



LOST ODYSSEY
Microsoft's Final Fantasy?

TURNING POINT
Nazis invade New York!



HYPER

CONDEMNED 2: BLOODSHOT

Is this the most brutal game ever made?

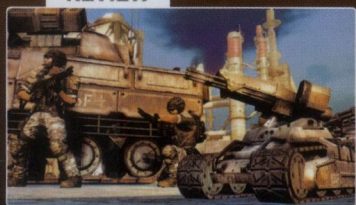
THE CLUB

Can a third-person-shooter that plays like a racing game really work?

GAME OF THE YEAR

Your picks for top honours inside!

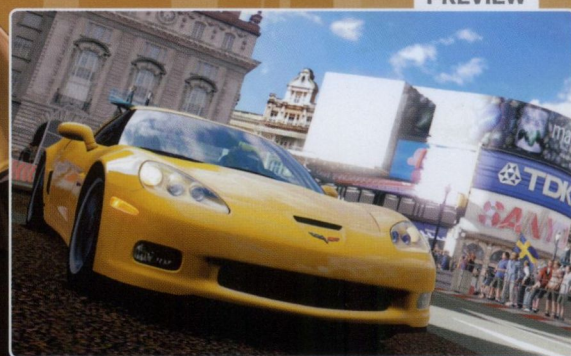
REVIEW



FRONTLINES: Fuel of War

Explosive war or a burnt wreck?

PREVIEW



GRAN TURISMO 5 PROLOGUE

Full game or paid demo?

EXCLUSIVE PLAYTEST!

Grand Theft Auto IV

WE PLAY THE MOST ANTICIPATED SEQUEL OF THE YEAR!

REVIEW

FINAL FANTASY XII on DS

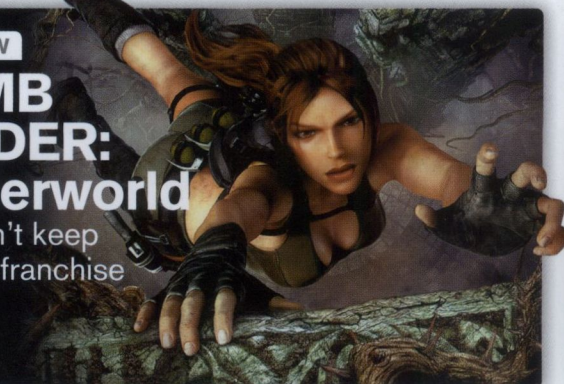
Ivalice in the palm of your hand!



PREVIEW

TOMB RAIDER: Underworld

You can't keep a good franchise down!

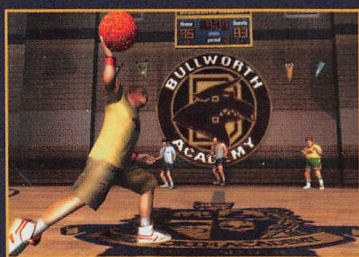
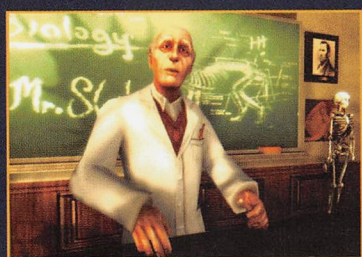
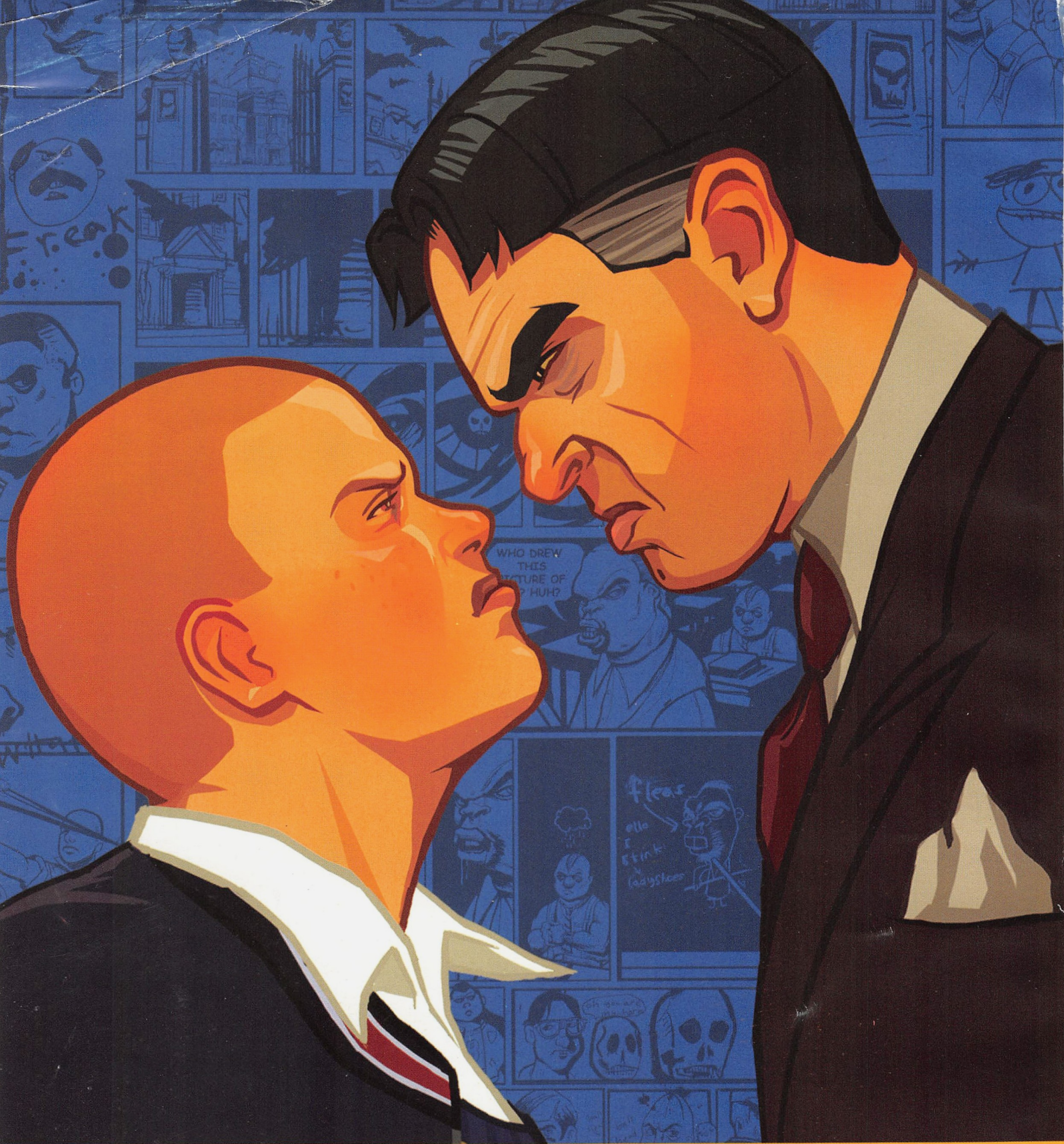


A next MAGAZINE



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174 APRIL 2008
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M

Moderate themes,
violence and
sexual references



XBOX 360

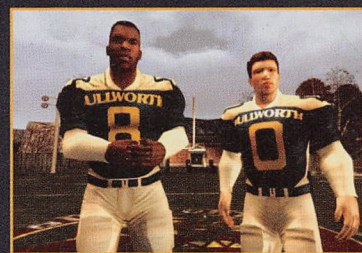
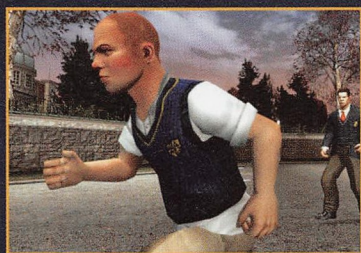
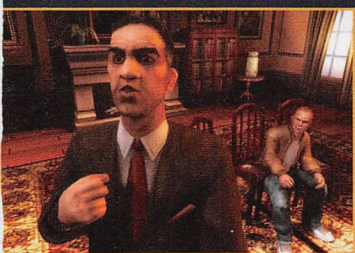
Wii



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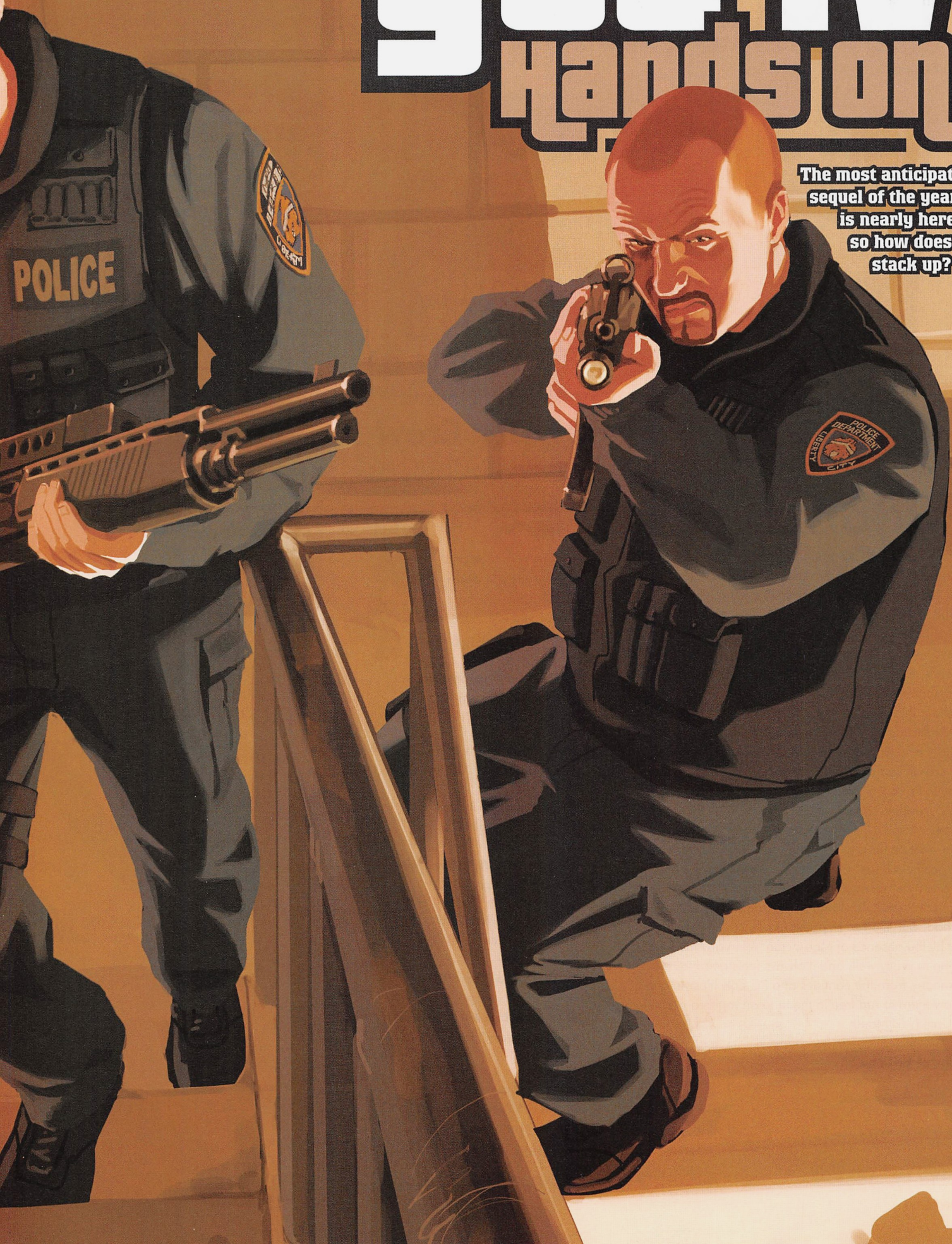
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65 REZ HD

12 gta IV Hands on

The most anticipated
sequel of the year
is nearly here -
so how does it
stack up?





Editorial

❖❖ GTA IV has to be one of the most highly anticipated games of the year. There seem to be few who don't think it's going to be one of the gaming highlights of 2008. To be honest, up until recently I was one of those few. I have a real love hate relationship with Rockstar – I love what they try to do when they put their minds to it while simultaneously hating the repackaging of what is essentially the same game multiple times, as well as the fact that their very name seems to inspire awe and a blinkered sense that anything they do or say will be gold – and was worried that GTA IV may simply just be GTA 3 Redux 4 HD. After getting my hands on the game, I'm a believer.

Anyway, welcome to issue 174, an issue that marks Hyper as being 14 ½ years old. Another six issues and we'll be turning 15. Rather disappointingly the magazine still isn't old enough to drink legally, but give us a couple more years and we'll happily remedy that situation. Also this month we've had a bit of a teething period, with Darren stepping in to fill the massive gap left by the absence of Moe's chin. All in all I think he's fitting in pretty well, and it always feels good to release someone from the confines of a PC only lifestyle and allow them to run free in the land on multi-format bliss.

Until Next Month

Daniel Wilks ❖❖ Editor

Hyper Crew MONTHLY TOP 5 GAMES

DANIEL – Editor

1. **Odin Sphere** – PS2
"I'm pretty sure they made this just for me"
2. **Everyday Shooter** – PS3
3. **Patapon** – PSP
4. **Rez HD** – Xbox 360
5. **Ghost Squad** – Wii

DARREN – Deputy Editor

1. **Rez HD** – Xbox 360
"Hacking has never been so trippy!"
2. **Burnout Domination** – PSP
3. **Final Fantasy XII: Revenant Wings** – DS
4. **Guitar Hero 3** – PS2
5. **MGS: Portable Ops** – PSP

MALCOLM – Art Director

1. **Mario Galaxy** – Wii
"Super Luigi Galaxy!"
2. **Team Fortress 2** – PC
3. **Endless Ocean** – Wii
4. **Patapon** – PSP
5. **Buzz Dino Den** – PS2

ELEANOR EIFFE – Scientist

1. **Final Fantasy Tactics: TWTotL** – PSP
"It punishes me but I keep coming back"
2. **Lost Odyssey** – Xbox 360
3. **Mass Effect** – Xbox 360
4. **Spin the Black Circle** – PC
5. **Peggle** – PC

HYPER

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WRITE TO HYPER!

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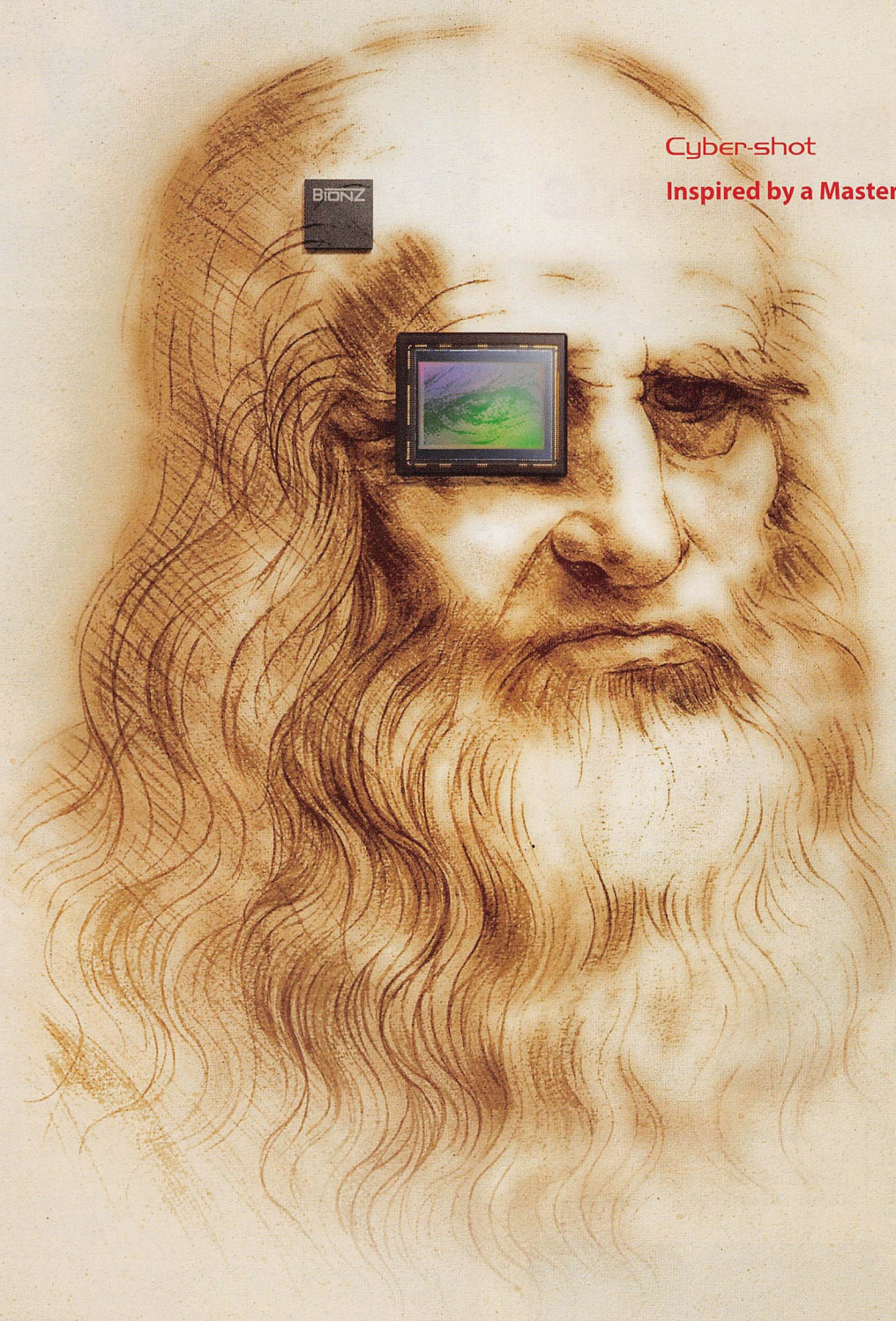
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Smash Bros. Smashes Records

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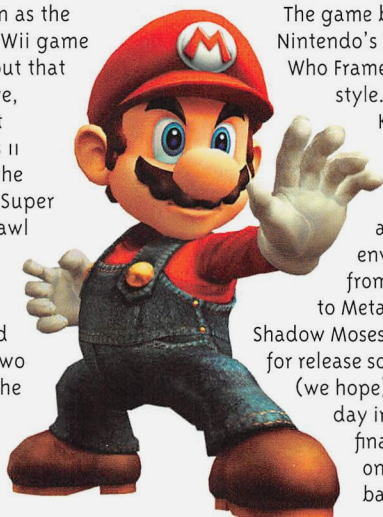
While Wii owners have had cause to hold their heads high — Twilight Princess and Super Mario Galaxy were fine titles indeed — those neck muscles are starting to show signs of strain. Simply put, the console has been home to precious few must-have games, but if the Japanese performance of Super Smash Bros. Brawl is any indication, that could all change in spectacular fashion.

A mere fortnight after hitting the shelves, Super Smash Bros. Brawl sold over a million copies, putting it down as the fastest-selling Wii game in history. To put that into perspective, consider that it took Wii Sports 11 weeks to shift the same number. Super Smash Bros. Brawl is now part of an exclusive club: PC icon Diablo II moved the million in two weeks, as did the 360 posterboy Gears of War. To see SSMB perform the



same feat without resorting to the usual industry tactic of "Add more blood and gore so more males buy it!" is encouraging.

The game brings together all of Nintendo's biggest characters, Who Framed Roger Rabbit-style. Mario, Donkey Kong, Pikachu and Solid Snake, as well as a shedload of others, face off against each other in environments ranging from atop a spaceship to Metal Gear Solid's Shadow Moses Island. Scheduled for release sometime this year (we hope), it'll be a grand day indeed when we finally get our hands on this million-dollar baby.

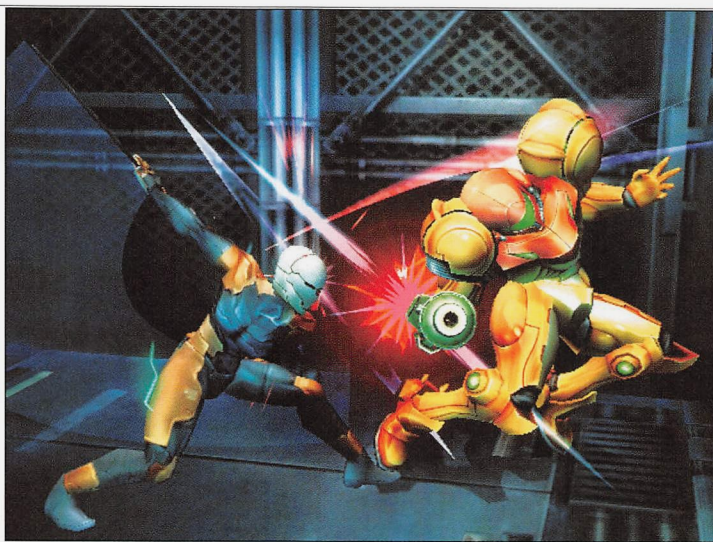


CAPTION THIS!

Come on, make us laugh. Just send your funny screen captions to us at captionthis@next.com.au with **Caption This Part 99** in the subject line.



Caption it!



IDIOTS!

Your Pokemons: Let Me Steal Them

Charmander, I choose you!

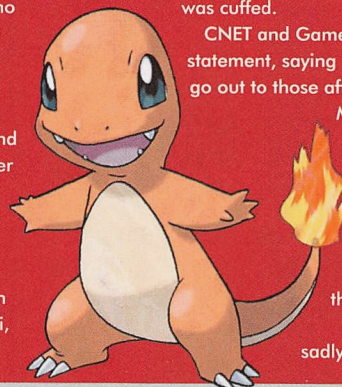
We at Hyper must be getting old, because we simply don't understand the youth of today. Back when we were littlies the worst that could happen was someone stealing your Iced Vovos, and the worst way you could retaliate was hitting them with your shoes. Not anymore.

Take Roosevelt Elementary School in California's Redwood City. A 6-year-old student was playing with his Pokemon trading cards when he looked up and saw a pellet gun pointed at his head. The culprit? A 10-year-old boy, who demanded he hand them over. School officials were quick to suspend the would-be robber, and are deciding whether to expel him altogether, but all we can do is shake our heads sadly.

Then we move on to Palmyra, Missouri, where a teenage

boy was charged for suspected arson. Using the online handle "Jediknight12345", he posted in the Current Events section on GameFAQs.com his plans to burn down a local school and church. Although the posts were quickly deleted by forum moderators, Mr 12345 appeared a few days later with a similar post, stating that he had in fact performed the deed, and even attached camera phone pictures as proof. Local authorities were quickly notified and the teen was cuffed.

CNET and GameFAQs issued a statement, saying "Our thoughts go out to those affected by the Mission Hill Baptist Church fire. ... We are working with the proper authorities to assist in their investigation of this matter." Once again, we sadly shake our heads.



MMORPGS!

MMO A Go-Go

Massive news for the massively multiplayer genre

Plenty of news on the MMO front this month, with a number of big-game companies and games announcing some new developments, much to the joy of Level 61 Rogues/Hobbits/Kitties everywhere.

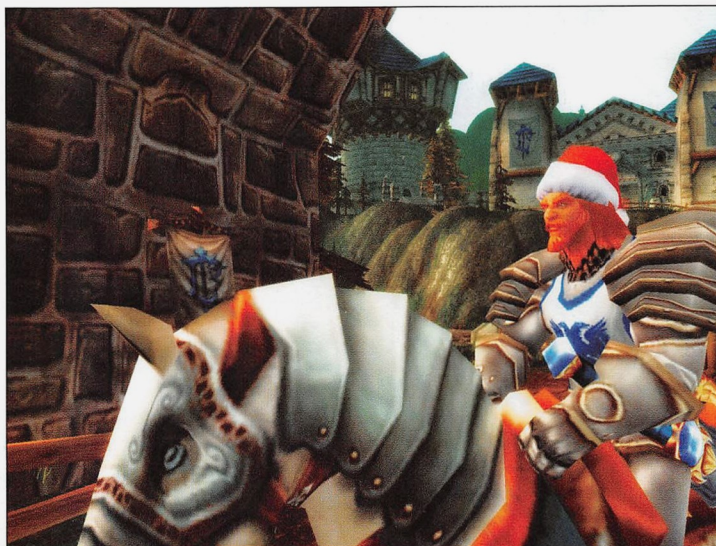
First up is the venerable World of Warcraft, with Blizzard releasing patch 2.4 in its Public Test Realm. Among the new features are the addition of The Sunwell Isle, which includes a new quest hub and 5-player and 25-player instances, as well as an overhaul for the combat log, which now supports assigning custom colours to enemies and friends. There's squillions of changes for each character class too, and they'll all hit your compy when the patch is rolled out for public consumption soon.

The other Big Cigar in the MMO world is Lord of the Rings Online,

Beth couldn't stop reading the latest Harry Potter.



and it's about to get a hefty content boost with the forthcoming Book 12: The Ashen Wastes. Aside from adding an extra 100 quests and the opportunity to recover the Narchuil ring, the update allows players to customise their characters in all manner of weird and wacky ways. Thanks to Book 12, your new look will no longer impact on your armour stats, meaning that off-shoulder pink t-shirt or that dainty French underwear will still offer the same protection as that beefed-up steel suit you've got equipped. Plus you can choose from over 50 hairstyles! Daah-ling, it's simply to die for! What, you want more? How about a 12-player raid in the Dungeon of Fror that gradually evolves into a PvP match? Or an enhanced housing system? Or the chance to boot Frodo down a steep hill in The Shire's Hobbit Kicking Competition? (Note: may or may not appear in final product). Lotsa stuff in store.



"Waddaya mean I'm late for the Christmas party? I have a hat and everything! Come on, let me in!"

But maybe you're tired of elves and orcs. Perhaps you'd prefer something cuter. Say "hello, kitty" to Hello Kitty, now in pure untainted MMO form and currently in closed beta. Due for a late 2008 release, Hello Kitty Online is free to play and includes everything a good MMO should — character customisation, item crafting, combat, player economy, plenty of NPCs, and avatars that make you go "Awww..." before being reduced to a quivering ball of goo at the sight of so much cute. There's also a tight integration with Sanriatown.com, which lets players upload photos, blog entries and videos about their adventures in Kitty Town.

And now to some MMO news that

is not to be. The proposed Marvel Universe Online MMO has officially been canned, with Microsoft Game Studios' head Shane Kim confirming the news that superheroophiles have no doubt been dreading. Rather than being the result of angry words and slamming doors, Kim cites the decision as being an "amicable" one between Microsoft and Marvel, and puts it down to the uncertainty of what business model to use given the project's progress. (i.e.: "How do we proceed now?" "Uhh, I dunno." "Me either. Screw it, let's ditch the whole thing.")

But not all news is bad news. While the long-rumoured KOTOR MMO has been revealed as just that — a rumour — an EA analyst report listed the KOTOR brand as being on the collective plates of LucasArts and BioWare. Meaning it's still on the go. Meaning KOTOR 3? We sure hope so.



Taking you places you've never imagined!





WHO KNEW?

Mass Effect Comes to PC

Absolutely no one is surprised

Cross-platform games are nothing new, even when they're touted as being "exclusive" to a particular system. We all know that enough patient waiting will see their exclusive contract expire, allowing a game to spread its wings and visit all the gaming avenues.

Mass Effect is no exception, and EA has confirmed the expected: the space opera RPG is heading to PCs in May. Naturally, the similar architecture of the 360 console and PC hardware will (hopefully) assist in a smooth port, but the PC version will offer a little more besides replacing "Press X" with "Press Enter".

For starters, the graphics resolution has been bumped right up to take advantage of today's powerful videocards, and the controls are tailored to feel right at home with a mouse and keyboard, with the option available for customisation. Those with a heavier leaning towards action rather than

reams of blah-blah-blah alien dialogue should appreciate the new hotkey system, allowing them to assign biotic powers or skills and then use them on the fly.

From an interface standpoint, there's work being done to ensure there's no Oblivion syndrome in this little RPG. (Oh, how they hollered!) The game's inventory GUI and functionality has been redesigned

specifically for a PC's monitor and controller input, and just so it's not all random tweaking, there's a new decryption mini-game! Joy!

No word on whether the hot, sweaty blue alien sex has been modified in any way (in light of the stink raised by US Fox News and numerous conservative bloggers), but if it's still in there, we're guessing those buttock textures will look totally awesome.



OVERFLOW

Vauxhalls, no, sorry, we mean Voxels

Details, Details

■ An Australian company, Unlimited Detail claim they have created technology that will allow computers to process unlimited voxels (if you're not sure what they are, think "tiny 3D atom"), thereby giving the impression of an unfeasibly high polygon count even on lower spec hardware. Potentially this could have as huge impact on gaming, as console and PC manufacturers could refrain from pumping billions of dollars into technology designed to squeeze out a few more polygons. So far we haven't seen much aside from canned videos and a demo of a four year old build running the technology at a resolution of 640x480 but we are cautiously optimistic that, when Unlimited Detail show us the next build of their "mass-connected processing" technology in around two months, we'll be blown away.

Pirates set free!

Ninjas still pricey

■ It has recently been announced that the long awaited Flying Labs MMO, *Pirates of the Burning Seas* will be offered for free in Australia thanks to a deal between the developer and Telstra. To obtain a copy of the game all you need to do is head to the Telstra website and enter your email address to obtain a download key. Before you get too excited - it's only the game itself that is being offered for free. Australian players will still have to fork over the \$15.95 a month to play the game, unless, of course, you're a Bigpond subscriber and get the special 20% discount, making your subscription price a nice, round \$12.76.

Goss does Tekken, Mink does MK

Expect keytar battles

■ It's been a big month for martial arts movies based on games. It has recently been revealed that Luke Goss, former Bros keytarist-turned-actor with previous starring roles in *Blade 2* and *Cold & Dark*, has been cast as brit boxer Steve Fox in the upcoming Tekken movie. Personally we don't think it's too bad a piece of casting, though we really would have preferred if Craig Anderson had been cast in the role. If you don't know who Craig Anderson is, let us enlighten you. Craig is the genius behind *Double the Fist* and played the role of Steve Foxx in the show. What could be more fist-worthy than Steve Foxx playing Steve Fox? Nothing. That's right. Nothing at all.

In slightly more disappointing news, it has also been recently announced that a new *Mortal Kombat* movie is on the way. Director mink claims that the film will be a "re-imagining" of the franchise and will have nothing to do with the previous two films or TV series. Two things about this scare us. Firstly, has there ever been a director with a single name who hasn't sucked? Pitof? He made *Catwoman*. McG? He made *Charles Angels: Full Throttle*. Do you really think a re-imagined MK by mink will be better?



BAD COP NO DOUGHNUT

DANIEL WILKS

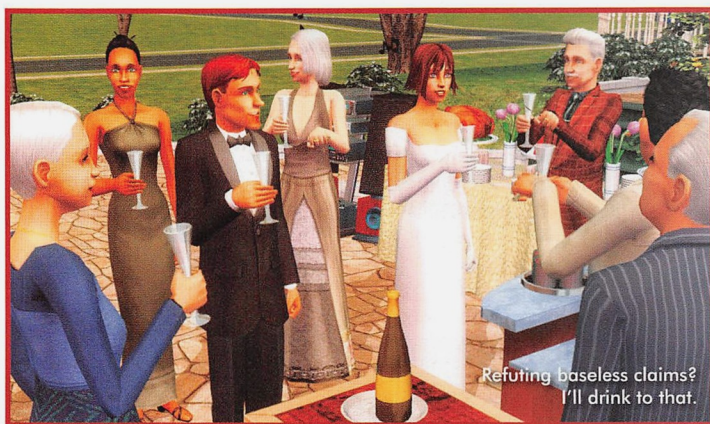
Loving your inner man-boy-child

There has always been this misconception that gaming is a pastime solely the province of adolescent boys. This misconception, or as I believe, a deliberate dismissal of facts, has been used as the basis for nearly all current arguments to do with gaming, such as whether companies are deliberately marketing their adult games to kids and the like.

Within the last month or so there seems to have been a shift in that thinking, but unfortunately not for the better. The new thinking seems to accept the fact that gaming is an adult pastime as well, but unfortunately instead of leaving the facts as they stand, they have been used to create a bizarrely counter-intuitive proto-feminist claim (or anti-feminist, depending on how you view the claim that millions of young women are disappointed in their inability to find and domesticate a young man) that men who play games are trying to recapture, or never leave, their adolescence and therefore don't assume responsibility in work, relationships and what have you.

Kay S. Hymowitz, a contributing editor for the Manhattan Institute's City Journal, in an article titled The Child-Man claims that today's young single males exist in a constant state of adolescence due to the fact that they're not married by the age of 26. Her argument, before it falls far off the rails (more on that in a second), seems to be that in 1965, by 26, young males had hit all of the adult milestones, such as a degree, a job, a wife and a kid. Nowadays young males only have a degree, a job and financial independence, thereby not fully qualifying as adults as they have not shackled up with their high-school sweetheart and squeezed out an offspring. They also apparently fail to qualify because they're happy to spend their leisure hours downloading MP3s, playing games, hanging out with friends and participating in social activities instead of saddling themselves with a mortgage.

Of course, later in the article she uses the widely known research of renowned child-man psychologists Judd Apatow and Nick Hornby, citing their major academic works Knocked Up and About a Boy respectively to illustrate her well constructed point that guys who don't have a wife are children who do little more than play games, take drugs, masturbate and occasionally have unsafe sex with unfeasibly attractive strangers.



When a writer needs to turn to fiction to support their theory you know there's some problem with the argument, but that's not the fundamental problem I have with the article (and the few copycat articles that followed it on various blogs and journals). The problem I have is that: a) blanket statements are stupid (woo, irony!), and b) you shouldn't claim a feminist stance when the basic gist of your argument is that women need to

domesticate men for women to be happy and for men to have the impetus to grow up.

As far as blanket statements go, I would like to know where the Next Gaming crew falls. There are seven of us working over Hyper and PC PowerPlay. Four of us are married, three of us have mortgages (or are about to), two of us have kids, but only two of the married couples have mortgages and one of the married couples with a kid rents. All of us have degrees – some of us more than one. Therefore it seems as though all

seven of us fulfil some of the criteria for being both an adult and a child-man. Perhaps we should petition for a new categorisation for people like ourselves. Maybe something like teen-man or the more scientific (or super-heroic) sounding proto-man.

As far as claiming a feminist stance – I think Kay S. Hymowitz just needs to grow up.

There seems to have been a shift, but unfortunately not for the better



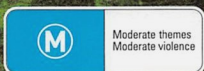
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GIVE ME LIBERTY

HANDS ON WITH GTA IV

»DANIEL WILKS

I'm the first person in the world who starts complaining when things begin to stagnate. I like change. Not change for the sake of change — that way lays confusion and Michael Moorcock novels. No, I like things to progress naturally, so, as such, I have no fundamental problems with sequels. Something that continues a story in an interesting way or expands on something set up in an earlier instalment usually keeps me happy. Can you see where I'm going with this?

Now for some controversy. As a philosophical exercise, I really liked GTA 3. I liked the way in which the game opened up the world to players and essentially asked them to make their own fun. I liked the incidental details, like radio stations. I liked the ability to perform physics defying stunts. Unfortunately there were a bunch of things that

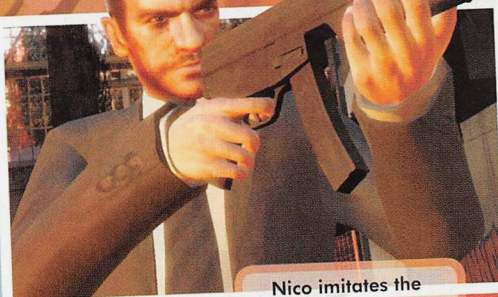
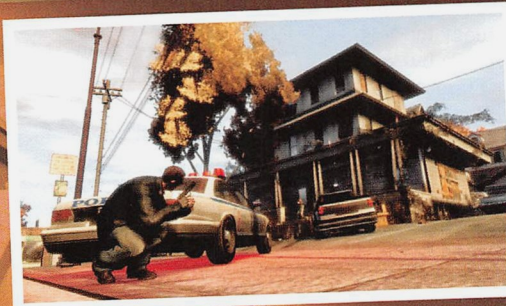
didn't grab me. The characters were, to put it mildly, bland and the story was all but non-existent. I didn't like the loose controls and rather terrible aiming either. What I didn't like about GTA 3 most of all, though, was the fact that it was made another half dozen times in the forms of Vice City, San Andreas, Liberty City Stories and Vice City Stories. Yes, I only mentioned four games there but I consider the rejiggered PS2 ports of the Stories games to be separate releases.

BRING THE HATE

Now some people are going to be frothing at the mouth and I can guarantee that my inbox will be [continued p.14]



R Give me death



Nico imitates the reaction of a GTA fan reading Wilks' opening paragraph

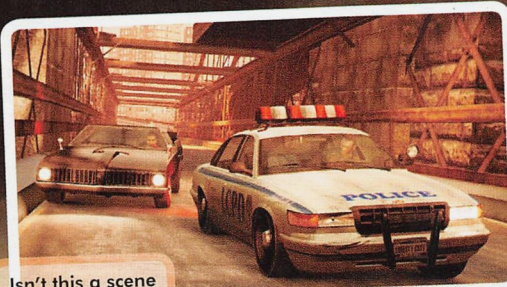


the FUZZ

Any time Nico breaks into a cop car he can access the Police Database, a central information source invaluable for locating targets, finding contacts, gathering rumours or looking up any fact the police might want to know.

The Wanted system has also been almost entirely revamped. Every time Nico commits a crime that warrants a wanted star, a red and blue "search radius" appears around Nico's position on the mini-map and Police Dispatch will notify officers in the given area as to who they are looking for, the last known location, the car the player was last seen in, et cetera. To lower the wanted level, Nico must escape from the search radius unnoticed. This may sound identical to the Wanted system in previous games but this time round the Wanted level is based very much on line of sight. If a police officer sees Nico, or catches him changing cars, the search radius is re-centred on that location, making it harder for Nico to escape. Nico can no longer simply "walk off" a single star either.

The wanted radius no longer goes away after a time limit – the only way to escape the police is to leave the radius altogether. In addition, the size of the search radius increases based on Nico's wanted level, so the more heinous the crime, the more difficult it is to escape.



Isn't this a scene from the Blues Brothers?

GTA IV hands-on

» flooded with reams of mail as to why the GTA series is the best thing ever. They'll tell me why I am stupid, why I shouldn't have the job that I do, and that I am most probably gay to boot. You can argue all you like about how each of the last generation GTA games redefined the sandbox genre but even Rockstar would disagree with you. The fact that none of the games after GTA 3 contained a number in the title is telling. Not one of those games is a sequel. Each of those games is simply another riff on the same theme.

Three hundred and fifty odd words into a hands on feature and nothing but vague condemnation of a franchise might give you the impression that GTA IV is not exactly shaping up to be great. You should get that idea right out of your head. From what I've played of the game so far, GTA IV is shaping up to do everything a good sequel should; extending on the groundwork laid in the previous games, fixing the problems that plagued previous titles and creating an experience that feels at once familiar and fresh.

EVERYTHING OLD IS NEW AGAIN

The basic gameplay premise of GTA IV works along the same lines as previous games. Players take the role of a central anti-hero and shoot, steal and drive their way to success, travelling anywhere and doing anything that the game engine allows, but this time there are some major shake-ups in mechanics that go much further than the ability to eat a hamburger or mash buttons to work out in a gym.

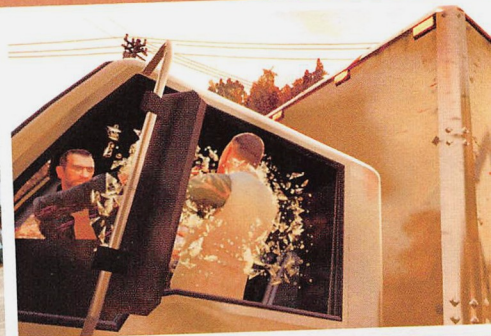
GTA IV features a totally revamped combat system that drastically changes the way the game plays. The new combat system features a lock on targeting system (similar to that of GTA: San Andreas) that instantly zeroes in on the nearest target when the player holds down the aiming trigger, showing a circular health meter on the target. When the player locks on they have the option to simply blaze away or try to refine their aim by tilting the right thumbstick, enabling them to aim for the head or limbs. Holding down the targeting trigger half way allows the player

to go into free aim mode, much like the targeting of previous GTA games. Free Aim is especially useful when targeting cars, as players can't lock on to vehicles.

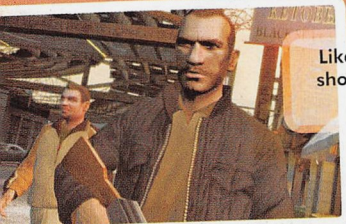
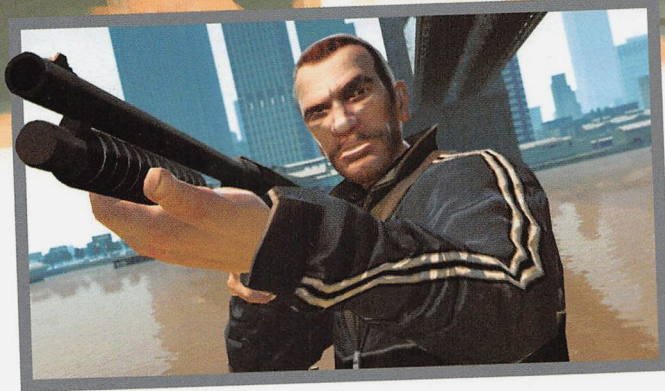
The aiming system feels fantastic and should go a long way towards placating the people who felt the targeting in previous GTA games was, for want of a better word, awful. On paper it may sound as though locking on to a target may make gunfights much easier, but that isn't actually the case. Sure, fighting a single enemy is easier but when you're faced with more than one target the gunfights still pose a challenge. Rockstar states that their change of targeting mechanics mirrors the fact that even before the game starts the main character, Nico, is already a hardened criminal and a master of weaponry, so it's only fair that he has an easier time with guns. We can't help but agree – the new targeting mechanics not only make gunfights more approachable, they also serve to really make Nico feel like the badarse he is.



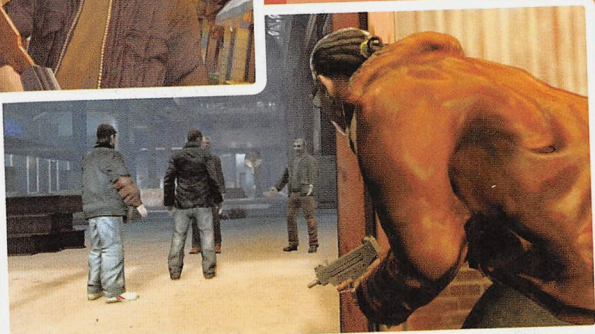
Nico can't help but admire his .45. It's Bloomtastic!



the new targeting mechanics serve to make nico feel like the badarse he is



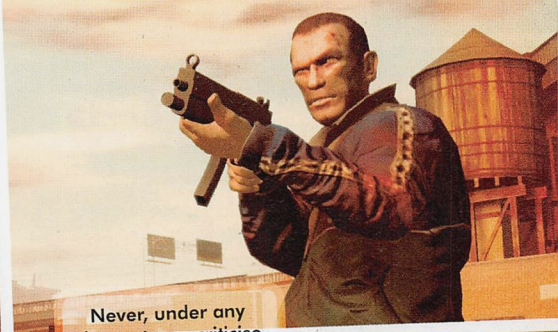
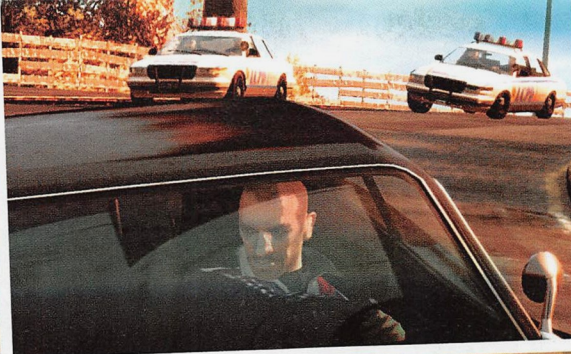
Like dogs, AK47s should be walked every day



With Friends Like these

NPCs aren't just simple quest vendors – they are real (virtual) personalities that may require a bit of coddling. Befriending characters by performing missions, simply spending time with them or making the occasional phone call has its benefits. Brucie, one of the first characters the player will meet will offer Nico helicopter rides if he becomes a friend. Little Jacob, the Jamaican will offer to sell Nico weapons when they become friends. Roman, Nico's cousin runs a taxi service and will come and pick up Nico if asked.

Maintaining friendships will take some effort on the part of the player as well – NPCs will get pissed off if you skip out on a meeting, so it will be much better to call and cancel rather than simply fail to show up.



Never, under any circumstance criticise a man's tracksuit.

COVER ME!

Along with the aiming system, GTA IV also features a brand new cover system. Not only does it allow players to actively make and use cover, it also features the ability to quickly transfer from one piece of cover to another, enabling them to move without inviting a hail of bullets. By placing the targeting reticle over a nearby object that can be used as cover and pressing the cover button, Nico vaults or slides to the new position safely. When in cover, Nico can blind-fire whatever weapon he is currently wielding. Obviously Nico's aim is severely limited when shooting blind but the ability to spray some lead from a safe position is a nice addition to the game. One thing we did notice during out hands on time is that some crates and cardboard boxes look almost identical so you need to be careful when searching for cover as, strangely enough, cardboard boxes aren't all that good for stopping a hail of lead.

GTA IV is based more in the real world that previous GTA games, so getting a new weapon is

no longer a simple matter of walking into a gun shop and picking up an Uzi. Instead, Nico must develop underworld contacts and do shady deals to increase his armoury.

Car handling remains faithful to the last few games with some pleasantly floaty physics and handling, as well as a decent sense of speed. We played the Xbox 360 version of the game and found rumble to be curiously absent but have subsequently discovered it was simply turned off in the build. We're not sure as yet whether rumble will make an appearance in the PS3 version but we're keeping our fingers crossed that it will make an appearance, as feedback will lend a nice sense of weight to the vehicles.

Anyway, enough of the mechanics — on to the actual game.

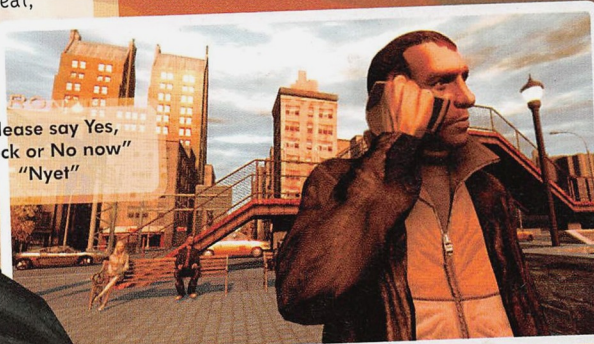
JAMAICAN HEAT

The first mission we got to play, Jamaican Heat, takes place early in the game and serves as a kind of tutorial to the

FOR a good time call...

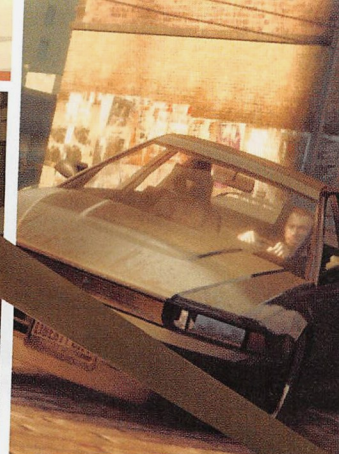
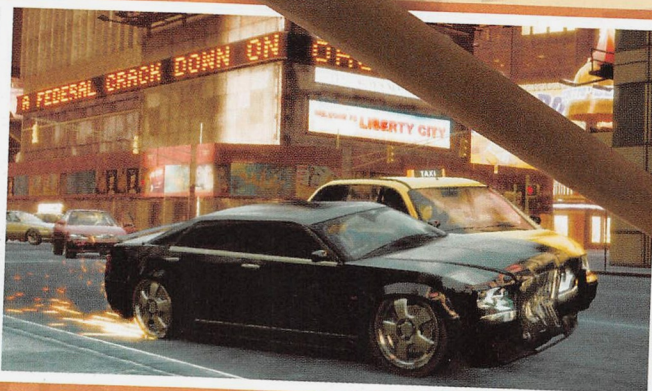
Aside from a gun, Nico's most invaluable tool in GTA IV is his cell phone. The phone acts as his major point of contact, his organiser, camera and contacts list. Rather than simply throwing missions at the player and forcing them to accept, many missions in GTA IV are offered to Nico over the phone and it's up to the player if they want to accept the call or not. Of course, if someone really wants to get in contact with Nico they'll keep calling, getting more and more irate as time goes on. Nico can also use the phone to set up meetings with contacts, to buy guns, do shady deals, pick up some money on the side or to simply make friends.

»
"Please say Yes,
Check or No now"
"Nyet"





Nico pretends the door frame is a T-1000



Team Deathmatch

No matter how many questions we asked and how hard we needed the Rockstar PR and Marketing during our playtest, they wouldn't tell us a thing about the multiplayer elements of GTA IV. All we know is that the cell phone will play an integral part of the multiplayer experience. We're assuming that it will act as a kind of friends list, enabling players to contact each other to start a game, but we could be wrong. We'll find out all the details in the next few months.

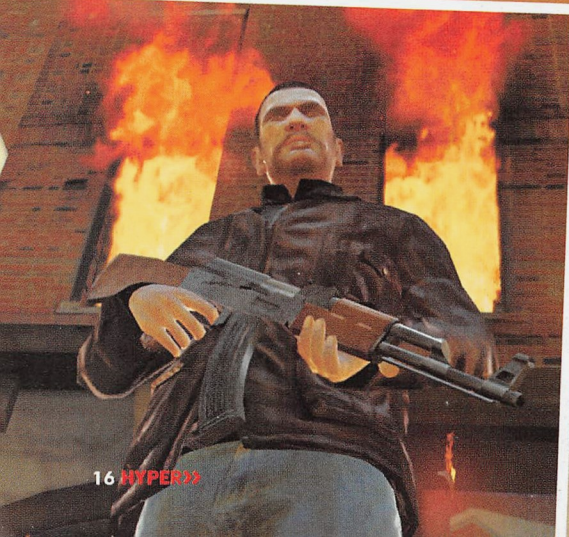
TURN LEFT in 200 metres

Navigation in GTA IV is easier than ever before with a solid GPS/Waypoint system that shows players the optimal route to get to their destination. If you do manage to miss a turn or get sidetracked whilst travelling to a mission, the GPS will update your location and re-work a new route to your target. While basic vehicles only have access to a simple GPS system, high-end vehicles like luxury sedans and sports cars often come equipped with voice navigation. Now all the game needs is a disgruntled Jeremy Clarkson screaming for the benign female navigation voice to shut up and randomly stabbing dashboard buttons trying to shut it off.

save meh!

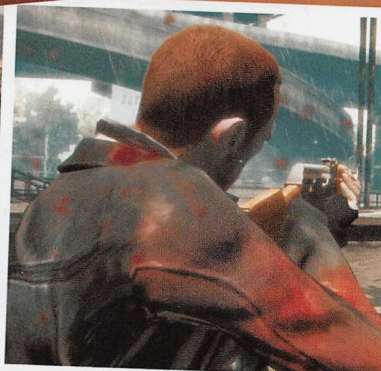
In a move sure to piss off some purists but make everyone else rather happy, GTA IV auto saves after the completion of each mission. Now there's no longer any need to continue running back to your safe house to save every time you've completed part of the story. What's more, players have the option to instantly retry a mission should they happen to fail.

Black Hawk Down is not the best helicopter training video

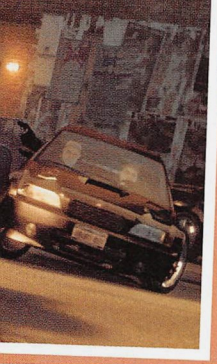


ALL the RAGE

GTA IV runs on the proprietary Rockstar Advanced Game Engine, a brand new engine that will be used to drive all of Rockstar's next generation games. The upcoming Midnight Club: LA stands to be a real showcase for the RAGE engine.



Gta IV hands-on



» gunplay mechanics of GTA IV. Nico's cousin Roman introduces the Eastern European heavy to Jacob, an incredibly thick accented Jamaican who needs a driver/bodyguard for a couple of deals he is making. When we say his accent is thick we're not exaggerating — nobody present at the demo, including the Rockstar guys, could pick up more than half of what he was saying, leading to many amused shrugs. Naturally, things go pear shaped and the Rastafarian is doublecrossed in a back alley, giving Nico a chance to show off his marksmanship.

As this was the first time we had a chance to actually get control of Nico, things didn't go as smoothly as we could have hoped to begin with, but after the third or fourth opponent showed up we were shooting like professionals. Our first impressions of the revamped lock on system were good — the basic lock is tight and the target switching (by flicking the right stick) and ability to tilt the aim to head or legs (also by flicking the right stick) works brilliantly.

Naturally this first mission is quite simple so we were never in much danger of being killed, but as an introduction to and a showcase of the aiming system, it works fantastically. Our only gripe is that this introductory mission felt a little too much like an introductory mission, taking away from the sense of immersion that Rockstar are so want to talk about in their new game. Of course, we were playing the mission in a vacuum so there could have been a lot more to it than what we saw.

JACOB'S LADDER

Our second mission saw us still working as a driver/bodyguard for Jacob. Another training mission, Jacob's Ladder saw us waiting in an alley in case our Jamaican friend needed a fast getaway from a deal. Naturally he did, as a half dozen or so thugs chased him from the building he entered and began firing both at he and Nico.

The first part of the mission was

failed attempts to gun down the enemies running through the streets we changed tack and opted instead to go for a little vehicular manslaughter, running down anyone who dared raise a gun. This proved to be a much better tactic and in no time flat the streets were safe again. Well, safe for Nico and Jacob at any rate.

The second half of the mission saw us engaging in more combat and gave us a chance to come to grips with the new cover system. Once attached to a wall Nico has two different ways to switch cover. Double tapping the right bumper (on 360) or holding the left thumbstick in the direction you want to go and tapping the right bumper a single time automatically takes you to the nearest cover. Alternately you can aim at the cover you want to go to and hit the bumper, taking you to the cover you're aiming at. Once in cover, as mentioned before, Nico can aim normally or blind-fire. In addition, Nico can also vault over low objects by pressing X.

The cover system really breathes new life into the franchise, taking gunfights from largely run and gun, haphazard affairs and transforming them into tactical battles that necessitate the clever use of cover, diversionary fire, and careful movement. The system complements the lock on targeting brilliantly — enemies use cover as much as the player, adding an element of timing to gun battles as players strive to take out their target when they pop up to take a shot, but keeping Nico from absorbing a barrage of bullets in return.

HARBOURING A GRUDGE

The final mission we were able to play saw Nico heading down to the docks to intercept a shipment of meds and then take said shipment to a drop-off point. To start the mission Nico had to do some climbing to get to the roof of a nearby warehouse, shimmying up ledges, moving along guttering and generally behaving like a cranky, slightly overweight (not to mention hairy) Tomb Raider. The climbing



TAXI DRIVER

The police in Liberty City are far more alert than police in previous games, making car-jacking a far riskier endeavour than ever before. Liberty City is also a huge expanse that is quite easy to get lost in. To this end, cabs have become a valuable tool for getting around. Players can either stay in the cab for the entire ride, or can cut the ride short, making the trip instantaneous but more expensive. In the code we played, cab rides were quite prohibitively expensive, sometime costing a few hundred dollars. We're not sure if cabs will cost this much in the final code but we have a funny feeling that the demo code we played didn't have finalised pricing.

Luckily the area was littered with freight containers, crates and piles of packing tablets so there was more than enough cover to use. Blind-Fire also proved to be an invaluable skill during the mission, as during the early stages there were far too many guns being aimed in Nico's direction to warrant popping his head out of cover.

After dispatching all of the guards, the final part of the mission saw us having to drive the captured truck full of meds to a secure drop-off point. Aside from giving us a chance to drop some grenades from the truck window, the final part of the mission proved to be a fairly straightforward car chase, with enemy cars trying to run Nico off the road and us doing our best to get away at speed.

THE AFTERMATH

What became most obvious throughout the missions is that Rockstar have pulled out all the stops to make the game a far more immersive one in terms of story and character — far more than we have seen in the franchise before. All of the sundry characters we met, as well as those we couldn't get our hands on but saw, showed a level of detail far beyond any of the previous games. Rather than simple ciphers or stereotypes, each of the characters appears to have believable character traits and mannerisms.

It seems clear that GTA IV is the first true sequel in the GTA franchise to have come along in years. From what we've seen it takes the elements that made the series so popular — non-linear progression and open world gameplay — and adds a level of depth that seems to have previously been impossible due to hardware limitations. We're not just talking graphically either. Sure, the game is great to look at, and should be stunning once the final shading and shadowing passes have been made, but it's Nico himself, and the contacts he makes that gives GTA IV the edge.

There's not too many sleeps left until GTA IV hits the stands, so get ready for our full review within the next few issues. We can't wait. «

the cover system really breathes new life into the franchise

obviously set up to show off the revamped "shooting from vehicles" controls. Whereas in San Andreas players could only fire a pistol from inside a car, GTA IV allows players to fire any one handed weapon, and even drop grenades. It seems as though people who live in Liberty City have no real idea how to operate a car window, so before firing, the player must first break the window by hitting the left bumper (in the 360 version) to break the window. Players are then free to shoot with the left bumper, aiming with the right thumbstick.

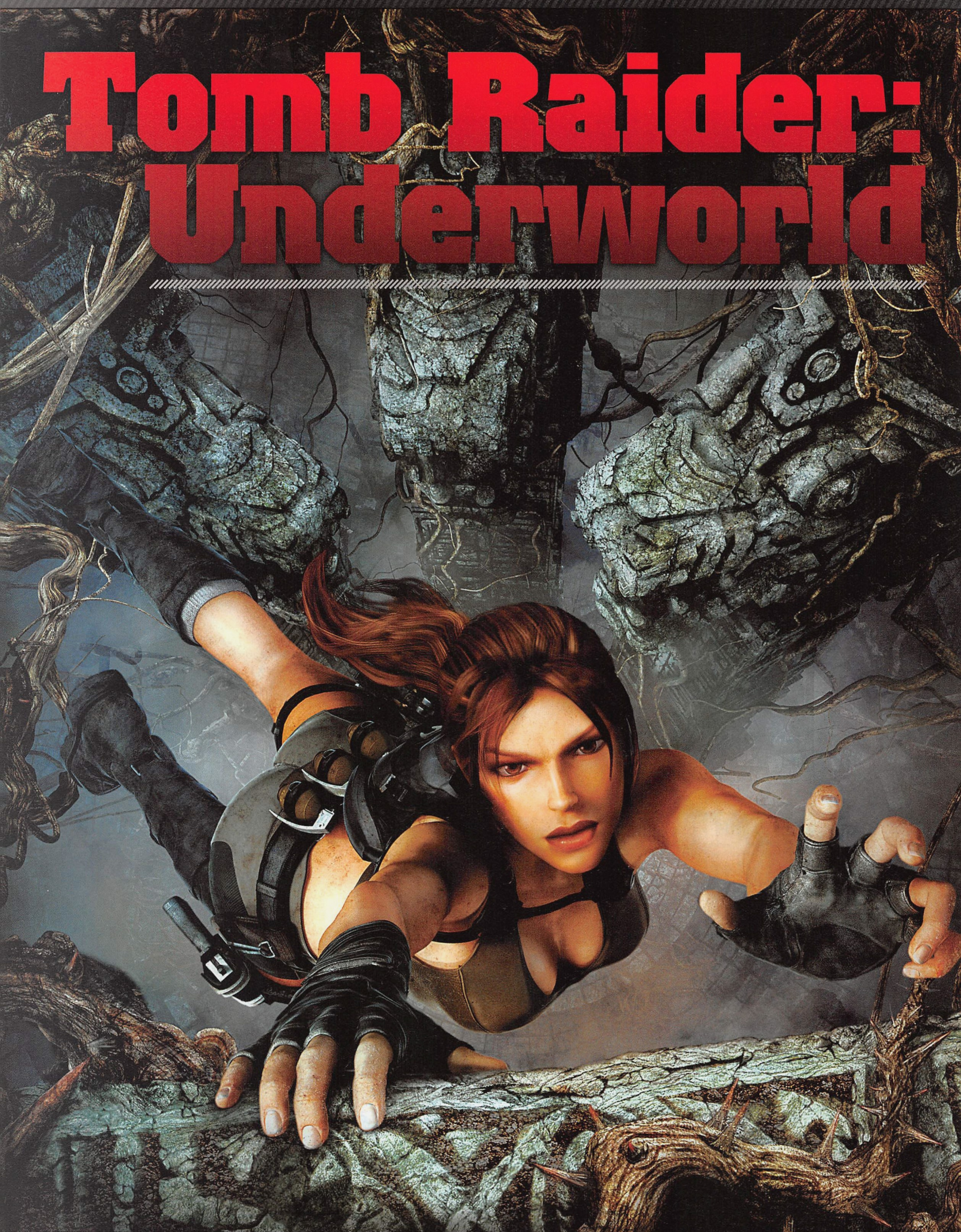
Trying to drive with the left thumbstick and aim with the right is a lot easier than it sounds. After more than a few

controls are simple but we had some difficulty with a few of the jumps — the camera seemed to conspire against us a little, though it's more than likely that this is just an issue with debug code.

The next part of the mission required all that we had learned about gun-fighting, as a dozen or so armed guards stood between Nico and the truck full of meds. More so than any of the previous missions we had played, Harboring a Grudge showed us the vital importance of the cover system. There would be absolutely no way to beat the mission without using cover, as every one of the guards seemed to be better armed than Nico, and a crack shot to boot.



Tomb Raider: Underworld



X360 | PS3 | Wii | PC | PS2 | DS | PSP

Category: **Action Adventure** • Players: **1**
Developer: **Crystal Dynamics** • Due: **Q4 2008**

When we got the call to check out the new Tomb Raider game, there was a collective 'huh?' from an office full of people who could swear that they had only just put down the Wii version of Anniversary. There's a new Tomb Raider game? Well, duh — there's always a new Tomb Raider game. The only thing more certain than one Lara adventure following on from the other is death. And Internet porn. But, since most people typically get to die only once, whereas they are able to play multiple Tomb Raider games before hitting the casket for a good eternity's slumber, Tomb Raider: Underworld is therefore weighed down with another certainty: expectation.

CRYSTAL'S CAVES

And expectations here are high. Fans were given cause to rejoice after Tomb Raider Legends saw Crystal Dynamics lift the franchise from the pit of mediocrity, and everyone started to expect solid play mechanics and enjoyable level design from lady Croft all over again. Anniversary was no slouch either, although it was inevitably less celebrated and forward-moving by sheer default of being a remake; a piece of competent filler in essence, it was a means of biding time before the next big step. Underworld aspires to be that next big step, one that will bring the series truly into a new generation that is finally beginning to gather steam, and one that carries the responsibility of not falling into the same pit as 2003's Angel of Darkness.

Glancing at the situation, it would be easy to produce a tabloid-worthy story that places Underworld on the same slippery slope as its 2003 peer. Word of Eidos' parent company, Sci, being in financial trouble (despite reasonable sales of Kane and Lynch that go against the middling reviews and marketing controversy that surrounded it) echoes that time of the earlier half of this decade, and a new fixation on animation brings with it further comparisons — Angel of Darkness notable for being a game hamstrung by amazing animations that failed to work harmoniously with character control. We didn't see all that much in the way of actual Tombs, either.

But Tombs have been promised, although when we first pressed the matter, the respective Senior Producer and Brand Managers looked at each other, voicing the curious dilemma of whether

they were even allowed to answer our query. Under the watchful eye of Eidos' Export PR Manager their trepidation is understandable, and he eventually jumped to their rescue, refusing to give any rough percentage of content but promising "lots of Tombing. Lots."

GREEN ORANGE CRUSH

Putting aside all the dilly-dallying with the setting that the franchise has done over the years, the question of Tombs could easily have been inspired by what we were actually shown of the game. With the stage we witnessed being set in Mexico, there was plenty of greenery on display. Panthers to shoot (however did they know that I had the misfortune of being born in Penrith?), and, thankfully, exotic ruins to explore. The dense foliage stuck out more than anything else, however, and an ominous sky bubbled with weather effects that seemed to suggest Crystal Dynamics had looked Naughty Dog in the eye, acknowledged what Uncharted had achieved, and then decided to raise it a thunderstorm.

Still in its pre-alpha stage, a glance at the visuals does little to differentiate them from the general standard of the 360 and Ps3 that we've grown accustomed to. But that's not to say that certain subtleties weren't highlighted and appreciated. Great emphasis was placed on how much effort has been put into integrating Lara into her world as not only will rolling around in mud get her dirty, but rain will also get her wet... and eventually clean again, for that matter. Shadowing was particularly impressive, with subtle variations of intensity and even slight tints of colour where appropriate.

More encouraging than all this was the animation itself. There's a great amount of context sensitivity in play, and Lara will now brush bushes aside as she runs through them. More to the point, despite being fully motion-captured, the animations seemed designed to increase play harmony with the gameworld and not just act as a technical showcase. Just how responsive the controls actually are will remain a mystery until we're actually given a chance to play the game ourselves, though. »



The lengths Lara goes to work her glutes...

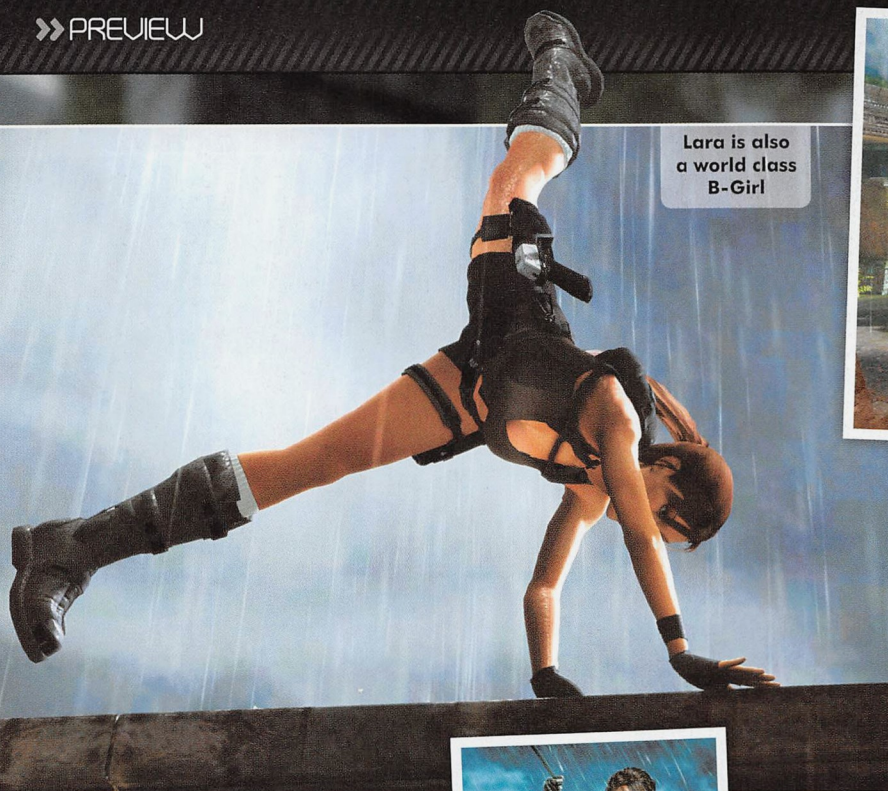
WHAT WE'D LIKE TO SEE:

Tombs. We've been promised them but we'd like to, y'know, actually see them.

That pillar had better watch itself



... despite being fully motion-captured, the animations seemed designed to increase play harmony with the gameworld and not just act as a technical showcase.



Lara is also a world class B-Girl



Don't Jump - we've almost forgotten AOD!

» PRANCING LIKE A GIRL

With the controller gripped firmly within the hands of Eidos staff, the promise of all new AI and emergent gameplay felt almost like a disclaimer to protect against any unexpected bugs raising concerned eyebrows. Not that it was needed should that have been the case, and such a claim can sit safely as a boast since the demonstration competently showed off a mixture of gunplay, exploration, acrobatics, grappling and puzzle solving.

What was shown seemed to be about half-way through a stage that was half way through the game and gunplay was the first element to be shown. Nothing



here felt particularly new, and Lara pranced and dodged around in the manner we've come to expect. But blow us down if those big black cats didn't look cool. These beasts had a unique menacing presence, felt genuinely possessed and give off a shadowy vibe reminiscent of the ghostly foes in Ico. Only they must have been fleshy, as towards the end of the demonstration Lara ventured

back where she came and past the corpses of the cats she dispatched earlier, cleverly showing off a fully persistent gameworld.

Next up, a pole was picked up and used at the same time as standard inventory items, a small touch that promises some pleasantly seamless environmental interaction. For all the creative uses promised of this pole, however, it was rather obvious that it also served a scripted purpose and was soon promptly clicked into a pillar, allowing Lara to holster herself up the outsides of the temple in front of her for a semi Prince of Persia entry.

NOW WE'RE GETTING SOMEWHERE

It wasn't until Lara clambered inside that things got really interesting, and a series of small touches really managed to whet our appetite. We rather like how grapple points are less overtly obvious now, but

it was a moment when Lara used the rope itself that she had attached to one of these points as a means of levering a loose boulder from a pillar that truly excited us. Such logical environmental puzzles seem to be becoming a hallmark of this hardware generation, and it still delights us whenever we see small flashes of creativity in the implementation.

There were also a lot of free climbing surfaces, specific patches of wall faces that have been not too cleverly blended into the main game world. It drew comparisons to Assassin's Creed from some of those present at the presentation, but we were far too busy being distracted by the large spiders climbing all over the place and watching Lara try to deal with them. They certainly can't have been dangerously poisonous, as one of them appeared to bite Lara in the face and her skin didn't so much as puff up (and after the mud and rainwater demonstration, we know that turning her ugly is technically feasible), but their wall clambering and the challenge it presented was promising. More promising still was assurance of more fantastical creatures — Lara has been blasting away at endangered species for far too long now, and the cleaner conscious and gameplay possibilities of new critters is inviting.

The demonstration was wrapped up quite painfully at a place where we would actually have liked it to have begun. With the final piece of a puzzle solved, Lara jumped onto an all-new looking bike from which we can expect features above and beyond what was seen in Legends, zipped across a chunk of soggy Mexican greenery and landed herself in an underground chamber never before seen by modern man. Or woman. Whatever. Of course, she landed in there just before it closed itself back up again, leaving her in a fix, and us with a strong sense of hope for this game still knowing where it's true larger-than-life roots belong. **C**



LARA DRAKE

Is it ironic that this game gave us strong recollections of Uncharted? Well, yes — it is. It's the jungle scenery that's mostly responsible, causing us to envy those over at Crystal Dynamics who were flown out to take however many thousands of photos get taken for videogame reference research these days. The setting has been well realized though, even in this pre alpha stage, although considering the storm that's supposed to be raging we can't help but feel that the trees were swaying a little too gently.

Wildlife is about to get more endangered



LETS TALK ABOUT -BLANK- BABY

Since we're yet to be trusted to play the game, in order to scrape that little extra info we sat down for a chat with several faces: **Sarah Van Rompaey** (Senior Producer), **Kathryn Clements** (Senior Brand Manager), **Bill Beacham** (Designer)

And here's what we had to say...

Hyper: You said that the demonstration took place during the fourth stage, which was half-way through the game. Are we correct in assuming there will be eight stages, then?

Sarah: I can't confirm anything, but I'm not going to out-right deny it.

And the general scale of the stages?

Sarah: The scale will be large, although I can't confirm the exact size.

Bill: Puzzles will be spread out, but there will also be nooks and crannies to explore. Lara's bike will also come into play, as we want exploration to be purposeful and free from trudging.

Lara's scaling of the environment has drawn some comparisons to Assassins Creed from some others here. Has there actually been any influence?

Bill: Not Really. The game's been in development for longer than Creed has been around, and much of what we're doing here is stuff that we would have liked to have achieved on the Playstation 2, but technology has only just now caught up. We're essentially trying to encourage player freedom.

And what of the Wii version?

Kathryn: There's a dedicated team working on the Wii version. There's a philosophy of building it separately as an optimized Wii title, like with Anniversary.

But Anniversary was initially a Playstation 2 release, and the Wii has the graphical muscle to match that. With the Playstation 3 and Xbox 360 being the base systems here, it's a whole different graphical ballpark, to say nothing of physics calculations.

Sarah: We can't really say much other than the Wii version is being built with that console's specifics in mind.

Very well. Speaking of Playstation 3, though, is Underworld going to be another case of an Xbox 360 and PC release followed by a Playstation 3 version 'sometime later'?

Sarah: The Playstation 3 version should be released at the same time.

Cool. Looking at content more directly, just how many of Lara's foes are going to fit under the 'mystical creature' umbrella?

Sarah: Seeing as Lara is going places that people haven't yet been before, there's going to be a greater focus on fantastical creatures.

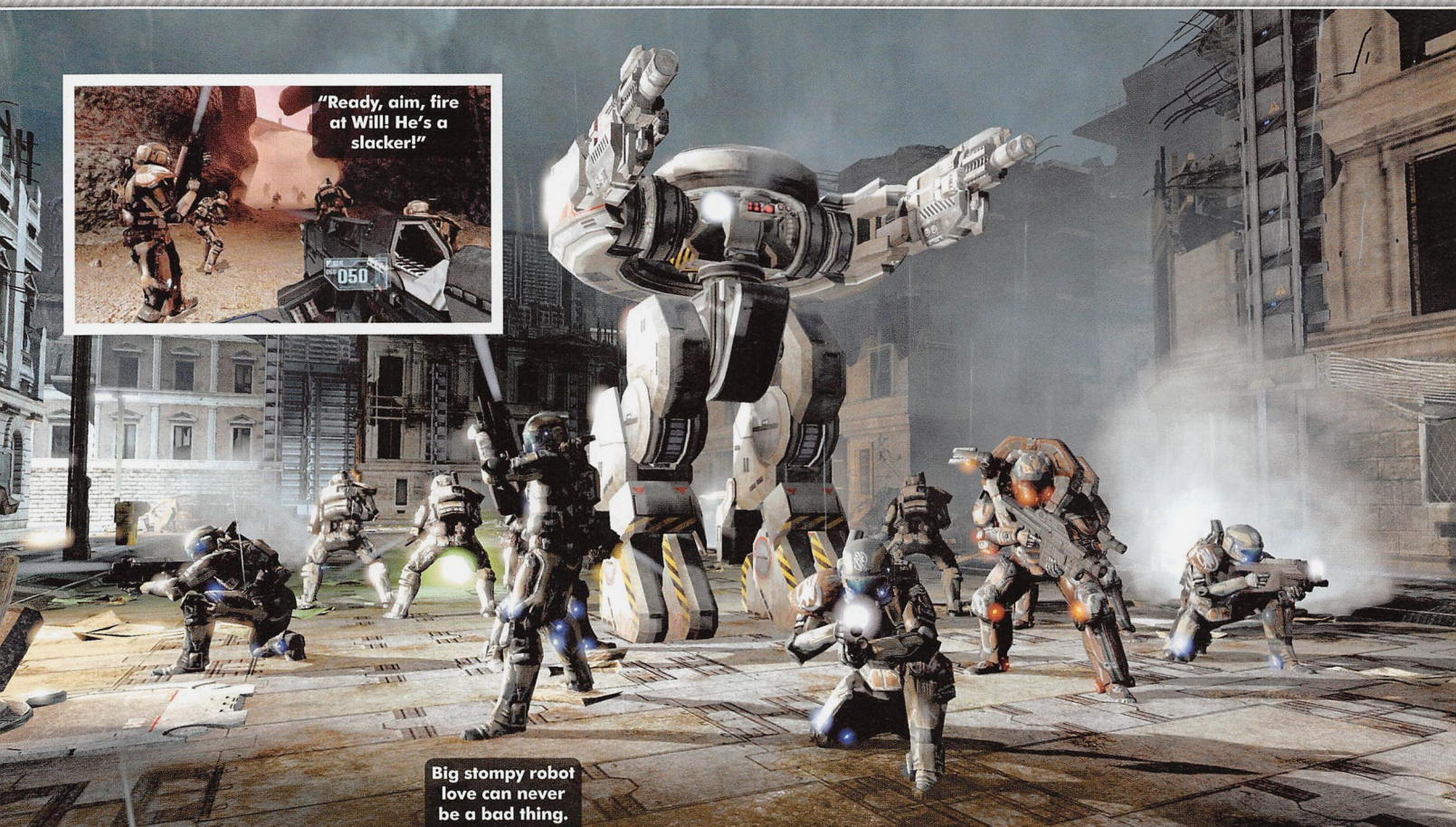
Finally, the HUD seemed mostly clean aside from the odd button prompt. Are we going to continue to see Quick Time Events?

Bill: QTE's will still be present, but we are looking to increase the variation and make them feel more natural in a way that actually encourages player freedom. Those prompts themselves are still tentative, and final implementation will be determined by extensive playtesting.

Sarah: Crystal Dynamics do layer upon layer of playtesting. The importance that this process is given is amazing.

That's pretty encouraging. Thanks.





Big stompy robot love can never be a bad thing.

Tiberium

X360 | PS3 | Wii | PC | PS2 | DS | PSP

Category: **First person, squad-based shooter**
Players: **1-16** • Developer: **EA Los Angeles**
Due: **Q3 2008**

Back in 2002, Westwood Studios—since gobbled up by the Tetsuo-esque EA—produced *Renegade*, a first person shooter in which the player stepped into the shoes of a GDI commando. *Renegade* was met with little fanfare. So poor were the sales, in fact, that a planned sequel was, sadly, scrapped. And so, six years on, EA is being quite courageous in once again attempting to move the franchise beyond the strategy genre.

Tiberium—not to be confused with last year's *Tiberium Wars*—is to be a squad-based affair. The hero this time around is one suitably ethnic-sounding Ricardo Vega, a member of GDI's elite Rapid Assault and Intercept Deployment unit—not to mention main character of the *Tiberium Wars* novelisation—who's pulled out of retirement to kick arse and take names in a way only a pensioner could.

As a commander in this unit, Vega's role, mostly, is to manage all the tactical stuff. This isn't to be another *Full Spectrum Warrior*, though, where your troops do all

the work. Vega can participate in battles. Armed with a GD-10—a "transforming" weapon that has four different forms—and a jetpack, he's able to scoot around the battlefield to assist his men and provide covering fire.

As Vega, you'll be able to command up to four squads of troops at any one time—further reinforcing that EA intends the player to focus as much, if not more, on tactics as satiating their personal bloodlust.

Tiberium sounds like it's going to be forgiving. If any of your squads are wiped out, you're able to call in another and continue your charge to wherever the plot calls upon you to go. Will this make for a game that's overly—for want of a better term—dumbed down? Hopefully not, but we wouldn't be doing our jobs if we weren't a little cynical.

That being said, while reinforcements are unlimited, you will have to do a little work to get them onto the battlefield, securing landing zones and—to remind you that this is, after all, a *Command & Conquer* game—stockpiles of the minerals from

WHAT WE'D LIKE TO SEE:

Some delightfully dodgy FMV sequences with C-grade actors hamming it up. We can only dream.



» You'll be able to command up to four squads of troops at any one time



which the game takes its name.

Seeing as the game has Unreal Engine 3 under the hood, you'd think it'd be visually attractive, but in this regard *Tiberium* disappoints us somewhat. Sure, it's early days—and maybe this poor writer needs to get his eyes checked—but *Tiberium*'s graphics aren't noticeably different than those of *Gears of War*, which came out in November 2006. Too, in all but a couple of the screenshots released thus far, the environments fail to impress. Sure, *Tiberium* is set in a wasteland, but the afore-mentioned *Gears* managed to drop many a jaw with a setting that was just as unlikely to be one of Contiki's best selling tour destinations.

This aside, *Tiberium Wars* looks like it could be a whole lot of fun—we've no doubt the multiplayer component will be very strong—but we're just not ready to free ourselves a few niggling doubts. By no means do we doubt, though, that *Conquer* could make for a good shooter. After all, *Renegade*—despite the truly shitful reception from the general public—was pretty good. **Christopher Taylor** »

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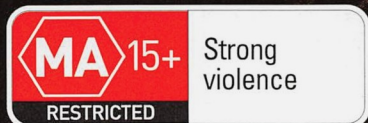


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Mythos

X360 | PS3 | Wii | PC | PS2 | DS | PSP

Category: **XXXXXXXXXX** • Players: **1-16**
Developer: **Flagship Studios** • Due: **Soon-ish**

Hellgate: London was such a bloody letdown it was unforgivable. All those years of waiting to find ourselves playing something that was so completely and utterly ... mediocre. Flagship Studios, the parent of that mildly deformed, poorly behaved child, lost a place on our Christmas card mailing list.

And so it is, constant reader, that we encourage you to approach Mythos—yes, they've already another title coming out—with considerable trepidation. Especially when the studio is quite open about how it started life as a sort of test for the network component of the engine behind Flagship's flagship.

This isn't to say you should totally ignore it, though, for there's the chance that Mythos could be what we gamers have been craving for many a year—a Diablo-style game that's actually semi-decent.

We're not shitting you when we say that Mythos is a "Diablo-style" game. In terms of gameplay, there is essentially *nothing* that sets it apart from Blizzard's classic. The perspective is the same (although the characters are now 3D). The map is huge. And you've item randomisation and all that jazz.

Playing Mythos, you'll be able to create a character of one of three races—Human, Gremlin and Satyr. Whatever that last one is. The differences are purely cosmetic. While the race selection

will be largely pointless, class selection won't be. At this stage in the game's development, there are three classes—Bloodletter, Pyromancer and Gadgeteer—which conform to the archetypes of melee fighter, mage and archer respectively. Thing is, though, they're not complete idiot savants. A Bloodletter will be able to, if required, cast a decent spell or use a bow with some degree of competence. This worries us some, particularly with regards to longevity. Part of the reason Diablo 2 was so good was that each of the available characters were so distinct from each other. Playing as a Necromancer was a very different experience to playing as a Barbarian.

Each of the three classes has two "summons" at their disposal. The Gadgeteer can whip up automated turrets that shoot lightning and fire at foes, as

»» Each of the three classes has two "summons" at their disposal



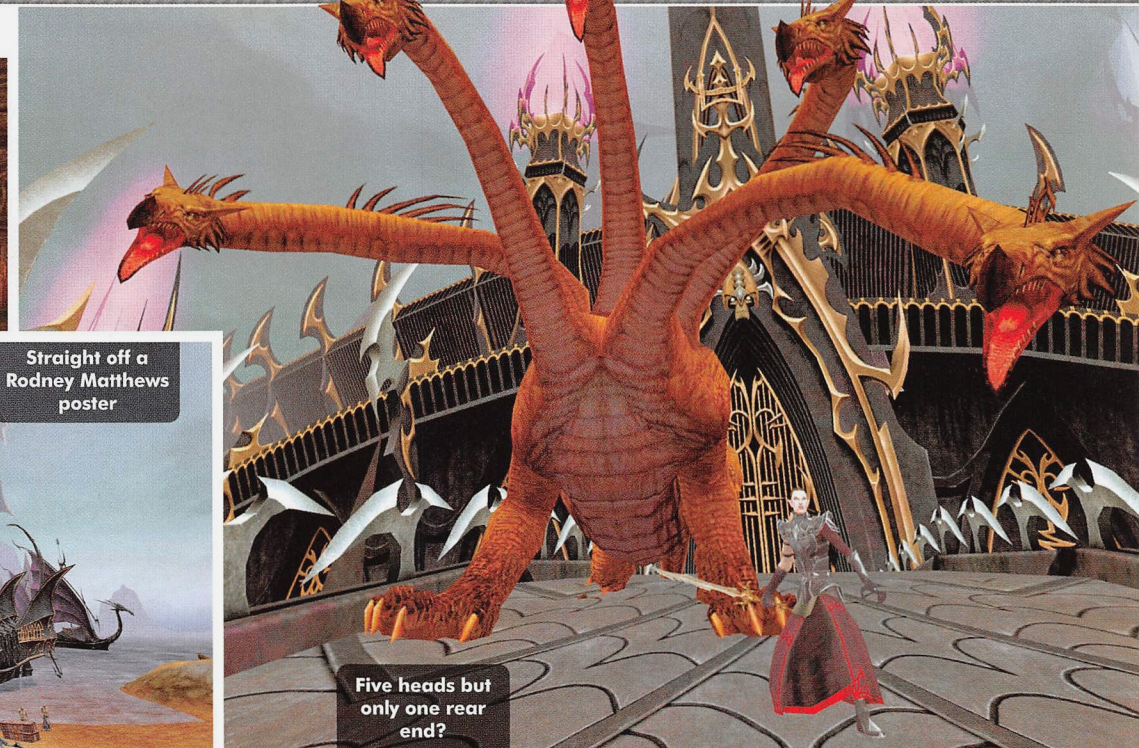
WHAT WE'D LIKE TO SEE:

More free games!
Or more games that don't cost the earth and seven kidneys to buy.
Thumbs up, Mythos!



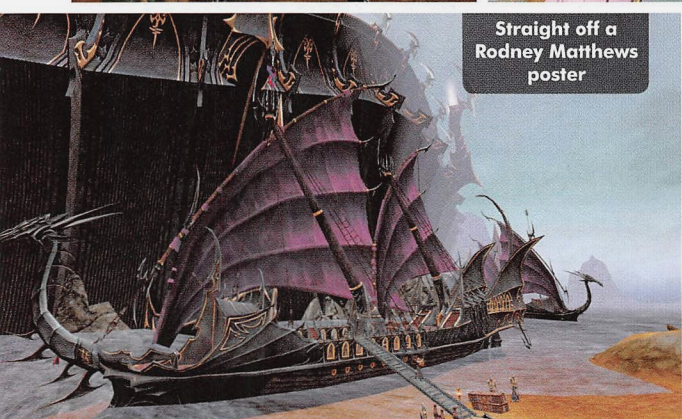
Mythos won't be available in retail stores, but will be distributed digitally. And, in a bizarre move, Hanbitsoft—the game's publishers—have seen fit to release it free-of-charge. That's right, kids. It won't cost you a cent to download or play this game. Where you'll have to break the credit card out is when you want access to rare and powerful items—without which, presumably, progressing past the first section of the game will be incredibly difficult. Will this cunning plan of Hanbitsoft's pay off? Probably not, says the battle-hardened games writer in an amused tone. Mythos isn't the only game that'll be working on this model—EA intend do to the same with the next PC Battlefield game. It'll be interesting to see if EA modifies their plans based on the success or failure of this here hack-n-slash. **Christopher Taylor** »





Straight off a Rodney Matthews poster

Five heads but only one rear end?



Warhammer Online AGE OF RECKONING

X360 | PS3 | Wii | PC | PS2 | DS | PSP

Category: **MMORPG** • Players: **Lots!**
Developer: **EA Mythic** • Due: **Q2 2008**

Warhammer is the perfect hobby for the demanding nerd. It demands an eye that's attuned to the finest of details. And, like one of those wacky cults that demands adherents donate a considerable portion of their annual income to God c/o The Church Pty. Ltd., it wreaks havoc on the balance of one's savings account. And then there are all the rules. And the back-story that just morally obliges Games Workshop to hire a team of specially trained monkeys to pump out novelisation after novelisation after novelisation. The only way Warhammer could be any geekier is if some developer out there—like, say, EA Mythic—adapted it to MMORPG form.

This isn't, of course, the first time someone's tried to do a Warhammer MMO. A few years ago, Climax Online—the company beyond such hits as Ghost Rider, the GBA version of Serious Sam and the PC port of Viva Piñata—had a crack. Their efforts ground to a halt in 2004 and, well, that was that, until Mythic nabbed the licence twelve months later.

Warhammer Online is, we're told, to be a "realm versus realm" game. For those of you who've not much experience with the genre, what this means is that there are two sides—in this case, the dramatically-

named Order and Destruction—who aren't on the best of terms. And you, the player—so long as you pay your fees—can choose which side you'd like to be on and take part in the joyous hostilities.

Depending on which side you align yourself with, you'll be able to choose from six races. On the side of Order, there are the Dwarfs, the High Elves and the Empire (humans). Fighting for Destruction, meanwhile, are the Dark Elves, Chaos and the Greenskins (orcs). Those familiar with the tabletop game will have no doubt noticed that a few of the races are missing. Call this here writer a cynical bastard, but upon finding out that only a half dozen of the Warhammer universe's many races had been included, he had the most vivid of visions, in which Mythic followed up Warhammer Online with one or two expansion packs to correct the oversight.

Strip away the PR speak and Warhammer Online's feature list is made up of standard MMORPG stuff—you pick a side, you pick a race and, too, a class or "career." The careers are quite standard—there are four in all, ranging from the melee damage specialist to the support guy—but have a distinct Warhammer flavour to them. The Greenskins, for instance, have a Goblin Shaman as their support character. The Dwarfs have Ironbreakers fulfilling their "tank" roles. And the Empire uses Bright Wizards to dish out damage at long-range.

There's not a helluva lot that's truly unique about this game, aside from the fact that it's Warhammer. With the fan base that Games Workshop has, it doesn't need to be anything more. Especially when you consider that folks from Workshop are working closely with the development team, ensuring their stick to canon. We do hope, however, that like Relic Entertainment's Warhammer 40000: Dawn of War, the Age of Reckoning has something to offer those of us who aren't diehard fans of the source material.

Christopher Taylor »

WHAT WE'D LIKE TO SEE:

Some new ideas thrown into the fantasy melting pot. Haven't you had enough of orcs and elves and dwarves?

» The Empire uses Bright Wizards to dish out damage at long-range



Epic beard, epic hat with wings. 100% epic.

Condemned 2: BLOODSHOT

X360 | PS3 | Wii | PC | PS2 | DS | PSP

Category: **FPS** Players: **1-?**

Developer: **Monolith** • Due: **20 March**

There are few things in life more brutal than listening to country and western music. The violence level in Condemned 2 is one of those things.

The original game of 2006 was noted for a number of aspects. It had a dark 'n' dank atmosphere, its interface was minimal, and, in a departure from traditional FPS gameplay, it put an emphasis on melee combat rather than on firearms. This meant that the action happened in a manner that was much more intimate, much more in your face, than picking off distant foes with a gun. Angered enemies lunged forth to attack from a hair's breath away, and your subsequent retaliation was shown in no-holds-barred detail. A swing of a metal pipe would smash it into their jaw, sending blood and teeth spraying to one side, while the crunch of a wooden plank against their skull proved that the use of timber extends beyond building a new deck for your Aunt Doris.

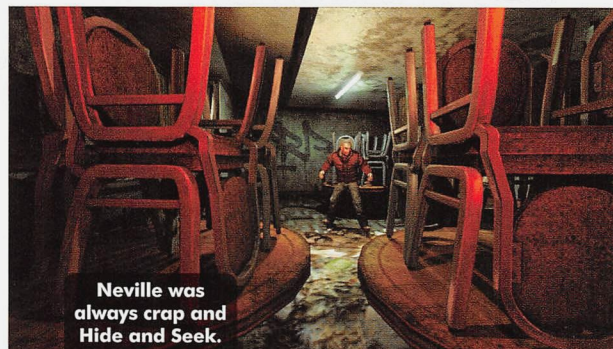
It was brutal stuff, make no mistake. Condemned: Criminal Origins revelled in it, and now the sequel is looking to up the ante. Indeed, the press release for Condemned 2: Bloodshot promises "the most brutal hand-to-hand combat experience the first person genre has ever seen." Our hands-on time with the game presented us with a tutorial that involved beating on homeless people for a bit, before we got to lay the pipe down into

some more savage souls further on in the game. Lovely stuff.

Ethan Thomas, troubled star of the first game, returns here in an even more shaken state. Now an ex-member of the Serial Crimes Unit, he's been roped back into duty to assist the finding his missing partner, Darcy. But work is the last thing on his mind: after the events of the previous game that saw him kill a fair chunk of crazies, Ethan's been understandably left somewhat rattled. Thus, his psyche has to contend with all manner of disturbing visions and hallucinations — something that his recent penchant for hitting the bottle isn't helping.

It's a (perhaps surprisingly) mature approach. Not only does it craft a lead character with more depth than Generic Protagonist X, but it also turns those normally-faceless foes from the original game into real people, the deaths of which lead to real consequences. They're not just forgotten. They've been utilised in a manner that seems meaningful.

Still, don't expect anything cheery or family friendly here. When a game sees you whacking people in the face with a



Neville was always crap and Hide and Seek.

WHAT WE'D LIKE TO SEE:

A level that's as scary, if not scarier, than the original's mannequin scene. We've still got the spooks over that one.

"Doctor, I feel a burning sensation..."



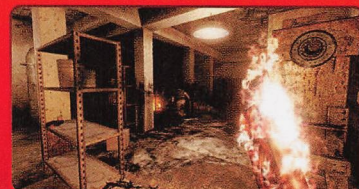
metal pipe, or our favourite, a prosthetic arm, you know that you don't want Little Johnny sitting next to you. And in Condemned 2 things take an even more bizarre twist with the enemies: whereas in the first game they kind of resembled shrivelled zombies, the second outing sees people dripping in a black tar-like substance. There are even moments where walls are oozing the stuff, allowing these tar people (that's what we're unofficially calling them) to emerge. Seemingly a supernatural element has crept into the game, but we'll have to wait for the full game before we can know for sure.

We do know there's a new fighting mechanic with which to pound those chumps. Offensive and defensive moves can now be linked into combo chains, letting you unleash even more powerful blows, while getting engaged in closer-than-close-quarters combat means you'll need to negotiate a quick-time event before you can grapple free.

Beyond that, we'll have to wait and see. The gloom is intact, the brutality is there in spades, but it remains to be seen if the gameplay can hold it all together. ☞



Violent J also does children's magic shows.



BLOOM, BABY, BLOOM

Condemned 2, like pretty much every game these days, uses the Unreal 3 engine. While Epic's powerhouse has shown its versatility across a range of titles, one thing remains constant: It loves to use the bloom effect. Every flicker of light positively glows - the smallest beam radiates with brightness - and when the effect is used in a game like Condemned 2, which more often than not relies on the lack of light, it's hard not to notice it. Our preview code was no different, so fingers crossed that the final product turns things down a few watts.

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PlayStation®Portable

Gran Turismo 5 Prologue

X360 | PS3 | WII | PC | PS2 | DS | PSP

Category: **Racing** • Players: **1-16**
Developer: **Polyphony Digital** • Due: **March**

Goodness me, we've come a long way in a decade. The Gran Turismo series is perhaps the best evidence of this, with the original PlayStation game in 1997 offering what was considered at the time to be the supreme driving simulation. Put it up against the forthcoming Gran Turismo 5: Prologue and it's like comparing a pixelated apple to a bump-mapped orange.

It's something that we've known for some time simply from looking at the screenshots, but now we can say it with authority. We've had some hands-on time with Prologue at Sony HQ, and only now are we picking up our jaws from the floor. To see the game running on a nice widescreen television in 1080p is to see a thing of beauty, and barring the very occasional instance of jaggy edges and shadowing, it looks amazing.

But how does it play? This ain't your arcade racer, boyo. This isn't the sort of game where you can effortlessly slide your blinged up ride around a hairpin curve at 120 kilometers per hour. Like its predecessors, GT5 Prologue requires conscious effort to keep one's vehicle on the asphalt, and each ride handles

noticeably different from the one before it. Even on a track as simple as the iconic Daytona Beach, with its roaring speed and endless left turn, it becomes clear that some vehicles just aren't suited to be handled under such breakneck pace. As we stretched the legs of each vehicle, some spun out while others hugged the road, and the game demands constant adaptation to each new car rather than allowing the player to employ a catch-all driving technique.

Similarly, entering a new race is benefited with a few practice laps, as each corner, chicane and barrier requires a unique approach. The track layout itself offers a couple of slight modifications — you're allowed to throw a few tight corners into Daytona's normally speedy oval, for instance. And you can bet that each track has been accurately modelled from the real thing. Our UK-born PR rep at Sony told us of her first experience racing on a London track, where she was able to easily identify familiar buildings and store fronts. Fingers crossed there are a few Australian tracks in the full game.

Off the racetrack we're offered a world of automobile paraphernalia (or "car stuff", if you want to say it in a far more boring manner). The main menu

»» The game demands constant adaptation to each new car



The cameraman got hit by a reversing car...

WHAT WE'D LIKE TO SEE:

We've said it since Gran Turismo 2, but we'll say it again: A damage model! It's something the series has always been lacking, and it's something that would make this comprehensive simulator all the more realistic. Let's crash some cars!

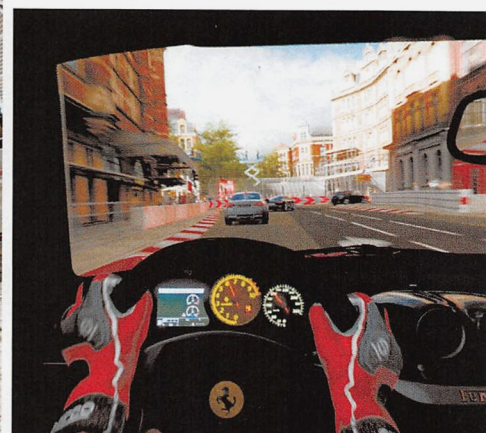
reduces the barrier between offline and online down to an indistinguishable blur, bringing everything automotive right to your TV screen. You're able to read the latest car news, filtered by model and manufacturer if you prefer. You can download HD showreel clips of the hottest wheels (we were told that episodes of Top Gear are on the cards). And for the first time in the series' history, the game offers online matches for up to 16 players, allowing you to throw those AI opponents and lap times to the side of the road and take on some real racers.

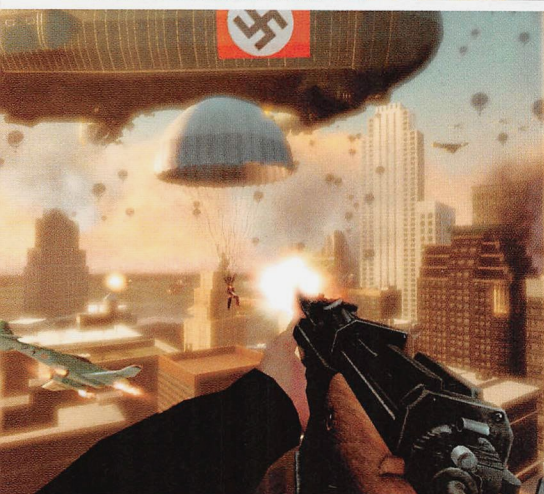
It's looking good, both from a polish and graphical perspective, but we have a few bugbears. Cars seem to land a tad too gracefully after coming down from a jump; they don't bottom out or crunch under the suspension. When it comes to Prologue specifically we didn't see any variations with the weather. It's sunny or nothing. And to revisit a dead horse, we're still not entirely sold on paying for what is essentially a demo. GT5 looks to offer a squillion cars and a kajillion tracks, so it makes more sense to the hip pocket to wait for the full game... though it's still not clear when it'll hit, with Sony offering little more than a release date of "when it's done".

Still, for those chomping at the bit to see the next instalment in the venerable series, Prologue could be just the ticket. «



I could really go some TDK right about now...





Turning Point: FALL OF LIBERTY

X360 | PS3 | Wii | PC | PS2 | DS | PSP

Category: FPS • Players: 1+

Developer: Spark Unlimited • Due: March 13

WHAT WE'D LIKE TO SEE:

A Nazi zeppelin exploding

There are a couple of things that a sure fire winners in the Hyper bunkers. We love zeppelins, dirigibles and any other flying vehicle that is little more than a slow moving bomb. We love polar bears — any animal for which the tip to survival if you happen to be attacked is “curl into a ball, hope they don’t eat any internal organs and eventually get bored” is OK with us. We also love Nazis. Love them as targets, that is. The Nazi is the guilt free enemy. You can shoot as many of them as you like and not feel bad. Hell, even the most conservative of video game haters doesn’t seem to get up in arms about the killing of a few hundred goose-stepping nasty persons. Of course there is danger in having too many Nazis in games — there are only so many WWII shooters you can play before getting a little bored. Thankfully Turning Point: Fall of Liberty takes a new and interesting approach to shooting Nazis. Instead of setting the game in one of the famous theatres of WWII, Turning Point charts an alternate

history in which Winston Churchill was killed by a Taxi in New York City, thereby failing to unite Europe against the Germans, allowing Hitler to first conquer Europe and then launch an attack on the United States.

Players take the role of a high-steel construction worker, compelled to take up arms against the invaders when NY is attacked. We recently had the chance to get some hands on time with early code of Turning Point, playing through a few early missions in the game, starting with the protagonist’s escape from the

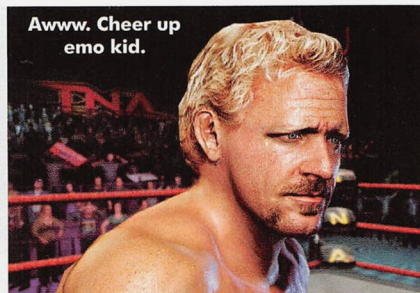
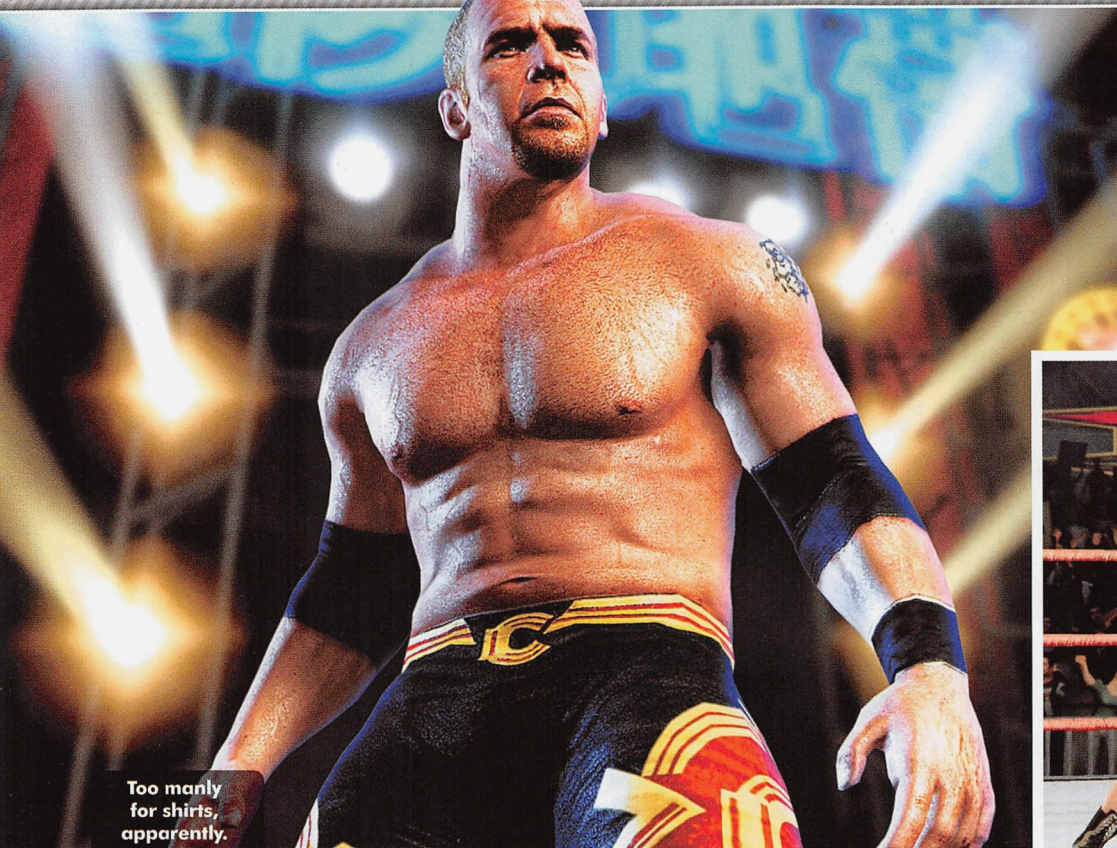
high-rise he’s busy working on through to defending a fortification against a Nazi attack. What we’ve seen so far is quite positive. At this stage the shooting mechanics feel quite run of the mill, with a nice balance between precision and console friendly leniency, but it’s the melee abilities of the protagonist that makes the game stand out. Aside from simply being able to club enemies with the butt of his weapon, the player can also take enemies to use as human shields, as well as executing context/environment sensitive one shot kills, ranging from stealing an enemy’s weapon and shooting them with it point blank, to pushing them off the edge of buildings.

Set in 1953, Turning Point offers something a little different from the standard Nazi killing shooter, as most of the weapons in the game, as well as many of the vehicles, are quasi-futuristic designs pulled from Third Reich drawing boards, such as troop transport zeppelins, updated period guns (the M-50 replaces the M-40) and jet bombers. From what we’ve seen the game doesn’t feature any polar bear stormtroopers but hell, two out of three ain’t bad.

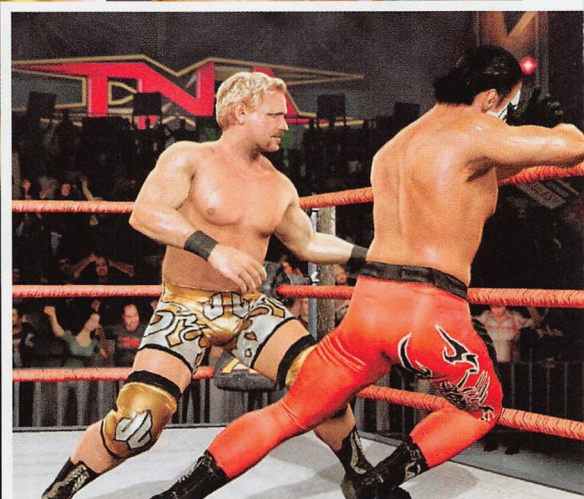
Turning Point: Fall of Liberty should be hitting Australian shelves in mid March. <<

>> A nice balance between precision and console friendly leniency





Awww. Cheer up emo kid.



Too manly for shirts, apparently.

TNA: Impact!

X360 | PS3 | Wii | PC | PS2 | DS | PSP

Category: **Wrestling** • Players: **1-2**
Developer: **Midway Studios LA** • Due: **Soon-ish**

At long last, the Smackdown! series has some competition. TNA: Impact!, for those not-so-familiar with "sports entertainment", is based on what Wikipedia terms "the Total Non-Stop Action Wrestling professional wrestling promotion." In game terms, what this translates to—or rather, what Midway Studios are hoping it'll translate to—is a wrestling game that's fast-paced like a regular fighting game.

Feature-wise, there are few surprises in store. There's the "create a wrestler" function that's been in ... well, every wrestling game that's come out since a long time ago—although this one will let you create an entourage that'll hang around your avatar in "moments of glory." You've the storyline mode that will let you gradually develop your character through a combination of matches and exercise-themed mini-games as you strive to become the champion of the world and a hero to pre-pubescent boys everywhere. Too, you've the option of choosing which "faction" to fight for—a choice that, we're told, could improve or severely hamper your progress in the campaign.



Never mess with an angry chiropractor.

Getting to the top will require more than simply hitting the gym frequently and winning matches. You'll be tasked with building a fan base, which can be achieved by humiliating your opponents and fighting with style, just like a real, honest-to-God sports entertainer.

Speaking of real, honest-to-God sports entertainers, TNA wrestlers Samoa Joe and A.J. Styles—who are both, apparently, hardcore gamers—have worked closely with the Midway Los Angeles team as advisors, while their colleagues Christopher Daniels, Senshi and Sonjay Dutt have been involved in the motion capture side of things. Exactly how many TNA wrestlers will make it into the game is yet to be confirmed—or, rather, announced—at the time of writing, but expect somewhere

in the realm of a couple dozen. There are eight arenas in all. How impactful.

There's a multiplayer component, of course, that'll let you go online and slap your pals silly in Fatal Four-Way matches, tag team matches, a couple of unique TNA matches—Ultimate X and King of the Mountain—as well as regular one-on-one matches.

All this non-stop, impactful gameplay is to be bought to you not only by the letters T, N, A and the number 12, but also the Unreal Engine. The characters don't look too bad ... so far as large, virtual, sweaty men in tight shorts go, anyway. Although in the screenshots we've seen, their man tits look really weird. It's probably too late in development for Midway to do much about this, but we're hoping they'll fix the problem in the sequel. Assuming they do one, for this is a game that's facing stiff competition from Smackdown!, a series which has the good fortune of being attached to a much more popular "brand" and stars known to even to ignorant plebs like this writer, who couldn't tell a choke slam from a double facebreaker, even if threatened with having their piles driven. Or getting a pile driver. Or something. ☐

WHAT WE'D LIKE TO SEE:

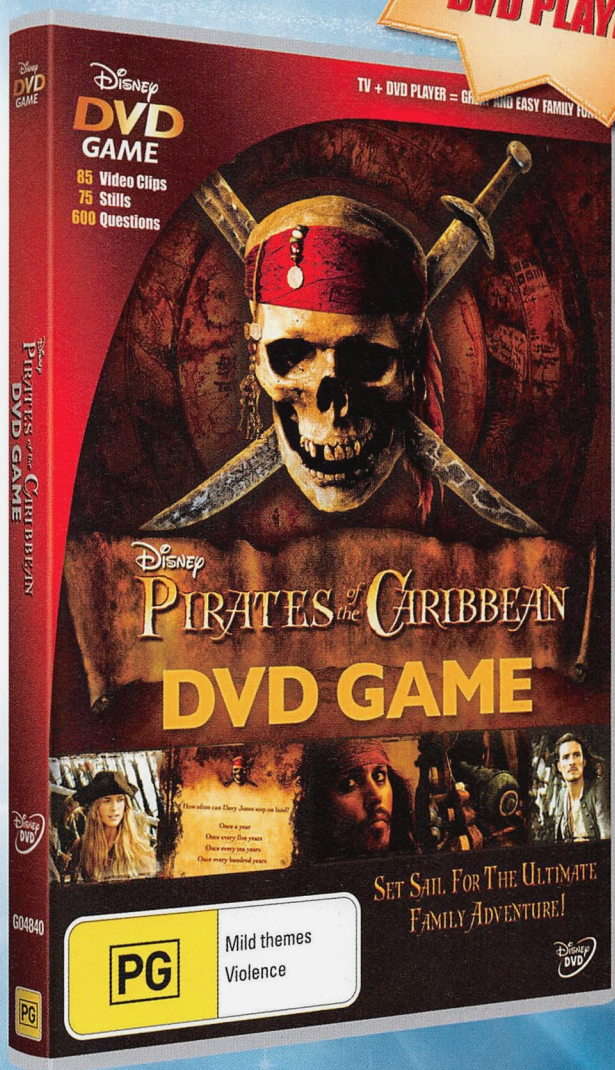
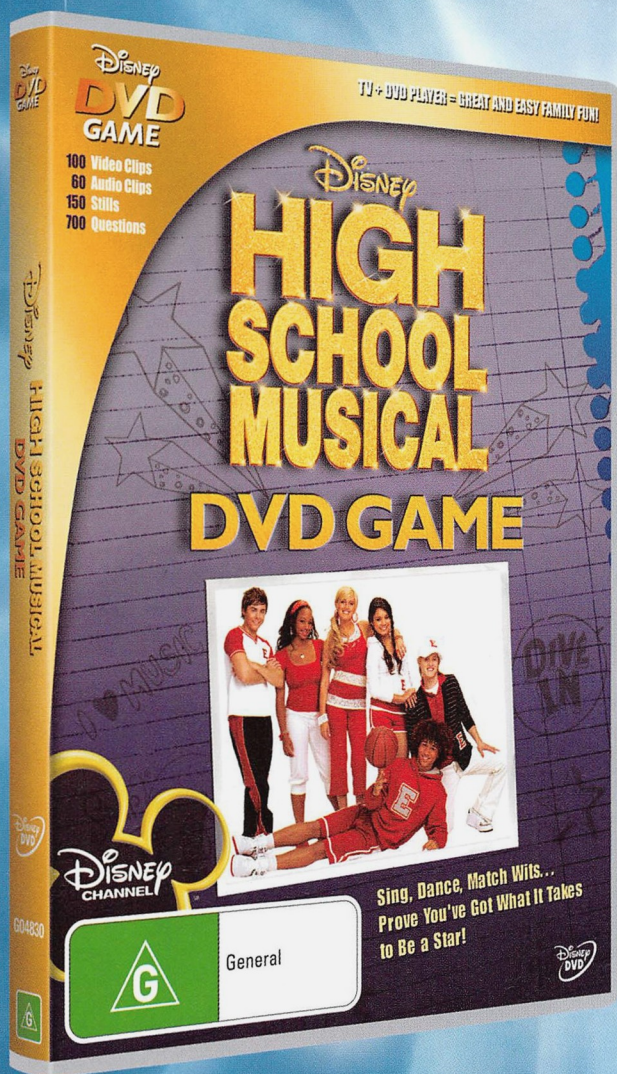
Someone entering a crying fit after being informed that wrestling isn't real. That, or Hulk Hogan in something that's not 3 Ninjas: High Noon at Mega Mountain.

» Getting to the top will require more than simply hitting the gym

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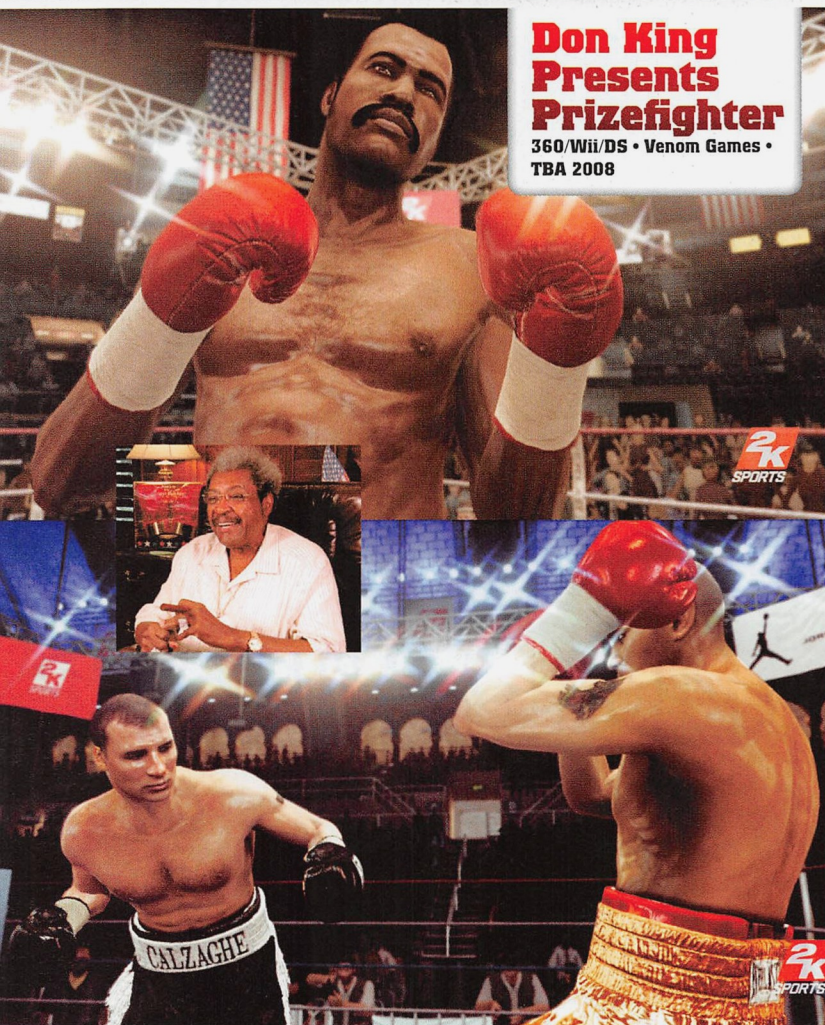
Just Cause 2

PC/PS3/360 • Avalanche • TBA



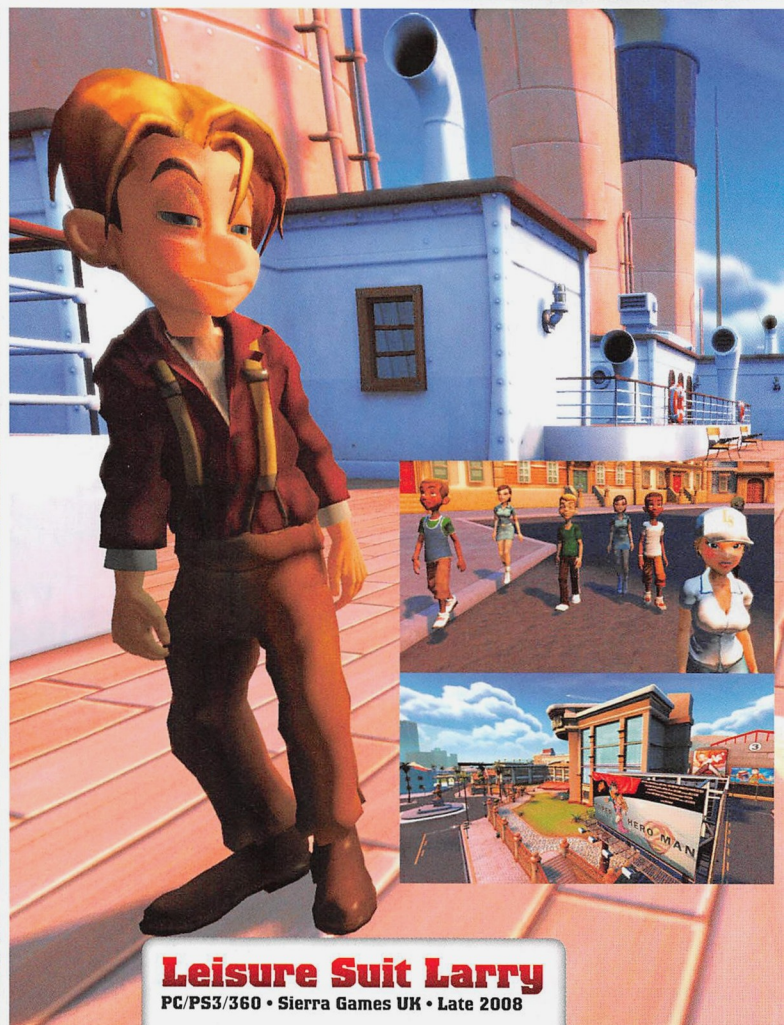
PURE

PC/PS3/360 • Disney Interactive • TBA



Don King Presents Prizefighter

360/Wii/DS • Venom Games • TBA 2008



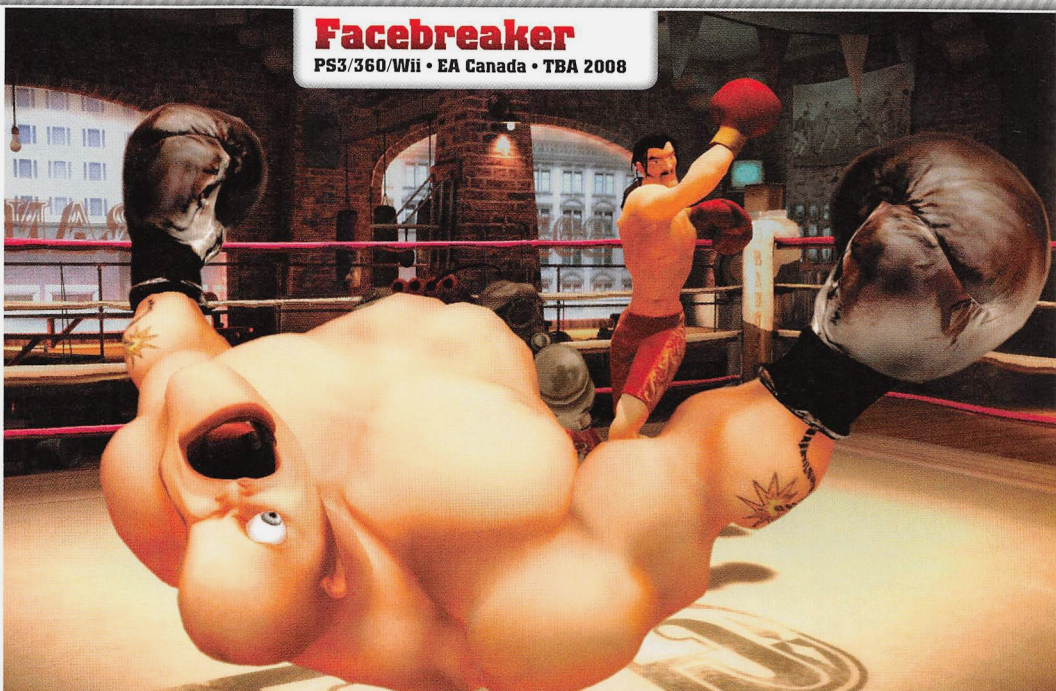
Leisure Suit Larry

PC/PS3/360 • Sierra Games UK • Late 2008



Jumper

360/Wii/PS2 • Brash • March 2008



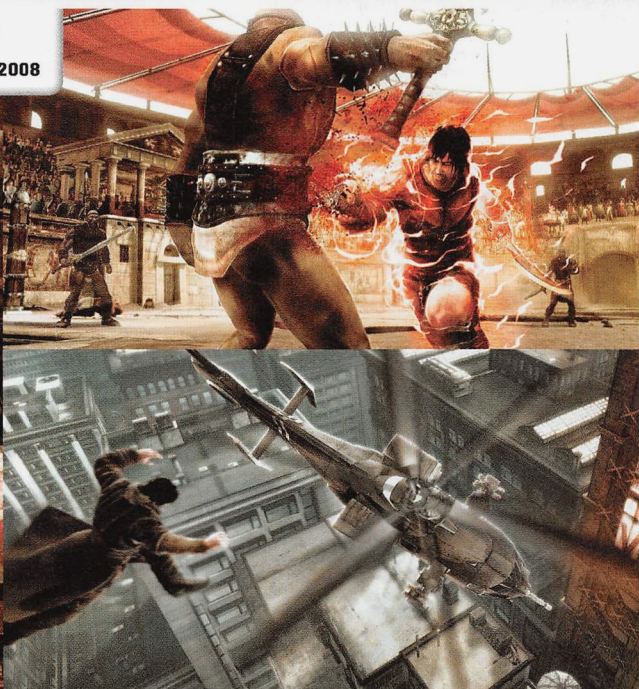
Facebreaker

PS3/360/Wii • EA Canada • TBA 2008



Highlander

PC/PS3/360 • Widescreen • 2008



Viking

PS3/360 • Creative Assembly • March





The write

Games that themselves

»Tim Best

“It’s using the computer for more than just a typewriter.” That’s David Braben’s description of procedural design. Considering he co-created the game that set the bar for open-ended gameplay with *Elite*, he’s a pretty good person to ask. The fact that he’s the CEO of Frontier Development and working on a procedural next-gen shooter — *The Outsider* — doesn’t hurt either. While I hammered down a host of great definitions from every corner of the biz, Braben’s most flippant is the one that nails it.

Procedural design is about using the computer as more than a typewriter. It’s about creating rules which tell your silicon-filled buddy how something should be made — or how it can work out how something should be made — and then having it compute, rather than spit out the canned result you entered earlier. To wax proverbial, it’s teaching the man to fish, rather than giving him a fish ... if the “man” is a computer, and the fish is pretty much anything you could imagine dumping into a game.

The possible benefits of rules-based design include tiny (downloadable) file sizes, reactive worlds, resolutions that always fit your monitor, cheaper and faster game development (giving indie ideas a chance to compete with games that are high-class corporate hookers),

and it even promises more meaningful stories. Seriously, you’ll be surprised what a few rules can do. To offset any disbelief, I have seven of pioneers and innovators of procedural design waiting to take you on a guided tour.

Let’s start with *Spore* lead designer Alex Hutchinson and one of the most ambitious games of 2008.

EXHIBIT ONE: SPORE

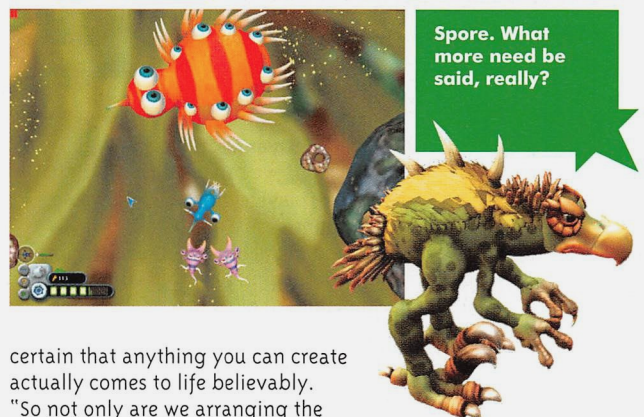
“A huge part of *Spore* is being built as you play,” says its lead designer, Hutchinson. “All of the creatures in the world are not only built by other players but they are being chosen and placed in your game based on archetypes.”

If the game needs a large and aggressive beasties for the creature phase of the game, it will use a set of rules to grab something that fits the bill from the massive pool of characters created by other players.

“Similarly, all the buildings created by other cities in the civilization phase are pulled from other player’s games, and then aesthetically matched together based on rules that look for specific shapes and colours, so that the cities have a unified appearance,” he adds.

When it comes to the tribe phase (which also pulls creatures from other players’ designs) the game queries the terrain of the planet and looks at where the tribes would have settled based on their proximity to the player, to water, to food sources and a bunch of other variables.

“But, perhaps most excitingly,” Hutchinson continues, “the procedural animation system is able to make virtually anything the player creates move and animate in a believable fashion. And we have worked extremely hard to make

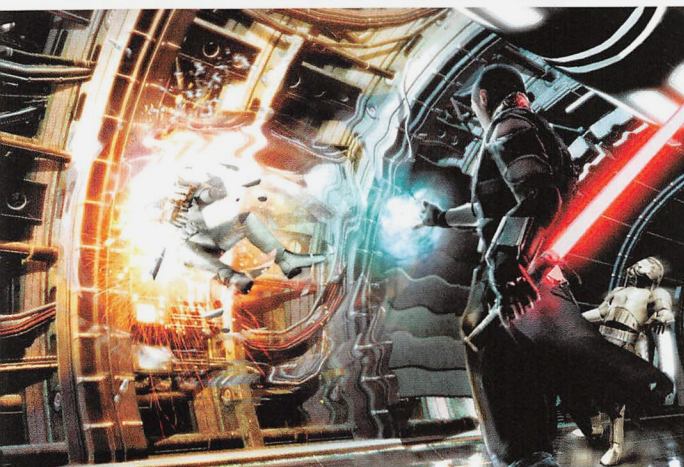


Spore. What more need be said, really?

certain that anything you can create actually comes to life believably. “So not only are we arranging the objects, features and creatures in the world procedurally, but we are selecting them based on rules from player created content, and then making them animate and use different behaviours in code as well based on the kind of creature the player has made.”

»

Procedural
zorching is
the future of
the Star Wars
franchise



» EXHIBIT TWO: THE FORCE UNLEASHED

LucasArts is drawing on not one, but two separate 3rd party procedural design game technologies for its upcoming, all singing, all dancing, Star Wars title. These are NaturalMotion's euphoria, which literally redefines responsive characters, and Pixelux's Digital Molecular Matter, which literally adds new substance to the world.

Explaining what happens when you combine the resistible force with the moveable object, Haden Blackman says: "With euphoria, when you chuck a stormtrooper across the room he'll squirm around trying to get his feet underneath him and he'll try to grab on to other objects near him (or even other stormtroopers)."

Characters in the other room will react differently to seeing their compatriot zipping around, some will jump clear, others will be a touch slow and be bowled over, prolonging the fun.

Blackman continues, "Likewise, with Digital Molecular Matter technology, from Pixelux, we can create a world that reacts like players think a world would. Wood splinters like real wood, plants sway, and metal bends. It really is fun to play around in this world with these technologies; it adds to gameplay giving a sense unpredictability and an element of surprise to the player."

Although Blackman is pretty excited about the technology, he makes sure to point out the forest from the Speederbikes saying, "Simulation-based gameplay technology is very important to us at LucasArts, and this is just the beginning ... but it's important to keep in mind that a shiny new piece of technology doesn't mean much by itself. For us, again, it's about authenticity."

a studio of about
a dozen people
is tackling a city
the size of GTA's
Vice City ... but it's
aiming to fill its
buildings

Subversion's
city generator
in action

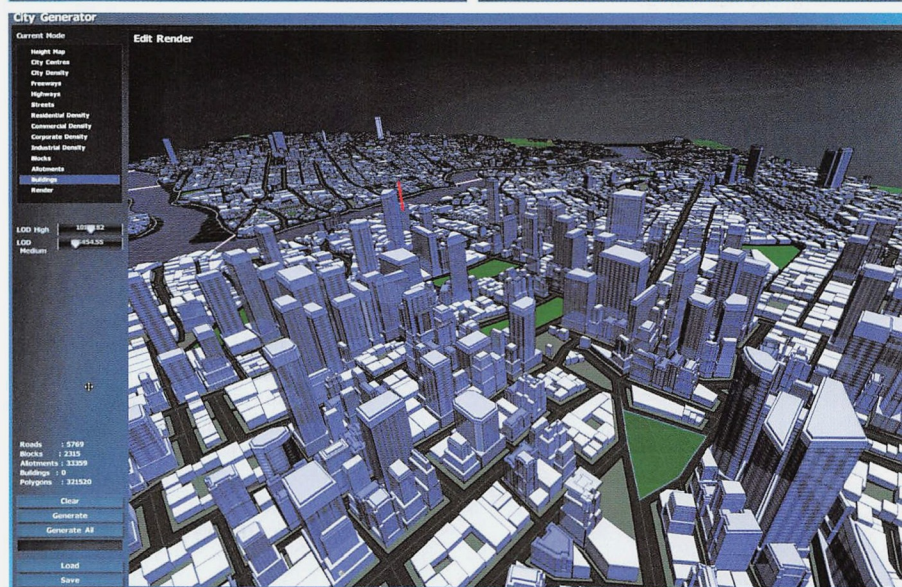
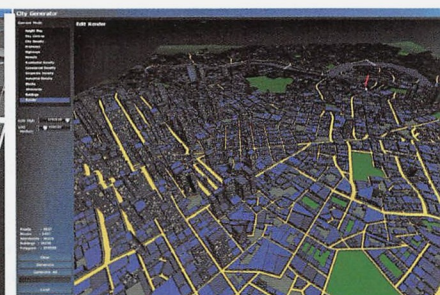
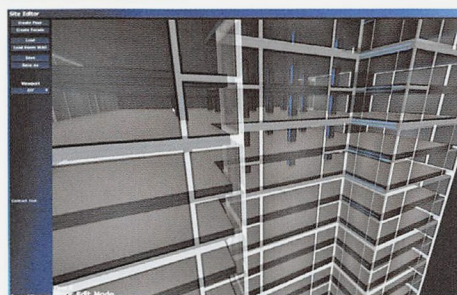


EXHIBIT THREE: SUBVERSION

While both Blackman and Hutchinson have some pretty major backing — in the form of a monster franchise or billion-dollar publisher — other developers come to procedural design from another angle.

On the Introversion website you'll find the moniker "the last bedroom developer". You can count its development team on two hands while still keeping enough digits free for crude gestures. That hasn't stopped it from making Uplink, Darwinia and Defcon, three games that stuck it to triple A titles with ten times their staff and 100 times the budget.

Its latest project is called Subversion and Chris Delay,

Introversion's CEO and co-founder, is cooking up one mean Mumba-Jumba of a prototype. His procedural mojo is working up a 10 square kilometre city for a backdrop. The system generates dynamic city layouts, taking in variables like an area's population density and changing building size and density accordingly. By tweaking a few values Delay can cause the layout to shift from something organic and twisting, like old London town, to something modern, planned and gridded. The really interesting thing is that once the algorithm is in place, it can be tasked to take on other things as well. In this case, Delay has retooled his city layout generator to tackle individual building plans, right down to their interiors. He confides that they're still experimenting

a lot, so he can't say what they'll be aiming for with any reliability, however, "it's a really interesting project and we've had a lot of success in our prototypes." Understatement. Look at those screenshots.

Let me just re-iterate: a studio of about a dozen people (including marketing, sound design and freelancers), is tackling a city the size of GTA's Vice City ... but it's aiming to fill its buildings.

Working smarter, not harder is the key. Delay says, "Content creation is an extremely expensive process — with modern games utilising large teams of artists and modellers and designers to get the kind of quality gamers now expect. Small indie companies can't hope to compete in this realm, so we really need to be smart about how we go about making our games. Procedural generation is one method for generating high detail content without needing large teams."

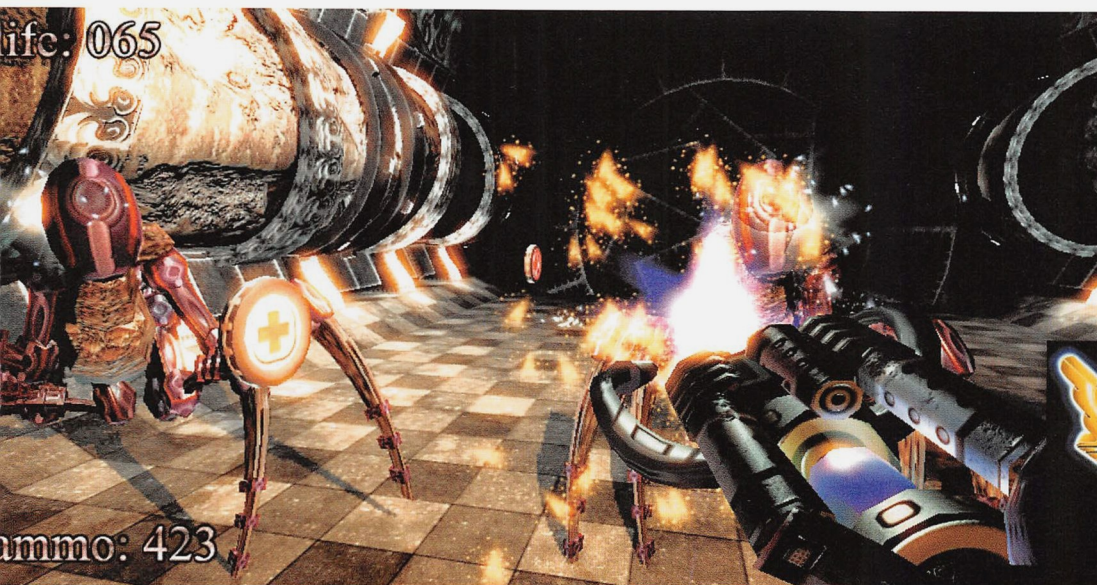


EXHIBIT FOUR: .KKRIEGER (THE 97KB FIRST PERSON SHOOTER)

The Farbrausch crew rocked the demoscene when it temporarily put "The Party" event back on the radar in 2000 with its 64KB extravaganza ".theproduct".

Last year, a demo called ".debris" once again shook the scene, and the Farbrausch alumni drove home their procedural wizardry with a beautifully textured and lit, 3D first person shooter, .kkrieger. All told, it's an entire game level with monsters, weapons and sound weighing in at a miniscule 97KB — that's less than a screenshot you'd take of it running, or about five seconds of your favourite mp3 song.

Farbrausch artist Christopher "giZMo" Muetze explains the magic of the tiny file size saying, "procedural textures 'describe' graphics and patterns with algorithms, like a recipe. There is no overhead of pixel-based compression like JPEG for example, and the file size is substantially smaller.

"In other words, you don't have to carry the cookies around all the time, just let the computer bake some when you are hungry :)" The smiley emphasis is his.

That's just the visible tip of the iceberg, he's quick to point out, explaining the real "beauty of our procedurally-generated content is flexibility and inheritance. Unlike with classical approaches there is no point-of-no-return. You can change everything ... always."

It means that if an art director decides that the entire of colour of a temple is a little off, normally you'd be in a world of hurt because you'd have to rip out all of the questionable textures and manually redo them. In Farbrausch land you can just tweak the settings so the desired textures are produced.



"You can just go in, rework the structure and see how it changes in the whole scene in real-time: from the texture of the vase to the normal map on the temple's stone," gizmo says. "You can change and test designs very quickly and therefore polish and tweak your content on the fly: more freedom, more control, next to zero return-times."

Should we also mention that since your computer generates all the textures, it can bake them to whatever resolution you need, and there are no compression artefacts? Those cookies he's talking about are pretty sweet.

EUPHORIA, A CASE STUDY

So far we've skipped over how most of the procedural tricks work. Let's address that with a couple of examples. When Elite shipped with 1500 planets on one floppy (and it could have had trillions), it didn't store that information in a classical sense. Rather, it had an algorithm that generated the basic stats of each planet from a seed number. Once the basic properties of the worlds were laid down, the game used another set of rules to produce things like the trade goods such a planet would »

A Brief Timeline of Procedural Design in Games

Rogue (1980) — Featuring ASCII graphics, this epic dungeon crawl sent you to the bottom of a randomised labyrinth and then made you fight your way back out. The precursor to NetHack, Angband, and Diablo.

Elite (1984) — The definitive space trading game. It offered a massive universe to explore, a ship to upgrade and some great lessons in capitalism. Elite could have shipped with 248 galaxies (that's trillions), but it was locked to eight so as not to overwhelm players.

Pirates! (1987) — Sid Meier's precursor to Civilisation. This game generated a version of the Caribbean for each player, and had rules that saw its world evolve during the game.

Star Control 2 (1992) — Not only did the sprawling space adventure procedurally generate planets from star data, it also generated the look of the world from orbit.

X-Com Enemy Unknown (1993) — This one generated isometric mission maps, including buildings and crashed spaceships ... and it was all destructible. It even took into account how well you were going before spitting out missions.

Elder Scrolls II: Daggerfall (1996) — An exercise in fantasy world generation. Bethesda's precursor to Morrowind and Oblivion was 10,000 times the size of Morrowind, and had three quarters of a million NPCs. Sure, they might have been pretty much all the same NPC, but still...

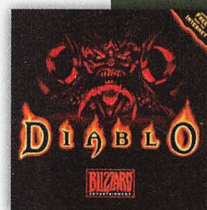
Diablo (1998) — Reinvigorating the RPG genre, this had randomised dungeons and treasure, not to mention gameplay that put pop-songs to shame in the "catchy" department.

Darkstone (1999) — Delphine's dungeon crawl also had randomised levels, but it also chose the seven major quest arcs out of a list of a couple of dozen, to keep the story just as unpredictable.

Darwinia (2005) — Introversions innovative and stylish RTS showed us that bedroom developers could take on the big boys. It used procedurally generated landscapes and textures to produce its retro TRON look.

Just Cause (2006) — Generated 250,000 acres of island battleground.

Hellgate (2007) — Procedurally generated London streets, all in glorious 3D. The repetition wasn't quite as glorious, unfortunately.





» product, and those rules filled in the rest. By throwing in the same seed number Braben could reproduce the same huge "random" number which set the planet properties each time, which meant he and his compatriot Ian Bell could try a few combos, find one that gave them the warm fuzzy, and then recreate it all from one, innocuous, seed number. It also meant they had almost perfect compression. From what my Arts grad brain can make of it, Farbrausch's technology works in a similar way, except its two-decades-more-advanced editor lets you go backwards by placing all of the elements you want, and then figuring out the seed number you'd need to create it.

Every procedural animation works a little differently, but what they have in common is the fact they can only be as good as the rules you give them. NaturalMotion's CEO and co-founder, Torsten Reil, made it into MIT's 2003 Technology Review of top 100 innovators. It's his company's euphoria technology that is powering the procedural animation in both *The Force Unleashed* and *Grand Theft Auto 4*, as well as popping up in



Euphoria tech has appeared in films such as Poseidon & Troy

Hollywood Blockbusters *Poseidon* and *Troy*.

Reil explains how his technology works saying, "euphoria has three simulation components: body (using rigid body physics), muscles and nervous system (the actual control that makes the body alive). All three require a lot of know-how and work, but it's fair to say that our biggest IP is in the nervous system (i.e. control) side of things."

The system models the physical properties of a body, like limb length and muscle strength as well as things like balance and basic instinctual behaviours like grabbing onto things as you plummet past them or raising your arms to protect your face.

The big benefit beyond cost, space and time savings is that, "Content is generated that exactly fits the situation. For example, every football tackle or fight reaction looks exactly right. This also means that games can have truly surprising and unique moments."

The euphoria systems lets the computer figure out animations for characters across a wide range of situations and under all manner of bone-jarring forces,

but it's still a work in progress.

Reil says, "The technology's current strengths are definitely character interactions, such as football tackles, fighting interactions, bumping into

crowds, etc. These also happen to be areas that traditional animation is pretty bad at.

"However, we'll see the synthesis approach extend into much more subtle animation areas too, including locomotion, emotive expressions et cetera. The ultimate goal is to create virtual characters that are believable and indistinguishable from the real thing."

THE FUTURE

To take us into the future of procedural design I talked to one of the trailblazers of procedural texture technology, Professor Ken Perlin of the New York University, Media Research Laboratory. He makes some pretty pie-in-the-sky claims about where this is all going, but keep in mind that not only did he write what was probably the first shader language in 1983, he created Perlin Noise — which is used in all manner of games and appears in movies from *Terminator 2* to the *Lion King* ... and earned him an Oscar to boot — but he also has a Ph.D. in computer science and a bachelor's degree in Mathematics.

When I asked Perlin what kind of game he'd make using procedural technology, right now, if I gave him a blank cheque and a big studio, I was expecting something pretty scientific. Instead I got something a lot harder to define in math.

Perlin says, "I would aim as squarely as possible at an experience where the 'player' is dealing with ordinary people leading ordinary lives. Think about how most people spend most of their time and psychological energy. We gossip about other people. Or we watch movies and TV shows, and then we talk about the make-believe people we've just watched. Kids spend endless hours discussing Harry and Ron and Hermione. And they're not talking about the characters in the computer game, but rather the characters in the books."

Magnificent Seven

Procedural Design is set to one of the key pillars of next-gen game design. In trying to get my head around it I talked to some of its biggest proponents, artists, coders and pioneers. To help you keep score here they are:

1. Lead Designer for the Next Big Thing

Alex Hutchinson, Spore Lead Designer

2. The Tech Provider

Torsten Reil, NaturalMotion CEO and co-founder

3. The Ingenious Indie Dev

Chris Delay, Introversion CEO and co-founder

4. The Researcher

Ken Perlin, Professor, New York University, Researcher, Inventor of Perlin Noise, Writer of the First Shader Language and Oscar Winner

5. Mega Franchise, New Tricks

Haden Blackman, Star Wars: The Force Unleashed Project Lead

6. The Hot Demoscene Artist

Christopher 'giZmo' Muetze, Farbrausch Artist

7. The Pioneering Dev

David Braben, Frontier Development Founder, Co-Creator of *Elite*

NaturalMotion's CEO and co-founder, Torsten Reil, made it into MIT's 2003 Technology Review of top 100 innovators

"The future is not in spaceships or dragons or laser death rays, but rather in the mysteries of the human heart," he says.

"The Sims were an interesting precursor to all this, but they could only hint at the possibilities, because Will Wright had only canned animation to work with, and therefore needed to position his characters as Doll figures, not as believable humans. That's why so many kids are tempted to starve their Sims, or drown them, or lock them in a burning building."

Considering Hutchinson works at the studio that makes The Sims, I asked the Spore lead designer about taking procedural design in that direction. He says, "We certainly could envision experimenting with creating dynamic lives for non-player characters that give them motivations and long term desires, which they then pursue in a logical, ordered fashion. If you integrated a quest system with this, and it became possible for the player to actually see the other characters go about their lives and realize why they were asking you steal from another character, then it could be an amazing environment for players to explore."

Perlin finishes the thought nicely, "Truly thoughtful interactive characters, believably acted, scripted to reveal mysteries of the human heart, that would change everything. That would be the beginning of an interactive literature."

THE PROBLEMS WITH PROCEDURE

So where do the boundaries lie? Perlin has an interesting take on that as well: "I think the limits of the technology now are mainly limits of belief, of the will to invest

Of course, there are some issues on the technical front. LucasArts' project lead points out that they couldn't have made The Force Unleashed on the PS2 ... well, not if they want to simulate more than one or two characters at a time. Likewise, Delay worries about how long it will take player's computers build his 10km city, each time they load up. Both Hutchinson and Blackman highlight the design challenges of creating a fun level when you don't have a set script.

Then there's the real soul-killing boogieman of computer generated content: recognition. Our brains are great at picking patterns and at getting bored when we figure there's no surprised left. As Perlin says, "Procedural behaviour is meaningless if it is repetitive. The second time you see an actor go through precisely the same movement that actor becomes completely dead to you."

"In that moment you know deep down that the character has nothing to say that you can learn from. You might as well just shoot them."

KILLING GENERIC

One of the big ways to avoid repetition death is to make sure it only happens in areas that won't bother players, like the ground under the dragon or waeve in Lara's sarong. Introversion's Chris Delay says, "Right now I believe the core content of your game should be modelled by hand, or at least guided by human creativity, but you can use procedural design to fill in the other 80% of your world. You end up with a richer, deeper (and usually much larger) world this way.

I'm thinking a cross between Cloverfield and The Life Aquatic with Steve Zissou, but that might just be sleep deprivation

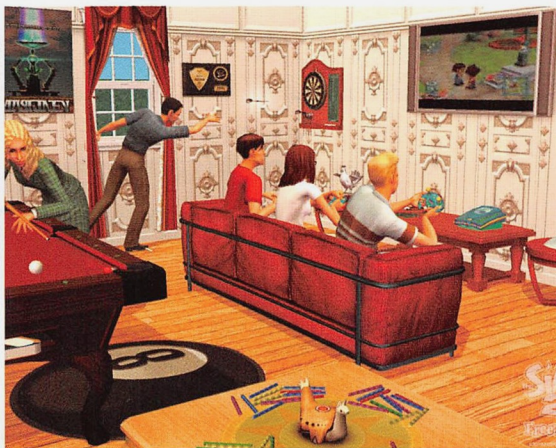
games, and the experience we've gained building game structures procedurally will almost certainly start to appear in other games."

Just imagine a giant monster game with Spore's creature editors, and creature supply, Subversion's city generator, NaturalMotions's animation and Pixelux's DMM encouraging buildings to shatter realistically. Oh, and the mysteries of the human

heart. Now that would be a game. For some reason I'm thinking a cross between Cloverfield and The Life Aquatic with Steve Zissou, but that might just be sleep deprivation talking.

THERE IS NO SPOON

Of course, procedural design is not quite there yet. All the possibilities we're talking about here sound great, but we haven't actually seen any of this next generation of games yet, and Hellgate didn't quite manage to set London on fire, let alone the world. When I talk to Braben about rules-based design in hushed tones you can tell he thinks I'm a bit of a tool. In his mind that is exactly what this technology amounts to:



in this direction, and to build the proper creative tools.

"Tools need to be created that allow good story tellers, acting coaches, directors, to infuse interactive software with their particular talent. I would focus on building those tools — roughly the equivalent of the Noise-based procedural texture — to allow those kinds of talents to be brought in, to add their magic into the content."

Interestingly enough, these sentiments were echoed by tech provider Riel, Farbraush artist giZmo, and independent innovator Delay.

You can also focus your attention on the 20% of really important world content, and make it shine."

Of course, the other option to avoid seeing the pattern at work is having more complex and organic patterns to throw us off the scent, ones fed by chains of procedural systems and player feedback.

Already we're seeing The Force Unleashed lash two sets of third-party procedural design systems together to produce a something greater than the parts, and Hutchinson thinks there's "a huge opportunity for Maxis and EA to take the technology we've developed and turn it into tech we can use on other projects. The editors could be used in all kinds of

The Sims: Procedurally generated gameplay

a tool. Something that does some things well, and others really badly, and that's been true since before he worked on Elite more than two decades ago.

And despite all the potential, he's one hundred percent right. Just because you can take a movie camera out into a real city, teeming with real people (with both city and people undeniably formed with staggeringly complex, reactive and realistic rule sets) it doesn't mean you'll make a fantastic, or even vaguely interesting film.

While procedural design opens a lot of doors, we'll always need developers with the creativity and vision to make sure we don't end up in a closet. «

Hyper Game of the Year Awards

2007 WINNERS

Best Graphics



YOUR PICK

Winner:

CRYSIS

(28% of the vote)

Platform: PC • Developer: Crytek • Distributor: EA

Runner-Up:

BIOSHOCK

(25% of the vote)

HYPER'S PICKS

Daniel: It's a toss-up between Assassin's Creed and Heavenly Sword. I'm an absolute sucker for beautiful animation.

Darren: My head says Crysis but my heart says BioShock. The opening reveal was perfect and the art deco style always impressed.

Best Gameplay



YOUR PICK

Winner:

SUPER MARIO GALAXY

(36% of the vote)

Platform: Wii • Developer: Nintendo • Distributor: Nintendo

Runner-Up:

PORTAL

(29% of the vote)

HYPER'S PICKS

Daniel: Portal all the way. Real time puzzle solving at its finest.

Darren: The Legend of Zelda: Phantom Hourglass. Used the abilities of the DS in some very clever ways, and coupled it with a cracking adventure for our plucky green-clothed hero.

Best Sound



YOUR PICK

Winner:

BIOSHOCK

(32% of the vote)

Platform: Xbox 360/PC • Developer: 2K Boston/2K Australia
Distributor: 2K

Runner-Up:

SUPER MARIO GALAXY

(17% of the vote)

HYPER'S PICKS

Daniel: BioShock – brilliant ambient sound and fantastic voice acting.

Darren: BioShock, for exactly the same reasons.

Best Innovation



YOUR PICK

Winner:

PORTAL

(79% of the vote)

Platform: Xbox 360/PC • Developer: Valve • Distributor: Steam/EA

Runner-Up:

SUPER MARIO GALAXY

(20% of the vote)

HYPER'S PICKS

Daniel: Portal – Sure, they did it before with Narbacular Drop but the level of polish and the way it is integrated into gameplay is light years ahead of the indie-game.

Darren: Portal. The FPS genre will never be the same again.

Best Independent



YOUR PICK

Winner:

SAM & MAX: SEASON ONE

(42% of the vote)

Platform: PC • Developer: Telltale Games • Distributor: Telltale Games

Runner-Up:

PUZZLE QUEST

(40% of the vote)

HYPER'S PICKS

Daniel: Puzzle Quest. The game that ate weeks of my life.

Darren: I never cared much for unicorns and rainbows, but Peggle showed me the way. Simple, but oh-so addictive.

Best Art Direction



YOUR PICK

Winner:

BIOSHOCK

(55% of the vote)

Platform: Wii • Developer: Nintendo • Distributor: Nintendo

Runner-Up:

OKAMI

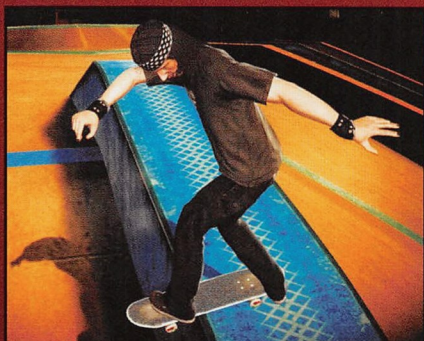
(22% of the vote)

HYPER'S PICKS

Daniel: BioShock. Managing to create a setting that is simultaneously hopeful, oppressive and frightening is a work of genius.

Darren: Team Fortress 2. It's been a good while since a game succeeded in exploring a non-photo-realistic avenue, but Valve's shooter does just that.

Best Sports Game



YOUR PICK

Winner:
SKATE

(52% of the vote)

Platform: Xbox 360/PS3 • Developer: EA • Distributor: EA

Runner-Up:
FIFA 08

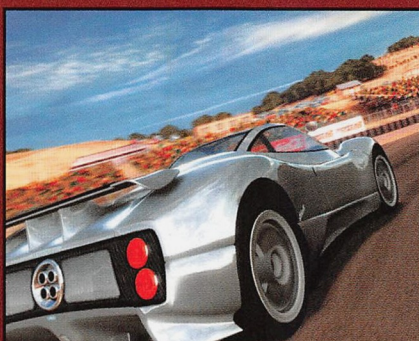
(27% of the vote)

HYPER'S PICKS

Daniel: Skate – Brilliant in nearly every way, though I'm still not sure why you can pop-shuvit but not shuvit.

Darren: Skate. Looks great, fun to play, and curls the stomach beautifully when you send Johnny Ragdoll down a flight of concrete stairs.

Best Racing Game



YOUR PICK

Winner:
FORZA MOTORSPORT 2

(44% of the vote)

Platform: Xbox 360 • Developer: Microsoft • Distributor: Microsoft

Runner-Up:
PROJECT GOTHAM RACING 4

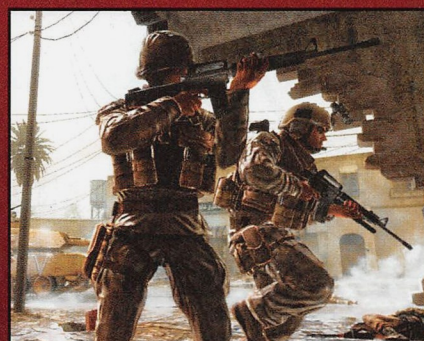
(39% of the vote)

HYPER'S PICKS

Daniel: DiRT. There's just so much to do.

Darren: Cars and trucks and buggies, oh my! DiRT comes in at pole position.

Best Multiplayer



YOUR PICK

Winner:
CALL OF DUTY 4

(40% of the vote)

Platform: Xbox 360/PS3/PC • Developer: Infinity Ward • Distributor: Activision

Runner-Up:
TEAM FORTRESS 2

(25% of the vote)

HYPER'S PICKS

Daniel: Team Fortress 2. I may be an Unreal Tournament fanboy but TF2 is in a league of its own.

Darren: Team Fortress 2. Beautifully balanced gameplay and rollicking fun visuals make it a clear winner.

Best New Peripheral



YOUR PICK

Winner:
WIRELESS GHIII GUITAR

(64% of the vote)

Runner-Up:
Wii ZAPPER

(12% of the vote)

HYPER'S PICKS

Daniel: Wireless Guitars – no wires makes it easier to duck-walk across the office.

Darren: The 360 Media Pad. Finally, a decent way to input text with a control pad!

Best Xbox 360 Game



YOUR PICK

Winner:
MASS EFFECT

(42% of the vote)

Developer: Bioware • Distributor: Microsoft

Runner-Up:
BIOSHOCK

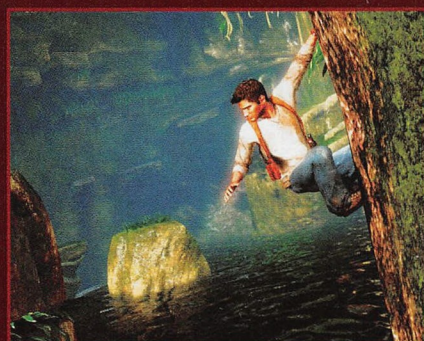
(30% of the vote)

HYPER'S PICKS

Daniel: Mass Effect. It may have terrible framerate problems but the story is brilliant.

Darren: An epic universe coupled with fantastic graphics, dialogue and story, Mass Effect stands head and alien shoulders above the rest.

Best PS3 Game



YOUR PICK

Winner:
UNCHARTED: Drake's Fortune

(54% of the vote)

Platform: Wii • Developer: Nintendo • Distributor: Nintendo

Runner-Up:
ASSASSIN'S CREED

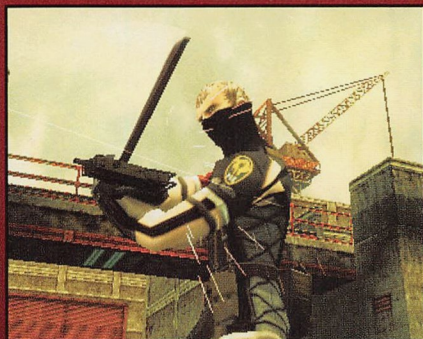
(13% of the vote)

HYPER'S PICKS

Daniel: Ratchet & Clank Future: Tools of Destruction – a fine return to form for the franchise.

Darren: What he said for the same reasons he said it...

Best PSP Game



YOUR PICK

Winner:

METAL GEAR SOLID: Portable Ops

(29% of the vote) Developer: Konami • Distributor: Atari

Runner-Up:

DISGAEA: Afternoon of Darkness

(17% of the vote)

HYPER'S PICKS

Daniel: Crush – clever bite-sized puzzles perfect for a handheld.

Darren: MGS: Portable Ops furthers the series by adding new elements, and shapes it to work beautifully on Sony's handheld.

Game of the Year



YOUR PICK

Winner:

SUPER MARIO GALAXY

(27% of the vote)

Platform: Wii • Developer: Nintendo • Distributor: Nintendo

Runner-Up:

BIOSHOCK

(22% of the vote)

HYPER'S PICKS

Daniel: After a lot of soul searching I have to conclude that Portal is my choice for GotY. No other game felt as complete, and finished. No other game was as funny or innovative. Most importantly, nothing was as enjoyable.

Darren: I'm going to nominate BioShock. Filled to the gills with fantastic characters and dialogue, not to mention the creepy atmosphere and the stunning art style, the game's many plasmids and ammo types lend themselves to a great playthrough the first time, and even better replays afterwards. Truly a landmark game.

Best DS Game



YOUR PICK

Winner:

LEGEND OF ZELDA: Phantom Hourglass

(59% of the vote) Developer: Nintendo • Distributor: Nintendo

Runners-Up:

PHOENIX WRIGHT: Justice for All HOTEL DUSK: ROOM 215

(16% of the vote each)

HYPER'S PICKS

Daniel: Puzzle Quest – Bejeweled was made to be played with a touch-screen

Darren: The Legend of Zelda: Phantom Hourglass. Scarily easy to lose oneself in that game for hours.

Best Wii Game



YOUR PICK

Winner:

SUPER MARIO GALAXY

(80% of the vote)

Developer: Nintendo • Distributor: Nintendo

Runner-Up:

METROID PRIME 3

(8% of the vote)

HYPER'S PICKS

Daniel: Super Mario Galaxy – a game more than worthy of every piece of praise heaped on it.

Darren: ...and again...

Best PC Game



YOUR PICK

Winner:

PORTAL

(32% of the vote)

Developer: Valve • Distributor: Steam/EA

Runner-Up:

BIOSHOCK

(25% of the vote)

HYPER'S PICKS

Daniel: Portal – nothing on PC in 2007 was more satisfying than 3 hours in the company of GLaDOS.

Darren: ...and again...

Best PS2 Game



YOUR PICK

Winner:

OKAMI

(33% of the vote)

Developer: Bioware • Distributor: Microsoft

Runner-Up:

GOD OF WAR 2

(24% of the vote)

HYPER'S PICKS

Daniel: Disgaea 2: Cursed Memories – still in my PS2.

Darren: Guitar Hero 3. Sure, the visuals don't challenge the X360, but it's all about the gameplay and the music. Plus, wireless guitar!

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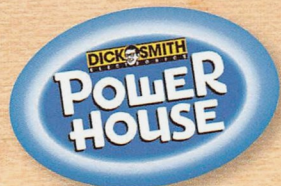
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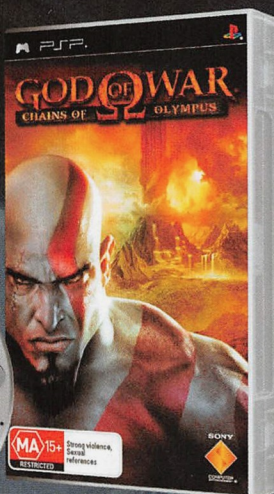
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TWO PRIZE
PACKS TO
BE WON!



GOD OF WAR CHAINS OF OLYMPUS

Kratos

is, without a doubt, one of baddest arsed of all badarses in gaming. He's murdered gods and men alike on his seemingly never-ending path of vengeance. Having already conquered basically everything that's even remotely conquerable on the PS2, Kratos is now rampaging his way on to the PSP in a new game called God of War: Chains of Olympus. To celebrate the upcoming launch of Kratos' new adventure, Sony have been kind enough to give us two God of War: Chains of Olympus prize packs to give to a couple of lucky subscribers.

That's right, we have not one but two prize packs to give away, consisting of a Limited Edition Silver PSP, a copy of God of War: Chains of Olympus for PSP and a Limited Edition Kratos Figurine.

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» Reviews



REALITY BYTES

DARREN WELLS

What's All This Then?

And so the changing of the guard has taken place. The Writer Formally Known as Chin has moseyed off into the sunset, leaving his oh-so-comfy chair up for grabs. Comfier than my old one. Naturally, I was jealous. I wanted an upgrade.

As is the case with Finders Keepers in the office, when one claims a chair one assumes all responsibilities pertaining to the chair, including but not limited to job title, role, and time on the office bucking bronco. So be it.

Hi, I'm Darren, and I'll be your new deputy editor.

Although my name may have reached some of you previously via a PC magazine, rest assured that my history with games extends beyond the mouse and keyboard. True, the first game experience I remember occurred on an Apple IIe with Moon Patrol, but it was through my Atari 2600 that my love was truly cemented. Space Invaders might have been simple, but it had me hooked for hours. As did Missile Command. As did River Raid, Kung Fu Master, and Pac-Man (yes, the shoddy Atari port of Pac-Man). If that's not enough, I've even played E.T., having borrowed it from a friend back in the day. (Naturally, I had the good sense to return it the next day and beat him to death with it.)

Flash-cut through the following years and you'll find all sorts of gaming snippets. My Mega Drive was a frequent customer of Sonic, Phantasy Star IV and Mortal Kombat, my PlayStation was all about Tony Hawk, Metal Gear Solid and Resident Evil, and my PS2 loves Burnout 3, Katamari Damacy and Guitar Hero. In short, I've never discriminated. I love games, pure and simple.

Which is why I'm happier than a pig in mud to join the Hyper fold. It's been a part of Australian gaming culture for high on 15 years, covering every major development. It's heralded in each new generation of console, it's seen developers go from fledging to flourishing, and it's had games that have gone down as history's classics feature throughout its pages.

I've never discriminated. I love games, pure and simple.

All this you already know. But it never ceases to amaze me just how far this whole gaming thing has come, and no magazine knows that better than the one you're holding right now.

As technology advances further and faster, and newer, fresher minds enter the development industry, some truly exciting moments have happened. Nintendo took a risk by entering an already overpopulated console market, but the NES clearly proved a winner. When things started shifting from pixels to polygons, Sony entered the 3D race, no doubt with fingers tightly crossed. The PlayStation at first seemed like a black sheep – facing up against big boys Sega and Nintendo – but it trounced the competitors by offering landmark 3D games backed

by Sony's crisp production values. Likewise, Microsoft decided to give things another stir, and the Xbox brought the online world to console gaming, changing the way we play once more.

From a pastime that evolved from a simple wavelength on an oscilloscope, a heck of a lot has happened over the last twenty

years. Put gaming on the technology timeline, and it's barely a blip, yet it's bounding along in a manner that would rival, say, the development of the automobile. It's never just been about adding subtle changes to a core base; throughout gaming's history whole new genres have been created, new platforms and technologies have been utilised, and new audiences – from your kid brother to your old nan – have been catered to in an industry that now has something for everyone.

If I had a time machine, I'd use it every month and report on gaming's future right here, for you to read today. Sadly, my supplies of plutonium are dwindling, so I'll have to write it as it happens. But you know what, I'm fine with that. I'm fine being on the frontline of such an exciting industry, documenting its evolution month by month. And I look forward to bringing all of its happenings to you.



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As big as four small dice

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As big as 23 toasters

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Bigger than 31 school girls

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Bigger than 214 zeppelins

90+

Bigger than 1 million rad tigers



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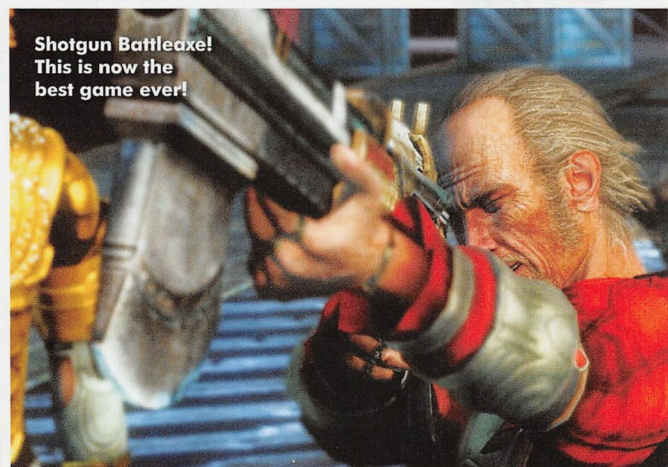
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X360 / PS3 / Wii / PC / PS2 / DS / PSP

Lost Odyssey

ELEANOR EIFFE gets lost in a cutscene

category: **RPG** / players: **1**
 developer: **Mistwalker, Feelplus**
 publisher: **Microsoft Game Studios**
 price: **\$99.95** / rating: **MA 15+**
 available: **Now**

For me, Lost Odyssey's grandiose opening sequence brought two things to mind: 1) this game sure is pretty and 2) this game sure is a JRPG. It's a real feast for the eyes, beautifully complemented by Nobuo Uemastu's score. The music isn't quite up there with Final Fantasies 6 through 8, but it's still pretty great — and very Uematsu. The legendary composer isn't the only Final Fantasy connection. The game's primary architect is Mr. Final Fantasy himself, Hironobu Sakaguchi — and boy, does it show. If you're a JRPG veteran, Lost Odyssey will feel more than a little familiar.

[below] Secretly, a hypocritical Kaim mocks someone else's hair

A WIZARD DID IT

The story begins in the midst of a "magic industrial revolution" (FF VI, anyone?) when our hero, Kaim (rhymes with "lime") Argonar survives a meteor strike that wipes out an entire battlefield. We soon discover that Kaim is immortal (hence the survival) and in a stunningly original twist, the poor guy's lost his memory. Kaim is soon accompanied by perky pirate Seth (also immortal, also amnesiac) and Jansen, a womanising drunkard who supplies a particularly annoying brand of "comic relief". (Later additions to the party include everyone from slightly creepy kids to an immortal queen who's not shy about displaying

her enormous... magic powers.) The starting trio is sent out on a quest to investigate the source of the deadly meteor. Of course, we all know by now that this simple task will escalate into an epic adventure, whereby an evil wizard will be thwarted and Kaim and Seth will recover their lost memories.

Many of Kaim's memories are revealed as a series of short stories called "A Thousand Years of Dreams", somewhat separate from the game's primary quest line. Written by award winning Japanese author Kiyoshi Shigematsu, the stories offer some insight into Kaim's character, via the events of his centuries-long life. The "Dreams" are presented as text accompanied by background images, sound effects and music, which do a remarkable job of establishing mood. The minimalist presentation is an interesting choice for a game



[above] Kaim immitates a shot from a Ridley Scott film

lost some of their emotional impact if less was left up to the reader's imagination. For me at least, the "Dreams" were far more engaging than the game's overarching narrative. Despite Lost Odyssey's relentless barrage of cutscenes, uncovering a new memory was always a pleasure.

JUST LET ME PLAY, DAMMIT!

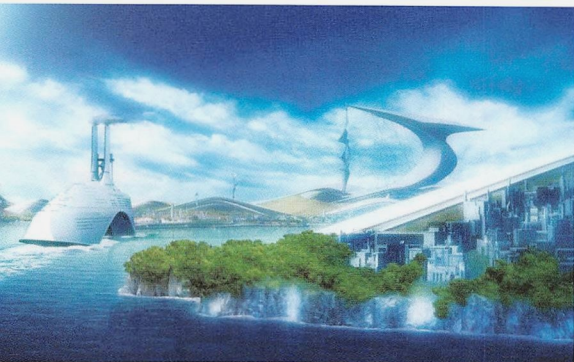
It's quite appropriate that I'm nearly halfway through this review and I still haven't talked about the real game-y bits of Lost Odyssey. For an alleged piece of interactive entertainment, you seem to spend an awful lot of time not

you'll be waiting a good three or four hours before you start to feel like you've actually been playing

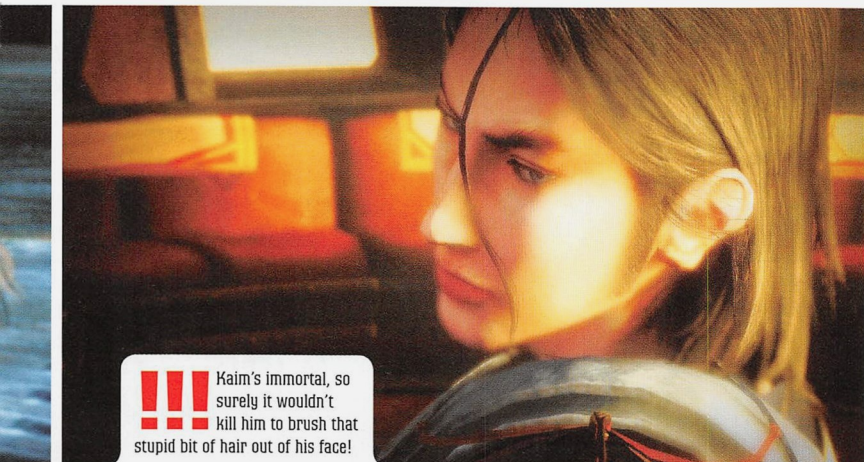
that clearly has no problem with cinematic sequences, but given the seriously hammy voice acting present elsewhere in Lost Odyssey, it's probably for the best. When the stories manage to avoid slipping into melodrama, they're often quite touching. I suspect they may have

interacting with it. If you're one of those people who can't bring themselves to skip a cutscene, you'll be waiting a good three or four hours before you start to feel like you've actually been playing something. It doesn't let up, either. Between the short story interludes,

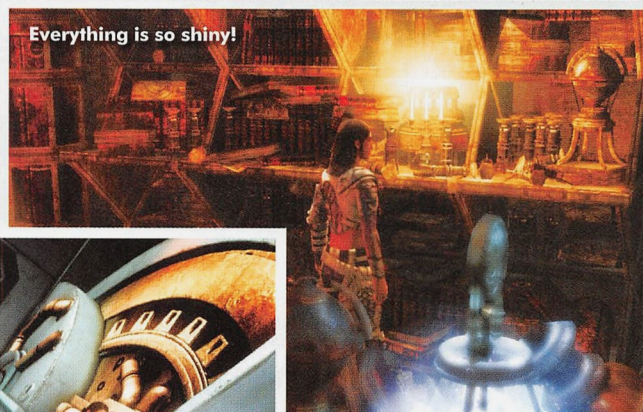




Stupid blurry dragon,
you die now!



!!! Kaim's immortal, so
surely it wouldn't
kill him to brush that
stupid bit of hair out of his face!



Everything is so shiny!



HAVE I HEARD YOU SOMEWHERE BEFORE?

Don't be surprised if you think many of *Lost Odyssey*'s characters sound familiar. Chances are, you've heard their voices somewhere before. Kaim is played by Keith Ferguson, who voiced Basch in *Final Fantasy XII*, while the voice of Seth is provided by Tara Strong, a.k.a. Rikku from *FFX*. You might also recognize some of the voice actors from the *Metal Gear Solid* series, *Psychonauts* and *Resident Evil 4*.

can assemble your own combat rings from common enemy item drops, so there's plenty of opportunity to play around.

The skill system is another area in which *Lost Odyssey* outperforms your average JRPG. The party is comprised of mortal and immortal characters. Mortals acquire new skills as they level up, but immortals expand their combat repertoire by equipping accessories or "linking" to learn the skills of an active mortal

character. The Skill Link mechanic forces you to think carefully about the composition of your party. Immortals automatically revive themselves three turns after a KO, but the more mortals there are in your party, the more opportunities there are for the immortal characters to learn things. While the mortal characters each have a clearly defined combat role, immortals are inherently customisable - it's slightly unusual for a JRPG to offer you that kind of freedom.

You'll find that your characters accumulate new skills quite rapidly. Most battles end with at least one person having learned something. By rewarding you so consistently, *Lost Odyssey* manages to avoid the sense of drudgery normally associated with relentless random

encounters. The battles themselves are surprisingly entertaining, too. The Guard Counter system, which measures how well the front row of a formation is protecting the back, adds a nice strategic element that prevents your average encounter from devolving into a mindless attack fest. The game's difficulty really ramps up once you're out of the tutorial phase, so you'll need to keep your wits about you, even when taking on the most mundane enemies. It's strange, but *Lost Odyssey*'s combat is enjoyable enough that you may find yourself actively seeking out new engagements (especially if you've just spent the past twenty minutes trapped in a cutscene or a pointless fetch quest).

Lost Odyssey doesn't really break any new ground, and it suffers from too many of the flaws that plague its genre to convert those averse to this style of game. However, it's extremely well presented and delivers of the best implementations of traditional JRPG mechanics we've seen in a long time. Which is great, if you're into that sort of thing. «

the overabundance of cinematic sequences (hey, there's a reason this game takes up four discs) and an assortment of pointless time-extendors (mini games at a funeral? That hardly seems appropriate!), it's entirely possible to feel like your one or two hour play session contained very little playing at all.

HEH, HEH, HEH...RING...

It's a pity, because the bits of *Lost Odyssey* that you actually get to play are really quite good. There are random encounters and turn-based battles, just as you'd expect from such a traditional JRPG, but a few subtle refinements to the formula help to keep things interesting. For example, each character can equip a "Combat Ring" which modifies their weapon-based attacks with properties such as increased power, elemental magic or increased effectiveness against a particular class of enemies. To activate a Combat Ring's effects, you'll need to hold and release the R-trigger at the precisely the right time as the character charges in to attack. The mechanic is reminiscent of the system in *Shadow Hearts* (whose developers, coincidentally, has a lot to do with this game). You

Satisfying combat. High production values.

Cutscenes that seem to go on forever.

**HYPER
VERDICT**

An extremely polished, but unmistakably old-school JRPG.

VISUALS

94

SOUND

89

GAMEPLAY

80

82



Patapon

Daniel, Daniel, Daniel, Wilks... Wilks, Wilks, **DANIEL, WILKS**...

From the first moment you start Patapon you can tell it's by the same people who developed LocoRoco. There are many similarities in design — beautiful, simple art, prominent use of child-like voices, an abundance of repetitive but utterly charming music and a premise that leaves you scratching your head when you think about it too hard. Whereas LocoRoco was about tilting the world to get smiling balls home, Patapon is a game about banging a drum so the good-guy eyeballs can kill their enemies, the bad guy eyeballs. Simple, no?

Much like LocoRoco, the player never actually appears in the game. Instead, the player takes the

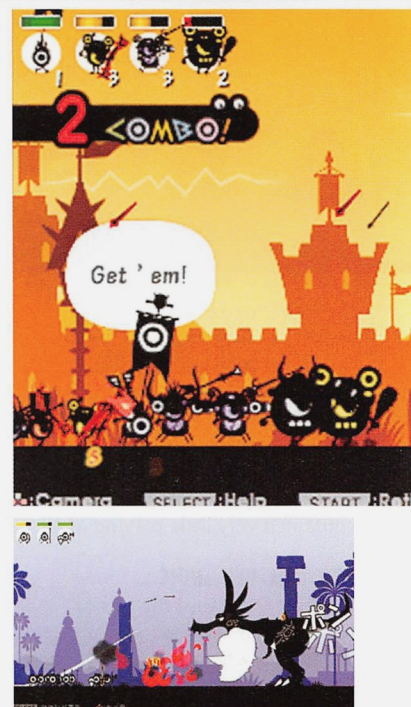
role of the deity of the Patapons, a race of good-guy eyeball men and lead them through the trials and tribulations of everyday life — hunting food for the tribe, gathering materials to resurrect fallen comrades and fighting enemies — by banging out repetitive rhythms on a drum. When it comes down to it, Patapon could be best described as a rhythm RTS, a strange combination, definitely, but one that proves to be a huge amount of fun and a game dripping with charm.

THE SOUND OF BATTLE

Basic gameplay revolves around sending Patapons off to hunt or fight, the player hitting different four part, two button rhythms to prompt them to do any action. For example, to make the Patapons

march forward, players must hit square, square, square, circle (Pata, Pata, Pata, Pon) in time with the backing beat and then give the Patapons time to repeat the refrain and move. If an enemy is encountered the player must use the Pon, Pon, Pata, Pon refrain to prompt the Patapons to attack. Time your button presses right and you begin to build up combos. Get a combo high enough and the Patapons will enter Fever mode, moving faster, defending better and doing more damage when attacking. Entering Fever mode also causes the music to become more layered — the sound of the Patapons in Fever is so joyous you'll probably find yourself trying to hit your combos just so you can hear it.

If all this sounds a little too simple and repetitive to make for an engrossing game, you couldn't be more wrong. With only six commands, the developers of Patapon have managed to put together a very deep little game that rests somewhere between strategy and getting into "the zone" — blessing out and just going with the rhythm. Small modifiers, such as wind, rain and temperature influence every battle. This is where Miracle Powers come in. Using specific drum beats, the player can change the direction of the wind, helping their spears and arrows fly further whilst hindering the range of



[above] Nice dragon, but where's his beefy arm?





!!! In addition to banging drums, various mini-games allow the player to get their hands on other instruments.



KACHING!

The biggest problem facing Patapon is the way in which the player progresses. The missions themselves are well designed and a good deal of fun but more often than not, to progress in the mission structure the player has to backtrack to one of the levels they have already completed to uncover an item needed to move on. A perfect example of this appears in a mission only a few hours into the game, where the player needs to gain the rain miracle power to cool down a desert so the Patapons can cross. To get the miracle power the player has to travel back to the

[below] "Hey, could you turn the thermostat down?"

stats and how they look — a basic spearman may only take some meat and a stick to make, but later in the game you can substitute better meat and wood when making spearmen to make superior, not to mention better looking, troops. There are reportedly over 100 weapons and helmets to find, so loot whores should be quite happy.



hunting grounds, play a specific rhythm next to a totem pole until the entire thing rises out of the ground, grab the object it releases then travel to the newly unlocked hunting area to kill the boss to grab the drum that teaches you the rain miracle. It sounds simple, if a little long winded but the problem lays in the fact that there is no indicator that this is what you need to do at all. We only discovered it through trial and error.

[above] I've already used that "crabby" pun, so I've got nothing.

invariably find yourself going back to the hunting grounds and spending five minutes picking off totally passive targets to gain some meat and coin.

Aside from the emphasis on backtracking and the rather obtuse nature of some quests, Patapon is a fantastic little game, perfectly suited to the handheld format. The



Patapon is a fantastic little game, perfectly suited to the handheld format

This element of backtracking also plays a major part in building troops. All units are created by the Tree of Life at the Patapon base. To create a new unit the player must give the tree the correct materials, such as a piece of meat, a twig and some coin (or kaching as it is known in Patapon). Unfortunately, with the exception of the hunting grounds, materials and kaching are fairly scarce, so whenever you want to create some new units you'll almost

controls are deceptively simple yet offer a good depth of gameplay and every frame of animation, as well as every note, just oozes with charm. Patapon may not be a game for everyone — if you're looking for some instant action then you should look somewhere else — but if you're in the mood for something quirky, charming and capable of melding two completely different genres into a brilliant whole, look no further. «

Utterly charming art; FEVER!; surprisingly deep

Over reliance on back-tracking; some very obtuse missions

HYPER VERDICT

Patapon is another brilliant genre bender for Pyramid/Interlink

VISUALS

90

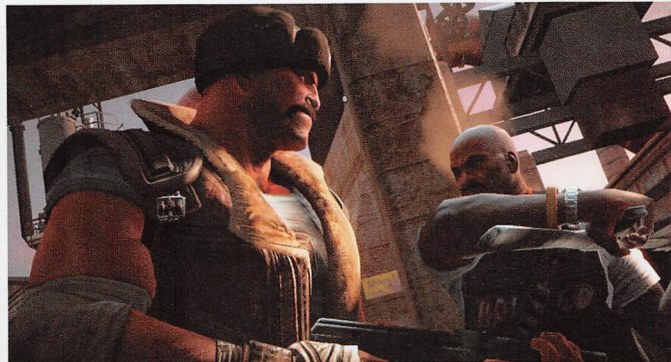
SOUND

92

GAMEPLAY

86

85



X360 / PS3 / Wii / PC / PS2 / DS / PSP

The Club

RICO SUAVEZ is a quick shot

category: **Third Person Shooter**
players: **1-4**
developer: **Bizarre** / publisher: **Sega**
price: **\$99.95** / rating: **MA 15+**
available: **Now**

The Club is not the easiest game in the world to get a handle on. Sure, it's easy to say that it's a third person shooter with the gameplay and aesthetics of a racing game, but when it comes to picking up the controller it's a pretty hard concept to actually come to grips with, for the simple reason that the game requires you to essentially forget everything you know about playing third-person shooters and instead conform to their set of brilliant, though confusing, and ultimately flawed, rules.

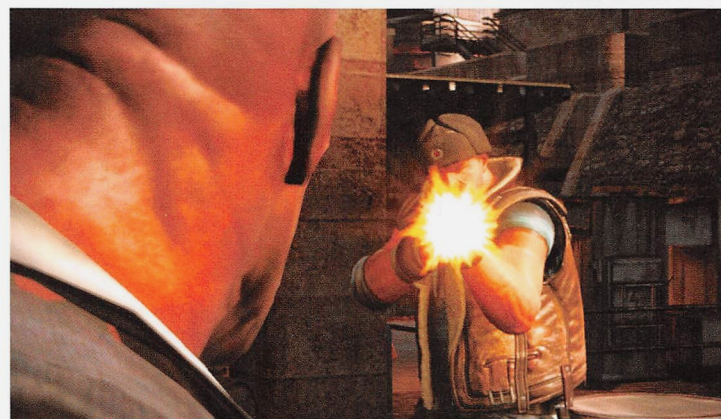
When the game was first presented to us, it was described as a shooter

[below] "Time Extended!" But not for the guy who's bleeding.

with a racing game aesthetic. We took that to mean that the game was about learning the "tracks" so you can achieve the fastest lap-time. This is only partially true. Yes, The Club does have a racing game heart, but not any old racing game. The Club is essentially Project Gotham Racing with guns. Actually, it's more than that. It's also the Tony Hawk of killing.

FIND ME IN THE CLUB

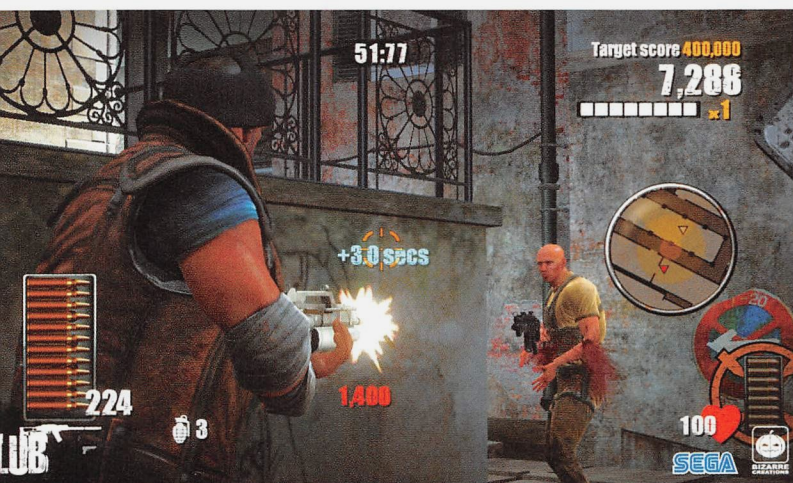
The Club of the title is a big, mean spirited, powerful, secretive and demented gun club that hosts events in various locales around the world. Each location boasts a number of events that the player must work their way through,



[above] "Get that torch out of my face!"

grand-prix style to accumulate points and (hopefully) earn a medal ranking, unlocking new areas, events, characters and weapons for use in multi-player. Events fall into three basic categories, a single stage in which the player has to find the exit while accumulating as many points as possible, locked box events in which the player is

the games rules. No matter the format of the event the basic rules are the same — get from one enemy to the next fast enough that you can kill them before the combo-meter runs down, accumulating as many points as you can by the end

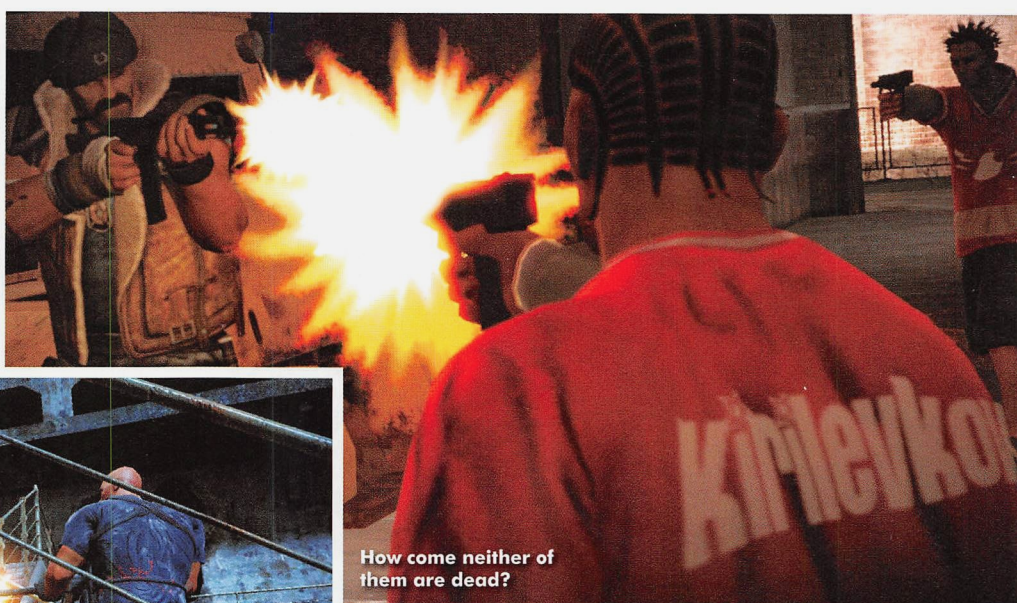
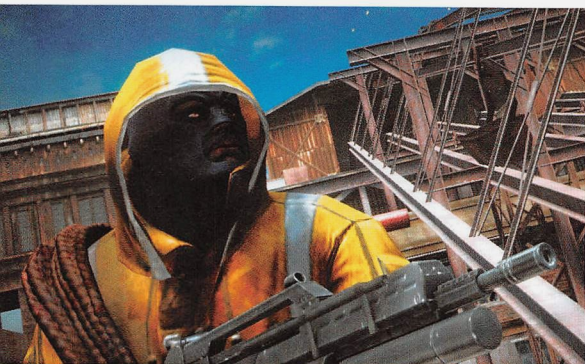


The Club asks players to forget everything they know about playing third person shooters

limited to a small area and must defend themselves for a few minutes whilst accumulating as many points as possible, and circuit races in which players must complete a few laps of the level, collecting clock icons and shooting enemies to increase the amount of time they have to complete the event.

As I said before, The Club asks players to forget everything they know about playing third-person shooters in favour of playing by

of the race. To this end, The Club necessitates players run and gun, never taking cover, never taking too careful aim, concentrating more on doing damage than avoiding being hurt. It's something that takes a few hours of gameplay to get your head around — shooting fast is rewarded more than shooting well. Sure, scoring a head shot will increase your points faster than a chest shot but not by an appreciable amount.



!!! We haven't had any hands on time with the PC code but we imagine the game will play better with the quick accuracy of a mouse and keyboard.

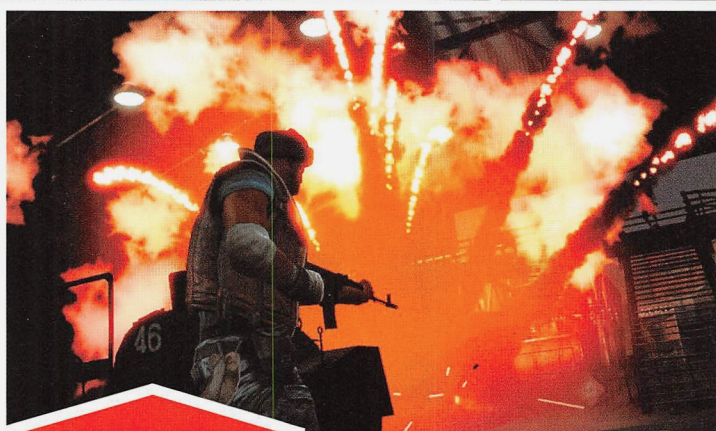


CUSTOM JOB

One of the biggest disappointments in *The Club* is the fact that players can't make their own characters. Choosing from a limited pool of pre-made characters is all well and good but since *The Club* is essentially a sports game a good amount of player attachment is lost. The characters the player can choose from, though, are an amusing bunch of tough guy stereotypes, ranging from the down on his luck gambler to the tough as nails undercover cop. Each character has different speed, strength and endurance stats but after having played all of the available characters you'd be hard pressed to tell much difference.

The Club is an absolutely brilliant idea, of that there is no doubt. It's probably going to be one of the most interesting shooters of the year. Unfortunately interesting doesn't always correspond to good. After playing a few hours of *The Club*, the overwhelming feeling left is that there's something missing. The idea of racing around and shooting people to work up a kill combo within a time limit is great, but the actual execution feels hollow.

The settings, of which there are eight, really illustrate this dichotomy between brilliant idea



YOU HEAD ASPLODE!

Some of the most fun to be had with *The Club* comes from the Siege mode, in which the player must defend themselves for a set amount of time from constantly respawning enemies. To make matters even more pressing, the player is restricted to only a small area – leaving that area triggers the timer on explosives implanted in the player's body, giving them only a few seconds to get back into the safe zone before exploding. Naturally, anything useful to the player – skull shots to increase the combo meter, weapons, extra ammo and health – are all placed outside of the safe zone, leaving the player to decide whether they want to play it relatively safe or risk exploding and go for gold.

and flat execution. Each map is almost flawless in terms of design and static enemy placement but not only are they rather drab in appearance, they also lack a necessary excitement. Static enemy placement is a brilliant idea in terms of learning maps but after a few runs through a map you know everything that is going to happen, making the game little more than a high-score grab. The addition of online leader-boards makes this a somewhat worthwhile pursuit but overall the single player game winds up feeling as though there's little in the way of competition.

KILL, KILL, KILL

Multi-player fares better, with some interesting gameplay modes that challenge players beat each other's high scores (Score Match) or kill more enemies in a time limit (Kill Match). This latter mode, in which two players have to battle it out to kill more enemies in the same arena is especially fun, as it not

only keeps to the spirit of the game, but adds that level of competition the single player campaign lacks.

The character models, stereotypes though they be, are well detailed and animated, displaying a level of personality lacking in the rest of the game. The soundtrack and effects veer more towards the functional than they do the good but they serve their purpose well enough. The voice acting, what little there is of it, is also a little underwhelming, featuring, as it does, a voiceover who would sound more at home in *Mortal Kombat* or *Unreal Tournament*.

There is nothing overtly bad or wrong with *The Club*. All of the individual pieces perform the way they are meant to but this is one of those occasions where not only does the final product not quite equal the sum of its parts, all of the parts remain squarely visible and don't quite mesh together enough to make a truly satisfying whole. Still, it's much better to see a great idea that doesn't quite make it, than yet another rehash of old ideas. «



Fantastic idea; kill Match; kill combos



Feels unfinished; drab

HYPER VERDICT

The Club feels a little undercooked but a sequel would be welcome

VISUALS

80

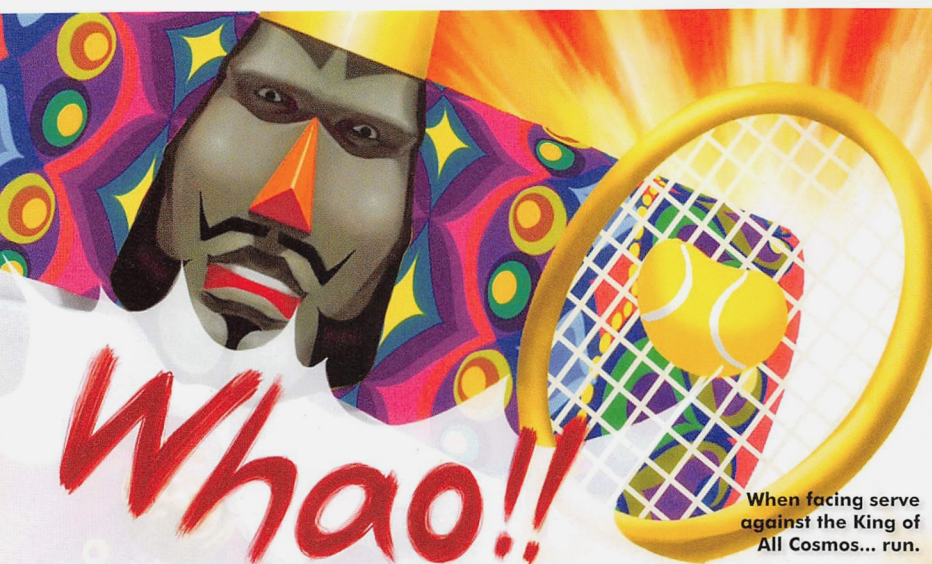
SOUND

79

GAMEPLAY

82

76



When facing serve against the King of All Cosmos... run.



X360 / PS3 / Wii / PC / PS2 / DS / PSP



Beautiful Katamari

DARREN WELLS makes fun happy time with sticky ball

The short version: It's Katamari on the 360. The long version: Read on. The combination of the dual thumbstick controller and Keita Takahashi's simple concept of "roll stuff up" is a better match than vegemite and cheese. Katamari Damacy and its self-referential sequel We Love Katamari took a game mechanic that looked as quirky as it sounded and paired it with a gloriously intuitive control scheme, resulting in a product that can be enjoyed by anyone of any demographic with even a sliver of gaming experience. Naturally, all

[below] Yes, that koala does appear to be humping an Xbox 360

it took was some observant chap at Microsoft HQ to see the success of the series of the PS2, see the dual thumbsticks on the 360 controller, and reach inside his jacket for the company chequebook.

The result is Beautiful Katamari, and if you've played either of the previous games you'd largely know what to expect. And it's that very point, as well as its Xbox x-ecution, that works both for and against it.

THIS IS HOW WE ROLL

If you like, feel free to tune out the following paragraph and make way for the newcomers, as the bizarre nature of the game warrants a little explanation. As a teensy-tiny Prince, it's your task to trot around

with a sticky ball — a katamari — and roll up all manner of objects. Everything, from paperclips to sauce bottles, trucks to elephants, is fair game, and the more you collect the bigger you get; the bigger you get, the more stuff you can collect.

That's the core of the game. In Beautiful Katamari, its rationale is similarly loopy. The King of All Cosmos and his wife were enjoying a nice game of tennis until a wayward serve ripped a black hole in the universe. It's up to you to recreate the missing comets, moons, asteroids, and planets (conveniently, Earth escaped the black hole's wrath) by rolling up enough stuff.

And rolling is what it's all about. The two controller thumbsticks are used in tandem to guide your katamari all over the place, no other buttons required. We'll say it again: The gameplay is simple, but its genius should not be understated. It allows anyone with even a passing interest the opportunity to pick up the controller and begin gaming, without having to memorise an imposing number of combinations and know what command is tied to what button.

Transferring that to the asymmetrical layout of the 360 controller yields a curious result. In the short term things feel slightly unbalanced — one stick is up there and one stick is down there — as opposed to the aligned formation



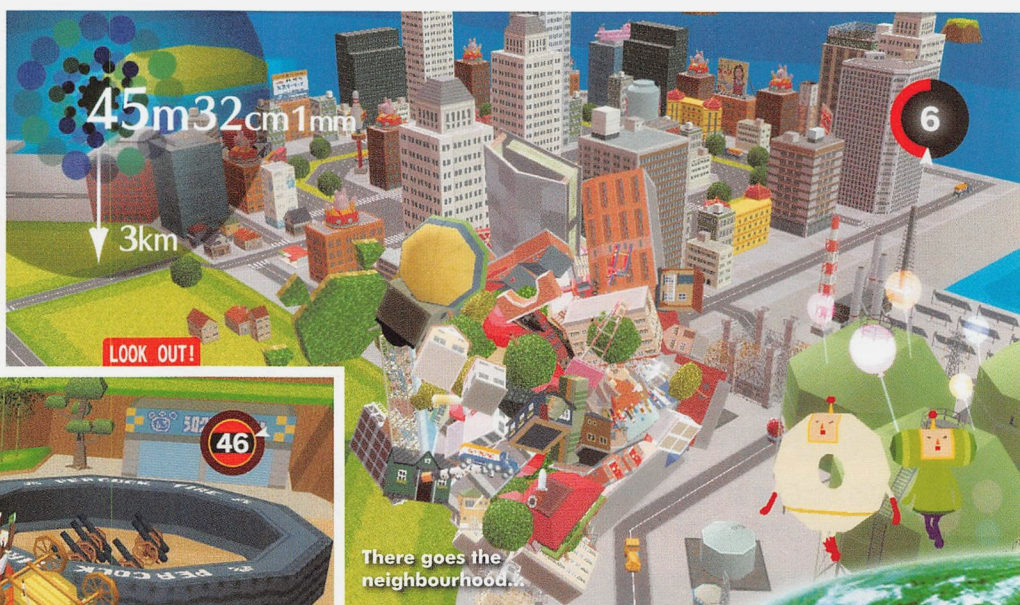
on Sony's PS2 controller. Given time things do settle, though it might happen sooner for those already familiar with the gameplay from previous Katamari titles, while newcomers to the 360 version may grapple a tad longer.

Overcome this, however, and the beauty emerges, idiosyncrasies and all. On a purely visual front the graphics display the same charm as before, eschewing photorealism in favour of deliberately boxy items and people (There's something indescribably awesome about rolling up a cat shaped like a rectangle.) Of course, now that it's on the 360, things are in widescreen, and of course, now that all sorts of fancy-pants effects are able to be performed, distant objects are judged behind a depth of field blur. This real-world visual element is not something that looks entirely at home amid cows on balloons and people who look like escapees from a Duplo playset, and seems almost shoehorned into the game simply because the processing power of the console allows it to be done.

KHAAAAAAAAAAN!

But the scale. Holy hornbeams, the scale. One of the series' best draw-cards was seeing how far





MAGIC RAINBOW!

Think of every colour in the universe, and create eleven more. That's how much colour is packed into Beautiful Katamari. It's one of the most colourful and vibrant games out there, and much of it comes from the camp-tastic King of All Cosmos. Puffy shirts and purple tights are the order of the day, and combine that with streaming rainbows, dancing pandas and giant robots doing the cancan, you not only have a game with hyperpersonality, but a game that no other will ever match in terms of weirdness.

and a glitchy camera that hides behind walls and large items all too often. If there's a silver lining, it's that there's no mid-level loading as was seen in We Love Katamari, which greatly assists the fun factor of going from rolling up cars to countries.

But it's the same kind of fun. It's the fun that we've already enjoyed on another platform, and the only new thing about Beautiful Katamari is that it's played on a lopsided controller plugged into a white console.

Those new to the series will certainly find it a great introduction, sporting a gentle learning curve, an easy tutorial, surreal humour, and gameplay that mesmerises like a lava lamp. Those who have played before will look at what separates this from the previous games, and will most likely come up short.

It's a great game for newcomers, but merely an okay one for old-timers. Perhaps it's expected that the game serves as the bat boy to a series that's in a league of its own, but it's still a tad disappointing that it didn't even try for a home run.

you could take things — watching your little Prince start with rolling up paperclips and thumbtacks and eventually getting big enough to collect hats, dogs, cars, trees, buildings and national monuments. Beautiful Katamari goes all out, like a hungry man at a restaurant constantly demanding "More, more!" How far? You'll be picking up whales, chunks of land, clouds, tornadoes, entire countries, the world itself, the other heavenly bodies you've created, star constellations, and

Everything, from paperclips to sauce bottles, trucks to elephants, is fair game

enough galactic junk to roll a ball big enough to plug that freshly-torn black hole. (Oh, and before you say anything, we agree — it doesn't make much sense to save the universe by destroying it, but since when has logic been part of the Katamari series?)

The other Katamari draw-card is the infectious nature of the boppy J-Pop soundtrack. The music here follows a similar path, but the new tunes offer nothing immediately catchy, and while the old tracks are

still fun to listen to, their presence highlights the all-too-frequent habit of Beautiful Katamari — leaning on the previous titles in an effort that their elements will carry this one to similar success.

It should, but doesn't. The main bugbear is that it's too familiar; there's nothing new for those who have rolled before. The music, the objectives, the environments, the items... all of it has been seen, heard and done before. (And missions remain the same throughout —

the game doesn't even throw us a "Fatten up the sumo wrestler" task!) That might be fine for those discovering the game for the first time, but the rest of us won't find much that will surprise. Not even the game length affords any opportunity for innovation, clocking in alarmingly short.

On the technical front, its 360 makeover brings with it long load times, an often stuttery frame rate,

Catchy gameplay; distinct charm

Very short; framerate issues; long load times

HYPER VERDICT

Same game, different platform.

VISUALS
75

SOUND
80

GAMEPLAY
83

78



Final Fantasy XII: Revenant Wings

DARREN WELLS always wanted to be a sky pirate

If it's "Final" Fantasy, how come there are so many of them? What, is that one old now? Fair enough. Let's try something different. What do you get if you cross the classic RPG series with a handheld console? The answer: A cracking good game. Hey, I didn't say the punchline would be funny, but it is true.

HARDEE-HAR-HAR

I don't need your pity laugh, but I do need you Final Fantasy veterans to bear with me if the following recap proceeds to bore. Set a year after the events of FFXII, Revenant Wings sees Vaan in the possession of his own skyship, and naturally, an epic adventure on the high clouds awaits. Gameplay is a mix of RPG and RTS, in that there's the usual inventory juggling and spell casting, but there's also the process of unit bandboxing (dragging a square over desired characters using the DS stylus) and group management. You're able to quickly select a group and send them into battle, before directing your remaining characters to fend off the rest.

It's a natural fit for the handheld's touchscreen, but it's not without its shortcomings. Since your selection of characters only lasts until they've been assigned an action, you'll find yourself constantly forced to re-select desired party members with each screen advance, felled enemy or opened treasure chest. It can get

hectic during battle, and coupled with the sometimes-wayward detection of the stylus position — "I wanted to attack, not walk!" — it's sometimes troublesome.

Likewise, you can only adjust your party's equipped inventory and change their gambits before advancing into an area, not in the middle of the battlefield. You also only earn XP after clearing the stage, as opposed to a traditional by-the-monster basis. On the one hand this makes sense, as Revenant Wings treats a level like one big foe, rewarding you when you complete the objective as opposed to while you're eliminating each baddie in between. But on another it's hard to gauge just how you're doing until you're greeted with the "Mission Complete!" screen and the XP points roll in.

OOOHH, AHHHH...

But the game's presentation oozes quality. The pre-rendered cutscenes, although slightly choppy, demand attention and respect. For something so detailed to fit onto such a small cartridge is no mean feat. The in-game action is also quite a marvel: sweeping camera angles move in and out of the environment, making things feel more than "just another isometric game", while the music successfully upholds the high FF standard.

As for the pacing... now that's a



[above] Master Tonberry! And a menu grid and stuff

tricky one. For the most part it's fine, barring only a couple of instances. The first few missions are gentle introductions to the gameplay, but then one heck of a roadblock is put up, ensuring repeat attempts and increasing frustration. Sure, it requires the player to utilise all the previously learned aspects of gameplay, but it requires them to

category: **RPG**
players: **1**
developer: **Square Enix**
publisher: **Ubisoft**
price: **\$69.99** / rating: **TBA**
available: **Now**

be used in a manner that's far too frantic and rushed compared to the pacing of the tasks before it. Skip forward to Chapter 3, and a stealth mission pops out of left field, with no prior skills to bring to it and no sliver of advice. The controls aren't really suited for careful sneaking, and it never feels entirely comfortable juggling between the D-Pad to move the game view, selecting Vaan with the touchscreen and selecting a point for him to move to with the stylus.

Still, despite the somewhat naysaying tone of this review, Revenant Wings is very much a thumbs up, and is sure to engage any FF or RPG fan. Even though the game takes no risks with its formula or with the DS's features (there's no touch-screen use on a par with Phantom Hourglass, for instance), there's still a mighty solid experience to be found — one that's easy to get lost in for hours at a time. «

<p>Solid RPG gameplay, great music, plenty of depth</p>	<p>Slight pacing inconsistencies, formula plays it safe</p>	<p>HYPER VERDICT</p>
<p>A solid game that's worthy of any FF fan.</p>	<p>VISUALS 82</p>	<p>SOUND 79</p>
	<p>GAMEPLAY 86</p>	<p>82</p>



Dragon Quest Monsters: Joker

RICO SUAVEZ wants to show you his Pokemans!

It seems as though every developer in Japan is, or has been, making Pokemon clones. Who can blame them? Pokemon is a huge franchise and a guaranteed money spinner. It must be the elephant in the room that nobody wants to talk about in design meetings, kind of like the way that every Western developer making an MMO seems to want to say that their game has not been influenced by the Blizzard giant at all. Anyway, musings on the inner workings of Japanese developments houses aping successful franchises aside, Dragon Quest Monsters: Joker is one of the most satisfying Poke-clones on the market, thanks, in no small part, to the wide bestiary stuffed full of wonderfully designed and, dare we say it, charming

creatures, each of which easily has as much personality as their better-known Poke-progenitors.

THE DAILY GRIND

Gameplay may take a different track but the basic game will be immediately familiar to Dragon Quest fans, and not only for the charming Akira Toriyama character and monster designs. The basic gameplay is similar to Dragon Quest, with a team of three facing off in turn based combat only this time around the team is made up of monsters that the main character has befriended. There is a cursory plot dealing with a monster hunting competition, ulterior motives and betrayal but ultimately Dragon Quest Monsters: Joker is a game about hunting monsters and grinding levels for said monsters. With a bestiary of around 200 different creatures, ranging from

simple Slimes all the way through to dragons, that makes for a hell of a lot of grinding. After reaching level five, players can put points into monster skills, giving them spells and abilities familiar to fans of the Dragon Quest franchise. The human



character controlling the monsters can't be directly attacked and can't attack in return, but can use spells and items to influence the battle, by healing or empowering the monsters in the team. If a monster falls in battle, the player can swap it for another monster being held in reserve. Fallen monsters can be revived with spells, items or by returning to a Guild hall.

One of the most interesting aspects of Joker is the ability to fuse

category: **Collect-'em-up**
players: **1-2**
developer: **TOSE**
publisher: **Square Enix**
price: **\$69.99** / rating: **G**
available: **March 31**

monsters together to make a third, more powerful (hopefully) monster. As many of the more powerful creatures in the bestiary can only be discovered through monster fusion, players will more than likely spend a good deal of time trial and erroring their way through the fusion process. Only monsters level 10 and over can be fused, and even then the fusion is mostly a transfer of skills, giving players even more impetus to grind their monsters to high levels.

Although the game doesn't do anything new in the collect-'em-up/monster battling genre, DQ Monsters should appeal to fans of Dragon Quest and should ably fill the time until Dragon Quest IX come to the DS later this year. Likewise, Pokemon fans should find enough to like in Joker to fill the gap until the next colour/gem themed version of the granddaddy of monster collecting games comes out. «

[below] Mr. ! comes as no surprise



Great character design; big bestiary; it's Dragon Quest	So much grinding; grindage; did we mention the grinding?	HYPER VERDICT	
Ease down on the grinding, guys	VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY
	86	80	80
	76		



!!! Ironically, the Wii is perhaps the least appropriate console for NiGHTS to appear on. This is a game that demands intimate analogue control, and the octagonal rims on all Nintendo analogue sticks compromise the free flow of flight.



X360 / PS3 / Wii / PC / PS2 / DS / PSP

Sonic is crying in his Eggman soup right now.

"Feed me, Seymour. Feed me all night long."

NiGHTS: Journey of Dreams

TIM HENDERSON tries forcing a Saturn controller into his Wii

category: **Not-Quite Link Attack**
players: **1-2**
developer: **Sonic Team**
publisher: **Sega**
price: **\$99.99(?)** / rating: **G(?)**
available: **Now**

There's something wrong with NiGHTS: Journey of Dreams. There's plenty that's right with it also, but something very fundamental is missing. Or, to put it more accurately, a lot of superfluous stuff that doesn't need to be there has been dumped on top, and has suffocated the purity of the experience.

IN A DREAM, I CAN SEE

Up until now, NiGHTS has managed to remain a clean franchise, untainted by Sega's habit of dragging once-loved properties through the dirt. As an exercise in refined gameplay mechanics, lucid control and a total lack of unnecessary distractions, NiGHTS

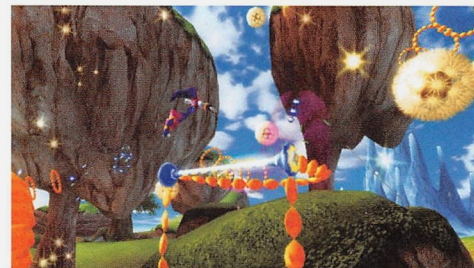
into Dreams was a game of the most honest sort: an endlessly replayable experience that took relish in its medium.

As a greatly belated sequel to a game of such clear intent, there's a distinct twinge of sadness that comes with the realisation that Journey of Dreams has been born from a clouded vision. The core gameplay of NiGHTS was an exercise in muscle memory — After merging with NiGHTS and clicking onto the closed flight circuits, it was all about ranking up chain links and of trying to rinse enjoyment out of every second of flight made available, all while maintaining a ballet of unfettered motion. This gameplay no longer exists, and where NiGHTS once allowed players to continue lapping its stages to

rack up points, Journey of Dreams forces the immediate progression to the next path once the main objective is completed.

And other stuff, too. Each stage is now broken down into five segments, each providing a different type of play. The link attack is a welcome follow-on from Christmas NiGHTS, but almost every other gameplay mode is not — especially the substandard platforming sections that are played out as the Children, Will and Helen, rather than NiGHTS. The cutscenes and dialogue that clump all of this together are even more cringe-worthy: where once stood a game that communicated everything it needed to and had unlimited replay value through its mechanics alone, now sits a sequel that forces cheesy exposition and awkwardly jams in multiple objectives and collectables to falsify its lifespan.

And yet there are moments of genuine inspiration to be found here. Through all the sludge, past



all the missed opportunities beats the heart of a game that can delight like few others. Aesthetics are mostly wonderful, if occasionally unfinished and the flight paths themselves display patches of genuine imagination: deserts spring to life, lights alter their surroundings and scale gets toyed around with childish glee. The soundtrack in particular is flawless, and if the dialogue can be ignored then the game's concluding moments are of almost unequalled splendour. That the fanservice here is overt to the point of being cut-and-pasted from the original, however, only makes us wish that the Sonic Team had understood more clearly just what exactly made this fan service so revered the first time around. **«**

[below] "Boat drinks."



When it flies, it soars

This is NiGHTS, dammit — it should fly all the time!

HYPER VERDICT

Misses the point a lot, but when it hits you can't help but smile again.

VISUALS

85

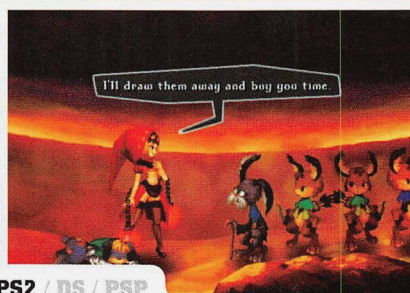
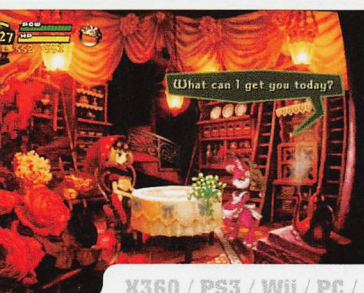
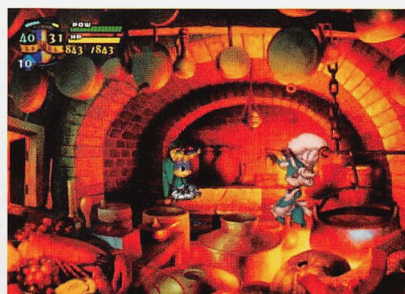
SOUND

89

GAMEPLAY

80

80



X360 / PS3 / Wii / PC / PS2 / DS / PSP

Odin Sphere

DANIEL WILKS has wings growing from his butt

This seems to be the month for genre mashing in games. So far we've had the Rhythm/RTS shenanigans of Patapon and the racing/shooting of The Club and now we get Odin Sphere, a 2D side scrolling beat-'em-up RPG with a strong alchemy system and minor RTS elements. And it's brilliant. The game's frustrating at times, sure, but the beautiful art design, bombastic soundtrack and simple, highly addictive button mashing combine to make a very satisfying, if somewhat old-school game.

Starting from the interesting kick-off point of a little girl in an attic reading one of five story-books, players make their way through five lengthy story arcs, each one showing a different perspective of roughly the same events. The first story arc, in which players take the role of Gwendolyn, arse-winged daughter of Demon King Odin of Ragnanival introduces all of the gameplay mechanics players need to master to get through the

category: **Action RPG**
players: **1**
developer: **Vanillaware**
publisher: **Atlus**
price: **\$69.99** / rating: **PG**
available: **March 13**

subsequent 40+ hours of button mashing bliss.

All characters have a simple square button attack that can be strung together to perform a combo, as well as a simple block and a jump. Pressing up or down on the d-pad the characters can attack high or low. Low attacks are especially important when fighting blocking enemies, as low attacks can break a block. Each character also has a special attack — Gwendolyn, for example, can perform a gliding/diving spear attack. In addition to the basic abilities, the five characters can unleash powerful magical attacks once they have charged the power bar with Phozons, the spirits of the dead. To stop the game from being an outright mash-fest, the HUD



features a POW bar that decreases each time a character makes an attack. If the POW bar ever reaches zero then the character is stunned for a short while and can't move.

SUCKING SOULS

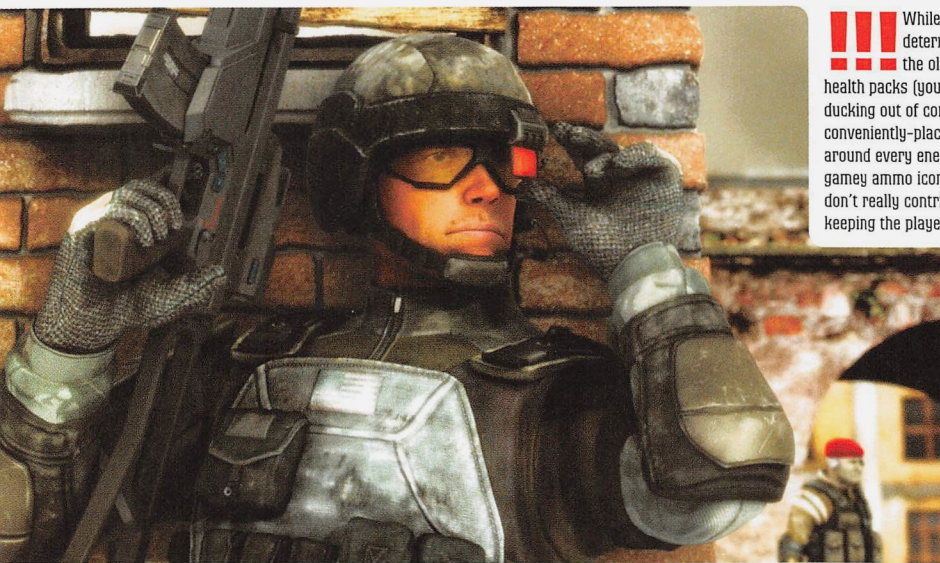
Phozons are the catch all material needed for magical attacks, leveling up weapon attacks and growing food, making it a truly valuable resource in game. Every downed enemy releases a set number of Phozons, which can either be used to simultaneously level up the character's Psypher (their weapon) and charge the character's magic bar or to grow plants from seeds to make healing food.

Food is another important resource in Odin Sphere, as it not only heals the character but also increases their food experience, enabling players to level up their hit-points throughout the game. Different foods have different healing and food XP levels, so balancing what type of food you have in your limited inventory becomes a very important factor in survival. There's also an alchemy system allows players to create potions with varying effects, with the added benefit that the higher the level of potion, the more Phozons released when it is created, slowing alchemy to synergize with the rest of the game mechanics.

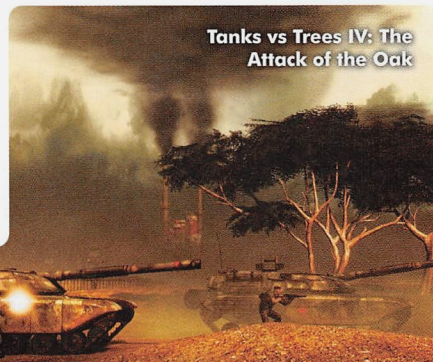
Odin Sphere is a beautiful game, and one that should appeal to fans of both brawlers and action RPGs. Not only is the game huge in terms of length, it's also huge in terms of mechanics. The PS2 may be all but dead and buried, but games like this will make sure the console will still get a lot of play for quite a while to come. »



<p>Gorgeous art design; clever levelling excellent crafting/food mechanics</p> <p>A fine example of PS2 development.</p>	<p>Overwhelming</p>	<p>HYPER VERDICT</p>	
	<p>VISUALS</p> <p>95</p>	<p>SOUND</p> <p>86</p>	<p>GAMEPLAY</p> <p>89</p>
<p>88</p>			



!!! While Frontlines might be determined to throw out the old FPS convention of health packs (you'll regenerate health by ducking out of combat), it's happy to use conveniently-placed ammo crates. Dotted around every enemy base, they sport a gamey ammo icon hovering above, and don't really contribute to Kaos's goal of keeping the player immersed in the game.



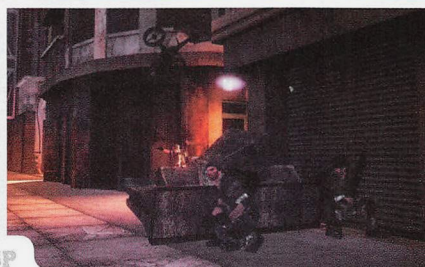
Tanks vs Trees IV: The Attack of the Oak



"Hey, so is it time for lunch yet? Is it?"



X360 / PS3 / Wii / PC / PS2 / DS / PSP



Frontlines: Fuel of War

DARREN WELLS never stands close to a naked flame

When the blood of the earth runs down to its last few drops, we're all screwed. The world we know relies on oil, petrol and gas, and if Frontlines is any indication, those vegetable oil and methane replacements aren't going to arrive in time. While the rest of us rediscover that crazy thing called "walking", the world's armed forces fight it out for control over the dwindling supplies. On this side is the combined might of the US and Europe, on that side is a Russia/China alliance. In the middle is the future of the world.

Sounds epic, doesn't it? Fontlines: Fuel of War charges at the FPS genre like a nuke out of a gate, letting fly with explosive action and a brash "let's get 'em all!" attitude. For that it must be commended. It sets everything to a storyline that could very well happen within the

next few years. For that it must be commended. It provides cunning enemy AI, a range of locations, and a nice mix between on-foot and vehicular combat. For that it must also be commended. But amid its strong points wade a range of not so strong aspects, rearing their heads throughout.

GOGOGOGO!

But let's start with the positives. The drawback of Frontlines is in the name itself: Players capture numerous objectives — seen on the battlefield as plumes of red smoke and on the minimap as distinct white circles — in an effort to achieve a larger goal. As each objective is taken the frontline of battle is pushed forward, giving your side more room to move and putting the pinch on the reds. This piecemeal collection at first seems

hand-holding, but it does provide a sometimes necessary sense of direction amid the firefights and explosions. It gives a clear idea on what you need to do to proceed, and where there are multiple points to capture before the frontline advances, you can choose an order that's convenient for you. The enemy AI adapts to each situation seamlessly, with no evidence of scripted events to funnel them down a predesigned path. They'll dynamically find cover, peek out and take pot shots, and generally make you work for your kill. It's not perfect — a few of them will wander out into a bulletstorm or simply run right into you — but for the most part it works.

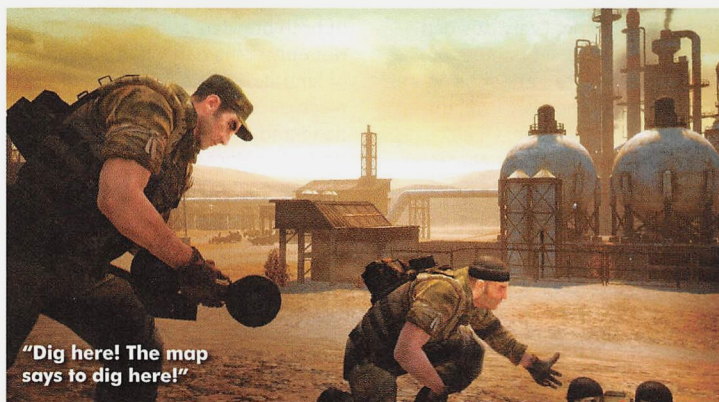
It's about the only thing that has potential for variation in Frontlines. Whereas the artificial intelligence can mix things up in areas that do allow for multiple methods of attack, the overall singleplayer campaign can easily be summarised as turning red smoke into blue smoke. Sure, the environments do their best to lend a different air to proceedings, as do the vehicle missions, but the one game mechanic essentially remains unchanged throughout. Escort the

civilians? Co-ordinate an air-strike? Flush out the enemy to waiting allies? Nope, it's just you chasing your minimap markers.

WHAT SMELLS LIKE BURNING?

Then there's the technical issues. Expect quirks such as a fellow soldier merrily being pushed by a tank, rather than being squished by it. Expect fired missiles sticking out of the ground with their jetstreams of smoke still billowing out behind, as though they forgot to explode on impact. Vehicle wreckage miraculously disappears and available tanks miraculously pop into existence. Expect it all. Despite those quirks though, multiplayer does prove rather fun, if only because it turns the normally one-way frontline into a thing that's in a constant state of flux. It's glorified Capture the Flag, but it's something.

It doesn't advance the frontline of the FPS genre in any way — with its bugs one could argue that it's going the other way — but it's still an alright sort of way to wile away some gaming hours. It's a game to play in the moment, and one that won't be missed afterwards. «



"Dig here! The map says to dig here!"

<p>Competent AI, remote drones, good multiplayer</p>	<p>Buggy, game mechanic doesn't evolve</p>	<p>HYPER VERDICT</p>
<p>Good in the moment, but forgettable outside of it.</p>	<p>VISUALS 79</p>	<p>SOUND 77</p>
	<p>GAMEPLAY 80</p>	<p>75</p>



Final Fantasy Crystal Chronicles: Ring of Fates

Who would put their fate in the hands of **DANIEL WILKS?**

The original Crystal Chronicles on the Gamecube was an interesting, if somewhat overly ambitious, game. Sure, players could enjoy a single player campaign, but to fully take advantage of the title they needed not only a GCN but four GBAs as well, making it not only a rather expensive outing, but a rather logistically uncomfortable one too. The move to the DS has been a good one for the franchise, as it allows the developers to keep the single player campaign intact and seriously streamline the multi-player element, making it a breeze to set up and play multi-player games.

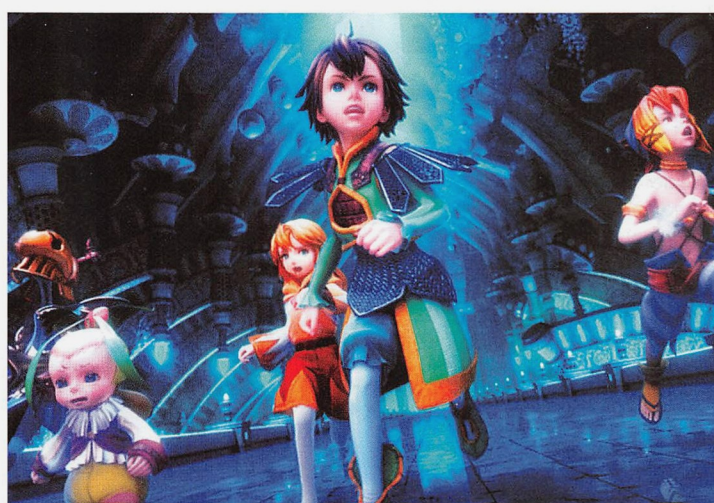
In the single player game, players initially take control of twins Yuri and Chelinka, thrust from their normal life into a quest to save the world from evil after, rather disturbingly, their beloved father gives them a hatchet and tells them to go out and play. Later, of course, the twins can add other members to their party, increasing their strength and number of skills they have access to. The story isn't anything you haven't heard countless times before, but thanks to the customary Square Enix high production values, it works well and sets a serious, yet playful mood.

category: **RPG**
players: **1-4**
developer: **Square Enix**
publisher: **Square Enix**
price: **\$69.99** / rating: **PG**
available: **March 31**

HOT POCKET

If you've played the original Crystal Chronicles you know what to expect from gameplay mechanics; players move and fight in real time, collecting loot and XP from fallen monsters, and collecting "Magicites" to cast spells. The only significant change in controls is that instead of having to use a menu to choose Magicites, potions or other items, the player can simply tap on one of the "pockets" represented on the touch screen to choose it. Discarding or moving pocketed items is as simple as dragging them to the centre of the bottom screen. Along with the real time combat, Ring of Fates contains a number of simple item puzzles and key collection quests. Whilst these tests may not tax the old thinking bone too hard, they do add a touch of much appreciated variation to the dungeon crawling.

The four player co-op mode allows up to four players (strangely enough) to connect via WiFi, pick a character from one of four different tribes, each with their own special



[above] Running dramatically: it's the cool thing to do.

skills and either play the Free Mode, which is basically playing through the story mode up to the lowest point of progression of the assembled games or the Quest Mode, in which the players are tasked to perform specifically made multi-player quests that emphasise cooperation.

For all of the high production values on display, Ring of Fates

is not without its faults. While the combat is engaging, it does become remarkably repetitive quite quickly. It's also quite disappointing to note that the multi-player features absolutely no download play, necessitating all players have a copy of the game. Overall, though, Final Fantasy Crystal Chronicles: Ring of Fates is an engaging, if a little light-weight middle ground between traditional Japanese RPG and action RPG and should satisfy the cravings of both parties. **«**

High production values; good characters; use of touch screen	Repetitive combat; puzzles too easy; no download play	HYPER VERDICT
An engaging, if light-weight RPG romp	VISUALS 85	SOUND 82
	GAMEPLAY 83	81



Believe it or not, its mother was even uglier. Ugh.

!!! We know there are hardware limitations to consider, but it's bizarre seeing the wooden sides of a freshly-bashed crate disappear rather than remain on the floor. Oh well.



Won't someone think of the zombie children?



X360 / PS3 / Wii / PC / PS2 / DS / PSP

Dark Messiah of Might & Magic: Elements

category: **FPS**
players: **1-10**
developer: **Ubisoft**
publisher: **Ubisoft**
price: **\$109.95** / rating: **MA15+**
available: **Now**

Dragon or drag on? **DARREN WELLS** just wanted to use that pun.

Don't get your hopes up: this is not the game that appeared on the PC and scored a respectable 81 from this very magazine. Dark Messiah of Might and Magic: Elements is not made by Arkane Studios, the team behind the PC version of 2006. This time around Ubisoft is handling the duties in-house, seemingly in an effort to get a console version out the door while the Dark Messiah name is still semi-warm. And that's precisely how the end result comes across — a half-hearted and tepid product.

OOH, HARSH

Well, yeah, but the game itself is none too kind either. The building blocks of the core game are there — a fantasy-themed FPS with an emphasis on environment interaction — but they're hastily joined at the seams by some very rushed and very dodgy elements.

Take what should be a very basic aspect: picking up stuff. Now, telekinesis isn't a power you acquire until a few hours into the game, but you wouldn't know it here, for DMO&M:E (what an acronym) allows you to acquire weapons, items, and bodies that lie far beyond a reasonable reach. Picture a sword 'n' sorcery game with a tractor beam. That's what it's



like. Indeed, it's rather amusing, but intentionally so, to see the corpse of an enemy gain a ragdoll life and literally fly through the air towards you. Those Jedi have nothing on a simple programming quirk, one that's noticeable throughout the entire game and lends it no sense of quality or polish.

Same goes for the basic structure. Level segments feel far too small for the amount of time spent loading — and believe us, load times are loooong. Flub an objective or get spotted when you're meant to be stealthing it, and settle in for another epic session of Load Times with Loady the Loaderator. Then there's the technical issues: The framerate stutters all too often, overlapping textures glitch and

clash, and visuals look largely muted, allowing nothing to stand out. The sum total of it all adds up to a game where "rough around the edges" only goes a part of the way to describing it.

NO GOOD?

Which is a shame, because there are a lot of elements in, uh, Elements that are worthy of attention. A non-combat moment that sees you creating your own sword blade using a bar of steel and a

blacksmith's fire lends a nice layer to the usual "find sword, use sword" mentality. There's satisfaction to be found in the battleground improvisation, with one carefully-timed kick sending your foe into an array of spikes or off a ledge. The sword combat also works quite well, as once you're within striking distance to an enemy that's spied you, the controls put you into a nice circle-strafting mechanic that feels natural and appropriate. Simply step back out of range and you're back to the usual FPS controls.

Good moments *are* present in this action-oriented title, but they're simply overshadowed by a lot of basic things that games years ago did a lot better. The many glitches and bugs just bog down a concept that stood half a chance, dragging it down into a sea of mediocrity and tarnish.

If you're the owner of a suitably-powered PC, then do check out the original title. Let's leave Elements to sit in the corner and think about its mistakes. <<

<p>Booting enemies off ledges, killing dudes</p>	<p>Severely unpolished, long load times, often repetitive</p>	<p>HYPER VERDICT</p>
<p>Feels rushed, despite arriving two years later. Simply no excuse.</p>	<p>VISUALS 68</p>	<p>SOUND 60</p>
	<p>GAMEPLAY 70</p>	<p>53</p>

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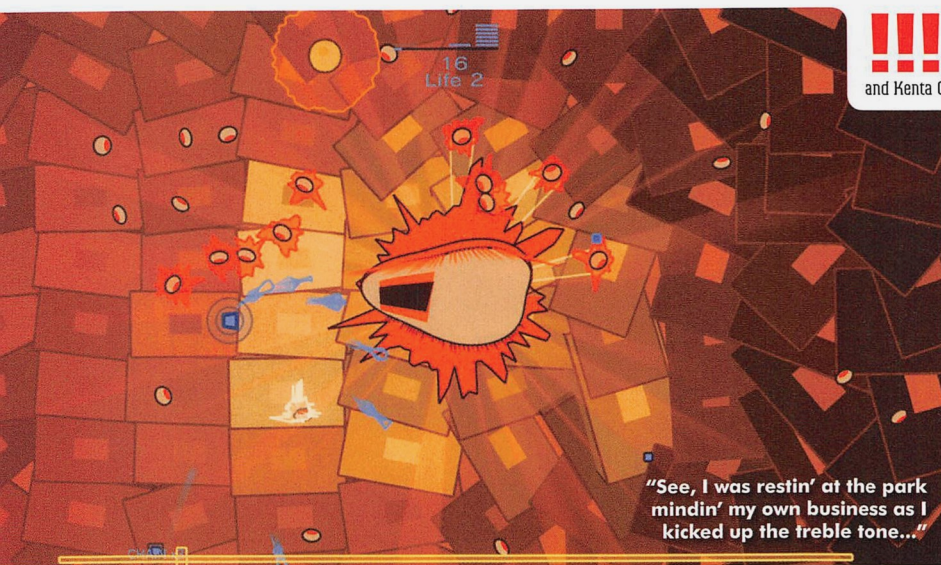
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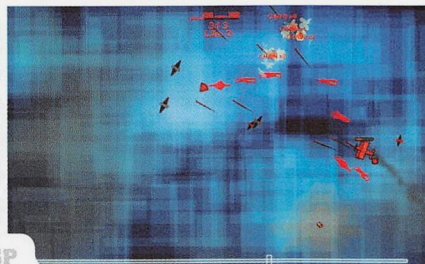
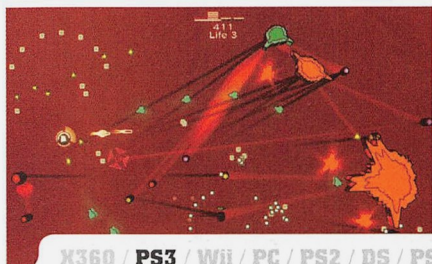
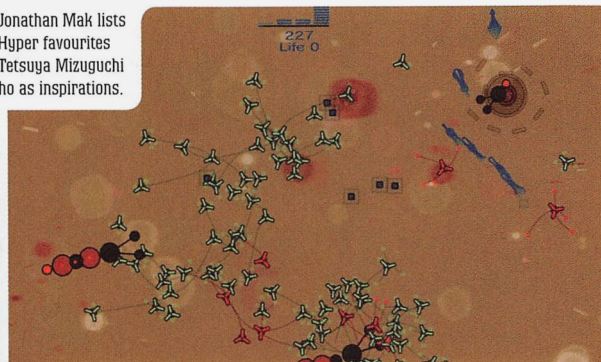


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!!! Jonathan Mak lists Hyper favourites Tetsuya Mizuguchi and Kenta Cho as inspirations.



X360 / PS3 / Wii / PC / PS2 / DS / PSP

Riff: Everyday Shooter

DANIEL WILKS likes Arrested Development

We've joked many times in the past that it seems to be the law that every second game to be released on either Xbox Live Arcade or Playstation Network has to be a Robotron style game, in which the player moves their ship/robot/tank/plane/soldier/blob using the left thumbstick and fires in any direction using the right. Riff: Everyday Shooter is one of these games but don't let our constant joking about the control style put you off playing it. Everyday Shooter, without hyperbole, is fantastic.

Combining elements of past Robotron clones, such as Geometry Wars and the synaesthetic games of Tetsuya "the Miz" Mizuguchi, Everyday Shooter, subtitled "A queasy game by Jonathan Mak" sees players piloting around a pixel/blob, shooting various enemies comprised

of basic geometry, picking up dots that can be spent unlocking different visual modes, extra lives and the like, all to a wonderful guitar based soundtrack that integrates the player's kills into the overall soundscape. Each level is represented as a track on an album, so players need to stay alive until the track ends to progress to the next track.

Rather than simply killing everything that moves to get points, Everyday Shooter rewards players for creating chains — long kill combos triggered by shooting the level's specific chain trigger enemy.



Each level varies wildly in the way in which chains can be triggered. The first level simply features a sort of star-burst shaped enemy that destroys anything that comes in contact with its explosion radius, whereas the second level features two different ways of starting chains, one involving what can only be described as pylons and the other involving hypnotic slowly growing amebas. There are no clues given each level as to how to start chains, so it's up to the player to experiment and discover all the secrets.

GIVE A MAN A FISH

Although Everyday Shooter only contains eight levels, the game features a clever rewards system that allows players to spend their accumulated unlock points (the dots you pick up during levels) to buy extra starting lives, different graphics schemes, unlock single levels to play, the ability to randomise the progression of levels, interactive backgrounds and the like, really promoting repeated play.

Everyday Shooter is not without its frustrations. The visual design is very busy, making it quite easy

category: **Robotron clone**
players: **1**
developer: **Queasy Games**
publisher: **Sony**
price: **\$12.95** / rating: **G**
available: **Now**

to lose track of the player's ship/pixel/blob thing, seriously upping the difficulty of even the most basic of levels. There also seems to be little balance in terms of repeated playthroughs — sometimes a level can be very orderly but at other times the player can find themselves absolutely inundated by an insurmountable number of enemies. The game also features a very steep learning curve, or, more precisely, a learning cliff, as the levels increase almost exponentially in terms of difficulty. In itself this is no bad thing, but people wanting a good casual game should beware; Everyday Shooter may look old school and simple but it plays very much like a hard-core shooter.

Ultimately Everyday Shooter is going to be one of those games that people either "get" or don't. It's a wonderful twist on an old mechanic but one that comes with some baggage that may turn off some gamers. If you're willing to strain your eyes a little and dig the idea of shooting blobs to a garage rock guitar soundtrack, however, then don't hesitate to give it a look. For the price you really can't go wrong. «



✓ Clever chaining mechanics; lovely design; great simple soundtrack

✓ Massive learning curve; visually very busy

HYPER VERDICT

A fantastic spin on an overused control mechanic.

VISUALS

86

SOUND

90

GAMEPLAY

90

89

!!! Darren's still holding a grudge against the
 !!! "Running Man" and boss in Rez HD, after it killed him while hanging onto only a sliver of health. Grrr...

The Running Man: Way better than the Lawnmower Man.

C:\Programs\RezHax**DARRENWELLS**.exe

category: **Shooter**
players: **1**
developer: **Q Entertainment**
publisher: **Xbox Live Arcade**
price: **800 points** / rating: **G**
available: **Now**

widescreen TV, and Dolby surround sound to finally do the music justice. It even comes with the original untouched game if you really can't do without your jaggies in 4:3. The makeover is entirely faithful and brings the game to today's technology seamlessly.

You know what you're in for once you realise Rez takes its moniker from an Underworld song. Like its musical sibling, the game presents a trancy experience, doing so by way of a unique shoot 'em up set inside a computer network that's clogged with too much data. As one is prone to do when one knows too much, the computer wants to end it all. It's your job to hack in prevent that.

Presenting things in a manner that's colourful yet minimalist, the key to Rez in its sound design.

Rez is up there with those underappreciated games that were bought by a precious few. Originally released in 2002 on the Dreamcast and PS2, it wasn't until it faded into the ether that people realised what they were missing. Until now eBay was the last bastion of hope for those looking to login to Tetsuya Mizuguchi's digital trip, but thanks to a remastered version being made available on Xbox Live, everyone is able to enjoy it for a handful of points.

Don't let the "remastered" aspect put you off. Rez HD is byte for byte the exact same game, sporting cleaner vectors that fit perfectly on a

FIRE [x1]
Sentry
Aerial
Sentry
AirBurst
Sentry System
Flare

ALERT

"No." "No." "No."
"No." "No." "No."
"No." "Yes. Wait, I
mean no."

overdrive


Bizarrely, it uses almost no in-game sound effects, preferring instead to utilise a layered soundtrack. Things like the defeat of an enemy or the acquisition of a power-up add more elements to the trance music playing in the background. It works brilliantly from the get-go, with the first level beginning in stark silence, and only the elimination of enemies adding a few drum beats or electronic pulses to your speakers. The more you shoot, the more musical cues are added, and when things hit a crescendo, the game sends in a network node for you to aim at and shoot, which sends you into the next layer of the mainframe.

That's something that warrants particular mention: the shooting scheme. It's not a traditional mechanic of shooting each individual target; instead, you hold

down the A button and pass your targeting reticule over a maximum of eight enemies. That ensures a Lock On, and once you release the button, the damage is delivered. It adds a nice tactical layer to the shmup formula: do you use all your Lock Ons in one pass, waiting so you can destroy more at once, or do you rapid-fire in the traditional manner to eliminate enemies faster? The evolution aspect also ties in here, with the form of the player's avatar changing depending on their health. You know you're about to bite it when you're a polygonal sphere, but when you're Zening it up cross-legged, you'll be able to withstand a few hits before Game Over.

It's not a long game, but I swear, if you pass this up now, I will hunt you down and break your thumbs. Doyoureallywanthat? **«**

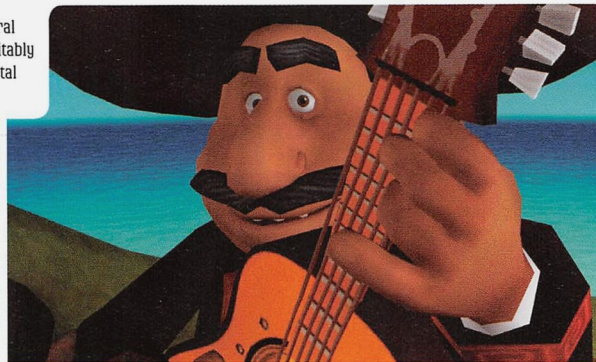


 Rather short, potentially hectic

HYPER VERDICT

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY
90	92	90

90



INDIE
GAME
REVIEW

X360 / PS3 / WII / PC / PS2 / DS / PSP

Sam and Max: Season 2 – Moai Better Blues

TIM HENDERSON misses the sun

Although the general measure of quality will always be established by the first bite of a series, it isn't until the second that the trends likely to become regular fixtures of the overall package can truly be picked out. We rather enjoyed the opening to this second season of Sam & Max. We appreciated the small tweaks and refinements that were made to the formula, and the renewed sense of freshness that the few months following the conclusion of Season 1 had allowed Telltale to inject into its little cartoon world. And now with the second episode of Season 2 upon us we know how

many of these little tweaks we're likely to see on the hour, at the hour in each episode to follow.

SMALL MENACES

Sam & Max 201 made a smart move by having a barely relevant but fun little puzzle kick things off with accessible flair. Although it sounds confronting to force a task immediately upon the gamer, the actuality was that the limited possibilities meant that it was an easy yet satisfying dilemma to solve, and a great way to ease any newcomers into the gameplay. Then the opening credits got underway and the game started in earnest. It felt like a smart, practical way to open a series — in fact, we hope it's going to feel



[above] Not pictured: Sea Monkey crotch. Thank god.

like a smart, practical way to open each episode, because it looks like we're going to be treated to another of these standalone openings a good three times more.

Cynicism of tone aside, there's nothing explicitly wrong with repeating the opening structure, and the plot relevance is a bit more coherent this time around. We're just noticing trends — trends that will likely also comprise of more car activities for prizes, basic arcade challenges, and a new series of insecurities from the paranoid Bosco.

So, with the framework now clearly laid out, does it appear robust enough to buttress several installments? We're inclined to say that it does. The trends noticed

category: **Adventure** / players: **1**
developer: **Telltale Games**
publisher: **Telltale Games**
price: **US \$8.95** / rating: **N/A**
available: **Now**

tend to draw from the Lucasarts original, Hit the Road, as well as traditional Adventure games at large; Compared to the reliably predictable situations from Season 1 (Sybil's job rotations; buying overpriced junk from Bosco) the actual gameplay diversity supported here appears much stronger. A short arcade segment can be thrown in to provide a harmless light distraction almost anywhere, and Bosco's new paranoia already feels less iterant.

For all this talk of foundations, it's probably worth mentioning that Episode 202 itself is pleasantly polished for the most part. The main setting of the upper side of Easter Island may be a bit weak from a visual perspective, but this is made up for by entertaining characters and some more intricate puzzles than we've been accustomed to so far. A shame, then, that we can't tell you if that one's going to become a recurrence in itself, because we'd certainly like to be able to. «

[below] "Four score and seven sammiches ago..."



Some surprisingly intricate puzzles to solve

Graphically lazy in places

**HYPER
VERDICT**

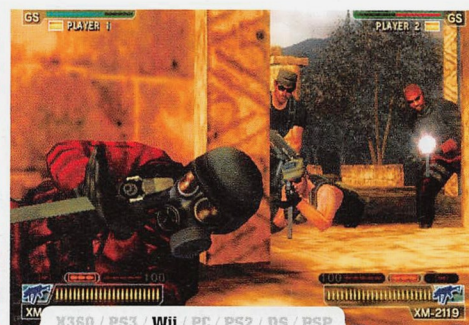
All signs pointing to a season more consistent than the first.

VISUALS
80

SOUND
85

GAMEPLAY
85

83



MX Vs ATV Untamed

MX Vs ATV: Untamed may feature numerous game modes and options but one thing the game is lacking is any real sense of excitement.

Sure, the game features a good sense of speed and some pleasantly arcadey handling and moon physics but when it comes down to actually racing the game proves to be quite a bore, requiring far more time investment than would be normally expected of an MX game. Entering a competition series, for example, can see the player having to run the same race three times: one for starting position and twice for actual placement. Considering that a single lap can take around two and a half minutes and you have to complete three laps per race that makes for a lot of time spent on a single event. If the races themselves were fun the time wouldn't be a problem but the races simply drag on rather than keep the player invested. Amusingly, one of the most enjoyable aspects of the game is the pre-race load screen, which allows players to tool around on whatever vehicle they have entered in the next event and perform stunts in a locked-box stunt arena.

YURI SPADEFACE

category: **Racing**
players: **1-12**
developer: **Rainbow Studios**
publisher: **THQ**
price: **\$99.95**
rating: **PG**
available: **March 13**

ATV Offroad Fury 4

Another day, another ATV game. After playing MX Vs ATV: Untamed, ATV Offroad Fury 4 comes across as a breath of fresh air, as it does a lot of things right — well, at least a lot more things than MX vs ATV anyway. Although a generation behind this month's other ATV game, Offroad Fury 4 equals the more powerful game in terms of handling, track design and content, a fact that is even more surprising considering that Offroad Fury 4 is over a year old, having been released in the US in late 2006.

Despite what the name may tell you, ATV Offroad Fury 4 features more than ATVs; players will also spend their time racing around in MX bikes, trophy trucks and buggies. The game features a wealth of events, including supercross, rallycross, hugely entertaining point-to-point races, circuit races and freestyle events. ATV Offroad Fury 4 features an all new "story" mode that casts players as, who would have guessed, an upcoming racer looking to make a name for themselves. The story mode is little more than a series of terrible cutscenes with even worse voice acting tying together a series of events. Bad as the story mode presentation may be, it does do a good job of tying events together in a nice and varied way. ATV4 may not be for everyone, but if you're looking for some fairly cheap offroad racing thrills, you could do much worse.

DIRK WATCH

category: **Racing**
players: **1-8**
developer: **Climax**
publisher: **Sony**
price: **\$79.95**
rating: **G**
available: **March 27**

Ghost Squad

Ghost Squad looks a generation behind and plays like it's a generation behind but perhaps that's the reason why Ghost Squad is such a blast (no pun intended) — at least for short bursts (again, no pun intended).

To put it very plainly, Ghost Squad is an old-school light-gun shooter that sees players taking the role of a member of Ghost Squad, a super secretive military unit that leaves no trace of their passing — aside from scores of bullet riddled bodies that is.

The game takes place over three rather short levels, each designed for maximum replayability. At various times throughout each level, players are given a choice about the way they wish to proceed. For example, a player might be asked whether they want to flash-bang a building and take out the terrorists in side or take a more stealthy approach. This branching structure progressively opens up more and more options, allowing each of the three levels to be played numerous times before all options are exhausted. Playing through the levels multiple times also unlocks extra features such as alternate costumes, extra weapons, multiplayer modes, and even the ability to transform terrorists into bikini girls wielding dolphin water pistols and bananas.

It's all very silly and adds almost nothing new to the light-gun genre, only occasionally branching out to brief hand-to hand or sniping missions, but that doesn't stop Ghost Squad from being quite an engaging game, albeit a rather overpriced one.

VAN HAMMERSLEY

category: **Light-gun**
players: **1-4**
developer: **Sega AM2**
publisher: **Sega**
price: **\$79.95**
rating: **M**
available: **Now**

HYPER VERDICT

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY	
78	80	80	65



HYPER VERDICT

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY	
76	79	80	78



HYPER VERDICT

VISUALS	SOUND	GAMEPLAY	
75	70	70	65





Weird, Weirder, Weirdest

The Strangest Videogames In Teapot

Believe it or not, there's more to gaming than shooting Nazi soldiers or taking your NBA team through to the playoffs. There's fighting psychic midgets, chasing crows through space, and having a feel around some plastic buttocks.

Not all games are content to go through the motions. The ones that make you go "who", "huh" and "wha?" leave a far greater impression than *Cookie Cutter Sequel 8*, and over the next four pages we're acknowledging some of the wackiest ideas ever committed to pixels. So please, enjoy, but watch out for the guy who sneaks up on you to give you a hamburger.

>> DARREN WELLS



INCREDIBLE CRISIS

PlayStation – 2000

It's Basically:

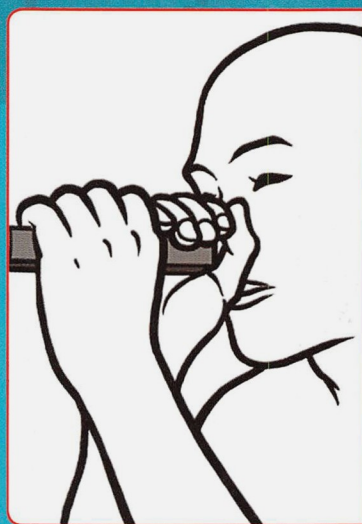
A day where everything goes wrong

Want More?

Life is never easy in Japan. In between nuclear bombs and giant lizards, there are the perils of everyday life to overcome... like organising a birthday party at the last minute. That's Incredible Crisis.

Over a series of cel-shaded mini-games, four family members must frantically pull together to celebrate their grandmother Haruko's special day. Trouble is, it's not that simple. Taneo, the father, must contend with falling elevators and giant rolling boulders, mother Etsuko faces masked terrorists, and the children – Ririka and Tsuyoshi – have an alien invasion to deal with. In between all that there's off-course ambulance stretchers, dancing sessions, and the mammoth task of adding up the cost of the groceries.

Okay, so it may not be entirely based on everyday life – unless you get chased by Indiana Jones-style boulders on a daily basis – but it's nonetheless one heck of a head-scratching title. The fate of the universe is trivial when a simple office worker must be the best robot dancer on his floor.



WARIOWARE: SMOOTH MOVES

Wii – 2007

It's Basically:

A collection of weird and wacky party games

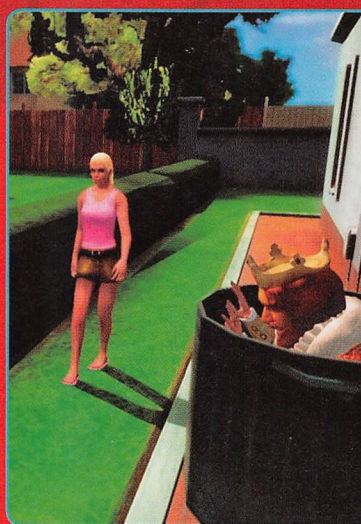
Want More?

You're at a party with your mates enjoying a refreshing glass of beer apple cider. Naturally, the situation calls for you to look like an elephant, answer a pretend telephone, and pick a polygonal nose. Things would be positively boring without WarioWare: Smooth Moves.

Most of the games only last for a few seconds, but all of them put the Wii's controller to a wide range of uses. One moment you're holding it horizontally with both hands, plunging it up and down to blow up a balloon; the next you're holding your palm flat and balancing it vertically like a broom. You hold it to your hip and twirl and imaginary hula hoop, you swing it like a sword to cut down attacking ninjas, and you point it like a stick to shave some guy's facial hair.

Smooth Moves delves right back into Nintendo's history and uses visual elements from Brain Training, Nintendogs, The Legend of Zelda, and even the original Super Mario Bros. in all of its pixelated glory. In between all that it wings it with flat polygons, children's paintings, cardboard cutouts, deliberately distorted drawings, and countless other techniques.

It may be bizarre, but it's perhaps the only game that has taken a good long look at the Wiimote and put it to more uses than a pretend lightsaber. Plus it lets you whack a guy on the back, guide people into toilets, spray flies, and trim someone's nails.



SNEAK KING

X360 – 2006

It's Basically:

Creeping up on people and giving them fast food

Want More?

Equal parts weird and creepy, and raising eyebrows for more than just its obvious product placement element, Sneak King met overwhelming demand and combined hamburgers with stealth gameplay.

As the face of the US fast food chain Burger King, players skulk around various environments to deliver tasty fast food dishes to well-off westerners on the verge of starvation. That's right – it's not enough to merely advertise your establishment; you must sneak up on unsuspecting civilians and accost them with your product. Points are awarded based on the method of attack/delivery – the more grandiose your technique, the more points you'll net. Meaning you'll need to factor in how close you are to the person before delivering their food, and whether you give it to them stationary or while sneaking quietly behind them.

What a concept. Imagine if it happened in real life. You're walking home from the shops minding your own business, when suddenly, from the bushes, a creepy guy wearing a cape, a cardboard crown and a plastic mask leaps out in front of you and shrieks "BOOSURPRISEHAVETHISDELICIOUSWHOPPERBURGERISN'TTHATGREATANDDELICIOUS?!?!?" Yet strangely the game has a cult fan base, proving the most popular choice from the three Burger King-themed games that US customers could purchase with their value meal.



EARTHWORM JIM

SNES, Mega Drive – 1994

It's Basically:

A worm in a suit launching cows and shooting space cows

Want More?

You want the posterworm of random videogames? Look no further.

Later turned into a TV series, Earthworm Jim was a game where words like "rational thought" and "logic" were just places to hang your multicoloured coat made from the skin of anemic doves. We're talking random. We're talking a game that has you catapulting a cow into space by dropping a refrigerator on a log. And that happens the first five minutes.

Helmed by David Perry – and considered by this author to be his swan song – the game was a riotous pastiche of Hanna Barbera and Warner Bros. cartoons, drunken Fridays down the pub, good ol' fashioned chase music, and references to other popular videogames and their structures. Take the Mortal Kombat-style face-off between Jim and his foe, Bob the Goldfish. The scene is set for an epic boss battle, but instead convention is turned on its head and the battle is won simply by knocking over Bob's fishbowl.

In true videogame tradition, Jim's mission was to rescue a damsel in distress, the kidnapped Princess What's-Her-Name. After racing through asteroid belts and beating a ball of snot in a bungee jumping contest, he sees his goal in sight. But before our wormy hero can get close enough to plant his heroic kiss, the cow he launched at the start of the game squashes her flat. Hey, at least she wasn't in another castle.



VIB RIBBON

PlayStation – 1999

It's Basically:

A dancing wireframe rabbit

Want More?

Graphics don't matter, and here's the proof. Vib Ribbon clocks in with a paltry two colours – black and white – and sports only the barest of half-arsed wireframe models for its characters and levels. But the weirdness isn't found in the visuals, it's found in the concept.

This is a game that generates its levels from music. The game's own tunes form the basis for the sidescrolling platform action that Mr Ribbon will face, with each drum beat and guitar wail generating a different obstacle. But a music-based game is only as good as its track listing, right? Vib Ribbon packed an extra surprise.

Since the game was stored in the PlayStation's RAM, you were free to take the game disc out and insert your own music CD, whereby the game would generate new levels from your selection. This meant that game difficulty could be controlled by the type of music: Your mum's Enya CD would make for a walk in the park, but put in a fast-paced techno track and prepare for absolute punishment.

Not surprisingly, this was another game to come from the mind of Masaya Matsuura, creator of PaRappa the Rapper. That man sure loves his music.



GITAROO MAN

PS2 – 2001

It's Basically:

Rocking foes into submission

Want More?

Before Guitar Hero made everyone feel like a rock star, Gitarro Man made them feel like a superhero armed with the power of sheer rock. And it's all thanks to a talking dog.

Plucky U-1 (that's the main character) finds out from his pet pooch that he's far from a bumbling dweeb – he's the savour of Planet Gitarro. Armed with a special guitar and one heck of a battle suit (think TRON meets more TRON), he must defeat his foes by rocking them into submission. Foes like a robot UFO and a devil wearing a black nappy.

It's a rhythm-based game, played by holding the analog stick in the direction of a coloured stream and pressing the right button, set to some catchy J-Pop/Rock beats. But really, it had us at "talking dog".



GOD HAND

PS2 – 2006

It's Basically:

A guy with an awesome arm doing awesome stuff. Awesomely.

Want More?

Okay, so it features an ape in a wrestler's outfit, it lets you bet on Chihuahua races, and you can fight skinny girls dressed in red leather. What the hell sort of game is God Hand?

There are many ways to describe it. It's a third-person action game, for a start. It's also a game that you'll either love or hate. There's no middle ground here, with God Hand being a pastiche of bad clichés and time-worn game elements stick-taped together in a Frankenstein mish-mash. Whether it works or not will depend on you, but chances are you'll like it more if you have a thing for midgets dressed like Power Rangers (they'll appear as mini-bosses).

Let's see, what else is there? Elvis Presley gets more than a few mentions, you can destroy a car similar to the task in Street Fighter II, and there's a word-for-word recital of a joke from Chappelle's Show. Oh, and that ape we mentioned earlier? You can punch it in the balls. Commence exclamations of "WTF?"... now.



ELITE BEAT AGENTS

DS – 2006

It's Basically:

Government-funded dancers saving the world

Want More?

"Put your hands up in the air, and wave them around like you just don't care. THAT'S AN ORDER, SOLDIER!"

A remake/translation of Osu! Tatakae! Ouendan, Elite Beat Agents is a strange one indeed. You're the choreographer of a team of government agents who help out people in need by dancing in front of them. Dancing leads to happiness, happiness leads to increased motivation, increased motivation leads to them overcoming the problem by themselves, and I should stop before I continue talking like Yoda playing Scrabble.

It's yet another rhythm game in our list, played by tapping targets on the DS touchpad in time with the music. It's all set to some wacky manga-style visuals and some bizarre mini-stories, such as the baseball player who needs to fight a fire-breathing golem. In a theme park. At least it all ends well, with every character who received Elite Beat Agent help banding together to ward off an invasion of aliens who hate music.

The Village People were right. You can't stop the music. Elite Beat Agents are GOOOOOO!!!





BOONG-GA BOONG-GA

Arcade – 2000

It's Basically:

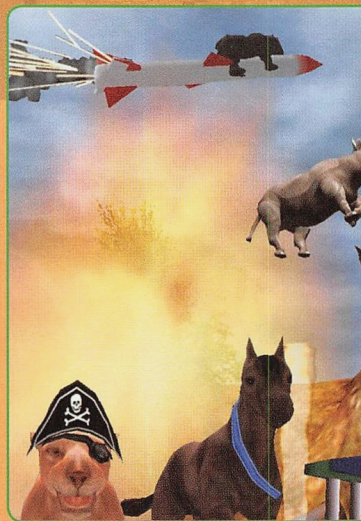
Sticking your finger up an anus

Want More?

No, we're not joking. This game was actually invented by someone who thought there might be a market for kancho arcade games. And just so we're absolutely clear, "kancho" means "anal probing".

Unlike those bland 'n' boring games that give you a light gun or a steering wheel, Boong-Ga Boong-Ga presents you with an oversized plastic hand, its index finger pointing out. In front is a pair of plastic buttocks and, as one would expect, between each cheek is a suitably placed orifice. The game allows you to select a victim—charming choices such as "gangster", "prostitute" and "child molester" are on offer—and, uhh, you can work out what happens next. The player's virility is ranked high if they perform well at the game, with those who rank the highest rewarded with a little trophy: a small plastic poo.

Apparently the game was well-received at the 2000 Tokyo Game Show and was designed exclusively for Japanese audiences, but hey, let's see it over here. If gaming is all about bringing new experiences to new audiences, then surely letting people stick their finger up someone's butt is a good thing. Right?



THE ZOO RACE

PC – 2007

It's Basically:

Glitchy animal racing as only the Bible knows how

Want More?

Hyper disclaimer: We're not anti-religious and we embrace all beliefs equally (except for the crazy ones). In that light we're not declaring The Zoo Race a weird game for its religious ties... we're declaring it weird for a bunch of other reasons.

Appropriate for ages 9-99 (according to its website), the game is touted as "the FUN game that the big game companies would not ever make" (according to its website) but various YouTube clips present it as an amateurish, bug-riddled mess (according to us).

There's no way to sum it up without sounding loony, so here goes. Some guy reading Noah's Ark gets ridiculed by a woman. Then she turns into a horse and he turns into a rhino. Then they appear on a track with other animals. Then they run around it. Then they swim in some water. Then they get fired out of cannons. Then they appear on a dancefloor where they get down and get funky. I do wish I was making at least one of those sentences up, but they're all legitimate moments from the game.

Seemingly produced on a budget comparable to the price of a Big Mac, it features some truly woeful animations, pathetic voice acting and a cavalcade of awkward pauses that you can imagine are the programmers exchanging worried glances and asking themselves "What am I DOING?" Which is what we imagine those playing it are asking, too.



ONSEI KANJOU SOKUTEIKI: KOKORO SCAN

DS – 2007

It's Basically:

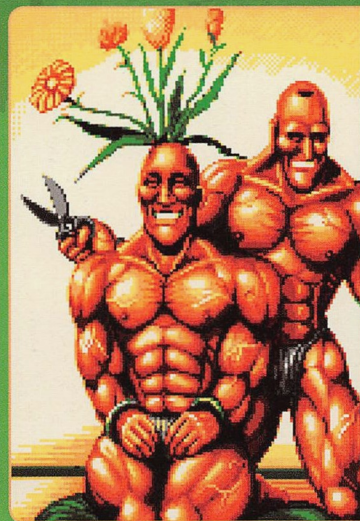
Actually, we have no idea

Want More?

We're serious. We're not entirely sure what this game is really about. Our best guess places it as a tool that analyses your speech patterns and tells you what mood you're in, sort of like an electronic mood ring. But if you need a machine to tell how you're feeling, we're guessing the advertising campaign will make sense to you and only you.

YouTube is your friend on this one. Look for the 14-second commercial featuring two girls reciting a phrase to the DS and laughing over the number it spits back at them, or look for the SIX MINUTE COMMERCIAL that features people's faces concealed by rainbow hearts, a mustachioed cartoon man covering his special place, and a nipple that changes into a dancing bear. Who then rides a bike on its front wheel. And gets chased by a dog. Who is chased by a Krishna look-alike on a cloud.

But hey, why not. Japanese gamers will soon be getting a DS game that tells them how to dress themselves properly. And you think we're kidding.



CHO ANIKI

TurboGrafix – 1992

It's Basically:

Gay dinner theatre, complete with lasers and protein.

Want More?

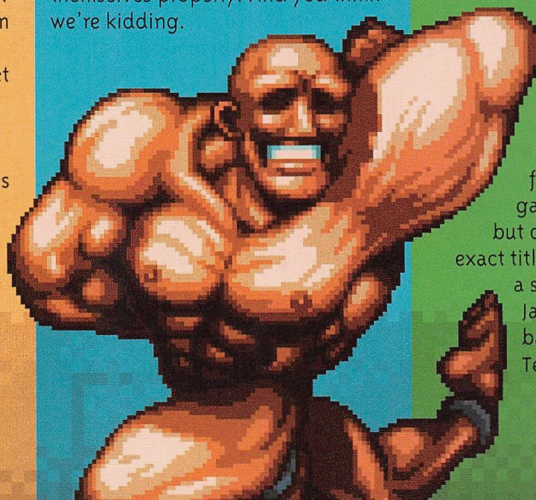
If a gun is a phallic symbol, then this Japanese shoot 'em up is one big steaming ball of sweaty man sex.

Created in 1992 and spawning sequels across the SNES, PlayStation and PS2, Cho Aniki separates itself from the rest of the shmup pack in one very distinct way: through its abundant use of muscley near-naked men. The two player characters sport only the skimpiest of speedos and shoot lasers from a hole in their heads, and as the series forges on, things get weirder, titles get longer, and the beefcake quota goes through the roof.

Ai Cho Aniki, the sequel, sees the main characters from the first game falling in love and eloping. Cho Aniki Bakuretsu Ranto Hen has a naked man riding in a half-moon and a battleship ferrying three similarly naked guys. Cho Aniki: Kyo kyoku Muteki Ginga Saikyo Otoko features digitised graphics, meaning naked man boss with a metallic codpiece that produces a penis

shaped like another naked man really IS an actual naked man wearing a metallic codpiece.

Interesting sidenote: While compiling this feature we knew of the game's basic concept, but couldn't remember the exact title. We hit up Google with a search string of "Naked Japanese shooter" and bang, we got Cho Aniki. Telling, no?



OF SUPERHUMAN BONDAGE: THE TRAGIC TALE OF

SUPERMAN

DEVELOPER: TITUS ■ NINTENDO 64 ■ 1999 ■ REVIEWED IN HYPER #71: 10%

The Nintendo 64 was a console of many benchmarks, by which the rest of the industry has been judged ever since. Every single 3-D platformer since Super Mario 64 has been compared to it. Goldeneye and Perfect Dark were heralded as the way to handle FPS on a console for a long time, and Ocarina of Time still holds the record for the best-reviewed game ever released. There's another benchmark set by the N64 that is generally left out from console retrospectives, though, a game sometimes forgotten among the lovingly written odes to the Rare/Nintendo relationship and Mario Kart 64 multiplayer. The Nintendo 64 also holds the benchmark by which all other bad games are

judged, the first title that comes to a lot of minds when asked to name the worst game ever released—Superman. A game so atrocious, so completely lacking in quality, it's taken on a historical importance on par with 'Plan 9 From Outer Space'. But, like Ed Wood's film, beneath the mountain upon mountain of garbage, there was a heart. A weak, sickly heart, perhaps, pumping tar through the game's sickly body rather than the sweet blood that fuels the best of games, but a heart nonetheless. Unfortunately, though, every other organ failed in the proverbial Superman body.

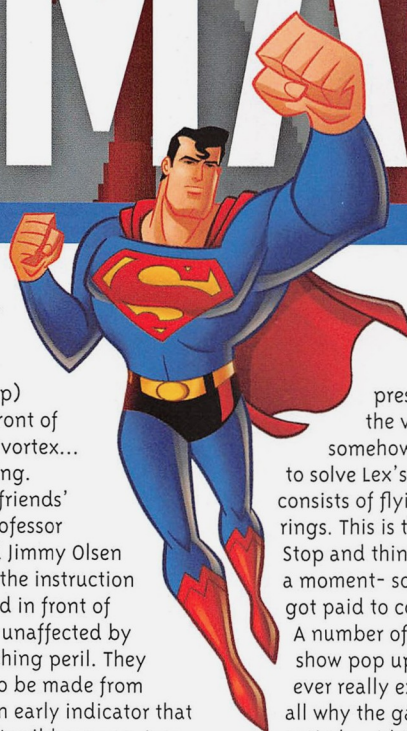
DOES WHATEVER A SUPER CAN

The game, loosely based on the animated television series, opens by

zooming in on Lex Luthor (complete with awful 64-bit pop-up) standing in front of some kind of vortex... machine... thing. Superman's 'friends' (Lois Lane, Professor Hamilton and Jimmy Olsen according to the instruction manual) stand in front of it, seemingly unaffected by their approaching peril. They also appear to be made from cardboard, an early indicator that something is terribly wrong. Lex warns Supes that he'll "never find his friends in this virtual world", and they get sucked into the

vortex. At this point Superman appears on screen, presumably inside the virtual world

somehow, and is goaded to solve Lex's 'maze', which consists of flying through some rings. This is the game's plot. Stop and think about that for a moment—someone actually got paid to come up with that. A number of villains from the show pop up, but nothing is ever really explained, least of all why the game is happening entirely within this poorly constructed 'virtual world'. To be fair, it does keep in line with the movie Superman 2's plot (wherein



LEXCOF

64

» JAMES O'CONNOR

reversing the earth's rotation also rewinds time). At this point the player, their face already slightly wet from the tears of wasted funds, come to grips with the game's horrific controls and abysmal graphics as they fumble their way through Lex's dastardly maze.

Superman's ring-maze is one of gaming's most infamous moments. There aren't a lot of games this immediately honest about just how awful they are. Often a game will endeavor to initially hide its inadequacies behind high production values, offer hope that things will get better, or even focus on making an opening that is actually worth playing. Superman's infamy is thanks largely to the fact that every single person who played

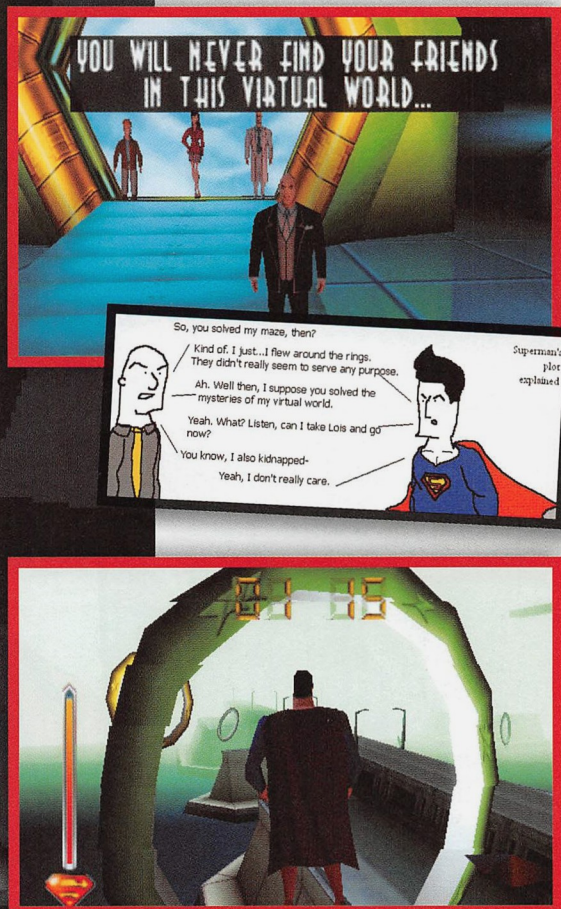
knew that it was awful, that there was no redemption, and that their soul would never know happiness ever again. What most players didn't realise is that by switching the difficulty to 'easy' the rings disappear and Superman simply needs to follow an arrow, which was much better but still didn't excuse the controls. The graphics were phenomenally, mind-blowingly awful. Titus tried to pass the fog that enveloped the entire game off as a special Kryptonite fog Luthor himself had employed to vanquish Superman, and in this sense it was a success since the player was more likely to switch off their console than continue towards the final showdown. If the rings didn't get you, the following ten minutes of

gameplay would. Often Superman had severe trouble with landing from a flight, and the only way to stop him was to smack him into a wall. Enemies tended to not be able to attack you if you stood too close to them, and combat mostly came

THE PREVIOUS CHAMPION

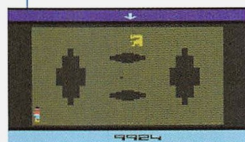
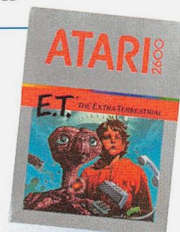
No, we haven't forgotten E.T., the other Worst Game Ever. Ultimately, though, Superman is the worse game. The Atari 2600 simply didn't have the processing power to make a game this bad - a 2600 cartridge could only hold about 20ml of virgin blood, while an N64 cartridge held about 100ml. That, and nobody actually played E.T. (this is a game infamous for the apocryphal

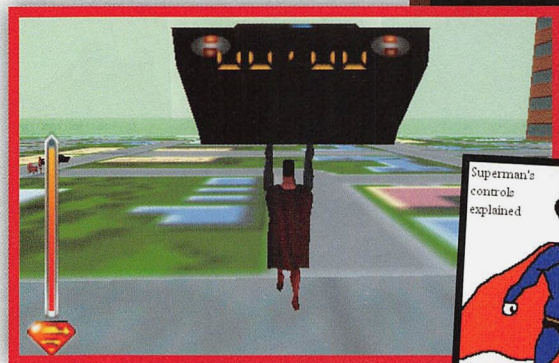
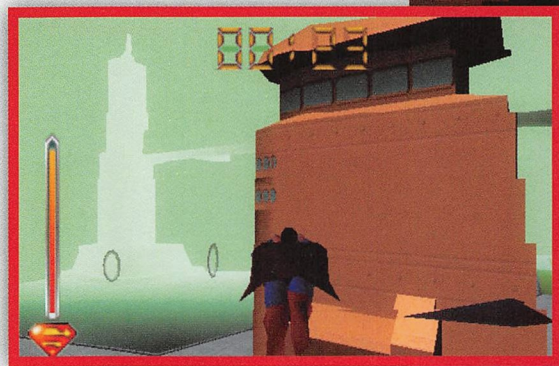
story about having truckloads of copies buried in the desert), while plenty of people got their hands on Superman. E.T. was an awful game, but ultimately Superman's awfulness is more relevant to the modern gamer. Hell, visually Superman is genuinely less appealing than E.T. was.



[above] Superman battles giant kryptonite fruit loops - or something

down to mashing a single button. The animation was incredibly poorly done - for example the super speed power up animation was the same as the walking animation, just sped up. To 'protect' cars in certain missions you simply picked them up and threw them. Most gamers were about done when, five minutes in, they were asked to stop tornados using Ice Breath. The rest of the game is even worse. Clipping issues aplenty, horrible combat, unexciting objectives, superpowers that were no fun to use and the constant, soul-crushing ring challenges caused game journalists worldwide enormous despair as they struggled to finish the game and report upon it. The highest review score it received was from Hyper's sister mag N64 Gamer, a 6/10 - which was, let's be honest, an insane oversight. There was »





[above] Apparently throwing cars from a great height protects them from harm

» no fun to be derived from this game. Even the glitches weren't funny, just deeply annoying- clipping was so prevalent that many gamers mistook it as an x-ray vision ability, until they walked right through a wall and got stuck in the infinite blackness. Superman was the vast, haunted graveyard where quality went to die.

EVEN FOG HAS A SILVER LINING

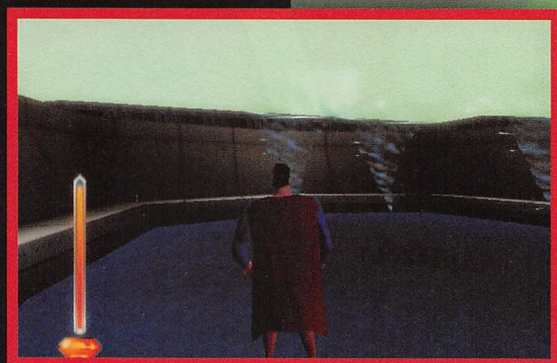
As easy as it is to pick apart a game like this, it's also important to consider that the team behind it did actually have a number of good ideas. Essentially, we can't say that Titus set out to make a bad game, just because of the sheer potential on display. Given another, say, twelve years in development, Superman could have been a masterpiece. As mentioned before, switching the game to Easy did away with the ring maze, allowing the player to simply get to grips with flying Superman around. No matter how poorly he controlled, there was a lot of initial excitement over the prospect of controlling a superhero in a free-roaming style like this. Cut to 2004, and the videogame adaptation of Spider Man 2 gives us a look at the potential Superman hinted at - the fun of simply controlling someone with superhero powers, while the Grand Theft Auto games have made 3-D exploration of large, open spaces the Next Big Thing. Likewise, Hulk: Ultimate Destruction's use of super-strength in a 3-D environment is reminiscent of Superman's ability to pick up cars, although Hulk did it much, much better, and Crackdown

has shown us the current-gen advantages of giving your gaming protagonist superpowers. There was also a fair bit of potential to Superman's arsenal of special moves, even if they were poorly utilized. Heat vision, ice breath, and super speed are all totally awesome abilities for a videogame character, even if they were severely underdeveloped in the game. Oh, and the audio almost approached the dizzy heights of 'below average' at times. Lex Luthor's evil laugh, in particular, was pretty amusing.

Similarly, the game's multiplayer mode, although still awful, displayed a certain level of effort and thought that can't be overlooked. Instead

of simply using their single-player gameplay engine, Titus decided to go with a Descent/Forsaken clone instead, where players piloted flying ships in both battle and race modes. The battle mode involved shooting at your opponents, while race mode involved one player dropping rings that the other had to fly through.

Sadly, though, it still really, really sucked- there was very little gameplay variety in the shooting, and the race mode was a baffling assault on common sense. Although the game seemed to conspire to actively warn your friends of your awful taste, and what on earth this actually had to do with Superman



SUPERMAN IS A BASTARD

Perhaps Superman's awful game was merely a continuation of his general bastard attitude. Check out www.superdickery.com, featuring a collection of Superman covers that make it abundantly clear that Superman hates every last person on earth except himself. After seeing Superman mocking his own son, punishing his girlfriend for no reason, and exploiting his amazing powers for personal gain at enormous expense to the entire world, it becomes easy to imagine Superman himself, sitting atop a mountain of money, smoking a cigar and laughing at everyone scarred by his game.



"SUPERMAN IS A BENCHMARK THAT WE ALL HOPE WE WILL NEVER SEE SURPASSED"

was never actually explained, the multiplayer mode could be seen as an unspoken admittance on Titus' part that the regular fighting engine simply wasn't going to work in multiplayer. This is something a lot of developers flat-out don't realise; at the time, Donkey Kong 64 suffered from a terrible multiplayer experience, while even today games like The Darkness don't much tailor their engines for multiplayer purposes. Yes, it was an epic failure, but it also had a somewhat smooth frame-rate and was, at least, a different approach (even if it was a rip-off of some much better games).

SUPERBAD

Looking at other Superman game releases, it could be argued that

Superman was doomed to fail from the beginning. Although this is the absolute bottom of the barrel, there has never really been a good Superman game. While it's probably fair enough that earlier games failed to capture the spirit of Superman (not just because of the old technology, licensed games in general have come a long way), there's no real excuse for more recent efforts. Last generation, Superman: Shadow of Apokolips on the PS2 and Gamecube scraped in average reviews and was promptly forgotten about, while the Xbox's Superman: The Man of Steel was a massive failure. More recently, the videogame adaptation of Superman Returns disappointed, with even the Xbox 360 version failing to capitalize

on the franchise. Despite the huge potential for Superman games, it feels as though developers since 1999 haven't put in the effort they could have. Just as every James Bond game is compared to Goldeneye, so has every Superman game suffered from the series' perverted 64-bit uncle. The closest we've gotten to a good Superman game is Justice League Heroes, a PS2/XBox game that off-set the Superman curse slightly through the appearances of Batman, Green Lantern, The Flash and others, which turned out decent enough but paled in comparison to Marvel Ultimate Alliance, released at the same time.

Superman is the quintessential bad game. Slipping onto shelves before most of the major videogame magazines could give their two

cents (and 2 percents in a few cases), it sold very well initially, charting fairly high, and broke a lot of hearts. For those who were lucky enough to not play it, for the sake of appreciation, it's important to at least know about it. Every time you find a niggle in a modern supergame, think back to this wretched title. Remember it for its glitches, its broken controls, its horrific level designs and combat engine. Superman is a benchmark that we all hope we will never see surpassed, a monument to the collapsed dreams of men and the potential catastrophe that can come from even the best plans and ideas—one that, ultimately, makes us all the more thankful for the games that get it right. «

A HISTORY OF FAILURE

Titus, the developers of the game, eventually closed their doors in 2004 due to immense financial pressures. Their back catalogue was mostly tripe, with one exception - Incredible Crisis, a Playstation game that actually reviewed quite well. A mini-game collection focused on a family organizing their grandmother's birthday party, it could be seen as an early predecessor to games like Wario Ware. On the Nintendo 64, despite generally poor reviews, 'Roadsters' and 'Xena Warrior Princess: The Talisman of Fate' garnered a few positive reactions from gamers. For the most part, though, especially after Superman 64, Titus was synonymous with poison. Before they went under, Titus was working on 'Sgt Cruise', an old-school action game that involved a man going on a quest to retrieve his stolen clothes. It looked like a truly awful game, but fortunately now we'll never know just how bad the end product would have been.





MAIL HYPER!

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HYPER: LIKE A HAIRCUT

I've read it countless times. Long time reader, first time writer. It never gets old.

I personally am not a long-time reader (nor writer for that matter). I am in fact an all-time reader; having read EVERY SINGLE ISSUE since inception. I have been awarded the title and associated spoils of Letter of The Month (under the guise of Professor Chocolate), as well as recently being one of your incredibly fortunate Assassin's Creed contest winners. I say this not to gloat (although with the Assassin's Creed faceplate now in my possession, I'm in prime position to), but simply to catalogue my history with Hyper, and extend a thank you, an overly firm (and slightly sweaty) handshake, and a

that look! I have instead attached a plethora of video game themed images I myself toiled. Well, plethora is an overstatement really. It's two, in actuality. I'm loathed to label them art, but the moniker 'fan-art' seems suitably ambiguous, perhaps even blue-collar. While they're not exactly marvelous examples of 3D modelling at it's best, pixel-art composed of 3D primitives as a concept is something I've seen very little of, although I can't say I've really looked.

You are more than welcome to post these images in your fine publication, assuming they are deemed worthy; and with people like Ryan Barlin running around I wouldn't be at all suprised if they weren't. God how I hate people with talent.

Regardless, thank you again for the good times, and the loot.

Oh shit, I didn't write anything about games! Er, I've owned Bioshock for months, but never got past the intro credits (zzzzz) - the new Zelda was over-rated - I'm thinking of hitting the crack pipe, just so I can stop playing Portal - If my Dreamcast hadn't shit itself I'd probably still be shifting crates in Shenmue - Am I the only person who thinks Smash Bros sucked? - The best game ever made was Super Mario Bros 3...how's that?

Keep on truckin'

Ted Ward

You're a strange customer, Ted Ward, but you've definitely been with Hyper for the long haul, and

Am I the only person who thinks Smash Bros sucked?

marginally inappropriate toothy smile and thumbs-up.

I couldn't tell you who the editor of Hyper was four years ago. In fact, I couldn't tell you who it is now. That's not the kind of fan I am. Hyper is simply a necessary part of my monthly ritual, like a haircut, only more satisfying (and marginally less itchy).

The reason for this email was simple. I wanted to give something back. No, not the faceplate...and don't give me

for that we salute you. We were tempted to go with the timeless "pics or it didn't happen" regarding your EVERY SINGLE ISSUE claim, but we'll give you the benefit of the doubt in light of your awesome fan art. It's like the polygons of the future met the pixels of the past and made hot, sweaty, digital love. While in a time machine. We like your fan art babies, and we look forward to seeing subsequent fruits burst forth from your gaming loins.

(Are you creeped out yet? Because we sure are.)

To address your pot-stirring games discussion in order: You're missing out if you ditch Bioshock just because the introduction bores you. Which

Zelda game are you referring to - we quite liked all the latest ones, save for Link's Crossbow Training. We've started attending



Feedback

Zeph101: Just finished the Bioshock peice and it makes me wish that all developers put as much dedication into their games. Though its probably a good thing it wasn't perfect because then there'd be no reason to play any other game ever again, except Bioshock 2.

UC1: How dare you guys not validate my opinion of DMC4??? Very angry, GRRRRRRRRRR!!!!

Zeph101: I want to know who Christopher Taylor is. If you read these Threads or use them yourself, I'd like to congratulate you for doing such a deep article in a gamer mag. That fifteen minutes peice really blew me away. Its articles like these that add to the many reasons on why I chose Hyper to get my gaming news and reviews. Bravo.

UKG: My copy arrived today and after having a quick flick through it looks Jam packed with substance this month bravo. Also liked the art direction throughout should give me a good read over the next couple of days.

Jay: Props to Jickle, and the mag looks pretty good. One question: was the text for the Soul Calibur 4 preview written well before the mag went to bed? Because although there is a picture and caption referencing Yoda and Vader's inclusion in the game the text makes no mention of it. I mean I realise the text is the first thing that gets done, I'm just wondering because it seems vaguely incongruous.

the_watchers_eye:

Just read the Tim Schafer interview, and I must say, as a huge fan of both metal and Psychonauts, Brutal Legend is sounding like the best thing ever.

Portalholics Anonymous in order to curb our addiction, but we always start to cry whenever cake is served for morning tea. We're still trying to get past the Quick Time Events in Shenmue. Yes, you probably are. The best game ever made was Tetris... oh, now we've started some pot-stirring of our own.

MEN WITH GUNS

I'm not much of a gamer. If anything, I'm what every gamer aspires not to be. I'm the person who stopped playing Metal Gear Solid after an hour because I was too stressed out about having my character being detected by the men with guns. In fact, I spent most of my time hiding behind crates and in lockers. My winning tactic in Wii Sports is to wave my arms frantically until someone gets knocked out so that I win by default (or in most cases, come second last). It took me too long to figure out what I was meant to do in Portal, and when I finally got it, I kept running into the wrong portals and into walls. The truth is I am hopeless when it comes to games (except Sim Town and Theme Hospital - I am very, very good at those).

Despite all of this, I like your magazine. I love your wit and humour, and I like that you write about video games in a way that everyone, even the demented like myself, can understand what's going on and appreciate what the gaming world has to offer. In short, I appreciate your existence and hope that you will continue to exist for many years to come.

Much love and Weighted Companion Cubes,
Tracey. L

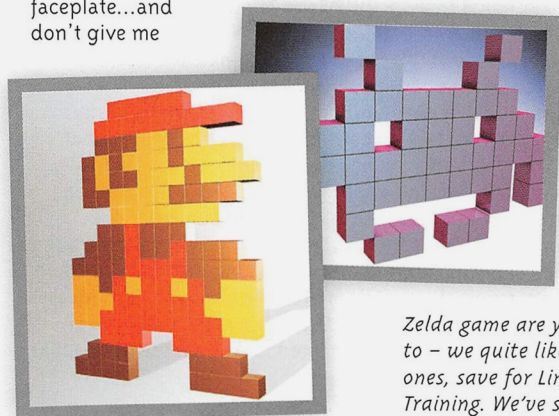
Hey, that's our Wii Sports tactic too. Have you been looking at our notes?

We're glad that you enjoy Hyper despite your self-confessed hopelessness with games, and it's great that you're still keen on checking out the latest titles rather than throwing in the digital towel. The fact that you've written in means that we're achieving our goal to be much more than just a magazine aimed at gamers.

We hope that those with even a passing interest in videogames, those who want to be kept in the loop to discuss games with others, and those who just enjoy a fun and entertaining read will all find something in Hyper. We're glad to have you part of the Hyper community, Tracey!

IT'S WAR!

I'm probably just one of many people to write in about this issue but here goes anyway: Electronic Arts' decision to remove multi-player from



the Aus release of Medal of Honor: Heroes 2 is complete and utter BS!

Although they've declined to comment on why they removed this aspect of the game, it seems obvious to me that it was simply because EA didn't want to pay for servers for such a small user base, despite the fact that online 32-player multi was A) advertised on EA's website and B) is the only reason people wanted the game in the first place. I hope EA enjoys responding to all the complaints lodged with the Office of Fair Trading....

Nintendo Australia is also culpable for this fiasco: if their company is so poorly structured that they have no idea what the hell is happening with games released for their own consoles, then someone over there needs to be fixed. (This is what happens when a videogaming company is run by an octogenarian woman...)

We Aussies constantly get screwed by games companies and Nintendo are the worst offenders. We pay far more for our consoles and games than our American counterparts do, we are forced to wait months for games already released in the NTSC regions and then, to top it off, we are told, "Oh, BTW, everyone in the world can have multiplayer, except you." Well, frag you, EA and frag you, Nintendo Australia. I'm getting a WiiKey next week and I will be importing all my games. Except anything from EA, since I'll never buy another EA game again.

Regards,
RainbowSeven

P.S. EA, you may need to see a doctor, as you are clearly exhibiting symptoms of Kutaragi Syndrome. - You know: where you get so full of yourself that you think you can tell the consumer what they want, instead of the other way around....

Mark tyrrell

You're saying that the multiplayer aspect is "the only reason people wanted the game in the first place." You speak for the entire game-buying population of Australia with that statement - are you able to justify your claim? Or are you letting your own frustration froth over?

Having said that, we're by no means defending EA on this one. It's disheartening for an entire region to be deprived of an aspect that other gamers are able to enjoy, not to mention the apparent ease with which it was deleted from Australian shores. And while it's true that console and game prices are steeper here than most other regions, Nintendo is not the only culprit. Local games distributors mark up their products and games hardware is similarly more expensive, regardless of format.

Forum Talk

TOPIC: How many keys are on your keychain?

Mouldy: I currently have only two keys on my keyring: Car keys and my house key. My house key is blue, so I never really get confused which is which... Pretty cool.

I used to have a third - my old work key, however I had to give that back once I left.

So how many do you have?

Dorepoll: I have one for each of household's cars, 2 for doors in my house, and 1 for the predictable dungeon joke that'll be made later in this thread.

DemonicBen: About 537. You'd need a licence to buy my set of keys from a weaponry store they're that dangerous.

When I got the keys to my new rental, I didn't bother sorting them out. I've been carrying them all around with me for 6 months. The set even includes these two ancient keys which I have no idea what they f**k they're supposed to open. I'm half expecting to be digging around in the garden one weekend and stumble upon a ancient treasure chest full of pirate booty, or a trap door to a secret underground lair.

Kotche: I have a bottle opener on my keyring, thats all that matters.

immol8: 1 key for just about every house I've had a key for for the last 7 years. Hooray for unforced entry!

Also got a bottle opener, busted mini-maglite and an NRL Dragons...thingy.



Ahoy, just a quick re-submission of my picture because the Hyper logo was backward; and we can't have that now can we?, lol :)
Daniel Mitchell

Wilks plays Guitar Hero backwards just for kicks.

We think the EA situation typifies the mentality of other companies and developers when it comes to the Australian market. It's fine to single EA out and refuse to buy any more of its games, but what about the others who continue to overlook us Down Under types? It's time for a change across the board... now what corporation will be the first to lead the way?

NEWSFLASH: GAMES ARE FUN!

So I've been thinking lately about how video games fit into our society. The people who grew up playing games are getting progressively older. As many people who were born in the late 70s or early 80s will know, video games are more than entertainment or art or meaningless distractions. Video games are a part of us, something that we live and breathe and as a culture perhaps we underappreciate the contribution of video games to our society.

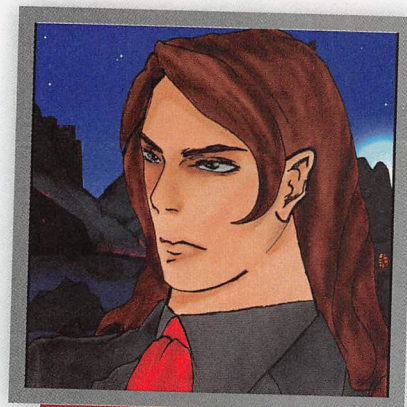
There are purposefully designed educational games, which is a good thing - and a smart move considering the majority of children these days will grow up with regular exposure to computers and new technologies. Then there are games that help you in some way. Maybe you're an insomniac - well Deus Ex will give you something to do. Maybe you're an isolated person with a disability who finds it hard to meet people, but enjoys the social aspects of World of Warcraft.

Games are not always meaningful, but some are not meant to be

Or perhaps you're in the hospital for whatever reason and can't do bugger all, bound to a bed for god knows how long; some portable Locooco action won't make you better, but it may bring a smile to your face and if it makes you forget your pain for even an hour or so, watching those little weirdo blobs yell "jooooiinn" then doesn't that make it worthwhile?

Games are not always meaningful or brilliant, but some are not meant to be - they are just for fun. But those games that resonate with us so strongly can go beyond our everyday experience. Our time is not spent 'playing' these games, but exploring fantastic worlds through the eyes of our chosen character, whether questing to save the world or just deciding where the next falling block needs to go; games empower us with a feeling of importance, allowing us to make decisions and live with the (often immediate) consequences.

No matter the reasons why we play



Seeing as you have been printing fan art again recently, i thought i'd may as well send you some of my drawings. Theres an awesome picture of Alucard from Castlevania as well as an entry i submitted for a segment on Late Night with Conan O'Brien for his Zip-Line idea (for anyone who watches the show). Unfortunately it wasn't shown on t.v. But if it gets in Hyper, i'll be just as pleased!

Anthony McKeown

Unfortunately there's no room for Conan, but at least Alucard got a look-in!

games, one thing is for sure- they are here to stay as fun entertainment, as cultural artifacts and no amount of opinionated high-brow snobbery about what is "art" can take away any of the magic or aesthetic design of a well made game.

Ponderously yours,
Australian Ninja

It seems obvious to say that games are fun, but we feel that in the face of other industry professionals applying review techniques that range from the provoking to the pretentious, it needs to be said.

Gaming is a great way to pass the time, and while it's fantastic to have a game offer a deep and meaningful take on all things deep and meaningful, we shouldn't expect all of them to do so. What's wrong with kicking back and blasting some zombie Nazi robots on rollerskates for half an hour? But there are those in the industry determined to apply all sorts of goatee-stroking analysis when it comes to games, just as is done with today's critiquing of movies and books. Whether this is a natural step or a shoe-horning of analytical techniques is still up for debate, but the fact remains that we need to remember why games were created in the first place: to entertain. In the words of The Joker, "Why so serious?"



LAND OF THE RISING FUN

Jonti Davies on games and life in Japan.



(main pic) Family Ski (above l to r) Family Jockey, Family Stadium, Family Trainer

Back in the mid-1980s, when I was still in short trousers, Namco was living the good life in Japan's home console market, making big hits with its *Family* games for Nintendo's likewise institutionally-named Family Computer. With the Japanese economy in 'Woo! Everybody's rich!' mode, and exciting technologies advancing more quickly than ever before, this was a time when games in Japan really were played by families – and happy families at that, with seemingly bright futures.

Nintendo had a virtual monopoly on the Japanese console game business back then, but third parties such as Namco (or Namcot, as it was hilariously known at the time) knew how to get their share of the Yen. In Namco's case, it just had to keep on pumping out games with Family in their titles: Family Stadium (a million-selling baseball game), Family Tennis, Family Jockey (wholesome-yet-popular horse racing), and Family Trainer (a precursor of Wii Fit developed between Namco and Bandai and bundled with an exercise mat accessory, some 20 years ahead of Nintendo's schedule) all did till-kachinging business in Japan. Some of those Family games went on to become established as series, sinking their roots even deeper during the Super Famicom era and surviving into the post-bubble PlayStation years.

In 2008, Namco Bandai is planning to put the Family back in 'Family Computer' (even though Nintendo's current dominating home console is called 'Wii', the format is successfully reviving the family-oriented game scene of the Family Computer era) with a new range of simple, fun games.



The first of these 21st century Family games on the Wii is Family Ski, which is a skiing game (duh) for the whole family. It will have been on sale in Japan for a few weeks by the time you read this, and it has some charming quirks – you can ski with Miis, take pictures of up to four Mii-headed skiers (the typical Japanese family is two parents and two children, and Family Ski has a four-player mode) in winter holiday scenes, use the Wii Balance Board in combination with the Nunchuk and Remote, and deliver hot food from restaurants on peaks to customers in valleys.

Before the end of the year, Japan will also get Wii rebirths of Family Jockey and Family Stadium, the former likely to give G-1 Jockey a good race and Stadium promising the definitive cute baseball experience outside of Wii Sports' limited-but-fun take on the sport. And, in a bizarre Quantum Leap kind of way, Namco Bandai will bring back its Family Trainer towards the end of the year and again bundle it with a multi-panelled mat peripheral that will be vital to the experience, rather than compromising the game design for compatibility with the Wii Balance Board.

I genuinely hope that Namco's experiment – an effort to attract new families to play simple games together on Nintendo's all-conquering Wii – is a success. Having recently started a family of my own, the timing feels right. If history repeats, the next few years should see a second boom for family-oriented gaming in Japan, even if the economy isn't wearing such a silly grin these days.

COLLECTIONS

BY ERIN MARCON

For every gamer, there is a title that bobs up again and again. This is the game that you find yourself playing even though you have beaten it six times already. This is the game you play even as the latest blockbuster (which just cost you \$100) languishes in its shrink-wrap. This is the game you play when you are too tired to play anything else. For Telltale Games' Brendan Q. Ferguson, there is no such game... or is there? After briefly insisting that his gaming time is entirely absorbed by new titles ("That's why I've had to buy so many."), he breaks down and confesses. "Well, okay," he says, "my brother always manages to lure me into playing more Heroes of Might and Magic. I mean that pile of gold is just sitting there waiting to be picked up, and whoa, who left that crystal lying around? Hold on, let me finish this scenario real quick."

Given that Telltale is among the few studios developing adventure titles, it would be interesting to hear about some of the games that have influenced the genre's resurgence. "At this point," he says, "I mainly play games so that I know what I can't put in our games without getting sued. Unless the game's obscure enough, then I just go ahead and steal it. Or the game's so famous that everyone will consider it homage. Come to think of it, I steal anything and everything. Disregard this response."

We didn't ask Ferguson



Check out the Princess Peach standee to the right of the picture. We can't decide whether it is cool or disturbing... or both.

where he stored his collection of traditional games, but hey, he told us anyway. "I keep my board and card games in the trunk of my car," he says earnestly, "in case of emergency."

Given that his shelves (pictured) house but a fraction of his 300 titles, you may be wondering where the remainder of his collection is stored. The truth, we are sorry to say, may be too much for some readers to stomach. "Though I'm not really a collector, per se, I do like to keep all of the original packaging," he says, "but my parents were running

out of rooms in their house, so for some of the games with less interesting packaging..."

You get the picture. To experience something as soul shattering as the loss of original packaging is bad enough, but how does Ferguson live with the knowledge that he is the architect of his own misfortune? It appears that he has become something of a sad clown: witty and fun-loving on the surface, but wracked with an inner melancholy from which there is no chance of escape. He may say that he merely discarded some cardboard boxes, but in truth, he discarded a piece of his soul.

We would like to thank Brendan for participating in this edition of Collections.

Meet Brendan Q. Ferguson

Brendan Q. Ferguson is a writer and designer with California's Telltale Games. He is currently hard at work on the latest episode of Sam & Max, the studio's cult adventure series. "In the past I worked for LucasArts," he says, "and before that, I delivered newspapers from my bicycle."

What can Ferguson tell us about the forthcoming Sam & Max adventure? "In the next thrilling episode of Sam & Max (episode three of season two), our freelance police heroes meet up with a Eurotrash vampire and his army of the undead. But they're no ordinary undead... they're dancing undead! You'll explore the vampire's spooky but happenin' castle, outwit incredibly s'tupid zombies, and get into more silly escapades than is allowed by international law.



Cataloguing the Classics

Ferguson dipped into his collection and plucked out a few items of interest. Despite claiming that he doesn't "own any truly obscure games", he quickly produced 10 that anyone under the age of 30 will have a very hard time recalling.

1. A Mind Forever Voyaging

Infocom's 1985 sci-fi thriller was boxed with an assortment of physical props, including a decoder wheel, faux advertisements and a map.

2. Goonies II

Konami's NES sequel to Richard Donner's film arrived in 1987. Like all great family games, it encouraged the liberal use of Molotov cocktails.

3. Guild of Thieves

This 1987 text adventure from Magnetic Scrolls was set in Kerovnia, the fantasy milieu established in the studio's previous adventure, The Pawn.

4. Miracle Warriors: Seal of the Dark Lord

SEGA delivered this long forgotten Master System RPG back in 1988. It features a giant lobster and is surely worth playing for that reason alone.

5. Moonsweeper

Imagic's shooter for the Atari 2600 challenged players to protect miners from marauding aliens. Hey tautology fans, don't forget to use your 'Forcefield Shield'.

6. Smurf: Rescue in Gargamel's Castle

Coleco's 1982 platformer challenged players to (you guessed it) rescue the Smurfette. Ferguson experienced this one on his Gemini, an Atari 2600 clone.

7. Super Pitfall

Despite its misleading title, Activision's 1987 platformer was developed for the original NES. Sadly, its SNES sequel wasn't entitled Super Super Pitfall.

8. Trinity

Infocom's 1986 text adventure was an offbeat meditation on the history and politics of atomic warfare. It was also among the first Commodore 128 titles.

9. Tutankham

Short on dough? Why not jet off to Egypt and pillage important burial sites?

10. Voodoo Castle

This creepy text adventure from the appropriately named Adventure International was released for the Commodore Vic 20 in 1981.

The Passion of the Gamer

MARCH OF THE CONSOLES

By Dylan Burns

Only last month it was Compy's turn to get a makeover. Compy, for those of you not familiar with my naming system, is what I call my PC. He sits there all day, working his little metal arse off to keep Word running, my collection of eclectic music files pumping and, most importantly, he keeps secret those hidden government files relating to my great grandfather's lost treasure and deformed bastard offspring.

In any case, I spent a fair amount of money on Compy's upgrade, and as I did so I had visions of a utopia where I would at last get to play PC games at frame rates that actually saw the people moving and the little icons glowing and stuff. It was glorious – I put *The Witcher* in and all of a sudden I could actually play. *Crysis*? Pfft, Compy eats it for breakfast. What a glorious time to be a gameboffin!

But of course, it wasn't long before my gaming desire, like the desultory appetite of a fussy child, found a different avenue to explore, and my rather depleted wallet screamed in horror as I contemplated a much larger purchase than a stop-gap PC upgrade. No, this wasn't a new game, mic headset, pack of batteries or even burger-in-a-can (trust me, it exists). Nay, this contemplated purchase was instead of the console variety. That is, my steam train of desire was rolling inexorably towards the shiny blackness and coquettish curves of a PS3.

The fact that I've held off for this long is almost a miracle in itself, although my purchasing reticence certainly had some justification given the fact that pretty much all of the games that I wanted to play were cross platform, with very few PS3 exclusives that interested me. This all changed, of course, with the release of games such as *Uncharted* and *Ratchet & Clank*. So it was with a confident swagger, and an alarmingly low credit limit, that I waltzed into my nearest gaming shop and walked out with a new black beast. I call it a beast, but let's face it, we pretty much got screwed with a gimped 40GB version. But hey, what can you do when there are cool games to be played?

If put up against a wall and threatened with a blast of bad breath, I'd be happy to admit that the PS3 is impressive. The aforementioned must-have games run perfectly and I'm having a ball going through them. Any negative aspects have been argued over far too much for me to repeat them; yes the initial lack of rumble sucks and the apparent lack of in-game invites is pretty much arse, but then I'm still in the honeymoon phase with my new console so I'll forgive her a few ugly spots. After all, beauty is only apparent when there's something to compare against, so with all of my next-gen consoles lined up (I do consider the Wii to be part of this list) I'm like the proverbial pig in shit; if the pig is me and the shit is a heap of awesome consoles and games.

It's during this moment that a realisation hits me: this generation

really does belong to the consoles. Now, before any PC fanboys spurt out mouthfuls of iced coffee and turn all vitriolic, please let me add a disclaimer that I absolutely love games on all formats. I am like a wolf following a scent; I will go where it leads, whether that is towards the dark den of consoles or that yawning crevasse where PCs spend their winters. It's the games that are important. That said, consoles are noticeably in the lead when it comes to market focus. This is readily apparent in the way that most cross-platform games regularly appear first on consoles and then months later on PC. What small victory

do PC gamers gain from this? The most recent example would be *Gears of War* and its added chapter, but it does beg the question if such additions are worth waiting for.

I also suspect that our idea of the 'average gamer' may be somewhat cloudy. It's nice (yet naïve) to think that every other person with a hundred bucks and an urge to game would have the same refined tastes and knowledge as us, but it's just not a reality. Too many times have I seen copies of the *Bee Movie* game (or insert appropriately awful game here) leave stores, while recent classics like *BioShock* or *Mass Effect* sit there dejectedly. The console market is so insanely broad, from kids through to adults, that no wonder developers only see dollar signs in the console camp. PC gamers are almost by default assumed to be middle aged, fussy and fervent in their defence of their resolutions and frame rates. They lap up more 'adult' titles, particularly anything involving RTS gameplay. Remember, these are just the views that I suspect marketing and PR gurus hold, which therefore influences the

flow of games for each platform.

The PC river is straight and narrow, with only a few breakaway streams that venture into platform land or puzzle-ville. The console river, on the other hand, is a raging torrent, threatening to burst its banks and flood the land with a proliferation of completely average games. Floating almost precariously through this soup are those top ten games that we wait for and savour like vintage cheese. The biggest problem being that in order to be in the running to experience every great game that gets released, you need to constantly be there on the riverbank, strainer in hand and a big bloody fishing net ready to catch the ones that are worth playing.

So anyway, where was I? Oh yes, I now have all of the consoles and a PC, so you can imagine how tiring it now is for me to scour for information on every upcoming release just in case I (oh don't even think about it) miss a game! I tell myself that will never happen. I mean, just look at her, my new PS3, all new and shiny and black and covered in fingerprints... pity there are only three games worth playing.



Fishing the mighty Console River for games. Or cheese or something. Maybe pigs. Actually, eels. Maybe.

gameboffin@hotmail.com

DEVELOPMENT

This column is late. Indeed, I'm getting increasingly bloodthirsty emails from my editors about it. It has been one unending horror of failure, meat and tears.

Because this column was supposed to be about creating an indie game, putting together an elite team of outlaw poet games designers, coders, artists and musicians and ... and everyone, damnit! I was going to create a coven of badassery the likes of which the world had prayed never to gaze upon!

What have I learned about game design? Surprisingly little, actually. Last month, all I really learnt was that, like any big expensive media, it all gets tied up in committees and the bean-counters and suits sit like vultures over everything. That's not actually a criticism. It's just a fact.

But I did figure out you start with a pitch, then you get to work on a few things at the same time. The first is an engine, I'd imagine. I mean, something has to run the game.

So I pick up my phone and I call the most badass coder I know! He works for a bank creating security systems of some

Therefore, my code monkey is, as the kids say, made of fail. Hell with him. I work in comics! Alls I know is artists!

'Artist friend! Do you know about my plan to create an entirely new game?' I barked over beer.

'Was this that thing about the lizard who had sex with a power station?'

'It was a dragon molesting an oil derrick! And no, that changed. Now it's a role playing adventure about a monstrous bastard who commits crimes.'

'Sounds... great. Yeah. Great. What do you want from me?'

'I want you to design all the characters, environments, weapons, clothes, textures, every monster, every tree, rock, barrel and shadow.'

'That's an absurd amount of work for one person.'

'Nonsense! I have faith in you.'

'Also, there's the question of professional versus amateur. I'm a freelance illustrator. I work for a minimum of fifty dollars an hour. US. If I mates rated it for you, for twenty dollars an hour and put in three days work, that's six hundred bucks. And in three days,

my code monkey is, as the kids say, made of fail

such thing. I don't know. I hate computers. 'Dude! I'm creating a game! I need you to quit your job and come and devote yourself to me entirely!'

'I earn well over a hundred thousand dollars a year and I don't even like you very much, so why would I do that?'

'FOR ART!'

'Well, for one, no. Secondly, I don't know very much about game design. Most of it is done in C++ but there's loads of specialty knowledge involved, especially for consoles. I'm sure I could pick it up but it's a discipline of its own. Now, have you thought about with API or library you'll be using?'

'No! And stop talking like that or I'll have you burnt as a witch!'

'Do you know what an API is?'

'Is it... your mum!?'

'Who'll do your physics? Do you have access to an engine. There's a few... well, only OK, free ones out there.'

'You'll write one for me!'

'Bye Christian.'

An API is a application programming interface.* In your face, code monkey! In it hard!

I'd probably have a few rough ideas for a few characters, a few polished pieces and that's it. Plus you'd eventually need everything done in 3D.'

'... can't you do it for free?'

'No. And you could go to a guy for free but, you know what, you get what you pay for.'

The damn thing was, he was right.

I called up a creepy guy I know who works in a stockroom and who does remixes of bollocks old Goth songs. He does, however, have access to all sorts of sound mixing equipment.'

'Here's the deal. Can you create sounds, record voices and write original music for my computer game about bastards? For free?'

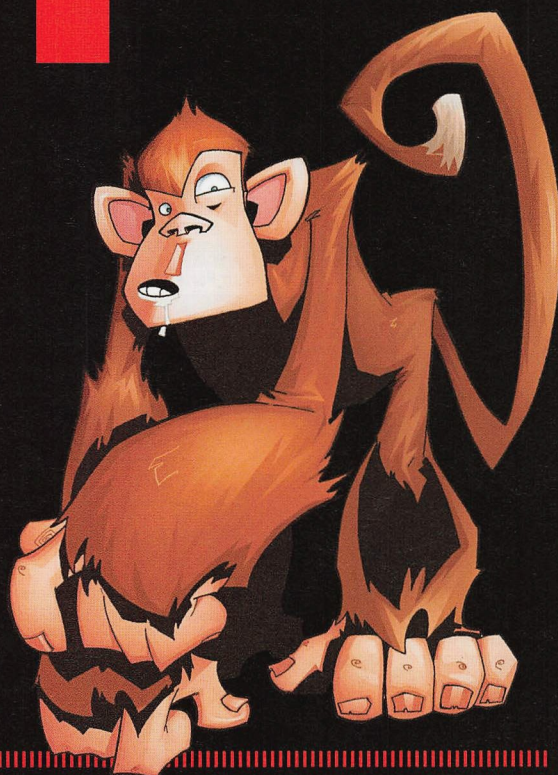
'Sure, but I'll have complete artistic control.'

I left a Moog Synthesiser in his brainpan and laughed as I left his house.

I simply don't have the skills to make a game by myself nor do I know the talent who could help me.

There's just one final stab.

NEXT MONTH. I try to get a job!



BY CHRISTIAN READ

THE OFFICIAL AUSTRALIAN GAMES CHART

Compiled by GfK in association with the IEAA

TOP
10

PlayStation 2 Games Over \$30

W/E 10th February
2008 RETAIL SALES

- 1 ▲ High School Musical (S/W) Family
- 2 ▼ Smackdown V Raw 2008 Fighting
- 3 ◆ Singstar Rnb Bundle Family
- 4 ▲ Singstar 80S (S/W) Family
- 5 ▼ Need For Speed Pro Street Racing
- 6 ▼ The Simpsons Game Adventure
- 7 ▼ Singstar 90S (S/W) Family
- 8 ▲ Eyetoy Sports Bundle Ptm Family
- 9 ◆ Singstar Pop (S/W) Family
- 10 ▼ Crash Of The Titans Action

TOP
10

Nintendo DS Games Over \$30

W/E 10th February
2008 RETAIL SALES

- 1 ☆ Mario & Sonic At Olympics Sports
- 2 ☆ Kageyamas Maths Training Family
- 3 ▲ Brain Training Family
- 4 ▲ New Super Mario Bros Action
- 5 ▼ More Brain Training Family
- 6 ▲ Alvin And The Chipmunks Family
- 7 ▲ High School Muscial Family
- 8 ▼ The Simpsons Game Adventure
- 9 ▼ Pokémon Diamond Role-Playing
- 10 ☆ Hanna Montana Adventure

TOP
10

Nintendo Wii Games Over \$50

W/E 10th February
2008 RETAIL SALES

- 1 ◆ Mario & Sonic At Olympics Sports
- 2 ◆ Ghost Squad Shooter
- 3 ◆ Super Mario Galaxy Action
- 4 ◆ Mario Party 8 Family
- 5 ▲ Boogie Family
- 6 ☆ Donkey Kong Jet Race Racing
- 7 ▼ Guitar Hero 3 Bundle Family
- 8 ▼ Zelda Twilight Princess Role-Playing
- 9 ☆ Looney Tunes Acme Action
- 10 ▲ Lego SW: Complete Saga Adventure

TOP
10

Playstation 3 Games Over \$60

W/E 10th February
2008 RETAIL SALES

- 1 ☆ Devil May Cry 4 Action
- 2 ☆ Burnout Paradise Racing
- 3 ☆ Turok Shooter
- 4 ▼ Call Of Duty 4:Modern Shooter
- 5 ▼ Uncharted Drakes Fortune Adventure
- 6 ▼ Assasins Creed Action
- 7 ▼ Guitar Hero 3 Bundle Family
- 8 ▼ Ratchet & Clank: Tools Action
- 9 ☆ The Club Shooter
- 10 ▼ Fifa 2008 Sports

TOP
10

PC Games Over \$20

W/E 10th February
2008 RETAIL SALES

- 1 ◆ Call Of Duty 4: Modern Shooter
- 2 ◆ World Of Warcraft Role-Playing
- 3 ◆ WOW Burning Crusade Role-Playing
- 4 ▲ Crysis Shooter
- 5 ☆ Sims Castaway Stories Strategy
- 6 ▲ WOW Battlechest Role-Playing
- 7 ▼ The Sims 2 Teen Style Strategy
- 8 ▲ Flight Sim X Simulation
- 9 ▲ The Sims 2: Seasons Strategy
- 10 ▼ The Sims 2: Pets Strategy

TOP
10

Xbox 360 Games Over \$50

W/E 10th February
2008 RETAIL SALES

- 1 ☆ Devil May Cry 4 Action
- 2 ☆ Lost Odyssey Role-Playing
- 3 ☆ Turok Shooter
- 4 ☆ Burnout Paradise Racing
- 5 ▼ Call Of Duty 4: Modern Shooter
- 6 ▼ Halo 3 Shooter
- 7 ☆ The Club Shooter
- 8 ▼ Assasins Creed Action
- 9 ▼ Mass Effect Role-Playing
- 10 ▼ Need For Speed Pro Street Racing

TOP
10

All Format Games Over \$50

W/E 10th February
2008 RETAIL SALES

- 1 ▲ Mario & Sonic At Olympics Nintendo Wii
- 2 ☆ Devil May Cry 4 PlayStation 3
- 3 ☆ Devil May Cry 4 Xbox 360
- 4 ☆ Mario & Sonic At Olympics Nintendo DS
- 5 ☆ Lost Odyssey Xbox 360
- 6 ☆ Burnout Paradise PlayStation 3
- 7 ☆ Turok Xbox 360
- 8 ☆ Kageyamas Maths Training Nintendo DS
- 9 ☆ Burnout Paradise Xbox 360
- 10 ☆ Turok PlayStation 3

TOP
10

PlayStation Portable Games Over \$40

W/E 10th February
2008 RETAIL SALES

- 1 ▲ Crash Of The Titans Action
- 2 ▲ Smackdown V Raw 2008 Fighting
- 3 ▼ The Simpsons Game Adventure
- 4 ▲ Syphon Filter Logans Shooter
- 5 ▼ Need For Speed Carbon Racing
- 6 ▼ Ricky Ponting 2007:Pressure Sports
- 7 ▲ Medal Of Honor Heroes 2 Shooter
- 8 ▼ Gta: Liberty City Stories Ptm Action
- 9 ▲ Fifa 2008 Sports
- 10 ▲ NBA Live 2008 Sports

- ☆ New Entry
- ◆ Non Mover
- ▲ Up from last week
- ▼ Down from last week



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HY44052	HY47086	Leona Lewis - Bleeding Love
HY43996	HY47102	Alicia Keys - No One
HY44111	HY47151	Fergie - Clumsy
HY43539	HY46994	Timbaland feat. Keri Hilson - The Way I Are
HY44084	HY47100	Santana feat. Chad Kroeger - Into The Night
HY44226	—	The Potbelly - Dont Hold Back
HY43960	HY47088	Matchbox Twenty - How Far Weve Come
HY43988	HY47095	Mika - Happy Ending
HY44116	HY47146	Maroon 5 - Wont Go Home Without You
—	HY46981	Plain White T's - Hey There Delilah
HY44118	HY47107	Sean Kingston - Me Love
HY44122	HY47111	Avril Lavigne - Hot
HY44062	—	The Veronicas - Hook Me Up
HY44053	HY47087	Chris Brown - Kiss Kiss
HY44055	HY47109	Rihanna feat NeYo - Hate That I Love You
HY44124	—	Linkin Park - Shadow Of The Day
HY43398	—	Sneaky Sound System - UFO
HY44056	HY47091	Ida Corr Vs Fedde Le Grand - LET ME THINK ABOUT IT

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 HP86220	 HP86241	 HP85926	 HP85711
 HP85792	 HP86163	 HP85900	 HP86071
 HP86205	 HP86162	 HP85635	 HP85628

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Top wallpapers

 HY57635	 HY57701	 HY57751	 HY58352	 HY56225	 HY56829
 HY56383	 HY61436	 HY57751	 HY58352	 HY56225	 HY56829

Babes

 HY60044	 HY58120	 HY594484	 HY58327
 HY56766	 HY60185	 HY58243	 HY58327
 HY57978	 HY58150	 HY56128	 HY56176
 HY57796	 HY58331	 HY58276	 HY57657

Celeb Vids

 HY75984	 HY79042	 HY78904	 HY78932	 HY78730	 HY78912
 HY78076	 HY75982	 HY76363	 HY78753	 HY78713	 HY78938

Fantasy Vids

 HY75962	 HY75979	 HY77266	 HY77280	 HY75931	 HY77294
 HY77303	 HY76420	 HY76254	 HY75966	 HY76219	 HY75952

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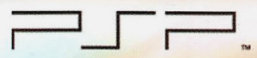
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