NAG

NEW AGE GAMING MAGAZINE

SOUTH AFRICA'S LEADING COMPUTER ENTERTAINMENT MAGAZINE

MADE IN SOUTH AFRICA

PC | Xbox | GameCube | PlayStation | GBA

H@rdcor3 Round-up: Sound Cards | Glossary: Gaming Lingo
The Hulk | Red Faction 2 | Fable | Splinter Cell
Freelancer | Black Hawk Down | Primal

sound cards
Sound Card Round-Up

HULK ™

Lazy Gamer's
Guide to...

Tom Clancy's SPLINTER CELL ™

If your Cover CD is missing, it

doesn't mean it's not here...

THESE GREAT TITLES
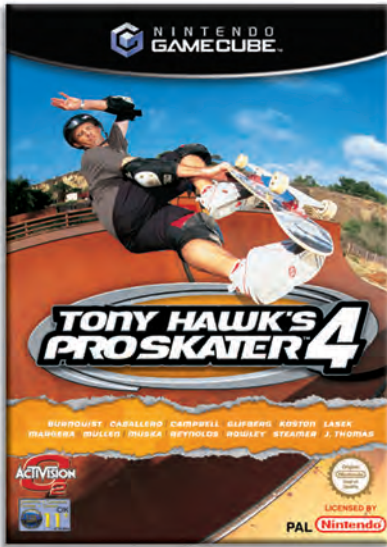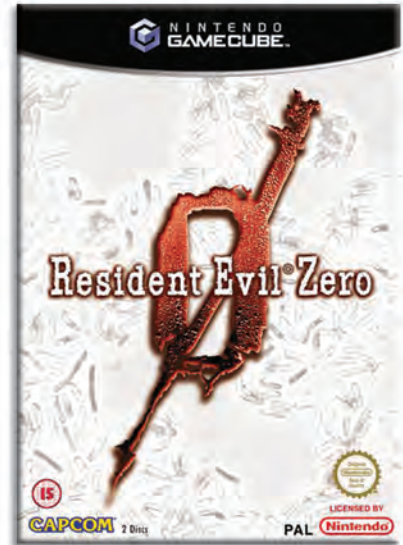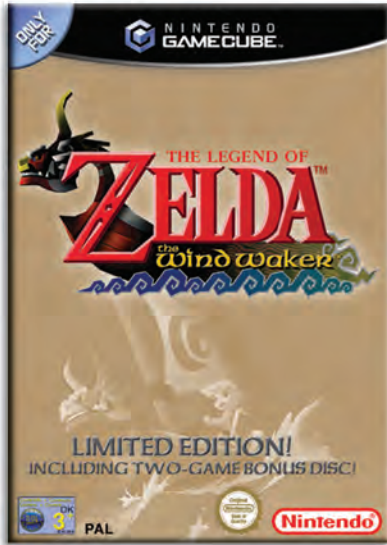
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THERE IS ONLY ONE WAY TO ENTER THE MATRIX

"The most anticipated videogame in history"
PSM2 Magazine

Written and Directed by the Wachowski Brothers, the creators of the Matrix™ trilogy

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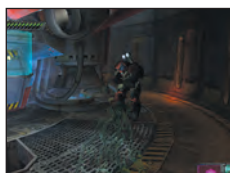
Bitch & Moan

Go back to Hollywood, we don't need you!

With regards to The Hulk and Enter the Matrix…
In some way I'm annoyed that Hollywood is now smearing their glitzy veneer all over gaming. My first reaction is a street brawling, hey, back off… this is our territory and if you think you can come in here and turn our precious digital world into more Forest Gump and Driving Miss Daisy you're going to run into a big green fist with your teeth on it. The second [latent] reaction is one of dejected realisation, knowing it was inevitable and then secretly hoping the game in question will be fun because the movie was half decent… I know, I'm a fool but at least I have hope. What are your comments on Hollywood and gaming - send mail to letters@nag.co.za.

With regards to bad service…
I don't normally do this, but this month I've been pushed to the extreme… nudged over the edge, and hurled far beyond my breaking point. So in retaliation I'm going to use whatever influence I have to persuade all NAG readers to avoid the following companies… I'm starting an ongoing campaign headlined as follows:
Entities that don't deserve your money…
I'm going to keep adding to this list each month or whenever it comes up any companies that have dished out poor service to me and I'll even offer up a brief description of the problem I experienced. I've had enough of their stinking attitudes and if I turn just one person away from using, buying etc. their products or services then I've won a minor battle in this war. It's bizarre that they spend so much time and energy, not to mention money, on trying to get your business but they don't have a clue how to keep a client happy. I'm sure you've heard this a thousand times but the problem is nobody complains and everyone is too complacent. We all threaten to write a letter, so this is my letter…

Nedbank
I made my first call at about 15h00 and by 17h05 I gave up. My request was simple: what is the settlement amount on my car? The first number I was given by the unhelpful person who answered the phone at my branch was incorrect because the person there was not authorised to give me the information I needed. This person then gave me a new number that was never answered and when the automatic system did eventually kick in to help me I was cut off because the fax mail box was reported as full, odd considering I wasn't sending a fax. So I called the second person back to find out how I was supposed to get the settlement amount from a telephone system that was never answered and to report the actual fault I experienced with the phone system [no notes were made, just excuses offered about how busy the people were at the third telephone number]. This person then put me on hold - after a 6 minute wait [I timed it] while they checked the number. I was then told to send an e-mail instead because the phone system is broken - still broken mind you from a similar set of circumstances I experienced about two months earlier. I then demanded to be given the information I originally requested because I wasn't prepared to wait until tomorrow for an answer - again I was told that although I was at the vehicle finance department I was at the 'wrong part of the department' or something equally absurd and I could not be helped there [security and procedures are usually offered as excuses]. I asked if this was an acceptable level of service and was told no, I then asked the person what they were going to do about it and was told that an e-mail would be sent on my behalf. I put the phone down in disgust. Is this normal practice just to get a settlement amount on a car loan? Well done Nedbank, you've chalked up another satisfied customer - I wonder if this is the different kind of service you talk about in your adverts?

I'd go on but I've actually run out of space - next month: MWEB and Monte Casino Nu Metro.

Michael James
Editor

Next Month

The June issue will feature, among other things, a review on the new Indiana Jones game and hopefully a closer look at Enter the Matrix. But that's not all! We're also doing a round up on Joysticks and all the other stuff you know and love.

The June issue will be on sale: 29 May 2003

Work of Art

Nik Felbab pushed out another masterpiece... can we lick your mouse?

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caption of the month   **March winner**

Bee fun knee

Each month we'll select a screenshot from one of the games in the issue and write a funny caption for it, well... we'll try and make it funny...

Your job is to see if you can come up with an even funnier caption and send it to: **ed@nag.co.za**
Subject: **May Caption**.
If you use the wrong subject in your e-mail it'll get deleted...

Your prize: It looks like our little ploy last month worked and we now have a sponsor for this competition - say thanks to Vivendi Universal Games, they said they'll give us something interesting each month...

▲ 'Chiropractic extremes' – **nag's best [87% lame] effort**

▲ 'The unhappy scientist never did like getting his flu shot.' – **Karsten Richartz**

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lEttEr of thE momEnt

Well done **to** the **letter** of **the** month **winner** - your Electronic Arts game and T-shirt will arrive shortly.

Progress...

NAG certainly has gone from strength to strength as a publication over the last few years. Without a doubt the best local gaming publication in Africa, and certainly on the Southern Hemisphere's top five list (kudos on your brilliant advert on page 17 of the January edition!). That being said, however, there remains one bump in the road on the way to recognition as a world-class publication - the English is atrocious. I realise that there will likely be a large faction, of readers and staff alike, whose reaction will be "So what? We're gamers and hackers, we don't give a [supply noun]!" But being a hacker doesn't necessitate being a hack. Where language is the tool of the trade, there can be no expectation of tolerance.

From the Ed's note ("... give to just be able to play..." split infinitive; "... give you want you want..." simple typo; page 8) to the Send Off ("Jedi's" apostrophe; "Chainte" Chianti; page 98) and sprinkled liberally in between ("... for it's time..." apostrophe; "... saw more Mario's..." apostrophe; page 10. "... already singed me up..." simple typo; "... loathe to call them..." loth or loath; page 38) the errors abound. So, what is the purpose of this letter? Considering the content, it likely won't make it to publication. The motive force in this case is just to point out that there are those who notice everything, and think that with a little effort a five-star, sterling potential can be realised. MS Word spelling and grammar check doesn't know everything ;)

Mandarin

Ed: I'm too scared to reply to this mail… so I'm going to go with - so what? We're gamers and hackers; we don't give a [word rhyming with orange]. Okay, I guess we're looking for a new proof reader then - applications to ed@nag.co.za.

shorts

Wednesday - animals
The cow jumped over the moon. To go and eat the invisible people on the other side!
Not specified

Ed: The little spoon on humpty better go at the moss bender. Sesame clicks under the dial?

Important notice: If we've announced you as a prize winner and you haven't received your prize yet please send a mail to comp@nag.co.za with your claim and a few details and we'll make it all better...

Comics and others

I have sent you a comic made by myself, it's not of the greatest quality, but it should show you how I (and potentially lots of people) feel about your comics at the end of your magazine. Your magazine is great, but your comic man sucks, he's done the same thing for the past five months. What happened to the last one, his stuff seemed decent? I noticed that your release date of Freelancer was wrong since you placed it into the "release dates" section, you had it down for Dec 2002 for two months, and afterwards it moved to Feb 2003, which is still wrong since its planned release in the US is March 2003. Isn't one of your sponsors Microsoft (or are you running Linux ;)). Why haven't you done a preview of this great game? The only time you mentioned Freelancer was in your wrong release dates and one small description in the E3 section. You guys review "tiny" games that are developed by "tiny" studios, but not a word from a developer that has brought us Wing Commander? I don't know, maybe you don't like Microsoft or something. You know that little box, under the letters section, why not change the content sometimes as you used to do? The same formal stuff keeps its place there in that small box. Things like "don't take me to the crapper" was good, and even earlier there was always some sarcastic remark you guys placed there. Another point, I don't know but it seems to me that you only print letters that you can add something smarter in your reply than what the person who wrote to you said. What's the point of this? To make you feel better or smart? Otherwise thanks for the wonderful magazine, keep it up, but do something about the comic.

Someone

Ed: I hope my comic man doesn't read this but I also don't get the comics - I thought the attack one with the catapult was funny though - I keep hoping things will get better but you know how artists are - very dramatic. I think the best advice here is if you don't find the comic funny, don't laugh at it. The original release date for Freelancer was changed by the developer - we don't change them we just print them. On page 38 of our March 2003 issue we did a 3 page beta code preview of Freelancer and in this issue we have a 2 page review. We'll give those boring little boxes an overhaul soon. The

answer to your last question is yes - out of all the brilliant and insightful letters I get each month I only choose the rubbish that I can respond to with a smart comment so I can look smart and feel better. Blame my parents.

Code of Conduct

I agree with your remarks in your editorial. I was an avid player of Ultima Online for a couple of months, and I can imagine the frustration of the Administrators having to deal with troublesome people, and waste their time banning trouble makers. Of course, if you've played UO, or any other MMORPG, you will know about PK's (player killers). These people have so much time and money on their hands that they go around and senselessly kill other players. They only get away with this on the technicality that they are "role-playing" as senseless murderers. Although PK's are irritating, they do add an element of danger and excitement to the game as a whole. People who lose their cool, however, and go around swearing at people in anger, just create a hostile atmosphere and make people not want to play. Fortunately these swearing ninnies are usually the poorest players and can easily be silenced with a sword, or in the FPS genre, a rocket launcher. So next time someone starts swearing profusely, silence him with a quick head shot.

Damien

Ed: In some cases I believe that you do need the odd misbehaving player who goes around killing other players - that's a little more realistic than everyone being nice all the time. The problem is that most people have trouble balancing their mischievous streak with normal behaviour and then there are the others who do just need a good rocket up the shaft.

You could improve

As you have asked, I am sending in suggestions to improve NAG.
1. Please put at least one demo with system requirements at or lower than 466MHz & 64 MB RAM.
2. Extend the community.za section from two to three pages.
3. There was a statement in the editorial saying NAG would be in stores from the 6th of March onwards. I looked on the 7th but the store (CNA) didn't have it yet. I live in Cape Town - is the 6th of March thing for Johannesburg only?

4. Why does the cover say PC / PS / Xbox / GC / GBA? You don't do PlayStation games anymore, only PS2 and you only preview Xbox titles.
Rocket Launcher

Ed:
1. We usually put on new game demos with the occasional golden oldie here and there - they just don't make demos that run on older computers anymore.
2. It's actually on 6 pages this issue.
3. It should be out on the date I specify - sometimes the magazine is late for reasons beyond our control - acts of God etc.
4. We cover whatever PlayStation games we get for review... and for the last two months we have featured Xbox titles from EA for review. Usually when a game is released on multiple platforms we get given all the games but only have space to do a review on one. We do however indicate which platforms it is available on.

Cheats

In last months issue Lama_Man commented about cheats. He asked what the point was in playing a game if you were just going to cheat. The thing is that many people don't play a game for "the challenge" but just for having fun or pretending to be in another world. A lot of gamers would find it depressing if, for instance, you were playing a RPG and had to play for hours just to find a necklace so they could fight an enemy character on equal terms. I'm just saying that maybe not everyone is a die hard gamer and maybe the developers realise this and put these cheats in for people who enjoy feeling invulnerable.

Schizo PuPU

Ed: Cheating is like cross dressing, you're either into it or you are not.

Virtual Reality

We all know that advanced VR is coming in a matter of years, and I for one think it will totally revolutionize gaming as it is today. In Counter-Strike we'll feel the balaclavas chafing against our cheeks, the shotguns in our hands, and the Kevlar on our chests. We'll hear ear-splitting gunshots, the pointless shouts from our team-mates of "stick together team" much clearer. But most of all we'll be ten times more nervous than playing it on a Pentium. Also on survival horror games like Resident Evil and Alone in the Dark, the adrenaline junkies will flock to these games just to

get terrified stiff.
Faust_the_necromancer

Ed: I guess this is the eventual conclusion [or just the beginning] of gaming as we know it. Imagine in this new brave world of virtual gaming what a sub standard title will look or feel like? Will there be such a thing as poor graphics and sound or more serious bugs that result in real wounds for example… bad things will eventually happen in these virtual worlds, they always do and that's when the real fun begins [insert evil laugh].

Programming articles starting point...
With ref. to your question about where to start with articles on programming - Are you kidding? Anyone who knows anything about programming will tell you that the best place to start is with a structured language that can teach the basics, like variables, loops, logical processes, etc. Most colleges therefore start their students off with COBOL, even though it's a dinosaur in the programming world. So if you want to give all the budding programmers that read NAG a taste of what they're in for, start there. But if your articles are going to assume some sort of fore-knowledge of programming principles, then sure, go ahead with Flash or Java or PHP or something else new.
Morgue

Ed: So, we're still back at square one - where to start.

AMD vs. Intel
It seems to me that the war between AMD and Intel is far from over! It didn't surprise me to see that Intel recently breached the 3GHz mark with their latest Pentium 4 Processor. I thought that AMD wasn't going to be able to compete with this "new" chip. Boy was I in for a royal treat as I saw the other day on AMD's site that they released the AMD Athlon XP 3000+ processor. Let me tell you (you probably have known this the whole time :)) this new chip of AMD kicks booty! On the benchmarks on AMD's site they

showed that it outperforms the P4 3GHz chip by nearly 17%. I have no doubt that Intel had good intentions with their new release but this just shows you that you can never, ever think that AMD will be second best. I am a proud AMD supporter and I am damn proud of it. So Intel fans, (think that includes you too NAG!) AMD is back with a vengeance!
Stone Cold

Ed: Ah yes, the good old Intel versus AMD letter… here is something to think about, I can't understand it myself so perhaps someone out there can fill me in a little. There's one thing you hardly ever hear and that's an Intel chip owner shouting and defending his choice of processor. On the other side of the coin your typical [note the use of the word typical, so if you don't do this you aren't typical so it doesn't apply] AMD owner is always telling everyone why his choice of processor is better and to the same degree why Intel sucks. I take no side - I only ask the question. Send mail to: letters@nag.co.za and tell me why this is…

World piece
Over the last decade, I have been working on a method to cause world peace, however due to financial reasons I am unable to continue my research. All I require to finish my method, and implement it are these items:
1x Rocking Horse Pooh
2x Crocodile Skeleton
1x Elephant Blubber

Jason Human is the person responsible for this clever picture...

1x Pink Flamethrower (with flowers) - must come with petrol
<Goes on>
Now, All I ask is that if you posses any of these items or can contribute in any way, to please mail me at: <edited>.
Unknown

Ed: I should give out this mail address and teach a clown a lesson, but I'm really a nice guy so I won't.

Tutorials
I noticed a certain interest amongst readers for another tutorial series (ala Blueprint style) and I would like to offer some (dubious?) advice. We have, in South Africa, a brilliant game development community consisting of people from I-Imagine, Enlightenment (an informal company that has been in limbo for a while but is starting up again with a great deal of fire) and miscellaneous other smaller groups of people working on collective developments. Needless to say there is a great deal of talent here in our back yard. So why not tap it? There are many talented game developers that would happily write articles for NAG. You could even specialize in a different department every issue (AI, Audio, Graphics, File storage, Modelling, Concept Art, GUI, etc). We have people who are gurus in these different areas of game development. You can contact most of these people as their contact details can be found on "www.sagamedev.co.za".
Tom

Ed: Give me a call and we'll talk… I think the time is right for a new thing on game development. Ideas or help to ed@nag.co.za.

New LAN attendance
I have been reading your magazine for

quite some time and I loved it so much that I've subscribed for the second year now. There is one problem though, the LAN section is very good but for new comers like me who do not know how to join events like Mayhem for example it's hard to know where to start. I would like to know how to register for events such as Mayhem, how do you pay, which events are better to start with if you're a new comer and lastly where exactly do the events take place. So, could you help me?
Syco Circuss

Ed: There's no space to go into specifics here but we have in the past featured sections in the Community.za section dealing with similar questions. As a rule you can go to www.langames.co.za to see a list of events and then from there just contact the people involved. The gaming community is very friendly [usually] and helpful and really don't mind answering questions and helping new comers - remember the more people playing games the better for everyone.

Show how much you care...
Check this out www.specialdefects.com /embed/heart_preloader.html.
Mars

Ed: Have a look at this - it's sick and funny all rolled into one package.

more shorts...

Two mails from Bryan
In last months edition of NAG someone complained about you putting the wrong trailer of LOTR: TTT on the CD. You said that by the time you get this message LOTR will be old news - well Lord of the Rings isn't old news to me.
Letter two
Why can't you please pretty please very pretty please beautifully pretty please put another Rampage thingy on the Cover CD?
Bryan

Ed: By the time you get this message the Rampage thingy will be old news… sorry, I don't make the rules of life. What are you talking about anyway?

Censor
Why do you sometimes censor the word 'sh!t' but sometimes do not? Publishing this will offer some confirmation.
Tommy knocker

Ed: I don't know, I usually remove all slang and bad language but sometimes things do slip past. As a rule we don't allow the use of swearing in the magazine - we're trying to maintain a good wholesome image. In the future if you spot a dirty word try and picture a loaf of steaming home baked bread on a table [think wooden breadboard on a white and red chequered table cloth] in a log cabin high up in the mountains - probably next to a sparkling stream of crystal clear icy cold spring water.

letters letters letters letters letters letters letters letters letters letters letters letters letters letters letters letters letters letters letters letters letters

11

THERE ARE ALWAYS TWO SIDES TO ANY GIVEN STORY:

THE DOMAIN OF THE_BASILISK

AND THE WRONG ONE.

▶ Since the rise in popularity of the Internet in the mid 1990's, and the move away from the "shareware" model of game distribution, the game development industry has been hit by the scourge of piracy. Millions of dollars in potential revenue are lost because so few people actually pay for their games. At any given LAN, less than a quarter of all the software you will see is original. These days, the cracked version of a game is usually available for download a few weeks before its official release date, and by the time it does come out, everyone has already finished it. In the hands of "hardcore" players, games will not normally last longer than a week anyway. Forty hours of gameplay is considered to be a worthwhile amount, but it is comfortably finishable in a few days if the player puts all of his time into it. One could almost say these games are becoming outdated. The more multiplayer-focused titles, however, have a much longer play life. We are seeing a definite increase in the number of online games (especially MMORPGs), first person shooters and strategies. Tournaments, clans and online guilds are further increasing the lifespan of these "player vs. player" scenarios. And, as a result, they are being pirated even more than the single player games.

t his is hurting the industry to a remarkable degree. I believe the lack of financial return is largely responsible for the generally poor standard of games being released today. Publishers cannot afford to spend insane amounts of money on game development (with the exception of the really big production houses), because they will probably get the same profit off a second-rate title. The better games are simply copied more. It's a similar problem to the one facing the music industry (with MP3s making the electronic sharing of music unstoppable). I sat down and thought about it recently, and I realised that the solution is actually right in front of us. That's correct, no jokes, I have the answer to piracy. First of all, let's examine why piracy is so widespread. There are several contributing factors. To begin with, the effort of going out to buy a game is much greater than just queuing it on KaZaA (online peer-to-peer file sharing program) or copying it from someone at a LAN. People pirate because it's quick, easy and risk-free (if they don't like the game they can just delete it, no strings attached, no money wasted).

Aaaaaaarrrrrrghhhhh!
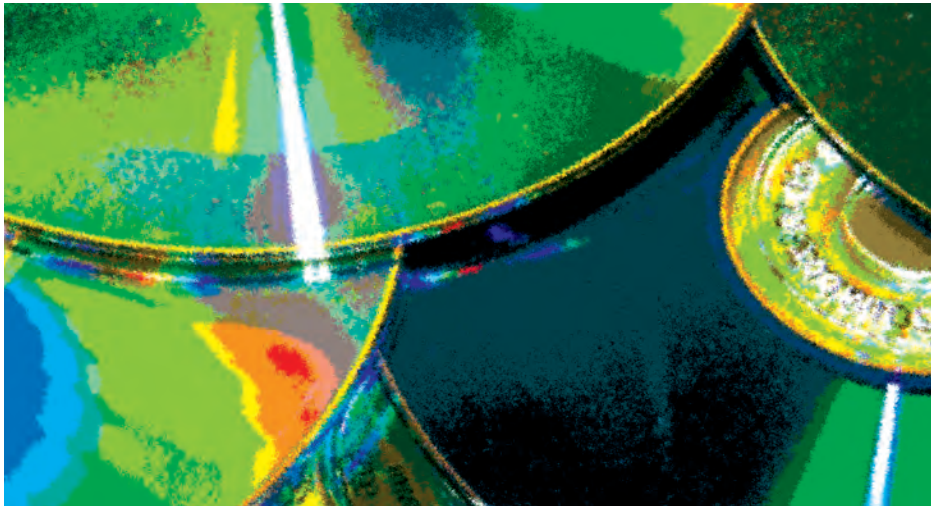
Unfortunately, the concept of "try before you buy" is not generally applicable in the computer-gaming industry. It has become more like "download before you buy", but once a game is on the hard drive, going out to purchase the original rapidly disappears from the list of priorities.
A common complaint about original titles is the lack of "extras". What does one get for the trouble of purchasing a game? (aside from moral and legal peace of mind, that is...) Usually a rather anticlimatic DVD box and a four-page, black-and-white manual. The problem is that people want to see something for their money. They want an illustrated manual, concept artwork, and maybe a poster. Again, I'll draw a parallel to the music industry. Why do people by original CDs? They do so for the sleeve artwork, lyrics, photos, etc. If a CD is well published, it will garner more sales than a competitor of the same popularity, purely because people put great emphasis on value for money.
This leads on to the third major reason for all those scurvy pirates (arrrgghh!) out there, which is the seemingly disproportionate price of games. Especially in countries where the currency's value is weak in comparison to the dollar. Take South Africa for example (many international trend studies are carried out here). In addition to the poor exchange rate, we have charges such as import duties and shipping fees. The average gamer is not overly wealthy. The average gamer is, well, average. And considering the average gamer is usually under eighteen years of age, paying R500 for

a game seems a little ridiculous. Most working adults these days are struggling to get through the month, never mind coughing up that amount of cash every time a new title is released.
Now, the MMORPG (Massively Multiplayer Online Role Playing Game) producers believe they have found the answer. Because players need to create an account and play on specific servers (otherwise it's not massively multiplayer anymore), they started charging a monthly fee. I don't think I've ever heard of anything so blatantly conniving, diabolical and downright bloody stupid. They think I'm going to buy the game off the shelf, only to discover I can't do anything with it until I pay more, every month? Not a chance in hell. I'd set up a hacked server just to spite them if I had the free time and bandwidth. That attitude is just asking for a disgruntled gaming public.
No, the solution is a mentality shift from the current exploitative (American) approach to a logical and understanding one. Sure, there are criminals out there who would pirate even if games were sold for 50 cents, but the majority of the population is not like that. Piracy is happening because for some there is no other choice.
For starters, drop the price, you fools. This is the basic idea behind a sale in a clothing or department store. The loss in profit from an individual item is more than made up for in the total profit off all the extra items sold because of the lower price.
This applies not only to local distributors, but also (and especially) to the overseas producers. Currently, the price of games is just out of most people's reach. Sell the games at a reasonable price and you will sell a lot more of them. Secondly, give us our money's worth. Give us a nice-looking box to display on our bookshelf, give us an entertaining manual (as Star Control 2 did, for example), give us background information and artwork. Make us proud to own the original. Stop hitting the public with a second-rate product.
Unfortunately, that's the limit of what I can suggest for single-player games. But online multiplayer games is where the true inspiration comes in. The idea of paying per month is the perfect example of a good idea taken too far. If you backtrack just a fraction, there is a very plausible way of ensuring the developers get paid for their work. As well as putting the game on the shelves, I suggest making it freely available for download over the internet. Release the game as legal shareware. Then, charge gamers a registration fee to create their account on the online servers. Instead of paying per month, there is a once-off charge that, if kept to a rational amount, will not put people off their food. That way they get to "try before they buy," then pay to join the online community should they happen to like the game.
And what do those who buy the game off the shelf get? Hopefully the developers have also listened to my earlier comments and it'll be the satisfaction of owning a piece of original gaming art.
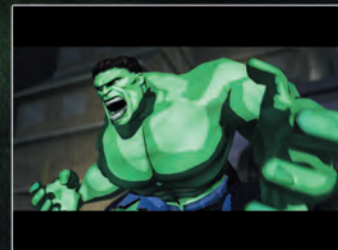
GOD FROM THE MACHINE

► There are a number of pitfalls that await Game Masters, particularly those new to the whole concept of running a role playing game. But the biggest and nastiest of these is one that can be described as "deus ex machina," or, in more contemporary terms, god from the machine…

To best illustrate the concept of deus ex machina, we need to take a look, literally, at an example of this in play. Say, for example, our low level characters are traveling through a dungeon complex when they run across a monster far more powerful than the players could handle, even collectively - a dragon, perhaps, or something similar. Without any kind of intervention, the group of characters is pretty much toast. So, what should happen? A powerful NPC shows up to pull the fat out of the fire and make sure that the PCs live to fight another day.

But this could be crucial to the story brought forth in the role playing session. How do we know when it is a plot device, and when it is deus ex machina?

The answer is quite simple. Does this more powerful character showing up on the scene in the nick of time further the story? In other words, is it important that the players meet this particular character at that time? Or is this NPC going to be popping up every time the characters bite off more than they can chew to save the day? Because this latter case is most certainly deus ex machina.

There are certain things the GM must keep in mind. Most importantly, the players must have a good time. That's why they are playing after all. If they are merely going from room to room, running into creatures that they can't handle and constantly in need of rescue, the fun factor is going to fly out the window pretty damn quickly. And that will mean that the players will follow soon, leaving the GM without a group… which kind of

defies the point of role playing in the first place.

On the other hand, just because players are low level doesn't mean that they will only run into puny monsters. After all, the places they explore are part of complex ecosystems (if you think about it) and it is quite possible for low level characters to run into challenges they can't handle. This makes for a more tricky situation, because the GM may not want to slay the entire group at that time. However, if the players are dumb enough to send the characters storming in when they should realise that they don't stand a chance, they are probably going to get what they deserve. However, at a time like this, a handy high powered NPC could help the situation.

As you can see, deus ex machina is a grey area, because one could argue a situation either way. However, the GM will be well aware of the fact that he is committing a deus ex machina "offence" because it will be planned. It will not be a random encounter. And it will not be intended to let the players display better judgment. It will be a series of events there purely for the GM to show off his "awesome power." And it will do nothing but glorify NPC characters, leaving the PCs in the shadow of a mightier character that is totally beyond their control.

A word to new Game Masters: There is no need to prove to players that you are "all powerful" within the game world. They know that already. Remember, you control everything around them, and I mean everything. The environment, the weather, politics, other people… absolutely everything. They should, if they are at least decent players, realise that you are the one who calls the shots, without you having to make use of some gross display of game mastering power. Don't do it. Players who don't know better will grow bored, and those who do will probably start avoiding your games.

Nobilis

Every once in a while, a game that redefines role playing concepts sneaks in under the collective noses of the community and sort of acts as a neutron bomb from the inside out… such a title is Nobilis. It snuck quietly onto the shelves of role playing stores and, before anyone could say anything, it began making quite an impact on those who discovered it.

Trying to explain the premise behind Nobilis is rather a difficult task. In fact, this is probably one of the most difficult aspects of the game: trying to wrap your mind around the background tale. However, once you get the picture, you will realise that this game has a huge amount of potential.

Set in the modern time, Nobilis deals with creatures called the Nobles. Somewhere between gods and men, these minor deities, which are played by the players, are creatures of many realities. They exist in our realm, but they also exist in a realm where spirits abound. And everything has a spirit. Take, for example, a car. The spirit of the vehicle is a servitor spirit, happily serving man for many years. But, after some time, this spirit would begin rebelling, resulting in older cars acting up.

The Nobles are involved in an age old struggle of good versus evil. But there is more to this game than this very basic concept. The best thing is to get hold of it and sort through the rich and interesting background yourself!

Nobilis is one of the very few games that makes use of an utterly diceless rule system. Because of this, combined with a thorough yet simple rule system, makes the title a very versatile game, though some may feel that the rule system puts too much power in the hands of the Game Master.

Nobilis is a game that is recommended for experienced players and GMs. It is dark and utterly twisted, yet has a bright and cheerful side to it. Described as Clive Barker's Hellraiser and Neil Gaiman's Sandman on an absinthe bender, with flowers, it is a thoroughly enjoyable title that more experienced gamers will come to cherish.

REVIEWED BY	
Walt "Shryke" Pretorius	
PLUS	MINUS
Diceless	Tough to understand
Amazing concept	Tons of GM power

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PlayStation 2
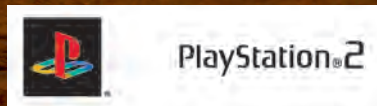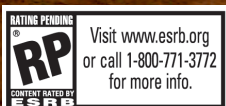
LucasArts

Distributed by Electronic Arts Africa

www.lucasarts.com

Official Indiana Jones website
www.indianajones.com

[100% OtakU the NaG Anime paGe]

The third of the freely released episodes from The Animatrix, A Detective Story is written and directed by Shinichiro Watanabe. Agents hire a detective to locate the beautiful hacker known as Trinity, who's voice work is done by Carrie-Anne Moss. Created with a distinct noir look and feel, this 10 minute video requires QuickTime to play.

ON THE CD

Once again we enter the world of Anime, the ever popular Japanese animation art form that supports a growing sub-culture within the gaming community...

by Anton Lines

japanese for dummies, part 2

This month, we explore a common practise in Japanese, which is the addition of suffixes to a person's name. Anyone who has seen the movie The Karate Kid will remember "Daniel-san". These suffixes are used to express tones ranging from affection to dislike. Calling someone's name without a suffix can be taken as having uncertain feelings towards them. This custom is often responsible for confusion in the west when a character's name appears to differ depending on who is speaking to him/her. Below is a list of the most common suffixes.

Suffix:	English Meaning:
-san	Denotes general respect (eg. "Mister" or "Missus")
-kun	Denotes affection (usually for a male)
-chan	Denotes a "cute" sort of affection (for a girl or small boy)
-sama	Someone in direct authority (eg. "Sir" or "Boss")
-sensei	Teacher or doctor
-senpai	Senior (usually a senior student)
-kyo	Someone of rank or nobility (eg. "Lord" or "Duke")
-baka	Idiot
-dono	More archaic version of "-san"
-jiji	Old man ("Gramps")
-baba	Old woman ("Granny")

It is also highly important to understand the basic structure of any language before attempting to learn it. Before we go into grammar, I will first explain how words are formed. The Japanese language is made up of three alphabets, Hiragana, Katakana and Kanji. Kanji are the original characters taken from Chinese. The others are simplified sets, Hiragana used for indigenous Japanese words and Katakana used mainly for imported or "pop culture" words. For the purposes of the anime fan, however, it is only important to know the Romanji (how words are represented in the english alphabet).

A consonant and vowel together form a sound group called a phoneme. A vowel by itself, the letter "n", and certain three-letter groups using the letter "y" (eg, kyo) and the letter "h" (eg, cha) are also phonemes. Each letter of the Japanese alphabet represents a phoneme, and words are made up of a succession of these letters. There are no common exceptions to the rule (if there are any at all, I don't know them). This will help you to write down Japanese words as you hear them, and to check their English spelling. Part 3 next month...

Vision of Escaflowne

Vision of Escaflowne

Genre:	Fantasy
Year:	1996
Producer:	Sunrise
Format:	Series and Movie
Episodes:	26 + 1
Language:	English / Japanese with English subtitles
Availability:	Common

Concept	6
Story	9
Soundtrack	8
Characters	7
Animation	9
Translation	7
Total Score (out of 100)	84

Escaflowne can be classed as a modern-day fairytale. It tells the story of Hitomi, an ordinary Japanese high-school girl interested in tarot card reading and other supernatural phenomena. One day, she has a vision about another world and a mysterious young swordsman. The man from her dream suddenly appears in front of her, and the two of them are attacked by a dragon, right in the middle of her school's athletics field. In killing it, Hitomi and the young man (whose name is Van) are pulled back into his world, called Gaea, where the Earth and the moon hang in the sky. There they must save Van's kingdom from the malevolent Zaibach empire, find a way back to Earth, and unlock the secrets of the ancient armour known as Escaflowne.

The concept alone is quite cheesy. The idea of the main character being swept away to a fantasy world where he/she is the only "normal" person has been done to death, in books and in movies, in every culture on the planet. However, the show still manages to be quite addictive because of how the storyline progresses from its initial standpoint. While this is a trademark fantasy anime, it is also very much an example of political intrigue, and this, in my opinion, is its strength.

Unfortunately, even when the supporting cast is strong, a poor main character can negatively affect the atmosphere of the show. Hitomi has picked up a nasty reputation as the most annoying female anime character ever. I wouldn't say this is entirely true, but she is painfully incompetant. There isn't much of a reason for the audience to care about what happens to her, other than wanting to see her dead. Although, as I mentioned before, the rest of the cast is wonderfully diverse and well constructed.

As for animation and soundtrack, they are both above average. There are some beautifully painted backgrounds, and the colour scheme of Gaea is truly pleasing to the eye. The motion is quite standard, as is the drawing of the characters. The music is appropriate, but doesn't stand out as exceptional when you've watched a lot of other animes. In the end, there is something quite magical about the show, which explains its popularity. However, it is by no means the best of its genre.

Vision of Escaflowne

An explanation behind some of the things commonly seen in anime (that you've always no doubt wondered about)…

Those Pinkish petals / trees
[Why are they always gliding past my screen?]
Ever wondered what the deal is with those pink petals that always seem to float past a beautiful anime girl during a close up shot or suddenly appear when a samurai draws his sword? Well what you're looking at is Japan's national tree the Sakura cherry blossom tree. There are groves of these trees usually located near shrines and cemeteries, they play a big part in Japanese culture and in fact as I'm writing this article Hanami (hanna＝flower Mi＝look) is taking place in Japan. This is a time of year when families, couples and business colleagues alike all gather in the Sakura groves and have picnics under the trees enjoying the blooming cherry blossoms until the nightly festival activities take place under the blooming Sakura. Find out more about Hanami at www.blackblade.za.net.

That Sailor Style Schoolgirl Uniform
[Sure it's cute, but where does it come from?]
Well sometime in the 1800s when Japan finally re-opened its borders to foreigners they thought it may be a good idea to catch up on technology and science (since they'd been isolated from the rest of the world for so long) so the Japanese sent emissaries all over the world to study foreign science/culture etc. They were so seriously impressed with the Prussian* school and education system that they copied it, school uniforms, school buildings, the whole whack, and the sailor-style school uniforms of the Prussians can still be seen today in Japan and of course in Anime.

- Serpent

*(Prussia used to be part of Germany before the Russians assimilated it after WW1)

Serpent's Monthly Character Bio

Name: Nausicaa
Title: Princess
Favorite colour: Blue
Favorite hobby: Tromping through the toxic wastelands in search of adventure (and weird bugs)
Famous quote: Why? Who could have done this to the world?

Nausicaa Hime (Princess Nausicaa) the beautiful Princess of the Valley of the wind still remains one of my favourite characters to this day; this lonely Princess spends her time trying to find a way to restore the world to what it once was. Humanity created mighty weapons which bathed the world in seven days of fire destroying almost everything... from the ashes sprung the toxic wastelands, huge poisoned forests which creep over the surface of the planet like a disease, inhabiting these forests are giant insects the likes of which you've never seen before which guard the wastelands by destroying anything which tries to interfere with the forests. Nausicaa has a mysterious power over the insects, she is not afraid of these giant terrors and is able to calm and befriend them, and she is destined to heal the world by discovering the secret of the wastelands.

What genres do you get in anime?

This isn't the kind of question people actually ask outright, but I'm sure every newbie has wondered about it at some stage or another, especially after their craving for whatever genres they started out with has been sated. One could be forgiven for thinking that only action, comedy, cyber, fantasy and any odd mixes of the four are the only genres available - they're certainly the ones with the most appeal. However, they don't even come close to representing the range of genres encompassed by Japanese animation. Drama is something you'll find relatively often, though it rarely stands on its own. You'll lose count, after a few years of watching anime, of how many tragic and needless deaths you've witnessed or how many harshly unrequited gestures of love nearly had you smashing the TV screen. Anime drama can really engross those, like me, who tend to get sucked into whatever they are watching. War dramas are nothing new, but a bit of something old, you don't seem to get as many of them these days. Primarily a post World War II thing, these animes dealt with that famous war from many different angles such as soldiers on the front line wondering what it's all for, or normal, every day people trying to scrape a living in that difficult era. The two genres, romance and bishoujou are often overlapped and sometimes confused. Romance anime is standard romance stuff, dealing with tender feelings and complicated love triangles whereas shoujou anime is pretty much the same thing, though it focuses mainly on high school students. There are a few genres that are unique to Japanese animation too, such as the aforementioned bishoujou, magical girl, sports, demon-busting, and super-deformed. Examples of magical girl include the popular Sailormoon, Revolutionary Girl Utena and Pretty Sammy, all of these are anime in which every day Japanese schoolgirls are singled out and granted special powers to combat evil forces. Magical girl anime is primarily for younger audiences, but it does often contain humour that older viewers might appreciate. The Japanese also like to make animated series centered around popular sports, and these series are almost always insanely funny. Demon-busting is a genre that both the Japs and the westerners like to use, though the word "demon" seems to be rather taboo on western television. The Japanese style is quite different however, since the demons depicted and the methods used to combat them can be entirely fictional or even fanciful portrayals of actual Shinto religious practices. The super-deformed genre is so diverse that it's a loose classification at best, but it describes the sickeningly cute style where the characters are drawn with big heads and small bodies for humorous purposes.
Then let's not forget the samurai genre, which is not limited to anime and is pretty much the Japanese equivalent of the American western genre. Vastly different the two are, and yet strangely similar. The hero of a samurai movie is usually as proficient with his sword as the hero of a western might be with his gun. The idea of the "quick draw" is also present in both, but vastly different. When speaking of anime samurai action, nothing springs to mind faster than the awesome Rurouni Kenshin series, but there are others, like Kazemakase Tsukikage Ran to name but one.
I could go on forever, but my point is this, the range of genres in anime is wonderfully diverse and often unusual. There is plenty to suit just about any established taste and almost as much to please those looking for something that defies classification. Again, if you want to know more, the only way to really find out is to see for yourself.
- KnightGainax

the LAZY GAMER'S guide to the Asus L3000H Notebook

This month? Why it's a notebook! These machines have come quite a way from being the underperforming cousins of the desktop PC to sleek, high-end portable beasts, complete with a lot of expansion space, 3D acceleration and DVD playback. They still cost a bit more, though...

The FN key
In a nutshell, the FN key is Asus' answer to shortcut keys. The software installed with Windows allow you to set shortcuts (ie. FN+1) to load specific programs. What once was gimmicky is now really useful, not to mention that it means you don't need a lot of shortcut icons on your desktop or in your shortcut tray.

The Screen
You can grab this model in a pretty standard 14 or 15", though obviously the latter is a better choice. The display is clear, so it's great for high resolutions or watching DVDs, but it's not great against direct light or reflections. And yes, it ripples when you poke it.

Boot-up keys
Called the Instant Launch Keys, this set of keys boot up your machine. There is the standard power button, but the rest will also launch a specific application. So when you press the mail key, your machine boots and immediately opens your mail program. There's a button for Mail and Internet each as well as a Power Gear button (for low power situations) and finally a programmable button to launch a custom application.

Movie/Sound controls
If you are busy watching a movie or playing a CD, there are rather convenient media keys on the front of the notebook. These do the usual skip forwards/backwards, pause, play and fast forward/rewind.

The touchpad
The touchpad is a standard feature, as well as the scroll buttons, which are becoming more and more standard with notebooks. You also get a Optical mouse along with the hardware, in case the touch pad isn't your thing.

DVD!
Really, what is the point of being mobile and not being able to slack off and watch movies while waiting for a meeting to begin? The notebook ships with a standard DVD drive and Asus' own DVD software bundled along.

Inside!
Inside the notebook you'll find a Pentium 4 with at least 128MB RAM, a SIS650 graphics core with at least 32MB of RAM, Onboard modem and LAN connectors, a DVD drive, a wireless LAN connection, 2 PCMCIA expansion ports and a hard drive in 40, 60 or 80GB flavours - yummy.

writer: James Francis

FREELOADER

▶ Once again we endeavour to bring you the pick of the freeware crop - if only to save you time on surfing so that you can get more NAG reading done. So, without further ado...

Winamp 2.90

It is no mystery why Winamp is the most popular MP3 player out there. It simply is the best out on the market, but it did lack some functionality. Nullsoft tried to make up for this and bridge a major gap with Winamp 3, but the software was just very cluttered, slow and buggy. Of course, you can't keep a good thing down, and the people behind the player have also been working on an update for the original player, and it comes in the form of Winamp 2.90. The biggest change, apart from some nips and tucks? A media library, and the ability to play video files.

The biggest, and most useful addition has to be the media library, which allows you to manage your collection. There have been other programs that do this, some even working with Winamp, but except for Winamp 3, this feature has never been part of the program. In a nutshell, it's an interface to control your files. Ctrl+L brings up the window, and then it's a simple matter of adding a directory. The library screen lists albums according to artist and album. You are able to change the filename info, as well as the id3 tags. You can also add entire albums to playlists, or play specific albums or artists. There are still a few bugs. I've had files that had their own album, separate from songs from the same album, and the only solution seemed to be to remove the id3 tag information and then re-enter it after the manager sorted it into the right album category. Bugs aside, though, it's very useful. The manager also makes building playlists a lot easier, since you can easily assign songs to existing or new lists.
www.winamp.com

AdAware 6.0

Getting a lot of spam mail? Your machine unusually slow? Or are you getting a lot of pop-up windows selling you rubbish? Chances are you've got Spyware. It's a reoccurring topic, but to refresh your mind or explain to new readers, Spyware is a definition for malicious programs installed by vendors to your machine. These tend to come with the likes of Kazaa and Bonzi-Buddy, and they create targeted advertising, causing pop-ups and sometimes spam mail. There are even worse examples, often installed by porn sites, ranging from simple trackers to dialers. Either way, there are companies out there installing programs on your machine that you do not want. So what to do? Lavasoft's AdAware has always been the best program to get rid of these programs. It does a scan of your machine, in particular the Registry, and points out potential Spyware programs and entries, and allows you to delete the ones you want. Using Spyware is very easy - it's a simple matter of scanning, and unless you know of specific programs that you want to keep but might appear as Spyware (the toolbar Alexa is often mistaken as one), you can safely delete the entries. But it's always safe to check the list, because some authorized entries might end up being deleted, which means you'd have to re-install the application.

Ad-Aware also comes in a Pro flavour, which you can buy, though this basic version does the job. Remember to keep checking the Ad-Aware website for definition updates - which help identify new forms of Spyware.
www.lavasoft.de

Send-To Toys

Send-To Toys is a simple but very useful enhancement to your Send To menu tree. If you haven't noticed it yet, right-clicking on a file opens a menu of which one of the items are Send To, usually allowing you to mail the file, move it to a compressed folder, and so on. The toys add the ability to move it to a command prompt, Run command, to a specific folder (complete with a copy and move option) or the filename to the clipboard.

It's small and simple, and very useful if you make use of the Send To option, or need to move files to specific folders often. The To Folder command supports moving multiple files and folders.
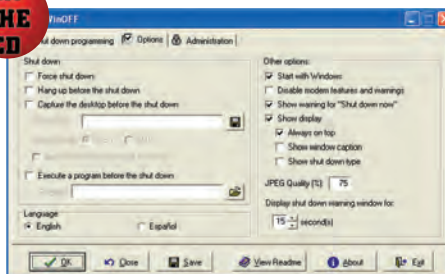
FreshDiagnose

Do you really know what's going on inside your PC? Few realize this, but your PC is not unlike a car. If you want good performance out of it, you need to look after your machine. But it's quite a complex box you have there and a quick look at your drive space in Windows is not enough. If you do the routine stuff such as defragging and scanning your drives for errors, that's a good start, but proper diagnosis of your PC means you need to know what's under the hood. Fresh Devices have been making a variety of free tools for a while now, and their Fresh Diagnose tool recently got another update. If you don't use Fresh Diagnose, you are missing out in vast proportions. Fresh Diagnose is as thorough as any commercial product, and gives an array of data on your machine.

There are the basics, such as what devices are present and basic Windows settings to more complex elements such as Cache Memory or what engines are currently running on your machine.

The program also allows you to benchmark elements of your machine, such as your hard drive speed or memory performance. Note, Fresh Diagnose doesn't actually adjust anything on your machine. You'll need more complex software if you want such an all-in-one package or you can use the various tweaks already available on your machine. But it does give you a good indication of what's going on in your PC.
www.freshdevices.com

AMP WinOFF

You have to leave, but you have a file downloading or a defrag in progress, and you really don't want your machine on all night, or have the modem run through the day, running up your phone bill.

AMP WinOFF is a handy utility that sits in your system tray and lets you set a time when your machine should do something. Something comes in the form of a reboot, shutdown, workstation lock, or even disconnect your modem. You can also force a shut-down if the CPU is idle for a certain time.

AMP WinOFF allows you to shut down according to a time and date, or a specific amount of minutes. You can even execute a specific program before a shut down or take a screenshot of your desktop, for diagnostic purpose. It's loaded with options to use, so take your time and explore.

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www.

▶ **A Modest Destiny**
www.squidi.net
Sprite comics have got a bad rep online, and deservedly so - they usually suck. When you speak of sprite comics, though, it usually refers to comics where game sprites are used to portray a story, and they are usually meant for fans, not to mention often quite bad. The other school that don't like them are purists, since sprite comics mean copying and pasting frames over and over. But that's a personal taste issue.
Still, say 'sprite comic' and people cringe. But readers of A Modest Destiny can proudly say the phrase and stand tall, for all of the comic's foes will be vanquished by a horde of evil ninjas! If that sentence enticed you, read on…
A Modest Destiny is a really good comic series that takes sprite back to the literal sense. All the characters and settings have been built out of pixels to resemble old eight-bit system graphics, although with more colours. In fact, the artist is very talented. Plus it has one of the funniest and most original stories I've read in a long time as far as online serials go.
As with all web comics, it deserves to be read from the start, of course. Also visit the features section for some hilarious 'behind the scenes' strips. The creator of A Modest Destiny, Sean Howard, has a very dry wit, and takes continuous stabs at fantasy culture. If that's your thing, you should be there already.

Novalogic
www.novalogic.com
I've been avoiding Novalogic's site for months - it never was any good. But they make good games, at least one's I'm a fan of, so it was inevitable that I would have to go there for information of some sort, though I wasn't expecting to get any info. The site was really that backwards. Lo and behold I find not the poor excuse of a web presence that I had become accustomed to, but instead a new(ish) site that not only covers all their games, but does it well! Of course, this is not news to anyone who has been using the Novaworld service, but not everyone is that keen to battle it out on international bandwidth, so it's safe to assume I'm in the safe zone here. Regardless, my point is that Novalogic's site has had a major revamp, so go and look!
The biggest change has to be the design, which is far more fluid and accessible. Each game has an information section that links you to everything you need

- from a breakdown of features and specs to downloads, online games and the option to buy (though the last one does not really help any local surfers). In short, its praise to a site that does the job right and gives the information that gamers need. A couple of publishers are catching on to the trend of doing this, but there are still far too few who have a nicely rounded site that is fast, easy to navigate and very informative on the games. Some community site links would be nice, but those might appear eventually.

MegaRom
www.megarom.co.za
MegaRom have finally launched their official website, covering their range of games - and they have a lot of games. For the few who don't know, MegaRom are the local distributors of Activision, Novalogic, Ubi Soft, Infogrames and Codemasters. Or in general terms, they have games such as DOOM III, Enter the Matrix, Neverwinter Nights, Black Hawk Down and Colin McRae 3. They definitely have the most varied catalogue of all the local distributors.

Daily Confessions
www.dailyconfession.com
Everyone has something to feel guilty about. Of course, we tend to keep these things to ourselves, and only tell absolute strangers when we get drunk and share war stories. But we all have dark little secrets or desires. Of course, since no-one's sharing (except in inebriated states that no-one talks about again), we all think our problems are the worst. Thanks to the Internet, though, shame has been traded for hiding behind the online anonymity, and everyone is revealing what their hearts have been hiding or desiring on Daily Confessions.
The site allows anyone to confess their 'sins' or let us into sticky situations they might find themselves in. These range from rather saucy stories to more curious ones (such as a guy whose girlfriend wants him to pick up a LOT of weight).
Sadly, the site needs work itself, and it's not catalogued very well, so it's a pain to

browse, not to mention that the webmaster deemed it clever to load all the content of a specific category on one page.
Still, it's a nice example of how the Internet is opening new avenues of interaction that you simply won't get anywhere else. Oh, and it makes you realize that the people out there are pretty screwed up in general. I'm staying home a lot more often ever since…

▼ **space**

surfing the vast

Space, the final frontier! Of course, it's not likely to be soon when humans are swooping around space Freelancer style, taking jump gates to the far corners of the galaxy, but at least we've figured out a way off our native rock. If you want to know what's happening with the world of space, here are a few sites to visit.

www.space.com
NASA might be a bigger site, but it's not as user-friendly as Space.com, a portal that's all about promoting space to the common folk. Information on local programs, planets, projects, as well as wallpapers, screensavers and interesting features (such as satellite photography during the war on Iraq) galore.

www.nasa.gov
Of course, the undisputed place for all things space, though in a more bland, autocratic flavour, remains NASA. The agency has been sending people, monkeys and germs up to the stars for years and they have pictures of it.

www.ksc.nasa.gov
The official website of the Kennedy Space Center; it's where you should be if your interest is in the NASA shuttle launch program.

www.esa.int
The US isn't the only place with a space program. Europe has had one going for a while and this is the official site for the European Space Agency, and they are up to quite a bit more than you'd think.

www.spaceweather.com
Every morning I wake up, but no news channel covers what today's solar wind speed and density is! Thank goodness for such sites as Space Weather! More practical, though, is their schedule for meteor showers and such things.

pds.jpl.nasa.gov/planets/welcome.htm
Ugly as sin but pretty thorough. If you need to know about the planets in our solar system, this resource is pretty thorough.

lifeboat.com/ex/main
Let's be honest, you want the weirder stuff. So head over to this site, where a non-profit company is trying to construct a space ark that will save humanity from all the bad stuff that's happening on Earth. Lots of pretty renderings…

You take the blue pill, the story ends...you wake up in your bed and believe whatever you want to believe. You take the red pill, you stay in wonderland and I'll show you how deep the rabbit hole goes.

rabbit

Follow the white rabbit ....

How far down does the rabbit hole go? Are you ready to find out?

www.megarom.co.za

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huh?!?

▶ Turtling

▶ What did that geek just say? What is this reviewer talking about? Did that guy over there just insult me? You'll never know until you know the lingo of IT and gaming, so we put together a Newbie GameSpeak Glossary - a collection of terms bound to crop up a lot in gaming articles and chatter.

ADSL
Asymmetric DSL. DSL is high-speed broadband that has high up and down transfer speeds. ADSL is geared to home users, who are more likely to download more data than upload (as opposed to a server, which uploads more data). Therefore in ADSL the download stream has more bandwidth.

Bump-mapping
Bump mapping is a rather clever trick to simulate textures on a surface. In a nutshell - there are two ways to make textures on a surface. Either you create actual grooves and bumps in the surface (which means more faces and thus more rendering power) or you use bump-mapping, which looks the same but uses less resources.

Bluetooth
Named after the nickname of a Danish king that unified Norway and Denmark, Bluetooth is a short-range wireless technology that can connect a range of peripherals such as printers, cameras, cell phones and palm tops at 720kbit/s and at ranges of up to 10 metres.

Camping
Camping is when someone, a camper, stays in one spot to keep an advantage during a deathmatch game instead of running around. Campers usually hang around the spawn spots of powerful weapons, power-ups or health.

Co-op
Co-op means Co-Operative Play. This is when two or more players play together to finish single-player missions. The Deathmatch equivalent would be Team Deathmatch.

CODEC
CODEC is an abbreviation for coder/decoder. CODECS find their most common use with videos on PCs, of which DivX is the most popular. It is used to compress or decompress special technologies, such as Dolby 5.1 or AVI.

CTF
Or Capture the Flag. CTF is a multiplayer game where a team has to capture the opposing team's flag on the other side of the base. Whichever team captures the enemy's flag most, wins!

Deathmatch
You don't know this one? It's when two or more gamers battle it out over a network or the Internet. Any kind of non co-op multiplayer game is a deathmatch of some sort.

E3
E3 stands for the Electronic Entertainment Expo, and it signifies 3 days in the middle of May where everything that is anything in gaming appears. Since it's a press and industry-only event, a lot of debuts and special viewings happen here.
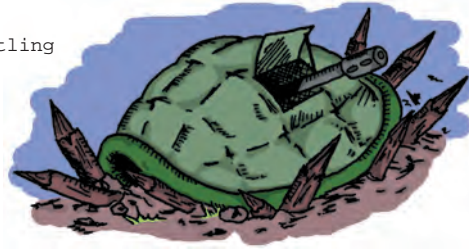
Firewire
A competitor to USB, Firewire can be used to connect peripherals or other machines to a machine. It supports high-speed transfers of data and has a theoretical maximum data rate of 400 Mbps, roughly the same as USB 2.0.

Frag
A frag is a kill in a game. It is used to indicate a kill inside a first person shooter such as Quake or Unreal Tournament, but these days it's a more generic term for most FPS games.

FPS
First Person Shooter or Frames Per Second. The first is self-explanatory - think Quake 3 or Rainbow 6. The second indicates the amount of frames per second a game renders. 60 is usually the industry norm, though traditional film and animation only require 25 fps.

FSAA (Full Screen Anti-Aliasing)
Anti Aliasing is the process of blurring or smoothing polygon edges. You can easily spot a polygon because its harsh edges make it stand out, but when it is anti aliased, the blurred edges blend more with the background, which is how we see things in real life. FSAA is a feature on some 3D cards that applies anti-aliasing to polygons.

Gib
A gib is, in a nutshell, when a game character explodes, usually thanks to your rocket. You see gibs in shooters, in RPG games such as Neverwinter Nights (usually on a critical hit) or anything where you see chunks flying thanks to someone's firepower.

GPU
A GPU is a processor chip that sits on a graphics card and handles the mathematical calculations for lighting and rendering effects of 3D objects, freeing up cycles on the CPU. This technology is used in games, 3D development and CAD applications. The GeForce was the first card to have an on-board GPU, capable of processing at least 10 million polygons per second.

Hardware T&L
T&L stands for Texture and Lighting. If a card has hardware T&L support, it means the 3D Card's GPU handles the lighting and texture rendering, instead of the software (and therefore your CPU).

ISO
More commonly heard in piracy circles, ISO is actually a CD standard. The original name refers to ISO 9660, the standard file system to which all CD readers read compact discs. Discs written to this standard can be read by Macs and PCs. An ISO can also be a digital image of a CD that can be stored on a harddrive and later used to write an exact copy of the CD.

Lag
Lag refers to when a network game is slow. If a game over a network or the internet tends to stutter or update its state sporadically while you play, that's lag.

LOD (Level of Detail)
Level of Detail is a cunning trick that most games use to make your machine run fast, despite the game being graphically intensive. It does this by adding and removing elements depending on how far something is from you. For instance, when you see a character from far away, it's relatively low poly. Move up closer and more polygons and effects are added, until up close you might sit with a 4000 polygon character, complete with bump-mapping and the kitchen sink.

MMORPG
Massively Multiplayer Online RPG. This is the abbreviation for games such as Everquest and World of WarCraft. It means you control a character in a persistent world.

MUD
Multi User Dungeons. MUDs are the forefathers of MMORPG games. They are text-based dungeon games online where thousands of users would use a text-based interface to roam the dungeon, battle monsters, gather items and meet other gamers.

Ownage
Ownage is gamer slang for dominating someone. It's very loosely used, though. You can 'own' someone beating them hands down (for instance: -10 to 20 kills. Also known as being raped). You can also own them with a particular good kill. For instance, if he had a chainsaw and you had a rocket launcher, and he kills you, you were owned.

Page File
The Page File is a file on your harddrive where RAM data that isn't accessed often is stored. This way the data is still available, but not taking up memory resources, and the data won't need to be reloaded from scratch when a program asks for it.

Ping
Ping, apart from the program itself that does the same thing, means to check the presence of something online, be it on a LAN or on the net. When a machine is pinged, a packet of data is sent, and the response time counted. The slower the target responds, the higher its ping. Networks operate by sending data packets to other machines and receiving responses. A high ping indicates a slow connection, either due to low bandwidth or high packet loss.

Pixel Shaders
In layman's terms, a pixel shader is a program on the GPU that processes and manipulates pixels. Pixel shaders help developers manipulate the interaction between objects to give more realistic effects, such as dynamically rippling water.

PK
PK stands for Player Kill. This is a common problem with MMORPG games where players kill off lower level players for various reasons.

RTS
Real Time Strategy, such as Command & Conquer and WarCraft.

Red Hat
Red Hat is the most popular and widely used version of Linux.

Rail-whore
A rail whore is a Quake 3 term for someone who either camps to get the Rail Gun or uses it all the time.

SCSI
An abbreviation for Small Computer System Interface. It's a high-speed standard that can connect up to seven devices to one port, ranging from CD Roms and hard drives to scanners and removable drives. It still remains faster than IDE, the standard found on PCs, and only Firewire and USB 2.0 are comparable. SCSI is more expensive, though, and isn't a standard feature on PCs.

Shaders
Programable shaders, a feature on newer graphics cards, allow developers to combine and create new effects formerly not possible. Thanks to shader technology, things such as rendering fur, clothing and detailed lighting have appeared, and theoretically the amount of effects that you can create are limitless.

Terabyte
A thousand Gigabytes, or 2 to the 40th power bytes (1000 000 000 000 bytes). The next measure is a Petabyte, which is 1000 Terabytes (1000 000 000 000 000 bytes). Note: This is calculated on the US definition of a billion, which is 1000 000 000.

Teraflop
A Flop means a floating point operation by a computer. A teraflop is roughly a trillion floating point operations a second. Teraflops are currently the fastest computers have reached, though scientists are working on petaflop speeds.

TGS
The Tokyo Games Show is the other big event on the gaming calendar, except that it has open sections for the public. It takes place in Tokyo every year and is the other important place to be [E3 is first] if you want to know what will be the next big thing in the console industry.

Turtling
If you are playing an RTS match, and you build tons of defenses, basically walling yourself it, that's turtling. Yeah, we've all done it.

USB
Universal Serial Bus. USB is a better standard to connect peripherals to computers. It has a thinner cable than serial and parallel connectors, but is faster, and USB hubs can allow up to 125 devices to be connected to a machine at once. USB devices can also be connected or disconnected without rebooting a machine. USB 2.0, the new standard, is as fast as its rival, Firewire.

Virtual Memory
This is the amount of memory available to the CPU for operating programs. Virtual memory can be less or more than the actual memory on a machine.

Vertex Shaders
A vertex is a point on a 3D object that is defined in 3D space. For instance, if you had the co-ordinates of a vertex, it would be in height, width and depth of the space it exists in. Vertex shaders allow developers to manipulate vertex points in real time (and thus the shape and appearance of polygons), including their colour, lighting and fog attributes, amongst other things. Vertex shaders can't remove or add vertexes, just manipulate them.

▼ Owned   ▼ Deathmatch   ▼ Lag

Player of the Month ▷▷▷
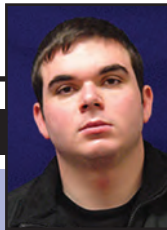
profile

Name: Eleftherios Tsironis	**Clan:** Naja
Nick: Nautilian	**Games:** Unreal Tournament | UT2003 | Medal of Honour Allied Assault
Age: 19	
	Quote: "Without struggle there is no progress."
Occupation: Student / Web Designer	

Achievements:
* Represented South Africa at WCG 2002 for Unreal Tournament
* 3rd place in UT at Worfaire Prelims 2002
* 1st place in UT at Worfaire Finals 2002
* 3rd place in UT Koltagon 2000
* 1st place in Richards Bay UT Tournament 2001
* 1st place in Cape Town UnrealWorx UT Tournament 2001
* 2nd place in The Clash 5v5 tournament (Naja)
* 1st place in The Clash 2v2 tournament (Naja)

<The_Basilisk> Out of curiosity, what is the meaning of your nickname?
<Nautilian> Well it is a long story... Remember Captain Nimo? 10000 Leagues Under the Sea? The Submarine Nautilus? (which means a multi-shelled fish). So inevitably I did my own little mod to the name and I came up with Nautilian.
<The_Basilisk> Did you expect to win Worfaire 2002?
<Nautilian> Yes and No. Not to make any excuses but I changed my mouse 2 weeks prior to the preliminary event and my game felt off. Baltazar, Casper and Belgarath played some awesome games and in saying that, they outplayed me. However, I did get my own back in the Worfaire Finals.
<The_Basilisk> How did you train for the competition?
<Nautilian> I trained so much it almost cost me my schooling career. On average I was playing 35 hours a week, and that was just practicing. The majority of the time was spent playing bots, and then a few hours against human players at night online.
<The_Basilisk> What is the most important "ingredient" one needs to win a tournament?
<Nautilian> Self confidence, controlling your nerves and knowing how to play mind games with your opponent. Obviously it's easier said than done, but that is why I practised.
<The_Basilisk> What are the major differences between Unreal Tournament and UT2003?
<Nautilian> In all honesty they are two completely different games. The engines are different, the feel is different. You have more of a tactical advantage in UT2003 because the weapons are so expansive, in other words you can inflict more damage in less time, and controlling maps are a lot easier. UT original was extremely well balanced.
<The_Basilisk> Does equipment make the man?
<Nautilian> You need the basic requirements like a reasonably good graphics card and a processor that will be able to handle the game comfortably. However, a mouse that is to your liking can turn you into a much better player.

The Answers To All Your UT2003 Questions

With Unreal Tournament 2003 replacing Quake 3 as the world's official one versus one competition game, players are starting to ask questions about how the game will be run in the official capacity. A thorough knowledge of the rules and regulations is essential to the competitive player. If you're practising the wrong game type, it could negatively affect your performance in competitions. Also, for those wanting to get into a new competitive game, it can sometimes be a daunting task to get your version up to date (there are several required patches, mutators, new maps, etc). So to help bring new players into the UT2003 community, we have compiled all the necessary information into one helpful article.

PATCHES
The first thing to take note of is the version of your game. If you've installed it straight from the CDs and never downloaded any updates, then you're running what we call "vanilla" UT2003. If you intend to play the game online or at the major LANs, unfortunately this pure version will not be enough. Every so often, the developers release patches that fix bugs, add new features and increase performance of the game. For UT2003, the latest patch (at the time of going to print) is version 2199. Version 2219 is due for release soon, so keep an eye out for it. A great place to get new patch information and to download the patches themselves is Planet Unreal at www.planetunreal.com/ut2003. If you do not have internet access when a new patch is released, try to attend a LAN and copy it from someone there. If your version is out of date, you will not be able to connect to servers until you update it. You can download it from the servers themselves, but this takes ages.

TOURNAMENT RULES
If competitions are your forté, take careful note of this section. The format mentioned here is the World Cyber Games standard, also likely to be used at the Electronic Sports World Cup. All South African tournaments will be running this configuration, so if you intend to compete, make sure you're fully informed.

Game Type	One versus one (Team Deathmatch mode so players get shoulder lights)
Game Rules	- Weapon Stay off - Translocator off - Weapon Throwing off - Bright Skins off
Mutators	- TTM2003 version 2, available for download at www.planetunreal.com/ttm/downloads_v2.html (warmup enabled, timer enabled) - No Adrenaline - No Superweapons
Maps	DM-Compressed, DM-Antalus, DM-DE-Ironic, DM-DE-Grendelkeep, DM-Curse3, DM-Insidious
Server Settings	- Timelimit: 15 - Fraglimit: 0

You'll notice that TTM is not running on any of the South African online servers. Unfortunately this is because of a general phobia about it in the South African online community. This is because the initial release version was buggy. However, the bugs have now all been corrected. Another complaint was that TTM "turns UT2003 into Quake 3". This is completely untrue. All TTM does is add a useful voting system, a warmup mode and a timer, while collecting player stats during the game. It basically adds what should have been present in the first place. Although, like it or not, TTM is the international standard which is being adopted here as well.

Groups for tournaments will be determined according to seeding, so if you want to get a good (easy group), make yourself known online and at LANs.

TOURNAMENTS AND LANS

This year, there are an abundance of UT2003 competitions planned. The first ever South African competition was a mini-tourney held at the Collective LAN on the 29th March, and was won by 42.Livid. By the time this goes to print, the first major competition, the Shuttle Xtreme George LAN (hosted by K-Sports) will have been played, and the winners will be announced in an upcoming issue. As for future tournaments, the 1000manlan (mentioned last month, www.1000manlan.co.za) and Gamers Gate (www.gamersgate.co.za) are offering rather enormous UT2003 competitions. Gamers Gate are sending the winner to compete in the Electronic Sports World Cup in France, so that is the big one.

As for LANs, Mayhem (www.mayhem.co.za) and The Collective (www.collectiveza.com) are the major gathering points for Gauteng's UT2003 community. The odd game or two will usually be played at every LAN though. Try and make it to one of these, to see how you measure up against the competition. Visit www.langames.co.za for plenty of LAN information.

PACKS AND MUTATORS

Similar to patches, these are add-ons to the game in the form of new game types, features and maps, and are usually released by third-party developers. If you do not have all the packs and mutators that a particular server is running, you will not be able to connect before downloading them. Again, you can download directly from the server if you have a lot of time on your hands. If you are going to be playing at a LAN, it's best to ask the person running the server to share all of his files for everyone to copy. To play on the online South African servers however, you need the following files:

ALL SERVERS	
Epic Bonus Pack	ftp://ftp.gamezone.co.za/Mods_Maps/UT2003/UT2003-epicbonuspackone.exe
DE Bonus Pack	www.unrealza.co.za/files/packs/debonus.ut2mod.zip
DEATHMATCH SERVERS	
UnrealZA Server Pack	www.unrealza.co.za/files/packs/uzapack1.zip
Optional Maps	www.unrealza.co.za/files/maps/dm-tazmoon.zip www.unrealza.co.za/files/maps/DM-Agony2.zip www.unrealza.co.za/files/maps/DM-Ancient2003_SE.zip www.unrealza.co.za/files/maps/DM-Taz4_2003.zip www.unrealza.co.za/files/maps/dm-codex2k3.zip
CAPTURE THE FLAG SERVERS	
CTF Pack	www.unrealza.co.za/files/packs/CTFPack1.exe
DEATHBALL SERVERS	
Deathball Pack	www.unrealza.co.za/files/mods/deathball16.exe
Deathball Map Pack	ftp://ftp.gamezone.co.za/Mods_Maps/UT2003/db_pack.zip

SA ONLINE SERVERS		
Server Name	**Game Type**	**Server Address**
Unreal Tournament 2003		
SGS UT2003 Server 1	Deathmatch	196.4.79.7:7777
SGS UT2003 Server 2	Deathmatch	196.4.79.17:7777
M-Web Phobos 1	Deathmatch	196.2.17.20:7777
M-Web Phobos 2	Capture the Flag	196.2.17.20:8777
M-Web Duel Server	Duel	196.2.152.238:9777
M-Web UT2003 Deathmatch DEMO	Deathmatch	192.2.33.21:8777
M-Web UT2003 Bombing Run DEMO	Bombing Run	192.2.33.21:9777
Unreal Tournament		
SGS UT	DeathMatch Server	196.4.79.14:7777
M-Web Kalahari (1)	DeathMatch	196.2.33.21:7777
M-Web Karoo	CTF	196.2.152.238:7777

It is recommended that you download The All-Seeing Eye (www.udpsoft.com/eye) to help locate new servers, and to tell which ones are up and down. You can also download the UnrealZA server manager created by ProAsm (www.unrealza.co.za/proasm/ut2mon.html).

SOUTH AFRICAN CLANS

If you are serious about getting some practise, the best way forward is to join one of South Africa's UT2003 clans, where you'll receive all the competition and all the advice you need. Currently, there are seven established clans, and more are likely to spring up in the near future. Look out for the Avatars, Dogs of War, Helix, HellRaisers, Naja, Team 42 and R3negade. (If you are part of a clan that has not been mentioned here, please email basilisk@webmail.co.za). The online community is spread across the IRC channel #ut2k3 on snow.shadowfire.org, and the forums at www.unrealza.co.za.

▼ UnrealZA Server Manager

The addition of alternative entertainment for the Electronic Arts, G8Keeper 1000manLAN has caught the imagination of many gamers, and has stimulated a great deal of interest from the alternative gaming communities in South Africa.

Africa Militaire (www.africamilitaire.net) was the first to get involved with the Electronic Arts, G8Keeper 1000manLAN through their close ties with the Armed Forces, in particular Air Force Base Waterkloof, and the 28th Squadron. They have for some time been responsible for the large display of scale model building that goes on at the International Air Show at Waterkloof every year. They also build and show model trains, and have recently expanded their future plans to build replicas of WW II military trains. The Africa Militaire repertoire extends to meet The South African Wargamer's (www.TheSouthAfricanWargamer.co.za) interests when we get to the little (and often quite intricate) figurines used for Wargames. The enthusiasm from these communities was incredible! Where better to do a little strategy gaming Brain Share than at a computer gaming event where pretty much every game is about strategy, territory, tactics and mental toughness?

Combine these different stimuli with the inputs from The Association of Virtual Aviation (AVA - www.ava.org.za) and the Virtual Aviation Clubs (VACS) around the country, and you have a diversity of information and experiences that can make all gamers sit up and take notice! By bringing in the aviation side of gaming into the event, we joined in the international celebration of the Centenary of Flight, and the celebration of the 28th Squadron's 60th Anniversary.

This addition made some gamers happier than they have ever been in their lanning days! Flight simulator games have generally not been regarded as the best LAN type games because of their long duration format. By promoting short-format dog-fights at the event for the public and non-flight simulator players alike, we hope that a different angle has been given to this often misunderstood genre of games. The reality based Virtual Airlines, Virtual Air Traffic Control and Rally flying stand as a wide-open domain for everyone from the aviation "specialist" to the weekend flyer.

It's been a long time since that great a diversity of games have been played and officially supported at such a large-scale event. G8Keeper seriously hope that these beginnings form the foundation for a more diverse, fun and educational experience for the future of gaming in South Africa.

We hope that you thoroughly enjoyed the Electronic Arts, G8Keeper 1000manLAN and hope that you will be back for more next time.

Rocco Strauss
RandoM@g8keeper.co.za

How to keep your PC secure at a LAN

I have a few problems regarding the whole etiquette at LANs when it comes to invading my machine without being asked. I know at least one person that will be defensive about his actions, but frankly, it's not an isolated incident nor is it uncommon.

Let's just simplify it for those who are not smart enough to figure it out. If you don't lock your front door or window, would you want someone to enter without knocking? The person might not actually do any harm but it remains an invasion of your private space. Even though he might only use something without removing it, it remains unpleasant. It is after all common courtesy to ask someone before you use his or her stuff. It goes for shares and files stored on another person's computer as well. It however seems common practice to go browsing the network at LAN's for things to copy from another person's machine. This will get you into serious trouble if you ever did this on a company network and into serious bad books with your fellow Lanners, no matter who you are.

This article is not about etiquette, it's about how to relatively protect yourselves against incoming connections to your machine - going from a quick fix solution, to severe countermeasures. Note, the guys who are really out to steal your company information would probably still be able to connect to your machine at a LAN without problems, but this is to cover the 99.99% of the rest of the populace.

A lot of security holes exist in your operating system. I am even debating if Microsoft is intentionally building in flaws, or perhaps even an evil plot by the Illuminati (funny that MS Word does not recognise Illuminati as a valid word… makes you wonder).
The best thing to do when you install a new operating system, is to install all the required security patches available for your Operating System (I am going to talk about Windows, because I haven't seen too many Linux gaming machines at LANs YET! Oh look, MS Word knows about Linux! Nice). You all should have a Windows update button on your Internet Explorer. Service Pack 3 for Windows 2000 or Service Pack 1 for Windows XP and all the additional security patches from Windows update stops most of the old tricks in the book. There are a lot of security holes in IIS that leaves machines insecure and open to these people. Though my discussion is mostly for Lanners, it won't hurt to implement it for your dialup machines at home.

Please note, the suggestions below go from simple actions to the more advanced and if you fall out of the rocking chair on your way down, please don't e-mail me.

1.	Do not create any shares; to stop all your shares at a LAN is first prize. You are slowing the network down for other people, but in a perfect world, this is unlikely to happen.
2.	If you are using Windows 98, 2000 or XP, try and keep the access to your machine to a minimum. Simply place a '$' sign behind your share name to make your share hidden from the rest of the network browsing utilities. This means a person would have to type in \\myspecialcomputer\myspecialfolder$ in the Run box to access that share that is called "myspecialfolder$", you can try it out on your own computer to see if it works.
3.	If you are going to share, put a password on the share. This is a dual edged sword for a LANning environment. On Windows 2000 and XP you supply both a username and a password of an existing user on that machine. In other words, the person who made the share, also creates a "sharing" user on his machine, and assigns only the sharing user to have access to the share. On 98 its a lot simpler to put a password on the share but you will have problems on many occasions connecting to a user that doesn't have default user enabled since 98 machines generally don't ask for a username when connecting out. The default user is a user that is disabled by default in your system management /users section. Enabling this user means that you won't need to type in a password to access a share, unless you have NTFS on that machine and applied some security on a file system level, but I digress.
4.	If a person has managed to find out your administrator or super user password at a LAN, because maybe you thought it was decent to tell him this password (after all, he is your best friend, he would NEVER copy from you while you are playing), you are basically leaving him open to connect to the root of your Windows 2000/XP machine. \\computername\c$ is the administrator share and is usually available on most machines. The only way of preventing people from connecting here is stopping your machine as a server. Stop the server service on your machines by clicking Start/run type: 'Services.msc' and press OK, then look for the Server service. While you are there, stop the messenger service too (rather annoying to receive popups in the middle of a game). Btw, never give your admin password out… technically, if I knew this I could remotely run a process on your machine via RPC$; for those who know what I am on about good, you probably know how to secure yourself already.

Ok, for the slightly more advanced and slightly more paranoid people read on. For those who believe that ports on a computer look like the 3D animated ones of the movie "Lawnmower Man" - and says "access denied" in a sexy female voice, stop immediately and praise yourself for knowing a lot of stuff so far to protect yourself. For you reaching over to pat yourself on the back, go right to the end where it reads "disclaimer" because it gets a bit more geeky.

Backdoor Trojans and things like these are basically the domain of the truly desperate at LANs who lack the social graces to ask the person nicely if he may have his wallpapers. If you have gone this far, consider yourself the geekiest of the geeks (no, no, I don't mean it as a compliment… now sit down and take a deep breath). Save yourself the trouble and just go ask the guy if you could copy something from him before he spots you or you stumble across someone who has counter measures and get thrown out of the LAN for being there for the wrong reasons.
The next step after you have patched Windows from allowing the general guy in the street to use the well documented exploits, how about the people that go a step further? Firstly, to find out if someone is actually accessing your machine is simple when they are connected to your share. Right click on "My Computer" and click on manage the drill down to shared folders / sessions. This allows you to see who is connecting. (W2k and XP)

Personal firewalls will block the rest of the world at LANs but they are very annoying when you are trying to have fun. Personal firewalls basically block most of the unknown ports. You are left with a tiny little hole in your machine to see the rest of the world. For those of you who have read this far, I wont beat around the bush. Personal firewalls where you have to unblock each incoming IP/Port every time you play a new game could take up more time than you actually playing the game. It also depends how well you have read the documentation to actually enforce the right amount of security that will block that 0.01% percent of the populace capable of not getting to your machine, but still getting you to play, my opinion. Personal firewalls are only useful if you want to monitor people's attacks on your machine at a LAN, not for actually playing while being attacked.

Disclaimer
Ok. This is me not taking responsibility for any of your actions. Firstly, make sure you know what you are doing, and ask people before you are doing this if it is the right course of action for your machine since you might be using a company/spouse/parent's machine at a LAN and might cause him more hassles than what he asked for. So basically, read up a bit more on what I have said, and make sure that you feel its enough security. Most people don't have to go past point number 2 at the top to prevent people from finding their secret Back Street Boys MP3 collection (really don't blame you for wanting to keep it a secret). [*or your 'dress Barbie' toy, Ed*]
Note, this is not a complete unbreakable system and though a lot of people will be able to catch you even if you go beyond this point, since we have security experts of major banks playing alongside normal gamers and would find you no matter what you do to hide yourself, just trust me on that one.

Happy LANning, and if you plan to use your sniffing tools, prepare to have your ass booted from a LAN quicker than you can say "1aMal33tHax0rK1ddy".

Firewall sites for those interested www.tinysoftware.com and www.zonelabs.com

TadMadLad and Infiltrator

▶▶ And the winner is…

La Toscana at Monte Casino, North of Johannesburg set the stage for the Nintendo GameCube final on Saturday the 5th of April 2003. Regional events were held in Johannesburg, Pretoria, Durban and Cape Town. Each region saw one winner out of hundreds of hopeful entrants walk away with a Nintendo GameCube, four games, a one year subscription to New Age Gaming Magazine and some of the hottest Nintendo shirts I've seen! These four finalists then met at the final event at La Toscana to compete for the trip of a lifetime!

The three runners-up (Aadil Barendse from Cape Town, Grant van Goeverden from Durban and Aiden Musnitzky from Gauteng) will each receive a selection of triple-A games released during the next twelve months by Nintendo South Africa, a prize worth an estimated R8000-00 each!

Congratulations to Roy Lovett from Mulbarton, who is SA's Nintendo Console Gamer of the Year! Roy won a trip for him and a partner to E3 in Los Angeles, America courtesy of Nintendo and STA Travel. STA specializes in youth travel and they will be treating Roy and whomever he takes along with him, to VIP treatment at luxury hotels and a guided tour of the best electronic show on earth. Roy has also been invited as a VIP quest of Nintendo to the Nintendo after-party! Roy, this is a friendly warning… The booth babes are there to look at, not to take home with you!

We gave Roy a call the day after he had won and asked him a couple of questions…

How many hours of practice did you put in for the final event?
Not as much as I would have liked! I work during the day and that leaves me with only the afternoons to practice. I was playing on average about 3 - 5 hours each afternoon... mainly on Tony Hawk's Pro Skater 4... cause I REALLY needed it!

How long on average do you spend each day playing games?
Once again, work kinda gets in the way, about 3 hours during the week and about 90% of my weekends are spent in front of my TV.

Have you packed your bomb shelter DIY kit? And do you have baked beans in your survival pack?
Mmm... thought about it! But I'm rather taking my Game Boy Advance SP and some pretzels... that will aid me in survival cause I'm not too keen on beans.

What was your favourite part of the competition, apart from winning it?
Meeting all the people! I made two new friends in Ian and Blake who were my hardest competition in Pretoria... and at Eastgate! Blake took second at both venues, Ian took fourth! Little punks came through to the finals to support so I thought a shout-out was in order!

Your thoughts on the GameCube?
I've been lucky to play most of the consoles that have been released and can honestly say that, along with the Dreamcast, it must be the most under rated piece of hardware around. Games like Metroid Prime and Eternal Darkness are worth the purchase of the console alone! Then you take multi-player games like Super Smash Bros. into account and, *sorry to say it*, you have a console that's much better than any other. I can hear the cries from all the PS2 and Xbox owners out there but trust me, play Metroid before you pass a comment...

Favourite game of all time?
Ouch! Tough one....Legend of Zelda: Link's Awakening on the Super Nes. Nothing has been able to come close to the feeling I had when I first saw the rain effects on the old 16-Bit SNES, and the game is just pure bliss.

Well there you go, that sees the end of a fantastic event - thanks to everyone for participating!

Ok, that's it from me… don't forget that registrations for the Electronic Sports World Cup Preliminary at The Carousel Casino in June are open on LanGames.

L33t rul3s :)
Oh… And Ferrari too :)

Len Nery
Len@GamersGate.co.za
www.gamersgate.co.za

Well thank goodness that is over. April was one of the busiest months the Mayhem staff have had in ages.

One month, four weekends, six events and a war in Iraq.
Please note that Mayhem had nothing to do with the war in Iraq. We do however hope that one day we can get Saddam, Bush and Blair to have it out in a multiplayer game of C&C Generals.

EVENT NEWS:
For a full break down of what happened at the 1000man LAN, and the Shuttle Extreme LAN in George as well as Das Wolf in Pretoria go check out the news section on www.mayhem.co.za.

LEAGUE NEWS:
The Mayhem off-line league is nearing its end with only two events to go. If you wish to see over all results as well as a per event break down, you can find all that info on the news section of www.mayhem.co.za. Not too long from now the winning teams will be announced. Prizes will be awarded as a few teams will find themselves playing in the Gamers Gate Carousel LAN (12, 13, 14 June) with a chance to go play in France.

For more info on the Carousel LAN as well as the tournament in France go check out www.gamersgate.co.za or read the Gamers Gate section in NAG.

Some news from the SGS side. We had a chat with Elyzium from SGS, and the SGS on-line Counter-Strike League is in full swing. Elyzium was disappointed that only 24 teams registered for the on-line league as the staff of SGS had geared up and were ready to take on 100 teams over the next few months. Mayhem will try to keep you up to date with the SGS on-line league.

If all has gone to plan SGS should have their Freelancer server up and running by now. So you can now play Freelancer on-line as well as at Mayhem. The new game by Microsponge has sparked a lot of interest, but delays at customs have slowed down gamers buying the game as well as the implementation of a SGS freelancer server. This should however have been sorted out by now. If you are in need of a copy Freelancer send a mail to vapour@mayhem.co.za and we will have it to you at the next Mayhem event.

DATES TO LOOK OUT FOR
 3 May - Funky Cow LAN PTA
10 May - Monthly Link Day PTA
17 May -- Mayhem off-line Counter-Strike League
31 May - Mayhem open LAN. (this event might move to 24 May)
12,13,14 June - Gamers Gate Carousel LAN.

Vapour[SOD]
We pull wire country wide
Vapour@mayhem.co.za
www.mayhem.co.za

WOLVENOID'S LAIR
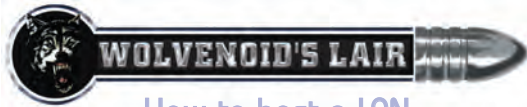
How to host a LAN
Part 3

"Champions do not become champions when they win the event, but in the hours, weeks, and years they spend preparing for it. The victorious performance itself is merely the demonstration of their championship character."
- Alan Armstrong

It's 4 o'clock in the afternoon, there's a storm building up outside, it's warm and although I know my thoughts should be on my work, I can't get it out of my head. Another 30 minutes and I'll be on my way.

Rush hour is hectic, but it will be worth it when I get home. I close the door behind me, and it's all quiet, it has started raining, I slip off my shoes, take a glimpse at it and tip toe to the bedroom. I wade through my wardrobe to find something comfortable, decide on a silk shirt … nothing else ….I run past the fridge to find something cold and wet. I dim the lights to enhance the mood as I make my way towards it. Slowly I trace its contours, it's hard and cold, I shiver. I press the button. A familiar sound relaxes me, like a well-oiled machine performing at its best. Anticipation grows as I take the rocket in my hands … I enter….. cyber world, my arena, my strategy, my tactics. It's a close battle for sweet victory. Fifteen minutes of intense action passes, at last, yes I did it, I beat him by a frag. And I wonder, why am I sitting here all alone, queen of the arena, with no one to cheer and praise!

All the more reason to attend a LAN, host a LAN, spectate at a LAN, experience the excitement, the disappointment, feel the tension, share in the glory, listen to the silence, the cheering, the forbidden words. See the face, see the person and see the gamer in action.

To recap, we have by now decided on what type of LAN, the size of the LAN and gathered a group of helpers. What now? The next step is very important when hosting a LAN. Where do you host?

Where can 50 gamers fit? Arrange a meeting with your helpers and discuss the venue. Find a central location where you will be able to draw a lot of gamers. Then look up possible venues such as community halls, conference facilities, school halls etc. Don't rely on telephone conversations when determining what they offer, inspect the venues yourself.

Your group of 50 gamers will most likely consist of working people or students, even scholars, or all mentioned. How much is the average gamer willing to pay? What can you offer them? What will be an affordable entrance fee to charge? What do you want to do with the entrance fee? Only pay for the hall hire? Run your LAN as a sideline business and make money? Pay off equipment bought for the LAN? Get answers to all these questions, do the calculations, then go venue hunting.

It's always recommended to enquire about the hall fees before you arrange a meeting to inspect the premises. If the price is too high and the gamers you are planning on drawing can't afford the entrance fee you require to cover your expenses, you won't have anybody but your friends at the event.

The first and most important point to consider is power. You need to find a hall with at least 1.2 ampere per PC, thus 60 ampere for the 50 PC's and additional for any servers, lighting etc. The whole power setup will be discussed in a later installment. Warm hot days equates to fans! Gamers bring their own fans, when you decide on how much power per PC remember to add a little fat for the 21" screens, the odd speaker here and there as well as fans. Also remember to include your own usage, i.e. Servers, proxima's, sound system, switches, etc. Make sure you are the only people using the power source, if not, take the other people's power consumption into consideration. Make 100% sure when searching for the right venue that your power is sorted, since networks and power are the two most common mistakes made. There is nothing more aggravating than a power failure at a LAN. This is also damaging to your PC. Failure to plan this aspect will ensure you are stuck

with unhappy gamers that won't easily attend your events soon. Will it be easy to do fault finding, can you access the power box? Take your power-guy with you and familiarize yourselves with the setup.

Does the venue provide security? Can a gamer attend your LAN and know that his car and PC will be safe for the duration of the LAN? If not, consider hiring a security guard. Perhaps locking the gates is an option. The most frightening aspect of a gamer who had his car stolen at your event, is that you will be subjected to endless hours of nagging while he bunks at your place since he has now become part of your new lift-club. Just remember that security requires an additional area of responsibility for one of your team members.

Another important issue will be access to the venue. Access is firstly what type of roads you have to travel to the venue, and how easy it is to navigate there. Secondly, imagine walking with your 21inch monster 3 story's up steps along a hallway from here to grandma's hospital bed. Enquire if the venue has any trolleys or similar transport equipment available if the distance to the hall is quite far. What if it should rain on the day? Ask your helpers to bring along umbrellas, black bags, etc. How will the gamers get their most precious PC's inside the venue? Is it possible to pull you car up and unload close to the entrance? Perhaps the venue has a backdoor, which will make access to the hall easier. All these soft issues do get considered when a gamer browses through LanGames and decides where he wants to be LANing for a weekend.

Never forget the entrance inside the venue. Do you have to squeeze through cracks, cramped tables and a chair, pretending your PC is an ironing board? Make sure the entrance inside the venue is open and clear and that there are no cables to trip over. Somebody that starts leopard crawling with his PC due to tripping over something will conjure up images of headshots with you as the target.

Windows can be a big problem. Not the Microsoft type but those with the glass trapped behind some putty. If the sun decides to show you the sunny side, it will influence the gamers. Glare can mean that you won't be able to play. Windows need to be covered. Use brown paper, newspapers or something similarly cheap. If you decide that your venue is suitable, and you decide to make the venue permanent you should consider buying curtains or painting the windows if they allow you to. Does the venue have an air conditioning system? PC's generate a lot of heat as do excited gamers: Keep in mind it's always better to put the PC box on the floor where it's cooler which allows more space on the table for those rapid mouse movements. If the venue doesn't

have an air conditioning system, can you open the windows or back doors to get a draft through the hall?

By now you think, nahhh not so difficult, I can do that. Right, you've got a venue and the power seems to be fine. Ask if they will provide tables and chairs. If not, reconsider the hall. Hiring tables and chairs is difficult and only one more thing that can go wrong. Finding companies and realizing they are fully booked on your LAN weekend is nerve wracking. More shocking is the cost of roughly R20 a table, chair not included. Remember to check the size of the tables. Gamers need space to move. The tables should be big enough, sturdy and strong.

Enough setup time is crucial. Find out when the hall will be ready for you to setup. Can you setup the hall the night before or do you get in an hour before your gamers start arriving? Do you need to setup tables and chairs, or is that part of their service? Remember to inform your helpers of the set up times.

Recalling a Prophecy posting re: female gamers. We are so few and scarce, some believe we're only a myth. You are catering for gamers. Please do take into account toilets. If a female gamer should grace you with her attendance, ensure that there is a female toilet facility. Ensure that it is clean and clear directions are visible. It's also recommended to inform all gamers where the rest rooms can be found during registration.

Refreshments. Ask the venue manager the range of services they offer in this regard. Many venues prefer that you should make use of their facilities while sometimes it is a requirement. If they do not provide any such services, ensure that you have the menus and contact details of fast food outlets available. Ask your sister or girlfriend nicely and perhaps they can help and prepare something to eat at the LAN such as hotdogs or curry and rice.

By now you've got the venue with enough power, security, tables and chairs, eager helpers, a sister cooking in the kitchen. What else?

Back to the drawing board : Go to the venue and measure your hall. Get the helpers again and draw up a table layout, keep in mind the required space per gamer, size of tables, admin tables, server tables, network cables and power cables. Take this venue layout to the venue manager and discuss this with him in person. Make sure he understands what you need.

Since there are only 4 hours left before I have to be at work, and I still need to play "only a few minutes" of Unreal, I will leave you until next month…

SGS Online

Well there I was in the NAG offices trying to work out how I could fit the Editor's monitor under my top while he's not looking, and the next thing I hear mention of how a monthly column for SGS would be cool. A nice way of letting you the gaming freak know what's up at this really awesome and free online gaming service. And any of you that know me will agree I have a big mouth, so here I am letting you all know what's up at SGS. The idea is to give you the latest SGS news here in NAG where it will really reach the South African gaming community.

So I guess the best way to start this is by letting you know who we are and how we work. I think its hard to pin down our motives but I guess you could sum it up like this… "SGS, giving the gamers what they want, if we can". The only reason I added the "if we can part" is because of the problems we encounter when it comes to games like DAOC or any other online game that you need a license to host. Other than that we pretty much host every game that the community wants. In fact if I tried to list them all the 400 + words in this column would be used up on IP addresses and server names.

SGS basically works like this; each game has a head admin. The head admin of any particular game then recruits admins to help him with the ins and outs of that particular community. Events, comps and leagues are organised and run from within each community. Most of this is done via the SGS forums, and I have to say if you are not registered on the forums you need to be. All IP's, upgrades, patches/plugins and events are listed in the relevant game forums.

Ok so now that we have that out the way where is the news you say? Well I have some good stuff for you so power up your pc, pay your phone/isdn/adsl bill and get online. The really big news at SGS this month is the Freelancer server. Thanks to NAG and Microsoft we now have a server up and running before the actual release date of the game. This is a really cool game and I can see the community getting hours of great online play with this game. There are some patches out (who wants to buy a battleship?) and hopefully we can try some out in the near future.

Another great event that is running right now is the OM League (Official Maps). This is a Counter-Strike League and I hear all the top clans have entered; there will be HLTV servers up so if you just want to check out the talent and maybe record a demo or two you can. The OM league will be a continuous event at SGS getting bigger every time. When it's running smoothly I can assure you all there will be some very cool things happening here. If you haven't registered your clan for this event make sure you do the next time SGS hosts it.

As many of you know the MOHAA community is growing fast and they are hosting/organising some cool things. Check out the clans and comps section of the MOHAA forum, they have some great admins organising some really cool events and I assure you that your time on the MOHAA servers will be well spent.

Day Of Defeat, a Half-Life Mod, has a strong following at SGS - this could be due to the fact that DOD-WAR is so popular. It's a team based event held every two weeks and it's aimed at the FFA gamer that wants to experience a really great team based game without the hassle of joining a clan. Check out the DOD forums for more on this event.

So many games and so few words to list them all, so until next month see you on the servers. Any questions can be mailed to gamesmaster@saix.net or get hold of your nearest SGS admin on mirc in #sgsadmins on the shadowfire irc server.

SnakeStyles
http://games.saix.net

Lanning, alive and kicking in Cape Town with Organised Chaos

► Organised Chaos is Dietmar, Steve, Lance, Reinhard, Tiaan and Marc. They are supported also by Liza who is the creative force behind the OC web page and Head chef at Café Chaos. Though officially only seven months old the event has been around, under different guises, for just over a year and a half. First as "School is out" and then as "Blue9 Anarchy", though it was only called this for one event. At the "Blue9 Anarchy" LAN in April 2002 a popular vote was taken and the event became "Organised Chaos".

In October 2002 OC received their first official sponsorship, from Scoop Distribution, a Planet Network Vendor. Scoop sponsors OC their switches and other networking equipment. With the sponsorship from Scoop, OC has become a more serious venture, with the organisers investing in better equipment and improved infrastructure. The planned number of LAN's for each month has also been increased to three. The investments that the OC organisers are making also include prizes for tournaments and raffles.

The main Organised Chaos event will be held at Theo Marais Park in Milnerton. The Storm LAN presented by OC will be held at the Storm Model Agency in central Cape Town. The third event will be a roving LAN that moves around the Cape area bringing LAN gaming to those that cannot get to Theo Marais Park. These roving events will depend on the availability and quality of the venues. Planned venues for the roving LAN's are Paarl, Worcester, Muizenberg and Constantia.

The number of people attending the OC events has increased dramatically over the last several months to over 100 people. This is over double the number three months ago. This increase in numbers bodes well for gaming in Cape Town. In keeping with the sterotypical Cape Town fashion the OC events are all very relaxed. Competition during the tournaments however is fierce with prizes including motherboards, RAM, graphic cards, peripherals and software bundles. There are also regular raffles held. Regular tourney games are MoHAA, UT2K3, Counter-Strike, C&C: Generals and WarCraft III. The tourneys, raffles and large number of prizes handed out ensure that there is something for everyone at these events.

From the 4th-6th of April the first Storm LAN, presented by OC, event took place. This over 16 event was attended by over 50 people, filling out the venue at Storm Model Agency in central Cape Town. The usual relaxed atmosphere gave way to a mammoth game of Wolfenstein that lasted nearly two hours; amid much screaming and shouting it was discovered what a fantastic multiplayer game this could be and is sure to become a regular feature at upcoming OC events.
In the MoHAA tournament despite a last minute surge by {2DG}Equinox, {KMA}Onslaught, after a clean run to the finals, walked away with a Radeon 9000 sponsored by PC.com. In the C&C Generals tournament Sphere had little trouble fending off the other competitors in the final to earn himself a copy of Norton System Utilities, sponsored by Symantec. 46 hours after starting and six hours after the advertised closing time the organisers were finally able to make all the gamers leave under much protestation. Concluding, as all would agree a most enjoyable weekend.

Upcoming OC events will be at Theo Marais Park from the 16th to the 18th May.
For more information contact Dietmar at Dietmar@organisedchaos.co.za or go to www.oc.co.za

Sean "KiLRoY" Beamish
skbeamish@hotmail.com

/ City Interactive's upcoming games

Polish developer City Interactive is at work on the sequel to Project Earth. This space real-time strategy title will be story-driven and will feature a more user-friendly interface than that of its predecessor. Project Earth 2's story will revolve around a group of unjustly condemned people out to clear their names. Another current project at City Interactive is Smash Up Derby, which will let players drive cars crazily in Destruction Derby style. The cars will be composed of 10 different materials, each with its own characteristics, which will allow damage modelling to be far more realistic. Smash Up Derby will be released within the next couple of months.

/ Nina: Agent Chronicles

A new action-adventure title using the LithTech Talon graphics engine is Nina: Agent Chronicles. The heroine of this game, portrayed by Polish model Iza Czarnecka, possesses psychic abilities that allow her to subvert other people's minds, and so she is recruited by an anti-terrorist organisation. The game has a strong tactical and cerebral element, making it necessary to solve puzzles and discern the most effective way to use Nina's available resources.

/ BF1942: Secret Weapons of WWII

Electronic Arts have announced the second expansion pack for Battlefield 1942. This add-on will offer new weapons, vehicles, locations and campaigns. In addition, it will feature C-47 cargo planes that will serve as mobile spawn points, British Commandos, German Elite troops and a new game mode that will require the completion of objectives for victory. The game is in development at the Canadian division of Digital Illusions, and is scheduled for release late this year.

Web Scores

How NAG reviews compare to internet site reviews

	Freelancer	Divine Divinity	Splinter Cell	Rallisport Challenge	Delta Force: Black Hawk Down	TOCA Race Driver
NAG /100	80	76	90	87	93	89
www.gamespy.com /100	83	84	91	89	80	63
www.gamespot.com /10	8.3	8.6	8.7	8.8	5.6	7.1
www.pc.ign.com /10	9.2	8.5	9.4	8	8.9	n/r

/ City States: Stone to Steel

City States is an innovative upcoming game that will allow players to guide a tribe from prehistoric times right through to the forging of a nation. Unlike other titles that have attempted this, this game will handle everything in an interactive, dynamic way, so each nation will turn out differently, depending on technological and sociological choices, as well as diplomatic relations with neighbours and other actions taken by the player. An interesting feature of the game is that the developers are aiming at believable variety in all graphical representations, meaning that each unit and structure will have numerous graphical variations, and seldom will any two look alike. Furthermore, the scale of military engagements will be larger than anything seen before.

/ Black9

This upcoming action role-playing game is set in 2080, when nine Illuminati vy for domination of the world scheme against each other in the closing phases of their long struggle. Players will assume the role of a mercenary undertaking operations on behalf of these shady characters, and will be offered various dilemmas to unravel, including moral and ethical ones. The game will combine intense play delivered by the Unreal Warfare engine and MathEngine's Karma engine handling physics, with role-play elements such as character class selection and skill development through earned experience. The view will switch between first- and third-person perspectives as dictated by the story. There will be multiple ways to solve most missions, and some degree of stealthy, tactically minded play will be required. Black9 will feature multiplayer modes, including co-operative play and online play. It will be available on PC, Xbox and PlayStation 2.

/ Combat Mission: Afrika Korps

Next in the Combat Mission series of games is Afrika Korps, which focuses on the fighting in the African theatre-of-war during World War II. The game will feature numerous enhancements and modifications suited to portraying battle in the North African desert. The style of the game will be hybrid turn-based/real-time 3D simulation, and it should be available in time for Christmas.

/ Wish

Mutable Realms are working on a massively multiplayer online fantasy role-playing game called Wish. Their planned server infrastructure will mean that all players in the world will be able to interact, since the game will not use zones or shards. Mutable Realms are dubbing this Ultra Massive Multiplayer Online RPG. The game will go into beta-testing late this year, and will be released early next year.

/ Geneforge 2

Geneforge 2, from Spiderweb Software, will be an adventure game with a sci-fi theme. Assuming the role of an apprentice Shaper, the player will be able to create monsters to serve him or her, and will have the choice of several factions to join. The game will feature a dynamic story-line, allowing for numerous possible endings. Geneforge 2 will be released around mid-year for PC and Macintosh.

International Release Dates

TITLE	GENRE	RELEASE DATE
No Man's Land	Strategy	May 1
1914 - The Great War	Strategy	May 1
Empire of Magic	Strategy	May 1
Aquanox 2: Revelation	Action	May 1
Lotus Challenge	Racing	May 1
EVE-Online: The Second Genesis	MMORPG	May 6
Harpoon 4	Strategy	May 6
IndyCar Series	Racing	May 6
Rollercoaster Tycoon II: Wacky Worlds	Strategy	May 6
Day of Defeat	FPS	May 6
Enter The Matrix	Action	May 13
Grand Theft Auto: Vice City	Action	May 13
The Sims Superstar	Simulator	May 13
Cold Zero: The Last Stand	Action	May 14
Enigma: Rising Tide	Simulator	May 14
PlanetSide	Action	May 19
F1 Career Challenge	Racing	May 19
Rise of Nations	Strategy	May 20
Medieval Total War: Viking Invasion	Strategy	May 20
Breed	FPS	May 27
World War II: Frontline Command	Action	May 27
Neverwinter Nights: Shadows of Undrentide	RPG	May 27
Disciples II: Guardians of the Light	Strategy	May 27
Mistmare	RPG	May 29
Silent Storm	Tactical	May 30
Call Sign: Charlie	Tactical	Jun 1
Midnight Club II	Racing	Jun 3
Moto GP 2	Racing	Jun 3
The Hulk	Action	Jun 3
Republic: The Revolution	Strategy	Jun 3
Halo	FPS	Jun 10
Star Wars: Knights of the Old Republic	RPG	Jun 14
Port Royale	Strategy	Jun 14
One Must Fall: Battlegrounds	Action	Jun 14
Downtown Run	Racing	Jun 14
Disciples II: Servants of the Dark	Strategy	Jun 23
Spells of Gold	RPG	Jun 24
Soldner: Secret Wars	Strategy	Jun 24
Star Trek: Elite Force II	FPS	Jun 24
Korea: Forgotten Conflict	Strategy	Jun 24
WarCraft III: The Frozen Throne	Strategy	Jun 24

/ Stoked Rider

A cel-shaded snowboarding game is on its way from Austrian developer Bongfish. Its title, Stoked Rider, is about all that is known about the game so far, besides the fact that the game will let players assume the role of freeride legend Tommy Brunner. The game is due for release later this year.

AGE OF MYTHOLOGY: THE TITANS EXPANSION PACK
Microsoft has announced an expansion for Age of Mythology titled Age of Mythology: The Titans. This expansion will add a fourth culture, the Atlanteans, to the existing Greek, Egyptian and Norse mythologies. It will include a new single-player campaign with 12 new scenarios. Atlantean players will be able to call upon the might of the Titan gods multiple times throughout the game, and may also upgrade human units to heroes. The expansion pack will introduce 12 new god powers, 18 new human units and 10 formidable myth units to the game. The expansion is due for release later this year.

HYBRID
A first-person shooter titled Hybrid is in development at Vulcan Software UK. The game's theme will be dark science-fiction, with the story opening with the extermination by aliens of a research ship's and a moon base's crews. Of course, the player will be called upon to single-handedly wipe out the alien threat! No release timing information is available as yet.

MECHWARRIOR SUSPENDED
FASA's MechWarrior 5 has been put on hold. Two reasons were given for this: firstly, FASA are concentrating on other games that they must complete on schedule. Secondly, FASA believe that MechWarrior's genre needs more development, and will only release another game in the series when they have something startlingly original to offer. They emphasised that the franchise has not been scrapped altogether.

GALAXIES SPECIAL EDITION
Star Wars Galaxies: An Empire Divided has been delayed, with no updated release schedule announced as yet. However, when it does come out, a limited edition version will also be available, of which around 75000 units will be produced. This version will include a book containing all concept art ever created during the development process, a pewter figurine, a sew-on patch with the game logo, Imperial and Rebel lapel pins and an autographed manual.

AMERICAN CONQUEST EXPANSION
CDV have announced that they are working on an expansion pack for their historical strategy game American Conquest, to be titled American Conquest: Fight Back! It will consist of new maps, a new battle mode, new nations, new units and new campaigns.

RAILROAD TYCOON 3
Take-Two Interactive Software's upcoming Railroad Tycoon 3 will bring the series' renowned play dynamic up to date with the introduction of full 3D. The game will chronicle the period between the Golden Era of Railroading through to modern day locomotion. Take-Two's PopTop Software will be finishing up work on this one in about six months.

SUPERPOWER 2
GolemLabs are currently at work on SuperPower 2, to be published late next year by DreamCatcher Interactive. In contrast to its predecessor, this game allows a player to play an individual character, rather than an entire nation, thus requiring political and social manoeuvring in order to succeed. Just as SuperPower did, SuperPower 2 will use real-world census and military data, and will also feature multiplayer support.

ACTIVISION AND VALVE TEAM UP
Activision and Valve have entered into a strategic partnership that grants the publisher world-wide rights to games created by Valve. The first of these is Day of Defeat, a World War II first-person shooter that should be shipping as you read this. Using Half Life technology, and originally appearing as a mod for the abovementioned, Day of Defeat aims at recreating battles between the Allies and the Axis forces, and features several selectable character types. Although using the Half Life engine in a general sense, this game will enjoy numerous enhancements to it.

MAGIC: THE GATHERING ONLINE 2.0
So far an estimated 70 million digital Magic cards are in circulation which has prompted Wizards of the Coast to offer a first look at Magic: The Gathering Online 2.0 at E3. The expansion will introduce an array of features for new players as well as experts such as new custom interfaces, new tutorials introducing basic concepts, a playback feature, thousands of new cards, swappable avatars, new tournament formats and a premier events room for advanced players.

PLAY
WITH
YOUR
HEART
NOT
YOUR
HEAD

A NAG
hardcore
gaming
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/ Street Racing Syndicate

/ Jacked

3DO seem to have fallen in love with the idea of illegal street racing, and are currently busy with two titles. Set in the street racing scenes of Los Angeles, Miami and Philadelphia, Street Racing Syndicate will allow players to participate in legal and illegal car races. The game is in development at Eutechnyx of the UK, and will feature over 20 cars that can be tuned. Needless to say, one of the hazards will be police out to nab illegal racers. It will be available for PlayStation 2, Xbox and GameCube around mid-year. The second title is Jacked, which focuses on motorcycles, and adds an element of combat to the racing theme. Players will once again be able to tune and upgrade their vehicles, and will also be able to acquire weapons of various sorts, including melee and projectile weapons. This game is expected to ship a couple of months after Street Racing Syndicate.

/ Jak II

A new plot-driven adventure game is in development at Naughty Dog, the makers of Crash Bandicoot on the PlayStation. Apparently, Jak II, the sequel to Jak and Daxter: The Precursor Legacy, will feature a dynamic storyline that will be influenced by players' actions. Jak II is expected to be released on PlayStation 2 late this year.

/ Kya: Dark Lineage

Atari and Eden Studios have announced Kya: Dark Lineage for the PlayStation 2. Described as an action-adventure game, it will feature 34 quests and missions, magic and an involved story. No release date has been hinted at yet, as the game appears to be in early stages of development.

DOWNHILL DOMINATION
Sony have announced Downhill Domination, a mountain bike racing game currently in development at Incog Entertainment. The game will feature renditions of real-life riders and bikes, the latter being upgradeable during the course of a career game. Several disciplines will be supported, such as mountain cross and technical downhill, and the game will offer additional spice in the form of special combat moves, over and above the to-be-expected trick moves. Downhill Domination has been planned for a mid-year release.

/ Wreck'n Krew

Based on the farcical premise of a crew of demolitions maniacs out to defeat the evil Arnie and his army of attack robots, Wreck'n Krew will be a character-based arcade title that will require players to select characters, blow everything up, expand the crew by hiring more staff, blow everything up, complete mission goals within a specified time limit, blow everything up, upgrade and customise equipment, and blow everything up!

NAMCO RECRUITING ADDITIONAL STAFF

Namco are recruiting additional production staff for two upcoming games. The Ace Combat and Tekken development teams are being upgraded, which can only mean that a new Tekken game is in the works. Work on Ace Combat 5 has been going on for some time.

STARCRAFT: GHOST UPDATE

Blizzard have announced that their upcoming title StarCraft: Ghost will be released on PlayStation 2, Xbox and GameCube.

NEW SHOOTER FOR PS2

Sony have Dutch developer Lost Boys working on a first-person shooter for the PlayStation 2. The game is called Kin, and there is about a year's development remaining on it. Sources close to the project are referring to it as a potential "Halo-beater".

NINTENDO AND ONLINE GAMING

Nintendo have stated that no first-party online-enabled games will be on show at this year's Electronic Entertainment Expo. Instead, the company will be focusing on some sort of GameCube LAN connectivity. Nintendo's management claim that the online scene is not developed enough to be worth their while investing heavily in.

FIFA ONLINE

Electronic Arts and Microsoft could not agree on terms for Xbox Live-enabled games, and so EA are focusing their efforts on the PlayStation 2. EA's well-established FIFA franchise will be getting represented on the PS2 soon, with a first public showing likely at this year's E3.

BALDUR'S GATE: DARK ALLIANCE II

Black Isle Studios are at work on a sequel to Baldur's Gate: Dark Alliance, for the Xbox and PlayStation 2. The game will use the third edition Dungeons & Dragons rules, and is expected to be released around Christmas.

DEAD OR ALIVE FILM COMING

Impact Pictures, who have acquired film rights for a couple of gaming franchises recently, have set aside a production budget of $30 million for a Dead or Alive movie that will be released at the same time as Dead or Alive 4, sometime late next year. The film will revolve around four (voluptuous) female fighter characters, each versed in a different martial style. Dead or Alive 4's story is expected to be based on that of the film.

LIMITED EDITION XBOX

A green version of the Xbox is likely to become available this month. Although it is unclear whether "green" refers to the unit being environmentally friendly or to its actual colour, what is known is that its design is based on that of the Xbox debug unit.

OPERATION FLASHPOINT

Operation Flashpoint is being ported to the Xbox, and will include the Resistance Campaign. According to rumours, it will also be Xbox Live enabled, and will feature capabilities such as voice-over-net.

GRABBED BY THE GHOULIES

Some of you may remember Rare's Atic Atac, on Spectrum and Commodore 64. The company is currently developing Ghoulies, believed to be a 3D update of that old classic. Whatever the exact nature of Ghoulies, it will likely be shown at the E3, given that the company has announced that it will be showing off another game besides Kameo.

GAMER ADVISORY PANEL

Sony have founded the Gamer Advisory Panel, a body that will consist of thousands of game users which will enable feedback from the community for the company to use in its policies and game designs. If you are curious, visit us.playstation.com.

XBOX PRICE CUT IN EUROPE

Microsoft have cut the price of the Xbox in Europe by 20%. With some luck, this may influence local pricing, but we'll have to wait and see!

International Release Dates

TITLE	PLATFORM	GENRE	RELEASE
Aquaman: Battle for Atlantis	Xbox	Action	May 5
Castlevania: Aria of Sorrow	GBA	Adventure	May 6
Color Quest	PS2	Strategy	May 6
Finding Nemo	PS2 | Xbox | GC	Action	May 6
.hack Part 2: Mutation	PS2	Role-Playing	May 6
IndyCar Series	PS2	Driving	May 6
Lost Kingdoms II	GC	Role-Playing	May 6
MTV's Celebrity Deathmatch	PS2 | GC	Action	May 6
Puzznic	PS2	Puzzle	May 6
Return to Castle Wolfenstein: Operation Resurrection	PS2 | Xbox	Action	May 6
Alias	GC	Action	May 14
Enter the Matrix	Xbox | GC | PS2	Action	May 14
High Heat Major League Baseball 2003	GC	Sports	May 15
Kingdom Under Fire 2: The Crusaders	Xbox	Strategy	May 15
She, the Ultimate Weapon	PS2	Adventure	May 21
X2: Wolverine's Revenge	Xbox	Action	May 21
Buffy the Vampire Slayer	GBA	Action	May 21
Crushed Baseball 2004	GBA	Sports	May 21
High Heat Major League Baseball 2004	GBA	Sports	May 21
Inside Pitch 2003	Xbox	Sports	May 21
Mace Griffin Bounty Hunter	PS2	Action	May 21
MotoGP 2	Xbox	Driving	May 21
Sega Arcade Gallery	GBA	Action	May 21
Speed Kings	GC | Xbox | PS2	Driving	May 21
Arc the Lad: Twilight of the Spirits	PS2	Role-Playing	May 21
Army Men: Sarge's War	GC	Action	May 27
Brute Force	Xbox	Action	May 27
Evil Dead: A Fistful of Boomstick	PS2 | Xbox	Action	May 27
Fila World Tour Tennis	Xbox	Sports	May 27
The Hulk	Xbox | GC | PS2	Action	May 31
The Incredible Hulk	GBA	Action	May 31
Group S Challenge	Xbox	Sports	May 31
International Superstar Soccer 3	GC	Sports	May 31
Lamborghini	Xbox	Driving	May 31
Perfect Ace: Pro Tournament Tennis	PS2	Sports	May 31
Psychonauts	Xbox	Action	May 31

/ Project Gotham Racing 2

UPCOMING XBOX GAMES

Three new titles for the Xbox are coming from Microsoft, and will most likely be previewed at E3. Project Gotham Racing 2 will be a platform driver featuring North American, European, Australian and South East Asian locations. This Xbox Live-enabled game will also feature 30 real radio stations with international DJs, and is expected to hit shelves in time for Christmas. Rallisport Challenge 2, to be released early next year, will also be Xbox Live-enabled, and will support up to 16 players. It will allow the creation of custom rally events, and will enjoy the availability of downloadable content, including custom paintjobs. It will feature a staggering 91 courses and over 40 vehicles, including some that are not legal in actual rally racing. The cars will have damage modelling and will suffer performance degradation. Links 2004, thanks to Xbox Live technology, will allow players to set up tournaments online. The Xbox version will be released in time for Christmas this year, which is a year before the projected release of the PC version.

Web Scores

How NAG reviews compare to internet site reviews

	Primal [PS2]	The Mark of Kri [PS2]	Tenchu Wrath of Heaven [PS2]	Pac Man World 2 [PS2]	Big Mutha Truckers [PS2]	Golden Sun [GBA]
NAG /100	79	85	71	81	70	90
www.ign.com /10	8	8.8	8.5	7.9	n/r	9.7
www.gamespot.com /10	7.9	7.5	8.3	8	n/r	8.6
www.gamespy.com /100	75	78	83	84	n/r	91

/ Pioneer's portable DVD-R/RW drive

Pioneer have begun shipping the DVR-SK11B-J, their new portable DVD-R/RW drive. It is external and weighs in at under half a kilo, and connects via USB 2.0. Although a bit slow in terms of CD-ROM read speeds, it is very versatile, able to read or record CDs and DVDs. It uses an external power supply.

/ D-Link DVC-1000 i2eye Videophone

Real-time video communication, as seen in sci-fi flicks for years, will soon become an accessible reality. D-Link's DVC-1000 is a live streaming videophone rather than a Web-cam. It requires a broadband connection and a TV or similar device, such as a PC with a suitable graphics card, and can connect to a regular phone for full-duplex audio. Because it uses an Internet connection, the DVC-1000 allows for two-way video communication between two parties anywhere in the world at whatever the cost is for local calls, though here in South Africa it looks like it may be a while before broadband is readily accessible.

/ Xbox on the move

NAKI International have released a useful carry case for the Xbox. The G-PAK Organizer and Travel Case accommodates an Xbox console, two controllers, 16 disks, several memory units and Xbox cables and power supply, and even has room for game manuals or similar documentation. The design allows for the console to be used from inside the case, featuring a fold-down cable backdoor. The case is padded and reinforced for safety while travelling, and features an adjustable shoulder strap. The G-PAK Organizer and Travel Case is approved and endorsed by Microsoft. www.nakiusa.com

/ Disc Steno CP100

Apacer Technology's new Disc Steno CP100 is a combination Flash card reader and CD-RW drive, allowing data to be copied from sources such as CompactFlash and Memory Sticks to CD. This is particularly handy for users of digital cameras. The drive can also be used to play back music CDs, and supports multi-session CD writing.

/ Three no-longer-blind mice

An attractive new mouse pad is available for case-modders who want that "flashing lights look". The Xide-Pad Ultra II is a stylish mouse pad that features LEDs for visual appeal. The pad is available in C, square and oval shapes, and the lights in blue, red or green. The LEDs are socketed, so it's possible to get two and switch some of their lights around, in addition to easy replacement in case of an LED going faulty, which is an incredibly rare occurrence. The surface is marked with random micro-patterns for precise optical mouse tracking. A supplied USB cable provides power to the unit.
www.xidepad.com

/ X-Trac Eels

X-Trac Eels tape is a specially coated tape that can be cut to shape and applied with built-in adhesive over your existing or worn out mouse feet to reduce friction and smooth out the movement of your mouse.
http://store.yahoo.com/pcxmods/

/ Big Brother could soon be watching you

Fujitsu have developed a miniature non-contact biometric authentication and identification system. The device's miniature sensor reads blood vessel patterns, which are unique to each person and constant over time, much like fingerprints. The device is reasonably accurate, given the fact that the technology is still totally new. Possible uses include security applications and automatic registration at hotels and the like. Soon, scenarios such as those depicted in films like Gattaca and Minority Report, wherein citizens are automatically recognised by automatic electronics wherever they go, may become reality.

Intel Centrino Mobile Technology

It's about time South Africans demand "Hotspots"!

This was the general sentiment of the press and VIP's that were invited to attend the Intel Centrino launch recently held in Sandton, Gauteng.
If you, like me, look forward to the day where you will be able to sit at your local coffee shop whilst browsing the net, reading and replying to your mail or better yet, logging onto Battle.net for a game of WarCraft III… Read on.

Imagine being able to take your modem with you to a restaurant, plugging it into a telephone socket and accessing your mail. Well, that (in a nutshell) is what a hotspot is, except for one major difference - its wireless, so you won't need your modem.
Intel set up South Africa's first hotspot at Nino's in Sandton for the Intel Centrino launch in conjunction with InfoSat and Micro Pro. Intel's vision of a converged world is fast becoming a reality, creating an environment where computing devices will communicate and communications devices will compute. As a result, people will increasingly be able to stay connected with families, friends and co-workers while on the move. Intel Centrino mobile technology is aimed at anyone who wants the freedom and flexibility to work, play and connect on the go. This means that work will now become something you do, rather than a place you go to. This yields significant benefits for an increasingly mobile workforce. Numerous traditional down times will now become opportunities to be more productive and ultimately help people achieve a better work-live balance. Hotspots will adopt the same "pay as you go" card system cellular users are currently enjoying. Once you enter a hotspot, you will be able to buy a 15-minute access card for example. The card has an identification number and a PIN number that needs to be entered into your notebook, thereby providing you with Internet access.

How will people know that they have in fact entered a hotspot area? Simple… Wherever you see the Intel Centrino and Wi-Fi (Wireless Fidelity) logo.
Intel is a member of the Wi-Fi alliance program. The Wi-Fi alliance (www.wi-fizone.org) and the Wi-Fi alliance logo are currently one of the most recognized independent references to public wireless LAN infrastructures. Besides providing visibility, the Wi-Fi Zone ensures a qualified network. Each Wi-Fi Zone provider has to meet strict requirements for network deployment, service levels and customer service and has to provide the users the following:
-       Simplicity, regardless of the Wi-Fi radio brand, manufacturer or technology
-       Approximately 11 Mbps data rate connection speed
-       Quality assurance via a posted, easily accessed customer service number
-       A secure connection

Intel's expertise in this area stems in part from the deployment of WLAN within its own network and currently has nearly 80 buildings equipped and approximately 20 000 employees using WLAN. Intel has also been involved in the deployment of public networks such as the citywide WLAN network in the historic city of Zamora, Spain and the hotspot services in Brussels airport.
The first network deployment in Zamora started in March 2002 after the announcement was made in January 2002. With 70,000 inhabitants, Zamora was considered to be a good size for a trial WLAN. Moreover Zamora's local government provided strong support for the project and three months later the first customer trials began during June 2002. By September, the project was ready for full commercialization! Tariffs were set at 9.90 euros per month for unlimited access to the Internet. This was almost half the cost of standard dial-up connections and many times the speed. With government backing the project, the entire city of Zamora has access to a Wireless LAN. It's about time we see a similar move from the South African government, wouldn't you agree? Sadly, at this point in time it is even illegal to run a network between two homes let alone an entire city.

The Centrino processor has been built from the ground up to deliver breakthrough mobile experience, combining microprocessor architecture that delivers low power consumption and high performance, with components that work in concert to deliver wireless mobility.

There are four key features to the Centrino microprocessor:
-       Integrated wireless LAN capability
-       Extended battery life
-       Breakthrough mobile performance
-       Enabling thinner, lighter and thus sexier notebook designs

The average notebook currently provides you with approximately 2 hours of battery life; with Centrino you will now be able to enjoy up to 6 hours.
When comparing a standard Intel Pentium4 2.4 Ghz Processor with a Centrino 1.7, the latter proved to be faster, even though the Pentium4 has a faster clock rate.
So, there you have it… Thanks to Intel and the Centrino microprocessor we have the technology, now all we need to do is demand Government support!

'SMART LIVING' FROM MICROSOFT
Microsoft's latest marketing slogan is "Smart Living in the Digital Decade". Under this catch-phrase, they are promoting various products that integrate computers and home entertainment appliances. The operating system Windows XP Media Center Edition is designed to allow a PC to act as a centralised remote controller for all manner of TVs, video recorders and media playback devices. Windows-powered Smart Displays from Philips and ViewSonic are becoming available, and Creative are developing a portable media player based on the Media2Go platform.

IBM AND NVIDIA TEAM UP
IBM and NVIDIA have agreed on a partnership for the next few years. The agreement will give the graphics hardware manufacturer access to IBM's foundry facilities. IBM will begin manufacturing GeForce processors within two months.

SIS'S NEW HYPERSTREAMING ARCHITECTURE
Silicon Integrated Systems will soon launch their new SiS748 chipset, featuring their recently developed HyperStreaming architecture. HyperStreaming is designed to enhance the overall performance of a PC by more efficiently managing data streams. Besides increasing data throughput bandwidths, the new chipset determines the content type of streams it is processing to appropriately prioritise the allocation of bandwidth to different applications. This new architecture significantly boosts the speed of hard disk access, Internet data transfer, memory operations and video and audio output, and reduces overall latencies in a PC.

CPU UPDATE
Intel expect to release their upcoming Prescott CPU before the end of the year. The new chips boast a 0.09 micron process, 800MHz FSB, 16K level-1 cache, 1MB level-2 cache and Intel's new Hyper-Threading Technology. They will include 13 new instructions focused on gaming and multimedia handling. They will enter the market at 3.2GHz, and will be scalable to around 5GHz. Prescott chips will be compatible with all previous Intel-compatible software, without modification. The timing of Prescott's release will coincide with that of AMD's Hammer processor, placing the two in direct competition. Next year Intel will reveal the Tejas processor, Prescott's successor.

NVIDIA AND EA FORM ALLIANCE
nVidia has signed an exclusive alliance with Electronic Arts to optimise its game code for nVidia's range of GeForce graphics processors, making the hardware EA's "preferred platform". This alliance will also see nVidia-specific features and special effects in several upcoming EA titles, such as Madden NFL Football 2004 and others for the PC. In addition EA has awarded nVidia exclusive original equipment manufacturer (OEM) bundling rights to some of its PC titles. What this means is that nVidia will act as sole OEM distributor of PC titles published under the EA Games and EA Sports brands, bundling select content with its PC manufacturer and system builder partners.

INTEL ULTRA-THIN CSP: 5-LAYER CHIP-SCALE PACKAGING
Intel has announced a new CSP technology enabling 5-layer 1.2mm thick chips. At the same time the company announced 13 new products featuring this Ultra-Thin Stacked Chip-Scale Packaging (CSP). The new Intel technology is designed for miniature components, especially mobile handsets.

/ Samsung DVD-L100

Samsung's new DVD-L100 is a portable DVD player, and much more besides. Looking rather like a laptop somewhat smaller than a sheet of A4 paper, it opens up to present the user with a full-featured DVD player with remote control. It supports all the major forms of video and audio input and output, allowing it to be connected to camcorders, TVs and all manner of home entertainment systems. It can also play back normal CDs, and can read memory sticks, allowing it to be used for image browsing or MP3 playback. It carries two small speakers and two stereo headphone outputs, allowing two people to simultaneously watch a movie. The included battery lasts about 2.5 hours, though an optional 3.5-hour battery is also available. A carry case is included, along with the required mains cables for battery charging.

/ Mouse Wax

First the tape now the wax? Mouse Wax is a water based non-toxic, semi-opaque liquid that has no real wax or petroleum product in it; Mouse Wax is wet, but it's dry and is designed for certain kinds of mouse pads and mice including optical and ball mice. In a nutshell what it does is reduce drag and friction between the mouse and the pad to create a smooth sliding motion for a more accurate gaming performance.
www.CrazyPC.com

/ Mini-Wireless Optical Mouse

The Belkin Mini-Wireless Optical Mouse is a small portable mouse ideal for use with a laptop. Sporting a rubberized design, a wireless Radio Frequency transmission range of three feet and a 27MHz frequency for worldwide compatibility, this mouse is ideal for jet setters.
www.belkin.com

/ Winner of the Sapphire Radeon Graphics Card

Kyle Stone [right], the winner of the Sapphire Radeon 9700 Atlantis Pro (January 2003 issue), receiving his prize in the NAG office from Sapphire Technologies.

We're still mopping up the drool...

/ Game-specific keyboards

Ideazon have begun marketing a new keyboard design that offers the advantages of keyboard overlays, while avoiding most of the downsides. The Zboard consists of a base unit that connects to the PC via PS/2, onto which "keyboard interfaces" can be attached. Each such interface consists of a specific keyboard design customised to work with a specific game or application. The designers have developed keyboard layouts that are more logical for each specific application, given the fact that each keyboard is specialised, and some frequently used keys are larger. At present, Medal of Honor and Age of Mythology are supported, along with Microsoft Office, Internet Explorer, Adobe Photoshop and several Macromedia applications, but this list will grow as marketing agreements are reached between Ideazon and game publishers. A USB version is currently in development.

/ Piracy wars rage on

Macrovision have announced that there are now over 100 million copy protected music CDs on the market. The company are the world's largest producers of copy protected CDs, using a technology that creates hybrid CDs that do not allow ripping. Record companies, who have been suffering lately from massive scale ripping and illicit online redistribution of music, are loving this technology, although it has met with mixed response from consumers. On the local front: the South African Revenue Service, the South African Federation Against Copyright Theft, the Recording Industry of South Africa and the International Federation of Phonographic Industries recently destroyed counterfeit materials worth R5-million, of which R1.5M's worth consisted of music discs. The rest was a combination of PlayStation games and DVD movies.

/ All-In-Wonder 9800 Pro

As you read this, a new graphics card from ATI should be hitting the market - the All-In-Wonder 9800 Pro. More than just a graphics card, it is a bundle of graphical functionality that includes TV support, the Radeon 9800 graphics chip, a remote control, dual tuner capabilities such as picture-in-picture, video capture capabilities and playback functionality. It also includes software for editing and such cute little touches as translucent TV viewing. It works with any current Windows operating system, and supports DirectX 9.0 and OpenGL.

THE HULK

To be honest… occasionally I've really wanted to raise my fists high in the air and bring them crashing down on my keyboard crying out to the heavens, 'Hulk smash' or something rude. To some people this might sound weird but I know there are others out there who will just smile a grim little smile and nod their heads in agreement. Computers can be painful, especially when they hang halfway through a particularly long Word document. In this regard I feel that I can truly identify with the Hulk and hopefully one day, someone out there will make a stress toy that can be hammered and smashed into a thousand tiny little pieces instead of just squeezed in a stern manner with a furrowed forehead.

By now, if you've been a gamer for more then 2 years or so, you've probably at one point or another rushed back home with a game based on your current most-favourite-movie-ever in your sweaty paws. Heart pumping in an excited manner you naively settled in for a night of action and adventure, you mentally prepared to relive each moment of the movie in the comfort of your own home, you prepared to be your ultimate hero… From that point on, after the installation [during which you rushed off to make coffee and perhaps an unhealthy snack], and no more than ten minutes into the game you pressed out a grim expression and probably sucked on your coffee coated tongue. The game was nothing like the movie. Hell they didn't even bother to follow the plot and the hero's voice sounds like a bad imitation of a bad imitation of the guy in the movie. Welcome to the world of movie to game conversions pal… at least you can take some solace in the fact that the people who ripped you off are still smiling or maybe not. Thankfully there's a big but attached to this dreary image, and that but is the fact that lately there's tons of money in making half decent games based on movies and more dedicated involvement [good or bad, you decide] by the big knobs in Hollywood. All this interest in these types of games has helped the situation and now the picture is starting to look a little less jagged and patchy. Lord of the Rings is a perfect example of this - the PlayStation 2 version was a fun and authentic game that provided an enjoyable alternate environment to continue enjoying the fantastical world the movie created. Oddly on the other side of that coin the PC game version of The Lord of the Rings stank - who could have guessed - I expect the situation will still be more Russian roulette than pie throwing for a few more
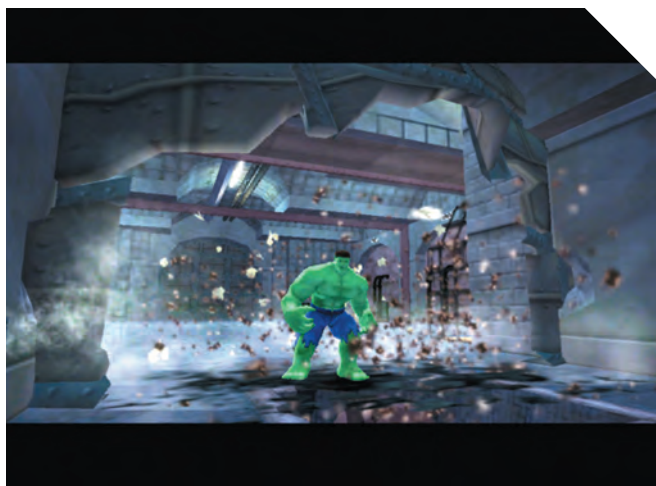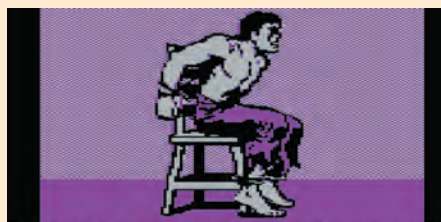
▼ ## History

There have been to date two other Hulk games, the first was an adventure game which hit the scene in 1984 - it was simply called: The Hulk and was developed by Adventure International, a name some of you old gamers may remember, back in the days when graphics and adventure games were first put together.

In the game players had to collect gems to escape a bunker in the desert. The game began with you playing Bruce Banner tied to a chair - If memory serves you had to get a swarm of bees to sting you to go Hulk and break your bonds… or something like that.

The second game was called: The Incredible Hulk: The Pantheon Saga and was released more recently, in 1996 by Eidos Interactive of all people. The game was an isometric 3D action title that featured plenty of smashing and breaking. It wasn't very good and I guess the publishers of the new Hulk game are hoping there aren't many gamers out there who remember this turkey. **Oops, sorry guys.**

▲ 1984

▲ 1996

years but that's why you read game reviews before spending your cash right? Anyhow, now that I've set the mood and tone let's hit the wine and go to bed early baby… kidding people, just kidding.

The computer game concept, The Hulk has much to prove, the franchise already has a dodgy track record when it comes to virtual entertainment and let's face it there's only so much fun you can have with a big dumb green guy in ripped pants that smashes things with his bare hands or someone's torn off arm… hang on, it's actually perfect for a game and in this case the developers have added a few extra bits and pieces to the formulae that make controlling the characters in the game [Hulk and Banner] and their resultant adventures potentially fun.

The game is set a year after the movie and will, incidentally, also feature the voice of Eric Bana [the actual actor] phew… the story is your basic stop the bad guy before he takes over the world type and focuses on Bruce Banner's colleague and mentor, Professor Crawford [the bad guy]. Your job in the game as Bruce Banner, the weenie one and The Hulk, the double cheeseburger with 'freedom?' fries and a large chocolate milkshake one will be to stop the evil professor and save the day. It's sad if you consider how many times I've written that same line of text… why must it always be the evil professor against the morally conscious student and his pet?

Hulk smash

The first thing you should notice is that the game is cell shaded - this is a technique that you might have seen in screenshots of the upcoming XIII title from Ubi Soft. It's a fairly untested delivery method so we'll just have to wait and see if this cartoon-like portrayal of game characters works or fails, it does seem to suit this style of game perfectly as it looks and dare I say feels exactly the same as those older Superman and Fabulous Four comics lying in a box in your garage. This retrospective look was intentional and if successful should catch on with all superhero titles in the future. The Hulk portion of the game is geared around smashing things and kicking all eight shades of freckles off the bad guys. There are plenty of moves waiting for players to master, upwards of 25 in total. These moves range from the more simplistic hit this dumb bad guy with this big green fist variety to the more complicated combination attacks that'll see you toss bad guys around like, well… like tossing your sister's Barbie dolls around - if that's your thing. This variation will be balanced in that anyone with any playing style will experience a fair measure of success no matter if they choose to randomly stab buttons or perform well timed combination moves. One unique element to the fighting is the rage bar, the more and better you fight, the quicker this bar fills and once full, Hulk enters turbo mode where all his attacks are much more destructive and powerful. Like they say, don't tick him off…

Next to the simple bad guy smack around play dynamic the game offers scenery and landscapes that can be destroyed. It won't be uncommon to pick up a car and throw it at something, destroying both objects - this concept filters down to almost anything you see on the screen from tables and chairs to people and military hardware.

Naturally a game about The Hulk wouldn't be complete without Bruce Banner featuring here and there. From the planned design of the game there will be a few missions where you must play Bruce, a stark contrast to the smashing and bashing play dynamic as Bruce's alter ego. These 5 'Bruce Banner' levels will require a more

puzzle solving and stealthy approach but most of the game will centre on Hulk smash everything type play.

Big green meatball

Negative concerns about the game include the possibility of repetitive play interspersed by tedious Bruce Banner puzzle levels. If the developers give us variety in both scenery and bad guys and make sure the enemy artificial intelligence is challenging then The Hulk might just be the thing, especially for all those fans. We'll have more on this title closer to the time and for now these few words and screenshots will just have to do.
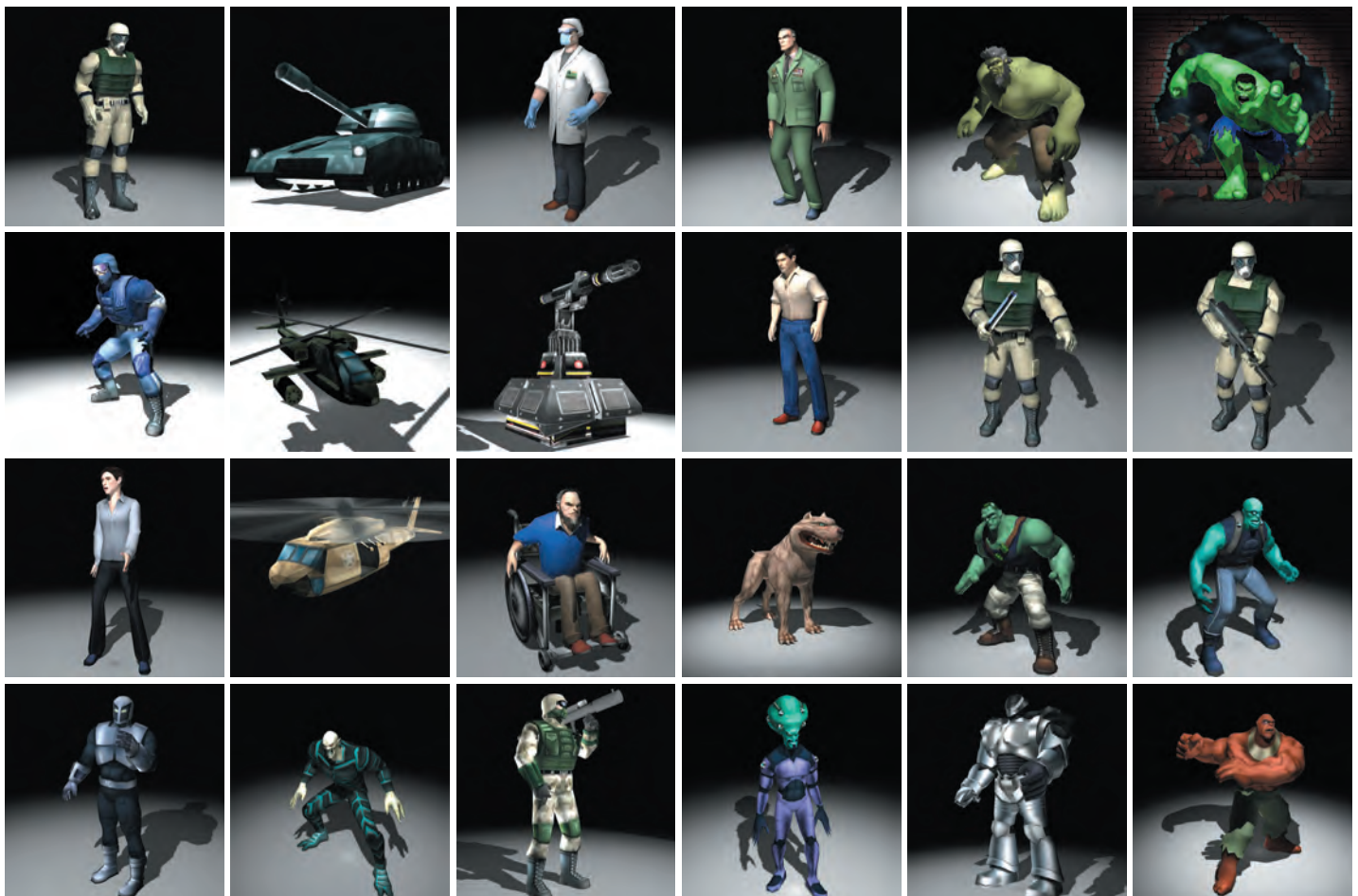
RED FACTION 2

▶ **Xbox and PC owners are in for a real treat, as PS2 gamers already know. Making a belated appearance is Volition's Red Faction 2, the sequel to one of the best-selling and most critically acclaimed original game franchises of 2001.**

Players will defend their country as Alias, a demolitions expert, with the help of five elite squad members, each specialized in their own means of destruction. Tasked with completing multiple mission objectives in a number of diverse levels, players will have various vehicles and an arsenal of powerful weapons at their disposal in a rampage to overthrow the government. Improvements for PC/Xbox in every area of the game are on offer. Nathan Camarillo, Lead Designer at Volition, spoke more about this to Derek dela Fuente.

"Xbox and PC are great platforms for customising these versions of Red Faction 2 to take full advantage of their strengths. We've optimized performance and taken advantage of the powerful Xbox and PC hardware so the game runs at a slick 60 frames per second. You won't find that kind of performance in any other version of Red Faction 2. We've also added 20 new multiplayer maps specifically for the Xbox version - PC owners will get this as well!"

It appears that Red Faction 2 is still the only first person shooter on any console to feature Volition's impressive proprietary Geo-Mod technology, and now the team target PC/Xbox with added focus. Bringing and keeping Geo-Mods at the forefront of Red Faction 2 is important for the fans. When all is said and done, Volition knew that they were making a game and not just a technology demo - that's why they've worked hard to expand the multiplayer modes, and included things like dual wielded guns and the ability to toss grenades without switching weapons. As you would expect focus has also been on improving the AI, characters, and level design.

"Working Geo-Mods further into the game play of Red Faction 2 was a design goal of ours from the very beginning. This time around we planned out a lot of regions with Geo-Mods in mind, and tried to make the flow of the level work with this as opposed to squeezing destruction in as an afterthought. There are some distinct puzzles laid out throughout the game that require the player to use Geo-Mods. Additionally there are many situations where Geo-Mods instantly change your combat environment. The player may use Geo-Mods to blow away the enemy cover, or in some situations your enemies will use Geo-Mods to blow away your cover."

"Simply put, the Geo-Mod engine allows for the player to alter their environment in real time. In some games the player's weapons have

no effect on the game environment. In Red Faction 2 you unleash your arsenal to destroy everything from coffee cups to vehicles and even the walls that stand in your way."

Basically within this FPS the story is important but not the main focus and there are a few limited tie-ins to the first story, but nothing that would put a new player at a disadvantage if they weren't familiar with the original. You'll be able to infer some of the occurrences in the five-year gap between the two, particularly with regard to the nanotechnology from the first story. "Although we have an extremely robust multiplayer mode, the real meat of Red Faction 2 can be found in the single-player mode. No longer a mad-scientists' dream, the research and advancements of nanotechnology have been repeatedly stolen and fought over, and the player takes the role of a nano-enhanced soldier in the midst of an uprising. Soldiers enhanced with this technology become hunted and eliminated by their ruthless, tyrannical leader. The player's squad joins the Red Faction. This resistance movement looks to overthrow the oppressive dictator of the Commonwealth. The player is a part of a larger squad, and each squad member has their specific talents or abilities. Rather than roaming through the game world as one large squad, the player often participates in coordinated maneuvers with a single sidekick that offers something unique to that level. The members that you're with never overpower the player's ability but can still provide valuable assistance. In the context of our story, the 'sidekick' style assistance worked really well for the objectives we were laying out for the player, and we didn't want to overwhelm that balance."

You assume the role of Alias, a demolitions expert. You have a variety of squad mates, each with their own set of abilities. Tangier is the stealth and infiltration expert. Quill is a deadly sniper. Repta is the heavy weapons expert. Shrike operates all the vehicles. Finally, Molov is the squad's leader and tactician.

Getting the levels right, ensuring the correct mix and feel is never easy. Nathan explained that plenty of time is needed as well as inspiration. "We usually start the process of designing a level with a basic environmental idea. We find a way to work that environment into our main story arc, and we figure out the story dependencies. Once we find the best fit for the

environment, we consider the weapons that will be available to the player at that point in time and what types of enemies the player will face. After some discussion we move onto a paper version of the level where the designer and level designer create game play scenarios and events that could occur in the level. A concept
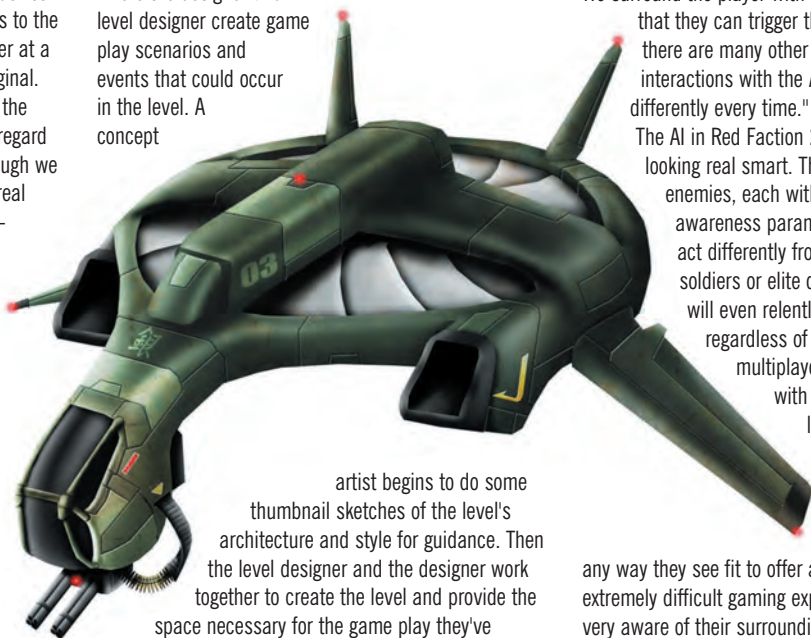
artist begins to do some thumbnail sketches of the level's architecture and style for guidance. Then the level designer and the designer work together to create the level and provide the space necessary for the game play they've envisioned. We all draw inspiration from movies, other games, real world places, and throw in some stuff from our own heads. The end result is always spectacular." Many of Red Faction 2's weapons are based upon real-world counterparts with some believable additions that push the envelope of today's available technology. In Red Faction 2 the team has taken the standard small arms to the next level. The dual handed variants can be fired independently for a unique game play experience. Nathan commented that they are so much fun to use that some people play through the game with dual handed weapons only. "Included is the powerful assault rifle, the NICW, which is based upon the OICW currently in development by the US army. The NICW sports an assault rifle combined with a grenade launcher and threat displays, including health information about your enemies. In addition there are futuristic weapons like the magnetic rail driver that can see and fire through walls. Combine this with other explosive weapons that are available to the player as a demolitions expert, and there is a great deal of variety. The player could play through the entire game almost exclusively with a single weapon but will find that choosing the right weapon for the job will enhance their experience, and in some situations make things easier." Red Faction 2 is full of non-stop, relentless action. "We had some stealth areas in the original Red Faction and found that these areas frustrated players since they had all these

powerful weapons but really weren't supposed to use them. Most players wound up blasting their way though the 'stealthy' areas. So we decided to skip that style of game play in favour of what people love doing the most. We surround the player with some pre-scripted events that they can trigger through their actions, but there are many other events, including interactions with the AI that may play out differently every time."

The AI in Red Faction 2, we are informed, is looking real smart. There is a wide variety of enemies, each with their own behaviors and awareness parameters. The fodder units will act differently from the highly trained soldiers or elite death squads, and some will even relentlessly pursue the player regardless of pain. The bot AI for multiplayer is really good as well, with three different base skill levels on offer. With the player's ability to create their own multiplayer bots, they can adjust and fine-tune their bot in any way they see fit to offer a challenging or even an extremely difficult gaming experience. The enemies are very aware of their surroundings and the player's actions. The AI will even use geo-mods against you. From top to bottom Red Faction 2 is looking pretty impressive and we hope the team's final words on the game rings true! - "Red Faction 2 for the Xbox and PC is the ultimate experience!"

MACE GRIFFIN BOUNTY HUNTER

► **A fine mix of experience and expertise, including Warthog veterans and new faces from many other top UK development houses,** make up the team behind this title. With added experience from doing space combat titles they believe they will collectively deliver a title that will be accessible to a wider audience, including those who enjoy playing FPS games. Paul Chapman, the Producer, spoke with Derek dela Fuente.

The game revolves around Mace Griffin, a former government ranger, seeking revenge. Melding both the first person shooter genre and vehicular combat on land and in space, the game reaches far beyond any game currently available. This was eagerly elaborated on. "The obvious elements that Bounty Hunter will bring to the mix are the space combat/flight sections. Flying spacecraft in Bounty Hunter will come as natural as driving cars in GTA3. We've worked hard to develop the areas which cross over between space and ground - jumping into the back of a ship as it takes off, killing the pilot and taking the controls, that type of thing."

The story starts like a classic Western and just gets more and more intriguing. The team wanted to create a story which was wildly compelling and entirely convincing. The mission path is linear but structured in such a way that you will have no idea whether what you are doing will progress you further in the plot or simply earn you a reward.

A condensed summing up of the story goes like this: Hundreds of years in the future, several dominant races (Human, Jaldari, and Velleakan) occupy a host of solar systems and discover new planets on a regular basis. Huge conglomerates vie for rich resources on every new world, resulting in fighting, smuggling and the emergence of pirate clans. To combat this growing trend towards war, the government sets up a group of elite Rangers, who are quickly brought down by an unknown traitor. Mace Griffin, the only surviving ranger, becomes a bounty hunter and sets out to discover the truth behind his team's ruin.

Although billed as a shooter there are many other strong elements to the game. "The game enables players to pilot six different ships, from powerful alien fighters to massive carriers. Each handles differently so you get experiences as far apart as high-speed dog fighting to moving colossal ships across millions of light years. We worked extremely hard on creating a player interface

that feels natural from moving around interiors to piloting ships. I think it works pretty well and people will not have to work too hard to adjust between controlling Mace to piloting a starfighter."

As would be expected the technology behind the game is a serious focus for the team, hence the usage of The Tusk 3D Portal Engine, allowing for creation of seamless transitions between environments with dynamic lighting and shadows, depth of field and environmental effects such as fog and water. The engine also allows two key play dynamic innovations. Tusk employs scene-graph principles that allow movement within and between different types of environments - currently impossible in other games. Additionally, the advanced portal technology will allow gamers, for the first time ever, to be able to seamlessly transition between first person combat and space flight action.

The game thrust requires exploration, detection and deduction, with a wide variety of objectives and ways in which the player must interact with both organic and mechanical objects. There is however a lot of combat but because of the AI the player must employ a variety of weapons and tactics to be successful. "You will need to think to complete Bounty Hunter. You can approach different situations in different ways - guns-a-blazing may get you there but maybe a little negotiation will help get you there even faster."

You will be rewarded with new weapons after completing missions and will also find them if you explore hard enough. The diversity of the opponents you face in this game means that you will need a variety of weapons at hand, and choosing the right tool for the job will be a big part of the combat.

Paul felt the AI within the game was a very important component but should also be transparent.

"If you are enjoying the game then the AI is probably good. If it's bad it will look either comical or be frustrating. Ours is neither comical nor frustrating. Our AI is a simulation of what skilled human soldiers do - inflict damage on the enemy whilst protecting one's self with the use of cover, movement and distraction. We have basically applied common sense principles - don't let the NPCs get in each others way, don't attack the player from too many angles at once, basically anything which makes the game play realistic but at the same time fun. Our worlds are also inhabited by neutral NPCs, who will panic and scatter at the first sign of trouble."

The environments on offer will contain hundreds of destructible objects, but the main topology will not be deformable, as in Red Faction. However at points, large structures, like bridges will be destroyed. Altogether there are 15 different levels, from cities to slave mines, along with 50 different character types, including aliens and mechs.

Best described as a First Person Shooter/Adventure (with space flight action) with diverse missions, some story driven, some incidental, to create a dynamic, realistic universe for an immersive experience. The high levels of visual effects, lighting and sound ensure this is top notch.

RESTAURANT EMPIRE

▶ **Restaurant Empire faithfully recreates all the challenges of building and operating a restaurant franchise through a unique blend of business-simulation and RPG gameplay. Derek dela Fuente spoken with Trevor Chan at Hong Kong based Enlight Software.**

In Restaurant Empire, the design aim was to provide the player with a thrilling gaming experience of building up a restaurant empire and becoming the greatest chef that the culinary world has ever acknowledged. "Restaurants have been a compelling subject to many people. I mean eating out in restaurants is such an indispensable part of our social life and opening a restaurant is the dream of many people whom I have talked to. In fact, there is a surprisingly large number of people among all of us who either love to cook or aspire to be a restaurant owner (and admittedly, I'm one of them). This fact, coupled with the absence of a detailed restaurant simulation on the market, effortlessly led me to the decision of developing Restaurant Empire."

Restaurant Empire's innovations bring new life to the business simulation games genre by combining RPG elements with business simulation game dynamics. The game tells the story of a young chef called Armand, who has just graduated from the culinary school and sets out to build up his restaurant empire. The player takes on the role of Armand and is treated to a unique gaming experience that combines business strategy and adventure game styles.

Like any game, extensive research on the subject matter was done. To get the game's simulation model right, it was essential to thoroughly understand the entire operation of the restaurant business, down to the details of staff management, kitchen setup and food menu design, just to name a few.

Restaurant Empire's campaign consists of 18 scenarios and it is through these scenarios that the player will see the main character Armand grow from a fresh graduate from the culinary school to the greatest chef and most successful restaurateur in the world. As the story unfolds, the player will be asked to achieve a variety of goals like attaining 4 star status of his restaurant, pleasing customers, earning a certain amount of profit, setting up new restaurants - like seafood and music-theme restaurants.

Trevor continued: "The RPG/adventure layer of game play revolves around meeting different characters that may offer help or assistance to the player in one form or another. Building up a great team of chefs and improving your culinary skills over time is akin to the RPG game play model. It is also played out somewhat similarly to the traditional adventure game where you will have interactive conversations with different characters and obtain key items or information in order to progress through the game."

You can also hire experienced chefs, acquire ingredients and obtain secret recipes from the adventure mode. These efforts will in turn benefit your business in the business simulation part. Needless to say, a killer recipe will have you seeing customers flock to your restaurants and generate an incredible amount of profit. The hiring and managing of staff is also a key aspect of restaurant management.

"It may look deceptively easy to run a restaurant but in fact it is not. While it is very easy for the player to get started with the game, especially with the game's interactive tutorials, the truth is that, just like in real life, making a restaurant profitable can be a daunting task.

Customers always complain. They may complain about the food, the service, the chairs or even the washroom. It is clear to every restaurateur that customers are hard to please and yet clearly your job is to please them. The player will learn the subtlety and tricks of pleasing customers and racking in profits bit by bit over the game's 18 scenarios."

The player's success in the game is gauged by the following factors: the customer satisfaction, the restaurant's profitability, the star status of their restaurants, which in turn is determined by the restaurant's food quality and how nice and well decorated the dinning environment is. In addition, all the chefs in the game strive to increase their 'Star Chef' ranking by participating and winning cooking contests. It is almost universally true to all chefs that they see winning the ultimate Master Cooking Contest as the Holy Grail of achievements in their careers.

The game provides a goal report that clearly shows all the given goals and the player's status in achieving them and the game's interface is designed to be as intuitive as possible. There is a screen called Information Center where the player can find all the detailed information of the restaurant handy in a single screen. There are also panels that list all the customers and staff currently in the restaurants. These panels are always accessible from the bottom of the game screen. All in all, our interface design philosophy has been to put the most frequently accessed interfaces on the main screen so that they are always just one click away. For detailed information that takes more time reading, they are grouped into a single screen that enables the player to navigate through the reports very effectively.

FABLE

▶ Derek dela Fuente interviewed, Dene Carter, Managing Director at Blue Box, about the much talked about game Fable. With the guidance of game visionary Peter Molyneux, this looks to be a title with huge potential!

Can you tell us anything about the back-story that ties the events of Fable together?

Many hundreds of years ago, a great civilisation grew based on the power of a strange artefact called the Pandora. Its great walls stretched from sea to sea, and its knights strode the world, proud, ruthless and unbeatable. In one night, the kingdom was shattered and all who lived within its stone walls disappeared. Over the centuries, those who survived, away from the kingdom's bounds, began the task of building civilisation once again. This is your world, Albion.

Obviously the character development is Fable's strongest allure; we've heard of scars forming and skin tanning under prolonged bouts in the sun, but can you tell us a little more about this excellent feature, how extensive and wide is the scope for characters to develop?

Skin tans and pales, veins grow more visible due to magical activity, skin ages, tattoos can be applied to various body parts, hair and beards can be cropped into a wide range of styles, clothing can be mixed and matched, muscles develop with weapon use, skin scars if deep wounds are left to bleed and much, much more...

Despite knowing a considerable amount about the game features, we don't actually know that much about the actual game dynamic; can you talk a little about the controls, combat methods, etc?

First and foremost, the control of Fable is simple. Every decision we've made has been predicated on the idea of 'fun' as opposed to realism. There's a single context sensitive interaction button and a 'use object in hand' button, and a Will button. With these simple controls you can fight, use magic, talk, light lamps, open doors etc, etc. The combat is real-time, brutal and heavily based on combos and enhancements you can learn as you progress in the game.

Pete Molyneux claimed at X02 that he personally learnt a lot from offering players complete freedom in Black &

White; to this extent will Fable be a more closely scripted title?

The major thing we realised was that if 200 things are going on in an area of the world far away from the hero, a console gamer is highly unlikely to notice. We began by trying to do the entire game via AI. We swiftly realised that AI leads to quite stagnant plotting, and a sense of disconnect with the world. We've thus used AI and scripting in tandem to draw attention to the areas we felt were important.

The Xbox HDD must play a crucial role in the structure of Fable. Can you tell us how Xbox development has been?

Xbox development has been a dream in most respects - with no Xbox there would be no Fable. The biggest problem has been that being given so much freedom suddenly makes decisions far harder - after all, you can do almost anything.

How long can players expect to be playing, and is there scope to continue playing the game after you've completed the main quest?

We reckon that the core quest could take as little as 20 hours to complete. This is a console game, so the pacing needs to be fast, fast, fast. However, there's a whole world to explore, and a lot of fun to be had wandering around and interacting with people.

Can you give us some details on the 'simulated world' that you've created?

There are Bandits with their own aspirations, Traders who wish to ply a reasonable trade, Villagers who just want a peaceful life, and Guards who feel it's their duty to keep the peace. On top of that, there are the enemies: the strange extra-dimensional creatures which inhabit the woods and dark places of the world, and the brutal rising force that threatens all life in Albion.

All of these different factions have their own needs, agenda and effects on the world, all of the people live their own little lives and all these things are the canvas upon which your story unfolds.

What do you see as the most innovative features in the game?

Genuine personalisation of character, both as a chosen action, and a result of your actions and dealings with the people of the world is probably the most important aspect of this game. We've not defined any roles for the player, so the way Albion will interact is entirely up to them.

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MICROSOFT FLIGHT SIMULATOR 2004: A CENTURY OF FLIGHT

It is now over 20 years ago since Microsoft's first Flight Simulator software flew off store shelves and onto PCs. This summer Microsoft commemorate this event along with the fact that it was one hundred years ago that Wilbur and Orville Wright left the ground and soared in the first successful powered aircraft, the 1903 Wright Flyer.

Derek dela Fuente interviewed Ken Lavering, Lead Program Manager at Microsoft Game Studios about this exciting project.

Do you believe that Flight Sims are a very specialist game genre and how do you try and entice new gamers in and how important is this to do?

One of the keys to Microsoft Flight Simulator's success

is its broad appeal. We go to great lengths to ensure that the product provides something for everyone from the new user to the hardcore enthusiast. We have made incredible progress in the UI design and overall accessibility of the product and this pending version is the best yet.

How is each successive Flight Sim title different from its predecessors?

In every new version of Microsoft Flight Simulator we try to focus on two or three key new features. An example of this would be the new Garmin GPS and the new weather system added to FS2004. In addition to the 2 or 3 key features we are constantly enhancing the graphics and existing features. Existing areas that we have improved for this version include bump mapping water surfaces and significantly improved ATC.

Flight Sim 2004 has many new additions including the Wright Flyer simulator. How much research was done on this and tell the readers what they can look forward to?

Normally we spend several days with the aircraft that we model, but with the 1903 Wright Flyer this was not possible so we gathered engineering design drawings and existing wind tunnel test data to formulate how the aircraft flies. From this engineering data we are able to calculate how the aircraft flies and its handling qualities. We have aeronautical engineers working on the flight models to make sure we get the simulation correct from an engineering point of view. Once we have a usable simulation we compare the results to the qualitative information we are able to gather, then from the results of the final comparison we are able to fine-tune the simulation to match what the real experience would be like.

A century of flight is indeed a comprehensive package. Could you briefly list some of the planes you will be able to pilot?

The new historical aircraft included in FS2004 A Century of Flight are:

1903 Wright Flyer; Vickers F.B.27A Vimy; Curtiss JN-4D "Jenny"; Ryan NYP "Sprit of St. Louis"; Ford 4-AT-E Tri-Motor; Model 5B & 5C Vega; deHavilland DH-88 Comet; Douglas DC-3; Piper J-3C-65 "Cub".

These aircraft will let the user experience firsthand what it is like to fly aircraft from the 1910's, 1920's, 1930's and newer. The player will be able to recreate the first flight of the Wright Flyer, Charles Lindbergh's trip across the Atlantic to the experience of a modern airplane captain piloting a Boeing 747-400. To add, three-dimensional virtual cockpits are also part of the pilots' package. This feature far surpasses previous versions, enabling pilots to operate aircraft controls, to tune radios, and to flip switches. Air-traffic control is also interactive and updated during flight simulations. All of the flights will be recreated in the modern world containing more than 23,000 airports across all 7 continents.

What improvements have you made to the weather conditions?

We have completely rewritten our weather system for this release. Our new weather system still has all of the functionality of past versions including 'Real World Weather' but is now dynamic and includes moving clouds and weather fronts.

The inclusion of interactive multimedia detailing aviation history, what was the reasoning behind this and what exciting information will be available?

New engaging features such as interactive multimedia provide a wealth of historical information on the planes that shaped aviation history and the pilots who flew them. Informed and insightful articles explain all there is to know about Microsoft's "Flight Simulator" and the 24 aircraft included in the software. These aircraft played a significant role in the history of aviation and we felt that it was important to tell a compelling story for each plane. One of our overall goals for this version is to make the additional content more discoverable and engaging to the user. We felt the best way to accomplish that goal is to make extensive use of multimedia content in a familiar format.

NAG Editors Choice

This game or product is the pick of the bunch for the month as it has that special something which makes it stand out from the rest.

NAG Award of Excellence

Games which score over 90% are given this award. The ultimate achievement for a game. It represents an automatic purchase if you enjoy the type of game on offer.

NAG Award of Merit

Games which score over 85% and below 90% are given this award. A game scoring here is good in every way but lacks that something extra that separates it from classic status.

Delta Force: Black Hawk Down [pc]

"…in my mind Black Hawk Down is the best game since Delta Force, if not the best in the series, period."

James Francis

93% NAG EDITOR'S CHOICE

Golden Sun [gba]

"Except for personal taste and maybe a lack of patience and self control, there's not much I can fault here."

James Francis

90% NAG AWARD OF EXCELLENCE

Splinter Cell [pc]

"This game is all about stealth, go in blazing like Rambo and you will probably not survive…"

Brett Hamilton

90% NAG AWARD OF EXCELLENCE

TOCA Race Driver [pc]

"This game is great fun, and a smart AI guarantees challenging races across the board."

Walt Pretorius

89% NAG AWARD OF MERIT

Rallisport Challenge [pc]

"The graphics are simply gorgeous to look at, the sense of speed and sound make for an exhilarating experience."

Brett Hamilton

87% NAG AWARD OF MERIT

DEATH

MERCENARY

STARSHIP CAPTAIN

BAD GUY

BANK TELLER

PIRATE

TRADER

HITCHHIKER

FIGHTER PILOT

PRINCESS

DRUNK

HERO

FREELANCER

IT IS YOUR DESTINY

SUPERHERO

EMPEROR

THE FINAL FRONTIER. A SPACE GAME THAT PLAYS THE WAY YOU WANT IT TO. STAY ON THE RIGHT SIDE OF THE LAW OR BE AN EVIL SPACE PIRATE. BUT REMEMBER, EVERYTHING YOU DO WILL AFFECT HOW PEOPLE RELATE TO YOU. SO BE NICE, OR DON'T. IT'S UP TO YOU

FREELANCER

Freelancer is an epic space adventure that combines a deep storyline, the action of 3-D space-combat, the exploration of a dynamic, living universe and trading in a rich galactic economy where the player's decisions drive the action.

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SPLINTER CELL

NAG NEW AGE GAMING MAGAZINE AWARD OF EXCELLENCE
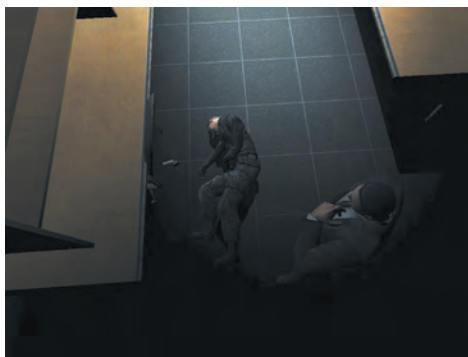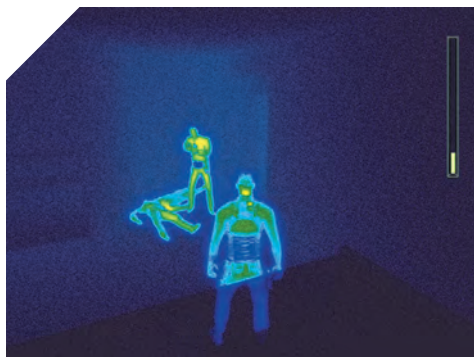
▶ In today's world of Gulf wars and troubled hotspots the slant and story of Splinter Cell is uncannily realistic immersing the player in the murky world of covert operations Tom Clancy style. You play Sam Fisher (brilliantly voice acted by Michael Ironside of Starship Troopers and many other B grade movies), an ultra secret commando for the Third Echelon a sub-agency of the NSA. Sam always seems to be in the dark about his operations and the objectives change quite dramatically during certain missions. I'm guessing Jack Ryan is too much of a nerd for this type of stuff.

Missions are set in the not too distant future, the CIA has contacted the NSA (National Insecurity Agency) regarding the loss of contact with certain agents in the Soviet Republic of Georgia. With these events unfolding the Third Echelon has been activated and Splinter Cell operative Sam Fisher is sent in to find out what has happened. Unfortunately for Sam if he gets killed or captured the government will deny all knowledge of his existence; he is a

Splinter Cell likened to a sliver of glass, small, sharp and nearly invisible.

This game is all about stealth, go in blazing like Rambo and you will probably not survive, and even if you do you will have raised too many alarms and our dear friend Col. Irving Lambert would have to call the mission off. You can pretty much kill or knock out everyone in the game, but you better remember to hide the bodies really well; trying to complete the game without killing anyone except the plot characters must add up to one of the most difficult challenges a game can offer. Sam has many moves that allow him to do things quietly, he can crouch and roll, hide against a wall and do a split jump that enables him to drop on unsuspecting enemies. Sam can use his climbing prowess to clamber up objects, shimmy across ledges, go hand over hand across pipes and zip line down wires. Doors can be peeked through and walls rappelled down only to burst into a window Die Hard style.

Sam has an impressive range of hardware at his disposal starting with the SC-20K assault rifle. This silent but deadly weapon

Infiltrate the refinery by the main pipeline.

Access the CIA central server

comes with my favourite addition, the multi-purpose launcher which has the ability to deploy remote camera's and non-lethal projectiles, my favourite being the sticky shocker which makes an enemy do a high voltage dance. Other inventory items include a silenced pistol, lock picks and a laser microphone to record those crucial conversations. Opening doors can be quite a hazard in Splinter Cell and making use of the Optic cable is a great way to avoid detection although I had one moment when an enemy decided to open the door while I was looking under it. Most of the missions take place under cover of darkness, this is where the thermal and night vision come into their own; the thermal vision reminds me of a Predators vision mode and the night vision is a grey screen view which blinds you if a enemy guard decides to shine a torch in your face.

Enemy AI ranges from good to downright silly but overall is quite believable, sometimes they seem to find you

Access the CIA central server

when you are totally invisible but this doesn't happen enough to adversely affect the experience. Splinter Cell offers a wide range of character interaction; you are able to grab enemies and use them as human shields or make them open a door and activate retinal scanners. Some missions require you to interrogate suspects for information, all these features make Splinter Cell extremely immersive, for once a linear plot doesn't feel that linear although once you realise it the scripted trigger point's mission becomes that much more predictable.

Missions are varied and even though there are only nine of them each one can take a considerable amount of time to finish; the scripting of each mission is top notch, only once did I have a mission where a character I was supposed to catch disappeared altogether and I spent 2 hours trying to find out what I had missed only to reload the level and finish it perfectly the next time round - it

Trail the mercenary technician.

Meet the contact

appears that going through the wrong door broke the scripted sequences. Bullets in missions are crucial, I don't know how many times I ran out of ammo only to be faced by a horde of enemies; the earlier missions with only a silenced pistol are difficult only because the pistol has a stopping power of a wet tissue. Remember to refer to your OPSAT (sponsored by PALM) your wrist mounted PDA that keeps you up to date on mission info and objectives; the only gripe I had was on the map info, I really did get lost in some levels.

The in-game sound must be pretty darn good because I hardly noticed it; I was so immersed in the environments that everything sounded natural. Music is subdued only picking up when guards were alerted or something plot

specific happened, Splinter Cell by nature is a silent game so a hardcore dance soundtrack would have been out of place.

Level design is nothing short of brilliant with believable settings and scenarios, I must comment on the dazzling use of lighting throughout the game, really some of the best effects I have seen in a game to date. Sam Fisher's modelling is nothing short of breathtaking with each movement fluidly moving into the next and the level of detail on his model being almost photo realistic. The enemy units are not as highly detailed but overall very impressive; I did experience a few areas with laggy framerate, mainly where massive amounts of lighting and particle effects were combined but for the most part it was smooth on my Ti4400 at 1024*768. I'm guessing that lower spec machines will have many issues with the lighting in particular, but the detail levels can be adjusted to suit almost any spec of machine although the minimum spec won't really leave a gamer impressed with Splinter Cell. My only gripe is that this game is maybe a little too short, a good player should be able to finish this game in about 10-15 hours. Considering the rigid scripting the re-playability is not going to be a shining point, my suggestion is that you try it on the hardest difficulty and try to sneak past almost every character for a real challenge. There is no multiplayer, but a co-op version for the single player's mission would go down really well. Ubisoft definitely have a winner on their hands, I really can't believe that this is an Xbox port, Xbox certainly is turning out some impressive titles, I wonder if it will ever see the light of day in South Africa? For all those Thief and Hitman fans go get Splinter Cell, it has to be one of the most entertaining gaming experiences this year. Operative out.

Minimum Specification

Pentium 266 MHz | 128 MB RAM | 24 x CD ROM | 4 MB D3D Video Accelerator 1000 MB HDD

☺ Atmosphere	☹ To short
☺ Challenging	☹ Scripting bugs
☺ Great graphics	☹ High end machine needed

Summary

Where games like Hitman 2 and Thief 2 have set the benchmark on PC and Metal Gear series on PS2, Splinter Cell has risen to the challenge and taken it to a new level. Not only is the game challenging it is also astoundingly good to look at; a few minor flaws have stopped this game from being the definitive title for this genre but never the less an awesome effort.

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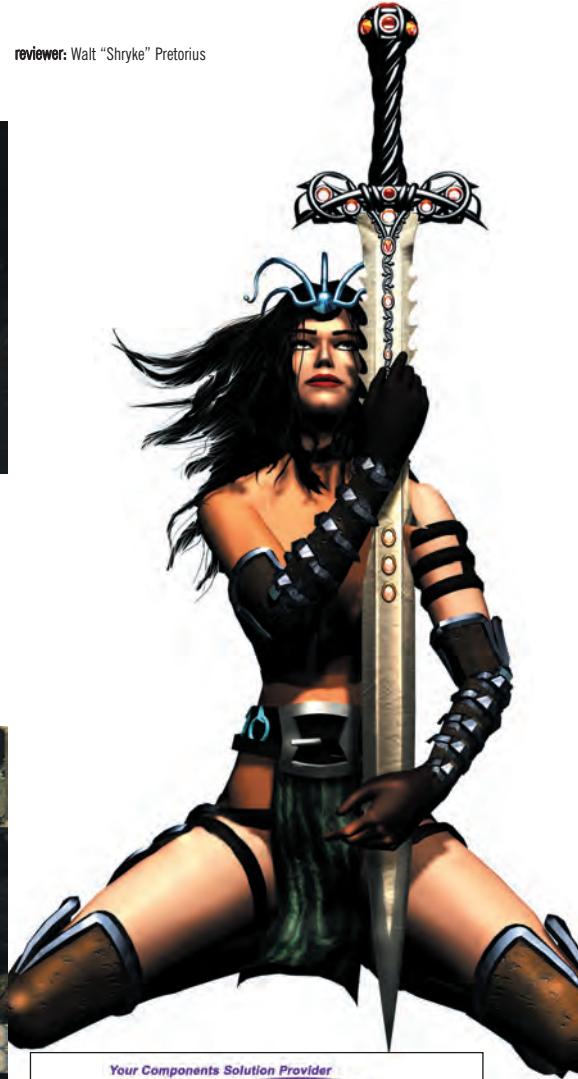
DIVINE DIVINITY

▶ With the amount of good, original titles available, and their obvious popularity, it's no surprise that a number of clones appear on the market. However, every now and then - just every now and then - one of these clones comes to the fore as a game that, while perhaps not perfect, certainly is a diamond in the rough.

Divine Divinity, developed by Larian Studios and released by German distributor CDV may, at first glance, appear to be little more than a Diablo clone, with a strong Baldur's Gate influence thrown in. In fact, the game is little more than this. With an overall game dynamic and user interface very reminiscent of Diablo II, and a quest style story structure that reminds one of Baldur's Gate, the average opinion about the game is not entirely misguided. The developers obviously drew on these titles as their inspiration, at the very least, and almost certainly stole a few ideas from these other games.

But judging a book by its cover is not something that a game reviewer should do. So, with much trepidation, I slogged on through the game, and soon found myself inexplicably hooked on Divine Divinity.

This is a title that, right from the get-go, presents minor problems. Not the kind of problems that affect game play or anything like that. I am talking about the picky little things that get annoying, even though they have little real impact on the game itself. For example, some of the voice scripting is rather poor - your character will say rather pointless and sometimes downright stupid things at times. However, overall, the voice acting within the title is of a high standard, adding to the complex and rather enjoyable story.

Another little pain that the game creates is the fact that the character animations, particularly when running, could have been a lot better. However, the overall graphic performance of the game is rather good, with vivid and clear visuals including things like reflections in water and the like.

And while the story is a rather unoriginal "you are the chosen one" type of fantasy tale, there is a great deal for the player to do within the game.

With three basic types of characters to begin with and a freeform skill system allowing the player to make use of any skills within the game, Divine Divinity offers the gamer an entertaining and rather compelling experience, provided said gamer is not too shallow and is able to look past a number of cosmetic problems that exist within the title. While there are a few control hiccups and, of course, the mentioned problems, this game is a massively compelling and hugely playable game, with even some replay value and a wide variety of options to keep the player busy. The game, being very freeform despite the linear story, may prove too challenging at times as the player may wander into areas intended for more powerful characters, but is quite manageable for the most part.

Overall, while this may not be the greatest fantasy title to hit the market in some years, it will provide players who can get over themselves with a rather enjoyable experience. As long as you don't get too picky, that is.

Minimum Specification
Pentium II 450 MHz | 64 MB RAM | 8 x CD ROM | 8 MB D3D Video Accelerator | 1.7 GB HDD

☺ Compelling   ☹ Silly character comments
☺ Varied   ☹ Some animation mistakes
☺ Quite addictive   ☹ Unoriginal

Summary
Although this game does have its fair share of problems, Divine Divinity is a title that will give fantasy adventure fans a good fix of gaming. A long and varied game, this title is more fun than one might initially think - if you can look past what really are cosmetic faults, you will discover a fun and rewarding game.

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reviewer: James "Ham Solo" Francis

FREELANCER

▶ Who needs a cause to fight for? We all want money! Money, big weapons and bars filled with wenches! See, whether its swords and sorcery or heavy fighters with big guns, human ambition never changes: we want stuff to blow up and we want to get something for it.

Do you remember Elite? I'll be honest, neither do I [*hillbilly, Ed*]. Most gamers seem to fondly remember the game that started the space flight genre, but to me it's a loss - a gap in my gamer education. What I do remember, though, is the Wing Commander series, and one of its sub-titles: Privateer.

To recall an old review on Privateer that I read, it is so much cooler than Wing Commander. Luke Skywalker was a wimp - everyone wants to be Han Solo. That was the point behind Privateer. You flew around space making money by hunting bounties, trading and doing odd jobs as your cash went up and your reputation (and notoriety) grew. There was a story in the background, but in reality it was all about the money.

Freelancer has been a long time coming, and it was developed, originally, by the man who designed the original Wing Commander, Chris Roberts. He has since left Digital Anvil, the company he formed after leaving Origin, when Microsoft bought the developer, and for a short period of time cast doubt on the game's release.

Then there was speculation that Freelancer would be released on Xbox only. These were dark times for a game that started out in development around the same time as Halo. But after several years, a change in ownership and some key figures leaving, Freelancer is finally here. Excited? Yes, I am.

Actually, I've been excited since playing the beta, which stops around half-way into the game. And I was ready to declare Freelancer as a potential game of the year. But after playing the full game, I'd have to step back a bit. Freelancer is like getting a really cool gadget, playing with it for a few days, and then realizing it's not as great as you thought, mainly because you placed extra expectation on it.

Expectation can come in two forms. There is the Black & White syndrome, where a lot of planned and announced features simply didn't make it into the game. In the case of Freelancer it was the ability to actually fly to planet surfaces and through cities. But to woe on this is moot. More to the point, Freelancer pales when you compare it to Privateer, purely

because it is too restrictive.

For the plain and simple reason of the developers forcing levels onto you, you race through the game at light speed, and soon you sit with a neat ship, a lot of cash and a finished game. And not in that fulfilling way that Max Payne left you. Max Payne was an 8 hour ride through hell that I'd gladly repeat any day. Freelancer forces you to progress, due to a very stupid flaw: some levels can only be attained through finishing a mission. To explain, Freelancer uses an RPG-style point system where you reach higher levels through money. The more cash you earn, in total, the closer your next level. But

every now and then you must complete a game mission to get to the next level. This keeps the game inside a controlled environment that throws any open-endedness out of the fray. In short, compare Diablo II to Dungeon Siege. The latter forced you into levels, while the first was more open, and ultimately more replayable.

Had Digital Anvil bothered to leave it up to you when to do a mission, and simply scaled your enemies according to your current level, it would have been much better. It couldn't have been worse with another game, either. Freelancer is a stunning game in looks and vastness, and the feeling of the open space has never been done better in a title. There are scores of planets and stations to visit and trade with, and a lot of groups and factions to side with or combat against. But the single-player drags you along a string, and you never really get to experience the Freelancer world. For this you need multiplayer.

Digital Anvil were kind enough not to only make multiplayer pretty damn interesting, but you can also run a dedicated server and a game on the same machine - a feature rarely done by developers. Sadly, multiplayer also has its vices, because the game's hardware is too limited. It doesn't take long before you can get the best ship with the best weapons, and soon you'll be bored. After all, if you don't have a goal, namely that shiny new heavy fighter in the showroom, what is the point?

Freelancer gives you enough means, since the traditional Privateer means are there in headhunting, bounty hunting, trading, smuggling and so on. Alliances and reputation go far in getting you specific hardware or missions, and bribing the odd person to get your favour in a company is also an option, though not one I used a lot.

Don't get too discouraged, though - it's a great game. Kudos to the unique control system, where you point the ship, and your firing direction, with your mouse. It sounds strange, but a joystick can't emulate the ease of flying this allowed. Apparently it's the same control system, used in Wing Commander: Prophecy, but I never played that particular title. The controls in general are great and all in reach. There are no complications with balancing shields or such things. One key reloads your shield, one key to drag in floating bounty, one key to target, and so on. It's simplicity divine. Graphically, as well, the engine is a marvel. It scales well to most systems, and looks great, no, stunning. The vastness of space, with the trade lanes, space debris, asteroids, and huge planets is very immersive, and the worlds and stations are quite varied. Sadly, no

aliens live anywhere, so all you deal with are humans, but they come in all creeds and clans.

Freelancer's sound is really good, but the developers opted to use your resident Windows CODECS to power it. This is fine, unless you have third party packs, such as the popular NIMO Codec Pack, installed. In this case, it tends to screw up the sound, with music effects and dialogue sporadically appearing and disappearing. No patch on the horizon yet. Another sound bug is on Live cards, where accelerated sound could cause static and screeching (a similar bug to the one in Battlefield 1942). Despite the bugs, the short lifespan and the feeling that this was an opportunity squandered instead of harnessed, Freelancer is worth playing, purely to see what a good game is. It's good because, despite its shortcomings, it's still a very, very impressive and fun game, and it will achieve classic status, but it could have been immortal.

MOUSE FLIGHT

MEET JUNI IN SPACE OUTSIDE RESEARCH STATION WILLARD

MOUSE FLIGHT

Minimum Specification
Pentium III 600 MHz | 128 MB RAM | 8 x CD ROM | 16 MB D3D Video Accelerator 900 MB HDD

☺ Excellent engine ☹ Forced story
☺ Innovative controls ☹ Lack of freedom
☺ Cool multiplayer ☹ Sound bugs

Summary
Freelancer is a flawed masterpiece. It is the spiritual successor to Privateer, and ultimately the Wing Commander series, and it does everything right, except for forcing you to play at a set pace, which ruins the overall play dynamic and really does not let you experience the game as you should. Multiplayer's a blast, though.

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IGI 2: COVERT STRIKE

▶ IGI 2: Covert Strike is a first-person shooter (FPS) that combines stealth and strategy. However, does it do enough to make it stand out from the crowd?
The past few years have seen the emergence of more realistic FPS titles. Increasingly, these games focus on using stealth rather than brute strength to get things done.
Enter IGI 2.

This sequel to IGI takes its inspiration from the cloak-and-dagger style of traditional spy movies. The player continues in the role of ex-Special Air Service (SAS) soldier David Jones to save the world from terrorists. Sound familiar? In fact, the entire game has a very stereotypical feel to it. From the Eastern European accents of some of the terrorists to the locations of the game, playing IGI 2 is reminiscent of the old Cold War days.
The developers have also retained the services of the ex-SAS serviceman Jones is modelled on, Chris Ryan. Ryan acted as the military consultant to ensure the weapons are as realistic as possible. To this end they have succeeded as each weapon differs in accuracy and reload speed.
A very welcome addition to the franchise is that of the

Map Computer. This uses global positioning technology to help the player determine enemy positions, the direction they are facing and to work out their patrol patterns. Of course, being a satellite system means it does not show enemies that are stationed inside buildings.
Jones also carries a thermal imaging device (TID) with him that shows the enemies as heated objects. It comes in very handy when you want to find out if a guard is stationed close to an entrance inside a building you want to enter. Using these two devices in addition to your binoculars will see that you have no excuses not to know exactly where the enemy is coming from.
One of the problems with IGI 2 is the inability to shoot out lights and move corpses. One would think a game that focuses on stealth would allow you to hide the body of a guard in case someone notices and triggers the alarm. Having the alarm triggered is, of course, not advisable. In fact, when you hear that infernal siren screaming, you might as well pack your bags and restart the mission since the guards outnumber you by a very large margin and your chances of surviving a full-on attack are small.
Graphically, the game is adequate without overwhelming the player with beautiful environments. The positional audio is good but the in-game music score is a problem. Why is it that developers insist on including music for games where background noises form an integral part of the title? I am quite sure the real covert troops do not have to worry about music playing in the background while completing missions.
Additionally, IGI 2 gives the player only three saves per mission. While I understand the reasoning behind this, the levels are

rather big to only save three times. Perhaps they could have incorporated a point system that enables you to purchase additional save game slots?
Overall, IGI 2 is a competent title. Having said that, you will not be missing anything if you never play it. Alas, the lack of replay value will see IGI 2 gather dust on a shelf once it has been completed.

▼ Who said a spy's life was glamorous?

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Minimum Specification
Pentium III 700 MHz | 128 MB RAM | 8 x CD ROM | 32 MB Video Card | 1.9 GB HDD

☺ Computer map   ☹ Limited save games available
☺ Realistic weapons   ☹ Cannot hide corpses
☺ A thinking man's FPS   ☹ In-game music

Summary
The good news is that IGI 2 is a solid title that does not have any major flaws and succeeds in immersing the player in the game world. The bad news is that its uninspiring graphics and lack of replay value will see it become a budget PC game quite soon.

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THE ITALIAN JOB

▶ Based on the 1969 movie of the same name, The Italian Job sees you racing against the clock through London, Turin and the Swiss Alps, on several missions leading up to the biggest heist ever pulled - stealing $4,000,000 from the Mafia amidst the greatest traffic jam ever seen. Unfortunately, it seems that The Italian Job was pulled straight from the PSOne, with virtually no retouching whatsoever…

The Italian Job follows the story of freshly-released convict Charlie Croker and his gang of cronies, er…

peers, on their quest to pull one final, memorable heist, namely stealing $4m from the Italian Mafia. The story is told through "Italian Job" mode, in which you have to complete missions with objectives ranging from stealing 4x4's off trains to busting your pals out of jail, all within a strict time limit, and while trying to keep the police off your tail. The concept is an entertaining one, and although the play dynamic is far from being a simulation, with most of the vehicles on offer having very similar handling, it does provide fast and exciting game play. Unfortunately, the controls feel far too loose, and those accustomed to more realistic driving games will find it difficult to get used to the arcade-style control scheme employed in The Italian Job. In terms of sound, although the soundtrack is very limited indeed, the single track that repeatedly plays throughout every one of your missions never seems to become tedious. The voice acting, though, is virtually flawless, and adds tremendously to the comical style of the game. The Italian Job's biggest letdown comes in the way of visuals - although they have been slightly spruced up in comparison to the original PSOne title, they are still unacceptably poor, with a very low-resolution, and textures that are severely lacking in detail, as well as scenery that could easily pass for being cardboard cutouts. The Italian Job's second major flaw comes in the way of variety - a poor, turn-based multiplayer mode detracts heavily from the game's longevity, and the other single player modes (time-trial, cone-crushing and free ride) offer little replay value. Thankfully, the 16 missions in the main mode present a decent challenge, and some do have replay potential. On the whole, The Italian Job is entertaining, but deeply flawed, and one is left with the feeling that its unique concept has not been done justice by the final product.

Minimum Specification
Pentium II 300 MHz | 64 MB RAM | 4 x CD ROM | 16 MB DirectX Video Card

☺ Entertaining
☺ Good voice acting
☺

☹ Awful graphics
☹ Sloppy control
☹ Poor multiplayer

Summary
The Italian Job is a fun and somewhat addictive romp, unfortunately let down by poor graphics and shoddy control. The sound effects and voice acting are certainly above average, and the concept unique, but on the whole, The Italian Job just isn't up to the standard set by most PC games today - you'd be better off with the PSOne version.

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PC

review preview hardware regular feature

may 2003 nag magazine

DELTA FORCE: BLACK HAWK DOWN

NAG NEW AGE GAMING MAGAZINE EDITOR'S ★ CHOICE ★

► "A Black Hawk is down! A Black Hawk is down" Those words immortalised one of the biggest military blunders in US history, and it spawned several documentaries, newspaper articles and a ground-breaking movie. And now Novalogic gives you the chance to dodge bullets in one of the hottest war zones of the 90s.

To put it bluntly, and to the point for you lazy readers - if you enjoyed the movie, or thought it would make a good game, get Black Hawk Down. It's as simple as that. I've just sat through one of the best shooters I've played in years.

To lament the point, I am rarely impressed these days. You can only play so many games before you get jaded, especially if you are forced to play them (the price of cat food is up). The Delta Force series isn't even a particular gem in my mind, either. The first game was great - a groundbreaker. But it took Novalogic two more games before they made it remotely useful to accelerators. Delta Force's engine, similar to the older Commanche games, used voxels to create vast landscapes. While this worked great, voxels couldn't be accelerated by the older cards, which meant all that processing fell squarely on your possessor. Not good news if owning a P166 was the norm. The second game did this as well, by which point a 3D card was the norm, so it was stupid. Land Warrior, the third game, did use 3D acceleration, but the gameplay was still numb. You shot moronic enemy units at long distance. It was neither challenging nor interesting. Great for a quick few kills but nothing to write home about, especially since the special characters made you nigh-invulnerable. The concepts worked great in Delta Force, officially the grand daddy of all things tactical shooter, but to continue the trend when games such as Counter-Strike, SWAT, Rainbow Six and so on have appeared and improved the genre was dumb.

Conflict Brings Change

So thankfully someone at Novalogic took this to heart, because in my mind Black Hawk Down is the best game since Delta Force, if not the best in the series, period. The principle is the same. You have large areas, a lot of combat and rather dumb enemy units. But a few subtle changes not only made these acceptable again - they made it fun.

If you want a recap on the Black Hawk Down saga, read the box out. But in a nutshell, the US was combating a militia that had no uniform, and they got their asses kicked in one particular conflict where two Black Hawks went down. You don't start there, though.

In true Delta Force tradition, there aren't briefs or anything fancy. You select the mission, choose your weapons (the selection being defined by the type of mission) and while the level loads, a text document gives you a rundown of what happens. But in short it's all the same: move to your objective point, and shoot any hostiles you encounter. Sounds simple and repetitive, right? In a way…

Your game starts with generally protecting food convoys or taking out arms caches. This more or less follows the activity of the US soldiers during Operation Restore Hope. But soon you start targeting warlords and arresting them, culminating to a series of missions around the infamous October 3rd, where the Black Hawks went down.

The game mechanics are still true to Delta Force. One

shot takes out an enemy, and there are lots of them. They still appear at pre-determined spots and act rather stupid. Thank you for small blessings, because if the enemy AI was innovative and unpredictable, this game would be impossible. By the ending stages of the game I've accumulated a body count of well over a thousand, and these do not count the militia your squadron take out. Complimenting the AI are the levels. Taking out men with guns on an open plain is easy, but once you are inside a Somali city, and the civilians look remarkably similar to the soldiers, it's another ballgame. Shoot too many civilians and you lose, but military snipers and ground troops are all over the place, waiting to ambush you. This creates some very intense moments that re-create the feel to the movie perfectly. Oh, did I mention civilians can pick up guns and shoot you as well?

Game of the movie?

It's rather uncanny, because as far as I know the game isn't based on, or related to, the movie. But it does mirror the movie closely, which is due a tip of the hat to Ridley Scott and co, since it appears they represented the conflict quite accurately. The game has small touches that reflect the events historically. For instance, you keep changing units between the US Rangers and Delta Force, since both had active roles. This means you don't play a set game character - just as well, since there is no story anyway. Another aspect is the weapons, which are restricted to the role of the mission. For instance, when you drop down to protect the fallen Black Hawk pilots, you only have a choice of sniper rifles. During the actual conflict two snipers were dropped in to protect the pilots. Graphically the game took a major leap. Sure, it's not as impressive as Ghost Recon, but the stages are much bigger, hence more toned-down graphics. The military hardware is very detailed. You'll have several trips on helicopters, humvees and other transport forms, and they all look great. Small touches such as rippling, reflective water, accurate splashes and wind-ripples or dust clouds formed as a chopper hovers close by add to the atmosphere, which is capped by very impressive sound and a great soundtrack.

It's been a while that I've been this impressed with a game. Black Hawk Down is the finest in the Delta Force line and a must-buy for anyone who enjoys tactical shooters, war shooters or just a great title.

Minimum Specification
Pentium III 700 MHz | 256 MB RAM | 4 x CD ROM | 64 MB D3D Video Accelerator | 750 MB HDD

☺ Great atmosphere
☺ Great graphics
☺ Fairly accurate

☹ Tough
☹ Not for low end machines
☹ No real single player replay value

Summary
Great graphics, great sound and great gameplay bring together a game based on the Operation Restore Hope campaign. It's a rough ride, but worth it, creating the best Delta Force game to date, and one of the best games of the year.

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RALLISPORT CHALLENGE

NAG
AWARD OF MERIT
NEW AGE GAMING MAGAZINE

► The best rally game to hit the PC in a long time - some might disagree and say that Collin McRae is the true leader but after a couple of weeks with RalliSport Challenge I'm thinking we have a new contender for King of the Hill. I love rally games, call me crazy but I think that Rally is far more exciting fare than almost any other form of racing except maybe SuperBikes (mmm, Ducati).

Microsoft Game Studios has delivered almost all the goods as far as a rally game is concerned, the only thing that stops this title from getting 100% is the poor crash model and watching cars that have rolled, miraculously land on their wheels; this takes away the awesome realistic feel of the rest of the title.

RalliSport Challenges offers the usual fare as well as some awesome additions that true rally fans will appreciate. For one we now have Ice Racing, this slippery racing has to be one of the most intense and difficult driving experiences seen, add Hill Climbing to the mix and we finally have a well rounded rally game that will leave a gamer satisfied. RalliSport supports single race, career and time attack modes allowing one to get familiar with the tracks and cars available; it is an easy enough game to get into but a difficult one to master. Computer controlled cars are very tough to beat on new tracks but the learning curve is just right so that you don't get too frustrated. I don't know how many times in the Mediterranean Stages I went flying off a cliff to my doom. RalliSport Challenge supports most wheels and controllers which are really simple to configure, I had great fun reviewing the Microsoft Sidewinder Force Feedback steering wheel with this title, unfortunately I still can't beat my l33t keyboard driven times. The graphics are simply gorgeous to look at, the sense of speed and sound make for an exhilarating experience. RalliSport needs a decent system to be appreciated to the full, hardware T&L is a must so anything Ge-Force 256 and above will suffice. I can't imagine how many queries Microsoft must get from poor sods who bought a title that requires hardware T&L only to wonder why it doesn't work with their 16mb onboard graphics.

The terrains available vary from jungles to deserts with a lot of snow, rain and ice thrown in for fun, environmental effects range from rain and snow to night racing making each track a unique experience. RalliSport finds a nice balance between arcade and simulation without adversely affecting either one; once you have conquered each course and unlocked every rally car, it's time to test your metal against human opponents. Four way multiplayer is supported over TCP/IP on both local LAN and Internet play, All Seeing Eye has a server browser so hopefully servers will start popping up now and then. For those looking for a well rounded Rally game with a multitude of options this is the title for you, if only Microsoft would look at adjusting their pricing structures we might actually see the awesome titles they publish get more support from local gamers.

▼ I can't recall if it was parallel or horizontal parking

Minimum Specification
Pentium 733 MHz | 128 MB RAM | 24 x CD ROM | 32 MB D3D with H/W T&L Video Accelerator 1.5 GB HDD

☺ MS goes offroad   ☒ Price
☺ Lots of tracks and race types   ☒ No real mud
☺ MultiPlayer

Summary
The scenery zips by at over 160km/h; no time to take it all in, push hard for the next marker and hope your navigator really means hard left. Microsoft has joined the rally scene with one of the most awesome Rally games to hit the PC, let's delve deeper into its muddy tracks.

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NAG AWARD OF MERIT
NEW AGE GAMING MAGAZINE

TOCA RACE DRIVER

Fifteen years ago, Ryan McKane watched his father die in a terrible accident caused by a rival race car driver. A terrible fireball ended his life… but it also set the course of Ryan's, who decided that he would live up to the name McKane by becoming the best of the best behind the wheel.

Codemasters are well known for their excellent racing titles, and the TOCA series has been considered one of the best for quite some time. TOCA Race Driver stands to gain the same reputation and, seeing as it is not your average racing game, mainly because it has a whole lot more to offer in the story department. But do racing titles need stories?
The answer is a little more difficult than a simple yes or no, because a lot could be done with the story behind a racing game. Had this title included something of an RPG element (yes, it can be done, think about it) then I would have praised the inclusion of the story more highly. A driving game where the driver as well as the car could be improved would be rather awesome. However, the story behind TOCA Race Driver is little more than flavour. Not a bad taste, but it serves little function other than giving the player a reason to drive in all them races… and let's be honest, racing fans don't need a reason.
In terms of actual performance during the races, Codemasters have scored another winner here. This title runs beautifully, even on lower spec machines (apparently lower than the minimum spec given - I loaded it up just to try) and delivers a wonderfully realistic feel to the simulated vehicle… all of which is wonderfully summed up by great graphics.
One problem that enthusiasts may have is the lack of high detail specialisation within the vehicle. You can set almost everything on the car, from downforce to suspension to tyre types. But, for example, you can't alter gear ratios. It seems that this element of the title sits somewhere between a basic system and a very detailed one. It's easy enough to use, though, and settings can be saved and reloaded later, which is handy. And, most importantly, changing settings do affect the vehicles within each race. Sadly, though, there don't seem to be many repercussions to wrecking cars. Yes, they perform more poorly (and get bent out of shape - a very nice damage model) but the characters in the story are quite happy to see the cars get trashed. Other drivers may moan at you in special cut scenes, but that's about it.
This game is great fun, and a smart AI guarantees challenging races across the board. Several play modes, including multiplayer, make for a wonderfully replayable title that, partly because of its user-friendliness, partly because of its great graphics, partly because of its brilliant feel and partly because of its excellent performance on low spec machines, is certainly one of the top racing games I have seen in a long time.

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Minimum Specification
Pentium III 700 MHz | 128 MB RAM | 8 x CD ROM | 32 MB D3D Video Accelerator | 1.4 GB HDD

☺ Very nice graphics
☺ Good physics
☺ Replay value
☹ Some detail lacking

Summary
TOCA Race Driver is a good, clean and fun way to while away many hours. With good graphics, excellent physics and tons to do, the game is bound to become a favourite among the series. It even has a story, although this seems to be little more than window dressing. TOCA Race Driver is a brilliant title filled with thrills and spills.

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ZOO TYCOON: MARINE MANIA

▶ First we had animals to take care of (as well as the people that came to see them). Then we added dinosaurs. Now, in the third and biggest addition to Microsoft's Zoo Tycoon, we have more than just the addition of marine animals to see us through...

Zoo Tycoon has obviously proven to be a very successful title for Microsoft and developer Blue Fang Games. In fact, after the original title, another two support titles

have seen the light. First came Dinosaur Digs, which introduced a "Jurassic Park" flavour to the game. And now Marine Mania has been brought to the light, giving the player a slightly more realistic addition to one of the world's more popular didactic management titles. However, Marine Mania offers more than just a number of new animals for the player to add to their zoos. A new concept enters into the game, making for new challenges and, of course, new ways to make money from the simulated people visiting your zoological gardens.

This new concept is that of the marine animal show. Of the more than twenty new animals brought to the player by the game, including the bottlenose dolphin, the great white, manta rays, giant squid and killer whales, around five or six can be used to present shows to zoo visitors. This means a whole new opportunity to make cash and thereby turn your zoo into a more profitable venture. These shows are performed in tanks built next to exhibit tanks, and are performed by a new kind of staff member, the marine specialist. Fans of the title series will certainly be pleased with their new, performing additions to their exhibits such as boat rides, a shark tunnel and guests even swimming with the dolphins. In addition, a whole lot of new attractions, stalls and decorations have been added to the game to further enhance the view. Of course, all of these have a marine "flavour" to them for the enhancement of your new attractions.

As before, this title

is didactic - in other words, it is as educational as it is fun to play. Extensive information is provided on each species within the game. While the animals within the game may not be ultra realistic, this feature is very well researched and informative, making the game as much of a learning experience as a fun management title for kids of all ages.

There are no real changes to the game in terms of game dynamics or similar. In other words, the only new things here are additions to the title. While this may seem like a bit of a crock, the fact is that the game has definitely been enhanced by this expansion. It certainly is not a "can't be without" expansion, but the value added to the game by the title is quite substantial, as the newer kinds of exhibits can be applied to animals from previous titles as well as to the marine mania critters.

Minimum Specification
Pentium II 233 MHz | 64 MB RAM | 8 x CD ROM | 4 MB D3D Video Accelerator | 350 MB HDD

☺ Great educational element ☻ No dynamic changes
☺ Lots of new stuff
☺ Animal performances

Summary
This new addition to the Zoo Tycoon series investigates life below the waves as a whole lot of new animals and attractions are added to the title series. Arenas for performing animals are also a new addition to the game, and the educational nature of the title is well sustained in this expansion.

77

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PRIMAL

▶ There is far more to the world than we realise. But there is even more to multiverse, and it gets downright scary when you learn more about it. Especially when you happen to be part demon (a fact that you only recently learned) and you have been chosen by good to be her champion in the war against evil. And, on top of it all, you're having a bad hair day…

When ultra modern girl Jen has her boyfriend Lewis captured by a demon outside a nightclub, it's just the start of a series of very strange events that will lead her through the dark reality of her existence. With her spirit pulled from her body, lying on a hospital bed by a strange little gargoyle named Skree, Jen's night is about to get interesting…

Trying to review a title like Primal is something of a difficult affair. Sure, I can wax lyrical about the brilliant graphics, good character animations and brilliant voice acting. I can compose long passages of prose about the interesting story and the seamless action to movie transitions, not to mention the challenging levels, but there are so many things about this game that are as

annoying as these other factors are brilliant, that it is difficult to know what to concentrate on.

Primal starts with an impressive movie, and launches into a very interesting game indeed. However, getting through the first fifteen minutes or so of the game is quite a chore, because for every minute of game action, there are about five minutes of movie. And while these movies are important, seeing as how they try to make a rudimentary explanation of the rather strange situation Jen is in, they are thoroughly annoying. It seems that every three steps the character takes, there is another movie.

Once that is over with, however, the action starts. The game teaches you to play while you play it - both the player and Jen learn of her powers at the same time. She is a likeable, animated character, full of good spirit and charm, despite her rather strange situation. In fact, perhaps she is a little too blithe in her acceptance of her role as saviour of the universe and champion of good.

Jen gains, through the game, the ability to change form into several different humanoid creatures - each with their own strengths and weaknesses. This makes for

interesting and varied game play. However, the player may feel that he has been denied a lot in terms of control. Jen climbs, jumps and does pretty much everything else on her own. The same counts for her

sidekick, Skree. While the player can control either character at will, there is something of a problem (I feel) with not being able to decide when your character jumps, at very least.

But I am sounding very negative about this title, which, in fact, I am not. Frustrated, yes, but not negative. Primal is a good game, with a simple control system and an intriguing story, complimented by great graphics and stunning voice acting. The characters are true individuals, with well developed personalities and a host of abilities available only to them. The rather linear story is a bit of a downside, but, overall, Primal is a great game for those who enjoy intriguing and challenging third person adventure titles.

Requirements
1 player | Vibration compatible | Analog compatible

☺ Great graphics	☒ Linear
☺ Excellent voice acting	☒ Limited control
☺ Rich story	☒ Too many movies!

Summary
For ordinary girl turned universal saviour Jen, life is getting interesting. Primal is a challenging and fun game, but not without faults. Limited controls and a linear story counteract great graphics and a brilliant voice cast. Still, it is a fun third person adventure, without a doubt.

80

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PS 2

review preview hardware regular feature

TENCHU 2: WRATH OF HEAVEN

▶ Slipping through the shadows, silent, effective and above all, deadly… the ninja was the stealthy assassin of feudal Japan, capable of sneaking into any fortress and exterminating any target… whether for good or evil. Now, prepare for a return to the darker side of ancient Japanese society as you dispense justice through stealth, guile and a swift sword…

Tenchu, probably one of the greatest stealth titles of all time, is back in the guise of Tenchu 2: Wrath of Heaven. With the original having been a rather compelling and brilliantly challenging, thought provoking title, a lot was expected of this PS2 revamp of the title. And it does deliver, although not as well as it could have.

What makes Tenchu 2 playable at all is the absolutely brilliant nature of the game. This is stealth through and through, with no breaks for mindless combat. Here is a game that will keep the player on his toes for the duration of the tale, always needing to make the right decisions and play to the best of his ability. To this end, the title can be savagely unforgiving. Sadly, the title does not deliver like its PSOne predecessor did. The first and most noticeable problem lies in the fact that the game does not meet the mark graphically, with character modelling and animations that leave something to be desired. Also, the play dynamic is compromised by both an inept camera and controls that can be far too sensitive at times and utterly sluggish at others.

Overall, this title can be a lot of fun to play, but you will need to look past a few problems if you are going to enjoy yourself. Once you get past the faults, though, Tenchu 2 is a title that is, at the very least, worth a try.

☺ True stealth
☺ Challenging

☒ Unforgiving
☒ Graphics nothing special
☒ Dodgy camera

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BIG MUTHA TRUCKERS

► At last, for all of us who've dreamt of driving huge cargo trucks, drinking obscene amounts of beer, and speaking a dialect of English virtually indecipherable to most ordinary people, but have never had the nerve to pursue those ambitions, a decent redneck simulation has finally arrived! Big Mutha Truckers aims to be primarily an exercise in good, old fashioned comedy, and in that respect, it certainly succeeds.

Ma Jackson has realised she's getting a bit too old to run her incredibly successful trucking company, and so she summons her 4 off-spring to determine who is most worthy of being handed the reins - whoever can make the most cash in 60 days gets the spoils. After choosing one of the 4 characters, you have to start hauling goods around Hick State County, buying for as low a price as you can get, and selling at as high a price as possible in order to make the most profit. Along the way, you'll also be able to blow your hard earned cash playing the fruit machines, engage other truckers in races to towns of your choice (with a wager riding on the event, of course), as well as perform missions for people capable of providing you with sufficient remuneration for your services. It's a simple concept, but it does prove to be both highly entertaining and challenging. In terms of the visuals, Big Mutha Truckers certainly looks the part, with characters, towns, scenery and vehicles all very well detailed, and few incidents of frame rate drop. The control system isn't overly complicated, but is still effective, and the trucks handle as one would expect.

Much fun can be had on the roads, in the form of dicing with either the police or biker gangs, not to mention multiple-car pile ups that occur when your trailer swings wildly out of control after you realise you just missed your turn off. The game also features a fairly extensive sound track, with different styles of music selectable through a GTA3 style radio. It's interesting to note that South African artist Candice also appears on the sound track. Ultimately, Big Mutha Truckers is certainly entertaining, if only because of the tongue-in-cheek look it takes at the trucking "community", but also has a solid play dynamic, and a fair amount of replay value. On the whole, though, it's unlikely that Big Mutha Truckers will be liked by everyone on account of its rather obscure subject matter, so be advised to try before you buy.

☺ Humorous
☺ Original

☒ Not for everyone

70
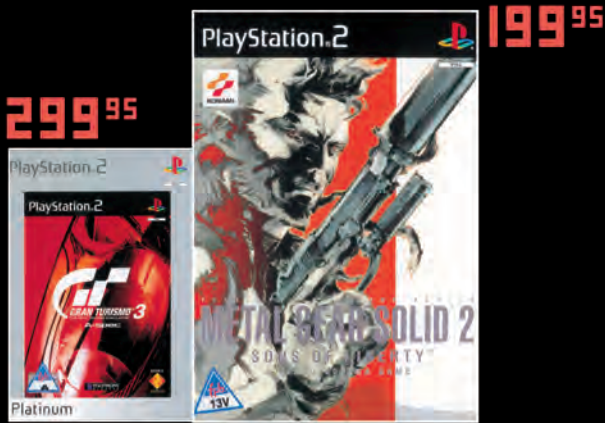
PS 2

review preview hardware regular feature

INTERNATIONAL SUPERSTAR SOCCER 3

▶ The latest in Konami's line of arcade-styled FIFA challengers, International Superstar Soccer 3 certainly looks the part, but without an official license. Can it stand up to the FIFA juggernaut?

The ISS games have long enjoyed a reputation for being some of the better football games around, but have never enjoyed the same popularity as the FIFA series, particularly in South Africa. The arcade-style football game market is a tricky one, and often games are sold because of the players and teams that appear in them, rather than on account of their playability. Unfortunately, ISS3 suffers in both of the aforementioned areas. Firstly, although international teams (with fairly accurate line-ups) are present, the only "club" teams available are entirely fictitious. Of course, transfers, kit alterations and name changes can be made to the existing "original" teams, provided you have the financial clout (points, earned from winning matches), not to mention the patience, to do so. There is a fair amount of variety on offer in ISS3, with tournaments, friendlies, and mission matches (where you have a certain objective to complete in order to win, e.g. scoring directly from a free kick). Graphically, ISS3 also doesn't disappoint, with cut-scenes being shown after scoring goals, winning corners and missing shots, and realistically animated players, not to mention little extras, like how the grass is disturbed by sliding tackles. Where it all comes apart, however, is the control system and play dynamic. The controls are unfortunately irresponsive, and it's often exceedingly difficult to precisely aim the direction in which your player dribbles, and there is no way to change the amount of pace on your passes and through balls, meaning that they rarely arrive where intended, causing tremendous frustration. Furthermore, the AI is often downright stupid, blatantly refusing to tackle the opposition at times, and it's virtually impossible to score from outside the penalty area. Furthermore, it's impossible to judge how much power goes into your shots, so even close-range efforts can sail miles over the crossbar with only a light tap of the shoot button. On the whole, ISS3 does look good, but the play dynamic is often too clumsy and frustrating, making it a chore to play. It's not a terrible game, but it certainly can't take on the likes of the latest FIFA.

☺ Good graphics
☺ Variety

☹ Annoying controls
☹ Poor AI
☹ No license

68

PAC-MAN WORLD 2

▶ Pac-Man is inarguably one of the oldest, and most popular, video game characters, and he's still going strong. Namco once again bring the pellet chomping yellow sphere into the 3D platform genre, and they've done quite well.

Pac-Man adapts quite nicely to the whole 3D platform game concept - running around collecting things has always been his forte, after all. Pac-Man World 2 sees you chasing ghosts, eating pellets, and collecting fruit through a number of different (yet nonetheless stereotypical) locales, some being underwater, others sprinkled liberally with lava or ice, and most of the other archetypal platform game areas. In fact, PMW2 borrows aspects of its play dynamic from virtually every other noteworthy platform game ever released, but Namco have managed to sew it all together seamlessly, and we're left with an entertaining, and undeniably cute (also family-friendly) game, with a touch of nostalgic value to boot. Graphically, Pac-Man World 2 is bright and colourful, just as one would expect from a game of this nature. The graphics are not exactly remarkable, but there's little fault with them either - the game won't go out of its way to push the PS2 to its limits, but it still looks good enough. The audio is very reminiscent of the arcade Pac-Man games, from the beeps made when ghosts become edible right down to the simplistic, yet strangely effective, background tracks. The control system is responsive, and Pac-Man has an array of new moves, including spinning dashes, ledge hanging, bouncing and swimming to add depth to the title. And, for those who can recall playing the early Pac-Man games in the arcades, should you find enough tokens scattered throughout the levels, the original arcade versions of Pac-Man can also be played. Ultimately, Pac-Man World 2 is very far indeed from being a revolutionary platform game, but it is good, if simplistic, fun, and that isn't necessarily a bad thing. It's light-hearted, adorable, and easy to pick up.

☺ Fun
☺ Aaah, memories!
☺ Cute…
☹ …maybe too much so?
☹ Annoying camera

81

reviewer: James "Djinn-buster" Francis

GOLDEN SUN

NAG AWARD OF EXCELLENCE
NEW AGE GAMING MAGAZINE

I don't like Final Fantasy fans. In fact, I really, really don't like Final Fantasy fans. I'd hate them, but that means I'd have to pick public fights with them. My deeply seated distaste for this particular type of gamer is because most of them gloat over the FF series because of its CG sequences. I rarely ever encounter a FF fan that talks about the actual play dynamic, something that the series pioneered and can now be found in most console RPGs.

It's very simple - turn-based combat where you can use combat moves and spells to beat your opponents. This system works very well, and branches into different disciplines, but it's even found its way onto such games as Phantasy Star Online. Simple, easy and excellent. You have to respect it for what it is.

The trick, of course, in making a great RPG is building a game around this system. Golden Sun is a RPG of this discipline that was released on the Gameboy Advance. Three years before the game two thieves try and steal the world stones - four stones that hold the power of magic in control. The game truly starts when you explore the temple that houses the four stones, and involuntarily you help the thieves steal the stones, so it's up to you to recover them, thanks to bizarre village elder logic that only exists inside fantasy games and novels.

Every stone also houses several Djinns - powerful creatures that feed off the magic. As you and your party travel through the land, you can capture Djinns, who you can use to enhance your own power, get extra sells as well as do special attacks. Your own skills improve as you level up, opening new spells and attack moves.

The Djinns are the wildcards in the system. A character's available spells depend on what Djinns a character controls. For example, some Djinns give earth attacks, but this might disallow healing spells (not something you want to discover in the middle of a battle). You can use a Djinn to do a special attack, or charge several Djinns to unlock even more powerful attacks, though charging a Djinn will cost you a round.

Of course, you can't be too surprised at the game system used. Golden Sun is originally a Japanese game called Taiyotla, and this is obviously the translated version. And the Japanese LOVE FF style RPG games.

Story-wise, Golden Sun is traditional fantasy. You'll encounter a host of creatures and monsters, ancient trees, old catacombs, caves and a variety of villages and people. There are dozens of items to collect, and in a clever move, the weapon, armour, inn and magic vendors all look the same, no matter where you are - making things easier overall. The game is pretty linear, though, and some sections are downright frustrating because some puzzles or routes are not obvious, especially when you are trying to find the solution to a problem, and lesser monsters continually attack you. One problem had me so stumped that I was several levels above the norm by the time I figured it out, making a large part of the game combat after that easier than it should have been.

It's a cute and pretty game, and a masterpiece as far as GBA games go. Golden Sun has had me swearing a lot, wanting to throw the GBA into the corner and stomp away, but five minutes later I'd be back and trying again. Except for personal taste and maybe a lack of patience and self control, there's not much I can fault here. It's the best RPG on the GBA and one of the best games in the current title collection.
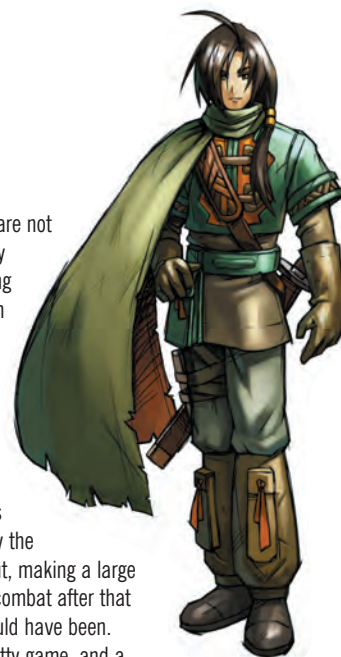
upcoming

No Golden Sun 3

The folks over at Camelot Software, developers of this game, have just seen the release of the second game, Golden Sun: The Lost Age. But sadly they are not planning another in the series. In fact, they aren't planning an RPG at all, but instead a GBA version of Mario Golf. Bah!

Requirements
GameBoy Advance | GameBoy Advance SP | Two thumbs

☺ Long game time
☺ Lots of spells and characters
☺ Cool Djinn magic system

☒ Frustrating in places
☒ Gets repetitive
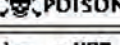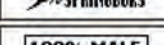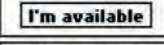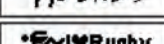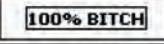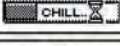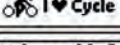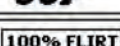
Summary
Golden Sun has a special place with me - that being in my pocket all the time so that I can play it instead of listening to the Editor when he complains. It's really addictive and classic Japanese-style RPG. Plus it takes a while to finish and looks really cute. Everything you'd want from a GBA classic.

90

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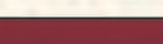| RINGTONES	NOKIA & SAMSUNG CODE	ERICSSON CODE	MOTOROLA CODE
4 My People	10010	14010	18010
American Pie	10028	14028	18028
Baby one more time	10052	14052	18052
Barbie Girl	10047	14047	18047
Black suits coming	10061	14061	18061
Bolero	10030	14030	18030
Bond	10057	14057	18057
Enter Sandman	10054	14054	18054
Evergreen	10040	14040	18040
Family Affair	10012	14012	18012
Final Countdown	10059	14059	18059
Flintstones	10036	14036	18036
Full Moon	10053	14053	18053
Genie In a Bottle	10020	14020	18020
Get Ur Freak On	10048	14048	18048
Hard Knock Life	10034	14034	18034
Hier kom die Bokke	10064	14064	18064
If you had my love	10063	14063	18063
Impi	10065	14065	18065
Indiana Jones	10022	14022	18022
Just like a pill	10037	14037	18037
Knight Rider	10066	14066	18066
Lady Marmalade	10013	14013	18013
Like a virgin	10041	14041	18041
Little L	10060	14060	18060
Livin La Vida Loca	10032	14032	18032
Looney Tunes	10049	14049	18049
Love don't cost a thing	10017	14017	18017
Love Foolosophy	10033	14033	18033
Mambo No 5	10021	14021	18021
Mission Impossible	10042	14042	18042
Monty Python	10011	14011	18011
NkalaKatha	10111	14111	18111
Objection	10075	14075	18075
Oops I did it again	10084	14084	18084
Pink Panther	10079	14079	18079
Pinky and the Brain	10094	14094	18094
Shackles	10124	14124	18124
Simpsons	10098	14098	18098
Smurfs	10074	14074	18074
Teenage Dirtbag	10100	14100	18100

OPERATOR LOGOS	NOKIA & SAMSUNG CODE	ERICSSON & MOTOROLA CODE
GAME OVER	20010	24010
(skulls)	20012	24012
POISON	20015	24015
HOT STUFF	20016	24016
I'm da MAN!	20020	24020
SOUTH AFRICA	20021	24021
I ♥ Soccer	20023	24023
LARA CROFT	20024	24024
BOMBSHELL	20030	24030
FRENCH	20033	24033
Phreak	20036	24036
I ♥ BEER	20039	24039
(batman)	20043	24043
ORLANDO PIRATES	20050	24050
RAVE	20051	24051
NO PAIN	20053	24053
WILD THING!	20054	24054
(logo)	20059	24059
CHILL	20060	24060
I ♥ Cycle	20063	24063
Kaizer Chiefs	20067	24067
007	20073	24073
100% FLIRT	20074	24074
SEX BOMB	20082	24082
MATRIX	20088	24088

OPERATOR LOGOS	NOKIA & SAMSUNG CODE	ERICSSON & MOTOROLA CODE
No Mercy!	20100	24100
WHO LET THE DOGS OUT!	20101	24101
NOKIA	20112	24112
SPRINGBOKS	20113	24113
100% MALE	20115	24115
LEVI'S	20118	24118
BITE ME!	20122	24122
DIESEL	20123	24123
PLAYBOY	20126	24126
I'm available	20130	24130
BOKKE!	20131	24131
NO FEAR	20133	24133
FRIENDS	20137	24137
I ♥ Rugby	20142	24142
Chill out!	20143	24143
Get a life	20149	24149
HANDS OFF!	20150	24150
100% BITCH	20154	24154
Fossil	20156	24156
BEAR HUGS	20171	24171
NO ENTRY	20177	24177
GET NAKED	20178	24178
HARDCORE	20179	24179
MAFIA	20180	24180
100% BOK	20208	24208

H@RDCOR3
sound cards

All H@rdcor3 hardware is tested on an Emerald computer supplied by Light Edge Technology:

2GHz Intel Pentium 4 processor
MSI 845PE Max 2 motherboard
Transcend Radeon 9700
Philips 107E 17" monitor
Transcend 1GHz RAM DDR333
Western Digital 80GB HDD 7200rpm
LG DVD/CD-RW combo drive

writer: Tom "the Toolman" Taylor

Benchmarking

When I thought about how I was going to approach this months H@rdcor3 round-up, I wanted to do things a bit differently. Everybody is always looking at the high-end of the market when they review sound cards. There are pretty decent entry-level sound cards also available, and some of them offer great sound quality at a very reasonable price. So what I did was look at a hand-full of cheap, entry-level sound cards, while keeping the die-hard computer enthusiasts happy with the high-end stuff. Looking at the sound cards, I evaluated them using the usual 4 scoring areas (features, sound quality, value for money and its software bundle). What was important to me was the sound quality and price. In the end I pondered over whether I would buy the sound card if given the choice.

> With almost all of the new motherboards being produced with onboard sound, there has not been a great need for PCI sound cards. Even though the sound processors found on the motherboards of today are more than acceptable for Joe Average, you are not reaping any of the benefits that most of the new games of today have on offer.

Although not necessarily the most expensive component in your PC, a sound card is the one device I would find my computing life difficult without. Apart from playing music and listening to the wonderful Windows start up tune, the sound card adds a realism factor to games that even graphics cards can't. A sound card brings to life the tense and frightful moments in a game that developers intended for you to experience; AVP2 was one such game and I am still haunted by the purr-like noise made by the Predator. On the more serious side, the sound card technology we have today allows us to accomplish tasks not thought of a couple of years ago, one such example is the ability for us to have a fully fledged recording studio in the comfort of our home, provided we use the correct software of course.

Generally speaking, sound cards can be split into two groups - entry-level cards, which offer basic features and sound quality, and high-end sound cards offering support for audio technologies such as Dolby Digital EX (for DVD playback) and Advanced EAX (Environmental Audio Extensions) HD and EAX 2.0 and with its sound quality being much crisper and clearer. There are many more technical benefits to a high end sound card, but I will not bore you with techno-babble. The entry level sound cards are never a bad choice if you want to upgrade from an onboard sound card, but if you have the money (or the will power to save a bit longer) it would definitely be in your best interest to buy one of the higher end models.
To achieve the best possible sound it is not just a decent sound card that is required though, speakers also play a huge role in this process (we will be looking at speakers in the July issue of NAG). If you want to get more from your gaming experience or if you want a better DTHT (Desktop Home Theater) system consider a sound card upgrade. If you buy a high end sound card you will not be disappointed.

Genius Sound Maker-32X2

This sound card is the entry level unit in the Genius sound card range and it offers nothing more than a one channel output along with a Mic in and a Line in. The Genius Sound Maker-32X2 also features a MIDI/game port which will come in handy for those gamers still playing with older joysticks. This card features the ForteMedia FM801 sound processor and although it only supports the basic technologies such as A3D, DirectSound3D, its sound is still great for its intended purpose.
The software supplied with this sound card is nothing spectacular and features only the device drivers along with the QSound 3D Audio Demo and a music player called EzAudio. Because of its entry-level nature it is difficult to tell anybody to dash out and buy this product though.
If you want really basic sound, for casually listening to music or the occasional game this would be your perfect solution. It offers a price that is hard to beat and it offers a sound performance that would suffice to most, barring the die-hard computer users or gamers. If given the choice I would stick to my onboard sound, but on the other hand if I really wanted a proper sound card I would much rather opt for the Genius Sound Maker Value 5.1.
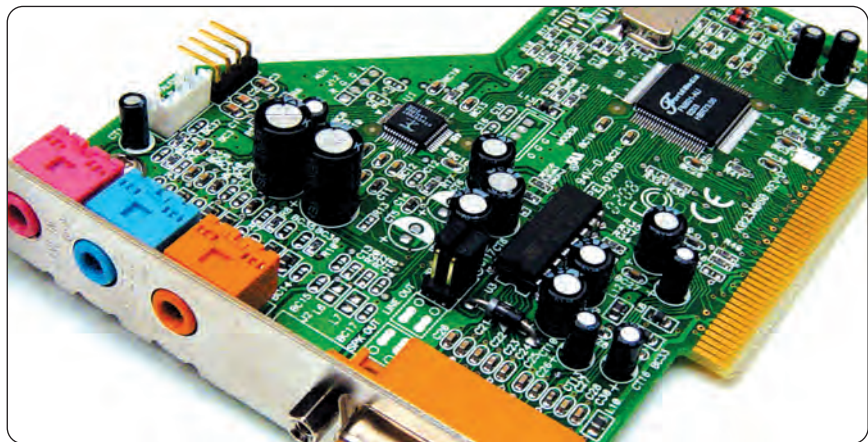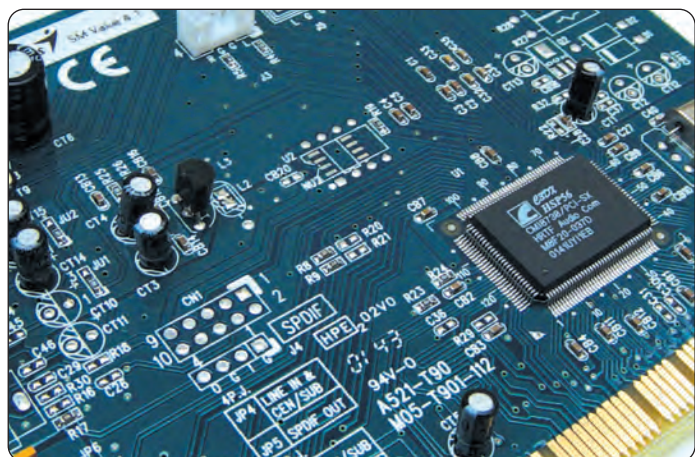
		Overall	
Features	70	**70**	**Pros:** Cheap basic sound card
Sound Quality	76		**Cons:** Offers nothing for die-hard gamers
Value for money	85		**Supplied by:** TVR Computers [011] 807 1390
Bundle	50		**ERP:** R121.98
			Internet: www.geniusnet.com.tw

Genius Sound Maker Value 4.1

As its name implies, the Genius Sound Maker Value 4.1 is just that. This is the soundcard for the person wanting a decent sound card at a very reasonable price. This card is powered by the CMI 8378 Sound processor, which is the same sound processor as those found on most of today's motherboards. Also on the card you will find four 3.5-inch jacks assigned to Mic in, Front Out, Rear Out, and Line in. Because this card only supports 4.1-channel operation there is just a Front Out and Rear Out to plug your speakers into. The other two plugs on the card are for Line In and Mic In, there is also a MIDI/game port on the back bracket. Being a card aimed at the budget market this card does not offer spectacular sound quality.
This card will perform well if you have two sets of speakers lying at home, you can plug one set into Front Out jack, and the other two speakers into the Rear Out jack, basically creating a make-shift surround sound speaker setup. Included with this card is a driver CD on which you will find, apart from the drivers of course, a program called Multi-Channel Audio Demo allowing you to experience the sound card in all its glory with the surround sound demos, as well as a copy of Audio Rack, the software that ships with all CMI 8738 sound cards/processors. The Genius Sound Maker Value 4.1 is also Yamaha certified for the 512-voice Wavetable synthesizer software and although the box features a logo for EAX it is only compatible with EAX 1.0. This sound card would be a great buy for a person on a shoestring budget, but the fact that the Genius Sound Maker Value 5.1 retails for less, almost assures that this card will not be a popular seller.

		Overall	
Features	76	**78**	**Pros:** Cheap 4.1 sound card
Sound Quality	83		**Cons:** Sound Maker Value 5.1 is cheaper
Value for money	85		**Supplied by:** TVR Computers [011] 807 1390
Bundle	68		**ERP:** R167.98
			Internet: www.geniusnet.com.tw

The Sound Maker Value 5.1 is the top card in the Sound Maker range. Its estimated retail price is way under R200 and is actually cheaper than the Sound Maker Value 4.1 which makes it a very good value for money product. This card hosts the C-Media CMI8738 / PCI-6Ch sound processor. Looking at the card, it has a dark brown/black pc-board which is a fresh change from the dull green we have become used to. Feature wise this sound card offers superb value for money. It has 6 ports at the back of the card - Line-in, Mic, Front-out, Rear-out, Center/sub-woofer, and game/Midi port. As with the other Genius sound cards, the Genius Sound Maker Value 5.1 is very easy to install and set up. The supplied drivers do not offer anything exciting, and only includes the device drivers, Audio Rack, and Intervideo WinRip (an MP3 encoder/player). On the card there is also an AUX and CD-in connector. At first I did not think much of this sound card; I mean what can a 5.1-channel sound card, retailing for under R200 offer? Upon connecting the test speakers I could see that this sound card definitely performs well enough to satisfy most computer users. Under gaming conditions this card showed it could keep up the pace with its HRTF (Head Related Transfer Functions)-base 3D positional audio which supports DirectSound3D, EAX and A3D.
In a nutshell this card offers very acceptable performance and is extremely well priced to boot. Keeping in mind that this card is an entry level product, and not expecting the world, this would have been my card of choice, had the Chronos 5.1 Channel Sound Card not retailed at R20 cheaper.
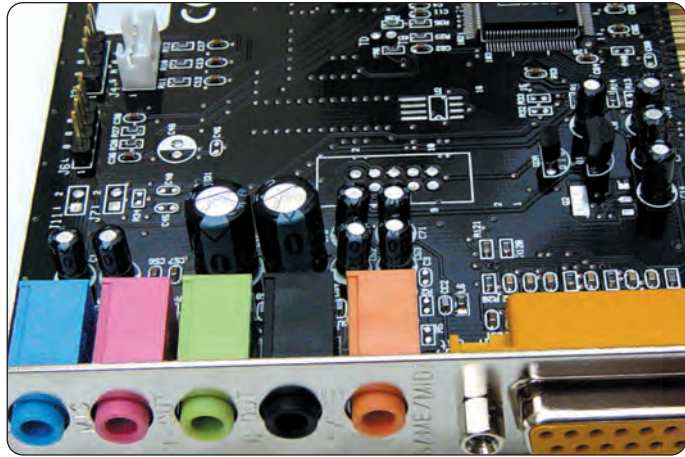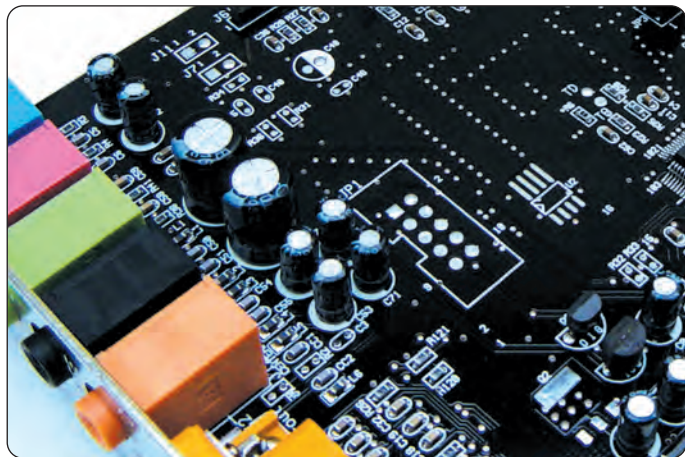
		Overall	
Features	80	**83**	Pros: Price
Sound Quality	87		Cons: Nothing comes to mind
Value for money	93		Supplied by: TVR Computers [011] 807 1390
Bundle	72		ERP: R153.90
			Internet: www.geniusnet.com.tw

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NEW AGE GAMING MAGAZINE
AWARD OF EXCELLENCE

Chronos is a brand not often associated with sound cards but they do make decent products. The Chronos 5.1 Channel sound card does not offer all that much, but would be more than sufficient for the person wanting basic 5.1 channel sound. This card sports the C-Media CMI8738 / PCI-6Ch sound processor which is the same one used on the Genius Sound Maker Value 5.1 and on the ASUS A8738 Sound card. Incidentally, this card is exactly the same as the Genius Sound Maker Value 5.1 down to the last capacitor.
On the card itself are 5 audio-jacks (Line in, Mic in, Front out, Rear out, and Centre out), a MIDI/game port, and an AUX and CD-in connector. Because this card is aimed at the entry level market there is no spectacular bundled software. On the supplied driver CD you will find the drivers for all Windows versions as well as Audio Rack and Intervideo WinRip (an MP3 encoder/player). The card, although no documentation indicates this, hosts HRTF-base 3D positional audio and supports DirectSound3D, EAX and A3D. Installing and setting up the card is a breeze and the sound quality it provides is very good. If you are a hard core gamer I would not consider this card, as it lacks certain key features. Keeping that in mind this is the perfect card for all other basic sound requirements and its cheap retail price should not put a hole in your pocket. Looking at its estimated retail price, compared to the Genius Sound Maker Value 5.1, this sound card would be my entry-level sound card of choice.

		Overall	
Features	80	**84**	Pros: Price
Sound Quality	87		Cons: Nothing comes to mind
Value for money	95		Supplied by: Light Edge Technology [021] 510 8270
Bundle	72		ERP: R130
			Internet: www.chronos.com.tw

Creative have long been a popular sound card manufacturer. This is due to the fact that they have had a major portion of the market share and they have always catered for both the high-end and entry-level markets. Lately they have focused more on the high-end market, which is not entirely a bad thing. It must be said though that their entry level products still give their competitors a run for their money.
The Sound Blaster Vibra 128 4D is the "baby" in the Sound Blaster range and offers basic functionality. This 4.1 channel sound card hosts the Creative CT5880 sound processor and features 4 audio jacks and one MIDI/game port. The 4 audio jacks are for Mic in, Front speaker out, Rear speaker out, and Line in. The Front line-out also doubles as an optional SPDIF-out. On the card there are also three other connectors, these are for AUX and CD-in. The third connector is for a modem/TAD (Telephone Answering Device). The Vibra 128 4D supports EAX, Microsoft DirectSound, and DirectSound 3D, the card also features a 128-voice music synthesizer.
The driver disk contains the device drivers as well as a couple of other applications. The first application is LAVA! player, an MP3 player with a twist. While listening to your music the application creates a sophisticated environment of 3D objects, textures, images, messages and colours that dynamically evolve in sync with the music. The second application bundled with this sound card is MediaRing Talk which is basically Internet voice communications software. The final two bundled titles are PixMaker and PixScreen. PixMaker is a very funky application, it allows you to transform, or stitch as they call it, multiple still images of a scene into a wide still picture or a 360° PixAround Scene. This program is very easy to use and the end result is quite impressive. You can actually view the end result as a moving video clip. PixScreen allows you to view the 360° image you created in PixMaker.
All in all this is a pretty decent sound card with a great software bundle; its only drawback is that it is a 4.1 channel sound card. If you are looking for a big brand product with basic features and great sound quality, but do not want to spend a R1000 in the process, get the Creative Sound Blaster Vibra 128 4D. Otherwise I would seriously consider spending about R540 extra and getting the Sound Blaster Audigy SE.
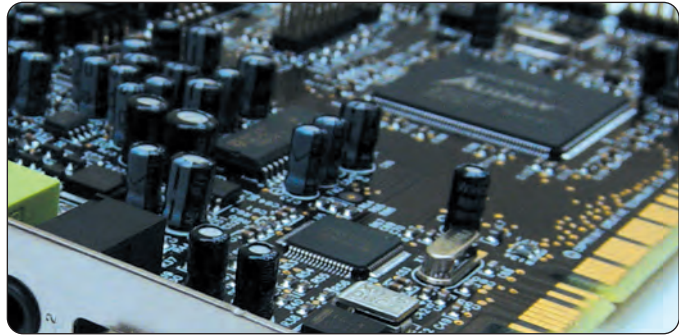
		Overall	
Features	78	**85**	Pros: Software bundle
Sound Quality	89		Cons: Price
Value for money	87		Supplied by: Sahara Computers [011] 542 1000
Bundle	88		ERP: R339
			Internet: www.creative.com

The Sound Blaster Audigy is still a very impressive sound card even though it has been surpassed by the Audigy 2. This SE version of the Audigy means that the package only contains the sound card and not the external Audigy drive, all the extras found in the Platinum Ex versions are also omitted. This SE version also does not have the snazzy gold plated connectors, but looking at the price saving I think I can get over that. The up side to this is that you get the power of the Audigy at about R2000 less. Even just looking at the Audigy you get a feeling of raw power and it actually looks more like a graphics card than a sound card. The Sound Blaster Audigy SE box contains the sound card, a driver CD, and a game port/Midi bracket. The reason for this extra bracket is because on the sound card there is no more space for any other connectors, instead you will find a SB1394 (IEEE1394) port, this is useful for connecting peripherals using the IEEE1394 specification. The other connectors found on the Audigy are the analog/digital-out, line- in/out, Mic-in and rear-out. The driver CD shipped with this sound card includes the Creative PlayCenter, Surround Mixer, and Wave Studio. There are also some SoundFonts and MIDI files.

What makes the Audigy sound card such an impressive one is the fact that it features EAX Advanced HD, Dolby Digital, and a 24-bit/96kHz DAC. The sound processor found on the Audigy allows for four different sound environments to be processed at the same time. What this means, especially for gamers, is that different sound environments and transition effects will appear much smoother and crisper and that the Audigy is able to mix up to four different sound environments at once.

It goes without saying that the sound quality produced by this card is superb, at its sub-R1000 price tag I would recommend it to the serious gamer with a decent speaker system. If I was looking to buy a high-end sound card today, I would not hesitate in my decision. This card offers excellent performance at a very reasonable price.

Features	90	Overall	Pros: Great price for a great card
Sound Quality	92	**87**	Cons: No games bundled
Value for money	89		Supplied by: Sahara Computers [011] 542 1000 ERP: R879
Bundle	79		Internet: www.creative.com

At its prime, about a year ago, the Creative Sound Blaster Audigy Platinum EX was the cream of the crop when it came to sound cards. It still is one of the best sound cards on the market, but many of its technologies have received an upgrade and takes its form in the Audigy 2. The Audigy Platinum EX still offers a myriad of features though. Apart from the Audigy sound card, you will find a black external Audigy drive and an extension drive. The purpose of the external Audigy drive is to be able to connect many devices and sound sources to your computer. On the external Audigy drive there is a SPDIF in/out, an optical in/out, headphone socket (with dedicated volume control), AUX in (for the Left and Right channels), a Line/Mic-in (with dedicated volume control), a SB1394 (FireWire) port, and a MIDI in/out port. The Creative Sound Blaster Audigy Platinum EX is not the sound card your average man-on-the-street would want to buy as it offers various features one might never use. Something I particularly liked about the external Audigy drive was that in using the supplied remote control I was able to adjust my speaker volume (among many other thing) from my couch, this made watching DVDs on my PC a breeze.

Looking at the bundle, this card has a lot to offer - Creative surround mixer, Creative Remote Centre (enables you to control your PC from your couch using the remote control that ships with this product), Acid Style 2.0, Beatniks Mixman Studio, Ulead Studio 4 SE, Cubasis VST, WaveLab lite, ReCycle lite, and FrootyLoops.

As with the Creative Sound Blaster Audigy SE, this card performs very well and should keep anybody happy for a long time. Its price concerned me a bit

though and I would much rather consider the Audigy 2 or the Audigy 2 Platinum EX over this card.

Features	93	Overall	Pros: Offers a lot
Sound Quality	92	**88**	Cons: Bit on the pricey side
Value for money	80		Supplied by: Sahara Computers [011] 542 1000 ERP: R3099
Bundle	87		Internet: www.creative.com

As with the first range of Audigy sound cards, the Audigy 2 range is available in different packages. The Audigy 2 Platinum comes with all the bells and whistles and its retail price shows this, the pure Audigy 2 consists only of the sound card. This is definitely not a bad thing as many people will never make use of the external Audigy drive (which is much the same as the external drive found on the Audigy Platinum EX) in any case. There are 6 jacks consisting of a Digital out, Line in, and Mic in; the other three jacks are for the speaker Line out. There is also one SB1394 (FireWire) port on the back of the card.

The Audigy 2 sound card boasts some impressive features, the first of which is that it supports 6.1-channel speaker systems. Other features include support for Dolby Digital EX, EAX Advanced HD, and DVD Audio, the latter being the latest new feature. DVD Audio allows us to listen to music on up to six channels; the quality is to say the least superb, a DVD Audio sampler disc is included in this package.

The Audigy 2 card is outfitted with gold plated connectors all-round, the software bundled in the box is not extensive (the Audigy 2 Platinum has more bundled software aimed at music creating/editing). There are two very decent games Hitman2: Silent Assassin and Soldier of Fortune II: Double Helix. Then there is the Installation and Applications CD, a feature showcase demonstration CD, and the Creative DVD-Audio sampler disk.

Retailing at a couple hundred more than the first Audigy, the Sound Blaster

Audigy 2 was a difficult sound card to rate, value wise. On the one hand it offered more in terms of specification and bundle, and on the other hand it was about R500 more expensive. If I take into consideration the price I would normally pay for the two extra games, the decision is easy.
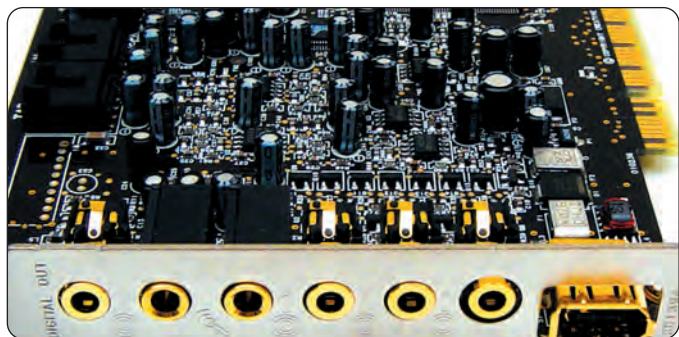
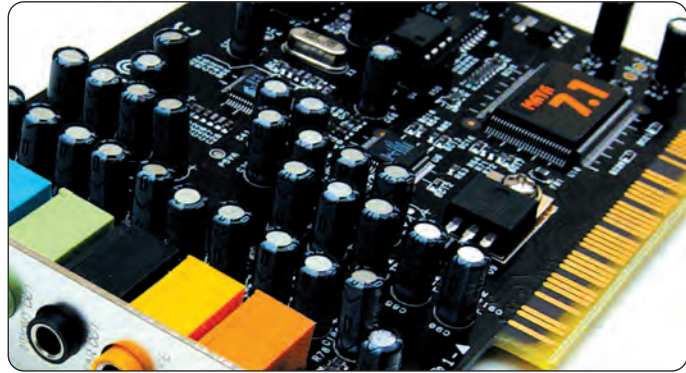| Features	95	Overall	Pros: Great features
Sound Quality	94	**90**	Cons: Pricey for most gamers
Value for money	85		Supplied by: Sahara Computers [011] 542 1000 ERP: R1419
Bundle	89		Internet: www.creative.com

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EDITOR'S
★ CHOICE ★

The Audiotrak MAYA 7.1 was the world's first 7.1 channel DVD soundcard.
When you listen to a 5.1 channel source such as a DVD, the MAYA 7.1 can separate the channels virtually. What also makes this sound card different is the fact that it is based on professional audio technology and hosts many features that will be welcomed by gamers and DTHT (Desk Top Home Theater) enthusiasts alike.
When you saw the title you might be wondering how the speaker setup of this 7.1 channel sound card would look. The 2 extra channels that this card provides are situated between the left and centre speaker and the right and centre speaker, giving you a total of 5 speakers in front. Alternatively you can position the 2 extra speakers to your direct right and left, giving you 2 speakers to your rear, 2 next to you and 3 three in front of you. This sound card also supports 5.1 and 6.1 channel set-ups.
This cards connectors include an optical out, centre left and right jack, centre/subwoofer jack, rear out, front out, line in, and Mic in. I was a bit disappointed with the lack of added software in the box, the Audiotrak MAYA 7.1 only ships with a driver diskette. Some of the technologies found on this card include the Sensaura 3D sound engine which has support for all the major sound formats such as A3D 1.0, DirectSound 3D, EAX 1.0, EAX 2.0, Macro FX, Environment FX, Multi Drive, and Zoom FX, I3DL2.
The Audiotrak MAYA 7.1 is an impressive all round sound card; it offers crystal clear sound at a reasonable price. Suffice it to say that this is not an entry level sound card; hardcore gamers should find its performance more than acceptable. If you want a sound card that can work hard for you, this

would be it, I would find it a difficult choice between this one and the Creative Sound Blaster Audigy 2. But if I had to choose, I would rather go with the Creative solution.

		Overall	Pros: Features
Features	94		Cons: Software bundle
Sound Quality	93	**80**	Supplied by: Tuerk Technologies [011] 792 8402
Value for money	86		ERP: R1395
Bundle	50		Internet: www.audiotrak.net

The Prodigy 192 is the sound card for people who want a versatile yet
hardworking device. Apart from the 7.1 channel support, this card also features 24-bit 6 channel 192 KHz playback and 96 KHz recording. Other features of this card include Advanced NSP, DirectWIRE, E-WDM, ASIO 2.0, and VST. Advanced NSP (Native Sound Processing) is a new sound processing technology offered by Audiotrak. DirectWIRE is an interesting and new driver technology developed by Audiotrak which can be used to route audio streams internally within applications using other audio drivers and it can be used even if they are running at the same time. What this means is that you are able to record any other application's output without physically doing any external wiring. This means that you can play a DVD, MP3, or music CD and record the audio without loosing any quality or connecting any wires. E-WDM is an enhanced audio MIDI driver based on the original concept of WDM technology from Microsoft. ASIO 2.0, and VST are products used for home studio recordings and can even be used for professional sound reproduction.
The other software titles are trial versions and include, naming a few, Steinberg Cubase SX and Nuendo, and Native Instruments' Absynth and B4 Organ.
The Prodigy 192 also supports Sensaura 3D sound and reverb engine, A3D 1.0, DirectSound 3D, EAX 1.0, EAX 2.0, Macro FX, Environment FX, Multi Drive, and Zoom FX, I3DL2.
On the driver CD there are various applications, the bundled full version software include titles such as InterVideo WinDVD4, Emersys Maven 3D Pro,

FAsoft Ntrack Studio, and SpinAudio Native Sound Processor.
I was really impressed with this sound card, although it had many features gamers and home users will not use, it performs very well and if you are a DTHT enthusiast this card should definitely be on your shopping list.
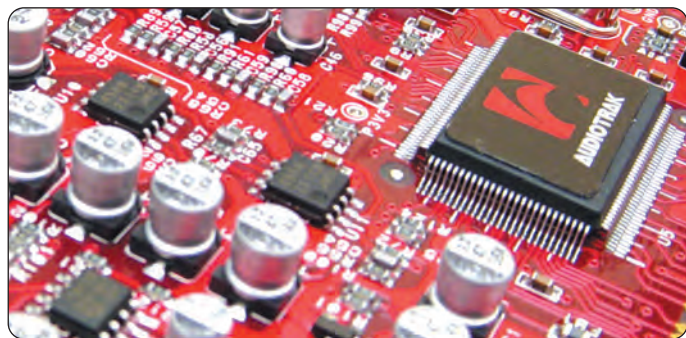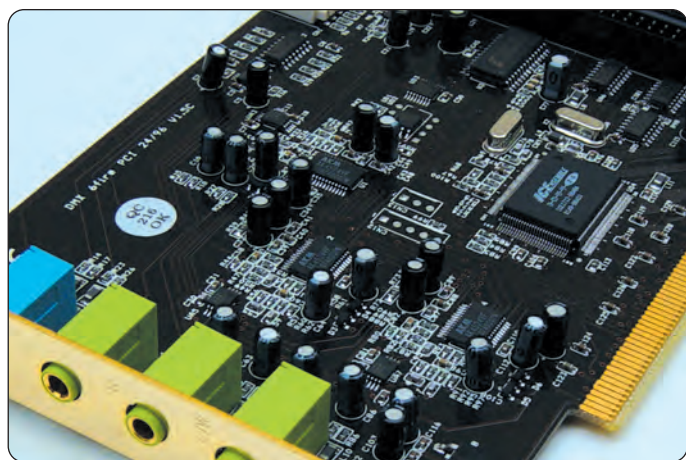

		Overall	Pros: Features	Sound quality
Features	94		Cons: Pricey if you are not using all its features
Sound Quality	93	**89**	Supplied by: Tuerk Technologies [011] 792 8402
Value for money	85		ERP: R1995
Bundle	87		Internet: www.audiotrak.net

The Terratec DMX 6 Fire LT is a 5.1 channel sound card with 24bit playback
and 96KHz recording. This sound card is available in two versions, the DMX 6 Fire LT which has the MXR (optical in and out) module, and the DMX 6 Fire 24/96 which has an Analog and Digital multi I/O module which fits into a 5 ¼ inch bay in your computer. The card does not look like anything spectacular and it only has 4 audio jacks at the back. These are for line in, front speaker out, rear speaker out, and centre/subwoofer out. On the card itself there are a couple of other connectors, 2 CD-audio connectors and 1 AUX connector.
The DMX 6 Fire LT features the ICEnsemble Envy 24 sound processor and supports the Sensaura 3D with EAX 1.0 and 2.0, A3D, DirectSound and MacroFX specifications. I was a bit disappointed in what this card had to offer, as it was a lot more expensive than the Prodigy 192 but offered less features than it. Some of the software shipped with this drive is a bit dated, and include Cyberlink Power DVD 3, Steinberg WaveLab Lite 2.0, Emagic MicroLogic FUN(only for Win98SE and ME), Musicmatch Jukebox, and Algorithmix Sound Laundry TerraTec Edition.
All in all, this card did not perform too badly and because of its high retail price I expected a lot more. It is a good sound card though but if I had to choose which one to buy I would overlook this one and focus on the Creative Audigy range.

|		Overall	Pros: Optical in/out module
Features	90		Cons: Price
Sound Quality	90	**85**	Supplied by: Tuerk Technologies [011] 792 8402
Value for money	80		ERP: R2795
Bundle	80		Internet: www.terratec.net

As with the Audigy Platinum EX, the Terratec DMX 6 Fire 24/96 is not so much of a gaming sound card, although its sound performance is more than adequate, it is aimed at the budding musician wanting to edit or create music on their PC. This card features 5.1 channel audio support with 24Bit playback and 96 KHz recording. This card is also compatible with the Sensaura 3D, EAX 1.0 and 2.0, A3D, DirectSound and MacroFX specifications and sports the ICEnsemble Envy 24 sound processor. As mentioned in the previous review, what makes this card different from the DMX 6 Fire LT is the Analog and Digital multi I/O module. This module which is very similar to that of the Audigy Platinum EX allows for a wide range of connections. The module slots into a open 5 ¼ inch bay in the front of your PC case, and on the module there is a line in (left and right), Phono (left and right), and line out (left and right). Then there is a Mic in, with dedicated volume control, a headphone jack, also with dedicated volume control. On the digital side of things there is a digital coaxial in and out, as well as an optical in and out. The last two connectors on this module are the MIDI in and out jacks. On the card itself, there are four connectors, one for AUX-in, one for CD-ROM digital input, and two for CD audio-in. There is also a multipin connector on this card which is used for the Analog and Digital multi I/O module. In the box there is the same fair of software as the LT version of this sound card; the titles include Cyberlink WaveLab Lite 2.0, Power DVD 3, Steinberg, Emagic MicroLogic FUN (only for Win98SE and ME), Musicmatch Jukebox, and Algorithmix Sound Laundry TerraTec Edition.
For hardcore sound enthusiasts this sound card would definitely be a good choice, it is to my mind better than the Audigy 2 Platinum Ex in many respects, but not so much for the gaming side of things.

Features 89	**Overall**	**Pros:** Optical in/out module
Sound Quality 89		**Cons:** Price
Value for money 73	**82**	**Supplied by:** Tuerk Technologies [011] 792 8402
Bundle 80		**ERP:** R4985
		Internet: www.terratec.net
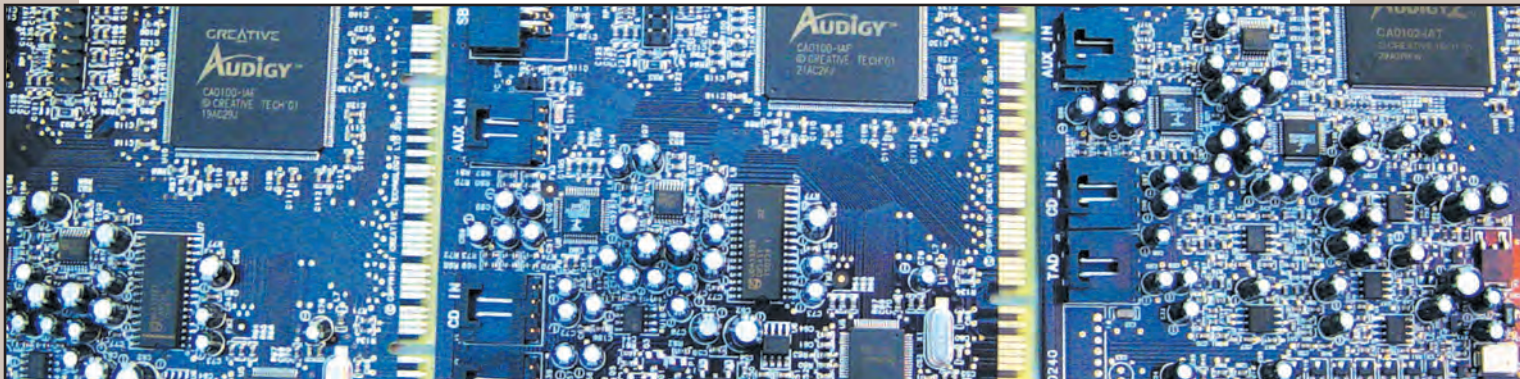
CARD NAME AND MODEL	SOUND PROCESSOR	CHANNEL SUPPORT	SUPPORTING FEATURES	PRICE	RATING
Genius Sound Maker-32X2	ForteMedia FM801	2.1	A3D, DirectSound3D	R121.98	70%
Genius Sound Maker Value 4.1	C-Media8738/PCI-SX	4.1	A3D, EAX, HRTF	R167.98	78%
Genius Sound Maker Value 5.1	C-Media8738/PCI-6ch-LX	5.1	A3D, EAX, HRTF	R153.90	83%
Chronos 5.1 Channel Sound Card	C-Media8738/PCI-6ch-LX	5.1	A3D, EAX, HRTF	R130	84%
Creative Sound Blaster Vibra 128 4D	Creative CT5880	4.1	A3D, EAX, DirectSound3D	R339	85%
Creative Sound Blaster Audigy SE	Creative Audigy	5.1	EAX Advanced HD, Dolby Digital,	R879	87%
Creative Sound Blaster Audigy Platinum EX	Creative Audigy	5.1	EAX Advanced HD, Dolby Digital,	R3099	88%
Creative Sound Blaster Audigy 2	Creative Audigy 2	6.1	EAX Advanced HD, Dolby Digital EX, DVD Audio	R1419	90%
Audiotrak MAYA 7.1	Not published by developer	7.1	ASIO 2.0, Dolby Digital, THX, DTS ES 6.1	R1395	80%
Prodigy 192	Not published by developer	7.1	A3D 1.0, DirectSound3D, EAX 1.0, EAX 2.0, Macro FX, Environment FX, Multi Drive, and Zoom FX, I3DL2	R1995	89%
Terratec DMX 6 Fire LT	ICEnsemble Envy 24	5.1	ASIO, A3D 1.0, DirectSound3D, EAX 1.0, EAX 2.0, MacroFX	R2795	85%
Terratec DMX 6 Fire 24/96	ICEnsemble Envy 24	5.1	ASIO, A3D 1.0, DirectSound3D, EAX 1.0, EAX 2.0, MacroFX	R4985	82%

MSI FX5800 ULTRA-TD8X

▶ **After a year of anticipation NVIDIA finally released the GeForce FX. But was it too late? Many people (including myself) tend to think so. I was privileged enough to get my hands on the first MSI GeForce FX 5800 Ultra to hit our shores and my experience was one filled with many mixed emotions.**

When I first heard of the GeForce FX last year I was extremely excited; at the time of its announcement, NVIDIA released details of some of its features and I was astonished. At about the same time of their release I was planning on purchasing an ATI graphics card but decided against it as the release date for the GeForce FX was near. Like you all know, the release date came and went, and I was still waiting with anticipation. Suffice it to say I could not wait much longer, so I bought the ATI graphics card instead. Finally the day arrived and I was able to get my grubby paws on the GeForce FX.
After much negotiation, the folks at Light Edge Technology arranged for an MSI FX5800 Ultra-TD8X to be shipped as soon as it came off the MSI production line. This month I will not focus much on the technical aspects of this graphics card as we have already looked at it in this year's January issue (page 86 to be exact). The NVIDIA GeForce FX5800 Ultra is the top-of-the range FX card in production. Based on the NV30 core this GPU utilises the 0.13-micron manufacturing process which aids in the reduction of power consumption. One of the major improvements on the GeForce FX5800 Ultra is the core memory clock speed, using 128 MB DDRII RAM the RAM operates at a frequency of 1GHz when under load, and at 500 MHz when in a normal Windows environment. The core clock of the GPU runs at 500 MHz which is 175 MHz faster than the Radeon 9700 Pro.
NVIDIA has gone to a lot of trouble to make the MSI FX5800 Ultra-TD8X package look more attractive. The box features a flip-cover design explaining all of the GeForce FX features on the inside, on the box there is also a carrying handle, this is not much of a wonder as the GeForce FX 5800Ultra is a heavy monster thanks to its large copper heatsink. As usual we see a whole bunch of games and software bundled with this card, sadly there were no new games or applications to utilise

the GeForce FX 5800 Ultra GPU. The games include: Duke Nukem Manhattan Project, Tom Clancy's Ghost Recon, and The Elder Scrolls III: Morrowind. There is also a disk with various game demos on. On the software side there are titles such as: VirtualDrive

Professional, InterVideo WinDVD 5.1 channel, InterVideo WinProducer / WinCoder, and RestoreIT Professional.
Looking at the card in detail, the first thing you will notice is the massive cooling system. The design is quite intuitive, the air-inlet system allows for cool air outside of the case to be sucked in by the fan. The fan in turn cools the massive copper heat sink that covers most of the area around the FX GPU. This larger than normal graphics cooling system results in the MSI FX5800 Ultra requiring two slots at the back of your PC. One aspect of the GeForce FX 5800 Ultra that I did not like is the noise of the fan. Under normal operation, the fan is quiet enough but as soon as a game is started the fan spins faster creating a noise that is very distracting. The fan noise would be especially irritating when playing games at night and you do not want to pump your speakers up to full volume. A cooling system like the one on this card is there for a reason, this card gets very hot and it averages 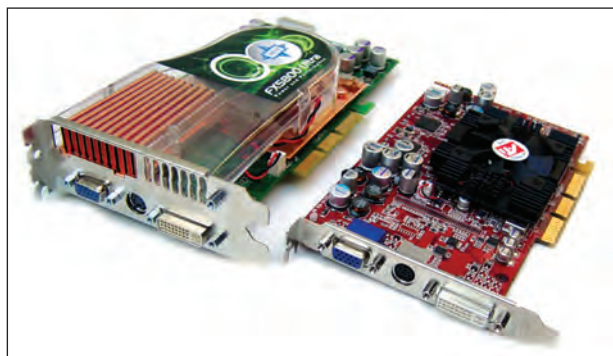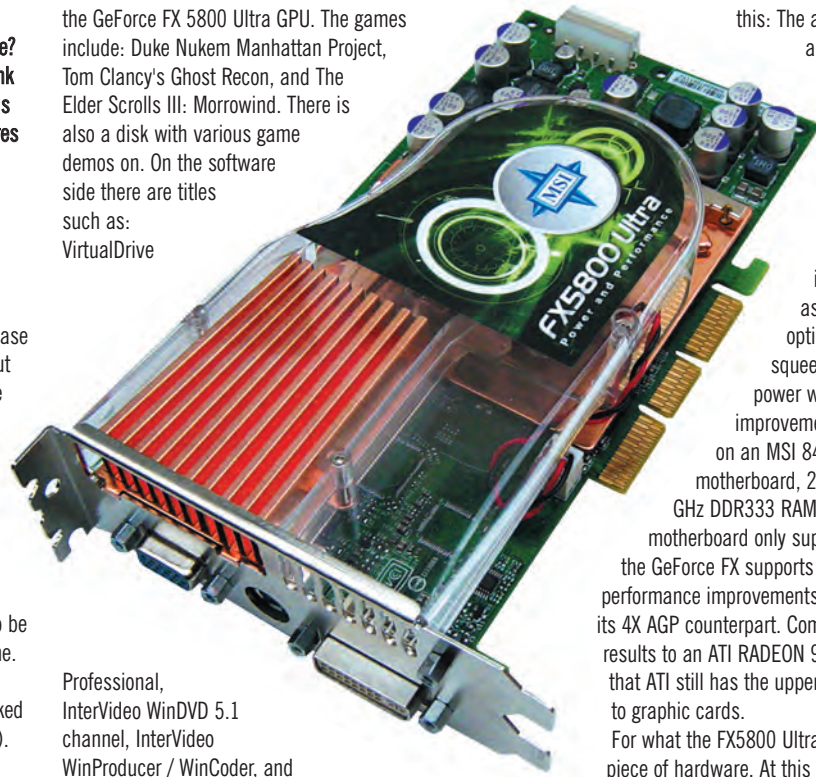between 50 and 60 degrees Celsius. People who are sensitive about the heat of their CPU or the inside of the case, will have to add a couple of extra fans to their boxes to compensate for the extra heat. As with the Radeon 9700 range of cards, this one requires extra power and is obtained by plugging in a Molex power cable, but unlike the Radeon's which uses a stiffy drive power connector, the GeForce FX uses the larger 4-pin, hard drive-type power cable.
The performance offered by the MSI FX5800 Ultra is not as great as I had hoped. There are many reasons for

this: The applications, games, and benchmarks are not yet optimised to take advantage of the features that this card has to offer. The Detonator drivers are also still in its infant stages and as soon as NVIDIA can optimise the drivers to squeeze out every bit of power we will see huge improvements. I tested the card on an MSI 845PE MAX-2 motherboard, 2 GHz Pentium 4, and 1 GHz DDR333 RAM. Although the motherboard only supports 4X AGP, while the GeForce FX supports 8X AGP, the performance improvements are roughly 10% over its 4X AGP counterpart. Comparing the benchmark results to an ATI RADEON 9700 Pro it is apparent that ATI still has the upper hand when it comes to graphic cards.
For what the FX5800 Ultra is, it is a superb piece of hardware. At this point in time though the Radeon 9700 Pro is still a better graphics card delivering better game performance and benchmark results (in most cases). Give this card a couple of months, and it will show its true colours. The only problem then is that ATI would have already released their new range of Radeon cards.
I cannot see that many people will run out and buy the MSI FX5800 Ultra. There is a light at the end of the tunnel though, the standard MSI GeForce FX 5800 (without the Ultra) will be retailing for about R3500. While offering a slightly slower specification, it will still be a good performer and it would also be a much better buy to my mind, you will not have the hassle of a loud fan.
If you want the latest and greatest, this card is a must have. If you want the best performer on the market, the ATI RADEON 9700 Pro is still the best bet.

nitty gritty

MSI FX5800 Ultra-TD8X Specifications

Graphics Core: 256-bit
Core/Memory Clock: 500/1000MHz
Memory Bandwidth: 32GB/sec.
Fill Rate: 4 Billion texels/sec.
Vertices per Second: 200 million
Memory: 128MB
Transistor Count: 125 million
Rendering Pipelines: 8

REVIEWED BY	
Tom "Tool Man" Taylor	
PLUS	**MINUS**
New technology	Noisy fan
Fast GPU clock	Runs hot
DDRII RAM	Cannot outperform Radeon

SUPPLIED BY: Light Edge Tech [021] 510 8270
PRICE: R 5130.00
INTERNET: www.msi.com.tw

BENCHMARKS	3DMark 2001 SE	3DMark 03	Aquamark	UT2003 Bot Match	UT2003 Flyby
MSI FX5800 Ultra-TD8X	10948	2998	52.9	48.26	138.35
Sapphire Radeon 9700 Pro	11357	4245	63.7	49.94	143.84

Mainboard supports Virtual Processor
Optimizes Hyper Threading Technology

Intel® 845PE CHIPSET Supporting Hyper-Threading Technology

Experience the power of "Virturl Proessor"!! MSI's lastest motherboard supports Hyper-Threading Technology, allowing the processor to execute two threads simultaneously on shared execution resources. MVP–Motherboard supports Virturl Processor, the most valuable player will be you.

845PE Max Intel® 845PE chipset

- Supports Intel® Pentium® 4 processor to 2.8 GHz
- FSB 533 MHz
- USB2.0 Technology
- 2 DIMMs, up to 2GB of DDR 333(PC2700) Memory supported
  - 6 PCI/1CNR/1AGP Intel® 82562ET LAN

Intel® 845PE CHIPSET Supporting Hyper-Threading Technology

533 FSB · USB 2.0 · DDR 333 · 5.1 Channel Audio · D Bracket 2 (Optional) · Live Update 2

648 Max SiS® 648 Chipset

- Supports Intel® Pentium® 4 processor to 2.8 GHz
- Onboard 10/100 Ethernet Lan (Optional)
- 5.1 channel audio and MSI 5.1 channel DVD s/w
- 3 DIMMs, up to 3GB of DDR 266(PC2100) and DDR 333(PC2700) Memory supported
  - FSB 533 MHz clock
  - AGP 8X supported
  - ATA 133

Bluetooth · 533 FSB · DDR 333 · AGP 8X · ATA 133 · D Bracket 2 (Optional) · Live Update 2 · 5.1 Channel Audio

KT4 Ultra VIA® KT400 Chipset

- Supports AMD Athlon™ XP / Athlon™ / Duron™ processor
- Supports 3 DDR333 SDRAM, up to 3GB
- AGP 8X graphics card supported
- 6 ports of fast USB2.0 (480Mbps) supported
- 2 Serial ATA + 1 Parallel ATA133 supported (Optional)
- MSI exclusive PC2PC-Bluetooth™, supports Bluetooth connection (Optional)
  - 5.1 channel audio and MSI 5.1 channel DVD s/w

Bluetooth · DDR 333 · USB 2.0 · AGP 8X · 5.1 Channel Audio · i-Speeder · Fuzzy Logic 4 · Serial ATA

CD-RW Drive / CR48-A (MS-8348A)

48x16x48x

- Maximum data transfer rate: 7,200KB/sec. (48x) writing / 2,400KB/sec. (16x) rewriting / 7,200KB/sec. (48x) reading
- ExacLink™ prevents buffer underrun
- EXACT-Rec monitors accuracy of writing
- AWSS technology reduces vibration and noise
  - ROPC technology boosts recording reliability
  - 2MB buffer size
  - Flash memory upgradeable
  - Enhanced IDE/ATAPI interface
  - WindowsR XP WHQL certificate

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TREND MICRO

LOGITECH IO PEN

▶ **It's a pen! That writes! And remembers what you write! Isn't it amazing? What will they think of next? Well, maybe some practical uses for it…**

This isn't a piece of hardware that just arrived on my desk. I saw a mention of it in an overseas technology magazine a few months ago, and since then I've had NAG bug Logitech to send it our way as soon as it arrives.

The principle is alluring enough - it's a pen that writes normally, and also records all your writing, which you can load onto your PC later - up to 40 pages can be stored on the pen at a time.

In theory, this sounds great, and in practical terms it would be terrific, if you could write text on anything. But the main problem is - how does the pen know where you write?

If you are writing linear stuff, going line by line, that's easy, but if you're like me, taking notes at meetings or doodling in the corner while not paying attention to the editor, you write all over the place [*this is why your increase is only going to be 4%, Ed*].

Logitech solves this rather well with the introduction of digital pen-friendly books that indicate to the pen not only on what page it is, but where on the page.

The pen ships with one such a book, plus a special Post-It pad and several extra pen nibs for when you run dry.

While that solves the problem, it makes owning the pen pretty pointless.

The idea would be that the pen eliminates the need to carry around a note book, since you can scratch notes on anything, throw that away and keep the records on the pen. This would be great for me, since I lose notes all the time.

But you still need to carry around a book, and a specific one at that. I don't know how much one would set you back, but since they'll need to be imported, at least a bit more than a standard quality note book.

Kudos, though, to the usual Logitech quality. The pen installs easily, is pretty comfortable for its size, and simply oozes quality, plus it's a simple matter of installing the drivers, plugging the cradle into the USB port and connecting the power (the batteries last roughly twenty pages). It recognizes your standard mail and word programs automatically.

But Logitech need to realise that people who want this pen write a lot (more than what the book supplies for) and they write anywhere.

If you need archiving of your documents, then this is ideal, but in the end it's a great idea implemented in the wrong way.

No, I don't know how they'll make it work without special paper, but I'm not paid to figure that bit out. I just want one that does.

REVIEWED BY	
James "Doodler" Francis	
PLUS	**MINUS**
Great design	Requires special paper
Easy to use	Expensive
Interesting	Needs real innovation

SUPPLIED BY: Logitech [011] 452-7331
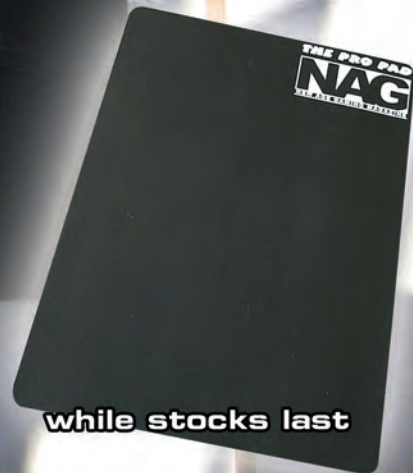**PRICE:** R 2499.00
INTERNET: www.logitech.com

LABTEC MIC 534

▶ Sometimes I wonder what can be said about some of the hardware devices that come my way. A microphone is a microphone, after all. But anyone who has ever been remotely involved in, for example, the music industry, will immediately tell you that there are mics, and then there are mics - and they are worlds apart. Good sound comes from a good microphone, and bad sound is the result of a poor one. And most PC mics are rather poor in quality.

The Labtec Desk Mic is, however, a rather fine piece of sound recording equipment. I wouldn't want to use it for vocal at the local studio, but its unidirectional microphone (which is great for filtering out unwanted noise by concentrating it's area of sensitivity into a narrower "space") has a good sensitivity, supported by a shielded cord, which also assists in noise reduction, ending in a standard 3.5mm jack (silver plated for

better sound quality). It also makes use of NCAT amplification and noise reduction technology, for even clearer sound transmission.

This device really is a multipurpose device. While perhaps not as well suited to online play as a headphone mounted mic, it's monitor mounting ability and clarity, as well as its unidirectional sensitivity, do make it appropriate for that purpose. It has been specifically engineered to deliver optimal audio input for the following Voice-Over-IP applications - Internet Voice Chat, Video Conferencing and Multi-player Internet Gaming. If you prefer to keep it desk mounted, that also is not a problem. The unit has a stable base and the mic itself, beautifully crafted from durable materials, is fully positionable - making placement on even a cluttered desktop a fairly simple task.

One of the nicest features of this mic unit is the inclusion of a mute switch in a convenient "thumb-press" position.

The Labtec Desk Mic is a very slick-looking, convenient and good quality microphone with a myriad of uses. It can be positioned in a number of convenient and space saving ways, and delivers good sound capture.

REVIEWED BY	
Walt "Shryke" Pretorius	
PLUS	MINUS
Fits on any desk	Not the best gaming mic
Good sensitivity	
Versatile	

SUPPLIED BY: Logitech [011] 452-7331
PRICE: R 199.00
INTERNET: www.logitech.com

LOGITECH OPTICAL PS2 MOUSE

▶ One of the things that I have always loved about console gaming is the fact that, if you get a game made for the particular console you use, it works. No questions asked, no specs to look up, no patches to download. The downside with console gaming, however, lies in the fact that the controller is, for certain game genres, rather limited. It doesn't feature the variety available to a keyboard and mouse setup, which means that certain genres of game on the PS2, for example, lack the punch they deliver in their PC versions.

No more, my friends, no more. The PS2 has always had two USB slots, and companies are finally starting to take advantage of them. Enter the Logitech Optical Mouse for PlayStation 2. This device, which is basically a medium sized three button mouse, allows a keyboard and mouse style of play right there on the console, allowing greater precision and control in genres like First Person Shooter games.

And, of course, it comes from one of the best peripheral manufacturers around.

The mouse is solidly built and comfortable. It reminds one a little of PC mice from a few moons ago - none of the fancy techno-babble stuff that you find on PC mice

today can be found here. It is a simple device - two buttons and a wheel - that performs wonderfully when put to the test, allowing a playing speed and precision previously unknown on the PS2. No more waiting for the controller to get where you want to go… the player can now execute crisp, quick moves, thereby enhancing the overall gaming experience.

You will need a PS2 keyboard with this device more often than not (a fact that the packaging of the unit seems to forget) to fully utilise this device. FPS titles certainly need this set-up, but with titles like Age of Empires (which supports this device) just having the mouse alone will probably suffice. You can't really use it in combination with the PS2 DualShock 2… it does work, but the standard PS2 controller needs two hands to operate, after all. Also you will need to have some kind of surface to play on. A console controller may be snug in your palms, allowing you to use it from virtually any position, but you are going to need something flat to use your mouse and keyboard

configuration on.

The biggest problem with this device, as with all relatively new technology, is that it has very little support out there. This will certainly change as more and more people get these devices, but, for now, only four or so titles support a mouse in game play (including, I must add, the brilliant Red Faction 2.) There certainly will be more titles to support the device in future, but the likelihood is that these games will probably be in the minority, considering that most PS2 gamers will probably just stick to the DualShock 2 controller. This is a huge speculation on my part, however, so I guess that we really will have to wait and see…

That the Logitech Optical Mouse for PlayStation 2 enhances gameplay is an undeniable fact, and gamers who take their experience with their console seriously will certainly want to get hold of this unit (and probably a good keyboard to go with it.)
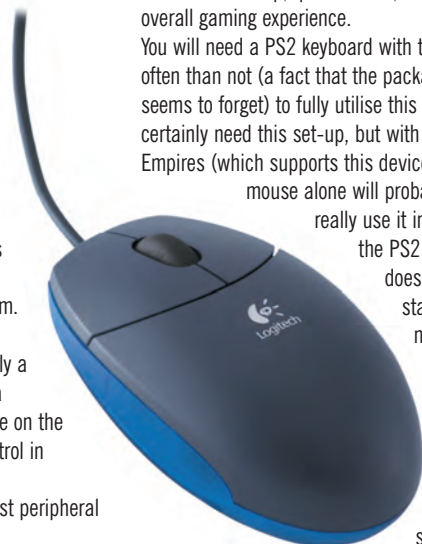
REVIEWED BY	
Walt "Shryke" Pretorius	
PLUS	MINUS
Accurate control	Limited support
Comfortable	Need keyboard for some titles
Price	

SUPPLIED BY: Logitech [011] 452-7331
PRICE: R 299.00
INTERNET: www.logitech.com

AOpen Tube Motherboard [AX4B-533]

AX4B-533 Tube - This new motherboard incorporates the novel, modern-day adoption of an idea that was spawned by the invention of the electric light bulb by Thomas A. Edison back in 1879 - the vacuum tube. In taking this bold step towards audio perfection, AOpen's hybrid AX4B-533 Tube unquestionably is targeted to a very exclusive niche market - passionate audiophiles and extreme gamers who are interested in building their own ultimate entertaining PCs. The motherboard is also certain to appeal to retailers that desire to cater to these two eccentric groups with custom-built PCs, delivered with matching speaker systems and the latest CD and DVD playback devices.

Edison's Revolutionary Invention Finds New Life in the 21st Century

What is a Vacuum Tube?

▶ The tube is basically an electronic valve that controls the flow of electrons. It consists of an envelope (bulb, usually glass) from which most air and other gasses have been removed. Inside this near vacuum are two systems. One is called the heater. This is in the centre of the tube and is the portion you will normally see glowing orange (some tubes may have more than one heater). The other system consists of the cathode, grid(s), and plate (also called the anode). The plate is the largest metal structure you see inside the bulb. All of this is held to correct locations by thin disc spacers made of mica or ceramic.

What's that Silver Stuff on the Glass?

The silver deposit is called the "getter" and is there to help increase the vacuum in the tube. Its colour may vary slightly. Sometimes the getter will flow with use, even to the point of becoming evenly and thinly deposited over the entire envelope. The edge of this flow may have a brown colour.

Why the Vacuum Tube?

Before we go further, someone undoubtedly will ask, "Why the vacuum tube?" A quick answer would be: "The tube looks cool!" But the real answer does not stop here; there are more legends about the tube that wait to be unveiled.

Why Are Vacuum Tubes Superior for Music Playback?

Why use the vacuum tube? Because the tone of the tube attracts listeners in a simple, basic way. There have been too many arguments between solid-state and tube technologies - many experiments and blind tests have been conducted. Even statistical gurus have contributed to the argument on the outcome of these tests. Scepticism has argued that even an average solid-state amplification device is measurably superior to the best tube device, but the argument may not stand the trial of tonality. So let us make it simple here - We love what we hear regardless of harmonic distortion as well as the limited frequency

response compared to a solid-state device. With tube technology, the music is more musical!

Jimmy Page strikes the guitar strings on "Stairway to Heaven" and Angus Young of AC/DC's "Back in Black" share one common attribute- It is the vacuum tube that powers their guitars' souls that express what they want to sound like and what the listener likes to hear.

How Does The Vacuum Tube Work?

Let's take a look at the fundamentals of how the vacuum tube works. In a modern vacuum tube, there are four principal elements that work together to make a tube work. The Filament (heater), Cathode, Grid and Anode (or plate). When the filament is connected with voltage that boils the cathode, the cathode then emits electrons that pass through the grid and hits the Anode. Through this electron flow, the tube will amplify a small AC signal into a larger AC voltage, thus amplifying it. By controlling the grid voltage, the current flow can be regulated and thus creates the desired electronic characteristics, while amplifying the signal (source).

Today, most electric guitar and bass amplifiers are tube-based. Professional audio equipment also deploys the tube as a preferred amplification device. One can even find tubes in digital-to-analog converter designs. The vacuum tube is a natural choice for these music-associated vehicles to depend on.

AX4B-533 TUBE

CPU:	Intel Pentium 4 CPU, 533MHz
Chipset:	Intel 845E, Intel ICH4
Main Memory:	DDR DIMM x 3
Graphics:	4X AGP slot
Sound:	TubeSound Vacuum Tube Technology
Form Factor:	ATX

SPECIFICATIONS

CPU
- Intel Pentium 4 CPU
- Socket 478
- 533MHz

Chipset
- Intel 845E
- Intel ICH4

Super I/O
- Winbond

Clock Gen.
- ICS
- Max Overclocking : 992Mhz

Main Memory
- Support DDR266 [PC2100]
- DDR DIMM x 3
- DIMM Type : 8/16/32/64/128/256/512MB & 1GB
- Max Memory : 2GB

Graphics
- 4X AGP slot

IDE
- Integrated ATA100 Controller
- Max Disk : 144,000,000GB [by 48 bits LBA Spec.]

LAN
- Integrated Intel 10/100Mbps LAN Controller
- Intel PHY

Sound
- Realtek AC'97 CODEC on-board
- 5.1 Channel
- TubeSound Vacuum Tube Technology

USB
- USB2.0 x 6

Slots
- AGP x 1
- PCI x 3

Storage & Back Panel I/O
- Floppy Drive Connector x 1
- IDE Channel : ATA100 x 2
- PS/2 Keyboard x 1 | PS/2 Mouse x 1
- USB Port x 2 | LAN Port x 1
- COM Port x 2 | Printer Port x 1
- Game/MIDI Port x 1 | Speaker_Out x 1
- Line_In x 1 | MIC_In x 1

On Board Connector
- Front Panel x 1 | Front Audio x 1
- CPU FAN x 1 | System FAN x 1
- Chassis FAN x 1 | Case Open Connector x 1
- AUX_IN x 1 | CD_IN x 1
- Wake_on_LAN x 1 | Wake_on_Modem x 1
- IrDA x 1 | S/PDIF x 1
- USB Port x 4 (optional cable)
- Tube Audio Connector x 1 (Lin-in to Tube AMP, RCA output, S/PDIF output, 6.3mm Headphone)

BIOS
- Award PnP 4Mb Flash ROM BIOS

Form Factor
- ATX

Board Size
- 305 mm x 244 mm

Software & Utility
- Acrobat Reader | AOconfig utility
- EzRestore/ProMagic | EzSkin utility
- EzWinFlash utility | Norton Anti-Virus
- Online eBook Manual | SilentTek Software
- Accessory | Easy Installation Guide x 1
- Enhanced Full Pictured Manual x 1
- EzRestore Guide x 1 | Tube Manual x 1
- Bonus Pack CD disc x 1
- Norton Anti-Virus CD disc x 1
- Floppy Disk cable x 1 | 40-wire IDE cable x 1
- 80-wire ATA133 cable x 1
- Powered by AOpen Plate x 1
- Tube Audio cable x 1 | Vacuum Tube x 1
- CPU Retention Module x 1

SilentTek | EzRestore
TubeSound | Vivid BIOS
JukeBox | 1MHz Stepping
WatchDog ABS | Dr Voice II
Dr LED | DieHard BIOS

KEY FEATURES

Supports 533MHz FSB Intel Pentium 4 Socket 478 CPU | Hyper-Threading Technology | TubeSound Technology | High-end Audio Grade Capacitors | CPU Jumper-less Design | 1MHz Stepping CPU Overclocking | Adjustable CPU Vcore through BIOS | Large Low ESR Capacitors | WatchDog ABS - Intelligent Overclocking Anti-lock Break System | AGP Protection Technology | CPU Over Current Protection (OCP) | Hardware Monitoring | SilentTek Noise Reduction Technology (From R3.0.05a) | Chassis Intrusion Detector | Resetable Fuse for Keyboard and USB | AC Power-On Auto Recovery (*Note) | Battery-less & Long-life Design | Dr Voice II | Dr LED Debug Tool (optional module) | JukeBox CD player | Vivid BIOS Technology | EzWinFlash BIOS | Multi-Language BIOS | Support DMI management under Windows | Wake on Keyboard/ Mouse | Wake on LAN | Wake on Modem | Wake on RTC Timer | EzRestore/ProMagic HDD Crash Protection | Suspend to Disk (ACPI S4) | Suspend to RAM (ACPI S3) | BIOS Virus Protection | DieHard BIOS Lite | AOpen Black Pearl PCB | Full Coloured Easy Installation Guide | AOpen Bonus Pack CD | Norton Anti-Virus CD included

writer: Walt Pretorius

UT 2K3 EDITOR CHAPTER 5: RETURN TO NATURE

▶ Welcome to the second last chapter in our series covering the unreal editor for Unreal Tournament 2003. It is going to be dedicated almost entirely to making the sky in your level look real, as well as having a bit of information on making your terrain look a bit better.

Ground work

We learned how to create terrain in the last chapter and, while it might have looked good as terrain, there were a few problems. Firstly, there wasn't much variation going on. And, secondly, we didn't have anything believable above our heads.

Let's begin with the terrain itself. If you think about it, you will realise that there are different strata to geography, and that's what we now need to create. If you recall how we made our texture layers in the terrain editor before, you will see that this is achieved in much the same way. If we open the terrain editor dialogue box and select the layers tab, we will notice that there are still a whole bunch of undefined, deep red layers

▼ Placing the Sky Zone Info actor tells the program which area to use as the false background in the level

available. Select the next one (for your new texture) and follow all the same steps that you would have to create your first texture layer. However, when it comes to setting the RGB and Alpha levels, you need to make a change. Now we set all the RGB settings to 0, and the Alpha setting to 255. What this means is that the new texture will only display where we tell it to. Make sure that your tool setting is set to Painting, and then just CTRL+LMB where you want your new texture to appear! Easy as that.

The Sky's the limit

Right, now we have believable terrain, and lots of nice hills and vales. But the sky still looks utterly stupid. So, let's make us a sky box…

Sky boxes are actually not part of the level. We build them off to the side (well off to the side is best, so that they can't interfere with room and object placement) and then instruct the level to display them where needed. Here's how we do it. Build a cube of 1024 x 1024 x 1024 out of the way of your main level. Texture all the sides (walls, floor and ceiling) of this new cube with the sky you want to use. I made use of various positional textures from the ElecFields section of the SkyRenders texture set. Whatever you use doesn't really matter - pick one you like, and that suits your level. Make sure that you put the right skies in the right places, though. Now add a SkyZoneInfo actor (from the ZoneInfo group) and set the actor's ambient brightness. Then, go back to your main terrain area, select all sides of the large

cube and set Fake Backdrop under the surface properties to on. Rebuild the level and right click on the top left corner of the viewport window. Under views, select Display backdrop, and your sky will be displayed. But it looks horrible and cube like.

A better way to handle skies (although more limited) is to build a sky ball into your sky box.

Having a ball

A sky ball will help you create a sky that moves more realistically, and doesn't look like a textured cube. This

▼

buildings

You really should have been able to figure this out for yourself, but let me elaborate. Should you want to create a building in a terrain area, simply add it as you would any new feature, and go from there. It's probably better to start with a big block and "carve" it out as you go along. Remember that if you choose to build the building elsewhere and then drag it into your terrain, you may run into a few problems with adding and subtracting areas. Use the method that you are most comfortable with.

▼

strata

Sometimes our terrain textures don't look quite right. To change them, we can use the series of texture tools in the terrain dialogue box. Options like Texture Pan and Texture Scale are available, and are applied much as you would paint on new textures. A little experimentation may be needed here, but don't be shy. Just remember to save your level before making any major changes to it, just in case you make an utter mess of things!
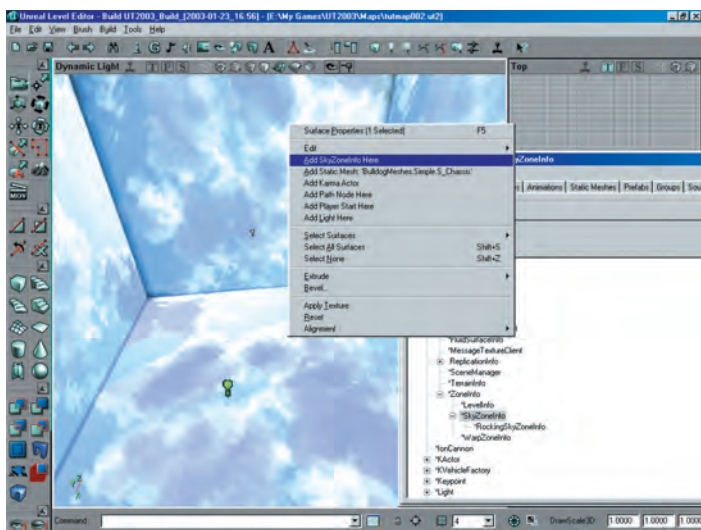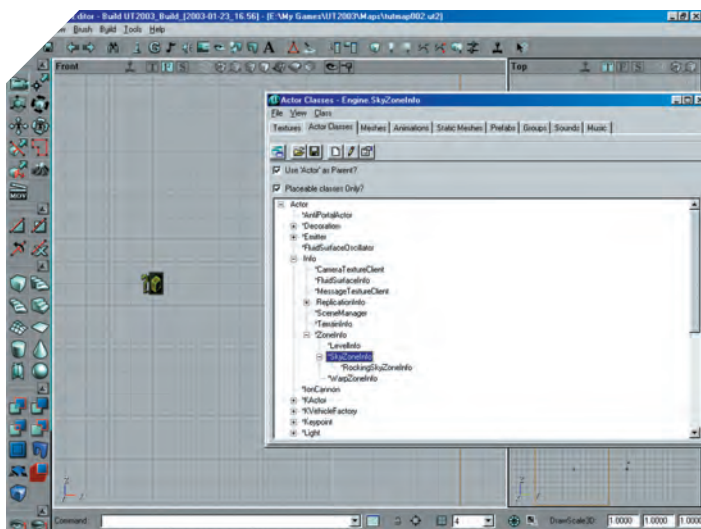
▼ Using plain sky boxes can have unsatisfactory effects. Sky meshes create a better result
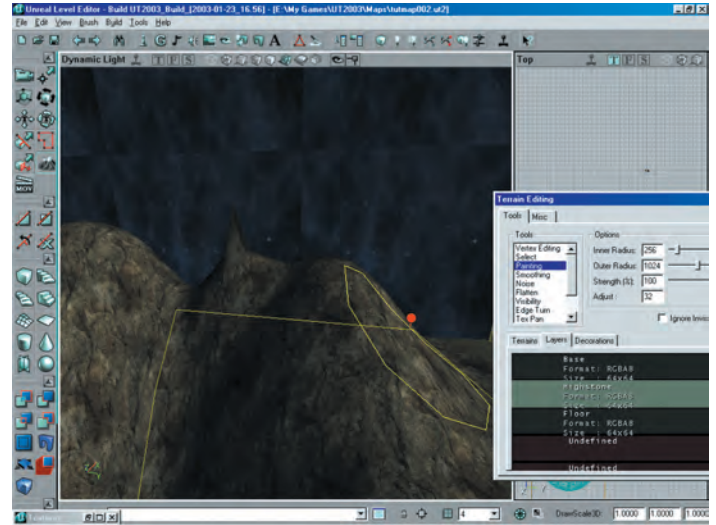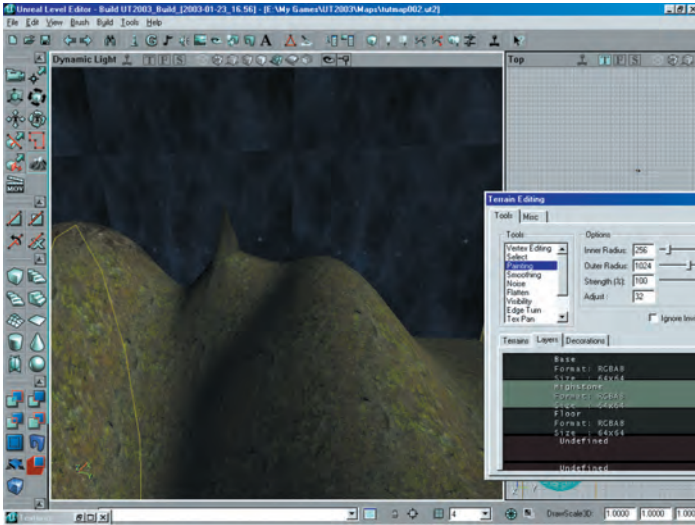
▲ Terrain before and after: changing the various terrain textures will add a sense of realism to your outdoor areas, particularly if you are careful with heights and types of terrain

is probably the easiest way to make skies, although it does take a little more time.

There are a number of static meshes that will help our skies look better, but I am going to concentrate on only one for now - a night sky with a glowing moon. You will need to hunt down and experiment with other meshes yourself, unfortunately!

At this point, the sky texture you placed in your sky box becomes completely unimportant, because this mesh is a solid night sky mesh. That's what you will see! The AWStellarMeshes package contains two static meshes, and we will use both. First, add the skyball mesh to your sky box. It will be a bit small, so you will need to adjust the size of it by altering the Draw Scale numbers (three numbers at the bottom right of your program interface) so that it fits snugly inside your sky box. Don't let it go outside of the box, however, because this will cause problems. Now place the MoonCard mesh somewhere near the top of your sky ball (if you want a moon, that is). Then make sure that your SkyZoneInfo actor is in the middle of the skyball, and perform all the necessary tasks to make sure that the sky displays. There we have it, a lovely night sky.

You are my sunshine

Even at night, the sun's light has an effect on our planet. To make your terrain look really spectacular, we will now,

as the final step, add a sunlight actor.

From the Actor browser, under the Light subcategory, select sunlight, and add it to your level. Don't worry about its position, because it will act almost as an ambient light, lighting the whole level equally. Once it is added, the "griffin's head" symbol will show that it is there.

Now you will notice that the actor has an arrow. This is the direction of the light, and can be altered using the Actor Rotate tool. Set it up the way you want it - go for maximum effect! Remember to set your terrain ambience back down to zero, or the sunlight will have little effect on your level. Now to set the properties of the Sunlight actor. You will need to work with the light colour, light brightness and light saturation settings. A brightness of 80 and a saturation of 210 gives a nice moonlight feel, as well as a slightly blue

colour - however, feel free to use whichever settings you prefer here.

And that is that for the penultimate editing tutorial. In the last chapter, we will look at bot paths and ambient sounds. Keep in mind that you need a complete level for bot paths, so go ahead and build one in the meantime. Have fun!
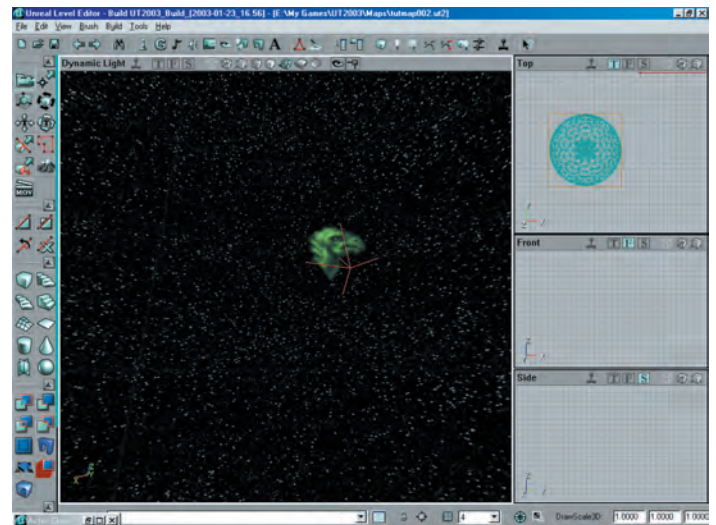
▼ The final look is quite impressive, especially if you handle your sunlight actor correctly...

▼ Placement of the sky ball is quite important. If it exceeds the box, you will have hassles


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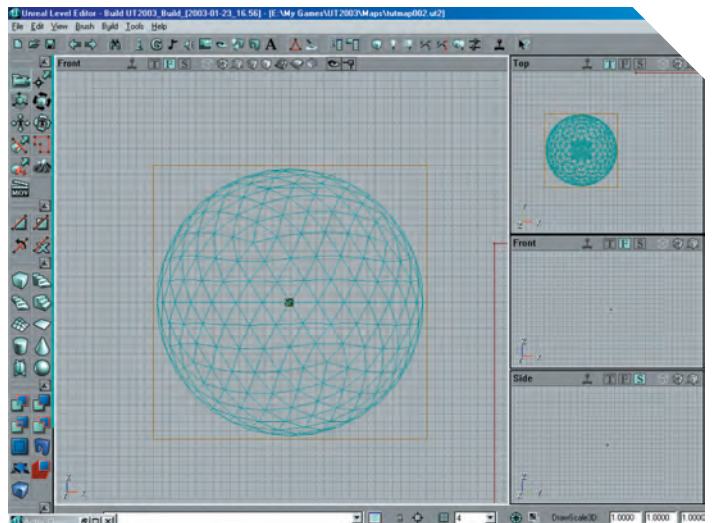
Orange County

I have been putting off watching this movie from the day I noticed the poster. The cover makes it look like one of these weird, you have to be high on dope to even try and understand it kind of movies. Totally bored on a Saturday afternoon, I thought I would give it a try, hate it after 10 minutes and pat myself on the back to say I told you so. Well the pat never came, but a huge kick in the ass did, for not seeing this movie sooner. It was really good, and no dope or any hallucinogenic drugs were needed to enjoy or understand it. It's really quite a simple story. A decent boy is trying to get into Stanford University. When his guidance councilor sends in the wrong transcript for him, his application is rejected. He is now on a mission to prove his worth and get into the university. This is a great movie that needs to be given a chance, you will not be sorry.

Scooby-Doo

Scooby Doo is really an enjoyable movie. The actors used to portray the Mystery Inc Gang are very accurate and well placed, and Scooby is, well what can we say, perfect.
Two years after a clash of egos forced Mystery Inc to close its doors, the group is individually summoned to Spooky Island to investigate a series of paranormal activities. The thought that the island may be haunted, the gang try to out prove each other and try to solve the mystery on their own. With the usual Scooby Doo antics, you can guess where it goes and how it ends; this is true to the cartoon and anything else will be a sell out.
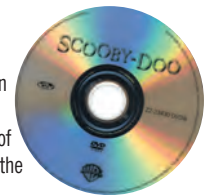
Friday The 13th - The New Blood.

It may be an old film but it is new to DVD, and with the forth-coming release of Freddy Vs Jason, I thought that this would be appropriate. This is the 7th film in the series and is just like all the others. Jason is resurrected or, spiritually called up, unfrozen, dug up (pick one they have all been done, just cant remember which film fits with which explanation as to why he is alive again). Jason goes to Camp Crystal Lake and starts hacking up the innocent people who dwell there this summer. In this one we are given a little girl with telekinesis power, to battle Jason. If you are a fan of the series you will have seen it, if not watch it at your own risk.

Jimmy Neutron - Boy Genius

Back to the land of animation, as this is always a good stress reliever and today's animation is far better and aimed more at adults than those of a few years ago. Jimmy Neutron comes to us from the Nickelodeon stables and is another cartoon to movie transfer. Jimmy, as the title suggests, is a boy genius and way ahead of his friends but when it comes to being cool he is way behind (See Urkle and Malcolm for examples). One day his parents and all the parents over the world are kidnapped by aliens. Its now up to Jimmy and his mighty brain to save the day.
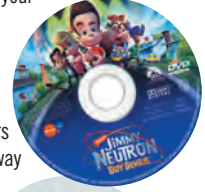
Swordfish

Any reason to catch a view of Halle Berry and her assets, is good enough for me. Swordfish has been on the DVD shelf for a while, but after we have just seen her in Bond, we long to see her again and again and the only good view we get is Swordfish.
When the DEA shut down its dummy corporation named SWORDFISH in 1986, they generated $400 million, which they let sit around. Fifteen years of compound interest has let the grant total at $9.5 billion. This money is locked away behind super encryption and someone wants to get in. Enter Hacker Stanley Jobson who has been hired by Gabriel Shear to get them in. Bombs, escapes are the name of the game in this above average action thriller.

The Deep End

A mother who raised her children virtually alone, has a teenage son who is testing the waters of the adult world. Early one morning she wakes to find the dead body of his gay lover on the beach of their rural lakeside home. What is rational and what do you do to protect your child?

Hart's War

Bruce Willis doing what everyone else is up to, WAR. William McNamara is imprisoned in a brutal German POW camp. As the camps highest officer, he leads the inmates as he would on the outside. A murder in the camp gives him the chance to put a risky escape plan into motion. With a court martial to keep the watchful eyes busy, it is the perfect time to move and get out.

3000 Miles to Graceland

Elvis does Vegas who does bank robberies, in a nutshell. A Bunch of ex cons decide to rob a Las Vegas casino during an Elvis convention. Even more ingenious is they dress up as Elvis so that they don't stick out like a sore thumb. Everything goes according to plan until one of the ex con's decides that he is going to keep all the money. So it's a case of robbery going well, after sales service sucking.

Showtime

Its reality TV at its best, when a TV exec hops onto an opportunity of a lifetime. Take a camera and follow a no-nonsense cop around while he is on duty. To add that extra bit of entertainment throw in a sidekick, who screwed up an earlier bust and who is hated by the other cop. Its sounding more like Big Brother Meets Survivor in a cop car.
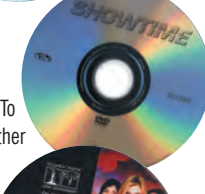
The Sweetest Thing

A woman's search for true love is the subject matter for this unconventional and often quite naughty comedy. Christina Walter (played by Cameron Diaz) is in search for the perfect man, helped by her two friends (Christina Applegate and Selma Blair.) They undertake a road trip to follow a guy she meets one night, and run into all kinds of misadventure and sexy fun. This is a fun film for those who like their comedy uninhibited and left of centre.

Away From the Sun
3 Doors Down

When 3 Doors Down first launched themselves into the big time with the phenomenal Kryptonite, everyone sat up and listened. Here was a band that could capture an unusual yet catchy rock sound with an apparent ease that was mystifying. So when their next album, entitled Away from the Sun rolled along, a great many people got quite excited. Sadly, though, there is not another Kryptonite on this album. In fact, the songs on this CD are rather plain, even though they are good. It's sad to see that happen, because the band really had something good going with that track. **(Universal)**

Treasure Planet Soundtrack
Various Artists

Disney soundtracks tend to be very positive and hopeful entities, treating the listener to sounds that are generally happy and buoyant. And that's exactly what you will find in this collection of tracks from the latest Disney film, Treasure Planet. Orchestrated by James Newton Howard, the music is powerful stuff almost reminiscent of Wagner at times, but laced with a possibly unhealthy dose of sentimentality and frivolity that is utterly American. Three vocal tracks are on offer - the single I Am Still Here by John Rzeznik (of the Goo Goo Dolls) as well as BBMak's Always Know Where You Are and (for some reason that I couldn't fathom) Heinz Winkler's Chasing Shadows. The Rzeznik track is killer! **(Gallo)**

The Transporter Soundtrack
Various Artists

While this soundtrack seems a little unlikely when you consider the subject matter of the film, it is (contextually) a perfect sound track for the film. Full of RnB and light hip-hop, this album features tracks by the likes of Tweet, Nate Dogg, Knoc-Turn'al, Missy Elliot and Keith Sweat, to name but a few. It is a light and eclectic mix of songs within its musical category, and makes for great light listening. Fans of the genres will certainly enjoy it, and those who enjoyed the movie will notice the aptness of the song choices. **(Gallo)**

Songs for the Deaf
Queens of the Stone Age

Here's a band that defies its own genre. You probably won't get through this in one sitting, because Queens of the Stone Age are a band that challenge the listener. Take a metal band and throw away everything you might expect from them - vocal style, musical style, lyrical content… this band does nothing normal. And that's probably what makes them one of the best new acts out there, capable of performing at peak level of unexpected excellence. Featuring a few big names (including Dave Grohl on drums) Queens of the Stone Age are a band that, once you have got used to them, are truly revolutionary and utterly brilliant. **(Universal)**

The Last Temptation
Ja Rule

The biggest problem with Ja Rule is that, while he comes across as this hard core gangsta type who, quite frankly, is about as hard as a roll of wet toilet paper. I admit right out that I feel he is certainly not the best rapper out there, and his "hip-hop" is closer to love song ridden R&B than anything else. And the worst of it is that this album isn't even his best work. In fact, unless he is riding on the coat-tail of a bigger name, he really doesn't seem to perform all that well. Disappointing at best. **(Universal)**

Grammy Nominees 2003
Various Artists

Here's an album that every music lover should have - in fact, every music lover should have a whole collection of these, because they do represent the best of music that each year has to offer. In theory.
This year is such a year, with Grammy Nominees 2003 being a very solid collection of excellent songs. As usual with such CDs, it is an eclectic grouping of songs, ranging from the hip hop of Eminem to the pop rock of Vanessa Carlton and the skate punk of Avril Lavigne. It is a fun and complete collection, showcasing a very interesting year of musical achievement. **(Gallo)**

Night Tracks Volume 2
Various Artists

Here's an interesting collection, particularly for those that remember the hits of yesteryear. Featuring tracks by Boz Scaggs, Christopher Cross, Alan Parsons Project, Chris Rea, Toto, America and Glenn Frey, it is a chilled and varied collection of light rock and pop that will please those with an appreciation for tracks that are not yet classics, but are on their way to achieving that status. This is great stuff indeed, although some of the better known tracks are interspersed with the music of people who are a little obscure (like who the hell is Robbie Dupree?). Either way, it is relaxed and enjoyable light listening. **(Gallo)**

The Very Best of MTV Unplugged 2
Various Artists

MTV really hit it big with their televised Unplugged series. Featuring acoustic sets by some of the best artists in the business. And the CD releases, based on this series, have proven just as popular.
Featuring the likes of Sting, REM, Tori Amos, Bjork, Seal, Midnight Oil, Sheryl Crow and Elton John, this album is a stunning collection of tracks that are just a little out of the ordinary - recorded live and without the use of heavy amplification, the tracks tend to be more subtle and somehow more heartfelt.
This is a great CD for the music lover. Even those who just enjoy good listening will find a lot of merit here. **(Gallo)**

Cradle to the Grave
Various Artists

There seem to be two ways for the latest action movie soundtracks to go. Either they tend to be super metal and alternative collections (which tend to be the more sci-fi kind of movie) or they go the hard-core hip-hop route… like this one.
DMX really has taken a shine to acting, too, with yet another action role under his belt, this time starring with Jet Li.
But that's beside the point.
This is a rather good hip hop collection, featuring the likes of Eminem, newcomer 50 Cent, Fat Joe and, of course, DMX himself. **(Universal)**
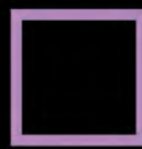
Shryke: Jeez, man. My wallet was full this morning...

Priest: Yeah, about that. I'll give you that sixty back later. I didn't have cash on me, and my dog ate my credit card, and there was this thing I really needed to buy.

Shryke: **[Gives Priest a look]** Next time just ask. And it wasn't sixty, it was six hundred...

Priest: If I actually asked you, you'd know how much I really owe you. Anyway, wasn't me. **[Thinks a bit]** Are we talking about your wallet this week or last week?

Shryke: This morning. I had six hundred in it this morning. I know about last week. I told you to take those magazines and videos back, remember? And what do you need six hundred bucks for, anyway?

Priest: I bought shares in a major IT company.

Shryke: You bought shares for six hundred rand? In a major IT company?

Priest: Well, I obviously had much more cash. I've been skimming off your wallet for months.

Shryke: If that's the case, I think you had better chip me in on those shares. Before I call my friend Bruno... you know, the one with the bat and the penchant for fracturing?

Priest: You're already part of the system. I bought Microsoft Games stock. At the rate they're charging, I'll be rich in no time!

Shryke: Whoa, hang fire man. You bought a Microsoft title, didn't you?

Priest: What? I'm not stupid. I bought a PS2 title instead. It's cheaper.

Shryke: I think that perhaps buying a PS2 console might be cheaper. But what's this got to do with that six hundred bucks you stole from me?

Priest: Not steal. Look at it as an investment. If the stocks pay off, I'll buy you a new couch. In the mean time I saved you money by ordering Freelancer from EBGames. It only cost me $49!

Shryke: **[Looks up Bruno's number]** Uh huh...

Priest: By the way, don't look under the blanket that's draped over the couch.

Shryke: **[Looks under the blanket on the couch while dialing Bruno's number]** You did! You bought Freelancer! Six hundred bucks! Where's your mind?

Priest: Well, I saved YOU money. Besides, Bruno won't help you. He thinks you've been skimming off his monthly payments.

Shryke: Aha, that's where you're wrong - he knows it was you... **[speaking into phone]** Hello, Bruno. Are you still offering that "two kneecaps for the price of one" deal?

Priest: I know THAT. But I gave him a lot of the stock I bought. So as far as he's concerned, EVERYTHING's your fault. Oh, ask him to bring more of his mom's lemonade when he comes around. It's excellent.

Shryke: **[Hangs up the phone, looking pale]** Hmmmm. Know any good travel agents?

Priest: I just so happen to own stock in one...

Shryke: Right. Any shares in a cheap deserted island resort? The kind where Bruno won't find me? And could you lend me cash for the airfare? I seem to be broke...

Sure, I might not sell well in Japan, but I'm the biggest, baddest, most powerful console out there! And What about DOA Extreme Beach Volleyball? DOA chicks in bikinis! Exclusive to me! YEAH!

What you looking at? I'm cute! The kids LOVE me! Okay, so I only see a really good game once every few months, I'm still cute! And I have Mario! And Zelda! And Pikmin! I rock!

Go look at the charts – whose the numero uno console, eh? ME! And I have over a thousand games! Okay, most are utter crap, but A THOUSAND! Who needs anti-aliasing and a decent controller when you have a ton of games?

What, I'm not even in this race. I'm eternally more powerful, I have far more games, and I am way more versatile. Ignore the fact that all my games still look only as good as the console titles. And that I cost around the same as a small car.

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