Northbridge cool in our SA climate is ever so slightly distracting. What you need is cooling and with it some peace and quiet.

The ThermalTake Tai-Chi series aluminium tower chassis has aluminium cooling fins formed onto the outside of the case to help with some convection cooling, a pair of 120mm 'ThunderBlade' case fans pre-mounted in exactly the right positions, and support for ATX and BTX platforms. Most importantly, this particular Tai-Chi model, the VB5001SNA, sports a water-cooling system integrated neatly into the overall package.

Unfortunately the Tai-Chi fails on the basics, like the fact that the hard drive cage can't be removed with a motherboard installed in the system.

The aluminium body itself is very shakily constructed. Doors quickly fall off their hinges, and the stylish 'yin-yan' face is held closed by tiny fridge magnets which aren't even affixed to the body. Then there's the funky hydraulic strut which pushes the side panel open smoothly and with a satisfying little 'whoosh'. But it proves a nuisance when you want to close the case as there's nothing to help you resist this pushing until you've screwed the chassis bolts in.

The water-cooling system itself is decent but also flawed in ways. The two 120mm radiator fans are quiet and effective, while the water pump sounded a bit laboured right off the bat, generating some noticeable noise. Bring the pair of ThunderBlades into play for added cooling (necessary for your Northbridge, since you have to remove the big radial CPU blower), and you've got a very noisy system again.

Apart from these technical design foibles which make the Tai-Chi look like it's been built by the TT marketing team, the price is the hurdle which the Tai-Chi fails to even try to overcome. You can buy a good case, an excellent aftermarket PSU (which you'll have to add anyway if you buy the Tai-Chi – it doesn't include one), and a top-of-the-range water-cooling system and you'll save at least a grand.

And of course, the Tai-Chi is BTX-compatible, provided you order the optional conversion kit as well.

Apart from that, the system was kept cooler, if no quieter, than using the more conventional fans-only approach. We have to say though, to quote one of our favourite TV personalities Jeremy Clarkson, who in a recent Top Gear episode quipped: "If you're mad, as in if you woke up this morning thinking you were... an onion, buy this car."

Substitute the word 'case' for the word 'car' and that's pretty much how we feel about the ThermalTake Tai-Chi VB5001SNA. **NAG**



## VITAL INFO

### Pros

Good looks

### Cons

Poorly engineered;  
Steep price

### Supplier

Corex (011) 707 5000

### Internet

www.corex.co.za

### RRP

R4,995

### Reviewer

Russell Bennett

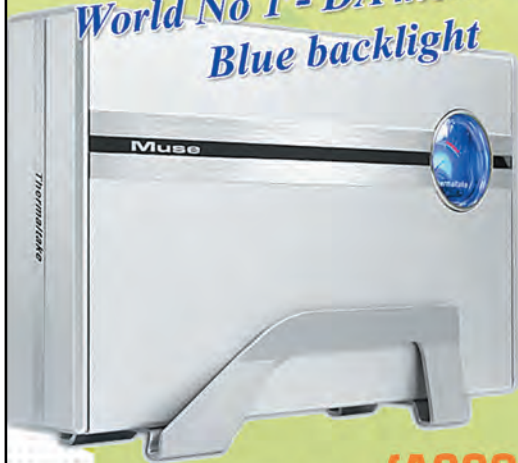
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# Muse

FOR 3.5" HDD

External Hard Drive Enclosure

World No 1 - DA meter with  
Blue backlight



(A2292)

- All aluminum fanless design
- Silver body with graceful curve
- Screwless design easy to install 3.5 HDD without tools
- Deliver Meter with blue backlight to indicate digital signal
- Cypress AT2+ chip - speed & protect your digital data
- IDE to USB2.0 interface - the most compatibility
- Compact mount easily to stand
- Transfer speed up to 480Mbps

- Easy to install, Tool-Free Design
- Fully anti-shock protection
- All Aluminum fanless design
- 480Mbps USB2.0 port



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# HARDCOR3

## GAMER'S TOOLKIT

**T**HE GAMER'S TOOLKIT IS a rather new concept in the LAN and gamer circles. In essence, it's a bunch of hardware items that will come in handy when you encounter a PC-related problem, be it at home or at a LAN.

This month we took a bunch of tools we use daily and designed our toolkit around it. The great thing about a gamer's toolkit is that it puts all your tools together so that you don't have to struggle at a LAN or even at home when you troubleshoot or even build a PC. Apart from the hardware we listed here, there is a stack of other items you can add at your discretion, such as cable-ties, a Dremel [for those on-the-fly mod jobs], case fans [just in case yours fail], and even hardware such as spare RAM, just in case.



### PROFESSIONAL BRIEFCASE TOOLKIT

This kit features an array of

tools geared towards the electrical technician.

Even though not all of these tools are essential for the gamer's toolkit, it's still a very handy kit for the gamer as it contains many of the basic essentials.

**PRICE:** R956 **SUPPLIER:** Esquire 0861 70 00 00 **INTERNET:** [www.esquire.co.za](http://www.esquire.co.za)

#### Toolkit includes

5-inch side cutter

5-inch long nose pliers

4.5-inch flat nose pliers

4.5-inch bent nose pliers

Colour screwdrivers

Utility knife

6-inch tweezers

7-piece folding hex key wrench

Brush

PVC insulation tape

6-inch scissors

2-piece needle file

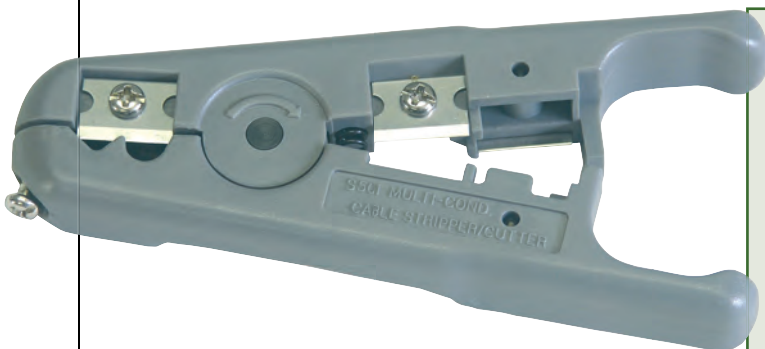
6-inch adjustable wrench

Soldering kit

Multimeter

Utility storage box

Measuring tape



### ROTARY COAXIAL CABLE STRIPPER

This handy little tool is an absolute must if you regularly strip and cut Ethernet cable. The size of the cutting mechanism can be adjusted to the thickness of your cable, and it simply requires you to lock it around the cable and turn it to cut the outer layer of the Ethernet cable. It is very easy to use and is cheap, so there's no reason not to have this in your toolkit.

**PRICE:** R150 **SUPPLIER:** Scoop Distribution [021] 555-4740

**INTERNET:** [www.scoopdistribution.co.za](http://www.scoopdistribution.co.za)





### CRIMPER

The Crimper is one of the most essential tools any gamer or techie should own. In essence, this tool allows you to put the RJ-45 (or RJ-11 for telephone jacks) on the Ethernet cable. It also has a built-in cable cutter and stripper. If you want to make Ethernet cables for your home LANs, then you need one of these.

**PRICE:** R170 **SUPPLIER:** Scoop Distribution [021] 555-4740

**INTERNET:** [www.scoopdistribution.co.za](http://www.scoopdistribution.co.za)



### LAN CABLE TESTER

Once you have made your LAN cables it's always a good idea to test them. Alternatively, if you have an existing cable but you have problems with your network, this is the tool you need to check if the cable is working or not. It requires a 9V battery which sends a signal through each strand of cable and the LEDs will light up if the strand is working. This allows you to easily check whether one of the cables is damaged and not making contact.

**PRICE:** R400 **SUPPLIER:** Scoop Distribution [021] 555-4740

**INTERNET:** [www.scoopdistribution.co.za](http://www.scoopdistribution.co.za)

### BOOTS AND RJ-45S

RJ-45 is the name of the connector that's crimped onto each end of an Ethernet cable. The boots are not essential but they round the connector off, giving it a professional finish. It's always a good idea to have a few of these in your kit in case you need to make an Ethernet cable for that extra person joining your LAN, or if the dog chewed your existing one.

**PRICE:** Boots: 70c ea, RJ-45: R1.50 **SUPPLIER:** Scoop Distribution [021] 555-4740

**INTERNET:** [www.scoopdistribution.co.za](http://www.scoopdistribution.co.za)



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### CAT 5E CABLE

Cat 5E is the specification of the Ethernet cable that connects PCs on a network. The 5E specification is designed to handle 10/100/1,000Mbps transfer rates and depending on the quality of your network hardware [such as the switch and network adapters], you should be able to get a link at up to about 300 meters away. Generally we recommend nothing longer than 100 meters.

**PRICE:** R2 per meter **SUPPLIER:** Scoop Distribution [021] 555-4740

**INTERNET:** www.scoopdistribution.co.za



### SWITCH

You can have all the Ethernet cable money can buy, but without a switch to plug the cables into, it will be pretty useless. For your gamer's toolkit it's always handy to carry a small switch around in case you want to host a quick LAN event, or if you just want to transfer files between PCs. It's also handy for troubleshooting a network should it not be working. Generally a four or eight port switch should suffice, but physical size is the key element here because it will be part of your toolkit and trust us, you don't want to carry a 24-port switch around with you. The switch we chose for our kit is the ultimate gamer accessory, the D-Link DGL-4300 Gaming Router. It's designed to give network preference to games, so any other task such as file downloads will be throttled down. It also has 802.11g wireless built in.

**PRICE:** R1,999 **SUPPLIER:** D-Link 08600 35465 **INTERNET:** www.d-link.co.za

### MULTIMETER

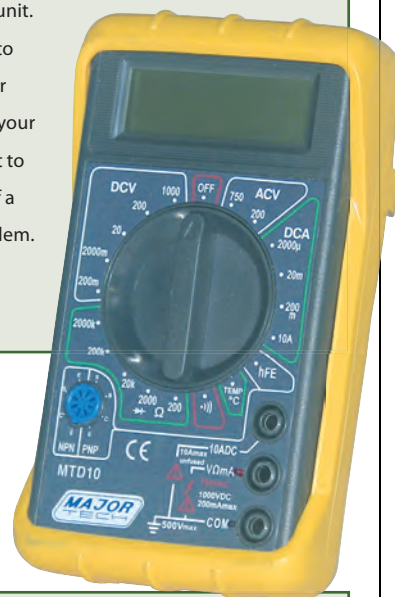
This tool is geared more towards the techies. It's designed to measure, amongst other things, the voltage and resistance of electronic hardware. In the PC environment it's a great tool for measuring

the rails on a power supply unit.

This is essential if you need to establish whether the power supply is stable enough for your requirements, or if you want to figure out if it is the cause of a specific power-related problem.

**PRICE:** R150

**SUPPLIER:** Any electronics shop



### MEMORY STICK

Today it's virtually impossible to transfer data such as drivers or patches using a floppy disk. It's for that reason that USB flash disks have become so popular. No toolkit is complete without at least a 128MB USB flash disk. We however recommend something with a little more space, such as the Iomega MicroMini hard drive. This hard disk-based portable data device is not particularly big, which makes it easy to carry all your critical patches and drivers in your pocket. Its large 8GB capacity will also allow it to be used to transfer other large files.

**Price:** 8GB R1,499; 6GB R1,299; 4GB R1,159 **Supplier:** Datashuttle [011] 466-2331 **INTERNET:** www.datashuttle.co.za







### SWISSMEMORY

The SwissMemory is a very basic pocket knife, but it has a built-in flash memory module.

This memory module can be clipped off if you want to transfer data, or you can use it while attached to the pocket knife.

Victorianox also manufactures a Flight version which doesn't come with a knife or scissors, which will allow you to take it on an aircraft. The SwissMemory is available with flash memory of 256MB, 512MB and 1GB.

**PRICE:** 256 MB version R699 **SUPPLIER:** Sharp Edge [011] 883 3059



### CYBERTOOL

If MacGyver had this one back in his day, he would've been able to build a microwave out of a toaster. The SwissChamp XLT is one of the most comprehensive tools around and would be ideal for the gamer's toolkit. It features everything from a nail file to a set of screwdrivers, pliers, wire crimper, and also a pen which doubles as a tool to set DIP-switches. In fact, this could be considered a toolkit on its own. So if you only have one of these, you should be set for any emergency.

**PRICE:** R645 **SUPPLIER:** Sharp Edge [011] 883 3059

### HEATSINK PASTE

Something that's often overlooked in the gamer's toolkit is heatsink paste. This stuff is exceptionally important as you aren't able to fit a CPU or even change a heatsink without it. Heatsink paste is not particularly expensive and the ones that are available from NakedIT are great for any job. We always have about five tubes available at any time just in case we need to swap out a motherboard or even just a heatsink.

**PRICE:** R35 **SUPPLIER:** NakedIT [011] 678-1288

**INTERNET:** [www.nakedit.co.za](http://www.nakedit.co.za)



# MP3



*Digital Play*



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### PC REPAIR MANUALS

If you're not a complete tech-head, these books from Intersoft are perfect to teach you all you need to know about PC repair and maintenance. The first one we recommend is the PC Upgrade and Repair Bible and the second one is The Complete PC Upgrade and Maintenance Guide. Both these books will give you the information you need for almost any troubleshooting scenario. Even if [you think] you know everything, these books still make great reference tools for those times you 'cannot' solve that particular problem.

**PRICE:** PC Upgrade and Repair Bible: R289.95, The Complete PC Upgrade and Maintenance Guide: R599.95

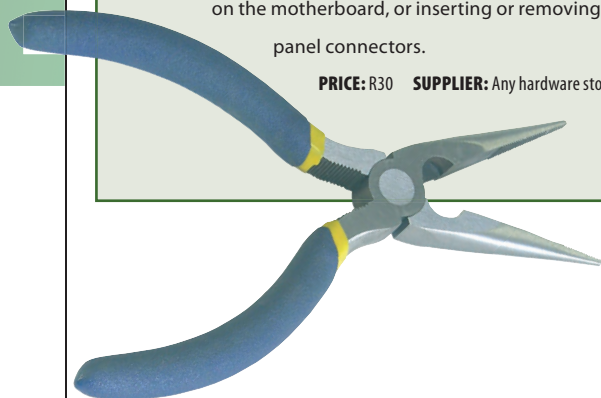
**SUPPLIER:** Intersoft [011] 341-0857 **INTERNET:** [www.intersoft.co.za](http://www.intersoft.co.za)



### PLIERS

No toolkit is complete without at least one pair of pliers. Pliers have too many uses to mention, but some of the creative uses we've had for them was picking up screws that fell in tight spots on the motherboard, or inserting or removing front panel connectors.

**PRICE:** R30 **SUPPLIER:** Any hardware store



### MICROFIBRE CLOTH

If you're as fanatic about a clean kit as we are, then this is another item you need in your toolkit. The MicroFibre Cloth doesn't give off any pieces of fibre or lint, so it's ideal to clean hardware such as your monitor. We also recommend you use it in conjunction with antistatic foam, such as the one available from Fellowes, to clean your monitor or other peripherals.

**PRICE:** R15 **SUPPLIER:** Pick 'n Pay **INTERNET:** [www.picknpay.co.za](http://www.picknpay.co.za)



### PRECISION SCREWDRIVERS

These are also highly recommended. Precision screwdrivers are designed for small screws that are so common in electronics. These will not be used so much in your PC, but many peripherals feature these small screws.

**PRICE:** R50 **SUPPLIER:** Any hardware store







#### COMPRESSED AIR

Dust is one of the biggest problems you're likely to encounter inside your case. The only sure way to get rid of it is by blowing it out with compressed air. This is also handy for blowing dust out of your keyboard or other peripherals. Just be sure to use short bursts when using compressed air.

PRICE: R40 SUPPLIER: DCS [011] 466-

5099 INTERNET: www.dcs.co.za



#### MULTIPLUG ADAPTER

When you get to a LAN event, chances are you will struggle finding a power point for your PC and monitor. Having a multiplug adapter handy will ensure that this is not a big issue.

PRICE: R119 SUPPLIER: Pick 'n Pay INTERNET: www.picknpay.co.za



#### TIM-CLEAN

When you've removed the heatsink from your CPU or GPU, you'll always have lots of heatsink paste still left on the processor and heatsink. This citrus-based solution is designed to remove the paste with minimal effort.

PRICE: R39

SUPPLIER: NakedIT [011] 678-1288

INTERNET: www.nakedit.co.za



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Gigabyte® MB71 Barebone Solution  
2x DDR333/400, Integrated Graphics, Integrated Sound, 10/100 Integrated LAN,  
Gigabyte Black & Silver Optical Mouse, Keyboard & Speakers  
Intel® Pentium4 3.0GHz Boxed Processor And FAN - LGA775  
Corsair® 1GB DDR400 ValueSelect  
GIGABYTE® 16x +/- DVD Dual Layer - BLACK  
Seagate 160GB SATA Hard Drive (7200RPM)  
1.44MB Stiffy Drive



**R 5,937**

#### DISPLAY CARDS PCI-EXPRESS

Gigabyte® ATI® Radeon X700 256MB 128Bit. **R 1,497**  
Gigabyte® nVidia® GeForce 6600GT, 256MB 128Bit, SLI **R 2,318**

#### MONITORS

AOpen® Black 17" - 3yr Warranty CRT.  
AOpen® F2701 17" White LCD.



**R 813**  
**R 2045**

#### MEMORY

DDR400 256MB, life-time warranty  
DDR400 512MB, life-time warranty

Transcend

**R 240**  
**R 480**

#### MULTIMEDIA SOLUTIONS

Creative® Inspire T6060 - High End 5.1

**R 1300**



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### ELECTRIC SCREWDRIVER

God bless the man who invented the electric screwdriver.

This handy tool will allow you to unscrew your case in record time. The electric screwdriver is also great if you are tired of manually doing the job.

**PRICE:** R250 **SUPPLIER:** Any hardware store



### PSU MODDING TOOLKIT

This kit contains four tools which will help you to remove or repair the pins inside the Molex connectors from your PSU. This kit is also essential if you want to mod your Molex connectors by adding UV reactive or simply different coloured ones.

**PRICE:** R199

**SUPPLIER:** NakedIT [011] 678-1288

**INTERNET:** www.nakedit.co.za



### SCREEN CLEANER

There's nothing worse than using a monitor with fingerprint marks and greasy smudges all over it. Screen Cleaner from Fellowes is a kit which contains a spray solution and micro-fibre wipes. The spray features non-streak properties and is antistatic.

**PRICE:** R49.95 **SUPPLIER:** DCS [011] 466-5099 **INTERNET:** www.dcs.co.za

### LEATHERMAN WAVE

A Leatherman is a tool no man should be without. There are numerous models in the range and the best feature of these handy devices is its 25 year warrantee. This means that Leatherman will replace any part of the unit should it break within that time. The Wave features all the standard blades you would expect as well as sharp nose pliers, Philips screwdriver, scissors, and more.

**PRICE:** R669

**SUPPLIER:** Leatherman SA [021] 510 5795

**INTERNET:** www.leathermansa.co.za





# Tenor

VB2000 Home Theatre Chassis

*See the World in  
a different way!*



- Thermally Advantaged Chassis-
- Prescott Ready
- Standard ATX & ATX PSII PSU
- Drive Bay Capacity : 3 x 5.25" & 5 x 3.5"
- Stylish front bezel : Aluminum made
- Reliable EMI Shielding
- Dual USB 2.0, IEEE 1394 Firewire, Audio & Speaker Ports
- Available in Black & Silver
- Microsoft MCE compatible



Top View

- Dual Rear Exhaust Fans:**  
Dual 60 x 60 x 25mm Silent Fan, 2500 RPM 19dBA
- Front Intake Fan:**  
80 x 80 x 25mm Silent Fan, 2000 RPM 19dBA



Install with VFD  
media kit  
(optional)



Aluminum Extrusion Case

## the Truly Liquid Cooling Case - Tai-Chi

- ATX / BTX form factor compatibility:  
fits Intel ATX(12"x9.6"), micro ATX(9.6"x9.6")  
fits Intel BTX (10.5" x12.8"), micro BTX(10.5" x10.4"), pico BTX(10.5" x8")
- BTX Upgrade Kit (Option) P/N: A9449
- Retaining holes for liquid cooling kits
- Optimize internal space for installing liquid cooling system



## Kandalf

A design so powerful, it will redefine  
the way you view a computer



- Air Cooling System  
liquid Cooling System - Best choice  
of liquid cooling case
- Fanless System:
- Optimized internal space and airflow
- Minimized noise level
- Ventilation opening on top  
(62% opening ratio)
- Totally Fanless thermal system  
validated
- Innovation Design- Compatible  
with ATX and BTX**

Available in Black & Silver

## Armor - Super Tower Series

Optimized Thermal management



- Air Cooling System  
liquid Cooling System
- Optimize internal space for installing  
liquid cooling system
- Totally Fanless thermal system  
validated
- Optimized internal space and airflow
- Ventilation opening on top
- Dimension 530 x 220 x 560 mm  
(H\*W\*D)

**Innovation Design-  
Compatible with ATX  
and BTX**



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## Shark

- Removable motherboard tray
- Dual 12 cm fans in front & rear
- Fits Tt liquid cooling system (performance  
radiator with 12 cm fan) or any other  
specific brands
- See - through side panel with EMI shield
- Security lock in front bezel and side panel
- Retractable foot stand
- Ultra light: 6.8 kg (14 lbs)



Available in Blk & Silver

## Tsunami Aluminum Case

- High Efficient ventilation:
- Dual 12cm silent fan in front & rear
- Mirror coating
- Dual USB 2.0, IEEE 1394 Firewire, Audio  
& Speaker ports
- Ultra light: 5.6 kg (12.3lbs)
- Lockable safety side-panel
- Retractable foot stand
- Highly flexible "Silent Purepower supply"  
unit supports PS/II for PC case (optional)



Available in Blk & Silver

## Swing Middle Tower Case

- High efficiency ventilation: 12cm silent  
fan in rear
- Tool - Free when installing 5.25" & 3.5"  
device
- Dual USB 2.0, IEEE 1394 Firewire,  
Audio & Speaker ports
- Stylish streamline form design
- Thumb-screws for easy opening side panel
- EMI protection spring

Swing



## Mystic

### Xaser Case Series

- Home theater style appearance
- Noble aluminum front door design
- Sound level indicator
- Fits standard motherboard and  
PSII power supply
- Performance-oriented
- Side I/O ports for easy access

ThermalRock  
a Division of Thermaltake



## Manbo

### Advanced front panel design

- Advanced front panel design
- Fits standard ATX motherboard
- Dual 120mm front and rear fan
- Screw-less for easy installation
- Dual USB2.0, Audio & Speaker ports
- Drive bays: 5.25" x 4, 3.5" x 2 (external),  
3.5" x 5 (internal)



Distributor of:



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Puma Technologies 011 466 4060, ZAPS 011 789 9747, Edenvale Computers 011 453 4422, Upington: BSA Rekenaar dienste 054-331 2689, Bedfordview: Cyber orange information 011 615 3175,  
Linbro Frontier Electronics 011 608 1809, Potchefstroom: Blutek Computer 018 297 0164, Sasolburg: Mobile Comp Tech 016 976 1199, Roodepoort: CTT Computers 011 472 3249, Brits: SBINK 012 252 3720,  
Pretoria Montana: Ouka Technology 012 548 1773, Centurion: 3 blokes.com 012 657 1656, Cape Town: Buy Computers 021 713 1627, Take 2 021 591 1939, Cafe Viva 021 683 6789, East London: JOES 043 7261235,  
Pe Technologies 043 721 0738, Border Technologies 043 721 1390, George: The C Shop: 004 884 0022



## DESIGN SHOULD BE LAW

**J**OHN ROMERO'S FAMOUS LINE, "Design is law!", attracted a lot of laughter, especially after Daikatana's luminous green robot frogs and mosquitoes appeared on PCs the world over. But there's something to be said for what he was trying to get across: design is important, especially considering how so few developers [yes, even the large studios] use good design practises.

There are many approaches to designing a game and it's difficult to say that any one of them is worse than the others, except for the 'design by committee' publisher-driven chop shop that produces terrible licensed game after terrible licensed game. In general, the goal of a game's design is to describe the game in some form to make it easier to build. As long as that's your focus, your design will be useful and help you to realise your vision. To help you on your way to building great games, here are some guidelines that will improve your design skills.

### 1. Develop the habit of writing things down

**H**OW MANY TIMES HAVE you had a great idea one day and not been able to remember it the next? It's always good to capture things in case they're useful later. Never throw an idea away. Even if it's not going to help your current project, it might be worth something down the line.

An idea is not a design though - that's important. A good design will include many ideas and focus on how those ideas tie together to form a playable game. Learning how to capture those interactions so that you [and hopefully others] can read them later is a valuable skill. Remember that you want to be able to answer pretty much any question about your game by referring to your design documents, so try to capture everything that you feel is relevant, from gameplay to resources and game systems.

### 2. Focus on the player experience

**A** GAME NEEDS TO BE fun for the person playing it. In many cases, people forget that they've played their own game many times over and know all the little tricks and secrets, so they try to make it a challenge and it ends up being too difficult for normal players. That's just one example of not keeping the player experience in mind. You need to always be thinking "What will the player do here?" or "How will this make the player feel?"

Keep the player's goals, motivation and rewards for playing the game in mind at all times. Most games have



a long-term goal that the player is aiming for throughout the whole game [save the world]. There are also a lot of short-term goals that the player needs to feel he/she can achieve. This rewards them continuously and they keep playing the game. Try to supply a 30-minute goal [re-establish power in the base], a 10-minute goal [find the fuse-box], a 3-minute goal [collect a fuse] and a 30-second goal [don't get killed by the zombies between you and the fuse].

Every game project will change over time. To prevent feature creep from killing your game, come up with a set of questions that uses the player's point of view to evaluate new ideas: Will this add to the player's enjoyment?; How often will the player use this?; Does this change or contradict something that the player already expects from the game?

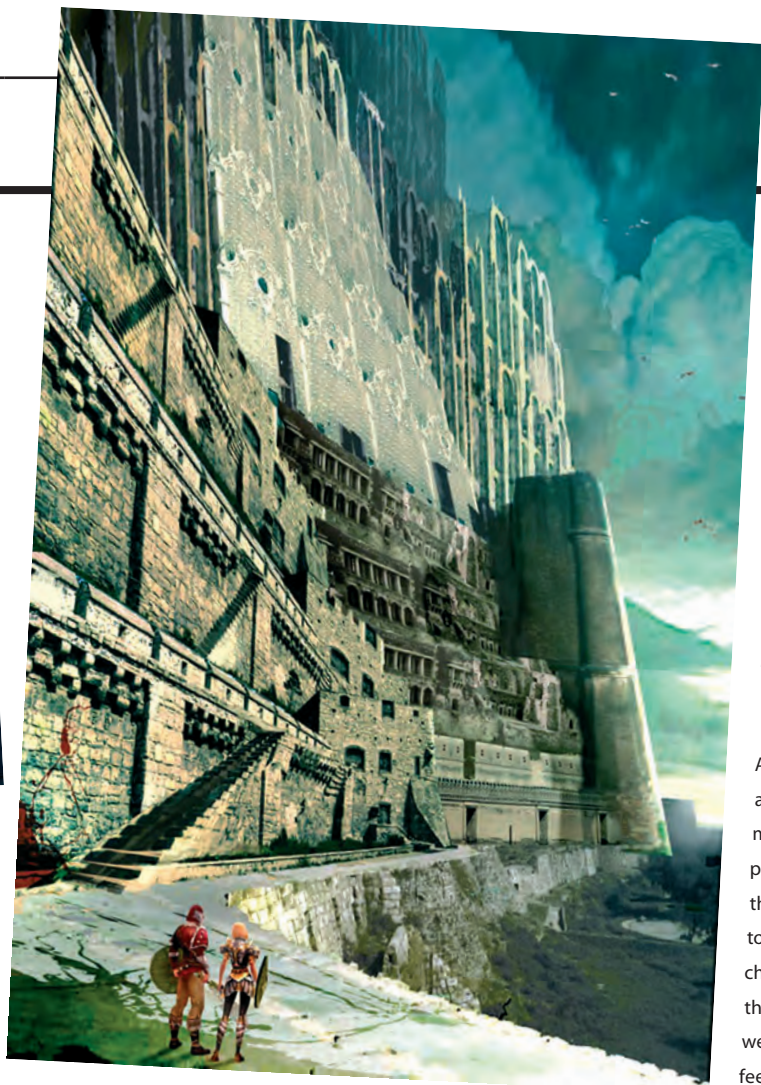
### 3. Play the game in your head - the whole game

**E**VERY DEVELOPER WITH A game idea imagines themselves playing their game. To flesh out your design properly, you need to imagine playing the entire game and not just the 'cool bits' that make it fun and interesting. Imagine how the saving system will work. Play through the menus and change your imagination's resolution.

Try to picture what the levels and puzzles will look like.

Keep the player's goals, motivation and rewards for playing the game in mind at all times. Most games have a long-term goal that the player is aiming for throughout the whole game [save the world]. There are also a lot of short-term goals that the player needs to feel he/she can achieve. This rewards them continuously and they keep playing the game.





Then picture the systems in place behind the scenes that drive them. Capture as much of this as you can. As you read over your design document, you need to be reminded of everything that you imagine your game to be. Try to make it as powerful as the first time you played it in your head. Your design is the first step to turning that vision into a reality. Don't gloss over important things your game will need by thinking that you'll "get to that later." At best, you'll have to rewrite entire parts of the game. At worst, you'll get demoralised by all the work that's 'suddenly' needed and give up. It's a lot less work to add or change a couple of lines in your design.

#### 4. Prototype early and often

**W**Henever you're not sure of something or you have an idea you feel could work, build a quick little prototype to test it out. The prototype doesn't need to be elaborate; keep it the barebones minimum to answer your questions and no more. Do this for important things like the core gameplay dynamics that your game uses and for less important issues like how menu buttons should react when the player places his/her mouse over them.

It is great motivation to work on a game that you know is fun, because you can't stop playing the gameplay prototype. You don't want to only find out that your main control idea is

a yawn-fest after designing twenty missions around it!

Take note that a prototype doesn't have to be on computer. You can get an idea of how things could move by sketching them. You can test an economy system using cards and a couple of friends. Reference your prototypes in your design doc so that other people can see what you mean by "The smaller zombies jiggle slightly when they take damage," instead of relying on various interpretations of "jiggle."

## 5. Any feedback is good feedback

**L**EARN TO DISTANCE YOURSELF from your game and be objective about what people say about it.

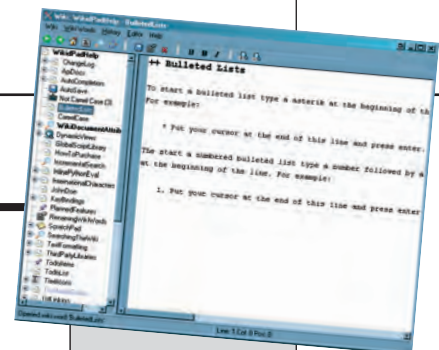
Any criticism your game receives is not a direct attack on you. Rather treat it as an opportunity to make your game even better. Listen to what your players are saying and look for the reasons behind the changes they're asking for. Often you'll be able to deal with three or four issues with a single small change somewhere else, i.e. if people are saying that the enemies feel too strong, you could make the weapon effects have more oomph so that the players feel rewarded for destroying 'stronger' enemies with 'bigger' guns when no actual damage ratings changed.

That said, be careful to take feedback with a pinch of salt sometimes. It's your game and your vision. If the feedback directly opposes something that's explicitly mentioned in your design document, you should consider it carefully. Often people will bring things up that you haven't thought of or didn't cover in your design. Either way, if you focus on what you want the player to experience [mostly the nebulous concept of 'fun'] and use the questions you came up with from point 2, you should emerge with a better game at the end.

## 6. Study other games

**A**S A DESIGNER, IT'S important that you have a feel for the things that make games fun or boring. Different people enjoy different things and you need to be able to make as many people in your target market enjoy your game as possible. Often this unquantifiable feel only comes with experience, but you can never have too much understanding and reference material.

Most of all, you should be aware of the things that have been learned by other designers before you. Know why some decisions were made and others typically aren't. Read game post-mortems to understand what their designers saw as good or bad in the final game. Keep up to date with techniques and information that you might be able to use for your next killer idea. **NAG**



## WIKIDPAD

You'll find a great little design tool on this month's cover DVD. Wikidpad allows you to use the popular and intuitive wiki format [ala Wikipedia] to write your design documents. Use CamelCase [multiple capitals in a single word] or square brackets to denote a wiki word that gets its own page in your document. You can make multiple wiki words refer to a single page by using [alias:<alternative name>] on the word's page somewhere

## DESIGN RESOURCES ONLINE

[www.gamasutra.com](http://www.gamasutra.com)

The Gamasutra post-mortems' archive is a treasure trove of lessons for the aspiring designer. Also on Gamasutra, design guru Ernest Adams writes the 'Bad game designer, no twinkie!' series. Be sure to avoid twinkie denial conditions in your games.

**5years.doomworld.com/  
doombible/**

The Doom design document was released a couple of years ago. Read it to see how much id had to discard in the original and why they made Doom 3 the way it was. It's on the DVD this month.

**www.gamedev.net**

GameDev.net is a leading online community for game developers, encompassing developer news, articles, resources and forums.



# THE LIFE-CYCLE OF A TRIPLE-A GAME

Triple-A games are the ones we see on store shelves. They are the titles that push hardware and win awards, the games that drive this behemoth we lovingly call our industry. This is their life-cycle, from start to finish.

## Conception

**E**VERY GAME STARTS AS an idea. Anything from “I have this really cool mechanic” to “Let’s get rich too” can spawn a game. The ideas that end up becoming triple-A titles typically come from within a development studio or a publisher that has a license or franchise that it wants developed. The days of ideas being bought off young spotty types are over. It’s a legal minefield accepting something like that because it’s difficult to prove that it’s your idea and not stolen. The fastest way to get any e-mails ignored by a studio is by putting “Game idea!” in the title. It’ll get relegated to the trash unopened so that the developers can’t be sued if they happen to already be working on a “World War 2 FPS with tanks where you beat Rommel!”

Sad, but true. In fact, an idea is only the beginning. Studios need to sell their idea to a publisher by building a prototype that shows off why the game will be a success and submit it to as many publishers as possible until one picks them up. Publishers need to find someone to flesh out their ideas into a design and then offer it to studios to tender for. Obviously publishers get the best out of the deal, being able to pick and choose either way. Few developers are big enough to push their own games into the market. For each Valve, id or Blizzard there are hundreds of lesser-known development studios out there that don’t have publishers falling over each other to distribute their games.

## Creation

**T**HE EMPHASIS FOR THE creation stage is on the development studio. Here the game gets a complete design that is part work-schedule, part requirements list and part luck. A lot of things can go wrong as the game is coded and assets are produced, and slippages do happen. Sometimes there are design problems that become large changes in the game, other times technical issues force a redesign. Either way, this strains the publisher-developer relationship. Publishers pay developers according to milestones that are set up using the initial design document. If this changes, milestones have to change too. If a game’s progress stalls and it doesn’t look like it’s going to be a success anymore, the publisher may end up deciding to pull the funding and the developer can’t afford to produce the game anymore.

Publishers are doing more than just handing over money at this stage, they’re forming marketing strategies and working out how the game is going to be sold. This is when press releases start appearing and as the game nears the ‘some indeterminable point that only publishers recognise’, the hype machine starts spinning up.

## Debugging

**O**NCE THE GAME IS fully playable and contains all the assets it requires, it goes to Quality Assurance testing. Quality

## THE ROLE OF PUBLISHERS

**P**UBLISHERS TAKE THE RISK that a game they fund is going to sell. They foot the development bill and hope to make a killing on the eventual sales. While this is similar to publishing in the book or record industry, game publishers tend to have their cake and eat it: they usually keep ownership of the game that gets produced and any Intellectual Property (IP) that goes with it. Authors and recording artists sign over distribution rights and keep their IP, which means they can move to another publisher and keep working on their successful franchises, while in the games industry it’s common for a publisher to move from developer to developer each time it releases a new sequel. It’s argued that this is needed because of the huge costs and risks of games, compared to other forms of publishing.

Many publishers pay per milestone and put veto powers over developer decisions in contracts. Paying per milestone is a good way for publishers to ensure that the game progresses without tying the developer into too rigid a work schedule, as games can change a lot from first idea to final release. But if changes need to be okayed by the publisher all the time and there’s no money coming in until the next milestone is reached after the change, developers can get into hot water. It’s this pressure, combined with marketing targets, that leads to games getting released before they’re fully stable.

All the payments that are made to a developer are then recouped by the publisher from the game’s sales. Developers will not get any return in the form of royalty payments until the publisher’s investment is paid back. Games that don’t sell well enough don’t give developers any royalties because the publisher is desperate to make its money back. This leaves many development houses in positions where they don’t have money to work on a new idea to pitch to a publisher, so they borrow. A few cycles of this, and the debt developers rack up is enough to destroy the company.

Publishers aren’t all bad though. Without the money they provide, few games would see the light of day, especially not the graphically intense wonders we expect from cutting edge systems. Game developers are also notoriously bad at marketing. Without publishers marketing games so aggressively and thoroughly, we wouldn’t hear about the games that did manage to get developed. We certainly wouldn’t see those games in shops down here in SA without publishers and their distribution networks. Publishers usually also handle technical support. It’s cheaper to run one big call centre for 500 games than it is for every developer to have dedicated support staff. They also produce patches for games if issues crop up after release and can provide resources like Quality Assurance testing facilities that typically aren’t needed for a game’s entire development cycle.



Assurance puts the game through its paces and tries to locate as many bugs as possible. This bug-list is sent back to the coders and artists who send back a 'fixed' game for more testing. This happens over and over again until a stable build is produced. Often there just isn't enough time in the development schedule to finish this stage [even with the suicidal crunch hours that get put in] and a few bugs escape unnoticed. Console games also need to go through a certification process by the console manufacturer before they can be released on the desired platform.

### Production

**W**HEN THERE'S A STABLE, working copy of the game, the publisher typically pays the developer a final amount and starts working on localisation. A localised copy of a game may be in a different language or even contain different graphics/characters [German games cannot have red blood in them, for instance]. Localisations have their own development cycles with their own Quality Assurance, but these are usually handled by other teams than the main developer.

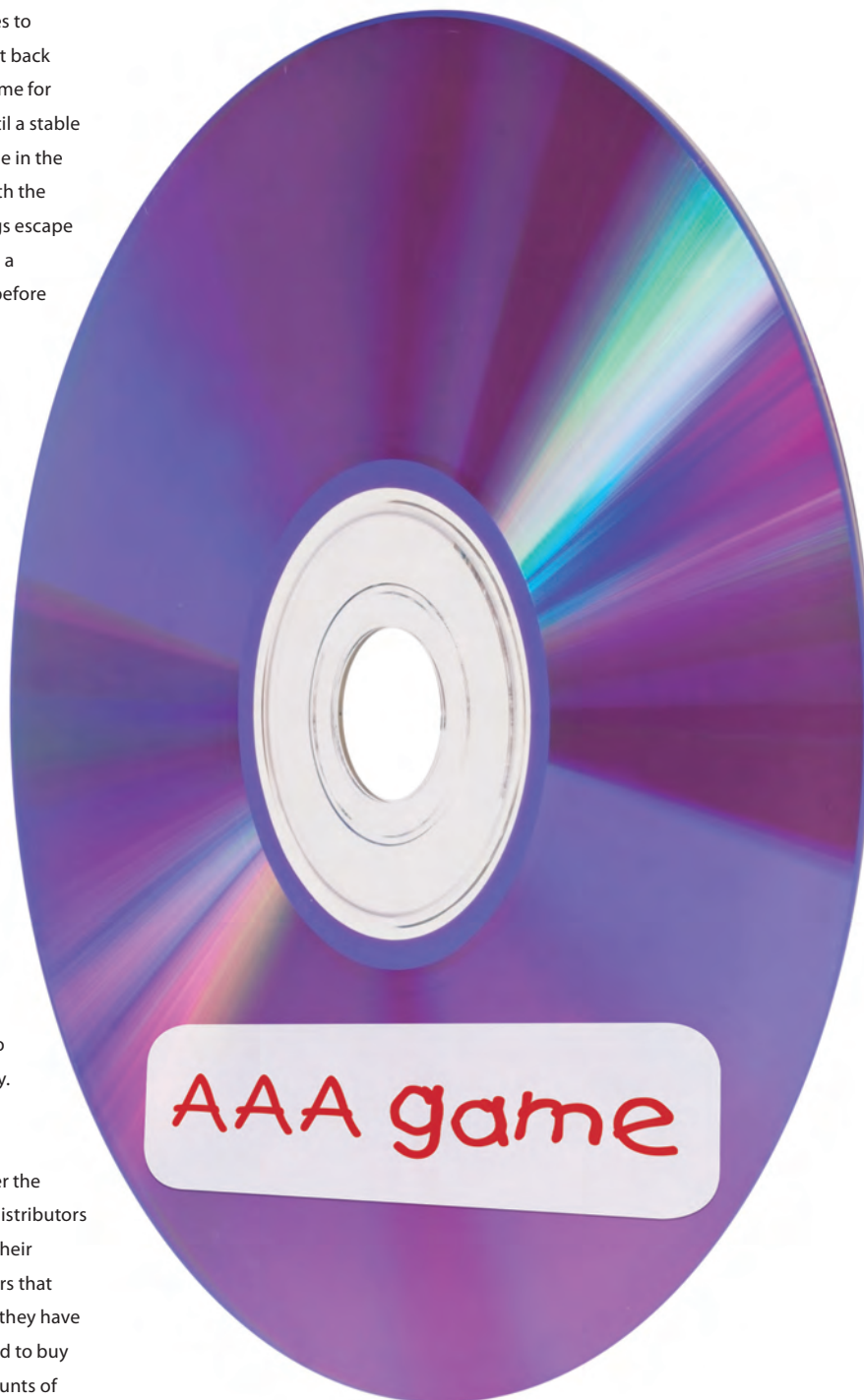
The final, gold-master release is sent to reproduction by the publisher once they're sure it's going to be a hit. CDs and DVDs are pressed, manuals have already been printed and boxes are packed, ready for shipping. Typically, manual information and box art are completed long before the initial Quality Assurance phase is over. This is why games still ship with 'readme.txt' files that explain how the released game works, compared to the manual which describes the intended gameplay.

### Distribution

**T**HE PUBLISHER ALLOWS THE final game package to enter the distribution chain. Typically various dealers or distributors have already ordered copies of the game to sell to their customers. In South Africa, we have local distributors that bring in games from international distributors that they have relationships or agreements with. Retailers also tend to buy from distributors in advance and have specific amounts of units they want on their shelves by a certain time. There's a lot of pressure up the distribution chain to get games to retail as quickly as possible.

### Consumption

**F**INALLY THE GAME APPEARS in shops and people can buy it. Early adopters will buy or pre-order the game at full price, depending on hype and marketing, while late adopters will pick up the game if it looks attractive and matches what they want. Hardcore gamers [the early adopters] are not a huge marketing target market. Publishers know that they'll go out and find information on the games they want, while it's the weekend and casual gamers that publishers really strive to reach.



### Remarketing

**E**VENTUALLY THOUGH, THE GAME stops selling and unsold copies are removed from shelves and find their way into bargain bins and rental systems. Publishers don't see any of this 'after-market' income and try to milk their games by re-releasing special packages like collector's editions, classics, etc.

Successful games that turn out to be good investments for their publishers will get analysed and will be the focus of market studies until the publisher feels that a sequel would also be a money-winner, and the whole cycle starts again. **NAG**



# LAZY GAMER'S GUIDE

## OAKLEY THUMP 2

**L**ET'S FACE IT; WHEN music can be played from your wristwatch, it is mainstream. But sunglasses? While NAG staff members aren't the types to get up at the crack of dawn on a Sunday to hit the biking trails, we have to dig the sci-fi notion that your headgear becomes an entertainment centre. Maybe on-visor displays are next...

**Supplied by:** Oakley [0861 OAKLEY]

**Internet:** [www.oakley.com](http://www.oakley.com)

**RRP:** R2,250 (256MB); R2,500 (512MB); R3,250 (1GB)

### Push the button

The controls for the player are located on both sides of the frame. On one side three buttons control 'Next', 'Play/Pause' (and 'Power') and 'Previous'. The other side has two volume control buttons. This makes navigating music on the Thump 2 very easy, since it's essentially like adjusting your sunglasses. The rubber buttons also suit the frame design.



### The Brand

It's a bona-fide Oakley – the fashion-conscious will still be in with the trendy crowds. It's also a decent set of glasses, if we may say so ourselves. The on-board electronics do make for a bit of a bulky design, so people with small heads won't find the glasses comfortable. But the glasses are stylish and black is always a good colour.



### Sit, swivel and listen

The built-in earpieces have four joints to perfectly fit the speakers over your ears. These are pretty sturdy, so if you have a specific configuration that works, you won't disturb it when you swing the speakers out of your ears. The sound is crisp and solid, but the speakers' fit isn't as snug as conventional headsets.



### Jacked-up gear

Music is transferred to the flash drive through a standard USB cable, which is also how the player is charged. The glasses need no proprietary software for Windows 2000 and XP systems. The Thump 2 comes in 256MB, 512MB and 1GB capacities.





# GUILD WARS™

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[Internet Connection Required]



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The game is designed to reward player skill and teamwork, not time spent playing, so you won't need to spend hundreds of hours levelling up your character to compete.



Guild Wars takes the best elements of today's massively multiplayer online games and combines them with a new mission-based design that eliminates the tedium of those games.



# Gilles Poitras The Living Japanese-in-Anime Encyclopaedia

**I**F YOU ARE A hardcore anime fan or otherwise known as an otaku, you probably have your anime proudly exhibited on a shelf, which nobody is allowed to touch, organised in genres and sorted alphabetically. On your computer you will have an intricate catalogue with detailed info on the show, expansions, characters and directors. But I can bet you, you haven't seen anything like Gilles Poitras' (GP) collection.

#### How did you become an anime and manga fan?

**GP:** Originally I was a fan of cinema. In college one of my hobbies was to go see films at the local art house theatre. I especially went to see classic Hollywood, European and Asian films. I would usually watch the movie, then sit through it a second time to pay attention to the structural elements such as camera work, editing, the use of music, silence etc. This was not in any strenuous manner or related to my course work, it was for fun.

In 1977, I had just moved to the San Francisco Bay Area to begin my graduate studies in Berkeley. I was staying with friends in San Francisco and had decided to spend a few days exploring. I found Japantown easily enough as the bus I regularly took passed by it. While walking through a group of shops I saw a TV with a cartoon on. The illustration quality was comparable to what one would see on US TV at that

time. However, the way the images were used was much more cinematic. This is what began my interest. However, it would be only a few years after I graduated that I had the time to explore anime and manga.

**Your latest book 'The Anime Companion 2', which is extremely fascinating by the way, boasts hundreds of glossary-style entries about Japanese culture in anime. Did you approach this book from a Japanese culture or from an anime point of view?**

**GP:** From an anime and manga point of view - that is I only included items that I saw in anime and manga. This, of course, means many things Westerners associate with Japan get little or no mention. Zen Buddhism, for example, shows up in so few titles available in English you could count them on one hand. If I had done a list of commonly known items I would have been hard pressed to find examples of them in many anime or manga.





What I basically do is take detailed notes on each manga I read and each anime I watch, or read as I only view subtitled shows. Then the notes go into a single very large document. I also take extensive notes from books and add them to the document. All of the notes are topically structured so when I sort, similar items are next to each other. When I have a match between something in anime or manga and a secondary source, I take those notes and add them to a database in which I then write new entries. Both volumes of the Anime Companion were written in Filemaker Pro databases. I also have a database for items which I have added to the supplement. This helps keep all those items organised and keeps confusion to a minimum.

**Which anime would you recommend to someone who wants to learn about the real Japanese culture?**

**GP:** This is a surprisingly easy question to answer: *Maison Ikkoku*.

The reason for this is that this particular show covers so many aspects of everyday life in Japan. As it is fairly long there is much to see compared to shorter works. *Maison Ikkoku* also has a great story that draws you in.

Other series would include the new *Ah My Goddess* and, one of my favourites, *City Hunter*. For shorter works dealing with modern Japan, the anime directed by Kon Satoshi such as *Paranoia Agent*, *Perfect Blue*, *Tokyo Godfathers* and, my favourite, *Millennium Actress*.

Two shows set in the past, or with heavy references to the past, are *Otogi Zoshi* and *Mirage of Blaze*.

**Which anime directors' work do you like watching at the moment?**

**GP:** Kon Satoshi, Miyazaki Hayao and Oshii Mamoru.

**Is your interest only animation or do you also have a love for Japanese live action movies?**

**GP:** I don't have as much time as I would like to watch live action movies. There is just so much anime to go through. I do like the older movies of Kurosawa Akira and I was watching some Yakuza films to better understand their depiction in *City Hunter*. I regularly watch the NHK Taiga Dramas - this year is *Yoshitsune* and last year was *Shinsengumi*. Occasionally I'll watch another Japanese drama. I'm lucky to live in an area where we get over the air broadcasts of subtitled Japanese shows.

**Do you think that it is the ability to break conventions that makes anime so rich in their variety of stories?**

**GP:** In a sense. Many of the stories come from the highly competitive manga market where companies try to find new genres and story elements to satisfy a reading public. This is also true in the world of OVA releases, as just doing safe stuff that resembles older successful titles results in a shrinking customer base as they get bored. In fact, many of the lower quality shows that exist are just that: attempts to copy earlier successes.

**Do you think people should differentiate between anime/manga produced in Japan and anime/manga [which we call neo-manga/neo-anime] produced in, for example, the US [Tokyopop and EigoManga]?**

**GP:** Yes, manga is from Japan. Neo-manga deserves to be judged on its own merits. To simply call it 'manga' is to lump it together with something it is not. I really think publishers are doing non-Japanese artists a disservice by trying to package their works as 'manga' when in reality they are something else - even if they are influenced by manga.

There are some excellent artists doing work inspired by anime and manga. My favourites are Adam Warren, who did a great series of *Dirty Pair* comics, and Fred

Gallagher, who writes the *Megatokyo* comic [[www.megatokyo.com/](http://www.megatokyo.com/)]. In fact, these are the only two non-Japanese comic artists whose work I buy.

**You also taught an anime class at Pixar. Why and what did you teach the talented people at Pixar?**

**GP:** I was asked to teach the class as part of their in-house continuing education programme for staff. Who could turn down such an offer?

I focused on a variety of genres and studios to give the class a view of how broad anime was and animation could be. The students ranged from anime novices to a couple who were very knowledgeable. Often they just wanted me to shut up and show them more, but I attempted to drag comments and questions out of them. They are a great bunch of folk and I'm looking forward to seeing what they do in the future.

**At the moment Hollywood is very interested in Japanese movies, may it be live action or animation. Do you think the interest in Japanese culture will continue to grow or fade sometime in the near future?**

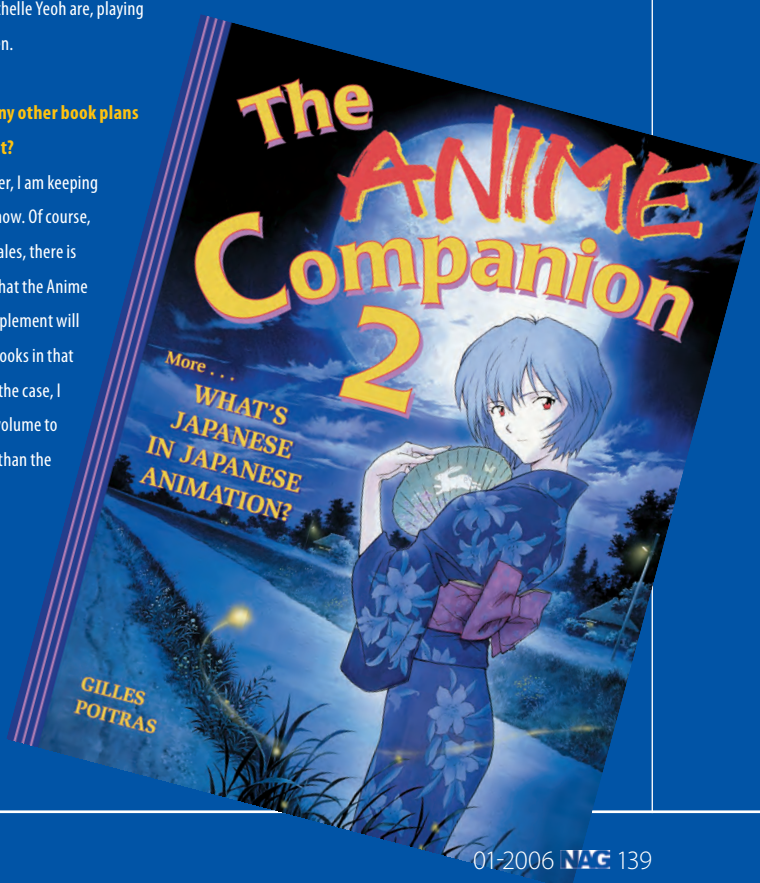
**LO:** Hollywood's interest is varied. The studios seem to be mainly interested in how they could do works that take advantage of the interest in things Japanese. They are only slightly interested in distributing titles. This is the reason why so many US anime distributors are independent or Japanese owned.

Expect to see more remakes of Japanese movies and original works with Japanese themes. Don't expect anything insightful concerning Japanese culture out of Hollywood or the New York investors who put up the funds. They really don't care about Japanese culture. They just want an exotic setting. In fact, they are often just plain wrong in so many details as to be disrespectful.

For example, from what I am hearing in the *Memoirs of a Geisha* movie, the shamisen style is not that of Kyoto but of Northern Japan, and the kimono style the women wear at one point in the story is a type worn by young women not older women. Then there is the whole issue of having Chinese actresses, even as gifted as Maggie Cheung and Michelle Yeoh are, playing Japanese women.

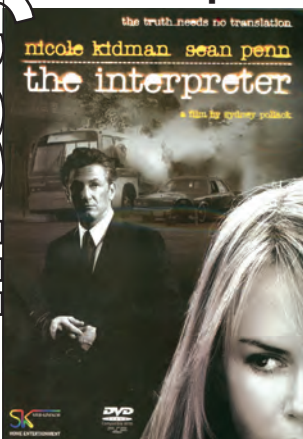
**Do you have any other book plans at the moment?**

**GP:** Yes. However, I am keeping them quiet for now. Of course, depending on sales, there is the possibility that the Anime Companion Supplement will result in more books in that series. If that is the case, I want the third volume to be much larger than the previous two.





## The Interpreter



**N**ICOLE KIDMAN STARS AS Silvia Broome, a UN interpreter who speaks several African languages and dialects. She has dual-citizenship between the US and a fictional African country, Matobo [where she was supposedly borne and raised]. She even speaks with a fictional and totally unbelievable African accent. One evening, while going back to her cubicle at the UN, she overhears a plot to assassinate her country of birth's dictatorial and brutal leader. She receives protection from Tobin Keller [Sean Penn], a Secret Service agent. But as in all political thrillers, he obviously doesn't believe her at first - at least not

what she had apparently overheard. The film then takes a few surprising twists and turns in plot, and at one stage Broome is a suspect in the impending assassination attempt on Matobo's leader [she apparently has a few scores to settle with him anyway]. The film, directed by Sydney Pollack, falls flat somewhere along the line. Too much time is wasted on stupid sub-plots, like Keller trying to overcome the death of his wife. The story also moves too slow and seems stitched together. Kidman actually overshadows Penn in the film, despite her ridiculous accent. The end of the film is a utopian dream outcome for the UN. This is so far removed from reality that it's actually nauseating. Although The Interpreter is an average to good film which features some excellent eye-candy in the form of Nicole Kidman, it is, as mentioned, average to good. It doesn't grab you and suck you in at any stage and the ending is so far removed from reality that only a Hollywood scriptwriter could have come up with such an utter unbelievable ending.

## graphic novel

### Ghost in the Shell: Man Machine Interface

Dark Horse | R203.95

**I**F YOU HAVE SEEN either the original movie or the stand-alone complex series, you will get further pleasure by reading this story. With the same stunning artwork by Masamune Shirow, the story is designed to be reasonably simple to follow, but with lots of added information for the techno junkies. But it doesn't assume readers are familiar with the GitS universe. This novel is about a very advanced cyborg that surprised the people she worked for by becoming self-aware. Unlike most sci-fi stories though, she hasn't gone rogue, trying to destroy humanity. Instead she works with a secret police group doing her best to protect the world from the most dangerous elements the year 2035 has to offer. If you are a cyber junkie, or like good artwork of pretty girls, this is the story that will keep you coming back for more.



### Robbie Williams: Intensive Care

**H**IS BACK AFTER TWO and a half years. During that period he apparently secretly had wild sex with Naomi Campbell for over a year, but were sure he's not complaining. Intensive Care is his sixth studio album and it marks a new era in the career of Britain's favourite pop entertainer. Intensive Care is all about pureness and personality. Robbie's telling stories about being dysfunctional, about women he can't understand [go Naomi!], relationships he can't function in [Naomi 2, Robbie 0], paranoia and isolation. Intensive Care is also Williams' first album released outside the UK - in Berlin [sprechen Sie Deutsch?]. And yes, Intensive Care is evidence that Williams is maturing as an artist. The dramatic opener 'Ghosts' and the elegant, chiming 'Spread Your Wings' are very un-Williams and mercifully free of his tongue-in-cheek lyrics. Other songs to look out for are 'Your Gay Friend', 'Make Me Pure', and 'Advertising Space'. Intensive Care is all-in-all an excellent effort from Williams. Just a pity Naomi tormented him so much for a year - the poor guy.

### System Of A Down: Mesmerize

**O**N PACKAGING, PRESENTATION AND cover art work alone, Mezmerize, well mesmerises. It probably has one of the best CD sleeves we've seen in five years [because we're getting old, we can remember what tickled our fancy five years ago]. But, as always, the proof of the pudding is in the eating, or in this case the listening. Mezmerize is a brutal, frantic and frenetic assault on the senses. It takes the most intense hardcore and the fiercest fire-starting punk rock, mixes it with insanely complex rifling and induces a sort of music induced drug fuelled state. And all this is done while mixing in fierce political consciousness. The music is crazed, while brilliant. At the end of the album you literally feel exhausted. System Of A Down shows with this album that they intend on establishing their credentials as 'The first real rock group of this millennium'. Their next album 'Hypnotize' is just around the corner - so watch out.

### Green Day: Bullet In A Bible [Live CD and DVD]

**S**EVENTEEN YEARS AND SEVEN albums ago [sounds a lot like an Abraham Lincoln speech, doesn't it?], Green Day were travelling the countryside in a severely run-down van driving from town to town trying to find venues to play gigs in. How times have changed! Nowadays Green Day are rock superstars, able to sell out venues at the drop of a guitar. Not bad for a band with such struggling beginnings. They have tenacity and artistic drive and their sprawling pop/punk opera 'American Idiot' is testament to this. Bullet In A Bible is the power trio's decision to document their recent success with a live CD/DVD combo. The DVD chronicles Green Day's two-gig stay in Milton Keynes, England. Both gigs entertained sell-out crowds in excess of 65,000. According to some music crits, Bullet In A Bible is the greatest concert programme ever committed to CD. And we at NAG, being Green Day fans, support this wholeheartedly [how do you not crumble before Green Day's piece d' resistance?].



## comics

### Ghost Rider

Marvel | R31.50

Johnny Blaze was a top motorcycle stunt rider. When he found out his best friend was dying of cancer he made a deal with the devil. He would offer his soul if his friend was cured. Sure enough, the cancer was gone. But a week later the friend killed himself - no one had told him he was cured. Johnny tried to get out of his deal and eventually persuaded the devil to let him out of Hell for a while. Merged with a demon, Johnny became the flaming skull-headed entity called Ghost Rider. His mission: to track down all those who ought to be in Hell and put them there. When his time on earth ends though, he finds himself paying his dues in Hell. But now he has another chance. An angel wants some help and he will ensure Johnny never has to go back to Hell. The only problem is that Johnny has to escape first.

### Wraithborn

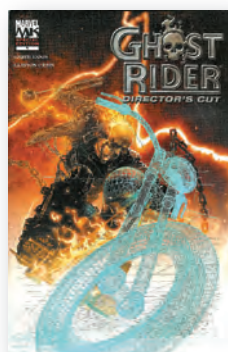
Wildstorm | R22.50

Melanie Moore was an ordinary girl, if a bit of a coward. She would like to stand up for the people who were picked on, but she just can't. She tried to look after her father and brother as best as she could. At least it made her feel more worthwhile. Then she went to visit her mother's grave and met up with a dying Wraithborn. She has no idea what a Wraithborn is, but now she has its powers and whatever supernatural beings killed it are now coming after Melanie. The only problem is that although she may have inherited the powers of the Wraithborn, no one has told her what those powers are, or how she can use them. Not quite the good girl finding her way kind of story, the new powerful Melanie loses her sense of mercy. A powerful teenager with no issue with killing things supernatural or human is always good reading.

### Advent Rising

Magesco | R21.50

It's hard enough being the new kid on the block, but Gideon is the new kid on the planet. His father is well respected, his brother is famous, and all Gideon wants to do is get on with school. Unfortunately, to add to his problems there is the girl of his dreams. But she's part of the local population who consider the newbies to the planet as the rich upper class snobs. To top it off, Gideon's family insists on calling him Giddy - not the sort of nickname a troubled and insecure teen really wants to have to live with. Advent Rising is for those who like their science fiction with a good detailed story.



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## Yu-Gi-Oh: Dark Revelation 2 & 2005 Collector's Tins

**Price:** Tinset: R200; Booster Pack: R45 | [www.blowfishentertainment.co.za](http://www.blowfishentertainment.co.za)

**F**OR THE THIRD CONSECUTIVE year, the Yu-Gi-Oh franchise is releasing six Collector's Tins, each with a unique card and five booster packs. Each tin contains a single booster from Dark Beginning 1, Dark Revelation Volume 1, Soul of the Duelist, Rise of Destiny and Flaming Eternity.

The exclusive card that comes with the tin is different depending on which tin you buy. This year's tin cards are Gilford the Lightning, Exarion Universe, Vorse Raider, Dark Magitian Girl, Rocket Warrior and Panther Warrior. Each tin features an embossed version of the monster artwork contained inside. The tins themselves are perfect for storing two deck boxes.

In conjunction with the Collector's Tins, the next series of cards is also being released. Dark Revelation 2 contains cards for players with



'extensive' knowledge of the game. A Player Tip card is included in each booster pack with useful tips for duellists. Dark Revelation Volume 2 combines the power of Invasion of Chaos and the strategy of Ancient Sanctuary into a single pack.

## boardgame

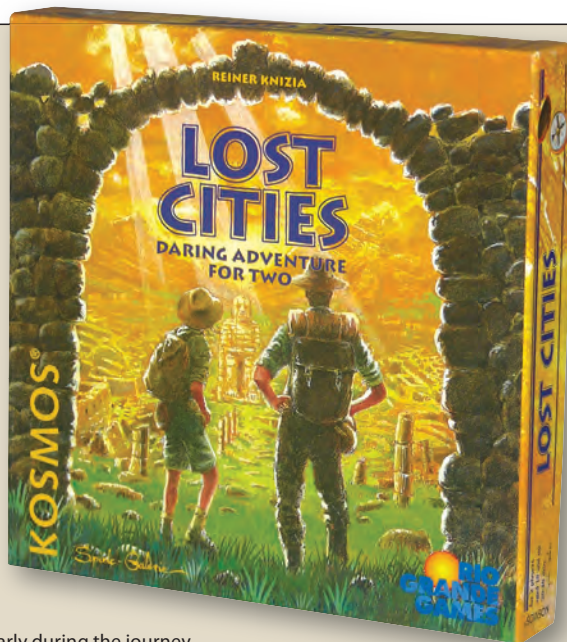
### Lost Cities

**Price:** R255 | [www.boardgames.co.za](http://www.boardgames.co.za)

**L**OST CITIES IS A two-player non-collectible card game that focuses on explorers looking for lost cities. At its core, Lost Cities is a trick-taking card game with a thinly disguised theme pasted onto the mechanics. The theme centres around two explorers organising expeditions to find up to five lost cities. The expeditions are represented by the colour of the cards, of which there are five colours. Each explorer can also decide - before an expedition is started - to invest some of his/her own capital into the expedition. Such investment will pay off if the expedition succeeds, or it may lead to catastrophe.

The theme translates into a simple and elegant game, where the five different expeditions are represented by card colour [or suits]. The distance to the individual cities are indicated by the value of the cards [in a range of two to ten]. Investment cards - the aces - have no value indicated on them, but rather a handshake. Players start with a random hand of eight cards. During a turn, a player has the option to either invest in an expedition [this can only be done at the start], or to explore by adding to one of the player's current expeditions, or to discard a card and draw another. The game ends when there are no more cards in the original starting pool - a simple concept, but there are one or two catches. Discarded cards are placed in colour-applicable piles, and any player can, instead of drawing a card from the starting pool, draw a card from one of the five discard piles. Furthermore, when expanding an expedition, a player is only allowed to add a higher-value card than the previous one in the expedition.

Once a game ends there is a scoring phase, where the number of investment cards and the distance travelled [determined by totalling the values on all of the cards for a specific colour] is calculated. It is possible that such a calculation will be negative if a player's expedition stalled very



early during the journey.

Lost Cities plays quick, with the box proclaiming a forty-five minute play time. This typically involves playing the game three times and determining a consolidated score. Plays have been as quick as five minutes, with fifteen minutes per game a maximum. In the small box are a game board [used to position the discard piles and serving as divider between the two players], sixty oversized cards and a four-page rulebook. The cards have drawings on them showing the distance that the explorer has travelled, with more detail becoming clearer as the player gets closer to the end goal.

Lost Cities may sound like a dry, boring game, but it could not be further from the truth. It is a brilliant two-player card game, with oodles of strategy and very quick to play. It appeals to gamers and non-gamers alike due to the simplicity of the rules and the sheer fun factor. It is recommended without reservation.



## book

### World of Warcraft Atlas

Pearson Education 0800 007 137 | [pr@pearsoned.co.za](mailto:pr@pearsoned.co.za) | R165.95

**B**RADYGAMES CREATES SOME WONDERFUL strategy guides - useful books that help you get the most out of your games.

For some reason though, they released this World of Warcraft Atlas which, while polished and somewhat useful, is almost entirely daft.

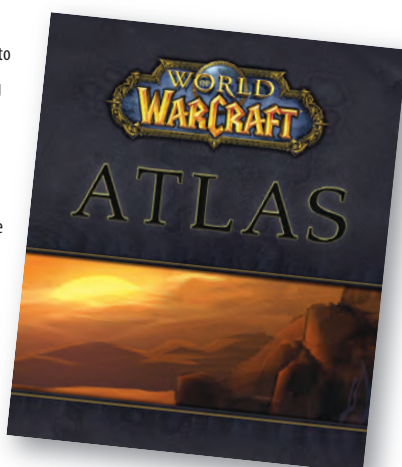
World of Warcraft is a MMORPG [Massively Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Game], and as such it has massive amounts of terrain to explore, monsters to kill and NPCs to find. The Atlas contains hand-drawn town maps with specific locations of NPCs, a world map marking flight paths, main cities, instance dungeons and battleground locations, as well as an exhaustive index of everything.

By the time you read this, it'll probably be 80% out of date.

Herein lays the crux of the Atlas. It's a beautiful book; the hand-drawn maps are atmospheric and tasteful.

But being a book - one that gives information about something as transient as a MMORPG - it is doomed to quickly become obsolete and relegated to something you idly read while on the loo.

Online you can find [for free, no less] detailed and oft-updated maps regarding World of Warcraft's landmass and population. It's hard for a book to compete with that, even a book with pretty maps and a nice flat spine so that you can view a double-page spread easily. But if you're a Blizzard fan boy who just has to have everything Warcraft, then no doubt the Atlas will soon appear on your coffee table, ripe to be bragged about to your online friends and unimpressed family.



## internet



### Cool Google Maps

<http://coolgooglemaps.blogspot.com/>

**G**OOGLE MAPS IS AN awesome service, especially since the XML code is easily reversible and hack-able. This blog brings the best of the Google Maps modifications the Web has to offer. Some interesting ones are a 9/11 archive with pictures, a global map of earthquakes and even a map that tells you where you'll end up if you tunneled through the earth from a location.

### Shadow the Hedgehog

[www.shadow-the-hedgehog.com/minigame/](http://www.shadow-the-hedgehog.com/minigame/)

**N**O SONIC FANS SEEM to like the new character Shadow, especially because he uses a gun. Either way, the official site has a nice side-scroller for a Flash game in which you can try your luck against the bad guys, as well as play with some of the weapons. It's not that good, but it is polished, nice-looking and a free way to kill some time.



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# FEEDBACK: DESIGN YOUR OWN GAMING MAGAZINE COMPETITION

**A**LL THE WAY BACK in the August 2005 issue of NAG, we initiated a unique competition to see if any of our readers had what it takes to create a gaming magazine... To be honest, none of the entries even came close to the magnificence and greatness of NAG, but hey, at least you tried [just kidding people, settle down now]. To be entirely honest, the level of competency and innovation was astounding and we received 21 entries in total with only three that didn't really get what we were asking for in the first place and sent us some weird stuff [an Internet site for example].

The top three entries appear on this page with a little explanation as to why they ended up on the winners podium. It wasn't an exact science choosing the winners, and we selected based on a voting system looking at things like design, innovation, typography, copy, structure and a few other criteria and then grouped all the highest scorers separately and made the final pick. But to be frank, the Editor's overall impression of the winning bracket is what really mattered at the end of the day.

We'd like to thank all those people who took the time and effort to put these submissions together and in our eyes you're all winners. At least now we also feel better knowing that 21 odd people out there really understand just how much goes into putting together what everyone enjoys so much each month. So, until we decide to run this concept again goodbye and good night.



## WINNER



### Winning entry

PC Maniac is an overall good example of an amateur gaming magazine. It's got style and flair and covers all the small important details that make the whole more polished. The artwork and design [while not the best on offer, if you consider some of the other entries] is well presented, but the typesetting is a little awkward. Overall, this one was the most impressive of the batch and considering it was all done in PagePlus, is commendable. Prize: 10 games plus a 3D card



### Second place

The race between GAR Magazine and PC Maniac was very close. The news section is well put together [lots of articles] and the use of advertising was a smart step that almost clinched the deal. The layout is a little formulaic and where it gets innovative it looks untidy – the cover also let it down a little. The Silent Hill review is particularly well done when it comes to the use of artwork, and overall the quality of the copy is rather good. If there were two winning slots for this competition, this would have shared first place with PC Maniac. Prize: 7 games



### Third Place

Games FX had a nicely designed cover [very bold and in your face] which got it past the first batch of voting – good first impression. The overall look and feel is different from most of what is around today, so that won a few points too. The typesetting is a little off here and there and the magazine features little variation, but overall is well put together, making it the third place winner. Prize: 3 games



All the entries that we could present in a digital format are on the Cover DVD for your viewing pleasure. This way you can also take a look at the local talent out there and if you disagree with our three favourites, then send a mail to [ed@nag.co.za](mailto:ed@nag.co.za) and tell him why – supplying a good reason or two will be helpful and we don't want mail from the mothers of the people who sent in any entries. Especially you Timmy!



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# GAME OVER

## BADGER HUNT

**E**ACH MONTH WE CHOOSE a cunning hiding place in the magazine for our badger friend [this might be in a screenshot, on a piece of artwork, the cover or anywhere really]. Your job is to find him and let us know you have! We'll announce a random winner each month, and that person will get a cool prize sponsored by our new best friends [see above]. Send your badger spotting to this address [ed@nag.co.za] with the subject line [January Badger].



Santa Badger Hunt winner [p73]: Dean Hemens

## CAPTION OF THE MONTH

**E**VERY MONTH we'll choose a boring, odd or peculiar screenshot from any random game and write a bad caption for it. Your job is to come up with a better [funny] caption. The winner will get a free game from Vivendi Universal Games. Send your captions to [ed@nag.co.za] with the subject [January Caption].

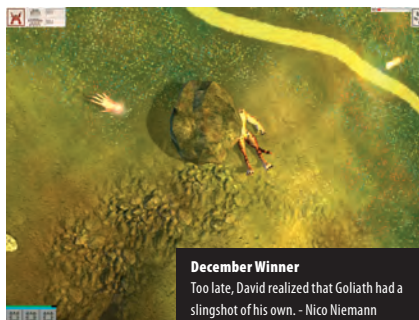
**RULES:** (1) If you don't use the correct subject line, your mail will be automatically filtered by our spam software and deleted. (2) If you think sending in 20 captions for the same screenshot is how you want to play the system, then put them all in the same mail or we'll keep the top one and delete the rest. You probably won't win anyway because you can't follow simple instructions. And people who can't follow simple instructions don't deserve to win things.

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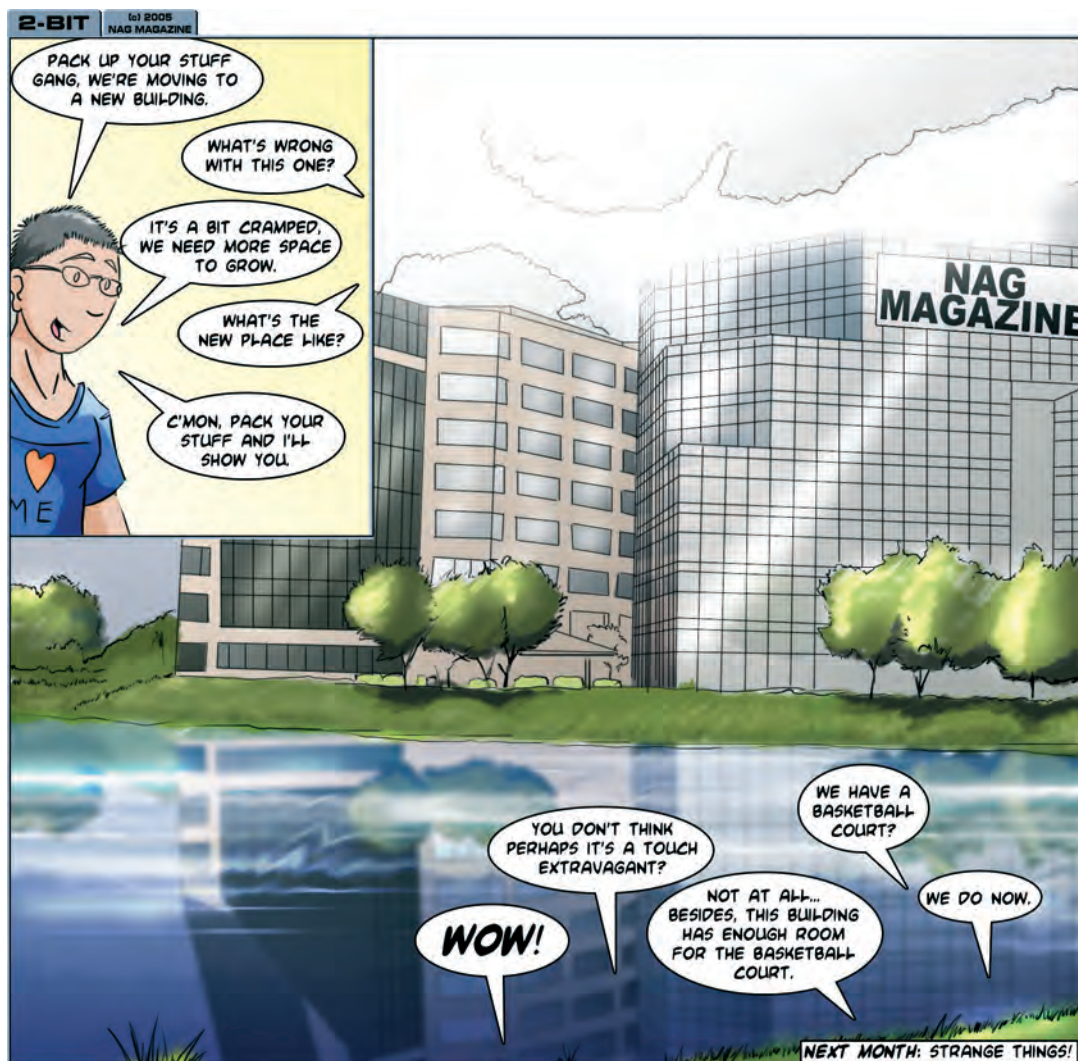
January contest

NAG's LAME ATTEMPT: "That's the last time you call my nose shiny, fat man!"



December Winner

Too late, David realized that Goliath had a slingshot of his own. - Nico Niemann



# NAG

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There may be cyllons among us.





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