PlayStation 3 Unlimited

PSU3

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WORLD EXCLUSIVE
TIMESHIFT ON PS3



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We are PSU3



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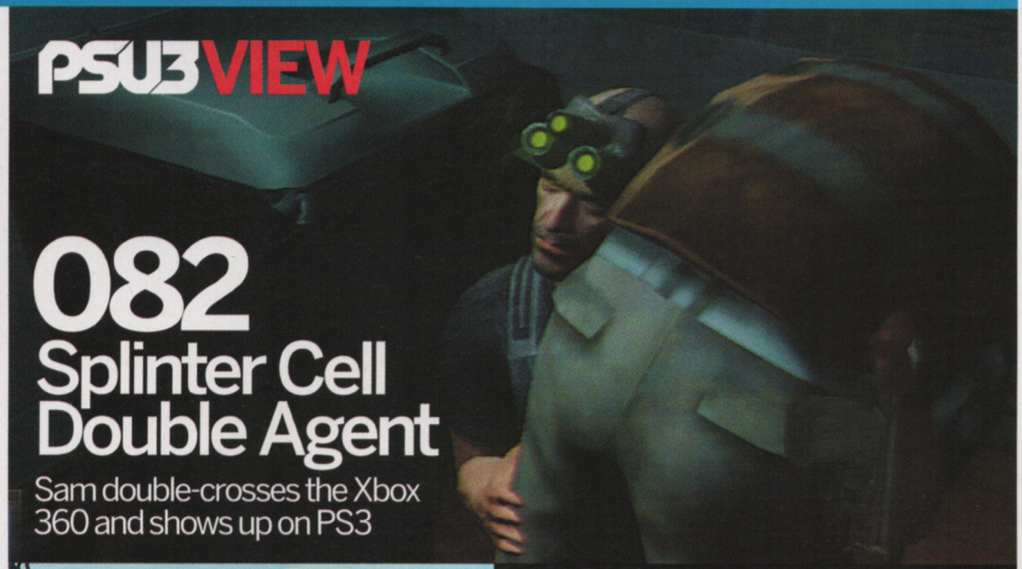
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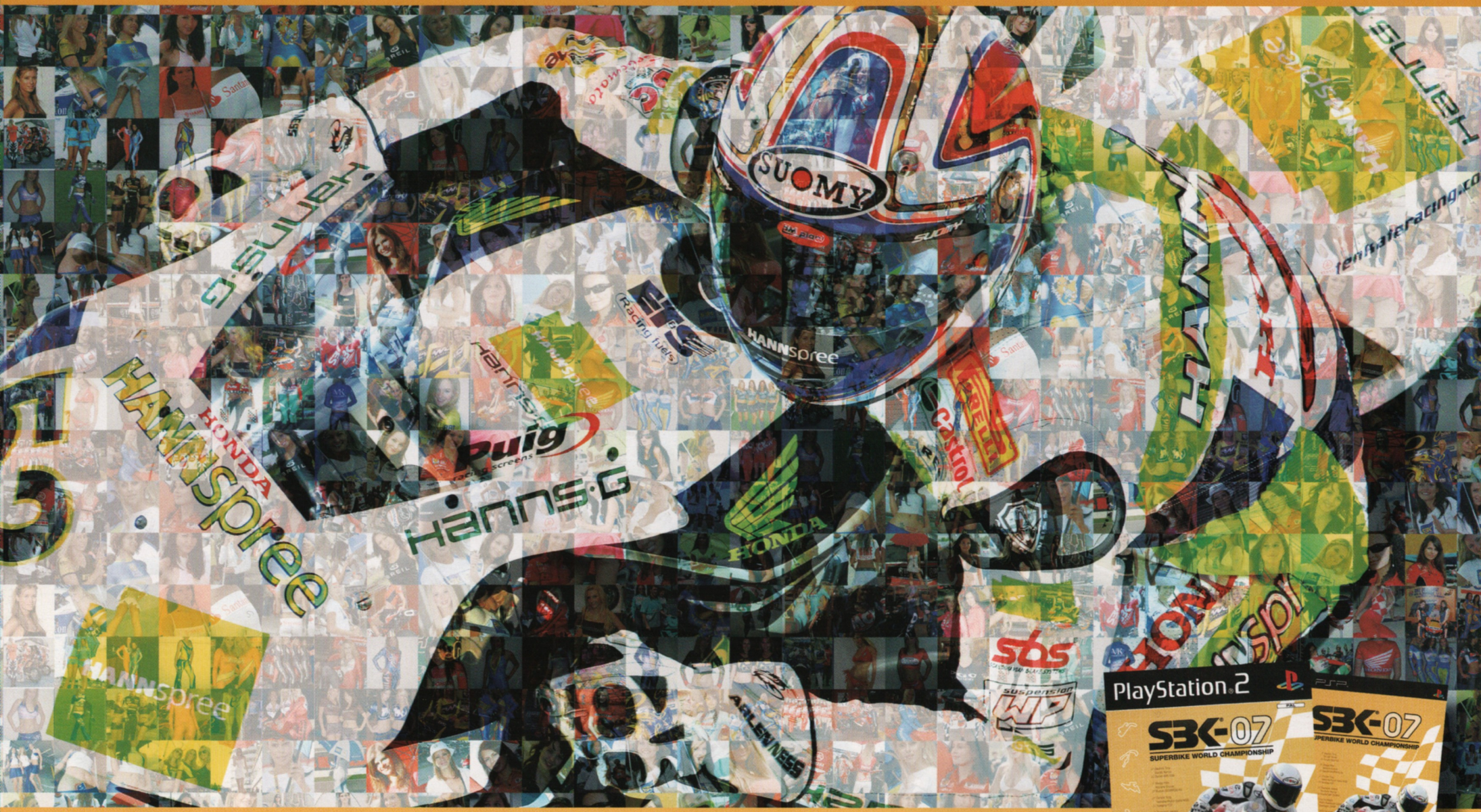
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Home sweet Home

We invite you in to Sony's brand new online home, where's there's no need to worry about crippling mortgage payments

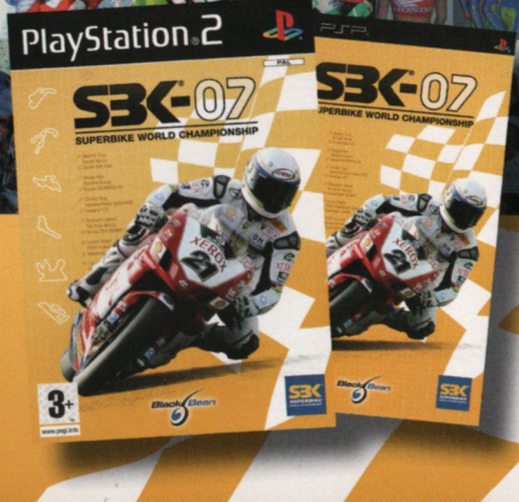
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THE OFFICIAL VIDEOGAME

SBK-07

SUPERBIKE WORLD CHAMPIONSHIP



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PSU3

Welcome

Hi there and welcome to another issue of PSU3

So, after months of speculation, *GTA IV* is finally on its way. Of course, it has always been on its way but now, after the release of a trailer, screenshots and artwork, it feels tangible; we can start forming opinions and asking questions about what we've seen.

I was privileged to attend an early screening of the game up at Rockstar's offices and, in spite of the demo lasting less than 20 minutes, it revealed a lot. There's a real sense of a fresh start with this game. Sure it retains the look (to a certain degree) and feel of previous *GTA* games but now, finally, *Grand Theft Auto* appears to have grown up.

Gone are the garish colours of *Vice City* and Las Venturas of *San Andreas* and in their place are sober browns and greys and, dare I say it, the game has a much darker undertone. The question is: is this a good thing?

I've always loved the fact that *GTA* always looked like a videogame – larger-than-life characters, massive and ridiculous weapons and those bright colours – and there was always a sense that this style underlined the game's take on commercialism and the 'American dream'.

GTA has always been a game that was proud to be a videogame. And it would stick two fingers up at anyone who didn't consider games a medium as valid an artform as, say, movies, books or cross-stitching. *GTA* has never tried to be anything other than a videogame, where so many more pretentious titles have tried and failed miserably. I'm hoping that Rockstar doesn't fall into this trap of trying to make serious social comment, to make an interactive movie that's about character and story *before* it's about being a videogame.

The fact that I don't know what's going to happen gives me a great sense optimism and excitement. It would have been easy for Rockstar to make a sequel to *San Andreas*, to make it bigger and bolder with flashier graphics and give it a list of new features, cars and weapons that surpassed anything that anyone else had done. What's harder to do is to take risks, to reinvent the world's most popular videogame.

Taking risks and doing something new has a massively positive side too: it's what excites the imagination of designers, of artists, of storywriters, of everyone involved in the creation of a new *GTA*. And if Rockstar feels inspired then that's good enough for me. I just can't wait to see what happens next.

Regards,

Nick Jones

Nick Jones, Editor in Chief

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PSU3

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PS3 is twenty-something no more

Sony's discontinues 20GB PS3, but talks of new 80GB version

AFTER much speculation Sony has finally confirmed that the 20GB version of the PS3 is to be discontinued in North America due to the overwhelming popularity of the 60GB model. Forecasters predicted this move some time ago when Sony failed to launch the 20GB in Europe, but SCEA's official statement reads, "At launch, we offered two separate models of PlayStation 3 to meet the diverse needs and interests of our PlayStation fan base. Due to the overwhelming demand for the 60GB model from both retailers and consumers, we have ceased offering the 20GB model here in North America." Figures released with the announcement showed that the beefy 60GB model has been outselling the 20GB by a ratio of 10-1 that, according to Sony America's Dave Karraker, proves that gamers are "willing to pay more for advanced technology".

It seems both Sony and console rival Microsoft have reached a similar conclusion as it was just last month that Microsoft unveiled the new feature-enhanced Xbox 360 Elite, which it appears has been a catalyst for Sony to discuss the prospect of a new 80GB PS3. In a recent interview with Reuters, when asked about the discontinuation of the 20GB machine, Sony spokesman, Satoshi Fukuoka said, "For users who vigorously store [games and entertainment content] in the PS3, 20GB is probably going to be too small." But then added, "Even 60GB might not be big enough eventually." It's obvious that with the Elite packing a whopping 120GB of space Sony would start making plans for a bigger PS3 hard drive in order to remain competitive. But those worried the PS3 might get a makeover so soon after launch needn't worry because in the same interview Fukuoka asserted Sony will not be changing the console's functionality, "We are not likely to change its core components and functions such as Cell, RSX, Blu-ray drive and network capability." For those not obsessed by the size of their hard drive, the 20GB PS3 is still available for purchase in Japan but, after being withdrawn from shelves in the US, its days could be numbered. ▲●×■

95

PER CENT OF ASSASSIN'S CREED'S GAMEPLAY WILL TAKE PLACE DURING THE THIRD CRUSADE, ACCORDING TO THE GAME'S TECHNICAL DIRECTOR CLAUDE LANGLAIS. BUT WHAT OF THE OTHER FIVE?

QUOTE ME

LAIR DEVELOPER, JULIAN EGGEBRECHT ON PORTING TO PS3

"All of the advantages of the PS3 turn into disadvantages if you don't start making your game on the PS3"



HARD FOR CORE

Sony's forward-thinking pays off

With the demise of the 20GB PlayStation 3, Sony has reassured adopters of the lower-spec model that they will be "100 per cent supported with software and services, since all PS3s have the same basic architecture." So with the 20GB underperforming, it was a relatively easy decision for Sony to pull the plug, but the same can't be said for the bastard child of the Xbox 360 Premium pack: the Core unit. If Microsoft was to stop selling its Core system then game developers would almost certainly make every game utilise the hard drive, leaving Core users with no choice but to upgrade.

NEWS BITE

JAPANESE MAG FAMITSU ASKED READERS 'WHAT EXCLUSIVE GAME WOULD YOU LIKE TO GO MULTIFORMAT?' RESULTS REVEALED THAT 360 AND WII GAMERS ARE KEEN TO GET THEIR HANDS FINAL FANTASY XIII.

QUOTE ME

GOD OF WAR CREATOR DAVID JAFFE ON PLAYSTATION DEVELOPMENT

"This is your life, it's the only one you get, and it doesn't make sense to do things other than what makes you excited"

Uncharted appears on PS3 map

Naughty Dog's secrets revealed

JUST a few short months back we got wind of a new project from *Jak and Daxter* developer Naughty Dog, first a few shots of a grizzled Indiana Jones-type monkeying about in the jungle were all we had to go on, but then a name was uttered, *Uncharted: Drake's Fortune*. The obligatory rumour mill was set churning as to what the game involved and just who was the driving force behind the project? Well, speculate no more as after a recent powwow with Sony it was revealed that *Uncharted* was its own secret property and that it was a swashbuckling adventure about the 'unfinished' story of Sir Francis Drake – Devon's most famous sea captain.

Evan Wells, co-president at Naughty Dog was keen to elaborate on just what the new project was all about, " Sir Francis Drake's career came to an end when his body was tipped over the side of his ship on the coast of Panama over the 400 years ago. But we asked – what if the lead coffin held no one?" What if it contained a mysterious book that hinted at his last great adventure?" What indeed? But the game fully intends to find out. "Our modern hero Nathan Drake believes that he is the descendant of Sir Frances himself and sets out to prove that this is the case, starting out from a clue engraved on a ring passed down through generations of his family."

Boasting a very cinematic experience, new animation techniques and 'total artistic freedom' we look forward to chatting with Naughty Dog team again next month and uncovering exactly what other treasures *Uncharted* has to offer. ▲●✕■

"We decided to go down a route that brings emotion to photorealism – it's not about being overtly exact but about creating an experience"

AMY HENNING, GAME DIRECTOR

70 PER CENT OF HIGH-DEFINITION MOVIE SALES IN THE FIRST-QUARTER OF 2007 HAVE BEEN ON BLU-RAY DISC ACCORDING TO THE BLU-RAY DISC ASSOCIATION. SALES OF BR DISCS HAVE ALSO REACHED ONE MILLION IN LESS THAN A YEAR.

QUOTE ME

SONY US BOSS DAVID KARRAKER ON A RUMBLE-READY SIXAXIS

"We are currently in discussions with Immersion on how we can incorporate their technologies into our products"

"We think we may have cast and created one of the most insane characters ever seen in a videogame, and I don't mean Andy Serkis"

NINJA THEORY TEAM, GAME DEVELOPER

Manner from Heaven

The changing face of the goddess of war

DENIED a studio visit this month due to the time constraints *Heavenly Sword* developer, Ninja Theory did at least let our eyes gaze upon the new and, dare we say, improved look of its upcoming adventure game. From the latest spate of screens it appears the developer is moving much more towards a photorealistic presentation of the game than the Manga-influenced styling of earlier versions. The new environments also hint at a much more platform-based *Tomb Raider*-style experience than we previously expected, perhaps using your chain weapon to negate from pillar to plateau. At present this is all still speculation but we will be first with new shots, information and in-depth developer insights next month in our exclusive *Heavenly Sword* feature. ▲●×■

QUOTE ME

ANALYST, YUJI FUJIMORI ON PS3 PROFITABILITY

"In the March quarter of 2008 Sony will start making money on the console. In the longer term, I see PS3's market share at 50 per cent within three years. In the shorter term, I see it at below 30 per cent"

600

THOUSAND. IN JUST FOUR MONTHS SONY HAS MANAGED TO ATTRACT 600,000 TO ITS PS NETWORK, THOUGH THE OFFER OF A FREE CASINO ROYALE BLU-RAY FOR REGISTERING MIGHT HAVE HELPED MATTERS.

PS3, ready... fight

Capcom favourites announced for PlayStation 3

BOTH Xbox 360 and Wii have been blessed with a version of possibly the best 2D fighting game ever made and at a recent Gamers' Day in San Francisco, Capcom revealed that it would soon be our turn to experience the full dragon-punching glory that is *Street Fighter II*. Considering the Japanese publisher claims that *SFII* on Xbox Live has garnered more revenue than any other Live Arcade game, there can't have been too much head scratching when it came to the decision about whether or not to release it on the PS Network. But alongside *Super Street Fighter II Turbo HD Remix*, Capcom also plans to release an updated version of *Super Puzzle Fighter II Turbo HD Remix* with art for both games being redrawn by Udon Entertainment (the folks responsible for the official US *Street Fighter* comics), so it will look more vibrant than ever before in full 1080p output.

Like the *Street Fighter II* on XBLA, both new *SF* titles will offer online and offline play for one or two players unlike *Rocketman: Axis Of Evil*, another downloadable gem unveiled by Capcom, where four players can duke it out co-operatively. *Rocketman* is an arcade shooter in which you join the ranks of the Alliance of Free Planets and struggle to free the solar system from the tyrannical grip of the Legion of Terra. As you blast your way through you can power up your weapons and generally lay waste to anything you like. All three titles are due to appear on the PS Store later in the year, so if you're not already online you won't get a better excuse to sign up. ▲●✕■



OLD SCHOOL RULES

Pay as you Playmore

Chances are, if you're a *Street Fighter II* fan then you'll also hold a special place in your heart for SNK Playmore's *King Of Fighters* franchise and so could soon be in hand-to-hand combat heaven come winter. This month SNK Playmore boss Ben Herman confirmed that Neo Geo games including the likes of *KOF* and *Metal Slug* will soon be available on Nintendo Virtual Console and followed up the announcement by revealing the company is also in talks with Sony to bring some properties to the PS Network.





QUOTE ME

SONY BOSS PHIL HARRISON ON RETAIL CHANNELS

"A game that somebody buys at retail is the beginning of our relationship with the customer, not the end"

NEWS BITE

HIDEO KOJIMA (MGS) AND SUDA51 (KILLER7) ARE JOINING FORCES ON THE MYSTERIOUS 'PROJECT S.' SUDA51 REVEALED ON JAPANESE RADIO THAT THE 'S' STANDS FOR SNATCHER. COULD BE A RETURN FOR THE SEGA CD GAME.



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View high-quality trailers of all the latest games. Plus get exclusive in-game footage that we've taken ourselves so that you can see exactly what the games look like when you play them.

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Get in contact with like-minded individuals that share your passion for PlayStation 3. Chat, debate and make new friends on the PSU3 forum. Also, we're there to give you expert advice on those burning PS3 issues.

Features
Get behind-the-scenes with the latest PlayStation 3 games with these exclusive development features and interviews with the people who make the games you love.

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// Heavenly Sword
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// Call All Cars
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NEWS BITE

EDUCATIONAL CHARITY D&AD HAS ANNOUNCED SEVERAL PLAYSTATION GAMES HAVE BEEN NOMINATED FOR THE PRESTIGIOUS YELLOW PENCIL AWARD.

QUOTE ME

ATARI ONLINE ENTERTAINMENT VP, CHRIS BERGSTRESSER HITTING BACK AT PS HOME

"User-generated content is not something you just let people dabble in. It's where you give people the tools to do whatever they want"



Sony brings the sing to PS3

Paula Bozek, game director

What's new on the PS3 version of *SingStar*?

⊗ *SingStar* on PS3 will feature the SingStore and My SingStar Online. The SingStore will enable players to create their own *SingStar* playlist by purchasing and downloading the songs of their choice.

My SingStar Online is an online platform for SingStar fans. It is all about sharing your best, funniest and most memorable SingStar performances.

For *SingStar* on PS3 we really wanted to focus on two main elements – choice and customisation as we feel these two fundamental themes really enhance the *SingStar* experience. We've also included a feature that allows you to customise the look of your menus with *SingStar*-style wallpapers.

What can we expect from My SingStar Online?

⊗ While you are playing *SingStar*, you can capture video and audio recordings as well as photos using a USB camera, and upload them to your space on My SingStar Online. You can create a profile, link to your friends' spaces. Rate videos, check out the highest rated videos and most recent uploads. All of these features will be available at launch, and My SingStar will continue to evolve and expand over time. It's a platform for sharing with friends and *SingStar* fans everywhere.

When will it go live and with how many tracks?

⊗ The SingStore will go live in mid June this year. It will have 350 songs – but that is only the beginning. The SingStore selection will grow over time and we expect over 600 songs by the end of 2007.

How often will new tracks be added?

⊗ Initially, new songs will be added monthly. Over the course of the year updates will become more frequent – i.e. every two weeks and eventually, we're hoping that songs will be available in the SingStore at the same time as the record companies launch the single.

How much will it cost to download one song?

⊗ Songs will be priced individually and in song packs that will be based on themes or genre collections. The final price will be revealed closer to launch.

How much space will a song take up on our PlayStation 3 hard drive?

⊗ It depends on the length of the song and whether the video for that song is in high definition or standard definition. The file sizes for different songs vary, but in SD, songs average around 50MB, and in HD they are around 90MB. All songs have their file size displayed in the SingStore.

Will I be able to use the SingStore as a library if I run out of space on my PS3?

Not exactly, the SingStore does not offer the player storage. But it does have a Purchase History, so if you need to delete songs on your hard drive for space reasons, or even if you delete them accidentally, you can download them again for free.

Will SingStore users be able to get everything available on PlayStation 2 or Blu-ray discs at the same time?

Songs released on PlayStation 2 *SingStar* discs will all be added to the SingStore over time. We might have some exclusive songs on the Blu-ray launch disc that may not be available in the SingStore immediately.

Can we transfer our tracks on my Blu-ray disc and PS2 discs to the PS3 memory?

No, you have to have the disc in the drive to play them.

Can we put in requests for new tracks to be added to the collection?

My SingStar Online, will be hosting song polls where you can vote for your favourite track. We're also looking to add functionality into the SingStore that will allow you to let us know what songs you would like to have on *SingStar*. ▲●×■

'08 EA HAS EXTENDED ITS LICENCE TO RELEASE TITLES BASED ON LORD OF THE RINGS THROUGH 2008. THIS COULD MEAN THAT THE PUBLISHER PLANS TO REVIVE THE WHITE COUNCIL PROJECT OR MAY EVEN HAVE A NEW HOBBIT-BASED ADVENTURE IN THE WORKS.

twitchgaming

Thoughts, imaginings and opinion from PSU3's resident columnist, Twitch



Blood, boners and Barker

News to get excited about. Literally

YOU know, one thing that always amuses me is when luminaries from other mediums get involved, one way or the other, in videogames. Cast your mind back to last year, when *Bad Taste*, *Braindead*, *Meet The Feebles* and, oh yeah, *Lord Of The Rings* director Peter Jackson announced that he'd be working on original episodic games set within the *Halo* universe. The word 'excited' just didn't seem to cover it – and by 'it' I of course mean the ubiquitous boner gamers grew across the globe. Everyone except me, of course... my boners are reserved for news of a genuinely celebratory kind.

Don't get me wrong: I absolutely love Jackson. Sure, *Lord Of The Rings* was as gay as it was epic, and *King Kong* was about a week and a half overlong, but there's little fault in the man's earlier stuff. In fact, *Bad Taste* and *Braindead* are two of my favourite films – but then I'm a sucker for aliens and Sumatran Rat-Monkeys. But videogames? Sure, Jackson's distaste with the way EA was handling his *LOTR* games, and the subsequent intervention of taking his next film tie-in to Ubisoft, did lead to the arguably excellent *King Kong*. But a lot of the credit rests with Michael Ancel, not Jackson. So I have to ask: when it comes to Peter Jackson's involvement in the *Halo* franchise, what are we actually getting excited about here?

The man certainly knows how to make films. That's his forte. In fact, we're talking about the next George Lucas here, minus the boring monosyllabic tones and lack of any actual neck. Through his Weta Workshop Company, Jackson has given us one of the best effects houses in years – both practical and special. Weta is already lending itself beautifully to videogame production, along with Jackson favourite Andy Serkis, in *Heavenly Sword*. But what about Jackson? What could he possibly bring to the table when it comes to games, apart from far more cinematic cinematics?

The mind boggles – and it's boggled many times before. When people who excel in other mediums attempt to infiltrate ours in some form the results have always been two-sided. Though his involvement with games today is tenuous at absolute best, Tom Clancy's earlier *Rainbow Six* endeavours on the PC benefited from the man's incredible research and knowledge. That was before he became fat with cash and bought a small island. Marc Laidlaw, respected science-fiction author, worked with Valve on its critically acclaimed – and deservedly so – *Half Life* series. The sequel, which just so happens to be my favourite FPS ever, also contains the wondrous City 17: one of the greatest and strongest pieces of fiction I've ever seen in a game.

But then you get people like Matt Costello, supposedly renowned author of god knows what, who worked on *Doom 3*'s story. That must have been the easiest job in the world then, as that was easily the worst aspect of that piece of shit. Another was that it 'borrowed' the idea of PDA reports wholesale from Irrational Games' unquestionably superior *System Shock 2*, without even realising what made them brilliant in the first place. But I'll save my *Doom 3* hating for another time – suffice it to say, I didn't get the Clive Barker-esque version of 'hell on Mars' that I imagined *Doom 3* would – and should – provide.

That brings us onto the man himself. More importantly, it brings us onto the kind of news I do actually find 'boner inspiring': Barker's involvement in *Jericho*. The Codies game, of course, not the TV show. You see, when a creative talent from another medium gets involved in a game, I like to think about the kind of talent that person possesses. Jackson is an excellent filmmaker – no one can dispute that. Likewise, Laidlaw is a brilliant and critically acclaimed writer. Clancy... well, he owns his own island and knows how to blow stuff up. But Barker?

Not only does he possess a truly twisted mind, giving us some of the most detailed and violence ever written or seen on a screen, the man has traversed so many mediums over his career too. Film, television, prose, poetry, stage plays; hell, he's even an amazing artist. Creatively gifted across many forms, Barker is the kind of talent who can really lend himself well to this visual medium we call videogames. Oh sure, Jackson may be a visionary filmmaker, but Barker has such sights to show us...

Twitch

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NEWS BITE

RED OCTANE HAS OFFICIALLY REVEALED GUITAR HERO III IS DUE FOR RELEASE THIS AUTUMN. IT'LL APPEAR ON PS3, PS2, WII AND XBOX 360.

QUOTE ME

NINJA GAIDEN SIGMA'S YOSUKE HAYASHI ON HATEFUL PS3 DEVELOPERS

"I think all those developers who are saying, "We don't want to do a PS3 game," or "It's really difficult to do it," should shut up and make their games"



POWERFUL RESULTS

THE PROCESS EXPLAINED

Thanks to the Cell processor in every PS3, the console can be linked with tens of thousands of registered users via its internet connection. Apparently, 10,000 PS3s emulate the same power as 200,000 networked PCs. In using that power, Folding@ Home studies protein cells and how they assemble. The whole process aims to cure several diseases: Parkinson's, Alzheimer's, Huntington's, as well as different types of cancer and more.

800K PS3S SOLD IN EUROPE SO FAR, ACCORDING TO HOWARD STRINGER AT THE SPIDER-MAN3 PREMIERE.

QUOTE ME *SUSAN NOURAI, DIRECTOR OF THE PS NETWORK*

"We've accomplished a lot in four months, with over 600,000 accounts and 3.7M downloads"

Folding@Home curing disease... at a cost?

Sony eyes possible commercial gain

FOLDING@HOME, the partnership between Sony and the Stanford University, which uses the power from idle PlayStation 3 to aid scientific experiments, has so far proven successful. As a result of that, Sony has been meeting with several unnamed companies to explore a potentially lucrative angle, as well as how it can affect registered users.

Chief technology officer Masa Chatani sees this as a great way for companies to get involved. Speaking to the *Financial Times*, Chatani explained that, "This kind of computing model could be used in a commercial application... for example, a start-up or pharmaceutical company that lacks a supercomputer could utilise this kind of infrastructure."

Chatani raised a salient point on this possible future of Folding@Home: some registered supporters just won't appreciate the various companies using their PS3s for free – especially given how power-hungry the units are – without some form of compensation. What that compensation ultimately is remains to be seen, but Chatani did predict one scenario: companies could offer each user free products to cover their role in power distribution, or introduce a point scheme that builds up over time. That, we're sure you will agree, only sounds fair. ▲●×■

QUOTE ME

GEORGE MILLER, FILM DIRECTOR ON GAMES

"I think the narrative in film and the narrative in games are really heading in the same direction and converging. I think it's a natural step for filmmakers"

NEWS BITE

ASHBOURNE ROAD, DERBY, WAS AT ONE TIME THE STUDIO FOR CORE DESIGN; IT IS NOW BEING COMMEMORATED AS THE OFFICIAL BIRTHPLACE OF LARA CROFT.

RATCHET & CLANK FUTURE: TOOLS OF DESTRUCTION

PREVIEW OF A PREVIEW

"Sometimes, you just need to take a step back. Case in point: *Ratchet & Clank Future: Tools Of Destruction*. Beginning on the PlayStation 2, this franchise has evolved through each entry, pursuing a course that would take it from a once-bright and bubbly world into much darker territory..." Turn to page 68 to read the rest of our two-page preview of Insomniac Games' *other* big Sony franchise.

QUOTE ME

DAVID JAFFE, ON DESIGNING CALLING ALL CARS

"Making these games is challenging but since it does not drain your soul like the epic titles, you don't need as much downtime..."

TOP 5 REAL PEOPLE IN GAMES

1. SHAQ (SHAQ FU)
2. PSU3'S NICK JONES (VF5)
3. CHOW YUN FAT (STRANGLEHOLD)
4. GENE SIMMONS (KISS PINBALL)
5. 50 CENT (50 CENT: BULLETPROOF)

Tools of construction

Insomniac makes dreams come true

IT'S stories such as this that make us proud to be affiliated with the games industry. Insomniac Games, esteemed developer behind the *Spyro The Dragon*, *Ratchet & Clank* and *Resistance: Fall Of Man* games has taken the likeness of nine-year old avid games fan James Westbrook and created a playable character in its forthcoming *Ratchet & Clank Future: Tools Of Destruction* based on him.

The news came during ABC's popular *Extreme Makeover: Home Edition*, which focused on the Westbrook family.

Both James and his father Gene are paralysed – James as a result of a severe car crash; his father while stationed out in Iraq. Their home has little support for wheelchairs, which we can only imagine being incredibly frustrating.

In one week, as per the show's standard, the house was given an extreme makeover to completely facilitate both father and son. Furthermore, when Insomniac learned of James's love of gaming, and his aspirations to be a developer, it decided to halt production of *Ratchet & Clank Future: Tools Of Destruction*, and tasked its whole team with the job of digitising young James. Like the show, Insomniac gave its team a week with which to design and develop the character.



He won't be ancillary either: James will be a fully playable character in the game – be that in single or multiplayer. The news was revealed to the family along with the redesigned home. And as well as the reveal of James's character, Sony also provided them with a free PS3, PS2, PSP and a bucket-load of games. This is surely the kind of goodwill story Sony needs to off-set recent bad publicity from *God Of War II* launch parties, goat sacrifices and all. ▲●×■

QUOTE ME

SEGA VP OF MARKETING, SCOTT STEINER ON PREVIOUS MOVIE-LICENSED GAMES

"Hollywood really can throw a grenade to game companies; they'd throw a licence grenade over the wall and game companies would have six months to build a game and market it. No surprise the game might not have been the greatest"

NEWS BITE

BLITZ GAMES HAS ANNOUNCED THAT ITS ZOMBIE TITLE 'POSSESSION' HAS BEEN PUT ON HOLD TEMPORARILY IN FAVOUR OF A 'MAJOR NEW PROJECT' FOR PS3 AND XBOX 360.



Key findings

AGE

"Although children are beginning to start playing at a younger age, the overall age of players is getting older. Younger games players are influenced by peer pressure and word of mouth, but negative press coverage for a game will significantly increase its uptake."

GENDER

"There is a sharp divide between male and female games players in their taste in games and how long they spend playing. Female games players tend to prefer 'strategic life simulation' games like *The Sims* and puzzle games and spend less time playing than their male counterparts; male players favour 'first-person shooters' and sports games and are much more likely to become deeply absorbed in play."

BENEFITS

"People play games to escape from everyday life and to escape to a world of adventure without risk that is under the control of the gamer, unlike the real world. Games provide a sense of achievement and are active, unlike television and films, which are passive. However, games are better at building character and as such gamers tend to care less about the storyline than making progress in the game. Gamers claim that playing games is mentally stimulating and that playing develops hand-eye co-ordination."

VIOLENCE

"There is concern that in some games wickedness prevails over innocence. However, most gamers are not seriously concerned about violence in games because they think that violence and television and in films is more upsetting and real."

20 FOLLOWING THE RECENT EUROPEAN PRICE DROP, SONY HAS FOLLOWED SUIT IN THE BRITISH ISLES AND REDUCED THE PRICE OF THE PSP BY £20. THE NEW RETAIL PRICE IS £129.99.

NEWS BITE

VIRGIN RADIO IS LAUNCHING A NEW SERVICE THAT CAN BE ACCESSED VIA THE PS3 WEB BROWSER WHERE USERS WILL BE ABLE TO LISTEN TO RADIO BROADCASTS, WATCH VIDS AND BUY GIG TICKETS FROM THEIR LIVING ROOM. DOWNLOADABLE SONGS ARE ALSO ON THE CARDS FROM STATIONS SUCH AS CLASSIC ROCK.



Playing the numbers game

BBFC publishes videogame findings

WITH the recent spate of new consoles coming to market, interest in videogames and particularly who is playing them (and their effects) has reached an unprecedented high. With an enumerable amount of fingers being wagged at videogames whenever a violent act is committed, it's more imperative now than ever we get clearer picture of the industry as a whole. One very informative investigation published this month came courtesy of The British Board of Film Classification whose report took a close look at many aspects of gaming culture.

The research set out to gain insights into a number of different issues, including what attracts people to playing videogames, what impact gamers think playing has on then and their behaviour and what they think about violence in games. Amongst a number of valuable findings, the paper asserts that gamers are "virtually unanimous in rejecting" the notion that violent games lead to real-life violent attacks, and they fully understand the difference between virtual and actual brutality.

David Cooke, director of the BBFC said: "People who do not play games raise concerns about their engrossing nature, assuming that players are also emotionally engrossed. This research suggests the opposite; a range of factors seems to make them less emotionally involving than film or television."

The conclusions reached concerning the perception of videogames by non-gamers were both positive and negative. The investigation uncovered that non-gaming parents were confident their children were well adjusted enough not to be affected by videogames and are alert to the dangers of chat-rooms; however, the bad news is that they are more than "happy to give their children adult games because they are 'only games'." A worrying finding given that games are more realistic and graphic than ever – why have the rating if they are simply going to be ignored? A point picked up by David Cooke, "This firm grasp on reality seems to extend to younger players, but this is no reason to allow them access to adult-rated games... Parents should not treat videogames in the same way they would board games." ▲●×■

Should there be a regulatory body for gaming? Let us know your thoughts on the issue at www.psu3.co.uk/forum

NEWS BITE

A RECENT ENTERTAINMENT-INDUSTRY POLL REVEALED THE BIG BOSSES CONSIDERED 'USER-GENERATED CONTENT' AMONG THE TOP THREE THREATS TO PROFITS. 57 PER CENT THOUGHT THAT CHEAP PRODUCTION AND DISTRIBUTION METHODS OF GAMES AND PODCASTS WERE A CONCERN.

QUOTE ME

DAVE KARRAKER, SCEA, ON PS3'S POTENTIAL

"It is no secret that with an internal hard drive in every PS3, the system could be used like a Tivo device"

In the news... May

Sony figures Sony's fortunes have been a little up and down of late, with the incongruous news that while the PS3 is the only console enjoying real growth – up two per cent to almost 130,000 units – and the PS2 is still outselling every other console, SCEE is laying off a number of staff from various departments. Up to 160 positions are at risk during what an internal memo called a 'period of transition'. "Staff," according to SCEE boss David Reeves "across all areas of the business" will see the changes. That said, the letter received by the almost 2000-strong SCEE workforce states that the compulsory redundancies are "proposals only at this stage". Sales of the console are encouraging, with Sony seeing $200 million of that R&D money flowing back into the coffers. Of course, this is just the start with pre-eminent analysts Goldman Sachs predicting a 50 per cent market share within five years. While supply issues aren't anywhere near as dire as other console launches, we're doubtful whether Sony has hit that ambitious '6 million by March' figure, as it's keeping production figures under wraps at the minute.

There's more movement from Sony with the drop in price of the PSP from an RRP of £149.99 down to £129.99 (following on from retailer's PS3 price drop earlier in the month from £425 to £400). With that twenty quid you're saving, you can get hold of one of the new range of awesome platinum titles, including *Ridge Racer 2*, *LocoRoco*, *Killzone* and *Tekken: Dark Resurrection*, and still have change left over. Thank publisher pressure for that one.

Square business model But then it's not just Sony encountering change at the minute, as Square Enix has recently announced a rather radical new business model. In a nutshell, this revolution within the company will see a greater focus on re-releases, sequels and remakes of its older franchises. What this means for us, of course, is another two years of rumour and speculation about a *Final Fantasy* remake that we'd all thought had inexplicably gone by the wayside. This news is off the back of some fantastic sales of a number of re-releases across various platforms. Previously forgotten titles like *FFVII*, *Kingdom Hearts*, *Vagrant Story* and *Tobal No 1* are all now back in the mix for remakes or sequels. Hurrah.

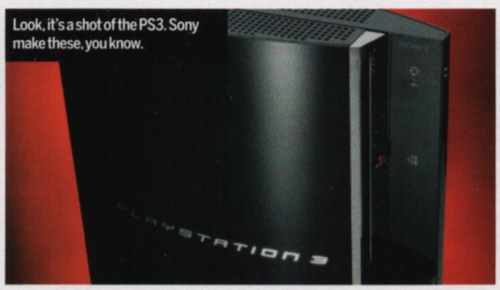
LucasArts' civil war It's all very well remaking a game, but when you remake a war, like LucasArts is looking to do with its as-yet unnamed shooter, you have to be a little careful with sensitivities of the nations involved. A modern take on the American civil war sees not North and South, as the conflict of the 1860s, but an East and West of the future going at it for dominance of human evolution. On the one side a group of techno-cyber-heads, while on the other a nation of genetically enhanced super soldiers. Sounds like fun, right?

Guitar heroes Following protracted court proceedings, another rather interesting release is coming our way, courtesy of Harmonix and EA. The company's first endeavour, Rock Band, is set to add a whole new range of musical peripherals to your living room. Great. More clutter. Including a lead guitar, bass guitar, drums and a mic, you're going to need a few friends to make the most out of it, but you can guarantee that your living room will be bouncing during any house parties you care to hold. Given EA's penchant for sourcing top tunes, we bet there'll be plenty of licensed tracks out of the box. The real meat will no doubt come in the form of regular downloads on Xbox Live and PSNetwork, though. Rock on.

Similarly rocking is Activision's effort, *Guitar Hero III*, which will no doubt be going head-to-head with *Rock Band*, and with the benefit of a sturdy fan base, the addition of an online multiplayer is something sure to get wannabe rockers everywhere excited. The reason for this splicing of what looked to be a stable and successful allegiance of publisher RedOctane and developer Harmonix seems mainly due to Activision's desire not to spend $150 million on a development company who's only success is a rip-off of another game, namely *Guitar Freaks* way back in 1998. It hasn't stopped them rolling joyously in the licence though, has it? There's bunch of lawsuits currently entering their closing phases at the moment, so with the combined dollars of MTV, EA, Activision and Neversoft involved as well as the RedOctane and Harmonix, expect a great deal of directly competitive marketing as the two games face off against each other later this year.

Home again, home again... If you want to talk about competition, just have a look at the PS Home versus Xbox Live debate. It's clear from Phil Harrison's reaction to a recent interview that he's not happy with comparisons to anything else out there, mostly being dissatisfied with the suggestion that it may not be all too secure. Indeed, many have likened Home to the PC life simulator, *Second Life*. Unlike *Second Life*, however, moderation and security will be tight, enthused Harrison, who believes that PS Home will sell PS3s and help overcome some negativity the company has seen of late. Similarly working toward improving the reputation of the brand, Susan Nourai, senior director of the Playstation Network, has been waxing lyrical about the fact that PS Nework is very much an emergent entertainment network, and as such has a huge amount more to offer over the years. With over 600,000 users and a total of almost 4 million downloads thus far, it's not doing too bad, eh? The idea of Sony-endorsed Homebrew should also add to the popularity of the machine, and with the announcement that it is ditching its possessive attitude to its hardware, as well as Microsoft's XNA development tool hitting the market, the console world will be changing fast over the next few years. Not that isn't changing now, because with the news that you'll soon be able to play those PSone classics on your PS3, Sony is immediately expanding the base of games playable on the system. Sure, it's not happening just yet, and many of the supposedly backwards-compatible titles just don't work properly, but these are all issues that will be resolved in one of Sony's many firmware updates. If you're missing your rumble by the way, the latest update, version 1.7 enables the vibration function on your old PS2 and PSone peripherals, although most of us will have lost ours by now.

Translation Crysis Speaking of Lost, the hit US TV drama is coming to the PS3. The news came during an ABC podcast from *Lost* producers Damon Lindelof and Carlton Cuse. Given the huge success of the show, Ubisoft Montreal's involvement and this more focused approach, we could be looking at a title that goes completely against the TV-show-to-videogame-licence grain. Another bit of hopeful information comes in the form of some recent advertisements for positions at Cryteck, the developer currently working on what



Look, it's a shot of the PS3. Sony make these, you know.


Guitar Hero will be going head-to-head against EA's *Rock Band*.



PlayStation Home. Awesome. Will it 'beat' Live, though?

250K

MORE THAN 250,000 UNIQUE PS3 USERS HAVE REGISTERED TO FOLDING@HOME IN JUST ONE MONTH

QUOTE ME

EIDOS SPOKESPERSON ON PUBLISHING NINJA GAIDEN

"There are currently no plans for a Ninja Gaiden Special Edition two-disc box set in the UK"

has to be the most impressive FPS of all time, Crysis. While the idea of *Crysis* coming to PS3 is still very much spurious rumour at the moment, the fact that the company is looking for folk with specialist skills in porting to the PS3 with a responsibility for development on the CryEngine 2.0 is encouraging.

Jaffe cakes Less encouraging is David Jaffe's rants about the PS3's Blu-ray player, and how he would have left it out and sold the console for a lower price. While we're used to Sony Santa Monica Studio creative director Jaffe shooting his mouth off about various niggles he has with Sony, we're a little concerned that such negativity should come from such a prominent figure in the development world. If Blu-ray were a great benefit to games and not just a way of shoehorning homes with players to boost the Blu-ray market, developers should be happy with the technology being so vastly superior to the competition's. In the second part of an in-depth interview with Jaffe, the creative mind behind *God Of War* and *Calling All Cars* has expressed an interest in setting up his own studio, despite also articulating a desire to stay within the Sony clan. At least we know that whatever spews forth from the loins of Jaffe, should he stay with Sony or sidle off somewhere else, will have a uniqueness about it.

Movie tie-ins The same can't be said of a new glut of movie tie-ins, sadly. We just refuse to believe anything positive said about these multi-platform blunderbuss titles. Sega's vice president, on the other hand seems to think they've "evolved". Blaming movie studios demanding tiny turnaround times on these kind of games in the past, Scott Steiner maintains that nowadays they're taken more seriously. But he would say that, what with Sega having just secured a partnership with Marvel, wouldn't he? Expect both Iron Man and the Hulk to appear on our shelves with Sega's brand on the box at some point in the future. Now, judging from what else is on offer, those could well be the pick of the bunch. The idea of a Kung-Fu panda may seem like an awesome one, but when you find out that it's a movie tie-in to be released on the next-gen platforms, we're left feeling a little nauseous. That mild rot turns to rage when you learn that THQ is releasing another Cars title across every platform in the universe. *Cars Mater-National* is likely to be much like the first in the series. We're about ready to start crying.

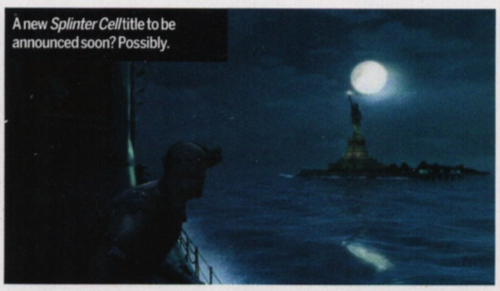


Final Fantasy XIII: without doubt the most anticipated game in Japan.

New announcements If you're after some virtual tissues though, you're in luck, as us PS3 lovers have got the joy of a brand new Katamari title, *Beautiful Katamari* which, with the announcement on next-gen consoles, brings the whole issue of online play and downloadable content into the equation. The most sizable enhancement is the sheer scale of the piece, with *Katamari* reaching gigantic proportions. Another plus point on the game announcement front is Pandemic's most recent effort, Saboteur. Okay, okay, it's a WWII adventure title, but don't let that put you off, as it's drawing in a lot of talent from teams with proven successes such as Full Spectrum Warrior, Mercenaries and Battlefront. No, this will be one to look out for and unlike many in the industry, Pandemic has been happy to divulge plenty of info on the game. Set in mid WWII Fance, you play a mechanic and brawler called Sean who has been likened (by the dev team, admittedly) to both Indiana Jones and John McClane. Sounds like our kind of protagonist. Splinter Cell Double Agent's Sam Fisher is about as manly a lead guy as we've got at the minute, but if a new, and slightly bizarre, website is anything to do with what we think it has, we could soon be seeing his new adventures. There's very little actual information on the site, but prominent on the page is the telling Tom Clancy icon. To be fair, that could mean any number of the eponymous *Clancy*'s titles could be getting reworkings, not least of which being *Rainbow Six*. A new brand in the *Clancy* range has been announced as well, entitled Tom Clancy's EndWar. Serge Hascoét, chief creative officer at Ubisoft briefly outlined the format of this new next-gen only franchise by saying "*EndWar* will allow gamers to lead their own armies against hundreds of others online in real global locations on the massive battlefields of World War III." This sounds a lot like an online RTS to us. And why not, eh? Ubisoft has been busy and looking at the company's line up, there's plenty to look forward to. If you remember, one of the titles mentioned in the leaked release schedule from the publishing giant a few months back, in fact, mentioned a *Tom Clancy's Firehawk*. Going back to this strange website, the first few letters of the url for the page are jsf. *Joint Strike Fighter*, perhaps? *Jumbo Sausage Fest* is equally likely at this stage though, as it's all a little too close to internet rumour at this stage.

Bound to cause a stir on said information superhighway is the next-gen *Mortal Kombat*, that's for sure. Ed Boon, creator of the seminal beat-'em-up has indicated that the team is going right back to the beginning and doing away with everything. There's going to be a huge focus on realism, you see, which raises all kinds of questions. Chopping the head off a poorly digitised avatar is all well and good, but when the character you're dismembering appears real, you know you're in Jack Thompson territory.

So, price drops, new announcements and PS Network news. It's been a quiet month, but given the PS3's release in March, we weren't expecting anything too major. Watch out for those Kung-Fu Pandas, and we'll see you next month. ▲●✖■



A new *Splinter Cell* title to be announced soon? Possibly.



LocoRoco, one of the best PSP titles and apparently coming to PS3.



FIRST LOOK

Grand Theft Auto IV

The evolution of a revolution

THE city is key... it always has been, and you'd think sandbox games would have cottoned on to that fact by now. It's the sole reason games like *The Getaway* and *True Crime: New York City* failed to achieve anything beyond boring the snot out of gamers and thus making them wish they were playing or doing things far more entertaining. The problem with these accurate representation games is the fact that real-life cities just aren't that fun to explore. If they were, we'd spend much less time pulling menial nine-to-five jobs and more time jacking suckers in the street, staging mass riots, robbing banks, jumping rooftops on pizza delivery bikes and so on... at least more than we do currently.

And while several recent sandbox games finally appeared to understand how important the city environment is – such as Volition's amiable but po-faced *Saints Row* and *Crackdown*, Realtime Worlds' excellent virtual-playground-in-a-box – it feels odd and a little disappointing that it's taken this long for them to do so. After all, it's been nigh on six years since *GTA III* appeared, redefining free-roaming games and setting the bar high for years to come. And while the games industry continues its attempts to reach that level, rather than exceed it, Rockstar Games is about to nudge it just that little bit higher when *Grand Theft Auto IV* is released this October. That is, after it's replaced said bar with something new and far more interesting than before... which is our rather tenuous way of linking directly into the redesigned Liberty City at the heart of *GTA IV*.

While some have expressed disappointment with the developer's decision to return to Liberty City – the third time this franchise has ultimately used it – it actually makes perfect sense. *GTA III* was as much a technical showcase of the PlayStation 2's capabilities as it was an awesome videogame, presenting us with the closest we could get to a bustling and diverse modern city environment. What better way to show the PS3's potential than to return to the city that (technically) started it all? It presents the perfect canvas for us to contrast and compare the leap in graphical prowess between the PS2 and PlayStation 3.

More important, however, is the fact we live in different times now. The world has changed somewhat drastically in the years between *III* and *IV*, making this franchise's knack for attacking and satirising our consumerist society all the more prevalent. By taking New York as its design inspiration again, Rockstar has perhaps the most apt association with Americana it can, enabling it to attack infinite aspects of the modern world. The possibilities really are endless. As are the areas Rockstar North intends to take this franchise. It's safe to say we are dealing with a far more realistic *GTA* than before. It will retain the elements that defined this series, such as the aforementioned satire and humour, but in a more different – and darker – light than previously.

The first example of this is the way the story is portrayed. While Rockstar obviously couldn't divulge all the details, it did inform us of the new structure it's taking. In the past, these games thrived on your playable character starting at the bottom of the hypothetical ladder and gradually working their way to the very top. King of the city, if you like. In *GTA* »



As our demonstration came to a close, the last thing we saw was this beautiful shot of the city.





A convenient truth

What's in a trailer?



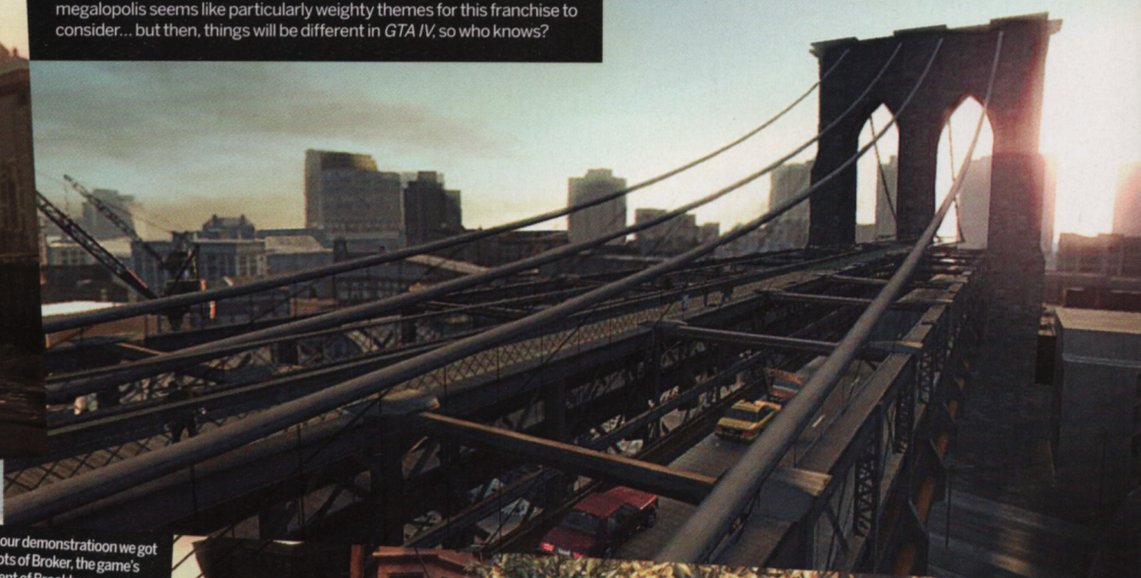
New York... landmark buildings stand tall, reaching to the very heavens above. Clouds move faster than normal, bouncing reflections off windows and obscuring the incandescent glow of a beaming hot sun. Below, people go about their lives: walking through packed streets, using the subway, shopping, gossiping, and living in the big city. More than a dozen gorgeous vignettes all played out to a beautiful Philip Glass score. We wouldn't blame you for thinking we're describing the *GTA IV* teaser trailer that debuted back in March, but we're not: it's the trailer for Godfrey Reggio's 1980s documentary *Koyaanisqatsi: Life Out Of Balance*.

It's a film of the *Planet Earth* and *An Inconvenient Truth* variety that details the majestic beauty of the natural world, contrasting it with modern society and ostensibly criticising the way we've changed the world into a much harsher, more damaging environment. An important film to be sure, and with precedent that still exists today. And as you can no doubt tell, a clear inspiration for that first teaser – right down to its use of Philip Glass music. It isn't a parody however, which is the sort of thing you might expect from Rockstar, but a genuine homage. There's clear respect for that film and the evidence lies in the trailer.

Whether said trailer holds more than its deliberate resemblance, perhaps hinting at themes Rockstar wants to explore in *Grand Theft Auto IV*, remains to be seen. Given Dan Houser's comments on the franchise now shying away from film inspiration, we still wouldn't put it past them. The state of the world and how it's become a mostly hulking megalopolis seems like particularly weighty themes for this franchise to consider... but then, things will be different in *GTA IV*, so who knows?









During our demonstratioon we got to see lots of Broker, the game's equivalent of Brooklyn.





Sight seeing

Can you spot these landmarks in the teaser?

1



The State of Liberty

2



Stock Ticker Board

3



Times Square

4



Chrysler Building

5



Flat Iron Building

6



Brooklyn Bridge



Even the classic art style from the previous games is changing into something more realistic.

games of old it was never a rare occurrence to find yourself walking or riding around with tens of thousands of dollars stuffed into your pockets, either. That's the template we've become used to. However, that's pretty much going to change in *GTA IV*. No longer is it about becoming the King of Liberty City. Now, the onus is on survival. You're Niko Bellic, an Eastern European immigrant living in the US. The only contact you have is your brother Roman, and it's his fault you're here in the first place. Having arrived in Liberty by boat, Niko hopes to leave a very dark and complicated life of crime behind him.

Unfortunately for Niko that life will be catching up with him again, as well as the Russian Mafia and other such unsavoury types. *Grand Theft Auto* IV will be a game of survival; doing jobs and making enough to keep yourself afloat, but at the same time working to establish yourself, any way you can, in this city. That extends to buying or developing property too. As Rockstar told us during our demonstration of, if Niko is earning thousands of dollars from owning a nightclub or other such place of business, there's little actual need for him to be playing the story and doing the missions at all. When you think about it, thanks to his business ventures Niko would be pretty much be set for life.

Not only would that prove incredibly boring to play through, it would also negate one of the main reasons Rockstar is pursuing the Bellic character aspect: it's a damn fine way of re-introducing players to Liberty City, and a better way to make them sympathise and empathise with his plight – pretty much making both feel like fish out of water. Generally speaking, what better way to put players at a distance, re-introducing them to this game world than by casting them as an Eastern European immigrant? It's a pretty inspired decision and one that should present more than a number of amusing culture clashes within the game. After all, New York itself is one very culturally diverse environment. You should expect to find an accurate





Pedestrians are far more realistic now, which should make killing them linger on the consience a bit.

"Don't expect the more fantastical elements of past titles, such as jet packs, bikes and so on"

representation of that in *GTA IV*, with Niko at the heart of it all.

Speaking of being at the "heart of it all", don't expect to find yourself stuck in ten block traffic jams à la real-life Manhattan. While Rockstar wants to create the impression of being in a New York-style environment, it's the first to admit that being too realistic would be a problem. Blaring around a corner with the cops in close proximity, only to smash into the back of the huge traffic jam wouldn't so much hinder progress as annoy the hell out of you. Worse still: imagine being in the middle of that thing. It wouldn't be fun. That said, Rockstar is still remaining true to the way New York operates – but it's aiming to create the impression of things like dense traffic, without actually doing it.

Another thing *GTA IV* won't be doing is referencing films half as much as it had previously. According to Dan Houser, vice president of creative for Rockstar Games, there hasn't been a great crime film for years – not since *Heat* or *Casino*, at least. The series, despite its own merits, arguably become a case of spot the film reference: for example, the *Terminator 2*-inspired truck-versus-bike chase in *San Andreas*, the whole *Boyz 'N' The Hood* and *Menace II Society* vibe at the start of the game, *Scarface* and *Miami Vice* in *Vice City*, and so on. Well, gone are the days of an abundance of film references – beyond the Koyaanisqatsi-inspired teaser trailer, that is, which you can read about in the 'Convenient truth' boxout – and in are the days of real-life crime and real-world history. It's just a part of Rockstar's more organic design dogma, which it's clearly re-defining for this fourth game. Sure, it'll still deal with the same two things as always: the first being the act of completing missions and earning money, the second leisure time spent exploring the city looking for fun, non-story centric things to do.

Just don't expect the more fantastical elements of past titles, such as jet packs, bikes, skateboards











GTA IV might be light on film and TV references, but there's something distinctly *Miaimi Vice* in this shot.



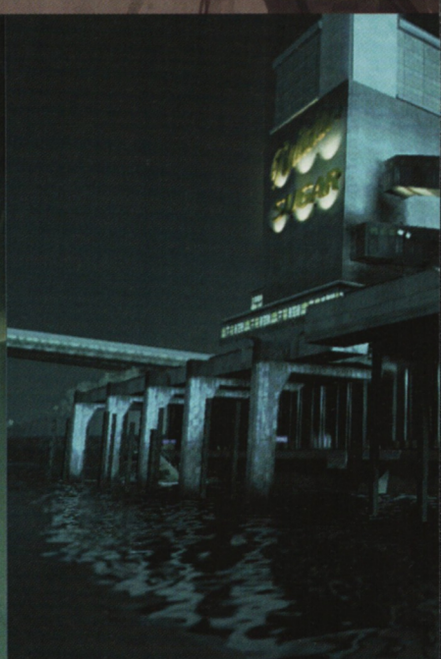


Casting Call

Don't be on the lookout for any familliar faces this time... they've all gone AWOL

This franchise has been filled with so many memorable characters that it's hard to really pick a favourite... Okay fine, we loved Kent Paul in *Vice City*. And Lance Vance – until he turned into an absolute bitch. Oh, and Officer Tenpenny in *San Andreas*. But as far as *Grand Theft Auto III* is concerned, don't look for Asuka, Maria, Donald Love or Catalina in *GTA IV*. In fact, don't even look for any of the newer characters that appeared in *Liberty City Stories*. The truth is: most of the developer's favourite characters were either killed or had their stories told. As far as canon is concerned, and in respect to characters, this may officially be the fourth game in the franchise, but it really is a new start.





"At night there'll be fewer cars and fewer people around too."

» and so on to make their return here. In line with the new direction Rockstar is taking, there's just no way a character like Bellic would leap onto a unicycle or grab a jetpack, flying around the city – it'd be a little too out of the ordinary, to say the least. We have to admit, however, that we're a tad worried about this side of *GTA IV*.

While we're sure the game will be an amazing accomplishment, we're still a little concerned that these elements – which are arguably one of the driving forces of *GTA* – are essentially being neutered. Though we completely buy the idea that the fantastical stuff snuck it's way to the forefront of previous games a bit too much, one of our favourite things in *San Andreas* was jacking a plane or helicopter, flying close to the heavens, then leaping up – skydiving close to the surface before pulling the cords on our parachute. Whether or not Bellic, as a character, would do such things in the full game remains to be seen – it is, after all, still being tweaked and tested as you read this for its October release date – but given the fact this city has some of the tallest buildings in a *GTA* game to date, Rockstar really would be remiss to not include such things as base jumping.

That said, one thing we do feel inclined to report on, especially due to the preposterous amount of coverage it's been getting online and in the mainstream press, is the camera angle situation when driving. We've lost count of the amount of times we've read someone report that there's only one perspective when in a vehicle, and that it's closer and lower than previous games. Well, that's only half true: indeed, there's a new camera angle and it's closer to the ground, but it isn't the only angle. There are about four altogether, another new perspective of which puts you in a sort of first-person mode, looking across the bonnet. Lest we forget that you also have the right analogue stick to move 360 degrees around the car too.

We asked about weather in the game, and how it will affect gameplay, if at all. Unfortunately, Rockstar couldn't answer that, but it did reveal that the day and night-time cycles aren't merely for show... well, they clearly are, but they'll affect the game beyond mere visual gloss: during the day you'll find more pedestrians milling around, and with more traffic on the streets. At night, there'll be fewer cars and fewer people around too. It's something that may or may not affect the missions, depending on what time of day you accomplish them – but we know it'd certainly be easier navigating the Liberty City streets at night, with nary a soul around. While we didn't see any weather effects, beyond the blaring sun that is, and how that may affect the game, we did spot the way physics apply to Niko.

The way his movements react to the environment is pretty unique. For example, when walking down a fairly steep hill his posture clearly changed as he moved. Likewise, while climbing his way up some steps before entering a house, his weight shifted with each step. That also affects Niko when he runs too. In the past, where characters' upper bodies would remain the same as they ran, except for their swinging arms of course, Niko is far more realistic. Cars will react to the environments much the same as Niko does too – each wheel reacting to the road or whatever happens to be in front. After all, with this being *GTA*, the chances of you keeping the car almost entirely on the road is very small.

And again, this being *Grand Theft Auto*, we are sure it will be nothing short of breathtaking. We'll admit that we're not entirely confident with a couple of aspects, such as the stripping back of fantastical elements – a true hallmark of this franchise that also extends to rampages, slow motion pills, hidden stash piles and so on – but then, as Rockstar told us, not everything is set in stone just yet. There's still a lot of time left to contemplate what will go into this next iteration of the franchise. One thing no one can deny, however, is Rockstar's passion to venture into brand new territory, or the balls it has by taking the *Grand Theft Auto* franchise along with it. So when Dan Houser says *Grand Theft Auto IV* marks as big a leap in the franchise as *GTA III* did compared to the very first game, we now have clear and irrefutable evidence to support it. ▲●✕■



The city will react to time of day, with less pedestrians and vehicles appearing at night time.



Virtual reality

It's the Holy Grail of videogaming – to be able to produce a photo-realistic game that looks and feels like you're there, in the thick of the action. But will the PS3 be the machine to achieve it?

AFTER spending serious money on your PS3, it is only right that you would expect the very best. And one of the most obvious things you would want to see are improved graphics – after all, you like to show off to your friends and family and the visuals are the most obvious way of grabbing attention.

Now, while we here at PSU3 would never place graphics over gameplay, we admit that a lush-looking game is certainly more desirable than one that looks like a sewer. Sony hasn't inserted NVidia's custom GeForce graphics chip for nothing. It can draw up to 75 million polygons a second and with that level of power at their disposal, developers would be nigh on crazy not to take advantage of it.

But we have been here before. Every time a new generation of console is released, the manufacturers, the gaming press and the fanboys talk about how the graphics are being pushed, how we're moving towards more realistic-looking, lifelike games. Yet each time, the hype is greater than the resulting titles. We don't reach photorealism and the graphical advances tend to come towards the end of a console's life cycle – play *Shadow Of The Colossus* on PlayStation 2, for instance, to see what we mean.

And so we come to what is now considered as the 'current generation': the PlayStation 3, Xbox 360 and the Wii. Nintendo has decided to pull out of the graphics race, leaving Sony and Microsoft to plough ahead without it. Those two companies are making the same old claims about photorealism. The only difference is that this time they may well be true and a large number of analysts, developers and publishers agree.

"I no longer think it's a hardware restriction," says David Kunkler, producer for Obsidian Entertainment (maker of *Neverwinter Nights 2*). "Today, it's more of a manpower restriction under the demands of production. It's simply a matter of being able to focus enough people on that goal. One thing is certain: it will happen in this generation of hardware."

With all of the essential techniques needed for photo-realistic graphics now being understood – the industry has the necessary texturing, lighting, and animation techniques available – many believe it's only a matter of time before it happens; soon enough a team will dedicate its resources to work on a game that will blow our eyeballs out of their sockets.

"I equate the visual quality of previous-generation games to stage-play actors," says Kunkler. "Personality in those games were defined by silhouette, required heavy make-up, and exaggerated animation. With this generation of hardware, we are capable of creating something that is more film-like. Our characters look like real people or actors. Their personality is conveyed through facial expression, »



An uncanny shining example?

Now entering Uncanny Valley

Creating graphics that are realistic has its problems. Get it wrong, and it falls into the realm of the Uncanny Valley, a hypothesis put forward by Japanese roboticist Masahiro Mori in 1970. He said the more humanlike a robot becomes, the more people are attracted to them, but only up to a point. When they become too lifelike, people see them as creepy.

This is because people have a lifetime's daily exposure of communicating with a large number of real people, and we are all very sensitised to things being 'not quite right'.So if we get a robot that is 99 per cent humanlike, we begin to focus on the missing one per cent. This causes people to be repelled. Simply having a 'real-looking' character without any other human behaviour behind the look quickly leads to the assumption that it is some kind of axe-murderer.

This area of repulsive response, which lies between "barely human" and "fully human", is called the Uncanny Valley and it essentially means game developers need to do more than create a photo-realistic face.

We already have good-looking human characters in games but because the facial expressions are often so strange, or because the speech isn't properly lip-synced, they can sometimes be scarier than the enemy.

"To move forward, we need to develop human behaviours in our games – which are essentially animations, mostly subtle, backed up by good AI," says British computer programmer David Braben, co-writer of the influential space trading game *Elite* and founder of Frontier Developments.

"We need eyes to look away or engage us directly... we also need in-game conversations to have some sort of mood, to be able to break them off and interrupt people to influence the ongoing dialogue exchange. If you're saying something important and someone walks away you'd be really annoyed and would probably let them know."

When your avatar looks weird, the game suddenly becomes less engrossing and that 'missing element' continues to remind you that it's a game. A lot of it comes down to neurology, since our brains are programmed to realise if something is different in a human's face. This means creating realistic faces is a tough one for developers.

Some argue that we should go the other way and be more cartoon-like: sketched cartoon strips prove more engrossing than the 'Dear Deirdre' photo alternatives, for instance.

Yet developers like to show off technology: the PS2 Emotion Engine was revealed with a demo depicting a realistic old man's face and the PS3 went one better with actor Alfred Molina's face being showed off with real-time lighting, subsurface scattering, and realistic expressions. But while impressive, something was still missing.

"For me, even if in-game graphics wind up matching the best current offerings of in-game FMV or CG films, there's still that whole 'Uncanny Valley' phenomenon," says Ian Malcolm, who worked for Melbourne House on games such as *Star Wars*, *Looney Tunes* and *Men In Black II*.

"I know I'd prefer the more stylised CG characters used in the movie, *The Incredibles*, over the creepy mannequin-looking characters in that god-awful *Final Fantasy* movie."

All too real

Nothing better than the real thing?

One of the criticisms levelled at the games industry's passion for advancing graphics is the effect it would have on people's minds.Take a game such as *Grand Theft Auto*, for instance. Would it be desirable to have real-looking people being shot at? There have been many studies on the effects of playing games and how it affects the brain with varying conclusions, but the simple fact is, the more real games become, the more the critics are likely to raise their concerns.

Rockstar Games appears to attract much of the criticism, whether it is for *GTA*'s violence (and Hot Coffee discovery) or *Canis Canem Edit*'s theme of bullying. In the case of the latter, the game – which was originally called *Bully* – was attacked, extremely unfairly as it happens, before anyone had even seen the code.

So it's no surprise that Rockstar does not want to discuss photorealism in games and the possible problems it could cause. A source at the company told us: "We won't be passing comment on shooting and photorealism [in future *GTA* games] as we want people to be celebrating the achievements of the game not discussing issues that have been repeatedly dragged up by the ignorant mainstream media and used against us."

But would a game like *Grand Theft Auto* be a different proposition if the characters were 'real'? Jamie Jackson, art director of FreeStyleGames, told us: "*GTA*, in my humble opinion, should not go too real. It works so well being a game that looks like a game. I think it would be a real shame if all developers aimed for realism... think of all the things you'd lose. Real *Mario*? That would be crap! I hope that the industry has a good balance of guys delivering real and others giving you the game experiences that we have grown to love over the past 25 years."

Game artist Aaron Allport from Blitz Games said: "It's a funny thing in this industry at the moment: so many studios are racing to create the most realistic human in-game. This is such an elusive goal for real-time graphics because of the interactivity and motion fidelity we need to include. But is it always desirable for our games? Not at all, ultra realism is not always the best direction for a game character. Instead we may want to create a more cinematic version of realism, creating a character we really want to play may include exaggerations in detail and proportion until they just 'feel right'."

Let's get physical

Sony pulled off a crucial deal when it signed a bit of paper, bringing hardware firm Ageia aboard the good ship PS3

Ageia is one of the pioneers of hardware-accelerated physics for games and it has created PhysX SDK, which is specially optimised for the PlayStation 3's Cell processor.

The company, rather predictably, says it adds mind-blowing physics action to the high-definition graphics of PS3 titles.

But it certainly does take gaming up a notch. "Real-time physical simulation is the new frontier in computer entertainment, and the PlayStation 3 will lead the way with the help of Ageia's technology," says Dominic Mallinson, vice president of Sony Computer Entertainment Inc's research and development.

"Our collaboration with Ageia will provide PS3 developers with another powerful tool, enabling the creation of amazingly rich and realistic interactive entertainment."

Manju Hegde, founder and chief executive officer of Ageia, said: "The debut of the PS3 has been one of the most anticipated launches in the history of games. With our technology, content creators will have the tools they need to create a new era in action-packed, physics-enabled games."



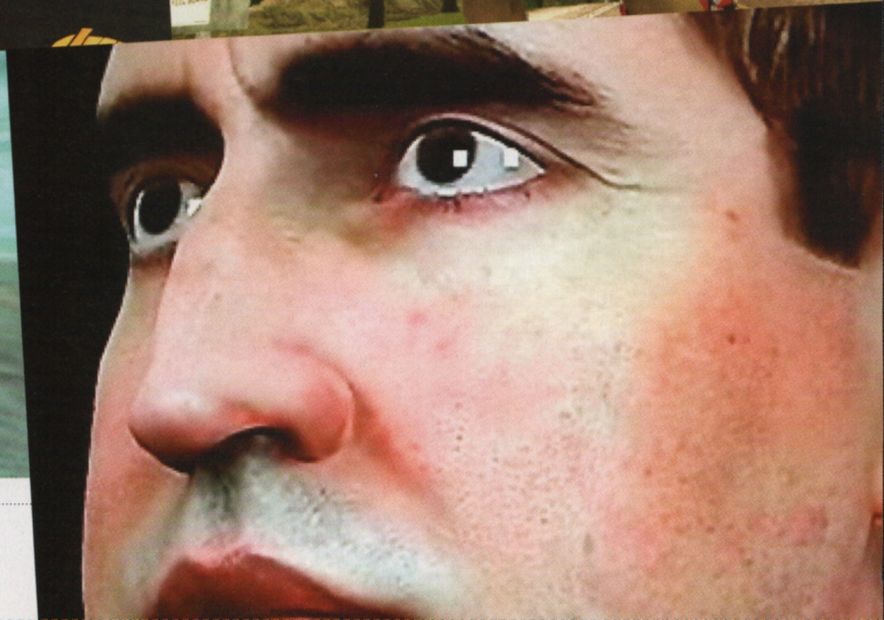




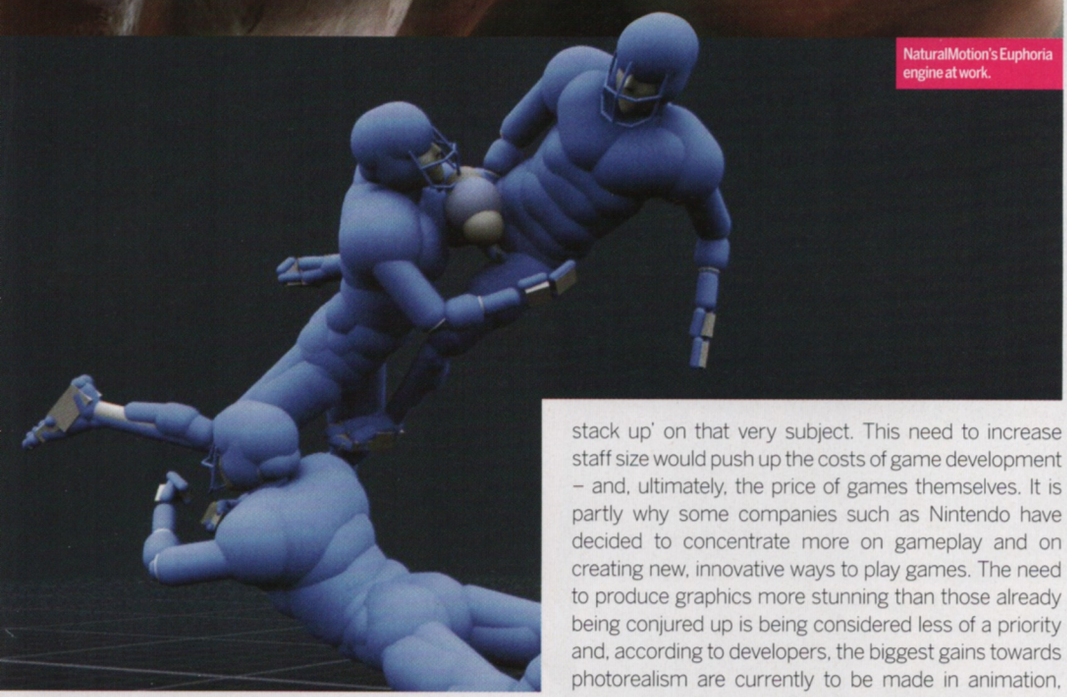
It may not look real now but *GTA* could well be photorealistic one day.



A demo of actor Alfred Molina's computer-generated face is simply stunning.







NaturalMotion's Euphoria engine at work.

» subtle animation differences, voice, and camera all working together. If anything is off, you'll notice."

So are we talking a year or two before we see such realism? Kunkler thinks so: "I think it will take a development team the learning curve of two game cycles on the current generation of hardware. They have to build the tech features and learn how to use them on a game.

"A second game built on the same engine that combines polished rendering techniques with experienced art staff should be able to achieve photorealism, if that is their goal."

One of the main obstacles to fully realising the graphical capabilities of the PlayStation 3 is money. Team sizes would need to double to 100, or even be pushed up to as much as 400 in order to fully exploit the graphical capabilities of the next generation of consoles. At least that is according to Clint Hocking, Ubisoft Montreal's creative director, who hosted an E3 workshop called 'Next-gen game design: How the new consoles stack up' on that very subject. This need to increase staff size would push up the costs of game development – and, ultimately, the price of games themselves. It is partly why some companies such as Nintendo have decided to concentrate more on gameplay and on creating new, innovative ways to play games. The need to produce graphics more stunning than those already being conjured up is being considered less of a priority and, according to developers, the biggest gains towards photorealism are currently to be made in animation, not rendering.

Many say animation has a lot of catching up to do to match the visual standard set by contemporary graphics cards and this is where most of the work is being done. When you look at games such as *Heavenly Sword*, you can see the physical boundaries that are being pushed. The videogame employs some of the best physics we have ever seen. Not only do the objects fly around and land convincingly, but the characters do the same too, making the whole thing appear almost movie-like.

So where does this leave photo-realistic graphics then? Expensively out of reach? "It all depends to a large degree on the definition of 'realistic'," says Stephen Thomson, art direction manager at Blitz Games. "For me the next big leap as far as graphical advances goes will be creating technology that gives a character new layers of emotions and behaviour. Getting a face looking realistic is only part of the story, it's how the character interacts with the world and behaves in certain circumstances that will be the real challenge for the future. As each new 'layer' of realism is achieved, a whole new set of issues will manifest."

The close relationship between graphics and physics is becoming increasingly important – "There's no point having a 5 o'clock shadow shader if the dude walks like a stick man," says Jamie Jackson, art director of FreeStyleGames – and, to that end, companies are working on getting the blend just right.

Games such as LucasArts' *Indiana Jones* are using NaturalMotion's Euphoria to produce a behavioural simulation engine that enables computer-controlled characters to simulate the behaviour of real people.

Euphoria's Motion Synthesis technology is based on robot control theory and biology and looks at the body as a collection of links connected by joints. It replaces canned, or pre-determined, animations with real-time simulations of the 3D character. It enables the CPU, such as the PlayStation 3's Cell, to simulate the body, muscles and motor nervous system of the character; meaning that game animations are not played back but are synthesised by the CPU in real-time as the person plays the game.

Torsten Reil, chief executive officer of the company NaturalMotion, explains: "The old approach of playing back canned animations never really looks right, as actions look repetitive and non-interactive. Games that use Euphoria, like LucasArt's next-gen games *Indiana Jones* and the next *Star Wars*, behave differently every time you play them."

But what is needed to make a game look real? According to FreeStyleGames' Jamie Jackson, the power of the PlayStation 3 is of great importance. The machine is capable of producing photo-realistic graphics, the only challenge is unlocking it and that's a process that, he says, could take up to four years.

"To make games appear real, I think we're looking at layered skinning to allow meshes to move like the human skin would," he says. "But the more important things will be back-end code, which allows the game engines to run multiple shader effects, particle effects and masses of animation data. This is the only way we can deliver the complete package. Film production companies have already proven that artists can create realistic-looking graphics. It's now down to the engine programmers to unlock the console's power."

British computer programmer David Braben knows all about unlocking the power of computers. His first game, *Elite*, was highly influential, boasting wireframe 3D graphics and an open-ended gaming model with an advanced game engine. Back in 1984, this was impressive stuff with Braben and *Elite* co-writer Ian Bell being showered with praise.

Still involved in the industry and producing *The Outsider* for the PlayStation 3, he says gameplay is his priority. Gorgeous graphics are important but he says that photorealism is not vital. Braben told us: "With »

"There's no point having a 5 o'clock shadow on a guy if he walks like a stick man"



Driving graphics forward

PSU3 had a chat with Merseyside's 'Team F1' about the game

Consoles have been blessed with many driving games and, in terms of graphics and physics, this is one genre in which great strides have been taken. *Formula One Championship Edition* by Sony's Studio Liverpool has intense driving action with some very realistic-looking environments.

Is PlayStation 3 the machine to bring super-realistic graphics into the home?

Yes, definitely. It's enabling developers to achieve incredible levels of realism in their games, not just from the graphics but also the physics, behaviour of the game characters (AI) and game design. Our experience making *Formula One Championship Edition* showed us just how powerful the PS3 architecture is. One single PS3 F1 car has the entire memory budget of all 22 PS2 cars and one of our PS3 tracks has an 11-fold increase on its PS2 equivalent. This basically means that we can go to an incredible level of detail in the game, right down to the correct number of seats from the stands in game to match the real-life stands and accurately match the surface of the F1 tracks to the game models.

What aspects of the game's graphics stand out?

The marriage between the super-realistic graphics and the incredible processing power of PlayStation 3 shows itself when you play a Grand Prix race in heavy rain. The reflections of the 22 high-resolution cars are drawn in the wet track surface. You will see rain drops bouncing off the track calculated individually on the SPUs and as you race, notice the rain streaking across your visor according to the speed you are travelling and position on the track.

How far off are super-realistic games featuring human faces as they actually look?

I think we're there now. With digital scanning techniques we can represent a given person's face down to an incredible level of detail and facial motion capture technology is well equipped to capture an actor's performance. Games that utilise human characterisation and emotions will be able to marry the latest scanning and capture technology to the processing power of PS3 to give amazing results. We are seeing this already with games that are currently in development on PS3.

What technology helps developers to make their games realistic?

The PS3 platform is incredibly powerful. The RSX graphics core gives us the ability to render surfaces like cloth, skin and hair accurately (emulating visual artefacts like sub-surface light scattering) as well as scene post-processing, such as motion blur, exposure effects and atmospherics – all in high definition – for the first time.

How do realistic graphics enhance the playing experience of games?

The impact that convincing graphics can make to a game is staggering. With *Formula One*, the PS3 has the power to fully utilise the incredibly accurate data sets that we create for both cars and circuits. Drawing highly detailed circuits and 22 cars is a non-trivial task but the Cell processor and the RSX combined allows us to create the most immersive and convincing F1 driving experience to date.





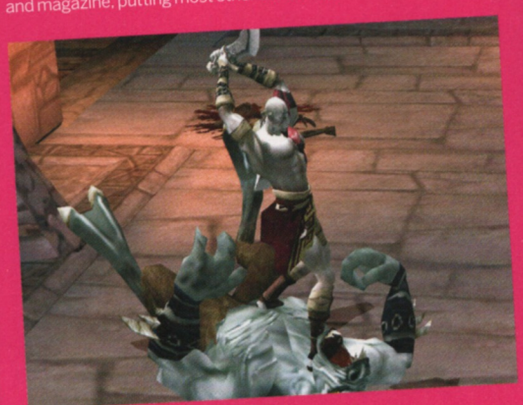
Landmark PS2 titles

You can teach an old dog new tricks

The 'humble' PlayStation 2 is a perfect example of how a console's graphics improve as the machine gets older. Early on, games for the PS2 were simply PSone titles with better graphics, but the latter-day PS2 games have pushed the machine ever harder. It takes developers time to learn how to fully use a machine and build the necessary technology, and this is happening with PS3 too. What PS3 gives is the performance to be in control of even more artistic decisions, like subtle aspects of the characters' appearance and even how they behave. Here are some of the landmark titles that pushed the graphical boundaries of the PS2.



Shadow Of The Colossus *(2005)* With a host of artistic awards, this title set the gaming world alight. Its visually stunning aesthetic presentation was applauded by just about every gamer and magazine, putting most other titles firmly in its shadow.



God Of War *(2005)* Many people said this was 2005's game of the year and who could argue? In terms of graphics, it had the look of an epic; it's strong visceral impact being complemented by superb, smooth animation.



Final Fantasy X *(2001)* Remarkable for its range of realistic facial expressions and cool animation, *Final Fantasy X* was a landmark title. When you consider the technical achievement of this game's graphics, is it any wonder people began getting excited about the PlayStation 2?



Heavenly Sword has incredible graphics and physics – objects fly and land convincingly.

The Outsider, we're making huge strides towards believability in both look and behaviour with animation, artificial intelligence and conversation. We have the technology prototyped and are moving into production with it now."

Braben adds, "For me, photorealism is not desirable in every case. We need to entertain people too. Think about Pixar's desk lamp – even something as far away from human as that can still draw empathy from the viewer. So 'real people' isn't a goal we should all follow blindly. The thing that PS3 gives us, through the power on offer, is the ability to be in control of the decision, so we can have a much broader range of characterisation. Our *Outsider* characters, for example, are believable but not 100 per cent 'real' – there are relatively subtle exaggerations of various features to communicate something about the character to the player."

Kunkler agrees: "Games require gameplay and that tends to be independent of photorealism. Realistic characters are more necessary when you are trying to evoke stronger emotions in the player based on storytelling." To create a totally realistic-looking human face requires extremely high visual and motion fidelity capturing all the subtle nuances that the moving face is capable of showing.

The visuals appear to be less of an issue. Developers can 3D-scan people's faces for shape accuracy and surface detail and have technology for accurate shadow and lighting terms. They also have shading techniques that allow them to simulate the way that skin and eyes react to the light. What's being worked on now is the next layer of subtlety: how light bounces off various materials, how light goes through them, shadowing effects, materials, hair. Creating these is as much about programming as it is about art.

David Amor, creative director at Relentless, said: "I think super-realistic games featuring human faces is proving harder than anyone imagined. I've seen some work-in-progress, PS3 titles that are coming really close, but I think most people could spot a computer-generated character in a police line-up."

Amor continues, "We've been talking about 'realistic' graphics for about ten years, but we're still not that close. If you look at CG used for feature films then you get some idea of where we'll be in a few years on PS3."

So why is it so hard? "The difficulty comes with the motion," says Aaron Allport, a game artist at Blitz Games. "Capturing all the changes in surface colour and deformation depending on speech, emotion and environment is the key. The closest I've seen to date would be the work being done by George Borshukov and his UCap team. The result shown at this year's GDC [Game Developers Conference] looked amazing."

Mr Borshukov is a computer graphics supervisor at Electronic Arts and his Universal Capture (UCap) team have been working on the evolution of facial capture techniques, the likes of which have been used in movies such as *The Matrix* and *Mission: Impossible 2*. Such advances are getting over the 'Uncanny Valley' pitfall where computer-generated animated faces appear unintentionally creepy (see 'An uncanny shining example' boxout).

"The PS3 is set to see fundamental changes in the way games are made and played"

But hard as it may be, the developers are continuing to beaver away, pushing the PlayStation 3 to its limit. And although true photorealism is not about to happen in the next year or so, it doesn't mean there are no advances currently being made in these early PlayStation 3 days. For example, *Alone In The Dark* for the PS3 promises to push the boundaries in terms of physics and break all of the rules of videogames. At least that's what an Atari spokesperson told us.

"You'll have freedom to use anything in the game as a weapon or as it would be used in real life," he says. "The character animation is unbelievable and textures and lighting is so advanced that it has to be seen to be believed. Locked doors and enemies that can't get to you are a thing of the past and the ability to set fire to objects and watching it propagate the scenery is something else. If it's flammable then it will catch fire and this can be used to your advantage or disadvantage, depending on the situation."

It seems as if developers are concentrating on in-game physics, bringing them up to the same level of advancement as we have seen with game graphics before the two are able to marry in perfect harmony.

And while we don't know when that will happen, one thing is certain: the PS3 is set to see some fundamental changes in the way games are made and played. It may not stop us from wanting more – our appetite for graphically gorgeous, physically perfect games being insatiable – but we can at least sit back in the knowledge that things are going to become better than ever. And if that doesn't excite you, then nothing will. ▲●×■

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TimeShift

Play it again, S²am

INFORM **Publisher** Sierra | **Developer** Saber Interactive | **Release Date** November | **Players** 1-TBA
Genre FPS | **Website** www.timeshiftgame.com/uk

WHAT would you do with a little more time? For many it's an easy question to answer; after all, couldn't we all do with just a few extra hours in the day to relax, to play videogames, to drink, dance and be merry? It's a no brainer for us – there's a million different things we could spend that time doing, but for Kyle Peschel project director of *TimeShift*, Sierra's long-delayed futuristic FPS, the question wasn't exactly a welcome one. After starting game development under the Atari umbrella, the game was originally due for release on the Xbox before the decision was made to shift as it were to next-gen formats (or should 'current gen', now?). A new development platform was soon followed by a new publisher as Sierra sunk its hands into its, admittedly, very deep pockets to purchase the property from a cash-stricken Atari. Soon after its platform and publisher transition it seemed *TimeShift* had finally found its place in the world and Sierra decided to 'show the dog the rabbit' and give journos a full eyes-on of what was a very promising and playable game.

Adjusting to its new surroundings and working out the final bugs (only seven were left from a documented 14,000) Saber Interactive was all but ready to shrink-wrap the boxes and ship the game out of the studio door when the suits upstairs asked a question not many development teams expect to hear: "What would you do with another year?" We've heard of games being given ludicrously tight deadlines and titles rushed out only half-baked, but not often do we hear of a publisher willing to spend additional time and budget to ensure one of its games reaches its full potential. And extra potential it certainly has. While the 'original' *TimeShift* had a lot of exciting ideas, the new *TimeShift* has emerged from its development chrysalis looking like a completely different animal. In a recent chat with *TimeShift* project director Kyle Peschel, he explained that after having to talk a whole bunch of guys down from the roof who'd been working on the game for over three years already, they realised that this additional year was a great opportunity to make some real innovations in the FPS market; when asked what his first reaction was to being offered an additional year of development time Peschel replied, "I just started listing off everything that was on our 'rainy day' list, like that I wanted to change the physics system and we'd like to refocus the style to resonate with the end users because they didn't understand Steampunk as a universe". He didn't stop there, "While we're at it let's kill off a bunch of characters and levels, redo the opening and lose the FMV. Let's cut the voice acting and redraft a whole new script that supports our developments". A huge wish list and one Peschel thought would never fly, "I just looked at the list and thought surely no one is going to go for this, they'll just say 'okay, just put the game out as is' but to my surprise they said 'alright, go for it'." A huge bonus for the developer but the extra time also meant that Saber was then able to factor in a PS3 release.

During the last year Saber has been tending to every element that wasn't quite working in the original game and providing a solution, but perhaps it would be beneficial at this point to go all 'Craig David' and re-e-e-wind to refresh memories of what the basic premise of *TimeShift* actually is. The crux of the story was, and still is, about a weapon being developed by the US government, which would allow them to manipulate the very fabric of time; however, during its production a nogoodnik by the name of Krone stole the suit and used it for his own nefarious means, namely becoming the world's most oppressive dictator. So, in an effort to correct its mistake, good ol' Uncle Sam develops a more advanced version of the Alpha suit that the player straps on and uses to try to topple Krone. Those are the story elements that have survived the cull, but as far as anything else is concerned you can forget it. You might remember *TimeShift* having a colourful, some might say even 'cartoonish-type', world reminiscent »

"S²am is like a big Sky+ box but much cooler"

A look back in time

The fundamentals of TimeShift can be found in many other television shows, films and games. Let's rewind and check out some favourites...



BACK TO THE FUTURE

The greatest time-travelling trilogy ever made, without the aid of a S^2am suit Marty and Doc Brown use their modified DeLorean to travel through time. Shades of Krone can also be seen in knucklehead, Biff Tannen who in *Back To The Future II* abuses time travel to become rich and powerful.



THE TIME MACHINE

First published in 1895, H.G Wells's concept of time travel is still alive and well in popular culture today.



BLINX: THE TIME SWEEPER

Artoon's cat was outfitted with a magical vacuum cleaner (the Time Sweeper), which like S^2am could exert control over time itself – slowing, stopping and reserving the flow.



FUTURAMA

Philip J Fry is cryonically frozen and then revived one thousand years in the future and if that isn't weird enough he then goes to work for his distant nephew. The situation reminds us of when we first saw *TimeShift* in action and Michael Swift's elderly son visits him and utters the immortal line "don't be alarmed, I am your son." Weak.



BILL & TED

Moving away from Marty McFly's pimped DeLorean, Wild Stallion's Bill S Preston and Ted Theodore Logan used a telephone box to travel back in time and turn in a very impressive history report.



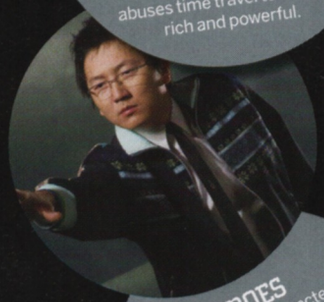
PRINCE OF PERSIA

Ubisoft's silver-tongued monarch has long been using his Dagger of Time to reserve time and get himself out of innumerable sticky situations.



HALO

Not only does S^2am resemble MasterChief in terms of appearance, but also talks to the player Cortana-style.



HEROES

Like S^2am, *Heroes* character, Hiro Nakamura has the ability to control space and time. Not only can he journey through time, he can also freeze the world around him and walk about freely just like your character in *TimeShift*.



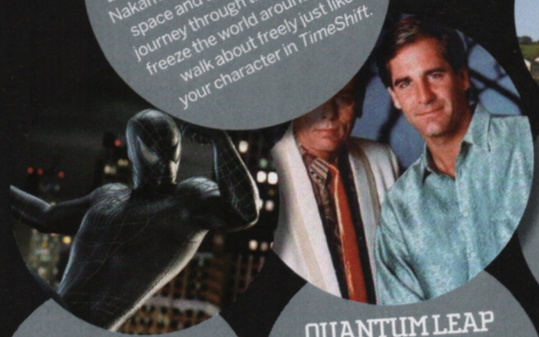
F.E.A.R.

The whole slow-down-time concept has been used several times but probably no better than in Monolith's FPS, *F.E.A.R.* Like *TimeShift*, *F.E.A.R* has very dark overtones and you must use your powers to lay waste to countless imperialist troops.



DR WHO

Again a telephone box is the favoured method of time travel, but the Doctor goes one step further by adding interplanetary travel to his bow.



SPIDER-MAN 3

We're stretching it a little here but perhaps the whole self-aware suit thing could end badly. What's if like Spidey's black suit S^2am is evil and is using you to do its bidding?

QUANTUM LEAP

Just as S^2am was created in a US-government-funded facility, so too was the accelerator chamber, physicist Sam Beckett uses to test his own time-travel theory before 'leaping' from life to life.



CLICK

Like our feline friend Blinx, in *Click* Adam Sandler's character, Michael Newman acquires a 'universal remote' that can control the universe around him.



Back To The Future: All images copyright © Universal Pictures [Boxset now available] **Click:** All images copyright © 2006 Columbia Pictures [Blu-ray now available] **The Time Machine:** All Images copyright © 2002 Dreamworks [DVD now available] **Bill and Ted's Excellent Adventure:** All Images copyright © Orion Pictures [DVD now available] **Dr Who:** All Images copyright © BBC [Now showing Saturdays on BBC1] **Heroes:** All Images Copyright © 2006 NBC Universal Television [Now showing Mondays on The Sci Fi Channel] **Spider-Man 3:** © 2007 Columbia Pictures [Now showing in all good theatres] **Futurama:** All Images Copyright © 1999 20th Century Fox Television [Currently showing on Sky Television] **Quantum Leap:** All Images Copyright © Universal Studios [Season DVD boxsets now available]



"TimeShift has to do more than just simulate a good shower – that will get old very quickly"

of Free Radical's excellent *TimeSplitters*. Uber-hero Michael Swift was the time-travelling protagonist fighting for truth, justice and apple pie, but as both he and his Steampunk-modelled world had been lingering around for over three years, the game ran the risk of being stale before it was even released. So perhaps the decision to stop and reconnect with the audience will turn out to be a marketing masterstroke.

Discussing the old *TimeShift*, Peschel was willing to admit where they had gone wrong, "In the old game you played as Michael Swift and he wore this kind of '*Twenty Thousand Leagues Under The Sea*' suit and was considered the best of the best, but the problem was that set-up was fine for videogame design back in 1994; however, the feedback we got was that gamers couldn't connect with the character of Swift, he was exactly that... just a character." So one of the major changes that has been implemented is the removal of flamboyant lead character, Michael Swift and a redesign of the time-shifting beta suit. The game's protagonist is now nameless, faceless and – perhaps to the disappointment of former Swift voice actor, Dennis Quaid – voiceless. The suit has gone all 'Barry Bethal' on us and now resembles a slender MasterChief but it has retained its advantageous ability to stop, slow and reverse the flow of time – it's a bit like a Sky+ box, but much cooler. The beta suit is a military upgrade of the original and so as well as being fully battle-ready it comes with some handy new features; the pick of the bunch being the auto recall function, which when it senses an imminent threat actually transports you back to where you originated from. Another upgrade of note is that the suit now boasts an infantile AI program called S^{2}am, which stands for 'Strategic System for Adaptable Meta-cognition', meaning the suit is self-aware. Peschel clarifies, "It's probably more accurate to say that the suit puts you on than the other way around. The military realises that an android alone can only do so much, but with you and the android suit working together it's a completely different scenario."

It's important you don't take S^{2}am's abilities for granted because it is so much more than Krone's Alpha suit. The ability to slow, stop and reserve the flow of time was never intended to be part of the suit's original functionality. The beta suit simply sends you through time; in the opening sequence of the game things get a little messy, so in an effort to save your life S^{2}am decides to initiate the auto recall; however, in doing so it malfunctions and tries to self-repair leaving you with finite control over time. At the testing stage of the old *TimeShift*, Saber discovered that players found it a little too difficult to work out how best to use the 'slow', 'stop' and 'reverse' function at every point during the game, so now S^{2}am will work with you assess the situation and make recommendations on the best course of action to take. You can ignore his suggestions, of course, but considering he is designed with your best interests at heart it would be foolish to go it alone.

S^{2}am and his abilities should also prove invaluable when it comes to the *TimeShift*'s various environment-based puzzles. Although admittedly the puzzle element of the game world has been trimmed down in favour of more run-'n'-gun action, there is still ways in which you must manipulate time in order to progress – an integral element in the fight to differentiate *TimeShift* from every other FPS currently roaming console corridors. Obviously time-twisting puzzle sections have been used before in games such as *Prince Of Persia* and *Blinx: The Time Sweeper*, but here the scalp scratchers are being used a little more subtly, so say for example you're faced with a pipe leading to a platform you need to get to but every time you step into it and try to make your way to the other end the pipe seesaws over due to the distribution of weight. You have figure out how to use your abilities to best it. There's a relatively simple solution to such a problem of course, which is to stop time when you are at one end of the tunnel and then cheese it across to the other side before it dips, leaving you free to unfreeze time and hop on to the platform. Simple when you know how, but it's these sorts of scenarios that should provide a spot of relief from gunning down reams of grunts, helping to keep your senses sharp.

Mental agility appears to be a pre-requisite of playing *TimeShift* because the more creative you can be with your powers, the more of a badass you become on the battlefield. There's a great deal of fun to be had with S^{2}am and his powers that will leave your enemies completely flummoxed; for instance, you could slow down time, walk up to an opponent and grab his gun straight out of his hand before unloading a full clip into his still-grimacing face. Or you could always stop time and sneak into a room full of guards, when you start time again the enemy soldiers will have no idea you're in the there, allowing you to leap out from a behind a box like some sort of death-dealing viper. There's also the opportunity to use the reverse function as a 'get out of jail free' card; if a grenade is thrown and blows half you limbs off, you can rewind time and make evasive manoeuvres to ensure you survive with arms and legs intact. Of course, by gifting you these powers Saber hopes to make you feel god-like; however, you're



With a focus on fun over frags, the multiplayer game is certain to be popular on the PS Network.

Run + gun = fun

Time to talk multiplayer

According to the development team it went through at least four iterations of multiplayer, first only giving the time-shifting powers to one person, but ultimately found that while it was great playing as that person, it sucked for the others in the game. Saber then went to a new concept that is quite a large departure from how the powers work in single-player, where the suits you wear export time abilities to things called Kronos Grenades, which can then be thrown out into the environment. Players can select what kind they want to throw: a 'slow', a 'stop', or a 'reverse' grenade and once lobbed it will explode in an 8-10 meter sphere, like a bubble of completely temporal space.

You can use the Kronos Grenades to attack and defend, so say for instance Player One is chasing Player Two, if Player One fires a rocket, Player Two could defend himself by throwing a slow-down grenade. The rocket will travel at its normal speed until it hits the slow-down bubble, which slows it up and gives Player Two a chance to get out of the way. Another example is within games like Capture The Flag; if Player One is about to pick up the flag, Player Two could chuck a time-stop grenade and freeze Player One in his tracks, grab the flag himself and, if he's feeling particularly sadistic, end his opponent's miserable existence.



Despite toning down on the gore factor there's still more claret on show than in your local Thresers.



PROJECT DIRECTOR
KYLE PESCHEL

Developer Interview

The world's most enthusiastic project director talks exclusively to PSU3

How does a team remain motivated having worked on a project for so long?

⊗ I make a mean batch of Kool-aid and I make every one drink it until they fall into line. Ultimately it was a really rough start because at least four months of that year was lost to ideas that didn't work out. But we did achieve our goal in terms of changes.

What's changed since the Atari days?

⊗ There was a refocusing on the overall quality of the product. Sierra has a different expectation of quality than Atari and it's not willing to release games that fail to meet its high standards and that's when the changes started to come about. It was a bit rough at first before we decided what the new style was to be. We used to have a game that was very Steampunk orientated, but the problem was no one really knew what Steampunk was. So we went to a new totalitarian regime, a kind of 'real world oppression' feel so players can more easily identify exactly what's a threat and what isn't.

Okay, so what's the same?

⊗ We actually keep quite a lot, we used to have things like trikes, but we killed them off and now have ATVs instead. We still have some Zeppelins because at it's core the game is about time travel and some of it is set Circa 1939, back when Zeppelins were a viable form of transport, we've also kept a solid portion of the levels that were working well and only chose to focus on the ones that were a little confused or disjointed.

How has the time system changed? Does S²am's introduction take anything away from the player?

⊗ The suit will work with you to make recommendations via the HUD, so the suit is not making decisions for you but rather assessing the situation and advising a possible course of action to take.

Are there any weapons that specifically benefit from the timeshifting ability?

⊗ The weapons are of an alternate time stream, you don't show up with any weapons but the ones you do find seem to be rather advantageous to your abilities. One example is the clutch grenades – when you throw them they get stuck on an opponent and rather than explode on impact they delay a few seconds, to give the AI time to react, but also to give you enough time to reverse time if a grenade lands on you.

Games have used time-related themes before, how is yours different?

⊗ As you slow, stop and reverse the flow of time you're immune from damage. It's not like the reverse in a *Prince Of Persia* game. In *POP* if you fall off a cliff you hit the reserve button and it's almost like a 'get out of jail free' card you get to carry on and avoid a two-minute level load. But in *TimeShift* if you fall off the cliff you will be hitting the ground, but there are ways to save yourself, you could chuck a barrel off the cliff first and then hit reverse, meeting the barrel in midair and riding it back up.

By stopping time everyone in the room is paralysed but you can move around freely, but to balance that you can't use it for very long and later in the game there are some opponents who will counter what you're doing.

Will there be a recharge mechanic for the suit's powers?

⊗ The powers will need to recharge but it's a very quick process. You can slow time for approximately 12 seconds, stop time for around five seconds and reverse time for ten seconds. Your suit will recharge every 40 seconds allowing players to feel rather god-like, so much so you can even walk across the surface of water if you stop time. However, you're not playing in god mode so we'll balance the gameplay accordingly.

How does the time-shifting mechanic affect combat?

⊗ As you master time control, you master the gameplay and so we'll be constantly stacking the odds against you. Using huge mechs that demolish buildings, intelligent AI opponents who will protect one another and later androids that can counter your powers so you have to keep adapting your combat tactics.

Tell us about us about one of the game's major changes?

⊗ Before at press events I used to walk past the pods and see players on different levels of the game and couldn't really say that the game had an identity, I couldn't tell they were all playing the same game, so we changed that. We haven't robbed the user of anything they had before, you still have indoor and outdoor environments, aerial combat etc, but now it actually looks like the same game. It looks like *TimeShift*.

Previously the likes of Michael Ironside and Dennis Quaid were involved in the project, what has become of them?

⊗ I wouldn't write them out entirely because I might bring them back in a cameo capacity, but we definitely don't have any plans to use them as primary characters.

What influences have you taken from videogames/Movies/TV?

⊗ I'd be lying if I told you I haven't been influenced by certain things, but I can't point to a specific game or movie. The team is actually more focused on making our world unique.

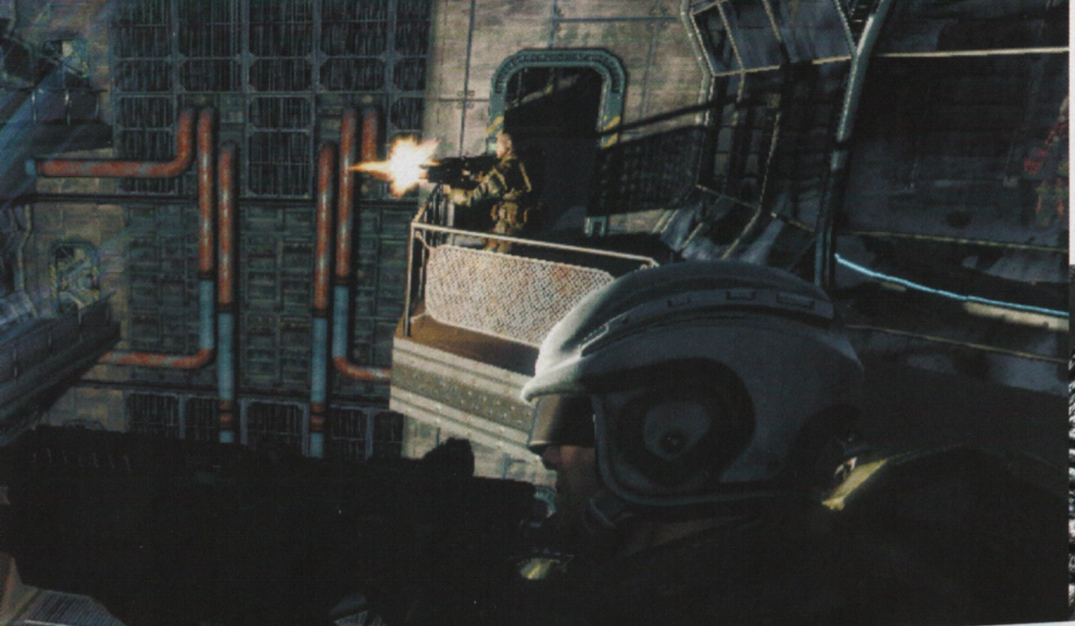
Any plans for PS Network and Home?

⊗ We are still working with Sony at the moment as to how best to support Home and what its launch plans for the service are.













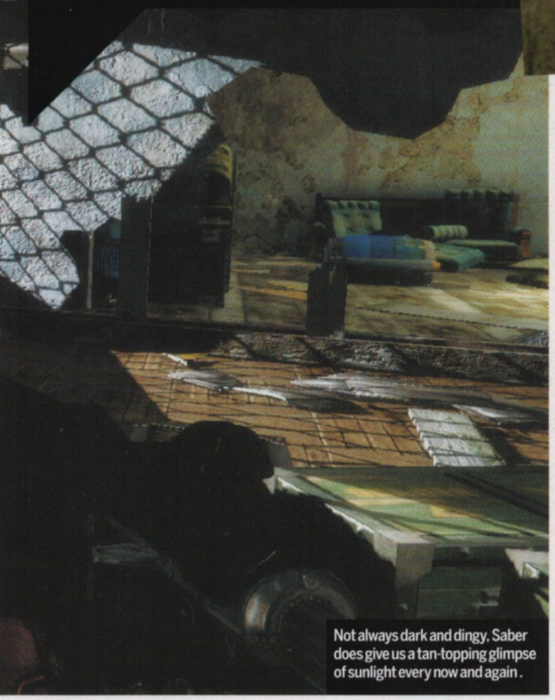
Not everyone is fortunate enough to sport the S^{2}am suit, but oversized guns certainly help to compensate.



Out of steam

Old school, new rules

The old *TimeShift* was modelled on a sub-genre of fantasy science fiction known as Steampunk, which came into prominence in the early Nineties. It's a patchwork of eras such as the Victorian period where steam power was widely used and a mysterious world of tomorrow with fictional technological advances. First choosing to represent the world of Kronos like this the team soon realised that your average Joe didn't really know a great deal about Steampunk or even what it was and so choose to reinvent the world in a much more recognisable way – making it look shiner than a greased seal in the process.



Not always dark and dingy, Saber does give us a tan-topping glimpse of sunlight every now and again.

» not untouchable, Kyle Peschel was eager to point out that you'll be constantly tested. First of all, you can't just power through the game using your powers to combat every single situation, S^{2}am's abilities do need time to recharge and there are plenty of surprises along the way to stop you from feeling too cocky. Peschel explains, "In one of the early levels you'll see a couple of foot soldiers just standing around, so you'll probably just steam in and take them out, but what you don't see is their buddies on the other side of the wall who start to shoot through, revealing 30 more guys and a huge mech."

The addition of mechs and ATVs fit perfectly with the new artistic and technical direction of the game. The vibrant visuals have been replaced with washed-out, gritty textures and *Gears Of War*-style torrential rain, which when you slow time can be seen in all of its next-generation glory. Trust us, it used to be water but now a next-gen game is judged by its droplets. Still, *TimeShift* has to do more than just simulate a good shower, that will get old very quickly, what the new style does do is give the whole game a moodier, more menacing feel in keeping with the dark, dystopian world you inhabit. Although it appears the gore factor has been turned down a tad, you can still slow time and see limbs-a-leaping off bodies and there is a decent amount of destruction to boot. Making you a faceless resistance fighter free of any real identity does help sell the feeling you and your squad is part of a larger conflict – although your mad skills still put your brethren to shame, of course.

In fact the darker tone and time manipulation element reminds us of another Sierra property, *F.E.A.R.* Just one example of the competition a game like *TimeShift* faces upon its release on PlayStation 3, if this game had only been released on Xbox 360 and PC as planned it might have been lost in the crowd, but with decent AI, clever time tricks and a new, more sinister storyline *TimeShift* could and should make a big impact on Sony's new console.

With such a public delay in getting its product to market, the pressure is on Saber to deliver the goods, but if the sentiments of Mr Peschel are anything to go by, we needn't worry our pretty little heads about it, "The pressure someone in management or marketing can put on us is nothing compared to the drive we have to innovate in the FPS marketplace. Our aim is to progress what people have seen in first-person shooter games, not by tacking on some extra RPG or RTS elements but by having a team of people working tirelessly to make this something different." We only wish that we could fast-forward time and get to grips with a finished version of *TimeShift*. ▲●×■

TimeShift ***is due for release at the end of the year, but if its track record is anything to go by we could be left waiting a little longer.***

PS3 FIRST LOOK

SmackDown vs. Raw 2008

Bringing the pain back

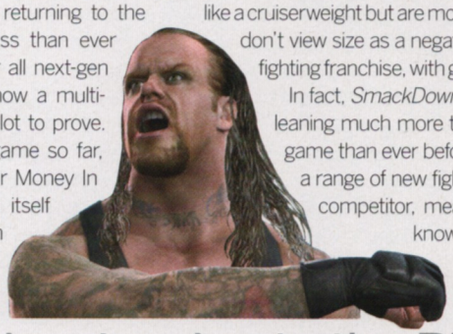
INFORM **Publisher** THQ | **Developer** Yuke's | **Release Date** November
Players 1-4 (Online TBC) | **Genre** Sports | **Website** www.thq-games.com

LAST year was not a good year to be a PlayStation 3 fan – due to delays, marketing mistakes and, of course, love of the almighty dollar, many of the franchises that were previously considered 'PS3 exclusives' left us for a new upstart outfit known as the Xbox 360. While some properties we were willing to share, one of the bigger guns we were very sour about losing was the hugely popular WWE wrestle-fest *SmackDown vs. Raw*. Initially announced for the PS3 but then cancelled for undisclosed reasons, effectively making for an Xbox 360 next-gen exclusive – the move was about as popular as a ginger-haired stepson. But at the risk of sounding too clichéd it seems that every cloud does indeed have a silver lining; while the 2007 iteration was a palatable slice of WWE action, it wasn't nearly as well received as its predecessors. A lot of new ideas were implemented but not all of them worked. A new 'Total Control System' assigned control to the analogue sticks, environmental hotspots and endless bouts of button bashing were supposed to enhance the experience but left many stalwarts feeling a little alienated – twin that with upgraded visuals, a bigger roster and more game modes and it was probably too much too soon with Yuke's over-stretching its resources.

Now, however, almost a year on and things are looking decidedly different, *SmackDown* is returning to the PlayStation bigger and more badass than ever before. Extending its reach to cover all next-gen consoles *SmackDown vs. Raw* is now a multi-platform brand and has a hell of a lot to prove. Going by what we've seen of the game so far, it has every chance of becoming Mr Money In The Bank. The development team itself has admitted to learning a lot from moving to a different platform and are now much more prepared to take advantage of what each console has to offer. So how has the developer managed to take advantage of the PS3, the most powerful next-gen system on the market? The straight answer is: improvements – lots of improvements. According to Yuke's, everything from AI to match types is being created from the 'mat' up. New match types (over 50 in all) mean there's ample opportunity to bring the pain and AI must be as alert as possible too, not only aware of your actions, but anything else that is going on inside *and* outside of the ring. This should mean a world of difference when it comes to those infuriating tag-team showdowns with partners that are about as intelligent, as... well, your average wrestler.

The extra year of development time is going to mean a whole new world in terms of animation, Yuke's is refusing to just tinker and revive old wrestler movements lifted from previous games; all new noggin'-knocking moves have been recaptured to ensure everything looks fresh and slick. The blending of moves like the transitions from walking to running or climbing cages look much smoother and more realistic. This sense of realism extends even further to the superstars themselves whose movement is now highly individualised. Animations will be more closely tied to size, so the bulkier brutes won't be able to speed around the mat like a cruiserweight but are more cumbersome. But please, don't view size as a negative because like every good fighting franchise, with great size come great power.

In fact, *SmackDown vs. Raw 2008* seems to be leaning much more towards a traditional fighting game than ever before; Yuke's has implemented a range of new fighting styles specific for each competitor, meaning you not only have to know about your wrestler but how best to use their fighting style. Each style



"SmackDown is returning to the PlayStation bigger and more badass than ever before"





Match made in heaven

Main events and minor details

As part of the new, revamped *SmackDown* experience, Yuke's has promised a wide range of new match modes, but with the WWE continuing to push the envelope when it comes to sadistic scenarios, what can we expect from the new edition? With the ECW invasion angle being pushed, don't be surprised to see kendo sticks, barbwire baseball bats and a flaming table or two alongside the usual TLC matches. At present Vince seems to have a penchant for head shaving so the Brutus 'The Barber' Beefcake-style clippers could also debut. For pure gimmick value, who could resist a throwdown with the gigantic waste of space that is the Great Khali in a Punjabi Prison match? Seeing as he was almost unbeatable in the last game, any pairing with him is likely to end in a great deal of pain.



of fighting has exclusive move sets, strengths and strategies, making it much more like a beat-'em-up than old-school *SmackDown*. Just imagine the likes of Batista as Zangief and Rey Mysterio as Vega and you'll get a basic idea; however, the system actually goes much deeper than that. There are eight different styles to choose from, so your game experience should change drastically depending on which superstar you select. The eight different classes are Powerhouse, High-Flyer, Technician, Brawler, Hardcore, Dirty Fighter, Submission Artist and Showman. Even casual wrestling fans (if such a thing exists) will easily be able to identify which category each character would fall into, but simply knowing what kind or wrestler they are doesn't necessarily translate into knowing how to use them. This means time must be invested in working out the intricacies of each style and, more importantly, which fighting style works best for each match type.

If you've ever seen the powerful pageantry of the WWE before you should have a fair idea what most of these styles are all about, but for those greener than Kermit's loofah, let us enlighten you on what you can expect. Powerhouses might be slow but their moves will really pack a punch, reducing energy quicker, Hardcore wrestlers are proficient with weapons and are happiest when the head claret is flowing; High-Flyers inhabit the top ropes performing death-defying aerial moves, whereas Submission Artists get their kicks for stretching, tearing and choking anything they can get their paws on. Brawlers, as you can probably decipher, are scrappy and have a range of unique strike moves; Technicians on the other hand are old-school mat-based wrestlers and like to keep you off your feet and eating canvas as much as possible. Then we get to guys who put the 'entertainment' in WWE, the Showmen and the Dirty Fighters – the Showmen like to pander to the crowd; first humiliating their opponents and then going in for the kill, Dirty Fighters are the ones grannies want to stab with their knitting needles and in the same vein as the late, late Eddie Guerrero will lie, cheat and steal their way to the top.

So you know the basic fighting styles, but there's a problem with such distinct categorisation because a great many wrestlers span several of these styles, such as the Nature Boy Ric Flair, for instance, who is Dirty and a Showman, or guys like CM Punk who are Hardcore High-Flyers. It's a good job then that Yuke's has dodged that particular bullet by giving each wrestler two fighting styles – providing a mix of skills and much more variety in terms of moves you'll see during a match. Be warned though, while you can combine fighting styles, you only have the finisher for your primary style, which when you think about it makes sense as most wrestlers only have one famed finisher anyway whether it be slam, spike or submission.

If submissions are your thing then you'll be elated to learn about the new submission mechanic featured in *SmackDown vs. Raw 2008*. The 'Submission Struggle System' builds on the last game's philosophy of attributing more control to the analogue sticks. Wisely deciding to ditch the infuriating and outdated button-bashing system to try to break holds, submissions now play out using the analogues and follow a very simple formula. Once the move is locked in you decide how much pressure to apply by pulling back on the stick in real time. Yank it right back to apply a dose of high-intensity pain or just a little to extend the suffering (and probably your opponent's limbs) a little longer. So now moves like Crossfaces and Figure-fours can be dragged out, teasing your opponent with the possibility of escape but then pulling back even harder. However, this new control method also works as a defensive system using a quick thrust of the stick to power out or slowly try to wriggle your way free. It sounds like a very sensible transition, and it's a system designed to ensure that you're not waiting around for your next opportunity but instead you are constantly turning the tables and figuring out ways to break holds. It also forces you to consider your choice of superstar, because if you're booked in an 'I Quit Match' obviously Submission Artists and Powerhouses will have an advantage at holding and breaking vice-like locks.

Style tips

Your guide to the new wrestling styles



SHOWMAN

Wrestlers: Mr Kennedy, Randy Orton, Johnny Nitro

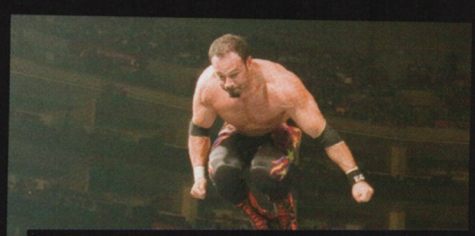
It's all about image for these primadonnas. Pandering to the crowd and infuriating their opponents into making a mistake, lowering morale and then going in for the kill. But don't be tricked into thinking they are all mouth and no tight Lycra spangley trousers – they also have some devastating moves to use when the time is right.



TECHNICIAN

Wrestlers: Shawn Michaels, Triple H, CM Punk

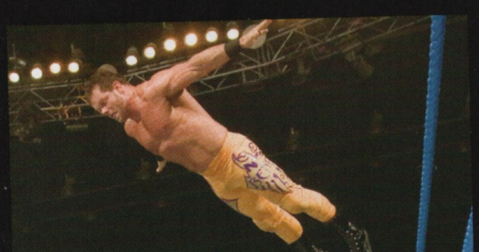
Excellent all-rounders, these grapplers use moves that are about as close to 'real' wrestling as you're ever going to see in the WWE. Due to their extensive wrestling knowledge and all-round mad skills they should never be underestimated. If you're going into a long season mode, technical prowess is a must.



DIRTY FIGHTER

Wrestlers: Edge, Ric Flair, Chavo Guerrero

Exactly what it says on the tin, these guys will use every cheap trick in the book to gain an advantage. Eye pokes, nipple twists and even laying out the ref – if they can get away with it they'll be sure to do it. These dirty skills, twinned with a strong secondary skill set, could well be a recipe for success as you can lie, cheat and beat your way to victory.



SUBMISSION ARTIST

Wrestlers: Chris Benoit, Ric Flair, Chris Masters

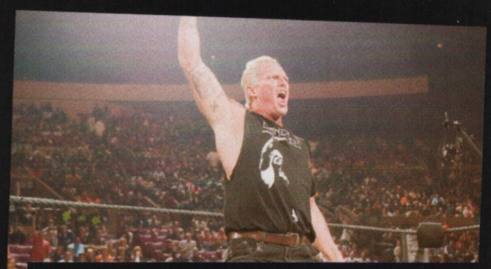
With the new Submission Struggle System in place, playing as a submission artist should drastically change how you experience the game. Master the controls and your Crossfaces and Figure-fours will be impossible to break. It will also be interesting to see just what other moves are in your arsenal because if they're largely submission based it could put you at a disadvantage in some contests.



POWERHOUSE

Wrestlers: Batista, Lashley, Kane

Bulbous muscles, popping veins and chest measurement bigger than the equator – all the signs point to the fact that these guys can lay a real hurting on you. They have power, yes, but at the expense of speed; chances are they'll be more cumbersome than their willowy counterparts, so the key is to grab your opponent tight and give them no chance of escape. An interesting benefit of being a Powerhouse is that if you have a stored finisher you can use it to power-out of a pin.



HARDCORE

Wrestlers: Sabu, Sandman, Tommy Dreamer

The world of WWE got far more extreme when Vince McMahon decided to resurrect the ECW brand and now you can experience the violence for yourself. Of course, the obvious choice for Extreme and no DQ matches these basket cases are proficient with weapons, tables and pretty much anything else that causes excessive amounts of pain. It's unclear at present just how the 'extremists' will be used in the game but we've been assured they will definitely feature.



HIGH-FLYER

Wrestlers: Rey Mysterio, Super Crazy, Brian Kendrick

The cruiserweights revolutionised wrestling in the WCW and now courtesy of the promotion's demise WWE has a large pool of high-flyers to choose from. Spending much of their time leaping off the top turnbuckle they put their bodies and pride on the line to hit high-risk, high-impact moves. Giving up a few hundred pounds to the heavyweights these sprightly little ring monkeys are very quick and just as effective, if used properly.



BRAWLER

Wrestlers: Finlay, John Cena, The Undertaker

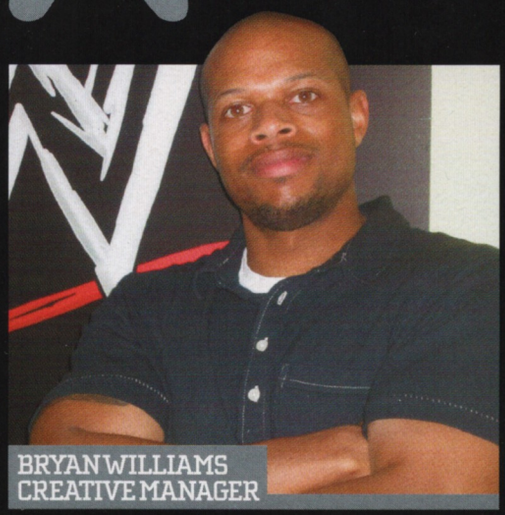
Finlay's catchphrase sums up this style perfectly – these guys "love to fight". Using a street-fighting style they have fists of fury and rely on strike moves to cave in faces. Could be useful when heading into a first blood match. Harder than a week-old dog turd and packing a 'never say die' attitude, Brawlers are sure to be title contenders.





"Yuke's has implemented a range of new fighting styles specific for each competitor"





BRYAN WILLIAMS
CREATIVE MANAGER

Developer Interview

PSU3 called out SmackDown's Brian Williams. Here's what he had to say

Tell us three words that best describe your game
⊗ Intense wrestling action!

Up until last year every platform had different WWE properties but the Xbox 360 and now Wii are all under the *SmackDown* umbrella. Why the choice to go multi-format with next-gen consoles?
⊗ The history of the *SmackDown vs. Raw* franchise speaks for itself. The franchise has been the most consistent WWE video game in gaming history, in terms of quality, sales and resonating strongly with the fans. With the next generation of consoles finally upon us, what better time than now to take advantage of the burgeoning audience thirsting for that next generation gaming experience? Why limit your potential audience to a segment of the gaming community when you can make your game available to everyone, regardless of their console?

Do you think it's a risk assigning even more control to the sticks with the new Submission Struggle System?
⊗ Not at all! Like any change in controls made to a long-standing system, there was a bit of trepidation on our part as well as the fans. However, after having had a chance to experience the new control system first-hand, the response from fans has been overwhelmingly positive. I think that after trying out the new Struggle Submission System, fans will wonder how they were ever able to play without the analogue stick. Being able to control the amount of force you want to apply on an opponent is an infinitely much more satisfying and compelling experience than wildly mashing on the face buttons.

There's no sign of ECW in the game title but the extreme superstars are said to feature. Can you give us any insight as to how you intend to integrate them?
⊗ Of course! In addition to joining the roster, *WWE SmackDown vs. Raw 2008* will also feature exclusive ECW match types and weapons, allowing players to recreate the bone jarring, blood splattering matches only found on ECW programming.

Obviously the transition from last to next-gen consoles is a lengthy one, but what do you consider the major improvements to be in this iteration over last year's?
⊗ Last year's title was a huge success for us both critically and commercially, but there is always room for further improvement. In addition to all of the new features we have planned (Superstar Fighting Styles, Struggle Submission System, WWE 24/7 Mode, etc.), fans can look forward to experiencing a whole slew of improvements. The AI, especially in tag team situations, will be greatly improved from last year, as will commentary and other supporting game play features.

The season and general manager modes have been amalgamated into WWE 24/7 can you elaborate on exactly how different it will be?
⊗ In previous iterations of the game, the crux of Season mode revolved around the player headlining WrestleMania and walking away the champion. Similarly, the focus of General Manager Mode was to garner more viewers than the competing brand and be presented with the coveted General Manger of the Year award at WrestleMania. Completing one or both of these goals were tremendous achievements in and of themselves. However, does headlining one WrestleMania event automatically cement one's status as a bonafide WWE Legend? Take, for example, future WWE Legend The Undertaker. Not only has Undertaker appeared in 15 WrestleMania pay-per-views, he's remained undefeated in each one of those 15 matches! If that statistic alone isn't worthy of Hall of Fame contention, I don't know what is. The brand new WWE 24/7 Mode is about stepping into the shoes and living the life of a WWE Superstar. Players will experience first-hand the intense travel schedule, injuries, sudden fame and heated rivalries so prevalent in the WWE landscape. A gauge will be used to track and measure achievements made throughout your career, with the overall goal of being inducted into the prestigious WWE Hall of Fame.

We've heard you plan to take advantage of each console's individual attributes, does that mean there will be distinct differences between the three versions? Perhaps motion-control aspects for PS3 and Wii?
⊗ Taking advantage of each console's strength is of paramount importance to us as well as the fans. We'll be announcing more details in the future.

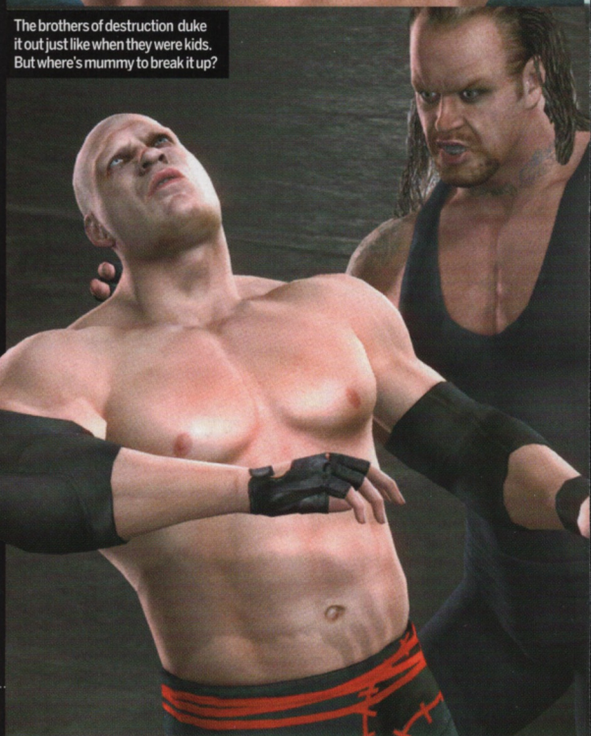
The new fighting style categories sound like a great idea, is it your desire to lean more towards traditional fighting games or just a natural direction the series is taking?
⊗ I definitely view the introduction of Superstar Fighting Styles as being a natural progression of the series' fantastic game play. The introduction of Superstar Fighting Styles come not so much as a nod to traditional fighting games and their proclivities but more out of our desire to accurately represent the individual characteristics and personality traits of the WWE Superstars. From a visual standpoint, you'd be hard pressed to find another WWE game with character models that look nearly as good as those found in the *SmackDown vs. Raw* franchise. However, it's one thing to have great-looking models, but it's quite another to have them behaving and acting in accordance to their on-screen personas in-game. As good as past titles were, the one thing that stood out more than anything else was how similar the game play experience was, regardless of the Superstar chosen. This was due to the fact that every Superstar in the game was able to perform every type of action in the game regardless of their size, weight and/or attribute limitations. Aside from their physical appearances, there really was no discernible difference between playing as Superstars like Kane or Rey Mysterio. With the infusion of these eight, wholly unique fighting styles (Powerhouse, Technical, High-Flyer, Brawler, Submission Artist, Dirty, Showman and Hardcore), each Superstar will play fundamentally different from one another. We are ultimately leaving it up to players to decide how they want to play the game. Do you want to play as a muscle-bound Powerhouse, wrecking opponents with your superhuman strength, or maybe you'd prefer playing as a quick and nimble High-Flyer soaring through the air with reckless abandon? How do you want to play?

Are the new fighting styles implemented in an effort to attract more than just wrestling fans to the *SmackDown* series?
⊗ The decision to include fighting styles had more to do with us wanting the Superstars to behave as they actually would on WWE programming.

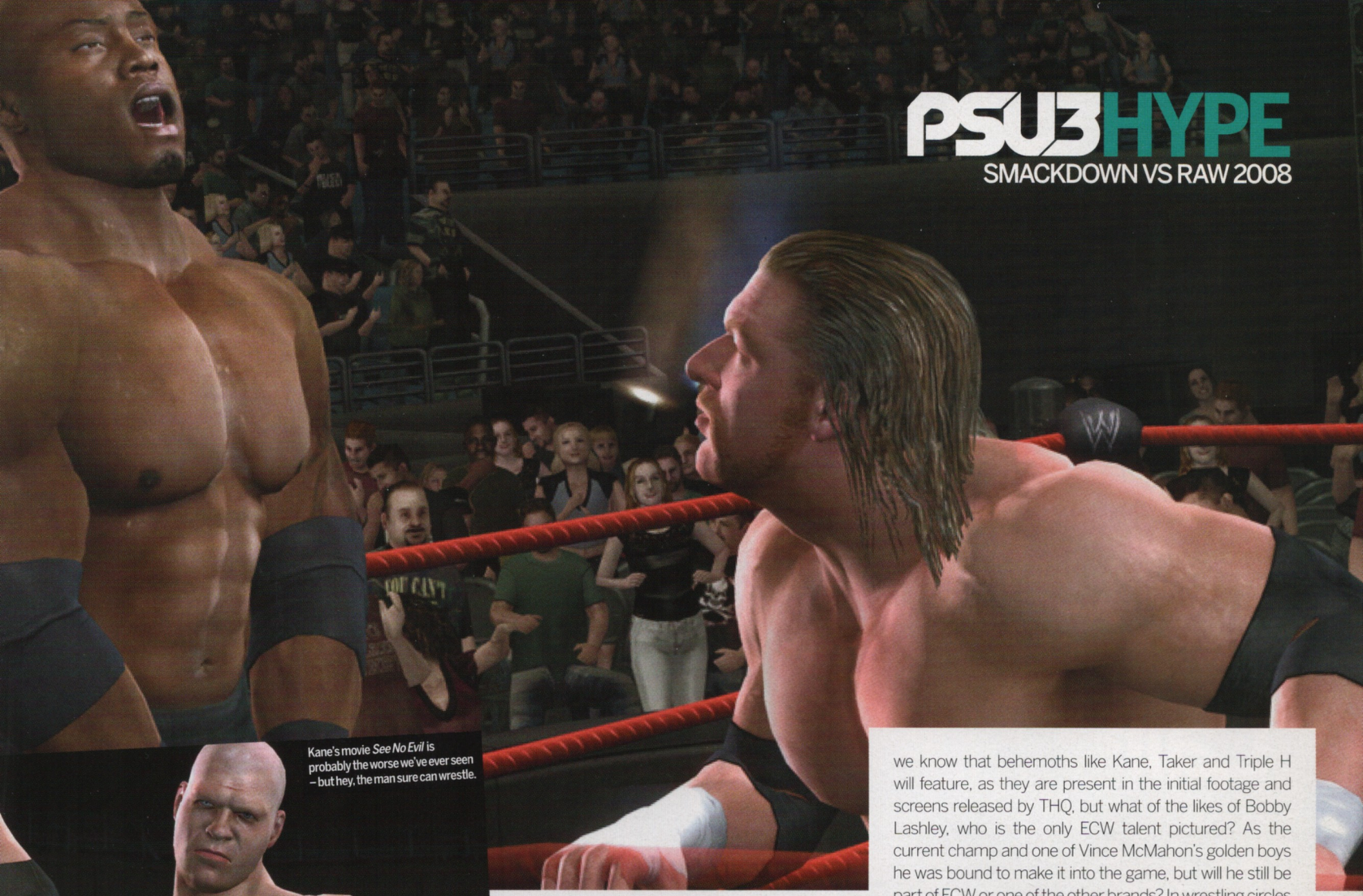
The Smackdown games are famed for it's legends – we don't suppose you want to let us in on who will be featuring in *SmackDown* Vs RAW 2008 do you?
⊗ No problem! Well, what kind of a Legend roster would it be without... (to be continued).







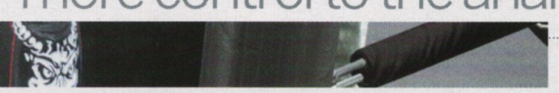
The brothers of destruction duke it out just like when they were kids. But where's mummy to break it up?





Kane's movie *See No Evil* is probably the worse we've ever seen – but hey, the man sure can wrestle.





"The 'Submission Struggle System' attributes more control to the analogue sticks"

All of these elements need to be addressed before starting out on the road to WWE superstardom, whether you choose an existing talent or create your own mammoth monstrosity. In fact, creating your own character is a much more exciting proposition this time around. The old Season and General Manager modes have been merged into what is now being called WWE 24/7 – alluding to the fact you'll be living the life of a superstar all day, everyday. Whereas in previous *SmackDown* iterations your goal was to become the champion or main event WrestleMania, here your challenge is to make yourself a living legend. Start out as a created character and it's a long road ahead; depending on your abilities in the squared circle and the decisions you make, it could take years to achieve your dreams. In 24/7 the spirit of the old GM mode lives on but it is much more character-centric. You have to schedule time to train, manage your character brand, choose allegiances and even jump franchises if needs be – anything to improve your chances of success. You have a set of preset (as yet unannounced) targets to reach, which could take up to three years – in the game world, of course – to achieve. If you're not one for long, drawn-out careers you could always play as someone already teetering on legendary status like The Undertaker or Triple H and then take them the rest of the way.

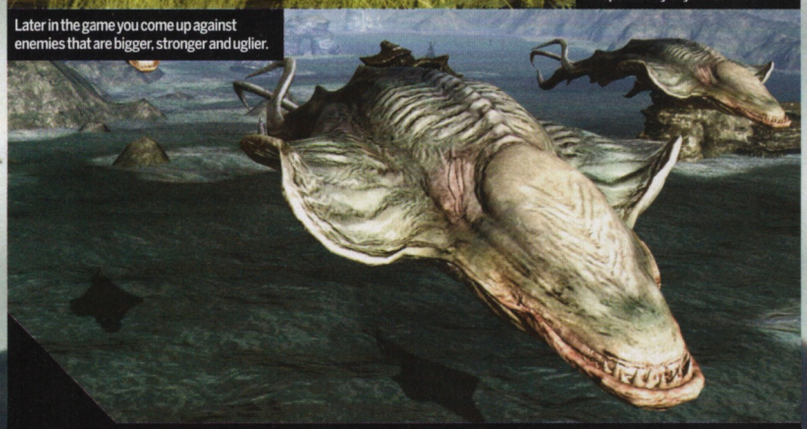
When it comes to actual Legends line-up, the guys at Yuke's are keeping their lips firmly buttoned; in fact at this stage we know very little about the roster. Obviously we know that behemoths like Kane, Taker and Triple H will feature, as they are present in the initial footage and screens released by THQ, but what of the likes of Bobby Lashley, who is the only ECW talent pictured? As the current champ and one of Vince McMahon's golden boys he was bound to make it into the game, but will he still be part of ECW or one of the other brands? In wrestling circles (or should that be 'rings'?) it has been rumoured for some time that the company's 'extreme' brand isn't performing as well as expected and unless things improve it's not long for this world. At present THQ maintain that ECW stars, arenas and matches will be represented in the game and on an equal footing with both SmackDown and Raw, both with no mention of the brand in the title we have to wonder. There is talk of an 'ECW invasion' angle but little else has been revealed.

Another important element of the game yet to be discussed in any real detail is the online play. With Xbox Live thriving and arrival of the new and improved PS Network, online throwdowns are more important than ever. Last year's game failed to set the online community alight, a feat Yuke's is determined to rectify in 2008. Though no online game modes have been announced, our pecks are dancing in anticipation of 30-man over-the-top royal rumbles or taking our created character online and competing for the one true 'world' title. As a matter of fact, there are a great many things about this game we're excited about, but also a few things that concern us. *SmackDown vs. Raw 2007* was a disappointment, it was suppose to be wrestling for a new generation but by implementing too many changes too quickly it lost some of its soul and we hope that history isn't going to repeat itself. Judging on what the development team has to say it does appear as though the mistakes that were made have been recognised, and the team is now concentrating on those key areas to ensure that *SmackDown*'s PlayStation 3 debut is not only a show-stopper but is truly 'the game'.▲●×■

Despite starting life on the PlayStation this will be the first* SmackDown *game to appear on Sony's new system, so expect a very grand debut.



In *Lair*, the two armies duke it out independently of your control.



Later in the game you come up against enemies that are bigger, stronger and uglier.

Lair

Pushing the boundaries in terms of 'scale'

INFORM **Publisher** SCEE | **Developer** Factor 5 | **Release Date** September **Players** 1 | **Genre** Action | **Website** www.us/playstation.com/lair

We can think of no other game on the PS3 release list that has split opinion quite as much as Factor 5's, *Lair*. After an initial play-test of the now-instantly recognisable 'Bridge Level', some loved the concept of being able to cause havoc with a dirty great dragon in real-time using the Sixaxis controller, while others bulked at the rather rudimentary way in which both the flight and combat sections play out. The truth is *Lair* is never going to appeal to a hardcore audience, but if executed correctly it could have massive appeal to that oh-so-important casual contingent.

So what lies behind the veil of mindless lizard carnage? Seemingly quite linear in nature, individual missions will allow for various branching goals, giving you at least some degree of choice when it comes to achieving your goals. You can choose to annihilate the troops on the ground with your atomic breath or take chunks out of your fellow flyers – or why not combine the two by jumping off your dragon onto another and then whaling on enemy riders with a mace? But this is unfortunately the only type of hand-to-hand combat you'll be involved in; Factor 5 has reiterated that you're a dragon rider and not a soldier, so there will be no on-foot sections, which could disappoint those who wanted to dismount and get stuck in. There are compensating elements, of course, one being the ability to increase your dragon's skill set moving from simple fire-breathing and trampling, to learning how to pick and throw other mythical beasts into the destructible environment.

Improving your skills is vital as you progress further in the game; while puny humans and some of the smaller dragons might fall under your flame, later enemies will be almost immune to fiery attacks and will require a more physical approach. The more destructive you get, the bigger your Carnage meter grows, helping you earn your end of level medals and, of course, those precious Home trophies. Though the majority of the damage you cause will be to other dragons and their riders, it has been revealed that some missions require you to destroy cities, obliterate squadrons of soldiers and fend off sea vessels. It's encouraging to see the game has a good mix of objectives; variety could be the key to making *Lair* more than just an elaborate vehicle designed to showcase Sony's Sixaxis. ▲●×■

Lair *is currently slated for release in September; however, a PS Network demo is due in July, so expect more on the winged warriors very soon.*



We're convinced we could trick anyone into thinking this was a real set from an upcoming Aardman Animations' flick.







If you want to reach the next platform, you've got to add a means to get there – it's safe to say, it's completely up to you.

Big, wide world

The boundaries have been lifted...

As well as the sheer ingenuity that comes packaged with *LittleBigPlanet*, the basis for a universal community is also on the cusp of becoming a reality. Once you've ploughed hour after hour into making a top-notch level, you'll be able to upload it to a worldwide server for other creators to download. Much like a leaderboard, each map can be voted for and then get ranked by popularity; there's the possibility that your design could be astounding players across the globe.

Current rumours suggest that a closed-beta will take place later this year, and although the focal point of it will be to see what feedback *LBP* receives, it also presents a fantastic opportunity for those lucky enough to be involved: the best constructions may end up featuring in the full retail version come 2008. If that's not enough to get the hairs on the back of your neck standing on end, we don't know what is.







Check out the Evel Knievel-style character, how cool is he?!

LittleBigPlanet

The future of videogames is unbelievably cute

INFORM **Publisher** Sony | **Developer** Media Molecule | **Release Date** TBA 2008
Players 1-4 | **Genre** Platformer | **Website** www.mediamolecule.com/games.html

If there was one entity no one thought would completely change the outlook of the videogame industry, it's sweet, harmless and, above all else, loveable characters. In a market so intent on releasing shooters with as much blood and gore as possible, and some guts thrown in for good measure, it was somewhat of a surprise when Phil Harrison revealed Sony's most ambitious project to date at this year's Game Developers Conference.

Known as *LittleBigPlanet*, its true genius doesn't come down to these adorable creatures. The brilliance revolves around the blank canvas every player is given to manipulate as they see fit. A small animal (of sorts) that looks like a sack – dubbed by some as 'Sackman' – has power over the world, and through him you place different materials into an area, create a level and then play through it. You may fill your space with a piece of wood or a rubber ball, and each adheres perfectly to the laws of physics. So, if a spherical object has been placed to block your path, you simply approach it and push it out the way, just as you would in real life. However, due to the thought and effort Media Molecule has put into *LittleBigPlanet*, any item can be altered – including its weight and texture; if you decide to make the object ridiculously huge with a jagged edge, it'll take more than one character to budge it.

Although this may sound relatively simple to those who aren't thinking big, it really is incredibly special. Every mechanic, deliberately, has been kept simple, so altering the universe and designing levels is easy and accessible to everyone. You don't have to understand the inner-workings of physics or game development to start creating; you decide what you want and get on with it. That's not to say you can't come up with intricate and complex stages – it all depends how much time and thought you want to put in.

Such is the customisation available; a puzzle can be set up in literally hundreds of ways. Getting past a giant orange may require hurtling over the top of it, or gathering momentum to get it rolling. If what we've seen so far is representative of the finished product, this is just the tip of the iceberg. Hell, you could even invite some friends round to join in the fun, work together to produce a map and then continue the love by trying to overcome it; the community that could grow out of *LittleBigPlanet* has massive potential. After all, user content can be uploaded to the PlayStation Network and then downloaded by different users (see 'Big, wide world' boxout). Media Molecule even hinted that new parts could be found to build more complicated and diverse levels. To say the future is exceedingly bright for a venture like this is a major understatement.

The icing on the cake, particularly to a casual consumer, is how pretty the darn thing is. Despite its cutesy, sweet art style, the graphics resemble that of a Pixar movie. Watching how the four critters interact with their environment and each other is almost scary; they look astoundingly real and their movements are near perfect.

There's no surprise after seeing Sony's great hope in action why it stole the show at GDC 2007. The emphasis on working together and solving problems is just the beginning, and the variety, adapting, and community aspects that Sony is looking to focus on will be the catalyst to send *LittleBigPlanet* into the next stratosphere. True, at its heart, cynics will claim it is nothing more than a platformer, but how many times have you sat down with a *Mario* or *Sonic* game and thought, "I could do better than that" – now you will have the chance to prove it, and on nothing less than a worldwide scale. *LittleBigPlanet* could well and truly be a defining moment in the age of the next generation and maybe even the history of videogames. ▲●✖■

LittleBigPlanet's *life actually started way back in 2006; known as 'Yellowhead', the starring role was filled by, surprisingly, a character named Yellow Head and featured ragdoll physics.*





This kind of screenshot clearly shows you that EA is thinking non-linear this time.

Not that we're stating the obvious or anything but one of us is at a serious disadvantage here.



Medal Of Honor Airborne

We tumble and fall, together we crawl

INFORM **Publisher** Electronic Arts | **Developer** EA LA | **Release Date** August
Players 1-15 | **Genre** Action, Adventure, FPS | **Website** www.moh.ea.com

Some advice: forget what you know about *Medal Of Honor: Airborne* is different. Sure, we can deliberate aesthetics all you want, concentrating on such things as the familiar-sounding orchestral score, its particular art direction or the fact every bloody level is still preceded by a quote from someone supposedly important and prophetic. Forget all of that – it's purely surface level stuff. And when, in the past, we were dealing with what is essentially the videogame equivalent of a historical Hollywood blockbuster, that may have counted for something. Visceral thrills and all that. But times are changing. *Medal Of Honor Airborne* is moving beyond that. In fact, one might say EA is itself taking a leap, putting many of the elements that defined the series on the line.

But don't let that worry you too much: *Airborne* is still about kicking Nazi arse, which we experienced during an extensive hands-on period at EA. Having spent considerable time playing and exploring a huge level known as 'Infinite Mischief' – and given the fact we've played almost every *MOH* game to date, we can safely assert that *Airborne* represents almost the same huge leap that *Allied Assault* did on PC compared to the original PSone games.

"EA is itself taking a leap, putting many of the elements that defined the series on the line"



The level begins in a large tent, the action preceded by a short briefing sequence. Here, one of your commanding officers details the forthcoming level and what your objectives are via projected stills on a white board. We got to see an accurate aerial layout of the level, where several prominent areas – in this case four AA guns that needed to be destroyed – were highlighted, as well as additional pieces of information. Once the talk was over, control was given to us and we had the option to explore the tent a little: listen to other soldiers talk, look at plans scattered around, generally try to get more details. Once satisfied we made our way to the exit and left. From there we were presented with a short load process, a quick quote from some historical figure and, finally, were thrust into the action itself.

Or, more accurately, we were thrust *above* the action – the level opening just seconds before the game's main character, Private First Class Boyd Travers, jumps with the rest of the 82nd Airborne Division. It's typical war stuff: the shit has hit the fan, our plane being struck by the AA guns. As the red light flashes on and off there's tons of shouting and screaming. Everyone hustling forward in a panic. It's all suitably and incredibly hectic. To our left, someone appears to be choking, unable to move. Ahead of us, outside the plane's cockpit, a soldier lies dead on the floor – probably thrown by the turbulence. We can't move through any of this, but we can look around. One-by-one our fellow paratroopers leap out from the burning confines... and then it's our turn.

You don't have to escape the confines just yet, however: you can wait by the door for several seconds, deciding to jump later. That way, you'll be further over the landing area and will therefore have the chance to land somewhere you probably couldn't had you jumped straight away. So, after a few seconds of much deliberation we leap out, and begin our fall. Obviously, it's even worse out here. The reddened sky awash with gunfire, spotlights, burning planes and falling paratroopers. The town is beneath us, and we're coming in hard and fast.



We crash onto the tiled roof of a tall building and fall flat on our face. We haven't quite got used to perfecting landings just yet – or 'Greased Landing' as the game refers to them. Instead, we hit the rooftop and spend the next few seconds picking ourselves up and cutting away the parachute. The more we play this level the more we come to see how landing is everything. Botch it like we did, but in the middle of an intense skirmish, and it could find your arse being pumped full of lead before you even get to raise your rifle. Come down straight, pull back on the analogue stick just as you land, however, and Boyd will hit the ground running – weapon raised immediately. We also botched our sense of direction. You'll see green smoke emitting from certain areas as you approach the ground. These are safe spots, set up by pathfinders who leapt before you.

The green smoke areas are where members of the Airborne Division will be headed, so the general idea is to join them and play it safe. That said, and as we clearly highlighted, you can land anywhere – absolutely anywhere – within locations and go about your own endeavours. This is the first *Medal Of Honor* game that can proudly declare itself non-linear – a godsend for this genre of games. Okay, so it's still tremendously annoying that you can't open doors in the game, despite the fact we're at that stage now where you should be able to blow them apart either with guns or grenades. But you take what you can, and *Airborne* is already giving us a ton of stuff beyond its non-linearity.

Chief of these is the unquestionably impressive AI. While your squad can barely land a shot, at least in the build we played, your enemies are truly scary bastards. Encounter one and you can happily take about a full magazine, at point blank range, walking away unscathed. Run into several enemies, however, and the game suddenly becomes much more intense. With each enemy displaying what appears to be random and completely unpredictable AI, this could be the first *Medal Of Honor* game to successfully portray WWII battle at a level close to what it must have been like for those who fought in it.

There's also the element, at least at the start of each level, of never being sure which direction you take is always the safest. You can go anywhere within the confines of the massive levels, and approach objectives however you wish. But at the beginning of each mission it feels like the enemy is everywhere... and they are. Thankfully, a compass shows you whenever friendlies and enemies are in close proximity. And as far as objectives go, the best strategy we found was to brave one at a time – rather than running from one to the other at different stages of completion throughout.

You see, when you die you'll respawn in the air – just after you've pulled your parachute. This way you'll get another chance to explore areas you may not have during your previous run. Also, if you've completed any of the objectives, which appear as gold stars on your map, they'll stay completed. So, as we said, our best strategy was approaching each objective one at a time. And as we also mentioned earlier, said objectives were four huge AA guns that needed blowing up. Destroying them was classic *Medal Of Honor* stuff: a transparent red bomb clearly indicated where we needed to place our charge. We then held the ⊗ button to place it. Job done – no daft attempts at Battle Action Sequences like *Call Of Duty 3*.

After planting the final charge we were surprised to find the level actually continued, with new objectives emerging.

"Airborne represents almost the same huge leap that Allied Assault did on PC compared to the original PSone games"

Given how long it took to destroy just the AA guns themselves, we asked one of the developers present at the hands-on how long each level generally was. He told us that highly-skilled gamers could expect to complete each in around 45 minutes at the very least, which should mean around an hour – or a bit more – for the rest of us. *Airborne* also seems to utilise a similar trick to the aforementioned *Call Of Duty 3*, whereby in-game cut-scenes act as load areas. That's where the comparisons end, however... well, unless you're going to be anal and point out that each is a WWII FPS, addressing some of the same missions.

That's certainly true of *Airborne* itself. However, it has the benefit of giving us a new perspective on things, literally. As Boyd Travers you'll experience five of the biggest airdrops in World War II history; in addition to that, you may stumble across areas you experienced in previous *Medal Of Honor* games, which could make for interesting gameplay. Speaking of previous games, *Airborne* borrows a thing or two from *European Assault* in terms of screen decoration. Your HUD has a distinctly arcade feel to it at the moment – more modern-looking than historical. It was also jarring when, in the middle of an intense fight, we suddenly hit slow-motion and a huge on-screen prompt informed us that we had unlocked a pistol upgrade. Other bizarre touches were an indicator at the very bottom of the game that stated what kind of kill you just pulled, be that Headshot, Melee Kill, Pistol Kill etc. It all just seems a tad superfluous. At least from what we played.

You can't really criticise a game during its preview stage, especially when there's quite a bit of time left on its development, but the controls did take a little getting used to. Sure, it was smooth sailing from once we got a hang on things, but you can't really call *Airborne* a 'pick up and play' game at this stage – which is something past games were. We also found it strange that you can't seem to strafe while aiming. Thankfully, EA has ample time to amend any problems and we really hope it does: they were the only grey spots in the otherwise impressive hands-on.

Our biggest concern was by how scripted it was, given past games in the franchise. Once upon a time, highly-scripted WWII FPSs such as *Medal Of Honor* would wow gamers with sequences like the Omaha Beach landing. But such things have arguably become something of a bane for this franchise, and we feared that would be the case with *Airborne*. Surely more power means EA can stage even bigger, more





A gun mounted on sandbags is perhaps one of the most affilated images with WWII games





One of your more standard areas: take out the big guns that are shooting down your planes



Your pal here can hide himself up against pillars and such... but you can't, strangely enough.



PATRICK GILMORE
VICE PRESIDENT AND EXEC PRODUCER

Developer Interview

Hitting the frontline with Airborne's executive producer...

What convinced you to return to the European theatre?

⊗ The lore of the Pacific theatre is very different from the European. The Pacific is more of an American theatre as opposed to the multinational Europe. The lore of the Pacific is of retribution for Pearl Harbor, whereas Europe is more of valour, sacrifice and fighting the ultimate definition of evil: Hitler and the Nazis. So a lot of what's great about World War II is it's a multinational effort, this great kind of allied community and very clear line between good and evil that you find in Europe but much less the Pacific.

So what are you achieving in *Airborne* that you've wanted to do for a long time?

⊗ A non-linear FPS... it's the holy grail of first-person shooters. When we first started this game I sat down with the technical director and said here's what I want to do: it's going to be airborne and it's going to feature an air drop and we're going to be able to start anywhere. He's like, "You're never going to do it... there's no way". This was a couple of years ago, and I said, "What are you talking about? It's like one feature – it's an airdrop!" And he said, "You don't understand: it touches on everything in the game."

You pretty much had to start over again?

⊗ Really, I can't tell you how much stuff we just had to forget we ever knew, because it was leading us down the wrong path. So things we used to script we now systematise because nothing is scripted in the game. Things we used to plan now happen spontaneously, and it's sheer luck. You've hopefully seen how much variation it provides.

What avenues do you think WWII-based shooters need to explore in the future to remain entertaining?

⊗ Well I don't want to give away my secrets but I must say that, philosophically, I felt like the genre in general, product-by-product basically widened the lens. To the point where we were kind of watching 'The Greatest Hits of WWII': "Yeah! We're going to have Battle of the Bulge! And we're going to go to Pearl Harbour! And Monte Casino too!" It's like there's no attention given to the idea this was somebody's experience. And what we really want *Airborne* to do is something that had a much more refined and consistent and clear through-line. I wanted to focus just on the experience of one division and that's it.

So it's the 82nd Airborne Division all the way through?

⊗ To the exclusion of everything else. People say, "Well the 101st, they fought in the Battle of the Bulge – you should do that!" And it's like "No, they didn't drop... there was no jump in Battle of the Bulge" This game's about jumping out of airplanes into combat. The amount of innovation in this game, the amount of new gameplay by getting deep into these experiences is staggering. And that's where the real richness of the product comes in. We want to get away from that 'checking all the boxes' mentality, into a deeper, more focused kind of game.







Extra features

More content for your buck

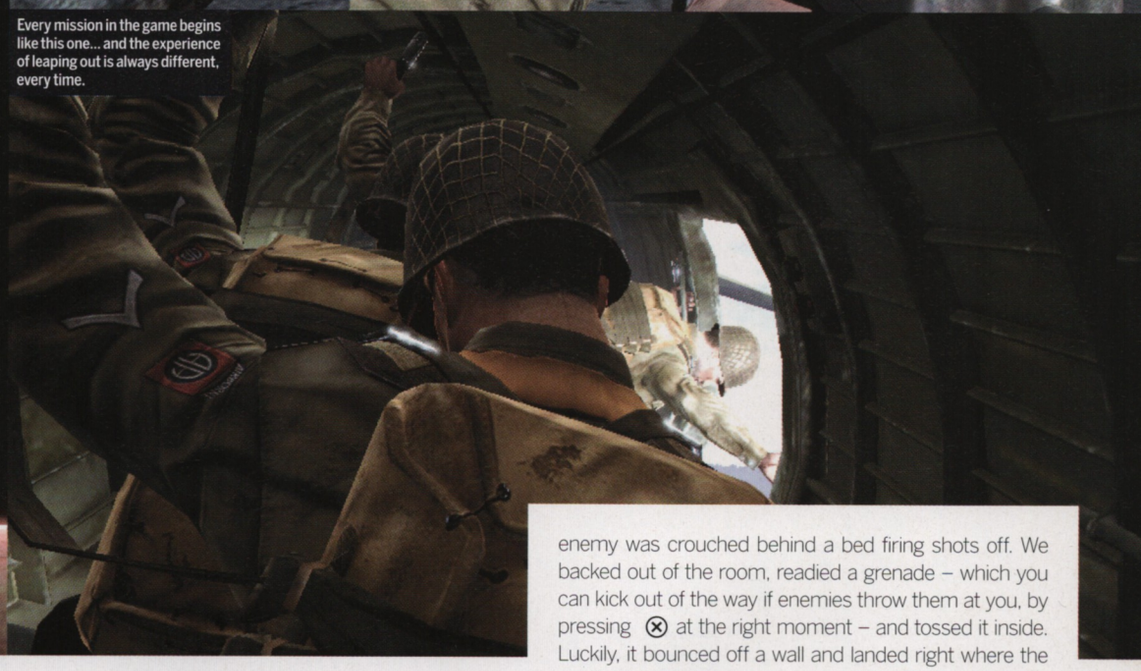
Though it won't be anywhere near as extensive as *Pacific Assault* – which had its trivia built into the game itself, enabling players to understand the Pacific Theatre a little more in-depth (as well as where the term 'Gung-ho' actually came from) – *Medal Of Honor Airborne* will have extra historical content. According to Patrick Gilmore: "There's a whole bunch of DVD-like add-on material, and not just like the making of the game but in particular about events in the war."

He continues: "One of the things we did was, we took our historical consultant to all the battle sites that we've re-created for the game. Basically he describes in that site exactly what happened. He's there and he's essentially saying "These were the divisions involved, this is where they came from" – he's literally pointing. It's less about the little attempt at a video style, and much more about going to the spots and describing specifically just what happened"

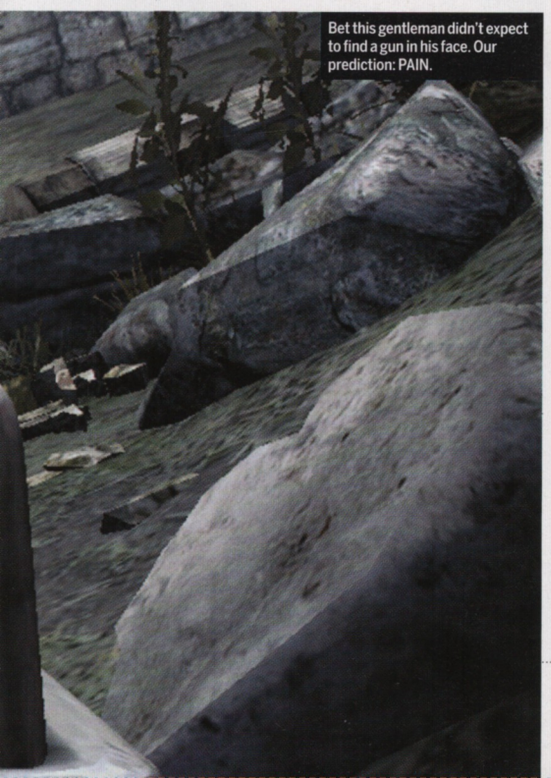




Every mission in the game begins like this one... and the experience of leaping out is always different, every time.



"Airborne has an air of Halo about it, with gamers essentially creating their own set pieces"



Bet this gentleman didn't expect to find a gun in his face. Our prediction: PAIN.

» cinematic sequences? Imagine how surprised we were to find a lack of scripted sequence in the level we played, at least after the jump. Stuff just happens and it changes each time. Thanks to the excellent AI it had an air of *Halo* to it, with us essentially creating our own set-pieces.

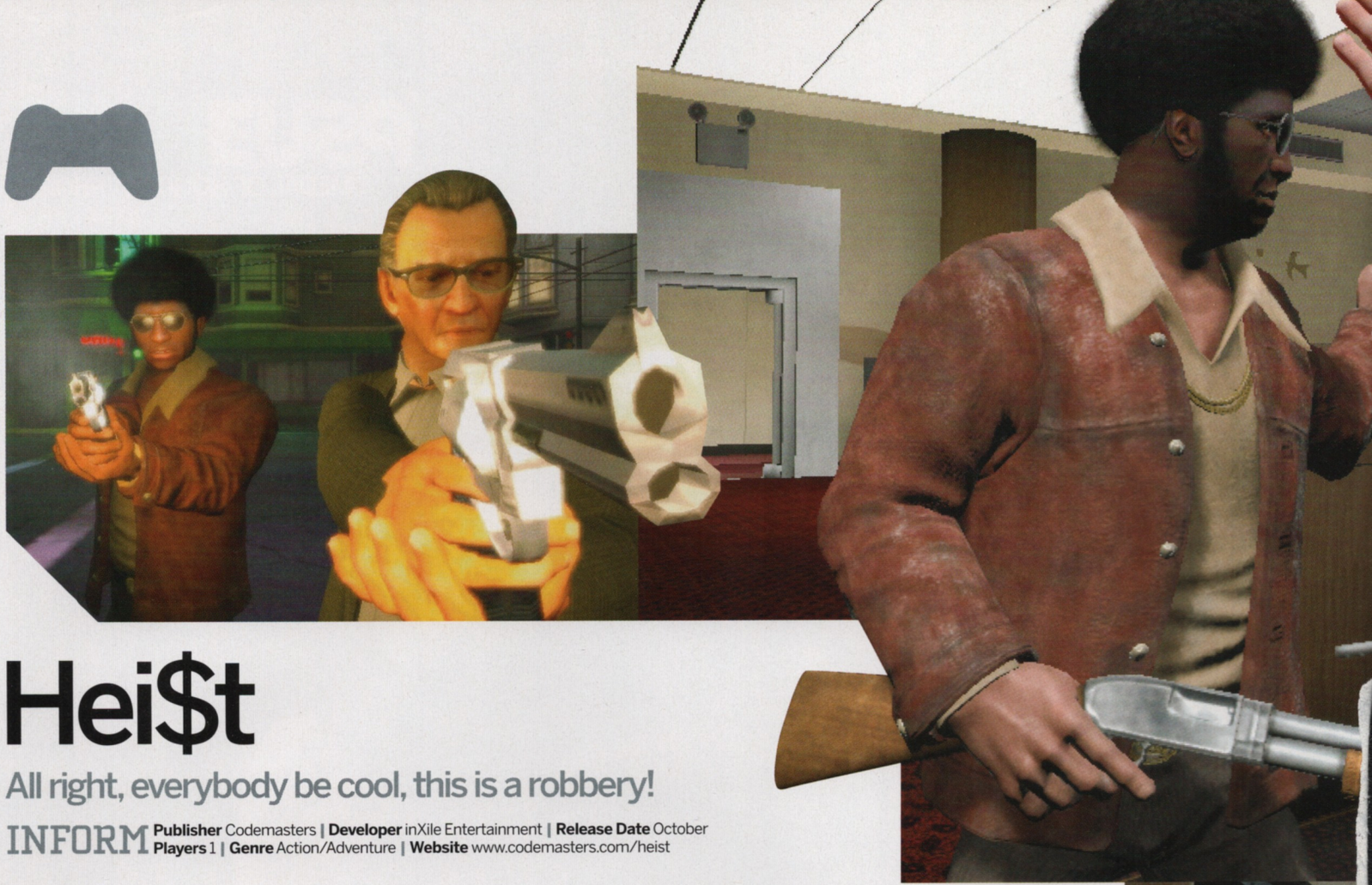
And they were different each time, which should raise the replay value immensely. So should the idea of parachuting into battle. We also really liked the idea of respawning in the air, as it enables you to try different tactics if you first failed. At one point we were trying to enter a large building with heavy resistance outside. For the first few attempts we just tried ploughing straight up the steps, and in through the front door. However, upon our third or fourth jump we noticed a watchtower missing its roof. It overlooked the area leading to the huge building we were trying to enter. A lone soldier was hiding inside. We aimed towards the tower as we landed. Thankfully, we got up in time to shoot the soldiers. From there, we could pick the majority of them off from a distance – making our entrance much safer and easier.

Another fairly memorable moment occurred when we had very little health left and few bullets remaining in our rifle. We were in what appeared to be a house, and a single enemy was crouched behind a bed firing shots off. We backed out of the room, readied a grenade – which you can kick out of the way if enemies throw them at you, by pressing ⊗ at the right moment – and tossed it inside. Luckily, it bounced off a wall and landed right where the soldier was. He then stood and ran straight out of the room – inadvertently towards us, where we filled him full of holes and stole his ammo. There were many moments such as this, but all of them relatively different.

We weren't the only journalists there, you understand. There were several and we all took continual turns playing. Doing so highlighted our favourite part of the game: it isn't single note design anymore. Nothing is clear-cut or definitive in terms of what you'll see because EA LA is putting emphasis on your enemies, rather than linear game design. You can't learn levels by set pieces and, more than anything else, it makes *Medal Of Honor Airborne* feel a little bit more special than previous games. The idea of an open environment, parachuting from planes and intelligent opposition has changed the *Medal Of Honor* formula we used to know and love. It really is different now.

It feels like an immersive sim, leaving you to accomplish objectives in the way you choose. That should make conversation between gamers interesting as you discuss your strategies for the same situations. Throughout the last decade or so, the *MOH* franchise has taken millions of players to war... but only now, with *Airborne*, will they get to bring their stories back with them. ▲●×■

Airborne *is set across four nations: Italy, France, Holland and Germany. The final mission was described as "The Death Star of* Medal Of Honor Airborne*" by executive producer Patrick Gilmore.*



Hei$t

All right, everybody be cool, this is a robbery!

INFORM **Publisher** Codemasters | **Developer** inXile Entertainment | **Release Date** October **Players** 1 | **Genre** Action/Adventure | **Website** www.codemasters.com/heist

Now *Hei$t* was something of a surprise to us. The only previous titles that have ever come close to even attempting to emulate the excitement of a stick-up, bank robbery or robbery were a couple of shoddy PS2 titles, namely *Reservoir Dogs* and *The Plan*. Even then, they were both very different games to that which Californian developer inXile is currently working on. No, this isn't something you'll have seen before, and even if this effort doesn't quite hit the mark, you can pretty much guarantee a glut of similar titles over the next couple of years. Roll on the bank-job genre.

Crim-sims are ten-a-penny nowadays and just as valuable. The trouble is that a vast majority of them don't put the player in any kind of situation. A bank-job in a current title usually goes along the lines of 'walk in, kill a few folk, blow up the safe and run out with the cash, taking full advantage of the cops' inability to either run or shoot'. *Hei$t* just isn't like that. Thank god. No, *Hei$t* is all about the job. From conception to completion, the bank-jobs are what separates this from every other free-roaming shooter on the market, most notably *GTA*. It's commonplace for all but the most budget of open-world titles to attempt to distance themselves from Rockstar's seminal action/adventure, but in most cases it's difficult to see where the differences lie. Not so with *Hei$t*. While on paper it may seem like a cheap clone, the differences only make themselves apparent when you actually get down to the nitty-gritty of pulling off a job.

Sure, there's driving, there's shooting and there's a bunch of missions spread throughout the San-Fran of the Sixties, in which it's set. We won't shy away from the fact that we were initially unimpressed by these sections, which err depressingly on the unimaginative side, but once you get to a bank it's easy to see where the effort is going. In fact, the fun starts well before the bank's threshold is crossed. Don't get us wrong, this isn't likely to be the most intricate system of preparation, but it's along the lines of the original *Rainbow Six* titles, where your band of thieves can be placed and given orders to speed up the robbery process.

'Deliberate often, but decide once' is the order of the day here and with the planning stages any job can be made as easy or as difficult as your skill allows. The first stage is all about finding and exposing weaknesses in the bank security. Getting access to intel about the place, casing it and obtaining plans are all part of the process. With information about how busy it gets at various times, how many guards are on duty and the quality of the safe, it's reasonably easy to build a plan of action to minimise any commotion and get in and out in the shortest time possible. Getting to, not to mention inside, the vault and managing the crowd is where the real meat of the job happens; maintaining a level of discipline amongst your crew is vital too, given that one nervous shot is all it takes to screw up an entire job. Getting away is another key part of the process; unlike many other crim-sim, you're unlikely to be getting away from anything with a straightforward 'dash-to-victory' attitude, as the cops will drop you in seconds should you attempt it at an inopportune time. It's clearly a huge focus of the game, and while it makes strides away from the regulation pap we expect these days, many other sections we've seen don't hold our interest nearly as well.

Early peeks at *Hei$t* have made it clear exactly what inXile is trying to do with the game and we love the idea. However, as it's at such an early stage of development, we couldn't say how it's shaping up on a technical level. At the minute it's difficult to get over the shoddy visuals, but hope is a wonderful thing – if *Hei$t* manages to brush up well for its winter release, we're looking at one of the games of the year right here. ▲●×■

Developer inXile cites a number of films as being an influence, not least of which is **Point Break.**



Here we have a retro-style Robin Hood and his band of merry thieves. They're collecting money for the poor, right?







Voice box

Screaming at your TV is fun

Other games have tried with a voice-recognition feature in the past, but have always taken a functional approach to it. *Hei$t* includes a voice command function, but unlike titles such as *SOCOM*, or *Rainbow Six*, it's been put in to add a little more fun to proceedings. The idea is not to monotonously chant orders into the mic, but to get into the spirit of a bank-job. A Ramsey-esque level of profanity is suggested here and while the commands are likely to remain pretty unvaried, you're bound to enjoy the freestyle swear-a-thon it could well become.



Meet the boys

Johnny, Kid, Crumb and Cracker

Okay, they sound a little like children's cartoon characters, but this lot are the team that make the heists happen. You play Johnny, a long-time con with a master plan and sideburns to match, and are in charge of the moves. Crumb is your gunman on the scene, while Kid takes the car sections and Cracker deals with the safes. They all have differing personalities and will approach situations in varying manners. Crumb, for example, often takes a more aggressive approach to people management, while Kid will be a little calmer. Should you see them do something particularly good, players can reward them with a high-five or positive phrase, which will increase the chances of them performing that act again. We haven't really seen this in action, as that would require extended play, but the idea of creating your team in this way is an intriguing one.



Seminal rally racing in the Castrol Celica. Just like the real thing.



Apparently buggies are featured in the latest *Colin McRae*. Will they be as good as *TOCA*?



The main thrust of the game, though, is old-fashioned point-to-point rallying.

Colin McRae: Dirt

A little McRae of sunshine

INFORM **Publisher** Codemasters | **Developer** In-house
Release Date June 2007 | **Players** 1 | **Genre** Racing
Website www.codemasters.com/colinmcrae3

Over a sextillion audio crash combinations, up to 20 kilometres of course on a single track, 46 cars, 182 liveries, 61 tracks and up to 100 players online can race point-to-point at any one time. Those are the facts. Well, some of them at least. We're not really interested in facts when it comes to titles like *McRae*. In fact, it's difficult to get really het up about what's bound to stay the same for a good long while yet. The clear hike in graphical quality is nice, the physics are delicious, and the environments strikingly realistic at speed. The trouble is, it's *McRae*. Regardless of the quality of the piece, we'd be lying if we said we were really looking forward to it. Seeing a release on 360 and PC before it hits shelves on Blu-ray is another factor to consider, and while it's almost as great as we expected – there were some issues with the grass and clipping – it's one of those sturdy titles that Codemasters does so well every year or so. ▲●✕■

Interest isn't particularly high around here, but fans will undoubtedly love the immense jump in the visuals and the ability to test yourself online.


TOYOTA
castrol
K-AM 2555



Apparently this particular design of Zeppelin was being considered by the Nazis toward the end of WWII.





Turning Point: Fall Of Liberty

The new Medal Of Duty: Road To European Assault

INFORM **Publisher** Codemasters | **Developer** Spark Unlimited | **Release Date** November **Players** 1 | **Genre** FPS | **Website** www.codemasters.com/fallofliberty

Uber-Nazis, in our opinion, should probably be left alone for a bit. They're not conducive to fantastic storylines, they're well used and, given the amount of imagination going into character design nowadays, they just seem a little, well, 'old school'. Just because Spark Unlimited has chosen to include them as a fairly major element of its latest endeavour, *Turning Point: Fall Of Liberty*, doesn't put us right off it, but it doesn't start on a good footing. If early viewings are anything to go by, expect the *Turning Point* franchise to take aspects of the two biggest WWII series, namely *COD* and *MOH*, and slap a little 'alternate history' on it.

The most obvious example of this comes in the opening scene, which felt much like early PS2 versions of many shooters. Grandiose, explosive and 'in your face', the intro sees you take control of honest Joe Regular who, until moments previously, was happily going about his life as a construction worker. Being atop a half-built skyscraper at the start of the game offers the opportunity to view, in epic scale, the invasion of America by the Nazis. The downside of the section we saw was that it takes so many cues from past titles; particularly in the rather basic way the action is delivered.

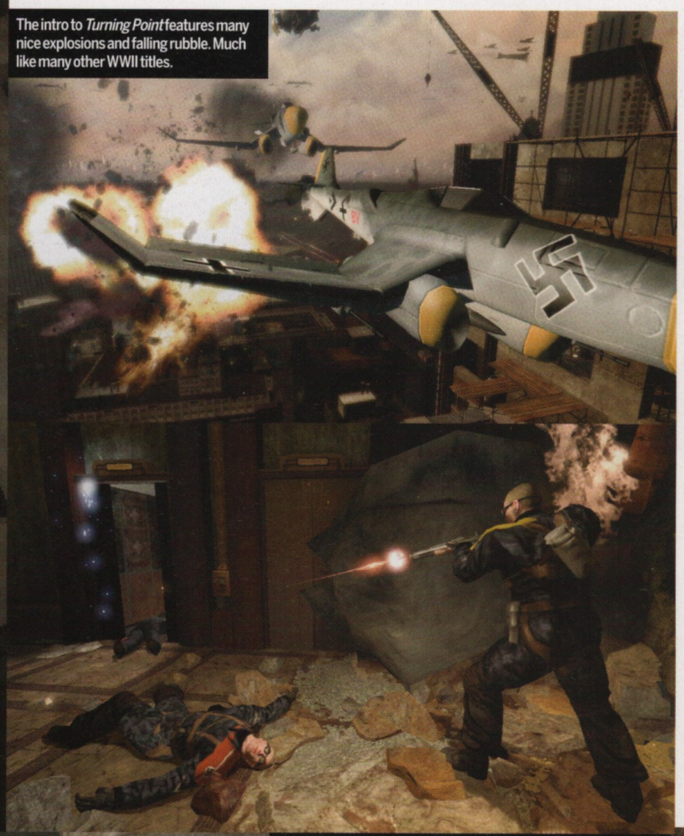
Make no bones about it, *Fall Of Liberty* is a linear a title as you can imagine. We're not slating it for the lack of routes, quests or paths by any means, but the feel is so overwhelmingly – and unnecessarily – primitive, it's difficult to see it as anything more than a derivative take on some great titles of the past. Routes through the buildings are often blocked off at the last minute by falling rubble, forcing the exploration of the level through very clearly defined avenues. These kind of interactive intros, where players are immediately thrown into the action used to be cleverly designed segments of play that made the player's experience as analogous to the protagonist's as possible. Now they're just a little tired. That's only one area of the game, of course, but we suspect that many aspects will continue in the same vein to the detriment of the experience.

Sure, we haven't seen a huge amount of innovation in those key areas, but there are a number of points of interest, not least of which is a considered approach to melee combat – the kind that we haven't seen for a good long while. Environmental kills feature heavily, and we've seen a range of effective melee combat in first-person shooters of late, but the most complete aspect of the game so far has to be the variety of kills on offer when you run out of ammo or have no weapons. Another attractive touch is the third-person view that the camera adopts when you perform a manoeuvre such as mantling or climbing ladders. From past experience this kind of thing helps to reinforce the feeling of immersion but as it stands now, the character model is neither unique or of a high enough quality to make the mechanic work.

We have had much to say about *Turning Point: Fall Of Liberty*, but not too much of it has been good. That's not to say it's a title to ignore completely, but we can't get overly exited about something that takes so much from games from the PlayStation 2 era. The whole 'Uber Nazi' alternate reality thing doesn't really do much for us either and, going on initial gut reactions, we're expecting something along the lines of *Urban Chaos* – an exciting, story-led shooter with a slightly 'budget' feel to it. There is a place for that, however, but don't expect anything truly revolutionary. ▲●✕■

Turning point ***looks like a reasonably enjoyable, if derivative, take on the WWII shooter.***





The intro to *Turning Point* features many nice explosions and falling rubble. Much like many other WWII titles.



Have gun, will travel

The phases of war

Turning Point is split into four sections. The first, set in New York is all about survival. Ammo is scarce, encounters are strange and frightening and the overriding objective, given that you're playing as a civilian, is solely survival. The next step is finding the resistance movement.

We've got to hand it to Insomniac: it's got mad skills in the character design area.





The Groovitron is a disco-ball device that makes your enemies bust out dance moves.

Deadlock and loaded

Previously, in Ratchet & Clank...

When their spaceship is overrun with robots, our heroes Ratchet and Clank find themselves taken prisoner. At the behest of the nefarious Gleeman Vox, president of Vox Entertainment, Ratchet is slapped with a Deadlock collar and forced to compete in the reality holovision show, Dreadzone. This brutal blood sport pits contestants against each other with the intent to kill. Clank is MIA as a playable character in the game, instead communicating with Ratchet from Mission Control.

Fighting his way through a series of skirmishes both on-foot and in vehicles, Ratchet finally wins his way to the top – facing off against the evil Vox. Our hero naturally wins, but not before Vox activates the self-destruct sequence. Ratchet manages to make a break for it with Crank in the last escape ship, just as the Dreadzone Station explodes, marking the end of the game and paving the way for *Tools Of Destruction*, their next adventure and the first on PlayStation 3.







A tall-ass enemy, but it's also cute as hell.

Ratchet & Clank Future: Tools Of Destruction

A next-gen spanner in the works

INFORM **Publisher** Sony | **Developer** Insomniac Games | **Release Date** September **Players** 1 | **Genre** Platform | **Website** www.insomniacgames.com/

Sometimes, you need to take a step back. Case in point: *Ratchet & Clank Future: Tools Of Destruction*. Beginning with *Ratchet & Clank* on the PS2, this popular franchise has excelled and evolved through each entry, pursuing a course that took it from a once bright and bubbly world into much darker territory along the way. The results were the brilliantly titled *Up Your Arsenal* and its sequel, *Gladiator*, the latter of which seemed to drop the platform-centric gameplay almost entirely. But with *Tools Of Destruction*, Insomniac Games – the developer of the highly entertaining, but arguably less than stellar, *Resistance: Fall Of Man* – is taking a step back, returning the franchise to its roots.

The game's palette is more colourful, back in line with the first two games – rather than the greys and browns dominating *Gladiator*. The comedy, always a high point for this series, is just as wicked as ever. And, yes, there are some incredibly cool weapons on offer, which we'll get to later. But more than these things, there's actually platform gameplay again and it's taking centre stage. While the later games swapped their adventure for adrenaline-fuelled, explosive combat – arguably causing the franchise to lose its way – said adventuring is back. And so is a general sense of wonder – accentuated by several gameplay specifics.

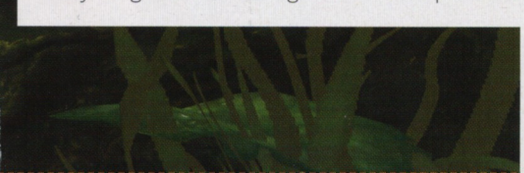
First, and key to this sense of wonder, is just how busy the game is. One thing Insomniac did prove with *Resistance*, above all else, was the scale at which the PlayStation 3 could perform without breaking into a sweat. *Tools Of Destruction* follows that, presenting huge landscapes for players to explore – and everything Insomniac is stuffing them with should make this the most populated and packed *Ratchet & Clank* game yet. It's epic on an unprecedented scale compared to previous entries, and is yet another example of what the PS3 can do for games, thanks to its mass storage. There's tons of stuff happening at any one time, especially in the popular city levels.

As has become standard with this franchise, *Tools Of Destruction* will offer some truly awesome destructive tools. Albeit, not in the way we might expect. The Groovitron, for example, is a disco ball-like device that causes your enemies to break into a unified dance number. It's amusing to watch, of course, and more in line with elements of the first two games, rather than the later ones. The Tornado Launcher is going to make wonderful use of the Sixaxis's motion sensing too: the weapon shoots out a large twister that the player can rotate using the tilt function. The beauty of this is the fact the player can still move via the analogue sticks as this happens. There are many undisclosed weapons too, of course, though one developer on the team did state the motion-sensing feature on the Sixaxis could work wonderfully with a flamethrower-style device. A hint? We will find out soon enough.

Speaking of finding things out, many of the questions and story strands left hanging from previous games are likely to get wrapped up in *Tools Of Destruction*. We are going to be treated not only to more information on Ratchet himself, but the history of the Lomboxes too – so far the series has established that only two exist. And what of Clank? Puritans of the series will be happy to know that, after his absence from the last game as a playable character, he is returning to the fore in *Tools Of Destruction*, which should hopefully make the gameplay that little bit more diverse, just like earlier entries.

By the time *Ratchet & Clank: Tools Of Destruction* is released in the UK, Home will be out. There is close to no information currently available on what the game will feature in relation to Sony's online forum and lobby, or how many people it'll support in its online multiplayer either. But you have to admit, it would be pretty crazy for a first-party title to be released without supporting Home in some way. *Resistance: Fall Of Man* was a real shining light for Sony's online service, so we expect the same from *Tools Of Destruction*. We would also expect a return to form too, but it's already clear that's the path Insomniac Games is pursuing. So it should be excellent. ▲●✖■

Tools Of Destruction ***was originally known as* I-9, *so it's the ninth game developed by Insomniac Games.***



DNA

Meddling with creation

With *Hot Import Nights*, you don't just race on your own, but as a crew. Your crew have a creation system that takes the elements of your driving and forms them into an AI model, which can then be transferred onto your mate's console and used to compete against. Every now and again you're rewarded with updates to your DNA driving buddies that adds to their driving style; so the longer you play, the more your DNA will be like you.



No Westwood required: pimp your own ride using *Juiced 2*'s aftermarket mods.



Juiced 2: Hot Import Nights

Time to adjust the flange crankle wotsidoodle again

INFORM **Publisher** THQ | **Developer** Juice Games | **Release Date** September
Players 1 (2-8 online) | **Genre** Racing | **Website** www.thq.com

A fact that surprised us was that the *Juiced* franchise is second only to *Need For Speed* in the racing stakes. Given *Juiced*'s rather jumbled heritage, that's something very much to THQ's credit. *Juiced 2: Hot Import Nights*, we've been assured, has been built from the ground up, making it somewhat more appealing than you might initially think. The result of this is something that pretty much ticks every box you'd want it to tick. However, the downside is, there aren't any more boxes to tick, even if *Juiced 2* wanted to tick them.

Please forgive the ticking analogy, but the fact is that if you're interested in the car-modding scene – something that few of us are nowadays – then *Juiced* has always been the zenith of the genre. If, on the other hand, you're after racing, we're sure there will be plenty of other racers around that will do a better job of making you happy.

The irritations of the previous versions have been addressed well, and with online betting and a range of drift and duel events, we're sure that the single-player mode will fill the gap in any boy (or girl) racer's heart. The cars themselves are suitably beautiful, even if the character models aren't as yet. Still, with only around 40 per cent of the game completed, there's plenty of time to sort out the clipping as well as a few other loose ends that we noticed.

Juiced 2: Hot Import Nights is clearly aiming for a distinct audience, and that crowd will undoubtedly be overwhelmed by a title that fits the bill so well. As for the rest of us... well it's *Juiced*, isn't it? ▲●×■

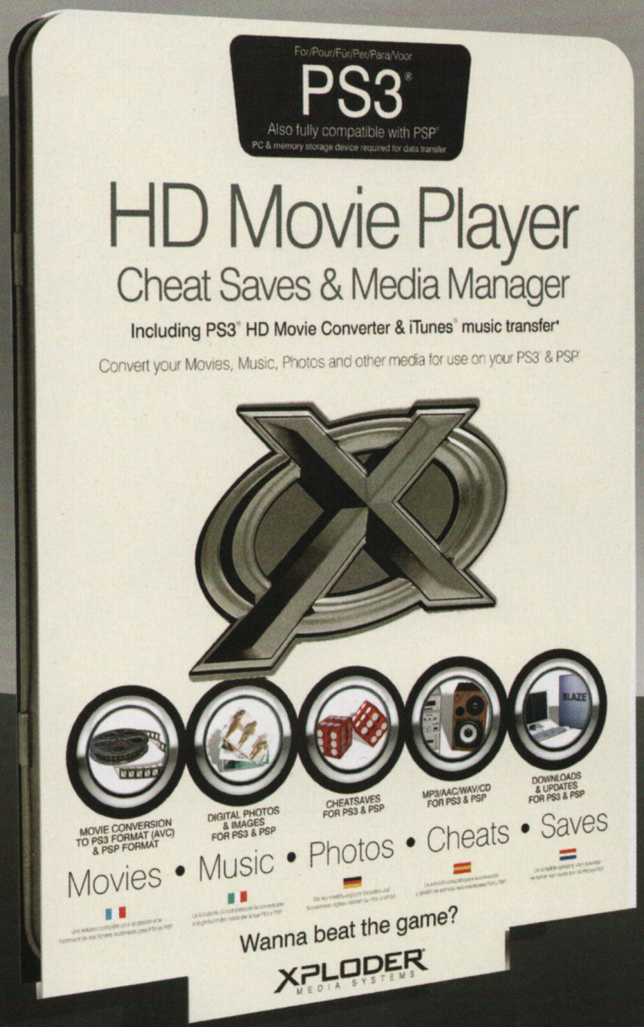
Hot Import Nights ***isn't really all that hot. It'll be fun for the modders out there, though.***



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6 THINGS WE LOVE ABOUT...

The Club

Putting the 'first' back into first-person shooters

1 **Anyone remember fun?** Despite its almost Jerry Bruckheimer-esque atmosphere, with tons of explosions, lots of shooting and gruff-looking buggers with guns, *The Club* is a different kind of shooter. Unashamedly rudimentary, it aims to remind gamers of a time when the fun factor was key.

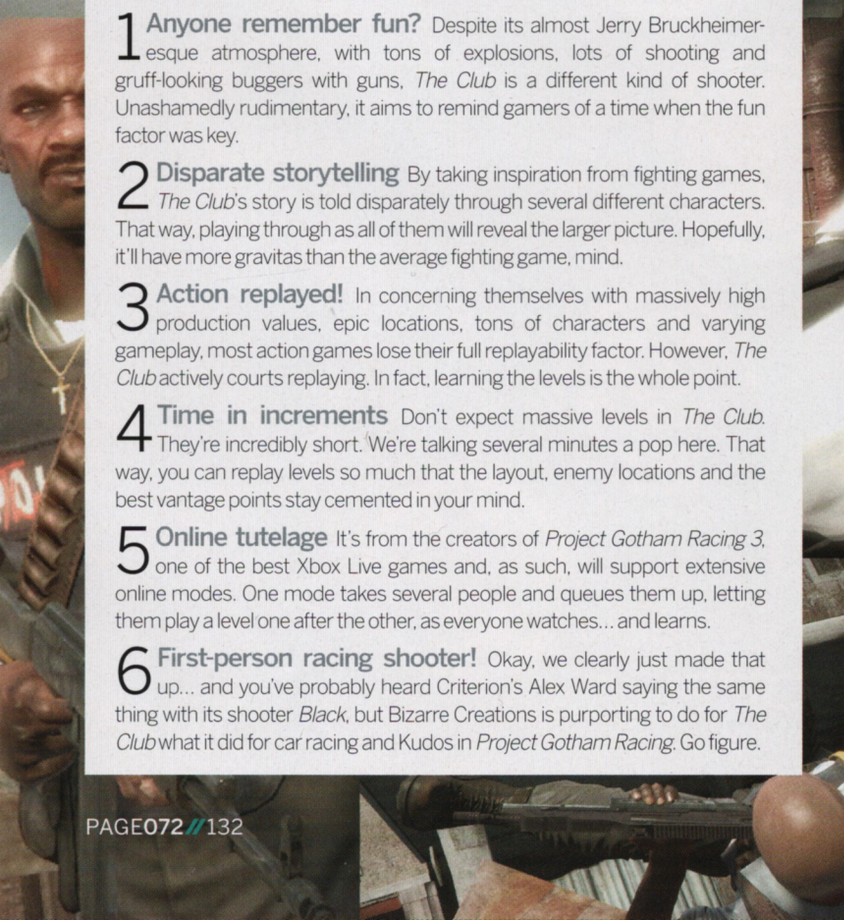
2 **Disparate storytelling** By taking inspiration from fighting games, *The Club*'s story is told disparately through several different characters. That way, playing through as all of them will reveal the larger picture. Hopefully, it'll have more gravitas than the average fighting game, mind.

3 **Action replayed!** In concerning themselves with massively high production values, epic locations, tons of characters and varying gameplay, most action games lose their full replayability factor. However, *The Club* actively courts replaying. In fact, learning the levels is the whole point.

4 **Time in increments** Don't expect massive levels in *The Club*. They're incredibly short. We're talking several minutes a pop here. That way, you can replay levels so much that the layout, enemy locations and the best vantage points stay cemented in your mind.

5 **Online tutelage** It's from the creators of *Project Gotham Racing 3*, one of the best Xbox Live games and, as such, will support extensive online modes. One mode takes several people and queues them up, letting them play a level one after the other, as everyone watches... and learns.

6 **First-person racing shooter!** Okay, we clearly just made that up... and you've probably heard Criterion's Alex Ward saying the same thing with its shooter *Black*, but Bizarre Creations is purporting to do for *The Club* what it did for car racing and Kudos in *Project Gotham Racing*. Go figure.







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Transformers

Not as tasty as a transform-a-snack

INFORM **Publisher** Activision | **Developer** Traveller's Tales | **Release Date** July
Players TBA | **Genre** Action | **Website** www.transformersgame.com

Okay, so it's not based on the classic Eighties cartoon we all remember from our childhood. It's not based on the incredible 1986 movie, starring the voices of Orson Welles and Leonard Nimoy, and it's not based on the cool Dreamwave comics that reignited the franchise a few years ago. No, Activision's upcoming *Transformers* game is based on this summer's Michael Bay movie, a film that has tinkered with the classic franchise so much that it's causing fanboys around the world to eBay their original Optimus Primes in disgust.

That doesn't necessarily mean that the official videogame of the movie will have the same effect, though. It may feature the same dumbed-down story, vacuous human characters and those new sacrilegious robot designs, but there's no denying the fact that everyone would kill to actually be a Transformer. The lure of being able to stomp around a city, high above the pedestrians, blasting helicopters out of the air before transforming into a car and speeding away is just too much to resist... even for the most jaded of fanboys.

For those who can't possibly imagine a new game without comparing it to an old one, *Transformers* is basically *Crackdown* with giant robots. There's a huge open world city to explore and almost everything within it can be damaged, destroyed or picked up and flung at something else. You can even pick up fallen enemy robots and hurl them through the sky. And let's not forget that, with this being a *Transformers* game, you can instantly transform into either a car or jet plane at any desired moment. As a car you can zip from one side of the city to the other much quicker, outrun enemies or even just use the vehicular form as a disguise so as not to panic the human populace. Decepticons, they're the bad Transformers for those not in the know, can transform into jet planes, take to the skies to get an aerial view of the world below or just engage in high-altitude dogfights.

That's not the only difference between the Decepticons and their good counterparts, the Autobots. Play as an Autobot and the game will largely follow the same plot as the movie, since the film tells the story of Optimus Prime and company; however, play as a Decepticon and you'll get to see the story from the bad perspective and even get the chance to take over the world – something we're sure won't be happening in the film. There's also a *Knights Of The Old Republic*-style good/bad meter that tracks the players' actions. Autobots are expected not to damage human property and to help those in need, while Decepticons relish the opportunity to do the opposite. Stray too far from your chosen path and it will have a lasting effect on the rest of the game, although Activision has yet to confirm exactly how this will work.

From what we have seen so far, it looks as though the *Transformers* game could turn out to be much more fulfilling than the movie it's based on. After all, there's no Hollywood budget in the world that could possibly afford to represent live-action Transformers in the way we have grown up watching them in cartoons. But in a videogame the chances are much higher that we will actually get to see and do all the cool realistic Transformers things we have dreamed about for years.

This could well turn out to be the best *Transformers* game yet as well. The current reigning champion has to be Atari's 2004 PlayStation 2 game, but that took place in a remote jungle environment, whereas the urban environment of Activision's title will help increase the sense of scale as the Transformers stomp over familiar objects like buildings and cars.

Without hands-on experience, however, we cannot truly say one way or the other whether this will be the definitive *Transformers* game, but you can bet that by the time the movie is released this summer we will be able to give you a definite answer. Don't forget to come back to find out. ▲●✖■

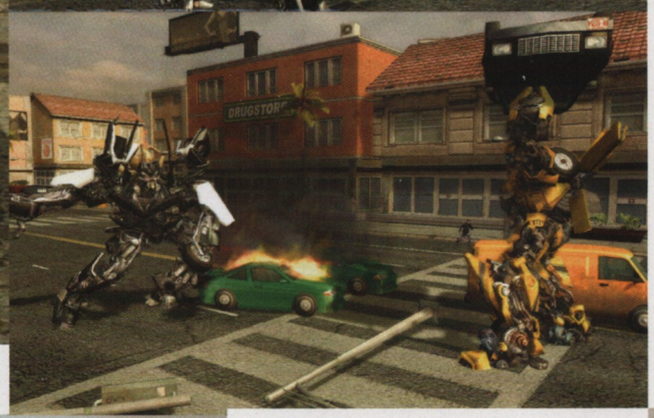
Forget that licensed games are usually awful. The appeal of giant transforming robots is irresistible.

This is Bumblebee. We know that he doesn't look anything like a real bee but his sting will probably hurt all the same.









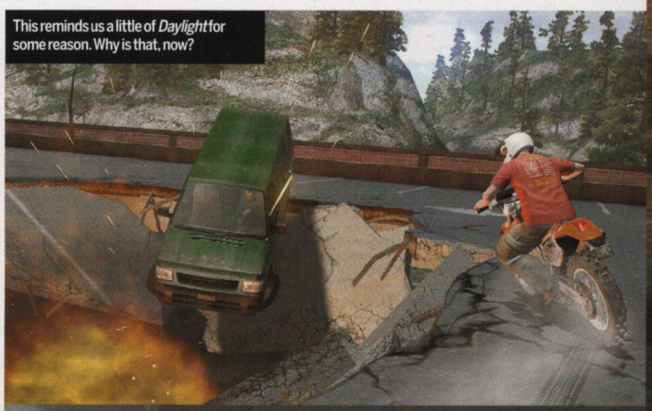
The combat will probably be quite easy, but if it's not there's always the option to turn into a car and speed off like a coward.

Primed and ready

The voice of Optimus returns

If there's one aspect of the new *Transformers* movie that has satisfied die-hard fans it's that legendary voice-actor Peter Cullen is returning to voice Optimus Prime, a character he has not played since 1987. In those intervening twenty years, Peter has put his voice to work in forty other cartoons, TV shows and movies, including *Ducktales*, *The Real Ghostbusters* and *Visionaries* (remember that?).

Peter Cullen also reprises the role of Optimus Prime in the *Transformers* game and although it isn't currently confirmed if his voice can be heard during actual gameplay, he definitely makes an appearance during the FMV cut-scenes. The immortal line "One shall stand, one shall fall" from the animated movie can even be heard during the opening sequence. How's that for fan service?



This reminds us a little of *Daylight* for some reason. Why is that, now?





The replays really are something to behold, if nothing else but for impact.

Movie madness

It's nothing like racing, y'know

The premise of *Stuntman: Ignition*, for the uninitiated, is all about performing a series of stunts for films. Spread throughout set courses, which rarely last more than a few minutes, are a series of stunts. Some involve hitting things, others drifting; yet more are concerned with context-specific actions like boosting or jumping. The sets themselves have little to do with racing, even the time is of little importance, as it's more about pushing your motor to the limit and getting as close to crashing as possible without stacking it and missing the next stunt cue.





It's not just cars on offer, there are bikes and trucks as well.

Stuntman: Ignition

Hot 'n' fresh out the kitchen

INFORM **Publisher** THQ | **Developer** Paradigm | **Release Date** August **Players** 1 | **Genre** Racing | **Website** www.stuntmanignition.com/

There's a lot been said about genre-mixing of late, and while it's easy to identify those titles that have successfully (or unsuccessfully come to that) mixed two existing genres to produce a title with enough innovation to get recognised; titles that don't so much fuse genres together as stir the existing mass of ideas don't seem to get quite so much attention. If that's the case, *Stuntman: Ignition* isn't going to get the interest it deserves – something that makes us very sad indeed.

Why so sad? Why not the standard level of lamentation at a franchise that may well get overlooked? Well, it's the suspicion that so many may hold about the game when it hits the shelves that gets us; despite the original's horrific level of frustration and difficulty, *Stuntman: Ignition* is shaping up to be a title well worthy of your consideration.

Sure, our original fear – that it could well be a little small (perhaps a reason for the original's prohibitive harshness) – has proved to be well-founded but, in all honesty, size doesn't seem to matter here. *Stuntman: Ignition* feels like an entirely new game. It's utterly devoid of any of the annoyances of the previous version: if you take away anything from this preview, ensure it's that. The emphasis on making things easier has been lathered on so thick it's almost to the game's detriment. The urge to restart each level after even the smallest of cock-ups, for example, gets unbearable. No, everything has been focused toward combating the gamebreaking niggles of the first title, meaning that any consideration of the first in the series should be discounted.

Playing through the first time on early preview code, we were concerned about the sheer weight of on-screen action happening every millisecond. However, it didn't seem to test the capabilities of the PlayStation 3 in the same way that it pushed our eyes to the limit, which is encouraging.

Similarly exciting is the way in which *Ignition* enables you to freestyle. Rather than hitting the set points and stunts that the director calls out as you speed through the roads, the larger scores are only going to be accumulated by stringing together stunts and close shaves to create one gigantic stunt. Indeed, the difference between a passing score and a top-notch one is a matter of millions and millions of points.

With only 42 missions in total, each of which can be completed in around three minutes, you need an awful lot of replayability. Thankfully, new developer Paradigm has managed to fashion some of the most horribly addictive gameplay this side of *Oblivion*, so longevity isn't really an issue. We spent a good hour or so on one single level, endlessly trying to perfect our run. We didn't manage it, however. We would happily have continued in our struggle for perfection for another hour, had we not had other levels to look at. The feel is very much akin to *Burnout*'s Crash Junction challenges, and we can see it working remarkably well as a very social single-player experience, passing around the pad after 'just one more' go.

The ability to make up to five errors before the director calls a re-shoot, helps an awful lot in making the experience enjoyable as well, and with a stunt constructor – which we're guessing will allow you to create stunt tracks to put online – there's going to be enough longevity to keep anyone happy. An online multiplayer, where players stunt race against ghosts, is also likely, as are online scoreboards and rankings. The move to THQ seems to be a great one for *Stuntman*, and with Paradigm being entirely owned by the publisher, things are looking good for a franchise that hasn't seen much positive publicity for many a year. The PS3 could well offer the right kind of platform for a title that deserves to be noticed. ▲●×■

Despite being sidelined for so very long, and visually a little ropey, we loved the addiction factor.





Battlefield: Bad Company

Dodgy Seventies rock references are strictly forbidden

INFORM **Publisher** EA | **Developer** Digital Illusions | **Release Date** TBC
Players 1-24 TBC | **Genre** FPS | **Website** www.battlefield.ea.com/battlefield/bf/

When you're the largest publisher in the industry a little bit of criticism is par for the course. In terms of both size and success, EA has led the market for so long that gamers have become suspicious of its motives, and with good cause. Regardless of devotion to artistry, the ultimate purpose of any company is to make money, but EA's tendency to establish a franchise and wring every last drop of earning potential from it with spin-offs and yearly updates has made it easy for the public to dispense with any positivity. There's nothing wrong with turning a profit – EA would be of no use to gamers if it couldn't afford to continue making games – but doing so in such a relentlessly commercial fashion is not the best way to endear yourself to your audience.

This year will no doubt see the arrival of yet more iterations of *FIFA*, *Tiger Woods* and a number of other lucrative franchises, but EA is redressing the balance with some of the most exciting projects in its long history. First impressions suggest that *Spore* and *Crysis* will manage that rare mix of ground-breaking design and compelling gameplay, and could well bring about a turnaround for the company's chequered public image.

Initially, *Bad Company*'s close proximity to the release of its lacklustre predecessor marks it out as an opportunist sequel, but Digital Illusions has taken a decidedly different approach to the gameplay, hinting that its development actually predated the release of *2142*. Where previous *Battlefield* games have relied heavily on the multiplayer experience – a little too heavily in the opinion of many – *Bad Company* is being pitched as a primarily single-player experience. There is a credible argument to suggest that creating yet another solo FPS is far from innovative, but in terms of the series it marks a step forward, demanding that the developer fundamentally reassesses the game rather than simply design different environments.

The setting is intended to be a few years into the future, and the early screens indicate that the game will have similar settings to those in *Modern Combat*. Where *Bad Company* will really distinguish itself from previous entries, though, is in its physics and the interactivity of its environments. EA has promised that at least 90 per cent of the scenery will be fully destructible. This is not merely window dressing, however. *Bad Company* will force you to use the feature to your tactical advantage. Should you need to stage an ambush, you will be able to blow out the wall of a building to create the perfect spot for a sniper, while if the boot were on the other foot, you could use a tank or rocket launcher to destroy the sniper's cover and flush them out. Exactly how prevalent this tactical manipulation of the scenery will be in the finished game is unclear, but if *Bad Company* is to set itself apart from the crowd EA will have to make it a key feature.

Die-hard *Battlefield* fans are unlikely to be disappointed by the multiplayer mode either, with credible rumours suggesting that a minimum of 24 players will be supported, with a possible maximum of 50. Beyond that details are still sketchy, but this is a 'from the ground up' next-gen shooter expanding on a winning formula, coming from the richest development house in the business just as it's beginning to remember that innovation is every bit as important as growth and profitability. It may not be a guaranteed masterpiece, but this could be far better company than we expected. ▲●×■

Bad Company* is also the name of a rock band who had a number one hit with Can't Get Enough *in 1974.



There is a far greater emphasis on plot and character this time round. With any luck it won't be rubbish.



This being a war game, we predict running, shouting, shooting and dying, though not necessarily in that order.

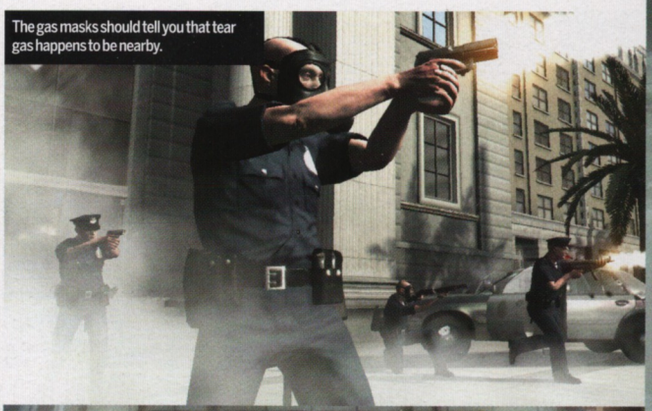




What's the story?

Let's go a little deeper

Don't let the photo-realistic visuals fool you, beneath those perfectly rendered faces are real people with real emotions – or so Electronic Arts would have us think. In the modern industry the presence of a single-player mode virtually guarantees an overwrought storyline, but the development team at Digital Illusions is putting a lot of effort into giving *Bad Company* a compelling narrative, or at the very least some rubbish one-liners. So without further ado, meet Haggard, the 'crazy' one, and Sarge, the 'serious' one. With characterisation this complex, who needs a story anyway?



The gas masks should tell you that tear gas happens to be nearby.





Kane & Lynch is clearly going for that popular over-the-shoulder aiming style.

Heat fuss

Laying on the influence

If Kane and Lynch were real people, there's a very good chance that their favourite films would be *Collateral*, *Heat* and *The Usual Suspects*. We're sure the latter ties into the game's plot more than anything, but the first two are clearly influences on how this game plays. There's one situation that even finds our crazy duo fighting having to escape the reception area of a tall building, out into a cordoned-off high street that is packed full of police. A *Heat*-like set piece kicks off with our anti-heroes cutting a line through the boys in blue in order to escape.





Kane & Lynch: Dead Men

Stuck between a dark place and an even darker thing

INFORM **Publisher** Eidos Interactive | **Developer** IO Interactive | **Release Date** November
Players 1-2 | **Genre** Third-person shooter | **Website** www.kaneandlynch.com/

We're suddenly thinking of *Twin Peaks*, David Lynch's exceptional early-Nineties TV show, and that great line Kyle MacLachlan delivers when asked how he takes his coffee. "As black as the sky on a moonless night" he says. And while *Kane & Lynch: Dead Men* has nothing in common with the epochal *Twin Peaks* – beyond that obvious surname connection, of course – we can't think of a better way to describe the atmosphere and style of the game than that. It's twisted stuff. Darker than dark. Something perfectly emphasised by its two lead characters.

Meet Kane... he used to be a family man, holding down a job that let him provide for his wife and two kids. The 'American dream' – well, almost. But it was a job of questionable intent, leading to Kane's two-year old son finding his father's gun and shooting himself. Two weeks later the boy dies in hospital. Kane is guilt-ridden and leaves his family to become a mercenary-for-hire. After several years he's contacted by the mysterious Seven, who offer him a lucrative payroll for his exemplary services. 13 years later, he botches a retirement job leaving his whole team supposedly dead. With a fortune in diamonds he vanishes, only to be apprehended by the police and sentenced to death.

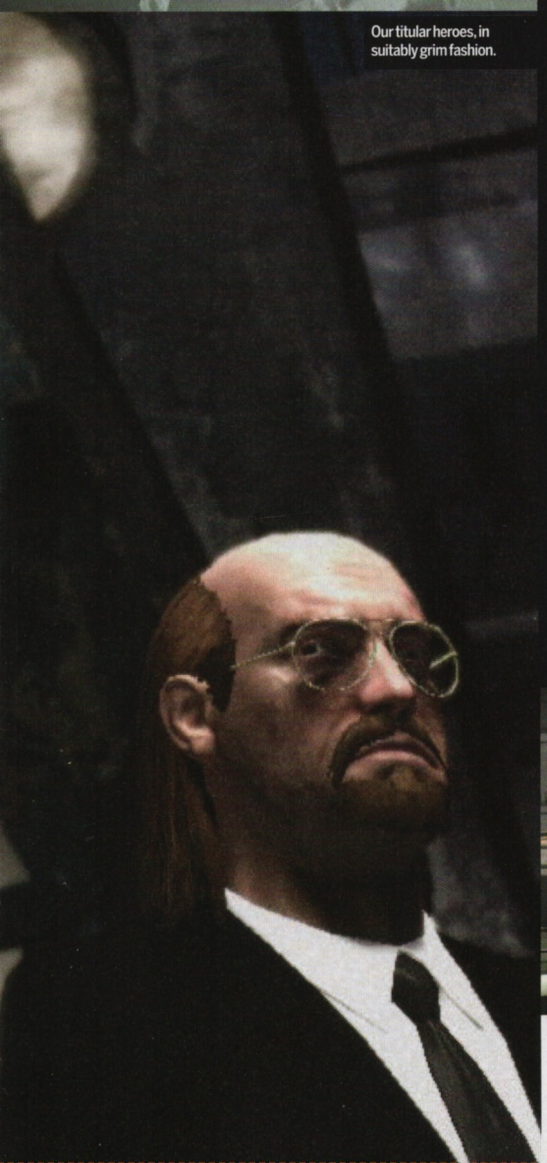
Say hello to Lynch... a man who may have slaughtered his wife. Prone to blackouts that see him committing truly horrible and brutal acts of violence, and suffering severe schizophrenia, he's a man who requires extensive medication. He used to be an average Joe, working jobs all over the city until that fateful day. Though he doesn't believe he killed her, with irrefutable evidence based on his past stacked against him, he too is sentenced to death. And it's on their way to a lethal injection that the two men meet.... right before their transport vehicle is ambushed. Turns out four members of the Seven survived the retirement screw-up and they want revenge.

However, given that Kane is the only person who knows the location of the stolen diamonds, he gets this choice: his wife and daughter are murdered, or he helps the Seven and they will only kill him. He opts for the latter. To ensure he's good on his word, the psychopathic Lynch is tasked with keeping an eye on him. Welcome to *Kane & Lynch: Dead Men*, the new franchise from IO Interactive. And to think: some people say story isn't everything. No wonder Fox has snapped up the rights to make a movie, despite knowing little about the game itself. That puts us in a much better position than Fox, then.

The game is a squad-based third-person shooter, taking its cue more from the underrated *Freedom Fighters* than *Hitman* – IO's extremely popular franchise – by enabling players to lead several men through action-packed scenarios. Said team-mates aren't just fodder either: each has a backstory that fleshes them out and should make losing them a little bit more immersive. IO is taking a minimalist-is-best approach by ramping up the story, but holding back the cut-scenes. That's something that extends to the gameplay too: there's little that should detract from the gameplay in terms of HUD or menus. The point is to grab players by the balls and lead them through this constantly twisting, always surprising, world.

While the game can be played entirely in single-player as Kane, a second person can join anytime as Lynch. It evokes a bit of an *Army Of Two* feeling, what with the two men constantly bickering. That said, we'd much prefer to be face-to-face with an armed professional rather than some psychopath. Kane probably feels the same way. ▲●×■

There are a number of references to Kane and Lynch in IO Interactive's previous game,* Hitman: Blood Money *– hinting that both take place in the same world.



Our titular heroes, in suitably grim fashion.





GAMING LINEAGE



1999 METAL GEAR SOLID PSONE



2002 HITMAN 2: SILENT ASSASSIN PS2



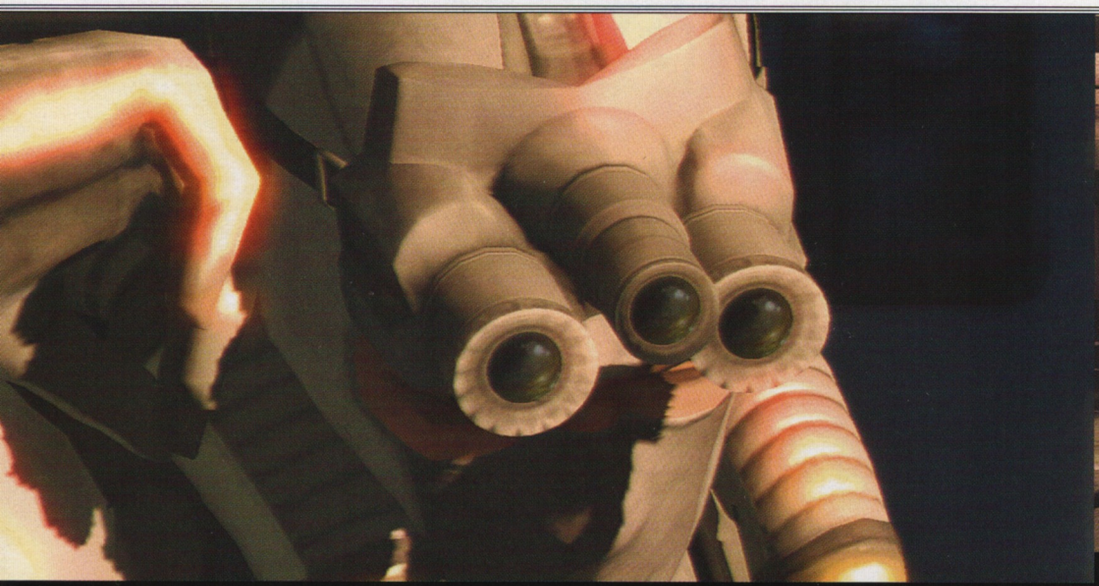
2004 SPLINTER CELL PANDORA TOMORROW PS2

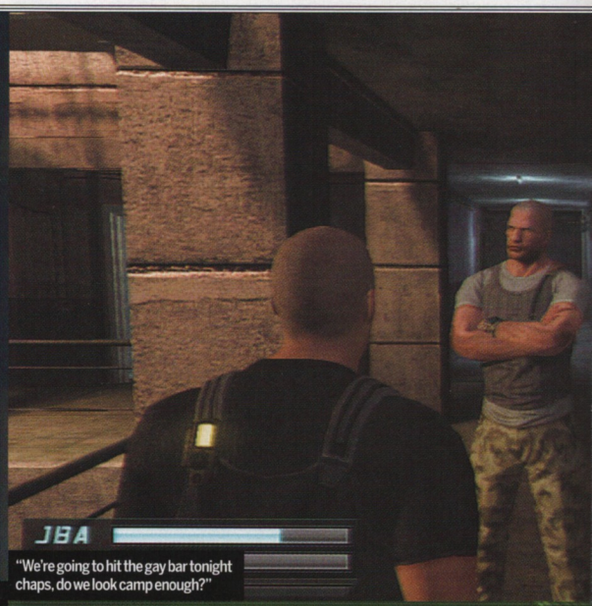


2005 SPLINTER CELL CHAOS THEORY PS2



2007 SPLINTER CELL DOUBLE AGENT PS3





Splinter Cell: Double Agent

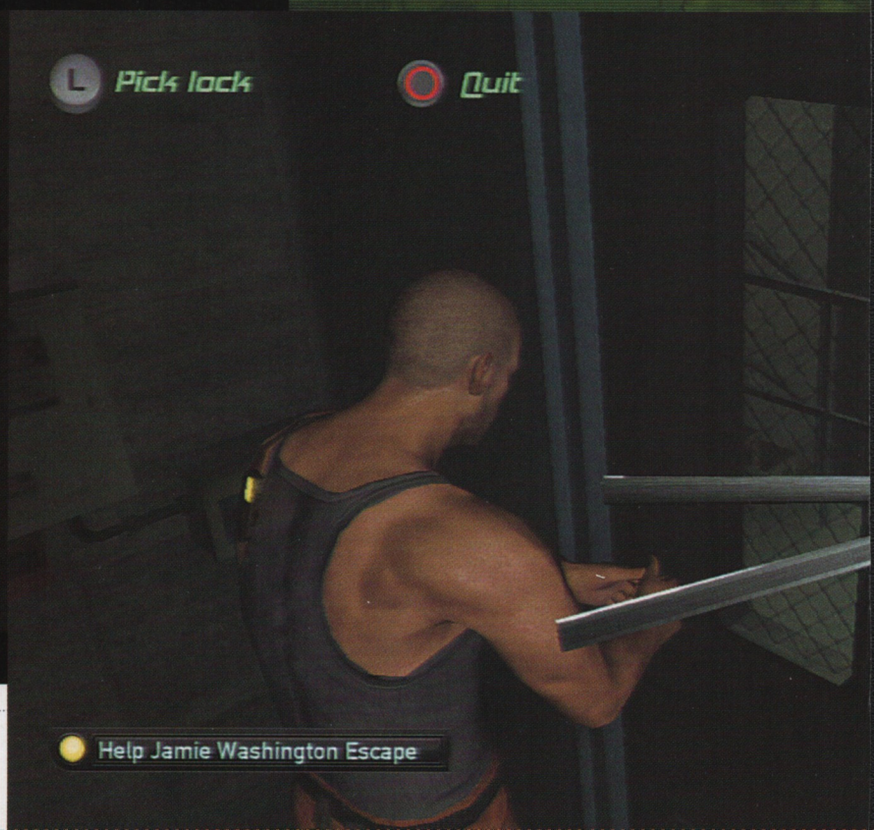
Sam Fisher – agent of change

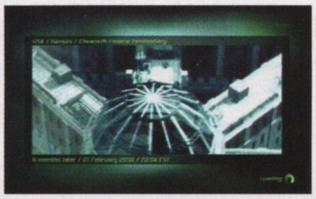
INFORM **Publisher** Ubisoft | **Developer** Ubisoft Shanghai | **Release Date** Out now | **Price** £49.99
Players 1 (2-6 online multiplayer) | **Genre** Stealth-'em-up | **Supports** 720p Dolby | **Age Rating** 15+
Website www.splintercell.com | **Demo** No





A perfect example of Sam Fisher's hardness. He's not scared, is he?

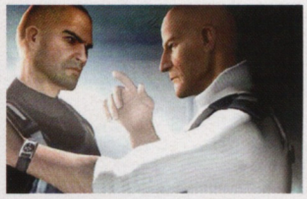




NEXT GEN

WHAT DEFINES THIS AS A 'NEXT-GEN' PLAYSTATION 3 TITLE?

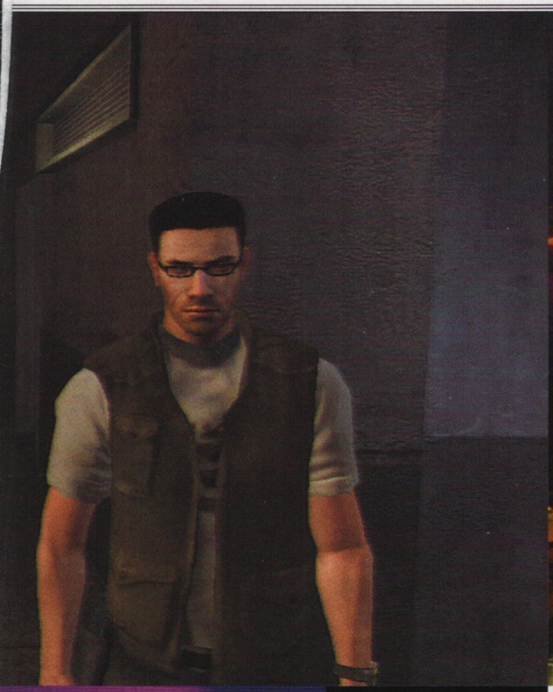
CONTEXT SENSITIVITY Everything is context sensitive. We wish real life was like this: just perform the same action with everything and it'll work perfectly. A little more interest in the basic things would've been nice.



PROFILE

WHAT'S IN A GAME

EMILE What a foul human being this guy is. The first conversation he has with you in the game results in the cold-blooded murder of some poor beaten-up chap. Murdering him is particularly satisfying.







We rarely found any real use in this vision mode, except in an attempt to brighten up these dark pages.



So. How are we going to deal with an ailment that seems not only horribly invasive and chronic, but quite possibly fatal to the games industry? Forgive the dramatisation here, but it really is that pervasive. What's wrong with pretty much every third-party title on the PS3 at the moment? The bloody Xbox 360, that's what. Now this isn't any kind of attack on Microsoft, or the console, it's a genuine concern about the state of the industry. Let us explain ourselves. When Microsoft created the Xbox 360, one of its lesser concerns, we suspect, was how easily titles developed for the system could be ported to the PlayStation 3. It seems that many of the PS3's early titles are suffering badly for this. Chief among these thus far is *Tom Clancy's Splinter Cell Double Agent*. Sad. Real sad.

What grinds our gears about this particular issue is not that *Splinter Cell*'s magnificent gameplay is raked through with horrific frame rate issues, or even that many elements look decidedly 'budget': these niggles are things we encounter and deal with on a day-to-day basis. No, what hurts is that we were promised such a great power differential between the 360 and PS3, that when a big-budget affair like *Splinter Cell* comes along – a good few months after the Xbox 360 release, mind – we expect at least the same level of brilliance, if not a significant step-up in visuals as well as some bonus content. It's a bit like finding out first-hand that your dad can't actually take that other kid's dad. The fact is, you're just not getting any kind of single-player improvement with the PS3 iteration, and while it certainly doesn't feel like a lazy port: there's clearly been a fair degree of effort both in development and the transfer to another platform, it just isn't as good.

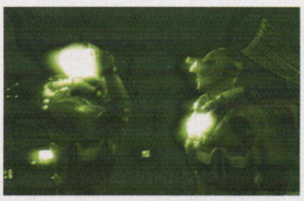
But then we've dealt with this situation before – *F.E.A.R.* and *Tony Hawk's* spring to mind – and it's very much an obstacle to overcome with a quality title, rather than a wholly game-breaking aggravation.

So we've established that *Splinter Cell* does nothing for the PS3 on a technical level – we're not going to dwell on that further – but even if you're the type that finds it difficult to overlook such things, there's still an awful lot of fun to be derived from what Ubisoft Shanghai must be proud to have been a part of.

We hear it a lot, being a common PR term, but when a progressive series like *Splinter Cell* truly 'goes back to its roots' there's only one of two possible outcomes: it either identifies, with exactitude, those things that have been copied, and bettered in the series, suffering from the nostalgia the developer has mistakenly opted to include in favour of something new, or it turns out bloody good, a refinement of those concepts that couldn't be properly implemented in the previous instalments. *Splinter Cell* is the latter.

Double Agent makes you feel like a spy in the same way that the original imbued you with the very particular joy of covert operations. Everything seems real. No one has had to persuade us that the AI is spectacular, there have been no enthusiastic producers convincing us that Tom Clancy has been on board from the start, and little rhetoric regarding the unprecedented this, or unparalleled that. In short: no crap. We enjoy the absence of crap and almost without exception, *Splinter Cell Double Agent* delivers the kind of gaming it's difficult not to become immersed in.

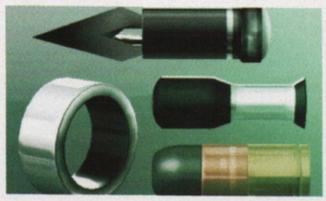
From the start, Sam Fisher's world is both believable and exciting. Even the training missions, which are »



IN-GAME ANALYSIS

STUNNING MOVES

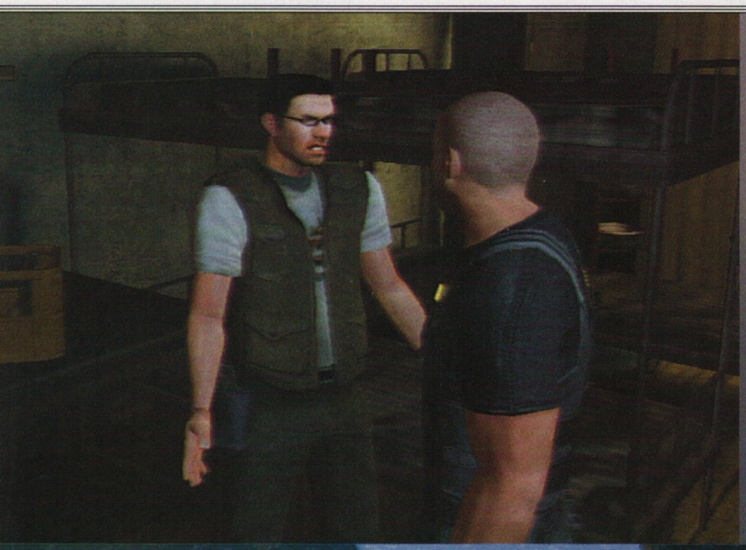
GREEN SCREEN The classic infrared goggles are nigh on essential if the sun shines through the curtains and creates an irritating reflection on the screen. Other than that they're pretty much useless. The same could be said of the other vision modes as well. They're cool enough to warrant trying out, though.



PROFILE

WHAT'S IN A GAME

STICKY CAMERAS Fantastic devices these. Pump them unto a wall and use them to watch the action from afar. The real joy is pretty much any combination of the noise, gas and explosion function.

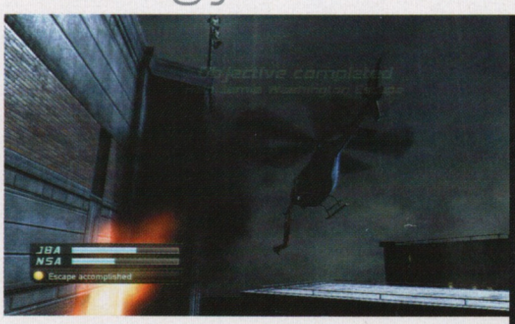




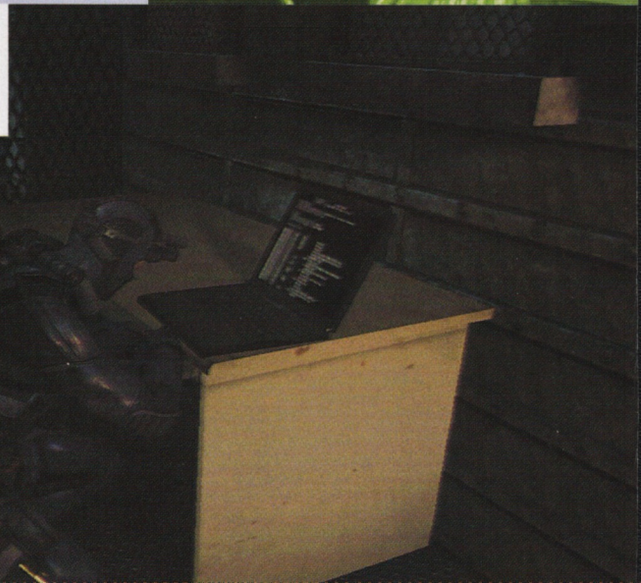




"Splinter Cell does a marvellous job of making you feel like a super spy"









NEXT GEN

WHAT DEFINES THIS AS A 'NEXT-GEN' PLAYSTATION 3 TITLE?

LOCKTOPUSSY You start with a lock-pick, but as you upgrade it happens automatically. This is rubbish. If a person makes toast each morning, it doesn't mean one day they'll be so good at it that it'll happen automatically.

CONTROL SYSTEM

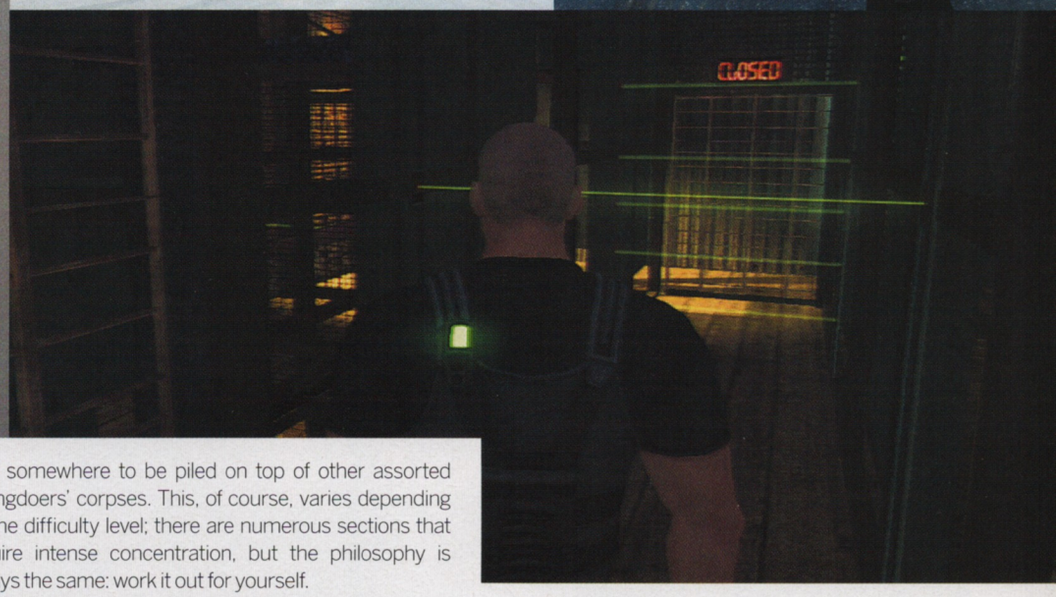
Now we've mentioned that the control system doesn't stand up to really close scrutiny, but it does the job well in most situations. The issue isn't really in the button mapping or even the camera, but the sheer amount of things that can be done at any time means that a complete mastery of it is required in any tense situation.

BY NO MEANS AWFUL, BUT IT DOES DIFFER FROM MANY ON THE MARKET.









graciously optional, hand you tools and scenarios and usher you out the door like a busy mother of five on a Monday morning. Left on the doorstep, it's difficult not to feel slightly bewildered by the absence of guidance in a situation where you might normally expect to be led right the way through by the hand and patted on the head by way of reward for following orders.

Splinter Cell is far from a mothering title, and while that may prove to be a downfall for many, it's unarguably the way that any serious stealth game should go. This hike in autonomy could well prove to be a sticking point for many: those who may feel that the narrative is somehow watered down by the addition of multiple paths and numerous options. While it may be a valid point, *Splinter Cell*'s approach is erring toward the true heart of next-gen gaming, namely freedom. Sure, it's great to be given the choice to diverge from the main path, but if you're not given the tools to do anything, the experience can become empty. *Splinter Cell* combats this by offering the unnecessary. There really isn't any kind of benefit – in most situations – to throwing a bottle to distract the guards, for example, and in many cases it will get you caught or shot quicker than you can say "By jiggerty, I've been caught or shot." What *Splinter Cell* does is offer you the option to get all clever, but at the same time make it just as viable to simply run up to a guard, bosch him over the bonce and drag his carcass to some dark hole somewhere to be piled on top of other assorted wrongdoers' corpses. This, of course, varies depending on the difficulty level; there are numerous sections that require intense concentration, but the philosophy is always the same: work it out for yourself.

This has its frustrations, however. Were we cracking a safe in the dark, not inches away from some well tooled-up terrorist lunatics in real life, for example, we'd go into it a good deal more informed than Sam. Given the looser nature of the storyline and the ability, in many situations, to ignore objectives completely, some situations feel like an unconnected string of events superimposed over some generic storyline.

The HQ missions are a prime example of this, being at times nonsensical, and at others just plain weird. It's understandable that as a new recruit to a terrorist organisation you're seconded to perform some pretty menial tasks, such as putting mines together, but it seems a little counter productive when they pretty much leave you to perform any number of covert operations within their base without batting an eyelid. If there's anything in the game that feels at all contrived it's this, and there are too many occasions where these timed missions just don't fit. However, it's not all bad, there is a certain calmness to these missions, it's just that that relaxation can easily be confused for boredom in many cases. There's a distinct difference in the emphasis of these levels for a number of reasons. First of all, you're never given weapons, any kind of force is pretty much out of the question, thus compelling you to go back to basics and do everything with old-fashioned stealth. By the end of the game, you've pretty much got every bit of information possible about your new-found buddies, John Brown's Army (JBA) along with samples of various substances and a complete rundown of their plans. The trouble is that this is all kind of handed to you on a plate during these missions. The information you receive during the regular missions is, for the most part, cleverly delivered, with some nice sections where nuggets of storyline are less dropped in your lap as thrown over your head. It's this kind of narrative delivery that we like about *Splinter Cell Double Agent*. For those who want to get all the information in one sitting, there is enough leeway to complete both the NSA (your original masters) and the JBA (your new terrorist chums) missions. There are instances where you have to choose between them, but for the most part anyone with a real drive to get to the bottom of the story can do so. It's somehow a more 'real' experience if you take a more laissez-faire approach and don't push it too far, leaving some of the objectives until next time around.

And you *will* be playing this again. In fact, it only really gets good on your second time around, as the less-than-forgiving nature of the game demands a number of attempts first time around. Were we reviewing this from a first play, we would more than likely score it lower. The Xbox 360 version has been around a little while now though, so we already knew many of the routes through the levels, something that upped the enjoyment no

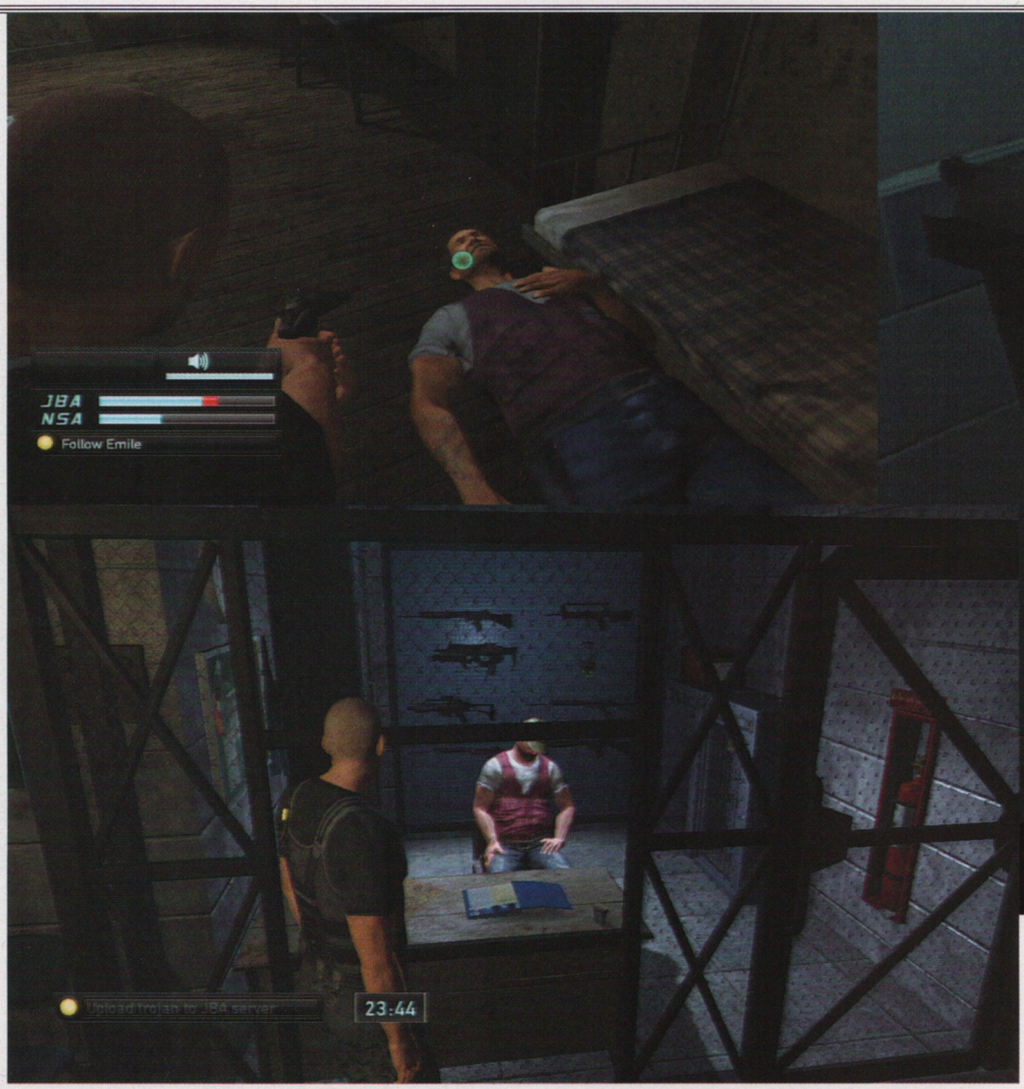
TOP 5 IN-GAME GADGETS

1 STICKY CAMERA
2 STICKY SHOCKER
3 TRI-VISION GOGGLES
4 WALL MINES
5 SMOKE GRENADES



TRIVIA

AS YOU'RE NO DOUBT AWARE, MICHAEL IRONSIDE SUPPLIES THE VOICE TALENT FOR SAM FISHER. WHAT YOU MAY NOT KNOW IS THAT HE WAS CONSIDERED FOR THE ROLE OF ROBOCOP, BUT WAS EVENTUALLY REFUSED THE JOB AFTER ISSUES WITH THE SIZE OF THE COSTUME.





Tee hee! He's going to be well surprised when he wakes up in this bin with his knees around his ears and a banana skin down his pants.

end. Normally we wouldn't think about replaying a title with such a storyline; however, the non-linearity of it means that not only do you have the joy of numerous paths through the levels, but the smoothness of the gameplay improves with each go as well. When you truly nail a level, it's pretty difficult not to feel like the cleverest git on Earth, despite the fact that you know the level inside out, as you have failed it a good couple of hundred times in the past.

The difficulty is a weird one, however. The control and camera system work wonderfully well to a point, but when the action starts to get seriously tense, you rarely feel like you've got the quality there that you really need. Sometimes shadows offer complete protection, at other times your safety isn't assured by lurking in the shadows. The differing difficulty levels do a lot for the replayability as well. The 'easy' setting is a great place for noobs to start, and the training levels serve to get anyone not too well versed in the control system back into the swing of Sam's world. Ratchet it up to 'normal' difficulty and the game becomes far more realistic. The AI no longer behaves as if it wants you to kill the mindless NPCs and there's a distinct feeling of unpredictability with the situations you find yourself in. Playing through on 'hard' is just plain impossible, and once you think you've mastered the controls it might be worth giving it a bash. You're not even given ammo for your weapons, which seems a little heartless from the NSA really. No, *Splinter Cell*, unlike so many titles out nowadays, rewards repeated play. It's not because of any achievements or a sense of completion, but because it just feels so much nicer to know what you're doing. Given that you've got so many options and methods with which to achieve your targets, there's more than enough scope to take different routes and go for alternative targets.

So, plenty of play. And quality play at that. It goes back to the roots, in making the player feel more like a spy than any stealth-'em-up out there, and despite some strange missions and an overwhelming amount of objectives, the storyline and characters remain tight enough to keep you engrossed.

In stony-faced spite of the issue we raised at the start of this review, namely the porting from the Xbox 360, we have to recommend it to pretty much anyone. There are still some elements that are left over from the previous versions that some may find a big turn off, though. While we've been ranting on about the freedom offered to you, it is, at the end of the day, merely the illusion of choice. The 'double agent' element, which forces you to choose between good and bad at numerous points in the storyline, is just a couple of bars, which means 'game over' should they drop to zero; this does nothing for the feel of a game that has successfully managed to move away from feeling like a one-man show toward a far more complete story, with real characters and situations. There are levels, most notably Kinshasa and the oil tanker, that feel genuinely free. They allow a level of exploration that *Splinter Cell* just hasn't had before. Both incite you to work things out for yourself, and while it doesn't always work like that, Ubisoft is close to getting it right. Really right. Then there are levels that take the old-fashioned stealth approach, which require more patience than skill. While the illusion of freedom stands up really well, you're

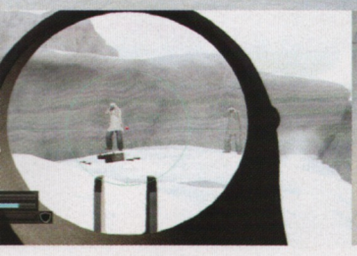


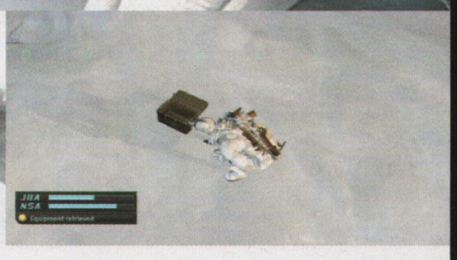
NEXT GEN
WHAT DEFINES THIS AS A 'NEXT-GEN' PLAYSTATION 3 TITLE?

SUPER SPY After bumbling through the level to sabotage a missile, get to the bomb and press the button. All hell breaks loose and you have no idea how to escape. From super spy to halfwit in the blink of an eye.



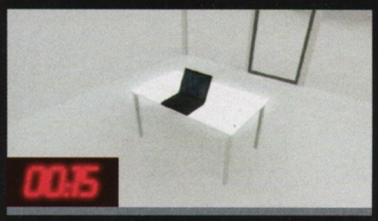






First level timeline

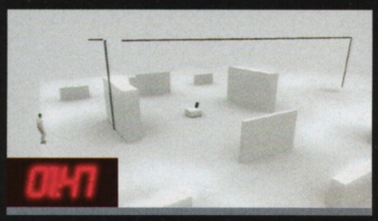
Training isn't done on the field any more; it's done inside your mind. Red pill, blue pill...



Right, here you are after a little cut-scene somewhere in your own mind. It's a little strange, but it somehow fits with *Splinter Cell*'s near-future style.



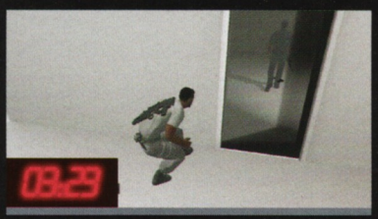
Your objective here is to get to the computer without setting off the alarms. You can just run up to it, grab the info and bugger off, but you won't get many points for it.



As if you veterans of the series couldn't work it out, there's a whacking great pipe running across the room. Disable the cameras (when they appear) and grab the high-tech booty.



Next mission then, and you start atop a white tower, just like Rapunzel. Your hair won't help you here, though. Being a sure shot with your gadgetry will, however.



Righto. So you have got to disable this guy without killing him, and without him seeing you. Classic stealth stuff, you should manage it without our help.



Watch the chappy enter the door, then follow him in as closely as possible. Creep up behind him and whack him over the head, grab him or pump him full of sticky shooters.



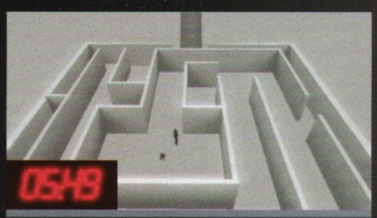
He's the only guy on this level, so once you have dispatched him, just find a door and enter. You will then be treated with a loading screen. Fun.



Okay, so this is a little more like the situations you'll find yourself in during the game. Outgunned and outnumbered. Not by much, but it's still tricky.



You can't use the stealth shots in zoom mode, so move close enough to get an airfoil in the first terrorist's head. This will drop him like a cheap suit. Or something.

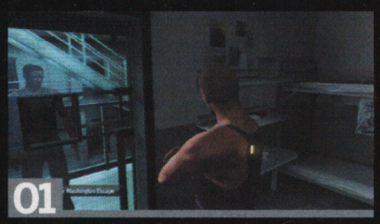


Pick up the airfoil and press RT to bring up a handy map of the area. This will give you an idea of the route you should take around the maze.

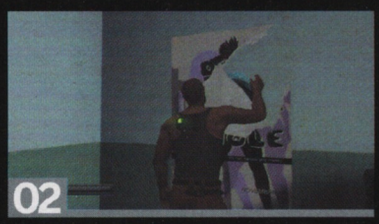
Summary It's straightforward, but it allows you to get to grips with the controls. Try it more than once.

How to... weasel your way into a terrorist organisation

Helping a key member of a terrorist group escape prison is a good way to work your way inside



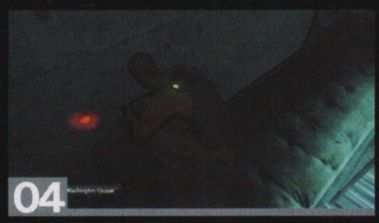
Meet up with Jamie Washington and listen to his little spiel. It's rather boring, but at least it allows you to get a little closer to the characters.



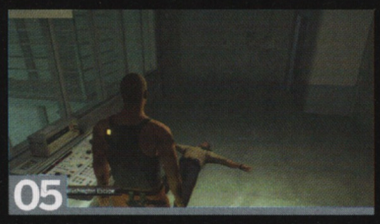
Now every self-respecting convict would be without a tunnel chiselled out of the wall behind some poster or other. This is one of the hardest parts of the game if you don't know how to do it.



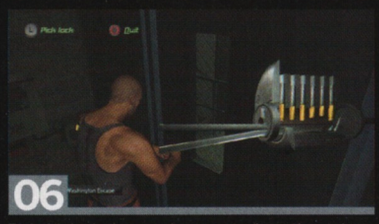
Climb through the tunnel and you will get to some pretty linear segments of climbing. It's best to just follow the many different pipes and tunnels – kind of self-explanatory, really.



Next you'll come to an air vent, after which you will be able to drop down into a control room. This is the first time you'll encounter another human being, and sets the precendent for the rest of the game.



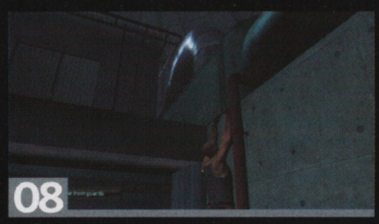
You don't have any weapons yet, so just hit this chappy over the head. If you want to grab him and get some information out of him, do. It doesn't make much difference.



Pick this lock, then work your way down the stairs. You can bust the lock and charge the guard on the other side for a bit of a shortcut as well.



Make your way through the linear level to the control tower. And hack the computer to release all the prisoners and start a real riot. There are a couple of ways through the tower where it's placed.



Get your ass up onto the roof real quick. Jamie is being held there. You can help him out, but he manages to get out of it himself after a while by bashing his captor in the face.



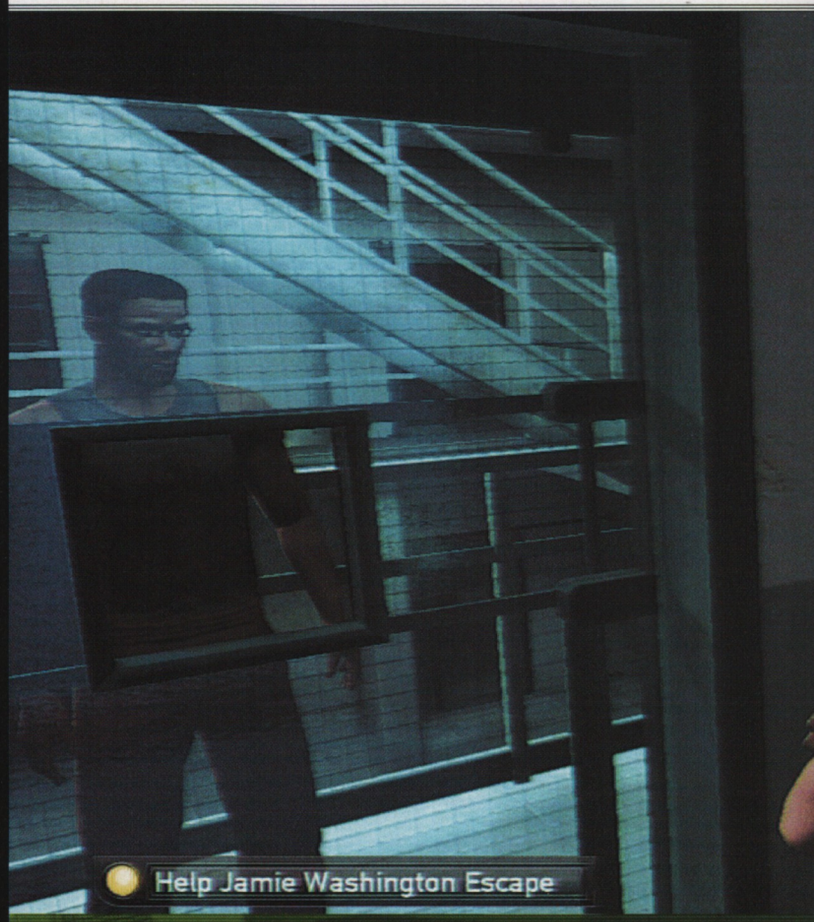
Run right across the roof to the highest point you can find and jump on the news helicopter. This completes your mission. Well done, soldier.



For some reason though, helping Jamie Washington escape involves leaving him behind, and taking this helicopter home.

Summary Thankfully his feels like a proper level, and not an extra training mission. Time is scarse, so you have two choices: Explore or escape.

12.5M UNITS IN THE TOM CLANCY SPLINTER CELL FRANCHISE SOLD SINCE 2002





QUOTE ME

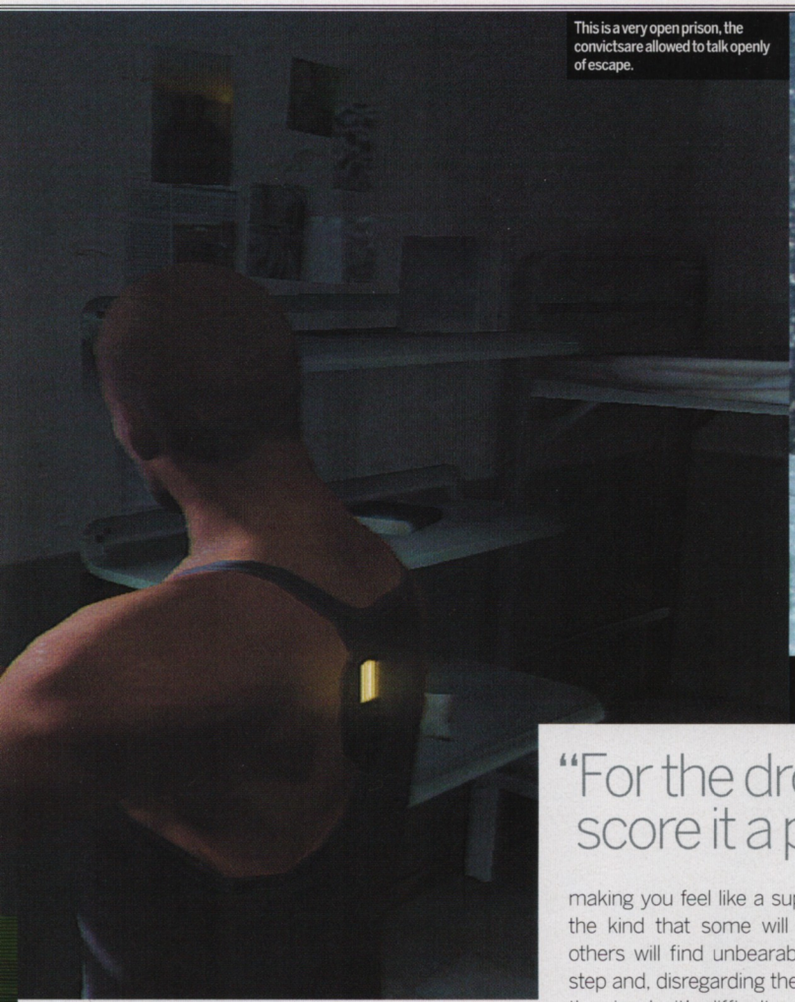
MATHIEU HECTOR, PS3 PRODUCER AT UBISOFT, ON SIXAXIS

"We implemented the Sixaxis control when it was fun to play or adding value to the game play experience"

TOP 5 MICHAEL IRONSIDE FILMS



1 TOTAL RECALL
2 STARSHIP TROOPERS
3 HIGHLANDER 2
4 SCANNERS
5 TOP GUN



This is a very open prison, the convicts are allowed to talk openly of escape.



This combination of punctuation marks indicates surprise. Well you would be, wouldn't you?

"For the drop in presentation alone, we have to score it a point lower than we'd like"

» more than aware of the fact that you're being gently nudged somewhere by something. These are the levels that give you the opportunity to take an air vent rather than a door, and are quite happy to leave it at that. In all fairness, these feel like hangovers from past versions, and not entirely ingrained into the ethos of the game, so it's not something that mortally wounds the game.

Then there's the trial and error aspect. Finishing a level clarifies the issue, as the debriefing screen gives a completion time. Rather than being an accumulation of your numerous repetitions of the level. This means that having spent well over and hour and a half attempting to complete the level, when it all finishes, your time bears no resemblance to the hours you've spent retrying and restarting the levels. Many folk will find this not only frustrating, but also entirely prohibitive to any kind of enjoyment. There will be people for whom this is an utterly gamebreaking experience, and who will simply abhor every step of the way.

So *Splinter Cell Double Agent* has a lot of ups and an almost equal amount of downs. We'd have to say that it does a marvellous job of fulfilling its brief, though: making you feel like a super spy. The issues it has are the kind that some will find easy to overlook, while others will find unbearable. We enjoyed almost every step and, disregarding the obvious slide in the quality of the visuals, it's difficult not to find it utterly engrossing. Sure, you might be better off with the 360 version, but the PlayStation 3 does an ample job of imitating it. It's well worth a bash, but then we're the kind that could see past the trial and error, the variable and bizarre missions and the slightly 'iffy' controls, to delve into the core of a game that raises the franchise's game significantly. For the drop in presentation alone, we have to score it a point lower than we'd like, but given the relatively sparse nature of the range of titles on offer for the system, this is one of the best. Later on in the PS3's life cycle, we suspect it may not look too good, but as an indicator of the way developers should look at the genre, this does a wonderful job of pointing the way in the darkness.

Such a huge section of a title like *Double Agent* is based, of course, around stealth. It's worth noting that the enemy AI can, at times, spoil what is otherwise an experience filled with tension. Situations that, due to the confines of the game, feel forced are commonplace. Take, for example the cruise liner level. It starts on the wrong footing, as the regular clientele are all hidden from you, on the orders of the Mexican coast guard, who order the poor civvies to stay in their rooms – a pretty weak premise in all honesty. Later in the same mission Sam encounters a deck full of said coastguards. Despite being inexplicably aggressive, these chumps aren't actually your enemies, so killing then isn't really an option. They're fair game for a nice exercise in stealth, but what the AI seems to really want is for you to dive into the swimming pool, evading al with one fell swoop. Now these guys really shouldn't be as stupid as this. Similarly, in the snowy tundra of the arctic, and on the oil tanker early in the game, there seem to be points where you're shepherded into long-range gunfights with the eagle-eyed enemies, who really shouldn't be able to see and identify you from such immense distances. These points are two of only a handful of similar issues, and stick out very much as incongruent to the level of freedom you're offered, but do serve to bring home the inadequacies of *Splinter Cell Double Agent*. ▲●✖■

PSU3 Overall Comment

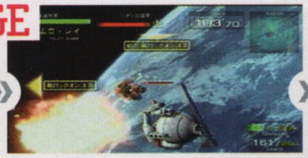
There are ups and there are downs, and *Double Agent* has both in abundance. Even if you are not a big fan of the series, we'd recommend a rental at very least.

07 OUT OF 10

GAMING LINEAGE



2002 DYNASTY WARRIORS PS2



2001 MOBILE SUIT GUNDAM FEDERATION VS. ZEON PS2



2005 DYNASTY WARRIORS 5 PS2



2006 MOBILE SUIT GUNDAM: CROSSFIRE PS3 CROSSFIRE PS3



2007 GUNDAM MUSOU PS3





Musou's camera sometimes works against the game, but it's easy to reposition your perspective to restore playability.



Gundam Musou

Is this a focused experience, or just another vague Target In Sight?

INFORM **Publisher** NamcoBandai | **Developer** Koei | **Release Date** Out now (Japan) | **Price** £Import
Players 2 | **Genre** Action | **Supports** 480p, 720p, Dolby Digital 5.1
Age Rating 12 + | **Website** www.gundam-musou.jp | **Demo** No



Gundam gamers should have sun glasses at the ready as they won't be used to this level of colour saturation.





NEXT GEN

WHAT DEFINES THIS AS A 'NEXT-GEN' PLAYSTATION 3 TITLE?

BLINDING LIGHTS The most impressive feature of *Gundam*'s visuals – namely, the wonderful environmental lighting effects – marks this game as a true PS3-level production. Weapons beam with *Star Wars*-quality laser effects. In short, *Musou* is a blinder.



PROFILE

WHAT'S IN A GAME

ZHWING! Amuro's RX-78-2 is by default equipped with this rather nifty light sabre, which becomes powerful enough to defeat boss characters once it's been levelled-up.







The lighting effects in Gundam Musou give a hint as to what can be achieved with the PS3 hardware.

"It's thoroughly satisfying to be the instigator of Musou's scenes of metal destruction"

We've finally recovered from the sense of utter disappointment that we were left with after playing through *Gundam: Target In Sight*. And now, just as we were about to decommission our *Mobile Suit* pilot's licence, *Gundam Musou* arrives in our private hangar. This is a game that takes the *Gundam* IP and merges it with Koei's *Dynasty Warriors* – of all things – resulting in a title that (we are generally happy to report) is nothing like *Target In Sight*. This is *Gundam* done differently.

The concept behind *Gundam Musou* is simple and places emphasis squarely on your role within the field of battle – even though you are ostensibly part of a team. You enter each mission with support from a huge number of allied mechs, admittedly, but their AI should probably be reclassified as AU (Artificial Unintelligence). They will follow you around and, just occasionally, you will catch a glimpse of one of your comrades attacking an enemy. That is quite a rare sight, though, and most of the time your army is rendered ineffective by AU that likes to stand around and watch, leaving you to do all the hard work.

The level of enemy AI here is also questionable: *Gundam Musou* offers three difficulty levels, but even on the hardest setting it presents only a few enemies per mission who are difficult to overcome. To get to those feisty challengers, you'll first have to cut down hundreds of drone mechs. This is where the game – as in, the game – really takes place. Your objective is to defeat huge groups of enemies, racking up combos and level-ups as you go, while also remaining alert for any collectables that appear in the wake of rusting carcasses. Big kills: new skills. And repeat.

Although we will have to overlook the regrettably dim team support offered by *Gundam Musou* (not because it's forgivable, but just because there are things beyond that shortcoming that are worth seeing), the game works perfectly well as an improbable one-versus-hundreds kind of encounter. Your incentive in all the missions spread out across *Musou* is the same: protect something and destroy any threats to that something. Usually, "that something" is a base or another character, a critical point in the story of your pilot.

The methods employed here are also consistent. On the top-right of your screen is a map of the play area, which is always a square, and there are both red and blue fields displayed on this map: blue markers indicate friendly mechs (or in *Musou*'s case, passivist mechs), and red marks danger (nasty foes/baddie types). Red/blue boxes are also displayed, showing areas controlled by the two forces. Defeat a sufficient number of bad mechs and an even badder one will appear – a guard or



a boss – whom you must then defeat to gain control of an area (those red boxes will turn to blue).

Generally, *Musou*'s level design is such that you will gently be encouraged to move in the direction of your eventual goal without forcibly being escorted there. This amounts to an impression of freedom, leaving you to make your own way through any given mission. Occasionally, though, you will receive cries for help from comrades and it's imperative that you respond to these in good time. But it's not particularly a drag when you're summoned away: the battle maps in *Musou* are quite reasonably sized, so it will never take longer than a couple of minutes to get from one extreme of the map to another.

Typical missions do, however, take around 30 minutes to complete. But the length of missions isn't related to how much ground you'll have to cover, it has more to do with the number of enemies you'll have to destroy, which often rises to 1000 kills per battle. It can also take a while to defeat each mission's boss characters, as they tend to have an inordinately large amount of health. Perseverance is key in *Gundam Musou*, then. If you are happy to keep on repeating the same (intrinsically satisfying) actions until something breaks and victory is awarded, *Musou* has a huge amount to offer. But if you want to be surprised by your games, *Gundam Musou* has nothing.

At least mission environments are varied: battles occur in deserts, arctic regions, underwater labyrinths, and verdant tropics, and even make forays into outer space. But the regular change of environment doesn't really impact on how the game plays at any point – even in space battles you are in effect floating on a single horizontal plane, which restricts your movement so as to maintain the flow of *Musou*'s on-ground gameplay. It can be seen as a development shortcut that things never really change in spite of the game's rotating backdrops, but it does at least enforce a set of rules that are constant and reliable.

The tangible variation in *Gundam Musou* comes instead from its configurable Mobile Suits. High kill

How to... fight in outer space and be victorious

Gundam Musou's space battles are visual highlights of the Musou show



Asteroid fields are present in some space missions, but they don't present a threat because, in keeping with *Gundam*'s principles, damage cannot be sustained through collisions with the environment.



Some *Gundam* mechs convert to flying machines when in space, such as this mini-boss, but most simply use their boosters to hover and float.



It can be easy to lose your sense of position when fighting in space, but a quick tap of L3 remedies the situation by centralising the camera on your Mobile Suit.



Tron-style translucent grids appear to give you a sense of perspective. Grids also serve to delineate the boundaries of a map, so don't think about going outside of the grid.



Although enemy mechs may seem to be on a lower horizontal plane when they're standing in the mid-distance, they soon rise to your level as you approach. This makes it easier to attack them.



Approach a boss and some spoken banter will ensue, which is also written inside a textbox. Cirocco tells us that we "can do it". He needn't have bothered – we died and had to start again.



Special attacks are vital to success in outer space (and elsewhere, for that matter), but your Mobile Suit is limited to periodical use of these specials. Use them wisely...



When surrounded by a full field of enemies it's best just to mash the buttons: sad, but true.



Many of the more lightweight enemy mechs can be left behind, but it's essential that you take out the bulkier and more threatening types before they advance on your protectorate.



Mass carnage is the inevitable result of battle, and *Musou*'s carnage never looks prettier than when it's set in outer space. Time to head back to ground.

Summary Thanks to grid backdrops and space stations that can be entered and used grounding points, battles in space are surprisingly straightforward.

1K THIS IS THE NUMBER OF MECHS ATTACKING YOU IN EACH MISSION, AND IT'S MORE THAN SUFFICIENT TO MAKE YOU FEEL OUTNUMBERED. ESPECIALLY WHEN COMBINED WITH YOUR OWN ARMY'S RETARDED AI...





IN-GAME ANALYSIS

HERE I GO AGAIN ON MY OWN

ENERGY BARS In *Gundam Musou* it's your job to see that enemy gauges are depleted as quickly and comprehensively as possible. You can't rely on your comrades to do much energy bar damage, but at least that gives you the freedom to go on a satisfying solo rampage.



CONTROL SYSTEM

No tilt features here: just a solid slash-and-shoot mechanism that repeats on an ever-enlarging scale. Attacks are assigned to the Sixaxis' face buttons, camera control is on L1.

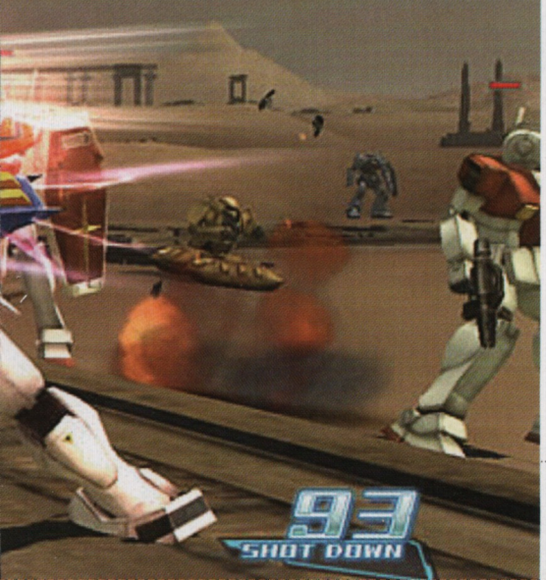
GUNDAM MUSOU IS EASY TO CONTROL AND GIMMICK FREE.



Claustrophobia sufferers might want to look elsewhere: Gundam Musou surrounds you with piles of machinery and refuses to back off.



The impact felt when heavy attacks are landed is almost tangible (in spite of the Sixaxis' current lack of rumble).



counts are rewarded with level-ups that can increase both your attacking and defensive powers, while the collection of Special Points is linked to three-stage special attacks. And these special moves are unique to each pilot/mech, again adding some variety where it's needed.

Gundam Musou's control system should be especially easy for anyone with *Dynasty Warriors* experience. Taking its inspiration from the frantic button presses required in the *Dynasty games*, *Gundam Musou* places its primary attacks on the □, ○, and ✕ buttons. Long-range attacks are limited to ineffective guns, however, and special attacks can only be performed when your Special Points gauge is full. As a result, the most useful attacking method in *Gundam Musou* is each mech's close-range attack (which is usually a kind of lightsaber that can strike through several enemies simultaneously). Particularly thanks to the group mentality of enemies in battle, the level of carnage that can be wrought by levelled-up Mobile Suits is impressive. And in spite of the game's repetitious leanings, it is thoroughly satisfying to be the instigator of *Musou*'s scenes of metal destruction.

Unlike *Target In Sight*, which struggled to keep up a decent frame rate even when presenting one-on-one battle action, *Musou* almost always delivers 60fps – even when dozens of mechs are caught up in melee and pyrotechnics (laser beams and explosions) are flying across the screen. Collision detection, too, is excellent. And the flawlessness of *Musou*'s game engine amplifies the satisfaction you'll get from triggering attacks.

Even more impressively, when you face a boss (or even a mini-boss, for that matter) brief, but seamlessly introduced, cut-scenes and freeze-frames help to increase the level of tension. There's no loading time to

> "Battles occur in deserts, arctic regions, underwater labyrinths... even in outer space"

give you any advanced warning that a cut-scene is about to begin, but when it does – thanks to some wonderful camera work and perfect timing – you will be thrust into the subsequent fight with the kind of dramatic quality that the *Gundam* anime is famous for. And the great news is, it doesn't end there. The developer has taken this idea to its logical conclusion, peppering additional scenes throughout the duel (specifically, whenever you or your enemy lands a particularly powerful attack) and capping each boss battle with a brief dramatic finale.

The way the game is sliced and presented, you would think *Musou* would have arcade origins. (It doesn't.) Instead of one central campaign mode (à la *Target In Sight*), there are separate stories for each pilot character. Official Mode replicates true Gundam stories, while Original Mode contains brand new stories in new settings, but with familiar faces and old Mobile Suits.

Completion of one character's story reveals an additional character story, providing plenty of incentive (especially for fans of the anime) to play the game to completion. And although its repetition can be gruelling at times, there is a two-player Co-op facility in both Original and Official mode. This isn't online, unfortunately, but even in a vertical split-screen setup *Musou* excels as a two-player adventure. At last, an intelligent comrade! There's also a two-player versus mode, which provides some *Virtual On*-style competition.

As we've said previously, this is a completely different game from *Target In Sight* – *Gundam Musou* isn't rusty. Unfortunately, though, even *Musou* isn't quite the game we thought it would be. While it looks superb and has the technical prowess to deliver an experience that, at times, is overwhelmingly manic, there's a notable lack of tactics at play here. The core gameplay and its leaning towards close-range combat, however, makes for an involving and satisfying *Gundam Musou* battle experience. ▲●✕■

PSU3 Overall Comment

If Koei decides that *Gundam* should become a series, the next step would be to add some strategy to the game. As it stands, this is 'just' a competent action game.

07 OUT OF 10

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Home sweet home

The day Sony changed the world – the future of online gaming is almost here



QUESTION: How do you change an entire gaming community's opinion of you in one fell swoop? How do you bring the cynics, the elitists, the casuals, the non-believers and the non-gamers together with a solitary move? How do you shatter the hopes of the competition with one simple word? If you're Sony, you talk about Home. If somehow you've managed to miss the hype that has brewed to an almost-dangerous level since this year's GDC, you've missed out on the most important announcement – if not of this console generation, then perhaps the entire history of online gaming. Sony is here to take the concept of global community to the next level, to launch a full frontal assault at everything Microsoft shaped, and to deliver a swift and violent kick directly into the teeth of naysayers the world over. Stand up and take notice – Sony is coming home.

So, if you are one of the uninitiated, a brief glance at the screenshots will have surely piqued your interest. Home is, in the most basic of terms, a three-dimensional dashboard for all of your online gaming needs. But to just leave it at that would be near-criminal – Home has the potential to change the gaming world. You begin by creating an avatar; a *Sims*-esque projection of your own personality constructed from slick, high-definition building blocks, then enter into an MMO-mimicking community where you can converse with an entire globe's worth of other Home boys and girls. From there, you can organise multiplayer gaming sessions, watch HD movies, invite your new pals back to your HomeSpace (more on this later) or simply chew the fat and pummel through the world's issues in the company of friends and strangers alike. In many ways, it's *Second Life* for the MySpace generation – a digital universe whose quality is dictated by its users.

This is Home at its most basic, yet already it's massively exciting. Just the scope for avatar creation »

is something sure to enthuse a large percentage of the population. Just look at the popularity of Nintendo's charming 'Miis' – basic caricatures whose charm is only limited by the imagination of their creator. And of course, going back to MySpace again, the idea of idealistic self-projection is hotter than ever right now. Just look at the photos of all those Emo kids with faultless hair or the seemingly never-ending succession of attractive females – they're not an accurate representation of who you're reading about. No, they're an avatar, a snapshot of that person at their best and most beautiful; a deceptive insight into a personality that they can live out in an online space. Weird? Yes. Harmless? Most probably. But popular? You'd better believe it.

Home allows this cross-section of the population to expand upon this slightly facile fascination with image, but in a way that's become very familiar to gamers. Using a system very similar to EA's superb cross-title gameface, every Home user can build a version of whoever they want to be. So, do you create yourself in meticulous detail and see how the world accepts you? Or do you step into Sony's universe as an 25-stone guy with a lime-green Mohawk (assuming you don't look like that already)? The choice, as they say, is yours.

A typical Home scenario for you: you stroll out into the Central Lounge (see 'Hubble bobble' boxout), decked out in a new pair of trainers and a trilby, and on your travels bump into someone wearing a *MotorStorm* t-shirt. Figuring that the man's choice of clothing could well dictate his taste in excellent launch games, you engage him in conversation. Pleasantries are exchanged and before long, the topic of Evolution's superb off-road racer comes up. As a confident young individual, you naturally assume you can take him to the cleaners. Unsurprisingly, he disagrees. Keen to see the argument reach its natural conclusion, he invites you back to his HomeSpace. As you walk into his slightly scary apartment, the realisation sets in that you may be in trouble. Everywhere you turn, there's *MotorStorm* memorabilia. Pictures on the wall, trophies in the cabinet; a selection of chairs laid out in a formation eerily reminiscent of Monument Valley itself. You turn around, slowly. He's dancing. He's taken his top off, and he's singing *Kumbaya* into the microphone, filling in the gaps between lines with heavy breathing. D'you know what? It's probably time to leave. You turn off the PS3 and cry yourself to sleep.

Of course, this is an anomaly. 999 times out of the thousand, you would have launched into a few competitive games of *MotorStorm* online, had a chat, realised you both like *Resistance*, cruised back to your own HomeSpace, mucked about with some furniture then shot up some fools on *Fall Of Man*. Add one to the 'buddy' list. This is the flexibility of Home from a gaming point of view. If you've ever played *Halo 2* online (yes it's an Xbox game, but it's also the benchmark for lobby systems in online console videogaming), then you'll know you can create a party with friends and take the party into ranked competitive games ad infinitum. In Home, you can do this with *every* game. That, ladies and gentlemen, is good news.

Even if this were all Home offered, it would still eclipse everything available on rival systems. For the past year and beyond, Microsoft has led the way in the online race, delivering a truly excellent level of functionality and ease of use, allowing for a level of synergy between console and user that the PlayStation Network in its current state could only dream about. And for that year and beyond, the industry mused on just how Sony could possibly outdo Microsoft, or even if it could match it. No one was expecting this. As has been put so eloquently elsewhere, Home is the answer to a question that nobody asked.

The beauty of Home is in its potential. In his keynote speech at Gamer Developers Conference (GDC), Phil Harrison discussed some of the ways in which Home could be used by gamers and corporations alike. One such suggestion was in the form of company-owned spaces within the Home universe. So, for example, you wander into EA's space, all bright lights, slick wooden floors and glass walls. On large video screens, trailers for the latest batch of games are playing. On the wall, pods featuring playable demos of EA's current output are being used by other Home inhabitants. Turn a corner, and you can pre-order the next *FIFA* or electronically buy the current one. And it doesn't stop at game companies, either – who's to say that there won't be an Amazon space or a Converse shop within Home? The scope





HDTV screens will play hi-res game trailers as you strut around Home's Central Lounge.



Hubble bobble

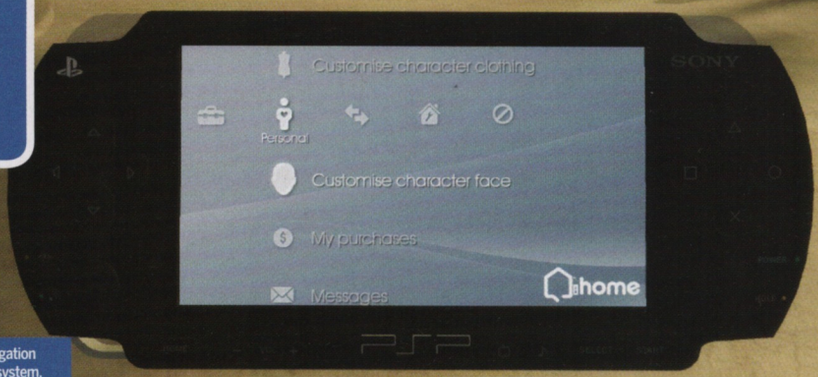
Taking the first tentative steps into Home

The first port of call when you delve into Home is the Central Lounge, a hub of activity and interactivity where you can meet your friends and converse with randoms to your heart's content. The Central Lounge has a maximum capacity of 64 people, and then respawns infinitely to accommodate everyone who is logged into Home at any time. This means that Home will never suffer from the kind of overpopulation that has dogged mainstream MMORPGs, leaving it clean, spacious and welcoming. When you're in the Central Lounge, you can alter your body language to match your mood, chat via text or voice and even gesticulate. Expect large groups of garishly dressed dancing men to appear in a Central Lounge near you this autumn.









The PSP is used as a navigation tool for the entire Home system, streamlining everything.





With a few spare bucks you can turn your HomeSpace into the apartment of your dreams.





Living the dream

Grand Designs, PS3 style

Time spent within Home will most likely be within your freshly built apartment, an ultra-chic 'footballers' wives'-type affair with the focus on shiny floors and minimalist design. Everyone in Home will have their own apartment, or 'HomeSpace', and it will come free with a selection of furniture and paraphernalia, which you can move around as you see fit. Should you be a budding interior designer, you can then purchase new furniture and household items from the PlayStation Store, or even splash the cash on a new luxury apartment.

Brilliantly, not only can you invite up to 16 friends back to your HomeSpace to hang out, but you can also stream your own music and video so everyone can experience it. So, if you've just nabbed an mp3 from a forthcoming album, invite everyone back to listen to it. Just make sure they don't start kicking over your furniture. Because they will, you know. They hate you.

You play, we play

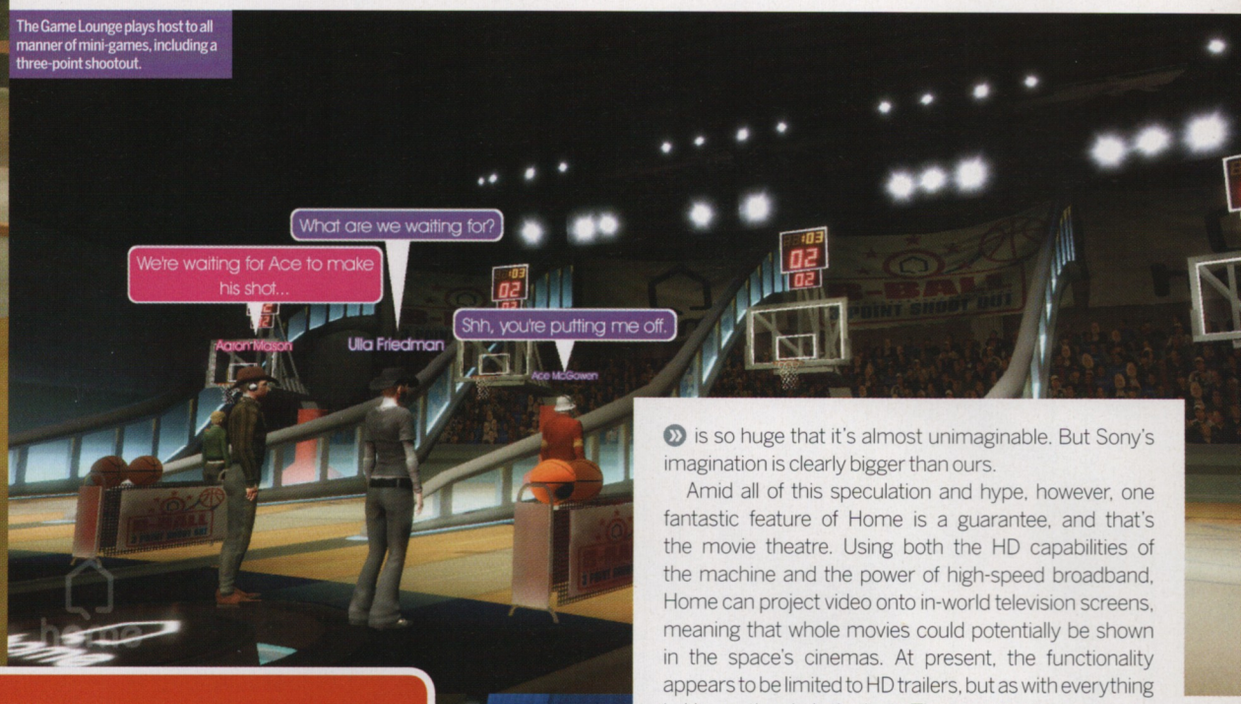
It's not all about chatting and posing, you know

Sony has incorporated the perfect icebreaker for anyone struggling to keep a good conversation going – a games room, or Games Lounge to give it its proper name. Featuring a fully functional pool table, bowling alley and a user-definable arcade, it's the ideal way to get to know new people and kill half an hour if you're waiting for a friend.

As with the Central Lounge, the maximum capacity for gaming is 64 but, again, it will respawn infinitely to accommodate everyone. So no need for virtual pound coins on the pool table, then.







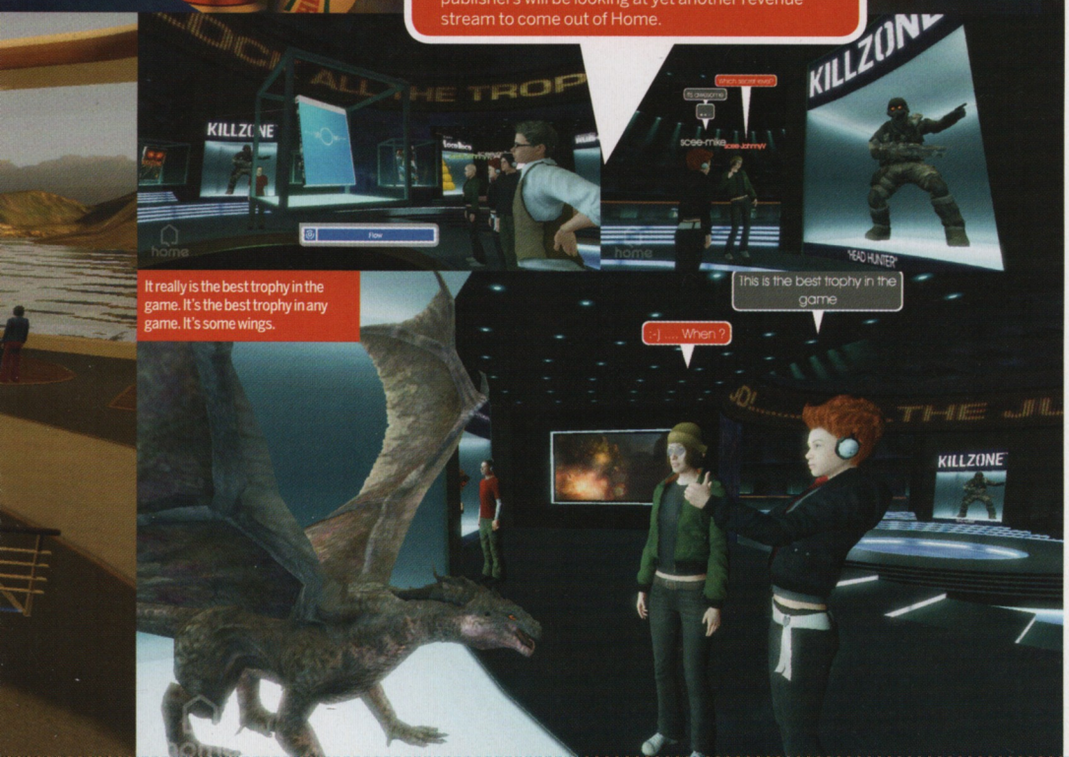
The Game Lounge plays host to all manner of mini-games, including a three-point shootout.



Achievements? What's an achievement?

Sony outdoes Microsoft. Yet again

You know how Xbox 360 owners are always banging on about Achievements? Well, Sony was clearly listening, and has modified the idea and given a slick Home twist. Now every Home-r will have their own Hall of Fame – a three-dimensional representation of their gaming abilities. Sony is pretty keen for every game to come with a fully rendered trophy that can be unlocked within the software. Win it, and you can place it proudly in your trophy cabinet. If this trophy system can match the compulsion that Achievements has managed to muster, then publishers will be looking at yet another revenue stream to come out of Home.



» is so huge that it's almost unimaginable. But Sony's imagination is clearly bigger than ours.

Amid all of this speculation and hype, however, one fantastic feature of Home is a guarantee, and that's the movie theatre. Using both the HD capabilities of the machine and the power of high-speed broadband, Home can project video onto in-world television screens, meaning that whole movies could potentially be shown in the space's cinemas. At present, the functionality appears to be limited to HD trailers, but as with everything in Home, the sky's the limit. The beauty of the service is that Sony has the power to change, upgrade and improve it forever. And judging by the enthusiasm on the faces of Harrison and Co at GDC, we'll be talking about Home for plenty of time to come.

So what does this mean for the average gamer? Well, not only is Home optional for your online gaming needs, it's also completely free to download when it arrives later this year. When you compare that with the £40-a-year Microsoft charges for Live, it suddenly becomes incredibly good value. Home will open up a new way of communicating and interacting with the world's PS3 owners, offering a freedom of creativity and expression as an accompaniment to a solid gaming foundation.

It's not just the gamers that are set to benefit from the advent of Home, however. In a classic 'everybody wins' scenario, Sony is pushing for companies to use its new universe to advertise their wares, be they game-related or otherwise. It may seem intrusive to think that a corner turned within Home could lead to a garish advert for Coca Cola, but it's no different to real life. And if it means the service remains free and these revenue streams allow Sony to continually fund and improve it, then surely the occasional piece of product placement is a fair trade.

There's no denying it, Sony is on to a winner here. Coupled with the gorgeous *LittleBigPlanet*, it has finally become clear that the PlayStation 3 is not here to play second fiddle to anything. Sony is determined to not only win the generation's online war, but to start a new one, to take on the likes of *Second Life* and even the wildly successful *World Of Warcraft* and to get its user base spending as much time on its console and within its space as possible.

As exciting as Home sounds now, it will be doubly so in 12 months. As the beta test comes and goes over the next few months, the true impact of Sony's potentially world-changing project will become apparent. If it takes off – and surely it will – then even the likes of MySpace will be fighting Home for new users. Take our word for it; this is going to be huge. ▲●×■



Director//Martin Scorsese **Cast**//Leonardo DiCaprio, Matt Damon, Jack Nicholson **Price**//£25.99

Old ground, new fun

The Departed

HOW annoying. There we were, all convinced that unoriginality was a bad thing and then along comes Scorsese with a remake of a gangster flick forcing us to re-evaluate our standards. Though it may be hard to argue that *The Departed* is in any way new, it would be double the task to argue that it's anything but a blast.

Telling the tale of two undercover operatives (one for the mob, one for the police), *The Departed* explores the violent, depraved underworld of Boston, a place where murders are so common observations are made about the different way people fall when shot in the head. It's dark stuff, but crucially it never feels depressing. Indeed, the sense of danger is always met with wit and charm, a quality that has always separated Scorsese's efforts in the genre from other directors'. But *The Departed* is also more than a stylish investigation into the underbelly of Boston – it's a story of two men sacrificing their sense of identity for the job. It's a tragic proposition, and again handled superbly by the veteran director.



As you might hope, there are too many terrific aspects to mention, but it must be said that the film's cast impress in a manner few other ensembles have. It's rare we can say that so many of a film's main players are so good, but that's certainly the case here with several brilliant turns enlivening an already-snappy script. Incidentally, the prospect of a sequel with Mark Wahlberg's aggressive cop at the centre frankly has us drooling.

There are parts that don't work – the poorly managed romantic interest for the leads in particular – and the feeling that you're never watching anything new is inescapable, but there's just too much here to enjoy for any of that to really matter. Great fun. ★★★★



PICTURE QUALITY

One of the many great qualities in Scorsese's films is how effortlessly brilliant they look, and *The Departed* is no exception. There's no contrived cinematography, just simple, sophisticated stuff. Now though this might mean there's not a great deal the new format can work with to show off, the transfer is clean and crisp enough for it not to matter. The film's terrific mix of tones and its rich palette make for an altogether decent BD. The disc's ability to bring out the best in textures also mean Jack Nicholson's wrinkles have never been so charming. ★★★★

BEST BD SCENE

The climactic meeting on the rooftop.

Director//Michael Bay
Cast//Nicolas Cage, Sean Connery, Ed Harris
Price//£29.99

The Rock

Escape to Alcatraz

NOW the summer is saturated with comic book adaptations, but it wasn't that long ago the big screen's busy season was full of brash, man-friendly actioners with more explosions crammed in than could possibly be necessary. Of course, we prefer the current situation but that doesn't stop us looking back with an ironic fondness at silly Simpson/Bruckheimer fare like *The Rock*.

Some disgruntled soldiers have taken up residence in Alcatraz and will destroy San Francisco unless they get some money. Enter Nic Cage and a particularly roguish Sean Connery, here playing the only man ever to have broken out of Alcatraz now charged with the responsibility of breaking back in. It's pacey, loud stuff and it does at least look expensive with Michael Bay needlessly swooping his camera about. Ultimately, however, this is too ridiculous to enjoy on anything but a sardonic level. ★★

PICTURE QUALITY

As with most of these action blockbusters, *The Rock*'s shiny photography can't but impress on Blu-ray. Every scene is now enhanced with more detail and overall polish, and though it never really wows, it does the job. Of course, were Bay's camera to behave itself there might have been more time for us to better appreciate the details. ★★★★

[BEST BD SCENE]

The opening car chase.











Director//Simon West **Cast**//Nicolas Cage, John Malkovich, John Cusack **Price**//£29.99

Con Air

A different type of in-flight movie

MORE ridiculous OTT Bruckheimer cinema, only this time Nic Cage has been working out. Telling the tale of a soldier unfairly given a seven-year manslaughter sentence and how he ends up saving the day onboard a plane for transporting A-list criminals, *Con Air* does at least have the good sense to not take itself too seriously. That said, it lacks the intelligence to ever be more than just another blockbuster chocka-block with explosions, pantomime characters and impossible heroics.

As the film's hero, Cage is unusually boring, clumsily tip-toeing along the line between Rambo and Romeo. Much better is the support, with Malkovich having fun in the role of Evil McDevil (or whatever his name is) and Cusack sobering the whole affair up with his typically dry performance as US Marshal Larkin. There are far worse effects vehicles out there than this but that doesn't stop this from being utterly disposable. ★★

PICTURE QUALITY

Again, as with *The Rock*, this is a decent effort from the home of Bruckheimer, but the lack of visual invention means it feels flatter than it otherwise might have. The quality is still there though, the crisp transfer helped along by some clean photography and sharp textures. ★★★★

BEST BD SCENE

The villains' last stand.





Director//Bill Condon **Cast**//Jamie Foxx, Jennifer Hudson, Beyoncé Knowles **Price**//£25.99

Dreamgirls

Making a song and dance about Motown

OF course, no matter how good they are, musicals will never be cool. The closest any all-singing, all-dancing spectacle came to being that was *Grease*, and even that's widely considered to be 'one for the girly men'. There really is no hope for the genre in the hip stakes whatsoever and so long as that's the case, five-star reviews of quality entertainment like *Dreamgirls* are going to be scoffed at. Oh well.

Dazzlingly photographed from start to finish, Bill Condon's film version of the Eighties Broadway musical – based loosely on the rise of Motown and the Supremes – is simply one of the best films of last year. The performances – particularly that of newcomer Jennifer Hudson as the soulful Effie – are top-notch, dragging you into the rags-to-riches-to-redemption story with consummate ease. The film's terrific pace helps ensure that there is never a dull moment, while the production as a whole is as polished as you could wish it to be. But it's in the area that counts where the film really delivers, the big, electric numbers filling a void left empty for far too many years. ★★★★★

PICTURE QUALITY

If nothing else, the *Dreamgirls* Blu-ray makes for a refreshing change from the action blockbusters that are threatening to make things a little boring. The big numbers have an even bigger impact on the high-definition format, while the slickly presented era is done no harm. However, often the film's cool photography limits its ability to shine as it might otherwise have done. ★★★★

BEST BD SCENE

The lively debut of the Dreametttes.

Director//Tony Scott **Cast**//Gene Hackman, Denzel Washington, James Gandolfini **Price**//£25.99

Crimson Tide

As deep as Tony Scott gets

THOUGH far from a brilliant thriller, it's a shame that Tarantino's questionable involvement with the script is what Tony Scott's submarine drama will be most remembered for. What it should be remembered for is Gene Hackman and Denzel Washington. Rare is it that two powerhouse performers can lock horns as pleasingly as they do here, the two stars gobbling up the scenery to thrilling effect. By comparison the rest of the film suffers, the mediocre mutiny plot falling by the wayside unable to offer real depth to the showdowns. Still, at least Tony Scott's tendency to make films look like car adverts is negated by the confines of the tin can. ★★★

PICTURE QUALITY

Unfortunately, though the film is well shot, the palette is diminished by the situation. Submarines have undoubtedly been the home of good cinema, but apparently they also stifle the potential of HD. ★★★

BEST BD SCENE

All similar stuff, but probably the well-edited mutiny.





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...on hi-def Blu-ray



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BATMAN BEGINS
2 Should be great on the next-gen disc.



VALIANT
3 Poor Brit-toon gets polished for HD.

BROKEN ARROW
4 Travolta and Slater Woo us with this nuke actioner.

FROM HELL
5 Depp hunts the Ripper in this semi-decent thriller.

ALIEN VS PREDATOR
6 Absolute crap in high definition. Wow.

GLORY
7 One of the best war movies finds a new home on BD.

THE DA VINCI CODE
8 Ron Howard riles people all over again in high definition.

U-571
9 Mostow's decent, if inaccurate, u-boat actioner comes to BD.



CRUEL INTENTIONS
10 You can put it anywhere, including your BD drive.

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Director//Gore Verbinski **Cast**//Johnny Depp, Orlando Bloom, Keira Knightley **Price**//£29.99

Pirates Of The Caribbean: The Curse Of The Black Pearl

From the makers of a rollercoaster

THE reason it's hard to think of another character created this side of the year 2000 to have shared Jack Sparrow's appeal is obvious: it's because there hasn't been one. So sublimely judged is Johnny Depp's performance as the quirky captain that the rest of the film is made to seem better than it actually is.

The truth is that Orlando Bloom's horrid turn as the miserable blacksmith-turned-pirate is easier to overlook in Captain Jack Sparrow's presence. The same can also be said of Keira Knightley's performance as the detestable Elizabeth and the script's irritating reliance on cheap laughs (seriously, what's with the obsession with the corset and wooden eye gags? They're not funny the first time round, let alone the eighth). Of course, there are some sound, expensive-looking set pieces that are made to feel all the more refreshing by the setting – pirate ships had been absent from our screens for far too long. There is also a decent villain (played with gusto by Geoffrey Rush), but ultimately the film just isn't as quick-witted, charming or well formed as its hero. ★★

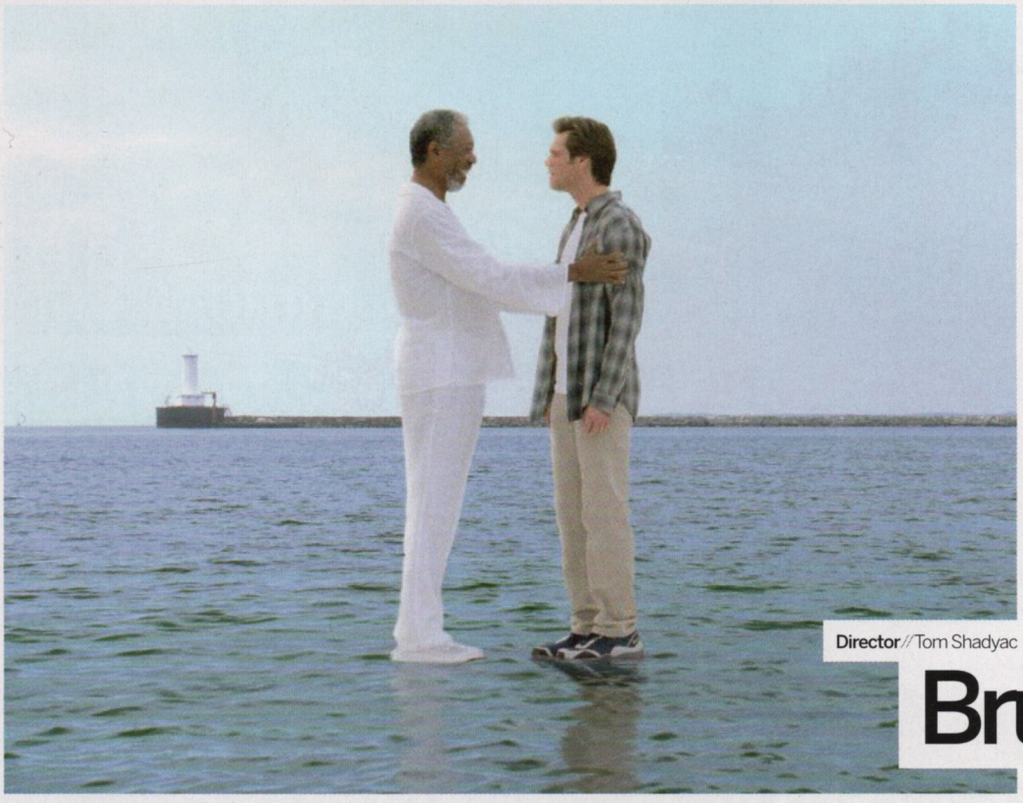
PICTURE QUALITY

A great thing about Verbinski's *Pirates* is that it's never afraid to vary the setting, and the Blu-ray really benefits from this. Rich in both texture and colour, *Pirates* is a superb example of what the format can achieve. It is really not a bad effort from Disney, who has only just started to make its mark in the HD market. ★★★★

BEST BD SCENE

Jack Sparrow's arrival and subsequent escape.





TALK about films not living up to their trailers. Though this was never expected to be anything more than okay, the preview at least hinted at a few laughs, most of which stemmed from the central premise (guy gets given the power of God). Nevermind.

Lacking any of the imagination needed to make such a concept work, *Bruce Almighty* is just a series of letdowns placed one after another. The predictable comedy template within which the film is set doesn't help matters.

Frustratingly, the film's cast, which includes Jim Carrey, Jennifer Aniston and Morgan Freeman, are never given the opportunity to excel and this, we suspect, is due to the film's clear intent to never offend. This summer's follow-up, *Evan Almighty*, will hopefully learn from the failings of the first. The signs are good at least – the trailer was awful. ★

PICTURE QUALITY

The textures are sharp, the colours are strong – but there's a distinct lack of pizzazz. ★★★★

BEST BD SCENE

The meteor's landing.

Director//Tom Shadyac **Cast**//Jim Carrey, Jennifer Aniston, Morgan Freeman **Price**//£25.99

Bruce Almighty

Why God, why?



Director//Darren Aronofsky **Cast**//Hugh Jackman, Rachel Weisz, Sean Patrick Thomas **Price**//£25.99

The Fountain

Who wants to live forever?

GIVEN the unique structure (it's one story told through a trio of Timelines; one in 16th Century Spain, one now, and one in the 26th Century space) it's not hard to see how Darren Aronofsky's film has left so many confused. But *The Fountain* is a much simpler movie than it might at first seem.

It's the tale of a man obsessed with finding the mythical Tree of Life, motivated as he is by the impending demise of his one true love. That's not us giving a pretentious reading of a convoluted narrative either – it genuinely is that straightforward. Make no mistake, though, *The Fountain* is by no means conventional. From start to finish, it's utterly different and thoroughly refreshing.

When it comes to sublime, original visuals, this is up there with *2001*. There is an entirely unique look and feel to the film, but never does it feel contrived or over-stylised. Impressively, director Aronofsky also manages that rare feat of making each segment feel distinct but without compromising the fluidity of the film. It's delightful stuff, easily on a par with *Pi* and *Requiem For A Dream* in terms of visual impact.

Though so much of this film's success is owed to Aronofsky's incredible talent, it's quite clear that the film just wouldn't have worked as well without the excellent cast, Hugh Jackman in particular.

As the obsessed lead, Jackman demonstrates a range and restraint that was, up until this point, only ever hinted at. It's a terrific performance, giving the film the emotional centre it so desperately needed. Brad Pitt's departure may have meant the film was $55 million worse off, but we think, on this evidence, that it was probably a good trade-off. ★★★★

PICTURE QUALITY

What's terrific about the more exciting directors is that they're willing to try new things, and that's certainly something Aronofsky has done here. The whole film is enriched with a tremendous golden sheen, and this in turn is served brilliantly by the Blu-ray format. Aronofsky's superbly managed textures are also made all the more impressive by the enhanced detail – the more intimate scenes between Jackman and Weisz benefiting especially.

It's in the third timeline, however, that the transfer really comes into its own. Unlike any sci-fi we've seen before, this section of *The Fountain* is impressive enough in standard definition, so you can imagine the dazzling impact the BD version has. ★★★★

BEST BD SCENE

The closing montage. Superb stuff.



Director//Gore Verbinski **Cast**//Johnny Depp, Orlando Bloom, Keira Knightley **Price**//£25.99

Pirates Of The Caribbean: Dead Man's Chest

Jack's back, but so are the others

AS ever with these sorts of sequels (ones that lead directly into the soon-to-be-released third part), Dead Man's Chest is so bogged down with plot and set-up it often forgets to enjoy itself. Essentially about the coup of Davey Jones' (excellently played by Bill Nighy) still-beating heart, there are so many needless layers, twists and tangents that it can become an effort to follow. This feeling is only ever worsened by the inevitable lack of resolve, frustrating when you've just invested two-and-a-half hours of your time and twenty of your pounds.

And yet somehow, despite the surprising (and it must be said, ridiculous) lack of Jack and surplus of chat, *Dead Man's Chest* is okay. It shares some of the flaws of the first – it's far too long for what it is and has a tendency to go for the easy laugh – but also many of its qualities, chiefly Verbinski's ability to concoct some tremendous set pieces. The three-way sword fight on a spinning wheel is probably the best of the bunch, but the fact that it's a close-run thing between at least two other skirmishes should speak volumes. The effects are also consistently stunning and even though this one generally disappointed us, the uniqueness and energy of the series means that we're still very excited about the next one. ★★

PICTURE QUALITY

The mix of bright colours and strong textures make this one of the best Blu-rays yet. Well, in terms of picture quality at least. ★★★★

BEST BD SCENE

The final battle with the Kraken.



Director//Mathieu Kassovitz **Cast**//Halle Berry, Penelope Cruz, Robert Downey Jr **Price**//£25.99

Gothika

Supernatural guff. Like we needed more of that...

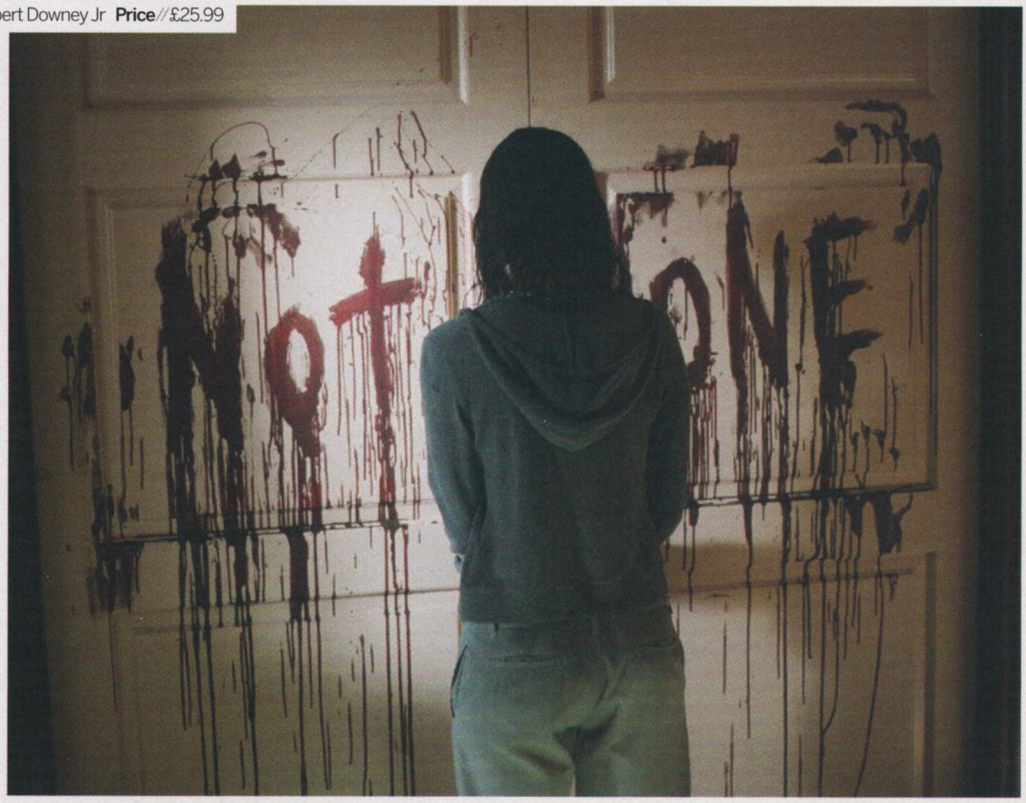
ONE day a superb tragedy will be made about the career of Halle Berry, but until that day comes we have to put up with nonsense like this. Playing a psychiatrist who one day wakes up to find herself a patient in her own asylum, Berry looks to be a world away from the actress in *Monster's Ball*. Worse still, depressingly, is the rest of the film. A horrid mixture of the supernatural, painful dialogue and silly twists, *Gothika* manages that all-too-common feat of misfiring on every level. Even a strong supporting cast which includes Penelope Cruz and Robert Downey Jr can't save this from being one of the worst films of the past ten years. How offensive piffle like this gets the greenlight we'll never know. ★

PICTURE QUALITY

The shady cinematography isn't made for high definition, but for the most part this is solid stuff. Nothing spectacular, just solid. ★★★★

BEST BD SCENE

The first appearance of the ghoul.



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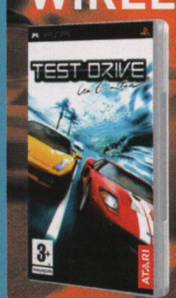
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DVD round-up

BECAUSE IT'S OKAY TO LIKE STANDARD-DEF MOVIES TOO

Rating guide

ESSENTIAL	★★★★★
ROCKING	★★★★
GOOD	★★★
BARGAIN BIN	★★
BIN FODDER	★

Director// Edgar Wright **Cast**// Simon Pegg, Nick Frost, Paddy Considine, Jim Broadbent **Price**// £24.99 **Out**// 11 June

Hot Fuzz

This DVD just got real



HOT *Fuzz* is brilliant, but it's worth mentioning from the start that the film's biggest enemy is also its main driving force: the action genre. Look at every piece of publicity released – the posters, trailers, quotes, interviews – and they all lead you to expect an absolute balls-to-the-wall action film. Michael Bay in the West Country. But that isn't *Hot Fuzz*, not until its final 20 minutes at least, and even then it has more in common with Robert Rodriguez.

Wright and Pegg may have planned a British version of your typical Jerry Bruckheimer production, but what they've crafted instead is two parts murder mystery, one part action – with lashings of character and comedy throughout. Where *Shaun Of The Dead* was filmed with love for the once-great John Carpenter, right down to the same aspect ratio, *Hot Fuzz* is a cacophony of styles – Rodriguez, Bay, Jackson, Scott – the film even riffs Argento, master of Italian splatter, during its second act.

As such, it's harder to pin down. Pegg and Frost's real-life friendship shines on screen, despite playing complete strangers. And there's a host of Britain's most revered thespians having fun with the material. The screenplay gives each enough time to shine, displaying Wright and Pegg's faithfulness to their ensemble. But it's the melding of styles that keeps it from 'classic' territory. So when the shit hits the fan and people start drawing guns, diving through the air, blowing things up and high-kicking grannies in the face, it feels like a totally different film.

But when the action is that amazing, the film as consistently funny as it is, and the actors willing to take stereotypes and turn them on their heads, there's really very little to complain about. As entertainment, *Hot Fuzz* is just too much fun to hold grudges against. It's not as good as *Shaun Of The Dead*, and it's unclear whether it will endure a life as long as its undead cousin. But it certainly deserves to.

★★★★

EXTRAS

Audio commentary with Simon Pegg and Edgar Wright, audio commentary with the Real Fuzz, commentary with the Sandford Village People, and commentary with the Sandford Police. 22 deleted scenes with optional audio commentary by Pegg and Wright. 12 production blogs, outtakes, Visual FX feature, plot holes feature, art department feature, flip chart, Easter Eggs and more.

★★★★★

Price// £19.99 **Out**// Now

The Grudge 2

Same scary bitch, longer hair



AS far as remakes of Asian horror flicks go, 2003's *The Grudge* was hardly a bad movie. Sure, it lacked any notion of character development and didn't make the slightest bit of sense, but when it came to creepy set pieces Takashi Shimizu's remake of his own original franchise was, at times, really quite terrifying. It is that fact alone which elevated it above a lot of its many contemporaries – *Pulse*, *The Ring Two*, *Dark Water* and the like – and ensured that it was popular enough to earn itself a sequel. And so the originally titled *The Grudge 2* was born.

Just like the film before it, in this encounter we're dealing with multiple characters – and once again a distinct lack of any depth or development. Three hot schoolgirls, Sarah Michelle Gellar's sister, a reporter from Hong Kong, and a family back in the United States all fall victim to the horrible curse.

Forget the story, you're here for the scares. While nothing can quite match the business building/apartment scene from *The Grudge*, the atmosphere is incredibly unsettling throughout, and there's a knockout scene in a headmistress' office toward the end. Recommended for those purely wanting some solid scares without the cheap BOO! factor. ★★★

EXTRAS

★★★

Price// £17.99 **Out**// 11 June

Epic Movie

Remember when parodies were funny?



EPIC *Movie* is the latest cinematic abomination from the people responsible for the not-amusing-in-any-way-shape-or-form and oh-god-please-make-it-stop-before-we-gouge-our-eyeballs-out-with-a-spoon *Date Movie*. There is, however, a scene about an hour in where Borat shows up.

It's not Sacha Baron Cohen, of course, he likes to retain at least some decency. It's merely a look-a-like. Anyway, he is kissing someone rather passionately before he suddenly stops, turns to the camera and proudly proclaims: "This is my sister! She is number one prostitute in all of Narnia... Nice." End of joke. Brilliant. These numbskulls have gone out of their way to prove that they haven't got an original bone in their body – so much so that they're ripping off jokes, almost word for word, from other, better comedies. Films that, you know, have a degree of inventiveness about them.

With *Epic Movie* there is nothing even faintly amusing or memorable to take away from it, save for a Samuel L Jackson parody that, like everything else in this rubbish film, far outstays its welcome. And it doesn't understand what an epic film is half the bloody time. Trust us: this is Agent Orange in film form. Avoid. ★

EXTRAS

★★★

Price//£19.99 **Out**//11 June



Apocalypto

Gibson: First Blood

NO one can say they expected this from Gibson; not after *The Passion Of The Christ*, one of the more controversial films in years. After creating such a transgressive audience splitter, no one expected the accomplished actor and Academy Award-winning filmmaker to return with... well, this. *Apocalypto*, despite its hardcore historical setting, is very much just an action film. In fact, a good deal of it is a chase movie – replete with our hero, Jaguar Paw, setting up traps John Rambo style to catch and kill his pursuers.

You can cherry-pick whatever comment you think the film makes from several: satire on modern times, Gibson's personal struggle in film form, fear of change, a question of faith, religion or love. We think it's a ballsy and very well made action flick, not at all betrayed by the Mayan language or overly brutal imagery. Given the subject matter, the most surprising thing is how approachable it all is. *Apocalypto* is certainly different... but not in the way you may expect. ★★★

EXTRAS

★★★

Price//£19.99 **Out**//Now



Déjà Vu

Trashy fun... Trashy fun...

IT all started with the underrated *Man On Fire*: that shaky, erratic and borderline spasmodic style of shooting and editing. It felt fresh and visually arresting at the time. But then it all went to hell with *Domino*, a film that felt like it was shot from the POV of someone having an epileptic fit – with shots rarely lasting more than a second. Thankfully for us filmgoers, that style is completely AWOL in Tony Scott's latest: a time-travel, action romance, whodunnit, revenge drama with delusions of *Minority Report*.

Denzel Washington is on fine form as the port cop assigned to investigate a boat accident in New Orleans. When a woman's body is found in the wreck, Washington uses funky FBI technology to travel back in time to save her and those families on the boat. It's action packed, inventive and very silly, but tons of fun. It also boasts the world's first car chase spanning two different time frames. Absolute trashy fun. ★★★

EXTRAS

★★★★



Doctor Who (Series 3) Vol 1

The not-so-new girl on the block

Director//Charles Palmer, Richard Clarke **Cast**//David Tennant, Freema Agyeman, Christina Cole, Anna Hope
Price//£17.99 **Out**//Now

IT was certainly an amusing situation: while everyone was anxious over Freema Agyeman's Martha replacing Billie Piper's Rose, everyone forgot that there was once a time, before this show even started up again, when they were doubting Billie as the Doctor's new companion. It's a bit of a vicious cycle – but one that's paid dividends... twice. We all know Piper was excellent, and so is Agyeman.

Volume 1 features the first three episodes of the third series, and they combine to form a decent start. The first is Russell T Davies' 'Smith And Jones' which acts as an introduction to Martha and how the Doctor comes to make her his new companion. It's a fun opening episode that serves its purpose much better than the season one opener, 'Rose.' It exists entirely to show us Martha's strengths as weaknesses. The story's simple: it sees the hospital Martha works in, the Royal Hope, suddenly being transported to the moon.

'The Shakespeare Code' is next and it's easily the worst episode on the disc. Set in London in the 17th Century, the Doctor and Martha have to save Shakespeare from three evil witches who intend to sabotage the lines of one of his plays. If it's read out on stage, wicked things will be released into the world. The production values are commendable but the episode is wholly contrived – a story where the great bard essentially meets what will become his 'inspiration' for the three weird sisters in Macbeth.

'Gridlock' is the final episode on the DVD, and it's a bloody corker. It has a *2000AD* vibe, and you can visualise it taking place in Mega-City One. The story centres on a massive traffic jam that seems to be in a perpetual loop. There could be more to it than meets the eye. Not only is it original, it has several great action scenes and a wonderful moment toward the end between the Doctor and the Face of Boe. The best episode on the DVD. ★★★★

EXTRAS

This being a straightforward vanilla release, there are no extras on the DVD to speak of. With that in mind, if you want commentaries, outtakes, Doctor Who Confidentials and more, we recommend buying the season boxset in a couple of months. That said, 'Gridlock' is reason enough to purchase this DVD. N/A



INFORM

- 4 Channel Input
- 75-degree field of view
- 2.1 F-stop
- Up to 640 x 480 resolution



RRP: **TBA**
Best Price: **TBA**
Manufacturer: **Sony**
Type: **Camera**

Eye, eye

New, and slightly uncomfortable on the eyes

RIGHT, some interesting tech news for you. The PS3 *EyeToy* has been announced, and apparently kicks ass. One of the most encouraging things about it is that it isn't compatible with the PS2, indicating whole new levels of technology for our enjoyment. The biggest additions to this – what Sony is calling simply 'Eye' – includes a two-setting optical zoom lens and a rather sizable microphone. This explains Sony's lack of interest in headsets and the like. The Eye is clearly designed to act as a chat device during gaming, and features an array of technology to make it every bit as good as a head-mounted microphone. Sure, it looks a little ugly, but it has so many cool features like 120 fps super-fast tracking and a bespoke media management program allowing you not only to sort and save your photos and movies, but edit them as well.

"The biggest additions include a two-setting optical zoom lens and a microphone"

TYPE FULL GAME ONLINE PLAY



Tigers for courses

Online options

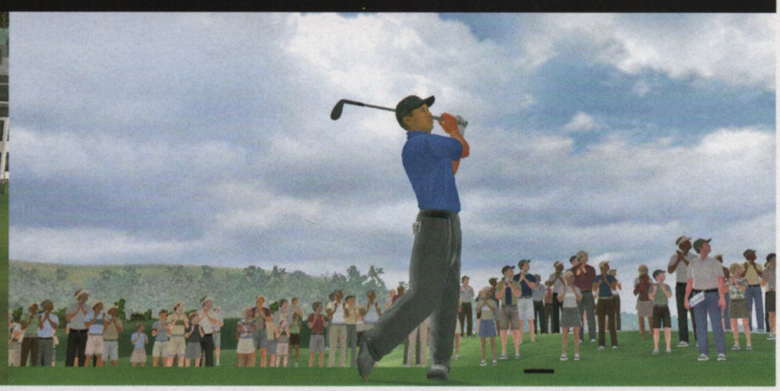
There's a distinct graphical hike, and the number of courses available to play through has doubled, including Pebble Beach, TPC at Sawgrass, Turnberry-Ailsa and St Andrews. It's not just about competing over the courses however, as stats like winnings and league rankings are monitored and listed online.

INFORM **Publisher** EA Sports | **Developer** In-house | **Players** 2-4 online | **Genre** Sports | **Online content** No | **Demo** No

Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2007

It's all in the wrists





PAST Tiger Woods titles have had such irritating glitches online, we've been forced to berate them. Indeed, until one such bug involving a turbo controller and two matchsticks was found, this particular reviewer was fourth in the world online rankings. And so it was with a view to uncover these cheats that we approached the latest iteration on the PS3, the inventively titled *Tiger Woods PGA Tour 2007*.

Fortunately we found nothing to indicate that any kind of niggle had been found by any of our online competitors, and the matches we played were both won fairly and utterly devoid of the kind of bustle you might expect of an online game. Indeed, that's likely to be the main appeal for most people. Granted, it can be a bit of a chore finding someone of comparable skill to have a lengthy session with, and the amount of breaks in the play as a result of connection failures (although this could well have been poor sportsmanship on our opponents' part) was verging on the prohibitive, but these are small matters compared to the overriding joy of spending an hour or so pitted against someone halfway around the world in a game of true skill. It really is lovely. Yes, lovely. That's the only accurate word for it.

Tiger's single-player AI isn't shown up as anything other than exemplary until you get online, and that, more than anything, should indicate how much enjoyment you'll get out of it online. It's an utterly timeless game at the end of the day, and comparable to the experience you can get from any other Tiger Woods title online. The Range of courses and modes is neither wildly exciting nor desperately awful, and for those who like the game and have progressed through the career mode enough to fashion a suitably awesome character, you're going to have a whole heap of the most tranquil fun imaginable. For anyone after something of a more thrilling nature, there are plenty of alternatives. ★★★★

Summary Peaceful and lovely, once you find a group of like-minded individuals, this will eat up an awful lot of your life.





INFORM **Publisher** Sony | **Developer** Studio Liverpool | **Players** 1-12 | **Genre** Racing | **Online content** No | **Demo** Yes

Formula One Championship Edition

Has Sony got the winning formula?



TYPE FULL GAME ONLINE PLAY

Season's greetings

Better late than never

Formula One Championship Edition concentrates on the 2006 season. Sure this might seem a bit behind the times, and there's no Edit mode allowing you to place drivers in specific cars, but that's not going to matter to the majority of gamers. Or is it? You tell us for once.

"BY the numbers." That's about as succinct as we can make this review without removing definite articles. Online racing is a tricky business to get right, but that's exactly what Sony's Liverpool studio has managed magnificently by making sure everything works. The trouble is it didn't go far past that, and while *Formula One Championship Edition* is undoubtedly fun, it's difficult to draw from it the kind of adrenaline rush you expect of a racer.

More of that later though, as it's a complicated issue. Let's deal with the more immediate aspects first. The menus and online lobbies are worthy of note, but for all the wrong reasons. After half an hour of confusion, things become clearer, but attempting to find an appropriate collection of races and people can be an absolute nightmare at times. There's little to help you, nothing to guide you and pretty much no help offered at any stage. It's not that it's – like, say, *MotorStorm* – lacking anything, but the system is unbearably poor.

Once you do get into a race, however, the fun begins. There's a distinct feeling of terror as you take to the roads for the first time because playing as realistically as possible means that any driver's mistake could cost you dear, regardless of how well you're doing. Indeed, there was one point at which we actually drove off the road and let a maniacal driver pass for fear of being brutally rear-ended. That's one way to win a race, we suppose.

The crux of the issue is that we just don't have the skill, patience or attention span to be able to really make the most of Formula One. If ever the adage "One for the fanboys" applied, it would be here. The insane feeling of speed, fright at being barged off the road by some suicidal loon and the lush visuals help make *Formula One Championship Edition* a slightly above-average racer for most, but a supremely exciting online prospect for those with the desire to master it. ★★★

Summary A slightly disjointed online experience that the enthusiast will enjoy far more than a regular racing fan.

TYPE FULL GAME ONLINE PLAY



Looking a little closer

The things you might miss

The stupidly fine attention to detail is something that the boys at Kush clearly pride themselves on. From the reflections on the ice to the grimaces of the players during a match, there's very little here from a graphical standpoint to complain about. The same could easy be said of the audio, but we simply don't have space.

INFORM **Publisher** 2K Sports | **Developer** In-house | **Players** 2-8 online | **Genre** Sports | **Online content** No | **Demo** No

NHL 2K7

The most complex reaction test you'll ever take



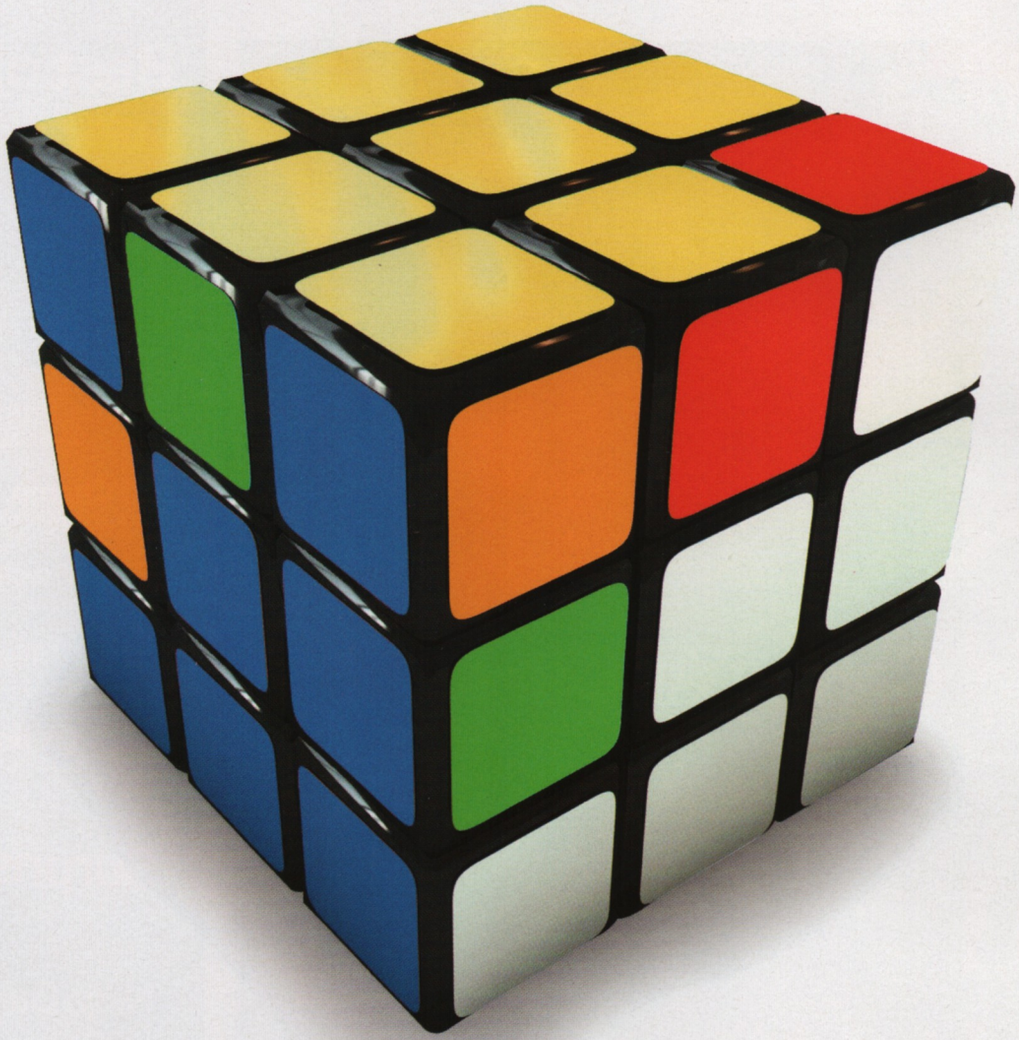


TAKETWO'S *NHL 2K7* isn't a title requiring consummate skill, and as such can make the best of multiplayer titles. By the same token, it can make the worst of multiplayer games. It all depends on how you look at it. Sure, there's more than enough depth to get sucked deep into the world of NHL, but your first matches online will doubtless end in rather humiliating defeat, even if you're a veteran of the series, and well versed in the art of puckmanship. Learning to deal with the ever-so-slightly fiddly nature of the control mechanic takes a little time, but a little perseverance goes an awfully long way, and once you're content that your unforced errors are at a minimum, you're ready to enjoy the game properly.

At that point, you're right in the zone. A seemingly random approach to goal scoring (to us on this side of the Atlantic, at least) is overshadowed by the simple fact that the team with the most chances on goal, whether they take them or not, is the team most likely to win. This, of course, makes it difficult to brush off a stream of defeats, when they inevitably come, you just have to be of the right mindset to accept it. Don't get us wrong, this is very much a good thing, and something we'd be peeved to find lacking in such a title, but on occasion losing matches can feel, for want of a better word, 'jippy', even if it's not.

While we're running our critical eye over the online aspect here, it's worth noting just how impressive the offline remains. There are mini-games, leagues, create-a-team efforts plus all manner of options that will aid you, eventually, in getting to the top of you and your mates' online league or tournament. Everything in the online mode is as slick as it is offline, and that says a great deal. There will be few committed players from this side of the pond, but should you really want to attain the dizzy heights that *NHL*'s online offers to the greatest, we say "go ahead" it's great fun. ★★★★

Summary A touch fiddly to begin with, but don't get put off, it's ridiculously good fun for anyone who enjoys fast-paced sport.



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TYPE FULL GAME PREVIEW



INFORM **Developer** Incognito Entertainment | **Type** Preview | **Players** 4 | **Out** June

Calling All Cars

Calling all credit cards



THIS is about as simple as games can get, which may be somewhat damaging if you're a massive *God Of War* or *Twisted Metal* fan, and are therefore expecting similar things from *Calling All Cars*. Get over your delusion, however, and you'll find that this is ultimately one of the better party games to raise its head in ages, and further proof that Sony's Network is fast becoming a wonderful aspect of the PS3. As for the game, well... it's like some bizarre combination of the previously mentioned *Twisted Metal*, *Micro Machines* and, yes, *Cel Damage*.

There are four cars, an escaped criminal, several weapons pick-ups and a time limit. The aim is to either pick up the criminal as he high-tails it away, or ram the car that has picked him up and is transporting him back to base. When the criminal is thrown into the air, you need to catch him as he lands, getting him to the police station before someone rams you, thus stealing him back. There are usually three ways into the station, each one harder than the other, each growing in points – a simple side entrance that gives you one point, a second-floor entrance you get to by jumping a ramp for two points or a winding, thin path to the rooftop entrance for three points. Oh, and you can drive over giant question marks that give you weapons to use – a mallet, a rocket or a magnet.

People have been vocal about David Jaffe's decision to follow up *God Of War* with something as simple as this. However, we've had the preview code for a while now, and any doubts we had vanished as soon as the laughing started. In other words: almost immediately. In *Calling All Cars*, Jaffe has stripped gameplay back to its bare minimum but kept the emphasis on fun. We can tell from the preview code alone that he's achieved that.

Summary There's every chance this could become our favourite Network game... at least for now. It exudes an endearing quality and charm in its simplicity, which makes it a perfect party game.

Best of the rest



1 Virtua Tennis 3 Demo
Cost Free | **Size** 819 MB | **Available** Now | **Region** US/Japan

2 F1 Champ. Ed Making Of 720p
Cost Free | **Size** 4040MB | **Available** Now | **Region** UK

3 The Wheelman HD Trailer
Cost Free | **Size** 4039MB | **Available** Now | **Region** US

4 GTA IV Teaser 720p
Cost Free | **Size** 4040MB | **Available** Now | **Region** UK

5 Stranglehold Trailer HD
Cost Free | **Size** 4040MB | **Available** Now | **Region** US

Surprise in-store

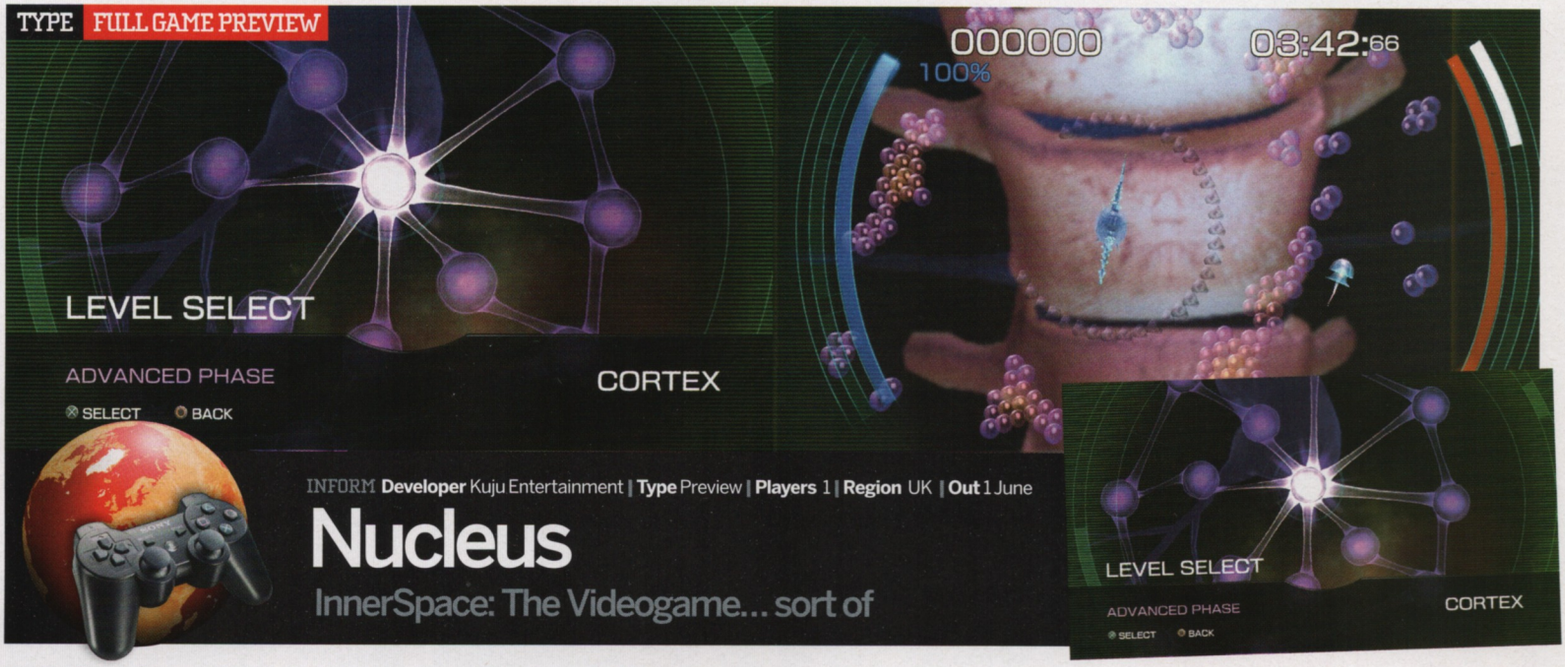
Across the regions, the best download

Ninja Gaiden Sigma Demo

Size 983 MB | **Type** Demo | **Availability** Out now
Region US/Japan

Perhaps the biggest addition to the Japanese Store in quite some time was the 1080p *Ninja Gaiden Sigma* demo. For those who have yet to download it, the demo lets you play through a whole level as Ryu, getting to grips with his new dual Katanas, as well as his Ninpo attack – something that didn't appear until later in the game in previous versions. By completing the demo, players also got to experience a special mission as Rachel. You can get the demo from both the Japanese and US Store.





INFORM **Developer** Kuju Entertainment | **Type** Preview | **Players** 1 | **Region** UK | **Out** 1 June

Nucleus

InnerSpace: The Videogame... sort of

TAKE *Blast Factor, Mutant Storm* and the 1987 Joe Dante movie *InnerSpace*, and you will have an idea what the game *Nucleus* is ultimately about. Framed like you're looking through a microscope, you have to guide a remote unit that looks a lot like a jelly fish with neon blue and purple bits glowing from it around the various areas of the body. The whole point of the game, or so it seems from the hands-on that we got to have with it, is to collect protein and dispel bacteria.

However, it won't always be as clear cut and as simple as that. Levels are constantly changing as you progress through them, never resolving to be just one thing à la *Super Stardust HD*: one level might be a basic shooter, tasking you with powering-up your protein bomb to blow away something huge, while another is one huge puzzle set to a time limit. You can, of course, collect various power-ups, as well as move cells into makeshift barricades. It's all just so bloody strange.

Summary *Nucleus* should prove interesting for those who lean towards the more cerebral action games. There's nothing else like it on the Network, which may work in its favour.



INFORM **Developer** Housemarque | **Type** Preview | **Players** 2 | **Availability** 15 June

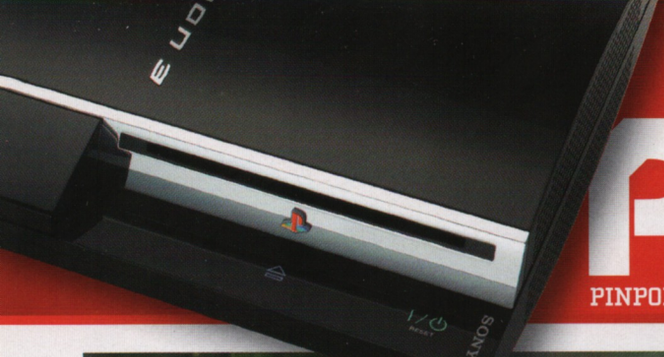
Super Stardust HD

Like Asteroids, with Snake and Space Invaders

A classic Amiga game re-envisaged for the PS3... now this is more like it. Here's *Super Stardust HD* in a nutshell: you're in space, moving along a spherical grid that protects various planets from incoming threats. Your whole role is to destroy – via shooty splode fun – the likes of huge asteroids, meteors, aliens, invading ships and so on. Said meteors break apart to reveal green rocks that can be destroyed for power-ups or extra points. There are various boss fights that break the action up too, making this distinctly old-school shooter a tad more diverse.

It's easily one of the more visceral games making its way to the Network. The way the meteors swirl and smash against the grid, the massive explosions and constantly upgrading weapons make for some intense and beautiful space-based action. Special mention must also go to the extremely kick-ass soundtrack, which marks some of the best music we've heard in a game in ages. Definitely on our "to play" list – and it should be on yours too.

Summary Stunning to look at and intense to play, *Super Stardust HD* is already one of our favourite Network games – and it isn't even out yet! A nod back to the halcyon days of shooty gaming but with great next-gen gloss.



PSU3releas

PINPOINTING THE FUTURE OF PLAYSTATION 3 ENTERTAINMENT



Uncharted: Drake's Fortune

Now this one is a little wierd. We've not seen much of *Drake's Fortune* and what we have seen looks a little budget.

Games

May 2007

Armored Core 4	505 Gamestreet
Rainbow Six Vegas	Ubisoft
Spider-Man 3	Activision
Surf's Up	Ubisoft

June 2007

Colin McRae: DIRT	Codemasters
Everybody's Golf	Sony
Fantastic 4: Rise Of The Silver Surfer	Take Two
Romance Of The Three Kingdoms	Koei
SingStar	Sony
Stranglehold	Midway
The Darkness	2K Games
GRAW 2	Ubisoft

July 2007

Battlefield: Bad Company	EA
Bladestorm: The Hundred Years' War	Koei
Harry Potter And The Order Of The Phoenix	EA
Ninja Gaiden Sigma	Eidos
Saints Row	THQ
The Outsider	Frontier
Unknown Realms (Monster Kingdom)	Sony

August 2007

FIFA 08	EA
Juiced 2: Hot Import Nights	THQ
Quake Wars	Activision

September 2007

Assassin's Creed	Ubisoft
Burnout 5	EA
Castlevania	Konami
Clive Barker's Jericho	Codemasters
Data-Fly	TBC
Frontlines: Fuel Of War	THQ
Gran Turismo 5: Prologue	Sony
Haze	Ubisoft
Indiana Jones	LucasArts
Lair	Sony
Medal Of Honor Airborne	EA
Metro 2033: The Last Refuge	TBC
Parabellum	TBC
Skate	EA
Stuntman: Ignition	THQ
Super Puzzle Fighter II Turbo HD Remix	Capcom
Tekken 6	Namco Bandai
The Club	Sega
The Eye Of Judgement	Sony
The Wheelman	Midway
Timeshift	Vivendi
Uncharted Drake's Fortune	Sony
Unreal Tournament 2007	Midway
Turok	Buena Vista Games

WANTED ON PS3

Hour Of Victory

Xbox 360

Ⓧ If *Call Of Duty* is the *Shaving Ryan's Privates* of videogames, *Hour Of Victory* could be likened to *Where Eagles Bare*. Sure, it may be unconventional to relate games to pornos, but it's a valid point. Far more story driven, and not concerned entirely with winning the war, *Hour Of Victory* could be one of the surprise showings in the WWII shooter market.





NEW GAMES ANNOUNCED THIS MONTH

1. Super Puzzle Fighter HD
2. Beautiful Katamari
3. Racedriver One
4. Rise Of The Argonauts
5. Operation Flashpoint 2

Ratatouille	THQ

October 2007

Afrika	Sony
Army Of Two	EA
Call Of Duty: Modern Warfare	Activision
Coded Arms: Assault	Konami
Dark Sector	D3Publisher
Devil May Cry 4	Capcom
Fall Of Liberty	Codemasters
Fatal Inertia	Koei
Golden Axe	Sega
Half-Life 2	EA
Heavenly Sword	Sony
House Of The Dead 4	Sega
Monster Hunter 3	Capcom
Pro Evolution Soccer 2007	Konami
Rock Band	EA
WarHawk	Sony
Alone In The Dark	Atari
Heist	Codemasters
GTA IV	Rockstar

November 2007

After Burner	Sega
Dynasty Warriors	Koei
Rogue Warrior	Bethesda
WWE SmackDown Vs Raw 2008	THQ

December 2007

Cipher Complex	Edge Of Reality
Fifth Phantom Saga	Sega
Getaway	Sony
Killzone	Sony
Mercenaries 2: World In Flames	EA



Heavenly Sword

We've got exclusive hands-on time with *Heavenly Sword* next month, so make sure you check out our coverage of the best game on PS3.



Colin McRae DIRT
Dirt by name, dirt by nature, whatever that means. Codies' latest racing title could well slip on PS3. Let's hope not.

Sega Rally	Sega
The Golden Compass	Sega
WarDevil: Enigma	Digi-Guys

February 2008

Avalon	TBC
Dirty Harry	Warner Bros
Eyedentify	Sony
Harker	TBC
Race Driver One	Codemasters
The Wall	Play Ten

March 2008

Grimsquad	Sony
Interstellar Marines	Zero Point Software
L.A. Noire	Rockstar
Metal Gear Solid 4: Guns Of The Patriots	Konami

April 2008

TNA Impact	Midway

June 2008

Final Fantasy Versus XIII	Square Enix
Final Fantasy XIII	Square Enix
Ni-Oh	Koei
Rise Of The Argonauts	Codemasters

November 2008

Operation Flashpoint 2	Codemasters
Tony Hawk's Project 9	Activision

December 2008

Saboteur	TBC
Project Offset (working title)	TBC
Resident Evil 5	Capcom
Beautiful Katamari Damacy	TBC

Blu-ray movies

May 2007

Dinosaur	Walt Disney
Eragon	20th Century Fox
The Prestige	Touchstone/Disney
Ice Age	20th Century Fox
Alien Versus Predator	20th Century Fox
The Day After Tomorrow	20th Century Fox
Man On Fire	20th Century Fox
Night At The Museum	20th Century Fox
Pirates Of The Caribbean	Buena Vista
Pirates Of The Caribbean 2	Buena Vista
Rocky Balboa	MGM Entertainment
Rocky	MGM Entertainment

June 2007

Breaking And Entering	Buena Vista
Dreamgirls	Paramount
The Rock	Buena Vista
The Pursuit Of Happyness	Sony Pictures
Crimson Tide	Buena Vista
Bruce Almighty	Buena Vista
Planet Of The Apes (2001)	20th Century Fox
Gothika	Warner Home Video
Valient (animated)	TBC

July 2007

Finding Neverland	Buena Vista
Air Force One	Buena Vista
Jerry Maguire	Sony Pictures
Ghost Rider	Sony Pictures

TBA 2007

Gattaca	Sony Pictures
Guns of Navarone	Sony Pictures
The Da Vinci Code	Sony Pictures
Reign Of Fire	Buena Vista

PSU3 essentials
FIRST-PERSON SHOOTERS



1 Killzone 2
This could well be the best game ever created. Whether it can steal Halo's glory is another matter.



2 Unreal Tournament 2007
Run toward weapon, pick it up and blast the crap out of everyone around you. It's not that hard, is it?



3 Turok
Could be fantastic, but could equally perform well under what we would expect, given its extremely long development time.



4 Medal Of Honor Airborne
Should mark a turning point for the series after a decade of doing the same linear bullshit.



5 The Orange Box
Five games in one box. Now that's value. This will almost certainly be a game every PS3 owner should have.

RRP: **£1,800**
Best Price: **£1,800 (B&O franchise)**
Manufacturer: **Bang and Olufsen**
Type: **HDTV**

BeoVision 8

Bang on a budget

NOW you might think Bang and Olufsen is a little pricey for you, but with the arrival of the BeoVision 8 HDTV, those price barriers have dropped. At £1,800, the BV8 is something of a surprise to us, given the huge price tags across pretty much the entire B&O range. There are issues with it, though. First off, it's 26 inches, which limits it to close-up use, like a desktop or breakfast-bar TV but, with an anti-glare contrast screen enhancing the 1200:1 contrast ratio, the blacks are amongst the best around. It's not 1080p either, making it unappealing for many looking for long-term gaming TVs. That said, it is incredibly compact and it's got an amazing device that will automatically change the black/white balance to suit the lighting conditions. If you want a slice of Bang & Olufsen's technology, this is a great way to get some at a reasonable price.



INFORM
- ▲ Freestanding design
- ● 16.4 Kilos
- ✕ 6 m/s response time
- ■ HDMI input

Some alternatives...

...at the lower end of the market



1 LG 42LCD2D At 42 inches (offering up to 1080i resolution) and allowing one of the widest viewing angles on the market, coupled with a healthy refresh rate of 8ms, there's much about this you might like. Not only is it environmentally friendly, apparently, but it's pretty good value as well, rarely straying over the £800 mark.



2 Toshiba TDP-MT400 Again, rarely over the £800 mark, and weighing in at a paltry 2.8Kg, this Toshiba projector is for those who think that size does matter. With no HDMI input or 1080p output, however, some may find that, being a projector and not offering full high definition, the quality isn't really enough.



3 Sony 40-inch Bravia At just over a grand, the Bravia KDL-40V2500U is pretty good value for a piece of Sony kit. The only real problem is that it doesn't support 1080p. A 1300:1 contrast ration is quite nice, though, which means you will be able to see Teletext's words and wizardry that much clearer.

UK PLAYSTATION 3 SALES CHART



01 MOTORSTORM *(SONY)*

A great excuse to roll in the mud

PSU3 RATING 9/10



02 RESISTANCE *(SONY)*
Mediocre single-player, great multiplayer
PSU3 RATING 8/10



03 F1 CHAMP EDITION *(Sony)*
Still in the top three?! WTF?
PSU3 RATING 6/10



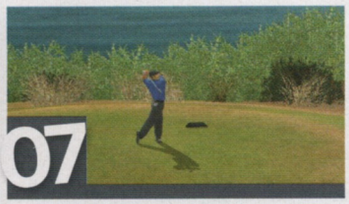
04 CALL OF DUTY 3 *(Activision)*
Dodgy port of a decent WWII shooter
PSU3 RATING 7/10



05 VIRTUA TENNIS 3 *(SEGA)*
The best sports game in years. Fact!
PSU3 RATING 9/10



06 FIGHT NIGHT ROUND 3 *(EA)*
Still brutal and brilliant one year on
PSU3 RATING 8/10



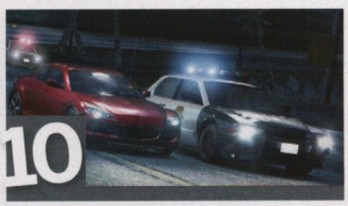
07 TIGER WOODS PGA 07 *(EA)*
Fun for old fogies and the rich
PSU3 RATING 7/10



08 RIDGE RACER 7 *(SONY)*
It's still same old, same old really
PSU3 RATING 6/10



09 VIRTUA FIGHTER 5 *(SEGA)*
Kicking nuts at number nine!
PSU3 RATING 9/10



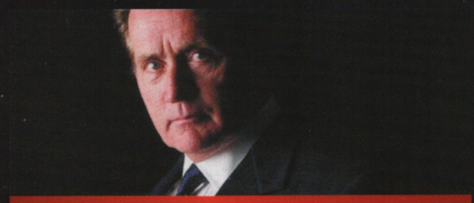
10 NFS: CARBON *(EA)*
Surprisingly good EA yearly update
PSU3 RATING 8/10

MP3 D/LOAD TOP 5



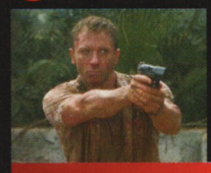
01 Mark Ronson Ft D M'weather – *Stop Me* (Columbia)
02 Furtado/ Timberlake – *Give It To Me* (Interscope)
03 Beyonce & Shakira – *Beautiful Liar* (Columbia)
04 Avril Lavigne – *Girlfriend* (RCA)
05 The Fray – *How To Save A Life* (Sony BMG)

DVD TOP 5



01 West Wing: Complete Series One
02 Extras: Series One
03 Point Break
04 Matrix: Ultimate Collection
05 Pink Live at Wembley Arena

BLU-RAY TOP 5



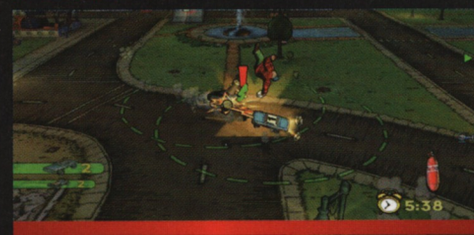
01 Casino Royale
02 Eragon
03 Aliens Vs Predator
04 Rocky Balboa
05 Black Hawk Down

US NETWORK D/LOADS



01 Calling All Cars
02 Tekken 5: DR
03 flOw
04 Blast Factor
05 GripShift

PSU3 RECOMMENDED



01 Calling All Cars
02 GripShift
03 flOw
04 Tekken: Dark Resurrection
05 Lemmings



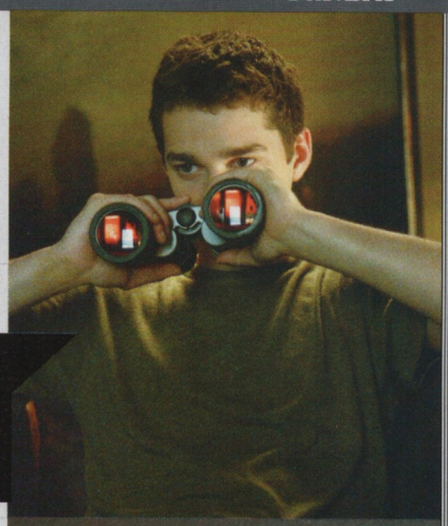
DIARY.JUNE

Whether it's games, Blu-ray releases or PlayStation 3 downloads, stick with us and you won't miss a trick this month...

MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY	SATURDAY	SUNDAY
				01		



PS3 Release Triple Whammy
Colin McRae: DIRT
Everybody's Golf
Fantastic 4: Rise Of The Silver Surfer



04

DVD Release:
Top Gear: The Challenges
Witness some of the more insane and epic challenges from one of the greatest shows on this earth, with the added benefit of pause, rewind, and replay too.

05

06

CD Release: Queens Of The Stone Age – Era Vulgaris
Finally, the fifth studio album from hard rockers QOTSA arrives today, featuring a swarm of guest vocalists and musicians. It should prove their most diverse album yet.



08

Cinema Release: Disturbia
Like a modern-day *Rear Window*, *Disturbia* sees a teenager under house arrest trying to expose a killer living opposite his home – without being able to leave his confines.

11

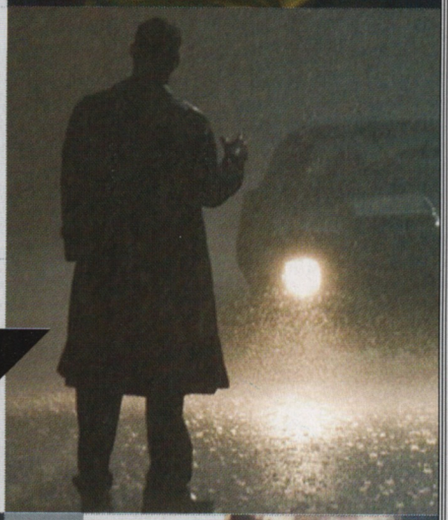
CD Release: White Stripes – Icky Thump
After the experimental and, arguably, inferior *Get Behind Me Satan*, The Stripes return with a new album. Let's hope it's more like *Elephant*.



13

14

15



18

18 June – Blu-ray Release:
Cruel Intentions
Amidst the sea of trashy teen horror and romance flicks that appeared at the time, Roger Kumble's *Cruel Intentions* was an overlooked gem. See that gem on Blu-ray as of today.

19



PSU3
THE NEXT ISSUE OF PSU3 HITS SHELVES!
21 JUNE

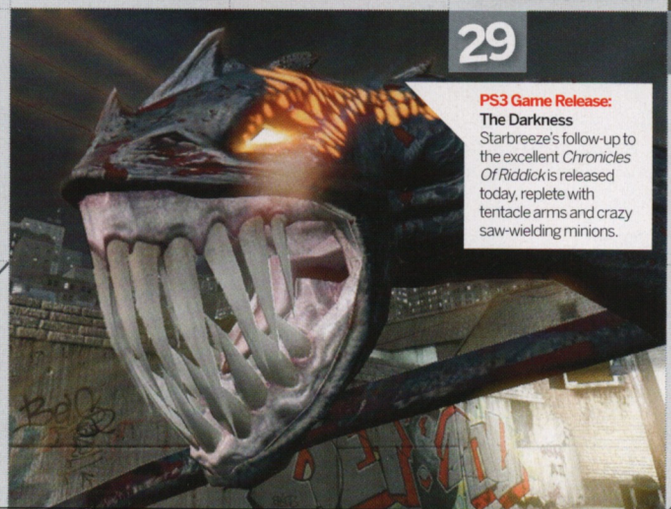
22

Cinema Release: The Hitcher
Sean Bean's about the only thing we're looking forward to in this remake. We're sure he won't disappoint in the psycho hitchhiker role.

25

25 June – DVD Release:
Arthur And The Invisibles
Luc Besson entertained a long period as one of the most promising filmmakers of our time. And then he made trash like *Joan Of Arc* and this, unfortunately the man's last official film.

26

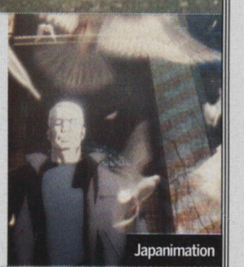


29

PS3 Game Release: The Darkness
Starbreeze's follow-up to the excellent *Chronicles Of Riddick* is released today, replete with tentacle arms and crazy saw-wielding minions.

30

Event: Japanimation
Hosted by Helen McCarthy, co-author of *The Anime Encyclopedia*, this series of events looks at and explores the relationship between anime and Western cinema.



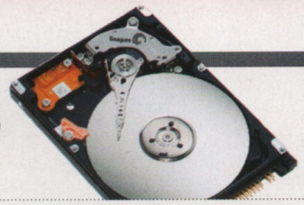
How to...

...replace your hard drive



Compatible hard drives

SATA up



THE only specs you'll need to look for with a new drive for the PS3 is size and connector. Basically, any 2.5" SATA drive will work fine. You'll want something with as much cache and speed as the Seagate one that comes with the PS3. Here are a few suggestions:

1 Toshiba MK1234GSX 120GB 5400 RPM 8MB SATA laptop hard drive. Now this one has the same specs as the Sony drive, with 8MB cache, but doubles the space. You'll get anywhere up to 100GB of real space here for around £80-90.

2 Seagate Momentus 7200.1 At 100 GB, this drive is a step up in terms of size, but is the £80 price tag worth the minimal speed increase? You decide. Smaller versions can be found for around £45.

3 Fujitsu's MHV2200BT is a meaty 200GB and is a pretty hot laptop drive. Low noise production (although the default one is pretty much silent) and high shock tolerance balance out a lower RPM and thusly speed. It's not available yet, but keep your eyes open for it.



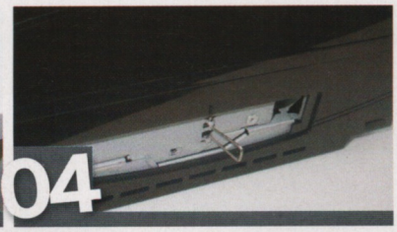
Unplug your PS3: this is essential for obvious reasons. Failure to do this may cause death etc... we can't be held responsible for this.



Flick off the black plastic cover. Having trouble here? We suggest giving up. Any flat-ended object, like a screwdriver, will do.



Unscrew the big blue screw. You'll need a bit of 'oomph' and a small/medium Phillips-head screwdriver for this.



Flip up the metal handle. This will give you a little more purchase. Like a tin of sardines – if this goes, you're screwed.



Slide drive to the right – don't try to just yank it out yet, as it's wedged in. You can be quite forceful with it.



Carefully remove the dive. Pretend like you're disarming a bomb. Breathe heavily and sweat lots, it's more fun.



Look inside your PS3, it may be the only chance you get. Don't be tempted to use it as a flower pot. This will more than likely break it.



Put PS3 to one side and concentrate on the drive for the moment. This may be a good time for a cuppa and a slice of cake.



Take screws out of the side of the drive casing, this will loosen up the drive. There are four of them.



Slide out your old drive and put your new one in straight away, the same way round as the old one.



Screw in the four casing screws and make sure the drive is tight in the case. We mean proper tight here, we don't want it rattling around.



Pop drive and casing into the PS3 and ensure you slide it securely back to the left. This is much like doing step five in reverse.



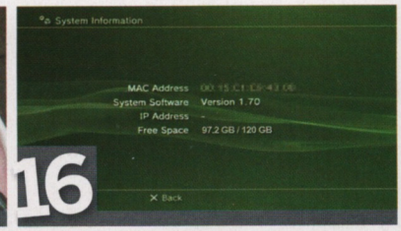
Screw blue screw back in tightly – this is significantly easier than taking it out. Nice and tight again, folks.



Put black plastic casing back on the console; this should come as second nature by now. If not, please don't have children. Ever.



Plug your PS3 in. Hopefully this will work fine and dandy. We're pretty sure that this will have voided your guarantee. Never mind.



Check your new power by going to 'System Information' in 'System Settings' in 'Settings'. It's amazing. No, really.

Don't leave the house, do it online with your PS3



FAST FOOD

www.dominos.co.uk

If we could recreate a drooling sound on the page, we would. The merest mention of a Domino's pizza is enough to send us into frenzy, and in all honesty we're unlikely to be eating anything else for a long while. Think about it: you're online with, say, *MotorStorm*, then you can just jump out of the lobby and order an online pizza (they're just the same as regular pizzas) to your door without even having to down your controller. This, folks, is the most exciting thing to happen to gaming in years.

www.fastfood.co.uk

This idea has already been in use throughout Europe for some time now and is hugely popular. The nation's indie fast food joints gang together and form a massive network of food delivery. Awesome. It's not quite up and running yet, but check it out in a couple of months.



ONLINE VIDEOGAME RENTAL

www.videogamerentals.co.uk

Probably the easiest place to start, videogamerentals.co.uk doesn't actually rent out games strangely enough. What it does do, however, is point you in the direction of the sites that might be of use to you and, importantly, reviews each site, giving you a full run down of their stocks, efficiency and customer ratings. Handy.

www.boomerangrentals.co.uk

This one is a little clunky on the PlayStation 3, but has everything you could want from a rental site at a very reasonable price. At £7.99 a month it's the cheapest we've found that deals with PS3 titles, and their upcoming section is a good addition.

www.gamesrentals.co.uk

Seriously simple and listing a fair few online movie rental sites as well, gamesrentals is a less comprehensive version of videogamerentals. It's more of a home page to the online rentals market than anything else, and is about as easy to use as is possible.

Internet round-up

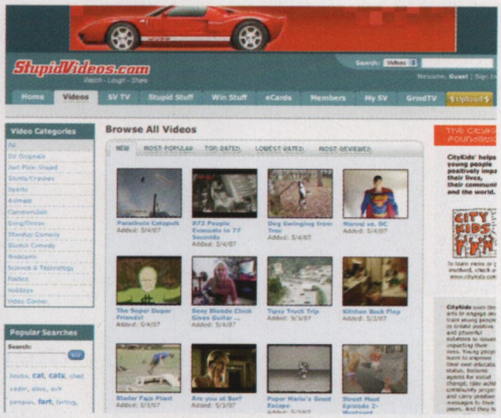
Make the most of your PS3



www.PS3gamesaves.net

A real lifesaver

WITH over 3,000 members all actively posting and requesting saves, PS3gamesaves.net is your one-stop-shop for cheating, if that's your thing. Not only are saves posted on a main page for easy download to your PC (there's a comprehensive tutorial as well), for easy transfer via USB to your PS3, but there's a particularly active forum to scour as well. From save requests to game hints, PS3gamesaves.net should be your first port of call.



www.stupidvideos.com

Money for nothing

A rare thing, this. Being a website dedicated to inane film clips homemade movies and assorted other trash, you'd expect it to be free. It's not though, and although it costs very little and you can see most of the footage without payment, downloading it to your PS3 (in a format that it will play instantly) will cost you. The downloads are specifically for the PSP, but work better if we're honest, on the PS3. Well worth a couple of dollars a month.



http://ps3-evolution.dcemu.co.uk/

Fancy a homebrew?

THE top site for PS3 homebrew so far. Not only will you find forum buddies who will ease you into the scene should you so desire, but there's also an array of homebrew applications in an easy to find and ever-expanding easy access library. One of the most interesting so far is the first homebrew application for the PS3, namely PS3 lines (a rather strange visualiser-type effort). A particularly handy application also comes in the form of Video 9, which will easily convert your movies to formats playable on the PS3. You'll need Linux and a reasonable understanding of the homebrew scene for much of this, but like we said, the forums should offer that.



www.europs3forum.com

Judge and Jurai

WHILE this website is still very much in its infancy, there are a number of points of interest, most notably in the PS3 software section. Jurai, the saviour of many PSP homebrewers has delivered what has been confirmed as a fully working MAME. Previous attempts at the arcade emulator have met with little success, indicating a clear move forward in the homebrew scene. Granted, Jurai himself mentions that it's not an application to be attempted by newbies, but the fact it's there along with a number of other linux-based add-ons is encouraging.























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Dark hair, firm & looking for a good time. No string. Will meet for hot fun.
High demand in: London, Midlands, Yorkshire, L'pool Scotland and Cardiff
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Warm and caring women wanting a real man to cook by day and bonk by night Will accommodate and travel.
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NIGHT WEAR ONLY
They love to dress up for men. 36D, long legs. Eager to please men, any race, age 20 to 50
High demand in: London, Midlands, Yorkshire, L'pool Scotland and Cardiff
TXT NIGHT 27 to 07624 806 066

BUBBLY WOMEN 35+
Looking for big guys. Experienced and will make you very happy. All ages and race welcome.
High demand in: London, SE, Birm', up North, Scotland and Shires
TXT BUBBLE 35 to 07624 802 861

BEACH BABES 23+
Beach girls Looking for fun guys. Some experience required in loving making. All ages and race welcome.
High demand in: London, SE, Birm', up North, Scotland and Shires
TXT BEACH 23 to 07624 806 067

SEXY HOT RUSSIAN 26+
Lots of Russian girls need looking after. No where to stay & willing to play with any age or race. Will travel
High demand in: South, Midlands, Shires, N. EAST, Scotland & L'pool
TXT MOS 26 to 07624 806 067

MAD 27+YRS, SINGLES
Flirty and VERY dirty! If you fancy giving them what they want , then they will meet you any time and where
High demand in: Manchester, London, N. East, Shires Scotland and Cardiff
TXT VIBE 27 to 07624 803 689

DESPERATE FOR EXTRAS
All girls have sexy bodies and are fun, warm & ready. No Strings. 28+ any race. Can travel & stay weekend
High demand in: London, South East, Midlands, N. EAST & L'pool
TXT FIRE 28 to 07797 807 054

BIG 25+YRS, SINGLES
Big women will give you an instant smile. Big kissable arse, tits & thick thighs will drive you crazy.
High demand in: Manchester, London, N. East, Shires Scotland and Cardiff
TXT DARE 25 to 07624 802 861

HOT & BLACK 22+YRS
Fun blacks girls looking for a great time and a difference.
High demand in: Manchester, London, N. East, Shires Scotland and Cardiff
TXT TWO 22 to 07624 803 675

BLOW YOUR MIND 28+
Girls 28+, with sexy arses, breast and need extra fun. Discretion needed. Will meet for fun.
High demand in: London, Shires, North E & S, Scotland and Cardiff
TXT FAN 30 to 07797 807 013

THAI GIRLS 20+YRS,
Girls recently arrived, in need of a good man to make a home; a good cook, cleaner and lover. Will travel.
High demand in: London, N.E, S.E &W, Birm', Kent, Scotland and Shires
TXT CHILL 19 to 07797 807 013

WILD GIRLS ONLY
Girls into fun fun and more fun. Loves playing games. Will travel if required.
High demand in: S.E. Midlands, N.E & Wales
TXT WILL 30 to 07797 807 055

DESPERATE GIRLS 25+
Night fun only. All girls are party girls looking for fuss free fun. NO strings any age.
High demand in: Manchester, London, N. East, Shires Scotland and Cardiff
TXT VISA 25 to 07797 807 011

KINKY SINGLE GIRLS
Want some real fun with kinky girls. They will do anything and will make sure you have a great time.
High demand in: London, Shires, Birm', North, Scotland and Wales
TXT KISS 30 to 07797 807 013

AFTERNOON EXTRAS
These girls all have great breast and are up for it but only in the afternoon. No strings any age/race Will pay travel.
High demand in: London, Midlands, Birm', Kent, Scotland and Shires
TXT LIFT 28 to 07797 807 055

SEXY RED HEAD - 25+ Yrs
Young and VERY dirty! Girls looking for older guys for fast dates & excitement. Limited travel, but will meet
High demand in: Manchester, London, N. East, Shires Scotland and Cardiff
TXT RED 28 to 07624 806 066

ASIAN & NAUGHTY 28+
Asian girls looking for a difference. Sexy body & mind. No strings any age/race Will pay travel and expenses.
High demand in: London, Midlands, Birm', Kent, Scotland and Shires
TXT TOY 28 to 07797 807 055

SEXY STUDENTs- 22+ Yrs
First year students looking for fun! Interested in older guys for fast dates & excitement. Limited travel, but will meet
High demand in: Manchester, London, N. East, Shires Scotland and Cardiff
TXT TAKE 22 to 07797 807 055

HOT FILIPINOS 20+
Hot student girls recently arrived in the UK looking for a good time. Sexy body & mind. No strings any age/race
High demand in: London, Midlands, Birm', Kent, Scotland and Shires
TXT TUG 20 to 07797 807 011

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50p

TV Time

Call 0909 925 6013

50p


Call 0909 925 1962

Behind Time

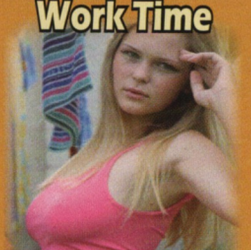
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PLAY Time

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Work Time

Call 0909 961 4983

Funky Time

Call 0909 961 4991

Bed Time

Call 0909 961 4973

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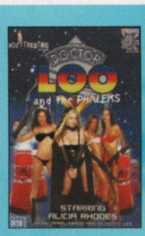
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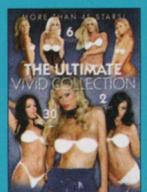
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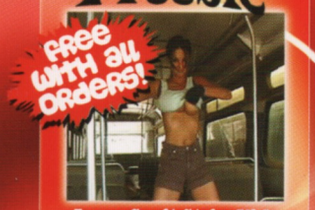
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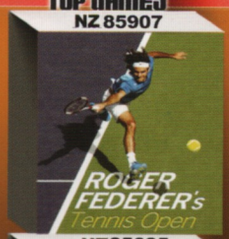
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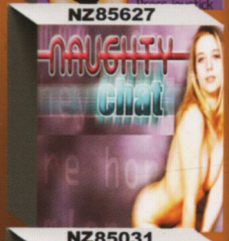
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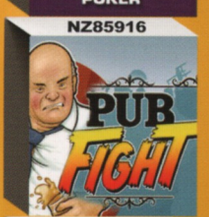
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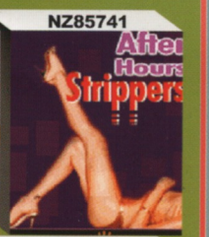


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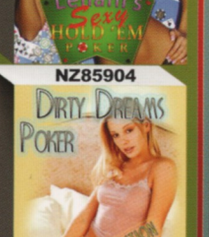
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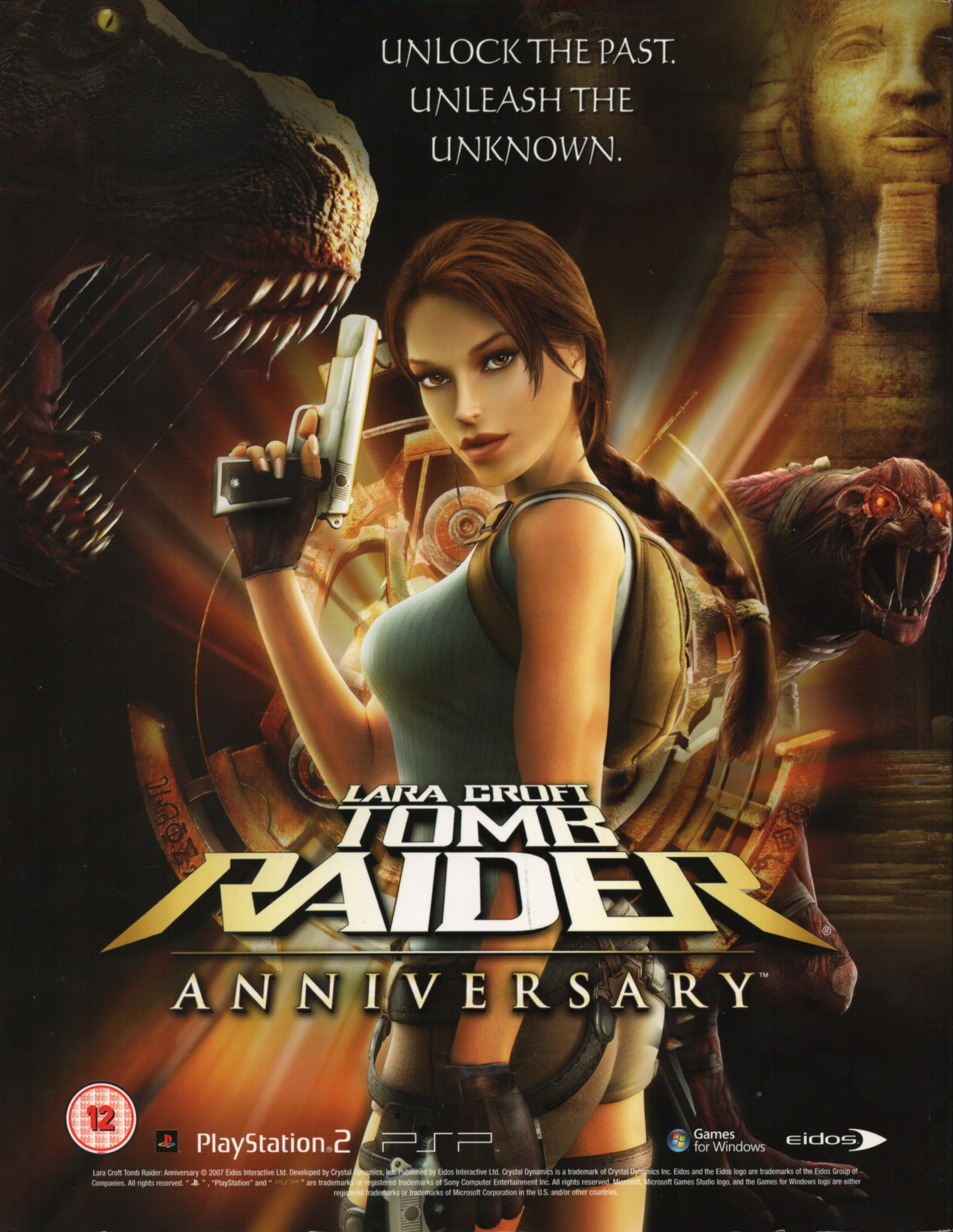
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